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“Une qualité rare et précieuse”: Music, Affect, and Meaning

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents an affect-centered approach to the analysis and interpretation of the experience of music and its attendant meaning in selected works of literature and cinema. Music's interpretative mutability often charges it with meaning, though in infinite gradations of singularity rather than any universal sense. Rather than undertake a formalist musicological study of affect, I examine a variety of different manifestations of this affective polyvalence and concomitant ways in which authors, historians, and filmmakers use music as an affective shorthand, or take advantage of music's ability to convey meaning. My conception of affect throughout this dissertation is shaped chiefly, but not exclusively, by the concepts of territorialization and the refrain in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari; and, in its more physical manifestations, by Roland Barthes's discussions of the grain of the voice and the corporeality of musical experience, as well as Vladimir Jankélévitch's distinction between drastic and gnostic ways of listening.

My first chapter surveys music and its affective territory in key scenes from Gérard de Nerval's *Sylvie*, whose narrator territorializes the ever-elusive "traditional" mores of his beloved Valois region onto its folk songs as interpreted by a succession of women who seem to him to bear the idealized truth of his Valois identity. In Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the famous Vinteuil Sonata is seen to evacuate a blank space on Swann's soul, a territory in which he inscribes the name of Odette, and which stands in for and sustains his love for her thereafter. And in André Gide's *La Symphonie pastorale*, the narrator's obsession with a blind woman in his charge, and his opposition of the purity of sound to the wickedness of sight, finds its most stark

literalization in a scene where they attend a performance of Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony together, allowing them to glimpse a territory too perfect to exist in their base reality.

In my second chapter, I focus on the composer Frédéric Chopin as a case study in the construction of musical meaning through extramusical and historical cues. I look at the processes by which keyboard instruments were, over the course of centuries, established as symbols of feminine domesticity, and then at how the music of Chopin—who composed chiefly for the piano, rather than in larger-scale genres like the symphony—has been seen to propagate that symbol. I read Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* with an eye to the distinctly queer subtext of its title character, a subtext that is immediately more evident to the reader with foreknowledge of the gendered construction of Chopin and his work. I also look at a more recent French-language novella, Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt's *Madame Pylinska et le secret de Chopin*, which shows the durability of Chopin's symbolic power as a figure of womanly softness that always threatens to subvert heteronormative paradigms.

Chapter three examines the role of music in Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Nausée*, in which it functions as the most reliable cure for existential despair, both allowing the narrator Roquentin to "unstick" himself from the morass of undifferentiated time, and providing him with a rhythm to overlay on his self-conception of his past exploits: the difference between meaninglessness and grandiosity, the "rare and precious quality" of adventure. As something of a coda to this reading, I look at two films by Lars von Trier that show the mutability of music's affects by inverting, or even perverting, the Sartrean paradigm: *Melancholia*, which draws even the viewer into existential nausea with its repeated use of the Prelude to Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*—and allows us a musical catharsis only at the moment of cinematic apocalypse; and *Dancer in the Dark*, an

unsettling variation on the movie musical whose main character, Selma, uses imaginary music to escape into the safety of her own affective bubble and unwittingly brings about her own demise.

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INTRODUCTION

In Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Trois Couleurs : Bleu* (1993), Julie (Juliette Binoche) is a haunted woman. Following the film's opening car crash that takes the lives of her husband and daughter, she finds herself unable to move on—followed unrelentingly not only by the memory of her lost loved ones, but also by a persistent strain of music that overwhelms her senses and seems to stop the passage of time. It is a fragment from a symphony that the world believes Julie's late husband, a composer, left unfinished at his death, though the film will lead us to believe that Julie herself played a significant and uncredited role in her husband's supposed oeuvre. At several points throughout *Bleu*, Julie is assailed by this symphonic excerpt, and its mechanism of action is similar: the screen fades suggestively to black as strings and horns play a stately and imposing motif. This seems to suggest a loss of consciousness, and our expectations point toward a jump forward in time. But curiously, when color and life fade back in, it is clear that no time has passed in the film's narrative—that Julie has experienced something all-encompassing, felt those notes reverberate, experienced some nearly infinite register of emotion, inside an infinitesimal point in real time. Kieślowski's is but one particularly evocative depiction of the *impulse* of music's affect.

What do I mean by *affect*, and how does this differ from *emotion*? What does it mean to affect, or to be affected? How can we talk about the complex interplay of forces, the potentials to move and be moved, the speeds and intensities that compose our experience of life? Recent scholars and theorists have discussed such questions in terms of a turn toward *affect*. It is true that "affect theory" as such is not a unified theory—it is still quite a new field, and pioneering scholars have defined it in ways that diverge from one another while generally upholding certain central aspects. But these divergent, ever-shifting terms are in keeping with the constant movements,

forces, flows and intensities of affects, as Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth explain: "There is no single, generalizable theory of affect: not yet, and (thankfully) there never will be. If anything, it is more tempting to imagine that there can only ever be infinitely multiple iterations of affect and theories of affect."[1] A focus on affect in all its forms might help us reconceptualize many fields of inquiry, from the writing of history to the experience of art, the interpretation of current events, and beyond.

In their 2010 compendium *The Affect Theory Reader*, Gregg and Seigworth broadly lay out the aims of their project and the genealogy of the thinking of affect. Their introductory chapter, "An Inventory of Shimmers," mentions two crucial figures in the history of affect theory: psychobiologist Silvan Tomkins and philosopher Gilles Deleuze, whose "Spinozist ethology of bodily capacities,"[2] especially as conceived in his works with Félix Guattari, tends to form the theoretical underpinning of most contemporary affect theories. It is clear in *Mille plateaux* that for Deleuze and Guattari, affects do not depend on unitary phenomenological subjects; they describe a "circulation d'affects *impersonnels*, un courant alternatif, qui bouleverse les projets signifiants comme les sentiments subjectifs" [circulation of *impersonal* affects, an alternative current that upends signifying projects and subjective feelings alike].[3] If we attempt to think *affect* as a synonym for *emotion*, it is difficult to understand how affects might be "impersonal"—how, in other words, "l'affect n'est pas un sentiment personnel, ce n'est pas non plus un caractère, c'est l'effectuation d'une puissance de meute, qui soulève et fait vaciller le moi" [affect is not a personal

[1] Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 3–4.
[2] Gregg and Seigworth, 5.
[3] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980), 285.

feeling, nor is it a trait; it is the realization of herd power that whips up and staggers the self].[4] It is thus important to remember here that in Deleuzian terms, a body

> ne se définit pas par la forme qui le détermine, ni comme une substance ou un sujet déterminés, ni par les organes qu'il possède ou les fonctions qu'il exerce. Sur le plan de consistance, *un corps se définit seulement par* . . . l'ensemble des éléments matériels qui lui appartiennent sous tels rapports de mouvement et de repos, de vitesse et de lenteur [. . .] ; l'ensemble des affects intensifs dont il est capable, sous tel pouvoir ou degré de puissance. . . . Rien que des affects et des mouvements locaux, des vitesses différentielles.[5]
>
> is not defined by the form that determines it nor as a determined substance or subject nor by the organs it possesses or the functions it fulfills. On the plane of consistency, *a body is defined only by* . . . the sum total of the materials that belong to it under certain relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness [. . .]; the intensive affects it is capable of under certain conditions of power. . . . Nothing but affects and localized movements, differential speeds.

Individuals do not exist as monads but as parts of assemblages which never remain inert or stable. They are, to use Deleuze's term, haecceities—"une individualité parfaite et qui ne manque de rien . . . tout y est rapport de movement et de repos entre molecules ou particules, pouvoir d'affecter et d'être affecté" [a perfect and complete individuality . . . pure relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, the power to affect and be affected."[6] A haecceity, Deleuze tells us, is "[ce] que vous en êtes, et que vous n'êtes rien d'autre. Vous êtes [. . .] un ensemble de vitesses et de lenteurs entre particules non formées, un ensemble d'affects non subjectivés" [what

[4] Deleuze and Guattari, 294.
[5] Deleuze and Guattari, 318.
[6] Deleuze and Guattari, 318.

you are, and all that you are. You are . . . a collection of speeds and slownesses between unformed particles, a collection of unsubjectified affects].[7] Every person, animal, object, concept, weather pattern, natural phenomenon, or work of art has its own affective potentials that act upon and react to other bodies it comes in contact with. Everything is composed, decomposed, modified by affective intensities, "augmentant ou diminuant sa puissance d'agir, venant des parties extérieures ou de ses propres parties" [augmenting or diminishing its power to act, coming from outside parts or from one's own parts].[8] Affects come from both within and without, and we cannot know what an interaction between two given bodies will look like before it happens:

> Nous ne savons rien d'un corps tant que nous ne savons pas ce qu'il peut, c'est-à-dire quels sont ses affects, comment ils peuvent ou non se composer avec d'autres affects, avec les affects d'un autre corps, soit pour le détruire ou en être détruit, soit pour échanger avec lui actions et passions, soit pour composer avec lui un corps plus puissant.[9]
>
> [We know nothing about a body before we know what it can do—what its affects are, how they can or cannot bond with other affects of another body, either to destroy that body or be destroyed by it, to exchange actions and passions with it or to bond with it and compose a more powerful body.]

In other words, everything and everyone, every individuality has its own set of affects and thus its own unique affective potentials, its capacities to act and be acted upon.

As Gregg and Seigworth, taking a largely Deleuzian tack, summarize: "Deleuze's Spinozan route locates affect in the midst of things and relations (in immanence) and, then, in the complex

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[7] Deleuze and Guattari, 320.
[8] Deleuze and Guattari, 314.
[9] Deleuze and Guattari, 314.

assemblages that come to compose bodies and worlds simultaneously."[10] It is in that space of potential—among the interplay of those capacities—that affect arises. Affect "is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise)"; it is the name we give to "visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion";[11] it is, moreover,

> a gradient of bodily capacity—a supple incrementalism of ever-modulating force-relations—that rises and falls not only along various rhythms and modalities of encounter but also through the troughs and sieves of sensation and sensibility, an incrementalism that coincides with belonging to comportments of matter of virtually any and every sort.[12]

Affect, then, is not something that *is*, but something that *happens* to, in, among, beside, and between bodies and within assemblages; it is something that we become or that becomes us in our "perpetual becoming (always becoming otherwise)."[13] We cannot *not* affect or be affected, for this is the work of bodies, as Bruno Latour writes: "to have a body is to learn to be affected, meaning 'effectuated,' moved, put into motion by other entities, humans or nonhumans. If you are not engaged in this learning, you become insensitive, dumb, you drop dead."[14] Affects are ongoing processes in which we participate at all times; the cessation of affect is thus the cessation of life.

Rei Terada's work *Feeling in Theory* puts forth an account of affect through an explicitly poststructuralist lens. Although critics have claimed that poststructuralism either does not account for emotion—or that its rejection of the monadic subject is contradicted by its proponents' legible

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[10] Gregg and Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers," 6.
[11] Gregg and Seigworth, 1.
[12] Gregg and Seigworth, 2.
[13] Gregg and Seigworth, 3.
[14] Gregg and Seigworth, 11.

emotions[15]—Terada argues that "a discourse and ideology of emotion exist; poststructuralist theory shows their relation; and the effect of this exploration is to suggest that we would have no emotion if we *were* subjects."[16] (Patricia Clough agrees, noting affect's potential to draw attention to "the subject's discontinuity with itself, a discontinuity of the subject's conscious experience with the non-intentionality of emotion and affect."[17]) Terada is careful to differentiate between emotions and affects; in her conception, *affect* is the physiological correlate of *emotion*, which is a "psychological, at least minimally interpretive experience."[18] She also separates out both *feeling*—which for her connotes both physiological affects and psychological emotions—and *passion*, which, as a mostly compulsive "interior limit of volition," thus represents "the nonsubjectivity within the very concept of the subject."[19]

In *The Antinomies of Realism*, Fredric Jameson takes up Terada's vocabulary: "affects are bodily feelings, whereas emotions (or passions, to use their other name) are conscious states. The latter have objects, the former are bodily sensations: it is the difference between the *coup de foudre* and a state of generalized depression."[20] Jameson proceeds to set up an opposition between feelings/emotion—"preeminently a phenomenon sorted out into an array of names"—and affect, which "somehow eludes language and its naming of things (and feelings)."[21] Emotions are

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[15] Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the "Death of the Subject"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 3.
[16] Terada, 4.
[17] Patricia T. Clough, "The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedia, and Bodies," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 206.
[18] Terada, *Feeling in Theory*, 4.
[19] Terada, 5.
[20] Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies Of Realism* (New York: Verso, 2013), 32.
[21] Jameson, 29.

categorized, named, and reified, while affect is resistant to language and "[insatiably colonizes] the as yet unexplored and inexpressed."[22] For Jameson, then, affects exceed language—i.e., words—and a "different kind of language" is needed to evoke affect "without, by naming it, presuming to define its content."[23] For this, he calls upon Heidegger's depiction of affect—centered around the German word *Stimmung* (something like "mood," but also used to describe the tuning of a musical instrument), which frames affect in a model of audition. This is an advantageous parallel: we might look at modes of major and minor, as well as the seven Greek modes (Ionian, Lydian, etc.), in much the same way as the already named, codified emotions—in contrast to "affect's chromaticism, its waxing and waning not only in intensity but across the very scale and gamut of such nuances."[24] To speak of affects requires that we speak of "a slippage up and down the tones," which disregards traditional tonality and tonic conventions, and which makes of each tone a unique, "specific coloration."[25] In this way, affect becomes "the very chromaticism of the body itself."[26] This resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of tonality and chromaticism, the latter of which "[étend] l'action du centre aux tons les plus lointains, mais aussi [prepare] la désagrégation du principe central, [substitue] aux formes centrées le développement continu d'une forme qui ne cesse pas de se dissoudre ou de se transformer" [stretches the action of the center to the most distant tones, and also prepares the disaggregation of the central principle and replaces centered forms of continuous development with a form that ceaselessly dissolves and

[22] Jameson, 31.
[23] Jameson, 37.
[24] Jameson, 38–39.
[25] Jameson, 39.
[26] Jameson, 42.

transforms itself].[27] (As Jameson points out, a chromatic notion of affect, a "sliding scale" conception of it, calls to mind quartertones and a move away from Western tonality, the central principle that chromaticism will disaggregate.[28]) An "déchainé" [unleashed] or "généralisé" [generalized] chromaticism trades in "durées, intensités, timbres, attaques" [durations, intensities, timbre, attacks],[29] in much the same way as affects. This way of thinking affect keeps the emphasis on intensities and speeds, on instantaneous self-differentiation, "each infinitesimal moment differentiat[ing] itself from the last by a modification of tone and an increase or diminution of intensity."[30] (Jameson's musical parallel is particularly striking as it highlights the appropriateness of affect as a model for aesthetic experience. For example, it is perhaps because of such "generalized chromaticism" and instantaneous slippage in time and intensity that music, and sound generally, "nous envahit, nous pousse, nous entraîne, nous traverse" [engulfs us, impels us, sweeps us up, penetrates us], why it possesses the strongest deterritorializing force.[31])

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling* proceeds in a different direction from Jameson. She writes of affect in a way that seems largely coterminous with Terada's *feeling*—that is, not only as a physiological correlate to psychological experience, but as something subsuming the two. Her affects are named, though as Jameson points out, this is not necessarily a bad thing: human beings "objectify their projects and their desires, thereby enriching them: life it itself then a series of reifications which are themselves absorbed and enlarged."[32] Sedgwick differentiates

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[27] Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 120.
[28] Jameson, *The Antinomies Of Realism*, 39.
[29] Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 120.
[30] Jameson, *The Antinomies Of Realism*, 42.
[31] Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 429.
[32] Jameson, *The Antinomies Of Realism*, 30.

"drives" (mostly biological, physical functions—breathing, sleeping, eating, drinking) from affects, which

> have far greater freedom than drives with respect to . . . time . . . and aim, [and] especially . . . with respect to object, for . . . the object of affects such as anger, enjoyment, excitement, or shame is not proper to the affects in the same way that air is the object proper to respiration.[33]

This means that affects "can be, and are, attached to things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of other things"—including, crucially, other affects. In this way, "one can be excited by anger, disgusted by shame, or surprised by joy."[34] Sedgwick was among the first to see the potential of affect as applied to queer studies: more specifically, the pervasive effects of shame, which "for certain ('queer') people . . . is simply the first, and remains a permanent, structuring fact of identity."[35] Thinking shame as a habit, a long-term and structuring affective fact, "opens a lot of new doors for thinking about identity politics"[36]—we might even think of *queer* itself as a term for "those whose sense of identity is for some reason tuned most durably to the note of shame."[37]

In these theories of affect—some more abstract and desubjectified than others, but all generally concerned with potentialities, with the changing capacities of bodies as they interact in an affective economy—what is at stake is the way in which we speak of, or perhaps even conceive

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[33] Eve Koskofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.
[34] Sedgwick, 19.
[35] Sedgwick, 65.
[36] Sedgwick, 62.
[37] Sedgwick, 63.

of, our interactions with ourselves, with one another, and with our milieus. Although there is a temptation to ascribe objective evaluations to different sets of affects, it is important to keep in mind that indeed affect "bears an intense and thoroughly immanent neutrality."[38] On the one hand, we have what Gregg and Seigworth call "the delight and desirability of thought and feeling (and investigations of the relationship between both) as endpoints for intellectual practice in themselves."[39] But this must be countered with what Lauren Berlant calls the "cruel optimism" of sets of objects and ideas that seem to promise progress: there are always "moments when it could become otherwise," when we feel the affective capacity toward a way out—but "shifts in affective atmosphere are not equal to changing the world."[40] Theories of affect do not necessarily guarantee any political payoff, but they have potential—and it is in this multiform, mutable, maddeningly mercurial potential that I find affect to be a particularly appropriate concept through which to examine musical experience.

Bringing theories of affect into conversation with musical analyses is rarely straightforward. Though there are doubtless many people for whom music as an artform is not particularly charged with meaning or feeling, a great many people across cultures and time periods have written about music's peculiarly powerful ability to stir the emotions. But are musically mobilized emotions, and the meaning that an individual listener finds therein, contained somewhere in the notes themselves? On the flip side, do all musical affects arise from acculturation and connotation—meaning that the form and content of a work of music have a smaller role to

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[38] Gregg and Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers," 10.
[39] Gregg and Seigworth, 18.
[40] Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 116.

play than the ways in which different cultures associate certain motifs, melodic gestures, timbres, forms, and tonalities with different occasions and different emotional paradigms? I don't believe it is controversial to posit that the reality lies somewhere in between, that the myriad ways in which myriad listeners perceive a musical performance or recording are influenced by cultural norms and conventions *as well as* by the actual musical content in its dynamics, colors, and gestures, and further by the infinitely complex web of memories and extramusical ideas that each individual listener brings to bear on each and every musical encounter. "Emotion," Susanne Langer writes in her 1953 *Feeling and Form*, "may be taken either as the effect of a work on the beholder, or as the source from which its author's conception arose."[41] It is in the elision of these two paradigms that artificial distinctions and facile abstractions are often drawn: if emotions are codified and reified into discrete abstract categories, as Jameson writes, affects are impossible to fully pin down, referring instead to the impossibly complex, rhizomatic networks of information and interplays of forces and potentials that compose experience in its rawness, irreducible and singular.

Though there is no accounting for the affective shape a musical encounter will take, there are of course ways to think musical language and parse works of music for affective cues that make them more or less likely to be interpreted and felt in particular ways, other extramusical and personal factors notwithstanding. Langer proffers the concept of music as "significant form," with its significance "that of a symbol, a highly articulated sensuous object, which by virtue of its dynamic structure can express the forms of vital experience which language is peculiarly unfit to convey. Feeling, life, motion and emotion constitute its import."[42] Dramatic shifts in pitch and

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[41] Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form* (New York, Scribner, 1953), 14.
[42] Langer, 32.

dynamics correspond somewhat mimetically to shifts in emotional states, making the trajectory of a work of music something of a correlate to an emotional journey. In *Philosophy in a New Key*, Langer asserts that music "can *reveal* the nature of feelings with a detail and truth that language cannot approach."[43] Though there is something appealing—especially to, say, an impressionable 8-year-old budding pianist watching the 1995 film *Shine*—in the idea that music "expresses so completely the inexpressible,"[44] I am more inclined to agree with Patrik N. Juslin in his 2019 work *Musical Emotions Explained*, who takes up Langer and other early thinkers of affect in writing that "Because musical expression is slightly 'flexible' or 'imprecise,' it enables the listener to project his or her own interpretation onto the music in a way that would be impossible with, say, ordinary language."[45] Juslin reframes Langer's arguments in terms of affects—specifically *vitality affects*, a term coined by Daniel Stern, which refer to "a set of elusive qualities related to shape, intensity, contour, and movement […] best described in dynamic terms, such as growth and decay, tension and release, crescendo and diminuendo, and accelerando and ritardando." Vitality effects map not onto emotional states but onto "abstract *forms* of feeling that may occur both together with, and in the absence of, 'proper emotions'"[46]—which means that music "can express vitality affects in a precise manner, but this does not imply that music can express discrete emotions in an equally precise manner."[47] In other words, to sum up, it is difficult to deny that

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[43] Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (New York: New American Library, 1956), 191.
[44] *Shine* (Film Victoria, Momentum Films, 1996), 36:57.
[45] Patrik N. Juslin, *Musical Emotions Explained* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 92.
[46] Juslin, 93.
[47] Juslin, 94.

music is expressive but no less challenging, in most cases, to pin down exactly of what it is expressive.

Throughout my project I will continue to draw on ideas by Deleuze, whose thought forms a substantial part of the corpus that has led to the advent of affect theory—and also on those of Roland Barthes, a less prominent figure in most contemporary models of affect. My own understanding of musical affect is informed by the resonances and differences between these two influential twentieth-century philosophers who often employed different theoretical vocabularies in the service of divergent projects, and I think it is worth examining their depictions of territory, madness, innovation, pulsation and rhythm, and the place of the body in music-making and -listening. Barthes and Deleuze were both great lovers of music, and their writings on the artform often resonate with one another. In 1979, Barthes published an essay on one of his best-loved composers, "Aimer Schumann," in which he wonders why the great Robert Schumann does not always tend to inspire the same exalted devotion as many of his fellow composers. "Il y a beaucoup de wagnériens, de mahleriens," Barthes laments, "mais de schumanniens, je ne connais que Gilles Deleuze, Marcel Beaufils et moi" [There are plenty of Wagnerians and Mahlerians, but as for Schumannians, I only know of Gilles Deleuze, Marcel Beaufils, and myself].[48] In 1980, the following year, Deleuze and Félix Guattari would publish *Mille plateaux*, a staggering work of philosophy and criticism that situates nearly every conceivable sort of intellectual or artistic pursuit in a new ontological framework. And indeed, Deleuze and Guattari also express their admiration for Schumann, praising his "génie" [*genius*][49] and positing him as the catalyst for a new musical

[48] Roland Barthes, "Aimer Schumann (1979)," in *L'obvie et l'obtus: essais critiques III* (Éditions du Seuil, 1982), 263.
[49] Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 331.

episteme; their chapter on the *ritournelle* makes multiple references to Schumann and ends poetically with the one-word sentence "Schumann."[50] Deleuze and Barthes are two of the most prominent twentieth-century French thinkers who directly engage the auditory, the sonorous, and the musical: Barthes's musical essays, including the influential "Le grain de la voix," and Deleuze and Guattari's *Mille plateaux*, are among the most fascinating texts on music with which scholars of French, philosophy, and musicology continue to grapple today. *Mille plateaux* has almost single-handedly spurred the creation of several compendiums treating Deleuze and music, and Barthes is still cited regularly in contemporary musicology. The two do not often directly reference each other in these texts, but their shared enthusiasm for the music of Robert Schumann is only one example of a possible point of overlap between them. Both provide unique and potentially revolutionary ways of thinking music, one of the most maddeningly difficult artforms to pin down with language, by putting forward arguments that posit difference or creation as immanent to music-making. That is, there are strains of thought in the *oeuvre* of each writer which allow for a conceptualization of music-making as an act of pure innovation, a way of thinking which grants ontological specificity to each and every act of musical creation. This is an emboldening proposition for musicians and listeners alike, who might draw on it and seek new avenues of interpretation and comprehension, heretofore unexplored nuances—melodic lines, accents, dynamic changes, minute and personal adjustments to the ostensibly sacrosanct store in pieces of music written centuries ago. For Deleuze, this conceptualization arrives through difference as the power *to differ* in *Différence et Répétition*, and through the deterritorialization of a *ritournelle* [refrain] in *Mille plateaux*; for Barthes, it happens through a multifaceted embodiment of musical

[50] Deleuze and Guattari, 433.

experience, from the idiosyncratic grain of the voice to the "beating" of the musical body and the notion of an individuated *idiorythmie*. Though Deleuze and Barthes take different paths to reach similar conclusions about Schumann, for example, their writings on music complement one another, ultimately treating not only the role of the mind, but also those of the body and the beating heart in imbuing music with its unique power to move, both figuratively and literally.

Barthes freely admits that "il est . . . très difficile de parler de la musique. Beaucoup d'écrivains ont bien parlé de la peinture; aucun, je crois, n'a bien parlé de la musique, pas même Proust. La raison en est qu'il est très difficile de conjoindre le langage, qui est de l'ordre du général, et la musique, qui est de l'ordre de la différence" [It is very difficult to talk about music. Many writers have spoken well about painting; none, I think, has spoken well about music, not even Proust. The reason is that it is very difficult to unite langage, which is on the order of the general, and music, which is on the order of difference].[51] However doomed this enterprise might be, he is neither the first nor the last to embark on such an endeavor anyway: "Si donc, parfois, on peut se risquer à parler musique, comme je le fais aujourd'hui, ce ne doit pas être pour 'commenter' … mais pour affirmer ouvertement, activement, une valeur et produire une évaluation" [If we may sometimes venture to talk about music, as I'm doing today, it must not be to 'comment' on it, but to actively affirm a value and produce an evaluation].[52] Although Deleuze might not have ascribed language to the order of the *général*, this Barthesian distinction between orders of *général* and *différence* is not far removed from Deleuze's; as he explains in his 1968 dissertation *Différence et Répétition*, Deleuze sees "une grande différence entre la généralité, qui désigne toujours une

[51] Roland Barthes, "La musique, la voix, la langue (1977)," in *L'obvie et l'obtus: essais critiques III* (Éditions du Seuil, 1982), 247.
[52] Barthes, 247.

puissance logique du concept, et la répétition, qui témoigne de son impuissance ou de sa limite réelle" [a great difference between generality, which always denotes the concept's logical power, and repetition, which demonstrates its powerlessness, its concrete limits].[53] And Barthes's *ordre de la différence* is effectively synonymous with Deleuze's order of repetition, since for the latter, "l'opposition réelle n'est pas un maximum de différence, mais un minimum de répétition, une répétition réduite à deux, faisant retour et écho sur soi, une répétition qui a trouvé le moyen de se *définir*" [the real opposition is not a maximum of difference, but a minimum of repetition, a repetition reduced to two, coming back and echoing itself, a repetition which has found a way to define itself].[54] In other words, difference is not the contrary of repetition but is, in fact, *immanent* to repetition: "toujours, *c'est dans un même mouvement que la répétition comprend la différence* (non pas comme une variante accidentelle et extrinsèque, mais comme son coeur, comme la variante essentielle qui la compose, le déplacement et le déguisement qui la constituent pour une différence elle-même divergente et déplacée)" [it's always *in the same movement that repetition includes difference* (not as an accidental or extrinsic variation, but at its very heart, like the essential variation that it comprises, the displacement and disguise that constitute it for a difference that is itself divergent and displaced].[55] Difference cannot be thought in terms of an identity, or of sameness, or by passing through a negative dialectic à la Hegel. For Deleuze, repetition *is* difference, and difference always already differs in, of and from itself.

It would follow that any of music making is necessarily an innovative act, unique and unprecedented. To wit, Deleuze and Guattari write: "Même un rubato de Chopin ne peut pas être

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[53] Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 22.
[54] Deleuze, 23.
[55] Deleuze, 370, emphasis in original.

reproduit, puisqu'il aura chaque fois des caractéristiques différentes de temps" [Even a rubato in Chopin cannot be reproduced, because each time its temporal characteristics will change].[56] There is no way to simply "reproduce" a performance; each time a "work" of music is performed (I add quotation marks because what we call "Chopin's Piano Concerto Op. 11 in E Minor," for example, is not a stable or unitary signified but exists idiosyncratically in the imagination of every performer and every listener, and within the same listener at different times and in different contexts) it will differ in time and character from every other iteration of the same "work" since its inception. What is essential in a framing of music based on Deleuzian difference is, Brian Hulse explains, "learning to hear and appreciate the radical complexity of dynamic processes formed through repetition in music—processes no a priori schema or structure can anticipate or capture."[57] The score is nothing but a stripped-down framework, a skeletal set of guidelines toward a literally infinite variety of musical events. Barthes evokes the inadequacy of such a priori schema to anticipate a specific musical event, in his 1975 essay "Rasch": "Les indications de mouvements, d'atmosphère, sont en général aplaties sous le code italien (*presto, animato*, etc.), qui est ici un code purement technique. Rendus à une autre langue (originelle ou inconnue), les mots de la musique ouvrent la scène du corps" [Tempo markings and directions are generally flattened out under the Italian code (presto, animato, etc.), here a purely technical code. Rendered in another (originary or unknown) language, the words of the music open the scene of the body].[58] In addition to all of the ways in which a

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[56] Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 331.

[57] Brian Hulse, "Thinking Musical Difference: Music Theory as Minor Science," in *Sounding the Virtual: Gilles Deleuze and the Theory and Philosophy of Music*, ed. Brian Hulse and Nick Nesbitt (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), 34.

[58] Roland Barthes, "Rasch (1975)," in *L'obvie et l'obtus: essais critiques III* (Éditions du Seuil, 1982), 274.

written score cannot account for infinite gradations and differences in dynamics, tone, phrasing, tempo, etc., it also cannot account for the singularity of the body in music.

This theater of the music-making body is, indeed, a crucial site of Barthesian thought, alongside that of the listening body (although this is not a strict opposition, as we will see). For Barthes, listening—often abstracted, viewed as distancial—is an irreducibly physical interaction between bodies: "'écoutez-moi,'" he writes in "Écoute" (1976), "veut dire: *touchez-moi, sachez que j'existe*" ["Listen to me" means: *touch me, know that I exist*].[59] And in another 1976 text on Romantic songs, he explains that one engaged in listening to a song also sings along in the space of the imaginary and resonates internally in accordance with the received vibrations: "Qu'est-ce qui, dans mon corps, à moi qui écoute, chante le lied? C'est tout ce qui retentit en moi, me fait peur ou me fait désir" [What, in my body as I listen, sings the Lied? It's everything that reverberates within me, scares me or entices me].[60] The true space of listening, for Barthes, is "l'intérieur de la tête, de ma tête : en l'écoutant, je chante le lied avec moi-même, pour moi-même" [the inside of the head, of my head: when I listen to it, I sing the Lied with myself, for myself].[61] This economy of music-making bodies, and their immanent power to differ, produces Barthes's famous *grain de la voix*:

> Quelque chose est là, manifeste et têtu (on n'entend que *ça*), qui est au-delà (ou en deçà) du sens des paroles … quelque chose qui est directement le corps du chantre,

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[59] Roland Barthes, "Écoute (1976)," in *L'obvie et l'obtus: essais critiques III* (Éditions du Seuil, 1982), 223.
[60] Roland Barthes, "Le chant romantique (1976)," in *L'obvie et l'obtus: essais critiques III* (Éditions du Seuil, 1982), 255.
[61] Barthes, 256.

> amené d'un même mouvement, à votre oreille, du fond des cavernes, des muscles, des muqueuses, des cartilages, et du fond de la langue.[62]
>
> [Something is there, manifest and stubborn (we hear only *it*), which is beyond (or short of) the meaning of the words … something that is the singer's body itself, brought to your ear in one movement from the depths of the caverns, the muscles, the mucous membranes, the cartilage, and from the depths of language.]

The *grain* is "la matérialité du corps parlant sa langue maternelle" [the materiality of the body speaking its native language];[63] it is "le corps dans la voix qui chante, dans la main qui écrit, dans le membre qui exécute" [the body in the voice that sings, in the hand that writes, in the limb that performs];[64] more than a simple question of timbre, the *grain* "ne peut précisément mieux se définir que par la friction même de la musique et d'autre chose, qui est la langue (et pas du tout le message)" [cannot be more precisely defined than as the friction between the music and something else, which is the language (and not at all the message)].[65] Understood rudimentarily, the *grain* is the presence of the body in (especially, but not exclusively) vocal music—the catch in the voice on a given note; an unexpected, almost imperceptible moment of hesitation or acceleration in a phrase; an idiosyncratic, immediately recognizable vibrato; a hauntingly peculiar tone color. There does not have to be a literal *langue* for the *grain* to be heard and experienced; it is also to be found in instrumental music. "S'il n'y a plus là de langue," Barthes writes,

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[62] Roland Barthes, "Le grain de la voix (1972)," in *L'obvie et l'obtus: essais critiques III* (Éditions du Seuil, 1982), 238.
[63] Barthes, 238.
[64] Barthes, 243–44.
[65] Barthes, 241. As in the blockquote above, the French word *langue* means both "language" and "tongue," adding to the corporeality of Barthes's description.

> il y a du moins le corps de l'artiste qui de nouveau m'impose une évaluation. . . . Pour la musique de piano, je sais tout de suite quelle est la partie du corps qui joue: si c'est le bras, trop souvent, hélas, musclé comme le mollet d'un danseur, la griffe (malgré les ronds de poignets), ou si c'est au contraire la seule partie érotique d'un corps de pianiste: le coussinet des doigts, dont on entend le 'grain' si rarement.[66]
>
> [If there is no longer language / a tongue, there is still the artist's body which imposes an evaluation on me. . . . In piano music, I know immediately which body part is playing: if it's the arm, too often, alas, muscled like a dancer's calf; the claw (despite the rounded wrists); or if, instead, it's the only erotic part of a pianist's body: the pad of the fingertips, whose 'grain' we so rarely hear.]

Barthes does not expand on the ways in which he hears the *grain* in instrumental music—but the idiosyncrasies of any performer, whether vocalist, pianist, or cellist, are identifiable as literal extensions of a particular body in a particular territory.

The word *territory*, of course, immediately recalls the work of Deleuze. Introduced in Deleuze and Guattari's 1972 work *L'Anti-Œdipe* (the first volume of *Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, predecessor to *Mille plateaux*), functions of territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization are among Deleuze's best-known contributions to critical theory and philosophy.[67] For Deleuze and Guattari in *Mille plateaux*, music is a phenomenon of deterritorialization and retorritorialization of the *ritournelle*, usually translated as *refrain*. The refrain is a "bloc d'expression"[68] borne out of notions of territory: a birdsong, perhaps, or a child's

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[66] Barthes, 244.
[67] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *L'anti-Oedipe: capitalisme et schizophrénie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972), 40–43.
[68] Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 367.

voice carving out a melody to orient itself in space and time, to call upon the refrain's reassuring forces—that is, to conjure the scene of its native territory, the safe embrace of a mother's lullaby, and transpose the attendant affects of that territory onto a new or potentially threatening environment. The refrain is "le contenu proprement musical, le bloc de contenu propre à la musique" [the properly musical content, the bloc of content unique to music],[69] though it is not music itself. Rather, music is the process of taking hold of a refrain and deterritorializing it, subjecting it to *lignes de fuite* [lines of flight] and reterritorializing it, submitting it to "ce traitement très spécial de la diagonale ou de la transversale, [l'arrachant] à sa territorialité" [that very special treatment of the diagonal or transverse, [wresting it] from its territoriality].[70] Music exists, then, because the refrain exists,

> parce que la musique prend, s'empare de la ritournelle comme contenu dans une forme d'expression, parce qu'elle fait bloc avec elle pour l'emporter ailleurs. . . . La musique est l'opération active, créatrice, qui consiste à déterritorialiser la ritournelle. Tandis que la ritournelle est essentiellement territoriale, territorialisante ou reterritorialisante, la musique en fait un contenu déterritorialisé pour une forme d'expression déterritorialisante.[71]
>
> [because music takes, seizes upon the refrain as content in an expressive form, because it makes a block with it in order to transport it away. . . . Music is the active, creative operation that consists in deterritorializing the refrain. While the refrain is essentially territorial, territorializing or reterritorializing, music makes it a deterritorialized content for a deterritorializing expressive form.]

[69] Deleuze and Guattari, 368.
[70] Deleuze and Guattari, 367.
[71] Deleuze and Guattari, 368–69.

If the refrain of a well-known lullaby immediately calls to mind safety, maternal love, the comforts of home, etc., then music is the process of taking that refrain out of its original territory and inscribing it within a new space. (Recall the third movement of Gustav Mahler's First Symphony, a funeral march that reterritorializes the children's song "Frère Jacques" to eerie and disconcerting effect.) Although published after *L'Anti-Oedipe*, Barthes's "Rasch" appeared before *Mille plateaux*, in which Deleuze and Guattari write about music at length for the first time. In his essay, Barthes lays out a conception of the territoriality of sound: "Pour le mammifère, son **territoire** est jalonné d'odeurs et de sons; pour l'homme—chose souvent sous-estimée—l'appropriation de l'espace est elle aussi sonore: l'espace ménager, celui de la maison, de l'appartement … est un espace de bruits familiers, *reconnus*, dont l'ensemble forme une sorte de symphonie domestique" [The mammal's **territory** is marked out with scent and sound; for humans—something often underestimated—the appropriation of space is also auditory: the domestic space, the house, the apartment … is a space of familiar sounds, recognizeable, which form a sort of domestic symphony.][72] Indeed, territory is a vital concept in Barthes's thinking of the auditory: "C'est sans doute à partir de cette notion de territoire (ou d'espace approprié, familier, aménagé—ménager), que l'on saisit le mieux la fonction de l'écoute" [It's probably through this notion of territory (or of appropriated, familiar, arranged space) that we might best understand the function of listening].[73] With regard to the efficacy of de- and reterritorializations, Deleuze evokes Schumann to illustrate his theory in action: "L'œuvre de Schumann," he writes, "est faite de ritournelles, de blocs d'enfance, auxquels il fait subir un traitement très spécial : son devenir-enfant à lui, son

[72] Barthes, "Écoute (1976)," 218, emphasis mine.
[73] Barthes, 219.

devenir-femme à lui, Clara" [The work of Schumann is made of refrains, blocks of childhood, which he subjects to a very special treatment: his own becoming-child, his becoming-woman, Clara].[74]

At one point, the refrain's importance seems to be briefly displaced by that of the *intermezzo*, a concept essentially straight out of Barthes's "Rasch." Deleuze and Guattari explain that "une ligne-bloc passe au milieu des sons, et pousse elle-même par son propre milieu non localisable. Le bloc sonore est l'*intermezzo*" [a line-block passes straight through the sounds, and impels with its own unlocalizable milieu. The sound block is the intermezzo].[75] He does not elaborate much further upon how the *intermezzo* functions in his thought, except to explain its importance in the development of Romanticism, of which Schumann is his favorite exemplar. This represents the only point in their treatment of music in *Mille plateaux* at which Deleuze and Guattari directly reference Barthes—specifically, "Rasch," which deals with Schumann's celebrated *Kriesleriana*. The Deleuzian refrain appears to bear traces of Barthes's *intermezzo*: "L'intermezzo," writes Barthes, "n'a pas pour fonction de distraire, mais de déplacer. . . . À la limite, il n'y a que des intermezzi: ce qui interrompt est à son tour interrompu, et cela recommence" [The intermezzo serves not to distract, but to displace. . . . At the limit, there are only intermezzi: what interrupts is in turn interrupted, and it begins again].[76] The blocks of sound, refrains or *intermezzi*, are constantly displaced, constantly displacing one another, following transversal, diagonal lines of flight toward an act of musical creation—displacements which Barthes sees and hears especially in the work of Schumann. "Le corps schumannien ne tient pas en place" [The

[74] Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 368.
[75] Deleuze and Guattari, 365.
[76] Barthes, "Rasch (1975)," 266.

Schumannian body does not hold still], writes Barthes. "Ce n'est pas un corps méditatif. . . . C'est un corps pulsionnel, qui se pousse et repousse, passé à autre chose—pense à autre chose ; c'est un corps étourdi (grisé, distrait et ardent tout à la fois). D'où l'*envie* (gardons à ce mot son sens physiologique) de l'*intermezzo*" [It is not a meditative body. . . . It's a pulsional / instinctual body that pushes back and forth, moves on to something else—thinks about something else; it's a dazed body (at once intoxicated, distracted, and ardent). Hence the envy (keeping the word's physiological meaning) of the intermezzo]. [77] Barthes ties the pulsional, unruly Schumannian body with a pulsional, troubled mind. "La réalité [chez Schumann] est menacé de désarticulation, de dissociation. . . . rien ne tient longtemps, un mouvement interrompant l'autre" [Schumann's reality is threatened with disarticulation, dissociation. . . . Nothing holds for long, one movement interrupting another].[78] Schumann's constant musical displacements and deterritorializations are inextricable from his very *reality* that imposes itself upon players and listeners, a dissociative, "mutant" reality bearing "quelque chose de radical, qui en fait [de la musique de Schumann] une expérience existentielle plus que sociale ou morale. Cette radicalité n'est pas sans rapport avec la folie" [something radical, which makes Schumann's music more an existential than social or moral experience. This radicality is not unrelated to madness].[79]

Quelle folie? Schumann's fragile and progressively deteriorating mental health has been well documented, and indeed, Deleuze and Guattari wish to pay "hommage à Schumann, folie de Schumann."[80] Their work in the two volumes of *Capitalisme et schizophrénie* is concerned with

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[77] Barthes, 266. From the Latin *invidēre*, to look askance.
[78] Barthes, "Aimer Schumann (1979)," 261.
[79] Barthes, 261.
[80] Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 365.

a liberatory "schizo-analyse," a deterritorialized and deterritorializing tack, freed from quotidian constraints, a counterpart to the essential Deleuzian notion of the *rhizome*, which would supplant the normal dichotomies and hierarchies of Western ethics and aesthetics. In a rhizomatic philosophy, there are only horizontal and diagonal lines, no hierarchical verticals: "Il n'y a pas de points ou de positions dans un rhizome, comme on en trouve dans une structure, un arbre, une racine. Il n'y a que des lignes" [There are no points or positions in a rhizome as one would find in a structure, a tree, a root. There are only lines].[81] (Interestingly, Deleuze turns to a musical example in his introductory chapter to elucidate the rhizome: "Quand Glenn Gould accélère l'exécution d'un morceau, il n'agit pas seulement en virtuose, il transforme les points musicaux en lignes, il fait proliférer l'ensemble" [When Glenn Gould speeds up the execution of a piece, he's not simply being virtuosic—he's transforming musical points into lignes, proliferating the whole][82]). And only a schizo-analytical mind is readily able to navigate such lines, to traverse deterritorializing *lignes de fuite*. "En traitant l'inconscient comme un système acentré, c'est-à-dire comme un réseau machinique d'automates finis (rhizome)," write Deleuze and Guattari, "la schizo-analyse atteint à un tout autre état de l'inconscient" [In treating the unconscious as an acentered system—as a machine-like network of finite automatons—schizo-analysis evokes a whole other state of the unconscious].[83] There is, then, a positive side to what society calls "madness," to the ability to resist normalizing standards, to envision and then to embark upon these transversal *lignes de fuite*: "Les schizos . . . ont l'oeil aigu, et l'oreille" [Schizos . . . have a keen eye, and ear].[84] If *schizos*'

[81] Deleuze and Guattari, 15.
[82] Deleuze and Guattari, 15.
[83] Deleuze and Guattari, 27.
[84] Deleuze and Guattari, 42.

ability to deterritorialize verges on dangerous (i.e., runs the risk of alienating schizoanalytic thinkers from "reality"), it also allows them to see and hear what may be unseeable or unhearable for most. If for Deleuze, any artist can be properly schizo-analytical, Barthes installs musicians in a separate rung, since their works are often unbeholden to purely linguistic signifiers: "

> Dans la musique, champ de signifiance et non système de signes, le référent est inoubliable, car le référent, ici, c'est le corps. Le corps passe dans la musique sans autre relais que le signifiant. **Ce passage—cette transgression—fait de la musique une folie : non seulement la musique de Schumann, mais toute musique.** Par rapport à l'écrivain, le musicien est toujours fou (et l'écrivain, lui, ne peut l'être, car il est condamné au sens).
>
> In music, a field of signification rather than a system of signs, the referent is unforgettable because the referent is, here, the body. The body is relayed into music by the signifier alone. **This passage—this transgression—makes music into madness: not only Schumann's music, but all music**. Compared with a writer, a musician is always mad (and a writer cannot be, for he is condemned to meaning].[85]

In any act of music making, the *body* itself is the referent, not the "text" (i.e., the score); the body is what we hear *through* the music, what penetrates us aurally and stirs our emotions and renders us all a little crazy—even *schizo*, if we listen right.

The longtime illness that led to the schizoanalytic Schumann's institutionalization and premature death may have also allowed him to forge a *ligne de fuite* toward a new era of music. "C'est peut-être dans le lied, et surtout dans le lied de Schumann," Deleuze and Guattari write, "qu'apparaît pour la première fois ce pur mouvement qui met la voix et le piano sur un même plan

[85] Barthes, "Rasch (1975)," 273.

de consistance, et fait du piano un instrument de délire, dans une direction qui prépare l'opéra wagnérien" [It may be in the Lied, especially the Schumannian Lied, that for the first time we see this pure movement that juxtaposes the voice and the piano on the same plane of consistency, and makes the piano an instrument of madness, paving the way to Wagnerian opera].[86] It is with this musical usage of their *plan de consistance* ("plane of consistency") that Deleuze and Guattari, perhaps indirectly, construct an inevitably hierarchical dichotomy:

> Nous devons opposer les deux plans comme deux pôles abstraits: par exemple, au plan organisationnel transcendant d'une musique occidentale fondée sur les formes sonores et leur développement, l'on oppose un plan de consistance immanent de la musique orientale, faite de vitesses et de lenteurs, de mouvements et de repos.[87]
>
> [We must oppose the two planes as two poles of abstraction: for example, in opposition to the organized transcendental plane of Western music founded on forms and their development, an immanent plane of consistency of Eastern music, made up of speeds and slownesses, movements and rests.]

The *plan organisationnel* ("plane of organization") upon which Western classical music is built "couvre effectivement ce que nous appelions stratification: les formes et les sujets, les organes et les fonctions sont des 'strates' ou des rapports entre strates" [essentially covers what we call stratification: forms and subjects, organs and functions are "strata" or relations between strata].[88] Idioms of tonality and rhythm, then, are unrhizomatic—they are artificially rigid strata which do not allow for the same freedoms—lines of flight—as the "plan d'immanence, consistance ou composition" [plane of immanence, consistency or composition] which entails "une

[86] Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 378.
[87] Deleuze and Guattari, 331.
[88] Deleuze and Guattari, 330.

déstratification de toute la Nature, y compris par les moyens les plus artificiels" [a total destratification of Nature, including by the most artificial means].[89] It is difficult not to conclude—from their association of Eastern, atonal, or irregularly rhythmic music with the *plan de consistance*, and of Western classical with the *plan organisationnel*—that Deleuze and Guattari favor the former in a philosophical sense, especially when one considers their claim that "le plan d'organisation ne cesse pas de travailler sur le plan de consistance, en essayant toujours de boucher les lignes de fuite, de stopper ou d'interrompre les mouvements de déterritorialisation" [the plane of organization never stops working on the plane of consistency, always attempting to block lines of flight, to stop or interrupt movements of deterritorialization].[90] The *plan organisationnel* is an active opponent of liberty; it works against *lignes de fuite* and tries to divert deterritorializing movements toward the stratified forms of the normative. For Deleuze and Guattari, not just tonality but also metric rhythm lie on a *plan organisationnel*, not the more favorable *plan d'immanence*, on which "il s'agit d'une libération du temps, Aiôn, temps non pulsé pour une musique flottante, comme dit [Pierre] Boulez, musique électronique où les formes cèdent la place à de pures modifications de vitesse" [we're dealing with the liberation of tempo, Aiôn, a non-pulsed tempo for a music that floats, as Boulez says, electronic music whose forms give way to pure modifications of speed].[91]

But where Deleuze and Guattari sometimes speak of music in the abstract, as though works of music could be thought to exist outside of their actualized performance—played, heard, and *lived* by bodies—Barthes establishes rhythm, and music, differently. He, too, recognizes

[89] Deleuze and Guattari, 330.
[90] Deleuze and Guattari, 330.
[91] Deleuze and Guattari, 327.

"l'autorité du code fondamental de l'Occident: la tonalité" [the fundamental authority of tonality in the West][92]—but he does not oppose it hierarchically to Eastern or modern music. He allows that from one standpoint, dodecaphonic tonality might be seen as restrictive, preventing a transmission of affect: "D'un côté, tout l'appareil tonal est un écran pudique, une illusion, un voile *maya*, bref une *langue*, destinée à articuler les corps, non selon ses propres coups (ses propres coupures), mais selon une organisation connue qui ôte au sujet toute possibilité de délirer" [On the one hand, any tonal apparatus is a modesty curtain, an illusion, a Veil of Maya—a *language* meant to articulate bodies not according to its own beats (its own cuts), but according to a framework that keeps all subjects from madness]. In this viewpoint, not far removed from that of Deleuze and Guattari, tonality is a system that makes performers work for it and eliminates the potential for *délire* (the Barthesian correlate to *deterritorialization* or Schumannian *folie*). But viewed through a different lens, "la tonalité devient la servante habile des coups qu'à un autre niveau elle prétend domestiquer" [tonality becomes the lowly servant of beats / blows that on another level it purports to tame].[93] Perhaps a tonal system does not actively seek to block lines of flight, or subjugate performers to its strictures; instead, a musician uses tonality to his or her own ends, subjecting the system to a whole economy of bodily affects. And a metered rhythm does not have to be thought as part of a *plan organisationnel*: "Par le rythme aussi," Barthes writes, "l'écoute cesse d'être pure surveillance pour devenir création. Sans le rythme, aucun langage n'est possible" [Through rhythm as well, listening ceases to be pure observation and becomes creation. Without rhythm, all

[92] Roland Barthes, "Musica Practica (1970)," in *L'obvie et l'obtus: essais critiques III* (Éditions du Seuil, 1982), 233.
[93] Barthes, "Rasch (1975)," 274.

language is impossible].[94] For Barthes, even *listening* is a creative act, because the listener participates in an economy of bodily affects; her presence is as constitutive of the performance as that of the musician. Further, where Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between planes of consistency and organization has been used by interlocutors to inscribe improvised music (often jazz) as more "free" or more "musical" than Western classical,[95] Barthes once again offers a way of reaffirming the importance of the performer and listener *in the here and now*, of positing all performances as acts of creation and composition. "Composer," he writes, "c'est, du moins tendanciellement, *donner à faire*, non pas donner à entendre, mais donner à écrire. . . . c'est nous qui jouons." [Composing is, at least tendentially, *giving something to do*, not giving something to hear, but something to write. . . . it is we who play it].[96] No matter what is written on the score, the music we make cannot be inscribed on a page—*we* are the ones who are playing, and the *grain* of our voices or instruments makes our playing locatable in a unique spatiotemporal point, different from any musical act ever before or after.

In the act of inscribing their personal aesthetics as ethical or empirical, Deleuze and Guattari seem at moments to forget the role played by the heart, the unpredictable ability of certain musics to affect certain bodies. "Chez Schumann," they write, "c'est tout un travail mélodique, harmonique et rythmique savant, qui aboutit à ce résultat simple et sobre, *déterritorialiser la*

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[94] Barthes, "Écoute (1976)," 220.

[95] See, for example, Eugene Holland, "Studies in Applied Nomadology: Jazz Improvisation and Post-Capitalist Markets," in *Deleuze and Music*, ed. Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda (Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 20–35; Jeremy Gilbert, "Becoming-Music: The Rhizomatic Moment of Improvisation," in *Deleuze and Music*, ed. Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda (Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 118–39.

[96] Barthes, "Musica Practica (1970)," 235.

ritournelle. Produire une ritournelle déterritorialisée, comme but final de la musique, la lâcher dans le Cosmos, c'est plus important que de faire un nouveau système." [In Schumann's music there is a knowing construction of melody, harmony, and rhythm that lead to a simple and sober outcome: *deterritorializing the refrain*. Producing a deterritorialized refrain, as the ultimate goal of music, releasing it into the Cosmos, is more important than inventing a whole new system].[97] A Deleuzian notion of *différence*, coupled with the function of deterritorializing the *ritournelle*, seems sometimes to bear less weight when Deleuze and Guattari make aesthetic judgments. An argument could be made for any Western composer's ability to deterritorialize the *ritournelle*—after all, Schumann's music is neither atonal nor ametric. In the same way that Deleuze and Guattari seem to install Schumann's music on a *plan de consistance* because of their own aesthetic preferences, Barthes allows his predilection towards certain artists and styles to inflect his theory of the *grain* (recall his reference to "le coussinet des doigts, dont on entend le 'grain' si rarement" [the pads of the fingertips, whose *grain* we so rarely hear][98]). If Barthes cannot hear the *grain*, he seems to imply that there is not one—but the function of the listener fundamentally changes the performance of a piece of music, and if he does not hear a *grain*, it does not necessarily mean that there is none to be heard. But Barthes, an amateur pianist himself, knows that when we talk about "Schumann" we are also talking about ourselves as listeners or performers. This is why he opines that "un même auteur peut être mineur si on l'écoute, immense si on le joue (même mal): tel Schumann" [one creator can be minor in listening, monumental in performing (even badly)—like Schumann].[99] The experience of *playing* Schumann's music oneself is different from *hearing* it played, even

[97] Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 432–33.
[98] Barthes, "Le grain de la voix (1972)," 244.
[99] Barthes, "Musica Practica (1970)," 231.

though listening is also an act of creation. What sets Barthes apart is his recognition of the intensely personal character of musical affect, which he admits freely in "Le grain de la voix": "Ce que je vais tenter de dire du '*grain*' ne sera, bien sûr, que le versant apparemment abstrait, le compte rendu impossible d'une jouissance individuelle que j'éprouve continûment en écoutant chanter." [What I will try to say of the "grain" will be only, of course, the seemingly abstract aspect, the impossible accounting for an individual *jouissance* that I experience ceaselessly while listening to someone sing].[100] He does not shy away from subjective aesthetic judgments, but they are inscribed as precisely that; he implicates himself, his body, his heart, and his mind in the process. As Dominic Symonds writes, "That Barthes's analysis represents a comparative judgment of value is evident, and he is himself aware of the inculcation of 'personal taste' and the hierarchy that he sets up in such a distinction: this is 'the impossible accounting of an individual enjoyment.'"[101] In "Le chant romantique," Barthes wonders, "Que dire de ce qu'on aime, sinon: *je l'aime*, et répéter sans fin?" [What to say about what one loves, except—*I love it*, repeated over and over?][102] Apparently, quite a lot—and much of it rather profound—but for Barthes, always with the understanding that when we write about music, we are also writing about ourselves and about what we love most deeply. Every voice has a *grain*, and every work of music deterritorializes a *ritournelle*; even if they do not ultimately reach this conclusion, Deleuze (with Guattari) and Barthes give us all the tools to find it ourselves and make it a part of our own music-making territory.

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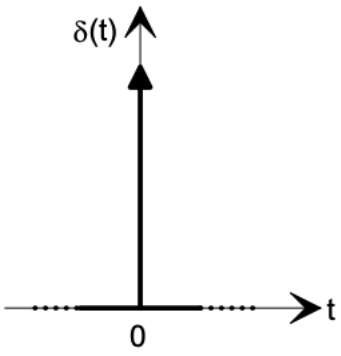
[100] Barthes, "Le grain de la voix (1972)," 238.
[101] Dominic Symonds, "The Corporeality of Musical Expression: The Grain of the Voice and the Actor-Musician," *Studies in Musical Theatre* 1, no. 2 (August 31, 2007): 172.
[102] Barthes, "Le chant romantique (1976)," 253.

The irrevocably (em)bodied nature of musical encounters as in Barthes's writings, and the idea of an instantaneous and discrete affective jolt, bring to mind the idea of an *impulse*. In modeling certain systems and solving differential equations, engineers and mathematicians often refer to what is known as the Dirac delta function to represent an impulse or a moment of impact, with time represented on the x-axis and amplitude on the y-axis. The particularity of this function is that it has amplitude only at t=0 but that its integral is 1—in other words, that "although its value is strictly undefined at that [instant], it must tend toward infinity."[103] This representation of a nearly infinite amount of force applied in a vanishingly small duration of time seems a fitting way of modeling affective encounters, since—as Deleuze especially makes clear—the potential contained within any affective assemblage is nearly limitless. If we look at Julie in Kieślowski's *Bleu*, those split-second blackouts that take over her being for an imperceptibly small amount of time are implicated in such a vast network of personal and impersonal affects that it would be folly to try to account for them systematically in a way that could be legible to someone outside of Julie's interiority: the history of Western music, the timbre of a string instrument, every piece of music Julie has ever heard, every tender and terrible moment she spent with her husband before his death, the unprocessed grief of the loss of her daughter, her lack of recognition as a composer in her own right, the interlocutors who force her into confrontation with a still-too-painful past… Although



b) The impulse function

[103] "The Dirac Delta Function and Convolution," Massachusetts Institute of Technology Department of Mechanical Engineering, accessed November 14, 2021, https://web.mit.edu/2.14/www/Handouts/Convolution.pdf.

Kieślowski's evocation in *Bleu* matches up uniquely well with the model of the Dirac delta function (since he literally depicts an affective impulse lasting no time and containing a near-infinite amount of information), the idea of a musical moment being supercharged with affect is something that seems to be intuitively obvious in many depictions and legible to even the widest and mainstream of audiences. In the 1994 film *The Shawshank Redemption*, one of the most popularly beloved films of all time (indeed, the top-ranked film on IMDB.com since 2008, when it displaced *The Godfather*), there is a well-known sequence in which the protagonist, imprisoned for a crime he did not commit, contrives a way to take control of the prison loudspeakers and broadcasts a Mozart aria for all of his fellow inmates to hear. And these hardened men in the yard—convicted criminals starved of art and culture and music and, by necessity and lack of any appropriate outlet, habituated to tamp down strong emotions—stop dead in their tracks to listen, unmoving and unspeaking, to "Sull'aria… che soave zeffiretto" from *The Marriage of Figaro*. The choice of aria seems almost irrelevant, as the film's narrator (Morgan Freeman) recounts: "I have no idea to this day what those two Italian ladies were singing about. Truth is, I don't wanna know—some things are best left unsaid. I like to think they were singing about something so beautiful it can't be expressed in words and makes your heart ache because of it." In fact, the opera's Susanna and Rosina are plotting to expose the infidelity of Rosina's husband Count Almaviva, one of many plot points in a madcap comedy of errors—but for potentially millions of viewers of *Shawshank* who speak no Italian and are unfamiliar with the plot of *Figaro*, this aria is now imbued with exactly the meaning that Freeman's character ascribed to it: a paean to ineffable beauty, art, freedom.

The *Shawshank* example shows what I find to be one of the most salient points about analyzing music's relationship with listeners: the singular and irreproducible context that forms the infinity of the impulse function. There are, of course, many interesting and rigorous ways to examine "Sull'aria…" from a musicological perspective, pointing to the characteristics of it that make it a good candidate for the *Shawshank* scene: the delicate blending of two soprano timbres, the lilting 6/8 meter and *allegretto* tempo that may help suggest the "gentle little zephyr" Susanna and Rosina are singing about. In a 2020 monograph on music and affect, Michael Spitzer—while also providing cogent and elegant histories of thought about music, expression, and humans' metaconceptions about their own emotions, up to and including recent neuroscientific explanations—offers a brief affective reading of the opening Aria from Bach's *Goldberg Variations*: "The lyric tenderness of the music elicits a listener response of intimacy and yearning," he writes, "[creating] . . . a bond, a phenomenal identification between the Aria and its audience, enhanced by their attachment to the sound's very sweetness."[104] Although his description is one that tracks with my own experience as an amateur pianist and a longtime regular listener of Western classical music, I am not sure to what degree it is possible to talk about "the listener" in a universal sense (and later on in his analysis, Spitzer switches to the first person, highlighting a note that "always gives me emotional 'chills' however many times I hear it or play it"[105]). In other words, though I find his methodology sound and his results convincing, I am also interested in the many other listeners who might not respond to the Aria in the same way as he and I—whether because they are less familiar with instrumental classical music and its conventions, or because

[104] Michael Spitzer, *A History of Emotion in Western Music: A Thousand Years from Chant to Pop* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 28.
[105] Spitzer, 29.

they are distracted or in a foul mood and not predisposed to the kind of attentive listening that an emotionally invested reaction presupposes, or because they once had a cruel piano teacher who forced them to practice Bach *ad nauseam*, or because their life experience has led them to associate the Aria, or classical piano music entirely, with negative memories. I do not mean to suggest that the actual musical content of a piece of music has no bearing on the way it is felt and interpreted—it is difficult to imagine a relaxing spa day soundtracked by Bernard Herrmann's staccato strings from *Psycho*, or a rowdy mosh pit forming at a performance of Debussy's *Clair de lune*—but rather that it is only one factor among many in the way that experiences of music are lived and depicted in literary works. There are many ways in which music "sticks" to and carries meaning to large audiences, often owing to biographical knowledge of a composer or interpreter, programmatic titles and descriptions of works, or (in the 20th and 21st centuries) use in television or movies; and there are many ways in which music comes to signify something to us individually, due to the contexts in which we hear and rehear them. I am less interested in examining "a work" as a pure object of study *per se* than in looking at the some of the many different kinds of ways in which, once placed into the inestimably complex and always-shifting assemblage of affective intensities and potentials that undergird every moment of life, a work takes on a plenitude of meaning *within a singular context*, and the ways that different works of literature and film grapple with (or take advantage of) the slipperiness of that ascribed meaning, whether by assuming its universality *a priori* or by attempting, to some degree, to recreate its context as closely as possible to reproduce a given affect either in the world of the narrative or in the mind of the reader. All works of art have the potential to mobilize multiple sets of affects, of course, and our reactions to paintings, poems, films, and books are intensely personal and a result of innumerable experiences

and preconceptions—but I want to take a closer lens to some of the largely *extramusical* ways music carries meaning and affect.

My first chapter, "Les refrains oubliés du bonheur," deals with three literary works that contain multiple common resonances and depict musical meaning in related, though by no means identical, ways. I read Gérard de Nerval's 1853 novella *Sylvie*, published just a few years before the author's suicide, alongside Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the refrain, de- and reterritorialization. The trials of Nerval's narrator center around tradition and territory as embodied by music: he first deserts his childhood sweetheart Sylvie for another woman whose singing voice seduces him and comes, in his mind, to represent a potent nostalgia for the old Valois and its comforting ways; and later, when he desperately seeks to recover something of their earlier bond, he is desolate to discover that even the innocent Sylvie, who is supposed to be unsullied by modernity, nonetheless shows signs of corruption and decadence in the way that she sings—with operatic phrasing, not with the plain and assuming country ways of the girl next door. When she sings one of the old songs that used to charm him, it is this, more than anything else, that throws the present into stark relief with the past, which he realizes is irrevocably lost.

As Marcel Proust was inspired by Nerval's work, I also read selected scenes from *A la recherche du temps perdu* with a focus on the famous *petite phrase* from the Vinteuil sonata that, as a bloc of affect, becomes for Swann a symbol of his love for Odette. Proust's depiction of music's incredible power—capable of vacating a space in one's very soul upon which it can then indelibly inscribe nearly anything—is particularly beautiful and particularly germane to an overview of musical affect. Like Nerval's narrator in Sylvie, Swann reaches a critical realization about his own life when a later audition of the *petite phrase* finally forces him to take stock of the

gap between his idealized projection of Odette sustained by the music and the messy, unsatisfying reality of loving her as a real person.

Finally, I look at André Gide's *La Symphonie pastorale*, in which the narrator, a pastor, takes in a blind woman, Gertrude, and ultimately falls in love with her—a love story which culminates at a concert where he and Gertrude hear the titular Beethoven symphony. A similar mechanism of idealization through music takes places in this novella, bringing a further layer of complication with its use of one of Western classical music's most famously programmatic works—one of only two symphonies that Beethoven named himself (as well as each individual movement, to suggest images in listeners' minds when primed with this information). Gide's ecstatic depiction of their shared audition goes as far as inspiring in Gertrude a vision of the world "non point … tel qu'il était, mais bien tel qu'il aurait pu être, qu'il pourrait être sans le mal et sans le péché" [not as it was, but as it could have been, as it could be without evil and sin][106], as well as ostensibly revealing to her the nature of light and color, despite her blindness. In Gide's novella, the truth found in hearing (both generally as one of the five senses and particularly as music) is greater, simpler, and purer than anything revealed through our other senses.

My next chapter, "'Some Secret Chord': Chopin, Pianism, and Sexuality" presents a sort of case study based around the figure of Frederic Chopin, the "poet of the piano," whose music has for centuries been imbricated in a web of discourses about the feminized nature of keyboard instruments—which, for a variety of reasons, including their prevalence as a symbol of status and of domesticity, were viewed as being among the only "acceptable" musical instruments to be

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[106] André Gide, *La symphonie pastorale (1918)*, ed. Justin O'Brien and M. Shackleton (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1954), 23–24.

played by ladies—and of piano miniatures as a genre. During his lifetime, conductors and critics associated Chopin with "fairy dances" and "small fairy voices," which even in the 1830s and 1840s suggested "notions of a being at once removed from sex and possessed by a longing for it,"[107] in the words of Chopin scholar Jeffrey Kallberg. And the link between Chopin's music and sexuality can be borne out in vastly different ways: In Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*, the title character's frequent playing of Chopin at the piano—often at the exhortation of Lord Henry Wotton, a character implied to be homosexual—is one of many subtextual cues that code Dorian himself as queer or sexually deviant. In the more recent *Madame Pylinska et le secret de Chopin*, published in 2018 by Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt, the author recounts the piano lessons he took with a stern and opinionated Polish woman during his college days, who had some very interesting ideas about pianistic poetry and physical love: "pour la prochaine leçon," she implores him after his playing is shown to be too muscular, rigid, solid, "faites l'amour avec quelqu'un."[108] Schmitt sets up his novella in a way that is by turns harmonious and at odds with the discursive construction of an effeminate and effeminizing Chopin seen in *Dorian Gray*: Schmitt's first and most primal encounter with the music of Chopin is through the playing of his Aunt Aimée, a lifelong bachelorette who Schmitt later learns carried on a lengthy affair with a married man and found in Chopin the perfect outlet through which to express her romantic chagrin. And though Schmitt is careful to portray his younger self as virile, strong, and decidedly heterosexual—too virile, indeed, to play Chopin properly before he has been trained by another lifelong bachelorette, and it is partly

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[107] Jeffrey Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries: Sex, History and Musical Genre* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 77.

[108] Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt, *Madame Pylinska et le secret de Chopin*, 1er édition (Paris: Albin Michel, 2018), 66.

through the liberating effects of heterosexual sex that he is able to bring a keener musicality to Chopin's work—his piano training also endows him with a greater sensitivity that propels him to a more authentic self-expression through music, but only temporarily when he is guided toward Chopinian truth by either his aunt or his piano teacher. Chopin remains, for Schmitt, a feminized and feminizing influence, best understood and felt by women.

Chapter three, "'J'ai eu des aventures': Music, Adventure, and Time," takes up the question of the impulse function in a fairly literal sense—music as an impulse in time, implicated in sets of visceral and bodily affects, that actually has the power to break (or, conversely, to reinforce) the illusion of being stuck in time in a sort of existential quagmire. Drawing on Barthes, Deleuze, and Guattari vis-à-vis questions of territory, repetition, and the temporal impulse imparted to listening bodies by music addressed above, I examine how music carves out a spatial and temporal milieu for itself in which we can construct our own microcosmic realities and milieus of meaning. The main primary text for this chapter is Sartre's *La Nausée*, in which Roquentin's nausea comes about from a mindset that flattens out the differences between all matter, making everything into an abhorrent sameness from which Roquentin finds little avenue for escape—except, of course, through music. When he feels himself becoming stuck in the morass of undifferentiated time, music has the power to cut through his nausea and make him cognizant of time's passage. In this way, not only does his existential terror diminish when he faces the present; the intensity of the music—in this case, the jazz standard "Some of These Days"—also enables him to feel that life itself, and more specifically his past, can take on the quality of adventure. The impulse function here is quite clear, with music's temporal momentum and affective impulse coming as an almost

electric jolt to the heart of Roquentin, restoring color and meaning to the flabby uniformity with which Nausea has covered his world.

I move on from *La Nausée* to discuss two films by Lars Von Trier that present different but no less compelling portraits of musical affective potential: first, inspired by the originally planned title of *La Nausée*, the 2011 apocalypse film *Melancholia*. The nondiegetic use of Wagner's Prelude from *Tristan und Isolde* repeats ad nauseam throughout the film, especially at moments that highlight the soul-crushing ennui of protagonist Justine (Kirsten Dunst). Von Trier is attempting to deterritorialize this well-known refrain for the viewer to heighten the existential malaise, to create a temporal milieu that drips as slowly as molasses and, if he succeeds, to make us welcome—along with our downtrodden protagonist—the literal end of the world, spelled out onscreen by the first arrival of the Prelude's climactic measures after many repetitions of the same fragment. Finally, I turn to an earlier film by Von Trier, the 2000 musical *Dancer in the Dark*, a dark interpolation of the genre that sees main character Selma (played by Björk) escape into a private temporality of song and dance as a respite from the boring and backbreaking existence she leads, working in a factory as she loses her sight. The film subverts our expectations by initially setting up a correlation between the musical numbers and blithe escape, and then by showing us how Selma's avoidance of reality through musical numbers actually leads to her demise—a graphic end accompanied by a melancholy song.

CHAPTER I

LES REFRAINS OUBLIES DU BONHEUR

The narrator in Gérard de Nerval's celebrated *Sylvie* is a man in search of something that cannot be found—a refrain, a dream woman, a territory lost to time. The novella's narrator—who remains unnamed, but whom I will call Gérard, adopting Georges Poulet's convention[109]—is, to use the terminology of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, a consistently deterritorialized and deterritorializing force. He is constantly being removed, voluntarily or otherwise, from his natural milieu (the mid-nineteenth century Valois), and his narrative voice is always deterritorializing people, objects, places, and songs—sometimes spatially or bodily but also, quite often, *temporally*, from the past onto the present or vice versa. In some cases, he attempts to control forces of deterritorialization and concomitant reterritorialization; in others (particularly in the case of the sonorous or musical, as I will discuss later) he seems helpless to resist them. Gérard remains largely untethered to his milieu, and often displays an eagerness to depart, somehow, from his temporal locus and live in the mythical past. "Un de mes oncles," he tells the reader when introducing us to the actress Aurélie, for whom he harbors a great desire,

> qui avait vécu dans les avant-dernières années du XVIIIe siècle . . . [m'avait] prévenu de bonne heure que les actrices n'étaient pas des femmes, et que la nature avait oublié de leur faire un coeur. Il parlait de celles de ce temps-là sans doute; mais il m'avait raconté tant d'histoires de ses illusions, de ses déceptions . . . que je m'étais habitué à penser mal de toutes **sans tenir compte de l'ordre des temps**.[110]

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[109] Georges Poulet, *Trois essais de mythologie romantique* (Paris: J. Corti, 1966), 13.

[110] Gérard de Nerval, "Sylvie," in *Les Filles du feu* (Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1888), 23, emphasis mine.

> [One of my uncles, who had lived in the last few years of the 18th century . . . warned me early on that actresses were not women, and that nature had forgotten to give them a heart. He was probably speaking of those from his own day, but he told me so many stories about his illusions and his disappointments that I had grown used to assuming the worst of all women **without regard for the order of time.**]

In this instance he consciously deterritorializes an idea from a bygone era and reterritorializes it onto his own present.

But the actress Aurélie has always already been reterritorialized by Gérard; he admits to himself that "c'est une image que je poursuis, rien d'autre [I am in pursuit of an image, nothing more than that]."[111] Aurélie must remain at a distance, because "vue de près, la femme réelle révoltait notre ingénuité; il fallait qu'elle apparût reine ou déesse, et surtout n'en pas approcher [from up close, a real woman was an affront to our innocence; she must seem to be a queen or a goddess, and we must never try to approach her]."[112] In essence, the Aurélie who is bodily present has been deterritorialized, and onto her Gérard has reterritorialized an image with no substance—or, perhaps more accurately, an image whose substance is entirely the stuff of Gérard's imagination. This is what Deleuze calls a *ritournelle*: a concept which has its roots in music, but which can be used to think myriad problems, relations of force, and forms of art. A *ritournelle* in itself has no real content, no inherent artistic value, but a musical event happens when a *ritournelle*—itself a sort of crystal which imposes a structure on its surroundings via rhythm, timbre, pitch, temporality—is taken from its territory and reterritorialized rhythmically or spatially.

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[111] Nerval, 26.
[112] Nerval, 24.

The *ritournelle,* write Deleuze and Guattari, is a "bloc d'expression"[113] borne out of notions of territory: a birdsong, perhaps, or a child's voice carving out a melody to orient itself in space and time, to call upon the *ritournelle*'s reassuring forces—that is, to conjure the scene of its native territory, the safe embrace of a mother's lullaby, and transpose the attendant affects of that territory onto a new or potentially threatening environment. The *ritournelle* is "le contenu proprement musical, le bloc de contenu propre à la musique [the uniquely musical content, the block of content inherent in music],"[114] though it is not music itself. Rather, music is the process of taking hold of a *ritournelle* and deterritorializing it, subjecting it to *lignes de fuite* ("lines of flight") and reterritorializing it, submitting it to "ce traitement très spécial de la diagonale ou de la transversale, [l'arrachant] à sa territorialité [that singular process of the diagonal, the transversal, [removing the content] from its territoriality]."[115] Music exists, then, because the *ritournelle* exists,

> parce que la musique prend, s'empare de la ritournelle comme contenu dans une forme d'expression, parce qu'elle fait bloc avec elle pour l'emporter ailleurs. . . . La musique est l'opération active, créatrice, qui consiste à déterritorialiser la ritournelle. Tandis que la ritournelle est essentiellement territoriale, territorialisante ou reterritorialisante, la musique en fait un contenu déterritorialisé pour une forme d'expression déterritorialisante.[116]
>
> [because music takes it up, grabs hold of the ritournelle as the content of an expressive form, because it forms a block with it to transport it away. . . . Music is the active, creative operation that consists in deterritorializing the refrain. Whereas

[113] Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 367.
[114] Deleuze and Guattari, 368.
[115] Deleuze and Guattari, 367.
[116] Deleuze and Guattari, 368–69.

> the ritournelle is essentially territorial, territorializing or reterritorializing, music makes it a deterritorialized content for a deterritorializing expressive form.]

If the *ritournelle* of a well-known lullaby immediately calls to mind safety, maternal love, the comforts of home, etc., then music is the process of taking that *ritournelle* out of its original territory and inscribing it within a new space. To wit, we might recall the third movement of Gustav Mahler's First Symphony—a funeral march that transposes the children's song "Frère Jacques" into a minor key, capturing an artifact from the realm of the familiar and comforting and changing it just enough that it remains recognizable as itself but also, now, as other—a reterritorialization that works to eerie and disconcerting, even uncanny, effect.

In this chapter I will examine three well-known French novels that demonstrate different, though related, modalities of de- and reterritorialization through music, the sets of complex affects educed thereby, and the dramatic and powerful effects of those affects on the three protagonists. Nerval's *Sylvie* provides perhaps the most literal example: for him, the strongest forces of territorialization are those of a literal geographical territory—that of the Valois, the French region in which he and his forefathers grew up and on which he projects a web of different meanings: homeland pride, "traditional" values, bygone purity, and a particular manifestation of femininity that encapsulates all of these and which is expressed most profoundly through music, the old songs of the Valois. Gérard is so captivated by the promise of this idealized territory that a performance of these old songs profoundly and ecstatically alters the course of his life; and when he attempts to backtrack and make up for lost time, it is again these songs—performed in a different, more "modern" manner—that make clear to him that he has come too far and that the past, and the kind of romantic love that has always obsessed him, is out of reach.

Next I will briefly read key scenes in Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, inspired by Nerval and *Sylvie*, which contains some of the most evocative and celebrated descriptions of the experience of music and its capacity to bring about profound affective shifts. The most famous example is certainly the Vinteuil sonata and its *petite phrase*, which serves as an emblem of the relationship between Swann and Odette. Proust's description of Swann's first and subsequent hearings of the *petite phrase* is a beautifully apt depiction of the deterritorializing forces of music—polyvalent enough to latch on to almost anyone or anything, and potent enough to become indelibly associated with a given territory for an entire lifetime. In the first audition the music enhances Swann's burgeoning love for Odette and comes to stand in for it, but time passes and that love fades—and it is only in hearing the *petite phrase* again, having those affective associations stirred up once more, and comparing them to the present state of his relationship with Odette, that Swann finally comes to realize it is over between them. The evolving relationship between Swann and the *petite phrase* over time also illustrates the differences between two models of listening laid out by Vladimir Jankélévitch: the visceral and preverbal *drastic*, which opens up Swann's soul and leaves vacant spaces on which the *petite phrase* can inscribe the name of Odette, and the rational and distanced *gnostic*, which allows Swann to examine the *petite phrase*'s deterritorializing effects from a more objective distance and take stock of the authenticity, or lack thereof, of those mobilized affects to his current situation.

Finally, André Gide's 1919 novella *La Symphonie pastorale* outlines a musical territory with an even more abstract referent, a world that exists chiefly in the imagination of the narrator, a priest: that of the eponymous symphony by Beethoven, one of the most famous examples of programmatic music in the common classical canon. As is so often the case, extramusical cues

open the door to this territory: here the title of the symphony and the subtitles of each of its five movements—all provided by Beethoven himself—predispose listeners to project certain images and affects on to the score as they hear it, associations which become indelible and taken as fact.[117] Enamored with his charge, a blind woman named Gertrude, the priest believes that when they attend a performance of the symphony, they enter together into that imaginary idyllic world—and the priest constantly seeks thereafter to regain that lost paradise. Gertrude's only access to it is through music and the sonorous, and the priest enjoys serving as her guide and providing her with a bowdlerized vision of the world, stripped of the sin that the seeing cannot help but see. But when she has an operation to restore her sight, the spell is broken: earthly truth comes crashing down upon both of them, driving them further away from the virtuous pastoral world and toward a tragic end.

I. "UN ECHO LOINTAIN" DU VALOIS: NERVAL AND *SYLVIE*

Early in 1855, the writer known as Gérard de Nerval wrote to his aunt, "Ne m'attends pas ce soir, car la nuit sera noire et blanche" [do not wait for me this evening, for the night will be

[117] Gide's use of an actually existing work of music adds an extra layer of meaning to the novella for those who are familiar with it, and who can imagine the strains of Beethoven as they read and perhaps catch a glimpse of their own version of bucolic rapture. It is worth noting that, of course, Vinteuil is fictional and thus a reader cannot listen to his sonata to attempt to hear in it what Swann hears—whereas Gide uses a perennially popular Beethoven symphony, which, for readers who are familiar with it, may add emotional weight to Gertrude's response. Countless scholars over the years have nonetheless perused Proust's letters for hints as to which real-life sonata he may have been thinking of, with Saint-Saëns, Fauré, and Franck proving popular candidates. On the other hand, since the Vinteuil sonata has no certain real-life referent, it might stand in metonymically for any work of art that has affected the reader.

black and white],[118] left his home, and hanged himself from a sewer grate in Paris's fourth *arrondissement*. For years, he had suffered from recurrent bouts of mental illness, passing in and out of hospitals and burdened by the stigma of the label "insane." Although he ultimately took his own life, he was able to produce in the midst of his "*folie*" several enduring works of poetry and prose in the years before his suicide. Perhaps the best known among these is his collection *Les Filles du feu*, first published in 1854, from which his 1853 novella *Sylvie* remains the most celebrated today. In his introductory remarks to *Les Filles du feu*, he shows evidence of both great clarity and possible mental instability—of thought processes that, for twentieth-century theorist and philosopher Gilles Deleuze, may indicate a potentially dangerous proclivity toward absolute destratification and deterritorialization. (That is to say, toward a breaking down of normative structures and hierarchies, and a dissociation of people and objects from their milieus—to such an extreme that connections can no longer be drawn and we risk losing our grasp on the actual.) This tendency is not rare, especially among artists—indeed, it is indicative of a "schizoanalytic" mind, one capable of drawing connections between the most diverse ideas (a paradigm of which poet Antonin Artaud is the favored and oft-cited exemplar for Deleuze and frequent collaborator Félix Guattari). It is a trait which reflects the "'danger' propre à toute ligne qui s'échappe, à toute ligne de fuite ou de déterritorialisation créatrice: tourner en destruction, en abolition" [the danger inherent in any line that flees, any line of flight or creative deterritorialization: a turn toward destruction, abolition][119]; it is a trait to which we might owe a considerable amount of great art,

[118] Gérard de Nerval, *Oeuvres* (Éditions Alpina, 1958), 261.
[119] Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 367.

but which may rob us in the same movement of the men and women, like Gérard de Nerval, who create that art.

When his friend Alexandre Dumas heard about one of Nerval's "*crises de folie*," he dedicated what Nerval sardonically called "quelques-unes de vos lignes des plus charmantes à l'épitaphe de mon esprit" [some of your most charming lines to the epitaph of my mind].[120] This was, unsurprisingly, a source of pain for the troubled Nerval, who addressed Dumas's remarks in the prefatory comments to *Les Filles du feu*, written upon his release from institutionalization. In this brief text, Nerval passes through a variety of strong emotions, from bitter irony—"Aux yeux des mortels j'ai recouvré ce qu'on appelle vulgairement la raison" [In the eyes of mortals I have recovered what is vulgarly called reason][121]—to cautious, perhaps ironic, self-exaltation: "Oh! tenez, mes amis! j'ai eu un moment l'idée d'être vrai, d'être grand, de me faire immortel enfin" [oh, my friends! I had for a brief moment the feeling that I was true, was great, could finally make myself immortal].[122] He evinces a passionate but worrisome tendency toward delusion, toward a loss of the self: "Il est, vous le savez, certains conteurs qui ne peuvent inventer sans s'identifier aux personnages de leur imagination" [There are, as you know, some storytellers who cannot invent without identifying with the characters of their own imagining].[123] Nerval deterritorializes himself, as an author located in a specific spatiotemporal milieu, and is reterritorialized upon his characters. On one hand, this out-of-body, even oceanic, feeling is just the sort of experience many readers seek when they open a novel, that listeners hope for when hearing a new piece of music or

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[120] Gérard de Nerval, "À Alexandre Dumas," in *Les Filles du feu* (Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1888), 1.
[121] Nerval, 2.
[122] Nerval, 12.
[123] Nerval, 3.

revisiting one with which they have already established affective affinities. On the other hand, there is a danger inherent in any such *ligne de fuite* if we can no longer find our way back to "reality." Nerval is a particularly deterritorializing reader and writer, describing the way in which "l'on arrive . . . a s'incarner dans le héros de son imagination, si bien que sa vie devienne la vôtre et qu'on brûle des flammes factices de ses ambitions et de ses amours!" [one manages . . . to embody oneself in the hero of his own imagination, so much that his life becomes one's own and one burns in the false flame of his ambitions and his loves!][124] Characters and stories take on lives of their own for Nerval, and in his mind they seem to assume a sort of blurred ontology—what is "true," what is a "story," and how can he know the difference? Further, he sometimes cannot fully recall whether an *author* existed or is merely a character of his own making: "Où ai-je lu la biographie fatale de cet aventurier?" Nerval writes of someone called *Brisacier*; "je me sens bien incapable de renouer la moindre preuve historique de l'existence de cet illustre inconnu" [Where did I read that fateful adventurer's biography? I cannot now dredge up any proof at all that this illustrious stranger ever existed]![125] In Nerval's mind, the processes of realizing characters — the powerfully imaginative work implicated by giving life to a being of one's own invention — is so intense, his vicarious experience of their lives and struggles so vivid, that in terms of their affective impact, the question of their literal worldly existence becomes almost immaterial.

Gérard, Nerval's stand-in in the novella *Sylvie*, is scarcely less unmoored. If the image of the *femme idéale* is for Gérard a motif, a *ritournelle*, Aurélie is but the latest instance of the deterritorialization of this idealized image and its partial reterritorialization upon a physically

[124] Nerval, 4.
[125] Nerval, 4.

extant woman. He even confesses this to Aurélie: "Je lui racontai tout; je lui dis la source de cet amour entrevu dans les nuits, rêvé plus tard, **réalisé en elle**" [I told her everything—I told her of the origin of that love glimpsed at night, later in dreams, and finally **realized in her**].[126] To this Aurélie responds, rightly, "vous ne m'aimez pas!" [you don't love me!] and sends him away: "vous cherchez un drame, voilà tout, et le dénouement vous échappe. Allez, je ne vous crois plus" [you're looking for some dramatic story, that's all, and you can't find a satisfying ending. Go now, I can't believe you any more]![127] Gérard's love for Sylvie, in a parallel process, wavers whenever Sylvie herself becomes an actualized person upon whom Gérard can no longer easily reterritorialize a virtual image. His feelings for Adrienne, on the other hand, remain intense throughout his life because in her, the ideal image remains deterritorialized—i.e., Gérard never knows her at all; she is only a surface, a pure virtuality upon which he is free to reterritorialize whatever he chooses—even as Adrienne also represents the territories of the Valois and of the nun's cloister.

Interestingly, unlike most *ritournelles* (which are usually quite strongly tied to an actual territory before they are deterritorialized), the *femme idéale* is at the outset an absolutely deterritorialized image. The ideal woman does not have a territory, properly speaking; she only ever exists as a virtuality—in much the same way that Gérard's idyllic image of the Valois of the past was never actualized exactly as he imagines it. But the notion of territory in the traditional, spatial sense is itself very important for Gérard; one reason he is drawn to Adrienne is because she has blood ties to the Valois: "C'était, nous dit-on, la petite-fille de l'un des descendants d'une famille alliée aux anciens rois de France; le sang des Valois coulait dans ses veines [they said she

[126] Nerval, "Sylvie," 79, emphasis mine.
[127] Nerval, 79.

was the granddaughter of a descendant of a family linked to the old kings of France—the blood of the Valois coursed through her veins]."[128] As Nerval writes in *Chansons et légendes du Valois*—a text juxtaposed to *Sylvie* in *Les Filles du feu*—

> "Nous aurons des ballades franques, normandes, des chants de guerre, des lais et des virelais, des guerz Bretons, des noëls bourguignons et picards… Mais songera-t-on à recueillir ces chants de la vieille *France*, dont je cite ici des fragments épars, et qui n'ont jamais été complétés ni réunis?[129]
>
> [We have Frankish and Norman ballads, war songs, lays and virelays, Breton gwerz (story songs), Burgundian and Picard Christmas carols… But will anyone think to collect all those songs from the old *France*, from which I cite here but scattered fragments, and which have never been brought together in their complete forms?]

This is why Adrienne becomes so important for the narrator Gérard: the entire Valois region and Gérard's idealized image of its past are reterritorialized on the figure of Adrienne. Her voice *is* a territory; the Valois and all its history—and by extension the very notion of Frenchness—depend on her.

This emphasis on voice, song, and the auditory is no fluke. When, near the beginning of *Sylvie*, Gérard reads about the *Fête du bouquet provincial*—which starts him reminiscing in the first place—he describes the sensation with an auditory metaphor: "c'était un souvenir de la province depuis longtemps oubliée, **un écho lointain** des fêtes naïves de la jeunesse" [it was a long-forgotten memory of the countryside, a **faraway echo** of the innocent fairs and feasts of my

[128] Nerval, 30, emphasis mine.
[129] Gérard de Nerval, "Chansons et légendes du Valois: Vieilles ballades françaises," in *Les Filles du feu* (Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1888), 88.

youth].[130] And indeed, the first sense he mentions that transports him through time, sets the scene, and allows him to reorient himself in the past is the auditory: "Le cor et le tambour résonnaient au loin dans les hameaux et dans les bois" [the horn and the drum resounded in the distance, in the hamlets and through the woods],[131] he writes by way of introduction to the scene of memory. He continues, "Des jeunes filles dansaient en rond sur la pelouse en chantant de vieux airs transmis par leurs mères, et d'un français si naturellement pur que l'on sentait bien exister dans ce vieux pays du Valois, où, pendant plus de mille ans, a battu le coeur de la France" [Young girls formed a circle in the grass, dancing and singing the old melodies passed down by their mothers, in an older French, so natural and pure that we felt as if we were living then and there, in that old Valois country where the heart of France used to beat for over a thousand years].[132] These *vieux airs* are both highly territorialized for Gérard—that is, they are inextricably bound up with the Valois and with Gérard's notion of Frenchness—and potently deterritorializing, as they instantly transport Gérard into a space of imagination, toward a past of his own making, on a *ligne de fuite* toward a virtuality. As the novella proceeds, this doubly territorialized and deterritorializing function of music continues apace, perhaps nowhere more notably than in Gérard's recollection of his first encounter with the *belle chanteuse* Adrienne. As soon as she prepares to sing, Gérard tells us, "un trouble inconnu s'empara de moi" [I was seized by an inner turmoil I could not place].[133]

> On s'assit autour d'elle, et aussitôt, d'une voix fraîche et pénétrante, légèrement voilée, comme celle des filles de ce pays brumeux, **elle chanta une de ces**

[130] Nerval, "Sylvie," 27, emphasis mine.
[131] Nerval, 27.
[132] Nerval, 28–29.
[133] Nerval, 29.

> **anciennes romances,** pleines de mélancolie et d'amour, qui racontent toujours les malheurs d'une princesse enfermée dans sa tour par la volonté d'un père qui la punit d'avoir aimé. La mélodie se terminait à chaque stance par ces trilles chevrotants que font valoir si bien les voix jeunes, **quand elles imitent par un frisson modulé la voix tremblante des aïeules**.[134]
>
> [No sooner had we gathered and seated ourselves around her that her voice rang out, sweet and piercing like the other young girls' in this mist-covered land. She sang one of those ancient romances, suffused with melancholy and love, that always tell of the misfortunes of a princess shut up in her tower by her father, punishing her for having loved another. At the end of each stanza there was a lilting trill, as youthful voices execute so well, **imitating the trembling voices of their foremothers with a melodious shiver**.]

For Gérard as a spectator, Adrienne's song is strongly de- and then re-territorialized as soon as it begins—taken from its present context and imposed on an idealized vision of the land, "ce pays brumeux," as Gérard imagines it existed in the past. It does not belong to the here and now but is rather "une de ces anciennes romances . . . [qui imitent] la voix tremblante des aïeules." The simple act of hearing it is also a powerfully deterritorializing experience for all those who listen; when Adrienne has finished, "elle se tut, et **personne n'osa rompre le silence**. La pelouse était couverte de faibles vapeurs condensées, qui déroulaient leurs blancs flocons sur les pointes des herbes. **Nous pensions être en paradis**" [she fell silent, and nobody dared break that silence. The grass was covered in thin wisps of condensation, the weeds flecked with white. **We thought we had ascended to heaven**].[135] In the silence that follows, the spectators have been so gloriously deterritorialized by the music that they dare not speak, for fear of breaking the spell—of emitting

[134] Nerval, 29–30, emphasis mine.
[135] Nerval, 30, emphasis mine.

an utterance so banal that it will truncate the still-proliferating *lignes de fuite* created by the song and will reterritorialize everyone, remove them from their ecstatic escape to an evanescent *paradis*, and reattach the shackles that bind them to the mundane.

Later in the novella, when Gérard and Sylvie's brother wander into a "fête particulière" in the abbey at Châalis, Gérard believes one of the angels singing over "les débris du monde détruit" [the detritus of the destroyed world] is in fact Adrienne:

> Chaque voix chantait une des splendeurs de ce globe éteint, et l'ange de la mort définissait les causes de sa destruction. Un esprit montait de l'abîme . . . c'était Adrienne transfigurée par son costume. . . . **Sa voix avait gagné en force et en étendue**, et les fioritures infinies du chant italien brodaient de leurs gazouillements d'oiseau les phrases sévères d'un récitatif pompeux.[136]
>
> [Each voice sang of the splendor of this broken earth, and the angel of death declaimed the causes of its destruction. A spirit rose up from the abyss . . . it was Adrienne, transformed in her costume. **Her voice had grown stronger, more expansive**, and the countless flourishes of Italian song, like a bird chirping, weaved the austere phrases of a solemn recitation.]

Once again, it is Adrienne's voice that sings of the "splendeurs de ce globe éteint." Here the metaphor is even more direct, as she is now a nun participating in a theatrical production about the end of the (laical) world—but for Gérard, Adrienne was *always* singing about "les débris [d'un] monde détruit," about "[les] splendeurs de ce globe éteint," weeping over the ashes of the Valois of the past, toward which all *lignes de fuite* were now blocked, except through the medium of music.

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[136] Nerval, 52, emphasis mine.

Gérard never has any influence over Adrienne, and when he hears her sing it always seems like a result of divine chance. On the other hand, he spends a great deal of time with Sylvie, and interacts with her as a person rather than a distant, untouchable image. When he thinks of her after they have spent several years apart, he is able to deterritorialize the person from the image, to imagine that he loves her more than anything else in the world. In these remembrances, too, Gérard's most direct access to the past is through sound and music: when he remembers Sylvie, he imagines her doing her lacework and can almost hear "les fuseaux de sa dentelle, qui claquaient avec un doux bruit sur le carreau vert que soutenaient ses genoux" [the spindles of her lacework clicking together softly on the checkered green under her knees].[137] When the passage of time has sanded down the rough edges in his memory of Sylvie that once kept him from loving her steadfastly, he reterritorializes the image of the *femme idéale* on her, the one that was always so easy for him to project onto Adrienne from afar. "Et Sylvie que j'aimais tant, pourquoi l'ai-je oubliée depuis trois ans?" [And why haven't I thought of Sylvie, whom I once loved so, in the last three years?] he laments, and right away he hears her ritournelle: "j'entends le bruit de ses fuseaux sonores et sa chanson favorite: 'Le belle était assise / Près du ruisseau coulant…'" [I hear the noise of her spindles and her favorite song: 'The beautiful girl sat on the bank / Of the babbling brook…'][138] Like most of the songs that Gerard so loves, those which seem to tie him to the Valois, its history and its inhabitants, this is a simple refrain about a nameless, beautiful woman surrounded by a nameless, blandly beautiful nature.

[137] Nerval, 42.
[138] Nerval, 32–33.

But when Gérard meets Sylvie again and tries to use her as a conduit toward an absolute, transcendent deterritorialization in the same vein as the experiences inspired by Adrienne's presence and voice, he always fails. In his absence—for he has abandoned the Valois for the metropolis, Paris—Sylvie has stepped out of her idyllic milieu into a messier, less sunny vision of modernity. She is no longer the untarnished representation of the bucolic Valois, if she ever was. Gérard accompanies her to Châalis, where he once heard Adrienne sing, and they have this heartbreaking (for him) exchange:

> « Alors, chantez-moi la chanson de la belle fille enlevée au jardin de son père, sous le rosier blanc.
>
> —On ne chante plus cela. [. . .]
>
> —Sylvie, Sylvie, je suis sûr que vous chantez des airs d'opéra!
>
> —Pourquoi vous plaindre?
>
> —Parce que **j'aimais les vieux airs, et que vous ne saurez plus les chanter**. »
>
> Sylvie modula quelques sons d'un grand air opéra moderne… Elle *phrasait*![139]
>
> ["Now, sing me the song about the beautiful girl kidnapped from her father's garden, under the white rosebush."
> —No one sings that any more.
> —Sylvie, Sylvie, do you sing operatic arias now?
> —Why are you complaining?
> —Because **I loved the old melodies, and you've forgotten how to sing them**.
> She trilled a few lines from a modern opera aria… She was *phrasing!*]

Sylvie has been trained, polished, stripped of the provincial charm bestowed upon her by her ancestors, her upbringing, and her place of birth. She no longer demonstrates the rustic,

[139] Nerval, 67, [bold face] emphasis mine.

untaught quality of the old *chansons* that for Gérard signifies the idyllic, unmodernized Valois; he cannot reterritorialize the image of Adrienne onto her, for Sylvie lacks "la voix tremblante des aïeules" that had so entranced him. Her espousal of the idiom of modern opera is an affront to Gérard, who can only plead for her to embrace, along with him, the past of his imagination. She now deterritorializes a different ritournelle—in the literal, musical sense, as well as in her work, for even her beautiful, aesthetically-focused lacemaking, with the *doux bruit* of the spindles, has been replaced by a more utilitarian, industrious kind of work as a glove-maker. "Je comprenais que **Sylvie n'était plus une paysanne**," writes Gérard. "Ses parents seuls étaient restés dans leur condition, et elle vivait au milieu d'eux comme une fée industrieuse, répandant l'abondance autour d'elle" [I understood that **Sylvie was no longer a peasant.** Only her parents had remained in their station, and she was living among them like an industrious fairy, spreading abundance around her].[140]

In a show of desperation, he takes Sylvie to the abbey at Châalis, into the same room where he once heard Adrienne (or someone he believed to be Adrienne) sing about "les débris du monde détruit." He goads her into singing an older song, reciting it for her line by line and having her repeat it: "'Oh! que je vous entende! lui dis-je; que votre voix chérie résonne sous ces voûtes et en chasse l'esprit qui me tourmente, fût-il divin ou bien fatal!' Elle répéta les paroles du chant après moi: 'Anges, descendez promptement / Au fond du purgatoire…'" ['Oh, let me hear your voice!' I said to her, 'let your lovely voice ring out through this vault and chase away the spirit that still torments me, even if it's heaven-sent, even if it kills me!' She repeated the words of the song after

[140] Nerval, 66, emphasis mine.

me: 'Angels, come down to us from heaven now / To the heart of purgatory…'].[141] He thus attempts to make Sylvie deterritorialize the *chant* from its original temporal and vocal milieu, in order to retrigger for him the experience of an absolute, heavenly deterritorialization. But his attempt falls short, as it will again when he and Sylvie dine with the *père* Dodu and Gérard's *frère de lait*, the "grand frisé," whom Sylvie ends up marrying: "Sylvie ne voulut pas chanter, malgré nos prières, disant qu'on ne chantait plus à table" [Sylvie didn't want to sing, despite our pleas, claiming that nobody sang any more at the table].[142] The capacity to be deterritorialized is out of Gérard's hands, and as he will discover, there will be no more chance encounters with Adrienne, who is long since deceased. Gérard also learns that, in a cruelly ironic twist, it was he who once kept Sylvie tied to the *temps anciens* of the Valois, as she had done for him—and that it was perhaps his leaving that facilitated her deterritorialization from it.

> « Vous êtes dans vos réfléxions? » dit Sylvie. Et elle se mit à chanter:
>
> À Dammartin l'y a trois belles filles;
>
> L'y en a z'une plus belle que le jour…
>
> « Ah! méchante! m'écriai-je, vous voyez bien que vous en savez encore, des vieilles chansons.
>
> —**Si vous veniez plus souvent ici, j'en retrouverais**, dit-elle, mais il faut songer au solide. Vous avez vos affaires de Paris, j'ai mon travail. »[143]
>
> ["Are you lost in thought?" asked Sylvie. And she began to sing:
> "Three pretty girls in Dammartin / One more beautiful than the light of day…"
> "Oh! Cruel girl!" I cried. "See, you still know those old songs."

[141] Nerval, 68.
[142] Nerval, 72–73.
[143] Nerval, 70.

> "**If you came around here more often, I would remember**," she said, "but let's not waste time on dreams. You have business in Paris, I have my work here."]

Deleuze, in his early work *Proust et les signes*, writes that "les femmes aimées sont souvent liées à des paysages, que nous connaissons assez pour souhaiter leur reflet dans les yeux d'une femme, mais qui se reflètent alors d'un point de vue si mystérieux que ce sont pour nous comme des pays inaccessible, inconnus" [beloved women are often linked to landscapes, familiar enough to us that we imagine them reflected in a woman's eyes, but which we find reflected through a vantage point so mysterious as to become untouchable, even unknowable].[144] This is precisely the case for Gérard with both Sylvie and Adrienne (perhaps less so for Aurélie, except insofar as she stands in for both other women in Gérard's eyes). As Gérard says when deciding to return and find Sylvie, "Je sentis le besoin de revoir Sylvie, seule figure vivante et jeune encore qui me rattachât à ce pays" [I felt the need to see Sylvie again, the only one still young and vibrant that tied me to this land].[145] But neither Deleuze nor Gérard seem to realize—or think it worth expounding upon—that for the women they love, *les hommes aimés*, too, are often linked to *paysages*. Gérard does not understand until this conversation that for Sylvie, in turn, he has served as her link to the country; on him Sylvie has reterritorialized her own Valois. As Peter Dayan writes in *Music Writing Literature*, music "creates the appearance that such [a national] essence exists, and a desire to believe in it. . . . [it] satisfies our longing for unity at every level. But if we allow ourselves to believe that this unity exists in the world, we will soon find ourselves creating new demons."[146]

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[144] Gilles Deleuze, *Proust et les signes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964), 14.
[145] Nerval, "Sylvie," 59.
[146] Peter Dayan, *Music Writing Literature, from Sand Via Debussy to Derrida* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2006), 18.

This is the illusive unity to which Gérard finds himself ineluctably drawn—unity between and among the beautiful Adrienne as a physical presence, as a heavenly voice, as a representative of a place and time upon which, for Gérard, his history and that of his family and countrymen depend. It is, indeed, his failure to actualize this unity that creates the demons that plague him throughout his life, that lead him away from what might have been a happy life with Sylvie and toward an ideal that collapses under the weight of its own impossibility.

One way to read *Sylvie*, then, is as the story of a narrator who, after a youthful encounter with a divine experience of deterritorialization through music, spends his life seeking to recapture that seemingly limitless *ligne de fuite*. Such is the unique power of the auditory-sonorous, of music and the voice, as Deleuze notes when comparing its deterritorializing effects to those of painting: "Or il semble que **la musique ait une force déterritorialisante beaucoup plus grande, beaucoup plus intense et collective à la fois,** et la voix une puissance d'être déterritorialisée beaucoup plus grande aussi" [Truly it seems that **music has a greater deterritorializing power, at once much more intense and collective**, and the voice a much greater capacity to be deterritorialized as well].[147] Music is the artistic process whose deterritorializing forces are strongest. It is perhaps for this reason that the narrator Gérard of *Sylvie*, and the author Nerval himself, are constantly being borne away through time (and space) by voice and melody; and why the sense of *hearing* is often the first Nerval mentions when his thoughts turn to memory. "Chaque fois que ma pensée se reporte aux souvenirs de cette province du Valois," Nerval writes in *Chansons et légendes du Valois*,

[147] Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 371, emphasis mine.

> je me rappelle avec ravissement les chants et les récits qui ont bercé mon enfance. La maison de mon oncle était toute pleine de voix mélodieuses, et celles des servantes qui nous avaient suivis à Paris chantaient tout le jour les ballades joyeuses de leur jeunesse. . . . Aujourd'hui, je ne puis arriver à les compléter, car **tout cela est profondément oublié; le secret en est demeuré dans la tombe des aïeules**.[148]
>
> [I recall, enraptured, the songs and stories with which I grew up, those that played the symphony of my youth. My uncle's house was always filled with melodious voices, and all day long the maidservants who had come with us from Paris sang joyful ballads of their youth . . . . Today, I can no longer remember them, for **all of that is now profoundly forgotten; its secrets forever buried in the tombs of our foremothers**.]

In all his reminiscing, Gérard attempts to recreate the forces of deterritorialization of that first encounter with Adrienne, to set in motion a process that will allow him once again to attain that *paradis*—but the effect is lessened in remembrance. As he will learn, it is the involuntary deterritorializations that wield the greatest power, the greatest *impulse*; they invariably lose potency when he attempts to forcibly recreate them. Of course, whether or not the author Nerval truly believes that "tout cela est profondément oublié," the narrator Gérard seems intent on calling upon those *aïeules* to tell him their secrets. In *Sylvie*, these are not only mythical deterritorialized figures; Gérard encounters one in the flesh, in the form of Sylvie's aunt in Othys.

During their visit to Othys, Gérard and Sylvie discover, and proceed to try on, the wedding outfits of Sylvie's aunt and uncle; and "en un instant," writes Gérard, "je me transformai en marié de l'autre siècle" [instantly, I felt myself transformed: I was a newlywed from that long-ago

[148] Nerval, "Chansons et légendes du Valois: Vieilles ballades françaises," 87, emphasis mine.

time].[149] The clothing is really just a fraction of the equation, however. It is what happens when Sylvie's aunt sees them dressed up that brings Gérard as close as he will ever again come to the deterritorialized *paradis* of his fantasies: she *sings* with them. She teaches them "les ballades joyeuses de [sa] jeunesse" [the joyful ballads of her youth], in one of the loveliest passages of the novella:

> La bonne vieille ne songea plus qu'à se rappeler les fêtes pompeuses de sa noce. Elle retrouva même dans sa mémoire les chants alternés, d'usage alors, qui se répondaient d'un bout à l'autre de la table nuptiale, et le naïf épithalame qui accompagnait les mariés rentrant après la danse. Nous répétions ces strophes si simplement rythmées, avec les hiatus et les assonances du temps; amoureuses et fleuries comme le cantique de l'Ecclésiaste:—nous étions l'époux et l'épouse pour tout un beau matin d'été.[150]
>
> [The good old woman fixated now on the grandiose celebrations of her own wedding. She even found, in the recesses of her memory, the old call-and-response songs so in vogue at the time, which each end of the wedding table would take turns singing to each other, and the sweet epithalamium that sent the new couple off to their shared home after the revelry. We sang those verses after her, so simple in their rhythms, their pauses and rhymes, brimming with romance, flowery as the song of Ecclestiastes. We were husband and wife for the length of a beautiful summer morning.]

Sylvie later makes reference to this moment, with not a little wistfulness: "Vous souvenez-vous du jour où nous avons revêtu les habits de noces de la tante?" [Do you remember that day when we put on my aunt's old wedding outfits?] she asks Gérard. "Ah! que n'êtes-vous revenue

[149] Nerval, "Sylvie," 49.
[150] Nerval, 50.

alors! Mais vous étiez, disait-on, en Italie" [Oh, why didn't you come back? They said you'd gone to Italy].[151] Each represents for the other both a reterritorialization of their homeland on a so often yearned-for past, as well as the possibility of absolute deterritorialization, toward *lignes de fuite* that would allow them to escape their temporal and spatial planes. Perhaps this is the tragedy of any foolhardy, youthful love that inevitably loses its lustre—or perhaps Gérard is truly given the chance to reattain the heightened sense of being he had felt in the silence after Adrienne's song, and fails to realize it until it has passed far out of reach.

II. "UNE IMPRESSION *SINE MATERIA*": VINTEUIL'S MUSIC IN *À LA RECHERCHE*

Marcel Proust, the modernist master who achieved literary immortality in the decades after Gérard de Nerval's death, was a great admirer of Nerval's work, and particularly of *Sylvie.* In an essay on Nerval that was not published until 1954's posthumous collection, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust criticized contemporary critics like Sainte-Beuve for misreading Nerval's novella, for flattening its contours, rendering its imaginative subtleties in broad biographical strokes, and not appreciating its "miraculeuse fraîcheur."[152] This miraculous originality was, for Proust, born out of Nerval's heightened, fragile mental state, of his proclivity to attach more importance "à un rêve, à un souvenir, à la qualité personnelle de la sensation, qu'à ce que cette sensation signifie de commun à tous, de perceptible pour tous, la réalité" [to a dream, a memory, the intimate quality of sensation, than to the meaning and perception of this sensation as others would interpret it — the

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[151] Nerval, 56.

[152] Marcel Proust, "Gérard de Nerval," in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, n.d., https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Contre_Sainte-Beuve/Gérard_de_Nerval.

reality of it].[153] This volatility born of sensation and emotion (i.e., of affect) comes out in more aspects of Nerval's writing than just his depictions of music—from his descriptions of scenes, places, and the physicality of his characters, to his looseness with nonlinear temporality and the narrative blurring between memories and dreams—but Proust's description here echoes, in many ways, the ways in which the affective power of music is often described. He even goes so far as to compare the experience of reading *Sylvie* to that of hearing a work of music:

> Donc ce que nous avons ici, c'est un de ces tableaux d'une couleur irréelle, que nous ne voyons pas dans la réalité, que les mots même n'évoquent pas, **mais que parfois nous voyons dans le rêve, ou que la musique évoque.** Parfois, au moment de s'endormir, on les aperçoit, on veut fixer et définir leur forme. Alors on s'éveille, on ne les voit plus, on s'y laisse aller et avant qu'on ait su les fixer on est endormi, comme si l'intelligence n'avait pas la permission de les voir. Les êtres eux-mêmes qui sont dans de tels tableaux sont des rêves.[154]
>
> [What we have here, then, is a painting rendered in unreal colors, the kind that we never see in reality and that words fail to describe, **but that we sometimes see in dreams, or hear evoked in music**. Sometimes at the moment between waking and sleeping, we perceive the outline of such a tableau and we try to fix its shape it in our mind, to perceive it more clearly. But then we awaken and lose it completely, or we succumb to sleep before we've been able to perceive it and define it—almost as if we did not have permission to see it with our faculties lucid and awakened. The beings depicted in that sort of painting are dreams themselves.]

In this passage, Proust puts a great deal of stock in the notion that Nerval is somehow capable of capturing something that should be uncapturable, bringing an oneiric experience into

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[153] Proust.
[154] Proust.

the cold light of day, making legible a wordless music. “Il n’y a que l’inexprimable,” he continues, “que ce qu’on croyait ne pas réussir à faire entrer dans un livre qui y reste. C’est quelque chose de vague et d’obsédant comme le souvenir. C’est une atmosphère. L’atmosphère bleuâtre et pourprée de Sylvie” [There is only the inexpressible, only that which one feels incapable of depicting in a book that remains there in the end. It is something as vague and haunting as memory; it is an atmosphere—the bluish crimson atmosphere of *Sylvie*].[155] This *inexprimable*—an affective content whose intentionality is beside the point, and impossible to pin down—is common to both Nerval’s colorful prose and to an individual listener’s experience of music, as Vladimir Jankélévitch writes.

“Le mystère musical,” for Jankélévitch, “n’est pas l’*indicible*, mais l’*ineffable*.” It is not unspeakable, because it is somehow spoken, sung, written; but it is ineffable, because it is impossible to locate it in a word or a phrase, whether verbal or musical. What is ineffable is inexpressible, “inexprimable parce qu’il y a sur lui infiniment, interminablement à dire : tel est l’insondable mystère de Dieu, tel l’inépuisable mystère d’amour” [inexpressible because one can speak about it infinitely, interminably; such is the unfathomable mystery of God, the inexhaustible mystery of love].[156] The meaning of music—if such a meaning can be said to pertain—is like the subtextual, hazily definable meaning of Nerval’s novella. It lies somewhere in the half-dreamt, half-waking space so dear to Proust, evinced in his essay on Nerval and in his magnum opus, from the very first paragraph:

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[155] Proust.

[156] Vladimir Jankélévitch, *La musique et l’ineffable* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1961), 86.

> À peine ma bougie éteinte, mes yeux se fermaient si vite que je n'avais pas le temps de me dire : « Je m'endors. » Et, une demi-heure après, la pensée qu'il était temps de chercher le sommeil m'éveillait ; je voulais poser le volume que je croyais avoir dans les mains et souffler ma lumière ; je n'avais pas cessé en dormant de faire des réflexions sur ce que je venais de lire, mais ces réflexions avaient pris un tour un peu particulier ; il me semblait que j'étais moi-même ce dont parlait l'ouvrage : une église, un **quatuor**, la rivalité de François Ier et de Charles-Quint.
>
> [As soon as I had extinguished my candle, I felt my eyes shut so quickly that I hadn't time even to think, "I'm falling asleep." And a half hour later I would find myself awakened by the thought that it was time for bed, that I needed to turn the light out and put away the volume whose weight I thought I could still feel in my hands. Even as I slept, my thoughts remained fixed on whatever I had just finished reading, but strangely transformed, such that I believed I myself had become what I had been reading about: a church, a **quartet**, the rivalry between François I and Charles V.]

The logic of dreams, like the logic of affect, is singular and individualized. We struggle to recapture and retell our dreams through conventional narrative economy; the harder we try to capture their meaning, the more their immediate impressions—color, light, shape, sound, affect—slip like sand through our fingers. "L'inexprimable-ineffable," writes Jankélévitch, "étant exprimable à l'infini, est donc porteur d'un 'message' ambigu" [the inexpressible-ineffable, expressible ad infinitum, thus carries an ambiguous 'message.'][157] This ambiguity is beautifully captured in Proust's novel from the very first time that Swann hears Vinteuil's sonata for violin and piano in *Du côté de chez Swann*. He is struck deeply by a musical motif, a recurrent *petite phrase*: it evokes a bizarre impression, "purement musical[e], inétendu[e], entièrement original[e],

[157] Jankélévitch, 87.

irréductibl[e] à tout autre ordre d'impressions. Une impression de ce genre, pendant un instant, est pour ainsi dire *sine materia*" [purely musical, unadulterated, entirely original, irreducible to any other order of impressions. An impression of this kind, for an instant, is in effect *sine materia*].[158] In the initial hearing, not yet familiar with the work, "[Swann] n'avait goûté que la qualité matérielle des sons sécrétés par les instruments," implicated as he is in what Jankélévitch, in *La musique et l'ineffable*, calls "une sorte d'opération magique"[159] that operates between composer, performer, and listener in a drastic experience of music. Carolyn Abbate elaborates, "drastic connotes physicality . . . involving a category of knowledge that flows from drastic actions or experiences and not from verbally mediated reasoning."[160] Swann's first encounter with the phrase is a drastic one, for, as Jankélévitch writes, "la musique ne signifie quelque chose qu'au futur antérieur!" [music only signifies anything in the future anterior!].[161] He has not yet ascribed to the phrase what it will later come to mean to him. "Peut-être est-ce parce qu'il ne savait pas la musique qu'il avait pu éprouver une impression aussi confuse" [Maybe it was because he didn't know the music that his experience was so chaotic], writes Proust, and here he takes the opportunity to expound philosophically on the musical experience, leaving Swann for a moment and talking about *nous*, the reader and, presumably, himself:

> Sans doute les notes que nous entendons alors, tendent déjà, selon leur hauteur et leur quantité, à couvrir devant nos yeux des surfaces de dimensions variées, à tracer des arabesques, à nous donner des sensations de largeur, de ténuité, de stabilité, de

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[158] Marcel Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann* (Gallimard, 1992), 202.
[159] Jankélévitch, *La musique et l'ineffable*, 91.
[160] Carolyn Abbate, "Music: Drastic or Gnostic?," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (2004): 510.
[161] Jankélévitch, *La musique et l'ineffable*, 76.

> caprice. Mais les notes sont évanouies avant que ces sensations soient assez formées en nous pour ne pas être submergées par celles qu'éveillent déjà les notes suivantes ou même simultanées.
>
> [Perhaps the notes that we hear [at the moment of first audition] seem already, as a function of pitch and quantity, to drape before our eyes shapes of various sizes, to trace arabesque patterns in the air, to make us feel as if we are sensing depth and breadth, width and fineness, stability and fragility, whimsy and temperament. But the notes vanish before the sensations they inspire solidify; they cannot help but be swallowed up by the notes struck after, or even at the same time.]

For Proust, the first time we hear a melody or a musical motif, we are more or less subject to it as an affective bloc. It does not limit itself to the auditory plane but inspires in us sensory perceptions that are indeed *sine materia* but vividly felt; the sounds we hear, confused and formless as they may seem in those moments of drastic encounter, often bleed ineffably over into the realms of the visual and the tactile (among others) as we scramble to make sense of them, ascribe to them a certain order by which we might trace their structure in time. A melodic line or harmonic progression that is not yet familiar to us can affect us deeply on the first listen, but until we have truly become acquainted, this is usually only fleeting. "Les motifs qui par instants . . . emergent, à peine discernables," Proust continues, "[plongent] aussitôt et disparaître, connus seulement par le plaisir particulier qu'ils donnent, impossibles à décrire, à se rappeler, à nommer, ineffables" [Barely discernable motifs emerge every now and then, only to disappear straight away beneath the surface, known to us only by the pleasure they make us feel, but impossible to describe, to remember, to name, ineffable]. This is indeed a drastic experience in the vein of Jankélévitch and Abbate, and an affective experience in the vein of Jameson, for whom emotions are those categories of feeling for which we have specific names, whereas to speak of affects requires that

we speak of "a slippage up and down the tones." This is a musical model that disregards traditional tonality and makes of each tone a unique, "specific coloration," such that affect becomes "the very chromaticism of the body itself."[162] For Proust, too, there is a slippage in and out of sense, a dizzying array of affective chromaticism, an inability to name or describe the precise shape of that encounter before it slips away.

If this first audition had been interrupted, Swann's love affair with Odette may never have come to pass, or might at least have unfolded quite differently. But the *petite phrase* fully insinuates itself into Swann's affective vocabulary as he continues to listen to the Sonata and his memory finds its first footholds: "Sa mémoire lui en avait fourni séance tenante une transcription sommaire et provisoire . . . si bien que, quand la même impression était tout d'un coup revenue, elle n'était déjà plus insaisissable" [His memory had supplied him on the spot with a cursory, temporary transcription . . . so that when the same impression had suddenly returned, it was already no longer elusive]. He is able to begin grasping the piece's logic, "l'étendue, les groupements symétriques, la graphie, la valeur expressive" [the expanse of it, the symmetry of its structure, its written form, its expressive value], and in this way it takes form, is no longer *sine materia*. It is no longer "la musique pure," but has entered the realm "du dessin, de l'architecture, de la pensée" [of drawing, architecture, thought] and as such "permet de se rappeler la musique" [allows one to recall the music]. As Jankélévitch writes, "La deuxième fois, la phrase musicale informe devient organique, la deuxième fois l'arbitraire et l'insolite revêtent un sens plus

[162] Jameson, *The Antinomies Of Realism*, 39, 42.

profond"[163] [The second time, the shapeless musical phrase becomes organic, the second time the arbitrary and the unusual take on a more profound meaning].

At this point the *sens* that the music will take on is undetermined and full of extraordinary possibility; it has not found its territory yet. And it is in this space where drastic is becoming gnostic, where affect is reaching out is tendrils toward the nearest or most welcome territory, that Swann hears the *petite phrase* and that the course of his great love story (or at least the soundtrack that will accompany it, in a Schopenhaueran sort of way)[164] is set in motion. In this state where the nebulous is beginning to solidify, the shape it will ultimately assume is still in question; it is a deterritorialized state in which a multivalent potential will choose one or more affective territories upon which to settle for Swann. And it is at this moment, in this state of charged potential, that Swann, able to encounter it on its own plane, truly meets the *petite phrase*, a meeting perhaps as fateful as his first encounter with Odette: "une phrase [s'était élevée] pendant quelques instants au-dessus des ondes sonores. Elle lui avait proposé aussitôt des voluptés particulières, dont il n'avait jamais eu l'idée avant de l'entendre, dont il sentait que rien autre qu'elle ne pourrait les lui faire connaître, et il avait éprouvé pour elle comme un amour inconnu" [a phrase had, for a few moments, risen above the sound waves. It seemed to offer to him a peculiar sensual delight that he had never imagined before hearing it, a delight toward which he felt the phrase alone could lead him, and for this he felt a sort of unknown love for it].

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[163] Jankélévitch, *La musique et l'ineffable*, 33.

[164] As Schopenhauer writes in *The World as Will and Representation*, "to the man who gives himself up entirely to the impression of a symphony, it is as if he saw all the possible events of life and of the world passing by within himself."

The phrase leads him “ici d’abord, puis là, puis ailleurs” [first here, then there, then somewhere else entirely], and then “vers un bonheur noble, inintelligible et précis” [toward a noble, unintelligible and precise happiness]. It stops and starts, changes direction abruptly, and “d’un mouvement nouveau, plus rapide, menu, mélancolique, incessant et doux, elle l’entraînait avec elle vers des perspectives inconnues” [with a new movement, faster, slight, melancholy, relentless and sweet, it carried him with it toward unknown vantage points]. Finally, it disappears. When Swann goes home that night, “il eut besoin d’elle, il était comme un homme dans la vie de qui une passante qu’il a aperçue un moment vient de faire entrer l’image d’une beauté nouvelle qui donne à sa propre sensibilité une valeur plus grande, sans qu’il sache seulement s’il pourra revoir jamais celle qu’il aime déjà et dont il ignore jusqu’au nom” [he needed the phrase, he was like a man whose life has been wholly upended by the sight of a woman briefly passing by, a mere glimpse of whom has made him conceive of an entirely new kind of beauty, who has heightened his powers of perception, even though he has no idea if he’ll ever see her again, this stranger he loves despite knowing nothing about her, not even her name].

With the passage of time, though, and repeated listenings, the *petite phrase* comes to sustain and stand in for his love for Odette. In a later audition, “ces parties de l’âme de Swann où la petite phrase avait effacé le souci des intérêts matériels, les considérations humaines et valables pour tous, elle les avait laissées vacantes et en blanc, et il était libre d’y inscrire le nom d’Odette” [those parts of Swann’s soul where the *petite phrase* had erased the importance of material interests, considerations that concerned all humankind, it had left them empty and blank, and he was free to inscribe Odette’s name upon them]. The music is inscribed onto these blank spaces in Swann’s soul, thereafter tied to Odette as the “air national de leur amour” [the national anthem of their

love]. As the novel continues, his feelings about the *petite phrase* change correlatively with his feelings toward Odette, and the *petite phrase* ineluctably activates his memory, driving him to relive all the moments he has spent with her. Each encounter with the phrase retains some of its initial drastic mystery, but also takes on a more gnostic cast: "Gnostic as [drastic's] antithesis," writes Abbate, "implies not just knowledge per se but making the opaque transparent, knowledge based on semiosis and disclosed secrets." Here Swann has, in a sense, inculcated a certain intellectual distance from the work, attempting perhaps to master it by familiarity, thinking less about the phrase itself than about "de simples valeurs" he knows he has substituted—for his mind's convenience—for the little phrase, for "la mystérieuse entité qu'il avait perçue" [the mysterious entity he had perceived]. Although at earlier points in the novel, the *petite phrase* had bolstered Swann's love for Odette, this particular audition calls up memories that he has, to some degree, hidden from himself—he is struck now by memories of the time when Odette had loved him, memories which "il avait réussi jusqu'à ce jour à maintenir invisibles dans les profondeurs de son être" [he had managed until then to keep hidden in the depths of his being] and which are suddenly reawakened to come sing to him, "éperdument, sans pitié pour son infortune présente, les refrains oubliés du bonheur" [desperately, irrepressibly, without mercy for his present misfortunes, the forgotten refrains of happiness].[165] Proust explains once again that the *petite phrase*'s affective power goes beyond that of language:

> Au lieu des expressions abstraites « temps où j'étais heureux », « temps où j'étais aimé », qu'il avait souvent prononcées jusque-là et sans trop souffrir … il retrouva

[165] Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann*, 326.

> tout ce qui de ce bonheur perdu avait fixé à jamais la spécifique et volatile essence ; il revit tout.[166]
>
> [Instead of abstract notions — "that time when I used to be happy," "that time when I was loved" — which he had often thought to himself before and without much pain … he recalled everything that had forever determined the specific, volatile essence of this happiness. It all played before his eyes again.]

This is a sort of retransmission of memory through musical affect. Because of its inextricable association with Odette and his idealized vision of her and of their world together, the *petite phrase* enables—or forces—Swann to take stock of the dissonance between that idealized world and his reality, to see that "le sentiment qu'Odette avait eu pour lui ne renaîtrait jamais, que ses espérances de bonheur ne se réaliseraient plus" [The feelings that Odette had had for him would never be rekindled, his long-awaited happiness would never return].[167] As Jankélévitch writes, sonorous material is not "purement et simplement à la remorque de l'esprit et à la disposition de nos caprices : mais elle est récalcitrante et refuse parfois de nous conduire là où nous voulions aller" [simply in tow behind the mind and at the disposition of our whims; it is stubborn and sometimes refuses to lead us where we want to be led][168] Swann is, in a sense, taken for a ride by the petite phrase, which has become imbued with memory and meaning.

The *petite phrase* initially functions in the realm of affect, in a drastic relation that is "supérieure aux choses concrètes" [superior to tangible objects].[169] It has no semantically or linguistically identifiable meaning, but operates as a *bloc* of potentiality, forming an assemblage

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[166] Proust, 326.
[167] Proust, 333.
[168] Jankélévitch, *La musique et l'ineffable*, 39.
[169] Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann*, 228.

with—and mobilizing affective potentials and memories within—the listener. Proust called music "l'exemple unique de ce qu'aurait pu être [. . .] la communication des âmes" [the only example of what might have been … the communication of souls], both believing that music failed to signify in the same way as language, and yet writing beautifully and lucidly about the way in which it can come to signify for us as individuals. Language must draw artificial divisions, must fit meaning into discrete units, and so our ability to communicate with one another is always already mediated by the restraints of linguistic economies. On the other hand, music is capable of producing such powerful responses in listeners that it can seem as if what has been communicated through musical exchange is affect itself, a nebulous complex of emotive potentiality that gives the impression of being both universal and particular. The Vinteuil scenes in Proust are an exemplary instance of the musical-affective phenomenon in literature, and depend on the drastic nature of musical encounters. "[Musical ideas'] very power of affectivity," writes Jessica Wiskus, "a power that prompts Swann to change the trajectory of his entire life—springs from performative, dynamic realization. Indeed, the musical idea cannot be said to exist without the performance that calls it into being."[170]

This drastic encounter with music frequently takes place most profoundly during the first audition, before any sense has been made of the music, before order has been retroactively and anticipatorily ascribed to it, before enough time has elapsed to take an intellectual distance. Because music is an artform that "exists" only in time, and as an event rather than a static object of examination, "il y a donc un temps d'approfondissement, et ce temps, perpendiculaire au temps

[170] Jessica Wiskus, *The Rhythm of Thought: Art, Literature, and Music after Merleau-Ponty* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), 93.

d'exécution (si l'on ose employer un tel langage), est le temps que met l'auditeur à pénétrer dans l'épaisseur de ce sens dénué de sens" [There is, then, a time of deepening, a time perpendicular to the time of execution (if we dare to use such a term), which is the time the listener spends plumbing the depths of this meaning devoid of meaning].[171] As is the case for Swann, it is often upon listening *again* that "la phrase musicale informe devient organique, la deuxième fois l'arbitraire et l'insolite revêtent un sens plus profond."[172] When Swann is listening to the sonata later, and is familiar enough with the piece to distinguish its form, he picks up on lines and motifs that had previously gone unnoticed: "Il y avait là d'admirables idées que Swann n'avait pas distinguées à la première audition et qu'il percevait maintenant, comme si elles se fussent, dans le vestiaire de sa mémoire, débarrassées du déguisement uniforme de la nouveauté" [There were admirable ideas here that Swann had not distinguished on his first hearing and that he perceived now, as if, in the cloakroom of his memory, they had cast off the uniform disguise of their newness].[173]

Later in the *Recherche*, when Marcel (Proust's narrator) hears Vinteuil's septet in *La Prisonnière*, he describes its effect on him as "comme sans doute la petite phrase de la sonate pour Swann" [like that of the *petite phrase* to Swann] and compares it to a "créature invisible dont je ne connaissais pas le langage et que je comprenais si bien—la seule Inconnue qu'il m'ait jamais été donné de rencontrer" [invisible creature whose language I didn't know and yet whom I understood so well—the only Unknown I've ever had the fortune to meet]. He does not speak music's language, but he nevertheless hears something intimate and meaningful in it. This is

[171] Jankélévitch, *La musique et l'ineffable*, 85.
[172] Jankélévitch, 33.
[173] Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann*.

because, in the words of Jankélévitch, "La musique a bon dos!"[174] We can, and do, project specific meanings and feelings onto musical melodies, works, and performances, but "la musique ne signifie rien, donc elle signifie tout" [Directly and of itself, music means nothing, except by association or convention; music means nothing, so it means everything].[175] Music means nothing (in particular); thus it means—can mean—everything (in general). Jankélévitch elaborates on the ineffability of music, which is different from unspeakability—"le mystère musical n'est pas l'*indicible*, mais l'*ineffable*," he writes, and what is ineffable is not unsayable but inexpressible, in the sense that "il y a sur lui infiniment, interminablement à dire : tel est l'insondable mystère de Dieu, tel l'inépuisable mystère d'amour" [about it there is infinitely, interminably more to say; such is the unfathomable mystery of God, the inexhaustible mystery of love].[176] We cannot say what a D-flat means, or parse a specific encoded meaning from a melodic line, but for many listeners, music comes to signify very powerfully. This is often due to extra-musical factors: the title of a work, biographical knowledge about its composer, the circumstances in which we hear it, the people with whom we listen to it. "Le sentiment de l'inexprimable," Jankélévitch wonders, "ne rend-il pas muets ceux qui l'éprouvent?" [Doesn't the feeling of the inexpressible render those who experience it unable to speak?][177] For Nerval and Proust, the answer must be a rather resounding no—but for André Gide, or at least for his characters led to their doom by approaching too closely that inexpressible, the response may be more complicated.

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[174] Jankélévitch, *La musique et l'ineffable*, 22.
[175] Jankélévitch, 21–22.
[176] Jankélévitch, 86.
[177] Jankélévitch, 163.

III. "Le monde tel qu'il aurait pu etre": Gide's *La Symphonie pastorale*

André Gide's 1918 novella *La symphonie pastorale* is written in a lyrical, lilting style, and deals explicitly with music and sound as recurrent themes. The novella's narrator, a pastor, takes pity on a young blind woman whose caretaker has died. He brings her to stay at his home, where he and his family name her Gertrude, but initially she is uncommunicative: she has lived in isolation and never learned to speak. Her ignorance of language makes her difficult to reach, and the pastor can only attempt to link other sensory input with words until she grasps their linkage: "tout est chaos dans cette âme. . . . Il s'agit, pour commencer, de lier en faisceau quelques sensations tactiles et gustatives et d'y attacher, à la manière d'une étiquette, un son, un mot, que tu lui rediras, à satiété, puis tâcheras d'obtenir qu'elle redise" [all is chaos within this soul. . . . The only way to begin is to link together a few notions of touch and taste and to attach to them a sort of label, a sound or a word, that you say to her over and over and encourage her to repeat back to you]. The details of this process are mostly glossed over, but Gertrude is a quick and able learner, and soon undergoes an existential and linguistic *éveil*, when "tout à coup ses traits *s'animèrent*" [all at once her features *came alive*],[178] thanks to the pastor's efforts.

One of the earliest mentions of music in the novella comes when the pastor takes Gertrude for a walk and they listen to birdsong together. Here Gide recounts Gertrude's delight through an almost synesthetic linkage of sound both with sight, as Gertrude imagines it, and with touch:

> Elle me raconta plus tard, qu'entendant le chant des oiseaux, elle l'imaginait alors un pur effet de la lumière. . . Je me souviens de son inépuisable ravissement lorsque

[178] Gide, *La symphonie pastorale (1918)*, 17 emphasis in original.

> je lui appris que ces petites voix émanaient de créatures vivantes, dont il semble que l'unique fonction soit de sentir et d'exprimer l'éparse joie de la nature.[179]
>
> [She told me later that when she heard that birdsong, she imagined it as a pure effect of light . . . I remember her inexhaustible rapture when I told her that those little voices came from living creatures, whose only function seemed to be to feel and express the scattered joys of nature.]

For Gertrude, then, who is unable to resort to metaphors of vision, all sensation—perhaps including emotion—is intimately tied to hearing, for her the chief conduit to the world outside herself, the sense through which her life and her interaction with others is mediated. Not for the last time, Gide invokes a hierarchy of sense in which hearing is linked with truth and prelapsarian grace, while sight is fickle and disingenuous. Gertrude asks, "Est-ce que vraiment . . . la terre est aussi belle que le racontent les oiseaux? . . . J'écoute si bien les oiseaux; je crois que je comprends tout ce qu'ils disent" [Is the earth really as beautiful as in the birds' song? I can hear them so well; I feel like I understand everything they say]. The pastor can only respond, "Ceux qui peuvent y voir ne les entendent pas si bien que toi, ma Gertrude" [Those who can see cannot hear them so well as you, my Gertrude][180]—in other words, sight is a distraction, adding sensory noise that obstructs the purity of sound.

Gertrude continues making terrific progress, speaking fluently and with ease. Her education comes to a bit of a roadblock when the pastor attempts to teach her about colors: "elle avait le plus grand mal à comprendre que chaque couleur à son tour pût être plus ou moins foncée, et qu'elles pussent à l'infini se mélanger entre elles" [she had the most difficulty understanding

[179] Gide, 19.
[180] Gide, 19.

that each color had lighter and darker shades, and that they could mix together in infinite gradations].[181] Soon after, he takes her with him to a concert; this is a crucial scene in which music is more or less the central character. The pastor attempts to draw a parallel between the colors of the spectrum and the tone color of each instrument in the orchestra:

> Le rôle de chaque instrument dans la symphonie me permit de revenir sur cette question des couleurs. [. . .] Je l'invitai à se représenter de même, dans la nature, les colorations rouges et orangées analogues aux sonorités des cors et des trombones, les jaunes et les verts à celles des violons, des violoncelles et des basses; les violets et les bleus rappelés ici par les flûtes, les clarinettes et les hautbois. Une sorte de ravissement intérieur vint dès lors remplacer ses doutes.[182]
>
> The role of each instrument in the symphony allowed me to return to this question of colors. [. . .] I asked her to try to associate the reds and oranges found in nature to the sounds of horns and trombones, yellows and greens to those of the violins, cellos, and basses; purples and blues evoked here by flutes, clarinets, and oboes. A kind of internal rapture came over her and swept away her doubts.

But the comparison falls apart when Gertrude asks about the color white (a bit of a contrivance on Gide's part). He finally tells her, "représente-toi le blanc comme quelque chose de tout pur, quelque chose où il n'y a plus aucune couleur, mais seulement de la lumière; le noir, au contraire, comme chargé de couleur, jusqu'à en être tout obscurci" [imagine white as something completely pure, something without any color at all but simply light; black, on the contrary, as saturated with color to the point of total obscurity]. But they both come to realize that there is always something in the visual that exceeds audition, and vice versa: "Ainsi j'expérimentais sans cesse à travers elle

[181] Gide, 22.
[182] Gide, 22.

combien le monde visuel diffère du monde des sons et à quel point toute comparaison que l'on cherche à tirer de l'un pour l'autre est boiteuse" [In this way I experienced ceaselessly through her how greatly the visual world differed from the world of sounds, and how precarious was any comparison one attempted to draw between the two].[183]

Nonetheless, the concert, at which the pair hear Beethoven's sixth symphony (the novella's namesake), is a rapturous moment for Gertrude. The pastor notes her "immense plaisir" and recounts her dreamlike state:

> Longtemps après que nous eûmes quitté la salle de concert, Gertrude restait encore silencieuse et comme noyée dans l'extase.
>
> —Est-ce que vraiment ce que vous voyez est aussi beau que . . . cette '*scène au bord du ruisseau*'?
>
> Je ne lui répondis pas aussitôt, car je réfléchissais que ces harmonies ineffables peignaient, non point le monde tel qu'il était, mais bien tel qu'il aurait pu être, qu'il pourrait être sans le mal et sans le péché.[184]
>
> [For a long while after we had left the concert hall, Gertrude remained silent, as if awash in ecstasy.
> "Is what you see truly as beautiful as that 'scene by the brook'?"
> I didn't respond to her right away, as I was thinking to myself that those ineffable harmonies painted the world not as it was, but as it could have been, as it could yet be without evil and without sin.]

Here the pastor—who believes Gertrude to be pure and unaffected by sin, and wishes her to remain so—is reinforcing the idea that sight is the root of sin, while hearing is an inherently honest

[183] Gide, 22–23.
[184] Gide, 23–24.

sensation incapable of leading us astray. This appears to be a reversal of a common trope, whereby sound (i.e., music and the voice) is thought to be a conduit toward sin, because of its ability to seduce and penetrate.[185]

Following the pastor's admittedly *boiteuse* comparison of tone color to visual color, Gertrude, with her sense of hearing at the core of her identity, conceives life itself as music, as a symphony. She asks the pastor if she is beautiful, wanting to be sure that "[elle] ne détonne pas trop dans la symphonie" [she does not sound out of tune in the symphony].[186] Although she cannot see, she understands after the concert the power and importance of harmony and beauty. She begins spending time (and, in an act of mutual musical creation, playing the organ) with the pastor's son, Jacques, who falls in love with her—but as she can only hear him, not see him, she remains untainted by lust and agrees to let the pastor send Jacques away. He claims to do so for Gertrude's own good, but he has an ulterior motive. His wife, Amélie, represents Gertrude's opposite: she is generally depicted as joyless, bitter, and jealous of her husband's affection for Gertrude, accusing him of taking better care of her than of his own children, and does not participate in the sonorous economy of honesty in which the pastor strives so hard to believe. Instead of words or music, she uses loaded silences to convey meaning: "elle ne me fit point précisément des reproches; mais son silence même était accusateur" [she refrained from ever reproaching me directly, but her silence was accusatory in itself].[187] It becomes apparent that, although Gertrude and the pastor do not physically undertake an affair, he is very much in love with her and she seems to return the feeling.

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[185] Linda Phyllis Austern, "'Alluring the Auditorie to Effeminacie': Music and the Idea of the Feminine in Early Modern England," *Music & Letters* 74, no. 3 (August 1, 1993): 343–54.
[186] Gide, *La symphonie pastorale (1918)*, 25.
[187] Gide, 26.

Near the novella's conclusion, Gertrude is deemed eligible for a new surgery that may enable her to see. The pastor, though distraught over the possibility that she may become independent and no longer need him to be her eyes, sends her away for the operation, which is a success. However, almost immediately upon her return, she attempts to drown herself. On her deathbed, she makes a devastating confession to the pastor: "Quand j'ai vu Jacques, j'ai compris soudain que ce n'était pas vous que j'aimais; c'était lui. Il avait exactement votre visage; je veux dire celui que j'imaginais que vous aviez" [When I saw Jacques, I suddenly understand that you were not the one I loved; he was. He had your face—I mean the face that I imagined you had].[188] In the end, then, the old trope is not really overturned, though it is perhaps transposed: hearing becomes a locus of idealism and unattainable perfection, while sight restores Gertrude to the "full" truth, which turns out to be fatal to her.

In these novels by Nerval, Proust, and Gide, music serves as a space upon which characters inscribe their own meanings. Since music possesses a potent affective power, but only signifies particularly insofar as we territorialize it onto our own memories, dreams, and feelings, it possesses an uncanny ability to evoke vastly divergent images and affects for different listeners—but the fact that these affects are not universal does not make them less potent in our experience of them; on the contrary, we can grow as attached to them as to the objects, people, places, and memories to which we feel they are linked. Gérard in *Sylvie* and Swann in *À la recherche* find that the intensity of the meaning conveyed to us by an experience of music may ultimately lead to profound disillusionment by their juxtaposition with a flawed and complicated truth; Gertrude in *La Symphonie pastorale* is so deeply shaken by the disconnect between the ostensible truths revealed

[188] Gide, 68.

to her through Beethoven's music and the complicated, often ugly world previously hidden from her sight that she literally cannot go on living after her blindness is cured.

CHAPTER II

"SOME SECRET CHORD": CHOPIN, PIANISM, AND SEXUALITY

> "Why have you stopped playing, Dorian? Go back and play the nocturne over again. Look at that great honey-colored moon that hangs in the dusky air. She is waiting for you to charm her, and if you play she will come closer to the earth."
>
> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

The great pianist Vladimir Horowitz is said to have once remarked, "There are three kinds of pianists: Jewish pianists, homosexual pianists, and bad pianists." He surely meant to imply that he, renowned virtuoso that he was, belonged only to the first group—but it is now widely assumed that he was also a member of the second. Though there are a great many prominent counterexamples to Horowitz's quip, the hypothetical link that he perceived between pianistic talent and certain minoritarian status (either ethnic or sexual) may derive from, or point to, a set of long-established discursive formulations, including the correlation of keyboard instruments with domesticity and the feminine. Can music itself transmit meaningful messages? Or do conceptions of "who" certain composers were—that is, from an identitarian standpoint—influence the ways in which their works are understood and discussed? If Foucault's evocation of an author-function—"Dans l'écriture, il n'y va pas de la manifestation ou de l'exaltation du geste d'écrire ; il ne s'agit pas de l'épinglage d'un sujet dans un langage; il est question de l'ouverture d'un espace où le sujet

écrivant ne cesse de disparaître"[189]—is particularly a description of writers, might it apply also to composers of music? Can anything about instrumental classical music itself be "queer," or does such an interpretation necessarily proceed from understandings about composers and performers themselves, or even about the genre or instrumentation of music? To what degree can we isolate the ways in which a composer's life and work is interpreted—what it comes to signify in and out of the concert hall—outside the bounds of contemporaneous, and later inherited, discourses?

I. THE COMPOSERS' CLOSET

Extrapolating the notion of a *composer-function* based on the *author-function* is perhaps an overreach, as Foucault is not known as a scholar of music, but a recent work by Finnish scholar Lauri Siisiäinen attempts to meet Foucault on the auditory-sonic plane in his own terms. *Foucault and the Politics of Hearing* begins with the admission that Foucault is not known "as a thinker of music, or more generally, as a thinker of the 'auditory-sonorous' at all, unlike … Barthes or Deleuze. . . . We have been fairly strongly accustomed to approach Foucault as a thinker whose focus was on the eye, as well as on language and discourse; not on the 'auditory-sonorous.'"[190] However, Siisiäinen sees this as a worthwhile challenge: "The basic aim [of this work] is to contest the view of Foucault as a thinker for whom sound, voice, and auditory perception was an issue of only minor (if any) importance . . . to show Foucault's continuous interest in the 'auditory-

[189] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?," in *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 821.

[190] Lauri Siisiäinen, *Foucault and the Politics of Hearing* (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2013), 4.

sonorous' throughout the course of his intellectual biography."[191] Siisiäinen argues that Foucault "offers us a starting point to think of the affective power of voice, and of musical art, as well as their function in the use of power that shapes each individual personality and 'character,' as well as the community as a whole."[192] He traces Foucault's discussions of the senses of sight and sound through several of his key works, including *Les mots et les choses*, whose treatment of the "visible-optical" and the "vocal-sonorous-auditory" demonstrate the historicity of these senses: "just like our eyes, so also our ears (auditory perception) have gone through historical transformations."[193] He also points to a 1983 interview to posit that if Foucault did not often treat music specifically, it is because this domain is somehow ineffable, untouchable, even for so great a thinker: "The real beauty, that is, for me, a musical phrase, a piece of music that I do not understand, something of which I cannot say anything. I have this idea—maybe it is arrogant or presumptuous—that I could say something about any one of the greatest paintings in the world. And that is the reason why they are not absolutely beautiful."[194]

Siisiäinen is not a musicologist himself—but many scholars in that field have also drawn on Foucault's ideas as a lens through which to examine the manifestations of musicians and music in the popular imaginary. Susan McClary's widely-read work (even outside the academy, with a notable rave review by pop / rock critic Robert Christgau in *The Village Voice*)[195] *Feminine*

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[191] Siisiäinen, 4.
[192] Siisiäinen, 7.
[193] Siisiäinen, 49. Relevant quote from *The Order of Things*: "Language [. . .] has acquired a vibratory nature which has separated it from the visible sign and made it more nearly proximate to the note in music."
[194] Siisiäinen, 101.
[195] Robert Christgau, "Theory of the Rhythmic Class: Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings*," *Village Voice*, June 4, 1991, https://www.robertchristgau.com/xg/bkrev/mcclary-91.php.

Endings: Music, Gender & Sexuality is among the first examples of "an approach that came to be called the 'new musicology,'"[196] in parallel with the "new historicism" movement. McClary draws heavily on Foucault throughout her work, noting that "in book after book, he has demonstrated that such apparent universals as knowledge, sexuality, the body, the self, and madness all have histories bound up with institutional power [and are] variously defined, organized, and constituted by means of cultural discourses such as literature or music." She does believe, however, that Foucault is a pessimistic thinker whose theories "rarely admit the possibility of agency, resistance, or alternative models of pleasure," and thus depends also on Gramsci, Bakhtin and Adorno to stake her claims.[197]

McClary's book constantly evokes the artificial, constructed nature of gender and sexual categories through discourse around music at various time periods (harking back to the Renaissance and Monteverdi, and leading all the way to the twentieth century and avant-garde powerhouse Diamanda Galás). What she does with Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony, written in 1877, is curious: an opera like *Carmen* can be studied for the discourse present in its libretto, but a symphony—with only melody, harmony, intensity, and vibration—is a less traditional object of discursive inquiry. McClary's interpretation of the symphony, highlighting several climactic and striking moments in the score, is that it represents "a narrative in which the protagonist seems victimized by patriarchal expectations and by sensual feminine entrapment. . . . As a homosexual in a world of patriarchally enforced heterosexuality, his behavior was always being judged against

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[196] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (U of Minnesota Press, 2002).
[197] McClary, 29.

cultural models of 'real men.'"[198] She does not claim that all parts of the work can be explained by biographical insight, but ascribes a certain agency to Tchaikovsky, accessible through the act of composition, that would have been otherwise unavailable to him:

> This is a composition by a man who was tormented by his situation within his homophobic society. As a composer, he inherited a code of signification that marked themes (as well as human beings) as either masculine or feminine. . . . It was in his power—at least as a composer—to manipulate these *musical* materials to conform to his own specifications, even if his choices in real life were rather more restricted and treacherous.[199]

Tchaikovsky is perhaps the most prominent example of a big-name canonical composer whose homosexuality is accepted without qualification. There is something fascinating to the idea that musical scores might be read as discourse, but one wonders if McClary's interpretation of Tchaikovsky's music would have been different had she not already begun with an assumption of the totality of his composer-function: that is, the function of a "gay composer," who, it might follow, creates "gay works." McClary's interpretation of Tchaikovsky's symphony—intriguing and impassioned though it is—necessitates a certain amount of unverifiable extrapolation, tendencies which (alongside charges of essentialism) made McClary's work controversial in academic circles. (McClary herself wrote about the mixed reception of her book twenty years later, worrying that the timing of its release, and the opposition it provoked, may have had "an overwhelmingly negative impact on the subfield of feminist musicology" even if it has since established a legacy as something of a paradigm shift among scholars and artists.)[200] More

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[198] McClary, 76–77.
[199] McClary, 78.
[200] Susan McClary, "'Feminine Endings' at Twenty," *Trans (Online)*, 2011.

recently, the work of Judith Peraino has more rigorously situated the reception of Tchaikovsky as both a historical figure and a composing subject within turn-of-the-century sexological discourses by writers like Magnus Hirschfeld, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, and Havelock Ellis, the latter of whom posited a common link between neuroticism (and by extension, homosexuality) and musical aptitude.[201] Peraino also reads Tchaikovsky's personal letters from near the end of his life, in which he posits his Sixth Symphony—known as the *Pathétique* and, aptly, charged with emotional resonance—as his "most sincere," alongside the final movement from that symphony. A bold break with post-Beethoven symphonic tradition, Tchaikovsky chose to end what would be his final symphony—he died just over a week after its premiere—with an *Adagio* lament rather than following the expected march toward redemption and triumph. This sort of "transgendered vocality" could thus signify a confession of something unconfessable, "a man lamenting as if he were a woman and . . . a symphony finale singing a lament as if it were a triumph."[202]

Gary C. Thomas, coeditor of the anthology *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, takes a different tack from McClary in his article about the Baroque composer G.F. Handel. "Was Handel gay?" he wonders, and moreover, why should we ask such a question? Heather Love, whose terrific *Feeling Backward* calls often on Foucault, might attribute Thomas's question to a "longing for community across time [that is] a crucial feature of queer historical experience." For Thomas, its discursive root is "the Gay Closet," upon which he expounds thus:

> Knowledge can be thought of as 'closetworthy' in approximate proportion to its ability to threaten or contest manifest or dominant versions of the truth. . . . On the

[201] Judith Ann Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 71–73.
[202] Peraino, 84.

> most basic level closet knowledge depends on silence, an 'absence' out of which is generated a discursively elaborated 'presence,' the secret. Then, as in Freud's 'negation' or Foucault's 'spiral'—mechanisms by which an object to be denied, repressed, or disciplined gains more, rather than less, presence and power—the secret is by the logic of 'reverse discourse' further constituted and elaborated in a procession of alibis, justifications, or explanations.[203]

Thomas limns the discursive production around the concept of (what is now called) "homosexuality" in Handel's time and traces the numerous strategies on the part of scholars to sidestep the question of Handel's sexuality altogether. He concludes that "the closet is so useful and its destruction more anxiety-provoking even than its continued maintenance" because "in its deepest recesses the closet harbors its final secret and ultimate threat: that 'manliness,' that always vulnerable plenitude in constant need of discursive renaturalization and reinforcement, that illusion on which modern patriarchal control is so utterly dependent, will finally be unmasked as the truly 'unnatural' and 'perverse' image that it is."[204] This unabashedly polemical article brings to mind what Heather Love calls the "most problematic [issue] about gay and lesbian historiography to date . . . [not] its attachment to identity but rather its consistently affirmative bias."[205] In other words, Gary Thomas's article—rigorous and thorough as it is—seems to have been shaped to fit the conclusion that Thomas wished to draw from the beginning: if Handel was "gay," he can be claimed as "one of ours," *re*claimed as part of a community that did not exist when he lived and

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[203] Gary C. Thomas, "'Was George Frideric Handel Gay?': On Closet Questions and Cultural Politics," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 167.
[204] Thomas, 189.
[205] Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 45.

composed. "While it would be neither possible nor desirable to go back to an earlier moment in the history of gay and lesbian life," writes Love,

> earlier forms of feeling, imagination, and community may offer crucial resources in the present. Attending to the specific histories of homophobic exclusion and violence—as well as their effects—can help us see structures of inequality in the present. It is also a way of claiming homosexual identity in the face of a call to abandon it. . . . I insist on the importance of clinging to ruined identities and to histories of injury. Resisting the call of gay normalization means refusing to write off the most vulnerable, the least presentable, and all the dead.[206]

Thomas and the other editors of *Queering the Pitch* preface their anthology with a passionate introduction. Displaying the desire for identification with historical subjects that Love describes, they aver in the Preface to the First Edition that they "[chose] to incorporate [themselves] as subjects in [their] work, including those parts of [themselves] that have been kept invisible and thought unacceptable and unspeakable, both by [themselves] and others."[207] However, their goal is not simply to "out" long-dead composers, to "[uncover] 'facts' of sexual preference" and "assert that Handel or Schubert was 'gay,'" but rather to "reveal the homophobia, as well as the pathetically limited terms, of a scholarly inquiry that either [Handel or Schubert] might have been [gay] . . . [and] to examine and attempt to revalue models of musical difference that these composers represent and to which we can relate." They aim to "reassociate music with lived experience and the broader patterns of discourse and culture that music both mirrors and

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[206] Love, 30.

[207] Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C Thomas, eds., *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), ix–x.

actively produces."[208] Finally, they posit that the act of "queering" may "uncover for music's lovers what it is we generally repress in thinking about our experience of music: our emotional attachments to music, our needs met by music . . . our voices, our bodies."[209] As I will discuss below, the semi-closeted figure of Frédéric Chopin provides a rich case study in such musical difference and, perhaps especially, the particular emotional and bodily attachments to his music that many writers and musicians have eloquently framed, necessarily within the epistemological terms available to them.

One reason the Polish-French Chopin stands out as an exemplary figure of inquest is that, as Philip Brett argues in his article "Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet," composers in the Germanic tradition—e.g., Bach, Beethoven, Schumann, Brahms—have avoided the "feminine" trap, writing in the more "masculine" genres of symphony and concerto, and working within the bounds of stoicism rather than expressivity. Brett gives credence to the panopticism of Foucault's *Surveiller et punir* when he talks about the "self-policing" of music in the nineteenth century, a process which saw composers in the Germanic tradition avoid charges of "daydream, imagination, or masturbation" by moving toward "abstraction, formalism . . . pure form and pattern": a kind of intellectualization of music that would separate it from messy, feminine emotion and uphold its status as a useful art in a "rational, masculine, heterosexist program."[210] This program, most notably mobilized in Germany through composers like Bach, Schumann, Brahms, and even Wagner, cannot allow canonized composers in the Germanic tradition to be emasculated without

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[208] Brett, Wood, and Thomas, x.
[209] Brett, Wood, and Thomas, xi.
[210] Philip Brett, "Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 13.

threatening the paradigm that supposedly helped the art form as we now know it to survive. The silence around Franz Schubert, and the continued insistence by some scholars and historians that there is no way to ascertain his suspected same-sex proclivities, exemplifies for Brett this type of policing that is still perpetuated centuries later. Here Brett, too, calls on Tchaikovsky as a contrast with the German Schubert, an example of a composer whose homosexuality is widely accepted precisely because his music is too emotive, too dramatic, too prone to excess and decidedly un-German:

> The one composer we have been allowed to 'know' about in the period is Tchaikovsky. A Russian composer could be homosexual . . . because that would allow the exotic, decadent, and effeminate quality of the music to be held up . . . as a warning. The central German canon must at all costs be preserved in its purity. The closeting of Schubert is of a similar order as the papering over of Wagner's anti-Semitism.[211]

Brett's argument hinges upon the "essentialist myth of musical creativity as a force deriving from the 'eternal feminine' in man," as well as the embodiment of "'the muse' in the figure of the male composer," concerns which "often [seem] to demand a compensating amount of energy spent in holding up the façade of masculinity." The male-dominated nature of classical music, even in performance practices today, can be posited as an extension of this discomfort: "The struggle against the recognition of women in certain roles in music is bound up with homosexual panic."[212]

What are the stakes, today, of asking whether a composer was "gay," or at least engaged in same-sex relationships, irrespective of the identity categories available to them? As McClary's

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[211] Brett, 15.
[212] Brett, 22.

work shows, it is difficult not to avoid begging the question when we attempt to read some truth into the identity, sexual or otherwise, of a composer based purely on an instrumental work of their creation. Listening to Tchaikovsky with retroactive knowledge about his life, it is easy enough to find phrases, motifs, dynamic gestures, and intense outpourings of emotion and to ascribe to them some ostensible correlate in the composer's biographical details—but even if Tchaikovsky himself had pointed to a moment in one his symphonies and written, "These bars are an expression of the inner conflict that being homosexual in an unwelcoming society has wrought upon me," we could not really say that another interpretation of the same bars by someone who was hearing the music for the first time, and knowing nothing about Tchaikovsky, was any less valid—we could not say that any specific information was encoded directly and irrefutably in the music itself.

The political stakes of such questions, of course, often remain as urgent as ever. In Poland, right-wing demagogue incumbent Andrzej Duda narrowly won reelection in the 2020 presidential race while mobilizing virulently anti-gay discourses. He denigrated LGBT people as "not people" but "an ideology . . . even more destructive than communism,"[213] casting queerness as dangerous, unnatural, a foreign invader from which he would protect the Polish people. In doing so, he gave credence to the nearly 100 towns in southeast Poland that had declared themselves "LGBT-free zones" the previous year, making the country one of the most inhospitable places for queer people in Europe. In the midst of this culture war over sexual freedom, Swiss music journalist Moritz Weber released a two-hour radio program called *Chopin's Men* that ignited a firestorm around one

[213] Phillip M. Ayoub, "Analysis | Attacking LGBT Life Helped the Right-Wing Polish President Win Reelection — Barely," *Washington Post*, n.d., https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/07/21/attacking-lgbt-life-helped-right-wing-polish-president-win-reelection-barely/.

of Poland's most beloved figures—one whose name adorns its largest airport, whose busts and statues decorate small towns and big cities, and whom Balzac purportedly called "plus polonais que la Pologne," despite the fact that he was half-French and ultimately lived half his life in France. Weber pointed to a longstanding erasure and elision of the famed composer's homoerotic letters and alleged same-sex inclinations, occasionally through deliberate mistranslation of pronouns by official bodies like Warsaw's Fryderyk Chopin Institute.[214] The degree to which the letters—as well as conflicting historical evidence regarding Chopin's famed love affair with novelist George Sand—confirm any interior truth about Chopin or his music is likely to spur continued debate. But the debate is not new; it has, in one form or another, been ongoing since Chopin's lifetime, influencing the ways in which Chopin and his work have been received and recounted by historians, musicians, critics, and even novelists.

II. "SMALL FAIRY VOICES": CHOPIN, KEYBOARD INSTRUMENTS, AND *DORIAN GRAY*

Toward the end of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Lord Henry Wotton—a character known for his praise of hedonism and sensuous pleasures—implores the title character, "Let us have our coffee in the music-room, Dorian. You must play Chopin to me."[215] Is Chopin a haphazard choice on Wilde's part, or is he knowingly playing upon a variety of discursive

[214] Philip Oltermann and Shaun Walker, "Chopin's Interest in Men Airbrushed from History, Programme Claims," *The Guardian*, November 25, 2020, sec. Music, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/nov/25/chopins-interest-in-men-airbrushed-from-history-programme-claims.

[215] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1908), 271.

implications surrounding the composer and his unique musical output? A curious figure in the history of Western classical music, Chopin often figures today among the commonly cited pantheon of great composers, but he is a composer in a rather different vein from Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Mahler, Wagner, and other luminaries. Where many of the great masters remain known chiefly for their grand, large-scale works, such as symphonies and operas, which require expansive orchestras to execute properly, Chopin wrote almost exclusively for a single instrument: the piano. Though he composed a handful of concerti, the majority of his works are smaller-scale, solo pieces (often described, with varying degrees of condescension, as "piano miniatures"): Preludes, Études, Polish-inflected Mazurkas and Polonaises, and Nocturnes. During Chopin's lifetime and following his death in 1849, praise for his music among European critics and musicians tended to be qualified; in the era dominated by the philosophy of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, "total art work," which sought to incorporate multiple art forms in a grand artistic apotheosis, Chopin was something of an outlier. The piano, and keyboard instruments more generally, had for centuries been broadly associated with femininity; and Chopin, who was plagued by illness throughout his short life and died before the age of forty, took on a peculiarly feminized status. This musically gendered imbrication persists even today, with contemporary pianist Hélène Grimaud consciously choosing to avoid Chopin, rebelling against "performing in ways that might be 'expected' of a female pianist. [. . .] Instead of focusing on Chopin . . . Grimaud would rather 'play like a man.'"[216] What is "unmanly" about Chopin? Is it his preferred instrument? His sickly physical body? The genres in which he wrote? Or something in the quality of the music itself? Further, what does it mean to invoke Chopin's name in a literary context? References to both the piano and

[216] Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries*, xi.

to the instrument's composer *par excellence* allow Wilde to comment on and bring wider discursive implications to bear on his characters. Dorian Gray is not just an artist, but a musician; he is not just a musician, but a pianist; he does not play just any composer's music, but in particular Chopin's; and, of Chopin's works, he possesses a marked talent for the Nocturnes. Each of these choices works to establish Dorian in opposition to traditional masculine, heterosexist paradigms, as explicitly as possible during a time when those sorts of subversions still dared not speak their name.

Though historically a largely male-dominated field, music was a frequent target of suspicion for its ability to distract and beguile. Its seductive power could effeminize men by playing on their emotions and rendering them irrational, romantic, or melancholy.[217] Further, the musical event was inextricably caught up in a process of bodily exchange between music-maker and music-listener, a dynamic that could only be abstracted so far. As Richard Leppert writes in *The Sight of Sound*, "The body produces music, often from the depths of its interiority . . . Whatever else music is 'about,' it is *inevitably* about the body; music's aural and visual presence constitutes both a relation to and a representation of the body."[218] There was something paradoxical about musical exchange: on one hand, "the culture genders it as feminine; it is simultaneously a source of bliss to men and a threat to them"[219]; on the other hand, musical (and artistic) creativity was "a male prerogative"[220] until quite recently. But different kinds of music-making configured bodies, and thus implicated gender, in different ways. To begin with, appropriately "feminine"

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[217] Austern, "'Alluring the Auditorie to Effeminacie.'"
[218] Ibid., xx, emphasis in original.
[219] Leppert, 147.
[220] Leppert, 133.

instruments were those which "[required] no alteration in facial expression or physical demeanor."[221] The cello, with its deep timbre, was not generally an advisable choice for young ladies, whose modesty prevented them from holding the instrument between their legs.[222] Though there were a few women violinists who met with a moderate degree of success,[223] playing the violin caused a woman to "twist" and "strain" unnaturally, and to risk "[developing] an unsightly scar on her jaw."[224] Less physically demanding, and thus more "ladylike" than the bowed instruments, were the plucked strings of a lute or guitar or, better yet, a harp.[225] On the other hand, wind instruments were almost always off limits, since it was unbecoming for a woman's face to be "reddened and distorted, lips and cheeks compressed."[226] Ursula Rempel lists the flute as a possible exception, since a flautist's technique required her to "smile."[227] In a 1722 conduct book, however, Englishman John Essex wrote that "there are some others that really are unbecoming to the Fair Sex; as the Flute, Violin and Hautboy; the last of which is too Manlike, and would look

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[221] Carol Neuls-Bates, ed., *Women in music : an anthology of source readings from the Middle Ages to the present*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), xiii.
[222] Arthur Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos: A Social History* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1954), 65.
[223] Julie Anne Sadie, "*Musiciennes* of the Ancien Régime," in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (University of Illinois Press, 1987), 205.
[224] Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos: A Social History*, 65.
[225] Sadie, "*Musiciennes*," 203. According to Sadie, the harp's popularity rose in the second half of the eighteenth century during the reign of Marie-Antoinette, a noted proponent of the instrument.
[226] Ursula M. Rempel, "Women and Music: Ornament of the Profession?," in *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Samia I. Spencer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 174.
[227] Ibid., 174.

indecent in a woman's mouth; and the Flute is very improper."[228] The flute and oboe were phallic in shape, which made them unsuitable for polite ladies.

Keyboard instruments, on the other hand, avoided the pitfalls of many other instrument groups, and became particularly associated with women, femininity, and domestic spaces. As a conspicuously expensive purchase, the harpsichord served an extramusical purpose as a status symbol for wealthy families. Further, the ornate decorations commonly painted on harpsichords were designed to appeal to women from at least the early Renaissance.[229] The instrument did not require the physical force of the cello or the breath control of the flute, and a woman could sit demurely at the bench with her legs locked together. Perhaps most crucially, the harpsichord was too large to be portable. It was therefore an instrument played and kept in the home, firmly rooted in the locus of feminine domesticity and seclusion. Here women could entertain trusted family and friends—spectators who would not (in theory) be overcome with lascivious desires while listening—and later, potential suitors, who tended to find musicianship highly attractive in women.[230] Indeed, the harpsichord's status as both an instrument of the home and an important asset for marriageability made it an often integral part of a young woman's education. This was a cultural link that transcended national borders from England (where the instrument was even called

[228] Quoted in Leppert, *The Sight of Sound*, 67.
[229] Rempel, "Women and Music," 174; Richard Leppert, *Music and Image: Domesticity, Ideology and Socio-Cultural Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 154.
[230] Leppert, *The Sight of Sound*, 69.

the "virginal")[231] to Germany,[232] France,[233] and Belgium[234]. The feminization of keyboard instruments in the popular imaginary is corroborated by Arthur Loesser's *Men, Women and Pianos: A Social History*, in which Loesser quotes amply from primary texts dating from the 16th through the 19th century to illustrate the ways in which the piano, and its predecessors—the virginal, the spinet, the *clavecin*, and the harpsichord—were discursively, and often practically, correlated with femininity.[235] This correlation continued in later centuries, after the new pianoforte supplanted the harpsichord as the most popular keyboard instrument. As Jeffrey Kallberg notes in *Chopin at the Boundaries*, "women were far and away the primary consumers of piano music in the first half of the nineteenth century (just as they had been of keyboard music generally in the eighteenth century)"; it was they who played "most of the keyboards found in middle-class homes throughout Europe and the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."[236] As artifacts that enhanced the bearer's social standing and feminine cachet, keyboard instruments were for many years important vehicles for female agency and artistry (within largely delimited boundaries).

In this context, and the context of musical production outlined above in Philip Brett's article (following the mostly Germanic composers who upheld the "rational, masculine, heterosexist program" through grandiose forms and elaborate instrumentation), Frédéric Chopin's reputation

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[231] Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos: A Social History*, 190–92, 258.
[232] Loesser, 64–67.
[233] Elise Goodman, *The Portraits of Madame de Pompadour: Celebrating the Femme Savante* (University of California Press, 2000), 40.
[234] Kristine Forney, "'Nymphes Gayes En Abry Du Laurier': Music Instruction for the Bourgeois Woman," *Musica Disciplina* 49 (1995): 151–87.
[235] Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos: A Social History*.
[236] Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries*, 35–36.

was never a sure thing. His music tended to be delicate and lyrical, still technically demanding but trafficking more in subtle gradations of tone color and extended legato phrasing than the work of many other well-loved composers. Jeffrey Kallberg reconstructs a popular discourse around Chopin and his music as otherworldly, angelic, and effeminate, citing the composer Hector Berlioz, for whom hearing Chopin was akin to "a concert of sylphs or elves"[237]; the conductor Charles Hallé, who said of Chopin that "he is no man, he is an angel, a god . . . during his playing I could think of nothing but elves and fairy dances"; as well as *La France musicale*'s founder Léon Escudier, who likened Chopin's music to "small fairy voices sighing under silver bells, or a rain of pearls falling on crystal tables."[238] Invoking figures like sylphs, elves and fairies implied a set of sexually ambiguous discourses: "To label an adult male a fairy or an elf in the 1830s and 1840s was to invoke," writes Kallberg, "besides the obvious qualities of lightness, charm, and magic, notions of a being at once removed from sex and possessed by a longing for it."[239] A similar paradox will be exemplified by Dorian Gray, which I discuss further below.

Not only through his music, but also in his slight physical stature and frail constitution, Chopin provided a stark contrast to many of his contemporaries—notably the Hungarian virtuoso Franz Liszt, who had achieved something of a proto-rock star status in Europe. Liszt, a "matinee idol of the concert stage,"[240] inspired waves of frenzied, fanatical followers in a phenomenon that came to be known as "Lisztomania," by virtue of his physical strength, technical virtuosity, and virility. When he and Chopin performed duets together, the juxtaposition of their bodies

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[237] Kallberg, 64.
[238] Kallberg, 64.
[239] Kallberg, 77.
[240] Benita Eisler, *Chopin's Funeral* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 21.

highlighted the physical and temperamental differences between them; by contemporary standards of masculinity, Chopin could not hope to measure up. "Liszt's bony frame made him appear even taller than his six feet," writes biographer Anita Eisler. "His angular form . . . seemed to miniaturize his partner's slight body still more: just over five feet tall, weighing less than one hundred pounds, Chopin appeared no larger than a child."[241] On one occasion, at the end of a taxing concert, Liszt "rushed to the stage, cradling the exhausted [Chopin] in his arms," and attempted to "carry him from the piano," an event that became the subject of widespread mockery.[242] The flamboyant Liszt had seemingly boundless energy, selling out concert halls, conducting his "turbulent life . . . on a world stage," and making no secret of his womanizing tendencies.[243] Overcoming the "feminized" position of keyboard players through an excessive, ostentatiously performed masculinity, Liszt was "the virtuoso that audiences wanted to hear—and see,"[244] whereas, held up to the Lisztian model of virility, the sylphlike Chopin figured as "not a man."[245] On top of his feminized musical output and physical presence, Chopin's most famous love affair was with French novelist George Sand, known for her masculine comportment and dress, as well as her sexual libertinism and rumored same-sex liaisons. Sand referred to Chopin as "little Chip-Chip"[246] and as an angel (*ange*), a word which meant, in 1840s Parisian slang, homosexual. "As unlikely as it seems that Sand consciously exploited the double entendre," Eisler explains, "[it is] equally unlikely that she was unaware of the word's underground

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[241] Eisler, 21.
[242] Eisler, 86.
[243] Eisler, 22.
[244] Eisler, 82.
[245] Eisler, 80–81.
[246] Eisler, 80–81.

connotations."[247] This way of playing on multiple meanings while leaving room for plausible deniability is also typical of Oscar Wilde's allusions to homoeroticism (often through musical terms) in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Wilde calls upon music frequently in the novel, both as a metaphorical figure and as an actual narrative event, often in ways that conflate acts of music and musical instruments with sensual gratification and with gendered and sexualized bodies. As with Sand's usage of Parisian slang, it is unlikely Wilde would have been unaware of music's singular association with deviant sexuality and sensual abandon; Marc-André Raffalovich, part of Wilde's circle of friends in London, wrote in 1896's *Uranisme et unisexualité* that "dans certaines coteries le mot musical comme le mot artistique semble être devenu synonyme de pédéraste ou une périphrase pour indiquer une soumission à tous les plaisirs, tous les caprices sexuels ou leur pratique" [in some circles, the word *musical*, like the word *artistic*, seems to have become a synonym for homosexual, or a way to connote submission to every pleasure, every sexual whim and practice].[248] In Wilde's and Raffalovich's era, even male musicians who did not engage in same-sex dalliances were seen as particularly lascivious and exotic, likely to corrupt their listeners and prey upon women's carnal desires. As Joe Law writes, "Men who do play the piano or some other instrument are frequently represented as a source of moral danger [in Victorian literature]. . . . Moreover, these musicians are often foreigners, sexual predators who use music to obtain a mysterious hold over their female auditors."[249] This widespread fear is reflected in the novel through the character of Lord Henry's

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[247] Eisler, 80–81.

[248] Joe Law, "The 'Perniciously Homosexual Art': Music and Homoerotic Desire in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Other *Fin-de-Siècle* Fiction," in *The Idea of Music in Victorian Fiction*, ed. Sophie Fuller and Nicky Losseff (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004), 183.

[249] Law, 181.

wife Victoria, who proclaims herself acutely susceptible to music's romantic charms and talks freely about her particular fondness for pianists, conflating sexual and geographical exoticism: "I don't know what it is about them. Perhaps it is that they are foreigners. They all are, aren't they? Even those that are born in England become foreigners after a time, don't they?"[250] She later runs off with one of these mysterious pianists, who even Henry admits "played Chopin exquisitely."[251] As in the predominant discourses of the day, Chopin is established in Wilde's novel as an exotic Other, tied to a form of eroticism that threatens to disrupt the normal order of Victorian society.

As Basil says near the novel's beginning, "You know how I love secrecy. It is the only thing that can make modern life wonderful or mysterious to us. The commonest thing is delightful if one only hides it."[252] Wilde takes care to hide homoeroticism in plain sight, coding it through tropes that become legible to audiences "in the know."[253] Throughout the novel, Wilde carefully avoids any explicit mention of homosexual activity or homoerotic desire, though they appear subtextually at various points—it seems more than plausible, for example, that Lord Henry's affection for Dorian, or Lord Basil's infatuation with him, goes beyond Platonic interest. Drawing on Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* and D.A. Miller's work on the open secret, Elisa Glick writes, "since 'telling' is both prohibited and required, queer identity is always an internal contradiction between opacity and transparency, at once hidden and revealed."[254] As with the "sylphlike" Chopin's paradoxical status—"at once removed from sex and possessed by a longing for it"—Dorian Gray occupies a highly sexualized yet sexless place. In describing his hedonistic,

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[250] Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 63.
[251] Wilde, 271.
[252] Wilde, 11.
[253] Law, "The 'Perniciously Homosexual Art,'" 175.
[254] Elisa Glick, "The Dialectics of Dandyism," *Cultural Critique* 48, no. 1 (2001): 129.

sensual pursuits, which lead his and others' reputation to ruin, Wilde largely leaves sexual connotations in the realm of allusion.

One prominent locus for this not-quite-dissimulation, for these oblique or elided allusions to homosexuality or homoeroticism, is in language that makes reference to music. Although contemporary attitudes dictated that domestic musical activity, and keyboard instruments in particular, were appropriate for women, Dorian's pianistic ability is one of the attributes that ingratiates him to Lord Henry's aristocratic crowd. Indeed, it is one of the first things we learn about him: Lord Henry first hears his name from Lady Brandon, who says that Dorian "doesn't do anything—oh, yes, plays the piano."[255] And the first time that Lord Henry meets Dorian in the flesh (also the reader's first encounter with Dorian in the novel), he is seated at the piano.[256] Dorian's affinity and talent for the piano already "[mark] him as effeminate"[257] from the beginning. Further, Lord Henry's affection for Dorian is often mediated through musical language. To wit, after Henry makes Dorian's acquaintance and spends some time with him, he thinks of their encounter (through the narrator's free indirect speech) in musical terms: "Talking to [Dorian] was like playing upon an exquisite violin. He answered to every touch and thrill of the bow. . . ."[258] The exchanges between the two men occur, at least superficially, on an intellectual level—but they are mediated through musical terms, and music, as we have seen, always implies an economy of bodies and of carnality. Later, when telling Dorian to give in to sensuous pleasures and passions, Henry speaks to the younger man with a "low, musical voice,"[259] and his words touch "some secret

[255] Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 16.
[256] Wilde, 25.
[257] Law, "The 'Perniciously Homosexual Art,'" 180.
[258] Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 51.
[259] Wilde, 29.

chord" in Dorian, one that "had never been touched before, but . . . was now vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses."[260] That this is the effect of words appears peculiar to Dorian, as such turmoil is usually reserved for the domain of music, which "had stirred him like that . . . had troubled him many times. But music was . . . another chaos, that it created in us."[261] We know from this that music, for Dorian Gray, is a force with immediate access to secret spaces, to an unsettled interiority normally inaccessible to language. In other words, there are secrets he might hide superficially from others, but he himself will inexorably remember them, especially when music enters the equation.

Biographers of Chopin have posited that in letters the composer received from the Marquis de Custine, a fervent admirer, references to musical *jouissance* hint at homosexual undertones. We do not have Chopin's replies but, according to Eisler, "the presumption behind Custine's outpourings has assumed a certain encouragement on the part of the composer."[262] An unseen letter plays a similarly ambiguous role in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: When Dorian murders Basil and needs to dispose of the body, he blackmails his erstwhile friend (and probable lover) Alan Campbell into helping him by threatening to make public an incriminating letter whose contents are not revealed to the reader. The implied scenario is that Dorian is threatening to expose Alan as homosexual, a charge punishable by a prison sentence, as Wilde himself would (in)famously discover a few years after the novel's publication. The details of Dorian and Alan's broken friendship are left equally murky, with Wilde saying only that they had been "great friends once . . .

[260] Wilde, 30.
[261] Wilde, 30.
[262] Eisler, *Chopin's Funeral*, 80.

almost inseparable, indeed. Then the intimacy had come suddenly to an end."[263] The reader does learn, however, that the two regularly attended the opera together and were seen "wherever good music was going on," and that at the time of their acquaintance, Alan was a pianist and violinist. It was music that "had first brought him and Dorian Gray together,—music and that indefinable attraction that Dorian seemed to be able to exercise whenever he wished, and indeed exercised often without being conscious of it."[264] Here music both foregrounds and effaces the romantic character of Alan's attachment to Dorian. It is part and parcel of Dorian's appeal, and it inevitably implies physical exchange—but with its storied power to mobilize the emotions, music can serve as a more socially acceptable pretext for the strength of the bond. Wilde's account of the intensity of their relationship, indeed, transcends that of a Platonic friendship, with Dorian representing to Alan "the type of everything that is wonderful and fascinating in life." But after their dalliance comes to an end, for reasons unspecified, Alan "was strangely melancholy at times, appeared almost to dislike hearing music of any passionate character, and would never himself play."[265] Alan and Dorian's relationship cannot be explicitly depicted as sexual in nature, given the standards of propriety in Wilde's Britain, but it can be, and is, writ through their shared passion for listening to and making music together. Since their connection is founded on this appreciation, hearing music after their rupture is unbearable for Alan. The musical process is now inexorably tied to his memories of Dorian; it reminds him of heartbreak, or it reminds him of his own capacity to transgress the moral boundaries of his milieu. In either case, Alan is compelled to forsake something that has brought him great joy and great sorrow. Music, with its capacity to stir the

[263] Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 213.
[264] Wilde, 213.
[265] Wilde, 214.

emotions and pierce the walls of secret spaces, has become something dangerous, especially when it is of a particularly "passionate" nature—like, perhaps, one of Chopin's Nocturnes.

The works of Chopin that bore the brunt of nineteenth-century criticism on gendered grounds were almost certainly the Nocturnes. These works, suffused with an ethereal, dreamlike atmosphere have endured as a distinctly Chopinian idiom, as Eisler writes: "The nocturne has come to be the form most closely identified with Chopin's musical style without Polish origins."[266] Critics in the 1830s—i.e., contemporaries of Chopin—described the Nocturnes as "the outburst of a feminine heart," a "dream . . . of longing which chose pain on its own, because it could not find again the joy that it loves. . . . always most attractive to all hearts inclined toward the feminine."[267] The sentimental underpinnings of the works run the risk of "falling into the effeminate and languishing, which displeases stronger souls and altogether tires the listener."[268] Other composers working in the Nocturne form received similar criticisms; Robert Schumann wrote an account of Mikhail Wielhorsky's Nocturnes imploring the composer to work in "a less sentimental genre where imagination can stretch more."[269] The Nocturne, then, as a miniature style rather than an epic one (like the concerto or the symphony), was from its beginnings associated with feminine emotional excess.

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[266] Eisler, *Chopin's Funeral*, 50. So associated are these works with sentimentality and emotive excess that even Eisler cannot help but wax poetic about the Nocturnes, in which "sudden shifts from minor to major, then back to minor chords, catch us . . . like an intimate revelation overheard."

[267] Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries*, 33.

[268] Kallberg, 34.

[269] Kallberg, 35.

Later in the century, too—in 1888, just two years before *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was first published—Frederick Niecks, an early biographer of Chopin, wrote that the Nocturnes, despite their widespread popularity, were "dulcet, effeminate compositions [illustrating] only one side of the master's character, and by no means the best or most interesting."[270] He decried these works' lack of "manly vigor" which could nevertheless be found elsewhere in Chopin's oeuvre. In 1900, James Huneker wrote that Chopin was "desperately sentimental" in many of the Nocturnes, averring that "the poetic side of men of genius is feminine, and in Chopin the feminine note was over emphasized—at times it was almost hysterical—particularly in these nocturnes."[271] He called for pianists to play these pieces with a more vigorous, faster, "less languishing touch" to "rescue them from lush sentiment."[272] Not long after Wilde, Proust, too—whose sexuality is, a bit like Chopin's, something of an open secret that we are not really allowed to "know" about—loved Chopin and addressed him in an eponymous poem as "mer de soupirs, de larmes, de sanglots" [sea of sighs, of tears, of sobs]. Like Wilde, he was certainly aware of what Chopin (and the Nocturnes in particular) signified to his contemporaries, resulting in one of the most humorous tongue-in-cheek exchanges involving the Baron de Charlus, figure *par excellence* of Proustian homosexuality. "Je n'ai jamais entendu jouer Chopin," proclaims Charlus in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*,

> et pourtant j'aurais pu, je prenais des leçons avec Stamati, mais il me défendit d'aller entendre, chez ma tante Chimay, le Maître des Nocturnes. – Quelle bêtise il a faite là, s'écria Morel. – Au contraire, répliqua vivement, d'une voix aiguë, M. de

[270] Kallberg, 42.
[271] Kallberg, 42–43.
[272] Kallberg, 42.

> Charlus. Il prouvait son intelligence. Il avait compris que j'étais une « nature » et que je subirais l'influence de Chopin.[273]
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> [although I could have—I was taking lessons with Stamati, but he forbade me from going to my aunt Chimay's house to hear the Master of Nocturnes. "What a foolish thing to do!" cried Morel. "On the contrary," replied Charlus swiftly in a high-pitched voice. "That only proved his intelligence. He had understood that I was a 'natural' and that I would suffer the influence of Chopin."]

Though Chopin was not the first to write Nocturnes for the piano, his are the most enduring exemplars of the genre today. Perhaps this is the reason that Hélène Grimaud and others find something "feminine" about Chopin's music: his Nocturnes, and by extension much of his other output, were (and remain) discursively established as feminized by the time Wilde was writing.

In light of this, Lord Henry's final scene with Dorian Gray is rife with symbolism. Henry specifically requests that Dorian play Chopin, and the music puts Henry in a near-ecstatic state, as if hypnotized. He begins to sing Dorian's praises: "You are really wonderful, Dorian. You have never looked more charming than you do to-night. You remind me of the day I saw you first."[274] He cannot resist rhapsodizing, "It seems to me that you are the young Apollo, and that I am Marsyas listening to you. I have sorrows, Dorian, of my own, that even you know nothing of."[275] A curious reference, to be sure, as the legend recounts that Marsyas, having challenged Apollo to a musical duel and lost, is flayed for his hubris. But as Law argues, references to Hellenic figures could—and often were—read by the audiences "in the know" as a "code" by which to recognize

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[273] Marcel Proust, *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, vol. 3, *À La Recherche Du Temps Perdu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1924), 186.
[274] Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 276.
[275] Wilde, 276–77.

queer subtext.[276] Henry positions himself as a mortal and Dorian as a god, which calls to mind Charles Hallé's description of Chopin: "he is no man, he is an angel, a god." Dorian has outperformed Henry in life, most notably in the quest for pleasure: "What an exquisite life you have had! You have drunk deeply of everything. You have crushed the grapes against your palate. Nothing has been hidden from you."[277] Henry regrets not having pursued every avenue toward sensual indulgence, whereas for Dorian, nothing of life's fleshly pleasures has been hidden—not least the secret that led Alan Campbell to become complicit in Dorian's murder of Basil (and subsequently to commit suicide). Henry's words in this scene are set against the "marvelously romantic" aural backdrop of Chopin; and the piece Dorian plays—the cause of Henry's quasi-inebriated, nostalgic, emotionally vulnerable state—is, of course, a Nocturne. "Go back and play the nocturne over again," Henry implores.[278] "Do stay. You have never played so well as to-night. There was something in your touch that was wonderful. It had more expression than I had ever heard from it before."[279] If, for Lord Henry, talking to the younger Dorian is like "playing upon an exquisite violin," the (imperceptibly) older Dorian is now playing Henry like the keys of a piano, using Chopin's music to provoke the same "chaos" in Henry that Henry's words once stirred in Dorian. There is something in the music that prompts Henry to bare his soul to Dorian; somehow the Nocturne reminds him of his secret sorrows and brings into relief his great appreciation, both aesthetic and affective, for Dorian. The qualities of the Nocturne that were so often targets of critics' disdain—namely, their freeform structure and unabashed, "feminine" expressivity—

[276] Law, "The 'Perniciously Homosexual Art,'" 175.
[277] Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 277.
[278] Wilde, 278.
[279] Wilde, 279.

become, here, a conduit through which Lord Henry is able to allude to not-so-secret secrets and perhaps, even, to a love that dare not speak its name.

Oscar Wilde could not include direct references to homosexual behavior without incurring reproach on both legal and moral grounds. But the title character in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is coded as queer (as are several other male characters) in a variety of ways, many of which constellate around music and musical metaphors. Dorian's pianistic ability plays on a long history of keyboard instruments as the domain of women, of music as troublingly seductive to listeners, and of musicians as lascivious and hypersexualized. His affinity for the works of Chopin further queers his character, given the composer's discursive inscription as physically and musically less than masculine. In particular, the genre of the Nocturne, which Dorian plays exceptionally well, is, at the time of Wilde's writing, established as lushly, excessively emotional, often in terms of a gendered discourse to which Dorian defiantly runs counter.

III. Chopin's private pleasures: *Madame Pylinska et le secret de Chopin*

This effects of this gendered discourse still resound in many contemporary depictions and discussions of Chopin, as in the 2018 novella by Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt, *Madame Pylinska et le secret de Chopin*, a literary hit which soon found success in a stage adaptation as well. The Franco-Belgian Schmitt, an erudite member of the Académie Goncourt which bestows France's most prestigious yearly literary prize, is also an amateur musician, and the novella recounts his lifelong love affair with the music of Chopin. Here, Chopin's music is not necessarily coded as queer, but interestingly, while seemingly attempting to ascribe to it a sort of neutrality upon which a pianist must impose their own configuration of affects, Schmitt depicts it as necessarily sensual, sexual,

and associated with femininity—as well as with a disruption to heterosexual reproductive economy and a private retreat into an emotional world of one's own.

As a young child Éric does not care for the upright piano in his family home, played only (badly) by his sister. But that changes when his aunt Aimée—"blonde, féminine, soyeuse, poudrée, fleurant l'iris et le muguet" [blonde, feminine, silky, powdered, exuding iris and lily]—pays a visit and takes a seat at the bench.[280] It is Aimée who transports the young Éric to "un nouveau monde . . . un ailleurs lumineux flottant en nappes, paisible, secret, ondoyant" [a new world . . . a luminous elsewhere, floating in the clouds, peaceful, secret, undulating], who gives him a vision of "un univers parallèle, l'épiphanie d'une manière d'exister différente, dense et éthérée, riche et volatile, frêle et forte, laquelle, tout en se donnant, conservait la profondeur d'un mystère" [a parallel universe, the epiphany of a different way of existing, dense and ethereal, rich and volatile, fragile and strong, which played out even while maintaining the depths of mystery].[281] What is the nature of this mystery? He demands to know what his aunt has just played, and her terse response, "Chopin, évidemment," incites him to take up piano lessons immediately.

But he finds that he is incapable of recreating the magic of that first time, that the piano "ne répondait ni à mes rêves ni à mes souvenirs" [responded neither to my dreams nor my memories] and that the instrument that had sounded "suave, clair, fragile, émouvant, sous les doigts d'Aimée, retentissait viril et franc sous les miens" [smooth, clear, fragile, and stirring under Aimée's fingers sounded virile and stark under my own].[282] Unlike the hyperfeminine Aunt Aimée, the young and avowedly heterosexual Schmitt is unable to recapture the same tenderness of affect

[280] Schmitt, *Madame Pylinska et le secret de Chopin*, 9.
[281] Schmitt, 11.
[282] Schmitt, 14.

that had so suited the music of Chopin. He is more successful in his study of literature, but even after he is accepted to the prestigious École Normale Supérieure in Paris, he cannot let go of the Polish composer, "sa lumière . . . sa paix, sa tendresse" [his light . . . his peace, his tenderness], and seeks out a piano teacher who can help him uncover the secret of Chopin. Appropriately enough, his search leads him to Madame Pylinska, an eccentric Polish immigrant who lives alone with her three cats and whose life centers on the glorification of her most famous composing countryman. "J'ai appris le piano," Schmitt tells her, "pour interpréter Chopin et je n'y arrive pas. Les autres compositeurs, je les écorche, peut-être, mais ils survivent, tandis que Chopin . . . Chopin . . . il me résiste" [I've learned the piano in order to play Chopin but I can't manage it. I might mangle other composers, but they survive—but Chopin resists me].[283] If he is to find a door unto the sonorous world of Chopin, it is this singular woman who holds the key.

The first time Madame Pylinska sets eyes on her new pupil, she declares him "trop costaud" [too strong]—reaffirming Schmitt's masculinity as an impediment to the interpretation of Chopin—and, before asking to hear him play, makes him lie down under the piano and instructs him to "rendez [votre peau] permeable" [make your skin permeable] because "la musique, c'est d'abord une experience physique" [music is first and foremost a physical experience].[284] Leppert's description of the inherent embodiedness of music is particularly pertinent here in Schmitt's recounting of the effect that Madame Pylinska's playing has on him—an effect which he struggles to capture concisely, resorting not for the last time to a long and belabored list of verbs as he attempts to contain the emotive excess of his response in language:

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[283] Schmitt, 17.
[284] Schmitt, 18–19.

> La musique me frôlait, me léchait, me piquait, me pétrissait, me malaxait, me ballottait, me soulevait, m'assommait, me brutalisait, m'exténuait, les basses me secouant comme si je chevauchais une cloche d'église, les aigus pleuvant sur moi, gouttes froides, gouttes chaudes, gouttes tièdes, lourdes ou ténues, en rafales, en ondées, en filets, tandis que le médium onctueux me recouvrait le buste, tel un molleton rassurant au sein duquel je me blottissais.[285]
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> [The music brushed against me, licked at me, stung me, kneaded me, mixed me up, tossed me about, lifted me up, knocked me out, roughed me up, exhausted me, the bass notes shaking me as if I were sat astride a church bell, the high notes raining down in cold drops, hot drops, lukewarm drops, heavy or slight, in torrents, in showers, in trickles, while the smooth middle register enveloped my chest like a warm blanket I could nestle inside.]

With the obstinate Madame Pylinska as his mouthpiece (sounding more like a member of the Académie Goncourt and less like someone speaking a second language), Schmitt holds forth on the reasons for Chopin's superiority to all other composers, defending him against his contemporaries' and successors' accusations of frivolity, simplicity, or inadequacy: "On l'accuse de s'être limité au piano," Madame Pylinska cries, "on le lui reprochait déjà de son vivant quand fortune et renommée venaient de l'opéra ou du concert symphonique. Il a résisté. Admirez sa force d'âme ! . . . Cessez de seriner que son inspiration s'est 'réduite au piano' ! Il a inventé le piano. Avec lui, le piano est devenu un monde, un monde suffisant, continental, océanique, immense, infini"[286] [People accuse him of limiting himself to the piano—they were already doing it when he was alive, when fortune and renown came to composers of operas and symphonies. He resisted.

[285] Schmitt, 20–21.
[286] Schmitt, 25.

Admire his fortitude! Stop saying that his inspiration never 'went beyond the piano'—he invented the piano! With Chopin, the piano became a world unto itself, continental, oceanic, vast, infinite]. She rules on the Chopin-Liszt dichotomy in Chopin's favor, while perhaps unknowingly parroting the epithet of *ange*, the slang term for a homosexual with which George Sand purportedly teased him: "Liszt assène, Chopin écoute. . . . Chopin cherche la poésie du piano et s'y confine. Liszt cherche un tremplin sur le piano et s'en évade . . . Liszt est un dieu qui vient donner le spectacle de sa puissance, Chopin un ange déchu qui tente de rejoindre le sentier du ciel" [Liszt strikes, Chopin listens. . . . Chopin looks for the poetry within the piano and makes a home there. Liszt looks for a springboard with which to escape it. . . . Liszt is a god who makes a show of his powers, Chopin a fallen angel attempting to find the path heavenward].[287] She even provides a tongue-in-cheek recounting of the love affair between Chopin and George Sand: "La première fois que Chopin a vu Sand, il a dit : 'C'est une femme, ça ?' La première fois que Sand a vu Chopin, elle a dit : 'Qui est cette jeune fille ?' Quelle histoire !" … "On n'aime vraiment que lorsqu'on n'est pas amoureux" [The first time Chopin saw Sand, he said, 'Is that a woman?' The first time Sand saw Chopin, she said, 'Who is that little girl?' What a story! . . . We only love truly when we aren't in love].[288] She is aware, then, of the ways in which both Chopin and Sand defied gender conventions, and seems to accept that tales of their great love are overblown, without explicitly speculating as to why. She is touching upon the open secret here, but it is not—or is not the only—titular secret of Chopin.

[287] Schmitt, 35–37.
[288] Schmitt, 45–46.

It is, however, immediately unclear where the secret is actually located, since for Madame Pylinska, it is not to be found in the music itself: she rails against the evocative titles given to some of Chopin's works, like the "Raindrop" Prélude and "Tristesse" Étude, averring that "Aucune image mentale ne préexiste à sa musique. C'est la musique qui impose sa réalité à l'esprit. . . . Elle n'exprime pas des sentiments, elle les provoque" [No mental image comes before his music. It's the music that imposes its reality on the mind. . . . It doesn't express feelings, it stirs them].[289] The nonspecificity of the feelings provoked by Chopin's music, with its inability to name emotions—"celles-ci naîtront de la musique" [the emotions are born out of the music], not vice versa[290]—resonates with Jameson's chromatic model of affect *The Antinomies of Realism*, calling upon Heidegger's depiction of affect. Centered around the German word *Stimmung* ("attunement"—something approximating "mood," but also used to describe the tuning of a musical instrument), Heidegger already frames affect in an auditory model. For Jameson, emotions are those categories of feeling for which we have specific names, whereas to speak of affects requires that we speak of "a slippage up and down the tones." Each tone is a unique, "specific coloration," such that affect becomes "the very chromaticism of the body itself."[291] Schmitt's conception of Chopin's secret, which is never expressed but constantly gestured to, has something to do with this unnameability of affect, but Madame Pylinska's pedagogical methods complicate the notion that the affect is an effect of the music, rather than its cause.

In order to understand Chopin and catch a glimpse of his secret, it is not enough for Éric to study the music; Madame Pylinska insists that Schmitt seek a better understanding of the natural

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[289] Schmitt, 49.
[290] Schmitt, 49.
[291] Jameson, *The Antinomies Of Realism*, 39, 42.

world and his physical presence in it. Their lessons almost never consist in music-making, but rather in the transmission of wide-ranging life lessons based on the perception and internalization of affects, of intensities and stillnesses. In an increasingly curious sequence of exercises throughout the book, she has Schmitt go to the Jardin du Luxembourg to learn to "cueillir les fleurs sans faire tomber la rosée" [pick flowers without disturbing the dewdrops] and teach his hands to move more softly, and to "listen to silence" in his room ("Chopin écrit sur le silence : sa musique en sort et y retourne ; elle en est même cousue" [Chopin writes about silence: his music emerges from and returns to it; it is stitched together from silence]).[292] Next, he must sit and observe ripples in the fountain in order to "apprendre à devenir liquide" [learn to become liquid].[293] Later, she commands him, "regardez minutieusement les effets du vent dans les arbres . . . l'indépendance des feuilles et des ramures par rapport au tronc" [meticulously observe the wind in the trees . . . the way the leaves and branches move independently from the trunk] as a metaphor for *rubato*.[294]

Éric obediently does everything that Madame Pylinska asks of him—but alas, even after all his communing with nature at the Jardin du Luxembourg, he is simply too manly to play Chopin correctly: "Trop de vigueur," Madame Pylinska frowns, "trop de muscles, trop d'énergie. Je vous rêve plus mou, plus souple, plus plastique" [Too much force, too much muscle, too much energy. You need to be softer, more flexible].[295] He is not soft like Dorian Gray, but perhaps a woman's touch can help: Madame Pylinska's next assignment for Éric is to come to the lesson just after sex (and not, she specifies, masturbation): "pour la prochaine leçon, faites l'amour avec quelqu'un.

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[292] Schmitt, *Madame Pylinska et le secret de Chopin*, 27.
[293] Schmitt, 39.
[294] Schmitt, 51.
[295] Schmitt, 62.

Pas l'amour solitaire" [for the next lesson, make love to someone—not to yourself].[296] He seeks out one of his many regular, casual sex partners, a fellow student named Dominique, and obliges—and though Madame Pylinska can hear that "vous aviez pratiqué l'exercice requis, je m'en suis rendu compte, car votre souplesse s'était améliorée" [I noticed you had practiced the required exercise, your flexibility had improved], she can also tell that he is not very good at sex, and that he needs to incorporate more foreplay. "J'ai l'impression que vous faites l'amour comme on emprunte un tunnel," she diagnoses, "en visant la sortie. . . . Franchement, je préférerais que vous appréciiez l'avant. Voyez-vous ? Que l'explosion n'apporte qu'un supplément, un *bis*" [I get the sense that you make love like one enters a tunnel: aiming for the exit. Honestly, I would prefer that you learn to appreciate what comes before. Do you understand? The explosion should bring only something extra, like an encore].[297] She tells him that he must return to Dominique and that the next time they sleep together, he must look her in the eyes the whole time, and it should take a full hour.[298] For 20-year-old Éric, happy once again to oblige, this has the immediate effect of making him fall deeply in love with Dominique, and he seems to have some trouble figuring out to what extent he should be grateful to Madame Pylinska: "*à cause de* madame Pylinska, ou *grâce à* madame Pylinska . . . Pour la première fois, la même personne unissait ma vie sexuelle et ma vie amoureuse" [*because of* Madame Pylinska, or *thanks to* Madame Pylinska . . . For the first time, the same person brought together my sex life and my love life].[299] The choice of the active verb here allows for some ambiguity—he is referring to Dominique, but he is also referring to Madame

[296] Schmitt, 66.
[297] Schmitt, 71.
[298] Schmitt, 80.
[299] Schmitt, 81.

Pylinska, who did indeed bring Éric's sex life and love life together, and with whom he is carrying on a sort of proxy relationship through Chopin and pianism.

Though his hourlong trysts with Dominique have softened Éric up enough to impress Madame Pylinska for the first time—"Vous jouez à ravir," she tells him, "parce que vous vous abandonnez. Vous consentez à la musique, ainsi que vous consentez à l'amour" [you're playing beautifully because you're giving yourself over. You're consenting to the music, just as you consent to love][300]—it is through Aunt Aimée, his original conduit to Chopin, that he reaches his greatest heights as a pianist. Aimée, like Madame Pylinska, is childless and unmarried, but Schmitt goes out of his way early in the novella to explain that this was her own choice: "[Tante Aimée] se situait aux antipodes de la vieille fille. Ravissante, coquette, cultivée, aisément éprise, elle avait traversé la vie en passant de bras d'homme en bras d'homme, telle une danseuse qui s'étourdit de cavaliers au bal" [Aunt Aimée was the polar opposite of an old maid. Beautiful, elegant, cultured, easily smitten, she had gone through life hopping from arm to arm, like a dancer overwhelmed with suitors at the ball].[301] Or, at least, so he has always believed—she ultimately reveals the truth to Éric, with whom she shares a special affinity among her family members: she has only ever been with one man, a married man named Roger. She once dreamed that he would leave his wife for her, but when she found out she was infertile, she watched him start a family with his wife and willingly played second fiddle for decades: "Incapable d'offrir une famille à l'homme que j'aime ! Mieux valait qu'il construise la sienne ailleurs" [Incapable of giving a family to the man I love! Better for him to make his own with someone else].[302] In both the fake story her family believes

[300] Schmitt, 83.
[301] Schmitt, 40.
[302] Schmitt, 55.

and the confession she makes to Éric, she is removed—voluntarily or not—from normal reproductive sexuality, much like Dorian Gray or Chopin himself, and she later tells Éric that she fills the void in her life with the music of the Polish composer. By this point in the novella, she has fallen fatally ill with cancer and, having categorically refused visitors, hears Éric playing Chopin on an old piano a floor below her hospital room. She descends to find her nephew at the piano, where they have one final chat (though she insists he not turn around to see her looking unlike her normally beautiful self). She explains, or at least evokes, the titular secret of Chopin in a lengthy monologue:

> Heureusement qu'il y avait Chopin. Sans lui, je n'aurais pas vécu. . . . Grâce à lui, je vivais dans un monde plein, un monde où battait toujours un cœur, un monde saturé d'émotions, de passions, de révoltes, de gentillesses, d'extases, de stupeurs, de convictions, de lyrisme. Quand Roger me manquait et que j'avais besoin de tendresse, Chopin me la fournissait. Quand Roger me manquait et que je voulais lui avouer mon amour, Chopin le lui disait. Quand Roger me manquait et que je désirais l'engueuler, Chopin s'en chargeait. [. . .] [Chopin] m'a permis de vivre dans un autre monde, un monde où les sentiments s'épanouissent. . . . Voilà ce que propose Chopin : un endroit où aimer. Aimer ce qui compose une vie, voire le désordre, la peur, l'angoisse, les tumultes. . . . Grâce à Chopin, j'ai bien vécu.[303]
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> [Thankfully there was Chopin. Without him, I wouldn't have lived. Thanks to him, I lived in a full world, a world of beating hearts, brimming with emotion, passion, revolution, kindness, ecstasy, amazement, conviction, lyricism. When I missed Roger and yearned for tenderness, Chopin gave it to me. When I missed Roger and wanted to proclaim my love to him, Chopin did it for me. When I missed Roger

[303] Schmitt, 106–8.

> and wanted to scream at him, Chopin took care of it. [. . .] He allowed me to live in another world, one where feelings flourish. . . . He offers a place to love. To love all the stuff of life, even chaos, fear, anguish, tumult. . . . Thanks to Chopin, I lived a good life.]

In the hands of Aunt Aimée who is, like Madame Pylinska, an outsider to the conventions of heterosexual reproductive normativity, the directionality of musical feeling as laid out by Madame Pylinska becomes occluded: this music that cannot itself express anything becomes fully expressive, laden with Aimée's own emotions rather than Chopin's (or rather than Chopin's alone, at any rate).

And for Éric, his beloved aunt's illness enables him, at last, to recreate the sound he was always searching for, sitting down to play the *Larghetto* from Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 2 (the very piece that, according to the Swiss journalist Weber, was inspired by Chopin's love for Titus Woyciechowski, as revealed in a letter in which Weber alleges the Chopin Institute changed a pronoun to dissimulate the true meaning of Chopin's words).[304] Despondent over Aimée's prognosis, Éric gives the performance of his life: "Jamais je n'avais joué ainsi. . . . Tout ce que m'avait appris madame Pylinska, le silence, les ronds dans l'eau, la rosée, les ramures qui ondulent sur un tronc souple, la décontraction, tout se réunissait enfin. Les notes venaient comme si je les improvisais ; [. . .] j'avais l'impression d'être touché par l'esprit de Chopin" [I had never played like this. . . . Everything Madame Pylinska had taught me—silence, water circles, dewdrops, branches waving atop a flexible trunk, relaxation—everything finally came together. The notes came to me as if I were improvising; I felt touched by the spirit of Chopin].[305] But is he touched

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[304] Oltermann and Walker, "Chopin's Interest in Men Airbrushed from History, Programme Claims."

[305] Schmitt, *Madame Pylinska et le secret de Chopin*, 104.

by the spirit of Chopin, or by the impending loss of his aunt? Indeed, though he continues his lessons after Aunt Aimée's death, Éric never again reaches the same expressive heights: "Plus jamais je ne regagnai cette évidence durant les mois où je poursuivis mon apprentissage chez [madame Pylinska]. Chopin se dérobait de nouveau" [I never again found that obvious truth during all the months I continued studying with Madame Pylinska. Chopin once again slipped away from me].[306] Is it simply that Chopin, with one open (sexual, identitarian) secret slyly alluded to and another (musical, emotional) closed off and accessible only to a pianist in a heightened or well-trained affective state, represents a sort of free-floating excess of affect—coded always as feminine—that can be mobilized to solitary ends?

André Gide, one of the few authors of his era about whom we are allowed to "know," in the way we know about Tchaikovsky, might have agreed with this. A passionate amateur pianist, he was particularly enamored of Chopin and began writing a series of *Notes sur Chopin* in the 1890s that were later published in 1938. As in Éric's episode of rapturous pianism before his aunt's death, Gide emphasizes Chopin's "air d'improviser," insisting that all emotion is lost unless the performer plays as if the piece "se forme sous ses doigts . . . semble sortir de lui, l'étonner lui-même, et subtilement nous invite à entrer dans son ravissement" [takes shape under his fingers . . . seems to escape from him, take him by surprise, and subtlely invite us to join in his delight].[307] Like Madame Pylinska, Gide cannot stand a virtuosic rendering of Chopin, preferring that his music be played "sans cette assurance insupportable du virtuose" [without that unbearable self-assurance of the virtuoso],[308] and "[se] préoccupe fort peu de la 'signification" d'un morceau . . .

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[306] Schmitt, 111.
[307] André Gide, *Notes sur Chopin* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), 41.
[308] Gide, 42.

La musique échappe au monde matériel et nous permet d'en échapper" [cares very little about the meaning of a piece . . . Music escapes the material world and allows us to escape],[309] as if to the "new world" Éric, or Lord Henry, glimpses when the right person is playing Chopin at the right time. And like Aunt Aimée and later Éric, Gide believes that some pieces are best enjoyed in solitude: "joué à demi-voix pour soi seul, on n'en peut épuiser l'émotion indéfinissable" [played *sotto voce* for oneself alone, one finds an inexhaustible well of undefinable emotion].[310] Another outcast of sexual normativity, Gide prized above all other interpretations his own amateur playing, for his ears only, the only way to follow Chopin to a world full of private emotion to which no one else has access.

[309] Gide, 64.
[310] Gide, 57.

CHAPTER III

"J'AI EU DES AVENTURES": MUSIC, ADVENTURE, AND TIME

Early in Sartre's *La Nausée*, the novel's narrator Antoine Roquentin finds himself in the midst of a bout with the titular affliction, this time in a place he had considered a safe haven: a café. "Les cafés étaient jusqu'ici mon seul refuge," he writes, but "il n'y aura même plus ça; quand je serai traqué dans ma chambre, je ne saurai plus où aller" [*Until now, cafés were my only safe place—but now I won't even have that; when it comes for me in my bedroom, I won't have anywhere to go*]. [311] Objects begin to lose their boundaries; Roquentin feels himself slipping into an undifferentiated state of existence, meaning draining away, faces horrifyingly fleshy, colors blinking in and out of focus, all sensory input serving only to worsen his malaise. The only escape, this time, will come courtesy of a scratchy old phonograph: a recording of a song Roquentin knows well, which he manages to ask the server to play for him. "Le temps est trop large," he despairs, "il ne se laisse pas remplir" [*Time is too vast, it can't be filled up*];[312] but the music on the record will give an order to time, allow Roquentin to see something outside the Nausea, a different order of being that he may not quite be able to reach, but which he can at least glimpse. "Tout à l'heure," he thinks as the song begins,

> viendra le refrain : c'est lui surtout que j'aime et la manière abrupte dont il se jette en avant, comme une falaise contre la mer. [Les notes] ne connaissent pas de repos, un ordre inflexible les fait naître et les détruit, sans leur laisser jamais le loisir de se reprendre, d'exister pour soi. Elles courent, elles se pressent, elles me frappent au passage d'un coup sec et s'anéantissent. J'aimerais bien les retenir, mais … il faut que j'accepte leur mort ; cette mort, je dois même la vouloir : je connais peu

[311] Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), 36.
[312] Sartre, 39–40.

> d'impressions plus âpres ni plus fortes. Je commence à me réchauffer, à me sentir heureux.[313]
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> [*Soon the refrain will come, the part I like most—especially the way it suddenly pitches itself forward, like a cliff against the seaside. The notes cannot rest; their birth and their destruction arise from the same inflexible order, which never lets them start anew or exist for themselves. They race, they rush forth, they strike me a sharp blow as they pass by and pass away. I wish I could hold onto them, but I have to accept their death—I even have to want it; I know few feelings stronger or crueler. I begin to warm up, to feel happy.*]

Sartre's depiction of musical experience is one of the loveliest sections of the novel, and one of the few times when our narrator seems to feel genuinely happy, even for a length of time as fleeting as a song. But the time of music is unique, implicating a listener's own particular rhythm and affective disposition. This chapter will examine the temporal impulse of musical affect in three works that see it used to vastly different ends. In *La Nausée*, music functions as an antidote to the existential malady of the title; it provides an impulse that spurs Roquentin to reanimate, in a sense, and to bounce back from the universe of undifferentiated matter to the world of living beings. I take a cinematic detour to a work that bears the title originally planned for *La Nausée*: Lars von Trier's 2011 *Melancholia*—a film in which music is used nondiegetically for the opposite purpose: to implicate viewers in the same apocalyptic anhedonia that grips protagonist Claire, symbolized by the maddening recurrence of a fragment of the prelude from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* that is not allowed to resolve until the film's final moments. And in another Von Trier film, 2000's *Dancer in the Dark*, a typically sinister Von Trierian take on the movie musical, music functions in a not altogether dissimilar way from the Sartrean model in *La Nausée*, but with the crucial

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[313] Sartre, 40.

difference that the musical scenes take place within a murky temporality that (like for Roquentin) help sustain and give meaning to the film's main character Selma while also (unlike for Roquentin) isolating her in a world of her own making and ultimately driving her to take refuge in an imaginary world where she cannot find safety from the encroaching forces that lead to her demise.

I. "Il faut souffrir en mesure": Music as an antidote to Sartre's Nausee

In a café, the kind of place which had, to this point in *Nausea*, been his sole refuge, Roquentin is seized by Nausea. He is surrounded by a whirlwind of color, he cannot see past individual attributes to recognize an entire face, and his own body feels foreign, unreal: he has "un ressort de cassé" [*a broken spring*], and can move his eyes but not his head. "La tête est toute molle," he writes, "on dirait qu'elle est juste posée sur mon cou; si je la tourne, je vais la laisser tomber" [*My head has gone all soft, as if it had just been placed upon my neck; if I turn it, it will fall to the ground*].[314] The Nausea permeates all things, dissolves the boundaries between people and objects, makes the color of a fellow cafégoer's suspenders flash in and out of existence in the play of the light, becomes a desubjectified feeling itself: "La Nausée n'est pas en moi: je la ressens *là-bas* sur le mur, sur les bretelles, partout autour de moi. Elle ne fait qu'un avec le café, c'est moi qui suis en elle" [*The Nausea is not in me: I feel it* over there *on the wall, on the suspenders, everywhere around me. It becomes one with the café, and I am inside it*].[315] All sensory input reinforces the Nausea, repulses Roquentin. He briefly breaks the spell and finds his voice in order

[314] Sartre, 37.
[315] Sartre, 38.

to ask Madeleine, the server, to play something on the record player: "Celui qui me plaît, vous savez [The one I like, you know it]: *Some of these days*."[316] This is, evidently, not the first time he has asked to hear the tune; a familiar melody beckons to him as a beacon in the nauseous fog.

What is a salve to Roquentin may be irritating to her other customers, so Madeleine asks permission of the men playing a game of cards next to Roquentin, who "n'aiment pas la musique, quand ils font leur partie" [*don't like music while they're playing their game*]. His escape from Nausea is contingent on the approval of these men—which they quickly grant—and when Roquentin looks at the card players, he sees only ugly, fleshly, clammy existence, a gnashing assemblage of hideous limbs and features that don't add up to anything reasonable, anything human: One has "les dents pourries" [*rotten teeth*], another "d'immenses narines, qui pourraient pomper de l'air pour toute une famille et qui lui mangent la moitié du visage, mais, malgré cela, il respire par la bouche en haletant un peu" [*enormous nostrils that could pump enough air for a whole family and that take up half his face, but he still breathes out of his mouth, panting a bit*] and another "à tête de chien" [*with a face like a dog*].[317] And the game they're playing is meaningless, arbitrary, accentuating the impossibility of time passing, or of giving that passage any meaning as Roquentin watches: "ça n'a pas l'air d'un jeu," he laments, "ni d'un rite, ni d'une habitude. Je crois qu'ils font ça pour remplir le temps, tout simplement. Mais le temps est trop large, il ne se laisse pas remplir. Tout ce qu'on y plonge s'amollit et s'étire" [*It doesn't even look like a game, or a rite, or a pastime. I think they're just doing it to fill up time. But time is too vast, it can't be filled up. Everything we dunk in it softens and stretches*].[318]

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[316] Sartre, 39.
[317] Sartre, 39.
[318] Sartre, 39.

At this moment, though Roquentin briefly worries that Madeleine will have put on the wrong record, he hears a respite from the Nausea arrive, a way to—if not fill up, exactly—make time pass in a way he can sense, in a way he might be able to cling to. He knows it immediately, recognizes it like an old friend:

"C'est un vieux rag-time avec refrain chanté. Je l'ai entendu siffler en 1917 par des soldats américains dans les rues de La Rochelle" [*It's an old ragtime with a sung refrain. I heard American soldiers whistling it in 1917 in La Rochelle*].[319] Even though this is a newer recording, the memory of the first audition still remains in every subsequent hearing, as for Nerval with the songs of the Valois, or for Proust with the *petite phrase*. And it is the promise of that sung refrain that draws him in, that puts his body back into time and into space in a way not governed by Nausea, by way of its particular rhythm and action that he can now anticipate: "c'est [le refrain] surtout que j'aime et la manière abrupte dont il se jette en avant, comme une falaise contre la mer" [*It's really the refrain I like most—especially the way it suddenly pitches itself forward, like a cliff against the seaside*]. Roquentin hears the *coup* of the refrain, taken up as rhythm by his own body, like Barthes listening to Schumann's *Kreisleriana*: "ce que j'entends, ce sont des coups: j'entends ce qui bat dans le corps, ce qui bat le corps, ou mieux: ce corps qui bat" [*what I hear are blows: I hear what beats in the body, what beats against the body: this body that beats*].[320] But before the refrain arrives, Roquentin must await the passage of the jazzy introduction, which for him consists not of melody but "juste des notes, une myriade de petites secousses" [*only notes, a myriad of little tremors*]:

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[319] Sartre, 40.

[320] Barthes, "Rasch (1975)," 265.

> [Les notes] ne connaissent pas de repos, un ordre inflexible les fait naître et les détruit, sans leur laisser jamais le loisir de se reprendre, d'exister pour soi. Elles courent, elles se pressent, elles me frappent au passage d'un coup sec et s'anéantissent. J'aimerais bien les retenir, mais … il faut que j'accepte leur mort ; cette mort, je dois même la vouloir : je connais peu d'impressions plus âpres ni plus fortes. Je commence à me réchauffer, à me sentir heureux.[321]
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> [*The notes cannot rest; their birth and their destruction arise from the same inflexible order, which never lets them start anew or exist for themselves. They race, they rush forth, they strike me a sharp blow as they pass by and pass away. I wish I could hold onto them, but I have to accept their death—I even have to want it; I know few feelings stronger or crueler. I begin to warm up, to feel happy.*]

This realization is central to Sartre's depiction of music's ability to place Roquentin back in time: in its absence, he is unable even to conceive of how time could continue passing, or what that could mean—but in its presence, in its unfolding, he not only imagines it but *wills* it. One moment passing away to allow the arrival of the next goes from impossible to likely to *necessary*—Zeno's paradox resolved, a path already drawn from point A to point B. Nausea has not left him yet, but as he awaits the voice that he knows will ring out, he catches a glimpse of a happiness outside the brutishness of undifferentiated existence, "un autre bonheur au-dehors … un autre temps" [*another happiness just beyond … another time*], a "bande d'acier" [*band of steel*] that is "l'étroite durée de la musique" [*the narrow duration of the music*]. In its inevitability it cuts through the spacetime imbued with Nausea, "le refuse et le déchire de ses sèches petites pointes" [*refuses it and tears it up with its sharp little points*].[322] Whereas anything else that one could throw

[321] Sartre, *La Nausée*, 40.
[322] Sartre, 41.

into the morass of Nausea would be eaten up by it, melted away into sameness and nothingness, "rien ne mord sur le ruban d'acier … la musique perce ces formes vagues et passe au travers" [*nothing eats away at that ribbon of steel* … the music pierces those shadowy forms and passes right through them].[323] The only presence that survives Nausea's horrific leveling effects is the steel band of music, more solid to Roquentin in this moment than any object he could reach out and touch.

The tension mounts as the refrain approaches: it is "inevitable," unstoppable by "rien qui vienne de ce temps où le monde est affalé" [*anything that comes from this time when the world is collapsed*], and it is "l'événement que tant de notes ont préparé, de si loin, en mourant pour qu'il naisse" [*the event that so many notes have prepared, from so far away, dying away so that it might be born*]. For Roquentin, this sense of a logical progression represents a potential way out of Nausea, but he recognizes that even the strong steel band, as it unfolds in time, is contingent on languid, flabby existence: "il faudrait si peu de chose pour que le disque s'arrête: qu'un ressort se brise … Comme il est étrange, comme il est émouvant que cette dureté soit si fragile. Rien ne peut l'interrompre et tout peut la briser" [*it would take so little for the record to stop: a broken spring … How odd, how moving that this hardness could be so fragile. Nothing can interrupt it, yet anything can break it*].[324] But fortunately, nothing does break it—the refrain arrives; the voice familiar to Roquentin sings the words he already knows by heart: *Some of these days / You'll miss me honey!* And in the sea of sickly softness without a foothold for purchase, the impossible comes with it: something actually *happens* ("*quelque chose est arrivé*").[325] The Nausea disappears:

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[323] Sartre, 41.
[324] Sartre, 41.
[325] Sartre, 41, emphasis in original.

"quand la voix s'est élevée, dans le silence, j'ai senti mon corps se durcir et la Nausée s'est évanouie" [*when the voice rose up from the silence, I felt my body solidify and the Nausea vanished*]. And the tempo of the music becomes the rhythm of Roquentin's own body: "[la musique] emplissait la salle de sa transparence métallique, en écrasant contre les murs notre temps misérable. Je suis *dans* la musique" [*The music filled the room with metallic clarity, crushing our own miserable time against the walls. I am* in *the music*].[326]

As the refrain takes shape, the steel band lends its solidity to the rest of Roquentin's world, and to Roquentin himself. In this *autre temps*, this other time and other tempo, his glass of beer now "a l'air dense, indispensable" [*looks dense, vital*], and when he reaches out his hand to lift it, he finds his very gestures have taken on the inevitabile character of the music: "Ce mouvement de mon bras s'est développé comme un thème majestueux … il m'a semblé que je dansais" [*The motion of my arm extended like a majestic theme … it looked like I was dancing*]. He presses his fingers against the glass, now solid, and looks over at Adolphe, manning the café counter; his face has "la nécessité d'une conclusion," and for one of the few times in his journal, Roquentin writes, "je suis heureux" [*I am happy*].[327] Even the card game happening beside him, that formerly gnashing mass of fleshy matter, takes on an air of poignancy, as Roquentin watches the king of hearts appear, "beau roi, venu de si loin, préparé par tant de combinaisons, par tant de gestes disparus … qui disparaît à son tour, pour que naissent d'autres combinaisons et d'autres gestes, des attaques, des répliques, des retours de fortune, une foule de petites aventures" [*handsome king, coming from so far away, prepared by so many combinations, so many bygone gestures … who*

[326] Sartre, 42.
[327] Sartre, 42.

disappears in turn so that other combinations and gestures can be born, actions and reactions, reversals of fortune, a host of small adventures].[328] Arriving alongside the refrain, the appearance of this particular card (which would have seemed utterly random to Roquentin just moments earlier) feels caught up in the tides of destiny, a potential rendered meaningful in its actualization from among an infinite field of possibilities, and a veritable *adventure*—a crucial term for Roquentin, and a sine qua non of being (as opposed to merely existing).

In Sartre's autobiography *Les Mots*, he admits to a certain degree of autobiographical representation in the character of Roquentin: "J'*étais* Roquentin," he writes, "je montrais en lui, sans complaisance, la trame de ma vie" [*I* was *Roquentin, I showed in him, uncompromisingly, the structure of my life*].[329] He evidently experienced music in a not dissimilar way in his own life, beginning from childhood when he found himself entranced the magic of the cinema, and when the fates of the archetypal cowboys, musketeers, and policeman onscreen seemed to play out in parallel in the music that accompanied their adventures: "Un chant ininterrompu se confondait avec leurs vies, les entraînait vers la victoire ou vers la mort en s'avançant vers sa propre fin" [*An uninterrupted melody merged with their lives, leading them toward victory or death as it advanced toward its own end*].[330] In the silent films he watched, music was the language through which his silver screen heroes spoke to him: "ils n'étaient pas muets puisqu'ils savaient se faire comprendre. Nous communiquions par la musique, c'était le bruit de leur vie intérieure" [*they weren't mute because they could make themselves understood. We communicated through music, which was the*

[328] Sartre, 42–43.
[329] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Mots* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 210, emphasis in original.
[330] Sartre, 102.

sound of their inner lives].[331] Through the music that resounded within the spectating Sartre, he found himself projected into the figures he saw, living their adventures in their place: "*ce n'était pas moi*, cette jeune veuve qui pleurait sur l'écran et pourtant, nous n'avions, elle et moi, qu'une seule âme: la marche funèbre de Chopin; il n'en fallait pas plus pour que ses pleurs mouillassent mes yeux" [she wasn't me*, that young widow crying on the screen—and yet she and I shared one soul: Chopin's Funeral March; that was all it took for her tears to fill my eyes*].[332] Sartre longed for this sort of certainty in his own life, deciding to "perdre la parole et vivre en musique" [*leave behind words and live through music*].[333] And every afternoon when his mother sat down at the piano bench to play, he enacted countless adventures of his own to the rhythms of Chopin, Schumann, Franck, Mendelssohn. "Comme un tambour vaudou," he writes, "le piano m'imposait son rythme. La *Fantaisie-Impromptu* se substituait à mon âme, elle m'habitait, me donnait un passé inconnu, un avenir fulgurant et mortel; j'étais possédé, le démon m'avait saisi et me secouait comme un prunier" [*Like a voodoo tambourine, the piano imposed its rhythm on me. The* Fantaisie-Impromptu *stood in for my very soul, it inhabited me, gave me an unknown past, a dazzling and deadly future; I was possessed, the demon took me over and shook me like a plum tree*].[334]

Although the imagery of a substitute soul might not resonate with Roquentin's model of musical experience here, the imposition of a rhythm is analagous—as is the notion that in entangling itself with an irrepressible music that propels it forward, the narrative of a lived experience can take on a new tenor, can achieve the exalted status of adventure. As it did for the

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[331] Sartre, 101.
[332] Sartre, 101, emphasis in original.
[333] Sartre, 103.
[334] Sartre, 103.

young Sartre at the movies, the music imbues the story of Roquentin's life with narrative thrust, urgency, inevitability—meaning, insofar as there can be any meaning—as he looks back on it from his seat in the café:

> Je suis ému, je sens mon corps comme une machine de précision au repos. Moi, j'ai eu de vraies aventures. Je n'en retrouve aucun détail, mais j'aperçois l'enchaînement rigoureux des circonstances. J'ai traversé les mers, j'ai laissé des villes derrière moi et j'ai remonté des fleuves ou bien je me suis enfoncé dans des forêts, et j'allais toujours vers d'autres villes. J'ai eu des femmes, je me suis battu avec des types ; et jamais je ne pouvais revenir en arrière, pas plus qu'un disque ne peut tourner à rebours. Et tout cela me menait où ? A cette minute-ci, à cette banquette, dans cette bulle de clarté toute bourdonnante de musique.[335]
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> [I am overcome, I feel my body at rest like a finely tuned machine. I have had real adventures. I can't recapture the details, but I can perceive the full succession of circumstances. I've crossed the seas, I've left cities behind me and sailed up rivers and plunged deep into forests, always with another city on the horizon. I've had women, I've fought with men—and I could never go backwards, no more than a record could spin in reverse. And where did all of it lead me? To this very minute, in this booth, inside this bubble of lucidity thrumming with music.]

For Roquentin, to have an adventure implies a succession of chances that accumulate and follow one another like music, measure after measure, so that it seems they could not have unfolded otherwise—and, crucially, adventure also implies a constant temporal throughline. Nausea steals this sense of continuity from him, making him feel as if past and present are unconnected, random points in the repulsive swamp of existence with no logic or order to govern them. Later, after the

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[335] Sartre, *La Nausée*, 43.

music's spell has faded, the impulsion towards the future—the meaning of its inevitability—goes with it: "Je *vois* l'avenir," he writes. "Il est là, à peine plus pâle que le présent. Qu'a-t-il besoin de se réaliser? … Je ne distingue plus le présent du futur et pourtant ça dure, ça se réalise peu à peu. . . . Le temps tout nu, ça vient lentement à l'existence, ça se fait attendre et quand ça vient, on est écoeuré parce qu'on s'aperçoit que c'était déjà là depuis longtemps" [*I* see *the future. It's there, barely paler than the present. What good will it do for it to be realized? ... I can no longer distinguish the present from the future and yet it lasts, it comes true little by little. . . . Time laid bare comes slowly into existence, it keeps us waiting and when it comes, it makes us sick because we realize it's already been there for ages*].[336] He no longer feels "le glissement, les frôlements du temps" [*time slipping by, brushing past*].[337] The order that music had bestowed is lost, and he becomes obsessed with an IDEA (rendered in all caps by Sartre): "Je n'ai pas eu d'aventures." Stories, events, incidents have *happened* to him, but he has not had any adventures. "Je m'étais imaginé," he writes, "qu'à de certains moments ma vie pouvait prendre une qualité rare et précieuse" [*I had imagined that at certain moments, my life could take on a rare and precious quality*], the quality of adventure. Only the temporal thrust of music now allows him to reestablish an order, to recapture that rare quality in recounting his life to himself: "Ma vie présente n'a rien de très brillant: mais de temps en temps, par exemple quand on jouait de la musique dans les cafés, je revenais en arrière et je me disais : autrefois, à Londres, à Meknès, à Tokio j'ai connu des moments admirables, j'ai eu des aventures. C'est ça qu'on m'enlève, à présent" [*There's nothing exceptional about my life currently, but from time to time—like when they play music in the cafés—*

[336] Sartre, 53–54.
[337] Sartre, 54.

I could look back and say to myself: once upon a time, in London, in Meknes, in Tokyo, I had adventures. That's been taken from me now].[338] The adventure, he believes, is over, and time has taken back its "mollesse quotidienne" [*everyday flabbiness*]: "derrière moi, cette belle forme mélodique s'enfonce tout entière dans le passé" [*behind me, this beautiful melodious form sinks wholly into the past*].[339] He thinks of how happy it makes him to listen to "Some of These Days" and laments, "quels sommets n'atteindrais-je point si ma *propre vie* faisait la matière de la mélodie" [what heights couldn't I reach if my *own life* could be the stuff of melody].[340] For young Sartre, this was akin to the experience of cinematic music: when the final blow of a duel coincided with the final chord of the score, he felt as if he had touched perfection (*l'absolu*), and after the cinema lights went up and the music stopped, "dans la rue, je me retrouvais surnuméraire" [*in the street, I found myself once again superfluous*][341]—just as Roquentin comes to feel that he is "de trop pour l'éternité" [in the way / superfluous for eternity].[342]

When, in perhaps the novel's most iconic scene, he sat paralyzed at the foot of the chestnut tree, whose roots revealed to him the stark and horrifying nature of undifferentiated existence, Roquentin had felt as if stuck in time: "Le temps s'était arrêté: une petite mare noire à mes pieds; il était impossible que quelque chose vînt *après* ce moment-là" [*Time had stopped: a little black pool at my feet; it was impossible for anything to come* after *this moment*].[343] As Sartre described it in an insert to the original French edition of the novel, often not included in English translations,

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[338] Sartre, 61.
[339] Sartre, 63.
[340] Sartre, 63.
[341] Sartre, *Les Mots*, 102.
[342] Sartre, *La Nausée*, 183.
[343] Sartre, 187.

nausea is "une métamorphose insinuante et doucement horrible de toutes ses sensations . . . ça vous saisit par-derrière et puis on flotte dans une tiède mare de temps" [an insidious, cloyingly horrific metamorphosis of all one's sensations . . . it seizes you from behind and sets you afloat in a tepid pool of time].[344] What Roquentin comes to realize is that the rhythm of song, its inexorable and pulsing drive forward, is what enables a potential escape from this lukewarm swamp, what can remove him from the realm of existence and launch him into the realm of being. When he returns to Madeleine's café at the novel's end, now with plans to leave town—possibly for new adventures—he has her play "Some of These Days" for the last time, and the notes on the saxophone make him feel ashamed: "Une glorieuse petite souffrance vient de naître, une souffrance-modèle. Quatre notes de saxophone. Elles vont et viennent, elles ont l'air de dire: 'Il faut faire comme nous, souffrir *en mesure*'" [*A glorious little suffering has just been born, a suffering par excellence. Four notes on the saxophone. They come and go, they seem to say, 'You must do as we do, suffer* in rhythm*'*].[345] He is ashamed for himself and for everything else that exists alongside the music, complacent in their existence, having given up on achieving the melody's status of being. As it unfolds in time, full of vibratory intensity, striking rhythmic blows against Roquentin's body, the *petite douleur*, the music doesn't exist—it *is:* "Elle est au-delà—toujours au-delà de quelque chose, d'une voix, d'une note de violon. . . . Je ne l'entends même pas, j'entends des sons, des vibrations de l'air qui la dévoilent. Elle n'existe pas, puisqu'elle n'a rien de trop : c'est tout le reste qui est trop par rapport à elle. Elle *est*" [*It lies beyond reach—beyond anything, any voice, any violin note . . . I don't even hear it, I hear sounds, vibrations in the air*

[344] Cam Clayton, "Nausea, Melancholy and the Internal Negation of the Past," *Sartre Studies International* 15, no. 2 (2009): 1.
[345] Sartre, *La Nausée*, 244–45, emphasis in original.

that reveal it. It doesn't exist, because it has nothing superfluous in it—it's everything else that's superfluous by comparison. It is].[346] It inspires Roquentin, becomes the model of being toward which to strive (but only asymptotically, as its being unfurls in "cet autre monde qu'on peut voir de loin, mais sans jamais l'approcher" [*another world that we can see from far away, but without ever approaching it*]), impels him to seek to "chasser l'existence hors de moi, vider les instants de leur graisse, les tordre, les assécher, me purifier, me durcir, pour rendre enfin le son net et précis d'une note de saxophone" [*to drive existence from myself, strip the fat from all moments, twist them and dry them out, purify and harden myself, in order to render the clean and precise sound of a saxophone note*].[347] He resolves to write a book that captures a being beyond existence, an adventure "belle et dure comme de l'acier" [*beautiful and solid as steel*] that, in its very being, makes others feel ashamed to exist alongside it.

For Roquentin, it is impossible for a person to *be*, completely, without simply existing, but he believes that creating an artwork like "Some of These Days" is the closest we may come to absolution, to being "lavés du péché d'exister" [*washed clean of the sin of existing*].[348] He projects this absolution onto the two figures he imagines are responsible for the song, to whom he refers frequently: "le Juif et la Négresse" [*the Jew and the Negress*], the songwriter and the woman whose voice actualizes his work. Roquentin conjures up a whole series of images to explain the song's genesis: "un Américain rasé, aux épais sourcils noirs, qui étouffe de chaleur, au vingtième étage d'un immeuble de New York" [*a clean-shaven American with thick black eyebrows, sweltering in*

[346] Sartre, 245–46.
[347] Sartre, 246.
[348] Sartre, 249.

the heat on the twentieth story of a New York high-rise].[349] And he fixes upon the image of this man to project a sort of comrade in arms, fighting against the softness and flabbiness of existence, striving for steel: "j'essaie de penser à lui *à travers* la mélodie. . . . Je trouve sa souffrance et sa transpiration émouvantes. . . . C'est la première fois depuis des années qu'un homme me paraît émouvant" [*I try to think of him* through *the melody. . . . I find his suffering and his sweat moving. . . . It's the first time in years that I've found anyone moving*].[350] This composer and the singer suffer in rhythm and thus make themselves worthy of being, and Roquentin's aim is that one day, after he has written his book, somebody will "penser à moi comme je pense à eux, avec cette douceur" [*think of me like I think of them, with such gentleness*].[351] The irony is, of course, that Roquentin is completely wrong about both of these sympathetic figures: "Some of These Days" was written by Shelton Brooks, an African American man, and performed by Sophie Tucker, a Russian-born Jewish woman.[352] Whether this mistake was intentional on Sartre's part is perhaps irrelevant—indeed, as Roquentin imagines the scene of the song's creation, he continues glibly, "Ça s'est passé comme ça. Comme ça ou autrement, mais peu importe. C'est comme ça qu'elle est née" [*That's how it happened. Like that or some other way, but it hardly matters. That's how it was born*]. In the same way that, for him, one facet of the adventure is that it seems somehow larger than life—he won't write a history book because history speaks about existence, is unable to access that "beyond" of the rhythm of song; he must write "une histoire, par exemple, comme

[349] Sartre, 247.
[350] Sartre, 248.
[351] Sartre, 249.
[352] Mark Carroll, "'It Is': Reflections on the Role of Music in Sartre's 'La Nausée,'" *Music and Letters* 87, no. 3 (2006): 401.

il ne peut pas en arriver" [*one of those stories, for example, that could never happen*][353]—the truth of his imagined scene is immaterial.

Sartre is playing on several conventions here in his chosen repertoire and in Roquentin's imagined protagonists: first, the stereotypical idea of jazz as an artform commanded and deployed by a subaltern Other, caught up in a web of racial, cultural, and class-based clichés. "Sartre's choice," writes Mark Carroll, "is consistent with the French embrace during the 1920s and 1930s of 'le jazz' in general as an exotic Other— a populist art form whose primitivist echoes appeared simultaneously to fascinate and appal audiences."[354] The sense of "dislocation and alienation"[355] that ostensibly inhered in the genre made it resonate, in a sense, with the dislocation and alienation experienced by Roquentin. Second, there is the notion—vehemently contested by Adorno—of jazz as an artform that is particularly "free," as it is unbeholden to a written score and often relies on improvisation. The musical score is, indeed, a matter of contention among interlocutors of Deleuze and Guattari, many of whom use the philosophers' writings on music to posit that jazz, or other improvised music, is superior to Western classical music, that it unfolds on a plane of immanence and not transcendence. In an article for the collection *Deleuze and Music*, Eugene Holland asserts, "Improvisational jazz repudiates 'reproducing' in favour of following or indeed creating. Whereas a classical symphony orchestra merely reproduces in performance what the composer has already created and written down in the score, jazz bands intentionally depart from what is already known in order to improvise and create something new."[356] For Holland, then, classical musicians do not

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[353] Sartre, *La Nausée*, 250.
[354] Carroll, "'It Is,'" 401.
[355] Carroll, 406.
[356] Holland, "Studies in Applied Nomadology," 26.

create anything, strictly speaking; they are mere vessels through which an already extant score is given voice—the voice of the composer, not the performer. Further, if the conductor is a prisoner to the score, orchestral musicians are in turn prisoners of the conductor, who "holds symbolic life-or-death power over their voices; *without him, they are nothing*."[357] And while the jazz standard is afforded an exalted place in the ontological economy of *La Nausée*, Roquentin is particularly excoriating when it comes to classical music:

> Dire qu'il y a des imbéciles pour puiser des consolations dans les beaux-arts. Comme ma tante Bigeois : « Les *Préludes* de Chopin m'ont été d'un tel secours à la mort de ton pauvre oncle. » Et les salles de concert regorgent d'humiliés, d'offensés qui … se figurent que les sons captés coulent en eux, doux et nourrissants et que leurs souffrances deviennent musique. . . . Ils croient que la beauté leur est compatissante. Les cons.[358]
>
> [Just think of the imbeciles who seek solace in the arts. Like my aunt Bigeois: "Chopin's *Preludes* were such a balm to me when your poor uncle passed." And the concert halls brim with humiliated, outraged people who … imagine that the sounds flow into them, sweet and nourishing, and that their suffering becomes music. . . . They think beauty is sympathetic to them. The idiots.]

But there is reason to take this with a grain of salt. For one thing, Sartre was himself a lifelong amateur pianist, and as François Noudelmann explains in *Le Toucher des philosophes*, his composer of predilection was Chopin—"Chopin, encore et toujours"—to whom he returned time and time again, as Roquentin returned to "Some of These Days."[359] Roquentin's vitriol might have

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[357] Holland, 27, my emphasis.
[358] Sartre, *La Nausée*, 244.
[359] François Noudelmann, *Le toucher des philosophes: Sartre, Nietzsche et Barthes au piano* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 19.

been intended to be read as tongue-in-cheek, and it might also have been a sort of repudiation of the bourgeois rigidity espoused by his maternal grandfather, who had helped raise him after his father's death when Sartre was two. We know that Chopin often provided the soundtrack to his imagined adventures and that, later, even at the height of his philosophical career, Sartre regularly traveled "au monde de Chopin, c'est-à-dire à un paysage intérieur composé d'images, de sons, de sentiments" [*to the world of Chopin—that is, to an interior landscape made up of images, sounds, feelings*].[360] But he also loved jazz, and would have loved to play it himself:

> [Sartre] troquerait sa carrière d'écrivain philosophe pour celle d'un **pianiste de jazz**. Cette ambition secrète surprend d'autant plus que Sartre ne joua pas de jazz, peut-être à cause d'un problème de rythme si difficile à saisir par un interprète classique. Déchiffrer ne suffit pas et pour jouer cette musique il faut accéder à quelque chose comme le swing qui excède les notes et leur reste pourtant indispensable. … On découvre cette imagerie à la fin de *La Nausée* lorsque Roquentin écoute compulsivement un air de jazz, *Some of these days*, censé sublimer tout le désenchantement du personnage englué dans un monde vidé de son sens.[361]
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> [Sartre would have traded his career in philosophical writing for one as a jazz pianist. This secret is all the more surprising because Sartre didn't play jazz, perhaps because of rhythmic complexities difficult for a classical interpreter to pin down. Sight reading is not enough; to play this kind of music, one must achieve something like *swing*, which exceeds the notes but is indispensable to them. We see this imagery at the end of *La Nausée* when Roquentin compulsively listens to the

[360] Noudelmann, 21.
[361] Noudelmann, 57.

> jazz air "Some of These Days," which serves to sublimate the disenchantment of a character trapped in a world emptied of meaning.]

The often hierarchically-presented relationship between jazz and classical music—and their particular rhythms, in Sartre's life and in the novel—is further complicated by the fact that, as Carroll points out, "Sartre chose as the epitome of existential freedom a refrain-based tune that, even by mid-1930s standards, was jazz at its most formulaic, ragtime at the end of its use-by date."[362] Furthermore, whatever unique improvisatory freedom might be said to exist in jazz is at the least materially altered by the fact that Roquentin is listening not to a live performance but to a recording. But a live performance would have been "more clearly anchored in the world of objects," and "had Roquentin actually been *playing* the tune, instrument in hand, while being unable to distinguish between his conscious self and inanimate objects, he surely would have been traumatized, not uplifted"[363]—so a recording is, here, a more propitious conduit for Roquentin to catch a glimpse of the steel band of being. And moreover, as Michael Szekely argues, even though a recording seems to us to offer up the "same" performance at each listening, a Deleuzean notion of repetition can offer a different reading: "We bring the difference and singularity of our lives to the operating table each and every time we experience even that same (i.e., recorded) performance. . . . This speaks of us more generally that we experience *any* music at every turn improvisationally."[364]

In the end, I recall Barthes's evocation of the true space of listening ("l'intérieur de la tête, de ma tête : en l'écoutant, je chante le lied avec moi-même, pour moi-même" [the inside of the

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[362] Carroll, "'It Is,'" 401.
[363] Carroll, 402.
[364] Michael Szekely, "Becoming-Still: Perspectives on Musical Ontology after Deleuze and Guattari," *Social Semiotics* 13, no. 2 (August 2003): 117.

head, of my head: when I listen to it, I sing the Lied with myself, for myself])[365] alongside the three aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's refrain: the "centre stable et calme, stabilisant et calmant, au sein du chaos" [*stable, calm center, stabilizing and calming, in the midst of chaos*]; the organization of space around that center, as in the creation of a home, a *chez soi*, composed of "mur[s] du son" [walls of sound]; and the improvisatory opening up of that space onto the outside, onto the forces of the future.[366] As Sophie Tucker sings "Some of These Days," Roquentin sings it too: it gives him substance and solidity in the midst of fleshy, flabby existence; it creates a translucent bubble of being as it permeates the café and the objects and people within; and it enables Roquentin to leave Bouville and to venture out into unknown territories, and into the future, beating at least for the moment in sync with the rhythm of being, with the rare and precious quality of adventure.

[365] Barthes, "Le chant romantique (1976)," 256.
[366] Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 382–83.

II. No Way Out: The *Tristan* Prelude in *Melancholia*

La Nausée was not the original title of Sartre's existentialist masterpiece—but in the same way he had railed against Roquentin's aunt Bigeois, he wanted to ensure that the existentialist project ran counter to bourgeois romanticism: "Le goût pour l'abjection," writes François Noudelmann, "estampille de la littérature existentialiste, a recouvert cette veine romantique au profit d'un réalisme antibourgeois" [The taste for abjection, hallmark of existentialist literature, covered up this romantic thread in the service of an antibourgeois realism].[367] The intended title for the work, almost certainly inspired by the 1514 engraving by Albrecht Dürer (which is found on some editions of the novel), was *Melancholia*. In Dürer's richly allusive, widely interpreted, visually chaotic engraving a winged woman sits, still and despondent, amid a collection of objects and creatures, perhaps waiting for an inspiration that will not come. An hourglass behind her appears frozen with half the sand on top and half on the bottom, equally divided between past and future. And in the background, a dazzling light appears in the sky—a star? a comet? or perhaps a rogue planet on an irrevocable collision course with Earth?

[367] Noudelmann, *Le toucher des philosophes*, 24.

In Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011), it is this latter eventuality which looms large (and then larger) over the film's events and characters. The film focuses on two sisters, Justine (Kirsten Dunst) and Claire (Charlotte Gainsbourg), and the ways in which they face—or refuse to face—the impending apocalypse as its arrival becomes more and more certain. *Melancholia*'s first half depicts Justine's wedding night during which she tries, with Claire's encouragement, and finally fails to fend off her paralyzing depression, which ultimately sees her and her new husband part ways just hours after their union. She notices that the star Antares, which she had glimpsed before the wedding, is no longer visible at night's end—it is, we learn in the film's second half, hidden behind a planet called Melancholia that is making its way toward Earth, though scientists offer assurances that it will pass by harmlessly. While Melancholia draws nearer, Justine emerges from her near-catatonic state, seeming to find a sort of rapture in the irreality of the situation, and then able—unlike Claire and her husband—to face it when it becomes clear that after its first pass, Melancholia will become tangled in Earth's gravity and return for a head-on collision that will bring life on Earth to a cataclysmic end. Throughout the film's duration, von Trier soundtracks the action (or lack thereof, at some moments) with a recurrent refrain: excerpts from the Prelude to Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, one of the best-known pieces of music ever written, and one whose persistent recursion—as well as its internal harmonic and melodic tension—seem to reflect the eponymous affect, especially as it applies to Justine. The cues are always nondiegetic, so Wagner's Prelude cannot be said to function in the same way as "Some of These Days" does in *La Nausée*, but the insistent repetition of the opening bars implicates the spectator in a similar temporal morass as we watch Justine remain stuck in her melancholy, seemingly unable to pass from one moment to the next.

Melancholia opens with a visually striking eight-minute "Overture," which suggests or depicts, often obliquely, the events that will follow. Wagner's Prelude plays from the beginning and almost in its entirety as we see a succession of nearly-static images, moving in extreme slow motion in what feels indeed like the "tiède mare de temps" evoked by Sartre: a closeup of Justine staring blankly, despairingly into the camera as birds drop lifelessly from the sky around her; Justine spinning her nephew Leo around in an opulent garden overlooking the sea, lined with neatly trimmed topiary and centered around a massive sundial, frozen in time; a copy of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Hunters in the Snow*, erupting in flames; a view from space of Melancholia with a luminous red dot to its right—the star Antares, which Justine sees disappear in the planet's shadow in the film's first half—moving slowly but unmistakeably behind it; Claire carrying her son Leo through a golf course, her footsteps sinking into the ground as if it were quicksand; a horse collapsing onto its hind legs; Justine standing with arms spread wide, Christ-like, illuminated by moonlight (or Melancholia-light) and surrounded by moths or butterflies; a wide shot of Justine, Leo, and Claire (the three characters huddled together at the film's end, when the apocalypse arrives), with light from the sun, the moon, and Melancholia behind them; Melancholia just missing Earth (small in the foreground) as it makes it first pass (before ricocheting back around, caught in Earth's gravity); Justine on the golf course, holding her hands to the sky as her fingers glimmer with electric tendrils of lightning; Justine in her wedding dress, literalizing the description of her melancholy that she later gives Claire: "trudging through this gray, woolly yarn that's clinging to my legs. It's really heavy to drag along"; Melancholia and Earth, now the same size, in the moments before their collision; an interior shot with a burning bush (one of the garden's topiaries) visible through the window; Justine in her wedding dress, clasping a bouquet as she

floats on her back down a stream, looking like Ophelia; Justine walking toward Leo as he whittles a stick, like one they will use to construct the "magic cave" in which Leo wants to take refuge as Melancholia approaches; and the enormous Melancholia approaching the much smaller Earth, tentatively reaching out tendrils of atmosphere before enveloping the planet entirely, pulverizing it into an ocean full of dust.[368]

Each of these tableaux evokes, in one sense or another, both human-level stasis and celestial movement, and the helplessness that accompanies depression. And Wagner's Prelude is, here, and then throughout the action of the film, pervasive, repetitive, inescapable, all-encompassing—and even unbearable for reviewers like the *New Yorker*'s Alex Ross, who writes that von Trier "dwells so relentlessly on the opening of the prelude that it turns into a kind of cloying signature tune; repetition robs the music of its capacity to surprise and seduce the listener."[369] But whatever else depression is, it is also boring beyond words, mind-numbing like an earworm we can't shake, enervating like the A note that Robert Schumann heard repeating ceaselessly as he wandered farther and farther away from sanity toward the end of his life. And the unsettling opening bars of the *Tristan* Prelude accompany the manifestations of Justine's profound melancholy, becoming the refrain of her despair—and then of Claire's, when their affective states switch. In the first half of the film, as Justine descends deeper into depression, we hear these bars as she leaves her wedding reception in a golf cart following a disastrous toast by her embittered mother (Charlotte Rampling), who proclaims, "I hate marriages," and advises the bride and groom to "enjoy it while it lasts." The first three bars repeat twice in succession as Claire

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[368] *Melancholia* (Magnolia Home Entertainment, 2011).

[369] Alex Ross, "Melancholia, Bile," The Rest Is Noise, accessed September 28, 2021, https://www.therestisnoise.com/2011/11/melancholia-bile.html.

later tries to rouse Justine from a nap, only for Justine to reveal to her the inescapability of her condition: “I’m trudging through this gray, woolly yarn that’s clinging to my legs. It’s really heavy to drag along.” They return again when Claire and Michael, Justine’s new (soon to be ex-) husband, confront her on realizing the extent of a misery she is failing to dissimulate, accusing her of “lying to us all” about what she really wants.

In the second half of the film, the two sisters slowly exchange roles—with the depressive Justine, accustomed to feeling like the end of the world is nigh and having no one else believe her, clear-eyed in the face of destruction; and the high-functioning, practical Claire frantically scrambling to cling to something normal in the midst of chaos. When Claire is worried that the scientists are mistaken and that Melancholia will indeed annihilate Earth, Justine calmly tells her, “The Earth is evil. We don’t need to grieve for it,” that life “exists only on Earth and not for long,” and the *Tristan* Prelude’s opening bars play once again. Later, after Claire’s husband (Kiefer Sutherland), despite his prior reassurances, poisons himself rather than witness the apocalypse, Claire attempts to flee to town with Leo in a golf cart, but we hear the Prelude again as Melancholia’s approach makes the Earth’s electrical fields run haywire and stop the cart in its tracks. Finally, with young Leo’s father now dead and his mother unable to cope with an impossible reality, his aunt Justine is the only one who can help: after earlier denying his request to play, once on her wedding night and again in the most immobile moments of her depression, she offers to help him build a “magic cave” that will protect them. In the last minutes before Melancholia collides with Earth, they gather large sticks and construct a fort in which to take shelter—and the Prelude plays once more when we get a glimpse of it, continuing as our three survivors, not for long, sit and wait for the end: they all lock hands, but in the final moments, Claire

cannot bear it and grasps her head in her hands to sob alone, while Justine and Leo remain calm and hold on to one another, eyes closed as they are obliterated along with Earth and Wagner's music resounds.

The use of the *Tristan* Prelude in *Melancholia* represents something like the obverse of "Some of These Days" in *La Nausée*, demonstrating the deterritorializing power of music: as it can be a channel to the future, to freedom, an unshakeable refrain can also be the sonic manifestation of an immobilizing Nausea. In this case, von Trier's repetition of the opening bars makes viewers like Alex Ross recoil and, eventually, to dread the motif's next occurrence as one dreads the feeling of an impending depressive episode: "il faut souffrir en mesure," as Roquentin says, but sometimes the rhythm doesn't provide the way out. There is even a harsh rebuke of the notion of music as a liberating force in *Melancholia*, when Claire has realized the end of the world is nigh and attempts to make a plan for how best to meet it. Always one to go about things properly, Claire tells Justine, "I want to do this the right way," ludicrously but understandably clinging to the notion that questions of right and wrong could still pertain with only hours left before the world will cease to exist, "a glass of wine together, maybe?" Justine is unable to muster up any merciful indulgence, retorting with bitter sarcasm, "How about a song? Beethoven's Ninth, something like that?" Claire, hoping she means it, tells her sister that "that would make me happy," but Justine, who knows that the stakes have moved well beyond questions of right and wrong, happy and sad, calls Claire's plan "a piece of shit" and can only laugh in disbelief when Claire continues to protest, "I just want it to be nice." One of the best-loved works of music ever composed, a universal symbol for brotherhood, triumph, and joy, the Ninth Symphony is held up to be torn down: for Claire and

Justine there can no longer be any music, any freedom, any future at all. But as for the spectators, we know that there will be more Wagner.

Of course, a jazz standard with a recurrent chorus and the Prelude from *Tristan und Isolde* mobilize very different sets of affects, and von Trier's choice of Wagner was not accidental. The twelve opening bars contain the "*Tristan* chord" four times (in various permutations), one of the most vociferously debated chords in the history of music: it defies simple ascription to any tonal framework, and plays on dissonances that refuse to resolve, denying quick or easy satisfaction to the listener. A combination of motifs of desire and suffering, the chord offers, right from the start of the work, a "symbolic musical bridge between suffering and yearning that will not be resolved until its transformation at the end of the opera."[370] Each time von Trier returns to it, it brings with it a sense of unresolved, and even unresolvable, tension, and the impression of being unmoored from a center, as Justine and Claire will be in the first and second acts, respectively. And the many repetitions, cloying as they may be to some viewers, are also in some way resonant with the musical context from which the Prelude is taken: an opera that is, as Linda and Michael Hutcheon write, "a most obsessively repetitive text . . . structured on what could be called compulsive repetitions."[371] Adorno was critical of this aspect of Wagner's music, what he called an "impotent" repetition of music that "[caused] time and action to stand still 'so as to accompany it down into the kingdom of death, the ideal of Wagnerian music.'"[372] Though this contention has been challenged by many scholars and critics, including Ross, it is a fitting description of the function

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[370] Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, "Death Drive: Eros and Thanatos in Wagner's Tristan Und Isolde," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 11, no. 3 (1999): 273–74.
[371] Hutcheon and Hutcheon, 271–72.
[372] Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: NLB, 1981), 103, quoted in Hutcheon and Hutcheon, 273.

of the Prelude in *Melancholia*. But the sense of architecture and structure for which Wagner is so renowned is nowhere to be found as we head inexorably for the world's end: the excerpts of *Tristan* we have heard through the film have often been cut and resequenced in ways that are likely to disturb listeners who admire the Prelude as "a masterpiece of organic continuity" that should be heard in full, with inveterate provocateur von Trier saying, "For years, there has been this sort of unofficial film dogma not to cut to the music. Don't cut on the beat. It's considered crass and vulgar. But that's just what we do in *Melancholia*. . . . we cut right on the beat. It's kind of like a music video that way. It's supposed to be vulgar. That was our declared intention. It's one of the most pleasurable things I've done in a long time."[373] Whether it's more a result of careful planning or of glib "vulgarity," the modifications are destabilizing, heightening the film's sense of irreality.

When Roquentin talks about adventures and stories, he laments that "il faut choisir: vivre ou raconter. . . . Quand on vit, il n'arrive rien" [*One must choose: to live or to tell. . . . When one is living, nothing happens*].[374] It is only on looking back that one ascribes meaning and order to the narrative, creating an adventure out of happenstance—or on projecting oneself into the future and crafting a narrative from that imagined point. "On a l'air de débuter par le commencement. . . . Et en réalité c'est par la fin qu'on a commencé. . . . Le récit se poursuit à l'envers" [*We seem to start at the beginning. . . . But really we start at the end. . . . The story continues backwards*]. The end is the center, the backbone of the adventure that imbues the lead-up with significance—even though when we are living through those events, we don't yet know the end: "nous oublions que

[373] David Larkin, "'Indulging in Romance with Wagner': Tristan in Lars von Trier's Melancholia (2011)," *Music and the Moving Image* 9, no. 1 (2016): 49.
[374] Sartre, *La Nausée*, 64.

l'avenir n'était pas encore là" [*we forget that the future wasn't yet there*].[375] In *Melancholia*, Justine only gets "unstuck" in time when the end of time reveals itself, when it is not just the end of her adventure but of the very idea of adventure. There is no more uncertainty, no more gray, woolly yarn weighing her down; there is only the gravitational pull of the inexorable end, of Melancholia itself and its promise of finality. After so many (no fewer than nine) recurrences of the opening bars, it is at the moment of apocalyptic impact that von Trier cuts to the emotional climax of the *Tristan* Prelude, bars 83-84, for the first time in the main action of the film—having previously played this sequence only in the introductory Overture, also at the moment that depicts Melancholia's collision with Earth.[376] In both cases, von Trier has the music simply fade out at the climactic moment rather than allow the roughly 25 remaining bars of the Prelude to play out in full. Having seen it happen already in the Overture, we can never really doubt that the world will end, that Melancholia will arrive to cut the Prelude short. Just as the lovers in Wagner's opera can only achieve a "blissful reunion in death,"[377] following the famed "Liebestod," the Prelude offers, in the composer's own words, "a glimmer of the attainment of highest rapture: it is the rapture of dying, of ceasing to be, of the final redemption into that wondrous realm from which we stray the furthest when we strive to enter it by force."[378] The end of suffering, the end of adventure, the end of song—but for Justine, the beginning of meaning itself.

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[375] Sartre, 66.
[376] Larkin, "'Indulging in Romance with Wagner,'" 47.
[377] Hutcheon and Hutcheon, "Death Drive," 275.
[378] Wagner's program notes for the Prelude, quoted in Hutcheon and Hutcheon, 288.

III. "WHAT KIND OF MAGIC IS THIS?": MUSIC'S DARK SIDE IN *DANCER IN THE DARK*

Von Trier is not known as a filmmaker of abiding optimism, so it is not entirely surprising that his œuvre contains other films that culminate in the death of the principal character(s). What is perhaps surprising about *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), the heartrending story of a woman trapped in a set of tragic circumstances beyond her control—who ends up being put to death for a crime she was coerced into committing—is that it is, at least in part, a musical. A collaboration with Icelandic singer-songwriter Björk, who initially planned only to score the film and write the songs but ultimately agreed to play the lead role, *Dancer in the Dark* met—as many of von Trier's films do—with a highly polarized reception, winning the Palme d'Or and Best Actress awards at the Cannes Film Festival, but also called "the most sensationally silly film" of 2000, as well as "the most shallow and crudely manipulative," by *The Guardian*'s Peter Bradshaw.[379] One reason for the negative reaction to the film might be the unusual way it straddles genre conventions, taking place in two very distinct (and not necessarily easily reconciled) modes: gritty, almost documentary-style realism; and saturated, colorful Hollywood musical, complete with choreographed numbers and wide, unflinching grins.

Lars von Trier is well known as the co-founder, along with Thomas Vinterberg, of the Dogme 95 movement in cinema, which arose largely in reaction to a dominant cinematic aesthetic at the end of the twentieth century that von Trier and Vinterberg saw as overly glossy and dependent on technological tricks. Wanting to strip their films of artifice and reject the "overly

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[379] Peter Bradshaw, "Dancer in the Dark," *The Guardian*, September 15, 2000, sec. Film, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2000/sep/15/1.

cosmetic nature, predictability, and superficiality" that audiences had come to expect, the two directors wrote a manifesto and a "vow of chastity" espousing the tenets of their new movement: shooting on location with no external props or artificial sets; exclusively diegetic sound; hand-held cameras; color film without artificial lighting; a lack of optical filters and of "superficial action" like "murders, weapons, etc."; a setting in the "here and now"; an avoidance of "genre movies"; the use of Academy 35 mm film; and a refusal to credit the director, who must "refrain from creating a 'work'" and seek to "force the truth out of my characters and settings . . . at the cost of any good taste and any aesthetic considerations."[380] Reactions to this manifesto, which von Trier was known to shower upon audiences in the form of red leaflets, were also mixed, with director Richard Kelly calling it "the most audacious and conspicuous attempt to reinvent cinema since Godard," but with critics like Jonathan Rosenbaum and Armond White dismissing it as a childish publicity stunt.[381] It did indeed bring publicity to Vinterberg's *Festen* (1998), the first Dogme 95 film, which was successful enough to ascribe a sense of legitimacy to the movement—though even this first film broke at least one of the tenets of the manifesto, and the movement officially disbanded in 2002, fearing that it had unwittingly created a genre unto itself.

At the movement's height, von Trier released *Dancer in the Dark* as the third volume in a "trilogy" (thematically linked, but not strictly a trilogy) known as the "Golden Heart," following *Breaking the Waves* (1995) and *The Idiots* (1998). It breaks nearly all ten of the rules of the Dogme

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[380] Maggie Magno, Lars von Trier, and Thomas Vinterberg, "Dogme 95 Manifesto," in *The Manifesto in Literature*, ed. Thomas Riggs, vol. 3, Activism, Unrest, and the Neo-Avant-Garde (Detroit, MI: St. James Press, 2013), 144.

[381] Magno, Trier, and Vinterberg, 144–45.

95 manifesto,[382] but in a way that brings the multiplicity of genres into focus: in a sense, *Dancer in the Dark* is the (likely intentionally) jarring marriage of a Dogme 95 film with a (warped, admittedly) Hollywood musical. The film tells the story of Selma Ježková (Björk), a Czech immigrant raising her 12-year-old son, Gene, in Washington state in 1964. Her existence is fairly bleak: she and Gene live in poverty even though she works long, backbreaking hours in a factory to make ends meet, and to save up money for a surgery to save Gene's vision, the only goal that really drives her life forward. He suffers from a genetic condition that will ultimately make him lose his sight—a tragedy that Selma knows all too well, because he has inherited it from her. At the film's start she is nearly fully blind already, taking double shifts at the factory while she can still work (having memorized the letters on the vision test chart to fool the eye doctor into thinking the situation is less dire than it really is). But she finds solace in musicals: the film's opening scene shows her on stage rehearsing to play the role of Maria in a community theatre production of *The Sound of Music*, singing "My Favorite Things" and dancing somewhat awkwardly, failing to cover up her visual impairment, which the play's director notes with chagrin. And she often goes to watch old movie musicals at the cinema with her friend and coworker Kathy (Catherine Deneuve), who describes to her what is happening onscreen, provoking the ire of their fellow moviegoers.

Selma and Gene live in a trailer on the property of policeman Bill (David Morse) and his glamorous wife Linda (Cara Seymour), who Selma thinks "look[s] like a movie star," like one of the characters that populate her fantasy world. Linda explains that she and Bill are well-off because of a large sum he inherited—but later, Bill confesses to Selma that he is actually broke, having

[382] Rachel Joseph, "'Only the Last Song If We Let It Be': Dancer in the Dark, The Sound of Music and Song and Dance as Traumatic Container," *Studies in Musical Theatre* 10, no. 1 (2016): 85.

spent all of the inheritance, and fears that his and Linda's house will soon be repossessed. Selma, touched that Bill has entrusted her with such a grave secret, shares with him her own—the progressively deteriorating vision, the plan to help Gene, a recurrent lie she has told about sending money back to her father in Czechoslovakia—and the two, promising not to reveal the other's secret, bond over their shared love for musicals. "I've got little games I play," Selma admits, "when it goes really hard, when I'm working in the factory . . . The machines, they make these rhythms, and I just start dreaming, and it all becomes music." As the film moves forward, we will see this in action: Selma, confronted with a moment in which her pain is too great to process—in which it seems impossible for another moment to follow this one—sings herself an elaborate refrain, makes herself a stable center in the darkness, and finds the rhythm with which to continue moving through time. The first instance follows shortly thereafter when Selma works her first night shift at the factory, given more machines to operate and ordered to work faster. Exhausted, she stops at one point to gather herself and starts to listen to the noises of the factory, feeling the rhythm of the machinery in her body. When she looks up, the film has entered its second, dreamlike mode for the first time: the shaky handheld cameras are gone, replaced by over 100 stationary cameras filming from all angles; the colors, previously desaturated to the point of near monotony, have taken on a vivid new sheen and brightness; and Selma is the star of a musical, conducting the action from the center as she and her grinning coworkers dance, clap, and sing around "the clatter-machines / that greet you and say / 'We tap out a rhythm / And sweep you away!'" The juxtaposition of this Technicolor musical world with the cold, hard reality of Selma's desperate situation results in a heartbreaking dissonance, highlighting the artifice of the musical even as it compels us to wish for Selma to stay there. But return to the real world she must, and she does so

in the most unfortunate way: distracted by her reverie, she makes a serious mistake, jamming the machine she is working on, causing production to stop for the night and interrupting the musical number mid-refrain.

Back at home, Bill—having already asked Selma for a loan and "jokingly" threatened to shoot himself when she refused—watches her put her money away, knowing she cannot see him, and now knowing where her savings are hidden. The next day, Selma resigns her leading role in *The Sound of Music* under false pretenses, gets fired from her job for her error the previous night, and admits her blindness to her coworker Jeff as he walks her home. The sound of a train passing over the tracks next to them creates the rhythm for the next song, "I've Seen It All," in which Selma processes, for the first time, the loss of her sight: to Jeff's lament that "You've never been to Niagara Falls," she glibly replies, "I have seen water—it's water, that's all. . . . I've seen what I was, and I know what I'll be / I've seen it all, there is no more to see." When she arrives at home, she discovers that Bill has stolen her money and has told his wife Linda a made-up story about Selma attempting to initiate an affair with him. Selma attempts to retrieve her money from Bill, but he refuses and holds her at gunpoint—and in the ensuing struggle, she shoots and ultimately kills him. Unable to cope or move, frozen in place, Selma constructs another song, "Scatterheart," over the sound of a record left looping nearby. In this number, Selma stages the scene of absolution she desperately seeks but will never find in reality: Bill's bloodied corpse stands up and dances with Selma, singing "I hurt you much more / So don't you worry . . . You are forgiven," and outside on his bicycle, Selma's son Gene intones, "You just did what you had to do." Linda tells Selma to run before the police arrive, embracing her as she leaves. As Faber writes, the musical numbers in *Dancer in the Dark* serve to "evoke a world where forgiveness for the worst imaginable crimes is

possible, where the dead rise, where the good is always coming to us."[383] Selma cannot go on without forgiveness or absolution, and she is able to grant herself both on behalf of Bill, Linda, and Gene in the space of the music, which permits her to continue moving forward.

Selma knows her time is limited and rushes to the office of the surgeon who will perform Gene's vision-saving surgery. She gives him the money for the operation and, when prompted, tells him that Gene will give his name as "Nový"—as in Oldřich Nový, legendary Czech actor and dancer of big-screen musicals, who Selma had previously claimed was the father to whom she was sending money back home. She then allows Jeff, unaware of the murder, to take her to rehearsal, where the director has been apprised of the situation and calls the police to alert them to Selma's whereabouts. She seems to glom on to the tension in the atmosphere and makes an attempt to leave, but the director contrives to keep her there until the police arrive, insisting that Selma be present as they rehearse "Climb Ev'ry Mountain"—which almost immediately transforms into her next imaginary song, "In the Musicals." "What kind of magic is this?" she sings. "How come I can't help but adore it? / It's just another musical / No one minds it at all / If I'm having a ball / This is a musical / And there's always someone to catch me when I fall." In this case she is tragically correct: when she falls backwards in the midst of her dance number, it is the police who have arrived to catch her and take her away. The song continues throughout so that Selma's arrest is seamlessly integrated into the choreography—this particular moment is too difficult for her to bear, so she remains in the song's comforting rhythm. Notably here, though, reality threatens to impede on reverie, and in this song we see the first instance of a character from the Dogme 95 film

[383] Alyda Faber, "Dancer in the Dark: Affliction and the Aesthetic of Attention," *Studies in Religion* 35, no. 1 (2006): 93.

who is not taken over by the Technicolor wash of the musical number: the director of *The Sound of Music*, who opens the door for the police, looking distraught and bereft even as everyone around him continues dancing happily.

The song's end brings us abruptly to the courtroom, where Selma is being tried for Bill's murder. Von Trier cannot resist a tongue-in-cheek indictment of American mass hysteria: the prosecutor paints Selma as merciless, devoid of a conscience, and—perhaps most damningly—a foreign communist who "has nothing but contempt for our great country and its principles . . . apart from its musicals." The eye doctor whom Selma had tricked by memorizing the vision charts also testifies that she was not blind at the time of the murder, and in what is likely the most egregious contrivance in the film—exhibit A for charges of crass emotional manipulation—Selma refuses to defend herself with the full truth, unwilling to break her vow to keep Bill's secret even after his unconscionable betrayal. This would truly strain credulity in a film ostensibly about gritty realism, but makes more sense in the context of Brenda Austin-Smith's insightful reading of the film's conflicting paradigms of genre, in which the movie musical comes up not against the exemplary "truth" of a Dogme 95 film but against the genre of the maternal melodrama. The response of Selma's character to the "over-determinations of melodrama, and its fondness for a multiplicity of obstacles with which to confront its innocents"[384]—blindness, poverty, overwork, foreignness, single motherhood, an ailing child, betrayal and duplicity, and on and on—allows laudatory critics to cast her as "innocent and unworldly" and cynical ones as "deluded or pathetic."[385] Rather than come clean about her visual impairment and her son's surgery, she falls back on the lie about

[384] Brenda Austin-Smith, "'Mum's the Word': The Trial of Genre in Dancer in the Dark," *Post Script* 26, no. 1 (2006): 32–42.
[385] Faber, "Dancer in the Dark," 94.

Oldřich Nový, saying that the money she wanted to recuperate from Bill was intended for her father in Czechoslovakia. Von Trier twists the knife by having the prosecution respond by calling Oldřich Nový himself, who has taken his retirement in the United States, to the stand to testify against Selma.

Nový testifies that he does not know Selma, has never received money from her, and is categorically not her father. He explains to the court that she must have known him for his career: "I was an actor. I made films. They were musicals." And Selma, desperate to avoid feeling the pain of one of her heroes helping to sign her death warrant, seizes upon the scraping of a court artist's pencil on paper as the rhythmic base for a reprise of "In the Musicals," this time with Nový himself participating and taking up the refrain, "I'll always be there to catch you when you fall." In a fairly inspired bit of intertextual casting, Nový is played by Joel Grey, especially known for his iconic role as the Master of Ceremonies in the Broadway and Hollywood versions of *Cabaret*, for which he won both a Tony and an Oscar. Grey's conspicuous presence, as he locks arms, sings, and tap dances with Björk, allows the film to "comment on the genealogy, the family history, of the musical, and of this film in particular as a rejected child of that tradition": in other words, if Selma loses the trial, Nový's telling the court "she is not my daughter" will also be, in a sense, Grey's telling us in the film's audience "this is not really a musical."[386] But lose the trial she does, and the jury sentences her to death by hanging. Kathy and Jeff hire a new lawyer who can argue a stay of execution and get Selma a retrial—but when she finds out they have conspired to pay him with the money that was supposed to be for Gene's surgery, she refuses to cooperate, guaranteeing that her sentence will be carried out. When the day of her execution arrives, Selma is paralyzed by

[386] Austin-Smith, "'Mum's the Word.'"

grief and fear, unable to will her legs to walk the 107 steps to the gallows. But she receives help from Brenda, a kindly officer who takes pity on her. Selma has already told Brenda about how she used to escape from the difficult conditions at the factory by "dreaming that I was in a musical—because in a musical, nothing dreadful ever happens. But it's so quiet here." The silence of the holding cell unnerves Selma, leaves her with nothing to latch on to, no rhythm to punctuate forward motion into the future, not even the crystal of a refrain around which to build a bubble of safety. "I have a plan," Brenda tells Selma. "You're gonna stand up with me. I'm gonna make some noise. It'll give you something to listen to." She starts making a rhythm with her footsteps and encourages Selma to do the same, and then begins counting the number of each step out loud, from 1 to 107. This is the step-by-step ostinato against which Selma's final Technicolor song unfolds: amid sweeping strings, she twirls down death row and sings out the numbers at regular intervals, comforting the other prisoners in their cells on the way to the gallows as a grinning Brenda continues counting in the background. Kathy is waiting in the observation deck to comfort Selma in her final moments, and to inform her that Gene's operation has been successfully completed—her sacrifices have not been in vain; he will not suffer the same fate as his mother.

Earlier in the film, during Selma's ill-advised heart-to-heart with Bill that led to her ultimate tragedy, Selma had told Bill the only thing she hated about musicals: the grand finale. "Isn't it annoying when they do the last song in the films?" she asked. "You just know when it goes really big and the camera goes, like, out of the roof, you just know it's going to end. . . . I really hate that. I used to cheat when I was a little girl back in Czechoslovakia: I would leave the cinema just after the next-to-last song, and the film would just go on forever." As she is being tied up to the gallows, steeling herself for death, she performs the film's final number, "The Next-to-

Last Song": "This isn't the last song," she sings, "there's no violin / The choir is so quiet / And no one takes a spin / It's the next-to-last song / And that's all." Unsurprisingly enough, this is the only song in *Dancer in the Dark* filmed with the real world's shaky hand-held camera, depicted in the washed-out colors of Dogme 95 melodrama rather than the vivid space of the Hollywood musical—the only song that Selma is actually singing out loud for the other characters to hear. Even in the silence of this most abject space, Selma carves out her own rhythm—closing her eyes and even smiling as she sings—but the viewer is forced to remain outside that fantasy with our only company the impassive security guards, the unyielding noose around Selma's neck, and a weeping Brenda. Salvation now seems impossible, but as long as Selma is singing, we wonder if there is one last chance for her: "Von Trier creates a visceral jolt of suffering in the viewer that disrupts efforts to turn these events into a happy ending," writes Faber. "Nonetheless, the film arguably depends upon a spectator's *desire* for a happy ending, since this desire keeps the spectator engaged with Selma."[387] The gallows scene is so mercilessly, even gratuitously drawn out that we cannot help but want our suffering to bear fruit as well—we want Selma's song to beat out a rhythm toward a brighter end—but as she reaches a final high note, the floor falls out beneath her and we watch her hang, silent and lifeless. Before the fade to black, an epigraph appears on the screen: "They say it's the last song / They don't know us, you see / It's only the last song / If we let it be." Of course, von Trier does not give us the opportunity to follow Selma's example, to leave after the next-to-last song and imagine that her idiosyncratic music will somehow continue; like Michael Haneke in *Funny Games*, he subverts our expectations and forces us to confront our desire for facile resolution, for a catharsis that will never come.

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[387] Faber, "Dancer in the Dark," 96.

In one cogent reading of this film by Rachel Joseph, the function of music, and of the imaginary space of the musical, is strictly related to a processing of trauma that cannot take place anywhere else: "Trauma . . . tears apart carefully constructed fantasies that structure reality and expose what usually hides from consciousness. *Dancer in the Dark* repeatedly comes back to this split between reality and fantasy. The protagonist, Selma, dreams herself into musical numbers to escape tragic deadlocks in the reality that is her life."[388] Just how it is that she escapes these deadlocks—what makes music uniquely positioned to break them—is its rhythm, its ability to disrupt the flow of time or mend it back together, the corporeality of the *coups* that Barthes describes in the music of Schumann. When Selma makes a song out of the factory noises, she is hearing the rhythm of *adventure*, like Roquentin—a start, an end, and a navigable path between them that imbues cold, gray reality with a vibrancy that is sufficient to help her survive, at least as long as the music continues. Music in *Dancer in the Dark* functions both to help the character of Selma put one foot in front of the other—literally—and to enable the audience to continue watching what might otherwise be an irredeemably painful film. Like *Melancholia*, it ends in a death that appears inevitable in retrospect; unlike in that film, it is a death that music initially seems to have the ability to drive away rather than bring about.

Sartre's novel and the two Von Trier films demonstrate the contingency and polyvalence of musical affects, always full of *a priori* virtuality before they are called upon to work. Just what sort of impulse is imparted to listeners by hearing a certain piece of music always depends on the unaccountably complex affective disposition of the listener in regard to the world at large, to the work of music, and to the context in which it is being heard. In *La Nausée*, Roquentin is

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[388] Joseph, "'Only the Last Song If We Let It Be,'" 82.

predisposed to bring positive associations to bear on *Some of These Days* because it conjures up images of freedom and adventure, outlining a rhythmic backdrop that provides him with a meaningful framework for his entire life. In *Melancholia*, Lars Von Trier primes the viewer to associate Wagner's *Tristan* Prelude with abject existential despair and the apocalyptic breakdown of all meaning, so that by the time the climactic moment is finally heard, we are ready for it to accompany a destructive apotheosis—the end of adventure and of time itself. And in the same filmmaker's *Dancer in the Dark*, Björk's guileless and childlike performance encourages us to view her musical interludes—which seem to provide her with a respite from earthly time, rather than reawakening her to it—as necessary and life-sustaining flights of fancy, only for the rug to be pulled out from under us as we recognize she is singing herself to her own death.

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