

The Sound of Subjectivity: on the actuality of Hegel's music

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This article offers a philosophical analysis of G. W. F. Hegel's conception of music as articulated in his lectures on aesthetics, with a focus on music's unique ontological and speculative status within absolute spirit. It argues that, for Hegel, art functions as a practice of truth by supplementing empirical reality through productive semblance (*Schein*). Rather than representing reality, art condenses it in a way that renders its constitutive principles intelligible. Music realizes this function in its most radical form. The study demonstrates that Hegel understands music as the paradigmatic romantic art, distinguished by the negation of spatial objectivity and the primacy of intensity, vibration, and interiority. By abolishing stable external form, music transforms sensuous material into oscillation and movement. Central to this transformation is the speculative concept of *Ton*, which unites sound, tone, and materiality. *Ton* exists only insofar as it vanishes, giving music the structure of a double negation through which being appears as trembling and persistence in dissolution. Moreover, the article shows that music produces a distinctive temporal order by interrupting homogeneous duration through rhythm and cadence. This interruption renders time structured and countable, enabling the emergence of subjectivity as self-relation rather than substance. Finally, it is argued that music occupies a privileged position within absolute spirit because it makes audible the immanence of subjectivity and the inner movement of thought itself. By rendering disappearance perceptible, music provides a non-representational yet rigorous access to the truth of subjectivity and temporality.

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La musique est quelque chose qui me donne le sentiment de rassemblement de moi-même.
(Alain Badiou)

In his 1826 lectures on the “philosophy of art”, delivered at the Humboldt university, Hegel noted that “art always supplements [*ergänzt*] the experiences of our actual life” (Hegel, 2004, 56) Through art in general human life is generically supplemented.¹ Because art is a practice of generic supplementation, it is capable of, is a practice of truth. But what art in general supplements life with is not simply the emotions and feelings that we otherwise would not experience. Art – in the singular, even though it exists only as plural – supplements reality with the truth of that very reality; with a new perspective onto that reality which condenses that entire reality of which it is a piece of art in such a way that we can think through it. This has nothing to do with art representing reality. Rather art adds to reality something that one otherwise cannot grasp in it. It produces an angle on all of reality that otherwise would not exist – there is otherwise, we could assume no all of reality for Hegel. Art fictitiously totalizes and this allows to see things anew.

For it effectuates its supplementation by means of a “deception [*Täuschung*]” (Hegel, 2004, 64) or in the medium of semblance [*Schein*]. Truth has the structure of a fiction after all. This deception and semblance are productive, as it makes us “more capable [*fähiger*]” (Hegel, 2004, 56). Art increases our capacities. It increases – to speak Spinozist for a moment – what our bodies can do. And also, what thought can do. For “the semblance of art is a much higher and truly more real form than what we are used to calling reality [*Realität*] or how we are used to seeing ethical or sensual life” (Hegel, 2004, 64). Art is in reality more real than reality, more realistic than it because it gives us an insight into what constitutes reality and this does otherwise not appear in reality. It gives us a way of accounting for the limits of a particular historical conjuncture and therefore shows us its real. Yet, if art’s medium is deception, it is only through deception that we can actually account for historical reality that is constituted. Art presents us with, “an idealized... reality” (Hegel, 2004, 76), with a reality accounted for and looked at from the perspective of the idea or ideal. For Hegel an idea is the coincidence of a concept and its actuality – say there is an idea when thought thinks itself by means of thought and when therefore the actuality of thought coincides in thought with its being thought. An ideal is the inscription into the world of appearance of a standard by means of which we can determine the degree to which a concept is actualized in reality.

¹ We can recall that it is no one else than Alain Badiou who claims that any truth, any novelty has the structure of a generic supplement. Cf. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Bloomsbury 2013), p. 15.

In 1823 Hegel indicates that “it is in art that the peoples have recorded their highest notions and art is often the only key to get to know the religion of a people” (Hegel, 2007, 4). So, only through art we get an insight into a certain historical social formation and its highest value. Only through art we can determine what people think about, say, the relationship between life and its purpose, the relationship between the finite and the infinite or the ways in which they conceived of subjectivity (if they thought of it at all or if they did in terms of freedom, for example). Art makes the thought appear that structures a historical conjuncture; it is as if it formalizes it and thereby also makes its limitations appear. It is thus through art that knowledge about a historical situation is produced. Artistic generic supplements formalize the very constitutive principles of a reality that they supplement. This formalization appears itself in the form of an object, but of a different kind. For it has “received the baptism of spirit” (Hegel, 2007, 11). Art is “from spirit and for spirit [*aus dem Geist und für den Geist*]” (Hegel, 2007, 11) and it makes the (historically specific) transcendental of a world appear in its compositional logic. Artworks can do this, because they also always make their own principles of appearance appear. An artwork shows us, demonstrates in front of us what it does and how and why it does it. It says what it does and “does what it says” (Badiou, 2009, 74), to cite a comment Alain Badiou once made with regard to Mallarmé. This means that in an artwork appearance qua appearance appears – and in this sense all we have to work with is appearance. “Appearance is completely essential” (Hegel, 2004, 76) as Hegel says in 1823, or in another famous formulation: appearance is essential to essence (*das Erscheinen ist dem Wesen wesentlich*). Reality’s essence thus appears differently because reality’s constitutive principles appear, due to artworks, within appearance. Artworks produce thereby a minimal difference in appearance. This is the background, against which I want to start turning to what Hegel has to say about music and why it is today worth returning to.

Hegel thinks that music together with painting is a romantic form of art. It is the romantic art par excellence (Jaeschke, 2010, 440) – which means that it is emphatically subjective and not determined by the predominance of objective materials or reliant on anything given. In painting we can register a subtraction or negation of one dimension of space, for Hegel, but in music there is the “obliteration [*Tilgung*] of the whole of space [*der totalen Räumlichkeit*].”¹ Music is antispatial. *Tilgung* in German means to strike out, to extinguish, to annihilate and was used to indicate the literal wiping out of a debt from the debt register, or as the British expression goes: as fulfilling of one’s obligation. Music for Hegel does not

¹ In the following I cite from the following German and English editions: G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik*, Vol 1-3 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1986), abbreviated as: “Ästh”; and G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press 1988), abbreviated as AESTH. The citation above is to be found in: AESTH, 891; Ästh, 133.

accept any objectivity and indebtedness to it. It does not start from anything that is external and is rather external to all externality. It is thus not about objective extension but about intensity, intensification and interiority. Hegel describes this in such a way that we encounter in music “a complete withdrawal [*völliges Zurückziehen*] ... into subjectivity” (Hegel, 1988, 889). But music is not just a most subjective art. It is rather the art of subjectivity. It does not allow “the external..., a fixed existence as something external” (Hegel, 1988, 890). This is another way of saying, music creates movement. It moves, not only us but everything. Nothing remains that could have an unmoved and stable existence.¹ Hegel describes this by stating that music’s sublating act makes “a specific sensuous material sacrifice [...] its peaceful separatedness”. It moves it, “yet so [that it] vibrates in itself that every part of the cohering body not only changes its place but also struggles to replace itself in its former position. The result of this oscillating vibration is sound or a note, the material of music” (Hegel, 1988, 890). Music is not an unmoved mover, but a moved and moving one.

It moves all things. It moves them so that they are no longer stable but rather “tremble in themselves” (Hegel, 1988, 890). Music in general comes with an ontological modification. Or, with a different ontology. Only through music we can think that things oscillate in themselves. Music is the trembling not of all things, even though it is also that. But it is the trembling of their being and therefore music can be defined as the trembling of being. *Dinge erzittern*, things tremble in themselves that there is a swaying and swinging movement – Hegel speaks of a “*schwingende Erzittern*”, a swinging trembling, a trembling swing. With music this now becomes the material of art. It is not only that music swings. Music supplements a specific world of appearance such that now everything swings. Everything is now under the trembling sway of... subjectivity. Adding subjectivity as a supplement to being and subtracting objectivity means that now everything is different. When everything swings and trembles, it must be subjectivity. To add a note on Hegel’s terminology here. What in the English translation is rendered as “sound” – the oscillating vibration that so the word Hegel uses in German is “Ton” (Hegel, 1988, 890). In German “Ton” can count as what Hegel called a speculative word, which characterizes a word that brings together a series of even contradictory meanings into the unity of one signifier. It is one signifier that sways between different meanings and therefore vibrates, oscillates the meaning-signifier relationship. For, Ton in German means sound (Ton as Klang), it also means tone of colour (as in *der Ton einer Farbe*) or just means tone (as in: watch your tone). It means musical

¹ Music also moves us. Not only emotionally, but also materially. Hegel’s wonderful slogan for this, and Friedrich Kittler has written a nice, short commentary on this, is that music is infectious or more precisely “dance music even gets into our feet [*bei der Tanzmusik kommt es einem gar in die Beine*].” Ästh, 155. It, literally, comes – not only gets – into one’s feet and it is precisely this “it” that music is able to mobilize.

note, but – and that this makes clear why Hegel speaks of a matter of music, of a materiality of music that is linked to the *Ton* – it also means clay. *Ton* is the clay from which music moulds not this or that shape but ultimately what it is itself. *Ton* is the clay and matter of music and this means that music is *Ton* (I am consciously here using the German term). Music is what is made of the stuff that music moulds and thereby brings into existence. Hegel states in 1823: “Der *Ton*, indem er ist, ist nicht “(Hegel, 2007, 265). We can translate: *Ton* insofar it is, is not. For its being is to vanish. It is precisely therefore that “the plethora of sound [*Ton*] falls into time” (Hegel, 2007, 265).

Because the element of music is *Ton*, “music relinquishes the element of external form and perceptible visibility” – Hegel is indicating that what shakes and swings the world is invisible – and therefore needs another form of treatment. Another *Auffassung*, conception, idea, concept, apprehension. For its production necessitates another subjective organ, namely hearing [or: listening, FR]” (Hegel, 1988, 890). The ear. The very form of musical material – a vibrant form, not of matter, a form internal to matter that vibrates but is at the same time not beyond form – can only be what it is when it is identified as what it is. Only through a thinking engagement with the work.¹ To conceive of music, of its internal form that is its matter, the form of the *Ton*, we need a subjective, we need to establish an inner sense. This is why music demonstrates another ontology. It is an ontology where the vibe, the vibration, the trembling rhythm of being needs to be perceived, registered. The eye – which is, as Hegel indicates also a passive organ but of a different quality – is too bound to objectivity. But the ear can do it. Music demands not only an ontology and a theory of the ear. Rather any ear demands a different ontology. For it is only the ear that can hear what music actually does: namely it dissolves all stability of any being, it makes it tremble and thereby even undoes (the objectivity of) being.

Music makes dissolution, dissolving audible. The ear is the organ that can hearken it. This cannot but mean that there is no *Ton* before music – of course, there is for Hegel noise and acoustic material – but as much as there is no music before the invention of the *Ton*, of tonality, there is for him no *Ton* before the invention of music. “Sound and its figuration become an element artificially moulded by art [*ein erst durch die Kunst... gemachtes Element*]” (Hegel, 1988, 894). Hegel will call this “the peculiar power of music... an elemental one, i.e. it lies in the element of sound in which art moves here” (Hegel, 1988, 906). What we encounter here is like in a version of Heinrich von Kleist’s gradual production of thought while speaking, the gradual production of music by the invention of

¹ It is exactly here that I would like to indicate that this is one of the very few passages, and maybe the only one that is as explicit as this, where Hegel indicates that ultimately when it gets to the nitty-gritty he is “little versed in this territory and must therefore excuse himself for restricting myself simply to the more general points and to single remarks.”

sound as well as the gradual production of sound by the invention of music. Music changes everything, it makes everything tremble. But its result is not simply a dissolution of all previously existing ontologies, but rather an audible and hence a perceptible form of disappearing. Hegel calls this “doubled negation”, *gedoppelte Negativität*, so redoubled negativity:¹ music is that which persists in and in a very specific sense emerges from and only through disappearance and dissolution. For not all disappearance and dissolution is the same. Music makes it possible to think absence. Through music we think that that which is not is not always the same and thus can be differentiated (and how could this not lead to the core of Hegelian philosophy?). We sensuously encounter a movement of redoubled negativity, a not nothing that we can hear. This is the *Ton*, the sound of music.

Hegel adds to this that: “The ear... without itself turning a practical relation to objects, listens to the result of the vibration of the body through which what comes before us is longer the peaceful and material shape but the first and more ideal breath of the soul. Further, since the negativity into which the vibrating material enters here is on one side the cancelling of the spatial situation, a cancellation cancelled again by the reaction of the body, therefore the expression of this double negation, i.e. sound, is an externality which in its coming-to-be is annihilated again by its very existence, and it vanishes of itself” (Hegel, 1988, 890). In music we listen to the sound of redoubled negation, we listen to externality vanishing, to the sound of vanishing. We listen then not simply to the being of things, but to being being touched by subjectivity. To the being of subjectivity itself and we could say thereby to being-being subjectivized. The musical ear makes us hear in music “the breath of the soul”, *den Atem der Seele*, an expression first used by Meister Eckart. The soul is what moves us but the way it moves, the way it in-and exhales, is what we experience when we listen to music. In less metaphorical terms, music makes us listen to the inner life of subjectivity. Music is the first art that comes with an ontology of the subject for Hegel that is an ontology of the movements of inner life or the inner life as being moved. By listening to music, we listen to the immanence of truth of subjectivity.

This immanence is here an interiority that is not spatial but temporal. Because it no longer has any stable objective form. This is why a musical piece, or more generally: why sound, why *Ton* is able to do something to the really existing external body by turning it into what he calls “the manner in which the inmost soul is moved to the depths of its personality and conscious soul” (Hegel, 1988, 891). What Hegel will describe as “the soul of the tone” is what allows to touch our soul: the movement of music is, in other words, another form of movement, a different ontology of movement; one that can move all things since it can move us. The ontology of subjectivity is an ontology of the movement of subjectivity. That

¹ Ästh, 135.

we encounter in music – and this is what makes its universal appeal possible – “our entirely empty self” (Hegel, 1988, 891). does not oppose the insight that it is precisely through music that we feel uniquely moved in a way that only we are moved.¹ Music, this is the philosopher speaking about the relationship about philosophy and music, is the theory of the subject outside of philosophy.

Hegel calls music the “Kunst des Gemüts”, “the art of mood” (Hegel, 1988, 894)²; *Ton* as mood, that ultimately displays what subjectivity is in its fundamental ways, namely something that is moved and therefore needs to be produced to exist at all. We leave the thinking of substances (the harmony of sphere etc) behind when we conceive of music in terms of subjectivity and subjectivity through the ontology of music. Hegel claims that for music there are no objects that exist in themselves [*für sich bestehendes Objekt*] and that it would deal with – he is here already indicating music is doing what for a certain post-Heideggerian philosophy art in the 20th century is attempting to do, notably to subtract all objectivity from within itself. Music is – say classical music without words – without content, but therefore not without devoid content. Rather it’s content is what pure subjectivity actually is; a “free unstable soaring... that is a communication which, instead of having stability on its own account, is carried by the inner subjective life, and is to exist for that life alone” (Hegel, 1988, 891). It is not that music is what words cannot capture and this is why there are no words in it. Rather for Hegel music is saying it, is able to say it – “it” being subjectivity and its inner movements – exactly in the right way, namely in the form of an movement through organized dissolution. Hegel claims that “we always think in words but without needing actual speech” and it is precisely this fact that leads to the possibility of the *Ton* “acquiring independence” (Hegel, 1988, 898).

He insinuates that we always think in words but there are ways of indicating that we think in words that have nothing to do with spoken words and for which we are even often

¹ “The world of sounds, quickly rustling away, is directly drawn by the ear into the inner life of the heart and harmonizes the soul with emotions in sympathy with it.” AESTH 894, Ästh 139.

² It is interesting – and an anticipation of a claim that one will later find in Heidegger, who makes a connection between *Gemüt*, so mood, and *Mut*, so courage. For Hegel states in a lecture from 1823 that “with the regiments one has good music, it will inspire [*befeuern*], fire up the courage in a battle...” Music can not produce courage, but it can supplement and “support the powers of courage and duty.” Hegel *Vorlesung*, 264. Interestingly, he makes a difference between when “Orpheus... domesticated men, gave them laws by means of music. Music alone, for itself without content, does not work for us. For our formation, education we also need other things.” Hegel, *Vorl*, 265. Or in his *Lectures on Fine Art*, he states: “The pipes of the Highlanders made an essential contribution to inflaming their courage, and the power of the: Marseillaise, the *fa ira* of the French Revolution, is not to be gainsaid. But enthusiasm proper has its ground in the specific in the true spiritual interest which has filled the nation and which can be raised by music into a momentarily livelier feeling because the notes, the rhythm, and the melody can carry the man away who gives himself up to them. Nowadays, however, we will not regard music as capable of producing by itself such a courageous mood and a contempt for death.” AESTH, 908f.

at a loss to say how they precisely work. This is the independence of *Ton*. Because *Ton*, sound is able to present thought. Music is able to make the inner communication of subjects audible, the thought of subjects. It presents the inner voice of a subject in the outer world without introducing any externality. It is what Hegel calls the “sphere of inner sense or sensibility” (Hegel, 1988, 905). This means for example that the distinction between the I that thinks something and the thing that is thought in music disappears: “this distinction is expunged... the thing felt is interwoven with the inner feeling as such, without any separation between them” (Hegel, 1988, 904). The way to make externality disappear is thus to change the ontology to such a degree that we are within an immanence and music is the presentation of this very immanence, in which I am what I think, I am what I resonate with. Hegel in 1823 claims: “In music the inner sense hears itself [*vernimmt sich selbst*, so also: interrogates itself] and it cultivates this hearing [*bildet dieses Vernehmen aus*]” (Hegel, 2007, 266). Music is a production of an inner sense, cultivation of an inner sense itself, not an expression of interiority, but its artistic auto-genesis, by means of creating and hearing it.

For this purpose, music “does not make sound subservient to speech but takes sound [*Ton*] independently... as an end in itself” (Hegel, 1988, 899) And because it can do this, it again affirms its independence and autonomy from any externality, external content for example. This implies that: “The difficult task assigned to music is to make th[e] inwardly veiled life and energy echo on its own account in notes, or to add to the words and ideas expressed, and to immerse ideas into this element of sound, in order to produce them anew for feeling and sympathy” (Hegel, 1988, 902). Music is like a private language that we all speak and that needs no actual speech.¹ It is for Hegel the articulation of a “free unstable soaring”, of a free, unhalting, *Verschweben*, floating, hovering, a levitation. Not simply of music but of the inner being of subjectivity. Music is therefore what moves subjects as well as how subjects move and are moved. Musical objects are generated by music alone, musical themes are generated by music alone, etc. Hegel’s indicates to a certain degree that the death of (trivial forms of) representation is simply what music IS. And the reason for this is: music is nothing but the pointed organization of disappearance, of dissolution, and the medium of the *Ton*, the sound, is exactly what allows for it. What does all this mean for this relationship between philosophy and music? It means that philosophy can learn from music how to dissolve, to undo, how to dissolute, but not only in a negative manner, but

¹ Hegel calls this also the “poetic of music, the language of the soul...” Ästh, 185.

rather in the form of a composition, in the form of a work. An undoing work is a work done by music.¹

But music for Hegel does not simply undo things. We will not forget that he called his own project at some time a “sich selbst vollbringender Skeptizismus”, self-consummating scepticism. So, there is never just undoing or undoing has to be organized strictly. What is then undoing in music? We hear encounter what Hegel calls two extremes, namely a form of undoing and a form of compositional doing and it is in their relation where rhythm and cadence come in as categories of thought. Therefore, he can claim that “what dominates in music is at once the soul and profoundest feeling and the most rigorous mathematical laws so that it unites in itself two extremes which easily become independent of one another”: the soul and mathematical reasoning power. Any one-sided re-enforcing has a detrimental effect, since we need both for music to work. A mathematics of feeling, that is an audible mathematics of a movement of dissolution that persists in dissolution. But music only is music when it is heard. Subjects are “gripped [*ergriffen*]” (Hegel, 1988, 906). by music – music does not operate by means of conceptual conviction, not directly by means of a *Begriff*, but rather grips us, operates by means of an *Ergriff*, – and when this happens the subject “is elevated... and activated by it” (Hegel, 1988, 906). Music is literal emotional activation of subjectivity through mathematically organized persistence in dissolution.²

This is all quite abstract for now. But Hegel discusses in greater detail the specifications of time-signature, beat (*Takt*) and rhythm³ and harmony⁴ in music (which I leave aside for another time) as this is how music produces its very own objectivity.⁵ It is a musical objectivity that is entirely, we could say, historical. Nothing in it is just given. The general direction of this argument here is that “music is not only concerned with time as such and relations of longer or shorter duration, pauses, emphases, etc., but with the concrete time of specific notes in their resonance which therefore do differ from one another solely in their duration” (Hegel, 1988, 912). The organization of persistence in dissolution provides the ground for what turns out to be ultimately an organization of different forms of differences whose medium is the *Ton*. This ultimately affects the concept of time that we have. For it

¹ Absolute spirit is composed of different practices of *Abtun*, of undoing, of producing a distance to the objective world and objective spirit. For this cf. Rebecca Comay / Frank Ruda, “On Gaps. Is there a Politics of Absolute Knowing”, in: *Hegel Bulletin*. Published online 2025:1-26. doi:10.1017/hgl.2025.8

² In 1823, Hegel also describes it as “the struggle of freedom and necessity which presents itself here to us. The high point is the production and the combatting of contradiction.” Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, 269. He also calls this the „struggle of the freedom of phantasy... and the necessity of harmonic relations.” Ästh, 189.

³ *Zeitmaß*, *Takt*, *Rhythmus*, Cf. Ästh, 163f.

⁴ Harmony is “the realm of notes as such” AESTH, 919. This is where we have to consider the different instruments, the different keys, the system of chords,

⁵ Rhythm for Hegel is what enlivens (Ästh, 168), if it manages to free itself from the “barbarism of a unified rhythm” (Ästh, 170).

is no longer just “inherently undifferentiated duration” (Hegel, 1988, 913), rather “time becomes countable” (Hegel, 1988, 913). And because thereby what could otherwise still have appeared to be a given medium of Ton, namely temporality is transformed into something that is produced, into something that is made, into something that is different from time as mere duration. Hegel describes this as a move that leads from the I to the self, and this move is an interruption, an interruption of time with another, now musical time:

“But the I am not an indeterminate continuity..., but only becomes a self by concentrating its momentary experiences and returning into itself from them. The process of self-cancellation whereby it becomes an object to itself turns into self-awareness and now only through this self-relation does it come to have a sense and consciousness, etc., of itself. But this concentration of experiences essentially implies an *interruption* of the purely indefinite process of changes which is what time was as we envisaged it just now, because the coming to be and passing away, the vanishing and renewal of points of time was nothing but an entirely formal transition beyond this 'now' to another 'now' of the same kind, and therefore only an uninterrupted movement forward “(Hegel, 1988, 914).

Music articulates and is what interrupts uninterrupted temporal movement and thereby moves time. It makes time move, interrupts time by timing differently. It undoes the temporality of the ever the same now by introducing a different organization: it produces in the now an interruption of the now, by inscribing a temporality of interruption. Time as countable is time as interrupted and interrupting. This means that now the inner sense – which already in Kant was the locus of the form of time – is not simply given, but produced and because it is the inner sense that is now moulded, the now is now moulded in different ways: The undoing interrupts natural time and this subjectivizes. Music, we could venture to say, is for Hegel like the architecture of time. An architecture of gaps, of all the material it has to invent while constructing with it. What allows music to interrupt natural time and its durational *modus operandi* is the introduction of another form of repetition (for example through the beat).¹ This is now a different self-relation one by means of which we persist in what is entirely artificially made “Contrasted with this empty progress, the self is what persists in and by itself [*das Beisichselbstseiende*], and its self-concentration interrupts the

¹ Cf. Ästh, 166. Hegel remarks that repetition is of the essence for music, since each musical work has to be repeatedly produced and this is a crucial component of how music operates. For music not even music is simply given (Ästh, 194). This also plays a role for the emotion, i.e. for the movement in music. We can only be moved by music if the composer was also moved by what she put into the composition. So, the composer was moved, symbolized the movement and thereby what is transmitted is movement. Music is an effective transmission of trembling.

indefinite series of points of time and makes gaps [*Einschnitte*] in their abstract continuity; ...” (Hegel, 1988, 914).

Music denaturalizes time by making gaps into it, by moulding time and thereby moulding and shaping change itself. It is therefore subjectivizing because not only is a subject what persists through change, rather a subject is ultimately for Hegel nothing but the practice of change itself. For, as he famously stated, a subject is nothing but what it makes of itself. Music presents us the immanence of the truth of subjectivity (in its diversity), by making audible what it means that a subject is nothing but what comes into existence as part and parcel of a process of transformation that is form of persistence in dissolution. Music is what subjectivization sounds like, what the now – and in this sense the temporal immanence – of subjectivization sounds like. It can only do so by being the art of time and timing, of creating organizations of time that are pointed. The negation of natural time, producing cuts, gaps in it, becomes the very form of musical organization and is thereby again negated. Undoing time creatively by means of time, music absolutizes its own time. It is now that the now is entirely self-reliant and self-organized. And because “I am in time and time is the being of the subject itself” (Hegel, 1988, 156), it means the subjects in music determines their own being. In music, we experience ourselves outside of ourselves as being with ourself. Through music we are subjectivized, because subjects for Hegel are “*beisichselbstseiende*”, they are with themselves, they are not in themselves, or better: their interiority is a *bei-sich-sein*, being-bei, being-next, besides ourselves. It is this experience, the experience of us being-bei, that makes music able to touch something absolute. We hear to ourselves besides ourselves in music and can realize that this is what it is to be a subject.

The mode of the absolute in Hegel is the mode of the *bei*, the mode of the *besides* (so not of the goal ahead or the *telos* or the clear direction). It shows that the absolute demands, conceptually, sidedness, one-sidedness and not neutrality. For Hegel, music is a practice of absolute spirit (all art is), because it presents us with that which is not simply merely subjective nor objective but absolute. In music this absolute takes the form of a moving siding with oneself beside oneself. In and through music we are being moved to the side, we learn how to be beside oneself. It is this strange relationship – as we can obviously raise the question: where exactly is *bei*, where is the place of the absolute here? – which is an experience of the absolute. *Absolutus* derives from *absolvere*, which means to set free, to detach, acquit, bring to an end, and is composed of *ab* (to loosen, to untie, release, detach) and *leu* (to loosen, divide, to cut apart). What we encounter in music is an absolving of all objectivity, even of the seeming objective structures of subjectivity and an absolutization of the inner space, or the inner sense as absolute. We listen to the being beside ourselves of ourselves as what is absolute. Hegel suggests that philosophy can learn from music how to think the inner sense from the immanence of the becoming of a *bei-sich-selbst-sein*, of a

subject, by the radical subjectivization of all that seems objective. Thereby we learn from it the creation of a world of subjectivity that is detached from any objective grounded as well as from any stable substance. We learn that the subject is nothing but what it makes of itself and therefore not even a stable nothing. We are a nothing that is beside itself, which is a thought that is so intricate and irritating to think through that – following Hegel’s still pertinent argument – it is at first only music that can get us moving toward it.

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