

**Making Way to  
Music:  
Heidegger and  
Adorno**

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## Abstract

With the aid of Heidegger's late lecture, 'Der Weg zur Sprache', a parallel way to music is sought that breaks with metaphysical ways of thinking on music. The way is parallel ultimately because of the twofold way in which the world opens up for human being, namely, in understanding and attunement. Human beings can only make music through being attuned to and listening to the quivering that grants attunements. That is, it is the originary quivering that enables human beings to be musical, thus being used by appropriation (Ereignis) to allow music itself to make way to music. As a foil to this post-metaphysical way to music, Adorno's theologically transcendent, subjectivist music aesthetics is discussed.



# 1. A parallel way<sup>1</sup>

We are seeking a parallel way to music. The way is to be parallel to Heidegger's way to language, thus in a certain way plagiarizing it. It should first be recalled where the word 'parallel' comes from. It is Greek in origin, and comes from παρά ἀλλήλω, meaning "next to one another". Thus, the way to music is supposed to lie next to and to run alongside the way to language, in itself a mysterious circumstance calling for elucidation.

To seek a way to music is here supposed to indicate that a type of thinking that is no longer metaphysical is attempting to make its way, to make headway, or simply, to make way (*Be-wëgen*). In seeking to make its way, thinking is to travel on a path that runs alongside the way to language in order to experience something essential and intrinsic about music, in particular, its parallelism to language.

'The Way to Language' is the title of a late lecture that Heidegger held in January 1959. The lecture is the final text in a series of essays and lectures which Heidegger wrote in the 1950s and published under the title *On the Way to Language*.<sup>2</sup> As the chronologically last text and the text which gives the volume its title, 'The Way to Language' could well be regarded as the final, mature fruit of a decade of intensive thinking and writing about language.

How are we to seek a way to music in parallel to a way to language? We can only do so by looking over toward the way to language to see how that way makes way. The formula announced at the beginning of 'The Way to Language' which is to serve as a thread for the way to language is: "Die Sprache als die Sprache zur Sprache bringen" (242). The formula has to be rendered in English something like: "Put language

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented to the conference *Heidegger. Natur – Kunst – Technik 25 – 28 May 2011* in Meßkirch convened by Alfred Denker and Holger Zaborowski, extracted from my *The Quivering of Propriation: A Parallel Way to Music* [www.arte-fact.org](http://www.arte-fact.org) 1998/2010.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger *Unterwegs zur Sprache* Neske, Pfullingen 1959, eighth edition 1986.

as language into words.” Heidegger points out that what seems at first to be a formula will be transformed while under way. In its final reformulation, the formula will become: “Die Be-wägung bringt die Sprache (das Sprachwesen) als die Sprache (die Sage) zur Sprache (zum verlautenden Wort).” (261). Without having followed the path that leads to this ultimate reformulation of the apparent formula, this final rendering is initially incomprehensible.

Here, for the moment, we only have to ask: What does this formula imply for the parallel way to music? On this path we are trying to make way to music by way of thinking in language. The essence of music, or music as music will not be put to music but, at best, it will be put into thoughtful words. This shows that the way to music in thinking must be a way that runs alongside any way that leads to music as tuneful and attuning tones. Thinking can only seek a parallel way to music, and it can only make way in words that show it the way. The formula that can serve as a thread for an attempt to follow a path in thinking to music as music is the following: To put music as music into music. This formula has to be transformed into the parallel formula: To put into words the making-way of music as music into music. Later on, this formula will be elaborated and transformed into the as yet incomprehensible formulation: “Making-way allows music (the essencing of music) as music (the quivering) to come to music (attuned sounds)”.

## 2. Making way

To the present day, what is essential to music has been regarded as inhering in musicking as sounds or tones brought into a form. To recur to the formula of the first section, it can be asked: Does this conception of music appropriately describe the putting of music as music into music? The traditional metaphysical way to music sets out in the direction of humankind; it leads through music to something else: to the representation of human emotions in tonal signs, in a language of emotions. The essence of music conceived of with regard to something else, however, does not already point toward or point out the essencing of music, the mode in which music holds sway and whiles as music, gathered into what allows music to come into its own as music.

If we carefully follow the track of music as music, then we have already renounced the procedures for regarding music that have hitherto prevailed. We can no longer treat music as the representation of human experiences, nor as a mirroring of physiological sense data in tonal consciousness, nor as a formal structure of harmonious sounds, no matter how conventionally or unconventionally 'harmony' is understood, nor as a representation of anything at all. Instead of explaining music as this or that, and thus fleeing from music, the way to music wants to go through an experience (*eine Er-fahrung*) of music as music. In defining the essence of music as a representation or expression, music is indeed comprehended, but it is grasped by something other than itself. If, on the contrary, we pay attention to music as music, then it demands of us that everything that belongs to music as music be brought out into the open.

The way to music now attempts to follow more strictly the thread which the formula names: To put into words the making-way of music as music to music.

People making and listening to music (i.e. musicking in the broad sense) belong to music as an activity, but not in the sense of cause and effect. Rather, those musicking have their presence, and thus present themselves, in musicking. And where are they present? They are present

with what they use for musicking; they are present where they while with what already affects them in individual and multifarious ways. What affects them, each in its own way, are other people and things and everything that attunes these people and affects these things as a whole. In musicking for each other, whether it be directly in bodily presence, i.e. live, or indirectly through the media, a whole range of moods is made to resound in one way or the other; it is modulated and perhaps developed, attuned in such a way that those musicking by making and listening to music attune each other and themselves. The songs sung with voice and/or instruments, alone or together, are manifold. What is musicked may disappear without leaving a trace or it may be preserved or linger on in some way or other. What is made to resonate in music may be long past, or it may have been long since allotted as a music destined to be brought to resonance.

What is sung in the broadest sense of musicking, whether vocal or not, originates in manifold ways from what is unsung, what is unmusicked, whether this be what has not yet been musicked or what must be left unmusicked in the sense of what is withheld from music. Thus what is musicked, i.e. brought to resonance in music in manifold ways, has the appearance of being removed from music-making and music-makers and does not belong to them, whereas in truth it holds up to music-making and music-makers that toward which they comport themselves, no matter how they dwell in what is musicked from the unmusicked origin.

Let the sought-for unity of the essencing of music be called the *fugue*. This name calls on us to look more carefully at what properly characterizes the essencing of music. A fugue is a musical composition in which several themes, which in their difference flee (L. *fugere*) from each other, are nonetheless held together by means of the laws of contrapuntal harmony. Here, by contrast, the fugue is taken to be the entire manifold of ordinary tunes or moods of a time held together and adjoined in the articulated unity of that fugue which resonates through and originally opens up the free dimension of attunement that comes to resonate in manifold attunements. The fugue is here the ordinary articulated reverberation of the essencing of music, the total structured quavering of attunements in which those musicking and what is

musicked and its unmusicked origin are joined in what has been allotted and conceded by the fugue.

The fugue as the unified, ongoing essencing of music remains hidden and muffled even in its approximate reverberation as long as we do not take care to note in what sense already musicking and what is musicked have been spoken of.

Musicking is a making of sounds. It can also be conceived of as a human activity. Both are correct conceptions of music as musicking. Both are now put to one side, without us wanting to forget for how long the sounding of music has already been waiting for an appropriately attuned definition; for, the acoustico-physiological, emotionally expressive and harmonic explanations of sound-making and musicking do not experience their provenance in the pealing of stillness. Still less do they experience the attuned definition of sound-making which stems from and resonates with this origin.

In what way, however, have musicking and music been thought in the preceding? They already show themselves to be phenomena through which and in which something makes way to music, i.e. comes to resonance, *insofar as music is made*.

But what does it mean to *music*? To experience what this phrase says we are bound to what our language itself calls on us to think in this word. “To music” is a nonce-verb to the noun “music”, from Greek μουσα, the mountain nymph who inspires the singer to sing. The singer can only sing when attuned with the musical source, and thus inspired through breathing in the spirit, his or her singing temporarily and temporally permeates and colours existence as a whole with a particular mood or moods. Mood is the way the world is open to us momentarily as a whole in any particular situation at any particular time. It is the way we find ourselves in any particular situation, whether downcast or uplifted or on even keel. Musicking must therefore be understood as an opening of world in a particular *way* in bringing a mood to resonance.

We are saying something self-evident and yet something that has scarcely been pondered on in its significance and ramifications when we point out the following. To sing to each other in musicking means to bring each other to resonance, to reciprocally let oneself go with the

mood of the music. To music with each other means: to make something resonate together, and thus to allow a certain attunement to vibrate. What is unheard is not only that which lacks acoustic sound in not having been made audible, but is also the unmusicke, i.e. what has not yet gained resonance in an attunement. That which has to remain unheard is withheld in the unmusicke; it whiles as a hidden secret in muteness as that which cannot be made to resonate in an attunement, perhaps even for an entire age. What is granted to resonance resounds as an attunement in the sense of what has been allotted, whose resounding does not even need any sound.

Musicking, as the resounding of an attunement, belongs to the fugue of the essencing of music which is permeated by the modes and melodies of resonance in which moods are announced, conceded and denied, come to resonance and amplitude in attunement or withdraw, ebb and fade. With regard to the relations or rapport of attuned resounding, we call the entirety of the essencing of music the *quivering* and admit that, even now, what unifies these relations of attuned resounding in the fugue of music has not yet come into sight.

The word “quivering” is today usually used in a pejorative sense. “Quivering” is regarded as a description for that which is not firm, which shakes and trembles (perhaps with fear) and thus is not steadfast, robust and sturdy, perhaps wavering, ill-defined, ambiguous. The earth may shake and quiver in an earthquake that brings destruction. A person or an animal may quiver with fright or agitation, but perhaps also with sheer, overbrimming vitality. The quivering or rapid agitation of the prongs of a tuning fork allows a pure tone to resound. People quiver with emotions resonant with a situation. Quivering may possess the unreleased tension of a potential for movement. Every situation is resonant with the quivering of a mood which attunes those who are currently in that situation. Quivering is the hearth in whose radiance the attunement of moods can come to resonance. We can understand quivering from the attunements which resonate with it.

*The essencing of music is quivering as the attuning of a mood. A mood is the mode or colour of any given situation. We humans are open to this ordinary quivering as an opening of world in a given time, and*

can therefore resonate with it in an attunement or a mood. Quivering's attuning is not based on any feelings or sensibilities, but rather, all feelings and sensibilities stem from an attuning quivering within whose resonance feelings as such can be felt.

With a view to the fugue-like character of quivering, we must not ascribe attuning exclusively or primarily to human activity. Attunement as resonance characterizes the presence and absence, the resounding and fading of moods of all kinds and degree in an age. Even when attunement is brought about by our musicking, this attuning as the striking of a chord is preceded by a propensity and proclivity to resonate in a mood.

Usually, making music and listening to music are counterposed to each other. Some make music and others listen. But listening accompanies and encloses musicking not only in the sense that music requires listeners. Making music is in itself a listening. It is a listening to the music which we music. Thus musicking is not a listening at the same time, but is rather a listening *beforehand*. This listening to music precedes all other kinds of listening in the most imperceptible way. We do not just make music, but we music out of music. We can only do this by virtue of having already listened to music. What do we hear? We hear the musicking of music.

But does music itself music? How could music do this, since it does not have any musical instruments nor a voice with vocal cords, mouth, tongue, etc. Nevertheless, *music* musics. In the first place and properly speaking, music follows the essencing of music: the quivering. Music musics by quivering, i.e. by attuning a mood. Its quivering emanates from the once musicked and still unmusicked quivering which vibrates throughout the fugue of music. Music musics as attunement by reaching into all ranges of attunement from which moods are brought to resonance or fade. Accordingly, we listen to music in the mode of allowing it to attune us with its quivering. Listening means *allowing oneself to resonate with the quivering* thus enabling all apprehension of mood and feeling. In musicking as this fundamental listening to music, we are attuned to the quivering that we have already heard and make it

resonate. We let music's silent voice come and we reach toward the sound that has been reserved for us and call for it.

When musicking, as listening to music, lets itself be attuned by the quivering, this letting-be can only be granted insofar as our own being is immersed in quivering. We only hear it because we belong to it. Quivering only grants listening-to-music, and thus musicking, to those who belong to it. Such granting whiles in quivering. It lets us reach the ability to music. The essencing of music rests in quivering that grants the reach to musicking.

And quivering itself? Is it something completely separated from our musicking to which a bridge has to be built? Or is quivering the stream of stillness which itself bridges its banks, of attunement and our musicking, by forming them? Our usual ideas about music can scarcely reach this point. When we try to think the essencing of music starting from quivering, do we not run the risk of inflating music into a fantastic, autonomous being which cannot be found anywhere as long as we think soberly and circumspectly about music? Music remains, after all, inextricably bound to human musicking. To be sure. But what kind of bond is this? Whence and how does its binding hold sway and bind? Music needs human musicking and is nevertheless not merely something made by our activity in musicking. Wherein lies the essence of music? On what is it grounded? Perhaps we are asking in a direction that misses the essencing of music when we ask for grounds.

Is quivering itself the resting which grants rest to what belongs together in the fugue of the essencing of music?

### **3. The quivering of appropriation**

The way to music from music as music has reached its destination. Thinking has arrived after travelling along the way to music. It seems to be so and it is so as long as the way to music is taken to be a path of thinking which thoughtfully follows the track that leads to music. In truth, however, thinking now sees that it has only just been brought to the *way to music* and has scarcely been set upon its track. For, in the meantime, something has become apparent in the essencing of music which shows that in music as quivering, something resembling a way holds sway.

What is a way? A way allows somewhere to be reached. It is quivering which, insofar as we listen to it, allows us to reach the musicking of music.

The way to musicking whiles in music itself. The way to music in the sense of musicking is music as quivering. What is characteristic and proper to music thus hides itself in the way in which quivering lets those who listen to it come to music. We can only be these listeners insofar as we belong to quivering. The way that lets us reach music comes already from being enabled to belong to quivering. This belonging shelters what is properly essencing in the way to music. But how does quivering hold sway that it is able to enable and grant such belonging?

Quivering is attuning. In everything which affects us, which touches us as a mood that has been brought to resonance, which attunes us, which waits for us as the unmusicked, but also in the musicking which we ourselves perform, attuning holds sway which lets moods reverberate and fade. Quivering is in no way a supplementary expression of mood; rather, all moods and their fading reside in and rest on attuning quivering. Quivering permeates and composes the free fugue in the resonant temporal clearing which all moods have to seek out and from which all spent moods fade, in which all resonance and fading away have to reverberate.

In having its eye on human being, it is appropriation (Ereignis) that appropriates mortals by giving them over to that which grants itself to

humankind in quivering from everywhere toward what is encrypted. The enpropriation of humankind as the ones who are attuned *to* quivering is characterized by its releasing human being into its own, but only so that humans, as the ones who music, respond to quivering in their very own way. This is the making of music. The responding music of mortals is already an answer: a listening, attuned, accommodating musicking. The enpropriation of mortals to quivering releases human being into usage whence it is used to put soundless quivering into resounding music.

Through enpropriating usage, propriation allows quivering to reach resonance in music. The way to music belongs to the quivering that resonates out of propriation as an accompaniment, parallel to the way to language that belongs to the saying defined out of propriation. What is characteristic of music encrypts itself on this way which belongs to the essencing of music. The way is propriating: propriation appropriates human being for its use through enpropriating it to quivering. In propriating attunement as its own property, propriation is the making way of quivering to music, just as, in parallel, in propriating pointing as its own property, propriation is the making way of saying to language. The formula for the way to music thus becomes:

*Making-way brings music (the fugue as the essencing of music) as music (quivering) to music (resounding song).* In talking of a way to music, it now no longer means merely and primarily the path of our thinking which thinks about music. The way to music has changed on the way. It has been displaced from our activity into the propriated essencing of music. But the change in the way to music only seems to us, from our own standpoint, to be a displacement that only now takes place. In truth, the way to music has always had its sole locus and origin within the essencing of music itself. This, however, also means that the way to music in the first sense does not become superfluous, but only becomes possible and necessary through the way proper, the making-way that propriates and uses. For, because the essencing of music rests in propriation as attuning quivering, which hands us humans over to the serenity of free, attuned listening, only the making-way of quivering to music opens up to us the paths on which we think about the proper way to music.

## 4. Subjectivist aesthetics (Adorno)

An obvious issue arises from the preceding path of thinking and its unusual, if not downright strange, determination of the essencing of music as the making-way of the quivering of appropriation to the resonant musicking of human beings, namely: What does it have to do with aesthetic theories of music that have held sway for two hundred years and continue to do so today? Aesthetics today remains the term employed ubiquitously and thoughtlessly for all discourse on art. The word ‘aesthetics’ was not even employed in the preceding part. Rather, there was much said of moods and attunement as a way in which the world opens up for human being.

In a recent book on music aesthetics published in 2004,<sup>3</sup> there is not a single mention of ‘attunement’, and the word ‘mood’ is employed once in two hundred pages. This can be taken as an indication that the preceding path of thinking is way off the trajectory of recent aesthetic discussions of music. The thought that music is a “language of the emotions” or that the composer “expresses emotions” and communicates them to listeners, by contrast, is well represented in the book cited. This is presumably because aesthetics is used to dealing with subjects who express and communicate emotions through art works — even, and especially, when repudiating “putrid emotionality”, a famous exclamation by Eduard Hanslick which is itself presumably an antithetical reaction to the Romantic yearning “to think with the heart” (Hofmannsthal). The authors are at ease with, and employ the vocabulary of the metaphysics of subjectivity/objectivity. The notion that a quivering from ‘out there’ could make its way to human musicking is antithetical to any aesthetic theory for which the human subject remains unquestioned and unquestionable as the underlying instance for art works.

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<sup>3</sup> *Identity and Difference: Essays on music, language and time* Leuven U.P. 2004 with contributions from Jonathan Cross, Jonathan Harvey, Helmut Lachenmann, Albrecht Wellmer, Richard Klein.

## 4.1 Meaningful musical language?

Albrecht Wellmer opens his article entitled ‘On Language and Music’ with the question, “Is music speech-like (*sprachähnlich*)?” (p. 71) with the intention of answering it in the affirmative. What worries Wellmer is whether music has a relation to the outside world consisting of “conceptual and emotional threads” (p. 72, citing Nietzsche), or whether it could free itself “from the yoke of extra-musical purposes and intentions” and instead concern itself only with its internal rules and questions, as purportedly is the case with “serial music” (*ibid.*). Wellmer wishes to refute such an ‘internally generated’, ‘formalist’ or ‘absolute’ conception of music.

Wellmer is concerned with the question, “does purely instrumental music have a world-relation, a connection to the extra-musical domain” (p. 78), whereby he assumes that “the world-relation of the arts refers back to language and the dimensions of linguality” (p. 82). Language is therefore for Wellmer the connection to the world. The thesis that music possesses a linguality thus insists the world does not take a parallel way to human being, but that music is a human product that must maintain a connection, and pass through language to make sense, even when music, like other art forms, remains a “riddle”, as Wellmer claims, citing Adorno. And, he asserts, it has an “aura” that, “in meaningful music”, “‘exceeds’ the purely material sound-structure” (p. 119). How could this excess be produced by an artist subject? Why should this excess be meaningful and linguistic in nature?

The thesis initially cited by Wellmer, “Music is like language” (*Musik ist sprachähnlich*), comes from Adorno (1978) which is in itself an admission of failure. As evidence for the similarity, Adorno cites that “die traditionelle musikalische Formenlehre weiß von Satz, Halbsatz, Periode, Interpunktion; Frage, Antwort, Parenthese; Nebensätze finden sich überall, Stimmen heben und senken sich, und in all dem ist der Gestus von Musik der Stimme entlehnt, die redet.” (*ibid.* S. 251) An interpretation of language in these terms is already metaphysical, going all the way back to Plato and Aristotle and the Alexandrine grammarians, so Adorno is here naïvely positing a metaphysical thesis

about both music and language that diverges wholly from the way to language and the parallel way to music by overlooking that speaking with the voice (*Stimme*) is always also attuned (*gestimmt*), so that any logic of saying is always *accompanied* by an ‘illogical’ attuning of mood.

The positing of music’s similarity to language ties music to *λόγος* and everything that flows from it in the history of Western thinking by way of rationality and ratio. Hence, for Adorno, music, too, has unquestionably “eine immanente Logik” (S. 255) that must be respected and obeyed if it is not to become “ein bloßes Spiel” (*ibid.*). Tied to logic in this way, music is destined to participate in the access to the world through the *λόγος* even though the attempt to spell out the musical meaning, according to Adorno, must finally fail. The way music itself is conceived thus remains within the penumbra of logic, despite all rebellion in the same breath against it. Hence music does not come into its own element in Adorno’s thinking.

The excess of musical language, according to Adorno, consists not in its down-to-earth, but ungraspable moodedness, but in its transcendent “theologischer Aspekt” (*ibid.*), for music’s “Idee” (*ibid.*) is “die Gestalt des göttlichen Namens” (*ibid.*) that humans vainly attempt to spell out in music. Human musical intentions “das Absolute zu sagen” (S. 254) mediatedly thus fail, Adorno asserts, just as the attempts of “die meinende Sprache” (*ibid.*), to say the Absolute, immediately fail. “Musik trifft es unmittelbar, aber im gleichen Augenblick verdunkelt es sich” (*ibid.*). Adorno’s conception of the essence of music is hence not only subjectivist, but also transcendentally theological in a Jewish way. Nevertheless, it is only this excess of the vain attempt to say musically the name of God that makes music for him more than a mere succession of formed sounds.

Adorno therefore rejects both expressive and formal aesthetics, because the former exhausts itself in the expression of “individual intentions” of the subject, thus missing “den intentionslosen Gehalt des Ganzen” (S. 255), whereas “der Begriff ‘Form’ erklärt nichts vom Verborgenen, sondern schiebt bloß die Frage nach dem zurück, was sich im tönend bewegten Zusammenhang darstellt, was mehr ist als nur

Form” (ibid.). Formal aesthetics, Adorno claims, turns music into “ein bloßes Spiel” (ibid.), thus failing to “point beyond itself”. “Der Inbegriff solcher Transzendenz des musikalisch Einzelnen ist der ‘Inhalt’: was in Musik geschieht” (S. 256). Instead of staying close to the mood that comes to resonate in music and as music, exceeding, or rather, parallel to all understanding, Adorno is off after a transcendent, divine content, “eine Bestätigung eines dennoch nicht ausdrücklich Gesagten” (S. 253).

The movement of music, for Adorno, is one from the inside to the outside, from the inwardness of subjectivity to the transcendent divine that eludes expression. Against the formal conception of music, he points out that there is no music “in der nicht expressive Elemente vorkämen” (S. 255). Let us take a telling illustration for what has been said. Adorno’s disciple, Wellmer, relates an anecdote from his piano-playing days when he was struggling to master a piece by Beethoven. His piano teacher exclaimed in exasperation, “Now listen, this is the French Revolution!” (Wellmer op. cit. p. 107). This plea is understood in subjectivist metaphysics as a cry to express an emotional meaning over against the demands of mere formal technique.

Viewing the phenomena themselves, however, it easily can be seen that this is a misinterpretation. Why? Because the French Revolution is not an emotion coming from inside a subject that clamours for expression, but a momentous history-making, quivering happening out there in the world that emanates its own mood which comes to resonate grandly in music with Beethoven. Hence the teacher says, “Listen!” — to a vibe coming from out there. The mood of freedom is not theological and transcendent, and its coming-to-music is not the vain attempt to speak the divine name. Rather, the historic mood of freedom in an age is *itself* coming to music excessively, that is, in an atmospheric excess that exceeds, on its parallel way, both understanding and language, coming nevertheless into its own resonant element.

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