

II.

~~1. Origins. 2. 1977 onwards.~~

1. ORIGINS. Disco emerged from clubs in New York City that catered primarily to African-American, Latino and gay subcultures. Based on the 'sweet' soul sounds popularized by the Motown and Philadelphia International recording companies, disco also included funk and Latin elements, and initially included a stylistically diverse range of songs. Its impact extended beyond musical style, challenging prevalent notions in popular music criticism about authorship and creativity. The central figure in this challenge was the DJ. Because DJs were responsible for selecting and sequencing songs, it was their taste that dictated disco's sense of style rather than the singers and instrumentalists of soul and rock musics; successful DJ's could acquire their own following in much the same way as a recording artist. In fact, the disco DJs predilection for reconfiguring existing recordings by fading out of one song and into another led to the recording industry's invention of the 12-inch single, designed for easier editing. DJs shared the creative locus of the disco scene with the audience itself, as the focus on dancing stressed social interaction.

of seeing has survival value. For danger, more often than not, comes from things that have faces (and jaws). However that may be—whatever the proper explanation—that we do see faces and figures in perceptual patterns or ambiguous drawings, and not usually the other things they may even more closely resemble, seems to be an irrefutable, brute fact. And if that much is granted, I think it will be allowed that I am hardly making a very *outré* claim when I assert that we hear music as speech, utterance, gesture, bodily movement, and so on.

What I am arguing, then, is that we tend to "animate" sounds as well as sights. Music may resemble many other things besides human expressions. But just as we see the face in the circle, and the human form in the wooden spoon, we hear the gesture and the utterance in the music, and not another thing. I do not suggest, of course, that this is an entirely conscious, or self-conscious phenomenon. On the contrary, it is so natural as to go for the most part unnoticed. But only a moment's reflection on the way we talk about music will reveal, I think, how deeply "animistic" our perception of it really is. A musical theme is frequently described as a "gesture." A fugue subject is a "statement"; it is "answered" at the fifth by the next "statement" of the theme. A "voice" is still what musicians call a part in a polyphonic composition, even if the part is meant to be played on an instrument rather than sung by a voice. Violins as well as sopranos are instructed to sound *sotto voce*. A pianist is advised to cultivate a "singing" tone. A good woodwind is said to "speak" easily. And it is an age-old observation that instruments in musical ensembles seem like partakers in a conversation. Literature and musical criticism are rife with such descriptions. My own particular favorite is this passage from Thomas Mace's musical miscellanea, *Musick's Monument* of 1676, in which the author describes some of the ensemble music of his day as follows: "We had for our *Grave Music, Fancies* of 3, 4, 5, and 6 *Parts* to the *Organ*; Interpos'd (now and then) with some *Pavins, Allmaines, Solemn, and Sweet Delightful Ayres*; all which were (as it were) so many *Pathetical Stories, Rhetorical, and Sublime Discourses; Subtil, and Accute Argumentations*. . . ."¹ In short, our descriptions, and perceptions of music are redolent with animistic, anthropomorphic implications.

Richard Wollheim observes that "when we endow a natural object or an artifact with expressive meaning, we tend to see it