

Thinking About Theory, Theories, and 'the Musical' in Music

For a composer or a performer (perhaps also for an actively creative listener), the constructs of a quantified music theory may be exteriorized resources for composition, that is, for the reintegration of a musical particularity—a particular manifestation of musical-ness—within a music. Inside the internal-compositional circle, such a theory's prescriptive-normative implications are negotiated within a compositional process, that is, transmuted into, as, the particular-musical. In that context, musical output emerges as ideologically neutral, or, rather, its ideology is expressed as a particular musical-ness: its political-aesthetic implications are assimilated into the non-paraphrasable (and hence interpretively unconstrained) nonverbal (acoustic or mentalized) sonic text. The implicit self-privileging and prescriptive-normative messages of such texts are unproblematic because they speak integrally within their own musics. Exteriorized as public-persuasive discourse, however, the ineluctable privileging and normative-prescriptive messages of theory become ideologically and expressively preemptive, disembodied ideology and expression from the musical text and relocating it within the discourse text exhaustively. Perhaps it can be said, then, that the public theory-making space is essentially post-musical, and that the musical music-making space is essentially pre-theoretical. Creative interaction with one's own musical experience is a radically different kind of theorizing, trading in authoritative prescription for imaginative re-creation, recognizing the musical in music by leaving it normatively uninvaded.

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