Music and Language Revisited

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The relationship between music and language is one of the mainstays of philosophical reflection on music. Even before Aristotle theorized the political distinction between *phone* and *logos* (cf. Agamben 2018) the relationship between sound and meaning has been identified as a problematic node from which to compare these two forms of expression. The 'linguistic turn' (Bergmann 1953; Rorty 1967) of the twentieth century and the emergence of disciplines such as semiology, semiotics, philosophies of language and hermeneutics has led to a rich proliferation of frameworks for comparing music and language. In musicology, too, a search for language-like structures in music (Jakobson 1932; Ruwet 1966; Nattiez 1975; Lerdahl, Jackendoff 1983; see also the essay by Marta Benenti on music and metaphor in this volume) has led to fruitful connections.[1] More recently, the development of cognitive sciences (Leman 2007; Patel 2008) has provided new tools for the study of musical understanding, casting new light in particular on the possibility of a semantic dimension in music.

But what about the relationship between music and language in our present era, following a kind of multi-pronged rejection of the linguistic turn? The tendency to reduce philosophical problems to linguistic ones in post-Wittgensteinian schools of thought, as well as the belief that universal structures underlie otherwise disparate language systems (Chomsky) and that those structures might also underlie many different cross-cultural frameworks (e.g. Lévi-Strauss), were largely displaced by thinking in terms of discursive-material co-constitutions (Foucault 1969), subalternity and praxis (Scott 1987), multiplicity (Deleuze, Guattari 1980) and more. More recent developments in fields as diverse as affect theory (Massumi 2002), object-oriented ontology (Bryant 2011; Harman 2002), speculative realism (Meillassoux 2006; Harman 2019) and post-phenomenology (Gallagher 2016) have lent further support to the idea that the experience, and indeed the very constitution of the world does not necessarily have to refer to linguistic mediation.[2] From this series of perspectives, the linguistic turn marked a particular historically contingent regime of philosophical thought. Thinking in the

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[1] See Feld and Fox (1994) for an exhaustive overview of ethnomusicological considerations of music-language relationships.

[2] Much work remains to be done in music studies from these new perspectives. See Lochhead (2016) and Mailman (2016) for two recent studies that engage post-phenomenology and speculative realism in compelling ways.

wake of the linguistic turn had important resonances for music and music studies, including especially around the ability of language to 'reach' music as an object of inquiry (Jankélévitch 2003; Kerman 1985; Abbate 2004) and perhaps the necessity of transforming language such that it might get closer to doing so (Boretz [1978] 2003; Randall [1972] 1995).[3] But it has also suggested an imperative to reconsider specifically the different ways that music and language might be thought as being related. What this paradigm shift requires is not an abandonment of the idea that music and language can be intricately connected, but new modes of reflection on the relationship between them, which must necessarily seek new paths, new approaches and new possible points of connection.

For this reason we have devoted this issue of RIFL to the theme 'music and language revisited', as a forum for gathering many voices from different fields in order to pose again, but on different bases and in light of more recent practical and theoretical developments, the question of the link between the two forms of expression. Once the risk of a mere reduction of music to the linguistic sphere has been mitigated, there is a possibility of exploring the differences between the two, without neglecting the most evident (including potential) points of contact. To this point, we can read the opening article by Antonia Soulez—devoted to a comparison between Adorno and Wittgenstein on the theme of "we" in music—as well as the essay by Gianpaolo Cherchi on Adorno's logic of disaggregation as valuable contributions that both open onto new ideas while carefully reconsidering old ones.

Certain trends in twentieth-century musical practice have challenged the very idea of music as a kind of language by insisting against certain kinds of musical formations— background-foreground structural relations; conventions for continuation or closure; developmental techniques that resemble literary or poetic ones in non-trivial ways—and by progressively moving in some cases from a 'music of notes' to a 'music of sounds', in which parameters that were previously partially neglected acquire syntactical value within a compositional/improvisational system or listening framework. An important parallel emerges here. The linguistic turn assumed a kind of (potential) closure to language: that anything that could be expressed could, at least in theory, be expressed through the mediation of language. Challenges to this epistemological assumption have largely taken language's essential multiplicity—its endless proliferation of meanings and sign-relations (Derrida 1967); its ability to be made to do things other than what it was intended to do—as well as its *essentially sonorous quality* as their critical starting points. We see this not only in the proliferation of critical theorizing about language, but also in the work of authors from Joyce, Beckett and Stein to Mackey, Morrison and Moten (and in the work of poets throughout history), who experiment with the sonorous potential of language to mean multiply and creatively (see the essays by Cristina Ghirardini on poetic improvisation in *ottava rima* and Lucia Pasini on music and language in Mallarmé's work in this volume). Music likewise: the turn from notes to sound, from Schaeffer and Cage to the 'spectralists' to Saariaho and beyond marks a similar proliferation of meaning-possibilities. To pose again the question of the relationship between music and language means, therefore, not to try to reduce one to the other (as Marco Damonte affirms in his contribution on the interweaving between music and language in Wittgenstein's thought), nor to apply to the study of the former the criteria and concepts typical of the

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[3]Susanne Langer's mid-century work is also important in this regard. See Parkhurst (2017) for an analysis of Langer's position on, and role in constituting, a modern account of musical meaning that turns from linguistic representation.

latter, but to place both terms in a more general context of human expressiveness (as, for example, we see in the essays by Adriano Bertollini on rap and hate speech and Henry Campos Vargas on rhetoric, persuasion and music).

Paraphrasing Proposition 7 of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, the Italian composer Luciano Berio (2006: 133)—to whose theoretical reflections the article by Stefano Oliva in this issue is dedicated—suggested that about which what one cannot speak, one must sing. This does not mean that music is the continuation of language by other means but that music brings a different range of expressive possibilities that language cannot capture. But, on pain of falling into a regressive conception of music (i.e., music as a spontaneous, merely instinctive, pre-linguistic form of expression; see the contribution by Tamara Tagliacozzo on the link between music, the divine word and writing in Walter Benjamin for a powerful counterexample) we have to take language into account and eventually 'pass through' it[4], not looking for musical expressiveness in a sort of state of nature untouched by language (as Hanslick might have suggested) but acknowledging and indeed celebrating the complexity of the relationships that link the music we make (we play, sing, listen, dance) with the language we speak. For a reflection on the relationship between music and enunciation on the ground of music recording, see the article by Gabriele Marino; for a comparison between music and speech acts, see the essay by Peter Nelson.

All of the contributions to this volume take up existing lines of inquiry that either function within or respond in some important way to the movements of the linguistic turn, and redirect them in newly productive ways. To this end, the entire volume should be read as a series of prompts to stimulate further inquiry and to develop new lines of convergence between language and music: not to reproduce old comparative (and hierarchical) questions but in order specifically to engage the complexity of their relationship; to 'pass through' that complexity in order to invent ever new conjunctions and disjunctions.

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[4]«Language is first, it has invented the dualism. […] We must pass through [*passer par*] dualisms because they are in language, it is not a question of getting rid of them, but we must fight against language, invent stammering not in order to go back to a prelinguistic pseudo-reality, but to trace a vocal or written line which will make language flow between these dualism, and which will define a minority usage of language, an inherent variation as Labov say» (Deleuze, Parnet 1987: 34).

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