

Walking Up and Over: Approaching Boretz's *Qixingshan*

Chris Stover

I.

Multiple temporal strata—very long sounds freely coexisting with quick bursts of activity. Repetition—but not repetition so much as recurrence, the recognition of objects and events reappearing in new contexts. Registral displacements—literal reachings up and over, inviting participation in new registral spaces. Very long events—approaching stasis. The trembling of bow on string as a player attempts to sustain a single very soft pitch. Or noticing the timbral difference that occurs when a single bowed note, *pp*, is transformed into a double stop. “The ambience of that mountain was the image—environment into which I composed my impressions of those qualities of sonic being.”¹ Tending-toward structure and then radically (or subtly) disrupting where those structural implications may have seemed to have been heading. “[A]n infinite chain of disappearing links, each a path to something else.”² Expansions and contractions—of intervallic spaces, of rhythmic gestures, of melodic cells, of densities, of registers.

To conflate a few words from Ben, a few from Joseph Dubiel, and a few from Martin Scherzinger, I am searching for (some of) the “modalities that flush out the radical particularities” of *Qixingshan*, to “notice what is startling and abnormal” about it, to “become perplexed by it.”³ I like very much the notion of becoming perplexed by a musical encounter—suggesting, perhaps, that I’m initially not perplexed but that by repeated, sensitive engagement my attention is drawn to aspects of the music for which I do not have a register of ready-made mental configurations, and that perhaps I am discovering that I can’t so easily—without careful and creative consideration—formulate new ones. I also like the Deleuzian implications of becoming-perplexed (here recast as a compound procedure, always already in-the-process-of) as an active deterritorialization animated by the radical particularity of this piece of music, my experience of listening to it, the reflective meta-musical thought that goes into trying to subtend music and experience with words, and the ecological space that emerges through the interaction of all of these. And, back to Ben, how all of the directional threads that constitute this active process are what determine the emergent ontology of the music-as-experienced. Below I’ll consider whether some instance of perplexity results from my listening from the wrong perspective; trying to hear structure in a particular way where that mode of listening is

¹ Morris 2014, quoting Boretz.

² Boretz [1979] 2003, n.p.n.

³ Scherzinger 2002, 162–163.

inappropriate.⁴ Am I, in these instances, asking the wrong questions? (Am I coming to some bit of music with the wrong “non-innocent eye” (or ear)?) As Gadamer suggests, to understand is to always ask questions, to always be inquiring creatively into the ways of being in a relationship with some object of knowledge, so I’m not too concerned yet, as long as I am asking and not assuming. Don’t make assertions, ask questions. Listen. As Heidegger insists, we enter into relationships with things so we can let the things be as they are, in all their relationality and in-the-world-ness. By teasing out the relationship between this perspective and the perspective that foregrounds and valorizes our own experiences and affective states—the power to affect and to be affected—this shifting relationship is what I understand interpretation to be.⁵

An analytic of experience, then, beginning by understanding the in-between-ness of experience—the dialogue between the act of experiencing and the experienced thing; the mental configurations that are formed, and how; what Dubiel characterizes as the relationship between “how we shape ourselves to the music” and “what is presented to us *as* music.”⁶ This, for me, is real phenomenological engagement; a dialogue that emerges between *perspective* (but striving to stay away from terms like *judgment*) and *apodictic experience*—striving to engage the object of experience as and how it presents itself, but not fearing the kinds of understanding that emerge from perspective, personal engagement, embodiment, and so on (including emotional states (including brute psychomotor responses)). And also understanding that our understanding is being shaped at the same time as the ontological identity of the music-object is emerging. This seems to be what Ben means when he suggests that we need metamusical thought to be “functional right where the musical action really is,” contributing to one’s “self-determining, evolving creation of their own music—as listeners, inventors, players—in the service of their own needs and uses for music.” ([1992] 2003, 338) And that “[t]he temporally evolving act of ‘thinking in music’ constitutes the simultaneous ongoing creation and music-entity-productive action of a fluid but determinate set of syntactic mindwarps which at any juncture could be described as determining, for every possible soundthing, the range of music-meaning things it could be.” (340) In this construct the musical-experience-having entity is explicitly given, and so that range of music-meaning things really is the terrain upon which music and musical-experience-having beings come into dialogue, creatively and affectively co-composing one another.

Boretz as (Deleuzian) Spinozist—that’s a paper that needs to be written still.⁷ Throughout Ben’s writing we find affective language: action, agency, impingement, interpretation,

⁴ This aligns with some important observations Ben makes in *Meta-Variations*, about appropriations of previously defined functional terms into contexts that result in inconsistent or incompatible usages (1972, 149), explanatory inadequacies or reduced standards of structural uniformity (152), and inconclusive appeals to extramusical domains for epistemological corroboration (153).

⁵ This is my reading of Gadamer reading Heidegger, with a Boretzian gloss. See Gadamer, 268–273ff.

⁶ Dubiel 1999, 268.

⁷ While he has not expressed direct filiation to any of them, Ben has been written about from the perspective of the radical art aesthetics of Tolstoy, Collingswood, and Dewey (Maus 1988), and from Deleuzian (Scherzinger 2002) and Heideggerian (Stein 2005–6; Scherzinger again, 2005–6; Gleason 2013, 68–72) perspectives. Scherzinger’s evocations of Heidegger in Ben’s thought is particularly compelling—see pp. 82–83. Ben’s musical thinking has also been described as phenomenological, and even as foregrounding a latent connection between Husserl’s phenomenology and Carnap’s phenomenalism (Rahn

motivation, sensation. Ben doesn't use all of the words per se, but his language shimmers with their ranges of meanings and meaning-potentialities. As Fred Maus describes, Ben "writes that musical awareness and conception deal properly with occasions and activities, not pieces or works, and he identifies listening as 'the primal expressive act', moving us 'exactly insofar as it expresses us, the listeners'."⁸ The following narrative recounts aspects of one such occasion/activity.

2.

Adumbrating intervallic cells—not to exhaust all permutations but to explore potentialities, expressive possibilities, sonic combinations. Up and over, down and under, around behind, zooming in, pulling back. Outside-in and inside-out. Always a new perspective. The first Boretz quote in the first paragraph above ends with an allusion to "qualities of sonic being"—what can he mean by this aphorism? What does "being" mean in this context, and how might an adumbrational approach allow us to begin to understand the nature of that being? Later I'll suggest a parallel between the "image-environment" into which Ben "composed [his] impressions" and the "mental configurations" that are brought to bear in many of Ben's narratives about musical experience. But for now a recognition of "being," as an ever-emergent quality (there is always another adumbration) seems like a phenomenologically sound starting place, turning our mental configurations around in ways that might map onto how the musical objects themselves seem to be turning around.

Figure 1 abstracts two passages from *Qixingshan* that I hear as linked in some salient way. Annotations show the ways I (choose to; for now) hear musical progression through each of the passages, or put another way, what sort of immediate provenience some particular sound-object seems to have—how some given gesture reflects the passage of what has preceded it.

2012; see also Gleason 2013, 46–7). I think the Spinozan implications of Ben's various entreaties for these particular kinds of active listening stances are highly compelling.

⁸ Maus 1988, 219.

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a) mm. 20–42

b) mm. 80–85

In this hearing, major seconds are the basic shapes around which musical processes unfold. There are three, or maybe four, ways in which these simple shapes are developed: they are filled in, as in the cello F# that fills in the long sustained G to F “pedal” in Figure 1a; the reverse of this, where a single pitch is flanked on both sides to become a major second, as with the beginning of the passage shown in Figure 1b; they are concatenated to form longer major-second melodic segments; or they project continuations of further major-second gestures, such as those that appear a semitone away in pc-space but displaced by an octave. In addition, they expand or contract, as when the viola G rises through Ab to Bb, transforming a major second into a minor third then a perfect fourth—the Ab–Bb dyad a linearization of F–G; the F# (leap away-from and back-to) that temporally separates them at first mysterious but very soon revealed as projecting a second melodic stratum, F# to a G#–A# dyad, whole steps to contrast the chromatic hexachord that defines the pitch content of the lower stratum. As cello and viola climb in register, this separation starts to disappear—strata fold into one another—but the generative significance of the major second is reinforced, culminating in major ninth (F–G, again) and then minor seventh (Ab–Bb, again) dyads, the last of which is filled in by the viola’s solo A, which, significantly, also impinges on the whole-tone space of the original higher stratum. The passage shown in Figure 1b, several minutes into the piece, reflects a number of further developments that have occurred in the meantime, but the projection of major seconds is an easy, and I’d argue useful, way of hearing through the passage, beginning with the bifurcation of the violin’s G# pedal into a G–A

dyad, its octave transfer to Bb–C (following the same transformational path that the cello and viola took in measures 20 to 25), the rapid proliferation of whole steps in the second violin's entrance, and the very salient major-second relation between the viola and second violin's final notes (and their relation to the first violin's pedal).

There is a different form of adumbration at work here too, by which I mean my repeated listenings, approaching *Qixingshan* from as many different listening perspectives as I could imagine, understanding it as an aural event, as an experience. Boretz: listening as experiencing the music as experiencing my experience of the music. John Rahn: rewind and play again. Turn it over again: what's on the other side? Turn it back over: what can I find that I didn't catch before? Through adumbrational listening I am accumulating knowledge—knowledge of what *Qixingshan* is communicating to me, of what meaning-indicators it is offering, of how it is inviting me to ask questions. Repeating experience—how do we think through the “again” of playing it again? Reminding myself that this is experiencing not only Ben's *Qixingshan* but also the Momenta Quartet's CD recording of Ben's *Qixingshan* (there is no other performance I have access to, except the one that plays in my head when I follow the score without the recording). The recording is mostly excellent—aside from a few liberties taken with Ben's tempo indications, a few expressive dynamic embellishments that I would have interpreted in a more stark manner to emphasize the subito nature of Ben's indications, and an occasional tentativeness with the very soft and exposed double-stop passages, they offer as sensitive a reading as one could hope for. And I'm the kind of listener that also likes to stop and rewind and play over and over some small passage that interests or excites or confounds me, which I find myself doing a lot with this piece.

I first approached *Qixingshan*, and *Qixingshan*, from an unusual (for me) perspective. In short, I approached from the perspective of wanting to engage a new work of Ben's that I hadn't yet come into contact with, for the express purposes of generating this essay. Ben had sent me the CD but it was still in the queue when Dorota emailed to ask if I would like to participate in this project; I asked if this would be an appropriate piece to investigate and if she could send a score along, and so it began. Less unusual (for me), I began without the score, with about a dozen listenings over the course of a few days, immersing myself into its sound-logic, into an emerging conception of its syntactic terrain, into considerations of what its expressive gestures mean to me. Zooming my perspective in and out, listening for syntactic details, thinking about larger-scale coherence, beginning to form rudimentary mental configurations to come to terms with what *Qixingshan* is expressing and how it is doing so. Many more listenings then, with and without the score, and then increasingly close scrutiny as this or that feature began to call for my attention...

Ben also does something unusual in *Qixingshan*, or at least in his meta-musical discourse around *Qixingshan*, and at least in the context of how he usually presents his music to the public—he hints at an extramusical program. “*Qixingshan* converged two experiences: walking up and over the classically beautiful mountain near Taipei where, and just after, my granddaughter Lyla Luyi was born....” It is easy to read the slow rising gestures of what Elaine Barkin refers to as the “world's slowest fugue” as mimetic evocations of the act of approaching and ascending the mountain; it is equally easy to read the motionless sustained tones and clusters

of tones from which those fugal gestures emerge as the mist surround the foothills of the mountain or the sulphur springs that one encounters on the way to the summit. I see no reason not to engage these readings—they are lovely and evocative.⁹ Even Bob Morris describes “a subtle sensation of climbing” in this passage; at any rate these sorts of descriptions are playing a role in my experience of the piece, even when I am listening with more structure-seeking (or determining) ears.

3.

As is well-known, much of Ben's work has circled around an extended critique of the claims of music theory as an explanatory project. Scott Gleason characterizes as “the Turn” the extended moment in which Ben and J.K. Randall, according to many observers, abandoned the hyper-rigorous formalism of their earlier work to focus on matters of personal experience and engagement with(in) musical contexts, with concomitant experimental language. A recurring theme in Gleason's narrative is that this turn is not as radical as some have made it out to be; that “the Turn” was a necessary and logical extension of Ben's earlier deep engagement with frames stemming from the brand of logical positivism of Quine, Carnap, and Goodman that Milton Babbitt was championing, which Ben was (I'd argue, as would Gleason and I think Ben), as early as *Meta-Variations*, already channeling in the service of that exact critique, imbuing a formalist rigor with an acutely careful way of framing the object of analysis that always already challenged any received (or preconceived) ideas about what the ontological identity of that object might be.¹⁰ In one of the most celebrated passages from *Meta-Variations*—the well-known analysis of the *Tristan* prelude—Ben is doing nothing if not imploring the reader to bring an eidetic attitude to the act of analysis, to begin with one's experience of the object, to let analytic identity emerge from that experience, and to be open to plural analytic identities. And of course Ben then brilliantly demonstrates a few ways that this can be done. Dora Hanninen, in her analysis of “Language ,as a music / Thesis” demonstrates how even in that radical project, a powerful formal integrity can be demonstrated through creative, sensitive engagement with the syntactic and morphological logics that emerge from the work (and from Ben's recorded reading of the work, which is surely a truer *urtext* of the work than the print version). Ben himself, in what might be characterized as meta-meta-musical thought, has interrogated his own ontologizing self, demonstrating for any reader willing to find it that the earlier, formalist Boretz and the later, experimental Boretz are at the very least in close dialogue with one another—not exactly reducible, but inflecting one another in crucial ways. See “Experiences with No Names” and

⁹ I say this, by the way, while fully investing myself in Ben's ([1970] 2003, 228–229) very pointed critique of what an artwork can/does and cannot/does not express representationally, including especially one of my own biggest takeaways from Ben's critique: that at the least, what an artwork literally represents is probably the least interesting aspect of what is going on in that work.

¹⁰ For just one example of many, consider how Ben describes the way we should engage music works “as individuals representing high-level articulation through elaborate syntactical ascensions which, however, must be uniquely inferred for these individuals” (1972, 157), rather than through the distorting lenses of ready-made epistemological frames.

“Rainyday Reflections” for two of many examples; I would include “Language as a music” in this category as well—as a critique of the limitations of meta-musical discourse framed as an extended utterance that effectively elides music and words about music into one another.

In “Experiences with No Names,” Ben offers two impressionistic accounts of musical experience, of the prelude to Act Three of *Parsifal* and the opening of Mahler’s Fourth Symphony respectively. As Ben describes (and celebrates), these experiential accounts are not “used, or allowed, to invade and holistically pre-empt and remake the ontological interior of what is experienced as those musics” ([1992] 2003, 350); this largely because (1) they are descriptive rather than ascriptive, and (2) they describe aspects of a personal coming-into-contact with the sonic stuff of the music, rather than reductively attempting to describe some essence of the music in reifying terms.

Ben’s use of ontology needs some unpacking here. I’ve touched on it above, but ask more explicitly now, what is the “music-ontological core” of musical experience, and how do we reach it? The answer resists discursive felicity; it is a multiplicity, always in motion, involving flows of intensities between experiencer and experienced object—as experienced, but in a way that is sensitive both to the kinds of meaning-generative flows—from the object (as both a temporally-constituted and -constituting musical reality), and to the knowledge that one’s experience is situated and incomplete, that every effort to contact the music in its putative wholeness only reveals new transcendental lines and new epistemological possibilities.¹¹ Even more important in this way of thinking about ontology is how Ben foregrounds *choice* in all of this: “the ontological ‘given’ of music is still always and comprehensively...a ‘chosen,’ by conscious or non-conscious action of a perceiver’s perception....” (351) This is a radically liberatory reading of “thinking in music.” One of the biggest takeaways from this essay of Ben’s, for me, is how it dovetails into a suggestion that *all* modes of inquiry, “from neanderthal chord-labeling to Jim Randall’s amazing verbal compositions rendered out of deeply specific, creative music-hearing” (350), can and do play a role in constituting that multiplicity, in colluding to define the nature and the terms of the ontology with which we’re concerned here.

Elsewhere, and earlier, Ben has suggested that not only is meaning constituted through the listening experience—structure and syntax are as well. In fact, he has insisted in no uncertain terms that structure and syntax *are* where meaning comes from; for instance a telling quote from his Nelson Goodman essay:

What, then, *do* art entities *express*? Ideas of relation..., *particular* coherences, in analog form; and what they *exemplify* is their structures. That is, works of art may be regarded as analog models of closed formal-systematic structures whose interpreting entities express the relations of the formal-systematic entities through patterns of relative quantity of

¹¹ See Haraway (1988) for a powerful account of how situated knowledge is really the only kind of knowledge that we can access, and how that reality should be embraced rather than abstracted away through reifying epistemological models. I find many deep resonances between Haraway’s work and Ben’s.

perceptual qualities, such qualities being quantitatively articulated by scales of measurement chosen by a perceiver. ([1970] 2003, 229)¹²

It's important to note the phenomenological implications of this passage and the text that immediately follows it—the suggestion that through perception we can reach ever closer toward meaning-generative aspects of an art-object's ontological nature, and that those meaning-generative aspects are intricately bound with the art-object's syntactic structure—resonates with Husserl's account of eidetic experience in a way that few models of music-analytic engagement have achieved. It's also important to consider that Ben's focus on syntactic structures in his earlier writings may have been part of the reason that many observers read such a radical change into his work—mistakenly reading discursive rigor (which, I and many would argue, has never waned in Ben's writing) as formalist preoccupation, or in other words a misreading that suggested that at one point Ben was pursuing syntactic knowledge in an inside-out, piece-driven way, and then shifted his thought radically in pursuit of questions of musical experience and meaning. But as Ben stated in 1970, “what I call ‘musical structure’ is just the coherent juxtaposition of everything relevant to the identity of a musical work” ([1970] 2003, 226 fn 1)—in other words, pre- and post-“Turn” Boretz *are* reducible; they are really just two ways of framing the same sorts of questions, of working through the same sorts of problems.

4.

A very fast *ff* oscillating gesture from the cello starts things off, alternating Gs and As but with the first G repeated to set things akimbo ever so slightly. An arrival on a sustained A changes the mood dramatically—near-stasis, apart from a decrescendo. The cello's melodically-articulated dyad is then transferred up an octave to form a sustained simultaneity played by the viola, and then A moves up to C, forming two new intervals, a melodic minor third and a harmonic perfect fourth with the still-sustaining G. G's possible generative primacy is reinforced by a unison double stop, and the A is transferred up another octave, this time joined by a G# played by the second violin. The G# fills in the G–A dyad, and opens up a new registral space—we have traversed four octaves at this point. And as G# moves melodically down to F# and the viola A moves down to E, two more major-second dyads are introduced (the melodic G#–F# and the harmonic F#–E). The violin melody continues: G#–F#–D#–C# (<2,3,2>), the minor third derived from measure 3? The viola melody continues: A–E–B–F# (<5,5,5>). The vertical dyads between violin and viola expand from minor second to major second to major third to perfect fifth (or, more accurately, the compound versions of all of these). Their paired descent is answered by an ascent, violin G#–C#–D#–F# (<5,2,3>, duplicating the linear intervals that have appeared thus far) and viola B–E–A–B (<5,5,10>), with vertical dyads of a major sixth, another major sixth, a tritone, and a perfect twelfth. There are aspects of this last violin/viola phrase that I find myself, already, becoming perplexed by, and/but I'm already afraid that it might be my mode of attending, and not the music, that is causing my perplexity.

¹² And there's the invocation of *choice* once again!

I hear this passage, from m. 1 to m. 10, fifty seconds of music, as something of an incipit for all that will come. Not an introduction, or theme, or phrase, or section, but as a partial laying-out of the syntactic terrain that *Qixingshan* will territorialize. There seem to be between three and five musical objects/gestures impinging on one another, depending on how I want to hear segmentations and associations, or how I feel I am being steered through their interactions. My favorite reading (I think; at least for now) is five gestures, with four distinct connective relations: counterposition, superimposition, repetition/sequence, transformation. Or, in a bit more detail, the slow, gentle second segment (b) greatly contrasts the aggressive initial gesture (a), accompanied by a change of instrument and dynamic level (but abetted by that decrescendo—not quite as radical a contrast as my narrative might imply); the third segment (c) impinges on the second (now abetted by a shared instrumental role—the viola participating in both); the fourth segment (d) is a rhythmic and (melodic) intervallic repeat of the third (but the interval between viola and violin is expanded—major seventh to major ninth stretched out to major tenth to perfect twelfth); and finally a transformation that problematizes the five-segment reading—(c) and (d) can be taken together as a single gesture that projects onto the final gesture (e), which is *almost* a retrograde reordering of the last two. The viola voice doubles back on itself, fanning out in two directions around a central F# (A–E–B–F# / B–E–A–B*), while the violin drops down a perfect fourth to begin the new phrase and then loops back: G#–F#–D#–C# / G#–C#–D#–F#; another way to think about violin line is as a rotated retrograde statement, with the second G# also displaced an octave. In Figure 2 we see all of these relations, including the relationship between the last segment and the previous two that calls into question the five-segment reading that informs this early analysis.

Figure 2 illustrates the musical analysis of a passage from measures 1 to 10. The notation is presented in two systems: the top system in bass clef and the bottom system in treble clef. Five segments are identified and labeled (a) through (e), connected by arrows indicating their relationships:

- (a)**: An aggressive initial gesture in the bass clef, consisting of a series of eighth notes.
- (b)**: A slow, gentle second segment in the bass clef, consisting of a series of quarter notes.
- (c)**: A third segment in the bass clef, consisting of a few notes, which is superimposed over the end of segment (b).
- (d)**: A fourth segment in the treble clef, which is a rhythmic and intervallic repeat of segment (c).
- (e)**: A final gesture in the treble clef, which is a transformation of segments (c) and (d).

The connective relations are labeled as follows:

- counterposition**: An arrow points from (a) to (b).
- superimposition**: An arrow points from (b) to (c).
- sequence**: An arrow points from (c) to (d).
- transformation**: An arrow points from (d) to (e).

So what is it about my mode of attending that is abetting *Qixingshan*'s becoming-perplexing? I fear that I'm letting my history of experiencing superficially sonically similar music-events (post-, say, Bartók string quartets) guide me into a hearing that foregrounds intervallic relationships, very particular ways of thinking about motivic development, and thoughts about repetition and non-repetition of elemental musical objects, all through a filter that privileges consistency across ranges of newness. This is not how I listen to many other kinds of music, and it's a way of listening that Ben would insist we should, at the least, be distrustful of. But that return to B* in the final note of the viola phrase upsets my sense of where I think the music should be going, and I'm pretty certain that it's my hearing—or the protensive field that my hearing is animating—that's wrong, not Ben's music. But at the same time, I am searching for aspects of musical meaning in (my experience of) the syntactic structures that the music is communicating. How to proceed?

What if, in a second reading, I attempt back-form a second syntactic terrain from some aspect of that last, anomalous utterance? We are entering via another passage here, again always careful to avoid anything that smacks of reification or that might falsify the meaning-generative aspects of musical syntax and structure in search of a solution that "works".¹³

(1) repeated B engendering retroactive hearing of earlier repeated notes (2) G–G, (3) G–G, (4) A–A, and repeated dyad (5) G#/F#–D#/C#

¹³ This line of Ben's thought, woven through his various critiques of how reifying music-theoretical models fundamentally misrepresent and distort the musics that they purport to clarify, also resonates with themes that recur throughout Deleuze and Guattari's writings. For one example that we could use to subtend Ben's critique and contemporaneous criticisms of the aims and limitations of structuralist thought, "[o]nly the principle of multiple entrances prevents the introduction of the enemy, the Signifier and those attempts to interpret a work that is actually only open to experimentation" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 3).

In this reading the repeated B inscribes, retroactively, a new sense of thinking about the role and significance of repetition through the passage leading up to it. Now, for example, the paired Gs that began the opening cello oscillation acquire additional meaning—not only do they serve to offset the submetric implications of the G–A dyad, they project a chain of paired repetitions—two Gs, two G–As in two octaves, two As invited by the second G’s call, two descending major-second dyads, and so on. And, not insignificantly we’ll find as *Qixingshan* continues, a temporal expansion as G–G gives way to A–A and then to B–B (and of course A–B is another major-second dyad). I like this reading in conjunction with that above; how it inflects, retroactively, the initial reading with a second layer of meaning, requesting a mode of listening that is attentive to both retentive principles and the in-time ongoingness of the music as we’re experiencing it, and how both readings emerge from syntactic matters from within the music itself, reflecting how “the ongoing retroactive transformation of things is even more extreme, since no properties of anything remain fixed by the operation of anything external to the context.” ([1977] 2003, 425)

5.

About that “world’s slowest fugue.” It’s not really a fugue at all, of course, but in the way that its gestures repeat it feels like it *should* be one; at any rate it is evocative of imitative polyphony. Rising stepwise gestures emerge from sustained sounds or clusters of sounds. Scale-like, but not reducible to any conventional scales. One of the things that is lovely and evocative about this passage is how a line will rise out of the mist, but then become part of that mist, engendering the next rising gesture. An F#–G dyad gives way to a single pitch, G, in the cello as the first violin begins its ascent. The violin’s arrival on E singles an answering ascent from the cello. The cello’s melody is the intervallic inverse of the violin’s, by the way— $\langle 1, 1, 2, 2, 1, 1 \rangle$ answered by $\langle 2, 2, 1, 1, 2, 2 \rangle$. The cello arrives on E# (notated as F in the figure below, for visual clarity) to signal the viola’s entrance, a transposition (T_{11}) of the violin’s initial statement, now over the E–E# dyad articulated by first violin and cello. The viola arrives on Eb, and the second violin enters over the Eb–E–E# trichord that results. This fourth gesture is a transposition (T_1 , or T_{12} in p-space) of the cello’s, and ends with an F# that extends the sustained chromatic sound-object into a four note cluster. The fourth gesture is displaced registrally from the first three—why?

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The image shows two musical staves. The first staff contains two melodic phrases. The first phrase is annotated with the intervallic sequence <1,1,2,2,1,1> above it. The second phrase is also annotated with <1,1,2,2,1,1>. The second staff contains a single melodic phrase annotated with <2,2,1,1,2,2>. Circled notes in both staves indicate specific intervals or transformations between notes.

So there is a great deal of formal coherence in this passage. Each melodic utterance is symmetrical, and the pairs fold into one another, whole steps becoming half steps and vice versa. The third statement is something of a synthesis of the first two, its initial interval filling in the whole step of the second statement, which was in turn an intervallic expansion (by descent) of the first. The fourth statement returns to the pc level of the first but expands back out to a major second. And meanwhile the accompaniment is slowly being built out to that (inevitable?) four-note chromatic cluster. The way these wiggling up-and-down melodic onsets, together with the mutually infolded intervallic content of each statement in turn, conspire to build the sustained clusters is a marvelous example of expressive meaning generated through syntactic rigor, of syntax generated from within the music itself, not adhering to, or requiring, any a priori explanatory model. As the music continues this cluster expands and contracts, gently respirating between full (now five-note) texture and a series of dyads that are extracted from it. The world's slowest fugue never returns, having set up a "chain of disappearing links" that lead to a new space...

6.

Listen:

...

you can hear an image,

...

or,

*you can metabolize an image, as a symbol
absorbing it into
an infinite chain
of disappearing links,
each a path
to something else.*

Can one hear Qixingshan in *Qixingshan*? What would it mean to do so? Or, can we metabolize Qixingshan, the place (meaning not the mountain as one could go experience it now or at any time, and certainly not the mountain as I have superficially come to know through internet photos and travelogue descriptions in preparation for writing this essay, but Ben's particular experience of it at the particular time he was approaching and climbing over it) as an image or symbol through hearing *Qixingshan*?

Perhaps I had this line from the Epilogue to "Language, as a music" abstractly in mind as I listened repeatedly and carefully to *Qixingshan* in the early stages of this project, but it was not quite conscious. Nevertheless, the notion of "an infinite chain of disappearing links, each a path to something else" sounds very much like how I have been choosing to hear certain kinds of musical unfoldings in the passages described above. Perhaps it will be valuable to return once more to the opening ten measures of *Qixingshan* tracing a line that touches on these key words: absorbing; a chain of disappearing links; a path to something else. I'd like to add one more word, proliferation, to this roster, as the possibilities animated by early moves open multiple trajectories through the music's continuation. This analysis requires us to progress past the initial ten bars, as it should of course, since the version of those ten bars that matter most are the ones that continue on to the rest of the work, finding their completion nineteen minutes later.¹⁴

A twice-articulated ff G from the cello sets an oscillating major-second dyad in motion, a robust opening gesture that halts suddenly, decaying to give way to (make room for?) the viola's octave-displaced, verticalized restatement (twice turned up!),

¹⁴ Ben makes this point in his *Tristan* analysis when he critiques analytic readings that stop short of addressing the prelude's connection to the work as a whole. This has Heideggerian resonances too—any engagement that stops short of developing relationships through time with, ultimately, the entirety of the engaged object, with careful and creative awareness of the ongoingness and finitude of its temporal identity, is inauthentic and impoverished (which is not to say inaccurate, just very incompletely accurate). Of course in this small essay I cannot come close to engaging all or even very much of *Qixingshan*—that will be another, larger project.

expanding to a perfect fourth (up again!) then to unison Gs—a textural accent plus ever-so-brief increase in dynamic intensity marks G still more as something to pay attention to. But also the initial dyad as viola and now a violin join with a gesture that both reinforces and complicates the generative status of the opening cello motif—the A that completes the next G–A dyad (and opens another registral space; up again) is coupled with a major-seventh-higher G#, filling in the opening dyad; absorbing the open intervallic language (major seconds, perfect fourths, a single melodic minor third) expressed thus far into a more variegated chromatic space. Is the G# another up-again, or perhaps are we peering at a more distant rise? A descent—every mountaineer knows that it's not up all the time. Descending through an intervallic space that reinforces much of the reading thus far—melodic steps and thirds and fourths; harmonic too! That major seventh is an aberration; wondering how (if) it will play out. Wondering when (if) the spirit of the opening gesture will return. Wondering when and how the first violin will make its appearance. Perhaps the major seventh is a tiny opening of a path. Viola and violin auto-respond to their last gesture (why am I hearing viola as the primary voice here?), which retrogrades the previous utterance, but not exactly—the displaced retrogrades are a lovely touch, fanning out in two temporal directions (yes, of course time can go backward too!). There's an inevitability about that last gesture that is disrupted by the viola's final B, which repeats the note three events prior—hearing backwards, hearing repetition, repetition absorbed into newness, hearing sameness in change and thinking about the particular ways in which things change. Then melodies and two-event textures give way suddenly and unexpectedly to a tense chromatic chord (a weirdchord) topped by an Ab from the first violin, who is finally making an appearance—we've heard that highest note already as the beginning of the G#–F# dyad that articulated the second violin's first appearance, but now the interval is compressed, Ab as an upper neighbor to another G. A semitone—a projection from the major seventh? Also: are intervallic spaces (or are textural spaces more generally) starting to map to instrumental roles? Three open fifths from the cello, A–E–B–F#, in a quick rising melodic fragment that spans the registral space of the sustaining parts. They also remind of the falling and rising viola fourths just heard. The cello's F# forms a major second with the first violin's Ab—an echo of the second violin's earlier utterance (but also, after Dubiel, perhaps that's not technically an interval at all), and then major second is compressed to minor second—the chain disappearing—as the first violin initiates a new texture (what is the relationship between this and the cello opening? I want to hear one), and we're off to the races as a dialogue between violin and cello commences, fast semitones in the former, temporally-expanding rising fifths in the latter, three fourths of the weirdchord sustaining throughout. And on it goes...

7.

That analysis is a creative endeavor. That experience is experience-of. That poetic language can have both great precision and descriptive power. That music and meta-musical thought should not be far from one another. That we should be distrustful of reifying systems. That thinking in and around music should be rigorous but also open, creative, and fun.

These are among the many things that my 20+ years of contact with Ben's music and meta-musical thought have taught me. Another thing that I have learned is the importance of resisting appeals to either positivist formalization, in the form of a priori systems intended to fix aspects of musical design according to adherence to formal principles, especially when such appeals infer that such analytic accounts reveal (or suppress) information that gets to count as first-order significance for the constitution of musical meaning; or pseudo-hermeneutic exegesis, in the form of appeals to cultural or social locations that (a) reify binary notions of insider/outsider status, (b) locate "culture" as a thing that can even be determined, outside and above the individuals and micro-cultural bundles and intersubjective interactions from which culture is constructed ("there is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language within a political community"¹⁵), and (c) misread what musical expression even is, by determining it as emerging solely from producers in their various modes of production and ignoring the co-constitutive, creative, evolving, affective flows between producer and experiencer—experiencer experiencing experience, as Don Ihde would put it (and to add one more perspective to the phenomenological theme that has threaded its way through this paper). In other words, all three of these positions ignore "the ontological space of the contents of musical experience" that Ben asserts is what we should really care about. I, for one, prefer Ben's way.

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¹⁵ Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 7. While Deleuze and Guattari's account of the political implications of reifications of linguistic formations is more overt than how I tend to read Ben's, Scherzinger has convincingly read Ben's thought in explicitly political terms. See especially Scherzinger 2002.

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To CHRIS STOVER: F#-B is the junction between the two 5-chains (G#-C#-F#-B) (F#-B-E-A) and is the arrival sonority of the 2-phrase passage, the (high) F# of the violin and the (low) B of the viola. So the high point of the violin's ascension-chain G#-C#-F#-B which sounds as the high voice is (in the viola) at the bottom of the F#-over-B sonority, and the low point of the viola's ascension-chain F#-B-E-A which sounds as the low voice in the phrase is (in the violin) as the high voice in the F#-over-B sonority - flipping the orientation of the pitch-chains as the phrase-end becomes the emergence-point into the first violin's entrance. Its identity as a subphrase endpoint is its parallelism to the 12th (C#-over-F#) that marks the turnpoint between the two subphrases. It's a Bachrhythm thing. Sans explication, it was the sound I needed for that moment to do that thing.

TO DAVID HICKS, PAUL LANSKY, ERIC LYON, JOSH MAILMAN:

Qixingshan lodged in my head as après *Postlude* - the world from above and out in the air after *Postlude*'s journey within (*Downtime*, composed within days after the completion of *Postlude*, only began to exhale). And the literal and nonliteral affectmodel in my ear (as I wandered on the mountain in Taipei) was the first movement of Beethoven's Spring Sonata - its opening gesture compressed to be mirrored as a tremor in the cello and squeezed down to the semitone violin tune and its cycle-of-fifths cello reflection.

To JOSH MAILMAN: That musical effects are correlated with musical facts seems uncontroversial. But if your entry into the territory of musical facts is through the experience of musical effects it is likely that your fact-reifications will reflect your effect-experiences, and be selectively biased by them. So that something is assertible as a fact doesn't carry its own interpretation as to what musical effect it effectuates. There's always a taint of "post hoc ergo propter hoc" in the karma of any music-analytic discourse but even though it doesn't ever prove anything, doesn't the affect of a wordname given to identify - even just heuristically - some music-fact thing convey something musically meaningful? Shouldn't it intend to have explicit experiential consequences?