Distributed Listening:

Aural Encounters with J. S. Bach's Sacred Cantatas

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As prized objects in Western modernity's imaginary museum of musical works, Johann Sebastian Bach's sacred cantatas can be appreciated as individual works of art that have attracted countless hours of close scholarly attention. The 632 pages of Eric Chafe's recent book on *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis* BWV 21 offer a certain culmination of this tradition of intensely focused interpretive engagement.[1] This essay does not intend to denigrate this mode of close reading, which offers abundant rewards and which I myself have practiced in private as well as in print. But I do want to ask what happens if we temporarily put aside some of the foundational assumptions that underpin this close reading practice, in an effort to recapture other, more historically oriented modes of encountering this music. The term "close reading" is already revealing here, since scholarly approaches to this repertoire almost invariably involve careful scrutiny of the notated text, a privilege that Bach's early eighteenth-century listeners would not have shared. Their exposure to this music would have been almost exclusively aural (even if some could follow the words in their libretto booklets) and limited to once a week on average (if they went to church regularly). How, then, might Bach's Leipzig congregants have experienced the weekly cantata performances of the 1720s and 1730s without access to a score or repeated hearing via recordings? What could they hear, how might they have listened, and how might this music have affected and become meaningful to them across the annual sequence of Sundays and Feast days?

I would like to thank Christina Fuhrmann and Mark Seow for their helpful comments on this essay.

[1] Eric Chafe, *Tears into Wine: J. S. Bach's Cantata 21 in Its Musical and Theological Contexts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

In raising these questions, my interest does not lie primarily with issues of performance practice, which have been amply discussed in the literature. Daniel R. Melamed's *Hearing Bach's Passions* offers an expert summary regarding questions of performance forces, role distribution, and so on, in order to get at the key question of whether when we listen to a Bach Passion now, it is really "the same piece Bach wrote in the early eighteenth century."[2] In other words, Melamed's primary concern is with the musical object and how it sounded, rather than historical listening behaviors. Although Melamed notes some of the differences of liturgical versus concert performances of the Passions and associated listening attitudes, the performance practice debate overall has tended to rely on a paradigm of the "attentive listener," and it is this paradigm that I would like to subject to some scrutiny here.[3] This does not mean embracing the facile assertion that before the nineteenth century people simply did not pay attention to the music they heard. While Tanya Kevorkian's evidence for commotion and inattention during Leipzig church services is invaluable in attempting to reimagine the listening habits of Bach's congregants, William Weber has rightly cautioned against our view of the past being "distorted by the aesthetic and ideological assumptions through which we interpret our own musical experience."[4] That is, we should not assume that the modern concertgoing expectation of listening with "absorption" is or has been the only way to engage meaningfully with music's sonic presence. When Bach's congregants practiced various forms of more or less attentive listening, they would not necessarily have aimed to get the same out of that activity as scholars or concertgoers might now. Their "protocols of listening," as Bruce R. Smith has called them, potentially operated in remarkably different ways.[5]

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[2] Daniel R. Melamed, *Hearing Bach's Passions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3.
[3] Melamed, *Hearing Bach's Passions*, 8.
[4] Tanya Kevorkian, *Baroque Piety: Religion, Society and Music in Leipzig, 1650–1750* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 28–52; William Weber, "Did People Listen in the Eighteenth Century?," *Early Music* 25 (1997): 678–92.
[5] Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 8.

If, according to James H. Johnson, the "attentive listening" paradigm emerged in Western concert culture in the decades after 1800 (in conjunction with the rise of the work concept), it was subsequently sharpened further into a mode of "structural listening."[6] This mode, as Rose Rosengard Subotnik argued in her trenchant critique, became a commonplace in twentieth-century scholarship on Western art music, supplying it with a yardstick of aesthetic value located "wholly within some formal sort of parameter, to which it is the listener's business to attend."[7] In its demand for unflagging cognitive engagement, structural listening claims intellectual superiority over other ways of encountering musical sound, such as the everyday listening practices documented by Tia DeNora and many others.[8] In Bach studies, this structural listening paradigm has customarily been overlaid with a mode of intensely hermeneutic listening, involving close attention to text-music relationships and their intended theological message. As author of supremely abstract artifacts such as *Die Kunst der Fuge*, Bach still stands as perhaps the most celebrated structuralist in Western music history; yet in approaching his sacred vocal works, scholars have tended to assume their task to be to listen through the structural details to the meanings they encode.

This structural-hermeneutic mode of listening, which enables the close reading practices referenced above, presupposes a level of technical training and engagement with musical detail that would have been largely absent among Bach's congregations. It also rests on a potentially anachronistic assumption of a particular kind of listening attention. I should note here that most scholarship in this vein does not set out to make any claims about historical listening practices, instead ostensibly focusing on what can be found in the work

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[6] James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). See, however, Katharine Ellis's recent reframing of the absorbed listening paradigm as a "niche activity" in her "Researching Audience Behaviors in Nineteenth-Century Paris: Who Cares if You Listen?," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Listening in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Christian Thorau and Hansjakob Ziemer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 37–54.

[7] Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Deconstructive Variations: Music and Reason in Western Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 153.

[8] Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

itself, that is, on what Jean-Jacques Nattiez called the "neutral" level of the semiotic process.[9] Yet any implied sense of neutrality here masks the extent to which such an approach necessarily builds on a scholar's own listening assumptions. Looking past some of these assumptions toward the historical factors that shaped the listening habits of Bach's congregants could therefore raise certain fundamental questions regarding any claims for historical veracity or aesthetic valorization in these structural-hermeneutic analyses. As Anahid Kassabian has demanded, "studies of music reception need to reconsider their baseline assumptions"; they need to ask "what difference a presumption of inattentive or less attentive listening would make to their analyses, theories and models."[10] Kassabian proposes that such a shift would engender greater engagement with the "sensory affective processes" entailed in listening, as well as the "distributed subjectivities" that arise through partially attentive listening practices. Although an inquiry into early eighteenth-century listening will need to historicize any such terms carefully, Kassabian's notion of "distributed" practices of attention and subject formation offers one promising entry point into the question of what Bach's listeners might have heard both of and in his cantata performances.

I will consider the "distributed" nature of congregational listening in Bach's Leipzig in three respects: listeners' attention distributed across the musical and textual features in individual pieces; sonic-affective markers distributed across the corpus of cantatas; and the distribution of affective responses across the bodily-spiritual community of Bach's congregation. The third section then broadens out to consider some of the ways in which Lutheran notions of interiority and spiritual listening "away from the flesh" may have foreshadowed certain aspects of the structural-aesthetic listening paradigm that still persists in Western concert hall rituals today.

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[9] Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Towards a Semiology of Music*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).

[10] Anahid Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention and Distributed Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 110, xxiii.

Distributed Attention: Auditory Streams in Bach's Cantata Movements

My initial approach to the question of how Bach's congregants listened was of a decidedly presentist nature. In the autumn of 2018, I decided that I needed to relisten to all of Bach's cantatas in a systematic fashion. But with the everyday pressures of work and life, the only way to manage this was to put it alongside other items on my to-do list. And so I found myself in the position of a partially attentive listener, with my ears pricking up at moments of surprise, recognition, or affective intensity after stretches of only marginal awareness. In other words, I was "listening-in-readiness," as Barry Truax called it in his three-tiered hierarchy of listening modes: that is, "an intermediate mode of listening" in which "attention is in readiness to receive significant information, but where the focus of one's attention is probably elsewhere."[11] Truax's other two levels are "listening-in-search," an acute mode of attentiveness that structural listening presupposes; and background listening, exemplified by listening to the radio to accompany domestic activities. In practice, those three modes may often be difficult to keep apart, since, as P. Sven Arvidson has stressed, attention is always a dynamic process.[12] Certainly in my own cantata listening Truax's levels seemed to intermingle freely; and even in a concert hall environment, designed to foster maximally focused listening, most listeners likely end up shifting among different modes over the course of a performance. For Bach's congregants, too, we will need to assume a spectrum of greater or lesser attentiveness along which their listening experiences unfolded. As the Lutheran pastor Christoph Raupach noted in 1717, although congregants should aim to listen to music in church "from beginning to end, with attention," some listened only "so obenhin ein bißgen"—a little bit, superficially.[13]

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[11] Barry Truax, *Acoustic Communication* (Westport: Ablex, 2001), 21–24.
[12] P. Sven Arvidson, *The Sphere of Attention: Context and Margin* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 56.
[13] Christoph Raupach, *Veritophili Deutliche Beweis-Gründe* (Hamburg: Schiller, 1717), 32. All translations are mine unless otherwise specified.

While I would in no way claim that my own listening to Bach's cantatas could approximate the experience of an early eighteenth-century churchgoer, it did lead me to ask how one might go about analyzing such experiences of partial musical attention. Perhaps most immediately, it raised the question of how much of the text was routinely heard. Prior knowledge of the cantata libretti among many Bach experts now necessarily clouds our ability to assess this question. Nonetheless, I attempted, through the headphones attached to my laptop, to listen as if for the first time to the opening chorus of *Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben* BWV 147. Even with the slender forces of the Bach Ensemble directed by Joshua Rifkin (1987), I found it more or less impossible to make out the words of the second line of Salomon Franck's text, "muss von Christo Zeugnis geben," when it first appeared.[14] Only highly targeted aural attention or reference to the score would reveal that it initially occurs in the soprano just before the bass entry of the opening fugue subject, which offers a more obvious point of attention, amplified by the bassoon. These simultaneous sonic events are embedded in a dense texture of sixteenth-note melismas in the alto and tenor as well as busy figuration in the instruments. Arguably the first easily audible iteration of this second line of text, which is needed to make sense of the first, only occurs sometime later when it is sung in homophonic alternation between the upper and lower voices (at around 1:10 in Rifkin's recording). As the movement progresses, aural comprehension of the concluding two lines of text is aided by their repeated homophonic a cappella presentation, before listeners are launched back into the contrapuntal elaborations of the opening.

Other movements are less kind to those attempting to catch the words. *Der Himmel lacht! die Erde jubilieret* BWV 31 opens with an instrumental sonata, which for listeners new to the piece may initially raise expectations for voices to enter at some point. As the minutes ticked by (2:22 in John Eliot Gardiner's version with the English Baroque Soloists), it may

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[14] "J.S. Bach / Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben, BWV 147 (Rifkin)," 8 October 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7jh-riSkA2A.

have seemed increasingly likely to worshippers on Easter Sunday 1724 that they were dealing with a purely instrumental movement.[15] But this would have given them little chance to refocus their attention when the chorus entered straightaway at the start of the next movement, sung at a brisk Allegro pace in Gardiner's recording, in line with indications in the autograph parts. If congregants failed to pay immediate attention to the words, they would have found themselves tangled up in a web of melismatic elaboration that made the opening textual phrase difficult to discern. The numerous subsequent repetitions of these words would have given listeners additional chances to work out what was being said. Yet overall the overlapping vocal entries and melismas in this and many similar choruses would have required a particular kind of aural determination to get to the final cadence having understood all the words. Even if a complete sentence is presented clearly at the outset, as in the opening chorus of *Wer Dank opfert, der preiset mich* BWV 17, where the instrumental texture thins out for the tenor to sing "Wer Dank opfert, der preiset, der preiset mich," once the other voices join in, the increasingly dense contrapuntal activity eventually blends words and syllables into an inarticulate cloud of sound. This effect is as audible in a 2013 performance by the Eastman School Bach Cantata Series as in Karl Richter's much fuller rendering with the Münchener Bach-Chor (1977).[16] In fact, the initial melismatic embellishment on the third and fifth words ("opfert," "preiset") could already have gotten in the way of straightforward text comprehension, even assuming good diction on the part of the singer.

A similar issue arises in many arias where melismas decorate key words on their first utterance. Of numerous examples, take the aria "Fürwahr, wenn mir das kömmet ein" from *Herr Jesu Christ, du höchstes Gut* BWV 113, first heard on 20 August 1724. The opening textual statement was potentially quite readily audible, given the slimmed-down instrumentation and

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[15] "J. S. Bach—Cantatas—Cantatas BWV 4, BWV 31, BWV 66—J. E. Gardiner (Vol22 CD1)," 7 September 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=so4h6CHjGMQ.
[16] "J.S. Bach: BWV 17: Wer Dank opfert, der preiset mich," 26 September 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGBG9up0_S0; "J.S. Bach Cantata Wer Dank opfert, der preiset mich, BWV 17," 19 August 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izMogpNkdhE.

predominantly syllabic presentation. But when the bass moves on to the following line, "dass ich nicht recht vor Gott gewandelt," the melisma on "wan-" demands a certain degree of concentration from a listener to catch the end of the word when it comes after the extended "a" sound; this is especially marked, perhaps, in the seductively mellifluous version sung by Peter Kooij with the Bach Collegium Japan (2004).[17] Halfway through the melisma, the oboes enter with a restatement of their opening theme (associated with the first line of text), offering ample opportunity for confusion or distraction before the sentence is finished.

Unlike many of Bach's cantatas, BWV 17 used a psalm text (Ps. 50:23), hence offering a fair chance that Bach's listeners would have recognized those words. This would have been the case, too, in pieces drawing on popular chorale texts and tunes, like most of the movements in BWV 113.[18] Raupach advised that when listening to organ preludes, congregants should reflect on the words associated with the tune before they went on to sing them.[19] In some of Bach's chorale-based movements, such as the opening of *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland* BWV 62, listeners on the First Sunday of Advent 1724 would similarly have been able to infer the words before the voices entered, as the chorale melody appeared prominently in the oboes toward the end of the introductory instrumental ritornello. For properly attentive listeners, it would even have been audible right at the outset, when the basso continuo presented the tune after an initial moment of silence that could have served to direct their attention to its entry. Meanwhile, in the opening chorus of *Jesu, der du meine Seele* BWV 78 (first heard on 10 September 1724), the arrival of the chorale melody in soprano, horn, and traverso might have helped clarify the textual content of the earlier imitative vocal entries.

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[17] Johann Sebastian Bach, *Cantatas*, vol. 24, Bach Collegium Japan, conducted by Masaaki Suzuki, BIS, 2004, compact disc.
[18] Note, however, that although the third movement in BWV 113 starts with the first line of verse 3 of Bartholomäus Ringwaldt's hymn "Herr Jesu Christ, du höchstes Gut," the second line departs from the hymn text, which reads "was ich mein Tag begangen."
[19] Raupach, *Veritophili*, 31.

Not surprisingly, using well-known texts constituted one of the main pieces of advice from contemporary commentators for ensuring the words could be heard. The critic Martin Fuhrmann decreed in 1706: "In church pieces, composers must use biblical and especially mostly well-known texts, if they are to be understood by the congregation. For if they use unfamiliar texts and work them out in florid counterpoint etc., a listener will hardly understand a single line of text, especially if the instruments also join in and all the vocal and instrumental parts get mixed up together."[20] In particular, he warned against those imitative settings which created "a clash and collision of so many different vowels and diphthongs." "Amen" and "Alleluia" passages were well suited to imitative treatment, Fuhrmann suggested, since "even a child will understand those words," but otherwise the new cantata style was too elaborate to render the text audible. Arias, too, if they were set for too many voices, would be as incomprehensible as the "language of parrots."[21] In 1726, Joachim Meyer similarly asked, "how can you understand what is being sung and thereby keep your devotion when you do not hold the text in your hands, which is available to the fewest of listeners?" Audiences, he argued, needed something well known "in which to ground their devotion and attention."[22]

Most writers at the time conceded that listeners probably could not understand the words fully, whether they were bemoaning or defending this state of affairs. Christian Gerber's acerbic critique of 1703 is worth restating here: "But look at today's manner of making music in our churches, God help us, what a shouting and sounding is that! You hear organs, violins, trumpets, trombones, cornettos and drums, often all simultaneously, and

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[20] "Zu Kirchen-Concerten muss ein Componist lauter Biblische und zwar meistens bekannte Texte nehmen / sollen sie von der Gemeinde verstanden werden. Denn wo er unbekandte Texte nimmt / und solche Contrapuncto florido etc. ausarbeitet / wird ein Auditor fast keine Zeile von dem Text verstehen / insonderheit wenn die Instrumenta dazu kommen / und alle Vocal und Instrumental-Stimmen zugleich durcheinander gehen." Martin Fuhrmann, *Musicalischer Trichter* (Frankfurt an der Spree: Autor, 1706), 83.

[21] Fuhrmann, *Musicalischer Trichter*, 83–85.

[22] "Wie kan / wenn man den Text nicht in Händen hat / welchen denen wenigsten Zuhörern wiederfähret / einer verstehen / was gesungen wird / und seine devotion dabey haben?" Joachim Meyer, *Unvorgreiffliche Gedancken über die neulich eingerissene theatralische Kirchen-Music* (Lemgo, 1726), 59.

numerous voices shouting along, with one chasing the other … rarely do listeners understand a word of it, and usually the text is so chopped up and garbled that it no longer makes sense even if you catch some of the words."[23] His comment could arguably stand as a not too far-fetched description of the sonic experience of the opening choruses of BWV 147 or 31. The pastor Johann Muscovius similarly complained that people hear "nothing more than a kind of laughter, now someone tears the text apart with a coloratura or a trill, now a small boy whimpers or crows like a cockerel, now the whole mob cries together like hunters at the hunt, alongside there is fiddling, reed-playing, drumming, trumpeting, and sounding and roaring in multifarious ways so that not a single word of the text is understood."[24] Some decades earlier, Theophil Großgebauer, whose treatises were still widely cited in Bach's time, bemoaned that such an indistinct racket rendered the congregation "weary and listless: some sleep, some chat, some look where they should not look, some would like to read but are not able to because they have not learnt it, some would like to pray but are so taken in and confused by the roaring and sounding that they cannot."[25]

Among those writers stepping in to defend this new "theatrical" style of music-making, very few ended up arguing that people were in fact able to hear the words well. Johann Mattheson simply pointed out that in traditional motet style the words also could not be understood, while Raupach noted that even instrumental music had remarkable power

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[23] "Da sehe man aber die heutige Art zu musiciren in unsern Kirchen an / hilff Gott / welch ein Geschrey und Gethön ist das! Da höret man Orgeln / Geigen / Trompeten / Posaunen / Zincken und Paucken offt alles zugleich / und auf einmahl / etliche Stimmen schreyen denn mit unter / und jaget eines den andern … es verstehen aber die Zuhörer selten ein Wort davon / und wird auch gemeiniglich der Text so zuhacket und zerstümmelt / daß man keinen Verstand draus nehmen kan / ob man schon etliche Worte erschnappet." Christian Gerber, *Unerkannte Sünden der Welt* (Dresden: Hekel, 1708), 1065.

[24] "nichts mehr hörete / als ein Gelächter / da bald einer durch Zerreissung des Textes daher coloraturiret / oder drüllert / bald ein kleiner Knabe drein winselt / oder wie ein Hähnlein krähet / bald der gantze Hauffe / wie die Jäger auff der Jagt / zusammen schreyet / darunter noch bald gefiedelt / bald geschalmeyet / bald gepaucket / bald gedrommetet / und auff mancherley Art drein gethönet und gesauset wird / daß man vom Textu kein Wort vernimmet." Johannes Muscovius, *Bestraffter Mißbrauch der Kirchen-Music* (n.p., 1694), 30.

[25] "darüber wird die Gemeine schläfferig und faul: etliche schlaffen; etliche schwatzen; etliche sehen / dahin sichs nicht gebühret; etliche wolten gerne lesen / können aber nicht / dann sie es nicht gelernet … Etliche wolten gerne beten / werden aber durch das Sausen und Gethön so eingenommen und verwirrret / daß sie nicht können." Theophil Großgebauer, *Drey geistreiche Schrifften* (Rostock: Keyl, 1667), 209.

over its listeners "without any words being necessary."[26] In his 1703 response to Gerber, Georg Motz resorted to listing a number of good reasons why the words could not be heard, including the acoustic properties of church buildings, with reverberation and architectural features such as pillars getting in the way; the congregants' distance from preachers or musicians (a point relevant to the placement of Bach's musicians up on the galleries); and large crowds of worshippers rendering the air thick and immobile.[27] Hence, even if we might ascertain, with Rolf Dammann, a "striving for exegetical profundity" on the part of the composer, it is worth recalling that Bach's congregants would have encountered the words inspiring such exegetical zeal primarily in sung rather than read form; as such, they would have afforded a particular kind of sensory stimulation alongside transmitting semantic content.[28] Motz himself offered a revealing comparison of aural versus visual modes of perception: "The eye can in one instant see and take in many things with good differentiation: for the matter and colors that come before the eye are something lasting: Sound and tones, however, which are sensed by the organ of hearing, are something successive. … This is why with the ear we cannot perceive and understand everything as precisely, since that which comes before the organ of hearing is not lasting but ephemeral."[29] As Jerrold Levinson has pointed out, what is heard in musical listening is usually not strictly a single moment; rather, he posits a process of "quasi-hearing," in which "conscious attention is carried to a small stretch of music surrounding the present moment," in order to "synthesize those events into a coherent flow, insofar as possible."[30] Yet Motz's comment chimes well

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[26] Johann Mattheson, *Der neue göttingische aber viel schlechter, als die alten lacedämonischen urhteilende Ephorus* (Hamburg: Autor, 1727), 80, 91; Raupach, *Veritophili*, 23.

[27] Georg Motz, *Die Vertheidigte Kirchen-Music* (Augsburg, 1703), 72.

[28] Rolf Dammann, *Der Musikbegriff im deutschen Barock*, 3rd ed. (Laaber: Laaber, 1995), 156.

[29] "Das Auge kan zu einer Zeit viele Sachen mit guter Unterscheidung ansehen und betrachten: Dann die Materie und Farben welche dem Auge vorkommen / sind etwas bleibendes: Der Ton und Schall aber welche durch das Gehör empfunden wird / ist etwas nach einander folgendes. Was nun mit dem Auge auf einmahl geschiehet / das geschiehet in dem Ohr nach und nach / und dahero kommt es auch / daß mit dem Ohr nicht alles so genau betrachtet / und verstanden werden kan / weilen dasjenige so dem Gehör vorkommt / kein bleibendes sondern etwas vergängliches ist." Motz, *Vertheidigte Kirchen-Music*, 71–72.

[30] Jerrold Levinson, *Music in the Moment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 19.

with Levinson's model of "concatenationist" listening, where instead of searching out large-scale structures, listeners tend to focus on "the continuously evolving detail of a small amount of 'current' music."[31] It also chimes with Walter Ong's classic analysis of orally based modes of expression, which, Ong suggested, tend to be additive rather than subordinative and aggregative rather than analytic, characteristics that contravene some of the key demands of a structural-hermeneutic listening approach.[32]

How, then, might listeners have made sense of the "tumultuous cumulative concertizing" of Bach's cantata performances?[33] Part of what made them "tumultuous" was no doubt the frequent density of sonic events, rendering a thorough grasp of those constellations of voices, motives, and timbres illusory. An experimental study by David Huron found that, in a keyboard fugue, the maximum number of auditory streams listeners could reliably distinguish was three, though Huron suggested that greater timbral differentiation may increase this number.[34] While the question of what constitutes an "auditory stream" might require some flexible answers, many of Bach's vocal compositions undoubtedly exceed three.[35] A classic example might be the first movement of the *St. John Passion*, which opens with three instrumental streams of slow chromatic oboes, sixteenth-note "circulatio" figures in the upper strings, and a steady eighth-note pulse in the bass; a fourth stream is added when the vocal ensemble enters. Note that already, in such an account, the differentiation of individual voices within each stream is put to one side. In many of his choruses, Bach seems to have gone to great lengths to separate these streams in terms of timbre, motion, motivic material, and so on; still, the resulting aural effect can make it challenging to keep track of

[31] See Eric F. Clarke, "Listening to Performance," in *Musical Performance: A Guide to Understanding*, ed. John Rink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 192.
[32] Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 2002), 36–39.
[33] "das tumultuöse cumulativische Concertiren," Christian August Pfalz, *Muscoviana veritas illibata* (n.p., 1695), 35.
[34] David Huron, "Voice Denumerability in Polyphonic Music of Homogeneous Timbres," *Musical Perception* 6 (1989): 361–82.
[35] Huron defines a stream as "auditory 'things' that continue to exist for an appreciable period of time and that yet may evolve with respect to pitch, timbre or various other parameters." Huron, "Voice Denumerability," 362.

each layer as a movement unfolds. In the first movement of *Freue dich, erlöste Schar* BWV 130, "Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir," the opening offers a fairly distinct three-stream layout, with trumpets, drums, and continuo articulating the first three beats of the bar with sharp staccato chords, and two choirs of oboes and strings filling in the gaps with eighth-note and sixteenth-note figuration, respectively. Although in some modern recordings it is difficult to hear the winds separately right from the start, spatial positioning of the three groups may have facilitated transparency.[36] As the movement progresses, those streams get increasingly entangled, so as to coalesce into a densely woven sonic backdrop to the vocal entries, which themselves divide into two layers of slow chorale melody in the soprano and fast-paced elaboration in the lower parts. In line with Motz's account, a listener's attention would presumably either have hovered indistinctly over the unfolding sonic event or had to keep shifting between streams, since the intricacies of their combination would have overtaxed one's perceptive capacities as the music rushed past in real time.

Most of Bach's arias, meanwhile, tend to make it easier to keep hold of the ongoing auditory streams. Those solo arias with a single obligato instrument and basso continuo, in particular, offer a model for three coexisting and often clearly differentiated streams. In "Lass, o Welt" from *Liebster Immanuel, Herzog der Frommen* BWV 123 (first sung on Epiphany 1725), the vocal bass and traverso share the same opening motive, but the subsequent figuration in the flute part is unmistakably instrumental in nature and not replicated in the voice. The initial clear alternation between instrumental and vocal passages seems designed to enable listeners to apprehend the two streams (plus the supporting basso continuo) separately before they coincide later on. Yet even this model of moment-to-moment listening for auditory streams may be too structurally oriented to capture the vagaries of any individual's aural attention. At any point, for instance, the virtuosic elaboration in an instrumental part may

[36] As in a 2018 performance by Lutherània Budapest: "Lutherània Budapest—J. S. Bach: Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir (BWV 130)," 14 June 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1_5KsHnz6A.

have ended up distracting listeners from a singer's line (and their words), and this could even have been their function: for if congregants were ultimately meant to listen "through" the instrumental sounds to the verbal message, then why include those obligato parts in the first place? In the second aria of the New Year cantata *Gott, wie dein Name, so ist auch dein Ruhm* BWV 171, "Jesus soll mein erstes Wort," the solo violin's involved passagework often threatens to fragment or take aural precedence over the soprano part, especially perhaps when taken by one of Motz's "whimpering" boys. Some of that effect comes through in Nikolaus Harnoncourt's recording with Helmut Wittek (1987), whereas in some brisker versions, such as Helmuth Rilling's rendering with Arleen Auger (1983), the problem appears less acute, perhaps in part because the units of "quasi-hearing" are more compact here, allowing for the whole sentence to form a graspable entity.[37] Modern recording technology, too, can help foreground the vocal stream in a way that a live performance may not have achieved. Yet in a distributed attention model, the text would only ever have formed one stream among several. Even if some listeners may well have endeavored to keep their attention on the words throughout, we should not automatically assume a kind of "cocktail party" effect where listeners zoomed in on one voice while tuning out other noise as much as possible. While it serves certain modes of structural-hermeneutic listening well, such a model does not map convincingly onto contemporary reports regarding text comprehension; nor does it leave room for the musical ongoings to make any meaningful impression on listeners outside of textual meaning, instead rendering them ultimately dispensable. Hence, in a traditional text-based reading, one might claim that the function of the valiant violin figuration in "Auf ihn magst du es wagen" from *Was willst du dich betrüben* BWV 107 was to represent the "unerschrockner Mut" in Johann Heermann's text as voiced by the bass singer.

[37] "Bach—Cantate BWV 171—Gott, wie dein Name, so ist auch dein Ruhm," 18 September 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=piXjER6e2cU; "Gott, wie dein Name, so ist auch dein Ruhm, BWV 171: Aria: Jesus soll mein erstes Wort (Soprano)," 1 February 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gL0URQaN8DI.

Yet its potential to lead an auditor's attention away from the vocal line makes such an explanation only partially persuasive—not least since the word "unerschrocknem" is once again stretched out over a melisma during which the instrumental noise continues unabated.

Many of Bach's cantata movements, then, habitually presented their partially attentive listeners with a degree of aural overload that, while widely critiqued at the time, could also be heard to instantiate Martin Luther's vision (as quoted by Motz) of contrapuntal music as a reflection of the eternal wisdom of God: "the voices seem to lead a heavenly round-dance, meet each other graciously, hug and embrace each other heartily, so to speak, so that those who understand this a little and are moved by it, need to marvel greatly at it and feel that there be nothing more extraordinary in the world than such singing."[38] As Motz proposed, unwittingly anticipating Huron's insights into the psychology of musical listening, the "trias harmonica" offered the best earthly depiction of these heavenly delights, which "could not be represented more effectively than with such a shadow-play, that is with a three-voiced piece of music."[39] In this vein, Raupach concluded: "If it happens now and then that they do not understand every word that is sung (just like one cannot hear and understand all sermons word for word), they still gain from such joyful and jubilant music a magnificent encouragement for joyful devotion in the Lord, and are thereby overcome by a powerful foretaste and reminder of the eternal life of joy or the heavenly music."[40] Bach's congregants may well have heard some of the words in his cantatas, but also many things besides. If, as is

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[38] "Daß die Stimmen gleichsam einen himmlischen Tantz-Reihen führen / Freundlich einander begegnen und sich gleichsam hertzen / und lieblich umfangen / also daß diejenigen / so solches ein wenig verstehen / und dadurch beweget werden / sich des hefftig verwundern müssen und meinen / daß nichts seltsamers in der Welt sey / den ein solcher Gesang." Motz, *Vertheidigte Kirchen-Music*, 66.
[39] "anders kan es wohl nicht besser fürgebildet werden / als durch ein solches Schatten-Werck / nehmlich durch eine dreystimmige Music." Motz, *Vertheidigte Kirchen-Music*, 62.
[40] "Kömmts dann und wann einmahl / daß sie nicht jedes Wort / so musiciret wird / verstehen; (wie man denn auch nicht alle Predigten von Wort zu Wort verstehen und vernehmen kan) So empfangen sie von einer solchen frolockend- und jauchtzenden Music dennoch eine herrliche Aufmunterung zur frölichen Andacht im Herrn; sie überkommen auch dadurch einen kräfftigen Vorschmack und Erinnerung des ewigen Freuden-Lebens oder der Himmlischen Music." Raupach, *Veritophili*, 48. On Raupach's idea of music as a foretaste of heaven, see also Chafe, *Tears into Wine*, 312–44.

likely, they grasped little of the structural-hermeneutic intricacies uncovered by modern-day analyses, this by no means rendered their aural experience ineffectual or trivial.

Meaningful Invariants: Sonic-Affective Markers Across the Cantatas

Although many movements in Bach's vocal music did not start with the words, the arrival of the text has often been taken as necessary for clarifying the music's intended effect. John Butt comments on the arioso "Betrachte, meine Seel" in the *St. John Passion*: "the comforting nature of the music only becomes completely comprehensible" when we hear the key word "Himmelsschlüsselblumen." Or, in the alto aria "Von den Stricken" from the same work, Butt discerns the key issue to be the "absolute inescapability of sin, which can only be redeemed through the reciprocal bondage of Christ. The instrumental lines are all tightly interrelated ... the voice is, literally, 'bound' into the motives and ritornello structuring of the piece."[41] Such a reading, while entirely plausible, again relies on a knowledge of textual content that many listeners would not have had when the music initially struck up. What, in the absence of that knowledge, would the opening instrumental ritornello have done for them? In my own experience of hearing the cantatas in fairly close succession, what emerged perhaps most prominently across the repertoire were certain commonalities of what I might call sonic-affective profiles—not based on individual words or motives as much as broadly recognizable affective markers.[42] Eric F. Clarke has used the notion of "invariants" to describe how a musical utterance, while continually changing as it unfolds in time, can nonetheless be comprehended as coherent. Though Clarke applies the concept primarily to the listening experience of individual movements, he also considers it across genres, such as when people describe certain sounds as "soap opera music" or "Euro pop."[43] In this manner,

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[41] John Butt, *Bach's Dialogue with Modernity: Perspectives on the Passions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 83, 77.
[42] Chafe also pursues such an intertextual approach, though his focus is on shared theological themes and tonal structures. See Chafe, *Tears into Wine*, 427–73.
[43] Eric F. Clarke, *Ways of Listening: An Ecological Approach to the Perception of Musical Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 198.

the notion of invariants can become useful in accounting for certain recurring features coalescing into familiar sonic-affective profiles over weeks and months of hearing a Bach cantata performed each Sunday. Such an informal corpus analysis will hardly enable us to rehear this repertoire as Bach's listeners did; yet it might clarify some of the parameters that shaped those historical listening experiences, while productively dislodging some of our ingrained structural-hermeneutic inclinations.

As Clarke stated at the outset of his study, "there is still a fragmented and contradictory understanding of what listening to music 'feels like,' and how that experience might be understood and explained."[44] Where Clarke's model of "ecological listening" seems grounded in the assumption of a transhistorical listener, a more historically attuned approach appears in Melamed's *Listening to Bach*. Melamed here identifies some of the stylistic markers that would have been immediately recognizable to Bach's listeners, thereby making those historical sensitivities and meanings—of the rage aria, the love duet, and so on—accessible to lay listeners today.[45] Melamed's approach thus begins to address Shai Burstyn's call for constructing "a hypothetical musical-mental model of listeners in a given place and time."[46] In listening for these invariants of genre, details of textual interpretation as well as structural features beyond immediate repetition recede into the background, in favor of those "sensual affective" dimensions hinted at by Kassabian: timbre, texture, density, gesture, motion, pulse. In attending more fully to these "surface" features, such an approach can begin to reverse the stripping away of sensual pleasure that structural listening entails. As Subotnik pointed out, structural listening is characterized by a "hierarchical opposition between structure and medium," and in traditional readings of Bach, too, the former dimension has tended to be privileged.[47] Hence Alfred Dürr's account of Bach's maturation as a composer posited that

[44] Clarke, *Ways of Listening*, 40.
[45] Daniel Melamed, *Listening to Bach: The Mass in B Minor and the Christmas Oratorio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 82, 84.
[46] Shai Burstyn, "In Quest of the Period Ear," *Early Music* 25 (1997): 695.
[47] Subotnik, *Deconstructive Variations*, 149.

"in the course of his creative life Bach increasingly departed from the ideal of idiosyncratic, sensual sonic stimulation in favor of a spiritualized, immaterial beauty of voice leading and harmonic balance."[48]

One might object to Dürr's dichotomies by pointing out that the notion of "Geist" in Bach's time could hover dangerously close to the material realm, and that sensory pleasure relied fundamentally on the flows of spirit in the human body and soul. More pertinently, though, a listening practice more attuned to those sensual dimensions in Bach's music may help elucidate what a sonic event such as the opening of "Von den Stricken" might have done for its Leipzig listeners. The aria's instrumental introduction offers two distinct auditory streams: a basso continuo line repeating a compact rhythmic motive in upward transposition; and first one and then two oboes in an imitative duet saturated with suspensions and parallel thirds. The legato indications and later thirty-second-note figuration in the oboes perhaps imply a more moderate tempo than the forward propulsion of the bass might suggest; but even in the fairly brisk rendering by the Dunedin Consort directed by John Butt (2013), the emerging sonic-affective profile is a familiar one that recurs in manifold instantiations across Bach's output.[49] Its gestural and timbral characteristics—two oboes joining a middle-register voice in close contrapuntal entanglement—reappear, for instance, in the tenor aria "Ich höre mitten in den Leiden" from *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir* BWV 38 (first heard in Leipzig on 29 October 1724). Here, too, the two oboes intertwine seamlessly with the voice in a suspension- and third-filled texture over a similarly active if less obstinately repetitive bassline. Incidentally, the texts of both arias thematize the paradox of Christ's suffering as an act of love; and indeed, Bach usually employed the different sonic-affective profiles at his disposal in ways that accorded closely with textual content. Yet, crucially, a listener's appreciation of

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[48] "Immer mehr entfernt sich Bach im Verlaufe seines Schaffens vom Ideal eigenwilliger, sinnlicher Klangreize zugunsten einer vergeistigten, materielosen Schönheit der Linienführung und Ausgewogenheit der Harmonie." Alfred Dürr, *Die Kantaten von Johann Sebastian Bach*, 2 vols. (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1971), 1:142.

[49] Johann Sebastian Bach, *John Passion*, Dunedin Consort, conducted by John Butt, Linn Records, 2013, compact disc.

those two arias would not have had to wait for the words to arrive; rather, the combination of timbral, gestural, and affective markers would have had the potential to affect them immediately without reference to the particular verbal message. Although the term "timbre" itself only entered musical usage in the later eighteenth century, commentators at the time were clearly aware of these distinct sonic properties. A comment by Friedrich Erhard Niedt, for instance, reveals his awareness of the particular blended quality of an oboe-voice duet: "I always use the oboe in a sung aria, so that both the singer and the instrumentalist contend with each other. When this instrument is played properly, you can hardly hear any difference from when two singers contend with one another."[50]

The sonic-affective profile instantiated in these two Bach arias is necessarily fluid, endlessly transformable, and overlapping with other possible groupings across the corpus of his vocal music. It also remains hard to delineate verbally. If, as Nicholas Cook has put it, music as a whole "resists comprehensive verbal formulation," this resistance is perhaps most pronounced in areas such as timbre and affect, for which an adequate technical vocabulary has often seemed lacking.[51] Yet while it seems difficult to assemble a definitive list of adjectives to describe this profile as it takes shape in any particular performance (moderate, soft, longing, mildly tormented, bittersweet?), this does not reduce its recognizability on first listening encounter, even as specific features varied while others remained constant. We might count, for instance, the aria "Ich will auch mit gebrochnen Augen" from *Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin* BWV 125 as sharing the same profile, though here the "softness" factor is increased by the choice of traverso and oboe d'amore to accompany the alto voice, as well as the tied note repetitions in the continuo part. We might even include the duet "Wie selig sind doch die" from *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott* BWV 80, though here the affective character varies

[50] "Der Hautbois wird allezeit von mir bey der Sing-Arie gebraucht / so daß beyde / der Sänger und Instrumentist mit einander certiren. Wenn solches Instrument recht geblasen wird / kan man fast keinen Unterscheid hören gegen dem / wann zweene Sänger mit einander certiren." Friedrich Erhardt Niedt, *Musicalischer Handleitung Dritter und letzter Theil* (Hamburg: Schiller, 1717), 38.
[51] Nicholas Cook, *Music, Performance, Meaning: Selected Essays* (New York: Ashgate, 2007), 222.

strikingly in modern-day performances, ranging from Rilling's elegiac 1964 rendering of over five minutes to the light-footed lilt of Ton Koopman's recording with the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra (2007), which lasts just three and a half minutes.[52]

Clearly, the question "what are the invariants that specify x" cannot be disentangled from the expressive properties of performance.[53] But it would take a particularly perverse approach to render any of Bach's major-key, diatonic, fanfare-studded trumpets-and-drums choruses as other than a sonic-affective profile broadly characterized as joyful, buoyant, exhilarating. The unmistakable timbral-gestural markers of, say, the opening choruses of *Jesu, nun sei gepreiset* BWV 41 and *Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele* BWV 69, the second movement of *Gott, man lobet dich in der Stille* BWV 120, or other movements starting with those sharply articulated brass sounds remind us that timbre is indeed often the place "where listening starts," as Anthony Gritten has put it. Yet Gritten's summons to let "timbre resonate without forcing it to signify" suggests perhaps too strict a separation between the processes of sensory stimulation and emergent meaning.[54] While an encounter with this or any other sonic-affective profile may not have triggered a fully articulated hermeneutics on the part of Bach's listeners, the sonic event still had the potential to act upon them in ways that were more or less immediately meaningful. And those effects were by no means limited to music by Bach; in fact, listeners' habituation to the output of the previous Leipzig Thomaskantor, Johann Kuhnau, would have been critical for the effectiveness of Bach's own music when he arrived in 1723.[55]

The concept of meaningful invariants can become useful in recitative listening as well, even if textual content presumably could have formed a much clearer point of focus there.

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[52] "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott, BWV 80: No. 7. Duetto "Wie selig sind doch die, die Gott im …," 3 November 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UgQx51HSi00; "J. S. Bach—Cantatas BWV 80, 30; Mass BWV 236—T. koopman (Vol. 22 CD1)," 22 July 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HfN9pn8AfGk.

[53] Clarke raises this question but keeps the performative dimension separate, in *Ways of Listening*, 199.

[54] Anthony Gritten, "Resonant Listening," *Performance Research* 15 (2010): 116, 117.

[55] See, for instance, the opening of Kuhnau's 1716 cantata *Wenn ihr fröhlich seid an euren Festen* for a compelling version of the trumpets-and-drums profile.

For in this genre, too, distinctive formulas were at work beyond those well-known cadential tropes that signaled the arrival of the next aria. In terms of its invariant features, recitative is perhaps best described as an indeterminate sequence of predictable instabilities: it left listeners in the dark about how long it would last and where it might turn musically and textually, but its contours nonetheless often fell into recognizable patterns. One striking generic marker was the unstable or outright dissonant chord at the beginning of many recitatives (such as the fourth movement of BWV 147), calling listeners to attention and generating a particular affective ambiance before any words were uttered. As the physician Ernst Anton Nicolai characterized the effect of dissonance in 1745, "the proportions are such that they cause greater difficulty to [the soul] when it wants to represent them to itself; they cause it confusion, which necessarily brings with it a sense of displeasure."[56] Motz opted for a more physiologically grounded account: "As far as non-sensical sounds or the mixing of high and low sounds into dissonances is concerned, this harsh disagreeable sound leaves people's heart and soul tightened, apprehensive and fearful, and therefore easily moves them to displeasure and antipathy."[57] His description suggests that the opening chords of *Mein Herze schwimmt im Blut* BWV 199 may indeed have instilled a palpable sense of unease in Bach's congregants on 8 August 1723.[58] The series of unresolved dissonances would have served, not least, to keep listeners on their toes, counteracting what Meinrad Spiess described as the fundamentally "schläffrig" (sleepy) nature of recitative.[59]

Other ways to keep a listener's attention as a recitative unfolded included those well-placed bursts of melisma in an otherwise syllabic environment, such as the "Freude"-melisma

[56] "Ihre Verhältnisse sind so beschaffen, daß sie ihr mehr Schwierigkeit verursachen, wenn sie sich dieselbe vorstellen will, sie setzen sie in Verwirrung, welches nothwendig ein Mißvergnügen nach sich läßt." Ernst Anton Nicolai, *Die Verbindung der Musik mit der Artzneygelahrheit* (Halle: Hemmerde, 1745), 10.
[57] "Was aber den Widersinnischen Ton oder die aus dissonantien unordentliche Vermischung des hohen und tieffen tons anlanget / so machet dieser grausame Ubellaut / daß das Hertz und Gemüth des Menschen zusammen gezogen / beklommen / geängstiget / und also zum Verdruß und Widerwillen gar leichtlich gebracht werden kan." Motz, *Vertheidigte Kirchen-Music*, 80–81.
[58] See my "Heartfelt Musicking: The Physiology of a Bach Cantata," *representations* 143 (2018): 36–62.
[59] Meinrad Spiess, *Tractatus Musicus Compositorio-Practicus* (Augsburg: Lotter, 1745), 131.

in, say, "Du wirst mich nach der Angst auch wiederum erquicken" from *Ihr werdet weinen und heulen* BWV 103, where dissonance is transformed into a diatonic outpouring of joy; or at the start of "Die Freude wird zur Traurigkeit" from *Ach wie flüchtig, ach wie nichtig* BWV 26, where that process is reversed. According to the church father Augustine, the primal function of melismatic singing in the jubilus was to express a joy that words could not articulate: "He who sings a jubilus, speaks no words … It is the voice of a heart dissolved in joy."[60] This effect is enacted on a broader scale in many of Bach's arias, too, such as "Ich esse mit Freuden" from *Ich bin vergnügt mit meinem Glücke* BWV 84, with its characteristic markers of fast triple meter, running sixteenth-note motion, major-key diatonic figuration, bright violin and soprano timbres, and so on. In this instance, it is the solo violin that sounds the wordless melismas over the predominantly syllabic vocal part. I would venture that Bach's partially attentive listeners on Septuagesima 1727 would not have needed to grasp much beyond these sonic-affective markers to find themselves enveloped by the emotive force of the piece.

If such an analysis can seem overly simplistic compared with the structural-hermeneutic complexities uncovered by score-based close reading, I would hold that this is partly due, again, to that lack of precise vocabulary to capture the nuances of each individual instantiation of these profiles. We do not quite have the words to tell how the opening choruses of BWV 41 and 69, in any given performance, might feel subtly different yet also closely allied in their broader affective stance. And, once established, any of these sonic-affective profiles could be subtly twisted to generate more unusual or unsettling effects. In relation to the "Freude"-profile, the final aria of the Purification cantata *Ich habe genug* BWV 82, "Ich freue mich auf meinen Tod," comes to mind, with its awkward vocal contortions impeding a straightforward rush of joyous sound; or the aria "Ich ende behende mein irdisches Leben" from the Christmas Cantata *Selig ist der Mann* BWV 57, which similarly sings

[60] Cited in Marian Bennett Cochrane, "The Alleluia in Gregorian Chant," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 7 (1954): 214.

about the paradox of joyfulness in death and disrupts its sprightly gigue pulse with persistent syncopations in the violin. Performers may choose to play down or accentuate the unsettling effect—compare, for instance, Gardiner's harsh and out-of-joint rendering (2000) with Dorothea Röschmann's graceful version for an album entitled *Bachs schönste Arien* (2015).[61] In either case, Bach's creative play with invariants here seems to build on the assumption of a collective stylistic and affective habituation among his regular listeners.

Many other such sonic-affective profiles might be added to my initial assortment: the pastoral with its various subtypes, the poised minuet type, the "running" type, the tormented chromatic Adagio type. Yet in setting out to compile a more comprehensive list, my approach may begin to look suspiciously like yet another version of *Affektenlehre*; that is, one of those Matthesonian taxonomies ascribing specific affective content to different motives, keys, or dance genres. Or, in a more presentist vein, it could end up approximating those all-too-obvious accounts of basic musical emotions offered by some music psychologists today, where we learn that major-key fast music makes people feel happy.[62] Neither of those systems of categorization, I think, quite manages to capture the nuances by which these sonic-affective profiles could become effective and meaningful for listeners in each performed realization. As Lawrence Zbikowski has affirmed, processes of categorization are indeed fundamental to any understanding of music, which in the aurally shaped musical culture of Bach's Leipzig would have involved the recognition of what Ong called "mnemonic patterns, shaped for ready oral recurrence."[63] But to my mind both Mattheson and certain strands of current music psychology too easily embrace the position, most prominently articulated by Peter Kivy, that music is only capable of conveying "gross" emotions without nuance.[64] In that case, one

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[61] "Johann Sebastian Bach, "Selig ist der Mann, BWV 57 (John Eliot Gardiner)," 10 February 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7I-JCknjd8; "J. S. Bach: Selig ist der Mann Cantata, BWV 57—7. Aria: Ich ende behende mein irdisches Leben," 25 October 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6xPrm-aWe0.

[62] See for instance Patrik N. Juslin, *Musical Emotions Explained* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 126.

[63] Lawrence M. Zbikowski, *Conceptualizing Music: Cognitive Structure, Theory and Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 12; Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 34.

[64] Peter Kivy, *Sound Sentiment: An Essay on Musical Emotions* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 47–48.

might ask polemically, why go to the trouble of writing a new musical version of joyfulness or distress each week? I would argue, instead, that music seems uniquely placed to put into sound (not words) those differentiated affective motions that, as current affect theory holds, are experienced somatically yet cannot be accounted for verbally.[65] However, whereas many affect theorists will insist that affective experiences therefore remain pre-linguistic and pre-significatory, I would suggest that at least in the experience of musical affect, meaning is always already emergent for habituated listeners, even if it remains on the level of unspecified "meaningfulness."[66] This is, perhaps, what Motz was getting at when suggesting that a listener did not need to know all the words as long as they understood the "genus" of a piece. The "fröliche" and "traurige" genera he identifies appear not as fixed categories but as loose arrays of interrelated sentiments in the manner of family resemblances: the expressions he considers under the "fröliche" heading range from "rejoice in the Lord" and "sing joyfully" to "take care," "give thanks," "serve the Lord joyfully," and so on.[67]

This notion of family resemblance pertains, as well, to the overall affective trajectories of many Bach cantatas, which followed certain repeatable patterns that allowed for innumerable particular instantiations. One of those patterns is memorably articulated in Heinrich Müller's instruction for curing a believer's afflicted soul through singing: the beginning, he says, is often "schwer und unlustig" (difficult and serious), intoning "Ach Gott! wie manches Herzeleid"; but the middle already sounds "lieblicher" (more pleasant), and the end is "gar erfreulich" (very joyous).[68] In Bach's own version of "Ach Gott! wie manches Herzeleid" (BWV 58), that trajectory is realized by means of an initial Adagio duet that opens with the "schwere Gang" (*passus duriusculus*) of a chromatically descending bass, a moderately contented middle aria, and a closing duet enacting its own version of the "Freude"-profile. In

[65] For a summary and critique of this position, see Ruth Leys, "The Turn to Affect: A Critique," *Critical Inquiry* 37 (2011): 434–72.
[66] On meaningfulness, see Butt, *Bach's Dialogue with Modernity*, 181.
[67] Motz, *Vertheidigte Kirchen-Music*, 14.
[68] Heinrich Müller, *Geistliche Seelen-Musik* (Rostock: Fritsch, 1742), 62.

each of these arias, specific musical features coalesce into clusters of affective and semantic potential that overall could lead a listener through the corporeal-spiritual stages of affliction, consolation, and release. BWV 199 follows a comparable pattern, as does BWV 21, whose "sequence of affective stages" is meticulously traced in Chafe's book.[69] Other groups of cantatas strike a celebratory tone throughout or only grant resolution from musical-spiritual torment in a final chorale. Any such effects, however, remained dependent on the disposition of a particular individual or group of listeners. As Nicola Dibben has put it, "the notion that meaning is mediated by musical materials does not mean that that meaning is somehow inherent in musical material, nor that it is fixed. It is at all times a function of the relationship between listener and material."[70] In the musicking practices of Bach's Leipzig, that relationship was guided fundamentally by those meaningful invariants as they subtly evolved from one Sunday to the next.

Hearing with the Body: Affective Contagion

While Dibben's model of meaning as arising from an interaction between listener and material is a powerful one, any use of the singular "listener" in our context obscures the fact that listening to Bach's cantatas was very much a collective, inter-subjective experience. Not only would the levels of noise, movement, and (in)attention from fellow congregants have notably affected an individual's ability to lend their ear to an ongoing musical performance, but the bodily-spiritual presence of those surrounding that individual may have shaped their affective responses to a degree that attending to the musical sounds alone cannot capture adequately. As each aria or chorus unfolded over several minutes, this allowed time for its sonic-affective impact to permeate and spread between the listening ears and bodies in

[69] Chafe, *Tears into Wine*, 17.
[70] Nicola Dibben, "What Do We Hear, When We Hear Music? Music Perception and Musical Material," *Musicae Scientiae* 5 (2001): 185–86.

attendance. Otherwise, why would any individual movement need to be quite so stretched out over time, especially if, as I have suggested, certain sonic-affective profiles offered listeners immediate affective recognition? The amount of small- and large-scale repetition of textual-musical material in cantata compositions certainly formed a point of contention in contemporary critiques. Gerber, among others, called for censorship of those cantors who "presume they have the liberty and authority to make music according to their fancy, whenever and for however long they wish."[71] But for most writers, congregational listening did not exhaust itself in a momentary insight; rather, those affective forces and emergent meanings needed to be fully absorbed in mind, body, and soul. Hence Gottfried Tilgner argued: "To those who cannot stand the frequent repetition of words in arias, we admit that too much of it causes listeners displeasure; but too little does not move them at all. An emphatic word, a forceful affect cannot be impressed into the soul more powerfully than through incisive repetition."[72] Raupach similarly held that through judicious repetition, the words are "implanted in the heart" all the more potently.[73]

Raupach's mention of the heart is crucial here, since it encapsulates the contemporary understanding of faith as a holistic physiological as well as psychological experience. The affective dimensions of timbre and gesture, of musical streams moving along at different speeds, of dissonance making your innards contract, afforded engagement beyond cognitive appraisal to encompass a believer's entire body-soul. This refocusing on the corporeal domain productively counters the tendency in structural listening, noted by Andrew Dell'Antonio, to "transcend the potential sloppiness and impreciseness inherent in the physical manifestations

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[71] "die Macht und Freyheit hinausgenommen, daß sie nach ihren Gefallen Musiquen machen, wenn, und wie lang sie wollen." Christian Gerber, *Historie der Kirchen-Ceremonien in Sachsen* (Dresden: Sauereßig, 1732), 281.
[72] "Welchen aber die öfftere Wiederholung etlicher Worte in den Arien unerträglich ist, denen geben wir gerne zu, daß, zu viel, die Zuhörer verdrießlich mache; aber zu wenig rühret sie gar nicht. Ein emphatisches Wort, ein nachdrücklicher Affect kan dem Gemüthe nicht kräfftiger, als durch eine durchdringende Wiederhohlung eingepräget werden." Gottfried Tilgner, Vorrede, in Erdmann Neumeister, *Fünfffache Kirchen-Andachten* (Leipzig: Groß, 1716), n.p.
[73] Raupach, *Veritophili*, 31.

of sound."[74] In foregrounding a listener's intellectual response over the corporeal, a structural-hermeneutic approach may lead us to forget that words, too, when spoken or sung, are bodily phenomena, involving tongues, lips, teeth, diaphragms, and eardrums. Chorale texts and melodies were entities that congregants could feel in their mouths and throats as well as comprehend mentally. Musical timbres and affects did not just enter the ear to be transported to the thinking brain, but could penetrate a listener's skin, bones, and heart. And this was not just a matter of individual bodies and souls. Unlike my own solitary listening exercises, the Leipzig congregational experience was built upon the intercorporeal production and expression of affect, devotion, and faith. Affective contagion, facilitated through the physical resonance of timbre, formed a vital element in shaping a congregation's corporeal-spiritual state, leaving worshippers ready for receiving grace. The collective creation of harmonious song—involving performers and listeners alike—offered a powerful means of forging and affirming this community of the faithful. As Großgebauer claimed, referring to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, singing psalms only in your mind "does not build the community, but when the whole congregation sings along internally and speaks to one another through Psalms, this improves them and leaves them full of spirit. No better concord can be devised than this, and it is nothing but an image and foretaste of the eternal congregation in heaven."[75]

Raupach repeatedly claimed that this affective contagion could spread across listeners regardless of their levels of attention or understanding. Composers who used their musical devices well, he asserted, could bring about any desired effect in listeners (depending on their temperament), "even if they did not prepare themselves for receiving the impression and

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[74] Andrew Dell'Antonio, *Beyond Structural Listening? Postmodern Modes of Hearing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 3.

[75] "Wann jemand Psalmen singet / wie Paulus redet / im Geiste / das kan die Gemeine nicht bauen; wann aber die gantze Gemeine im Sinne singet / und gleichsam einer zu dem andern durch Psalmen redet / das bessert und machet voll Geistes. Kein schönere Zusammenstimmung kan erfunden werden / als eben diese: und ist nichts anders als ein Fürbild und Vorschmack der ewigen Versamlung im Himmel." Großgebauer, *Drey geistreiche Schrifften*, 194.

although the person that receives it does not know why and how."[76] So when the mellow sounds of two entwined oboes penetrated the bodies and minds of Bach's congregants, they would have rendered those body-souls soft and malleable, enabling their hearts to melt in penitence and love. Music's immersive sonic presence facilitated the formation of their distributed subjectivities as they listened, prayed, sang, looked around, or chatted idly.

And yet those body-souls were not mere resonators: they had agency too. Early eighteenth-century Lutheran bodies were not neutral entities, but saturated with sinful desires, and the threat of "Fleischeslust" loomed large in any sensory encounter with musical sound. According to Niedt, an "orderly and measured gratification of the soul" was entirely permissible; yet immoral persons might give in to the darker side of "Wollust," characterized by a craving for "insatiable gratification."[77] Among a list of "shortcomings and weaknesses of the ear" in Johann Jacob Schmidt's *Biblischer Medicus* (1743), we find an entry on "itching of the ears," which leads "lustful listeners" to want to be "pampered with gratifying speeches and such sermons that are fashioned according to vain human wisdom, which caress the flesh but leave behind all the more pain in the soul."[78] Those contemporaries of Bach who condemned the new cantata style held that it had been introduced into the church only on account of this desire for sensory gratification. As Meyer put it, listeners' ears "itch for something new, and where the audience is not being kept amused with the variations of a fleeting and thrilling composition, which is more suited to the theatre and to which it is easier to dance than awaken one's devotion to the praise of God, they soon turn up their noses and even leave the church."[79] Hence, while in Lutheran theology music in itself was regarded as a

[76] "So wird er in allen Gemüthern … die Würckung zuwege bringen welche er will / obgleich sie sich nicht so eben dazu gefaßt gemacht haben die Eindruckung zu empfangen / und obgleich die Person / die sie empfängt / nicht weiß / warum und wodurch." Raupach, *Veritophili*, 22.
[77] Niedt, *Musicalischer Handleitung Dritter und letzter Theil*, 54.
[78] "Das Jucken der Ohren; welches im Geistlichen ein solcher Zufall lüsterner Zuhörer ist, da sie nur mit liebkosenden Reden, und solchen Predigten, welche nach eiteler menschlichen Weisheit eingerichtet sind, wollen gakrauet seyn, welches dem Fleische zwar sanft thut, aber desto mehr Schmerzen dem Geiste hinterläßt." Johann Jacob Schmidt, *Biblischer Medicus* (Züllichau: Dendeler, 1743), 217.
[79] "Ihren Ohren jücket nach etwas neues / und wo man nicht mit allerhand Veränderungen einer flüchtigen und wilden Composition, welches sich besser auf dem Theatro schicket / und wornach man eher tantzen als eine Andacht zum Lobe

gift of God, bad listening habits could turn it into a source of vice. Raupach denounced those people who chose to listen to church music not for devotional purposes but to reminisce about their sinful worldly pursuits, "like those spiders who suck the nectar out of sweet flowers and it afterwards turns into poison." They listened "from the flesh" both to sermons and music, whereas true devotional music went "from heart to heart."[80]

Flesh, in this context, referred less to the body as a physical entity than to the worldly, fallen dimension of human nature, as opposed to the believer's inner (heart-based) spirituality. In the decades around 1700, as Pietism reshaped the language of Lutheran religiosity, those categories of inner and outer came to frame contemporary notions of what we might describe as "mere hearing" versus "proper listening." Whereas hearing involved sensory stimulation of the outer ear and associated desires for worldly pleasures, true devotional listening took place inside: "Those who do not open the ears of their heart to hear the voice of the Lord are hardened and numb in their hearts," wrote the Saxon theologian Gottfried Arnold in 1700.[81] Raupach accordingly advised congregants to "diligently ask God for his blessing in all external listening, and pray that their inner devotion should thereby be furthered and increased."[82] As the Lutheran preacher Conrad Dieterich had put it a hundred years earlier: "We should take care that when we listen to instrumental music with organs, pipes, flutes, violins, strings, trombones, cornettos and further instruments during worship in church, we should not sit there like mute sticks and blocks, or like unreasonable beasts, who have nothing but the sound and echo in their ears and will not be moved further; rather, we should listen to

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Gottes erwecken kan / das auditorium amusiret / rumpffet man bald die Nase / und gehet wol gar zur Kirchen hinaus." Meyer, *Unvorgreiffliche Gedancken*, 55.

[80] Raupach, *Veritophili*, 47.

[81] Gottfried Arnold, *Unpartheyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historie* (Frankfurt, 1700), 2:513.

[82] "daß er fleißig Gott um seinen Segen zu allem äusserlichen Anhören anflehe und seufze / daß die innerliche Andacht dadurch befordert und vermehret werde." Raupach, *Veritophili*, 32.

it with reasonable human hearts, indeed with proper blessed Christian hearts, to elevate our hearts with it and entice our souls to Christian devotion."[83]

Strikingly, in such commentary one might see certain demands being made of listeners that are not inimical to those of the later structural listening paradigm—a paradigm equally allergic to people sitting impassively through a concert "like a cabbage or a stone."[84] The distributed listening practices of congregational worship here become infused with a sense of individual responsibility for a deeper kind of listening that potentially helped constitute the closed-off inner self of Western modernity. As Butt has argued, Bach's music can indeed be seen to sit on the cusp of this modern individuated subjectivity.[85] This is due, not least, to his performances continually pushing the boundaries of what might be considered appropriate in a liturgical context in terms of length and style, and thereby raising the possibility of music being appreciated as a means of "aesthetic" edification in its own right.[86] In many ways, the Lutheran mandate for the individual cultivation of faith through listening remained functionally distinct, no doubt, from the ostensibly secularized listening culture of the modern concert hall. But the two approaches arguably converge in certain key features: properly directed attention, withdrawal from sensual pleasure, denial of the "exterior" body, putative moral gain. Just as structural listening provided twentieth-century scholars with a yardstick of not just aesthetic but moral value, as Dell'Antonio pointed out, so did good listening, in Raupach's terms, lead to virtue (and, ultimately, salvation): "With time it will happen that their soul will have to be moved and stimulated through such well-ordered

[83] "Sollen hierbeneben auch diß in Acht nemmen / daß wann wir ein Instrumental Music von Orgeln / Pfaiffen / Flöten / Geygen / Saiten / Posaunen / Zincken / andern dergleichen Instrumenten mehr / bey dem Gottesdienst im Heiligthumb des Herrn anhören / wir nicht dabey sitzen / wie stumme Stöck unnd Blöcke / oder wie dumme unvernünfftige Thier / die anders nichts als Thon und Hall in Ohren / und weiters nicht sich bewegen lassen / sondern wir sollen mit vernünfftigen Menschen- Ja / mit rechten Gottseeligen Christenhertzen dieselbige anhören / darunder und darüber unser Hertzen erheben / unsere Gemüther zu Christlicher devotion und Andacht auffmuntern." Conrad Dieterich, *Ulmische Orgel Predigt* (Ulm: Meder, 1624), 39–40.
[84] That is, though bodies are to be kept still, minds should be active. Quoting the American educator Sophie Gilbing in 1917, cited in Karin Bijsterveld, *Sonic Skills: Listening for Knowledge in Science, Medicine and Engineering* (London: Macmillan, 2019), 61.
[85] Butt, *Bach's Dialogue with Modernity*, passim.
[86] See my chapter "J. S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*: Music in the Margin of Indifference," in *The Sound of Freedom: Music's Witness to the Theological Struggles of Modernity*, ed. Jeremy Begbie et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

church music that their desire for many Christian virtues will become ever greater."[87] Other contemporaries recognized that music, though it might aid the inculcation of religious doctrine, could achieve something distinctive, beyond what the words of a sermon might do. Hence Motz submitted that, while a piece of music could be analogous to a sermon in the way it "moves its listeners to the good," it ultimately had the power to instill in them a sense of the "wondrous and sweet sounds of the angelic choir," which a "mere oration" could not do.[88] I would venture that some notion of the "aesthetic," at least in its initial formulation by Alexander Baumgarten as the sensory appreciation of beauty, is not too distant from what Motz is trying to articulate here. In this sense, we might begin to see Bach's weekly cantata performances as paving the way for the later appropriation of music in bourgeois concert life as a means of individual moral betterment, with structural listening as its most elevated expression.

Yet ultimately this homology can only be carried so far. For even if one might posit a mode of avant-la-lettre "aesthetic listening" among some of Bach's congregants, my aural analyses of the repertoire they encountered have led in very different directions from a structurally oriented approach: redirecting our attention from "depth" to "surface," from pitch and tonality to timbre and gesture, from uniqueness to family resemblance.[89] Meanwhile, my insistence on some of the sonic features of these cantata performances at the expense of focusing on textual content does not, I hope, stem solely from a latter-day desire to enjoy Bach's cantatas aesthetically, to listen for the music over the (sometimes objectionable) theology. Rather, it is intended to widen our aural horizons in the wake of a perhaps overzealous application of the Lutheran "sola scriptura" principle to Bach's music in some modern-day scholarship. As Bernd Wannenwetsch has explored, Lutheran listening as "an

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[87] "So wird es denn mit der Zeit nicht fehlen, seine Seele muß durch so gute Anordnungen der Kirchen-Music gerühret und gereitzet werden, daß er zu vielen Christlichen Tugenden desto grössere Lust bekömmt." Raupach, *Veritophili*, 32–33.
[88] Motz, *Vertheidigte Kirchen-Music*, 52–53.
[89] On the aesthetic construct of depth, see Holly Watkins, "From the Mine to the Shrine: The Critical Origins of Musical Depth," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 27 (2004): 179–207.

encounter with the word that was made flesh" could be figured as a "non-objectifying incorporation of the world as sound."[90] In other words, although the "sola scriptura" principle formed an unassailable foundation of early modern Lutheran thought and practice, acts of (musical) listening also afforded more capacious ways of absorbing spirit and truth. Finally, and most importantly, the internalized approach to listening endorsed by Motz and Raupach—like the later notion of structural listening—was an idealized formation, telling participants how their listening *should* unfold. It thereby concealed a range of by all accounts rather divergent actual listening behaviors. By attempting to look beneath these idealized formations toward that spectrum of historically conditioned listening responses, we might begin to articulate aspects of the auditory experience of Bach's cantata performances that have tended to be muted in established discourse. Perhaps this type of inquiry, and the analytical tools it proposes, could be extended fruitfully to other specific listening situations, too, from early eighteenth-century Tafelmusik consumption to those weekly Bach cantata series now taking place in different locations around the globe. In recognizing that musical listening is and has always been a distributed, mutable, multidimensional set of practices, our own engagement with these repertories and histories can only be enriched.

[90] Bernd Wannenwetsch, "'Take Heed What Ye Hear': Listening as a Moral, Transcendental and Sacramental Act," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 135 (2010): 100.