

Agency, Physicality, Space:

Analytical Approaches to Contemporary Nordic Concertos

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Thesis submitted for the degree of DPhil in Music

Hilary Term, 2011

Abstract

The concerto enjoys a position of centrality within the oeuvres of many contemporary Nordic composers: the genre often functions as a vehicle for the exploration of advanced compositional techniques and aesthetic preoccupations, and the resulting works are well-represented on recordings and in the concert hall. Yet this repertoire has largely been neglected in scholarship.

Through detailed analysis of works by Per Nørgård, Kaija Saariaho, Magnus Lindberg, and Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, this thesis develops analytical technologies for a genre which has received less musicological attention than it deserves. Placing a particular emphasis on the theatrical aspects of concerto performance, the project explores the application of three lines of enquiry, each of which has been theorised in some detail: agency (Cone, Maus, Cumming), physicality (Clarke, Cox, Larson), and space (Brower, Williams). Each of these lines of enquiry has been directed at the concerto sporadically, if at all – even though concertos make particularly compelling and potentially enriching case studies for the theoretical models in question. This thesis represents the first sustained attempt to explore the concerto with reference to these bodies of literature.

The analytical models developed have wider applicability, to concertos both within and without the Nordic arena. I draw attention at numerous points to ways in which they can illuminate works by Ligeti, Birtwistle, Musgrave, Berio, and Lutosławski, among others. The project also has wider implications for our understandings of Nordic identity, virtuosity, and musical modernism at the turn of the twenty-first century.

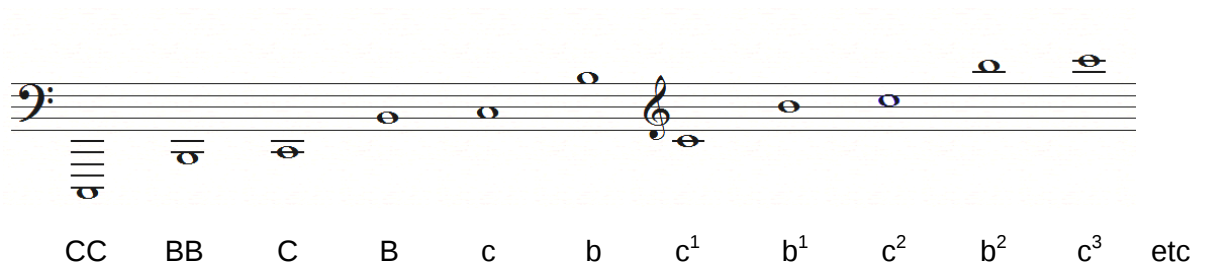
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Systems of Pitch Reference

References to pitch use a slight variation on the Helmholtz system of pitch notation.

Given the propensity of the works under discussion to explore registral extremes, I have favoured the use of digits over successive dashes to designate higher octaves:



Unless otherwise noted, references to pitch in transposing instruments are given at sounding pitch.

Acknowledgements

Dan Grimley has been a wonderful supervisor – endlessly insightful, eager to push opportunities in my direction, blessed with an uncanny knack for developing the merest fragment of a thought into a truly exciting idea. I'd also like to thank my examiners, Nick Reyland and Martyn Harry, for the meticulousness and richness of their comments on the thesis. The project also benefitted immeasurably from the contributions of Robert Adlington and Tim Shephard, both of whom took the time to provide close, perceptive readings of the work in progress.

So many other people have enhanced what follows, whether through lengthy critiques or through little comments that proved considerably more important than their makers might have suspected: I'd like to thank Kofi Agawu, Bill Booth, Scott Burnham, Jan Butler, Eric Clarke, Mark Clayden, Owen Cox, Jonathan Cross, Chris Fish, Nick Grant, Paul Griffiths, Daphne Hall, Angela Kang, Dennis Leo, Fred Maus, Gwilym Morus, Catriona Paul, Mary Lou Reker, Philip Rupprecht, Nick Sackman, Hannah Shoukry, Tom Speller, Justin Williams, Katherine Williams and Peter Wright.

During the course of the project I was lucky enough to interview Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, Per Nørgård and Rolf Wallin. These composers were tremendously generous with their time, coffee, ideas, scores, recordings, and draft sketches. The people at Edition Wilhelm Hansen, in particular Eva Ohrt, provided invaluable assistance in arranging interviews, plying me with composer information, and sending score after score across the North Sea.

Pip Sharp has been a wonderfully loyal companion, tested to the limits of human endurance by lost memory sticks, tempers and – on occasion – perspective. She has been brilliant.

Mum and Alex have been terrifically supportive throughout the project – as was my dad until his death in 2010. I will be happy if even the tiniest fraction of Dad's brilliance and adventurous spirit has somehow touched the pages that follow.

My research has been generously supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. I also enjoyed three immensely stimulating months at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC, courtesy of the John W. Kluge Center and the AHRC.

Introduction: The Scope of This Thesis

Since the 1980s, the Nordic region has seen a particular flourishing of the concerto and works with concertante elements. The success of this genre has been prompted by a range of institutional, economic and artistic factors; and implicated in it are noted composers of several generations. The composers involved are broadly modernist in outlook, and from several perspectives can be identified as a more-or-less coherent group tied to regionally derived notions of identity. This thesis sets out to study the Nordic concerto's success and its articulation of both regional and modernist preoccupations through the prism of four particular works and their composers.

It is worth being specific about our definition of 'Nordic' from the outset. Throughout this thesis, the term refers to the five nation-states – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden – plus the three autonomous regions – Åland, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland. 'Norden', a regional name that has all but dropped out of English usage, is distinct from 'Scandinavia', which encompasses Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

The majority of this thesis is dedicated to the detailed analysis of four concertos by the composers Per Nørgård, Kaija Saariaho, Magnus Lindberg and Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen. Although music-analytical methods therefore predominate, other approaches are also deployed. The creation, since the Second World War, of bureaucratic institutions such as the Nordic Council and the European Union, has ensured the availability of large quantities of data bearing on the

institutional, economic and social circumstances under which repertoires are fostered. Further, the composers whose work I analyse are still living, leaving open the possibility of discussing the concertos with them directly. It is important to note that, given the metaphorical (if not, in this case, literal) 'death of the author', it would be a foolish enterprise simply to attempt to uncover and uncritically privilege an 'authorised', totalising view of a work's meaning. Nonetheless, whilst maintaining a critical distance, I have used interview as a resource on several occasions and to two ends: to benefit from many of the truly revealing insights that the composers have into their own music; and, in the case of Per Nørgård particularly, to get a stronger critical sense for the ways composers fashion their own identities.

This thesis sets out to approach these materials with three main aims in mind. First, it seeks to offer sustained critical-analytical accounts of a number of works which, though well-represented in the concert hall and on recordings, have largely been neglected in existing scholarship. No writer has yet considered recent Nordic concerto production as a whole, although Kimmo Korhonen has written a monograph on Finnish concertos from the eighteenth century to the 1990s;¹ this is now supplemented by a second book covering concertos and orchestral works composed since the first was published.² Korhonen strains towards exhaustive coverage and these books therefore provide numerous composer snapshots which are highly useful for performers and scholars looking for a panoramic sense of the repertoire. Analytical insights are, as one might expect, few and far between.

I have certainly not set out to provide exhaustive coverage of concerto production in the Nordic region since the early 1980s (for one thing, the remarkably

¹ Korhonen 1995.

² Korhonen 2006.

prolific nature of that production precludes such an approach). Rather, I have chosen works which contrast one another in provocative ways, and engage compellingly with three topics of broad relevance to the concerto: agency, physicality and space. Of course, these topics are hardly unique to this genre in particular, but I suggest that concertos tend to foreground these preoccupations, negotiating them in especially explicit ways. Nonetheless, while each can potentially be matched to a substantial music-analytical literature (for example, Cone, Maus and Cumming on agency; Clarke, Cox, Larson on physicality; and Brower and Williams on space), none of them has been used in depth and in detail to elucidate any part of the concerto repertory.

The deployment of these three topics, or analytical categories, prompts a second of this thesis' aims: the development of analytical technologies for a genre that has not been theorised in sufficient depth. Throughout a reception history that Simon Keefe calls 'chequered', the concerto has frequently been dismissed as superficial, messy and analytically lightweight – or in other words it has been found to be at odds with prevailing (symphonic) values of depth, unity and concision.³ My analyses do not attempt to obscure or explain away qualities considered suspect under that system of values, such as theatricality or messiness: indeed, these qualities will emerge as being crucial to several of the works under discussion. Rather, I attempt to demonstrate that the importance ascribed to these qualities therein offers a pointed and compelling challenge to conventional analytical paradigms.

³ A point discussed in Keefe 2005a.

In this respect, the thesis sets out to make a wider contribution. Although the main thrust concerns Nordic concertos, I have aimed to develop analytical models whose relevance is not restricted to concertos from within the Nordic area. Similarly, I will not limit my comments to the concertos under analysis, but will consider the broader implications of my analyses for our understanding of the composers involved. In order to reconcile this broader applicability with the geographical and generic distinctions that frame this thesis, the analyses seek to stress the permeability of boundaries: I argue that Nordic concertos, whilst Nordic, nonetheless address musical preoccupations of broader relevance with particular directness and urgency. Such an approach may prompt challenges to the homogeneity of my subject matter; as will emerge, my own perspective on notions of a homogenous Nordic identity is a sceptical one and attempts to strike a balance: while there is no single, quintessentially 'Nordic' concerto, there may nonetheless be 'Nordic concertos' which are representative of distinctive trends within a diverse repertory.

The third and final aim of this thesis is to advance our understanding of Nordic musical identity and musical modernism(s) in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (I consider all of the works discussed to be modernist in the sense articulated in chapter 2.2). These two complex entities – regional identity and modernism – might be thought to merit two separate mentions, yet I consider them to be deeply intertwined. Since the Second World War, modernisms have been strongly localised, in centres such as Darmstadt and Paris's Centre Pompidou, and the dynamics of such localised modernisms can proceed quite independently: vital, self-conscious modernist movements have been reborn (as in 1980s Finland) at times when others have flagged (as, perhaps, those in Central Europe at around the same

moment).⁴ I argue later in this thesis that modernism has nowhere been more an issue of place than in the Nordic region. Furthermore, I contend that, contrary to what one might expect in an increasingly globalised world, the link between place and identity has hardly weakened – it has, in many cases, become stronger.

Whilst modernism has recently enjoyed a revival as a topic of study within musicology, the existing literature on contemporary Nordic musical identity is sparse. Frederick Key Smith's *Nordic Art Music* covers each of the composers discussed in this thesis, but tends towards a style of brief portraiture which precludes both in-depth analysis and, for the most part, broader historical discussion. John David White and Jean Christensen's collection *New Music of the Nordic Countries* provides the most substantial available account of recent trends in Nordic music. Following a short introduction tying together developments in different Scandinavian countries, however, each country is assigned its own section with its own author – a format which largely precludes the identification of the cross-regional themes which its title appears to promise. This omission is one that my research may help to remedy: I interpret concertos, given their remarkable importance for composers in the region, as compelling exemplars of prevailing trends in Nordic musical modernism at the turn of the twenty-first century.

In realising these three aims, the thesis begins with a three-part chapter designed to set the stage for my analyses. In the first part (2.1), I examine the determined institutional facilitation lying behind the recent flourishing of the concerto

⁴ On the locatedness of modernism, see, for instance, 'Progressiveness and Place' in Whittall 2003, 3-14. Much of the Whittall chapter is concerned with modernisms of the early twentieth century, although I would argue that the connections forged between place and progressivism remain important to the present day. As I discuss later in this thesis (2.2), the issue of place is afforded considerable emphasis in Taruskin 2005b, yet there is arguably too strong a polarisation here between East and West. This thesis attempts to create a heightened sense of modernist geography but in a less polarised way.

in the Nordic region, elucidating the generally favourable circumstances under which the works to be analysed were conceived and created. The second part of the trilogy (2.2) surveys the spectrum of twentieth-century modernisms in order to locate and understand the particular modernisms found in the Nordic region, and the tasks of identification with which they have been charged. In the final part (2.3), I consider the various approaches to the concerto that have been developed within the field of music analysis, offering a critical view of their suitability to the material at hand.

The main body of the thesis, comprising analyses of several concertos, is then organised into three chapters corresponding to the topics that describe my approach: agency (3.1, 3.2), physicality (4.1, 4.2, 4.3), and space (5.1, 5.2). Each chapter begins with a review of pertinent existing analytical technologies, in addition to discussions of how they can be applied to reasonably well-known twentieth-century works (where possible, these works are concertos, but it has proved necessary at several points to draw examples from outside this repertory). Each preliminary discussion offers both a brief, focused literature review and a discussion of a number of twentieth-century concertos from a certain perspective. It is hoped that, considered collectively, these three surveys offer a wide-ranging critical overview of concertos composed in the latter half of the twentieth century (whether within or outside the Nordic arena). This breadth of perspective is necessary not only to enhance the relevance of this project for scholars of the concerto, but also to combat weaknesses common to accounts of contemporary music: the assignment of too much authority to the composer, an uncritical subscription to his or her projections of individuality or originality, and a resultant neglect of the composer's

place within broader historical or generic frames of reference.⁵ This contextualisation becomes all the more important when we consider the unprecedented global cacophony of contemporary voices – over 3000 classical composers with some degree of professional recognition, by one estimate – that clamour for our attention.⁶ Simply to champion the cause of one's little-known niche within this saturated market is not a worthwhile scholarly enterprise.

The bulk of each of these three chapters is a case study (in the case of 'physicality', two closely connected case studies) centred on a single concerto whose implications are of particular relevance to our understanding of the topic in question. In selecting case studies, I have worked towards a wide cross-section of the Nordic repertory, and towards a selection of works which counterpoint each other provocatively. Inevitably, however, there are omissions: the limited available space, and my interest in providing in-depth analyses, has meant that Danish and Finnish composers predominate. Cross-sectional coverage of the range of solo instruments is likewise less than exhaustive. As I will show in the chapter on physicality, the nature of a concerto's solo instrument – both its history and its playing techniques – has a substantial effect on aesthetic concerns and compositional process. Given the importance of their role, it is with regret that I have bowed to pressures of space in restricting the number of instruments I have discussed. I attempt to make partial amends for both these omissions by providing shorter discussions of numerous Nordic concertos as the thesis proceeds, and by including an appendix which draws

⁵ For a useful discussion of the difficulties of writing about contemporary composers, see Cross 2004.

⁶ The number 3000 comes from the Brahms pages at IRCAM, 2010. There is, of course, a degree of bias in this source, reflected in its suggestion that France has produced more composers than any other nation. Bias is inevitable, however, from any perspective, and the Brahms pages at least seek to give a reasonably comprehensive view of composition across the globe.

attention to other interesting possible case studies which, while engaging with the analytical topics discussed, could not be included here.

The first of three topics to be considered is agency (3.1): a richly multifaceted concept, agency is perhaps the central strand throughout the thesis, and to some extent underlies the other two main topics. In my overview of analytical approaches to the concerto (2.3), we will encounter a widespread assumption that agency in concertos is a relatively straightforward matter – that instruments can be assigned concrete roles as actors within a dramatic realm. In chapter 3.1, I argue that many modernist concertos actively dismantle this assumption through a wide variety of agency-projection strategies. The first half of my preliminary discussion outlines existing theoretical perspectives on these strategies while making reference to concertos by a diverse range of composers including Nielsen, Birtwistle, Ligeti and Henze. The second half of the discussion explores some of the interpretative implications of a more complex treatment of agency. The ensuing case study focuses on Per Nørgård's *Concerto for Due Tempi for Piano and Orchestra* (1994), which is analysed as a virtuoso performance in the projection of agency through a virtually exhaustive variety of strategies.

The analysis of the Nørgård throws up several examples of the intertwining of agency and physicality, in the extent to which the physical layout and sonic characteristics of the solo instrument have a tangible effect on the work's harmonic and rhythmic syntaxes. However, in the following chapter (4.1, 4.2, 4.3) I consider the topic of physicality more directly, in terms of the mechanisms of sound production, the muscular strains of performance, and the sense of music as acoustic energy. I argue that concertos tend to foreground these overtly physical aspects of music – in

the process locating themselves on the 'wrong' side of the oft-cited 'mind over body' bias that informs much classical music criticism.

The initial discussion considers three related but distinct perspectives on physicality, exploring the ways in which these have been negotiated in music since 1945. Each of these perspectives comes into play in the chapter's two case studies. The first study (4.2) develops the idea of instruments as compositional agents, examining the particularly thorny history and 'personality' of the solo violin. The work under examination is *Graal Théâtre* by Kaija Saariaho, a composer who, while often appearing somewhat aloof from classical traditions, shows herself to be keenly aware of – and productively anxious about – the difficulties presented by the violin's illustrious past.

The second case study (4.3) explores a conception of music primarily as the forces, strains and motions of performers and their instruments – it is intensely preoccupied with the physical processes behind the production of music. I choose for this analysis Magnus Lindberg's highly successful Clarinet Concerto, which has been warmly received by numerous audiences across four continents since its 2002 premiere.⁷ Most critics have painted the picture of a model of perfectly, neoclassically balanced single-movement organicism for the twenty-first century. Yet I argue that, just as the work's soloist must persistently stave off exhaustion and collapse in executing an uncompromising clarinet part, the composition's structure is precariously, dramatically close to collapse at several points. Central to this analysis is an interpretative causality located in-between what Roger Scruton terms the 'real

⁷ North American Premiere: US, January 5th 2010, Alan Gilbert and the New York Philharmonic; Asian Premiere: Japan, May 28th 2004, NHK Symphony Orchestra and Jukka-Pekka Saraste; Australasian premiere: New Zealand, June 5th 2009, New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and Pietari Inkinen.

causality' of sounds and the 'virtual causality' of tones.⁸ The analysis is finally considered as a challenge to the conventional organicist paradigms that would tend to view formal straining in a negative light. Instead, I argue, the work has a compelling and dramatic affective shaping – the amplification of a concern with strain and exhaustion that is more common to 'absolute' music than has often been supposed. Both case studies 4.2 and 4.3 engage with the third aspect of physicality identified: the interrogation of 'sound itself'.

The theme of the final analytical chapter (5.1 and 5.2), space, is another major preoccupation of modernist production. In music, this manifests itself in the treatment of both physical and metaphorical spaces: on the one hand, through the exploration of acoustics, of different reverberations, or the positioning of different sound sources; on the other, through the accentuation of, or resistance to, the spatialised temporality which has so often been identified as an important and problematic aspect of the modern condition. In their myriad divisions of an instrumental ensemble, concertos tend to explore physical space. And in an analytical connection with the previous case study, my initial discussion here investigates a linkage between this physical space and the metaphorical space(s) projected, drawing on concertos by a range of composers including Birtwistle, Carter, Feldman and Takemitsu.

In my final case study (5.2) I discuss the appeals made by Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's music to a particularly varied range of spatial metaphors, with one conspicuous exception: his work staunchly resists the monodirectional arrow of time, and instead strives to project circles, spirals, mirrors, plateaus. This

⁸ Scruton 1997, 76-80. For further discussion see also 'Music, Motion, and Subjectivity' in Clarke 2005, 62-91.

tendency is particularly marked, I argue, in the composer's recent *Plateaux pour Piano et Orchestre* (2005), the very title of which suggests an interest in suspending the passage of time. My analysis discusses a kaleidoscopic array of spatial tropes projected by this concerto, many of which would be paradoxical or impossible to render in a domain more concrete than music. The tropes include surface (the idea that the analyst cannot delve deep into the work, but can only skip across it, refracted in strange and unexpected directions), suspension, and containment (a negotiation of the paradoxical relationship between extreme confinement and freedom). The case study closes on the theme of 'spatialised time', and a discussion of 'concertante approaches to analysis'.

2

Approaching Nordic Concertos

2.1

Institutional Factors in the Flourishing of the Nordic Concerto

Nordic Music Days, the foremost annual festival run by the Nordic Composers Council, opened in 2008 with a 'Concerto Marathon'. This 'Marathon' involved the performance of six works – one from each of the five Nordic nation-states, plus the Faroe Islands – composed either in recent years or especially for the occasion. The event was well-attended, filling Helsinki's University Festival Hall to its capacity. Several new and challenging works, exploring the limits of players and instruments alike, were given polished premieres by acclaimed soloists working with two of Finland's leading orchestras, the Helsinki Philharmonic and the Tapiola Sinfonietta. The festival integrated concertos into a programme of opera, puppet theatre and 'happenings', positing 'Music + 1' as the connecting theme:

It is not music – but music *plus one*. In these concerts music is combined with other elements of art. Nordic composers want to find out what comes when you combine contemporary music with new circus, old theatre, wild movements and slow text.

Plus one can be a saw soloist disturbing the orchestra, opera disturbing the city centre, circus disturbing the intermission.¹

¹ Nordic Music Days 2010.

This provocative conception presents a stimulatingly skewed engagement with convention. The soloist-as-disturbance sits awkwardly, for instance, with the prevailing notion of the concerto soloist as ‘star’ performer, or central protagonist.

Indeed, while the complexities of the relationship between the orchestra and the solo saw in Jan Erik Mikalsen’s *Pygar Tales for Sinfonietta* could not adequately be encapsulated by the term ‘disturbance’, the spectacle of the concerto’s saw-wielding composer-soloist alternately dancing, grimacing and grinning his way through the performance undeniably represented a persistent disturbance to certain conventions of the classical concert. Convention suffered a further blow at the hands of the circus performers who joined the audience periodically throughout the concert, problematising the dramatic ‘fourth wall’ whilst reinforcing the priority of the theatrical, seemingly at odds with the concerto’s traditional pretensions to instrumental abstraction.²

The creative activation of space was a prominent feature of the event, and one which further problematised that notion of hermetic closedness which has often been attached to absolute music. This was particularly true of Mikko Heiniö’s *Envelope*, in which the solo trumpet’s sonic envelope was complemented by the spatial positioning of instruments around the audience. Before the performance of this work could begin, the players had to jostle for a view of the conductor, straining around pillars and rearranging the audience, leading one to ponder whether these practical challenges were themselves an essential part of the performance of this concerto-theatre.

² On the ‘fourth wall’, see Pavis 1998, 154.

Finally, as the concert's billing hints, there were suggestions – particularly in Sebastian Fagerlund's Clarinet Concerto – that the performance of a contemporary concerto is above all a sporting event, demanding high levels of physical endurance, muscle training and dexterity. Performed to a remarkably international audience, no doubt partly because the festival organisers had cannily arranged for a coincidence of Nordic Music Days and the annual European Art Music Fair, the 'Concerto Marathon' bore vivid testament to the significance and vitality of contemporary concerto production in the Nordic region.³

Of course, the 'Marathon' was also demonstrative of the crucial role played by another musical 'plus one' – the institutions that stimulate and shape musical production in the Nordic countries. The event was one in a series of statements, reaching back into the 1980s, demonstrating a broader institutional commitment to concertos. The history of the Council's Music Prize (one of many 'cobwebs' integrating the region culturally and politically since the Second World War⁴) offers further evidence of that commitment: awarded fourteen times to a contemporary work since 1976, the prize has gone to a concerto or concertante work on six of those occasions (see Fig. 2.1.1).⁵ Given that the Music Prize aims to celebrate the

³ There are precedents for such tactical programming, most obviously the coincidence of 1992's Nordic Music Days with the ISCM festival, both held in Stockholm.

⁴ The 'cobweb' theory of Nordic integration was developed by Nils Andrén in Andrén 1964. It retains currency in more recent writings on regional integration: as Christine Ingebritsen argues, for instance, 'Nordic integration has proceeded dialectically, in a pattern of action and reaction: ambitious schemes have been planned, have failed, and in their wake many lesser schemes have been implemented which add further strands to the web of integration' (Ingebritsen 1998, 16). For further information on the recent institutional integration of 'Norden', particularly in the context of the European Union's development, see Arter 1999, especially the chapter entitled 'A Nordic model of government', at 144-172. Other particularly pertinent examples of pan-Nordic institutions include Nomus, which produces the journal *Nordic Sounds*.

⁵ See Nordic Council 2010 for more information on the Council that runs this and other Nordic cultural prizes.

achievements of performers and composers equally, this preference for a genre strongly associated with virtuosity is understandable.

Fig. 2.1.1: Nordic Council Music Prize-winning concertos and concertante works since 1976

1976	Atli Heimir Sveinsson	Iceland	Concerto for Flute and Orchestra
1986	Hafliði Hallgrímsson	Iceland	<i>Poemi</i> for solo violin and string orchestra
1988	Magnus Lindberg	Finland	<i>Kraft</i> (for six soloists, orchestra, and electronics)
1990	Olav Anton Thommessen	Norway	<i>Gjennom Prisme</i> for cello, organ and orchestra
1996	Bent Sørensen	Denmark	<i>Sterbende Gärten</i> for violin and orchestra
1998	Rolf Wallin	Norway	Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra

Indeed, the Nordic countries have, in recent decades, produced a number of internationally acclaimed classical performers that is disproportionate to the relatively low regional population (approximately 25 million). The public sector, in terms of both employment and expenditure, plays a larger role in Nordic countries than elsewhere in Europe, investing heavily in arts and culture. Government spending on culture per capita in Scandinavia and Finland is roughly twice that in the United Kingdom (nearly three times that in Germany), resulting in a culture sector that contributes around 30% more to employment than the European average.⁶ This substantial state support allows Norden to boast a remarkably large number of sizeable professional

⁶ The average government expenditure on culture per capita in Scandinavia and Finland is €294, compared with €197 in France, €101 in Germany, and €143 in the United Kingdom. See *Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe*. The Nordic average for number of people employed in the cultural sector is 3.2%, against a European average of 2.4%. See European Commission 2010.

ensembles, at a time when the symphony orchestra as an institution appears to be in difficulties in many parts of Europe and America.⁷ With around 30 orchestras maintained out of public funds, Finland has more orchestras per capita than any other nation in the world.⁸ (The exceptional international prominence of Finnish conductors today suggests just how helpful that abundance has been.⁹) The other Nordic countries are not far behind.¹⁰

Also noteworthy is the number of prestigious, largely state-funded ensembles which not only dedicate themselves to the performance of new music, but embrace the role of a laboratory facilitating the development of both young composers and new instrumental techniques: these include the Elsinor Players in Århus,¹¹ the Oslo Sinfonietta, Bergen's '20-Bit' ensemble,¹² and 'Toimii!' ('It works!'), based in Helsinki.¹³ There is an energetic belief in the value of new music that would be the envy of composers from many other parts of the world. Such interest has unfamiliar consequences: Kaija Saariaho, albeit one of the most internationally recognised composers of her generation, has complained that her public profile is uncomfortably high in Finland – as she observes, this is generally not a problem for her colleagues in America (the same is surely true of colleagues in much of continental Europe).¹⁴

⁷ Cottrell 2003, 252.

⁸ See Häyrynen 2006 for further information on the Finnish state's commitment to orchestral music and the ideologies behind it.

⁹ See Luukka 2007.

¹⁰ Sweden has a publically funded professional symphony or chamber orchestra for each of its 25 counties, with numerous orchestras in major cities like Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö.

¹¹ For a more detailed discussion of Danish ensembles, festivals, and state funding, see Christensen 2002, 5. Christensen quite rightly emphasises the important role played by Denmark's 1976 Music Act – the first of its kind in the world – in the country's commitment to the performance and dissemination of new music.

¹² For a useful discussion of Norwegian contemporary music ensembles and festivals, see the introduction to Gibson 1999, 5-10.

¹³ See the individual sites of the countries' music centres, listed in the bibliography at the end of this thesis.

¹⁴ Moisala 2009, 20.

The rapidly expanding portfolio of contemporary music ensembles and festivals, spread across the region and increasingly populating provincial areas, has in the last thirty years nurtured a particularly strong spirit of collaboration between performers and composers.¹⁵

This spirit was much in evidence at the Concerto Marathon, in which, judging from the programme notes, at least three works had been written with (rather than for) a particular soloist. As Kimmo Korhonen observes of the spirit of collaboration in Finland,

new concertos have in many cases become icons not only of the instrument in question but of the premiere soloist as well. [...] Examples of musicians who have inspired new concertos abound in Finland. Thus the name of Jouko Harjanne will usually be found somewhere behind the new trumpet concertos, while Kari Kriikku can frequently be associated with clarinet concertos, Timo Korhonen with new works for the guitar and Anssi Karttunen with new showpieces for the cello.¹⁶

Korhonen's observation can be extended to prominent soloists across the Nordic region. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the Swedish trombonist Christian Lindberg, who seems virtually to have co-written a number of concertos, including Jan Sandström's popularly successful '*Motorbike*' *Concerto*.¹⁷ Trumpeter Håkan Hardenberger, cellist Mats Lidström, and pianist Per Salo, among many others, have also enjoyed prolific careers as concerto collaborators. So significant are these relationships that the highly successful generation of Finnish composers born in the

¹⁵ The decentralisation of contemporary music ensembles has in part been the result of a concerted political effort to keep culture lively in more remote regions. Yet it has also been a product of the common perception that smaller cities are fresh, vibrant alternatives to the more stuffily traditional capitals. In 2.2 we encounter a good example of this perception in the case of Denmark.

¹⁶ Korhonen 1997, 4.

¹⁷ The '*Motorbike*' Concerto's success is explored in O'Leary 1996.

1950s, whilst accepting concerto commissions from orchestras across Europe and the USA, continue to write for the Finnish soloists with whom they first worked in the early 80s. A recent example of this phenomenon is Kaija Saariaho's 2007 *Notes on Light*, commissioned by James Levine and the Boston Philharmonic, but written in collaboration with Anssi Kartunen.

With the help of this institutionally-fostered and state-funded abundance of world-class virtuosos and orchestras, the concerto has enjoyed a central position in Nordic new music since the 1980s. The concerto 'turn' is particularly evident in the recent outputs of relatively well-known composers such as Magnus Lindberg (b.1958), Rolf Martinsson (b.1956), Poul Ruders (b.1950), Kaija Saariaho (b.1952), and Rolf Wallin (b.1957). An older generation, born in or around 1930, turned towards the genre at much the same time: one thinks, for instance, of Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen (1932-), Arne Nordheim (1931-2010), Per Nørgård (1932-), and Einojuhani Rautavaara (1928-). In any one of these composers' oeuvres since the 1980s – and for the younger generation, throughout their careers – it would be perfectly possible to trace a productive career-narrative through concertos alone (a narrative, furthermore, which weaved through both abstract and more dramatic preoccupations). It is important to register, of course, that the trend is not unique to the region: concertos and concertante elements have in recent decades been important to many composers outside the Nordic area, such as Luciano Berio, Harrison Birtwistle, Elliott Carter, György Ligeti and Witold Lutosławski. Nonetheless, I would argue that among Nordic composers the sense of commitment to the genre, and to the virtuoso performance it almost invariably entails, has been particularly intense.

The enthusiasm with which those who fund and promote Nordic music have facilitated the concerto's pre-eminence may derive partly from a policy aim. The concerto's strong virtuoso element, allied with the spectacle and even theatricality of the solo-orchestra opposition, makes for concerts of wide-ranging appeal. Since around the 1970s, the Nordic model of cultural administration has placed a firm emphasis on broadening accessibility, and the spectacle and drama of the concerto has proved particularly apt to promote this end. Such an approach (like much else in Nordic cultural administration) is borrowed from a Norse model, in which 'public subsidies to artists [...] are usually justified by socio-political arguments'.¹⁸ (However, as we will see in this thesis's case studies, accessibility has hardly compromised innovation where concerto composition is concerned.)

Such explanations are needed to account for a phenomenon that is, from a non-Nordic perspective at least, aesthetically counter-intuitive. The turn towards the concerto is striking because the oeuvres of Nordic composers are so frequently 'symphonised' – a trend that is largely the extension of tendencies in the reception of Carl Nielsen and Jean Sibelius.¹⁹ The influence of Sibelius – a largely non-concertante composer – has drawn particular scholarly attention, and the recent prominence of the concerto in Finland must pose an interesting challenge to those who seek to assert his continuing regional dominance as a musical model.²⁰ More generally, the priority of concerto over symphony perhaps challenges a still-current

¹⁸ See Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe 2009. This website is still in its infancy, with only nine countries covered so far. Nonetheless, it is already an invaluable source of information on culture in Norway.

¹⁹ See, for example, the first English language monograph on Carl Nielsen, Robert Simpson's *Carl Nielsen: Symphonist* (Simpson 1952).

²⁰ Recent studies of the influence of Sibelius include Howell 2006, particularly the first chapter, 'In the shadow of Sibelius', 1-28. Indeed it is significant that this, the first critical-analytical survey of Finnish composers of the mid- and late twentieth century, approaches the subject from such a pointedly Sibelian angle. There are also discussions of the more problematic aspects of Sibelius's influence in Anderson 2004 and Oramo 2004.

British and Central European desire to associate the North with 'closeness to nature': where the symphony has so frequently been upheld as the paradigmatic manifestation of musical organicism, the concerto concerns itself more overtly with the exploration of technology.²¹

The common importance of institutional forces across the Nordic region provides one important strand of support for the geographical frame adopted for this thesis, serving to describe Nordic musicians (willingly or not) as a group. It is the support of Nordic institutions that ensures the continuing, performed existence of the repertory under discussion – a repertory, indeed, in which the demand for large performing resources and considerable rehearsal times serves to highlight the role of such patronage. Inevitably, the explicit nature of this institutional support has implications for the identities of the composers who are thus promoted; and such interventions in artistic identity, whilst perhaps integral to success and visibility, are not always welcomed. In accepting a close association with Nordic organisations, an artist risks placing a firm and problematic emphasis on a regional identity often perceived as peripheral in the international context. Since the Second World War, such an emphasis has often been the subject of vicious polemics, which I discuss in greater detail later in this chapter (2.2). A further potentially unwelcome effect is the blurring of distinctions between musical individuals – a problem rendered particularly explicit by the 'Music + 1' promotional material, in which the congregation of Nordic composers is treated almost as a single research team ('Nordic composers want to find out...'). Yet another, subtler, difficulty lies precisely in the ready availability of

²¹ On the North and nature, see Davidson 2005. Robert Simpson, an influential critic of the works of Nielsen and Sibelius in particular, hardens an organicist conception of the symphony in his introduction to Simpson 1966, Vol.1, 13-14: 'the fusion of diverse elements into an organic whole'. For a recent critical discussion of the valuation of 'natural' elements in the symphony, see Grimley 2009.

high-quality ensembles, even for the performance of works by little-known composers, which can create an impression of cosiness – of the ‘sheltered workshop’²² – that is at odds with the image of an artist intrepidly probing the inhospitable frontiers of their craft. The tense relationship between edginess and institutional affiliation – a perennial problem, of course, for the supposedly progressive composer who is supported by the bourgeois *status quo* – is felt particularly strongly in the Nordic region.²³ In response to these circumstances, concertos (as we shall see) often enact reactions against, or ironic subversions of, the forces that facilitate and shape their existence.

Institutional influence, strongly supportive, potentially homogenising, usually double-edged, never entirely relinquishes its hold on the chapters that follow. Yet, as I will argue throughout this thesis, institutional factors are far from being solely responsible for the concerto’s sustained popularity among Nordic composers, performers and audiences. More personal and artistic motives are suggested by the fact that the region’s leading composers, whilst bombarded with diverse and competing commissions, nonetheless retain a particular commitment to the genre. With its particularly ‘chequered’ reception history, inescapable associations with virtuosity, and characteristic division of the orchestral ensemble, the concerto often functions as a vehicle for composers’ explorations of innovative techniques, both instrumental and compositional (this distinction, as we shall see in this thesis, can often become quite murky). Furthermore, particularly for Nordic composers, the relative lightness of the concerto tradition – or at least its commonly perceived

²² I borrow this term from Tony Griffiths, who uses it more specifically in relation to the Swedish Department of Cultural Affairs established shortly after the Second World War (Griffiths 2006, 184).

²³ A useful discussion of this and related problems can be found in Robert Adlington’s introduction to Adlington 2009.

lightness – presents a lower burden of influence-anxiety than the symphony.²⁴ Less particular to the Nordic context, but no less significant, is the fact that the structural implementation of individuation within an ensemble, central to the concerto format, offers a mode of structural articulation that can serve as an alternative to the conventional harmonic and thematic devices of classical music. Viewed in this light, the concerto format can provide a particularly explicit framework for harmonic, timbral or rhythmic explorations.²⁵ Finally, as I aim to demonstrate amply in the following chapters, the concerto foregrounds technical preoccupations that are central to the work of many Nordic composers.

²⁴ For a discussion of symphonic anxiety in Finland, see 'The Shadow of Sibelius' in Howell 2006, 1-28.

²⁵ Paul Griffiths makes this observation in Griffiths 2007.

2.2

Modernism and Nordic Identity at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century

A number of recent monographs and essay collections attest to modernism's contemporary vitality, both as a musical practice and as a field of scholarly enquiry.

This state of affairs is heralded in terms of surprise, and apparently, for some, relief.

Focusing mainly on literature, Marjorie Perloff writes of the

tired dichotomy that has governed our discussion for much too long: that between modernism and postmodernism. Indeed, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the latter term seems to have largely lost its momentum.²⁶

Picking up on this observation, Björn Heile argues that

although widely accepted in neighbouring fields, the idea that postmodernism has lost momentum may come as a surprise to many musicologists. After all, the concept has only fairly recently found a home in music studies, and it was modernism that seemed dead and gone as a topic of musicological discourse not so long ago.²⁷

Despite their protestations, the fact that both Perloff and Heile begin their discussions with an appraisal of this most familiar dichotomy suggests that, tired though it may be, this polemic continues to shape the discussion of modernism, which in turn retains a reactionary element.²⁸ Nonetheless, there is no question that musical modernism is now being studied from an unprecedentedly broad range of perspectives, as Heile's book demonstrates: contending that discourse on late

²⁶ Perloff 2002, 1-2.

²⁷ Heile 2009, 1.

²⁸ Heile in particular has attacked a perceived bias against modernism in Anglophone musicology (Heile 2004).

twentieth-century modernism is often either 'journalistic or analytical', he presides over an essay collection in which social and economic contexts are generally in the foreground.²⁹ This recent development in the scholarly landscape profoundly enriches the frame of reference for an enquiry such as mine, but it also reinforces the need to tease apart the word 'modernism' before I begin, and to be specific about the ways in which it is relevant to Nordic music.

Tensions in the Modernist Model

In his *Musical Modernism at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, David Metzger offers valuable starting points for an analytical discussion of modernism. Metzger's approach has a strong hermeneutic component, identifying and focusing on the 'lines of enquiry' pursued by composers, a conception suggestive of the 'restless curiosity driving modernism'.³⁰ His 'lines' include the act of expression, purity, modern silence, the fragmentary, lament, and sonic flux. While my three main topics are different to Metzger's – a reflection, to some extent, of my generic focus – there are many provocative intersections, and I draw on his idea of 'lines of enquiry' for its sense of continuing research into particular topics (or indeed instrumental techniques and sonorities). The topical orientation offers, for me, a salutary contrast with more obviously technical accounts, which take parameters such as harmony and rhythm as a starting point. My work proceeds from the conviction that overly formalist

²⁹ Heile 2009, 3.

³⁰ Metzger 2009, 6-7.

analysis only reinforces certain reservations that many people have with regard to musical modernism.

Another part of the appeal of 'lines of enquiry' as a concept is that it maintains an emphasis on exploration and discovery, and thus a continuity with the adventurous departures in musical language that occurred at the turn of the twentieth century. Furthermore, it reinforces the notion of 'uncompleted projects', while nuancing and somewhat tempering modernism's oft-supposed obsession with the 'new'.³¹ It is therefore an elegant way of circumventing a familiar historiographical problem. As Metzer notes,

most textbooks of twentieth-century music reinforce the bias towards innovation. [...] Innovation is, however, a hard act to keep up, for both modernist works and the narratives built around them. [...] The narratives typically flag when they hit the 1960s and 1970s, if not earlier [...] At this point, textbook histories typically shift narratives from tales of innovation to repeated notices about pluralism.³²

Given this historical tendency, Metzer's attempt to 'map' the highly complex terrain of contemporary classical music is a bold one. Of course, the perceived bias towards innovation in modernism is arguably as much a product of music criticism as it is of modernism itself. The association with newness has always been too reductive: as Theodor Adorno reminds us, modernism not only 'seeks', but 'negates', 'explodes', commits 'violence'.³³ Such actions are, of course, dependent on the existence of a clear, calcified object ripe for those kinds of deconstruction or assault. The aspiration towards an utterly clean break with the past, as expressed most vehemently by certain leading figures in the aftermath of the Second World War, has often proved

³¹ I mention 'uncompleted projects' in reference to Habermas 1988, 177.

³² Metzer 2009, 5.

³³ Adorno 2006, 85-90.

misleading: Adorno's emphasis on a modernist reaction against that which is established or staid strongly demonstrates the centrality of tradition to innovation – a point which Arnold Whittall has more recently demonstrated particularly convincingly.³⁴ Even after a twentieth century of modernist reappraisal, the concerto tradition, as this thesis argues, remains an especially provocative site for modernist negation, deconstruction and – in extreme cases – violence. A work's apparent stance on musical tradition, from the calmly deconstructive to the aggressive, from neoclassical concerto style to abrasive anti-concerto rhetoric, has important implications for the identity it projects for its composer – a point to which I will return several times in the course of this thesis.

Adorno argues, furthermore, that 'the new is the longing for the new, not the new itself';³⁵ and elsewhere, he contends that 'the cult of the new is a rebellion against the fact that there is no longer anything new'.³⁶ The idea of struggling towards the new, anxiously resisting the ageing of modernism, is one which, animating many works of the last few decades, reappears at several points in this thesis (particularly in the discussion of Lindberg). Yet I think it is important here to underline the challenge posed by my research to Adorno's (now quite widespread) supposition. Most obviously, many of the instrumental techniques explored in the concertos under discussion are incontrovertibly new, often resulting in striking and novel sonorities – and perhaps it is more possible to cling to wide-reaching notions of innovation and progress in a genre so preoccupied with innovations in playing technique. This primacy of technology, both in the compositional process and in its

³⁴ This relationship is underlined throughout Whittall 1999.

³⁵ Adorno 1997, 32.

³⁶ Adorno 1974, 235.

result, admittedly remains the subject of ambivalence for many contemporary composers. It sits awkwardly with a problematic modernist inheritance from Romanticism – the ideal of the solitary composer’s ‘vision’ being ephemeral, sublimely unencumbered by practical limitations. (This is, as Richard Taruskin has suggested, a modernist quandary that has been especially marked in the ideology at IRCAM.)³⁷ Here is one way, I think, in which contemporary concertos can upset certain prevailing understandings of musical modernism.

Yet the current success of the concerto also runs contrary to another perception of the relationship between contemporary music and technology: highly challenging instrumental parts, notated traditionally and with a high degree of precision, are hardly in keeping with the development of computer music which many anticipate will return us to a more oral, postliterate tradition. Offering a possible ‘Glimpse of the Future’, Richard Taruskin argues that

even composers who do not use samplers use sequencing programs, and this has affected virtually everyone’s musical style [...] Computer-assisted ‘real-time’ composition – used sometimes in performance, sometimes as a basis for written elaboration – is another aspect of the [...] resurgence of ‘orality’.³⁸

For the composer Kyle Gann, the change has not only been technological, but more widely attitudinal as well: sampling, for instance, ‘has led music away from atomism toward a more holistic approach’.³⁹ Yet the case studies in this thesis are not only composed with a traditional pen-and-paper approach (indeed, composers like

³⁷ As Taruskin argues, ‘there was a paradoxical or ambivalent side to high-tech modernism, since one of the principal tenets of the modern movement had always been the composer’s autonomy or freedom from external factors. So technology, whatever prestige or possibilities it may offer, is inherently suspect. It must be kept in its place; it must never seem to dominate or determine the artist’s conception’ (Taruskin 2005b, 479).

³⁸ Taruskin 2005b, 508.

³⁹ Gann 2000, 24.

Nørgård and Gudmundsen-Holmgreen still resist using notation software); in making exceptional demands on the 'note-learning' abilities of even the ablest performers, they strongly retain the distinction between text and act, while encouraging an atomistic focus on notational detail. This thesis, then, argues for the continued importance of a tradition that resides between two technological extremes: it contests both a disembodied, non-technological notion of modernist composition and one in which recent technological innovations have largely superseded old-fashioned tools such as printed scores and acoustic instruments. A protracted engagement with instrumental technology is an important strand of this thesis's chapter on physicality (4.1, 4.2 and 4.3). As the other chapters aim to demonstrate, however, that engagement is hardly the only site for innovation in contemporary concertos.

The Mellowing of Modernism

Concertos also frequently challenge the sense of high-minded, earnest endeavour conveyed by so many accounts of modernism. Certainly, they exhibit enquiring, questing, challenging tendencies; yet in many cases the arguably scientific notion of a 'line of enquiry' or the idea of 'violence towards tradition', for instance, seem too cold-hearted, too dry, too unreceptive to irony. Playfulness, gentle subversion and compromise are qualities that we will encounter at numerous points in this thesis. This, in conjunction with the generic problems already described, perhaps reflects a recent 'mellowing' of modernism, a trend which warrants further discussion in the context of this thesis.

It has often been noted that the militaristic notion of an avant garde has become increasingly suspect since the decade or so that immediately followed the Second World War.⁴⁰ The idea of an artist or movement at the forefront of developments, 'preceding the main sections of the army, operating rather isolated as the annunciation of something larger still to come',⁴¹ obviously demands an underlying sense of continuous progress within a single, unified cultural field. It is well documented that such a clear way forward seemed to evaporate amidst the postmodernism of the final decades of the twentieth century.⁴² Claims of artistic leadership or prophecy have necessarily been tempered by this often overwhelming sense of plurality and cultural stasis. As Jim Samson argues, the concept of an avant garde can now 'have only a narrow, and perhaps a rather emasculated, definition within today's culture, associated with a continuing but now decentred modernist project. That project is sanctioned rather than dissenting'.⁴³ This new, sanctioned role particularly offends an ideal that is as old as one of the very first uses of the term 'avant garde' in an artistic context: that leading artists should be motivated by social dissent, the ultimate goal of which is the establishment of a new utopia quite distinct from the prevailing social condition. Another reason for the decline of the avant garde, and perhaps a resultant mellowing of modernism's aims, is that freedom, artistic and otherwise, has become somewhat less valued since 1989. As Taruskin argues,

⁴⁰ Samson 2007.

⁴¹ Adlington 2009, 18.

⁴² See, for instance, 'Part III: Many Rivers: the 1980s and 1990s' in Griffiths 1995, 238-327. The notion of a single river of musical development is precisely the kind of meta-narrative that postmodernism deconstructs – this idea of postmodernism as a scepticism of meta-narratives originates with Lyotard 1984.

⁴³ Samson 2007.

the geopolitical polarisation engendered by the Cold War made [artistic] freedom – or, more precisely, that perception of freedom – an issue worth the sacrifice of public relevance to many artists in the West, who saw totalitarian regimentation as, if not the only alternative, then at least the one that needed to be most vigilantly resisted, whatever the social cost.⁴⁴

The mellowing of musical modernism has taken many forms: most obviously in the present context, it has been felt in the relaxation of resistance to traditional genres, as composers have increasingly accepted the impossibility of the complete break with the past which had been entertained in the aftermath of the Second World War. There has also, perhaps, been a general recognition that, as Arnold Whittall observes, ‘the explicit use of ‘concerto’ as a title is not in itself evidence of a conservative disposition: composers are just as likely to employ it to dramatise the distance of their own concepts from those of tradition as to suggest strong sympathy with that tradition’.⁴⁵ The mellowing of modernism has also been reflected in what Alastair Williams calls ‘the general softening of structural obsessions since the 1950s’ – a decline in the use of rigorous precompositional organisation.⁴⁶

This softening is particularly evident in the ‘renewed emphasis on subjectivity’ evident in neo-Romanticism, as seen in the 1980s in works by Wolfgang Rihm and certain of his young West German contemporaries.⁴⁷ Neo-Romanticism has been characterised not only by a pursuit of previous ideals of subjectivity and interiority; it has usually employed previous styles in order to capture that immediacy.⁴⁸ If the ‘modernist credentials’ of neo-Romanticism’s retrospection have sometimes been questioned – often due to an overly simplistic equation of postmodernism with the

⁴⁴ Taruskin 2005b, 508.

⁴⁵ Whittall 2005, 162.

⁴⁶ Williams 2004, 527.

⁴⁷ Williams 2006, 384.

⁴⁸ A point made by Hermann Danuser (Danuser 1984, 400-403).

accessible, modernism with the difficult – Metzger’s argument for a renewed enquiry into ‘the act of expression’ (of which neo-Romanticism is a part) puts increased subjectivity and interiority on a less disputable modernist footing (an emphasis on probing exploration replaces nostalgia). The transition between the ‘cooled expressionism’ of Ligeti’s post-war idiom and the same composer’s laments of the 1980s supports this contention. Metzger points to a similarly suggestive change in Lachenmann’s output:

[Lachenmann] tried in his earliest pieces to ‘refuse’ expression, a statement that could serve as a platform for the ‘aesthetics of negativity’ that Danuser considered his music to exemplify. How surprising then for a composer who subverted conventional genres, sounds, and modes of expression to write an opera. *Das Mädchen mit den Schwefelhölzern* (1997) continues Lachenmann’s interrogation of the conventional but at the same time it takes command of the lyrical and dramatic powers of the genre.⁴⁹

At the other end of the expressive spectrum, the 1980s saw what Paul Griffiths has described as a ‘resurgence in musical humour (not a prodigious category in the 1950s and 1960s)’.⁵⁰

Melodicism, that well-established bastion of both accessibility and expressivity, has returned to the forefront of much recent modernist output, while the results of spectral composition – usually seen as a paradigmatic example of a late twentieth-century modernist ‘school’ – are often characterised by a perceptibility

⁴⁹ Metzger 2009, 15.

⁵⁰ Griffiths 1995, 288.

denied by many previous rigorous precompositional strategies: as Arnold Whittall argues,

The integration of harmony and timbre which spectral techniques promote makes it possible to transform traditional kinds of harmonic thinking without losing touch with the feeling for hierarchy on which the communicativeness of tonality has always depended. The music of [Tristan] Murail and [Magnus] Lindberg (among others) may in consequence have a more immediate appeal than that of more complex composers.⁵¹

Certainly, a 'feeling for hierarchy' plays a part in this appeal. Yet I wonder whether there is a risk here of over-intellectualising matters: we should not underestimate the powerful attraction of the consonances that spectral technique produces. The redoubtable modernist credentials of spectral music have played an important role in legitimating the reappearance of consonance in many composers' oeuvres. Throughout this thesis we will frequently encounter numerous examples of melodicism, consonance, lament, humour. Indeed, I would go so far as to argue that the concerto, with its strong solo voices and its tendency towards lightness and structural perceptibility, often pulls composers in precisely those directions, or at least rewards such aesthetic leanings. An interesting tension, of course, is that the concerto, arguably more than other traditional genres, fosters an avant-garde mindset: it embraces new techniques, new sonorities, notions of artists working at the forefront of their craft. Exploring this tension will be one of the tasks of the chapters that follow.

⁵¹ Whittall 1999, 385.

Another key tension to address is that between what might be termed 'international' and 'local' perspectives on musical modernism. In many twentieth-century cases, modernism was tethered to particular centres dedicated to research and innovation (IRCAM is a particularly well-known example). In recent years, however, global communications have instead created the impression of a small number of modernist composers scattered around the world, plugged into a niche market largely supported by the internet. Through this development, and in tandem with the broader globalised world, modernism appears to have been decentred in both cultural and geographical terms.⁵² The purchase of questions of physical place appears reduced, as does the importance of regional identities.

Such conclusions seem to be supported by a recent decline in the once-urgent political emphasis on Nordic identity, evident in various political and economic developments. The aftermath of the Second World War saw Nordic identity asserted through a 'cobweb' of political measures such as the institution of the Nordic Council (in 1946), the abolition of passport restrictions within the region, and the instigation of a common Nordic labour market. As Nils Andrén argued in 1964, 'the gradual process of Nordic cooperation and the general development of interrelations have actively contributed towards increasing the awareness of common ties among the nations in the region'.⁵³ Among the most important Nordic ties was a shared model of government, a fairly distinctive Social Democratic 'middle way' between the politics of

⁵² Björn Heile's '*Weltmusik* and the Globalisation of New Music', in Heile 2009, 101-122, is a particularly useful discussion of the impact of globalisation on musical modernism.

⁵³ See Andrén 1964, 3.

East and West, characterised in particular by a large public sector.⁵⁴ While to date the Nordic public sector remains large by European standards, the forces of global capitalism have made themselves felt in recent decades; furthermore, the collapse of Communism has eroded the distinctiveness of that once-vaunted middle way. Meanwhile, the last half-century has witnessed a marked strengthening of European unity and, while Nordic countries have rarely led the way in that integration,⁵⁵ they have all participated to some extent or other. With the exception of Norway, the Nordic countries are now members of the European Union, prompting questions regarding the political and economic advisability of Nordic unity (all of the Nordic offices require substantial public funding alongside the European ones).⁵⁶

Despite these important political developments, my thesis contends that regional identities remain highly significant, even more so – and it is thus in agreement with a fast-growing body of scholarship in musicology and beyond.⁵⁷ As Kenneth R. Olwig and Michael Jones argue in their recent work on Nordic landscape and identity,

globalisation has, in an apparent paradox, been accompanied by a revived interest in the particularities of place [...] The emergence, for example, of globally oriented transnational bodies such as the European Union has opened the way for a re-examination of regional place identities that previously had been suppressed under the political and ideological hegemony of the nation-state. The rise of the European Union and the fall of the Soviet bloc have created what is perceived to be a realistic foundation for the

⁵⁴ The term 'middle way' as applied to Scandinavian politics, derives from Child 1936 (entitled *Sweden: The Middle Way*).

⁵⁵ A notable exception was Denmark's becoming one of the six nations which formed the European Economic Community in 1973.

⁵⁶ For a particularly useful discussion of the tensions between Nordic and European cooperation, see the introduction to Ingebritsen 2000.

⁵⁷ Recent musicological examples of this kind of cultural geography include Grimley 2006, Krims 2007, and Johansson and Bell 2009.

reconstitution of historical regional identities, sometimes crossing national boundaries.⁵⁸

Examples of this reconstitution can be found in the writings of many cultural commentators. In a 1992 edition of *Ballade*, the pre-eminent journal on Nordic music, Anders Beyer argued for a reconsideration of Nordic musical identity in the face of European integration. He identified a common Nordic

opposition to the Central European dominance that has characterised [the twentieth] century, not only in the realms of politics and economics, but also in those of art and culture. Perhaps it is exactly for this reason that we have a Nordic Council as a stronghold; with collaborative discussions, the Nordic Music Days and an all-Nordic publication [*Ballade*] which publishes information from all of the Nordic music information centres [... These are] institutions that we protect, and which represent a mentality we can identify with – to many of us even more than the thought of a common European brotherhood.⁵⁹

Many commentators would dispute Beyer's claim of Central European dominance, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, arguing that on the contrary this period saw a weakening of the European position as the opposition between the USA and USSR became the major force in shaping global affairs (in his *History of Western Music* Taruskin argues, albeit controversially, that this shift in dominance was also reflected in musical production⁶⁰). Nonetheless, it is easy to see why Beyer could have thought European integration to be the most significant threat to Nordic unity in 1992. His stance is representative of a renewal of the effort to maintain the Nordic distinction, culturally as well as politically, after the Cold War – an effort still in

⁵⁸ Introduction to Olwig and Jones 2008, ix.

⁵⁹ Beyer 1992a, 23.

⁶⁰ Taruskin 2005b. Much of Taruskin's prologue to the 2007 edition of his history is devoted to the defence of his emphasis on the opposition of the USA and the USSR.

evidence a decade later, in the decision to make the Nordic Music Days an annual rather than biennial event.

Modernism and Nordic Identity

The tension between international integration and regional identity has been keenly experienced in the careers of many leading Nordic composers. In the years since the Second World War it has been the subject of several polemics and caused several institutional upheavals. What follows is a brief critical overview of the intersection of place and identity in Nordic modernism in these decades. This section is broadly organised thematically rather than chronologically, and does not pretend to be exhaustive. It aims, rather, to use just a few historical examples to reflect the issues and polemics at stake as Nordic composers negotiate geographically-determined identity.

In Nordic countries, there has been a tendency to associate tradition (whether in a positive or a negative light) with the north, whilst projecting progressive credentials southward onto Central Europe. Following the Second World War, a large number of younger Nordic composers engaged with the developments of the Central European avant garde. Among these were Erik Bergman (1911-2006) and Finn Mortensen (1922-1983), the first Finnish and Norwegian composers respectively to adopt the twelve-note method. In Sweden, the encounter with modernism was led by the 'Monday Group' (Karl-Birger Blomdahl, Sven-Erik Bäck and Ingvar Lidholm), who created the important music series 'Nutida Musik' and the Electronic Music Studio, a

pioneering centre for the use of computers in composition. At the same time, the political promotion of Nordic identity after the war found a counterpart in the works of composers whose styles emphasised 'Nordic' elements. In Norway, Geirr Tveitt (1908-1981) led the way in synthesising Central European modernistic and Nordic folkloristic elements, as exemplified most clearly in his concertos for hardanger fiddle and orchestra.⁶¹ Yet the forces in favour of regional identity were arguably felt most strongly in Denmark, where the establishment worked hard to promote the fundamentally traditional, diatonic principles they associated (sometimes questionably) with the legacy of Carl Nielsen (1865-1931). Vagn Holmboe (1909-1996) led the way in cultivating a post-war Nordic symphonism that is best exemplified in his *Sinfonia Boreale* (1952). This style owes much to Sibelius' economy and linearity, developed by Holmboe into the somewhat nebulous idea of 'metamorphosis'.⁶² Organicism is the central metaphor in Holmboe's accounts of this principle, suggestive of a deep closeness to nature. Holmboe's style is also characterised by austere orchestration and a preference for registral extremes, both of which seem to strain towards the uncompromising topography of an imagined Nordic landscape. Yet another notable aspect is a marked strength of gesture, which seems designed to capture the vigour and ruggedness presumably required of the inhabitants of this harsh Nordic realm.⁶³ The importance of asserting such qualities was surely especially pressing given the need for national and regional confidence in

⁶¹ For a discussion of Geirr Tveitt's concertos and other uses of the hardanger fiddle in a classical context, see Aksdal 2006.

⁶² For a critical discussion of the 'metamorphic technique', albeit one with much of the vagueness of Holmboe's own accounts, see Nielsen 1972.

⁶³ Peter Davidson discusses these concepts of Nordic identity in Davidson 2005. On the association of Nordic identity with the qualities of strength and ruggedness – and with a number of more specifically musical qualities – see Grimley 2005.

the wake of German occupation.⁶⁴ While he was a prolific concerto composer, Holmboe's more well-known symphonies have tended to consolidate an association of Nordic identity with ruggedly constructed symphonic designs.

One of Holmboe's students, Per Nørgård – the subject of the first of this thesis's case studies – made a particularly controversial argument for Nordic solidarity in a 1956 article entitled 'The Universe of the Nordic Mind'. Here, the young Nørgård frequently employs the imagery of a lone pioneer exploring uncharted terrain (a notion particularly compatible with our imaginings of Europe's most sparsely populated region): 'an open, receptive attitude [to developments south of Denmark] is healthy, but beyond a certain point it endangers our own activity and our independent pioneer spirit'.⁶⁵ The article angered a number of composers, including Karl-Birger Blomdahl, who accused Nørgård of championing a 'Blud und Boden' cult.⁶⁶ Nørgård's polemic, like Holmboe's *Sinfonia Boreale*, resulted in limited stylistic fraternisation, and the younger composer would go on to align himself unambiguously with the Central European avant garde later in the 1950s (Holmboe, a generation older, would remain committed to a more traditional style).⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the notion of an 'independent pioneer spirit' reminds us of an important counterpoint to the progressive associations of South: being on the geographical edge of Europe, especially on an edge associated with intractable topographical and

⁶⁴ For a discussion of issues arising from the German occupation of Denmark see Voorhis 1972 and Giltner 2001. For a broader history of Denmark and the struggles involved in the negotiation of a Danish identity, including the German occupation, see Jespersen 2004.

⁶⁵ Nørgård 1956.

⁶⁶ See Gefors 1996, 35.

⁶⁷ Half a decade later, Nørgård would instigate perhaps the greatest upheaval in the modern history of the Danish classical music institution. A composition student considered gifted and progressively-minded by Nørgård and several of his colleagues was rejected by Copenhagen's Royal Academy on the basis that he had performed poorly in more tradition-orientated counterpoint tests. Viewing the decision as symptomatic of a broader institutional conservatism, Nørgård promptly left, along with all of his composition students, to form a leading composition department at Århus.

climatic conditions, reinforces projections of edginess and exploratory vigour. (Such a counterpoint has often played out on a smaller scale within countries, as cities like Århus and Bergen have increasingly established themselves as fresh, vital alternatives to the purportedly stuffy, institutional cultural environments of the capitals.)

The intense engagement with the international avant garde undertaken by many Nordic composers during the late 1950s presaged what has since seemed a characteristic Nordic pattern of behaviour: styles from the centre were assiduously studied then returned to the periphery where adaptation took place, with predictably idiosyncratic results. An earnest spirit of openness towards developments to the South works in an often subtle tension with a persistent sense of critical distance. Very few Nordic composers have become long-term residents outside their native countries (Saariaho, who has lived in Paris since 1982, is a notable exception to this rule). We see this pattern of detachment and adaptation in countless well-documented cases. Nørgård, suddenly sceptical of what he saw as the avant garde's disregard for perceptibility, developed serialism into the 'infinity rows' which form the starting point of our first case study. Rautavaara established a neo-Romantic style as early as the late 1950s, based on what he terms 'non-atonal dodecaphony'; the complexity of the avant garde gave rise to one of Europe's strongest 'New Simplicity' movements in Denmark and Norway during the late 60s, as we will discuss in the case study on Gudmundsen-Holmgreen.

It may be objected that the process of studying established methods, then adapting them to one's individual needs, is so commonplace an artistic practice as to be of little note. Also, a critical reader will demand that the monolithic notion of a

Central European avant garde be deconstructed – as the memoirs of any leading figure will affirm, this oft-perceived monolith was deeply fractured in many ways. Here, however, we rub against the difference between the reality, as best estimated by a balanced historical perspective, and projections of identity. In the public profiles of many Nordic composers, geographical distance reinforces artistic difference, allowing a questioning spirit and individualism to appear almost innate to a peripheral identity. Certainly, a degree of geographical separation seems to relieve some of the weightiness of traditional genres (with the obvious exception of the symphony, in which genre Nordic composers have created such an imposing canon). Nordic production in more traditional musical veins has remained remarkably prolific since the Second World War, albeit with a minor dip during the late 50s and early 60s, when the grip of the avant garde was felt most strongly.

Many commentators on Nordic music argue precisely that a degree of distance from the European centre has fostered stoical individuality and a general scepticism of dogma or of fashionable compositional schools. As Beyer argues,

Something that, with few exceptions, characterises Nordic composers is, among other things, a refusal to allow oneself to become adapted; to be included in groups and cliques that have found the “answers” and would like to convert the world. This is true of most Scandinavian composers; individualism above collective deliverance.⁶⁸

This simple formulation is of course worth interrogating: compositional schools, collectives, influential teachers with their distinctive compositional orthodoxies, have abounded across Scandinavia. Perhaps a more realistic argument for individualism as a Nordic trait is the marked emphasis on tolerance and plurality, which has

⁶⁸ Beyer 1992a, 23.

developed alongside the Scandinavian model of social democracy.⁶⁹ However, this sense of tolerance is rendered less remarkable by the ample resources at hand: the comparatively high availability of performers for new compositions has enabled what might cynically be perceived as a kind of relativism.

The compositional orthodoxies by Beyer are easy to find in the Nordic region, although they are also plural. One thinks, for instance, of that legion of composers who have composed metamusic in Denmark, led largely by Karl Aage Rasmussen;⁷⁰ or of institutionalised 'Sonology', which has maintained a grip on much Norwegian composition since the 1970s. One of the most interesting cases in this respect is the Finnish 'Ears Open!' Group. While 'open' discussion has unsurprisingly been one of the main events associated with this collective, Esa Pekka-Salonen, a founder-member, has hinted that the group was hardly light on doctrines:

[Ears Open] merely defined what music should not be: music may not be tonal, music may not be modal, music may not be easily understandable – the form of music must be complex.⁷¹

The word 'merely' fails to capture just how prescriptive the Ears Open group could be, even in the words of one of its most prominent exponents. Each of the developments discussed here, of course, bears a resemblance to those that have

⁶⁹ Beyer 1992b, 76: 'Danish composers have generally been diehard individualists. It is a question of pluralism that is, I think, a Danish phenomenon. It can have something to do with the especially democratic spirit in this little country'.

⁷⁰ 'Metamusic' is a term that has been applied to numerous compositional aesthetics of the late twentieth century, and as such it has acquired a potentially confusing array of definitions. Rasmussen's particular metamusic is often described as 'music about music' in which the aim is not sounds that are previously unheard but connections that are previously unheard. As Erik Jakobsen argues, 'this preoccupation manifests itself in works which aim to problematise issues of musical meaning through the reuse and reshaping of existing material' (Jakobsen 2007).

⁷¹ Quoted in Moisala 2009, at 7.

taken place elsewhere, and usually at around the same time: distance from the centre has very rarely prohibited Nordic connections with other parts of the world.

Orthodoxies are promulgated also through education. It is arguable that the most influential schools and teachers across the region have largely come from Denmark and Finland. Their usefulness for the development of composers has been noted by Beyer, among others:

One of the problems for the development of new music in Sweden and Norway seems to some extent to be the fact that there have not been any obvious paternal figures to discuss with, fight with and settle with. Acting as teachers in Denmark, Per Nørgård and Karl Aage Rasmussen alternately gave musical bubble- and acid-baths to a number of generations of younger composers.⁷²

The bias of a Danish viewpoint is perhaps betrayed by Beyer's mention only of Nørgård and Rasmussen, not Paavo Heininen or Joonas Kokkonen. Yet there is truth in the statement that, while the balance has been redressed in recent years, the infrastructure for teaching composition has generally been strongest in Denmark and Finland.

Amidst this notably democratic and pluralistic region, identifying a single dominant Nordic musical subjectivity seems difficult indeed. Even the existence of a self-consciously Nordic aesthetic, like that of Holmboe or Tveitt, seems questionable in the contemporary context: it is difficult to see, for instance, how qualities of ruggedness and strength can be upheld convincingly alongside a general quality of life that has become the envy of much of the developed world. (2009's Nordic Music

⁷² Beyer 1992a, 24.

Days had the Nordic enjoyment of 'Luxury' as its theme.) There have been occasional resurgences of interest in overtly Nordic instruments and idioms, some of them long-lived. The Norwegian Academy of Music (Oslo), for instance, introduced the study of hardanger fiddle to its curriculum in the 1990s, while some composers have been commissioned to write specifically Nordic works. Perhaps the foremost example is Lasse Thoresen's Concerto for Hardanger Fiddle, Nyckelharpa and Orchestra (2005), written to mark the centenary of the dissolution of the union between Sweden and Norway with a combination of the two nations' best known folk instruments. Yet these are isolated instances, which must be weighed against the bulk of Nordic music in which there are few overt indications of provincial identity. What we are seeking in this thesis are the common threads which more subtly suggest that certain Nordic traits lie behind works that outwardly appear representative of plurality and international engagement.

2.3

Ignoring, Confronting, Appropriating Tradition: Analysing the Contemporary Concerto

It could be argued that existing concerto-specific analytical models, being paradigmatically concerned with the eighteenth-century repertory, have little or no applicability to the concertos of today. Generic conventions were subverted and problematised during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to such an extent, one might claim, that there is now no standard to which the contemporary concerto can adhere or react. Paul Griffiths argues that the term 'concerto' had 'lost any residual formal meaning' by around the 1970s, and from then on has indicated nothing more than a work with one or more soloists. Any study that sets out to analyse a more-or-less coherent group of contemporary works designating them as 'concertos' must therefore make a case for the meaning of the word, its relevance, and the ways in which a work associated with it might meaningfully be interrogated.

In support of his condemnation of the term 'concerto', Griffiths cites Jean Barraqué's *Concerto* (1968) and Milton Babbitt's *Piano Concerto* (1985), as well as Barraqué's statement that he employed the title for its 'neutrality'.⁷³ The etymology of the word 'concerto' is somewhat hazy, and thus from a certain perspective the assertion of neutrality may be defensible: perhaps Barraqué's comment should be seen in the context of the widespread twentieth-century interest in returning to the 'roots' of genres.⁷⁴ Depending on whether we accept the Latin or Italian origins of the term *concertare*, it can mean 'to contend, dispute, debate' or 'to arrange, agree, get

⁷³ Griffiths 2007.

⁷⁴ Arguably the most well-known instance of this preoccupation with rootedness is Stravinsky's comment that *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* is not an essay in symphonic form but rather a reference to the term's older, broader connotations of 'sounding together'.

together' – it is thought that both definitions were in use during the genre's early development in the sixteenth century.⁷⁵ The distance between these two definitions suggests the possibility of a no-man's-land in between, a ground whose neutrality renders it ideal for that particular kind of modernist work which strives to set its own boundaries and rules, and to be understood exclusively on its own terms. However, this is not the only possible modern approach to the genre: many late twentieth-century concertos, far from attempting a neutral exclusivity, instead make pointed reference to historical models from the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Well-known examples include Schnittke's *Concerto Grosso* and Peter Maxwell Davies's 'Strathclyde Concertos'.

The works analysed in this thesis tend to probe a problematic middle ground between neutrality and explicit, fastidious attentiveness to generic history. On the one hand, we should resist the notion that Nordic composers generally treat the concerto with utter irreverence and ahistoricism. On the other, it would be a mistake to configure the current popularity of the concerto in the Nordic region as part of a broader flowering of neoclassical genre-engagement or formal analogy akin to that which occurred between the First and Second World Wars. We see the grey area between these extremes, for instance, in Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's *Concerto Grosso*. The title is loaded with a reference to a genre that lacks the solo concerto's historical continuity; and the work's asymmetrical division of the ensemble, along with its tendency towards motoric rhythmic regularity and stratified dynamics, is indeed suggestive of a Baroque model: yet the analyst who attempts to impose a Baroque form on the work quickly pushes against the limits of tenability. Likewise, Magnus

⁷⁵ Hutchings 2007.

Lindberg's Piano Concerto entertains notions of neoclassicism with its three-movement, fast-slow-fast structure and lucid scoring for an orchestra of Classical dimensions; yet the parallels with sonata or ritornello forms, for instance, do not go far beyond this point.

The predominance of this 'middle ground' among the concertos analysed in this thesis is both interesting in itself and intensely problematic in analytical terms. Both poles bespeak an engagement with the historicity of the genre, but in very different modes, rendering difficult the choice of technologies for probing the spectrum in-between. We must first survey relevant existing literature, and assess its value to the analyses that follow. Two strands of thought in particular seem productive: the relatively large body of recent work that focuses quite pointedly on relationships between twentieth-century music and the past, on the one hand, and analytical discussions of concerto form, on the other.

Neoclassicism and Influence-Anxiety

Much of the scholarship exploring relationships between recent and past music is to be found in orbit around the term 'neoclassicism', and is preoccupied with works that are more specifically allusive than the repertory under discussion in this thesis. Martha Hyde's typology of early twentieth-century neoclassicism, for instance, has limited applicability to the majority of contemporary Nordic concertos (although it may function as a useful starting point in nuancing definitions of a term whose usage has

often been problematically vague or tendentious).⁷⁶ Also, the numerous intertextual frameworks put forward in David Metzger's study of 'quotation and allusion' in twentieth-century music are generally difficult to apply to a repertory in which direct quotation and acute formal allusion are rarities – a fact I discuss at greater length in the following chapters (although one exception to this general lack of quotation, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's *Plateaux pour Piano et Orchestre*, is explored).⁷⁷

More pertinent to the foregoing analyses are certain ideas extracted from theories of influence-anxiety, as developed by Harold Bloom and adapted to the analysis of twentieth-century music most notably by Joseph Straus.⁷⁸ The specific tropes encountered in these theories are invoked infrequently in what follows, but the analyses are nonetheless indebted in important ways to that more general sense of potentially stifling anxiety that this body of thought brings to bear on questions of generic tradition. We will often, for instance, be reminded of the Bloomian conceptualisation of a work jostling for creative space within a tightly packed and potentially stifling container:

Poems fight for survival in a state of poems, which by definition has been, is now, and is always going to be overpopulated. Any poem's initial problem is to make room for itself – it must force the previous poems to move over and so clear space for it.⁷⁹

In the consideration particularly of recent works, of course, such an emphasis on historical constriction often vies with an anti-historical, postmodern perspective. From

⁷⁶ Hyde 1996.

⁷⁷ Metzger 2003.

⁷⁸ Bloom 1973 and Bloom 1975; for musicological adaptations of Bloom's influence-anxiety, see Straus 1990, Straus 1991, and Korsyn 1991.

⁷⁹ Bloom 1975, 121.

the postmodern point of view, objects from the past (concerto form, for instance) are neutral, their cultural meaning nullified, and notions of progress and canonical centrality are highly suspect.⁸⁰ As I have already made clear, however, I treat the works analysed in the main body of this thesis as modernist (in the senses discussed in chapter 2.2).

In fact, the modernism of these Nordic concertos is tied to their genre in a way that specifically promotes Bloomian anxiety: modernist notions of progressivism find the propulsion they need in a genre historically centred to a large extent on the progression of instrumental technique (an area in which perfectly demonstrable, often quantifiable, leaps have been made in the last few decades). Throughout this thesis we will encounter several works which confront the anxiety prompted by working within (or against) traditions in which certain monuments represent encyclopaedic showcases of what can be done on a given solo instrument. The burden of maintaining a narrative based on progress in the latter half of the twentieth century is an anxiety ripe for music-analytical treatment. The counter-argument is, of course, that it is not the concerto but the symphony that is the quintessentially anxious orchestral genre, especially for Nordic composers. Yet I would suggest that the symphony's weightiness in the Nordic region has become such that it now provokes distance and wry deconstruction, as in Leif Segerstam's series of 239 symphonies.⁸¹

⁸⁰ See Jameson 1991, 25-31. See also J. Kramer 1995, 17-18.

⁸¹ The number 239 is accurate as of December 2010. Segerstam has not, to my knowledge, explicitly suggested a deconstructive intent behind his symphonies or indeed their proliferation in his output. It is difficult, however, not to perceive such a stance when one considers the common perception of the symphony as a genre into which composers make only a small number of sustained, large-scale and identity-shaping forays. Indeed, Segerstam's symphonies often seem to be short, explosive flurries of creative activity, as if in reaction against the weighty, taut structures one might associate with symphonic writing.

The concerto, by comparison, has not quite reached that tipping point. (This is a thread of discussion picked up in my case study on Saariaho (4.2).)

The 'Psychology' of Concerto Form

The second strand of literature mentioned earlier – analytical accounts of concerto form – is certainly pertinent to this thesis. While very few contemporary concertos adhere rigorously to Classical procedures, the traditional model represents a hardening of certain norms which tend to personify the genre. We might speak, for instance, of the concerto's behavioural tendencies, or of the 'psychology' of the form, without necessarily describing the more exact details of its constitution. Tracing the echoes of concerto 'psychology' in contemporary works constitutes another productive, sensitive and non-totalising approach to the probing of the spectrum between self-conscious historical engagement and historical irreverence or ignorance. I will shortly discuss the various forms this 'psychology' might take, but first I will outline the most common classical concerto three-movement form.⁸² While much of the forthcoming analytical work resists the static, structuralist sense of form encapsulated by the following diagram, such a concrete representation makes a provocative launching point for our discussion of form.

Even where specific analogues to the procedures specified in fig. 2.3.1 are not encountered in contemporary concertos, one can discern traces of past generic

⁸² The information in Fig. 2.3.1 is extracted from a number of sources, most notably Stevens 1971; Plantinga 1999, especially 9-21; Rosen 1997; Hutchings et al. 2007; and Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, especially 430-602. Simon P. Keefe gives a very useful overview of theories of the concerto in Keefe 2005b.

Fig. 2.3.1: Outline of Classical Concerto Structure

Note: the first rows of the below tables are concerned with textural individuations; the second with thematic materials; the third with the main tonal areas explored; the fourth with miscellaneous details.

First Movement (Fast)

Tutti ₁	Solo ₁	T ₂	S ₂	T ₃	S ₃	T ₄	Cad	T ₄
a b	a b d			A	b d			
I	I-----V	V	V	----- I	(I)	I ⁶ ₄		I
		S*				S		

* S = *Spielepisoden* (Display Episodes): Hans Engel's term (1840) for virtuosic passages heard occurring towards the close of certain solo passages.⁸³

Second Movement (Slow)

These are surely the most formally diverse movements in the classical concerto. Aria forms (ABA') are common, as are more episodic rondo forms and sets of variations.

Third Movement Sonata-Rondo (Fast)

S	T	S		T	S	T	S	T	S		T	T	S
a		B	C			D	a	b	C		A		
I		I-----V			vi	I							

⁸³ Engel 1974, 2:2.

practice. On the most basic level, a concerto might be in three movements, perhaps in a fast-slow-fast sequence, and it might be of normal concerto duration – around 20 to 30 minutes. Such details might seem prosaic, but in the context of contemporary music, from which the prosaic is often excluded on principle, normalities are often noteworthy – as Paul Griffiths argues, for instance, ‘reduction of scale is just as much a characteristic of recent music as expansion: what has been vacated is the middle ground of twenty to thirty minutes, except in works meant for traditional contexts’.⁸⁴

At a slightly greater level of engagement, contemporary concertos may also respond to the Classical model by implementing a clear structural correspondence between textural individuation and thematic or harmonic developments.⁸⁵ They might feature a quite rigorously-structured, conflictual first-movement; a freer-sounding, more rhapsodic slow movement; or a rambunctious, trivial mutual rondo finale which appears to do little more than celebrate the reconciliation of the previous opposition. In a similar vein, concertos might respond to the playfulness associated with the genre since the eighteenth century.⁸⁶ Yet another concerto norm that might find a reflection in a contemporary concerto is the way in which the orchestra starts proceedings with a tutti that sets initial thematic or harmonic parameters, while the soloist tends to take responsibility for crucial modulations, thereby taking on the leading role in the movement’s progress. Again, it might echo the tendency towards a

⁸⁴ Griffiths 1995, 257.

⁸⁵ Both Donald Tovey and Charles Rosen have argued for the interdependence of formal shape and solo-orchestra interaction. See Keefe’s summary of existing theories of the concerto in Keefe 2005, especially 17.

⁸⁶ Joseph Kerman, for instance, associates the concerto rondo with high comedy as it flourished in the eighteenth century: ‘Goldsmith and Sheridan, Marivaux and Beaumarchais, Mozart and Da Ponte’ (Kerman 1999, 104). Kerman points out that, of his 44 concertos, Mozart wrote only two in minor keys, K.466 and K.491 – it is also suggestive of certain critical predispositions that these are the two Mozart concertos most discussed in the literature.

more rapid exchange between soloist and orchestra as the conclusion of a movement or work draws near. It might strike a general sense of balance between solo and orchestral sections, both in terms of playing-time and in apparent control over the work's setup and development. Finally, a contemporary concerto is likely to share the teleological structure which ensures that climaxes of technical display are heard towards the end of a section, movement or work (with problematic consequences for certain analytical criteria, as I will discuss in a moment). The analyses presented in the main body of this thesis make frequent reference to these norms.

Of course, to each of the typical behaviours described above there are numerous canonical exceptions which vastly predate the repertory discussed in this thesis. These include the compressed one-movement design of Liszt's Second Piano Concerto in A (1861) – which dispenses with most elements of the Classical form – and the symphonic four-movement structure of the Brahms B♭ Concerto (1881). The treatment of endings as light display episodes is upset as early as Beethoven, who tends to load his first movements' final tutti sections with 'far-reaching experiment and expansion';⁸⁷ meanwhile the particularly complex finales to his Fourth and Fifth Piano Concertos represent a larger-scale type of end-weighting. Grieg extends this tendency in the conspicuous end-weighting of his Piano Concerto (1868), in which the final movement is the longest and most multifarious of the three. The mutual rondo is jettisoned in most of the nineteenth century's best-known concertos (with the notable exception of Brahms's Second Piano Concerto⁸⁸). However, the triumphant

⁸⁷ Plantinga 1999, 13.

⁸⁸ See, for instance, Donald Tovey's famous characterisation of the Brahms finale: 'We have done our work – let the children play in the world which our work has made safer and happier

conclusion continues to dominate: Liszt develops what Kerman describes as ‘the characteristic nineteenth-century solution’, ‘the ecstatic or heroic or triumphant finale’.⁸⁹ We must wait until the twentieth century, as I discuss later in this thesis, for concertos that react against this generic triumphalism with concluding tones of lament.

However, from a twentieth-century perspective, the exceptional character of these strategies is tempered by their own place in the genre’s history. Romantic deviations from the Classical model have become forms with their own traditions. Among these is the symphonic model, which strives towards the unity, tautness and weightiness of a genre usually held in higher regard than the concerto, and is most strongly associated with the late Romantic behemoths of Brahms, Ernst von Dohnányi (1898) and Ferruccio Busoni (1904).⁹⁰ The twentieth century saw a large number of equivalent but more clearly signalled generic hybrids, most notably Bela Bartók’s ‘symphony-like’⁹¹ *Concerto for Orchestra* (1943), Benjamin Britten’s Cello Symphony (1963), and the *sinfonia concertante*s of William Walton (1928), Serge Prokofiev (1938), and Peter Maxwell Davies (1982). Such hybridities are marked by an important concertante tension, as Busoni argued early in the twentieth century:

With the rise of virtuosity the word [concerto] became restricted to the meaning which it still commonly has – a *bravura* piece for a single instrument, for the greater glory of which the orchestra [...] is subordinated.

For the sake of respectability these *morceaux d’occasion* were given the outward shape of a symphony; the first movement put on the mask of a

for them’ (Tovey 1903, 3:125). Kerman agrees that this finale is a kind of ‘carefree appendix’ (Kerman 1999, 114).

⁸⁹ Kerman 1999, 122.

⁹⁰ For a discussion of early twentieth-century symphonic concertos, see Schneider 2005, 140-144.

⁹¹ Keefe 2005b, 12.

certain dignity, but in the following movements the mask was gradually dropped, until the finale brazenly displayed the grimace of an acrobat.⁹²

This (arguably false) tension between virtuosity and substance, and the resultant problem of ('brazenly acrobatic') endings, is one to which we will return at several points in this thesis. The symphonic model has been significant for a number of Nordic composers in recent decades. Lasse Thoresen, for instance, has written a Symphonic Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, while Kalevi Aho has titled his Third Symphony *Sinfonia Concertante* (1973). Though less suggestively titled, the concertos of Magnus Lindberg, in particular the *Concerto for Orchestra*, appear to strive towards symphonic breadth (as I note in the third of this thesis' case studies (4.3)). Yet these examples are exceptions to the rule that there is little overt cross-fertilisation between the two genres, suggesting that they are commonly viewed as being quite distinct from, perhaps even incompatible with, one another.

It is another established Romantic deviation, the programme concerto, whose characteristic narrative and drama have come to predominate in the repertory during recent decades, both within and outside the Nordic region. As Paul Griffiths argues,

a notable feature of concerto composition after World War II has been the conception of the solo–ensemble relationship as a dramatic one, with each side expressing 'characters' involved in calm discussion, violent argument or independent development.⁹³

Griffiths cites Thea Musgrave's several concertos, in which 'the dramatic situation is heightened by the soloist's physical movements within the orchestra', and Henze's Violin Concerto No.2, which 'pushes the techniques to the borders of music

⁹² Quoted in Sitsky 1986, at 92.

⁹³ Griffiths 2007.

theatre'.⁹⁴ Such theatrical conceptions of the genre lie at the heart of this thesis and much of its analytical framework.

The Concerto as Drama

A common thread through the case studies in this thesis is a keen sense of the concerto as a visual, performed spectacle, inviting provocative analogies with theatre. Such analogies, indeed, play an important part in the genre's history, and analytical approaches of this type have already been described in relation to twentieth-century and earlier concertos. We should, of course, immediately dispel any notion that all dramatic concertos find their model in the Romantic programme concerto. Both that model and its symphonic counterpart are exemplary of nineteenth-century music's tendency towards the exaggeration and eventual maximisation of different oppositions. Throughout its history, the concerto has frequently foregrounded the opposition between autonomy and contingency, and thus the concerto deviations of the latter half of the nineteenth century can be seen as just such an exaggeration of existing polarities.⁹⁵ Similarly, the powerfully theatrical or narrative programme concerto of this period is less a radical alteration of the Classical model and more the hardening of connections that the genre has always had with dialogue and drama.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ This opposition of (and space between) 'autonomy' and 'contingency' is explored at length in the introduction to Kramer 2002. Kramer's history begins with a discussion of 'the development of both analytical devices for understanding music as autonomous art and interpretative strategies for understanding music as meaningfully engaged with language, imagery and the wider world' (*Ibid.*, 1).

These connections are arguably integral to the concerto, and are frequently to be found expressed in implicit and explicit terms. For instance, the designation *ritornello*, often used interchangeably with *tutti* in concerto analyses, is borrowed from the operatic aria (another genre in which a highly skilled soloist is supported by an instrumental group), where it refers to recurring instrumental refrains. Writing in 1745, J.A. Scheibe argues that the concerto and da capo aria are so alike that his chapter on the latter will entirely suffice as an explication of the former.⁹⁶ The theoretical accounts of Heinrich Christoph Koch, surely the eighteenth century's most illuminating writer on first-movement concerto form, bear more rigorous testament to the concerto's dramatic credentials. Simon Keefe has explored the ways in which these writings suggest 'new avenues of investigation into what is arguably the central dramatic component of the late eighteenth-century concerto: the interaction between the soloist and the orchestra'.⁹⁷ Keefe's discussion of the soloist-orchestra relationship in Mozart's Piano Concerto K.459/i is a revealing application of late eighteenth-century theory to a late eighteenth-century work. (As with so much analytical work of this type, however, a purportedly neat fitting of theory to work obscures the inevitable gaps – chronological and technical – between theory and compositional practice.)

One of the most provocative recent accounts of the dramatic elements of the concerto is that of Joseph Kerman, who offers a striking plethora of roles played by soloist or orchestra across a range of concertos, including 'eavesdropper, tease, survivor, victim, mourner or pleurant, minx, lover, critic, editor'. He shows how these

⁹⁶ Scheibe 1745, 632. For a thorough appraisal of structural affinities between the da capo aria and the concerto, see Rosen 1988, 28-70.

⁹⁷ Keefe 1998, 368.

and similarly provocative metaphors can be implemented in 'relationship stories'.⁹⁸

Simon Keefe has questioned the validity of such an approach:

Is the identification and application of a wide range of roles for concerto participants a legitimate hermeneutic practice in the present scholarly era, when not accompanied by thorough consideration of the historical, contextual or critical implications of each role?⁹⁹

The irony for Keefe's argument is, of course, that in the 'present scholarly era' he invokes, when the 'death of the Author' is so well established, we are surely liberated from considering the historical implications of a hermeneutic role in a way that we might not have been in a previous time. Keefe seems to be approaching the issue from a poietic perspective, in keeping, perhaps, with his general focus on historical (thus compositional practice-shaping) rather than contemporary (thus reception-shaping) theories of the concerto: he wants to know why a work was made as it was. Kerman's is a more esthetic approach:¹⁰⁰ it offers appealing hermeneutic frameworks, generally divorced from historical documentation, which have the potential to significantly enrich a listener's experience of a work. The analyses in this thesis tend similarly to put forward dramatic readings that seem provocative and illuminating, while not necessarily relating in any way to what we can know of compositional process. This is a particularly important point to make given the possibility of asking questions directly of the composers involved (as I have occasionally done).

⁹⁸ Kerman 1999, 50.

⁹⁹ Keefe 2005b, 15.

¹⁰⁰ For a discussion of these analytical approaches, see 'Theory and Analysis as Symbolic Constructions' in Nattiez 1990, 201-237.

My slight reservation about Kerman's, and other, concerto stories is, in fact, that they often do not go far enough. The analogy with theatre opens up numerous possibilities that have not been much explored. Most obviously, accounts rarely reach beyond personification and story-telling to consider the specific types of theatre with which the genre engages, and this is an avenue of enquiry to which I will have frequent recourse in the ensuing chapters. An exception to the scarcity of more specific discussions of concerto-theatre is the tradition of comparing the concerto to ancient Greek tragedy. The implications of that comparison are wide and pertinent to the Nordic repertory, and demand detailed consideration.

The analogy with an ancient theatrical form goes back to Koch:

In short, by a concerto I imagine something similar to the tragedy of the ancients, where the actor expressed his feelings not towards the pit, but to the chorus. The chorus was involved most closely with the action and was at the same time justified in participating in the expression of feelings.¹⁰¹

As Keefe argues, 'Koch may have intended his specific invocation of Greek tragedy, one of the artistic genres most admired in the Enlightenment, to negate the abuse that the concerto had suffered, and consequently to elevate its aesthetic standing'.¹⁰² This is perhaps one of the reasons why the analogy has been enduringly popular. Yet that popularity is also attributable in part to the analogy's several compelling implications, and their continuing resonance in the contemporary concerto.

In ancient Greek theatre, the chorus may either be intrinsic to the dramatic action, actively influencing and participating in debate with the actors; or it may be extrinsic, representing an external, artificial element, without influence on the actors,

¹⁰¹ Koch in Keefe 1998, 369.

¹⁰² Keefe 1998, 376.

functioning largely as a commentator. Often, however, the chorus's status is not so clear-cut, interest being derived from the tension between the two functions. As such, it may play an active part in problematising the 'fourth wall' between stage and audience, a task that it is well-positioned to accomplish being spatially located in the centre of the theatre (in the 'orchestra'), precisely where that wall is normally located.¹⁰³ The chorus need not demolish the boundary between stage and audience; nor need it reinforce that boundary; it may, however, encourage a dialectical reading of the fourth wall articulated by Patrice Pavis thusly: 'there is in fact a boundary between stage and audience, but also constant crossings in both directions, and it is within this denial that theatre exists'.¹⁰⁴ The chorus is often the mobile entity making those crossings, setting up, for the spectator, a second spectator or judge of the action 'authorised' (by the author) to offer commentary, and thus acting as a proxy for the audience's faculty of interpretation. The chorus, in this account, emerges as Schiller's 'ideal spectator', whose reading of the action can be controlled by the playwright.¹⁰⁵

If the orchestra assumes this role of chorus or 'ideal spectator', as Koch's account of the analogy between concerto and theatre appears to suggest, one arrives at the possibility of mapping soloist-orchestra dialogue as an idealised composer-audience dialogue. Such a conception can facilitate particularly rich and interesting readings of the drama of the soloist-orchestra relationship. Joseph Kerman makes precisely the same connection in relation to Mozart and his early-

¹⁰³ As Nietzsche noted, 'there was at bottom no opposition between public and chorus' in the design of Greek theatres (Nietzsche 1967, 58).

¹⁰⁴ Pavis 1998, 154. It appears Pavis uses the term 'denial' in its psychoanalytic sense, referring to 'the process which brings to consciousness repressed elements that are denied at the same time' (*Ibid.*, 93).

¹⁰⁵ On Schiller's concept of the 'ideal spectator', see 'Chorus' in Pavis 1998, 53-55.

1780s Viennese audience, arguing that the first movements of the piano concertos, for instance, typically consist of a 'collaborative test situation': the soloist

presents himself to the orchestra and shows how he is able to cope with conditions they have laid down. These conditions are not inflexible; in the process of dialogue they can change considerably, for the orchestra allows and indeed encourages criticism, initiative, even spontaneous display, on the part of the soloist.¹⁰⁶

For Kerman, a Mozart concerto therefore presents us with a dialogue reflecting a reciprocal relationship between composer and audience, in which neither side is entirely dominant. The initial tutti sets the agenda for the soloist, and may be considered analogous to the audience's tastes and expectations; then, the ensuing solo is typically characterised as more adventurous, controlling the unveiling of the sonata form through its explorations of new harmonic terrain. Thus, while the balance of power may swing from one side to the other as the movement progresses, this paradigmatic example of concerto first-movement form may be seen as capturing the spirit of a complex, fluctuating (nevertheless constantly apparent) two-way dynamic between the one and the many, between the composer's innovation and the audience's expectations.

The notion of a concerto modelling an idealised composer-audience dynamic has interesting implications for the contemporary context, especially if one accepts as still-pertinent the Adornian scepticism of new music audiences – passive, uncritical, eager to be associated with whatever appears to be novel or radical.¹⁰⁷ The strings might, for instance, function as an 'ideal spectator', bristling with excitement as the

¹⁰⁶ Kerman 1999, 59.

¹⁰⁷ For a discussion on Adorno's views on 'regression of listening' specifically in the context of modern classical rather than popular music, see Paddison 1996, 184-204.

soloist enters; the orchestra might suddenly be hushed as if in reverence of the soloist's exploration of a demanding new technique. As an analytical strategy, the conflation of composer with soloist receives support also from other quarters: Paul Griffiths has suggested that the contemporary popularity of concertos, with their usually preeminent solo voices, is related to the current necessity of distinctive solo voices amidst a vastly overpopulated stratum of contemporary composers.¹⁰⁸ Such a conflation is perhaps strongest in cases where the composer is also the soloist in a work's first performances, or where the soloist plays a leading role in the compositional process (concepts of agency, voice, and links between composer and performer, are discussed more thoroughly in this thesis's chapter on agency (3.1, 3.2)).

The validity of such interpretations is arguably further strengthened by the self-conscious disruption of performance convention – particularly of the relationship between performer and audience – enacted in so much twentieth-century art. The narrating or otherwise mediating presence between action and audience is an important and sometimes self-conscious continuity between ancient Greek tragedy and the 'Rough Theatre' which had such a prominent place in twentieth-century drama. The category of 'Rough Theatre', as devised by Peter Brook, includes folk, popular and street theatre, cabaret, circus and pantomime.¹⁰⁹ As implemented by playwrights such as Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud, Rough Theatre reacts against the Romantic emphases on realism and naturalism: the tendency is towards strikingly direct, self-conscious and stylised presentation; a blurring of the division between

¹⁰⁸ Griffiths made this suggestion in a paper entitled '21st Century Music: A Progress (?) Report', delivered at a Graduate Colloquium held in the University of Oxford Music Department on 22 April 2010.

¹⁰⁹ Rough is one of Brook's four categories, alongside Deadly, Holy and Immediate. See Brook 2008, 65-96, for a discussion of Rough Theatre.

actor and audience, as in Greek tragedy; and a non-naturalism which often manifests itself in the pointed interruption of narrative continuity. Rough Theatre is closely related to Brecht's concept of *Verfremdung* (alienation), in which dramatic conventions are entertained and then quickly subverted, such that their artificiality is suddenly, disconcertingly brought to the foreground.

Much twentieth-century music theatre has a distinctly 'rough' quality. In Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale*, for instance, 'the audience is as much participating in a ritual as observing a play'.¹¹⁰ As Jonathan Cross argues, *The Soldier's Tale* paved the way for

the overtly 'rough' undertakings of such works as Birtwistle's *Down by the Greenwood Side* (1968-9), Maxwell Davies's *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame* (1978) and *The Lighthouse* (1979) and Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Greek* (1986-8), the anti-opera, nonsense theatre of Ligeti's *Aventures* (1962) and *Nouvelles aventures* (1965), and even the instrumental role-play of Stockhausen's monumental *Licht* (1977-[2003]).¹¹¹

The disruption of performance ritual is frequently enacted by the instrumental role-playing in recent concertos. Indeed, several aspects of this genre seem actively to invite a self-conscious treatment of their own performance: for instance, it is hard to resist an accentuation or mockery of a prima donna solo role, or a tongue-in-cheek commentary on the high-mindedness which often ensures that a slight sense of shame hangs over the enjoyment of virtuosity. We will encounter several examples of this kind of commentary in the analyses that follow.

¹¹⁰ Cross 1998, 138.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

Recent decades have seen a number of studies which interpret the concerto's soloist-orchestra relationship in specifically socio-political terms.¹¹² A paradigmatic example of this hermeneutic approach is Susan McClary's reading of the second movement of Mozart's Piano Concerto in G major, K.453, as a negotiation between the wants of the individual and the rules of the collective (the movement's failure to reconcile the conflict between the two is interpreted as a subversive critique of Enlightenment values). McClary's selection of Mozart as a case study is a polemical one given the common associations of that composer's music with abstract perfection and universalism.¹¹³ Her analysis is a particularly rigorous and compelling application of an idea that has often been casually put forward in discussions of the concerto's popularity or 'relevance': that concertos offer subtle reflections of relations between individual and society.

One recent such discussion took place at a seminar entitled 'Concertos: Music of our Time', which immediately preceded the 'Concerto Marathon' at the Nordic Music Days festival. Among the ideas put forward – and quite widely endorsed – was that the concerto enjoyed its status as 'timely' precisely because it foregrounded that relationship between individual and society, which was taken to be of paramount concern for today's society. The obvious problem with such a contention is that it is difficult to think of a time when the relationship between

¹¹² These are documented in DeNora 2005, 19-31.

¹¹³ McClary 1986. McClary interprets J.S. Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 along similarly political lines in McClary 1989a.

individual freedom and societal constraint has not been an issue in some form or another.

Certainly, some of the twentieth century's more oppressive regimes have given rise to concertos, or at least concerto movements, in which a socio-political reading is hard to resist. The highly conflictual soloist-orchestra relationship in Lutosławski's Cello Concerto (1969-70), for instance, has often been construed as a dissenting response to the Soviet authorities at a time of great unrest in Poland.¹¹⁴ Elliott Carter composed his Piano Concerto in Berlin when the Wall was being erected, and has spoken of how machine-gun fire was in his ear as he created a solo-orchestra conflict whose brutality is surely unsurpassable.¹¹⁵

The post-war Scandinavian context obviously offers less potential for such interpretations. The few overtly political concertos to have emerged from the region tend to engage with international rather than regional affairs: Per Nørgård's viola concerto *Remembering Child* (1986) is an example.¹¹⁶ Likewise, Nørgård's *Borderlines* (2002) for violin and orchestra takes as its subject matter the tension between humans and their environment. The orchestra fluctuates rapidly, often violently, between a 'natural' harmonic series-based tuning system and the man-made equally tempered one, and the violinist must diplomatically adjust the intonation of her playing in response to the shifting, tensely contested 'borderline' between the natural and the man-made (the concerto's conclusion, in which the soloist is still having to make intonational adjustments to a single sustained high note,

¹¹⁴ See, for instance, Stucky 1981, 177.

¹¹⁵ David Schiff portrays the piano as an 'anti-hero' in the alien world of modernity (Schiff 1998, 235-237); Kerman characterises the piano as the 'victim' to the orchestra's 'brute' (Kerman 1999, 119).

¹¹⁶ This concerto is a requiem for Samantha Smith, the American child who attracted extensive media attention in both the USA and the Soviet Union as a 'goodwill ambassador'.

suggests that this borderline is irresolvable). Such works, with their hermeneutic pre-loading, suggest to the analyst quite a specific narrative strategy. I would argue, however, that the ensuing analytical approach – a fleshing out of the usually skeletal story forwarded by the composer – is often rather limited and two-dimensional.

The works given detailed consideration in this thesis (including one by Nørgård) are less overtly engaged with specific extra-musical issues, and socio-political hermeneutics at no point dominate to the exclusion of other ways of configuring concerto structure. Nevertheless, one final observation about the political implications of the concerto relationship will prove valuable in the analyses that follow. Especially after Beethoven, the soloist's leadership or defiance of a large orchestral collective has often been central to perceptions of the genre's inherent heroism. Early in the twentieth century, W. H. Auden claimed that the idealism of much nineteenth-century opera was incompatible with the twentieth century, when even the notion of free human agency seemed suspect.¹¹⁷ As Leon Plantinga argues,

The same malaise threatens our perception of Beethoven's persistent vision of heroic struggle toward human perfection (in the composer's earlier days this idea was mingled with notions of a utopian socialism going back to Plutarch) [...] At the dawn of the twenty-first century the heroic is if anything even more suspect because the coin seems further debased: the mode has been invoked in the service of too many unworthy causes, of imperialist and colonialist adventurism that we now more clearly see as such, and, more recently, of nationalisms run amok.¹¹⁸

This scepticism is surely reflected in the soloist-orchestra dialogues of many contemporary concertos. David Schiff, for example, reads this quality into Elliott Carter's concertos, 'each of which is a subversive anti-concerto in its own way, in

¹¹⁷ Auden 1962, 474.

¹¹⁸ Plantinga 1999, 8.

which 'the soloist is usually cast in the role of the underdog' whose 'alienation is absolute'.¹¹⁹

As we will see in the forthcoming chapters, the orchestra in contemporary Nordic concertos is usually individuated, boisterous, challenging, independent, capricious – anything but uncritically subservient to the solo instrument. This is in part a general resistance to received notions of generic heroism. Rolf Wallin, for instance, has suggested that the appeal of composing his *Timpani Concerto* (1985) lay in the solo instrument's status as a relatively uncelebrated alternative orchestral power-centre, a riposte to Romanticism's exultation in the heroic soloist (this work is discussed at greater length in the appendix). Eero Hameenieni's anti-heroic stance manifests itself in a more direct attack on the solo violinist: in the first movement of his *Violin Concerto No.1* (1990), the soloist's pre-eminence is constantly threatened by solo entries from members of the first violin section – a tendency sure to amuse violinists jaded by years of accompanying soloists who are equally skilled but eminently more marketable than themselves. This scepticism of heroism is hardly uniquely Nordic, but it nonetheless represents a particularly lengthy and important strand in concertos from the region, reaching back most notably to the mischievous, unsettling, guffawing secondary soloists of Nielsen's concertos. Still earlier is the strangely introverted, mostly orchestra-led solo part in Wilhelm Stenhammar's *Second Piano Concerto* – a particularly unsettling contribution to a genre in which the authoritarian status of the soloist is particularly strong given the nineteenth-century cult of the composer-pianist. In general it is in the playing out of this resistance to

¹¹⁹ Schiff 1998, 234.

heroics, born of suspicion and indignation, that the soloist-orchestra relationship found in the Nordic concertos discussed in this thesis is most explicitly politicised.

Analysing the Contemporary Concerto: Summary

The analytical approaches discussed above range from the abstraction of ritornello form to the programmatic interpretation of concertos as political dramas. It might be tempting to think that in visiting both poles of this familiar abstraction-programmaticism opposition, the existing analytical toolkit has an element of completeness. There is no question that each of the methodologies discussed can significantly enrich our understanding of a given concerto – and this thesis inevitably builds in numerous ways on the existing concerto-analytical literature. Yet important aspects of the concerto seem to have been largely neglected in this literature: narrative accounts tend to obscure the fact that actorial agency in concertos can be less than certain, often considerably so – this ambiguity, I will argue, is an important and tantalising aspect of the genre; the centrality of virtuosity, instrumental skill, physical exertion, and gesture to the concerto is generally not recognised; the importance of acoustic space, in a genre where spatial layout is often in the foreground, needs greater attention than it has been afforded in the past. Addressing these gaps, often by synthesising existing concerto theories with the rich bodies of literature concerning agency, physicality and space, is a primary task of the chapters that follow.

3

Agency

Nothing in human life and history is much more thrilling or of more ancient and universal experience than the antithesis of the individual and the crowd; an antithesis which is familiar in every degree, from flat opposition to harmonious reconciliation, and [...] which has been of no less universal prominence in works of art than in life. Now the concerto forms express this antithesis with all possible force and delicacy.

Donald Tovey¹

We may well ask whether the present popularity of the concerto is in fact in the spirit of the times. Is there something about the present day that in some specific way singles out the individual at the expense of the community, the heroic soloist rather than the tight-knit collective?

Kimmo Korhonen²

A concerto has for me always been a drama, a conflict between the individual and the collective

Einojuhani Rautavaara³

3.1

Introduction

Interpretations of concertos as dramas involving human characters – interpretations like those quoted above – are commonplace (such interpretations often make strong

¹ Tovey, 1903, 3

² Korhonen 1995, 7.

³ Einojuhani Rautavaara in *Ibid.*, 7.

and dubious claims either for the genre's universality or for its ability to speak compellingly of a particular time or place). Questing heroes, tight-knit collectives, crowds, and 'belles of the ball' feature throughout this thesis.⁴ But in this section I take a step backwards, to consider the processes by which these agents are projected. I argue that this is precisely the step taken by many modernist concertos: their central focus of enquiry is the process of projection itself. Let us begin by considering that non-representational element which never fully surrenders its grasp on instrumental music, no matter how dramatically provocative it may be.

Abstraction and Ambiguity

A concerto foregrounds and explores a division within an instrumental ensemble. The division is typically asymmetrical, usually resulting in the playing out of inequalities and imbalances of power between two entities (the theme of balance is one we will visit in the case studies on both Nørgård and Lindberg). In concertos, orchestral unity is fractured. This fracture, and the asymmetry it causes or delineates, is provocative in abstract terms: it potentially engages, for instance, with philosophies of the fragment.⁵ David Metzger provides a useful discussion of this body of philosophy and the way in which it intersects with recent modernist music; concertos do not feature in his subsequent analyses, however, which are focused more on formal than textural fragmentation.

⁴ The phrase 'belle of the ball' is composer Paavo Heininen's description of the concerto soloist. In Korhonen 1997, 7

⁵ See Metzger 2009, 104-135.

The concertante distinction between two entities also offers a fitting format for the exploration of methodological dichotomies. In the first movement of John Cage's *Concerto* (1950), for example, the comparatively rigid 'gamut technique' of the orchestral part is set against a more freely composed piano part; a partial but distinctly imbalanced resolution takes place in the second movement, in which the piano follows in the orchestra's concentric circular tracks across the gamut charts; yet we must wait until the third movement for the emergence of chance operations, which are seemingly offered as the only proper resolution to the previous methodological conflict between system and subjectivity.⁶ A similar focus on technical oppositions characterises Iannis Xenakis's piano concerto *Erikhthon* (1974), in which the solo instrument's inability to explore the spaces between pitches is set against the sweeping string glissandi common in Xenakis's music. The result, as Peter Hoffmann argues, is 'a dialectical treatise on continuity and discontinuity in music'.⁷ Similarly, Elliott Carter's Piano Concerto is viewed by David Schiff as its composer's 'most extended vision of the clash between chronometric and chronometric time-worlds'.⁸ The only agencies implicated in these readings are those of the composer exploring a certain technical dichotomy, and the interpretative agent discerning fragments, (dis)continuities and oppositions. Neither soloist nor orchestra is configured as a dramatic agent. Such examples can be placed in productive counterpoint to the large number of concerto interpretations which configure the soloist-orchestra relationship as an interaction between human protagonists.

⁶ See Pritchett and Kuhn 2007 for a sense of how this progression towards indeterminacy fits into Cage's career.

⁷ Hoffmann 2007.

⁸ Schiff 1983, 237.

Certainly, there is much to be said for 'human' interpretations: they often provide accessible and colourful accounts of challenging concertos; they potentially reflect the perceptual salience of the actual human agents required to bring concertos into sonic reality (a connection between the physical and figurative which I discuss at greater length in the section on physicality); furthermore, such analyses are supported by both Jean-Jacques Nattiez's 'narrative impulse'⁹ and the tendency for listeners to identify 'person-like' qualities in music rather than other attributes.¹⁰ Yet there are deep theoretical problems with the imposition of too concrete an assignment of agency: the liberatory narrative often associated with such human or actorial accounts can be no less essentialising than other, more 'autonomous' responses. Music's tantalising hover between autonomy and contingency cannot simply be dispensed with, no matter how tempting the hermeneutic concreteness of the 'concerto drama' may be.¹¹ As Fred Maus argues, an important aspect of musical experience is 'a pervasive *indeterminacy* of agents' – an indeterminacy which cannot easily be reconciled with the demands of a conventional drama involving human protagonists.¹²

Dramatic accounts of concertos must circumvent this problem with a usually tacit assumption, rendered explicit in the 1974 study in which Edward T. Cone introduced agency to music theory: the concerto soloist is frequently used as an example of a 'fixed virtual protagonist' (this is the element which, for Cone, categorically differentiates the genre from symphonic music).¹³ Following this line of

⁹ Nattiez 1990b, 243.

¹⁰ Watt and Ash 1998, 33.

¹¹ This 'hover' frames Lawrence Kramer's discussion of musical meaning in the introduction to Kramer 2002.

¹² Maus 1988, 68.

¹³ Cone 1974, especially 'Participation and Identification', 115-133.

argument, Maus proposes that 'concerto style' is largely an exception to the rule of indeterminacy in instrumental music, an 'extreme context' in which 'a differentiation of agents within the texture may be more natural'.¹⁴ Joseph Kerman paves the way for his 'relationship stories' with the contention that 'in general one knows exactly who is who in a concerto, and who is doing what'.¹⁵

It could be argued that, at least in the tonal repertory with which most writers on agency have been concerned, such assumptions do not seem especially problematic. Yet in *Concerto Conversations*, in a chapter entitled 'Diffusions', Kerman looks at ways in which concerto textures can become more complicated in twentieth-century works (several of which we will examine shortly). His conclusion, however, pointedly downplays these incidences and evades the task of analytical explication:

Analysis of concerto textures works well enough when the soloist is accompanied by the orchestra, falters when the relationship between them is contrapuntal, and all but collapses when the solo appears to be accompanying the orchestra. One can not theorise, one can only admire.¹⁶

Kerman never explains why we are unable to theorise: complexity, I would argue, should hardly prevent such an attempt. Our textural models should be able to cope with twentieth-century concertos, which often set up a simplistic textural individuation – expressed in the formulation 'Concerto for *x* and *y*', and in the spatial positioning of instruments – precisely so that it can be dismantled.

In the following section, I provide several examples of modernist concertos which play with various schemes of individuation, upsetting any assumption that

¹⁴ Maus 1988, 68.

¹⁵ Kerman 1992, 87. See also Kerman 1999.

¹⁶ Kerman 1999, 90.

matters are as simple as they may at first appear. Such works explode the issue of concerto agency, reminding us that textural individuation, though prominent in concertos, is just one of many strategies by which acting personas can be projected: agency in instrumental music, regardless of genre, is never absolutely unambiguous. In foregrounding this interpretative complexity, these works demonstrate that music theory, which often affords paradigmatic status to a limited range of Classical and Romantic works, neglects more recent case studies at its peril. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, they show how concertos can be intensely dramatic, foregrounding the issue of agency, but at the same time maintaining a pervasive agency-ambiguity: the lingering possibility of abstraction, and a fundamental lack of precision – both of which are often obscured in ‘relationship stories’ – can themselves work as stages for particularly compelling, if somewhat more abstract, dramas. In the following sections, I first identify the numerous processes by which agency is projected, beginning with the individuation of a given instrument within a texture; in doing so, I develop an analytical methodology with which to approach Nørgård’s *Concerto in Due Tempi*; finally, I outline some interpretative implications of a complex treatment of agency in concertos.

Playing with Schemes of Individuation

As David Schneider has shown, an important tendency in the twentieth-century concerto, at least in works pre-1945, is the weakening of the binary opposition between soloist and orchestra, often through the emergence from the latter of

secondary soloists.¹⁷ While the grouping of concertos by Dohnányi, Ravel and Nielsen under a single heading ('Sharing the Spotlight') allows Schneider to make a worthwhile point about a broad trajectory towards greater 'equality' in mid-century concertos (most notably in Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*), his discussion conveys just how differently the secondary soloists function in different works, such that it becomes clear that the label 'secondary soloist' is not sufficiently nuanced. In the second movement of Ravel's *Concerto in G*, for instance, the solo flute's sustained melody is accompanied by the piano, leading one to consider whether the flute has become the primary soloist. If the solo-accompaniment relationship here suggests a strong degree of cooperation between agents, the relationship is distinctly more antagonistic in other works. Schneider's prose makes it implicitly clear just how strongly characterised and antagonistic Nielsen's secondary soloists tend to be when compared with others in broadly contemporaneous concertos: while Schneider's discussion of other works remains largely distanced from dramatic analogy, his commentary, on turning to Nielsen, suddenly involves terms like 'actors' and the mention of 'gauche' entries, 'frightened outbursts' and '(post-coital?) guffaws'.¹⁸ Vocality emerges as an important way in which dramatic agency is projected (the nature of vocality is explored more fully later in this discussion).

Another complexity emerges when the primary soloist loses its distinctiveness by merging into the orchestra. Kerman gives a brief but valuable summary of the ways in which this can occur:

[In his Violin Concerto] Berg denatures or blanches out the solo presence by means of muting and doubling. [...] Bartok does something analogous in both

¹⁷ Schneider 2005, 144-146.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

his Second and Third Piano Concertos, in the central, 'fast' sections of the two slow movements. The piano temporarily takes a step back as a solo instrument and takes its place in an ad hoc night-music orchestra.¹⁹

The tendency towards a more complex treatment of concerto agents continues in post-1945 music. As Robert Adlington argues, Harrison Birtwistle's concertante works, for example, 'take steps to prevent [the solo] figure holding sway over all around it – as tended to happen in the nineteenth-century concerto'.²⁰ One example is the treatment of the string section in *Melencolia I* for clarinet, harp and two string orchestras (1976):

The strings' rather faceless progress for the majority of [*Melencolia I*], which would seem to indicate a relegated role – providing, perhaps, 'the environment through which the clarinet travels' – is disturbed towards the piece's close. In one of the work's most striking gestures, the individual string instruments suddenly break free of the anonymous confines of dense tutti sections in a shudder of fragmentary, uncoordinated solo phrases. This gesture of individuation suggests the lurking presence of a stronger element of agency than had hitherto been recognised – as if the work's 'environment' had all along been hiding a multitude of individuals.²¹

Abrupt textural contrast, 'gesture' and the 'uncoordinated solo phrase' may thus be added to vocality and sustained melody, in an inventory of strategies by which individuation within the ensemble can be created. Each strategy can undermine the soloist's primacy, making the issue of individuation considerably more complex. Of course, the projection of instruments as agents is by no means inherent in all of these strategies. It is, however, presupposed by the terms 'gesture' and 'vocality': David Lidov has identified both qualities as signs representing the human body, and

¹⁹ Kerman 1999, 89.

²⁰ Adlington 2000, 62.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

thereby contributing strongly to the listener's perception of a musical subject.²² As Robert S. Hatten observes, 'when musical events are heard as gestural, then the implication of agency is inescapable'; the same claim can be made for musical events that are heard as vocal.²³ Additionally, we can posit a third category, 'willed action'. This is arguably implicit in both the Nielsen and the Birtwistle: emerging from the orchestra as an additional soloist can readily be construed as a willful act on the part of the instrument in question. Such instruments, then, not only 'stand out' in textural terms: they do so behaviourally as well, in the context of an established musical style.

Vocality, Gesture, Willed Action

The identification of these three 'human' qualities bears a strong resemblance to Naomi Cumming's formulation that 'gesture, vocality, and agency may be drawn together to motivate a synthesis that forms the experience of an active agent or 'persona' in a musical work'.²⁴ (Cumming's use of the term 'agency' here is potentially confusing: it seems to refer to a volition acted upon or expressed through gesture and vocality, a point confirmed later when Cumming poses the questions: "whose voice?", "whose gesture?", "whose will?".²⁵) Drawing particularly on the semiotic approaches of David Lidov and Eero Tarasti, Cumming provides a useful discussion of the processes by which the individual components of this apparent

²² Lidov 1987.

²³ Hatten 2004, 222.

²⁴ Cumming 1997, 11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

synthesis can be imagined by the listener.²⁶ Here I outline and expand upon some of Cumming's arguments, discussing in particular their applicability to the present repertory (Cumming's primary case study is J.S. Bach's *Erbarne Dich*, and her discussion is concerned principally with melody).

Following Lidov, Cumming considers vocality to be most directly related to timbre. Different violin strings and playing techniques, for instance, create a range of timbres which 'can be placed under descriptions appropriate to vocality and discriminated as 'warm and rich' or 'nasal and restrained', each with its own affective connotation'.²⁷ The connection of vocality and timbre seems reasonable, given that the human voice is distinguished from musical instruments by its ability, necessitated by language, to modulate through timbres with exceptional rapidity.²⁸ Yet pitch also has an important part to play: particularly in non-tonal languages, most utterances, even those which are expressive of extreme affective states, occupy a limited pitch-range when compared with musical melody. Of course, I am neglecting singing in making this comparison: many melodies in instrumental music gain their expressiveness – and with it, the sense of a subject to whom that expressiveness belongs – through the '*cantabile*' imitation of vocal vibrato and phrasing. As is evidenced in so much twentieth-century writing for both singers and instruments, however, vocality is also speech-like, sometimes guttural, sometimes stilted, rhythmically uneven, melodically restrained, and above all timbrally flexible. While the pursuit of new playing techniques and timbres, often at the expense of melody, has occasionally been received as an aspect of modernist insularity, it might alternatively

²⁶ Lidov 1988 and Tarasti 1994.

²⁷ Cumming 1997, 7.

²⁸ For a recent empirical comparison of timbre and pitch in speech and music, see Patel 2009, especially 'Sound elements: pitch and timbre', 9-86.

be heard as a striving towards the expressive timbral flexibility of the human voice – in which case an emotive expressive agency can be perceived in both that new flexibility and in the very act of straining towards an unattainable parity with the vocal instrument. Vocality in instrumental music is arguably at its most accented in recent works such as Kaija Saariaho's recent flute concerto *Aile du Songe* (2001), in which the flautist whispers phonemes into the instrument (Saariaho is, of course, the subject of a case study later in this thesis).

Musical gesture has been the topic of several recent articles and books. This is perhaps unsurprising given that, as Robert S. Hatten observes, 'perhaps no term has been used in such a bewildering array of contexts as the term *gesture* in relation to music'.²⁹ Although concepts of musical gesture have become considerably more nuanced as a result, notably in Hatten's work and a recent collection edited by Anthony Gritten and Elaine King, gesture continues to be a broad term.³⁰ It describes the physical movements of performers and the mimetic responses of listeners, a subject I discuss at greater length in the chapter on physicality; it also works as a pervasive metaphor for conceptualising a wide range of musical configurations, including small motivic units, cultural topics such as dance or march rhythms, and, on occasion, whole works (as in the 'sweeping' symphonic design). Hatten's definition of gesture as 'a significant energetic shaping through time', while wide in scope, seems as focused as possible.³¹ I am particularly concerned, at least in this section of the thesis, with the metaphorical use of the term (performer gesture, and its link to the

²⁹ Hatten 2004, 93.

³⁰ Gritten and King 2006.

³¹ Hatten 2004, 95.

metaphorical, becomes more apposite in the chapter on physicality), particularly within certain limits articulated by Lidov:

Gesture encompasses all brief, expressive molar units of motor activity, be they of the limbs, the larynx, the torso, etcetera, units which are whole but not readily subdivisible. The essence of motor gesture is readily represented in music by a brief group of notes. The small gestalt of a few notes, a motive or ornament or single figuration, is the atomic level of signification in music.³²

A strong sense of gestalt identity is similarly important for Hatten:

A musical gesture is the product of a single or coordinated set of representational and / or inferred human movements [...] A musical gesture bridges the discreteness of isolated musical events by providing coherent and nuanced shaping, shading and/or consistency across possible highly variable parameters.³³

Hatten's mention of 'highly variable parameters' is perhaps suggestive of the fact that many late twentieth-century works, in which the treatment of certain parameters is heard as highly variable and unpredictable, could be used as particularly compelling test cases for theories of gesture: commentators often use notions of gesture to describe works in which harmonic or rhythmic syntax is difficult to grasp. The metaphor can, in certain cases, seem a critical fallback option; yet, in many cases, it can tell us much about how a work maintains a sustained expressiveness. Register can be a particularly direct gestural correlate: not only do the terms 'high' and 'low' resonate strongly with the motion involved in many bodily gestures, discussion of musical gestalt is almost invariably concerned with registral contour.³⁴ Though

³² Lidov 1987, 77.

³³ Hatten 2004, 95.

³⁴ This metaphorical link between a more abstract notion (musical register, for example) and the comparatively concrete realm of embodied experience is explored at length in Lakoff and

register is not often the central focus of analytical enquiry, it assumes the role of a primary structural parameter in many post-tonal works. This is certainly characteristic of the Nørgård work analysed at length in the case study to follow.

Of the three components identified above, willed action is perhaps the one for which existing perspectives need most adaptation to the contemporary concerto. The notion of a virtual persona deciding to follow or disobey an established convention has generally been exemplified in terms of tonal or formal conventions, rather than the generic textural convention referred to earlier. Anthony Newcomb, for instance, makes the connection between stylistic transgression and agency in his examination of Mahler's Ninth Symphony, demonstrating how agency can be projected through the treatment of tonality and form;³⁵ Cumming observes that 'a tonal line may be heard as having volitional content, exercising a subliminal control that 'contains' or 'undergirds' the gestural expression even as it unfolds'.³⁶ She builds on Tarasti's concept of 'actorial agency':

Musical subjects are formed in relation to some object, which appears implicitly in the music by an identification of the kind of action that is taking place. Put simply, the agent, or 'subject' of the music, is either striving toward something, being an actor, or suffering action.³⁷

Cumming then invokes the notion of 'reflexivity', involving the duality of active effort and passive movement, as employed by Lidov:

Johnson 1980. This text is generally regarded as a key work in metaphor theory, a body of thought which also plays an important part in this thesis's later chapters on physicality.

³⁵ Newcomb 1997b.

³⁶ Cumming 1997, 10.

³⁷ Cumming 1997, 11.

Agent and patient may be the same self and the double pattern of energy can be represented within one line. A line or melody so interpreted will be heard as showing both effort and momentum.³⁸

Agency is thus linked with the dichotomy of tonal tension and stability. The focus on harmonic syntax reminds us that wilful action is not only expressed texturally in concertos. One might expect the emphasis on that textural form of expression to be heightened in post-tonal concertos, in the absence of a firmly established-convention (or 'object', to employ Tarasti's framework) against which volition can be demonstrated. Revisiting the motional metaphor of dance that prompts Lidov's concept of reflexivity, there may appear to be a lack of harmonic gravity against which active effort can react. I would argue, however, that other forces, generated through the repetition of particular motivic, harmonic, and rhythmic units, offer similar potential for the reflexive enaction of agency. A work can set up its own, perhaps idiosyncratic sense of gravity.

Before we can consider the interpretative implications of agency, it is necessary to consider two further complexities. Both go so far as to unsettle basic orientations of the theoretical apparatus outlined so far, reinforcing the pervasive ambiguity which I am seeking to underline.

More direct characterisation

One difficulty with Cumming's proposed synthesis is that it fails to acknowledge a strong degree of reciprocity between the impression of musical subjectivity and the

³⁸ David Lidov in Cumming 1997, 11.

qualities by which it can be generated. Certainly, Cumming is right to stress how the three elements of vocality, gesture and volition reinforce one another. Yet we could easily invert this schematic, such that an initial (perhaps verbal) suggestion of subjectivity, combined with a perception of volition, for instance, leads to our interpretation of a given musical event as an utterance or gesture. Such an interpretation becomes all the more urgent when we consider that so much music composed since the Second World War falls explicitly into the category of 'instrumental theatre' – music in which players and their instruments are strongly characterised by qualities that might conventionally be considered to lie outside the domain of music analysis.

The post-Second World War preoccupation with theatre was in some ways a surprising development: as Paul Griffiths suggests, 'in the 1950s, when attention was generally fixed on musical fundamentals, few young composers wanted to work in the theatre'.³⁹ Yet early in the 1950s John Cage was demonstrating, most notably in *4'33"* (1952), that a concert is intrinsically theatrical, that the rituals of performance are dramatic sites for dramatic subversion. This self-conscious theatricality has pervaded much instrumental music since. We see the vivid characterisation of instrumentalists in, for instance, Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Harlekin* (1975), in which the solo clarinettist leaps around the stage, and in Mauricio Kagel's *Der Atem* (1970), which depicts a wind player caring for his instrument but playing it only very rarely.

Inevitably, this kind of vivid characterisation has extended to the concerto. Thea Musgrave's concertos are important examples of this tendency: the movements of players around the stage play a key part in the drama of both the Clarinet

³⁹ Griffiths 1995, 171.

Concerto and the Horn Concerto (1968 and 1971 respectively); and, in the Viola Concerto (1973), the entire viola section is incited by the soloist to stand up and play in defiance of a totalitarian conductor, who must eventually introduce the brass to suppress the sound of the dissidents. Hans Werner Henze's Violin Concerto No.2 is another pointedly dramatic work. It begins with the violinist, costumed as the Baron von Munchausen of German fable, arriving 'late' on stage and reciting a poetic commentary by Hans Magnus Enzensburger on Gödel's incompleteness theorem. This direct characterisation within a pointedly theatrical realm has compelling implications for our understanding of agency in a genre which tantalisingly maintains its connection with notions of abstraction.

Themes or topics as agents

Finally, we must consider an inversion of the scheme which has generally been presented so far: instruments are agents, musical developments their actions. There is, of course, a long tradition of ascribing agency to themes. Scott Burnham makes this mode of interpretation explicit in his discussion of Beethoven's middle-period works: as he argues of the first movement of the Third Symphony,

the concept of theme as protagonist reflects the dynamic nature of the thematic process in Beethoven's heroic style while offering an available and easily identifiable model for the engaging drama of this music.

This is a more portentous critical turn than one might think, for in musical thought since Beethoven, motives and themes have often been conceptualised as dramatic protagonists.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Burnham 1995, 8.

Such an orientation should not be neglected in concertos, even if the conceptualisation of instruments as agents tends to predominate. Can this still be the case in modernist idioms in which thematic development has considerably less structural importance than it does in the works of Beethoven's middle period? Perhaps not, but where thematic development has generally diminished in importance, musical topics have often taken on a central role. Like thematic materials, such topics are readily recalled from previous contexts, where they have acquired meanings which have a level of agency in subsequent settings.

Developed most notably by Leonard Ratner and Kofi Agawu, the concept of musical *topoi* is surely one of the most insightful ways of exploring the musical surface.⁴¹ Eighteenth-century works have tended to serve as paradigms for this concept, with common examples of topics being minuet, brilliant style, fanfare and fantasia; Janice Dickensheets has made an especially valuable contribution to our understanding of Romantic topics, such as bardic, chivalric and demonic styles, Chinoiserie, and gypsy music.⁴² There is still much work to be done on twentieth-century topics, but an important contribution is Márta Grabócz's work on Bartók, which identifies recurrent topics such as the hopeless, gesticulating hero, expressed in dissonant bitonal contexts with heroic fourths and fifths; and the grotesque, represented by mechanical rhythms or waltz figures, for instance.⁴³ As Agawu argues, Stravinsky's music – *L'histoire du Soldat* is the example given – is similarly rich in topical content.⁴⁴ Alfred Schnittke's Concerto Grosso No.1 could be posited as an example of a late twentieth-century concerto in which eminently recognisable

⁴¹ See Ratner 1980 and Agawu 1991.

⁴² See Dickensheets 2003.

⁴³ See Grabócz 2002.

⁴⁴ Agawu 2009, 50.

musical styles enter a work in a manner akin to secondary soloists. If the dialogue between the work and the formulae of a Baroque form is regarded as the Concerto Grosso's primary concertante interaction, the characters from 'banal' popular music, in repeatedly interrupting an archetypally classical medium, might be conceptualised as the agents which destabilise that interaction.

We can see from these examples how strong the personalities of topics can be, and how the interplay between them can develop into a compelling drama – a drama in which the instruments involved are subservient to agents developed through the history of musical styles.

Interpretative Implications of Agency-Ambiguity: Shifting Views of Soloist(s), Orchestra and Composer

We are, then, presented with a potentially bewildering array of strategies by which agency might be projected in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century music. This potential for bewilderment has implications for the comprehension of large-scale formal structure. Numerous strategies may be deployed simultaneously, sometimes reinforcing one another, sometimes resulting in form-blurring contradictions. A work may therefore push the issue of agency to the fore, parading a seductive array of virtual personae; yet at the same time these personae can destabilise one another, making agency ambiguous if not indeterminate, and frustrating our attempts to weave 'relationship stories' around the personae perceived. This possibility adds an

important twist to the assumption, cited in my introduction, that soloist-orchestra individuation can function as a crucial perceptual aid in post-tonal contexts.

Ambiguity of agency also destabilises the basic concerto dichotomy and its constituent elements, with an array of interpretative implications. The symphony, with its etymological emphasis on 'sounding together', is easily upheld as the epitome of orchestral unity. Yet I would argue that the orchestral unity posited in concertos is, in one sense, a stronger one. The binary opposition of soloist and orchestral collective tends to harden both concepts: the interpretation of these agents' interaction as a conflict strongly suggests that the orchestra is a single unit in which relatively minor divisions have been nullified through a shared, stark opposition to the soloist. If the orchestra is interpreted as a single subject, secondary soloists potentially unravel any notion of that subject's completeness and solidarity, revealing it to be contingent, conflicted, fragmentary.⁴⁵ If the orchestra is interpreted as a collective – clearly multiple yet functioning as a single agent – we might relate it to social contexts in which individuality is stifled. The expression of individual volition in such circumstances is particularly striking, as it potentially destabilises the whole notion of a collective. Ritualistic ceremony aptly exemplifies the gestural or vocal expression of collective rather than individual identity: a recurrent theme in this thesis is the way in which concerto agents may rise out of the collective to disrupt the rituals of classical performance, and to upset the perceived dictatorial or egotistical presence of the

⁴⁵ A useful musicological discussion of subjectivity is that of Lawrence Kramer in Kramer 1995. As the title of this book would suggest, Kramer explores the subject from the perspective of distinctions between modernist and postmodernist perspectives. The exploded, fragmentary subject described here has much in common with the postmodern subject articulated by Kramer: 'the true human subject is fragmentary, incoherent, overdetermined, forever under construction in the process of signification' (Kramer 1995, 34). Arnold Whittall offers a useful summary and brief appraisal of musicological writings on subjectivity in Whittall 2000.

primary soloist (the twentieth-century preoccupation with undermining secondary soloists can convincingly be configured as a manifestation of the aforementioned general scepticism of the heroic).

A further interpretative facet of agency is the possible conflation of the composer's agency with that of the soloist. The interpretation of musical agents as authorial presences is a reasonably common analytical tool, explicitly at work in Cone's discussion of an imagined 'composer's voice' and its position within a work, whether in a vocal line, accompaniment, or the combination of the two.⁴⁶ It is, as Cone amply demonstrates, a short imaginative step from the perception of instrumental volition to the sense that this volition may determine the course of the composition as it unfolds. While Cone begins with a consideration of song – strengthening his use of 'voice' as a connective apparatus – he demonstrates how this apparatus can be extended to other genres. The player is not configured as improvising the music, but as performing the act of its composition. One example given by Cone is the introduction to the finale of Beethoven's Piano Sonata op. 106: 'it is often said that in such passages we are in the process of Beethoven at work, wrestling with his musical material'.⁴⁷ The tendency to conflate performing agent with composing agent is a particularly prevalent trope in concerto reception, as several of the concerto analyses discussed in Chapter 2.3 (the Kerman in particular) confirm. Concertos are to a significant extent about their solo instruments: the histories and techniques of instruments and their players frequently play a readily discernable role in the composer's handling of numerous parameters (a strand which, running through this thesis, is given particular emphasis in the chapter on physicality). The

⁴⁶ Cone 1973, 17-18.

⁴⁷ Cone 1973, 128.

implications of this conflation are particularly interesting, I would argue, in twentieth-century concertos, where the binary opposition between soloist and orchestra is comprehensively undone: how are we to hear a thronging, competitive, destabilising multitude of authorial agents?

This multitude of creative voices also opens up space for an appraisal of narrativity. Let us imagine, for instance, that the soloist and orchestra are interpreted as the protagonists in a familiar narrative of conflict and resolution. My use of the term 'narrative' here invokes a fundamental distinction in narratology between 'story' and 'discourse': Paul Ricoeur, for instance, suggests that to narrate is to 'draw a configuration out of a simple succession',⁴⁸ while Hayden White argues that 'narrative concerns the problem of 'how to translate *knowing* into *telling*'.⁴⁹ Both approaches underline the presence of a narrative agent. This agency has often been neglected in accounts of musical narrativity, although its presence has in recent years been theorised by Hatten ('shifts in level of discourse') and Lawrence Kramer ('hermeneutic windows').⁵⁰ As Carolyn Abbate argues in *Unsung Voices*, the first musicological study of narrative agency,

[the narrating voice is] marked by multiple disjunctions with the music surrounding it. These disjunctions, their forms and signs, [...] change from work to work; they are fugitive. [...] We understand musical narration not as an omnipresent phenomenon, not as sonorous encoding of human events on psychological states, but rather as a rare and peculiar *act*, a unique moment of performing narration within a surrounding music.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ricoeur 1984, 65.

⁴⁹ White 1987, 1.

⁵⁰ Hatten 2004, 35. Kramer 1993, 12.

⁵¹ Abbate 1996, 19.

For Abbate, these acts tend to be 'disruptive and charged with a sense of both difference and distance'.⁵² Abbate does not consider concertos in her analysis, although I would argue that the emergence of a seemingly vocal, gestural, wilful secondary soloist, highly disruptive, conspicuously distanced from the orchestra, is a strong candidate for the role of a narrative agent.

Finally, let us consider the ways in which this narrative presence can connect with the notion of metamusic. Self-reflexivity is a characteristic frequently underlined in composition since the Second World War. As Alastair Williams argues, 'in an age when the functions and possibilities of art are themselves subject matter for artistic contemplation, philosophical reflection has become part of the medium'.⁵³ Williams discusses self-reflexivity specifically in the case of the young Pierre Boulez, for whom

[Stéphane] Mallarmé and [James] Joyce pushed the frontiers of modernism into areas that music hitherto had failed to explore: in the most advanced texts of these writers the art work becomes self-reflexive, examining its own procedures and pondering its purpose. Boulez wants to bring this self-knowledge to music, so that the score becomes a text, conceived as a commentary on itself by means of tropes, grafts and constellations; it dwells on its own strategies and alludes to the possibility of its own disintegration.⁵⁴

The term 'self-reflexivity' implies a subjective presence turning back upon and evaluating itself. But this process can alternatively be conceptualised in terms of multiple agents within a work, one scrutinising or ironically deconstructing the other. In dividing an ensemble, the composer gains the opportunity for one agent to commentate musically on the music of the other. Indeed, Paul Griffiths goes so far as

⁵² *Ibid.*, xii.

⁵³ Williams 1997, ix.

⁵⁴ Williams 1997, 61.

to consider the text-commentary duality ‘inherent’ to the genre.⁵⁵ I think this is an exaggeration, although there is no question that a number of key twentieth-century concertos have a strong text-commentary element. Take, for instance, Luciano Berio’s contributions to the genre, many of which are overt developments of previous works of his. The obvious examples are the *Chemins*, each of which elaborates orchestrally on a particular *sequenza*, shedding new light on the solo instrument’s timbres and harmonies (these works are discussed at greater length in the chapter on physicality); likewise, *Concerto II (Echoing Curves)* (1989) is a pointed development on the acoustic and pitch-generating geometries at work in *Points on the Curve to Find...* (1974) – David Osmond-Smith discusses these strategies in a section of the Grove article on Berio entitled ‘Text and Commentary’.⁵⁶ Even in cases where the use of a pre-existing text is not so obvious, configuring one agent as a commentator on the actions of another can provide an especially rich reading of a concerto dialogue.

Summary

Far from presenting us with simple stories of relationships between two characters, many twentieth-century concertos play with schemes of individuation and disrupt assumptions that matters can be so straightforward. Agents can be projected through gesture, vocality, or sometimes more direct characterisation (as in the concertos of Musgrave and Henze, for instance). Crucially, themes and topics, as well as

⁵⁵ Griffiths 1995, 194.

⁵⁶ Osmond-Smith 2007.

instruments, can be configured as concerto agents. The implications of this play with agency are wide-ranging, reaching across issues of authorial presence, narrativity, and commentary. In the following case study we explore each of these issues in a concerto that features a striking and often bewildering plethora of agency-projection strategies.

3.2

Wandering Metronomes, Duelling Tempos, and an Errant Reed: Agency in Per Nørgård's *Concerto in Due Tempi for Piano and Orchestra*

Per Nørgård has rarely been received as a primarily dramatic composer. While he has composed five operas,¹ two ballets, two oratorios, and music for four feature films (most notably 1986's *Babettes Gæstbud*), the dominant strand running through accounts of Nørgård's career remains a symphonic one. Even in an essay entitled 'Nørgård's Music Drama' – and conceiving of 'drama' in a wide sense – Jens Brincker argues that Nørgård's 'work with the institution of opera has not come as naturally as his work with the symphony orchestra'.² The seven symphonies composed to date are spaced roughly evenly throughout Nørgård's career; this, coupled with the symphonising tendency discussed in the previous chapter, ensures that these works are seen as the principal markers of a coherent, linear progression from the early 1950s to the present.³ An additional factor is the composer's canonisation within Danish musical life: in a country where metamusic has been an important force in recent decades, championed most notably by Karl Aage Rasmussen, Nørgård has increasingly been distinguished through his insistence on using new materials (as usually developed in more abstract idioms), rather than exploring the dramatic interplay of different, pre-existing musical identities.⁴

¹ The operas are *Labyrinten* (1963), *Gilgamesh* (1972), *Siddhartha* (1974-9), *Det guddommelige* (1982) and *Nuit des Hommes* (1996).

² Brincker 1996, 190. It is telling that, in spite of Nørgård's plainly voluminous dramatic output, Brincker's is the only essay in the Beyer collection to focus on drama. The remainder tend to focus on more abstract techniques exemplified in Nørgård's absolute music.

³ For accounts like this, see Kullberg 2010. Julian Anderson's account of Nørgård's career tends to take the symphonies as cornerstones of his narrative (J. Anderson 2007).

⁴ Perhaps the most well-known example of Danish metamusic is Rasmussen's *Berio Mask*, which borrows extensively from Berio's *Sinfonia* (1968) – a work which is itself often regarded

The monumental Third Symphony (1972-5), once described by Nørgård as his ‘Te Deum’,⁵ is arguably still received as the composer’s most important work: not only is the Third monumental in terms of sheer size and scale, but it stands as the maximal manifestation of the ‘infinity row’, Nørgård’s best-known compositional technique. In its simplest form, most clearly discernable in *Voyage into the Golden Screen* (1968) and the Second Symphony (1970), this post-serial technique enables the composition (or arguably extrapolation) of a work from a single interval. Using a gradual process of intervallic expansion, it produces a fractal structure in which the same, basic motivic unit operates simultaneously on multiple hierarchically-related timescales.⁶

Ex. 3.2.1: an example of the ‘infinity series’ at its simplest, as employed in Nørgård’s Third Symphony, bb.65-67



as an archetypal example of modernist intertextuality. For a discussion of the relationship between the two works, see Metzger 2003, 133.

⁵ Kullberg 2010b

⁶ For an explanation of the infinity series and its development, see Kullberg 1996.

In the Third Symphony, the principle is extended to the hierarchy of the (theoretically infinite) harmonic series. The resultant projection of organicism, of rootedness in natural pitch structures, enhances the sense of deterministic unfolding. In spite of the Symphony's post-tonal syntax, one is reminded of that naturalistic music-theoretical notion of the composer breathing the overtone series into life, after which the work unfolds with a high degree of inevitability.⁷ The projection is that this composer-deity's agency, though apparent in the work's beginning, can subsequently vanish: the symphonic 'universe' – and here I use a term common to the many spectacular accounts of the Third Symphony – has been set in motion.⁸ In addition, formal unity is complemented by textural unity (there are rarely instrumental solos) such that the work resists the type of individuation that would prompt dramatic interpretation. One other important characteristic of the work, a result of its gradual development, is the perceptibility of its form (this is usually documented as a primary interest throughout Nørgård's career).⁹ Impressive claims for the work's universality, often expanding on the composer's own commentaries – Nørgård has worked prolifically and influentially as a teacher and writer throughout most of his career – have been made on the symphony's behalf. Erling Kullberg, for instance, claims that,

⁷ For a discussion of this strand of naturalistic music-theory, with a particular focus on Heinrich Schenker but references also to Marin Mersenne and Jean-Philippe Rameau, see Clark 1999. Jørgen I. Jensen argues that the Third Symphony's 'vision of organic coherence' is 'reminiscent of Goethe' and 'a world in growth, balance and interplay' (Jensen 1996c, 4). More specifically, one is perhaps reminded of Goethe's *Ur-phenomenon* of the plant 'as arising out of the interplay' of two forces, the 'vertical' and 'horizontal' tendencies (see Seamon 1998, 4). The composer's agency, following 'conception', is not apparent in such a naturalistic conception.

⁸ For a brief critical discussion of hierarchical music as a 'philosophy of life and a theory of society', see Brincker 1996, 203-206. The Norwegian composer Rolf Wallin discusses what he perceives as the absence of Nørgård's agency in 'Avant-garde, Ghosts, and Innocence' (Wallin 2010): 'with certain intervals, a short melodic sequence pops up that is not only clearly tonal, it could have been written by a contemporary of J.S. Bach. And Nørgård does not lift a finger to avoid it or to cover it!'

⁹ Having won the prestigious Gaudeamus Prize in 1959 for his *Fragment VI*, Nørgård realised that little if any of the serial calculation behind the work was perceptible to the audience. A concern with perceptibility has been documented as an important preoccupation since.

as is generally the case with Nørgård's oeuvre, this symphony is a *musical* [italics original] answer to a question posed at the level of *general epistemology*. For many years he had attempted to study and discover why it is that all things in the world seem to be interrelated, both large and small. He became more and more convinced that there was an all-embracing cosmic connection, and this idea forms the theme of the Third Symphony. The Symphony thus becomes a microcosmic portrayal of this cosmic harmony – the apotheosis of universal harmony.¹⁰

The creative agent behind the Third Symphony, then, is portrayed as a discoverer and purveyor of 'cosmic connectedness'; of consonance, manifested in the harmonic series used, the neatly hierarchical arrangement of rhythms, and the projection of alignment with cosmic harmony; of truth, as Nørgård and several commentators have drawn attention to the infinity row's anticipation of certain mathematical and scientific models, most notably fractal theory; and, finally, of readily perceptible unity and gradual formal unfolding. Those in search of musical drama might be well advised to look elsewhere.

Let us now skip forward to 1994, when Nørgård composes the intensely dramatic *Concerto in Due Tempi for Piano and Orchestra*, the sixth of the nine concertos he has written to date (he has shown a marked commitment to the genre in recent decades, with all but two of those concertos having been written since 1982).¹¹ It is a highly dissonant and often rebarbative work, as both its harmonic and

¹⁰ Kullberg 2010. This grandiose, epistemological conception of the symphony again seems to hark back to early twentieth-century Viennese aspirations for the genre. Taruskin discusses *Weltanschauungsmusik* – roughly, 'music expressive of a world outlook' or 'philosophy-music', specifically in the context of the maximalised, philosophical symphony of early modernism, in Taruskin 2005a, 8.

¹¹ *Concerto in Due Tempi* was preceded by the *Accordion Concerto Recall* (1968), *For a Change* for percussion and orchestra (1982), and three string concertos commissioned by the Danish Royal Academy of Music: *Between* for cello (1985), *Remembering Child* (1986) for viola, and *Helle Nacht* (1987) for violin. The subsequent concertos are *Bach to the Future* (1997) and *Shaking Hands* (2000), both for percussion and orchestra, and the Second Violin Concerto *Borderlines* discussed in the introduction. A very early work is the piano concerto

rhythmic syntax – Nørgård tends to blur the boundary between these two parameters¹² – are based to a large extent on the ratio $\sqrt{2}:1$. This ratio precludes the kind of 8:4:2:1 hierarchy employed in the Second and Third Symphonies: two pulses or frequencies bearing this relationship to one another, if started simultaneously, will never coincide; the result is maximal ‘destructive interference’. The ‘due tempi’ of the Concerto’s title refers to a frequent, sometimes frenetic alternation between two pulses related to one another by this ratio. In what seems a provocative perceptual experiment, Nørgård suggests that both tempi exist simultaneously, alternating between positions of dominance and submission.¹³ Harmonically, this impossibility of ‘constructive interference’ is better known as the equally-tempered tritone (it is fitting, of course, that the work’s solo instrument stands as the epitome of equally-tempered rigidity). The tritone is thus a particularly common interval in the concerto, although it jostles for supremacy with an array of pitch-structures so varied that any sense of harmonic unity is resisted. Throughout its almost unrelenting half-hour single movement duration, *Concerto in Due Tempi* turns restlessly from one motivic idea to another, such that thematic unity is likewise difficult to perceive.

Finally, and most crucially in this case study, this concerto features a colourful cast of dramatic personae, projected through an exhaustive array of strategies. The Concerto’s persistent, distracting, form-obscuring play with schemes of individuation leads one to suspect that its composer is primarily preoccupied with deception rather

Rhapsody in D (1952), with which Nørgård impressed his first composition teacher, Vagn Holmboe.

¹² As Jørgen I. Jensen argues, an important feature of Nørgård’s music since *Siddhartha* is the idea of ‘temporal dissonance’ (Jensen 1996a, 12).

¹³ This sense of multi-layering builds on a central preoccupation of the violin concerto *Helle Nacht*. See Beyer 1996, 132-141.

than the perceptual clarity that is emphasised so often in his biography.¹⁴ Crucially, however, *Concerto in Due Tempi*'s many wilful, volatile agents undermine any sense of a singular creative presence controlling the work's unfolding – indeed, 'unfolding' is far too passive a word for the battle of wills with which we are confronted. Where the Third Symphony is portrayed as a contemplative look to the stars, *Concerto in Due Tempi* is, in its composer's words, 'a voyage into the abyss'.¹⁵

We get an initial hint of this pervasive dramatic playfulness on observing that Nørgård has written two programme notes for the Concerto, one printed in the score (hitherto referred to as 'Programme Note 1'), the other published on the Edition Wilhelm Hansen website ('Programme Note 2'¹⁶): even in the aspect of musical convention most obviously designed singularly to assist the listener's comprehension of a given work, Nørgård is duplicitous. While the two programme notes do not directly contradict one another, they privilege different agents and suggest different lines of enquiry, strongly inflecting the way in which we understand the music that follows.

I begin this case study by following an analytical line of enquiry posited by Nørgård-as-commentator. This is followed by an exploration of some of the other characters presented to us during the course of the Concerto. In the process, the case study identifies five basic types of agency projection which are employed. My aim is to create a strong sense of the disorientating interpretative labyrinth Nørgård constructs through his play with agency, and to demonstrate how that play posits a

¹⁴ As Anders Beyer argues, for instance, 'Per Nørgård has worked a great deal with perceptual phenomena, our experience of structural connections; undoubtedly, issues of musical information are crucial to his works' (Beyer 1996, 142). The only writer so far to have counterpointed perception with deception is Julian Anderson. See J. Anderson 1996.

¹⁵ Nørgård, Programme note to *Concerto In Due Tempi* (hitherto referred to as Programme Note 1).

¹⁶ Nørgård, Programme note to *Concerto in Due Tempi* on Edition Wilhelm Hansen website.

kaleidoscopically colourful, insurmountable challenge to any single, unified reading of *Concerto in Due Tempi*. Of course, an important traditional function of analysis is to dispel rather than celebrate the structural ambiguities of a work; unifying a seemingly disparate surface has often been the key analytical objective, even in modernist works which seem particularly concerned with disunity and fragmentation.¹⁷ My analysis, however, is broadly in sympathy with Joseph Straus's view that

analysts of twentieth-century music may have spent too much time seeking a single vantage point from which to hear a piece whole, as an integral organism with all its detail functioning in the service of the central idea. I think the time has come to embrace the multiplicity and diversity of atonal music, to accept the tensions and discontinuities that form part of our listening experience, and to reflect them in our theoretical models.¹⁸

While my analysis does attempt to identify central ideas in Nørgård's concerto – play with agency is of course the main one – it aims to reflect the myriad ways in which this concerto enacts a pointed resistance to notions of wholeness and closure. I conclude by working towards a tying up of musical agency with identity, and of musical narrative with career narrative, in a concerto which was commissioned for a key moment in Nørgård's reception history. It is at this point that we explore the apparent chasm between the utopian universe of the hierarchical music and the fractured world of the more recent concerto. Arguing for a much more widely theatrical interpretation of Nørgård than has previously been posited, the case study reads both the composer's works and his commentaries as complementary actors in a complex and expertly directed metaperformance involving the construction and

¹⁷ The analytical pursuit of unity has been problematised in, among others, Street 1989. The pursuit of unity in modernist repertory is critiqued by Jonathan Cross in 'A Fresh Look at Stravinsky Analysis', Cross 1998, 193.

¹⁸ Straus 2009, 273.

interaction of numerous identities – a performance in which even those most pointedly abstract symphonies are implicated.¹⁹ Let us now begin the central analytical component of the chapter by following Nørgård into ‘the abyss’.

Analysis: Five Agency Projection Strategies in *Concerto in Due Tempi*

Agency Projection Strategy 1: The Heroic Soloist and the ‘Abyss’ Narrative

The idea of a ‘voyage into the abyss’ conjures up the image of a heroic protagonist venturing courageously into a dark and unfamiliar realm. As one might expect, that heroism is principally associated with the pianist, whose three extended solos, in bb.37-86, 389-417, 467-527, are the work’s most exploratory moments. More specifically, these are the points when Nørgård’s rhythmic technique is at its most pioneering, particularly prone to forays into ‘the unknown’ (necessarily so, perhaps: at these times, after all, the rhythmic elasticity of the solo part would appear to prohibit precise coordination with the ensemble). The climax of the ‘voyage into the abyss’ is, I would argue, the second cadenza heard roughly midway through the work, a chromatic helter-skelter in the deepest reaches of the piano’s range. This registral saturation is the culmination of a descending tendency instigated in the work’s opening bars. The cadenza exploits the common interpretative conflation of registral depth with darkness,²⁰ and the diffuse blurring of notes into one another is

¹⁹ For a discussion of the sway held by verbal commentaries on contemporary music, see Ian Pace 2009. See also Charles Wilson on Ligeti (Wilson 2004).

²⁰ This is a conflation to which Nørgård has himself drawn attention (Interview, Copenhagen, 6 August 2008).

also suggestive of the lack of clarity we might associate with the navigation of an abyss.

Ex. 3.2.2: bb.390-92 – cadenza, the climax of the voyage?

Piano solo

Tempo giusto*) **accel. to double speed** **Doppio tempo** (♩ = ♩)

390 (All flats) (All naturals) (quasi niente) dim. each second attack (in each hand)

Tempo I Equalize! (NB!) (approx.) (to) 2 391

accel. to double speed **Doppio tempo** **Tempo I** Equalize! dim. each second attack

3 392 **accel. to double speed** (approx.)

Doppio tempo dim. 2 + 4 attack of each 4 · group

In this and the other solos, pianism is closely associated with exploration, as the piano layout quite clearly mediates compositional technique: the cadenza's rolling metrical turbulence is derived from the imbalance between the seven white notes and five black notes of the keyboard – the left hand, playing ascending scales on the former, and the right hand, playing in parallel on the latter, go almost instantly out of sync with one another (this ratio of 7:5 is as close an approximation of $\sqrt{2}$:1 as is

possible using reasonably low integers).²¹ The exploratory element also lies in the cadenza's investigation of novel bass sonorities produced by idiosyncratic pedalling and half-struck piano keys – in interview, Nørgård has discussed the ways in which bass is still a relatively unexplored realm:

Western music neglects the deeper areas, I feel: we generally use the bass as a kind of accompaniment to the middle and the 'good' registers. I feel an attraction towards finding the nuances.²²

At this point, the Concerto seems quite conventional in its handling of solo and orchestral roles: the piano is the central, questing protagonist, around whom the first strands of a fairly straightforward heroic concerto-story are being woven. The cadenza concludes by surging up into the middle of the piano's range roughly eleven minutes before the concerto's ending. Listening to the work for the first time, one might reasonably expect the conclusion to follow more closely: no longer solitary, and having returned to the mid-register, our solo protagonist seems to have left the abyss. One might therefore wonder how a further eleven minutes of music can be sustained if the tension of exploration has already been resolved? In terms of conventional narrative structure, the abyss has featured conspicuously early; in terms of concerto structure, the cadenza, this apotheosis of solitary exploration, is similarly oddly placed. One possible answer is that, contrary to appearances, we have not yet reached the 'abyss': perhaps the pervasive sense of structural disorientation in

²¹ This assignment of one hand to black keys, the other to the white, is of course an important trend in late twentieth-century piano writing. Its most well-known exponent is Ligeti. See, for instance, the *étude* 'Désordre'. Many of Ligeti's *études* take the piano's spatial layout as a compositional starting-point. The parallels between Ligeti and Nørgård are striking, as Julian Anderson observes in 'Perception and Deception', 165. We will see a similar use of the instrument in Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's *Plateaux* later in this thesis.

²² Per Nørgård in M. Anderson 2002b, 11. Register is arguably the dominant structural parameter in Nørgård's Fifth Symphony (1990), in which 'fragments [...] repeatedly run off either extreme of the orchestra's range into inaudibility' (J. Anderson 2007).

work's final eleven minutes is itself the darkness of the abyss (with the cadenza thus becoming nothing more than an interpretative trapdoor). Certainly, nothing about the Concerto's conclusion suggests closure. Its final bars present us with a conspicuous opening of registral space – register once again assuming primary structural importance. While a conflation of registral and interpretative space is best approached with caution, it offers a convincing reading of these bars, particularly given that other Nørgård works seem to welcome this type of interpretation: the final bars of the Second Symphony, for instance, are characterised by a clear-cut registral close which represents the mirror image of its (chronological and registral) opening.

Ex. 3.2.3: 'closing' bars of *Concerto in Due Tempi*

The image displays a musical score for the 'closing' bars of *Concerto in Due Tempi*. The score is arranged in three systems, each with five staves. The first system is for 6 Violins (Vle. sole), the second for 6 Violas (Vcl. soli), and the third for Cello and Double Bass (Crb. solo). The music is written in a key with two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The notation includes various dynamic markings such as *pp* (pianissimo), *f* (forte), and *dim. al niente* (diminuendo to nothing). The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes, and a prominent use of slurs and ties. The overall structure suggests a gradual fading out of the music, culminating in a final, sustained note.

The final barline therefore appears an arbitrary cutting off, suggesting that the structural problems inherent to *Concerto in Due Tempi* are irresolvable.²³ The tension between tempos, having failed to diminish, reinforces this impression (after all, the proportional relationship between the tempos results in a theoretically eternal pattern of destructive interference, which prohibits resolution). Thus, with apparent inevitability, the final bars leave us firmly within the interpretative abyss. As I have suggested, it is the preponderance of agents besides our heroic solo protagonist which lies at the heart of this ambiguity. I therefore turn in the next sections to the other, less conventional dramatic agents projected in the concerto.

Agency Projection Strategy 2: Secondary Soloists

A sprawling array of secondary soloists – often in the form of instruments that do not belong in the conventional orchestra – is another force destabilising our piano-centric, heroic concerto narrative. These outsiders wander in and out of the concerto (sometimes they are more effervescent, popping up into the texture) with little regard for the concerto etiquette that demands a neat alternation between solo and tutti sections. This disobedience amply provides that sense of volition discussed in 3.1. The rototoms of bb.182-189, the bongos in bb.282-87, and the woodwind intrusions of bb.479-496, are all conspicuous examples. Yet the most persistent offender in this respect is an alto saxophone labelled the ‘shrill reed’ in Programme Note 1 (Nørgård’s verbal personification of the reed is an example of the way in which,

²³ Conspicuously open endings have become something of a norm in Nørgård’s more recent output. This is a point made by Hans Gefors in Gefors 1996, at 55.

reversing Naomi Cumming's synthesis, the suggestion of subjectivity leads to the perception of vocality and gesture). This instrument enters in b.27, rearing its disconcerting head sporadically and utterly unpredictably throughout the remainder of the Concerto.

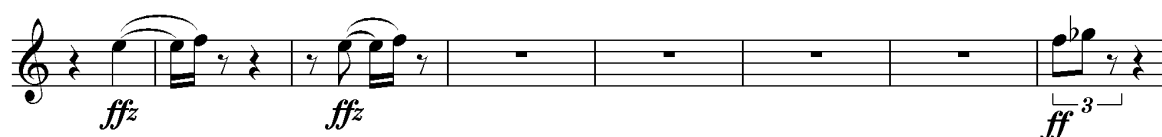
Having commented briefly, dismissively even, on the concerto's piano-orchestra interaction – it is simply described as 'balanced' in both programme notes – Nørgård paints this secondary soloist as an altogether more compelling entity than the purportedly primary one: the reed, to quote Nørgård, 'has a mind of his own most of the time'.²⁴ The instrument is thus set up as a subjective, wilful agent – an agent, furthermore, who is mostly outside the control of the persona who is supposedly controlling the concerto. In a prosaic sense, Nørgård has a high degree of control over the reed, for the part is fully written out; but he is positing a compositional drama in which the concerto-composer is one persona among many – in which the performance is the performance of an *act* or *multiple acts* of composition, rather than a composition as such (a point I pick up on later in this case study). The saxophone's importance as a problematic agent is reinforced by its spatial positioning. Nørgård stipulates that the reed should have a podium all of 'his' own, to the side of the stage, so that the 'loneliness of its utterances' is accentuated. One can imagine how, in a live performance, this isolated figure, cast out of the orchestra, emotively peripheral, is quite a distraction – an outsider whose subject-position one might readily adopt, neglecting that of the primary soloist.

Other characteristics of the reed part reinforce our sense of its subjective agency. Its appearances are conspicuously gestural: usually registrally

²⁴ Programme Note 1.

monodirectional and less than a bar in length, these appearances might remind us of the sudden, jerking motion of a limb, for instance. A paradigmatic example is the series of two-note, *fortissimo* outbursts in bb.97, 103 and 107, all of which suggest an obsessive focus on the interval of a semitone (ex. 3.2.4). The reed's outbursts are also strikingly vocal, as Nørgård suggests with performance directions such as 'screamingly' and 'cantabile'; they are also vocal in their sheer variety, which appears to strive for the timbral flexibility of the human voice; and, of course, let us not forget the suggestion of strained vocality in Nørgård's name for the saxophone. A singing vocality is very rare in the reed part, as its utterances are pointedly unmelodic and limited in terms of pitch and range; rather, these utterances are strongly reminiscent of sighs and screams – highly gestural vocalisations in which bodily motion conveys more meaning than the words used.

Ex.3.2.4: bb. 123-130, a typical few bars in the 'life' of the reed



Each of these appearances is also distinguished by the aforementioned disobedience of concerto etiquette: when the orchestra has dropped away for piano solos, the reed continues to make itself heard (this tendency is particularly marked in the solo of bb.123-135). Its habit of playing in unison with the piano for the briefest of moments – no mean feat for the saxophonist, given the rhythmic complexity of the work – is arguably more disconcerting than an apparent disconnection with the piano part would be. This is because the reed cannot simply be explained away as a dissident: it is an altogether more problematic presence – an agent who occasionally

seems compliant, eager to reinforce the primary soloist's rhetoric, or occasionally accepting of the need for its silence during solo passages. We are left to wonder whether reed and piano are one agent or two.

In Programme Note 2, Nørgård designates the reed as an 'anti-soloist'. Certainly, the extended techniques employed on the instrument make it pointedly unpianistic: in particular, Nørgård fully exploits the wind instrument's ability to manipulate the dynamic and timbre of a note after the attack. The reed's tendency to focus on single pitches is also uncharacteristic of piano writing, in which a relatively small range of available timbral variation can quickly render such repetition uninteresting. The opposition is also expressed texturally: the characteristic qualities of the reed's utterances work in radical contrast to the complex, polyphonic textures which typify both piano and orchestral parts – even monophonic instruments tend to struggle linearly towards polyphony by employing frequent registral leaps – usually of a perfect fourth or a tritone – which stratify their otherwise semitonally incremental lines.

Ex.3.2.5: Tendencies toward melodic stratification in single-voiced instruments

Second trumpet, bb.111-115



Clarinet, bb.662-665



The reed, by comparison, never seems interested in that kind of registral stratification, and leaps of more than a minor third are rare throughout its part.

The reed's behaviour does not fundamentally alter over the course of the work: there is no comfortingly teleological structure in which differences are reconciled, with the reed's rehabilitation as an integrated and cooperative member of the ensemble; nor does the reed detach itself decisively from the concerto. Its function as an unchanging problem is another component of the anti-narrativity which sits in opposition to Nørgård's voyage metaphor. As such, the reed complements the work's lack of closure by preventing closure around the piano-orchestra ensemble: its tantalising hover between positions inside and outside the work reinforces an impression of eminently permeable, even contingent borderlines.

Agency Projection Strategy 3: Tempos as Agents

In both Nørgård's programme notes the matter of soloist-orchestra dialogue is further subsumed by a preoccupation with temporality – and in particular the relationship between two tempos related by the closest practicable approximation of the ratio $\sqrt{2}:1$ (the initial Tempos are MM100 and MM72, although they shift late in the work to MM144 and MM100, and I discuss ways of reading that shift later in this section). Recalling the intense temporal dissonance of this ratio, we must ask whether temporal opposition represents the work's main concertante conflict, rather than that of the piano and orchestra. The importance of these relationships is confirmed by that sense of metrical tug-and-pull which pervades the concerto.

In interview, Nørgård personifies the tempos, configuring their relationship as one of restless alternation between positions of dominance and submission; the theoretical premise is that two tempos can exist simultaneously.²⁵ Of course, the perceptibility of the repressed tempo is questionable, but its conceptual existence arguably becomes audible existence during the numerous moments when there is a 'quirk' in the pattern of tempo-alternation, in which the 'background' tempo fleetingly surges into the foreground. At such moments, one might be reminded of the technique of 'metrical modulation' encountered in Elliott Carter's music: certain instruments or small collectives within the ensemble tend to maintain the same pulse across shifts of tempo by switching between quintuplets and septuplets, as in bb.182-191 (the ratio 7:5 approximates to $\sqrt{2}$).

Fig 3.2.6: metrical modulations, bb.182-185

The musical score for Figure 3.2.6 illustrates metrical modulations across measures 182-185. The score is written for a large ensemble, including Percussion (Perc.), Harp, Piano solo, Violin I (Vi. I), Violin II (Vi. II), Viola (Via.), Violoncello (Vcl.), and Contrabass (Ctb.). The Percussion part is the primary focus, featuring a complex rhythmic pattern with quintuplets and septuplets, marked 'Roto.' and 'poco più p. sub.'. The Piano solo part also features similar rhythmic patterns. The score is divided into two sections: 'Tempo I' and 'Tempo II', with a 4/4 time signature indicated for Tempo II. The Percussion part has a 'f' dynamic marking at the end of the first section.

²⁵ Interview on the Per Nørgård website.

Carter also supplies a notable precedent for the conceptualisation of ‘tempos as agents’ in concertos, particularly in the *Double Concerto*, in which ‘speed is treated as a structural element’.²⁶ A more explicit precedent is Berio’s *Tempi Concertante* for flute and four instrumental groups. Despite this, the supposed existence of a narrative centred on the solo protagonist puts considerable strain on the notion of tempos as agents: if a tempo is likened to the timescale on which agents act in a narrative, it is difficult to imagine the tempo itself being an agent; designations of tempo such as *andante* or *marcato* are suggestive of our tendency to view tempo as the property of an act, rather than an agent.²⁷ As such, the notion of tempos as agents surely demands a complete conceptual reorientation.

Still, three factors suggest that this reorientation is more straightforward than it may at first appear. The first of these factors is the most general: modernist music so frequently works to challenge conventional hierarchies such as the relative structural weightings of different parameters – weightings implicit to accounts that configure harmony or melody, for example, as the driving force behind a work’s development; the reorientation of a given parameter between the roles of agent and action is therefore likely to accompany the reappraisal of such a hierarchy. Secondly, and more specifically, the idea of tempo-as-agent can be accommodated quite comfortably through a dramatic metaphor suggested by Leif Thomsen:

Imagine that you are watching two films at the same time. The films are not very different from each other. The players are the same and the plots are comparable. But... the two films are being played at different speeds [...] Imagine now that these two films have been copied onto the same track in soft focus. Sometimes the first film is dominant, sometimes the second, and

²⁶ Schiff 1998, 236

²⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the relationships between tempos and bodily actions, see London 2006.

sometimes they just shade each other out. Moreover, these shifts of perspective are unpredictable.²⁸

We can easily add a stronger sense of agency to Thomsen's analogy: who is playing these films at different speeds and directing the alternation between them? Perhaps there is a single director of proceedings, prone to switch the reels wildly and unpredictably; equally, we might envisage two camera operators or projectionists vying for supremacy as the action proceeds. In either case, the issue of narrative agency is foregrounded: we are made keenly aware of this mediating presence. Violent switches between tempi, or more subtly felt compressions or expansions of musical time, might therefore be envisaged as the disjunctions rendered by narrative acts.²⁹ The third factor which eases the conceptual reorientation of agent and act is Nørgård's employment of maximally oppositional tempos: the theoretical impossibility of rhythmic hierarchy between the two tempos means that their individuation could not be more stark. The inevitability of 'destructive interference' between these temporal layers is easily linked with the notion of dramatic conflict between clearly defined agents, which lies at the heart of so many definitions of the concerto as a genre.

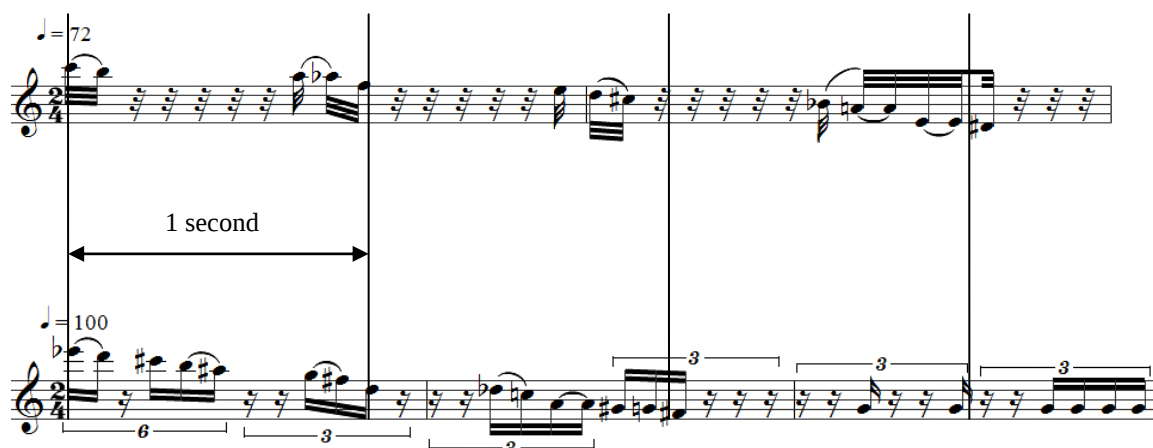
We can easily discern the narrative potential of this duel between tempos, and in the next few paragraphs I outline what might be considered the key points within such a narrative. The duel begins as a playful tug-and-pull between tempos in bb.1-20, primarily experienced through the rhythmic warping of the sprightly opening gesture: in b.14 it is as if Tempo 2 has snatched the opening ambit from the control of Tempo 1 (Fig 3.2.7). In the work's first example of what might be deemed a kind of

²⁸ Thomsen 2010.

²⁹ See my discussion of narrative agency in 3.1.

metrical pun, the distinctive semi-tonal downwards skip is transformed from a straight demisemiquaver to a triplet semiquaver – giving the figure quite a different feel – yet the temporal duration of this skip is virtually the same (0.1 seconds) in both cases (as will become increasingly apparent throughout this chapter, an exact equivalence would be somewhat out of this Concerto's untidy character). This is a subtle but useful example of the types of gestural distortion that the flexing of time produces.

Ex. 3.2.7: muscular contortions, bb.1-14.



This exchange quickly develops into a less playful, more frenetic fluctuation between the two tempos. A particularly direct presentation of the conflict is heard in the aforementioned bb.182-191, when the rhythmic awkwardness of the piano part – despite the fact that the section is almost entirely in one metre, 3/4 – results from an alteration in each bar between the two tempos and a corresponding alternation between quintuplet and septuplet rhythms. The strikingly gestural interjections of woodwind and brass in these bars – especially given that we can identify several sharply individuated lines in the texture – could be interpreted as the actions of

instrumental agents. Alternatively, they can be heard as the muscular contortions of the two writhing tempi.

The piano cadenza is memorable not only in registral terms but also in its characteristic 'rolling' rhythm. I have already discussed the ways in which the layout of the solo instrument encourages a 7:5 rhythm, but the notion of tempos as agents adds a different slant: while I adhere to the interpretation of the keyboard layout as the cause of this distinctive rhythm, it is notable that the cadenza quickly strays from a strict adherence to the patterning dictated by that layout. It is as if, in defecting quickly from this pattern, the temporal instability rises to the foreground and gains a stronger agency in the cadenza's unfolding than the piano itself. This switch of agency from solo instrument to tempo, enacted at a point in the work that is easily read as climactic, is compatible with an easily imagined compositional process: the composer sits down at the piano and, with an affected naivety, fleshes out the implications of a patterning that is so easily taken for granted by those accustomed to the piano; in doing so, however, he uncovers a wealth of rhythmic possibilities which quickly grip the compositional process and become the main driving force behind it (this imagined agency of the composer is discussed at greater length later in this chapter, in reference to 'Agency Projection Strategy 5').

These rhythmic conflicts and distortions are only the most obvious manifestations of the way in which tempos function as agents. The distinctive sonorities of the cadenza demonstrate that we can extend the tempos' influence to the sphere of harmony, as a way of explaining *Concerto in Due Tempi's* propensity for highly dissonant (destructively interfering) dissonances: just as altering the speed of revolution of a record affects both tempo and pitch, periods of intense rhythmic

disturbance are often particularly dissonant – often employing dense clusters of semitones in deep registers. It is as if as if two versions of the same record are being played simultaneously at different tempos. Of course, this connection of tempo and pitch is not applied in any mathematically rigorous way, as it inevitably is in the case of the spinning record: as I discuss at greater length in the conclusion to this chapter, Nørgård has, since the days of the parameter-conflating Second and Third Symphonies, worked hard to resist such tidy unified theories.

Perhaps the apotheosis of the concerto's temporal conflict is the appearance, in bb.417-526, of four amplified acoustic metronomes set at MM 72, 100, 144 and 200 (such that the ratio of each pulse to the last approximates to $\sqrt{2}:1$).³⁰ Nørgård specifies in the concerto's prefatory notes that the metronomes are to be kept hidden from the audience's view, reinforcing the impression that the concerto is a fundamentally theatrical work in which the off-stage action can be as significant as that which occurs on-stage. It perhaps seems odd that metronomes, being paradigmatically uniform in rhythmic and dynamic terms, are interpreted here as representing the climax of the work's conflict: surely, one might think, the gestures and rhetoric of climactic conflict are unpredictable, erratic, extreme. Yet it is precisely this incongruity which underlines *Concerto in Due Tempi's* surrealism (an issue I return to later in this chapter): previous fluctuations in tempo and metre might have been considered a kind of local effect which temporarily warped our sense of time; the conspicuous clashes between metronomes – instruments inextricably associated with the clock-like fixedness and consistency of perceived time – suggest that

³⁰ Perhaps the most famous use of metronomes in a work is Ligeti's in 1962's *Poème Symphonique for 100 Metronomes*. There are important differences, however: Ligeti does not, for instance, specify tempi in his work, and the instruments are in full view of the audience.

temporality is itself radically distorted and changeable in the strange parallel world of Nørgård's concerto.

Ex. 3.2.8: example of the 'space equivalent to time' notation of the metronome pulses.

The image shows a musical score for Percussion 3 and Piano solo. The percussion part consists of four staves, each labeled 'Metronome 1' through 'Metronome 4', with the instruction 'etc. sim.' (etcetera, similar) following each. The piano part is a single staff with a 'Piano solo' label. The score includes tempo markings 'Tempo II' and 'Tempo I'. The piano part features various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as 'mf', 'f sub.', 'f', and 'p'. The percussion part shows rhythmic patterns corresponding to the metronome pulses.

Different conceptualisations of time are of course a key preoccupation throughout Nørgård's oeuvre, as in works like *Kalendermusik*, *I Ching*, *Times and Seasons*, and *Recurrences* (indeed, the experience of time is a central preoccupation of much modernist music³¹). Another effect of the concerto's challenge to a common view of temporality is a highly accented awareness of time's agency: it is no longer a flat, constant plane on which we act, but a mobile, unpredictable agent that distorts, compresses, expands, precludes completion (as the Concerto's conspicuously open

³¹ As Robert Adlington argues, for instance, 'many twentieth-century composers – including Stravinsky, Messiaen, Carter and Stockhausen – have declared a fascination with the relationship between music and time. This can be seen, in part, as a consequence of the abandonment of tonality. Tonal harmony ensured a type of musical organisation so closely congruent with prevailing models of time – which is to say, one that was continuous, connected, motional and unidirectional – that there was no reason to question the fit of one to the other' (Adlington 2000, 96). See also Jonathan Kramer 1988, especially 'his chapter entitled 'Linearity and nonlinearity', at 20-65, in which he focuses at length on the nonlinear forms encountered in twentieth-century music ranging from Steve Reich's *Come Out* (1966) to Harrison Birtwistle's *The mask of Orpheus* (1986).

ending strongly suggests).³² The entry of metronomes is therefore not only the most striking manifestation of the work's temporal conflict; it is the work's most compelling challenge to the understanding of instruments as agents. If the metronomes were marched on-stage, we might be more likely to attribute agency to the instruments themselves, or to the performer who brings them into view and audibility; yet they are set into motion by an invisible, more intangible presence, such that their sound may be interpreted as the actions of time(s).

As one might now expect, temporal conflict hardly subsides following the apotheosis of bb.417-526. A glimmer of resolution is perhaps offered in b.527, although its perceptibility as such might well be called into question. The tempos change from 72/100 to 85/120 following the final appearance of the metronomes: the lower of these tempi is now almost equidistant between the previous 72/100 pulses (I suspect that the reason for the choice of '85' rather than the equidistant '86' is that the fractionally lower tempi allow the section to begin with the relatively ubiquitous and performer-friendly MM 120 rather than MM 122). This is, however, only a partial compromise, because the ratio $\sqrt{2}$:1 is maintained between the new tempi. As if to signal the inevitable failure of resolution, the work subsequently presents us with perhaps its most overt superimposition of tempos, when the piano and orchestra are firmly individuated by metre (ex. 3.2.9). Once again, the notion of resolution is comprehensively undone, and *Concerto in Due Tempi* offers absolutely no assistance to the listener attempting to reassemble a more easily workable sense of

³² It has of course long been established in physics that time is far from being the constant we perceive it to be in everyday life. Yet that idea of time as a constant remains central to its 'everyday' perception. This perception is the one that modernist music tends to challenge (see Adlington 2003). For a general discussion of tensions between scientific and cultural conceptualisations of time see Hoffman 2009. For a more specific discussion of this tension in the context of music see the introduction to Kramer 1988.

temporality once the concert has concluded and the routines of everyday life must recommence.

Ex. 3.2.9: bb.663-66, perhaps *Concerto in Due Tempi*'s most direct 7:5 superimposition

The image displays a musical score for a section of a concerto, specifically measures 663-666. The score is written for Piano solo and a string ensemble (Violins I and II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabasso). The Piano solo part is in 7/8 time, with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 120$. The string ensemble part is in 5/8 time, with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 170$. The score is labeled "Tempo II(a)" and includes the instruction "la melodia in rilievo". The Piano solo part features a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The string ensemble part consists of sustained chords and a pizzicato (pizz.) section. The overall effect is a 7:5 superimposition of the two tempi.

Agency Projection Strategy 4: Themes, Topics, Registers as Actors

If time can function as an agent, it is surely possible for the same to be true of other musical elements which are less tangible than instruments and their players. As I suggested in the preliminary discussion, themes, though less physically graspable than instruments, are often configured as actors in a dramatic realm. *Concerto in Due Tempi* presents us with copious examples of this form of agency. Of particular importance in this respect is its use of strongly characterised and historically loaded materials – musical gestures or topics with well-formed identities solidified by centuries of musical tradition. Take, for instance, the grotesque neobaroque keyboard

figurations of bb.50-58, in which a clear four-part texture and tendency toward ornamentation are adapted to a post-tonal context and a strikingly awkward rhythm. Some explanation is needed here of Nørgård's somewhat idiosyncratic rhythmic notation and its sonic results. It will be noticed that the time signature changes with every bar in ex. 3.2.10. These metrical designations with a line between the two integers differ from the standard time signature format: in keeping with convention, the top number designates beats in a bar; the bottom one, however, coupled with a note duration, states how each beat is divided (for instance, in the first bar of ex. 3.2.10, there is one beat consisting of five evenly spaced demisemiquavers; *f* is heard for the first four of these, *E $\flat$* for the last). Even without a full technical understanding of the durations involved, we can see how the effect of awkward motion is created: a readily perceptible pattern of alternation between low and relatively high registers sets up an expectation that the texture will follow one of the more predictable formulas: to my ears, at least, this texture engages with a well-known system of accented, long bass notes followed by weaker, shorter attacks in the treble. Yet very often it is the bass note that is shorter and more weakly placed.

Ex. 3.2.10: Neo-baroque grotesquerie in bb.50-58

The musical score for Ex. 3.2.10 is presented on two staves. Above the staves, a series of time signatures are listed, each with a top number and a bottom number separated by a horizontal line. The time signatures are: $\frac{1}{5}$, $\frac{2}{7}$, $\frac{5}{16}$, $\frac{2}{5}$, $\frac{1}{7}$, $\frac{2}{5}$, $\frac{4}{7}$, and $\frac{2}{5}$. The musical notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings such as *ff* and *f*. The notation is complex, reflecting the idiosyncratic rhythmic system described in the text.

The odd effect is that the delicacy and poise associated with the Baroque ornaments clashes with a lumbering, deeply uncomfortable gait. The figure seems a strange, unsettling, perhaps amusing caricature, perhaps of that rhythmic awkwardness encountered in late Beethoven, particularly the *Hammerklavier*. It is one of the few figures that returns – in various guises, but always distinctly recognisable – throughout the work. It thus takes on the role of a leading character in this strange and labyrinthine drama.

Perhaps we might also posit a similar reading of the work's 'voyage into the abyss' as a caricature: the reader might already have wondered just how sincerely we should take Nørgård's invocation of such a clichéd expression. The concerto's cadenza, with its saturation of a commonly understood signifier (lowness of register being symbolic of darkness, either literal or emotional),³³ perhaps pushes depth into the realm of triviality. Where I previously configured the piano as the agent exploring an abyss, agency could instead be attributed to the low register itself. The piano's lower reaches have long been assigned a personality by the left hand's designation as *mano sinistre* (a designation which Ravel plays on in his *Concerto for Left Hand* – a work which will be discussed shortly). The register is thus a character, with a long and distinguished history, who tugs mercilessly at the piano.

Agency Projection Strategy 5: Unsettling the Agency of 'The Composer'

As I noted briefly in the introduction to this case study, *Concerto in Due Tempi* presents a compelling challenge to that most straightforward and common

³³ In interview, Nørgård drew attention to precisely this form of synaesthesia (interview in Copenhagen, 7 August 2008).

conceptualisation of the composer as the agent responsible for the processes and events that take place in a work. It is remarkable just how completely this concerto's dramatic interplay of agents can suspend us above the prosaic fact that a single agent (Nørgård) is behind the work's design. Just as we discussed how the concept of rhythmic interference has a clear harmonic analogy, it can also be linked powerfully with the sense of creative personae entering and interfering with the concerto. One might go so far as to suggest that Nørgård's fascination with the concept of interference is an important factor in his interest in the concerto, a genre rife with possibilities for the interactions of different agencies.

In this section I examine an agent quite distinct from Nørgård himself, but apparently characterised by a composer- or deity-like omnipotence, an ability to exercise complete control over the stage on which the concerto's unpredictable, seemingly spontaneous theatre takes place. Perhaps the closest we have come to this kind of agency so far is that possible sense of a force or combination of forces restlessly manipulating the timeframe in which the work operates. Other examples proliferate, however. Take, for instance, the pre-cadenza stripping away of texture in bb.383-389, when the orchestral sonority vanishes up through the harmonic spectrum into the auditory stratosphere (ex. 3.2.11). We might ascribe causality here to an imagined agent suddenly raising the ambient temperature and bringing about a rapid evaporation (Nørgård's works provide innumerable examples of the way in which twentieth-century music appeals to a kaleidoscope of metaphors aside from the motional conceptualisation that has tended to dominate music analysis³⁴). The force

³⁴ A conceptualisation problematised in Adlington 2003. Through analytical accounts of a range of twentieth-century works, Adlington provides a number of compelling additions to the range of metaphors commonly used in discussions of music (gravity, contraction, light, for

of gravity is tampered with at several points, most notably during the piano cadenza: it drags music from comfortable, normative registers down into the lowest reaches of the auditory spectrum, where it compresses the music with crushing intensity. This idea of a deity-like agent determining the parameters and constants of the environment in which the concerto takes place suggests a similarity with the projection of initial agency – doing little more than setting up the parameters which rigorously determine the work’s progress – encountered in the ‘hierarchical music’ discussed in the introduction to this case study. The difference is that the other agents in *Concerto in Due Tempi* – characters such as the piano or the reed – appear to possess a great deal more free will within the relatively weak constraints imposed by their more loosely defined environment. This is a point discussed at greater length in the conclusion.

Ex. 3.2.11: the strings’ evaporation into the auditory stratosphere, bb.387-89

Senza Misura rigida
(with a sweeping gesture)

The musical score for strings (VI. I, VI. II, Vla., Vcl., Ctb. div.) shows a sequence of glissandi, tremolos, and legato passages. The score is marked 'Senza Misura rigida' and includes performance instructions like 'sul pont. trem.', 'gliss.', 'trem.', and 'legato'. The dynamics range from 'ppp' to 'f'.

instance). These metaphors are explicitly explored at numerous points in each of the case studies that follow.

Interpretative Implications of Nørgård's Play with Agency

It is hoped that we now have a strong impression of the complexity, perhaps even the indeterminacy, of agency in *Concerto in Due Tempi*, potentially blurring what often stands as a division between the concerto and other instrumental genres. But here Nørgård strikes a crucial balance: agency may be highly ambiguous, to the point where an entity can be regarded as an agent in one interpretation and an action in another. Yet, in tension with that ambiguity, the issue of agency is constantly foregrounded: this is a distinctly theatrical work in which numerous virtual personae are projected through a bewilderingly wide range of strategies. These personae develop such strong personalities that they threaten to bury beneath them the supposedly crucial matter of piano-orchestra interaction. The idea of a foremost heroic narrative – the primary soloist's voyage into the abyss, in this case – is persistently suggested, destabilised, and ultimately frustrated by a seductive and distracting parade of colourful secondary soloists; by the strange notion of tempos as agents; by a range of particularly loaded musical caricatures, which often take on a life of their own; and by the occasional projection of an omnipresent agent who holds ultimate sway over the setting in which the drama unfolds. The implications of the concerto's play with these strategies are wide and far-reaching. These implications are the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

Structural Openness

One of the most important implications of the concerto's play with agency is the unravelling of the notion of a comfortably conventional, closed narrative. The centrality of the heroic protagonist's story is persistently thrown into question; each of the agents discussed strongly reinforces the impression of a pointedly open ending in which nothing is resolved. The idea of destructive interference, most obviously relevant to the domains of tempo and rhythm, is also applicable to the way in which agents intrude upon the normative soloist-orchestra relationship and thus demonstrate that the work is anything but a closed system. Here I discuss a kind of interpretative openness which is distinct from, but closely related to, this kind of structural openness.

As I mentioned in the thesis's introduction, part of the concerto's appeal to the post-tonal composer is that the use of instruments as agents functions as 'a ready means of generating perceptible forms'.³⁵ The principle behind this is that alternations between solo and tutti sections are synchronous with changes in other musical parameters, such that the one reinforces the other and a stronger sense of structure results. This is surely the use of concerto format that one would most expect from a composer who is supposed to be deeply concerned with the listener's comprehension of structure. Yet I suspect that Nørgård's attraction to the genre since the 1980s has been due in large part to an eagerness to play with and upset this comfortable assumption. The often hazy soloist-orchestra distinction in 1987's *Helle Nacht* pushes in this direction,³⁶ but it is in *Concerto in Due Tempi* that Nørgård's

³⁵ Griffiths 2007.

³⁶ See Kullberg 1996 for a discussion of *Helle Nacht*.

interest in deception is absolutely fundamental: this work resolutely avoids the correspondence between parameters that would support a more definite sense of form. Certain correspondences are discernable, such as the maximisation of register with the piano cadenza; they are never exact, however, and so the prevailing impression is one of slippery stages ‘overlapping’, as Nørgård suggests in Programme Note 1. Presented with this distinctly messy interaction of structural signifiers, the listener constructs a form by prioritising certain signifiers over others – say, reed-orchestra over piano-orchestra interaction – and noting the occasional correspondences between signifiers. A loose and highly contingent ‘aggregate form’ emerges. Accentuated openness to interpretation complements the accentuated openness of *Concerto in Due Tempi*’s conclusion. This openness is a crucial point to which we return in the case study’s final section.

Surrealist Theatre

The complexity of agency also creates the impression of a surrealist theatre: the incongruous wonderings of the concerto’s numerous agents upset concerto ritual so comprehensively that the artifice of that ritual is foregrounded. The roles played by different instruments or musical parameters are kept maximally unstable, such that a given sonority might switch disconcertingly between the roles of agent and action. We are often suspended in a realm in which cause and effect are highly ambiguous, challenging fundamental understandings of ‘the arrow of time’. The work’s multiplicity of characters wildly distorts the rather conventional story of exploration built around

the heroic primary soloist, and in doing so presents a powerful challenge to the notion of narrativity – a particularly common tendency in surrealist theatre. The persistent distortion of timescale is another important anti-narrative trait.

Of course, the idea of ‘play’ with agency inevitably has connotations of lightness, perhaps of a game of wits contested by work and audience. Here we touch on another aspect of the concerto’s surrealism: the persistent clashing of the trivial and the profound. With its almost unrelenting half-hour duration, clashing dissonances and registral depths, *Concerto in Due Tempi* hardly courts interpretation as a flippant, light-entertainment piece: from one perspective, at least, it seems utterly convincing as a voyage into emotional darkness or unexplored terrain. Yet the pervasive sense of playfulness is also inescapable: as Nørgård has remarked in interview, the concerto is ‘bubbling over with high spirits’, a comment that is difficult to square with his invocation of ‘the abyss’. Developing the idea, Nørgård observes how ‘it’s as if cartoon figures suddenly pop up in the middle of a serious passage’.³⁷ Perhaps the most apt examples of this kind of caricature are the wailing saxophone and the saturated, comical lowness of the piano cadenza. This at times grotesque combination of the light and dark is perhaps unsurprising in a piano concerto: it reacts in a markedly bi-polar way to the sense of triviality which has often been attached to the concerto tradition. Piano concertos are especially suited to playing with caricatures because their solo instrument is the archetypal orchestral impersonator, the tool most strongly associated with the composer’s craft, and an instrument that has proved adaptable to a particularly wide array of genres (by comparison, string concertos surely have a stronger connection with the profound, a

³⁷ Per Nørgård in Thomsen 2010.

theme to which we return in the analysis of Saariaho's *Graal Théâtre*). As one might expect from the above quotation, the strongest canonical examples of a pronounced generic light-dark opposition are the two piano concertos of Ravel – the oft-noted 'friend to *tromp-l'œil*, deceptions, merry-go-round horses and booby-traps',³⁸ as well as the originator of the statement that 'a concerto should be a *divertissement*'.³⁹ Of course, the temptation to set the *Concerto for Left Hand* in sharp relief with the *Concerto in G* should be tempered by the fact the former is not so unrelentingly apocalyptic, nor the latter so unrelentingly jubilant, as several commentators have suggested (probably in response to the contemporaneity of the two works):⁴⁰ as Michael Russ argues of both concertos, 'jazz, machines and circus all play a role and the almost comic and tragic intermingle in a sometimes bitter and ironic way'.⁴¹ These concertos are particularly strong examples of their composer's oft-noted mask-wearing.⁴² Another example is the capricious play with musical topics and prevalent sense of multi-voicedness that we often encounter in Serge Prokofiev's piano concertos. Likewise, the first and third movements of Stravinsky's Concerto for Piano and Winds (1924) are characterised by a 'dizzy parade of parodies, including 'a cakewalk, a couple of tawdy marches, and a parody of a certain *Well-Tempered Clavier* fugue';⁴³ and Britten's Piano Concerto (1938) is littered with caricatures of Lisztian climaxes, waltzes and fanfare progressions, and a parody of Beethoven's search for a finale theme in the prologue to the finale of his Ninth Symphony.⁴⁴ My

³⁸ Vladimir Jankélévitch in the introduction to Mawer 2000, at 1.

³⁹ Maurice Ravel in Russ 2000, 129.

⁴⁰ See Michael Russ discusses this reception history in Russ 2000, 125

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 125

⁴² Vladimir Jankélévitch was the first commentator to argue that Ravel is masked (see Jankélévitch in Deborah Mawer, 'Introduction' to Mawer 2000, 2. The idea has most fully been pursued by Stephen Zank in Zank 2009.

⁴³ Kerman 1999, 29-31.

⁴⁴ On the 'expressive ambiguity' of Britten's Piano Concerto see Roseberry 1999, 236-37.

proposition that *Concerto in Due Tempi* exhibits a similar propensity for play with masks brings us to a final consideration of theatricality in a broader sense.

Nørgård's Metaperformance

Before turning to the circumstances of *Concerto in Due Tempi*'s commission, a few words are necessary on what I term Nørgård's 'metaperformance' – that interweaving of composition and commentary with which the composer expertly directs his own reception. As I argued at the beginning of this chapter, the focus on theatrical performance is distinctly alien to Nørgård's prevailing reception: he is typically not seen as a dramatic composer, and his well-documented interest in perception has obscured a deep preoccupation with masks. My emphasis on theatre extends both to his music and his public persona, which are intrinsically linked in a performance which extends over the course of Nørgård's career.⁴⁵

A recurrent tendency in Nørgård's reception (and, of course, in that of many composers) is the enthusiasm for finding unities within a highly varied, often contradictory output. In part, this tendency responds to the projections of linearity and inter-connectedness that we encounter in many of Nørgård's best-known works – it is satisfying, if obviously suspect, to read a similar inter-connectedness into the composer's career. Attempts to do so are particularly marked in explanations of (perhaps even apologies for) the most disconcerting 'phase' in Nørgård's oeuvre. I

⁴⁵ Without using the term or fully exploring the idea of composer-identity as a kind of theatre, Jens Brincker pushes towards the notion of 'metaperformance' in Brincker 1996, especially in an 'intermezzo' entitled 'Hierarchical Music as a Philosophy of Life', 203-206.

refer here to the composer's 'Wölfli' period which, lasting from the late 1970s to the mid 80s, was characterised by an intense preoccupation with the Swiss 'outsider' artist Adolf Wölfli. In response largely to the schizophrenic fragmentation and conflict of Wölfli's work, Nørgård embarked on a radical departure from the connectedness and consonance of his previous music. This is seen most clearly in the opera *Siddhartha* (1979) and in the Fourth Symphony (1982), which Nørgård described as an attempt to realise Wölfli's musical vision, as cryptically expressed on the six-line staves laced across or around many of the artist's paintings. Jørgen I. Jensen devotes much of his essay on 'the Great Change' to reconciling the oppositions between this intensely agonistic, conflictual development and the harmonious world of the Third Symphony:

All this took place without Nørgård completely changing his language, style or acoustic pattern: he didn't put on a new mask, it was still possible to recognize him in the new works [...] Per Nørgård had entered a new phase as had so many other composers before him [...] The musical connection backwards to the 1970s eventually became quite clear.⁴⁶

Jensen's argument is part of a general reluctance to accept the obvious, that a great change did occur, and that Nørgård assumed a new identity. It is suggestive of a deeply theatrical bent that he spent years impersonating Wölfli: I can think of no other example of a composer attempting to realise another artist's vision in a symphony – in a genre so closely associated with bold, public statements of identity.

In a commonly accepted, rather *agon*-free narrative put forward by Erling Kullberg, the Wölfli works are followed by a synthesis of previous preoccupations, which manifested in the three string concertos where the 'outsider' meets the

⁴⁶ Jensen 1996, 10.

'collective'.⁴⁷ In actuality, however, this synthesis is more tidy than accurate: the concertos offer little in the way of a resolution between these extremely contrasted styles, and their proximity to one another has much to do with the Copenhagen Royal Academy's commissioning of three string concertos. As if to acknowledge this pragmatic element, Nørgård wryly makes the first of these works, *In Between* for cello and orchestra, explicitly concerned with the relationship between the composer's individual volition and the forces that shape his output. It is a striking moment of pragmatism in the work of a composer who tends to project a transcendent disregard for practical details. This clash of pragmatism and mystical symbolism is an example of that play with identity with which I conclude.

Nørgård's own rapport with the tidy career-narratives critiqued above is characteristically poised between extremes: he has been known to entertain unifying, somewhat nebulous trajectories yet destabilise them at the same time. In 1987, for instance, he posited the idea that his development could be viewed as a linear progression divided into a series of seven periods of roughly equal length. Perhaps inevitably, the influence of this obviously suspect, numerologically suggestive delineation can still be traced in Nørgård biography; this despite reports of Nørgård's 'wry smile' on forwarding the idea.⁴⁸ Built into this cleverly poised double edge seems to be the acknowledgement that reductive career-narratives are intriguing, seductive, but also constrictive, deterministic and conducive to the rigor mortis of a once flexible identity.

Concerto in Due Tempi was written to celebrate Nørgård's becoming the first native winner of Denmark's most prestigious music award, the Léonie Sonnings

⁴⁷ This is precisely the narrative put forward in Kullberg 2010a.

⁴⁸ Kullberg 2010a.

Musikpris (the award ceremony, and with it the work's premiere, took place in 1995). The achievement of this award was a significant moment in Nørgård's reception, aligning him with previous Musikpris-winning composers including Stravinsky, Messiaen and Boulez. The event therefore played an important role in Nørgård's canonisation; on the flipside of this, it played an important role – particularly, I think, for a native award-winner often upheld as the truest (symphonic) heir to Carl Nielsen's legacy – in the creation of a potentially stifling career-narrative woven around a single restrictive identity. Three works were due to be performed. Unsurprisingly, the purportedly summative Third Symphony was first on the bill; it was followed by the choral work *Wie Ein Kind*, a shorter piece representative of the Wölfli phase. Nørgård, then, was composing the finale to his celebration.

A less well-behaved finale than *Concerto in Due Tempi* can scarcely be imagined! The concerto's defiance of structural summary, its pointed resistance to closure, its revelling in disunity, are quite common to Nørgård's work of the mid- to late-1990s – all can be regarded as aspects of his preoccupation of interferences, rather than closed systems. In a later example of the composer's subtle commentary on his commissions, the Sixth Symphony (1999), premiered on the eve of the new millennium, quite pointedly critiques the buzz of closure and summation that accompanies a *fin de siècle*:

The subtitle 'At the End of the Day' can be understood literally or it can mean "when all is added up". However, in my opinion, nothing ever quite adds up, there is always "something" missing, any ending will be provisional ...⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Per Nørgård's Programme Note to Symphony No.6, available on Edition Wilhelm Hansen 2009. 'Symphony No.6 Programme Note'. See also Nørgård's programme note to suggestively titled *Terrain Vagues* (2001), the composition of which was supposedly necessitated by the non-closure of the Sixth Symphony: 'A few of my works [...] could be said to "jump" or "bolt" just before the ending; in the last minute or two a completely new music

This philosophical preoccupation with ‘loose ends’ is, however, only a part of the reason for *Concerto in Due Tempi*’s messiness: its plethora of agents strains against the strait-jacket of a single identity at a potentially constrictive event; its poise between the light and the abysmal foregrounds complexity, deception, interference, the elusiveness of all-encompassing description; and structural ambiguity – largely the product of Nørgård’s play with agency – upsets the very notion of a coherent (career) narrative.

The tie-up of concerto-agency with identity, and of concerto-structure with career-narrative, is potentially problematic territory. Whatever the theoretical objections may be, of course, such an interpretative procedure can at least offer listeners a provocative angle on a work.⁵⁰ Yet I would argue that this connection is particularly justifiable in this case, for a number of reasons. The first of these is the special importance of this work’s premiere in the construction of identity. Second, Nørgård’s play with masks in his commentaries on the work, and his play with caricatures within it, paves the way for a blurring of boundaries between his projected identities and those constructed in his music. Third, this concerto is to some extent about authorship. Take, for instance, the reed ‘with the mind of its own’, seemingly outside the projected concerto-composer’s control, or the agency of an imagined deity who controls the environment in which the Concerto’s drama develops: a performance of *Concerto in Due Tempi* is less the performance of a composition and

appears, breaking off the development, and indicating a wholly new perspective. Typical of this is my Symphony No. 6, which boasts several of these glimpses of new musics in the final minutes. The very last glimpse is of a music so different that the symphony momentarily turns “inside-out”. This short ending, or coda, with its multi-layered and heavily stomping music held captive my imagination to the extent that it became the starting point for my next endeavour, the present work, *Terrains Vagues*’.

⁵⁰ I am grateful to Fred Maus for making this point after my paper on *Concerto in Due Tempi* at the ICMSN Conference, Keele University, July 2009.

more the performance of a distinctly conflicted act of composition. Fourth, the piano, as the most common orchestral impersonator and compositional test-bed, is especially suited to the play with masks we see in other concertos by composers like Ravel and Prokofiev. Finally, there is the close connection of piano technique with the concerto's rhythmic and harmonic design, and the particularly pioneering treatment of rhythm in the piano part. The voice of 'Nørgård the pioneer' can, I think, be identified with the primary soloist, although it jostles incessantly with the other voices – detached, comical, ironic – projected in the concerto. Thus *Concerto in Due Tempi* is not so much a celebration of its single heroic protagonist: this would, after all, be surplus to requirements given the nature of the award ceremony. The work is more an affirmation of the difficulties of pinning down a creative voice, and the resultant problem with unifying career-narratives. As befits its genre, *Concerto in Due Tempi* is a virtuoso performance in the projection and manipulation of agency, the subversion of narrativity and the management of identity.

4

Physicality

So the question 'What is a concerto?' is posed. Put it to the music-lover and the answer may be that a concerto spells dazzle, display, delight, dexterity, that it is a spot-lighting of the performer and his instrument, an impressive example of mental concentration and physical endurance.

- J Raymond Tobin¹

In respect of instrumental music, he required that the orchestra should as much as possible be hid; because by the mechanical exertions, by the mean and awkward gestures of the performers, our feelings are so much disturbed and perplexed. Accordingly, he always used to shut his eyes while hearing music; thereby to concentrate his whole being on the single pure enjoyment of the ear.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe²

4.1

Introduction

Concertos usually explore the physical limitations of performers – the boundaries of, for instance, dexterity, stamina and strength. Of course, this is especially marked in solo parts; in twentieth- and twenty-first-century concertos in particular, however, it is also the case that orchestral parts are often noticeably challenging. The exhilarating

¹ Tobin 1952, 7.

² Goethe 1962, 486.

spectacle of a virtuoso performing at the edge of his or her capabilities is sometimes central to our experience of a work.

In these observations we encounter a number of reasons for the scepticism with which concertos have sometimes been regarded. It is not only that concertos tend to celebrate the performer in a culture that has traditionally privileged text over practice, and composer over performer.³ Concertos showcase many performer attributes that would normally be associated with a sporting contest; they showcase the performer's body and, as Daniel Grimley argues, thereby fall foul of 'our common tendency to seek to decorporalise our critical accounts of musical events'.⁴ A prevalent bias of mind over body in classical music is addressed in Roland Barthes's discussion of 'the grain of the voice'; many other writers have made a similar observation, with studies of performance, gesture, and embodied cognition becoming increasingly prominent in recent musicology.⁵ (Of course, as a casual perusal of much music criticism might confirm, there nonetheless remains widespread devotion to the idea of a performer transparently converting the composer's text into sonic reality.)⁶

Additionally, concertos have often functioned as 'battlegrounds for musical taste'⁷ in being to some extent 'about' given solo instruments – their histories,

³ For a detailed appraisal of these biases, see Goehr 1992. See also Dahlhaus 1989, 8-15, in which two divergent aesthetics in nineteenth-century music are noted. The strand associated with Beethoven, which understands music as a text to be understood in the manner of a literary or philosophical document, has arguably proved predominant in subsequent criticism. For a discussion of the often tense relationship between the nineteenth-century work concept and virtuosity, see Samson 2003, esp. 'Composing the Performance', 66-102.

⁴ Grimley 2003, 29.

⁵ Barthes 1977. See also Cusick 1994 and Mead 1999.

⁶ As Leon Plantinga observes, the ideal of the performer as a 'neutral executant' or 'faithful transmitter' was most marked in the mid-twentieth century (Plantinga 1999, 279).

⁷ Simon P. Keefe sets the stage for his edited collection on the concerto by dealing first with the theme of virtuosity and ways in which its associations with the concerto have inflected the latter's reception history. This notion of a 'battleground for musical tastes' comes from Keefe

capabilities, playing techniques, and their subtle, idiosyncratic ways of shaping the composer's organisation of texture, phrasing and pitch. Once again, this practical orientation sits awkwardly with an essentially Romantic – but still popular – ideal of the composer's uncompromising 'vision' being unfettered by practical limitation.⁸ Yet a heightened attention to practical limitation is perhaps unsurprising given that composers in recent decades, faced with a potentially stifling freedom from traditional harmonic or formal constraints, can find inspiration in the provocative limits imposed by performers and their instruments.

Indeed, music since 1945 has often been characterised by an 'increasingly frenetic search for novel instrumental possibilities',⁹ a protracted interest in the production of new timbres, and the composition of works which foreground the physicality of performance or are simply unimaginable performed by instrumental forces other than the ones for which they are written. The decades immediately after the Second World War in particular saw a 'revolution in performance practice'.¹⁰ Numerous possible reasons for this 'revolution' suggest themselves. One factor was that the intricacy and precision of scores such as Pierre Boulez's *Marteau sans Maître* (1954) and Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Zeitmasze* (1955) demanded an exceptionally high level of technical skill. (While I seek to keep this 'high skill level' distinct from the more loaded term 'virtuosity' – which has stronger connotations of bravura and display, in addition to a moral element related to its stemming from

2005a, 2. Janet K. Halfyard provides an apt example of this battleground: 'in the early twentieth century, musical culture was divided between audiences eager to see virtuoso playing and, most often, music critics who perceived virtuosity as a vulgar display that appealed to an ignorant and easily pleased public but did not serve the music well' (Halfyard 2007, 114). See J. Burk on the 'Fetish of Virtuosity' for an exemplar of the kind of criticism that virtuosity has received (Burk 1928).

⁸ The ideal of the 'unfettered genius' is notably encapsulated in the 'Beethoven paradigm': see Goehr, 205-242, especially 225.

⁹ Brindle 1987, 153.

¹⁰ Griffiths 1995, 191.

'virtue' – there is inevitably a significant overlap between the two.) Eric Salzman, who used the term 'New Virtuosity' to describe a trend he identified in New York in the early 1960s, suggested two further causes: first, that 'an elaborate and highly ornamented sense of line and texture helps sustain liveliness and flow' in the absence of "functional" or directional rhythm and phrase (not to mention harmony); second, that a heightened interest in the performer, and in the contingency of performance, also linked to the relatively new 'possibility of achieving a kind of complete, perfected order and predetermination with electronic means' (in the form either of electronic composition or the availability of recorded performances on the mass market).¹¹ This state of affairs could lead to the conclusion that there was

no longer any point in striving for perfect articulation and architecture in music written for live performance; the truly human, non-electronic task is to do what the machine can not: act freely and variably, exercise choice. Thus each performance should presumably be as unique as the performer himself.¹²

In testing the limitations of performers to breaking point, New Virtuosity might usefully be situated within the broader context of the predetermination-indeterminacy dialectic that was foregrounded in the 50s and 60s by developments such as electronic music, total serialism and aleatoricism.¹³ A pronounced focus on the performer's body also worked in opposition to the serial rationalisation which is often (misleadingly) seen as the dominant aesthetic of the postwar avant garde. Indeed, the uncompromising application of serial methods often produced unplayable results,

¹¹ Salzman 1963, 175.

¹² *Ibid.*, 175.

¹³ See 'Construction and Indeterminacy' in Williams 1997 for a consideration of the dialectic between construction and indeterminacy in the case of Boulez and Cage.

such that bodily failure, approximation and contingency became inevitable and potentially expressive characteristics of the performance of many total serial works. Such instances perhaps invite a more dialectical understanding of this repertory – as an exploration of the relationship between mind and body, rather than a one-dimensional indulgence of the one over the other.

Concepts of physicality, along with associated ideas about virtuosity and spectacle, have developed in important ways since those polemical works of the 1950s. The following section discusses three key strands in the exploration of physicality during the last few decades, on the understanding that many concertos are better understood when placed in this context. Certain developments are of course less pertinent to the present repertory than others: there is, for example, little discussion in this thesis of the musical appropriation of sounds from the everyday world (sounds such as car horns or crying babies): we are generally concerned here with purely instrumental, acoustic concertos. The three strands identified here as most pertinent are the compositional agency of the solo instrument, the idea of music as actions and forces, and the exploration of sonority.

The Solo Instrument as Compositional Agent

In the chapter on Nørgård we encountered several instances when the physical layout and sonic characteristics of the solo instrument have a tangible effect on the work's harmonic and rhythmic syntax. We also encountered ways in which the piano's history, its associations and 'personalities', are fundamental to the work's play with

agency. In these two ways, the solo instrument seems to have an important level of agency in the compositional process. Accordingly, our first strand of physicality takes up the idea that concertos often engage intensely with the histories and physical layouts of their solo instruments.

Luciano Berio's *Sequenza* series offers a particularly sustained and comprehensive examination of instrumental techniques, sonorities and histories. Elevating technique to the role of primary structural parameter, the *Sequenzas* challenge the equation of technical focus with showiness and, correspondingly, with superficiality. As Paul Griffiths argues,

in *Sequenza IV* for viola (1967), frenetic tremolo chords are the substance of the piece. *Sequenza V* for trombone (1966) could not exist without the new effects of the period, especially singing into the instrument. *Sequenza III* for female voice (1965-6) is not a song with new vocal techniques, but new vocal techniques that make a song.¹⁴

Central to the *Sequenzas* is Berio's conception of 'New Virtuosity', which places considerable emphasis on the notion of 'virtuosity of knowledge':

I hold a great respect for virtuosity even if this word may provoke derisive smiles and even conjure up the picture of an elegant and rather diaphanous man with agile fingers and an empty head [...] As I've often emphasised, anyone worth calling a virtuoso these days has to be a musician capable of moving within a broad historical perspective and of resolving the tension between the creativity of yesterday and today. My own *Sequenzas* are written with this sort of interpreter in mind, whose virtuosity is, above all, a virtuosity of knowledge.¹⁵

¹⁴ Griffiths 1995, 192.

¹⁵ Berio in Berio, Dalmonete and Varga 1985, 91.

To some extent, Berio's distinction between 'new' and 'old' is a perhaps anxious defence against potential suggestions of the superficiality and empty-headedness of his own works. Yet there can be no denying that a thorough knowledge of a given instrument's history significantly enriches both the performer's and listener's interpretation of a *Sequenza*. Each of the works in this series amply demonstrates that instruments have rich and provocative histories which must be reckoned with. Rather than delighting 'merely' in physical dexterity, the emphasis remains firmly historical. This is perhaps clearest in the *Sequenzas* for historically typecast instruments. *Sequenza XIII* for accordion (1995-6), for instance, can be regarded as 'an essay in the instrument's social history', 'an amalgam of echoes from tango, work-song, cabaret and other forms of popular entertainment';¹⁶ *Sequenza II* (1963), by contrast, reacts with music of 'unwonted ferocity'¹⁷ against the harp's historical consignment to an excessively limited expressive range. But a rigorous engagement with the solo instrument is hardly limited to works in which that instrument is an unconventional soloist. Indeed, more conventional solo instruments can have especially rich – and potentially thorny – histories. As I seek to demonstrate in this chapter's first case study, the violin is particularly loaded in this way, as is made especially clear in concertos for the instrument. We must now, however, counterpoint the above discussion with a turn to what might be considered an anti-historical focus on instruments.

¹⁶ Osmond-Smith 2007.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

In the late 1960s, Helmut Lachenmann developed the compositional ideal of 'decontamination'. The aim, as Ulrich Mosch argues, was

not merely to extend the repertory of available sounds along the lines of the discussions of the 1950s and 60s on the concept of musical material, or to shock the listener by the 'alienation' of the familiar sound of the instrument. Instead, the composer's intention was to explore a new sound world and to create compelling and logical musical works based predominantly on sonorities which had remained unused and hence uncontaminated in the past.¹⁸

With its pointedly irregular, often violent instrumental techniques, *Pression* for solo cello (1969) is typical of what Lachenmann terms *musique concrète instrumentale*, adapting the name of Pierre Schaeffer's school of electroacoustic composition.¹⁹ The techniques used strongly draw the listener's attention to the objects and actions involved in a given sound's production:

The sound events are chosen and organised so that the manner in which they are generated is at least as important as the resultant acoustic qualities themselves. Consequently those qualities, such as timbre, volume, etc., do not produce sounds for their own sake, but describe or denote the concrete situation: listening, you hear the conditions under which a sound- or noise-action is carried out, you hear what materials and energies are involved and what resistance is encountered.²⁰

¹⁸ Mosch 2007.

¹⁹ Lachenmann would later suggest that this adaptation was 'perhaps an error' in Lachenmann 1996, 211-12. Nonetheless, it gives a strong sense of the connection that both Schaeffer and Lachenmann are using conventionally 'unmusical' sounds: Lachenmann's instrumental starting point, as David Metzger observes, is 'demusicalised' (Metzger 2009, 197).

²⁰ Molsch 2007.

Music is thus object, action and mechanism; the kinetics of performance are far more than a means of producing music – they are central to it.

Their centrality is arguably still more pronounced in Mauricio Kagel's *Sonant 1960/...* for guitar, harp, double bass and drums. In what is perhaps the work's most overwhelmingly visual example of music theatre, 'Pièce jouée, pièce touchée', the performers must play their parts without producing sounds. As Bjorn Heile comments,

the music becomes a dumb show, but sounds can be imagined, and from time to time sounds may be heard as players accidentally touch the instruments. What is most remarkable here is that the players are not actually miming: the inaudible music is exactly notated and composed with the same rigour as the other music; it is in fact serially constructed.²¹

A marked emphasis on the struggles and apparent failures of performance is an important feature also of much of Brian Ferneyhough's work. As the composer writes in the introductory notes to an important early work, *Cassandra's Dream Song* (1970) for solo flute, 'the audible (and visual) degree of difficulty is to be drawn, as an integral structural element, into the fabric of the composition itself'.²² It is not obvious from this quotation how this assignment of difficulty to an integral role is distinct from the central virtuoso component of an *étude* or concerto finale. The difference is that, where a virtuoso work takes the performer to the limit of what is playable, Ferneyhough's music frequently includes passages which are unplayable. In a later discussion of *Cassandra's Dream Song* Ferneyhough clarifies this point:

²¹ Heile 2006, 36.

²² Ferneyhough 1970.

The boundary separating the playable from the unplayable has not been defined by resorting to pitches lying outside the range of the flute, or other, equally obvious subterfuges, but has been left undefined, depending for its precise location on the specific abilities of the individual performer, whose interpretational endowment forms a revitalising 'filter'.²³

One might wonder whether concertos explore such uncompromising extremes as these. Perhaps the presence of an orchestra, and the inevitable focus on its relationship with the soloist, tends to dilute the intensity of concentration on the contortions of the solitary performer. Additionally, one might suspect that the allusion to a historical genre tends to introduce issues of tradition, which might also weaken a singular focus on music as actions and objects. It is, for instance, suggestive that Lachenmann's first concerto (1976's *Accanto* for clarinet and orchestra), is an early example of his preoccupation with the 'aesthetic apparatus': far from seeking decontamination, this work explores 'worn and outmoded'²⁴ expressive means and has a focused rapport with Mozart's famous Clarinet Concerto. This is not to say that *Accanto* is more conservative than, say, *Pression*; nor is it to deny that the solo part in this work features considerable difficulties and new techniques (for it certainly does). But the engagement with a traditional genre introduces an historical dimension that inevitably contends for our attention with a more overtly physical experience.

It is certainly the case that early paradigmatic examples of works with this singular focus, such as those just discussed, tend to be for soloists or small ensembles. More recently, however, the concerto has assumed a more central place in this form of exploration. This is partly because the financial resources needed for a larger-scale piece of instrumental theatre have increased as composers' reputations

²³ Ferneyhough 1995, 5.

²⁴ Mosch 2007.

have grown; it may also be because, as observed in Chapter 2.2, there has developed a keener sense that allusion to tradition can be anything but a statement of conservatism. Crucially, I think, the concerto's tendency towards both theatricality and virtuosity has fostered precisely the kind of modernist enquiry we are discussing here.

Concertante elements became central to the work of both Kagel and Ferneyhough in the late 1980s and 90s. Importantly, the preoccupation with the physicality of performance has remained intense in the work of both composers. 1992's *Konzertstück* for timpani and orchestra, for instance, represents Kagel at his most theatrical. Reacting against the solo instrument's ability to create a ferocious wall of sound, Kagel creates a powerless solo cadenza in which the timpanist uses only brushes. When the soloist finally has the opportunity to attack his instrument, he is ordered to do so with such violence that he crashes through the skin of the drum. Meanwhile, the interactions of soloists with small, often idiosyncratic ensembles have emerged as a key preoccupation of Ferneyhough's oeuvre, as in *La Chûte d'Icare* for clarinet and small ensemble (1988), *Terrain* for violin and wind octet (1992), and *Allgebrach* for oboe and nine solo strings (1996). In none of these works is the level of technical difficulty (for any of the players, soloist or not) less than extreme; and in all of these works we encounter a 'filtering' effect akin to that found in *Cassandra's Dream Song*, along with a marked emphasis on the material forcefulness of sound and the processes behind its production. The straining of the player, the resistances of the instrument, and the abrasive frequency and amplitude of the vibrations produced, are central to this section's second case study.

The Exploration of Sound

Our final preliminary consideration is an aspect of physicality which is pertinent to both of the forthcoming case studies. The exploration of sound is a central component of a great deal of modernist music: the borderlines between noise, everyday sounds and music have continuously been questioned and renegotiated; technologies such as spectral analysers have enabled composers to examine and implement what are variously called the ‘microscopic properties’ or the ‘anatomy’ of sound;²⁵ and timbre has frequently become a primary structural parameter as more conventional considerations such as harmony and melody have been pushed to points of perceived exhaustion. Despite this, the somewhat amorphous quality of ‘sound’ as a concept has meant that, until recently, it has been neglected in scholarship when compared with more easily defined entities such as rhythm and harmony. One useful contribution in this area has been Douglas Kahn’s history of ‘sounds in the arts’, although the focus of this work is on the musicalisation of everyday sounds.²⁶ More relevant to the foregoing analyses is David Metzger’s work on ‘sonic flux’, and the ‘motion and transformation’ of ‘composed sonorities’.²⁷ Metzger suggestively places the concerto at the heart of his discussion of sonic flux in recent works (indeed, the concertante work he discusses is Saariaho’s*à la fumée*). The key factor behind this placement seems to be the genre’s negotiation of relationships between sound masses and single lines. The concerto’s usefulness as a site for this

²⁵ ‘Anatomy of sound’ is a term of Lachenmann’s. See Mosch 2007.

²⁶ Kahn 1999.

²⁷ Metzger 2009, 177.

type of exploration will be discussed more thoroughly in both of the forthcoming case studies.

In the last few decades many Nordic composers have focussed intently on the physical properties of sound. It will be recalled that Nørgård's Third Symphony (1975) is structured fastidiously around the harmonic series, drawing attention to the intrinsic interconnectedness of rhythmic hierarchy, harmony and timbre in ways that anticipate developments of the French spectral school (developments that are discussed at greater length throughout the following case studies). A naturalistic engagement with sound has characterised much of Nørgård's work ever since; the rather striking photograph on the cover of Anders Beyer's essay collection captures the composer on a Balinese beach listening intently for the ocean's 'shadow tone'. This nebulous notion is demonstrative of the ways in which the study of sound is strongly associated with projections of mystical depth: it is a study which can readily appeal to notions of the natural, and of 'essences' uncontaminated by Western harmony.

More scientifically rigorous, less mystically orientated, is the strand of 'Sonology' developed in Norway. Especially in the 1980s, a number of now-influential Norwegian composers studied at the Institute of Sonology in Utrecht, where the disciplines of music, acoustics and music technology have been intertwined since the 50s.²⁸ The main stated aim of this Institute was the development of methods for analysing and describing sound based on the ideas of Pierre Schaeffer. The leading Norwegian composers associated with this development are Lasse Thoresen and Olav Anton Thommessen. In keeping with a tendency noted in my introduction, they

²⁸ See Koninklijke 2009. Several Sonology departments are now scattered around Europe, with notable centres at The Hague's Royal Conservatory and at the University of Padova

retained a slight distance from this Central European development, returning to the Nordic periphery of Europe for a sustained period of adaptation. This involved a rapport with theories of linguistics and gesture: as Harrauld Herresthal and Morton Eide Pedersen observe,

knowledge of sound spectra was combined with tale-telling, letting [composers] produce works where timbres and isolated sounds could take the function ordinarily taken by a theme or motif.²⁹

One of the most important trends in Finland, meanwhile, during the early 1980s, was an intense engagement with French spectralism. This compositional school, largely associated with IRCAM, is arguably the foremost recent manifestation of the modernist enquiry into sound and its compositional implementation. The two composers discussed at length in this section, Saariaho and Lindberg, both worked extensively at IRCAM. Lindberg has since returned to Finland, but Saariaho remains resident in Paris, still closely involved with developments at the Centre Pompidou. The compositional employment of sound spectra remains characteristic of both composers' work, and there is perhaps a resultant risk of a reception which draws them together in a somewhat vague and indistinct way. While we start here with a connection between Saariaho and Lindberg – an intense preoccupation with the physicality of music, manifested to a striking degree in concertos – the following two case studies explode that unity and attempt to demonstrate the divergent paths this preoccupation has taken.

²⁹ Herresthal and Pedersen 2002, 418.

4.2

The Violin Concerto as Grail: Kaija Saariaho's *Graal Théâtre*

How does one go about composing a violin concerto in the late twentieth century? I suggested earlier in this thesis that the concerto is a relatively loose, 'messy' genre, less demanding than the symphony, for instance, in terms of conventional analytical values such as tautness, cohesion and depth; indeed, certain concerto traditions, mentioned in Chapter 3.2, call for a degree of high-spirited playfulness, potentially making for a less anxious compositional process. Yet, by virtue of its particular history, the violin concerto is surely an exception to the rule. A strong generic tie with Romantic notions of profundity, isolated subjectivity, and highly charged affective states is in part a response to the violin's technical characteristics. As David E. Schneider observes,

a string instrument can not only sustain a line in a high tessitura, soft dynamics and slow tempo, it can do so without losing what Joseph Kerman has dubbed *virtù* – a term useful for describing impressive soloistic qualities that do not rely on the fireworks commonly equated with virtuosity.¹

Yet the violin concerto's history is more imposing than those of concertos for the other string instruments. Following Beethoven's Op.61 – the 'King of Concertos', as one 1930s commentator rather elaborately put it² – the violin concerto is monumentalised in the nineteenth century as a genre at which one makes a single, definitive attempt, rather than attempting a multiple (symphonic) canon. The sense of monumentality is strongly reinforced in the first half of the twentieth century: Alban

¹ Schneider 2005, 145.

² Lawrence Sommers in Stowell 1999, at 1.

Berg's 1935 concerto, arguably the preeminent work in the twentieth-century repertory, is famously dedicated 'to the memory of an angel', although its characteristically complex web of intertextual and numerological signifiers, along with a combination of gestural suggestiveness and agency-ambiguity,³ ensures that the range of possible programmes extends far beyond the 'official' one relating to Manon Gropius.⁴ This apparent symbolic richness only contributes to the potentially oppressive sense of weightiness associated with the work. The concertos of Benjamin Britten and Karl Amadeus Hartmann (1939's *Musik der Trauer*), for instance, reinforce the link between the violin concerto and themes of death and transfiguration.⁵ One might wonder, on hearing the mournful passacaglia of Britten's 'finale', the Munchian scream of Hartmann's, or Berg's closing setting of 'Es ist Genug', whether these works are requiems for a genre. In their wake, the threnody becomes the dominant generic topos, as in Shostakovich's first Violin Concerto (1947), and the once-dominant fiddle-led dancing finale is usually attended by a dark modernist irony: divested of its idealised, pictorial qualities, the folk-fiddle topic returns to lead a sardonic *danse macabre*.

Of course, violin concerto production has remained alive and buoyant to the present day, with composers adopting a variety of stances, anxious, ironic, evasive, towards a potentially suffocating tradition. Indeed, the early 1990s were distinguished by a significant cluster of violin concertos.⁶ One approach in these works has been to construct a distance from historically received notions of the violin as Western

³ Joseph Kerman has argued that the Concerto's opening ascent, worked around the violin's open strings, is an 'all-encompassing metaphor – the birth of natural acoustics, birth of the twelve-tone row, birth of Manon Gropius, birth of Woman' (Kerman 1999, 51).

⁴ Jarman 1990, 185-92.

⁵ David E. Schneider argues for this connection in Schneider 2005, 145.

⁶ As Antony Bye suggests in Bye 1991, 75.

music's quintessential *cantabile* or melodic⁷ instrument and, connectedly, of the violin concerto as a dramatic genre involving 'human' protagonists. The range of playing techniques and sonorities has expanded so considerably in the later twentieth century that the contemporary composer is presented with a vast range of alternatives to *cantabile* melody;⁸ likewise, the emotional connotations of the concerto-as-drama can be eschewed through a firm emphasis on more abstract questions of audibility, acoustic balancing and tuning – in line, perhaps, with a modernist interrogation of 'sound itself' (as I discussed in the previous section). György Ligeti's commentary on his Violin Concerto (1989-1993) is notable for focusing only, and at length, on such technical matters as the variety of tuning systems employed and the interactions of the harmonics of different instruments.⁹ Of course, his Concerto frequently references historical models: in particular, the second movement, 'Aria-Hoquetus-Choral' pulls towards more recognisably concertante topics, nodding most obviously towards the Stravinsky Concerto. At the same time, the Violin Concerto is characteristic of Ligeti's preoccupation with stylistic 'impurity',¹⁰ and its exuberant play with an anachronistic variety of historic models, none of them inseparably associated with the concerto, forges a distance from the genre: if anything unifies this pointedly heterogeneous work, it is a late twentieth-century preoccupation with different tuning systems and their resultant sonorities, rather than a protracted engagement with generic tradition.

Elliott Carter forges space within this stifling tradition by stressing distance from its perceived Romanticism. Where David Schiff identifies an essential

⁷ See Kramer 2007, 207.

⁸ For some of these alternatives, see Zukofsky 1992, 143-147.

⁹ See Lobanova 2002, 357-359.

¹⁰ See Floros 1996, 30.

incompatibility of style and genre as a source of anxiety, I am inclined towards the view that an accented incompatibility is precisely the mechanism by which Carter's work combats anxiety:

We can detect the underlying anxiety that Carter brought to the genre [...], a sense that its traditions were antagonistic to his own style [...] Its poetic content is remarkably Carterian in its enactment of states of alienation. Unlike the Piano and Oboe Concertos, Carter did not give the violin its own orchestra. Throughout the work it stands alone in its materials and moods.¹¹

The dominance of this sense of alienation is perhaps a reaction to the tone of collective lament that represents such an important twentieth-century violin topic (certainly in the Berg Concerto, for instance, which Carter reportedly described as 'so sentimental' while he was working on his own¹²).

John Adams, when discussing his own attempt at the genre, speaks quite frankly of the anxieties it elicits:

So many composers [...] had written just one violin concerto. These tend to be their greatest works, so unless one is completely historically indifferent, which I can't say I am, one tends to tread lightly.¹³

This lightness of step seems audible in the concerto's first movement, in which unbroken strands of solo melody are spun across the 'dancefloor'¹⁴ provided by the orchestra's floating, non-diatonic successions of second-inversion triads. This impression of floating also pervades the concerto's second movement, 'Body through which the Dream Flows', in which the violin is configured as a 'disembodied spirit' moving through the 'body' of the orchestral chaconne. Combined with the work's

¹¹ Schiff 1998, 267-268.

¹² Schiff 1998, 267.

¹³ John Adams in Steinberg 2008, 155 .

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

pervasive sense of nostalgia (in both its sweeping lyricism and retrospective harmonies), this light, even disembodied feel can at times create a sense of ghostliness – a comment, conceivably, on the work's genre? An alternative reading, again linked to the role of melody, is that the violin concerto genre – alive, muscular, dominating – wrenches an almost tortured lyricism out of the composer. As Adams comments,

I knew that if I were to compose a violin concerto I would have to solve the issue of melody. I could not possibly have produced such a thing in the 1980s because my compositional language was principally one of massed sonorities riding on great rippling waves of energy [...] As if to compensate for years of neglecting the singing line, the Violin Concerto emerged as an almost implacably melodic piece – an example of 'hyper-melody'.¹⁵

Let us, then, summarise the main aesthetic and technical challenges posed by the violin concerto to the late twentieth-century composer. First, the genre developed strong ties with Romantic monumentality in the nineteenth century, and thus became likely to provoke increasingly stifling influence-anxiety in successive generations of composers. Second, it became strongly associated, in the first half of the twentieth century, with extreme affective states, emotive protagonists, and tragic drama. Third, lament became a dominant generic topic, while other previous staples of the genre, such as the folk-fiddle finale, became difficult to sustain amid a prevailing sense of desolation (the darkly ironic imitation of common generic topics also has a limited lifespan). Fourth, the violin's insistent lyricism made problematic demands on those composers who were largely neglecting melody and exploring other parameters (the clattering, percussive sound of the piano, by contrast might seem better suited to this avoidance of lyricism). To these I would add one further,

¹⁵ Adams 2009

somewhat paradoxical problem: though oppressively weighty, the twentieth-century violin concerto has never quite reflected dialectically on its own imminent implosion and demise in a way that could compare with the twentieth-century symphony. Perhaps because one can cling to an idea of progressivism in a work that explores new instrumental techniques, the violin concerto has tended to struggle on under its own weight, rather than viewing itself from the kind of detached distance which allowed the anti-symphonic symphony to flourish in the latter half of the twentieth century. There are no violin concertos which enact the overt generic deconstruction performed by Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia* or Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's *Symphony, Antiphony*.¹⁶

It will be noticed that the three recent violin concerto composers cited above, Ligeti, Carter and Adams, were all internationally well established when they published their forays into this particularly thorny genre (Adams, though relatively young in this group, had already produced well-known works like *Shaker Loops* (1978) and *Nixon in China* (1987)). In spite of this, a range of evasive strategies can be discerned in these concertos. In the following case study I analyse a violin concerto written by Kaija Saariaho (b.1952) in 1994, at a stage when this composer, though a noted figure in Paris and the recipient of several prestigious awards, was still to develop the leading international position she commands today.¹⁷ While this concerto was not written especially early in Saariaho's career (her first published work, *Bruden*, dates back to 1977) its compelling confrontation with genre can readily be seen as a crucial stage in the formation of Saariaho's highly acclaimed dramatic

¹⁶ Gudmundsen-Holmgreen is course the subject of this thesis's final case study.

¹⁷ As Pirkko Moisala argues, it was with the acclaimed opera *Amour de Loin* (2000), winner of the Grawmemeyer Award in 2003, that Saariaho arrived 'at the forefront of contemporary composers' (Moisala 2009, 22).

idiom of the late 1990s and 2000s. That confrontation is all the more remarkable when one considers Saariaho's aesthetic preoccupations and stylistic tendencies in the early 90s, and indeed the tropes which dominate her reception to this day. In the following section I outline some reasons why the violin concerto would have been a particularly challenging genre for Saariaho in 1994.

Saariaho: a Concertante Composer?

Saariaho's music rarely makes explicit reference to classical traditions, let alone those so problematic as the violin concerto. Still to adopt a generic title for any of her works, Saariaho prefers to cite literary or visual models, and occasionally natural phenomena.¹⁸ Her historical allusions are typically to a distant past predating classical instrumental traditions: the evocation of a shrouded ancient world plays an important role in the composer's projections of timelessness and mysticism. Always seeming somewhat aloof from the classical tradition, she has remained particularly distant, at least in her reception history, from its Austro-German canon. Saariaho has lived in Paris since 1982, and her 'Frenchness' has consequently been asserted with such frequency that discussions of her regional identity are, paradoxically, often more simplistic than they might be if she had stayed more closely associated with Finland (Saariaho's period of study at the Freiburg Musikhochschule in 1981-2, with Brian Ferneyhough and Klaus Huber, is generally neglected in discussions of her music). The biographical 'quirk' of long-term residence in Paris allows two regional

¹⁸ See Moisala 2009, 55-60, for a discussion of these influences.

stereotypes to emerge as a frame through which to view Saariaho:¹⁹ as the composer acknowledges, ‘in Finland, everyone says my music has a French flavour; in France, they write that this music comes from the bleak north’²⁰ (gender is, of course, the other recurrent platitude, and one with which this case study is not concerned). So consuming is the French-Nordic dichotomy that I am yet to find a discussion of Austro-German influences in Saariaho criticism. The intensity of Saariaho’s engagement with a genre so dominated by Austro-German models surely challenges the prevailing bias.

Second, the conceptualisation of music as drama is hardly compatible with the metaphors that dominate Saariaho reception. Early in her career, Saariaho emphasised an aesthetic of ‘purity’,²¹ articulated via uncompromising position-statements on programme music, which was condemned by the composer in 1989 as ‘formally loose and lacking originality [...] Putting together the form is a matter of operating with abstract but sounded parameters’²² (one wonders whether this emphasis on abstraction was in part a reaction to Paavo Heininen’s criticisms of Saariaho’s over-reliance on texts as a composition student: Saariaho recalls that she ‘was locked into writing vocal music all the time. In my visual expression I always

¹⁹ A comment on the recent *Notes on Light* reflects that this weak interpretative device remains at large: ‘a Finn long resident in Paris, she writes as though pressed in each piece to rehearse her autobiography and demonstrate how deep, primeval, Scandinavian broodings are wholly compatible with the Gallic meticulousness of a composer such as Dutilleux’ (Driver 2008). Driver’s jaded regional stereotypes tell us considerably more about Driver’s criticism than Saariaho’s music. Even if one were to accept his Scandinavian-Gallic axis, the notion that this supposed synthesis should be considered the rehearsal of an autobiography is highly problematic. That notion is symptomatic of a tendency to latch onto a limited set of ‘quirks’ in Saariaho’s biography – while Driver makes no mention of gender, it is, I suspect, a reason behind the relatively pronounced emphasis on biography which prevails more generally in Saariaho reception.

²⁰ Saariaho in Moisala 2009, 29.

²¹ As Julian Anderson notes in Anderson 1992b, 616.

²² Saariaho in Oskala 2008, 6.

needed to have humans, I couldn't break into abstraction'²³). Saariaho repeatedly claimed throughout the 1980s that she would never compose an opera,²⁴ although she has since composed two, *L'Amour de Loin* (2000) and *Adriana Mater* (2007), both highly acclaimed works which arguably dominate her recent oeuvre. Prior to the operas, discussions of Saariaho's music, perhaps in response to the composer's emphasis on abstraction, very rarely invoke ideas of human agents acting and interacting in a work. Even the agency of the human performers is often minimised through a focus on electronic sound production; the early tape composition *Vers le blanc* digitally samples the sound of a choir but removes breath noises, with the stated aim of producing 'music without bodies'.²⁵

Dramatic interpretations are also obscured by the prevalence of visual metaphors, particularly those concerning light, in Saariaho interpretation: her textures 'shimmer', her timbres are almost invariably 'colours', and the vague impression conveyed in many commentaries is of lights slowly changing in hue and intensity.²⁶ This tendency responds in part to the widespread use of the term 'spectral' as a convenient label for the works Saariaho composed in her time at IRCAM. It is also the result of Saariaho's propensity for vivid imagery in works such as *Verblendungen* (1984), *Lichtbogen* (1986) and, most recently, the cello concerto *Notes on Light* (2007). Saariaho does not resolve the tension between these visual metaphors and her emphasis on 'abstract but sounded parameters'. One possible partial resolution is that light metaphors are so dominant in the conception and interpretation of this music that they are elevated to an all-pervasiveness where they regain a certain

²³ Saariaho in Beyer 2000, 4.

²⁴ Moisala 2009, 93.

²⁵ See Moisala 2009, 30.

²⁶ See Moisala 2009, 57.

purity. It might also be added that it is hardly surprising to encounter a predominance of light metaphors in the reception of a Nordic composer.²⁷ At least in Saariaho's music up until the late 1980s, this type of imagery is reinforced by a resistance to the clear textural and formal individuation that normally prompts more dramatic interpretation. The tendency is toward gradual process rather than abrupt change, and solo lines set against the orchestra are often not sufficiently lengthy to provoke the listener's experience of an individual 'voice' separating itself from the collective – very little of Saariaho's music up until the mid 90s is melodic. An avoidance of sharp individuation is also inherent to one of Saariaho's key preoccupations, the exploration of what Anni Katariina Oskala terms 'transitional spaces'.²⁸ Exemplary 'spaces' in Saariaho's oeuvre are those between a pure tone and inharmonic noise, or between harmony and timbre.²⁹ Oskala also connects the concept with the prominence of glissandi in Saariaho's output;³⁰ it will be remembered that I mentioned the striking vocality of certain Saariaho instrumental parts in the chapter on agency – this is an example of another transitional space, that between instrumental music and song. The resultant emphasis on slow transition is, again, hardly compatible with the idea of stark opposition between cleanly defined entities. Violent formal or textural rupture is, with few exceptions, hardly a characteristic that has been underlined in Saariaho's music.³¹

Thirdly and finally, Saariaho had, by 1994, developed an impressive array of strategies by which she could reinvent the work for violin and orchestra as an

²⁷ See, for instance, Stephen Johnson's 'Darkness and Light in Nordic Music' (Johnson 2006).

²⁸ Oskala 2008, 36.

²⁹ Saariaho discusses the spaces between these poles in Saariaho 1987, 84.

³⁰ Oskala 2008, 36.

³¹ Julian Anderson provides one such exception, noting in 1992 the emergence of a 'more violent' style, although the article's emphasis is firmly on spectral transitions (J. Anderson 1992b, 616).

exploration of certain acoustic phenomena, thus evading the concerto tradition. During her work at IRCAM she had shown an intense interest in advanced playing techniques, new sonorities, and the timbral or spatial effects of interactions between different sound sources. The nod towards the distant past was counter-balanced by a determined commitment to the new (the classical concerto would, presumably, occupy the no-man's land between the two). Saariaho's array of distinctly contemporary preoccupations could support a lengthy work for soloist and orchestra (or at least a Ligeti-reminiscent commentary on such a work), avoiding confrontation with a weighty historic genre. Indeed, Saariaho had, by 1994, edged somewhat tentatively towards the textural individuation of soloist(s) and orchestra: ...à *la Fumée* for flute, cello, orchestra and electronics (1990), and *Amers* for cello, orchestra and live electronics (1992). Both works have been described as the first flourishings of a 'stile concertato', a more dramatic development away from the sound masses and gradual transformations of spectralism.³² David Metzger has recently demonstrated how single lines become increasingly prominent throughout the diptych *Du Cristal...à la Fumée*, marking out a transition to a more concertante style: the orchestral sound mass of *Du Cristal* is gradually unravelled into the interweaving lines of ...à *la Fumée*.³³ Ivanka Stoïanova has likewise pointed towards a concertante element in *Amers*.³⁴ Certainly, the prominence of soloists in these works is striking when compared with the sound masses of Saariaho's previous oeuvre. Yet, by keeping the emphasis firmly on electronic manipulation, slow transition and a high modernist interrogation of timbral interactions between lines and sound masses, ...à *la Fumée*

³² Pousset 2000, 67-110.

³³ Metzger 2009, 183-95.

³⁴ Stoïanova 1994, 54.

keeps a distance from a concerto tradition. The centrality of electronics to *Amers* has a similar effect: a microphone developed by IRCAM permits the sound from each of the cello's strings to be picked up separately, such that four loudspeakers, positioned around the concert hall, can amplify one string each.³⁵ Varying the delays across the speakers reinforces the sounds' dislocation from their original source, fragmenting the cello's voice, and often compromising any sense of binary concertante opposition. The work seems less concerned with received tradition than with the distortions and interactions of multiple sound sources. A similar electronic distancing would have been available to Saariaho when composing for violin and orchestra. We therefore have a substantial number of aesthetic reasons, alongside an enviable repertory of evasive manoeuvres suggesting that Saariaho easily could – and probably would – avoid too direct a confrontation with any historic genre, let alone one so loaded as the violin concerto.

Graal Théâtre

Saariaho's violin concerto, titled *Graal Théâtre*, engages intensely with the dramatic associations of its genre (as the latter half of its title suggests), projecting its soloist as a captivating and emotive protagonist. Though never totally relinquishing its abstraction, the concerto for the most part has a strong sense of dynamism and teleology which, combined with the presence of strong instrumental personae, provokes narrative interpretation. It is a strikingly melodic and vividly gestural work. In a remarkable turn against the dominance of electronics in Saariaho's previous music, *Graal Théâtre* employs only acoustic resources – a large but conventional orchestra,

³⁵ See Szendy 1992.

albeit featuring a wide range of percussion instruments, and an unamplified violin.³⁶ Oppositions, both formal and temporal, are often stark and sometimes violent; a pervasive impression of binary opposition is conveyed in the titles of the concerto's two movements, *Delicato* and *Impetuoso*. Tim Howell, among others, has connected this opposition with the idea of an ambivalent, polarised response to tradition.³⁷

Of course, when viewed from one perspective, the work's title reflects an evasion of the concerto tradition: 'Grael' harks back most obviously to the medieval tradition of chivalric romance, in common with several of Saariaho's works (most notably *Amour de Loin*, which focuses on the life of a thirteenth-century French troubadour). In the context of a concerto, this medievalism might appear a veil for a more pressing generic influence-anxiety. Yet the archetypal quest plot,³⁸ as exemplified in romance literature, is particularly ripe for a kind of concerto interpretation with strong precedents.³⁹ Central to both quest and concerto is the single heroic protagonist, a paradigm of the virtues (*virtù* or virtuosity) embraced by the wider community. The hero ventures into uncharted, exotic territory (hitherto unexplored technical resources of the solo instrument, perhaps) and faces a series of tests. Additionally, both forms are deeply concerned with the relationship between solo protagonist and community. *Grael Théâtre*, as I argue in this chapter, engages intensely with this basic quest structure, and also with the central grail topics of ritual, revelation and the miraculous. Crucially, this engagement is dialectical: Saariaho reinforces these topics at some points, and deconstructs or resists them at others.

³⁶ Saariaho produced a chamber version, with an unaltered solo part, in 1997. The form is unchanged in this version, and the only difference is a lighter scoring of the orchestral parts.

³⁷ Howell 2006, 208.

³⁸ For more on 'archetypal plots' in a specifically musical context see Newcomb 1987.

³⁹ A noteworthy example of concerto interpretation on these mythical lines is that of Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto, Mvt.II, which has long been held to have strong associations with the Orpheus legend. See Jander 1985.

While medieval grail quests are typically long, trying but ultimately successful,⁴⁰ *Graal Théâtre* is altogether more ambivalent. This is, of course, in keeping with the modern use of the term ‘holy grail’, which implies something desired, sought after, but never possessed. I therefore relate the concerto not only to the quest’s medieval tellings but to more recent, less optimistic adaptations, most notably Alfred Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* and T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*.

Yet the aim of my analysis is not only to discuss the structure of *Graal Théâtre* in relation to an archetypal plot: this chapter is, after all, concerned with the violin concerto genre and the anxious struggle it entails. While I have already suggested that *Graal Théâtre* has a somewhat indirect rapport with its genre – both in its marked theatricality and in its adaptation of a quest plot easily connected to concerto form – there are a number of other details suggesting more strongly that Saariaho’s grail quest is intertwined with her engagement with the violin concerto tradition. In the following paragraphs I outline those details before positing the particular, generically loaded grail-symbol on which *Graal Théâtre*’s quest is centred.

In 1994, the violin concerto would have represented an authorial grail for Saariaho. As I have argued, the problems this genre poses to any contemporary composer are potentially stifling; yet they were particularly problematic for a composer with Saariaho’s aesthetic preoccupations and stylistic traits in the early 1990s. Saariaho speaks of a long period spent studying the existing repertory before embarking on the composition of her own violin concerto – she refers to her attendance of rehearsals of the Beethoven as the inspiration for her own attempt (Gidon Kremer, the soloist in those rehearsals, would become the first performer and

⁴⁰ Wood 2000.

dedicatee of *Graal Théâtre*).⁴¹ In the concerto's programme note, Saariaho reveals the origin of the work's title:

Graal Théâtre takes its title from a book of the same name by Jacques Roubaud. [...] Roubaud's interpretation of the old legend, with its very personal example, [...] encouraged me to realise something that I had long found impossible: to bring an idea of the violin concerto, a genre with so many moving and skilful masterpieces, into my musical framework and language.⁴²

This choice of precursor is very significant. Making exhaustive reference to the many existing adaptations of the Arthurian legend, Roubaud's text is self-reflexively concerned with its author's attempt to integrate the Holy Grail quest and its protagonists into a new, rigorous set of mathematically generated linguistic constraints. The book is broadly in keeping with two of Roubaud's fundamental principles: first, that 'a text written according to a constraint must speak of this constraint';⁴³ second, that 'the apparently unrelated fields of poetry and mathematics [are] complementary disciplines characterised by the use of formal constraints'.⁴⁴ These recent adaptations amply demonstrate how the rich history of this archetypal quest-narrative has been characterised, even from its beginning, by a sense of shared authorial enterprise and a proliferation of self-conscious adaptations and expansions of precursor texts. The grail motif first appeared in Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval ou Le conte du Graal*, dated to around 1190, and, while Chrétien died before completing it, a number of other writers quickly offered what are now

⁴¹ Michel 1994, 22-23.

⁴² On the Chester Novello website. In citing a book with just Roubaud as its author, Saariaho seems to be referring to *Graal Fiction* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977). Although there seems to be some confusion in the programme note, one suspects Saariaho's use of the word 'theatre' rather than 'fiction' reflects her interest in a musico-dramatic rather than textual medium. Florence Delay co-authored the theatrical adaptation of Roubaud's ideas. Together they wrote ten Arthurian plays between 1980 and 2005. These are collectively titled *Graal Théâtre*.

⁴³ Jacques Roubaud in Ireland 1995, 163.

⁴⁴ Ireland 1995, 165. In his autobiography, Roubaud considers the pursuit of this inter-relationship as his own Quest for the Holy Grail (see Laskowski-Caujolle 2001, 72-73).

collectively termed *The Continuations*. Throughout these *Continuations* the grail acquires an increasingly 'sacramental' character (the placement of the grail in the context of Christ's passion is usually attributed to a series of three romances written by Robert de Boron between c.1191-1200).⁴⁵ Tracing this development through the centuries, one eventually arrives at the contemporary multitude of positions on the source and meaning of the 'Grail Story':

Celtic myth, the Eucharistic rites of Eastern Christianity, ancient mystery religion, Jungian archetypal journeys, dualist heresies, Templar treasure, the descendents of Christ and Mary Magdelene, several actual objects, and any combination of the above.⁴⁶

The crucial point in this is that the grail story's adaptation and development, from author to author, is itself a compelling and frequently told story, and one now inseparable from the grail quest itself, which only develops in richness and allure with each variation. Thus Roubaud and Delay present us with two intertwined dramas: that of the grail quest itself, and that of the pointedly constrained act of retelling. I suggest in this chapter that Saariaho's *Graal Théâtre* shares precisely this duality.

The two theatres become intertwined in dealing with a particular grail-object whose significance has been constructed and safeguarded by numerous canonical retellings: the D major triad. This particularly loaded harmonic entity represents the central, most highly valued area in a fiercely contested generic territory, and is regarded in the forthcoming analysis as a grail-sonority. As such, its tantalising presence lies at the heart of *Graal Théâtre's* chivalric quest narrative. My analysis

⁴⁵ For more information on the development of the grail motif, see Wood 2000, 171-174.

⁴⁶ Wood 2000, 169.

explores the ways in which a number of chivalric tropes are negotiated, reinforced or resisted in Saariaho's retelling.

The D Major Triad as Grail

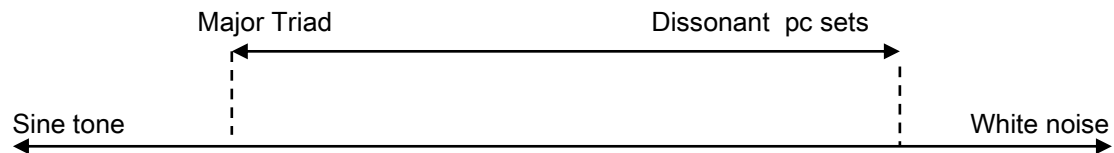
D major often functions as a grail-key in Wagner's *Parsifal*, where it is associated with healing and redemption, just as the grail is associated with the miraculous sustenance of the maimed Fisher King.⁴⁷ This tonality has still stronger associations with the violin concerto tradition: the Beethoven, Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky concertos are all in D major (even if the Stravinsky, as Paul Griffiths suggests, seems at times to be written 'against' the great D major predecessors⁴⁸). There are good technical reasons for this choice of key: tonic, dominant and subdominant can all be played on open strings of the solo instrument. Yet Saariaho's musical syntax is often tonally allusive rather than tonally functional. Consonant sonorities appear quite frequently in her oeuvre, usually because of the similarity between the major triad and the harmonic spectra that Saariaho explores. Yet tonality's hierarchical dissonance-consonance dichotomy is replaced with the opposition between white noise and sine tone. These two extremes are explored most pointedly in the earlier, electroacoustic works Saariaho composed at IRCAM; however, neither extreme is a technical possibility within the entirely acoustic confines of *Graal Théâtre*. I therefore posit a somewhat narrower non-tonal

⁴⁷ See Watson 2002, 34. See also David Lewin's work on Parsifal (Lewin 1992).

⁴⁸ Griffiths 2007.

transitional space between clashing and complementary, mutually reinforcing harmonics – between dissonant, complex pitch class sets and the D major triad.

Fig 4.2.1: *Graal Théâtre*'s harmonic-timbral transitional space



Despite this spectral conceptualisation of Saariaho's harmonic-timbral syntax, I do not wholly subscribe to the view that Saariaho's consonances are spectrally rather than tonally derived: that distinctively 'spectral' superimposition of an augmented fourth and minor seventh on a major triad, for instance, is never heard; much of the drama of the *Graal Théâtre* quest is centred on harmonic tensions which I hear as tonally or at least modally generated. It is therefore worth emphasising that the grail-object is the D major triad, with all its historical connotations, rather than a harmonic spectrum on D.

This triad is hinted at, if not fully unveiled, at numerous points throughout *Graal Théâtre*. Most of these points are discussed in the forthcoming analysis, the structure of which is broadly narrative and chronologically organised (occasionally, however, the explication of a certain topic demands skips through the work). The sense of regular departure and return may function as a harmonic analogue to the several instances in the grail quest when the knight-errant reaches the Fisher King's castle (in some tellings, the Chapel Perilous) only to fail a final test. Just as grail tellings often begin with the knight already in tantalisingly close proximity to the grail, *Graal Théâtre* begins with an approach to the D major triad, albeit in an iteration which is both contingent and barely distinguishable as such. The solo violin bow

flutters rapidly yet almost imperceptibly between the second and third strings, playing a natural harmonic a^2 and an open a^1 respectively – the somewhat blurred distinction between the two is partially the result of a wiry *sul ponticello* sonority dominated in both cases by higher overtones. In bb.2-3, a descending glissando from a^1 to $\sharp^1$ on the second string produces ascending harmonics from a^2 , through d^3 , up to $f\sharp^3$. Of course, matters are by no means so clear-cut: especially in the spaces between the first, second and third harmonics, a particularly unpredictable, glassy sound of indiscernible pitch is produced; the difficulty of sounding these harmonics, especially as the bow flies between the strings, makes the second-inversion D major triad fragile and contingent at best, imperceptible at worst.

Ex. 4.2.2: *Graal Théâtre*, opening bars

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is labeled 'Sounding pitch' and contains a series of notes with a 'rubato, dolce' marking and a 'S.P.' label. The bottom staff is labeled 'Solo Violin' and contains a 'sul D' marking, a 'mp' (mezzo-piano) dynamic, and a 'gliss.' (glissando) marking. A 'S.P.' label with an arrow points from the top staff to the bottom staff.

This briefest glimpse of the grail-sonority marks the beginning of *Graal Théâtre's* quest. In the following section I am less concerned with the specifics of the story told in *Graal Théâtre*, and more with the basic trope of questing.

Questing

Saariaho's oeuvre provides several paradigmatic examples of musical modernism's resistance, whether through non-linearity, non-closure or some other means, to the

conceptualisation of works as journeys with clear destinations; her resistance to the concept of stories told musically is arguably still more marked.⁴⁹ Many of Saariaho's earlier works in particular present a striking challenge to the very notion of teleology. A good example is 1983's *Verblendungen*, which 'evolves from climax to gradually vanishing lines, [...] contest[ing] the traditional ideal in which the work develops towards the climax'.⁵⁰ Later on, the diptych *Du Cristal...à la Fumée* runs contrary to the conventional trope of crystallisation from chaos. Saariaho's first explicit use of travel as a theme is *Stilleben* (1988), although the emphasis here is firmly on the denial of arrival. For Anne Sivuola-Gunaratnam, *Stilleben* is 'a maximal expansion of the idea of transition: the theme of travelling is a transition, non-arrival and non-fulfilment';⁵¹ Saariaho considers the work to be about 'longing' (a theme to which we turn in the following section).⁵² For arrival we must wait until *Amers*, in which the solo cello is a 'navigator on the sea' guided and misguided by orchestral beacons ('amers'). Anticipating the harmonic teleology of *Graal Théâtre*, a 'basic chord for the work functions as a kind of returning tonic chord' (the 'tonic' in *Amers*, however, is not nearly so historically loaded: it is a set 4-12 tethered to an E $\flat$ in the bass).⁵³

The transitional space between a grail-sonority and pitchless noise is compelling and far-reaching terrain for a quest that dramatises the distance (both metaphorical and physical) between the familiar and the exotic – a traditional quest preoccupation. *Graal Théâtre's* solo protagonist moves through the richly and

⁴⁹ For a discussion and typology of different forms of modernist nonlinearity, see J. Kramer 1988, 21-65. Robert Adlington examines the resistance of much twentieth-century music in particular to motional metaphors in Adlington 2003 (this resistance is of particular pertinence to my section on 'Space'). Adlington uses Saariaho's *Du cristal* as an example of this resistance. He turns instead to light metaphors, reinforcing what is arguably the most dominant metaphor in this composer's reception.

⁵⁰ Moisala 2009, 31.

⁵¹ Sivuola-Gunaratnam in Moisala 2009, 35.

⁵² Saariaho in Moisala 2009, 31.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 39.

restlessly changeable harmonic terrain provided by the orchestra. A sense of harmonic exoticism is generally created through microtonal tunings in the string section or through dissonant pitch class sets, in which the predominant interval class is 1, being compressed tightly into the bass register. Such sonorities often contrast the solo violin's equal-tempered and more tonally suggestive lines, dramatising the difference between protagonist and environment, as in ex. 4.2.3.

Ex. 4.2.3: Example of harmonic, melodic and rhythmic contrasts between protagonist and environment, bb. 40-46

The musical score for Example 4.2.3, measures 40-46, is presented in a multi-staff format. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Perc. 1:** Glockenspiel, measures 40-46, marked *pp* and *mp*, with a "very even" triplet pattern.
- Perc. 2:** Timp., measures 40-46, marked *pp* and *p*.
- Harp:** measures 40-46, marked *pp* and *mp*, with a "very even" triplet pattern.
- Piano:** measures 40-46, marked *pp* and *mp*, with a "very even" triplet pattern.
- Solo Vln.:** measures 40-46, marked *sempre espressivo*, *mf*, and *p*, with a melodic line featuring triplets and slurs.
- Vln. I:** measures 40-46, marked *mf* and *p*.
- Vln. II:** measures 40-46, marked *mf* and *p*.
- Vla.:** measures 40-46, marked *pp* and *mp*, with a "S.P." (Sustained Pedal) section.
- Vlc.:** measures 40-46, marked *pp* and *mp*, with a "S.P." (Sustained Pedal) section.
- D.B.:** measures 40-46, marked *pp* and *mp*, with a "N." (Normal) section.

As the example above demonstrates, rhythmic contrast also contributes significantly to an impression of strangeness. While the expressivity of the solo part is largely the product of rhythmic suppleness and unpredictability, there is often an unyielding evenness and metrical regularity to the orchestral accompaniment. This is usually

suppl d by softer melodic percussion instruments such as the glockenspiel and crotales; the effect of this quiet pulsing can be gently disconcerting (bb.391-393?). Yet there are several points at which rhythmic regularity becomes a threatening orchestral edifice, as in the tensely oppositional bb.280-321. Here, the violin's utterances, rhythmically sinuous, dynamically and harmonically varied, are regularly interspersed with pauses, as if to invite a dialogue. The orchestra, however, produces an uninterrupted and tightly regulated stream of 'very even' semiquaver arpeggios, seemingly oblivious to the violin's invitation. It is as if this vast, uncooperative entity is absolutely unfamiliar with the sense of dialogue central to concerto ritual. The orchestra also seems disconcertingly unaware of the tacet convention in which its constituents stay broadly in rhythmic phase with one another: one of the stranger effects in *Graal Théâtre* is produced by the orchestral texture's tendency to slip away from the four semiquaver grouping suggested on casual inspection of the score: certain instruments often descend through three rather than four pitches, going almost instantly out of phase with the prevailing meter (see, for instance, the piano's 'slip' from groups of four to three, then to two, during bb.285-290). Furthermore, orchestral textures quickly thicken from cleanly articulated arpeggios, spanning more than an octave (in b.293, for instance), to densely packed lines that are frequently no more than a clashing semitone apart (ex. 4.2.4). The orchestra's seeming acceptance of this decline in harmonic and rhythmic clarity places it in sharp contrast with an anxious, hyperactive soloist constantly making harmonic and rhythmic adjustments. The straining, *sforzando* glissandi of bb.307-309 sound like an urgent plea for some form of recognition, of subjectivity, from the orchestra.

Ex. 4.2.4: bb.291-296, a striving soloist subjectivity set against the string section's mechanicity

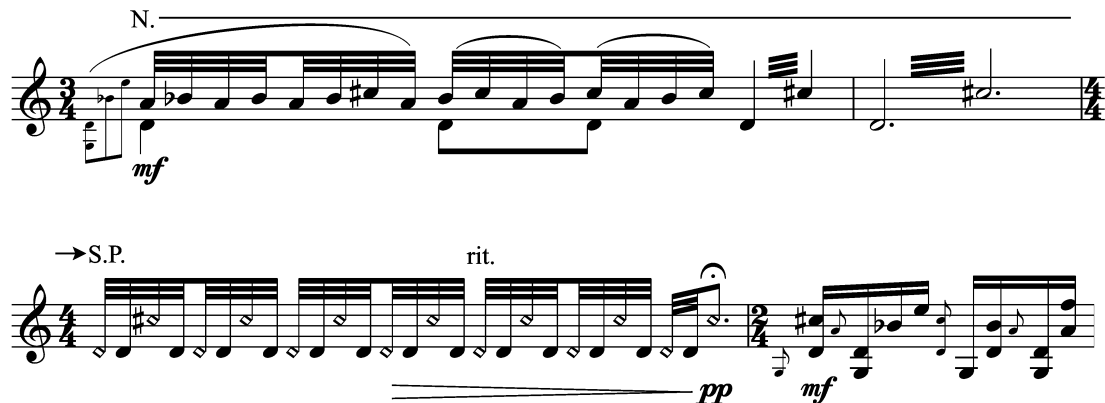
The sense of distance travelled – an essential aspect of a quest narrative – has much to do with these and other contrasts between solo protagonist and environment – contrasts suggestive of misapprehension and rituals unfamiliar to the central protagonist. Of course, one of the principal functions of ritual is as an anti-naturalistic learned behaviour that can signify both hieratic community and the non-belonging of outsiders.⁵⁴ While Saariaho's means of harmonic organisation are diverse, far more so than in her previous works, the sense of a large-scale *telos*, in the form of a D major triad, lends much of the harmonic directionality to this quest. Yet perhaps the missing element in this account so far is the more local sense of teleology which creates a persistent and urgent impression of yearning. Saariaho's method of creating this impression is discussed in the following section.

⁵⁴ As Catherine Bell argues, 'ritual is a matter of various culturally specific strategies for setting some activities off from others, for creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the "sacred" and the "profane", and for ascribing such distinctions to realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors' (Bell 1992, 74).

Yearning

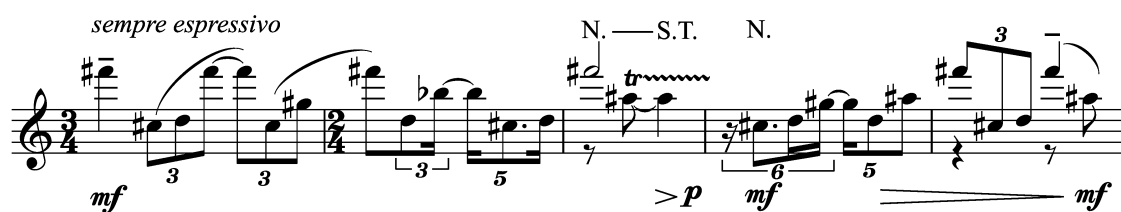
Graal Théâtre's powerful linear orientation, in contrast with the non-linearity and verticality of Saariaho's earlier music, is frequently experienced more locally in the treatment of motivic material. The concerto often creates an urgent sense of yearning through its protracted straining towards melodicism. Early in the first movement the solo violin presents the listener with a small number of pointedly short motivic fragments, perceptibly derived from unstable vertical structures, and repeated insistently. Bb.6-22 are particularly rich in this style of writing. The verticality of these bars is striking: as in the Berg concerto, Saariaho engages closely with the way in which pitches are laid out on the solo instrument: g, d¹, a¹, and e² are prominent, as is the sense that all the pitch classes employed are locked tightly into specific registers. The result is a strict, accented textural stratification that precludes smooth melodic contour: b.9's initial leap of an augmented eleventh, followed by the augmented fourth between b^{b1} and e², makes for a melodic awkwardness only increased by insistent repetition. This awkwardness is further reinforced by a melodic deployment of notes derived from the D minor *harmonic* scale, and a particular focus on the augmented second between b^{b1} and c^{#2}. Furthermore, this small fragment is crammed with suspensions that pull powerfully toward the D major triad. Resolutions are denied, however, and the fragment is simply repeated with scarcely any development. The d¹-c^{#3} dyad of bb.7-8 seems unsatisfactory as a resolution both in voice-leading terms and in its nagging major seventh: the music yearns for the resolution of a D major triad.

Ex. 4.2.5: Pitch-centricity in the opening of *Graal Théâtre*, bb.6-10



An unprecedented strand of solo lyricism appears, ‘sempre espressivo’, in bb.42-55. By contrast with the previous dominance of semiquaver regularity, a rhythmic unpredictability, with frequent variation between triplet and quintuplet groupings, emerges; slurs indicate where ‘breaths’ are to be taken between singing phrases liberated from *Graal Théâtre*’s initial registral tethering (and indeed, the seeming requirement of having more than one string sound at once). While these important elements of lyricism are in place, however, the result is anything but a 12-bar melody; rather, it is a perceptibly coherent succession of units often of no more than a bar’s length.

Ex. 4.2.6: bb.42-46, early 1-bar stirrings of lyricism



The distinction lies partly in the absence of underlying harmonic progression in the orchestra, yet it has more to do with the solo part’s absence of a simple, over-arching

registral shape: the registral high- and low- points of bb.42-55's solo part, f^{#3} and c^{#2}, are frequently heard. Furthermore, these pitches form a memorable, tonally loaded gestalt (f^{#3}-c^{#2}-d²), which the melodic units repeatedly fail to escape. The prominent g^{#2} and a^{#/b^b2} can both be heard as pulling restlessly towards an a² that fails to materialise. The gestures are lyrical; the initial tonal tension, almost reminiscent of an appoggiatura, is a well-worn lyrical device; yet the failure of resolution, coupled with the circular, repetitious patterning of these bars, creates a powerful sense of unfulfilled yearning: as Thomas May argues, 'the motivic material [early in *Graal Théâtre's* first movement] doesn't develop but recurs obsessively'.⁵⁵ Thus the concerto adds a melodic significance to the D major triad: the attraction and repulsion of this *grail-sonore* seems to generate the tug-and-pull of an imagined but still distant *bel canto* line. We will arrive at what I consider the work's grail melody later in the analysis.

The trope of yearning can be further enriched by introducing certain interpretative nuances. It is worth recalling, for instance, that the issue of melody is a particularly problematic one for Saariaho, who has previously placed such a strong emphasis on vertical structures and transitional spaces; problematically, therefore, lyricism is a historical imperative that significantly intensifies the technical challenge of composing a violin concerto. *Bel canto* lyricism can therefore be viewed as another aspect of Saariaho's authorial grail, pursued compulsively but also feared and resisted. One could alternatively explore the erotic connotations of yearning, of the resolution offered by the D major triad, or of the enchantment cast by *bel canto* lyricism – just as the grail quest is eroticised in *Idylls of the King*, where it originates

⁵⁵ May 2010.

in 'the sublimated sexual yearnings of the little nun who sought the convent when her own human passions were unfulfilled':⁵⁶

A holy maid; though never maiden glowed,
But that was in her earlier maidenhood,
With such a fervent flame of human love,
Which being rudely blunted, glanced and shot
Only to holy things.⁵⁷

The intertwinement of the sacred and the erotic is an important theme in Saariaho's work; indeed, *Château de l'âme* (1995) for female choir and orchestra, composed immediately after *Graal Théâtre*, is notable for its use of 'erotic imagery to express religious feelings'.⁵⁸ I would argue that Saariaho's ambivalence towards the grail quest and its underlying motivations is paralleled by an ambivalence towards the concerto tradition – virtuosity being configured as a lustful ritual that works in tension with the more pious intentions often expressed by virtuoso performers (commitment to the text or to the hagiographic status of the composer, for instance). Saariaho reads a similar opposition into the work's title, alluding to a feeling of unease with regard to the theatricality of concerto performance.⁵⁹ In the following section I discuss this opposition in terms of those themes of virtue and piety which underpin grail narratives.

⁵⁶ Pratt 1973, 311. For Hugh Kenner, Tennyson's grail quest partakes of a 'depraved religiosity' in which 'the cup [...] never succeeds in being more than the reward of a refined and sublimated sexual impulse' (Kenner 1959, 170).

⁵⁷ Alfred Tennyson, 'Idylls of the King', II. 72-76.

⁵⁸ Richard Dryer in Moisala 2009, 42.

⁵⁹ See Kaija Saariaho's Programme note to the concerto, published online at Chester Novello.

Straining towards lyricism alternates, throughout the first movement, with vivid and wide-ranging displays of technical accomplishment: much of the movement might be heard as an unabashed showcase of late twentieth-century violin virtuosity. For all this impressive variety, we can identify two tendencies which appear to dominate the display. The first of these is ascending pitch: the vast majority of the soloist's gestures are broadly registrally monodirectional – usually heading towards f^{#3}, a pitch whose significance throughout Saariaho's music is discussed later in the section on revelation. Even for those listeners lacking the technical knowledge to comprehend the precarious nature of intonation high in a string instrument's range, the conflation of pitch with 'up' and 'down' suggests a series of 'uphill struggles'. Each registral ascent can thus be heard as a heroic act more perseverant than the last; the idea of ascent is also congruent with the notion of elevation towards the purity of the grail-sonority.

The other tendency is towards brute force. One of the most distinctive string-playing techniques employed in *Graal Théâtre* is a progressive, but often rapid, increase in bow pressure to produce a 'scratching sound in which the audible pitch is totally replaced by noise'.⁶⁰ The noisiness of the sonic result is enhanced by a corresponding movement of the bow from the normal playing position to the bridge. As ex. 4.2.7 suggests, these escalations in force are usually rapid and short-lived – qualitatively different to that more passive (or perhaps more ominous) drifting cloud of sound that characterises this noise as used by a composer such as Penderecki.

⁶⁰ This is specified in the instructions at Saariaho's instructions at the beginning of the score.

Ex. 4.2.7: *con ultima forza* transitions between pitch and noise

The musical score for Violin, Ex. 4.2.7, is written on a single staff in 3/8 time. It consists of four measures. The first measure is marked 'N.' (Noise) and 'ff' (fortissimo), featuring a rapid sixteenth-note glissando. The second measure is marked 'N.' and 'fff' (fortississimo), continuing the glissando. The third measure is marked 'S.P.' (Sound/Pitch) and 'con ultima forza', showing a sharp upward glissando. The fourth measure is marked 'N.' and 'disperato', featuring a rapid sixteenth-note glissando. The score includes dynamic markings 'ff', 'fff', and 'con ultima forza', and performance instructions 'gliss.' and 'disperato'.

The use of ‘ultima forza’ can readily be interpreted as a deployment of sheer strength to overcome an obstacle to the quest’s progress. Occasionally, this response seems effective: for instance, it is the prelude to a much lighter, ‘energico’ passage in b.234. At other times, however, the ultimate helplessness of the violin is clear when the concerto dramatises its sonic weakness relative to the massive body of the orchestra. We often hear the soloist’s bow hurtling across all four strings in a plucky but futile attempt to right an inevitable concertante inequality and match the towering registral range and forbidding *fortissimo* of an orchestral wall of sound. In bb.310-338, for instance, we are presented with a concerto conflict of striking directness. The battle for sheer audibility is elsewhere more subtle, but the solo instrument’s weakness can often be mocked by the solo contributions of louder instruments. In bb.135-164, for instance, the trumpet constantly threatens to become the primary rather than secondary soloist. While the interaction of soloists begins harmlessly as a dialogue replete with dovetailing and the sharing of melodic ideas, matters quickly become antagonistic in bb.146-153, in which a violin response is obscured by a louder, higher trumpet line. The violin reasserts its dominance through a rapid escalation towards a violence of gesture previously unheard in *Graal Théâtre*: *poco disperato* glissandos in bb.165-172, and b.169’s maximally noisy *sforzando* chord, are frantic displays of strength.

Each of these examples serves to illustrate the unavoidable fragility of the solo instrument. It begins to become clear that the violin must discover a means of overcoming adversity other than brute force. This also seems inevitable because of the harmonic and symbolic purity of the protagonist's *telos*: recalling our continuum between noise and the D major triad, the noisiness generated by the *ultima forza* direction actually distances the violin from the grail-object. A more subtle, learned approach – a more virtuous, less virtuosic mode of pursuit, perhaps – appears necessary. After all, the symbolic and structural significance of the D major triad-as-grail can only be grasped by an initiated elite; this is also true, as I will now demonstrate, of the most intractable obstacle to the quest for this grail.

Common to quest stories is the discovery that the greatest impediment to the protagonist's progress is a weakness of his own – a weakness which might previously have been interpreted as a strength (this is a major contributor to the important moralising element of quest narratives). In the case of *Graal Théâtre*, the impediment seems to lie in the harmonic tensions produced by the violin's physical distribution of pitches. As in Berg's Concerto, the harmonic language of *Graal Théâtre* is in large part a complex response to the open strings of the violin. Of course, in a hypothetical passage in which only the four open strings are heard, the g is more likely than the d¹ to be perceived, at least by the tonally-inclined, bass-privileging ear, as tonic. This potentially weakens the status of *Graal Théâtre's* vaunted harmonic centre, and, throughout the concerto, pitch class 7 (heard in a variety of registers, but frequently in that corresponding to the violin's first string), serves as a persistent source of harmonic ambiguity. It is often the case, in tonally allusive passages such as bb.9-27, that the powerful bottom string creates a strong

hint of subdominant harmony. Only with scordatura – which Saariaho avoids throughout the concerto – would it be possible to offer a 4-3 resolution of this tonal tension. Thus the pitch g becomes a particularly problematic entity.

A distinctive solo gesture, heard twice throughout the concerto (bb.23-28 and 113-115), is a particularly dramatic act of resistance to the first string: a series of ascending glissandi, mainly in the third and fourth strings, strain away from the harmonic tether embodied by repeatedly, obstinately struck open first string. The effort to escape that tether is, on both occasions, unsuccessful: bb.28-32 are distinguished by a descent back towards g, coupled with the compression of a registral space that the glissandi had worked to broaden; even though the glissandi reach a higher pitch during bb.113-115, and in spite of a momentary escape in b.116, g re-establishes itself, with *sforzando* violence, in bb.118-127.

Ex. 4.2.8: Attacking the first string, bb. 23-27

The musical score for Ex. 4.2.8, measures 23-27, is presented in a single system. It features a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The tempo is marked 'piu agitato'. The dynamics are indicated as *mp*, *f*, *mf*, *f*, *mf*, and *f*. Above the staff, there are markings 'N.' and 'S.P.' with arrows indicating a change in the sound production technique. The music consists of rapid, ascending and descending glissandi. The key signature changes from one flat to two flats. The score ends with a final *ff* dynamic.

This pitch becomes so doggedly persistent later in the concerto that one senses its eradication will require nothing less than the physical eradication of the string with which it is associated. Of course, this is a possibility, particularly if the string is attacked with sufficient force. Precisely that intent can be read into furiously energetic

passages such as bb.122-124. Of course, the overwhelming likelihood, given the string's resilience, is that the problem will stubbornly remain, only being exacerbated by the *fortissimo* energy with which g is asserted. Once again, brute force seems counterproductive. The violin gradually develops a more subtle, lyrical style as the first movement progresses, as if in growing recognition that the grail will only materialise in quiet, reflective, fragile moments of revelation.

Revelation

We are presented with *Graal Théâtre's* most lyrical passage towards the end of the first movement, in bb.345-360, during a rare moment of sustained *piano* dynamics and harmonic stasis on a clearly articulated D bass-note. The passage is also distinctive for its relatively spacious exploration of strongly defined melodic units, rendered *sempre espressivo*, with *rubato*, and uninterrupted by violently gestural outbursts. Prominent pitches from the previous 344 bars are linked together, suggesting that the passage functions as a kind of melodic *telos* – a strand of lyricism that has only been hinted at previously.

Yet even this apotheosis of sorts seems somewhat ambivalent about its own lyricism: any analyst attempting to identify a single melodic gestalt covering these fifteen bars will inevitably falter amidst pauses, evaporations of melodic lines into upper harmonics, and textural stratifications. And resolutions are still denied – particularly those of the still-persistent g – projecting the music onwards. We have not yet arrived at a moment of revelation, but this highpoint of D major-oriented lyricism,

Ex. 4.2.9: Melodic *telos* of *Graal Théâtre*, bb.345-360

The image displays a musical score for two staves, likely for a vocal and piano duo. Above the staves, tempo and performance markings are indicated: S.T. (Sotto Voce) → S.P. (Soprano/Piano) → S.T. → N. (Normal) → S.P. → N. → S.P. → N. The first staff begins with a *rubato* marking and a *senza v.* (senza vibrato) instruction. It features a melodic line with a trill, a triplet, and a *v. ord.* (vibrato ordinario) marking. The second staff continues the melodic line with a triplet, a *p* (piano) marking, and a *f* (forte) marking. The score includes various dynamic markings: *mp* (mezzo-piano), *mf* (mezzo-forte), *p* (piano), and *f* (forte). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The score is written in a modern, minimalist style with a focus on melodic contour and dynamic contrast.

compared with the frenetic previous struggle, suggests that we are closer to that point.

A little later in the movement, a bass D is articulated with surprising frequency and *forte* clarity: such a heavy-handed gesture is rare in Saariaho's music, which often preserves a stronger element of harmonic ambiguity. The sustained D provided by bassoon, trombone, harp, piano and double bass in b.417 therefore has a brutish quality that gives it an instant structural salience. This harmonic marker (almost like the 'seamarks' of *Amers'* voyage) is sounded repeatedly and at length throughout bb.417-430, as if to signal an end to the movement's harmonic ambiguity. Yet just as the instruments in the orchestra's higher reaches begin to coalesce on a D major triad, this harmonic guide seems to disappear, and we return to more harmonically ambiguous treble figurations. These frustrations powerfully demonstrate the grail's elusiveness.

When the D major triad is finally unveiled it comes as something of a surprise. The chord is not prepared tonally; rather, a collection of quarter-tonal clashes dissipates to reveal an underlying grail-sonority exposed and sustained for the first

Ex. 4.2.10: *Graal Théâtre*, ending of first movement

To state that the grail-sonority shimmers serenely is to invoke the light metaphors whose dominance I problematised earlier in this chapter. Yet the metaphor surely offers the most apt characterisation of this moment, especially because the grail has so often been associated with light imagery: in *Idylls of the King*, for instance, Guinevere associates truth, order, authority and purpose with ‘that

pure severity of perfect light’;⁶¹ conversely, the light of the grail is perverted, blood-red. And in *The Waste Land*, the hyacinth girl, who makes the poem’s only (rejected) offer of fertility, is closely linked with ‘the heart of light’ – a sharp contrast with the sad and flickering light over the wasteland. I am led to wonder whether it is specifically the f#³ sustained over the final bars – and so frequently a registral high-point in the preceding music – which represents the ‘heart of light’ that proves so elusive in Eliot’s telling. A suggestive intertextual link in this respect is the isolated f#¹ which concludes Saariaho’s recent cello concerto *Notes on Light*, accompanied by a quotation from *The Waste Land*.

I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.⁶²

The difference is of course that, where *The Waste Land* and its bleak cast of characters seem to reject this pure light, it is embraced in both *Graal Théâtre* and *Notes on Light* as a point of departure and return. Similarly, *Lichtbogen* (‘Arches of Light’) closes with an f#, this time over a D in the bass – another suggestion of the way in which given pitch-classes and harmonies have a particularly rich symbolism in Saariaho’s music.⁶³

We have not, however, addressed the most important symbolism of the D major triad’s coveted appearance: are we listening to the hard-earned acquisition of an object, an outright transfer of ownership from a precursor work? Or, less extremely, does this moment represent a claim for space or a plea for survival within

⁶¹ Tennyson 2004, 295.

⁶² Eliot 1922, lines 38-41.

⁶³ See Howell 2006, 210-216 for a discussion of *Lichtbogen*.

a 'badly overpopulated' 'pinnacled city'?⁶⁴ Or is it less than this, the merest, most contingent glimpse of the grail? The fragility of the D major chord would certainly appear to suggest something more transient, less final than possession. As I argue in the following section, this impression is confirmed by *Graal Théâtre's* second movement.

Bacchanal

Following the apparent success of the violin concerto's grail quest, the second movement is intensely problematic in terms of narrative structure: its very existence contradicts the first movement's archetypal linear process of elevation towards the purity or redemption offered by the D major triad. If the second movement has often been perceived as overly long, this is perhaps less because of its modest ten minute duration and more because the movement's *raison d'être* seems questionable in the first place.⁶⁵

In creating such a glaring problem for the simple Romantic quest, *Graal Théâtre's* second movement engages with an important narrative tendency of modernism: a resistance to resolution manifested in a climax that precedes a protracted period of dissolution, instability or incoherence. We see this modernist plot elsewhere in this thesis (the confusion of the Nørgård concerto, for instance), and of course more broadly in the treatment of climaxes and subsequent unravellings in

⁶⁴ The imagination of an area of artistic production as a 'badly overpopulated state' is taken from Bloom 1975, 121. 'Pinnacled city' is a reference to Linda Ray Pratt's description of Camelot in Pratt 1973, 3.

⁶⁵ Tim Ashley, for instance, expresses the view that the second movement is too long

much modernist music.⁶⁶ More broadly still, the second movement engages with an archetypal plot from modernist literature and film: David Lynch's films, for instance, often feature an early moment of relative clarity or completion, which is subsequently unravelled – with perhaps the most obvious example being the confusion of the second half of *Mulholland Drive*, following a first half that 'makes a good deal of sense'.⁶⁷ Yet the strangeness of Saariaho's second movement also engages with a wider generic issue: concerto finales are a thorny problem. The finale's purpose is inevitably questionable if the notion of linear narrative is accepted and a concerto's dramatic *telos* appears to have been accomplished before the movement has even begun; once resolution or reconciliation has been accomplished, the composer is left with only the option of brilliant display. Far from being overly long, Saariaho's second movement, as I argue in the following section, participates in a modernist challenge to a traditional 'journey' narrative, offering a compelling and novel solution to a concerto problem in the process.

An initial argument for this reading of the second movement stems from the basic structure of *Graal Théâtre*: a two-part form is often less well suited to linear interpretation than to other kinds of conceptualisation. Saariaho's many two-part works or diptychs, for instance, often work with a given binary (crystal and smoke, for instance), leaning towards the simultaneous presentation of two oppositional extremes to the listener (or viewer, perhaps, as there is a strong visual element to this conceptualisation). This leaning tends to work against the linear notions of past and present, cause and effect. These ideas of non-linearity and binary opposition are

⁶⁶ For a discussion of these anti-teleological unravelling of musical modernism, see Jonathan Kramer's chapter on 'linearity and nonlinearity' in J. Kramer 1988, 20-65.

⁶⁷ McGowan 2004, 67.

of particular pertinence to my reading of *Graal Théâtre*'s second movement: I propose another, not mutually exclusive reading of the concerto's title, in which 'graal' refers to the first movement's quest and 'theatre' to the surrealist, phantasmagorical bachannal with which we are presented in the second movement. In this reading, the violin's role as an earnest, questing protagonist is replaced by that of a *jongleur* (a persona which certainly contradicts that high-minded seriousness so often perceived in Saariaho's music). The violin's movements are no longer characterised by linear progress towards a grail sonority, but by an energetic circulation through various acrobatic displays, rituals and theatrical interactions with the orchestra.

We could interpret the bacchanal as an absolute break with the preceding quest, a strange and utterly incoherent assault on the concerto's previous narrativity; alternatively, we may read it as a subsequent chapter in the quest, in which the grail has offered the intoxication with which it is mythically associated. Both interpretations are congruent with the argument for a modernist resistance to the first movement's closure. I would tend, however, to favour the latter interpretation, as a link between the movements is strongly suggested by the ways in which the harmonic language of the second movement resembles that of the first: the opening gesture recalls the opposition of D major and G minor tonalities so frequently suggested in the first movement, and the violin still seems lumbered with an inability to escape the pull of its open first and second strings. The opening gesture's stark rhythmic simplicity, combined with its high tessitura, ensures that a jarring metrical imperfection is produced by the appoggiatura that precedes it from the third bar onwards. This dramatises the first string's continued dominance, as we often saw in the first

movement. Of course, this harmonic similarity represents both a continuation and a challenge to linearity: its recurrence flouts the narrative convention in which previous tensions have been dissipated through the accomplishment of a particular harmonic *telos*.

Ex. 4.2.11: Opening of *Graal Théâtre*, Second Movement



Shortly afterwards, in bb.463-467, there is a brief return to the harmonic syntax, textural stratification and regular semiquaver rhythm of bb.6-21. This allusion to the first movement's opening is again representative of the way in which the second movement is primarily reflective, offering much in the way of subtle adjustment and development of previous material, and little in the way of teleological progression. Of course, the harmonic similarities between the first and second movements potentially challenge the fundamental contrast I am outlining between the two. Let me therefore draw attention to examples of the dramas, rituals, sudden breaks and seeming hallucinations which contrast the previous movement's earnest quest.

The second movement is characterised by an accented distinction between soloist and orchestra: a comparatively lengthy solo opening to the movement sets up a clearer concerto binary than previously existed, offering heightened potential for the

dialogue and drama which are important aspects of the bacchanal. We also bear witness to moments of orchestral commentary on the *jongleur*, as if in imitation of the ancient Greek theatrical setup of actor and chorus. Initially the violin, intoxicated and energised by its encounter with the grail, whirls round and round through a single gesture in an attempt to excite the crowd. The initial orchestral response is a series of short, shuddering, deep-seated growls that seem to warn the pesky jongleur away (bb.459-62). Yet the violin persists, first with the more seductive tones echoing *Graal Théâtre's* opening, and then, in bb.469-71, with ever more *impetuoso* rhetoric that finally succeeds in provoking sustained and vivid orchestral participation in bb.472-77. The distinctive semiquaver-dotted quaver, high-low rhythm of these bars, combined with the circularity of the harmony, is suggestive of an orchestral dance: the colourful orchestration, with string trills and oboe glissandos, conveys individual flourishes within a collective motion. But it is the rhythmic awkwardness of these bars, inverting a more familiar rhythmic and registral patterning, that contributes most to their sense of surrealism (it will be recalled that a similar awkwardness also contributes to the surrealism of the '*Grosse Fugue*' passage from Nørgård's piano concerto, shown in ex. 3.2.10).

The orchestral dance dissipates with dream-like rapidity, to be followed by a hushed, sparsely orchestrated texture. This dissipation is characteristic of a movement in which periods of ecstatic dance alternate frenetically with moments of reverie, as soloist and orchestra both demonstrate a theatrical, surreal propensity to switch roles and behaviours with striking frequency. The soloist in particular is quick to change character: in bb.490-506 we see a more gracious persona, gently teasing imitative angular melodic strains from individuals within the orchestra, especially the

oboe, clarinet and harp. Yet we have perhaps learned to expect that this gentler dialogue will be short-lived and, inevitably perhaps, b.508 sees a sudden escalation in both pitch and dynamics. Thus begins a pattern of *fuoco* ascent in the soloist matched by clattering registral descents (or perhaps dissent) from the orchestra (bb.512-535). The exchange is suggestive of a vividly gestural dance between the two.

In continuation of the tendency towards rapid changes of scene, bb.550-53 present us with a hushed sonority strongly suggestive of D major. It is as if a flagging soloist once again turns to the grail object for an injection of energy and intoxication, so that the wild dance may begin again. What follows, however, is perhaps a more savage episode than had been anticipated. Bb.582-608 offer a Stravinskian *danse sacrale* which again combines rhythmic unity and regularity with a complex and richly layered orchestral texture. The violin here plays the 'chosen one', glorified but *disperato*, utterly at the mercy of the orchestra's insistent, battering ostinati. The impression of fantasy at this point emerges from the rapidity with which the violin is able to disentangle itself from this ritual, offering a cadenza-like passage in bb.617-631, in which hints of *dolce* lyricism alternate with *energico* double-stopping. Such rapid fluctuations in energy level, coupled with alternations between roles and relationships, are central to the movement's pervasive sense of intoxication and hallucination. Of course, the spell must wear off eventually. It does so, I would argue, before the concerto has finished.

The Waste Land?

It is difficult to identify precisely when it is that the second movement's enchanted bachannal dissipates and makes way for the hangover. Bb.649-659, however, are strongly suggestive: the violin, ever more rhapsodic and determined to maintain its previous tendency towards registral ascent, frantically resists the 'very even', sober chromatic descent instigated by the percussion and subsequently delivered by the rest of the orchestra. In what follows, fleeting recollections of the previous 659 bars persist, but the sense of a concerto 'winding down' is inescapable. The orchestral texture gradually dissipates until we are left at b.704 with the solo violin and the slow diminuendo of a repeated trill between d¹ and a harmonic d³.

Ex. 4.2.12: *Graal Théâtre* closing bars



The slipping away of this grail-tone may call to mind Tennyson's evocation of a dying grail-vision:

And then the music faded, and the Grail
Past, and the beam decayed, and from the walls
The rosy quiverings died into the night.⁶⁸

It is easy to read a desolate finality into *Graal Théâtre*'s closing bars, to conceive of a hopeless 'crumbling into dust' amidst a 'waste land'.⁶⁹ This interpretation, given *Graal*

⁶⁸ Tennyson 2004, lines 121-123.

Théâtre's particular grail-object, has bleak implications for the violin concerto tradition: it has ultimately become barren and infertile. The grail's acquisition has been only temporary – indeed, the reality of that acquisition has been thrown into question; the grail's energising effects have certainly proved illusory and short-lived. Yet behind this somewhat pessimistic outlook is a particularly possessive approach to tradition, an assumption that the D major triad, zealously guarded by its canonical associations, could nonetheless have been seized and made one's own. This is, of course, an assumption which inevitably leads to disappointment and desolation.

Yet there is also a strong suggestion of circularity in *Graal Théâtre's* ending. As an obvious return to the opening sonority – the chime of a triangle in b.708 makes the allusion particularly strong – the final bars perhaps imply that a new quest begins as the concerto fades out of audibility. And there is, furthermore, the likelihood that the subtlest hint of pitch class 7 will emerge in the concluding sonority: Saariaho calls for a rapid alternation between a d¹, played on the open second string, and the d³ produced through a natural harmonic on the same string. As a result, the violinist is given an infinitesimally short time in which to apply precisely the amount of pressure needed to sound the harmonic. Even in the hands of an exceptionally skilled violinist, it is likely that g¹ will sound occasionally, if only fleetingly, due to a slight excess of pressure on the string. In both existing recordings of *Graal Théâtre* – the full version with Kremer as soloist and 1997's chamber version with John Storgårds – a hint of g¹ is often perceptible.⁷⁰ The result in both cases is the continued presence of the

⁶⁹ 'Lo, if I find the Holy Grail itself, / And touch it, it will crumble into dust' (Eliot 2006).

⁷⁰ The Kremer recording is Kaija Saariaho, Esa Pekka Salonen, Dawn Upshaw, Anssi Kartunen, BBC Symphony Orchestra, *Chateau de L'Ame, Théâtre, Amers* (Sony, B00005NNNX, 2001); the Storgårds recording is Kaija Saariaho, Hannu Lintu, Avanti Chamber Orchestra, and John Storgårds, *Graal Théâtre, Solar, Lichtbogen* (Ondine, B000069KMS, 2002).

harmonic tension which propelled the concerto's narrative forward – suggesting that the quest is anything but complete. As such, the final bars can be heard as a gesture of deferral. Of course, deferral – rather than ownership – has arguably become the key theme in the story of the grail quest and its many retellings: a sense of an ongoing tradition, of ceaseless development, of the impossibility of a final, definitive version, is inherent to this meta-narrative. This impression is perhaps the most important implication of Saariaho's invocation of the grail tradition.

Conclusion

Graal Théâtre presents a radical challenge to certain common perceptions of its composer's identity. The teleology, linearity, lyricism and drama of its first movement sit awkwardly with the aesthetic and technical preoccupations for which Saariaho is often noted; the hallucinogenic, surrealist theatre of the second movement is difficult to reconcile with the commonplace impression of a composer experimenting earnestly with abstract forms; the sheer intensity of *Graal Théâtre's* engagement with tradition might also come as a surprise. To some extent, Saariaho's reception has always been skewed by certain reductive tendencies – tendencies that might well be challenged by much of the music the composer wrote prior to the *Graal Théâtre*. Nonetheless, the violin concerto marks a particularly adventurous and far-reaching development in Saariaho's career: the obvious difficulties encountered in its composition forced the composer to widen her technical range quite considerably, particularly in the direction of a more dramatic idiom. There is already a tendency in Saariaho reception to focus on the early, more obviously experimental works or the

highly acclaimed recent operatic endeavours. As such, *Graal Théâtre* potentially occupies a somewhat neglected transitional space. As I hope to have shown, however, its theatrical struggle with the abstract demands of genre represents transitional space at its most compelling.

4.3

Drawing Breath: Strain and Suffocation in Magnus Lindberg's Clarinet Concerto

Magnus Lindberg's earliest works serve as compelling examples of the accentuated, even brutal physicality often encountered in high modernist music of the 1980s.¹ In particular, *Kraft* (1983-5), Lindberg's internationally acclaimed 'breakthrough' work, has frequently been noted for its 'sheer violence',² a description which is accurate in both literal and figurative terms. Scored for five electronically amplified soloists (originally the members of the aforementioned *Toimii*) and orchestra, *Kraft* exploits, within its two-movement, 'anarchic'³ form, the entire continuum from pure sine tone to white noise – most obviously reflecting the influence of Gérard Grisey, with whom Lindberg had studied in 1981-2. Its protracted focus on this continuum, and in particular the sustained explorations of its extremes, could lead one to assert quite reasonably that the work is 'about' acoustic phenomena.⁴ Assaults on the ear by sheer amplitude and the exploitation of registral extremes serve as a recurrent reminder of the material forcefulness of sound.⁵ An array of peculiar additions to the percussion section (chair legs, car suspension coils, a radiator, among others), coupled with numerous displays of virtuosic technique, draws attention to the music's

¹ For instance, Lundman 2002 (entitled 'Music with Muscle') is exemplary of the accented physicality often perceived in the composer's music.

² J. Anderson 1992, 566.

³ J. Anderson 2004, 206.

⁴ John Warnaby, for instance, has suggested that 'the distinction between sound and noise rapidly emerges as one of Lindberg's prime concerns' (Warnaby 1992, 26).

⁵ Attali 1985 is rare in emphasising this material forcefulness, emphasising at several points the potential violence of music's physical presence.

materiality. A similar effect is produced by the unusual spatialisation of the music: the performers and the conductor move around the auditorium during the performance; electronic sounds are also moved using variations in amplification between four speakers which surround the audience.

Kraft's physical abrasiveness is complemented by the imagined straining generated by its violent implementation of certain parameters, particularly timbre, texture and rhythm. The oppositions of soloists and orchestra are frequently suggestive of concerto conflict taken to a point of maximal destructiveness. *Kraft* explores the full gamut of (non-)attacks from sudden explosions to the gradual, almost imperceptible emergences of solo instruments from vast masses of orchestral sound. Viewed from this perspective, it appears less revolutionary than its reception, particularly in Finland, has tended to suggest: a kind of gestural saturation is already apparent, for instance, in Berio's style from the late 50s through to the early 70s: as David Osmond-Smith argues, works such as *Sequenza II* for harp (1963) or *Sincronie* for string quartet (1964) seem to owe their cohesion almost entirely to the sustained inventiveness of their individual gestures';⁶ the archetypal, arguably unsurpassable orchestral theatre of gesture is of course *Sinfonia* (1967-8).⁷

To undermine *Kraft's* progressiveness in this way is not necessarily to cast aspersions on its value. It might, however, be seen as such an attempt by the many listeners who have attached that value to the work's leading position in a progressivist narrative. And *Kraft* can indeed be interpreted as straining towards precisely that position: the history of its commission and composition can be read as reflecting an anxiety about the tension between progressivist identity and the

⁶ Osmond-Smith 1991, 40.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

concerto genre. It is difficult to imagine *Kraft* being labelled 'a monument of Finnish modernism'⁸ had it remained the 'Piano Concerto' originally commissioned by the Helsinki Festival. As it is, the title 'Kraft', in both its meaning and the hardness of its consonants, reflects the centrality of ideas of strength and forcefulness to the young composer's 'punkish'⁹ identity. The work's sheer violence of musical gesture, in addition to the raw physical power of its sonorities, can readily be heard as an urgent, frantic resistance to the stranglehold of an ageing late twentieth-century modernism.

His modernist credentials having been internationally established in works like *Kraft*, Lindberg has 'mellowed' in the 1990s and 2000s.¹⁰ The anarchic, punkish identity of the 80s, along with its associated youthful mantra that 'only extremes are interesting',¹¹ has given way to a composer keenly and perhaps neoclassically preoccupied with balance. As the composer argued in a 2002 interview,

Because there is a strong classical impulse in my makeup, perhaps stronger now than it was in the eighties, the goal is to re-establish a balance between musical parameters, after having brought these parameters to such extremes over the past few decades. I like trying to meld together these parameters, to create an illusion, at least, of balance between modes of expression. [...] If the modern spirit is alive and continuous, then it will not necessarily continue to push parameters to their extremes, for ultimately that would become retrogressive. And conversely, rediscovering balance might be a force for renewal.¹²

In at least partial response to composer-commentaries like this one, 'balance' has become the prevailing theme in Lindberg's recent reception. The term's breadth of meaning has often led to the kind of imprecise usage which allows wide generalisation; I would offer four distinct types of balance commonly encountered in

⁸ Korhonen 2003, 187.

⁹ Ross 2007, 177.

¹⁰ An observation made by Arnold Whittall in Whittall 2005, 172.

¹¹ Cody, Noreen and Lindberg 2000, 36.

¹² *Ibid.*, 37.

Lindberg's music. For the composer himself, the term most often designates a subtle reduction in the complexity of one musical parameter in compensation for an escalation in the complexity of another – it is primarily a perceptual consideration. Elsewhere, balance refers to an arch-like, basically ternary classical structure, which became increasingly prominent in Lindberg's oeuvre from the early 1990s; as did its antithesis, an interest in the 'inclined starting planes'¹³ which provide teleological direction towards levelled-out conclusions. In a definition particularly pertinent to the physicality with which this chapter is concerned, balance can denote the comparative volumes of different sound sources. All three of these types of balance come to the fore in Lindberg's first concerto, for piano and orchestra (1991, rev.1995), in which a fast-slow-fast movement structure (featuring what is arguably Lindberg's first 'slow movement'), light orchestration and a remarkably non-percussive solo part reinforce one another in the suggestion of a rapid and perhaps surprising departure towards the neoclassical. This concerto's synthesis of the new and the old also conforms to that fourth type of balancing act which figures most ubiquitously in Lindberg scholarship: in a chapter on the composer titled 'Rediscovering Balance', Tim Howell argues that 'the reconciliation of oppositions, set against one another and played out towards balanced conclusions, [...] seems to be the key to Lindberg's position as a leading figure in contemporary music'.¹⁴ Among several other supposed syntheses, Howell points towards Lindberg's wide-ranging array of declared influences (discussed in greater detail in the next section), and suggests that 'just how such variety becomes channelled into a single voice is part of the fascination surrounding

¹³ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁴ Howell 2006, 231.

this composer [...] A prevailing sense of integration, drawing diverse styles and mediums together, characterises this music'.¹⁵

Notions of organicism have also become central to many accounts of Lindberg's more recent music.¹⁶ Arguably the most successful Finnish composer since Sibelius, Lindberg has frequently been aligned with an illustrious compatriot often received, at least in Anglophone musicology, as the archetypal organicist (Julian Anderson has argued that *Kraft's* 'deliberately unsymphonic' form is in part an anxious reaction to Sibelius's legacy, while more recent works reflect a much more accommodative relationship¹⁷). The block-like construction of the early works has been replaced by continuity and gradual growth, in a style which frequently attracts adjectives like 'symphonic'. This particular term is most often tagged to the four-movement *Aura* (1994),¹⁸ although as Arnold Whittall argues, 'a sequence of concertos shows this quality at full stretch'.¹⁹ Rhythm and texture, once dominant in Lindberg's work, are now on a more equal footing with a concern for melody and harmony, both of which are generally integrated into quite conventionally linear, teleological forms. An organic mode of thought also underlies a structural procedure of wide-ranging importance in Lindberg's music since *Marea* and *Joy* (both 1990) – the two works in which it is most clearly discernable. The procedure, broadly analogous to the Baroque chaconne, involves the cyclical repetition of a succession of spectrally or serially derived harmonies, with the music progressing towards the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Johnson 1999, 696.

¹⁷ J. Anderson 2004, 206-7.

¹⁸ As Lindberg comments in the work's programme note, 'I believe the overall form of *Aura* would make it appropriate to call the piece a symphony.'

¹⁹ Whittall 2005, 172.

fullest presentation of a given goal-sonority.²⁰ Lindberg's explication of the technique is suggestive of its role as the unifier of the 'body' of a work: 'I build a series of chords that comprise the skeleton of the whole work. They are omnipresent, they give the work form and identity'.²¹ 'Identity' is another quality which connects with organicism: Lindberg's works have increasingly been personified as robustly constituted but vivacious characters bubbling with 'vim and verve';²² there is a much stronger sense of subjectivity than might traditionally be expected of a composer in whose work serial procedures remain an important force.

Lindberg's Clarinet Concerto (2002), which has now been widely acclaimed on four continents, is often seen as exemplary of these critically lauded trends in its composer's output. Cast as a 25-minute single movement, it has often been described as 'symphonic'.²³ Concomitant suggestions of interiority, unity and integrity have often been made, as if to compensate for the Concerto's superficial attractiveness and preoccupation with instrumental technique. Critical responses to the work have largely been exemplary of the tradition-fearing dispositions of those who put them forward: for one commentator, the Concerto represents 'an almost optimal synthesis of substance and extravagance, surface and depth, the subjective and the objective'.²⁴ Its harmonic language tends to be described in terms of a similar balancing act: 'indubitably contemporary' but nonetheless 'sensuously easy (tuneful,

²⁰ Julian Anderson has argued that Lindberg's syntax stems from a synthesis of serial and spectral techniques: 'essentially, he has sought to combine his serial pitch-systems with the laws of acoustics in order to broaden his harmonic vocabulary. A serially derived chord is analysed for its acoustic properties and one or more virtual fundamentals are deduced from it. This transforms what may sound like fairly dissonant aggregates into richly sonorous resonance chords' (J. Anderson 1992a, 566).

²¹ Magnus Lindberg in Martin 2005, 10.

²² Kimmo Korhonen, *Ibid.*, 183. See also Lundman 2002, 18.

²³ See, for instance, Whittall 2005, 172.

²⁴ *Hufvudstadsbladet (Helsinki)* quoted on the Boosey & Hawkes website (<www.boosey.com/pages/cr/composer/composer_main.asp?composerid=2974>).

even) on the ear'.²⁵ A surprising tunefulness²⁶ (at least in the context of Lindberg's oeuvre) has much to do not only with the Concerto's popularity but also with its sense of gradual development: the work's pentatonic motto theme returns at numerous points, usually to be developed with increasing virtuosity. That sense of development surely plays an important part in the apparent aptness of organic metaphors in describing the Concerto. Abundantly varied, highly characterful displays of technique reinforce the notion that the organism in question is a richly multifaceted and energetic person. The prevailing impression of the Clarinet Concerto is one of rosy-cheeked good health: it is a model of balance for the twenty-first century, of conflicting impulses brought together in cathartic synthesis; it is an ideal dinner party companion, good-looking and intelligent, outgoing but not abrasive in its behaviour; it respects the old but embraces the new, bursting with vitality and good humour even at this perceived late hour of modernism (it is, after all, a work that makes copious use of typically modernist developments such as pitch-class set theory and spectralism). It has, in short, been received as a much more comfortable work than *Kraft*.

I have a number of objections to the prevailing interpretation of the Clarinet Concerto. First, it seems overly reliant on tropes of balance and organicism which recur to the point of over-simplification, blandishment and perhaps distortion in criticism of Lindberg's music. Second, I detect in some commentaries a haste to appease an attraction to surface gloss by making assertions of more 'respectable'

²⁵ McDonald 2005. Of course, the implication that this language's sensuous, tuneful easiness exists in spite of its indubitable contemporaneity perhaps says less about the work (and early twenty-first-century classical music more generally) than it does about the institutional ideologies behind music criticism.

²⁶ As Tim Howell observes, 'to go away singing bits of Lindberg to oneself is a rather novel experience' (Howell 2006, 253).

qualities that may not be present. Third, I believe it is worth interrogating a potential and suspect conflation of sonority with form – a tendency, for instance, to equate ‘smoother’ sounds with formal continuity, and ‘rougher’ ones with formal disruption, when the two need not go hand in hand at all. Finally, the prevailing reception obscures aspects that are important to my own experience of the Clarinet Concerto: I do not dispute that this work can come across as a smooth-talking dinner party companion; my contention is that the ‘psychology’ and ‘well-being’ of this companion might be considerably more complex than has previously been allowed. In this case study I therefore present a counterpoint to the ‘smooth-talking’ interpretation by arguing that Lindberg’s Clarinet Concerto is considerably less healthy and less smooth than it might appear in existing criticism. My analysis suggests that the work is beset by breathlessness, suffocation, collapse, and laboured reinvigoration. Responding somewhat polemically to existing criticism means that there is inevitably a skew towards the ‘uncomfortable’ in my reading. Given, however, that an analyst’s agenda comes to bear on even the most impartial-seeming interpretation, I hope that an explicit statement of my own agenda will allow my analysis to function not as a distortion of the Clarinet Concerto’s ‘character’, but rather as a contribution to the complexity and interest of commentary around this and other Lindberg works.

My interpretation proceeds from the conviction that discomfort is an important part of concerto performance and, by extension, the genre itself. As listeners we are acutely aware of the intense physical demands the Clarinet Concerto makes on its soloist – Kari Kriikku, the virtuoso for whom the work is written, just about staves off breathlessness and exhaustion. Even a studio recording does not – and should not, I think – fully mask the physical strain of the solo part. Our acute awareness of this

physical strain reinforces the impression of imminent formal collapse. My analysis posits an interpretative connection between the physical movements and strains of the clarinettist and the formal movement and strain of the concerto. It therefore engages with a line of argument expressed, among others, by Patrick Shove and Bruno H. Repp:

Traditionally, to explain the source of musical motion, theorists, philosophers and psychologists alike have turned to musical structure, which by most accounts is abstract. This has led some to believe that the motion heard is virtual, illusory or abstract. [...] Hidden from this view is perhaps the most obvious source of musical movement: the human performer. Why have so many theorists failed to acknowledge that musical movement is, among other things, *human* movement?²⁷

Thus I argue that the clarinettist's performance foregrounds notions of motion, stasis and strain, which we then project onto other aspects of the music. But the connection can be made considerably stronger, and perhaps more nuanced, by building on recent theories of mimetic response and embodied cognition. The first of these theories underlines the listener's intense empathy with the straining, whether real or imagined, of the performer. The 'mimetic hypothesis' is outlined by Arnie Cox as follows:

Part of how we understand music involves making the heard sounds for ourselves, and this imagined participation involves covertly and overtly imitating the sounds heard and imitating the actions that produce these sounds.²⁸

²⁷ Shove and Repp 1998, 58.

²⁸ Cox 2006, 46.

This hypothesis, as Cox argues, is supported by four types of evidence;²⁹ it therefore offers compelling empirical reinforcement for the idea that listeners empathise with the bodily exertions of a concerto soloist, and that these exertions thereby strongly inflect the listener's response to the music. Cox outlines three ways in which we might respond mimetically to certain instruments. Our comprehension of a gesture on a wind instrument can involve:

(1) Imitation of the fingering, embouchure and blowing; (2) subvocal imitation of the musical sounds produced [...] and (3) amodal, visceral imitation of the exertion dynamic of the event.³⁰

We encounter all three types of imitation in the analysis that follows. A final pertinent observation of Cox's relates to agency:

The fact that the music is produced by a source exterior to ourselves may be what motivates a projection of our mimetic musical agency outwards, perhaps towards this exterior source. But since this agency can not be identified directly with the actions of the performers, it remains an ideal agency that is not-us. We call this agent 'the music', and its genesis might follow this pattern: (1) the sound-producing actions of the performers are (2) heard/seen and imitated by a listener, which (3) motivates a participatory agency within the listener, which (4) is then projected outwards towards the original source but which (5) cannot be identified directly with this original source and so remains ideal.³¹

The notion of an ideal agency hovering between performer and listener opens up an interpretative space – a space which, as Cox suggests, allows the connections of the

²⁹ '(1) Studies of imitation in face-to-face communication; (2) motor imagery studies involving *mirror neurons*; (3) subvocalisation studies for speech and for music; and (4) non-vocal motor imagery studies for music' (Cox 2006, 48).

³⁰ Cox 2006, 52

³¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

performer's actions with those of 'the music'; this is a space in which my analysis of the Clarinet Concerto often operates.

The strength of the connection between literal and metaphorical physicality is also strengthened by recent insights, from fields such as neuroscience, linguistics and evolutionary biology, which present a compelling challenge to the Cartesian division between mind and matter, and to the notion of the disembodied mind.³² I am referring in particular to the concept of *image schemas* first developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson.³³ The idea has since seen a number of musicological adaptations. A recent and particularly compelling example is Candace Brower's discussion of 'paradoxes of pitch space', in which a useful summary of *image schemas* is offered:

Our most instinctive responses to both music and visual art originate in the body. It appears that musical sounds, like visual images, evoke bodily sensations due to our metaphorical projection of them into the domain of embodied experience. Furthermore, certain recurrent patterns of embodied experience, known as *image schemas*, appear to play a central role in such metaphorical projections. [...] These schemas – sensorimotor images constituting the basic 'shapes' of bodily experience – are extracted from such everyday experiences as balancing the body while walking, reaching out and grasping an object, moving along a pathway towards a particular goal, rising to a standing position and entering or exiting closed space. It appears that we use these image schemas to make sense of patterns perceived in more abstract domains through metaphorical projections, or *cross-domain mappings*, which imbue those patterns with bodily meaning.³⁴

Brower provides six examples of these schemas, acknowledging that these examples are not exhaustive. Three of these, VERTICALITY, CENTRE-PERIPHERY and

³² For more on the range of challenges to the mind-body dichotomy, see Leman 2008, 13.

³³ Lakoff and Johnson 1980.

³⁴ Brower 2008, 59-60.

BALANCE, 'capture important features of our experience of the body'; the other three, PATH, CONTAINER and CYCLE, 'reflect ways in which we experience the body in motion'.³⁵ Schemas from both categories have certain properties in common that allow them to be conflated: VERTICALITY and PATH, for instance, share the characteristic of linearity. Given that the physical strain of performance is central to my analytical framework, I would add another schema, OBSTACLE, which works in conjunction with PATH or VERTICALITY to evoke the sense of obstructed or frustrated linearity. When this schematic combination is perceived we have an intense awareness of force or energy without movement – and a resultant strain. That sense intersects with Lindberg's use of harmony, rhythm, melody and texture in the projection of formal motion, stasis, and strain. I unveil the different metaphorical ways of reading Lindberg's musical syntax – whether in terms of energy, motion, or collapse – as the analysis progresses. Harmony, rhythm, and texture are all pertinent aspects of this syntax, with melody assuming a prominence previously unheard in Lindberg's music. Though it differs in crucial ways from common-practice treatments of these various parameters, Lindberg's syntax quickly creates its own, more idiosyncratic senses of functionality, relaxation and strain – the composer has perhaps been a shade too modest about his own achievements in commenting quite recently on the elusiveness of 'functionality in an essentially atonal world'.³⁶

I think it is reasonable to conceive of the relationship between clarinettist and work in fairly flexible terms. There is, as I suggested previously, an idea that strain in one foregrounds strain in the other. But more causal interpretations may also make for a compelling narrative: we might, for instance, perceive the transfer of energy

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

³⁶ Magnus Lindberg in Cody, Noreen and Lindberg 2000, 33.

from the soloist's lungs to the composition, or the composition gradually breathing the soloist into life; more dramatically, we might conceive of an urgent resuscitation of one by the other. The following analysis is organised broadly chronologically, and has a strong narrative element in which this type of causality is often invoked. In order most clearly to demonstrate an inextricable connection between metaphorical and literal strain, my analysis is structured around those points in the solo part which seem particularly physically challenging. For the purposes of comparison, I also focus on those rare moments which seem conspicuously comfortable for the soloist; rarer and perhaps more significant still are those points when the clarinettist does not play. The reader may be struck by the highly selective nature of my reading, as large sections of the concerto are not discussed in what follows. My hope is that, by making explicit the basis of my choices, I justify this selectiveness. There will doubtless be analyses that aim to emphasise other important aspects of the Concerto, such as its harmonic structure or the gestures handed down from past concertos. The job of this particular case study, however, will be to focus on the links between physical and metaphorical strain.

The Clarinet Concerto: An Analysis

Bb. 1-19

The lyrical, relatively relaxed opening is something of a norm in clarinet concerto writing, as established in the concertos of Mozart, Gerald Finzi, Aaron Copland and

Carl Nielsen – and also in the Debussy *Rhapsody*. Lindberg's Concerto is no exception (indeed, its opening seems to allude in particular to the Debussy). It is as if the work must gently, tentatively breathe life into the solo instrument before more energetic developments can take place. At least in its initial stages (see ex.4.3.1), Lindberg's opening melody sits comfortably and softly in the clarino register, and little demand is made on the soloist in terms of rapid passagework or breath control:³⁷ bb.1-10 are characterised by rests nearly as long as the melodic fragments they intersperse.

Ex. 4.3.1: clarinet opening melody, bb.1-9



The absence of perceptible physical strain is complemented by the absence of tension-generating deviations from the opening's B $\flat$ pentatonicism. Conflating harmonic tension with motion (a commonplace device in traditional theory so pithily formulated by Walter Piston, among others³⁸), the impression is of a near-stasis reinforced by the near-stasis of air around the instrument: the softness of the playing is such that there is probably the sense of a clarinet gently, multi-directionally filling the air, rather than sending air molecules hurtling towards the listener. I use the non-

³⁷ For a discussion of the clarinet's different registers, see Piston 1955, 163-182.

³⁸ 'The essential quality of dissonance is its sense of movement.' Piston, 1978, 7. I would not go nearly so far as Piston's essentialism. As mentioned in the previous discussion of physicality, Robert Adlington's 'Moving beyond Motion' (Adlington 2004) is a compelling challenge to the conceptualisation of musical change exclusively as motion. Adlington at no point denies the usefulness of motional metaphors. On the basis that they do play an important role in musical perception, they are central to this analysis, but I also attempt to integrate them, through the inherently transferable realm of energy, with metaphors such as heat and light – and, of course, with the energetics of sound.

absolute term ‘near-stasis’ because B $\flat$ itself is tellingly absent, and the repeated denial of a resolution from c² to the apparent tonic creates a subtle sense of potential motion unfulfilled. An impression of inertia – different to stasis, of course, but nonetheless congruent with the absence of a motion-creating imbalance – is created by the repetition of the opening’s descending gestalt: writing on musical energetics, Steve Larson identifies *inertia* as ‘the tendency of a pattern of musical motion to continue in the same fashion’.³⁹ Furthermore, this pattern of registral descent is likely to be conflated with descending force. One of Yonatan Malin’s examples of the ways in which energetic analysis can draw on performance experience is the observation that, at least in wind instruments, the production of higher pitches demands higher energy levels.⁴⁰ A listening wind player is probably more aware of that demand than, say, a listening pianist, but it is surely the case that anybody with the experience of straining vocally towards high pitches makes this connection to some extent. Furthermore, the sense of decreasing force is strengthened by the use of diminuendos at the end of each short phrase.

In bb.1-19, the correlation between high pitch and high energy levels appears on the higher structural level at which sharpwards or flatwards modulation occurs. A narrative account of these bars would forge a link between the low levels of energy in bb.1-9 and the subsequent flatwards ‘slump’, the melody twice elaborating on a G $\flat$ major triad (bb.10 and 15) before a rapid recovery ‘overshoots’ the original tonic by rising exuberantly sharpwards to C major (a pattern that we will see at work on a still larger structural level – as Tim Howell argues, ‘the opening solo clarinet statement encapsulates much of the dramatic and structural processes of the piece as a

³⁹ Larson 1997, 57.

⁴⁰ Malin 2008, 68.

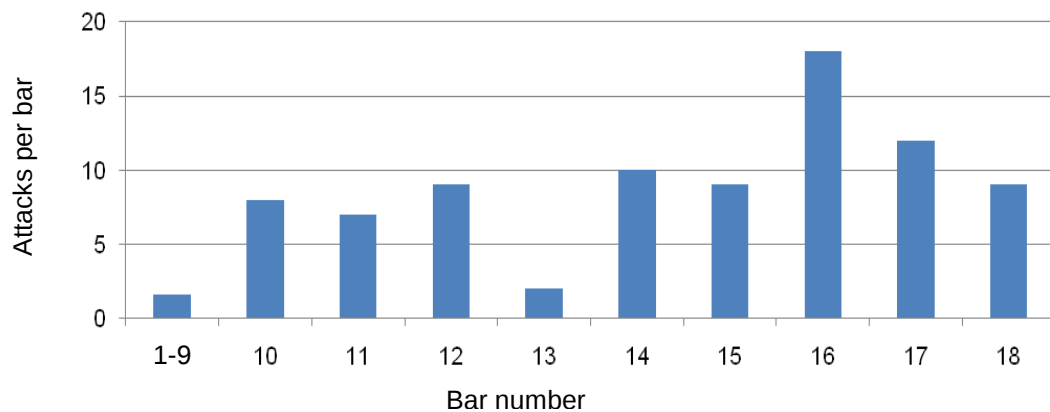
whole'⁴¹). The struggle involved in that recovery is conveyed by the increased rapidity of the clarinet's passagework, the rapid escalation towards a higher register, and the fact that there is scarcely an opportunity to breathe throughout bb.10-19.

Ex. 4.3.2a: Harmonic outline of Clarinet Concerto, bb.10-18 (first bar represents bb.1-9).



* Note that I have placed an emphasis on triadic harmonies, omitting their chromatic elaborations. The exception is the densely chromatic b.17. The slurred quavers aim to give a sense of linear progression.

Ex. 4.3.2b: Number of attacks per bar in bb.9-18



* The column for b.17 is an estimate, as the bar consists entirely of a tremolo of unspecified speed.

⁴¹ Howell 2006, 255.

The relationship between the increased energy involved in playing the clarinet part and the increased registral and harmonic energy of the melody can readily be heard as one of cause and effect: the soloist's physical exertion seems to inject much-needed energy into the flagging concerto. But the apparent recovery of the initial tonal equilibrium is not entirely convincing: in b.19, as the orchestral texture develops from a faintly perceived string accompaniment, we are introduced to the tonally ambiguous octatonic figurations which will come to represent such an important and problematic component of the Clarinet Concerto's harmonic syntax.

Bb.32-87

Following a somewhat tranquil opening, a marked increase in the soloist's physical effort is experienced in bb.34-45's registrally jumpy, more rhythmically taut material. This is complemented by an increase in harmonic tension generated by the dominance of the octatonic scale within the clarinet's triadic figurations. Reinforcing the connection between physical and metaphorical tension, the sinuous, breathless, chromatic passagework of bb.52-60 culminates in the concerto's first moment of striking difficulty – and of chromatic saturation – in bb.61-2's stream of demisemiquavers positioned precariously high in the clarinet's register. A keen sense of forward impetus is also created: for Tim Howell, b.63 marks the initiation of 'a greater sense of development' and a 'more virtuosic treatment' of the idea first encountered in b.32.⁴²

⁴² Howell 2006, 256.

Ex. 4.3.3: 'jumpy' rhythmic material, bb.63-65



Lengthy runs of semiquavers, an ascent into the clarinet's extreme register, and a series of crescendos work hard towards b.80's B $\flat$ major triad and the oboe's restatement, in b.82, of the opening theme. B.80 therefore sounds like a point of arrival, of strain suddenly relieved as the opening pitch-centre is crisply and confidently reasserted, with ascending arpeggios in the piano and harp sounding like a concluding gesture.

This is an impression confirmed by the clarinet's silence in bb.81-84 – a period of well-deserved rest, perhaps, after an increasingly arduous effort to regain the opening's pitch-centricity. As such, physical strain, and its subsequent absence, reinforces the impression that bb.1-80 constitute an initial cycle through a harmonic process. That process is not quite so cleanly defined as it is in the 'chaconnes' of earlier works such as *Joy*: as melody is more to the fore as a determinant of the Clarinet Concerto's structure, it is possible for the harmonic syntax to be somewhat freer. It nonetheless involves a process of development from diatonicism, to octatonicism, to more intense chromaticism, and back to the initial pitch centre.

One of Lindberg's principal reasons for using the chaconne is the 'drama' that can be created through divergence from it.⁴³ Less rigid though the structure is in the Clarinet Concerto, that sense of neatly rounded closure in b.80 sets up the idea of a

⁴³ Martin 2005, 57.

Ex. 4.3.4: Clarinet Concerto, bb.79-82 – the conclusion of a cycle?

large-scale rhythm centred on the repeated rotation of a harmonic process. If we conceptualise this rhythm in terms of a breath – and the Concerto’s performance might encourage us to think in terms of the tensing and relaxing of a diaphragm – there are particularly compelling dramatic implications to the fact that the B $\flat$ -F dyad, unfettered by extra pitch classes, will never be heard again in the 586 bars that follow its statement in b.80.

Bb. 128-143

The introduction of the clarinet’s perceptibly stressful ‘multiphonics’ gesture (bb.134-136) follows an orchestral statement of the work’s motto theme. While the opening’s B $\flat$ pentatonicism remains, a stronger sense of harmonic directionality develops from the A $\flat$ in the first violin in b.128. That flatwards force is fulfilled by flatwards motion in b.129, in which the harmony is derived from an E $\flat$ pentatonic scale. A dense, rhythmically complex texture also plays an important role in this section’s energetics:

the rate of attacks throughout the orchestral accompaniment is much higher than the speed of harmonic change and that at which the melody unfolds. The well-worn phrase ‘shimmering texture’ becomes an apt way of characterising a passage in which a high proportion of the total energy is dissipated multi-directionally as heat and light – and a relatively low proportion as tonal, mono-directional motion. The impression of a heat-producing struggle is thus produced by both the soloist’s increased effort and the interaction of harmonic rhythm and textural complexity.

Ex. 4.3.5: textural complexity in the treble range during thematic statement, bb.128-131

The musical score for Ex. 4.3.5, measures 128-131, is presented in a multi-staff format. The instruments included are Piano (Pno), Harp, Solo Clarinet (Solo Cl.), Violin I (Vl. I div.), Violin II (Vl. II div.), Viola (Vla div.), Violoncello (Vc. div.), and Double Bass (Db.). The tempo is indicated as quarter note = 126. The key signature consists of two flats. The Harp part features 'laissez vibrer' markings. The string parts (Vl. I, Vl. II, Vla, Vc, Db) are marked with 'molto f' and 'con vibr.' (with vibrato). The Solo Clarinet part is marked with 'f' and 'con vibr.'. The Piano part is marked with 'f' and 'con vibr.'. The overall texture is highly complex and shimmering, particularly in the treble range.

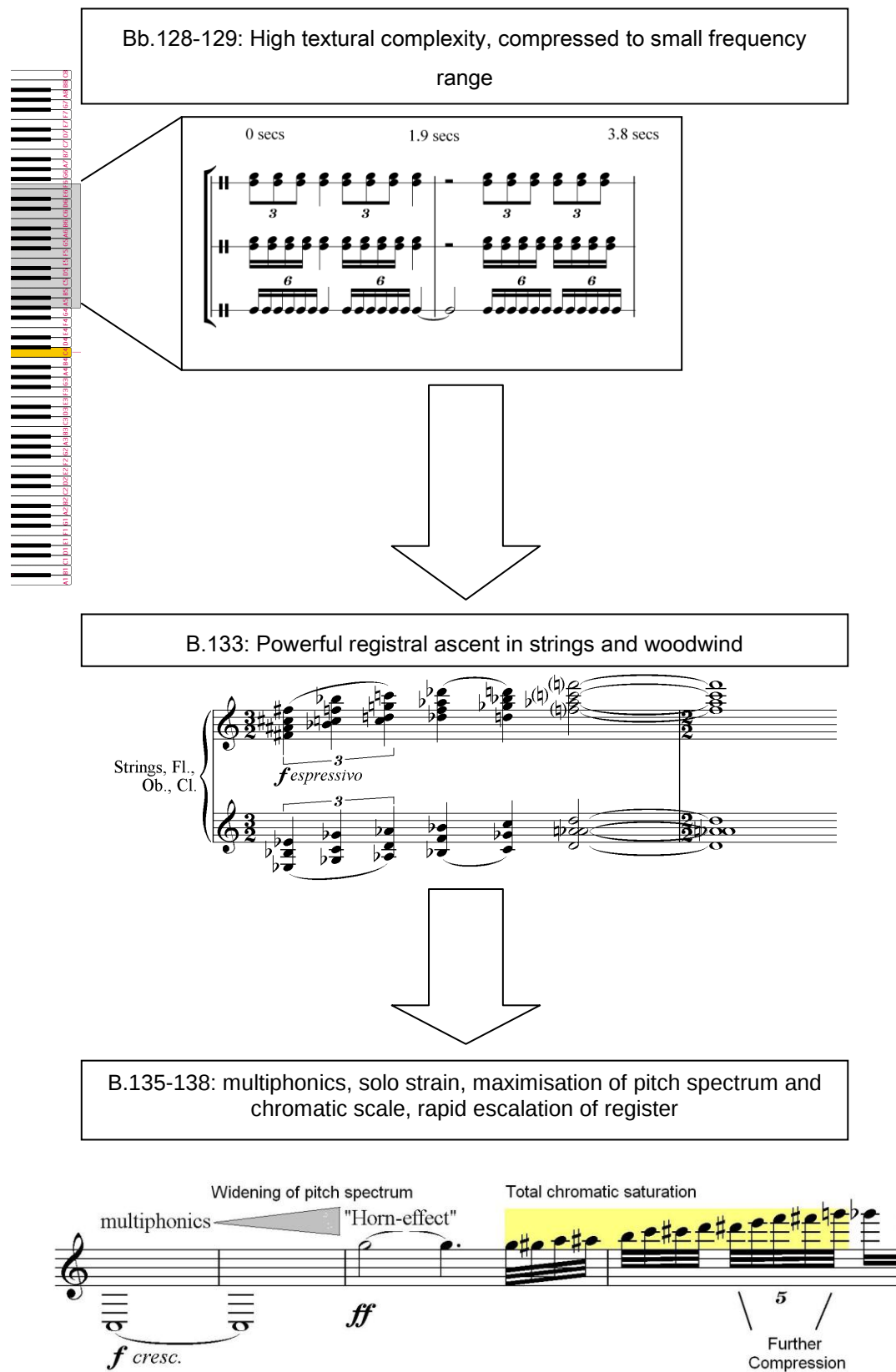
Harmonic motion meets a still more uncompromising barrier on encountering the tritone relation introduced in the bass at b.131; the shimmering texture is abruptly curtailed shortly afterwards. The considerable energy conveyed by both must go

somewhere, and is seemingly channelled into the rising, *espressivo* lines of the strings in b.133. These *espressivo* lines are short-lived and, as if to suggest that they are unable to contain the energy transmitted to them, the metaphorical realm is breached decisively in the violent surge of sonic force unleashed by the clarinet, timpani and percussion in b.134. As the clarinet's urgent crescendo towards an absolute peak of intensity demonstrates, other means of dissipating energy are either unavailable or prohibitively limited in effectiveness. Harmonic motion, in particular, is unavailable: the rapid figurations of the strings in bb.136-137 are derived uniformly from a single octatonic scale. As a mirror set, the octatonic lacks the asymmetries and hierarchies that can generate tonal motion in, for instance, a diatonic set (Lindberg, as we shall see, also makes use of symmetrical pitch assemblages besides the octatonic, and it will be recalled that he links imbalance with forward motion, and balance with the stasis of completion and closure). Rapid oscillations between rising and falling figures also convey an absence of registral directionality. A resultant inertia works in dramatic opposition to the demisemiquaver figurations and crescendos of the strings and percussion, which struggle to dissipate the excess of energy through sheer rapidity of arm, bow and drumstick movement. It is surely during such moments that we are most strongly aware of the powerful connection between actual and metaphorical physicality.

In reaching the apparent limits of the soloist's lung power in b.136 we also reach the limit of pitch-complexity that can be produced multiphonicallly: this sonority has an especially full, comprehensive harmonic spectrum, encompassing all twelve notes of the equally-tempered scale (the notation of the technique, a broadening

Ex. 4.3.6: Summary of ways in which energy is transferred rapidly from domain to domain,

bb.128-136



horizontal line, conveys this rapid widening of pitch-content). The dynamic maximisation of the multiphonic technique is therefore also a maximisation in reaching the limits of the CONTAINER represented by the chromatic scale – a point confirmed by the violent glissando of b.137's glissando, the twelve-note highpoint of a progression away from the opening's pentatonic tetrachord. The Concerto thus reaches two peaks beyond which it can not go, and the result might be conceptualised as a kind of suffocation: raw maxima generate much of the teleology which sustains the concerto – in appearing too early, they present serious problems for the work's continued vitality. As we shall see, however, there are other sustaining goals for the work to fall back on.

The subsequent descent through triadic arpeggios (b.138), balancing a previous tendency towards rising pitch while reverting to remnants of tonal harmony, might be construed as the inevitable dissipation of energy following b.137's maximisation. Yet the arpeggios are derived from a single octatonic set, whose tension between symmetry and tonal allusiveness is shown at its most extreme. As if to signal that dissipation has not occurred, demisemiquavers and repeated crescendos return in bb.139-141. Rapid oscillations between pitches a semitone apart reinforce a sense of strain emanating from a tension between harmonic inertia and excess energy. Chromatic saturation returns in bb.142-143 as the clarinet descends towards a repetition of the multiphonics, which are once again accompanied by rising octatonic sequences in woodwind and strings. A sense of harmonic, if non-diatonic, motion re-emerges subsequently in the appearance of a rising sequence in the clarinet. Connectedly, the sonic forcefulness of the clarinet

part decreases, its energy-dissipating burden shared once again with pitch-related directionality.

Bb.189-211

Bb.189-211 arguably represent the work's most prolonged demonstration of the soloist's stamina and agility. The absolute absence of opportunities for the soloist to take a breath is likely to induce an empathetic shortness of breath in the listener (who in all probability lacks the capacity for circular breathing that must be employed by the soloist).⁴⁴ In addition, the sheer speed of demisemiquavers conveys a sense of rushing onwards to the next note before the current one has had time to speak: the rate of attacks is around 12 per second, just beyond the 'speed limit' (10 attacks per second) at which the ear can still distinguish one note from the next.⁴⁵ Exceptionally rapid passagework like this represents an interesting problem for the mimetic hypothesis: the rapidity of the clarinettist's bodily motion is surely inimitable for the vast majority of listeners. Is not the most likely response therefore a kind of awed paralysis? In this case, I suspect we still experience a more holistic imitation of the overall dynamic: we hear the clarinettist's sequence of scales as and arpeggios as 'runs' or 'leaps' at *overwhelming* speed – a sensation produced by the passagework's breaking of a critical perceptual speed limit. The hierarchical perception of rhythm

⁴⁴ Andrew Mead writes of a suggestive experience of listening to a contemporary oboe concerto: 'I found myself at one point in intense pain (not from the music per se, I should add), which abated when I found myself taking a deep gasping breath. What had happened, I realised, was that I had quite unconsciously been breathing along with the soloist' (Mead 1999, 1).

⁴⁵ Justin London lays out various bodily determined speed limits in 'Musical Rhythm: Music, Pace and Gesture' (London 2006), see especially the summary of limits on p.133.

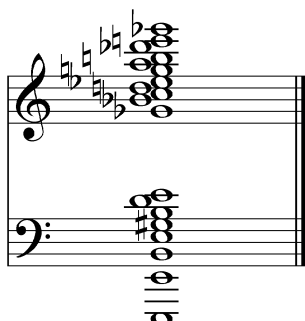
means that a slower meter is of course perceptible, yet that meter is still rapid: phrasing and registral motion in bb.189-191 both suggest divisions of each bar into four quaver-beats, corresponding, perhaps, to the 170 beats per minute of a racing heart. This extreme effort sits restlessly in tension with an absence of harmonic and registral directionality: the resolutely non-motional octatonic is frequently deployed in both the clarinet and orchestra. Furthermore, the clarinet appears locked into a pattern of frenzied oscillation between high and low registers: the result is that impression of inertia we encountered early on, although the tension with the soloist's effort is considerably more dramatic. Occasional, fleeting escapes from the prevailing b-c³ compass convey a sense of strain against inertia.

In bb.210-211, however, the melodic contour, though still vaguely reminiscent of the rising-falling gestalt that has predominated since b.189, becomes more complex, and the clarinet escapes in b.212 to its very highest register. In doing so, however, it reaches another maximum problematically early – that of sheer speed: the demisemiquavers in the last two beats of b.211 occur at a rate of approximately 15 per second. Once again, furiously energetic demisemiquavers in the strings enact a futile struggle to release that energy, unaided by the prevalence of static octatonic harmony. Demisemiquavers vanish abruptly in b.215, as does the sense of physical strain in the clarinet. But just as the *pianissimo* db³ in b.219 requires considerable but subdued strain on the soloist's part, the underlying harmony maintains a subtle tension: we are presented with a tonally suggestive set 12-1 chord – a particularly prominent structure in Lindberg's music.⁴⁶ It is the registral distribution of pitch

⁴⁶ See Martin 2005, 19-27. As Martin argues, Lindberg's use of the device may be attributable to Lutoslawski, an influence acknowledged most pointedly in 1994's *Aura: In Memoriam Witold Lutoslawski*. Lutoslawski's employment of 12-tone chords, beginning in 1956, has been considered 'the most significant turning point in [Lutoslawski's] career' (Rae 1994, 50).

classes which generates the chord's close resemblance to tonal harmony. While Lindberg's harmonic language owes much to pitch class set theory, his attentiveness to registral spacing demonstrates a shortcoming of that theory as a technology for approaching his works. The importance of the hierarchical relationships between registers – specifically, the over-riding significance of lower pitches in the determination of a harmony's functionality – is demonstrated by Lindberg's placement of an E major triad at the base of b.219's set 12-1 chord. As a result, higher pitches are heard as tonally directional – suspensions demanding resolution, or chromaticisms pulling towards other triads. The difficulty, however, is that in such a complex harmonic structure numerous pitches are pulling in conflicting directions. Most notably in b.219, an augmented fourth and minor seventh, both relatively low in the chord, pull simultaneously in sharpwards and flatwards directions. Expectations of multiple resolutions can only be frustrated, tonal motion is impeded, and a sense of straining stasis results.

Ex. 4.3.7: Harmonic spectrum-reminiscent chord played by strings in bb.219-220.



In b.233 we hear a twelve-note chord quite distinct from the more tonally allusive aggregate heard in b.219. Characterised by a number of semitonal clashes in its deepest register, the chord sounds considerably more dissonant than previous examples. Furthermore, it is demonstrative of the way in which Lindberg sometimes arranges pitches such that the highest six pitch classes form a hexachord (in this case 6-Z43) which is Z-related to the hexachord formed by the lowest six (6-Z17).⁴⁷ As the two halves of the chord therefore have the same interval vector, we are once

Ex. 4.3.8: Twelve-note chord played by strings in bb.233-234



again presented with a kind of vertical symmetry around a central axis. In this case, dissonance certainly lacks the 'essential quality of movement'. Locked into a paralysing symmetry, the dominant impression is one of stasis. Rapid trills, never diverging from this underlying pitch assembly, create the sense of shuddering resistance to a harmonic impasse.

The clarinet's response is easily construed as one of frenzied anguish: in b.236 it hurls a flurry of staccato demisemiquavers at the problem. The clarinet uses every available pitch in a tightly compressed tritone between a[#] and e¹, the exhaustion of this space creating a feeling of brutal constriction. The following bars

⁴⁷ For more on Lindberg's symmetrical pitch assemblages, see Martin 2005.

witness a marginal expansion of range: the tritone is transposed a tone, for instance, for the tremolos with which the darting passages are interspersed. The impression of a resistance to constriction complements the passage's tethering to a single underlying harmony loaded with numerous tensions. Recalling the harmonic collision explored in *Kinetics*, the main opposition here is between symmetrical twelve-note and spectral chords (spectrally derived harmonies are of course markedly asymmetric in their registral distribution) – chords which have individually shown themselves to be wrought with tensions. The clarinet's tremolos between g[#] and d¹ accentuate the 5th and 7th partials of the EE which still lingers softly but tangibly in the double bass. Yet the pitch-space between g[#] and d¹ is densely packed with the orchestra's symmetrical 6-Z4 chord. The intractability of these tensions is suggested by the clarinet's unchanging but conspicuously effortful alternation between darting passagework and awkward tremolo. A sudden thinning of texture in b.250 represents a dissolution, rather than a resolution, of these tensions.

A question raised by the complex symmetrical pitch structures involved in this section (and throughout much of the Clarinet Concerto) relates to the issue of audibility: we may understand on a theoretical level that symmetry, as a visual manifestation of balance, connects with inertia; it is harder to accept that the ear necessarily unravels these harmonies to perceive this inertia. The question becomes all the more pertinent when one considers the concern for perceptibility that Lindberg has inherited in large part from the spectralists. Yet I think this is precisely what reinforces the central point of this chapter: a harmonic kinetics of occasionally questionable perceptibility is powerfully amplified by the literal kinetics of the soloist's

performance, and this is perhaps a significant reason for Lindberg's sustained interest in a genre that lends itself so keenly to physicality.

Bb.357-382

A peak of sheer force is reached in the clarinet's multiphonics in bb.355-357, followed by the soloist's longest rest (19 bars) in the entire Concerto. My reading of this sequence of events is that the acoustic energy generated in this soloist's initial dynamic peak is sufficient to propel a relatively lengthy subsequent section of the work (of course, the shortness of this 19-bar rest relative to the length of a traditional tutti section shows how precarious the work's energetics are). As if replenished by its brief siesta, the clarinet re-enters in b.376 with a languid statement of the opening theme. The accompanying orchestral chord is perhaps the best possible example of a twelve-note chord that is 'sensuously easy on the ear' (indeed, the contrast between the harmonies heard in bb.233 and 376 is surely paradigmatically demonstrative of the importance of register to a harmony's sonority). The impression of consonance emerges from the use of a second-inversion B $\flat$ 7 harmony as the bottom tetrachord, along with the first violins' reinforcement of these pitch classes in a higher register. Yet we should also note the prominence given to pitch classes 0 and 4, both in the violas and – two octaves higher – the flutes. The prominence of pc 4 in particular is significant: an augmented fourth above B $\flat$, it sits in sharpwards-flatwards tension with the a $\flat$ in a hexachord strongly reminiscent of a harmonic spectrum on B $\flat$. The spectrum's fundamental (two octaves lower than the B $\flat$ we

hear) is itself not sounded, an example of Lindberg's fondness for spectra left suspended above absent bass-notes.⁴⁸ This impression of suspension is complemented by the absence of strain in the clarinet line – both seem to float, disembodied, on the air.

This impression also reinforces the disappearance of another type of strain: along with the return of the opening's pitch centre, bb.376-382 present us with the previously elusive synthesis of spectral and twelve-note harmonies – a synthesis that

Ex. 4.3.9: harmonic spectrum-reminiscent accompaniment to motto theme, bb.376-8

The musical score for Ex. 4.3.9 is a multi-staff arrangement. At the top, the tempo is indicated as $\text{♩} = 54$. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Solo Cl.:** Plays a melodic line with dynamics *mp* and *pp*.
- VI. I (div. in 4):** Two staves, each with *pp* dynamics and *senza vibr.* markings.
- VI. II (div. in 6):** Two staves, each with *pp* dynamics and *senza vibr.* markings.
- Vla (div. in 4):** Two staves, each with *p* and *mp* dynamics and *senza vibr.* markings.
- Vc. (div. in 4):** Two staves, each with *pp* dynamics and *senza vibr.* markings.
- Db.:** A single staff with *p* dynamics and *senza vibr.* markings.

The score is in 4/4 time and spans measures bb.376-8. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

⁴⁸ Paul Martin compares this device to a low-pass filter, in which every pitch below a given frequency is cut out of the sound. See Martin 2005, 27.

is a major preoccupation for Lindberg. This thematic return might therefore suggest itself as a point of closure that resolves the previous conflict between systems of harmonic organisation. The problem is that the floating, relatively effortless return runs contrary to the breathless fireworks demanded by wind concerto tradition.

Bb.411-435

The thematic return of bb.411-415 sounds like a much more fitting finale. In terms of sheer amplitude – a significant parameter where strain is concerned – these bars, and those that follow, have the work's highest decibel level (as measured on both the Ondine studio recording and that of a live BBC Proms performance of the Concerto).⁴⁹ This level alone, however, represents only a part of what gives a sound its subjective loudness: pitch plays an important role, as treble frequencies of a given amplitude are perceived as being considerably louder than bass frequencies of the same amplitude. As ex. 4.3.10 shows, the high frequency range in bb.411-415 is particularly energetic, with the violins, flutes and the clarinet all playing the f³-d³ opening with fortissimo, almost piercing intensity. This, along with the frenetic rhythmic concentration of, say, the piano in b.412 or the ascending strings of b.413, creates an especially radiant texture.

As in the thematic statement of b.376, we are presented with a spectrally derived flatwards-sharpwards (a^b-e^b) tension around an underlying B^b centre.

⁴⁹ This is true on both the first commercially available recording (Kari Kriikku, Sakari Oramo, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, *Clarinet Concerto; Gran Duo; Chorale* (Ondine, B000ARHNG, 2005) and the BBC Proms performance of Kriikku, Semyon Bychkov and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, broadcast live on BBC Radio 3 on 3 August 2007.

Disconcertingly for our sense of a maximally energetic climax, the flatwards drive quickly overcomes the sharpwards, this time manifested in a registral descent through a series of perfect fifths (bb.416-419). A jarring $a\flat$ -d tritone halts this descent, but not before the now readily recognisable signals of increasing strain have come to the fore. The descent through the circle of fifths is accompanied by rhythmic augmentation in the accompaniment (septuplets becoming quavers then crotchets), and the section's earlier rhythmic energy is transferred into the timpani roll. The *accelerando* called for in b.418 seems particularly anachronistic given the collapse of the section's rhythmic momentum, and sounds similarly like a new and necessary channel for the excess energy contained within what went before. In b.420 the brass begin to predominate with a series of rising chromatic motifs, reinforcing the argument that, particularly in passages for wind instruments, rising pitch can create a sense of rising intensity – this is particularly likely when the instruments are heard in their high registers, as is the case with the first horns and trumpets during bb.420-423. A *rallentando* only 3 bars after the *accelerando* reinforces the sense of struggle between tempos following the certainty of pulse that characterised bb.411-417 – even the music's temporality is seemingly flexing under the strain. It is at this point that the clarinet's multiphonics reappear. Occasional triplet rhythms in the brass and timpani, remnants of the previous rhythmic stability, are abolished in b.424 by what is arguably the most abrasive sonority heard throughout the work. A tritone relation lies at the root of b.424's twelve-note chord, and the balancing of bass and treble initially ensures that all pitch classes except 1 and 7 function timbrally rather than harmonically. This changes almost instantly as the balance in dynamics between

Ex. 4.3.10: climactic thematic statement, bb.411-412

[illegible]

registers and instrument groups enters a state of constant flux. Yet restless timbral variation throughout bb.424-427 struggles against the persistence of the underlying twelve-note harmony, which sounds increasingly like a point of structural breathlessness that timbral variation is simply unable to push beyond.

There is perhaps a poignant irony in the fact that, despite this display of timbre's futility, this towering obstacle is followed by the work's most extended exploration of timbral variation, particularly through the use of peculiar chamber music reminiscent textures. Throughout bb.435-525 the texture is usually strikingly sparse, the clarinet in dialogue with orchestral soloists – most notably, and most frequently, with two other solo clarinets. Such combinations draw attention to the spatialisation of the music, the final form of actual physicality that Lindberg underlines. As the final available means of foregrounding the music's physicality, this spatialisation brings a sense of exhaustion. That exhaustion lasts, I would argue, between bb.435-526, in which a loss of energy is particularly detectable in the scarcity of apparent directionality in the treatment of harmony, rhythm and gesture.

As if in acknowledgement of this dissipation, the main theme makes a decidedly subdued reappearance in b.488, a tone lower than it has been previously. The perceptibility of the latter difference is questionable following such a harmonically ambiguous section, but the descending glissando and decrescendo in b.491 reinforce a sense of decreasing intensity.

Ex. 4.3.11: The Clarinet Concerto's most abrasive sonority involving all 12 pitch classes

[illegible]

Bb.527-cadenza

Bb.527-557 encompass every extreme of technical difficulty so far encountered in the Concerto, in some cases narrowly surpassing what has gone before: the negotiation of registral extremes in bb.527-532; extreme rapidity of passagework (again, approximately 15 notes per second in bb.533-534); peaks of amplitude, often accompanying registral highpoints. Yet these displays of power, while certainly impressive, seem anxiously to resist structural disintegration. The previous fluency and continuity with which one idea succeeded the last has all but evaporated: the clarinet's phrases are often short, fragmentary, incoherent – a scattered exploration of several ideas, none of which seems to supply lasting sustenance. A sense of exhaustion is complemented by the harmonic syntax, as much of the passagework is characterised by a dense chromaticism that resists any sense of tonal centrality. Given that a tonally-allusive harmonic directionality has been so important to the Clarinet Concerto's sense of onward motion, the marked atonality of these bars creates the strong impression that impetus is lacking – perhaps even that collapse is imminent. While triadic harmony resurfaces in the arpeggios of bb.542-546, each arpeggio begins a semitone higher than the last, obscuring any sense of tonality and exhibiting the anxious, almost desperate-sounding tendency towards rising pitch. This tendency reaches its absolute peak in b.550, when a 'glissando with teeth on the reed' takes the clarinet into an unprecedentedly high register. The clarinet maintains a precarious hold on that register in a tense stasis which seems to state most overtly the structural impasse which has been reached. The impression of tension is surely reinforced by the visual aspect of the soloist's biting gesture.

How can this section, during which multiple maxima are attained, be followed? Lindberg assigns this task to the soloist. The composer's decision not to write the work's cadenza – still the exception rather than the rule following the nineteenth century's separation of the roles of composer and performer⁵⁰ – has generally been taken as a token of trust in Kari Kriikku, the friend and colleague who has played the solo part in the vast majority of the Concerto's performances to date; the mutual respect in this composer and performer relationship has often been taken as an excellent example of the widespread creative cooperation so beneficial to recent Finnish music-making – as one commentator puts it,

Lindberg worked at his summer cottage and delivered passages to his soloist by boat. It is not very far-fetched to say that the Clarinet Concerto was fostered by sea and sun.⁵¹

This seems a far cry from those bickering composer-soloist relationships documented in so much musical biography.⁵² Yet the soloist has surely been assigned a task of potentially stifling difficulty. The impossibility of surpassing the technical difficulty of the music preceding the cadenza accentuates the challenges that have historically made cadenzas such a problematic, destabilising part of concerto ritual. Duration also plays a role: formal strain has already sounded uncomfortably prolonged in bb.527-557. Additionally, while one could question the perceptual salience of proportion over the course of this 25-minute long single movement, the cadenza's presence upsets the placement of b.411's climactic

⁵⁰ See Whitmore 1991, 3-19.

⁵¹ CD Liner notes, 3.

⁵² Many accounts of concerto production feature performer-composer confrontations. One example is the conversation reported between Maurice Ravel and Paul Wittgenstein, the pianist for whom *Concerto for Left Hand* was written. The relationship between the two was often tense, leading to the pianist's outburst: 'Performers must not be slaves!', to which Ravel replied 'Performers *are* slaves'. (quoted in Russ 2000, 125)

thematic statement at the work's golden section. The difficulties of the soloist's assignment bring about a sense of imminent collapse, of the risk that both work and performer could be *wegkadenziert* ('cadenza-ed away').⁵³

This cadenza-space is crucial to the Clarinet Concerto's problematic structure: it is exemplary of the way in which cadenzas often sound like breaking-points in a movement's design, intrusions which sit uncomfortably with the traditional values of tautness, unity, and the composer's complete authorial control (Tovey exemplifies his focus on Classical ideals when contending that the cadenza represents 'the saddest chapter in the story of the concerto'⁵⁴). Joseph Kerman has discussed this clash of values:

In the Classical concerto, the distention of cadential energy that is promoted by the cadenza is, at the very least, unclassical – to say nothing of the license granted by improvisation, the license to break with tempo and rhythm, recall themes, make modulations, and what not, indifferent to the balance of theme and tonality in the work as a whole.⁵⁵

The Classical standard remains pertinent in this case because Lindberg's Concerto so frequently entertains notions of neoclassical balance (a fact confirmed by its critical reception). Particularly in the case of our wind concerto, the cadenza can be interpreted as the blank space in which the concerto's main creative force, having been suffocated, can re-draw breath in preparation for the final section. This need for a conspicuous breather within a single movement would be problematic enough from a traditionally organicist viewpoint; yet the Clarinet Concerto, as I argue in the following section, fails even to take the opportunity for a breath.

⁵³ A term used by eighteenth-century theorist D.G. Türk in *Clavierschule* (1789). See Badura-Skoda and Drabkin 2007.

⁵⁴ Tovey 1903, 72.

⁵⁵ Kerman 1999, 72.

The post-cadenza Clarinet Concerto

The bars following the cadenza represent Lindberg at his most schematic. They are more formulaic and more regular in terms of rhythm and harmonic change than any other bars in the Clarinet Concerto – more so, perhaps, than any in the composer's whole output. The over-riding impression is of mechanicity: 'the [immediately post-cadenza] home stretch [...] opens with enormous drive', as Risto Nieminen notes;⁵⁶ I hear this, however, not as a teleological drive homewards, but rather as a fearful drive away from the cadenza and the problems it represents. The mechanicity of this rhythm following the collapse might well put one in mind of cardiac compression.⁵⁷

This relentless stretch of semiquavers leads towards a final, climactic return of the Clarinet Concerto's main theme – perhaps the work has been nursed back to a full recovery. Yet the radiant exuberance of this return surely belies the fragility of one who has recently been brought back from the brink of death. The clarinet, firmly located in the stratospheric heights of the extreme register, is nonetheless capable of sustaining the work's lyrical main theme. Luxurious, fulsome orchestration and washes of vibrant spectral colour are suggestive of a healthy abundance which surely seems suspicious under the circumstances. Lindberg suggests that the desperation with which the Concerto clung to life has been replaced by something insincere, somehow distanced from that struggle: he is reported to have dismissed

⁵⁶ Nieminen 2005.

⁵⁷ This is of course not the first time a cardiac arrest has been depicted in music. On the wealth of speculation on Mahler's heart condition and its possible connections with aspects of his Ninth and Tenth Symphonies, see Hefling 1999, 467-8. Cardiac arrest has similarly been heard in Nielsen's Sixth Symphony by a number of writers (see Roth 2009, especially 167-169).

the climax with the words 'you may laugh at this point if you wish to do so'.⁵⁸ This surreal, grotesque abundance remains as the music is wrenched up a tone to a final, *fortissimo* C major chord, recalling on a larger scale the local sharpwards twist that occurred in bb.1-19. The timbral sheen of this final chord, particularly with its added ninth, perhaps harks back to the close of Sibelius's Seventh Symphony – a work in which the arrival of a once-triumphant C major seems similarly suspect, following an all-too-rapid dissolution of intractable tonal tensions.⁵⁹ The final section of the Clarinet Concerto therefore has a vitality that seems entirely and disturbingly artificial: there is the nagging suspicion that, instead of a hard-won recovery, we are hearing the hollow reanimation of a corpse. The alternative view is that the Clarinet Concerto is resurrected – indeed, restored completely and miraculously to its youthful vitality – after dying at the cadenza.

Conclusion

Formal collapse and laboured reinvigoration, to say nothing of resurrection, sit uncomfortably with the model of healthy organicism which pervades much music analysis and criticism – in spite of the problematisation of musical organicism by writers such as Ruth A. Solie and Janet M. Levy.⁶⁰ Having set itself up as a twenty-first century model of single-movement organicism, the Clarinet Concerto emerges

⁵⁸ Magnus Lindberg in Howell 2006, 257.

⁵⁹ Sir Colin Davis hears the conclusion of the Sibelius as 'the closing of the coffin lid'. (Davies in Grimley 2004, 234). The tensions I refer to involve the Seventh's disconcerting habit of slipping flatwards from its tonal centre. For a useful discussion of this symphony see Whittall 2004, especially 61-65.

⁶⁰ Solie 1980 and Levy 1987.

as a grotesque affront to conventional criteria of musical value.⁶¹ If the ending is heard as a hollow reanimation, it offends vitalist sensibilities while its surface sheen, easily heard as being only 'skin deep', potentially challenges a bias for a balance between depth and surface.⁶² Investment in the latter interpretation demands a faith all but extinguished in modernist music analysis.⁶³

Furthermore, this ending is an inevitable outcome of formal problems that have been endemic to the Concerto. Throughout its 25-minute duration, the work has lurched from one source of sustenance to another, proceeding rapidly, perhaps even desperately, through series of literal and metaphorical peaks: those of speed, rhythmic activity, register, harmonic complexity, sheer amplitude, treble concentration, and timbral variation. Its fundamental structural difficulty is a quintessentially concertante one: how can the work continue once a point of saturation (suffocation) has been reached? Throughout this struggle for sustenance, the physical strain, even exhaustion, of the work's soloist powerfully reinforces the sense of imminent formal collapse.

Once again, the concerto-genre functions as a 'battleground for musical tastes'. Given the predominant paradigms in musical analysis, there is a strong probability that this conclusion will seem like a negative response to the Concerto, a perhaps spiteful riposte to those who have celebrated the balance and good health of a highly successful deployment of twenty-first-century modernist techniques. Arnold

⁶¹ Schenker, for instance, considers mechanicity to be a particularly crushing condemnation in 'Rameau oder Beethoven', in the third volume of *Das Meisterwerk in der Musik* (Schenker 1930, 501-503).

⁶² The negative connotations of the expression 'skin deep' connect with the value judgements that surround the depth-surface dichotomy. A particularly useful exploration of these judgements is provided in Fink 2001. Depth and surface are discussed in much greater detail in my case study of Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen.

⁶³ For a sustained discussion of the values implicit in music analysis see Street 1989.

Whittall, one of very few commentators to note the Concerto's structural strain, seems to view that characteristic as a compositional defect:

sheer expansiveness of design and expression comes close to running out of steam in the Clarinet Concerto's later stages, and comparable reservations can be registered about [Lindberg's] Concerto for Orchestra.⁶⁴

I would argue that, far from being a weakness, the work's struggle against exhaustion is an affective shaping – a shaping which is ultimately a compelling challenge to the conventional analytical fear of breathlessness.

The analytical propensity for organic continuity also pervades discussions of Lindberg's career: Howell, for instance, has argued that Lindberg's style has evolved organically and what he describes as a 'domino effect' is still pertinent: 'there is a line of development beneath a diversity of expression'.⁶⁵ As with Nørgård's output, the tidiness of these trajectories must be questioned, and one should avoid smoothing over obvious ruptures between the soundworlds of works separated by nearly two decades. I maintain that there is a striking and important distinction between the industrial pyrotechnics of *Kraft* and the living, breathing, dying organicism of the Clarinet Concerto. I conclude, however, by positing one important unity between them: the latter concerto's dramatic fight against exhaustion, together with its concluding artificiality, seem to move it closer to the anxious, broken structures of *Kraft*. Yet I would offer an alternative reading of the connection between these two outwardly dissimilar works. The artificiality – perhaps even the humorous disavowal – of the Clarinet Concerto's ending offers a new way of reading the earlier work: for all

⁶⁴ Whittall 2005, 172.

⁶⁵ Howell 2006, 259.

the apparent earnestness of its struggle against the late-twentieth-century ageing of modernism, *Kraft* is perhaps a more distanced, 'disembodied' work than it may initially appear. Rather than 'strength' or 'force', its title might be understood in the sense of 'craftsmanship', such that its wide-ranging catalogue of high-modernist gestures is a distanced, *Grand Macabre*-style parody rather than an earnest struggle against suffocation.⁶⁶ In both *Kraft* and the Clarinet Concerto, the imminence of exhaustion is the topic of a pointedly staged drama; and in both cases, a strong concertante element, with its intrinsic theatricality and concern with maximisation of technique, proves itself ideally suited to precisely that sort of production.

⁶⁶ For an in-depth music-analytical discussion of parody in *Le Grande Macabre*, see Everett 2009.

5

Space

5.1

Introduction

A great deal of twentieth-century musical production is deeply concerned with the exploration of acoustic space. Early in the century, Charles Ives' *The Unanswered Question* (1908) focuses quite pointedly on the placement of its three musical groups (strings, flutes, trumpets), as reinforced by the temporal and harmonic oppositions between them. Likewise, Stravinsky's treatment of pitch and register frequently accentuates the physical distances between instruments or groups within an ensemble: as Judith Weir observes of *Oedipus Rex* (1927), for instance, 'little groups of instruments [are kept in] very narrow wavebands [...] each instrument group operates at a different height in the score'.¹ In the same generation, Edgar Varèse envisages a spatial music in which moving masses of sound are controlled by 'acoustic arrangements' to permit the 'hitherto unobtainable non-blending' of different timbres.² As Jonathan Cross argues, however, Varèse's

ambition for a genuinely spatial music remained only latent until the advent of the electronic tape, which then made possible both *Deserts* (1949-54) and the *Poème électronique* [...] Varese paved the way for many post-World War 2 composers who have explored the spatial and dramatic possibilities of

¹ Judith Weir in Cross 1998, 37.

² For a discussion of Varese's 'liberation of sound' and its impact, see Boehmer 2003, 160.

electronic music [...] and more recently the use of computers to transform sounds and throw them around the performing space.³

Boulez's *Répons* is a particularly noteworthy example of a more recent work that does precisely this, taking on 'spatial organisation as a creative issue'.⁴ The first major showing of the 4X digital system – that 1980s 'Rolls Royce of computer music'⁵ – *Répons* also features a chamber orchestra and six soloists (like Lindberg's *Kraft*). Reflection is perhaps the key mode of musical development here: as Susan Bradshaw argues,

Répons is a hugely wide-ranging investigation of the proliferating reflections of a single aural image – a series of spiralling echoes that sometimes follow one another, almost like classical imitation [...]; are sometimes simultaneous in the vertical sense [...]; and are often superimposed horizontally in heterophonic layers.⁶

It is obvious from this concertante example that, while much of this repertory makes extensive use of electronic manipulation, the oppositions of soloists and instrumental groups have remained at the heart of many paradigmatic explorations of acoustic space. The notion of a conspicuous spatial division in an instrumental ensemble has often given rise to multiple, complex divisions and novel arrangements of performers and audiences.

How can the analyst approach works in which spatial organisation is central? Certainly, one approach can be to consider effects such as reverberation, and the interactions between direct and refracted sounds as they enter our ears. Delay also

³ Cross 1998, 37.

⁴ Williams 1997, 196.

⁵ Born 1995, 285.

⁶ Bradshaw 1986, 224.

becomes a key issue in works where spatial positioning is an important feature. Further, as in *Répons*, reflection can be analysed as a primary structural parameter. But such works hardly neglect more conventional structural parameters, and for analysts accustomed to dealing with large-scale temporal structures, and concerned with more hermeneutic ways of reading works, these acoustic effects can only take us so far. In an analytical connection with the previous section, I am particularly interested here in the ways in which this physical spatialisation interacts with the metaphorical spaces these works appear to project.

From Acoustic to Metaphorical Spaces

Many twentieth-century musical works are of course strikingly spatial also in metaphorical terms – they seem to strain against their temporality, towards the stasis, concreteness and three-dimensionality of a visual medium like sculpture or architecture (conversely, many twentieth-century static visual works struggle towards the temporality of music⁷). The distended time of Sibelius's last tone poem, *Tapiola* (1926), is a particularly striking early example of this tendency: as Arnold Whittall argues,

Tapiola seems to concentrate on different aspects of the same idea. Hence the feeling that there is no genuine symphonic progress through argument to resolution but, instead, the exploration of a landscape seen in a single frozen moment: a painting. *Tapiola* raises the paradox of time and timelessness far

⁷ Early in the twentieth century, for instance, Cubism in particular gave rise to analogies between music and art. See Golding 1988, 20-21.

more acutely than many more radical works which contrast measured and unmeasured material.⁸

Prolonged passages of harmonic stasis, ostinatos and block forms can often be heard as a similar tension between time and timelessness in Stravinsky's music. Later twentieth-century examples of overtly spatialised time include Morton Feldman's 'still life' pieces. More broadly, it has been argued that 'spatialised representations' of music became particularly dominant in works of the mid-twentieth century.⁹

This spatialisation of temporal process can easily be linked with changes in the perception of time in other fields of twentieth-century thought. At the beginning of his monograph on 'the time of music', Jonathan Kramer notes that 'critics and theorists of all disciplines have pointed to the upheavals in time concepts since 1900'.¹⁰ Writing specifically on musical modernism after the Second World War, Alastair Williams observes that

Lukács offers a piercing critique of the effects of industrialisation on our perception of time, arguing that when humanity is subordinated to the machine, 'time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable "things" [...] in short, it becomes space'.¹¹

Some composers seem to reinforce this conceptualisation: in Xenakis' millimetre-ruled graphs of pitch against time, for instance, the latter becomes a mere dimension in a homogeneous, isotropic space, not distinguished in any way from the dimension of pitch. This perceived sameness allows geometrical transformations and alterations

⁸ Whittall 1999, 64.

⁹ Richard Taruskin makes this argument in Taruskin 2005b, 513. He is responding specifically to Jerrold Levinson's critique of spatialised representations of music in Levinson 1997, xi.

¹⁰ J. Kramer 1988, 12.

¹¹ Williams 1994, 195.

between the two.¹² Other works seem to resist that perception, often with a rhythmic freedom which disturbs any sense of spatial compartmentalisation, as manifested most ubiquitously in the regularity of modern time-keeping devices. One thinks, for instance, of the ‘chrono-ametric’ temporalities encountered in many of Elliott Carter’s works.

Globalisation, as Williams notes, has had an important effect on late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century perceptions of temporality:

The experience of space-time compression is too strong in an age of global communication and travel for the spatial not to exert a hold on our imaginations. The possibility of related events happening simultaneously across large geographical spaces poses problems for the concept of coherent, successive events in time – a sense which underpins traditional narrative techniques and the positing of an unfolding temporal logic in music.¹³

Globalisation has had another important effect on conceptions of musical time: much compositional practice of recent decades has been affected widely by exposure to musical traditions in which a nonlinear ‘time of being’ dominates, as opposed to classical music’s typically linear ‘time of becoming’.¹⁴ In the following discussion I explore the ways in which both this spatialised time and investigation of acoustic space are important – and connected – aspects of a great deal of concerto composition.

¹² Hoffmann 2007.

¹³ Williams 1994, 196.

¹⁴ Jonathan Kramer contrasts these two kinds of time in J. Kramer 1988.

Many concertos of the past half-century are strongly suggestive of the ways in which spatial arrangements of instruments can inflect or assist our understanding of the music's more abstract structures. As in the previous analytical case study, we arrive at a conflation of literal and metaphorical domains. A particularly rigorous example of this connection is encountered in Elliott Carter's *Double Concerto* (1961), in which 'the structural function given to the spectrum of pitch and volume is complemented by a structural activation of space'.¹⁵ As David Schiff observes,

the two groups of instruments sit as far apart as possible, surrounded by the four evenly spaced percussionists to the rear of the stage and the soloists to the front. The plan is both antiphonal and circular; the music moves from left to right and back, and also clockwise and counter-clockwise in changing patterns.¹⁶

In the absence of traditional tonal means of structural articulation, physical space assists in the audience's comprehension of the work's less familiar, complex harmonic and rhythmic structures: different instrument groups 'specialise' in different intervals and rhythmic relationships. Boulez's *Domaines* (1961-8) for solo clarinet and six instrumental ensembles is another example. The physical movement of the soloist between the ensembles significantly reinforces the distinctions between the more abstract 'domains' through which the composition 'moves'. As Boulez has argued, '[*Domaines*] could be played without moving about, but this would give a false perspective of a piece that actually has a very clear tendency to individualise its

¹⁵ Schiff 1998, 239.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 239.

various component parts'.¹⁷ Birtwistle has also been heavily committed to the interaction of physical space and musical structure. In *Verses for Ensembles* (1968-9), for example, the changing positions of performers or groups on the platform are reflective of their changing roles in the music: soloists, for instance, move to desks at the front of the stage, while woodwind players move from left to right depending on where they are playing within the work's auditory spectrum. A similar blurring of physical and metaphorical space is likewise central to the more recent *Secret Theatre* (1984): 'stage separation is used to articulate musical difference: the cantus is placed to one side of the bulk of the ensemble (the continuum)'.¹⁸

The fact that layers of sound potentially dramatise musical space (a possibility first explored through the multi-track tape works of the late 1950s) was also never far from Berio's mind. After the 'sound in the round' experiments of *Allelujah II* (1957-8), Berio, for practical reasons, kept his orchestra on the traditional platform. However, he repeatedly devised new seating patterns for his performers so as to dynamise acoustic space within that confine. These range from the 'echo-chamber' provided by a third group of violins seated at the back (*Epifanie, Sinfonia*) to the radical rearrangements of *Formazioni* (1985-7) or *Concerto II (Echoing Curves)*. Nevertheless, only by electronic means was he able to reclaim music's potential 360 degrees. The resultant tension between the physically performing body and the disembodied, roving sound of the TRAILS system (or its more economically viable successors), made explicit in *Ofanim* (1988), remains vivid and unresolved.

¹⁷ Pierre Boulez in Boulez and Deliège 1976, 87. In the same conversation, Boulez suggests that the aspects of the structure may actually be rendered 'too audible' by the use of physical placement.

¹⁸ Adlington 2000, 59.

More recently, and within the Nordic arena, one may recall the elaborate spatial configuration of Mikko Heiniö's *Envelope* for Trumpet and Orchestra, a work quite explicitly concerned with connections between literal and metaphorical containment:

Envelope is an overture which doesn't just come before a classical concerto but envelops it totally. The piece begins with my music, proceeds without a break, slips to Haydn's trumpet concerto as painlessly as possible and ends with my music again. I have also added a cadenza to the Haydn concerto and written bridge passages between the movements. [...] My music envelops Haydn's not only in time but in space as well. The only instruments on the platform are those needed for the Haydn concerto, plus a piano, a harp and one percussionist. The other instruments are placed around the audience.¹⁹

Other, more pictorial concertos favour the analogy of a soloist exploring an environment constructed by the orchestra. Discussing his trumpet concerto, *Endless Parade*, Harrison Birtwistle offers the metaphor of exploring different perspectives on a parade as it moves through an Italian 'medieval labyrinth of streets'.²⁰ The concept of soloists as 'strollers' in an orchestral Japanese garden is posited by Tōru Takemitsu as a way of approaching his *Quotation of Dream*, a concerto for two pianos and orchestra;²¹ a variant of the 'soloist in orchestral garden' metaphor is also offered by Danish composer Bent Sørensen in the Nordic Council Music prize-winning violin concerto *Sterbende Gärten*.²² Although Ligeti does not offer such a concrete metaphor for his Piano Concerto, he makes it clear that the work is deeply concerned with the spatialisation of time:

¹⁹ Mikko Heiniö, Programme Note to *Envelope*.

²⁰ Harrison Birtwistle in Adlington 2000, 118.

²¹ For a more detailed discussion of *Quotation of Dream*, see Burt 2001, 220.

²² See Sørensen 1995, 50-52.

Now with the Piano Concerto I offer my artistic credo [...] I favour forms that are less process-like and more object-like. Music as frozen time, as an object in imaginary space that is evoked in our imagination through music itself. Music as a structure that, in spite of unfolding in the flux of time, is still synchronically conceivable, simultaneously present in all its moments. To hold onto time, to suspend its disappearance, to confine it to the present moment, this is my primary goal in composition.²³

Ligeti's tendency to conceive music in spatial terms has been extrapolated by Jonathan W. Bernard into the production of graphs that show the pitch-space explored in Ligeti's early piano *Étude* 'Désordre'.²⁴ One thinks in particular of the Mauritz Escher-like spatial paradoxes encountered in 'Vertiges' and 'L'escalier du Diable'.²⁵

I would suggest that there is something about the piano concerto genre in particular that encourages both composers and listeners to think in especially spatial terms. David Schiff makes a similar observation in stating, in connection with Carter's Piano Concerto, that the piano is 'the spatial instrument par excellence'.²⁶ Keyboard layout provides the clearest spatialisation of register, intervals and voicings.

On attempting to recreate metaphorical spaces when listening to these works, listeners may have the impression that metaphorical spaces tend to be considerably more multifarious, paradoxical and contingent than the relatively fixed and concrete spaces in which musical instruments are positioned; the 'soloist as explorer of an orchestral environment' analogy can easily collapse, potentially reflecting the relative

²³ Ligeti 1988.

²⁴ Bernard 1987.

²⁵ For a discussion of these works see Steinitz 1996.

²⁶ Schiff 1998, 229.

athleticism or elusiveness of metaphorical space and motion. Foregrounding notions of space, concertos can invite and ultimately frustrate too literal a mapping of the physical onto the metaphorical. In doing so, such works revel in the spatial paradoxes which, while difficult to recreate in more concrete realms, are possible in music because it is performative, non-representational and primarily experienced as a temporal phenomenon.²⁷ Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's (b.1932) *Plateaux pour Piano et Orchestre* (2005) is a particularly compelling example of such a work.

²⁷ Candace Brower has recently provided a comprehensive consideration of paradoxes and contingencies in tonal pitch space (Brower 2008). I argue in this chapter that similar paradoxes also emerge in spatial conceptualisations of other parameters and in atonal pitch space.

5.2

Around, Across, Between Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's *Plateaux pour Piano et Orchestre*

Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's five existing concertante works – *Triptykon* (1985), *Concerto Grosso* (1990, rev. 1995), *For Cello and Orchestra* (1996), *For Violin and Orchestra* (2002), and *Plateaux pour Piano et Orchestre* (2005) – arguably represent the central strand in the composer's output since the Nordic Council Music Prize-winning *Symphony, Antiphony* (1977).¹ Spatial layouts in all five concertos are fairly conventional, involving a simple and static physical separation of soloist (or soloists in *Concerto Grosso*) from ensemble. The vast majority of textures encountered in these works involve single instrumental sections, such that the concertos demarcate the orchestral space with a striking clarity. The effect is almost as marked in the stereo pannings of recordings as it is in live performance.

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen often plays with the idea of a similar unambiguous fixedness in the metaphorical spaces he constructs. This kind of playfulness is particularly apparent in the composer's discussion of the 'geographically' conceived *Concerto Grosso*, in which the orchestra, surrounding the soloists (a string quartet), is configured as the 'wild jungleland' in which the soloists 'move around'.² Already, the connection of physical and metaphorical spaces is strained, as the soloists do not literally change location – rather, their 'movements' are conveyed musically through emergent harmonic, rhythmic or motivic differences or similarities between their parts

¹ For a discussion of *Symphony, Antiphony* in the context of late twentieth-century symphonic formal strategies, see Grimley 2011.

² Interview with Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, Copenhagen, 8 August 2008.

and those of certain orchestral sections. We realise quickly that the 'geographical design' is little more than a provocative, space-foregrounding starting point for approaching a work by a composer who discusses and organises his music through a richly evocative and varied array of spatial metaphors: harmonies are generated through systems analogous to mirrors, as in the system developed in *Spejl II* (1973) for orchestra and subsequently used in *Symphony*, *Antiphony* and *Concerto Grosso*. Forms are described as circles and spirals,³ often in reference to repetitions of materials or short-term processes (Gudmundsen-Holmgreen deems 'spirals' more accurate, as three-dimensionality better accommodates the idea of a return that is identical from one perspective and different from another). Contour is a pervasive organisational principle in *For Violin and Orchestra*, in which distinctive melodic shapes are diminished and augmented in terms of both pitch (quarter-tones becoming whole tones, for instance) and rhythm (the degree of augmentation or diminution may not be constant throughout a single 'variation', suggesting that an impression of overall shape is of greater importance than the specific notes themselves). One spatial configuration Gudmundsen-Holmgreen resists is what he sees as the straight, teleological arrows of late Romanticism: a readily discernable diagonal gradient on a graph of dynamic intensity against time in the prelude to *Tristan und Isolde* supports Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's contention that 'Wagner's ups and downs are really the highpoint in searching for the high point'.⁴ He contrasts this with the 'zigzagging' of dynamic intensity in the final movement of the percussion concerto *Triptykon* (1985). To those theorists accustomed a more circular view of late

³ In interview Gudmundsen-Holmgreen discussed the form of *For Cello and Orchestra* in terms of circles and spirals, claiming that 'circulating is one of [his] favourite conditions'. The metaphor was used on numerous occasions throughout the interview.

⁴ Gudmundsen-Holmgreen 1994, 41.

Romantic form,⁵ Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's analysis is perhaps an example of a composer misreading the past to forge distance from it. The crucial point, nonetheless, is that he works towards spatial conceptualisations which are markedly more elaborate than the straight teleological arrow.

Spatial configurations are even more multifarious across *Plateaux's* nine movements than in the previous concertante works – this concerto projects the most spatial, least temporal structures that its composer has yet created. In this chapter I aim to convey the multitude of ways in which the analyst or listener can construct, view, move within, across or between different spatial configurations. I discuss three basic spatial tropes: flatness, suspension, and confinement, each of which branches into a number of sub-topics. Partly in an effort to capture the way *Plateaux* struggles towards spatial conceptualisation, my analysis is anything but chronologically organised: the order in which different movements are considered reflects how the work seems to aspire towards the condition of a painting or a sculpture – something we can begin examining from infinite possible points.

Flatness

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen has become established as the leading musical exponent of *Den Ny Enkelhed* ('New Simplicity'), a movement which can also be seen in

⁵ Such cyclical conceptions of Romantic form range from the nineteenth-century theorist Ernst Kurth's concept of 'symphonic waves' (see Kurth and Rothfarb 1991, 188-206) to much more recent cyclical models of late Romantic harmony, such as Richard Cohn's work on 'maximally smooth cycles' (Cohn 1996).

Danish visual arts (the works of Per Kirkeby, for instance⁶). The connection with other media is important, as visual analogies have frequently accompanied the movement's musical manifestations: Henning Christiansen's *Perceptive Constructions* (1964), arguably the first musical example of *Den Ny Enkelhed*, is described by its composer as consisting of 'four forms of music construction in which sound is like a sculpture, a building, a frame, in short, like architecture in the air'.⁷ Though traceable back to the early 1960s, *Den Ny Enkelhed* has enjoyed a central position in Danish musical thought ever since.⁸ Various writers have contributed to the canonisation of this movement in Denmark, and Danish literature on the subject often exudes a sense of national pride in the instigation of a trend that seems largely to have anticipated the German *neue Einfachheit*. It was only in the late 1970s, with the emergence of young composers such as Wolfgang Rihm and Hans-Jürgen von Bose, that simplicity approached being as institutionalised in Germany as it had been in Denmark during the previous decade.⁹ Thus, 'New Simplicity' has become a central component of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's identity. Yet there are subtle differences between the meanings of 'enkelhed', 'einfachheit' and 'simplicity': of particular pertinence here is the Danish word's implication of isolation or objectivity, which is conveyed in Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's reference to *Den Ny Enkelhed*'s 'purgation process that peeled old expressive clichés from the musical material and tried to penetrate to an objective expression'.¹⁰ Paradigmatic examples of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's *Ny Enkelhed*, such as the scandalous *Tricolore IV*

⁶ Kirkeby's brick sculptures in particular are characterised by a striking clarity of line and symmetry that is easily paralleled with the musical 'New Simplicity'. See Munk 2007.

⁷ Henning Christiansen in Smith 2002, 125.

⁸ See Brincker 2000.

⁹ See Fox 2007 for an account of the German 'New Simplicity'.

¹⁰ Gudmundsen-Holmgreen in Smith 2002, 125.

(1969),¹¹ place a firm emphasis on the most familiar materials, in particular the major triad. The meanings collected by musical objects such as triads are here conceptualised as a progressive layering which obscures objectivity. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen tends to employ repetition or anachronistic juxtaposition to problematise those meanings and seek a new depthlessness free of these layers – flatness.

Ex. 5.2.1: *Tricolore IV*, opening

TRICOLE NO. 4

It is tempting to identify strands uniting *Tricolore IV* (1969) with more recent works: stylistic constants include clarity of demarcation (both between instrumental groupings and between formal sections), juxtapositions of seemingly incompatible

¹¹ A performance of *Tricolore IV* caused a scandal at the 1970 ISCM festival in Basel. See Brincker 2000, 9. For Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's own account of the event see Rex 2007.

elements, persistent repetition that borders on the absurd, and the prominent use of familiar, tonally allusive elements. Yet, as Ursula Andkjær Olsen argues,

from the late 1970s onwards, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's works open the doors to a dynamism, technical virtuosity and complexity immediately distinguishable from the doctrines of New Simplicity. This trend is seen in *Symphony*, *Antiphony*, *Triptykon*, *Concerto Grosso*, *For Cello and Orchestra*, *For Violin and Orchestra*, to name just some of the most large-scale examples. Yet it still applies in these works that scenes are established in which the most diverse, seemingly incompatible voices and materials are allowed to move independently.¹²

The temptation to summarise Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's output with a single convenient term – made all the more tempting by the fact that it has to some extent been cultivated and 'authorised' by the composer himself – is highly problematic for another reason: even in his most overtly 'simple' works, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen revels in the contradictions inherent in the notion of 'new simplicity': his music is inescapably 'old' in an important and obvious sense, as it revisits long-established materials; though apparently simple in technique, it is formidably complex, double-edged and paradoxical in other, crucial ways.

The problems posed by Gudmundsen-Holmgreen are similar to those presented by other late twentieth-century and contemporary styles in which structure is so clear as to render conventional unity-identifying analytical exegesis redundant. The issue, as Daniel March succinctly puts it in his analytical discussion of 'simplicity

¹² Olsen 2004, 8-9 (Original Danish: 'Fra slutningen af 1970'erne og frem slår flere af Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreens værker dørene op for verdener, som i henseende til dynamik, spilleteknisk virtuositetsgrad og kompleksitet umiddelbart adskiller sig fra den ny enkelheds doktriner. Det drejer sig for eksempel om *Symfoni*, *Antifoni* (1977), *Triptykon* (1985), *Concerto Grosso* (1990), *For cello og orkester* (1996) og *For violin og orkester* (2002) for blot at nævne nogle af de mest monumentale. Men det gælder fortsat også for disse værker, at de opstiller klanglige scener, hvorpå højst forskelligartede, umiddelbart uforenelige, musikalske stemmer og ting får lov at bevæge sig uafhængigt af hinanden.')

in theory', is 'with music this simple, what is there to analyse?'¹³ As Robert Fink argues,

the assertion that abstract musical artworks have a surface, and thus also have a hidden interiority and depth, underlies what is perhaps the single most important metaphor of structuralist musical analysis [...] In the face of much recent music which, in a peculiarly postmodern way, exalts surface and flouts depth, one might begin to question whether hierarchy is the best index of value in contemporary music.¹⁴

A difficulty in Fink's discussion of depth is the ironically two-dimensional equation of depth with structural hierarchy: it is surely possible to conceive of depth without this form of hierarchy. We might, for instance, imagine a depth of intertextual layering that has no intrinsic connection with structural hierarchy; and in asking a large number of double-edged and refractive questions through their very superficiality, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's *Plateaux* surely construct a depth that is again distinct from the idea of structural levels. The issue of structural hierarchy and perceptibility is nonetheless a key one – and an issue for which Fink provides a useful starting point. Fink suggests that the challenge to hierarchical theory is presented most acutely in minimalist works such as Steve Reich's *Piano Phase*, which is 'so obviously *flat* that even the most flexible depth theorist must quail before it: what is there on this surface that needs generating or explaining through a series of structural levels?'¹⁵ But we should resist aligning Gudmundsen-Holmgreen with minimalism. His challenge to Central European complexity is linked in important ways to composers from across the Atlantic – in particular John Cage and Morton Feldman – often mentioned as precursors to the American minimalist mainstream. Yet, with characteristic fondness

¹³ March 1997, 5.

¹⁴ Fink 2001, 102-103.

¹⁵ Fink 2001, 127.

for peripheries, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen has always been somewhat detached from the 'minimalist experiment'. Perhaps the most important difference is that, compared with paradigmatic examples of minimalism like *Piano Phase*, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's music is considerably less preoccupied with gradual, perceptible process and 'clearly detectable transformation'.¹⁶ Sharp divides and clear juxtapositions play a crucial role; repetition is normally employed as a means of constructing distance from the familiar, very rarely as a means of seamless transition from one state to another; Stravinskian block form¹⁷ has always played an important part in Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's work.

The contrasts between adjacent movements in *Plateaux* are usually as sharp as possible: for instance, the *fortissimo* aggression of the first movement, 'Brut', is juxtaposed with the near-silence of the second, 'Simple, Prèsque rien'. Additionally, the structure of each movement is generally clearly articulated. In his programme note, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen describes the movements as 'levels' on which 'various and heterogeneous objects are placed'.¹⁸ Those objects tend to be small (often no more than a bar in length), clearly distinguished from their surroundings, and placed at absolutely regular distances from one another (we will encounter a clear example of this in the section entitled 'Suspension'). Though not quite so elementary as the structures encountered in, say, *Tricolore IV* (a single chord sustained over eleven minutes by varying combinations of the three main orchestral groups), *Plateaux's* nine movements offer little work for the hierarchically-minded analyst to perform. One might invoke the more everyday French meaning of the word

¹⁶ Whittall 2003, 326.

¹⁷ For an in-depth discussion of Stravinsky's block form and its influence on later composers, see Cross 1998, 17-80.

¹⁸ Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's programme note to *Plateaux pour Piano et Orchestre* Programme Note (Copenhagen: Edition Wilhelm Hansen, 2005).

'plateau' to express the idea that one can only approach these movements as one might a meal served on a plate: *Plateaux* can be construed as a gentle resistance to – or perhaps even mockery of – the notion of depth-seeking analytical penetration. Such analytical attempts tend to glance off surfaces which are already clearly demarcated. This image of 'glancing off' surfaces, often in unpredictable and perhaps unfamiliar analytical directions, is one that may spring to mind quite regularly throughout this case study.

Heterogeneity is itself a crucial and pervasive aspect of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's resistance to depth. It is in reference to this particular aspect of his superficiality that Gudmundsen-Holmgreen most often defines his opposition to Per Nørgård: 'Per is the type who is *digging* to find. He's a constructor, and an inventor, and so on. But I'm just going around collecting things'.¹⁹ (Nørgård, incidentally, has defined his opposition to Gudmundsen-Holmgreen along similar lines.²⁰) Where Nørgård professes a belief in underlying, all-encompassing cosmic connectedness, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen speaks of a conviction that beauty of surface is sufficient to render unifying depths unnecessary: 'I generally get on better with people who observe rather than explain'.²¹ Of course, just as we encountered the ironic, unity-undermining smile in Nørgård's Piano Concerto, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's music often delights in contradicting its own projections of simplicity and naivety. Nonetheless, these projections have played an important role in the canonisation of the two composers as the 'grandfathers' of Danish contemporary music. An interesting link, of course, is that both composers seem to consider issues of

¹⁹ Interview with Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, Copenhagen, 8 August 2008.

²⁰ Interview with Per Nørgård, Copenhagen, 6 August 2008.

²¹ Beyer 1992, 22.

compositional unity or heterogeneity to be closely bound up with questions of faith – in interview, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen took atheism as a point of departure for discussing his employment of familiar harmonies.

We might compare certain Gudmundsen-Holmgreen works with the surfaces projected in Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia* or George Rochberg's *Music for the Magic Theatre*. As Fink observes, such spaces resonate with Foucault's idea of 'heterotopia':

the disorder in which a large number of possible orders glitter separately, in the lawless and uncharted dimension of the *heteroclite* [...] In such a state, things are 'laid', 'placed', 'arranged' in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a common place beneath them all.²²

The many *objets trouvés* encountered in Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's collage works from the mid 1960s – the Samuel Beckett-inspired *Je ne me tairai jamais. Jamais* (1967) is a multi-faceted example – offer the composer's most obvious examples of multiple 'glittering' surfaces. Though more recent works are characterised by allusion to musical archetypes rather than specific quotations,²³ a tendency to accentuate differences between materials has remained pervasive throughout Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's oeuvre. *Plateaux* is staunchly 'heterotopian', resisting the concept of a single, underlying unity beneath its markedly contrasting movements. Certain movements may bear strong resemblances to others: for instance, I, IV and V, all titled 'Brut', are dominated by the jarring sound-object shown in the piano part in ex. 5.2.8 (see the section titled 'Confinement'); movements III and VII, 'Murmure' and 'Murmure dans la Boue', are united by the prominence of an F major chord poised

²² Michel Foucault in Fink 2001, 131.

²³ Jakobsen 2007.

tantalisingly between what a tonally-oriented analysis would conceive as subdominant and tonic functions (this issue of harmonic orientation is discussed at greater length in the following section, 'Suspension'). But beyond such obvious connections – made all the more obvious by Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's recurrent movement titles – there is the strong impression that further reduction is not only untenable but fundamentally alien to the work. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen has often spoken of his interest in the work of the Dutch painter Piet Mondrian: the *Tricolore* works in particular seem to recall the brazen lines and primary colours of *Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red* (1937-42). We are surely not stretching this analogy too far in suggesting that an analytical attempt to blur distinctions between the (albeit more elaborate) plateaus would be akin to blurring the lines and colours of a Mondrian composition.

Yet *Plateaux* does toy with the notion of a summative, distinction-blurring conclusion in its penultimate eighth movement, 'Composition', the title of which hints at the possibility of a composite of the materials previously presented (in interview, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen has suggested that the movement has precisely this role²⁴); additionally, in a 40 minute-long work in which movements can be as short as IV's thirty seconds, the nine-minute duration of 'Composition' perhaps suggests a strong degree of end-weighting. However, while subtle traces of previous materials are presented in 'Composition', the movement is dominated by the harmonic preoccupations of 'Murmure' and 'Murmure dans la Boue', omitting the materials presented in 'Brut' and making scant reference to those of Movements II and VI, 'Simple, Prèsque Rien' and 'Sombre, Simple'. 'Composition' can hardly be considered an all-encompassing synthesis. As if to confirm – perhaps celebrate – this irreducible

²⁴ Interview with Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, 8 August 2008.

heterogeneity, the final movement, 'En Majeur', features the work's first *objet trouvé*, fixating on a fragment from Mozart's Coronation Concerto, K. 537 (this movement is also discussed in greater detail in 'Suspension'). *Plateaux*'s resistance to synthesis suggests another way in which the 'Plateau' metaphor is apposite: in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, the term evokes a flat, 'rhizomatic' 'image of thought'.²⁵ The image is a multiplicity-apprehending one, distinguished from an arborescent image characterised by linear progression through a hierarchical succession of dualistic oppositions – often visualised as an upward progression from a deeper, unifying level.²⁶

One final aspect of *Plateaux*'s flatness deserves mention: Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's approach to concerto dialogue. It will have been noted already that, with the exception of *Concerto Grosso*, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen avoids referencing the genre explicitly in his titles. The reason for this, as the composer argues, is a resistance to the genre's associations with conflict. This resistance can be interpreted hermeneutically, for instance in terms of a human drama; yet it is sufficient to view the avoidance of that association as a more abstract critique of the kind of black-and-white opposition which normally generates or results from conflict. In keeping with that image of an interpreter glancing off plateau-surfaces in unpredictable directions, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen seems to prefer the thought-image of refraction – scattered, three-dimensional – to that of reflection back and forth. Of course, this resistance sits in tension with the simple oppositions (old-new, complex-simple) we visited earlier in this chapter. Here, however, we might recall Gudmundsen-

²⁵ Deleuze and Guattari 2004.

²⁶ This rhizomatic image of thought is discussed and extended into the realm of music (specifically that of Messiaen), in Ronald Bogue's 'Rhizomusicology' (Bogue 1991).

Holmgreen's dialectical treatment of simple opposition: concerto oppositions, like projections of childish naivety, are sites for playfulness and ambiguity. Instead of conflict, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen discusses his works for soloist and orchestra ('non-concertos', as he calls them²⁷) in terms of 'meetings between creatures',²⁸ although, as we shall see, the behaviour of these 'creatures' is usually conspicuously human. (Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's interest in relatively complex shapes might explain his preference for 'meetings': a more placid, amicable approach to instrumental interaction is compatible with the notion of multi-directional movement – the motion of somebody 'milling around' at a social gathering, for instance – rather than the reciprocal advance and retreat of two conflicting forces). In Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's description, these meetings do not necessarily alter their participants; rather, meetings reveal different aspects of the participants' personalities. To describe the orchestra as purely accompanimental would risk obscuring the textural interest and distinctive gestural language characteristic of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's orchestral writing; yet the piano is heard almost constantly, dominating proceedings to the extent that *Plateaux* may be regarded principally as a 'character study' of its solo instrument, reflected in different orchestra-generated surfaces. The solo instrument's subjectivity is strikingly superficial, denied the modernist ideals of 'depth' and 'centrality';²⁹ rather, it is a subject composed of numerous, contingent surfaces, each of which only appears in an encounter with a specific entity. In *Plateaux*, we encounter almost every aspect of the piano's personality: the three 'Brut' movements, for example, reveal the instrument's percussive bass register, but contrast this

²⁷ Interview with Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, 8 August 2008.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ For a musicologically-orientated discussion of modern and postmodern perspectives on subjectivity, see L. Kramer 1995, 9-10.

display of its mechanistic side with a more unpredictable, rhapsodic subjectivity that surges expressively into a higher register (see the section of this case study entitled 'Confinement'); in 'Simple, Prêque Rien' the piano moves from almost imperceptible attacks, through a tentative staccato, to recurrent, fragmentary renditions of familiar piano gestures – trills and rapid registral expansion through octaves, for example; the two 'Murmure' movements, III and VII, exhibit the piano's suitability for cluster chords, in contrast with the more strident, virtuosic style of writing that characterises the later stages of 'Brut's third and final appearance. Not one of these expressive tropes emerges as central, and not one of the registers explored, least of all the mid-range, achieves the status of a 'norm' for the entire work. The piano as subject is pointedly heterogenous. Its various subjectivities are explored in greater depth in the remainder of this case study.

Suspension

In titling his work 'plateaux', Gudmundsen-Holmgreen alludes not only to a pervasive image of horizontal, depthless surfaces but also to a sense of suspension – a temporary and perhaps tenuously maintained stable state in which the potential for change is clearly evident. In this respect, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's indebtedness to Samuel Beckett is clearly discernable. I am reminded in particular of *Waiting for Godot* (1952), in which two clowns' desire for a specific change (the arrival of 'Godot') is repeatedly articulated and repeatedly ironised or frustrated. Vladimir's acknowledgement, in the play's second act, that 'we're on a plateau, served up on a

plateau',³⁰ is in part a description of that situation (certainly, the first half of the statement can be read this way; the second half, which reminds the audience of the drama's stagedness, becomes more pertinent later in the present section). I begin this section by discussing ways in which this suspenseful poise between constant and changing offers a useful perspective on Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's harmonic syntax; second, I consider the usefulness of suspension as a way of conceptualising Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's play with established musical signifiers and with ritualistic elements.

Before discussing more specific details of harmonic syntax, a preliminary word on a pervasive 'suspension' is necessary. Throughout the next few paragraphs, neutral designations of pitch class often make way for vocabulary associated with tonality. This is because Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's syntax often alludes intensely to tonal functionality. Given Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's tendency to ignore or frustrate tonal expectations, the use of this vocabulary is problematic. To deny these problems would be misleading; I suspect that, in dealing with this vocabulary, we need to conceive of a suspension – perhaps demarcated by quotation marks – between historical loadedness and neutrality.

'Simple, Prêque Rien' offers good examples of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's tonal allusiveness, of a repeatedly articulated and frustrated desire for tonal resolution. The only pitch class heard in bb.1-8 is 0 (the timpani's tentative, *pianissimo* introduction of pc 5 in b.5 is sufficiently indistinct in terms of pitch to seem texturally rather than harmonically significant). The piano quietly introduces another pc, 2, in b.8, but quickly withdraws to focus exclusively on pc 0. By b.14, the piano

³⁰ Beckett 1952.

has added pcs 2 and 11 to its vocabulary, and a trill involving all three suggests that the pitch space is developing into a tonal one – a suggestion seemingly confirmed by the emergence of e^1 in b.19. The double bass' introduction of F in the bass in b.20, followed by G in b.22, would strongly imply a cadential progression were it not for the piano's increasingly chromatic wanderings two octaves above: an e^b above the F momentarily pulls towards B^b major – quickly corrected by a $b^{\sharp}$ in b.21 – while b.22's g^b (enharmonically transformed to $f^{\sharp}$ in the following bar) hints that the G in the bass functions as tonic rather than dominant. A lydian-inflected F major emerges as a possible resolution to the $B^b/B^{\sharp}$ conflict in b.27, but a meticulously crafted poise between tonalities remains until the final barline.

Ex. 5.2.2: Reduction of 'Simple, Prêque Rien'. Stems designate pitches that seem to anchor the work to a tonal centre (the preponderance of stems in the treble towards the end of the movement reflects the harmonic significance attached to these concluding pitches)

The image displays a musical score reduction for 'Simple, Prêque Rien'. It consists of two systems of staves, each with a treble and bass clef. The first system covers measures 1 through 23, with measure numbers 1, 5, 13, 16, 19, and 23 marked above the treble staff. The second system covers measures 25 through 35, with measure numbers 25, 27, 32, and 35 marked above the treble staff. Stems are used to highlight specific pitches across both staves, indicating their role in anchoring the tonal center. The notation includes various accidentals and ties, reflecting the complex harmonic language of the piece.

Though b.35 may initially be heard as a registrally idiosyncratic presentation of leading-note and tonic in C major, B $\flat$ major lingers as a possibility due to the movement's final staccato note: not one of the four tonalities previously played with ever entirely relinquishes its hold on the movement, and tonal suspense is left unresolved.

A different form of harmonic suspense is encountered in the subsequent movement. 'Murmure' begins in highly ambiguous tonal territory as a result of densely chromatic figures in the wind section and myriad semitonal clashes in the piano part (right and left hands play cluster chords on the white and black keys respectively). Yet subtle hints of tonality appear: the pianist's right hand (white keys) tends to be slightly more dominant than the left, while the FF frequently interjected by tuba and contrabassoon contributes to a gradually increasing sense of tonal centricity.

Ex. 5.2.3: 'Murmure', piano, bb.1-6.

The musical score for 'Murmure', piano, measures 1-6, is presented in two systems. The first system contains measures 1-3, and the second system contains measures 4-6. The notation is for piano, with two staves (treble and bass clef). The music is characterized by dense chromatic figures and cluster chords. Dynamics include *p*, *pp*, *mf*, *p*, *<mp*, *mf*, *mp*, *pp*, *pp*, *mp*, *p*, *mf*, *pp*, *f*, *mf*, and *pp*. There are also triplets marked with a '3' and a bracket.

There are fleeting glimpses of the Lydian-inflected F major heard in movement II, as in the third beat of b.8, when F³ is heard at the same time as an entirely white-note chord in the piano; the music rests temporarily on the same harmony following the second beat of b.17. In b.36 the impression of tonal centricity is strengthened considerably by the introduction, by strings, harp and vibraphone, of an F major triad with added major seventh and ninth. Although this is easily the clearest assertion of tonality heard up to this point in the movement, F major seems to function tonally as a subdominant as a result of the b $\natural$ repeated insistently in the piano. Yet a C major resolution fails to materialise. The characteristic sonic envelope of these chimes, a sharp attack followed by a somewhat staggered but generally rapid decay, complements their strong but ultimately frustrated sense of tonal directionality. A similar tension is heard in b.39, this time above a G7 chord to which the notes of an F major triad have been added (the A is supplied by the piano a dotted quaver after the chord is struck). This harmony again pulls strongly towards C major, but we are instead presented, through the semitonal motion of each line, with a dissonant aggregate of E $\flat$ major and F $\sharp$ minor 7 chords.

Of course, the procedure of setting up cadential progressions and withholding their completion is hardly unique to Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's music. More exceptional is the absolute failure of a C major resolution to materialise throughout the movement: the last chord played by the distinctive combination of strings, vibraphone and harp, in b.64, is precisely the subdominant heard in b.36. This early denial sets up an important suspension that conditions our expectations for the remainder of the work: tonal gravity seems nullified, and the expected is precisely what we learn not to expect.

'Murmure' is also distinguished by the absolute regularity – every five crotchet beats, without exception – with which its chords chime into the texture. This process of clockwork repetition is readily conceptualised, especially in music-technological parlance, as a 'loop'. Other loops occur simultaneously – the repeated 10-beat rhythm of the sandpaper blocks, for instance. These loops of different lengths – crucially, lengths that share common factors – perhaps evoke the image of concentric circles, and a sense of circular motion may be evoked by the impression of tonal directionality held in tension with the movement's pervasive harmonic stasis. As a result, 'Murmure' represents a good example of the way in which Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's music often calls to mind the mobiles of sculptor Alexander Calder. A shared preoccupation with circulation is particularly striking in the case of a Calder work such as *A Universe* (1934), 'an open sphere made of steel wire containing two smaller spheres in constant motion'.³¹ Yet, following the above exploration of flatness and heterogeneity, I would also draw parallels with the multiple, flat surfaces presented to us in a work like *The S-Shaped Vine* (1946). A potential difficulty of the hanging mobile, given the foregoing discussion of rhizomes, is that such structures tend to emanate from a single, central point: I allude to *The S-Shaped Vine* because it is among the hanging mobiles which, while possessing a central 'vine', otherwise resists branch-like hierarchy. I would add that it is acceptable not to reconcile the differences between a rhizomatic thought-image and a mobile suspended from a single point: such a tension can be upheld as an example of the work's paradoxical spatial projections.

³¹ Marter 2007.

The poising of a given harmony between the functions of subdominant and tonic is a device frequently employed throughout *Plateaux* (and, indeed, in several other Gudmundsen-Holmgreen works – see, for instance, the fourth movement of *Antiphony*, the second part of *Symphony, Antiphony*). Another example is found in *Plateaux*'s final movement, 'En Majeur' (a title which constitutes the work's first verbal reference to tonality). This movement persistently sets the D major I-V-I progression of the aforementioned *objet trouvé* against G major 9 arpeggios from the strings, and a C $\sharp$ caustically, repeatedly inserted in the bass. The resultant harmonic tension, interpretable as the major obstacle to the movement's closure, is never resolved: the work can only conclude once the orchestra, seemingly unable to produce anything but subdominant arpeggios, drops away in b.67, 4 bars before the final barline. (This IV-I tension, along with the D major 'tonic', bears a similarity to the harmonic tension explored in Saariaho's *Graal Théâtre*.)

Ex. 5.2.4: Reduction of 'En Majeur', bb.5-11, showing tension between keys of D, G, and C major.

Ex. 5.2.4 continued

The musical score is for a piano and orchestra. The piano part is written in treble and bass staves. The orchestra part includes staves for Clarinet (Cls.), Trumpet 1 (Tr. 1), Horns and Clarinet (Hrp. & Cl.), Horn (Hrp.), Violoncello (Vc.), Piccolo (Picc.), and Cymbals and Trombones (Cyg. & Tb.). The score is in D major and 4/4 time. The piano part begins with a melodic line in the right hand and a supporting line in the left hand. The orchestra enters with a rhythmic pattern in the woodwinds and strings. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mp*, *p*, and *mf*, as well as articulation marks like accents and slurs. The woodwinds play a triplet figure, and the strings play a rhythmic pattern. The score is divided into measures by bar lines.

Yet Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's treatment of his *objet trouvé* is surely of utmost importance to the final movement's sense of suspension. Over the course of the movement, an excerpt from the Larghetto movement of Mozart's 'Coronation Concerto', K.537 (transposed from A to D major) is fragmented and reduced to its barest elements. A sense for its disfunctionality in its new context is created by a failure to develop beyond the initial four-bar phrase, and this impression is reinforced by the orchestra's apparent disinterest in the theme (in the Mozart, by comparison, the piano's first eight bars are echoed straightforwardly by the orchestra in bb.9-16). At one point, the movement does entertain the idea of development: in 29-30, Mozart's development of the theme on the dominant (b.17 of the original) is heard fleetingly; yet a sudden, dashing chromatic elaboration seems to scurry away from the work, before bringing us back to precisely where we started.

Ex. 5.2.5: momentary development, bb.28-36

This isolated escape serves only to strengthen the sense of claustrophobic confinement (a trope explored in the following section). In bb.68-71 – the work’s final bars – that constriction is felt at its most extreme, manifested in a stuttering rendition of fragments from the theme’s opening two bars.

Ex. 5.2.6: *Plateaux pour Piano et Orchestra*, final bars

This fragmentation is characteristic of a procedure Gudmundsen-Holmgreen has aptly described as ‘rotating objects under a light’, an image concomitant with the circularity that pervades his music.³² The result of this meticulous object-revolution is that ‘familiar musical materials’ are suddenly rendered ‘strange and disorientating’.³³ One other variation on circulation is irresistible, given that ‘plateau’ is also a French word for ‘record’: perhaps we are listening to a locked groove on a dusty old LP recording of the ‘Coronation Concerto’.

But the question persists – why Mozart? One possible reason ties in particularly well with the idea of suspension. Two important certainties are associated with the Mozart (and perhaps with Mozart more generally): the tonal certainty expressed in the basic I-V⁷-I progression and the sense of certainty that comes with recognition of a canonical concerto theme. These certainties are challenged such that the fragment, its tonal closure, its associations, have been thrown ‘up in the air’. One may be reminded of the way in which Samuel Beckett manipulates, fragments and juxtaposes particularly well-known words and phrases until they are suspended, no longer grounded in their conventional meanings.³⁴ Another reason is that musical fragmentation and fetishisation seem most offensive – at least from an Adornian perspective – when inflicted upon a composer who commonly stands as an epitome of classical values.³⁵ Especially given that recordings have often been associated with this bourgeois fetishisation, the movement’s resemblance to a faulty LP presentation is particularly supportive of such an interpretation. Such an ironic and mischievous quotation places this plateau alongside the likes of Louis Andriessen’s

³² Interview with Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, Copenhagen, 8 August 2008.

³³ Grimley 2011.

³⁴ Berio explores precisely this suspension in the third movement of *Sinfonia*, which uses a number of fragments from Beckett’s *The Unnamable*. See Osmond-Smith 1985.

³⁵ For a discussion of Mozart’s association with these values see McClary 1986.

M is for Man, Music, Mozart (1991). And I would posit one other reading, which need not be mutually exclusive with those suggested above: Mozart often evokes a child-like realm of toy boxes full of mechanical jack-in-a-boxes. And this particular theme, with its very simple procession of crotchet beats, is exemplary of that mechanical quality. Thus there is the projection of something naive, playful, yet there is also the nagging, disconcerting sense that the naivety causes or at least fails to comprehend an imminent danger. Through thematic fragmentation, tonal suspension, and a seemingly disengaged orchestra, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen amplifies that impression of playing with something which, though apparently harmless, is potentially explosive. The explosion is of course denied, as it would be too final for a Gudmundsen-Holmgreen 'finale': we are kept in suspense beyond the last double barline.

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's tendency to render familiar materials 'strange and disorientating' constitutes an important part of the ritualistic element that many commentators have underlined in his music: while rituals (for instance, those of concert performance) involve customs that seem alien when perceived from a distance (usually by an 'outsider' to a given society), they are normally utterly natural to those within the social groups they organise and define.³⁶ Particularly in his works from the 1960s and early 70s, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen delights in drawing attention to and disrupting rituals of performance. *Plateaux pour Deux*, the first of the two works in which Gudmundsen-Holmgreen has used the word 'plateaux' in a title, is written for cello and car horn. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen stipulates in this work's programme note that 'both parties – despite their obvious differences – behave in an equally formal manner'.³⁷ In a distinctly theatrical work, the performers must resist

³⁶ For a comprehensive discussion of ritual see Bell 1992.

³⁷ Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, Programme note to *Plateaux pour Deux*.

conveying, through gestures or facial expressions, the strangeness of the car horn's presence in the concert hall. The work demonstrates how the plateau metaphor may be linked to ritual through the idea of suspension: on close inspection, the rituals of performance, like a geographical plateau, may seem flat, unremarkable; the car horn has the effect of suspending us above the plateau, revealing its peculiarity.³⁸

Plateaux pour Piano et Orchestre does not disrupt performance rituals to quite the same extent; nonetheless, certain movements, for example VI ('Sombre. Simple'), are compellingly ritualistic in other ways. The soloist-orchestra dialogue in this movement is particularly suggestive of ritual: the movement opens with a succession of twelve-note chords deep in the registers of the cellos and double basses. The texture is rigidly homophonic, attacks, crescendos, diminuendos glissandos occurring with exact simultaneity across the string section. The depth of register results in a blurring of pitch, such that, while we are aware of numerous instruments being involved in the creation of the sonority, individual instruments are impossible to isolate: the orchestra forms a solid, indivisible collective, in a paradigmatic display of ritualistic behaviour. The piano's entry in b.10 recalls the ornamentation of movement 'Simple, Prèsque Rien' and occasional Lydian-inflected F major modality of 'Murmure', sharply contrasting the orchestra's amorphous, atonal introduction. From that point onwards, the piano scarcely rests, the right hand's fleeting forays into F major, G and C (again, recalling 'Simple, Prèsque Rien') almost constantly underpinned by the left hand's metronomic chordal accompaniment.

³⁸ Sangild 1999, 264-267.

Fig 5.2.7: twelve-note chord in 'Sombre. Simple', bb.1-2

The image displays a musical score for two instruments: Violoncello (div. a 5) and Contrabbasso (div. a 4). The score is written for measures 1 and 2 of the piece 'Sombre. Simple'. The Violoncello part consists of five staves, and the Contrabbasso part consists of four staves. Each staff begins with a 'V' marking. The music features a complex, repetitive pattern of notes, with a prominent 'FFF' (fortissimo) dynamic marking in the first measure of each staff. The notation includes various note values, rests, and slurs, indicating a highly structured and rhythmic composition.

Set against the rhythmic unpredictability of the right hand, the repetitious nature of that accompaniment is striking, mimicking the formal patterns of ritualistic behaviour – its ‘routinised, habitual, obsessive qualities’.³⁹ A strong sense of circularity, as materials return with conspicuous regularity, reinforces this ritualistic element.

This tightly disciplined mode of behaviour takes us to the third and final spatial trope identified in this chapter.

Confinement

Much of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s music is characterised by an eminently perceptible sense of tight control, of inflexible harmonic, rhythmic or formal grids

³⁹ Bell 1992,19.

being imposed uncompromisingly. One particularly prevalent rhythmic grid, first implemented extensively in *Concerto Grosso*, involves a 35-bar stretch in 12/8 metre, in which one instrument plays every 5 semiquavers, another every 7. The two pulses coincide at 35-semiquaver intervals, but the process is only completed after 35 bars, at which point the pulses meet at the start of a bar for the first time. A similarly prevalent harmonic device – encountered, again, in *Concerto Grosso* but also earlier in *Spejl* (1974) and *Symphony, Antiphony* – involves inverting a monodirectionally ascending row of pitches and presenting both prime form and inversion simultaneously to produce a gradual registral expansion. *Plateaux* is in many respects more freely composed than *Concerto Grosso*, and no grid is used so comprehensively as in the earlier work. Still, 35-bar units and 7-bar sub-units remain dominant, and objects are generally placed at strikingly regular distances from one another. The regular spacings of barlines, and the unstinting use of 4/4 (even if this meter often seems an arbitrary division of the music with little bearing on the accents that are heard), strengthen the analyst's or performer's impression of order strictly imposed. That impression tends to be considerably stronger in the orchestra than in the piano: the soloist's playing often contrasts the orchestra's rhythmic mechanicity with irregularity and unpredictability; at times, the impression of spontaneous creation might prompt an interpretation of the solo protagonist as an authorial presence.

Rhythmically free though it often seems, the piano foregrounds constraint of another type: registral confinement. Throughout *Plateaux*, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen constructs various arbitrary boundaries on the keyboard, outside which the pianist's hands seem forbidden to venture. In 'Murmure', for instance, the pianist's hands are confined largely to the octave above middle C, never escaping the area between $b\flat$

and a². The sense of confinement is particularly strong because so many notes are packed into that space: cluster chords represent the dominant piano texture, and the pianist's hands often overlap, right and left having sole responsibility for white keys and black keys respectively. The physical appearance of those hands, claw-like, knotted together, reinforces the sense of a more metaphorical arthritis – the arthritis felt acutely in the movement's confinement to the harmonic space around a single unstable F major chord.

While 'Murmure' seems largely accepting of its registral confines, concluding comfortably within them, the movements titled 'Brut' seem to struggle urgently against their containment. The forceful, combative style of this resistance leads me to reorientate registral space from the platitudinous horizontal domain of the piano keyboard to a vertical one invoking notions of gravity and crushing downward pressure. Indeed, this weightiness is a quality that needs emphasising as a counterpoint to the picture of calm, ritualised, suspended rotation described previously. Movements I, IV, V are to a great extent concerned with the attempt to escape the gravitational pull of the piano's very lowest register. A fleeting d¹ is the registral highpoint reached by the orchestra in both Movements I and IV, while the vast majority of pitches heard lie in the lowest two octaves of the piano's range. From bb.7-14, the ear struggles to isolate individual lines, a result of the many pitches heard simultaneously or in rapid succession in that register – the excess of pitch events (at least in terms of harmonic perceptibility) is consistent with a general impression of extremely high pressure. Frequently heard ascending gestures convey

Ex. 5.2.8: An example of intense registral and rhythmic pressure in Mvt.I, b.12.

The musical score for Ex. 5.2.8, measures 13-14, features the following parts and markings:

- Cfg.**: Measure 13 starts with a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a half note and a quarter note. Measure 14 has a half note and a quarter note.
- Cor. in Fa**: Measures 13 and 14 are mostly rests, with some notes in measure 14.
- Trbn. t.**: Measures 13 and 14 feature a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a half note and a quarter note. Measure 14 has a half note and a quarter note.
- Trbn. b.**: Measures 13 and 14 feature a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a half note and a quarter note. Measure 14 has a half note and a quarter note.
- Tb.**: Measures 13 and 14 feature a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a half note and a quarter note. Measure 14 has a half note and a quarter note.
- Oil Bar.**: Measures 13 and 14 feature a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a half note and a quarter note. Measure 14 has a half note and a quarter note.
- Tamt.**: Measures 13 and 14 feature a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a half note and a quarter note. Measure 14 has a half note and a quarter note.
- Perc.**: Measures 13 and 14 feature a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a half note and a quarter note. Measure 14 has a half note and a quarter note.
- Gr. c.**: Measures 13 and 14 feature a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a half note and a quarter note. Measure 14 has a half note and a quarter note.
- Timp.**: Measures 13 and 14 feature a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a half note and a quarter note. Measure 14 has a half note and a quarter note.
- Pno. solo**: Measures 13 and 14 feature a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a half note and a quarter note. Measure 14 has a half note and a quarter note.
- Cb.**: Measures 13 and 14 feature a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a half note and a quarter note. Measure 14 has a half note and a quarter note.

a persistently frustrated impulse to escape this register: the movement opens with the tuning of the timpani from E up to G, then back – more quickly – to E, the quick return sounding like a collapse after a more prolonged effort; the prevalent orchestral gesture in bb.7-14 is a monodirectionally ascending one. The piano's *fortissimo*, brutally incessant, mechanically regular repetitions of a single chord (set 4-8, a striking dissonance even when not placed so low in the auditory spectrum) seem to

urge the music onwards, perhaps combating the crushing downwards pull of the plateau's registral gravity.

Arguably more than anything else, the striking brevity of Movements I and IV dramatically conveys the formal problem presented by such an early manifestation of these upper limits (both registral and dynamic). Both movements attempt the same solution to the problem, concluding with four-bar piano solos. These solos seem cadenza-like, contrasting the previous rhythmic mechanistic with considerable irregularity and unpredictability.

Ex. 5.2.9: piano 'cadenza', Mvt.I, bb.13-1

The musical score for the piano 'cadenza' in Movement I, measures 13-1, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 13-13) begins with a *loco* marking and a *ff* dynamic. It features a complex texture with a five-measure rest in the right hand and a triplet in the left hand. The tempo is marked *rit.* (ritardando) and the dynamics range from *f* to *ff*. The second system (measures 14-14) begins with a *molto allargando* marking and a *pp* dynamic. It features a complex texture with a six-measure rest in the right hand and a six-measure rest in the left hand. The tempo is marked *a tempo* and the dynamics range from *pp* to *ppp*.

Crucially, the cadenzas are moments of escape: in Movement I, the piano surges up to g^3 as soon as the orchestra drops away, as if to configure the orchestra as a prison cell; a variety of textures, ranging from single lines to cluster chords, are employed in the final four bars; the tempo is considerably freer, and there is frequent and sudden variation of dynamics and articulation. A sense of spontaneous creation,

perhaps of the solo protagonist undertaking the compositional process, generates myriad ideas that could support much longer stretches, particularly given the economy of objects that characterises Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's music. Yet, for all this invention, registral space quickly contracts into a singularity: the clusters of b.17 give way to the d^{#1}/c^{#1} dyad of b.18, collapsing towards the singularity of a tenuous, staccato d¹. The movement's concluding gesture is a quiet slump back into the piano's lowest octave, the double barline confirming that rhythmic, dynamic, and harmonic enterprise has quickly succumbed to the movement's 'brutish' gravity. The collapse seems particularly unsatisfactory because it occurs at the midpoint, rather than at the end, of a seven bar unit (at the midpoint between 14 and 21). Of course, the perceptibility of this discrepancy is questionable, but those listeners better acquainted with Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's idiosyncratic sense of proportion might have the impression of a disquieting shortcoming (perhaps the listener has already acquired a sufficient sense for these proportions when Movement IV is cut off at a similar midpoint, b.11).

Failure is felt still more acutely in Movement IV, which, at thirty seconds, is even shorter than the movement that first posed the problem; furthermore, this movement's cadenza never ventures above middle C. The potential for another failure, more catastrophic than the last, lingers over the 'third attempt' made in Movement V. Yet V develops into a sustained concerto dialogue: as in I, the piano surges rapidly, expressively to g³ in b.15. In b.17, however, the movements part company, and V/b.18's return to the bass register is accomplished with a bravura crescendo rather than a subdued slump. The orchestra re-enters and, for the first time in the work, a sense of dramatic dialogue develops, albeit one in which the

piano dominates while the orchestra makes relatively short, tensely percussive interjections. A comparatively lengthy, 7-bar soloist monologue in b.28, followed by b.35's reintroduction of the movement's opening material, suggests that the music has settled into the relative stability of 7 and 35 bar divisions. In the following 35-bar section we observe the soloist's increasing ability to sustain passages of octaves around and above g^3 : an e^4 concludes high-register stretches lasting 2, 4, then 5 bars – each stretch featuring a higher pitch-maximum than the last. The orchestral response to this trend is the introduction of trumpets in b.46 to what has previously been a texture devoid of treble instruments. By b.70 the frequency spectrum has filled out considerably with the introduction of violins and piccolos, and by b.100 the texture is dominated by treble instruments. In the bars that follow, bass instruments offer only sporadic staccatos while the brass section sustains a series of *fortissimo* E^b Major 7 – A^b Major 7 progressions (bb.82-106 are characterised by an apparent plateau of noisiness), voiced entirely in the two octaves above middle C, perhaps hinting at an imminent plagal cadence in E^b (the tensions with D^b in the woodwind and strings are not particularly problematic for this reading, as these staccato interjections seem timbrally rather than harmonically significant).

Brassy, mid-register dominance is such that the bass seems to lack the brutish strength to cut through the sound and offer the cadence sufficient support. As a result, in a characteristic denial of closure, the tonally allusive progression drops away, leaving a solitary piano playing a rapid figuration in its very highest register, touching frequently on c^5 . As if in belated realisation that the orchestra has exited the movement – rendering somewhat absurd a demi-semiquaver figuration that

previously appeared as a glittering textural enhancement of the concluding cadential stretch – the piano is silenced suddenly in b.107.

Ex. 5.2.10: Plateau V, bb.104-112

$\text{♩} = 72$

Piano

Woodwind & Strings

Brass

Pno.

Ww. & Str.

Br.

(8)

Ex. 5.2.10 continued

The musical score for Ex. 5.2.10 continued consists of three systems. The first system includes staves for Piano (Pno.), Woodwinds & Strings (Ww. & Str.), and Brass (Br.). The Piano part features a rapid, repetitive sixteenth-note pattern in the right hand, while the left hand plays a slower, more melodic line. The Woodwinds and Strings are mostly silent, with some initial activity in the Woodwinds. The Brass part has a few initial notes. The second system continues the Piano part, with the right hand playing a series of chords and the left hand playing a descending line. The Woodwinds and Strings remain silent. The third system shows the Piano part continuing with a series of chords and a descending line, while the Woodwinds and Strings remain silent. The score includes dynamic markings such as *ff*, *mf*, and *pp*, and a rehearsal mark (8) at the beginning of the first system.

The movement has progressed from crushing gravity to a suspension which is, in its own way, equally destructive. Its final 7 bars can be heard as an acknowledgement of the irony that, having fought such a sustained battle to escape one impasse, the oppositional extreme, once achieved, has also proved stifling: with a sense of resignation, the piano descends in ragged, ungainly leaps to the bass register. The final three notes, C, BB-FF – vaguely suggestive of a I-V⁷ progression in C – seem to reflect on the occurrence of another failed resolution. Bb.107-112 can alternatively be heard as an ironic acknowledgement of a suspension of disbelief central to the drama of ‘Brut’: given that the piano is, in registral terms, the least

limited of all instruments, the movement's basic conceit, though utterly absorbing, has also been artificial – the final bars remind us of the supreme ease with which the pianist can move between registers.

Registral confinement surfaces once again in Movement VII, 'Murmure dans la Boue', in which the cluster chords recalled from the prior 'Murmure' (III) are transferred into the piano's very deepest octave; the muddy orchestral texture of 'Sombre, Simple' also makes its return. In this movement, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen attempts to emulate the extraordinarily low, guttural sounds produced by Indonesian pearl divers.⁴⁰ For this reason, 'Murmure dans la Boue' is sharply distinguished from the 'Brut' movements by its sense of acceptance: at no point does either orchestra or soloist attempt to escape its confinement. The piano seems to content itself with a new rhythmic freedom, employing a more flexible notation system in which the spaces between notes are equivalent to their durations. The lack of registral escapism is complemented by the pervasive muffled *piano* dynamic – while fleeting accents, *fortes* and crescendos appear often, they are quickly stifled. This lack of protest, wildly contrasting the 'Brut' movements, seems to suggest that the movement's register, though absurdly low, has become a comfortable norm. As listeners, we are dimly aware of the harmonic nuance in the piano part and the varied voicings of the cellos and double basses – as it stands, these are heard timbrally more than harmonically, whereas they would, if transposed up three octaves, be compelling in terms of pitch content alone. Much of this nuance is lost, however, as a result of registral placement, creating the disturbing impression that the movement, crushed beyond recognition by *Plateaux's* gravity, has been forced into a warped

⁴⁰ Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen discusses the striking vocalisations of these pearl divers in specific relation to *Plateaux* in Rex 2009.

environment where the auditory spectrum itself seems radically different to and incompatible with that of the listener.

Largely because of the muffled dynamics of soloist and strings in this movement, we are particularly aware of the rattling, chafing, hissing sounds emanating from the percussion section. Though these have been introduced previously (the rhythmic pattern involving oil barrel, tamtams and gran cassa is largely recalled from 'Murmure dans la Boue'), they are strikingly foregrounded here. Of particular note in this respect is the lion's roar heard frequently throughout the movement. Though somewhat muted – it never goes above *mezzoforte*, perhaps suggesting a rather distant 'creature' – the lion's roar stands for wildness and resistance to containment. While the composer has only made the 'concerto as wild jungleland' analogy in connection with one work, *Concerto Grosso* – a score which features the lion's roar heavily – the instrument is sufficiently commonplace in Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's orchestral oeuvre to suggest that the tension between containment and wildness is a more general preoccupation: the lion's roar is a strikingly, perhaps naively direct presentation of a tension expressed in numerous other ways, some of which have been discussed above. While Gudmundsen-Holmgreen constructs his music using tight constraints, the music's drama tends to result from a persistent resistance to those constraints. This constant tug and pull, between revelling in and resisting an extreme, is the first of two themes I wish to discuss in closing this final case study.

Spatialised Time

As a commonly used example of the spatialisation of time, and as the descriptor of a suspension of a temporal process, 'plateau' is a powerful metaphor for understanding not only this chapter's central case study but Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's music more generally. Yet we stretch the metaphor to breaking point in attempting to encompass all the spatial configurations discussed above – it is only by working through second-level metaphors that a plateau can be conflated with a hanging mobile, for instance. It is worth reiterating that Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's music escapes any single pervasive metaphor, playing instead with a striking variety of spatial projections. The myriad spaces, objects and motions encountered in *Plateaux* – the surfaces, blocks, confines, ceilings, suspensions, rotations – are all participants in a resistance to music's temporal unfolding – a resistance to the monodirectional 'arrow of time'. Different spaces suspend time, fill time with arresting, imagined spatial configurations, as we await the resolution which will be flatly denied us in the work's concluding moments: although certain movements – those titled 'Brut' for instance – entertain notions to the contrary, *Plateaux* is resolutely anti-narrative (Movement V, for example, concludes with an ironic acknowledgement of the failure of resolution).

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's play with multifarious shapes can usefully be likened to Beckett's play with verbal shapes in *Waiting for Godot*: as Hugh Kenner comments, 'to wait; and to make the audience share the waiting; and to explicate the quality of the waiting [...] Beckett fills the time with beautifully symmetrical structures'.⁴¹ This is not to imply that symmetry is Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's primary

⁴¹ Kenner 1996, 33.

means of suspending time; he, like Beckett, has many such devices at his disposal (those works conceived harmonically in terms of the 'mirror' technique might make for a more striking comparison with Beckett's symmetries, although the symmetry of the 'mirror' is still registral rather than temporal). It is, more generally, a decidedly present-tense-orientated, intent focus on small objects, and a concomitant frustration of the audience's teleological expectation of closure (an example of which is the denial of a concluding synthesis in *Plateaux's* final two movements) that *Plateaux pour Piano et Orchestre* shares with the plateau presented to us in *Waiting for Godot*. Temporal suspension is such that *Plateaux* at times approaches the fixedness and stasis embodied by its instrumental ensemble. Inevitably, of course, it never quite reaches that absolute, even at its most striking moments of suspended time. Discussing *Triptykon*, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen conveys the attraction and the dread of this particular 'never quite':

You can't imagine music that is 100% static. But you can deal less categorically with the term, and say that music can be near-static one way or another. A piece can be static in pitch, consisting, for instance, of just one note, where the variations are changes in timbre, volume or rhythm. The more areas you incorporate and lock in, the closer you get to the impossible: the absolutely static. It's strange that the idea of that impossibility exerts an attraction both as a horror and as a dream of the great calm which comes from being liberated from conflict.⁴²

In this statement we can see how the dynamic-static polarity is intimately bound up with the ideas of confinement and liberation expressed in the previous section. The argument also epitomises the paradoxes that lie at the centre of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's music: stasis, derived from a rigorous 'locking in' of parameters, results

⁴² Gudmundsen-Holmgreen 1994, 40.

in liberation; liberation, in turn, functions both as a source of calm and horror. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's music is often disturbing as a result of its meticulously struck balances between oppositional affective extremes, its refusal to tilt conclusively in any single direction (this can be seen in the score, in the tension between the regular spacing of the barlines – time is industrially spatialised – and a music that often renders barlines utterly arbitrary from a perceptual point of view). It is music that can readily be construed as a balancing act: as Gudmundsen-Holmgreen argues,

I have the classic need for balance... [...] not the balance in the music of the classical period, but ... a balancing act. I feel that my pieces are like a tight-rope walk. One may be a clown on a rope, fall down numerous times, have big shoes on and wear a strange hat. But it is very elegant that after all the clown manages to stay on the tight-rope.⁴³

This trivial image, juxtaposed with notions of horror and the 'great calm', is typical of the way in which the sinister is constantly kept in tantalising balance with the playful (this quality often imparts a black irony on the jack-in-a-boxes, soloists at cocktail parties, childish visions of 'the jungle'). In another quotation the composer pithily expresses the sense in which his music stretches in two oppositional directions at once, saying 'both yes and no'.⁴⁴ The result is music that is profoundly ironic, not least in its ambivalence about being music: in 'Brut', for instance, *Plateaux* tilts unsettlingly towards the impossibility of weightiness (resisting Nietzsche's formulation, made in opposition to Wagner 'the old forger', that 'music is lightness,

⁴³ Beyer 1992b, 213.

⁴⁴ See 'Både Ja og Nej' [Both Yes and No] in Olsen 2004, 10-24.

pure weightlessness'⁴⁵); in movements such as 'Murmure' and 'En Majeur', *Plateaux* tilts towards the impossibility of stasis.

Concertante Approaches to Analysis

Let us conclude by considering the ways in which Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's plateaus encourage an inversion of the notion of part of this thesis's title – concertante approaches to analysis. When writing about what he terms 'vertical music' – music in which a 'single present [is] stretched out into an enormous duration, a potentially infinite 'now' that nonetheless feels like an instant',⁴⁶ Jonathan D. Kramer suggests that, when presented with a certain, more static kind of composition, the listener moves around within the work:

Listening to a vertical musical composition can be like looking at a piece of sculpture. When we view the sculpture, we determine for ourselves the pacing of our experience: we are free to walk around the piece, view it from many angles, concentrate on some details, see other details in relationship to each other, step back and view the whole, contemplate the relationship between the piece and the space in which we see it, close our eyes and remember, leave the room when we wish, and return for further viewings.⁴⁷

While I think Kramer's use of a single spatial trope, verticality, potentially undermines the sense of three-dimensionality that is so central to this conceptualisation, it is a description that seems to capture a quality frequently encountered in Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's music: when short found objects are repeated insistently, we are

⁴⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche in Ballantyne 2007, 51.

⁴⁶ J. Kramer 1988, 55.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

encouraged to imagine ourselves moving around them, exploring them from different angles; we are forced to embrace that notion of analysis as performance, active and ongoing, as advocated by Kofi Agawu, among others.⁴⁸ The idea of a singular 'analytical approach' quickly seems problematically one-dimensional. Yet this is a well-established analytical method: we select a particular approach to a given work and observe how it moves relative to a fairly fixed vantage point. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's works, however, tend to demand that we observe how our subject-position is moving in relation to strikingly fixed music, to consider the ways in which we move between different perspectives. We have seen this not only in the variety of spatial metaphors deployed in this case study, but also in the idea of an analytical enquiry skipping off a surface in unpredictable directions, rather than penetrating deep below it. I would argue that it is for this reason that Gudmundsen-Holmgreen has been so dedicated to concerto composition in recent decades: concertos foreground questions of subject-position – most obviously, those positions taken up by instrumental agents – and dialogue. As such, they encourage us to consider carefully our own positioning with respect to a given work, and the ways in which we can engage it in an analytical dialogue. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's notion of 'concerto meetings', with entities exploring one another from myriad different angles, could apply just as easily to those between works and their interpreters as it could to those between instruments.

⁴⁸ See Agawu 2004.

6

Conclusion

We now turn to what I believe to be the main contributions of the foregoing chapters. First of all, each case study has examined, in unprecedented depth, a contemporary concerto that has been critically acclaimed as well as well-represented in the concert hall and on recordings – even in cases where the work is only a few years old. Indeed, the four main analyses are considerably more detailed than other existing accounts of single works by these leading composers. The stylistic traits and aesthetic preoccupations examined will have wider applicability to their other works – concertante or otherwise. Each of these composers has been subject to prevailing and often reductive characterisations, to which my analyses pose a challenge: Nørgård the mystical symbolist, forging closed musical universes; Saariaho, a synthesis of Nordic and Francophone soundworlds, and a creator of slowly-changing hues of gently fluctuating intensity; Lindberg the mellowed high modernist who has come to serve as a model of neoclassical balance and post-Sibelian organicism for the twenty-first century; and Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, a purveyor of renewed simplicity in a convoluted world. I have sought not to demolish such impressions, as there is an important element of truth in each of them; instead, I have aimed to ‘muddy the waters’, to resist the convenient summary or bland generalisation that can so easily materialise when a vast multitude of composers compete for our attention. Each composer emerges as a more complex and provocative figure than the many pre-existing accounts had been able to reveal.

The second contribution has been the development of more generally applicable analytical models which may be applied to concertos that lie both within and outside the repertory under discussion in this project. Each of the three main generic lines of enquiry identified – agency, physicality and space – was already the protagonist of an extensive literature, yet that literature had been connected with concertos only sporadically, if at all. I do not claim to have developed a generalised analytical methodology for the concerto. This might appear a weakness given that many music-theoretical writings attempt precisely to present a unifying theory of their chosen repertory. Certainly, some important unities have been identified; yet the multiplicity of analytical strategies employed has been a response to the wide variety of styles and aesthetic preoccupations in the works considered. To analyse each work using precisely the same theoretical framework would be to present an overly deterministic perspective. Furthermore, stopping short of full theoretical closure reinforces that sense of an ‘unfinished project’ – the sense that the concertos discussed are pursuing a line of enquiry whose final destination remains difficult to identify. We have certainly not reached a saturation of concerto topics.

In the meantime, I would suggest that the foregoing chapters put forward analytical approaches which are potentially deeply revealing when applied to a broad array of concertos. I will offer some examples, though this should not be taken as an attempt at a comprehensive list. It would be particularly worthwhile to account for a wide range of agency-projection strategies in an appraisal of Ligeti’s disruptive treatment of the solo-orchestra relationship in his Piano Concerto. The ‘anxiety of lyricism’, as discussed in the case study on Saariaho, would be a powerful lens through which to conduct a thorough examination of numerous recent violin

concertos, in particular those of composers as different as Sofia Gubaidulina, Elliott Carter and John Adams. This anxiety also extends to concertos for other string instruments, particularly the cello. The frenzied, breathless solo assault encountered towards the conclusion of Penderecki's *Capriccio for Oboe and String Instruments*, or throughout Ferneyhough's *La Chûte d'Icare* for clarinet and chamber ensemble, seem to demand an implementation of the analytical technology developed here for Lindberg's *Clarinet Concerto*. And finally, the links between acoustic and metaphorical space, as discussed in my work on Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, potentially offer penetrating insights into works as apparently different as Morton Feldman's *Piano and Orchestra*, Berio's *Points on the Curve to Find...* and Birtwistle's *Secret Theatre*. (It should be recalled that the Appendix to this thesis will draw attention to several other works, specifically from the Nordic arena, which would likewise make compelling further case studies for the analytical approaches deployed here.)

One theme that has emerged frequently in these analyses has been the multifarious nature of virtuosity: it rarely refers simplistically to the player's technical prowess, but to a virtuosity of knowledge, virtue (modesty, or effortless execution), the virtuoso play with masks or identities, and the composer's virtuosity in the chameleon-like acquisition of new musical styles and techniques. In fleshing out these various interpretations, my analyses provide new perspectives on what surely remains one of the genre's central characteristics. My sense is that the notion of compositional virtuosity in particular has become more important in classical music production of recent decades. With the fading of an avant garde that adheres to an essentially Romantic conception of artistry, greater value has been attached to skilful

imitation and mask-wearing; the composer-as-craftsman's ability to work in various collaborative media, to effect stylistic syntheses, has often been commended over adherence to a single uncompromising path.¹

More generally still, I think that the topical orientation of the foregoing analytical approaches is suggestive of important changes in musical modernism. Implicit in my analytical enquiries has been the contention that traditional parameters of harmony, melody, rhythm and such have generally been configured in the compositions as secondary to the topics of agency, physicality and space. I would suggest that this appeal to a more hermeneutic mode of interpretation is an important contributor to the contemporary concerto's relative popularity. A protracted focus on the development of abstract parameters, as exemplified most obviously by most avant-garde composers shortly after the Second World War, has given way to a mode of composition preoccupied with the exploration of topics that have broader extra-musical significance (this is of course a change implied by the orientation of David Metzger's study of recent musical modernisms). In many cases, this change has been necessitated by the greater availability of financial support for what tends to be a more accessible form of enquiry. A less pragmatic reason is, of course, that whilst a sense of weariness has sometimes lingered over the investigation of new harmonic or rhythmic schemes, agency, physicality and space have been primary structural parameters for a far shorter time. Of course, this hermeneutic approach is in part the product of an analytical predisposition: every one of the works discussed, after all, could be examined in more abstract terms (the Lindberg and Saariaho in particular

¹ Relationships between music and moving images are only the beginnings of such collaborations. Arne Nordheim, for instance, worked on a 'sound sculpture' with the sculptor Arnold Haukeland, in a project for Erling Stordahl's Centre for the Blind at Skjeberg. The objective was to enable blind people to sense a plastic sculpture aurally.

would yield effectively to an exhaustive – rather than incidental – analytical application of pitch class set theory in which extra-musical metaphors were kept to a minimum). Yet this subtle interpretative bias should not obscure the fact that the concertos discussed, like so much recent modernist music, have a pronounced dramatic element. To shun ideas of ritual, theatre, or dramatic agency in their appraisal would surely be misleading; and to write exclusively in terms of musical parameters would be to impart precisely the kind of academic dryness that is resisted by the vibrant, richly characterised rhetorics of so many contemporary concertos.

The third and final contribution I have aimed to make has been to the understanding of contemporary Nordic musical identity. As I suggested in the introduction, the aim has certainly not been to identify a single, quintessentially Nordic concerto: the diversity of styles and techniques encountered throughout the thesis has surely dispelled any idea that such an entity might exist. Yet there are important unifying strands between these works, and the main task of the following paragraphs will be to clarify what those strands are, and to discuss whether they point towards a Nordic identity.

The first two continuities worth noting both relate to notions of purity. The first of these is that aforementioned purportedly uncontaminated focus on ‘purely’ musical expression. It will be remembered that all of the composers discussed in depth have often been associated, in one way or another, with the ‘purely’ musical. Nørgård has been received primarily as a symphonic rather than dramatic composer, as I argued in the first case study. The emphasis on abstraction is even more marked in Lindberg’s reception: this supposedly post-Sibelian composer’s oeuvre is dominated by orchestral music; and Lindberg’s own commentaries suggest an intense

preoccupation with the exploration of purely musical parameters and the balances between them, rather than with extra-musical connections. Likewise, in spite of her recent success as an opera composer, Saariaho has never lost her earlier associations with purity, manifested most clearly in her exploration of 'sound itself'. And Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's far-sightedly myopic focus on the most commonplace musical objects leans heavily towards the abstraction of 'music about music'. To some extent, this emphasis on purity is part of a more general modernist ideal that intermingles notions of the uncontaminating, the natural and the uncompromising.² Yet it also relates more specifically to the reception of Nordic composers as symphonists working at the pinnacle of austere, abstract form-building. In favouring a hermeneutic mode of interpretation I have attempted to reflect how these concertos run contrary to still-prevalent notions of Nordic musical identity. I have aimed to show that the concerto's centrality to the region's musical production is suggestive of technical and aesthetic preoccupations quite distinct from those (often reductively) associated with the legacies of Nordic composers' illustrious predecessors.

The second notion of purity these concertos kick against is the suspect idea of the composer's 'vision' being sublimely unencumbered by the practical limitations of performers and instruments. That resistance is obviously most striking in those composers who often entertain projections of mysticism or transcendentalism. Such projections form part of a commonly perceived Nordic subjectivity that connects with ideals of closeness to nature (and thus a deep-seated understanding of its workings), distance from the clatter of Central European life, and a sense for vastness of scale

² David Metzger provides a very useful discussion of modernist notions of purity in Metzger 2009, 30-62. See also Cheetham 1991.

that links with popular visions of Nordic topography. Of the composers studied in depth, this tendency is most marked in Nørgård (even if he does come from the region's most Central European country): nebulous commentaries, prohibitively complex rhythms, and demands for vastly expensive, irregular orchestral resources combine to create the impression of a composer whose visions know no practical bounds.³ Similar projections of transcendentalism are encountered frequently in the words and music of composers like Einojuhani Rautavaara and Arne Nordheim.⁴ The concerto's emphasis on instrumental technique and the exploration of practical limitation tends to undermine these projections. Indeed, this repertory is pervaded by a particular kind of materiality that one might tentatively identify as characteristically Nordic: there is the sense of a composer's straightforward, tactile inspection of the ergonomics and mechanisms of the solo instrument; yet that impression is held in a quite gentle, unabrasive tension with a warmer personification of instruments, a playful rapport with their histories and their many 'faces'.

The contradiction between pragmaticism, on the one hand, and projections of mysticism, on the other, is often acknowledged by even the most other-worldly of composers. It is a contradiction which often gives rise to a tantalising sense of irony: concertante practicalities can result in the projection of a playful, down-to-earth,

³ For a discussion of this rhythmic complexity, see Christensen 1996. On Nørgård's spirituality, see Johnson 1996. As Poul Ruders argues, 'the gap between artistic vision and technical ease has always been the true yardstick of a composer's courage', i.e. the courage to walk the tightrope without a safety net; the courage to make seeing your visions through your first priority, rather than writing what is technically feasible, let alone comfortable, for the players. In that respect Per Nørgård is certainly one of the most courageous modern composers I know of' (Ruders 1996, 244).

⁴ In his book on Rautavaara, *Unien lahja* (The Gift of Dreams), Pekka Hako gives a useful and sometimes cynical account of the composer's international marketing. Particularly revealing is the account of the marketing of the Seventh Symphony (1994), often heralded as his international breakthrough work: the Seventh was first subtitled 'The Bloomington Symphony' in honour of the Indiana city where it was premiered. It was decided subsequently that a more marketable title would be *Angel of Light* – the work thus strengthened the 'angel' theme running through Rautavaara's oeuvre (see Korhonen 2006).

deconstructive composer's voice quite distant from the mystical one. One voice conveys a high-minded purity of vision, the other revels in impurity. Practical contingency has much to do with the concerto's associations with lightness and triviality. Perhaps this is an aspect of the genre's appeal to Nordic composers: a ludic tone is readily discernable in each of the works discussed – in Nørgård's play with masks, Saariaho's intoxicated finale, Lindberg's sometimes humorous theatre of gesture; and of course, ironies lie at the heart of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's *Plateaux*. This lightness is perhaps in keeping with that mellowing of modernism discussed earlier in my introduction. Yet my sense is that these subtle tones of warm-hearted irony and wry playfulness are key components of a more specifically Nordic musical subjectivity (a subjectivity quite distinct from that notion of the rough-hewn, craggy symphonic epic which animates a fairly common conception of Nordic musical identity). Of course, the difficulty here is that 'tone' remains a slippery entity, one that music-analytical tools are arguably quite poorly equipped to deal with. We can strengthen what may appear a somewhat ethereal suggestion by discussing some of the balancing acts that we encounter regularly in this repertory. Each of these 'balancing acts' relates to the ways in which composers engage with the provocative particularities of a conventional genre.

The first point to make in this respect is that, as argued in my introduction, 'anti-concerto' is too strong a term for any of the works discussed in this thesis: at no point have we borne witness to a frenzied or systematic demolition of the genre. The prevalent impression is surely one of concertos kicking against their genre, rather than razing it to the ground. Perhaps the most striking example of this is the way in which composers toy with the soloist-orchestra binary. In all of the works discussed

(and particularly in the Nørgård), a simple soloist-orchestra dualism is often rendered problematic, usually through the introduction of secondary soloists, most often by the deployment of highly complex, variegated orchestral textures which defy the role of simple accompaniment; yet in no work is the solo part entirely suppressed by the orchestra. Generic associations with conflict are also deconstructed, as the relationships between concerto agents change so frequently. Each of these concertos explores the middle ground between absolutes, between solo and orchestra, between concerto and anti-concerto. This is in part a problematisation of the Romantic heroism that many contemporary composers have seen as inherent to the genre: works allow the soloist a degree of pre-eminence without allowing the ego or control of the individual to run riot. One tempted by political analogy – as many concerto commentators have been – could go so far as to argue that this is a manifestation of the Scandinavian ‘middle way’, even if most commentators agree that the region has shifted politically somewhat to the Right since its ‘social democratic harvest’.⁵ The resistance to absolute oppositions (as in Saariaho’s favoured ‘transitional spaces’) might also be linked with that odd quality of light often encountered in the Nordic region: long hours are spent in a suspension between two absolutes, night and day, and the eye is especially prone to spotting fine gradations during those lengthy moments of dawn and dusk. This connection becomes stronger when one considers that light metaphors have become almost a cliché in accounts of Nordic music, largely in response to the titles composers give their own works.⁶ Examples from the concerto repertory are Saariaho’s *Notes on Light*, Rautavaara’s

⁵ The phrase ‘social democratic harvest’ is the title of Tony Griffiths’ chapter on the decades after the Second World War in Griffiths 1996. Griffiths also documents the shift to the right that has taken place in recent decades.

⁶ Johnson 2006.

Angel of Dusk and Nørgård's *Helle Nacht* (Light Night). The last of these works in particular is in many ways a perceptually-orientated study of the twilight zones between numerous oppositions, including the soloist-orchestra relationship.⁷ (Of course, here I am reinforcing a metaphor whose predominance I questioned in the chapter on Saariaho. Note that I did not deny its importance, but suggested ways in which the metaphor's hegemony could be resisted.)

Just as these concertos tend to deconstruct the absolutes of soloist and orchestra, they also rummage around in other liminal spaces associated with generic tradition. Nørgård, for instance, sets up a relationship between two maximally oppositional (concertante) tempos, only to explore the murky interferences between them for the majority of the work. More generally, the middle ground between acceptance and demolition is also detectable, for instance, in each of these concertos' treatments of tonality. Certainly, these treatments vary widely from work to work. Lindberg's harmonic syntax is arguably the most pitch-centric, and 'tonic' triads have a greater pre-eminence in this concerto than in the other case studies. Yet his other methods of harmonic organisation, including octatonicism and twelve-note chords, replace tonic-dominant harmony; and while Lindberg imposes a strong if idiosyncratic sense of harmonic functionality on these post-tonal elements, there is little in the way of an analogue to the large-scale hierarchical structure associated with common-practice tonality. In Saariaho, we have a powerful sense of the historical loading of tonality in the form of a D major grail-sonority. It might be argued, furthermore, that the significance of this triad generates much of the Concerto's pitch-related linearity: tonally suggestive notions of prolongation are difficult to resist.

⁷ See Anders Beyer on *Helle Nacht* in Beyer 1996, 132-141.

Tonic-dominant harmony, however, is again absent, and this triad is integrated into a spectral (white noise-sine tone) rather than tonal system of harmonic organisation. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's *Plateaux* present us with numerous fragments of tonality, always firmly within quotation marks: seeming subdominants and Mozartean I-V-I progressions are key to the work's ironic suspension. Nørgård's is the most dissonant and least pitch-centric of all four concertos analysed here – indeed I struggle to think of another Nordic concerto with such a rebarbative harmonic language – yet it is at numerous moments pointedly, and perhaps ritualistically, tethered to the diatonic and pentatonic patterns inscribed in the layout of white and black keys on the piano keyboard.

Finally, Nordic concertos tend towards an ambivalent perspective on the structures and formal behaviours traditionally associated with their genre. Viewed from a distance, they might seem rather conventional: given that contemporary music so frequently functions at microscopic or vast timescales,⁸ it is striking that all of the concertos studied – and indeed the vast majority of works in this repertory – work within a traditional generic timespan of 25 to 40 minutes. It is particularly interesting that this is the case even in Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's *Plateaux*, where the durations of individual movements are so odd and so significant. Three-movement works are uncommon, although some of the best-known successful Nordic concertos, like Lindberg's Piano Concerto and Rautavaara's *Gift of Dreams*, are undoubtedly important counter-examples. In works less obviously engaged with the Classical model there is nonetheless a marked and arguably traditional sense of alternation between passages that celebrate instrumental bravura and those that

⁸ An observation made in Griffiths 1995, 256-7.

demonstrate *virtú*. And not one of the works encountered in this thesis is resolutely anti-virtuosic: Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's certainly comes closest to the anti-virtuosic but remains scattered with technical difficulties and irresistible flourishes of ornamentation, more so than one might expect of a composer associated with the New Simplicity. The other works are concerned in various ways with the advancement of technique, both compositional and instrumental (in several cases we observe just how closely linked these two forms of technique can be). Finally, suggestions of unity are entertained, whether through a single-movement 'voyage into the abyss', a Grail quest, a wind concerto conceived as a single breath, or a closing 'composite' of previous movements. On closer inspection, of course, each of these unities is deconstructed.

With this (dis)unity comes the challenge to closure noted in each of the case studies: Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's glittering heterophony, for instance, complements the way in which his final plateau stutters to a halt, fragmented and conspicuously open-ended. Closure is a structural impossibility for Nørgård, who concludes his Concerto with a conspicuous opening gesture, a resistance to interpretative finality that is reinforced by the work's persistent unravelling of the standard binary concerto texture. Saariaho leans towards the linear teleology of a quest narrative, before presenting us with a hallucinatory finale and a vision of the Waste Land, as far removed as can be imagined from the blazing triumphalism that normally concludes a heroic concerto quest. Lindberg's ending is outwardly suggestive of precisely that more conventional finale, with a thematic return orchestrated to the hilt and drenched luxuriously in spectral sheen. Yet it is a conclusion that rings hollow following a conspicuous formal collapse; artificiality is all

the more striking in light of the concerto's promise of rosy-cheeked organicism. Of course, 'the sense of an ending', as connected with the impression of linear development, is compellingly absent from a great deal of modernist musical production.⁹ Yet that absenteeism seems all the more striking in this repertory. Perhaps this is because the concerto genre has historically been afflicted by numerous problematic or dissatisfying endings, often as a product of the perceived need for concluding with a triumphant peak of virtuosic display, once the 'more serious' business of reconciling previous conflicts is completed. It may also stem from the fact that concertos often suffer an excess of closure, drumming home their resolutions with celebratory mutual rondos or triumphant flourishes that seem superfluous from the perspective of certain traditional analytical criteria. The works discussed tend to react with a sense of wry detachment to this problematic of the concerto.

The notion of works commentating on their genre has been often latent and sometimes overt in the foregoing analyses. This characteristic is particularly evident, as I have shown, in Saariaho's Violin Concerto and its dramatic struggle with tradition; it is true also of the Mozart quotation in Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's final plateau. And both the Nørgård and Lindberg concertos respond to the richly multifaceted personalities of their solo instruments, largely as they have been configured historically by the concerto repertory. This is both an aspect of the detached subjectivity discussed, as well as a characteristic of the genre: concertos usually progress towards a pinnacle of bravura, and this formal tendency is also

⁹ A term taken from the title of Kerman 1979. Joseph Kerman has commented on certain parallels between Kerman's ideas on elaboration and the theory of Heinrich Schenker (Kerman 1999, 104). See J. Kramer 1988 for a wideranging discussion of modernist works which flout expectations of closure.

reflected in a generic history that particularly fosters a sense of progressivism. As new instrumental possibilities develop, so new concertos are required as 'showcase' works; conversely, the pressures of concerto composition are often the driving force behind new technical developments. It thus becomes easy to hear the final, triumphant cadence of a nineteenth-century 'warhorse', following a peak of soloistic heroism, as a statement of summation – a statement that we have now experienced all that can be done on a given instrument. By contrast, each of these more recent concertos seems to project us, through its open ending, towards future explorations; the gesture appears to suggest the spirit of that 'unfinished project' of modernism – in this case, the project of exploring the sonic and perhaps dramatic possibilities of a given instrument, or of generic topics more broadly conceived. Each of the three main lines of enquiry identified in this thesis is therefore pointedly kept open by the (non-)closing rhetorics of these works.

This sense of openness and continued exploration is one of the main reasons why I now conclude by arguing that the prospects for the concerto, both in and beyond the Nordic region, remain very good indeed. As I have argued, concertos foreground preoccupations of wider importance for contemporary music. Agency, for instance, has been an important concern for many composers in recent decades, reflected both in composers' negotiations of identity and in the treatment of sound sources in their compositions. The notion of a distinctive composer's voice, allied with that of virtuoso mask-play, becomes especially provocative (and perhaps questionable) given the unprecedented plethora of contemporary voices that can so easily be accessed. And developments in electroacoustic composition in particular can distance or manipulate the sources of sounds in acoustic space, often with

interesting implications for an audience's perceptions of the agency behind the act of performance. Similarly, as I aimed to demonstrate in the previous chapter, space has enjoyed wide-ranging thematic importance in modernist musical production. New technologies designed for the dislocation of sounds from their original sources, coupled to increasingly sophisticated means of shaping delays and reverberations, have ensured that this remains an area of intense exploration for many contemporary composers.

As this range of generic intersections implies, the concerto is a comparatively uneconomical way of exploring these issues. The survival – indeed, the centrality – of a genre so demanding of orchestral resources (not only the number of instruments employed, but also rehearsal time typically required) can hardly be taken for granted, even in regions where those resources are notably abundant. As Richard Taruskin has suggested,

the lowered cultural prestige of literate musical genres has accompanied the marginalisation of musical literacy and abetted it; the availability of technologies that can circumvent notation in the production of complex composed music may eventually render musical literacy, like knowledge of ancient scripts, superfluous to all but scholars.¹⁰

For some, this demise would be taken as a blessing. Familiar concerns about composers mistaking notes for the music are potentially abetted, while technologies such as sequencers have had important and revitalising effects on compositional thought. Electronic media also provide what has long been frustratingly elusive to a certain object-centred mindset: “text” and “work” can fuse under electronic conditions so as to produce a definitive work-object [...] in a way that the intervention of human

¹⁰ Taruskin 2005b, 510.

performers inevitably precludes'.¹¹ Concertos attest to the continued attraction of precisely this intervention, and to the interest of exploring the space between notation (usually copious, elaborate, perhaps prohibitive) and act. They celebrate the contingencies of human performance and the development of new techniques, and are likely to remain a vibrant source of innovation – in a range of parameters other than instrumental sonority – as long as forward-looking instrumentalists are available. This foregrounding of performance, and indeed the rituals of classical performance more broadly conceived, will surely continue to inject productive tensions into classical concert life; furthermore, the celebration of the conflict between text and act, and of the strains and imperfections of live performance, will ensure that concertos remain battlegrounds for musical tastes long into the twenty-first century.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 481.

Appendix: Further Contemporary Nordic Concertos which would reward the Analytical Lines of Enquiry Suggested in this Thesis

Hans Abrahamsen, Piano Concerto (1999-2000)

The composer's agency

The Piano Concerto is one of the most provocative works of the Danish composer Hans Abrahamsen. Abrahamsen's style is typically characterised by a directness and concision inherited to a large extent from Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, and this 4-movement, 15-minute-long work lacks the 'sprawling' propensity of the Nørgård Piano Concerto. Yet it shares with the Nørgård a disconcerting tendency to explore myriad agency-projection strategies.

The notion of playing with authorial voices is foregrounded very early on: only thirty seconds into the first movement, and having established a minimalistic patterning that could continue perpetually, the concerto has what Abrahamsen describes as a 'seizure'.¹ This collapse may remind us of the compositional drama we encounter in Lindberg's Clarinet Concerto, but the depiction of creative strain is if anything more direct in the Abrahamsen: the following two movements seem preoccupied with the struggle for the health of the composer's creative force, which

¹ Abrahamsen in Michelsen 2002.

seems finally to exert itself in the frenetic fireworks of the third movement's scherzo. As in the Lindberg concerto, the recovery is suspiciously energetic. A provocative addition to this play with authorial presence is the number of composers other than Abrahamsen who appear, at several moments, to exert their will upon the concerto. Mahler, for instance, is a clear presence in the second movement, which is penetrated by the C# trumpet fanfare of the Fifth Symphony (Abrahamsen acknowledges this in the score with the words 'Wie Mahler!').²

Later in the concerto, Abrahamsen plays to a greater extent with the agencies of instrumental forces. The piano, though hardly ever silent in the first three movements, 'takes a break and listens'³ in the finale, when the work is overrun by orchestral agents behaving with much greater volition than they have exhibited previously. The piano, to use Abrahamsen's metaphor, 'has stirred up an anthill'.⁴ Of course, the swarm of ants offers a particularly compelling relationship between individual and collective volition: the coordination of the group is striking, but only because the number of individuals involved is so high. The piano's recurrent motif in this finale is a kind of lullaby, seemingly longing for closure just as the orchestra has been roused. With its particularly obvious implications for structure, this tension between the perceived intentions of the work's protagonists again pulls us towards an interpretation of the concerto as a performed act of composition.

² The Piano Concerto is hardly unique among Abrahamsen's works in having a particularly keen engagement with the past: his compelling orchestrations of Carl Nielsen's three late piano pieces, op.59 and of Arnold Schoenberg's *Sechs kleine klavierstücke* op. 19 are only the most direct examples of this.

³ Abrahamsen in Michelsen 2002.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Kalevi Aho, Cello Concerto (1984)

Play with schemes of individuation; anti-concertante disruptive treatment of the soloist; assault on normative concerto narrativity

The Cello Concerto is one of Kalevi Aho's most pessimistic works: taking the notion of concerto conflict to its extreme, the unruly interaction of numerous concerto agents finally results in annihilation. This is annihilation not only of the protagonists involved but also of the piece itself. Following reasonably benign beginnings, the first movement is disturbed with increasing frequency and energy by members of an anti-orchestra comprising organ, accordion, mandolin, saxophone, tuba and side drums. All of these instruments are either conventional outsiders to the orchestra or generally banished to menial roles within it, and it seems likely that their disruptive intent is a reaction to the fact that the cello enjoys both a rich solo repertory and a centrality to the orchestra. The cello is regularly attacked and subverted by both orchestra and anti-orchestra.

Disruption turns to outright chaos in the second and final movement, which concludes with a mournful coda that one critic calls

quiet but hardly peaceful. In it, the sonic landscape is figuratively littered with broken instruments that mankind has forgotten how to play, or no longer cares to. The 'world' of Aho's Cello Concerto ends with squawking, squeaking, and bitter snickering.⁵

⁵ Tuttle 2009.

Following a slow and inexorable decline, 'the grotesque gestures' of mangled instruments 'finally subside into the void'.⁶

Nils Henrik Asheim, *Catch Light*, Double Concerto for Violin, Percussion and Orchestra (2009)

Space; light and dark; precision of notation

The importance of the performing space is almost a constant preoccupation in the works of Nils Henrik Asheim. Not only has Asheim worked prolifically in music theatre, a great many of his pieces have been written for and apparently performed *by* specific places: both *Blowout* (1996) and *Strandhogg* (1998), for instance, are written for Stavanger Harbour, brass instruments, steel pipes, electronics and boats. This accented awareness of the performing space and its potential centrality to music is transferred to Asheim's orchestral music, in particular the recent double concerto *Catch Light*.

A significant element of this music's spatialisation is achieved through the amplification of the two soloists' instruments. The purpose of this amplification is, however, not to increase general loudness, but to pick up and significantly amplify those instrumental sounds that are usually neglected: Asheim aims to capture scratching, chafing, breathing sounds – sounds that might remind us of a flickering candle whose light is so easily negated by a brighter, more constant source. Asheim

⁶ Korhonen 1995, 61.

seems particularly interested in what happens to his wealth of strange sonorities once the initial attack has occurred: with what speed and regularity do these sounds decay? Is the decay uniform across the harmonic spectrum, or do some partials hang in the air much longer than others? This kind of microscopic detail is of paramount importance throughout *Catch Light*: the work's title is in part a reference to the way in which the kind of intense magnification Asheim explores is a strongly visual concept – the composer's own example of this level of detail is seeing the camera reflected in the eyes of the subject of a photograph.⁷

It is rare, given the expense of hiring an orchestra, to see one used as little more than an extremely sophisticated and versatile reverberation chamber. Yet this is precisely the role that Asheim's orchestra plays throughout much of this concerto: positioned between the violinist and percussionist, it provides echoes of various lengths, adds chattering or pulsating timbres to decays, and sustains certain partials of the soloists' sounds while letting others fall away. Most crucially, in occupying a large area of the auditorium, the orchestra also has an innate ability to throw these refractions around acoustic space. This is an ability that Asheim uses to maximum effect.

As in Chapter 5, there is an important link here between acoustic and metaphorical space. In making specific reference to a camera reflected in the eyes of somebody who is photographed, Asheim is doing more than exemplifying a high level of detail: he is foregrounding acts of perception. One of Asheim's preoccupations, as discussed in his programme note to the work, is the experience of listening to a work

⁷ Asheim 2009.

multiple times and the ways in which different details of that work strike us or escape us with each experience – and the ways in which the listening experience can be as

Ex. 6.1: *Catch Light*, bb.25-30 – the orchestra as reverberation chamber

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The musical score for measures 25-30 of *Catch Light* is presented in a multi-staff format. The instruments listed on the left include Piccolo, Flutes 1 and 2, Oboes 1 and 2, English Horn, Clarinets 1 and 2, Bass Clarinet, Basset Horn, Contrabass, Horns 1-4, Trumpets 1-3, Tympani, Tuba, Vibraphone, Percussion 2, Harp, Piano, Violin Solo, Percussion Solo, Woodblock, Bells, Bowed Bells, Violins 1 and 2, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (pp, mf, f, sf, sfz), articulation (accents, slurs), and performance instructions (straight mutes, always pedal). The measures are numbered 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, and 30 at the top of each system.

transient as the sonic energy which inevitably dissipates around a space. Central to *Catch Light* is the impossibility of ‘capturing’ and ‘retaining’ a work in its totality, as a presence in both space and in memory. The concerto, as a genre prone to foregrounding the momentariness and contingencies of performance, is particularly well-suited to negotiating this concern.

Kimmo Hakola, Piano Concerto (1996)

The composer's voice(s); engagement with the history of the solo instrument

Consisting of nine movements and with a total duration of 55 minutes, Hakola's Piano Concerto bears obvious comparison with Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's *Plateaux*. Yet this is a somewhat superficial similarity, and it is perhaps more illuminating to discuss Hakola's concerto in terms of its relationship with its solo instrument's past, rather than the spatial tropes that the Gudmundsen-Holmgreen engages with. An exact contemporary of Magnus Lindberg, Hakola for many years lacked the fluent output of his Finnish colleague. Following the success of early works like his first string quartet (1984), Hakola's output was apparently stunted by self-criticism. It is therefore interesting that he returned to public musical life more than a decade later with this vast jamboree of musical identities: the piano concerto leaps capriciously, perhaps chaotically, across the full spectrum of piano styles, 'from generic international modernism to neo-romantic gestures, via all kind of references

to popular and world musics'.⁸ It is as if the anxiety of forming a single compositional voice has driven an explosion of multiple, parodic voices. The piano, as I suggested in my analysis of *Concerto in Due Tempi*, is the archetypal instrumental pluralist and impersonator, ideally suited to precisely the play with masks that we see in Hakola's concerto.

Rolf Martinsson, *Bridge*, Trumpet Concerto No.1 (1999)

Physical and metaphorical strain; breathlessness; problematic cadenza spaces

Martinsson's music has much of the 'Hollywood' orchestral sheen, sensuous melodicism and virtuosic multiplicity of harmonic syntax that we encounter in the Lindberg Clarinet Concerto. Martinsson's most oft-performed concerto, *Bridge*, in particular also appears to share a similar preoccupation with structure and the potential for its collapse – and indeed this potential is often reinforced through the strains of a soloist negotiating a formidably challenging part.

In *Bridge* there is perhaps less of a strain towards unified organicism than in the Lindberg concerto – a more architectonic, inorganic conceptualisation of form is suggested both by the work's title, its clear division into three sections, and by sustained periods of strikingly regular (mechanistic) rhythm: the final seven-minute section has a single pulse virtually throughout, and this is foregrounded by the

⁸ Clements, A., 2009. Review: Hakola: Piano Concerto; Sinfonietta: Sigfridsson/Tampere PO/Storgårds. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2009/mar/06/hakola-piano-concerto-sinfonietta-review>

percussion with surprising directness. This accented sense of inorganicism works less well with the metaphor of breathlessness that was central to my analysis of the Lindberg concerto. But we nonetheless have the sense that a seemingly super-human soloist must, through sheer physical exertion, bear the burden of two major responsibilities: first, he must hold the work's three sections together with his cadenzas alone; second, in the finale in particular, he must work frenetically, exploring more and more timbres and registers, to fight a monotony which is so clearly threatened by the metronomic drumming of the pulse.

Thomas Agerfeldt Olesen, *Steinfeld* for Piano and Orchestra (2004)

Physical and metaphorical strain; maximalisation of parameters; the composer's agency

While strain is often especially visible on the faces of wind players, this in no way suggests that the connection between physical and metaphorical strain is not experienced in concertos for other types of instrument. With its consistency of tone, regardless of register, however, the piano as solo instrument might seem an unlikely candidate for an analysis that looks to explore this connection. Yet it is precisely that regularity that opens up the potential for a dramatic sense of cagedness: the piano, for instance, imposes obvious pitch limitations (captured archetypally in the story of Charles Ives' father banging away at piano keys in an attempt to hear the gaps

between them), along with restrictions to dynamic range – the instrument's mechanism gives absolute limits to both loudness and softness

In *Steinfeld*, Thomas Agerfeldt Olesen explores this dramatic potential and seems to link it with the creative struggles of compositional process. Olesen articulates his particular struggle thus:

I have over the years wondered how it might be possible to get close to a real time composition process and still maintain all the values of the thinking process, which makes the difference between composition and improvisation. Composing *Steinfeld* in 2004 I tried to act like a visual artist with pencil and paper, capturing the vision of the piece in a drawing "flux". This vision was then the basis of the composition process.

The vision turned out to be that of an imprisoned being escaping into movement, stopping again, repeating this pattern in various ways, never really capable of finding the freedom it is longing for. This is all reflected in the creative process and in the material of the piece.⁹

In light of these words it is difficult not to hear the futile struggle against containment as being enacted in one of the work's frequently recurrent gestures: the lowest keys of a piano are thumped indiscriminately with a wooden pad while the orchestra repeats a highly dissonant cluster chord at a volume which prompts many audience members to block their ears. It is the brutishness of the wooden pad that is most striking, however: this pad is able to depress a greater number of keys than could a pianist's fingers or hands; with every additional key depressed, the total amplitude increases slightly, suggesting that we are bearing witness to a compellingly crude attempt simply to maximise amplitude – and thereby to shake free of the restrictions that are imposed on performer and pianist alike.

⁹ Thomas Agerfeldt Olesen, Programme Note

Einojuhani Rautavaara, *Annunciations for Organ, Brass Group and Orchestra* (1977)

The solo instrument as creative persona; clashes of triviality and profundity

This concerto responds both to the organ's religious connotations and its ability to sustain a note indefinitely. The solo instrument takes on the role of an omnipotent deity: its pipes gradually – and at first notelessly – breathe the brass group and then the orchestra into life; for much of the remainder of the work, we hear what the composer describes as a 'domino' effect in which the developments in the organ trigger similar developments in successive instrument groups.¹⁰ Another, altogether less sacred aspect of the organ's personality emerges towards the concerto's ending: as Rautavaara recalls, one critic, commenting on this finale, once remarked that it reminded him of a Pasolini movie in which 'drunken aristocrats writhe over the organ keys'.¹¹

Rolf Wallin, *Concerto for Timpani and Orchestra* (1985)

Compositional agency of the solo instrument; anti-heroes; maximisation of parameters

The leading Norwegian composer Rolf Wallin has written a number of concertos which demand an approach underlining the ways in which the playing techniques and histories of solo instruments have a compelling impact on the compositional process.

¹⁰ Einojuhani Rautavaara, Programme note.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

The Concerto for Timpani and Orchestra (1985) is exemplary of this. As Wallin comments,

When Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra asked me to write a concerto for timpani and orchestra, I reacted spontaneously like most composers would do: is it possible to write a solo concerto for an instrument with so many limitations? Pitchwise they cover less than two octaves, and though pedals have made for a fairly fast retuning of a timpano, free and fluid melodical writing is impossible. On top of everything, the instrument lacks what seems to be the sine qua non of a solo concerto: an emotionally charged voice. My final acceptance of and enthusiasm for the idea emanated from these facts. I always have had problems with the concept of the solo concerto, as I have regarded it as an egocentric residue of the romantic era, where the task of the orchestra has been to highlight the brilliant ego. Besides this, I have always been fascinated by the timpanist's role in the classical orchestra, as an alternative power centre in the implicit hierarchy of the orchestra, a sort of anti-hero.¹²

Wallin upsets this hierarchy not through conspicuous secondary soloists (for he has already cast the primary soloist in precisely that role), but through a denial of subjective agency. A complementary absence of subjectivity is projected in the Concerto's design: the Timpani Concerto is the first work in which Wallin explores the extensive use of computer-generated chance procedures – a technique which, while centred on a dialogue between composer and computer, significantly reduces the involvement of the composer's subjectivity in the creative process. As a result, the

¹² Rolf Wallin

sense of an unyielding mechanistic control behind the Concerto is frequently eminently perceptible, particularly in the work's dynamics, which, taking a cue from the solo instrument, range from inaudibility to a deafening, sustained cacophony. Yet other parameters, crucially textural complexity (the number of layers in the texture), are also varied at random. On occasion this results in the combination of near-inaudible softness and maximal textural complexity, producing what sounds like an extreme compression with the potential to crush the Concerto into silence. Alternatively, random organisation at times produces the brazen combination of a sustained *ffff* with a maximally sparse texture (often no more than a single timpano). The effect in both cases can be reminiscent of studio compression pushed to an unsympathetic extreme that highly distorts, even eliminates, 'natural' dynamic variation in recordings.

Rolf Wallin, *Imella* (2009)

Compositional agency of the solo instrument; tensions between regional and international identity

Rolf Wallin's recent *Imella* (2009) for hardanger fiddle and chamber orchestra is a particularly interesting example of the ways in which a Norwegian contemporary composer reacts to the identity and the technical properties of his country's foremost folk instrument. It is difficult to avoid perceiving such a work as a nationalistic statement: it certainly appears to be precisely that in the hardanger fiddle concertos

of Geirr Tveitt (1908-81); in bringing together the most well-known folk instruments from Norway and Sweden, Lasse Thoresen's *Double Concerto for Hardingfele and og Nyckelharpa* (2005) seems just as political.¹³ Wallin, of course, has engaged so pointedly with global affairs in previous works that his turn to the instrument is suggestive of his confidence in his own international identity. The title of his concerto – 'imella' is North Norwegian dialect for 'between' – is reflective of the work's tense positioning in relation to two traditions whose differences are more obvious than their similarities: it strives to 'combine the drive and the direct expression of folk music with the possibility in art music to take the listener on a journey in large and changing soundscapes'.¹⁴ Wallin's syntax relates to the 'eccentric logic of melody and tonality'¹⁵ dictated by the hardanger fiddle's layout of pitches. The melodic writing is generated by a 'bank' of short melodic motives (called "vek"), repeated and varied quite freely, and transposed up and down in fifths according to the strings of the fiddle. Another characteristic of the hardanger fiddle sound, again important in *Imella*, is that the music is often played on two strings simultaneously, with one mostly open string, the other carrying the melody. Often the melody lies in the lower string, or it flips between the two strings, producing brilliant, ringing and slightly dissonant sonorities. The work abounds with examples of an idiosyncratic instrument imposing itself on a compositional process.

¹³ For more information on hardanger fiddle concertos, see Aksdal 2006.

¹⁴ Rolf Wallin, *Imella* Programme Note

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

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