

# LIFE AS AN AESTHETIC IDEA OF MUSIC

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LIFE AS AN AESTHETIC IDEA OF MUSIC

edited by Manos Perrakis

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MANOS PERRAKIS

## Preface

The volume at hand is based on the symposium *Music as a Metaphor for Life. Allure and Hazard*, held from the 2<sup>nd</sup> until the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2017 at the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz (KUG). It presents an inquiry about life as an aesthetic idea of music. If music, above all purely instrumental, ‘absolute’ music expresses aesthetic ideas,<sup>1</sup> and even the idea of the aesthetic idea itself as an affective substrate of language and culture, as Immanuel Kant claimed,<sup>2</sup> then the most inclusive aesthetic idea cannot be but *life*.

That life is the most inclusive idea of music is an intuition shared both by philosophers and musicians, musicians influenced by philosophers, and philosophers under the influence of literary authors, all that in a perfectly circular manner that seems to fully justify the characterization of music as an enduring metaphor. Wilhelm Dilthey, the central figure behind *Lebensphilosophie* [life-philosophy or philosophy of life], the movement which reiterated the romantic elevation of music and consolidated its primacy in the hierarchy of arts by promoting the idea of life as an aesthetic idea of music, declared that what instrumental music in its highest forms expresses is the indefinite object of life.<sup>3</sup> No wonder then that there have been compositions ambitious enough to address this most inclusive idea directly in their titles and programmes. (And when music and words come together, music either enlivens/affirms a content or it prevails over / depotentiates it as, to use an expression by Rainer Maria Rilke, the more ‘naive’<sup>4</sup>, *i.e.* lively element. The liveliness of music works as the denominator for the aesthetic idea proposed by words. Perhaps.)

The most prominent example of the aesthetic idea of life in music is Carl Nielsen’s Fourth Symphony with the notorious title *The Inextinguishable*. Its motto *Music is life, and, like life, inextinguishable*, means both the inextinguishable character of life and of music as the art that conveys a

feeling of presence that can neither be stilled nor fully satisfied. This is a motto that can be read as a minimalist's summary of life-philosophical tenets that map both music and life between the abundant and the inextinguishable.

If the object of life is indefinite, a necessarily complementary strategy to approach life as an aesthetic idea of music is to trace the aesthetic ideas closest to it; aesthetic ideas that present life as a dynamic movement of becoming, as a drama of forces, an interplay of allure and danger, or even hazard. And indeed: this is the path most contributions take. Subjectivity, process, heroism, emerging presence, eccentric positionality, virtual temporality, all these are ideas that explicate and contour the indefinite object of life, transcend and dramatize it, remaining however not less abstract. Others address the issue of biography as real or fictive role play, an issue which could have hardly been absent from a volume dedicated to music and life.

Finally, the editor would like to thank the authors for contributing to a highly experimental volume; the Austrian Science Foundation (FWF) for funding the Grazer symposium; the Styrian Government and the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz for funding this publication; Andreas Dorschel for accepting this volume for the series *Studien zur Wertungsforschung*; and Maria Klinger for her keen assistance.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Kant defines an aesthetic idea as a “representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e. concept, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible. —” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, Cambridge 2002, p. 192. For Kant's aesthetic idea see Friedrich Kaulbach, *Ästhetische Welterkenntnis bei Kant*, Würzburg 1984. For aesthetic ideas in music see Hermann Danuser, *Weltanschauungsmusik*, Schliengen 2009. Danuser highlights seven aesthetic ideas in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century music: community, education, religion, heroism, love, nature/universe (Allnatur). However, he does not refer to the aesthetic idea of life.
- <sup>2</sup> “Its [art of tone] charm, which can be communicated so universally, seems to rest on this: that every expression of language, has, in context, a tone that is appropriate to its sense; that this tone more or less designates an affect of the speaker and conversely also produces one in the hearer, which then in turn



arouses in the latter the idea that is expressed in the language by means of such a tone; and that, just as modulation is as it were a language of sensations universally comprehensible to every human being, the art of tone puts that language into practice for itself alone, in all its force, namely as a language of affects, and so, in accordance with the law of association, universally communicates the aesthetic ideas that are naturally combined with it; however, since those aesthetic ideas are not concepts nor determinate thoughts, the form of the composition of these sensations (harmony and melody) serves only, instead of the form of a language, to express, by means of a proportionate disposition of them (which, since in the case of tones it rests on the relation of the number of the vibrations of the air in the same time, insofar as the tones are combined at the same time or successively, can be mathematically subsumed under certain rules), the aesthetic ideas of a coherent whole of an unutterable fullness of thought, corresponding to a certain theme, which constitutes the dominant affect in the piece.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (note 1), pp. 205–206.

- <sup>3</sup> “Instrumental music has no definite object – only something infinite and therefore indeterminate, something that can only be found in life itself. Thus instrumental music in its highest forms has life itself as an object.” Wilhelm Dilthey, ‘On Understanding Music’, in *Music in European Thought 1851–1912*, ed. Bojan Bujić, Cambridge 2008, pp. 371–374, 374.

- <sup>4</sup> “In jedem Werke einer der Künste müssen alle Wirkungen ‘der Kunst’ erfüllt sein. Ein Gemälde darf keines Textes, eine Statue keiner Farbe – im malerischen Sinne – und ein Gedicht keiner Musik brauchen, vielmehr muß in jedem alles enthalten sein. Nur ein so willkürlicher und grober Rahmen wie die Bühne konnte daher auch eine Vereinigung von Text und Musik befürworten, wie sie in der Oper und Operette zutage trifft. Daß dabei die Musik *als das naivere Element das sieghafte bleibt* [emphasis added], spricht nur für die Ungerechtigkeit einer derartigen Vermählung.”

[Every work of one of the arts should contain all the effects produced by the ‘art’. A painting should not need a text, a statue should not need a colour – in terms of peinture – a poem should not need music; every work should contain it all. Therefore, only such a frivolous and clumsy framework like the stage could also advocate a union of text and music, as we have it nowadays in the opera and the operetta. That music, *as the more naive element, prevails* [emphasis added], is indicative of the injustice of such a marriage.] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Das Florenzer Tagebuch*, Frankfurt a. M. 1982, p. 44. My translation.



BENEDICT TAYLOR

## Schubert's *E♭ Trio* D. 929 and Models of Music Subjectivity

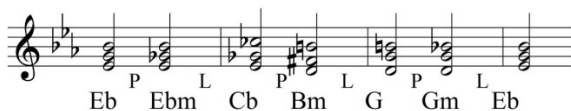
Music is the art of subjectivity – or so a long-standing truism, dating at least back to the second half of the eighteenth century, would have us believe – and in considering the idea of ‘music as a metaphor for life’, the notion of musical subjectivity proves especially pertinent. In fact, some model of musical subjectivity is almost invariably going to be proposed, implicitly or otherwise, in making the conceptual movement between music and life.<sup>1</sup> The task of the present essay is to look at a particular instrumental work which may exemplify both the allure and the hazard of the music-as-life metaphor, and more specifically I would like to highlight some interpretative problems suggested by music in this regard, foregrounding the models of subjectivity that underlie them. The nineteenth century is not short of potential examples for such purposes, but there are surely few better places to look than to the music of Franz Schubert.

Schubert's *Second Piano Trio in E♭ major*, D. 929, dating from November 1827, is celebrated for several reasons: for the dizzying harmonic cycles in the first movement; for the haunting despondency of the second movement *Andante con moto*; and for the cyclic return of this same theme, quite unexpectedly, within the course of the finale.<sup>2</sup> (As might be perceived, the third-movement scherzo gets somewhat short shrift here: indeed, the extent to which the metaphorical attribution of life is selectively applied to parts but not wholes of multi-movement cycles is conspicuous in the present discussion.) I am interested for the purposes of this chapter in the first and last of these: the harmonic cycles of the first movement, and the cyclic return of the second movement in the fourth.

For those who are not so well acquainted with the first movement, I should explain that we find here a remarkable series of harmonic shifts through equal interval cycles that have caused much comment from music

theorists, especially from within the Neo-Riemannian turn taken by North American musicology since the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> The first appearance of these is a partial major-third cycle found in a passage that occupies a curious position between the primary theme and transition in the exposition (bars 48–66); this passage recurs again, transposed, in the recapitulation (bars 434–52), and then is finally heard in complete form (spiralling through an entire major-third cycle) in the movement’s coda (bars 585–614; see fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Schubert, *Piano Trio in E♭ major*, D. 929, I, bars 585–614 (harmonic reduction), appearance in coda of complete (‘Western’) hexatonic cycle.



Such cycles are commonly referred to as *hexatonic* cycles – a cycle because they return to the opening harmony after a given number of stages (in this instance six), and hexatonic because all six triads visited in a complete cycle use only six notes in total (realisable as a six-note scale of alternating minor thirds and semitones). They are also examples of ‘maximally smooth’ triadic progressions, in that each triad differs from its neighbours by a single, semitonal voice-leading (in Neo-Riemannian operators, P–L [Parallel–Leittonwechsel]).

Complementary to this are the three huge blocks sequencing a row of minor-third shifts that occupy virtually the entire development section (fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Schubert, D. 929, I, harmonic reduction of development section, bars 195–337, showing octatonic cycles.

195  
Partial octatonic cycle:  
missing  $A\flat$  (IV)

247  
Partial octatonic cycle:  
missing  $E\flat$  (I)

299  
Completes cycle  
 $B\flat$  (V)

These may be known as *octatonic* cycles: here there are eight stages for a complete cycle, giving a total of eight notes, corresponding to the octatonic scale of alternating semitones and tones. The voice leading is still smooth, but not as smooth as the hexatonic cycle discussed above (in Neo-Riemannian operators, P–R [Parallel–Relative]). Again, the first two occurrences are incomplete: Schubert presents three stations of the four minor thirds given by the equal division of the octave the first two times round, before giving us all four in the final block. Here, however, the music does not return back to the initial point and hence does not complete the cycle, as will happen in the coda with the major-third cycle.

In the finale, meanwhile, there is something fantastically fatalistic about the way in which the second movement theme materialises as a ghostly revenant near the start of the development (bar 278), now darkened from C minor into the key of B minor (#v of the tonic E♭, heard enharmonically as an abrupt minor Neapolitan to the secondary key of B♭ in which the exposition had closed), before being reheard in E♭ minor in the coda, turning to the tonic major only at the very end. The harmonic regions it excavates sound unsuspected depths, continuing the exploration of Neapolitan relations and chromatic third-relations found throughout the work and particularly this movement.

This doleful theme is completely unexpected here, and therein lies part of the negative effect. It should, by rights, have been left behind. For a start, it is from an earlier movement, and while such cyclic recall is not unprecedented (we might think of Beethoven's *Fifth*, or Schubert's own *Violin Fantasy in C*, or indeed several early works of Mendelssohn), it is still highly uncommon at this time. Moreover, the work had already seemed to make its peace with that theme in the coda to the earlier movement. In that passage (bars 196–212, marked *un poco più lento*), the successive liquidation of the theme's basic idea, alongside a chromatic descending inner line and subdominant emphasis, seemed to offer some partial amelioration to its final appearance, ending in a triple *piano* calm.<sup>4</sup> Its re-materialisation now in the finale is thus of something that had appeared to have been laid to rest.

Yet the shock of this returning theme may be obliquely prefigured in the strange passage of C minor that, in parallel to the opening movement, occupies a curious limbo between primary and subordinate theme areas in the finale's exposition: an apparition, existing enigmatically within the form,

statically reiterative in its threefold thematic presentation, its repeated rhythmic figures calling to mind that similar phantom in the first movement as well as the tramping accompaniment to the *Andante*, and perhaps most significantly of all revisiting the latter's C minor tonality.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, this interpolated passage intrudes again towards the end of the exposition, following the failure of the subordinate theme to maintain a decisive cadential close in the dominant Bb.<sup>6</sup> To this extent the interruption of negatively charged minor-key music in the submediant had already been presaged in the movement.<sup>7</sup>

The connection with an idea of 'life' is as alluring here as it is elusive to justify. There is something in Schubert's fatalistic repetitions that seems to chime with a more disillusioned, Romantic, 'realistic' view of human existence. What is so gripping about this cyclic recall is the sense in which this unwanted intrusion, this inability to escape from earlier events, seems to ring so psychologically true, to give us an unvarnished picture of 'how the world really is' or seems, on occasion, to be – essentially miserable, haunted by the baleful spectres of the past. (I was reminded of a line by Schopenhauer from *Parerga and Paralipomena*: "In such a world where there is no stability of any kind [and] no lasting state is possible...happiness is not even conceivable."<sup>8</sup> Compare this with the saying attributed – perhaps apocryphally – to Schubert: "do you know any happy music? I don't [...]"). More even than in the first movement, this music seems to invite – demand – a response on the part of the listener in terms of the tribulations of an aesthetic protagonist or 'persona' (in Edward T. Cone's terminology).<sup>9</sup> But trying to pin this down any more precisely becomes beset with problems. What is returning – an event external to the supposed aesthetic protagonist, or something within the musical subject's own consciousness? Or even, to use the landscape and peripatetic metaphors that are well-nigh *de rigueur* for discussing Schubert, is the solitary wanderer's journey looping back on itself, revisiting an earlier terrain?<sup>10</sup>

We might think the returning element is external to the aesthetic subject: there seems after all to be something unsolicited, unwelcome about the recall – the implacable workings of fate, stern, objective, and unrelenting (akin to the recurrence of the 'fate' theme in the finale of Tchaikovsky's *Fourth Symphony*). Yet it is a lyrical, songlike theme – a common, if not quintessential marker of subjectivity.<sup>11</sup> And where can we draw the line between the virtual subject we hear in the music and the world external to this subject? If internal, on the other hand, why does the recall seem marked

by such otherness and inexplicable dread? How can we distinguish between what is given by the subject's own agency and that which appears to emerge contrary to its volition, though somehow still remains part of this subject? (This is not a new question of course: I would like to recommend here Seth Monahan's valuable recent essay on the attribution of agency in writings on music, which unravels some of these concerns.)<sup>12</sup> External, internal – or is the distinction unhelpful?

The problem I'm wanting to investigate in both the above examples is not with the music, but with what I would consider are standard models used to describe music: how to describe it in a way which seems to do justice to the expressive effect, rather than fit it more-or-less uncomfortably into generally accepted paradigms. We may start with the first movement.

It maybe helpful here to set Schubert's practice against what I call the 'dramatic' paradigm. Classical-Romantic instrumental music – above all that based on sonata form – is often viewed as the metaphorical journey of a fictional protagonist, "the almost universal critical concept of the anthropomorphic subject" in Scott Burnham's apt choice of phrase – "the musical theme that acts as a dramatic protagonist whose tribulations and triumphs comprise for the listener a deeply engaging psychological process".<sup>13</sup> The journey of this subject may be akin to that of the thematic subject across the work, or it may seem to be the case that the whole music is a composite subject that overcomes obstacles (presented paradoxically by itself) and attains certain goals.<sup>14</sup> This viewpoint, present in some form since at least the early nineteenth century, has recently been reformulated by James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy as a governing tenet of their 'Sonata Theory', in their assertion that "a sonata is a metaphorical representation of a perfect human action".<sup>15</sup>

A sonata is a linear journey of tonal realization, onto which might be mapped any number of concrete metaphors of human experience. Since a central component of the sonata genre is its built-in teleological drive – pushing forward to accomplish a generically predetermined goal – the sonata invites an interpretation as a musical narrative genre.<sup>16</sup>

In sonata theory, these "generically predetermined goal[s]" turn out to be large-scale cadential articulations (revealing the Schenkerian inheritance of modern North American theory), coordinated to rotational cyclings through a regulative thematic order. The agent's journey or quest consists of completing certain tasks (for instance, accomplishing the burden of the

sonata principle). The language used (journey, action, goals) is decidedly spatially oriented. We might see this in the diagrams provided to illustrate the theory's 'essential expositional' and 'essential structural trajectories', in the various zones and vectors, et cetera.

I will designate this understanding as dramatic: an action, a doing (from Aristotle's proposed etymology of the word 'drama' [a thing done] from the Doric *δράν* – to do, a doing).<sup>17</sup> Emphasis is on the narrative (understood in the broader sense of 'emplotment' used by Hayden White or Paul Ricoeur, as opposed to the familiar distinction between 'narrative' and 'story' after Gérard Genette).<sup>18</sup> There is a protagonist, to be sure. But still, this subject is a function of the larger plot – the 'generically predetermined goal'. It is also fundamentally a spatial model – of movement towards certain goals – and linear. There are obvious resonances of this model with music as a metaphor for life. But it is a life seen 'from the outside'; in the third person as it were.

That such a dramatic model has long proved problematic applied to Schubert's music is saying nothing new. It is a veritable cliché of Schubert criticism that his expansive repetitions and the often seemingly meandering course of his instrumental forms should not be judged against the goal-oriented trajectory often assumed as normative for Western classical music (characteristic above all of the heroic, middle-period Beethoven). This much was being observed by scholars a century ago, and shows no sign of abating even now.<sup>19</sup> The usual response by Schubertians is to maintain the spatial model of his music as the activity or movement of a subject, but suggest a different type of movement within the sonata terrain: rather than triumphantly reaching goals, the subject now wanders, aimlessly, through a bleak landscape.<sup>20</sup> This model is perfectly admissible, and proves highly apt for some of Schubert's music with its frequent poetic allusions to the figure of the Romantic wanderer and mimetic insistence on walking figures in the accompaniment (think of the *Wanderer* Fantasy, the first movement of the *A minor Sonata* D. 784, the *F minor Impromptu*, *Winterreise*, etc.). But we could also suggest that in some cases the dramatic-spatial-active model is simply inappropriate. A promising approach down these lines has recently been offered by Matthew Riley in relation to Haydn's music. Arguing that Hepokoski and Darcy's action-man model is largely anachronistic for the late eighteenth century, Riley goes on to analyse the first movement of the 'Oxford' Symphony in relation to contemporary accounts that considered musical works "as indices of genius", the ingenious formal play reflecting



the workings of a great mind (a reading not tied to diachrony and metaphors of action, journeying, or goal-directed movement).<sup>21</sup>

Treating music as to some extent like life, as a form of subjectivity, need not simply be conceived in dramatic terms as the action of a human protagonist, a quest or journey, the attainment of goals. We may also experience music's subjectivity in a (virtual) first person (and this is where I return to some of the issues given in my working definition of subjectivity in note 1). The empathy or identification with the sounds is such that we may at times feel it as an extension of ourselves (that we "are the music while the music lasts" to allude to T. S. Eliot's famous formulation). The historical grounding for this understanding is at least as strong as that for music as the metaphorical action of a dramatic protagonist (that seems to have established itself around the end of Schubert's life, in critics such as A. B. Marx and in the reception of Beethoven's heroic works such as the *Eroica*). When authors in the early nineteenth century write about music as the art of subjectivity, they are normally meaning something much more like this. I think of the German Romantics or idealist philosophers in particular: of writers like (in their different ways) Wackenroder, Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Schelling or Hegel, where music is not the metaphorical action of an external protagonist but an art of far greater immediacy, an expression of the depths of consciousness with the power to seize the listener to his (or her) very core, the art that "takes for its subject matter the subjective inner life itself", a medium in which the subject sees itself reflected.<sup>22</sup>

We might characterise this as the psychological model of musical subjectivity: not a mimesis of the action of an external subject, but a personal identification with the stream of musical events as akin to the flow of ideas, sensations, or emotions in consciousness. The music is formed from a chain of ideas obeying laws of psychological association or the workings of the mind, which need not be linear. (I think here especially of the common association at the time between the confusing but purportedly logical flow of musical events with the idea of creative fantasy, normally of the genius.)<sup>23</sup>

The distinction between the two – dramatic and psychological – could be characterised as loosely equivalent to that between classical narrativity (the subject being the function of the plot), and the modern emphasis on character (the plot being subsidiary to the evolution of the subject) – as in the contemporary *Bildungsroman* or later in more extreme form, the stream-of-

consciousness novel.<sup>24</sup> Recall in this context Schumann's admiring comment on the psychologically rich and unusual connection of ideas he found in Schubert's music.<sup>25</sup> Or for that matter, his likening of Schubert (in this case the 'Great' C major Symphony) with a 'thick novel by Jean Paul, in four volumes': what is distinctive about Jean Paul is not merely the famous, Shandean digressions, but also the keen psychological truths, the deep empathy of the character-drawing.

The metaphor of life is being used here in terms of psychological identification, reflecting the movement of consciousness, not in terms of an agent moving across sonata space. The implication of this is that the conceptual space such music inhabits may be quite different from that implied by the dramatic model: not something akin to quotidian external space but instead inward, qualitative not quantitative, intensive not extensive (as Henri Bergson would have said). Linear trajectories striving towards obligatory goals and are called into question. As much as a spatial understanding persists, it may well imply some (higher) multidimensional 'space'. Or we might simply choose to abandon the spatial metaphor, and its concomitant ideas of goal-directed motion, as largely unhelpful.<sup>26</sup>

This is evidently of significance applied to the opening movement of the Eb Piano Trio, with its curious bifurcation between passages conforming to generic demands and functional ('first practice') tonality, and those interruptions, interpolations, and lengthy meanderings that correspond more often to 'second practice' harmonic means. The movement starts with a primary theme in the tonic Eb; a V:HC Medial Caesura is reached at bar 98, and a PAC is given in the subordinate tonality of Bb (the traditional dominant) at bar 116, reinforced by further instances at bar 156 and bar 173. The recapitulation is regular: latter parts of the primary theme group are transposed down a fifth, and the subordinate and closing themes return in the tonic. Sonata business is carried out. Yet the attainment of structural cadences and their articulation through primary 'action zones' (in Sonata Theory parlance: primary theme group, subordinate theme group) seem to have little to do with the more aesthetically distinctive process of lyrical growth seen in the emergence of the closing theme across the exposition (sounding rather like Schubert's famous setting of Scott's 'Ave Maria' (D. 839, 1825), which will be continuously looped across the development's minor-third cycles), and the hypnotic circling through equal interval cycles found in those passages occupying a strange functional limbo within the

form. There seem to be two distinct processes or musical levels going on in this movement, and the intersection between the two is obscure.

Take the emergence of the first hexatonic cycle (fig. 3). Having turned to the tonic minor, at bar 38 an ascending chromatic scale on B♭ in the piano over the descending triadic head-motive in violin and cello trills inconspicuously divides the chromatic scale into three four-note segments spanning the augmented triad (B♭–D–G♭), forming a chromatically altered dominant (V with suspended  $b \Rightarrow 3$ ; the triple metre reinforces the octave division into three pairs of four semiquavers that outline the augmented triad). On its repetition, though, the G♭ is reinforced, the piano's chromatic scale now starting from this pitch, and the music plunges enharmonically to V<sup>7</sup> of B minor, from which realm the first hexatonic cycle at bar 48 begins.<sup>27</sup> The augmented triad has served as a type of portal from the diatonic into the hexatonic realm.

Fig. 3: Schubert, D. 929, I, exposition, bars 32–50.





After working its way three stages down the major-third cycle and back to the tonic (Bm–G–Gm–Eb), the music now normalises the third shifts as upward diatonic third progressions, this time from the diatonic submediant (Cm–Eb–Gm–Bb), in this way finally effecting a transition to the dominant, which is weakly tonicised by the end of the process. The entire preceding hexatonic cycle has served as an enormous loop – redundant in the tonal scheme of things. From the perspective of the ‘one central mission’ the sonata agent is tasked with, the move from the tonic minor to B minor and back might have never happened. On the other hand, the regions opened up have important consequences for later stages of the work. B minor of course is the key in which the second-movement theme will return in the finale. It is also consequential in the strident *fff* emphasis on the enharmonic C $\flat$  near the start of the first movement’s coda (a  $b \Rightarrow 6$  upper neighbour to  $\Rightarrow 5$ , resolving as a German sixth to a dominant 6/4 of Eb), which will lead to the complete hexatonic cycle at the close (fig. 4).

Fig. 4: Schubert, D. 929, I, start of coda, bars 564–588.





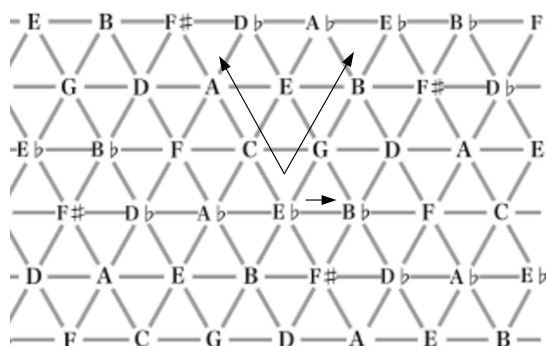
There is a contrast between movement in hexatonic/octatonic and diatonic ‘spaces’ in this movement. But the implications for the directed motion of a pseudo-protagonist across a single terrain (or the mapping of a single narrative onto a time-line) is problematic. For a start, from a diatonic, functional perspective, the hexatonic and octatonic cycles merely prolong a harmonic function.<sup>28</sup> They do not ultimately ‘go’ anywhere. This is glimpsed in the large-scale sequences of the development section, where the blocks implicitly compose out octatonic prolongations of the harmonic functions IV–I–V (the octatonic ‘root’ is the absent stage of the cycle in the first two; only in the last of these blocks is the dominant appropriately reached). It is apparent above all in the complete hexatonic cycle in the coda, which starts from E♭ major and ends in E♭ major, the dizzying spiral through E♭m–C♭–Bm–G–Gm in between being to some extent pointless in a goal-directed sense.

Yet there is surely a sense in which the coda eventually ‘completes’ the task of forming a complete cycle through hexatonic space. Rather than seeing this as attaining a goal or objective (understood spatially), I would rather conceive it (after Riley’s suggestion) as some conceptual completion. (In some ways the difference is not major: I am still using the language of completion and attainment, but underscoring the non-spatial aspect. The

result is to this extent vaguer: spatial metaphors have grown up for good reason, to provide a clearer representation of otherwise fairly intangible concepts. But in certain cases I think we need to be more ready to modify them when not fit for purpose.)

How do the diatonic and hexatonic/octatonic systems relate to each other? Is there a common ‘space’ which they inhabit? Perhaps yes – we can conceptualise both types of movement on a standard *Tonnetz* (fig. 5), but they do not form a common ‘vector’ on it or conform to a common harmonic practice; rather, they are two distinct ways of navigating around an expanded tonal terrain.

Fig. 5: Fifth-based, hexatonic and octatonic movement depicted on a standard *Tonnetz*



The analogy is admittedly not exact, but the point is that Sonata Theory’s essential cadential trajectory follows a linear, one-dimensional plan. And the Tonnetz shows how we are thinking in terms of two-dimensions – or three really, in a toroidal space. In such a situation, it might simply be easier to put the spatial representation to one side.

Parts of Schubert’s first movement fit the dramatic paradigm, and others the psychological. Parts move purposefully by means of functional tonality to secure generic keys with perfect cadences (as actors directed towards a goal), while other parts – in this instance normally the most interesting ones – form enormous internal loops (a “time-out-of-time” in Richard Taruskin’s

phrase),<sup>29</sup> moving through second-practice cycles as if showing the mind of the subject undertaking a conceptual task ("let's experiment with maximally smooth cycles of triads!") and dwelling on thematic ideas as if internally transported by their radiant qualities (the 'Ave Maria' closing theme, as spun out with imperturbable leisureliness over the development section).<sup>30</sup> I am aware that stated in such binary terms this characterisation recalls numerous similar dualities: Karol Berger's division of Beethoven into 'Beethoven Hero' and 'Beethoven Dreamer', distinctions between passive and active sections of musical form, Raymond Monelle's reworking of A. B. Marx's *Satz* and *Gang*.<sup>31</sup> To some extent, too, this reading aligns with Richard Cohn's reading of nineteenth-century harmonic bilingualism, in the movement's differentiation between first and second harmonic practice.<sup>32</sup>

It is not really my intention to reinforce such familiar dichotomies here, though clearly there is some overlap. For a start, my interest is more in bringing to light the possible forms of the 'music as life' metaphor, and secondly I do not think we are dealing with a clear-cut division into just two discrete interpretative paradigms; there are numerous ways in which music may suggest a virtual subject, sometimes in different ways at the same time. Neither am I trying to impose another, 'better' model of subjectivity to this music. Instead, my point is that the metaphorical attribution of 'life' may be used productively in different, perhaps mutually incompatible ways within the same piece. Indeed, to my mind, parts of the movement do not really support any subjective predicates at all. Subjectivity comes and goes, without completely dying; the metaphor of life is both variously and discontinuously applied.<sup>33</sup>

Such concerns are highlighted in the finale, whose interpretative problems have been outlined earlier. The distinction between 'external' and 'internal' has appeared tricky to conceptualise. But if the subjectivity of the music is understood as being often more aptly conceived in terms of first-person identification, with music as reflecting different 'soul-states' (*Seelenzustände*) or the movement of consciousness, the outer/inner distinction becomes less the issue, insofar as musical subjectivity often implies just such slipping subject positions.<sup>34</sup> For I think that insisting on one model at the expense of the other is to demand unnecessary exactitude.

The idea of musical subjectivity, I would be the first to admit, is often frustratingly imprecise. "Accounts of musical subjectivity", writes Lawrence Kramer,

have often been bedevilled by a nagging sense of futility. The subjective content of music feels unimpeachably real, but the moment one tries to specify it, it risks seeming paper-thin by comparison to the solidity of form, technique and structure, the stuff of analytical understanding.<sup>35</sup>

Kramer is touching on a fundamental concern here; for all the attraction of hearing some form of subjectivity in music, it is not immediately obvious in a more concrete, analytical sense where this subjectivity might be located.<sup>36</sup>

The indeterminacy of the musical subject is often lamented in relation to that in language. But the comparative indeterminacy of music's positing of a subject is at the same time one of its strengths. It can allow the adoption of multiple, 'impossible' subject-positions, just as the metaphorical spaces music may seem to inhabit are flexible and mutable. One of the reasons why music can be so potent as a model of human subjectivity derives from the multiple ways in which a sense of subjectivity may be suggested without being delimited. As Fred Everett Maus has argued, "musical textures usually invite several discrepant individuations of agents without resolving the issue, and [this] play of different individuations is an important part of musical experience."<sup>37</sup> "In musical thought," he proposes, "agents and actions sometimes collapse into one another":

This indeterminacy between sounds as agents and as actions is possible because a musical texture does not provide any recognizable objects, apart from the sounds, that can be agents. If the sound is regarded as action, the listener may also, seeking a perceptible protagonist, attribute those actions to the sounds as agents. In music, Yeats's enigma – how to tell the dancer from the dance – arises continuously and vividly.<sup>38</sup>

Music may be heard as an action or type of agency, as speaking to us through another persona, as immediately expressive of feelings and emotions that are felt as ours, as pure presence, as another consciousness, or even as an extension of, or surrogate for, one's self. Such a view implicitly qualifies Edward T. Cone's thesis that all music possesses a univocal subject, that is, speaks in a single voice. Often there is not a single, realistic subject formed by the music, but disparate elements of that which may constitute a subject (like – employing a fruitful homology – modern ideas of the complexity of the human subject). The very indeterminacy of the subject permits the fluid movement between otherwise contradictory perspectives, allowing us to construct an apparently impossible object which is both ourselves and 'other'. In this, music may have an advantage – a sometimes dubious one, it must be admitted – over the subject of language, which,



when all is said and done, for all its greater precision, is no less fictional than that of music.

What still needs to be done in order to clarify the attribution of subjective qualities to music as much as is possible – and this may only result in partial success at best – is to come up with something akin to a ‘phenomenology of musical subjectivity’ – what is it in the music that plausibly suggests its interpretation as a virtual subject, a living entity or surrogate consciousness. I will not be undertaking this here, but hope that some pointers and gentle provocations may have been set down here which might stimulate future approaches to the subject.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Subjectivity is a much used and yet often obscure concept in musicology and the humanities more broadly. For heuristic purposes, the reader may take it that by this term I am referring to a cluster of often overlapping meanings relating to the understanding of music as akin to a living being, an animate consciousness, but often such that the experience may be of an apparent immediacy that shades it into a privileged first-person perspective – as if somehow viewing it as part of oneself. Fuller explication of this idea of musical subjectivity is a task I am currently engaged with, to which the present essay forms a type of *parergon*.
- <sup>2</sup> The main theme of the *Andante* is famously based on a Swedish song *Se solen sjunker* (The Sun is Sinking), which Schubert had heard sung by the composer Isak Albert Berg shortly before (it is not entirely clear whether the song is a genuine folksong or Berg's creation). See Elizabeth Norman McKay, *Franz Schubert: A Biography*, Oxford 1996, p. 299. It should be noted that Schubert's version is quite altered from Berg's setting.
- <sup>3</sup> See for instance Richard Cohn, 'Maximally Smooth Cycles, Hexatonic Systems, and the Analysis of Late Romantic Triadic Progressions', *Music Analysis* 15 (1996), pp. 9–40, and 'As Wonderful as Star Clusters: Instruments for Gazing at Tonality in Schubert', *19th-Century Music* 22 (1999), pp. 215–218.
- <sup>4</sup> This sense of retrospection or distancing on the final coda appearance is aided by the unusual form of the second movement, in which a return to the opening theme in the tonic at bar 84 is followed by a tonally mobile and developmental passage, leading to a reprise of just the second theme (bar 129), now resolved into the tonic major, and an extended post-cadential section. The recall of the 'Se solen sjunker' theme at bar 196 is thus the first time this material has been heard for some time; indeed, the movement has more or less ended before this return,

thus imbuing the recall with an aura of nostalgia. The design is akin to a binary sonata / sonata rondo hybrid (known sometimes as a ‘Brahmsian’ deformation), more common in later 19<sup>th</sup>-century music.

- <sup>5</sup> This is making a nod to Adorno’s C# minor ‘phantom’ in the finale of the *A minor Quartet* (see Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Schubert (1928)’, trans. Jonathan Dunsby and Beate Perrey, *19th-Century Music* 29 (2005), p. 14).
- <sup>6</sup> A PAC is given at bar 137, but this confirmation is undone by the subsequent circling back to the preceding cadential music at bar 151; the PAC now more insistently heralded is broken off at bar 163, leading to the return of the apparition theme at bar 167. Only following bar 193 can a final expositional PAC be attained (reiterated at bars 205 & 217).
- <sup>7</sup> A more extensive account of this movement might profitably examine the rhythmic modification of themes in the development section, which bring the ‘apparition’ and recalled Andante themes into the orbit of the finale’s opening theme.
- <sup>8</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols., Oxford 1974, vol. II, §144, p. 284.
- <sup>9</sup> Edward T. Cone, *The Composer’s Voice*, Berkeley, CA 1974.
- <sup>10</sup> Scholarly literature on Schubert and the wanderer archetype is legion. See for instance William Kinderman, ‘Schubert’s Tragic Perspective’, in *Schubert: Critical and Analytical Studies*, ed. Walter Frisch, Lincoln, NE 1986, pp. 65–83, and ‘Wandering Archetypes in Schubert’s Instrumental Music’, *19th-Century Music* 21 (1997), pp. 208–222; Charles Fisk, *Returning Cycles: Contexts for the Interpretation of Schubert’s Impromptus and Last Sonatas*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA 2001, esp. ch. 3 ‘The Wanderer’s Tracks’, pp. 60–80; Jeffrey Perry, ‘The Wanderer’s Many Returns: Schubert’s Variations Reconsidered’, *The Journal of Musicology* 19 (2002), pp. 374–416.
- <sup>11</sup> See for example Benedict Taylor and Ceri Owen, ‘Subjectivity in European Song: Time, Place, and Identity’, *19th-Century Music* 40 (2017), pp. 185–188; also Naomi Cumming, ‘The Subjectivities of “Erbarne dich”’, *Music Analysis* 16 (1997), pp. 5–44, and *The Sonic Self: Musical Subjectivity and Signification*, Bloomington, IN 2000.
- <sup>12</sup> Seth Monahan, ‘Action and Agency Revisited’, *Journal of Music Theory* 57 (2013), pp. 321–371; see also the work of Fred Everett Maus and Berthold Hoeckner. I sense this conflict between the claims of different hierarchical levels of musical agents already in writing lines such as “the work had already seemed to make its peace with that theme” earlier.

- <sup>13</sup> Scott Burnham, Review-Article 'E. T. A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings', *19th-Century Music* 14 (1991), p. 295.
- <sup>14</sup> Again, the tricky question of the hierarchy of putative musical agents have been much discussed since Cone's *The Composer's Voice*; they are addressed most recently by Seth Monahan ('Action and Agency Revisited'). See also Edward T. Cone, 'Schubert's Promissory Note: An Exercise in Musical Hermeneutics', *19th-Century Music* 5 (1982), pp. 233–241.
- <sup>15</sup> James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata*, Oxford and New York, NY 2006, p. 252.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.
- <sup>17</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, ch. 3 (1448<sup>b</sup>1).
- <sup>18</sup> See Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore, MD and London, 1973, and Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, 3 vols., Chicago, IL 1984–1988; cf. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, Oxford 1980.
- <sup>19</sup> Such sentiments were made by Armin Knab in 1920 ('Schuberts unvollendete Klaviersonate in C-Dur und ihre Ergänzung', *Deutsche Musikzeitung* 2 (1920), pp. 185–186), and are still repeated by scholars in the last decade. An example is given by Suzannah Clark's 2011 *Analyzing Schubert*, which further criticises the "one-sided masculinist view of 'human experience'" present in Hepokoski's and Darcy's teleological model (Clark, *Analyzing Schubert*, Cambridge 2011, p. 204).
- <sup>20</sup> A classic example is given by Adorno, who speaks of "the ex-centric construction of that landscape, in which every point is equally close to the center, reveals itself to the wanderer walking round it with no actual progress" – though this landscape is already more curious in its geometry than is often found ('Schubert', 10). More recently, the idea of parataxis has been drawn upon in accounting for Schubert's musical structures, sometimes very profitably (see for instance Su Yin Mak, 'Schubert's Sonata Forms and the Poetics of the Lyric', *The Journal of Musicology* 23 (2006), pp. 263–306). As this is a linguistic metaphor, however, it does not directly relate to the present topic of music as a metaphor for life.
- <sup>21</sup> Matthew Riley, 'Hermeneutics and the New *Formenlehre*: An Interpretation of Haydn's 'Oxford' Symphony, First Movement', *Eighteenth-Century Music* 7 (2010), p. 218. As Riley notes, "it is extremely difficult to find eighteenth-century critical accounts of the symphony as a narrative of action, let alone dynamic, goal-directed action: that was left to nineteenth-century commentators" (201).

- 22 For instance, for Schelling, “Art is the manner in which the self can intuit itself”, and music in particular is the “art of reflection or of self-consciousness” (F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath, Charlottesville, VA 1978, p. 219; *Philosophy of Art*, trans. Douglas W. Stott, Minneapolis, MN 1989, p. 162). In Hegel’s view, “Music is spirit, or the soul which resounds directly on its own account and feels satisfaction in its perception of itself.” “The chief task of music consists in making resound, not the objective world itself, but, on the contrary, the manner in which the inmost self is moved to the depths of its personality and conscious soul” (*Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, 2 vols., Oxford 1975, vol. II, pp. 939, 891). The idea of music as a succession of *Seelenzustände* (or soul-states) is also common at this time; see further on this matter Anthony Newcomb, ‘Once More “Between Absolute and Programme Music”: Schumann’s Second Symphony’, *19th-Century Music* 7 (1984), pp. 233–250. These expressions are not identical, but what is common to them all is that there is no virtual subject projected in the music. The ‘subject’ is the listener – or, given the common belief at the time in the direct transference of the creator’s own emotions in art, the composer, who is able to communicate directly to the listener through the transparent medium of music. There is simply no need in this era for the intermediary level of a virtual work-persona to be introduced into the model.
- 23 Compare this with Novalis’s famous likening of the *Märchen* with a musical fantasy: “Ein Märchen ist [...] Ein Ensemble wunderbarer Dinge und Begebenheiten – z. B. eine *musikalische Fantasie*“ (Novalis, *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenburgs*, ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl and Robert Samuel, Munich and Vienna 1978, vol. II, p. 696). Or Carl Maria von Weber’s description in his unfinished novel *Tonkünstlers Leben* of “an apparently disconnected flight of imagination, that seems to be a *Phantasiestück* rather than a movement obeying the normal rules of musical composition [...] a world which is only apparently chaotic and really has an inner coherence that is absolutely sincere in feeling, if only one can tune one’s own feelings to the same pitch” (Weber, *Writings on Music*, trans. Martin Cooper, ed. John Warrack, Cambridge 1981, p. 362).
- 24 I draw here on the work of authors such as Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge, MA 1989, and Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, Chicago, IL 1992.
- 25 Cited by John Daverio “‘One More Beautiful Memory of Schubert’: Schumann’s Critique of the Impromptus, D. 935”, *The Musical Quarterly* 84 (2000), p. 604.
- 26 I develop this point at greater length in ‘Schubert and the Construction of Memory: The Quartet in A minor, D. 804 (‘Rosamunde’), *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 139 (2014), pp. 41–88.

- <sup>27</sup> It is common to analyse Schubert's music through the consequences drawn from a 'promissory note', and such a situation certainly obtains here. The G♭ that had been heard earlier at bar 24 as a momentary jolt into the flattened mediant has not only led to the minorising of the third (E♭ major to minor), but is now heard as the enharmonic V of B minor.
- <sup>28</sup> This is a viewpoint proposed by Richard Cohn (see, for instance, 'As Wonderful as Star Clusters' (note 3), and his later refinement of such ideas in *Audacious Euphony: Chromaticism and the Triad's Second Nature*, Oxford and New York, NY 2012); it should be noted that the idea of prolongation here would be problematic from an orthodox Schenkerian perspective.
- <sup>29</sup> Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, 5 vols., Oxford and New York, NY 2005, vol. III, p. 110.
- <sup>30</sup> A longer account of Schubert's *Trio* might pursue this quality of subjectivity in the growth of the turn motive first heard at bar 16 via the form heard at bar 99 into the lyrical 'Ave Maria' theme at bar 140, ultimately blossoming in the unrolling sequences of the development. This provides an instance of a paradigm that I call 'coming to lyricism', where the emergence of a lyrical voice within a texture, often given as the expressive goal of a movement or piece, points to a link with the emergence of subjectivity within the music. An intriguing contrary view has been suggested by Michael Spitzer, however, proposing (as Adorno might have) that the hexatonic and octatonic cycles of this movement might better be viewed not as the vehicle of lyric subjectivity but, in their repetitive and somewhat mechanical quality, as crystalline, geometric, and timeless – in short, as dead.
- <sup>31</sup> Karol Berger, 'Beethoven and the Aesthetic State', *Beethoven Forum* 7 (1999), pp. 17–44; Raymond Monelle, 'The Temporal Image', in *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays*, Princeton, NJ 2000, pp. 81–114.
- <sup>32</sup> See especially Cohn, *Audacious Euphony* (note 28).
- <sup>33</sup> As mentioned earlier in relation to the scherzo and the often inconsistent role attributed in subjective discourse to the individual part within multi-movement cycles. Indeed, in this regard I find the finale much more hospitable to subjective readings than the first movement.
- <sup>34</sup> Another profitable approach to this movement and its apparent slipping between subjective agencies is to conceive the recall as applicable to a single subject but reflecting different processes of memory in the individual's consciousness, such as the familiar distinction between field and observer memory (i.e. viewing the recalled events in the first and in the third person respectively). A useful recent discussion of this point is given by Kristina Muxfeldt, 'Music Recollected in Tranquillity: Postures of Memory in Beethoven', in *Vanishing Sensibilities:*

*Essays in Reception and Historical Restoration – Schubert, Beethoven, Schumann*, Oxford and New York, NY 2011, pp. 118–47.

- <sup>35</sup> Lawrence Kramer, 'The Mysteries of Animation: History, Analysis and Musical Subjectivity', *Music Analysis* 20 (2001), p. 174.
- <sup>36</sup> Eero Tarasti similarly worries about this question: "Where are the musical subjects? Are they in the music, the musical enunciate itself? If so, where exactly?" (*A Theory of Musical Semiotics*, Bloomington, IN 1994, p. 108; cited by Cumming, 'The Subjectivities of "Erbarne dich"' (note 11), p. 12).
- <sup>37</sup> Maus, 'Agency in Instrumental Music and Song', *College Music Symposium* 29 (1989), p. 37.
- <sup>38</sup> Maus, 'Music as Drama', *Music Theory Spectrum* 10 (1988), p. 70.

## ABSTRACT

This essay examines the idea of the 'music as life' metaphor as applied to the outer movements of Schubert's *E♭ Piano Trio*, D. 929. It argues that music need not simply be conceived in dramatic terms as a mimesis of the action of an external human protagonist, a quest or journey across an imaginary space, but may alternatively be experienced from a (virtual) first-person perspective, through a personal identification with the stream of musical events as being akin to the flow of ideas, sensations, or emotions in consciousness. This distinction between *dramatic* and *psychological* metaphors may be considered analogous to that between classical narrativity (the subject being the function of the plot), and the modern emphasis on character (the plot being subsidiary to the evolution of the subject). Many models we currently use to interpret music assume the dramatic paradigm, but it may be more profitable (and indeed historically apt) to approach Schubert's music through the psychological model.

MICHAEL SPITZER

## The Glory of War in the Finale of Beethoven's *Eroica*

An astonishing scene from Abel Gance's monumental film, *Napoleon*, depicts the siege of Toulon in 1793, in which the young captain helped capture the port from the British. It is Napoleon's first success, and sends him on his way to First Consul and Emperor. Carl Davis, who compiled the score for *Napoleon*, leans heavily on Beethoven's *Eroica*; indeed, he draws mostly from the finale, despite the first movement being much more dominant in the symphony's reception history. For this particular scene, Davis uses the music of the finale's second fugato section. Although the crassness of Davis's score has been much criticized, and justly so, in this particular scene I think Davis gets it right. Music and imagery come together in an expression of the violent, group emotions of war, an experience well captured by the late nineteenth-century French military historian, Commandant Henri Lachouque's report on Waterloo.

Much has been written about mass hysteria. These men gone berserk, drunk with fear, rage, enthusiasm, blood; killing one another regardless of nationality, shouting with joy, cursing, crying for vengeance in five languages, were victims of an emotion neatly summed up in the imprecation attributed to Cambronne on the evening of 18 June 1815.<sup>1</sup>

There are two versions of what General Cambronne is heard to have said. The famous inscription on his monument records that it was "La garde meurt et ne se rendent pas!" ("the guard dies but does not surrender"). On the other hand, Victor Hugo says it was, simply, "Merde!" Here we have, then, two versions of glory: something magnificent which is also enmired in the dirt of war. If this episode is the chaos, then other side of glory is the apotheosis of the theme just afterwards. These two sides constitute an emotional script, which looks, from the outside, like battle leading to victory; and from the inside, as a move from heroic self-sacrifice to public recognition. Or from "Merde!" to "Meurt".

The topic of my essay is the glory script as expressed in the finale of Beethoven's *Eroica*: glory as both a timeless emotion, going back to Homer and Plutarch, and an historically very specific instantiation. First, we must ask whether glory is actually an emotion at all. Talking about emotion in Beethoven runs against the grain of German idealism, which has governed nearly all reception of his music as organically unified, and organized by a quasi-Hegelian *Idee*. One version of this essay might go deeper down this path, because if you scrape away the surface of German idealism, you find emotion. The emotion of glory lurks at the basis of dialectical synthesis: the drama of the self willing itself to go to ground, to emerge sublated at a spiritual level.<sup>2</sup> Just like Beethoven, the young Hegel was immensely impressed by Napoleon's victories. In more sober middle age, Hegel wrote more circumspectly about glory in his *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel links glory to violence; recognizes that glorious death can be willed and volitional; wonders whether glory is always posthumous; and asks pointedly whether a republic is ever actually worth dying for. I won't go down this path here, however, because my agenda is how Beethoven fits within the history of emotion, a rising discipline in the humanities and social sciences, yet one which musicology has virtually ignored. There are two main strands to this approach. First, the idea that there is a link between emotion and cognition; more properly, between the structural features of the musical object and its affective properties. This claim runs counter to Kant's and Hanslick's outlawing of emotion from their definition of an object's formal beauty. For them, emotion sits in the subject, not the object. The second strand is that these formal, emotional features were historically mutable.

Let's begin with history. Two books are especially relevant. William Reddy's *Navigation of Feeling*,<sup>3</sup> a study which explores sentimentalism in French eighteenth-century politics, from its origins as a critique of artificial etiquette, and then, provocatively, as the source of the Jacobin reign of terror. Reddy only touches upon Napoleon, who had little interest in sentiment, which is where I turn to a second book by Robert Morrissey on the economy of glory.<sup>4</sup> Whilst Napoleon is the centre-piece of Morrissey's book, he also argues that glory had a far wider historical significance, especially in France, stretching as far back as Homer and Plutarch, an author with whose heroes Napoleon was obsessed.

According to Reddy, the history of emotion in eighteenth-century France progresses in three main steps: sentimentalism; its mutation into Jacobinism; and its efflorescence into Napoleonic glory. So, sentimentalism first.



The sentimentalist attack on courtly etiquette as artificial, hypocritical, and stifling fed on familiar ideas of Shaftesbury, Hume, Smith, Diderot, Rousseau, and many other thinkers. Reddy's new angle is that confining the expression of sincerity to intimate private spaces – what he terms 'emotional refuges' – created 'emotional suffering'. In an hydraulic metaphor of pressure and release, this claustrophobic emotional suffering is relieved when sentiment is discharged into a wider social and political arena; in other words, there was a yearning to reform the state on the basis of natural human feeling. Is this audible in Beethoven's music? The finale is a set of variations, and its theme is, ostensibly at least, extremely simple, especially when introduced as a naked bass-line, the so-called *basso del tema*. David Hume's notion of emotional 'sympathy' seems relevant here.<sup>5</sup> For Hume, people are brought together by resonating sympathetically with each other's sentiment, what we would nowadays call 'emotional contagion'. In Humean terms, Beethoven's theme is sociable because it is so conventional, made up of simple tonics and dominants, the building-blocks of music. The audience resonates with the clarity and symmetry of the form. But the theme also enacts sociability through the subject-answer periodicity of its form; the way the phrases answer each other sympathetically, a dynamic with which the listener also resonates. This resonance is repeated at rising hierarchical levels.

Now, Beethoven was obsessed with this so-called *contredanse* theme. He explored it in his earlier *Variations for Piano*, op. 35 and his ballet, *The Creatures of Prometheus*. The Promethean narrative of brute, natural material being gradually brought to life, ennobled and refined, of course maps naturally onto variation process. This is exactly how the symphony operates: a playful, childishly simple theme is set on the path of spiritual growth and heroic apotheosis. Critics have compared this childish tone to Schiller's play drive,<sup>6</sup> and a sense of the ridiculous turns on the absurd empty bars and peremptory Bbs. This is music of pure contingency, of *hazard*. With a child's lightness of spirit and lack of consequence, the grown-up hero will throw his life away, as if in a game. Not for nothing does Gance's film begin with a snow-ball fight, with the child Napoleon out-maneuvering a rival gang of school-boys.

The second moment of Reddy's story tells how sentiment is politicized, even weaponised, by the Revolution. Appealing to emotional authenticity, the Jacobins sought to transform all of society into a private enclave, a vast salon, an emotional refuge. In short, to render private emotion into public

emotion. We hear something of this eruption from inner to outer in ‘Clara’s song’ in Beethoven’s *Music for ‘Egmont’*. When the orchestral tutti bursts in, there is a vertiginous opening up of emotional space. Nevertheless, Reddy easily demonstrates how the Jacobin project was riddled with contradictions, in a narrative through which an emotional regime based on natural sentiment led to terror and mass murder. The logic of turning white into black was ineluctable. The Republic used its machinery of violence to purge feelings it saw as unnatural so as to purify emotion. The terror was destined to fail because it assumed that everyone was heroic and ready to die for the Republic. If they did not, then this was a failing of sincerity and a marker of guilt. There thereby emerged a vicious circle through which emotion consumed itself and the revolution devoured its children. To be afraid of death damned you as insincere; and the fear of being detected of being frightened made you even more frightened and insincere. The definition of terror is the terror of being discovered in your terror. This made literally everybody into a traitor. Can we detect this emotional suffering in the music of the Revolution? I hear it in the monotonous euphony and overbearing uniformity of its soundscape, as in Gossec’s grand symphony of 1793, *Le Triomphe de la Republique*. Like Beethoven, Gossec ends with a *contredanse*. Such music is unbearable because it doesn’t comprehend dissonance or real drama. Its sanitized consonance typifies what Frolova-Walker calls the officially sanctioned *boredom* of revolutionary music, as in Soviet Russia in the 1930s.<sup>7</sup> The paradox is that state terror needs to expunge representations of terror in its cultural materials. A vision of hell is to hear this consonance for all eternity. The broader contradiction of the Jacobin emotional regime is that it attempted to make an essentially private emotion, sentimentalism, into a public one. Similar conceptual problems beset Adam Smith’s theory of sentiment. Smith’s notion of the ‘impartial spectator’ leads to a conformist, right-wing view of emotion as governed by the social status quo and the financial market.<sup>8</sup>

And so we come to the third moment of Reddy’s story, Napoleonic glory. Here are the Emperor’s final words to his troops before departing for his brief exile at Elba: “Do not lament my fate. If I have decided to go on living, it is to serve your glory”.<sup>9</sup> And here is a key passage from Neufchateaux’s elegy for General Desaix, killed at the battle of Marengo in 1800: “Existence is nothing, for them glory is all [...] Those who defy death are the masters of the world”.<sup>10</sup> Several strands can be picked out from the rich economy of glory. First, glory, as conceived by Napoleon, was a public

emotion which could bring together every level of society – aristocrats, financiers, common soldiers – in what Morrissey calls “the politics of fusion”.<sup>11</sup> The whole nation could rally around the heroic individual, decked out in a suitable display of splendor – a role incarnated by Napoleon himself. Napoleon achieved this through the democratization of warrior values, whereby anyone could be a soldier, and every soldier was noble. The hard, practical, basis of that was universal military conscription, the bulwark of his army. Napoleon's war economy succeeded, but relied on continuing military victories, so it of course had a limited future. On the debit side there is also the cynicism of the cult of appearance, shading into the glory of gold, the luster of which so impressed the heroes of Wagner's *Ring*. The crucial point is that the unifying function of national glory allowed Napoleon to leap-frog the chasm between private and public emotion, a chasm which had swallowed up the Jacobins. The Terror had also attempted to expunge fear, but glory changed the terms of the equation. Now seduced by the glory of a charismatic leader, the nation gladly put fear to one side. In a neat inversion of the Jacobins' terror of concealed terror, voluntary self-sacrifice, seduced by the charisma of a Leader, surmounted the terror of death.

To return to the glory script in this historical light, we see that glory is distributed evenly, yet differentially, between hazard and allure. There is of course a history of glory before Napoleon, and the outline of this history marks a coming to terms with the virtue of self-sacrifice. Glory was not just a gloss justifying death retrospectively – although this of course remained. Glory was also a reflection of what military martyrs really felt, a true nobility of the spirit.

In the early modern period, Thomas Hobbes establishes the contrarian, brutally realist position. For Hobbes, the thirst for glory was the engine of human endeavor in the “war of all against all”.<sup>12</sup> As with David Hume's emotion of pride, a close cousin of glory, and Hume's principal passion, glory was the very corner-stone of human subjectivity, echoing Spinoza's *conation*, and anticipating Darwin's survival instinct. Hobbes' map of glory makes some revealing distinctions. True glory serves the self. Against that, ‘vainglory’, or false glory, isn't properly earned by battle; it is propaganda.<sup>13</sup> There is also cowardice, when one refuses to struggle; and finally, and most important for my argument, there is recklessness, which is to sacrifice yourself in battle. The nihilism of Hobbes has no time for glorious

self-sacrifice; this is exactly what becomes sanctioned in the eighteenth century. Compare these words by Montesquieu, from his *Persian Letters*:

The desire for glory does not differ from that instinct which all creatures have for their self-preservation. It seems that we extend our very being when we can exist in the memory of others. We acquire through it a new life.<sup>14</sup>

Now, Montesquieu wrote these words extolling the French monarchy in 1721. Nevertheless, his advocacy for a moral economy based on what he calls “that general passion of the French for glory” lays out the basis for Napoleonic glory some eighty years later. This is the crucial step: the idea that we ‘extend our being’ when we die for a higher cause. In other words, the unit of the self is raised from the single human subject, to the unit of the nation, or the species, just as with the tension in evolutionary theory between genes and organisms, when a creature dies for the greater good of the species or gene-pool. The finale of Beethoven’s *Eroica*, then, is a staging of glorious self-sacrifice, and we can put our finger on this emotion when we analyse its form.

And so now to the form of the finale. The glory script captures the two strands of the finale: the music of battle; and the music of triumph. These two elements are relatively straightforward in themselves. However, it is their interaction which has foxed generations of critics and theorists, because the *Eroica* finale has resisted analysis, even by the likes of Hepokoski and Darcy, who don’t even touch it. The form of the piece is *sui generis*, an original fusion of variation, fugue, rondo, and sonata. Let’s take the two strands in turn, beginning with battle.

There are actually two waves of battle, both in fugato style; the music Davis uses for the Siege of Toulon, is the second, more extreme, episode. The two fugatos are based on the same tonal model, both starting with a chord of G, and climaxing with a dissonant harmony featuring a powerful A flat. The first fugato cuts in after variation three, after an emphatic caesura on two chords of G as dominants of C minor. This instigates 60 bars of fugato, cycling away from, and returning to, the key of C minor. This climaxes on a diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord of C minor, with a powerful Ab in the bass. The second wave is bigger and more extreme in every sense. The harmony of G minor is powerfully tonicised, for the first time in the movement, by bringing the theme back in D major, the dominant of G, and then in G minor itself, ending with an emphatic cadence at bar 256. There follows 70 bars of fugato climaxing with an extraordinary, 20-bar prolon-

gation of a Bb7 chord. The pitch Ab is now posited as the seventh of the dominant, the normative tactic at the end of sonata-form retransitions. In Schenker's classic graph of this movement, the fugato unfolds a simple neighbour-note progression from G, the primary tone, to Ab, the upper-neighbour, supported by a dominant.

I want to focus on this second, more extreme, fugato, the music for the Siege of Toulon. Why do I hear it as a sonic metaphor of glorious self-sacrifice? Let's un-pack the fugato bit by bit.

First and foremost, what is striking is the absence of fear. The music lacks any of the topoi of frightening music: no mystery, no vagueness, no tremolando, no unusual or particularly dissonant harmonies.<sup>15</sup> It sounds quite different from the development of the first movement. The music is not chaotic: on the contrary, it is marshaled extremely tightly towards a climactic goal, the dominant 7<sup>th</sup> of the tonic. And it doesn't wander off into any alien keys, such as the E minor of the first movement. I want to underline in triplicate this absence of fear for various reasons. We have gotten used to invoking Burke and Kant's category of the sublime for all music which sounds loud, overwhelming, or deceptively chaotic. The links between the sublime and fear are well-known. But the defining feature of this music – what makes it 'glorious' – is the very lack of fear. Indeed, self-sacrifice must be fearless. How does Beethoven achieve this, without it sounding boring or sanitized? In three main ways.

First, he uses fugal texture. This baroque idiom is appropriately objective and self-less, and parallels Napoleon's taste for the coldly rational emotions of seventeenth-century classical painting, especially as imitated by the neo-classicism of David. See for instance David's *The Oath of the Horatii*. As with the Spartan discipline of David's soldiers, Beethoven's subject submits selflessly to the objectivity of the contrapuntal texture.

Second, he uses sentence technique at an architectonic level. The phrase-structure which Schoenberg termed 'sentence form', as in the *locus classicus* first theme of op. 2 no. 1, is as fascinating as it is under-theorized.<sup>16</sup> The sentence is a little machine for accelerating time and condensing material (see fig. 1).

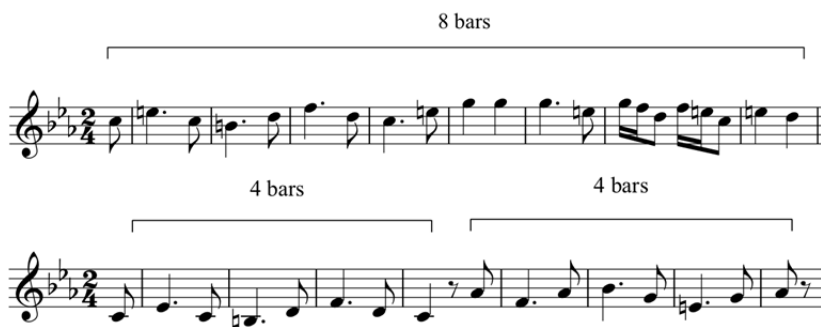
Its rising arc of intensification exemplifies Goethe's theory of *Steigerung*, and I have elsewhere theorized it as a vehicle for a metaphoric of personification, the gradual incarnation of the subject, a technique which fits the *Eroica*'s Promethean narrative like a glove.<sup>17</sup> Now, whilst sentences

Fig. 1: Beethoven, *Piano Sonata op. 2, no. 1 in F minor*, sentence form.



are normally considered at the level of the phrase, Beethoven also likes to apply their processes of *Steigerung* to entire sections. Thus one might term the second fugato a ‘grand sentence’, as it unfolds a progressive acceleration of phrase structure and harmonic rhythm. The unit of repetition begins with the 8-bar phrase, and is whittled down to four bars, two bars, single bars, and ultimately to single crotchets, or quarter-bars (see fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Liquidation in Second Fugato.



## The Glory of War in the Finale of Beethoven's *Eroica*

2 bars                      1 bar                      1 bar                      1 bar

1/2 bar    1/2 bar    1/2 bar                      1/4 bars .....

HARMONIC ACCELERATION (5TH CYCLE)

THEMATIC LIQUIDATION (OCTAVE MOTIVES)

So, an 8-bar phrase. Then a four-bar phrase. Then 2 bars, elided into 1-bar sequences. Finally, half a bar and a quarter of a bar. Note the acceleration of harmonic rhythm; and the liquidation of the octave motives into quavers. The telos of this drive is the BbV7 chord. The music submits itself to this single point, just as it submits to the discipline of fugato counterpoint, and just as an individual soldier submits to a military strategy commanded by a general.

Third, the really unusual aspect of the music, and the secret of its glory, is that it features three cumulative returns of the theme in the tonic Eb, first on flute, a military instrument; then on horns, and climactically on full brass and wind. Of course, this is implicit in fugato style, in the alternation between tonic subjects and dominant answers. This is why, unlike a proper development section, a fugato cannot wander too far away from the tonic; the tonic is kept in sight at all times. But that is exactly the point: Beethoven embeds a tonic-centered fugato within a sentence-style drive to the dominant. Let me emphasize how counter-intuitive it is to mix-up a drive to the dominant with premature tonics. The music is engaged in a massive teleological push towards a dominant seventh climax; any reference to the tonic within that drive should, in principle, be avoided because that risks short-circuiting this drive to the dominant. Certainly, the second halves of development sections in sonata forms avoid pre-empting the climactic dominant sevenths. I simply don't know of any other work in the repertoire

which does this. And yet Beethoven brings the theme back in the tonic three times, with cumulative emphasis. This cuts across the incredible energy of the music. Beethoven compounds that with striking metrical and harmonic displacements. First, the refrains are displaced by half a bar, creating dramatic conflict between layers of the counterpoint. At the climax, the horns, trumpets, and wind even cut into the harmony of the strings: the strings play a subdominant harmony; the brass and wind superimpose a tonic over that. The effect is one of powerful assertion, stamping the authority of a leader onto the contrapuntal texture. This metrical energy disguises the fact that, tonally speaking, nothing much happens in this music other than a conventional alternation of tonics and dominants, just as in the theme itself. There is no real dissonance, no true hazard. It is all a rhetorical trick, perhaps the ultimate truth of glory.

I venture, then, that secret of Beethoven's glorious self-sacrifice is hidden in this tonal and formal paradox: a drive to the dominant short-circuited by tonic refrains. The tonic fanfares assert authority, reassurance, fearlessness, and also a certain feeling of timelessness. The three tonic returns are little islands in the stream of time. They are extremely suggestive for unlocking Beethoven's dialectic of glory. On the one hand, the music is rushing purposefully towards its climax, a military goal. On the other hand, true nobility doesn't have a purpose; it sacrifices itself because that is the right thing to do. To coin a phrase, it is purposive without purpose. These three sincere, authentic-sounding tonic fanfares express a true ethical content: they meld the beautiful with the good.

Now let's look at the second half of the glory script, the triumph of glory. If the first half, the battle, expresses the earthy imprecation ascribed to General Cambronne, this second half is the inscription on the monument: the radiant, more leisurely, mostly posthumous, emotion which memorializes the sacrifice. This is what we hear in the slow apotheosis of Beethoven's theme, just after the fugato climax. In many ways, its emotion of pride is much more straightforward to decode. As with pride, Hume's principal passion, the theme puffs out its chest. We are reminded of the stately march of a proud French overture by Lully; or even of a Chopin polonaise; also of Siegfried's horn leitmotiv decked out in clanking armour at the court of the Gibbichungs. The tempo is slow, because the music is heavy. The weight exudes sheer power, a mixture of heaviness and difficulty. This power is demonstrated in the effort needed to lift those heavy French Horn semiquaver scales up to the high A flats. We empathetically



feel with those horns, pushing up the scale, and leading the orchestra. And of course, the brass of the horns gleams with the glory of gold, of money.

The apotheosis is recognized not only in itself, but as a justification for the battle. It also crowns the sentimental education of the original theme: its growth from playfulness to heroism. Most broadly, it puts the stamp on the apparent inevitability of the process, why this is musical form and not improvisation. This inevitability can be reverse engineered back to the theme. The fearlessness of the battle music, the absence of real dissonance, is already implicit in the theme's harmonic simplicity, the naïve reduction to tonics and dominants. We can also imagine those bizarre, empty bars in the theme as a kind of chthonic cave, out of which emerge the music's powerful heroic forces. Whilst all these things might be true, and may emerge on reflection, I don't think we hear the music as inevitable. The power of Beethoven's battle is that it is made to sound precarious and contingent – like an improvisation – and also goal-driven at the same time. How these contradictory forces are made to coincide is exactly the music's glory: we can feel it; but it is harder to analyse it.

There are similar issues when we explore the effect of glory in everyday life. Psychologists of emotion are fond of erecting walls between aesthetic emotion and what they term 'utilitarian' emotion.<sup>18</sup> This distinction doesn't work, particularly for glory, an emotion which passes easily across art and life. We don't need to go to battle to experience glory, so I won't go down the road, with critics such as Susan McClary, of apologizing for the heroic style as murderous or blood-soaked, even given Napoleon's insouciance towards military casualties.<sup>19</sup> In our everyday lives, we experience glory when we achieve something against the odds. For instance, when we overcome a disability such as deafness. There is also glory when this victory is recognized by other people. But, as a codetta to this paper, let's end by taking the battle into the enemy camp, indeed to consider a battle as a kind of work of art.

Beethoven famously said to a French officer, "If I, as general, knew as much about strategy as I the composer know of counterpoint, I'd give you something to do".<sup>20</sup> On the other side of the looking glass, one is tickled to discover that scholars analyse Napoleon's battles, just as we analyse Beethoven symphonies.<sup>21</sup> Military historians agree that Napoleon's strategic masterpiece – his *Eroica* – was the Battle of Ulm in 1805, a campaign in which he encircled and captured the Austrian army with hardly a single shot being fired.<sup>21</sup> The operation unfolded in two waves, not unlike, perhaps, the

two fugato episodes in Beethoven's finale, and there are many graphic analyses of the attack in military histories.<sup>22</sup> Not being tied to immobile food depots, like the army of Frederick the Great, Napoleon's troops lived off the land as they moved, often in harvest time, with an ability to disperse and concentrate rapidly with multiple routs of advance. At Ulm, the French turned the Austrian flank and positioned themselves between their army and its base. This maneuver usually leads to the total destruction of an army because it cuts off its line of retreat. The interesting thing is that Napoleon had trialed exactly the same maneuver five years earlier at the Battle of Marengo in 1800. A battle, like a symphony, can have a conventional form which can be repeated and improved. Although Napoleon won at Marengo, on that occasion it was largely through sheer luck, but that is not how the propaganda after the battle presented it. Napoleon's publicity machine portrayed a seamless unity between planning and execution; for instance, presenting a chaotic rout as a tactical retreat. Napoleon's victory at Marengo was crucial in burnishing his reputation as a First Consul on the way to becoming an Emperor. Yet glory in this case was the force which holds together planning and execution. This is what Hobbes calls 'vainglory'. By contrast, the glory of Ulm was fully justified. In Beethoven's case, imagine that the triumph of the theme wasn't fully motivated by the fugato battle. Simply put, that it was composed badly, as in, for instance, his later pot-boiler, *Wellington's Victory*. The vainglorious *Wellingtons Sieg* was Beethoven's most successful work in his lifetime. It was his Marengo Moment. By contrast, the *Eroica* finale is his masterpiece; it is Beethoven's Ulm.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Henri Lachouque, *The Anatomy of Glory: Napoleon and his Guard, A Study in Leadership*, Pickle Partners Publishing 2015, p. 106.
- <sup>2</sup> Katrin Pah, *Tropes of Transport: Hegel and Emotion*, Chicago, IL 2012.
- <sup>3</sup> William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, Cambridge 2001.
- <sup>4</sup> Robert Morrissey, *The Economy of Glory: From Ancien Régime France to the Fall of Napoleon*, Chicago, IL 2014.
- <sup>5</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* [1739], London 1985. See also John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford 1988.

- <sup>6</sup> See Stephen Rumph, *Beethoven after Napoleon: Political Romanticism in the Late Works*, Los Angeles, CA 2004.
- <sup>7</sup> Marina Frolova-Walker, 'Stalin and the Art of Boredom', *Twentieth-Century Music* 1 (2004), no. 1, pp. 101–124.
- <sup>8</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* [1759], London 2007.
- <sup>9</sup> Munro Price, *Napoleon: The End of Glory*, Oxford 2014, p. 243.
- <sup>10</sup> Judith Miller, 'Fratricide: Tragic Brothers, Masculine Violence, and the Republic on the French Stage, 1799', in *Republics at War, 1776–1840: Revolutions, Conflicts, and Geopolitics in Europe and the Atlantic World*, ed. P. Serna, A. De Francesco and J. Miller, London 2013, pp. 189–211, 205.
- <sup>11</sup> Morrissey, *The Economy of Glory* (note 4), p. 147.
- <sup>12</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* [1651], London 2011.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- <sup>14</sup> Morrissey, *The Economy of Glory* (note 4), p. 59.
- <sup>15</sup> Clive McClelland, *Ombra: Supernatural Music in the Eighteenth Century*, New York, NY 2012.
- <sup>16</sup> William Caplin, *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven*, Oxford 1998.
- <sup>17</sup> Michael Spitzer, *Metaphor and Musical Thought*, Chicago, IL 2004.
- <sup>18</sup> Marcel Zentner, Marcel, Didier Grandjean, and Klaus Scherer, 'Emotions Evoked by the Sound of Music: Characterization, Classification, and Measurement', *Emotion* 8 (2008), no. 4, pp. 494–521.
- <sup>19</sup> Susan McClary, 'Getting Down off the Beanstalk: The Presence of a Woman's Voice in Janika Vandervelde's Genesis II', *The Minnesota Composer's Forum Newsletter* (1987), pp. 4–7, 7.
- <sup>20</sup> Rumph, *Beethoven* (note 6), p. 100.
- <sup>21</sup> See for instance David Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, New York, NY 1966.

ABSTRACT

This essay is a taster of my long-standing project on the history of musical emotion. Whilst there are genealogies of basic emotions such as fear or anger, there are also histories of culturally local emotions, such as Napoleonic glory. I analyse the finale of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony as a platform to explore the emotion of glory in musical terms. The first part of the chapter rehearses the issues in the rising discipline of history of emotion. The middle part considers, in turn, the phases of eighteenth-century sentimentalism in France, refracted through the lens of William Reddy's seminal *The Navigation of Feeling* (Cambridge, 2001). Part three focuses on Napoleonic glory as the climax of sentimentalist political emotion, and applies it to music. A formal analysis of the finale of the *Eroica* reveals musical glory to be a complex emotion, involving the bracketing of dissonance and violence.

LAURA TUNBRIDGE

## Robert Schumann's *Frauenleben*

Few musical forms are as self-evidently bound up with metaphors of life as the song cycle, particularly those that follow a narrative tracing an individual's journey to death. In fact very few nineteenth-century cycles are that explicit: Schubert's miller boy is assumed to commit suicide, once he's stopped singing, yet that's not taken from the score but from the poems by Wilhelm Müller that Schubert did not set. The protagonist of *Winterreise* does not die in the cycle, whatever the consequences of him thinking about wandering off with the hurdy-gurdy man may be. Similarly the poet of Schumann's *Dichterliebe* sinks his love and his songs, not necessarily himself. Even the songs of Mussorgsky and Mahler are about death, rather than enacting it. These cycles are certainly preoccupied with existential matters but they present life primarily as a metaphor for musical existence – their songs, after all, will be sung and heard again. We do not get their life stories.

It's left to female protagonists to provide those. The eight songs of Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben* op. 42 (1840) move from first love through marriage to widowhood; significantly, the composer omitted Adelbert von Chamisso's poem revealing she was recounting her experiences to her daughter, instead letting that idea of recollection permeate the piano postlude of the cycle. There are few song cycles that make such an obvious musical connection between beginning and end. Here, as Charles Rosen and Kristina Muxfeldt have acutely observed, the piano lets the climactic phrase of the vocal melody from the opening song, "[es] schwebt sein Bild mir vor" ("his image hovers before me") retreat into an inner voice, leaving us "to supply in our own minds not only the missing words but the missing melody".

Fig. 1: From Kristina Muxfeldt, 'Frauenliebe now and then', *19th-Century Music* 25 (2001), pp. 27–48; 46.

© University of Oxford

18 *pp* *ritard*  
der Schlei - er fällt, da hab' ich dich und mein ver - lor - nes Glück, du mei - ne Welt! *Adagio*

24 *p*  
Tempo wie das erste Lied  
"sch ich ihn"

31 *pp*  
"tiefstem Dunkel"

37 *pp*

Example 3: Schumann, *Frauenliebe und Leben*: The Postlude.

Yet it is not possible to do so exactly, because crucial melodic notes are submerged, even expunged. Schumann's postlude, according to Muxfeldt,

may be thought to represent a memory, and not merely a symbolic formal return, precisely because the past is brought back through the filter of present emotion

and experience. The very inaccuracy of the repetition, its muted passion, imitates the perceptual mechanisms of a memory that has no hope of being revitalized by physical proximity.<sup>1</sup>

Life is being recast as a musical memory; it is given posthumous form, perhaps.<sup>2</sup> It is a clear example of an artwork not possessing the improvisatory, unpredictable quality that marks everyday existence.

That element of narrative control fed into feminist critiques of Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben*. In 1992, Ruth Solie famously decried the cycle as "the impersonation of a woman by the voices of male culture, a spurious autobiographical act".<sup>3</sup> There have been numerous attempts subsequently to correct, nuance, and re-evaluate interpretations, arguing for greater contextualisation of the poems and songs in light of Chamisso's and Schumann's attitudes and personal circumstances.<sup>4</sup> Although scholarly discomfort has probably not reduced the number of *Frauenliebe* performances and recordings, in recent years other Schumann song cycles, loosely based on a woman's life, have begun to be undertaken by singers with greater frequency. In the Elisabeth Kulmann lieder, op. 104, composed in the summer of 1851, and the *Gedichte der Königin Maria Stuart*, op. 135, from 1852, Schumann presented two very different types of female protagonists. Both die before their time but Kulmann is a young innocent, while Maria Stuart – now by far the most popular 'feminine' cycle by Schumann after *Frauenliebe* – presents the incarcerated queen preparing for her execution.<sup>5</sup>

Schumann's decision to set female poets is often taken to signify his sympathy with women more generally – Graham Johnson points out that he was "a fond father of daughters [...] and his study of the character of Goethe's Mignon (who also died young) predisposed him to see the pathos of her story in terms of femininity and unfailing dutifulness".<sup>6</sup> An alternative resonance with Schumann's life is proposed by Michel Schneider, for whom the "female voice, clearly expressing a 'not-I', allows Schumann to escape from his recurrent melancholia".<sup>7</sup> The Kulmann and Maria Stuart cycles seem to offer a slightly different kind of female portraiture to that of *Frauenliebe* in that they deal not with an abstract idea of womanhood, devised by a male author, but with historical figures who seem to be speaking for themselves, through their own poetry.

The assumption is misleading. Although Kulmann was a historical figure – she died aged 17, a celebrated translator (she was of Russian-German parentage) and author – there have been doubts raised about the authenticity

of many of her literary works with, as is often the case, her male mentor Karl Friedrich von Großhainrich supposedly being the more likely source – certainly he played an important part in producing the collected editions of her poems.<sup>8</sup> And then Maria Stuart was almost as fictional as Chamisso's protagonist in *Frauenliebe und Leben*. Schumann used Gisbert Friedrich Freiherr von Vincke's German translations of what circulated as the poems of Mary, Queen of Scots. One or two may have been by her. Others were most definitely nineteenth-century creations.<sup>9</sup> Vincke had used sources such as Fanny Lewald's *England und Schottland: Reisetagebuch* of 1852, which presented graffiti from the walls of the antechamber in which Mary gave birth to her son, James VI, as being written by the imprisoned Queen – even if she barely spoke Scots. Mary's final prayer – the last song in Schumann's cycle – was probably invented by the English ballad composer Henry Harington in 1792. The only poem likely to be by Mary, because it is included in an autograph copy housed in the British Library, is the sonnet Vincke translated as 'Abschied von der Welt'.

The question of authenticity is also important for the Kulmann songs, which Schumann at least believed were all by the young woman. Unusually, he devised a biographical frame for the seven songs he set as his op. 104 by including a prefatory dedication to Kulmann and providing epigraphs to each song. He described "these unpretentious songs" as being "dedicated to the memory of a girl who departed from us long ago, and whose name is known to very few". ("Es sind diese schlichten Lieder dem Andenken eines Mädchens gewidmet, das schon lange nicht mehr unter uns weilt, das die Wenigsten wohl kaum dem Namen nach kennen.")<sup>10</sup> Schumann rarely provided contextual information for and even poetic interpretations of songs as he does here. The first song ('Mond, meiner Seele Liebling') is said to be addressed to Kulmann's mother, the second ('Viel Glück zur Reise, Schwalben!') praises her homeland, the third ('Du nennst mich armes Mädchen') denies that she is poor, the fourth ('Der Zeisig'), a song in which a bird challenges children to a singing competition, "reflects reality in the profoundest way", the fifth ('Reich mir die Hand, o Wolke') has a sense of foreboding as does the sixth ('Die letzten Blumen starben'), and in the seventh ('Gekämpft hat meine Barke') she grieves at the prospect of being separated from her mother. As a postscript, Schumann adds:

She died, writing poetry to the very end, on 19 November 1825, in her seventeenth year. Among her late verse is the remarkable 'A vision after my death', in which she describes her own death. It is, perhaps, one of the sublimest



masterpieces in all poetry. Thus she departed, as airy as an angel passing from one shore to another, but leaving behind her the luminous trail of a heavenly vision, gleaming afar.<sup>11</sup>

(Sie starb, bis zu ihren letzten Minuten schaffend und dichtend, den 19. November 1825 im 17ten Jahre. Zu den Gedichten der letzten Zeit gehört auch jenes merkwürdige "Traumgesicht nach meinem Tode", in dem sie selbst ihren Tod beschreibt. Es ist vielleicht eines der erhabensten Meisterstücke der Poesie. So schied sie von uns, leicht wie ein Engel, der von einem Ufer zum andern übersetzt, aber in meithinleuchtenden Zügen die Spuren einer himmlischen Erscheinung zurücklassend.)

Unlike in *Frauenliebe und Leben* in which, as explained earlier, Schumann provided a piano postlude that seemed to serve the purpose of framing the cycle as recollection in lieu of Chamisso's final poem, here the reader of the score is pointed in the direction of a poem Schumann neither set nor evoked musically. There are understandable reasons for his not including 'A vision after my death', not least that the poem runs to some fourteen pages. What is more, the collected edition of Kulmann's poems undertook the same kind of biographical framing that Schumann's cycle does, in more extended fashion.<sup>12</sup> This kind of exegetical presentation seems contradictory to the oblique musical readings Schumann provides for a poet such as Heinrich Heine in *Dichterliebe*; however, it seems common when dealing with a female poet whose life – and, importantly, whose suffering – seems to explain her artistic output. These were women's lives to be consumed by the reading public, which casts an interesting light on the kinds of musical contexts in which these songs might be played and sung.

There are some shared poetic themes between the Maria Stuart and the Kulmann songs – notably sea voyages and prayers for salvation. Musically speaking, both cycles are fairly constrained: the Maria Stuart songs only diverge from E minor as their guiding tonality in the central, third number (which moves to A minor); the Kulmann songs circle around G minor for the most part, until Eb major offers some solace at the end. The vocal range of the Kulman in particular is limited but more lyrical than most of the Maria Stuart songs, which tend towards the declamatory. Two short examples will be helpful here, to illustrate the musical worlds of both sets.<sup>13</sup>

The aforementioned final Kulmann song, 'Gekämpft hat meine Barke', brings together themes of a voyage and farewell (see fig. 2).

The protagonist sees from her battered boat the tranquil shores of heaven and fears for her mother's peace of mind, which will be assuaged only when

Fig. 2: Robert Schumann, *Sieben Lieder von Elisabeth Kulmann*, op. 104, 'Gekämpft hat meine Barke', bars 22–34.<sup>14</sup>

Meer. Dort an - ge - langt, ent - wei - che ich nim - mer - mehr dem

Strand, seh' stets nach dir und rei - che der Lan - den den die Hand.

she is reunited with her daughter in heaven. Schumann provides a suitably choppy accompaniment, with occasional moments of harmonic unease; note, in figure 2, which shows the song's final verse, the pull towards and away from B $\flat$  via fluctuations between A $\sharp$  and A $\flat$ . Although above I said that the textual epigraph negates the need for a piano postlude, there are six bars of a repeated melody that draws the set to a close. It is nothing as extravagant as the earlier cycles but still allows for an open ending (not least through the late resolution of the final chord), rather like the protagonist's outstretched hand.

Schumann's approach to telling the life of Maria Stuart is also somewhat fragmentary. Graham Johnson summarizes the peculiarity of the songs' overall narrative well:

The span of the cycle is twenty-six years of a woman's life – many more than that of *Frauenliebe und -leben*. There is no reference here to love between man and woman, nor to any of the Queen's three husbands, source of the controversy surrounding her life, as well as of the accusations against her. Instead we see a young girl devoted to her adopted land of France, a young mother concerned for the legacy of her son, a proud imprisoned queen forced to write a pleading letter, the same prisoner some four years later renouncing hope in life and, finally, praying before a fearful death. This is certainly an extraordinary *Frauenleben* expunged of the *Liebe* that was at the heart of Mary Stuart's tragedy.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike in the Kulmann lieder, Schumann provides no guiding notes about how the songs relate to Maria Stuart's life; there is a presumption that the tale would already be familiar, much as he set songs from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and, indeed, how he approached the composition of the *Szenen aus Goethe's Faust*, which selected scenes from both parts of the drama paying little heed to explaining how one moves between them.<sup>16</sup> The question of how to read or perform 'external-plot' song cycles, as Ruth Bingham calls them, lies at the crux of understanding how to engage with the narratives of Schumann's song cycles with female protagonists.<sup>17</sup>

The harmonic world of the Maria Stuart songs, like op. 104, is direct and relatively uncomplicated. The cycle's symmetrical layout places 'An die Königin Elisabeth' at its centre and that song is the only one that has a sense of thematic return at its end. It is also, as mentioned, the only song to break from the tonic – E minor in the first edition – to venture to the subdominant minor. The next song, 'Abschied von der Welt', seems to have the greatest emotional weight. Jon Finson considers Schumann here to have adopted "a minimalist version of the dirge topos", one so highly stylised that it might be overlooked.<sup>18</sup> (See fig. 3.)

Finally, 'Gebet' looks beyond the end of the cycle, and beyond her death, to her salvation. It is this unfinished business, perhaps, that allows us to think about this particular example from Schumann's musical output as not only a depiction of a life but a metaphor for it. The cycle, like many others, is not poetically complete in itself. Its harmonic closure is not emphasised by thematic return. The songs progress through Maria Stuart's life to the point at which there is no going back. The final prayer calls out for salvation but there is no knowing if it is granted.

The Kulmann lieder and the Maria Stuart Gedichte seem a long way from the tonal complexities of Schumann's song cycles from the 1840s. There is not the sense of return gained from the repetition of material that is

Fig. 3: Robert Schumann, *Gedichte der Königin Maria Stuart*, op. 135, 'Abschied von der Welt', bars 1–10.

**Abschied von der Welt.**

N<sup>o</sup> 4.  
Langsam.

Was nützt die mir noch zu-gemess-ne Zeit? Mein Herz er-

starb für ir-di-sches Be-geh-ren, nur Lei-den soll mein Schat-ten nicht ent-

beh-ren, mir blieb al-lein die To-des-freu-dig-keit. Ihr

felt at the end of *Frauenliebe und Leben*; staying within the same tonality instead creates a feeling of stasis, perhaps even incarceration. Even a musical topic as straightforward as a lament – conventionally nothing more than a descending tetrachord – is distilled further. All these factors – simplicity, stasis, stylisation – seem like markers of a composer's late period.<sup>19</sup> To be sure, late twentieth-century interpreters have tended to sense in Schumann's attraction to figures such as Maria Stuart signs of his own demise. For example, Eric Sams, one of the most influential Anglophone writers on Schumann's lieder declared in 1969:

One of the saddest entries in Schumann's diary records his joy on completing these last five dismal songs. We can only conjecture what personal meaning he found in them. The first begins with "I am going away." The last ends "Save

me.” Soon after their completion came his mental breakdown, his attempt to drown himself in the Rhine, and his incarceration at the asylum at Endenich, where in July 1856 he died.<sup>20</sup>

More recently, Roman Hincke has written of the cycle:

Schumann [...] may well have seen in the sombre mysticism of the texts, with their themes of resignation, loss, and religious abnegation, a reflection of his own bleak situation, dominated by depression and a “sad decline in my strength”. Hence his settings may easily be understood as the quiet swansong of a disheartened soul, which bears no trace at all of the passionate vehemence of his reactions to the joys and sorrows of existence in the earlier works. Lost, now, is all human feeling, which has yielded to an inexplicable paralysis of the spirit. “Was nützt die mir noch zugemess’ne Zeit? Mein Herz erstarb für irdisches Begehren” (What use is the time I am still allotted? My heart is dead to all earthly desires), we are told in *Abschied von der Welt*. The nightingale was on the point of singing himself to death.<sup>21</sup>

These are just two of dozens of examples reinforcing the notion that these songs are Schumann’s last testament; that they represent a radically altered expressive world that reconfigures the relationship between voice and piano; that these are bad poems; that there was a resonance between the ill-fated Schumann and the ill-fated Queen; that all human feeling is lost and song is the vehicle, maybe the cause, of death.

However, as Finson has pointed out, in fact Schumann was doing nothing more than reflected the popular culture around him, participating in the craze for all things Maria Stuart related that hit Europe in the mid nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> The five songs of op. 135 were composed in the winter of 1852. They broke a three-month fallow period following a period of illness (‘nervous attacks’, rheumatism, coughing fits, exhaustion), coinciding with Schumann’s last engagements as conductor of the Düsseldorf Gesangverein and orchestra. It was a difficult period for Schumann, professionally, eventually leading to his resignation from the post of music director, but while the *Gedichte der Königin Maria Stuart* may have been his ‘last song cycle’ they were far from his final compositions.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Finson explains that they were designed as a Christmas gift for his wife Clara, who had entered the poems in their journal of ‘poetry for setting’ after reading them in the local *Kölnische Zeitung* on 11 and 17 November. They should be understood as a ‘song bouquet’, a gift for a specific person for a special occasion. Clara noted in her diary that, along with a new purse, bracelets, soap and cash, Robert had given her “the

gift of songs with texts by Maria Stuart, his first attempt at composition for a long time".<sup>24</sup> What is more, she condoned the publication of op. 135 in 1855 (by Carl Siegel), by which time her husband was in the asylum at Endenich. Clara was not prone to endorse works she thought were inferior.

With this historical context in mind, to those markers of late style – simplicity, stasis and stylisation – needs to be added the complicating factors of sentimentality and sociability; of even ‘dismal’ songs being a welcome Christmas gift alongside soap. The relatively straightforward piano parts and limited vocal range of the Kulmann and Maria Stuart songs may, then, have been intended to make them suitable for proficient amateurs. Perhaps it is better to think of Schumann’s Maria Stuart as an opportunity for middle-class women to imagine themselves as imperilled queens, or as attractively doomed young women in the manner of Kulmann, rather than as a cipher for the anguish of a tormented male composer. The stories told outside such cycles, leaving the songs to stand in allusive relationships to other narratives, such as biography, add an element of openness and uncertainty to the works. Role-play is an important if often overlooked aspect of lieder performance, as Jennifer Ronyak has argued.<sup>25</sup> While within nineteenth-century performance contexts it can be understood as contributing to identity formation for otherwise disenfranchised sectors of society, such historicization does not necessarily help singers attempting to engage with these cycles today. In part this has to do with approaches to lieder performance more broadly and takes me back to Solie’s objection to *Frauenliebe und Leben* as “the impersonation of a woman by the voices of male culture, a spurious autobiographical act”.<sup>26</sup> I am less interested in the feminist angle of Solie’s argument than in the notion that lieder performance involves a kind of impersonation and how that might relate to the presentation of life stories within musical works.

According to the *New Grove*,

As a lyric poet, Schumann explored the inner lives of his subjects [...] The gently affirmative tone of [*Frauenliebe und Leben*] gives way to mysterious understatement in the Kulmann lieder and an unusual blend of passion and austerity in the *Maria Stuart* cycle.

Exploration of inner lives seems in keeping with the emphasis on interiority typical of writings on lieder.<sup>27</sup> Yet, as Edward T. Cone explained, at the same time often “the protagonist is [...] portrayed as a singer who creates his own songs”.<sup>28</sup> There is thus an elision between poetic and singing

subjects that perhaps why a woman in the late twentieth century might feel uncomfortable expressing the desires of a different age or, indeed, why there might be objections to a man singing *Frauenliebe und Leben* (despite baritone Julius Stockhausen having given the first public performance of the cycle in 24 February 1862).<sup>29</sup>

Part of the problem is a tension between whether, as in *New Grove*, Schumann is considered a 'lyric poet' or, as Cone argues, whether singers somehow embody or at least envoice a poem's persona. Jonathan Culler argues that the latter is a trend in Anglo-American literary criticism (one not shared by French and German scholars). He explains:

Modern criticism, increasingly cognizant of the problems of treating lyric as the direct and sincere expression of the experience and affect of the poet, has moved toward something of a compromise position, treating lyric as expression of a persona rather than of the poet and thus as mimesis of the thought or speech of such a persona created by the poet. If the speaker is a persona, then interpretation of the poem becomes a matter of reconstructing the characteristics of this persona, especially the motives and circumstances of this act of speech – as if the speaker were a character in a novel.<sup>30</sup>

Thus lyric poetry has the potential to be considered a representational art, according to writers such as Barbara Herrnstein Smith and even Helen Vendler.<sup>31</sup> Culler's critique of Smith may be helpful here.<sup>32</sup> First, he agrees that lyric poems are "not historical utterances" because "they are not said by someone on a particular occasion". However, he disagrees with Smith's notion of *fictive utterance* being extended beyond emotions or persona being fictional to incorporating speaking, addressing, expressing and alluding as "fictive verbal acts".<sup>33</sup> Second, Smith's resistance to distinguishing between everyday and poetic language is objected to by Culler because those two contexts need not necessitate "imagining that in the poem they are represented as spoken by a fictional character". Third, there is no simple solution, according to Culler, to the problem of how to define the relationship between the 'I' of the lyric and the poet. Smith's claim that "the 'I' is by definition fictional since the poetic utterance is a fictional imitation of personal utterance", in other words that "the lyric is a fictional representation of a possible real-world speech act", is described by Culler as dubious.<sup>34</sup>

Culler's reservations cast a shadow over musicological interpretations of the persona within a song that tend towards Smith's *fictive utterance*. Dunsby, on attempting to dismantle Solie's reading of *Frauenliebe* as a

‘female impersonation’, argues that “Whether life was ‘different’ in 1840 is not the substantive point: that life is re-enacted now, and this is the sorcery of all art, especially the greatest art”.<sup>35</sup> This view is more in line with Alessandro Barchiesi’s explanation of the classical lyric:

Lyric can be tentatively (transhistorically) defined as a first person utterance whose performative conditions are reconstructed by a re-performing reader, who typically positions himself somewhere in a continuum whose extremes are a generic voice and some individual idea of the author.<sup>36</sup>

The concept of the continuum between generic and individual voices is important in thinking about the ways in which performers and their listeners engage with Schumann’s songs for female protagonists, as is demonstrated by my final example.

The sentimental and sociable aspect of Schumann’s song output – and the works’ potential for reflecting, in music, lived experience – in the early 1850s is perhaps best illustrated not by solo lieder but by further settings of Elisabeth Kulmann. His *Mädchenlieder* op. 103, were four duets for female voices. The first two poems were taken from the ‘Gemäldesammlung in vierundzwanzig Sälen’ (‘Collection of pictures in twenty-four galleries’) section of the edition of Kulmann’s poetry Schumann owned, with the remaining two chosen from a ‘Gemäldesammlung’ of twenty galleries. They are less varied in tone and content than the op. 104 lieder. In fact, they are quite generic, consisting of ‘Mailied’, ‘Frühlingslied’, ‘An die Nachtigall’, and ‘An den Abendstern’. The music is not difficult to sing (although intonation may be a problem) or to play on the piano. Many verses of music are repeated. Yet they are not entirely devoid of character. ‘Mailied’ instructs the young women to pick roses to make wreaths for their hair, and to give one to the musician who will play for their dances. Be happy while the summer lasts, they are advised, for soon winter will come again and you will be back sweating over menial tasks (see fig. 4).

The threat of returning to working by lamplight incites the lowest pitches in the vocal line and the farthest harmonies. Schumann’s repetition of the first verse to bring the song to a close, however, means that the voices end with their pleasing parallel thirds to encourage themselves to enjoy the summertime.



Heide und Dreck von Brecht und G. Harig in Leipzig.

3. Lan - ge müsst ihr dann auf's neu' bei der Lam - pe si - tzen, und bei ew'gem Ei - ner - lei - san -

3. Lan - ge müsst ihr dann auf's neu' bei der Lam - pe si - tzen, und bei ew'gem Ei - ner - lei - san -

- rer Ar - beit schwi - tzen. Pflücket Ro - sen, um das Haar schön - - - da - mit zu krän - zen,

- rer Ar - beit schwi - tzen. Pflücket Ro - sen, um das Haar schön - - - da - mit zu krän - zen,

rei - he dich, o jun - ge Schaar, dann zu fro - hen Tän - zen, dann - zu fro - hen Tän - zen.

rei - he dich, o jun - ge Schaar, dann zu fro - hen Tän - zen, dann - zu fro - hen Tän - zen.

Ad. \* Ad. \* Ad. \* Ad. \*

B. N. 100.

This kind of domestic music is no less a type of role play than Schumann's solo lieder but is rarely taken as seriously with regard to gender politics.<sup>37</sup> Defracted as a duo, perhaps the singers have a reduced agency – they need not engage with the characters as intimately as might be expected of singing as Maria Stuart. Music aesthetics are here still shaping perceptions of life, though: the way in which women of a certain class and place are allowed to behave and how they might reflect on their own existence is encoded in the winsome verse and tunes of op. 103. More than that, it is worth noting the liminal status of these part-songs within Schumann's output; they are barely mentioned in biographies, and rarely studied independently. Recognising that Schumann engaged with this kind of music-making alongside the 'dismal' lieder of the early 1850s serves as a reminder of his expressive range and allows for a growing appreciation of his ability to imagine and give voice to a wide variety of musical lives.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Kristina Muxfeldt, "'Frauenliebe und Leben' Now and Then', *19th-Century Music* 25/1 (Summer 2001), pp. 27–48, 47.
- <sup>2</sup> Jeremy Tambling, *Becoming Posthumous: Life and Death in Literary and Cultural Studies*, Edinburgh 2001.
- <sup>3</sup> Ruth M. Solie, 'Whose life? The Gendered Self in Schumann's "Frauenliebe" Songs', in *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*, ed. Steven Paul Scher, Cambridge 1992, pp. 219–240, 220.
- <sup>4</sup> Jonathan Dunsby addresses flaws in Solie's analysis in 'Why sing? Lieder and song cycles' in *The Cambridge Companion to Schumann*, ed. Beate Perrey, Cambridge 2007, pp. 102–122. For further discussion of the cycle see also Elissa S. Guralnick, "'Ah Clara, I am not worthy of your love": Rereading "Frauenliebe und Leben", the Poetry and the Music', *Music and Letters* 87/4 (2006), pp. 580–605; and Rufus Hallmark, *"Frauenliebe und Leben": Chamisso's Poems and Schumann's Songs*, Cambridge 2014.
- <sup>5</sup> Schumann also set the female poets Catherine Fanshawe ('Rätsel', trans. K. Kannegiesser, in *Myrthen* op. 25 no. 16), Wilhelmine Lorenz ('Loreley' from the *Romanzen und Balladen* iii op. 53 no. 2), Marianne von Willemer ('Lied der Suleika', in *Myrthen* op. 25 no. 9) and Lily Bernhard ('Mädchen-Schwermut' from the *Vier Gesänge* (1840, pub. 1858 as an 'Unbekannter Dichter').

- <sup>6</sup> Graham Johnson, liner notes to *The Songs of Robert Schumann – 3*, Hyperion Record, London 1999, p. 67.
- <sup>7</sup> Michel Schneider, *La tombée du jour: Schumann*, Paris 1989, p. 155; trans. in Dunsby, ‘Why sing? Lieder and song cycles’ (note 4), p. 119.
- <sup>8</sup> For more see Olga Lossewa, ‘Neues über Elisabeth Kulmann’, *Schumann und seine Dichter: Bericht über das 4. Internationale Schumann-Symposium am 13. und 14. Juni 1991 im Rahmen des 4. Schumann-Festes, Düsseldorf*, ed. Matthias Wendt, Mainz/London 1993, pp. 77–86.
- <sup>9</sup> For more on this see Jon W. Finson, ‘At the Interstice between “Popular” and “Classical” Schumann’s “Poems of Queen Mary Stuart” and European Sentimentality at Midcentury’, in *Rethinking Schumann*, ed. Roe-Min Kok and Laura Tunbridge, New York, NY 2011.
- <sup>10</sup> Robert Schumann, ‘Widmung [7 June 1851]’, *Sieben Lieder von Elisabeth Kulmann zur Erinnerung an die Dichterin* op. 104, *Robert Schumann’s Werke*, ed. Clara Schumann, Leipzig 1887, XIII, p. 3.
- <sup>11</sup> Trans. Richard Stokes, CD booklet *The Songs of Robert Schumann – 3*, Hyperion Records, London 1999, p. 76.
- <sup>12</sup> Schumann had acquired the sixth edition of her poetry, *Elisabeth Kulmann: Sämtliche Dichtungen*, ed. Karl Friedrich von Großheirich, Frankfurt a. M. 1851.
- <sup>13</sup> I have written on the Kulmann and Maria Stuart songs at greater length in my *Schumann’s Late Style*, Cambridge 2007.
- <sup>14</sup> Der Text unter den Notenbeispiel lautet: “ Sie starb, bis zu ihren letzten Minuten schaffend und dichtend, den 19. November 1825 im 17<sup>ten</sup> Jahre. Zu den Gedichten der letzten Zeit gehört auch jenes merkwürdige “Traumgesicht nach meinem Tode”, in dem sie selbst ihren Tod beschreibt. Es ist vielleicht eines der erhabensten Meisterstücke der Poesie. So schied sie von uns, leicht wie ein Engel, der von einem Ufer zum andern übersetzt, aber in weithinleuchtenden Zügen die Spuren einer himmlischen Erscheinung zurücklassend.”
- <sup>15</sup> Johnson, liner notes to *The Songs of Robert Schumann* (note 6), p. 77.
- <sup>16</sup> On Schumann’s approach to Goethe’s novel and drama see Nicholas Marston, “‘Entzückt’: Schumann, Raphael, “Faust””, in *Rethinking Schumann* (note 9), pp. 109–128; Julian Horton, ‘The Musical Novel as Master-genre: Schumann’s “Szenen aus Goethe’s Faust”’, in *Music in Goethe’s “Faust”: Goethe’s “Faust” in Music*, ed. Lorraine Byrne Bodley, Woodbridge 2017, pp. 117–136; and Laura Tunbridge, ‘Schumann’s Struggle with Goethe’s *Faust*’, in *The Oxford Handbook*

- of Faust in Music*, ed. Lorna Fitzsimmons and Charles McKnight, New York, NY forthcoming.
- <sup>17</sup> Ruth O. Bingham, 'The early-nineteenth century song cycle', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*, ed. James Parsons, Cambridge 2004, pp. 108–110.
- <sup>18</sup> Jon W. Finson, *Robert Schumann: The Book of Songs*, Cambridge, MA 2007, p. 189.
- <sup>19</sup> On which the literature is extensive: see Edward Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature against the Grain*, London 2007; and Gordon McMullan and Sam Smiles, *Late Style and its Discontents: Essays in Art, Literature, and Music*, New York, NY 2016.
- <sup>20</sup> Eric Sams, *The Songs of Robert Schumann*, London 1993, p. 273
- <sup>21</sup> Roman Hinke, 'I'd like to sing myself to death, like a nightingale: Robert Schumann's Song Fever', trans. Charles Johnston, Programme booklet to *Schumann Lieder*, Bernarda Fink and Anthony Spiri, Harmonia mundi, 2009, p. 13.
- <sup>22</sup> Jon W. Finson, 'At the Interstice between "Popular" and "Classical" Schumann's "Poems of Queen Mary Stuart" and European Sentimentality at Midcentury', in *Rethinking Schumann* (note 9).
- <sup>23</sup> Early 1853 was very productive: Schumann worked on his 'Bachiana' projects, completed the last of the four choral ballades, *Das Glück von Edenhall* op. 143, wrote several orchestral works (including the *Fest-Ouverture* op. 123 and the Violin Concerto), and various chamber music works. He gathered poetry for his *Dichtergarten* collection and worked on a collected editions of his writings.
- <sup>24</sup> Berthold Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: Ein Künstlerleben nach Tagebüchern und Briefen*, Leipzig 1910, vol. 3, p. 269.
- <sup>25</sup> Ronyak's focus is slightly earlier in the nineteenth century but remains pertinent here; see her "'Serious Play," Performance, and the Lied: The Stägemann "Schöne Müllerin" Revisited', *19th-Century Music* 34/2 (2010), pp. 141–167, reprinted in revised form in *Intimacy, Performance, and the Lied in the Early Nineteenth Century*, Indianapolis, IN 2018.
- <sup>26</sup> Solie, 'Whose life? The Gendered Self in Schumann's "Frauenliebe" Songs' (note 3), pp. 219–240, 220.
- <sup>27</sup> As discussed in Benjamin Binder, *Intimacy, Introversion and Schumann's Lieder*, PhD Princeton University 2006.
- <sup>28</sup> Edward T. Cone, *The Composer's Voice*, Princeton, NJ 1974, p. 3.
- <sup>29</sup> For more on Stockhausen's performances of cycles see Edward F. Kravitt, 'The Lied in 19th-Century Concert Life', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 18 (1965), pp. 207–218; Kristina Muxfeldt, *Vanishing Sensibilities:*

- Schubert, Beethoven, Schumann*, New York, NY 2012, p. 102; and Natasha Loges's forthcoming, 'From Miscellanies to Musical Works: Julius Stockhausen, Clara Schumann and *Dichterliebe*'.
- <sup>30</sup> Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, Cambridge, MA 2015, p. 109.
- <sup>31</sup> Culler points out that although Vendler has emphasised that 'A lyric poem is a script for performance by its reader', in her textbook *Poems, Poets, Poetry*, Boston, MA 2002, she encourages students to imagine becoming the fictional speaker.
- <sup>32</sup> His main targets are Smith's *On the Margin of Discourse*, Chicago 1978; and *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*, Chicago 1968; Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (note 30), pp. 110–111.
- <sup>33</sup> Culler quoting Smith, *Theory of the Lyric* (note 30), p. 111.
- <sup>34</sup> Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (note 30), pp. 111–112.
- <sup>35</sup> Dunsby, 'Why sing? Lieder and song cycles' (note 4), p. 111.
- <sup>36</sup> Alessandro Barchiesi, 'Carmina: Odes and Carmen Saeculare' in *Cambridge Companion to Horace*, ed. Stephen Harrison, Cambridge 2007, p. 150; quoted in Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (note 30), p. 116.
- <sup>37</sup> Exceptions can be found in two chapters in the collection *Brahms in the Home and the Concert Hall: Between Private and Public Performance*, ed. Katy Hamilton and Natasha Loges, Cambridge 2014; Heather Platt, 'The construction of gender and mores in Brahms's "Mädchenlieder"', pp. 256–278; and Katy Hamilton, 'Music inside the home and outside the box: Brahms's vocal quartets in context', pp. 279–299.

## ABSTRACT

This essay considers Schumann's musical responses to female poets, concentrating on his *Elisabeth Kulmann lieder*, op. 104 (1851) and the *Gedichte der Königin Maria Stuart* op. 135 (1852). It addresses questions about authorial authenticity raised by Schumann's addition of biographical explanations to the Kulmann lieder and about the validity of negative assessments of the composer's music for the Maria Stuart songs. Finally, it argues that Schumann's settings provided an opportunity for role-play, rather than being a cipher for the composer.

ANDREAS DORSCHER

## Life's Work. Wagner's *Tristan* and the Critique of Biographism<sup>1</sup>

Interpretation would be impossible if the expressions of life were utterly unfamiliar. It would be unnecessary, were there within these expressions nothing that was unfamiliar. Interpretation, therefore, must take place between these two opposite extremes.

Wilhelm Dilthey

### I.

Mozart composed his great *G minor Symphony* because he was in a dark mood, Schubert set the cycle of poems *Die schöne Müllerin* to music because he was unhappily in love, Wagner created *Tristan und Isolde* because he was having an affair with Mathilde Wesendonck, Brahms wrote his *Four Serious Songs* because he sensed his approaching death: such assertions fulfil all the criteria of biographism. It is everywhere, yet at the same time hardly a reasonable person feels at ease with it. This contradictory state of affairs gives us good reason to examine the question of what makes biographism attractive, and what makes it inappropriate.

Proponents of biographism attempt to draw conclusions from works about the mental makeup of their authors – and *vice versa*. In the simplest case this procedure is circular: Mozart wrote his *G minor Symphony* because he was in a dark mood. What is the evidence for this? The *G minor Symphony*. And what explains the genesis of the symphony? The dark mood. There may of course be independent evidence of this mood. A composer may have expressed such a mood in letters. However, this hardly makes biographism any more acceptable as an explanation of art. After all,

many people get into dark moods, and yet they do not write symphonies in G minor – and certainly not this particular one, KV 550.

To explain something means to deduce the unknown from the known. Mozart's *G minor Symphony* may be unfamiliar, even unsettling, but almost everyone has dark moods at some time. Thanks to biographism, the sphinx that stares at us in the form of every great work of art is a little less of a sphinx. Should one therefore counter biographism by demanding that the sphinx remain a sphinx? No and yes. No, because to learn something new about Mozart's *G minor Symphony* is not the worst thing that can happen to us regarding the work – though at the same time it is clearly not the only good thing. Yes, because the reduction of art to that which lies outside art deduces the unknown from the known to such an extent that those aspects which make the attempt to understand worthwhile in the first place are lost in the process. Precisely that which constitutes the art of Mozart's composition is still not understood.

Is biographism then wrong to make deductions about art from that which lies outside of art? Even this is problematical, because art is not something that leads a separate existence beyond that which is not art. If this is the case, what is wrong with bringing both sides into contact? Marcel Proust attempted to expound upon this question in his major essay *Contre Sainte-Beuve* of 1908/09.<sup>2</sup>

Proust distinguishes between “the ‘me’ who produces the works” (“Le moi qui produit les œuvres”) and the “external me” (“extérieur”) (222). This he also calls the “fundamental me” (“moi profond”), distinguishing it from a “much more external me” (“soi bien plus extérieur”) (224). The “moi profond” has its own “unique world that is the soul of the poet, closed, without contact to the outside world” (“ce monde unique, fermé, sans communication avec le dehors qu’est l’âme du poète”) (225). For Proust the difference between the ‘me’ who simply experiences, and the authorial ‘me’, “le moi véritable du poète” (225), lies in “inspiration” (224). The artistically productive ‘I’ is a medium, whereas the everyday ‘I’ is simply itself.

In effect, Proust's sole criticism – a criticism he repeatedly formulates in different ways – is that Sainte-Beuve fails to recognise this distinction. The objection that one should avoid false deductions about the work from life appears to make sense, but from what historic and systematic position does this objection exactly spring? Between Proust, born in 1871, and Sainte-Beuve, born in 1804, lie two generations. Proust appears to be taking leave of a bad piece of nineteenth century in favour of a decidedly modern



position. In fact, however, precisely Proust's "moi véritable" or "moi profond" is an echo of the romantic aesthetic of genius and the concomitant cult of profundity. As a creator, the great artist is no longer fully of this world.<sup>3</sup> However, very much of this world is the artist as conceived by Sainte-Beuve, in whose writings Proust recognises the distasteful tone of urbane conversation, with all the critics' lack of respect for the poetic creator.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, in his attempt to ensure a suitably reverential tone, Proust slips into unintentionally comic analogies:

Just as the Heaven of Catholic theology is comprised of several heavens, each superimposed upon the other, our own person – given its external form by our body, with its head that limits our thoughts to a little sphere – our spiritual person is comprised of several, superimposed persons.

Comme le ciel de la théologie catholique qui se compose de plusieurs ciels superposés, notre personne, [dans] l'apparence que lui donne notre corps avec sa tête qui circonscrit à une petite boule notre pensée, notre personne morale se compose de plusieurs personnes superposées. (249)

If, according to Proust, the empirical, biographically tangible self is not the author of the work, then which self is? Either the empirical self is simply a medium of a higher authority that can itself claim true authorship, or there is a second, intelligible self, radically different from the empirical self. Both cases imply the construct of an ulterior world for which there is little evidence. To recognise the empirical self as the author is quite compatible with the observation that many an empirical self is very much concerned to discover a self which may be significantly different, usually better than this self. Autobiographies such as Wagner's *Mein Leben* tell us not so much about how he lived, but rather how he would have liked to have lived. Such an invented 'I' is not a self that lies beyond the empirical, as does Proust's "true me", but is a product, among other products, of the empirical 'I', addressed to his fellow men and to posterity.

While biographism makes do with psychological categories, anti-biographism – as soon as it ceases to restrict itself to criticism and affirms what it sees to be true – reaches out exuberantly into the realms of theology or metaphysics. This Leibnizian monad, which has sunk from metaphysics into literary theory, the monad of the enclosed, non-communicative "true me", is an *entitas ficta praeter necessitatem*. Any look at life and art, even Proust's, teaches us that the idea of a world that is "fermé, sans communication" (225) is, quite simply, empirically implausible. The

question of any relationship or non-relationship between life and work demands a sober historical appraisal and not excursions into metaphysics, or borrowings from theology. We can at least demand that the appraisal be a sober one, if it is to result in a piece of scholarship. Marcel Proust's own *chef-d'œuvre*, which contradicts his preceding essay so grandiloquently, expounds upon the intimate interweaving of life and work in a quite unsober fashion, in all the candidness and overflowing communicativeness of the *éducation littéraire* granted to a hero whom we may call by no other name than: Marcel. *À la recherche du temps perdu*, conceived as a work of art, seeks and finds its mark more astutely than Proust's theoretical statements that preceded it.

## II.

"Now that is art! But this art is very much bound up with my life", Richard Wagner wrote on the 29th of October 1859 to Mathilde Wesendonck.<sup>5</sup> The comment simply postulates that the two are interconnected. Did Wagner envisage the form this connection took when he was working on *Tristan und Isolde*?

The notorious unease that biographism inspires – the suspicion of philistinism – comes not least from its quick answer to the question of how art is interconnected with life. In more or less all popular biographies<sup>6</sup> this answer is: art reflects life. The artist experiences certain things; these are then 'mirrored' by his art. The work has 'autobiographical significance'.<sup>7</sup> Whoever finds the models in real life – for example Mathilde and Otto Wesendonck – has explained their images in art: in this case Isolde and King Mark. If this version of biographism seems thoroughly inept, this is hardly because such a constellation between life and art never occurs. Of course, artists for better or for worse do draw on their own lives. This may provide models for the figures of their art – sometimes directly, more often indirectly. Details may be taken from reality and supplemented by a wealth of elements from the imagination. 'Mirror image' and 'reflection' are far too simple terms for something that can take on all conceivable gradations. To fail to see this is the first mistake of a simplistic biographism.

This mistake can be compounded by a second. Not only should this scenario – art offering a picture of life – be elucidated in a more nuanced fashion. The fallacy that this is the only possible scenario is more serious.

At least Wagner's statement that with him art is "very much bound up with [...] life" avoids this mistake. On the contrary: Wagner emphasises quite a different state of affairs. In a letter to Mathilde of the same year he writes:

The common world, influenced only by experiences forced upon it from outside and comprehending nothing that it is not, as it were, bluntly and palpably taught, can never understand the position a poet takes toward his own experiences. It will never be able to account for the striking assertiveness of the poet's creations other than by assuming that he must have experienced them himself, as directly as everything recorded by his memory. This phenomenon has been drawn to my attention most noticeably regarding my own person. With my poetic conceptions I was always so far ahead of my experiences that I view my moral education as being almost entirely determined and effected by these conceptions. The Flying Dutchman, Tannhäuser, Lohengrin, the Nibelungs, Wotan – these were all in my head rather than in my experience. However, you will no doubt readily understand the wonderful relationship I now have to *Tristan*. I say it openly, because it is a characteristic not of this world but of the consecrated spirit that an idea can never enter our experience with such assertiveness. They are so subtly, wonderfully interrelated that a common mode of thinking will only be able to grasp the extent to which they have both predetermined each other in the most wretched, distorted way.<sup>8</sup>

The implicit question in this passage is as follows: which came first, the Mathilde-loving Richard Wagner or the Isolde-loving *Tristan*? Who is the picture of the other? The scenario Wagner presents in answer to this implied question is the exact opposite of the platitude offered by biographism – which sees art as the picture of life. Art does not mirror the experience of life. Rather the experience of life retrospectively makes manifest that which is anticipated by art. The encounter with Mathilde reflects Wagner's conception of Isolde, not the other way round. Beyond the Wagnerian glorification of the "consecrated spirit" ("geweihten Geiste[s]"), roughly psychologically speaking: an artist does not just have any, random experiences; more to the point it should be said that, consciously or subconsciously, he chooses experiences likely to be productive for the work of art taking shape in his imagination.<sup>9</sup>

Wagner is talking here as someone who is justifying himself – as he almost invariably does elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> His relationship with Mathilde is justified because it is imbued from the start with the light of an artistic vision. Both are equally beautiful. However, Wagner goes on to qualify his proposed relationship between art and life. To his assertion that art does not mirror life, but that experience retrospectively manifests what is anticipated

by art, he adds that “both [*sc.* lived experience and artistic creation] predetermined each other”. Wagner has not explained this reciprocal effect. To understand it one would have to know in what respect the one determines the other and *vice versa*. One is perhaps, after all, referred back to the initial antithesis to an empirical or indeed positivistically inclined biographism: namely that imagination anticipates life. This antithesis was put forward most succinctly and elegantly a generation later by Oscar Wilde. In the dialogue *The Decay of Lying* (1889/91) he has Vivian say: “*Life imitates art* far more than *Art imitates life*.”<sup>11</sup> Translated into Wagner’s language: “Poetic conceptions” precede “experiences” rather than the other way around. (With the phrase “far more than”, Wilde’s formulation allows for the relationship of precedent and reflection to work both ways, too.)

There is at least one other, third possibility. In December 1854, two and a half years after his first meeting with the Wesendoncks,<sup>12</sup> Wagner wrote to Franz Liszt:

Because in life I have never enjoyed the real happiness of love, I still want to erect a monument to this, the most beautiful of dreams, in which, from beginning to end, this love may be truly satisfied: in my head. I have conceived a *Tristan* and *Isolde*.<sup>13</sup>

Here art does not precede life, as in the second scenario described in the letter to Mathilde Wesendonck of January 1859. It is rather a reaction, thus coming after. However, it does not follow as a picture of life, in the way a naïve biographism implies. Rather does art call into being the antithesis of existence. It stands for that which was not experienced, instead of experience itself.<sup>14</sup> Art escapes from experience into the unreal, because real life was and is wretched. Again, in approximate psychological terms – without implying any pejorative sense in the expression – art is here a process of surrogate action. Sometimes the replacement can be better than that which it replaces.

In cases like this the work does not act centripetally to life, as biographism suggests in the notion of ‘reflection’, but centrifugally. Clearly the *Tristan und Isolde* of Wagner’s “Handlung”, finished five years later, is not merely the “monument” to the “real happiness of love”, as announced in the letter to Liszt. What unfolds in the work is rather the unhappiness of love, “love as a terrible torment”.<sup>15</sup> Whatever may be the case, the letter to Liszt rightly names a third possibility in the relationship between art and

life: it may neither be simply the picture of life, or an anticipation of life, but rather, opposed to life, represent an escape from its misery, whether erotic, political or financial. Even such a rejection would entail a certain relationship between work and life – no less determinate because it would be negative rather than positive: heightened antithesis instead of faithful image. That is why recourse to life does not abruptly bring unambiguousness to the ambiguous world of works of art. Only a simplistic biographism hopes for such unambiguousness.

### III.

Firstly, art can become the image of life. Secondly, an artist may seek out experiences that fit his artistic vision, so that these experiences may 'fill his vision with life'. Thirdly, art is sometimes the antithesis of life, related to it as a negative image. Aspects of these various states of affairs may be present to various degrees in one and the same work of art. And even when art primarily seems to refer to other works of art, this must be mediated through the living experience of these works: a seeing and hearing in the here and now of that experience.

'Life and work': to study Wagner's letters and diary entries for Mathilde Wesendonck in the conviction that this allows us to understand *Tristan und Isolde* more thoroughly, would be to follow the method of Sainte-Beuve,<sup>16</sup> disallowed by Proust. But in fact, as Thomas Mann comments,<sup>17</sup> after reading these writings one does understand the work more thoroughly. No doubt this is due to the writings themselves, which are unique among the thousands of pages of Wagner's prose. They interlace life and work through the paradigm of procreation. After Wagner had moved to his 'Asyl', he and Mathilde began to regard *Tristan und Isolde* as a collaboration, as the symbolic child of their erotic unification in a spirit of sublimation.<sup>18</sup>

Wagner called *Tristan* in its subtitle "Handlung" – "action", "activity", "act". It stands for an act that did not take place between him and Mathilde Wesendonck. But in a historical horizon transcending biography "Handlung", in Spanish "auto" (from Latin "actio" or "actus"), is the abbreviated generic description of Calderón's "autos sacramentales", his sacred dramas.<sup>19</sup> These are always related to the missal sacrifice. According to Catholic teaching, the Eucharist entails a bloodless repetition of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, making way for man's redemption.<sup>20</sup> Lovers, as

Wagner understood them in *Tristan und Isolde*, sacrifice themselves and so gain each other in their release from the world. During their intensive communal reading of the dramas of the Spanish writer, Wagner addressed Mathilde in his letters as “Lady Calderon” (“Frau Calderon”).<sup>21</sup> In the centre of the “auto sacramental”<sup>22</sup> *Tristan und Isolde* there stands a prayer: “O sink down upon us, / night of love, / make me forget / that I am alive; / take me / into your bosom / deliver me / from this world” (“O sink hernieder, / Nacht der Liebe, / gib Vergessen, / daß ich lebe; / nimm mich auf / in deinen Schoß / löse von / der Welt mich los”). The allusion to the Lord’s Prayer is intentional: “deliver me from this world” replaces the formulation “deliver us from evil”. *Tristan* is the Mass of a religion without morals, a religion that reserves the right to stand above morality, or to be itself a higher form of morality.

At the time when he was working on *Tristan und Isolde*, ‘life’ for Wagner was not just a term referring to an existence that could be grasped through biographical details. Beyond its random circumstances, ‘life’ was at the same time part of an ethical concept engraved within the ‘Handlung’ *Tristan und Isolde*: “A denial [or annihilation] of the will to live”<sup>23</sup>. However, the work is not Schopenhauer set to music. Nowhere do we see more clearly just how different it is than in Wagner’s exchanges with Mathilde. During work on the first act of *Tristan*, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1858, the composer set to music these verses written by his friend with the imperative title “Stand still” (“Stehe still”):<sup>24</sup>

Rushing, roaring wheel of time,  
 measurer of eternity,  
 shining spheres  
 that encircle the globe  
 in the vast universe,  
 primordial creation, cease!  
 Enough of becoming, let me be!  
 Stop, o seminal force,  
 primal thought that forever creates,  
 hold your breath, calm your urging,  
 be silent just for one second!  
 Swelling pulse, fetter your beat:  
 end the eternal day of desire!  
 So that in blissful, sweet forgetfulness  
 I may fathom all joys,  
 that eye to eye I may sweetly drink,

soul sinking into soul,  
one being discovering itself in another being,  
announcing an end to all hope;  
The lip falls still in awed silence:  
the inner self no longer wishes to engender any desire:  
Mankind discovers the trace of eternity  
and solves your riddle, sacred nature!

Sausendes, brausendes Rad der Zeit,  
Messer du der Ewigkeit,  
leuchtende Sphären im weiten All,  
die ihr umringt den Weltenball,  
urewige Schöpfung, halte doch ein,  
genug des Werdens, lass mich sein!  
Halte an dich, zeugende Kraft,  
Urgedanke, der ewig schafft,  
Hemme den Athem, stille den Drang,  
schweiget nur eine Sekunde lang!  
Schwellende Pulse, fesselt den Schlag:  
ende, des Wollens ew'gen Tag!  
Dass in selig süßem Vergessen  
ich mög' alle Wonnen ermesen;  
wenn Aug' in Auge wonnig trinken,  
Seele ganz in Seele versinken,  
Wesen in Wesen sich wiederfinden,  
und alles Hoffens Ende sich künden;  
die Lippe verstummt in staunendem Schweigen,  
keinen Wunsch mehr will das Inn'r zeugen:  
erkennt der Mensch des Ew'gen Spur,  
Und lös't dein Rätsel, heil'ge Natur!<sup>25</sup>

On the one hand this is primarily an intimate personal document rather than a work of art directed to the outside world. On the other hand, it is manifestly the abstraction of a private love affair. What we read here is an instance of poetry of ideas. The verses address philosophical categories with remarkable directness. The poem does not shy away from metaphysical concepts such as time, eternity, being, becoming and will ('Wille') – abstractions of which it has been said that they spoil lyrical poetry as a medium of moods. The author avoids this effect by balancing the poem's conceptual element with physical imagery: breath, pulse, beat, lip – all these evoke direct sensual contact, a tangible quality. If one recognises this

double character, the poetry sustains even apparently clumsy formulations such as ‘Messer’ (a German word that could mean ‘measurer’ or, more commonly, ‘knife’) in verse 2. The wheel of time appears to measure with each turn; more drastically it appears to cut time into sections.

The twelfth verse (“ende, des Wollens ew’gen Tag!”) condenses Schopenhauer’s philosophy in the formula: to put an end to will. Yet in what immediately follows, Mathilde Wesendonck gives it a radically anti-Schopenhauerian twist: in the unmistakably erotic picture of drinking eye to eye, the writer announces as the path to redemption<sup>26</sup> what Schopenhauer sees as the root of all evil. Eroticism is here not the instrument of the will, but a liberating release from the will.<sup>27</sup> Only nine months later did Wagner reach a clear understanding of what he had unconsciously and vaguely guessed at in the *Tristan* poem he sent to Schopenhauer,<sup>28</sup> namely an inversion of Schopenhauer’s ‘metaphysics of sexual love’. As if it were a new, unique insight, Wagner’s diary entry for Mathilde from 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1858 announces in sweeping, didactic prose that which his friend had already – and more beautifully – told him in verse:

I have recently been slowly reading through my friend Schopenhauer’s main work again and this time he has greatly inspired me to extend and, in some details, even to correct his system. The matter is of utmost importance and perhaps it falls to my singular nature at this particular time of life to gain insights that are not open to others. It concerns evidence of the path of salvation that no philosopher, not even Sch., has recognised, to a complete pacification [Beruhigung] of the will through love: not an abstract philanthropy, but the love that truly springs from sexual love, that is to say from the attraction between man and woman.

If at some time inclined to a lengthier treatise, Wagner felt that he would be able to

demonstrate that in love lies the possibility of rising above the compulsions of the individual will, where, once completely mastered, the will of our species may achieve full consciousness: something that at such heights would amount to complete peace [Beruhigung]. If my exposition succeeds, all this may become clear even to the inexperienced. The result would inevitably be very significant and would completely and satisfactorily fill the gaps in Schopenhauer’s system.<sup>29</sup>

In Mathilde Wesendonck’s and Richard Wagner’s artistic vision, the paradox of an animated repose is set against the static repose of Schopenhauer’s Nirvana. With Schopenhauer, repose exists only beyond life: “One



may regard our life as an unnecessarily disrupting episode in the blissful peace of nothingness".<sup>30</sup> For the Zurich lovers however: "Oh, here is peace, and in that peace, most sublime, consummate life".<sup>31</sup> And music can achieve only this sort of peace: in the face of Schopenhauer's quietude, it would have to fall entirely silent. Although Mathilde's poem is titled 'Stand still', that state which it contrasts to the turmoil of the times as something that must be brought to a standstill is itself movement, if of a different kind, namely "sinking" ("Versinken"). At the same time, the vision eliminates Schopenhauer's implication of the inferiority of the feminine to the masculine.<sup>32</sup> These appear rather as opposite, though equivalent poles. Within the utopian horizons of the vision revealed in the duet from the second act of *Tristan und Isolde*, the division of humanity into two genders is suspended.<sup>33</sup>

One cannot demonstrate the metaphysical truth of such a vision – contrary to Wagner's repeated statement in the diary that he wants to "prove" ("nachweisen") something here. What a work of art like *Tristan und Isolde* can convince us of is the sincerity of such a vision. And this force of conviction is compounded by the biographical fact that this work – which connects in its title the name of a man and the name of a woman with the "sweet little word 'and'" – is the product not of one of the countless male monologues about women, but of the dialogue between a man and a woman. One side of this dialogue – the male side – is sketchily preserved.<sup>34</sup> The female side must be largely deduced.<sup>35</sup> Only in Mathilde's five poems which Wagner set to music are both sides fully present. There are clearly moments where Wagner ignores the person he is addressing – as in the quoted diary entry for her on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1858. This trait has often been commented on. But no real dialogue exists without moments of incomprehension or misunderstanding. In fact, even these moments within the larger fragment of the exchange between the two lovers, Richard Wagner and Mathilde Wesendonck, are enlightening. To recognise blind spots is, after all, to see something.

Works of art are not illuminated but obscured by an amassing of mere biographical detail. Certain ways of researching an artist's life-story are hardly suited to rehabilitate Sainte-Beuve's method in face of the criticism of the young Marcel Proust. It may succeed, though, where such momentous evidence is preserved as in the case of *Tristan und Isolde*.

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Translated into English by Robert J. Crow. The rendering of passages from sources not originally in English, including a poem by Mathilde Wesendonck, is also due to Robert J. Crow.
- <sup>2</sup> Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* [1908/09], ed. Pierre Clarac, Paris 1971. Bracketed page numbers in the text refer to this edition.
- <sup>3</sup> “hors de la réalité et du présent”, p. 309.
- <sup>4</sup> Biographism notoriously comes under suspicion of representing a valet’s perspective. Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* [1822–31], vol. 1: *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister, Hamburg 1994, p. 103: “It is a familiar proverb that for a valet there are no heroes; I have added – and two years later Goethe repeated it, – but not because the one isn’t a hero, but because the other is a valet.” The passages that Hegel here refers to: *Phänomenologie des Geistes* [1807], ed. Johannes Hoffmeister, Hamburg 1952, p. 468, and *Die Wahlverwandtschaften. Ein Roman von Goethe*, Tübingen 1810, p. 260. – Since artists seldom have valets, and perhaps because they are seldom heroes, this suspicion rather applies to political biographies. However, cf. Scott G. Burnham, *Beethoven Hero*, Princeton, NJ 1995. Major biographers continue to regard it historically noteworthy that in Beethoven’s lodgings the unemptied chamber pot still stood under the piano in the afternoon; see Lewis Lockwood, *Beethoven: The Music and the Life* [2003], New York, NY 2005, p. 20.
- <sup>5</sup> Richard Wagner, ‘Letter to Mathilde Wesendonck, 29 October 1859’, *Sämtliche Briefe*, vol. 11, ed. Martin Dürer, Wiesbaden/Leipzig/Paris 1999, pp. 328–333, 329. Laurenz Lütteken speaks of the “declared unity of art and life”, ‘Einleitung’, in *Kunstwerk der Zukunft. Richard Wagner und Zürich (1849–1858)*, ed. Laurenz Lütteken in collaboration with Eva Martina Hanke, Zurich 2008, pp. 11–17, 16.
- <sup>6</sup> For a distinction between reflective biography and trivial biography in music compare the essays in *Musical Biography: Towards New Paradigms*, ed. Jolanta T. Pekacz, Aldershot 2006.
- <sup>7</sup> Hans Gal, *Richard Wagner. Versuch einer Würdigung*, Frankfurt a. M. 1963, p. 46. Gal’s monograph is one of the better books on Wagner.
- <sup>8</sup> Richard Wagner, ‘Letter to Mathilde Wesendonck, 19 January 1859’, *Sämtliche Briefe*, vol. 10, ed. Andreas Mielke, Wiesbaden/Leipzig/Paris 2000, pp. 241–248, 242–243.
- <sup>9</sup> Paul Bekker, *Wagner: das Leben im Werke*, Stuttgart/Berlin/Leipzig 1924, *passim*. Cf. Alexander Rehding, *Music and Monumentality: Commemoration and*

*Wonderment in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, Oxford/New York, NY 2009, p. 48: "Needless to say, the notion that the creations and the biography of an artist are inextricably linked is one of the cornerstones of nineteenth-century criticism and was perhaps brought to perfection in the case of Wagner himself. This line of criticism culminated in the intriguing reversal suggested by Paul Bekker in 1924, that Wagner did not write *Tristan und Isolde* as a creative outlet for his amorous feelings for Mathilde Wesendonck, wife of his Swiss patron, but rather that he started an affair with her *because* he was working on *Tristan* at the time."

- <sup>10</sup> It is clear from the way the passage continues that Wagner saw in his idealised construction a justification of his relationship with Mathilde Wesendonck: "You guess it, you know it! Yes, and only you! For if anyone else knew it, no one would bear a grudge against us anymore." (Richard Wagner, 'Letter to Mathilde Wesendonck, 19 January 1859', *Sämtliche Briefe*, vol. 10, ed. Andreas Mielke, Wiesbaden/Leipzig/ Paris 2000, pp. 241–248, 243).
- <sup>11</sup> Oscar Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying: An Observation' [1889/91], *The Works of Oscar Wilde*, Leicester 1987, pp. 909–931, 921.
- <sup>12</sup> Wagner tells of his first meeting with the Wesendoncks in his 'Letter to Theodor Uhlig, 26 February 1852', *Sämtliche Briefe*, vol. 4, ed. Gertrud Strobel and Werner Wolf, Leipzig 1979, pp. 297–302, 301.
- <sup>13</sup> Richard Wagner, 'Letter to Franz Liszt, 16 (?) December 1854', *Sämtliche Briefe*, vol. 6, ed. Hans-Joachim Bauer and Johannes Forner, Leipzig 1986, pp. 298–301, 299. – Cf. John Deathridge, 'Public and Private Life. Reflections on the Genesis of *Tristan und Isolde* and the *Wesendonck Lieder*', id., *Wagner beyond Good and Evil*, Berkeley, CA/Los Angeles, CA/London 2008, pp. 117–132, 117–118. – Shortened German version: 'Rätselhafte Liaisons. Richard Wagner und Mathilde Wesendonck aus neuer Sicht', in *Kunstwerk der Zukunft. Richard Wagner und Zürich (1849–1858)*, ed. Laurenz Lütteken in collaboration with Eva Martina Hanke, Zurich 2008, pp. 97–105.
- <sup>14</sup> Cf. Richard Wagner, 'Letter to August Röckel, 8 June 1853', *Sämtliche Briefe*, vol. 5, ed. Gertrud Strobel and Werner Wolf, Leipzig 1993, pp. 312–317, 315.
- <sup>15</sup> Richard Wagner, 'Letter to August Röckel, 23 August 1856', *Sämtliche Briefe*, vol. 8, ed. Hans-Joachim Bauer and Johannes Forner, Leipzig 1991, pp. 152–157, 156.
- <sup>16</sup> "L'homme et l'oeuvre", the well-known formula for the method that Sainte-Beuve employed in *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire sous l'Empire* (1860, based on a series of lectures in Liège, 1848/49) and elsewhere, seems to be a later version of this.

- <sup>17</sup> Thomas Mann, 'Leiden und Größe Richard Wagners' [1933], in *Leiden und Größe der Meister*, Frankfurt a. M. 1982, pp. 716–779. Mann treats Wagner's letters to Mathilde Wesendonck as an aesthetically particularly revealing reference. He arrives at the general conclusion that aspects of Wagner's "private life" reached "deep into the realms of the spiritual and artistic" and finally found their way "into Wagner's works" (pp. 764, 766).
- <sup>18</sup> Cf. John Deathridge, 'Public and Private Life. Reflections on the Genesis of *Tristan und Isolde* and the *Wesendonck Lieder*', in id., *Wagner beyond Good and Evil*, Berkeley, CA/Los Angeles, CA/London 2008, pp. 117–132. – Wagner calls the sketches to *Tristan* "embryos" ('Letter to Mathilde Wesendonck, 28 September 1861', *Sämtliche Briefe*, vol. 13, ed. Martin Dürer and Isabel Kraft, Wiesbaden/Leipzig/Paris 2003, pp. 234–236, 235).
- <sup>19</sup> These works had just appeared in Eichendorff's translation: Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Geistliche Schauspiele*, trans. Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff, Stuttgart/Tübingen 1846–53. – Concerning the history of this genre see Bruce W. Wardropper, *Introducción al teatro religioso del Siglo de Oro: la evolución del auto sacramental 1500–1648*, Madrid 1953. Wagner owned the translation of Eichendorff (and Lorinser) – see Henry W. Sullivan, *Calderón in the German Lands and the Low Countries: His Reception and Influence, 1654–1980*, Cambridge 1983, p. 310, and about Wagner and Calderón in general pp. 309–313.
- <sup>20</sup> Historically differentiating: Paul F. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins*, London and New York, NY 2004.
- <sup>21</sup> Richard Wagner, 'Letter to Mathilde Wesendonck, 18 December 1857', *Sämtliche Briefe*, vol. 9, ed. Klaus Burmeister and Johannes Forner, Leipzig 2000, p. 77.
- <sup>22</sup> Interpretations of *Tristan und Isolde* as a sacred work have been propounded by: Joseph Kerman, 'Opera as Symphonic Poem' [1956], id., *Opera as Drama*, Berkeley, CA/Los Angeles, CA 1988, pp. 158–177; Michael Tanner, 'The Passion of Passion', id., *Wagner*, Princeton, NJ 1996, pp. 140–155; Roger Scruton, *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's Tristan and Isolde*, New York, NY 2004. Karol Berger criticises this position in *Beyond Reason: Wagner contra Nietzsche*, Oakland, CA 2017, pp. 234–241.
- <sup>23</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* I [1819], book IV, § 68, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Wolfgang Freiherr von Löhneysen, vol. I, Stuttgart and Frankfurt a. M. 1960, p. 514.
- <sup>24</sup> The song exists in two versions. Wagner gave the manuscript to Mathilde Wesendonck. "When, in the Autumn of 1858 after he had moved to Venice, he wanted to recall the songs, he only had the sketches. Because he wished to

- possess a completed score of the songs and apparently did not want to ask Mathilde to return them, a situation occurred that was unique in his oeuvre: Wagner wrote a second version of a work from existing sketches, independently of the first working." Egon Voss, 'Besseres, als diese Lieder, habe ich nie gemacht ... Zu den Wesendonck-Liedern' [1983], id., "*Wagner und kein Ende*". *Betrachtungen und Studien*, Zurich 1996, pp. 105–109, 108. – Concerning some differences between the two versions see Peter Andraschke, 'Richard Wagners Wesendonck-Lieder. Umfeld und Rezeption', in *Richard Wagner. Persönlichkeit, Werk und Wirkung*, ed. Helmut Loos, Beucha/Markkleeberg 2013, pp. 121–129.
- <sup>25</sup> Mathilde Wesendonck, *Märchen und Märchenspiele*, ed. Heinz Rölleke, Trier 2002, pp. 228–229. The reprint is, in contrast to other editions, faithful to the letter and retains the original punctuation. – The two verses "leuchtende Sphären im weiten All, / die ihr umringt den Weltenball" have been rendered as three in the above English version: "shining spheres / that encircle the globe / in the vast universe".
- <sup>26</sup> Compare the poem's resonance in Wagner's 'Morning confession' ('Morgenbeichte'); Richard Wagner, 'Letter to Mathilde Wesendonck, 7 April 1858', *Sämtliche Briefe*, vol. 9, ed. Klaus Burmeister and Johannes Forner, Leipzig 2000, pp. 228–232, 231: "But I look into your eyes and I can no longer speak; all that I might say becomes futile! Then for me all becomes so indisputably true, I am so sure of myself, when these wonderful, sacred eyes rest upon me, and I can sink into them! Then there is no longer subject and object; all is united as one: a profound, immeasurable harmony. Oh, here is peace, and in that peace, most sublime, consummate life! O fool, who wished to win the world and peace in the outside world! Such a blind man cannot have seen your eyes and found his soul within them! Only within, within, only in the depths does redemption lie!"
- <sup>27</sup> Karol Berger, *Beyond Reason: Wagner contra Nietzsche*, Oakland, CA 2017, p. 231: "making eros into the royal road to transcendence".
- <sup>28</sup> Schopenhauer did not reply.
- <sup>29</sup> *Richard Wagner an Mathilde Wesendonck. Tagebuchblätter und Briefe 1853–1871*, ed. Wolfgang Golther, Leipzig <sup>57</sup>1916, pp. 130–131. In December 1858, Wagner began writing a letter to Schopenhauer which he left unfinished: Richard Wagner, 'Letter to Arthur Schopenhauer, December 1858', *Sämtliche Briefe*, vol. 10, ed. Andreas Mielke, Wiesbaden/Leipzig/Paris 2000, p. 208.
- <sup>30</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* I [1819], book IV, § 68, *Complete Works*, ed. Wolfgang Freiherr von Löhneysen, vol. I, Stuttgart and Frankfurt a. M. 1960, p. 514.

- <sup>31</sup> Richard Wagner, 'Letter to Mathilde Wesendonck, 7 April 1858', *Sämtliche Briefe*, vol. 9, ed. Klaus Burmeister and Johannes Forner, Leipzig 2000, pp. 228–232, 231.
- <sup>32</sup> 'Über die Weiber', *Parerga und Paralipomena* II, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Wolfgang Freiherr von Löhneysen, vol. V, Stuttgart and Frankfurt a. M. 1965, pp. 719–735.
- <sup>33</sup> This idea is based on a particular interpretation of Aristophanes' speech from Plato's *Symposion*. Cf. Karol Berger, *Beyond Reason: Wagner contra Nietzsche*, Oakland, CA 2017, p. 228.
- <sup>34</sup> It is a remarkable detail of the source material that Cosima Wagner destroyed nearly all the original letters of Richard Wagner to Mathilde Wesendonck after they had been published by Wolfgang Golther. Cf. Cosima Wagner, *Das zweite Leben. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen 1883–1930*, ed. Dietrich Mack, Munich/Zurich 1980, p. 405.
- <sup>35</sup> The appendix in *Richard Wagner an Mathilde Wesendonck. Tagebuchblätter und Briefe 1853–1871*, ed. Wolfgang Golther, Leipzig <sup>57</sup>1916 contains only 14 letters of Mathilde Wesendonck to Richard Wagner, pp. 373–394; these originate from the time after the completion of the *Tristan* score. Wagner's letters to Mathilde of course contain numerous allusions to her part in the dialogue.

## ABSTRACT

How is art related to life? During the nineteenth century that seemed to be, both to the educated public and to scholars, a question of prime importance. The twentieth century, by way of contrast, brought that issue in disrepute. Yet there is cause to reconsider it. Admittedly, there once was (and perhaps is, in popular literature) a psychological brand of simplistic biographism that was (and is) bound to fail. Reasons for categorical anti-biographism, however, are quite feeble. Simplistic biographism can be avoided, if we distinguish (at least) three potential relations between art and life. First, art can become the image of life. Second, an artist may seek out experiences that fit his artistic vision, so that these experiences may 'fill his vision with life'. Third, art is sometimes the antithesis of life, related to it as a negative image. A biographic poetics that is sensitive to historic context can disclose significant traits of a work of art, as a (though sketchy) case study of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (1859) indicates.

NANETTE NIELSEN

## Carl Nielsen, the Modern Musical Philosopher: Life as an Aesthetic Experience

Music is Life, and like Life, inextinguishable.

Carl Nielsen (1916)

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Danish composer Carl Nielsen (1865–1931) added his own distinctive contribution to the long-standing music-philosophical debate about the relationship between music and language. Scholars have generally agreed that Nielsen was no philosopher, yet his writings are saturated with philosophically relevant and interesting material.<sup>1</sup> Some of this material seems idiosyncratic or ‘home-spun’ and needs to be understood almost exclusively on its own terms. Other material discloses Nielsen’s deep engagement with the aesthetic and philosophical thought peculiar to his own time, and reveals a reflective individual eager to make sense of the world around him, leaving posterity with the task of comparing his critical approach to contemporary musical and philosophical ideologies. Either way, Nielsen’s thought is rife with lively and stimulating musical observations of a philosophical potential that the composer himself is likely not to have fully realised, and which is still to be comprehensively interrogated by scholarship.

Key to what might be extrapolated as one of Nielsen’s main philosophical entanglements with music is the extent to which he found language thoroughly insufficient for expressing musical meaning, or the ‘sense’ of music. Nielsen’s criticism of the shortcomings of language opens up his musical aesthetics – not least his somewhat obscure and grandiose, yet pervasive, idea that “music is life” – for understanding in greater depth. Using Nielsen’s Symphony no. 4 *The Inextinguishable* (*Det Uudslukkelige*) (1916) as an example, and analysing aspects related to movement and the temporal in particular, this chapter puts the statement “music is Life” into

further relief. While pointing to new interpretive opportunities, I interrogate how scholarship has mainly focussed on extrapolating connections between Vitalism and Nielsen's aesthetics. Instead, I argue that focusing on experience as a main aesthetic feature is a fruitful way forward for unravelling Nielsen's music-philosophical approach. Nielsen's experiential engagement with music arguably offers an important contribution to philosophy not only within his own early twentieth-century context but also to current philosophical thinking about music, in that it can be regarded less a "philosophy of music" than a "musical philosophy".<sup>2</sup> In recent years, philosophers have pointed to new ways of engaging with music that mirror Nielsen's aesthetic approach: in that way, the composer anticipates present-day music-philosophical debates, leaving us with a musical sense-making that is surprisingly modern and instructive.<sup>3</sup> When we – like Nielsen – resist language as a satisfactory explanatory tool, the linguistic statement "music is life" can instead be understood on the musical terms it (necessarily) unsuccessfully seeks to capture.

### When Concepts Fail

If you ask a composer what he meant by a particular chord or a particular succession of notes, in reality he can only reply by playing or singing the passage in question; all other explanation is nonsense. – Carl Nielsen (1909)<sup>4</sup>

In his essay *Words, Music and Programme Music* from 1909, Nielsen offers one of the clearest examples of his ambivalent attitude to language. While lamenting that contemporary criticism mixes up descriptions of the various art forms – e.g. that music can be colourful, or a painting harmonic – thereby resulting in what he calls "concept confusion", Nielsen turns to the relationship between words and music. Key to his discussion is the English philosopher Herbert Spencer, who in 1857 published *On the Origin and Function of Music*, in which he provided an account of music's meaning.<sup>5</sup> To Spencer, music had its origin in language, and could be regarded as expanded or idealised speech. Nielsen disagreed: "[Spencer] may have had a certain interest in music", he wrote, "but he could impossibly have been musical, let alone have had minimal possession of a real sense of music".<sup>6</sup>

The crux of Nielsen's criticism of Spencer is twofold: his insistence on language as insufficient for expression in a musical sense, and his claim that music is capable of expressing infinitely more than what words and



concepts are able to capture. Nielsen recounts how music can, for example, express a state of peace and silence in a way that language cannot. And specific musical meanings – e.g. the precise point of a particular chord or tone row – cannot easily be translated into words: here, the composer must resort to singing or playing rather than explaining verbally (cf. the quotation opening this section). Finally, music cannot express words concretely: to think this, would be another instance of “concept confusion” for Nielsen.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, “music cannot express anything at all that can be said in words, or shown in colours or pictures.”<sup>8</sup> Needless to say, Nielsen was very critical of programme music, which he found to be a similarly impossible exercise due to music’s innate inability to express words, thoughts, or actions concretely.<sup>9</sup>

Instead, the relationship between words and music should be understood “decoratively” or “decoratively-enlightening” (*dekorativt-belysende*).<sup>10</sup> Invoking the sun and its relation to all things, Nielsen offers an idiosyncratic sense of decoration as similar to how the sun shines on something which thereby becomes colourful, it warms and gives life. Anticipating those critics for whom this comparison would be to lessen the value of music as an art form, Nielsen is quick to add that there is nothing derogatory in his usage of decorative: it is through the sun’s participation that possibilities are unfolded, materialised, and made beautiful.<sup>11</sup> In short, like the sun, music makes life possible and enhances it.

Nielsen’s sense of decoration, then, and his ideas about what music is capable of being and doing, encompass real effects. Like life, music is pervasive, and its forceful effect is that it is capable of enhancing the felt aspect of living, the experience of being alive. It is, I would argue, precisely his fundamentally experiential approach to musical expression and understanding that allows us to grasp in greater depth Nielsen’s musical philosophy. To Nielsen, music was both a physical and a mental discipline. The felt, experiential aspect of his thought is summed up concisely in an 1893 statement that “the greatest joy in the world is simply to feel one’s own strength, both physically and intellectually, but especially intellectually.”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, as Daniel Grimley states, Nielsen “subscribed to the vitalist idea of music as a form of nervous excitation, albeit usually in more figurative terms (as a force or impulse flowing through his body).”<sup>13</sup> (We will return to Vitalism again below.)

Nielsen’s experiential aesthetics thus opens up the possibility of uncovering a close link between the mental and the physical in his approach

for example between embodied perception and bodily experience. As Grimley has persuasively argued, the composer partook in the early twentieth century music-theoretical developments forged by August Halm, Ernst Kurth, and Hans Mersmann. Consequently, Nielsen was attracted to an idea “of music as the play of opposed forces, which for him represented not simply a textural or compositional principle but a fundamental law of musical perception.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, particular building blocks of a composition – e.g. the opposed pair of dynamic and static musical elements – were for Nielsen both constructed and experienced, both realised in musical terms and – keeping his statement above in mind – felt physically and intellectually. Crucial to the discussion offered here is the extent to which “[the] vitalist struggle [between oppositional pairs] was an essential sign of musical life” to Nielsen and to his German and Austrian contemporaries.<sup>15</sup>

The statement opening this section offers a good sense of Nielsen’s stance on the troubled relationship between music and language and points to how his awareness of the limits of language might lead to a practical, or experiential, aesthetics. Concurrent with other contemporary music-theoretical developments (not least the work of Hans Mersmann), Nielsen’s aesthetic approach, rooted as it was in embodied experience, can in many ways be regarded a forerunner of music phenomenology.<sup>16</sup> “[M]usic is an art form to which we should listen, for which one should charge the sense we call hearing”, he wrote in the aforementioned essay of 1909.<sup>17</sup> In any case, it is certainly not clear how, as Finn Mathiassen claims, “declarations such as [the opening statement] are in open conflict with Nielsen’s practice as a composer”.<sup>18</sup> Quite the contrary: statements such as these reveal a musical philosophy entirely grounded in Nielsen’s practice as a composer. To Nielsen, when concepts failed, music came to his aid (to paraphrase Adorno). Exploring Symphony no. 4, *The Inextinguishable*, as an example, we now turn to developing further facets of this point.

### *The Inextinguishable* in Context and Reception

*The Inextinguishable* was conceived in 1914 and completed in January 1916. Nielsen himself conducted the first performance of the symphony in Copenhagen on 1 February 1916. As I briefly sketch in the following, the composer presented the work in various alluring ways as a symphony which

was all about nothing less than Life with a capital 'L', about a pervasive inextinguishable life force, an elemental will to live.

On 3 May 1914, Nielsen revealed the creative seeds for the Symphony in a letter to his wife Anne-Marie:

I have an idea for a new work, which has no programme, but which is meant to express what we understand by the life-urge or life-manifestation; that's to say: everything that moves, that craves life, that can be called neither good nor evil, neither high nor low, neither great nor small, but simply: "That which is life" or "That which craves life" – I mean: no definite idea about anything "grandiose" or "subtle and delicate" or about warm or cold (powerful, maybe) but simply Life and Movement, yet varied, very varied, but holding together, and as though always flowing in one large movement, in a single stream.<sup>19</sup>

Nielsen's idea of "one large movement, in a single stream" made its way into the symphony in structural terms: although it has four movements, these are meant to be played without breaks, as if they were just one big movement. Musically, it is clear that they overlap, and that the symphony in that sense coheres.

As for the other kind of movement mentioned here – the dynamic kind, *i.e.* that we understand life, or expressions of life as "everything that moves" – this is a key aspect of vitalism, and will feature again in discussions below. Finally, in line with his critical attitude towards programme music, Nielsen says explicitly that the symphony has no programme. Instead, the music is meant to "express" what we already understand. Apart from echoing Nielsen's sense of music being a pervasive force, it also suggests that further explanation is not necessary (nor indeed possible). To this extent, the music should express more than what language is capable of capturing.

Before turning to the symphony's reception in the press, a couple of further examples of how it was presented by the composer. In 1916, in the programme book for the first performance on 1 February, we can read the following:

In using the title *The Inextinguishable* [*Det Uudslukkelige*], the composer has attempted to suggest in a single word what only the music itself has the power to express fully: the elemental will to life.

Faced with a task like this – to express life abstractly, where the other arts stand without resources and are forced to go in roundabout ways, to extract, to symbolise – there and only there is music at home in its primal region [*Ur-Omraade*], at ease in its right element, simply because solely by being itself has it

performed its task. For it is life there, where the others only represent and paraphrase life. Life is indomitable and inextinguishable; the struggle, the wrestling, the generation and the wasting away go on today as yesterday, tomorrow as today, and everything returns.

Once more: music is life, and like life, inextinguishable.<sup>20</sup>

We have here – again – an idea of musical expression, that music can express life abstractly in a way that no other art form can. But in addition to presenting music as expression, Nielsen is making an ontological leap with his well-known exclamation that “music is life, and like life, inextinguishable”.

A close connection between life and movement appears to have been the most prevailing descriptor in Nielsen’s statements on *The Inextinguishable*. A good example is the programme note he wrote for the teacher and author Gerhardt Lyngé in 1916–17:

Music is Life.

As soon as a single note sounds in the air or through space, it is the result of life and movement; that is why music (and the dance) are the most immediate expressions of the will to life. The symphony evokes [*skildrer*] the most original sources of life and the wellspring of the life-feeling; that is, what lies behind all human, animal and plant life, as we see[,] perceive or live it. It is not a musical, programmatic account [*skildring*] of the development of life within a limited stretch of time and space, but an un-programmatic dip right down to those layers of emotional life that are still half-chaotic and wholly elementary. That is, the opposite of all programme music, despite the fact that this sounds like a programme. [...]

[The symphony] is in a way a completely thoughtless expression of what makes the birds cry, the animals roar, bleat, run and fight, and humans moan, groan, exult and shout without any explanation. The symphony does not describe [*skildre*] all this, but the fundamental emotion [*grundfølelse*] that lies beneath all this. [...] For it is life there, whereas other arts only represent and paraphrase life.<sup>21</sup>

What kind of movement is at play here? The sound of a single note seems to be more than sufficient for movement to have been firmly established: “it is the result of life and movement”. Moreover, dance is mentioned alongside music as the “most immediate expressions of the will to life”, making the idea of movement not just metaphysical, but physical as well. In addition, by introducing the close link between the symphony and emotion, Nielsen avoids connecting music and natural sounds in any reductive, or even direct way. Instead, music is elevated: it has capacity to express

something fundamental, the essential emotional life-drive underlying less complex natural sounds. The usage of the word “describe” in the penultimate sentence warrants brief comment, as it is a slightly misleading translation: the Danish word *skildre* captures more than strictly linguistic description, and would, for example, be better replaced by the word “characterisation”. In other words, though fully aware of its limitations, Nielsen does not resort to a descriptor too closely to what language would be capable of doing (*i.e.* “describe”), but opts for *skildre* instead (indeed on three different occasions in the quotation).

As Nielsen offers his compelling statements on *The Inextinguishable*, he can be seen to partake in what Karen Painter has named an “aesthetics of strength” which took hold of the language of music criticism in the early twentieth century: “Music was to ‘convince’ in the mid-nineteenth century, ‘compel’ at the turn of the century, but ‘force’ or ‘overwhelm’ beginning around 1910.”<sup>22</sup> Saturated with powerful punch, Nielsen’s language displays a potent tension between the ideal and the real: at the same time that he appears to place music (and therefore life) in the ultimate abstract as an ideal end-goal worthy in and for itself, he is nonetheless keen to keep it concretely grounded by making frequent references to nature. In his capture-all approach, he sees music as having the innate ability to reach all the way from “the most elementary of things” to being something abstract, autonomous, and utterly capable of embracing and expressing the essential life-force driving everything.

But what life, and for whom? To what purpose did Nielsen attempt to “overwhelm” his contemporaries with the power of music? Were there any obvious external reasons for offering his forceful statements? Tempting as it may be to link his formulations about life and struggle with the War that was raging in 1916, this connection is not to be found in the symphony’s immediate reception.<sup>23</sup> The Danish newspapers certainly covered issues related to the War – activity on the various fronts, victory, defeat, losses – but it was a far cry from what was written on the concert pages, and *The Inextinguishable* was neither read against its political context by its contemporaries, nor proposed as a relevant wartime musical comment. One exception is in *Fyns Stiftstidende* in which war is mentioned, but this is in order to claim that the symphony would surely become a success and endure “despite war and evil times”,<sup>24</sup> not to make a point not about the work in any way mirroring its own context.

The Danish reviews of the Symphony surrounding its premiere were positive overall and recount how the composer received several standing ovations at the end of the concert. While recognising (and reporting) the composer's stated ideas behind the work, critics clearly heard 'life' in the symphony, and furthermore applauded Nielsen for composing an energetic work with a varied tone language, both modern and traditional ("not too complicated", as one critic noted).<sup>25</sup> The least positive review still accounted for 'life' in the music, albeit a dark side to life: the critic in the national newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* commented that "[Nielsen] doesn't choose the happy, festive sides to life, but predominantly the dark, introspective, angry, embittered, you might be tempted to call them life-antagonistic [sides]."<sup>26</sup> As for the statement accompanying the work, it was frequently ridiculed, and critics seemed perplexed as to why Nielsen had supplied it. One critic (in the paper *København*) called the title "rather contrived, rather unclear".<sup>27</sup> Another critic wrote in the large newspaper *Nationaltidende*: "The philosophy preached here is rather foggy – that is, superfluous. [...] The explanation explains too much, and thereby nothing."<sup>28</sup>

When viewed against their immediate critical context, then, Nielsen's statements about life do not appear to have been written in order to satisfy a contemporary demand to be overwhelmed by the power of music in wartime Denmark. Instead, we now turn to aesthetics and philosophy to clarify further aspects of how Nielsen engaged with his own context, arguably offering life not just as an aesthetic idea, but as an aesthetic experience.

### Life as an Aesthetic Idea of Music: Vitalism

Nielsen's reference to the sun in the 1909 essay sketched above can be seen in light of his *Helios Overture* (1903), and places his comments, as well as *The Inextinguishable*, in the larger context of hellenism and vitalism.<sup>29</sup> Danish scholar Michael Fjeldsøe has noted that:

[E]veryone who has ever worked with Nielsen knows his motto "Music is Life"; but [has] overlooked [Vitalism as a feature of Nielsen's work] in the sense that this motto and its aesthetics are part of a current in Danish and European culture of those days, and not just the personal and original invention of Nielsen.<sup>30</sup>

The artistic current of vitalism, is – in short – “art dedicated to the aesthetic of vitality, health, youth and strength”.<sup>31</sup> In Denmark, the vitalistic movement was particularly prevalent in the period 1890–1940, where artists presented themes from modern life, while drawing on Nordic mythology and Greek antiquity as primary sources for depicting both physical and spiritual beauty. A key example of Danish Vitalism in the visual arts is the painting *Sun and Youth* (*Sol og Ungdom*) from 1910 by Nielsen’s close friend Jens Ferdinand Willumsen (1863–1958). An earlier, no less famous version from 1909 was called *Children Bathing at Skagen Beach* (*Badende børn på Skagen strand*): the well-known bright sunlight of Skagen is prominent, and the luminous bodies of the children are close to the same colour as the sand. The painting displays a lot of movement, life, and dynamics; vitalist characteristics that are highlighted still further in the 1910 version *Sun and Youth*. Here, the contrasting colours are particularly noticeable: they bring attention to the lines of movement in the painting as the energetic direction of moving limbs are clarified in the almost blinding figures. Indeed, the play with dark and light shades bring even further attention to the contours of the muscles on the bodies. With regard to movement, it is striking how the arms of the tallest running boy in the 1910 painting are dynamically reaching out, welcoming and embracing the force of the sea with noticeable strength, instead of simply preparing to dive in as he seemed to do in the 1909 version.<sup>32</sup>

In his texts and statements, Nielsen can indeed be seen to engage with a variety of vitalist features, some of which we have already encountered above. Turning to literary studies, literature scholar Anders Ehlers Dam asserts Nielsen as probably the Danish vitalist writer *par excellence*. He points to Nielsen’s 1920 comments to Julius Röntgen on Symphony no. 4 as one of the best examples of the vitalist current of thought in Denmark<sup>33</sup>:

The music is supposed to give expression to the most elementary forces as manifested between people, animals and even plants. We might say: if the whole world was destroyed by fire, flood, volcanoes etc., and all living things were destroyed and dead, then Nature would still begin again to beget new li[f]e, and to assert itself with the strongest and finest powers that are to be found in the material itself. Soon plants would begin to form, and the coupling and screeching of birds would be heard and seen, along with people’s aspirations and desires. It’s these powers that are ‘inextinguishable’ and that I have sought to represent.<sup>34</sup>

But even if we can find some vitalist features in Nielsen’s statements and texts, Fjeldsøe understandably remains less convinced about how we might

find similar vitalist traces in Nielsen's music. In his ensuing (2010) search for key musical manifestations of Vitalism in the music of *The Inextinguishable* he focuses on energy; tensions that would give a sense of life; movement in the form of forward-moving momentum; and movement in the form of a large-scale current, namely the sense in which the whole symphony is one big cyclical construct, so has a prevailing sense of coherence.

The force and energy of conflicting material – *i.e.* tension that would give a sense of life – is apparent within the very first second of the symphony which serves a flash of moving between major and minor – a motivic interaction that will continue throughout. As sudden and effective as this outburst of concentrated energy seems, Fjeldsøe notes that this motivically-relevant statement might be hard to grasp for the listener. Another weakening factor is that the high level of energy of the beginning seems to bring with it a less effective sense of forward-moving momentum: after the initial outburst, the symphony has a very slow start. To a scholar like David Fanning, the first subject in fact lacks a capacity to grow:

[T]he first subject is less stable [compared to the second subject] in all sorts of ways and demonstrates no comparable capacity for variegated growth – on the contrary its component parts tend to be hived off in rhythmically undifferentiated repetitions. This constitutes a negation of momentum [...].<sup>35</sup>

In Fjeldsøe's search for vitalist musical features in *The Inextinguishable*, it all ends with a paradox. Nielsen's both abstract and convincing vitalist descriptions of the symphony seem to drown out the musically specific and it is hard to find particular examples of what musical elements of Vitalism might be present.

Because the vitalist intention is elevated to a new level where it on the one hand is all-encompassing, and on the other hand sharpens the characterisation "Music is life", what it means to "be" music [...] becomes an expression of a vitalist idea. Any musical references to the vital thereby loses specificity and become general principles rather than specific points of reference.<sup>36</sup>

To Fjeldsøe, had it not been for Nielsen's descriptions, *The Inextinguishable* would not really qualify as a vitalist work, and it is in particular the Symphony's lack of forward-moving momentum that reduces the potential of vitalist expression from its musical fabric.<sup>37</sup> While the interrogation of possible links between *The Inextinguishable* and Vitalism undoubtedly offers sound insight into ways in which Nielsen's aesthetic approach could be seen to engage with important cultural and artistic connections in the first



decades of the twentieth century, it does not capture all that is at play in his musical philosophy. Thus, moving from aesthetic ideas towards aesthetic experience, the remainder of this chapter suggests additional music-philosophical avenues.

### Life as an Aesthetic Experience: ‘Temporally Moving Forms’

The philosophy of music has recently seen a development towards involving more experiential aspects of musical encounters in philosophical deliberations. In her critique of object-focussed analytical philosophy of music, this ambition is concisely summed up by Kathleen Higgins in her poignant utterance that “music is, first of all, an experience.”<sup>38</sup> A cornerstone of much current music-philosophical debate is exactly the same challenge that troubled Nielsen, namely the relationship between music and language where music is capable of capturing something more than can be expressed in language. For example, in his recent essay on ‘Musical Sense-Making’, Andrew Bowie criticises the kind of philosophy that treats music in reductive ways at the same time that it also treats language reductively, and refers to Martha Nussbaum’s telling statement that:

Musical works are somehow able – and, after all, this “somehow” is no more and no less mysterious than the comparable symbolic ability of language – to embody the idea of our urgent need for and attachment to things outside ourselves that we do not control, in a tremendous variety of forms.<sup>39</sup>

In addition, and drawing links to a (language) philosopher close to Nielsen’s own time, Bowie points to how Wittgenstein’s seminal 1921 work *Tractatus* contained significant references to music, an aspect largely overlooked by philosophy to this day. In his 1915 preparatory notes to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein poignantly asks:

But is “language” the “only” language? Why should there not be a means of expression with which I can talk “about” language, so that it can appear in combination with something else? Let’s assume music would be such a means of expression.<sup>40</sup>

To Bowie, Wittgenstein’s idea that music might be able to say something “about” language offers a valuable kind of musical sense-making:

The fact that music makes a kind of sense which is not expressible in verbal language, and yet evidently relates closely to it, suggests that we inhabit forms of

intelligibility which may mutually influence each other in ways which escape our conscious attention. These forms can do so in ways which may also resist philosophical articulation, because they have to be experienced through engaging with the world, rather than being verbally explained, otherwise there would be no reason to introduce music in the context in question.<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps especially given the composer's own attempts at grappling with the limitations and possibilities of language, we are granted a welcome opportunity to consider *The Inextinguishable* in (musical) terms compatible with recent scholarly aims for a philosophy of music, while in turn making further sense of Nielsen's musical philosophy. If there is a close link between a musically forward-moving momentum and the life-drive so crucial to vitalist aesthetics, then there might, for example, be mileage in asking what the perceived lack of forward-moving momentum in the symphony could tell us. What form of intelligibility or musical sense is at play here? After all, to establish a sense of movement, a single note would be enough, or as Nielsen put it: "As soon as a single note sounds in the air or through space, it is the result of life and movement; that is why music (and the dance) are the most immediate expressions of the will to life." If we might gain a sense of forward-moving momentum from a single note and other more static elements than have hitherto been discussed by scholarship, there is additional clarification to gain from visiting two further comments from Nielsen. In his letter to German-Dutch composer Julius Röntgen in 1915, he wrote:

[...] I shall also soon finish a new Symphony [No. 4]. It's very different from my other three, and there's a definite idea at its basis, namely that music's most elementary essence is sound, life and movement, which break silence into pieces. Therefore I have sought to depict everything that has the will and the urge to life, which cannot be kept down.<sup>42</sup>

Elsewhere in a 1914 letter to the singer and later Director of the Danish State Radio Emil Holm, but still with particular reference to the symphony, we get a strong sense that Nielsen's experiential aesthetics is both mental and physical. Echoing the 1893 statement mentioned previously, he declared:

[...] I can tell you that I'm well under way with a new, large orchestral work, a kind of symphony in one movement [No. 4], which is to depict everything one feels and thinks with the term we call our life, or rather "Life" in its broadest sense.<sup>43</sup>

In order to interrogate briefly musical movement, and what we might at this point recognise as a possibility for embodied perception, we turn to the third movement of *The Inextinguishable*. Written in a *poco adagio quasi andante* tempo, the music, although rife with interwoven and prolonged melodic movement, seems at times to have so little forward-moving momentum that it risks coming to a halt. As the movement progresses, it is almost impossible not to be struck, or at least intrigued by this juxtaposition: if life is characterised by Nielsen as ‘everything that moves’, how can this extremely static musical material be justified in a symphony which is supposed to be all about Life with a capital ‘L’? Here, Nielsen’s idea of the powerful single note is significant: like its brief appearance in the beginning of the first movement, it emerges out of nowhere in the third movement, thereby “break[ing] silence into pieces”. A will and urge to life that cannot be kept down. And it is the simple half-tone, whole-tone theme emanating from this single note that drives the movement of the musical material forward just as the flow appears to come to a standstill. “The interval and rhythm are the first parents of music, Adam and Eve, from which all other values of the art emanate”, Nielsen exclaimed.<sup>44</sup> This theme is a potent example: it is – in all its simplicity – a powerful means by which the rest of the symphony is on the one hand broken apart as it nears collapse, and on the other hand coheres. Finally, fanfare-like, the interrupting fortissimo theme (rhythmical in construction and almost militant in its *un poco agitato* execution) arguably becomes a (vertical) physical experience for the listener who is abruptly jolted out of an otherwise horizontal, static *molto tranquillo* musical flow. To this extent, it offers something felt and thought at the same time, an embodied perception of Life in miniature thematic form (see fig. 1).

To be attentive to potential interruption and collapse in Nielsen can be enlightening because the musical material betrays more than just a peculiar compositional choice, instead offering insights with greater aesthetic and cultural ramifications. In his extensive analysis, while recognising that Nielsen’s works are often fractured and energised “by moments of *gennembrud* or *Durchbruch*” displaying “a sense of radical destabilisation created through the incursion of music from seemingly beyond the boundaries of the individual musical work”, Grimley concludes:

Whereas in Mahler, and other early twentieth-century modernists such as Elgar, this process of opposition and breakthrough often signals defeat, resignation, or alienation from world, even at its most seemingly affirmative, in Nielsen the

emphasis is rather on the music's dynamic instability, its creative energy or impulse towards transformation, regeneration, and change. The multiple voices within Nielsen's music are not so much a sign of aesthetic fracture, the normative modernist sense of "things falling apart" in terminal decay, but rather part of a rich and more playful dialogue, a *novelistic* texture that might be interpreted more positively as a musical response to the diversity of the modern world.<sup>45</sup>

Fig. 1: Carl Nielsen, *The Inextinguishable*, 'Third movement', bars 596–606.

35

molto tranquillo

596

Fl. 1

Ob. 1

Cl. (Bb) 1

2

Fg. 1

2

VI. 1

VI. 2

Va.

Ve.

Cb.

602

un poco agitato

poco rit.

The interrupting thematic *Durchbruch* material in the slow movement of *The Inextinguishable* arguably serves as this kind of impulse towards regeneration and change, as – in this case – a prime mover of new organic

material: from it emerges a counterpoint which propels the music forward again; a characteristic early twentieth-century notion of counterpoint (in Grimley's words) "as vitalist life-force: the melodic line's energetic struggle and conflict to emerge, develop, and evolve in its full richness and complexity, a process that constantly threatens to spin out of control."<sup>46</sup>

Some of the more 'static' elements in the symphony can thus be seen to serve effectively – in a dialectical sense – to assume the role of *primus motor*, driving the material forward. This arguably introduces a different, powerful idea of movement than has hitherto been covered adequately by Nielsen scholarship, and that is neither irrelevant to the vitalist agenda, nor to Nielsen's idiosyncratic musical philosophy. Crucial to this point is not just the monotony of the repeated note, but the persistence of this repetition. The idea of persistence of repetition as something life-affirming was no stranger to Nielsen, as I briefly show in the following.

In June 1907, Nielsen composed what was to become one of his most loved songs: *Jens Vejmand* (Jens the Roadmender) to a text by Jeppe Aakjær from 1905. It is a simple diatonic song with a clear strophic phrase structure that is easily memorised, positively inviting communal participation and becoming – as Grimley states – "a sung celebration (through tragedy) of the idea of a social community".<sup>47</sup> The song recounts the hard life of the poor, hard-working Jens the Roadmender who spends his days crushing rocks as his livelihood. In each of the stanzas, the listener (or singer) 'meets' him in a new place, encountering him either through sight or sound from a distance – we might see him in town, on a day with bad weather, we might hear the hammer early in the morning, or – at the end of the song – notice his grave in the churchyard. While inviting this kind of close engagement through the senses and narrated with an abundance of powerful images, the final ironic lines of the song are crushing and cruel, telling the sad tale of social inequality:

It is surely Jens the Roadmender.  
His life was full of stones,  
But on his grave, in death,  
They spared him not a single one.

The song's cyclic melodic repetition has been recognised by Grimley as life-affirming:

Nielsen's song [...] recycles itself, the melody's circularity affirming its own powerfully regenerative force, directing our attention outwards as it records the

roadmender's fate. Death in Nielsen's song, becomes merely another stage in a continually evolving life cycle.<sup>48</sup>

Given its melodic circularity, what we might accordingly identify as the life-affirming power of the repeated single note is present towards the end of each stanza in the song. Although this single-note phrase could just as well have been an embellished melody, Nielsen chose instead to use it to create an effect by deliberately mirroring the monotony of the hammer with note repetition. Key words like "hammer" or "beating [of stones]" are set to music at exactly this point in the first two stanzas, serving as a powerful, memorable introduction to what ensues. And as with the third movement of *The Inextinguishable*, what is at stake is not just the monotony of the repetition, but the noticeable persistence of the repetition, and the life-affirming, forward-pointing gesture a single, repeated, "beating" note can offer. A Nietzschean eternal recurrence, we might say. Finally, while mirroring the physical action of hammering, the motif becomes a cognitive projection of embodied experience. Nielsen seemed acutely aware of such simple, yet powerful musical effects.

Fig. 2: Carl Nielsen, *Jens Vejmand*, Strofiske Sange, op. 21/3, first stanza

22 JENS VEJMAND III

Tempo giusto (jævnt, skridende) Tekst: Jeppe Aakjær

*mf* Hvem sid-der der bag Skjær-men med Klu-de om sin Haand, med Læ-der-lap for Ø-jet og

7 *f espressivo* om sin Sko et Baand? Det er saa-mænd Jens Vej-mand, der af sin su-re Nød med *p*

*f* *p*



Understanding Nielsen's philosophy on musical rather than linguistic terms allows us to grasp the extent to which it engages not just with aesthetic ideas, but with aesthetic experience, which in turn emphasises how Nielsen – in a very modern way – anticipates current philosophy of music.

To return now to the challenge from (and to) language: instead of submitting to abstract musings or ineffability in the face of what is difficult (if not impossible) to articulate in words, Nielsen's descriptions of music and musical engagement are overwhelmingly experiential in nature and mirror the experiential aesthetics he also transferred to his compositional choices. His explanations of musical points frequently draw on examples of everyday events, very often with an embodied slant. For example, in his 1909 essay he explains the extent to which artists are not the only ones who feel and think in connection with their craft by referring to how the swimmer, the gymnast, the horseback rider, the carpenter, and the craftsman would do exactly the same.<sup>49</sup> In thus turning musical engagement into embodied processes, Nielsen's ontology – what it is to be music, and what, in turn, it is to be life – becomes a felt ontology.

The felt aspect of not just movement but also time play a significant role in Nielsen's musical sense-making. Perplexed as to why one keeps trying to explain music when it is impossible to capture in words, he writes:

But might there not be a seed to understanding exactly in the fact that our search itself [our attempt to explain the nature of music] is perhaps a musical movement [*bevægelse*] that strides forward in the same tempo as what we are looking for, so that we're not capable of grasping neither the one, nor the other, in the same way as when we sit on a train and think that we're moving, when it is the others, or two trains move in the same direction at the same speed, and it looks like everything is at a standstill.<sup>50</sup>

Concurrent with his ideas about the close relationship between movement and life, Nielsen's statements on time, rhythm, and the temporal offer vital insight into his experiential, embodied aesthetics. In a 1922 essay entitled *Musical Problems*, he embarks on accounting for rhythm and time. Rhythm is closely connected to life in his explanation, for example as "resistance that creates images of movement [*bevægelsesbilleder*] abiding by the laws of all life".<sup>51</sup> On this, his concept of "organic rhythm", he writes:

Rhythm should not just be felt in every measure of the music, but be closely connected with both the previous and subsequent movement (*bevægelse*). What I mean by this is however very difficult to explain in words. It can only really be understood through tones or through movement underneath music [...].<sup>52</sup>

Again, Nielsen grounds his explanations in the felt and experiential, not the abstract: the temporal needs to be experienced in order to be understood.

The sense of time is arguably one of the musical elements of *The Inextinguishable* which may be most challenging for some listeners. The lack of forward-moving momentum lamented by scholars is partly due to the fact that Nielsen stretches the listener's sense of time to its limits. He does this in two ways in particular: by offering the symphony as one large movement, one "single stream", and (as we saw above) by dwelling on more static material, leaving the listener waiting attentively for something to happen before jolting him/her back into a renewed state of awareness. Apart from what we encountered in the third movement above, Fjeldsøe draws attention to two places in the first movement where the music comes almost to a halt before slowly picking up again: bars 33–51 (by the introduction to the second subject) and bars 89–97 (as the second subject moves into its *alla-breve* form).<sup>53</sup> The Nielsenesque stretching of time is something which is felt, and the listener – suspended in anticipation – becomes eager to fill the temporal 'void' with much-needed musical action.

Given what I have covered here, it would appear that it is possible to link the dynamic with the static in Nielsen's ideas about movement and the temporal, as well as their execution in a suitable musical language. To this effect, Nielsen is arguably making a musical point about 'Life' in the symphony, even if this point is difficult to articulate with words. While acknowledging that *The Inextinguishable* is "concerned with the fundamental energetic opposition of stability and instability", Grimley analyses the horizontal/dynamic and the vertical/static as two principles of musical



form for Nielsen.<sup>54</sup> Recognising the extent to which Nielsen's model of formal principle can (via Paul Hamburger) be extended into the area of music psychology, he concludes:

Nielsen's two principles of musical form thus gain their true affective properties as contrasting forms, or *Gestalt* models of embodiment: the metaphorical projection of bodily experience into embodied perception.<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, as encountered above, the play of opposed forces in music was (to Grimley) not just a compositional principle in Nielsen, but "a fundamental law of musical perception". One might, then, – *pace* Hanslick – identify the symphony's conflicting and fragile material to be Nielsen's 'temporally moving forms': determined by both time and movement, these forms of intelligibility shape the symphony as well as the listener's mental and embodied experience of it. In a creative approach which offers a surprisingly modern musical sense-making pertinent to philosophical discussions today, Nielsen reaches beyond the aesthetic idea and into the domain of aesthetic experience.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> See, for example, Michael Fjeldsøe, 'Carl Nielsen and the Current of Vitalism in Art', *Carl Nielsen Studies* 4 (2009), pp. 26–42, 27, and Finn Mathiassen, 'Music and Philosophy', *Carl Nielsen Studies* 3 (2008), pp. 65–79, 66–67.
- <sup>2</sup> Whereas the "philosophy of music" could be seen as being more engaged with discussions of the 'object' music, *e.g.* the musical work, a "musical philosophy" would be more concerned with engagement with music as a lived experience. For a discussion, see, for example, Andrew Bowie, *Music, Philosophy, Modernity*, Cambridge 2007.
- <sup>3</sup> See, for example, Kathleen Higgins, *The Music of Our Lives*, Lanham, MD 2011. Previously published by Temple University Press, 1991; Aaron Ridley, *The Philosophy of Music: Themes and Variations*, Edinburgh 2004; Bowie, *Music, Philosophy, Modernity* (note 2); Andrew Bowie, 'Musical Sense-Making', in *The Oxford Handbook of Western Music and Philosophy*, ed. Jerrold Levinson, Tomas McAuley, and Nanette Nielsen, Oxford forthcoming.
- <sup>4</sup> Carl Nielsen, 'Ord, Musik og Programmusik' (1909) in *Levende Musik*,

København 1976, p. 25. “Spørger man en Komponist, hvad han har ment med en eller anden bestemt akkord eller tonerække, kan han i virkeligheden kun svare ved at spille eller synge det omhandlede sted; al anden forklaring er nonsens.” Author’s translations unless stated otherwise.

<sup>5</sup> First published by *Fraser’s Magazine*, October 1857. Reprinted in *Literary Style and Music*, London 1950.

<sup>6</sup> Nielsen, ‘Ord, Musik og Programmusik’ (note 4), p. 24. ‘[Herbert Spencer] kan måske have haft en vis interesse for musik, men musikalsk kan han umuligt have været, ja, kan end ikke have haft den alleringeste virkelige føling med musik.’

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 32–33.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> *Carl Nielsen Brevudgaven*, ed. John Fellows, Copenhagen 2005, No. 1, p. 308. Quoted in Daniel Grimley, *Carl Nielsen and the Idea of Modernism*, Woodbridge 2010, p. 70.

<sup>13</sup> Grimley, *Carl Nielsen and the Idea of Modernism* (note 12), p. 73.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Husserlian (transcendental) phenomenology was to have an impact on musicology in the 1920s. A key text here is Hans Mersmann, ‘Versuch einer Phänomenologie der Musik’, *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 5 (1922/23), pp. 226–269.

<sup>17</sup> Nielsen, ‘Ord, Musik og Programmusik’ (note 4), p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> Mathiassen, ‘Music and Philosophy’ (note 1), p. 72.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Carl Nielsen to Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen, 3 May 1914, quoted in David Fanning and Michelle Assay (eds.), *Carl Nielsen: Selected Letters and Diaries*, Copenhagen 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Text in the programme for the first performance, 1 Feb. 1916. The final text was drawn up by Nielsen’s pupil, Knud Jeppesen. Trans. John Fellow (ed.), *Carl Nielsen til sin samtid*, vol. 1, Copenhagen 1999, p. 198. “Komponisten har ved Anvendelsen af Titelen ‘Det uudslukkelige’ med et enkelt Ord søgt at antyde, hvad kun selve Musiken har Magt til fuldt at udtrykke: den elementære Villie til Liv.

Overfor Opgaver som denne; at udtrykke Liv abstrakt, hvor andre kunstarter staar uformuende, tvungne til at gøre Omveje, gøre Udsnit, symbolisere, dér og først dér er Musiken hjemme på sit Ur-Område, ret i sit Element, simpelthen fordi den, ved kun at være sig selv, har løst sin Opgave. Thi den *er* liv dér, hvor de andre kun forestiller og omskriver Liv. – Livet er ukueligt og uudslukeligt, der kæmpes, brydes, avles og fortæres idag som igaar, imorgen som idag, og alting vender tilbage.

Endnu engang: Musik *er* Liv, som dette uudslukeligt. [...]"

- <sup>21</sup> Nielsen's programme note written for Gerhardt Lyng, *Danske Komponister i det 20. Aarhundredes Begyndelse*, Århus 1917. Trans. John Fellow (ed.), *Carl Nielsen til sin samtid*, vol. 1, Copenhagen 1999, pp. 194–195. "Saasnat blot en eneste Tone klinger i Luften eller gennem Rummet, er det følgen af Liv og Bevægelse; derfor er Musiken (og Dansen) det mest umiddelbare Udtryk for Livsvilje. Symfonien skildrer Livets oprindeligste Kilder og Livsfølelsens Udspring, altsaa: det, der ligger bag ved Menneske-, Dyre- og Plantelivet, som vi ser, opfatter eller lever det. Den er ikke en musikalsk, programmæssig Skildring af en Livsudvikling inden for et begrænset Område i Tid og Rum, men et uprogrammæssigt Greb helt ned i de lag af Følelseslivet, som endnu er halvt-kaotiske og helt-elementære. Altsaa det modsatte af al Programmusik, til trods for at dette lyder som et Program. [...]"

[Symfonien] er paa en Maade et fuldkommen tankeløst Udtryk for det, der bringer Fuglene til at skribe, Dyrene til at brøle, bræge, løbe og kæmpe og menneskene til at jamre, stønne, juble og raabe uden al Forklaring. Symfonien skildrer *ikke* alt dette, men den Grundfølelse, der ligger *under* alt dette. [...] Thi den *er* Liv der, hvor de andre Kunstarter kun forestiller og omskriver Liv. [...]"

- <sup>22</sup> Karen Painter, *Symphonic aspirations: German music and politics, 1900–1945*, Cambridge, MA 2007, p. 151.
- <sup>23</sup> For a reading which attempts to read evocation of war into the symphony's timpani duel, see Raymond Knapp, 'Music as Life: Authority and Meaning in Nielsen's Fourth Symphony', *Carl Nielsen Studies* 5 (2012), pp. 148–164.
- <sup>24</sup> 'En musikbegivenhed', *Fyns Stiftstidende*, 145de Aargang, Nr. 107, 17 April 1916, p. 5.
- <sup>25</sup> 'Musikforeningen', *Nationaltidende* (2 February 1916), Morgen-Udgave, pp. 3–4, 4.
- <sup>26</sup> 'Musikforeningens anden Koncert. Carl Nielsens Nye Symfoni', review by 'A.T.' in *Berlingske Tidende*, 168. Aargang nr. 33 (2 February 1916), p. 3. "[Nielsen] vælger da ikke Livets glade, festlige sider, derimod fortrinsvis de mørke, indadvendte, vrede, forbitrede, man kunde fristes til at sige livsfjendske."
- <sup>27</sup> 'Musikforeningen. 2. concert', review in *København* (2 February 1916), p. 5.

- <sup>28</sup> For further reviews, including a snapshot of the reception in the rest of Scandinavia, England, and Germany, see the preface to the score: *Carl Nielsen Værker* II/4, København 2000, pp. xi-xxi.
- <sup>29</sup> Apart from the brief account offered here, see also Grimley, *Carl Nielsen and the Idea of Modernism* (note 12), pp. 61–95.
- <sup>30</sup> Fjeldsøe, ‘Carl Nielsen and the Current of Vitalism in Art’ (note 1), p. 27.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 27. Fjeldsøe also discusses the two Willumsen paintings mentioned here, and offers further examples of vitalist art.
- <sup>32</sup> For a visual example of these paintings, see, for instance, the newspaper article in *Kristeligt Dagblad*, ‘Historien om billederne, der er indbegrebet af friluftsliv, sol og sommer’, 21/6/2016: <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/kultur/historien-om-billederne-der-er-indbegrebet-af-friluftsliv-sol-og-sommer>.
- <sup>33</sup> Fjeldsøe, ‘Carl Nielsen and the Current of Vitalism in Art’ (note 1), p. 31.
- <sup>34</sup> Carl Nielsen’s letter to Julius Röntgen, 15 February 1920. Here quoted from Fanning and Assay (eds.), *Carl Nielsen: Selected Letters and Diaries* (note 19), p. 469.
- <sup>35</sup> David Fanning, ‘Progressive Thematicism in Nielsen’s Symphonies’, in *The Nielsen Companion*, ed. Mina Miller, London 1994, pp. 167–203, 188. Quoted in Michael Fjeldsøe, ‘Vitalisme i Carl Nielsens musik’, *Danish Musicology Online* 1 (2010), pp. 33–55, 46.
- <sup>36</sup> Fjeldsøe, ‘Vitalisme i Carl Nielsens musik’ (note 35), p. 46. (My translation.)
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 45–47.
- <sup>38</sup> Kathleen Higgins, *The Music of Our Lives* (note 3), p. 113.
- <sup>39</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, Cambridge 2001, p. 272. As quoted in Bowie, ‘Musical Sense-Making’ (note 3), unpaginated.
- <sup>40</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus. Tagebücher 1914–1916. Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Frankfurt a. M. 1984, p. 144, as quoted in Bowie, ‘Musical Sense-Making’ (note 3), unpaginated.
- <sup>41</sup> Bowie, ‘Musical Sense-Making’ (note 3), unpaginated.
- <sup>42</sup> Letter dated 5 April 1915, *Carl Nielsen: Selected Letters and Diaries* (note 19), p. 371 (emphasis added).
- <sup>43</sup> Letter dated 24 July 1914, *Carl Nielsen: Selected Letters and Diaries* (note 19), p. 360 (emphasis added).
- <sup>44</sup> Nielsen, *Levende Musik* (note 4), p. 49.

<sup>45</sup> Grimley, *Carl Nielsen and the Idea of Modernism* (note 12), p. 237.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Nielsen, *Levende Musik* (note 4), pp. 26–27.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 7. My translation. “Men skulle der ikke ligge en kim til forståelse netop deri, at selve vor søgen [efter at forklare musikkens væsen] måske er en musikalsk bevægelse, der skrider frem i samme tempo som det vi søger, så vi ikke er i stand til at erkende hverken det ene eller det andet, på samme måde som når vi sidder i toget og tror, det er os, der kører, medens det er de andre, eller to tog kører i samme retning med samme fart, og det ser ud, som om det hele står stille.”

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Fjeldsøe, ‘Vitalisme i Carl Nielsens musik’ (note 35), p. 46.

<sup>54</sup> Grimley, *Carl Nielsen and the Idea of Modernism* (note 12), p. 100.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

## ABSTRACT

One of Carl Nielsen’s main philosophical entanglements with music emerges out of the extent to which he found language thoroughly insufficient for expressing musical meaning, or the ‘sense’ of music. His criticism of the shortcomings of language opens up his musical aesthetics – not least his somewhat obscure and grandiose (yet pervasive) idea that ‘music is life’ – for understanding in greater depth. Using Nielsen’s Symphony no. 4, *The Inextinguishable* (*Det Uudslukkelige*) (1916) as an example, and analysing aspects related to movement and the temporal in particular, this essay puts Nielsen’s famous statement ‘music is life’ into further relief. When we – like Nielsen – resist language as a satisfactory explanatory tool, the linguistic statement ‘music is life’ can instead be understood on the musical terms it (necessarily) unsuccessfully seeks to capture.



KATHRIN KIRSCH

## Creative Impulse of Life and Musical Process in Jean Sibelius' *Seventh Symphony*

Drawing a connection between the ideas of 'music' and 'life' raises difficulties in defining primarily the latter term. Whereas 'music' can be defined by admittedly vast criteria relating to characteristic, historical, social, or physical properties, the term 'life' does not have a one-to-one relation with any kind of entity. 'Life' has to be observed and narrated as such and can be envisioned in different senses: as a form of existence or an expression of life in a given context.<sup>1</sup> In music historiography and interpretation both aspects of life have been considered: life as an autonomous, self-reflecting system and life as retrospective totality of an individual composer's experience and (musical) development. In this second sense, 'last works' such as Jean Sibelius' *Seventh* can be a topic of narratives of analogous development in a composer's life and oeuvre. This perspective, of course, is especially interesting in Sibelius' case, as the end of his symphonic production came long before his life's end. But if one focuses on the *Seventh Symphony* itself as an entity, one finds that the unfolding of the musical structure corresponds to the first-mentioned idea of life, that of autonomous existence and self-reproduction. In contemporary aesthetic discourse, specific understandings of life have emerged that have changed our view of it from a kind of mechanism to a complex and creative process of differentiating. Sibelius' *Seventh*, on the other hand, from its early reception up to recent research, has been described as an organically developing entity within itself as well as the aim of Sibelius' symphonic evolution from his *First Symphony* onwards. This paper connects relevant contemporary ideas of life and understandings of music as a living process with aspects of the specific dynamic in the structure of Sibelius' *Seventh*.

## 1. Music and Life – Changing Perspectives around 1800

Romantic music aesthetics established instrumental music as capable and responsible for its own rules, movement, and development. These rules were adopted from rhetoric in the early eighteenth century, but in the nineteenth-century instrumental music came to be regarded as inhabiting a ‘separate world of its own’.<sup>2</sup> The idea of ‘absolute’ or autonomous music increasingly bestowed upon instrumental music the basic criteria of life as a self-maintaining process. Understanding music as an entity with a life of its own required previous notions of the relationship between life and music to be revised. To be sure, the subject of the composer as creator is vital in Romantic aesthetics. But Robert Schumann introduced the sphere of the ‘poetic art’ as a utopia in which all kinds of ‘real’ art and artists meet in understanding. The mutual explanation of different artistic media – poetry and music in particular – gains plausibility from that understanding and was reflected in Schumann’s writing on music and his introduction of the ‘dissociated’ author.<sup>3</sup> The interface between the autonomous life of a musical composition and life as the composer’s reality remained in question. Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach could call his *Fantasy in F# Minor Wq 67* ‘C. P. E. Bach’s Sentiments,’ thereby identifying a portion of himself as living being with a portion of his compositional œuvre, but such a direct sentimental connection must appear suspicious if the understanding of music as autonomous art is to be taken seriously later on. In Schumann’s understanding, music is a living entity with which the composer and the listener connect in the sphere of the poetic<sup>4</sup> and by using different senses. The relative status of life and music as equal entities seems natural. A tangible *tertium comparationis*, however, does not seem to be necessary because both life and music either meet in the poetic sphere or not at all.

The tendency of Romantic music aesthetics to see music as a living system of its own seems therefore to have separated life and music into different spheres. The understanding of music as an autonomously operating entity obviously changed the way of speaking about music, thinking in music, and probably also actually writing music. The interest of the present volume to investigate the extent to which connections between life and music can be constructive or narrated and what impact that may have on music itself, its creation, and interpretation, therefore promises to be especially interesting for the history of symphonic writing after Beethoven. In Beethoven’s symphonies the longest lasting concept of musical process



as cyclic, end-weighted symphony stream of life was projected onto later symphonists.<sup>5</sup> The common understanding of life and its nature, however, changed substantially around 1900 and may have led to altered compositional perspectives on life and music, especially outside the realm of Austro-German criticism.

## 2. Stages of Music and Life as Processes

A directed, irreversible sequence of events is called a process.<sup>6</sup> Two different types of processes can be identified based on how they shape time. Mechanical processes are defined by causal relationship between any coming state and its predecessor. Time in such a process is being patterned by predictable steps. Music can be seen as such a mechanical process, *e.g.*, in terms of theoretical rules: In counterpoint a consonance must follow a dissonance, the dissonance must be resolved in order to carry out a proper process. Of course, a musical process cannot be reduced completely to only one possible successor of a certain state, but the solution to a work's final cadenza comes close to this on that micro level.

But in music, as in art, the dimension, of course, has to be the entity of the work or even the genre. The idea of the original genius in eighteenth-century music highlighted the notion of a piece of art as an individual. 'True' art was not supposed to be identical with its basic rules but rather should express specific differences while still keeping its communicative significance. This explicit demand initiated the discourse about autonomous music because the ideal of obeying traditional external conventions or *exempla classica* as virtual rules had to be rethought. Composing has never been – as far as we know from the beginning of notation – mere craftsmanship, but has required artistic decisions. The image of what music is and how it proceeds, however, changed essentially around 1800 and again around 1900.

The idea of a process itself also changed: Up to 1800 the concept was understood as being completely determined in a scientific way. Olin Downes' characterization of Sibelius' *Seventh* in this sense represents the mechanist view of organic process: "The music simply grows out of the internal inexplicable forms of the seeds."<sup>7</sup> The image of a seed containing all relevant data for a process whose course can be altered by certain circumstances and logical reactions relates to the idea of organic life, but

here life is a predictable process of blossoming and ending. This biological concept of process characterizes large parts of critical writing on music and is also present in Sibelius' own affirmation of the symphony's "profound logic" that he expressed at the time he was composing the *Third*.<sup>8</sup>

The biological concept gradually widened to encompass factors that were not altogether comprehensible with respect to a musical subject, such as complexity, probability, coincidence, adaptation, and creativity. Such a dynamic understanding was articulated prominently by Alexander von Humboldt<sup>9</sup> and his successors and then – closer to Sibelius's time – developed by Sigmund Freud and Henry Bergson.<sup>10</sup> Humboldt probably first conceived the history of nature as a self-maintaining process. A process from this point of view does not need a subject but proceeds by itself, affected by its environment. In contradistinction to a mechanical process, the self-maintaining natural process is not predetermined by its biology or fate. Life as such, realised in individuals, species, and ecological environments, can be understood as an entity that can at (nearly) any point react and decide upon different connected actions and thus change the course of future developments.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, 'life' as form of existence was not seen as the status of an item or a cyclic movement of seasonal iteration but as a stream leading to ideal adaptation to a certain condition.<sup>12</sup> This notion was particularly constructive for the historiography of the symphony as genre, developing by immanently proceeding and differentiating as it accommodated external demands such as aesthetic discourse or historical developments in connection with social transformations.<sup>13</sup> In this context, for example, Edward Laufer states that the *Seventh*'s "unique and highly original formal designs" give "rise to a number of questions as to the evolution of the 'symphony' in the twentieth century."<sup>14</sup> According to this perspective, it is in the *Seventh* that the symphony crosses a boundary and finds a path leading towards emergence of a new species.

Most of the notions of process described above are common to music criticism on different levels and have directed the reception of Sibelius' symphonic work. The *Seventh*, however, seems more than other symphonies to resist both the end-weight cyclic concept at least in its emphatic form and or prescribed mechanical and evolutionary ones. Nineteenth-century philosophical designs were applied not only to the understanding of mind, consciousness, and art including music.<sup>15</sup> The idea of 'process' around 1900 also became *in vogue* in other sciences such as sociology and psychology, where it gained further autonomous aspects. In virtual opposition to the

mechanical concept of process in the psychological concept as viewed by Freud, a process in these new sciences seems to be a means of accounting for developments that cannot be explained by logical causality. Freud's model of id, ego, and superego operates on different levels in processes, the subject as such being deconstructed and decentred in the face of multifarious interacting processes. These interacting entities fight conflicts to actually lead a proper life. This kind of processive argumentation is understood as a basic feature of individual and also social life as realized in conflict, competition, cooperation, or consent.<sup>16</sup> So far the concept seems to mirror eighteenth-century sonata form as a dramatic conflict of two entities (keys defined by themes) in music set in opposition and manipulated towards a solution. The new perspective on processes as multiple rather than subject-controlled seems, moreover, to find its reflection in the increasing interest in one-movement forms that allow inclusion of different processes and changing perspectives within a single identity. Vejio Murtomäki's conclusion with reference to the formal design of Sibelius' *Seventh* seems to allude to such a concept: "It [the *Seventh Symphony's* form] can be studied as a process moving forward simultaneously on many levels, in which case the understanding of its form depends on the dimension which is being emphasized."<sup>17</sup> Along with Franz Liszt and others who composed concert overtures or programmatic symphonies, 'absolute' symphonists experimented with merging movements or creating single-movement forms, as in Sibelius' own *Fifth Symphony* in three movements, Nielsen's two-movement *Fifth*, or Arnold Schoenberg's *Kammersymphonie* in one movement. The tendency towards one-movement cycles has been seen as one distinguishing criterion of 'modern' symphonies.<sup>18</sup>

This notion of process is also directed in time: the course of time is the premise whereby psychological, social, or musical necessities are articulated and conflicts set up and resolved. The focus here, however, is the quality of the events and their possible and impossible impulses and ramifications. Conflicting processes in music can – in discussions of music – be based on 'conflicting' harmony or contrasting thematic construction. Reconciliation or resolution may thus be reached by thematic combination or dissolution of material. As in psychological and social processes, impulses for processive movement in music will spring from conflict, not from concord.

Listening to Sibelius' *Seventh*, the idea of a multifarious, autonomously interacting process is plausible, but the primacy of conflict as a means of

developing it is not. Rather critics stress – as Murtomäki prominently does – the unity on many levels, including material, form, and tonality.<sup>19</sup> Here another contemporary concept of living processes may be helpful, namely Henri Bergson's *élan vital*. He extends the rather reasonable concept of evolutionary processes (logically reaching the aim of optimization) by the factor of impulse. In contrast to the idea of a (musical) seed, a primary impulse in that sense comprises all material necessary for its continuation, but by its own force or drive it moves on to develop different characteristics, entities, or even antagonisms: Duration of life means “invention, creation of forms, continuous building of something absolutely new.”<sup>20</sup> Progress here is basically free and not pre-determined, but nonetheless meets corresponding stages by their specific force.<sup>21</sup> In musical terms, from this emerges the conviction that form is not a given state but a rank of existence in the course of life. Running time in this context is not a factor of decay, but of creation. Given the often implied picture of the *Seventh* as ‘stream of continuity’ – in Tomi Mäkelä's words: “The caesura are weak, but the characters strong”<sup>22</sup> – and its proximity to the genre of symphonic fantasy reveals that aspects of such a creative force might be relevant here.

### 3. Composing and Life in Jean Sibelius' Diary

Jean Sibelius' life and composing are part of the *fin de siècle* in Europe. Sibelius is not known to have addressed or occupied himself with Freud's or Bergson's writings,<sup>23</sup> but he certainly was a person of his day. His intensive diary writing and depressive self-examination indicate this. In his regular notes written over years and sometimes also mirrored in his letter writing or recorded anecdotes, he juxtaposes seemingly unconsciously and at random information on nature, his everyday life and feelings, and observations relating to weather, economics, politics, and the status of his current compositional work. This practice not only puts all of this on an equal level, but also suggests that the different subjects are connected with one another, even if apparently in contrasting mood: “Autumn sun and fresh: 7 +. Dumped the orchestra things [probably meaning material for the *Fifth*, *Sixth* or *Seventh Symphony*]. I am pessimistic now about my genius and skills. How my life flew through my fingers. Terrible.”<sup>24</sup>

How permeable Sibelius saw the border between the creative compositional process and his own personal life is apparent in several notes in

which he articulates the idea of actually being driven by the music to compose a certain kind of development: "I am ill and tired today. Worked at the first movement of the Vth symphony. Still. It must be good. 'Held on' enough in classicist tokens. But the motives demand it. Hier stehe ich, ich kann nicht anders."<sup>25</sup> Here I remain, I cannot do otherwise. Karl Ekamn recorded an even more explicit variant of this thought uttered by Sibelius concerning his last symphony:

The VIIth Symphony. Joy of life and vitality with appassionato passages. In three movements – the last a "Hellenic rondo" [...] In regard to Symphonies VI and VII the plans may possibly be altered according to the development of the musical ideas. As usual, I am a slave to my themes and submit to their demands.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from the idea of two separate autonomous processes – of the work and the person – the keyword 'vitality' and the apparently self-motivated dynamic and movement resemble aspects of Bergson's widely-received publications in Scandinavia. The subordination of life to creative work can also be turned the other way round in Sibelius' view: "I want to give the symphony [the *Fifth*] another – a more human form. More down-to-earth, livelier. The problem is that I became another person while working at it."<sup>27</sup> It seems as if Sibelius, in a way, sees his compositions as one of his psychic processes interacting with his personal reasoning about what is the proper aesthetic for composing. For him, as the diary suggests, music actually is an autonomous process to which he has to react and that reacts to his state of being. Music in this perspective *is* life and not merely a metaphor for it.

#### 4. The *Seventh Symphony*

The geneses especially of the last two symphonies and the symphonic poem *Tapiola* suggest a highly coordinated effort that produced three major compositions sharing basic material or ideas. Murtumäki states that prominent motivic material in the form of "cyclic impulses" connects the late symphonic works of Sibelius.<sup>28</sup> Mäkelä argues that the *Seventh* answers the *Sixth's* questions and begins in the same mood as the earlier work ends,<sup>29</sup> and that Sibelius' symphonies are connected by an open network.<sup>30</sup> Beyond continuity of material across different symphonic pieces, a tendency towards unification of the single symphonic cycle in a one-movement form seems obvious: already in his *Fourth Symphony* Sibelius had attempted to

merge certain parts of the form, and in the *Fifth* he actually did so for the first and second movements. So within the *Seventh* and within the symphonic œuvre with the *Seventh* at its (at this point unexpected) end, Sibelius seems to have aimed at some kind of continuity of movement. Possibly he reached a problem similar to Bergson's when reasoning for the *élan vital*: Whereas the impulse of life (*élan vital*) seems infinite in the perspective of the universe, the subjective experience of a personal life recognizes the end and death of individual lives.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, it is the challenge for individual symphonies to create a process and to form an appropriate ending, but when viewed as a genre symphonies affiliate to earlier ones and offer impulses for followers. How exactly could the idea of an inherent impulse of life forcing processes of differentiation and maintaining and forming a state of movement be reflected in music?

Looking at current formal analyses of the *Seventh*, most of them based on thematic characteristics and interrelations, one observes from that meta-perspective that the evolutionary idea of process assumed in these analyses does not match up with the idea of life as a directed, irreversible process. Most authors agree that the beginning of the symphony consists of an introduction (b. 1–59)<sup>32</sup> and that there is a recapitulative section at the end (from b. 476)<sup>33</sup>. Other formal boundaries have been recognized widely at the same points – convincingly so where there are changes of compositional technique and musical material. But in the context of an understanding of music as a directed process from one state to a consequently or logically following state, it seems awkward that commentators disagree, for example, in terms of the function of some basic sections: The trombone theme in bar 60 has been seen by Eric Ringbohm as a “Schlussgruppe” (concluding theme), meaning the end of the introduction.<sup>34</sup> Ernst Tanzberger, in contrast, has seen it as the beginning of a form, namely as part A in an ABA ternary arch form.<sup>35</sup> The section at bar 258 has been named “central Allegro”,<sup>36</sup> “Transition”,<sup>37</sup> or “joyous Finale”<sup>38</sup>. Each of these three terms marks a different status in a process directed towards a specific endpoint and different conditions of time. A ‘central Allegro’ alludes to a kind of processive gravity, a presence to the musical course, whereas ‘transition’ describes the effect of leaving one status and moving to the next, with the ‘Finale’ again reflecting a settled status, looking back on the previous process or even serving as a culmination of it in a breakthrough or apotheosis.<sup>39</sup>

Ambiguous function of forms in music, of course, are found in many pieces of Western music since the late eighteenth century, and are all the more evident in twentieth-century examples. But as long as a compositional standard and principles can be recognized, models of form employed can be reconciled with analytical findings in complex adaptations such as double function form. The use of multifunctional terms to describe different formal stages of a process, particularly in this rather extreme example, however, shows that the notion of music developing in time is rooted in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music and that basic principles seem to have changed again around 1900: Historically-grown topoi of symphonic beginnings (overture-like figures, triadic themes in sonata forms, or even slow movement with melodic segments in discrete formal parts), of transitions (sequences, truncation or other liquidation of thematic material, gradual change of key), or endings (pedal points, fast repetition of short motives, scales or fanfares and confirmation of the tonic in tonal music, recapitulative return of material) offer the vocabulary to create and to perceive beginnings, developments or closings. The level of processive thinking in and about music is thus derived from eighteenth-century music, mainly at the level of themes and motives connected to harmonic areas. Such thinking was associated early on with subjects providing the necessary conflict to initiate the course of the musical flow. Initially applied to subjects in a single movement, this arrangement expanded to encompass the whole symphonic cycle and in turn strengthened the idea of an organic process – that is, of germination, blossoming, and dying – in music.

Sibelius (as well as Gustav Mahler and others who adhered to tonality of some description) gradually expanded not only musical form and harmonic structure but also the characteristics and roles of musical subjects. Characteristic tones, topoi and idioms, or even 'structures' increasingly took the place of thematic subjects. In Sibelius' *Fourth Symphony*, fanfare-like idioms and broadly singing cantilenas together shape the movements.<sup>40</sup> In his *Fifth* the focus is on spatial fields of blended musical materials rather than progression from one discrete idea to another.<sup>41</sup>

At the beginning of his *Seventh*, it seems as if Sibelius is reaching another level in the handling of his subjects, now focusing on single events. In contrast to the *Fourth*, where the tritone provided important basic material for the characteristic musical gestures but also carried harmonic implications, the *Seventh* features musical movement that is – over a long span of time – slowed down and stretched apart, with the result that every

motion becomes an impulse that is followed by actions and reactions. The music singles out items as if showing them through a microscope. The first impulse by the timpani contracts and releases the energy of the piece. A sound with a high level of noise and an undefined rhythmic shape cannot be regarded entirely as musical material or something that contains 'seeds' to be developed. It functions instead as a gesture of impact. This impact seems to replace conventional symphonic opening gestures characterized by dynamic formulas such as fanfares (encountered in *Tapiola* as well). In the *Seventh* the impulse launches an ascending scale in the cellos that begins with A after the first impulse of G in the timpani, and thus in a way continues the primary impulse while at the same time weakening the tonal outline because of the duality between G mixolydian and A minor. The basses follow the ascending motion of the other strings, but an eighth note behind. This is the first mutation, that is, creative change that introduces variety and furthers the process of differentiation. Although the delay seems accidental or undirected, it introduces a characteristic element – the rhythmic shift – that ensuing passages will have to deal with in some way. The next event is the unprepared and surprising diastematic turn to E $\flat$  in the cellos that, by another, simultaneously occurring event, namely the entry of the woodwinds and horns, becomes the fifth of an A $\flat$  minor chord (b. 3), the violins turning partly to the new fundamental tone as well and the basses breaking off. This sonority persists until the bassoon introduces D into the A $\flat$  minor sonority in the second half of b. 3, generating a tritone clash with the fundamental and secondary clashes with the third and fifth. What could be an allusion to madrigalist contrapuntal licence actually loses any sense of strongly directed harmonic movement of the sort typical for a freely introduced dissonance. Instead, nothing else happens, again for a very long time, and the sound loses any sense of direction. The rhythmic structure still is unclear because of the delayed entrance of the basses and the entries of the bassoon and following voices that avoid metrical emphasis. The woodwinds then die away in b. 3, and the horns move from E $\flat$  to E, which does not resolve the tension completely. Horns II and IV take a step to G and B $\flat$ , but it requires further stepwise motion to reach F major in bar five. This level is held again without anything happening until D $\sharp$  and B in timpani and strings introduce B major as if by chance as a new counter-reaction to F major. Yet this impulse does not seem to have much force: D $\sharp$



fades out, and B gives way to A, so F major seems confirmed, although through unconventional means.

Until this point there has been no subject-like figure, the harmony has consolidated from something like G mixolydian / A minor / Ab minor to the subdominant sphere of the prescribed C major, and tones have been restricted to stepwise movement, except in the case of a single F-major triad in the moment of clear tonality. Rather than proceeding according to organized counterpoint, the music here fails to move in a directed and predictable way. It seems to be finding its way back to a tension-free status through trial and error, and in doing so exposes more and more elements and characters. One impulse leads to actions, but they follow only later and occur successively in different parts. Strictly speaking, there is no counterpoint in the sense of *contramotion*, because generally only one part moves at a time and not always with purpose towards resolution.

Then, having found F major as safe ground, the first musical gesture enters and plays around A and F (second bassoon and second flute) to create a little pastoral motive (b. 8). Murtomäki points out that its basic movement as a circling structure connects Sibelius' last three symphonies. From that point of view, the more or less sudden appearance of the figure at the beginning of the *Seventh* underlines the idea of that last symphony's being in evolutionary and impulsive contact with its predecessors. F major as firm ground is disturbed by the intensive D once again in the first flute entering with this motive, a fourth above the second flute. The result is a drone-like sound shimmering between F major and D minor with a disturbing pedal point C in the horns. As if rethinking themselves after a short break (b. 9), the surrounding pedal tones shift to C minor, and the sequence of the pastoral motive – for the first time – reacts directly and shifts to C minor as well. The following statement of this motive seems to be an incomplete copy. But still, this bit of characteristic musical material plays a role in the process. The short figuration is being torn apart into fragments of scales (b. 13), augmented, and combined with the slight rhythmic displacement of the beginning and the distant memory of counterpoint underlying the movement of tension and release. These very basic ideas carry the musical process forward and engender further material.

The opening bars of latent contrapuntal movement, increasing complexity, and avoidance of thematic subjects lead into a section of “almost static slow tempo from which to gain momentum”,<sup>42</sup> as Laufer puts it. The force culminates in the entry of the trombone theme that is seen by

all critics as the work's major theme. The fact that this theme finally brings the first proper harmonic confirmation of the expected tonic C major establishes its importance, as does the melody's return in two recapitulations. But at the same time, it is quite unremarkable as a first theme proper. Lying within the low register of the orchestra, the theme features only one specific element, the long opening D which, like the D of the bassoon in bar 3 and the D of the flutes in bar 7, seems out of place. Triads and sustained tones within the harmony of C articulate the theme within the surrounding texture. Only a slight dynamic highlighting and a punctuated triplet rhythmic figure suggest its importance. Accordingly, the trombone theme does not appear as the aim of the previous development, but as just another stage of a process that has been in play since the beginning of the work. That is, this theme does not seem to be presented as an important subject but rather to be on a footing equal to others that – by convention of symphonic composing – hold the role of the subject.

Another look at the formal design of this single-movement symphony suggests a rather clear architectural design. On the broadest level, conventions of a slow introduction are met, there are sections of developmental character and of scherzo and rondo character, and at the end we perceive recapitulative elements with the return of musical material from earlier sections. The problem of definitively linking specific passages to certain points of the musical process underway is so difficult in my opinion because the music avoids defining its stages. The clues normally employed to do so – contrasts in orchestration, melodic formation, harmony, or formal relevance of items – are only rarely used. Orchestration mostly differentiates antiphonal groups in the *tutti*s, melodies hardly present themselves as dominating material, and only motivic splinters or rather basic elements such as scales and triads offer options for motivic networking. The gravity of harmonic centres is apparent only at rare points (C major – with lots of disturbances – dominating over long distances),<sup>43</sup> and repetitive sequences used primarily for the rondo effect in the middle paragraphs repeat sections rather than characteristic subjects. Form in the sense of boundaries between distinct areas, realized by harmonic, thematic, or motivic contrasts, is not operable. The simple musical material connects to a linear process of integration of seemingly contingent elements.

The rather slow, static tempo over extended passages and the avoidance of characteristic figures give the single-movement piece the effect of a stream of continuity. The focus on single events and reactions to these show

the musical process as a self-regulating one. Whereas in Classical-Romantic composition, the composer is perceptible as the subject directing the musical process, 'doing' and 'deciding' things, here the music seems to pull itself into being, entering into a very broad stream but often ignoring listeners' expectations of form that should emerge from the process. Form seems to be generated partly by autonomous force of differentiation and occasional retrospective review of previously heard material. The question of direction, aim, or logical relation of cause and effect seems secondary.

But how does this process find an end, and how does that end help to define it? A recapitulation can be pointed out at bar 475, at the return of the trombone theme. Although the tempo recalls the Adagio of the beginning, the underlying motion is relatively fast. There is an impression of two speeds, belonging to two different earlier sections, projected one across the other.<sup>44</sup> The trombone theme and its returns provide a very stable framework for the piece – Parmet names these statements "cornerstones"<sup>45</sup> – whereas, as Laufer describes, "everything else around them [is] in constant flux and transformation."<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the signal of the trombone theme does not finally bring the movement to an end, rather it goes on with a kind of antiphonal chorus having something of a closing function. But even here the creation or inclusion of material does not come to a cease. In bar 518, Sibelius's *Valse triste*, or more precisely the theme's accompaniment, is cited.<sup>47</sup> Yet again, it is not the thematic subject itself but a basic building-block, supplying in this case a reminiscence of pre-existing external material that introduces another impulse. The last chords revert to the beginning of the piece with its repeated use of unprepared dissonance in a very slow, static environment. The diastematic steps expose the ninth in bars 522–523, and the seventh simultaneously with the long-awaited C-major chord in bars 524–525. Here again, traditional cadential movements, spread out over two separate events in extreme prolongation introduced one after the other), produce a sense of stasis. This state persists into the final C-major chord, but the energy seems not to come out of an inner logic, mechanism, or directed activity but out of an inner compulsion for movement that exists in the sense of Bergson's primacy of movement, in any state. From this point of view, the symphony's conclusion cannot be read as a regression back to its beginning. Rather the piece has shown that its first impulse opened space for differentiation of distinct events, processes, and movements, and that phases of static, slow motion consolidate its energy for a new impulse. The end of the *Seventh*, therefore,

might be read not as the final goal before Sibelius' entry into the silence of Ainola, but as merely a temporary halt.

The present state of any development carries its past within it. In the *Seventh Symphony*, mechanical processes are active – e.g., resolution of dissonances and evolutionary processes such as motivic developments, sequences, and spinning out of ideas. Other conventional techniques, such as a more organic and purposeful unfolding of events, realized, for example, in a breakthrough or crisis of ideas or themes, seem to play a rather subordinate role. Another model of process, not exactly predictable but operating autonomously, brings about the movement and complex interaction of different forces to carry the music forward. Sibelius worked on the problem of 'profound logic' on different levels in his symphonies. In his last one he seems to have reduced the scope of his material – from themes, characters, or single intervals in earlier symphonies – another step to single events. That change calls into question the entire notion of symphonic process as a movement aiming at a substantial goal.

Arnfried Edler pointed out the relevance of Bergson's *L'Evolution Créatrice* for twentieth-century music.<sup>48</sup> Compressing the duration of a work's *elan vital* (impulse of life) and realizing this impulse in action, material, and form allow an artwork to take on qualities resembling the continuity of differentiation of autonomous life. Edler notes the increasing importance of sounds as single phenomena before the First World War and again – drawing on that tendency – in the 1950s.<sup>49</sup> The *Seventh* in this sense appears as an "accidentally achieved bulge within a line [here: of the symphony as a genre] that the life's flow pulls through the matter".<sup>50</sup> This last symphony, opening with a single impulse but connected with earlier symphonic impulses, creates a wave that in turn will impact future creative impulses bringing new symphonies to life.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Christian Bermes, 'Leben', in *Wörterbuch der philosophischen Metaphern*, ed. Ralf Konersmann, Darmstadt 2014, pp. 191–198.
- <sup>2</sup> Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, *Werke und Briefe*, Heidelberg 1967, p. 245, cited from Carl Dahlhaus, *Die Idee der absoluten Musik*, Kassel 1994, p. 13. Unless otherwise specified, translations in this paper are by Kathrin Kirsch.

- <sup>3</sup> For a recent study of Schumann's image of music, art, life and writing on music, see Bernd Sponheuer, 'Die Gründungstexte von Schumanns Davidsbündler-Projekt. 1. Teil: Schumanns Erstlingsrezension über Chopins op. 2', *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 74 (2017), pp. 2–39.
- <sup>4</sup> For Schumann's problematization of the boundaries of life and music, see the author's (formerly Kathrin Messerschmidt), "... manchmal ist es mir, als könnte ich immerfort spielen...". Zur humoristischen Entgrenzung musikalischer Zeit in Robert Schumanns 'Humoreske' op. 20, *Die Musikforschung* 58 (2005), pp. 11–27.
- <sup>5</sup> The idea that a piece or cycle of music is not primarily organized as a form of balance like in baroque or early classic works but rather a dynamic process that makes the finale of a symphony the heavy part of the cycle because it has to resolve conflicts of the preceding movements as in an apotheosis or in a total dissolution. See e.g. Siegfried Oechsle, 'Intensive und extensive Zeitweisen der Form. Symphonische Monumentalität bei Schubert und Brahms', in *Brahms' Schubert-Rezeption im Wiener Kontext. Bericht über das internationale Symposium Wien 2013 (Schubert: Perspektiven-Studien 5)*, ed. Otto Biba, Gernot Gruber, Katharina Loose-Einfalt, Siegfried Oechsle, Stuttgart 2017, pp. 193–216, 195–196 or "Finalproblem". *Große Form zwischen Apotheose und Suspension*, ed. Kathrin Kirsch and Siegfried Oechsle, Kassel 2018 (Kieler Schriften zur Musikwissenschaft 56).
- <sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Reiner Wimmer, 'Prozeß' in *Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie* vol. 3, ed. Jürgen Mittelstraß, Stuttgart and Weimer 2004, pp. 385–387, 385.
- <sup>7</sup> Olin Downes, *Sibelius*, trans. Paul Sjöblom, Helsinki 1945, quotes after Vejo Murtomäki, *Symphonic Unity: The Development of Formal Thinking in the Symphonies of Sibelius*, Helsinki 1993 (Studia Musicologica Universitatis Helsingensis 5), p. 247.
- <sup>8</sup> Karl Ekman, *En konstnärs liv och personlighet*, Stockholm 1935, p. 185–186.
- <sup>9</sup> Kurt Röttgers, 'Prozeß I', in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 7, ed. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Grunder, Darmstadt 1989, col. 1543–1558, 1549.; ggf. Berson Einleitung.
- <sup>10</sup> Rémi Brague, 'Einleitung', in Henri Bergson, *Schöpferische Evolution*, trans. Margarethe Drewsen, Hamburg 2013, pp. IX–L, XIX–XX.
- <sup>11</sup> Röttgers, 'Prozeß I' (note 9), p. 1549.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid. Röttgers quotes an expression of Humboldt actually using and criticizing the term 'process'. Beyond that Humboldt's writings emphasize repeatedly the

- interconnectedness of development of living nature within geologic, climatology, ecologic and social conditions.
- <sup>13</sup> Most strikingly Paul Bekker has at the time connected Beethoven's symphonic work and the symphony's future fate to social developments in *Die Symphonie von Beethoven bis Mahler*, Berlin 1918.
- <sup>14</sup> Edward Laufer, 'Continuity and Design in the Seventh Symphony', in *Sibelius Studies*, ed. Timothy L. Jackson and Veijo Murtomäki, Cambridge 2001, pp. 352–390, 355.
- <sup>15</sup> Starting off, for example, with Hegel's idea of music's occupying human consciousness by organizing time. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Ästhetik*, vol. 2, Berlin and Weimar 1976, p. 275–276.
- <sup>16</sup> Röttgers, *Prozeß* (note 4), col. 1556.
- <sup>17</sup> Murtomäki, *Symphonic Unity* (note 7), p. 280.
- <sup>18</sup> Eberhard Hüppe, 'Kontinuität und Umbruch', in *Die Symphonie im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Wolfram Steinbeck and Christoph von Blumröder, Laaber 2002, (Handbuch der musikalischen Gattungen 3,2), pp. 153–176, 154.
- <sup>19</sup> Murtomäki, *Symphonic Unity* (note 7).
- <sup>20</sup> Henri Bergson, *Schöpferische Evolution*, trans. Margarethe Drewsen, Hamburg 2013, p. 21.
- <sup>21</sup> Bergson, *Evolution* (note 20), pp. 51–52.
- <sup>22</sup> Tomi Mäkelä, *Jean Sibelius und seine Zeit*, Laaber 2013, p. 224.
- <sup>23</sup> See Tomi Mäkelä, *Jean Sibelius*, trans. Steven Lindberg, Woodbridge 2011, p. 139; Mäkelä, *Sibelius und seine Zeit* (note 22), p. 272.
- <sup>24</sup> Jean Sibelius, *Dagbok 1909–1944*, ed. Fabian Dahlström, Stockholm 2005, p. 279.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.
- <sup>26</sup> Karl Ekman, *Jean Sibelius. En konstnärs liv och personlighet*, Stockholm 1935, p. 247–248. English translation quoted after Laufer, *Continuity* (note 14), p. 352.
- <sup>27</sup> Sibelius, *Dagbok* (note 24), 243.
- <sup>28</sup> Murtomäki, *Symphonic Unity* (note 7), p. 254.
- <sup>29</sup> Mäkelä, *Sibelius und seine Zeit* (note 22), p. 223.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.
- <sup>31</sup> See e.g. Rémi, 'Einleitung' (note 10), p. XXXIV; Bergson, *Evolution* (note 21), p. 35.

- <sup>32</sup> See e.g. Laufer, *Continuity* (note 14), p. 354, Murtomäki, *Symphonic Unity* (note 7), p. 279. For an overview of available analysis see *ibid.*, p. 243–246.
- <sup>33</sup> See e.g. Laufer, *Continuity* (note 14), p. 354, Murtomäki, *Symphonic Unity* (note 7), p. 279.
- <sup>34</sup> Eric Ringbom, *Symphonien, symphonische Tondichtungen, Violinkonzert, Voces intimae: analytische Beschreibungen*, Helsinki 1957, p. 12, see also Murtomäki, *Symphonic Unity* (note 7), p. 243.
- <sup>35</sup> Ernst Tanzberger, *Jeans Sibelius. Eine Monographie*, Wiesbaden 1962, p. 134, 140, see also Murtomäki, *Symphonic Unity* (note 7), p. 244.
- <sup>36</sup> Simon Parmet, *Sibelius Symfonier: En studie i musikförståelse*, Helsingfors 1955, English trans. Kingsley A. Hart, London 1959, pp. 127–129, quotes after Murtomäki, *Symphonic Unity* (note 7), p. 246.
- <sup>37</sup> Laufer, *Continuity* (note 14), p. 354.
- <sup>38</sup> Eino Roiha, *Die Symphonien von Jean Sibelius. Eine form-analytische Studie*, Jyväskylä 1941, p. 80. See also Murtomäki, *Symphonic Unity* (note 7), p. 244.
- <sup>39</sup> For symphonic music as finalized processes see e.g. “*Finalproblem*”. *Große Form zwischen Apotheose und Suspension*, ed. Kathrin Kirsch and Siegfried Oechsle, Kassel 2018 (Kieler Schriften zur Musikwissenschaft 56).
- <sup>40</sup> Kathrin Kirsch, „Eine Erscheinung aus den Wäldern “? Jean Sibelius’ zweite und vierte Symphonie – Horizonte der Gattungstradition, Frankfurt a. M. 2010 (Imaginatio borealis. Bilder des Nordens 19), pp. 296–303.
- <sup>41</sup> Lorenz Luyken, „...aus dem Nichtigen eine Welt schaffen ...“ *Studien zur Dramaturgie im symphonischen Spätwerk von Jean Sibelius*, Kassel 1995 (Kölner Beiträge zur Musikforschung 190), pp. 21–25, 33–37, 38–120.
- <sup>42</sup> Laufer, *Continuity* (note 14), p. 360.
- <sup>43</sup> For the harmonic aspect of symphonic unification in this symphony see Murtomäki, *Symphonic Unity* (note 7), pp. 259–275.
- <sup>44</sup> See also Laufer, *Continuity* (note 14), p. 385.
- <sup>45</sup> Parmet, *Sibelius Symfonier* (note 3), pp. 127–128, quotes after Murtomäki, *Symphonic Unity* (note 7), p. 246.
- <sup>46</sup> Laufer, *Continuity* (note 14), p. 385.
- <sup>47</sup> See *Valse triste op. 44, Nr. 1*, bars 25–48 and also, e.g., Mäkelä, *Sibelius und seine Zeit* (note 22), p. 224.
- <sup>48</sup> Arnfried Edler, ‘Zur Beziehung einiger Grundfragen bei Bergson zum musikalischen Denken nach 1900’, in *Bericht über den Internationalen*

*Musikwissenschaftlichen Kongress Berlin 1974*, eds. Hellmut Kühn and Peter Nitsche, Kassel 1980, pp. 467–470.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 469.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 468.

## ABSTRACT

The essay deals with Jean Sibelius' *Seventh Symphony* under the perspective of a specific understanding of process. This term, common in writings about works of the classical and romantic period of Western music, denotes (among other things) an understanding of a logical, compelling progress in a musical structure. Especially in symphonic music, this is also connected to the idea of the cycle aiming at an individual and, in comparison to its earlier movements, grave finale and ending, such as for example an aesthetic 'solution' or a 'catastrophe' as 'enactment' of tragic life. In Sibelius' *Seventh* another understanding of process as a rather 'organic', non-predictable but still self-differentiating development seems to be relevant and creatively active. It correlates with Bergson's *élan vital* as modernist imagination of life as evolutionary development initiated by a specific impulse in early twentieth century.



JULIAN JOHNSON

## Debussy, *La mer*, and the Aesthetics of Appearing

### *Trois Esquisses Symphoniques*

Composed between 1903 and 1905, Debussy's *La mer* was contemporary with Mahler's *Sixth Symphony*, but it is hard to imagine two works with less in common. Neither symphony nor tone poem, Debussy's idea of 'trois esquisses symphoniques'<sup>1</sup> surely signals a sense of non-identity with the Austro-German symphony, a deliberate distance from its discursive ambition and formal accomplishment. *La mer* might be thought of as a kind of gentle anti-symphony. It deploys all the outward material of a symphony – a full orchestra, a series of connected movements, processes of exposition, development and return, recurrent motifs, and a structural weight accorded to the finale, and yet, it seems to do so to an opposite end, to create a quite different kind of logic. It seems to have no interest in discursive argument, narration, or development. This is no surprise from a composer who asserted, in 1901, that the symphony was no longer a valid form; it had, Debussy wrote, become anachronistic, formalistic, and constraining; in a word, 'useless'.<sup>2</sup> So in what way are these 'three sketches' symphonic while at the same time so distant from the idea of the symphony?<sup>3</sup>

A sketch is incomplete, the result of a few brief movements, defined as much by empty spaces as the lines made with the pen. It is understood to be preparatory – a momentary appearance that implies being filled out later in more solid form.<sup>4</sup> The tension between the idea of momentary sketch and fully completed symphony is found in several aspects of *La mer*. The recurrence of motifs might suggest symphonic technique but they work quite differently here; as Mark DeVoto points out, Debussy's practice "is as far as it could be from the Austro-German tradition of motivic development".<sup>5</sup> The use of a full orchestra might seem to suggest symphonic music, but often produces the same bewilderment Roger Nichols found in *Jeux*: "So much solid, material presence to produce sounds that are ethereal,

evanescent, questioning.”<sup>6</sup> The term *esquisse* stands in, perhaps, for a term unthinkable for Debussy – impression. By 1905, the impressionist label had been a term of critical dismissal for decades. Debussy railed against it, but in order to rescue something that mattered very much to him. In a letter about his orchestral *Images*, he wrote:

I’m trying to do something else and to create – in some way – realities which the imbeciles call “impressionism”, a term employed as badly as possibly, above all by those art critics who don’t hesitate to use it for Turner, the most beautiful creator of mystery there could be in art.<sup>7</sup>

Turner’s seascapes might certainly offer us one way into *La mer*. This, after all, was the painter whose pictures William Hazlitt once suggested are “portraits of nothing, and very like”.<sup>8</sup> There is much that could be said about the parallels between Debussy and Turner; not least, that both used the idea of representation as a kind of frame to legitimate their exploration of colour, surface, and texture. The breaking of dawn over the sea, the play of light on waves, the stormscape of water and wind, all act as a foil, a cover or excuse to elaborate something otherwise ‘unacceptable’. As Vladimir Jankélévitch puts it, in relation to the *Preludes*, “the titles are often pre-texts and alibis”.<sup>9</sup> The same might be said about Debussy’s contemporary, Claude Monet. For all the pitfalls of this over-worked parallel, it remains suggestive – less in terms of vague talk about impressionism, and more in the very specific question of the relation between time and perception – the capacity of artworks to draw attention to the act of perception rather than to represent some notional objectivity of things. Monet’s series of paintings ostensibly of the same object, seen at different times of day, and thus in different lights, might be seen as a precursor of *La mer*. The series of haystack paintings, for examples, presents less a set of haystacks than the temporality of seeing itself, a dissolving of the solidity of objects into a potentially infinite series of moments of perception.

One further significant connection between Debussy’s musical art and that of the painters he admired is a shared fascination with landscapes either without human form or in which natural elements threaten to overwhelm it. The cover image of the first edition of Debussy’s *La mer* is perhaps more famous than the piece itself (fig. 1a) – neither Turner nor Monet, but a print by Katsushika Hokusai from 1832. In fact, the image used by Debussy and his publisher is only a detail; the original has been cropped to remove two

Fig. 1a: Cover of Durand score of *La mer* (1905)



Fig. 1b: Katsushika Hokusai: *The Great Wave of Kanagawa* (1832)



boats and fishermen that are about to be engulfed by the mighty wave (fig. 1b). Such an erasure of the human figure ties in with the reading of Jankélévitch that in *La mer* “the human face has utterly disappeared.”<sup>10</sup> What we are presented with, instead, he goes on is “the inhuman sea, far from any shores, trees or houses, [that] has ceased to be ‘landscape’. One hears only the noise of amorphous elements, anonymous and unconscious, which have competed with one another since the origin of the world.”<sup>11</sup> The absence of human agency is demarcated by a striking absence of voice, already clear in Debussy’s earlier *Nocturnes*. In the final movement of the latter (‘Sirènes’), the use of wordless female voices serves to highlight the absence of the kind of subjective, lyrical or narrative voice which usually articulates symphonic music. There is no autonomous, subjective agency predicated by this music. The first movement of the *Nocturnes* (*Nuages*) similarly refuses any discourse or argument. It simply presents unchanging musical objects that are realigned through a constantly changing kaleidoscopic rotation. This is an art of time, space, colour, repetition and change – but never of discourse, argument, or narration. It says nothing in the way that clouds say nothing.

### Saying Nothing

‘De l’aube à midi sur la mer’, the opening movement of *La mer*, deploys a familiar convention – beginning from nothing and expanding outwards to acoustic fullness. From Haydn’s *Representation of Chaos* to Wagner’s *Rheingold* prelude, from the sunrise in Ravel’s *Daphnis et Chloé* to Jonathan Harvey’s *From Silence*, this is a basic trope of the evocation of nature. But the quiet radicalism of Debussy’s form is that this is all it does. It does not stage the appearance of something or someone that walks out on stage to speak or to act. Jean Barraqué, in a famous analysis of *La mer*, aptly describes the opening as “a kind of raising of the curtain”<sup>12</sup> except here the curtain rises to reveal an empty stage. Of course, this is palpably still tonal music, articulated through clear motivic and orchestral identities; it still has one foot firmly in the tradition I am suggesting it is in the process of stepping out of, and it is still amenable to familiar analytical approaches.

The opening 30 bars, for example, can certainly be understood in terms of a simple harmonic reduction, by which a pentatonic set (F#–G#–A–B–C#) turns out to function as a prolonged altered dominant of the tonic key of

D-flat. Far more significant, however, is the gradual emergence of clear orchestral tones out of silence and indistinct noise, and the sense of spatial expansion created by means of register, timbre and rhythm. The low B in the opening bar begins as an almost imperceptible hum, not as distinct musical tone. The addition of the F# and G# (in the harps and cellos) clarifies tone through articulation and presents the origins of a rhythmic figure definitive for the whole piece – the dotted-note rhythm in the cellos (fig. 2). Barraqué refers to this as ‘the call motif’ – both a call to presence and of presence. Its dotted rhythm is a basic form of autogenesis – like the dividing of a cell – a single explosive moment of self-production.

Fig. 2: Debussy, *La mer*, ‘De l’aube à midi sur la mer’, bars 1–5.

3 TIMBALES

CYMBALES

TAM-TAM

1<sup>re</sup> HARPE

2<sup>de</sup> HARPE

VIOLONS

ALTOS

VIOLONCELLES

CONTREBASSES

Très lent (116 = ♩)

Sourdines

Sourdines

Sourdines

Div.

Div.

Div. pizz.

arc ppp

Hermeneutic approaches are of course not confined to matters of structure, tonality or motif. A few bars into this introduction, the empty space delineated by strings and harps forms the background for two woodwind figures (fig. 3). There are certainly things to say about this section in terms of harmony, and we can hardly overlook the first appearance of the principal cyclic theme of the whole work (given by cor anglais and muted trumpet). But formal analysis here might surely be supplemented by hermeneutic analysis, provoked by the overt reference to Wagner’s *Tristan*

and *Isolde*. The woodwind figure in bars 6–8 references not only the Tristan chord but also the scoring of its first appearance in the opera.

Fig. 3: Debussy, *La mer*, 'De l'aube à midi sur la mer', bars 6–10.

What could it possibly mean that Debussy cites *Tristan* here? Simon Trezise makes much of the fact that *La mer* was composed as Debussy began an affair with Emma Bardac, who would later become his second wife, an affair that provoked the attempted suicide of his first wife, Lily Texier. Trezise suggests the tempestuous nature of *La mer* – especially the Finale – is as much linked to the tumultuous events in Debussy's personal life as it is to the elemental force of nature.

Without rejecting such intertextual resonances, we might also suggest that this is not primary to the way in which the music works and has its effect. If the *Tristan* reference signals a collection of extra-musical motifs (of illicit love, violence and associated guilt) it does so only by stepping outside the phenomenological act of listening in order to move to the quite

different act of hermeneutic reading. Dwelling in the former focuses instead on how the emptiness of Debussy's introduction gives way to a kind of sonic plenitude. Opening over a sustained D-flat pedal, the ensuing section of Debussy's piece presents no less than five motifs over 53 bars. A familiar formal function is clearly presented as the ambivalent tonal introduction leads to a principal key area and an exposition of motifs, but the familiarity of this plot masks a subtle process of defamiliarization. The tension between the two is manifest in the way that generations of commentators have struggled with how to understand the articulation of form here. Take for example the build up towards what Roy Howat hears as the first big climax at bar 76 and the appearance of a 3-note motif heard for the first time (fig. 4) (Howat calls it Motif A, even though it is heard after several others).

Fig. 4: Debussy, *La Mer*, 'De l'aube à midi sur la mer', bars 76–81.

The musical score for Debussy's *La Mer*, 'De l'aube à midi sur la mer', bars 76–81, is presented in two systems. The first system covers bars 76 to 81, and the second system covers bars 82 to 87. The tempo is marked 'a Tempo' and the dynamics range from 'pp' (pianissimo) to 'f' (forte). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The instruments listed on the left are Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in A (Clar. A.), Clarinet in Bb (Clar. Bb.), Bassoon (Fag.), Trombone (Tromp.), Trumpet (Tromp.), Tuba (Tub.), Cymbal (Cymb.), 1st and 2nd Violins (1re et 2de Viol.), and Harp (Harpe). The score is divided into two systems. The first system covers bars 76 to 81, and the second system covers bars 82 to 87. The tempo is marked 'a Tempo' and the dynamics range from 'pp' (pianissimo) to 'f' (forte). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Un peu plus mouvementé (69:♩) **9** Très rythmé (104:♩)

[illegible]



This act of appearing is unprepared. The B-flat major tonality, and the rich sonority of closely scored cellos and unmuted horns appears out of thin air. To be sure, the generative dotted rhythm picks up an earlier idea, though transformed here into a new 3-note figure, ending with an open 5<sup>th</sup>. But the logic of this moment is primarily neither tonal nor motivic; its principal act is to displace distance with palpable proximity, silencing the earlier wash of multiple orchestral layers to foreground a single gesture of arresting clarity. This is a framed moment of appearing – a gesture of breaking open – and, as such, it cannot really develop. Instead, it generates an extended textural passage, across the next 38 bars, using the repetitive rocking figure to fashion a series of wave-like swells. The climax of this collective presence is followed by an extended process of disintegration – a fall back towards emptiness and inarticulation. This in turn, leads to one of the most extraordinary passages not only in this piece, but in the whole of Debussy's music (fig. 6).

Fig. 6: Debussy, *La Mer*, 'De l'aube à midi sur la mer', bars 121–125.

The musical score for Debussy's *La Mer*, 'De l'aube à midi sur la mer', bars 121–125, is presented in a multi-staff format. The tempo is marked 'Très modéré (104:♩)' and the key signature is B-flat major. The score includes parts for Flute (Fl.), Horn (Hb), Cor Anglais (Cor A.), Clarinet (Cl.), Violins (v.), Violas (vl.), and Cello/Double Bass (cello Soli). The score features a variety of dynamics including 'p très expressif et soutenu', 'pp légèrement soutenu', and 'p très expressif et soutenu'. There are also markings for 'Tous Div. en 2' and 'Div. pp sur la touche'. The score is written in a standard musical notation with various ornaments and phrasing marks.

Roy Howat labels this passage as a ‘transition’, on the basis that its function is to move the music from the end of the preceding section into the ensuing Coda. But to conceive of it purely in terms of its tonal function, as a prolonged dominant, is surely astonishingly reductive. It turns one of the most arresting moments in the whole piece, a moment defined by a quality of sound like nothing else heard before or after, into a purely abstract function of musical form. To do so surely misses the point of this extended epiphanic moment. The cor anglais (doubled by two solo cellos) moves gently between two musical spaces – its octave descent accentuates a dominant harmony, its returning ascent suggests a whole-tone space. The instrument associated with Tristanesque absence and longing here hangs tantalisingly on the edge of appearing. It is one of music’s most precise articulations of the sense of a threshold, a liminal shoreline between two different musical spaces. Its promise of appearing is far more intense than the brief, brash and conventional coda that will silence it.

Of course, tonally, the coda fulfils the function of this ‘transition’ passage: D-flat major arrives, marked with brassy statements of the dotted-note motif in the trumpets and horns, before even the brass are submerged in the noisy turbulence of tremolando strings, cymbal rolls and tam-tam. But, for all the coda’s outward trappings of a substantive moment of appearance, nothing appears as such. The brief climactic moment offers instead only the *jouissance* of an act of appearing itself, without any object, a sense that is reinforced by what follows. After the gap that separates the first and second movement, the nothing that has appeared is the entire insubstantial substance of ‘Jeux de vagues’, one of the most radical movements Debussy ever wrote – even the title draws our attention not to objects but simply to the purposeless play of changing surfaces. And ‘Jeux de vagues’ begins with a trace of exactly the same sonorities with which the previous movement ended: the sizzle of the cymbal is here transformed into the glitter of glockenspiel, harp and the faintest touch of cymbal itself, articulating the gentle rise and fall of the open fifth in tremolando strings, while the sonority of the cor anglais colours the woodwind chords (fig. 7).

An analysis that came anywhere close to opening up the subtlety of this movement would take a book-length study.<sup>13</sup> In its place, we might dwell for a moment on quite how different the process of this piece is compared to the symphonic tradition in which it is located. ‘Jeux de vagues’ foregrounds

Fig. 7: Debussy, *La Mer*, 'Jeux de vagues', bars 1–4.

**II. Jeux de vagues**

**Allegro (dans un rythme très souple) (116 : ♩)**

2 GRANDES FLÛTES  
1 PETITE FLÛTE  
2 HAUTOIS  
1 COR ANGLAIS  
2 CLARINETTES en LA  
3 BASSONS  
1<sup>re</sup> et 2<sup>e</sup> CORDS chromatiques en FA  
3<sup>e</sup> et 4<sup>e</sup> CORDS chromatiques en FA  
3 TROMPETTES chromatiques en FA  
CYMBALES  
TRIANGLE  
1 GLOCKENSPIEL<sup>(\*)</sup>  
2 HARPES

**Allegro (dans un rythme très souple) (116 : ♩)**

VIOLENS  
ALTOS  
VOLONCELLES  
CONTREBASSES

(\*) ou *Chitra*

and makes thematic the idea of appearing and disappearing. As signalled in its title, its formal paradigm is play and its material is the ungraspable nature of movement itself. Waves go nowhere, turn in on themselves, are formed from nothing and collapse back to nothing; they are merely the mobile traces of an invisible and undirected energy. It makes for a quietly shocking quality to this music, a ‘lightness of being’ that could not be further from the noisy discourse of symphonic music.

The final movement, ‘Dialogue du vent et de la mer’, just like the first two, has often been approached in relation to conventional formal types. Debussy’s debts to the Franckian cyclic symphony are clear enough since a whole series of first movement themes return here. One could also deploy the kind of hermeneutic lens Simon Trezise proposed, in terms of Debussy’s own biography. The echoes of *Tristan* in the first movement find a parallel in the third through echoes of Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande* – most obviously in the pervasive presence of a motif that recalls the jealous Golaud, hunting the two lovers just before he kills Pelléas, in Act 4. But *La mer* proposes something quite different. The threat of death is answered by the powerfully affirmative ending which combines a triumphant D-flat chorale with several repetitions of a motif often labelled as ‘the call of the sea’ (a motif that is itself a rewriting of the first movement *Tristan* reference). From this perspective, we might seriously consider the idea that, in the wake of the premiere of *Pelléas et Mélisande* (in 1902) and amid the subsequent dramatic events of his own domestic life, Debussy here revisits the death of his lovers and rewrites the end of the opera with a spectacular affirmation of presence. The idea has a persuasive appeal, but it reads the relation the wrong way round. It is perhaps less that Debussy deploys orchestral music to reference a human drama, than the opposite: that he deploys musical materials which, in the earlier opera, were already an exploration of forces over which humans have little control.

Compared to the second movement, the third exhibits far greater continuity, but with one notable exception: the violent cut off (in bar 55) and the unprepared appearance of a new soundworld that follows. This is the first appearance of ‘the call of the sea’ motif. Jankélévitch hears it as an explicitly siren voice: “Viens à moi” they seem to sing, he suggests, in “a song of seduction which leads us vertiginously, irresistibly into abysmal depths.”<sup>14</sup> When it returns later in the movement, over a sustained tonic pedal (bar 157), it is accompanied by the ethereal sonority of a high violin harmonic, marking it as a distant and heterotopic space, a promise of

Fig. 8a: Debussy, *La mer*, 'Dialogue du vent et de la mer', bars 157–160.

Plus calme et très expressif

Retardes un peu pendant ces 4 mesures . . .

1<sup>o</sup> Solo

pp

1<sup>o</sup> Solo

pp

Cl.

Cors

4<sup>o</sup>

pp

1<sup>re</sup> Harpe

{ SOL } pp

{ MI }

2<sup>de</sup> Harpe

{ SOL } pp

{ MI }

Plus calme et très expressif

Retardes un peu pendant ces 4 mesures . . .

pp

(1<sup>er</sup> de chaque pupitre Sol)

sur la touche

pp

sur la touche

pp

molto pp

4 C. Basses Soli

pp

‘somewhere else’ (fig. 8a). Not inconsequentially, for a programmatic reading, this passage recalls a similar moment in the Act 4 love scene of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, the singular moment after the half-heard declaration of love, in which Pelléas describes Mélisande’s voice as one “that comes from the end of the world” (fig. 8b). In *La mer*, however, what first appears as fragile and distant, will later return in a much more tangible and fulsome way.<sup>15</sup> The same motif comes twice more before being answered by an expansive statement of the brass chorale from the end of the first movement. Is it that Debussy can’t resist the grand symphonic gesture after all? The finale’s drawing together of themes, in a richly affirmative D-flat major, feels like a very solid kind of conclusion, and a long way from the evanescent appearing and disappearing of the second movement. I will return to this question at the end of my discussion.

Fig. 8b: Debussy, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Act 4, scene 4.

### The Aesthetics of Appearing

The ending aside, *La mer* might be heard as a prime example of what Adorno would later imagine as a ‘musique informelle’, a music that generates the whole from its parts in a bottom-up associative process rather than a top-down formal logic. Adorno was not thinking of Debussy, a composer he chauvinistically dismissed as a French sensualist with no

critical sense of second nature. But a hundred years after Debussy's death, and fifty years after Adorno's, we might hear it differently. It is a familiar cliché that Debussy's music resists analysis. In particular, it resists categories concerned with abstract relations – which is to say, structural levels separated from the material particulars that are deemed to be structured. By reducing or even negating the surface on which this music depends, they silence its definitive particularity. Barraqué's reading of *La mer* as “a proliferation of instants”<sup>16</sup> is perhaps overstated, but it underlines an opposition to the idea of music as discourse which made Debussy, for Barraqué, the first composer of modern music.<sup>17</sup> That was also the view of Boulez, whose own music plays out some of the consequences of Debussy's. It is not insignificant that both shared a fascination for the work of Stéphane Mallarmé, and it is to Mallarmé I turn now to explore the relation between the metaphor of the sea and a gentle but radical reconfiguration of language.

Mallarmé's poetry is pervaded by images of shipwreck and haunted by the figure of the siren.<sup>18</sup> But this is far more than a theme of Mallarmé's work. As Roger Pearson has shown, the shipwreck first and foremost, occurs in poetic syntax: “the ‘sirène’ is at once an agent of death and a means of renewal and salvation: and the poem as siren song both destroys everyday language and offers the prospect of poetic beauty.”<sup>19</sup> The abyss to which the ship sinks is thus “the bottomless, empty abyss of a language that has cast off from the shores of reference”.<sup>20</sup> Such imagery is central to Mallarmé's late and most radical poem, *Un coup de dés*, published in 1897, the year in which Debussy began the *Nocturnes*. If it tells any tale at all, it is of a mariner/poet who, no longer the master of his ship of language, finds the transformation for which he voyages, only in his own shipwreck. The structure of language itself is here lured towards destruction by the siren song of music, breaking up the vessel held together by the ordering planks of grammar and syntax, and giving way to something fluid and mobile – a polysemic world of infinite difference, beautiful but dangerous, that loosens the grip of the mastering ‘I’.<sup>21</sup> This is famously presented by Mallarmé's dissolution of the visual order of the printed page itself which, in *Un coup de dés*, falls across the page like the sinking ship towards the abyss, its lines breaking up into multiple strands, reconfiguring semantic order as it does so.

Mallarmé anticipates Jacques Derrida in the way he opens out a vast space that becomes visible only when the ship of language breaks apart.

Both treat language negatively in order to break the metaphysical closure (by which the word would denote the presence of a thing), and, instead, to open language up to point beyond its own limits. It is also one of several points of contact with Debussy. To be sure, Debussy's music depicts no shipwrecks but, as with Mallarmé, it is within the use of musical language itself that the abyss opens up, in the apparently infinite spaces that appear when music allows itself a kind of freedom from its earlier grammatical orders. It is on this level that Debussy's music relates to the boundless self-sufficiency of the aquatic – not because his titles tell us so, but because his music unfolds immersive musical structures whose harmonic and sonorous continuities let go the firm footing of tonal ground and linguistic order.

It is telling that Debussy, in trying to articulate his sense of a new kind of harmonic grammar, should have reached, in 1889, for an aquatic metaphor: "In submerging tonality [*en noyant le ton*], one should always proceed where one wishes, one can go out and return by whatever door one prefers. And our world, thereby expanded, is capable of greater nuance."<sup>22</sup> Debussy's phrase "*en noyant le ton*" is just as well translated as "in drowning tonality"<sup>23</sup> – not just an immersion but a kind of re-making, such as follows the drowning of the mariner in *Un coup de dés*. For Debussy, this new 'aquatic' space of harmony brings with it a kind of 'polymorphous' quality (to borrow Freud's term); compared to the phallogocentric law of tonal direction, in Debussy's world one can enter or exit harmonic space in multiple ways. But Mallarmé's poem does not end with the drowning of the mariner. Its still centre is followed by a vision of a mermaid who brushes aside the hard structures that impose a limit on the infinite. One of the polyphonic voices of the poem muses wordily on the transformation of the mariner/poet while another, separated by its larger, bold and upper-case typeface, slowly coalesces across several pages to deliver a single line with the force of an epiphany: "NOTHING [...] WILL HAVE TAKEN PLACE [...] OTHER THAN THE PLACE [...] EXCEPT [...] PERHAPS [...] A CONSTELLATION." The result of the shipwreck of linguistic order, the unstitching of its signifying forms, is a clearing of space within language itself. With the clarity of a revelation, in place of the solidity of things, one now sees the patterning of relations between things, the spacing of form that is their constellation.<sup>24</sup>

Elizabeth McCombie, in her book-length study of Mallarmé and Debussy, points to the "grandeur and finality" of this "symphonic conclusion" to Mallarmé's poem, with its "visually and semantically



dramatic ascent towards the shimmering “CONSTELLATION” of the last page”.<sup>25</sup> In this, she compares Mallarmé’s poem to Debussy’s *Jeux*, but to my ears it is surely the ‘grandeur and finality’ of the ‘symphonic conclusion’ to *La mer* that offers the most resonant musical parallel. On one level, the chorale ending evokes a musical gesture all but worn out by the time of Debussy’s work, suggesting a kind of symphonic language Debussy otherwise distances. But, as in Mallarmé, the ‘grandeur’ of the ending is less the arrival of some thing than the luminescence of appearing itself, less the proclamation of some discursive conclusion than a resonating of the space that has been opened.

One could say that all art is, fundamentally, an act of presenting its own appearing. But if that is the case, what is the distinctive change enacted by aesthetic modernism around 1900? A partial answer is perhaps given in Jankélévitch’s argument that, while we can never know things in themselves, we can perhaps know them through the manner of their appearance.<sup>26</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy picks up a similar idea, exchanging substantive material presence for the process of appearing or coming to presence: “Presence is nowhere other than in ‘coming to presence’. We do not have access to a thing or a state, but only to a coming. We have access to an access.”<sup>27</sup> Debussy’s music connects in profound ways to this tradition of French philosophy, one that runs from Bergson, through Merleau-Ponty and Jankelevitch to Derrida, Lyotard, Michel Serres and Nancy. It is a tradition which makes mobile the fixed objects implied by an instrumental use of language, and that opens up things into the larger processes of which they are part. In the words of the German philosopher Martin Seel, “the aesthetic object is an object in the process of its appearing; aesthetic perception is attentiveness to this appearing.”<sup>28</sup>

The reassertion of art’s materiality, around 1900, asserts something similar. Debussy’s music proposes a quiet critique of the solid objects of nineteenth-century music, not least through distancing itself from a musical tradition that had allowed itself to become discursive rather than phatic, signifying rather than sonorous. It repositions itself in ways underlined by Jean-Luc Nancy: “Art disengages the senses from signification, or rather, it disengages the world from signification, and that is what we call ‘the senses’ when we give to the (sensible, sensuous) senses the sense of being external to signification. But it is what one might just as correctly name the ‘sense of the world’. The sense of the world as suspension of signification.” Mallarmé found something similar in the mute art of ballet which for him

embodied the idea that what matters in art is the kind of looking or listening to the world which it occasions. He was fascinated by one dancer in particular – the American Loïe Fuller – and wrote a rapturous account of her performance at the Folies Bergère in 1893 (fig. 9). Fuller became famous through dances involving huge swathes of silk put in motion by the movement of her body and caught in the play of light against a black backdrop, a movement without representational content in which Mallarmé found a perfect analogy for his idea of a musicalized poetry. As Jacques Rancière later expressed it:

The body abstracts from itself, it dissimulates its own form in the display of veils sketching flight rather than the bird, the swirling rather than the wave, the bloom rather the flower. What is imitated, in each thing, is the event of its apparition.<sup>29</sup>

Fig. 9: Loïe Fuller (1862–1928)



What Mallarmé and Rancière saw in Loïe Fuller's dancing was a new idea of aesthetic 'writing' that "substitutes the plot with the construction of a play of aspects, elementary forms that offer an analogy to the play of the

world". The play of Fuller's veils (*voiles*) might be understood, therefore, in much the same way as the play of Debussy's waves. In Rancière's words: "These forms can be called abstract because they tell no stories. But if they get rid of stories, they do so in order to serve a higher mimesis: through artifice they reinvent the very forms in which sensible events are given to us and assembled to constitute a world."<sup>30</sup> Just as Fuller's art "dismisses the representative art of ballet, which subordinates the force of the body to the illustration of stories",<sup>31</sup> so too does Debussy's art distance itself from symphonic discourse and musical representation in order to foreground the sensuous act of appearing itself. Jean-François Lyotard once suggested that what Paul Klee learned from Cezanne "was not to script with geometric volumes, but rather to deconstruct representation and invent a space of the invisible, of the possible."<sup>32</sup> We might say something similar about Debussy. It is certainly a rich paradox that Debussy should frame his deconstruction of representation in a musical work that has all the outward signs of representation, in which representation is staged in order to be gently undone.

Debussy's music resists being taken as a metaphor for some separate reality understood either as aspects of the natural world or indeed of human experience. It is not that his music is unrelated to these things, but the relationship is not that of one thing (art) imitating another (life). It is, rather, that Debussy's music foregrounds (and also enacts, provokes, and occasions) ways of knowing the world and thus ways of being in the world. It does so by foregrounding acts of appearing and disappearing in favour of more familiar ideas of art as a mimetic representation of the world, the communication of ideas, or the expression of emotions. The consequences of this shift are by no means small; as Martin Seel reminds us, this kind of aesthetic attentiveness to appearing occasions a kind of "attentiveness to ourselves".<sup>33</sup> In the third part of Seel's book, titled *Flickering and Resonating*, he explores the idea of "an occurrence without something occurring", such as the rustling of leaves in the breeze or the play of light on the surface of water, events that are in one sense empty, but deliver through aesthetic perception an extraordinary experience of fullness.<sup>34</sup> Such experience is, Seel argues, "a form of awareness that is constitutive of the human form of life", without which, "human beings would have a vastly diminished sense of their life's presence."<sup>35</sup> It is not that aesthetic perception replaces conceptual determination of the world but that it may temporarily suspend the latter.

In aesthetic intuition, we desist from the exclusively determining and affecting orientation. We liberate ourselves from its determinations. We abstain for the sake of presence. We allow ourselves to be abducted to presence. Aesthetic intuition is a radical form of residency in the here and now.<sup>36</sup>

This, I think, is axiomatic to the reversals made by Debussy's music. It resists the idea of discursive determination not to define a lack, but to allow a different kind of presence that emerges only in the act of appearing itself. In Mallarmé's words, it says nothing to allow everything.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Letter to André Messager, 12 September 1903. Claude Debussy, *Correspondance (1872–1918)*, ed. François Lesure and Denis Herlin, Paris 2005, p. 780.
- <sup>2</sup> Brian Hart suggests that *La mer* might be understood in relation to the contemporary French 'message symphony' exemplified in works from the early 1900s by Vincent d'Indy, Guy Ropartz, Charles Tournemire, Théodore Dubois, Charles-Marie Widor. See 'The Symphony in Debussy's World. A Context for his views on the genre and early interpretations of *La Mer*', in *Debussy and His World*, ed. Jane F. Fulcher, Princeton 2001, pp. 181–201. But this has to be set against Debussy's comments about 'the uselessness of the symphony since Beethoven' (*La Revue Blanche*, 1 April 1901). See Claude Debussy, *Debussy on Music*, ed. François Lesure, trans. Richard Langham Smith, London 1977, p. 15.
- <sup>3</sup> Simon Trezise suggests there is a broader context for *La mer* in a contemporary genre of sea symphonies. He points to Victorin de Joncières's four-movement symphony (*La Mer*) from 1881 and Paul Gibson's cyclic orchestral work *La Mer* of 1892, subtitled 'symphonic sketches'. Vincent D'Indy's *Second Symphony* (1902–1903) is a cyclic work in four movements, while his *Jour d'été à la montagne* (1905) is a 'symphonic triptych' clearly divided by three moments of the day – sunrise, daytime, evening. See Simon Trezise, *Debussy: La mer*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 33–35.
- <sup>4</sup> The idea is further suggested by Debussy's piano piece *D'un Cahier d'Esquisses* (1903) which shows a number of similarities with *La mer* (of motif, key and texture), such that it may have been a kind of sketch for the orchestral one.
- <sup>5</sup> Mark DeVoto, *Debussy and the Veil of Tonality: Essays on His Music*, New York, NY 2004, p. 145.
- <sup>6</sup> Roger Nichols, *The life of Debussy*, Cambridge 1998, p. 64.

- <sup>7</sup> Letter to Jacques Durand, end of March/early April 1908, Claude Debussy, *Correspondance (1872–1918)*, pp. 1080–1081.
- <sup>8</sup> Cited in Kenneth Clarke, *The Romantic Rebellion. Romantic versus Classic Art*, London 1976, p. 259.
- <sup>9</sup> Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Debussy et le mystère de l’instant*, Paris 1976, p. 221.
- <sup>10</sup> Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. Carolyn Abbate, Princeton, NJ 2003, pp. 35–37.
- <sup>11</sup> Jankélévitch, *Debussy et le mystère* (note 9), p. 203.
- <sup>12</sup> See Jean Barraqué, *Debussy*, Paris 1962, p. 150.
- <sup>13</sup> For an excellent study, see Francesco Spampinato, *Debussy, poète des eaux. Métaphorisation et corporéité dans l’expérience musicale*, Paris 2011.
- <sup>14</sup> Jankélévitch, *Debussy et le mystère* (note 9), p. 73. He makes a further comparison between the aquatic realm of ‘Sirènes’ and the aerial realm of ‘Nuages’.
- <sup>15</sup> This is similar to the middle section of the *Prélude à l’après midi d’un faune*, where the delicate and languorous melody (also in D-flat) returns with fulsome orchestration to affirm a bodily presence that Mallarmé’s poem studiously avoids.
- <sup>16</sup> Barraqué, *Debussy* (note 12), p. 180.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.
- <sup>18</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Mallarmé. The Politics of the Siren*, trans. Steven Corcoran, London 2011, p. 4.
- <sup>19</sup> Roger Pearson, *Unfolding Mallarmé. The Development of a Poetic Art*, Oxford 1996, p. 229.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.
- <sup>21</sup> Michel Serres later developed the same metaphor of language as a ship. Language, he writes, “protects like the belly of the ship which separates us from the cold of the sea.” Michel Serres, *Les cinq sens*, Paris 2014, p. 188.
- <sup>22</sup> Cited by James R. Briscoe, ‘Debussy’s Earliest Songs’, *College Music Symposium* 24/2 (1984), pp. 81–95, 87.
- <sup>23</sup> Roger Nichols translates the key phrase as “drowning tonality”. *Idem, The life of Debussy* (note 6), p. 58.
- <sup>24</sup> It recalls a similar formulation of the seventeenth-century Japanese poet, Mizuta Masahide: “Now that my barn has burned down, I can see the rising moon”.

- <sup>25</sup> Elizabeth McCombie, *Mallarmé and Debussy. Unheard Music, Unseen Text*, Oxford 2003, p. 119.
- <sup>26</sup> Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Le Je-ne-sais-quoi et le Presque-rien. 1. La manière et l'occasion*, Paris 1980, p. 18.
- <sup>27</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, Stanford 2000, p. 14.
- <sup>28</sup> Martin Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, trans. John Farrell, Stanford 2005, p. 4.
- <sup>29</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis. Scenes from the aesthetic regime of art*, trans. Zakir Paul, London 2013, p. 100.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 104.
- <sup>32</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon, Minneapolis, MN 2011, p. 231.
- <sup>33</sup> Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing* (note 28), p. 15.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 144.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 20.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

## ABSTRACT

The music of Debussy exemplifies a shift, around 1900, from an idea of music as a kind of telling or saying to one that foregrounds the act of appearing. Explored through aspects of *La mer*, my chapter argues that, while this music has its roots in nineteenth-century music, it stands on the threshold of a quiet but radical revolution in how music makes sense. This shift, from a linguistic and literary paradigm to one closer to visual art, has profound consequences for later directions in both twentieth-century music and philosophy. The two are joined in a discussion that moves freely from close listening to passages of *La mer* to Mallarmé's idea of poetic language, and takes place against the background of a current of French philosophy running from Bergson to Jean-Luc Nancy.

MARKOS TSETsos

Music of a Life Constitutively Homeless, or  
*The Return of Ulysses*. Helmuth Plessner unriddles  
Nikos Skalkottas

In one of his early essays the philosopher Helmuth Plessner writes about music:

In a movement not bound to objects, progression generates the work in immediate expression. Its unity is not the resting goal attained through a creative unrest excluded nevertheless by the goal itself; its unity is the whole in the becoming, the self-shaped current, the self-rolling wheel, an image of life. There is not a single step which, having receded to the force of feeling, is not an accomplishment of our freedom; there is not a single calculated stretch which, in the reflective play of our creative imagination, we are unable to turn into a mirror for the evasion of all constraints and for imposing to the process a course towards a new meaning. The medium of sounds is the perfect material that possesses and communicates the consciousness of its meaning in its mere existence, that in the deed (in der Tat) it communicates its very idea. Then whom do we hear? Only ourselves.<sup>1</sup>

Leaving aside the incredible similarity between the last phrase and the opening of Ernst Bloch's 'Philosophy of Music' from the *Spirit of Utopia* published in the very same year, 1918 ("We hear only ourselves"),<sup>2</sup> there are three assertions obtainable from the passage: (1) music shares with life major formal features; (2) music is immanently meaningful; (3) musical meaning is about ourselves, humans, about our nature and our condition. The emerging issues obviously concern first of all human nature itself, then its relation to life, and, finally, the ability of music to render them both, to be "an image of life" and an expression of ourselves. Let us examine these issues in line with Plessner's thought.<sup>3</sup>

Along with Max Scheler and Arnold Gehlen, Helmuth Plessner is a major exponent of modern philosophical anthropology. We could define

philosophical anthropology, this “20<sup>th</sup> century trend of thought”,<sup>4</sup> as the non-empirical study of man. Empirical anthropology, whether biological or cultural, explains human nature in terms of one or more of its aspects: anatomical constitution, brain size and function, tool using and making, language, culture, social behavior and so on. Philosophical anthropology, on the other hand, understands human nature and its aspects in terms of general concepts or principles that explain these aspects or their possibility in their entirety. Thus, for Max Scheler<sup>5</sup> the anthropological principle is “Spirit” (“Geist”), as opposed to “Life”, and man is a spiritual being; for Arnold Gehlen<sup>6</sup> it is “Action” (“Handlung”) as opposed to instinct, and man is first of all a pragmatic being; for Ernst Cassirer<sup>7</sup> it is “Symbol”, as opposed to sign, and man is a symbolic being or “symbolic animal”, as he says; for Helmuth Plessner the principle of humanness is “eccentric positionality”<sup>8</sup> and man is a being unnatural by nature, inscrutable (unergründlich),<sup>9</sup> “constitutively homeless” (“konstitutiv heimatlos”)<sup>10</sup>, a being destined to find its “home” in the second nature of culture and the social institutions. This surely needs some elaboration.

Plessner bases his philosophical anthropology on a philosophy of living things, *i.e.* on a philosophical biology, because man is first of all a living thing. What distinguishes living from non-living things is the function of their boundary. Whereas the boundary of a non-living thing is nothing more than a formal edge, an abstract limit, the boundary of a living thing is a constitutive part of its very existence. As such, it enables the emergence of two fundamentally divergent yet correlated spheres of being, an internal and an external. By means of its internality, as generated by its existential boundary, the living thing is not only physically separated from its surrounding field; it is moreover positioned against it. Positionality thus becomes the fundamental property of the living thing. What is more, every aspect of life, growth, self-movement, metabolism, reproduction, even death, can be deduced from the very idea of the living thing articulating its positionality by realizing its boundary.<sup>11</sup>

According to Plessner, three forms of positionality are possible: the pre-centric or open form of the plant, the centric form of the animal, and the eccentric form of man. The open form of positionality is pre-reflective and the relation of the plant organism to its field is immediate. The centric form of positionality is reflective and the relation of the animal to its environment is (centrally) mediated or mediately immediate; yet the animal cannot reflect on its own reflectiveness or consciousness; it lives immediately,



“immersed” in it. Only the eccentric form of positionality, the human “level of the organic”, is fully reflective, then its very center is structurally reflective. As a self-reflective, self-conscious living thing, man not only has a self or soul, he also has an ego or I (Ich): “As an I, enabling the full return of the living thing to itself, man stands no more in the here-and-now but ‘behind’ it, behind himself, placeless, in nothingness, he merges with nothingness, with a spatiotemporal-like nowhere-and-never”.<sup>12</sup> Due to this structural distance both from the body and the “inner life or soul”, man is conscious of his surrounding reality not any more as an environment (Umwelt), but as a threefold world (Welt): an outer world of objects, an inner world of emotions and thoughts, and a shared social world (Mitwelt) of persons and interpersonal meanings, called mind (Geist).

Being the only living thing conscious of its body as part of an outer, objective world, man can make his body an instrument, both practically and aesthetically. For Plessner, the instrumentalization of the body or the embodiment (Verkörperung)<sup>13</sup> is synonymous with personification and hominization. Deprived of instincts or preformed patterns of efficient behavior, man “as eccentrically organized being must first make himself what he already is”.<sup>14</sup> “Man lives only as far as he leads a life”.<sup>15</sup> The “constitutive imbalance of his peculiar kind of positionality”<sup>16</sup> impels him to seek stability in “extra-natural things”, in “irrealization (“Irrealisierung”) in artificial forms of action”,<sup>17</sup> in the “nature-conditioned un-nature” (“naturbedingte Un-Natur”)<sup>18</sup> of tools, social norms and culture. The “constitutive imbalance” of human eccentric positionality renders this cultural un-nature historically unfixed. Content is always more than form, form less than content. The “mediated immediacy” (“vermittelte Unmittelbarkeit”)<sup>19</sup> of formed content or meaningful form is the law of human expressivity as of a distinctively human “mode of living” (“Lebensmodus”): “The law of mediated immediacy pushes man eternally out of the resting place where he wants to return. From this fundamental movement, history results. Its meaning is the regaining of what is lost by new means, the restitution of balance through subversive change, the retention of the old by rushing forwards”.<sup>20</sup>

It is obvious that such a fractured (gebrochen)<sup>21</sup> and dialectical<sup>22</sup> understanding of the human condition challenges both essentialist accounts of human nature and teleological conceptions of history, either idealist or Marxist. It likewise challenges radical conceptions of society, either communitarian, no matter fascist or communist, or individualistic.<sup>23</sup> The

fractured and dialectical constitution of humanness, its conjunctively individual and societal character, is instantiated in the partition of human life into two distinct spheres, a public and a private. It is moreover instantiated in the roles<sup>24</sup> humans, as fully reflective living beings, have to play within societies constituted and governed by the law of symbolically mediated immediacy. After all, dramatic acting is but the aesthetic form of a fundamental double-sidedness, if not duplicity.<sup>25</sup> In a striking passage, Plessner writes:

Even in his thought, emotion, volition man stands outside of himself. Then where does the possibility of false emotions, impure thoughts, of being possessed by something which one is not, come from? Where does the possibility of the (bad and good) actor, of the conversion of a man into another, come from? Whence comes that neither the other persons that watch him, nor first of all man himself can every time know even in moments of complete obliviousness and abandon whether he is playing a role or not? Inner evidence does not remove the doubt about the veracity of one's own being. There is no way out of the germinal break which crosses the selfhood of man, since it is eccentric, so that no one knows whether he is the one who cries and laughs, thinks and decides or that self already detached from him, this other in him, his counter-image and perhaps his opposite pole.<sup>26</sup>

Now, in order to understand Plessner's conception of music<sup>27</sup> as a manifestation of humanness, we must first of all point, along with him, to the trivial fact that music pertains not only to perception, but also to action. Either vocally or instrumentally, man produces sounds through movements of his body. The repertoire of these movements and of the resulting sounds depends on the specific character of perception and cognition. If perception and cognition are biologically constrained, as in the case of animals, then their kinetic repertoire, sound production included, is fixed or limitedly variable. If, by contrast, perception and cognition are biologically unconstrained, at least in principle and due to the eccentric positionality of the organism, then the kinetic repertoire of this organism, sound production included, is open, unfixed, infinitely variable and plastic. Human sound-producing body movement is never constrained by nature but only by culture, by norm. It instantiates the "fundamental anthropological laws" of "natural artificiality" ("natürliche Künstlichkeit")<sup>28</sup> and "mediated immediacy". Along with speech, music could thus be defined as a form of principally open yet culturally constrained sound production. As a kind of

body movement, moreover, music is also a form of human embodiment, a form of humanization.

Plessner was one of the first philosophers to display the privileged affinity of music to the living body.<sup>29</sup> Needless to say, being of a formal rather than of a material order, this affinity is displayable only in phenomenological terms. Thus, due to his eccentric positionality, man perceives himself as “a body, in a body (as inner life or soul), and out of the body as the viewpoint from which it is both”.<sup>30</sup> Plessner calls this peculiar situation, where we are bodies and at the same time we have bodies, the “conjunction of the living with the physical corporeality” (“Verschränkung von Leiblichkeit und Körperlichkeit”).<sup>31</sup> This very conjunction not only enables that instrumentalization of the body expressed in all kinds of plastic, flexible movement, from tool using to speech, art, music, dance and so on; it also produces that “encasement situation (Futteralsituation) towards one’s own body”,<sup>32</sup> that “self-referentiality” and “interiority” which motivates all sorts of belief in psychic and spiritual realities.

As regards music, the structural analogies between body awareness and sound perception are striking. In phenomenological experience, both living body and sound are here and there, close and distant, affective and objective. “Producibility and far-nearness of sound elucidate the peculiar relation of human subject to its body”, writes Plessner.<sup>33</sup> This human subject is the ego or the eccentric self, it is a body in a state of “being-out-of-itself” (“Außersichsein”); and “this being-out-of-itself documents itself, comes to its sensual fulfilment in the production [...] of sounds”.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, some phenomenal traits of sound point to analogous traits of the eccentric positionality of man: sound is “space-like, encasing, filling, everywhere and nowhere”;<sup>35</sup> man is “nowhere”, “placeless”, he stands in a “spatiotemporal-like nowhere-and-never”.<sup>36</sup> Through their “voluminosity” (“Voluminosität”) and “penetratingness” (“Eindringlichkeit”), sounds affect attitude and motivity of the human body, for they “conform to the bodily position (leibliche Position) of man. The voluminosity of sound ‘matches’ with the voluminosity of our being a body and in a body. Our body responds to the sounds like a resonator”.<sup>37</sup> Here is the foundation of dance and the legitimation of conducting.<sup>38</sup>

For the present discussion it is quite important to stress that, due to the phenomenal qualities of sound and the conformity of sound to human corporeality, any sequence of sounds is immediately perceived as a gesture (Geste) or posture (Haltung). Musical movements are gestures or postures

in a primary, non-metaphorical sense; they are sound-gestures.<sup>39</sup> The opposite would be the case if sounds were mere sense data objectively distanced from us, like colors, for example. In that case, surely, sound sequences could be perceived as gestures only through the metaphorical mediation of body conceptions, “body-derived image schemas”, and so forth.<sup>40</sup> Being, nevertheless, phenomenologically both objective and affective, far and near, distant and intimate, sounds conform to our corporeality by possessing themselves a corporeal-like (*körperhafte*) quality. It is therefore not surprising when Plessner relates music to the “stratum of behavior and conduct” (“Schicht des Verhaltens und Benehmens”).<sup>41</sup> Like all behavior, either practical or expressive, musical “behavior” is always already meaningful and that regardless of the impossibility to articulate this peculiar meaning in precise language terms.<sup>42</sup> Due to its intersubjective character, “sounding is always communication, even where there is nothing to communicate”.<sup>43</sup> To understand this, one needs only cease identifying meaning with reference (*Bedeutung*) and start thinking of musical meaning in terms of plain sense (*Sinn*).<sup>44</sup>

We have so far suggested an understanding of music as a non-metaphorical expression of a “constitutive homeless” form of life, as an essential aspect of humanness. We now proceed to the question whether and under which conditions music could turn its formal status into an expressive content; or, to put it differently, whether and under which conditions man, as a “constitutively homeless” living being, could make his own “constitutive homelessness” the object of musical expression. To raise such a question does not entail to convert an allegedly descriptive theory into a prescriptive one. The aim here is not to construct the model of something like a “truly human” musical expression, but to put a fundamental philosophical theory into the service of aesthetic interpretation. Let us only recall the importance of Hegelian dialectics for the understanding of Beethoven<sup>45</sup> or of Adorno’s negative dialectics for the appreciation of Mahler.<sup>46</sup> (In any case, the claim that Plessner’s seemingly non-prescriptive anthropology must be treated with due descriptive impartiality<sup>47</sup> is debatable, if one just considers his critique of social<sup>48</sup> and aesthetic radicalism).

Now, the question about the conditions under which music could sound as an expression of humanness can be approached in both negative and positive terms. First of all, an “anthropological” music cannot “behave” as if it were either utterly immediate, intimate, subjective, or utterly distant, alienated, objective. Refuting the fundamental anthropological law of

“mediated immediacy”, both radical attitudes turn dialectically into the very thing they negate: an extremely intimate musical expression would sound deceitfully reified, a totally distanced, inexpressive one, arbitrarily unmotivated.<sup>49</sup> Even worse, the belief in the naturalness of either pure expression or inexpression ignores another fundamental anthropological law, that of the “natural artificiality” of man and the “nature-conditioned un-naturality” of all his cultural displays, language and music included. Expression is always formed, form is always expressive, unformed, unmediated expression is as false as inexpressive form in the human condition.

Furthermore, a music interpretable as an articulation of the fundamental homelessness of man cannot unfold in a quasi-teleological manner, *i.e.* as if the musical process was directed towards some central musical event functioning as a final “cause”, “end” or “purpose”. From the perspective of a fractured anthropology, all conceptions of historical teleology, of the single man or humanity allegedly returning to their true condition, returning “home” after the vicissitudes of alienation, are nothing but idealist delusions. In a critique of Marxian anthropology, Plessner notes:

Self-alienation implies returning home from an alien place. This is a heroically appearing reference to a second history delineated within the history of Europe. Yet, man has never abandoned himself. No kind of labor has ever alienated him from himself. And no kind of work can deprive him of his possibilities. Thus, man never returns.<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, a music non-metaphorically expressive of human “constitutive homelessness” should be a music of mediated immediacy, that is, a music detached in its affectivity, familiar in its unfamiliarity, positive in its negativity, or, in one-word terms, a music ambiguous, enigmatic, paradoxical, “inscrutable”, like human existence itself. In addition, nowhere should it give the impression of fulfilling a purpose, of satisfying a long-awaited promise, of resolving expressive discordance into a final and permanent concordance. For discordantly concordant is the core expression of a living being eccentric, naturally unnatural, mediately immediate, elusive, homeless by constitution. Understood as anthropological and aesthetic categories, concordance and discordance need not be identified with consonance and dissonance, tonality and atonality or with any particular musical means, style or period whatsoever. In a seminal essay published in 1925 in common with the biologist Frederik Buytendijk, Plessner demonstrates how, given the environmental intentionality of the living body (*Umweltintentionalität*

des Leibes), the precise meaning of mimic expressions (here: musical phenomena), being never positively fixed, varies according to various situations. To put it differently, expressive meaning in life (and, by extension, in music) is a function of both figure and context: “[...] each expressive figure [...] does not have a sole meaning but conforms to many meanings, the determination of which results from the overall situation only”.<sup>51</sup>

At a first glance it seems rather incongruous to choose a work entitled *The Return of Ulysses* in order to exemplify a vision of man which proclaims no return, no conciliation. The contradiction could only be evaded if return was understood either in terms of infinite process, or in terms of philosophical allegory. The latter is here the case. To begin with, in Homer’s *Odyssey* the return of Ulysses, covering nearly half of the epic poem, is not about Ulysses’ adventures. These have been famously interpreted by Adorno and Horkheimer, in their *Dialectics of the Enlightenment*, as a metaphor for the triumph of rationality over myth.<sup>52</sup> The return of Ulysses is about the regaining of immediacy through mediation, it is namely about the regaining of forms of social intimacy, such as matrimony, parenthood, friendship, and loyalty, through reflective and detached forms of conduct, such as disguise, pretense, deceit, acting: “The last half of the *Odyssey* is a drama of identity disguised and revealed”.<sup>53</sup> The return of Ulysses features thus as the allegory *par excellence* of the human condition, at least as regards the constitution of the shared world (Mitwelt):

To find one’s way within this world, continuous effort and thorough experience is needed. For the “other”, irrespective of our common essential nature as persons, is an individual reality (like myself), whose inner world is for me completely concealed and exposable only through construals of various sort.<sup>54</sup>

There is another fact supporting the interpretation suggested here. In Homer, Ulysses’ return does not practically come to a real, definite end. Soon after the killing of the suitors, their kin decides to revenge. The new slaughter is avoided by divine intrusion, a gesture which imposes a clumsy and forced closure to the epic poem.<sup>55</sup> The awkwardness of the poetical handling seems to ratify the anthropological truth that the constitutive historicity of man turns all images of happy fixedness, all dogmas of an “end of history” kind, into dreams of wishful thinking.

Given the lack of sufficient evidence, it can be only speculated whether the music of the overture, composed around 1942, echoes Skalkottas’s famous social homelessness<sup>56</sup> or whether it portrays programmatically

Ulysses' vicissitudes after his return to Ithaka.<sup>57</sup> The fact nevertheless needs not prevent a philosophically motivated aesthetic interpretation of the music, provided the adoption of the intentional fallacy argument.<sup>58</sup> Besides concepts, for such an interpretation at least two things are needed: sound structure and historical context. Thus, in the context of Western musical modernity, atonality functions as the acoustic symbol of a supposedly genuine, unmediated, pre-social or pre-normative subjectivity. This is easily understood if we just consider that repetition is a necessary – though not a sufficient – condition of tonality and that repetition is, in its most general sense, the primary expression of social normativity in music. After all, styles are but sets of repetition norms regulating every musical parameter, from overall form to melody and rhythm. The fact that atonality challenged the social normativity of style in its most fundamental parameter, obviously in order to musically reveal the abyssal depths of human psyche, does not mean that atonality abolished all normative mediation. A need for “order, logic, comprehensibility”<sup>59</sup> pushed Schoenberg in the 1920s not only to the invention of a new repetition norm,<sup>60</sup> the “Method of composing with twelve tones which are related only with one another”, but also to a neoclassical recycling of older forms and rhythmic idioms. In Alban Berg the social mediation of the pre-social is attempted either through dramatic interplay of atonality and tonality, or through insertion of tonal elements in the nontonal fabric rather than through conflation of the divergent principles.<sup>61</sup> Only in Anton Webern does musical mediation remain exclusively one of method, a fact which apparently explains the esoteric quality of his music.<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, if we reflect critically on the problem of mediation within atonality we realize that in the abovementioned cases, by not being thorough, mediation fails to occur in the special anthropological sense of “mediated immediacy”. Schoenberg, for instance, dissociates the mediating elements of traditional form and rhythm from the mediated element of tonal order. His music remains thus an “aesthetic art of consciousness”, as Plessner would say,<sup>63</sup> an art of unambiguous, self-reflective subjectivity, analytically exposing the mediating terms of its expression. Berg, on the other hand, consciously mobilizing the expressive potentialities of both tonal and atonal harmony, juxtaposes rather than truly mediates the divergent elements, in a manner, however, which candidly articulates the drama of modern alienation. Webern, finally, does not even care to mediate perceptibly; his art is the “aesthetic art of consciousness” *par excellence*.

Fig. 1: Nikos Skalkottas, *The Return of Ulysses*, bars 1–3a.

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system, labeled '1' and '2', covers bars 1 and 2. It is marked 'Molto Adagio' and 'pp'. The first staff (treble clef) has a long note in the first bar and a more complex figure in the second bar. The second staff (bass clef) has a continuous eighth-note pattern in the first bar and a similar pattern in the second bar. The second system, labeled '3' and '6', covers bars 3 and 3a. It is marked 'mf'. The first staff (treble clef) has a complex figure in the first bar and a more complex figure in the second bar. The second staff (bass clef) has a continuous eighth-note pattern in the first bar and a similar pattern in the second bar.

Skalkottas achieves the expression of the anthropological ambiguity of “mediated immediacy” above all in the crucial realm of harmony. Here, the mediating principle is itself harmonic and none other than the traditional principle of superimposing thirds. There are few sonorities in *The Return of Ulysses*<sup>64</sup> not thoroughly made up of thirds, not containing at least one chord made up of thirds, not constructed through the superimposition of chords made up of thirds or not reducible to a chord made up of thirds, and all this in a context undoubtedly atonal. It is therefore not surprising that Skalkottas scholars use terms such as “euphonia”,<sup>65</sup> “‘functional’ atonal harmony”<sup>66</sup> or “tonal serialism”<sup>67</sup> to describe an idiosyncratic harmonic writing which not just juxtaposes, but fuses tonality and atonality.<sup>68</sup> Thus, in the very beginning of the piece the suspended C–G creates expressive



ambiguity through a latent reference of the atonal melody and bass to the note C (fig. 1). A D is added in bar 3 and at the end of the melodic movement in bar 5 we hear a sonority of four thirds superimposed on G: G–B $\flat$ –D–F $\sharp$ –A, actually a G minor chord with major 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> (fig. 2). In the last beat of bar 5 Skalkottas adds two more notes, E $\flat$  and C, thus expanding the melodically distributed material up to six superimposed thirds. In the following bar (bar 6) the harmonic material results from a continuous superimposition of thirds again on C (C–E $\flat$  [= D $\sharp$ ]-E–G–B–D–F–A $\flat$ ), plus the notes A and B $\flat$ , as if a major-minor tonic sounded together with its dominant minor 9<sup>th</sup> chord. In the last beat of the same bar we hear again in the upper voices the G minor chord with major 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> and in bar 8 (lower voices) the initial sonority of the two superimposed fifths, this time on F (fig. 3).

Fig. 2: Nikos Skalkottas, *The Return of Ulysses*, bar 5.

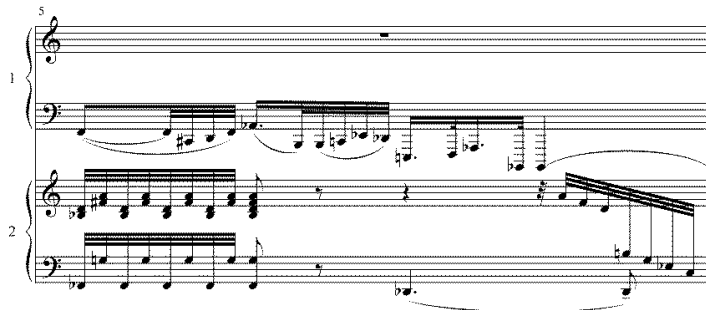
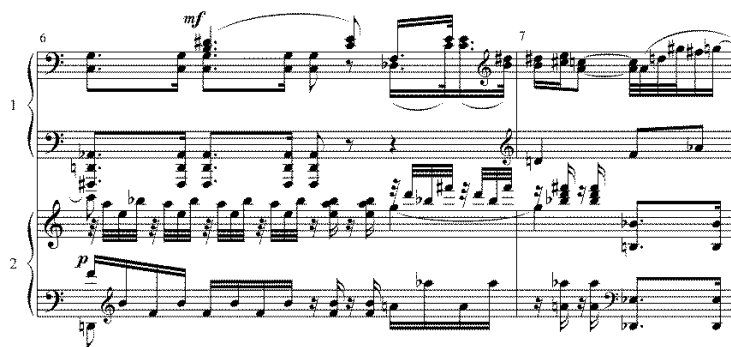


Fig. 3: Nikos Skalkottas, *The Return of Ulysses*, bars 6–8.



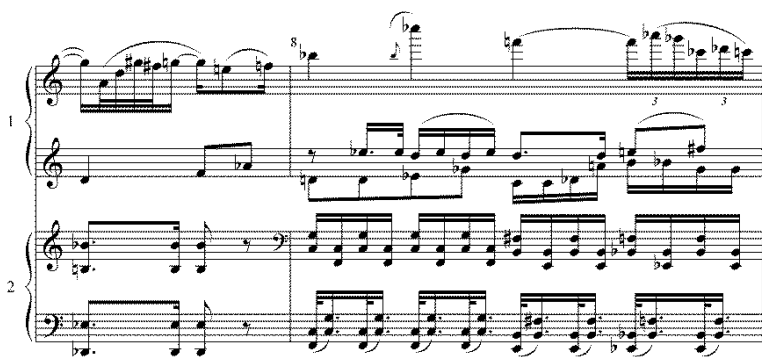


Fig. 4: Nikos Skalkottas, *The Return of Ulysses*, bars 13–17.

The ambiguous, “accordantly discordant” atonal harmonic writing of Skalkottas is further clearly exemplified in passages like the one that begins at the third beat of bar 13, where tonal reference is sensed initially to G and then to B. The passage leads to the first culmination of the slow introduction in bar 16, a sonority analyzable as a six-voice chord constructed from thirds superimposed on Eb (Eb–Gb–Bb–D–F–Ab) and sharing its three uppernotes (D–F–Ab) with the sonority of bar 6 (fig. 4). Finally, the very last sonority of the slow introduction exhibits once more the same tonality-derived harmonic thought: Db–F–Ab–C / G–Bb–[D]–F / Ab–[C]–Eb–Gb (fig. 5), not to mention the pervasive use of movement in parallel thirds or sixths. It must be stressed, nonetheless, that all this “accordant discordance” is nowhere sublated in an affirmative, tonal-like manner. On the contrary, the major culmination of the slow introduction at bar 40 is approached through a progression of six utterly dissonant sonorities comprising all the twelve notes of the chromatic scale (fig. 6), a gesture plausibly interpretable in terms of Plessner’s anti-teleological conception of human historicity.

Fig. 5: Nikos Skalkottas, *The Return of Ulysses*, bars 44–46.

The image shows a musical score for two staves, labeled 1 and 2. Staff 1 is in treble clef and staff 2 is in bass clef. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb). The score covers bars 44, 45, and 46. Bar 44 starts with a piano (pp) dynamic. Bar 45 continues the piano texture. Bar 46 is marked 'Allegro molto vivace' and starts with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic. In staff 2, bar 46 has a forte (f) dynamic. The notation includes various chords, arpeggios, and melodic lines with slurs and ties.

Analogous is Skalkottas’ treatment of atonality at the level of the overall form. *The Return of Ulysses* has been described as “the pinnacle of Skalkottas’s integration of free dodecaphonic technique and tonal structure”.<sup>69</sup> A characteristic example is the varied recurrence of the initial theme in bars 31–33, accompanied by the same fifth C–G, a gesture which gives to the slow introduction the shape of a traditional ternary form (fig. 7).

Fig. 6: Nikos Skalkottas, *The Return of Ulysses*, bar 39.

Figure 6 shows the musical score for bar 39 of Nikos Skalkottas's *The Return of Ulysses*. The score is for two systems, each with a piano (p) and a violin (v) part. The piano part is marked with a forte (f) dynamic. The violin part is marked with a forte (f) dynamic. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The score shows a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and a 'δρα' (drum) marking above the violin staff.

Fig. 7: Nikos Skalkottas, *The Return of Ulysses*, bars 31–33.

Figure 7 shows the musical score for bars 31–33 of Nikos Skalkottas's *The Return of Ulysses*. The score is for two systems, each with a piano (p) and a violin (v) part. The piano part is marked with a piano (pp) dynamic. The violin part is marked with a piano (pp) dynamic. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The score shows a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and a 'δρα' (drum) marking above the violin staff.

The same tonal structural logic pervades atonal material through the whole lengthy overture, itself written in a complex sonata form.<sup>70</sup> Each subject group of the exposition is displayed in terms of ternary form with varied repetition of its first theme. Moreover, the truncated recapitulation<sup>71</sup> of the overture repeats the themes of the first subject group a fifth higher, the first theme of the second group also a fifth higher and its concluding theme precisely in the initial pitch material, thus closing the recapitulation in a tonal-like manner. Mediating atonal material with tonal structuring principles and traditional form procedures, Skalkottas truly reaches a paradoxical, enigmatic<sup>72</sup> expression, detached in its affectivity, familiar in its unfamiliarity, positive in its negativity.

Melody and rhythm contribute to the overall expression as well. Skalkottas conflates expressionist melodic freedom with traditional melodic procedures, such as the literal or varied recurrence of particular melodic figures or even intervals and the derivation of new themes from older ones. Even the main themes of the principal *Allegro* are constructed through such procedures. The first theme of the first group, for instance, is built on the repetition of a single rhythmic figure plus a limited number of intervals (fig. 8); the third melodic figure of the second theme of the first group is an exact transposition of the first one a fifth below (fig. 9); the third bar of the first theme of the second group is a varied reiteration of the first (fig. 10) and the same occurs in the second theme of the same group (fig. 11). Finally, the theme of the first fugue of the development derives from the initial theme of the slow introduction (fig. 12). All this play of melodic repetition is underpinned by numerous rhythmical *ostinati* which provide some kind of dialectical counterweight to the atonal unpredictability of melody and harmony.

Fig. 8: Nikos Skalkottas, *The Return of Ulysses*, bars 46–49 (extract).



Fig. 9: Nikos Skalkottas, *The Return of Ulysses*, bars 71–74 (extract).

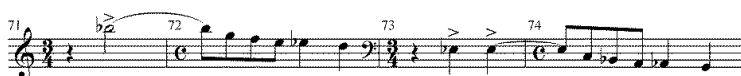


Fig. 10: Nikos Skalkottas, *The Return of Ulysses*, bars 163–168 (extract).



Fig. 11: Nikos Skalkottas, *The Return of Ulysses*, bars 181–183 (extract).

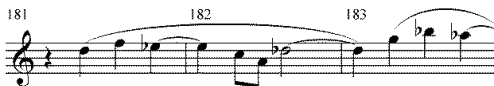


Fig. 12: Nikos Skalkottas, *The Return of Ulysses*, bars 275–278 (extract).



There is no better musical allusion to human eccentricity than this atonal unpredictability. Its purest form, the abstract dodecaphonic row; its more consistent materialization, the utter non-repetitiveness of the post-war total serialism. Plessner's anthropological critique revealed however the fallacy of an allegedly pure, unmediated expression of human eccentricity. Eccentricity is here understood in terms of self-reflective living body rather than in terms of another center above the one of the living body, a misconception that historically led to the supposition of a second, mental substance adjacent to that of physical materiality.<sup>73</sup> Plessner's new anthropological theory is fundamentally anti-idealist and explicitly anti-cartesian.<sup>74</sup> What we have in human expression, the acoustic one included, is movement of self-reflective living bodies. Yet self-reflective movement means conscious, controlled movement, and controlled movement is movement regulated by norms. These norms are dictated either by natural objectivity or by social tradition, and social tradition, as we saw, is the artificial "home" of a being constitutively homeless. Self-reflective expression is therefore always normatively mediated, even where intended is the negation of all normative mediacy.<sup>75</sup> Skalkottas's music bears testament of an intuitive awareness of these fundamental anthropological facts. Besides, it bears testament of a fact even deeper: that man can feel and think socially

even in extreme social isolation. As Plessner demonstrated, man is not social because of his social life;<sup>76</sup> on the contrary, his peculiar, role-mediated social life is the articulation of his structural sociality.<sup>77</sup> Man is the only living being able to say “me”, “you”, “it” to himself, even in complete social isolation. Homeless by nature, predestined by “ontic necessity”<sup>78</sup> to find his home in the unnatural realms of culture and the unrealities of norms and values, Ulysses, this very allegory of man, forever returns and thus never returns.

## NOTES

*Acknowledgements:* I am grateful to my colleague Ioannis Foulías for the printable version of the music examples and to my PhD candidate Maria Theofili for the final proofreading of the manuscript.

- <sup>1</sup> Helmuth Plessner, ‘Zur Geschichtsphilosophie der bildenden Kunst seit Renaissance und Reformation’, in idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Günter Dux, Otto Marquard and Elisabeth Ströker, vol. 7, Frankfurt a. M. 2003, pp. 48–49.
- <sup>2</sup> Ernst Bloch, *Geist der Utopie*, München/Leipzig 1918, p. 81. Compare E. Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, trans. Anthony A. Nassar, Stanford, CA 2000, p. 34.
- <sup>3</sup> For an introduction to Plessner’s thought, see, among others, Stephan Pietrowicz, *Helmuth Plessner. Genese und System seines philosophisch-anthropologischen Denkens*, Freiburg/München 1992; Hans Redeker, *Helmuth Plessner oder Die verkörperte Philosophie*, Berlin 1993; Gerhard Arlt, *Anthropologie und Politik. Ein Schlüssel zum Werk Helmuth Plessners*, München 1996; Kai Hauke, *Plessner zur Einführung*, Hamburg 2000; Kersten Schübler, *Helmuth Plessner. Eine intellektuelle Biografie*, Berlin 2000; Heike Kämpf, *Helmuth Plessner. Eine Einführung*, Düsseldorf 2001; *Plessner’s Philosophical Anthropology: Perspectives and Prospects*, ed. Jos de Mul, Amsterdam 2014.
- <sup>4</sup> Joachim Fischer, *Philosophische Anthropologie: Eine Denkrichtung des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Freiburg 2016.
- <sup>5</sup> Max Scheler, *Schriften zur Anthropologie*, ed. Martin Arndt, Stuttgart 1994.
- <sup>6</sup> Arnold Gehlen, *Der Mensch. Seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt*, Frankfurt a. M. 2016.
- <sup>7</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man. An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, New York, NY 1944.

- <sup>8</sup> Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch. Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie*, in *Gesammelte Schriften* (note 1), vol. 4, pp. 360–361. See also Joachim Fischer, *Exzentrische Positionalität. Studien zu Helmuth Plessner*, Weilerswist 2016; Volker Schürmann, *Heitere Gelassenheit. Grundriß einer parteilichen Skepsis*, Magdeburg 2002, pp. 81–116.
- <sup>9</sup> Helmuth Plessner, *Macht und menschliche Natur. Ein Versuch zur Anthropologie der geschichtlichen Weltansicht*, in *Gesammelte Schriften* (note 1), vol. 5, pp. 175–176. See also *Internationales Jahrbuch für Philosophische Anthropologie*, vol. 5: *Die Unergründlichkeit der menschlichen Natur*, ed. Olivia Mitscherlich-Schönherr and Matthias Schloßberger, Berlin 2015.
- <sup>10</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen* (note 8), p. 383.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 149–150. See also Robert Mugerauer, ‘Bi-Directional Boundaries: Eccentric Life and Its Environments’, in *Plessner’s Philosophical Anthropology* (note 3), pp. 211–228.
- <sup>12</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen* (note 8), p. 364.
- <sup>13</sup> Plessner, ‘Die Frage nach der *Conditio humana*’, in *Gesammelte Schriften* (note 1), vol. 8, pp. 195–209.
- <sup>14</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen* (note 8), p. 383.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 384.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> Plessner, ‘Der Mensch als Lebenswesen’, in *Gesammelte Schriften* (note 1), vol. 8, p. 314.
- <sup>19</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen* (note 8), pp. 396–419.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 417.
- <sup>21</sup> Olivia Mitscherlich, *Natur und Geschichte. Helmuth Plessners in sich gebrochene Lebensphilosophie*, Berlin 2007.
- <sup>22</sup> Hans Heinz Holz, *Mensch – Natur. Helmuth Plessner und das Konzept einer dialektischen Anthropologie*, Bielefeld 2003.
- <sup>23</sup> Helmuth Plessner, *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft. Eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus*, in *Gesammelte Schriften* (note 1), vol. 5, pp. 7–133. See also Plessner’s “*Grenzen der Gemeinschaft*”. *Eine Debatte*, ed. Wolfgang Eßbach, Joachim Fischer and Helmut Lethen, Frankfurt a. M. 2002.
- <sup>24</sup> Plessner, ‘Die Frage nach der *Conditio humana*’ (note 13), pp. 195–205.



- <sup>25</sup> See Helmuth Plessner, 'Zur Anthropologie des Schauspielers', in *Gesammelte Schriften* (note 1), vol. 7, pp. 399–418. See also Marco Stahlhut, *Schauspieler ihrer selbst. Das Performative bei Sartre und Plessner*, Wien 2005; Pascal Pilgram, *Der Schauspieler als Symbol moderner Kultur bei Simmel, Kracauer und Plessner*, Nürnberg 2010 .
- <sup>26</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen* (note 1), p. 372.
- <sup>27</sup> See Kurt von Fischer, 'Einige Bemerkungen zu Helmuth Plessners Reflexionen zum Phänomen Musik', in *Unter offenem Horizont. Anthropologie nach Helmuth Plessner*, ed. Jürgen Friedrich and Bernd Westermann, Frankfurt a. M. 1995, pp. 156–159; M. Tsetsos, 'Ästhetische Schriften zur Musik und modernen Malerei', in *Plessner-Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, ed. Joachim Fischer, Stuttgart 2019 (forthcoming), where further bibliography is provided and briefly discussed.
- <sup>28</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen* (note 1), pp. 383–396.
- <sup>29</sup> See the following fragments and texts by Plessner on music: *Die Einheit der Sinne*, in *Gesammelte Schriften* (note 1), vol. 3, pp. 221–244; *Anthropologie der Sinne*, *ibid.*, pp. 343–350, 355–363; 'Zur Phänomenologie der Musik', in *Gesammelte Schriften* (note 1), vol. 7, pp. 59–65; 'Sensibilité et raison. Contribution à la philosophie de la musique', *ibid.*, pp. 131–183; 'Zur Anthropologie der Musik', *ibid.*, pp. 184–199.
- <sup>30</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen* (note 8), p. 365.
- <sup>31</sup> Plessner, 'Vergleichbarkeit tierischen und menschlichen Verhaltens', in *Gesammelte Schriften* (note 1), vol. 8, p. 292.
- <sup>32</sup> Plessner, 'Der Mensch als Lebenswesen' (note 18), p. 321.
- <sup>33</sup> Plessner, 'Zur Anthropologie der Musik' (note 29), p. 187.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.
- <sup>36</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen* (note 8), pp. 363, 364.
- <sup>37</sup> Plessner, 'Zur Anthropologie der Musik' (note 29), p. 189.
- <sup>38</sup> See Arne Stollberg, "'Mimische Ausdruckshandlungen". Der Dirigentenkörper im anthropologischen Musikdiskurs des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts', in *DirigentenBilder. Musikalische Gesten – verkörperte Musik*, ed. A. Stollberg, Jana Weißenfeld and Florian Henri Besthorn, Basel 2015, pp. 25–30.
- <sup>39</sup> Plessner, *Die Einheit der Sinne* (note 29), pp. 240–241; 'Zur Anthropologie der Musik' (note 30), p. 196–197.

- <sup>40</sup> The related bibliography is large. See, indicatively, Janna Saslaw, 'Forces, Containers, and Paths: The Role of Body-Derived Image Schemas in the Conceptualization of Music', *Journal of Music Theory* 40 (1996), no. 2, pp. 217–243; Lawrence M. Zbikowski, *Conceptualizing Music: Cognitive Structure, Theory, and Analysis*, New York, NY 2002.
- <sup>41</sup> Plessner, 'Zur Anthropologie der Musik' (note 29), p. 197.
- <sup>42</sup> See Markos Tsetsos, 'The Specificity of Musical Meaning in Helmuth Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology of the Senses', in *Proceedings of the 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition and the 8<sup>th</sup> Triennial Conference of the European Society for the Cognitive Sciences of Music*, ed. Emiliós Campouropoulos, Costas Tsougras, Panagiotis Mavromatis and Konstantinos Pasiadis, Thessaloniki 2012, pp. 1025–1032, where a critique of embodied music cognition is provided.
- <sup>43</sup> Plessner, 'Zur Anthropologie der Musik' (note 29), p. 190.
- <sup>44</sup> Plessner, *Die Einheit der Sinne* (note 29), pp. 153–154.
- <sup>45</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven. Philosophie der Musik*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, Frankfurt a. M. 1993, pp. 31–32.
- <sup>46</sup> For a recent account, see Stephen Decatur Smith, 'Awakening Dead Time: Adorno on Husserl, Benjamin, and the Temporality of Music', in *Music in Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Martin Scherzinger, London/New York, NY 2015, pp. 48–49.
- <sup>47</sup> See, for instance, Mitscherlich, *Natur und Geschichte* (note 21), pp. 21–24.
- <sup>48</sup> See Matthias Schloßberger, 'Philosophische Anthropologie als normative Gesellschaftstheorie', *Internationales Jahrbuch für philosophische Anthropologie* 4 (2014), pp. 187–202.
- <sup>49</sup> Highly relevant is Adorno's criticism of technicization in modern music. See, for example, 'Das Altern der Neuen Musik', in Th. W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, vol. 14, Frankfurt a. M. 1986, pp. 143–167.
- <sup>50</sup> Plessner, 'Homo absconditus', in *Gesammelte Schriften* (note 1), vol. 8, p. 365–366.
- <sup>51</sup> Helmuth Plessner and Frederik J. J. Buytendijk, 'Die Deutung des mimischen Ausdrucks. Ein Beitrag zur Lehre vom Bewußtsein des anderen Ichs', in *Gesammelte Schriften* (note 1), vol. 7, p. 126.
- <sup>52</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, in Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften* (note 49), vol. 3, pp. 61–62.
- <sup>53</sup> Bernard Knox, 'Introduction', in *Homer: The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles, New York, NY 1996, p. 61.

- <sup>54</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen* (note 8), p. 375.
- <sup>55</sup> In fact, “the poem ends here, but like the *Iliad*, it has already charted the future of his hero. [...] In the *Odyssey* the hero’s death is foretold by Tiresias in the underworld”. Knox, ‘Introduction’ (note 53), p. 63.
- <sup>56</sup> See John Thornley, ‘An encounter with “Greek artistic reality” – Nikos Skalkottas’ return to Athens in 1933’, in *Nikos Skalkottas: A Greek European*, ed. Haris Vrontos, Athens 2009, pp. 334–366.
- <sup>57</sup> See Nikos Christodoulou, ‘Nikos Skalkottas – A centenary of his birth’ (note 56), p. 172. Although Christodoulou points out that “the work is not programmatic”, he makes the assumption that some formal features of the overture “allude to the idea of Ulysses and his adventurous return”. Compare Eva Mantzourani, ‘The Odysseus myth revisited: Exile and homecoming in the life and music of Nikos Skalkottas’, in *Musical Receptions of Greek Antiquity. From the Romantic Era to Modernism*, ed. Katerina Levidou, Katy Romanou and George Vlastos, Newcastle upon Tyne 2016, p. 251, where the same assumption is reiterated, almost verbatim. In other respects, Mantzourani’s psychological and historical approach shows illuminating parallels with the philosophical one presented here.
- <sup>58</sup> William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, ‘The Intentional Fallacy’, *The Sewanee Review* 54 (1946), no. 3, pp. 468–488.
- <sup>59</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, ed. Leonard Stein, London 1984, p. 216.
- <sup>60</sup> Anton Webern, *Der Weg zur Neuen Musik*, ed. Willi Reich, Wien 1960, p. 24: “Our twelve-note composition is based on the constant return of a certain sequence of the twelve tones: Principle of repetition!”
- <sup>61</sup> Berg himself was convinced about the mutual non-exclusiveness of tonality and atonality. In a letter to Adorno, dated 21.8.1926, he writes: “As far as the 12-note technique is concerned: The most conspicuous thing about it, I would say, is the fact that it does not exclude tonality (*intentional tonality* – not simply chance tonality, which would be very fishy) at all” (emphasis added). *Theodor W. Adorno and Alban Berg: Correspondence 1925–1935*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Wieland Hoban, Cambridge/Malden, MA 2005, p. 74.
- <sup>62</sup> Webern “was more ‘faithful’ to the method than its inventor. For whereas Schoenberg thought of his system mainly as an aid for organizing chromatic pitch relationships within a formal context that retained strong traditional ties, Webern accepted it as the basis for an essentially new way of thinking about musical structure. Not surprisingly, then, the unfamiliar nature of his music made it largely incomprehensible to contemporary listeners”. Robert P. Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music*, New York, NY/London 1991, p. 210.

- <sup>63</sup> As distinguished from the “aesthetic consciousness of art”. Helmuth Plessner, ‘Die Musikalisierung der Sinne. Zur Geschichte eines modernen Phänomens’, in *Gesammelte Schriften* (note 1), vol. 7, p. 486.
- <sup>64</sup> Here we refer to Skalkottas’s manuscript of his own reduction of the overture for two pianos, kept in the Skalkottas Archive in Athens.
- <sup>65</sup> Giannis G. Papaioannou, *Nikos Skalkottas*, Athens 1997, *passim*.
- <sup>66</sup> Christodoulou, ‘Nikos Skalkottas’ (note 57), p. 142. Christodoulou sees in this “‘functional’ atonal harmony”, “an instance of that frequent ambiguity in Skalkottas: a personal innovation – extending a modern idiom – that is at the same time classically-rooted”.
- <sup>67</sup> Melissa Garmon Roberts, *The Free Serial Style of Nikos Skalkottas: An Examination of the Twelve-Note Methods in His Late Serial Compositions*, Diss., Austin, TX 2002, *passim*.
- <sup>68</sup> Eva Mantzourani, *The Life and Twelve-Note Music of Nikos Skalkottas*, Farnham/Burlington 2011, p. 82: “Many of his compositional processes are idiomatic and deviate from the accepted conventions of serial handling. Skalkottas never abandoned the organizational principles of tonality and the integration of tonal elements in his dodecaphonic works; his harmonic language is inclusive, incorporating tonal, post-tonal and twelve-note elements, while the fusion of tonality and serialism is an important aspect of his compositional style” (emphasis added).
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.
- <sup>72</sup> For the enigmatic element in Skalkottas’s music, see Christodoulou, ‘Nikos Skalkottas’ (note 57), pp. 136–138.
- <sup>73</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen* (note 8), p. 361.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78–79.
- <sup>75</sup> See, for instance, the dialectics of atonal expressivist subjectivity in Adorno’s *Philosophie der Neuen Musik*, in *Gesammelte Schriften* (note 49), vol. 12, pp. 52–55.
- <sup>76</sup> See, for instance, George H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, ed. Charles W. Morris, Chicago, IL/London 1934, pp. 135–136.
- <sup>77</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen* (note 8), pp. 379–380.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 396.

ABSTRACT

Leaning on Helmuth Plessner's writings on philosophical anthropology and music, I first examine the possibility of understanding music in general as a non-metaphorical manifestation of an eccentric, "constitutively homeless" form of life, as an essential aspect of humanness. I then proceed to the question whether and under which conditions we could think of music as turning its formal status into an expressive content, or, to put it differently, whether and under which conditions man, as a "constitutively homeless" living being, could make his own homelessness the object of musical expression. According to my analysis, Nikos Skalkottas's (1904–1949) music, and especially his overture *The Return of Ulysses* (c. 1942), with its idiosyncratic fusion of atonal modernity and tonal tradition, gives us a telling example of how music could articulate "mediated immediacy" ("vermittelte Unmittelbarkeit") as the fundamental property of all human cognition and expression.



MARIA JOÃO NEVES

## Bernardo Sassetti's *The Dream of the Others*. Phenomenology of Dreams in Musical Time Perception

It is a familiar philosophical position that time structures our experience. Kant, for example, states in the *Critique of the Pure Reason* that "time is a necessary representation, lying at the foundation of all our intuitions."<sup>1</sup> Time as experienced by human beings is far more complex than what is captured by the concepts of clock time, or the common divisions between past, present and future. "Subjective time seems to have density and volume and well as length and force as well as rate of passage."<sup>2</sup> But because these subjective experiences of time are not commonly categorized, it is difficult to talk about them.

Being a temporal art, music expresses an enormous variety of lived temporal forms, creating a virtual time:

Music unfolds in a virtual time created by sound, a dynamic flow given directly and, as a rule, purely to the ear. This virtual time, which is an image not of clock-time, but of lived time, is the primary illusion of music. In it melodies move and harmonies grow and rhythms prevail, with the logic of an organic living structure. Virtual time is to music what virtual space is to plastic art: its very stuff, organized by the tonal forms that create it.<sup>3</sup>

Regardless, musical time is notated with remarkable imprecision and ambiguity<sup>4</sup>. Transcripts of performances create problems of various degrees. The pulsation is something that is felt so intimately that the notation becomes very debatable. And when writing was not intended, what legitimacy exists to enter this territory, especially when the composer did not write himself? Or, on the contrary, when a composer wrote many, many versions of the same work, who has the authority to decide on the official version when the author is no longer with us?

There is also a problem of another nature, with serious implications: formal musical analysis leaves out the sound itself. And what is music without sound? Music devitalized? What is sheet music? Musical corpses that the interpreter, by chance, resuscitates? In the analysis of scores, interpretation and performance are excluded, the alchemical nature of sound despised. As musical analysis is mostly confined to sheet music, non-notated music is often not analyzed. In jazz, for example, most of the music we actually hear is improvised, which is why a large proportion of these compositions are not taken as objects of study.

If we think that music is a model of human temporality *par excellence*<sup>5</sup> – and therefore a metaphor for human life – it turns out to be a great failure not to attend to the temporality of music in interpretation and performance. The composer Bernardo Sasseti<sup>6</sup> considers that the moment of interpretation is the maximum expression:

Everyone knows (or imagines) that the challenge of communicating, the spontaneity, the harmony, the conflicts of sounds and ideas, as well as energy in various forms and shapes, will always be commonplace when we speak of music, written or improvised. To interpret it in the moment is the maximum expression of our path and the constant search for the ways of others.<sup>7</sup>

According both to Susanne Langer and David Burrows, music symbolizes human temporality, it constitutes an access to this complex sphere that we constantly take in a reductive way, taking into account only the time of the clock. Langer becomes aware of the problem of ineffable nature that music does not solve, but rather shows.

María Zambrano, one of the most famous disciples of Ortega y Gasset, and so far the one and only female writer who has received the Cervantes award, was also a talented pianist. This was certainly most valuable for her reflection about time. In her phenomenology of dreams<sup>8</sup>, the Spanish philosopher focused on time perception, keeping in mind that there might be penetrations of temporalities characteristic of waking in a dream and vice-versa. She was aware that there are many more time-forms than the clock time we are used to. The possibility of speaking about something makes it more present; the word is recognizing existence. With the introduction of Zambrano's taxonomy of dreams, conditions were created to make it possible to refer to these other times experienced by the human being.

In consonance with Zambrano, Langer considers the time of the clock as reductive, and thereby incapable of giving an account of the human time as



experienced. She affirms that human temporality is substantially constituted by tensions:

The phenomena that fill time are tensions – physical, emotional or intellectual. Time exists because we undergo tensions and their resolutions. Their peculiar building-up, and their ways of breaking or diminishing or merging on to longer and greater tensions, make for a vast variety of temporal forms.<sup>9</sup>

The Portuguese composer Bernardo Sassetti was not likely to know the theories of María Zambrano or Susanne Langer about human temporality and its consubstantiation in the form of tensions, distentions and resolutions, which can be exemplified musically. Nevertheless, let us just listen to him:

I like to start the composition process using harmonic progressions in their simplest state, and from the moment the main motive is defined, I start by introducing out-of-scale notes or composed chords, as well as lines of constant tension and resolution to be able to give the idea of dynamics and movement.<sup>10</sup>

Music suspends the time of consciousness, this consecutive time we divide into past, present and future, conceived as a one-dimensional and homogeneous continuum. The language of music is sound. As Hanslick rightly remarked: “the unique and exclusive content and object of music are sound forms in motion.”<sup>11</sup> However, there is difficulty in apprehending them in a clear way. Langer suggests its ineffable nature. The possibility of talking about it would be, according to Langer, the great philosophical challenge:

Find us a symbolism whereby we can conceive and express our first hand knowledge of time. [...] Philosophy must give up discursive thought, give up logical conception, and try to grasp intuitively the inward sense of duration.<sup>12</sup>

The taxonomy of the phenomenology of dreams of María Zambrano could be the answer to the challenge posed by Langer. From 2010 to 2016 I conducted post-doctoral research<sup>13</sup>, to verify the possibility of the application of Zambrano's taxonomy of dreams to the virtual time of music. Unlike cardiac pulsation, which is a particular experience, the virtual time experience of music is shareable. The joint hearing of a musical piece brings the listeners to a common universe, a collective now. “Sound spaces are short-lived inflated containers like soap bubbles, defined by the common resonance they contain.”<sup>14</sup> In this space of common resonance, the musicians and musicologists who participated in this project acquired tools that enabled them to recognize the temporal experience that a specific musical work induced.

The research project aimed to identify the appropriate dream category in which a certain piece of music occurs, and to verify the musical parameters being used to induce that particular time experience. Musical pieces were selected and two interpretations of each one were auditorially analyzed. Musical parameters were cross-referenced with Zambrano's taxonomy of dreams, each piece being taken as a dream. In this sense, it is the predominant sensation that determines the classification, although one can find within a work moments that could be subsumed under another category. Also for this reason, with rare exceptions, the musical piece was considered as a whole.

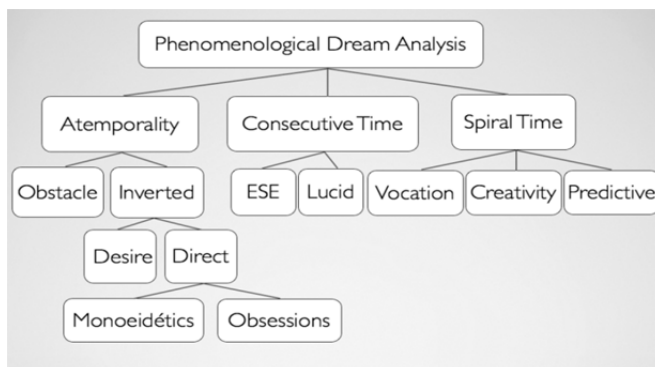
#### Musical Parameters:

- rhythm (rhythmic and vital energies, types of rhythm)
- timbre (gradations of color, gradations of luminosity and shadow, contrasts vs. uniformity)
- dynamics (variation of sound intensity: ppp *molto pianissimo*; pp *pianissimo*; p *piano*; mp *mezzo-piano*; mf *mezzo-forte*; f *forte*; ff *fortissimo*; fff *molto fortissimo*)
- progressions (harmonic, melodic)
- articulation (legato, staccato)
- surprise effects (which causes them)
- texture (musical planes, rarefaction vs. density, repetition, fragmentation, continuity vs. discontinuity, silences)
- characteristics of the musical phrase (propulsion and / or retraction of the musical phrase; direction, fragmentation, fluency, accents)

#### Zambrano's taxonomy of dreams:

##### 1. Atemporality

Atemporality implies the suspension of successive time<sup>15</sup>. In consequence, it is impossible for the subject to act or to exercise free will. In Atemporality questioning is also suspended, which, in consequence, leads to the impossibility for thoughts to appear. Atemporality is, therefore, mainly a receptive state when the dreamer is without thoughts or questions.



### 1.1 Obstacle Dreams

These are dreams where there is a threshold to overcome, but the attempted action always fails. The subject never succeeds because he has no access to conscious time, and lacks the minimum of freedom that would allow him to make decisions. In the absence of astonishment, no questioning occurs and, consequently, there is no revolt against the situation he is living in. According to Zambrano, we can recognize this state of endless suffering in Kafka's *The Castle* or in the Greek tragedies where the hero lives in a tragic inevitability. The subject passively watches what happens to himself.

### 1.2 Inverted Dreams

Inverted dreams present an object that is a mask or a symbol of something else, and they can be of two types:

#### 1.2.1 Desire Dreams

According to Zambrano, desires, although they manifest in the present moment, always originate in a previous time. A desire dream points to events of the past that have not been mentally resolved, like some muffled anxiety or unfulfilled but repressed needs. In dreaming, we can travel far back in time. This allows to address conflicts that stayed behind due to the incapability to deal with them at the moment, and eventually convert them into absolute past. This way, what happened acquires a meaning, that is, we see the articulation of past events within our actual life.

### 1.2.2 Direct Dreams

In this type of dream, the inverted object is a symbol that stimulates the development of the person. What appears in them is the requirement of an action to be carried forward for a purpose that is not fully shown, because it is, in principle, inexhaustible. These dreams, in which a goal-destination appears, propose an action of ethical character; they are liberating dreams that denounce a transformation of the person, which has already occurred or is about to happen.

#### 1.2.2.1 Monoeidetic Dreams

In this type of dream, the inverted object is a symbol that encourages the person's development. The Monoeidetic dream requests an action directed to a purpose which is not totally revealed, as this is in principle an inexhaustible process. The purpose of these dreams is of an ethical kind; they are liberators and point towards a personal transformation already achieved or about to happen. The person is carried in the strong impulse of the dream, like surfing a wave.

#### 1.2.2.2 Obsessions

Monoeidetic dreams are extremely important. In case the person in whom they manifest is not aware of their importance and does not act accordingly in an appropriate time frame, there is a deterioration of the oneiric activity: the neglected Monoeidetic dream turns into Obsession. The person enters a vicious circle between her thoughts, emotions and behaviour.

## 2. Consecutive Time

Consecutive time is the second stage, and comes close to our conventional understanding of time as divisible in past, present and future. It is this kind of time we are mostly aware of, the framework in which human life develops. In this stage we can experience freedom of thought and exercise our free will which enables decision making. It allows for the acknowledgement of a logical sequence of events or the lack of it.

This is the vigil time, the wakefulness time by definition which, according to Zambrano, is only possible due to the existence of a void, a pore in the time line. It is opposed to the Atemporality stage where images appear and disappear in non-stopping pace. It is this pore, this instant void,

that allows the perception that something is happening or something has happened to me.

### 2.1 External Sensorial Event

These are dreams that convert a present exterior sensation into an instantaneous dream experience.

### 2.2 Lucid dreaming

Lucid dreams are those when the subject knows that he is dreaming and may even alter the dream's story by his own will.

## 3. Spiral Time

Spiral Time is defined by Zambrano as indefinitely open but centered and integrated. The spiral movement allows the person to realize herself as a being in constant transcendence and simultaneous integration. Time, without disappearing, has been transcended by this unity in which "the beginning is informed by the end"<sup>16</sup>. We can experience this third state in privileged moments where there is a match between the person and her life. The person acts in unisonous with herself and produces a true action. The spiral time can manifest in three ways: vocation, creativity and predictive dreams.

### 3.1 Vocation

In the case of experiencing vocation it is as if the person had been informed of her fulfillment, if she were to take a certain course of action. It is a call that comes with an assurance. The person breathes calmly, resting in the confidence of working towards her realization. It is an experience of unity, wholeness, as if she had already closed the circle of life; the person feels complete in her being. Zambrano uses the expression "Perfect Present"<sup>17</sup> to define the temporal experience that we live in during this stage of spiral time: the person communicates fully with herself and the world and intuitively receives confirmation that her course of action is correct. Normally, vocation is experienced while being awake. However, we should keep in mind that, for Zambrano, what counts is the kind of timeframe experienced, independently from being awake or dreaming.

### 3.2 Creativity

When we transfer this state of knowledge to the sphere of artistic creation, the artist knows already the completion of the work that is yet to be created; it inspires him. This insight of the work of art dictates from the future its own unfolding as an art object. This paradox is exactly how we can understand the phenomenon of inspiration in Zambrano's aesthetics. The access to a future time is the mediator between the author and his creation. This channel now open is the inspiration that allows the artist-creator to 'give birth' to the work of art. They are in perfect harmony, in a way somehow mysterious the work of art only about to emerge knows already how to graciously evolve.

### 3.3 Predictive Dreams

Dreams can also have a predictive character, in the sense that a dream may correctly anticipate future events or action. The predictive power of the dream sometimes proves to be more accurate than conscious conjectures. In Zambrano's theory this is possible due to the spiral time in which the subject 'travels' to a future time and returns with information to the present.

For this paper I selected two interpretations of *O Sonho dos Outros* (*The Dream of the Others*) of the Bernardo Sassetti, the first for piano solo and the second for three pianos. There was no sheet music, the two interpretations were auditorially analyzed. The criteria cross-referenced the enunciated musical parameters with Zambrano's dream taxonomy described above. Musicians were instructed not to restrain the emotions or images aroused by music. Each piece was taken as a dream. In this sense, it is the predominant sensation that determines the classification, although one can find within a work moments that would subsume in another category. The musical piece is considered as a whole, as one dream.

In *The Dream of the Others*, for piano solo composed and interpreted by Sassetti himself<sup>18</sup>, the music presents a ternary structure with the regular rhythm of a waltz. A dormant waltz; certainly a sad waltz. However, it is a sweet sadness. There is something like an acceptance of what saddens, almost a surrender to it, in a word: melancholy. The melody in the right hand induces instability, always accentuated in the weak time. The accompaniment remains stable. Its slow and steady presence conveys a feeling of obstacle. The repetitive nature of the melodic and rhythmic

design in both the left and the right hand also contributes to this sense of obstacle, of a dead end. It is the repetition of a downward melody of ascending pairs of notes without dynamic contrasts or timbre, only slight changes in harmony, as something that could continue to repeat itself forever. You cannot escape or find a way out. There is an uneasiness never solved, despair without resolution. All this indicates the Obstacle Dream.

In *The Dream of the Others* for three pianos<sup>19</sup> we find three distinct musical layers, each one played in its piano. Each of these layers is well differentiated by its articulation, sonority and configuration. These variations bring relief to the oppressive character of the piece for piano solo, introducing more creativity. The rhythm of the melody is more rigid than in the previous version but the solo of Mário Laginha introduces a freer structure: more variety, its less confined. It suggests something of hope, a possibility for change. The melody develops progressively and continues despite the repetitive cycle, but there is a push forward by varying the energy and time, speeding up and slowing down, although the repetition of the left-hand chords gives a temporal regularity. The hands of the pianists run smoothly over the piano keys looking for something, but without anguish. At the end the piece returns to the initial regularity, but now punctuated by unexpected chords, which do not destroy the fluidity or the colour. On the contrary, they make it more positive than the interpretation for piano solo. Later, a new colour appears with the opening of a new structure. This allows a dialogue that transforms the melody: it dilutes, accelerates, and, at the end returns to its essential character of instability. It is especially important to emphasize the moment when the melody undergoes this transformation. Following the succession of various chords, the melody no longer appears as the dominant voice, but timidly goes to the sidelines, giving way to the third layer of improvisation. It is in this moment of counterpoint that it will suffer the transformation that will provide the fluidity that then is displayed. The piece steps back to resume the harder attack characteristic of the first layer. This 'step back' – the return to a distant past that is reluctant to solve and finally convert to an absolute past – is the main feature of the Orexis Dream. The ending in ascending form contributes to the sensation of hope, and the final chord is played in a more affirmative way, conveying a certain pacification to the rest of the work.

## Conclusions

This study was not intended to exhaust the appreciation of a work, which is an impossible task by nature. The artistic objects have a life of their own and provide infinite possibilities of access. The goal was much more modest: to introduce the taxonomy of dreams by María Zambrano as a conceptual resource for the description of the virtual time of music. The aim was to get to a more holistic encounter with a composition and use this technique as a complement to traditional musical analysis. By privileging sound, this technique allows for the reception of works whose notation is non-existent, such as jazz performance. It can also be developed as a complement to formal musical analysis, welcoming the alchemical components of sound, which are relegated to the background when the analysis is restricted to the score.

Zambrano's taxonomy of dreams, when combined with a selection of musical parameters that can be recognized by anyone without the need for specific musical knowledge, can also be very beneficial for the music lovers to deepen their hearing. There are auditory qualities, minutiae of attention and aesthetic appreciation, which can be developed even without the formal teaching of music. On the other hand, the musicians who participated in this project shared that naming experienced virtual temporalities contributed to their awareness of time, not only as musicians, improving their practice, but in ordinary life as well. They acquired a vocabulary to refer to time experiences that music has the power to exemplify, and the attentive ear the ability to identify. This outcome of the research carried out was considered beneficial not only for their musical profession but for their quotidian life experience. In any case, what was intended to be explored here was the possibility of speaking about the sonority of music, the alchemy of sound that is offered to us in its temporal virtuality.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> "With regard to phenomena in general, we cannot think away time from them, and represent them to ourselves as out of and unconnected with time, but we can quite well represent to ourselves time void of phenomena. Time is therefore given *a priori*. In it alone is all reality of phenomena possible. These may all be annihilated in thought, but time itself, as the universal condition of their



possibility, cannot be so annulled.” Kant, *Crítica da Razão Pura*, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisboa 1989, pp. 70–71. Translation from the author of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Susanne Langer, *Problems of Art*, New York, NY 1957, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> “Composers, more often than not, rely upon qualitative rather than quantitative directives to inform performers of intended tempo. And if the vagaries of such terms as *Adagietto* (somewhat slow), or *Lentissimo* (slower than slow) are not ambiguous enough, terms such as *Allegro ma non troppo* (fast, but not too fast), or terms that connote speed through emotion such as *Allegro appassionato*, *Bravura*, or *Agitato*, or terms that confuse complexity with speed, such as *Tempo semplice*, oblige the performer to imagine temporality from the composer’s perspective through guesswork. My favorite temporal marking is the term *Tempo rubato*, literally ‘stolen time,’ in which duration is added to one event at the expense of another. Long after German inventor Johann Maelzel patented the metronome in 1815, composers continued to persistently avoid strict measures of time in their scores, instead relying primarily on adjectival description.” Jonathan Berger (2014), *How Music Hijacks Our Perception of Time* <http://nautil.us/issue/9/time/how-music-hijacks-our-perception-of-time>.

<sup>5</sup> David Burrows, *Time and the Warm Body. A Musical Perspective on the Construction of Time*, Boston, MA 2007, p. ix.

<sup>6</sup> Bernardo Sasseti (1970–2012) was a Portuguese pianist, composer and art photographer. Mainly dedicated to jazz, he also composed numerous film scores. Despite his early death on May 2012, he left a significant work that greatly enriches Portuguese culture. For more information please see: <http://www.casabernardosasseti.com/?lang=en>.

<sup>7</sup> Bernardo Sasseti: “Sobre a música interpretada”, liner notes to *Ascent*, Clean Feed Records, Lisbon 2005.

<sup>8</sup> For a complete study on Zambrano’s phenomenology of dreams with case studies, see Maria-João Neves ‘Phenomenology of Dreams in Philosophical Practice’, *Journal of the American Philosophical Practitioners Association* 9/3 (2014), pp. 1475–1486.

<sup>9</sup> Susanne Langer, *Feeling and Form*, New York, NY 1953, pp. 112–113.

<sup>10</sup> Sasseti, *Ascent* (note 7).

<sup>11</sup> Eduard Hanslick, *Do Belo Musical*, Lisboa, Edições 70, 2002, p. 42.

<sup>12</sup> Langer, *Feeling and Form* (note 9), p. 114.

- <sup>13</sup> The post-doctoral research was funded by the Portuguese Foundation of Science and Technology (FCT). The first set of results was presented with the paper “The Depth of Dreams in Music and Philosophical Practice” at the 32nd Annual Conference of the International Association for the Study of Dreams, June 5–9, 2015, Virginia, USA.
- <sup>14</sup> David Burrows, *Time, Speech and Music*, Massachusetts, MA 1990, p. 36.
- <sup>15</sup> María Zambrano, *Los Sueños y el Tiempo*, Madrid 1992, p. 6.
- <sup>16</sup> María Zambrano, *El Sueño Creador*, Madrid 1986.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 72.
- <sup>18</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gFBTYcdw6k> (Date of Publication: 05/06/2012).
- <sup>19</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLSPFO4Imvw> (Date of Publication: 27/03/2008).

## ABSTRACT

This essay focuses on the virtual time of music. According to both Susanne Langer and David Burrows, music symbolizes human temporality, and constitutes an access to this complex sphere that we constantly approach in a reductive way by taking into account only the time of the clock. Langer becomes aware of the problem of the ineffable nature of human temporality that music does not solve, but rather shows. In my post-doctoral research, I have introduced the taxonomy of dreams by María Zambrano as a conceptual resource for the description of the virtual time of music. The goal was to get to a more holistic encounter with a composition and use this technique complementary to traditional musical analysis. The essay gives an example of this new approach by offering a music analysis of the piece *The Dream of the Others* by the Portuguese composer Bernardo Sassetti.

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Hanslick's *Vom musikalisch-Schönen* (2003). Tsetsos wrote entries on Greek composers for *MGG*, including the one on Nikos Skalkottas. He is founding member of the Greek Musicological Society and scientific committee member of the journals *Mousikologia* and *Axiologika*. Recent research focuses, *i.a.*, on aesthetic axiology and Plessner's philosophical anthropology as related to music.

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## STUDIEN ZUR WERTUNGSFORSCHUNG

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Aesthetic criteria in music are seldom the topic of interdisciplinary investigations. Even more unusual, perhaps, is an institute devoted to such research. The Graz Institute aims at joining careful musical analysis with the study of aesthetic, social, and psychological factors entering musical evaluation. Besides documenting current debates among European musicologists, the Institute's *Studien* are perhaps most instructive in posing philosophical problems by way of case studies. In the volumes under review, for example, several general issues have been raised: the relationships between large frameworks and detailed analyses, between musicology or music criticism and sociology or social criticism, between music institutions and other social factors, and among political commitment, musical practice, aesthetic programs, musicological theories, and music's social functions. Stated abstractly, such relationships might appear uninteresting or intractable. Highlighted by appropriate case studies, however, they become intriguing.

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