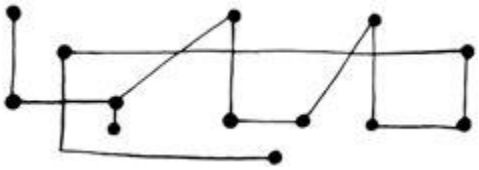

Listening Subjects: Semiotics, Psychoanalysis, and the Music of John Adams and Steve Reich
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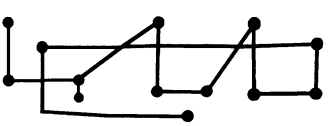
LISTENING SUBJECTS: SEMIOTICS, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND THE MUSIC OF JOHN ADAMS AND STEVE REICH



DAVID SCHWARZ

THEORETICAL POSITIONS

THIS PAPER OUTLINES a theory of listening subjectivity for music.[1] In general, I am interested in naming and exploring a middle ground between pieces of music as texts and psychic structures upon which their perception depends. Based on recent psychoanalytic criticism, I discuss listening subjectivity as a site for such a middle ground. More specifically, musical listening subjects are produced when moments in performed music allow access to psychological events that are presymbolic—that is, from that phase in our development *before* our mastery of language.[2] Not that *all* music is supposed to be *always* presymbolic; but certain kinds of music articulate their conventionality in such a way that the listener can have access to vestiges of presymbolic conditions within conventional forms and procedures. The psychic structures that I apply to the music of

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John Adams and Steve Reich are the "sonorous envelope" and the "acoustic mirror" from recent French psychoanalytic theory and Kaja Silverman's recent book, *The Acoustic Mirror*.[3]

Recent critical theory often defines a text as anything that can be perceived as a sign—whether a poem, event in everyday life, ad, pattern of speech, sonata movement, etc. A quintessential analyst of such new texts is Roland Barthes. Since Barthes, writers such as Kaja Silverman and Teresa de Lauretis have found it increasingly necessary not only to discuss texts as self-contained wholes, but to name the ways in which it is possible for such structures to exist—to name the text's "site of production" and its "enunciation of the subject." In Kofi Agawu's terms, to deal with the *how* in addition to the *what* of music.

Agawu calls his semiotic study of music a complement to structural music theory. His theories add to, but do not threaten, Schenkerian voice-leading considerations. In this study of two contemporary composers, the integrity of neither Schenker nor set theory is at stake. Nevertheless, I suggest that an approach to the listening subject does challenge the privileged status of music as art outside ideology, and it *supplements* structural music theory. That is, hearing music as listening subjects qualitatively shifts our focus away from hearing pieces as absolute and self-contained wholes, to hearing music as an embodiment of listening processes.

Psychoanalysis and Subjectivity

Despite the fact that we can't get out of language, access to the presymbolic can occur through the sounds *within* language that we first heard before we knew what they meant. For us to listen to music as an attempt within the symbolic order to hear echoes of this lost sound-not-yet-with-meaning is to construct a fantasy of musical subjectivity. Though we listen from social, institutional positions, such a fantasy of subjectivity expressed in sound can uncover thresholds between imaginary and symbolic structures (to be discussed below). And subjectivity is in part made possible by the crossing of symbolic thresholds in social space.

Benveniste points out that in addition to linguistic categories of signifier and signified, there are positions of enunciation that have unique binary structures. These positions are the pronouns "you" and "I," which constantly shift back and forth in discourse. Benveniste asserts that subjectivity and language are closely related, that we become subjects in and through language—the quintessential signifier of the symbolic order.[4]

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For Lacan, the infant experiences imaginary structures after birth and before language acquisition. Imaginary structures begin with lack of differentiation between the (not-yet-perceived-as-such) self and the world, and move through acoustic and visual differentiation. The symbolic order initiates the infant into language and social structures. The imaginary order is governed by the voice and image of the *mother*; the symbolic order—the name of the *father*. This narrative, left-to-right explanation is, however, a symbolic reconstruction. The binary categories of inclusion and exclusion of the imaginary order are paradoxically *distanced* and *fixed* by language in the symbolic order.[5]

I understand the role of language in subjectivity as the last among many stages in the splitting-off of the self from phenomenal experience. As we move away from immediate sensation and towards language, our subjectivity gradually comes into being, from birth, to the aural mirror stage (to be described below), to the visual mirror stage, the Oedipal crisis and triangulation of desire, to language and social structures.[6] Benveniste asserts that with access to language, we are able to say "I" and "you" and thus create ourselves as subjects, though shifting, temporary, and discourse-bound. I would like to suggest here that music can remind us of phases in our development when we crossed from imaginary to symbolic experience, and that the musical representation of such threshold-crossing produces listening subjects. In music's echo of presymbolic experience we hear into the spaces between symbolic convention and presymbolic sound; this is the listener's space.

In short, by musical listening subject, I mean that which is neither exclusively text, nor listener, nor culture, but a product of all three. Thus at times I say "listening subjects are produced" when agency is indirect and difficult to locate; at times I say "we construct ourselves as listening subjects" when an act of listening is crucial as psychological model or as immanent musical experience. Subjectivity in music, as elsewhere, is *intermittent* and is audible only for a moment as thresholds are crossed and enunciated.[7]

The Acoustic Mirror and Music

Recent psychoanalytic writings have developed a theory that sound and the voice play a crucial role in early development. Didier Anzieu, Guy Rosolato, Denis Vasse, and Michel Chion all discuss the perception of the mother's voice as a primal experience in which the child feels itself enclosed in an oceanic sense of union.[8] This body of French psychoanalytic theory is synthesized in Kaja Silverman's book *The Acoustic Mirror*: "it has become something of a commonplace to characterize the mater-

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nal voice as a blanket of sound, extending on all sides of the newborn infant" (72).

Guy Rosolato suggests a connection that this paper will exploit when he says, "The maternal voice helps to constitute for the infant the pleasurable milieu which surrounds, sustains, and cherishes him. . . . One could argue that it is the first model of auditory pleasure and that music finds its roots and its nostalgia in [this] original atmosphere, which might be called a sonorous womb, a murmuring house" (Rosolato "Entre corps et langage," 81).[9]

Neither Silverman nor I is suggesting that music *is* by definition a sonorous envelope. Silverman avoids such an essentialist approach to music by pointing out that the sonorous envelope is a *fantasy*. That is, all presymbolic experiences are retrospective reconstructions from within the symbolic order and have a certain function there—in social, cultural space. A recognition at this level is therefore necessarily a *misrecognition*, or what Lacan would call a *méconnaissance*. For Silverman, this relevant function is the engendering of subjects in classic cinema. The point in this study of Adams and Reich is to show *that* and *how* music can reflect the psychological events of the sonorous envelope and acoustic mirroring as moments in which we construct ourselves as listening subjects.

The Music of John Adams

The relationship between the sound of the maternal voice and the infant within the sonorous envelope is paradoxical. On the one hand, envelopment suggests undifferentiated, oceanic, expansive oneness; on the other hand, it suggests being contained, enclosed, and marked off. Thus, the sonorous envelope can be either a positive or a negative fantasy.[10] The fantasies of sonorous enclosure in Adams are neutral; in Reich, they are more negatively charged. See Example 1 for the initial measures of *Nixon in China*.

This music is marked by lack. There is no dialectical relationship between keys that propel, sustain, slow down, or speed up the music; there is no regular phrase structure, there is no binary opposition between foreground melody and accompaniment; there are no predictable, large-scale structural markers. "Dialectical relationships," "regular phrase structure," "binary opposition," "structural markers": these conventional phrases mark our listening posture within the symbolic order, and their omission, their effacement in the music at the outset of *Nixon in China*, provides an aural glimpse of the presymbolic. I'm *not* saying that the A minor scale is outside of culture; major and minor scales are culturally inscribed conventions that it took centuries for western culture

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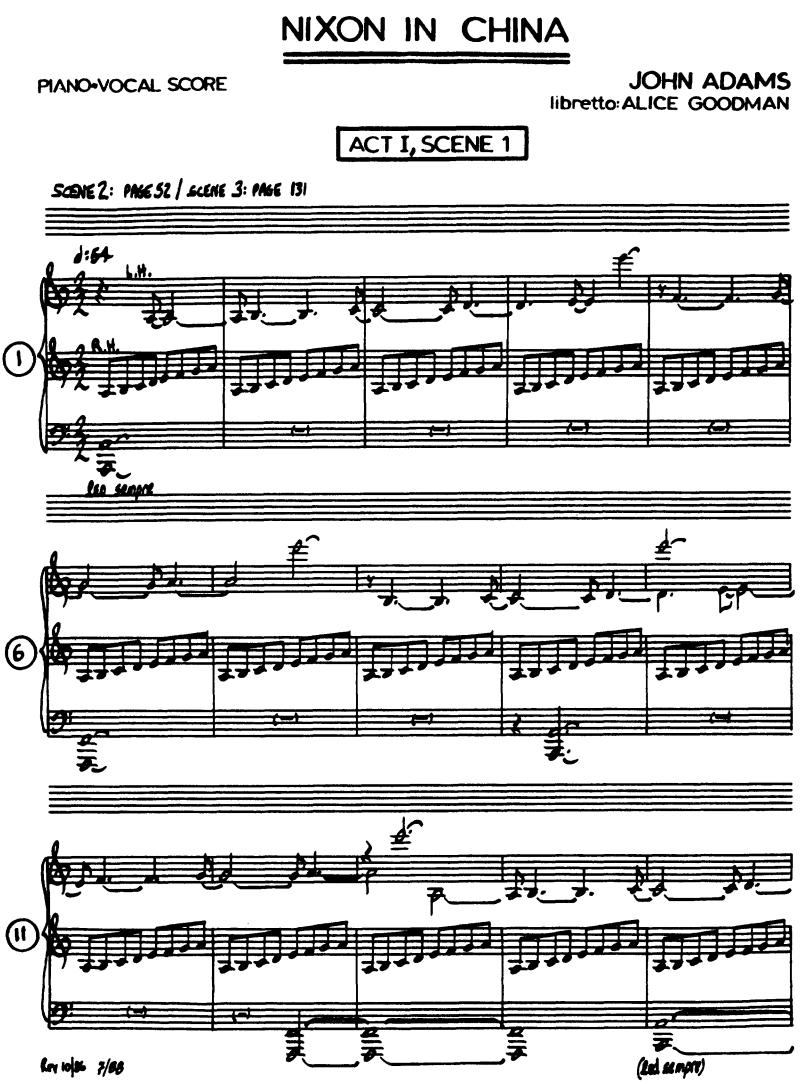

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EXAMPLE 1: JOHN ADAMS, *NIXON IN CHINA*, MM. 1–35

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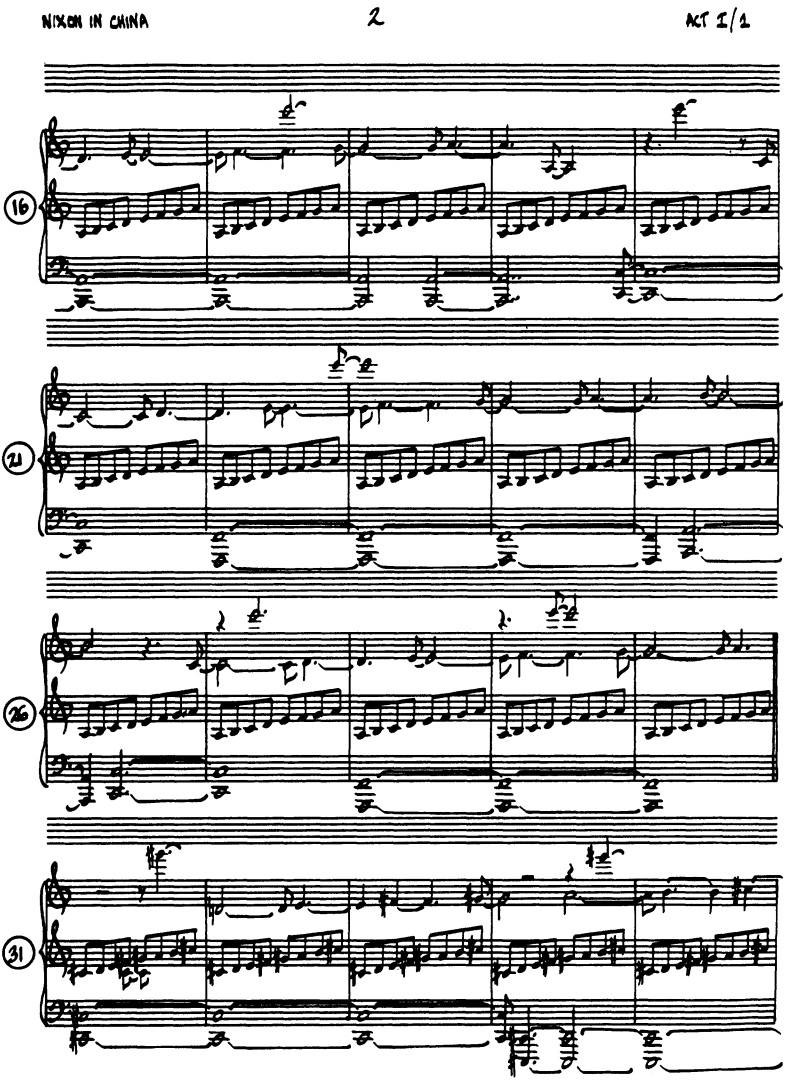

EXAMPLE 1: (CONT.)

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to develop. The saturation of the texture at the beginning of the opera with this scale, however, creates the illusion of pure basic material stripped of its structural significance.

The passage creates an illusion of the sonorous envelope through very repetitive and metrically regular fragments, on the one hand, and irregular entrances of sustained pitches, on the other. A predictable pattern of ascending A natural-minor scales fills each measure with eighth notes; and pitch classes A and F enter at irregular intervals in the bass, with E entering irregularly high above the texture. The augmentation of the A natural-minor scale notated on the middle staff mediates between the regular scale fragments in eighth notes and the irregular entrances mentioned above.

In psychoanalytic theory, the sonorous envelope precedes the mirror stage, with its binary oppositions set in motion by the child seeing itself reflected in the mother's face/mirror. Each splitting off of the self from the world brings the child closer to language, to socialization, and further away from the wholeness that the sonorous envelope represents. The first event that propels this series of splits opens the envelope and reveals messages inside—differentiation, language, and social conventions. The child's emergence from a sense of being bathed in the mother's voice is the acoustic mirror. Anzieu asserts that "[w]e would like to demonstrate the existence earlier still [than the mirror stage] of a sonorous mirror, or an acoustic-phonetic skin, and its function in the psychic apparatus of the acquisition of the capacity for signifying, and symbolizing" (162).[11]

As the acoustic mirror stage begins, the sense of being bathed in the sounds of the mother's voice is modified as the child imitates the sounds it hears and has the illusion of *producing* those sounds. According to Silverman: "since the child's economy is organized around incorporation, and since what is incorporated is the auditory field articulated by the maternal voice, the child could be said to hear itself initially through that voice—to first 'recognize' itself in the vocal 'mirror' supplied by the mother" (*Mirror* 80).

Anzieu maps out the acoustic mirror as several stages that occur between the child's initial sense of being bathed in the sounds of the mother's voice (the sonorous envelope) and clear imitation of her sounds (the acoustic mirror). For Anzieu, the basis of the acoustic mirror is vocal communication between the child and its mother. At birth, children can produce four different cries (described by Anzieu in terms of temporal duration, frequency, and acoustic signature)—hunger, anger, physical pain, and frustration. After the second week, the mother's voice stops a cry more effectively than any other sound. After the third week, the child develops the ability to emit a "false cry" to get attention. At five weeks, the child distinguishes the voice of the mother from other voices, while

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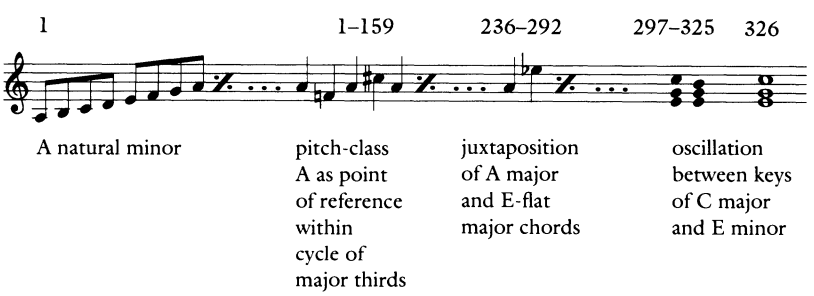
still not being able to distinguish visually among faces. Between three and six months, the child clearly plays with the sounds it emits, gradually moving closer to imitating the mother's voice (167–68).[12]

The acoustic mirror is thus an *aural* precursor of the *visual* mirror stage; the child both recognizes itself in, and hears itself separated by the sound of the mother's voice. Thus we can extend the point mentioned above in connection with Denis Vasse. The child is born, and the cutting of the umbilical cord severs the child from union with the body of the mother. The child yearns for identification with the mother and focuses on her voice, her smell, her image. The voice of the mother thus connects the child again to her, but this connection is predicated on a primal loss of physical connection. This suggests that our early acoustic experience involves a gender-specific ambivalence to sound, to the mother's voice, and by extension—to music. As a result of such an ambivalence, new music that evokes sonorous enclosure can produce a wide range of affective responses, as will be shown below.

There are moments in Adams's music at which the stability of the text shifts at the emergence of half-formed quotes—not so much of specific pieces, but more an appropriation of a pre-existing style.[13] One can see from Example 2 how conventional musical materials emerge during the initial 326 measures of the opera. At measure 297, the music sounds like the opening of *Das Rheingold* (see Examples 3 and 4). While Wagner prolongs an E-flat major chord diatonically, Adams projects C major across his two-dimensional tonal surface. Both Adams and Wagner superimpose an ascending arpeggiation of a major triad in dotted rhythm over a static arpeggiation of the same chord in the bass. Both set the stage as well for vocal entries in their respective operas.[14]



EXAMPLE 2: JOHN ADAMS, *NIXON IN CHINA*, OVERVIEW OF MM. 1–326

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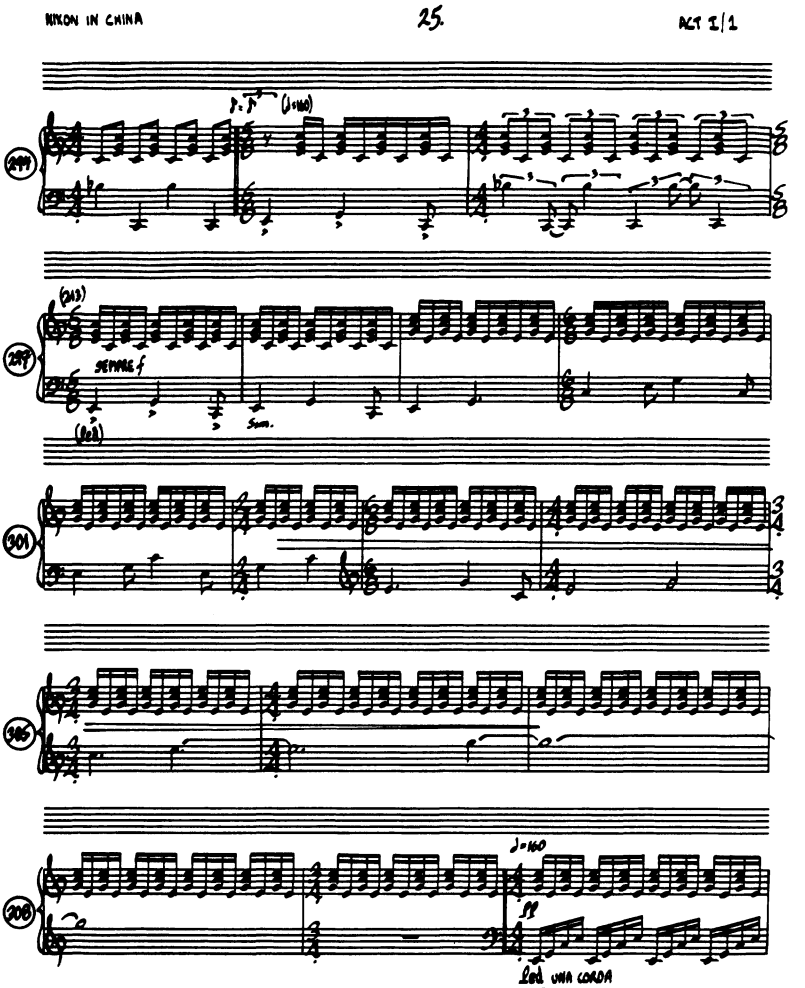

EXAMPLE 3: JOHN ADAMS, *NIXON IN CHINA*, MM. 297–310

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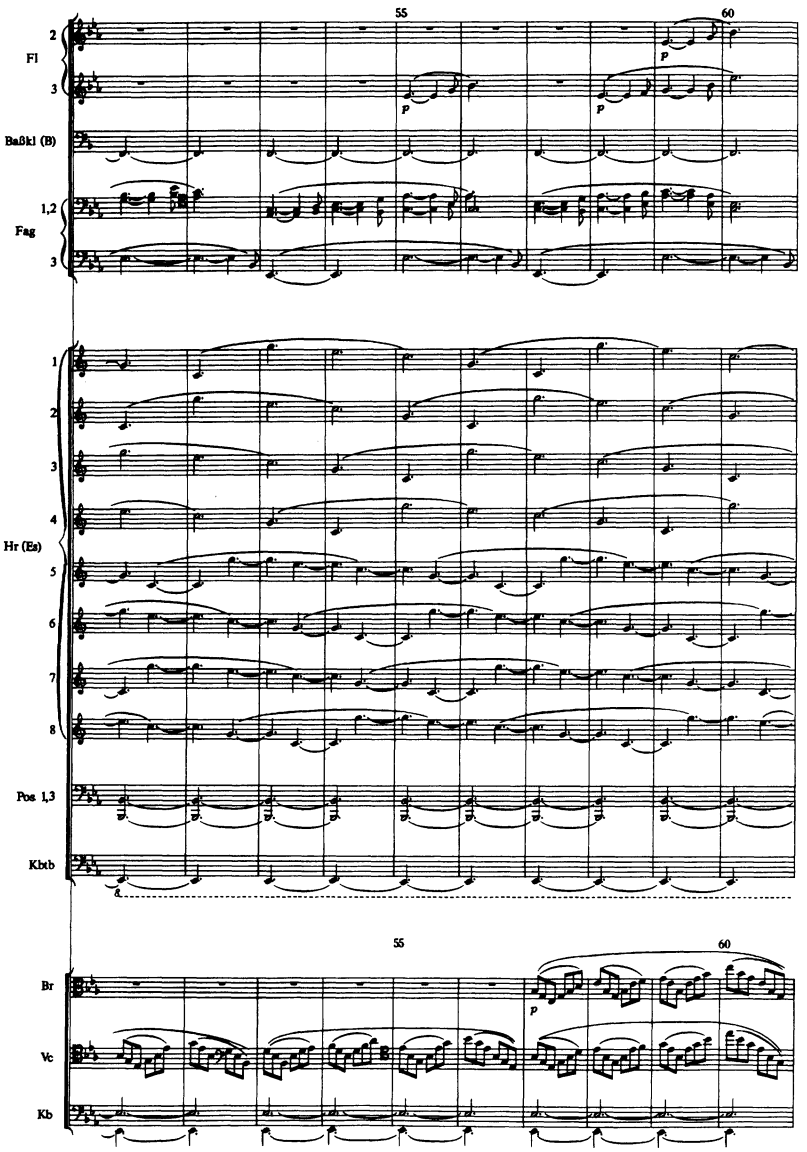

EXAMPLE 4: RICHARD WAGNER, *DAS RHEINGOLD*, MM. 51–60

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In *Nixon in China*, the oceanic, undifferentiated texture of the opening gets charged with musical conventions that gradually prefigure the "quote" from Wagner: the *pitch-class* A is a nonfunctional axis of the cycle of major thirds in the bass from measures 1–159; E♭ and A major *chords* are juxtaposed from measures 236–92; the oscillation between the keys of C major and E minor from measures 297–325 is a tip-of-the-hat to contemporary minimal music.

The moment of our recognition of this "quote" opens the space between John Adams the composer and us as listeners, and here we hear within an acoustic mirror. We have the illusion that our listening has created an element of musical structure as we hear the difference between being wrapped in the sonorous envelope of the initial measures of the piece and being split from it as the music becomes marked by convention. It is also as if we hear the music's origin at this Wagner quote—as if *The Ring* were bleeding into the score.

What really marks this moment of rupture as an acoustic mirror is the indirect way in which Adams quotes through texture and orchestration as much as harmony. If his music had involved real, clearly articulated quotations, then the binary opposition between text as monumental work and the listener would have remained intact. The quote would have functioned as a clear cross-reference between one work and another. But by having his stylistic pseudo-quotes emerge from the music, Adams's music reenacts a sonorous event in the structure of our subjectivity—showing social convention coming directly out of the sonorous envelope.

In addition to constructing a fantasy that enacts psychic events in the construction of the subject, on a larger scale, *Nixon in China* and the operas of Philip Glass refigure the function of opera, as well. Opera is by definition narrative; there is a diachronic unfolding of a plot and its musical representation. If the libretto tracks an epic journey of a hero, and if the music undercuts the linearity of such a narrative, then *Nixon in China* works according to a new concept of narrative. The musical representation of linearity in traditionally tonal opera can be described by the three-dimensional metaphor; the tonal structure of a piece links deep structures with surface manifestations in a synchronic system that unfolds diachronically to render the libretto. The musical representation of a cyclical form of narrative (such as John Adams's *Nixon in China*) can be described by the two-dimensional metaphor; tonal surfaces follow one another in patterns that are related to one another, but without motivic cross-references or a unified deep, musical structure. John Adams's harmonic language is two-dimensional.

Theorists have been interested in music and/as narrative for several years.[15] In her recent book *Unsung Voices*, Carolyn Abbate argues against a general theory of narrative, claiming instead moments of narration in

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music, voices that speak across ruptures in the musical text. Her critique of music as narrative is based on an attack against applications of the linguistic metaphor to music.[16] In *Alice Doesn't*, Teresa de Lauretis works through and goes beyond linguistic metaphors for narrative. Beneath the left-to-right diachronic model of "plot narration" de Lauretis finds a structure that (*a*) involves entry into and emergence from an enclosed space, and (*b*) is an essential underpinning of mythic plot narrative (136–40). De Lauretis's model is essentially marked by a concern with the engendering of western subjects. In a nutshell, the mobile figure of the male, mythic hero, moves against and is propelled forward by stationary female figures such as the Sphinx and her riddle. Thus the "enclosed space" is the static and enigmatic female position; the "entry" and "exit" from the space—the moving and clarifying mythic male subject (*Alice Doesn't*, chapter 5). In its two-dimensional pastiche of tonal materials, *Nixon in China* disrupts the diachronic story of a modern hero, and Adams thus implicitly demystifies the structures that produce western, male subjects.

In Adams's *Fearful Symmetries* (1988) there are intermittent quotes within a pastiche of styles, procedures, and textures. Example 5 shows a parallel progression in Adams that echoes a passage from Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* (see Example 6). In Adams, the first-inversion major chords ascend in semitones within a G-to-G octave as shown in the example. In Berlioz, the chords ascend in semitones within a C-to-C octave, with first-inversion chords beginning in measure 472. Adams echoes Berlioz's texture as well. After the first five chords in Berlioz and the first four chords in Adams, the harmonic rhythm quickens, as shown in the examples by the large arrows. Both passages use syncopation: the progression in Berlioz ascends *on* the beat with accented *second* beats from measures 477–84. In Adams, the progression sounds disjointed, with the syncopated bass "supporting" chords on the beat.

Harmony works differently in the passages. Berlioz's progression sets up a large dominant prolongation of C that resolves in measure 493—not shown in the example. Adams's appropriation of Berlioz leads to a tone cluster in which B♭, A♭, and G♭ are superimposed on the B–F tritone in the bass. The Berlioz resolves to C; the Adams is emptied of tension with an oscillation between E♭ and A in the bass—not included in the example.

The above-mentioned "quote" from Berlioz is a musical representation of acoustic mirroring. How can such a highly *symbolic* musical reference represent a *presymbolic* acoustic mirror? In two ways. First, there is a distinction between a left-to-right psychoanalytic theory of general, western subjectivity tracking the subject from birth to language acquisition on the one hand, and works of art, literature, film, or music that *represent*

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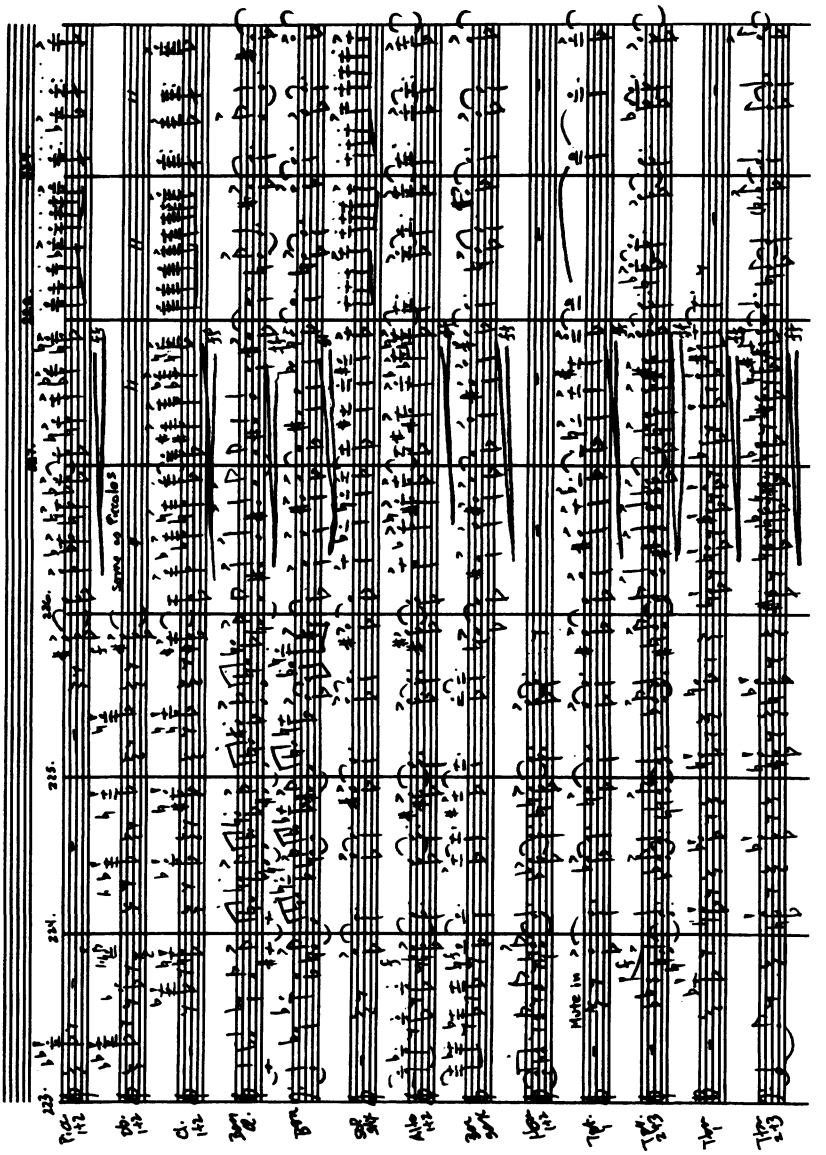

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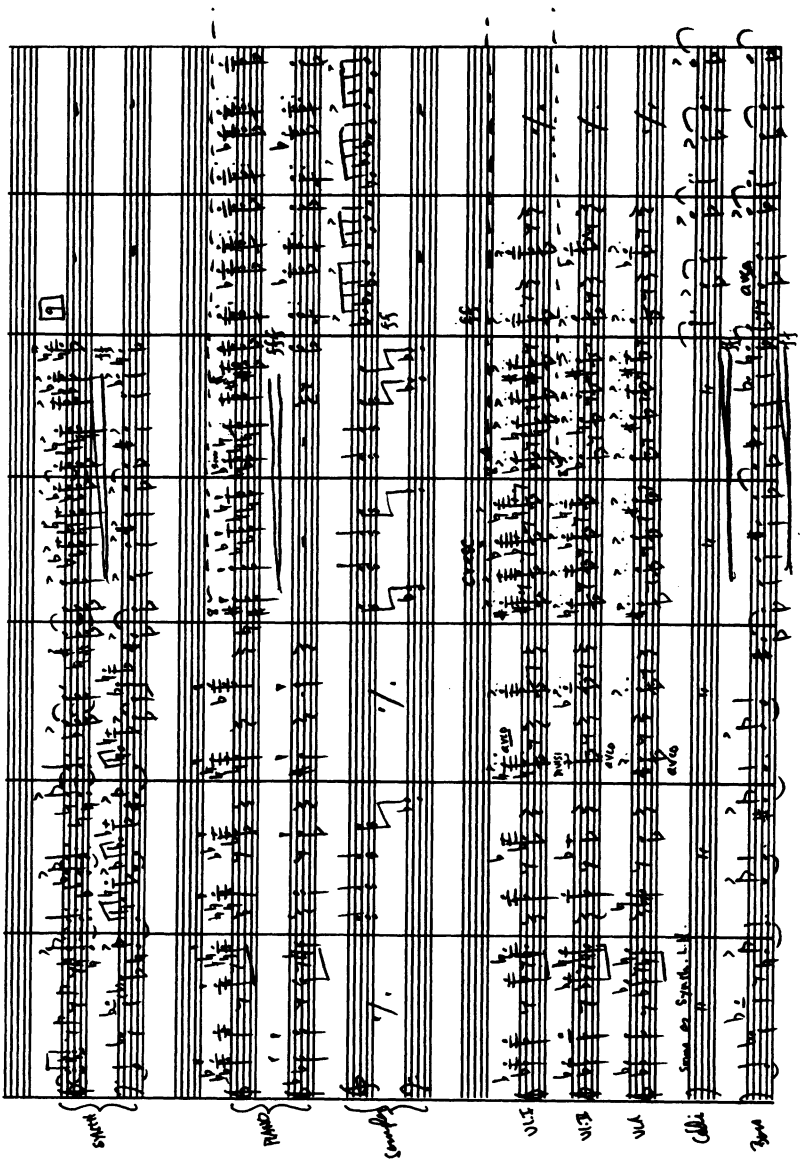

EXAMPLE 5: JOHN ADAMS, *FEARFUL SYMMETRIES*, MM. 223–29

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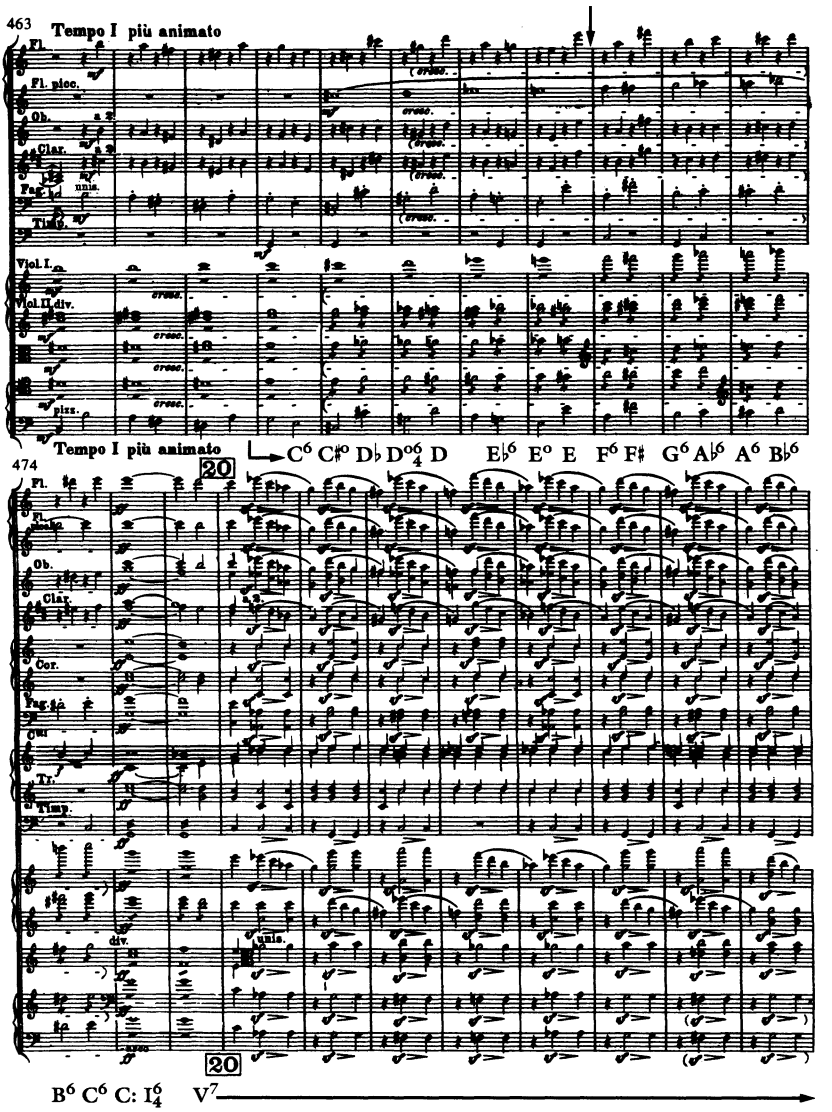

EXAMPLE 6: BERLIOZ, *SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE*, MM. 463–84

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or reenact such events on the other. All aspects of western art music are highly symbolic, and there is a gap between the experience of the presymbolic and music's highly conventional structure. Yet sound is common to both our psychoanalytic model and music, and it is precisely through such highly conventional signs that music can point back to the presymbolic, effacing itself, if only for a moment in certain ways, in certain pieces.

Secondly, in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva's notion of the thetic phase suggests how the presymbolic and the symbolic bleed into one another. She calls the prelinguistic, maternal phase the *semiotic*; the linguistic, paternal phase, the *symbolic*. That which articulates a move from the semiotic to the symbolic, she calls the *thetic*: "we view the thetic phase—the positing of the *imago*, castration, and the positing of semiotic motility as the place of the Other, as the precondition for signification, i.e., the precondition for the positing of language. The thetic phase marks a threshold between two heterogeneous realms: the semiotic and the symbolic" (102). This passage claims that the relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic is one of a mutually exclusive binary opposition. And yet Kristeva also says that there must be a dynamic within the semiotic that enables the thetic to take place: "the thetic originates in the 'mirror stage' and is completed, through the phallic stage, by the reactivation of the Oedipus complex" (113). In short, the thetic can shift back into the semiotic, and Kristeva makes clear a necessary link between the mirror stage and language: "the mirror stage produces the 'spatial intuition' which is found at the heart of the functioning of signification" (100). Rosolato also argues that the child's hearing and responding to the mother's voice is a key phase that sets the stage for more complex and later developments: "it [the mother's voice] carries, in effect, the first *introjections* [emphasis Rosolato's] preparatory to identification" ("Entre corps et langage," 80).[17]

Thus, what makes the Berlioz "quote" a representation of the acoustic mirror is not a matter of whether the music is more or less conventional, since every notation in the score is a mark of the symbolic order; rather, the acoustic mirror is a specific effect of musical representations of such conventions on a listener. Anzieu and Rosolato have shown that in its various phases, the acoustic mirror involves a split from the sense of union with the mother's voice, resulting in a sense that the child produces her sounds, leading to an attempt to imitate such sounds. The source of sound production thus shifts from mother to child, and the child moves from a listener to a producer of sounds. And the acoustic mirror tracks the stages that occur as reception of sound (the child "listening" within the sonorous envelope) yields to production of sound (the child imitating the mother's voice). A similar effect is produced in

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Fearful Symmetries with the Berlioz quote at once bleeding into the sounds of Adams's music and emerging out of our memories of having heard the *Symphonie fantastique*.

In *Grand Pianola Music*, the third movement is an example of a texture of sonorous enclosure opening into a conventional passage of acoustic mirroring that is a veiled reference to the pianistic passagework of the classical piano concerto (see Example 7). For sixty measures, Adams projects an E♭ major/minor seventh chord across the surface of the music. The texture superimposes eighth notes in two pianos with held notes in the brass and winds that alternate entrances, rests, and accents at irregular metric intervals. The nonfunctional nature of the chord is emphasized by the seventh moving up stepwise to E♭ in the first trombone part. This stepwise motion sounds jazzy with the trombone's glissando from D♭ to E♭, as seen in the example.

Dynamics produce an illusion of forward motion; the music gets gradually louder until measure 60. At measure 61, the music "resolves" in a flourish of arpeggiated A♭ major chords reminiscent of classical, pianistic passagework. The conventionality of the A♭ major flourish emerges from, and is made possible by, a condition of the oceanic, static texture of E♭ major; the eighth notes in the piano are first merged with, and then *split from*, the held notes in the winds and brass. Example 7 shows measures 54–65 of the full score.

All of these quintessentially postmodern "quotes" (from *Das Rheingold* in *Nixon in China*, from the *Symphonie fantastique* in *Fearful Symmetries*, from the style of the classical piano concerto in *Grand Pianola Music*) are bits of filler, marked with just a little bit of compositional presence. Adams's appropriation/(re)composition of such marginal passages opens his music and shifts the name of the composer from Wagner, Berlioz, and "Beethoven," to Adams, to us.

The Music of Steve Reich

Different Trains (1988) by Steve Reich establishes the illusion of the sonorous envelope through a texture that suggests both an internal, oceanic immersion in repetitive fragments of sound, ***and*** an obsessive, external, and iconic representation of trains. While the texture of Adams's music involves moments of sounding like previous styles from the canon, Reich explores the relationship between sound and language. First, intervallic structures in the accompaniment determine the intervallic structure of the language of the taped speech that is a part of the composition.[18] In the first movement, a minor third in the strings is taken over by the voice for the phrase "from Chicago" (0:35–0:40). This technique

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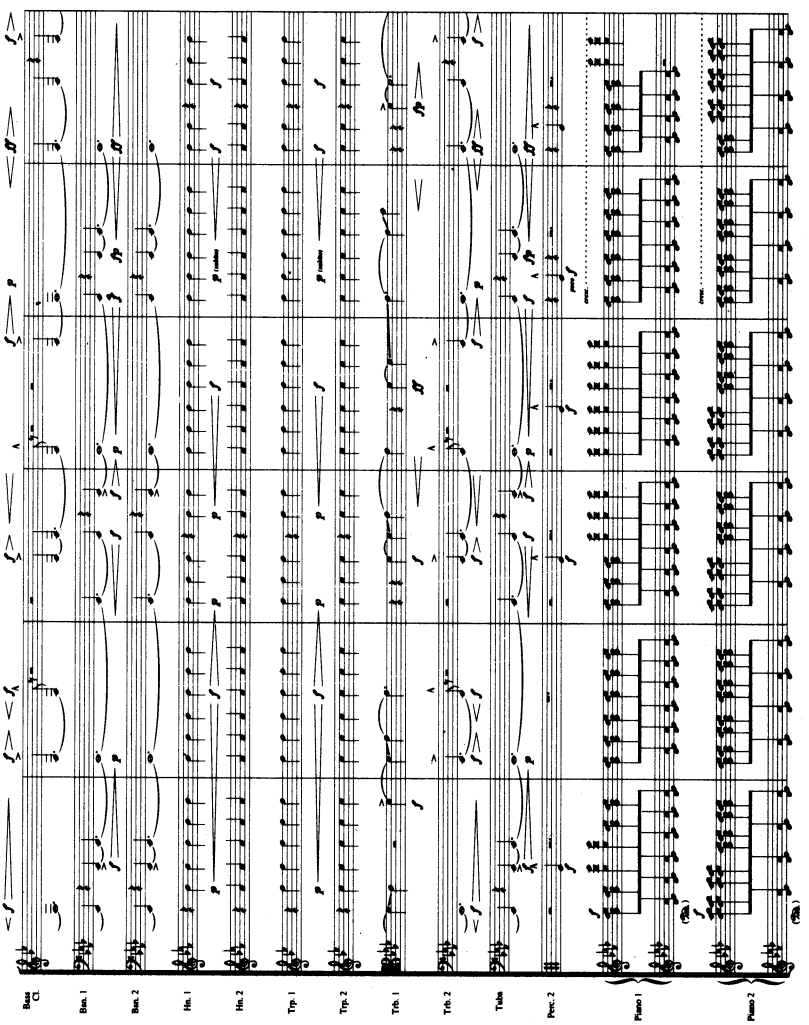

EXAMPLE 7: JOHN ADAMS, *GRAND PIANOLA MUSIC*, MM. 54–65

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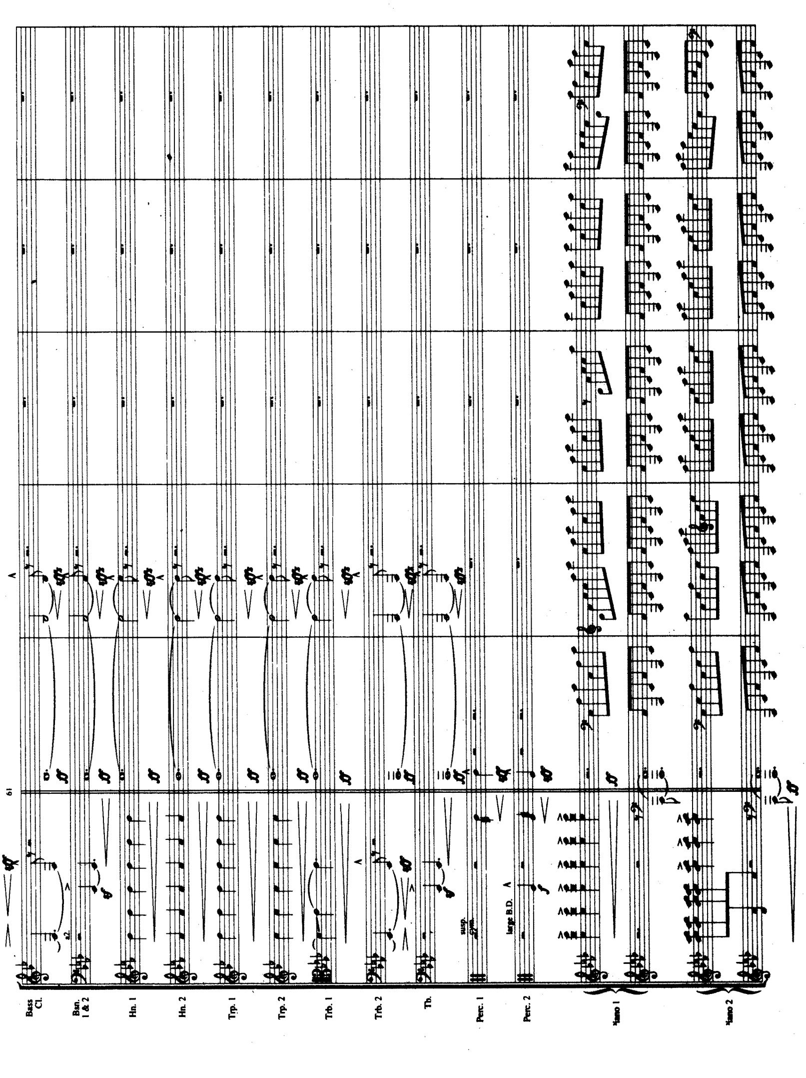

EXAMPLE 7: (CONT.)

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captures in miniature the way we first hear language as pure sound, then as words, phrases, and sentences with meaning.

Once speech has been introduced into the piece, it is effaced in two ways. First, speech sounds like pure syntax through repetition.[19] In this music, repetition as meaning-stripper creates the illusion of hearing the pure sound of the maternal voice before we were speakers of her language.[20] In the first movement, the phrase "one of the fastest trains" is repeated twenty-one times (1:23–2:37). The meaning-stripping function of repetition is enhanced in this passage through an intermittent additional repetition of the tag phrase "fastest trains." And as an instrument's minor third had prefigured the phrase "from Chicago," so, too, the viola imitates the intervallic structure of the voice throughout the passage.

Second, the voice is often distorted. The piece opens with clearly articulated speech and *moves to* distorted speech. This is a representation of a regression in sound back through the acoustic mirror phase. In the second part, entitled "During the War," the phrases "lots of cattle wagons there" (4:49–5:17) and "they were loaded with people" (5:18–5:40) are barely comprehensible.

In "La Voix," Rosolato discusses noise and the cry as features of the child's preverbal voice: "[I]t [noise] exists as a unique illustration of the voice before the Word in which man strips himself of words" (292).[21]

I hear two temporal structures in *Different Trains.* On the one hand, the piece is a monument to the survivors of the Holocaust; it tells a story of their trauma in the "before," "during," and "after," left-to-right structure that the movement titles suggest. On the other hand, the piece represents a regressive fantasy back to the presymbolic through the meaning-stripping function of repetition, and distortion of the voices. Another feature of the music reinforces this regressive element. In the first movement motives in the accompaniment precede the melodies in the voices; in the second movement, the motives in the accompaniment and voice sound *simultaneously* to suggest language reaching back to its origins of pure sound.

It's Gonna Rain and *Come Out*

Reich's early pieces *It's Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966) use repetition obsessively to strip meaning just as it is about to take shape.[22] *It's Gonna Rain* is in two Parts. Part I begins with a thirteen-second taped passage from a street preacher's sermon. After a one-second pause, two tracks of the phrase "it's gonna rain" go out of phase with one another. As the tracks move out of phase, the language sounds as if it

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were being ripped apart, with consonants torn from vowels through the violence of phase motion.

From 0:14 to 2:00, words and syllables also fade in and out. This gives sound a spatial impression—as if sounds were moving close (fading in) and receding (fading out). Fading dislodges the stillness of the listener. It is as if we must brace ourselves against approaching sounds, and "let up" as sounds move away, or we seem to push sounds away at some moments and call them up at others.

In his essay "The Uncanny" from 1919, Freud refers to literary representations of the odd, the horrifying, the fanciful as images of a state of mind in which what was once familiar becomes unfamiliar; this is the essential dynamic of the uncanny. Freud discusses the uncanny (*Unheimlich*) *not* in terms of a binary opposition between the comfortable, familiar world "inside" (the mind, the home, society, and so on) and a threatening, external, evil force. Rather, the uncanny seems to emerge *out of what had been familiar.* Freud discovers this dynamic within the etymology of the word *heimlich* (familiar, in German). Freud realized that the word first meant "familiar" "trusted" and slowly acquired additional connotations of "secret" "hidden."

Reich's fading imperatives are uncanny since we first hear "go" as a syllable of the word "gonna"; then we realize that it acquires a new meaning when severed from the other syllable. I find the fading in and out of the syllable "go" particularly haunting, as if a sound within a taped voice found a hidden voice of its own and turned a fragmented syllable into an fully meaningful imperative verb: "go!" A highly charged moment of listening subjectivity is created as the music seems to point directly to the mute listener. More important than the verb form "go" is the understood subject: "you."

With the imperative "go," Reich produces what I would like to call an *acoustic gaze.*[23] Silverman says "unlike the gaze, the look foregrounds the desiring subjectivity of the figure from whom it issues" (*Male Subjectivity* 142–43). The look is concrete; it has a source, a direction, a goal. The gaze is more diffuse, more symbolic; the gaze often suggests both a person who is looking *and* a sense that that person is being looked *at*, often by an inanimate object that represents the look of another. In *Looking Awry*, Zizek provides a clear example of the gaze in *Psycho.* As Lilah walks towards the house in which Norman's mother lives, the camera is focused on the *house* as if *it* were looking at *her*: "Let us return to the scene from *Psycho* in which Lilah approaches the house where 'Norman's mother' presumably lives. In what does its 'uncanny' dimension consist? Could we not best describe the effect of this scene by paraphrasing the words of Lacan: in a way *it is already the house that gazes at Lilah* [emphasis Zizek]. Lilah sees the house, but nonetheless she cannot see it at the

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point from which it gazes back as her" (118). Reich's acoustic gaze works to undermine the relationship between us as listeners and the *music* as that to which we are listening. As the house gazes back at Lilah in *Psycho*, so, too, the imperative "go" acoustically "gazes" at us in *Its Gonna Rain*.

From 2:01 to 7:44, several tracks go out of and move back into phase in one gesture. Here the phase process is audibly prefigured in the "unison" phrase with which the music begins: "it's gonna rain" (2:01...). The phrase "it's gonna" sounds doubled at the octave, while "rain" sounds like one voice. This shift in register has an uncanny effect on the listener—as if the voice were closing in on us. In *La Voix au cinéma*, Michel Chion discusses how in film, the viewer/listener tends to identify with voices that are recorded with no echo, or reverberation so that they sound close and intimate. Voices that echo, that reverberate within a space beyond the listener tend to sound more removed and less aimed at the listener.[24]

Part I of *It's Gonna Rain* ends abruptly with a line of taped, spoken speech that extends the text by one phrase: "it's gonna rain after awhile." The piece is contained within the musical equivalent of a frame—the one-second pause of silence between 0:13 and 0:14 that sets off the thirteen seconds of taped speech from the rest of the piece, and the return to taped speech at the end with the phrase "it's gonna rain after awhile." The frame articulates the piece as a symbolic fantasy.[25]

Part II begins with an extended passage of taped speech—0:00–0:40. The rest of the section fragments and superimposes words and phrases from this excerpt focusing on: "open the door," "God," "sure enough," and "Hallelujah." I hear this section not as a fantasy of negative regression (as in Part I), but as a nightmarish fantasy of the external, symbolic world as its voices flood in and overwhelm the ear.

It's Gonna Rain is about the horror that can reside underneath the symbolic order. Through the heavily mediated and conventional techniques of tape recording, splicing, and phase motion, Reich produces a nightmare of sonorous entrapment by having language split into its vowels and consonants. The vowels sound like inhuman cries; the consonants, like noises heard from within the body.[26]

In *Come Out*, Reich is overtly political. The liner notes describe a black who was beaten by police in the Harlem riots of 1964. In order to get medical attention, the youth had to squeeze his wounds to show blood. Accordingly, the piece begins with a taped voice saying "I had to like open the bruise up and let some of the bruise blood come out to show them" (0:00–0:05). After a two-second silence (0:05–0:07), the passage is repeated (0:07–0:12); after another two second silence (0:12–0:14), the passage is repeated again (0:14–0:19). For the rest of the piece, the

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listener moves into the spoken voice, through the repetition and phase manipulation of shorter and shorter phrases and words from the text with which the piece began: "come out to show them," "to show them," "come out." As in *It's Gonna Rain*, the repetition of "come out" sounds like a direct address to the listener, an imperative.

A quite different effect of acoustic mirroring is represented in Reich's phase music. *Violin Phase* and *Piano Phase* (both from 1967) involve a performer who plays first in unison, then moves out of phase with, a taped recording. As the violinist moves out of phase with the tape in *Violin Phase*, a space opens in which the listener hears first an acoustic tugging, followed by echo effect, followed by clear out-of-phase voices. Psychoanalytically, this series of moments (roughly 0:00–1:50) renders how the fantasy of sonorous enclosure can only be heard in retrospect. That is, only after hearing voices split away from one another can we imagine their having once sounded together.

After the above-mentioned splits and before the end, the fantasy of sonorous envelope consists both in the listener's hearing intertwined and indistinguishable "voices" ***and*** the fact that we know that one is stationary (as if deaf), the other mobile and listening. Listening subjectivity is produced as the listener joins the configuration; he/she is stationary, like the taped voice, but while the tape is deaf (it can only speak), the listener is mute (we can only listen).

An earlier footnote referred to the necessary link between the myths of Narcissus and Echo as a parallel to the acoustic and visual mirror stages. What happens to Echo in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* reflects Reich's phase music. In Ovid, Echo first has the power to stall the goddess Juno on her search for Jove due to the loquacity of her speech; Juno then punishes Echo by limiting what she says to verbatim repetition of what she hears. Echo is placed into and trapped within an acoustic mirror to match the visual mirror of Narcissus. The role of gender and voice in the developing subject is also reflected in this archetypal story; Echo is female; Narcissus is male. See "The Story of Echo and Narcissus" in the *Metamorphoses*, lines 338–99.

The unison between soloist and tape at the beginning of each of these pieces presents the listener with a fantasy of sonorous oneness; as the soloist and tape diverge, we hear a clear acoustic mirror as one voice literally echoes another. This initial unison-followed-by-divergence is heard as if from the listener's position from within the imaginary order with its binary categories of listener, on the one hand, and immediate perception of sound, on the other. As the pieces end, however, we hear not a symbolic inscription of the imaginary into social space; rather, the fantasy simply reverses itself.[27]

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Concluding Remarks

I hope to have suggested a way in which the fantasy of the sonorous envelope and its rupture in acoustic mirroring can illuminate the formation of the listening subject in music, and I hope to have shown how these structures work differently in the musical styles of John Adams and Steve Reich. In general terms, the construction of the subject follows a course of divisions between the self and the world of phenomenal experience through the phases of birth, the sonorous envelope, the acoustic mirror stage, the visual mirror stage, the Oedipal crisis, and the entry into the symbolic order. Each division both distances the subject from phenomenal experience *and* empowers the subject to master such distance through access to language. As we move from one of these realms to another we never lose what has gone before, and in our symbolic world of socialized structures traces of the imaginary order and preimaginary (dis)order remain.

On the broadest level, I propose a common ground between the sonorous structure of the subject in its early stages of development and music. More specifically, the new minimal style of recent postmodern music invites an intimate exploration of psychic and musical structures. What remains to be explored is more explicitly external ideology—links between psychic and musical structures, on the one hand, and culture, on the other. One might ask, for example, whether *Nixon in China* can, in its monumental power and beauty of orchestration, be a critical vehicle, or whether the music is complicit with the glorification of the global politics of America.

This is a crucial issue for postmodern art in general, for it often seems complicit with structures of dominance in the process of gaining distance from them; *Nixon in China* participates in this structure of resistance and complicity.[28] In his other, less overtly political pieces, however, John Adams's musical representation of the sonorous envelope and acoustic mirror is charged with an untroubled, positive affect. The music of Steve Reich, on the other hand, explores and represents more directly the horror within the human voice and early phases of developing subjectivity.[29]

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Notes

1. An earlier draft of this paper was delivered at the 1991 Society for Music Theory meeting in Cincinnati. I am grateful for the comments of Patrick McCreless, John Rahn, and Robert Hatten following the presentation. I would also like to thank Dennis Foster for constructive criticism on the psychoanalytic paradigm of the argument.

2. I use "imagery" and "symbolic" as Lacanian terms. For an overview of Lacan's theories, see Chapter 4 of Kaja Silverman's *The Subject of Semiotics* and Fredric Jameson's "The Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan" in *Ideologies of Theory* vol. 1.

3. I seek adjacency with such works as Lawrence Kramer's *Music as Cultural Practice*, in which Kramer reads musical and literary texts as expressions of psychic and ideological structures. Recent studies on subjectivity and music include Anahid Kassabian's work on film music in classic cinema and Kofi Agawu's *Playing with Signs*—an adaptation of semiotic theory to eighteenth-century music. My interest in critical theory and voice bears the indirect influence of Abbate's *Unsung Voices.*

4. See "Subjectivity in Language" in Benveniste's *Problems in General Linguistics* and *The Subject of Semiotics*, 43–44.

5. The (visual) mirror stage and its significance in development are central to Lacan; see "The Mirror Stage" (in *Écrits*). Considerations of sound are marginal in his work. More recent French psychoanalytic writings have developed and extended Lacan's theories to include a prominent role for sound and the voice in human development. For a discussion of the role of the mother's voice in the acoustic mirror, see Didier Anzieu's "L'Enveloppe sonore du soi" and Guy Rosolato's "La Voix: entre corps et langage."

   The position of the visual analogy in Lacan and film theory is discussed in Charles F. Altman's article "Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Imaginary Discourse." Altman argues that Lacanian psychoanalysis privileges visual experience at the expense of aural experience. He points out that the paradigmatic version of the mirror stage in literature is the myth of Narcissus. What happens to Narcissus is intimately connected, he argues, with Echo: "Even the Greeks . . . knew that the story of Narcissus is incomplete without that of Echo: the audio mirror completes the video mirror" (270). As will be discussed briefly below, it's actually the other way around in Ovid. Echo

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undergoes a series of reductions in the power of her voice before she falls in love with, and is thwarted by, Narcissus.

6. What I mean by "phenomenal experience" is what we think of anecdotally as "reality"; it is the reality that Freud refers to in his writings when he is not talking about *representations* of reality; it is everything that is outside the self. Lacan's notion of the Real is very different. According to Zizek, "[i]n the Lacanian notion of the real, the hard kernel that resists symbolization coincides with its opposite, the so-called 'inner' or 'psychic' reality" (Zizek "Grimaces of the Real," 60). Lacan's Real is perhaps so counterintuitive because it is everything that has not-yet/never-will-be marked by the imprint of our imaginary and symbolic experience.

7. In *The Acoustic Mirror*, Silverman also discusses subjectivity as transitory. She discusses "projection" and "introjection" as two simultaneous aspects of the viewer's gaze: sending-out (projection), and pulling-back information from the text in the opposite direction (introjection) (23). In introjection, "representations are taken into the self, and provide the basis for a *momentary subjectivity* [emphasis mine]—a spectator's previous structuration" (23).

8. See Anzieu, "L'Enveloppe sonore du soi," 161–62; Rosolato "Entre corps et langage," 81, "La Voix," 292; Vasse, "L'Ombilic et la voix," 1–23; Chion, *La Voix au cinéma*, 25–26 and 47–50.

9. This is Silverman's translation. The original French version of this passage: "Si la voix maternelle contribue à constituer pour l'enfant le milieu agréable qui l'entoure, le sustente et le choie, elle peut, inversement, en cas de refus massif ne devenir que pénétration agressive et térébrante contre laquelle il n'a guère de protection à déployer. On peut avancer qu'elle est le premier modèle d'un plaisir auditif et que la musique trouve ses racines et sa nostalgie dans une atmosphère originelle—à nommer comme matrice sonore, maison bruissante" (81). Silverman omits that part of the French that opens the possibility for the sonorous envelope to be experienced negatively—as a structure of terror and entrapment. Michel Chion's theory of the voice in cinema is based on this negative aspect of the mother's voice. Esther Bick's work shows clearly how a child's identification with the smell, the voice, the image of the mother can lead to pathological development in the case of severe neglect; see "The Experience of the Skin in Early Object-Relations."

My thanks to Prof. Philip Solomon of the Foreign Language Department at Southern Methodist University for assistance in the French–English translations in this paper.

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10. The potential for the sonorous envelope to produce a negative fantasy in Rosolato and Chion is reinforced by the work of Denis Vasse. Vasse argues that as the child is severed from the umbilical cord, he/she experiences the first in a long series of splits from phenomenal experience. Vasse argues that the role of the primal identification with the voice of the mother is to attempt to create a bond across that severed connection. Thus for Vasse, there is always a paradoxical sense of union with, and distance from, the voice of the mother (Vasse 17–18, Chion 57–58).

11. The French: "Nous voudrions mettre en évidence l'existence, plus précoce encore, d'un miroir sonore, ou d'une peau auditivo-phonique, et sa fonction dans l'acquisition par l'appareil psychique de la capacité de signifier, puis de symboliser" (162). Esther Bick takes the metaphor of sound as skin quite literally in her work: "The need for a containing object would seem, in the infantile unintegrated state, to produce a frantic search for an object—a light, a voice, a smell, or other sensual object. . . . Material will show how this containing object is experienced concretely as a skin" (484).

12. Azieu points out that there is disagreement on one aspect of the acoustic mirror—whether the child first makes as many different sounds as possible, followed by a narrowing down to match those of the mother, or whether the child seeks to imitate the sounds of the mother from the outset of the acoustic mirror and imitation takes time to perfect (168).

13. I use terms such as "quotes," "pseudo-quotes," half-quotes," "references," to suggest what I consider to be a unique aspect of Adams's music. Much of Adams's music depends on evoking a style from the standard repertoire, or even moments from specific pieces. It is a particularly postmodern kind of quoting in which the available materials of past works and styles themselves become the basic materials of composition. Another piece of postmodern music in which radical quoting *is* the musical materials of the piece is George Rochberg's *Caprice Variations for Solo Violin.* A similar example in postmodern literature is the dense, saturation quoting of the German playwright Heiner Müller.

14. My thanks to Patrick McCreless for pointing out that the Wagner quote at the outset of *Nixon in China* is more resonant still. McCreless suggests that Wagner was interested in beginning *The Ring* with a musical evocation of the root-syllable of nature. Thus these pieces share a concern with sound as origin of consciousness: for Wagner, the root-syllable is the source of meaning in the human body. See

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Richard Wagner, *Opera as Drama* Part III, Chapter 2: "The Sounding Vowel of Speech and its Rise to Musical Tone."

15. For a unique view of how music can render narrative structures, see Patrick McCreless's article "Barthes' *S/Z* from a Musical Point of View."

16. Nattiez is in accord with Abbate in his earlier French version of *Music and Discourse.* Nattiez proposes a three-tiered structure of musical perception. Despite the appearance of similarities between his interest in the listener and the present discussion, Nattiez assumes a clear conceptual autonomy among the three aspects of music under discussion, including the so-called "neutral level" of analysis. A theory of listening subjectivity denies that such a closed-off and self-contained entity is conceivable without the complicity of listening practices.

17. The French: "Elle [la voix maternelle] porte, en effet, les premières *introjections* préparatoires aux identifications."

18. Citations from Reich's music will be in minutes and seconds read from a compact-disc player.

19. By pure syntax, I mean a nonlinguistic sonorous structure. My sense of this structure as a pure syntax may seem counterintuitive; syntax is a feature of grammar, of highly symbolic signs that must be inscribed within the symbolic order. My use of the phrase "pure syntax" is meant to echo Kristeva's semiotic phase.

20. Although repetition must work differently in music, art, and literature, it can do many different things: (1) While one image can be absorbed or imprinted on the mind (imagine a painting of one Ballantine beer can) a repetition of the same image says to the viewer: "you are looking at looking"; This is the effect of Jasper Johns's *Painted Bronze Cans.* Hearing hearing is the effect of listening to the second, altered version of John Cage's "A Room." The first version is for piano; the second, for altered piano with objects placed on and around the piano strings to alter the instrument's sounds. (2) Repetition can also emphasize an idea, as in "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME" from *The Waste Land.* (3) It can create a cross-reference, as in the use of the song "The End" by the Doors at the beginning and end of the film *Apocalypse Now.* Berg's large-scale cross-reference between the music associated with Dr. Schön and Jack the Ripper in *Lulu* between the first and third acts is one example from music. (4) Repetition can also strip away meaning to create a fantasy of the pre-symbolic, as in much of Steve Reich's music to be discussed above.

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(5) Repetition can render a sense of stasis, as in the repetition of lines, groups of lines, and acts, in *Waiting for Godot.* And (6) repetition can emphasize that a representation is an attempt to reconstruct or imagine a traumatic event, at once signalling a desire on the artist's part to identify with a person, experience, and an acknowledgment on the part of the artist that symbolic reconstructions never bridge the gap entirely between experience and its representation. One aspect of Steve Reich's *Different Trains* involves such repetition as desire for/acknowledgment of the limitations of an identification with the survivors of the Holocaust. See as well the repetition of the phrase "before black water entered her lungs and she died" from Joyce Carol Oates's *Black Water.* Also, see the saturation repetition of images that reconstruct the fatal shooting of a Dallas policeman in Morris's film *The Thin Blue Line.*

21. The French: "[I]l [l'éclat] existe comme une singulière illustration de cette Voix d'avant la Parole, où l'homme se dépouille des mots." It should be pointed out that the French word *éclat* covers a semantic field far beyond any single word in English; its meanings include—noise, cry, burst of sound. *Parole* with a capital "p" suggests both the spoken word, and the word of God. In the passage at hand, Rosolato subtly compares *Parole* and the prelinguistic voice of the child (*Voix* with a capital "v"). The word *mots* (written words) refers to the language of the symbolic order.

22. My thanks to Dave Headlam for pointing these pieces out to me and for suggesting the possibilities for applying psychoanalytic concepts to their structures and techniques.

23. For a clear argument about the difference between a "look" and a "gaze," see Silverman's book *Male Subjectivity on the Margins*, "Introduction" and chapter 3.

24. In the third chapter of *La Voix au cinéma*, Chion explicates his theories of how voices affect the listener; he also uses *Psycho* as an example. First, Chion refers to a voice that we hear in film without seeing its source as *la voix acousmatique.* Chion discusses two different kinds of acousmatic voices in *Psycho.* As we see Norman in the jail cell having been "cannibalized" (Chion's term) by the voice of the mother, her voice is flat, insistent, "close" to the screen, forcing the viewer to identify with Norman's psychosis. As we see (much earlier in the film) Marion driving in her car, having stolen money from a client of her company, we hear *her* hear the voices of the men in her office earlier in the day. In this example, the voices reverberate in a space clearly beyond the listener; this is the space of Marion's

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conscience (47–50 and 116–23). Reich's shift in texture from "it's gonna" to "rain" is a purely musical version of what Chion describes in film music.

25. Framing is also essential in film for creating distance between the viewer and the main action. Think of *Blue Velvet*, in which the descent into and emergence out of the ear encloses Jeffrey's fantasy. The girl's voice-over at the beginning and end of *Cape Fear* also point to the large-scale significance of the film as a symbolic working-out of the young girl's ambivalence toward her father as she emerges from latency.

26. Two recent psycho-thrillers also touch upon the horror that lies beneath the symbolic order. In both films, the horror is produced when the relationship between imaginary and symbolic phases of development is flawed. Consider the logorrhea of the Speaker in *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover*, and the obsessive bodily functions to which the profusion of language can barely gain access. In *The Silence of the Lambs*, Hannibal Lechter's major malfunction is clearly related to an infantile desire to bite, to eat, to consume the mother. Though a master of language (a brilliant psychoanalyst and genius criminal), something did not happen in his anal-sadistic phase to free him from equating the desire to consume with the need to know.

27. By "symbolic inscription," I refer here to the theory common in film criticism that associates the shot with the imaginary order, and the reverse shot with the symbolic order (see "Suture" in Kaja Silverman's *The Subject of Semiotics*). As an illustration of this idea's consequences, Dennis Foster has pointed out to me that in *Body Heat*, the character played by John Hurt often is filmed with shots followed by reverse-shots, thus inscribing the representation of his character into symbolic, social space. On the other hand, the character played by Kathleen Turner is often only *shot*—making her a unique object of the camera's desire. In the classical style, two aspects of musical form suggest a musical equivalent of the reverse shot: the repetition of a sonata movement's exposition, and the recapitulation.

28. In her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon inscribes postmodernism within a paradox that crystallizes this sense of resistance and complicity in postmodernism:

> Postmodernism teaches that all cultural practices have an ideological subtext which determines the conditions of the very possibility of their production of meaning. And, in art, it does so by

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leaving overt the contradictions between its self-reflexivity and its historical grounding. In theory . . . the contradictions are not always . . . overt, but are often implied—as in the Barthesian anti-authorizing authority or the Lyotardian master-narrativizing of our suspicion of master narratives. These paradoxes are, I believe, what has led to the political ambidexterity of postmodernism in general, for it has been celebrated and decried by both ends of the political spectrum. If you ignore half of the contradiction, however, it becomes quite easy to see the postmodern as either neoconservatively nostalgic / reactionary or radically disruptive / revolutionary. I would argue that we must beware of this suppression of the full complexity of postmodernist paradoxes. (xii–xiii)

29. See Kristeva's notion of the abject in *The Powers of Horror* and the chora in "Revolution in Poetic Language" for related theories dealing with the symbolic and presymbolic in our subjectivity.

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