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Appreciation Without Apologies

PHIL FORD

Admit it: music appreciation is square. In the recent film comedy *School of Rock*, when a bumbling rocker somehow gets a job teaching at a stuffy prep school and begins teaching classes in “rock history and appreciation,” what’s funny is how the film takes a veritable icon of stuffiness (the music appreciation course) and repositions it in the incongruous terrain of power stances, groupies, and sticking it to The Man. The joke would not work without a certain settled, collective sense of the social authority that music appreciation represents, or without rock’s image of rebellion against that same authority. Eric Weisbard writes of Music Appreciation, which, imposingly capitalized, seems less an academic subject than a spirit of gentrification that tempts former revolutionaries with bourgeois respectability:

Seriousness . . . is a dangerous base on which to build a new rock canon. Lou Reed, for example, has talked with [David] Byrne on the show [*Sessions at 54th Street*] about Mr. Reed’s collaborations with the avant-garde director Robert Wilson and the novelist and filmmaker Paul Auster. But punk’s Uncle Lou also has junkie exploits and drag queens in his past. When music lovers make judgments based on high-flown associations rather than grit, the aura of Music Appreciation starts to hang over an innately unruly art form.¹

And Lou Reed himself, in his junkies-and-drag-queens past, once grouped music appreciation with theology, Playboy jazz polls, and psychological tests as symbols for everything repressive in square culture that rock was trying to undermine.²

Music appreciation feels square, middle-class, and middlebrow—or at least a brow lower than that to which one ought to aspire. To say we teach “music appreciation” is to suggest that the main thing we do is to appreciate something that is already there in the music, independent of us and our interests, identity, and historical moment. As music appreciators, we come to something already fully formed, lying passively in wait for us to appreciate it. Whatever it is we are appreciating has nothing much to do with us; we do not have a hand in creating or shaping it, any more than we do with the stars in the sky. On this account, then, music is the creation of a demiurge whose genius, like that of a divine Creator, we can only know dimly, by reflection, in the movements of His hand through His works.

In short, the “appreciation” mode of pedagogy appears to imply values of transcendence and universality, and throughout the academic humanities today these values are deeply out-of-fashion. The great challenge to musicology in the last fifteen years has been a critical perspective that sees musical canons, and the notions of musical value on which they are erected, as ideological constructions of race, gender, and class interest. Scholars who have kept up these debates don’t want to look as if they haven’t; they do not want to be taken for the sort of people who look to music in hopes of appreciating

¹Weisbard, “But is it Rock?”

²Reed, “View from the Bandstand,” 2.

timeless values. For that register of intellectual life marked by the critical temper, there are no transcendent values, either aesthetic or ethical, and to posit such values in the one realm is to posit them in the other. The music appreciator therefore makes a naïve error with dangerous political implications. To suggest eternal or universal or timeless values is to suggest that some cultural artifacts, some cultures, some ways of being human, are better than others. It is to assert a veiled will to power that, in imposing a monolithic Western identity, strips other peoples of their own. The stereotype of the tweedy music appreciation professor, bow tie askew and arms aflap as Beethoven plays scratchily on the classroom hi-fi, becomes a sinister archetype. He is now a propagandist, his ideology all the more pernicious for being unacknowledged, forcing his unwitting students into a passive state of admiration for the great white masters.

Belief in the transcendence of the artwork—even in a dilute form that considers the aesthetic power of an artwork merely as something different from its contingent social origin and identity—betrays an outlook to which few intellectually ambitious people will willingly admit. And should they forget themselves, enforcers of a now-conventional opinion will prod them back in line. Thus, Robert Walser reproves Simon Frith for his call for a renewed aesthetic engagement. Frith, after a career of writing about how rock articulates social identities, wrote *Performing Rites* to ask if one cannot also talk about the expression and value that people find in music. The suggestion does not please Walser, who finds a richly coded insult for Frith's suggestion: *music appreciation*.

Frith's appeal should sound familiar to music scholars: he has just reinvented music appreciation, whereby people who have greater authority, cultural capital or rhetorical skills (teachers, critics) tell others (students, fans) what they ought to be listening to (classical music, authentic rock) according to a single scale of value. The presumption is that what they should be hearing is somehow better for them, although it is rare to find anyone attempting to explain just how or why this improvement will take place. Since Frith limits his concern to what he thinks people should be listening to, without considering the moral and ethical commitments that underpin such choices, his is not really a discourse of value as much as it is a discourse of power.³

Walser's critique, though distinguished, is not alone in defining music appreciation in terms of a mentality that represses, that uses knowledge as power, and uses that power to erase difference.⁴ This schema of knowledge/power is the fruit of a continental tradition of radical philosophy. Michel Foucault, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Antonio Gramsci are only the most eminent thinkers who, in theorizing the nexus of knowledge and power, have influenced the various styles of academic Left antinomianism

³Walser, "Popular Music Analysis," 19.

⁴See also Regelski, "Social Theory." There are, of course, other arguments against music appreciation, and they have been made for a long time. Virgil Thomson argued that the "music appreciation racket" was a kind of confidence trick that played on Americans' piety and snobbery in order to gull them into buying records. Thomson, "Why Composers Write How." Although concerns of this essay are related to the question of what role music appreciation plays in the commodification of music, I do not deal with it here.

grouped loosely under the rubric of postmodernism.⁵ Contemporary postmodernism, in turn, has filled out a mental map first drawn in the vernacular American radicalism of the late 1960s and early 1970s. To be sure, the path of intellectual history that connects these points does not run straight. The mid-1960s postmodernism of Susan Sontag in *Against Interpretation*, which sought the recuperation of the aesthetic object within the senses and outside the tyranny of professionalized interpretation, is close to what I will propose at the end of this essay, but this strand of intellectual history all but disappeared as postmodernism itself became professionalized within the university.⁶ Even so, what unifies contemporary postmodern scholarship and the early postmodernism of what I will, for convenience, call the Movement is a specifically cultural understanding of hegemony.⁷ Hegemony is conceived as domination by means of culture; the critique that unmasks it is a critique of consciousness. The agent of hegemony is the mentality of Western, capitalist, technocratic man, who uses his busy, classifying mind to alienate nature and spirit from himself, to quantify and distance it, to map it onto a grid of utility, and thus to dominate it. Consequently, styles of thought come politically loaded, even when ostensibly neutral. Music appreciation comes to be seen as a manifestation of the aggressively appropriative cultural logic of the capitalist West. And here lies the sting of Walser's critique: music appreciation is bourgeois.

I do not wish to be misunderstood: when I say that current academic practice owes something to the 1960s, I am not arguing, in the neoconservative style, that humanities academics are domesticated radicals, bootlegging unreconstructed countercultural ideology into the humanities.⁸ The humanities' present historical moment could be characterized, I think, as a point where an ideological system has decomposed into something much less definite and hard-edged: an idiom, perhaps, or a sensibility. The sense of music appreciation as something square, middlebrow, or maybe worse, is in dialogue with a complex of ideas that is widely shared by both professors and students, that has indeed come to seem natural and inevitable, even as its historical origins have become obscure. What I wish to do in the remainder of this article is to suggest something of these origins, to shine a light of historical explanation on educated prejudice and, perhaps, to weaken its power to compel. Inherited prejudices against the appreciation model of pedagogy are not natural or given, but are contingent expressions of the edu-

⁵Postmodernism is a notoriously difficult thing to define, and I do not propose to define it here. Postmodernism belongs to that class of things, like jazz and *film noir*, to which Nietzsche's epigram, "only that which has no history can be defined," applies with special force. In this article I use the term "postmodernism" to denote those strands of Left critical thought cultivated in institutions of the arts and higher education since 1965, when Leslie Fiedler used this almost-new term to describe an emerging sensibility that was "post-humanist, post-male, post-white, post-heroic." Fiedler, "The New Mutants." Which is to say, postmodernism is a cultural mood, bound up with a cultural critique of the West and its traditional sites of authority, that emerged in the mid-1960s Movement. And while there are a potentially infinite number of postmodernisms, *my* postmodernism is the one whose present identity exhibits continuity with its historical roots, however mediated that continuity may be.

⁶Sontag, "Against Interpretation," 3-14.

⁷It is not quite right to say that these ideas belong to the New Left and its intellectual forebears, but neither are they strictly countercultural. The medium by which these ideas entered a wide popular consciousness was an alliance between New Left and counterculture that knew itself as the Movement: see Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties*. One particularly fine study of how cultural attitudes developed within a political milieu (and *vice versa*) is Rossinow, *Politics of Authenticity*.

⁸For an example of this kind of argument, see Kimball, *The Long March*.

cated elite's ongoing anxiety about its place in capitalist society. You are always free to decide for yourself whether to agree or disagree, and if you want to teach a music appreciation class, or something that feels like one, why not? Further, I want to suggest not only *why not* but also the *why*: beneath its dusty cloak of bourgeois meliorism, the appreciation model hides the possibility of renewing our students' (and our own) relationship to the world.

Dominant ideas are dominant because they command unthinking deference, which is to say that their warrants are defended less by explicit argument than by a widely shared sense that they are *how one is supposed to think*. And this is what has happened to the postmodern style of thought, particularly its axial principle of what Gerald Graff calls radical parallelism: the habit of understanding developments in the separate spheres of culture, politics, and society as symptomatic of one another.⁹ Writes Graff, “[the] central premise of cultural radicalism is that there exists a parallel or correspondence between psychological, epistemological, esthetic, and political categories of experience. Repression in psychology, objectivism in epistemology, representationalism and the elitism of high culture in esthetics are parallel expressions of bourgeois social domination.”¹⁰ In the 1960s, Movement analysis that used this style of thought triumphed over its competition—the plodding, paternalistic “consensus liberalism” of the 1950s—by making bold and speculative connections between formerly unconnected phenomena. Early in its development, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the flagship organization of the New Left, realized it could create a broad movement of the Left by understanding the grievances of separate single-issue groups as somehow interlinked. Little clots of activists could fight racism or the Vietnam war or the Bomb, but SDS specialized in finding critiques that could unite them in a common struggle.¹¹

One critique, increasingly attractive in the late 1960s, saw what Sontag called the “Western, Faustian ego,” rather than any singular manifestation of it, as a force that enslaved people of color throughout the world, laid waste to Vietnam, and threatened to blacken the whole earth with atomic fire. Sontag noted that the “Western, Faustian ego” was also responsible for “Mozart, Pascal, Boolean algebra, Shakespeare, parliamentary government, Baroque churches, Newton, the emancipation of women, Kant, Marx, and Balanchine ballets”—but at the time she did not think these things made up for the destruction unleashed by the mentality that made them possible.¹² This suggested a radical conclusion: we cannot overthrow the current political and social order unless the Western culture of which it is a manifestation is also overthrown. And while Sontag's thought here is strongly reminiscent of Adorno and Horkheimer's forbidding *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the general form of this analysis was also carried into popular cul-

⁹Graff, *Literature Against Itself*, 63-68.

¹⁰Ibid., 63.

¹¹See Kirkpatrick Sale's account of the early ideological formation of the SDS: Sale, *SDS*, 25.

¹²Sontag, “What's Happening in America,” 202-3.

ture.¹³ John Sinclair, a hippy intellectual who managed the MC5, a Detroit rock band famous for its militancy, tended to think in such terms, and his influence is palpable in an MC5 interview where the band's singer, Rob Tyner, declares that "European culture is such bullshit."¹⁴ In the early 1990s, one occasionally heard academics say things like this—and one also heard those comments endlessly repeated and deafeningly amplified in the early pitched battles of the "culture wars." But really it was the general style of thought, and the parallelism that underwrites it, that had persisted and shaped the cognitive style of the humanities.

Thus it has come to feel natural to assume the interpenetration of music and society and, by the same token, to feel that it is rather wrong to talk of music's autonomous effects—wrong, or at least naïve, to think of a musician's work as a zone in which a self-fashioned logic might momentarily suspend the gravitational force of politics and identity. Students might enter a music appreciation classroom with the naïve faith that what they love in music is something that is actually *in the music*, and they want to find out what it is. Frank Zappa tells the story of his own early hunger to discover the sources of his musical desire:

There were a few teachers in school who really helped me out. Mr. Kavelman, the band instructor at Mission Bay High, gave me the answer to one of the burning musical questions of my youth. I came to him one day with a copy of "Angel in My Life"—my favorite R&B tune at the time. I couldn't understand why I loved that record but I figured that, since he was a *music teacher*, maybe he knew.

"Listen to this," I said, "and tell me why I like it so much."

"Parallel fourths," he concluded.¹⁵

But ambitious students quickly learn at college that this is only a fan's attitude, not really an intellectual one, and, maybe more importantly, not a professional one. They are acculturated to believe that what they love is something in themselves, or in the society that bounds them, something we have all unwittingly conspired to believe, something that merely replicates social forms in the guise of art. Perhaps they cannot quite say why they now believe this, but that is not the point anymore. The critique has become rote—we no longer bother to argue for it all that much, and the habits of thought that make it possible are no longer theories, but givens.

¹³Sontag's dialectical understanding of the "Western, Faustian ego" as a force of both creativity and destruction is similar to Adorno and Horkheimer's conception of enlightenment. The "dialectic of enlightenment" is an ongoing process by which nature is subjugated to instrumental reason, even as it negates itself through the systematic exercise of its characteristic energies. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

¹⁴Walley, "MC5 Interview," 281. The ideological ferment of Sinclair's circle is especially well-captured in *Music is Revolution*, an audio collection of speeches, interviews, and bull sessions selected from the John and Leni Sinclair Papers at the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan.

¹⁵Zappa and Occhiogrosso, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 34-35. Emphases in the original.

But: why must aesthetic advocacy result in judgment on a “single scale of value”? Why are we to assume that aesthetic modes of engagement advance hegemony? Why are we to assume there is such a thing as hegemony, anyway? And if there is a hegemony, why must we think of it in specifically cultural terms? We could have an argument about all this, but for the most part we are not having that argument, because its warrants have entered the realm of *how one is supposed to think* and are defended by our fear of saying something gauche.

I am only stating the obvious when I say that one of the functions of humanities study is to foster a critical sense, to get students to look at themselves through estranged eyes and see that what they take for granted is just another possible position in an endless field of debate. This is one reason to question the postmodern sensibility, which has raised important questions of how culture marks social distinction but has yet to question its own place in the life of the educated American elite. In truth, Pierre Bourdieu’s masterpiece of cultural sociology, *Distinction*, did not fail to raise the question of academic prestige. Bourdieu had few illusions about higher education and understood that there is no escaping its competitive games of distinction. The academy, now sensitive to the old, crude forms of cultural exclusion, only makes them subtler. Music appreciation, like other pedagogical enterprises aimed at allowing students to gain cultural competence by way of precept and classification, arouses repugnance from those whose own cultural capital arises from the manners of inherited wealth. From their point of view, the music appreciation classroom is the site of nouveau-riche acquisition:

But above all—and this is why aesthetes so abhor pedagogues and pedagogy—the rational teaching of art provides substitutes for direct experience, it offers short cuts on the long path of familiarization, it makes possible practices which are the product of concepts and rules instead of springing from the supposed spontaneity of taste, thereby offering a solution to those who hope to make up for lost time.¹⁶

But the wrinkle that Bourdieu did not anticipate is that it is no longer aesthetes that resent the *arriviste*’s easy assumption of cultural competence, but a horde of little Bourdieus.¹⁷ The 20th century avant-garde’s habitual call for art to be subordinated to (or sublimated into) life has become the very thing the avant-garde meant to destroy, culture as a class marker and an index of prestige. It is now the sensibility of an elite—our bright and hardworking students, getting an education that will be rewarded in the post-industrial marketplace and aspiring to careers in law, education, and the arts. Theirs is the old middle-class ethic of striving and self-improvement, but anxious to hide itself, to distance itself from the grim embarrassment of middlebrow culture—things like Oprah’s Book Club, suffused with an earnest spirit that conflates intellectual effort and moral uplift, and uplift with faith in the universality of “human nature.”

¹⁶Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 68.

¹⁷It is worth noting the powerful influence Bourdieu has had on popular discourse, and not always on the Left—for example in Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise*, and in countless of Brooks’s columns.

This anxiety goes back at least to the cold war. Dwight Macdonald's classic study of cultural hierarchy, "Masscult and Midcult," takes a line from Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*—"There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being"—to be an "eleven-word summary, in form and content," of middlebrow culture.¹⁸ What Macdonald calls Midcult is a pseudo-profound spectacle of edification; the cracker-barrel maxims and realist dramaturgy of *Our Town* truckle to the limited cultural horizons of the American bourgeoisie, even as vulgar imitations of real modernism flatter them for their intellect. The middlebrow's ethic of self-improvement, his faith in universality, his anxious consumption of cultural goods bearing the imprimatur of High Culture—these were ultimately more dangerous than lowbrow "masscult," which at least remained honestly trashy. Unlike lowbrows, stupefied by their coarse pleasures and usefully out-of-the-way, middlebrows could inflict damage on an aristocratic high culture by making it over in their image. Macdonald was at least honest about what he thought ought to be done about the parvenus intruding upon high culture: "let the majority eavesdrop if they like, but their tastes should be firmly ignored."¹⁹ Ultimately, the only practical solution Macdonald could see to the problem of Midcult was the revival of an avant-garde spirit that could create a "cultural—as against a social, political, or economic—elite as a countermovement to both Masscult and Midcult."²⁰

This is in fact a blueprint for the countercultural revolution of the next decade, although with one very important (and slightly paradoxical) difference: Movement intellectuals would find a way to retain Macdonald's demand for a cultural elite while embracing mass culture. The Movement and its academic descendents have rejected Macdonald's high-art elitism, but are united with him in their loathing of the middle class and in their habit of collapsing class distinctions into those of culture. What Lionel Trilling called the "adversary culture" has always opposed class distinctions based on money, but not class distinctions as such.²¹ Like the decayed and impoverished English aristocracy early in the 20th century, America's adversary culture makes social distinctions based on tastes and attitudes, or rather attitudes within which tastes gain their meaning, and has its revenge on the middle class by declaring that money will not help. Distinction is not inscribed in the hard tablets of law and money but the soft matter of culture. And it is that protean kind of distinction that students are buying when they pay the vast sums demanded by elite American universities.

There is something softly totalitarian in the belief that there is no realm of the human imagination free of politics, and that all utterances must be judged—or "interro-

¹⁸Macdonald, "Masscult and Midcult" [pt. 2], 596.

¹⁹Ibid., 629.

²⁰Ibid., 626.

²¹Trilling, *Beyond Culture*, xv.

gated,” to use a telling cant expression—by the degree of their complicity with power.²² When I teach, I sense the reach of our collective interrogation, the pervasive desire to make music sweat under the hot lights, especially when it is a shade disreputable to start with—for example, the 1950s exotica pop of Les Baxter, music devoted to the depiction of imaginary exotic landscapes. In its images of lost jungle cities, exotic maidens, mysterious native rites, and whatnot, it projects the technologized, Western male into a libidinous fantasy stocked with conventionalized non-western subjects. Exotica is tailor-made for Edward Said’s diagnosis of Orientalism, one of the most intellectually powerful critiques of knowledge/power. Not all students have read Said or even heard of him, but his cultural authority makes itself felt in any classroom regardless. We do not enjoy exotica’s *luxe moderne* arabesque surfaces entirely without guilt and self-consciousness. With a glance at the sexy album cover art and overheated liner-note style, the expected social critique jumps to our lips. I begin to speak of Orientalism and the domination by means of its discourses; my students speak, perhaps less theoretically, of racism and sexism. Either way, we remain in thrall to exotica’s more limiting aspects, its retarded sexuality and racial paternalism, while something of *the music itself* remains untouched. The music waves cheerfully from across the gap between its sensibility and ours, reminding us that the pleasure afforded by a private enjoyment of music not dictated by social theory is now prohibited. Postmodernism, though it loudly claimed to be liberating pleasure from the sterile disciplines of modernism, has ended up like all revolutionary movements, as the gatekeeper of permissible pleasure.

The music itself: a suspect term, especially among those for whom social meaning is the ineluctable goal of musical hermeneutics.²³ And yet, as Carolyn Abbate has lately pointed out in her essay “Music—Drastic or Gnostic?,” music underdetermines any meanings it might owe its social origins. Indeed, music underdetermines all meaning. Meaning is what emerges from signification, and Abbate’s article is concerned with theorizing undomesticated kinds of musical experience, glimpsed in the moment of performance, that have “nothing to do with signification, being instead *doing this really fast is fun* or *here comes a big jump*.”²⁴ These are not the portable concepts one takes away from the experience of a piece of music in order to write or talk about it; rather, they are inextricable from the phenomenal experience of the music, in person and in real time, and they do not survive the moment of their disclosing. What Abbate calls “the drastic” and what Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht calls “presence” is the dark matter of the musical universe. It is the substance of musicians’ daily practice and listeners’ daily experience, but invisible to the devices of interpretation and therefore to the academy, which, as Gumbrecht points out, is the central institution—indeed, the embodiment—of meaning culture.

²²I am borrowing this term from Steven Marcus, whose essay “Soft Totalitarianism” is a study of how academic discourse forecloses dissent through the manipulation of language—something enabled by the “fundamental assumption” that “everything is political.” Marcus, “Soft Totalitarianism,” 632.

²³For an acute analysis of this term and its ideological overtones in cold war musical discourse, see Taruskin, “Myth of the 20th Century.” It should be noted that Taruskin’s own musical hermeneutics are eclectic and far from deterministic, relying on Howard Becker’s notion of “art worlds” to arrive at a fluid conception of the composer’s agency in a field of social and institutional forces. Taruskin, *Oxford History of Western Music*, xxvii–xxx.

²⁴Abbate, “Music—Drastic or Gnostic?,” 511.

The obvious question that arises from Abbate's article is how musicologists, the professionals of what Virgil Thomson called the "world of verbalized ideas and general aesthetic awareness," might engage with a realm of musical experience that lies outside of verbalized meaning.²⁵ Abbate herself does not really offer an answer. Presence is a plain fact, no less real for the academy's inability to make something of it, and in the end, Abbate does not offer a theory of academic praxis so much as a philosophy of the good life, the life spent outside the academy and at the opera house, awash in presence. The aesthete's stance is a lofty one, far removed from that most *déclassé* of all the spaces in the modern music department, the music appreciation classroom. But when Abbate asks that we "disentangle some virtues from a situation wherein the words explaining music are these: doing this really fast is fun," she is asking that we value the moment of performance as a site where a certain kind of musical presence is disclosed, and I would suggest that the music appreciation classroom is another such site.²⁶ Whatever its problematic status in the academic's professional world, presence matters in the world beyond—in the lives of performing musicians, for whom almost all musical knowledge is "drastic" in Abbate's sense, and in life as it is lived by our students.²⁷ I am advocating a pedagogy that engages presence in our students' lives and seeks to enhance it—a pedagogy that aims at apprehending the world as it is, but with its sounds, colors, and textures lit up by quiet and focused perception. To this kind of teaching the term "appreciation" might properly be applied.²⁸ Like performance itself, it is a situation wherein the words "playing this really fast is fun" are not inappropriate.

To suggest anything of this sort is to court charges of escapism, destructive irrationalism, and, inevitably, anti-intellectualism.²⁹ The sensibility I have sketched in this essay is inescapably critical in its orientation, as is its pedagogy. It is negating rather than affirming, concerned with seeing the world in terms of a dissonance between its actual state and an ideal form that is less hoped-for than heuristic, a baleful reminder of the inadequacy of the world we have. And so for Theodor Adorno, the great prophet of critical negation, "[p]erspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in messianic light."³⁰ Appreciation will always seem, from this rigorously critical

²⁵Thomson, "The Intellectual Audience," 170.

²⁶Abbate, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?," 533.

²⁷It is worth noting, though, that some scholars have devoted themselves to dragging the contents of "drastic" experience into the realm of the gnostic, sometimes with remarkable success. Elisabeth LeGuin succinctly defines the problem as one of rendering of the experiences of the music-making body, "which by its nature contains an extremely fine grain of detail, into concepts that are usefully transferable to other works, other points of contact with the composer, and eventually to points of contact with other composers altogether." LeGuin, "Cello-and-Bow Thinking." See also LeGuin, *Boccherini's Body*, and Sudnow, *Ways of the Hand*.

²⁸My definition of "appreciation" here is clearly not the same as Allen Carlson's narrower one, which holds that appreciation of an artwork necessarily constitutes "knowledge of that object" along the lines of the natural sciences and thus comprises an accumulation of facts—names, dates, comparative instances, and so on. (Which is not to say that I am opposed to teaching facts!) Carlson, "Aesthetic Appreciation," 393. For a response to this position, see Godlovich, "Carlson on Appreciation."

²⁹See for example the responses to Frank Lentricchia's "Last Will and Testament," some of which are reprinted in *Quick Studies*, 35-38.

³⁰Adorno, "Finale," 247.

stance, regressive and politically quiescent, a capitulation to things as they are. But a rigorously critical stance has its own blind spots, too: a refusal of pleasure (for all the ostentatious talk of the body worked up in cultural studies) and an authoritarian need to interpose itself in the student's dialogue with an artwork and deny the possibility of an unsocialized relationship between them. From this blind spot I would like to recover a notion of music appreciation as an appreciation of presence, its goal the revelation of an aesthetic object in the full richness of its being. On this account, teachers are those who not only explicate the social, political, historical, and cultural meanings of a piece of music, but are also professional enthusiasts, cheerleaders of the aesthetic experience, or, as Frank Lentricchia writes, rhapsodes.³¹ (And why should we have to choose?) It is worth quoting at length Gumbrecht's account of an "Intro to the Humanities" course he taught at Stanford University. It is a hymn to sensation and experience, which through its cataloguing excess tries to evoke the press and weight of presence and thus to perform the rhapsode's teaching self:

My *first* more personal concern for this class was to be a good enough teacher to evoke for my students and to make them feel specific *moments of intensity* that I remember with fondness and mostly with nostalgia—even if, in some cases, this intensity was painful when it actually happened. I wanted my students to know, for example, the almost excessive, exuberant sweetness that sometimes overcomes me when a Mozart aria grows into polyphonic complexity and when I indeed believe that I can hear the tones of the oboe on my skin. I want my students to live or at least to imagine that moment of admiration (and perhaps also of the despair of an aging man) that gets a hold of me when I see the beautiful body of a young woman standing next to me in front of one of the computers that give access to our library catalogue—a moment, by the way, that is not all that different from the joy that I feel when the quarterback of my favorite college team in American football (Stanford Cardinal of course) stretches out his perfectly sculpted arms to celebrate a touchdown pass. Quite naturally, I also want all of my students to feel the elation, the suddenly very deep breathing and the embarrassingly wet eyes with which I must have reacted to that very beautifully executed pass and to the swift movement of the wide receiver who caught it. I hope that some of my students will suffer through that sentiment of intense depression and perhaps even of humiliation that I know from reading "Pequeño vals vienés," my favorite poem in Federico García Lorca's *Poeta en Nueva York*, a text that makes the reader intuit how the life of a homosexual man was emotionally and even physically amputated in Western societies around 1930. My students should get at least a glimpse of that illusion of lethal empowerment and violence, as if I (of all people!) were an ancient god, which permeates my body at the moment of the *estocada final* in a Spanish bullfight, when the bullfighter's sword silently cuts through the body of the bull, and the bull's muscles seem to stiffen for a moment—before its massive body

³¹Lentricchia, "Last Will and Testament," 25-35.

breaks down like a house shaken by an earthquake. I want my students to join in that promise of an endlessly and eternally quiet world that sometimes seems to surround me when I get lost in front of a painting by Edward Hopper. I hope they experience the explosion of tasty nuances that comes with the first bite of great food. And I want them to know the feeling of having found the right place for one's body with which a perfectly designed building can embrace and welcome us.³²

These experiences are not all of artworks, and some are of commonplace things. It is not the things themselves, but the experience of them in their full richness, quiet and still and unmoved by the tidal pull of prior interpretation, that is the true goal here. It is the goal of intense perception. The teacher here is a guide, one who clears the ground for and points towards experiences—what Gumbrecht calls “moments of intensity”—that lie, ultimately, below language. In this sense, pedagogy is *deictic*, a pointing-to. As Gumbrecht points out, “there is nothing edifying in such moments, no message, nothing that we could really learn from them.”³³ And yet, I would like to argue, the accumulation of such moments, and the attuning of the human organism to them, is a worthy end.

Is there not some power in the mere act of pointing? Deictic pedagogy involves someone pointing and someone else looking at the thing being pointed at. Again the music appreciator becomes sinister: the invitation to participate in pleasure itself comes to seem softly totalitarian.³⁴ One might invoke the figure of Leni Riefenstahl, whose *Triumph of the Will* forever demonstrated that beauty can be the instrument of the most extreme kind of coercion. But Dave Hickey turns this argument on its head: what is authoritarian is the academy's mistrustful regulation of beauty, not beauty itself. Beauty is constituted from those moments where we, like Frank Zappa, exclaim “beautiful!” and begin to look around for confirmation—or dissent, argument, qualification, and perhaps, in the end, consensus. But consensus is never final and never enforceable, because we are always free to choose new objects with which to ground a new debate on beauty. And there are as many kinds of beauty as there are potential debates—an infinity of beauties. Against this radical pluralism, Hickey counterpoises the homogeneity of meaning that institutional authorities always try to enforce. Seeking to quiet the chatter of unregulated aesthetic discourse and to foreclose the unstable embodied (or “like-to-like”) meanings of beautiful things, administration seeks above all to drill designative meanings into us: Beethoven was a great composer, exotica is orientalist, etc.

Administrative cultures, preoccupied with delivering the message, keeping the record, teaching the lesson, and assuring our compliance, necessarily prioritize designative meanings. In order to survive, these cultures need to be relatively certain that we (their auditors) accept what they (our administrators) say that words mean and colors stand for. If we accept our administrators' reading of

³²Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence*, 97-98.

³³Ibid., 97.

³⁴See for example Danuta Fjellestad's response to Lentricchia's notion of deictic teaching, which she feels is likely to “overpower rather than empower his students.” Fjellestad, “Traumas of Teaching Theory,” 408.

the world, their ability to control our behavior is considerably facilitated: we stop at the sign and stop at the light as well. The urgency of their concern with teaching us what things mean derives from the fact that the world gets in the way of their authority. Administrative authority depends on designative reference, but like-to-like meanings always have cognitive priority.³⁵

Music's lofty claims to autonomy have by now been subjected to hard questioning. Talk of aesthetic autonomy has come to sound like whistling past the graveyard, a bourgeois institution's futile attempt to keep the disruptive forces of society at bay. But while the autonomous power of art is denied, the charisma of the individual artwork—its inner life, its auratic aesthetic presence—does not go away. Here is a new "return of the repressed." There is always a little piece of the artwork left over, even when smothered in social hermeneutics. Like King Kong, aesthetic pleasure becomes the disruptive and inassimilable other, chained up in interpretations, and paraded around until it gets loose and breaks something. And then we are the ones whistling past the graveyard, trying to conjure away the scary power of beauty with ritual invocations of its "social constructedness." Music leaves us like Fay Wray, helpless in the grip of the giant ape—its pleasure, like all pleasure, has its own agenda and does not let us go at our convenience.

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³⁵Hickey, "Buying the World," 84-85.

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