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Say No to Lacanian Musicology: A Review of Misnomers

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Abstract

Anglophone musicologists read the cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek more than they read the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and they are more concerned with Žižekian academia than they are with Lacan's clinical practice. Two major problems emerge: Lacan is conflated with Žižek, and Lacan is conflated with Kant. As a result, analytic discourse is confused with post-modern academia as well as an eighteenth-century master-discourse on the Sublime. According to the author's argument, *Lacanian musicology* is a misnomer, for it in fact refers to Žižekian musicology, and what musicologists call *the Lacanian Real* is not really Lacanian. The re-branding of the Kantian Sublime and/or the Thing as *the Lacanian Real* is not necessary; it is a symptom of confusion. The article concludes with a cautious recommendation, pertinent to the study of music and discourses (understood as ideologies, group ties or social bonds).

Key Words: Psychoanalysis; Lacanian musicology; Lacan; Žižek

Editor's Note: An early version of this PDF file introduced errors in Lacan's discourse-schemas and sexualization logic. The author is not responsible for these errors.

L'analyse ne se fait pas en musique.

– Jacques Lacan, 27 September 1953

[...] la topologie inepte à quoi Kant a donné corps de son propre établissement, celui du bourgeois qui ne peut imaginer que de la transcendance, l'esthétique comme la dialectique.

– Jacques Lacan, 14 July 1972

Mais ce n'est pas du tout kantien. C'est même ce sur quoi j'insiste. S'il y a notion du réel, elle est extrêmement complexe.

– Jacques Lacan, 29 October 1974¹

Introduction

Lacanian musicology is a vague and diffuse sub-field of cultural studies. Although Lacanian musicology is named after the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, its Anglophone proponents read the cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek more than they read Lacan; and they are more involved with Žižekian academia than they are with Lacan's analytic practice. Two major problems emerge: Lacan is conflated with Žižek, and Lacan is conflated with Kant. As a result, analytic discourse is confused with post-modern academia as well as an eighteenth-century master-discourse on the Sublime. Although the article's tone of address is severe, it does not aim to dismiss Žižekian musicology. The aim is to explain at length why Žižekian musicology should not be named *Lacanian musicology*.

Another Praxis of Garbage?

Throughout the twentieth century, psychoanalytic approaches to music were not popular within Anglophone conservatories; yet academics that write about sound art and participatory art, such as Claire Bishop, look back on “the use of Marxism, psychoanalysis and linguistics in the 1970s” as something especially familiar (2012: 7). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Lorenzo Chiesa held that “the risk of a belated fashion for ‘Lacanian soirées’ and the hegemonic imposition of a ‘soft’ – or simply mistaken – approach to [Lacan's] oeuvre is presently higher than ever in Anglophone university circles” (2007: 3). Lacanian musicology's status within academia is therefore precarious.

Lacan believed that his texts were incompatible, inappropriate and antithetical with respect to academia (1979a: 278; 2001e: 504; 2001g: 393). Even when he appeared on French television, Lacan spoke specifically about analysis; he did not address academics using the terms of their discourse or members of the public with no analytic experience (2001h 509-510; 2011: 194). Lacan did not consider open seminars very serious, and he referred to public texts as *poubellications* – a play on *publication*, *poubelle* (trash can) and the trashy public domain (2001b 285; 2006a: 244; 2011: 65). This partly explains how France’s first department of psychoanalysis (within academia) acquired its reputation as the praxis of garbage (Turkle 1992: 180): it took psychoanalytic babbling and made it public.

Lacan mocked so-called Lacanian academics within Humanities faculties on account of their *frotti-frotta littéraire* and *tourbillon de sémantophilie* (2001c: 494; 2001d: 12). More broadly, he made fun of academic *pédants* and partnered them with *pédés* (2001c: 462) – an allusion to boarding school fagging, perhaps, or members of Socratic societies that enjoy fondling boys. During a visit to Yale University in 1975, Lacan teased academics yet again: he claimed that, although literature pricks academics in the behind, it does not produce the same titillating effects for others (1976: 36). This is the sort of material that warrants the adjective *Lacanian*. It is not academic; it does not pretend that it is academic. In Lacan’s view, academics that cite his work (such as myself) are like a tree’s amber: the amber traps the fly yet knows nothing of its flight (2001g: 402). This is true. Many academics that cite Lacan have absolutely no analytic experience.

In 1968, after nearly three decades spent in three different psychoanalytic societies, Lacan admitted he had plenty of experience with household garbage (2006a: 11) – a reference to analytic case studies. By contrast, he never claimed to know much about musical practice. Who, then, can expect a happy marriage between analytic discourse and musicology?

Lacan Said Almost Nothing

In “Art after Lacan”, François Régnauld wrote, “We must admit that the subject ‘psychoanalysis and music’ never inspired any great writing, in spite of Theodor Reik’s treatment of Gustav Mahler”. Although Lacan regularly attended concerts throughout the 1950s and 1960s at Paris’s *Domaine musical* (which featured the music of Luciano Berio,

Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen), he never discussed events such as these in his seminars or articles. In response to Lacan's silence, Régnault was forced to infer, "Maybe music is of no use in psychoanalysis" (2013: unpaginated). Lacan issued a complementary statement back in 1953. Analysis, he pointed out, is not something that happens in music (2001a: 164). This is undoubtedly correct.

At least two guests invited to speak during Lacan's seminars mentioned music, but each mention failed to attract a response from Lacan. Michèle Montrelay was responsible for the first. Montrelay became a member of Lacan's *École freudienne de Paris* in 1965. During Lacan's unpublished seminar of 23 June 1965, Montrelay discussed Marguerite Duras' novel *Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein* and made a brief allusion to contemporary music by Stockhausen. The second moment concerns Alain Didier-Weill, whom Lacan called upon during the unpublished seminar of 21 December 1976. Didier-Weill's impromptu is somewhat amusing, thanks to the spontaneous coinage *sujet musicant*, "musicking subject" – a notion that became popular among Anglophone musicologists in the late 1990s, following the publication of Christopher Small's *Musicking*. I repeat: Lacan did not take up Montrelay's Stockhausen example, and he did not make anything of Didier-Weill's *sujet musicant*. Unlike Small, he certainly did not dedicate a book to the subject. Dedicated Lacanian scholars and clinicians tend to overlook these moments. They are not considered significant events in the history of *Le séminaire*.

In "Psychoanalysis and Music", Régnault reiterated his general argument. "I have always been struck by the silence of psychoanalysis with regard to music", he wrote: "nothing in Freud, almost nothing in Lacan". Although I endorse Régnault's argument, the following point is not correct: "Lacan stated only that music and architecture are the supreme arts" (2010: unpaginated). Since the subject of Lacan and music has not been adequately researched, it is worth sifting through the details, even if they prove tedious.

Lacan twice mentioned music during his final seminar series at the *École normale supérieure*, held from 1968 to 1969. He flattered music and architecture on account of their shared debt to mathematics and later spoke briefly about harmonics and musical intervals (2006a: 14, 296). When Lacan drafted his four discourse-schemas at the *Place du Panthéon*, he referred to a discourse's agent as *la dominante* (1991: 34, 47). In conventional Western music theory, the dominant is a note that implies or points to the tonic while remaining separate from it. Likewise, the dominant spokesperson of a social institution can

imply the truth (in a typically sleazy, sophistic manner) and can rely on others' belief in truth, but the spokesperson cannot wholly reveal it.

$$\frac{S_2}{S_1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\$} \quad \frac{S_1}{\$} \rightarrow \frac{S_2}{a} \quad \frac{\$}{a} \rightarrow \frac{S_1}{S_2} \quad \frac{a}{S_2} \rightarrow \frac{\$}{S_1}$$

Figure 1. Four non-identical discourses: academia, mastery, hysteria and psychoanalysis.²

In 1971, Lacan reminded his audience that thunder – a mysterious and imposing semblance – is a crucial support of divine authority; he noted that birdsong is often believed to incarnate divine praise; and he observed that singing is like the Phallus (a tormentor such as Priapus, Dionysus or Mutunus Tutunus) insofar as it ruptures a body's synergy and forces a division between phonation and breathing (2006b: 15-16, 70). Playing on *seriner* (a verb meaning “to drum in”) and *sirène* (the mythical, disastrous Siren), Lacan said that analytic experience repeatedly drums in the fact that there is no sexual harmony (2011: 18). These disparate comments do not add up to an academic theory of music; they simply invoke ancient musical topics such as sound, mathematics and myth.

In 1972, during the well-known *Séminaire XX, Encore*, Lacan played on the musical title and argued that an analyst must have a good ear. This, however, does not infer that an analyst's ear is the same as a musician's. An analyst must be able to discern equivocations that undermine potency. In the word *maître* (master), for example, an analyst should hear *m'être* (“my being”) – an equivocation that mocks the ego's confused apprehension of itself as a master (1975b: 53). A musician's ear, by contrast, develops in the direction of potency and sophistication. Music's notions of Good typically derive from the master's discourse: displays of virtuosity (from *vir*, “man”), precise intonation, control of coloratura, esoteric microtonal or spectro-morphological powers, sophisticated timbre manipulation, computer-generated rhythms that eschew the limits of human bodies, and so on. The aristocratic imperative is clear: “More! More!”

The musician's Good is whatever *il maestro* deems sound; whereas analysis is oriented towards a singular impasse. The two discourses – mastery and analysis – are separate. So-called post-modern, anti-mastery critics are separate yet again: they are either gripped by neoliberal empowerment rhetoric or *le discours hystérico-diabolique*.³

During the aforementioned session of *Séminaire XX, Encore*, Lacan argued that familiar pleasantries such as musical epithalamia and love letters do not constitute sexual harmony; they skirt around the fact that sexual harmony does not exist. In a later session, dedicated to the Baroque period, Lacan contemplated talking about music, yet he doubted he would ever have the time (1975b: 53, 105). This is not an auspicious beginning for Lacanian musicology. Further comments on music and notation can be found in Lacan's unpublished seminars of 2 December 1964, 9 December 1964, 17 March 1965 and 23 June 1965, and in Lacan's *Écrits* (1966: 35, 215 [note 1], 253, 335, 372, 423, 479, 503, 533, 539, 670, 729, 764, 890). On page 890 of *Écrits*, for example, Lacan slyly referenced "La cathédrale engloutie", a piano prelude by Claude Debussy that tries to evoke underwater cathedral bells. I hope that these references are of use to future scholars; but in sum, they do not amount to much. Régnault's argument therefore stands: Lacan said almost nothing about music.

Academia ≠ Analysis ≠ Mastery

During his seminars, Lacan regularly spouted material from academics (other than musicologists), just as analysands regurgitate stuff from the various discourses to which they are subjected. Academia, by contrast, applies strict regulations upon speech and publications issued within its domain. One cannot, therefore, claim that anything and everything from analytic discourse is welcome within academia. In 1963, Lacan employed an Anglophone phrase in order to denigrate a metaphorical pile of books and articles written by analysts: "psycho-analytical dunghill" (2004: 350). The following year, Lacan criticised analytic literature's extraordinary capacity for inconsequence and confusion. He was confident that analytic texts would one day be considered among the works of *les fous littéraires* (1973: 240) – a reference to the Surrealists' follies. From academia's perspective, this is not a commendation. Having said that, academics frequently betray the standards of their own discourse. They are not saints (Ioannidis 2005: 40; Verhaeghe 2014: 126-130).

From a different angle, Lacan maintained that a clinical setting was proper to his work rather than an academic setting. Psychoanalysis, he asserted, is applied only as a treatment to a subject that speaks and listens (1966: 747). If a prospective analysand knocks on an analyst's door, psychoanalysis may indeed have a purpose. If, by contrast, the Beatles abruptly truncate the end of a studio recording and their record label consents to

promote the song (and thus include it on an album that millions of people purchase), this is not a demand for analytic interpretation.⁴ The final stage of a commercial album's production is named *mastering* for a reason: it does not entail analysis or dissolution, unless the record company in charge of the album suddenly files for bankruptcy.

Freud occasionally indulged in the gratuitous analysis of art, notably in *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*; and since the late 1980s, Žižek has frequently practised non-clinical analysis within multiple branches of cultural studies. Compared to Freud and Žižek, Lacan was arguably more careful to avoid non-clinical analysis (1976: 36). In 1975, he made a few psycho-biographical lapses concerning James Joyce, but he later admitted that he was embarrassed to speak on the subject of Joyce's literary art (2001f: 573; 2005a: 74, 77). Lacan reminded his audience that Joyce was not his analysand. Instead of practising analysis on Joyce, Lacan made speculative comments about Joyce's *psychologie* and *I'ego* (2005a: 79-80, 149-152). (Anglophone Lacan scholars frequently overlook this point.) In David Macey's opinion, Lacan's well-known references to literature and visual art were subordinate to his main concern, which was the teaching of clinical analysis (2003: 151). I agree.

The difference between clinical analysis and non-clinical analysis is not subtle. The former is requested by a prospective analysand and must be agreed upon by an analyst; the latter is gratuitous. Régnault mocked the psychoanalysis of music and implicitly encouraged his readers to "avoid facile allegory which would run aground if one were looking for the sexual function of the dominant seventh, or castration in syncopation, for example" (2013: unpaginated [note 24]). An article by Kenneth M. Smith, "The Tonic Chord and Lacan's Object *a* in Selected Songs by Charles Ives", fell straight into Régnault's trap. According to Smith, during Ives' "Premonitions", "dominant-seventh chords, as free-floating signifiers, now divorced from a syntactically prepared tonal centre, simultaneously lacking and excessive, set the signification process in motion along the path of 'desire'. These seventh chords then become Lacan's anamorphic spots (phallic signifiers) that fuel our interpretative mechanisms (desires)" (2011: 389). Smith's passage – an epitome of facile allegory – was somehow published in the *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*. It does not read well out of context; but do all passages necessarily improve when read in context? I shall leave the reader to check.

In a footnote to “Psychoanalysis and Music”, Régnault downplayed pretentious discussions of silence. This is unfortunately relevant to multiple Lacanian musicologists (Jagodzinski 2005: 36-39, 58, 205; Reichardt 2008: 94-96; Schwarz 1997: 123, 142; Schwarz 2006: 72-76, 157; Willet 2007: 119). Although music does indeed involve silences as well as sounds, the proliferation of “banalities”, as Régnault put it, “about the silence following Mozart’s music being also Mozart, etc.” is unnecessary (2010: unpaginated [note 4]). I lack the will to pursue this subject further. Anyone interested in hyperbole regarding silences can consult the multiple references I just provided.

Lacanian Musicology is a Misnomer

Music research referred to as *Lacanian* and/or *post-Lacanian* generally falls within opera studies or cinema studies. Examples include *The Angel’s Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera* by the psychoanalyst Michel Poizat, *Opera’s Second Death* by the cultural theorists Mladen Dolar and Slavoj Žižek, and “Music as *Sinthome*: Joy Riding with Lacan, Lynch, and Beethoven Beyond Postmodernism” by the musicologist Eugene Kenneth Willet. Even so, works like these remain abstruse. They do not belong to a predominant field of Anglophone Humanities research. *The Angel’s Cry*, for instance, is Poizat’s only work available in English translation; *Opera’s Second Death* is the only book by Dolar or Žižek dedicated to music;⁵ “Music as *Sinthome*” is a doctoral thesis that has not been treated to a commercial publication.

Lacanian clinicians that write about music are few in number. Along with Poizat, examples include Sebastian Leikert, Eduardo Said and Didier-Weill. Leikert is the Chairman of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Psychoanalyse und Musik*. “The Object of *Jouissance* in Music” is Leikert’s only work available in English translation. Musicological texts by Said and Didier-Weill (such as the well-known *Les trois temps de la loi*) are currently limited to readers of Spanish and French, respectively.

Lacan’s name is rarely invoked in the swelling mass of popular music texts. Jan Jagodzinski’s *Music in Youth Culture: A Lacanian Approach* constitutes an exception, as does the work of David Schwarz. Jagodzinski’s methodology is similar to that of many Lacanian musicologists. He serves up Lacan via Žižek plus a cocktail of French philosophy and tries to say something about music, as evidenced by the following passage.

To what extent can this array of music youth cultures be theorized as examples of “becoming-woman” in Deleuzian terms? [...] Becoming-woman, a Deleuzian term, seems to sit uncomfortably within a book that utilizes Lacanian psychoanalysis, who is often accused of *transcendental* phallogocentrism against the author(s) of empirical *transcendent* immanence. To what extent, then, do I find myself “Oedipally” still loyal to Lacan, or to his most eminent practitioner [*sic*] in the English-speaking context such as Žižek? Gratefully perhaps, an exploration of pop music can result in a productive misreading so, at the very least, some form of “betrayal” can take place that furthers an understanding of youth today? (2005: 2; original italics)

Jagodzinski’s description of his own methodology contains a spelling mistake as well as a question mark at the end of a sentence that is not a question; and these are the least of its problems. When one compares an Anglophone commentary with translations of French primary texts, one expects the commentary’s prose to be less awkward. This, unfortunately, is not the case for *Music in Youth Culture: A Lacanian Approach*.

Schwarz’s rationale for dragging analytic discourse into musicology is, in my view, vain. In 1997, Schwarz wrote, “Why psychoanalysis? In part, I am drawn to psychoanalysis temperamentally; much of it just seems right, particularly with daily confirmation from the experiences of raising a small child” (1997: 2). By 2014, little had changed: “My approach is Lacanian because I have a history of inquiring into art from a Lacanian point of view” (Bard-Schwarz 2014: 2).⁶ Schwarz’s rhetoric is too limp to be labelled *authoritarian*, yet his methodology can effectively be reduced to the following: “Lacan is great for musicology because I say so, and I have said this for quite some time now!” On a more serious note, anyone that has read Lacan knows that he was critical of intuitive formalisations and sentimental excesses (1966: 571; 2005a: 150).

Sarah Reichardt’s justification for invoking Lacan is similarly troubling. In *Composing the Modern Subject: Four String Quartets by Dmitri Shostakovich*, Reichardt wrote, “Jacques Lacan’s concept of the real, thoroughly discussed in Chapter One, provides the foundation for the critical-theory approach” (2008: 1). At a time when at least six seminar series by Lacan were available in English translation as well as selected articles from *Écrits*, Reichardt founded her “critical-theory approach” upon just one article by Lacan and one seminar series. Like Schwarz, Reichardt principally engaged with the work of post-Lacanian academics, hence the following footnoted admission: “My account of the real is taken, for the

most part, from Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* [...] and *The Sublime Object of Ideology*” (2008: 8 [note 13]).

Žižek’s work, not Lacan’s, is the foundation of Reichardt’s project. Why, then, is Lacan’s name invoked on the first page of Reichardt’s book instead of Žižek’s? This is very peculiar. In *Listening Subjects: Music, Psychoanalysis, Culture* (published in 1997) and *Listening Awry: Music and Alterity in German Culture* (published in 2006), Schwarz, likewise, gave Lacan excessive credit and Žižek too little. It took till 2014 before Schwarz offered the following clarification.

For the past few decades I have approached Lacan through his interpreter, Slavoj Žižek. The advantage of such an approach is that one reaches the thought of the difficult master through a writer who makes Lacan accessible and very clear; the disadvantage of such an approach (as it occurs to me now) is that one misses the precision of the language of the master himself. (Bard-Schwarz 2014: 2)

If Lacanian musicologists instead referred to themselves as *Žižekian musicologists*, this would solve three problems. Their academic field would be named after an academic; appropriate credit would be given to the author whose texts they regularly cite; and focus would be placed on an author that sometimes writes about music instead of a psychoanalyst who never once issued a seminar or article specifically about music. Yes.

Although Lacan’s name featured in the title of Willet’s doctoral thesis, Willet’s review of Lacan’s work was even weaker than Reichardt’s or Schwarz’s. He only mentioned a single text by Lacan: *Séminaire XXIII, Le sinthome*. But he cited it incorrectly. See page 99: “*Le Séminaire [sic] XXIII: Le sinthome* (1971-1972), unpublished, lesson of 2/9/72; sited [sic] in Hoens and Pluth, ‘The *sinthome*,’ 1”.⁷ What a mess! Check Willet’s bibliography: the erroneous entry appears a second time.

What is worse, Willet’s carelessness or his shameless pretence? He purposefully named “Music as *Sinthome*” after a text by a well-known figure, which he then referred to no more than once over the course of 153 pages (see page 130). How could Willet’s sizeable Dissertation Committee – James M. Buhler, David P. Neumeyer, Byron P. Almen, Andrew F. Dell’Antonio and Richard A. Shiff – approve of this? If Lacanian musicology is in fact

Žižekian musicology, as I believe it is, that makes *Lacanian musicology* a misnomer. What if *Doctor Eugene Willet* is also a misnomer?⁸

Repetition

Robert Fink's *Repeating Ourselves* could serve as a motto for self-described Lacanian and post-Lacanian musicologists: it contains no specific references to any of Lacan's texts. *Repeating Ourselves* is ostensibly a book about *jouissance*, American minimalism and disco music. Throughout his book, Fink conflated discussions of *jouissance* by multiple authors – Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Roland Barthes and Jean-François Lyotard – that are far from similar. Worse, Fink's concept of "disco-as-*jouissance*" is explicitly vain, as evidenced by the passage below.

The Lacanian route can be a dangerous temptation: disco-as-*jouissance* provides both a satisfyingly radical take on the music, and a hermeneutic window that opens onto one of the most high-status theoretical discourses in postmodern academia. But try to use the trope seriously, and you will soon find out that *jouissance* is a rather blunt hermeneutic instrument. [...] It is spectacularly destructive of analytical method; it has little to do with the way dance music is produced and consumed; and it ignores huge swaths of popular reception. (2005: 39)

Fink's arrogance is just as prone to ridicule as Schwarz's opinion, "much of it just seems right". The "satisfyingly radical", "high-status" notion is especially peculiar: it re-emphasises the lack of attention paid by post-Lacanian academics to Lacan's discourse proper. According to Lacan, analysts are not satisfied; they are horrified by their practice. More importantly, Lacan claimed that no one could aggrandise one's self on account of anything learned from analytic discourse (1980: 13). He considered Freud *un débile mental* (a mental defective), and he applied the same label to himself (1979b: 14). For an analyst is not in a position to produce masterful, sophistic solutions. Fink does have a point, however, on the subject of hermeneutic interpretation. Psychoanalysis is not a hermeneutic instrument (Lacan 1973: 12-13); it cannot reveal "the true, hidden meaning of a text" (Nobus 2002: 25).⁹ In excess of this, the *jouissance* from which an analysand suffers is not something that conforms to academic discussions of musical enjoyment. This is a black omen for Schwarz's treatment of the Lacanian Real.

The Real is admittedly a point of controversy among Lacanian analysts, due to the fact that Lacan's discussion of the Real was not consistent throughout the twenty-seven years that he delivered *Le séminaire*. This should not surprise anyone. Having said that, few analysts – and perhaps few academics – would recognise Schwarz's version of the Real as Lacanian (Scherzinger 1999: 99-101). Why? Because Schwarz's Real is just another avatar for the Kantian Sublime – a topic guaranteed to satisfy any academic hankering for familiarity. "The Lacanian Real is rather like the Kantian sublime", he proclaimed; "a glimpse of the Lacanian Real is perhaps not unlike the Kantian sublime" (Bard-Schwarz 2014: 12, 71). Lacan, by contrast, explicitly stated that the Real is not at all Kantian (2005b: 96-97).

In an unpublished review of my work, Marc De Kesel failed to grasp this point; so I am obliged to provide further evidence. See "L'étourdit", in which Lacan distinguished his teaching from Kant's aesthetics as well as *la topologie inepte* that allowed the little gentleman to dream of transcendence. (What a terrific allusion to middle-class musicologists and their obsession with the Sublime! Perhaps others can pursue this subject further.) In the same text, Lacan defined the Thing not as the Real but as *le dit de la vérité* (2001c: 452, 472, 479-480). This should not be a point of confusion. See also the unpublished seminar of 19 March 1974, in which Lacan clarified that the three tenets of his doctrine – the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary – do not constitute a Kantian or Aristotelian ethics. He then insulted people who misunderstood his remarks about Kant and said that they were deaf. More broadly, one should not ignore the fact that Lacan spoke of sublimation together with the clinical category of perversion more so than the Sublime of eighteenth-century German idealism (1986: 131; Natahi 2009: 149-154).¹⁰ As Tim Dean pointed out, for example, "Joycean sublimation is fundamentally perverse" (1998: 259). Even in Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, one finds sublimation discussed together with perversion (1953: 156-157, 238-239). It is simply not necessary to invoke the Kantian Sublime.

Smith made no note of subtleties such as these. Like Alenka Zupančič (the author of *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*), Smith conflated the work of Kant and Lacan. (Perhaps the signifiers *Kant/cunt* and *Lacan/le con* are the cause. This should not be ruled out for the sake of academic piety.) Again, I shall leave the details of Smith's argument aside and simply provide the following passage as evidence: "Perhaps this is what Žižek refers to as the Kantian 'mathematical sublime' found in the drives of the Lacanian real", Smith wrote – "compounded forces that are too much for us to process". Smith also conflated the analysand's fantasy object (discussed frequently by Lacan) with the Kantian Thing:

“Although as ungraspable as the Kantian *Ding an sich* (with which, in a sense, it is identical), this imaginary goal structures encounters with everyday reality” (2011: 356, 368). The problem here is obvious: compounded surnames are too much to process. If a musicologist discussed Ives with reference to the Kantian Sublime and/or the Thing, that would produce a total of just two surnames: Kant with Ives. Are two surnames somehow insufficient? Why invoke Žižek and, soon afterwards, make equivalences between the work of Lacan (which has not been thoroughly consulted) and the work of Kant? (Kant scholars could ask Schwarz and Smith, where are the precise references to Kant’s work? There are none.)

Hypothetically, it is appropriate to write about a performer’s spectacle of mastery with reference to the Kantian Sublime but not the Lacanian Real. If a so-called empowered individual could master the Real that torments him/her, this would amount to a self-cure or an ideal self-realisation. There would be no need, then, for clinical analysis, in which case, the Lacanian Real would not exist (Lacan 2001h: 518). With this in mind, consider three passages from Schwarz’s review of a performance by Lesley Flanigan. This is the first passage: “I like noise and find it strangely soothing”, Schwarz wrote. “In order for this to happen, it has to resonate with some psychic formation and for me this psychic formation is the Lacanian Real” (2011: unpaginated). Again, Schwarz flaunts his liberal methodology and says whatever he pleases in Lacan’s name. I remain unconvinced by this. Schwarz’s second passage, copied below, does not dispel doubts.

The Real is the thingness which can seem to appear when some recognizable object is pulled apart, cracks, or reveals what lies beneath. The glimpse of the Real [...] is auditory and occurs when normal functioning of electronic equipment produces the feedback that she harnesses. As she masters that feedback, the resultant noise becomes tamed, named, Symbolic. (2011: unpaginated)

Why involve an analyst’s terminology in this situation? The musician under review is regarded as a master: Flanigan has a Master’s degree from New York University. Her performance was staged at the Studio for Electro-Instrumental Music in Amsterdam as an example of mastery. A display of mastery is the very opposite of a demand for analysis. Why did Schwarz not instead cite a liberal-capitalist theorist of progress and technological innovation? The twenty-first century is littered with them.

The third and final passage from Schwarz's review proves just how foreign his musical case study is from Lacanian case studies. "It is enjoyable to feel the fabric of subjectivity pull apart so that one can master it", he asserted (2011: unpaginated). Is it enjoyable, really? Consider the case of Daniel Paul Schreber (discussed by Lacan throughout *Séminaire III, Les psychoses*). In *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, Schreber wrote, "every human action however small which is combined with some noise, [...] is accompanied by a sensation of a painful blow directed at my head; the sensation of pain is like a sudden pulling inside my head [...] and may be combined with the tearing off of part of the bony substance of my skull" (1988: 204). Schreber is an exemplary Lacanian subject, for he is subjected to others' torments. He is not a master; he is helpless with respect to the Real. Is there a single Lacanian case study that could condone Schwarz's journalistic hyperbole or Robert Fink's "high-status" smugness? I am not aware of one. For the Real is nothing short of horrible. It is not something that the ego can master or overcome (Freud 1955: 143).

J. P. E. Harper-Scott is another musicologist whose enthusiasm for the Real is excessive. Consider the following passage from *The Quilting Points of Musical Modernism*: "Her ability to escape the focus on the phallic Φ , her refusal in all cases to make this 'all', is what makes woman, for Lacan, the superior subjective position, the one that can reveal the truth of the Real" (2012: 53). Harper-Scott made an obvious technical error. If women satisfied a refusal-function "in all cases", then logically, they would form a universe. The category in which Lacan placed women, *le pas-tout*, is named as such because it is strictly not a universe. *Le pas-tout* is literally "the non-all". Consistent refusal is in fact denoted by Lacan's formula for the mythical patriarch: $\exists x \cdot \overline{\Phi x}$ (1975b: 74; 2001c: 458). Women, by contrast, are indeterminate (1975b: 94; 2011: 47). In banal terms, they cannot find themselves in screams of either "No" or "Yes".¹¹ What does this have to do with musicology? That is for Harper-Scott to establish. I am not convinced he succeeds.

Given that academics are encouraged to be clear and comprehensible whereas analysts are permitted to babble incoherently, it is somewhat ironic when the former struggle to make sense. In *Listening Awry*, Schwarz attempted to establish a semantic link between Webern's "Marcia funebre" (from *Sechs Orchesterstücke, Op. 6*) and the death of Webern's mother. In my view, Schwarz did not succeed. According to him, Webern's work is "neither a traumatic experience nor a subsequent experience that reminds a patient of a traumatic wound"; the work is, rather, "one among presumably other ways of self-

representation and embodiment of that trauma” (2006: 79). I shall attempt to rephrase. Webern’s work is not a traumatic event or a representation of trauma; it is a representation of Webern’s self and an embodiment of trauma that somehow does not remind him of his traumatic wound. I admit: I am confused.

Music and Cultural Theory by John Shepherd and Peter Wicke belongs in the same field as Schwarz’s work. It, too, struggles to make sense. According to Shepherd and Wicke, Lacan’s work is “insufficient to sustain a line of argument which seeks to ground the relative autonomy of music in the specific character of its material grounds and to posit the connectedness of music as a signifying process to processes of subjectivity as one constituted through the impact of sound as a material phenomenon on the materiality of the body” (1997: 74). This is poor writing.

Intent upon the circular – and arguably nonsensical – connectedness of a signifying process *to processes of subjectivity* and the impact of a material phenomenon *on materiality*, Shepherd and Wicke abruptly abandoned Lacan. “Without losing the benefit of Lacan’s insight that processes of signification constitute subjectivities”, the two wrote, “it is necessary to reclaim the body from Lacan and weaken the stranglehold of language in his theoretical scheme” (1997: 74). Shepherd and Wicke’s proposal appeals to academics that love to envisage their bodies as empowered, free and unique; but not everyone is convinced. Eduardo Said, for example, argued that bodies possessed by music do not break the established order of *logos*; their enjoyment merely supplements it (2011: 3). I agree. Thanks to contemporary music videos, we know that jiggling bodies are anything but radical. They conform to consumerist enjoyment-rituals.

I am not smitten with Shepherd and Wicke’s ideal, liberated body. Instead, I place my faith in the body’s subjection, described by Schreber with psychotic rigour. The following epitomises Schreber’s position: “Like everything else in my body, the need to empty myself is also called forth by miracles” (1988: 150-154, 225). Evidently, Schreber could not free his body from language, which consists of demands, imperatives, summons, judgements, expectations, laws, mores, punishments, values, criteria, rules, conventions, customs, games, instructions, choreography and more. Musicians cannot free themselves from the stranglehold of language, either. The Schreber case also demonstrates that, in spite of Shepherd and Wicke’s criticisms, there is plenty of material in Lacan’s articles and seminars

that concerns the body, just not the faux-empowered, liberal-humanist body. See, for example, Lacan's "Télévision" (2001h: 521-525).

In 1962, Lacan refuted the notion that his discourse – one that necessarily involves an analysand's suffering – neglects affect and the body. At the same time, in an effort to clarify and delimit his discourse, Lacan listed topics familiar to academics that he did in fact intend to exclude, such as ego-psychology's catalogue of emotions, Being conceived as immediate, and the subject in a crude or animal form (2004: 23-24). These things remain motifs within musicology and other branches of cultural studies, as do variants of the Kantian Sublime and the Thing. These things are not Lacanian motifs. The distinction, once again, is not subtle.

Appeal for a Cut

Noise, static, dissonance, distortion, unexpected formal ruptures, extreme dynamics: these things are not traumatic encounters with the Lacanian Real. Unless one is subjected to torture, one can easily switch off a recording or walk out of an annoying concert. So, when musicologists speak of representations, embodiments or encounters with the Lacanian Real, they are exaggerating (Lacan 1975a: 184). For most academics, listening to music is not as exciting as the encounters detailed in Schreber's memoirs. This is perhaps fortunate.

Robert Fink, Jan Jagodzinski, Sarah Reichardt, David Schwarz, John Shepherd and Peter Wicke, Kenneth Smith and Eugene Willet collectively represent the lack of precise consideration and scrutiny that Lacan's work has received within the field of post-1990s Anglophone musicology. These names also represent academics' tendency to conflate Lacan's work with the work of Žižek, Kant and the usual suspects from Francophone cultural studies (Hooper 2006: 9-14). In future, if musicologists write about Lacan, they should first read his work. In an Italian interview from 1974, Lacan said that it is an abuse to speak of psychoanalysis without reading analytic texts, namely Freud's (2013: 3). Addressed to prospective analysts, Bruce Fink wrote, "I think it [is] important to emphasise that there is no substitute for reading the original texts by important analysts" (2007: 273).¹² This prescription is even more appropriate for academia; hence I issue two variations.

1. Students interested in Lacan should consult the growing list of texts published in Lacan's name by his literary executor, Jacques-Alain Miller, as well as the unedited seminar transcripts used by analytic institutions.
2. Students interested in European music from Lacan's lifetime should consult the mass of primary texts cited by Richard Taruskin in Volume Four and Volume Five of *The Oxford History of Western Music* – a paragon of academic knowledge (S_2), split between mastery (S_1) and critical objections (a).

Lacan's discourse-schemas could perhaps be supplemented by readings of musicians' primary texts. The latter inevitably detail music's subjection to hysterical, political and academic discourses; but let us not succumb to the Humanities' deranged optimism and thereby overlook the crucial point. If, in future, serious musicological ventures involve Lacan's texts, they will necessarily be grounded upon academics saying "No" to the present incarnation of Lacanian musicology. For now, Lacanian musicologists demonstrate that the most limited academics – in the pejorative sense – are ironically the most liberal.

Reduced Argument

Lacanian musicology in fact refers to Žižekian musicology, and what musicologists call *the Lacanian Real* is not really Lacanian. The re-branding of the Kantian Sublime and/or the Thing as *the Lacanian Real* is not necessary; it is a symptom of confusion. Worse, it is common. If nothing else, I have proven that there is a significant distance between Lacan and an adjective too often employed by Anglophone academics: *Lacanian*.

After reading this article, Žižek's followers will know to situate Žižekian musicology within post-modern academia rather than Lacan's analytic discourse. If there are fewer misnomers in future, this will count as an improvement.

Notes

1. There are paraphrased translations of these three quotations in the body of the essay.
2. *Discourse* is Lacan's term for an ideology, a group tie or a social bond (1975b: 21; 1991: 34, 47; 2011: 152). S_1 denotes imperatives or master-signifiers, S_2 *savoir*, \$ the questionable subject, *a* surplus suffering/enjoyment. Whatever term occupies the top-left position is the discourse's pretentious agent (*semblant*).
3. Lacan's little-known capitalist schema from 12 May 1972 is effectively his take on faux-empowerment rhetoric (1978: 40).
4. See the second chapter of David Schwarz's *Listening Subjects*, entitled "Scatting, the Acoustic Mirror, and the Real in the Beatles' 'I Want You (She's So Heavy)'".
5. Mladen Dolar's book, *A Voice and Nothing More*, is more broadly concerned with psychoanalysis, linguistics, philosophy and literature.
6. Between the publication of *Listening Awry* and *Strangest Thing*, Schwarz changed his surname to Bard-Schwarz.
7. Lacan's *Séminaire XXIII, Le sinthome* was delivered in 1975-1976. Lacan's *Panthéon* seminar series of 1971-1972 was in fact *Séminaire XIX, ... ou pire*. It includes the seminar dated 9 February 1972. Willet is confused.
8. The question is not intended as a joke. Poor scholarship like Willet's demeans the honorific *Doctor*.
9. Michael L. Klein, another Lacanian musicologist, defied this point and chose to follow Reichardt and Schwarz. "The Lacan I read about in [Anglophone] musicology and theory is not always the Lacan I recognise from my own poor attempts to interpret his work", he confessed (2015: 2-3).
10. According to Jacques-Alain Miller, "sublimation is often the salvation for perversion" (1996: 318). Cf. Marc De Kesel's *Eros and Ethics*. De Kesel disagrees with the coupling

of sublimation and perversion, and like Alenka Zupančič, he writes about Kant, Lacan and ethics.

11. “Woman is such in the phallic function only inasmuch as she says ‘yes’ *and* ‘no’ to it (where the ‘and’ is additional, not disjunctive)” (Chiesa 2016: 118; original italics).
12. Please note that Bruce Fink and Robert Fink are separate authors.

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