

# **Frames of Reference:**

## **Three Late-Modernist Case Studies in Music Composed after Painting**

**Julian Jay Green**

**Submitted for the Degree of PhD, Cardiff University  
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## Abstract

Music composed ‘after’ painting has featured prominently in the repertoire of Western art music, yet it has received little scholarly attention as an aesthetic phenomenon.

Despite certain commonalities with programme music on the one hand and forms of musical multimedia on the other, music after painting (MaP) differs crucially from these manifestations, in that the non-musical component – the painting – is conspicuous by its absence, hence its more usual treatment as a feature incidental to the music, a mere citational allusion. But what happens when the painting is treated as integral to the aesthetic experience? In what ways can music reach towards this other experiential domain, and how might the seeming incommensurability of music and painting – as ‘temporal’ and ‘spatial’ media – be transcended?

Drawing on, among other sources, the philosophy of Adorno, the phenomenology of Husserl and Clifton, the literary theory of Iser and recent theories of metaphor (Scruton and Guck), this thesis argues that the experience of music is never phenomenally ‘self-present’, that it is always supplemented by an element of ‘ideation’ (Iser), the evocation of non-existent or absent objects. Moreover, theories of multi-sensory perception challenge the idea of a musical experience that is purely auditory, demonstrating, rather, its susceptibility to a crossed modality in which one domain of experience either invokes or proves to be dependent on the memory or excitement of another. A dynamic response theory is therefore put forward to account for the painting as a frame of reference which directs, selects and contextualises this embodied experience. These possibilities of cross-domain mapping are then explored in three case studies – Morton Feldman’s *Rothko Chapel* (1971); Henri Dutilleux’s *Timbre, Espace, Mouvement: ou La nuit étoilée* (1978) and Tan Dun’s *Death and Fire: Dialogue with Paul Klee* (1992) – each of which highlights a different aspect of the music-painting conjunction while suggesting reasons for the resilience of MaP within aesthetic modernism.

## INTRODUCTION

Music composed ‘after’ painting (henceforth, music after painting or ‘MaP’) is a familiar notion in Western art music, yet despite its ubiquity it has rarely received attention as regards its aesthetic significance. Few have examined the precise role that an association with a painting plays in the reception of a musical work. Accordingly, this thesis sets out to ask a number of questions. At what level does the association with a painting come into effect, and are all modalities of such association valid? Is the painting merely a contingent aspect of the work’s reception, forming the ‘context’ within which the artistic ‘message’ proper (the music) is transmitted, or is the painting, or an imaginative recreation of it, integral to that message and an equally valid and essential part of the aesthetic experience? Might the music be seen as translating the message or materials of the painting, or might the two artistic media converge at some further, ideational level? Last, but by no means least, do the mechanisms of musical representation in MaP resemble other types of musical representation, such as programme music, or might there be a kind of MaP that does not involve ‘representation’ at all?

The tradition of pairing music with another medium is one that has a long and well-established history. Examples of such combinations range from music with a verbal text, such as song, to music with an integral visual and dramatic content, such as opera, music video or film. In addition, these art forms assume that their discrete, or at least theoretically separable, media are presented together, simultaneously. Hence, the interaction or cooperation of both media – the ‘seen’ and the ‘heard’ dimensions – is assumed and expected. This leads to an aesthetic experience created by and emergent from both. A large body of musicological research exists concerning

the synergetic effects of composing and presenting music alongside other media. For example, Nicholas Cook has written extensively on the subject of what he calls ‘musical multimedia’, discussing how the convergence of the visual and the musical (such as in film and television) produces a new or emergent meaning which goes beyond the additive meaning of either, by allowing for a fusion of elements between the two.<sup>1</sup>

However, what tends to distinguish MaP from the various forms of musical multimedia is the physical absence of the non-musical element – the painting. Therefore we must ask what effect this has, whether for the listener entirely unfamiliar with the painting, for the listener already familiar with the painting, for the listener who seeks out the painting having first heard the music, and for any such listener who subsequently revisits the music in light of that new acquaintance. Evidently, for the first category of listener (the listener unfamiliar with the painting) there is no imaginative engagement with the painting other than the metaphorical associations and imagery of any reference to it in the music’s title – whether that title is the actual title of the painting or not. It is only in the other three instances that the painting itself comes into play as an aesthetic stimulus, and accordingly our focus here will be on those instances when the painting is within the listener’s purview, even while that scope is one that involves their memory and imagination.

Despite a large and significant body of musical works that claim to have been composed after paintings, there has been a dearth of research dealing with this genre compared to that of programme music in general. Musical aesthetics has tended to subsume the phenomenon within broader discussions of musical representation and musical meaning, and it has rarely separated MaP from the field of programme music

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<sup>1</sup> See *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

itself. For this reason, the inquiry here sets out to discover if MaP has a unique status in the field of musical experience compared to, say, that of programme music with a literary source.

To situate our topic, it will be useful to chart a rough historical survey of the phenomenon of MaP.<sup>2</sup> The first important example is probably Franz Liszt's symphonic poem *Hunnenschlacht* ('Battle of the Huns', 1857), after Wilhelm von Kaulbach's painting *Die Hunnenschlacht* (ca. 1850). In his preface to the score, Liszt explains how he aimed to transfer to music Kaulbach's 'impression of two supernatural and contrasting lights', representing the pagans and Christians 'by means of two motives'.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, his performance instructions assign certain musical episodes narrative duties. Thus we find the *Crux fidelis* melody (marked *dolce religioso*) used to represent the Christians, and a battle cry ('Schlachtruf') representing the Huns. The ultimate victory over the Huns, and hence over barbarism, is highlighted by the addition of the organ, which, with its associations of religious ceremonial, resounds throughout the triumphant conclusion of the piece.<sup>4</sup>

Less than two decades later came perhaps the most famous example of the genre in Modest Musorgsky's *Kartinki s vystavki* ('Pictures from an Exhibition', 1874), composed after architectural drawings, stage designs and watercolours presented at the memorial exhibition of his friend Viktor Hartmann. Moving into the twentieth century, we find another notable example in Sergei Rachmaninoff's *Ostrov myortvikh* ('The Isle of the Dead', 1909), after Arnold Böcklin's painting of the same name. And, four years later in 1913, Max Reger composed one of his *Vier*

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<sup>2</sup> For an exhaustive list of works of music composed after visual art, see Gary Evans, *Music Inspired by Art: a Guide to Recordings* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Franz Liszt, *Hunnenschlacht*, in *Franz Liszts Musikalische Werke*, 1/1: *Die Ideale, Hunnenschlacht* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, c1908; repr. Farnborough: Gregg Press, 1966).

<sup>4</sup> See Michael Saffle, 'Orchestral Works', in *The Liszt Companion*, ed. Ben Arnold (London: Greenwood Press, 2002), 259–60.

*Tondichtungen nach Arnold Böcklin* ('Four Tone Poems after Arnold Böcklin') after this same painting.

Although Claude Debussy did not compose any of his music directly after any one particular painting, his *Nocturnes* took their title from J. M. Whistler's *Nocturne* paintings from the 1870s, themselves probably named after Chopin's *Nocturnes* for solo piano.<sup>5</sup> A few years later, in correspondence with the Spanish pianist Ricardo Viñes, Debussy wrote that the piano pieces *Masques* (1904) and *L'isle joyeuse* (1904) were influenced by paintings of J. M. W. Turner that he had seen in London in 1903.<sup>6</sup> While the composer's most explicit reference to a painting concerns the orchestral score for *La mer* (1903–5), which was adorned with a reproduction of Katsushika Hokusai's *Kanagawa oki nami ura* ('The Great Wave of Kanagawa', 1831–33), it was never claimed, by the composer or anyone else, that the woodcut print had provided any kind of formative stimulus for the work.<sup>7</sup>

We may nonetheless mark the period of *La mer*'s composition as a turning point towards the modernist period, during which programme music proper fell into a sharp decline. The period immediately after *La mer*'s composition saw the development of modernist impulses which tended to resist overt programmatic references in instrumental music. Gustav Mahler famously removed programmatic titles from his early symphonies, and Arnold Schoenberg originally left out the movement titles to his *Fünf Orchesterstücke* (1909), only adding them later at the request of his publisher.

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<sup>5</sup> Ronald Anderson and Anne Koval write that it was the patron and Liverpool ship owner F. R. Leyland who gave Whistler the title 'Nocturne', and that Leyland was an amateur pianist and great admirer of Chopin. See *James McNeill Whistler: Beyond the Myth* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1995), 168.

<sup>6</sup> See François Lesure, 'Claude Debussy' *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy <<http://www.grovemusic.com>> [accessed 24 October 2007].

<sup>7</sup> See Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, vol. 2: 1902–18 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) for a discussion of the influence of painting on Debussy's music.

Yet, through modernism and into high modernism, MaP has continued to flourish. In 1935 Paul Hindemith's completed his *Mathis der Maler* Symphony, an offshoot from his opera based on the painter Matthias Grünewald, whose 'Isenheim Altarpiece' triptych provided the stimulus for each of the three movements. Bohuslav Martinů completed *Les fresques de Piero della Francesca* in 1953, after the painter's frescos in San Francesco, Arezzo. And in 1958 György Ligeti composed his electronic *Artikulation*, citing, amongst other influences, works by Joan Miró. Harrison Birtwistle's *Carmen Arcadiae Mechanicae Perpetuum* (1977) was composed, but not titled, after Paul Klee's *Die Zwitschermaschine* ('The Twittering Machine', 1922); the third movement of Peter Maxwell Davies's *Five Klee Pictures* (1960, rev. 1976) is also composed after this painting. More recently, the British composer Mark-Anthony Turnage (1960– ) composed *Three Screaming Popes* (1989) and *Blood on the Floor* (1996) after paintings by Francis Bacon, and *Dispelling the Fears* (1995), after an abstract painting by Heather Betts.

The case studies selected in this dissertation are: Morton Feldman's *Rothko Chapel* (1971), Henri Dutilleux's *Timbre, Espace, Mouvement: ou La nuit étoilée* (1978), and Tan Dun's *Death and Fire: Dialogue with Paul Klee* (1992). Dutilleux's work refers to a single painting by Vincent van Gogh, Feldman's invokes a single set of paintings by Mark Rothko, and Tan's work selects seven paintings by Paul Klee as cited references. Stylistically, each of the musical works chosen here embodies modernistic traits, such as atonality and a focus on the sonorous, timbral aspects of their sound.

The rationale for these particular examples is twofold. Firstly, each of the paintings concerned lacks an explicit narrative, whether overtly depicted in the painting or invoked by it according to historical or epic tradition, such as is patently

the case in *Hunnenschlacht*, for example. This is significant because many examples of MaP from the Romantic period involve paintings that themselves portray a story of some kind. Liszt's symphonic poem, it could be argued, depicts programmatically the event also referred to by the painting, making the medium in which Liszt encountered his subject of lesser aesthetic relevance. The examples here are therefore chosen not only for their distance from the notion of programme music, but also because they reflect instances where the medium of paint itself was of evident interest to the composer. This is not to say that these case studies lack the potential for narrativity altogether, only that no such overt narrative has been intentionally provided.

So, by choosing musical works composed after paintings without an explicit narrative of their own, we are perhaps better able to explore the effect of the painting *itself* upon the aesthetic response of the listener than if there were a specific narrative implied in the immediate space of the painting. We are thus able to focus on the overt content of the painting rather than any reconstructed narrative. The crucial point here is to make a distinction between MaP on the one hand and programme music that takes its cue from a visual stimulus on the other. The former relies on the listener's own mediations from the visual field of reference, whereas in the latter, the listener's interpretation is tied essentially to the ideas conveyed by a literary field of reference, which lies behind both a musical and a visual representation.

Although some of our case studies include paintings that may be classed as representational, much of their import lies in their physical and material constructions, which encourage the listener to concentrate on the medium itself rather than the subject matter. Accordingly, through the thickly-daubed swirls of paint in Van Gogh's *La nuit étoilée* (1889) we see a painting that seems to express emotional experience rather than just concrete subject matter and the effects of light. The seven paintings by

the Swiss artist Paul Klee after which Tan Dun's work is composed were in the vanguard of modernism through their exploration of colour and movement.

Meanwhile, Feldman's *Rothko Chapel* (1971) is based on a set of abstract paintings housed in an ecumenical chapel in Houston, Texas, by the abstract expressionist Mark Rothko, whose non-representational colour fields engage the observer's interest in their construction, textures and hue.

These examples of painting are notable for drawing the viewer's attention towards their surface structures more than to the subject matter itself or, referentially, to objects which lie outside the space of the painting. And clearly, the focus on the medium itself and self-referentiality are central themes of modernism. Nevertheless, we have to ask how MaP sits within the modernist aesthetic. The art critic Clement Greenberg wrote that, for modernism, '[t]he task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art'.<sup>8</sup> If this music is reaching out towards the medium of the painting, is it, in the Greenbergian sense, disqualifying its status as modernistic? Or do the musical works in these case studies, by drawing heavily upon their own materials and focusing on aspects of the sonic medium itself, such as instrumental timbre, sonic signals, and melodic gestures, fulfil in this way at least part of the modernist agenda? Furthermore, although there may be coincidences between the painting and the music, and the composers have obviously stated their intent with regard to how the painting might guide the listener's perception, these coincidences and ways of hearing are not necessarily at odds with the tenets of modernism. For one of the ways the music may follow the painting is through pursuing its *own* materials rather than any extra-musical aspirations.

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<sup>8</sup> Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', in *Art in Modern Culture: an Anthology of Critical Texts* ed. Francis Frascina and Jonathan Harris (London: Phaidon, 1992), 309.

Let us now consider some of the ways a painting may be represented musically. This does not promise to be an exhaustive list of such modes of representation but is intended rather to provide a brief overview of the strategies that various composers have used. Imitation or mimesis is often held to be the most explicit form of representation. A painting of a cuckoo, for example, may be musically represented by an instrument mimicking a cuckoo's call: the representation becomes 'isonorous', to borrow Carolyn Abbate's term,<sup>9</sup> or iconic in the Peircean sense. However, in this case, once the music sounds like its object, it collapses into the object which it purports to represent, thus blurring the boundary between the representation and the thing (notionally) represented.

A composer may also resort to what are known as 'musical topics' – recognisable musical formations that have been conventionalised through their historical usage and previous association with particular programmes.<sup>10</sup> Unlike isonorous musical moments, these topics may bear no sounding resemblance to the object with which they are associated. In this way, certain styles of music may come to be associated with particular musical ideas. And while this is a general musical phenomenon, applicable to many areas of musical behaviour, it must still have currency for our subject here. For if a composer wishes to represent a pastoral scene, then there are particular musical styles which have, through association, become conventionalised as pastoral.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, if a military allusion needs to be made, there

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<sup>9</sup> See Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 33.

<sup>10</sup> See Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form and Style* (New York and London: Schirmer Books, 1980); Kofi Agawu, *Playing with Signs: a Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1991); and Raymond Monelle, *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military and Pastoral* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, David Wyn Jones, *Beethoven: Pastoral Symphony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 15; and Robert S. Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 80–98.

is a large repertoire of historical formulations on which to draw – the use of a marching rhythm, for example.

Clearly, the above devices are established through historical usage and their attendant associations rather than any intrinsic or necessary relationship between the music and the extra-musical idea or object. Another method at the disposal of the composer, though not involving ‘isosonorous’ resemblance, nonetheless retains an element of iconicity: instead of mimicking the sound of an object, this type of representation mimics its physical or gestural qualities by exploiting the sonorous possibilities of the musical medium itself. Hence the musical sounds themselves may represent a non-sounding object – a line, a curve or, to take a piece of vocabulary common to music and visual art, an arabesque.<sup>12</sup> And, significantly, because of its focus on aspects of process and material, this is a method which lends itself admirably to works composed after non-representational paintings or paintings with no discernible subject matter. If, for example, a composer wishes to represent something about the facture of an artwork whose paint has been applied roughly in a dark hue, then they may decide to use an instrument played in a very low register, with performance directions suggesting a sonority that can be metaphorized as texture. A cello, for example, played in its lowest register is generally perceived as having a thicker and darker texture than if played at the higher end of its range. Similarly, a direction to apply force and pressure to the bowing may produce a textural quality that appears to match sonically the visual and tactile qualities of a roughly painted surface. And, clearly, there is a vast range of other timbral effects at the composer’s disposal which might serve to represent other surface aspects of a painting.

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Gurminder Kaur Bhogal’s fascinating essay, ‘Debussy’s Arabesque and Ravel’s *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912)’, *Twentieth-Century Music* 3/2 (2007), 171–99.

One further method concerns the positing of a musical narrative.<sup>13</sup> But this involves less a story with characters, perhaps, than a temporal trajectory – a trajectory that reflects a personal apprehension of the painting, incorporating the idea of musical topics and the use of timbral and instrumental effects to suggest some kind of narrative. In the Dutilleux case study, for example, the composer alternates relatively static sections of music with whirlwind-like episodes, symbolising, perhaps, his affective experience of viewing Van Gogh's *La nuit étoilée*, his gaze moving from the more static sections of the painting to the turbulent rendering of the stars. This also raises the problem of time in music: how does the composer prolong in sound the immediacy of the painting's visual impact and the relatively stable aspects, say, of colour or a particular subject matter? We will see in the Feldman and Dutilleux case studies that the composers sustain and re-circulate pitch material to approximate, sonically, the visual effects of static sections of a painting – static, as implied by the subject matter or through the invariant use of colour.

The rationale for this thesis emerges from the conviction that any intended association with the painting, whether it is made by the composer or the listener, has an aesthetic function. In other words, the researcher must start from the premise that the deliberate alliance created by naming a composition after a painting conveys a statement of intent for that work's reception to be guided in some way by the painting, rather than a mere casual or passing reference or, worse yet, an opportunistic attempt by a composer to accrue cultural capital by aligning their music with prestigious examples of visual art. It is undoubtedly tempting for a composer to attempt to heighten a listener's interest in and attentiveness towards their music by drawing associations with painters of stature. But, equally, it might reflect a genuine desire to

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<sup>13</sup> For a thorough exploration of musical narrative see Anthony Newcomb, 'Once More "Between Absolute and Program Music": Schumann's Second Symphony', *19th-Century Music*, 7/3 (1984), 233–50.

communicate with listeners by means of examples of work with which they are more likely to be familiar.

Accordingly, it will be necessary to qualify what we mean by our use of the word ‘after’ here. And by explicating the application of this preposition we alight upon one of the essential theoretical foundations of this dissertation. On the face of it, ‘music after painting’ suggests that the genesis of the musical work followed the composer’s encounter with the painting. This assumes that the composer set about his or her musical work with the painting firmly in their sights. But, of course, this rarely involves the literal presence of the artwork: in almost all case, the composer writes music from an impression or memory of a painting, from a reproduction, physical (in a book or on a postcard) or virtual (on the internet or on television). So the ‘presence’ of the painting during the creative process cannot in any way determine the validity of the ‘music after the painting’ designation.

Music ‘after’ painting also implies a chronological order of precedence. But what if, for instance, the composer was searching around for an enticing name for their finished composition and alighted upon the title of a particular painting *ex post facto*? If the encounter with the painting did not precede the musical composition, is this still a form of ‘after’? ‘Music after painting’ seems to presuppose the artwork’s bearing on the work’s compositional beginnings, its process and progress. That this may not always be the case appears to present our prepositive use of ‘after’ with a problem. If the association was a mere afterthought, and neither the title nor the painting itself was instrumental in the work’s creation, can the painting still be said to be aesthetically relevant to our listening experience?

The thesis put forward here is that the composer’s intent, whether expressed through the act of titling or not, is sufficient for the painting to form part of an

aesthetic consideration of that work, irrespective of its priority vis-à-vis the composition. In this way, we may retain the phrase ‘music after painting’, for the proposition is that whatever helps create a particular aesthetic experience is in some way part of it. Hence, if the painting affects how we hear the musical object then accordingly it may be considered ‘after’ the painting, as we are cognizing it in *that* particular way – the music still has a viable relationship to the painting. Further still, perhaps we do not even need the composer’s intention for there to be an aesthetic effect from an association with a painting or visual scene. For example, Beethoven’s ‘Moonlight’ Sonata was not so named by the composer, but it is hard to imagine listening to it without drawing somehow on the imagery associated with its now common subtitle.<sup>14</sup>

The reason the painting is deemed to be aesthetically relevant regardless of the chronology of its intervention in the creative process – before, during or after composition – emanates from the idea that there is a response to the musical object conditioned by our expectation, projection and imagination. Thus the representation becomes about what the listener *wants* to hear rather than the mere sounds themselves. But let us be careful, for this seems to suggest that any piece of music may be *heard* as anything – a kind of aural carte blanche. Such an idea would lead us quickly to a full stop, for the case would be solved: music can mean anything we want it to mean. However, the theory expounded here posits the view that although musical meaning is reified at the point of the listener, it must occur in conjunction with the musical object itself.

What is important, though, is *how* this object sounds to the listener, not the nature of the sounds *in themselves*. In other words, if the music is to provide us with a

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<sup>14</sup> The nickname owes its provenance to a review by the poet Heinrich Reissner who commented that the first movement reminded him of moonlight on Lake Lucerne. See *The New Oxford Companion to Music*, s.v. ‘Moonlight’ Sonata’.

sense of existing ‘after’ a painting, the importance must rest in our phenomenological encounter with the musical work, what it is like in the ear of the listener, rather than on the page of the musical score. Accordingly, what follows in Part I is a theory of aesthetic response to MaP, but also one grounded in a phenomenological encounter. There is obviously no questioning the fact that we *listen* to music, that we perceive its sound aurally, and that it must stimulate us in certain ways – even if some of those ways might range between dire boredom and consumed intoxication – but we also respond to the music *aesthetically*.

In order to explicate this position further, and to demonstrate how easy it has been for previous criticism to fall into the trap of positing a straightforward linear relationship between music and painting, it may be useful to consider the phenomenon in terms of a classic schema of communication:

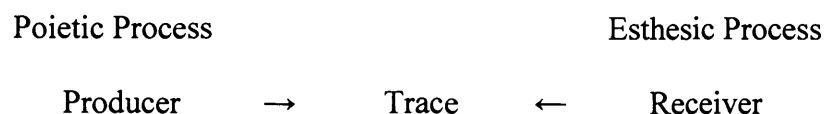
Producer → Message → Receiver

The notion that the producer (the composer in our case) creates a message (the music) received by the listener suggests something unadulterated and also something passive: that is, we hear the message intended by the producer. This simple schema belies the fact that meaning, especially in the case of MaP, is the result of a complex interaction between music, painting and listener. Accordingly, the musical semiotician Jean-Jacques Nattiez explains that it is possible for the listener to assign multiple meanings to the message. The meaning of a text ‘is not a producer’s transmission of some message that can be subsequently decoded by a “receiver.”’<sup>15</sup> Instead, meaning is a construction assigned jointly by the producer and the receiver. After Jean Molino,

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<sup>15</sup> Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Towards a Semiology of Music*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 11.

Nattiez proposes a schema to represent this three-dimensional communication process, one that involves an ‘interpretant’ (the poietic concerns the production and the esthetic the reception of a work):



The consequences of this schema of symbolic functioning are that the esthetic and poietic processes ‘do not necessarily correspond’.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the composer may not always leave a ‘trace’ of his intention in the musical form, and the listener ‘will project configurations upon the work that do not always coincide with the poietic process’.<sup>17</sup> The trace, Nattiez explains, is a ‘*material trace*, not in itself the bearer of an immediately decipherable meaning, but without which meaning(s) could not exist: a trace that we can analyze’. In this way, it is a neutral level which emanates from the poietic process and which forms the foundation of any meaning ascribed to it. Thus, we may think of this level as the ‘material reality of the work (its live production, its score, its printed text, etc.)’.<sup>18</sup>

This important contribution to semiotics presents immediate benefits for the clarity of our discussion, since the dialectical relationship posited between the composer and the listener points to the non-linearity of communication flow between these agents in the chain: meaning is not there to be received but is projected upon the material trace by the receiver. Accordingly, the meaning that emerges at the end of the communication is not necessarily the same as that intended by the composer at the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 16–17.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 15 (*italics original*).

beginning of the chain. In other words, the notion that meaning, any meaning, is transmitted *intact* from music to listener must be a fallacy.

If we take the present subject of MaP and suggest a further diagram, we will see more clearly that meaning results from a creative process which reconstitutes or reconstructs the original message from the musical object and the painting. If we simply substitute musical terms in place of the terms in the diagram above, already we are able to see the limitations of Nattiez's model for our subject, for where does the painting fit into this schema?



In accordance with our qualification of the term 'after', the painting does not necessarily have to reside next to the poietic level, but nor does it reside 'neutrally' next to the material trace either, for it is not phenomenally present in the way that the musical object is. This is not to suggest that the painting does not influence the compositional process, the musical trace. Rather it seeks to illustrate that the aesthetic response of the listener, the esthetic process, may be affected, as we have said, regardless of the timing of the painting's intervention before, during or after the creation of the musical work. The perceiver may project meaning equally upon both media and also from one medium to the other in the process of reconstituting the perceived 'message'. Hence, there is a real potential for a disjunction between the poietic and esthetic processes (between the intended meaning and the perceived meaning), and so we may therefore never fully recover, perhaps even partially, the 'original message' of the composer – assuming that such a definitive object ever

existed. The following diagram illustrates this non-linearity between the production of the ‘message’ and its reception:



The term ‘painting’ has here been parenthesized to denote its effective absences at both ends of the communication chain. Any potential mismatch between the intended meaning and the perceived meaning arises because we cannot be apprised of the composer’s experience of the painting, only our own. To indicate that the composer and listener will probably have a different imagining and memory of the painting, its appearances at both the poietic and esthetic ends of the chain are superscripted x and y respectively. Moreover, the poietic *construction* of the painting by the composer does not necessarily correspond with any subsequent musical manifestation. The painting must undergo at least three stages of mediation: that of the composer in their conception, the music in its realisation, and the listener in their interpretation of both the painting and the music. Thus, the only relatively fixed element of this schema is the music, for this element is at least phenomenally available and present, unlike the painting. The unschematized variables are the composer’s response to the painting and the listener’s response to the music and the painting.

The problem with such a diagram, then, is that it fails to account for the levels of sophistication involved in the aesthetic experience of MaP. What it does show, however, is that musical meaning for the listener is somehow parsed through their imaginative reconstruction of the painting, which is unlikely to be anything like the painting that the composer had in their mind while composing. But the point is that

listeners will create meaning when they situate the music in relation to the painting. This is not about converting one medium into the other in a form of transmutation, nor is it about transliterating individual components of the painting into elements of a musical 'language'. It is potentially both less and more than this. For why would the composer wish to say the precise same thing that has already been said in the other medium? The interesting fact must be the frame of reference which the painting provides the listener. Knowledge of the painting, it is argued, will privilege certain musical hearings whilst denying others; that is to say, it will enable the listener to make a particular selection of musical attributes and to hear those in relation to the horizon of the painting.

The responses we make as listeners, therefore, may differ markedly from the original intention or signification. Meaning must now be about the listener's interpretation of the painting as well as the composer's interpretation, and can no longer be *musical* alone. If the composer is in the business of communicating meaning in a manner similar to a writer or painter, we may ask whether communication occurs only when the music written has the same meaning for the person who composes it as it does for the listener who responds to it. But if meaning *is* transmitted – *any* meaning, regardless of the intention behind it – something has still been communicated.

An example given by Leonard B. Meyer will help to clarify this point. If person A observes person B winking, and interprets this as a friendly gesture, it has meaning for person A. But, Meyer writes, 'if the wink was not intentional – if, for instance, B simply has a nervous tic – then no communication has taken place, for to

B the act had no meaning'.<sup>19</sup> Thus the gesture has meaning only for person A (and an erroneous meaning at that); but what of the meaning for person B? It is true that the gesture was not intended as a friendly wink, but the fact that it was received as a friendly gesture means that meaning was communicated whether or not person B intended it. And so it is the same with any work of art, literary, plastic or musical: it is as much about our reception of a work as it is about the producer's original intention.

Meyer's concern seems to be about a lack of connection between the meaning intended by person B and the meaning received by person A – obviously no meaning was intended by person B. But even if there was no intention, there has still been a communication: a meaning has been imparted and understood by at least one part of the communication chain. And, further still, we may take the example of an individual who has been happily mishearing a favourite song lyric for several years only to be dismayed to finally hear or read the correct one. The issue becomes, then, one of importance: does it matter if we misinterpret an encounter with any particular artwork, and is it ever possible to *correctly* interpret an artwork?

It seems, then, that the issue at stake is not one of correctly interpreting MaP, but rather one regarding the creation of meaning: what are the conditions which allow the music to become meaningful? There must always be a certain amount of slippage between the original intention of a message and the message received, for our understanding of concepts must differ at an individual level. However, the interesting aspect concerns the mechanism of imparting this meaning to the receiver (the listener). By invoking the painting in this way, the composer has set up a triadic relationship: meaning does not inhere within the stimulus alone nor in the listener but

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<sup>19</sup> Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 40.

in the complex dialogue that exists between the musical work, the painting to which it refers, and the listener.

One of the important issues under discussion in this thesis concerns whether there exists in MaP the potential for a new kind of aesthetic experience. In other words, does the relationship with the painting create an interaction in the mind of the listener which somehow helps them understand the music? Such a mechanism clearly involves the use of our imagination and memory in the formation and connection of imagery and sounds. If this is the case, the listener potentially draws information from the painting, providing a framework and context in which to hear the music, and thus a new type of aesthetic response emerges that would not be available from the music on its own. That framework is a platform held in the mind of the listener, and amounts to a kind of scene-setting by means of which the listener is primed or sensitised to hear the music within or from a particular perspective.

Accordingly, something about the musical logic of these pieces may depend upon an intermediation of ideas seen in the painting which is then used to direct our musical hearing. The listener is being enjoined at the very least to cognize the subject of the painting, its physical and fictional spaces, and whatever association, connotation and imaging it might give rise to. If we are dealing with an interpretation, this implies some kind of negotiation with the musical object and the painting, and the corollary is that musical meaning is something made and not given. Such a dialogue fully implicates the musical object in affording such meaning in the first place, but it is contingent on what is an extra-musical dimension: the painting. The conditions which set forth this interaction and the way in which the painting comes to affect our understanding and hearing of the music will be the subject of Part I. In Part II, the three case studies will be analysed to explore different aspects of this interaction.

In Part I, MaP will be situated by means of a comparison with programme music in general. The first theme considers the ontological status of music – what music *is* –and to what extent the experience of it is similar to and different from that of painting. To do this, the immediate physical and phenomenological encounter with a musical work will be discussed. The second theme is predicated on there being something more than just a phenomenal encounter with this genre of music. If the relationship with the painting is to affect our aesthetic experience, this implies the transference of concepts from one domain to another. This mechanism will be explored through a discussion of reader-response theory, metaphor, and the notion of ‘hearing / seeing *as*’ through the projection of ideas onto the music. The assertion made is that such meaning cannot be located exclusively in the music nor in the listener but in a negotiation and interaction between the two.

The case studies in Part II are designed to demonstrate that although the meaning of works of MaP may be considered protean, such meaning is not by any means unrestricted and may come in certain contexts to appropriate and communicate certain meanings, whilst denying others. By positing analogical coincidences between the music and the painting, this section will attempt to demonstrate *how* music may become a bearer of meaning. Thus, the various and disparate ways these case studies refer to or represent their respective painting will be examined and discussed in relation to the theorised mechanisms put forward in Part I.

# **Part I: Mechanisms and Models**

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## CHAPTER 1: Situating the Concept

### 1.1 Between Ideation and the Pragmatic

Before embarking on our theoretical and methodological discourse, and in order to demonstrate the need for an exclusive study of MaP, it will be necessary to make a brief examination of the existing literature on this subject. This will be followed by an attempt to situate MaP within the broader fabric of programme music, with which it shares certain similarities while asserting its distinctiveness as a phenomenon in other ways.

There exists an abundance of literature on the subject of musical representation, on whether music is able to represent extra-musical ideas, or to invoke objects, people, and places, and some of this will be discussed later; but given the popularity and enduring nature of MaP, there has been surprisingly little scholarship on it as a distinct phenomenon. On the one hand there are studies that examine how painting has appropriated musical ideas, for example Andrew Kagan's *Paul Klee: Art and Music* and Karin von Maur's *The Sound of Painting: Music in Modern Art*.<sup>1</sup> And on the other hand, there are examinations of influences on music of paintings and painterly ideas. To date, however, there have been only two English-language treatises on the subject of MaP: Edward Lockspeiser's *Music and Painting: a Study in Comparative Ideas from Turner to Schoenberg* and Siglind Bruhn's *Musical Ekphrasis: Composers Responding to Poetry and Painting*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Andrew Kagan, *Paul Klee: Art and Music* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983) and Karin von Maur, *The Sound of Painting: Music in Modern Art* (London: Prestel, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Edward Lockspeiser, *Music and Painting: a Study in Comparative Ideas from Turner to Schoenberg* (London: Cassell, 1973) and Siglind Bruhn, *Musical Ekphrasis: Composers Responding to Poetry and Painting* (Hillsdale, New York: Pendragon Press, 2000).

In his short book, Edward Lockspeiser examines a few individual artists in his quest to posit the interpenetration of ‘comparative ideas’ between different media. In it we find as much emphasis on the discussion of painting’s reliance on music as on music’s reliance on painting. Expressing his unease with what he regarded as the increasing dominance of technical descriptions of music, Lockspeiser adopts a humanistic perspective in the ‘pursuit of an underlying purpose or idea’.<sup>3</sup> This position is exemplified for him by Sir George Grove’s analysis of Beethoven’s ‘Pastoral’ Symphony in 1896 ‘when style was still discussed in terms of poetic imagery’. Here the work is described in terms of repetitions which invoke the monotony and repetitiveness of nature, and Lockspeiser aligns this observation with the ‘accumulated repetition of a sensation’ associated with Impressionism, writing that the ‘repetitive manner in the First and Second Movements of the Pastoral symphony suggests a musical anticipation of this technique’.<sup>4</sup> Seen thus, Beethoven’s music prefigures these Impressionist ideas by some fifty years.

In the second chapter, the author makes a link between the English painter John Martin (1789–1854) and certain works by Berlioz, through the composer’s fascination with and programmatic uses of the catastrophic visions that also featured strongly in Martin’s paintings. Lockspeiser seems intent on establishing general aesthetic links that stem from the exchange of ideas between music and painting in the nineteenth century, discussing what he calls the ‘pictorial basis’<sup>5</sup> in particular works by Mendelssohn, Beethoven, Weber and Berlioz. But what we do not have is a discussion of musical works which invoke a specific painting: hence there is no consideration of problems of representation involved in MaP, perhaps because Lockspeiser is sceptical of such possibilities.

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<sup>3</sup> Lockspeiser, *Music and Painting*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Describing the ‘regions of representation and abstraction’ as ‘indefinable’, he adds that ‘[t]he representational technique belongs to painting but not to music; in fact in music any form of representation is impossible except by illusion or symbolical associations’.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, for Lockspeiser, music cannot be representational without recourse to these symbolic aspects, and by ‘symbol’ he does not mean ‘iconic’ in the Peircean sense, but ‘arbitrary’. This suggests that music conveys some *thing* beyond itself, and this something may be abstracted and taken out of the music itself. By virtue of convention and association, the music becomes representational by standing for something else, and therefore, in his view, the broad manner of ideas exchanged between painting and music is a shared web of ideology which is not specific to any one musical example. Instead he points to systems of value and purpose, and historical, cultural, political and sociological influences which were important to a group of practising artists in a given period, for example the Impressionist movement, which affected a generation of poets, painters, writers and musicians who all shared a common thread of interest in rendering sensations and impressions. Moreover, these impressions were often represented as nebulous and vague. As the author explains, this is one aspect of Impressionism which appealed to the composer Debussy.

Siglind Bruhn’s book is more comprehensive in scope, covering a range of music composed after poetry, literature, stained glass, painting and mixed media. And while Lockspeiser’s analyses posit connections through a comparison of ideas, Bruhn’s generally focus on any such ideation through the explicit connection borne by the musical work’s title. As the title indicates, the work is predicated on what the author calls ‘musical ekphrasis’. Ekphrasis (alternately spelled ecphrasis) is a literary term originally intended to denote poetry and literary works concerned with the visual

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 60.

arts or visual scenes in general; hence Keats's poem 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' would be considered an example of this genre. Here Bruhn generalises the term to mean 'a representation in one medium of a text composed in another medium'.<sup>7</sup>

Wary of describing the process of musical ekphrasis in terms tied up with music-specific meanings (transposition, transformation and transcription), and in terms which allude to either an exact correspondence (translation and transcription) or suggest 'a difference of quality between the former and the latter' (transmutation and transfigurations), Bruhn offers a new term: '*transmedialization*'.<sup>8</sup> However, in her opening introduction, we find a key-agenda paragraph which already suggests the danger of lapsing back into 'translation':

This study attempts to answer the question what it may mean if composers claim to be inspired by a poem or painting, a drama or a sculpture, to such a degree that they set out to transform the essence of this artwork's features and message, including their personal reaction to it, into their own medium: the musical language.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, in this formulation the author sets out to show 'what it may mean' if a composer *transforms* 'the essence of' a visual or literary medium into a musical one. Accordingly, the author's brief is to exemplify how musical works 'transmedialize' one medium into another. But although Bruhn's careful use of 'essence' implies that she is not countenancing the idea that one medium is translatable into another, it does point towards an abstraction from the medium itself, which suggests that the 'essence' of that original artwork is no longer bound up with the medium and may therefore exist somehow outside it. Thus, it seems as if its kernel is extracted and re-presented in the other medium.

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<sup>7</sup> Bruhn, *Musical Ekphrasis: Composers Responding to Poetry and Painting*, 8.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, xix.

This leads Bruhn to reveal relationships between particular pieces of music and their associated paintings as if they are just *there* waiting to be found by a suitably intelligent critic who can ‘translate’ them. For example, in her analysis of Respighi’s *Trittico botticelliano* she identifies certain musical motifs with figures in the Botticelli paintings. She argues, for instance, that in the movement ‘Nascità di Venere’ an unspecified flourish played by the clarinet ‘consisting of a concave curve (a lingering downbeat leading into a swift chromatic descent and re-ascent) followed by a varied sequence [...] is quite obviously intended to create a musical allusion to the breath with which Zephyr, who affects both Venus-centred scenes, blows the new-born goddess to her destiny’.<sup>10</sup> Statements such as this clearly contradict her earlier circumspection regarding a match-for-match likeness between image and sound:

One option of reading, which has a certain plausibility although I do not ultimately find it entirely persuasive, matches “figures” in Respighi’s composition with figures in Botticelli’s canvas. [...] Without wanting to dismiss out of hand the basic validity of such a pairing of musical and visual elements, I would like to argue in favor of a more subtle reading, one that I find more intriguing insofar as it explicitly addresses the question of transmedialization.<sup>11</sup>

This more ‘subtle’ reading consists of a discussion of Respighi’s allusion to spring through his use of material which resembles that of Vivaldi’s own ‘La primavera’ from *Le quattro stagioni*. While Bruhn’s literal reading identifying the clarinet’s flourish with Zephyr’s ‘breath’ and the secondary allusion to spring may at some level be plausible, what is needed is recognition of the self reflexivity and creativeness bound up in these types of conclusions. Nicholas Cook rightly observes that a theory of musical meaning needs to show ‘how music might support, or not

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 237–38.

support, the meanings ascribed to it'.<sup>12</sup> In other words, we need to investigate *how* we come to attach certain readings or interpretations to the music. The problem, therefore, is not in Bruhn's interpretations of the music itself but in not recognising her involvement in how that interpretation was arrived at.

There is obviously a tendency (and also a temptation) for us to naturalise any relationships between the music and the painting by way of a process resembling the familiar children's game 'I spy'. We try to 'fit' aspects of the music to the painting or the painting to the music, searching for viable correspondences when we should really be focusing on the conditions which enable those critical interpretations in the first place. The music may be felt to be significant, just as a bodily gesture might be significant but lacks the ability to signify without recourse to the painting.

Accordingly, our interest will lie in the assumption that this music is actively interpreted and framed in some way by the painting. For example, the selection of attributes that Bruhn makes in the music becomes effective because *she* has assigned them significance. It becomes one way of hearing the music amongst many other possible ways. The interpretation, then, shows us one way that the music can be heard, but only if there is a homology between the interpretation of the painting and the music. In other words, the interpretation has to be a 'good fit' with the painting.

In summary, then, Lockspeiser's book usefully points towards the sharing of ideas between music and painting in a general sense and by adducing hitherto unseen connections between the arts, but he does not address the phenomenon of music explicitly composed after painting. And neither does he seem convinced by the idea of a representational function for music beyond symbolic and certain conventionalised strategies. Bruhn, on the other hand, does focus on these specific musical works but

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<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Cook, 'Theorizing Musical Meaning', *Music Theory Spectrum*, 23/2 (2001), 171.

treats them as if they possess natural correspondences with the painting. It is a hermeneutic exercise, but more needs to be done to recognise how a listener might parse the music in light of the painting.

Musical meaning is a negotiated enterprise involving a delicate interplay between the music and the painting, where meaning is actively interpreted and emergent. Accordingly, the study here proposes to examine the mechanisms involved in the listener's aesthetic response to such works, whilst showing, through the analyses, how certain musical attributes come to support aspects of the painting.

## **1.2 Between the Programmatic and the Absolute**

There is no need to chart the historical lineage of programme music here as this has been attempted several times in the literature already.<sup>13</sup> But it is important to acknowledge both the close relationship MaP shares with this broader category of music as well as its distinctiveness in relation to that category.

The general definition of programme music is music which contains some kind of narrative or descriptive component purporting to 'represent extra-musical concepts without resort to sung words'.<sup>14</sup> It usually incorporates a specific and definite plan or 'programme' of events and a causally-derived narrative structure that is linear in nature and part-literary in its presentation. Not restricted to any one musical style, it has featured extensively in instrumental music, both chamber and orchestral, and gained considerable popularity in the Romantic period, where examples abound, the most obvious being Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* (1830).

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth Century Music*, trans. J. B. Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

<sup>14</sup> For a trenchant summary of programme music and its definition, see Roger Scruton, 'Programme Music', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy <<http://www.grovemusic.com>> [accessed 26 January 2007].

Liszt defined the programme as ‘any preface in intelligible language added to a piece of instrumental music, by means of which the composer intends to guard the listener against a wrong poetical interpretation, and to direct his attention to the poetical idea of the whole or to a particular part of it’.<sup>15</sup> This description points to the idea that musical representation is not inevitable or definite; rather, it needs a rubric set by the composer in some kind of ‘intelligible language’ to aid the listener’s involvement. In other words, our imaginative faculty is required to *hear* the music in a particular way through an interpretive framework.

Programme music includes not only examples with very detailed literary appendages, like the Berlioz example above, but also music that contains descriptive titles, such as those in Claude Debussy’s preludes for piano. However, as Roger Scruton has pointed out, the inclusion of mere titles broadens the term to be ‘so wide as to be virtually meaningless’.<sup>16</sup> Hence he holds that only those works with a narrative or descriptive meaning should be considered programmatic.

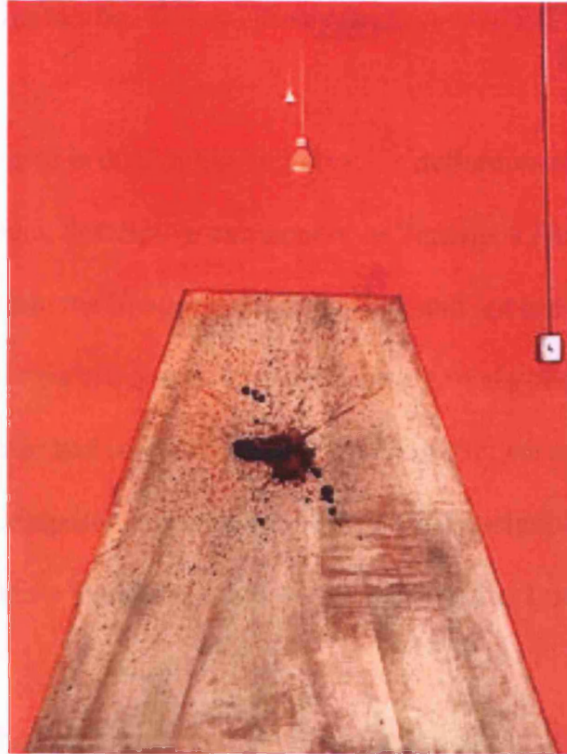
MaP often makes its connection to the painting through the title, so can it therefore be considered a species of programme music? For sure, this music does not fall into Carl Dahlhaus’s definition of absolute music (what he later calls independent instrumental music) as expressing ‘the true nature of music by the very lack of concept, object, and purpose,’<sup>17</sup> for the implication of having the painting in a musical title clearly offers a concept, object and purpose. But does it offer a narrative or descriptive component?

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<sup>15</sup> Cited in *The New Oxford Companion to Music*, s.v. ‘Programme music’.

<sup>16</sup> Scruton, ‘Programme Music’, *Grove Music Online*. In contrast, Frederick Niecks argues that music is programmatic if the composer had a programme in mind whilst composing, whether or not he indicates this through a title or makes it known through some other means. See his *Programme Music in the Last Four Centuries: a Contribution to the History of Musical Expression* (London: Novello, 1906), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. J. B. Robinson (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1989), 7.



**Figure 1.1:** Francis Bacon, *Blood on the Floor* (1986)

There is a relationship here with descriptive titles, such as that of Debussy's piano prelude *Voiles* (1909). Here the title evokes an image or an impression, though not one that is tied to a particular representation, such as a work of art. In some instances of MaP, the title itself is replete with its own imagery and concepts, regardless of the painting that is being referred to. The title of Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Blood on the Floor*, for example, evokes certain ideas and imagery before we even hear a note of the music. The words of the title have both a literal, denotative meaning and a second-order, connotative meaning. Although, the title does not presuppose any particular narrative, it does seem to beg insertion into a larger narrative. Our imaginative faculties might, for example, alight upon a sinister reading, inferring a narrative that embellishes the information provided, such as that of a crime perpetrated. Moreover, such potential is in no way diminished should we be presented

with Francis Bacon's painting (**fig. 1.1**) or already know it – indeed, the effect is probably strengthened.

The point in this case is that, unlike in Scruton's definition of programme music, any narrative or even descriptive component in Turnage's *Blood on the Floor* is one that *we* have read into the imagery of the painting and not one that is literally present. The narrative that we see or read into the painting might of course be the same one that the composer had in mind while composing. But we cannot know if it *is* the same one, for if the composer verbalises this narrative description and disseminates it to the listener then it becomes effectively another form of programme music.

Accordingly, if the narrative is ours, to describe the music as programmatic is spurious, for what and whose narrative is being followed here? Importantly, this qualification is not the same as saying that our experience of the music is not related to the painting in any way, for there may be definite correspondences to make between the two media; however, the job at hand will be to show how music may function within the context of the painting.

Significantly, programme music usually contains or implies a narrative component and one that is often based on an identifiable literary source containing a chain of events related to the progress of the music; and occasionally the narrative is written by the composer, as in Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. Composers may also append epigraphic inscriptions to various points in the score. Franz Liszt, for example, employs this technique in his symphonic poem *Die Ideale* (1857), where he inserts nine poetic fragments from Friedrich Schiller's poem as prefaces to the

musical sections.<sup>18</sup> Similar practices are evident in Beethoven's 'Pastoral' Symphony and Enrique Granados's piano suite *Goyescas*. It is clear, though, that such a programme is only available to the performers or listeners that have access to the score.<sup>19</sup>

As with the reversibility of the implied chronology of music 'after' painting, it is also the case that both composers and critics would sometimes impose a programme upon the music after it had been composed. Richard Strauss, for example, included the poem Alexander Ritter wrote after hearing the symphonic poem *Tod und Verklärung* on the flyleaf of the printed score. The musicologist Arnold Schering, in his controversial book *Beethoven und die Dichtung: mit einer Einleitung zur Geschichte und Aesthetik der Beethovendeutung*, asserts that some thirty-eight works by Beethoven are predicated upon poems by Homer, Goethe, Schiller and Cervantes, and he regards these as programmes that, once discerned, unlock the previously hidden musical logic.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Sir Donald Tovey and Susan McClary have both constructed imaginative programmatic interpretations of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony which, as Nicholas Cook argues, provide a cogent way of hearing the work and its musical relations.<sup>21</sup> However, although these 'programmes' have been imposed retrospectively, from a reception-orientated view it seems unlikely that their import is in any way diminished.

In his book *Nineteenth-Century Music*, Carl Dahlhaus discusses how Mahler used an 'exterior' programme to 'signpost' his listeners' musical understanding. He

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<sup>18</sup> Vera Micznik discusses this point in 'The Absolute Limitations of Programme Music: The Case of Liszt's "Die Ideale"', *Music and Letters*, 80 (1999) 207–40.

<sup>19</sup> Both Granados and Beethoven have adorned their scores with literary descriptions. Beethoven, for example, famously assigns woodwind instruments to the musical depiction of birds at the end of the second movement of his *Pastoral* symphony, and each movement is given a descriptive title.

<sup>20</sup> See Alfred Einstein's review of this book in *Music & Letters*, 18 (1937), 206–11.

<sup>21</sup> See Nicholas Cook, 'Theorizing Musical Meaning', 170–95.

quotes Mahler reflecting on the meaning of the titles proposed for his First and Second Symphonies:

Admittedly, I took my external stimulus from the well-known children's painting [*Des Jägers Leichenbegräbnis*]. What the movement depicts, however, is irrelevant; the point is the mood it is trying to express. So it is at all events advisable at first, while my art still occasions confusion, for the listener to be given a few [programmatic] signposts and milestones on his journey [...] but that is the most this sort of explanation can offer.<sup>22</sup>

This provides an interesting example of what a composer purports to understand by the inclusion of a 'programme', in this case a children's painting. Mahler's explanation – that the function of his programme is not to 'depict' but to signpost the mood of the piece to the listener – leads Dahlhaus to consider this component ephemeral and not part of the music, 'being no more than a scaffolding to be torn down as soon as the edifice it helped to erect is finished'.<sup>23</sup> But surely the programme continues to direct our listening, even as a memory, long after we have read or been apprised of it, thereby still affecting our aesthetic response to the music? Of course, Mahler eventually withdrew his First Symphony's designation 'Titan' and its descriptive movement titles, but from a reception point of view knowledge of the Jean Paul book on which it is based might still affect the listener's aesthetic experience of the work.

Furthermore, Dahlhaus writes that Liszt believed one of the aims of programme music to be to 'mediate between music and a traditional culture that was primarily literary and philosophical. An open mind – naïve, unreflective listening – was just what ought to be extirpated from the musical public'. And secondly, 'it is a

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<sup>22</sup> Gustav Mahler writing to Max Marschalk, cited in Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth Century Music*, 366.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

crude misunderstanding to think that a program is the meaning of a symphonic poem, that the programme could decode the music, as if it were a text in a cipher'. Dahlhaus continues, 'To think that Liszt translated poems into music – that he tried to say in another language the same thing as the original text – is a mistake, but its absurdity never prevented its dissemination.'<sup>24</sup>

It is not, then, mere narration. Indeed, it would seem superfluous to reiterate what already exists in another medium. This is a point overlooked by Siglind Bruhn with her notion, discussed above, of 'transmedializing' one medium into another. Dahlhaus explains that Liszt's 'Faust' Symphony is not about the content of Goethe's *Faust* but merely adapts the principal characters of the play as its subject. 'And a subject is no model to be imitated but rather a sort of material that the composer elaborates.' This subject 'is newly minted by the musical themes and motives. Program music rests on the interdependence of its components [the literary and the musical]'.<sup>25</sup> What Dahlhaus is discussing here is the influence of literary-based constructions upon our aesthetic understanding of a piece of music. This connects with the notion that what is imagined by the listener in MaP is not the original painting, but newly elaborated material based on functional elements of the original.

Programme music rose to prominence in the nineteenth century, an era, as Dahlhaus writes, 'when experience was shaped by reading and when literature on a subject was scarcely less important than the subject itself'.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, criticism has always shared in the production of meaning: 'Consciousness of music is determined, to no small extent, by literature about music [...] Musical experience almost always involves memory-traces from reading. And the meaning accumulated by music in its

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<sup>24</sup> Dahlhaus, *Aesthetics of Music*, trans. William W. Austin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 59.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 60.

secondary, literary mode of existence does not leave untouched its primary mode, the realm of composition.’<sup>27</sup> For Dahlhaus, the effect of literature on the listener’s musical experience re-contextualises and re-composes the musical work; once the work is affected in this way, it is forever changed.

Debates have raged over whether a listener uninformed of the programme of a musical work may have an aesthetically impoverished experience as a result. Roger Scruton has argued that programme music can be understood sufficiently well without its accompanying programme – ‘thoughts about a subject are never essential to the understanding of music’<sup>28</sup> – thus rendering the extra-musical component largely unnecessary. We might ask, therefore, if the mark of ‘good’ programme music is that it survives as a satisfying aesthetic experience away from its programme, or that it does not. Peter Kivy, espousing a somewhat holistic position, writes that ‘*Symphonie fantastique* is a work of art, and its programmatic text is part of that work of art. So, if you are not aware of that part, you are not fully appreciating that work of art. Something in your appreciation is lacking.’ He explains that there are certain gaps, inconsistencies and anomalies in the symphony which are at odds with the tightly organised symphonies of Beethoven and Haydn, and do not make musical sense until you know the programme. Thus, Kivy writes, the ‘program is the major organizing principle of the symphony, as musical as it nevertheless is on its own.’<sup>29</sup> In the view of an autonomist such as Scruton, meanwhile, a piece of programme music may ‘redeem’ itself by functioning convincingly as absolute music.

MaP refers usually (and certainly in the case studies in Part II) to an existing work by a painter. But is it not possible for the painting to be seen as a kind of

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>28</sup> Roger Scruton, ‘Representation in Music’, in *The Aesthetic Understanding* (London: Methuen, 1983), 75. See also his *Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 132–34.

<sup>29</sup> Kivy, *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 196–97.

programme, directing and even prescribing a way of hearing the passage of musical events? If that were to be the case, the shared ground with programme music would have to be conceptual, and, as we have said, any narrative projected onto the painting is only an interpretation which the listener wittingly or unwittingly constructs. Any directing, then, would have to be in terms of an imagined *programme* read into the painting by the listener rather than by any explicit programme given by the composer.

Of course, this is not to say that the painting necessarily evokes a narrative, but at the very least, an informed listener is able to peruse the remembered painting for coincidences that may be applied to a musical hearing. Still further, in both instances (programme music or MaP), there is a title that offers a conceptual framework. And it is, of course, possible for a single word to unleash a large conceptual field. Even the word ‘sails’ in Debussy’s title, *Voiles*, mentioned above, provides access to a large and interconnected set of ideas – breezes, movement, veils, mists, coverings, the texture of canvas and so on.

Whereas MaP is more often than not performed in the absence of the painting, in programme music the programme is often ‘present’ and available to the listener in some form or other. In the case of Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique*, the importance the composer bestowed upon this particular programme is evidenced by the multiple revisions he executed of it and by its provision in pamphlet form at performances. Indeed, Berlioz stated that the ‘distribution of the programme to the audiences at concerts where the symphony is to be performed is indispensable for a complete understanding of the dramatic outline of the work’.<sup>30</sup>

But is this really the case? While Kivy, quoted above, argues that something in his appreciation of the work is lacking without knowledge of the programme, the

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<sup>30</sup> Cited in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 1980, s.v. ‘Programme Music’.

work is clearly appreciated by many listeners who have no knowledge of the programme behind it. Moreover, demands for the distribution of the painting are rare at performances of MaP. It therefore seems reasonable to suggest that MaP functions, and is intended to function, independently of the material presence of the painting or a reproduction thereof. The reference to the painting, titular or otherwise, points to the aesthetic relevance of this connection, and, as we said in the Introduction, this relevance is not dependent on whether the image formed by the listener corresponds precisely with the original painting.

MaP rarely has any specific literary appendage other than the title of the painting – and it may not even have that.<sup>31</sup> In contrast to programme music, this music is trying to invoke and represent something in its absence using no more than a title. A concert whose programme contains a piece of MaP hardly ever requires the physical presentation of the painting, and it would be highly unusual for a composer to demand it. We would not, for example, expect to attend a performance of *Toteninsel* (1909) by Sergei Rachmaninoff, after the eponymous painting by Arnold Böcklin, and find the painting hanging behind the orchestra or be faced by some kind of cinematic projection of it. It would be less unusual to have access to a reproduction of the painting in the programme, but would a listener choose to gaze at the reproduction throughout the duration of the performance? Were the painting to be brought into the concert hall, would listeners necessarily focus their attention exclusively on the original? Probably they would not.

There may be more than one reason for this. First, there is the seeming incompatibility of the timescales for the reception of painting and music. While there

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<sup>31</sup> A work of MaP may adapt a title different from that of the painting after which it is composed. For example, Harrison Birtwistle's *Carmen Arcadiae Mechanicae Perpetuum* is composed after Paul Klee's *Die Zwitschermaschine*, while George Benjamin's representation of Turner's *Norham Castle, Sunrise* is entitled *At First Light*.

is evidence to suggest that paintings are taken in by viewers less instantaneously than is often thought, music unfolds over a specified (and usually longer) span of time. But, second, it suggests that imaginative projection, the very process of bringing to life in our imagination the suggested fictional space of the painting, is a vital component of the aesthetic experience. The ‘how’ of representation is as important as the ‘what’. Peter Kivy seems to be in concurrence with this view: ‘when one knows *only* what a musical composition might picture or represent, one doesn’t know so very much.’<sup>32</sup> Indeed, perhaps a full aesthetic experience is possible (and even desirable) with recourse only to the listener’s memories of the painting. Thus, the painting may be thought of as setting off a chain of imaginings in the listener which do not require its actual presence during the performance. Accordingly, in the absence of the painting, most listeners do not seem to share Kivy’s concern regarding an impoverishment of his aesthetic experience of music in the absence of its programme.

MaP cannot be considered a form of multimedia experience, for it does not use more than one medium of expression – it refers to but does not require the presence of the painting. By contrast, *Swan Lake* would be unthinkable without Tchaikovsky’s music, as would Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* without the accompanying Bernard Herrmann soundtrack. Since ballet and film are intended as audio and visual experiences with both components present, the absence of either would thwart our culturally derived expectations and fundamentally alter both the aesthetic intention of the composer and the aesthetic experience of the listener.

Jean-Jacques Nattiez, discussing Anthony Newcomb’s narrative approach to Schumann’s instrumental music, writes that a ‘narrative, strictly speaking, is not *in* the music, but *in the plot imagined and constructed by the listeners* from functional

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<sup>32</sup> Peter Kivy, *Sound and Semblance: Reflections on Musical Representation* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), 216 (italics original).

objects'. These functional elements are found in the musical structure and comprise tension and release analogous to that which we might find in a literary work. Nattiez continues: 'Newcomb's transposition in fact tells us that, for the listener, any "narrative" instrumental work is not *in itself* a narrative, but *the structural analysis in music of an absent narrative*.'<sup>33</sup> That is to say, we listen to the music as if there *is* a narrative there in the music when in fact the only narrative is the one which *we* read and project upon the musical structure.

In MaP, we are perhaps dealing with something very similar. The question we must ask is whether this involves imposing an absent narrative or the reconstruction of an image that we re-make, more or less approximating to the painting. By virtue of the music's title, we may have good reason to expect a representation of the painting, and we are therefore invited to construct a narrative by imagining subject-predicate relationships taking place within the music which pertain to the painting's conceptual content. Kivy insists that the context, such as a programme or title, justifies a 'representational ascription', although he adds that such an intention to represent is a 'necessary (though not sufficient) condition for representation'.<sup>34</sup> With this context, it therefore makes sense for us to conduct a representational reading of MaP – because the listener is so primed.

What we are dealing with here is a unique species of music. On the one hand it cannot strictly speaking be called programme music because it is without a literary programme, save perhaps for its title which, as we have said, is not necessarily a programme. On the other hand it cannot properly be thought of as part of a multimedia presentation, because it is not co-presented with the painting, as, say, incidental music is with a film or play. Still, it remains a species of music whose

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<sup>33</sup> Jean-Jacques Nattiez, 'Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, vol. 115/2 (1990), 249 (italics original).

<sup>34</sup> Peter Kivy, *Sound and Semblance: Reflections on Musical Representation*, 215.

significance seems to lie beyond the apparent emptiness of instrumental music, for it seems to be constantly reaching toward another experiential domain, the painting. This reaching outwards may be thought of as an effort, on the listener's part, to make sense of the music. We entertain a predisposition to understand this experience in terms of the painting and its attributes, which then exert a shaping influence on the aesthetic experience: 'this music is about that painting' or 'the music describes and represents something about the painting'.

In a noteworthy experiment, Nattiez played 300 schoolchildren, aged 11 to 14, Paul Dukas's symphonic poem *L'apprenti sorcier*. Instead of giving them the title, he told them: 'This music tells a story. What is it?' He reports that the aim 'was to see what narrative the pupils *projected* onto the music.'<sup>35</sup> Nattiez found that, when asked to listen in this narrative mode, 'the children made sense *after the event* of the succession of sound events by imagining subject-predicate relationships which, by itself, the music cannot make explicit'.<sup>36</sup> In this way, the narrative that is imposed afterwards exists only as a potential: it is the perceiver who creates and establishes the narrative links. We might at this point invoke Roman Ingarden when he writes: 'With regard to their [musical] properties they are ultimately dependent upon the opinions we [the listener] hold of them.'<sup>37</sup> Thought of this way, it becomes a matter of what the listener does with the sounds, or, even, what we do *to* the sounds in respect of the projections and connections that are made.

From all of the children's responses, Nattiez observed a narrative formula which may be described as 'calm/chase/calm'. It is, he says, 'the kinetic and dynamic aspects of musical substance' which create this schema; and, semantically, this is an

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<sup>35</sup> Nattiez, 'Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?', 246 (*italics original*).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 248 (*italics original*).

<sup>37</sup> Roman Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of its Identity*, ed. Jean G. Harrell, trans. Adam Czerniawski (London: Macmillan, 1986), 155.

‘image of the *effect* produced by the music on the listeners’.<sup>38</sup> Based on this experiment, the musical structure has been distilled to a simple schema, reminiscent of the supra-structural idea given over by Peter Kivy’s ‘contour theory’<sup>39</sup> whereby certain structural features of the music are analogous to the behaviours of human beings – bodily gestures, vocal inflections, and so forth. Moreover, such a simple schema as this clearly fits (and has fitted) many different narrative projections from its listeners. Why is this? It surely relates back to the idea of there being a potential for the music to support a basic trajectory of action without specifying the actors: as Roland Barthes commented in his essay ‘The Grain of the Voice’,<sup>40</sup> music tends to be accorded adjectives – we might add, verbs or adverbs – more than nouns.

But that none of the children in Nattiez’s experiment posited a narrative framework of, say, ‘chase/calm/chase’ suggests that the choice of narrative is necessarily constrained by the music’s kinetic and dynamic aspects. If narrative meaning is not universal, neither is it arbitrary. So what is important for our investigation of MaP is how musical attributes may fit or support a particular image or narrative; how, then, they become meaningful within a specific context. This is not to say that a programme is irrelevant, only that it need not be tied to one possibility.

Writing on Beethoven’s ‘Les Adieux’ Sonata, Nicholas Cook asks if it matters that it ‘was incorrectly interpreted by nineteenth-century critics as the parting and reunion of two lovers, instead of the departure and return of the Archduke Rudolph? I see no reason to think so.’<sup>41</sup> Cook’s example concerns two scenarios that share the same emotional contour: separation and reunion. That it matters little who is separated

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 248 (italics original).

<sup>39</sup> See Peter Kivy, *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music*, 40–46. Kivy’s ‘contour theory’ was first expounded in his book *The Corded Shell: Reflections on Musical Expression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

<sup>40</sup> In *Image–Music–Text*, trans. and ed. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 179–89.

<sup>41</sup> Nicholas Cook, *Music, Imagination, and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 171.

and who is reunited seems to point to the fact that music can describe things generally if there is a coincidence between something in the music and something in the programme. Moreover, the kernel of our aesthetic pleasure may be the very freedom that is left over by a flexible music that supports either of these scenarios, for example. That this is true also of MaP is suggested by Nicholas Cook, who, describing the transfer of attributes from pictures on record sleeves to the musical recording they contain, suggests that the painting ‘sets out a way of hearing the music that is not only possible but also pertinent’.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, concepts must be imposed from the painting onto the listening experience which help us select and foreground particular musical attributes whilst leaving others in the background.

### 1.3 Medium and Message

This, then, is a project which encompasses the question of musical meaning: a study into how and what MaP means. By asking whether the painting may affect our response to the music, we are also inquiring into the nature of how music communicates with us. Some maintain that music is a purely formalistic medium that imparts whatever meaning it has exclusively through the structural relationships of its inner components (the autonomist position), while others believe meaning to lie outside of music (the heteronomist position).<sup>43</sup>

In his book *The Composer's Voice* (1974), the musicologist Edward T. Cone has written succinctly: ‘No context, no content’. With this he not only suggests that meaning situates itself within the immanent formal context of the piece but, moreover,

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<sup>42</sup> Nicholas Cook, ‘The Domestic *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or Record Sleeves and Reception’ in *Composition – Performance – Reception: Studies in the Creative Process in Music*, ed. Wyndham Thomas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 111.

<sup>43</sup> These positions have been called other things at different times, perhaps notably by Leonard B. Meyer, who uses the terms ‘absolutists’ and ‘referentialists’ in his book *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, 1. Moreover, it is acknowledged that these are extreme poles with many subtler positions in between.

that ‘only within a context of wider human activity is its content revealed’.<sup>44</sup>

Typically, in music with a text, ‘content emerges from the mutual relations of words and musical gestures, and from the light they throw on each other’.<sup>45</sup> A very interesting observation, and one which may be expanded and developed for a different purpose here, is that the painting and its title are able to reveal aspects of the music hitherto and otherwise unavailable. We might substitute Cone’s ‘content’ for musical understanding and make the claim that it is this aspect which helps the listener complete the musical *picture* – pun intended. Thus, just as in vocal music we are able to map concepts belonging to the sung text onto the musical structure, so, too, in the case of MaP we are able to project attributes of the painting onto the music.

Accordingly, in considering the conditions necessary for meaning to emerge, we must now assess what potential aesthetic functions a programme might afford for the listener. Cone writes:

A program, however, is merely an adjunct to the music with which it is associated. Words and music are not sounded together; and since they are not synchronized, it is fruitless even to try and imagine them sounding together. In fact, the exact words are of little importance; the program consists of the ideas the words convey. A program, then, gives a composition a conceptual, not a verbal, context.<sup>46</sup>

For Cone, then, because the programme is not something normatively performed with the piece, it is a ‘conceptual’ addition that ‘can specify a general mood to be associated with the movement of the music, or it can follow – or direct – the course of the music more closely through the succession of sounds, actions, tensions and relaxations that its narrative suggests’. But, he adds, the programme’s effectiveness

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<sup>44</sup> Edward T. Cone, *The Composer’s Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 165.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

depends ‘on the degree to which it is felt to be figuratively isomorphic with the form of the composition – the extent to which the pattern of activity suggested by the program corresponds to the pattern of symbolic gestures created by the music’.<sup>47</sup>

Holding to this proposition, we might consider whether the aesthetic importance of a painting comes not from any verbal context but from the ideas it conveys. Further still, the concepts which encapsulate words do so from a shared cultural understanding of what words mean, and also from our own contextual experiences of those ideas contained therein; hence a word such as the French ‘voile’ has a different understanding for any two individuals (such as a yachtsman and a nun). Similarly, our recovery of the ideas contained in a painting is also subject to individual experiences combined with the possession of a shared cultural understanding of the conventions of a painting – such as an experience of two-dimensional perspective, say.

The difference, though, between a painting and a programme possessing a verbal content lies in the fact that although a painting may be able to reveal aspects of the musical structure, the revelation is not as straightforward as one that occurs from a verbal text, for are we not being asked to interpret something which is intrinsically more ambiguous than a written-down text? Moreover, the painting here is conspicuously absent, meaning that whatever concepts the listener might map onto the musical experience may only occur through a memory or impression. This would appear to be something far less definite than the concepts imparted by a verbal accompaniment or programme. And this factuality is compounded when we consider music composed after a non-representational (abstract) painting, for the lack of a

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 167. Mahler makes a similar point about the programme’s importance in expressing the ‘mood’ of his piece. See pp. 12–13 above.

discernible subject matter must limit the type of conceptual transference that we are talking about – any such transfer must be of a second order.

#### 1.4 Frames and Boundaries

To explore any possible relationships between music and painting requires that we consider where the limits of each artwork lie. Is an artwork limited solely to its own world, or can it extend beyond its own fictional space to other areas of experience, aesthetic or otherwise? Edward T. Cone, in his 1968 book *Musical Form and Musical Performance*, asks: ‘Where is the beginning of a piece of music? Where is the end?’<sup>48</sup> And, he wonders, does a composition begin with the first note and end with the last one: ‘Are periods of time before and after a composition ever parts of it?’ We might also regard the frame of a painting as an attempt to locate the limits of the subject, but Cone asserts that this is not necessarily the case: ‘we find that the edge of the picture demarcates that portion of a subject chosen for representation, but every depicted scene necessarily extends indefinitely outside its limiting boundaries. Even in the case of abstractions, one can usually imagine the pattern as continuing beyond the picture area.’<sup>49</sup> This is an interesting way of defining what the art object is and where it stops, for the implication here is that it continues before and after its literal event – that is, what we might regard as our phenomenal perception of its actual and physical presence. Often, before we experience an artwork, whether music or painting, we anticipate the experience in some way. Consequently, once we enter the art gallery or the concert hall, we have certain preconceived notions, issues of accuracy notwithstanding, of the sensory events ahead of us.

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<sup>48</sup> Edward T. Cone, *Musical Form and Musical Performance* (London: Norton, 1968), 12.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 14.

In a discussion of Kant and his three critiques, Jacques Derrida alights upon Kant's word *parergon*. He writes, 'The *parergon* inscribes something which comes as an extra, *exterior* to the proper field [...] but whose transcendent exteriority comes to play, abut onto, brush against, rub, press against the limit itself and intervene in the inside only to the extent that the inside is lacking. It is lacking *in* something and it is lacking *from itself*'.<sup>50</sup> Thus in the field of a framed painting, the intrinsic ambiguity of Van Gogh's *Les souliers* (1886) leads the viewer to supplant the 'whole by the part which explodes the frame or makes us jump over it'<sup>51</sup> – encouraging the viewer to pose external questions such as 'whose shoes are these?', 'are they shoes from the same pair?', and 'why have they formed a subject for this painting?'. In relation to the *parergon*, Derrida asks: 'Where does the frame take place. Does it take place. Where does it begin. Where does it end. What is its internal limit. Its external limit. And its surface between the two limits.' He argues that to determine what is framed (the intrinsic text) we must 'know what one is excluding as frame *and* outside-the-frame'.<sup>52</sup> In the case of MaP, of course, we could argue that the frame of the music extends outwards encompassing the limits of the remembered painting; indeed, it may even *demand* this extension.

The French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari also have something to say about frames in respect of their theory that art resembles the animal kingdom through its carving out of a territory which then intersects with the territories of others: 'But if nature is like art, this is always because it combines these two living elements in every way: House and Universe, *Heimlich* and *Unheimlich*, territory and deterritorialization, finite melodic compounds and the great infinite plane of

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<sup>50</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 56 (*italics original*).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

composition, the small and large refrain.’<sup>53</sup> The fact that the frame captures and selects depends on what Deleuze and Guattari call a ‘counterpoint’ with the surrounding universe. And although the frame constitutes sensations and figures within its scope, ‘it still needs a vast plane of composition that carries out a kind of *deframing* following lines of flight that pass through the territory only in order to open it onto the universe’.<sup>54</sup> Thus, it needs a contrasting reference point in order that it might establish its own territory: ‘The painter’s action never stays within the frame; it leaves the frame and does not begin with it.’<sup>55</sup> And so it is with music too: a melody may be contrasted and set against another melody in the form of counterpoint so that each has its own territory but depends on the other for its own definition. To illustrate the idea of the openness of a ‘plane of composition’ compensating for its ‘individuating closure’,<sup>56</sup> Deleuze and Guattari invoke the example of sonata form where the first movement presents the exposition of the first theme, a transition, exposition of the second theme, developments on both themes, a recapitulation and then a coda. Accordingly, the themes cross into other areas of the composition, while also maintaining their own individual ‘territories’.

The idea of framing off or marking out territory from the real world also extends to the other arts. In literature, for example, the typography on a page alerts us to the limits of a poem, the space a sculpture or building occupies sets its own threshold, and the house curtain in the theatre or cinema announces the beginning and end of the play or film. However, in the case of musical works, Edward T. Cone writes:

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<sup>53</sup> In *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Graham Burchill and Hugh Tomlinson (London: Verso, 1994), 186.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 187 (*italics original*).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

We can now recognize an important way in which music differs from these other arts: it has no internal environment. A composition cannot be thought of as a delimited segment of a longer line. It has no antecedents and no consequents. Whatever music may be about – and I do not wish to raise that issue – the “whatever” begins only when the music begins, and ends when the music ends.

While he concedes that certain music does have ‘a kind of internal environment in the form of its abstract system – be it tonal, atonal, or twelve-tonal – which in a sense existed before and continues after the concrete composition,’<sup>57</sup> this is rather like comparing musical syntax to grammar, ignoring the fact that grammar, unlike musical syntax, is ‘essentially timeless’. Music, on the other hand, Cone argues, exists and takes place in real time; accordingly, we need to ‘mark off musical time from the ordinary time before it and after it’.<sup>58</sup> Naturally, the framing method used for this is silence. However, although silence must indeed effectively delimit the musical experience from where the real world leaves off, music does seem to possess its *own* time which is different to clock time. This would explain why, when listening to a musical performance, time might be said to drag or to go more quickly, depending on our subjective involvement with the music. But what is most interesting for our purposes is the notion of the artwork extending beyond its frame.

### 1.5 Successive and Simultaneous

There is no arguing with the fact that music takes time to unfold and reveal its entire structure, and it could not be otherwise in such a temporally bound medium. It is equally clear that, in stark contrast, a painting is potentially available to the senses immediately in its entirety. Any musical representation of a painting therefore has to

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<sup>57</sup> Cone, *Musical Form and Musical Performance*, 15.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

extend itself over a particular length of time that would seem to be incommensurate with the painting's immediacy of visual impact. However, studies in human perception have shown that when the eye perceives an object, it undergoes what perceptual psychologists call saccadic and micro-saccadic movements. Paintings are therefore not experienced in one perceptual *hit*, as it were, but instead the eyes range about the painting, focusing and refocusing over its subject matter in a nonlinear manner.<sup>59</sup>

That the experience of seeing a painting may have a temporal dimension analogous to other so-called temporal arts is paradoxical in view of the widely held notion that music is the temporal art par excellence in contrast to the spatial art of painting, whose meaning is recovered immediately as an instantaneous perceptual acquisition. John Dewey, in *Art as Experience* (1934), argues that the distinction between the spatial and temporal arts is misguided because both require perception – and perception is never instantaneous. Dewey writes that the viewer ‘must create his own experience and his experience must include relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent’. The recovery and re-creation of those events is essential to the object being ‘perceived as a work of art’.<sup>60</sup> Accordingly, a spectator's experience of, say, a painting is not merely passive and distanced but an active attempt to reconstitute the work's genesis, albeit fictively and synthetically.

Edward T. Cone discusses the idea that the spatial arts are not fixed and unchanging and that we *read* them in a temporal manner just as we would a literary or musical work. He argues that, because we follow our own paths through a painting and work out its inner relationships and meanings for ourselves, we might say that we *perform* the work; and, because our eyes range about the picture's details, ‘the

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<sup>59</sup> See Stanley Coren et al., *Sensation and Perception*, 4th edn (London: Harcourt Brace Publishers, 1994), 528–31.

<sup>60</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee Books, 1980), 220.

contemplation of a work of spatial art almost always involves not one but several performances – or at least several partial performances’.<sup>61</sup> And for contemplation of a musical performance, certainly a live one, it is not possible to revisit a passage played earlier, for even were it repeated, it must now be subject to a slightly different interpretation by the performer. The only way to alight upon any aspect of the musical performance other than the present one is through the memory of an earlier passage or the anticipation of a later one. We could say then that both music and painting invoke our capacity for memory, for it would seem logical to suggest that even though the picture is all present, part of what directs our *reading* of the image must in part be what we remember from an earlier gaze: our eyes move in a direction governed by the painting but also by this earlier perception. Our perception is not neutral, then, but controlled by our recent experience.

According with this view, Clement Greenberg, in discussing the paintings of Paul Klee, writes that ‘the eye does not make an instantaneous synthesis; with Klee design is, as it were, temporal or musical. We are conscious of elements that are to be felt in terms of succession as well as simultaneity. The all-important factor is line.’ Significantly, Greenberg continues, ‘[a]djectives do not fit the case as well as verbs. Klee’s line indicates, directs, relates, connects’.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the experience of Klee’s work balances action (movement) with immediacy.

Jerrold Levinson appears to take a different view when he writes:

If one tries to achieve an overall grasp of a painting, the parts that need to be related and integrated into a total sign, as it were, are all of them perceptually present, accessible to a visual contemplation of a sustained sort. But with a musical composition of any extent the

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<sup>61</sup> Cone, *Musical Form and Musical Performance*, 33.

<sup>62</sup> ‘An Essay on Paul Klee’, in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 3: *Affirmations and Refusals, 1950–56*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 7.

parts that call for such relation and integration are in the most part perceptually absent, and representable only through memories, whether of a verbal or nonverbal type.<sup>63</sup>

Seen thus, painting allows its percipient to see the scope and extent of its boundaries, whereas music allows for only localised perception of its moment-to-moment unfolding. However, Levinson adds:

Of course one does not fully *understand* a painting in a single glance, any more than one does a musical piece in a single hearing, but the point is that you can have a synoptic perception, or beholding, of the whole in the former case, but not, given its temporal extent, in the latter.<sup>64</sup>

Nonetheless, is it not also possible to have a synoptic impression, not in the sense of a formal ABA synopsis, say, but as an apprehension of the affects of a piece of music? If we are asked, for example, to recall Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*, do we play out in our heads the fifth movement's heart-stirring themes in a time commensurate with the live performance or do we remember a synoptic impression much as we might from the effect of a particular painting? Similarly, an analogy could be made with the synoptic impression of the after-effects of seeing another kind of temporal medium, film. For example, we do not need to play out the scene of Aschenbach's arrival into Venice set to the Adagietto from Mahler's Fifth Symphony in Luchino Visconti's film *Death in Venice* (1971) to summon up an affective synoptic impression after the event. Moreover, perhaps it is not too bold to suggest that it is through an artwork's immediate after-effects that it ultimately becomes meaningful.

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<sup>63</sup> Jerrold Levinson, *Music in the Moment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 19–20.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* (italics original). Of course, it is important to mention that this statement comes from Levinson's wider argument (expanded and developed from Edmund Gurney) that what is important for our aesthetic understanding of music is gained from when we listen to it moment to moment (hence the title of his book). This argument forms the basis of the theory he calls 'concatenationism'.

The phenomenon of MaP provides an interesting turnaround, because now it is the less mutable element, the painting, that is absent, and therefore only available through the mechanisms of memory and imagination. In this way, the ontology of the absent painting, by default, could be said to resemble the way we recall the distant parts of the musical object: through memory. Accordingly, Levinson writes, ‘it seems that one cannot *perceive* the form of such a musical composition as a whole, one can only *conceive* it (or perhaps *imagine* it, in a nonperceptual way).’<sup>65</sup> Thus, just as we can no longer perceptually perceive the absent painting, nor can we perceptually apprehend the musical whole; but we can imagine both.

Paul Klee believed that the parameter of rhythm, a term normally considered the sole preserve of the musical realm, can rightfully belong to visual art too. Anything involving regularity or some kind of pattern can be plausibly defined as rhythm, and Klee notes in regard to ‘[r]hythms and rhythmic structures’ that ‘[w]e can perceive rhythm with three senses at once. First we can hear it, secondly see it, thirdly feel it in our muscles. This is what gives it such power over our organism’.<sup>66</sup> Being time-based, rhythm, though hitherto considered metaphorical when applied to the visual world, can be applied to any time-dependent medium, including painting, which is of course created in time.

Explicit and visible traces of rhythm can be located in certain paintings, for example in ‘action painting’ (or gestural abstraction, as it is also known).<sup>67</sup> Such painting records and preserves the artist’s presence and creative act in the drips, smears and splashes of paint that he or she makes, betraying the act of creation itself.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 20 (*italics original*).

<sup>66</sup> Paul Klee, *Notebooks Volume I: The Thinking Eye*, ed. Jürg Spiller and trans. Ralph Manheim and Heinz Norden (New York: The Overlook Press, 1992), 267.

<sup>67</sup> A term first coined by Harold Rosenberg in 1952 in his essay entitled ‘The American Action Painters’, first published in *Art News* 51 / Dec (1952), repr. in *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Horizon Press, 1960; repr. Da Capo Press, 1994), 23–39.

The prime exponent of action painting is of course Jackson Pollock (1912–56), but the style was also evident in earlier French *tachisme*, and is perhaps ultimately traceable to the thick, gestural brushstrokes of Van Gogh. This presence manifests itself in vestiges of movement; and of course any kind of regular succession of movement would be defined as rhythm. However, although Klee notes that ‘[t]he main characteristic of rhythm is repetition’<sup>68</sup> – something the viewer feels strongly when staring at the repeated drips and splashes of colour in a Pollock – it seems unlikely that he would have recognised this random ‘rhythm’ in the Abstract Expressionists in the same way that he prescribed a kind of geneseic rhythm in his own paintings.

Movement in art was paramount for Klee, and he revealed much of his philosophy on this matter in his remarkable ‘Creative Credo’ of 1920.<sup>69</sup> It is worth exploring some of those statements here in order to clarify links to the domain of music. He writes:

In the work of art, paths are laid out for the beholder’s eye, which gropes like a grazing beast (in music, as everyone knows, there are channels leading to the ear – in drama we have both varieties). The pictorial work springs from movement, is itself fixated movement, and is grasped in movement (eye muscles).<sup>70</sup>

In evocative language, Klee is suggesting here that the paths that are constructed by the artist are necessary to anchor the eye, which would otherwise ‘grop[e] like a grazing beast’. The myopic overtone of this sentence demonstrates that, for Klee, without some guidance the eyes will range about the painting unchecked, whereas in music the composer can exclusively feed the ‘channels leading to the ear[s]’ with his already determined (composed) paths of sound.

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<sup>68</sup> Klee, *Notebooks*, vol. 1: *The Thinking Eye*, 302.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Creative Credo’, in Klee, *Notebooks*, 76–80.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

Klee therefore raises the implication that music has an advantage over the plastic art of painting because of this rationing. In other words, although Klee accepted and perhaps even pioneered the temporal element in painting, his concern was with controlling this component: ‘truth demands that all elements be present at once.’<sup>71</sup> This idea helps qualify his assertion that ‘[p]olyphonic painting is superior to music in that, here, the time element becomes a spatial element. The notion of simultaneity stands out even more richly.’<sup>72</sup> Notions of temporality in painting are immanent in much of the ‘Creative Credo’, and the art historian Andrew Kagan explains that Klee’s statement on polyphony means that ‘painting, in his ideal vision, has a better potential for dealing with and overcoming its temporality without denying it’.<sup>73</sup>

Anticipating the action painters by some thirty years, Klee remarks how ‘space itself is a temporal concept. When a point turns into movement and line – that takes time.’ He asks: ‘Does a picture come into being all at once? No, it is built up piece by piece, the same as a house.’ He continues, ‘The work of art, too, is first of all genesis; it is never experienced purely as a result.’ Hence the ‘beholder’ does not see just the finished product, but sees evidence of the incipient stages of that work too. Klee adds that,

What the beholder does is temporal too. The eye is so organised that it conveys the parts successively into the crucible of vision, and in order to adjust itself to a new fragment has to leave the old one. After a while the beholder, like the artist, stops and goes away. If it strikes him as worthwhile – again like the artist – he returns.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Klee, *The Diaries of Paul Klee 1898–1918*, ed. and with an introduction by Felix Klee, trans. B. Schneider, R. Y. Zachary and M. Knight (London: Peter Owen, 1965), 372.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

<sup>73</sup> Kagan, *Paul Klee: Art and Music*, 46, 165 ff.

<sup>74</sup> Klee, *The Creative Credo*, cited in *Notebooks*, vol. 1: *The Thinking Eye*, 78.

The allusion to memory here is noteworthy and has definite analogies with the experience of listening to music. The experience of harmonic music does present simultaneous events (musical notes) all at once, but these are preconditioned, as it were, by that which has previously been heard. In this way, a chord in any given piece may be thought of as existing along a continuum: events before the chord in question help to contextualise it, just as the chord then contextualises and anticipates future musical happenings. Hence, the harmonic event does not exist independently of that which comes before and after it. In painting, too, synchronous events depend on that which delimits a particular moment; but, unlike music, these contextualising factors are always *present* in a painting. This is why, for Klee, polyphonic painting is superior, because '[t]he time element must be eliminated. Yesterday and today as simultaneous'.<sup>75</sup> Klee felt that only in painting could this condition be achieved.

## 1.6 Time and Space

As we have said, we tend to define music as a temporally determined object, and painting as a spatially determined one. On the face of it, then, music would also be experienced as temporal and painting as non-temporal. But might these sharp distinctions be deconstructed so that music may also be about space and painting about time?

In a fascinating essay: 'On Some Relationships between Music and Painting',<sup>76</sup> the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno suggests that:

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<sup>75</sup> Klee, *Diaries*, entry 1081, cited in Simon Shaw-Miller, *Visible Deeds of Music: Art and Music from Wagner to Cage* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 147.

<sup>76</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'On Some Relationships between Music and Painting', trans. Susan Gillespie, *The Musical Quarterly*, 79 (1995), 66–79.

The convergence of music and painting occurs at the expense of their merely natural differences on the strength of the more powerful, form-giving processes that manifest themselves as an identical principle in the encounter with their materials.<sup>77</sup>

As result of a phenomenal encounter, then, with the physical traces of the artwork's form arises convergence with the other medium; but it is not an epiphenomenon, for it is in some way causal to the experience of that medium. Radically for the possibility of representation in MaP, Adorno declares: 'The moment one art imitates another, it becomes more distant from it by repudiating the constraint of its own material, and falls into syncretism, in the vague notion of an undialectical continuum of arts in general.'<sup>78</sup> Accordingly, it must not try to disown the nature of its medium by attempting to be something else: '[music has] time as its problem', and it must therefore 'act upon time, not lose itself to it'. Similarly, he adds that painting entails a 'reworking of space', meaning 'its dynamization and negation'.<sup>79</sup> It would appear that Klee, too, was thinking along these lines in his efforts to somehow capture time in a painting while preserving, simultaneously, all of its elements spatially.

Each medium, then, strains against its immanent structure: painting through its fixedness in space seems to be pushing outwards towards something temporally contingent, and music finds itself straining (spatially) against time to resolve itself and reach a particular harmonic goal. Thus, to quote Act I of Wagner's *Parsifal*, 'Zum Raum wird hier die Zeit' (space becomes time and time becomes space). As we saw above, Klee was seemingly aware of this temporal component to painting and sought to exploit this parameter through balancing the idea of linear movement against simultaneity.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 66.

In examining the similarities between music and painting, Adorno observes that although everything in a painting is simultaneously present, elements of a painting may ‘seek to get away from each other’. This creates tension which ‘can in no way be conceived without the element of the temporal. For this reason, time is immanent in the painting, apart from the time that is spent on its production. To this extent, the objectivization and the balance of tensions in the painting are sedimented time.’<sup>80</sup> The viewer, in the act of looking, unlocks this time by seeing that elements of the painting are reaching outwards beyond their frame – exploding the frame in the sense formulated by Derrida above. Similarly, because music is constructed from spatial relationships between notes, ‘this qualitative relationship of music to its visible insignia, without which it could neither possess nor construct out duration, points clearly to space as a condition of its objectification’.<sup>81</sup> Thomas Clifton in his book *Music as Heard: a Study in Applied Phenomenology* observes something similar in the neumatic notation of Gregorian chant, stating that neumes not only ‘provid[e] a visual clue to the way the tones themselves are rhythmically grouped in performance, but also graphically demonstrate[e] that a certain passage through space is implicit in the notion of “interval”’.<sup>82</sup> In other words, it is only through a spatial system that music comes to express its form at all. And thus each art form somehow articulates itself in the intrinsic language of the other.

Adorno refers to Bruckner’s orchestration, explaining that it embraces the listener through the ‘forest of tones that arches over the listener’,<sup>83</sup> which reminds one of the painterly saturation of space that Edward T. Cone observes in music when he writes about how time in music ‘makes possible a kind of suspended saturation: the

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Clifton, *Music as Heard: a Study in Applied Phenomenology* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 145.

<sup>83</sup> Adorno, ‘On Some Relationships between Music and Painting’, 70.

development of an idea which on first presentation may seem of insufficient moment, but which through its treatment grows in interest, its true purport being revealed only gradually'.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, as the medium pursues its own materials, by default it converges towards the other medium. Painting, by bringing time into it through associations and, more importantly, from simply being perceived, 'ignite[s] the painting's power'<sup>85</sup> through the contradiction that this is a spatial medium. Precisely because it appears to negate time, it speaks of time. In this way time is no longer the preserve of music nor space that of painting. We speak of melodies in spatial terms, moving towards and away from, downwards and upwards, thickening and thinning and interweaving. Thomas Clifton regards this as a textural space, one that is only possible within a spatial world. And so it is with *musical* time, too, for music seems to bring with it its own time, effectively bracketing out clock time. This time unfolds and is driven within this same textural space.

In a related way, Adorno writes that '[w]hat is alive is rather the paintings themselves, what is painted, not what has been painted'. Here, then, the vital component is the world that the paintings themselves construct, not any representational gesturing away from this painterly domain. Our perception of a painting involves bracketing off this experience from any outside interference so that we might better apprehend the painterly world. The notion of 'what is painted' calls forth its corollary 'how it is painted', and it is this aspect that involves our interpretation. The very *act* of perception becomes one of the active components of the painting. It is the process that is important: 'It occurs in the speaking, not in what is said.'<sup>86</sup> Adorno continues, 'Painting and music speak by virtue of the way they are

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<sup>84</sup> Edward T. Cone, *Music: a View from Delft*, ed. Robert P. Morgan (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 16.

<sup>85</sup> Adorno, 'On Some Relationships between Music and Painting', 70.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

constructed, not by the act of representing themselves', and it is their 'immanent character, not the communication of something external to this complexion of the work'. Accordingly, he champions abstract painting as being 'set free' by our 'distraction away from its object-relatedness'.<sup>87</sup> By turning our attention away from the ostensible subject, such as an encounter with an abstract painting, we come to see its true character. If the respective mediums of painting and music are to become expressive and converge toward each other, then they need to abstain from communicating outside their respective mediums: 'Music and painting become writing through their renunciation of the communicative'.<sup>88</sup> In short, they need to refrain from symbolic gesturing – clearly a central tenet of modernism.

But where does such a theory leave MaP? Although Adorno seems to allow that music and painting possess similarities through our experiences of them, this takes place within a sealed frame: musical or painterly. He does not deny the role of the listener in creating musical meaning:

[M]usic no more belongs to subjective perception alone than to physics alone. It gains its objectivity by virtue of the fact that these two poles are mutually mediated within it. Something of this kind must also be the case with painting.<sup>89</sup>

Hence, as we would expect, there is some kind of interaction between the physical properties of the art object and what we subjectively do with those attributes. But rather than, as it were, 'accidentally' referring to a painting, can MaP refer or represent a specific painting?

Max Paddison argues that for Adorno, who rejected 'crude socio-economic determinism in his interpretation of Marx', 'art not only reflects society but also

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 76.

opposes it, not only converges with society but diverges from it and develops its own dynamic'.<sup>90</sup> For Adorno this was part of pursuing 'further the interpenetration of the subjective and the objective'. And, in the process, he 'found concepts which enabled him to discuss in both "material" and psychological terms, ways in which the outside world is refracted by the Subject and ways in which "inner subjectivity" is able to engage with the "objectivity" of the outside world through the processes of sublimation, repression, mimetic adaptation and rationalization'.<sup>91</sup> Accordingly, music may come to reflect the outside world by following its own inner principles. Thus, by maintaining a critical distance and not being determined by any particular system, music is able to reflect and oppose this outside world. And perhaps this is also the case with MaP: by following its own principles music may reflect but also diverge from the original artwork.

Adorno ascribes to both media the attribute he calls 'writing'. He seems to mean by this their communication of expression using their own respective materials, a 'flashing forth' that also has a 'temporal quality'. Once they are writing, they 'divest themselves of their "thingness"; here the heterogeneous media are at one'. In this way, 'painting and music do converge as construction'.<sup>92</sup> It is not a matter of one art form imitating another; it is, rather, through their very difference that they converge and become like each other, through a focus on their unavoidable mediation of the other.

In an equally modernist vein, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari observe that the formation of the artwork takes place on a 'plane of composition' which can be further subdivided into an 'aesthetic plane of composition' (which concerns the sensations) and a 'technical plane of composition' (the material of the artwork). In the

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<sup>90</sup> Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 128.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Adorno, 'On Some Relationships between Music and Painting', 77.

first instance, '*sensation realizes itself in the material* and does not exist outside this realization'. Painting adopts the form and organization of representational, perspectival art that already contains within it schemata that structure it. In music, such schemata are found in tonal compositions whose conventional structure organises the sonic material. And in literature, it is similarly the standard modes of storytelling which absorb these sensations. In the second instance, where it is instead the '*material that passes into sensation*', sensation does not exist outside the object, but 'now it might be said that it *ascends* into the aesthetic plane of composition'.<sup>93</sup> They explain that, rather than sensation being projected onto this absorbent surface, 'the material rises up'<sup>94</sup> into a plane or field of forces. Thus, the thickness of paint, the timbre of musical sounds and rhythms, and the syntax and semantic meanings in literature all gather up to create an aesthetic plane.

Deleuze, Guattari and Adorno, however, are all concerned with a specific period of modernist art whose agenda is with the materials themselves, together with an obvious acknowledgement that the medium, to paraphrase Marshall McLuhan, is not transparent to its message but *is* the message. Accordingly, painting, music and literature converge in their sharing of conventional forms which result in there finally being

only a single plane in the sense that art includes no other plane than that of aesthetic composition: in fact, the technical plane is necessarily covered up or absorbed by the aesthetic plane of composition. It is on this condition that matter becomes expressive: either the compound of sensation is realized in the material, or the material passes into the compound, but always in such a way as to be situated on a specifically aesthetic plane of composition.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 193 (italics original).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 196.

In this way, the aesthetic plane of composition constitutes a universe. And for our present concerns, might we not regard the intersecting territories of MaP as constituting a universe resulting in a single unified plane? The musical material effects sensations – a correspondent facture between the painted and musical surfaces, perhaps – and the aesthetic plane absorbs a memory of the painted material as a frame of reference.

The idea of the material rising up into a plane of forces and representing *itself* shares much with the modernist perspective of art. Meanwhile, the idea of the subject interacting with the physical properties (Adorno), and a similar projection of sensation onto the material (Deleuze and Guattari), points towards the idea that the aesthetic experience involves subjective mediation of the physical. This is contrary to the notion of the artwork representing anything external to itself, pointing to or symbolising things away from its own materials. Rather, it is our perceptual engagement with the work alone that enables its meaningful expression. In this way, we can see that the modernist agenda seems directed towards a phenomenal experience of the artwork. Accordingly, in the next chapter we will take a closer look at phenomenology as a philosophical system applied to music and, especially, MaP.

## CHAPTER 2: Between the Embodied and the Ideated

### 2.1.1 Perception as Embodied Experience

In this chapter, we will examine how well MaP fits into a phenomenological perspective and whether it is sufficient to account for the painting as part of that phenomenal experience. Section 2.2 will consider some of the principles of reader-response theory to explore the idea of there being an aesthetic response to MaP that involves the mediation of the painting as a conceptual and thus reflective addition to our purely phenomenal experience of the medium.

Phenomenological theory is one which is monistic: that is, it denies the duality of mind and matter, subject and object, and is therefore in some accordance with the subjective stance espoused by Descartes' famous *Cogito, ergo sum*. To arrive at this method of existential doubt, Descartes called into question the very existence of the world without its subject:

What about thinking? Here I make my discovery: thought exists; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am; I exist – this is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking; for perhaps I could come to pass that if I were to cease all thinking I would then utterly cease to exist. At this time I admit nothing that is not necessarily true. I am therefore precisely nothing but a thinking thing; that is, a mind, or intellect, or understanding, or reason – words of whose meanings I was previously ignorant. Yes I am a true thing and am truly existing; but what kind of thing? I have said it already: a thinking thing.<sup>1</sup>

His position, that all we can really be sure of is how things appear to us immediately in our consciousness, points to the belief that we actively constitute or intend the world we experience. The duality of mind (consciousness) and matter that Descartes

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<sup>1</sup> See René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress, 3rd edn (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 28.

posits was a starting point for the phenomenologists. But they took it further, believing that there is no such thing as a self-contained thought; all conscious thought must be directed at an object – or must intend an object. It must follow, then, that all matter and objects experienced are similarly both subsumed and constituted within our subjective mind, and the phenomenon becomes unified within us. The phenomenal experience, then, constructs and constitutes my lived experience. Consequently, phenomenology has often been described as the new Cartesianism: by focusing on the experiential, we become closer to a more reliable knowledge of the way things really are. The focus of this discipline, however, is on the conditions that enable knowledge of our world to emerge.

Phenomenology's primary representatives are Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80), Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and Emmanuel Levinas (1905–95). Its influence is felt in a number of other disciplines, in particular reader-response criticism, which will be discussed at greater length in the next section. Phenomenology's main principles orbit about the idea of explaining experience as it *really* is before the mind engages in its abstract conceptualising. Therein lies one of the theory's central claims: abstract or reflective experience is just that – removed from the thing itself – and so is unable to describe the pure essence of the experience. Thus, we might reasonably ask, are we here discussing a theoretical system which is at odds with an experience that requires imagining an absent painting? The reason we are taking this excursus is primarily to explore a system which will posit the importance of the phenomenal object to perception.

In *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty argues that bodily experience or perspective is our primary way of understanding the world:

My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my 'comprehension'. [...] It is my body which gives significance not only to the natural object, but also to cultural objects like words.<sup>2</sup>

He goes on to explain how words like warm and hard '[b]efore becoming the indication of a concept' are 'first of all an event which grips my body, and this circumscribes the area of significance to which it has reference'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, a visceral experience takes place which affects and has import for any subsequent cognitions. Countering traditional philosophy, Merleau-Ponty posits that abstract thought and reason are not the essential ways of understanding our world, but direct perception is: 'the *perceived* world is the always presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value, and all existence.'<sup>4</sup>

One of phenomenology's main goals is to describe experience before reflective thought is engaged and thus provide a more authentic description or account of what that experience is. Its focus is on the process of that experience and perception itself. In this way, it rejects positivism and objectivism as theoretical systems which deny the real essences of experience. The music philosopher Wayne D. Bowman has written succinctly that '[t]o perceive something is to live in it; to think about something, to hold it at a distance. Perception is attached, reflection detached'.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, phenomenology is only interested in lived experiences, that is, perceptual ones.

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<sup>2</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 273.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 273–4.

<sup>4</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art History, and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 13, cited in Wayne D. Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives on Music* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), 261.

<sup>5</sup> Wayne D. Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives on Music*, 261.

### 2.1.2 Music as Lived Experience

Discussing the phenomenology of the musical experience in the only significant treatise on the subject, Thomas Clifton writes that ‘we Westerners, being largely the beneficiaries of empiricism, often have confused the sign of music by what is signified by music’.<sup>6</sup> The signified, then, is the musical effect and is different to the sign. In the same way that we cannot know the real experience of swimming without actually getting in the water and moving our arms, legs and body, we cannot *know* music without immersing ourselves in it and examining the experience from that particular vantage point – its immediate effects, in other words. To discuss swimming in ways that are removed from the direct experience of it is not to discuss swimming but some abstracted observation of it. And so it is with music, too. Clifton refers to this first-order experience as *Erlebnis* (the German word for the experience of living through some event), and anything outside this immediacy is a second-order act of reflection.<sup>7</sup>

A phenomenological perspective emphasizes the fact that MaP posits analogies not between painting and musical notation, but between painting and actual sounds, for the reason that those sounds contain physical qualities that exist, however briefly, in the physical world as do the painted brushstrokes on a canvas. To obtain the necessary identification with music as it *is*, it is not enough to simply look at a musical score. Clifton writes, ‘to inhabit the world of music, it is necessary to be able to identify that world and refer to *it*, not its representative [the score]. And the only way to refer to it is by reflecting on it as a phenomenal object which one’s faculties recognize to be expressive.’<sup>8</sup> It is, therefore, what music does to us and what we do to

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Clifton, *Music as Heard: A Study in Applied Phenomenology* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 298.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 66.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

it that constitutes the *music* in the first place – not the act of reading the musical score. Moreover, in defence of this subjective position, Clifton argues that any notion of objectivity is ultimately misguided, because the study of an object always involves selection, and that selection is performed by a human subject using a language formulated by humans.<sup>9</sup>

In a related way, Carolyn Abbate, in a recent article ‘Music: Drastic or Gnostic?’,<sup>10</sup> invokes Vladimir Jankélévitch’s injunction to return to the ‘material’, acoustic phenomenon of the music rather than enact a metaphysical retreat from it. Abbate explains that such a retreat necessitates a displacement of the musical experience itself. When we focus on referential meanings or an analytical dissection of the work, we are always moving away from the experience the actual physical performance engenders in us. This has an obvious connection to the phenomenological standpoint discussed. There is no ‘away’ from the musical experience. For music to occur at all we must be attached bodily to it through the oneness of mind and object. There are no phenomena and *noumena* (Kant) or *noema* and *noetic* (Husserl).

Clifton explains that a phenomenological attitude entails ‘uttering meaningful statements which are objective in the sense that they attempt to describe the musical object adequately, and subjective in the sense that they issue from a subject to whom an object has some meaning. But *subjective* in this sense does not necessarily mean mere opinion: it means reciprocity.’<sup>11</sup> This last sentence shows how Clifton’s phenomenological stance relates to that of reader response theorists: reciprocity speaks of a two-way process whereby we are not merely passive observers of a phenomenon, but active contributors to the experience. When we listen to music we

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<sup>9</sup> See *Music as Heard*, viii.

<sup>10</sup> Carolyn Abbate, ‘Music: Drastic or Gnostic?’, *Critical Inquiry* 30/3 (2004), 505–36.

<sup>11</sup> Clifton, *Music as Heard*, ix.

are attached bodily to it. It is not some abstract object that is away from us; it is only through us that it is able to express at all.

Because of this attachment, the body, too, becomes a fundamental part of the conscious intentionality of a phenomenon. Indeed, Descartes observes: ‘What about sensing? Surely this too does not take place without a body, and I seemed to have sensed in my dreams many things that I later realized I did not sense.’<sup>12</sup> In other words, sensory experience is something we do with our bodies. It is the body that enables us to posit space because it is the body that experiences and occupies space in the first place. To put it another way, we *intend* our experiences bodily. We shall return to this point below.

Intentionality is one of the main themes of Husserl and Sartre. Husserl calls it *Intentionalität*, whose German usage differs from the English ‘intention’ (what is willed or its purpose), and instead derives from the Latin ‘intentio’, which refers to representations that are formed in the mind – an important idea for this present study. In short, the oneness of the mind and object can be explained by Husserl’s concerns over the intentionality of all experience: consciousness is always consciousness of something, and therefore the so-called mutual exclusivity of the cogitating subjective mind and an object that is ‘out there’, represented by Kant’s ‘phenomena’ and ‘noumena’ respectively, can only ever be a fallacy. There simply is no phenomenon without a consciousness.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 28.

<sup>13</sup> See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Book 1: *General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F. Kerston (The Hague and London: Nijhoff, 1982), 10.

### 2.1.3 Multi-Sensory, Trans-Sensual Experience

More pertinent still to MaP is the idea proposed by Mikel Dufrenne of the ‘quasi-subject’, where the object, in our case the composition, comes to have a world of its own. The music does not occur in space and time: these qualities are *in* the music itself. He explains ‘they are internal to the [aesthetic] object and assumed by it. It is they that make it a quasi-subject capable of a world which it expresses’. This occurs because the experience consists of ‘a sort of communion between the object and myself’, a oneness, in other words. He claims that music presents itself in a ‘gradual unfolding of the sensuous – the sensuous being the means and the end of the work, its matter and its final result’<sup>14</sup> – which point is strikingly reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari’s planes of composition that were discussed in Chapter 1, where sensation realizes itself in the material or the material realizes itself in sensation.

The time dimension is also one that occupies Thomas Clifton, who, like Dufrenne, maintains that an aesthetic experience like music does not occur in an objective time but carries its own time with it. The corollary is that whilst experiencing the music we, too, become part of this complete world: ‘It is events, as lived through by people, which define time.’<sup>15</sup> In apparent agreement with this position, the musicologist Barbara Barry writes, ‘it would seem that when listening to music in an involved, concentrated way, those visual rhythms – including one’s “rule of thumb” feel for clock time – are suspended or “blocked out” by the network of musical rhythms.’<sup>16</sup> In other words, the music forges its own world, as Clifton and

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<sup>14</sup> Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, trans. and with an introduction by Edward S. Casey et al. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), cited in Wayne D. Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives on Music*, 265.

<sup>15</sup> Clifton, *Music as Heard*, 55.

<sup>16</sup> Barbara R. Barry, *Musical Time: the Sense of Order* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1990), 7. The idea of clock time as a state qualitatively different to musical time was first expounded upon by Henri Bergson in *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (1889). Bergson discusses how the successive strokes of a ticking clock ‘melted into one another’ creating a qualitative perception which ‘made a kind of musical phrase out of it’. In this way, he argues, we should distinguish between

Dufrenne seem to think, through the musical rhythms that unfold. Barry continues that if musical time can ‘be described as the interaction between two distinct components, one being the innate organization of the work – its style, harmonic characteristics, internal subdivisions and so on – then the other is the responsive part played by the individual in the perception of time’.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the individual becomes complicit in the experience of musical time, or the *music*’s time, because their perception is constructed upon these experiential foundations.

Another aspect of phenomenology that Clifton writes about is the related dimension of space. He writes that for music to be meaningful as music or anything at all it must first be ‘something through which we live, something which, in a certain sense, we become. The piece, therefore, has value because I possess it, and it possesses me’.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, ‘musical space has significance because a person finds himself there, as a place to take up temporary habitation’.<sup>19</sup> As part of his reader response theory, Wolfgang Iser observes this point too in the way we might take up residence in the reading of a novel. He cites a critic who upon reading Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* feels that it is *they* who have married Mr Rochester.<sup>20</sup> We are immersed in the story because we become the character vicariously.

Furthermore, Clifton asks, how does music ‘speak to us of space? We are all familiar with the term “texture,” but space is what texture is all about. I will regard texture as both object and process, and will include tone quality within its domain’.

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time as a duration which presents itself to immediate consciousness as a ‘quality’ and time as something that has become ‘materialized’ as a ‘quantity’ by being set out successively ‘in space’. See the English translation *Time and Free Will: an Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1910), 127–28. Suzanne Langer makes a similar point when she writes that the order of music does not involve real time, but ‘virtual’ time. See *Feeling and Form: a Theory of Art Developed from ‘Philosophy in a New Key’* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), 108.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>18</sup> Clifton, *Music as Heard*, 273.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>20</sup> See *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974), 291.

He continues: 'Texture – or space – is what we experience when we hear durations, registers, intensities, and tone qualities.'<sup>21</sup> These parameters of music, then, simultaneously occur in and create the space and texture which unfolds in the musical time world. Our sensual experience of texture, the feeling of something rough or smooth, is of course something that normally takes place in space. The fact that an instrumental line can embody motions of up and down, moving away from and towards, thickening and thinning, and moving across and interweaving with other lines means that we hear it as existing in a *space*. Moreover, Clifton writes, '[t]here is a sense, too, in which a musical texture has a tactile quality [...] a flute or violin is sometimes heard as velvety, while a piano (especially when used in the performance of baroque music) can be "rubbery."'<sup>22</sup> In this way, both time and space could be said to exist on a continuum for Clifton, with space, and therefore texture, actively affecting the body through the time that is exclusive to music and which it carries with it.

Griselda Pollock writes that phenomenology might usefully be applied to the experience of space in a painting:

Instead of pictorial space functioning as a notional box into which objects are placed in a rational and abstract relationship, space is represented according to the way it is experienced by a combination of touch, texture, as well as sight. Thus objects are patterned according to subjective hierarchies of value for the producer. Phenomenological space is not orchestrated for sight alone but by means of visual cues refers to other sensations and relations of bodies and objects in a lived world. As experiential space this kind of representation becomes

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<sup>21</sup> Clifton, *Music as Heard*, 68–69.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

susceptible to different ideological, historical as well as purely contingent, subjective inflections.<sup>23</sup>

For Pollock, then, that phenomenological space is related at least in part to the bodily and the sensual – through touch, texture and sight – accords with Clifton's observation above that in music 'space is what texture is all about' and Dufrenne's assertion that music is the 'gradual unfolding of the sensuous – the sensuous being the means and the end of the work, its matter and its final result'. Our senses, then, seem to be subject to a crossed modality where one sensual experience implies or may be experienced by the memory or excitement of another. Applying this suggestive line of thought to painting, we might first consider the 'visual cues' which refer to these 'other sensations'. The heavy brushwork, a recurrent feature of much of Van Gogh's oeuvre, for example, is in abundance in *La nuit étoilée* discussed in Part II. In Van Gogh's work there is a tactile quality created by this blend of brushwork, and it serves to give his paintings a three-dimensional effect too. There is also an animate quality about his work, in the sense that whilst the paintings are clearly very stylized they also seem to convey a lifelike quality. Pollock's assertion, however, that such spatial representation is sensitive to subjective and ideological 'inflections' points to her departure from Clifton's non-reflective, Husserlian phenomenology, for it seems to allow for a cognitive component that would hold the phenomenal object at a reflective distance.

Similarly, the French filmmaker and theorist Michel Chion argues that the visual and auditory senses are not restricted to experiencing or perceiving only sight-and-sound-based phenomena respectively. In his words:

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<sup>23</sup> Griselda Pollock, 'Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity', in *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts*, ed. Francis Francina and Jonathan Harris (London: Phaidon, 1992), 128.

The eye carries information and sensations only some of which can be considered specifically and irreducibly visual (e.g. colour); most others are transsensory. Likewise, the ear serves as a vehicle for information and sensations only some of which are specifically auditive (e.g., pitch and intervallic relations), the others being, as in the case of the eye, not specific to this sense.<sup>24</sup>

Chion maintains throughout this work that there is interdependence between these senses. And, of course, one obvious manifestation of this idea is the eye perceiving sights which imply a sounding event: for example, a picture of the sea arguably evokes our memories of what the sea sounds like. Conversely, the sound of the sea or sea-like sounds may conjure our memories of visual images of the sea. Moreover, descriptions of music, both analytical and poetic, have tended to invoke visual metaphors in their discourse. Perhaps, then, these descriptions might be regarded as actually ‘perceptual’ in the multi-sensory field to which they give access, rather than merely metaphorical, explaining the seeming ‘rightness’ of describing certain musical experiences in this way. Thus, music is not a purely auditory experience but a synaesthetic one; spatial relations are not intrinsic properties of a musical object but fields of action in which we participate.

Essentially, we find in Clifton’s approach a radical departure from other explanations of musical meaning in his avoidance of characterizing music as symbolic, associative or representational: ‘Music is presentative rather than denotative’.<sup>25</sup> Instead he wants music to speak for itself, that is, the meaning does not lie elsewhere, extra-musically, in a painting, for example, but in ‘lived musical experiences’. His account is one of pluralism and, because of this, dangerously close to charges of relativism. Clifton’s argument is about the singularity of musical

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<sup>24</sup> Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sounds on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman with a foreword by W. Murch (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 137.

<sup>25</sup> Clifton, *Music as Heard*, 1.

expression: 'What the music says is what it is.' How, then, music 'speaks' becomes paramount to the essence of what the musical experience *is*. And we can see how close this line of thought is to the modernist agenda set forth by Adorno, Deleuze and Guattari in their emphases on the materiality of *how* something is being said musically. Moreover, they also seem to share the notion that a synaesthetic perception is an essential background to the experience of music and painting.

Discussing the perceived qualities of 'grace', 'drama' and 'agony' in the music of Mozart, Mahler and Coltrane respectively, Clifton asserts that '[i]t is not even accurate enough to say that these constituents are what the music is *about*: rather they *are* the music'.<sup>26</sup> So, rather than being depicted or represented by the music or being contingent aspects of it, these elements are immanent within it: the music actually *is* these things, but only through the complicity of the experiencing perceiver who makes these connections to the unfolding musical sounds. Therefore, although Clifton maintains that musical meaning is indwelling, it only becomes available through the *lived* musical experience, and this is dependent upon the experiences, predominantly bodily and carnal, that we might bring to it. The reason these qualities of grace, drama, and agony *are* the music is that they are what the music describes and utters to us through our lived experience of it. In other words, he is saying that the musical experience – or what we understand as music – *is* its process or how it articulates itself to us. There is therefore no point looking anywhere else for the music, because it occurs only in this process.

Clifton's position, then, suggests an immanent musical experience that is completely impervious to any outside influence, such as the 'imagination' of an absent stimulus, like a painting. In this way, 'perception' is the listener's immediate

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 19 (italics original).

field of consciousness at the point of their encounter with the musical object; it is a sensory and not an abstract process – if the painting is out of sight, it is out of mind. It is, therefore, contingent upon our bodily experience of the music – how we respond synaesthetically – and the body is therefore a ‘synergetic system which responds to a musical situation addressed to tactile and visual, as well as auditory, functions’.<sup>27</sup>

In discussing extra-musical association, Clifton maintains that ‘music has the power to evoke certain extramusical memories, feelings, and fantasies’. But he continues: ‘This is not the problem. The problem lies in the persistent use of the term *extramusical*.’<sup>28</sup> At first sight, this statement seems to veer in the opposite direction from his previous immanentist position. However, this is not quite what Clifton means: he is saying that music does not represent things, it does not point to those things, it simply *is* those things in the process of becoming music – just as we saw in the example above regarding the qualities of ‘grace’, ‘drama’ and ‘agony’. The problem with so-called extra-musical association, according to Clifton, is the fact that these memories and feelings are not extra to music at all, they *are* the music. He explains, ‘Debussy’s conception of the ocean is not “outside of” *La Mer*; the essence of the ocean shares in the essence of the music. It is not music which is adulterated by exposure to other natural or cultural phenomena, it is these phenomena which have become musicalized.’<sup>29</sup> Which point reminds us of how Siglind Bruhn asserts that musical works ‘transmedialize’ their subject. Significantly, though, Clifton differs here by stating that the music becomes the sea through its lived experience and not by abstracting its ‘essence’ in some passive, yet to be discovered, manner.

As laudably fresh an approach as this is, it is assuming a lot. First, Clifton is unquestioning in his assumption that *La mer* is really about the sea; but what if the

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<sup>27</sup> Clifton, *Music as Heard*, 137.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

music is not really about the sea and the title is just incidental? Second, whether it is about the sea or not, before it can become ‘musicalized’ as the sea it surely has to undergo some kind of reflection or mediation, that is, a judgement and therefore an interpretation; and that interpretation is at odds with phenomenology’s seeming insistence on the immanence of musical meaning. The third aspect concerns the representation. Even if the sea somehow becomes ‘musicalized’, does that restrict the music’s field of reference in any binding or permanent manner? In other words, could not the music’s kinetic and gestural qualities be ascribed to some other extra-musical object such as the wind in the trees, for example?

It is not difficult to imagine one being able to obtain inter-subjective agreement on there being sea-like qualities in the music of *La mer* – the ebb and flow of the dynamics, for example – but these aspects are generic and require the imaginative facility of the listener to interpret them in this sea-like manner. Moreover, these generic qualities refer to our experiences of the sea, and they therefore cast the music as symbolic, a status that Clifton vehemently resists for it. And the symbolic nature of these qualities requires our mediation and therefore also our memories and unique perspective of the sea, again something Clifton’s phenomenology seems to prohibit. In short, ‘oneness’ between the subject and object of consciousness presents a problem when dealing with the generic qualities of compositions such as *La mer*. In addition, it is true that an eradication of the boundary between the listener and the musical object carries the danger of a lapse into solipsism, denying the objectivity we are aiming at.

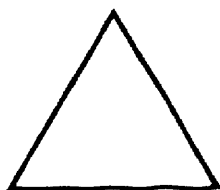
However, this epistemological issue is not necessarily a problem for Clifton; as we saw above, he claims that his approach is objective precisely because it purports to describe the musical object adequately, that is, as we experience it. We are, then,

always in the process of responding to our or someone else's actualization or concretization of a musical text and not the thing itself. In accordance with phenomenology and reader-response theories, then, meaning is not something that can be isolated but is an effect to be experienced, and we must therefore attend to the conditions of this meaning's emergence. Citing Merleau-Ponty's assertion that one's body is present wherever there is 'something to be done', Clifton argues on this basis that music is something we make, and we hear it *as* music because we make it.<sup>30</sup> This echoes Roger Scruton's theory of music as a 'tertiary' quality, which will be examined in the next chapter.

#### 2.1.4 The Imaginative Supplementation of Musical Meaning

Clifton's phenomenology sees music as more than just the object of passive listening: it is 'perceiving, interpreting, judging, and feeling', and 'the musically behaving person experiences musical significance'. This significance is not associative, symbolic or denotative; rather, it is 'presented in and by the sounds'. He continues: 'Music, whatever else it is, is not factually in the world the way trees and mountains are.'<sup>31</sup> It is as much about what we do with it that distinguishes it from other sounds that we would classify as non-music, such as the sounds made by a thunderstorm or in a noisy restaurant.

Clifton gives an excellent example of this phenomenological approach when he provides us with 'four *meanings*' that may arise from an equilateral triangle:



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<sup>30</sup> See Clifton, *Music as Heard*, 66.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

(1) an arrow pointing in any of three directions; (2) a figure pointing in three directions at once; (3) a spatial figure of a point in a background growing into a plane surface whose edge is visible in the foreground; and (4) the same planar figure receding into a point.

He explains that whilst he is free to interpret the triangle in many other ways, this freedom is not total and one is not likely to interpret it as right-pointing arrow, for example: 'In fact, I am free to perceive this figure in any of several ways only because my freedom is circumscribed by my past experiences and acquisitions of the world.'<sup>32</sup> A phenomenon is therefore something that can mean many things, but its meanings are delimited by our social, educational and cultural backgrounds. So, from this example and from Clifton's statement above regarding music's evocation of certain extra-musical memories, we can see that his approach allows for his listener's response to posit what is meant by or significant about a phenomenon. Clearly, then, there is scope here for that response to be affected by a painting.

The first-order *Erlebnis* is not a blind and purely passive perception, but one that demands further processing as a 'phenomenological reflection' on the original perception. Clifton argues that a reflective orientation is necessary if the thought in the perception itself is to emerge: 'The perceptive act is too full of meaning for the meaning to be completely grasped during the act itself. For this reason, reflection is not only necessary, but its task is never ending.'<sup>33</sup> But, much as this might appear to open the floodgates to reflective, second-order acts of perception, even here the Husserlian, phenomenological stamp is never very far away, for it is still about the properties of an object as experienced by a person located in a particular time and place – as we saw above in the triangle example. Moreover, this phenomenological 'take' on reflection assumes that a first-order phenomenal encounter *itself* elicits an

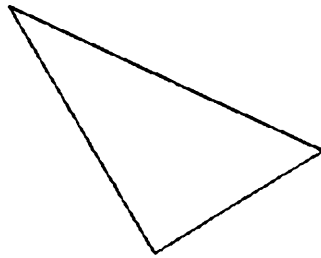
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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 11 (*italics original*).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 37.

actively reflective stance in the listener, rather than it being an abstract and passive one resulting from some external supplementation from the listener.

In his posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Ludwig Wittgenstein also adduces an example of a triangle to furnish his argument concerning interpretation and imagination.<sup>34</sup> This time, however, it is a scalene triangle:



Wittgenstein writes,

The triangle can be seen as a triangular hole, as a solid, as a geometrical drawing, as standing on its base, as hanging from its apex; as a mountain, as a wedge, as an arrow or pointer, as an overturned object which is meant to stand on the shorter side of the right angle, as a half parallelogram, and as various other things. [...] But how is it possible to *see* an object according to an *interpretation*? The question represents it as a queer fact; as if something were being forced into a form it did not really fit. But no squeezing, no forcing took place here.<sup>35</sup>

These possible interpretations of the triangle, then, are so readily available to us that their existence seems natural; there is no difficulty in accepting the interpretations that both he and Clifton present. It is an important example of how interpretation is not objective but subjectively led, and how perception can be guided. Wittgenstein

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<sup>34</sup> It is interesting that both philosophers have used the triangle for similar examples. It would seem likely that Clifton would have been aware of the earlier example by Wittgenstein but he makes no mention of it. Clifton's book was also published posthumously, which may explain this omission.

<sup>35</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations II* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 171 (italics original).

continues: 'The aspects of the triangle: it is as if an *image* came into contact, and for a time remained in contact, with the visual impression.'<sup>36</sup> Thus, it is as if we become one with the image.

Wittgenstein appears to be taking a stance similar to Clifton's phenomenology in that the phenomenal experience demands that the two poles of consciousness and object become one through the visual impression. But Wittgenstein goes further by arguing that to see the triangle in any of the ways described above 'demands *imagination*',<sup>37</sup> for we are obviously drawing on memories of experiences that are absent. We supplement the perception of the triangle with an image from our memory against which the triangle makes sense. And, so it is with music composed after painting: to hear the sounds presented as aligned with the painting in any aspect demands our imagination of the absent stimulus.

If we can view the triangle or the musical work as a set of conditions<sup>38</sup> for the emergence of meaning, these conditions, writes Clifton, 'may not be able to tell us what lies ahead, [but] the person cannot help *intending* a future content of some kind'.<sup>39</sup> This takes us neatly to one of the most important aspects of a phenomenal theory of music, and one to which reader-response criticism is also indebted. Hearing music is not a passive response to a collection of sounds; rather, it is something that we do actively and responsively. Music is something *to be made*. This is not to suggest that those meanings are arbitrary, for it is the 'mutual contributions made by the experiencing subject and the musical object being experienced'<sup>40</sup> that govern the production of the music. That is, the musical object has a potential similarity with its intended content, out of which a particular interpretation can arise:

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 176 (*italics original*).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 177 (*italics original*).

<sup>38</sup> Wolfgang Iser calls these conditions 'instructions' in respect of a literary text.

<sup>39</sup> Clifton, *Music as Heard*, 63 (*italics original*).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 70.

The unifying bond between melody and me is not a physical proximity, but a meaning which is constituted *in me by* the melody. The *melody* provides the meaning, not consciousness. It is the business of consciousness to embrace musical meaning, not impose it onto the musical object. This is why a particular musical meaning itself is a criterion for judging the suitability of a verbal, and sometimes metaphorical, description. Otherwise it wouldn't be as difficult as it is to talk about music. It is not the vagueness of musical meaning that we are trying to catch: it is its precision.<sup>41</sup>

In other words, our descriptions of music are contingent on the musical meaning of the melody in the first instance, and the meaning would be clear were we only able to find it a suitable description.

### 2.1.5 The Percept and the Image

Clifton asserts that the fundamental difference between percepts and an image (as in an imaginative act), is that 'the former contributes to knowledge, while the latter requires knowledge. Following Merleau-Ponty, we can therefore distinguish the sense of a perceived object as a *content* of consciousness from the sense of an imagined object as an *operation* of consciousness.'<sup>42</sup> But is this correct? Can something enter our consciousness unadulterated by our subjectivity – as an 'immaculate perception'?<sup>43</sup> Whereas for Clifton there is such a thing as 'pure' perception, we would argue that both percepts *and* imagining are implicated in our dialogue with the musical object. The music presents itself as a percept, content, but what we do with it thereafter is governed by our imaginative operations.

Clifton asserts that phenomenology bases the 'possible on the real':

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 47 (italics original).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>43</sup> The term 'Immaculate Perception' was used notably by Friedrich Nietzsche for the title of Chapter 37 in the second part of his book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (London: Penguin, 1969), 144.

The expression “logic of experience” then indicates that there are certain logical aspects of experience which are irreducible, not because of what or how I think, but because of the requirements of experience itself. And it is within the contingency of particular experiences that this logic expresses itself. If I listen to a composition and inquire about the purely logical necessities which make it possible to appear, I must consult the composition itself, rather than an intellectual scheme of my own design. To the question, What is necessary for the being of music? One can provide such essential constituents as musical time and space, as well as the human acts of feeling and intuitive understanding which flesh out the pure formality of these constituents.<sup>44</sup>

The ‘real’, then, in our case is the composition itself, and Clifton seems to suggest that the musical work itself must direct a particular experience. Accordingly, it would seem that there is something fundamental about the phenomenological attitude which can be retained in our explorations here, and *that* something is how we believe music to possess those qualities that we ascribe to it. Further still, in a related way, the phenomenological attitude suggests how we become one with the lived musical experience. The music’s function is not to refer outwards to this or that painting (or extra-musical object), but is instead bound up in its physical encounter with the listener.

However, the physical absence of the painting seems to present a problem for phenomenological perception, unless we hold that Clifton’s notion of a perception governed by our ‘past experiences and acquisitions of the world’ enables a role for the absent painting. The issue phenomenology raises for MaP is therefore its repudiation of the absent ‘image’ as integral to the experience of the phenomenal object. Clifton argues that,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 50.

With the best will in the world, it is still deceptively easy to confuse a phenomenological description of music with the poetic rambling of nineteenth-century music criticism, and to criticize it as anthropomorphic [...] [F]or these critics, the World is a Newtonian machine, a neutral zone for our projections, associations, and transferences. A “peaceful meadow” is meaningless, because, for them, the “human world” is meaningless. But then it is incumbent upon these critics to point to the “objective world.” Where is that? In the very act of pointing, the world becomes a human possession.

We saw earlier that in making selections of attributes, even as scientists, we present a bias that is subjective; it is imbued with a human interest and therefore non-objective. Clifton asks: ‘Is a phenomenon a mental construct?’ If it is, he says, then ‘attached to the notion of constructs is the implication that a perceptual judgement is a one-way street, that it consists of conferring meanings *onto* the raw material of the world which supposedly can mean anything we want it to mean’. However, Clifton argues against this constructivist view by positing the idea that a percept contributes to knowledge whereas an image requires knowledge. Hence the world cannot be entirely constructed, for it presents things into our consciousness:

The appearance of a phenomenon entails the recognition that the object perceived and the operation of perceiving are distinct but related poles of an ongoing dialogue. To assume that phenomena are nothing but mental constructs places too much weight on the operation of consciousness, and approaches an ideology which makes conscious operations the efficient cause of the conscious content.<sup>45</sup>

In his view, a perceptual judgement is an interactive proposition involving what Jean-Jacques Nattiez would call the ‘neutral’ or material trace and its esthetic reception.<sup>46</sup>

Phenomena like music are not exclusively mental constructions and neither do

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>46</sup> See my Introduction for a more detailed discussion of this component.

conscious operations cause the phenomenal content – the percept – alone. It is from the collaborative forces of these two poles that the musical perception emerges.

Clifton adds that musical meaning has the capacity to be both phenomenal and metaphorical. However, ‘the problem becomes one of distinguishing the levels on which the phenomenon and metaphor reside.’<sup>47</sup> When music is described as ‘lively’ it is a term most would call metaphorical since it refers to living beings, and music cannot be alive. He continues,

If we get beneath this presupposition, we find that “lively” is not an invented *relation* between musical and bodily pace, but rather an experienced *unity*. The meaning that we find in “lively” is not primordially a meaning of similarity but rather one of necessity. That is, “lively” expresses an essential aspect of the piece’s character, and one which is immanent in the piece itself.

The use of such terms as *lively* as an integral part of the musical score reveals a mode of conduct preceding any separation of thinking, perceiving, and bodily gesture, – and although I will not press it – any assignment of thinking as an activity belonging exclusively to the brain.<sup>48</sup>

His problem with metaphorical description, then, is that these descriptions are not figurative, they really *are* the phenomenal object in the lived experience. In describing music as ‘lively’ he explains that he is ‘not necessarily using the body as a physical referent; rather, the body itself is interpreted as meaning. The body is not only what we *have*, it is what we *are*, and it is in the latter sense that the body, as origin of music, is regarded.’<sup>49</sup> Hence, the musical experience is in *us*, or *is* us; made, as it is, from within and by our bodies. Musical meaning is something to be embraced and not

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<sup>47</sup> Clifton, *Music as Heard*, 44.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 47 (italics original).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 45 (italics original).

imposed externally onto the musical object. As such, our bodily identification with the work may be so complete that any boundaries between it and us disappear.

### **2.1.6 Musical Affordance and the Listener's Subject-Position**

It is remarkable how closely this formulation overlaps with Eric Clarke's ecological approach to musical listening, presented in his book *Ways of Listening* and based on J. J. Gibson's ecological model of perception, which assumes that structure is already inherent in the environment and is not, therefore, a mental construction imposed retroactively. Applying this model to musical meaning, Clarke identifies certain musical attributes as 'affording' certain meanings – 'affordance' being another term derived from Gibson. Thus, in discussing the interaction between musical structure (the environment) and musical perception, Clarke focuses in on the 'subject-position' of the listener. He writes that 'perception must be understood as a relationship between environmentally available information and the capacities, sensitivities, and interests of a perceiver'.<sup>50</sup> And it is the relationship between the music and the listener which defines a particular aesthetic orientation. The 'subject-position' – a term borrowed from film theory – of the listener results from the intrinsic musical structure causing the listener to adopt a particular attitude towards it; and thus, as Clifton says above, if we hear the music as 'lively' it is because it possesses this characteristic essentially and even 'demands' to be heard this way. In this way, there are limits to what music *can* mean – or, more accurately, limits to the orientations we might take while listening to it.

Once again, in light of MaP, this would seem to suggest that the integrated multi-sensory perception required to perceive any similarity or relation to the painting

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<sup>50</sup> Eric Clarke, *Ways of Listening: an Ecological Approach to the Perception of Musical Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 91.

is ruled out if the painting is absent. But as we have said, Clifton does seem to leave at least two possibilities open for the role of the painting: the music may trigger, synaesthetically, extra-musical memories of our past experience of the painting, or our previous encounter with the painting may itself affect our combined interpretation of what is meant or significant about the music in the lived experience. All of this refers back to the phenomenological view that perception is attached and reflection detached; that is, the more we distance ourselves from music through constructive or imaginative acts, such as metaphorical description, truly the less we are able to describe the musical object as we experience it.

As a philosophical basis for our phenomenal experience of music, phenomenology has much to recommend it, for it has restored the idea of music being something that we experience consciously and not from a distance, and also something that we become attached to through our bodies – hence the use of spatial orientation terms to describe music. And the purity of this notion is supported by Clifton's constant return to the musical object as the anchor for any meanings which are phenomenally presented. The most controversial point for our purposes, though, is the claim that music actually *is* what it describes, that the qualities ascribed to it are immanent in the music. Accordingly, the next section will further develop the view that musical meaning is something made and not given. While MaP remains contingent on our immediate experience of the musical object itself, it will nonetheless be argued that it may acquire additional import from the listener's access to and recollection of the experiential domain of the painting.

### 2.2.1 Reader-Response Theory: from Perception to Reflection

Thus far, we have considered the possible convergences between the spatial and temporal arts through discussing the phenomenal and trans-sensual encounter with the musical object itself. This system was brought in because it allows for the immediate, physical response to the artwork before we engage in any secondary reflections about it – a focus on the phenomenal effects of the artwork itself. However, as we said earlier, this system presents a problem if we wish to examine the role of an absent painting in the aesthetic experience of our musical case studies in Part II. This is because the painting's absence invites an imaginative response – what Thomas Clifton calls an 'image' – and that involves the operations of consciousness and 'hearing *as*' to supplement the musical experience with a background against which the music might fit. Where a percept involves the phenomenal perception of the actual object, in our case the music, the image involves the operations of our consciousness – imagination.

Accordingly, phenomenologists argue that such a state is reflective, holding the experience at a distance so that we are no longer describing the art object in a pure way but in a way that is now 'contaminated' by our subjective mediations. Moreover, any such imagining suggests that the encounter with the object is being supplemented by something external. But since this project posits the theory that our aesthetic response to MaP requires both the phenomenal perception of the music and imagery extending from the absent painting, we will here discuss the possibilities of extending Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theory to MaP in order to account for this process of supplementation.

One of the major criticisms of phenomenology has been its 'bracketing out' or 'reduction' of all preconceptions, assumptions and beliefs that might intervene in the

‘pure’ perception of the object. This process is called *epoché* and means the ‘setting aside of all historical and natural assumptions and factual knowledge in order to be able to apprehend more readily the phenomena and the subject’s consciousness of them’.<sup>51</sup> The fact that this Husserlian phenomenology is not interested in history and cultural meaning presents a problem for our investigation of MaP, for if we are to think of the situation as involving three parties – the music, the painting and the interpreter – the phenomenal field broadens and is opened to new culturally and historically determined meanings. So now, as well as responding in a bodily manner to the musical object, we are also being invited to imagine or construct a context from the painting to make sense of what we are hearing. The painting therefore provides a framework and opens a mental conduit to all of our preconceptions about paintings and, of course, *their* phenomenological worlds too. The fact that the painting is invoked *in absentia* may allow a greater amount of interpretative freedom than would be feasible if the artwork was staring us in the face. It allows the music to dominate and present its phenomenal world, albeit one that is tempered and constrained by the idea of the painting. It seems appropriate, then, to turn now towards a theory which will allow for the listener’s role in creating the meaning and experience of MaP.

Reader-response theory emerged from an opposition to the disciplines of formalism and New Criticism, which both focus on the text itself, its form and content, and not on the authorial creation (‘intentional fallacy’) or reception of a work (‘affective fallacy’).<sup>52</sup> But clearly, in an inquiry into MaP, reception and intention

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<sup>51</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, online edition, s.v. ‘epoché’ [accessed 10 June 2007].

<sup>52</sup> It was William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley in their 1946 essay ‘The Intentional Fallacy’ who coined the term ‘intentional fallacy’ to counter the discussion of any authorial intention, and who also offered the term ‘affective fallacy’ to highlight their opposition to an interest in the reader’s reaction to a text. Critical interest, they argued, should focus on the text itself. For the 1954 revised version of the essay, see W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*, with two preliminary essays written in collaboration with Monroe C. Beardsley (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 3–18

must be paramount if the absent painting is to hold any aesthetic sway over the listener's musical experience. Therefore, if we extend its principles from its native field of literature, reader-response theory allows for a model whereby we can formulate ideas from the image background of the painting and the phenomenal encounter with the musical object.

The vanguard of culturally oriented musicologists of the 1990s was inspired by Joseph Kerman's book *Contemplating Music* (1985), which championed a shift away from formalism and towards a more pluralistic view of musical meaning.<sup>53</sup> This position opened a dialogue that purported to place the critical interpretation of music within a cultural framework, rather than focus solely upon the music's structural components as the main source of musical meaning. It therefore shares a great deal with the reader-response theory derived from literary theorists such as Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser,<sup>54</sup> both of whom placed a new emphasis on the importance of the reader's involvement in creating the literary experience. Roland Barthes observed something similar when he wrote that 'the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text'.<sup>55</sup>

Fish and Iser's theories are not mutually exclusive and could be said to exist along the same continuum: their ideas, like those of the phenomenologists, meet in the conviction that works of art do not exist independently of a lived experience. The work of art, whether it be a book, a painting or music, becomes an aesthetic object in the process of being experienced. It is we who produce the aesthetic object in

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<sup>53</sup> Joseph Kerman, *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1985) – the British title was simply *Musicology* (London: Fontana, 1985).

<sup>54</sup> One of the major criticisms of Iser's form of reader-response theory has been what Dagmar Barnouw has described as the disappearing text and reader within the very 'act of reading'. But it will not be my purpose here to discuss these limitations, for I am using aspects of Iser's theory to explore the idea that musical meaning is an interactive process and one which is ultimately grounded in the perceptual experience of the work. For a good overview of this area see Dagmar Barnouw's review article 'The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response; The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett', *Modern Language Notes*, 94/5 (1979), 1207–14.

<sup>55</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, 2nd edn, trans. Richard Miller (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), 4.

conjunction with the work itself. Whilst it seems rather obvious that books are read by readers and music is heard by listeners, previous approaches to both literature and to musical analysis have all too often focused exclusively on the printed page. Terry Eagleton explains that this move towards reception theory in literature came from the conviction of its proponents that ‘[l]iterary texts do not exist on bookshelves: they are processes of signification materialized only in the practice of reading. For literature, the reader is quite as vital as the author.’<sup>56</sup> The focus, then, is as much on what the text does to the reader as on the text itself – a phenomenon illustrated well by the provocatively titled book by Stanley Fish *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities*<sup>57</sup> – the obvious inference being that there is no *text* without the reader.

Reader-response theory is, of course, heavily indebted to phenomenology, and this position is evident in Stanley Fish’s preface to his book *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*:

Meaning is an event, something that happens not on the page, where we are accustomed to look for it, but in the interaction between the flow of print (or sound) and the active mediating of the reader-hearer.<sup>58</sup>

Accordingly, meaning is something which happens in the lived experience through an interaction between the object and the interpreter.

In his book *The Act of Reading* (1978) Wolfgang Iser similarly explains that the ‘aesthetic response is set in motion through the reading process; such an analysis, however, provides a framework which enables us to assess individual realizations and

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<sup>56</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an Introduction*. 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 64–65.

<sup>57</sup> Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

<sup>58</sup> Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: the Reader in Paradise Lost* (London: Macmillan, 1967).

interpretations of a text in relation to the conditions that have governed them'.<sup>59</sup> These conditions are, of course, the text's instructions. For Iser, then, traditional modes of interpretation which purport to extract meaning from the text, like an archaeologist unearthing an artefact, are simply not viable; meaning is not there for the taking, it is a dynamic process. Referring to literary criticism of the nineteenth century, Iser writes, 'It seems only natural to the critic that meaning, as a buried secret, should be accessible to and reducible by the tools of referential analysis.' The problem of trying to extract its referential meaning is that once the text (or the music) has provided its referent, it is all used up and can be discarded. But clearly that is not our aesthetic experience of reading a book or listening to music; we seem to live through both and they remain with us long after our direct experience of them – meaning is not, therefore, 'transparent' to the medium which bears it.

For Iser, the central error in traditional referential analysis is its supposition that the critic should search for the truth hidden somewhere in the text like a piece of buried treasure, perhaps behind or underneath the text, and that it is always there as an authoritative or 'true' meaning, waiting for extraction by an authoritative and suitably intelligent critic. He argues that Henry James's short story *The Figure in the Carpet* (1896) unmasks this error because it shows how 'appearances are no longer the veil concealing the substance of a meaning; now they are the means to bring into the world something which has never existed at any other time or place before'.<sup>60</sup> The story's title, *The Figure in the Carpet*, is obviously figurative, highlighting the fallacy that a fixed and hidden meaning exists in the carpet (the text). Thus, the text does not reveal a transparent signified, but instead enables the reader to produce multiple readings conditioned by that text.

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<sup>59</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: a Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), x.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

The very appearance of the text, then, affords a set of directions actualized by the reader. Of course, this is what metaphor is capable of too: relating imagery already functioning in one field to a new field or situation enables it to describe new situations. It would seem, though, that for both Iser and the phenomenologists meaning cannot ultimately be textualized. For Iser, the meaning of a text is not indeterminate but it has to be completed or configured in the reader. And for phenomenologists, too, meaning is not indeterminate but nor is it language dependent: it is part of the physical, phenomenal encounter with the work.

Iser argues that if meaning is 'imagistic in nature' it cannot be identified by the critic, who requires a frame of reference to parse what is occurring in the narrative, for the text 'represents a pattern, a structured indicator to guide the imagination of the reader; and so the meaning can only be grasped as an image'. He continues:

Such a meaning must clearly be the product of an interaction between the textual signals and the reader's acts of comprehension. And, equally clearly, the reader cannot detach himself from such an interaction; on the contrary, the activity stimulated in him will link him to the text and induce him to create the conditions necessary for the effectiveness of that text. As text and reader thus merge into a single situation, the division between subject and object no longer applies, and it therefore follows that meaning is no longer an object to be defined, but is an effect to be experienced.<sup>61</sup>

It is once again a matter of what the text does to us rather than what it 'means'. The reader, the subject, has therefore become as important as the object itself; and in this way 'the conveyer [the text] cannot be identical to what is conveyed'<sup>62</sup> – according with Nattiez's discussions regarding the poietic and esthetic levels. It is for this

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 9–10.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 54.

reason that for Iser, communication – how the art object communicates – is the primary model for an aesthetic response, not meaning. It is a functional approach: ‘The focal point now is the interaction between the text and, on the one hand, the social and historical norms of its environment and, on the other, the potential disposition of the reader’.<sup>63</sup>

In his insistence that divisions between the subject (reader) and object (text) no longer apply, Iser’s demonstrates his indebtedness to the monism espoused by the phenomenologists. Thus, meaning involves a tripartite process which feeds back in all directions along its triangular geometry. At this point, it seems appropriate to apply this to MaP – for Iser himself happily navigates between visual art and literature – and ask what produces the conditions that are necessary for its effectiveness and reception. Here, though, the triangle involves the music, the painting and the listener. In this way, we might say that the frame of reference provided by the absent painting supplies a set of conditions for experiencing the music, and vice versa.

Iser goes on to discuss the emergence of New Criticism, which rejects the classical norm of the work or object containing a hidden, true meaning, and instead turns its attention towards the functions operating within the work. But Iser states that whilst this is a progressive move, it falls down in its reliance on defining these functions through the ‘same norms of interpretation that were used in uncovering representative meanings. A function is not a meaning – it brings about an effect, and this effect cannot be measured by the same criteria as are used in evaluating the appearance of truth.’<sup>64</sup> So, we must ask, is Iser rejecting the notion of meaning entirely if meaning lies in the shadow of functionality and hence effect?

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 15–16.

This point brings us back to the notion of the aesthetic response that Iser writes about in the beginning of *The Act of Reading*, a notion which leads him to posit the metaphor that the reader is like a ‘traveller in a stagecoach’ and has, therefore, a ‘moving viewpoint’. However, he still tries to ‘grasp the work as a single unit’.<sup>65</sup> It is this synoptic act, the subjective interpretation which the reader imposes upon the work, which constitutes the actualization of the potential meaning, and in this way the meaning cannot be fixed and nor is it intrinsic to the text; there is no ‘true’ meaning, for it may be ‘grasped’ at any changing moment. And for Iser, that it refuses to acknowledge this subjective reduction of a text, via the critic, to a single unit, has been the fundamental error of classical literary criticism:

Perception and comprehension are not qualities inherent in the objects themselves, and so the world must be translated into something it is not, if it is to be perceived and understood. But if symbols enable us to perceive the existing world and yet are independent of the visible, they must also in principle enable us to see a non-existent world.<sup>66</sup>

Accordingly, for either the existing world or the non-existent world to be perceived, it must be translated into something which it is not. And, unlike Husserl, Iser allows for the use of symbols here. It follows, then, that because these symbols are independent of the visible world, they can also enable us to see something absent, such as a painting.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 16–17.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 64.

### 2.2.2 Actualizing Latent Textual Meaning

Nicholas Cook gives a similar account of musical meaning in his essay ‘Theorizing Musical Meaning’.<sup>67</sup> Whilst this is not a purely reception-based account, it does draw heavily on Iserian concepts by arguing that music comes to mean something through having the ‘potential’ for certain meanings to arise, and how, in this case, these can become realised through the listener. Critical interpretations applied to music cause these meanings to become what he calls ‘actualized’: ‘the critical and analytical discourse that surrounds music is engaged in the very act of creating meaning’.<sup>68</sup> In fact, this argument is clearly predicated on the twentieth-century’s linguistic revolution, from Saussure to Wittgenstein, which recognised that language does not reflect or express meaning but actually produces it. To illustrate his argument, Cook invokes Susan McClary’s famous, sexual interpretation of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, and explains that what ‘assures its fit’ as a metaphor for the music is the ‘notion of homology’:

At the most obvious level, McClary’s interpretations involve equating the frustration and achievement of musical goals with sexual ones; at a more subtle level, they depend on an equation between conformance to or subversion of normative patterns in music on the one hand and society or ideology on the other. Take away the homology and the interpretation loses its plausibility as an interpretation *of* the music rather than one imposed *on* it; it becomes, in a word, arbitrary.<sup>69</sup>

Overlaying McClary’s interpretation upon the music works as a metaphor, therefore, because technical aspects of the music, namely the ‘subversion of

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<sup>67</sup> See his ‘Theorizing Musical Meaning’, *Music Theory Spectrum* 23 (2001), 170–95, and his books *Music, Imagination, and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) and *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>68</sup> Cook, ‘Theorizing Musical Meaning’, 184.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 172 (*italics original*).

normative patterns in music', equates with a similar sexual subversion in 'society or ideology' – both infringe established conventions. It is this correspondence which enables McClary's interpretation to stand and not to be mere imposition. Cook claims that the blend of music and (sexual) image

[R]esults in a new, which is to say emergent, meaning; there could hardly be a clearer illustration of the way in which the critical and analytical discourse that surrounds music is engaged in the very act of creating meaning. We shall never be able to shake our experience free from this powerful interpretation – that is, until the next one comes along.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, for Cook, interpretation means transforming the music's potential meaning into actualized meaning. He argues that there is a 'kind of sleight of hand' in the impression Donald Tovey and Susan McClary give of 'simply describing how the music is, when in reality they are in the business of proposing interpretations and so constructing actualized meaning'.<sup>71</sup> This is illustrative of the overarching theory that Cook hopes will 'outline a way in which we can understand at least some of the meaning ascribed to music as at the same time as irreducibly cultural and intimately related to its structural properties'.<sup>72</sup> Meaning, in other words, is not found or located by a critic, it is something that he or she has brought to bear on the musical structure to help it make *a* sense.

Cook, like Iser, is keen to show that meaning is not arbitrary but is contingent on the text's immanent structure. That meaning, however, is neither solely immanent in the text nor does it reside entirely with the listener. In essence, the person who ascribes a particular meaning to a piece of music is offering it up against the musical structure to see if it 'fits'. What is significant here is how Beethoven's Ninth manages

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 183–84.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 173–74.



to represent and support McClary's sexual interpretation – something which is clearly external to the music's world – through its own musical materials. But obviously, as Peter Kivy observes, 'one needs to *know* that one is listening to illustrative music in order to identify the object of the illustration'.<sup>73</sup> Once again, we can see how the critical interpretation itself is involved in the very act of creating meaning; at the very least it capitalizes on the music's potential.

Invoking Daniel Miller's analysis of material culture, Cook writes, 'any pot or picture has an indefinite, though not infinite, number of physical attributes, and each society makes its own selection from and interpretation of those attributes.'<sup>74</sup> Therefore we select aspects of an object which seem pertinent to us, perhaps through a programme, and they are socially conditioned or constrained by the particular culture in which they are received. Moreover, the particular sets of these attributes are reified through perpetuation within that society through, for example, a critical interpretation such as McClary's above. In this way, the music may be said to contain an 'enabling similarity' with some field of meaning outside itself. Cook maintains that 'while meaning is socially constructed, it is both enabled and constrained by the available attributes of the object'.<sup>75</sup> Again, it is ultimately about how the music speaks. Qualities or attributes of the musical object have the potential for certain meanings to arise in tandem with the perceiver, and these meanings are 'enabled' through them having some similarity between the ascribed meaning (in our case, the painting) and the musical sounds.

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<sup>73</sup> In *Sound and Semblance, Reflections on Musical Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 33 (*italics original*).

<sup>74</sup> Cook, 'Theorizing Musical Meaning', 178.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

Cook writes that music is never ‘alone’ (Peter Kivy’s term from his 1990 book *Music Alone*):<sup>76</sup> ‘it is always received in a discursive context, and [...] it is through the interaction of music and interpreter, text and context, that meaning is constructed’.<sup>77</sup> This, of course, is also the tenor of Iser’s statements. In this way, the music, continuously negotiated through these mediations, has the potential for certain meanings to emerge. And as Cook puts it, musical works, regarded as ‘agents of meaning’, are ‘unstable aggregates of potential signification’. This, he says, is at odds with musicology’s prevalent view, which considers musical works to be ‘relatively stable, hierarchically structured, culturally privileged – in a word, *authorized wholes*’.<sup>78</sup>

Finally, faced with a mistrust of the ability of words to describe the actual experience of music – ‘music depends for its meaning on critical interpretation but is at the same time ineffable’ – Cook urges that the aim of musical analysis ‘should not be to translate meaning into words, but rather to attend to the conditions of its emergence’.<sup>79</sup> Again, this is exactly what Iser advocates when he emphasizes the need to lay bare the functions and conditions governing a work’s reception.<sup>80</sup> If we are to achieve this, we need to show how the critical interpretations of MaP are grounded in its structure and musical attributes, and that these in turn either create meaning or not, depending on the extent of their similarity or fit to the painting. In this way, we create a novel situation where we are actively engaged with the creation of a critical interpretation rather than being passively attendant to it, performing a kind of self-reflexive analysis. This is entirely reminiscent of Thomas Clifton’s drive for music

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<sup>76</sup> Peter Kivy, *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

<sup>77</sup> Cook, *Theorizing Musical Meaning*, 180.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 188 (italics original).

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>80</sup> See Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 14, n. 29.

theory to embrace phenomenology, by which he means not only observing the music, but also observing the act of the ‘self observing the music’.<sup>81</sup>

Iser explains that,

The phenomenological theory of art lays full stress on the idea that, in considering a literary work, one must take into account not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text. Thus Roman Ingarden confronts the structure of the literary text with the ways in which it can be *konkretisiert* (realized). The text as such offers different “schematized views” through which the subject matter can come to light, but the actual bringing to light is an action of *Konkretisation*. If this is so, then the literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the esthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the esthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader.<sup>82</sup>

It follows, then, that the literary work cannot be completely identical to the text, or with the realization of that text, but in fact must lie somewhere between these two poles. The actual ‘work’ is therefore more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized by the reader, and, furthermore, ‘the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader – though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text’. Accordingly, it is the convergence of the reader and the literary work that brings the work into being. But this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed; it always remains virtual because ‘it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader’.<sup>83</sup> And it is this virtuality that for Iser gives rise to the dynamic nature of the reading experience. It is the aesthetic experience. Good evidence for this creative process and the indeterminacy of the readers’ position arises from the fact that

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<sup>81</sup> Clifton, *Music as Heard*, 37.

<sup>82</sup> Iser, *The Implied Reader*, 274 (italics original). It is noteworthy that these terms are, of course, remarkably similar to Nattiez’s poietic and esthetic processes respectively.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 274–75.

different readers can be uniquely affected by a literary text. Interpretations of the same text are, Iser argues, conditional upon the reader's social and cultural experiences of other texts and works of arts; hence, no two readers will concretize the text in the same way.

Iser holds that a functional account of meaning should ask what an art object *does* and not what it *means* – how, not what it means. This injunction is compelling for several reasons, for it seeks to explain meaning as a process of aesthetic response. It is of course what a book does to us – makes us feel in the process of actualizing it – that makes us read it in the first place, not mechanisms of signification alone. The aesthetic pleasure is in the experience of reading because the text cannot mean anything without a reader, just as the aesthetic significance of a piece of music is in the effect it has upon us (how and what it makes us feel) rather than what it means. Iser asserts that the words themselves do not point to a signified object, but instead designate a set of instructions for the production of the signified in the mind of the reader. The reader, then, produces the aesthetic object from the 'instructions' in the text, and it is this which constitutes the aesthetic response.

### **2.2.3 Construction and Ideation**

Accordingly, applying this model to MaP we might consider the music, its title, and our image of the painting as an attempt to designate similar 'instructions' in the production of a suitable aesthetic response. This is an attempt to 'ideate' (to borrow Iser's term), to evoke the presence of something which is not given. Iser writes that 'we must distinguish between perception and ideation as two different means of access to the world: perception requires the actual presence of the object, whereas

ideation depends upon its absence or non-existence'.<sup>84</sup> In other words, our imagination is engaged to supplement the presence of something absent. This point was raised in our discussion of phenomenology above, where Clifton posits the view that percepts contribute to knowledge but the image requires the operations of consciousness, and is thus detached. And it is clear that this is where phenomenology and reader-response theory part company, for the former theory does not seem to allow for ideation and imagining as aspects integral to a 'pure' perception.

Iser, on the other hand, sees these components as essentially forming the aesthetic response required to actualize the 'text' in the first place. Seen thus, there is no virtue in assigning the levels first-order (*Erlebnis*) or second-order (reflective) to acts of perception, for there is no 'work' unless these acts are performed and therefore there can be no *perception* either. Significantly, then, for an aesthetic response involving an absent painting in MaP, Iser's model reconciles these separate but related parts of the communication chain.

Jean-Paul Sartre notes something similar when he writes,

In order to imagine, it is enough that consciousness can surpass the real and constitute it as a world, since the nihilation [*sic*] of the real is always implied by its constitution as a world. But this surpassing cannot be effected in just any way and the freedom of consciousness should not be confused with arbitrariness. For an image is not purely and simply *the world denied*, but is always the *world denied from a certain point of view*, precisely that which allows the positing of the absence or non-existence of the object presentified [*sic*] 'as imaged'.<sup>85</sup>

Hence, by imagining, we are in the process of world-making. And this process is not arbitrary, but always takes place from a particular point of view, which, in the case of

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<sup>84</sup> Iser, *Act of Reading*, 137.

<sup>85</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary: a Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, trans. Jonathan Webber (London: Taylor and Francis, 1948), 184–85 (italics original).

MaP, is produced by the instructions given by the music and the imagined painting, and by allowing for the ideation and expectation of the absent object – what Iser would call the signified. This can also be thought as the projection of a world, instructed by the art objects and mediated by the listener.

In a related way, E. H. Gombrich holds that perception ‘is a constructive process, not a passive one’; it is the beholder’s job ‘to bring the picture alive’.<sup>86</sup> Based on his experiences in WWII monitoring barely audible radio broadcasts for the British Broadcasting Corporation’s Monitoring Service, he writes that,

It was then we learned to what an extent our knowledge and expectations influence our hearing. You had to know what might be said in order to hear what was said. More exactly, you selected from your knowledge of possibilities certain word combinations and tried projecting them into the noises heard.

The effect of this suggestion was so powerful, he continues, ‘that we made it a practice never to tell a colleague of our own interpretation if we wanted them to test it. Expectation created illusion’.<sup>87</sup> What this suggests is that any interpretation of a piece of art is likewise coloured by our own unique selection process. Gombrich writes that this process is so automatic that we might easily lose sight of our configurative contribution: ‘In the reading of images, as in the hearing of speech, it is always hard to distinguish what is given to us from what we supplement in the process of projection which is triggered off by recognition.’ Moreover, ‘it is the guess

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<sup>86</sup> ‘The Evidence of Images’, in *Interpretation Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1969), 71–72.

<sup>87</sup> Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: a Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*. 5th edn (London: Phaidon, 1992), 171.

of the beholder that tests the medley of forms and colours for coherent meaning, crystallizing it into shape when a consistent interpretation has been found'.<sup>88</sup>

Therefore, applying this to MaP, we can see that each listener has had their own experience of the absent painting, and it is this which helps to construct a configurative meaning out of the instructions given over by the phenomenal encounter with the musical object. Iser shares Gombrich's view, writing that 'comprehension is inseparable from the reader's expectations, and where we have expectations, there too we have one of the most potent weapons in the writer's armoury – illusion'.<sup>89</sup>

Accordingly, we might argue that the circumstances surrounding the experience of MaP – that is, our memories of the absent painting – generate expectations that lead to an effective illusion which creates the sense of a musically elaborated version of the original painting. It is clear that analytical interpretations are similarly prone to illusion: the music could mean other things if it were to stand in relation to a different meaning-bearer – another painting, for example. But it could not mean *anything*. Instead, it is an aesthetic response which is partly presented and partly constituted by our efforts in intending the painting as having a relational frame with the music.

This frame therefore has the potential to foreground certain musical attributes while casting others into the background. The very process of selection inevitably creates a background-foreground relationship, leaving the chosen element in the foreground. Thus, we might say that the listener's image of the painting establishes a frame of reference in the form of a thought or ideational system from which the musical attributes may be selected. Iser observes that this 'principle of selection exploits a basic condition for all forms of comprehension and experience, for the as yet unknown meaning would be incomprehensible were it not for the familiarity of

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>89</sup> Iser, *Implied Reader*, 284.

the background it is set against'.<sup>90</sup> For our purposes, then, we may think of the listener's memory of the painting as forming that background or framework.

Although Iser's work is predicated upon the philosophical tenets of phenomenology, and particularly those of Roman Ingarden, he takes leave from Ingarden in his rejection of the stabilities and determinacy that condition the reader of a novel to concretize the work within a set system of norms and schemata. The difference between these two writers is subtle, suffice it to say for our purposes that Ingarden posits the existence of true and false concretizations of a work based on places of indeterminacy. In this way, the work can be finalized. Iser, however, disagrees with this position and argues that the concretization of a work cannot be 'subjected to criteria of adequacy or inadequacy'.<sup>91</sup> For him, the work is always a two-way interaction and therefore cannot be definitively concretized; the text provides guidelines, but it is how we respond to those instructions individually which constitutes the aesthetic object. It is the text's very indeterminacy which drives us to work out a configurative meaning.

While Iser asserts that the text prevents our aesthetic response from being arbitrary, he argues that there is 'no frame of reference to offer criteria of right or wrong'.<sup>92</sup> In the case of MaP, though, the ideational system provided by our image of the painting constructs a frame of reference that enables us to posit interpretations and makes selections subject to that criterion. Naturally we are always faced with the epistemological problem of discussing our own concretization of the music, but it is this *act* which constitutes the musical elaboration of the painting. It is the continual selection process of the aesthetic experience and the search for a configurative meaning which constructs *our* musical representation.

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<sup>90</sup> Iser, *Act of Reading*, 93.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

Although, as we saw in the last chapter, phenomenology is able to account for the mechanism of reciprocity and how we stand in a subjective relation to the object, it is not able to account for any reflective or conceptual mediation. Both phenomenology and reader-response theory share the view that our experience of an art form involves reciprocity – the two-way process involving the artwork affecting us and us affecting it – yet it is only reader-response theory that allows for the possible worlds created by our intellectual as well as our bodily engagements with the aesthetic object. Both theories share the view that the aesthetic object emerges from the lived experience, but it is the model offered by Iser which, by accommodating the listener's cognitive involvement, turns out to be fundamental to discussing the effect of the painting *in absentia*. If the painting is to affect the selection of musical attributes, and hopefully the case studies in Part II will illustrate this, then we are clearly dealing with external facts impinging on our aesthetic experience of the music. It is these external facts which are bracketed out by phenomenology due to their cognitive demands and imaginative construction.

What Clifton's phenomenology wishes to prevent is the kind of relativist construct whereby meaning can be imposed onto a musical object such that it comes to mean anything we want it to mean. Moreover, he wants the music to speak for itself. The reciprocity to which Clifton's phenomenology makes reference involves our attached bodily presence, not vicarious experience through another medium. For Iser's reader-response theory, the oneness of mind and object combined into a single unified field is not at odds with phenomenology. However, allowing this oneness to be formed from an interaction between acts of comprehension and 'instructions' from another experiential domain – the painting – transgresses the Husserlian principle of *epoché*. Accordingly, because acts of comprehension come from a whole nexus of

interpretative fields – social, cultural and conceptual – we may take the frame of reference of the painting to instigate a significant part of this process.

Iser regards perception and comprehension not as qualities inherent in the objects themselves but as something we do to the object – it is *we* that comprehend and perceive the musical object, after all. Accordingly, it is how the object communicates itself to us, how it functions and brings about an effect, which forms a response model to the aesthetic object. The artwork, in Iser's view, asks something of its percipient; it is not passively given to us, and it is the nature of this solicitation that forms the conditions for the artwork to complete itself. For Clifton's phenomenology this activity stops at the conscious body, but for Iser it takes us off into other domains of experience.

In addition, for Iser's reader of a literary text, it is the very ambiguity, the gaps and indeterminacies, which drive our dyadic interpretation with a text, our need to concretize it by bombarding it with projections. But as the blanks give way to the reader's projection, the text becomes increasingly fixed, and it follows that the asked-for interaction can only come about through changes in the reader's projections – hence Iser's reader metaphorically travelling in a stagecoach with a moving viewpoint. Applying this to MaP, the shifting viewpoint induced by the musical object and the image of the painting invites a readjustment of the listener's projections, allowing them to experience something previously not within their experience. It follows, then, that any musical indeterminacy cannot be filled in by the musical system, so it must be filled in by another system: our conceptual comprehension. And that comprehension must be informed by the relational frame of the painting. Thus, the gaps stimulate in us a process of ideation according to terms and conditions set by the musical object, the instructions of which invite us to imagine the presence of

something not given. In this way, the musical object changes its significance through the interaction of our changing projections onto it. Meaning is not fixed: rather, it is always being renewed in the act of creation within this dynamic.

In MaP, then, the ambiguous musical object drives us to fill in its indeterminacies using the relational frame of the painting; but such an interpretation will always be subject to tests of adequacy and inadequacy posed by the music itself – how well, musically, does something fit a particular projection or ideation? If we are to consider perception and ideation as two different but essential means of access to MaP – perception requiring the actual presence of the musical object, and ideation depending on the absence of the painting – it seems appropriate to compare this situation to the mechanisms involved in metaphor, the understanding of one domain of experience in terms of another. To make a bridge between the musical object and the absent painting must accordingly require both perception and ideation – something concrete and something imagined (music and the painting respectively) – and this is why it has been so important to hang onto the phenomenological model alongside an aesthetic response theory.

It has already been argued that the musical object itself will constrain the interpretation that we may give to it, but in MaP this constraint occurs through an experience which is phenomenological and conceptual along some kind of feedback loop between the two domains – music and painting. The percept encourages us to conceptualise, to fill in the gaps, and the concept affects the experience. Accordingly, it follows that the concept sanctions certain actions and perceptions and structures our experience. Thus we might say that the concept emanating from the painting structures our experience of the music – rather in the way that Nattiez views narrative

music for the listener as being the structural analysis of an absent narrative.<sup>93</sup> Iser writes that comprehension is inseparable from the reader's expectations, so we might also contend that the way we *intend* the painting in our experience of the music shapes our musical understanding. To hear the musical attributes in relation to the painting must to some extent change their function and, therefore, communication, for now they have the potential to be mediated by concepts emanating from this other domain. It is in the setting of boundaries that these functions may take effect. Once again a phenomenological orientation seems both necessary and instrumental, for the very notion of imposing a boundary invokes the body: for example, something is held close or at a distance, inside or outside, behind or in front of, or on top of or underneath.

In the analytical interpretations of Part II, we shall see how the relational frame of the painting prompts the selection of musical attributes: focusing attention on one set of properties shifts our attention away from others. But although a subjective approach is inescapable if we wish to speak of a musical representation emerging through the selection of certain musical attributes, it is in revealing this mechanism that we may come to gain an objective understanding of how MaP may be experienced. Put this way, the metaphor 'music is a painting' shapes our perception so that the stream of sounds that we hear is selected according to this other, external domain. The metaphor potentiates a particular hearing because we look for significance in relation to the painting.

In this way, we can see how our understanding of the musical object comprises both a phenomenological attitude and a conceptual framework. The concept provided by the painting enables us to apply predicates from this experiential

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<sup>93</sup> See Chapter 1, p.38.

domain onto the musical experience. It is a way of bringing dissimilar areas together and giving them a relation where previously there was none. The aesthetic importance of this concerns the new experience of the music which this transfer makes possible. Thus we respond to the music in a different way. As we said in the Introduction, the music can never *become* the painting. However, in allowing predicates to be applied in this metaphorical manner to the musical domain, we change its aspect and so allow it to actually *have* these properties. Simply put, we respond to the musical domain in terms of the absent painting, but it is this absence which ensures our imaginative involvement and thus the supplementation of our physical encounter with the musical object, an encounter in which the body has a central relation.

It is, then, an interaction between the real (the perceived sonic stimuli) and the imagined (the ideated conceptual structure), which creates the new experience in *us*. The invited association between the painting and the music enables the projection of the painting's concepts onto our musical experience, but only if the musical structure can support these interpretations. Accordingly, in the next chapter, we will examine more closely this idea of conceptual listening.

## CHAPTER 3: Conceptual Listening and the Mechanism of Metaphor

### 3.1 Representation

The previous chapter considered how a theory of aesthetic response to the experience of MaP must involve some kind of interaction between the phenomenal object and the conceptual mediation induced by the intentional association of the music with a painting. We shall now turn towards the mechanism of metaphor to explore more deeply how ideas emanating from the image and memory of the absent painting might be transferred by the listener to the phenomenal experience of the music. In doing so, we will inevitably re-encounter questions concerning the representational qualities of MaP.

Roger Scruton has asserted that '[music] is an abstract art, with no power to represent the world. Representation, as I understand it, is a property that does not belong to music.'<sup>1</sup> He enumerates five criteria that music must fulfil if it is to be regarded as representational:<sup>2</sup>

- The observer must have some awareness of the representation and then it becomes 'aesthetically relevant'
- Representation requires a medium and is understood only when the distinction between subject and medium has been recognized
- Representation exacts an interest in its subject matter
- The representation must convey some thought or idea about its subject (a commentary)
- The representation must be convincing

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Scruton, 'Representation in Music', *Philosophy*, 51 (1976), 273.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

For Scruton representation is essentially propositional; it must be able to say something about its subject that is open to proof or disproof. Moreover, it must embody a subject and predicate logic, that is, it must assert something about the subject of this proposition. He states that music is unable to meet these criteria and is therefore non-representational. However, Peter Kivy in his book *Sound and Semblance* (1984) deals with each of the above criteria and rebuts Scruton's charge that music cannot meet these requirements. For Kivy, music, too, can be propositional:

I will not claim, however, that musical representation ever gets much beyond the bare minimum in respect of what Scruton construes in painting as propositional content. But it does not fall below it, which is all I need to claim for my own purposes. Indeed, it cannot fall below it, since, really, all the minimal claim to propositional content amounts to is what all representation possesses: a verbally expressible subject.<sup>3</sup>

And we could argue that once the piece of music has been given a title indicating the subject, the piece has, at least, the potential to be described verbally and, therefore, conforms to Kivy's 'minimal claim to propositional content'.

Similarly, Kendall Walton argues that music can be said to prescribe instances of human actions, although not the human agent themselves. He claims that it does this through its programme, and that '[m]ere titles suffice to make music patently representational; indeed I cannot imagine music that an appropriate title could not render representational. Music stands ready to take on an explicit representational function at the slightest provocation.'<sup>4</sup> Walton impressively demonstrates our

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Kivy, *Sound and Semblance: Reflections on Musical Representation* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), 158.

<sup>4</sup> Kendall Walton, 'Listening with Imagination', in *Introduction to Music and Meaning*, ed. Jenefer Robinson (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 58.

imaginative involvement with music through what he calls the construction of 'fictional worlds'. These worlds belong normatively to literary and pictorial representations, but, he says, also to music because they are 'like nonfigurative paintings that present fictional worlds populated by features of the paintings themselves, as when it is fictional that one rectangular shape lies in front of another'.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, he states that the prevalence of so many metaphors used in the description of the musical experience attests to the variety of imaginings of the fictional kind. These fictional worlds, then, are like a representational artifice, a means of engaging the subject imaginatively with the world of make-believe.

But even so-called representational art is not simply a mirror of reality. In providing a representation of objects, people, and things, the painter applies paints and other materials to a canvas base. It is the artist's particular use of the paints which provides a new perspective upon worldly objects. For example, the thickness, texture, colour and opacity of the paint used will render its subject in a unique way, and often in a way that bears little resemblance to reality. As much as representational painting might attempt to render its medium transparent in the manner of everyday language, we are nonetheless able to attend to the physical properties of painting and music for their own sake.

This raises very interesting questions about the nature of composing music after non-figurative works. On the one hand, music composed after something that possesses no tangible or concrete representational subject matter creates the obvious problem of determining what the music in its turn is representing: can music represent the non-representational? And on the other hand, this kind of composition might illuminate something fundamental about musical representation itself: searching for

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 61.

explicit correspondence between the paintings and the music is only one of the ways and conditions for a musical representation to occur.

The case studies in Part II set out to examine whether the works in question have successfully rendered a representation of their chosen painting and, if so, how this has been achieved. The first question posed by such an inquiry is that of what is meant by the term ‘representation’. A depiction of a tulip, say, is a representation that we recognise by means of certain representational conventions, which enable us to isolate the plant’s component features – a brightly coloured cup-shaped flower at the head of a single vertical stem with long, pointed leaves emerging from its base. This distinctive ensemble of components may enable the identification of the flower, however lacking in verisimilar aspects – proportion, perspective, foreshortening – the representation might otherwise be. But how do these conditions of representation transfer to music? For sure, music is able to imitate other music and things which make sounds – ‘isonorously’, as discussed in the Introduction – but does the use of resemblant sound constitute true representation? Resemblance, as Nelson Goodman put it in his seminal book *Languages of Art* (1968), ‘is no sufficient condition for representation’.<sup>6</sup> Goodman is not denying that representation may involve resemblance, but he wants to drive home the message that representation involves more than just isomorphism, for anything may be said to resemble anything else in some manner: rather, he suggests ‘denotation is the core of representation and is independent of resemblance’.<sup>7</sup>

However, we must not detain ourselves with Goodmanian accounts of representation save to say that signification and convention are aspects of representation that we should keep hold of. For example, by convention, certain

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<sup>6</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: an Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Brighton: Harvester, 1981), 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

instruments and instrumental techniques will already possess representational abilities in certain contexts, and through reference (signification) the music may come to stand for aspects of the painting, not only directly but also indirectly as well. Getting back to the example of the painted tulip, we can see that there are aspects of such a painting – whether colour, proportion or figural elements – that are likely to resemble the real flower. Even if certain aspects lack verisimilitude – colour, for instance, in a fauvist image – the representation as a whole contains enough similarity to support our conviction that we are looking at a representation of a tulip. But could the same be said of music? Can music become representational if it describes only certain aspects of a painting, metonymically, or a viewer's reactions to that painting?

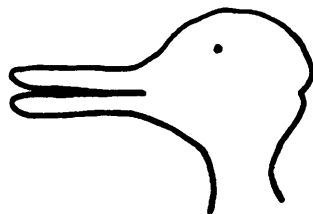
Representation, then, is not the same as pointing to something in an indexical manner: it is about description. Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* (1889) do not simply point to the flowers as a subject, they also describe them through the way the paint has been applied and the light rendered. Thus, a representational painting does not passively delineate its subject, but conveys thoughts and ideas about that subject, and these thoughts can then be converted into words. The imaginative aspect is therefore evident because those thoughts are *ours* – or at least the thoughts the work gives rise to.

### **3.2 Aspect Perception: Seeing and Hearing As**

Ludwig Wittgenstein writes about the aspectual difference in *seeing* a face and noticing its likeness to another: 'I *see* that it has not changed; yet I see it differently. I call this experience "noticing an aspect".' Adducing the example of a three-dimensional oblong box drawn with simple lines and placed as a diagram in a textbook, he argues that it is the accompanying text which supplies the interpretation

of the illustration: ‘But we can also *see* the illustration now as one thing now as another. So we interpret it, and *see* it as we *interpret* it.’<sup>8</sup> This is an important observation and one which we might apply to MaP if we substitute hearing with seeing, for is not the ideation supplied by the painting able to make us *hear* some new aspect hitherto unavailable?

Similarly, citing Joseph Jastrow’s famous duck-rabbit figure (**fig. 3.1**) – in which it possible only to see either the duck or the rabbit at any one time – he writes that seeing the figure as, say, the duck is ‘continuous seeing’ of an aspect, but suddenly seeing it as a rabbit is what he calls ‘the dawning of an aspect’.<sup>9</sup> Wittgenstein argues that there are two uses of the word ‘see’: ‘seeing’ and ‘seeing as’. The former concerns literal seeing, ‘I see this’, and the latter concerns ‘seeing something *as something*’.<sup>10</sup> Thus I can be persuaded or instructed to see or hear something in a particular way – to see or hear an aspect – but only if it is there for us to perceive it in the first place. The point is that perception is not passive and not just a product of the stimulus, but it is also affected by our expectations (Gombrich) and the way we are primed to see and hear something *as something*.



**Figure 3.1:** Joseph Jastrow’s duck-rabbit figure (1899)

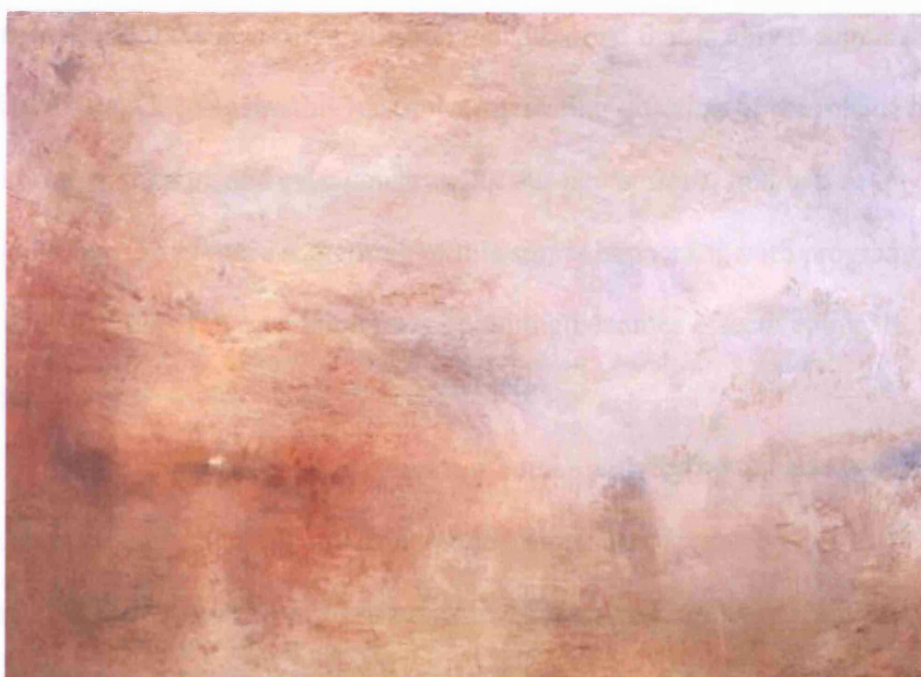
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<sup>8</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations II* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 165 (italics original).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 182.

However, even though MaP can still exist as a musical experience of one kind or another without reference to its source painting, does it require this component to make full musical sense and to be a complete aesthetic experience in the sense given by Kivy in Chapter 1? As we have said already, the music may be said to unfold or ‘move’ according to a certain logic that is unlocked through access to the painting-as-image – its frame of reference.



**Figure 3.2:** J. M. W. Turner, *Sun Setting over a Lake* (1840)<sup>11</sup>

Theorising the power and influence of a title and how it may lead us to ‘see in’ a particular representation in a painting, Peter Kivy adduces J. M. W. Turner’s *Sun Setting over a Lake* (**fig. 3.2**, ca. 1840) as an instance of a painting becoming representational through the viewer’s expectation induced by a title. Kivy asks whether, if the painting were shown amongst a group of abstract paintings, without a

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<sup>11</sup> Oil on canvas, 10.7 x 13.8 x 14.5 cm, Tate Britain, London.

title and without Turner's name, it would be recognised as the sun setting over a lake.

'Would it not rather be taken for a non-representational painting?'<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand a painting such as Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* seems to need no such title to direct us towards the deciphering of the image. In this way, there are aided and unaided pictorial representations. Intuitively, it would seem to be the same case in music. Kivy makes the distinction between two types of representation in music: 'pictorial' and 'representational',<sup>13</sup> the former being a representation that is recognised without the need for a title and the latter one that is only recognisable with the aid of a title. Once again, this raises the interesting question of the role of our expectations in shaping and even constructing our perceptions, in this case on the basis of a title. And perhaps something of this sort is happening with programme music and MaP too. The mediation by the painting becomes effective, in part, because we expect it to be.

Why, we might ask, does a composer bother with trying to be representational when the music can stand effectively as 'music alone', to borrow Kivy's own expression, and therefore be enjoyed on its own terms and in its own (musical) 'language'? Many listeners are probably not even aware of the representational aspects of much instrumental music. Indeed, Roger Scruton has argued that since programme music or representational music can be 'fully' appreciated without the narrative contained within the programme or knowledge of what it is supposed to be representing, then it cannot really be described as either narrative or representational at all because truly representational art – say Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* – would not make sense and could not be fully understood and appreciated without knowing what it represented. Kivy rebuts this claim from Scruton, arguing that he is wrong to

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Kivy, *Sound and Semblance*, 34.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

suggest that music can be ‘fully’ understood in the absence of its programme or representational reference. For Kivy, as we have already mentioned, Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique* does not make full musical sense until it makes narrative sense, in terms of the intended programme.

The philosopher Jenefer Robinson states that, save for a handful of examples, we cannot ‘hear in’ a piece of music what is being represented as we can see, for example, the woman in Thomas Gainsborough’s painting *Mrs Siddons*. If we can hear a representation in the music it is more likely to be an imitation of another sound or of a piece of music and not something extra-musical. In such instances of ‘isosonorous’ representation, the music has a tendency to collapse into the sounds represented, becoming transparent to its subject, and therefore not a representation but an imitation.<sup>14</sup> However, Turner’s painting is obviously closer to abstract art than Gainsborough’s, and is aided by its title in order to become a representation of the sunset depicted. So, if near-abstract paintings may become representational, perhaps music too might achieve such a condition through the help of a title?

In this view, an effective representation is not dependent purely on resemblance. Goodman sees all art as performing a symbolic function that is essentially propositional and subject to certain rules and conventions. Representation is denotation within a particular system, and ‘no degree of resemblance is sufficient to establish the requisite relationship of representation’.<sup>15</sup> Extending this notion to music, we might aver that resemblance in our music is also unnecessary for it to represent the painting; instead, its particular symbolic system may characterise this other domain or ascribe new qualities to it. Robinson accords with this view and

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<sup>14</sup> Kivy, Scruton and Robinson have all made this point at various times.

<sup>15</sup> Goodman, 5.

writes that it is the attributes of the picture itself which ‘tell us *how* something is’,<sup>16</sup> but the title of a picture serves as a subject term that tells us *what* is being described. Thus, in Goodmanian terms, the representation is governed by something analogous to the mechanism involved in a sentence structure containing a subject and a predicate. The title tells us what the subject is and the painting describes it or tells us *how* it is. This immediately provides us with a useful mode of avoiding the difficulty associated with the resemblance theory of representation in both music and abstract painting: the requirement that something must look like or sound like the thing it represents, that is, iconicity.

To avoid the representation collapsing into the thing it represents, Richard Wollheim, in his *Art and its Objects*, argues that ‘seeing in’ a painting consists of being aware at one and the same time of the painted surface and the representation that lies behind it (à la Scruton).<sup>17</sup> The viewer, then, chooses to see something in amongst the surface details despite their possible (and probable) artificiality vis-à-vis the thing or object represented; they accept the fiction whilst being cognizant of its construction.

Roger Scruton makes similar points in his *Art and Imagination*, holding that the purpose of representation is ‘to guide the imagination’ so that the thoughts engendered ‘may be essentially bound up with the perception of an aesthetic object, in the manner of “seeing as”’.<sup>18</sup> But, finding fault with Goodman’s semantic theory of the symbolic nature of art, Scruton sees this as reducing it down to mere ‘semaphor

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<sup>16</sup> Jenefer Robinson, ‘Music as a Representational Art’, in *What is Music? An Introduction to the Philosophy of Music*, ed. Philip Alperson (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 170 (*italics original*).

<sup>17</sup> See Richard Wollheim, *Art and its Objects*, 2nd edn with six supplementary essays (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 212–13.

<sup>18</sup> Scruton, *Art and Imagination: a Study in the Philosophy of Mind* (London: Methuen, 1974), 190.

[sic] signals'.<sup>19</sup> Instead, Scruton argues that for a painting to represent, it is necessary to understand the 'artist's intention'.

This intention reveals itself in the painterly conventions and traditions that the artist chooses to use. Moreover, a written indication in the form of the painting's title provides 'some instruction as to how [it] should be seen'.<sup>20</sup> And so it is with music: the title might be thought of as providing some direction to how the music should be heard and thus helps us hear in the music the representation of the painting (the composer's intention), while the musical attributes that the composer presents may steer our imagination in this direction by characterising something about the painting. Terry Eagleton, describing the theory of the American hermeneuticist E. D. Hirsch Jr, writes that '[a]n author's intention is itself a complex "text", which can be debated, translated and variously interpreted just like any other'.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, Scruton asserts that,

representation in literature is like representation in painting in that it is partly dependent on the author's intentions. Since the intentions are realized, if at all, in language, and since the language of literature is, in general, the language of the readers of literature, it might seem that there should be little discrepancy between the intention and the final result. But once again, we must remember that what is represented in literature is not only the gross outlines of human life, but also the fine details – shades of behaviour, and complexities of motive. Awareness of an author's intention can be an important guide in our thought of these elusive things.<sup>22</sup>

This quotation illuminates an important and subtle aspect of a representation, that of the determinacy of meaning. Scruton alludes here to the fact that the text could be

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>21</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an Introduction*. 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 60.

<sup>22</sup> Scruton, *Art and Imagination*, 206.

interpreted in multiple ways, and the finer details are only revealed through this extra or ‘meta’ text that we are calling authorial intention – it is this which directs us. So, in a novel, for example, the aggregate of a character’s motives helps us make sense of all of the various strands of that particular narrative.

Applying this to musical representation, Scruton sees no reason to believe that music should not represent in the same manner as painting; however, the resulting comprehension *is* different. In Debussy’s *La Mer*, he argues, the title enables us to hear ‘enormous power and tension in the musical line, comparable to the invisible straining of a quiet sea. But what is represented is something inaudible. Can we say, then, that we *hear* the music *as* the slow swell of the sea?’ In other words, it is we that are imaginatively ascribing qualities to our experience of a fictional sea in the music; hearing such forces in the musical line is an imaginative act involving the transference of properties from one domain to another, as in metaphor. Scruton explains that there ‘is no absurdity in supposing that I could hear the tension in the musical line while being unaware that it represents the sea. Representation does not determine our understanding of music in the way that it determines our understanding of painting or prose.’<sup>23</sup> However, it seems that he contradicts his earlier postulations regarding intentionality – the idea that once we know the author’s intention we can appreciate and detect subtleties of a text or painting that were hitherto hidden. For here, those subtleties, in the form of energies that we perceive in the musical line, are at least in part determined thus by the authorial intention, provided by the title, of wishing the listener to *hear* the sea.

Elsewhere, Scruton writes that,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 210 (*italics original*).

A passage of music may seem to carry some reference to grief, say, or to a flight of birds, or to something one knows not what. Characteristic of such reference is the frequent difficulty one has in putting the ‘thoughts’ conveyed by the music into words. A man may feel that *something* is being said by the music, but be quite unable to say what it is. But this inability is in no way a sign that he has not understood the music. Here we may wish to speak not of representation but rather of expression. Characteristic of expression is the presence of ‘reference’ without predication. Sadness is expressed by the music but nothing is *said* about the sadness, or the flight of birds is made ‘present’ in the music, but is not described there.<sup>24</sup>

But, that music can only refer and not predicate seems intuitively wrong. For surely this is where music excels best: if music expresses something, must it not be characterised or described in a musical way? Reference to extra-musical things presents music with the greatest challenge, and this is in part the job of the title of a piece. Scruton’s says that ‘nothing is *said* about the sadness’, but surely the sadness would have characteristics that we could discuss, such as its depth or seriousness? Many pieces of music are referred to as sad, and their musical ‘descriptions’ of this sadness are often wildly different. For example, the sadness described by Ravel’s piano piece *Pavane une infante défunte* seems markedly different to that described by the fourth movement of Tchaikovsky’s *Pathétique* Symphony, yet it would be acceptable to call both pieces ‘sad’.

Following Nelson Goodman, Robinson writes that when a piece of music represents something, ‘it seems to characterize, “describe” or attribute qualities to it, rather than copy or resemble it. Just as pictures describe the world, and get us to see it in new and interesting ways, so too does some music’.<sup>25</sup> In this way, the musical representation could be said to have both cognitive and aesthetic value because it affects the way we experience it. The music by itself cannot point to a particular

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<sup>24</sup> Scruton, ‘Representation in Music’, *Philosophy*, 51 (1976), 281 (italics original).

<sup>25</sup> Robinson, ‘Music as a Representational Art’, 179.

individual or thing, but once we become apprised of the subject of the music through the title, passages of music are able to represent in similar ways to pictures ‘as predicates in schemes of predication’.<sup>26</sup> A painting, for example, describes its subject through its execution or facture: the thickness and opacity of paint in one of Claude Monet’s water-lily paintings provides an inimitable impressionistic sensuality.

Accordingly, the title provides a subject and the music says something about the subject that is open to proof or disproof: its characterisation is up for measuring against a standard that we set from the sum total of *all* our experiences. This claim counters Scruton’s assertion above that music is not propositional, and qualifies it for representational status. Moreover, it would seem logical to surmise that part of our aesthetic understanding of a piece of so-called representational music rests on how well the music ‘fits’ its title or programme.

### 3.3 Projection

There is, of course, no definitive way of tying our perceptions to a single conception. The writer cannot guarantee the imaginations enacted by his reader any more than the composer can through his musical and textual cues. They can, however, encourage a particular selection, or privilege a certain viewpoint. It is not the fact that we misread the textual or programmatic instructions, but the result of the unique imaginings that listeners undergo in the face of any stimuli that means that each set of guidelines will be interpreted in a particular way. Moreover, this is not the same as saying that all meaning is relativistic and subject to the whims of the listener; there must be certain ways of anchoring a general perception. In this way, we might consider the idea of projection.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 180.

E. H. Gombrich, in his book *Art and Illusion* (1960), writes about the idea of concepts affecting our perception:

[T]he postulate of an unbiased eye demands the impossible. It is the business of the living organism to organize, for where there is life there is not only hope, as the proverb says, but also fears, guesses, expectations which sort and model the incoming messages, testing and transforming and testing again. The innocent eye is a myth.<sup>27</sup>

In other words, if we think of the world which is available to any one of our senses – or, indeed, combinations thereof – the cognitive psychologists long ago demonstrated that perception involves selective attention. It is obviously not possible to consciously attend to all of the incoming stimuli which bombard us in our daily lives. Instead, we must decide what is important in our immediate perceptual fields and leave unattended those stimuli deemed to be unnecessary to an effective perceptual experience. Of course, in order to parse the stimuli in this way, *all* of the stimuli must be attended to at some level, such as their physical characteristics.

The British psychologist Colin Cherry demonstrated this effectively in his ‘cocktail party’ problem in 1953,<sup>28</sup> whereby we can suddenly switch attention to a conversation across a noisy room if we hear our name, suggesting that we have been attending all along to *all* of the conversations at some level. But the mechanism of selective attention has allowed only *our* name to pass through its filter into conscious attention. Accordingly, the very act of selective attention suggests some kind of interpretative strategy; even at a base level, a set of criteria exist which allow us to attend to some stimuli whilst attenuating others.

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<sup>27</sup> E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: a Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, 5th edn (London: Phaidon, 1992), 251.

<sup>28</sup> Cited in Michael W. Eysenck and Mark T. Keane, *Cognitive Psychology: a Student's Handbook*, 5th edn (Hove: Psychology Press, 2005), 142–43.

In the third part of his book, Gombrich writes about the beholder's input in the perception of images, and he calls this 'illusion' (hence the title of his book). The first examples he provides involve the phenomenon of seeing faces in the clouds and the Rorschach test.<sup>29</sup> He uses these to demonstrate 'our, the beholder's, share in the reading of the artist's image' and how '[w]hat we read into these accidental shapes [of clouds and inkblots] depends on our capacity to recognize in them things or images we find stored in our minds'.<sup>30</sup> In this way, we also see images, or illusions, in both pointillist and impressionist paintings too, for the former is constructed from myriad tiny dots of colour, while impressionist works are characterised by hazy or indistinct textures. Perhaps, through the analogous mechanism of processing clouds into faces, what we have here is a similar 'reading-in' of an image, through the projection of schemata and imagery already available to us.

Part of this process is described effectively by the Gestalt psychologists, whereby we perceive an organised whole as more than the sum of its individual parts, as evidenced by the reification that takes place in the face-in-the-cloud phenomenon. Such materialization can only occur through what the Gestalt theorists call the law of *Prägnanz*, a principle of organization by which perceived or experienced forms tend towards meaningful wholes that are increasingly better defined, stable, simpler and more coherent.<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, Gombrich argues that the perception of art occurs through the world of illusion; that is, we see or read in images coherent shapes and realities that are not 'there' in any objectively given sense.

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<sup>29</sup> Designed and developed by the Swiss psychiatrist Hermann Rorschach (1884–1922), it is a personality test in which a standard set of inkblots are presented to the subject who is asked to describe what they suggest or resemble. OED online, s.v. 'Rorschach' [accessed 21 January 2008].

<sup>30</sup> Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 155.

<sup>31</sup> Paraphrased from Arthur S. Reber, *The Dictionary of Psychology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 301, 564.

Although Gombrich's exposition on this subject focuses on the visual world alone, it seems to me that the mechanism and process of illusion is also valid for our purposes in the exploration of MaP, for some of the terms he uses seem relevant to this music too. For example, he writes about the 'test of consistency', which he describes as the 'possibility of classifying the whole of an image within a possible category of experience'.<sup>32</sup> This involves 'reading' an image based on any situational clues that may inform us of its meaning, and testing the consistency of these against any subsequent expectations that these interpretations yield. It therefore becomes propositional – subject to proof or disproof. He elsewhere describes this process of 'reading' an image as 'testing it for its potentialities, trying out what fits',<sup>33</sup> which point reminds us of the inherent ambiguity of all perception. So, in our case, if the music fits the context of the remembered painting, then the representation becomes tenable.

Gombrich asserts that,

All representation relies to some extent on what we have called 'guided projection'. When we say that the blots and brushstrokes of the impressionist landscapes 'suddenly come to life', we mean we have been led to project a landscape into these dabs of pigment.<sup>34</sup>

These notions are of course based on the principle that perception is always interpretative: we are always trying to make sense of our perceptions from the best guess predicated on our experiences. From this vantage point we can project ourselves

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<sup>32</sup> Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 200.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 190–91.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 170.

imaginatively into the artwork, and the resulting perception would be described as the ‘good gestalt’, or the ‘pattern that supersedes all others’.<sup>35</sup>

In a related way, Roger Scruton has written that ‘[m]uch of music criticism consists of the deliberate construction of an intentional object from the infinitely ambiguous instructions implicit in a sequence of sounds’.<sup>36</sup> This notion of an ‘intentional object’ is taken from Husserl and Sartre’s phenomenological formulations about the directedness of our consciousness and is here used by Scruton to refer to the selective attention of our musical perception when we choose to hear sound as *music*.<sup>37</sup> This also has similarities with the Russian Formalists’ term ‘foregrounding’, which refers to the way our acts of perception ‘foreground’ or privilege some aspects of the object and ‘background’ or suppress others. Scruton argues that whilst for representational art, the ‘intentional characteristic’ of a painting and the meaning of a sentence are ‘publicly recognised facts’,<sup>38</sup> these ‘facts’ are not available in the musical realm. However, it would seem likely that Gombrich would take exception to the idea of ‘publicly recognised facts’ in a painting, as he makes strenuous efforts to exemplify the ambiguities inherent in works of art and naturally occurring phenomena, such as the clouds discussed above. Notwithstanding these perceptual ambiguities in visual art, most perceivers would collectively recognise certain actualisations other than the ones *they* have individually ‘read in’ or projected.

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<sup>35</sup> David Macey, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory* (London: Penguin, 2000), s.v. ‘Gestalt’, 160.

<sup>36</sup> Scruton, *The Aesthetic Understanding: Essays in the Philosophy of Art and Culture* (London: Methuen, 1983), 88.

<sup>37</sup> Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 78.

<sup>38</sup> Scruton, *The Aesthetic Understanding*, 67.

### 3.4 Music as Metaphor

The mechanism of metaphor extends concepts beyond their field of literal application to a new referential field, and thus describes that new sphere. This convention is so ingrained in our language about music that we seldom notice it. Scruton argues that ‘our ways of hearing sound that we consider to be ways of hearing music are based in concepts extended by metaphorical transference’.<sup>39</sup> By this he means that the spatial metaphors we use to talk about music – such as tones having movement, melodies having certain characteristics such as up and down or moving away from and towards, and simultaneous groups of pitches sounding full or hollow – are all figurative. An intentional understanding, he maintains, considers the world as an ‘intentional object’, – a Husserlian *Lebenswelt*. The connections and observations we make in our perceptions of the world are therefore already implicit in the concepts that we use. The idea of an ‘intentional object’ offers a way, Naomi Cumming argues, of ‘describing how the understanding of a perceiver is implicated in the content ascribed to a percept’.<sup>40</sup>

In Scruton’s words:

It seems then that in our most basic apprehension of music there lies a complex system of metaphor, which is the true description of no material fact. And the metaphor cannot be eliminated from the description of music, because it is integral to the intentional object of musical experience. Take this metaphor away and you cease to describe the experience of music.<sup>41</sup>

For Scruton, the fact that this intentional object is also conceptual leads to the very essence of what music is. Accordingly, there is a distinction to be made between the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>40</sup> Naomi Cumming, ‘Metaphor in Roger Scruton’s Aesthetics of Music’, in *Theory, Analysis and Meaning in Music*, ed. Anthony Pople (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>41</sup> Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetic Understanding*, 85.

actual and the metaphorical sounds caused by the intentional object. Somehow, we hear sounds differently that have been conceptualised in this metaphorical manner, otherwise all we would hear is a series of unconnected sounds that do not possess the gravitational attraction that we typically ascribe to them: 'to talk of tones is already to talk at the sophisticated level of musical phenomenology.'<sup>42</sup>

That music 'belongs uniquely to the intentional sphere, and not to the material realm'<sup>43</sup> means, for Scruton, that we cannot eliminate metaphor from our descriptions of music. And this is what makes the distinction between sound and music: our musical understanding is governed by concepts in response to the unfolding musical object. Significantly, though, Scruton is here conflating the idea of 'concept' with a phenomenological perception of music – the idea of musical space is, as we have said previously, not merely an abstract, geometrical one, but one that is grounded in the body and available to us from our own activities in the world. Evidently, this position accords with his view of music as something which is non-representational and unaffected by such things as a programme. Moreover, this is obviously not the whole story, for music itself can provide a certain imaginative context woven from within this intentional sphere that we construct. Thus, a given chord in a particular harmonic progression will sound markedly different depending on its musical context; it might sound doleful in one piece and purposeful in another, for example. However, consistent with the metaphoric transference that Scruton bestows upon our bodily engagement with the phenomenological perception of music (Clifton, of course, would deny that it was metaphorical), what we are proposing here is that the image of

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 93.

the painting may also be regarded as a conceptual field: the listener conceives ideas from within that image and projects these onto the musical experience.<sup>44</sup>

Scruton has written that '[r]epresentation is not like ostension, to represent an object is to convey a thought about it'.<sup>45</sup> Extending a concept borrowed from Ludwig Wittgenstein, Scruton writes about 'transitive' and 'intransitive' forms of expression, the former referring to a direct object, and the latter having no such object.<sup>46</sup> Hence, a piece of music may be said to be expressive of sadness, and we find inter-subjective agreement for this expression, but sad about what or whom? Accordingly, music remains intransitive, without a proper object or person onto which this sadness can be ascribed – until, that is, such an object is provided in the shape of a programme or title. As Goodman writes, 'Reference to an object is a necessary condition for depiction or description of it, but no degree of resemblance is a necessary or sufficient condition for either.'<sup>47</sup> Thus in MaP it would seem that we need the image of the painting and its attendant concepts to instantiate any possible 'facts' in the first place. The transference of concepts from one working field to another involves the ideation engendered by the painting providing a way of 'hearing in' the musical sphere. Through this mediation, the new field provides a conceptual framework to describe and understand the musical experience.

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<sup>44</sup> It is important to mention here that Naomi Cumming and Michael Spitzer have both criticised Scruton's theory of metaphor in music. Cumming has addressed the fact that Scruton's ascription of spatial and motional terms to music are not genuine metaphors, for they contain a material foundation in the sounds themselves, casting his notion of an 'intentional object' into question. Michael Spitzer argues that the listener has no choice in hearing the tone in this way. Moreover, the ineluctability of space and motion terms in describing the music as it is perceived rules out the possibility of choice and hence of an active interpretation. Thus, it seems that judging how much a listener's perception is under their volitional control is open to question. See Cumming, 'Metaphor in Roger Scruton's aesthetics of music', 3–28; and Michael Spitzer, *Metaphor and Musical Thought* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 83–85. Although their discussions suggest that spatial and motional terms have a more literal application than Scruton's account of metaphor allows, it will not be my intention to explore these any further here, for it was only my goal to demonstrate the idea that music may be seen as something we 'intend', and something we live through the *Lebenswelt*.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>46</sup> See Scruton, *The Aesthetic Understanding*, 53.

<sup>47</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 40.

So far, then, we have discussed processes where the intention of a composer, critic or listener may affect the listening experience. This intention manifests itself generally in the musical title or in any writing about the music, whether it is from the composer or by a critic, and such intention is evident in the *ways* we listen. Hence, in the music under scrutiny here, that intention can be neatly summed up as intending the painting in some way. We have also examined how expectation generated by, for example, a title encourages us to hear in the piece a representation or other extra-musical world, leading Roger Scruton to the observation, already quoted, that criticism consists in the ‘deliberate construction of an intentional object from the infinitely ambiguous instructions implicit in a sequence of sounds’.<sup>48</sup> The listener, then, forms a musical impression of the imagined painting from a premeditated selection of musical attributes; he or she has become, circumstantially, preconditioned to perform such an act.

Nicholas Cook makes a similar, but more oblique point in his book *Music, Imagination and Culture* (1990) when he writes: ‘One might even maintain that whereas critical interpretation is or can be intrinsic to the literary experience, the meaning that a critic discovers in a piece of music arises not from the music experience as such, but from the critical reflection *about* it; that is, the meaning is not musical but musicological.’<sup>49</sup> For Scruton, something is made from the ambiguous sounds by the listener – a configurative construction – and for Cook, meaning is made at the point of effect for the listener, as we saw for Wolfgang Iser’s reader in the last chapter. Accordingly, this continues the theme that meaning is not something to be found in the music: it is something that is made by the musical experience itself and

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<sup>48</sup> Scruton, *The Aesthetic Understanding*, 88.

<sup>49</sup> Nicholas Cook, *Music, Imagination and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 173 (italics original).

our critical reflections about it – meditations, of course, which would be denied by phenomenologists.

Marion A. Guck, in her essay ‘Two Types of Metaphoric Transfer’,<sup>50</sup> identifies two modes of analogical thinking which she classifies as comparative metaphor: the ‘direct comparison of single features in two different conceptual domains’ and ascriptive metaphor, defined as an ‘interpretation of a complex of features in one domain as similar to the structure of such a complex in a second domain’. She argues that ‘if music is expressive of other experience, it is because of similarity of conceptual structure’.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps, though, it would be more accurate to say that music has the *potential* to share in the structural similarity (once the conceptual frame has been extended to its domain through the music’s title) rather than that it possesses conceptual structure immanently. A piece of music cannot be a concept like ‘dog’ or ‘chair’, say, until it has that concept applied to it through a title; it can then absorb the complex of features which the title conceptualises – in our case, drawn from the painting. Like Scruton before her, Guck explains how even the technical language surrounding music is embedded in the use of spatial metaphors:

[I]f we wish to speak of music, we must speak in spatial terms. Thus, in tonal music lines rise and fall in registral space, and the root identifies a chord with a pitch at the bottom of its third stack. Though these notions are thought literally true of music, their sources are metaphoric; and the remnants of those sources are still discernible: such terms are *music-literal*.<sup>52</sup>

Adducing the metaphorical example of an arching line stretching over Chopin’s Prelude in B minor, Opus 28, she argues that it becomes a viable way of

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<sup>50</sup> Marion A. Guck, ‘Two Types of Metaphoric Transfer’, in *Metaphor: a Musical Dimension*, ed. Jamie C. Kassler (Sydney: Currency Press, 1991), 1–12.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 (*italics original*).

hearing the piece and that, although the notion of an arch is a ‘plain, even dull, image [...] once suggested, notions of arches worked their way into my hearing of the *Prelude*, began to proliferate and to direct my attention to more and more refined details of the music, while gathering those details into their conceptual nets’.<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, the critical intention of the arch enables the hearing of previously *unheard* aspects. Hence, recognisable features of the arch image in both domains are correlated; of course, one of those domains involves us correlating the audible with the visible – that is, the printed score. Guck explains that such a comparative metaphor is more straightforward in ‘delimiting the relevant features of an analogy and, thus, implying, relatively clearly, its extension’. On the other hand, treating the arch as an ascriptive metaphor is less clearly limited but therefore ‘promises a greater wealth of transference’.<sup>54</sup> As it involves a complex of features, however, rather than ones which are moment to moment, it does require greater powers of imagination to conjoin the metaphorical image with the music.

What all of this amounts to is to demonstrate the potentially creative and performative act of listening to music. Here we are provided with the concept of an arch – the kind of integrative gestural understanding often employed in music pedagogy – and it provides a way of playing, hearing, analysing and understanding the music in various arch-conceived ways. Our musical experience, then, is assimilated under this image, whether it is through direct comparison (comparative metaphor) or through sharing complexes of features (ascriptive metaphor). We will see in the case studies which comprise Part II of this dissertation that many of the analyses also involve both these levels of metaphor – what we might also refer to as first and second order aspects respectively.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 9.

Amy Bauer, like Scruton and Guck before her, argues that to hear sounds as music goes beyond parsing a musical work's self-referential details, such as the musical relations, 'but relies on the necessary mediation of metaphor'.<sup>55</sup> For Scruton, music is an intentional experience and 'to describe it we must have recourse to metaphor, not because music resides in an analogy, but because the metaphor describes exactly *what* we hear, when we hear sounds as music'.<sup>56</sup> We are therefore always dealing with a critical and conceptual interpretation of music in the first instance in discussing something that is figurative, albeit generated in collaboration with the object's sonic properties. It would seem, then, that imagination is fundamental to this experience we call 'music', enabling listeners to entertain the possible but not yet realised or actualised experiences.

### 3.5 Cross-Domain Mapping and MaP

In discussing the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur's ideas on metaphor, Leonard Lawlor writes: 'That referents can be described implies, for Ricoeur, that the referential field can extend beyond things which are directly accessible. In other words, we can describe what we cannot normally see.'<sup>57</sup> And the fundamental reason why we are invoking the mechanism of metaphor here is because we cannot *see* the painting in its absence. The painting's status, then, is figurative rather than literal, yet it is still able to exert its influence because it has become metaphorically attached to the music. Ricoeur himself argues that,

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<sup>55</sup> Amy Bauer, 'Tone-Color, Movement, Changing Harmonic Planes: Cognition, Constraints and Conceptual Blends in Modernist Music', in *The Pleasure of Modernist Music: Intention, Meaning, and the Compositional Avant-Garde*, ed. Arved Ashby (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 122. See also Lawrence M. Zbikowski, *Conceptualizing Music: Cognitive Structure, Theory, and Analysis* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), for a metaphorical understanding of musical meaning.

<sup>56</sup> Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 96 (*italics original*).

<sup>57</sup> Leonard Lawlor, *Imagination and Chance: the Difference Between the Thought of Ricoeur and Derrida* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 31.

Metaphorical discourse exploits this possibility by working in *two* fields. In metaphorical discourse, ordinary discourse's same twofold aim fulfils itself by transferring predicates already functioning in one familiar field to a new referential field which it then tries to describe. In other words, metaphor uses sedimented predicates to describe new experiences, experiences of new "things."<sup>58</sup>

In this way, metaphor augments experience. Thus, if the title and the painting are considered as an existing referential field with sedimented predicates, perhaps they can be seen as describing this new experience of music, for metaphor too is based on signifiers that are not attached to the thing they describe – they are only attached imaginatively. Ricoeur explains that the 'new field' exerts an attraction or 'gravitational pull' on the 'sedimented' predicates, which is possible because meaning or the sense of a word is itself dynamic, evidenced by the fact that a metaphor can transform itself and describe these new referential fields. Lawlor asserts that, for Ricoeur, '[t]he new combination (or synthesis) of the metaphor's predicative structure induces an image in which the pertinent characteristics of the subject and predicate (that is, their categories) merge to disclose something new' and hence 'the metaphorical event is an advent of meaning: it is a live metaphor'.<sup>59</sup>

Accordingly, a newly emergent meaning in MaP becomes available by transferring predicates already functioning in the field of the painting to the new referential field of the music. Lawrence E. Marks writes regarding the functioning of metaphor: '[the secret] lies in the fact that once an analogy is made between A and B, a whole gamut of associated meanings also becomes available. Not only is B like A in a certain way, but any and all of A's properties now become fair game to be absorbed

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<sup>58</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. Robert Czerny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 296–97.

<sup>59</sup> Lawlor, *Imagination and Chance*, 68–69.

into B.’<sup>60</sup> So the very fact of making an analogy between the painting and music enables other, perhaps less ‘well-fitting’ attributes to make the choppy crossing across the straits from the visual to the auditory domain. This is a good way of understanding why, from a reception-orientated standpoint, it does not matter whether a painting’s title is borrowed retrospectively for a composition: the listener will create the associations if the relevant attributes are there.

Nicholas Cook writes that this transference of similarities can only occur by virtue of an ‘enabling similarity’. In clarifying his position he cites George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s metaphor ‘love is war’ taken from their seminal book *Metaphors We Live By*, explaining that this metaphor becomes meaningful because love and war have attributes in common; therefore love possesses a ‘potential for change’ that enables a new meaning to emerge.<sup>61</sup> In this sphere, metaphorical transference is said to function only when the two subjects possess or have a potential for similarity. And for Cook this is only the first step; he writes: ‘it is only by virtue of what is “commensurable” – that is, enabling similarity – that signification can be drawn out of heterogeneity, and only by virtue of the “divergence” of media that there is anything for the similarity to enable.’<sup>62</sup> Thus, commonalities that love and war share – ‘he is gaining ground with her’, ‘she resisted his advances’ – make any further divergence credible.

Accordingly, metaphors are not a mere adjunct to language, a poetic or rhetorical device, they are actually integral to the way we think, perceive, act and live. This, of course, is what Scruton is really driving at too: understanding sound using spatial metaphors actually helps construct the musical experience in the first place.

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<sup>60</sup> *Unity of the Senses: Interrelations Among the Modalities* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 252–53, quoted in Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, 69–70.

<sup>61</sup> See Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 70.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

Lakoff and Johnson write that the essence of metaphor is '*understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*'.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the metaphor concept 'argument is war' structures what we do and how we understand our actions when engaged in an argument: we attack positions, we win or lose an argument, we see a position that is indefensible, it has weak defences, we can try a new line of attack and gain ground, we can advance or retreat, and so on. Hence, metaphor is not just in the words we use but in our very concept of argument and the way we perform during such an event; 'human *thought processes* are largely metaphorical',<sup>64</sup> they write.

The notion of a conceptual framework via the painting (and 'hearing *as*') can also be enriched through the work on conceptual metaphor by Lakoff and Johnson. The authors argue that through metaphor we are able to understand one conceptual domain in terms of another. That is, we have a source domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions and a target domain which we are trying to understand. Mapping occurs from the source to the target domain, hence the term 'cross-domain mapping', and in the process characteristics belonging to one domain are projected onto another. It is clear, therefore, that metaphor provides a new way of understanding and experiencing a target domain. Thus, if we generate the metaphor 'music is painting' then the music becomes the target domain in need of comprehension, and painting is the source domain from which we draw concepts and experience in order to accomplish that understanding. In this way, we can say the music is *comprehended* after the painting.

Through the spatial operation of many of our most enduring metaphors, which centralise our bodies in the experiences that they afford, we may also be able to reconcile these ideas with the bodily foundations of our knowledge, as posited by

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<sup>63</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 5 (*italics original*).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 5–7 (*italics original*).

Thomas Clifton's phenomenology. Lakoff and Johnson note that the meaning of a sentence is given in terms of a conceptual structure, and that most of the conceptual structure of a natural language is metaphorical in nature. This conceptual structure, they argue,

is grounded in physical and cultural experience, as are the conventional metaphors. Meaning, therefore, is never disembodied or objective and is always grounded in the acquisition and use of a conceptual system.<sup>65</sup>

The fact that such things as happiness, status and control are orientated by spatial concepts such as up and down – 'he is on the up' or 'she has climbed the corporate ladder quickly' – demonstrate the bodily orientation within them. Similarly, as we saw previously, time is often thought of in spatial metaphorical terms: 'time is a moving object' (it travels through space) and 'time is money'<sup>66</sup> (it is an amount). Scruton holds that, in the 'acousmatic experience' – the detachment of the sound from its circumstances of production – 'temporal order is dissolved and reconstituted as a phenomenal *space*'.<sup>67</sup> Thus, the spatial comprehension of music elicits a particular experience of time, and one grounded in our bodily orientations. In this way, Mark Johnson, in his book *The Body in the Mind*,<sup>68</sup> puts forward the idea that 'image schemas' emerge from our bodily interactions with the world around us and are therefore pre-linguistic. Johnson argues that these embodied patterns structure our experience and make possible conceptual metaphor mappings.

It is also in the act of comprehending a metaphor that something new is potentially created, what Ricoeur, in *The Rule of Metaphor*, calls a 'live metaphor'. In

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>67</sup> Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 75 (italics original).

<sup>68</sup> Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: the Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

this formulation, metaphor is not merely a rhetorical or tropical device but actually generates meaning. Lakoff and Johnson cite the example of a chemical metaphor – ‘the solution to my problems’ – given to them by a student that interpreted this as a large volume of bubbling liquid which dissolved some problems while precipitating out others.<sup>69</sup> The authors ‘see this as a clear case of the power of metaphor to create a reality rather than simply to give us a way of conceptualizing a pre-existing reality’.<sup>70</sup> The chemical metaphor is not simply a way of thinking abstractly about a problem, but, by means of its concept, it reveals a new way of actually processing a difficulty. The words alone do not change reality, but the ensuing changes which take place in our conceptual system *do* change what we experience and perceive and how we act upon those perceptions.

Lakoff and Johnson argue that ‘truth’ is relative to understanding, and our understanding of situations occurs from interactions with our conceptual systems; therefore truth is a function of our conceptual systems. And because metaphors are conceptual, they are seen as essential to our understanding of the world and its objects and for creating new meanings which did not exist before. Viewed this way, we may apply propositions to MaP which are subject to proof or disproof. This ‘truth’, then, is relative to the ‘subject position’ interpellated by the metaphor ‘music is this painting’. In this model, there cannot be objective meanings lying inherently in the music waiting to be uncovered in a one-way direction, since the mechanism of metaphorical communication demands that we are always engaged in a reciprocal relationship with the other experiential domain – the painting.

One of the key aspects of Lakoff and Johnson’s work is the idea of an entailment relationship from a metaphor. Thus, the metaphor ‘time is money’ entails

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<sup>69</sup> See Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 143.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

that time is a limited resource, which in turn entails that time is valuable – the very model that capitalism seems to be founded upon. These entailments are identified by Guck in her projection of the arch metaphor we saw above: ‘The interaction of image and musical structure at each level illuminates immediate and compelling features of the piece, and the interactions among the different arch interpretations and their analyses yield both a dynamic analysis of the Prelude and a wealth of information about the imagery of musical description.’<sup>71</sup> Her reference is to the features entailed by the initially very simple image of an arch and their subsequent relations to one another mediated through this ascriptive metaphor. Furthermore, the ensuing dynamic analysis is agreeably redolent with the dynamic interaction that we observed Iser writing about in the previous chapter – that is, we are reciprocally relating to the music through the image of the arch.

Guck writes that,

The role of the perceiver-promoter of a visual image like the arch shape is that of observer of an external object. Directly observable features of the image are correlated with directly observable features of the musical work. Each feature may undergo metaphoric reinterpretation as even music-literal terms [spatial notions of up and down] do, but each is directly perceivable in both domains.<sup>72</sup>

The imaginative act of seeing and hearing the arch metaphor highlights something crucial to our discussion of MaP: namely, that something extra-musical, and visual, is able to shape our perceptions of the music. And so it is with our case studies in Part II: the painting, as an external object, contains both metaphoric and literal visual images that we use to parse the musical object. It is precisely this mechanism that

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<sup>71</sup> Guck, ‘Two Types of Metaphoric Transfer’, 4.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

occupies Scruton's spatial metaphors and also Lakoff and Johnson's view of the metaphoric structuring of our experience. For Scruton this is objectively what music is: 'an intentional object of an experience that only rational beings can have, and only through the exercise of the imagination.'<sup>73</sup> Roman Ingarden also posits this view when he writes that 'a musical work is not a real but a purely intentional object and, strictly speaking, one of a higher order'.<sup>74</sup> Scruton's explanation that music is an intentional object is based on the idea that to hear tones instead of mere sounds we have to organise and order them as music: 'What is to count as music depends upon our decision; and it is a decision made with a purpose in mind.'<sup>75</sup> In this way, we may consider the listening experience of MaP to have both decision and purpose in a suitably primed listener.

This line of thinking is similar to the one asserted by Thomas Clifton that 'music is not a fact or thing in the world, but a meaning constituted by human beings'.<sup>76</sup> It also gives support to Clifton's claim that his is an objective account of musical experience, since it purports to describe the musical object adequately: how we subjectively experience it and how it becomes meaningful to us. Therefore, the ontological status of a sounding event, such as sound or music, is something which we ascribe to it. In other words, we intend that group of sounds to be a musical experience rather than random sounds emanating from an environment. Evidence for this presents itself in, for example, the car horn used in the song 'Country Honk' by the Rolling Stones from their 1969 album *Let it Bleed*. Hearing this car horn in the context of the rhythmic steel guitars makes of it the sort of aesthetic experience that is not created by hearing the same horn on our daily walk to work. The sound produced

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<sup>73</sup> Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 96.

<sup>74</sup> Roman Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of its Identity*, ed. Jean G. Harrell, trans. Adam Czerniawski (London: Macmillan, 1986), 119.

<sup>75</sup> Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 17.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Clifton, *Music as Heard*, 5.

by the horn does not suddenly become *music*, but we may *intend* it as music. It is therefore the listener who ascribes aesthetic meaning to certain sounds in particular contexts and not others.

Similarly, Michel Chion identifies a type of sound found in films, and indeed in everyday life, which he calls anempathetic.<sup>77</sup> An example of this is found in Steven Spielberg's debut movie *Duel* (1972). At one point in the film, we see the car driven by the character Mann veer dangerously off the road into a wooden fence after being pursued at a high speed by a large truck. Suddenly, we become aware of the country-and-western music playing on his car radio; it sounds suddenly very *loud* in the aftermath of the chase, and its conspicuous indifference to the emotional state of the protagonist is striking. The song heard on the radio is of course recognised as music, but is it *heard* as music? It is clearly experienced in an aesthetically different way to an intentional hearing of the same music. It is, therefore, how we stand in relation to the object that determines whether it is to be listened to as music or not.

In his famous essay 'The Death of the Author', Roland Barthes writes that '[t]he reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination'. In this way, it is readers who imaginatively hold together all aspects of the text in a 'single field'.<sup>78</sup> Scruton asserts that the aesthetic description we give to the sound 'is an attempt to characterize the intentional object – that which we see, hear, or understand *in* the work of art',<sup>79</sup> and it is here that we come to an integral part of the aesthetic experience: comprehension. We learn to understand the intentional

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<sup>77</sup> See Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

<sup>78</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image–Music–Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 142–48.

<sup>79</sup> Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 372 (*italics original*).

object through the very distance that separates it from the material object (the actual sounds). Frances Berenson writes:

As long as music conveys something/anything to us then that something is represented. There are many kinds of representation including abstract, non-material reality. If we can talk about something *in* the music then we have a subject-matter the representation of which is in some way there, in the music. Music has the ability for representation of the most subtle kind, the kind which can *only* be conveyed by sounds captured in very particular tones; the subject-matter itself being non-material – our shareable emotional experiences, our *Lebenswelt*.<sup>80</sup> That is what we are able to respond to in a most powerful way, that is what makes us want to *listen to music* as opposed to merely theorizing about it. Limiting ‘representation’ to the material world is merely legislating without any solid logical basis behind it.<sup>81</sup>

So when we speak of music we speak of something out of reach, distanced from its material basis. We situate the sounds in an imaginative space and populate it with the phenomenal objects of our perception, and these are not the physical or actual sounds themselves. The subject matter has no material reality, and the way the ‘representation [...] is in some way there’ is in our conceptual interpretation of the sounding objects.

Roger Scruton, like Clifton before him, argues that ‘[t]he life in music belongs in the musical process, abstract, indeterminate, unowned except through the act whereby we listeners possess it’.<sup>82</sup> Accordingly, music is constituted within a single phenomenal field in our imaginations, and that is why we possess it. It is through the lived world (the *Lebenswelt*) that the percepts emanating from the musical experience come to belong to us; and it is also how we come to believe a particular musical representation is in the music, because it is the content of the musical experience

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<sup>80</sup> *Lebenswelt* literally translates as ‘life world’ and is a Husserlian term meaning the world as it is encountered in our experience, the revealed presence of the phenomenal world, the world as lived.

<sup>81</sup> Frances Berenson, ‘Representation and Music’, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 34/1, (1994), 65.

<sup>82</sup> Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 355.

which takes place from *our* participation – the music is *in* us, and it therefore follows that the musical representation is in us too. Seen this way, any musical content is a result of our ascription and projection onto the sounds from other experiential domains, such as the painting indicated by a title.

### 3.6 From the Virtual to the Actual

Although we have now found a convenient model from which the musical representation of a painting may take place, from projection and imaginative action upon the phenomenal sounds, such a model seems to be veering dangerously towards a relativism that might permit us to attach any projection or imaginative ordering to any set of sounds. But, as we said above, it is how we stand, or listen, in relation to the music, mediated by the painting and its conceptual frame, that determines how the musical object becomes a bearer of meaning. In this way, the musical objects under scrutiny in Part II possess their own inherent qualities, which are founded sonically and represented by their musical scores. These qualities, it will be shown, have the potential to bear certain meanings and not others; they will, then, afford and delimit particular interpretations that we might project upon them from our mediations of the painting as referent.

Ronald Bogue cites the Swedish-born ethologist Jakob von Uexküll's influence on the thought of Deleuze and Guattari, explaining that human beings inhabit 'worlds of meaning'. Bogue offers a particularly vivid example of this when he writes:

When von Uexküll meets a furiously barking dog on his daily walk and throws a paving stone toward it to scare it away, the stone does not change its physical properties, but its *meaning* for the dog does change. What had been an object functioning in the human world as a support

for the steps of pedestrians (and probably as an indifferent feature of the ground for the dog) has been converted into a menacing projectile in the dog's world, into a bearer of meaning.<sup>83</sup>

He quotes Uexküll: 'It is only by way of a relation that the object is changed into a bearer of meaning, meaning which is conferred on it by the subject.'<sup>84</sup> It is, then, how we stand in relation to an object that affects how we see it, a fact that clearly disputes the idea of meaning being immanent with the object. He continues, an animal 'milieu constitutes a unity closed in on itself; each part of it is determined by the significance it receives for the subject of this milieu'.<sup>85</sup> Hence, although it seems that we all live in the same universe, in fact our universe is subjectively determined in relation to everything else.

Recalling the monism espoused by the phenomenologists, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus* regard this oneness of perceptual orientation and object as determining a singular plane:

In any case, there is a pure plane of immanence, univocity, composition, upon which everything is given, upon which unformed elements and materials dance that are distinguished from one another only by their speed and that enter into this or that individuated assemblage depending on their connections, their relations of movement. A fixed plane of life upon which everything stirs, slows down or accelerates.<sup>86</sup>

They regard philosophical concepts as taking place on this plane of immanence:

'Concepts are events, but the plane is the horizon of events.'<sup>87</sup> Moreover, this horizon is 'not a concept that is or can be thought but rather the image of thought, the image

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<sup>83</sup> Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 59 (italics original).

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in Bogue, 59.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. and with a foreword by Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), 281.

<sup>87</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 36.

thought gives itself of what it means to think, to make use of thought, to find one's bearings in thought'.<sup>88</sup> So, through this *image* the orientation of our thoughts are changed as we resonate with where the imagery takes us conceptually. Engaged thus, 'I am no longer myself, but thought's aptitude of thought for finding itself and spreading across a plane that passes through me at several places'.<sup>89</sup> They see this as a 'becoming other' and distinguish between 'sensory becoming' (that of aesthetic figures such as paintings and music) as 'the action by which something or someone is ceaselessly becoming-other (while continuing to be what they are)', and 'conceptual becoming' as 'the action by which the common event eludes what it is'. In other words, the image, though belonging to a 'conceptual becoming', may stand apart from the object which it describes and which gave it existence in the first place. Thus, works of art may embody an event (a horizon), giving it a body, a life and a universe. They 'construct their own limits, their distances and proximities, their constellations and the blocs of sensations they put into motion – Rembrandt-universe or Debussy-universe. These universes are neither virtual nor actual; they are possibles'.<sup>90</sup>

If we take the example of Francis Bacon's *Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953) (**fig. 3.3**) the screaming pope expresses a possible world – that is, until we discover the source of the scream. The face remains a sign of some as yet unspecified possible universe. And is this not the case in MaP? In its 'becoming-other', through our discovering the source of its utterance, the painting, the possible universes belonging to the music move from the virtual into the actual. Our change of orientation, then, is an event of actualisation. Thus, like the Bacon painting, the music expresses a possible world. Deleuze and Guattari write that it is an absurdity to believe that any language as such carries a message: 'A language is always embedded

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>89</sup> Cited in Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts*, 174–75.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 177.

in the faces that announce its statements and ballast them in relation to the signifiers in progress and the subjects concerned.’<sup>91</sup> Thus, language is not transparent as it is always coextensive and contingent upon the context of its expression, that context being primarily the facial movements – eye, mouth and tone of voice.



**Figure 3.3:** Francis Bacon, *Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953)<sup>92</sup>

Accordingly, a statement such as ‘you are a great driver’ may be meant literally or ironically depending on the facial context; the twist of a wry smile or the slant of the eyes, for example, may signal diametrically opposed meanings. Such a

<sup>91</sup> *A Thousand Plateaus*, 199.

<sup>92</sup> Oil on canvas, 153 x 118 cm, Des Moines Art Center, Iowa.

statement, then, as any other, is informed by the immediate context of its delivery, so if I am told this immediately after having driven through a red light then I can expect irony here. Hence, our ‘choices are guided by faces, elements are organised around faces: a common grammar is never separable from a facial education’.<sup>93</sup> The expression communicated by Bacon’s painting is different, however, for we are missing any such context which might give clues to the scream, and we therefore have no choice but to intuit the source of the subject’s expression.

This would also seem particularly true of any meaning conveyed by MaP. Any communication here is anchored by the qualities of the musical attributes – it is those qualities – because we cannot separate out the musical *face* from what is being said. Furthermore, the unspecified universe that is the music becomes named through its title after the painting; hence, we now know its universe and, therefore, we know its context too, so we are able to connect the musical attributes to this world. Bogue writes: ‘The face as sign, in Deleuze’s sense of the term, is an embodied difference, an entity that enfolds something unknown and requires unfolding in order to be deciphered.’<sup>94</sup> With MaP, then, our job is to unfold the musical attributes with respect to the painting’s world, for the meaning is not immanently within the music but is dependent upon our relation to the sonic object. Thus the sonic object may be said to have the potential for meaning to arise in conjunction with the relational frame of the painting. The meaning is embedded, therefore, in that musical *face*.

What is interesting about this for our purposes is the affinity posited by Deleuze and Guattari between the arts and philosophy: ‘In the one there is the constellation of a universe or affects and percepts; and in the other, constitutions of immanence or concepts. Art thinks no less than philosophy, but it thinks through

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<sup>93</sup> *A Thousand Plateaus*, 199.

<sup>94</sup> Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts*, 177.

affects and percepts.’<sup>95</sup> And both strain towards an outside: concepts strain towards new ways of thinking, affects towards new ways of feeling, and percepts towards new ways of seeing and hearing. It is in this related field of forces that philosophy and the arts converge.

For Deleuze and Guattari, philosophy is suffused in the same driving force as the arts; or, as Paul Klee puts it, ‘[a]rt does not reproduce the visible but makes visible’.<sup>96</sup> Significantly, for our discussion of the mechanisms involved in MaP, the title, as we have observed, provides a world, but it also provides a conceptual framework. MaP is *sui generis* because it provides us with three facets: sonic material, a literary title and a painting as referent. Within this trinity, we find a presentation of the virtual and the possible, together with the concept that extends from the painting and its title as a field of forces or a framework. It is to the question of how this virtual and possible becomes an actual world, how the imperceptible is rendered perceptible, that we must turn next. And to do this we must now address the meaning of concept and how metaphorical transference functions across these different experiential domains.

What we have thus far been trying to show in both this and the previous chapters is that meaning is a dynamic process, whether it is from a literary text, a painting, or from music. The virtual nature of these texts presents a possible world that invites its actualisation in ‘becoming-other’, whether our role is that of a reader, a viewer or a listener. Nevertheless, it is literary texts and representational paintings that seem to possess meaning of a non-reflexive nature; that is, meaning which does not necessarily reflect back upon the text itself, but points to concepts which lie outside the immediate remit of its own materials. And, apart from certain abstract or non-

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<sup>95</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 66.

<sup>96</sup> Cited in Paul Klee, ‘Creative Credo’, in *Notebooks*, vol. 1: *The Thinking Eye*, ed. by Jurg Spiller, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Overlook Press, 1992), 76–80.

representational paintings, music alone seems to be pre-eminently self-reflexive: drawing our attention to the quality of its meaning-bearing units for their own sake and the expectations implicated by its intrinsic structure. In this way, rather than possessing reflexive meaning, MaP seems to acquire it along the way; that is to say, it accumulates meaning by standing in a particular relation to the concepts provided by the imagined painting.

### 3.7 Musical Signification

Lawrence Kramer writes that music may act like ‘a sign fragment, the signifier of a veiled or unrealized signified. It is not a full sign because it lacks both a referent and a signified, but is not merely an “empty sign” (in Kevin Barry’s phrase) because it could at any time have either or both’. Seemingly shifting his previous music-as-culturally-determined position, he argues:

But one must above all not conclude from this that music lacks meaning. On the contrary, the semantic fragmentation forms one basis of music’s semantic absorptiveness. The absence of meaning at the level of virtual utterance is the medium at which meaning arises in the semantic loop. Hegel’s criterion for the sign, that it assumes a meaning foreign to its own nature, is precisely the one that music pointedly does not meet, or at least gives the illusion of not meeting. Music heard as meaningful does not seem to transmit a meaning that it signifies but a meaning that it exemplifies – “as if present and incarnated.”<sup>97</sup>

So, firstly, Kramer is asserting that music lacks the classical semiotic principle of signifier and signified, yet it has the potential to have either or both at any time.

Secondly, that it is this potential that gives music its ability to be meaningful –

‘semantic absorptiveness’ as he puts it. And thirdly, music does not convey a meaning

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<sup>97</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2002), 156–57.

away from its sign as a word seems to do, rather it ‘exemplifies’ the meaning in and of itself; it is, in other words, at one and the same time the signifier and the signified. This is, of course, what we have been saying throughout: whatever meaning arises from our contact with music, it is not transparent to its medium. But, in the case of MaP, the music is given the task of signifying the painting, and this leaves it the job of self-reflexively commenting on that signification.

Kramer’s formulation bears a striking resemblance to what Roland Barthes calls an ‘obtuse’, ‘supplementary’, or ‘third meaning’.<sup>98</sup> In contrast to the ‘obvious meaning’ (the informational and symbolic referential levels) the third meaning is a ‘signifier without a signified’. It refers only to the field of the signifier until, that is, it is able to gain significance “‘on the back” of articulated language’.<sup>99</sup> Hence Barthes claims that the burlesque proportions of Ivan’s beard in Sergei Eisenstein’s film *Ivan the Terrible* assume a third meaning by underlining the absurdity and obvious falsity of the image, which nonetheless retains its referential and historical potency.<sup>100</sup> In this way, it supplements the obvious meaning of the text or image, for it offers something in addition to the primary signification.

Applying this to MaP, the music contains a field of signifiers which refer self-reflexively to themselves. But extending this frame outwards and intersecting with the territory of the painting (to use the Deleuzian concept from Chapter 1), the music may be said to offer something of a ‘third meaning’ on the back of the obvious meanings within the title and the painting – and a third meaning with signification by virtue of its title. Significantly, this meaning does not overwhelm the first-order meaning of the painting or the music, but it may add to or exceed it.

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<sup>98</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘The Third Meaning’, in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 41–62.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 48–49.

This apparent indeterminacy may well be one of the keys to understanding MaP as ‘representational’. The musical representation – and let us call it that for the time being – of the painting is always less than the painting, for it can never obviously be the painting, but also more than the painting precisely because it is indeterminate. By being unfixed and possessing ‘semantic absorptiveness’, it has a certain malleability which enables it to absorb a greater potential variety of meanings than the painting. The music, then, has potential for meaning to arise. As Nicholas Cook puts it in discussing multimedia:

The alignment of the other media with music, that is to say, induces a specific perceptual selection from its available attributes. [...] [O]ne might think of music – and perhaps any other medium – as having potential for signification which is much broader than anything that can be realized in any given context. What matters, from this point of view, is not so much the signification that is ‘in’ the sound, but rather the potential for signification that it may support by virtue of specific intersections with other media. Seen thus, signification becomes a function of context: it is, in a word, performative.<sup>101</sup>

Such potential for signification may be viewed as the possible worlds we discussed in the last section. And in ‘becoming-other’, MaP may come to signify, or at least designate, the painting through this ‘intersection’ with the other media. It is tempting to see this interaction as similar to one that might emerge when we mix an accelerant with a substance, but it is in the ‘single field’ of the listener that the *combustion*, so to speak, takes place – like the Barthesian space where the unified text is *written*.<sup>102</sup> Perhaps, therefore, it is better to think of the listener as the accelerant. MaP in these terms may, then, afford the existence or affordance of certain meanings. It also suggests that the meaning does not reside solely in the music, because it may come to

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<sup>101</sup> Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, 83.

<sup>102</sup> See p.141 above.

support and absorb certain meanings from the painting which, in turn, comment back on the original artwork. Above all, the theory we are describing problematizes the view that music communicates to us in an uncontaminated way.

The notion that language actually participates in the construction of meaning rather than merely reflecting transparently how things are highlights the same mode of being for music: a musical experience is mediated by the sound itself and thus it does more than simply transmit a message. If music's sole function was to communicate a message from signifier to signified, then once this had been achieved it would all be used up and could be disregarded. The very fact that we repeatedly return to the same piece of music suggests that if the sound can afford the meaning, something about its meaning is mediated. Moreover, its aesthetic value must surely be in the experience, not in a transcendent meaning that we extract from the art-object, exhausting the latter in the process.

Cook memorably writes that '[p]ure music, it seems, is an aesthetician's (and music theorist's) fiction: the real thing unites itself promiscuously with any other media that are available'.<sup>103</sup> But, of course, it is listeners who conjoin and marry up the music to a particular context – we are the accelerant here because we make the connections. Writing about music in commercials, Cook asserts: 'That is how the music of these commercials seems: empty of meaning, but ready to accommodate meaning that is aligned to it, or even to create meaning where there was none.'<sup>104</sup> The music has potential then to become meaningful, and this is why it can go beyond the painting because what it brings to the aesthetic experience is more than either the painting or the music could bring in isolation. This is what Cook terms an 'emergent

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<sup>103</sup> Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, 92.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

property’;<sup>105</sup> a property, then, which comes from the negotiation between two media.<sup>106</sup>

Edward T. Cone writes that musical gestures ‘are both meaningless and meaningful’:

This apparent contradiction arises, of course, from a play on words. In the same spirit we might also say: musical gestures lack signification, but they can be significant. Like a sigh, a musical gesture has no specific referent, it conveys no specific message. But like a sigh, it can prove appropriate to many occasions; it can fit into many contexts, which in return can explain its significance. The expressive content of the musical gesture, then, depends on its context.

Deprived of context, the gesture expresses nothing; it is only potentially expressive.

This excellent example illustrates admirably what Cone terms ‘[n]o context, no content’.<sup>107</sup> As we discussed earlier, a piece of music may be said to be expressive of sadness, but sad about what or whom? Without a proper object the music remains intransitive. Once it is given an object, however, the music has the potential to be subsumed with that particular context – in our case, the painting – it becomes, then, significant within that context. Because the musical gestures remain bereft of representational meaning without a context, we may say that they are latently expressive of a possible world. Once provided, however, a context explains the significance of a musical gesture and affords it meaning – it is, then, no longer a ‘signifier without a signified’.

It is important to stress, though, that the image of the context will not always demystify the musical structure. It depends, rather, on the enabling similarity between the musical object and the ideation that takes place in our imaging of the painting.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>106</sup> In this description, Cook is, of course, discussing the interaction between film and music, but it nonetheless remains valid for the discussion of relationships between music and painting.

<sup>107</sup> Edward T. Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 165.

Viewing music as a ‘sign fragment’ allows it what Kramer calls ‘semantic absorptiveness’ because it can become the referent or the signified at any point. This concept of music would explain how its chameleon-like nature fits itself happily into numerous contexts because it can assume many roles. However, meaning only arises subject to the appropriateness of the music to this other context.

Kramer wrote in 1990 that music ‘must be made to yield to understanding’,<sup>108</sup> and this, we are arguing, may be accomplished by transferring meaning from the image of the painting to the music. A decade later, in *Musical Meaning: Towards a Critical History*, he wrote that ‘[i]nterpretation joins one communicative stream with another so that meaning can run through both’.<sup>109</sup> In this way, it is the mechanism of metaphor which provides an explanation for joining the communication streams of music and painting by enabling the listener to understand one domain of experience in terms of another. It is clear, though, that a representational (or even a non-representational) painting’s meaning is more readily available than musical meaning, and its concepts more recognisable, making it thus privileged in directing the interpretation.

Notwithstanding this primacy of meaning, however, Kramer observes that musical meaning shares something with W. J. T. Mitchell’s ‘imagetext’. The ‘imagetext’ articulates a level of meaning which is not medium specific and in which words and imagery implicate, complement and reinforce each other. Accordingly, all media are to some extent ‘mixed’. This formulation bears similarity to Adorno’s and Clifton’s espousal that the phenomenal encounter with either the ‘spatial’ or the ‘temporal’ arts implicates the essential aspects of both. Seen thus, musical meaning

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<sup>108</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1990), 5.

<sup>109</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Musical Meaning: Towards a Critical History* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2002), 167.

runs on what Kramer calls a 'semantic loop'. This loop describes a process whereby the music both receives meaning from the imagetext but also returns meaning to it, and in doing so, augments and transforms it. Kramer continues: 'The meaning-bearing music seems both to blend with the imagetext and envelop it, both to saturate and exceed it.'<sup>110</sup> It would seem useful to think of our MaP in this way too. Under the condition of its appropriateness to the context of the painting, once the music has absorbed this new conceptual structure, it will also comment on and perhaps enrich its primary source.

This dynamic relationship illustrates the relational nature of meaning, and it also shows us how our subjectivity mediated by the painting-concept selects from the musical object. Like Cone's sigh, MaP may be deemed to have signification because it has a specific referent which explains its significance. But, as we have said previously, the music always has the potential to be more than its ascription would suggest; it will always inform the original conceptual structure even if in an impoverished way. It is this relational aspect that gives the musical object its lived experience through our interpretation.

The reason it is useful to think of our music-painting relationship in terms of an imagetext is that the notion posited by Kramer is one of absence: the image implies an absent text and the text implies an absent image. We saw in Chapter 2 that perception requires the actual presence of an object, and ideation its absence, and thus the very absence of the painting invites our imaginative involvement and therefore our supplementation of the aesthetic experience. Without this mechanism the painting would be without consequence.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 153.

What we have been in the business of proposing, then, is a dynamic response theory to MaP; one where the music has the potential to bear meanings ascribed to it and is able to articulate itself from an interrelationship with the painting. Taking our lead from a number of different fields to explore how meaning or a representation might be generated, we have seen how there has been a shift away from the idea that musical meaning is immanent in the text. As Roger Scruton has compellingly demonstrated, music is what he calls a tertiary quality of a sounding object, for it is more than just a sensory perception as in the way we perceive colour,<sup>111</sup> because to hear music involves the faculty of our imagination.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, intentionality has been the thread that has bound these theories together, for were it not for our intention we should not be able to project, respond to, or imagine any of the meaning we see as ultimately belonging to the musical domain.

R. K. Elliott writes that any other way of viewing the philosophy of art involves an ‘objectivist Aesthetic [*sic*],’<sup>113</sup> where we inspect and come to know an object through examining the intrinsic qualities of the work without the use of our imagination. According to this view, we are not called upon to imagine anything, but simply to apprehend what is there to be seen or heard. However, Elliott adds, ‘what constitutes a proper response to a work of art [...] may be that a work of art is precisely the kind of thing which calls for imaginal and personal response. One might say that that is its essence and its life, and that the objectivist aesthetic extols not the

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<sup>111</sup> When we see an apple as green or red, the greenness or redness is what philosophers call a ‘secondary property’, for the colour cannot really be *in* the apple, for the fact that I see it depends on my labelling my interpretation of the light reflecting off the apple. It could be said, though, that the apple possesses intrinsic properties that cause my brain to see the apple as green or red, and this must be the case given the considerable inter-subjective agreement in the colour judgements made by observers.

<sup>112</sup> See Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 94.

<sup>113</sup> R. K. Elliott, ‘Imagination in the Experience of Art’, in *Philosophy and the Arts: Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures*, vol. 6: 1971–72, ed. Godfrey Vesey (London: Macmillan, 1973), 98.

work itself but its husk or corpse.’<sup>114</sup> And it is this view – that the aesthetic experience of MaP is driven by our imaginative involvement – that forms the response theory put forward here.

We shall now turn towards some examples of MaP in order to examine the mechanism and conditions that revolve around the contingency of the imagined painting. These conditions will involve an analysis of the musical attributes grounded in the score as a representation of the sonic experience, and also an examination of the painterly attributes to which this music ostensibly refers. The critical interpretation of these facets will therefore be driven by my own phenomenal experiences of both the music and the painting, with the latter acting as a framework for the selection of musical attributes. Moreover, where available, and as an additional framework for the interpretations that follow, this process is also enabled by the composers’ own writings about their subjective and compositional relationship with the painting. This aspect, though, is seen as secondary to the discussion of the phenomenal encounter with the music in the context of the painting.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 103.

## **Part II: The Case Studies**

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## CHAPTER 4

### Phenomenological Impressions of Time and Space in Morton Feldman's *Rothko Chapel*

#### *Chapel*

One might call [my compositions] time canvases in which I more or less prime the canvas with an overall hue of music.

I prefer to think of my work as: *between categories*. Between Time and Space. Between painting and music. Between the music's construction, and its surface.<sup>1</sup>

– Morton Feldman

Morton Feldman's well-known treatment of his musical scores as 'time canvases' seizes upon the metaphor that 'music is a painting'. In this chapter, an interpretation of the Rothko Chapel paintings posits a frame of reference for understanding Feldman's musical composition *Rothko Chapel*. The key questions addressed, then, are whether the paintings-as-metaphor provide a source domain from which to comprehend the musical experience, but also whether this is a necessary component for an effective aesthetic experience. How does the music relate to the chapel and its abstract paintings? What is it about this non-figurative backdrop that may enrich our understanding of the music? And how does music represent paintings that are seemingly without a subject? Furthermore, is the music able to create an experience in its listeners analogous to that of experiencing the chapel paintings?

In Feldman's writings and lectures, we find an abundance of vivid rhetorical formulations comparing his own compositional art to that of contemporary painters. Feldman regarded his work as lying somewhere 'between music and painting'. He claimed that he learned how to compose primarily from looking at the work of

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<sup>1</sup> Feldman, 'Between Categories', in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, ed. B. H. Friedman (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 88.

painters and listening to their views rather than through formal training in music.<sup>2</sup>

While Feldman's claims concerning his apprenticeship should not be accepted uncritically, his assertions do at least provide some insights into how we might interpret *Rothko Chapel* 'visually'. Moreover, it seems without question that certain aesthetic characteristics of Feldman's compositional style paralleled similar tendencies in the work of painters belonging particularly to the New York School. Accordingly, what follows is an analysis of the phenomenological encounter with this piece in relation to the Rothko Chapel paintings. How does the music sound in relation to the colour, texture, space and arrangement of this installation?

#### **4.1 Mark Rothko and the Rothko Chapel**

Mark Rothko was born Marcus Rothkowitz in Latvia in 1903, and arrived in the United States after his Jewish family emigrated there in 1913. Despite winning a prestigious scholarship, Rothko dropped out of Yale University at the end of his sophomore year and moved in 1923 to New York, where he pursued an interest in painting. For the first twenty years his paintings were largely figurative, and it was not until 1949, 'the year that he made his most daring painting gesture',<sup>3</sup> that he painted the first of his well-known rectilinear signature images. From his writings, it is clear that Rothko was an intellectual, passionate about music, literature and philosophy – particularly Dostoevsky, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. One of the leading exponents of Abstract Expressionism, Rothko always denied that his work was empty of meaning, provocatively describing it as 'nothing but content'.<sup>4</sup> It also seems evident that

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<sup>2</sup> For Feldman's own observations on his artistic formation, see *Morton Feldman Essays*, ed. Walter Zimmerman (Cologne: Beginner Press, 1985) and *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*.

<sup>3</sup> Dore Ashton, *About Rothko* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Rothko, cited in Anna C. Chave, *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 196.

Rothko saw his art as performing a phenomenological rather than a representational function: '[it] is not *about* an experience, it *is* an experience'.<sup>5</sup>

Commissioned by the art patrons John and Dominique de Menil in 1964, Rothko's Chapel is an interdenominational place of worship that houses an installation of fourteen paintings by Rothko. The painter clearly regarded this commission as the culmination of his life's work, writing to the Menils,

The magnitude, on every level of experience and meaning, of the task in which you have involved me, exceeds all my preoccupations. And it is teaching me to extend myself beyond what I thought was possible for me.<sup>6</sup>

Tragically, in 1968 the painter's health deteriorated suddenly, he suffered an aneurism and began drinking heavily. He separated from his wife and five-year-old son in 1969, and in February 1970 he committed suicide almost one year before the chapel opened to the public in January 1971. It was during the dedication ceremony in February 1971 that the Menils met Rothko's friend Morton Feldman and commissioned him to write a composition as a tribute to the artist. The musical work was premièred the following year in the chapel on 9 April 1972.

The commissioning of paintings to adorn religious spaces is of course nothing new in the Western art tradition, whose early history is closely bound to that of the Christian church. By the mid-twentieth century, such work was rarer. Nonetheless, the two decades preceding Rothko's Chapel had seen at least two notable examples in the Matisse Chapel of the Rosary in Vence, whose interior and stained glass was designed

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<sup>5</sup> Rothko, quoted in Dorothy Seiberling *Life*, 16 November 1959, cited in Sheldon Nodelman, *The Rothko Chapel: Origins, Structure, Meaning* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 341 (italics original).

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Mark Rothko to John and Dominique de Menil, 1 January 1966. Cited in Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, 'Material and Immaterial Surface: the Paintings of Mark Rothko', in Jeffrey Weiss, *Mark Rothko Catalogue for the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 283.

by Henri Matisse in 1950, and the chapel of Notre Dame de Haut in Ronchamp, designed in its entirety by Le Corbusier in 1956.<sup>7</sup> However, what marks Rothko's Chapel as unique is the fundamental integration of architecture and painting – the building was designed around the installation rather than the other way around. Rothko's commission gave him autonomy over all aspects of the chapel's design and, significantly, this allowed him complete control over the lighting that would illuminate his works.<sup>8</sup> Rothko even made a replica of the chapel's planned internal layout and its lighting in his New York studio so that he could accurately simulate the intended environment for his work.

The fourteen Rothko Chapel paintings are among the artist's largest, ranging upwards in size to 11 feet by 15 feet. The arrangement consists of three triptychs in the north, east and west, and five single paintings hung on the other five walls (see **figs. 4.1 and 4.2**).<sup>9</sup> Rothko's idea was to 'make East and West merge in an octagonal chapel',<sup>10</sup> and, indeed, the black-figure triptychs adorning these opposing side walls are almost identical.<sup>11</sup> Apart from the south-wall panel, which is characteristically rectilinear, the paintings are largely monochromatic, predominantly composed in the hues of purple, brown, ochre, and black. In this way, the installation's conspicuous lack of figuration arguably reaches new heights of abstraction.

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<sup>7</sup> Sheldon Nodelman argues that the de Menils' commission for the Rothko Chapel in Houston was directly inspired by the Dominican Father Marie-Alain Couturier's mission for the *Art Sacré* movement, which had already resulted in the religious works by Matisse and Le Corbusier. See Nodelman, *The Rothko Chapel Paintings: Origins, Structure, Meaning*, 34.

<sup>8</sup> The renowned architect Philip Johnson withdrew from his commission to design the building due to a disagreement with Rothko concerning the chapel's design. Two new architects, Howard Barnstone and Eugene Aubrey, finished the plans according to Rothko's wishes.

<sup>9</sup> Steven Johnson, in his essay 'Rothko Chapel and Rothko's Chapel', *Perspectives of New Music*, 32/2 (1994), describes the east and west triptychs as having a 'cruciform' configuration resulting from their transept-like outer panels being slightly lowered.

<sup>10</sup> Cited in Dore Ashton, *About Rothko*, 169.

<sup>11</sup> For some high quality reproductions of these paintings, see Nodelman, *The Rothko Chapel Paintings*, 16–30.

The overriding impression of this all-consuming abstraction is one of otherness: these paintings are diametrically opposed to worldly representations and are seemingly impenetrable because of this. Rothko's final artistic period, including the chapel paintings (1964–67), saw a move away from his bright-coloured rectangles towards a tenebrous mood, culminating in his black on grey paintings of 1969. Stylistically, too, these paintings mark a difference to his earlier work through their clean, taped edges – gone are the characteristically blurred, nebulous boundaries of his earlier colour planes. Robert Goldwater observes in these later paintings: 'It was not the expressive mood embodied that occupied him but the construction – the means.'<sup>12</sup> As in Greenbergian modernism, then, it was the medium, the physicality of paint itself that became paramount. Furthermore, Dore Ashton observed that any questions about the meaning of Rothko's work were to be 'definitively answered' by the chapel installation.<sup>13</sup>

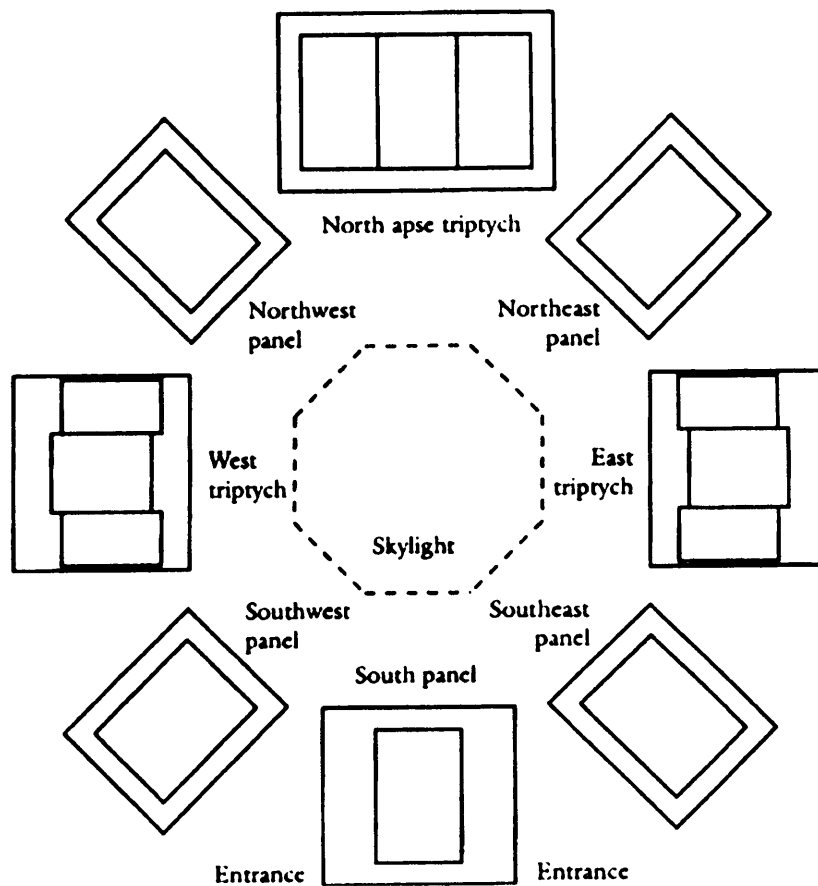
It is hard to ignore the possible relationship of Rothko's series of panels to the Roman Catholic tradition of meditating on depictions of the fourteen Stations of the Cross, particularly given that the chapel's original purpose was for Roman Catholic worship.<sup>14</sup> Significantly, Barnett Newman (1905–70), who provided the sculpture *Broken Obelisk* (1963–67) which balances on the apex of the pyramid at the front of the chapel, had painted a set of fourteen black and white paintings entitled *Stations of the Cross* (1958–64) just a few years earlier.

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Goldwater quoted in Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, 'Material and Immaterial Surface: the Paintings of Mark Rothko', 284.

<sup>13</sup> See Ashton, *About Rothko*, 168.

<sup>14</sup> The chapel was originally intended as a Catholic institution for the University of St. Thomas, but a disagreement between the University and the de Menils prompted the patrons to give the chapel an interdenominational status. Although many have read the number of fourteen paintings as significant, Sheldon Nodelman argues that there are only eight functional units in the ensemble: three triptychs and five single panels. See Nodelman, *The Rothko Chapel Paintings*, 307.



**Figure 4.1:** Schematic of the interior of the Rothko Chapel<sup>15</sup>

Adopting a phenomenological position, Rothko explains in 1953 that the viewer will have noticed two characteristics that exist in his painting: ‘either their surfaces are expansive and push outward in all directions, or their surfaces contract and rush inward in all directions.’<sup>16</sup> To experience the paintings in this way implicates a phenomenal encounter with the artworks, and one that provokes a temporal response too. Moreover, it recalls the discussion of framing in Part I: where does the picture stop (Derrida)? And which other territories does it intersect with in its aesthetic reception (Deleuze and Guattari)? Furthermore, something about the size of Rothko’s paintings invites an immediate phenomenal response from the viewer. Just as an

<sup>15</sup> Taken from Steven Johnson, ‘*Rothko Chapel* and Rothko’s Chapel’, 11.

<sup>16</sup> James E. B. Breslin, *Mark Rothko: a Biography* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 301.

individual might find themselves awestruck and humbled by the magnitude of a cathedral's architectural proportions, so, too, does a viewer upon viewing these imposing works.

Rothko had long striven for closeness and intimacy in his paintings, displaying them so that the viewer feels immersed in the picture, and he had also painted a group of large pictures before – the Seagram murals, now housed in the Tate Modern.<sup>17</sup> He claims that the reason he painted them this way was to convey an experience that was intimate and human: 'However you paint the larger pictures you are in it.'<sup>18</sup> The inherent phenomenality in this gesture relates to the way one feels consumed by the sheer scale of the paintings. In the chapel and the Tate's Rothko Room, the paintings encircle and smother, halting the viewer's reflective distance and ensuring the paintings' immediacy. The octagonal enclosure of the chapel envelops its viewers quite literally as they become surrounded by the fourteen paintings. Accordingly, multiplying the effects of scale by erecting a field of paintings seems to lessen the individual's role as a spectator and instead posits the oneness of their lived experience with the paintings.

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<sup>17</sup> These paintings became known as the Seagram murals, painted between 1958 and 1959, as they were originally intended for the Four Seasons Restaurant in the Seagram Building. Rothko, concerned with the materialistic opulence of the restaurant, eventually withdrew from the commission and returned the considerable advance he was given.

<sup>18</sup> Rothko, cited in Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, 'Material and Immaterial Surface: the Paintings of Mark Rothko', 284.



**Figure 4.2:** Installation view: north apse triptych flanked by northwest and northeast angle-wall paintings

## 4.2 Morton Feldman and the New York School

From the 1940s onwards, the American composer Morton Feldman (1926–87) belonged to the New York School – a loose term used to describe the cultural scene of visual artists and composers in New York from the early 1940s to the 1950s. Other leading members of this group included the painters Barnett Newman, Willem de Kooning (1904–97), Franz Kline (1910–62), Philip Guston (1913–80) and Jackson Pollock (1912–56); and the composers John Cage (1912–92), Earle Brown (1926–2002) and Christian Wolff (1934–). The term is also synonymous with Abstract Expressionism and action painting – action because the focus was on the act or process of painting rather than the finished physical object. Feldman was close friends with many of these artists, including Rothko, and delighted particularly in the new means of expression that painting showed him following his own excursions into graphic notation in compositions such as *Projections* and *Intersections* (1950–51).

This affinity with the painters expressed itself through a number of musical works that Rothko dedicated to his artist friends, including the sextet *For Franz Kline* (1962), the quintet *De Kooning* (1963) and the trio *For Philip Guston* (1984).<sup>19</sup> However, Feldman considered *Rothko Chapel* unique because it was ‘the only score where other factors determined what kind of music it was going to be’ and it is the ‘only piece – and it will never happen again – when all kinds of facts, literary facts, reminiscent facts, came into the piece’.<sup>20</sup> Does this statement mean, then, that the composition might be regarded as a musical representation of the chapel paintings? How might such musical representation work where non-figurative paintings are

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<sup>19</sup> He also dedicated his last piano piece *Palais de Mari* (1986) to the painter Francesco Clemente, who painted his portrait in the 1980s, and he composed the music for Hans Namuth’s film *Jackson Pollock* (1951).

<sup>20</sup> ‘Morton Feldman: Interview by Fred Orton and Gavin Bryars’, *Studio International*, 192 / Nov–Dec (1976) 244–48 <<http://www.cnvill.net/mforton.htm>> [accessed 4 August 2005]

concerned? What, precisely, is there to represent? The title, *Rothko Chapel*, would suggest that Feldman was concerned not just with the artist and his paintings but also with their arrangement within the chapel's interior and the installation's spiritual premise. But how did these concerns manifest themselves in the finished composition?

Firstly, we should consider the aesthetic concerns that Feldman shared with the painters. Jonathan W. Bernard writes that Feldman believed the Abstract Expressionists were 'shaking off the pernicious effects of the modernism of the first half of the twentieth century, in which the *idea* had reigned supreme, and thinking had come to substitute for looking'.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, there was a profound distrust of systems. Feldman scathingly wrote that Pierre Boulez is 'not interested in how a piece sounds, only in how it is made', and he commented: 'No painter would talk that way. Philip Guston once told me that when he sees how a painting is made he becomes bored with it.'<sup>22</sup> Dore Ashton observes that Rothko, too, 'was enough of a Nietzschean to be wary of systems'.<sup>23</sup> This quest for what we might understand as an 'innocent' gaze harks back to the phenomenological principles discussed in Part I.

When asked what he had learned from the Abstract Expressionist painters in a 1976 interview, Feldman replied: 'Maybe the insight where process could be a fantastic subject matter'.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in drawing attention to the raw physicality of the medium, he states: 'The new painting made me desirous of a sound world more direct, more immediate, more physical than anything that had existed heretofore.'<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, Feldman's focus was on the sounds themselves in the process of their

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<sup>21</sup> Jonathan W. Bernard, 'Feldman's Painters', in *The New York Schools of Music and Visual Arts*, ed. Steven Johnson (London: Routledge, 2002), 177 (*italics original*).

<sup>22</sup> Feldman, 'Predeterminate – Indeterminate', in *Essays*, 47.

<sup>23</sup> Ashton, *About Rothko*, 173.

<sup>24</sup> 'Morton Feldman: Interview by Fred Orton and Gavin Bryars' <<http://www.cnvill.net/mforton.htm>> [accessed 4 August 2005]

<sup>25</sup> Feldman, 'Autobiography', in *Essays*, 38.

execution: 'That collision with the Instant which I witnessed is the first step to the Abstract Experience. And the Abstract Experience *cannot be represented*. It is, then, not visible in the painting, yet it is there – felt.'<sup>26</sup> For Feldman, then, the aesthetic experience emerges from the physical encounter with the sounds.

In a similar manner, Irving Sandler explains that the painters were interested in 'the manipulation of paint as an end in itself, that is, for purely visual or retinal purposes'.<sup>27</sup> Harold Rosenberg, who invented the term 'action painters', writes,

What was to go on the canvas was not a picture, but an event. The painter no longer approached the easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter.

Accordingly, the materials and process became paramount: 'What matters always is the revelation contained in the act.'<sup>28</sup> Importantly, though, the focus on the word 'action' underlines the fact that paintings such as Pollock's capture in their frozenness all of that kinetic energy that went into their creation. But it is in the phenomenal encounter with the artwork that the 'revelation' of these forces takes place.

The New York School poet Frank O'Hara (1926–66) explains that the influence between the different arts has been mutual: 'the very extremity of the differences between the arts has thrown their technical analogies into sharp relief.'<sup>29</sup> This observation has definite resonances with Adorno's and Klee's view that it is in the phenomenal encounter that the fictional space of a painting requires time to

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<sup>26</sup> Feldman, 'After Modernism', in *Essays*, 104 (italics original).

<sup>27</sup> Irving Sandler, *The New York Schools: the Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties* (London: Harper and Row, 1978), 163, quoted in Johnson, *New York Schools*, 8.

<sup>28</sup> Harold Rosenberg, 'The American Action Painters,' in *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Horizon Press, 1960; repr. Da Capo Press, 1994), 25–27.

<sup>29</sup> Frank O'Hara, cited in *Morton Feldman: Essays*, 24.

unfold, and how, too, the parsing of musical voices takes place within a field of imagined space. O'Hara argues that it was the paintings of Philip Guston which allowed Feldman to focus on the 'condition under which the work was created and which is left behind the moment a given work is completed'.<sup>30</sup> In this way, the aesthetics of the New York School saw a turning away from history and the past, highlighted by Barnett Newman's statement that '[t]he image we produce is the self-evident one of revelation, real and concrete, that can be understood by anyone who will look at it without the nostalgic glasses of history'.<sup>31</sup> And this simplicity and purity of approach was also voiced by Feldman in regards to music: 'To rebel against history is still to be part of it. We were simply not concerned with historical processes. We were concerned with sound itself. And sound does not know its history.'<sup>32</sup>

In summary, then, the key points concerning Feldman's shared aesthetic with the painters are his eschewal of systems and ideas and a focus on the physical materials and process as revelatory of meaning. Significantly, though, considering this project's concern with the possibilities of musical representation, the composer's modernist focus on the process and materials themselves led to a rejection of representation and the object. So how does *Rothko Chapel* fit into this aesthetic? Is the work a representation despite itself, and, if so, a representation of what, precisely? By being non-figurative with no overt subject-matter, the paintings in the chapel draw the viewer's attention self-reflexively towards their surface and scale and to the phenomenal encounter one might have with them. The task ahead, then, will be to examine whether Feldman's musical attributes attain a similar level of self-reflexivity

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>31</sup> Barnett Newman, 1948, quoted in Jacob Baal-Teshuva, *Rothko (1903–1970): Pictures As Drama* (London: Taschen, 2003), 10.

<sup>32</sup> Feldman, 'The Anxiety of Art', in *Essays*, 86.

and whether the experience of Feldman's music in any way corresponds with the experiences of Rothko's paintings in their original setting.

#### 4.3 The Programme

For this composition, Feldman wrote the following as part of his programme note:

The total rhythm of the paintings as Rothko arranged them created an unbroken continuity. While it was possible with the paintings to reiterate color and scale and still retain dramatic interest, I felt that the music called for a series of highly contrasted merging sections. I envisioned an immobile procession not unlike the friezes on Greek temples.<sup>33</sup>

The notion of rhythm here is significant, for it implies some level of temporality in the experience of the paintings – space becoming time. Meanwhile, imagining 'an immobile procession' suggests that the surround of paintings somehow creates a frozen snapshot of movement. In this way, they are similar to Jackson Pollock's paintings, where movement seems preserved and frozen in the skein of drips and swirls. In the chapel, though, the processional component seems of a different order, dependent on the arrangement itself.

In arguing that it was not possible for the music to reiterate colour and scale like the paintings, Feldman problematizes the possibilities for a musical representation whilst also suggesting the musical solution – sections with a significant degree of contrast which also merge together. Thus, we find the composer acknowledging that an analogue with certain features of Rothko's paintings is simply not viable for this particular musical representation. Instead, something else is required that better suits the world of sound.

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<sup>33</sup> Feldman, 'Crippled Symmetry', in *Essays*, 125. Also quoted in the liner notes to CD *Morton Feldman Rothko Chapel, Why Patterns*, compact disc, New Albion NA039CD (1991).

Why he felt that the music called for this difference to the paintings is perhaps explained by the experiential nature of the octagonal arrangement in the chapel. The paintings create their own boundaries (or territories) as the viewer looks from one adorned wall to the other whilst still relating to the 'whole'. If, likewise, the music were to reiterate the same colour (that is, sonority) and proportions then it would be much harder for the listener to distinguish an equivalent alterity. Hence the music would fall into a single, unindividuated field, denying the processional element Feldman sought. Notwithstanding the need for such differentiation, Feldman felt the sections of his music should merge into each other to maintain, presumably, a cohesive experience and, perhaps, to recall the merging of colour planes in Rothko's earlier paintings.

Feldman's statement that various extra-musical 'facts' came into the composition suggests some kind of guiding programme behind the music, and indeed Feldman has offered a programme of sorts, both through the actual titles of the individual movements and their description. He also elaborated further in commentaries such as this programme note of 1972:

Like the chapel, the music is conceived in an ecumenical spirit. I think of it as a 'secular service'. I tried to create a music that walks the thin line between the abstraction of all art and the emotional longing that characterises what it is to be 'human'. The chorus symbolizes art's abstractness; the solo viola, the need for human expression. It is only at the end of the work that I think of Rothko and his own love for the melody. Here, I collage a Hebrewesque [*sic*] melody which I wrote thirty years ago – at sixteen.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> From the press release from *Rothko Chapel* for concert, April 9, 1972, cited in Dore Ashton, *About Rothko*, 185.

Calling it a 'secular service' suggests that Feldman saw Rothko's art and his own as performing an immediately human experience, and one which relates to basic human needs rather than less tangible, religious ones. Writing that 'the Abstract Experience is really far closer to the religious,'<sup>35</sup> he posits a tension, perhaps something that he felt in the chapel, between the abstract art and the real, living world. Interestingly, it is to the chorus that he assigns the job of rendering 'art's abstractness' and to the solo viola 'the need for human expression'. The expectation would perhaps have been for the human voices to symbolise human expression.

Feldman, by declaring that this was the first and last time his music would contain such 'facts', was presumably thinking of the conceptual component such programmatic ideation might confer. Rothko and Feldman, therefore, both seem to endorse a phenomenological approach towards the purely experiential nature of their work before any reflective thinking sidelines that initial impact. One of the key aesthetic questions is: by what mechanism is this music representational of Rothko's Chapel? If the music is representational, can it support multiple meanings or representations? Why is it that this music seems an effective representation of the soft reflectiveness of Rothko's paintings, whereas it would be decidedly ill-matched to, say, the stark imagery of a work by Francis Bacon?

As we discussed in Part I, the music must have pertinent similarities to (or analogical correspondences with) its context in order to enable the transfer of meaning from one domain to another; it must, in other words, harbour attributes that are felt to be commensurate or isomorphic with the experience of the Rothko Chapel. It would seem indubitable that the musical structure embodies sufficient looseness to relate to these colour-field paintings, but to pair it with the violence of Bacon's imagery would

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<sup>35</sup> Feldman, 'After Modernism', in *Essays*, 104.

seem ludicrous, for it simply does not possess anything we might construe as musically ‘violent’. Further still, it would also seem incongruous to pair it with the soft, diaphanous colours in Monet’s water-lily paintings. The solemnity of the music, as we shall see, would simply seem out-of-step with Monet’s subject matter. The subject of Feldman’s music, however, by virtue of its context alone, conveys a gravity that demands the hushed quietitude that the music engenders. The paintings’ abstractness, ensnared in tenebrous, funereal colours, clearly adds to that impression.

Accordingly, what follows is an analysis of the musical attributes as a basis for engendering an experience commensurate with the one emanating from the paintings. Since the paintings lack overt figuration, we are forced to contemplate, head-on, the manner in which the music represents the experience and pure painterliness of the artwork itself. Without the distraction of a subject matter, there is a potential here for uncovering how the music might represent the painted surface itself before the mind reflects on anything outside that medium. The ensuing perception of such a phenomenal encounter is one that is grounded in the musical experience itself rather than in any cognitive deferral. In short, we will investigate whether this music functions in a parallel way to the paintings through its own immediate material focus. Through an inward-looking refinement, paradoxically, does the music reach outwards towards the visual domain, and in this way maintain a modernist agenda set forth by Adorno, Greenberg and others?

#### **4.4 The Analysis**

What are the conditions here that allow meaning to emerge in the musical work *Rothko Chapel*? This section seeks out enabling similarities between the musical structure and the paintings and their arrangement within the chapel. This allows the

creation of critical interpretations that show the interpreter actively engaged in the creation of meaning – in a kind of self-reflexive analysis – rather than passively attendant to it. Moreover, the relatively large body of text that Feldman left behind regarding *Rothko Chapel* will provide a basis from which to mobilise and construct our visual interpretations of the music.

In his programme note for *Rothko Chapel*, Feldman divides the piece into four sections, giving each of these a brief description:<sup>36</sup>

1. A longish declamatory opening; 2: A more stationary “abstract” section for chorus and chimes’; section 3: ‘a motivic interlude for soprano, viola and tympani [*sic*]; 4: a lyrical ending for viola with vibraphone accompaniment, later joined by the chorus in a collage effect.’<sup>37</sup>

He also wrote:

To a large degree, my choice of instruments (in terms of forces used, balance and timbre) was affected by the space of the chapel as well as the paintings. Rothko’s imagery goes right to the edge of his canvas, and I wanted the same effect with the music – that it should permeate the whole octagonal-shaped room and not be heard from a certain distance. The result is very much what you have in a recording – the sound is closer, more physically with you than in a concert hall.<sup>38</sup>

The similarity here between Feldman’s desire for the listener to be immersed in the music and Rothko’s desire to envelop the viewer inside his painting is especially striking.

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<sup>36</sup> The recording used here is directed by Philip Brett, dividing the work into five sections, with the fifth being comprised of the chorus from section four. See liner notes to Morton Feldman, *Rothko Chapel, Why Patterns*, compact disc, New Albion, NA039CD (1991).

<sup>37</sup> Feldman, ‘Rothko Chapel’, in *Essays*, 141, and in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, 125.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

The analysis consists of the following sections: Dynamics and Immersion, The Antiphon, The Processional, Stasis, Hebrew Melody, and Dissonance and the Gaze. Each considers its own particular aspect of the music in relation to the experience of the Rothko Chapel. Just as the paintings marked a stylistic departure for Rothko with the hard, geometric edges, so, too, does *Rothko Chapel* mark a stylistic change for Feldman with its unusual melodic sections.

This discussion inevitably retraces some of the ground covered by the American musicologist Steven Johnson in his article ‘*Rothko Chapel* and Rothko’s Chapel’.<sup>40</sup> However, the primary focus here is on the experiential nature of the music and its parallels to the phenomenal effects of the chapel. While this chapter broadly agrees with certain of Johnson’s findings, concerning, for instance, Feldman’s musical recreation of stylistic characteristics of the chapel paintings, it posits further that Feldman was grappling with issues that are not exclusive to Rothko’s Chapel but that pertain to the aesthetics of the New York School in general and to the subject of cross-fertilization between the arts. Accordingly, Feldman’s musical response will be discussed within the larger subject of musical ‘stasis’.

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<sup>39</sup> For example, Gustav Holst memorably uses a wordless (offstage) choir in the movements ‘Venus’, ‘Mercury’ and ‘Neptune’ of his suite *The Planets*.

<sup>40</sup> *Perspectives of New Music*, 32/2 (1994), 6–53.

#### 4.4.2 Dynamics and Immersion

Discussing, as he saw it, contemporary music's obsession with differentiation, Feldman writes that '[c]hange is the only solution to an unchanging aural plane created by the constant element of projection, of attack'.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the repetition of that instrumental attack makes such invariance in the music intolerable – change therefore becomes necessary to alleviate this sameness.<sup>42</sup> And he explains further when he says:

This is perhaps why in my own music I am so involved with the decay of each sound, and try to make its attack sourceless. The attack of the sound is not its character. Actually, what we hear is the attack and not the sound. Decay, however, this departing landscape, *this* expresses where the sound exists in our hearing – leaving us rather than coming toward us.<sup>43</sup>

Seemingly, then, for Feldman, the real musical 'event' takes place just when it is fading away – as with his view of abstract paintings – and therefore it is not about the variegation and development he observed as salient in most other contemporary art music. In this way, he was creating a new musical aesthetic and one that had an analogue with the aesthetic he so admired in the painters – that is, the focus on process and materials (the individual sounds) rather than systems and ideas.

The first section is marked triple *piano*, consistent with the attendant quietude of a chapel or religious setting (see **ex. 4.1**). The opening drum roll on the timpani, according to familiar topical convention, heralds the onset of an event – somewhat ominously here due to the attenuated dynamics. When the muted viola enters in bar four, first with four notes, each marked with crescendo hairpins from an initial *mp*, an

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<sup>41</sup> Feldman, 'The Anxiety of Art', in *Essays*, 89.

<sup>42</sup> It is significant, too, that Feldman's efforts to reduce instrumental attack also serves to obscure the instrument's own identity, for it is through the instrument's characteristic attack envelope that we can ascribe such identity. Accordingly, this serves to limit the sound's ability to represent the instrument and so make it, too, abstract. See Robert Erickson, *Sound Structure in Music* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1975).

<sup>43</sup> Feldman, 'The Anxiety of Art', in *Essays*, 89 (*italics original*).

aural impression is given of something moving closer, in that a gradual increase in volume is often an index of the increasing proximity of an object. This effect is consistent with the ecological theory of Eric Clarke that we discussed in Chapter 2; the musical object demonstrates its ability to enable the listener to assume a particular subject position. The aural effect of these single notes fading in to perception might be considered analogous to the effect on a viewer standing in the middle of the octagonal room and feeling Rothko's colour planes moving inwards as the intensity of their hue is absorbed.

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Cello, Bass Drum, Timpani, and Viola. The Cello part has a circled '5' above it. The Bass Drum and Timpani parts have a circled '4' above them. The Viola part has a circled '10' above it. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'ppp' and 'f'. There are also some performance instructions like 'J=ss-ss exactly' and 'Car. Sord.'. The score is divided into two systems by a double bar line.

**Example 4.1:** full score showing bars 1–7

Nothing in the music feels rushed, and Feldman instructs his performers to play as quietly as possible and suppress attack, in order to make the sound source as ambiguous as possible. Once again, this provides an analogue with the gentle blending of colour in the paintings, their eschewal of hard outlines, for a suppression

of attack from his musicians produces a similar softness at an aural level. The suppression of instrumental attack, and with it rhythmic / metrical differentiation, ensures that the listener's focus is on the sound and timbre. By drawing attention to sound's physical being, Feldman confronts the listener with tone 'colours' in the same way that the viewer is confronted by the visible colours of the paintings.

In an interview with Paul Griffiths in 1972, Feldman remarked:

I'm not happy with electronic sound – the physical impact to me is like neon lights, like plastic paint, it's right on top, whereas I like my paint to seep in a bit. Part of my musical thinking is to have the sound sourceless, and it's too identifiable. My pieces fail if one can say: 'Ah, there's a trombone, there's a horn'. I like the instruments to play in the natural way; they become anonymous. Most new sounds come about when the instrument does not become anonymous, but deals in marginal worlds; and so they are precarious in execution.<sup>44</sup>

His metaphor that music is paint and needs to 'seep in a bit' is reminiscent of his painterly language, quoted above, about priming his 'canvas with an overall hue of music'. Examples of this effect might be said to occur between bars 134 and 194 with the timpani ostinato demarcating a large section of the music (see **ex. 4.4**) – and in any of the choral episodes (see **exs. 4.2, 4.3, 4.6, 4.7 and 4.9**).

The style of these choral episodes is one of sustainment. Although the thickness of the sound texture may alter through the omission and addition of voices, the sound of the choir covers large tracts of the musical surface. Not only the overlapping lines of the voices, but also their wordlessness and their lack of phonetic articulation serve to render the 'wash' of sound that Feldman designs. Moreover, the seamless nature of the writing and its complete immersion in the creation of a sound

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<sup>44</sup> In Paul Griffiths, 'Morton Feldman' [interview], *Musical Times*, 113 (1972), 758.

plane or ‘territory’ parallels the all-enveloping nature of Rothko’s flat planar panels in the chapel. The hazy, soft focus of the paintings bathes the viewer in a seemingly infinite void. With no figuration, there can be no reference point by which to anchor oneself visually. As in the music, there is no painterly ‘attack’ either: the colours merge seamlessly into their neighbouring areas.

The image displays a musical score for Example 4.2, covering bars 161 to 166. The score is arranged in a system of staves. The top four staves are for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). Below these is a staff for Chorus 2 (Ch.2). The next staff is for Solo Alto. The bottom two staves are for Timpani (Timp.) and Viola (Vla.). The music is written in a complex, multi-measure format with various dynamics like *mp*, *p*, and *fpp*.

**Example 4.2:** full score showing bars 161–66

#### 4.4.3 The Antiphon

Turning now to the octagonal schema within the chapel, is there anything about the physical arrangement of the paintings that Feldman responds to? In traditional figurative painting, viewers are able to situate themselves in relation not only to the size of the actual painting but also to the proportions that hold within the painting’s internal representational system – this holds true for many abstract works, too, whose inner relationships may be discerned through their various shapes and lines

(Kandinsky, for example). The fact that the chapel paintings possess no more than one contained form – the south entrance-wall painting bears a characteristic rectangular form – means that any internal relationships within the units are largely absent. Consequently, their relation is to the ensemble as a whole, yielding an external and environmental focus as opposed to one that is classically internal – as in other works of abstract or figurative painting – and therefore exploding the unit's frame outwards.

The octagonal configuration, as shown in **fig. 4.1**, shows how each of the imposing panels has an opposite. In an interview in 1976 with Fred Orton and Gavin Bryars, Feldman, aware of this aspect, recalled,

I think the orchestration was to some degree affected by the fact that I was writing it for a big production at the chapel. I went down there and I just walked around the chapel. It is built in a kind of glamorous idea of his studio. Actually the studio was bigger than the chapel, and it just cried out – the octagonal situation – to do something at the sides. That's where the antiphonal chorus came in, and something in the middle, and then they had the benches in the middle and they could bring in others. Visually too the whole battery of percussion looks nice.

In **fig. 4.1**, we can see that every single painting faces a counterpart on the opposing wall. To reflect the physical arrangement of the paintings, Feldman deployed his choirs antiphonally thus providing an analogue to the paintings' visual arrangement. He spoke of how the device of antiphony has the effect of 'mak[ing] you get involved with the totality'.<sup>45</sup> In this way, he maintains an immersive effect too, for the tone colours alternately come at the listener, filling the sound field from all areas.

A choral episode at bar 123, accompanied by the woodblock only, is repeated at bar 128 (**ex. 4.3**) now with crescendo and with the accompaniment of the viola. There exists no musical development here to prepare the listener for this restatement,

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<sup>45</sup> 'Morton Feldman: Interview by Fred Orton and Gavin Bryars'.

and the contrasting next 'processional' episode, discussed below, quickly usurps the memory of these voices until their reappearance in identical formation at bars 179 and 189. This accords with Feldman's statement that 'I would prefer never knowing when you are going to hear something, when you are going to see something'.<sup>46</sup> The surprise re-presentations of earlier material suggest a calculated unpredictability analogous, say, to the interjection of a Rothko panel into the chapel ensemble.



**Example 4.3:** bar 128 – repeated from bar 123

Moreover, the final, fourth section between bars 314–427 (**ex. 4.4**) marks the greatest contrast in the whole piece and stands in stark relief against the earlier, more 'abstract' sections. Bar 314 sees the introduction of the aforementioned viola and vibraphone section, an ostinato pattern in the vibraphone, marked quintuple *piano* and resonating freely (through use of the pedal), continues to the end of the piece – once again 'priming' a large area of musical 'canvas'. Then at bar 360, the chorus enters the proceedings with the addition of the celesta playing two octaves above the

<sup>46</sup> Feldman, 'XXX Anecdotes & Drawings', in *Essays*, 155.

vibraphone (see **ex. 4.10**). At bar 372, the viola melody and vibraphone accompaniment reappear almost verbatim, before once again being displaced by the re-emergence of the identical chorus and celesta episode that had immediately preceded it. This section, then, creates an antiphonal quality by collaging the choral section between the viola and vibraphone episodes. We can also see here how the call and response effected between the viola and the chorus relates back to Feldman's assertion that they represent art's abstractness and human feeling respectively.

♩ = 68 exactly (314)

Vib.

Vla.

ppppp et sim.

2 4 Ped. →

mp very, very simply

(319)

(323)

(329)

**Example 4.4:** full score showing bars 314–19

#### 4.4.4 The Processional

In the programme note quoted above, Feldman said that the effect of the chapel created in him the sense of an 'immobile procession not unlike the friezes on Greek

temples'. This statement suggests that Feldman saw some implied movement emanating from the fourteen panels, either within or between them, analogous to the frozen processional movement depicted on an entablature. The art historians Barbara Novak and Brian O'Doherty observed something similar when they wrote,

As eyes become dark-adapted, the paintings overlay this blindness, first with the classical "answering" of formats on opposing walls, then with the perception of colour, then with the sustained effort after whatever structures are discernible within. There is perhaps a sequential reading within the ensemble that in this context has a solemn, quasi-ritualistic echo.<sup>47</sup>

Clearly, the notion of a 'sequential reading' does imply that a spectator moves from one canvas to the next, and that of the 'quasi-ritualistic echo' has overtones of a processional. Rothko also told the art historian Katherine Kuh that his canvases envelop the viewer and resist being absorbed in a single glance; they require one to 'turn in space'.<sup>48</sup> The saturation of our visual phenomenal field, then, takes time. Furthermore, in light of his friendship with Rothko, it would seem likely that Feldman would have been familiar with the painter's sentiments regarding this temporal quality to his work. The composer colourfully observes animation in Philip Guston's paintings:

Not long ago Guston asked some friends, myself among them, to see his recent work at a warehouse. The paintings were like sleeping giants, hardly breathing. As the others were leaving I turned for a last look, then said to him, "There they are. They're up." They were already engulfing the room.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Barbara Novak and Brian O'Doherty, 'Rothko's Dark Paintings: Tragedy and Void', in *Rothko Catalogue*, 274.

<sup>48</sup> Katherine Kuh, interview, 1982–83, 154, Archives of American Art, Washington DC, quoted in Jeffrey Weiss, 'Rothko's Unknown Space', in *Mark Rothko Catalogue*, 319–20.

<sup>49</sup> Morton Feldman, 'Philip Guston: The Last Painter', *Art News Annual 1966*, 31 (1966), 100, quoted in Jonathan W. Bernard, 'Feldman's Painters', 182.

In the music, the processional quality seems aurally evident from bars 134–94 (**ex. 4.5**) and is effected by a minor-third ostinato pattern on the timpani, which provides the sense of a slow but relentless march. Interestingly, this episode occurs in triple time but retains the quality of a duple march through the equidistance of the two repeated notes (three crotchets apart) across the bar lines. This is complemented by a two-voiced chorus where the tenor enters in bar 135 and is joined by the alto a semitone higher in a rhythmically identical pattern from bar 138.

The musical score for Example 4.5 shows bars 134–40. It features five staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), Viola (V), and Timpani (Timp.). The timpani part plays a continuous minor-third ostinato pattern. The vocal parts (S, A, T) enter in bar 135 and are joined by the alto in bar 138. The score is marked with 'pppp' (pianissimo) and includes bar numbers 134, 138, and 140.

**Example 4.5:** full score showing bars 134–40

From bars 142 and 143 the simultaneous presentation of three and four voices respectively reminds one of Feldman's statement above regarding the 'thickening and thinning' of his musical textures. Then, from bar 148, the viola joins the choir, performing an act of stasis through its repetition of  $D\equiv$ . A musical analogue with the

gradations of hue in the paintings is created by the dynamic markings, ranging from triple *piano* to *mezzo piano*. The presentation of the voices (bars 154–60) uses largely the same pitch material as the previous bars, before the voices re-emerge in bars 161–64 together with a concurrent thickening of texture, which divides into eight choral voices and a solo alto singer.

At bar 171, we hear an unaccompanied melodic line played by the viola, lasting eight bars, striking in its contrast to the preceding choral episode. A solo soprano, again relatively melodic, displaces the viola at bar 180 until the ‘processional’ timpani ostinato reappears. The section, then, seems at least to provide the illusion of immobility that Feldman prescribes through its choral voicing, where each voice is given a particular pitch that is either held or enters and re-enters in canon. In marked contrast, the ‘processional’ two-note timpani figure provides a firm, rhythmic foundation and a strong directional impulse for the first time. The eight-bar solo viola episode supports the composer’s assertion that it is this instrument which injects a human element. Its intervallic leaps seem to be reaching outwards against the abstract wordless choir. The combination, then, of the rhythmic ostinato on the timpani against the purity of the ‘static’ choral voices exemplifies this idea of the music being ‘frozen’, but in a constant state of oscillation.

#### **4.4.5 Stasis**

In this section, we will continue the theme of immobility expressed in the last section by examining two further aspects of musical stasis: the continuation of musical material across a broad strip of musical ‘canvas’, and the related reiteration of chord and contour patterns altered chromatically. As we noted earlier in section 4.3, Feldman saw that it would not be possible in the music to simply reiterate musical

elements equivalent in colour and scale, and sought instead to merge highly contrasted episodes. Nevertheless, this section will argue that he has prolonged musical time by extending it across certain pitch clusters and repeating others with minute changes. Thus, in a way analogous to that in which the paintings are fixed in time for as long as we see them, the music is ‘fixed’ in the present moment through its extension and repetition. This idea is similar to what Edward T. Cone called a ‘suspended saturation’ of musical material, discussed in Chapter 1, whereby musical sounds may develop a painterly saturation of space through their continuation.

Feldman writes of being

involved like a painter, involved with gradations in the chromatic world [...] I work very much like a painter, insofar as I’m watching the phenomena and I’m thickening and thinning and I’m working in that way and just watching what it needs.

He continues:

But it’s like Rothko, just a question of keeping that tension or that stasis. You find it in Matisse, the whole idea of stasis. That’s the word. I’m involved in stasis. It’s frozen, at the same time it’s vibrating.<sup>50</sup>

Indeed, in experiencing a Rothko at first hand one is confronted by their sheer vibrancy. Despite their inertia, the colour fields typically yield a luminescent aura that is aided by the low-level lighting specified by Rothko – they seem to glow outwards into the room.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, writing about her experience of the paintings in Rothko’s

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<sup>50</sup> Feldman, ‘XXX Anecdotes & Drawings’, in *Essays*, 168.

<sup>51</sup> This effect is especially prominent in a painting such as *Red on Maroon* seen in the Rothko room in the Tate Modern. These paintings were originally displayed in the Tate Gallery under strict guidelines from Rothko about their positioning and lighting.

Chapel, the art historian Barbara Rose notes that ‘the paintings seem to glow mysteriously from within’.<sup>52</sup>

In his interview with Paul Griffiths, Feldman commented: ‘My compositional impetus is in terms of the vertical quality, and not what happens in terms of the horizontal scheme.’<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the small chromatic shifts evident in the vertical dimension of this music strikingly recall the minute shades and depths of hue a painter like Rothko uses across his vertical planes. Moreover, the oscillations from certain permutations of vertically positioned pitches exemplify moments of static vibrancy. This is perhaps what John Cage meant when he observed that Feldman’s music ‘seems more to continue than change’.<sup>54</sup>

In the following statement, Feldman explains the especial importance stasis had for his music:

Stasis, as it is utilized in painting, is not traditionally part of the apparatus of music. Music can achieve aspects of immobility, or the illusion of it. The degrees of stasis, found in a Rothko or a Guston, were perhaps the most significant elements that I brought to my music from painting. For me, stasis, scale, and pattern have put the whole question of symmetry and asymmetry in abeyance.<sup>55</sup>

This is, of course, reminiscent of Feldman’s statement envisioning an immobile procession. However, while a painting is static and fixed in space at any single moment of time, how does music, the arch-temporal medium, create a similar sense of immobility or stasis?

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<sup>52</sup> Barbara Rose, cited in Jacob Baal-Teshuva, *Rothko*, 75.

<sup>53</sup> Paul Griffiths, ‘Morton Feldman’, 758.

<sup>54</sup> John Cage, ‘A Lecture on Something’, in *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 128.

<sup>55</sup> Feldman, ‘Crippled Symmetry’, in *Essays*, 137.

Perhaps one of the keys to understanding this aspect of his compositional process reveals itself in the composer's interest in Anatolian rugs:

The color-scale of most nonurban rugs appears more extensive than it actually is, due to the great variation of shades of the same color (abrash) – a result of the yarn having been dyed in small quantities. As a composer, I respond to this most singular aspect affecting a rug's coloration and its creation of a microchromatic overall hue. My music has been influenced mainly by the methods in which color is used on essentially simple devices. It has made me question the nature of musical material. What could be best used to accommodate, by equally simple means, musical color? Patterns.<sup>56</sup>

We will see below how the music produces a similar 'vibrancy': chromatic shifts in sound 'colours' emulate the subtle changes of colour in the rugs and in the chapel paintings. Patterns, too, are evident throughout Feldman's *Rothko Chapel*; reiterations of musical material, re-presented identically or with subtle chromatic alteration, abound.

Similarly, Feldman states that, as in the art of minimal painting, from 1958 his musical surfaces were quite flat: 'My primary concern (as in all my music) is to sustain a "flat surface" with a minimum of contrast.'<sup>57</sup> In *Rothko Chapel*, evidence for this is found in the extreme subtlety of variation in time values and pitch repetition across the extent of the musical surface. Such repetition provides for a relatively stable or flat surface, and, accordingly, we might consider this a form of stasis. In addition, it provides a direct analogue with the strikingly low colour contrasts evident across the chapel paintings.

The first example of this low contrast occurs in the time values at the onset of the first choral episode in bar 29. A seven-part wordless chorus enters and remains

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>57</sup> Feldman, 'For Frank O'Hara (1973)', in *Essays*, 142.

largely in-rhythmic unison until the episode beginning at bar 211. Stasis of a different kind also occurs in the held notes throughout these choral episodes. In addition, the dynamic markings that fade these voices in and out produce a similar perception of the same hue continuing across the surface of the canvas, lightening or darkening only gradually. Like the dimming and brightening of a light, the louder the voices the closer and more vividly into ‘focus’ they become; and the following attenuation pulls them vaporously back into the oblivion from which they emerged. Examples of this are found between bars 29–37 and 84–93 (see **ex. 4.6**).

The Choir sings a consistent open hum throughout on the vowel 'n' but not too nasal

#### Example 4.6: bars 29–35

The *messa di voce* technique found in each of the choral voices at bars 34 and 37 effects fixedness, for the only aspect that changes is the volume, through its gradual crescendo and decrescendo – the musical space is thus saturated by gradation. Occurring in the soprano and alto voices one octave apart, it illustrates once again the

lack of pitch variety. Ironically, the impression of stasis manifests itself through the continuation of these voices over a spread of time.

Each instrument or voice has its own distinct material, so that instrument and musical figure are no longer separable, but instead the instrument along with its characteristic material becomes a musical entity heard alongside the other musical entities, like one of the canvases viewed side by side with the others. In this way, it assumes the identity of a fixed object, for it seems to ‘own’ a particular acoustical space, a territory, in the same way that one of the immense canvases occupies its physical space. The choral voices enter, fade, and re-enter like the imposing panels enveloping the viewer in the chapel ensemble.

The most compelling example of this aspect, and also of the continuation of material over the musical ‘canvas’ is found in the second section for chorus and chimes, which Feldman calls ‘abstract’ (bars 211–42, **ex. 4.7**). Feldman refers to this section as very ‘monochrome’ and closer to the chapel paintings in that it maintains ‘that kind of one hue of a colour’.<sup>58</sup>

Consisting of a twelve-part wordless chorus, plus chimes, the episode is the most densely scored in the piece. The chorus presents a sustained hexachord (E $\equiv$ , G, A $\equiv$ , A, B and C), and the chimes gradually fill out the remaining six pitch classes (E, F, G $\equiv$ , B $\equiv$ , C# and D) to form the aggregate. As Steven Johnson observes, Feldman disperses the rhythmic emphasis of each note evenly among the performers ensuring a uniform and continuous extension of sound.<sup>59</sup> Through its density of sound and its extension across thirty-two bars, the full complement of twelve notes musically reflects both the rich darkness of the monochrome paintings and the separate panels themselves. Just as the ensemble of fourteen paintings saturates the physical space of

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<sup>58</sup> ‘Morton Feldman: Interview by Fred Orton and Gavin Bryars’.

<sup>59</sup> See Johnson, ‘*Rothko Chapel* and *Rothko Chapel*’, 31.

the chapel and creates a totality from them, so, too, the twelve notes gradually enter and saturate the sound space of the listener.

**Example 4.7:** full score showing bars 211–17

Responding with his characteristic wit to observations that all his music sounds the same, Feldman writes, ‘I seem content to be continually rearranging the same furniture in the same room.’<sup>60</sup> So, is this a metaphor for how the composer achieves stasis, too, by rearranging his musical material? Using, as we have seen, the musical equivalent of abrash, Feldman varies his musical material with minute chromatic shifts over the musical surface. Similarly, looking at the distributional analysis in **fig. 4.3**, we can see that there is minimal variation in the pitch material of

<sup>60</sup> Feldman, ‘The Anxiety of Art’, in *Essays*, 94.

the viola part extending over the entire five movements. Moreover, the same contour of pitch shape keeps emerging throughout: see bar 16 and the following distributional column, where the interval leap of a major 7<sup>th</sup>, first  $D \rightarrow C\#$  and then  $D\equiv \rightarrow C$ , is repeated ten times. Similarly, we can see the falling intervals starting from bar 11 (central column, **fig. 4.3**) as an augmented fifth,  $E \rightarrow A\equiv$ , and then a series of intervals which fall by perfect and diminished fifths in bar 12: diminished fifth ( $D\equiv \rightarrow G$ ), perfect fifth ( $G \rightarrow C$ ), and diminished fifth again ( $C \rightarrow F\#$ ).

What this shows is the limited number of chords, ostinato patterns and melodic gestures Feldman is working with and the similarity of the musical contour that these intervallic repetitions generate. Moreover, if we look at columns two and three of **fig. 4.3**, we can see how the rhythmic distributions are also largely identical, only doubling or halving the note values at most. We might at this point aver that Feldman is attempting to represent musically the apparent sameness present across the paintings. However, as we saw above in Feldman's programmatic realisation, it would not be possible to represent the homogeneity he observed in the chapel. The limited use of pitch, sameness of intervallic contour, and rhythm, then, constitute recurring patterns in which he casts his overall musical hue. The sections themselves are demarcated by strong shifts of contrast between abstract choral material and more melodic episodes.

The paintings generate subtle variations of hue and light in each individual panel and across the ensemble as a whole, and so, too, Feldman alters certain musical contours chromatically across the four sections, thus varying his musical colours in an analogous way. For examples of this chromatic variation, see column three in **fig. 4.3**, bars 128–270.



Feldman also employs an annuciatory gesture from the viola, which appears solo for a bar and heralds the following section (see **ex. 4.8**). The first instance, heard at bar 130, marked pizzicato, signals the next contrasting section beginning at bar 134. The next occurrence at bar 210 is also marked pizzicato, but this time with different pitch material, and it marks the arrival of Feldman's second section beginning at bar 211. The fourth occurrence appears at bar 243, again with different pitch material, and signals the third section: 'a motivic interlude for soprano, viola and tympani [*sic*]'.

Bar 130



Bar 210



Bar 243



#### Example 4.8

Therefore, although each occurrence is constituted from different pitch material, the solo presentation and pizzicato marking over the minims, which vary from four or five in number, can stand as a musical gesture because of the timbral similarity which binds them together. Support for this relationship comes from the gesture's appearance just before a contrasting section.



**Example 4.9:** bars 36–42

The distributional analysis of the celesta part, **fig. 4.4**, also shows an overriding similarity in pitch, rhythm, and contour. The celesta's opening chord in bar 11 has a major seventh interval,  $B \rightarrow A\#$ , whose repetition can be seen through to bar 76. The chords shown in the other columns incorporate similar identical intervallic relationships, showing again the singularity of voicing that Feldman was working with.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps these repetitions help underline the fact that the reflective power of the superficial monotony of the canvases elicits some deep meditative state from its viewer. Moreover, this singular voicing is constructed from the same pitch material as that presented in the chorus. For example, except for  $G\#$ , the pitches that constitute the celesta chord at bars 42 and 46 are present in the choral voices heard at bars 36 and 37 (**ex. 4.9**).

<sup>61</sup> And here I mean singular in the sense that these musical voices are extraordinary because of their same-form repetition.

The musical score for the Celesta part is presented in two systems. The first system includes measures 11, 27, 42, 46, 56, 68, 70, 72, 74, and 75. Measures 42 and 75 are marked with circled numbers, indicating distributional analysis points. The second system includes measures 81, 83, 85, 87, 89, 91, 93, 97, 101, 103, 107, 110, 114, 118, 131, and 133. Measures 97 and 118 are also marked with circled numbers. The notation features treble and bass staves with various musical symbols, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as *pp*, *ppp*, and *f*.

Figure 4.4: Celesta part, distributional analysis

There are many other instances throughout the piece of the celesta chords being formed in this way. For example, a four-note chord presented at two-bar intervals between bars 79 and 93 reassembles material from the choral and vibraphone episode heard between bars 69 and 75 (F $\exists$  and G $\cong$  are played by the vibraphone). Similarly, the celesta chord at bar 97 finds its pitches presented in various combinations in the preceding chorus, viola and vibraphone parts. The chords heard at bars 101, 103 and 107 are identical, each being one octave lower than the chord heard at bar 97; the celesta chords at bars 131 and 133 assemble material from the preceding chorus and viola appearances; and, finally, pitches accumulated from the previous choral and solo soprano episode form the celesta chord presented at 186.

This shows that Feldman is reusing pitch material by reassembling pitches presented by other instrumental and choral voices in the chords played by the celesta. And, although common practice in many pieces of music, the re-use of pitches seems more evident here because of their invariance of register and timbre across large parts of the musical space. In this way, the execution of a chord in the celesta is cast into sharp relief, for that may be the dominant sound for several bars. Similarly, the preceding wordless chorus finds an analogy with the recombining of colour that Rothko executes through layering paint over the ‘ground’ layers with which he prepares canvases such as the chapel paintings.<sup>62</sup> The effect is one of looking through the painting to other lighter or darker sections of a similar hue; and hearing the reconstituted celesta chords is like hearing through to our memories of the earlier sound colours.

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<sup>62</sup> Carol Mancusi-Ungaro discusses these multiple layers of ground pigments in her essay ‘Material and Immaterial Surface: The Paintings of Rothko’, in *Mark Rothko Catalogue*, 286.

By presenting pitches heard previously in the viola, vibraphone and choral parts, Feldman not only recombines but also re-contextualises these chords by means of their new presentation. This has an analogue with the multiple layers of paint on Rothko's canvases as well as with the experience of seeing one of those paintings within the context of all the others: the sensation of seeing something similar but different again, or, in this case, hearing something familiar but different through its re-contextualisation. Recognition is possible because the context is sufficiently similar to the material's previous incarnation – the presentation alternates between chorus and celesta. In this manner, it bears comparison to a viewer rotating themselves about the central axis of the chapel and viewing the paintings from different angles, for the listener, too, will have a renewed perspective upon those sounds heard previously.

At the same time, the repetition of chordal patterns at irregular time intervals provides another kind of subtle variation through its unpredictability. These patterns appear slightly different from their earlier presentation because of their unexpected reappearance in the new context, but they also effect a kind of stasis because of their sameness. In this way, Feldman writes:

Repetitive chordal patterns might not progress from one to another, but might occur at irregular time intervals in order to diminish the close-knit aspect of patterning; while the more evident rhythmic patterns might be mottled at certain junctures to obscure their periodicity. For me patterns are really self-contained sound-groupings that enable me to break off without preparation into something else.<sup>63</sup>

Feldman's view that his musical patterns are 'self-contained' recalls the Deleuzian concept of territory. Each of the musical contours in **figs. 4.3** and **4.4**, with their associated timbres, create its own 'territory' through a distinctive form of patterning.

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<sup>63</sup> Feldman, 'Crippled Symmetry', in *Essays*, 130.

In this way, Feldman has created musical objects that are heard alongside each other, and which, like the paintings, each possess their own territory while forming part of a larger whole.

#### 4.4.6 Hebrew Melody

In the final section, Feldman composes a four-note ostinato on the vibraphone, which, as we noted earlier, continues unchanged until the end of the work. At its first appearance (bars 314–59) it is joined by the viola (bar 320), which plays a beautiful lament (see **ex. 4.4** above). At its second appearance (bars 360–71), a wordless chorus joins the vibraphone, replacing the melodic viola, forming a striking contrast to the preceding lyrical passage (**ex. 4.10**). The first chorus presents a six-note chord (D, F, C#, E, A $\equiv$  and E), which the second chorus echoes half a bar later, and preserves unchanged in all of its subsequent presentations. Once again, the choirs are antiphonal, reflecting the juxtaposition of the paintings in the space of the chapel. After a seven-bar interlude in which the vibraphone plays unaccompanied, the viola makes its second appearance, this time one octave higher, creating an effect of still greater tenderness. For the last time, the choirs replace the viola in the final episode, singing the same chord as before. This ABAB interposition of the viola and choral episodes contrasts both the stasis of the repeating ostinati and the chorus with the lyrical viola melody.

The choral episodes here enfold the listener in a manner similar to the ‘abstract’ section between bars 211–43 (**ex. 4.7**). Feldman was perhaps after the same effect that Dore Ashton observed in Rothko’s Tate paintings: ‘he sought the enveloping sensation that can be generated when tones from one surface echo another;

when the events on the canvas have the psychological effect of drawing the viewer into its space, rather than allowing him to stand outside, as did Renaissance artists.’<sup>64</sup>

**Example 4.10:** full score, bars 360–65

In explaining the inclusion of this melodic viola episode, Feldman states that he was thinking of Robert Rauschenberg’s photomontages: ‘At that time I would use a tune just the same way Bob would put a photo on the canvas. But I now feel that in

<sup>64</sup> Ashton, *About Rothko*, 157. Concerning this envelopment of the viewer, Rothko was also very exacting about the distance from which his viewer stood or sat in relation to the painting. Dominique de Menil recalls how during a visit to Rothko’s studio, the painter placed a chair twenty feet from one of the newly completed chapel canvases and another for himself between her and the painting: ‘He did not utter a word. He just looked at me.’ See foreword to Sheldon Nodelman, *The Rothko Chapel*, 9.

music it doesn't work the same way.'<sup>65</sup> That the composer includes such a distinctly melodic component here suggests that it has some special import concerning the nature of the commission. Accordingly, it is possible to hear this Hebraic melody not as an embodiment, but certainly as a more explicit representation of Rothko himself, in that it evokes a sense of pathos consistent with the painter's own obsession with tragedy while recalling his Jewish heritage. It may also be no accident that Feldman's choice of this particular melody, together with his programme note making the semitic reference explicit, could also be referring to the etymology of the word Hebrew ('ibri'), which means 'one from the other side (of the river)'.<sup>66</sup> In this way, the sharp contrast the viola melody makes with the predominantly 'abstract' choral episodes, draws the listener's attention to the 'otherness' that is evoked by this work and Rothko's.

#### 4.4.7 Dissonance and the Gaze

It is possible to argue that there is a dissonance produced by the effect of these imposing monochromatic paintings: a destabilising unease brought on by the absence of subject matter. Feldman writes, 'There is a real fear of the Abstract because one does not know its function'<sup>67</sup> – the meaning, then, appears ungraspable. The octagonal and triptych arrangements add to this uncertainty. Disposing three of the paintings into triptychs on the north, east and west walls of the chapel would seem to suggest some kind of relationship, a narrative perhaps, but one that is elusive and impenetrable like the deep, dark layers of paint across these giant canvases.

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<sup>65</sup> Feldman, quoted in Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, 'Morton Feldman', in *Soundpieces: Interviews with American Composers* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1982), 170.

<sup>66</sup> *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, s.v. 'Hebrew'.

<sup>67</sup> Feldman, 'After Modernism', in *Essays*, 104.

At the same time, Feldman's sustained voices stimulate a reflective calm that seems to resonate with the chapel's meditative function and purpose. They achieve this effect through their invariability and wordless nature, and the aural effect of this is analogous to the sustained inhalations and exhalations we might encounter from the repeated mantra of a Buddhist chant. The wordlessness of the chorus effectively represents the abstractness of the paintings and their attendant lack of subject matter. Moreover, the sense of transcendent otherness is enhanced by the fact that Feldman's musical idiom is largely atonal, lacking a clear tonal centre and making much use of dissonant intervals. The wordless chorus therefore appears doubly disconnected through both its wordlessness and eschewal of a clear tonal language. Thus, it represents the strange abstractness of the environment Rothko has created and the attendant disconnection from the material world that this implies. Feldman writes that the abstract experience 'is a metaphor without an answer', and because it combines the mystery of the unknown with the opacity of the art form, it 'is really far closer to the religious'.<sup>68</sup> Feldman's abstract music, then, also creates mystery; it leaves a metaphorical door open on the unknown because it lacks the directionality of a tonal language. We do not feel the push and pull of a gravitational tonal field; rather, the prolonged voices float like the colour fields that seem to hover in front of and beyond the paintings.

Dominique de Menil's dedication speech at the public opening of the chapel draws our attention to qualities of time embodied by the painting when she says that the artist wanted the paintings to be 'intimate and timeless': '[The paintings] embrace us without enclosing us. Their dark surfaces do not stop the gaze. A light surface is active – it stops the eye but we can gaze right through these purplish browns, gaze

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 104.

into the infinite. They are warm too.’<sup>69</sup> Menil’s suggestion that Rothko’s artworks act like portals through which we can gaze into the beyond is predicated, paradoxically, on their opaqueness; precisely the fact that there is nothing to see means we can carry on *seeing*. Consistent with this gaze is, of course, the chapel’s function for meditative contemplation of a spiritual nature.

The painter’s long-standing interest in Friedrich Nietzsche also seems relevant here: ‘And if you gaze for long enough into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you’.<sup>70</sup> The chapel has the proportions of a private auditorium, and, in **fig. 4.2**, we can see that the triptychs and the individual paintings appear as cinema screens or as windows into the infinite beyond. The gaze continues, as we have said, because there is no subject-matter to thwart it. Moreover, when Menil talks about their intimacy and embrace we can perhaps feel as if the paintings are watching us instead of us watching them. We cannot see through the paintings, so instead we are encouraged to look, at one and the same time, into the infinite and back into ourselves.<sup>71</sup>

#### 4.5 Conclusion

Through its melodic episodes, *Rothko Chapel* is unique in Feldman’s oeuvre; he was clearly attempting something musically out of the ordinary for this commission.

Ironically, the composer’s solution to representing Rothko’s most challengingly

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<sup>69</sup> Dominique de Menil’s dedication speech, cited in Jacob Baal-Teshuva *Rothko*, 74–75.

<sup>70</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Marion Faber with an introduction by Robert C. Holub (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1998), chapter 4, § 146, 64.

<sup>71</sup> This imposed-self awareness was also alluded to by Feldman when he wrote: ‘if, say, I begin with Piero, go on to Rembrandt, to Mondrian, then to Rothko and Guston – a certain sensation begins to emerge: a sensation that we are not looking at the painting, but the painting is looking at us.’ Cited in Feldman, ‘After Modernism’, in *Essays*, 108. Significantly, too, it is not possible to see all of the paintings at once in Rothko’s Chapel due to their 360-degree arrangement; therefore the paintings standing behind us at any particular point have the advantage of ‘seeing us’ whilst not allowing us to see them.

abstract work is through his most accessible composition, containing, as it does, a significant, if restrained, melodic impulse. What is noteworthy is that Rothko and Feldman went about the creation of intimacy through very different means. The painter uses the sheer physical size of his work and the surround effect of the chapel walls to consume the totality of the viewer's perception, and the composer uses intimate, soft dynamics to envelop and saturate the listener in sound. Both, then, draw upon a phenomenological encounter with their media.

The phenomenological method seems admirably suited to the question of the music's relationship to the chapel paintings, given that the principles of the New York School are about the immediacy of the encounter with an artwork, the event through which we live. Thus, it becomes less a case of the music trying to represent this or that feature of the paintings, and more a case of it engendering an event or experience that matches the qualities one might experience upon entering the Rothko Chapel. That said, if the music itself is so creative, we might reasonably ask if we need the paintings in order to 'hear' the music properly or to have the full aesthetic experience in the sense demanded by Peter Kivy in Part I.

Edward T. Cone wrote that music without context has no content and that we therefore need a context for signification to occur. But is that the issue here? Are the chapel paintings on the one hand and the music on the other intending to generate their *own* context, and hence content, through their effects and experience? The above analysis has shown how the music combines a prolongation of pitch with a particular use of dynamics to immerse the listener in the sound field in a way analogous to that in which the colour fields saturate the viewer surrounded by the paintings. Moreover, fading these musical voices in and out of that musical 'space' bears comparison to the effect of rotating ourselves about the space of the chapel and seeing the paintings fade

in and out of perception. The antiphonal arrangement of the choral episodes intensifies this effect by representing the ‘answering’ of the paintings within their octagonally complementary placements.

Together with this immersion, the music remains relatively inert through its sustainment of the choral voices across large sections of music. Devoid of words and continuing over the musical surface, these choral voices seem to ‘float’ as abstractly as the layers of hue seem to hover in front of the paintings’ transparent surfaces. Meanwhile, the invariance of the pitch material, subject to only small chromatic shifts over time, continues this sense of stasis and reflects Rothko’s gently changing colour fields. The absence of an internal representational system in the paintings generates a striking fixedness in space, because the panels are just themselves with no obvious reference to anything outside that ensemble. By making only small changes to his musical material, Feldman also represents something of this nature, for the music extends and continues over a period. In this way, musical time become like the paintings’ fields of space, recalling the metaphor ‘music is painting’.

There is no doubting the fact that these and the other musical attributes mentioned may be heard in a way that is analogous to the qualities of the chapel paintings. However, the vestigial signs of the material and its execution belong to many other examples in the New York School’s oeuvre and not just to Rothko, therefore complicating the issue of this particular representation. Is this a musical representation of Rothko’s Chapel, of Rothko’s work as a whole, or the work of the New York School in general? Notwithstanding this quandary, there are sufficient attributes here to identify the musical work with the chapel series. But, more importantly, does the chapel confer some advantage to, or enrich, the musical experience?

It is argued that the ideological framework that the chapel paintings enable draws out musical aspects hitherto hidden, thereby projecting a logic upon those musical attributes that would otherwise remain without meaning. It is what Wittgenstein calls the ‘dawning of an aspect’.<sup>72</sup> As was discussed in Chapter 2, it is in noticing an aspect of an object, that we may come to see or hear it differently whilst simultaneously noticing that it has not physically changed itself. Accordingly, it is the meaning or significance that has changed and not the music itself, and it is this meaning which constitutes the aesthetic experience of the music. Our response, in other words, has changed because of the paintings seen as a concept. It is about more than simply positing a similarity between the two domains, because the listener must bring something that is absent in order to parse the musical domain – to supplement the musical experience for it to make *sense*.

Thus, although the music might be said to exemplify itself and to draw attention to its own medium, it also, paradoxically, becomes imaginatively joined with the other communication stream that is Rothko’s Chapel. In this way, the two experiential domains form a single entity by means of their confluence, and the resultant meaning pools in a semantic ‘sea’. Each perceptual field, then, may conflate with and comment on the other domain. Hearing the music within this frame of reference allows the listener to attach certain sounds to an image of the paintings. The combined experience of hearing the sounds and imaginatively invoking the chapel paintings enables the musical voices to sound as if they are uttering forth from the paintings themselves. Accordingly, it seems appropriate that, just as Rothko said his painting was not *about* an experience but *is* an experience, listening to *Rothko Chapel*

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<sup>72</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (London: Blackwell, 2002), 166.

is something that happens as an event rather than as a representation; that event, however, is framed and enriched by its context.

## CHAPTER 5

### **Colour, Space and Movement in Henri Dutilleux's *Timbres, Espace, Mouvement* ou *La nuit étoilée***

In contrast to Morton Feldman's *Rothko Chapel*, discussed in the previous chapter, Henri Dutilleux's *Timbres, Espace, Mouvement* ou *La nuit étoilée* is composed after a representational painting – Vincent van Gogh's famous *La nuit étoilée* ('The Starry Night', 1889) – see **fig. 5.1**. However, despite its overt subject matter, it is clear that this painting is one whose aesthetic significance is largely derived both from its painted surface and the emotional effects to which this gives rise. Thus, it seems fair to say that the rendering of the subject matter is not something that is abstractable from the ostensible subject itself. Indeed, the painting is remarkable for its phenomenal effects. But, unlike in Rothko's chapel paintings, these effects are attributable to visible subjects – a small village, distant hills, a cypress and a starry night sky. Accordingly, these mundane objects bring with them their attendant conceptual components which orientate and give direction to their fantastical setting.

Here, then, the music will be discussed in terms of its tone colour, texture, space and movement, and how these aspects might be heard in relation to the Van Gogh painting. The central aim will be to establish whether the visual context supplements the musical experience. In a word, does the experience of the music somehow become 'animated', phenomenally speaking, through its relationship to the painting? Without this context, would the musical experience be in some way impoverished and lacking in coherent structure? And if this is the case, do we need knowledge of the absent painting in order for the sounds to make musical *sense*?



**Figure 5.1:** Vincent van Gogh, *La nuit étoilée* (1889)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Oil on canvas, 73.7 x 92.1 cm. Since 1941 it is has been held in the permanent collection of MoMA in New York.

Dutilleux states that he had the painting ‘constantly in mind’<sup>2</sup> while he was composing. The first part of this chapter will examine Dutilleux’s representational intent together with his known concerns about making too explicit a link with the painting. Why, for instance, did Dutilleux give the painting’s title, *La nuit étoilée*, as a subtitle rather than as the main title of his composition? The second part will focus on the musical representation of the painting’s physical and painterly qualities: its famous impressionistic texture and range of colour, and how these aspects are represented in the composition. The third part considers the phenomenal effects of the painting alongside the phenomenal effects of the music. For example, does the music convey something similar to the dramatic movement one feels when gazing at the painting’s swirls of colour and paint, and does it generate an experience which represents, sonically, the vortical chasm between the ground and sky? An interesting idea that emerges from this composition is that of the composer rendering musically the various psychological sensations and perceptions he felt upon viewing the painting. This affective response will be considered in relation to Dutilleux’s writings and interviews about the piece.

Accordingly, the focus will be on two principal areas of the painting’s potential for musical representation: firstly, representation of the objective, physical aspects of the painting – its colour range and texture – and, secondly, the affective aspects induced by one’s phenomenological experience of the painting – feelings of vertigo, rapid and turbulent movement, circling, and space, which are also cited by Dutilleux as forming part of his response to the piece. The closing discussion will consider whether these subjective components may be subsumed under the rubric of musical representation along with potentially more objective aspects. The point of

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<sup>2</sup> Dutilleux in interview with Roger Nichols, 19 April 1991, cited in ‘Dutilleux at 75’, *Musical Times*, 132 (1991), 701–2.

interest is whether the representation of colour in music, enshrined as it is in conventional musical terminology, is any more ‘natural’ than that of such qualities as turbulence, vertigo, space and movement.

### **5.1 Vincent Van Gogh (1853–90) and *La nuit étoilée***

Van Gogh was born in 1853 and turned to art only late in life, working variously as a bookshop clerk, art dealer and missionary evangelist before he took up painting. In his decade-long career, 1880–90, he produced nearly 900 canvases and over 1100 works on paper, though he is remembered mainly for the brilliantly coloured works of his last few years, unique for their impastoed brush strokes and replete with frozen energy. Key examples include his well-known suite of sunflowers and his wheatfield paintings. *La nuit étoilée* was to form the culmination of what might be considered a trilogy of starry, nocturnal images: *Terrasse de café la nuit* (‘Café Terrace at Night’) came first in 1888 followed later that same year by *La nuit étoilée sur le Rhône* (‘Starry Night Over the Rhône’). These first two were executed in Arles, Provence, but *La nuit étoilée* was painted during his voluntary commitment to the nearby mental asylum at Saint-Rémy after the infamous ear-cutting incident. All three use his familiar contrast between cobalt blues and chrome yellows to depict their subject matter, but it is the painting under consideration here which reaches new heights in its illusory effects of space and movement.

After *Sunflowers* (1888), *La nuit étoilée* is probably Van Gogh’s most recognisable and appreciated work, and it is rightly famed for its remarkable sense of movement, texture, space, colour and light. The range of imagery encompasses distant, undulating hills, a church steeple, cosily lit houses laid low in the foreground,

a dominating upwardly spiralling cypress<sup>3</sup> on the left, and, of course, the starry sky itself, which consumes the upper-third portion of the image. These subjects are rendered in almost caricature-like proportions: the cypress, for example, takes up almost a third of the painting and extends way up to the night sky above with its incongruously large orbs of light.

The painting possesses an almost palpable sense-impression of movement, most obviously in the portrayal of the cypress and the sky. Even the contours of the receding hills seem wave-like, matching the turbid contours of the cavernous sky. The sky is filled with nebula-like swirls spinning individually within their own orbits against this larger fabric. Rushes of streaked paint form vortices in the centre, implying that some larger stars have spun wildly out of their orbits and are tearing through the cosmos into this giant whirlpool of forces. The rendering of light, too, with its impastoed daubs of colour, seems to pulsate amidst this roiling mass of forms. There is a striking resemblance here to Lord Rosse's drawing of the *Whirlpool Nebula* (M51) from 1845, and it has been suggested that this well-known sketch inspired the painting (see **fig. 5.2**).<sup>4</sup>

*La nuit étoilée* is a painting of contrasts: between the bright yellow and the sober blue; between the serene normality of the sleepy village and the turbulent starry night; between the immediate foreground and the chasm of space; and between the individual stars and the charged vortex at the painting's centre. The visionary painting, then, can be primarily characterised as a rendering of extremes between relatively static areas to areas of extraordinary agitation. Moreover, this, combined with the sense of space, has the viewer's gaze travelling backwards and forwards

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, cypresses seem to have been something of a favourite to Van Gogh, for they feature in a number of paintings from the same year, 1889.

<sup>4</sup> Simon Singh makes this point in his recent book *Big Bang* (London: Fourth Estate, 2004), 183–84.

between these vertigo-inducing opposites, invoking our affective feelings and experience.

The phenomenological effect of this painting is remarkable and it must also be one of the best examples of what we might describe as a synaesthetic painting. Its texture invites a haptic response, and the sense-impression of movement and space implicates our body phenomenologically. Moreover, its illusory sense of depth and tumult seems to reach outwards beyond its frame, producing a visual effect that threatens to overwhelm its modest proportions – recalling our earlier discussions about frames and how a picture may ‘explode’ beyond its boundaries (Chapter 1).



**Figure 5.2:** *Whirlpool Nebula, M51 (1845)*

## **5.2 Henri Dutilleux and *Timbre, Espace, Mouvement ou La nuit étoilée***

Henri Dutilleux was born in Angers, western France in 1916. He attended the Paris Conservatoire and in 1938 won the Prix de Rome, though his residency in Italy was

cut short by the outbreak of World War II. A meticulous and non-prolific composer, he came to consider his first original work to be the Piano Sonata No. 1 (1946–48), renouncing his earlier output before this point. Dutilleux has previously included extra-musical links in his works, notably the Baudelaire-inspired cello concerto *Tout un monde lointain* (1968–70), whose five movements feature a Baudelaire epigraph at the head of each section of the score.

Dutilleux's musical style is notable for its use of timbre and is highly colouristic, often characterised by an upward movement through the pitch registers: for example, the passacaglia from the First Symphony (1950) presents a theme played by the double basses that gradually extends into the higher register of the orchestra. Moreover, Dutilleux's scores are remarkable for their visual quality, and he has even likened the physical appearance of a printed page of music to an abstract painting.<sup>5</sup> He writes: 'Often, in my own work, if I am not satisfied with a page of orchestral music from purely a visual point of view, then I feel something is wrong.'<sup>6</sup>

Commissioned by Mstislav Rostropovich to mark his first season as conductor and musical director of the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington in 1978–79, and dedicated to the memory of the conductor Charles Munch, *Timbre, Espace, Mouvement* was composed between 1976 and 1978 and consists of two movements: 'Nébuleuse' and 'Constellations'. In 1990, the composer revised the score, adding an interlude for cello and celeste. This chapter, however, will focus on the first movement, 'Nébuleuse', given that 'Constellations' demonstrates many of the same compositional devices (pitch sustainment, static and fast sections, and spatial and textural features) to similar representational ends.

In explaining his compositional impetus, Dutilleux states:

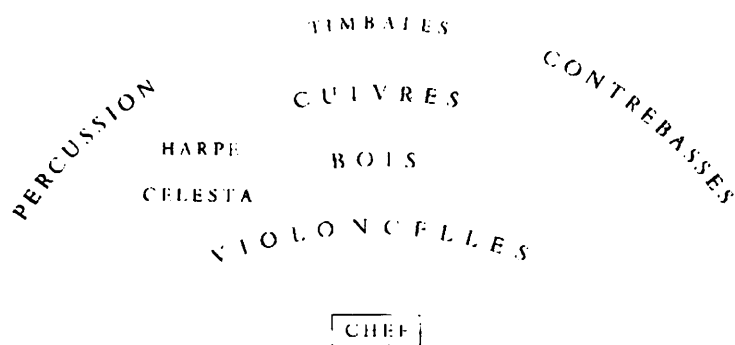
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<sup>5</sup> See Caroline Potter, *Henri Dutilleux: His Life and Work* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 122–23.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

I felt that I could use this Van Gogh painting – with its prodigious cosmic and mystic force – as the basis for an attempt at reproducing in sound the strange impression of vertigo and cosmic space this picture gives you, for which I should need to find something quite new in the way of form but particularly of instrumental texture. So *La nuit étoilée* was indeed my point of departure.<sup>7</sup>

In the orchestral score we find the following diagram of the orchestral layout (**fig. 5.3**):



**Figure 5.3:** *Timbre, Espace, Mouvement*: orchestral layout

The instrumentation of the score is highly unusual: twelve cellos are placed in a semicircle in front of the conductor, woodwinds sit immediately behind (two piccolos and two flutes, three oboes, oboe d’amore, E♭ clarinet, two clarinets in A, bass clarinet, three bassoons, and a contrabassoon). Next comes a row of brass (four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and a tuba), followed by the final row of percussion, timpani and double basses. To the left are placed a celesta and a harp between the cellos and percussion. The notable absence is, of course, the upper strings, and the instrumentation produces a sharp polarization between the woodwinds and low strings.

<sup>7</sup> Dutilleux, cited in Claude Glayman, *Henri Dutilleux: Music – Mystery and Memory: Conversations with Claude Glayman*, trans. Roger Nichols (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 73.

Dutilleux's various writings and statements about this composition indicate that he conceives of the painting in a phenomenological manner, that is, temporally and experientially, describing his experience of the kaleidoscopic painting in terms of his various emotional and affective states. The following analysis will explore the idea that the composer's experience is somehow presented in a musical form creating a virtual 'image' and sonic representation of the painting and its affects for the listener.

### 5.3 The Analysis

#### 5.3.1 Ordering and Chronology of the Titles

Before embarking on an analysis of the music and its possible relationship with the painting, it is important to say something about the title. The composer originally titled the composition *Timbres, Espace, Mouvement*, only adding the painting's title, *La nuit étoilée*,<sup>8</sup> as a subtitle after the work's première to make the 'link with [V]an Gogh'.<sup>9</sup> This action calls into question the composer's representational intentions and motivations about the painting; the very omission of the painting's title in the first instance and its subsequent addition only as a subtitle would seem to indicate something about the representational priority here and the intended message regarding the musical connection to the painting. Indeed, Dutilleux had described his relationship with the painting as 'a sort of osmosis',<sup>10</sup> perhaps indicating that his intentions were more to assimilate musically the effects of the painting than to represent its subject matter.

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<sup>8</sup> In the orchestral score the main title is emblazoned in large, bold capital letters and the subtitle parenthesized in smaller, lower-case italics.

<sup>9</sup> Dutilleux, cited in Claude Glayman, *Henri Dutilleux*, 79.

<sup>10</sup> Cited and translated by Caroline Potter in *Henri Dutilleux: His Life and Works*, 19.

Furthermore, as we have said, in 1990 Dutilleux composed a short interlude for the two-movement work, which divides the two outer sections, while adding the titles 'Nébuleuse' and 'Constellations' to the original first and second movements respectively. In a conversation with René Koering, he explains that 'there was a time when I wanted to forget about the painting, because it is extremely dangerous to attempt musical illustration'.<sup>11</sup> He later adds that the titles are 'perhaps too closely linked with the painting'.<sup>12</sup> It would therefore seem that Dutilleux's placement of *Timbre, Espace, Mouvement* as the main title reflects this circumspection. The main title of the work suggests that these are the qualities he experiences from the effects of the painting, and that his intention was to represent in music the fundamental contrast between relative calm and tumultuous movement. Accordingly, the composition provides a particular example of a musical representation and calls into question what might be included under such a category. Is, for example, this composition a musical representation of the main title's generic qualities rather than of the painting itself, even if these are qualities which originate from the composer's affective response to the painting?

Moreover, it is interesting to note that Morton Feldman and Dutilleux have both proclaimed their reticence at invoking an extra-musical dimension to their work. Dutilleux's point above about, that it is 'extremely dangerous to attempt a musical illustration', indicates the extent of his concerns and explains the almost fence-sitting position that he adopts. This recalls our earlier discussion in Chapter 1 about whether the mark of good programme music is that it survives as a satisfying experience away from its programme, or that it does not. The equivocal position that Dutilleux adopts

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<sup>11</sup> Dutilleux in conversation with René Koering, cited in Potter, *Henri Dutilleux*, 131.

<sup>12</sup> Dutilleux in conversation with Caroline Potter, cited in Potter, *Henri Dutilleux*, 131.

through his titling seems to suggest that something about the painting-as-programme must be retained for an effective aesthetic experience.

However, notwithstanding the composer's particular titling of the piece or his overt proclamations regarding this, the following discussion will take at face value the subtitle's invitation to consider attributes of the painting in relation to corresponding musical attributes, not least because we cannot take the composer's statements as authoritative or as a definitive source for musical meaning. The very spirit of this inquiry is about how meaning is generated in collaboration with the listener.

### 5.3.2 Colour

In choosing his main title, Dutilleux explains that 'timbres' was chosen 'by analogy with [V]an Gogh's colours'.<sup>13</sup> He also adds that he felt 'certain "chromaticisms" of colour could correspond to individual timbres'.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the distinctive quality of the sounds other than their pitch becomes analogous to the rendering of the objects in the painting. Qualities of the sounds themselves take on a significance which parallels the significance of the thick impastos of yellow and blue, and it becomes less about the subjects – pitch and object – and more about the way those subjects are portrayed, both sonically and visually.

One of the immediately striking aspects of the orchestral score is the conspicuous absence of the upper strings: this 'hole' in the orchestral texture creates a distinctive timbre. Dutilleux explains:

As you will remember, everything is happening in the sky, and the only links with the earth are the little church and a cypress in the foreground, which share the same upward movement.

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<sup>13</sup> Dutilleux, cited in Glayman, *Henri Dutilleux*, 73.

<sup>14</sup> Cited in Potter, *Henri Dutilleux*, 124.

Between them and the canopy of the sky there is a vertiginous impression of space, which immediately made me think of an instrumental grouping without any violins or violas.<sup>15</sup>

However, this void caused by the upper strings' absence not only results from his response to the 'vertiginous impression of space', an aspect we will return to in the next section, but also reflects Van Gogh's colour range. In the painting, the two primary colours that clearly dominate are blue and yellow, and this sparseness of hue is interrupted only by the dark green (a blend of blue and yellow), the brown of the cypress and the white halos surrounding the stars.

This is not to suggest that the composer feels that the violins and violas correspond exactly to the hues that are absent from the colour spectrum, but the absence of such a significant, middle part of the orchestra – physically and acoustically –<sup>16</sup> is persuasively analogous to the omission of Van Gogh's middle part of the colour spectrum. Blue and yellow are both visually and affectively colour extremes, with blue at the lower end of the colour spectrum and denotative of night, and yellow at the higher end of the spectrum and denotative of day and therefore light. Similarly, the tessitura created by the remaining instruments offers similar extremes: the flutes offering the high, 'brighter' end of the sound spectrum and the double basses presenting the lower 'darker' frequencies.

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<sup>15</sup> Dutilleux, cited in Glayman, *Henri Dutilleux*, 72–74.

<sup>16</sup> Obviously, this is rather a crude portrayal of the middle ground the violins and violas occupy because clearly they are capable of some of the highest frequencies in an orchestra, but it does serve to reflect an analogous impression of the painting's colour range.

CROTALE (sur pied)  
 CYMBALE SUSPENDUE aiguë  
 CYMBALE SUSPENDUE médium  
 TAM-TAM aigu  
 TAM-TAM médium  
 TAM-TAM grave

(♩ = 72 CHIFFON)  
 3/2  
 I exécutant (avec archet de Ch)  
 I exécutant (bag de timbales, feutre)  
 I exécutant (marche lourde)

1  
 Pts Fl.  
 Fl.  
 Hrb.  
 Hrb. d'A.  
 Pic Cl.  
 Cl.  
 2

**Example 5.1:** bars 1–7

Other textural effects concern the renowned impressionistic brushstrokes, which are clearly visible in the reproduction in **figure 5.1**. These brushstrokes are instantly recognisable as the work of Van Gogh, and this individualistic style of thickly daubed paint upon the canvas creates very distinct rhythmic lines of texture. In the musical score too, one can see very distinct patterns of instrumental line: for example, the largely homorhythmic lines of the flutes over the first seven pages of the orchestral score (see **ex. 5.1**). In fact, Dutilleux said this ‘static period is intended to be an exploration of colours’.<sup>17</sup> His musical ‘colours’, then, are presented here before being further developed. Accordingly, this section might be regarded as analogous to Van Gogh’s presentation of colour and contour through the coagulation of musical

<sup>17</sup> Dutilleux in conversation, broadcast on France-Musique, 28 December 1978, cited and translated in Potter, *Henri Dutilleux*, 125.

lines – through the onward sustaining of each individual note of the melody – that also have a very similar sound colour.

30

mb. susp. aiguë  
T Tam médium

3  
4

Harpe

30

31 Garder le mouvement des  $\text{♩}$  (♩-♩) soit environ 126 à 132  $\text{♩}$

(bag. de bois)

marc.

1 div.  
2 div.  
3 div.  
4 div.  
5 div.  
6 div.

Vk

7 div.  
en 3

5 Pages

Example 5.2: full score, figure 30

### 5.3.3 Space

In *Timbres, Espace, Mouvement*, Dutilleux says that for him ‘the notion of space is far more a question of psychology than of acoustics, everything happens on stage and it is through the actual writing that I tried to create the impression of unusual space’.<sup>18</sup>

Sonically, this spatial dimension, referred to by the title, is created by the instrumental lines shown in **exs. 5.1** and **5.2**, which seem to hang or float away from the rest of the musical texture. Detached, both rhythmically and harmonically, they therefore seem to occupy their own space and hang independently like the orbs in the painting.

In Part I, we discussed how, phenomenologically, the texture and time of music both imply and are experienced in an imaginative space. As Thomas Clifton has written, ‘space is what texture is all about’, and in these examples an acoustical space is constructed for the listener. Another pertinent example of this detachment from the musical texture occurs in the thematic flourishes discussed in the next section which discusses movement, as these episodes also seem to move independently through the background ‘space’, like the energised orbs firing through the night sky. Moreover, these lines interweave like the tangled *mélange* of swirling orbitals in the painting.

The instrumental groupings shown in the orchestral layout in **fig. 5.3** above could be said to reflect, graphically, something about the layout of the painting. And if to some degree the cellos and doubles basses, the traditional anchors of an orchestra, represent physically and visually the ground of the painting – symbolised by the dark green cypress – perhaps this ‘darker’ area is represented by the instruments’ texture and frequency range too.

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<sup>18</sup> Dutilleux, cited in Glayman, *Henri Dutilleux*, 96.

**Example 5.3:** full score, figure 6

Accordingly, at various points, textures remarkable for their density are produced from the combined forces of the cellos and double basses. For example, in figures 30 and 31 (ex. 5.2) of the first movement, the cellos divide into twelve individual parts, and the double basses play a harmonised chorale-like passage. At other times, the lower strings are noticeably absent, for example at the opening and at figures 17 and 18 of the first movement. However, another aspect of this particular

creation of texture and colour arises from using the lower strings up in their highest registers, often incorporating their harmonics, which causes them to extend into the higher end of the colour spectrum: see, for example, figure 6 (ex. 5.3) where the double basses have a G# harmonic above the flutes. Dutilleux explains these musical events in visual terms when he writes:

The cellos sit in front of the rest of the orchestra in a ring round the conductor. Together with the ten double basses they form a mass of lower strings that counterbalances the luminous sounds of woodwind and brass, with nothing in the middle. But there's no system about this. Sometimes the cellos move up into their high register – and cellos can go a long way up – and at a certain moment they sound as though they are suspended in space.<sup>19</sup>

What this passage suggests is that Dutilleux envisions the physical arrangement of his orchestra as somehow reflecting the disposition of the painting's subjects – which is, of course, highly reminiscent of Feldman's antiphonal deployment of his choirs in *Rothko Chapel*, examined in the previous chapter. In describing the lower strings as a 'mass', Dutilleux's evocative language figuratively conjures the image of the ground or the mass of the earth. And conversely, characterizing the woodwinds and brass as 'luminous' suggests that he intends these as representatives of the glowing and swirling orbs in the sky. Similarly, portraying the cellos as being 'suspended in space' in their highest register exploits a metaphor for physical and visual space.

However, more interesting still is the counterbalance of the woodwinds and brass and the lower strings; for he mentions 'there's no system about this', implying that there is not a straightforward linear balance of the lower strings in the 'ground' and winds in the 'sky'. Instead, the lower strings sometimes, as mentioned above, move into their highest registers, thus effectively turning the musical world upside

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<sup>19</sup> Dutilleux, cited in Glayman, *Henri Dutilleux*, 73.

down and creating a vertiginous experience like the one he experiences from the painting.

16

9

Picc Fl.

Fl.

Hrb.

Hrb. d' A.

Cl.

Cl. B.

Bass.

Corn.

Trp.

Tub.

Tuba.

T. Tam. median.

Harpe.

Vcl. ds. on 4.

Ch.

Préparez Flûte en Sol

H. 22018

Example 5.4: full score, figure 9

In explaining the spatial effect produced by this counterbalancing and ‘his search for contrast between the extreme registers of the orchestra’, Dutilleux writes, in the third person:

By a play of timbres, opposing the clear and luminous quality of the wind instruments in their high register with the mass of lower strings, he tried to create an impression of vast space which the extraordinary visionary painting which is *La nuit étoilée* suggested to him. Besides, Van Gogh himself was torn between his ardent desire to rise above earthly concerns – an almost spiritual state of mind – and “the appalling human passions” of the world.<sup>20</sup>

And in **ex. 5.2** above, the sonic ‘chasm’ created by the absence of any wind instruments effects a pendulum shift of emphasis between the lower and higher parts of the orchestra. Therefore, this draws the listener’s attention sharply towards the alternation between these two extremes of the orchestra. Sonically, then, one feels a disorientation and phenomenological effect which perhaps offers something akin to the experience of the painting.

To create this experience of vast space sonically, we can see that in **ex. 5.4** Dutilleux presents every G# within the orchestra’s range from G#1 in the double basses to G#7 in the flutes and piccolos. With very little activity in the mid-orchestral spectrum, save for the trilled G#s in the winds, the sheer five-octave distance between the double basses and upper woodwinds is suggestive of some kind of imaginary void in the musical texture.<sup>21</sup> Therefore the episode achieves a form of stasis, a hole in the musical space.

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<sup>20</sup> Dutilleux’s introductory note to *Timbre, Espace, Mouvement ou La nuit étoilée*, housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and cited in Potter, *Henri Dutilleux*, 125.

<sup>21</sup> Despite the extremes of G#1 and G#7, a six-octave gap is never produced, as G#7 moves down to G#6 in the piccolo just as the double basses move down from G#2 to G#1.

Between figures 7 and 10 of the orchestral score, each instrumental line is marked with substantial trill episodes, creating an unmistakable swirling sound effect from each of the respective instruments. This dramatic trill section culminates during the first two bars of figure 9, seen in **ex. 5.4** above, where one can observe an overall two-octave leap in the piccolo, and octave leaps in the flutes, trumpets and trombones. Interestingly, these octave leaps are immediately followed by octave falls, creating a dizzying rising and falling motion enhanced by the trills. The use of octaves here also adds to the feelings of vertigo created by the void of notes in between the octavo registers.

In describing what he regards as some of the problems posed by octaves, Pierre Boulez proscriptively writes that

octaves create a *weakening* or *hole* in the succession of sound relationships by way of reinstating a principle of identity denied by other sounds, so they are at variance with the principle of structural organization in the world in which they appear; [...] octaves must be completely avoided at the risk of structural nonsense.<sup>22</sup>

In other words, by drawing attention to their pitch identity through their sameness, octaves lack a directional impulse precisely because of their relative salience. The octave's lack of drive to resolve therefore sets it apart from the rest of the orchestral texture, creating a sonic vacuum – perhaps like the visual one experienced spatially between the ground and sky in the painting.

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<sup>22</sup> Pierre Boulez, *Boulez on Music Today*, trans. Susan Bradshaw and Richard Rodney Bennett (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), 46 (*italics original*).

### 5.3.4 Movement

Dutilleux explains that the composition's main title includes 'Mouvement' as one of its three qualities because Van Gogh's painting generates the appearance of movement: 'I've tried to represent it by music that goes from almost static moments to passages of extreme movement and great violence.'<sup>23</sup> And, as we have already discussed, the painting imparts a spectacular tableau of movement. The first movement's title, 'Nébuleuse', almost certainly refers to the glowing nebula depicted in the painting. It consists of several episodes of rapid movement each followed by periods of relative repose: episode 1 (figures 1–9), episode 2 (figures 10–16), episode 3 (figures 17–29), and episode 4 (figure 30 to the end of the movement). Dutilleux writes:

The first part of *Timbres, espace, mouvement* is presented in a single, unbroken piece, although three different rhythmic episodes underline its form. Sound events are tied together around a pivotal sound, G sharp, which runs through the work under a variety of lighting effects. Static, almost stagnant periods alternate with outbursts of violence.<sup>24</sup>

Once again, the composer opts for a visual metaphor, 'lighting effects', to describe his musical treatment. The description of static episodes alternating with violent 'outbursts' must presumably approximate to the turbulent effects that Dutilleux experienced whilst viewing the painting and may represent his own phenomenal experience of allowing his eyes to range across the canvas between these stark contrasts.

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<sup>23</sup> Dutilleux, cited in Glayman, *Henri Dutilleux*, 73.

<sup>24</sup> Henri Dutilleux (1978), cited in the liner notes to the *Symphony No. 1; Timbre, espace, mouvement*. Orchestre National de Lyon, cond. Serge Baudo, compact disc, Harmonia Mundi HMC 905159 (1986).

The opening figure 1 (ex. 5.1) creates an aural impression of the flutes shifting slowly across the musical canvas, and a disquieting intensity is sustained by the chromatic near-saturation of the octave below the initial high G#. Each atonal woodwind presentation seems to possess its own territory and sounds independent of the other musical lines, thus eschewing any real sense of harmonic structure. In the same way, the first harmonic grouping five bars into figure 1 (ex. 5.5) incorporates several minor seconds and major sevenths, but instead of creating any particular harmonic dissonance the atonal context seems to assimilate this potential within its pitch-oriented fabric.

Example 5.5: bar 5, figure 1

In other words, the instrumental voices assume the phenomenal appearance of floating lines adrift from the other musical textures, and the resulting inharmonic structure seems to accommodate (and absorb) the normally expected dissonance from such intervals. Moreover, the oscillations these intervals set up provide an analogue to the ‘vibrating’ orbs in the painting. The first notable change in the musical texture occurs in bar 3 at figure 2, where an irregular crotchet division, played staccato, appears in the oboe and clarinets, adding to the unrest. Further still, figure 1 presents a series of repeated-note triplets passed down through the woodwinds – first the flutes, second the clarinets, third the clarinets and bassoons, and then all winds together (**exs. 5.1 and 5.5**). This has the effect of punctuating the ‘static’ instrumental texture in a manner analogous to the orbs coruscating through their murky backdrop, as the viewer’s gaze alights upon the shimmering brilliance of each star before moving on to the next one.

From the opening, there is also a definite – and literal – sense of accumulating tension for the listener, stemming from a gradual thickening of the instrumental texture, together with a regular presentation of episodes of increasing acceleration. In the third bar after figure 3 there are four progressively accelerating, irregular crotchet divisions in the four horns (**ex. 5.6**). The episodes provide a dramatic contrast to the previously more ‘static’ texture, and produce an effect analogous to being suddenly pulled violently into the painting’s implied vortices.

**Example 5.6:** bar 3, figure 3,  
showing Cors anglais 1–4



The instrumental forces continue to gather at figure 4, but this time the impetus is conferred upon the two clarinets in A through their irregular upward flourishes – combined with a crescendo (ex. 5.7). This episode culminates in the *forte* crescendos in the next two bars where the flourishes switch to the E $\approx$  clarinet and the flutes (ex. 5.8).



**Example 5.7:** figure 4, showing Clarinets 1 and 2 in A

 A musical score for a woodwind section, including Piccolo Flute (Picc Fl), Grande Flute, Flute (Fl), Oboe (Ob), and Piccolo Clarinet (Picc Cl). The score shows a complex texture with multiple staves. The Picc Fl and Grande Flute staves feature rapid, flutter-tongued passages. The Flute and Oboe staves also have intricate, rapid passages. The Picc Cl staff has a more rhythmic, pulsating line. The overall effect is one of a gathering of instrumental forces, with many notes beamed together and dynamic markings like *mf* and *ff* indicating increasing volume.

**Example 5.8:** figure 4, showing flutes, oboes and clarinet in E $\approx$

These gathering instrumental forces, then, with their attendant increases in dynamics, convey something of the ‘cosmic whirling’ that Dutilleux writes about below, and the flutter-tonguing in the flutes continues this idea, with the oscillations circling and therefore implying the pulsating light from the orbs. Dutilleux records his affective impressions vividly in the following:

[I]t seemed to me that the intense pulsation that gives life to this picture, the sense of space that dominates it, the palpitation of the subject matter, and above all the effect of the almost cosmic whirling emitting from it, could have their equivalents on a musical level. And that certain “chromatics” of colour could correspond to particular sound colours.<sup>25</sup>

For Dutilleux, then, pulsation and palpitation are central impressions of this painting, combined with the apparent cosmic whirling. The kind of upward flourishes illustrated in **exs. 5.7** and **5.8** have a dramatic phenomenal effect, providing the listener with a feeling of acceleration. Moreover, the way these turbulent episodes are interlaced and distributed reminds the listener of the latent whirlwind effects that emanate from the manifold shapes and sizes of the orbs implied in the painting, so animating and giving ‘voice’ to the visual tumult. Very often the smaller rhythmic swirls seem to be part of an intricate and much larger network of cycling movements, revolving generally around G# as a focal pitch (**ex. 5.9**). These revolutions about G# have the effect of fixing the listener sonically to one place, both in musical and phenomenological time, for there is no overarching goal which propels either us or the music forward, save for the completion of these seemingly random circulations.



**Example 5.9:** figure 14 showing Flutes 1 and 2

<sup>25</sup> Henri Dutilleux, cited in Kyle Gann’s programme note for the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, 8 October 2004 <[http://www.cincinnati-symphony.org/PDF/ProgramNotes/CSO4\\_0405.pdf](http://www.cincinnati-symphony.org/PDF/ProgramNotes/CSO4_0405.pdf)> [accessed 5 January 2005].

Bars 4 and 5 at figure 8 (**ex. 5.10**) present an interesting counter-motion between the flutes and oboes and the clarinets and bassoons: the trilled flutes and oboes fall predominantly in minor thirds in quaver movements, whilst the clarinets and bassoons ascend more slowly in a mixture of semitones and minor thirds. This contrary motion augments the whirling effects by adding to the representation of turbulence. These sonic ‘eddies’ seem to reflect the visual swirls in the painting and provide the sense that, although subsumed by a more sweeping motion or undercurrent, these orbs spin within their own orbits independent of this grander scheme, effecting a kind of *tableau vivant*.

**Example 5.10:** figure 8, bars 4–5

Figure 10 (**ex. 5.11**) is perhaps one of the most striking episodes in the composition because it marks the introduction of a theme. Hitherto, there has been no such thematic subject, save for the rhythmic figures featuring increasing diminution. The first presentation of this theme is played by the oboe d'amore and begins on G#4, occurring twice more with some small pitch changes in the shorter note-values.



**Example 5.11:** figure 10, showing the oboe d'amore

The same theme appears next on the trumpet, third bar of figure 12, and then again in unison on the clarinet and oboe, both times also beginning on G#4. One bar into this last presentation from the clarinet and oboe at figure 13, the flutes enter on G#5 (**ex. 5.12**), creating a close, almost stretto-like canonic imitation, and this process continues in truncated fashion across all of the woodwind voices to the end of figure 15.

One of the striking effects of this instrumental interweaving is the turbulent chaos that ensues as each voice competes against the other, because no sooner have we heard the start of one statement than we hear the same theme beginning in another voice, overlapping the one already in motion. Moreover, there is an attendant feeling of acceleration and vertigo produced by the skein of overlapping voices and the increasing truncation of the thematic material in figures 14 and 15 (**ex. 5.13**) as the voices scramble to be heard.

Another interesting consequence from dividing this theme's presentation across the various woodwind voices is the possible analogue with the shades of colour in the painting's swirls. Van Gogh's treatment of blue and yellow, for example, finds

him using many impastoed shades of the colour resulting in a variety of textures. And, sonically, Dutilleux has created something similar by using the same theme but varying its 'colour' and timbre through its appearance across the differing instrumental voices. These thematic episodes, then, represent something of a plastic, object-oriented approach to composition: the 'theme' being rather like a sculpture viewed repeatedly from different angles – identified as the same object and seen differently on each new presentation – but never 'developed' in the sense of the 'thematic working' of the Austro-German classical tradition.

The image displays a musical score for a symphony, specifically focusing on a thematic episode. The score is divided into two main sections by a vertical dashed line. The left section shows the initial presentation of the theme, while the right section, starting at measure 13, shows the theme's re-entrance in different instrumental colors.

**Instrumental Parts:**

- Flute (Fl.):** The first flute part (Fl. 1) is marked *mf* and plays a melodic line. The second flute part (Fl. 2) is marked *mf* and plays a similar melodic line.
- Clarinet (Cl.):** The first clarinet part (Cl. 1) is marked *mp* and plays a melodic line. The second clarinet part (Cl. 2) is marked *mp* and plays a similar melodic line.
- Oboe (Ob.):** The oboe part is marked *mp* and plays a melodic line.
- Trumpet (Trp.):** The trumpet part is marked *pp* and plays a melodic line.
- Other Instruments:** The score also includes parts for Piccolo (Pic.), Flute in Sol (Fl. en Sol), Horn (Hrb.), Bassoon (Bons.), and Trombone (Trbn.).

**Thematic Material:**

- The theme is a melodic line in the right hand, starting on a G4 and moving through a series of intervals.
- The theme is presented in different instrumental colors across the two sections.
- The theme is marked *mf* in the first section and *mp* in the second section.
- The theme is marked *pp* in the first section and *mf* in the second section.
- The theme is marked *pp* in the first section and *mf* in the second section.

Example 5.12: figure 13

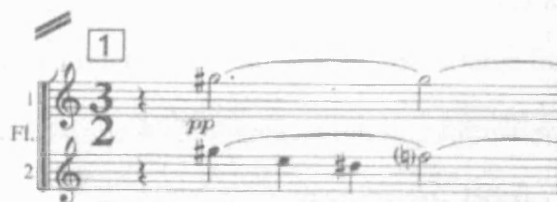
This musical score page contains three systems of staves, each corresponding to a different measure of a piece. The first system (measures 8 and 16) includes parts for Piccolo Flute (Pics Fl.), Flute (Fl.), Horns (Hrb.), Piccolo Clarinet (Pic Cl.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Bsns.), Contrabassoon (C. Bsns.), Cor Anglais (Cors.), Trumpet (Trp.), Trombone (Trb.), Tuba, and Timpani (Timp.). The second system (measure 15) includes parts for Violin (Vln.) and Viola (Vla.). The third system (measures 8 and 15) includes parts for Violoncello (Vcl.) and Double Bass (Cb.). The score is written in 2/8 time and features various musical notations including notes, rests, dynamics (e.g., *ff*, *mf*, *f*), and articulation marks. A box labeled '15' is present in the top right corner of the first system and the bottom right corner of the third system.

Example 5.13: figure 15, full score

### 5.3.5 Stationary Effects and the Prolongation of Time

Thus far, we have considered the musical generation of implied movement in the composition to represent the affective feelings driven by the illusory motion effects that Dutilleux sees in the painting. However, what makes this composition so effective is its juxtaposition of contrasting ‘static’ episodes, such as the G# circling episode in **ex. 5.4** above, against these more accelerated episodes – casting the latter into sharp relief. Accordingly, our discussion will now turn towards an analysis of these more stable elements of the music in terms of a response to the fixedness in time of the painting, which generates a sense of timelessness through minimal musical development and prolongation.

It might be argued that Dutilleux’s recurrent recirculation of musical material, and in particular the omnipresent G#, serves to reflect the vortical illusion induced by the painting: the listener feels continually pulled from side to side towards the same group of sounds just as the viewer feels as if they are being sucked inescapably into this picture, rocked violently between the orbs like a ball bearing fired into a pinball machine. In this way, both picture and music expedite a feeling of maintaining one’s position rather than developing a sense of progression.



**Example 5.14:** figure 1, showing Piccolos 1 and 2

As we saw previously, Dutilleux sustains each individual note of the opening melody throughout the opening bars. These lines are generated from the thematic

figure (G#, E, D#, and F) presented in piccolo two in bar 5, **ex. 5.14**. Each pitch is then sustained successively: the G# by first piccolo, the E by first flute, the D# by the second flute, and the F by the second piccolo (see **ex. 5.1**) – saturating the musical space. Interestingly, Dutilleux told the composer René Koering that bars 5–10 of this first movement are ‘la toile du fond’<sup>26</sup> (the backdrop) of the score, just as the ubiquitous swirls form the backdrop to the painting.



**Example 5.15:** figure 1, Piccolo 1, bar 8

In the eighth bar, two bars before figure 2 (**ex. 5.15**), Piccolo 1 takes the theme and presents it in retrograde, adding an initial C. Once again, the winds successively sustain each of these pitches. This time the brass underpins the process, the horns sustaining a chord whilst the trumpets reinforce the ubiquitous G#. There is also a concomitant thickening of texture: Flutes 1 and 2 in the ninth bar sustain a minor second (D# and E), and similarly Oboes 1 and 2 sustain the augmented second (C and D#), thus recreating the same pitch material previously heard at bar 8.

The sustaining and accumulation of the voices that emerge from the thematic cell heard at figure 1 (**exs. 5.14 and 5.15**) display a circling formation analogous to the rhythmic swirls in the painting, circling because they are orbiting the same material. Moreover, these voices ‘float’, like the orbs in the painting, suspended in their own musical space through an absence of tonal ‘gravity’ pulling them in any one direction. The palindrome strengthens this effect, too, through its retroversion, giving an

<sup>26</sup> Dutilleux in conversation, radio broadcast on France-Musique, 28 December 1978, cited in Potter, *Henri Dutilleux: His Life and Works*, 125.

impression of a reversal of direction – a phenomenon which a listener is likely to recognise due to the relatively slow tempo and the limited extent of the pattern. The accumulation of the musical texture through the prolongation of successive notes of the thematic cell thus creates an analogue to the accumulations of circular lines that form the contours in the painting. Confronted by the problem that music requires a particular duration of time to unfold its entire structure, whereas a painting is available to (if not perceptible by) the human gaze in a single instant, Dutilleux has found a way of prolonging an instant of time, a musical voice, through an absence of musical development. This, again, is what Edward T. Cone calls in Chapter 1 a ‘suspended saturation’ of musical space.

Similarly, if the opening section is a microcosm of the rest of the composition, this provides an analogue with the experience of the painting by introducing, for example, the pitch ‘colours’ presented in figure 1 (**exs. 5.1 and 5.14**) and prolonging them through the following bars. The analogue lies in the similarity between experiencing the painting’s colours first and then seeing their prolongation in the tableau’s constituent parts – principally the circulating swirls. Dutilleux constructs his composition upon this idea through the prolongation mentioned and thus builds up his musical texture in a similar way to Van Gogh’s method of building up his impastos using multiple lines and layers of paint.

Of particular interest here is the way this thematic material becomes a sort of template for the formal organisation of the piece as a whole. The pitch voices or lines circulate the same material without any particular development, motivic or otherwise, thus creating a sense of stasis. It is perhaps in this way that Dutilleux is attempting to represent the fixity of the painting’s images through the invariability of the musical material, which tends to change in aspect rather than form. What motion there is takes

the form of a kind of circumambulation, rather like the roving of the eye across the canvas – ‘a sense of walking or circling about something and alighting upon certain moments that pique our interest, our consciousness, before we are drawn to ‘observe’ another part.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter it has been argued that Dutilleux, rather than trying to represent the painting’s ostensible subject matter, has sought to present something sonically akin to a phenomenal experience of *La nuit étoilée*, such as the one that he says he experiences himself in terms of timbre, space and movement – hence the composition’s main title. In other words, the composer’s musical intention has been to produce emotional affects in his listener analogous to those one might feel upon viewing the painting itself – to reproduce ‘in sound the strange impression of vertigo and cosmic space this picture gives you’. The questions are whether these musical means we have discussed are enough to recreate the phenomenal effect of the painting in the mind of the listener and, indeed, whether this is enough to constitute a musical representation of Van Gogh’s painting.

Accordingly, we might say that the application of Clifton’s phenomenological approach to musical experience provides a particular and cogent way of describing the possible ways this composition may engender Dutilleux’s – and our – impressions of the painting. The principal facets discussed, then, have been musical space, and its implied texture, and musical time, which it has been contended are posited phenomenally by contrasting the extremes of instrumental tessitura and creating episodes between stasis and accelerating movement, respectively. Consistent with this theory and its methodology, the experiential foundation of, and bodily bases for, our

perception enable the listener to *feel*, affectively, these perceptual experiences: the highs and lows of the instrumental textures, the spatial void at the heart of the music caused by the absence of the upper strings, and the violence of the movement in the music's most frenetic sections. Therefore, it can be seen that the corporeal body of the experiencing subject may actually become part of our understanding of the music and the painting through notions of space, movement, touch and texture in the *lived* musical experience.

The two levels of representation that we have discussed, physical and affective, are also both driven by the primary attributes of space and movement, the former belonging virtually to the painting and implied by its subject matter, and the latter, affectively, through the composer's (and probably our) response to it. It is argued that the affective components intimated by the title *Timbre, Espace, Mouvement* are in part driven by our phenomenological way of knowing the world. Furthermore, both of these levels, physical and affective, are contingent upon the imaginative and perceptive faculties of the perceiver. It therefore seems likely that we could not understand the virtual level of movement and space in the picture without access to our experiential pasts of other paintings and real night skies, and our own movement in and around the worlds which we inhabit. In this way, the sense of movement and space in the music is also phenomenological: the dizzying whirlwind passages are so partly because of the physical movement we have encountered corporeally. And the ensuing affective level is one that relies on our emotive faculties as feeling and responding participants to the musical and visual experience. Spatial relations and movement are therefore not intrinsic properties of the painting or of the musical object, but are instead fields of action in which we participate in collaboration with the music and painting to create meaning.

Moreover, we said at the beginning that the visual experience of *La nuit étoilée* is not restricted to the sense of sight alone but stimulates other senses synaesthetically, creating experiences of physical space (the chasm), vertiginous movement (swirling) and touch (texture). And it seems also that Dutilleux's musical effects work by stimulating impressions which normally pertain to senses other than hearing alone. For example, notions of musical colour may be subsumed under this sensual banner, for we may also think of this parameter as something that is textural and thus experienced in a spatial way. The textural extremes of the low strings and high woodwinds have an experiential basis in the real world; if something sounds rough we recognise this from other senses such as touch as well. Occurring in physical space, touch and hearing are mutually implicated because it is through touching something that we create sound, and thus reciprocally sound may also remind us of touch.

Furthermore, although a musical pitch cannot obviously be a colour, it may behave and be experienced in a way that is analogous to the experience of a single colour. Given that colour is generally recognised by its hue, brightness, and saturation, a continuously held musical note may therefore represent a colour in the painting, as it may be said to continue at a specific intensity (saturation) across a musical space at a particular pitch (brightness) and texture (hue). Musically, then, we are experiencing something akin to the phenomenological perception of time and space that Dutilleux experiences as belonging to the painting.

However, although the facets discussed have been demonstrated as originating from the painting, do we need the painting to make sense of the music? Phenomenology argues that the phenomenal encounter with music is bracketed off from extra-musical experiences, and that it *is* those things it purports to be about. But

in the case of this composition, hearing what we might call the musical after-effects of Dutilleux's experience of the painting seems incomplete without our own reference to this other experiential domain.

We might recall at this point Edward T. Cone's example of hearing someone sigh: without knowing the context or what it refers to, the sigh may transmit no specific message and it remains intransitive and lacks causality until we discover its source. In the same way, *Timbre, Espace, Mouvement* only becomes expressive of the after-effects of Dutilleux's affective response to seeing the painting when we regard the painting as causative to these effects. The painting-as-referent enables us to hear in the music the facets discussed because we transfer concepts from the experiential domain of the painting which, accordingly, helps us to make appropriate selections from the musical domain, whose phenomenological effects are then ascribed to the latent ones in the painting.

Finally let us compare *Rothko Chapel* and *Timbre, Espace, Mouvement* for a moment. Feldman's work, on the one hand, seems intent on generating an event, reflecting aspects of the surround of abstract paintings, together with their colours and continuation. On the other hand, Dutilleux's work seems to represent the various phenomenal effects the composer experienced in his encounter with a single, representational painting. Accordingly, the difference is a subtle one between levels of intent. If *Rothko Chapel* focuses exclusively on the painted surface, *Timbre, Espace, Mouvement* does, at least, give some consideration to the representational aspects of the painting, such as the implied void and vortical motion discussed – a sonic representation of the composer's phenomenal impressions of the painting. In this way, rather than creating simply a representation of Van Gogh's painting (were such a thing possible), Dutilleux has sought to express something about his psychological

and emotional experience upon viewing it. Once this extra-musical link is established, the listener is able to ascribe the musical happenings to this, the source domain, and so it becomes an integrative field of forces that has cause and effect. Thus, the music might be said to provide a representation of a physical encounter and a psychological involvement with the painting, led by certain recognisable aspects of the visual world so depicted.

## CHAPTER 6

### **Making Audible: Unlocking Time and Movement in Tan Dun's *Death and Fire*:**

#### ***Dialogue with Paul Klee***

For me, there are no boundaries between the visual and the audio in art creation itself. They constitute a unified yet circular realm for my thinking.<sup>1</sup>

– Tan Dun

Art does not reproduce the visible but makes visible.<sup>2</sup>

[Painting is taking a]n active line on a walk, moving freely, without goal.<sup>3</sup>

– Paul Klee

Tan Dun's *Death and Fire: Dialogue with Paul Klee* offers an example of music composed after Paul Klee's paintings which are themselves indebted to musical ideas, suggesting a closer, almost circular integration between the two media: 'music is painting is music'. This chapter will set out to examine how Tan's music relates to Klee's paintings and, indeed, his overall aesthetic. Does it, for example, respond to the visible painting itself, its subject matter, or the ideology that may lie behind the work?

Through the medium of paint, Klee strove to capture time in the form of movement as expressed by colour, line or rhythm. In this way, the viewer, confronted by these elements, unlocks time in the unfolding process of looking. Gilles Deleuze argues that in painting, as in music, the problem is not in the distinction between the

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<sup>1</sup> Tan Dun, 'Visual Music', *Tan Dun Online*

<[http://www.tandunonline.com/Composition/VisualMusic\\_Overview.asp?id=4](http://www.tandunonline.com/Composition/VisualMusic_Overview.asp?id=4)>  
[accessed 25 January 2006].

<sup>2</sup> Paul Klee, 'Creative Credo' [1920], in *Notebooks*, vol. 1: *The Thinking Eye*, ed. Jurg Spiller, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Overlook Press, 1992), 76–80.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 16 (bold original).

figurative and the non-figurative, but in the rendering or ‘capturing’ of unseen and unheard forces. This was precisely what was meant by Klee’s famous formula, quoted above, that ‘[a]rt does not reproduce the visible but makes visible’. Forces such as time, then, are made visible. Likewise, Deleuze continues, just as painting must render ‘invisible forces visible’, so, too, music must render ‘nonsonorous forces sonorous’.<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, the relationship or ‘dialogue’ between the music and the paintings will be examined by considering the extent to which Tan succeeds in making audible the inaudible forces latent in the paintings. These ‘forces’ will be regarded as primarily temporal, suggestive of movement, and sonic, suggestive of noise, but also sensual, suggesting audible and haptic textures. This chapter will pursue the idea that Tan reanimates the ‘frozen’ time of some of the paintings through his use of instrumental colour, line, rhythm and sound effects, and so generates musical ‘narratives’.

## 6.1 Paul Klee

The painter Paul Klee (1879–1940) was born in Switzerland, although he studied and settled in Germany before returning to his homeland in 1933.<sup>5</sup> Born into a musical family, Klee was also a competent violinist, and he made copious references to music in both his visual art and his writings. Indeed, he wrote: ‘I am continually being made aware of parallels between music and the fine arts. As yet they defy analysis. It is

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<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: the Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (London: Continuum, 2004), 40.

<sup>5</sup> Klee left Germany and his teaching position at the Düsseldorf Academy in 1933 and returned to Bern in Switzerland after increasing hostility from the National Socialist movement and the Nazis. His paintings were displayed in the notorious Nazi exhibition in Dessau in 1937 entitled ‘Entartete Kunst’ (Degenerate Art), which featured over a hundred of his previously confiscated works.

certain that both art forms are defined by time. That can easily be proved.’<sup>6</sup> In particular, as the art historian Andrew Kagan writes, Klee’s search for ‘universally applicable aesthetic properties from the accomplishments of the titans of music’ – Bach, Beethoven and Mozart – led him to discover ‘theoretical parallels between painting and music’.<sup>7</sup> In painting, Klee’s fixation with music is evident in the wirily rendered musical instruments, the visual trajectory of a conductor’s baton beating triple or common time in the ‘ship’ drawings, visualisations of fugue and counterpoint and the use of musical symbols such as the fermata.

A sharing of ideas and an imitation of the other medium’s intrinsic properties – such as line, rhythm, polyphony, movement and time – constituted Klee’s central aesthetic relationship with music. The titles of many of his paintings suggest a close alignment with music, for example: *Dogmatisch Komposition* (1918), *Im Bachschen Stil* (1919), *Fugue in Rot* (1921), *Pastorale (Rhythmen)* (1927), *Nocturne für Horn* (1921), *Blau-orange Harmonie* (1923) and *Polyphon gefasstes Weiss* (1930). Visual rhythms, such as repeated line forms, abound in his works, and he frequently compares his painted lines to melodies. His extensive thoughts on this subject are effectively distilled into the quotation given at the head of the chapter, which suggests that painting is taking an ‘active line on a walk’. Through the fascinating and detailed examples of line in his writings and teaching notes, the artist shows how it is possible to represent, among other things, tension, movement, depth, balance and their opposites.<sup>8</sup>

Although Klee resisted facile connections between music and his painting, and was particularly vitriolic towards those that offered such a critique without

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<sup>6</sup> Hajo Düchting, *Paul Klee: Painting Music* (New York: Prestel, 2002), 8.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Kagan, *Paul Klee: Art and Music* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), 38–39.

<sup>8</sup> See his *Pedagogical Sketchbooks* and *Notebooks* for fully detailed accounts of Klee’s theoretical workings on line.

qualification,<sup>9</sup> he remained interested in finding equivalents in painting to musical rhythm and polyphony. He wrote that '[a]chievements made in music by the end of the eighteenth century remain (for the present) in their infancy in the visual arts',<sup>10</sup> and it is with these aspects in mind that he constructed many of his most enduring images, layering colours transparently on top of one another.

For Klee, the expressive effects of line and colour, once freed from the constraints of representational art, could be formalised in a manner similar to harmony and counterpoint in music. To this end, he spent a great deal of time creating values of light and dark gradations and then applying this to colour:

[T]ranslating the shadowy image, the method of measuring time in terms of light and dark, into colour means that [...] each tone value corresponds to a single colour. That is to say, do not add white to lighten or black to darken the colours, but use one single colour for one layer. The following layer gets another colour.<sup>11</sup>

These tectonic layers, then, are 'read' in a temporal manner but they also correspond to the synchronicity of voices found in a polyphonic musical composition. Kagan contends that Klee saw 'the possibility of an authentic, personally significant parallel with music – a parallel between absolute sound and theoretically autonomous form and colour'.<sup>12</sup> This can be observed in his assertion that musical tones, like colour, can take on a variety of shades: 'from the first, small steps to the rich flowering of a coloured chord! What prospects for the thematic dimension!'<sup>13</sup> And in the painting below *Neue Harmonie* (1936, **fig. 6.1**) we see a realisation of such a 'coloured chord'.

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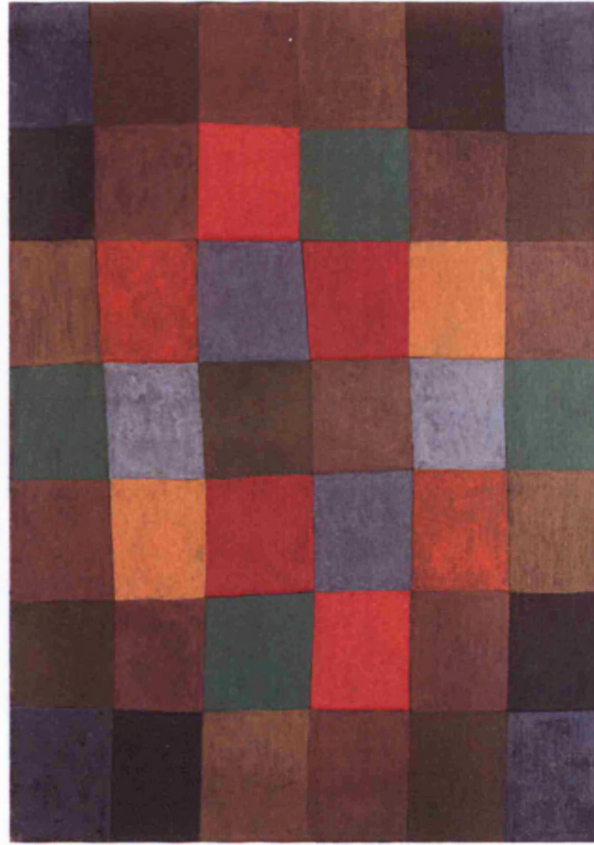
<sup>9</sup> See DÜchting, *Paul Klee: Painting Music*, 11–12. Andrew Kagan also makes this point about Klee's circumspection in *Paul Klee: Art and Music*, 21–22.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in DÜchting, *Paul Klee: Painting Music*, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Klee, *Diaries*, 142, cited in DÜchting, 18.

<sup>12</sup> Kagan, *Paul Klee: Art and Music*, 27.

<sup>13</sup> Klee, Jena Lecture, quoted in DÜchting, 46.



**Figure 6.1:** Paul Klee, *Neue Harmonie* (1936)<sup>14</sup>

In a drive towards purism, Klee focused on colour, light, and their dynamism as his subjects.<sup>15</sup> Andrew Kagan maintains that Klee's Grail for pictorial polyphony was 'inextricably bound up in transparent colour depth'.<sup>16</sup> For example, *Polyphon gefasstes Weiss* (fig. 6.16) demonstrates exactly that colour transparency and depth through its overlapping rectilinear planes of intersecting colours.

The art critic Robert Hughes, in his book *The Shock of the New* (1991), wrote that Klee's 'compositions of stacked forms, fanned out like decks of cards or color

<sup>14</sup> Oil on canvas, 36 7/8 x 26 1/8, Guggenheim Museum, New York.

<sup>15</sup> See Kagan, *Paul Klee: Art and Music*, 68–69.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

swatches, are attempts to freeze time in a static composition, to give visual motifs the “unfolding” quality of aural ones’.<sup>17</sup>



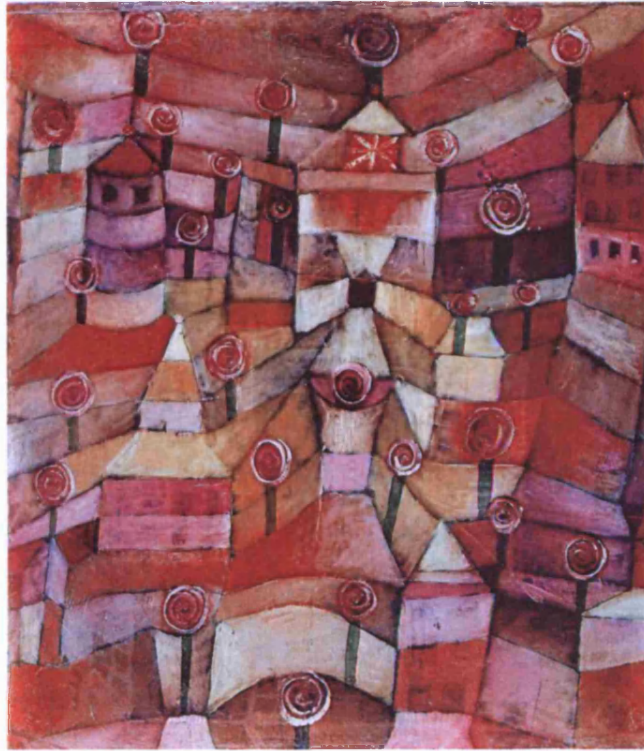
**Figure 6.2:** Paul Klee, *Fugue in Rot* (1921)<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, the suggestion and evocation of frozen time through implied movement or rhythm was to become the dominant subject of much of Klee’s output. The small pen and ink sketch *Flucht zum Recht* (1913) is an early example of a ‘static composition’ evincing movement and its direction. Because of Klee’s striving to create analogues between musical polyphony and his graded layering of colour, as well as his introduction of a temporal dimension through the creation of colour ‘swatches’ that incline the viewer to search the image in a particular dimension, it takes time to ‘read’ his paintings. The musical titles of many of his paintings betray this aspect, for example the directional impulse in *Fugue in Rot* (**fig. 6.2**), whose ‘themes’ unfold from left to right and downwards, like a musical score, and *Rosegarten* (1920, **fig.**

<sup>17</sup> Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 304.

<sup>18</sup> Watercolour on paper, 24.3 x 37.2 cm, private collection, Switzerland.

6.3) with its vertiginous parallel lines that encourage the viewer's gaze along its various paths.



**Figure 6.3:** Paul Klee, *Rosegarten* (1920)<sup>19</sup>

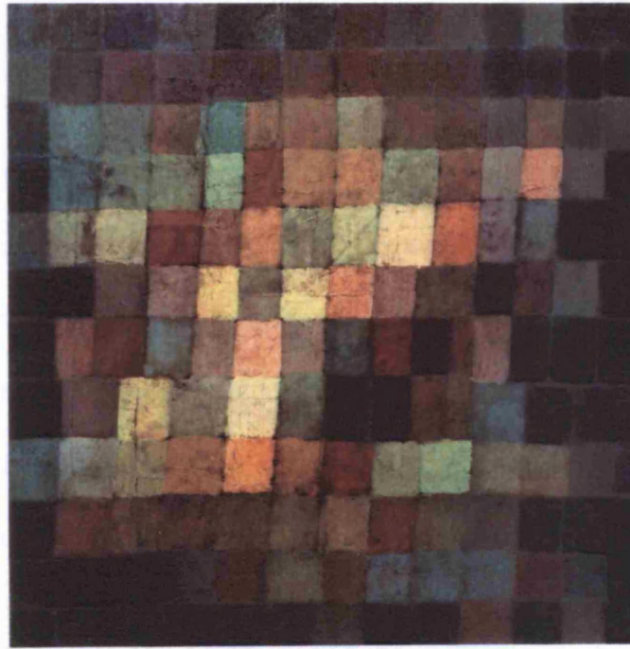
A directional reading effect can also be observed in the so-called 'magic square'<sup>20</sup> paintings, where one's eyes are drawn in one particular direction through a certain rhythmic and dynamic use of colour. For example, in *Alter Klang* (1925, **fig. 6.4**) an arrangement of various coloured squares directs the viewer towards the conspicuous white square, middle right, through the various colour dynamics.<sup>21</sup> Regarding this temporal aesthetic, Klee acknowledges the influence of the French artist Robert Delaunay (1885–1941), when he writes, 'Delaunay strove to shift the

<sup>19</sup> Oil on cardboard, 50 x 43 cm, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich.

<sup>20</sup> Klee's so-called 'magic squares' were dubbed thus by Will Grohmann, see *Paul Klee* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1954).

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Kagan argues convincingly that *Alter Klang* is painted after Leonardo da Vinci's *Saint John the Baptist*, about which Klee had enthused to his wife a few years earlier after viewing it on his trip to Italy 1901–02, see Kagan, *Paul Klee: Art and Music*, 71.

accent in art onto the time element, after the fashion of a fugue, by choosing formats that could not be encompassed in one glance.<sup>22</sup>



**Figure 6.4:** Paul Klee, *Alter Klang* (1927)<sup>23</sup>

In this way, there seems to be a concerted effort to slow the reading of a visual image, to let it unfold and be directional in time, like the presentation of a musical theme.

Klee declared in 1917 that '[p]olyphonic painting is superior to music',<sup>24</sup> because the time element becomes spatialized, the temporal forces of polyphony captured, in the process. But, while striving for a polyphony in paint that presents itself all at once, he was at the same time interested in our reading of his paintings in time, multidimensionally. Naturally, the objects which populate any one of these paintings really *are* there all at once, but it is we as observers who unfold them in time. By

<sup>22</sup> Klee, *The Diaries of Paul Klee 1898-1918*, ed. and with an introduction by Felix Klee, trans. B. Schneider, R. Y. Zachary and M. Knight (London: Peter Owen, 1965), 374.

<sup>23</sup> Oil on cardboard, 38 x 38 cm, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, Basle.

<sup>24</sup> Klee, *The Diaries of Paul Klee 1898-1918*, ed. and introduced by Felix Klee, trans. B. Schneider, R. Y. Zachary and M. Knight (London: Peter Owen, 1965), 374.

seeing music's default condition as polyphonic, involving the sounding of all of its dimensions simultaneously, Klee challenged the widely held notion that music is the temporal art par excellence and painting the spatial art, whose meaning is recovered immediately in one perceptual hit. But as we discussed in Part I, music's temporality may be said, phenomenally, to occupy a spatial component too, through its texture, so that it may not be entirely incommensurate with the space a painting occupies. Thus, both music and painting may be said to construct a field of action or territory in the Deleuzian manner. Moreover, the latent time component in Klee's painting belies the idea that either constitutes an instantaneous perceptual acquisition.

Klee used a remarkable variety of materials, techniques and surfaces in his work. The materials included oils, watercolours, crayons, pen, pencil and ink; the techniques included gouache, lithographs, stencilling and spraying, as well as conventional painting; and the surfaces ranged from standard canvas to newspaper, cardboard, sandpaper, cloth, gauze, tracing paper and burlap. Accordingly, there is potential here for invoking the phenomenological effect of the resulting surfaces through musical texture, and this aspect will be explored in the following analyses.

## **6.2 Tan Dun and *Death and Fire: Dialogue with Paul Klee***

Tan Dun, based in New York since 1986, was born in 1957 in Simao, China. Having worked as a rice-planter and a performer of Peking opera, he enrolled at Beijing's Central Conservatory, before moving to the United States in 1986 to continue his studies. In 1993 he completed his DMA at Columbia University with the submission of the composition under analysis here. His music has brought together both Western and Eastern traditions, and he has written many multimedia compositions, including the film score for *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), for which he won an

Academy Award for best music score in 2001. Other compositions he describes as ‘visual music’ include *Soundshape* (1990), written for an ensemble of 70 ceramic instruments, and, more recently, *Deconstruction – Reconstruction – Resurrection* (2005), the realisation of his concept for an installation of visual music incorporating the pyramidal rebuilding of two pianos in a visual and acoustic presentation. Therefore, it would seem that the composition for discussion here, *Death and Fire*, with its overt relationship to Klee’s work, is an extension of his visual music conception.

*Death and Fire: Dialogue with Paul Klee* (1992)<sup>25</sup> is an orchestral work named after Paul Klee’s *Tod und Feuer* (1940), though the work as a whole (in all but three of its ten movements) refers to six other specific Klee paintings. In the preface to his commentary on the work, submitted for his DMA thesis, Tan writes,

There are several ways in which Klee’s aesthetic ideas can be related directly to my music. In Klee’s thinking, thickness, density, length and contour of line correspond to dynamic, color, duration and contour respectively, in musical line. In translating some of Klee’s drawings back into my auditory imagination – in “reading” them as scores – a kind of melodic thinking which closely resembles certain Chinese music aesthetics was immediately recognizable to me.<sup>26</sup>

This Chinese aesthetic, he goes on to explain, is ‘linear [and] non-harmonic’,<sup>27</sup> and consists of playing musical notes in a variety of ways that affect their sound colour. It is thus, he claims, fully congruent with Klee’s occupation with colour and line. From

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<sup>25</sup> First performed in Glasgow, 27 March 1993 by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra with Tan Dun conducting.

<sup>26</sup> Tan Dun, ‘*Death and Fire: Dialogue with Paul Klee: an Analysis*’ (unpublished DMA thesis, Columbia University, 1993), 2.

<sup>27</sup> Tan Dun, cited in liner notes for *Out of Peking Opera; Death and Fire; Orchestral Theatre II*, Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, cond. Muhai Tang, compact disc, Ondine ODE 864-2 (1998).

this, it is clear that Tan intends to exploit melodic line and dynamics in his *Dialogue with Paul Klee*.

However, Tan's seemingly straightforward assertion about 'translating' these pictures 'back into' music through the act of 'reading' them as scores is, as we have discussed in Part I, an unstable and problematic idea – and somewhat reminiscent of Siglind Bruhn's 'transmedialization'. First of all, the notion of 'reading' a painting as a score implies that – were such a thing possible – a mere act of decoding. Even if Klee's drawings do in some way capture time, a direct and unambiguous route into the musical domain is obviously not viable. If Tan has attempted translation here, then he has done so through his own mediated interpretation – as we have been at pains to underline in Part I. But more significantly, it is how Tan's music functions in relation to the paintings, and how it *sounds* to the listener within that context, that matters here.

*Death and Fire: Dialogue with Paul Klee* is divided as follows:

#### I. Portrait

Insert 1: Animals at Full Moon

Insert 2: Senicio [*sic*]

Insert 3: Ad Parnassum

#### II. Self Portrait

Insert 4: Twittering Machine

Insert 5: Earth Witches

Insert 6: Intoxication

Insert 7: J. S. Bach

#### III. Death and Fire

Tan writes that the Roman numeral designations found in the score (I. Portrait, II. Self Portrait, III. Death and Fire) denote the main structural or ‘frame’ sections.<sup>28</sup> These sections are distinct from the ‘inserts’ through their sharing of pitch material. He writes:

They contain the large-scale pitch or melodic development, and are written primarily for strings. The pitch material is divided between the first two sections in such a way that there is material which is unique and material which is common to each. III retains a part of the distinctive material of II and repeats that of I. Structurally, this is something of a return, and thus a closure.<sup>29</sup>

The significance of this, then, is the implied congruity of the structural sections. Tan specifies an absence of pauses between the individual sections of the work, indicating that despite the apparent division into three main sections and seven inserts, he sees the work as a cohesive and continuous whole, strengthened by the sense of closure brought by section III through the return of material presented originally in section I.

The work’s subtitle, ‘Dialogue with Paul Klee’, is explained as follows by the composer in the preface to the orchestral score:

About five years ago, I went to an exhibition on the works of the painter Paul Klee at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. I was extremely moved and wanted to write a symphony. This became a discussion, a dialogue between myself and Klee’s paintings, but not in any sense a musical description of any particular paintings. Although constructed of many small sections, my symphony is imagined as a complete, continuous work.<sup>30</sup>

A further explanation is found in the introduction to his DMA commentary:

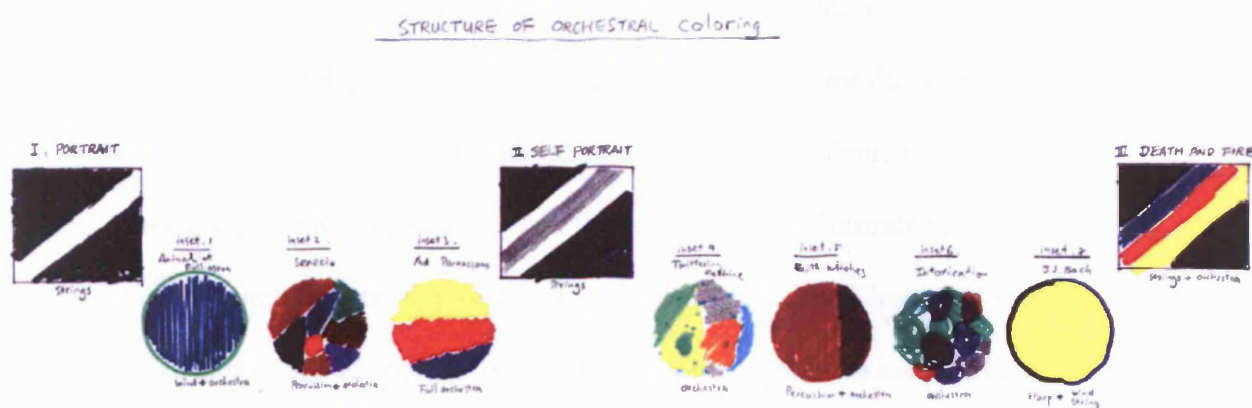
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<sup>28</sup> See Tan, ‘*Death and Fire* [...]’: an Analysis’, 18.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Tan Dun, programme note in full orchestral score, *Tan Dun, Death and Fire: Dialogue with Paul Klee* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1995).

My intention was to have a dialogue with Klee concerning these issues, rather than to translate, interpret, or represent his work. The Inserts of “Death and Fire” are not musical equivalents of the paintings referred to by the section titles. They are rather my own response, my own discussions of the ideas and images of the paintings.<sup>31</sup>



**Figure 6.5:** Tan Dun's 'Structure of Orchestral Coloring'

Tan's intention to have a discussion or dialogue with Klee's ideas and images rather than a translation, interpretation, or representation of the paintings seems to contradict his assertion, cited above, concerning the need to translate 'Klee's drawings back into [his] auditory imagination'. And such equivocation seems once again indicative of a composer's concern not to align their music too closely with the extra-musical domain. This draws into question the nature of the musical representation. To what extent does this remain 'music after painting' if the composer's engagement is not with specific paintings but more with Klee's ideas concerning the art, practice and philosophy of painting?

In *Death and Fire*, Tan exploits the standard orchestral instruments in novel ways that defy typical pitch classification, focusing instead on noise elements and timbre (sound 'colour'). Such sounds include breathing through brass instruments and

<sup>31</sup> Tan, 'Death and Fire [...]: an Analysis', 4.

clapping the mouthpiece, key clicking and blowing through the headjoints of woodwind instruments, and, on the strings, pizzicato, *col legno* and string slapping. These techniques perhaps find their analogue (and their dialogue) in Klee's experimentation into colour dynamics. Tan writes that 'Klee's mastery and theory of color stimulate my own long-standing interest in tone color. [T]here is an experimental approach in Klee which is akin to my own.'<sup>32</sup> It is clear that Klee spent much of his professional life theorizing and experimenting with colour, as is evident from his *Notebooks*,<sup>33</sup> which consist of over a thousand pages of illustrated technical writing. It would therefore seem apposite to a work composed after Klee that it should be based on the idea of sound colour – or at least the composer's own ideas of what sound colour is. But whilst necessary to demonstrate a relationship with Klee's painterly techniques, is such a general notion of sound colour sufficient for a musical representation or, indeed, a 'dialogue' with the paintings? It is perhaps a matter of how this sound 'colour' relates to Klee's use of colour, and how the listener interprets this in light of the paintings.

The work has ten sections in all, and from Tan's colour sketch of the 'symphonic' layout (**fig. 6.5**)<sup>34</sup> we can see that the Roman numeral sections – 'I. Portrait', 'II. Self Portrait' and 'III. Death and Fire' – form squared, graphical superscripts to the line of circular, coloured representations of Inserts 1–7, and therefore suggest a more solid and foundational function within the overall musical structure.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>33</sup> See vols. 1 and 2 of Klee's, *Notebooks. The Thinking Eye*, ed. Jurg Spiller, trans. Ralph Manheim and Heinz Norden (New York: Overlook Press, 1992).

<sup>34</sup> This colour sketch is titled 'Structure of Orchestral Coloring', obtained from the official website *Tan Dun Online* < <http://www.tandunonline.com/Composition/composition.asp?id=21&s=3> > [accessed 4 August 2006].

Tan titles seven of his movements directly after the respective Klee paintings: *Tiere im Vollmond* (1927), *Senecio* (1922), *Ad Parnassum* (1932), *Die Zwitscher-Maschine* (1922), *Erdhexen* (1938), *Rausch* (1939) and *Tod und Feuer* (1940). The remaining movements focus on what appears to be different aspects of Tan's relationship with Klee. 'I. Portrait' suggests a musical portrait of Klee, 'II. Self Portrait' is Tan's musical portrait of himself, and 'Insert 7: J. S. Bach' presents a homage to Bach (and, by extension perhaps, an acknowledgement of his influence on Klee's aesthetic). This arrangement accords with Tan's desire for a musical 'dialogue with Klee' and his paintings, for the placing of his own musical 'Self Portrait' at the centre of the work secures Tan's own *voice*. It seems likely, given that *Senecio*, *Ad Parnassum*, *Die Zwitscher-Maschine* and *Tod und Feuer* are among Klee's most popular paintings, that Tan is expecting his listeners to be already familiar with these works. However, notwithstanding the foreknowledge of his listeners, it is also apparent that the descriptive titles of all of these works are sufficient to generate their own conceptual imagery, by pointing towards the subjects alluded to in their titles.

### 6.3 The Analysis

In this section, the three framing sections – 'I. Portrait', 'II. Self Portrait' and 'III. Death and Fire' – will be considered due to their exclusive use of the string section, which differentiates them from the seven inserts. Following this, the inserts will be analysed sequentially in relation to their corresponding paintings.

### 6.3.1 Part I: Tan's Structural Sections I, II, and III

#### I. Portrait



**Figure 6.6:** Paul Klee, *Young Man Resting* (1911)<sup>35</sup>

The opening movement, 'Portrait', by implication a musical portrait of Klee, seems to draw on the style of Klee's own self-portraits, such as *Young Man Resting* (1911, **fig. 6.6**) and *Lost in Thought* (1916, **fig. 6.7**). It forms the first of the three foundational pillars of the piece suggested graphically by Tan's colour sketch seen in **fig. 6.5** above. In this schematic drawing, the black square with its thick white line cutting a diagonal from the bottom left-hand corner up to the top right-hand corner is the only monochromatic image among Tan's graphical illustrations. This graphical symbol serves, perhaps, two purposes here. First, the self-portraits themselves are black-and-

<sup>35</sup> Pen and ink on paper, 14 x 20 cm, no location given. Reproduced in Constance Naubert-Riser, *Klee: The Masterworks*, trans. John Greaves, with an introduction by Gualtieri Di Sanzo Lazzaro (London: Studio Editions, 1988), 13.

white sketches. Second, both Tan's graphic and the self-portraits share a certain roughness of execution. The quality of the drawings' facture reveals a scratchiness whereby one can almost feel the artist digging into the paper with his pen and ink.

Tan's 'Portrait' employs a similar monochromaticism through its sparse musical material and its scoring exclusively for cellos and double basses. The double basses enter at bar 1 with narrow intervals played glissando. This three-note gesture ( $B \cong C - B \Xi$ ) is what Tan calls the 'Paul Klee theme',<sup>36</sup> and it is immediately restated twice with progressive rhythmic diminution (**ex. 6.1**). This melodic cell – a rising tone and falling semitone – returns throughout the work under various guises, and despite appearing with various durational values and at different pitch levels, its contour remains nonetheless constant.



#### Example 6.1: bars 1–6

The monophonic linearity of this movement suggests a direct analogy with Klee's notion of 'line' and its execution in time. It is what Klee would describe as an active line 'limited in its movement by fixed points'.<sup>37</sup> The use of glissandi almost suggests the gliding of pen across paper, as if Tan is attempting to unleash once more the temporality inherent in the line 'imprisoned' on the sketchbook page or finished canvas.

<sup>36</sup> Tan, 'Death and Fire [...]: an Analysis', 25.

<sup>37</sup> Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, 18.



**Example 6.2:** bars 7–15

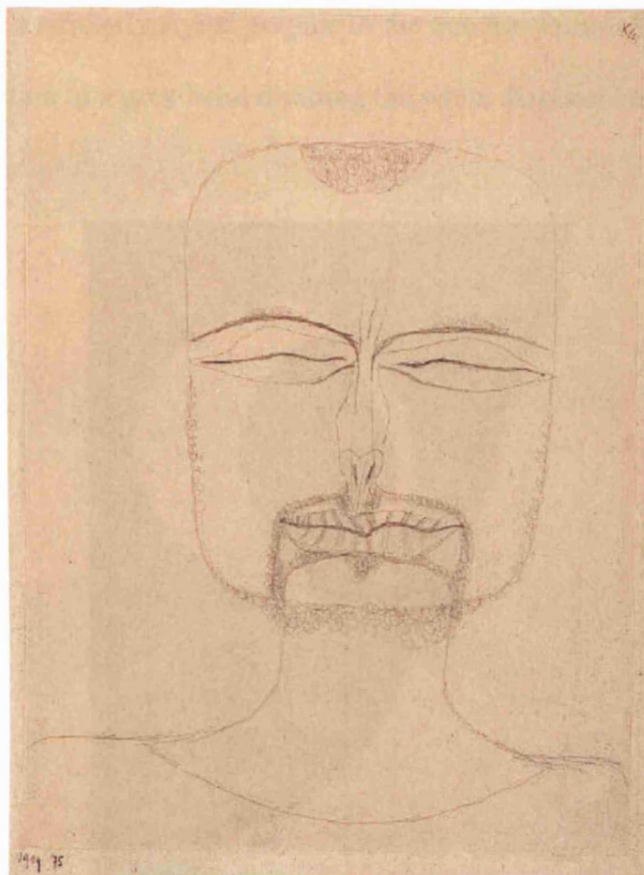
The double basses are then joined on the fourth beat of bar 3 by the cellos which double their line at the octave. The low pitch frequency, combined with the heavy timbre of the basses, seems to emulate the thick, heavy lines of the Klee self-portraits. The accented note-repetitions in the second quintuplet groups of bars 10 and 15 (**ex. 6.2**) suggests a rougher, denser, less well-defined texture analogous to the shaded-in areas of the self-portraits. Indeed, the actual gesture of scrubbing or shading is suggested by the performance direction ‘the bow deeply pressing the strings to make noise’ (**ex. 6.3**). Tan’s performance notes indicate this serration as an instruction to ‘slap the strings and the fingerboard with the palm of the hand to make a dry percussive sound’, which generates sound resembling the rough friction of pencil against paper. Whether or not these sounds represent a literal evocation of the *act* of drawing, their effect seems to be to inject ‘real time’ back into the frozen polyphony of Klee’s drawings.



**Example 6.3:** bars 19–26

Indeed, it is perhaps no accident that the visual trace of the serration bears a striking resemblance to the jagged lines in Klee's self-portraiture in **figs. 6.6** and **6.7**. The instruction 'to make noise' also suggests an analogy with colour rather than pitch itself, as it focuses on sonic and timbral properties (hence, sound 'colour') rather than on any vertical (harmonic) or horizontal pitch relations. This suggests that, rather than try to create a portrait in a slavish manner, Tan has employed methods which acoustically reflect the physical actions of tracing lines on paper.

The two- and four-note gestures accompanying the cello provide momentary interjections rather than a polyphonic counterpoint. The cello solo is allowed to mark out its musical space, accompanied by these small gestural units which sound as if they are filling in small details whilst the overall contour of the musical 'picture', its foreground, is delineated by the dominant cello. Our main focus, however, is inevitably concentrated on the principal melodic line.



**Figure 6.7:** Paul Klee, *Lost in Thought* (1916)<sup>38</sup>

## II. Self Portrait

'Self Portrait' would appear to be Tan's musical portrait of himself. The sketch shown in **fig. 6.8** below exists on Tan's own website under his work list for *Death and Fire*.<sup>39</sup> Immediately striking is its resemblance to a fermata sign, no doubt paying homage to Klee, whose frequent use of this musical symbol was just as suggestive and ambiguous. Tan's self-portrait suggests the physiognomy of a face seen side on, the white dot representing a left eye, framed by a white band outlining the shape of the head, possibly a head of hair. The image occupies about half the frame and has the appearance of having been roughly torn down the right diagonal. In **fig. 6.5**, Tan

<sup>38</sup> Lithograph; private collection. Taken from Hans L. Jaffé, *Klee* (London: Hamlyn, 1972), 91.

<sup>39</sup> <<http://www.tandunonline.com/Composition/composition.asp?id=21>> [accessed 4 August 4 2006].

assigns this image a similarly styled graphic to the one for 'Portrait' above, but this time with the addition of a grey band dividing the white diagonal bar.



**Figure 6.8:** Tan Dun, *Self Portrait*

Clearly, Tan's inclusion of this musical self-portrait amongst the other Klee-instigated compositions is noteworthy, since the movement was originally published as a separate work in 1983 before being revised in 1992 for inclusion in *Death and Fire*, and it is the longest piece of the set by some margin. Since Tan saw the Klee exhibition at MoMA around 1990, it is clear that 'Self Portrait' owes nothing to the stimulus of Klee.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps, therefore, its inclusion is motivated by Tan's desire to be a virtual part of this ostensible dialogue with Klee by integrating *himself* amongst the other Klee-specific movements. We now re-encounter the question of whether such music can still be considered 'after' a painting if it predates its putative 'stimulus'? As

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<sup>40</sup> Cited in the preface to the score. Since the score was first published in 1995, Tan would have seen the Klee exhibition in approximately 1990.

was argued in the Introduction, the fact that it forms part of this work affords it a viable relationship with Klee's ideas and images because we are being invited to hear the musical object in light of this context.

According to Tan this is the second structural section, sitting roughly in the middle of the work, and like the earlier 'Portrait' it is scored exclusively for strings. The cello solo between bars 85 and 100 (**ex. 6.4**) is stylistically similar to the one heard between bars 33 and 47 of 'Portrait'.



**Example 6.4:** bars 86–90

This time, however, the scoring is for a full string section: Violins 1 and 2 (at times divided into eight individual parts), viola, cello and double bass, resulting in a thickening of the texture compared to 'Portrait'. Many of the same kinds of sound effect that we saw in 'Portrait' are generated here: for example, the slapping of the strings and the fingerboards to make thudding percussive sounds, bows deeply pressed into the strings to produce a very rough texture, and the abundant use of glissandi. Additional techniques include *col legno* and the use of unpitched notes, particularly in the violins and violas, played at the highest registers possible.

Notable features of this piece concern Tan's use of a musical foreground and background, recalling Klee's visual use of this technique. At bar 1, Violin 1 plays triple *piano* semiquaver quintuplets all on the E string, of indefinite pitch apart from the instruction to play the 'highest notes'. A similar pattern enters at bar 3, played by Violin 2 on the highest notes of the A string (**ex. 6.5**). The two instruments effect a

‘whispering’ or ‘chattering’ pattern that continues until bar 13, where it reaches a double *forte* marking from the crescendo instigated in bar 11.

**Example 6.5:** bars 1–5

Throughout this episode, the duo of viola and cello plays a contrasting sliding melody replete with glissandos and the serrated marking mentioned earlier. Again, an analogy may be drawn with the rough-sounding bowing and the act of pressing a pen or pencil deeply into the paper: the bowing provides a thicker and coarser sound and the pencil a deeper and more visible impression on the surface. As we saw in ‘Portrait’, Tan seems to emulate the *production* of his portrait as much as the portrait itself.

**Example 6.6:** bars 12–16

This episode culminates with the violent quadruple *forte* of the double bass and a percussive beating on the body of the instrument, first with the palms of the hands and then with fingernails (ex. 6.6). The ‘chattering’ ends from the upper strings and the aural texture thickens in bar 16 with the *divisi* second violins ‘playing with noise behind the bridge’. The slap of the E double bass string produces a striking effect that serves to interrupt the reverie just gone. Here, then, we have several layers or voices: the background chattering in violins 1 and 2, the rough and scratchy viola glissandos, the disjointed, undulating melody from the cello, and the percussive beating of the palm and fingernails on the double bass. It is possible to argue that the influence of the Chinese musical aesthetic is felt through the linear, non-harmonic gestural style, together with the playing of a limited amount of pitch material using varied types of attack, dynamics, bowing techniques, glissandos and rhythms – all of which draw attention to the movement’s surface structure.

### III. Death and Fire

The third and final structural section, according to Tan’s layout of the work, ‘Death and Fire’, shares its name with the main title of the composition, and is the only one of the three sections to be named directly after a Klee painting – *Tod und Feuer*.

Stylistically, the painting is markedly different from Klee’s earlier work. Gone is the delicate tracery that characterised paintings like *Die Zwitscher-Maschine*. Instead in this, his last period, he paints in heavy black lines and moves increasingly towards recognisable figuration. Klee had previously worked almost exclusively with notebook-sized paintings, but in the period from 1937 until his death in 1940 he made increasing use of larger formats, up to four or five feet in width or height, although at 46 x 44 cm this painting still retains the modest, intimate proportions of his earlier

work. In addition, these later works have a striking element of symbolism, and this painting is no exception.



**Figure 6.9:** Paul Klee, *Tod und Feuer* (1940)<sup>41</sup>

The weave of the canvas material, plainly visible through the thinly-applied oils, and its frayed, torn-off edges seem symbolically to blur the very boundaries between art and reality – the foundation of his art seeping through to the surface. Thick, black outlines describe a gleaming white facial figure in the centre of the painting, a stick-like figure dominates the right side, and we are presented with a partial glimpse of what appears to be a large sphere at the bottom of the painting from which extends a platform that supports a sun-like globe. The large sphere possibly

<sup>41</sup> Oil on canvas, 46 x 44 cm, Paul Klee-Stiftung, Kunstmuseum Bern.

represents the Earth and shows its affinity to the face of 'Man' via the neck-like connection of the black line extending from the orb. The stick figure on the right appears to be impaling the skull of the white face. The ghoulish face itself looks like a death mask, created from an elongated half circle, its features clearly formed from the letters of the word 'Tod'. The incandescent red and orange that surrounds the face is presumably representative of 'fire'. The image also embodies links to the historical tradition of the 'memento mori': the impaling of the white skull face by the stick figure is clearly suggestive of death, and perhaps the stark whiteness of the face and its suggestion of a sickly pallor is representative of Klee himself.<sup>42</sup>

**Example 6.7:**

Vc.

Cb.



bars 1–5

The movement opens with the unison cellos and double basses transposing the Paul Klee theme that opened the first movement (**ex. 6.7**). The extended fermata, with its dramatic hairpin crescendo and decrescendo (*ppp* to *ffff* and back), give the line a sense of steadily increasing and decreasing weight and thickness, creating a thick, tactile surface, and this 'dark' timbre reflects the painting's subject matter and texture.

The melody has a searching quality, perhaps because of the falling semitone intervals in bar 4, which, alternated with ascending sixths, result in a rapid registral ascent, culminating in a quadruple *forte*. At bar 6, with the arrival on G#, the string section is engaged in extending an E major chord, trilled for three bars. Then at bar 9, above the E major triad held by the tuba and trombone, Trumpets 1 and 2 play a three-note figuration whose muted and sombre gesture effects a distant-sounding call far

<sup>42</sup> Klee had been suffering from a rare and fatal skin disease called scleroderma for a number of years.

removed from a fanfare in its audible dissolution. This two-bar episode continues twice more until bar 15.

But it is the final five bars (21–25) which are the most dramatic in conveying a narrative that seems connected to the painting (**ex. 6.8**). At bar 21 the clarinets continue their E crescendo from bars 19 and 20, and the four horns play a unison E. Tan instructs the orchestral players inactive at this point to sing this E in ‘real’ pitch to the phoneme ‘wu’, while the instruments crescendo, culminating quadruple *forte*, on the note E, which is emphatically sounded by the tubular bell on the first beat of bar 22. A narrative closure, then, is brought about by this blatant return to the E that we first encountered in ‘Portrait’. The striking of this tubular chime marks a ceremonious finality to the movement and the work as a whole, and may be heard as a death knell in the context of the painting, with its sinister title. This reading is supported by the gradual fading away of the remaining instruments and voices, the bell chiming very softly twice more, before it too fades away into the distance. The final beat of the movement, and therefore the composition, is played out by a sudden burst of frenetic energy, marked quadruple *forte* and played *tremolando* in the strings with flutter-tonguing in the winds (clarinets and horns), as if taking a last, desperate gasp of life. In this way, the musical experience provides an example of ‘death’ as a concept circumventing Klee’s visual representation, along with elements (across the three ‘portrait’ sections) of a birth-to-death narrative.

While the music’s sombre nature – suggested by the thick string texture, distant trumpet calls, and solemn chimes – might be evident to the listener without knowledge of its stimulus, there is little doubt that, considered alongside each other, the music and the painting generate interpretative implications that neither would give rise to independently.

**Example 6.8:** full score, bars 21–25

### 6.3.2 Part II: Inserts 1–7

#### Insert 1: Animals at Full Moon



**Figure 6.10:** Paul Klee, *Tiere im Vollmond* (1927)<sup>43</sup>

‘Insert 1: Animals at Full Moon’ is titled after Klee’s line drawing *Tiere im Vollmond* (1927, **fig. 6.10**). This is a curious drawing that superficially resembles a child’s doodle. We can see the representations of what appear to be four fox-like creatures gathered under the circle that represents the full moon mentioned in the title. Save obviously for the moon and the creatures’ eyes, the figures appear to be constructed from one single line, though this is a clever illusion. The wandering line which, by virtue of its execution, describes the trace of movement, aligns itself with Klee’s ‘Creative Credo’, in particular the idea that ‘[t]he pictorial work springs from

<sup>43</sup> In the F. C. Schang Collection, New York. Taken from G. di San Lazzaro, *Klee: a Study of his Life and Work*, trans. Stuart Hood (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), 79.

movement, is itself fixated movement, and is grasped in movement (eye muscles)'.<sup>44</sup>

For this drawing is clearly borne in a temporal manner in both its creation and in our experience of it, and provides one of the finest examples of taking a 'line on a walk':

'The original movement, the agent, is a point that sets itself in motion. A line comes into being. It goes out for a walk, so to speak, aimlessly for the sake of the walk.'<sup>45</sup>

This is not the only example of a Klee drawing that appears to have been completed in one continuous gesture.

## Cries

Tan marks the piece 'Andante amoroso', and in bars 1 and 2 we can hear the viola play the 'Paul Klee theme' (E–F#–F) against a sustained second inversion triad of E major played by Violin 2 and Cello. The harp's octaves sound like the gentle stirring of the creatures, which then emit their cries, played on the reeds of the clarinet and oboe at bars 3 and 4 (**ex. 6.9**). That Tan claims that neither this nor the other movements are representations of any of the paintings must surely be cast in doubt, given the overt nature of these gestures and their similarity to animal cries.

Andante amoroso (♩ = 62)

Picc.

Fl.

Ob.

Cl. in Bb

**Example 6.9:** bars 1–5

<sup>44</sup> 'Creative Credo', in *Notebooks*, vol. 1, 78.

<sup>45</sup> Cited in the programme guide to the exhibition: 'Paul Klee: the Nature of Creation', Hayward Gallery, London, 17 January – 1 April 2002.

The piccolo continues these 'cries' in bar 5. In addition, between bars 25 and 26 there is the first occurrence of a two-bar gestural unit, played by three piccolos, which seems to embody another animal cry, repeated in bars 27–28 and 33–34 (**ex. 6.10**).



**Example 6.10:** bars 25–29

The initial 'cries' on the oboe and clarinet reeds appear again immediately following this episode in bar 35, before returning in an interlocutory fashion to the gestural unit played by the piccolos mentioned above, giving the piece a sense of closure, rather like the quasi-single line that Klee uses to begin and complete his drawing. Once again we hear the Paul Klee theme, this time in the muted cello between bars 29 and 30. Interestingly, the passage between bars 29 and 35 is also identical in pitch material (except for the F# in bar 31) to bars 1–6 of 'Death and Fire'. Thus, in the order of the work, this first Insert anticipates the closure of the work and also provides it with cohesion through re-presenting pitch material seen earlier on the same instrument.

### Single Line and Overlap

In this movement, Tan appears to emulate the continuous line seen in the drawing. From the opening bar, an E major sonority is extended across the strings. Cutting across these sustained notes and lines are the gestural cries mentioned above. At the end of this episode, bar 10, the *divisi* cellos' trilled line continues into bar 11, played

with a glissando down to the  $A\equiv$  (ex. 6.11). Thus the same pitched musical 'line' continues from the previous texture.

### Example

6.11:

bars 6–11

This effect recurs from the second beat of bar 20, when Violin 1 emerges from the previous texture, and again at the end of the piece between bars 37 and 38, when Violin 2 plays solo in the final bar on C#. Similarly, from bar 23, following on from the orchestral tutti, a violin solo is presented, marked glissando with grace notes, which begins on the final note (D#) of the previous tutti. Again, this solitary musical line emerges cleanly from the dense string ensemble, like the wandering lines in Klee's drawing, ascending via the glissando to the D# one octave higher at bar 25. Here, the listener gets the sense of motion extending outwards from within a static chord. Despite the return of the brass and woodwinds at bar 25, the solo violin continues holding the sustained D#, this time one octave higher, until bar 27. The musical line continues with a falling glissando to G# at bar 29, an ascent to the D# at bar 32, and a further fall to the G# at bar 34 (ex. 6.12).



**Example 6.12:** bars 25–34

Discussing the reception of a painting, Klee states:

Receptively it is limited by the limitations of the perceiving eye. The limitation of the eye is its inability to see even a small surface equally sharply at all points. The eye must “graze” over the surface, grasping sharply portion after portion, to convey them to the brain which collects and stores the impressions. **The eye travels along the paths cut out for it in the work.**<sup>46</sup>

Such ‘grazing’ naturally implies accumulation and the process of time, for such wandering does not occur instantaneously – according to Adorno’s position that we saw earlier in Part I, where time is immanent in the painting. Moreover, collecting and storing impressions suggests the role of memory; perhaps an analogous mechanism to how we collect and store musical impressions as we listen to a piece of music. The phenomenal experience of the painting, then, becomes like a metaphorical journey, and the natural entailment is that we go on journeys with our bodies, such as we might walk along a forest path. Following Klee, it would seem that we experience painting in time, phenomenologically, because it becomes a lived experience that we traverse in a temporal manner. Accordingly, *Tiere im Vollmond* seems to provide an excellent example of just such a pathway for the eyes to ‘graze’ across, in the line which circumscribes the animal figures and their graphical relationships. Clement

<sup>46</sup> Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbooks*, 33 (bold original).

Greenberg, too, notes that Klee's line 'indicates, directs, relates, connects';<sup>47</sup> and, indeed, in this instance we literally have a line to follow.

And *mutatis mutandis*, is it possible for the listener to follow these sustained lines of music in a way that resembles the viewer's gaze, thereby unlocking the frozen or implied time contained within the line drawing? It might be argued that Tan 'draws' a musical analogy between the overlapping musical voices and the tangled lines in Klee's drawing. Together with this component, Tan has composed the above-mentioned gestural units which, played by the winds, do seem to embody animal cries and thus animate the representative aspect of the drawing. The music cannot depict every salient feature of the animals, so Tan presents what we might call a musical synecdoche by conveying an implied voice from the animals rather than the animals themselves – an implied part of the representation comes to stand for the whole.

In Part I, we saw how Klee regards physical space as a temporal concept and that what the beholder does is temporal too. From a phenomenological point of view, Tan has enacted something aurally similar to what the roaming eye might do. This argument and 'view' of the music is formed from what Scruton calls the 'deliberate construction of an intentional object from the infinitely ambiguous instructions implicit in a sequence of sounds'.<sup>48</sup> The music animates the drawing because we assume that its attributes belong to the visual realm when in fact they really belong to us, emanating as they do from our imaginative projection.

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<sup>47</sup> 'An Essay on Paul Klee', in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 3: *Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-56*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 7.

<sup>48</sup> Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetic Understanding: Essays in the Philosophy of Art and Culture* (London: Methuen, 1983), 88.

## Insert 2: Senicio<sup>49</sup>



**Figure 6.11:** Paul Klee, *Senicio* (1922)<sup>50</sup>

*Senicio* (1922) is one of the best known of Klee's paintings and appears as the title for 'Insert 2: Senicio', which is effectively the third movement of the work. The painting is constructed from squares and depicts the upper portions of a human figure: square-edged shoulders and neck, and inner squares appearing to form the neck and the round head. Indeed, the figure in the painting seems roughly symmetrical about these squares, divided vertically down the middle and into three horizontals. The word *senecio* translates from the Latin as 'old man', but is also commonly associated with the genus of the daisy family or groundsel. It may be for this reason that Klee chose for this image the dominant colours of white, yellow and orange.

In any case, Klee's paintings are renowned for their humour, and *Senicio* is a good example of that. It is an amusing caricature with asymmetrical eyes looking

<sup>49</sup> The correct spelling of the Paul Klee painting is *Senecio*.

<sup>50</sup> Oil on gauze, 40.5 x 38 cm, Kunstmuseum, Basel.

askance against the comical representations of eyelids. The subject of the painting is unknown, except for the designation *Senecio*, but it is generally held to be another self-portrait by the artist. Part of its appeal is perhaps its childlike, clownish appearance, something that gives it an air of benevolence or, perhaps, self-mockery.

Marked 'Misterioso', the movement opens with percussion, comprising cowbell, woodblocks, roto and Chinese tom-toms. The swift ascending and descending figure played on the roto toms and then on the woodblock lends playfulness to the proceedings through the woodblock's association with children's toy instruments, but also in the way it emulates a sound not unlike the popping of cheeks.

Underscored by the staccato timpani, the brass instruments in bar 2 present, staccato, superimpositions of minor thirds transpositionally combined at the interval of a tone (**ex. 6.13**). This section is immediately followed by the first appearance of a staccato string section in bar 3, marked triple *forte* and based on the Klee theme (A–B–B $\equiv$ ). On the second beat of this bar, the four horns are instructed to 'breath[e] through the instruments', creating a playful wheezing sound. Once again this adds a bodily component to the music that is especially fitting for *Senecio*. In phenomenological terms, our own bodily experiences of breathing and wheezing are implicated in the process of listening to this effect.

Next we hear a playful antiphonal effect between the bassoons and the bass clarinet (marked staccato) and the Chinese tom-toms and cowbells, which continues the previously heard disjointed rhythm caused by the alternation of semi-to-demisemiquaver rhythm. Episodes of ostinati or small gestural units like those seen in bars 2 and 4 constitute the style of this piece, perhaps reflecting the imagined jerky movements of *Senecio*.

Insert 2: Senicio

15

Misterioso (♩ = 140) 5

The score is handwritten and includes the following parts and markings:

- Picc.**: Piccolo part, marked with a circled '5' at the start.
- Ob.**: Oboe part.
- Cl. in B<sup>b</sup>**: Clarinet in B-flat part.
- Bs. Cl.**: Bass Clarinet part.
- Bn.**: Bassoon part.
- Cbn.**: Contrabassoon part.
- Hn. in F**: Horn in F part.
- Tpt. in B<sup>b</sup>**: Trumpet in B-flat part.
- Tbn.**: Trombone part.
- Tuba**: Tuba part.
- Hp.**: Harp part.
- Perc.**: Percussion part, including:
  - 1. Snare drum (CUE fingers)
  - 2. Snare drum (CUE fingers)
  - 3. Snare drum (CUE fingers)
  - 4. Snare drum (CUE fingers)

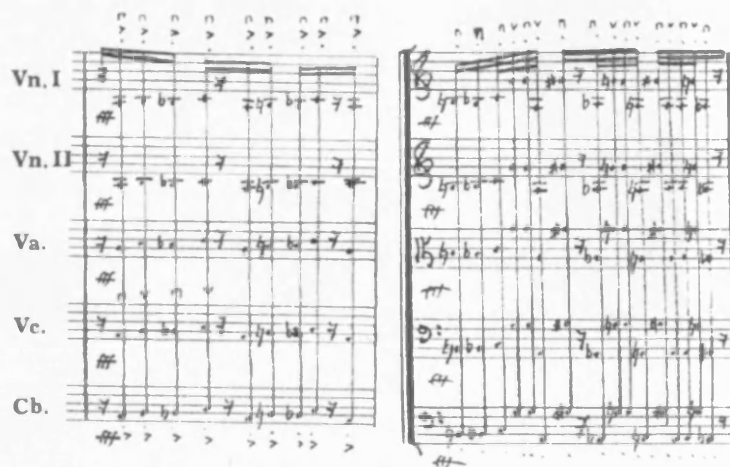
Handwritten annotations include: "change to flute" for Piccolo, "breathing through the" for Horn, "scrub and" for Trumpet, "scrub and" for Trombone, "scrub and" for Tuba, "Cue Harp" for Harp, and "Cue Harp" for Percussion.

**Example 6.13:** bars 1–5 (wind and percussion only)

Following the gestures played by the bass clarinet and bassoons in bars 6–8, the string section bursts into a frenetic three-bar episode beginning with unison semiquavers (first heard in bar 3), marked triple *forte*, staccato, accented on all of the beats, and punctuated by clusters in the horns and brass. In the second bar of this episode (bar 10), the motion becomes increasingly agitated with the interposition of shorter note-values amongst the groupings. It is as if this three-bar section is trying to

characterise *Senecio* being led violently around like a puppet, manipulated erratically by invisible strings controlling him in an erratic fashion (ex. 6.14).

Alternating between the brass and strings, the staccato playing combines with the one- and three-bar episodes throughout the movement to create an impression of frantic, uncoordinated movement. Interspersed with rests, these effects seem to bring *Senecio* jerkily to life.



**Example 6.14:** bars 9–10

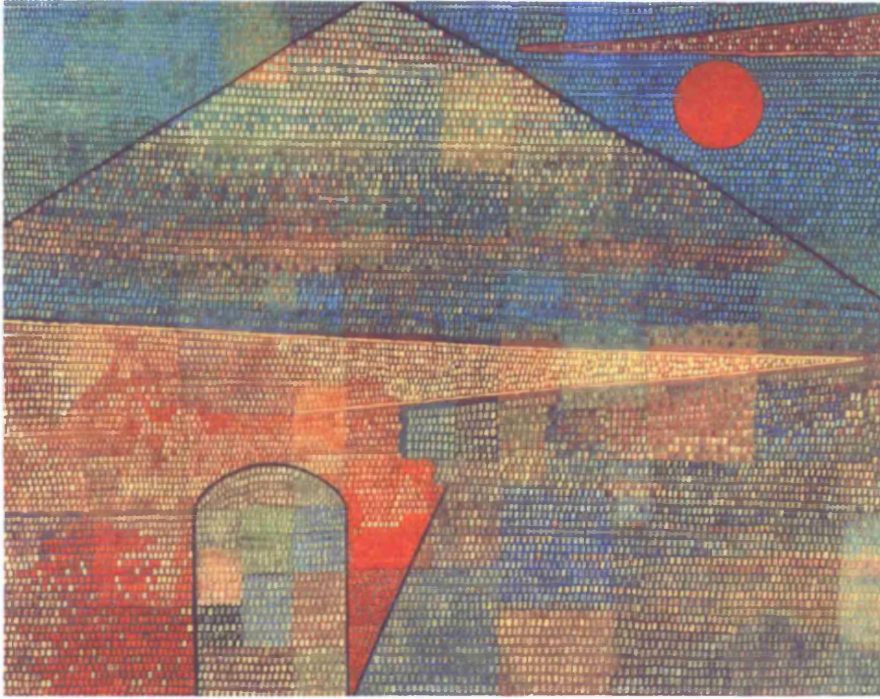
### Insert 3: Ad Parnassum

This unusual movement is named after Klee's *Ad Parnassum* (1932, fig. 6.12), whose title draws on the ideal state of beauty associated with Apollo and the Muses. Klee's interest in music suggests that it may also allude to the eighteenth-century treatise on counterpoint *Gradus ad Parnassum* by the Austrian composer and theorist Johann Josef Fux (1660–1741).<sup>51</sup> Andrew Kagan doubts that Klee could have been unaware of this important work of music theory.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, Klee's lecture notes devised for his teaching at the Bauhaus, detail systems of colour codification, such as the

<sup>51</sup> Fux's *Gradus* was first published in Latin (1725), and such was its influence and popularity it was subsequently translated into German (1742), Italian (1761), French (1763) and English (1791). A modern English translation can be found in *Steps to Parnassus: the Study of Counterpoint*, trans. and ed. Alfred Mann (London: Dent, 1944).

<sup>52</sup> See Andrew Kagan, *Paul Klee: Art and Music*, 42.

‘canon of totality’, that beg comparison to the systems of counterpoint in Fux’s treatise on music.<sup>53</sup>



**Figure 6.12:** Paul Klee, *Ad Parnassum* (1932)<sup>54</sup>

Through the painting’s use of multiple colours presented in squares against a background of larger squares distinguished by their different colours and overlapping paint, Klee creates the visual effect of polyphony that he sought from music.<sup>55</sup> The similarity of the technique to pointillist painting is notable, but the main effect lies in the effect of shimmer or movement of light that seems to occur because of the multiple layering or polyphony of colour, which provides a visual analogue to musical movement. An orange sun is depicted in the upper right-hand corner. It is possible to read this painting architectonically and see the gate-like outline in the bottom left half of the image as an opening or path – the path to knowledge – leading to Mount

<sup>53</sup> See Klee, *Notebooks*, vol. 1: *The Thinking Eye*, 485–91.

<sup>54</sup> Oil on canvas, 100 x 126 cm, Kunstmuseum, Paul Klee-Stiftung, Bern.

<sup>55</sup> See Hajo Düchting, *Painting Music*, 65–79.

Parnassus, whose shape as depicted here may have been inspired by the Pyramids, which Klee visited during his Egyptian trip of 1928.

Tan employs a quartet of solo string players who, between them, create a still backdrop on F# across four octaves (ex. 6.15). From the end of the first bar, the gradually thickening texture and rising dynamics seem to presage the onset of some event. First, the bass drum is attacked triple *forte*, masking the quiet entrance of Trumpet 1, which crescendos to quadruple *forte* against a tremolo on the same note in Trumpet 3. Then in bar 3, the bass clarinet offers a four-note gestural motif, also playing the Klee theme (B–C#–C3), before our attention is diverted by the fast syncopated rhythms emanating from Trumpet 2. Accordingly, this episode seems to convey a mounting urgency before being suddenly and abruptly cut off at the end of bar 4, leaving only the hushed string background.

At bar 5, an animal cry, like that in Insert 1, is produced on the oboe and clarinet reeds. At bar 8, the brass are again instructed to breathe through the instrument, as in ‘Insert 2: Senicio’. Also from that movement, the rhythmic ostinato of the one- and three-bar episodes returns, again in the strings and brass, in bars 26–27. So here we find direct quotations from Inserts 1 and 2. It is hard to determine quite what such self-quotation might mean, but it may relate to what Andrew Kagan writes regarding *Ad Parnassum* as the realization of Klee’s theories about ‘contrapuntal drawing’.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, there is a striking counterpoint between the mountain’s apex and the opposite-pointing acute triangle next to the ‘gateway’. Its exact resemblance to Klee’s drawing of a conductor’s two-in-a-bar time – ‘the accented first beat appears [as] a downward vertical’ –<sup>57</sup> affords it a clear musical

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<sup>56</sup> See Kagan, *Paul Klee: Art and Music*, 88.

<sup>57</sup> For an illustration of this see Klee, *Notebooks*, vol. 1: *The Thinking Eye*, 274.

description. Tan's re-use of earlier musical ideas therefore accords with Klee's own re-use of his earlier theories and musical analogies.

CL in B $\flat$

Ba. Cl.

Bn.

Cbn.

Hn. in F

Tpt. in B $\flat$

Tbn.

Tuba

Hp.

Perc.

Andante ( $\text{♩} = 70$ )

Vn. I

Vn. II

Va.

Vc.

Cb.

5

**Example 6.15:** bars 1–5

Andrew Kagan, in his penetrating discussion of *Ad Parnassum*, explains how Klee eschewed representation and 'sought to create absolute painting, rather than

musical painting'.<sup>58</sup> Klee, then, as we have said previously, is being careful here to avoid naïve imitation; instead he was interested in learning from and applying the vertical depth component of polyphonic music. Of import here is the notion that it was music that could freeze time by presenting several voices at once. In Klee's words: 'the simultaneity of several independent themes is something that is possible not only in music; typical things in general do not belong just in one place, but have their roots and organic anchor everywhere and anywhere.'<sup>59</sup> Tan's re-use of his earlier musical themes offers an analogy here, albeit a rather tenuous one. Perhaps the closest parallel to the painting that may be drawn is the movement's steadily increasing dynamics, culminating in the crescendo vocalizations across the final five bars of all the parts, and its sonic resemblance to the zenith of *Ad Parnassum*, with its visual and metaphorical significance as suggested by Kagan.

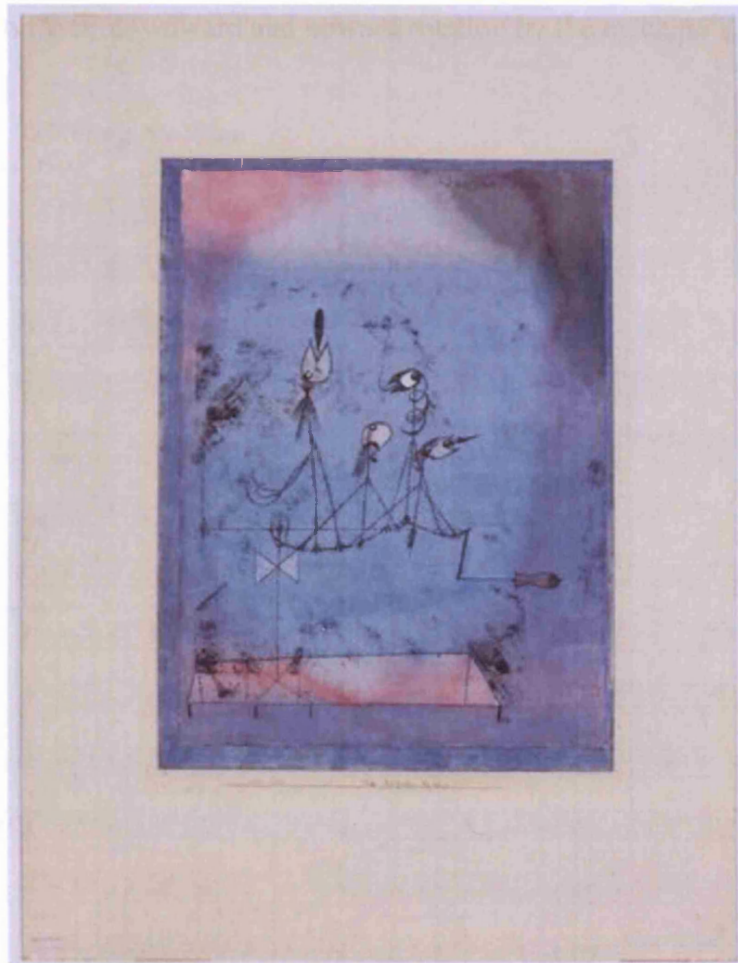
#### **Insert 4: The Twittering Machine**

This fourth Insert is named after Klee's painting *Die Zwitscher-Maschine* (**fig. 6.13**). It shows what seems to be a group of four birds perched on a pole turned by a crank handle on the right-hand side. The mechanism appears supported on top of some type of stand on the left side of the picture – a music stand, perhaps, from which the birds read their songs. The background of the picture is mainly turquoise, with the upper third in a cloudy pink, reminiscent of an early sunrise announcing the beginning of this unique dawn chorus. The bird on the far left has raised its head to a full vertical tilt, and because of the hyperextension of its tongue it appears to be twittering at maximum volume. The other three birds seem to be in different phases of their song. H. W. Janson wrote of this painting that '[w]ith a few simple lines, [Klee] has created

<sup>58</sup> Kagan, *Paul Klee: Art and Music*, 57.

<sup>59</sup> Klee, Jena *Kunstverein* lecture (1924), cited in Kagan, *Paul Klee: Art and Music*, 54.

a ghostly mechanism that imitates the sound of birds, simultaneously mocking our faith in the miracles of the machine age and our sentimental appreciation of bird song'.<sup>60</sup>



**Figure 6.13:** Paul Klee, *Die Zwitscher-Maschine* (1922)<sup>61</sup>

This painting has been the subject of many musical compositions, in particular those by the composers Peter Maxwell Davies, Gunther Schuller, Giselher Klebe and Harrison Birtwistle.<sup>62</sup> In the context of Tan's composition, 'The Twittering Machine' comes across as the most overtly representational of the work's ten movements, in its

<sup>60</sup> H. W. Janson, *History of Art* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1962), 527.

<sup>61</sup> Oil drawing (traced) and water-colour on paper backed with cardboard, 63.8 x 48.1 cm, MoMA, New York.

<sup>62</sup> *Five Klee Pictures* (1959–62), *Seven Studies on Themes of Paul Klee* (1959), *Die Zwitscher-Maschine* (1950), and *Carmen Arcadiae Mechanicae Perpetuum* (1977), respectively.

'Twittering Machine' opens with indeterminately-pitched woodwinds playing downward and upward glissandos, emulating the kind of sound that we might imagine the birds making on their downward and upward rotation by the machine's crank.

**Example 6.16:** bars 1–5

In addition, Tan instructs the oboists to use the reed only, emphasising the focus on the timbral qualities of the sound rather than the pitches themselves. Accordingly, the staggered introduction of the winds in bar 1 suggests the turning of the crank and its respective activation of each of the birds depicted in the painting, represented here by the flute, the oboe and the clarinet. This whole episode is accompanied by the brass, who are instructed to clap their mouthpieces alongside the rattling of sleigh bells in the percussion. The result is a rhythmic ostinato, possibly intended to represent the mechanism turning the crankshaft (ex. 6.16).

On the third beat of bar 4, a half-black circle symbol appears, which Tan explains in his performance notes as a vocalization that denotes an ‘unvoiced sound such as breathing and whispering’.<sup>63</sup> The appearance of the symbol is accompanied here by the instruction ‘twittering’ and appears across all the winds parts. The same symbol also appears across the strings, again with the ‘twittering’ instruction – though this time on beats two and four. In bar 6, the woodwinds (excluding the flutes) and brass (excluding the tuba and trombone) have the instruction ‘key-sounding’ in semiquavers, and the strings are directed to finger ‘harshly without bow-playing’, which creates an aural simulation of the birds running about their perches. The pizzicato quavers, marked ‘behind the bridge’ at bar 11, may be interpreted as a suggestion of the birds capering around (ex. 6.17).

**Example 6.17:**  
bars 11–15

The musical score for Example 6.17, bars 11–15, is presented for five parts: Vn. I, Vn. II, Va., Vc., and Ch. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Handwritten annotations include 'pizz (behind the bridge)' and 'f' (forte). A circled number '15' is visible in the top right corner of the score.

<sup>63</sup> See full score, *Tan Dun, Death and Fire: Dialogue with Paul Klee*.

Tan has used techniques, then, which create sonic effects implying the various sounds that might be made by the birds in the painting, and in this way provide a good example of imitative, or what Carolyn Abbate calls 'isosonorous', representation, discussed in the Introduction. Accordingly, this insert exemplifies an overt kind of representation: Tan has decided to interpret the subject matter head-on by giving the depicted creatures a voice. In this way, it bears comparison to the earlier movement 'Senicio', for there we argued that the puppet figure was somehow brought to life by musical animation. However, the fact that these interpretations are of the subject matter depicted draws into question their representational status: can they be said to be representations of the paintings themselves if their focus is upon the subject, the concept even, rather than the rendering itself? On the other hand, these representations would appear to depend more than others on the paintings concerned and a listener's knowledge of them. In other words, do these movements make adequate musical sense away from the paintings, and can the movements offer a full aesthetic experience without the supplementation of the image?

### **Insert 5: Earth Witches**

The fifth insert is named after Klee's *Erdhexen* (1938, **fig. 6.14**). It appears to be some kind of landscape with, once again, a mountain peak and an indistinct orbital suggestive of the sun or the moon in the upper left portion. These spheres are, as we have seen, ubiquitous in Klee's output; here, though, the sphere is partially hidden by the smoky-brown darkness that fills the sky. Overlaying the painting's rich earthy browns, thick black lines circumscribe ochre symbols that stand in stark relief to the landscaped background and firmly inscribe the curious subject matter and figuration. This strange imagery, presented in a fiery luminescent orange, is ambiguous save for

the clearly discernible face, middle right, with its facial identifiers: eyebrows, eyes, nose and mouth. The ‘smoked’ effect evokes a sense of swirling movement and rhythm and partially obscures the landscape.



**Figure 6.14:** Paul Klee  
*Erdhexen*, (1938)<sup>64</sup>

This almost naïve style of art, with its innocence and lack of artifice, was of special import for Klee, exhibiting a close connection to the ‘nature of creation’. E. H. Gombrich discusses how for Klee “‘form’ always comes first and the ‘subject’ second”. And that out of the emerging forms always comes some ‘real or fantastic subject to his imagination’. Gombrich argues that the influence of the force of nature on Klee was a ‘mysterious power that formed the weird shapes of prehistoric animals, and the fantastic fairyland of the deep sea fauna, which is still active in the artist’s

<sup>64</sup> Oil and watercolour on paper, 48.5 x 31.2 cm, Paul Klee-Stiftung, Kunstmuseum, Bern.

mind and makes his creatures grow'.<sup>65</sup>

44 Insert 5: Earth Witches (♩ = 124) ⑤

**Example 6.18:** bars 1–5 (gestures 1 and 2)

‘Earth Witches’ is the shortest insert of the work at about a minute in duration and is scored for the full orchestra, with a percussion section consisting of eight stones and a whip. The choice of stones here is significant for their associations with the occult. Accordingly, the movement’s subject, ‘Earth Witches’, draws on a long history steeped in the use of stones for rituals, for healing, and for spells, and they are

<sup>65</sup> See E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 12th edn (London: Phaidon, 1972), 459, 462.

clearly identifiable as stones from their first entrance in bar 1 (ex. 6.18). Although of short duration, this insert is frenetic and builds to a climactic volume at bar 26, marked quadruple *forte*. The trilling of the instruments, as can be seen in bars 1 to 3, produces a whirlwind effect, sustained through further upward and downward flourishes, and perhaps serves to emulate the obfuscating cloudiness seen in the painting. In bar 3, the rising upward gesture of the horns, marked triple *forte*, is answered by the woodwinds with trills followed by a rapid descent – gesture 1 (ex. 6.18). Another gesture of acceleration (gesture 2) is produced in bars 4 and 5, where an episode of diminution occurs in the horns through notes of increasingly shorter value.

**Example**  
**6.19:**  
bars 16–20

These two musical ideas – the rapid descent in the woodwinds and the progressive acceleration in the horns – form interlocutory gestures that constitute the signature of this piece through their subsequent repetition at regular intervals throughout the insert. In addition, these gestures are attended by increasing levels of orchestral ‘thickening’. At bars 8–10 the gestures recur, but this time the opening crotchet of gesture 1 is played flutter tongued by the woodwinds, heightening the sense of acceleration and frenzy, and gesture 2 is reinforced by the added forces of the

tuba and trombone augmenting the rhythm. Between bars 18 and 21 the two units reappear, again with some variation: horns and woodwinds enter simultaneously, the former with an elaborated ascending flourish, the latter with an extended trill. The horns this time also trill their long note, again increasing the tension (ex. 6.19). Gesture 2 recurs at bars 20–21, this time joined by the trumpets, trombone and tuba, again thickening the musical texture. Moreover, the dynamic volume of these recurrent gestural units increases steadily, culminating quadruple *forte* on the third beat of bar 21 across all the brass instruments. The gesture occurs once more on the third beat at bar 26 after the climactic episode just gone, presented in canonic form, marked triple *piano* and staccato, and ascending through the woodwinds: from bass clarinet, through clarinet, oboe and flute, to piccolo, before it rises to *forte* on the very last beat of the movement.

Following an examination of the painting, these musical gestures may be heard as representations of the swirling effect of the paint in Klee's work through their dizzying, overlapping rhythms. The rapid rise-and-fall motion of the horns and woodwinds respectively, combined with the trills and flutter tonguing in gesture 1, helps to create this whirlwind effect. The abstract motif that dominates the bottom half of the picture perhaps finds an analogy with the musical gestures discussed. Given the dominance of this motif in the painting, the recursive nature of the musical gestures mentioned seems to reflect this aspect. Furthermore, Klee's motif, whilst patently abstract, does carry representative implications too. These qualities, however, are very much dependent on the viewer's imagination; the 'eyes' represented by the two dots left of centre seem to belong to a phantasmic world.

The ambiguity of Klee's painting invites the viewer to read something into this image and ascribe to it particular qualities. A kind of anthropomorphism is at play

here, but one not necessarily tied to the ascription of human attributes. We, the viewers, therefore become constructive in the realisation of the painting's potential through seeing the motif in various guises. In the same way, the musical gestures, although obviously not coterminous with these visual motifs, may still come to take on various 'appearances' in collaboration with the listener. The conceptual ideation that emerges from viewing or remembering the painting encourages the listener to absorb the musical articulation within this larger imaginative construction.

Furthermore, Tan has doubtless borrowed the eerie imagery associated with the *col legno* markings in the strings (bars 26–30). For the use of the wood of the bow in this manner is heard memorably in the Witches' Sabbath from the last movement of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* ('Songe d'une Nuit de Sabbat') as well as in Saint-Saëns' symphonic poem *Danse Macabre*.

It is very interesting to examine how quickly this piece can assume narrative proportions: the trilling bassoons and bass clarinet in bars 1 and 2 may be interpreted as the 'Earth Witches' busy at their work, perhaps stirring a cauldron. The stones in the percussion (bars 1 and 2) seem to announce the onset of a ritual, and gestures 1 and 2 'intone' the spell through their emphatic-sounding articulation. The increasing dynamics and orchestral thickening reflects the mounting urgency of this fictional incantation. Arguably, then, through associating this movement with both the subject and the painting itself, Tan sets forth something like the mechanism of metaphorical entailment that we discussed in Chapter 3, whereby the use of the stones and *col legno* techniques opens up the rest of the movement's musical properties to be absorbed within the subject territory of the painting.

## Insert 6: Intoxication



**Figure 6.15:** Paul Klee, *Rausch* (1939)<sup>66</sup>

Insert 6 is titled after Klee's painting *Rausch* (1939, **fig. 6.15**). A metallic grey forms the background for this strange ensemble of abstract shapes presented in four colours: light orange, burnt red, straw yellow and light brown. Each one of these shapes is outlined in a smudged, hazy black that seems to make them shimmer against their silvery background. The scene looks to be constituted from the scattered parts of a dismembered body. A leg form is painted in burnt red (lying bottom right), a rotund upturned torso is suggested by the orange balloon-shaped form, the arms are the angled yellow object (bottom left) and the brown 'u' shape (centre right), and the detached head is the burnt-red lozenge shape at the top (left of centre). The elongated head lies on its left side, with the nose anchoring the other features in one long

<sup>66</sup> Tempera on tracing paper mounted on board, 52.7 x 36.2 cm, MoMA, New York.

horizontal stripe. The mouth, represented by the black lozenge-shaped dash, is perpendicular to the nose and is fitted with four straw-yellow teeth. And, finally, the eyes are formed by the two obliquely arranged dots. Several other vagrant shapes remain unidentified, but are presumed to represent the remnants of any other body parts.

*Rausch* is an interesting painting, whose title suggests the loss of self-control through elation, and whose portrayal of dismembered body parts clearly points towards an extreme form of the loss of self – the collapse of the body's integrity and a visual dispersal of its identity. The misplaced eye on the lopsided head adds to the apparent stupefaction, and the shimmery black outlines of the shapes achieved through the tempera and tracing paper impart an almost hallucinogenic aura to the scene.

Moderato (♩ = 89) ⑤

Vn. I  
Vn. II  
Va.  
Vc.  
Cb.

**Example 6.20:** bars 1–5 (string parts only)

The insert is connected to the preceding movement by a trilled (sounding) F in the B $\equiv$  clarinet tied over from Insert 5. Accompanying this trill, the string section successively presents pizzicato Gs at quaver intervals and in successively higher registers, culminating with the G above middle C in Violin 1 (**ex. 6.20**). This process begins again from bar 6, but this time with more frenzy, indicating perhaps the

increasing ‘intoxication’ of the implied figure in the painting, played *arco* and at twice the speed, while rising in dynamic to the triple *forte* in bar 7.

One of the notable features of this insert is its use of material from earlier sections. The first instance of repetition occurs in the reappearance of the horn gesture and woodwind flourishes (bars 9 and 10 respectively) from Insert 5. The double bass in bars 15–20 reintroduces material from ‘Self Portrait’, bars 47–52 (omitting only the trilled F in bar 50). This material is harmonically thickened by the addition of the lower woodwinds doubling two octaves above (bars 18–20 and 23–26). Once again, the entailments, enabled by the subject matter, allow the listener to attach the cause of this increasing musical intensity to the inebriated figure in the painting.



**Example 6.21:** bars 21–26 (percussion parts only)

This effect is strengthened by the canonic percussion entries (Chinese and roto toms), marked *forte*, between bars 21 and 30, playing a rhythm that accelerates from triplet crotchets to sextuplet semiquavers (**ex. 6.21**). Underscoring this, the double bass and lower winds, marked quadruple *forte*, play the ubiquitous Paul Klee theme ( $B \cong C - B \cong$ , bars 34–36), and significantly this version of the theme is the one first encountered in the opening bar of ‘Portrait’. Accordingly, both Klee and Tan become introduced virtually into the piece through the quotation of passages heard in ‘Portrait’ and ‘Self Portrait’. The movement ends with the ‘Ha’ vocalization, which

we encountered also in bar 27 of 'Portrait', fading away across two bars, signifying repose from the previous turbulent passages.

The painting, then, invites a musical narrative, as if the figure had literally blown apart from his intoxication and finally come to rest in one long euphoric sigh. However, such a narrative as this would involve quite a sophisticated interpretation, remembering thematic moments heard in previous movements and identifying their reappearances. For the interpretation to function in this way, the listener must involve themselves in a complex process of re-collection. Tan writes that it is his 'intention that the listener should recognise several pasts in one present', and 'the *profusion* of identities characterizing intoxication is not the *confusion* of drunkenness'.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps the juxtaposition of musical materials associated with specific paintings provides an analogue to the broken segments of the figure in the painting, and also to Tan's view of Klee's oeuvre as a whole, because it suggests that the composer views the work as a whole not as a set of isolated musical responses to the paintings but as a cohesive and integral totality reflecting Klee's larger aesthetic vision. Moreover, the musical materials are not reassembled but retain their earlier identity, like the floating body parts in the painting.

Of import, too, is the increasing density of musical texture. The cocktail of re-presented musical materials conveys with it a concomitant thickening and quickening of the musical gestures as well as a steady increase in dynamic that adds to the exhilaration assumed from the title 'Intoxication'. Of course, some of these repetitions have not been exactly correspondent, but are variations on rhythmic gestures that are sometimes repeated by different instruments and in different registers; this, too, serves

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<sup>67</sup> Tan, 'Death and Fire [...]: an Analysis', 54 (*italics original*).

to add to the feeling of intoxication from the slight disorientation that we experience *under the influence* of these past identities.

The interpretation above has evidently also been framed by the painting's title, the word 'intoxication' itself, for the narrative here imposed upon the imagery has been woven from the word's literal meaning. The movement, then, serves to represent the painting on several levels. First, the ubiquitous restatement of the Klee theme from the 'Portrait' section during one of the insert's most frenetic sections announces the painter's presence and provides coherence with the other movements. Second, the repetitions of gestural material seen earlier combine to represent a musical intoxication through the collection and memory of so many earlier musical identities – we become, therefore, *intoxicated* on the abundance of former sounds and their mutual disconnection, like that of the parts of the figure in the painting. Third, the increasing density of the musical texture, the variation of previous material, the dramatic flourishes and the rising dynamics represent the process of intoxication itself. Finally, the presentations of the musical identities that are now steeped in the associations of their respective paintings provide something akin to the intoxicating effects of seeing a retrospective of Klee's work at breakneck speed. The abundance of the artist's ideas, motifs and visions, as we move from one painting to another, leave one feeling overwhelmed by the impression of a collective, albeit fragmented, whole, like Tan's 'Intoxication' here.

## Insert 7: J. S. Bach

As time passes I become more and more afraid of my growing love of music. I don't understand myself. I play solo sonatas by Bach: next to them, what is Böcklin? It makes me smile.<sup>68</sup>

– Paul Klee

The seventh insert is perhaps the most unusual movement of the work. The other movements, with the exception of Tan's 'Self Portrait', refer to a Klee painting and therefore continue his 'discussion' with the artist, but this piece refers to a fellow composer. The Bach title, however, is not arbitrary and references Klee's especial admiration and respect for Bach who, together with Mozart, represented for him the apex of musical achievement. As we saw, Klee wrote extensively about the influence of Bach upon his own aesthetic ideas, namely fugal and polyphonic principles translated into the visual realm. Will Grohmann writes that Klee believed 'Bach and Mozart could probably help him to formulate certain fundamental principles governing painting, whose lack Goethe had felt – principles around which everything else would fall into place'.<sup>69</sup> In addition, paintings such as *Fugue in Rot* (1921) and *In Bachschen Stil* (1919) exemplify, at least nominally, Klee's links to Bach.

This is the most serene of the ten movements discussed here, in part because of its contrast to the clamorous 'Intoxication' but also because of the dynamic markings which, except in the last few bars, rarely move higher than triple *piano*. The movement opens with the alto flute moving up a tone hinting at the first (whole-tone) interval of the Klee theme, while the A $\equiv$  drone, which concluded Insert 6, continues into the first four bars, establishing a notional A $\equiv$  tonality. The material presented

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<sup>68</sup> Paul Klee writing in 1897, cited in Kagan, *Paul Klee: Art and Music*, 18.

<sup>69</sup> Will Grohmann, *Paul Klee* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1954), 70–71.

here is new to the work and comprises what Tan calls ‘collaged quotation’<sup>70</sup> from Bach’s forty-eight preludes and fugues, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. The first of the quotations appears in bars 3–8 and, in keeping with the tonal context, is taken from the Prelude no. 17 in A $\flat$  BWV 886 (ex. 6.21). In bars 5 and 7–8 the B $\flat$  clarinet quotes bars 2 and 20 of the prelude respectively.

**Example 6.21:** bars 4–8

In bar 8 the harp introduces the second quotation, taken from the opening of the C Major Prelude (BWV 846) of Book I. Its fractured presentation, using additional tied notes and rests, creates an effect of hearing this prelude in memory, strands of the melody breaking through before they are joined by the other quotations. The next and

<sup>70</sup> Tan, ‘*Death and Fire* [...]’: an Analysis’, 56.

final quotation, seven bars from the Prelude no. 4 in C# minor (BWV 849), is played by the solo string quartet from bar 9 onwards (ex. 6.22).

The presentation of these contrapuntal melodies echoes in the independence of voices not only Bach's own counterpoint but also Klee's use of contrapuntal pictorial devices, such as those seen in his *Drawing in Two Voices* (1921–22). Andrew Kagan writes that Klee shifted the focus from closed forms of interactive lines 'to the relationships between lines as distinct, individual entities'.<sup>71</sup> He continues, 'Klee found a solution to the problem of relating one independent line to another; namely, the principles of counterpoint.'<sup>72</sup> To emphasize the function of the melodic line here, Tan explains that 'the degrees of the diatonic scale sound equally, tending to undercut any sense of functional harmony', and '[t]his non-functional character allows a focus on the shape of the line as there is no longer a focus on harmonies in which the lines are moored'.<sup>73</sup>

### Example

6.22:

bars 14–18

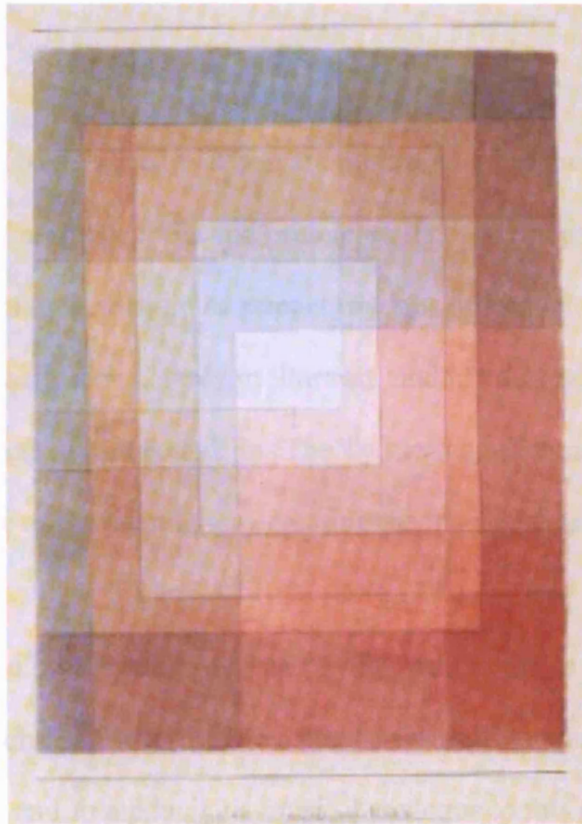
This piece, then, is arguably one of the best examples of a Klee dialogic because it highlights the influence of Bach as the supreme contrapuntist upon the painter through the collaged Bach quotations mentioned. In this way, it demonstrates a musical

<sup>71</sup> Kagan, *Paul Klee: Art and Music*, 44.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>73</sup> Tan, 'Death and Fire [...]: an Analysis', 58.

representation that operates refractively because, as well as citing Bach, Tan points implicitly to Klee's interest in the independence of line and the musical systems of polyphony and counterpoint, providing a musical representation of no one particular painting but of the conceptual underpinnings of Klee's painterly ethos. It also provides dialogue because Tan, like Klee, has looked outside his own artistic medium to incorporate conceptual ideas from another.



**Figure 6.16:** Paul Klee, *Polyphon gefasstes Weiss* (1930)<sup>74</sup>

Moreover, because we recognise the quotations and their original tonal contexts, the quotation of material from the three Bach preludes also has the effect of a collage of colour, through its presentation of fragments in the tonalities of A $\equiv$  major, C major and C# minor. Colour was an essential structural feature of Klee's

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<sup>74</sup> Watercolour with pen and ink on paper mounted on cardboard, 33.3 x 24.5 cm, Kunstmuseum, Paul Klee-Stiftung, Bern.

‘polyphonic’ canvases. Andrew Kagan maintains that Klee’s *Grail* for pictorial polyphony was ‘inextricably bound up in transparent colour depth’.<sup>75</sup> For example, in *Polyphon gefasstes Weiss* (1930, **fig. 6.16**), the painting demonstrates exactly that colour transparency and depth through its overlapping rectangles. In ‘J. S. Bach’ Tan has created something comparable through his collage of quotations with their associated tonalities.

#### 6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter it has been argued that Tan attempts a range of musical responses to Klee’s paintings and aesthetic ideas and principles. These responses have included animation, as evident in the disjointed puppet rhythms of ‘Senicio’, the simulation of the act of drawing itself, seen notably in ‘Portrait’ and in ‘Animals at Full Moon’, and the isosonorous effects of bird sounds in ‘The Twittering Machine’. Furthermore, Tan has interpreted some of the paintings by creating the musical equivalent of an implied narrative.

Thus, we find in ‘Intoxication’ that the fragmented figure is represented by quotations from several of the earlier movements, themselves identifiable with particular paintings, and so producing a musical analogue to this scattered identity. It would seem, also, that in this movement Tan responds more powerfully to the image itself than the meaning implied by the title – that is, the scattered dismemberment of an identity. Similarly, a musical narrative seems woven around the symbolic imagery of ‘Earth Witches’, with its particular use of instrumental sounds historically associated with witchery and ritual. ‘Death and Fire’ also seems to impose a musical narrative through its climactic ending. It seems that Tan, in these latter examples,

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 78.

rather than focusing exclusively on their rendering, has constructed his musical response around the concept emanating from their subject matter.

The composition is remarkable for its use of sound effects created from conventional orchestral instruments and some less conventional ones too. And this produces a wide variety of sounds which provide an analogue to Klee's interests in the expressive effects of colour. Of significance too is the focus on musical line. Throughout, Tan composes many single-line gestural units with very little harmonic activity beneath, which again provides an analogue with Klee's investigations into the formalisation of the drawn or painted line. In addition, many of these musical lines are nonetheless cast into the foreground against sustained background voices, resembling Klee's delineation of subjects and patterns on top of layers of transparent colours.

Interestingly, although Tan's musical quotation of Bach highlights the painter's interest in contrapuntal techniques, the 'polyphonic' component is conspicuously absent in the work here. More prominent is the analogy that may be drawn between Klee's working materials and facture (the layering of paint, brush strokes dug into the surface, and even the visibility of the actual canvas as in 'Death and Fire'), and Tan's exploitation of musical materials in a similar way: the scraping and digging of the bow into the strings, sound effects from head joints and mouthpieces of wind instruments, and vocalisations from the instrumentalists involving inarticulate sighs.

Klee, as we have seen, regarded space as a temporal concept, and in creating musical animations of this space, Tan has re-temporalized the paintings. Klee's intent to provide a temporal experience of his artwork has the effect of impeding the viewer from fixing their focus on any one aspect for too long. Similarly, these musical pieces literally extend beyond their frames and so also resist a focused 'gaze' – an effect

made prominent by the continuation of material from one section to the next and also the quotations from earlier and later movements. In Klee's work, too, there is often a sense that the image may be seen from multiple perspectives: 'we can speak of structural rhythm generated by the repetition of the same unit from left to right, or top to bottom.'<sup>76</sup> And on hearing gestural fragments repeated within the same movement, but also in later movements too, we are presented with an audible 'view' of the music's line which is, like Klee's, multidimensional.

However, in comparison with Dutilleux or Feldman, Tan tends more to create sound effects or to 'musicalize' the various subjects depicted in the paintings than to focus on the painted surface and the way it is rendered. Thus, *Death and Fire* may be seen as a departure from these compositions, drawing into question whether its status is that of a representation of the paintings, of their subject matter, or of certain aspects of Klee's aesthetic.

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<sup>76</sup> Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, 22.

## CONCLUSION

This project has asked the question – how, aesthetically, does MaP work? Exploring the idea that the aesthetic experience of the music is somehow enriched by its relationship to the painting, whether that stimulus is physically present or not, Part I aimed to show how the meaning of the work arrives at the point of intersection between the music and the painting through our response to this relationship. Crucially, however, it has been argued that although such meaning is response dependent, it is based on objective properties of the music and the painting. This, then, has not been an exercise in showing how one medium translates into another – what Siglind Bruhn calls transmedialization – nor has it shown that the music performs some kind of equivalent function to the tightly-woven narratives seen in nineteenth-century programme music. Rather it has been an attempt to demonstrate the mechanism of how our understanding of the painting as a field of action directs, selects and connects our attention to aspects of the musical object. By allowing the listener access to the concept of the painting through a title, the composer disambiguates what the music might be about, provoking a particular aesthetic response using this framework.

In addition, the discussions on phenomenology in Part I served to emphasize the bodily unity between the listener and the music, such that, in living through the experience, the listener's identification with the music becomes so complete that the two merge into a single essence. Using this approach, it was argued that both music and painting have the potential for multi-sensory experiences to occur. Thus despite music being processed through ostensibly auditory means it is able to excite in its listeners cross-modal experiences, so that music may also be experienced in spatial

and visual terms. Similarly, applying this model to painting, it can be seen that this domain may be experienced in ways which stimulate senses other than the purely visual. Further still, dismantling the conventional distinction that painting is about space and music about time, we are able to see that there are points where the two media might be said to intersect.

However, to account for the obvious mediation which the title of the music invites, a response theory was needed in order to accommodate *both* the listener's response to MaP as contingent on a necessary relationship with the phenomenal object – music as perceived – *and* the ideation brought to bear on that experience from the absent painting. In other words, the music itself possesses qualities which afford a particular subject position in the listener in conjunction with the painting as a frame of reference. The result is a dialogue between the music and us, mediated by our transference of concepts brought about by the link to the absent painting. The title erects a metaphorical bridge between the painting and the music, across which attributes belonging to either domain might cross; if meaning emerges from this experience it is contingent on this other mediated domain.

It has also been argued that the music does not transparently point at the painting in the way language might, but itself comments on this other experiential domain through its own causal power. Just as the painter's brushwork affects our view of their painted subject, so, too, the musical realization has the potential to affect and elicit experiences in the listener which describe new ways of experiencing the painting. And this is the reason the phenomenological perspective retains its relevance. The immediate physical texture, dynamics and 'colour' of the musical space constitutes the musical object, even if ultimately those aspects may be heard and interpreted differently in light of the painting. Accordingly, each of the three case

studies demonstrates a different mechanism of musical representation – despite there being considerable overlap between certain techniques.

In this way, Morton Feldman's *Rothko Chapel* saturates musical space and time in a similar way to that in which the hues of Rothko's panels immerse and envelop the viewer. The phenomenological encounter with this music seems more about generating an analogous experience to the chapel's quietude rather than the paintings themselves. Nevertheless, there are musical attributes here which may be heard as representing aspects of the ensemble and their painterly surfaces.

Employing a different approach, Henri Dutilleux's *Timbres, Espace, Mouvement: ou La nuit étoilée* seems intent on producing something of the phenomenal impressions of Van Gogh's subject-matter in his painting – as indicated by the qualities in the main title. Synaesthetically, the listener experiences a particular range of musical colour, moments of extreme movement contrasted against relatively static episodes, and space represented by the registral void between the woodwinds and double basses. Imaginatively, it is a small leap to ascribe these musical effects to representations of the painting and its subject matter. Significantly, though, the music seems to express and record something about the turbulent, illusory movement that springs forth from the painterly rendering of the starry sky – it goes beyond the mere subject to comment on the way those forces have been captured by the artist.

In contrast to the other case-study compositions, Tan Dun's *Death and Fire: Dialogue with Paul Klee* animates certain paintings in the set by creating sound effects which seem to belong to the subject matter and its concept within the painting, while effecting rudimentary narratives about others. In the movements 'The Twittering Machine', 'Senicio' and 'Earth Witches', for example, Tan's focus is more on the subject-matter than on its painterly realization. We must ask, therefore, whether

the music is representing the painting or merely a narrative that the painting might, in turn, be said to represent. Notwithstanding this uncertainty, it seems without doubt that through his musical animation and sound effects, Tan has represented the movement and time he sees as frozen in the drawings, and in so doing, unlocked aspects of those forces. Further still, even if Tan is trying to make the subject of the paintings ‘audible’ in time, that subject is in no way indifferent to its painted formulation. For example, Tan produces sounds from his ‘birds’ which connect metonymically with the crank mechanism depicted in the painting *Die Zwitscher-Maschine*, and this ‘turning’ is not merely a concept, but an implied operation taken exclusively from the domain of the painting.

Finally, then, for the listener, can knowledge of these paintings somehow enrich – or at least affect – the aesthetic experience of the music? We have shown how attributes may cross in either direction across the metaphorical bridge that is erected from this territorial intersection between the two media, and potentially this union also allows the musical (and the painterly) attributes to be heard from a certain perspective. It is argued that without this context, the music in many cases would simply not make musical sense. With context, however, it is able to predicate something about its subject – it is no longer dependent entirely on musical meaning – and can thus be heard within this extended field of meaning. There is a possible, although not inevitable, aesthetic experience at stake here. As a potential bearer of meaning, the music stands to signify aspects of the painting and complete the ‘picture’, but only if it ‘fits’ this other domain at some comparative level.

As we said at the beginning of this thesis, whatever helps to form part of an aesthetic experience may be considered as a valid and essential component. In this way, it has been argued that we supplement the musical experience with some kind of

imaginative recreation of the absent painting, allowing us to marshal the musical attributes accordingly. The title effectively mandates such an action, and thus to hear the musical attributes in relation to the painting must to some extent change their function. Accordingly, the music does not change, but its meaning or significance does; and it is this meaning which constitutes the aesthetic experience of the music.

Ultimately, though, it is the listener's *esthetic* response, in tandem with the phenomenal perception of the music, which determines whether the conceptual components from the painting are transmissible into the audible domain. Furthermore, the music may be said to signify aspects of the painting, but these significations are in no way independent of either the music's intrinsic properties or of the painting's field of experience. This fact exposes the fallacy whereby we attach the meaning to the musical object rather than to the experience to which it gives rise in a suitably primed listener. Accordingly, this is not a straightforward linear representation, such as we might find in language or painting. Hearing the musical sounds as belonging to the painting affords them an additional experiential dimension, but on the condition that the listener makes recourse to the domains of both music and painting. And if this mechanism affects how the music is heard, then the meaning that arises cannot be said to be entirely musical, but must also depend on the painting as a frame of reference.

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