

2. INTRODUCTION: THE SENSE OF DISORDER

How is it that a piece of music can move us? What is it in particular about the way in which a piece of music is written that can cause us to cry or to reflect, or to make us want to dance or even scream? You might feel that such questions don't need answers, and that we can be satisfied liking a piece of music simply for what it is. You might think—and you would probably be right—that we don't need to understand the intricacies of a work's inner mechanisms to experience its philosophy. Foucault, on reading a short story by Borges, described his earth-shattering unease reflecting on his laughter at a certain encyclopaedia. Just by laughing he had already begun to process the philosophy. This has always been the technique of the satirists, after all.

For such a simple question, the answer, or at least the process of answering, is inordinately difficult. It might be there is a specific part of a piece we like; it might be there is a character to the piece as a whole that appeals to us; or, perhaps the piece reminds us of something, prompting us to reflect on a powerful feeling. In these terms it might seem unrealistic to approach an objective argument because our immediate materials are inherently and inevitably subjective. This is undeniably the case; this is also necessarily the case, and such a realisation needn't cloud our present argument.

When we encounter a piece of music we relate what we hear to a lifetime of experience: all the music we have assimilated, but also the patterns of life in general—birdsong, the wind, footsteps, breathing, our heartbeat. These seemingly basic motifs already constitute their own complexes of relations. We can recognise all such manner of “conventional” relations—the rhythm of a heartbeat is familiar to us all; the function of a perfect cadence might seem ubiquitous but is really rooted in about five-hundred years of Western musical history; the particular sound of all twelve notes of the chromatic scale is tied most strongly to the Second Viennese School, et cetera. It is so obvious as to hardly warrant stating that conceptions of conventional relations are culturally codified. Given our distinct cultural dispositions we conceive relations differently according to our experience. In other words, our interpretation of a work is necessarily subjective: when we encounter a piece of music we attempt to make sense of its relations, and our response is based fundamentally upon recognition, upon experience. In this sense,

2. INTRODUCTION

listening alone can be considered a creative act owing to how each of us construes individually relations. This is why the current argument needn't be disturbed by subjectivity: it *is* subjectivity; our experience *is* our conception of history.

One thing we can take from this is that there is a reconfiguration of history in any creative act, be it listening, performing, composing, or even thinking (what I mean by this is that our experience is necessarily challenged). In fact, we might say that our history is reconfigured *because* of creativity, and that creativity is at the heart of change, be it philosophical, social or political. This is, of course, why we are interested in its mechanisms. Another way of framing this is in terms of betrayal, a powerful perspective according to which the creative act betrays its own history, betrays our conception of history. Accordingly, by writing this I am betraying what has taught me to write it, and you, by reading this—provided you are *reading* this—are betraying this very text. This may be difficult to accept at face value—it certainly is a striking claim that something so inherent to our lives as thinking can constitute betrayal. Betrayal, in this sense, manifests when there is even the smallest degree of the non-literal; it is ubiquitous in the practice of music. It follows that in any creative act there is a certain degree of loss—the loss of what is necessarily betrayed or reconfigured—and thus that we can consider listening, performing, composing, thinking as destructive acts. Destruction is tied to creation, whose history *must* be betrayed. History, which is the material of experience, is at once all-powerful and unfailingly fickle. The creative process rewrites history, challenges history, dismisses history. This challenge is precisely our concern.

Exactly what a piece of music challenges is its experience; what it expresses beyond that experience is the challenge itself. How a piece of music moves us is a product of how it expresses its challenge. How can we approach this challenge? Earlier in this essay I described how our response to a piece of music is based upon recognition; let us expand the conception of recognition to include those relations we do not recognise: the ways in which the experience is reordered. I am suggesting, in other words, that a work's challenge expresses the disorder of its history, and thus that to understand what a work expresses we must understand its disorder. As such, we might state that *the perception of the expression of a work is the sense of its disorder*. This may seem contradictory—how can disorder make sense?—and perhaps as if I am attributing disorder a kind of agency—how can disorder *have* sense? Indeed I am, and indeed disorder *is* contradictory. Disorder, as I conceive it, is both fluid and capable of immense precision. What disorder *means* is another matter entirely. Meaning, as we all know, is contextual. Indeed, disorder means nothing in itself, only in its relations. In this essay,

what disorder means isn't my concern but rather *how* disorder means: *how* it is, as I wrote at the beginning, that music can move us. Thus we have arrived at the sense of disorder and are attempting to understand it. Can disorder be codified? Are there structures according to which disorder manifests? Put simply, is there an order to disorder? In short, yes.

One of the difficulties in conceiving disorder, however, is that it has more than one face. For instance, we can consider dissonance a kind of disorder in its relation to consonance. An impressive analytical endeavour in the late 1990s was built on the theory that every work has its own tonality, and thus its own conception of dissonance and consonance (I am referring to Anthony Pople's *Tonalities*). We could expand this idea to include rhythm and timbre and so on and so forth, and propose that every work has its own *order*, its own distinct relational complex of these properties. But dissonance in one work can be consonance in another, and so this kind of disorder, which is a kind of text-based disorder based upon definable parameters like pitch and duration, is relative. In fact it means nothing in itself so in order to conceive its sense we must look to other works. In doing so we are essentially identifying trends. Such conception of conventions, though necessarily subjective, is useful, and represents a structure against which we can perceive disorder according to its departure therefrom. This is, as before, an analytical kind of disorder based on difference. What I mean by this is that this sense of disorder is evaluated according to the gap between itself and its history, whereby the sense of disorder is not the thing itself but its relationship to its conventional order. Ultimately, this is a conception of disorder based on "the sound".

However, in approaching a theory of expression, which is really what interests us, it is peculiarly important we look beyond the sound, beyond a conception of music as a configuration of literal parameters. Indeed, can you imagine a sound in itself—a sound without some physical association like a bow across a string, a sound without a dynamic character like "strong" or "soft", without a particular duration, a particular pitch? What is this abstract, non-physical, non-specific sound I have described? We are tempted to say it is not a sound at all. But for all its difficulties in comprehension, we can state at least this: a single *physical* sound is itself a complex of relations, those classic parameters of time, frequency, timbre, dynamic. What, then, are we looking for if not the sound as it was in the beginning? The answer is *the act*, an expression of will: what has been variously termed "gesture" and "utterance", and without which music can be no more than a pleasing algorithm. Sounds are the result of the transformation of the act into its figuration, the corruption of the will into relational complexes. Thus we can consider

2. INTRODUCTION

sounds the disorder of the act. But this disorder seems to be of a different sort since on the one hand its terms are sounds and on the other hand something somewhat harder to grasp... And what of the act itself? Must we think entirely in terms of the will? What or, rather, *how* is the act? Is the act born from experience? Is the act perhaps the influence of other acts, the disorder of its own experience, in other words? This, as we shall see, is in some ways the most difficult disorder to examine since its parameters appear less sharply defined. Indeed, it may be easier to visualise if we do not think in terms of its parameters but rather its impetus. Imagine, for example, skimming a stone across a lake. We could observe the number of times the stone bounces off the surface of the water, and the distance and time between each bounce; we could observe the ripples that emanate from the centre of each bounce, and count their number, how fast they grow and how large they become before fading back into the water's surface. What do these disturbances as they relate to one another tell us about the overall trajectory of the stone? You skim another stone. Now we can compare the two: in what ways do their paths differ? Perhaps the path of the second stone intersects the path of the first, creating patterns of interference which we could analyse, even sketch as they appear at a particular moment in time. What are the effects of this negotiation?; has it created new patterns, specific to the size and frequencies of the ripples?; in what ways do these new patterns represent not simply the differing trajectories of the stone but also their relative existence in time?; what is the quality of interference? Thinking entirely in terms of literal parameters we have reached a point of considerable mathematic complexity which may give us a great deal of information about the events on the water's surface. Let us take a step back. In what way is the the path of the stone a product of how it was thrown? With what force was the stone thrown?; at what angle was it thrown?; how was it spun? In other words, how does its physical power translate into the patterns we observe on the water's surface? Lastly, and most meaningfully, why was the stone thrown? Was it thrown in frustration, to hit the water with such force as to bounce very far?; was it thrown triumphantly, as if to skim as far as possible?; elegantly, perhaps, to create a golden-like pattern of bounces?; or hardly thrown at all, falling limply into the water lacking the power to bounce more than once or twice? In other words, what is the meaning of these patterns on the water? Can the ripples themselves evoke a character? How is it that there might be a character to the way in which a stone is thrown? What would this character be if we had not seen people skim stones before? This, for me, is the most stimulating line of questioning in which we analyse the physical effects of the metaphysical act, or, more complex still, in which the negotiation of two distinct acts

produces an entirely new effect which we seek to understand. To what extent are the observed unique patterns in the water representative of the negotiation of the history of their respective acts? But we are not really interested in skimming stones, and it would not be productive to stretch this analogy much further.

In sum, we have distinguished essentially three types of disorder, according to their composition of sounds, acts, or sounds and acts, which we have associated with various stages or “levels” of the compositional process: the act as a disorder of its experience, the disorder of the act itself in its musical figuration, the disorder of the conventional relations of its manifest sounds. These three levels, however, while perhaps useful to those unfamiliar with theory, are misleading because musical meaning is not a linear procedure, and neither is disorder necessarily distinct between levels. What I mean by this is that we must conceive the possibility of moving freely between levels such that we can conceive, for instance, musical figuration ascending to will—the act as a disorder of the sound, in other words (this is ubiquitous in the examination of performance, for example, but perhaps less obvious within the structures of composition itself). This is a striking thought to which we will return, not least because it seems to afford musical works a kind of agency; indeed, at times in this dissertation I will describe musical works as if they are living, sometimes breathing, organisms capable of transformation.

By this point the theory of expression has become quickly difficult. In working from first principles we have reached a stage whereby the act is somehow translated into sound, whose conventional relations are perceived subjectively, the product not just of all the music we have assimilated but our experience in general. We have characterised this figuration as a kind of will-to-sound, and have noted that this creative act is also destructive: in asserting itself the will surrenders itself to figuration. Rather than simply analysing the differences between its manifest sounds and their conventional relations as the source of musical expression, however, we are also investigating how this will-to-sound manifests, as well as how the will itself challenges its own experience. This, as we shall see, is both difficult and rewarding. It is difficult because we have transcended the comfortable realm of analytical difference, electing instead to negotiate the seemingly more ethereal concepts of the will and its figuration. And, it is more rewarding, as it has been suggested, because musical meaning is not bound by analytical parameters, by which we mean the physical, literal qualities of sound. We have characterised these mechanisms of musical meaning as a kind of disorder, the sense of which is our perception of the expression of a work. However, we have noted that the multi-faceted

2. INTRODUCTION

mechanisms of disorder are less than distinct, and that expression moves between them, capable of transforming mere sounds into will. Thus we have arrived at the seemingly bizarre conclusion that musical works have agency.

We are interested in disorder for the simple reason that it is *what* a work expresses. This may seem painfully obvious with respect to dissonance in the music of Handel, for instance, or structure in the music of Beethoven, but perhaps less so when we begin to consider the disorder of music's figuration or, indeed, the disorder of music's act. These latter structures reside, at least in part, beyond the text. Beyond the text is our experience—our conception of history and thus conventions of order—and so to situate these disorders we cannot help but think historically. It is the act which calls to question what is at heart being reconfigured; it is the act which, if we listen in a certain way, can tell us what is lost or destroyed in a work's disorder: the cost of creation, the value of its meaning. To experience the depth of this meaning we must listen beyond the work, and we must listen beyond the sound. Indeed, in perceiving the sense of disorder we must ask not simply what is the *sound* of disorder, which would limit meaning to its analytical parameters, but what is the *act* of disorder, thereby looking beyond its literal configuration. Thus we have come full circle, encountering once again the challenge. However, in examining the act of disorder we reframe the challenge as itself a disorder of its experience. It remains to be asked, then, what are the structures according to which *the act itself* is disordered?

In literary theory the answer is the trope. Troping in music is associated for the most part with the tradition of Gregorian composition in the Middle Ages, so it's important to clarify from the outset that this is not what I mean by 'trope'. Instead, and broadly speaking, tropes represent such structures of reconfiguration (I do not intend to define trope, which has remained more or less consistent since antiquity, but I am thinking of such structures as metaphor or irony, or the more complex structure of metalepsis: these are structures of figuration, structures according to which meaning is "refigured" and therefore transformed, challenged, betrayed). At this point we can no longer avoid invoking Bloom, who advanced a theory of poetic meaning along these lines, and on whose work I have drawn liberally. Bloom conceived poetic invention, which for him was the breaking of form, as a reaction, or rather defence, against precursor poets. He codified this defence according to what he termed "revisionary ratios", which are essentially related to various tropes. Bloom's ratios are as perplexing as they are at times moving, and they have inspired some interesting work in their musical translation, although not nearly so much, one might add, as the

deconstructionists provoked, with whom Bloom wrestled. In truth, I am not really concerned with Bloom's method, essentially because it is the product of a theory of poetry, and I cannot see how the methodological mapping of Bloom's ratios in musical terms can be ultimately productive. Musical influence has been understood in its own way far before Bloom, whether we are talking about Mendelssohn and Bach, Debussy and Wagner, or Beethoven and countless others. But, Bloom's understanding of how meaning comes about is remarkable, including, for instance, his writing on metalepsis, which is a kind of trope of a trope, and the comparison of his conception of the mechanisms of poetic meaning with those of musical meaning, the best of which has been put forward by Berio, is at the very least an interesting exercise (chapter 7). As a concluding thought on Bloom, for the time being at least, it is worth mentioning just how widely and critically his work has been misunderstood. Bloom's theory is at heart a very earnest theory of poetic meaning based on utterance (as opposed to the word) which seeks as far as possible not to restrict the profound depth of meaning of which he finds poetry capable. Bloom's writing is virtuosic, at times infuriating, but above all enchanting.

II

At the start of the twentieth century the collapse of world order coincided with the collapse of musical order. It is difficult to overstate the magnitude of the rejection of so vast a network of musical relations that transpired. The absence of so fat and rich a body of conventions presented an immediate issue of expression for the composer, whose task was, it seemed, to decide what constituted musical order. The most obvious answer was serialism, presented by Schoenberg as a '*Method of Composing with Twelve Tones Which are Related Only with One Another*'. Serialism represented a radically new conception of order but it didn't catch on: it was too unfamiliar, too academic. This was probably the point of departure for the institutionalisation of intellectual musical elitism, and the point at which composition of this kind becomes a subcategory of Classical Music in general. Some might call it a failing of this music to gain mass popularity, but its early proponents, on the face of it, were not concerned. This particular brand of order culminated in the work of Boulez, whose *Structures I* (1952), for example, serialised as well as pitch, rhythm, dynamic, and articulation. In doing so, Boulez transformed an essentially naive conception of musical order into a troubling philosophical reality.

2. INTRODUCTION

Supposedly free from association, an effect of the clinical procedure that constituted the compositional technique of *Structures 1*, the piece attempted to isolate the listener from the sounds. Neither could Boulez's process escape physical ramification: the totally serialised notation effectively disembodied the performers from their instruments, the procedure notated writing against any conventional physical association too. In this way, performers could be stripped of their musical agency, suspended under the scrutiny of the conductor, now no more than a human metronome, the political implications of which Fellini wonderfully staged in *Prova d'orchestra*. *Structures 1* represents an extreme kind of dominance of the composer. Whatever Boulez's intentions, they were hardly musical.

But let me be clear: I am not arguing that composers like Boulez did not create great work—they certainly did—but that this compositional approach played with the mechanisms of musical meaning often by restricting them, and with physical consequence. Indeed, this is not necessarily a criticism in the case of someone like Boulez, who, I am choosing to believe, understood, albeit in unashamedly elitist terms, the implications of his thought and its physically destructive realities in practice. Issues arise, rather, in its influence which can produce an unwittingly destructive music. On the one hand this is not such a serious point since it presupposes a rather weak reading of this kind of composition, yet its influence seems to me to have occupied a structural position in the practice of New Music today, out of which this dissertation attempts to provide a way.

'I take for granted that what I write has got a meaning', begins Peter Maxwell Davies. He is twenty-six, and the feature, alongside Dudley Moore, of a 1961 BBC documentary on the two composers. 'What does keep me awake at nights', continues Maxwell Davies, 'is the method of expression, the technique of composition: this, I think, is the composer's first concern'; his movements are angular, almost on each turn of phrase, and his delivery cold in amusing contrast to Moore's charm. The influence of Boulez is strongly felt in composers like Maxwell Davies, and the influence of Maxwell Davies endures today. If this seems an absurdly linear accusation it's because it is: this is rather my point.

What I am trying to illustrate is a perspective of composition as procedure or technique as opposed to technique emerging as a figuration of expression: a conception of "in the beginning was the sound", according to which the compositional process is essentially a giant game of chess bound by its analytical parameters (notwithstanding their infinity), as opposed to a conception of sounds as the product of expressive

negotiations (I hope it is clear that I am neither rejecting technique nor procedure but debating their positions within the mechanisms of musical meaning).

One culprit is, I think, such a historically linear conception of music. What I mean to describe by this is composition that pursues the false notion of “development”, in which complication is so often the easiest currency. Such novelty for novelty’s sake has been satirised as long as people have been creating things, but it is an unfortunate face of recent music, so self-consciously concerned with temporality as to call itself *Neue Musik*, *Avant-garde*, *Contemporary Music*, *New Music*... ‘I don’t want to be pompous about it’, says Maxwell Davies, ‘but I have got the confidence to know that I am at the beginning of something’: the claim, some might say, of a man fighting his belatedness. How aptly suggestive of Monteverdi’s expressive sensibility that he presented his style as simply another way to compose, a “second practice” rather than a “new practice”! Certainly Schoenberg is to be criticised—as he was—for his conviction that serialism was ‘a logical development of existing musical resources’ (one wants to retort, “Why should we expect music to change according to logic?”), but this influence is traced easily to the formal structures of Maxwell Davies, for instance, who describes a passage as ‘the logical outcome of the first idea’, by which it is clear that form is simply a product of the development of technical procedure. This describes, in other words, a will of technique rather than of expression.

Such a perspective of composition as ventured by Maxwell Davies is inherently limited in its scope of meaning owing to its composition according to definable sounds. It is an unwitting argument for music’s institution, an approach destined to express as a subcategory, an institutional footnote in the history of technique, ultimately ignorant that technique, the “first concern”, is itself trope: technique is a trope of order. I hasten to add that I criticise neither the skill nor sounds of Maxwell Davies; I am pursuing an entirely theoretical point: this is an allegory illustrating an effect of linear influence that intends to distinguish—and I put this as clearly as I am able—between a trope of order built from sounds, and a trope of disorder which manifests sounds. Neither base theory nor polemic are new here yet the fundamentals continue to elude a majority. You can give away as many free tickets as you like, organise concerts in concrete car parks, but the attempt to solve music’s inaccessibility is already thwarted in part by the composer’s argument. It should not be notable were it not for the fact that it has been so influential, perhaps unsurprising given the promise of power with which the composer is seduced.

To those who have distinguished their careers according to the development of “new” sounds, I am sorry to say such sounds mean precious little. Meaning is their

2. INTRODUCTION

relations. The absurdity here, of course, is that newness defines itself in terms of oldness; it is transparently linear in this way, which is what it expresses: the development of an analytical tradition. Were we to attempt to value a new sound according to the terms of this tradition we would have to assess the relationship between its created sense and its destroyed sense: in other words, we would ask “*What is the cost of its disorder?*”, not forgetting that loss is a fundamental mechanism of meaning, despite the reality that it has been misconstrued as an aspiration—newness—rather than as a consequence to examine. It is worth further reflection on the ramifications of this kind of linear imprisonment, which are almost always a reduced sensitivity to the history of its relations: in ignoring the histories of sounds we are also ignoring their physical histories. The historically-informed-performance movement that grew in the latter half of the twentieth century challenged music-making at the most profound level. Aside from the obvious changes of timbre associated with historical instruments—gut strings, natural horns et cetera—this new sensitivity to history reconfigured the performer’s physical relationship to the music; it embraced the inequality of every note that had been seemingly ironed out in the technology of the nineteenth century. In doing so, it was forced to confront how the notes truly related to one another: music “rediscovered” new temporal and social dimensions. It is a peculiar incidence of history that what we call a modern violin, for instance, is really a historic instrument of the nineteenth century—or the birth of the modern bow towards the end of the eighteenth century, for which Tourte fortified both ends, thus enabling long, even strokes, which has remained the benchmark for bows ever since. How can the twenty-first-century composer synthesise changing musical tastes with over two-hundred years of constancy of the physical relationship between performer and instrument?

The impetus of Varèse and others in their campaign for new instruments at the start of the twentieth century was surely not a search for new sounds as such but new *orders* of sounds. More remarkable were Berio’s experiments, firstly with tape and latterly with live electronics. At the invitation of Boulez, in 1974 Berio began directing the electro-acoustic division at IRCAM, examining the possibilities of these uncharted dialogues—the meaning of “electro-acoustic”, in other words. Berio left IRCAM in 1980, distancing himself from Boulez who was transforming IRCAM into a “computer music studio”, as Georgina Born records in *IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*, and a period of restructuring followed, described by Boulez as “rational streamlining”. In 1987 Berio established Tempo Reale, intended as a stable centre for research into electro-acoustic possibilities. The theoretical grounding to this

debate, of course, echoes the base argument of this chapter, perhaps most elegantly conveyed in Berio's wonderful 'Remarks to the Kind Lady of Baltimore' (1965).

It turns out Berio was ahead of us all along. This may come as a surprise since across all 1134 pages of *The Oxford Handbook of Western Music and Philosophy* (2021) Berio is not mentioned once. But Berio's poetics represent the most advanced, most expansive consideration of musical meaning in the twentieth century. As I demonstrate in the final chapter to the dissertation, early essays on gesture plant the seeds for a pre-Bloom theory of influence, skilfully applied in *Sinfonia* (1968-9), and the *Sequenze* undertake encyclopaedic examinations of individual instruments in which sound and physicality are ordered in time. Regarded as an experimentalist throughout most of his life, Berio shows his true colours as a theorist, and we have much to learn. It is no surprise that Frans Brüggen, one of the fathers of HIP, recognised as early as the sixties Berio's sensitivity to history, commissioning a work for solo recorder, *Gesti* (1965).

III

If it is possible to offer a solution to an issue that has become systemic, and one against which Berio has already written so elegantly, then the argument, for me, approaches the relation of will and sound via the mediating thread of physicality and its representation, notation. We disregard the physicality of performance at the ultimate expense of music. What this does not mean is that I think music should be easy to play or that the composer should not write against the instrument, simply that we should remember composition is inherently physical—Haydn makes unexpected jumps to remote keys that force awkward hand positions and therefore create different characters, for instance; Beethoven denies performative frameworks, deliberately isolating musicians from the physicality of the tactus; Bach composes F#s for the oboe (a notoriously ugly note, “fixed” on modern instruments) at the most intense, exposed moments to literally sound physical struggle. For, in performance notes find a will. Performance requires an act of translation in which the notation is shown to have a sense which must then become meaningful. The act of performance is convincing when its will is able to express the sense of disorder (this is an example of the necessarily fluid character of disorder). The performer *must* express else it is no performance at all. There is no doubt in my mind that the best performers are equally creative as the best composers. Have composers forgotten this? Analysis, in this way, seems to me an indispensable tool of the performer.

2. INTRODUCTION

It is worth remembering that Schenker, whose ground-breaking analytical theory represented the relations of sounds in structural terms via a novel kind of notation, taught at the piano, so closely intertwined did he believe theory and practice.

When I began my studies as a graduate student in Cambridge, the writing I submitted for the MPhil described the tendency of contemporary notation to “imprison” the performer. The impetus of my *tessitura a tratteggio 1* was to take the notational and physical aesthetic of this kind of writing but to provide a musical context in which the relation between individual notes was quite obvious, using the fabric of a simple piece for piano by Brahms as a kind of incomplete texture to be played around, and thus to let the performers embody the music. In *kreng*, a string quartet I wrote around the same time, I confronted this imbalance additionally in notational terms, writing in a way that necessitated the sounding together of performers’ parts be determined collectively, as opposed to comprehensive on an individual level or according to a metronomic beat—the technique essentially returned control to the performers. This different kind of notation I contrasted with conventional notational practices of New Music to create a dialogue throughout. The quartet was written exclusively from the notes of Beethoven’s “Heiliger Dankgesang”, mostly rearranged beyond recognition but with moments of quotation weaving in and out of the notational negotiations (the “Heiliger Dankgesang”, as I demonstrate in chapter 6, presents a similar dialogue between description and prescription). *Encore*, which I wrote for orchestra a few years later, was a similar attempt to give musical meaning to a disembodied notational aesthetic only without the kinds of pre-existing structures I had used for *tessitura a tratteggio 1* and *kreng*; instead, the piece grows from simple counterpoint above a single note sustained throughout the duration of the piece. At the midway point the music encores itself, on repetition elaborating harmony and timbre but with a memory of the fundamental contrapuntal structures. The counterpoint no longer exists, only its colour; thus the performance of *Encore* requires the musicians to listen in a different way and to respond to the notation in a way that attempts to bridge the clinical with the personal. *Encore* represents a different kind of dialogue by which its basic melody, harmony, and counterpoint attempt to teach the performers how to listen, and then challenge them to perform this “listening” in encore.

My most experimental work is probably *3 Dreams*, short pieces composed for a duo of baroque violin and modern violin which play first and foremost on the physical and notated histories of the instruments: the harmonic and rhythmic orders are products of these physical realities. The first movement makes clear this relationship: canons at the unison which sound like nothing of the sort, the performers sharing the same

notation which examines the implications of tactus; the central movement, ‘Tempo di dormire’, grows from a kind of breathing as the two performers alternate their open A-strings; and, the third movement is a kind of analysis of the whole in which the modern violinist follows the baroque violinist towards a synthesis. But the heart of the work is a single canon of eleven unmeasured notes, inverted at the unison which can be played in four configurations depending on who starts and in what direction they go. Woven between the movements these canons act as a kind of cement, holding everything together, but can also, if performed properly, create a journey and guide the audience through it (in practice we have performed them upwards of twenty times in a single show). There are almost no dynamics or instructions on the page because the physical and notational negotiations of *3 Dreams* make it obvious how to play, and, indeed, how the music can express variously depending on the interpretation of the negotiations. The marriage of metal and gut, eight open strings tuned to A440/415 Hz, of a modern bow and a baroque bow that speaks strongly only in one direction, of a score which is not transposing yet for which the same notation prompts both a different attack and frequency, and of the different resultant physicalities staged in performance is a curious and intoxicating experience, whose dialogue articulates far more precisely what I have attempted in this introduction.

à jamais 1 is a recomposition of Rameau’s ‘Tendre Amour’ in which the technical mechanisms of Rameau’s extraordinary expressions have been rewritten as if to be the product of the physicality of the instruments. This kind of composition is for me a fairly typical exercise when I am grappling with the influence of another composer, and is usually intended for the desk drawer. At a basic level the outcome is an understanding and command of the expression, but the structural reconfiguration that transpires is as if to make the former work an echo of the later expression (I am thinking of John Hollander’s ‘Echo Metaphorical’), and thus to quite literally “rewrite” history. (Could it be that when setting text the successful composer is able to make the text an echo of their musical expression?; and was my struggle setting Dante’s work because it essentially *is*—because in the Italian language Dante precedes echo?) At the same time, however, so overtly allusive is the surface of *à jamais 1*—an orchestration—that it cannot possibly seem an echo, and so this appearance is in conflict with the fundamental expression which is external to the work, and of whose mechanisms the beauty of the work is reconfigured as a product. *à jamais 1* I didn’t intend initially to publish but I was fond of the result and kept it as a partner to *à jamais 2* which is closer to what I originally set out to write. *à jamais 2* is a kind of transumption of tenderness (in this case

2. INTRODUCTION

the detached, sentimentality of lament, as described at length in chapter 3), by which I mean eating something with little trace. The mechanisms of lament that float in *à jamais 2* are not only products of the physicality of the instruments but lose their authority (their sense is overridden) within an expression that essentially pushes upwards.

By now it is hopefully clear that I am interested in music as expressive, and music to be performed. The question beyond expression itself is how it is translated into sound. As I have described, across my own work I have approached disorder's challenge through either the physical or notational, and often both. One work should be described separately, however, which is *Image*, a work for chamber ensemble and analogue photographer. In *Image*, a room is transformed into a darkroom the audience can inhabit. An exposure is captured by a photographer; the film is developed then fixed; a print is produced from the film, enlarging the negative onto negative paper which is itself then developed and fixed; lastly, the print is presented to the audience who have been free to move throughout the process. Meanwhile, music maps onto the physical structures of the analogue photographic process: certain extracts are recorded live, later to be played back through speakers, both on its own and accompanied by the musicians, and occasionally manipulated to sound in reverse (negative). There are a vast number of considerations relating to sound and its notation but the fundamental expression of *Image* is this structure as it maps onto the physical process experienced by the audience: it is an attempt to sonify the analogue photographic process, a process of light and time, and a process of sound and time. In *Image*, sound and light both become tropes of time. The harmonic structures of *Image* are products of the temporal structures of light's exposure and development—words, of course, ubiquitous in musical practice since the eighteenth century.

Temporality is a fundamental condition of music, but is perhaps no surprise that composers have tended to prioritise consonance in conceiving order since dissonance is surely the most tangible betrayal. Consonance is the first port of call for Pythagoras, Boethius, Zarlino, Rameau, and Fux, to name a few, only when they arrive at this conception of vertical order they are unsure what it actually means. Composers must realise that dissonance is nothing but a trope of disorder, whose mechanism is not sound, its material, but rather time. Indeed, composition is an all but impossible task in which a vertical coherence must somehow synthesise with a horizontal coherence. In other words, music is *in time*, and no one really knows how to deal with it. This is the great technical challenge of music: not the composition of the sounds themselves, however exciting that might be, but this act of translation from will to sound. That's why we are

interested in ideas of progression or structure, and why we talk about form, which is really a trope of time that describes the conventional relations of a tradition.

In Part II, two close analyses of work by Beethoven and Messiaen examine how music can challenge its own time. The selection of Beethoven and Messiaen is less important than the ways in which they contribute very differently to the illustration of disorder the dissertation attempts. In ‘Liturgie de cristal’ from Messiaen’s *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps* time is suspended; in the third movement of Beethoven’s string quartet in a minor, op. 132, the “Heiliger Dankgesang”, the performers struggle to be in time with one another.

Messiaen challenges what it means to play in time and to listen in time. ‘Liturgie de cristal’ represents a remarkable experiment in which time is imagined to be eternally present: if the past is a present moment that was, and the future is a present moment that will be, then what is the present if not eternal? The work holds legendary status yet is surprisingly lacking in serious scholarship, though there is the promise of future publications following the release of Messiaen’s personal archives into the French national collections. I offer an analytical proof for the musical operation of Messiaen’s philosophy which reconfigures how the musical materials are usually presented in scholarship, revealing the construction of a cyclic compositional procedure at the heart of the musical fabric. Disorder, we see, is entirely conceived according to its representation of musical time.

Beethoven’s “Heiliger Dankgesang” centres around a harmonic conflict; I demonstrate its operation within a large-scale structure, ultimately proposing a re-evaluation of the movement’s structure as a whole. I draw on Schenker throughout. This remarkable movement deals heavily in ambiguities; I demonstrate additionally how Beethoven denies a performative framework, demanding the active negotiation of the music’s terms. Here disorder is a network of the vertical and the horizontal that struggles for unity. In both works, the sense of disorder is such that its codification at the surface of the musical fabric represents impeccably the fundamental, structural disorders of the music as a whole. This is a very powerful relationship in a musical work. These analyses are based in text-based disorders which I interpret essentially according to issues of performativity; however, I have structured this writing such that these chapters may be read as analyses in their own rights rather than necessarily according to the theoretical lens of the thesis.

My framing of the chapters of the dissertation as “in Time”—“Structure *in Time*”, “Playing *in Time*”, and so on—is not intentionally disingenuous (all music is, after all, “in

2. INTRODUCTION

time”). Rather I think it is important we remember this: any conception of analytical order (conventions of counterpoint, for instance) is ultimately a trope of time; yet, moving beyond analytical conceptions of disorder towards the historical (ie. psychological) so too we see Time retains its force. Even the opening writing on Hogarth’s ‘Enraged Musician’ is an analysis that “looks in time”: the ultimate reading of the print depends on the disorder of the history of both its Italian influence and its own revisions, or the way in which the milkmaid, mid-step, expresses amongst the rhythm of the street. Hogarth engraves a different way of looking in time, a structure that dramatises looking and being looked at in the eighteenth century, only in this instance the materials are sound: hearing and being heard.

Part I is certainly more complex. The heart of the dissertation is chapter 3, in which I make the case that Rameau codified a different way of listening in the eighteenth century, an expressive structure that depends upon listening in time in a specific way. I identify this structure according to Rameau’s codification of tenderness, and examine various ways in which tenderness plays in time. The structure of tenderness plays on expectations in time, which I trace to the conventions of lament, demonstrating the ways in which tenderness disorders lament, questioning exactly what it is that is lost, what it is Rameau reconfigures. In fact, lament is itself literally an expression of loss—more precisely, an expression *about* loss. Following this thought we discover that the performance of lament realises a kind of dramatic irony. The operation of this figurative structure is possible for the simple reason that there is a tradition of lament, that it is itself trope. I provide a historical context to this tradition which I root in the narrative structures of the early seventeenth century in which lament was treated as a distinct structure owing to its expression as *about*. We have discussed already the way in which disorder, as an expressive mechanism, is a consequence of reconfiguration, the structures according to which sense is “refigured”, and the inherent destruction of this expression which we can conceive as what is lost. Moreover, with lament, which we have identified as an ironic, self-reflective expression, is it not the case that its expression is both literally and mechanistically the sense of loss, such that we can consider the sense of its disorder a trope of lament? (I hope my invocation of irony is not unproductive here, which I intend to describe the necessary figuration of lament according to which it must say other than it means else it is no lament at all. Lament is really a kind of misreading whose performance produces a dramatic irony.) When, then, we conceive tenderness according to the expressive structure of lament we may conclude that tenderness, as a disorder of the trope of loss, expresses a trope of a trope. There is nothing exceptional

about this figurative structure in general terms, only that its identification in tenderness, as far as I am aware, represents its earliest codification in musical terms. When we consider the meaning of tenderness according to the sense of its disorder we conclude that with tenderness, it seems, the meaning of Rameau's music is quite literally what it laments. In Rameau's hands, the trope of a trope manifests in a number of different ways which I approach on an individual basis in chapter 3, in which, having examined *how* tenderness means we ask at last *what* it might mean.

It is worth clarifying that "tenderness" is not an invention of mine, but a term Rameau uses in accordance with the expressive structure I identify. The capabilities of this expressive structure far exceed the characterisation of tenderness, just as tenderness can manifest beyond the structures of this expression. What tenderness represents in this dissertation, however, aside from something exceptionally beautiful, is a marriage of a precise character with a particular way of listening that is structurally codified, such that we may say that tenderness is the codification of the trope of a trope in musical terms, and the codification of a different way of listening.

I root the techniques according to which tenderness is composed in Rameau's theoretical writings, most notably his monumental *Traité de l'Harmonie* of 1722, and examine the ways in which the structure of tenderness as a different way of listening is prefigured in Rameau's radical conception of harmony which essentially inverts the prevailing conception of vertical order.

But Rameau was not the only composer to publish a theoretical treatise in the 1720s; three years later in Vienna, Fux publishes *Gradus ad Parnassum*. Fux's approach is diametrically opposed to Rameau's in the broadest terms. Whereas Rameau "discovers" tonality, Fux seeks to codify the counterpoint of the sixteenth century. Fux is thinking about history; he writes a dialogue which is slow and didactic, a stark contrast to Rameau's style which is obsessive, fast-paced and tangled. This is a contrast of vertical and horizontal, of something radical and something preserving, of raw excitement and patient clarity. Fux's patience is rewarded, whose prize is its influence: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven—a Classical tradition. In chapter 4 I demonstrate the influence of Fux, tracing the structures of his theory to their perhaps unexpectedly firm foundations in the sublime extreme of Mozart. As a conscious rewriting of history, the sense of lament for Fux looks to the future as a kind of anxiety of what would be lost, what it seeks to preserve. A chorus from Fux's *Orfeo ed Eurydice* of 1715 ('Sol per gloria di un giorno si grande') illustrates a sensibility close to the complexity and modernity of Rameau's tenderness, reaching far beyond routine accusations of conservatism to which Fux

2. INTRODUCTION

continues to be subjected. Drawing on mechanisms of lament I examine how this expression is transformed in the Classical condition such that Mozart can be seen to overcome the influence of his forefathers. Following chapters 3 and 4, my analysis of Beethoven's *Heiliger Dankgesang* in chapter 5 may be regarded as the ultimate negotiation of the vertical and horizontal as codified by Rameau and Fux at the start of the eighteenth century, the ultimate attempt of a synthesis of the Enlightenment which ends in a Romantic death, a spiritual embrace that seems to deny the physical.

IV

This dissertation began as a kind of ontology of order, but I soon realised that in the realm of musical meaning, *disorder* is the operative force. I theorise essentially that our perception of a work's expression is the sense of its disorder, and I attempt to demonstrate how this works theoretically and technically, and to provide historical and analytical examples. I am conscious that what I am writing at times seems rather obvious, that I am simply drawing together various theories and thoughts, and transposing them to furnish a context of musical meaning. Certainly I am not so well-read as I should be, and certainly I do not have such an erudite understanding of Derrida and de Man as Bloom, or indeed many others. And I am a composer, not a poet, so I hope you will excuse my style, which makes no attempt at elegance. But the point I am making, by theorising disorder, and by demonstrating its operations is, I believe, particular to this thesis, and certainly to its polemical side for which I situate this theory beyond the score—that is, I am essentially interested in music *to be performed*, and consider this physical, living reality of music a fundamental component of the compositional process. In short, I am writing this because I feel the structural relationships between composer, listener, and performer are dangerously imbalanced, that contemporary music is not plagued so much by the elitism of its traditions (this is a separate issue) but that this elitism is written into the music itself. This dissertation is not a criticism of complexity, and neither of technique nor procedure, although it is my observation that empty complication is often symptomatic of a sound-based approach to composition, itself often a product of “linear thinking”. Contemporary composers have barely begun to realise their belatedness, so strongly felt was the nihilistic urge of composers like Boulez. This is why so often a premiere can feel like a museum exhibit, as if it takes place behind glass. The relevance to our lives beyond the traditions of the stage

is removed as the music neglects to fight for this relevance, secure in its institution. Is there a way back up this slippery slope of elitism? The ultimate diagnosis is probably a “lack of history”, which is not to say that everyone should go away and listen to Bach’s *Matthew Passion*, a Haydn symphony, and Beethoven’s c# minor string quartet, but that the destructive nature of the creative compositional process carries with it a certain moral responsibility which includes the notes themselves but crucially also extends to their physical realities in performance.

In summary, this dissertation is an attempt to conceive the act of composition according to the physical and social disorders of performance, as codified by its notation, and as figurations of will whose expression is interpreted according to the sense of its disorder. In this dissertation I make the first steps towards a more general theory of lament, applying these ideas in particular to Rameau’s “tenderness”. Fundamentally, this is a dissertation about music, rather than about “about” music. But how does one write about such stuff? I am sometimes asked whether my work is “continental” or “analytic” but I don’t believe this is a productive distinction because it feels to me that these strands are in constant tension throughout, and it could be that the most productive sites of learning are where the dissertation fights against its own allegory. In any case, my influences will be clear to many—Bloom I have mentioned, as well as Hollander and de Bolla, but also Foucault, Deleuze, Kierkegaard and Kant. Having said this, I feel the more emphatic moments of analysis lean towards description and trope, and, accordingly, require the reader to “figure out” my meaning. This dissertation is an attempt to expand the limited conception of disorder that dominates contemporary practice; it is a call to let disorder move beyond itself. It is time to remember music’s lament.