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SILENT INVOCATIONS:
Music, Sublimation, and Social Transformation

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

at Massey University, Albany

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2011

ABSTRACT

On the premise that human subjectivity and social bonds are formed through language, Lacanian psychoanalysis is utilised in contemporary cultural and social-political theory as an analytic tool to explore human relationality, identity formation and to ascertain the dynamics of social life in the hope that the worst manifestations of violence and exploitation might be averted. The Lacanian wager suggests that any significant and lasting transformation of human relationality requires the reconfiguration of the unconscious co-ordinates of subjectivity through a particular practice of speech and speaking. In this assertion, however, Lacanian theory appears to present a point of impasse around the inability for the kernel of the human condition (the Lacanian Real) to be negotiated by purely symbolic means. Given that music and musical practices are closely allied to the structure of language and its temporal articulation as speech, but have remained outside psychoanalytic theorisation, this thesis approaches the Lacanian opus from the perspective of artistic musical practices to reassess the mechanisms that forge and reshape human relations and social formations. If cultural practices are the fulcrum upon which the entwining of the social-political realm and singular instances of subjectivity emerge, then artistic practices and processes – especially musical improvisation and composition – offer a particularly felicitous model to explore and explicate the mechanisms and conditions of contingent possibility through which reconfigurations of social-political life might occur. Applying a wide range of theoretical and practical musical knowledge to the close reading of the English translations of Jacques Lacan's Seminars and writings, this thesis makes the case that 'music' (understood as a performative and creative trans-subjective act of structuring sound) constitutes an alternative form of artistic 'writing practice', and a viewpoint from which a productive analysis and creative expansion of psychoanalytic theory can justifiably be envisaged. To this end, it also identifies the need to reconsider the prevailing emphasis on unconscious fantasy and its traversal in post-Marxist debates, in favour of a rearticulation of the efficacy of artistic practices that Lacan considered to be a privileged form of sublimation capable of social transformation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many individuals and institutions who have contributed to this project. First and foremost, thanks are owed to my academic supervisors: Dr Warwick Tie (Sociology), for his knowledgeable guidance, persistent enthusiasm, confidence and friendship; and Dr Jenny Lawn (English and Media Studies), for her support in the formative stages of the project and her valuable knowledge of Freud. I am also grateful to Dr Lucy Holmes (University of Auckland) and the Centre for Lacanian Analysis (CLA); Massey University, for their award of a doctoral scholarship; Leanne Menzies and Dot Cavanagh, for their administrative support; and my fellow post-graduate students in the School of Social and Cultural Studies for their camaraderie over the past five years. I would also like to acknowledge the formative influence and support of the musicians, teachers and colleagues I have worked with over the years: Frank Clayton Oxley (violin); Harold Colombatti (musicianship); Ethel Strickland, Phyllis Moore and Jennifer Calder (piano); Professor Uwe-Alexander Grodd (flute); my colleagues and friends (past and present) at the Nelson School of Music; members of the Nelson Symphony Orchestra and the wider Nelson music community; and the many students it has been my privilege to learn from across thirty years of teaching and playing music together. More personal thanks are owed to the friends who have offered moral support and devoted time to countless conversations about music, education, literature, art, family, and life: Emma Duncan; Jo Rollason; Adam Tipper; Megan Bolitho; Paul Windeatt; Karen Bolitho; the late Angie Rollo; and Margery Chilton (who has also, at various times, provided incomparable hospitality and a tranquil writing retreat). Finally, heartfelt thanks are owed to my family. The dedication and commitment required to complete this study has been entirely eclipsed by their encouragement, wisdom, and enduring support. In particular, I wish to acknowledge my late parents – Vic and Anne Johansen – who gave the invaluable foundational gift of a family life enriched by music; my daughter and son – Sally and Matthew – who blazed the doctoral trail ahead of me, and who continue to inspire me on a daily basis; and, above all, my husband Grant whose love and support for us all has truly been beyond measure or words.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- E* Lacan, J. (2006). *Écrits* (B. Fink, Trans.). New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company. (Original French text published 1966)
- SIII Lacan, J. (1993). *Seminar III: The psychoses (1955-1956)* (J-A. Miller, Ed. and R. Grigg, Trans.). New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company.
- SVII Lacan, J. (1992). *Seminar VII: The ethics of psychoanalysis (1959-1960)* (J-A. Miller, Ed. and D. Porter, Trans.). New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company.
- SVIII Lacan, J. (n.d.) *Seminar VIII: Transference (1960-1961)* (C. Gallagher, Trans.). Unpublished transcription.
- SX Lacan, J. (n.d.) *Seminar X: Anxiety (1962-1963)* (C. Gallagher, Trans.). Unpublished transcription.
- SXI Lacan, J. (1981). *Seminar XI: The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis* (J-A. Miller, Ed. and A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company.
- SXX Lacan, J. (1998). *Seminar XX: The limits of love and knowledge (1972-1973)* (J-A. Miller, Ed. and B. Fink, Trans.). New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company.
- SE Freud, S. (1955). *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (J. Strachey, Ed. and Trans.). 24 vols. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis.