

Correlating Musical Subject and Dialectical Subject to Develop a Critical Approach to Ideology in Musical Analysis and Composition

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Abstract : In music, subject typically denotes the initial idea to which the entire composition refers—a concept congruous with Aristotle's notion of subject as primary substance, in the sense of an irreducible this particular. Gioseffo Zarlino, who established subject (soggetto) as a musical term, insisted the composer as “rediscovering” the subject within their music in order to “[bring] it to perfection” and, furthermore, that if the composer had not rediscovered the subject already, then one would simply take the first part of the composition to be the subject. Meanwhile, Žižek reads the Hegelian subject (as negativity set against positive object) through Lacanian Psychoanalysis (in which the subject is a kind of fictive entity of the clinic: a mere appearance which sits atop the objects of analysis) in the concept of Absolute Recoil. For Žižek, subject exists retroactively in Absolute Recoil from object, meaning subject is a void which only has meaning because of the object it is seen through. Following the work of theorists such as Adorno and Althusser, one can understand the ideological construction of such a subject. It may be argued that in Zarlino, musical subject can be similarly read as retroactively constructed, either by the composer or the listener. Furthermore, in recent work, Samuel Wilson identifies different kinds of subjects in music which can be psychoanalytically examined, including the fictive subject: a purely musical entity raised to the level of psychoanalytic subject. On which basis if, as Adorno insisted, 'authentic' music constitutes 'cognition without concepts', where and what is this subject without concept?.

Keywords : absolute recoil, critical theory, ideology, music analysis, psychoanalysis, retroactivity, subject

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