

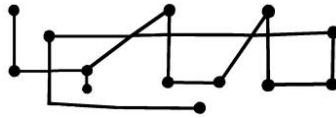
Interview

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JOSHUA B. MAILMAN



RACHEL VANDAGRIFF: What is your history with *Perspectives of New Music*?

JOSHUA MAILMAN: The odd thing for me is that I have assumed that *Perspectives of New Music* has been central to *everyone's* thinking maybe more than it actually has been. I guess that is because for me it has been so important.

VANDAGRIFF: How has it been important?

MAILMAN: The journal was introduced to me probably pretty early on, compared to how it has been for other people. That is perhaps a little bit unusual. I grew up in New York City, and I was aware of people like Milton Babbitt even before I was in college—when I was in high school. Of course, I was really involved in music when I was in high school. I went to the La Guardia School of the Arts, so I followed

what was going on. Actually I had heard about Schoenberg when I was in junior high school. I had some music teacher who told us about the twelve-tone system. Without having heard the music, I was fascinated, but then when I got a chance to hear Schoenberg—I guess I had gotten to hear Bartók first, and then Schoenberg—I was immediately hooked. The discourse, the system—what was described to me about the music—captivated me, and the way that the music sounded, independently of that, captivated me too. These combined got me really interested, and I started to tune into what was going on in the new music scene. I would read newspaper and magazine articles about this or that concert—started shopping for the LPs and CDs at record stores. I remember going to a concert of Milton Babbitt’s music in Miller Theater at Columbia University, I think that was in the late eighties—then it was called the McMillan Theater. It was the premiere of Babbitt’s “Composition for Guitar” (“Sheer Pluck” 1984), whenever that was. I remember the guitarist David Starobin played it twice; he said, this is a premiere, and I am going to play it twice. It was still quite unfamiliar to me, hearing it the second time. That hooked me even further, because I knew from listening to records of Schoenberg (and also Babbitt’s 2nd Quartet) that even something that sounded so unfamiliar on a second hearing could yet become familiar and that would be a very rich and worthwhile process.

Then when I was in college—at the University of Chicago—one of the things I was given to read in a music theory class was part of “Meta-Variations” (Boretz 1969–1973).

VANDAGRIFF: Do you remember who your teacher was?

MAILMAN: Yeah, it was Richard Cohn. We called him “Rick.” That was in the early nineties. The interesting thing for me with that was that I was a philosophy major, and the philosophy I was focusing on was analytical philosophy, which was big at the University of Chicago. Part of the history of that was that Rudolf Carnap taught at the University of Chicago a few decades earlier. So it was really interesting to me to be reading this article (part of “Meta-Variations”) that used the thinking, or the kind of language of analytical philosophy, to talk about music that I was already interested in. I was like a kid in a candy store. I thought that was mainly what music theory was, because that was my experience—well it was one of the most positive parts of my experience that stood out.

VANDAGRIFF: That “Meta-Variations” represented what music theory generally was?

MAILMAN: Yeah. So actually, strangely—I am not sure this is how you want to put it—but the strange thing for me, if anything, was how, over time, I realized that *Perspectives of New Music* is not as central to everybody as I originally thought it was or as it seems to be to me. That is actually more of a revelation. I am trying to think of another way to put that that is more positive, though there is a positive aspect to it, I suppose, because for me it has been so nourishing: I was served gold, and I eagerly ate it up. I don't know that I would have gotten into music as a profession if it wasn't for that kind of thinking as in "Meta-Variations". That's not to say that I'm of the analytical philosophy persuasion—if anything I'm now more intrigued by the process philosophies of James, Bergson, and Whitehead. But the precision of thought, and precision of thought's articulation, sticks with me from analytical philosophy. In my own way, I synthesize these strains (along with others) in my *Music Analysis* essay (2009) on Carter's *Scrivo in Vento*. Back in college, what I noticed about "Meta-Variations" right at the beginning, which had me hooked, was that this was a very intense technical discourse about music, whose purpose was to appreciate every nuance of music, which is what music that is unconventional, new, and pushing boundaries really deserves. That, to me, was, and still is, actually, what gets me up in the morning.

So that was the first encounter. I suppose I kept paying attention to this kind of discourse about music. Then after college I didn't go to graduate school right away, and I wasn't reading a lot of music theory at that time, except for Allen Forte's book *Structure of Atonal Music*, which isn't *Perspectives*, per se. I did a lot of listening to concerts and recordings of new music.

In preparing to talk to you I went through old issues of *Perspectives*. I got up to 1980 or so, going through the different tables of contents of *Perspectives* just to remember what I read, and reread. Actually I see only one Allen Forte article here, which is interesting—"Sets and Non-sets in Schoenberg's Atonal Music" (Forte 1972). That article was from before he published the book, so the ideas that are in the article are in the book. One of the other elements of discourse that you get in *Perspectives* (which unfortunately has been overcritized in the reception of Forte's work) is that analyzing music might involve making choices—segmentations, for example—that might not be the first to come to mind from your hearing. So your theorizing informs your analysis. Later, Hasty, Straus, and Hanninen infused much more nuance into such thinking, but the way in which productive feedback occurs between analysis and theory is right there in those earlier writings by Boretz, Lewin, and Forte. That is, kind of, a feedback process of analysis, that

maybe isn't so obvious to people at first. But I think I kind of got soaked in that pretty early on, so that made sense to me. Allen Forte's and David Lewin's work are examples of that, as is "Meta-Variations."

I think I should also say that I was studying analytical philosophy, yes, but I also had a course on aesthetics, for example, that was analytically oriented aesthetics, from Ted Cohen at the University of Chicago. One of the things that I noticed from that is that aesthetic criticism could also be layered. There was an article by Arnold Isenberg, for example, called "Critical Communication" (1949) that described criticism in this way, where you would point out details, for example, about a painting, and through a chain of statements you would lead the reader, or the viewer, to some appreciation about, for example, a painting. What struck me was how so many things Allen Forte and Benjamin Boretz (despite their many differences) were doing were essentially that. And yet, they were actually doing it with a kind of rigor and depth that you don't find in articles about paintings. They were actually *really* doing it with music. That was fascinating to me. It is still fascinating to me. That is what I try to do myself, in my own way.

I can see now that maybe my experience was very particular, because I had these very particular . . . not by accident, but nevertheless particular incidents with analytical philosophy and aesthetics and music, and where I was in New York . . . it all sort of converged; I don't take it for granted.

VANDAGRIFF: Do you want to tell me about some of the articles you recalled by going through those tables of contents?

MAILMAN: There are a lot of articles here that I read that were influential to me. I probably didn't read these until I was in graduate school at Eastman (when I worked with Bob Morris, Dave Headlam, Robert Wason, Ciro Scotto, Elizabeth Marvin, and others). Actually, it was not just from courses with Bob Morris that I read these articles.

This relates to what I was saying a minute ago, actually. One of the articles that influenced me in that way was "Behind the Beyond" by David Lewin (1969). This article is just fantastic. Every time I get into a conversation with anyone about what music theory or musical analysis is, this comes to mind. He writes that every analysis is a critical analysis, not least just because of the choices an analyst makes—what to point out and what to focus on. Analysis can be an intense, technically rich, pedagogically productive kind of "critical communication," the activity or process that Arnold Isenberg discusses, but just barely scratches the surface of.

Another interesting exchange was “Milton Babbitt Responds to George Perle,” where George Perle makes the mistake of saying that Milton Babbitt and David Lewin erred because George Perle thought that Milton Babbitt and David Lewin proved that Schoenberg’s Violin Concerto was great because of its hexachordal basis. But Milton Babbitt comes back and says, essentially: “No. we’re not under that delusion at all. We are just making a few of an infinitude of true statements that could be made about the piece. We’re drawing attention to these through our analysis.” (Perle and Babbitt 1963; Milton Babbitt’s portion runs from pages 127–132.) That is what criticism is. That is how I understood it. That is how it made sense to me, from reading Allen Forte and Boretz and Isenberg and other philosophers. It just made sense. Often I couldn’t understand why such things didn’t make sense to everyone else! (Laughter.) It just makes sense. Well, now I could go into depth philosophically about how and why that makes sense, but that would take us far off the track.

Perhaps the reason it doesn’t make sense to other people is because people don’t do it. Perhaps people don’t get involved in analyzing music. Perhaps they just don’t have a clue how technical discourse could actually advance your appreciation—by doing it, by engaging in it, by reading it, or both. So perhaps that is why people don’t understand that. If there is any one publication, that over a long period of time, in many different ways, gets that across, I think it is *Perspectives of New Music*. I guess I didn’t think of it that way until you contacted me, but I guess I would have to say that that is true.

VANDAGRIFF: It seems kind of wonderfully . . . I don’t want to call it “happenstance,” but amazing that so many of your interests, present in you from very early on, lined up with so much of what you found in *Perspectives*. I think of the journal as somewhat uncategorizable—over its history it has included all kinds of different things—yet it seems so many of them chime with your various interests.

MAILMAN: Yes. Another interesting facet of this is that when you compare *Perspectives* to other journals that we might call music theory journals—even, for example, *The Journal of Music Theory*, which is actually, in a way, a peer . . . I guess it started about five years before *Perspectives*, I think. [*JMT* was founded in 1957.] It is basically the same age as *Perspectives*. It is a peer.

But if you compare *Perspectives* to other journals such as *JMT*, you see that it really is a much more a journal of discourse. You really do have people discussing things out in the open that weren’t discussed, and are still often not discussed. There are a lot of people out there

with blinders on. They publish their articles, and they don't really pay attention to what else is going on. Actually, the recent issue of *Spectrum* did have a debate, and sometimes it got really ugly, especially from one of the two sides. . . . But when you look at these encounters in *Perspectives* they are not ugly. Even the pretty serious disagreements between Edward T. Cone and David Lewin—they are not ugly. They are just informative and interesting, and it is amazing to read them. You see whole entire ideologies about aesthetics get played out politely and productively in these pages. It is quite interesting. Like, people who have ideas that great art is and must remain magical, not to be touched too much, versus the idea it has infinite layers to unwrap . . . The first one would be more Cone's, perhaps, and the second would be Lewin's, but those ideas represent ideas that you could probably take back to Aristotle or Plato. I don't know if they have ever actually been played out or discussed to that level of detail—*ever*, anytime in the past. Critics in the nineteenth century were pretty vague in comparison to what we have here. Provided they were able to follow the technical details, I suspect music aestheticians of any prior century would be utterly amazed and dazzled to read some of what goes on in the pages of *PNM*.

Another thing that is interesting is how you have composers whose music is so different, writing about each other. That is surprising, interesting, and gratifying. You have Roger Reynolds talking to Takemitsu, Elliott Carter discussing the music of Milton Babbitt who writes about Varèse, for example—often these are not particularly detailed, and I am sure a lot of it is just professional politeness, but it is not only that. It shows respect and awareness of what their colleagues are doing, which indicates an earnest endeavor, rather than some trivial battle of egos and ideologies which you read it about in history books.

VANDAGRIFF: I would say that, if anywhere, in *Perspectives* they would like honest opinions.

MAILMAN: Yes, there is a lot of that, too, like when Cone expresses his discomfort with technical jargon in "A Budding Grove" (1965).

VANDAGRIFF: . . . Ben Boretz initiated a "Young Composers" series early on in *Perspectives*, which was a series of composers on composers (Perspectives of New Music 1963).

MAILMAN: I don't think I have read as many of those—but I might have. That was another thing that's been important about *Perspectives* for me: I learned the names of some composers I ended up liking. Or, in some cases, it introduced me to more music of people I already

knew of. Like, Mario Davidovsky—I already knew his music, but it was a bonus to come across his name in *Perspectives*, because it indicated how others out there were listening to and contemplating music I found intriguing. You know, reading the back of LP record jackets was just not enough for me.

In addition to having composers who are very different from one another writing about each other, you also have, for example in Joe Dubiel's "Three Essays on Milton Babbitt" (1990–92), something else that is interesting. Dubiel's writing about Babbitt is an instance of someone writing about another composer—in this case a student writing about his teacher's music—a very well-known, very much discussed composer, but writing about it in a quite independent way. That is, I always had the sense that he was writing about Milton Babbitt's music in a way that was not at all the way Milton Babbitt writes about music. Well, Milton Babbitt never writes in so much extensive detail about particular pieces of music. . . . He never did. To the extent that he did—for example in *Words About Music*, when he writes about Schoenberg's Wind Quintet—he did not write at all in the way that Joe does. So I think Joe's writing there is another example of having varieties of discourse that were pretty detailed, but varied from one person to another. In this case, the composer's writing as compared to the writing of one of his students. That is one of the fascinating potentials of discourse about music.

Of course, in the pages of *PNM*, I was also able to learn more about Milton Babbitt pieces that I like. . . . Like "Semi-Simple Variations"—there is an article by Christopher Wintle (1976) and another by Elaine Barkin ("A Simple Approach to Milton Babbitt's *Semi-Simple Variations*," *Music Review* 28/4: 316–22, 1967). Different ways of looking at twelve-tone music, articles by David Lewin, such as the one on segmental association (1962) . . . Actually, there is one called "On Partial Ordering" (Lewin 1976).

Stefan Wolpe! I always loved Stefan Wolpe's music from the moment I first heard the Quartet for Tenor Saxophone, Trumpet, Piano, and Percussion, and I was really grateful to get to read some about his music in Martin Brody's article, "Sensibility Defined: Set Projection in Stefan Wolpe's *FORM for Piano*" (1977).

So if you are into this music, and you turn the pages of *Perspectives*, you come to expect that you can learn more about music that you already like, knowing that learning more about it will actually advance your appreciation further, at least in my case. And there's a constant flow of new musical repertoires and new orientation into the pages of *PNM*. At least one of the articles by DiScipio is particularly worthwhile in this regard.

Ian Quinn's continuous quantity orientation toward discrete harmonic spaces (using Fourier balances) has definitely reoriented some of my thinking as a theorist. Those three *PNM* articles of his helped me put in perspective some of the "natural kinds" epistemology I found objectionable in his earlier *PNM* article "Listening to Similarity Relations." In these newer articles (which are from his Eastman dissertation) I started to find his thinking on chord quality resonated with ideas I was developing about dynamic form—what I would develop into the concept of a *vessel* of form, and that there might be more than one to choose from, depending on what's appropriate for the analytical situation.

I found Douglas Rust's (2004) article on Lutosławski very helpful when I taught a seminar on Dynamism, Processive Form, and Philosophy (University of Maryland). The seminar students, most of whom were composers, really took to that article. Barry Truax's "Composing with Real-Time Granular Sound" (1990) has been helpful as a point of reference for my thinking about form. Morris's "Footnote to Hasty, Whitehead, and Plato" (2002) affirmed some of my thinking on this. His "Compositional Spaces and Other Territories" (1995) is a landmark text that should be required reading for all those somewhat musically naïve interactive music system developers out there—if they only knew. . . .

VANDAGRIFF: Were you introduced to some new ideas about music through *Perspectives*?

MAILMAN: Yeah. Lots of ideas apparently, though it's not always easy to remember where I was introduced to a new idea, or to what extent it is *new*, to me. Well, let's see: segmental association is one specific take on twelve-tone music that gets a lot of mileage in my analytical practices—and even more so in those of Dora Hanninen for instance. But there are many other ideas, some of which are hard for me to articulate because, I suppose, I've synthesized them to the point I lack sufficient distance to isolate them in my thinking. But let me see . . . The ideas that resonated . . . we talked about that earlier. I think the things that I was introduced to through the journal would be approaches to analysis. I would say that I built up my repertoire of analytical techniques a lot through reading these articles, like the Lewin article on segmental association. "Inversional Balance"—that is another Lewin article (1968), and his one on hexachordal levels (1967). Arthur Berger—"Pitch Organization in Stravinsky" (1963)—he talked about octatonic sets in there, and how this observation sheds light on Stravinsky's *Petrushka* for instance. In fact, I remember being in

a course at Eastman in which Matthew Brown was talking about Stravinsky, and he went on about Peter van den Toorn and octatonic, and I said, “Wait a minute! Peter van den Toorn isn’t the one that came up with this. It is from the Arthur Berger article!” He was sort of stunned. . . . Like, “Does anybody really know about that?” (laughter.) “Yes, I know it!” I guess Arthur Berger didn’t pull it out of thin air either; but anyway his *PNM* article about it was my frame of reference for that.

Then there was what Ben talks about in “Meta-Variations” in regard to *Tristan*. I guess it was a new idea, because I didn’t know about it beforehand, but the diminished seventh chord symmetry that Ben Boretz discusses in “Meta-Variations,” that analysis of *Tristan*. I would say that was a pretty new way for me to think about that. But I didn’t know that it was “new” because I was just a college student back then: everything was new. The “Meta-Variations” Webern Op. 5, No. 4 analysis is classic.

Pitch-class consciousness . . . There is that pitch-class oriented article about Wolpe by Brody. And then that “Pitch-Class Consciousness” article by Paul Lansky (1975) . . . Just the fact that they’d focus at all on this concept definitely oriented my thinking pretty early on. Certainly those influenced my thinking to the extent that now, for example, I am doing work on interactive technologies with an infrared camera and controller gloves and things like that to control and algorithm that manipulates pitch-class and register independently of each other. . . .

Perhaps it’s been possible to plan out and think through such kinds of algorithmic interactivity because such concepts as pitch class are deeply synthesized into my thinking. They fuel rather than hinder my creativity. With lots of other interactive technologies that are based on swarming algorithms, or whatever, really what you hear are things going louder and softer and higher and lower. The expression you hear is so old-hat. To me those are sort of the most banal features of music, so I have it deeply planted in me to go for more nuanced kinds of flux in music. I think that is partly from, or I guess it is from, reading these articles, or listening to this music, or thinking about what these articles have to say about such music as Schoenberg, Varèse, Wolpe, Carter, Davidoswky, Babbitt, Martino, and so forth—having enough confidence in the discourse to follow deeply and often where other minds have gone in regard to such music.

The other side of all of this is twelve-tone music. This is another area in which I find a big difference between myself and other people. For me, twelve-tone music has been pretty much the center point of my interest in modern music. It isn’t the only interest, and doesn’t even make up the lion’s share of what I listen to and like, but I always see it as a point of reference. Of course, there are many articles about this in

Perspectives. If there is any journal that advances twelve-tone music research, it would be *Perspectives*; that's obvious. You have these articles on multiple-order function, rows . . . I am not really a twelve-tone composer, so they haven't really influenced my practice, but just the knowledge of them, an awareness, I would guess, has influenced how I have analyzed and written about some of Babbitt's music, for instance in my doctoral dissertation. It is especially pertinent if you combine this awareness with what Joe Dubiel writes about surface versus array in his article "What's the Use of the Twelve-Tone System" (1997).

VANDAGRIFF: You have not talked a lot about your composing explicitly, until now. . . .

MAILMAN: . . . I think the connection to *Perspectives* there is more indirect for me than it probably is for other people. Because my sort of "surge" in creative activities has really grown out of my doctoral dissertation work, which is on dynamic form. I wrote this long, "Meta-Variations"—length doctoral dissertation on the way that you can find form from flux of emergent properties in music, often quite unconventional emergent properties that don't even have names. I would say that is pretty indirectly related to things I read in *Perspectives*, but related to the music that interests me, which probably motivated me to read *Perspectives*. But there is an article that I remember looking at called "Modes of Explanation in Analytical Discourse" by Henry Martin (1977), which talks a bit about notation, or the biases that notation imposes on music analysis. This, together with some other articles such as Bob Morris's "Form, Attention, Quality . . ." in *Open Space Magazine*, was pretty helpful for me when writing my doctoral dissertation, because they emboldened me to develop and articulate the line of thinking that I was already pursuing, and I suppose indirectly influenced the kind of interactive music-making I am doing now. I say that because the interactive music-making I do now is not notational—it is algorithmic (never goes through a notational stage), and the kind of things the algorithm and interactivity focus on are things that I think are obscured by notation. So even in *Perspectives* you see a view articulated (by Martin) that goes against the grain of more notationally oriented, analytical views you see talked about in other articles in *Perspectives*. That is kind of interesting.

The other thing is (and this relates to it), I remember having a discussion with Robert Morris, in 2000, I think. I was developing an extensive analysis of Babbitt's saxophone piece, *Whirled Series* (1987). Bob and I were talking about twelve-tone, all-partition arrays, and he commented on something I said about how I think I hear the array on

the surface, or what of the array is, or can be, heard on the surface (thinking I subsequently developed with more rigorous force in my PhD dissertation). Bob's comment was something like, "Well, with these all-partitional arrays, the point is to get to know the array, and by getting to know the array, that is the way that you get to know how the array influences the surface." So I think either then or a little bit after that I heard something that Ben Boretz said to me, or maybe I read something that he wrote, that said something about . . . How did he put it? It was something like "Creative responses to music," or "One's Own *Re* . . ." It was in his contribution to the millennium volume of *Intégral* (2000/2001), let's see, on p. 67 "Creative interaction with one's own musical experience is a radically different kind of theorizing, trading in authoritative prescription for imaginative recreation." Reading this made me realize I was already engaging with music in this way. I was doing it through algorithm design.

. . . Only recently did I see that I could develop these interactive technologies based on similar principles, and that has expanded from there. That is a pretty indirect connection to *Perspectives*, but it is a connection. It has a few connections, I think.

You know, there are lots of other connections to different articles here, but they relate more to analytical technique than to composition. I guess I have mentioned the ones that were important to me that were published up through 1980, and some more recently. . . .

There have been some interesting things on Xenakis, and Dora Hanninen has published a few things in *Perspectives* that have been interesting with regard to segmentation (1997; 2002; 2006) and biological species (2009). Yet some of this I knew about from her doctoral dissertation which I read with much interest.

VANDAGRIFF: It is really interesting to hear about . . . I don't know how to put it, but how you have oriented and orbited around so much that has gone on in and around *Perspectives*, and you have found so many things in the journal that have been really valuable to you. That is pretty amazing.

MAILMAN: It was actually quite a surprise when you wrote to me about this. I hadn't really thought about all of this before. I have to say, certainly Benjamin Boretz's "Meta-Variations"—and I haven't read every page—but just the fact of it, and what I have read, looms large in my thinking. And, of course, I have been a fan of Milton Babbitt's music *forever*. That is really important.

Oh! I know one other article I read sort of recently that was interesting, and that was the one by Wayne Slawson on "Sound Color"

(2005). That was a pretty interesting article, and not just about sound color, but about phenomenology, and systematizing based on phenomenology. . . . Wayne is great. His music is really cool, actually. It is distinctly original and has permanently changed how I listen and how I think about listening to music; this is partly because it has incredibly interesting connections to the ideas of embodiment, embodied mind, which are currently in vogue, for good reason. Each new piece of Wayne's that I hear, I like better than the previous—well, perhaps I still like his *Rap Soft* (2000) best. . . .

VANDAGRIFF Do you still talk with Ben, Bob, or John?

MAILMAN: I don't really know John Rahn well. I think I have met him a couple of times, and of course I know his work, his article on Babbitt's *Du*, for instance (1976). Speaking of that, there was an article he wrote about repetition ("Repetition," *Contemporary Music Review*, 7: 49–93 (1993)), the merits of which I didn't grasp at first. Then Dora Hanninen wrote another article where she expanded on Rahn's ideas (Dora Hanninen, "A Theory of Recontextualization in Music: Analyzing Phenomenal Transformations of Repetition," *Music Theory Spectrum*, 25/2: 59–98 (2003)) in a way that made a lot of sense to me and increased my appreciation for the original Rahn article. (I expanded on this in the fourth chapter my PhD dissertation.) The whole process was interesting. In my writing I also reflect on Rahn's ideas about network models, in his contribution to Atlas and Cherlin's 1995 *Musical Transformations and Intuitions: A Festschrift for David Lewin*.

Bob Morris—I went to Eastman primarily to study with Bob Morris—I remember, perhaps it was the first time I met Milton Babbitt in lobby of Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center; I mentioned that I was planning to go to grad school for music theory. He asked me where. When I mentioned Eastman (I might have mentioned Robert Morris's name specifically—don't remember) a certain look came over his face and he remarked—in an even deeper than usual voice—on what a serious place it is. What an impression that made! I was even more intrigued, and I did end up going there. On many levels Bob and his work have been really important and influential for me both for affirming and emboldening my prior thinking and for challenging and stretching it beyond; of course we stay in touch.

Ben Boretz—I think I originally corresponded with him in the late 1990s—before I went to graduate school. I wrote a reply essay (commentary) to *Music Theory Online* called "The Aims of Music Theory and Neurath's Boat: A Reply to Jonathan Walker and Matthew Brown" (Vol. 2.4). It was sort of a defense of Babbitt, Boretz, and

Rahn—all of whose ideas I thought were grossly misrepresented. OK, my writing then has its own unsophisticated aspects, and I was a bit too shrill and dismissive of various diverse aspects of music theory, some of which I have since come to appreciate. What do you expect?—it was a long time ago. But anyway I think the basic idea of the article still holds up—and resonates with some of what I said closer to the start of this interview—and I’ve been gratified to see resonant ideas articulated by Stephen Peles and Adam Croom since then. I re-articulated these yet differently again in my “Seven Metaphors for (Music) Listening” article in the *Journal of Sonic Studies* (2012). Anyway, when the original *MTO* essay was published, Boretz wrote me an email. I was sort of surprised: “Oh my goodness, Benjamin Boretz is writing to me.” He was very nice, friendly, open, unintimidating, genuine—which I suppose shouldn’t have surprised me since I had also met Milton Babbitt a few times and he too was as warm as could be—though he didn’t use email, by the way.

I don’t remember when Ben and I actually met in person for the first time, but it might have been in 2004 when he came to Eastman to speak, or in 2005, for John Forshee’s performance of “Language ,as a Music.” I hung out with him a lot then. We met a couple of times, and we talked for hours. It was very, very interesting, because I connected with him in what was to me an unusual way, ranging fluently over many disparate topics. It was amazing to me, because he had a perspective that was, to me, really helpful for putting into focus some of the ideas of Robert Morris and David Lewin and things I was thinking about both before and since I arrived at Eastman. I appreciated it very much, still do. For example, we were talking about theories, and the idea of theory—and I think at that time he was a lot more down on music theory than he is now, but I don’t know. We were talking about theories perhaps because I wanted to address some of his recently articulated views that I didn’t think I agreed with. So I think I said to him, “You are sort of suggesting that theory is only possible if you have a syntax, or when you are stating what the rules of the particular piece of music can be, or possible rules of it.” And he said, “Well, yeah, what else is it?” And I said, “Well, couldn’t it also be a set of tools?” I was then channeling Bob Morris in a way that made sense to me, still does, and is even related to things I read by David Lewin from a long time ago, related to what I understand about aesthetics, “critical communication,” and the work I continue to do, including that in the cybernetic phenomenological vein, in which I see some of Lewin’s and Roeder’s work. In any case I was channeling the way Bob Morris articulates it in terms of “tools” and “toolchest” when replying to Ben: “Couldn’t theory also be a set of *tools* that you use to help influence you when

hearing music, to hear new things in music, or to help you project or present to other people how to hear different nuances that you might not have noticed?” And Ben said, “Yes, but then any musical instrument is a theory.” And I said, “Well, okay, yeah, I will buy that. Any piece you play on a new instrument, or if you compose a piece for an instrument that didn’t exist before . . .” (Which, by the way, is happening a lot right now—witness the yearly New Interfaces for Musical Expression (NIME) conference, which used to be called New Instruments for . . . It is what a lot of current musical innovation is focused on—making new instruments, or new interfaces—which are hard to distinguish from instruments as it turns out—especially in the growing context of interactive music systems. That is something we see now, but I didn’t see that back then when I was having that conversation, seven years ago, with Ben.) So, then, of course, a theory, too, is a kind of conceptual interface, in that it mediates between your hearing, your thinking, your presentation of the music. So then the distinction between an instrument and a theory becomes difficult to maintain. Ben hit on it immediately, articulating with clarity something so prescient as that.

Anyway, I went to Bob Morris with this comment, curious what his reaction would be. He agreed with the way Ben articulated it. So that was interesting, because here I was talking to Ben Boretz about something that probably would not have come up in a conversation between Bob Morris and me. Also I don’t think that that would have been a conversation that those two would have necessarily have had with each other. But you see how these things come around if you address the right questions to the right people. In that conversation with Ben, there were also some things about David Lewin that came up because I was interested in what Ben thought about, what was to me, frustratingly simplistic propaganda in how some people at that time saw Lewin’s transformational theory (as opposed to pc-set theory) relating to phenomenology of listening. I was gratified that Ben could see right through the ontological overgrowth that seem to snag so many others (mostly peers in some other graduate programs).

The interesting thing in talking to Ben and Bob, about each other’s ideas (and those of Lewin and Forte, etc.) and things like this, is that, unlike most of the professional music theorists you encounter, they are not knee-deep in ideologies; they are not so invested in whatever the latest trends in music theory are, or in trying to pin down music to universal rules, so they can converse more flexibly and have an intellectually honest conversation, which keeps me hopeful.