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‘Strange and dead the ghosts appear’: Mythic absence in Hölderlin, Adorno and Kurtág

> ‘Dear Bellarmin! I would like to tell this to you as precisely as Nestor; I move through the past like a gleaner over the stubble field when the master of the land has harvested; he gathers up every straw.’
>
> (Hölderlin, [1797] 2008: 21)

The relationship of text with history is a central concern of much twentieth-century critical theory, and it has filtered into the domain of musicology as much as any other.[1] Kristeva’s original formulation of the term ‘intertextuality’ (in her essay ‘Word, Dialogue, Novel’ of 1966) focusses on the way language itself shifts and mutates in meaning as it travels from text to text through time:

> Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*. (Kristeva [1966] 1986: 37; her emphasis)

Following on from Kristeva, numerous writers have demonstrated the presence of similar processes of migration and transformation in other, non-linguistic fields – such as the many examples of quotation, pastiche and allusion found within twentieth-century music.[2] These acts of borrowing carry with them complex historical baggage, of course – more so in the twentieth century than perhaps ever before – and much existing musicological writing on the topic is concerned with unpicking the way that quotation can serve in diverse ways as a ‘cultural agent’ (see Metzer, 2003: 2) within musical discourses in this period, highlighting composers’ shifting attitudes towards the past, as well as providing them with an additional source of structural and expressive nuance within their music. The various theoretical and philosophical approaches towards borrowing in this period might be conceptualised as a two-dimensional field, whereby contrasting views of the putative ‘shape’ of musical history interact with different stances on the responsibility of contemporary composers towards the past musics which they borrow or distort (Figure 1).

[1] This study builds upon research conducted under a Doctoral Studentship from the Arts and Humanities Research Council of Great Britain; it was continued with the help of a Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Humanities Research Centre at the University of York. I am grateful to these organisations for their support, and to Tim Howell, Daniel March and Murphy McCaleb for their helpful comments and suggestions on drafts of the material.

[2] For a summary outline of varied approaches towards musical borrowing in the twentieth century, see Burkholder, 1994: 869–70.

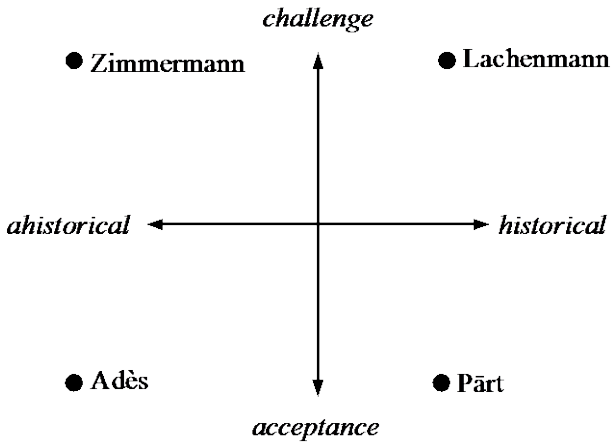


Figure 1: Views of history and approaches towards musical borrowing

In one corner of this field is the conception of history as a clear and directed progression to which music must respond – a viewpoint found most clearly in the writings of Adorno, who wrote of 'the irresistibility of the modern' (Adorno, [1970] 1997: 20). Individual musical works carry within themselves the 'sediment' of history, in the legacy of pre-existing styles and traditions, and even specific thematic or sonorous materials – a parallel to the trajectory of cumulative influence suggested by theorists such as Bloom. Yet for Adorno this process places a heavy burden of historical and political responsibility upon composers; the irresistible momentum of history means that sedimented materials can no longer be used authentically by later composers, because 'they no longer carry the same meaning today and can no longer be used in the same way' (Paddison, 1993: 93). As a result, in order to write truthful music – the central goal of Adorno's aesthetics – the composer must confront and critique this sedimented material directly, highlighting its anachronistic character by juxtaposing it with other materials that are authentic to the present historical situation. As such, Adorno's vision of musical intertextuality is both historical and critical; borrowing is inevitable or even intrinsic to musical creativity, but for that very reason composers have a duty to position themselves consciously against their own historical lineage. Adorno's admiration for Beethoven's late music, in particular, was rooted in the 'critical' nature of his compositional practice, whereby compositional patterns taken from a conventional tonal language are presented in such a way that their sedimented character is exposed, and 'the work […] turns its emptiness outward' (Adorno, [1937] 2002: 567).

More recently, this approach can be seen in the work of Helmut Lachenmann, for example, where snippets of existing musical material – whether canonic Western 'masterworks', folksongs, nursery rhymes or even simply snatches of conventional instrumental figuration (such as scales) appear in contexts that render them transformed, destroyed, or unrecognisable.[3] The influence of Adorno's critical approach to history can equally be seen in the work of composers such as Boulez or Stockhausen immediately following the Second World War. In this case, the zeal with which pseudo-scientific compositional methods such as total serialism were adopted highlights a desire to create a

[3] See, for example, Mohammad, 2004; Toop, 2004: 136–9; and Williams, 2013: 75–124.

music whose radically antihistorical, 'zero-hour' character would free it from the constricting influence of historical sedimentation and enable it to meet the unprecedented needs of the present.[4] Adorno himself saw this denial of history as a loser's errand, as his late article 'Aging of the New Music' makes clear ([1955] 2002); nonetheless, its debt to his own writings is unmistakeable, and in this case the obliteration of the past (futile though it may seem in retrospect) functions as the *ne plus ultra* of critique, a kind of criticism by omission.

Adorno's conception of history is closely wedded to his own highly negative variant of Hegelian dialectical materialism. If this complex and polemical viewpoint is rejected, however, the same attentiveness to historical relationships can in fact lead to opposite compositional results. In the work of Arvo Pärt, Henryk Gorécki or Veljo Törmis, for example, references to older musical languages (whether monastic chant or Estonian pagan traditions) appear not as part of a critical rejection of historical anachronism, but rather as an attempt to resurrect elements of a past compositional practice whose emotional or spiritual resources are sorely needed in the present day. If these examples would likely have been seen by Adorno as 'regressive' or 'fetishistic', that is a sign not of their ahistorical character, but simply of the distance of their own historiography from Adorno's.

For a true example of an *ahistorical* approach to musical intertextuality, a genuine parallel to the Barthesian 'death of the author', it is necessary to look to the examples of musical collage found in the avant-garde work of the 1960s and 1970s. The most philosophically grounded examples of this practice are to be found in the works of Bernd Alois Zimmermann, among them the vast and chaotic opera *Die Soldaten* (1960) and the *Requiem for a Young Poet* (1969), which brings together materials as diverse as The Beatles, Beethoven, Milhaud, Pope John XXIII, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Adolf Hitler. Zimmermann's practices were grounded in the concept of the 'sphericality of time', the idea that music is uniquely able to render past, present and future equally accessible to the listener (Metzer, 2003: 111); the ahistorical nature of this concept, which Zimmermann outlined in his 1974 essay *Intervall und Zeit*, suggests a kind of postmodernism *avant la lettre*. Yet in Zimmermann's case there remains a critical edge to his quotations; although they avoid any notion of historical 'necessity', his choices of pre-existing music tend to draw attention to the darker reaches of human history – many of his works have stark and provocative political dimensions – and there remains a sense that historical materials are brought to the fore to challenge the present status quo.

One could point to the early works of the British composer Thomas Adès (b. 1981) as examples of a similarly ahistorical approach towards musical quotation, but without the attendant sense of critique or historical provocation. Pieces such as *Sonata da Caccia* (1993), *Arcadiana* (1994), or *Powder Her Face* (1995) quote, parody and rework existing musics

[4] It should be emphasised that this 'zero-hour' viewpoint was by no means universal among the post-war avant-garde, nor was it particularly long-lived even among composers such as Boulez and Stockhausen who publicly embraced it for a time. In particular, the familiar association of Darmstadt, *Die Reihe*, Princeton and *Perspectives of New Music* with an uncritical acceptance of this viewpoint (and an undifferentiated adoption of integral serialism as historically inevitable) does considerable violence to the complex social and political realities of this period, as recent work by Martin Iddon (2011), Christopher Fox (2007) and Björn Heile (2004) has made abundantly clear.

(from the Baroque trio sonata, through Mozart, Beethoven and Elgar, to contemporary jazz and tango) without any apparent concern for notions of historical sedimentation or challenge. Arnold Whittall depicts Adès's approach to the past as one where 'the pleasures of allusion' triumph over the 'anxiety of influence' commonly associated with these practices (Whittall, 2003: 25–6; see also Straus, 1991). Immersion in the sensuous particularly of specific historical moments liberates both composer and listeners from the burden of history *en plein*.

From fields to feelings: mythic absence

However schematic it may be, this field of possibilities gives a sense of the complex and often conflicted status of history within recent music. What it cannot do, however, is give a sense of how this complexity might relate to broader currents within the arts and humanities more generally, beyond the immediate name-checking of ideas such Bloom's anxiety of influence or Adorno's historical sedimentation. In other words, it focusses on the intertextual relationships that exist between different *musical* texts, at the expense of those that might exist between music and other artistic, social or cultural spheres. More significantly, it gives little clear sense of what could be called the *aesthetic* dimension of these questions of history and memory: how decisions about the status and use of past musical or artistic models might be borne out in the 'feel' of a piece, in its expressive atmosphere and the particular sonic characteristics that linger in the memory after a performance. Whittall's descriptions of Adès's allusions as 'pleasurable' give a hint of this dimension, but it is far from clear whether this pleasure is for the composer alone or is to be shared by listeners, players, or even musicologists when the piece is performed or studied.

In order to focus attention on these two neglected aspects, this chapter outlines another related but distinct process of artistic interconnection, which cannot be reduced to either textual or musical borrowing (even though it contains examples of both). It might best be called 'aesthetic intertextuality': it describes the way in which a particular concept understood as an aesthetic unit – that is, a set of ideas closely bound up with a certain expressive world, a definable set of affective characteristics and emotional responses – can be seen to migrate across both time and artistic medium, shifting in some respects but keeping a recognisable core. The example offered as a case study here provides a particularly knotty complex of literary, philosophical and musical interconnections: it revolves around the figure of Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), the German Romantic poet, philosopher and novelist whose wide-ranging impact on history, politics and aesthetics, as well as poetry, has only gradually become clear. Hölderlin forms the centre of an intertextual web that stretches chronologically from the distant past to the present, through the arenas of poetry, literature, and music to philosophy and politics. This network traces the genealogy of a particular perspective upon the past which might be described succinctly as 'mythic absence'. What this means will become clearer as the argument proceeds, but in short it revolves around a kind of obsessive nostalgia, a yearning for a lost age of unity or integration which nonetheless leads not to passivity but to productive artistic response.

From this viewpoint the past – or more precisely *a* past, a geographically and temporally specific focal point – is transformed in the memory of the artist (whether

Hölderlin himself, or one of the many writers, composers and thinkers who have responded to his ideas) into an emblem of unattainable perfection; it becomes 'mythic'. This emblem is felt continually as a painful manifestation of everything that is missing from the present, an 'absence' which provokes artists to creative acts as a way of expressing grief and channelling it into transformative action. The focal concern of this chapter is the way this concept mutates – whilst retaining its core affect and significance – in its passage from fiction, into poetry, through philosophy, and finally to music. Indeed, the idea of mythic absence is particularly relevant to this kind of exploration because its aesthetic import *depends* on its intertextual connections: in every version of the concept described here, it is the very sense of reaching back (through quotation and reference) to the distant past that underpins the sense of loss and desolation so fundamentally constitutive of its aesthetic effect. What are being traced here, then, are aesthetic interconnections that arise directly out of textual, historical, and musical ones – a kind of double-layered intertextuality.

'Distant and dead are my loved ones': Hölderlin's *Hyperion*[5]

Hölderlin's innovative novel *Hyperion, oder der Eremit in Griechenland* [*Hyperion, or the Hermit in Greece*], first published between 1797 and 1799, offers perhaps the clearest literary performance of the concept of mythic absence in his writings. The eponymous hero, a Greek youth named after an obscure titan associated with watchfulness, wisdom and light, describes through a series of letters his deep sense of isolation and disenchantment in his native land. The source of his loneliness – which amounts to far more than conventional Romantic *Sehnsucht*, a kind of irresolvable existential angst – is his fraught relationship with the past; like Hamlet, Hyperion grows to curse the 'out of joint' time in which he lives. As Hyperion writes early in the novel, 'beautiful […] is the time of awakening, as long as we are not awakened at an untimely moment' (Hölderlin, [1797] 2008: 15). The 'other country' of the past (*pace* L.P. Hartley) – the mythic world of ancient Greece, where gods lived with humans – is the focal point of the protagonist's obsessive grief; places and figures from that period draw from him an unbearable and self-destructive longing, even though they are known to be illusory. In Hyperion's words, 'I loved my heroes as a fly loves the light; I sought their dangerous nearness and fled and sought it again' (25).

Hyperion's obsession is based on a specific and philosophically grounded ideal. He sees the Greece of the Classical period as a location defined by a total unity between nature and artifice, between body and spirit, between the divine and the terrestrial, a unity which has since been destroyed by overbearing rationalism. So desirable (and so painfully lost) is this sense of integration that it leaves its mark on the physical landscape of Hyperion's latter-day homeland. Sites of natural beauty, the ruins of ancient cities or temples, and the associations of place-names with mythical figures from the past conjure up a palpable sense of loss. Indeed, as David Constantine notes, the novel as a whole enacts a continual tension between narrative and lyric modes: although there is a narrative thread that runs throughout, it is continually interrupted by 'passages of especially rich texturing or colouring' that focus the

[5] All quotes in subheadings are taken from Ross Benjamin's translation of *Hyperion* (Hölderlin, [1797] 2008: 11, 214, 174, and 14 respectively).

reader's attention on the physical landscape, on the lived environment which so closely embodies the narrator's grief-struck vision of history (Constantine, 1988: 83). Over the course of the novel, it is the lyric mode that overpowers the narrative. The protagonist's attempts to usher in a new Greek golden age through revolutionary means founder upon the greed and opportunism of his comrades, who fall to looting and desecration at the first military victory; their betrayal of his ideals further cements his sense of isolation and temporal displacement. At the close of the novel, after the collapse of his political dreams and the death of his beloved Diotima (who stood, for him, as a kind of living embodiment of lost Greek perfection), Hyperion retreats into the solace of isolation, becoming the hermit of the book's title. It is whilst looking back from this point of detached contemplation that he writes the letters which make up the novel.

'I have dreamed it out, the dream of human things': Adorno and the late poetry

Hölderlin's mature poetry seems to begin where *Hyperion* ends. In the numerous expansive hymns, odes and elegies that the poet wrote in the final years before his breakdown and institutionalisation in 1805 (a social and psychological isolation, mirroring Hyperion's final withdrawal from society, that would last until his death in 1843), the same obsessive recollection that underpins the protagonist's epistolary outbursts is transfigured by a ruminative sense of distance into a style that is simultaneously more abstract and unflinchingly physical. Shorn of the narrative constraints of the novel, Hölderlin's writing continues to invoke the Ancient Greece of myth as a physical symbol of a long-lost 'wholeness and immanence in the cultural and in the religious life' (Constantine, 1988: 164). Shifted from the arena of political allegory or *Bildungsroman* to that of poetry proper, the resultant works still fall often back upon direct exhortations – either to figures from the longed-for past, or to present companions whom the poet invites to explore this lost landscape with him. The poet becomes a kind of desolate prophet, urging the reader to see their present situation in the light of what has been lost. As Constantine puts it:

> Our age is benighted, but if our benightedness were total, if all memory of the past had been eclipsed, then our condition would be static, we should be unaware that we needed to improve […] It is the poet's job to persuade his fellow men that benightedness is not their natural and inevitable condition, and he can do so by directing them again and again to look at the Age of Daylight (Constantine, 1988: 165).

Even at its most lyrical, Hölderlin's nostalgia always retains its political edge, seeking to prevent the act of recall from lapsing into unrealistic idealism or escapist nostalgia. However distanced they may seem from the frustrated revolutionary ideals of *Hyperion*, the exhortations of his poetry testify to a continued desire for memory to lead to present action.

This tension between idealism and nostalgia is at the heart of many of the distinctive qualities of Hölderlin's mature poetry, in terms of content as well as form. Perhaps the most oft-discussed aspect of these works (particularly in musicological circles) is their formal disjuncture. Although on the surface the poetic forms may seem relatively conventional, they revolve around the abrupt juxtaposition of contradictory elements which destabilise the

processes of reading and interpretation to the point of breakdown. In the process, they dramatise in poetic terms the temporal paradoxes that underpin Hölderlin's own philosophical and political yearning. It was Adorno who first brought this aspect of Hölderlin's work to light; his seminal essay 'Parataxis' describes the presence throughout the late poems of 'artificial disturbances that evade the logical hierarchy of a subordinating syntax' (Adorno, [1964] 1992: 131). As so often, Adorno's starting-point here is polemical: his target is Heidegger, who published a series of influential readings of the poet from 1934 to 1968. Adorno accuses Heidegger of systematically misreading Hölderlin to add credibility to his own philosophy of being, rather than accepting the poems on their own terms as aesthetic objects;[6] by contrast, Adorno presents them as living testaments to the fractured and incomplete state into which language is forced by the paradoxes of its social surroundings. As such, he reclaims them as proto-modernist artefacts, characterised by contradiction and instability.

From the viewpoint of the musical avant-garde, the timing of Adorno's intervention was propitious: coming directly after the increasing fascination with Webern, Cage and the compositional uses of silence and disconnection in the Darmstadt new music courses throughout the 1950s, the publication of 'Parataxis' helped ignite the widespread musical interest in Hölderlin's work among composers over the following two decades (Nielinger-Vakil, 2000: 246–7). Subsequent musicological work has drawn out many of the compositional implications of Hölderlin's formal innovations within the work of composers as diverse as Bruno Maderna, Luigi Nono, Wolfgang Rihm, György Kurtág, and Hans Zender.[7] Above all, these writings have emphasised the importance of Hölderlin's ideas to the blend of surface discontinuity and larger, web-like interconnection so characteristic of many strands within the post-1960s musical avant-garde. Hölderlin's ideas – especially as interpreted by Adorno – make possible a 'strategy of avoiding definitive closure, whilst nevertheless combining disparate elements into some form of collected identity' (Hodkinson, 2004: 32).

There is a danger, though, that Hölderlin's complex aesthetic and philosophical concerns – as filtered through Adorno's own thorny prose – lose something important in their intertextual transposition to the realm of music. As the title of his essay suggests, the question of discontinuity is central to Adorno's reading of Hölderlin, and it provides the basis for a carefully-argued theory of formal relationships in the late poetry. Discussions of the impact of Hölderlin's work on musical composition have tended to focus on this formal dimension, perhaps because it is ostensibly easier to find musical parallels to poetic structure than poetic language. Yet the thrust of Adorno's essay is reliant upon a *rejection* of the separation that this implies between form and content. As he puts it:

[6] At some points within his discussion Adorno even seems to draw connections between Heidegger's readings and the Nazis' lionisation of Hölderlin as their national poet (see, for example, 117–19); as Håvard Enge has pointed out, however, there is no clear external evidence for this link, in spite of Heidegger's own much-discussed early associations with Nazi ideology (Enge, 2010: 42–3). For a rich discussion of the polemical basis of Adorno's essay (and the controversy surrounding the keynote address at which it was first presented), see Savage (2008).

[7] See, for example, Vieira de Carvalho (1999), Nielinger-Vakil (2000), Farkas (2002), Hodkinson (2004), Enge (2010), and Wetters (2012).

> The truth of a poem does not exist without the structure [*Gefüge*] of the poem, the totality of its moments; but at the same time, it is something that transcends this structure, as a structure of aesthetic semblance: not from the outside through a stated philosophical content, but by virtue of the configuration of moments that taken together signify more than the structure intends. (Adorno, [1964] 1992: 112–13)

It is central to Adorno's argument that Hölderlin's use of parataxis is inextricably wound up with the specific content of his poetry, to the extent that one can speak of a parataxis of *language* as much as of form.

The practical implications of this principle are relatively easy to identify. Adorno notes that the use of reference in Hölderlin's late poetry is torn in two directions. In one direction, his writing remains filled (as *Hyperion* was) with references to specific names and places within his imagined, utopian Greece: these might be the names of ancient countries, cities and rivers, or of gods and heroes, but they are often dropped into the text without further comment, as if they should already be known to the reader. In the other direction, the poetry seems to become ever more ethereal, invoking philosophical abstractions such as goodness, peace and spirit as if they ought to have a kind of Platonic existence on their own terms, without reference to any conditions in the physical world. For Adorno, these contrasting forms of reference are both defined by the palpable effect of distance they create in a sympathetic reader, who is aware of just how inaccessible both kinds of referents are in the present day – the first because of the inexorable passage of time, the second because such naively idealistic goals are no longer tenable in the face of the crushing power of instrumental reason within human society. In the use of concrete names 'there always remains an excess of what is desired but not attained [….] [which] becomes autonomous and confronts them'; likewise, abstract nouns function as 'relics, *capita mortua* of the aspect of the idea that cannot be made present' (123). Hölderlin is not able to bring the objects of his references – concrete or abstract – to reality merely by invoking their names within a text; he is only able to emphasise the pain of their absence. Yet in both cases the correspondence is far more physical than the mere evocation of a myth or ideal: rather, abstract and concrete are brought together for an instant in the act of naming, such that 'under the gaze of a poem by Hölderlin what is historically finite becomes the manifestation of the absolute as its own necessary moment' (122). The words of the poet are 'shadowed memory traces' (116), reliant on their insufficiency for their very effect; they are born of 'nostalgia for a universality, in the good sense, of the living, something Hölderlin experiences as prevented by the course of the world, the division of labour' (124). It is in this context that the political force of his poetry, its status as a wake-up call to an ignorant generation, becomes apparent. In Adorno's words, 'the difference between the name and the absolute, which Hölderlin does not conceal and which runs through his work like an allegorical cleft, is the medium of his critique of the false life in which the soul is not granted its divine right' (123).

The short poem 'Lebensalter' ['Ages of Life'], written in 1803, illustrates many of these concerns in unusually compact form: the presence of both specific place-names (Euphrates, Palmyra) and seemingly atemporal abstractions (breath, Heaven, peace), as well

as the pervasive concern with memory and defamiliarisation ('strange and dead the ghosts of the blessed ones appear').

Ihr Städte des Euphrats!
Ihr Gassen von Palmyra!
Ihr Säulenwälder in der Eb'ne der Wüste!
Was seid ihr?
Euch hat die Kronen,
Dieweil ihr über die Gränze
Der Othmenden seid gegangen,
Von Himmlischen der Rauchdampf
Und hinweg das Feuer genommen;
Jezt aber siz' ich unter Wolken (deren
Ein jedes eine Ruh' hat eigen) unter
Wohleingerichteten Eichen, auf
Der Heide des Rehs, und fremd
Erscheinen und gestorben mir
Der Seeligen Geister.

[Euphrates' cities and
Palmyra's streets and you
Forests of columns in the level desert
What are you now?
Your crowns, because
You crossed the boundary
Of breath,
Were taken off
In Heaven's smoke and flame;
But I sit under clouds (each one
Of which has peace) among
The ordered oaks, upon
The deer's heath, and strange
And dead the ghosts of the blessed ones
Appear to me.]

(Hölderlin, 1996: 71)

Moving from a poetic to a music-philosophical point of view, it is hardly surprising that Adorno chose to examine Hölderlin's poetry in such detail; there are close connections between the poet's view of history and his own. Adorno's work is motivated by the same frustration at external circumstances as Hölderlin, the same sense that individual periods need their own appropriate artistic response, and that the past cannot be resurrected without

anachronism.[8] Yet at the same time his writings, like the poet's, look constantly back to the past; although they are emphatic in their insistence that new times need new music, what this music might be is defined always in relation to older languages and models which are invoked even as they are declared to be untenable in the present day. Chief among these models is the common-practice tonality of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, particularly within the music of Hölderlin's exact contemporary, Beethoven. Beethoven's music stands in Adorno's writings as the epitome of a unity between part and whole, between form and content, which is now not only lost but historically impossible.[9]

Fredric Jameson has written persuasively of the tendency for theories of history to orient themselves by reference to what he calls a 'moment of plenitude', a semi-mythical golden age where there was a unity between subject and object which has now been lost. He argues that in Adorno's philosophy 'the work of Beethoven stands as a kind of fixed point against which earlier or later moments of musical history will be judged', articulated as 'a precarious equilibrium between melody and development, between a new and richer thematic expression of subjective feeling and its objective working through the form itself' (Jameson, 1971: 39).[10] This imagined moment of plenitude is an illusion, of course. Just like Hölderlin's Ancient Greece, where gods lived with men, it is not real – but neither is it purely an empty ideal. It has a physical substance to it because of its residual artefacts, just as Hölderlin's use of the names of real places, rivers and people makes his longing concrete and tangible. In both viewpoints, the memory of this lost 'moment of plenitude' gives impetus to the need for art (and authentic artistic transformation) in the present.

'In the rubble of serene Athens': Kurtág's *ΣΤΗΛΗ*

One example of how these ideas might be transposed from the field of philosophy to that of music is found in the first movement of the Hungarian composer György Kurtág's orchestral work *ΣΤΗΛΗ* (1994).[11] The connection here is somewhat oblique – intentionally so, since the purpose of the comparison is to explore connections of affect and aesthetic, rather than necessarily of direct quotation or influence. Nonetheless, there remain some clear associations between poet and composer here. Kurtág makes no direct reference to Hölderlin within *ΣΤΗΛΗ*, but it does stand at the apex of a long period where the composer had been increasingly engaging with the poet's output. Kurtág's sequence of Hölderlin-related compositions extends from 1975 – when he set an aphorism about him as part of his *Four Songs to Poems by János Pilinsky*, op. 11 – right up to the Hölderlin-Gesänge of 1997, which

[8] Where they differ is in their view of the future. Adorno, writing after Auschwitz, sees no hope of redemption beyond the bleak resistance of negative dialectics; by contrast, Hölderlin seems to see at least the possibility of his art inspiring a future return to wholeness. It is this aspect of Adorno's reading in 'Parataxis' that is the most potentially problematic. At times he risks the same crime for which he castigates Heidegger: that of imputing to Hölderlin philosophical perspectives which are really his own, and which cannot be traced with any certainty to the poet himself.

[9] Indeed, already in Beethoven's late style Adorno sees this unity beginning to fragment. See Adorno ([1993] 1998); Subotnik (1976); and (especially) Spitzer (2006).

[10] For further discussion of Jameson's 'moment of plenitude' in relation to musical modernism, see Timms (2009).

[11] For a more extended analysis of *ΣΤΗΛΗ* as a three-movement work, see Hutchinson, 2016: 163–185.

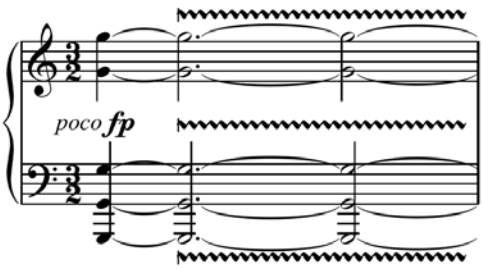
were begun before *ΣΤΗΛΗ* was composed. In between stand a number of other small settings and instrumental pieces with epigrams by the poet, such as …*quasi una fantasia.*… (1988). There is, moreover, a close material connection between *ΣΤΗΛΗ* and these other works: the first movement of *ΣΤΗΛΗ* is based primarily around a densely interwoven chromatic texture which Zóltan Farkas has identified as a recurrent musical 'topos' in many of the pieces associated with the poet (Farkas, 2002: 303). Given Kurtág's obvious familiarity with the Hölderlin, the choice of title for this work is even more suggestive. In the dead language of ancient Greek, *ΣΤΗΛΗ* refers to a gravestone or a monument, an artefact to commemorate the lost dead. As such, it neatly joins together Hölderlin's Hellenism and his aesthetics of loss.

The title is also very appropriate to the content of Kurtág's work. *ΣΤΗΛΗ* is itself a monument of remembrance in a number of senses. First and foremost, it is a personal memorial: it was written in memory of András Mihaly, a friend and colleague at the Liszt Academy in Budapest, to whom Kurtág had dedicated a number of works previously. Kurtág had written numerous memorial works before this one (indeed, frailty and mortality are perhaps the principal themes of his output), so that aspect of this piece is certainly not unusual. What *is* unusual here is its instrumentation. *ΣΤΗΛΗ* represents the then 68-year-old composer's first mature orchestral work, written after a residency with the Berliner Philharmoniker arranged by their conductor Claudio Abbado in the autumn of 1993 (Toop, 2001: 141). Given the composer's continual focus upon the fragile and the liminal, it is a surprise to find him writing for orchestra at all, yet here the orchestra is one of gargantuan proportions: *ΣΤΗΛΗ* is scored for an ensemble featuring up to sextuple wind parts, Wagner tubas, and an extended percussion section with two pianos, cimbalom and celesta.

Yet this is where a second, more public kind of memorial comes into play, highlighting deeper connections with Hölderlin's worldview and aesthetic. In writing for the Berliner Philharmoniker, Kurtág is associating himself directly with the grand line of German symphonic Romanticism that runs from Beethoven through to Bruckner; this repertoire stands as the embodiment of the tonal 'moment of plenitude' which twentieth-century Adornian musical historiography mourns. As one of the flagship orchestras of this tradition, itself previously conducted by Brahms, Strauss and Mahler, the Berliner Philhamoniker can be seen as a kind of 'monument' to this tradition in its own right. The first movement of *ΣΤΗΛΗ* plays explicitly on these associations by means of two direct (but heavily distorted) quotations which start and end the movement. Like the concrete names in Hölderlin's poetry, these stand as direct and provocative acts of memory, recalling an idealised past which cannot be recovered. As with Hölderlin, though, these memories are not felt purely as something abstract: they have an almost physical force. As such, they provide a bridge between the personal memorial that underpins this work and the wider and more public questions of history it raises.

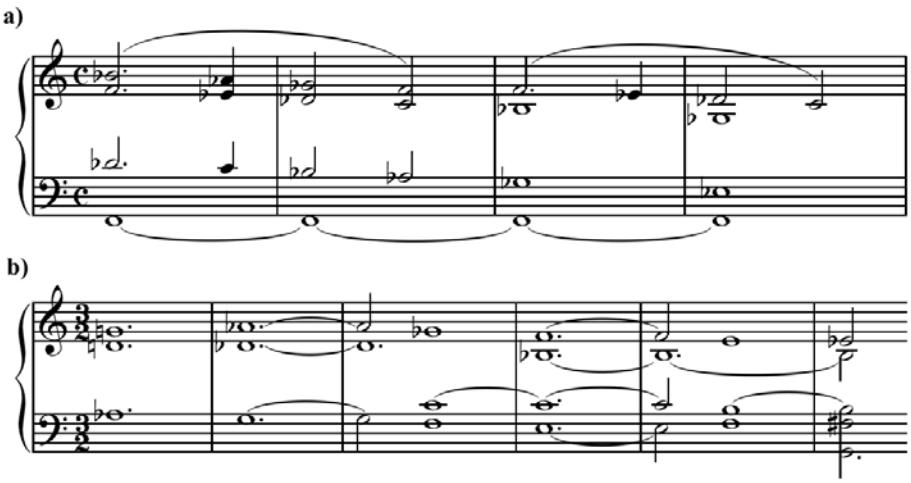
This process is evident from the opening gesture of the movement (Ex. 1), five octaves' worth of *tutti* G natural that are taken directly from the opening of Beethoven's *Leonore* no. 3 overture, as Klaus Kropfinger noted in his programme note to a performance of the piece at the 1996 Donaueschinger Musiktage (quoted in Toop, 2001: 142). Even without knowing the specific source, the effect of the quotation is unmistakeable: it stands as

a marker of strength and firm teleological intent, a classic opening gambit for a work from that period. Almost immediately, however, it is disconcertingly turned on its head: as the woodwinds' sustained pitches give way to a haze of unpredictable microtonal fluctuations, the music 'seems literally to dissolve' (Adlington, 2003: 315).



Ex. 1: Reduction of Kurtág's *ΣΤΗΛΗ*, opening sonority; wavy lines indicate microtonal fluctuations

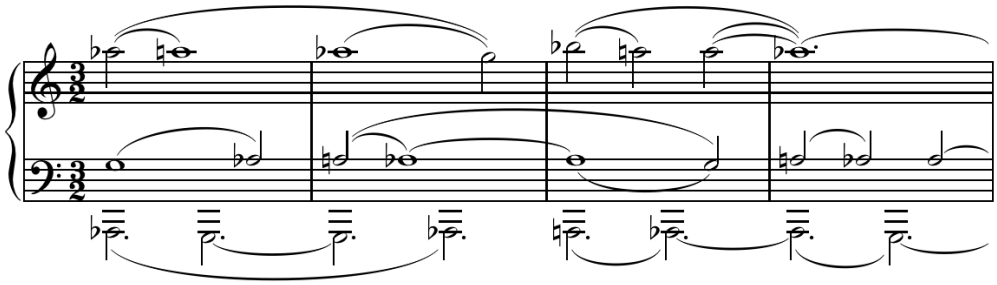
The aural illusion created by these microtonal distortions is compounded by the absence of any audible pulse or direction. Although it lasts only a few seconds in real time, without any way for the listener to measure this, the agony of the gesture stretches it to a near-eternity. The effect is strikingly physical: listeners are given a clear and unmistakeable icon of tradition, then forced to confront its 'lostness' in a visceral way.



Ex. 2: a) Bruckner, Symphony no. 9, *Adagio*: motif for Wagner tubas in bars 29–32; b) 'Hommage à Bruckner' material in Kurtág, *ΣΤΗΛΗ*, mvt 1, bars 26–9

The second quotation (Ex. 2b) falls nearly at the end of the movement, and is much less obvious; this in itself contributes to its effect in Hölderlinian terms. The source is a falling sequence for Wagner tubas taken from Bruckner's ninth and final symphony (Ex. 2a), a passage which carries its own symbolic weight as a kind of veiled 'farewell to life' from the aged composer (Asmus, 2000: 6, n. 3). Kurtág's rendition, however, is so badly eroded, so heavily tainted by the raw chromaticism of the rest of the movement, that it is only

recognisable by its distinctive instrumentation and clear falling contour, and by the fact that Kurtág helpfully marks it ‘Hommage à Bruckner’ in the score so that at least the conductor (and any passing musicologists) can identify it. Here, even more than the opening, there is a sense of experiencing a kind of artefact that is irretrievably distant from the present; that this relic is itself an emblem of mortality only increases the effect.



Ex. 3: Example of chromatic ‘Hölderlin topos’ material in *ΣΤΗΛΗ*, mvt 1: reduction of clarinet lines, bars 4–7

Between these two quotations, the rest of the movement is made up of very simple, hushed chromatic material based on the ‘Hölderlin topos’ which Farkas traces through the works of this period (Ex. 3). This material presents a process of expansion and saturation on several levels simultaneously. In pitch-structural terms, there is a gradual expansion upwards from a single pitch to encompass the full chromatic aggregate. This trajectory is matched in orchestration: through the main body of the movement different families of instruments are introduced in turn, moving from the softest and most timbrally mellow (the clarinets) to the brashest and most forceful (the brass). Finally, there is a gradual process of textural saturation: the stasis and transparency of the opening give way to increasing rhythmic and contrapuntal complexity as each new family enters, until they reach a point of maximal density at the climax of the movement.

These processes give the movement a clear dramatic arc. It connects with all the usual tropes of musical lamentation in its pervasive chromaticism, the slow but cumulative build-up of intensity through textural saturation and rising dynamic levels, and the wide range of ‘sighing’ and ‘wailing’ figures that run throughout the movement. What is most significant in the context of Hölderlin’s work, however, is the contrast this central material provides with the quotations which bookend the movement. Kurtág’s lament, like Hölderlin’s, is torn between the abstract and the concrete. On the one hand, the basic material of the movement is like a kind of rarefied, impersonal abstraction of the conventions of *Trauermusik*. On the other, at either end of this quiet funeral procession listeners are confronted with two musical relics which force them to confront this same sense of loss in a much more direct, concrete way. The listener is placed as it were in the position of Hyperion in the rubble of Athens, confronted with a scattered collection of weathered pillars, surrounded by a great expanse of mossy rubble; what little remains intact only serves to heighten the sense of loss and distance.

‘I thank you for asking me to tell you of myself’: lament and memory

The wanderings of the concept of mythic absence from Hölderlin, through Adorno, to Kurtág provide a clear example of the way an idea can shift and mutate as it migrates from one medium to another, without losing its basic identity. The hopeless yearning of Hölderlin’s Greek hermit is transmuted into something more distanced in his late poetry, darkened and sharpened further in Adorno’s polemical reading, and given a visceral sonic substance in Kurtág’s compressed musical lament; yet in each case there remain sufficient connections of idea and effect – the pervasive atmosphere of mourning and regret, the nostalgic gaze upon a Jamesonian ‘moment of plenitude’, the use of names and quoted musical signifiers as empty relics – to give it a shared expressive core. Moreover, because this sense of lostness and regret is so central to the idea of mythic absence itself, the affective or aesthetic qualities of the intertextual connections upon which it relies come quite naturally to the foreground. This is something particularly visible in Kurtág’s lament: the individual act of mourning implied by the dedication is transformed through the presence of the dilapidated Beethoven and Bruckner quotations into something both more public and more generalised, more suited to the implications of its title, such that musical borrowing both serves an expressive purpose (lamentation) and transcends it. Each new transposition of the idea serves as another link in the chain, a concrete embodiment of the varied ways in which texts of every kind (literary, poetic, philosophical, musical) can create connections across history. These memories cannot bring the past back to life, but they can provide an impetus for present or future transformation. It is perhaps for this reason that Hyperion writes to Bellarmin: ‘I thank you for asking me to tell you of myself, for recalling times past to my memory’ (Hölderlin, [1797] 2008: 14).

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