



The Dawn of Music Semiology: Essays in Honor of Jean-Jacques Nattiez. Edited by Jonathan Dunsby and Jonathan Goldman. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2017. 228 pp. ISBN 9781580465625.

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The Dawn of Music Semiology: Essays in Honor of Jean-Jacques Nattiez pays tribute to the influential semiologist in the form of an ambitious and valuable set of contributions representing “some of the latest thinking about the nature and purpose of music semiology” (p. 1). These essays build upon ideas from Nattiez’s numerous publications, some of which are

listed in a selected bibliography. The book is organized into three parts: “Metaconsiderations,” “Poietic Channels,” and “Esthetic Excursions,” providing a cogent structure by which to navigate the diverse subjects covered: the first section focuses on philosophical critique, the second contrasts methods of textual analysis, and the third emphasizes contexts of interpretation.

The first entry in “Metaconsiderations,” and a highlight of the book, is “Theorizing Gesture,” a chapter from Jean Molino’s *Le singe musicien: essais de sémiologie et anthropologie de la musique* (2009), here translated into English for the first time. Molino states that music is “complex, heterogeneous, involving the inherent participation of the body as well as the gestures of its producers and listeners. Thus there is no pure music” (p. 13). It may be no coincidence that Molino’s reintegration of music and gesture—soul (or mind) and body—comes at a time when embodied cognition in music research is beginning to come of age.

The second essay is Jonathan Dunsby’s “Music Semiology in the Mind of the Musician,” which describes music as mental synthesis and questions why semiology has not had more of an impact on music psychology. This is an important question, but Dunsby’s critique of music perception and cognition research would benefit from greater documentation. Claims such as



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“experts in music perception can seem to take musical signification for granted, probably because, broadly speaking, scholars often confuse music and language” (p. 24) are made without specifying who or how, and only three sources from the field are cited in the essay.¹ It would be interesting to know how Dunsby would assess a broader range of sources: for example, Aniruddh Patel’s *Music, Language, and the Brain* would offer much in response to the claim quoted above.²

Kofi Agawu’s “Against Ethnotheory” offers a compelling and eloquent critique of the will to difference upon which he claims ethnotheory is founded. This article presents the closest thing to an argument against Nattiez in this book: Agawu says that he has “stepped to the right of Nattiez by arguing against ethnotheory,” having found it “ultimately a confining rather than liberating discourse” (p. 51).

The second part of the book, “Poietic Channels,” opens with Simha Arom’s “From Georgian to Medieval Polyphonies: Analysis and Modeling.” Arom presents a comparative analysis of the interval content of a mini-corpus of seven works each of Georgian and Medieval polyphony, aiming to demonstrate the potential contributions of ethnomusicology to Nattiez’s ideal of *musicologie générale*. Next, Nicolas Meeùs’s “Schenker’s *Inhalt*, Schenkerian Semiotics: A Preliminary Study” suggests that Schenker “attempted to develop an autonomous musical semiotics” (pp. 82-83) in which meaning is situated in the correspondence between hierarchical structural levels, thereby accounting for meaning—conceived as musical content (*Inhalt*)—in “absolute” music. Arnold Whittall’s “Music under the Sign of Modernism: From Wagner to Boulez, and Britten,” concludes the section with what the author styles as “a deliberately impressionistic foray” into composers’ and scholars’ responses to Wagner’s work, with a particular focus on Boulez (p. 101). This section is somewhat more conservative overall, adopting methods and subject matter closer to those of traditional music theory and musicology.

“Esthetic Excursions,” begins with Rosanna Dalmonte’s “Musical Borrowings in the Works of Bruno Maderna,” which discusses theoretical and political dimensions of Maderna’s incorporation of folk and early music into his compositions. Neo-Adornian overtones colour the discussion: Maderna’s borrowings are described as suggesting “ethical and human meanings that had been effaced by time and by the culture industry” (p. 129).

Jonathan Goldman’s “Of Doubles, Groups, and Rhymes: A Seriation of Works for Spatialized Orchestral Groups (1958-60)” stands out through its eloquent prose, clarity of purpose, and

1. Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis, *On Repeat: How Music Plays the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Diana Deutsch, Editorial, *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1983); David Temperley, “Syncopation in Rock: A Perceptual Perspective,” *Popular Music* 18, no. 1 (1999).

2. Aniruddh Patel, *Music, Language, and the Brain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

thorough grounding. Goldman describes the outpouring of spatialized orchestral compositions between 1958 and 1960 in tandem with the stereo technology that was becoming popular at the time, and points out that musicological discussion of technology typically focuses on the poietic side, only rarely addressing esthetic implications such as those taken up in this essay.

The final entry, Irène Deliège's "The Psychological Organization of Music Listening: From Spontaneous to Learned Perceptive Processes," is an empirical study of segmentation and perception of musical form by musicians and nonmusicians. Its inclusion in this book is to be applauded for bringing together traditionally separated disciplines with much potential for mutual enrichment. Readers familiar with music perception and cognition literature would welcome more detail about the experimental design and statistical analysis, but the adopted tone is understandable in a collection of this nature.

The title of the book is intriguing in light of its contents: the editors intend the word "dawn" to indicate that music semiology is "young, vibrant, and certainly not fully formed" (p. 1). If this is a dawn, perhaps we have turned around to behold not the sunrise itself but the vast landscape that it illuminates. Another light-based analogy might be the prism: the white light of Nattiez's semiological insight having dispersed into a spectrum of complementary hues of inquiry. The editors "hope and believe that the heterogeneity of this rich assemblage will strike the reader as being part of its overall value" (p. 6), and I believe it does. However, the coherence of the collection, which "is promised by our strategy of exploring what we regard as central themes of the discipline" (p. 2), is somewhat more elusive given the wide variety of subjects and methodologies. This is in the spirit of Nattiez's *musicologie générale*, but it may make the collection useful to some readers as a collection of chapters rather than a unified whole. Nevertheless, this book is a welcome and substantial contribution to semiological and semiology-inspired research, and a fitting veneration of its honoree's life's work (so far).