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***Portfolio of Compositions and Critical Writing***

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**Abstract**

The portfolio of compositions comprises six pieces: a chamber opera, an orchestral piece and four shorter chamber works. These pieces are diverse and distinct from one another but collectively explore aesthetic tensions relating to tonality, aura and ontology. The largest piece is a chamber opera setting Margaret Atwood's novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, which has been flexibly scored as a series of fragments in order to reflect the quality of her text. The remaining pieces draw influence from poetry, landscape and the environment. They all encompass a series of material contrasts but attempt to simply contain these tensions in some way, leaving them partially unresolved.

The thesis is a re-assessment of the music of the Ukrainian composer, Valentin Silvestrov, in particular, his 'metamusic' approach to composition that treats pre-existing styles as a form of musical metaphor. Through a series of comparisons with landscape and photography, I offer new vantage points for approaching the aesthetic issues present in his work, relating to aura, imitation and historical reference. The metaphors of landscape and photography might appear far removed from his work, but mediated by the work of the artist Gerhard Richter, offer a basis for critically analysing Silvestrov's approach. Furthermore, by drawing upon the theories of Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes and the geographer, Stephan Harrison, I demonstrate how concepts from other disciplines can be recast in order to be effective for approaching both Silvestrov and Richter. As a form of conclusion, I consider the role of photography in the production of CD covers and how this relates to the reception of Silvestrov's metamusic in a commercial setting.

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*The relationship between my portfolio of compositions and critical writing*

For the critical writing component, I have decided not to directly engage with issues in my own compositional work but undertake an in-depth exploration of the music of the Ukrainian composer, Valentin Silvestrov. In some respects, Silvestrov's music has directly influenced and shaped my own compositional work. For example, in *Larch & Decay* and *Night, or Nothing* I have explored contrasts between expressive melodic, tonal material set against more abstract or atonal textures. More specifically, I have attempted to engage with the aura quality present in much of Silvestrov's work by experimenting with various devices for creating a sense of fragility and distance.

The thesis as a whole is also a reflection of my approach to composition more generally. I draw ideas and influences from the visual arts, geography and politics, often devising new conceptual frameworks for a piece before considering harmonic content. The overlaps and contrasts between different artistic disciplines, such as those between Valentin Silvestrov's 'metamusic' and Gerhard Richter's photo paintings, are a rich resource. Furthermore, the aesthetic issues addressed in the thesis, from ontology to image theory, are part of an ongoing focus in my musicological work. This questioning of aesthetic forms and structures underlies my compositional approach, leading to the flexible scoring of my opera, *The Handmaid's Tale*, or in the presentation of William Blake's poem *Night* in my piece, *Night, or nothing*.

The topics of landscape and geography have become a feature of my compositional work as I have developed an interest in sound, space and the environment. In the thesis, however, landscape is explored in a much more rigorous way, drawing upon previous study of glaciology. While its application as an analytical tool to the music of Silvestrov is as a metaphor, the intention is to interpret landscape in a multidimensional way. Glacial landscapes are, in some respects, a confluence of mythical, artistic and scientific aspects and it is because of this multidimensional quality that they have informed both my compositional and musicological work.

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## **Critical Writing Component**

*Images of Metamusic:*  
Photographs, Landscapes and Photos of Landscapes  
in the Work of Valentin Silvestrov and Gerhard Richter

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## **Portfolio of Compositions**

*There is No Sign*, for choir (SSAATTBB)  
*Night, or Nothing*, for mezzo-soprano and piano  
*Nunatak*, for a consort of six viols  
*Larch & Decay*, for chamber orchestra  
*Broken Thumbs*, for orchestra  
*The Handmaid's Tale*, a chamber opera

***Images of Metamusic:***  
**Photographs, Landscapes and Photos of Landscapes  
in the Work of Valentin Silvestrov and Gerhard Richter**

***New vantage points***

*I do not write new music. My music is a response to, and an echo of, what already exists.*<sup>1</sup>

Valentin Silvestrov

*As far as the surface is concerned – oil on canvas, conventionally applied – my pictures have little to do with the original photograph. They are totally painting (whatever that may mean). On the other hand, they are so like the photograph that the thing that distinguished the photograph from all other pictures remains intact.*<sup>2</sup>

Gerhard Richter, *Notes 1964-5*

Even in these distilled expressions of their creative processes, it is clear that the recasting of pre-existing materials is both a crucial and problematic element for the composer Valentin Silvestrov and the artist Gerhard Richter. It should be noted at the outset that Silvestrov's and Richter's creative processes are distinct from other postmodern approaches to historical reference where utility is the primary concern. The depth of experience from which Silvestrov and Richter draw their sources is readily analysable. For example, Silvestrov possesses an intimate knowledge of classical and avant-

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<sup>1</sup> Valentin Silvestrov, untitled text on *Requiem for Larissa*, *ECM Records.com*. Accessed on 25/10/11 at [http://www.ecmrecords.com/Background/Background\\_1778.php](http://www.ecmrecords.com/Background/Background_1778.php)

<sup>2</sup> Gerhard Richter, 'Notes, 1964-5', *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings and Interviews - 1962-1993*, edited by Hans-Ulrich Obrist, translated from the German by David Britt, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995), 34.

garde compositional method alongside the conventions of Ukrainian music. Similarly, Richter has developed a highly refined technique as a painter and sculptor whilst having also been involved in Fluxus-related performance art earlier in his career. Both Silvestrov and Richter, born in 1937 and 1932 respectively, have witnessed and participated in shifts in artistic trends and approaches from the modern to the postmodern. The outward appearance of Silvestrov's so-called 'metamusic' pieces and Richter's photo paintings is often explicitly imitative but as an extension of both modern and postmodern movements. However, a preoccupation with the outward appearance of their works overlooks the underlying constitutive forces, which are shaped by what Adorno terms 'internal, tacit experience':

Imitation is constitutive of art works, regardless of whether they are performed or not. In this constitutive sense imitation is achieved by experience – ideally by internal, tacit experience. This kind of imitation interprets art by culling the overall meaning from the signs of a work and by retracing the steps and points at which the work appears.<sup>3</sup>

Imitation here should be interpreted as being part of a broader aesthetic strategy rather than simply an artistic method. The process of culling the overall meaning from the signs of a work is an essential part of Silvestrov's and Richter's treatment of historical materials. Our analytical approach to their works should arguably do the same. In order to retrace the points at which their works appear, we should perhaps inhabit them in the way that a

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<sup>3</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, translated by Christian Lenhardt, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedmann, (London: Routledge & Paul, 1984), 183.

geographer inhabits a landscape. The metaphors of landscape and photography might appear far removed from the work of Valentin Silvestrov but, mediated by Gerhard Richter, they suggest new vantage points from which to approach his work.

**Ex. 1 - Lesende/Reader (1994) by Gerhard Richter  
[Oil on canvas]**

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright reasons. The image was sourced at:

<http://www.gerhard-richter.com/art/search/detail.php?paintid=8054&artworkID1=paintings&title=reader&p=1&sp=32>

## ***Authenticity, the original and the reproduction***

In his essay from 2005, 'Barthes's Punctum', Michael Fried critically analyses Roland Barthes's theories relating to photography.<sup>4</sup> His primary focus is Barthes's essay, *Camera Lucida*, in which Barthes outlines his categories of *studium* and *punctum* as a framework for assessing his experience of engaging with the photograph.<sup>5</sup> Fried cites a number of visual examples in that essay, including Richter's photo painting of his wife from 1994 entitled *Reading*. (Ex. 1) Fried's concern here is the significance of pose and theatricality to Barthes and cites this photo painting by Richter as an example of an absorptive picture: 'one of the most original features of *Camera Lucida* is that Barthes has no interest whatever in scenes of absorption or distraction'.<sup>6</sup> However, Fried neglects to highlight that *Reading*, unlike the majority of his other examples, is a photo *painting*, a painted replica or reimagining of a source photograph. While this fact does not necessarily impinge upon Fried's comments regarding absorption and distraction in the photo painting's subject, the strategy of photo painting will necessarily possess its own unique relationship to Barthes's theory given its ontological implications. Fried had inadvertently identified the potential for a critical examination of Richter's photo paintings in relation to Barthes's theory. Earlier

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Fried, 'Barthes's *Punctum*', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Spring 2005), published by University of Chicago Press, 539-574. Accessed on 06/01/2011 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/430984>

<sup>5</sup> Fried cites the original text and its translation:

Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma; Paris: Gallimard, 1980).

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida – Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard, (London: Vintage, 1993)

<sup>6</sup> Michael Fried, 'Barthes's *Punctum*', 552.

in the same essay, Fried references Walter Benjamin as an aside before introducing Barthes's own explanation of *punctum*. In parentheses, Fried describes *punctum* as a term 'that has proven almost as popular as Benjamin's aura'.<sup>7</sup> The resonance between the two terms remains largely untouched in Fried's essay also. If a new interpretation of Silvestrov's own use of reproduction can be developed through a critical dialogue with Richter's, then locating and contrasting Barthes's and Benjamin's terms, given their popularity and significance, is a productive first step.

Walter Benjamin is widely acknowledged as having established the aesthetic concept of aura, which has subsequently been widely applied in relation to a range of artistic disciplines. Benjamin formulated this concept of aura in order to meet the needs of a broader theory of art in the age of mechanical reproduction and align with a distinct political narrative. In 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Benjamin initially identifies aura in relation to works of art that encompass an authentic, original object, which is then depreciated through its subsequent reproduction.<sup>8</sup> In the context of music, aura is a limited concept because it fails to critically account for how we understand the idea of 'the authentic' and 'the original' in an art form predicated on a process of ongoing renewal through a series of performances. Several decades after Benjamin, Roland Barthes generated his own categories for examining the expressive potential of photography in

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 542.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Aesthetics – A Comprehensive Anthology*, edited by Stephen M. Kahn and Aaron Meskin, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008).

his essay, 'Camera Lucida – Reflections on Photography'.<sup>9</sup> Barthes's categories are similarly anchored within a specific discipline and shaped by a particular artistic perspective. A critical dialogue between Benjamin's concept of aura and Barthes's ideas of expressivity can be established, as a means to elucidate Benjamin's concept of aura and Barthes's categories making them available as meaningful concepts for a critical engagement with music. More specifically, these concepts facilitate a more textured engagement with particular kinds of postmodern music, such as the work of Valentin Silvestrov, where the concept of a musical image is highly relevant.

There are inherent complexities in drawing out a precise interpretation of aura from Benjamin's article because one of his central aims is to generate a new vocabulary for discussing the work of art and its related ontological issues. Furthermore, his argument regarding the field of aesthetics and critical theory is closely bound up with his political values. Benjamin's aesthetics run in parallel with his politics: if ritual has been replaced by politics in the work of art, as he suggests, then a critical reflection that expresses fundamental beliefs about art is, by extension, also expressing political beliefs. This is firmly established by Benjamin at the outset of his essay, by outlining a Marxist perception of society, a substructure of material and economic forces manifesting a superstructure of cultural products and systems. Benjamin acknowledges that transitions in that superstructure echo those that occur in the substructure and believes that a reflection on art should reflect both the late capitalist society and the prognostic tone of Marx's case for socialism. For

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<sup>9</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida – Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard, (London: Vintage, 1993), 6.

Benjamin, the requirement for a new terminology not only reflects a fundamental transition in artistic technique as a response to a change in the economic and material substructure, but also prevents the often false appropriation of art to fascist motivations by writers such as Jose Ortega Y Gasset.<sup>10</sup>

It is against this backdrop that Benjamin sketches a historical outline where processes of reproduction, such as lithography and photography, have given rise to entirely new forms of expression, such as the newspaper and so-called 'sound film' respectively. It is through this chain that he identifies that works of art in the late capitalist society are both *subjected* to reproduction, because we now behave as consumers of art, but also that reproduction itself has become *embodied* in the artistic process.<sup>11</sup> However, his historical outline is vague and he argues that all 'transmittable' works of art eventually became available to reproduction but with little attention given to the subtle differences between disciplines or genres.

The central concept of aura, which serves as a form of axis by which to examine the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, is fleshed out in response to a problematising of the concept of authenticity. Benjamin is insistent that 'the presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity'<sup>12</sup> and that technical reproduction, much more so than manual reproduction, undermines the notion of a unique object in several distinct ways. The ontology of the work of art can now be perceived as a series rather

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<sup>10</sup> José Ortega Y. Gasset, 'The Dehumanization of Art', *The Dehumanization of Art and Notes on the Novel*, translated by Helene Weyl, (USA: Princeton University Press, 1948).

<sup>11</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', 337.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, 329.

than a unique instance and the existence of a reproduction allows an object to be 'reactivated' at closer proximity to the viewer, meeting them 'halfway'.<sup>13</sup>

The consequence of this for Benjamin is a cathartic, destructive impact on the value of a cultural heritage, as events become available for reactivation or reimagining. Benjamin goes further still, arguing that even where the situation of a reproduction has little contact with the original, the reproduction still maintains the ability to depreciate 'the quality of its [the original's] presence'.<sup>14</sup>

The 'authority of the object', its bond to the domain of tradition and attachment to existing in a unique singular form are, in the age of mechanical reproduction, seen to be in decline and Benjamin subsumes those aspects that are in decline within the term 'aura'. For Benjamin, 'that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art'.<sup>15</sup>

Benjamin rather broadly subsumes 'that which withers' within the concept of aura but the essential aspect appears to be the notion of distance. According to Benjamin, it is the urge of 'the masses' to bring objects closer humanly and spatially, by accepting the reproduction in place of the original, which diminishes the work's aura. His insistence upon distance as central to aura is weakly established because its justification is drawn from only a passing comparison of natural phenomena to works of art. For Benjamin, this concept of aura originated with the work of art in its original formation, as an object of

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<sup>13</sup> These questions of ontology are explored in detail in the following texts:

Roman Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of its Identity*, translated from the original Polish by Adam Czerniawski and edited by Jean G. Harrell, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986).

Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: an Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', 329.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, 329.

ritual contemplation with a cult value. It is in this context that he claims that, 'the uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition.'<sup>16</sup> Subsequently, Benjamin argues that in the age of reproduction, artistic production has begun to be based on the practice of politics because the concern with authenticity has been marginalised. However, he sidelines counter-perspectives of artistic production, labelling them the 'theology of art' or 'the cult of beauty' which are deemed to be of the same nature as the preceding ritual contexts for art works.<sup>17</sup>

For Benjamin, this cult value is to be superseded by the work of art that effectively incorporates reproducibility into its process and thereby diminishes the distance between object and audience. However, he indicates that an initial resistance may occur, such as the persistence of portraiture in photography after the decline of painting. This particular tension will be pertinent to a later examination of Gerhard Richter's photo paintings, an activity that reprises this tension some decades on. The radical shift that Benjamin recognised was that the function of an object as a work of art may become incidental to its new functions and this is exemplified in the tension he noted in the struggle of photography and film to determine whether they can still be considered forms of artistic discipline, as previously defined. In his essay, he highlights that the arguments made for photography and film as art are based on outdated terminology and by drawing parallels with the contexts of other art forms.<sup>18</sup> For Benjamin, this marginalised position for film and

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 330.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, 330-1.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, 327-328.

photography in the arts is the consequence of a delay in the perceptual shift of the audience, following on from the transition in artistic process from the unique to the reproducible object. It is this tension that highlights the necessity for formulating an expanded definition of art in general.

While the decline of aura is a central tenet of his argument, Benjamin acknowledges the initial resistance of aura to reproduction, which is manifested in the persistence of portraiture in photography, and the initially ritualised setting for film, where special effects create an illusion of magic. To Benjamin, these aspects of film are merely seen as an illusion of 'cult-values' rather than a genuine exposure to them. Benjamin's examination of photography, and particularly film, is underpinned by his view of reproduction as a reflexive process, of reality being mediated to meet the needs of the masses whilst they adjust their perceptual apparatus to the new reality they inhabit. Initially, Benjamin appears sceptical of film because it has the capacity to alienate the actor from the product of their labour, because to perform to camera is like creating a reflection in a mirror that then becomes detached, commodified and consumable by a wider public, part of 'the cult of the movie star'.<sup>19</sup> He also suggests that the practice of creating film in front of the camera brings about a loss of the actor's aura and by extension, the loss of aura for the character he endeavours to represent. Benjamin appears uncertain at this stage as to what extent film contains reproduction within its artistic process as opposed to being merely a means to reproduce. What begins to redeem film for Benjamin is its potential to, in some cases,

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 334.

overcome the presence of its equipment and rather than stay distanced from reality, 'immerse deeply in its web'.<sup>20</sup> This ability of film to become deeply immersed in the web of reality leads Benjamin to a possible dialectic; the more fully reality becomes permeated by the presence of mechanical equipment, the more readily film can transcend its mechanical process and offer an aspect of reality free of all equipment. This capacity of film, Benjamin claims, is something we should be able to ask of a work of art more generally. Although the whole of Benjamin's essay can be said to be 'political', the latter part of his essay more directly deals with the role of 'Politics'. He identifies the revolutionary potential in film, which is brought about through the particular analysis it offers of its subject matter. The ability of film to capture fine details through close-up and slow motion techniques reveals an aspect of reality otherwise overlooked, a process that diminishes the potential for reality to be falsified and used as means to deceive and control. As Benjamin notes, 'the camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.'<sup>21</sup> Benjamin has an almost ambivalent response to the existence of a mass audience because, on the one hand, tastes and opinions are formulated through a mass group, creating a situation where 'quantity has been transmuted into quality',<sup>22</sup> but in the context of film, a situation is available for leading an otherwise 'distracted' audience to revelations about the reality they inhabit. It is possible to confront a mass audience with

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, 335.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, 337.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, 337.

uncomfortable truths not through 'ballistics' or 'tactile'<sup>23</sup> methods but to offer a postscript to what is shocking by flowing on to new imagery rather than revelling in it. As Benjamin claims, 'by means of its technical structure, the film has taken the physical shock effect out of the wrappers in which Dadaism has, as it were, kept it inside the moral shock effect.'<sup>24</sup> Unlike his contemporary, Theodor Adorno, who believed that a distracted audience was detached from reality and had succumbed to a false consciousness, Benjamin acknowledges a place for the distracted or 'absent-minded' audience of art. Benjamin argues that in certain artistic contexts, such as film, the public can become a politically engaged 'examiner' of reality by virtue of 'unconscious optics'. For Benjamin, where reproduction is fully embodied within the creative process, works of art then acquire the ability to transcend that creative process and reveal an aspect of reality through their unconscious power. Furthermore, he suggests that the ability of certain works of art to reveal an aspect of reality through the unconscious can offer a path to political consciousness.

Benjamin outlines some distinct conditions as to how we should understand works of art throughout his essay but there is, at times, a fluctuation between a commitment to a strong political polemic which demands holding on to a prognostic tone, and other passages offering a more work-based approach: the ambivalence towards the role of film is perhaps symptomatic of this. However, it is the role of the concept of aura and the extent to which a working definition can be derived which are of particular interest. Aura is

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, 337.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 337.

undeniably bound up with a sense of distance but Benjamin brings several categories of distance into play: physical, metaphorical and mystical. The emphasis on distance is, for Benjamin, established through his comparison of historical objects to natural objects and the way in which distance is perceived in relation to those natural objects. While Benjamin suggests that reproduction facilitates a diminishment of aura – a response to a late capitalist demand to bring the object closer to the viewer – it is possible to offer an alternative view. Benjamin highlights in film an overcoming of the reproductive process that is contained within its creation, allowing it to reflect upon reality less restrained. Where the reproductive process is foregrounded, a reproduction to an extent becomes an acknowledgement of distance from the original. In the work of later artists such as Andy Warhol, this pragmatic acceptance of reproduction and its foregrounding in the work offers the possibility of an artificial reverence for an object, a form of aura linked to notions of icon. There is a context for reproductions to behave as a form of residue or nostalgia for the original, a form of souvenir. While Benjamin sees ubiquity of reproduced art objects as diminishing aura, the sometimes-palliative effect of ubiquity can paradoxically bring about a heightened reverence for the original: even Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* which is a reflection on reproduction has been subsequently reinvested with cult-values and appreciated in a ritualised manner. The aura definition is usefully expanded though by Benjamin's articulation of the concept in 'A Short History of Photography', where aura is defined as 'a

strange web of time and space: the unique appearance of a distance, however close at hand.<sup>25</sup>

Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* is primarily a text examining the aesthetics of photography but it also offers insightful points of contact with Benjamin's aura concept and posits a distinctive conceptual framework of its own. The broader context of Barthes's essay correlates closely with that of Benjamin's: his ultimate purpose is to undertake an ontological inquiry and generate a new terminology that offers an expanded understanding of the discipline. Although Barthes is not explicitly politically motivated like Benjamin, his motivation is similarly emancipatory by attempting to evaluate the aesthetic without dependence on the 'community of images' that has gone before. Barthes firmly establishes that this is due to the nature of the photograph, and the manner in which it denies itself a presence, because it exists to make visible the subject of the image, which he terms 'the referent'. He further suggests that because the photograph does not make 'a mark' as such, that it is in effect 'invisible',<sup>26</sup> it cannot behave as a signifier. Barthes's qualification is that recourse to sociology or studies of photographic composition grasp at the photograph as signifier, but do not account for the unique expression it gives as a kind of pure referent.

Photography, for Barthes, contains three main aspects: 'to do, to undergo, to look.'<sup>27</sup> His interpretation of the role of the person or subjects that 'undergo'

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<sup>25</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'A Short History of Photography', translated by Phil Patton, *Classic Essays on Photography*, edited by Alan Trachtenberg, (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 209.

<sup>26</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida – Reflections on Photography*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, 9.

the process of photography closely parallels that of Benjamin's interpretation of the film actor. Barthes argues that the photographic process can never fully contain the subject's true 'self' and as a consequence a photograph remains 'heavy, motionless, stubborn'.<sup>28</sup> He is similarly sceptical of attempts to achieve a false realism by posing, seeing it as a way in which we transform ourselves 'in advance into an image'. It is this perception of photography as objectification that lays the foundation for Barthes' later arguments. For Barthes, it is not that the photograph contains a subject, or the subject *made* object, but rather that it captures the process of subject *becoming* object. In a manner similar to how the film actor casts a reflection that is then reproduced and made a commodity, the photograph too is at the mercy of the masses to be abused and appropriated. Consequently, Barthes understands the photograph as bringing about a form of death, because it brings about 'the advent of myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity.'<sup>29</sup>

Barthes' overarching intention is to establish a theory that satisfies his own experience of photography. A central obstacle to this path of inquiry is that, in his own experience, he acknowledges that photography is an 'uncertain art',<sup>30</sup> because tropes, subjects and styles may have different impacts in different contexts. However, Barthes rejects the argument that photography will necessarily lead to banality because, as Lyotard argues, it will always

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 12.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, 18.

participate in 'something or other'.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Barthes distances himself from the associated discussions of affect and logic, believing that the essential task is to account for the pathetic and sentimental aspects of photography, its potential to 'wound' rather than 'question'. With examples from Koen Wessing, Barthes proposes the possibility of an image existing for the viewer in an immediate way so that it resists appearing as a form of scene or pose, an artificial attempt to suggest reality. In the examples from Wessing, Barthes draws attention to seemingly serendipitous details, such as the coincidence of nuns alongside soldiers (Ex. 2) or the one bare foot of a corpse otherwise concealed by a sheet (Ex. 3). For Barthes, these serendipitous details that have the potential to trouble or 'wound', allow the photograph to occlude or overcome its process of objectification, which would otherwise have rendered the subject heavy and motionless.

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, 20.

**Ex. 2 - Koen Wessing. (1978) *Nicaragua, Esteli.*  
*Soldiers of the government and nuns on the street.***

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright reasons. The image can be sourced at:

<http://www.hollandsehoogte.nl/search.pp?showpicture=3040621&ExtSrc=15&ExtID=00388438&pos=21#3040621>

**Ex. 3 - Koen Wessing. (1978) *Nicaragua, Esteli.*  
*Summer 1978. Family mourning over a victim of a bombardment.***

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright reasons. The image can be sourced at:

<http://www.hollandsehoogte.nl/search.pp?showpicture=2901526&ExtSrc=15&ExtID=00238666&pos=413#2901526>

It is at this stage that Barthes introduces what is arguably the central part in his theory of photography in *Camera Lucida*, the distinction between the categories of *studium* and *punctum*. For Barthes, the term *studium* encapsulates the general interest or enthusiasm one might have for an image and accounts for our experience of the figures, scenes or actions which is based on our cultural understanding and experience of them. In addition, *studium* constitutes a form of education and involves those aspects of an image which can be decoded through excursions to other disciplines. Barthes draws out how biographical aspects of images, which he terms 'biographemes', also belong to the category of *studium* because it is a detail that is fetishised and satisfies a taste for information derived from partial objects, or an 'infra-knowledge'. This response to details or partial-objects in the photograph stands in contrast to Barthes's category of *punctum*, which also derives its power from a detail within the image, but a detail that functions to arouse one's delight or pain, rather than the more average emotional effects belonging to the culturally generated responses of *studium*. As Barthes put it, 'a photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)'.<sup>32</sup>

The key contrast between the two categories is that *studium* is coded and understood through reference to external conventions and knowledge, while *punctum* is not. However, Barthes appears to contradict himself, at one stage suggesting that *punctum* is, like the biographeme, derived from a partial object. This contrast is brought into focus by the assertion that *punctum*

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<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, 27.

undergoes an expansion; it has the ability to continue challenging us after the moment of viewing the photograph has passed. Barthes attaches great significance to this potential of certain photographs, existing as an ongoing invitation to think, rather than a discrete statement. Barthes contends that there is no direct relation between his two categories, in part because *punctum* is latent in the image and cannot be tied to a particular location. An interesting point of contact between Barthes and Benjamin's theory can be observed in Barthes' suggestion that *punctum* constitutes a form of mark, and 'by the mark of *something*, the photograph is no longer "anything whatever"'.<sup>33</sup> Barthes suggests that, because a photograph is always contingent on a referent, that photographs are mask-like as a consequence and that a mask constitutes a kind of pure meaning. He highlights the contemporary suspicion of a situation where meaning is too clearly articulated, where 'the photograph whose meaning (I am not saying its effect, but its meaning) is too impressive is quickly deflected; we consume it aesthetically, not politically.'<sup>34</sup> Barthes's implication is that *punctum* and its 'invitation to think' is the category that brings about an engagement with a political content. This formation of *punctum* as an 'invitation to think', arising from incidental details within an image, correlates closely with Benjamin's concept of 'unconscious optics' in film. The presence of *punctum* potentially signals a situation where reproduction has become embodied in the creative process allowing the level of the detail to be prioritised. If the presence of *punctum* suggests the persistence of a work of art where reproduction is contained within its creative

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 49.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, 36.

process, then it is perhaps, by extension, one constructed upon politics rather than ritual and cult value.

Despite the cogency of Barthes's newly devised categories, *Camera Lucida* does, like Benjamin's essay, show the mark of an inquiry that attempts to confirm a new position or perspective rather than discover one through the course of that inquiry. For example, Barthes suggestion that there is no connection to speak of between *studium* and *punctum* overlooks the role of construction and composition in giving the details of an image a particular role. The latency of *punctum* may in fact owe much to occupying a more marginal space in the image, intentionally avoiding the attention of a first glance. Also, the presence of discontinuous elements in an image, which supposedly avoids banality and gives rise to *punctum*, can be bound together or kept in suspense by the formal properties of the image. What is insightful about both essays is that Barthes and Benjamin attach great significance to the role of detail and the potential for the detail in certain contexts to have a revelatory potential. For Benjamin, where mechanical reproduction is thoroughly disseminated into the creative process of film, film has the ability to reveal details and aspects of reality free of mechanical equipment. When *punctum* is present in a photograph, it expands beyond the boundaries of the photograph, confronting the ontology imposed by photography as a form of reproductive process where it is entirely contingent on its referent. This suggests that both film and photography have the ability to embody reproduction to the extent that they can offer a revelatory, often political, content.

It is possible to draw more incisive distinctions between Benjamin and Barthes's positions by returning to the question of aura. For Benjamin, aura involves both the authority of a unique, original object and its reverence brought about through ritual and the attachment of a cult-value to that object: it requires 'the unique phenomenon of a distance'.<sup>35</sup> The most powerful aspect of a photograph for Barthes, the wounding quality of its *punctum*, relies upon its incidental and seemingly unique presence in the image. His insistence that *punctum* cannot be decoded relates back to the conditions of aura in its uniqueness and mysticism. Although photography is in essence a reproductive process, throughout his essay Barthes emphasises the notion of the photograph being 'invisible' because it establishes no mark of its own. Consequently, it would be unconvincing to speak of a 'unique' or 'authentic' photograph as an object. *Punctum* can be said to constitute a form of aura within the photograph because, as Barthes asserts, it stems from an incidental, seemingly unique, detail that is not 'posed', forged or reproduced. The idiosyncrasy of a detail can affirm a form of distance within the photograph because it heightens an awareness that a single instance has been captured.

While the formulation of the concept of aura can be refined by establishing contrasts with Barthes' categories of *studium* and *punctum*, we should acknowledge that Barthes does not propose a wider application for his terminology. He refers in *Camera Lucida* to a conversation between Januoch and Kafka, where Kafka is reported to have said 'my stories are a way of

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<sup>35</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', 330.

shutting my eyes'.<sup>36</sup> However, this is one of the rare occasions where other disciplines are brought into his discussion. In contrast, Benjamin consistently strives to make broader aesthetic points about the work of art in general in order that photography and film are seen to function both as subject matter for the discussion of mechanical reproduction and as illustrations for wider political arguments.

If the formation of the work of art in music or theatre is of a fundamentally different nature, then the precise manifestation of aura will change accordingly.<sup>37</sup> For example, Benjamin's claim that the existence of an original underpins the concept of authenticity is problematic because in music and other performing arts the concept of 'the original' is itself contentious. The ontology of a musical work often relies upon it being posited as an imaginary object. While he does acknowledge a contrast between *manual* and *technical* reproduction, this is primarily in reference to objects rather than works for performance. Because music is primarily a practice, its existence is predicated upon a reproductive process. To discuss aura in relation to a work of art that is predicated upon a reproductive process requires some modification of Benjamin's original concept in order to be relevant. Barthes' category of *punctum* can offer an insight here because it is, in theory, an aspect that stems from an incidental detail of a unique event. To put it another way, *punctum* is a crystallisation of the uniqueness of an event, an instance of a situation unbounded and open. The 'phenomenon of a distance', which is

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, 53.

<sup>37</sup> Carl Dahlhaus gives particular insight into the formation of musical works in: Carl Dahlhaus, *Esthetics of Music*, translated by William Austin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

essential to the experience of aura, is present in *punctum* because *punctum* brings to our attention a discontinuity that is captured in the photograph but has been left unresolved. Without forcing too neat a connection, it is this formulation of distance that can perhaps account for the presence of aura in the musical work. The openness of the musical work is such that each performance is a reproduction that rather than meeting the listener halfway, keeps the work at a distance by constantly reshaping the idea of the original. Paradoxically, Benjamin's suggestion that the reproduction depreciates the original is inverted and each reproduction affirms a sense of distance from an 'authentic' instance of the work.

For the composer Valentin Silvestrov, this concept of the performance as a unique instance of a work is an aspect that can be folded back into the compositional process. Through extreme precision in notation, Silvestrov fixes subtle dynamic and expressive shapes and fluctuations. The consequent appearance of many of these metamusic pieces, such as *Der Bote* for solo piano, is that they appear more like a form of transcription. (Ex. 4) This strategy in conjunction with the conventions of past styles posits the work almost as a form of musical photograph. It is the ability to interpret this transcribed quality as a form of *punctum* that makes this analogy meaningful; the performance underlying the piece might be real or imagined but either way, the score symbolically captures the crystallisation of a unique instance. Furthermore, the pared-down dynamics of *Der Bote* and the instruction to perform *una corda* with the piano lid completely closed creates a sense of distance that invokes Benjamin's aura quality. However, aura in this setting

can only be present in a limited way, perhaps as a form of artefact, because it stands in opposition to the work's process of renewal with each subsequent performance. A more accurate description of Silvestrov's strategy then is not that he creates fixed musical photographs but instead posits musical images as the basis for exploration. The distinction is a subtle but crucial one, and a tension similarly explored by Gerhard Richter through the medium of the photo painting.

Larissa Bondarenko gewidmet / dedicated to Larisa Bondarenko

# „Der Bote - 1996“ „The Messenger - 1996“ (1996 - 97)

Valentin Silvestrov (\*1937)

**Moderato** (♩ = 88)  
Nebelhaft \*) *dolce*  
Nebulous *rit.*  
*quasi una corda* \*\*)

Pedal nicht wechseln, damit die Harmonien verschwimmen  
do not change pedal; allow harmonies to blur

*dolcissimo (lontano)*  
hell, traurig / bright, sad *pp*  
*rit.* ----- *accel.* -----  
*(leggierissimo)* *ppp* *pp* *(dolcissimo)*

Pedal nicht wechseln  
do not change pedal

hier und weiterhin  
Pedal nur leicht treten  
here and further press  
pedal only slightly

**Allegretto** (♩ = 116), con moto, poco libero (meno rubato), *leggierissimo*  
*rit.* ----- *M.m.* ----- *accel.* ----- ♩ = 116 \*\*\*\*\*  
*(rit.)* ----- *(rit.)* -----

*ppp* *lontano (leggierissimo)*  
*(leggiere)*

\*\*\* (1/3)

\*) Das ganze Stück ist mit leichtestem Anschlag und mit „leichter Hand“ zu spielen. Der Klavierdeckel muss vollends geschlossen sein.  
Play the entire piece with the lightest of touches and a „deft hand“, keeping the piano lid completely closed.

\*\*) Das ganze Stück ist *una corda* zu spielen, falls der Klavierklang zu scharf ist.  
Play the entire piece *una corda*, if the piano's timbre is too bright.

\*\*\*) Pedal sofort wieder treten, damit der vorhergehende Klang nachhallt.  
Press pedal again immediately, allowing preceding sound to reverberate.

\*\*\*\*) (rit.) = Tempo unwesentlich verlangsamt (♩) = Tempo unwesentlich verzögert  
(rit.) = slow tempo imperceptibly (♩) = suspend tempo imperceptibly

M.P.Belaieff Nr. 681 - 30 4298 © 2007 by M.P.Belaieff

## Ex. 3 - Der Bote/The Messenger for piano (bars 1-13) by Valentin Silvestrov

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### ***Gerhard Richter, the photo painting and a 'secondary subject'***

During 2011-12, several galleries around the world hosted *Panorama*, a retrospective of almost five decades of work by Gerhard Richter. While Richter's work is extremely varied, a large part of the exhibition displays work that reflects Richter's long-term interest in the tension between photography and painting examined through the medium of photo painting. This exploration began in Düsseldorf in 1961 and, influenced by Marcel Duchamp, these early works were all but painted replicas of readymade photographs. It is Richter's subsequent development of the photo painting in the 1970s and 1980s that shifts the emphasis from replication towards a reimagining of the 'readymade' photograph, reflecting a more nuanced engagement with the tension between photography and painting. Richter's *Panorama* exhibition features an edition of his work for the 1972 Venice Biennale, *48 Portraits*. The black and white portraits of forty-two famous male figures, sourced from an encyclopaedia, form four rows of twelve on the wall, comprising writers, scientists and composers, but not political leaders. The photographic images of the figures and their associations may be familiar, but the use of painterly technique to realise them, and their seemingly dispassionate layout, distances the viewer from the figures themselves and closer to the idea of 'the photographic portrait'. It could be overlooked but Richter's title of *48 Portraits*, rather than *48 Figures*, is indicative that the concern here is as much with the method of presentation as what is being presented – the work is one of portrayal rather than mere depiction.

*48 Portraits* embodies perhaps the central aspect of Richter's photo paintings: their mediation of proximity and distance. The photographs Richter uses as the basis for his works have often semantically rich and historically significant subject matter. By invoking the emotional power of these underlying images, the feeling of proximity to the image is deeply felt. At the same time, the subject matter of the underlying photograph is kept at a distance by Richter's painterly technique: often photo paintings are passed over with a dry brush while the paint is still wet, in order to intentionally blur and distort. This process is not about challenging or undermining photography per se but reflecting upon the quality of its tension with painting. Gertrud Koch has argued that Richter 'no more trusts technology to aid in achieving a better position from which to view the world than he does painterly techniques. He simply places them on the same level.'<sup>38</sup> The particular edition of *48 Portraits* on display at the *Panorama* exhibition emphasises this tension further because it is a facsimile edition made after the exhibition and sale of the original work, thereby offering a readymade version in its place. Benjamin Buchloh observes that:

This seemingly paradoxical inversion of the process of representation (from photographic reproduction to original painting to photographic reproduction) was paralleled in the inversion from monumental installation to a reinscription of the images onto the plane of the archival registry and the photographic document from which they had originally been drawn.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Gertrud Koch, 'The Richter-scale of Blur', from *October*, Vol. 62 (Autumn, 1992), published by MIT Press, 137. Accessed on 7/12/10 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778707>

<sup>39</sup> Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'Divided Memory and Post-Traditional Identity: Gerhard Richter's Work of Mourning', *October*, Vol. 75 (Winter, 1996), MIT Press, 76. Accessed on 2/12/10 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778899>

Buchloh also notes that the creation of a facsimile edition seems to reaffirm 'the inescapable realities of the conditions of technical reproduction' even though the condition of 'hieratic monumentality' is barely established.<sup>40</sup> Although the method of photo painting already sustains a dialectical tension of proximity and distance, this subsequent facsimile stage demonstrates that Richter's process is potentially one of persistent negation.

Processes of reproduction, both manual and mechanical, are contained within Richter's creative process here. Furthermore, the figures in the portraits and their implied 'hieratic monumentality' invoke a sense of aura, not because of their uniqueness but the ritualised, cult-like manner in which the original images would have been regarded. The sourcing of subjects from an encyclopaedia indicates that it is Barthes's category of □*tadium* that offers the pretext for the work. As Barthes explains:

I did not know a French word that might account for this human interest, but I believe this word exists in Latin: it is □*tadium*, which doesn't mean, at least not immediately, 'study,' but application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment, of course, but without special acuity. It is by □*tadium* that I am interested in so many photographs, whether I receive them as political testimony or enjoy them as good historical scenes: for it is culturally (this connotation is present in □*tadium*) that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions.<sup>41</sup>

The arrangement of the portraits in the *Panorama* exhibition was in four rows of twelve, a grid-like layout that emphasised a dispassionate attitude, not

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, 26.

<sup>41</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, as quoted in Michael Fried, 'Barthes's Punctum', 541-2.

unlike Warhol's screen-print reproductions of the same image. However, when *48 Portraits* is arranged as Richter originally intended for the German Pavilion of the Venice Biennale in 1972, it forms a single line of blurred photo paintings displaying a spectrum of poses. (Ex. 5) In this arrangement, the focus shifts from figures to portraits, or subject matter to material. As Koch highlights, 'it is not the individual person that attracts attention; rather, the portraits have become part of an accumulation that can be tested in terms of its seriality'.<sup>42</sup> The emotional content now resides with the idea of 'the photograph', when it had belonged to the subject matter engaged with moments before. It is the interaction of layout and painterly technique that makes available this secondary subject matter. Also, it is the ability of the photo painting to oscillate between these two perceptions but with awareness of the other, between proximity and distance, which engenders a deeper, more textured engagement.

**Ex. 5 – *48 Portraits (Installationsfotos, 36. Biennale Venedig 1972)/For 48 Portraits (Installation Photos, 36th Biennale Venice 1972)*, by Gerhard Richter.**

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright reasons. The image was sourced at:

<http://www.gerhard-richter.com/art/search/detail.php?paintid=11621&artworkID1=3&title=48&p=1&sp=32>

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<sup>42</sup> Gertrud Koch, 'The Richter-scale of Blur', 138.

The art critic Stefan Germer identifies this dialectic of proximity and distance in response to Richter's series of paintings *18<sup>th</sup> Oktober 1977*. (Ex. 6) In this work, Richter bases his paintings upon media and police photographs he had collected of the Red Army Faction, primarily those surrounding the controversial deaths of the group's members. The title refers to the day when several members of the Red Army Faction were found dead in their prison cells, allegedly having committed suicide. *18<sup>th</sup> Oktober 1977*, also featured in the *Panorama* exhibition, is formed of fifteen photo paintings of related yet fragmentary images, each with its own form of blur and indistinctness. Through photo painting, Richter abandons any assertive authorial narrative and frames the historical narrative of the original images as simply one aspect among others to be contemplated. The potency of each underlying photograph is opposed by the abstract character of the painterly technique, an opposition that reflects both the tensions between the relevant artistic disciplines and also the question of how one might go about capturing historical events, particularly traumatic ones, in art. Mark Godfrey suggests that repetitions and differences in *18<sup>th</sup> Oktober 1977*, such as the three subtly different paintings entitled *Tote* or 'Dead', based on the same underlying photograph of Ulrike Meinhof, indicate Richter's 'sense of inadequacy of each attempted depiction, even his hesitancy about his undertaking.'<sup>43</sup>

Peter Osborne draws together Koch and Godfrey's concerns with Germer's dialectic, arguing that this mediation of proximity and distance 'imparts to Richter's paintings their broader meaning as sites for the exploration of the

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<sup>43</sup> Mark Godfrey, *Gerhard Richter – Panorama* exhibition leaflet, (Tate Modern, October 2011).

dilemmas intrinsic to painting', that they are 'timely only insofar as they are untimely; untimely only insofar as they emerge out of the most thorough immersion in the artistic problems of their day'.<sup>44</sup> This characterisation of Richter's early photo-paintings as 'sites' is insightful because it reflects a structure in which different layers of the subject matter are able to be contemplated alongside one another, rather than being arranged hierarchically. The oppositions embodied in Richter's photo paintings are a reflection of how his creative process responds at an aesthetic level to the artistic and historical context in which he works. In an interview with Benjamin Buchloh, Richter has said:

The only paradox is that I always begin with the intention of obtaining a closed picture, with a properly composed motif. Then, with a relatively big effort, I proceed to destroy this intention piece by piece, against my own will almost, until the picture is finished – that is, until it has nothing left besides openness.<sup>45</sup>

The closed picture is one that possesses little latitude for interpretation, being bounded by its historical context and semantic associations. The subsequent drive towards openness is not an attempt to straightforwardly critique or undermine that picture but to puncture its surface so that its inner material is made available for contemplation and creative usage.

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<sup>44</sup> Peter Osborne, 'Painting Negation: Gerhard Richter's Negatives', *October*, Vol. 62 (Autumn, 1992), published by MIT Press, 103-4. Accessed on 2/12/10 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778704>

<sup>45</sup> Gerhard Richter, 'Interview with Gerhard Richter by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh', in *Gerhard Richter, Paintings*, edited by Roald Nasgaard, (Toronto: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 27. As quoted in Gertrud Koch, 'The Richter-scale of Blur', 140.

**Ex. 6 – *Tote* (1988), set of three photo paintings from  
*18<sup>th</sup> Oktober 1977* by Gerhard Richter  
[Oil on canvas]**

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via  
ORA because of copyright reasons. The image was sourced at:

<http://www.gerhard-richter.com/art/search/detail.php?paintid=7687&artworkID1=paintings&title=tote&p=1&sp=32&tab-artwork=collection>

The 18<sup>th</sup> Oktober 1977 source photographs are examples of 'closed' pictures on the basis of two criteria: their biographical dimension and their shock aspect. Barthes's *studium* category incorporates an interest in a photograph based upon its biographical information, what he terms the 'biographeme'.<sup>46</sup> It can also involve an interest based upon the shocking subject matter of an image, when that shock quality is based upon cultural conventions of what is deemed distasteful or unpleasant. In *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*, Barthes outlines the concept of a shock-photograph where images are governed by the category of *studium*. In this respect they are closed images because, as Barthes puts it, 'for us they have no history, we can no longer invent our own reception of this synthetic nourishment, already perfectly assimilated by its creator.'<sup>47</sup> For Benjamin, all shocks should be 'cushioned by heightened presence of mind'<sup>48</sup> and to an extent, this is what Barthes demands of photography, arguing that photography is 'subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatises, but when it is *pensive*, when it thinks.'<sup>49</sup> Richter's strategy in this setting, through repetition, indistinctness and paint, reactivates the shock-photograph and invests it with this pensive quality whilst resisting resolution.

This capacity for a photograph to think and be pensive is addressed in Barthes's second category of *punctum*, which refers to an unresolved, seemingly incidental detail that has the potential to 'reactivate' the work in the

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<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, 30.

<sup>47</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Shock-Photos', *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*, translated by Richard Howard, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 71-72. As quoted in Gertrud Koch's 'The Richter-scale of Blur', 141-2.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, 337.

<sup>49</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida – Reflections on Photography*, 38.

mind of the viewer after it has been seen. Barthes elaborates upon the category of *punctum* in the following way:

This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of *studium* with my sovereign consciousness), it is the element which rises out from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me...This second element which will disturb the *studium* I shall therefore call *punctum*; for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole – and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).<sup>50</sup>

An important distinction that Barthes makes is that there is no rule of connection between *studium* and *punctum*; instead it is a matter of a 'co-presence'.<sup>51</sup> This separation exists because of a qualitative difference between the two categories: 'The *studium* is ultimately always coded, the *punctum* is not...'<sup>52</sup>

This distinction is pertinent to the discussion of aesthetic form in Richter's photo paintings because he is engaged in a process of reimagining pre-existing images that already possess cultural association. His particular process of reimagining invokes the cultural codes of his source materials, positing *studium* as an interpretative framework for the work as a whole. This positing of *studium* though is intentionally equivocal and, like the photograph that wounds, it is co-present with the category of *punctum*. At the outset of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes highlights the tautological quality of the photograph,

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<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, 26-27.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, 42.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, 51.

which carries the referent within itself to some degree.<sup>53</sup> In contrast, Richter's photo paintings project an image as a symbolic reference point within their structure. Without the containment of the tautological structure of the photograph, however, *punctum* is not confined to the source photograph but becomes a dimension of the work as a whole. *Punctum*, consistent with Barthes's criteria, is still manifested here through the presence of a form of detail, albeit a deceptive one, but it is synthesised intentionally in order to 'unresolve' the underlying image. This recasting of *punctum* diverges from Barthes's original formulation in two respects. Firstly, *punctum* represents an intentional element in Richter's creative process, which is itself a process of reproduction. However, Richter is in the historical position not of transcending methods of reproduction but problematising the method itself. The intentional misalignment of source photograph and photo painting reflects an identification and manipulation of the aesthetic concepts that his process invokes. Secondly, Richter punctuates the source image not in order to focus upon a poignant or emotive quality of the work but instead to discharge emotion by registering the inadequacy of the work to meet its semantic promises. As Gertrud Koch has argued, for Richter 'even emotion is perhaps only a trompe l'oeil'.<sup>54</sup> This distinction highlights that Richter is as concerned with critiquing the concept of 'artistic materials' as the materials themselves. As Barthes argued in the context of photography, it is more subversive to create works that are pensive, offering an invitation to think, rather than an attempt to shock.

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<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Gertrud Koch, 'The Richter-scale of Blur', 142.

Peter Osborne has argued that 'if Richter's paintings are philosophical explorations in paint of the state of contemporary painting, then they do not so much transcend this state as register it, immanently, in a series of diverse and innovative ways.'<sup>55</sup> Osborne characterises these 'philosophical explorations in paint' as mutual negations, an 'affirmation of photography by painting' but also 'an affirmation of painting in the face of photography'.<sup>56</sup> This dialectic is a fundamental aspect of interpreting the structure of Richter's photo paintings but it should not be overstated. The tension Richter identifies is more broadly historical in nature than restricted to a single material tension, arguing that 'all that perfection of execution, composition and so forth would still have been lost to us, even if there had never been such a thing as painting.'<sup>57</sup> Richter's intention to initially obtain 'a closed picture, with a properly composed motif' can therefore be understood as a crafted response to those aspects contained in the term *studium* rather than straightforwardly mimicking photography for the purpose of superficial irony.

This sense of loss is explored by Richter in his landscape photo paintings, partially through his treatment of aura. Koch argues that Richter's landscapes, particularly the seascapes, 'make use of the stock of montage and retouching techniques in order to deny the existence of aura, or rather to smuggle it in through the back door as a kind of manufactured artefact.'<sup>58</sup> Koch's choice of the word 'artefact' is relevant in more than one sense. On the one hand, it

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<sup>55</sup> Peter Osborne, 'Painting Negation: Gerhard Richter's Negatives', 110.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, 106-7.

<sup>57</sup> Gerhard Richter, *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings and Interviews - 1962-1993*, 149.

<sup>58</sup> Gertrud Koch, 'The Richter-scale of Blur' in *October*, Vol. 62 (Autumn, 1992), MIT Press, 139. Accessed on 7/12/10 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778707>

implies a relationship to the field of archaeology and identifies the landscape photo painting as a form of historical reconstruction. In Richter's hands, landscapes are no longer natural environments but a web of cultural codes and, like his other source photographs, merely 'the pretext for a picture'.<sup>59</sup> On the other, the term artefact implies that aura is something spurious and does not naturally belong. In this context, aura has become something invoked as a form of topic, perhaps referencing the photographs of Ansel Adams among others. It is located, as Benjamin suggests, while 'resting, to follow the line of a mountain range on the horizon'<sup>60</sup> but in this context, it is fundamentally 'untruthful'.

This concern is apparent in Richter's photo paintings of the Alps and is taken to a logical conclusion in his seascapes, particularly two works in 1970 where the sea itself is doubled as the sky. (Ex. 7) As Koch argues, 'it is not sky that one finds above the water, but rather a montage of mirror images of masses of water that nonetheless echo the formal structure of the more customary cloud formations.'<sup>61</sup> While Richter has often been reticent about revealing his criteria for selecting source photographs, he has been more candid about his relationship to landscape. More specifically, it is through the landscapes that he reveals his attitude to pre-existing aesthetic conventions:

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<sup>59</sup> Gerhard Richter, *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings and Interviews - 1962-1993*, 37.

<sup>60</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'A Short History of Photography', 209.

<sup>61</sup> Gertrud Koch, 'The Richter-scale of Blur', 139.

Of course, my landscapes are not only beautiful or nostalgic, with a Romantic or classical suggestion of lost Paradises, but above all 'untruthful' (even if I did not always find a way of showing it); and by 'untruthful' I mean the glorifying way we look at Nature – Nature, which in all its forms is always against us, because it knows no meaning, no pity, no sympathy, because it knows nothing and is absolutely mindless: the total antithesis of ourselves, absolutely inhuman. Every beauty that we see in landscape – every enchanting colour effect, or tranquil scene, or powerful atmosphere, every gentle linearity or magnificent spatial depth or whatever – is a [*sic.*] our projection; and we can switch it off at a moment's notice, to reveal only the appalling horror and ugliness.<sup>62</sup>

**Ex. 7 – Seestück (See-see)/Seascape (Sea-sea) (1970)  
by Gerhard Richter  
[Oil on canvas]**

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright reasons. The image was sourced at:

<http://www.gerhard-richter.com/art/search/detail.php?paintid=4870&artworkID1=paintings&title=seascape&p=1&sp=32&tab-artwork=sales-history>

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<sup>62</sup> Gerhard Richter, *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings and Interviews - 1962-1993*, 124.

In this setting, landscape provides the culturally embedded archetype that provides the pretext for a photo painting; while landscapes might be natural, the romanticised perception of them is synthetic. For Richter, photographs of both the Red Army Faction and glacial landscapes provide the necessary *studium* aspects for exploration and negation through the photo painting. Richter's position on the glorification of Nature in art is, to an extent, consistent with Edgar Morin's argument that 'the richness of the photograph is in fact all that is not there, but that we project or fix onto it.'<sup>63</sup> The principle of Morin's argument is valid in the context of a culturally informed richness but would ultimately conflict with Barthes's *punctum* category, which locates the real potency of a photograph with a quality of the image at hand. However, what Morin highlights is that Richter's negation of the cultural tropes underpinning a photograph is necessarily bound up with problematising the process of perception which we approach a photograph with. Richter is not just interrogating the photograph as an object but also the process of perception by which we receive that photograph as an image. Jean-Paul Sartre argues in his exploration of the imagination that to identify a specific object in a photograph requires us to approach with a particular intention. Furthermore, he identifies that, while we would expect 'a slight lag between the presentation of the photograph and the apprehension of it as an image', in reality 'the photo does not function as an object but gives itself immediately as

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<sup>63</sup> Edgar Morin, *The cinema, or, The imaginary man*, translated by Lorraine Mortimer, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 33.

an image'.<sup>64</sup> Richter teases these stages of apprehension apart in the structure of the photo painting but, through its imitation of the photograph, the photograph fraudulently attempts to give itself immediately as an image. Latterly, the photograph both as an object and an image in perception is negated. In discussing Richter's installation piece, *Atlas*, Gertrud Koch has argued that 'if reality cannot be understood, then the most adequate picture of it would be that with the fewest semantic promises.'<sup>65</sup> Richter's photo paintings reflect a projection of that sentiment encapsulated in his thoroughgoing process of negation, challenging notions of reality and the real. Richter's concern for aspects of documentary, myth and aura are brought together in the piece *Umwandlung*, meaning 'transformation.' In collaboration with Sigmar Polke, Richter creates a series of five images charting a mythical transformation of a mountain into the appearance of a sphere. Although *Umwandlung* is more playful in tone, its pattern of repetition with varying degrees of indistinctness prefigures Richter's interest in repeated forms, such as the *Tote* photo paintings, and documentary-like sets of images that form larger installations, such as *48 Portraits* and the installation piece, *Atlas*. The five images of *Umwandlung* are accompanied by the fictitious text, 'Five stages of a transformation undertaken by Polke and Richter. On April 26, 1968, the mountain was transformed into a sphere for the duration of two hours.' Polke and Richter's strategy employs an ironic tone here as a tool for highlighting the perceived redundancy of the underlying landscape motif. It is

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<sup>64</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Imagination – a Psychological Critique*, translated by Forrest Williams, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), 19.

<sup>65</sup> Gertrud Koch, 'The Richter-scale of Blur', 139.

this incorporation of an ironic tone that provides an initial point of contact with Silvestrov's metamusic. For Silvestrov, this translates as an exploration of a kitsch-quality applied to pre-existing styles in order to, akin to Richter and Polke, highlight the fallibility of that style. However, the qualities of irony and kitsch in the hands of Richter and Silvestrov are not discrete or unitary but involve a spectrum of approaches that range from the saccharine and humorous to the subtle and understated. Edgar Morin argues that the photograph contains both the genes of the mental image and the myth or double.<sup>66</sup> If Silvestrov's stylistic references are akin to the genes of the mental image in the photograph, a musical reconstruction that affords us no new information, then his creative interaction is to be pursued through this myth aspect. Unlike Richter though, his compositional process is not one of negation alone and that is where the structures of metaphor come into play.

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<sup>66</sup> Edgar Morin, *The cinema, or, The imaginary man*, 33.

### ***Valentin Silvestrov, metamusic and the semantic overtone***

The broad point of contact between Gerhard Richter and Valentin Silvestrov is primarily their attitude and aesthetic response to recreating or reimagining pre-existing materials. There is also a degree of historical overlap between Richter and Silvestrov that indicates not a biographical similarity but an aesthetic one in the nature of their response to the artistic issues of the period. As Umberto Eco argues, 'In every century, the way that artistic forms are structured reflects the way in which science or contemporary culture views reality.'<sup>67</sup> It is during Richter's thorough development of the photo painting in the 1970s and 1980s that Silvestrov also makes a shift in the aesthetic emphasis of his own work. This transition from a rigorously 'avant-garde' style to the metamusic approach was symbolically completed in 1992 with the composition of the tone poem, *Metamusik*, for piano and orchestra. For Silvestrov, the metamusic approach does not represent the conclusion of experimentation in his music but an extension of it, arguing that, 'the most important lesson of the avant-garde was to be free of all preconceived ideas – particularly those of the avant-garde.'<sup>68</sup>

Gerhard Richter was quoted in the previous chapter, claiming that, 'all that perfection of execution, composition and so forth would still have been lost to us, even if there had never been such a thing as photography.'<sup>69</sup> Following

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<sup>67</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, translated by Anna Cancogni, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 13.

<sup>68</sup> Valentin Silvestrov, 'Silvestrov – Background Information', *ECM Records.com*. Accessed on 25/10/11 at [http://www.ecmrecords.com/Background/New\\_Series/1700/Bgr\\_1776.php](http://www.ecmrecords.com/Background/New_Series/1700/Bgr_1776.php)

<sup>69</sup> Gerhard Richter, *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings and Interviews - 1962-1993*, 149.

this claim, he further argues that, 'literature and music are in the same mess. People praise Mozart and Glenn Gould to the skies, because the new composers can't offer the same thing any more, even though music hasn't been edged out by anything[,] analogous to painting [*sic.*].'<sup>70</sup> Peter Osborne's argument that the photo painting is 'an affirmation of photography by painting' could be recast here in musical terms, where Silvestrov's metamusic represents an affirmation of atonality by tonality.<sup>71</sup> This is reinforced by Paul Griffiths's suggestion that Silvestrov's works, 'revive past music, especially Romantic symphonic music, in the very act of lamenting its disappearance.'<sup>72</sup> While Richter's pursuit of painting in the face of photography appears similar to this revival, the tensions of painting after photography correlate more closely with composing instrumental music after the advent of electronic music. Specific parallels between technologies and practices are therefore relevant but potentially misleading. What is significant is not the specific artistic and historical tensions themselves but that both Silvestrov and Richter respond to their respective situations by treating the work as a site for placing these tensions alongside each other rather than attempting to resolve them. This treatment of the work requires that those tensions are held in suspense and not succumbed to, an inherently dialectical situation. As Adorno argues:

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<sup>70</sup> The original text is likely to be a grammatical error and punctuation has been added for clarity.

Gerhard Richter, *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings and Interviews - 1962-1993*, 149.

<sup>71</sup> Peter Osborne, 'Painting Negation: Gerhard Richter's Negatives', 106.

<sup>72</sup> Paul Griffiths, as quoted in 'Silvestrov – Background Information', *ECM Records.com*.

Accessed on 25/10/11 at

[http://www.ecmrecords.com/Background/New\\_Series/1700/Bgr\\_1776.php](http://www.ecmrecords.com/Background/New_Series/1700/Bgr_1776.php)

Commas added for clarity.

...They [arts works] can act as a dynamic field for internal antagonisms only if and when they are finished, congealed objects... Their motion must come to a halt and yet remain visible *qua* motion in this standstill.<sup>73</sup>

Both Richter and Silvestrov propose an image of a historical moment and then offer a nuanced reflection upon its semantic overtones, rather than a critique. However, Silvestrov is distinct from Richter because his 'closed' musical images and response to them does not arise from a fundamental opposition in media and materials, like that of photography and painting. His engagement with the past is articulated through a series of material contrasts; the tensions of tonality and atonality, melody and texture, and abstraction and expression all inform his compositional process.

Both Richter and Silvestrov exhibit a certain kind of postmodern attitude that runs deeper than surface artistic tensions. Jean-François Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, captures something of that attitude:

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work.

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<sup>73</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 253.

Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself are [sic.] looking for.<sup>74</sup>

Silvestrov's metamusic approach emerges from his abstract, expressionist approach that preceded, epitomised by pieces such as the Third Symphony – 'Eschatophony' or *Elegie* for solo piano. The metamusic approach then, is postmodern according to Lyotard's terms because it challenges both the dictates of modernist abstraction and invokes familiar materials while refusing to be governed by their conventions. Pursuing the 'most important lesson of the avant-garde' paradoxically involves a reappraisal and problematising of both tonality and atonality by establishing a context where neither is governed, in principle, by pre-established rules.

Within metamusic, Silvestrov's primary source materials are stylistic references drawn from earlier periods, with a particular emphasis on music of the Romantic era. These stylistic references are employed as a form of musical metaphor, reimagined by Silvestrov in order to invoke their broader meanings and associations. He contains these aspects of a style's symbolic potential in the term 'semantic overtone'.<sup>75</sup> However, a semantic overtone is not directly analogous to the referent of a metaphor. To an extent, it also encompasses the symbolic potential of a style which can be made available for creative usage, bringing about a form of secondary subject matter, akin to

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<sup>74</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, (Manchester University Press: Great Britain, 1987), 79.

<sup>75</sup> Tatjana Frumkis, 'Valentin Silvestrov – Schott Music Profile', *Schott Music.com*. Accessed on 6/7/12 at <http://www.schott-music.com/shop/persons/az/51048/>

Richter. Tatjana Frumkis characterises Silvestrov's definition of metamusic in the following way:

Of all the possible translations of the preposition "meta" – after, above, behind, beyond etc. – he prefers "above" or "beyond". He views "Metamusik" as a "semantic overtone above music". "Meta" can also mean a departure from music. But his form of departure should not be confused with the boundaryless experimentation typical of our postmodern age (e.g. in electronic music, concrete music, installations etc.), where music as art can lose its ontological meaning. "Departing from the music...without leaving it" – that is the watchword he so convincingly follows.<sup>76</sup>

In *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, Theodor W. Adorno argues that, 'The predetermined stylistic categories pay for their accessibility not by revealing the nature of form, but by hovering meaninglessly over the surface of aesthetic form.'<sup>77</sup> Silvestrov subverts Adorno's observation, drawing upon this capacity for stylistic categories to 'hover meaninglessly' in order to compose with them pliantly. Furthermore, it is through the appropriation of predetermined stylistic categories that Silvestrov is able to posit a new kind of aesthetic form. In this context, Silvestrov's stylistic categories are analogous to Richter's 'untruthful' landscapes, where familiar archetypes may be received at an emotional level but are counterfeit in some way. This is reinforced by Silvestrov's identification of these stylistic units as 'weak styles' due to their presentation as misaligned, often kitsch, versions of their former

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<sup>76</sup> Tatjana Frumkis, 'Echoes', liner notes from *Metamusik: Symphony for Piano and Orchestra; Postludium: Symphonic Poem for Piano and Orchestra*, Alexei Lubimov, piano; Radio Symphonieorchester Wien; Dennis Russell Davies, conductor, (Munich, Germany: ECM Records, 2003), ASIN: B00008MNCG, 29.

<sup>77</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, translated by Anne G. Mitchell. and Wesley V. Blomster, (London: Sheed & Ward, 1973), 5.

selves.<sup>78</sup> As Levon Hakobian argues, ‘though simplistic on the surface, the “weak style” by Silvestrov, as every “retro” procedure, is in essence strongly “sentimental”, not “naïve”.’<sup>79</sup> In his notes from 1964-5, Gerhard Richter recorded the following:

As a record of reality, the thing I have to represent is unimportant and devoid of meaning, though I make it just as visible as if it were important...I am not saying that the thing represented is abolished as such...The representation simply acquires a different meaning: it becomes the pretext for a picture.<sup>80</sup>

With only slight alterations in wording, Richter’s own dictum would accurately summarise Silvestrov’s metamusic approach; as Silvestrov suggests, ‘metamusical awareness is creative awareness; music creates music’.<sup>81</sup> The ultimate tone of their respective work may differ but this initial stage, where the concrete nature of the style or the photograph is overcome, correlates closely.

This perception of stylistic references as weak styles is engendered through their articulation but also the manner in which they are framed. Silvestrov’s pieces shaped by this concern are arguably not discrete works in the conventional sense because, as Silvestrov has suggested, metamusic is a

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<sup>78</sup> Svetlana Savenko, ‘Valentin Silvestrov’s lyrical universe’, *Underground Music from the Former USSR*, edited by Valeria Tsenova and translated from the Russian by Romela Kohanovskaya, (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1997), 78.

<sup>79</sup> Levon Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Age 1917-1987*, (Stockholm, Melos Music Literature, 1998), 309.

<sup>80</sup> Richter, Gerhard. ‘Notes, 1964-5’, *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings and Interviews - 1962-1993*, 37.

<sup>81</sup> Valentin Silvestrov, liner notes from ‘Valentin Silvestrov, *Drama – World Premiere Recording*’, performed by Jenny Lin (piano), Cornelius Duffalo (violin) and Yves Dharamraj (violoncello), (New York: Koch International Classics, 2007), ASIN: B000WC38KK.

process where 'we cannot expect to find a finished product'.<sup>82</sup> Silvestrov's music has been compared with that of Alfred Schnittke, based upon the polystylistic appearance of many pieces. However, Svetlana Savenko identifies that the particular interaction of styles in the context of Silvestrov's metamusic is quite specific:

...Silvestrov is not striving for a clear-cut delimitation of the contrasting stylistic spheres: the word 'collage' often associated with the polystylistics and implying the emphasis on junctions...can hardly be applied to his music...The term coined by Stockhausen – 'symbiotic polystylistics' – is more suitable to it...The resolution of the conflict occurs as if in overcoming the concrete nature of the style, on 'no man's land'...<sup>83</sup>

The significance of metamusic is concerned with a process of overcoming the concrete nature of styles and therefore an analysis that emphasises the identity of those styles runs the risk of marginalising the more significant question of their interaction as metaphors in this context. Where this is the case, analysts have often imposed their own narratives in order to remedy the absence of a finished product. Despite Savenko's awareness of Silvestrov's precise approach to polystylistics, she misguidedly projects a romanticised narrative onto the Fifth Symphony, referring to one passage as 'two facets of the resplendent being appearing as if for the last time in the resigned tension of parting'.<sup>84</sup> Gertrud Koch has acknowledged that:

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<sup>82</sup> Valentin Silvestrov, liner notes from 'Valentin Silvestrov, *Drama – World Premiere Recording*'.

<sup>83</sup> Svetlana Savenko, writing primarily about the pieces *Meditation* and *Drama* in 'Valentin Silvestrov's lyrical universe', 70.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, 75.

Richter himself has occasionally claimed that his pictures function like musical compositions. And in fact music disintegrates over the time in which it unfolds. As a compositional structure it is but a matrix of sounds that can be reassembled in the remembering ear of the listener.<sup>85</sup>

Koch is here referring to the theory that a musical work is only fully grasped in the remembering ear of the listener. Jerrold Levinson argues this way, claiming that 'the value of the total experience – and thus, ultimately, of the piece of music – is to a good approximation just the sum of values of the individual experience of parts.'<sup>86</sup> Rose Rosengard Subotnik has problematised this notion, arguing for a more sophisticated interpretation of 'structured listening'.<sup>87</sup> Richter's photo paintings, often arranged in installations or thematic groupings, also invite a degree of reconstruction given their presentation in an 'un-resolving' state. Conversely, it can be argued that Silvestrov's metamusic pieces function like Richter's photo paintings in some respects but the point of contact is more cogent than Koch's analogy. Silvestrov's metamusic pieces, through their exploration of the qualities of the postlude, incorporate a process of disintegration in their material; this notion of reconstruction or reassembly therefore addresses both ontology and the experience of listening. However, it is the concept of

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<sup>85</sup> Gertrud Koch, 'The Richter-scale of Blur', 140.

<sup>86</sup> Jerrold Levinson, *Music in the Moment*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 160.

<sup>87</sup> Rose Rosengard Subotnik, 'Toward a Deconstruction of Structural Listening: a Critique of Schoenberg, Adorno, and Stravinsky', from Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Deconstructive Variations: Music and Reason in Western Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 148.

photograph, musical image and Barthes's categories of *studium* and *punctum* that facilitate a more incisive connection.

Our understanding of Silvestrov's aesthetic can be enhanced if we interpret the stylistic references of metamusic as a form of discrete image, akin to the source photographs of Richter's photo paintings. In reflecting upon the Fifth Symphony, Hakobian identifies 'astonishingly beautiful, though ephemeral melodic images [that] wink from time to time', emerging from within 'slowly ascending and descending waves of sounding matter'.<sup>88</sup> Admittedly, Hakobian's observation is intended as a descriptive summary but the concept of a winking image captures the vividness and contrast with which Silvestrov's weak styles emerge that warrants further examination. Like Richter, the sources for Silvestrov's images are treated as reified objects, which form historical reference points for critical reflection. This represents a *studium*-like aspect shaped according to convention and cultural codes. In the piano pieces *Chopin-Augenblicke* and *Mozart-Augenblicke*, Barthes's concept of the biographeme is particularly relevant with the historical reference made explicit in content and title. (Ex. 8) In some respects, they represent a form of retrospective, or even retroactive, study. However, the recasting of a pre-existing image coincides with the pursuit of a *punctum*-like aspect, through painterly technique by Richter and subversion of convention by Silvestrov. To recall Barthes, 'Very often the *Punctum* is a "detail," i.e., a partial object'.<sup>89</sup> *Punctum*'s presence as a partial object is consistent with its capacity to unresolve an image and to expand when revisited in the mind of the viewer

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<sup>88</sup> Levon Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Age 1917-1987*, 311.

<sup>89</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida – Reflections on Photography*, 43.

after their time as viewer has passed. Both Richter and Silvestrov treat their source images as if they are reified objects, the pretext for painting and composition respectively, but are also engaged in a process of punctuating those images in order that they become unresolved. This form of *punctum* is more expansive than in the photograph because it addresses the question of ontology alongside reception; when the source photograph or stylistic reference is unresolved, they become, like *punctum*, partial objects in the structure of the work.

Für Vadim Sacharow / For Vadim Sakharov

## Zwei Stücke / Two Pieces

(2003)

## I. Chopin-Augenblicke / Moments of Chopin

**Maestoso** (♩ = 84), con moto, poco rubatoSehr leicht, durchsichtig, entfernt, wie vergessen, in sich rührend  
Very lightly, transparent, remote, quasi forgotten, stirring in itself

Valentin Silvestrov

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Ex. 4 - Chopin Augenblicke/Moments of Chopin from Zwei Stücke/Two Pieces, bars 1-13, by Valentin Silvestrov.

In 'The Richter-Scale of Blur', Koch highlights how different intensities of 'blur' and distortion applied to the photo painting by Richter serve to obfuscate the source image to varying degrees. Within Richter's photo paintings, a spectrum emerges from explicit replication to an implied, 'sliding glance'.<sup>90</sup> The *Tote* (1988) paintings referred to earlier reflect this concern, with the same source image being pursued with varying qualities of distortion and to various degrees of abstraction. In a similar way, Silvestrov offers a spectrum of creative responses to his source materials, with two discernible poles. The first is an attempt at near replication of stylistic convention, similar to Alfred Schnittke's strategy, where the reference is made explicit. This particular approach resonates with the tautological quality of the photograph, as described by Barthes, where the photograph represents a form of 'pure referent'. The composer's own 'style' emerges from the authorial mark they leave in the process of obfuscating their identity. It is in this context that the concept of a discrete musical image in Silvestrov's metamusic strategy is perhaps most convincing. The second pole is where Silvestrov's stylistic references are implied more fluidly through allusion, akin to a form of musical topic. They are distinct from conventional notions of topic though because these allusions are more strongly constitutive of the musical material as a form of metaphor, not simply a musical reference point within another material. In this context, the correlation with Richter is perhaps less direct. However, Silvestrov's awareness of convention and context in establishing

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<sup>90</sup> Gertrud Koch, 'The Richter-scale of Blur', 136.

these allusions develops a quasi-reified quality that still affirms, to some extent, the concept of a musical image. In these more fluid allusions, Silvestrov is arguably punctuating his own set of image-like reproductions of historical styles.

This first pole is apparent in several piano works, such as *Chopin-Augenblicke* and *Mozart-Augenblicke* referred to earlier, where the connection with the source material is explicit, indicated in the title and a vivid allusion to a pre-existing style, often expressed as a form of kitsch. As highlighted earlier in *Der Bote*, a relentless Alberti-bass and vivid major harmonies establish almost an estranged Mozart piano sonata. Like Richter, these musical ‘images’ possess a quasi-reified quality but here are more often reimaginings rather than literal reconstructions. In contrast to Richter, Silvestrov can define the shape of the underlying image that he composes upon, which offers a uniquely musical interaction with the underlying source. Silvestrov’s acceptance of reimagining rather than replicating indicates a marked contrast in attitude to Richter. Silvestrov’s weak styles are synthetic abstractions and, by extension, untruthful from the outset. While a necessary stage in the compositional process is to punctuate the weak styles, the goal is to make them available for creative manipulation, not simply to register their untruthfulness. In his Notes from 1964-5, Richter stated that his photo paintings are ‘so like the photograph that the thing that distinguished the photograph from all other pictures remains intact.’<sup>91</sup> Silvestrov is widely quoted as making the similar claim that, ‘I do not write new music. My music is

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<sup>91</sup> Richter, Gerhard. ‘Notes, 1964-5’, *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings and Interviews - 1962-1993*, 37.

a response to, and an echo of, what already exists.<sup>92</sup> However, in order to compose with weak styles in a more malleable way, Silvestrov largely disregards that aspect that distinguishes a stylistic fragment from all others. He consequently shifts emphasis towards the semantic overtone and away from a style's own matter.

As a singular object, the different aspects of the photo painting coincide but it is through its reception that it can be interpreted as functioning like a process that disintegrates in time. Silvestrov's metamusic pieces, to state a truism, are fundamentally different in nature because they necessarily unfold in time. However, the opposition between Silvestrov's formation of a musical image and his expressive punctuation of it can occur concurrently: a melodic passage may contain the allusion to a past musical style through its harmony and contour but be punctuated with seemingly anomalous shifts in harmony and direction. Svetlana Savenko identifies this quality in the Fifth Symphony, where 'conventional tonal chords accompany melody somewhat "out of place," as if at a tangent (but without a polyfunctional discrepancy), which gives an impression of latent tonality.'<sup>93</sup> Figure 80 of the Fifth Symphony demonstrates Savenko's point, where the woodwinds conclude a melodic falling passage with a diminished chord on D with an added E, which is then answered by a D major chord in the strings 'as if at a tangent' (Ex. 9). In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes suggests that 'however immediate and incisive it was, the *punctum* could accommodate a certain latency (but never any

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<sup>92</sup> Valentin Silvestrov, untitled text on *Requiem for Larissa*, *ECM Records.com*. Accessed on 25/10/11 at [http://www.ecmrecords.com/Background/Background\\_1778.php](http://www.ecmrecords.com/Background/Background_1778.php)

<sup>93</sup> Svetlana Savenko, 'Valentin Silvestrov's lyrical universe', 78.

scrutiny).<sup>94</sup> It could be argued that in the context of metamusic, the latency of *punctum* in a musical context has the capacity to bring about this impression of a latent, unresolved tonality, but that the expansion of *punctum* occurs over the course of the work as well as after its conclusion.

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<sup>94</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida – Reflections on Photography*, 53.

(rit.)  $\frac{3}{8}$   $\frac{4}{8}$  [80] rit. → Andantino rit.  $\frac{3}{4}$  più mosso ( $\text{♩} = 69$ )  $\frac{4}{8}$  Allegretto ( $\text{♩} = 112$ ) rit.  $\frac{3}{8}$

Fl. in G  
Cl. (in Bb) I  
Cl. basso II  
Cor. (in F) I  
T-tam II  
Gong  
C-elli  
Vibr.  
C-ne  
Cel.  
Arpa I  
Arpa II  
Pf.

1  
soli a 2  
2  
7-8  
1-4  
5-8  
9-12  
13-14  
Va. div.  
1-6  
7-8  
9-10

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Ex. 5 - *Symphony No. 5*, bars 649-653, by Valentin Silvestrov.

This 'out of place' quality which Savenko refers to arguably represents a form of *punctum*, where the deviation from stylistic conventions 'unresolves' the musical image that was originally proposed by the initial presence of those conventions. What is common to both Richter and Silvestrov is that here this *punctum*-like aspect addresses not the image or style itself, but the notion of it. As suggested earlier, the creative process is not one of clear-cut replication, even for Richter. The images in Richter's 48 Portraits offer an allegory for a style of monumental portraiture in photography and elaborate harp arpeggios in Silvestrov's Fifth Symphony invoke Mahler and the Romantic Symphony. However, it is essential for Silvestrov as well as Richter that this *studium* aspect is convincingly invoked in order for its interaction with a *punctum*-like aspect to be meaningful. Savenko highlights the complexities involved in this kind of compositional process:

The immersion into 'the magnificent past' seems to be absolute: the composer goes to an extreme, risking to sacrifice his own style. However, it is not an imitation, but a 'weak style,' to quote him once again; in other words his is a contextual style, based not so much on its own matter but a metaphor, an allegory, and an allusion.<sup>95</sup>

The consequence of this immersion is that the weak styles are initially indulged creating a feeling of proximity and intimacy, as if it were fully intended. The *punctum*-like aspect of Silvestrov's metamusic is part of the process by which we come to recognise these styles as weak styles, allowing them to function as allegory and allusion.

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<sup>95</sup> Svetlana Savenko, 'Valentin Silvestrov's Lyrical universe', 78.

This process is not limited to subversion through harmonic or melodic manipulation but also involves intentional overindulgence of styles in order to bring about a kitsch quality. At several points in the Fifth Symphony, Silvestrov intentionally overindulges the underlying styles through strategic orchestral doubling, creating a ‘sustain pedal’ effect. Savenko characterises these passages in the following way:

The melodic line is constantly “spotlighted” by the kindred and resonant timbres... These textural “doubles,” however, are not precisely following their principal voice, there arise heterophonic variants, with separate notes “being held up”, among them the most “inadequate” ones, such as the subsemitonal and passing notes... In this way there arises an interesting type of texture very characteristic of Valentin Silvestrov in general – sonoristic monody similar to the pedal “envelopment” of *Quiet Songs*. Owing to this device the themes seem to be vibrating, getting diffused in a certain halo – this is an aura incarnate, the materialized aura, a symbol of reminiscence and its unattainability.<sup>96</sup>

The consequent resonant halo gives a kitsch quality, allowing that material to be identified as a weak style and an imitation. In the central part of the work, Silvestrov obsessively repeats gestures as a process of abstraction, which in turn creates a sense of distance with the underlying style. These passages of obsessive repetition also have broader implications, which will be examined in the next chapter. Akin to Richter’s photo paintings, we can oscillate between opposing perceptions of Silvestrov’s musical material, between proximity and distance. The key distinction here is that, by virtue of working with an art form that unfolds in time, Silvestrov can more directly shape our movement

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<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, 78.

between these perceptions. Within this oscillation, Silvestrov arguably incorporates 'photo painting' moments, where both perceptions are legitimate and we feel the full impetus of the dialectic. Although this is an aesthetic distinction, it can be demonstrated that this concern shapes the literal articulation of Silvestrov's musical material. For example, at Figure 35 of the Fifth Symphony, the two harps offer a form of axis. Although they share a common timbre and are unified at other moments, Harp I here opposes the 'kitsch' playful melody proposed by the strings in the preceding bar with a fluid, falling motif in G-flat. In contrast, Harp II doubles the bass line of the strings' 'kitsch' melody in E-flat, lending weight to the conventions of the referenced style. (Ex. 10)

42

Andante ( $\text{♩} = 66$ )

Animato ( $\text{♩} = 126$ )

288  $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{4}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$  **35**  $\frac{2}{4}$

Fl. in G  
Fl. II  
Fl. III  
Cl. I (in B $\flat$ )  
Cl. II (in B $\flat$ )  
Cl. basso  
Cor. I (in F)  
Cor. II (in F)  
Cel.  
Arpa I  
Arpa II

Andante ( $\text{♩} = 66$ )

Animato ( $\text{♩} = 126$ )

$\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{4}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$  **35**  $\frac{2}{4}$

Vl. I  
Vl. II div.  
Va. 1-8  
Va. 9  
Va. 10  
Vc. 1-6  
Vc. 7  
Vc. 8  
Vc. 9  
Vc. 10  
Cb. div.

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Ex. 6 - Symphony No. 5, bars 288-299, by Valentin Silvestrov.

293 **2/4** Andante (♩) **4/4** **3/8** (♩ = ♩) Animato (♩) **3/4** Andante (♩) **2/4**

Fl. in G  
Fl. II  
Fl. III  
Cl. I (in Bb)  
Cl. II (in Bb)  
Cl. basso  
Cor. I (in F)  
Cor. II (in F)  
Ccl.  
Arpa I  
Arpa II  
VI. I  
VI. II div.  
Va. 1-8  
Va. 9  
Va. 10  
Vc. 1-6  
Vc. 7  
Vc. 8  
Vc. 9  
Vc. 10  
Cb. div.

mp, pp, fpp, con sord., solo, (l.v.), leggiero, arco, pizz.

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Passages such as this are illustrative of the oscillation between proximity and distance but prioritise a perception of the work as more static than dynamic. In reality, stylistic references that can be interpreted as musical images are transitory, constantly emerging and dissipating over the course of a large-scale work. By treating the work as a site in some respects, Silvestrov allows these images and their tensions to co-exist, often overlapping or running into one another. From a global perspective, there is still a clear sense of progression as a piece unfolds in time and, by extension, an interrelationship between stylistic references that appear to have a quasi-reified identity at times. However, progression is not analogous to development but is an accumulation of allusions and estrangements, a situation that requires a new model for analysing global structure.

### ***Postludes, metaphors and glacial landscapes***

The general perception of Gerhard Richter's photo paintings is that the opposition between photography and painting is the central aspect. In reality, it is Richter's treatment of the work as a site for examining a number of tensions that is more significant. Silvestrov treats the work in a similar way and this approach is reflected in the structure of Silvestrov's metamusic pieces, notably in the larger orchestral works where this aspect is writ large. In reflecting upon the Fifth Symphony, Savenko suggests that the piece is 'devoid of the conventional dramatic contrasts and collisions, lending therefore no sensation of the development in its process directed from point A (exposition) to point B (finale)'.<sup>97</sup> This quality is indicative of Silvestrov's attempt to overcome the concrete nature of style, a situation where pre-existing formal archetypes have become unsuitable. However, the term 'collage' is also inaccurate because, as Savenko suggests, the emphasis for Silvestrov is not on junctions between styles. In reality, stylistic fragments are embedded in a more active system where internal tensions generate a new form of subject matter through the structures of metaphor. The *studium* aspects of Silvestrov's metamusic are articulated through the historical conventions that make his weak styles tangible in some way. It is traditionally the analyst who projects a spatial interpretation onto a musical work but in this context it forms part of the compositional process. Barthes's concepts of *studium* and *punctum*, alongside Benjamin's concept of aura, are highly

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<sup>97</sup> Svetlana Savenko, 'Valentin Silvestrov's lyrical universe', 76. Edited for clarity.

relevant here but in order to be meaningful need to be set in motion in some way, situated within a framework that accounts for the reified and transitory, or spatial and temporal. Metamusic, like Benjamin's definition of aura, is 'a strange web of time and space.'<sup>98</sup>

To borrow Michael Spitzer's terminology, any characterisation of this musical foreground of weak styles needs to be consonant with the 'background story of engagement'.<sup>99</sup> This glacial landscape allegory can mediate concepts of site and system and therefore account for the contrasting dimensions of Silvestrov's music. Within a glacial landscape, the interacting processes of erosion, transportation and deposition craft new landforms, which are unique to the glacial setting and acutely reflect a tension between the pre-existing and the new. The impact of glacial ice is often perceived as overriding the pre-existing landscape but there is rarely any new formation that is not a reflection of the underlying geological structure: glacial action crafts a landscape upon a landscape. Similarly, Silvestrov's strategy is not to dominate historical styles but invoke their 'semantic overtone', thereby composing 'music about music'. The pre-existing in both cases is the foundation for the formation of new features.

Analytical storytelling of this kind is potentially problematic in the context of postmodernism, particularly for Silvestrov's metamusic. His method, like Richter's, possesses an intrinsic process of negation with the consequence that we cannot expect to find a finished product; this implied 'negative space'

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<sup>98</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'A Short History of Photography', 209.

<sup>99</sup> Michael Spitzer, *Metaphor and Musical Thought*, (USA: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 86-7.

is an essential part of the aesthetic. There is a tendency in some cases to burden Silvestrov's music with an extra-musical narrative that is dissonant with the background story of engagement. For example, in assessing part of Silvestrov's Fifth Symphony, David Fanning grandly refers to the 'final evocation of thunder and distant memory' which 'yet again parallels the programmatic birth-to-death trajectory of Tippett's Fourth [Symphony].'<sup>100</sup> In such a situation, metamusic is treated as the target and not the source of the characterisation. However, Michael Spitzer argues that analytical storytelling should be part of a bi-directional model where the music is both the source and the target for projection.<sup>101</sup>

Making a comparison between the structure of Silvestrov's orchestral works and that of a glacial valley may initially appear no less arbitrary than the colourful metaphors of Savenko and Fanning. The composer himself has not referenced landscape in his comments on his music although ECM have selected landscape imagery imparted with a strong sense of aura, synthetic or otherwise, for the cover artwork of a number of recent recordings of his music. Walter Benjamin's definition of aura is closely bound up with the qualities he associates with our perception of natural landscapes:

What is aura? A strange web of time and space: the unique appearance of a distance, however close at hand. On a summer noon, resting, to follow the line of a mountain range on the horizon or a twig which throws its shadow on the observer, until the moment or hour begins to be a part of its appearance – that is to breathe the aura of those mountains, that twig.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> David Fanning, liner notes from Valentin Silvestrov, *Symphonies 4 & 5*, Lahti Symphony Orchestra (Sinfonia Lahti), conducted by Jukka-Pekka Saraste, BIS-CD-1703, 2009.

<sup>101</sup> Michael Spitzer, *Metaphor and Musical Thought*, 86-7.

<sup>102</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'A Short History of Photography', 209.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the distant and proximate are brought together in Silvestrov's orchestral works in such a way that the perception of one is bound up with the other. Characterising Silvestrov's orchestral works in a geographical way allows these contrasts in scale, the equivalent of the twig and the mountain, to be accounted for and to interpret aura not as something nominally attached to simplistic notions of sentiment and nostalgia but as a quality thoroughly diffused within the work's structure.

The field of geomorphology is primarily concerned with the development of landforms but takes into account linear processes that unfold in time and also the influence of general atmospheric or geological conditions that inform those processes. Reductionism is necessary to analyse the systems underlying land formation but a concern with emergence is required when analysing how those systems interact to form landforms characteristic of certain conditions. The glacial valley operates on a vast scale, both spatially and temporally and therefore an overly reductive approach would be ineffective for assessing the diversity of processes involved. Likewise, a purely systems-based approach to Silvestrov's Fifth Symphony would constrain the potency of its musical metaphors. The geographer Stephan Harrison has promoted 'emergence' over 'reductionism' as a process for analysing land formation in geomorphology. He argues that, 'since the macroscopic structures of a complex system are insensitive to microscopic changes in that system we can only understand the large-scale by analysing the emergent phenomena

operating at that scale.<sup>103</sup> Silvestrov's metamusic strategy likewise prioritises the semantic implications of the 'emergent phenomena'. The semantic overtones of those passages are likewise largely insensitive to microscopic changes, although note-to-note details enhance the acuity of thematic gestures. In order for this comparison to be cogent, meaningful parallels need to be identified across different scales. Insightfully, Harrison also argues that qualitative narratives of landscape offer an effective analytical tool for addressing complex processes in the field of geomorphology:

We should assert that qualitative 'narratives' of landscape are valid responses to complexity and unknowability. Whilst this view might seem 'unscientific' to some and a 'counsel of despair' to others, other sciences and languages have long recognised the absence of 'absolute certainty' and 'absolute rigour'.<sup>104</sup>

By moving from the broad narrative of flow across a valley glacier, to the idiosyncratic behaviour of ice at a localised level and the landforms that emerge, it is possible to develop a textured reading of Silvestrov's method.

A process of gradual disintegration and dissolution is present in Silvestrov's pieces where the genre of the postlude is being applied as the central organising principle. This is succinctly expressed in many of Silvestrov's chamber works, such as the three postludes for piano, 'cello and soprano, but a creative tension emerges when this form is writ large in an orchestral

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<sup>103</sup> Stephan Harrison, 'On Reductionism and Emergence in Geomorphology' from *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series, Vol. 26, No. 3* (2001), published by Blackwell, 330. Accessed online in March 2012 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3650649>

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, 334.

context. He has referred to the Fifth Symphony as a 'post-symphony' but a similar structural quality is present in the Sixth Symphony, the tone-poem, *Metamusik*, and *Postludium* for piano and orchestra.<sup>105</sup> The postlude as a principle facilitates the exploration of an after-moment, a theoretical 'negative space' where disintegration displaces resolution. A structural principle of this kind sustains the underlying process of negation where, as Silvestrov suggests, we cannot expect to find a finished product. Silvestrov has expanded upon this postlude structure in the following way:

It is very important for a composition to begin with an impulse. No matter whether powerful or gentle, it should be the result of a preexisting energy that sets the composition in motion. Then the whole can unfold step by step.<sup>106</sup>

While the generalised notion of glacial motion is one of slow but imperceptible change, the reality is a body of ice that shifts from accumulation to depletion over its course. In a more environmental context, glacial landscapes with in-situ glaciers are also in a state of decline due to climatic change but the relevance of this observation is perhaps only a poetic resonance to Silvestrov's sense of nostalgia. The upland area of the glacier where new ice is generated is the accumulation zone and represents a point of high potential energy. Over a valley glacier's course there will be energy fluctuations, through tributary confluence or change in slope angle, but the overarching

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<sup>105</sup> Svetlana Savenko, 'Valentin Silvestrov's lyrical universe', 75.

<sup>106</sup> Valentin Silvestrov, liner notes from *Metamusik: symphony for piano and orchestra; Postludium: symphonic poem for piano and orchestra*, 30.

narrative is one of eventual depletion towards the tongue of the glacier where melting or sublimation occurs. At a localised level, ice flows at different rates and in rotations forming a constant process of re-emergence and renewal. This structural shape is present in the Fifth Symphony, opening with its moment of highest energy and tension, with rapid fragmentary gestures articulated in an unstable, atonal harmony. As the work's single-movement unfurls, there is a gradual diffusion of energy and no subsequent ebb regains the assertiveness of this opening gesture. Distinctive patterns of material are submerged and resurface though, akin to rotations of ice within the glacier but still mirroring the glacier's narrative of diminishing energy.

This narrative shape, from accumulation to sublimation or structural downbeat to after-moment, should not be overemphasised because it only becomes meaningful through its interrelationship with processes operating at other levels. The generalised metaphor of glacial motion often applied to particular orchestral textures posits the glacier as something homogenised though, approached from a global perspective. To some extent, this quality is reflected in the orchestral music of György Ligeti and Iannis Xenakis, where a preoccupation with internal logic brings about something sonically complex yet singular. The subtle shifts of motif in individual instrumental lines in Ligeti's *Atmosphères* could be mapped onto specific patterns of ice flow, such as the process of 'creep', where ice becomes malleable under pressure. Such an analytical process would require a degree of abstraction though, which deprioritises the formation of the wider landscape and the field of geomorphology more generally. Although this is a more reductive

interpretation of glacial activity, the application of the glacial metaphor as an analytical tool to Ligeti or Xenakis is still valid. However, the dissonances that exist between their orchestral works and this kind of analytical storytelling would need to be accounted for and elaborated upon, in line with Michael Spitzer's argument. With Silvestrov, we can pursue the glacial and geographical in a more committed way and comment upon the consonance. In reality, obstructions at the base of the valley and the intervention of tributary channels cause localised shifts in flow, with crevices and melt water channels emerging as a consequence. The surface of a valley glacier is textured and contains multiple crevices, which are a constant reflection of underlying tensions across different scales. Furthermore, processes of erosion and/or weathering acting on the valley sides create a glacier surface littered with debris, displacing the romanticised image of icy whites and blues to some extent.

This rich interaction of tensions and artefacts mirrors the general character of several of Silvestrov's metamusic pieces but underpinned by more specific parallels. Where obstructions are encountered in the valley glacier, such as protrusions or areas of more resistant geology, the process of 'creep' occurs. The build-up of pressure causes the ice to become pliable without melting and flow around a given obstacle. This pattern of obstruction and flow is analogous to a rubato quality, a wrought pattern of tension and release. Within the valley glacier, ice flows away from points of high pressure in an attempt to achieve equilibrium. The process of creep in particular decodes Silvestrov's rubato quality because melodic fragments are often drawn back to

a point of near stasis, often held back by a 'sustain pedal' effect produced by thick doublings in the lower strings. Obsessive shifts in metre dictate gestural shape, while bars of a semiquaver in length, marked *ritenuto*, capture the accumulated resonance at a point of maximum pressure. Onward momentum is then guided by precise tempo markings that emphasise the rate of flow between bars of contrasting metre. However, this *rubato* quality is not to the extreme that thematic identity is sacrificed and disintegration or 'melting' occurs, at least not at this localised level; the 'plastic flow' of ice also possesses a critical point at which it becomes denatured. From an aesthetic perspective, the significance of Silvestrov's *rubato* quality is twofold: it crystallises the expressivity of Romantic musical gestures as a form of historical artefact but it also evokes a general sense of musical stasis. That stasis is not inert though but reflects, like the ice, an ongoing pursuit of equilibrium or resolution, which is never fully realised.

In approaching these orchestral works by Silvestrov as sites for examining historical tensions, our perception of the work shifts from one of reductionism to emergence. More specifically, this entails developing an interpretation of the work as a complex and multifaceted system where certain conditions engender particular features. Stephan Harrison has argued in the context of glaciology that, 'It is clear that landform regularities and pattern development may emerge from chaotic and perturbed systems.'<sup>107</sup> The Fifth Symphony, for example, is not an autonomous system but it is chaotic in that it attempts to contain materials that are disparate in origin and perturbed because it

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<sup>107</sup> Stephan Harrison, 'On Reductionism and Emergence in Geomorphology', 331.

prioritises complex musical symbolism over empiricism. Silvestrov develops gestural patterns that respond to this condition, attempting to contain the tension rather than resolve it. As quoted earlier, Silvestrov has described metamusic as ‘a process’ where ‘we cannot expect to find a finished product’, but more crucially, that ‘Meta-musical awareness is creative awareness; music creates music...’<sup>108</sup>

In a quasi-minimalist manner, Silvestrov composes passages of obsessive repetition where Romantic gestural archetypes are indulged through orchestration but made abstract through the emerging sense of stasis. These archetypes offer a structure around which new material can gather, both literally, through variation and development, and symbolically, by transforming the perception of that material. The underlying gesture can be thought of as a form of musical image and the process of abstraction akin to Richter’s photo painting method. This comparison recalls the potency of Barthes’s categories of *studium* and *punctum* but frames them in a non-musical setting. The interaction between the pre-existing and the new in the valley glacier, specifically in the land formation of the drumlin, offers a comparison, which can set the categories in motion. Silvestrov’s repetitious textures are then more accurately understood as part of a process operating across time but also located alongside strategies engaging with tensions at other levels. The drumlin is an egg-shaped hillock formed of boulder clay deposited by a valley glacier and commonly occurs in large groups, referred to as swarms. These swarms exhibit obsessive repetition but with variation and refinement taking

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<sup>108</sup> Valentin Silvestrov, liner notes from ‘Valentin Silvestrov, *Drama – World Premiere Recording*’.

place over their course. The subtleties of drumlin formation vary but I.J. Smalley has encapsulated a general sense of the process in the following way:

At points at which the flow is interrupted the expanded dilatant system tends to form a local packing; once it has packed it is stable, and the flow adjusts by flowing around the resultant obstruction...the boulder clay would tend to pack at the lee side of the obstruction; thus the eventual drumlin has a rock embedded at its upstream face.<sup>109</sup>

The swarm of drumlins therefore represents a form of intersection between several processes. The obstructions and protrusions that bring about an interruption in flow are pre-existing in the bedrock and the consequent swarm forms as a response to underlying geological conditions. The shape and scale of that obstruction will also be reflected in the consequent drumlin although the characteristic egg-shape is often the dominant aspect.

Like other landforms in the glacial valley, the drumlin facilitates an engagement with Silvestrov's orchestral metamusic as something both static and dynamic. The physical form and arrangement of the drumlins as a swarm provides a structural characterisation of repetitious textures. In this setting, the piece is treated as a quasi-reified landscape. For the geologist or geographer though, landforms such as the drumlin contain within them traces of their processes of formation, like a rock embedded at the upstream face. Likewise,

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<sup>109</sup> I.J. Smalley, 'Drumlin Formation: A Rheological Model', *Science, New Series, Vol. 151, No. 3716 (Mar. 18, 1966)*, published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1379-1380. Accessed online in March 2012 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1718494>

it is possible to work retroactively and decode these textures as part of a process of formation unfolding in time. Given Silvestrov's use of a postlude form and the absence of 'conventional dramatic contrasts and collisions', this process of formation is more closely related to the perception of musical metaphor than discrete thematic units. Grasping this aspect leads towards the background story of engagement. There is a more literal interpretation that can be found within the compositional process though, where gestural fragments obstruct or protrude within more fluid material and are consequently affirmed through instrumental reinforcement or doublings that produce an almost *laissez vibrer* tail to the gesture. This gestural tail and its gradual refinement reflect the drumlin's shift towards a 'smooth shape that causes minimum disturbance in the flowing layer'.<sup>110</sup> This compositional process is what underpins the perceptual shift.

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<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*

596  $\frac{4}{8}$  74 103  $\frac{5}{8}$  rit.  $\frac{3}{8}$   $\frac{4}{8}$

Fl. I  
Fl. II  
Ob. I  
Ob. II  
Cl. I (in B $\flat$ )  
Cl. II  
Cl. basso  
Cor. I (in F)  
Cor. II  
Ccl.  
Arpa I  
Arpa II

VI. I  
1-6  
7-8  
9-10  
11-12  
13-14  
15-16

VI. II  
1-4  
5-8  
9-12  
13-14

Va. div.  
1-6  
7-8  
9-10

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Ex. 7 - Symphony No. 5, bars 596-648, by Valentin Silvestrov

643 79 rit.  $(\text{♩} = 72)$   $(\text{♩} = 138)$   $(\text{♩} = 72)$  acc. rit. → Andantino rit. più mosso rit.  $(\text{♩} = 72)$  5/16 3/8

Fl. in G  
 Cl. (in B $\flat$ )  
 Cl. basso  
 Cor. (in F)  
 Vibr.  
 Ccl.  
 Arpa I  
 Arpa II

VI I  
 1-6  
 7-8  
 9-10  
 11-12  
 13-14  
 15-16

VI II  
 1-4  
 5-8  
 9-12  
 13-14

Va. div.  
 solo (7)  
 solo (7)

Vc.  
 1-4  
 7-8

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Ex. 8 - Symphony No. 5, bars 643-648, by Valentin Silvestrov.

We can draw from this parallel with the drumlin at the localised level a general principle of repetition and incremental development, an interaction between the pre-existing and new. This parallel becomes more cogent though when located in the broader context of the glacier and the contrasting instances where they arise. Like the Fifth Symphony, these drumlin patterns and swarms are not limited to single instances but emerge multiple times throughout the glacier's course. The existence of repetitious passages across the symphony's structure does not affirm the parallel on its own but in conjunction with the manner in which these textures emerge. Along the course of the glacier, material is eroded, transported and deposited, forming landforms termed 'moraine'. Moraine is often used as a general term for deposited material but more specifically refers to distinct ridges formed when the glacier slows or encounters resistance. That material is primarily formed of boulder clay or 'till' and, appropriately for this comparison, is an unstratified mixture of silts, clays and rock or boulder fragments. Unlike a river valley system, there is only a limited amount of sorting or refinement of transported particles and the emergent moraines reflect this quality in their content. A musical analogue can be identified for different forms of moraine, such as ebbs or points of harmonic tension, but their ability to interact and merge with drumlins has a rich parallel in the Fifth Symphony.

Jan Lundqvist has identified different categories of moraine that relate specifically to drumlins.<sup>111</sup> The Rogen Moraine, named after Lake Rogen in

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<sup>111</sup> Jan Lundqvist, 'Moraine Morphology. Terminological Remarks and Regional Aspects', from *Geografiska Annaler. Series A, Physical Geography*, Vol. 63, No. 3/4 (1981), published by Blackwell, 128. Accessed online in March 2012 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/520824>

Sweden, exhibits three kinds of transitions to drumlins according to Lundqwist. Firstly, crescent-shaped ridges often occur within the Rogén Moraine, which many argue are incomplete drumlins. In this context, the Rogén Moraine encapsulates the emergence of another landform within itself. Secondly, within the ridges of the Rogén Moraine may be a ridge comprised of small, complete drumlins that have merged side-by-side. Here, the ridge represents a 'unison', fully formed manifestation of the drumlin. Lastly, there is often a 'deep-reaching striation' of the ridges in the Rogén Moraine, a groove or trough cut into the bedrock by fragments dragged along at the base of the glacier. These striations run parallel to the ice flow and form an indexical link with the action of the original glacier.

These different forms of transition to a drumlin-like texture find meaningful analogues in the Fifth Symphony and the first form offers the initial point of contact. At figure 74 (Ex. 11), harmonically unstable gestures of irregular length establish an implied undulating motion. After the introduction of a more assertively diatonic, melodic gesture in the woodwinds, the earlier unstable material coalesces as a *laissez vibrer* tail in the strings and a more discernibly repetitious texture with a thematic identity emerges (Ex.12). As highlighted earlier, the architectural shape of the Fifth Symphony is one of diminishing energy, an expression of the 'Post-Symphony' form that Silvestrov has devised. However, it can be argued that this passage embodies a quasi-Hegelian process of 'becoming', motivated by the dialectic of proximity and

distance drawn from Germer's interpretation of Richter.<sup>112</sup> That opposition is invoked by the tangential quality of the exchange between the melodic fragments of the woodwinds and the harmonic 'sustain pedal' effect of the strings. That dialectic is not specifically analysable within the musical material though because it operates at a perceptual level. For example, percussion interjections of sextuplet semiquavers underpinned by the strings contribute to the cumulative sense of instability, a constant eschewing of resolution. Like the Rogen Moraine, the emergence of another musical 'landform' appears to be encapsulated in the passage.

The ability to distinguish between contrasting perceptions of the Fifth Symphony as static and dynamic is relevant here and aids in making this particular comparison more precise. As a repetitious texture, akin to the drumlin swarm, a sense of stasis is created and a form of abstraction taking place along the lines of minimalist repetition. Within that pattern of musical 'landforms', there is an implied process of formation, which necessarily unfolds in time. From this position, these repeated gestures can be interpreted as a series of snapshots or images in a progression. In this context, the term 'becoming' refers to the process of gradual gestural refinement, which over time symbolically embodies the oppositions motivating its progression. Shortly before figure 85, a *dolcissimo* theme emerges as a violin solo subsequently joined by the full violin section at figure 87. Still at a *pianissimo* dynamic but without mutes, they are instructed to play expressively with bowings specified

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<sup>112</sup> Drawn from Janet Schmalfeldt, 'Form as the Process of Becoming: The Beethoven-Hegelian Tradition and the "Tempest" Sonata', *Beethoven Forum Vol.4, No.1*, published by University of Illinois Press, 37-71.

by the composer. Nearly every bar adopts a new length from the previous alongside regular *ritenuto* markings, embedding a strong *rubato* quality. This Mahlerian *dolcissimo* theme could, at a localised level, be posited as the outcome of this process of 'becoming', a fully realised expression of the Romantic rhetoric referenced in the preceding section. This theme retains an equivocal quality though and the undulating triplet semiquaver gesture developed in the preceding section has become subordinate to the melody and not part of any meaningful synthesis. More crucially, it is the location of this theme geographically in the piece, roughly one seventh of the work from its end, that suggests a more plausible role. At the tongue of a valley glacier at its furthest reach, energy is lost through melting and sublimation causing the ice to slow, reinforced by a decrease in slope angle. It is at this point that the glacier deposits a ridge of clearly defined material referred to as the terminal moraine. Beyond that ridge lies the outwash plain, a smooth area containing a delta of meltwater streams that stands in stark contrast to the dramatic landscape behind it. In the work's narrative of diminishing energy, this theme represents a form of terminal moraine, a final ebb at a point of diminishing energy. The codetta at figure 93 is a diffuse collection of now familiar gestures that appear as fragments in a state of decay. In the brass, air sounds produced by exhaling through the instrument interweave with sul ponticello chords in the strings at figure 95 contributing to this sense of dissipating energy, a sonic analogue of the outwash plain's landscape.

Within the glacial valley system, multiple processes occur across contrasting scales of time and space. This 'strange web of time and space', to borrow

again from Walter Benjamin's description of aura, produces a set of conditions from which characteristic landforms emerge.<sup>113</sup> After the glacier melts, inevitable incongruities emerge alongside these landforms and together affirm this quality of a unique instance. Hanging valleys, which avoided the erosive action of the main glacier, now sit high above the U-shaped valley as a tangible reference to the character of the pre-existing landscape. Misfit streams, which flow through the base of the U-shaped valley, appear out of place because they lack the physical power to have eroded the valley they are now situated in. This rich pattern of incongruities develops a degree of complementarity as they interact and flow into one another over time. In the Fifth Symphony, it is possible to attend to the spatial dimension, a landscape of unresolved themes and fragments, but also the temporal, the formation and perception of musical metaphor which unfolds in time. Like the glacial valley, contrasts in spatial and temporal scale become interwoven in new features that contain within them the tension between old and new.

Perhaps the most enigmatic of these formations is the erratic, a large boulder or fragment of rock that is transported by a glacier to a new location of contrasting geology, often hundreds of miles away, and then deposited when the glacier recedes. Erratics are a form of artefact from another location, which reveal the true extent of the original glacier. Once deposited, periglacial processes such as various forms of weathering begin to embed the erratic in its new location although never fully incorporate it. For example, a number of erratics in Ireland have been weathered at the base through fluctuations in

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<sup>113</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'A Short History of Photography', 209.

water table level, consequently producing the appearance of so-called 'mushroom stones'. This contrast between the localised action of weathering which is still ongoing and the power of the glacier that deposited the erratic which has ceased, produces an almost mythical quality that binds together the recent and the ancient, the proximate and the distant. The dynamics of ice flow and land formations in the valley glacier engage with the internal logic of the Fifth Symphony but as a chaotic and perturbed system rather than a coherent one. A consistent comparison therefore accounts for the presence of 'musical erratics' which stand in relief to their surroundings. In the Fifth Symphony and *Postludium* for piano and orchestra, moments of strongly melodic material emerge fleetingly and unexpectedly in contrast to surrounding textures, almost as a form of 'durchbruch'.<sup>114</sup> They possess an implausible, kitsch quality, akin to the synthesised aura of Richter's untruthful landscapes. Ex. 13 shows a passage from the Fifth Symphony where a strongly melodic 'erratic' in the piano part emerges from within a more unstable texture. The connection with aura is well established here, with Silvestrov including the instruction to play 'very gently and delicately, as if from afar'. Like the erratic boulders though, the logic of these moments is never fully established in the context of the larger landscape. The term polystylistics is inappropriate here but an overemphasis on nostalgia would also be misguided. If Silvestrov's metamusic method is one where we should not expect to discover a finished product, then these musical erratics

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<sup>114</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Mahler – A Musical Physiognomy*, translated by Edmund Jephcott, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 5-14.

represent artefacts of an unresolvable process. Their presence might appear anomalous but retroactively they affirm the work's metaphorical logic.

This metaphor of the erratic can be pursued a step further and interpreted as a form of emblem for the work as a whole. While the process of erosion is concerned with the transportation of material across potentially vast distances, weathering acts upon material which is in situ. In some respects, Silvestrov's compositional process is akin to this subsequent stage of weathering. He ascribes to his historical styles their new location but accepts his inability to mollify the tensions they engender in their new location. The contrasts of temporal scale cannot be overcome and he responds by registering that tension, affirming the musical remnants of earlier periods through the structures of metaphor and presenting them as something mythical. If aura is a concept relevant to Silvestrov's metamusic at all, it is perhaps not as the synthetic ritual-quality with which the weak styles are often regarded. Instead, by drawing together Adorno and Benjamin, it is by retracing the steps and points where these strange webs of time and space appear that the term 'aura' becomes meaningful for metamusic.



### ***Postlude: Photographs, Landscapes and Photos of Landscapes***

The discursive web outlined so far has engaged with photo paintings, glacial landscapes and metamusic, examining the resonances between their associated aesthetic concepts. As a form of postlude, that web can be enlarged a stage further in order to raise questions of reception while keeping the underlying aesthetic discussion in the background. More specifically, it is the question of whether the extra-musical narratives projected onto Silvestrov's works in order to make them commercially viable conflict with his underlying aesthetic project. That projection of an external narrative is articulated through liner notes and critical reflection but is embodied in the cover artwork for ECM's recordings of Silvestrov's recent music. ECM are the current producers of Silvestrov's new works and release them as part of their 'New Series', a diverse, postmodern catalogue of recordings that extends from John Cage to Pérotin. The company itself and, more specifically, the New Series recordings, belong to a distinctive project undertaken by the Executive Producer, Manfred Eicher. A number of Silvestrov's Eastern European contemporaries who explore 'the symbolic nature of the aural,'<sup>115</sup> such as Arvo Pärt, Sofia Gubaidulina and Giya Kancheli, are featured in the New Series recordings and subjected to a particular kind of promotional strategy where the liner notes and cover images arguably become part of a 'miniature *Gesamtkunstwerk*'.

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<sup>115</sup> Peter J. Schmelz, *Such freedom, if only musical – unofficial Soviet music during the Thaw*, (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 221.

The role of cover artwork has arguably grown in significance over the development of the music recording although more recently it has become marginalised due to the advent of digital media. Eicher and ECM attach significance to the role of cover artwork, commissioning and producing *Windfall Light: The Visual Language of ECM*, a book cataloguing cover artwork alongside critical essays. In an essay from the book, Ketil Bjørnstad argues the following:

It seems as though, right from the start, Manfred Eicher took the record cover as seriously as he took the music. In line with a philosophy that he has since expressed on various occasions, he did not want the aesthetic of the cover to be controlled by sales and marketing interests.<sup>116</sup>

Eicher's project is therefore concerned with identifying meaningful resonances between musical and visual language in order to produce a coherent product. This miniature *Gesamtkunstwerk* approach calls into question the ontology of the recording and the extent to which these non-sonic elements are constitutive of the product. However, despite Bjørnstad's claim that sales and marketing interests are not the primary concern for Eicher, the visual motifs and styles of the ECM covers have become increasingly standardised to the extent that many, it can be argued, are interchangeable. Lars Müller argues that Eicher 'focuses his attention on subtle variations within a recurring canon of motifs, and he insists on the differentiatedness of the image that is intended

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<sup>116</sup> Ketil Bjørnstad, 'Landscapes and Soundscapes', *Windfall Light: the visual language of ECM*, edited by Lars Müller, (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2010), 267.

to resist the visual noise of our times.<sup>117</sup> This emerging standardisation can be interpreted a number of ways. Eicher's initial intention has perhaps been disregarded as the visual language of ECM's cover artwork has found commercial viability. For example, a number of Arvo Pärt's non-ECM recordings feature expansive landscapes and vacant buildings, a visual language ECM have attempted to claim as their own. Alternatively, what can be understood to be the visual noise of our times has shifted since ECM's formation in 1969 to the extent that the aesthetic of the understated image pervaded by a sense of 'absence' or 'trace' has become a commonplace artistic archetype. Eicher's attempt to offer a more pensive album cover, to borrow Barthes's term, is now at risk of simply restating and fetishising a specific canon of motifs. Edgar Morin argues the following in the context of photography:

Of course we want to see, and not just take photos. But what we are looking for, what we see, is a universe that, sheltered from time, or at least victoriously enduring its erosion, is already itself a souvenir... This is why guidebooks despise a country's industry and work only to present its embalmed mummy with an emotionless nature.<sup>118</sup>

ECM's familiar canon of image motifs has, to some degree, become like a guidebook that only displays the embalmed mummy, reprising the cultural tropes of Barthes's *studium* category. *Windfall Light* represents a physical guidebook of ECM's cover images that treats them as souvenirs prised from

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<sup>117</sup> Lars Müller, 'Polyphonic Pictures', *Windfall Light: the visual language of ECM*, 353.

<sup>118</sup> Edgar Morin, *The cinema, or, The imaginary man*, 19.

their relations to the music they originally accompanied. While Sartre's concept of the mental image differs from the concept of the photographic image being examined here, his delineation of perception and consciousness is relevant:

In a word, the object of perception constantly overflows consciousness; the object of an image is never anything more than the consciousness one has of it; it is defined by that consciousness: one can never learn from an image what one does not know already.<sup>119</sup>

In the context of the ECM cover images, the expansive landscapes of Silvestrov's and Kancheli's recordings offer no new information than that which we have already learned of the underlying motif. Sartre's position, when applied to the context of photography, is complemented by Morin's argument cited earlier, that 'the richness of the photograph is in fact all that is not there, but that we project or fix onto it.'<sup>120</sup> It is the ubiquity of the motif and the prevalence of *studium* that make this form of image limited in its relationship to the music. The presentation of Silvestrov's metamusic in the ECM New Series is akin to Morin's concept of the guidebook, an attempt to preserve and aestheticise. In reality, Silvestrov works with the imperfect and unresolved, succumbing to erosion rather than victoriously overcoming it.

The motifs underlying many of ECM's cover images may be restrained by their ubiquity. However, their intentional coolness and neutrality is an intrinsic

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<sup>119</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Imagination – a Psychological Critique*, 10.

<sup>120</sup> Edgar Morin. *The cinema, or, The imaginary man*, 22.

part of Eicher's aesthetic approach outlined in *Windfall Light*. Thomas Steinfeld expresses this aesthetic approach in the following way:

None of these [ECM] pictures is an illustration in the narrow sense of the word. None of them refers to the music or to the musicians as a decoration. None of them pretends to give an interpretation or event to be interpreted on its own. These pictures accompany the music as pieces of art in their own right, in unexpected places and in often surprising forms. Each is a hieroglyph freed from much of its potential meaning, a work of dreamlike qualities, taken from nothing a sudden objection against the profane and its often inescapable presence. No work is presented with pride of achievement or in order to impress the listener. Nothing is to be taught, and no one is to be seduced. Instead, these pictures tastefully say: "reject".<sup>121</sup>

Steinfeld's interpretation of the ECM pictures as dispassionate in some way resonates closely with Gerhard Richter's aesthetics of negation, particularly by identifying the pictures as fundamentally a form of rejection. This connection is strengthened by the use of an out of focus 'blurred' effect in some pictures, such as the cover of Silvestrov's Sixth Symphony by Sascha Kleis. Richter's application of a dry brush to bring about a loss of focus and the photographic blurring by Kleis represent, as Steinfeld puts it, 'the refusal to sort the view according to the needs of the viewer.'<sup>122</sup> For Richter though, his process of blurring is a more destructive one because it follows an initial attempt to produce a properly composed motif and, unlike Eicher and Kleis, the question of whether the outcome is tasteful is sidelined or even irrelevant. However, a resistance to conventional sign structures is common to both

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<sup>121</sup> Thomas Steinfeld, 'When Twilight Comes', *Windfall Light: the visual language of ECM*, 36.

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*, 39.

Richter and ECM. The image theorist, Lambert Wiesing, expands on this tension through a series of rhetorical questions:

Must we assign a content or a meaning to an image? Must we interpret the depiction as content? Is what the image depicts the content of a sign simply thanks to the image's depicting it? Have we assigned a sense to a surface merely by seeing a depiction on this surface? If that is the case, then all images would always be signs.<sup>123</sup>

As identified earlier, it is the strategies of photo painting and metamusic that examine Wiesing's questions artistically in order to posit new forms of subject matter. Morin argues that 'the mental image and the material image potentially enhance or debase the reality they present to our view; they radiate fatality or hope, nothingness or transcendence, amortality or death.'<sup>124</sup> Richter is actively engaged in debasing or debunking reality but there is less clarity with regard to ECM's intention. Steinfeld identifies the images with a similar process of negation, particularly landscapes at the edge of water, such as the cover for the album 'Leggiero, Pesante' or 'Bagatellen und Serenaden': 'No allowance is made for the viewer in these photographs. The water does not reflect his gaze.'<sup>125</sup> In contrast, Bjørnstad interprets the pared down aesthetic of the ECM pictures as an attempt to make a more precise impact by demonstrating a certain control over the motif at hand:

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<sup>123</sup> Lambert Wiesing, *Artificial presence: philosophical studies in image theory*, translated by Nils F. Schott, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2010), 18.

<sup>124</sup> Edgar Morin. *The cinema, or, The imaginary man*, 29. Italicised in original source.

<sup>125</sup> Thomas Steinfeld, 'When Twilight Comes', *Windfall Light: the visual language of ECM*, 38.

...the more impressive the landscape is, the more controlled the colours are. It is at this point of intersection that the motif makes its impact. We are no longer referring to the hackneyed “less is more” formula or the worn-out “kill your darlings” principle, which are popular adages within the filmmaking community. Rather, we are saying that in order to make an impact, you need to be in control. Then you can approach any of your “darlings” and elaborate on the original idea.<sup>126</sup>



**Ex. 14**

**ECM Cover for *Bagatellen und Serenaden* (2007)  
by Valentin Silvestrov,  
photograph by Vladimír Jedlička**

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright reasons. The image was sourced at:

<http://www.gerhard-richter.com/art/search/detail.php?paintid=8291&artworkID1=paintings&title=seascape&p=1&sp=32>

**Ex. 15**

***Seestück/Seascape* (1998)  
by Gerhard Richter  
[Oil on canvas]**

The potential limitations of the ECM pictures, particularly those dealing with landscape motifs, are embodied in the question of how nature is being presented. Bjørnstad identifies a careful process of elaboration underlying the ECM landscape pictures with the purpose of enhancing rather than debasing the reality of nature. He romanticises and aestheticises these motifs, arguing that ‘the farther away we get from the world’s metropolises, the more

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<sup>126</sup> Ketil Bjørnstad, ‘Landscapes and Soundscapes’, *Windfall Light: the visual language of ECM*, 270.

powerfully nature speaks to us.<sup>127</sup> In contrast, Steinfeld's emphasis on the ECM pictures' tone of rejection and refusal to yield to the needs of the viewer is articulated through his perception of nature and landscape motifs. When assessing a number of images that feature bodies of water, he claims that 'if you look at the water from a low angle, it seems to become big, a glittering mirror with a hard surface. But you cannot step on it, and it actually has no form at all.'<sup>128</sup> Steinfeld's perception of the water is a reflection of his attitude towards the ECM landscape picture more generally, where the landscape motif is merely a hieroglyph freed from much of its potential meaning. This quality is also something Wiesing identifies in the structure of the image more generally, suggesting that 'the implication of presence and substantiality dissolves in the image. What we see in the image has no material substance.'<sup>129</sup> In the context of the photographic image, it is the effective dispensation of aspects such as composition, tone and focus that can expose this dissolution of presence and substantiality and transform the motif into a hieroglyph. For Richter, photo painting is the technique through which the dissolution of presence and substantiality takes place for both the depiction and the image object. In his summary of Richter's attitude to nature, the geographer Matthew Gandy provides an insightful parallel to Steinfeld's attitude to the ECM landscape:

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<sup>127</sup> *ibid.*, 269.

<sup>128</sup> Thomas Steinfeld, 'When Twilight Comes', *Windfall Light: the visual language of ECM*, 37.

<sup>129</sup> Lambert Wiesing, *Artificial presence: philosophical studies in image theory*, 10.

Richter presents us with an ironic landscape in which he recognises the continued poignancy, yet metaphysical redundancy of landscape motifs. He has referred to these pieces of nature as “cuckoo’s eggs,” an appropriate analogy for their superficial resemblance to the classic imagery of the romantic period...Richter attempts to divest nature-based iconographies of their ideological import by subverting our aesthetic sensibilities towards nature.<sup>130</sup>

Richter himself has argued that ‘pictures which are interpretable, and which contain a meaning, are bad pictures. A picture presents itself as the Unmanageable, the Illogical, the Meaningless.’<sup>131</sup> However, Gandy highlights that despite Richter’s resistance to interpretation and clearly articulated meanings, he recognises the continued poignancy of the landscape motif. The resemblance might be superficial but the resonances brought about through that resemblance are crucial to the photo painting’s overall effect. Morin argues that the structure of the photograph ‘contains the genes of the image (the mental image) and of myth (the double), or, if we prefer, it is image and myth in a nascent state.’<sup>132</sup> In both Richter’s and ECM’s landscapes, the image and myth are encountered in a nascent state, brought about through partial, indistinct and abstract viewpoints. If we adopt Steinfeld’s position, then myth is something to be invoked but not affirmed in the ECM landscape picture in order to maintain a degree of distance from the viewer. For Richter, a more radical position is taken, disregarding the issue of taste and engaging with myth as an axis around which to divest the landscape motif of its

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<sup>130</sup> Matthew Gandy, ‘Contradictory Modernities: Conceptions of Nature in the Art of Joseph Beuys and Gerhard Richter’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 87, No. 4 (Dec., 1997), published by Taylor & Francis, 650. Accessed on 26/03/13 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2564403>

<sup>131</sup> Gerhard Richter, *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings and interviews - 1962-1993*, 35.

<sup>132</sup> Edgar Morin, *The cinema, or, The imaginary man*, 33.

ideological import. Bjørnstad and Müller share Gandy's and Steinfeld's awareness of the poignancy of the landscape motif but place much greater emphasis on the myth aspect, indulging it to a much greater extent. Müller argues the following:

The qualities of these photographs resist assessment according to the usual criteria. It's not the exposure and depth of focus that determines their appropriateness, but the sheer event represented by their motif. The actors moving in the static landscape are wind, light and water.<sup>133</sup>

The implied expectation of Bjørnstad and Müller is that the viewer will shift towards something akin to a state of 'quasi-observation', to borrow Sartre's terminology. As Sartre outlines though, 'we are, indeed, placed in the attitude of observation, but it is an observation that does not teach anything.'<sup>134</sup> Sartre is primarily concerned with the concept of the mental image but as he highlights, 'the photo does not function as an object but gives itself immediately as an image' and that the photograph and the mental image are 'species of the same genus'.<sup>135</sup>

ECM photographs represent an attempt to demonstrate an awareness of the cover photograph's limitations, its inability to effectively capture the music it accompanies. As consciousness overflows the image, the music overflows its cover. The response of Kleis and others commissioned by Eicher is, akin to Richter, an attempt to offer few semantic promises. To state the obvious, the

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<sup>133</sup> Lars Müller, 'Polyphonic Pictures', *Windfall Light: the visual language of ECM*, 353.

<sup>134</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Imagination – a Psychological Critique*, 10.

<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*, 19

complexity of postmodern narratives that arise in the music of Silvestrov and his contemporaries are unable to be symbolically reflected in a single image. More crucially, the aesthetic approach of the ECM pictures can be understood as a resistance to defining the relationship of the music to society and other musical styles. If the role and relative position of contemporary music is in flux, particularly the work of composers such as Silvestrov who span multiple genres, then the most adequate picture ECM can offer of that situation is an equivocal and detached one.

## **List of examples and illustrations**

### **Ex. 1**

Richter, Gerhard. 1994. *Lesende/Reader*. [Oil on canvas] San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), San Francisco, USA. Accessed online at: <http://www.gerhard-richter.com/art/search/detail.php?paintid=8054&artworkID1=paintings&title=reader&p=1&sp=32> Accessed 10/01/14.

### **Ex. 2**

Wessing, Koen. 1978. *Nicaragua, Esteli. Soldiers of the government and nuns on the street*. [Photograph] Koen Wessing/Hollandse Hoogte. Accessed online at: <http://www.hollandsehoogte.nl/search.pp?showpicture=3040621&ExtSrc=15&ExtID=00388438&pos=21#3040621> Accessed 10/01/14.

### **Ex. 3**

Wessing, Koen. 1978. *Nicaragua, Esteli. Summer 1978. Family mourning over a victim of a bombardment*. [Photograph] Koen Wessing/Hollandse Hoogte. Accessed online at: <http://www.hollandsehoogte.nl/search.pp?showpicture=2901526&ExtSrc=15&ExtID=00238666&pos=413#2901526>

### **Ex. 4**

Silvestrov, Valentin. *Der Bote/The Messenger* for piano, bars 1-13, from Valentin Silvestrov, *Klavierwerke Band III/Piano Works Vol. III*, Mainz: M.P. Belaieff.  
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### **Ex. 5**

Richter, Gerhard. 1972. *48 Portraits (Installationsfotos, 36. Biennale Venedig 1972)/For 48 Portraits (Installation Photos, 36th Biennale Venice 1972)*. [Photograph]. Accessed online at: <http://www.gerhard-richter.com/art/search/detail.php?paintid=11621&artworkID1=3&title=48&p=1&sp=32> Accessed 10/01/14.

### **Ex. 6**

Richter, Gerhard. 1988. *Tote/Dead*. [Oil on canvas] The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA. Accessed online at: <http://www.gerhard-richter.com/art/search/detail.php?paintid=7687&artworkID1=paintings&title=tote&p=1&sp=32&tab-artwork=collection> Accessed 10/01/14.

### **Ex. 7**

Richter, Gerhard. (1970) *Seestück (See-see)/Seascape (Sea-sea)*. [Oil on canvas] Private collection. Accessed online at:

<http://www.gerhard-richter.com/art/search/detail.php?paintid=4870&artworkID1=paintings&title=seascape&p=1&sp=32&tab-artwork=sales-history> Accessed 10/01/14.

**Ex. 8**

Silvestrov, Valentin. 'Chopin Augenblicke/Moments of Chopin', *Zwei Stucke/Two Pieces*, bars 1-13, from Valentin Silvestrov, *Klavierwerke Band III/Piano Works Vol. III*, Mainz: M.P. Belaieff.

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**Ex. 9 - Ex. 13**

Silvestrov, Valentin. *Symphony No. 5* for Orchestra – full score, Frankfurt/M: M.P.Belaieff.

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**Ex. 14**

Jedlička, Vladimir; ECM Records. 2007 Cover photograph from *Valentin Silvestrov, Bagatellen und Serenaden*, ECM Records. ASIN: B000TLPW4O  
© ECM Records. Reproduced with kind permission of Vladimir Jedlička and ECM Records.

**Ex. 15**

Richter, Gerhard. 1998. *Seestück/Seascape*. [Oil on canvas] The Doris and Donald Fisher Collection at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), San Francisco, USA. Accessed online at:

<http://www.gerhard-richter.com/art/search/detail.php?paintid=8291&artworkID1=paintings&title=seascape&p=1&sp=32> Accessed 10/01/14.

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