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Adorno's Schreker: Charting the self-dissolution of the distant sound

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Abstract: Franz Schreker's opera *Der ferne Klang* is usually discussed using the term 'phantasmagoria', as a guiding thread. This article argues that this term names not one but two phenomena: as used by Theodor W. Adorno in his analysis of Wagner, the term denotes the repression of musical production in order to create a music without origin. In a lesser-known piece Adorno uses the term slightly differently, in a sense pioneered first by his friend Walter Benjamin. This second sense is interested in the repression not of musical production, but of the acoustic means of production that conspire to create a unified, synaesthetic experience (rather than an aesthetic object). This second sense, the denial of any sense data outside of the one experience to be had in an opera house, is exceedingly fruitful when applied to *Der ferne Klang*, since its hero is questing for the titular sound which is located in that very space the aural phantasmagoria has to pretend does not exist. Reading Schreker's opera keeping both senses of the term in mind may allow us to overcome Adorno's own somewhat negative assessment of Schreker's modernism and to locate within the opera a certain self-consciousness of phantasmagoric production.

Teddy at the opera

Die neudeutsche Schule hat bis zu ihrer Selbstauflösung in Schreker an der Idee des 'fernen Klanges' festgehalten; des Klingens, in welchem Musik verräumlicht innehält und Ferne so trugvoll verschränkend … die gesellschaftlichen Modelle abbildlich in Natur selber verzaubert.

[The New German School remained committed to the idea of the 'distant sound' until its self-dissolution in Schreker; the sound in which music becomes static and spatialised and mystifies the social models into nature itself . . .][1]

This dense passage from Theodor Adorno's *Versuch über Wagner* encapsulates several ideas central to Adorno's thought and to the aesthetics of early twentieth-century music. Characteristically, Adorno does not elaborate on the intriguing notion of a 'self-dissolution in Schreker', and one of the primary goals of this article will be to explore the possible meanings of this phrase, with a particular focus on Schreker's opera *Der ferne Klang*. On the one hand *Der ferne Klang* represses the mechanisms (musical or mechanical) that produce its spectacle – what Adorno terms 'phantasmagoria'; but at the same time its main character is constantly in search of the titular 'distant sound', a sound located at times off stage, at times in the orchestra pit, behind the scenes. In this sense, the opera is the story of a quest for the phantasmagoric space that it has to pretend does not exist. I believe it is this

[1] Theodor W. Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner* (Frankfurt, 1974), 82. All translations are my own. I have included the texts in the German original in the footnotes in order to allow for easier retrieval. The page numbers refer to Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften* (GS), ed. Rolf Tiedemann, Gretel Adorno, Susan Buck-Morss and Klaus Schulz (Frankfurt, 1986).

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paradox that Adorno points to when he calls Schreker's opera the 'self-dissolution' of the 'distant sound', a term that he seems to regard as almost synonymous with 'phantasmagoria'. Since Adorno maintains that the idea of a 'distant sound' has dominated the New German School up to and including Schreker, but that the idea undoes itself in Schreker's oeuvre, we are theorising something that dissolves in persisting or persists in dissolution – a common theme for Adorno, who invokes it when discussing art as a concept, idealist philosophy, etc. But what is it exactly that persists in *Der ferne Klang*, yet somehow implodes at the same time?[2]

The concept of a distant sound, of phantasmagoria, is key to understanding Schreker's opera, yet in a strange way the opera also exceeds any reading orientated to the concept. The phenomenon in question – whether we label it 'phantasmagoria' or 'distant sound' – is marked by three main qualities: a certain static sound, a spatialisation of that sound and the mystification of the means of production in terms of 'nature itself'. Crucially, this description subsumes not one, but two, hermeneutics, corresponding to two different conceptions of what constitutes the means of musical production.[3] The simultaneous persistence and dissolution Adorno finds in Schreker's opera is enabled by the conjunction of the performed work, on the one hand, and the technological means of its performance on the other. To put this another way, how we put on a show is as important as what we show there, and the *how* may subvert and complicate the *what*. The hermeneutic trope derives its force precisely from the historical fact that, after Wagner, it becomes impossible to distinguish form and content, technological means from musical material: all of them become part of the 'effect' of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. This is why I will follow Adorno in expanding the notion of the total artwork: since the integration of effect at work in modern opera houses is not only artistic, but rather a matter of art as relayed by acoustics, technology, etc., opera becomes not only an artistic totality, but a techno-totality as well.

[2] Schreker appears to have been a fixture in Adorno's timeline of musical history. He refers to him as the threshold to New Music and complains about an 'official' narrative that has all but stopped thinking about Schreker. Although Schreker receives prominent mention in Adorno's monographs on Wagner and Berg, the only two pieces exclusively dedicated to the composer are the 1959 talk and a short two-page reference in an earlier piece called 'Berliner Opernmemorial' of 1929. See Adorno, 'Berliner Opernmemorial', in *Musikalische Schriften VI*, GS 19 (Frankfurt, 1974) 272–4; Otto Kolleritsch, ed., *Adorno und die Musik* (Graz, 1978).

[3] Sherry D. Lee has recently read Adorno's piece on 'Schreker' in similar terms (Sherry D. Lee, 'A Minstrel in a World without Minstrels: Adorno and the Case of Schreker', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, [Fall 2005], 639–96). Since her article appeared only after this article was written, I have been able to include comments on the similarities and differences between the two articles' approaches and conclusions only in footnotes. The most general distinction between my approach and Lee's is the emphasis I place on the *technological* aspects of phantasmagoric production (and, consequently, on Adorno's text 'On the Natural History of Theatre'). Lee acknowledges this technological aspect (see esp. 649), but is mostly interested in the musicological understanding of phantasmagoria. Put differently, Lee's investigation of the 'distant sound' starts from the phantasmagoric qualities of Schreker's *sound*, whereas my article attempts to think it using the idea of phantasmagoric *distance* as a starting point.

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Phantasmagoria

The term 'phantasmagoria' has received much attention in recent scholarship. At its most basic, it refers to a repression of the means of production. Originally invoked by Karl Marx in *Das Kapital*'s chapter on commodity fetishism, it has come to denote something like the aesthetic equivalent of commodity fetishism: the commodity fetishist invests the commodity with a life it doesn't actually have and ignores the processes of which the commodity is a mere effect.[4] Phantasmagoria similarly dissimulate the aesthetic processes at work in their production; they wear the costume of something that just happens to be there, independent of what is going on behind the scenes. What exactly *is* behind the scenes is, as we will see, the subject of some debate – what are the means of production that the phantasmagoria occludes? Used by both Adorno and Walter Benjamin, in *In Search of Wagner* and the *Arcades Project* respectively, the word has spawned two distinct usages, one in the discussion of music and another in the discussion of media other than music.[5] The two, while not completely disjunctive, tend to differ with respect to their relative models of production. In general, we could say their variance coincides with that between the two senses of the word 'aesthetic' – one understands 'aesthetic' means of production to refer to something that brings about a *work of art* (the dominant usage since Kant); the other understands 'aesthetic' to refer to the production of a sensory experience (the original sense of *aisthesis*). Since both readings of the term will inform my interpretation of Adorno's claims about Schreker, I want to make clear what defines each and what distinguishes them from each other.

The first discourse of phantasmagoria is based strictly on Adorno's usage, and is often restricted to Wagner. It reads phantasmagoria as the dominance of things and thing-like qualities over the relational and social aspects of production. The first of these terms finds its most important musical manifestation in harmony, while the second is exemplified by motivic development. These relational aspects are 'social' because they refer to the means of production, the work that goes into creating and maintaining the aesthetic object; in phantasmagoria, the object attempts to repress or divert attention from this work of production. Adorno's analysis progresses by showing how a highly modern artistic 'technology' paradoxically serves to create an impression of the distant, autochthonous or mystical, all of which present the object

[4] 'Commodity fetishism' refers to the notion that the value of a commodity inheres in the object itself, rather than in the abstract social labour invested in its production. Adorno explicitly invokes this hermeneutic in his 1938 essay 'Über den Fetischcharakter in der Musik und die Regression des Hörens' (in Theodor W. Adorno, *Dissonanzen. Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie* [GS 14], 14–50). For a discussion of the problems inherent in Adorno's equation of a theory of economic *value* on the one hand and a theory of aesthetic *objects* on the other, see Wolfram Ette, 'Warenkunst: Prolegomena zu einer marxistischen Theorie der Musik', in *Mit den Ohren Denken: Adornos Philosophie der Musik*, ed. Richard Klein and Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf (Frankfurt, 1998), 415–42. The problem of the transferability of economic categories to the cultural sphere is also discussed by Andreas Huyssen, 'Adorno in Reverse: From Hollywood to Richard Wagner', *New German Critique*, 29 (1983), 8–38, especially 14–15.

[5] Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century', in *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York, 1978); and Benjamin, *Das Passagenwerk* (Frankfurt, 1982).

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as miraculously always already present and thus constitutively repress the question of the production of these aesthetic phenomena.[6] In other words, the archaic façade of the 'technology' hides the contingency and produced-ness of the phantasmagoria by insisting that the object is natural or is the reiteration of something that has existed all along.[7]

In a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, in which the traditional modes of producing an opera are all integrated and synchronised, phantasmagoria becomes the driving force behind the artistic form. However, even though libretto, music, *mise-en-scène* and the architecture of the opera house may be conceived and controlled by one and the same person, the opera cannot fully divest itself of the embarrassing fact that there is still a multitude of hands involved in its production: phantasmagoria is at heart an 'impossible object', and much of its work goes into repressing its own impossibility.[8] For Adorno, the reasons for this impossibility reside in the social world: in a contradictory, antinomial world any representation of a fused 'whole' belies the rivenness underpinning all (bourgeois) reality. Adorno writes that Wagner 'single-handedly wants to will aesthetic totality into existence through an act of conjuring, defiantly unconcerned that its social preconditions are lacking'.[9]

Because reality resists fusion, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* must proceed by means of a violent synthesis: the aesthetic illusion is accomplished by subordinating every element to the overall effect without regard for its own value and logic. The primary media of phantasmagoria are colour and sonority, and according to one critic, 'at its crudest, Adorno's Wagner monograph opens a distinction between motivic development as a kind of use-value and static webs of sound as phantasmagoria'.[10] While recent scholarship rightly complicates that simple distinction, it is fair to say that for Adorno it is the denial of time, of development, of newness, that marks Wagnerian music as phantasmagoric – a characterisation with obvious social implications.[11] As far as that music's interaction with the other components of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is concerned, Adorno claims, Wagner suffers from an impatience

[6] For the conception of 'natural history' that allows Adorno to theorise how history at its most historical can end up *producing* nature, see Theodor W. Adorno, 'Die Idee der Naturgeschichte', in *Philosophische Frühschriften* (GS1) (Frankfurt, 1973).

[7] Susan Buck-Morss (*The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* [Boston, 1989]) has illuminatingly expanded on Benjamin's analysis on these phantasmagoric and naturalising aspects of nineteenth-century culture: she draws attention to the architecture of train stations, subway systems and department stores whose steel-constructions were covered with pilasters, statues and mosaics, often depicting scenes of antiquity.

[8] See Alastair Williams, 'Technology of the Archaic: Wish Images and Phantasmagoria in Wagner', *this journal*, 9 (1997), 78.

[9] 'möchte die aesthetische Totalität von sich aus, auf eigene Faust, durch beschwörende Veranstaltung herbeizwingen, trotzig unbekümmert, dass ihr die gesellschaftlichen Voraussetzungen mangeln'; Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner*, 96.

[10] Williams, 'Wish Images', 81. A similar criticism is levelled at Adorno's *Wagner*-monograph by Carl Dahlhaus, who tries to respond to Adorno's points on Wagner's motivic development; see his 'Soziologische Dechiffrierung von Musik: Zu Theodor W. Adornos Wagner Kritik', *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 1/2 (1976), 137–47, especially 139–40.

[11] Williams, 'Wish Images'. Williams utilises Derrida's reflections on use value and exchange value to critique the blunt juxtapositions Adorno lapses into in his monograph.

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with particulars, with the isolated, with that which cannot be integrated.[12] Music, scene and word are forcibly integrated: the whole 'becomes tautological, becomes permanent agreement. Music repeats what the words have said already, and the more it plays itself into the foreground, the more superfluous it becomes.'[13] The various elements, now no longer distinct, regurgitate the dictated synthesis to one another, with no component responding to its own innate logic, but rather each subordinated to the abstract logic of musical (phantasmagoric) production.[14] Their 'wholeness' (as one of Adorno's most famous aphorisms runs) is their *untruth*.[15]

The dialectic of the dome

This is the first conception of phantasmagoria. Adorno's Wagner monograph proceeds by reading Wagner's music as phantasmagoric in this exact sense – essentially listening for the mythological within the technological, by which he means in particular the falsely naturalising, totalising and spatialising in Wagner's compositional technique. But this approach seems to subscribe to a relatively limited view of what constitutes a 'technology', focusing on the work of composer, librettist and stage director repressed in phantasmagoria. While this Wagner-focused reading of phantasmagoria is perfectly accurate when it comes to the *work of art*, it gives short shrift to the various technologies that actually contribute to a *performance* of, say, the *Ring of the Nibelung*. Phantasmagoria, in other words, is not merely a concept to be applied to colour, tone, texts or sets – it is also a concept intimately related to the fact that Wagner's operas were performed in Bayreuth and in the many opera houses subsequently styled after it, and that they were performed at a particular point in time, as certain technologies of performance had become possible. It is crucial that these technologies enabled not a new work of art, but rather a new kind of sensory experience.

In Adorno's own oeuvre, this second sense of phantasmagoria is comparatively marginal, making its appearance in the guise of the 'dialectic of the dome'. Adorno introduces this dialectic as a means of interrogating what is specifically modern within the (technological-architectural) place of performance by juxtaposing it with the atavistic ritual sublimated within it. This dialectic proves analogous to the more 'Benjaminian' reading Susan Buck-Morss has given of the term phantasmagoria.[16] As we will see, the term's meaning itself changes only little – what does change is

[12] Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner*, 96.

[13] 'wird zur Tautologie, zur permanenten Übereinstimmung. Musik sagt noch einmal, was die Worte ohnehin sagen, und je mehr sie sich in den Vordergrund spielt, um so überflüssiger ist sie'; Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner*, 98.

[14] In a 1965 essay on 'Some Relations Between Music and Painting', Adorno outlined how such particular 'logics' can function and how they may be subsumed by a totalising construction ('Über einige Relationen zwischen Musik und Malerei', in *Musikalische Schriften I–III* [GS 16], 628–42).

[15] *Minima Moralia* (Frankfurt, 1974), 55.

[16] Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered', *October*, 62 (1992). See also Rolf Tiedemann, 'Dialectics at a Standstill', in *On Walter Benjamin*, ed. Gary Smith (Cambridge, Mass., 1986); Margaret Cohen, 'Walter Benjamin's Phantasmagoria', *New German Critique*, 48 (1989), 97–107.

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the latitude of its possible applications. Culled from Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, this sense of 'phantasmagoria' reads for the most material aspects of production: it connects the performative aspect of phantasmagoria to the technological conditions of its performance.[17] Adorno utilises the *Arcades Project*-sense of 'phantasmagoria' as a hermeneutic in his 1958 essay 'Naturgeschichte des Theaters' ('The Natural History of the Theatre') where he labels it the 'dialectic of the dome' ('Dialektik der Kuppel').[18] Like his hermeneutic in the Wagner monograph, Adorno's approach to this dialectic is to read production back into the aesthetic object. Unlike the approach in *In Search of Wagner*, however, 'Naturgeschichte des Theaters' no longer conceives of production in terms of colour and sonority, but rather attempts to describe how architecture and acoustics conspire to produce a particular kind of synaesthetic experience. I take this 'dialectic of the dome' to stand metonymically for an entire range of applications that come to dominate the post-Wagnerian opera house. The dialectic of the dome inheres in the form of the opera house, but it is only the opera, the *performance*, that releases it. I therefore want to draw on three separate aspects of this idea, and only then to explore how *Der ferne Klang* in particular can be said to effect that release – and how the release may accomplish the 'Selbstauflösung' invoked above.

The dialectic inherent in the dome of an opera house lies, first, in its double function as 'dividing wall and reflector in one'. Neither ancient amphitheatres nor Shakespeare's Globe had domes; thus the ritual from which drama of all sorts descends could rise to the heavens (for which it was ultimately intended). Georg Lukács argued in his 1920 *Theory of the Novel* – a text that was vastly influential for Adorno – that this continuous gamut, which ran from the mortal to the heavens, defined antique totality. The dome is, by its very existence, evidence of and index for the disappearance of this totality of sense and meaning. Modern man is fragmented, severed from any total sense or sense perception of his world. The dome is also, however, a 'reflector'. The sounds erstwhile destined for heaven do not go to waste today; instead they are reflected back towards us as audience. They face us as a technologically produced nature – *our* sounds are as greedily consumed as the world outside is drowned out. What is more, the sound that reflects at us may even seem to us to come from heaven anyway – at which point we have mistaken human work, alienated by human means, for a hint of the divine. One can see how this concept lends itself to the late Wagner's Christian mysticism – anyone who has seen a performance of *Parsifal* in which a light show and an invisible choir accompany the revelation of the grail has been witness to this technological,

[17] We cannot speak of a strictly 'Adornian' use of the concept on the one hand and a strictly 'Benjaminian' one on the other (one reason why I associated the two variant conceptualisations of phantasmagoria with two particular *texts* rather than their authors). Adorno imports 'phantasmagoria' from Benjamin's vocabulary, along with a good many aspects of Benjamin's philosophy. However, Adorno's reception of Benjamin's aesthetics (including concepts such as 'aura' and 'phantasmagoria') continued over the better part of three decades after Benjamin's early death, changing considerably with time (see Martin Zenck, 'Phantasmagorie – Ausdruck – Extrem', in *Adorno und die Musik*).

[18] 'Die Naturgeschichte des Theaters', in *Musikalische Schriften I–III* (GS 16) (Frankfurt, 1974), 309–20.

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theatrical manna. As we shall see, however, Adorno's most striking example is that of applause.[19] Applause, he asserts, obviously once had ritual function – maybe a call out for the Gods to honour someone, or, perhaps more sinister, a call for a sacrifice. Today applause comes back at us roaring in all its mythic force, yet disconnected from anything whole. What we experience is nothing but uproarious agreement with each other, a brief identity not with the cosmos but with a (select) crowd of our fellow men.

The opera house functions as what Adorno thematised throughout his philosophy as 'identity', which Fredric Jameson has aptly characterised as 'repetition as such, the return of sameness over and over again, in all its psychological desolation and tedium: that is to say, neurosis'.[20] The dome of the opera house stymies all forms of openness: firstly human openness to difference as present outside the opera house. It also stymies cognitive openness to any difference within the opera house, since it 'collects' the sounds we are required to hear and subdues the manifold of buzzes and tingles into an experience. And thirdly, it undercuts any awareness or differentiation of who is doing what (since any such awareness may eclipse the self-sufficiency of the hall) and gives us the illusion that what people have produced comes like manna from heaven. Adorno sees identity operating in all aspects of our lives – any scientific concept that subdues a particular does very similar work as the dome of an opera house. It blinds humans to the non-conceptuality of the concept, to the tautological claustrophobia of their 'second' (cultural) nature, and to the very real differences and injustices that persist within it.

All of this, however, could just as well be said of any kind of roof over a theatre or an opera house. Adorno's 'dialectic of the dome' goes beyond theorising the roof of the concert hall as 'dividing wall and reflector in one', to consider also the specific construction of the dome, as man-made and technological. Identity requires work (Adorno's negative version of Hegel's notion of the labour of the concept), and that work consists not merely of passively obviating but rather of actively bundling the elements of the phantasmagoria. The dome has been *made* to actively bundle: it functions as shock-preventer and shock-conductor. I use the word 'conductor' here both in the sense of some*thing* passing something else along and in the sense of some*one* conducting a performance. How can a dome do both? It is the job of the modern opera house to keep certain stimuli from entering the sensory field of each audience member and to amplify others. One might argue that a wall or a well-placed window may perform a similar task, and that is where the second sense of 'conductor' comes in: the modern opera house, far from swallowing some sounds and allowing others to pass, is in fact actively (even uncannily) engaged in styling, modulating and inflecting the sensory input of its audience. Much as it would be simplistic to say that a movie theatre simply bathes its audience in light and leaves the exits dark, the opera house in fact composes a technological

[19] 'Naturgeschichte des Theaters', 309.
[20] Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Theodor Adorno or the Persistence of the Dialectic* (London, 1990), 16.

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sensorium for its audience. It carefully determines which stimuli are to reach the senses, when they are to do so and from where.

Both 'phantasmagoria' and the 'dialectic of the dome', then, refer to a 'totality', a construal of the mutual positioning of subject and its world of objects, that is technologically produced. And both dome and phantasmagoria gather and order sensory data to suggest a coherent whole rather than a buzzing confusion. Obviously, however, a real synaesthetic experience is rarely possible 'under conditions of modernity', as Adorno puts it.[21] The phantasmagoria produces a synaesthetic experience technologically: it composes space, time and sound in order to delude my sensorium into experiencing modernity whole, when in fact it isn't. Benjamin, whose *Arcades Project* is something of a catalogue of the phantasmagoria of the nineteenth century, lists the following examples of such synaesthetic composition: world expositions, panoramas, urban planning, the bourgeois interior.[22] All these are produced for the purpose of shielding – Adorno and Benjamin are not merely pointing out an idolatrous solipsism, but one that is *induced*, often for conservative political purposes.

Since they provide a total experience in a fragmented world, phantasmagoria are as marked by what they leave out as by what they keep in. Their effect lies in the management of 'shocks', as Walter Benjamin describes in his book on Baudelaire.[23] It is here that we need to leave Adorno's appropriations of Benjamin's theory of phantasmagoria (which is what the 'dialectic of the dome' amounts to) and focus on the cognitive theories to which it was closely connected in Benjamin's oeuvre, a connection that got somewhat lost in Adorno's appropriation. This cognitive theory is what Susan Buck-Morss has labelled Benjamin's anaesthetics: we are adapted to shocks by being systematically exposed to them in a technologically simulated environment. It is not so much that the phantasmagoric techno-totality (e.g. a walkman) is supposed to drown out the noise of traffic and people, it is ultimately supposed to attune me to them. After all, it doesn't combat noise by silence, but with more carefully structured noise. Not only do phantasmagoria shut me off from reality, then, but they gradually and artfully reconcile me to reality, in spite of my very real alienation from it. This is precisely how a modern opera house works: its greatest work goes into shutting out the world beyond the 'magic circle' of stage and audience; within the space of silence thus created, the modern opera can lay out a new geography, an *an*aesthetic one. The anaesthetic, particularly in the case of Wagner, can be about as noisy as a helicopter attack on a Vietnamese village (as Francis Ford Coppola's field tests have demonstrated), but it provides a composed assault as art or as entertainment, which prepares the audience for the world outside, both because it hardens them to it (makes them ready for it), and because it leads them to ignore it.

However, as Adorno and Horkheimer make clear in relation to cinema, phantasmagoria never quite deliver the relief they promise; all they can do is offer

[21] Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner*, 97.
[22] See Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*.
[23] Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften, I–2* (Frankfurt, 1974), 613f.

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constant release and defer deliverance *ad infinitum*.[24] This is where Jameson's invocation of identity as neurotic becomes cogent once more: phantasmagoria create a compulsion to repeat in a double sense – firstly one seeks them out again and again, and secondly, in their grasp, one is doomed (or enticed, rather) to 'reiterate the world', to repeat the way the world has always been. Herbert Marcuse therefore equated identity with Thanatos, the death-drive, a drive towards ever-sameness, a return into the womb.[25] As perceived by Adorno, attending the opera certainly has something in common with a voyage in the bowel of a whale, or a return to the womb.[26] The very insistence with which identity is produced, however, begs the question – as Jameson again points out – of 'what it would take to have the strength to stand the new, to be ''open'' to it; but even more; what that new might be, what it might be like, how one would go about conceptualizing and imagining what you can by definition not yet imagine or foresee; what has no equivalent in your current experience'.[27] Identity as the self-same obscures the new. However, Adorno is neither an advocate of this kind of radical openness nor an opponent of artistic form. It is, according to him, human to impose these forms: we do so, for example, just by thinking conceptually. The problem is that our abstract categorisations have become forces in themselves; or, to return to the dome of the opera house, that the man-made limit and reflector has transformed into a barrier for thought, turning what people do to people into a blind and inexorable force of nature.

This is the third aspect of the dialectic of the dome. We have foreclosed the cultic function of the opera house, in the sense that we do not believe it puts us in touch with divine or cosmic powers. Yet it retains a ritual function, having de-historicised and de-mythified that ritual. For Adorno the modern era is still marked by its insufficient cleavage from the ritualistic, mythic realities of 'pre-history', to the extent that we still live in pre-history. Technological developments have made the *Ur*-elements of the theatre manageable, but they have not sublated them (the Hegelian *Aufhebung*). Just as in modern society instrumental reason enslaves people in the same way that a force of nature might, the technological apparatuses in the opera house divest people of themselves just as an ancient sacrifice might.

[24] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Die Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt, 1971), 162.

[25] Freud's conceptualisation of the 'death instinct' (identified with Thanatos) clearly has many similarities to Adorno's and Marcuse's notion of 'identity': both are characterised by a desire to return to a unitary state, ultimately a return of the organic into an inorganic state. Moreover, Freud's 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' derives the death drive primarily from an investigation into the moment of *repetition* in human behaviour. Similarly, the reiterative, regurgitative aspect of identitarian or phantasmagoric production feeds on a compulsion to repeat an in itself unsatisfactory experience (Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 18, trans. James Strachey [London, 1955]). On Wagner's anticipation of Freud's theory of the death drive, see Linda and Michael Hutcheon, 'Death Drive: Eros and Thanatos in Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*', *this journal*, 11 (1999), 267–93.

[26] Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston, 1978).

[27] Jameson, *Late Marxism*, 16.

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In his 'Natural History of the Theatre' Adorno lays bare the archaisms of modern opera, not in terms of *musical* form, but rather in terms of the architecture and technology that 'put on' an opera in the first place: the lobby ('Foyer'), the parterre ('Parkett') and of course the dome ('Kuppel'). Since, as we have seen, the modern opera house is 'identitarian', i.e., it tries precisely to foreclose a plurality of readings, Adorno's method of reading for this repressed or sublimated archaism takes the shape of a sort of 'double vision'. In a post-Wagnerian opera house, many things happen at once, but none detracts from the one thing we *experience* happening. The way to dislodge this identity is via spatial and bodily dislocation: the modern opera house depends for its 'effect' on our bodies being in a certain place, looking a certain way, or holding our attention in one place rather than another. We offset or subvert phantasmagoria by looking where we are not supposed to, or by physically going where the techno-totality is revealed for a production. Not by accident did Gustav Mahler ban applause in between arias (the 'claque'), the constant coming and going of the Vienna *Hofoper*'s aristocratic guests, as well as any conversations during the performance.[28] One example, which can today also be attempted in movie theatres, is to turn around and look precisely where one is not to look – Adorno amusingly picks out the gallery as the locus of a 'second stage', from where, in a more 'natural' theatrical environment, such as a saloon, someone might actually shoot the piano player.

By partaking unreflectively in rituals older than the institution of the opera, audience and performers alike are caught in a *Zauberkreis*, a magic circle without escape. The only way we can recover, and become aware of, the mythic force of the goings-on is by putting distance between us and them – for example when we hear a concert on the radio. Similarly, anyone who has ever followed the end of a performance from the foyer or the coat check will have experienced the uncanny flip side of the civilised pageant inside: the distant claps, the indistinguishable shouts, the booing, the stamping feet; all of it betrays the atavism that the evening suits and bouquets inside attempt to cover over. Not only the place of ritual smacks of a certain atavism, however, the musical performance is rife with it as well: Adorno compares the soloist, the virtuoso, the star, to an animal trainer or bullfighter. Again, the dangerous banishing rituals performed by these high priests of art are obvious only to the non-spectator. Spatial dislocation allows us to see the theatre as an institution still mired in the irrational, regardless of (or maybe inversely proportional to) the technological means it invests in its own hermetic autarchy. The more we are shut out from the 'magic circle', the greater our awareness of the archaism, the magic of this circle. And herein lies the paradox: the more opera denies the traditional visual cues of its production, lowering the orchestra into its pit and hiding the elaborate acoustics, combining the sensory manifold of which it consists into a phantasmagoria, the more the mythic, archaic, irrational character of this strange ritual becomes apparent to someone spatially not within the purview of the phantasmagoria.

[28] See Henry-Louis De La Grange, *Gustav Mahler – Vol. 2, Vienna: The Years of Challenge* (Oxford, 1999), 59–61.

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The more perfect the illusion inside, the more evident its irrational antithesis outside.

Adorno's essay on the 'Natural History of the Theatre' may strike some as an apocryphal text within Adorno's theoretical works – an amusing collection cobbled together from short items that appeared in various sources over a number of years.[29] How crucially it yokes the central Adornian notion of 'natural history' and thus Adorno's version of dialectical materialism to his aesthetics becomes clear in a hitherto unpublished remark the philosopher made in his 1958 lectures on dialectics. In deconstructing the cult of immanence and empirical positivism in philosophical reflection, he advocates thinking a phenomenon both from within and from outside it. His example is what he refers to as 'music from the outside':

[Ich] habe deshalb das Experiment angestellt, über Musik Reflexionen, Betrachtungen anzustellen, die ich 'Musik von Außen' nannte, und zwar im wörtlichen und im übertragenen Sinn, also in dem wörtlichen zunächst einmal, Musik sich so anzuhören, wie sie nicht etwa in einem Opernhaus oder in einem Konzertsaal klingt, sondern wie eine Oper klingt, wenn man es etwa versäumt hat, nach dem Ende der Pause sofort in seine Loge sich zurückzubegeben und dann dieses Getöse von aussen vernimmt, das Gefühl, dass dabei eine Art Seite der Musik herauskommt, die man sonst nicht sieht, und, allgemeiner gesprochen, war mir aufgegangen, dass über ein Phänomen etwas nur auszusagen ist, wenn man es zugleich gewissermassen von aussen ebenfalls sieht und nicht nur von innen . . .[30]

[I therefore performed the experiment of arriving at reflections, observations about music by something I called 'music from the outside' ['Musik von Außen'], both in the literal and metaphorical senses, literally listening to music not as it sounds in an opera house or a concert hall, but as it sounds when you are late in returning to your box after intermission and you hear this noise from the outside, the feeling that this reveals a side of the music that one usually does not see, and, speaking more generally, I realised that describing a phenomenon involves seeing it as though from the outside and not just from the inside . . .]

But Adorno insists that it is only this *double* vantage that makes thought genuinely dialectical. Laying claim to an Archimedean point outside of the phenomenon in question without thinking through either the 'logic of the thing', or one's own implication in it, limits one's understanding, just as much as hovering religiously over the brute given 'facts' would. Our standpoint outside the 'magic circle' of the operatic performance is thus only one aspect of our exploration of the 'logic' of the phenomenon. The 'thing itself' can only be comprehended if we make our way back into the 'magic circle' and watch the opera – albeit while keeping the coat check and the foyer in mind.

[29] According to the German editors of Adorno's collected works, 'The Natural History of the Theatre' originally appeared in segments in various magazines, in particular in *Musik* and the newsletter of the Hessisches Landestheater in Darmstadt, some as early as 1931–33. These texts were first combined (and slightly expanded) in the *Neue Deutsche Hefte*, vol. 50, in 1958.

[30] The author is indebted to the Adorno Archives Frankfurt for access to the lecture transcripts (Vo 3179, 153).

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Der ferne Klang as seduction and promise

Spatial dislocation allows for a deconstruction of the mythic, the identitarian and the falsely particularising (to enumerate my points from the previous section in reverse order). While pursued within the world set up by the operatic phantasmagoria, however, distance is always off stage, non-specific, and always already encompassed by the pseudo- or techno-totality. What Schreker's *Der ferne Klang* accomplishes, I will argue, is to entwine the differentiating (spatialising) and integrative (identitarian) powers of operatic distance through a cunning combination of the phantasmagoric and the alienating. After all, the eponymous 'distant sound' is not the sound of the foyer, but off stage, a prosthetic, pseudo-foyer; and yet the opera's story thematises precisely the impossible remove of the 'distant sound', and turns its pursuit into something tragic.

Der ferne Klang is a kind of fairy-tale opera, although more overtly sexual than most other exponents of the genre around the turn of the century (such as the operas of Siegfried Wagner or his teacher Engelbert Humperdinck). The young artist Fritz leaves his provincial town to become 'an artist by the grace of God', embarking on a quest for the 'distant sound' that is drowned out by his mundane surroundings. He leaves his girlfriend Grete behind, promising her to return with fame and riches. An old woman observes the scene. Grete's father, who can be heard drinking and gambling with his friends in a tavern called The Swan from off stage, returns to announce that he has lost Grete to The Swan's proprietor in a game of bowling. Grete refuses to assent to the deal, revealing that she is 'engaged to another', and flees the scene. In an enchanted forest she contemplates suicide, but a strange vision of sexual passion ('love and happiness all day') stays her hand. She falls asleep by the side of the lake that was to be her grave and is found by the old woman.

The second act takes place in a dance establishment and brothel in Venice ('La Casa di Maschere'). Grete, who now calls herself Greta, lives the life of a courtesan, though she is dissatisfied and still longs for Fritz. A stranger appears: Fritz, who has been unable to find his 'distant sound', and has spent years searching for the love he left behind. Just now, he explains, he has heard his sound and it has led him to Grete's island. The lovers recognise each other, but once Fritz realises Grete has become a prostitute he insults her and leaves. Desperate, Grete acquiesces to a liaison with one of her wealthy customers.

The third act opens in the garden of a restaurant in an unnamed city. Two of Grete's father's friends from the first act discuss Fritz's autobiographical opera 'Die Harfe', which is being performed at the Hoftheater, within earshot of the 'Theaterbeisel'. The music (in fact musical material from the first two acts of *Der ferne Klang*) and applause can be heard faintly in the distance. Apparently, the première is going well. Suddenly, Grete enters: she has become unwell while attending the première. Now a common whore, she is recognised by her father's friends. Together, they are told that the 'Die Harfe"s première has turned into a scandal, the last act having been judged completely disastrous, and that Fritz is terminally ill. The friends, racked with guilt for their role in young Grete's downfall,

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agree to bring her to Fritz's domicile the next morning. There, the lovers are united, but Fritz dies in Grete's arms as the 'distant sound' can be heard once more.

Adorno doesn't appear to have disliked Schreker, which is unusual. At the outset of his radio lecture on the composer Adorno confesses to an 'adolescent' infatuation with Schreker, and in fact Adorno's analysis of the phantasmagoric and the utopian in Schreker is explicitly framed in terms of adolescence.[31] The essay wonders whether the 'rumour' emanating from Schreker's operas (in this case Schreker's *Die Gezeichneten*), their promise to the ears of a fourteen-year-old Adorno of 'something terrifying', of 'shockingly erotic goings on', may not in the end come closer to Schreker than 'any precise analysis' (369). It is thus exactly the titillation, the 'scandal' of Schreker that must frame our analysis of his oeuvre – and without libido, without desire, there can be no appropriate activation of the 'distant sound'. Because of this biographical and libidinal investment Adorno holds a rather charitable view of Schreker (especially when compared to Wagner).[32] And yet, Adorno's characterisation of Schreker as Mediterranean and overburdened (369) hardly seems complimentary. Moreover, he charges that 'Schreker read out of Wagner the moment of phantasmagoria and made it total' ('Schreker [hat] aus Wagner das Moment der Phantasmagorie herausgelesen, zum Einen und Allen gemacht' [370]). How could this be anything but an indictment of Schreker? How can someone who has made 'phantasmagoria' the 'one and all', when all is said and done, inspire a positive valuation from Adorno?

Since the twinning of musical and technological phantasmagoria have taken us to this point, it is not surprising that there are two answers to this question, one musical and one musico-sociological. In his 1959 radio lecture on Schreker, Adorno seems to address the first answer, and I will thus focus mostly on teasing out the more sublimated second one. Both answers are fundamentally predicated on an awkward side-by-side, in the first case an alternate modernism of Schreker's that allows Adorno to theorise Schreker's phantasmagoric sound as productively utopian, in the second a side-by-side of phantasmagoria and alienation *within* Schreker's works themselves, as I will hope to demonstrate for *Der ferne Klang* in particular. Not surprisingly, each answer has to emphasise a different aspect of Schreker's oeuvre and technique – the 'alternate modernism'-answer will depend on the non-representational, deterritorialised 'effect' (as suggested by Adorno's radio lecture on Schreker), whereas the 'alienation'-answer will depend on those moments in which the opera wants to simulate an anaesthetic world within the opera house (as suggested by the radio lecture read in conjunction with 'The Natural History of the Theatre').

The first (and Adorno's 'official') answer is that phantasmagoria function differently in Schreker than in Wagner. In Schreker's music the subsumption of the particular musical logics (of, say, an instrument or a motif) under the general 'technologies' of the composer has become so comprehensive as to draw attention

[31] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Schreker', in *Musikalische Schriften I–III* (GS 16) (Frankfurt, 1974), 368–81.

[32] Ernst Bloch famously remarked on Adorno's 'Polemik aus Bewunderung' ('admiring polemics') against Wagner.

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to itself.[33] The music creates an ambiance of ambivalence, or, as Adorno cites Schreker, the individual instrument is no longer allowed even a recognisable voice – in terms of accompaniment, Schreker 'only really recognised one instrument, the orchestra itself'.[34] As phantasmagoria, Schreker's 'sound' attempts 'to detach music from time, to quote it into space' (372). It is rhizomatic music ('Musik . . . die Luftwurzeln treibt'), 'denying any origin or consequence', even 'any compositional determination' whatsoever (372).

As Adorno points out, Schreker is loath to allow particular instruments their own voices, preferring to combine them into a 'sound' ('Klang'). The *differentia specifica* of Schreker's phantasmagoric technique may, however, lie in the role of the particular *vis-à-vis* its subsumption into the whole: 'The particular is illuminated for a moment and then sinks back into the whole, impossible to identify, hardly noticeable, droplets of the harp, solo violins in high positions, a clarinet doubled by a celesta, weightless horns' (374).[35] On the one hand, therefore, Schreker's orchestration is thoroughly phantasmagoric – it is the one, the effect that counts; any division of labour in the production of the effect is obfuscated. However, on this first answer, the very consistency of that gesture may end up undercutting the phantasmagoria on the level of totality. Horns, clarinets, solo violins and the 'droplets of a harp' should all be prime markers not merely of a sensual reality, but of a phenomenological one – they produce a sensation of space, rather than just sensation. Schreker's unwillingness to let them perform that work thus seems to subvert the post-Wagnerian orchestra's ability to suggest. What should have been suggestive *of something* is now just fraught with hints. And none of these hints ever reaches a level of clarity that would allow for the new pseudo-geography within the opera house to unfold fully. Insofar as phantasmagoria naturalise the given, Schreker's phantasmagoria may be said to destabilize what it is that is so given. As an early critic remarked apropos Act II, Schreker's opera presents the listeners with 'a sea of sound which they are incapable of disentangling'.[36]

When logic, connection, development are all expelled from musical production, it not only serves to create a monolithic musical structure, it also thwarts from the outset any rational apprehension. We cannot grasp the music logically; it confounds

[33] I take Lee ('Adorno and the Case of Schreker', 670) to be making a similar point, concluding 'that, in one respect at least, Schreker's compositional technique is closer to Schoenberg's than Adorno would care to admit'.

[34] Adorno, 'Schreker', 373. The remark Adorno is alluding to here appears in Schreker's essay on 'My Idea of Musical Drama' from 1918: 'Nichts wirkt störender als zum Beispiel eine Celesta, die sich mir als solche aufdrängt . . . Ich verneine . . . den allzu deutlichen, differenzierbaren Klang und möchte im Dienste der Oper nur ein Instrument anerkennen: das Orchester selbst'. ('Nothing is more obtrusive than, for example, a celesta that obstreperously insists that it is a celesta. I say no to the overly clear, differentiated sound and, in the service of the opera, I recognise only one instrument: the orchestra.') Schreker, 'Meine musikdramatische Idee', in *Neue Musik*, ed. H. H. Stuckenschmidt (Berlin, 1951), 357; cited in Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner*, 78.

[35] 'Das Einzelne leuchtet momentweise auf und versinkt sogleich im Ganzen, nicht zu identifizieren, kaum eben fuehlbar, Tropfen der Harfe, Sologeigen in hoher Lage, eine von der Celesta verdoppelte Klarinette oder die ihrer Schwere enteigneten Hörner.'

[36] Cited in Christopher Hailey, *Franz Schreker: A Cultural Biography* (Cambridge, 1993), 48.

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expectation; we cannot even recollect it unambiguously (an effect comparable, for example, to that of the Prelude to *Parsifal*). It is because of this irrationality and excess that Adorno paradoxically integrates Schreker into a form of modernity: the development of material and consciousness, these moments show, does 'not proceed along the axis on which the new music progressed' (372).[37] Schreker constitutes an alternate modernity to that of the 'new music' – an alternative that does not break phantasmagoria by allowing for rupture and alienation within the audience's experience, but one that overburdens and over-invests phantasmagoria to its breaking point. Schreker's music, writes Adorno, 'resists reification' (374) precisely by virtue of its non-dimensionality, its amorphousness and its libidinal charge, 'the immediate, unlimited promise of sensual enjoyment' (375).[38]

We will return to this libidinal aspect of Schreker's utopianism, but it is safe to say that, for Adorno, Schreker's utopian conception becomes insufficient at the moment when it unproblematically turns to the libido for liberation. In the end Schreker's sensual promise is too 'positive', too 'adolescent', too 'unsublimated'.[39] By promising salvation, as much as by positing salvation in physical, sensual guise, Schreker fails to account for the absorptive power of the administered world, of identity thinking, and of the burgeoning culture industry. Phantasmagoria is only an index of falsehood, it can never posit in the affirmative. 'That colour can be salvaged only in darkness, joy in asceticism, reconciliation in dissonance – all of this Schreker realised only very faintly' (380).[40]

It is an interesting question to what extent this partial vindication of Schreker would constitute a partial vindication of *Jugendstil* art, for it is precisely the critical vocabulary used for *Jugendstil* that Adorno seems to rehearse here: the idea of *Flächenkunst*, the dynamism, the ornateness, all of which are traditionally suspect among left-leaning music theorists because they seem to valorise motion without direction, fluidity in stasis. Adorno himself noted in his 'Berliner Opernmemorial' of 1929 (written several decades before 'Schreker') that *Der ferne Klang* was 'a work of *Jugendstil*. The girl who reclines morbidly by the side of the lake, death-wishing and ready for free love; the struggle with the family, art as a corrective counterbalance to bourgeois narrowness, all of it originates [with *Jugendstil*]. A second Romanticism that stigmatises the proximity of the naturalistically disenchanted world, so that it becomes immediately graspable as mere appearance.'[41]

A similar sense of static agitation (and thus of unbridgeable paradox) is evoked by the recurrence of mirrors in *Der ferne Klang*. One of the recurrent tropes in the opera is the mirroring of the ego, as explored through evocations of pictures (especially an image by Arnold Böcklin), poems, narrative digressions or simply visual cues. Ulrike Kienzle identifies instances of this trope in Fritz's primary

[37] 'nicht notwendig eindimensional auf der Linie . . ., auf der die neue Musik sich bewegte'.
[38] 'Der Ferne Klang ist das unmittelbare, ungeschmälerte Versprechen sinnlicher Lust.'
[39] On this charge, see Lee, 'Adorno and the Case of Schreker', 657 and 671.
[40] 'Dass das Bunte gerettet wird im Dunkeln, dass Glück in der Askese, die Versöhnung in der Dissonanz – all das hat Schreker nur von fern gestreift.'
[41] Adorno, 'Berliner Opernmemorial', *GS 19*, 272.

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narcissism, in Grete's suicide attempt in the forest and in the opera-within-the-opera.[42] As she points out, the most emphatic instance may well be the *Nachtstück*, the interlude that precedes the finale (Act III, scene 8/9). This piece, composed years before the rest of *Der ferne Klang*, recapitulates many of the opera's main themes and does so explicitly as a kind of recollection of the opera's plot in the course of a sleepless night.[43] In each case the mirror image becomes less an impetus for action or difference than a back-loop of sorts, libidinal movement in an infinite circuit. Spectatorship does not allow for an escape from this circuit. It could thus appear that *Der ferne Klang* has something of a *Jugendstil*-project: the hope that the mere libidinal charge of this loop, as of the distant sound itself, might suffice to liberate utopian potential within the opera's seeming solipsism.

I would argue that, despite the emphatic alliance he constructs between Schreker and *Jugendstil* in the 1929 piece, Adorno's conciliatory view of Schreker in the post-war article should not be understood as a wholesale vindication of *Jugendstil*. First, as Dahlhaus has shown, the visual technique of *Jugendstil* is to a certain extent an inheritance from Wagner, and its vindication would rob not only Adorno's Wagner-analysis but also the concept of phantasmagoria of its bite. Second, and more importantly, it is simply not entirely true that *Der ferne Klang* exhausts itself in mirrorings, in dynamism without actual movement. At several points the opera stages clear juxtapositions that do not merely serve to mirror one another, but rather allegorise or narrativise one another.[44] These juxtapositions explain, critique, question; and in understanding themselves as man-made, they in fact resist turning the opera into ornament, into a 'lighting-bolt' (as Georg Fuchs famously remarked of the tapestries of Hermann Obrist), into a 'natural element'. While I certainly don't want to suggest an equivalence between *fin-de-siècle* music and visual *Jugendstil*, I do think that the vindication of development over and against pure dynamism did raise *Der ferne Klang* over a post-*Parsifal* kind of opera that had become ornamental.[45]

These moments of juxtaposition and narrativisation point to a second explanation for Adorno's surprisingly positive reference to phantasmagoria as the 'one and all'. This second perspective may go some distance to counter Adorno's rather pessimistic (if congenial) final verdict in the radio piece on 'Schreker', and to clarify what makes (even for Adorno) *Der ferne Klang* different from other operas of the 'New German School'. This second reading of Adorno insists that there are in the opera, *pace* Adorno, precisely moments of 'reconciliation in dissonance', which

[42] Kienzle calls reflection and mirroring the quintessential 'dramaturgic technique' of *Der ferne Klang*; Ulrike Kienzle, *Das Trauma hinter dem Traum* (Schliengen, 1998), 358–9; on the *Nachtstück*, 365; on the geometry of the opera's plot, 271–3.

[43] 'Ein verfehltes Leben schreitet an dem Auge des Helden vorüber' (Franz Schreker, 'Nachtstück', *Der Merker 1* [1909], 9).

[44] I take Lee to make a very similar move when she insists that it is precisely the narrative constructions within Schreker's opera (which Adorno tends to neglect) that allow *Der ferne Klang* to engage self-consciously with its position within post-Wagnerian opera ('Adorno and the Case of Schreker', 677–8).

[45] See Carl Dahlhaus, 'Musik und Jugendstil', in *Art Nouveau, Jugendstil und Musik* (Zurich, 1980), 73–88; and Walter Frisch, 'Music and Jugendstil', *Critical Inquiry* (Autumn 1990), 142–60.

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the radio piece had claimed Schreker lacked compared to his more thoroughly modernist contemporaries. This answer thus suggests that Schreker's opera can think distance in non-phantasmagoric terms as well – that at certain points it manages to 'pass through' phantasmagoria. This possibility is already suggested by our first answer: after all, Adorno paradoxically seemed to consider it a positive move that Schreker raises the phantasmagoria to an even higher level than Wagner – and if we recall the quotation with which I opened, it is precisely in this 'one and all' that the 'Selbstauflösung' of the Wagnerian idiom occurs.

As we have seen, in the technologically despatialised opera house, in which the bourgeoisie is comfortably couched away from the world it has created, musical production sets up a new world – an anaesthetic, 'compensatory' and dulling pseudo-totality.[46] This new geography depends on the identity of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: it works only by exposing the audience to certain impulses at certain times. Unlike Wagner's operas and those of the verismo-influenced post-Wagnerians (whose insistent attempts to bring 'reality' onto the stage smack of Wagnerian attempts to compose away the world to compose it anew), *Der ferne Klang* partakes of its phantasmagoric production knowingly, or at least thematises phantasmagoric production, as emphasised by the controlling metaphor of the opera's title. After all, Fritz's 'distant sound' beckons always off stage. Much like Wagner and Mahler before him, Schreker thus lays out a symbolic geography by way of music, both on and off stage. The world outside, completely erased from consciousness by technical means, can now be simulated by musical means. Of course this describes a different effect than the 'over-integration' we have just traced in *Der ferne Klang*: where before all was hidden and subsumed into one, here that one is redifferentiated and reterritorialised, albeit still in the name of the unitary effect.

Put differently: we have until now explored the phantasmagoric implications of Schreker's *Klang*, that de-spatialised 'music from nowhere' that dominates Schreker's sophisticated harmonics. We will now turn to the question of *Ferne*, of distance in Schreker's opera. In this distance dwells not simply Fritz's mystical 'distant sound', but also a whole range of concrete everyday noises and music: from the noise of bars to a passing ship, from a train in the distance to a gypsy band, the events on stage are always accompanied by, or in dialogue with a space in the distance.[47] That this concrete, wordly distance and Fritz's transcendent 'distant sound' do not persist on the same plane, is clear; yet it is also clear that the two kinds of distance are themselves in dialogue. In Act I scene 1, Fritz tells Grete that his mysterious sound draws him 'weit – weit', when from off stage, the clamour of the bar interrupts him. Moreover, while for Fritz distance is bound up with an anti-bourgeois aesthetic impulse, the opera itself tends to associate it not only with naturalised society, but with operatic technology as well. In Act III scene 2, Fritz's opera-within-the-opera

[46] Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics', 22.

[47] In fact, Schreker's stage directions are very careful to distinguish the 'sound' (*Klang*) on the one hand and the various noises on the other: He describes them as 'noise' (*Lärm* or *Geräusch*), 'sounds' (*Töne* or *Getön*). All these (with the possible exception of *Töne*) have decidedly quotidian, not to say pejorative connotations when compared to the capacious meanings of *Klang* (for the range of connotations of *Klang*, see Hailey, *Franz Schreker*, 49).

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'Die Harfe' is being performed off stage and the applause from the well-received first act as well as the boos after the performance is over drift into the tavern in which the main action transpires. 'Was sagt das Parkett?' asks one barfly. The opera thus explicitly positions us in that space by the coat check from which Adorno practised his 'music from the outside'.

In considering topography in *Der ferne Klang* we will focus on aspects of the opera that we have until now neglected. The phantasmagoric annihilation of specificity that Adorno referred to is particularly prevalent in the overture, in the various narrative arias, in Grete's suicide attempt in the forest, as well as in the crystalline undulations of the aforementioned *Nachtstück* and the final scene. The phantasmagoric creation of artificial specificity, the simulated geography fashioned by the technological apparatus of stage and orchestra by contrast asserts itself in several dynamic juxtapositions throughout the opera, all of which not only lay out a new totality across and beyond the stage, but do so with unsettling social undertones.

The first of these occurs in Act I scene 3. The stage is occupied by Grete's home, but from the distance we can hear the clamour of the seedy bar, where, unbeknownst to her, her fate hangs in the balance. Grete has just been visited by the procuress ('die Alte') who is to discover her in the forest at the end of the first act. Grete wants to know whether her father is 'da drüben': 'Natürlich ist er da drüben' ('Of course he is over there'), her mother replies. The distant sound of the bar flares up as though in response – the bar, as Grete's mother explains, is where the family money now resides, with 'dem Gauner, dem Elenden' ('the rogue, the scoundrel'). For these women decisions are made elsewhere, and fate rules over them by proxy: only insofar as Grete's father has given in to his addiction to game and drink does fate actually have control over them. The social relations of the marketplace from which they are excluded lord over them like a force of nature; but the actual shape this supposed force of fate or nature takes is that of a bunch of men drinking.

Once the 'scoundrel' returns with his fellow barflies, the opera sets up an interesting *méprise* that serves to complicate the geography of the scene: three of the drinkers – the ham actor, the proprietor and the mysterious Dr Vigelius – elaborately describe what has just transpired: Grete's father has lost her over a game of bowling. Dr Vigelius's narration in particular, with its repetitive, almost mechanical quality, clearly establishes the game as a figure for blind fate. Throughout the scene 'die Alte' makes reappearances at the edge of the stage – but these appearances, though notated in the score, are entirely visual.[48] While Vigelius and his conspirators thus stage a dramatisation of blind fate in terms of *Klang*, the actual determinant of Grete's fate appears in the wings, and makes her presence known visually. While a topography is very clearly laid out, then, it is activated by the opera in contradictory ways: what distance figures for is anything but clear, but it is patently caught up with social difference, social position, social domination.

[48] Schreker's notes suggest appearances of the old woman at Reh. 36 (I, 48), Reh. 42 (I, 53) and Reh. 62/63 (I, 74); Franz Schreker, *Der ferne Klang. Oper in Drei Aufzügen (Studienpartitur)* (Schliegen, 1998), III, 66.

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A second instance of 'simulated geography' occurs at the opening of Act II. Here, Schreker's instructions make the scene's spatial aspirations explicit: 'The following scenes should present a *mélange* of the different sounds drifting onto the stage (voices from above, gypsy music, gondola music, the count's serenade) in such a way that the listener gets as realistic an impression of the milieu as possible, and almost feels as though he were himself in the middle of the action'.[49] Much as in the more tonal or colour-orientated segments of the opera, Schreker here insists on a mixture, but this 'mélange' does not perform the work of disorientation or pure libidinal suspension, but rather that of orientating or interpolating the listener.[50] The scene's various actors call out to the audience to place them *vis-à-vis* the goings-on, to make quite clear just where they are. On one level this effect promotes a 'fidelity to the milieu' that recalls the spirit of naturalism and verismo. However, the stage directions go much further when they seem to insist that only by positioning the audience (which, note, is male-defined) as though they were themselves part of the scene, it can give the audience a 'realistic impression' of the 'milieu', i.e., the social topography. The scene will not allow spectatorship from a safe and separate distance. Instead, counter to Kienzle's reading, which leaves the spectator comfortably aside, the stage directions here implicate the spectator in precisely the same mirror complexes highlighted on other levels of the opera's plot and visual conception. Considering that Act II transpires within the confines of a whorehouse, this seems to implicate the viewer in the same 'libidinal economy' as the events viewed. Phantasmagoria here tends towards the transcendence of its anaesthetic function and towards an implication of the consumer in the stage economy.

The third instance of this kind of simulation I want to discuss occurs during the *Nachtstück* and in Act III scene 9. Fritz's opera 'Die Harfe' has turned out an unmitigated disaster and the composer has withdrawn into his study. Outside the study, birds are singing (indicated in the score as well). And while there is, in keeping with Adorno's point, an emphasis on overall effect, on the voices as a whole, there is a surprising degree of specificity to the birdsong:

> There swells and ebbs a very quiet, unharmonically wonderful sound [*Getön*]. It is the song [*das Zwitschern*] of the great choir [of birds]; above it the voices of the soloists: nightingale, blackbird, finch, larch, etc.[51]

Schreker's notes identify the bird voices individually ('Nachtigall, Amsel, Fink, Lerche'), as well as describing the interior of Fritz's study in enough detail to allow

[49] 'Die folgenden Szenen sollen sich sich . . . mit den verschiedenen auf die Buehne dringenden Klängen (Gesang von oben, Zigeunermusik, Musik von den Gondeln, Serenade des Grafen) in der Weise vermengen, dass der Zuhörer einen möglichst getreuen Eindruck des Milieus erhaelt, und beinahe die Empfindung in ihm wachgerufen wird, er befinde sich selbst mitten in diesem Treiben'; Schreker, *Der ferne Klang*, II, 17.

[50] Adorno calls this predilection for mixtures Schreker's 'mixed drinks' and 'elixirs'; Adorno, 'Schreker', 374.

[51] 'Auf und nieder schwillt ein ganz leises, unharmonisch wunderbares Getön. Das ist das Zwitschern des großen Chors; darüber Stimmen der Solisten, Nachtigall, Amsel, Fink, Lerche, usw'; Schreker, *Der ferne Klang*, III, 66.

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guesses as to how well-off Fritz is at this stage in his career ('vornehm, einfach').[52] The most telling item of décor is the painting that hangs above the grand piano: Arnold Böcklin's 'Der Eremit', depicting a hermit playing his violin for a group of angels, is 'clearly visible'. The clear delineation of inside and outside (completed by the 'distant sound' of the birds) is another example of the opera's painstaking control of spatial meanings. Böcklin's painting goes further yet by inserting within the stage setting what might be called a 'framed framer'. While it may seem as though Fritz the bourgeois artist has acquired Böcklin's image of unalienated art, the very question of distance and of here-now-ness (the hermit faces a wall without any sign of anxiety) seems to reverse that order.[53] The Böcklin painting frames the opera by hinting at the very distance that the painting's subject in turn appears not to desire. Fritz's world makes obsessive reference to distance, whereas that distanced painting seems to rest in itself without surrendering any of its life.

In all three examples of 'simulated geography', spatial distance, articulated as a position of difference, becomes the very means by which phantasmagoria effects its integration. The idea of utopian difference is reinscribed into spatial difference; the distant sound is of course a utopian symbol, but it is a spatialised one.[54] It evokes 'Ferne' ('distance') only insofar as (a) we can't reach it (except in death, a point to which I will return); and (b) the bustle of the world distracts us from it. It is in this context that I would propose to revisit Adorno's terminology and take another good look at the 'distant sound' itself. If we were to perform *Der ferne Klang* under open air, we would probably not hear the sound at all – the opera's central theme makes sense only within the hermetically sealed performance space that modern technology provides. If we were not in an opera house, we would not hear the distant sound and we might assume that Fritz was simply delusional. Correspondingly, however, Fritz cannot hear the distant sound – he can't hear the distance, because of what is going on on stage. As he discloses early in the opera:

> Ein hohes, hehres Ziel schwebt mir vor Augen,
> Doch frei muss ich sein – frei!
> Denn nicht Ruhe find' ich zu Glück und Genuss,
> Nicht Ruhe zu Liebe und Seligkeit –
> Eh' ich ihn nicht habe und halte,
> Den rätselhaften, weltfernen Klang,
> Der zu mir herübertönt . . .

[A lofty goal is before my eyes, / But I must be free to achieve it – free! / For I can find no rest for happiness and enjoyment, / No rest for love and bliss – / Till I find it and hold it, / The mysterious, otherworldly sound, / Which wafts over towards me . . .]

[52] Kienzle, *Das Trauma hinter dem Traum*, 271.

[53] On the role of painting as a representative of the unalienated artwork, see Wolfgang Molkow, 'Die Rolle der Kunst in den Frühen Opern Franz Schrekers', in *Franz-Schreker-Symposion*, ed. Elmar Budde, Rudolf Stephan (Berlin, 1980), 83–94, esp. 88. On the role of the Böcklin-canvas see also Kienzle, *Das Trauma hinter dem Traum*, 271–2.

[54] For a history of the *topos* of 'distance' as a figuration of alterity in German music and literature, see Berthold Hoeckner, 'Schumann and Romantic Distance', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 50 (1997), 55–132.

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There are two ways of reading the geography of the *here* and the *distant* to which Fritz recurs throughout this scene. On the one hand, we can assume that he will fulfil his promise and return to perform his duties in society (especially *vis-à-vis* Grete) once he has found his distant sound – once he has the distant sound, he will have 'Ruhe und Seligkeit' in his life with Grete and can return to his lover with 'Reichtum und Ruhm' ('riches and fame'). The sound would then be something that transcends bourgeois society but could be harnessed within it (for riches and fame), and it would be primarily a means to an (again, very bourgeois) end: Fritz needs to become a great artist in order to be able to afford his expensive girlfriend Grete.

As becomes evident towards the end of the opera, however, this was always impossible: Fritz leaves society because he cannot find 'Ruhe' ('peace') or 'Seligkeit' ('bliss, salvation') and quests for the purely aesthetic experience of the 'distant sound', even if it leads to his death. And Fritz has much to complain about when it comes to society: the numerous arias, songs and narratives that make their way across the stage in the course of the opera (and even during his own opera-within-the-opera) combine to make it impossible for him to hear his distant sound. The 'Ruhe . . . zu Glück und Genuss', the absence of which Fritz laments in this opening scene, is constantly obscured throughout the opera – not least of all *by* the opera itself. Fritz is thus recapitulating the desire that has led the audience to the opera house in the first place: to get away from the 'administered world' (Adorno's term) and to the 'five o'clock world' (not Adorno's term) of aesthetic experience. To leave behind the noise and discontinuity of everyday experience and find the wholly different off stage. And yet, the fulfilment of this desire is always a return to the womb, for the opera-going public as well as for Fritz, for whom it quite literally means death. The wish for the distant sound is nothing but the death drive. It is the movement away from the complexities of the world and into a unified artistic production – into phantasmagoria.

The opera thus ultimately advocates a turn away from the sound and to the world that (as yet) obscures it. Fritz is reunited with his 'distant sound' only in death; we cannot be quite sure which comes first (that is to say, which causes which), but somehow we are pretty certain they are connected. If we were to posit that the distant sound equals death, we could simply chalk this equation up to the *Todesverliebtheit* of the *fin de siècle* – the sort of dalliance with or yearning for death Thomas Mann has his Hans Castorp undergo in *The Magic Mountain*.[55] Death, Adorno shows in the Wagner monograph, is an inextricable part of phantasmagoric storytelling. It is the way in which narrative can renounce itself into eternity; but Adorno adds in other places, mostly apropos of Heidegger's notion of being-towards-death, that it is precisely the naturalness with which death occurs in Heidegger, as in Wagner (in each it is a benchmark of a 'jargon of authenticity'), that mystifies the social world.[56] When the quotation with which I opened cited the

[55] On *Todesverliebtheit*, *Liebestod* and the Romantic obsession with Eros and Thanatos, see Linda and Michael Hutcheon, 'Death Drive', 268–9.

[56] See Theodor W. Adorno, *Der Jargon der Eigentlichkeit* (Frankfurt, 1970), 413ff.

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'Verzauberung' ('mystification') of the 'social models' into 'Nature itself', the point was essentially the same: there is a continuity between the obfuscation of the made-ness of phantasmagoric production (musical or otherwise) on the one hand and the attribution of socially caused death to 'fate', to myth, or to 'Nature' on the other.

But is there really an infatuation with death in *Der ferne Klang*? The shape Fritz's death actually takes seems far from mystifying. First, the distant sound as musical motif makes its first full appearance (illustrating the equation of the sound and death), but then dies along with Fritz (rather than intensifying with his death, thus seemingly undoing the equation). Second, Grete plays the part of Isolde quite well until her final line, in which she is not only clearly surprised by Fritz's death ('ach Fritz – was ist Dir?'), but also seems anything but accepting. Third, what has seemed up until this point a *Liebestod*-pastiche is disrupted by a final, violent blow, which seems to achieve the opposite of transfiguration: all of a sudden the music seems to insist that the opera's plot is tragic. And while tragedy has often been attacked for precisely transfiguring actual suffering into a general human condition, in this case the violent blow seems to question the very transfiguration.[57]

The very last three bars of the opera's score break not only with the mystification of Fritz's death with which the opera has seemed to flirt; they also rupture the whole notion of the operatic with a violent exclamation. The opera ends with a scream of surprise and sorrow, rather than on any melodic note. The 'distant sound' has developed itself out of existence with Fritz's death, and the opera seems to suspend its traditional musical means in the moment of death. Moreover, if it were not for the outburst of the final three bars, the opera could have ended as it began; it might have decrescendo-ed itself out of existence just as it slowly insinuated itself into existence in the overture. This return to the same is the mark of myth: in Schreker's Germany, for example, it was the mark of the fairy tale that it begins with 'Es war einmal' (presupposing an end) and ends with 'und wenn sie nicht gestorben sind, dann leben sie noch heute' ('if they have not died, they live to this very day'). The fairy tale not only ends in tautology, this tautology serves to sublate anything that happened in between the near-identical bookends. In other words, the seemingly nonsensical ending of a fairy tale is not conveying information, but is rather a magic formula for banishing the story conjured up by 'once upon a time'. *Der ferne Klang* proposes a similar fairy-tale or dream logic. The opening and the closing being identical, all having been restored to equilibrium (=identity), the death-drive having found its fulfilment. The opera has turned into one huge tautology, an A=A the 'lazy existence' of which (as Hegel called it) is relegated to a dream, which is now banished into an '=' by the recurrence of the overture and eventually drowned out by the applause.

Significantly, the overture and the final scene both play out in the distance, the former setting up the space in which the dream-content of the opera will unfold, the

[57] On the alliance between tragedy and transfiguration, see Peter Szondi, *Versuch über das Tragische* (Frankfurt, 1961); and Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Malden, Mass., 2003).

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latter rescinding that space. These positing and taking-back gestures are both accomplished via the 'distant sound', in which, as Adorno remarked in the passage I quoted at the outset, music is spatialised, and social systems mystified into nature. The opera replicates through the fates of Fritz and Grete the operations that phantasmagoric mystification performs on the social totality: an abnegation of social agency, of the fundamental made-ness of human fate, of the injustice entailed and yet eclipsed by abstract reason. Just as Fritz 'has' to die by some cosmic law, just as the 'distant sound' beckons as though a matter of metaphysics and not acoustics, the audience leaves the theatre confirmed in their belief that they deserve to be watching the drama, while others are involved in producing the latter or building the former.

It should be clear from what I have said so far that Schreker's opera is not in fact tautological. After all, the *Rücknahme*, the renunciation or negation (as Freud would call it), the gesture of taking back the techno-totality just as it was granted in the opening bars, is disrupted by Grete's scream and the chord accompanying it. This blow is historic; it is despatialised. It no longer transpires within the spatial framework set up by the music and the phantasmagoric apparatus, it happens outside of it. Moreover, by insisting on tragedy over transfiguration, the final chord paints as tragic not so much anything particular that animates the story, but the story's movement as a whole. Rather than putting anything narrated into question, it interrogates the very form of the narration. It places a question mark behind the death drive, insists that what has been posited can never be taken back without an indivisible remainder of suffering. As such it is historicising.

To put all this another way: the opera critiques the drowning-out of the distant sound by equating the distant sound with death. The only way to get beyond the 'white noise' created by modern society and to get to pure aesthetic experience is to die; and in Schreker's formulation this sounds less like a neutral statement of a generalised human condition than an indictment of modern society. It is the mark of the particular phantasmagoric, pseudo-totalising performance of *Der ferne Klang* that it (a) never enunciates without an element of subversion; (b) frames and historicises its own stasis and empty dynamism; and (c) does not allow for its complete retraction in the service of self-identity, in that, be it in the unsubsumable motifs of Schreker's music or the residual libidinal investment solicited by the opera, it always posits more than it rescinds.

This means however that the simplistic equivalence I half-seriously proposed earlier (distant sound $\approx$ death drive) cannot be left uncomplicated. Similarly, if the very distance of the sound has at once a phantasmagoric and an anti-identitarian quality, then the ambivalence becomes thematic in the figuration of the eponymous 'sound' itself. The equation of the distant sound with the death drive would seem reductive and not entirely apropos. After all, Fritz is driven to the distant sound not *because* it means death, stasis, sameness, pleasure; he is unaware what exactly it means. Unlike Mann's Castorp, who, in scene after scene, faces the choice between Eros and Thanatos, Fritz chases Eros but finds Thanatos. Where in Wagner's musical drama the yearning for death sometimes even comes to replace plot, the plot of *Der Ferne Klang* hinges instead on a *méprise* similar to the one attributed above

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to Grete – she sees fate and interrogates it, but in response obtains only social dependency.[58] Fritz seeks Eros but finds Thanatos – and whereas, as Buck-Morss points out, the Wagnerian drama has its content in 'life's negation' and 'sensuality's affirmation', we are in the case of Fritz dealing with a fundamental confusion between the two.[59] The quest beyond the *factum brutum*, the drive for the 'distant sound', is thus not itself vilified. It is the desire to create sensual reality apart from brute actuality, to generate erotic content that is neither contingent upon the actually existing nor in a separate sphere such as the imagination.

There is the danger of a loop in our argument at this point: is what I described above as 'simulated geography' not simply an aspect of verismo and thus an element of those artistic currents from which Adorno is labouring to cleave Schreker's oeuvre? And isn't that hope for the recovery of eroticism from brute actuality not a Wagnerian concern rather than one that Schreker shares with the New Music? If we recall however that Adorno (in the passage I cited in opening) saw a self-dissolution at work in Schreker, it would seem instead that in Schreker's 'simulated geographies' the logic of verismo is up-ended, as is the notion of phantasmagoria. After all, Adorno's target in this passage is not phantasmagoria at all, but rather the 'distant sound'. In his own discussion of *Der ferne Klang*, Carl Dahlhaus points out that Schreker's 'naturalism' (and in particular the naturalism of his libretto) has, like all nineteenth-century naturalism, an aspect of 'the quest for unspoiled [unverbraucht] aesthetic impulses'.[60]

In some sense, then, Schreker, in bringing the 'distant sound' on stage, has brought naturalism on stage.[61] The opera literalises its own thematic quest for the unspoiled aesthetic datum, as well as its link to social class (the 'Other' being conceived of primarily as a social Other). The opera thus thematises that it itself always *means* the '*big* Other' ('the impossible object', as it was called above), but always ends up pulling on stage the *social* Other. Instead of the 'distant sound' we are made to crave, the opera gives us diegesis – gypsy songs, gondoliers – but the 'dome' remains to sever us from the heavens where a 'distant sound' would ultimately reside. What's more, Fritz's initial disgust with Grete, as Dahlhaus points out, stems from the fact 'that she has become that which he – unwittingly – made her'. This 'leads him to miss the only path by which he could find himself and his *Werk*'.[62] It is the obstruction by that which has become, which has been made that supposedly obscures the access to aesthetic essence – in the case of Grete as much as in that of the opera house that for its perfection wants to will itself out of existence.

[58] The clearest example of this substitution of death drive for plot in Wagner is, of course, *Der fliegende Holländer*; see Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagners Musikdramen* (Stuttgart, 1971), 15–16.

[59] Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics', 25.

[60] Carl Dahlhaus, 'Schreker und die Moderne', in *Franz Schreker – Am Beginn der neuen Musik*, ed. Otto Kolleritsch (Graz, 1978), 12.

[61] Kienzle (*Das Trauma hinter dem Traum*, 106) similarly claims that *Der ferne Klang* constitutes an 'overcoming of naturalism'. Hailey (*Franz Schreker*, 38) characterises the opera as a 'mixture of naturalism and symbolism', without however assigning either term primacy in his analysis.

[62] Dahlhaus, 'Schreker und die Moderne', 14.

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Adorno claims that, like Cythera (clearly referenced in Act II of *Der ferne Klang*), Schreker's sound is 'separated by a wave-studded chasm from empirical reality – and yet it is nonetheless sensuous' (375).[63] That 'Schreker's sound' can here refer to a particular 'Schreker-sound' (which is what Adorno intends) or to Schreker's distant sound as operatic prop reveals to what extent the opera's structuring metaphor in fact recapitulates the operation of Schreker's music. The relationship of the Schreker-sound to phantasmagoric identity is thus an ambivalent one. On the one hand it produces gorgeous phantasmagoric soundscapes, on the other it produces them not as dreamlike, but *as a dream*, giving the sleeper an unnerving glimpse at the fact that he is dreaming.

I would be tempted to claim that it is precisely in this force-field of utopian and phantasmagoric, and of alienating and identitarian that the magic of *Der ferne Klang* unfolds. Schreker doesn't sit easy with Adorno in any case, and it seems his stock is buoyed primarily by Adorno's erotic attachment to the composer's oeuvre. In other words, Schreker's opera is a technological dream-machine, which thinks its participation in phantasmagoric reality. And it is up to desire, for which the opera's 'distance' ultimately codes, to entangle rather than disentangle the problematics of its production on the one hand with its juvenile promise on the other. It is (post-)Wagnerian opera that fully activates the 'dialectic of the dome'. Schreker is its 'Selbstauflösung' precisely because he thinks both with and against phantasmagoria to the point where *Sehnsucht* spells identity and phantasmagoria surrenders promise.

[63] 'durch einen wogenden Abgrund getrennt von der empirischen Realität und doch selber ein Sinnliches.'

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