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### **Desire**

*And precisely this...dreadful, Delphic-ambiguous obscurity really makes the art of instrumental music into a God for human hearts.*

*Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder*

### **Introduction**

In his 1820 review of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Hoffmann observes with respect to the famous Ghost scene that it gave him the creeps and made his hair stand on end (Hoffmann [1820] 1988: 363). This might be called the cosy shivering characteristic of the Burkean sublime-as-terror – cosy not only because as a fictional scene of terror the listener/viewer is safely distanced from the dreadful appearance of the Commendatore's marble statue at the banquet hall, accompanied by the ominous music of the overture, but also because eventually all comes to a satisfying ending in Mozart's Opera. After Don Giovanni is dragged into hell, a reassuring epilogue follows, and even though the moral lesson sung to the audience appears half-hearted it does remove the immediately overwhelming effect of the scene of terror, allowing for a sense of closure and relief.

If such closure appears typical of eighteenth-century opera – Handel's *Jephtha* is a case in point<sup>1</sup> – how different is Hoffmann's response to Beethoven's Symphony in C minor. Here, I will show in this chapter, he remains dogged even till after the music's very ending in an anxiety combining pleasure with pain that cannot, to all appearances, be effectively overcome or concluded. Indeed, the very inconclusiveness of this experience mirrors the Romantic notion of the infinite as indefinite flux that, for Hoffmann, especially informs Beethoven's instrumental works: Beethoven's symphonies, he states, have one 'subject matter' (*Vorwurf*) which ought to be the subject matter of all music: the infinite.

Comparable to Locke and Burke, I will argue in this chapter, Hoffmann and his Romantic contemporaries represent this infinite in terms of the indeterminate: in terms of something that cannot be defined, fixed, or encompassed, that lacks closure or resolution, but rather goes on and on, continuing indefinitely. In imitation of Jean Paul, Wackenroder, and Tieck, Hoffmann translates this indeterminacy into a semantic indeterminacy and links it up with the ambiguity or indecisiveness, the 'open sign', that he ascribes to music purely instrumental. In this way, I will show, he makes it into a vehicle, a witness, of the infinite.

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<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank Wessel Krul for these remarks.

Given the status of the infinite as a primary source of the sublime in eighteenth-century aesthetics, this could well imply that instrumental music also came to function as a vehicle of the sublime in the early Romantic era. Indeed, Carl Dahlhaus has observed in *Die Idee der absoluten Musik (The Idea of Absolute Music)* (1978), “the changing conception of instrumental music” during the 1790’s involved a re-reading “of ‘indeterminacy’ as ‘sublime’ instead of ‘empty’ ” that can be called “fundamental. The fact that musical ‘content’ cannot or only vaguely be determined, does not diminish but elevate” the status of music without words (Dahlhaus 1978: 67, my translation). It becomes the ‘highest’ art in the hierarchy of the fine arts, or at least a model for the arts of poetry and painting to undermine definite outlines, fixed signification or determinate sense.

In critical retrospect, the canonization of instrumental music can thus hardly be disconnected from the eighteenth-century aesthetics of the sublime as an aesthetics of the infinite. An aesthetics, I will show in this chapter, which evolved more explicitly into a poetics of the vague and indeterminate during the early Romantic era. Typically, the adequate response to such instrumental music would be an unfulfilled and unresolved yearning, an unending *Sehnsucht*: an ever-failed yet for that reason also ever-lasting desire. This Romantic desire, I have proposed in the previous chapter, displays an elective affinity with the sublime feeling in so far as it concerns a paradoxical, inconclusive experience of the unseen and indefinite. Here, I explore this affinity in more detail: I focus on the thematic overlap between *Sehnsucht* on the one hand as a feeling in which the impossibility of wish-fulfilment paradoxically occasions a delight of suspension, of concretisation being ever-deferred, and the Burkean experience of the infinite on the other in which the impossibility of imagination to fix a form or boundary, to represent a finished whole, allows for the delight of an anticipating without end.

It could, for that matter, be suggested that the early Romantic experience of *Sehnsucht* classifies as an instance of what Thomas Weiskel (1976) has in his elaborations on the Romantic sublime termed the liminal sublime. This liminal sublime is a sublime not of transcendence but one revolving around wavering, vacillating or withholding instead. Arguably, not all the details and implications of this Romantic sublime would apply to the idea of *Sehnsucht*. Yet the two do converge in their divergence from the normative, Kantian moment of climactic breakthrough: what is at issue here is not a transition from frustration to self-revelation, but a lingering or *hesitating at the limit of revelation* (Weiskel [1976] 1986: 174). Thus, William Wordsworth’s poetic landscapes signal, for Weiskel, the liminal sublime in so far as they would constantly hesitate on the verge of a revelation without, however, ever revealing anything specific at all (ibid.: 174). Not a narrative of overcoming, I will explain, but a narrative of repetition, such a liminal sublime experience tends toward the aesthetic idea: it revolves around an indecisive

imagination dawdling in an open space in which nothing has yet been definitely or concretely configured. Knowing this, Van de Vall has proposed, one could call this “an experience on its way to articulation” (van de Vall 1994: 384). As such an experience, I will argue below, *Sehnsucht* in fact never evolves beyond being on its way, always undermining its own resolution, always returning to its starting-point, and always sustaining its own internal conflict as an anxiety holding pain and pleasure in one. In this way, it could well make up an interesting, Romantic alternative to Kant's epic variety of the sublime feeling.

## Sehnsucht

*Sehnsucht* could be termed a feeling of infinite lack, the suffering of a desire which constantly eludes its goal or destination. Or better, in not reaching a destination, in indefinitely *postponing* a conclusion, the *Sehnsüchtiger* finds her or his destiny. S/he longs to be at home in an eternal not-yet – somewhat like the Freudian fetishist, s/he is absorbed by fore- rather than end-pleasure – and this is how s/he, comparable to the Usherian subject, is doomed to an eternal deferring and wandering, never feeling at home and never finding a home. For this home – and all the qualities familiarly associated with it – will always be where the yearning-craving subject is not, and s/he knows it: s/he is eternally homesick, eternally dissatisfied.<sup>2</sup> As Goethe puts it in *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774):

Oh, it is with the distant as with the future! A vast, dim All [*ein großes dämmerndes Ganzes*] rests before our soul, our feeling [*Empfindung*] melts in it like our eyes, and we yearn [*sehnen uns*], ah!, to completely surrender to it, to be filled with all the delight of a single, great, delicious feeling [*uns mit aller Wonne eines einzigen, großen, herrlichen gefühl ausfüllen zu lassen*] – And oh! when we run towards it, when the yonder now becomes here [*wenn das Dort nun Hier wird*], everything is as it was before, and we stand in our poverty, in our limitedness, and our soul craves for comforts slipped away [*entschlüpftem Labsale*]. (Goethe [1774] 1985: 31, my translation)

As a *Sehnsüchtiger*, a restless spirit hurrying to and fro and never finding what it was hoping for, Werther can only intimate an harmonious ‘All’ and the unitary fulfilment it would instil in his soul. He has a dim, lingering awareness of it but it dissolves precisely when it comes near, when he tries to appropriate it. Like the distant and the future, Werther’s hopeful ‘yonder’ cannot appear without disappearing in an empty here and now. Fulfilment is impossible because this yonder can only exist as a still immaterialized promise. Werther therefore speaks of a mental world full of premonitions and vague desires that he prefers to a world of materialisation: a world of divining, hinting, and anticipating in which nothing has yet presented or realized itself, in which nothing has yet been fixed and in which consequently anything can yet happen or occur (ibid.: 12).

One is reminded here of Burke’s and Beattie’s delight of imagination in the incomplete and undetermined. It allows for the

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<sup>2</sup>In his lectures on literature and art, August Wilhelm Schlegel ascribes this eternal homesickness to the “Christian attitude” (Schlegel [1801] 1981: 270). Christian religion, he says, “is bound to awaken the clearest realisation that we seek in vain for happiness here on earth...that no external object can ever entirely satisfy the soul, and that every pleasure is but a fleeting illusion” (ibid.: 270). Resting “beneath the weeping willows of exile”, the soul can only sing songs of melancholy because it remains ever-unfulfilled (ibid.: 270).

sustaining of a promise of 'something more' that has not yet been presented – *dargestellt*, in Goethe's terminology, which would literally mean: put there, in front of my eyes, already formed. Like Burke's unfinished sketches and drawings, Werther's world of premonitions or *Ahnungen* is a world-in-waiting where the subject can imagine an endless, unlimited becoming in an open, as yet undetermined space ahead.

If Burke associates this space with the world of youth and spring, of dawn and early hours where things have not yet definitely been configured, this is precisely the world where the *Sehnsüchtiger* wants to *return* to in longing for an unknown harmonious 'all' in the future. S/he wants to retrieve a state of youthful incompleteness *in* the unfulfilled yearning for an unattainable, undetermined 'yonder'. Though the wish be futile, s/he longs back for the times, as the poet in Goethe's *Faust* exclaims: "When I was still becoming,/...When mists [*nebel*] shrouded my world,/ The buds still promised wonders,/...Give me back my youth!" (Goethe [1787-1790] 1974: I, ll. 15-16, my translation). Thus, one could say, the *Sehnsüchtiger* wants to return to the future in so far as s/he wants to repeat a circumstance in which 'later', 'yonder', 'endless becoming', and together with it, endless longing was still possible – in which the future was still an open future.

If, as such, *Sehnsucht* manifests itself as a frustrated longing forward that is really an impossible longing backward for a 'once' in which such a longing forward was still viable, Ankersmit rightfully reads it in terms of nostalgia in *History and Topology* (1994). As he quotes from (and translates) the poem "Einst und Jetzt" ("Once and Now") by the Austrian Romantic Poet Nikolaus Lenau (1802-1850):

I wished I were again in the country,  
Where I once was happy,  
Where I lived and where I dreamt,  
That most wonderful world of youth!

Thus I was longing from afar,  
For childhood's native soil,  
Expecting, that in the familiar setting  
Childhood's bliss could be found again.

Finally it was given to me  
To return to the valley of my youth;  
But to him who comes back home  
It is not as in the days of old.

As one greets old friends  
So I greet many a dear place;  
But my heart becomes heavy  
For what was dearest is lost forever.  
(in Ankersmit 1994: 198)

What epitomizes these lines, according to Ankersmit, is a sense of “displacement, of being displaced”: as an adult, the speaker is not where he wants to be, and even when he returns to the place of youth, the place of dreaming, he can of course not mediate the distance between ‘once’ and ‘now’ (ibid.: 199).<sup>3</sup> As in fairy tales, ‘once’ is here probably only an imaginary place and time to begin with, so that one really longs to be back in what nowadays is called a *non-lieu*, or, more simply, a never-never land that was never (consciously) occupied. Thus, the point being made about nostalgia here is that “it always urges us to *undo* displacement but without ever actually *succeeding* in achieving this goal” (ibid.: 199). This mixture of desire and frustration also sums up *Sehnsucht*, whereby “desire and the frustration of desire both presuppose and reinforce each other”: *Sehnsucht* can be sustained as endless desire because it is a desire that can, and in a way must, not be satisfied (ibid.: 199). As with nostalgia, there is something odd about the “goal-means relationship of practical reasoning” here: “nostalgia presents us with a goal that selects the means that can never realize the goal while, paradoxically, this seems to be precisely the goal” at issue here (ibid.: 199). *Sehnsucht*, differently said, is nostalgia in its being a yearning that appears purposeful in its purposelessness – in never winning near the goal. In this respect, it recalls for Ankersmit the ‘purposefulness without a purpose’, the *Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck*, of the Kantian aesthetic judgement of the beautiful (ibid.: 199-200).

However, though this reference to Kantian beauty will indeed justify the attributing of an “aesthetic quality” to the fugitive object of *Sehnsucht*, I would rather link it up with Usher’s experience of the sublime as an experience that is likewise without end, without a final destination (ibid.: 200). My first reason for doing so is that *Sehnsucht*, as Ankersmit himself already points out, is an experience not of harmony but of difference: the nostalgia inherent to *Sehnsucht* does not imply a “re-enactment of the past” but the felt impossibility of such a complete re-enactment or return (ibid.: 205). There is a difference, a gap between the nostalgic or *Sehnsüchtiger* and her/his past prospect of fulfilment projected in the future, which cannot ever be bridged. The awareness of this gap, moreover, brings about a feeling of pain, rather than pleasure alone, even though this pain appears to give rise to a peculiar delight of some sort: like the pain of nostalgia, the pain of *Sehnsucht* is

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<sup>3</sup>As Ankersmit explains, nostalgia implies both a temporal and a spatial displacement (Wordsworth’s “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” (1798) is of course another case in point.) The latter, however, appears to be the older connotation of the two. Thus, the “neologism *nostalgia* (a composition of the Greek words *nosteo* – ‘to return home safely’ – and *algos* – ‘pain’) was coined in 1688 in a learned dissertation by the German physician Johannes Hofer to describe the mental afflictions of Swiss mercenaries fighting far from their native country – afflictions that might even result in suicide” (Ankersmit 1994: 199).

described in the same paradoxical terms as the pain of the sublime. It is a 'sweet pain', an 'aching pleasure', or a 'blissful grief'.<sup>4</sup>

As I have already observed in relation to Burke's experience of artificial infinity and Usher's sublime feeling, such a mixture of co-existing, yet apparently contradicting feelings can, in this respect, be described in terms of the constantly changing or shifting aspect of the same 'state': a radical indeterminacy, manifesting itself as lack and plenitude at once. In the Burkean experience of artificial infinity, this lack pointed to a lack of form, a lack of comprehension, while the idea of plenitude referred to the felt boundlessness of imagination expanding itself in the endless, successive apprehension of uniform parts. It was the plenitude created by the lack of a fixed boundary. In Usher's sublime feeling, again, lack signified a pain of unfulfilment, an obscure desire without an object, while at the same signifying an inexhaustible plenitude, a lasting promise of the unknown. Both the feeling of frustration and anticipation together making up anxiety, here existed as two deadlocked sides of the same structural uncertainty.

*Sehnsucht* is propelled by a similar mechanism: lack or un-fulfilment makes for a pain of agony and incompleteness, yet this very incompleteness is also the condition of possibility for the endless longing, the longing-in-itself, that the *Sehnsüchtiger* desires and tries to sustain. More so, I have noted, the delight of indeterminacy central to *Sehnsucht* consists in the fact that this unfulfilled, wandering desire *itself* amends for the lack of an imaginary past – the openness associated with 'youth' –

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<sup>4</sup>Take, for instance, poor Werther's impossible, frustrated love for the unattainable Lotte – unattainable because, in Roland Barthes' specular terms, she is a love-object "belonging to another" (Barthes [1977] 1990: 184). As little more than a screen on which Werther can project his wandering desires, 'Lotte' presents a prospect, an opening, for endless becoming: a medium through which Werther divines, *ahnt*, a possibility of fulfilment. However, no matter how unreachable 'Lotte' remains, no matter how big the gap between desire and gratification, and no matter how painful the sense of displacement, Werther persists – and not without reason. Yes, eventually 'Lotte' will be little more to Werther than a painful, continual reminder of lack. Nevertheless, and paradoxically, this is also a lack that almost literally fills him, transforms because dominates the world he sees, and this fixation, Werther admits "gives me then so many happy hours" (Goethe 1985: 62). For no matter how unbearable the pain, "can you demand of the poor soul, whose life is dying...steadily from a wasting disease, can you demand of him that he should finish his ailment outright, with one stab?" (ibid.: 49). No, because Werther is much too attached to his ailment, finds it all too delightful and revels, wallows in it. Just as the physical pain attending a (terminal) illness reminds a patient on the one hand of death approaching but, on the other, also of the fact that s/he is still alive, so Werther's pain sustains the nearness of 'Lotte'. It keeps her alive and real for him. No matter how nearby intolerable, his pain still ensures a (last) connection with his impossible beloved. As such, Werther's *Sehnsucht* may well intersect in some respects with Thomas Burnet's sublime experience of the 'ruins' of the Alps. As I have shown in the general introduction, mountains are for Burnet a painful reminder of the loss of paradise; ruins of guilt and depravity to the seventeenth-century Christian mind. However, at the same time they occasion a distinct delight as visible, palpable links with the Deity. Thus, while exciting a pain of lack, of displacement, the ruinous mountains that Burnet encounters also, and at the same time, make for a sense of belonging, of attachment.

irretrievably lost. That is to say, *in* the indefinable feeling of *Sehnsucht*, the desired incompleteness associated with this past is repeated in an experiential way. In focusing him- or herself on a *not yet* being or having, in ever-postponing a fulfilment of desire, and in sustaining its purposeful purposelessness, the subject tries to dodge the determinations of life 'after youth'. Give me back my youth!, the poet in *Faust* exclaims, give me back the openness that I now must lack. And he recreates it in surrendering to a longing-without-end.

*Sehnsucht* may therefore be painful because the craving subject remains wanting, but it is nevertheless a pleasurable pain. For precisely the unfulfilled status of this craving simulates a *desired* state of incompleteness. Thus, the place where the *Sehnsüchtiger* would like to linger (always-repeating the openness ascribed to a magic 'once' where something undefined may yet be coming or occurring, and all one has to do is wait for it to happen), is at a point right before a moment of fulfilment, revelation, completion, and so on. Just a glimpse of these, and never more – it is the question mark where Usher's sublime experience (not-)ends. For only at this (premature) moment, before promises of fulfilment can fade into lost prospects, before a vague 'over there' becomes the prosaic 'here and now', the desire of not-yet-being(-there) can be reasonably sustained. Seen in this light, and despite all the restlessness involved, what the *Sehnsüchtiger* wants to do is to postpone the course of time, postpone change. S/he wants to remain in a vacuum where things have not occurred, come about, evolved, or developed just yet. In this way, the ungraspable infinite for which s/he yearns is already felt in the openness of a permanent not-yet: as with Locke and Burke, infinity is felt in never coming one step closer to an end or goal, so that there remains endless, empty room for more. If this emptiness hurts, it also helps against hurting: it makes for tension, for agony, but for tensionlessness, for respite, at the same time.

### **Lacking an Ear**

If, as we have seen, Burke's experience of infinity, Usher's sublime feeling, and the feeling of *Sehnsucht* – a suffering to and craving for yearning – comprises lack and plenitude at once, one could detect a similar double bind in Thomas Twining's experience of the suggestiveness of instrumental music. Here, the lack of a definite concept, the lack of certainty, allows for a plenitude of interpretations to be made. What is more, this lack allows for a plenitude of *self*. For Twining, contemporary instrumental music hurries the listener back to his/her subjectivity, and allows this subjectivity to fill a music heard with emotions playing freely on the listener's fancy – while never in any way becoming determinate emotions.

However, it may be proposed, the absence of precisely mediated contents here also implies the absence of a 'firm' interpretive ground that could well lead to 'negative' feelings of impotence, disorientation and frustration. *Sonate, que me veux-tu?* Bernard Le Bovier de

Fontenelle long ago transposed the lover's question to the realm of instrumental music: what does instrumental music demand of me, what on earth must I do to satisfy the bidding of music's ambiguous signs? What, as William Fitzgerald puts it in "The Questionability of Music" (1994), is expected of me (Fitzgerald 1994: 123)? In contrast to many of his earlier nineteenth-century contemporaries, the critic and writer Charles Lamb would express a similar sense of helplessness and even an outspoken irritation with instrumental music in his delightful "A Chapter on Ears" from *The Essays of Elia* (1823). Before discussing the exalted musical *Sehnsucht* as described by Jean Paul, Wackenroder and Tieck, it will be instructive to first consider Lamb's invective in some detail.

"I am", Lamb's persona Elia makes clear ironically, "not without suspicion that I have an undeveloped faculty of music within me" (Lamb [1823] 19xx: 63). Yet, what he lacks is an ear, an ear for listening delightedly, exaltedly, and creatively to music. True, to "say that this heart never melted at the concord of sweet sounds, would be a foul self-libel. 'Water parted from the sea' never fails to move it strongly. So does 'In Infancy'. But they used to be sung at her harpsichord" – and it seems that the 'her' ("why should I hesitate to name Mrs. S., once the blooming Fanny Weatheral of the Temple") thrilled and melted Elia more than the sounds themselves (ibid.: 63). However, considered apart from Mrs. S., and apart from words, Elia cannot make head or tail of instrumental music. Indeed, the problem seems to be that he feels as if he is somehow expected or required to decipher a secret code while listening, but fails signally:

I am constitutionally susceptible of noises. A carpenter's hammer in a warm summer noon will fret me into more than summer madness. But those unconnected, unset, sounds are nothing to the measured malice of music. The ear is passive to those single strokes; willingly enduring stripes while it hath no task to con. To music it cannot be passive. It will strive – mine at least – spite of its inaptitude, to thrid the maze; like an unskilled eye painfully poring upon hieroglyphics. I have sat through an Italian Opera till, for sheer pain and inexplicable anguish, I have rushed out into the noisiest places of crowded streets, to solace myself with sounds which I was not obliged to follow, and get rid of the distracting torment of endless, fruitless, barren, attention!  
(ibid.: 64-65)

As Fitzgerald points out, like the hieroglyph (a notion that Lamb is likely to have borrowed from Denis Diderot's reflections on music) music for Lamb "torments us with an impression of meaningfulness that will neither allow us to satisfy our desire for understanding nor to relinquish our search" (Fitzgerald 1994: 123). It is a Twiningian experience of musical suggestiveness, or an Usherian *Sehnsucht*-like feeling of the sublime, without any appreciation for or delight in the semantically indeterminate. The Usherian question mark, continually postponing

revelation or, in case of Twining, fixed signification, becomes an unequivocal instrument of torture here. Almost a parody of the stock-Romantic response to instrumental music, Lamb's "inexplicable anguish" is caused by instrumental music's teasing ambiguity, neither allowing his ear to be passive, nor enabling it to be active or productive in an affirmative sense:

Above all, those insufferable concertos, and pieces of music, as they are called, do plague and embitter my apprehension. – Words are something; but to be exposed to an endless battery of mere sounds; to be long a dying, to lie stretched upon a rack of roses; to keep up languor by unintermitted effort; to pile honey upon sugar and sugar upon honey, to an interminable tedious sweetness; to fill up sound with feeling, and strain ideas to keep pace with it; to gaze on empty frames, and be forced to make the pictures yourself; to read a book, *all stops*, and be obliged to supply the verbal matter; to invent extempore tragedies to answer to the vague gestures of an inexplicable rambling mime – these are faint shadows of what I have undergone from a series of the ablest-executed pieces of this empty *instrumental music*. (Lamb 19xx: 65-66)

This is tongue-in-cheek, but still: what for Twining is the delight of instrumental music, is its horror for Lamb – to be given just a very vague hint and to supply or create the rest yourself. Lamb's frustration is particularly directed at the sounds rising "from that inexhausted *German* ocean, above which, in triumphant progress, dolphin-seated, ride those Arions *Haydn* and *Mozart*, with their attendant Tritons *Bach* and *Beethoven*, and a countless tribe, whom to attempt to reckon up would but plunge me again in the deeps" (ibid.: 66). These Arions and Tritons would become pillars of the musical sublime in the nineteenth century, and if Lamb feels the claim of their 'empty' instrumental music, but does not know "how to make good on [it]", writers like Jean Paul, Wackenroder, and Tieck had seemed to hold the answer: total surrender (Fitzgerald 1994: 123).

### **Naming a Lack**

One could in fact say that in so far Lamb's anguish here is due to a felt lack of response-ability, then for early Romantic writers like Jean Paul or Wackenroder a felt sense of lack precisely becomes a *condition* for musical response-ability: what music purely instrumental 'wants' or 'requires' from its Romantic listeners is a penetrating self-insight, a recognition of their "own nameless longing" (ibid.: 123). It wants involvement, submission, and even faith, so that this listener sighs and, in Jean Paul's words, exclaims: "Truly all you [music] name I lack" (ibid.: 123). These words from *Hesperus* are in fact Herion's, who is reflecting on the feeling of *Sehnsucht* while hearing a garden-concert from the distance. Almost literally echoing Usher's wandering desire that does not

yet know its object, and is thus without a name, he describes *Sehnsucht* as a “great wish that will never be fulfilled”: “it does not have a name, it is in search of its object [er sucht seinen Gegenstand]” (Bock 1900: 142, my translation). It comes when,

on a summer night, you look to the north, or to the far mountains, or when moonlight shines the earth or the heavens are full of stars, or when you are very unhappy. This great, awesome [ungeheuer] wish moves our spirit upward [hebt unsern Geist empor] but with pains: ah! lying down, we are tossed into the sky like epileptics [Fallsüchtigen]. (ibid.: 142)

Comparable to the sublime feeling, upward movement is attended by pain, yet, in contrast to Kant, this pain does not signal the success but the very failure of transcendence. Instead of rising above ourselves, we are “tossed into the sky like epileptics”, prone to falling, which no doubt symbolises the disillusionment of wish-fulfilment already described in Goethe's *Werther*. In so far, however, as the tones of music here nevertheless name the “awesome wish” or incurable lack that, according to Jean Paul, cannot be expressed as name in words, they become a vessel of truth, mirroring the rising and (inevitably) falling movements of the spirit. They name not *what* I lack, they name my *lack*, my endless, unresolved yearning.<sup>5</sup>

Comparable to Jean Paul, young Wackenroder describes the articulation of a like-minded, restless desire in music in “Das Eigentümliche innere Wesen der Tonkunst” (The Essential Inner Nature of Music) from *Phantasien über die Kunst für Freunde der Kunst (Fantasies on Art for Friends of Art)*, published after Wackenroder's untimely death in 1798 by Ludwig Tieck in 1799. Wackenroder speaks in relation to instrumental music of a “sweet, yearning-craving pining [sehnsüchtige Schmachten] of love, the ever-oscillating swelling and subsiding of *Sehnsucht*, because the soul, out of the tender slinking [Schleichen] through neighbouring tones, suddenly swings itself upward...and sinks again” (Wackenroder [1799] 1886: 72-73, my translation). And somehow it never stops rising and sinking. With “lascivious rancour” [wollüstigen Unmut] the soul here twists from one “unsatisfied striving” to another, eternally and fruitlessly struggling for resolution [Auflösung] (ibid.: 73). Even when it comes, moreover, this moment of resolution is not so much glorious and relieving as sad and undesirable. As with *Werther*, when the

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<sup>5</sup>Like August Wilhelm Schlegel, Jean Paul represents this nameless longing or *Sehnsucht* in his *Vorschule der Ästhetik (Introductory Course in Aesthetics)* (1804, 1814) as an essentially Romanticised (i.e. subject-centred) Christian feeling, or more precisely, as expressing a supposedly Christian withdrawal from the world of sense into an internal and eternal world of the spirit. In relation to this, Jean Paul proclaims a Christian poetry arising after and in opposition to the Greek poetic spirit which is essentially Romantic, because the Romantic stimulus – defined by Jean Paul in terms of indefinite expanse – finds a “congenial place” only in the allegedly immaterial ‘spirit’ of Christian poetry (Richter 1998: 14).

'over there' becomes an 'over here', the yearning-craving subject stands alone and disillusioned: the tension of *Sehnsucht* is a tension that "in the end resolves itself only with tears" (ibid.: 73). Pain persists.

However, if instrumental music thus enacts the oscillating movements of tireless *Sehnsucht*,<sup>6</sup> once more allowing for a plenitude of self, may not the lack that it names also be the lack or incompleteness of its ambiguous, open sign? That is to say, would not this incompleteness – cherished by Twining, abhorred by Lamb – *incite* the *Sehnsucht* that Wackenroder and Jean Paul are referring to, rather than music being an exemplification of the desire already rising and sinking within the Romantic subject anyway? Indeed, if the Romantic craving for yearning revolves around a continued deferral of presentation – of concretisation – Wackenroder represents instrumental music as being most suited to the purpose: as a holy mystery, allowing the listener to the limit of revelation, but never to revelation itself. As, more precisely, allowing not just for passive submission but also for that animated imaginative suspense of something still to be formed, determined, or disclosed, which also marked Burke's delight in unfinished sketches and drawings. Or, as Wackenroder cryptically describes the radical indeterminacy of musical meaning and expression in "Die Farben" (Colours):

Music wraps itself around people [*sie spielt um den Menschen*], it wants nothing and everything. It is a medium finer than language, perhaps softer than its thoughts. The spirit can no longer use it as a means, as an instrument. Rather, music is substance itself [*sie ist Sache selbst*], which is why it lives and moves in its own magic circle [*Zauberkreis*]. (Wackenroder 1886: 45-46)

Music wants, means "nothing and everything" (which is why it drives Lamb to madness) and, like the impossible feeling of *Sehnsucht* it arouses, cannot be used as a means for an end: it is an end in itself. That is to say, and this epitomizes the early Romantic conception of music as a shining example for the other arts, musical sounds cannot be used to imitate or refer to a world other than themselves because they live and move in their own magic world, because they create a self-sufficient world onto themselves. They do not individualize specifiable objects,

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<sup>6</sup>Though Wackenroder never mentions a single composer, his point of reference with respect to contemporary instrumental music would have been the music of the Classical or Viennese style. This style, one would say from a present-day perspective, is perhaps least suited to the feeling of *Sehnsucht* as an *unresolved* and *unending* desire. Yet, since Wackenroder emphasizes a final moment of resolution, though branding it a tearful, undesired resolution, this connection is not unfeasible. Indeed, he may well have recognized the anxiety inherent to *Sehnsucht* in that tension typical of the Classical style between 'stable' and 'unstable' tones respectively, which rises when tones move away from their own (contextually determined) key, decreases again when they approach this key, and is only (and for Wackenroder, who seems to strictly follow Wertherian *Sehnsucht*, sadly) resolved when eventually they return to the tonic by (regular) way of conclusion.

they are engaged in their own self-enclosed game – a prison-house of music – which touches the Romantic listener profoundly yet at the same time eludes him or her completely. The '*spielt um*', after all, suggests *Umspielen*: an almost physical nearness on the one hand, an encircling or entwining, but on the other hand a teasing distance, a dribbling round or past the listener's conceptual grasp.

Wackenroder's friend Ludwig Tieck, likewise fascinated by the *Sache selbst*-issue,<sup>7</sup> argues in a somewhat comparable manner in the *Phantasien*. Thus, in "Die Töne" (Tones) he describes the constitutive elements of music as "fluid", like

a transparent, crystal-clear stream. In the shimmering tones, the eye in fact often believes to see delightful, ethereal, and elevated figures trying to merge as one, working themselves up from the deep, growing clearer and clearer in the flowing tones. The true pleasure of music, however, is that it allows nothing to become a true reality [*daß sie nichts zu wahren Wirklichkeit gelangen läßt*], for with a glaring sound everything bursts [like a bubble] again, and new creations are in preparation. (Tieck [1799] 1886: 89, my translation)

Here, musical tones are condemned to what Paul de Man has defined in *Blindness and Insight* (1983) as a "persistently frustrated intent toward meaning" (de Man 1983: 129). As 'signs', the sounds of music are open, transparent like a water surface. Yet as such they do not allow the listener to 'see through' the looking glass and find a fixed and "true reality" on the other side. Rather, and hence the association of musical tones with a continuous flux, though possible 'signifieds' shimmer through the stream, they burst apart just before they reach the surface, just before they materialize as one, as concrete 'meaning'. Then, the whole process starts anew, with "new creations" in the making that likewise will never be finalized. As open signs, transparent and opaque at once, musical sounds thus not totally exclude a signified but continuously defer

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<sup>7</sup>In imitation of Wackenroder, Tieck declares instrumental music autonomous, radically separated from any mimetic (i.e. here: imitative) principle. Thus, he argues in "Die Töne" (Tones), sculpture, drawing, and painting derive their images, their subject-matter from living and identifiable nature – from a *dort* which is not themselves, however much "beautified" – and to that extent depend on it (Tieck 1886: 88). How different, he exclaims, it is with music! Music for him operates in the absence of a signified, always deferring its materialization, engaging the listener not in a play of make-belief and illusory recognition but in an infinite play of signifiers that 'speak nothing'. Its tones "do not imitate, do not beautify, they are a separate world onto themselves" (ibid.: 88). And again, in "Symphonien" (Symphonies): "In instrumental music, art is independent and free". Transposing, in typical Romantic fashion, the autonomy claimed for the Kantian transcendental subject to art and the aesthetic, Tieck states that art here "*writes its own laws*" in fantasizing "*playfully and without purpose*" – without any intent toward signification (Tieck 1886 : 95). This is what art should become in the Romantic mind: released from the dominance of the signified, it is to surrender itself to the dominance of the signifier *per se* as exemplified by the open and self-reflexive operations of instrumental music.

the realisation of a *determinate* signified. They raise, so to speak, a promise of meaning which is never made good, which evaporates in the very act of listening. The ear, here represented metaphorically as an eye that cannot 'see through' and cannot contain or retain a signified, is caught in an infinite, circular play of signifiers. To put it in Jos de Mul's words, in an endless, "unverifiable and uncontrollable process of meaning that must lack an ultimate signified" (De Mul [1990] 1999: 188).

It is not difficult to recognize in this persistently frustrated intent toward meaning the persistently frustrated intent toward fulfilment that characterises both *Sehnsucht*, Usher's feeling of a mighty unknown want, and Burke's self-divided and unresolved experience of the sublime-as-infinite. Indeed, if the latter explicitly concerns the infinite as unending process or movement, then Victor Cousin writes in his *Du vrai, du beau et du bien (On the True, the Beautiful, and the Good)* (1818, 1836) that the constant deferral of fixed signification (music's "weakness") precisely allows music to excite a sense of the infinite (music's "power"). Here, the sense of the infinite concerns not a metaphysical infinite, but an *indefiniteness* relative to the way in which instrumental music allows for infinite interpretation:<sup>8</sup>

Music pays for the immense power that it has been given; it awakens more than any art the sentiment of the infinite, because it is vague, obscure, indeterminate, in its effects. It is just the opposite art to sculpture, which bears less towards the infinite because everything in it is fixed with the last degree of precision. Such is the force and at the same time the feebleness of music that it expresses everything and expressing nothing in particular. (Cousin [1836] 1981: 318)

Like Wackenroder, Cousin states that music means nothing and everything at the same time, or rather, that it expresses something for everyone: "The same measure reminds one of a mountain, another of an ocean; the warrior finds in it heroic inspirations, the recluse religious inspirations" (ibid.: 319). No doubt, Cousin continues, "words determine musical expression but the merit then is in the word not in the music; and sometimes the word stamps the music with a precision that destroys it, and deprives it of its proper effects – vagueness, obscurity, monotony – but also fullness and profundity, I was about to say infinitude" (ibid.: 319). As with Tieck, the proper function of instrumental music is thus "to open to the imagination a limitless career" (ibid.: 318). This openness is then

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<sup>8</sup>Thus, it is indeed the aesthetic idea – rather than Kant's idea of reason in the mathematical sublime – that reigns supreme in these Romantic notions of the infinite. For a Friedrich von Schelling, De Mul points out, this aesthetic idea grants (finite) works of art an "unbounded quality", which implies, in a more or less poststructuralist train of thought, "that the meaning of the work of art contains an infinite number of possible interpretations that cannot be comprehended by finite [understanding], but can only surface in the fundamentally open history of the aesthetic experience of that work" (De Mul 1999: 12). This could justifiably be termed a textually infinite.

translated into music's apparently inherent ability to trigger a sense of the infinite as an indefinite postponement of resolution or, in visual terms, revelation. In so far as this coincides with the movements of *Sehnsucht* as never coming one step closer to an end or goal – as, in Jean Paul's Usherian terms, being ever in search of an object – one could say that both the early Romantic experience of music and *Sehnsucht* classify as an instance of Weiskel's liminal sublime: a hesitating before the limit of revelation, a moment never evolving beyond being on its way, which is experienced as painful and pleasurable at the same time.

### **Fragments and Aesthetic Ideas**

Such lingering or indecisiveness, always postponing resolution, may even coincide with what Jean Paul, in his *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (*Elementary Course in Aesthetics*) (1804), calls music's sonorous indeterminacy. Romantic sounds, he writes, such as the "wavelike ringing of a string or bell", materialize the idea of indefinite "expanse" as they ever-fade into the distance (Richter [1814] 1998: 15). Growing "faint in endless space", these sounds allow imagination to linger without end in what Jean Paul calls "a twilight realm of holy anticipation" (ibid.: 16, 18). Thus, Jean Paul defines the process of shimmering already outlined by Tieck in a *material* sense: in the endless echoing of (musical) sounds. As such, music embodies a semantic and a material diffuseness, an openness without bounds, conducive to the Romantic feeling of the infinite-as-indefinite (ibid.: 18).

Something similar had, in fact, been already observed by Carl Grosse (1768-1847) in his *Über das Erhabene* (*On the Sublime*) (1788). Critically elaborating on the notion of obscurity, and its centrality to the sublime as expounded by Burke and Beattie,<sup>9</sup> Grosse states that unclear or difficult ideas, unfinished things, silence, and emptiness overwhelm yet also activate the power of imagination, allowing it to freely fantasise (a favourite Romantic pastime) in an open space that has been left unseen or unsaid (Grosse [1788] 1990: 41). For that same reason,

A soft music heard from afar is much more stirring than heard in the concert hall; and the wavering tones of the distant [*Entfernung*, connoting separation] set off the power of imagination [*Einbildungskraft*] into a realm of scattering images; a few brushstrokes [*Züge*] suffice to inspire their course, just as they bring the passions to a greater intensity than full clarity and thoroughly painted [*ausgepinselte*] sketches. (ibid.: 41, my translation)

Interestingly, this indicates that for Grosse the sublime of sounds need not be restricted to the sonorous might discussed in the previous chapter. Rather, it also manifests itself in broken or faint tones signalling an indefinite expanse, a distant beyond: not an over- but an under-

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<sup>9</sup>Grosse issued a German translation of Beattie's *Dissertations* in 1790 (Zelle 1990: 82).

saturated presence, not an intrusive but an elusive presence that works its effects by concealing, withholding its full extent.<sup>10</sup>

It is difficult to assess the immediate influence, if any, of Grosse's ideas about obscurity, indeterminacy and the sublime on early Romantics like Jean Paul, Wackenroder, and Tieck. Carsten Zelle (1990), it is true, has already pointed to Tieck's enthusiasm for Grosse's literary work, while Dahlhaus (1978) shows that Tieck writes about the sublime in a letter of May 10, 1792 to Wackenroder (Zelle 1990: 82; Dahlhaus 1978: 62). It remains unclear, however, if Tieck's idea of an imagination caught in an unending play of signifiers while listening to musical tones is immediately derived from Grosse's notion of an indefinite, imaginative *Schwärmerei* related to the "obscurity in impression" of the (Burkean) sublime. At best, one could say that ideas of indeterminacy and indecisiveness which Jean Paul, Wackenroder, and Tieck connect to instrumental music, intersect with notions of the obscure as canonised, if you will, in mid- and late-eighteenth-century aesthetics of the sublime. Or that, hypothetically, these aesthetics formed the framework for the early Romantic aesthetics of the ambiguous, indefinite, and unfinished. The idea of incompleteness already centralised in British treatises on the sublime here becomes, in any case, a positive virtue and suggestiveness a standard: Romantic art is to shun the "sharp, closed outlines" of the plastic arts, to avoid imitation, and to undermine determinate sense (Richter 1998: 15).

Like his contemporaries, the poet-philosopher Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg) finds instrumental music most suitable to the purpose. He claims that in contrast to the painter, "not even the faintest suspicion of imitation [*Nachahmung*]" can fall on the musician (Novalis [1799] 1929: 354, my translation). This is because, as Wackenroder and Tieck had argued as well, there would be nothing in nature for the musician/composer to copy: s/he must create by herself an "independent" world for itself (*ibid.*: 354). This world would contain

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<sup>10</sup>In fact, while 'uncertain' or (semantically) indeterminate sounds thus signal the indeterminacy conducive to the sublime feeling, it is the organ of the ear that is, for Grosse, *already* most suited to an indefinite *Schwärmerei* (literally a swarming out or about, but also connoting a rapture or enthusiasm) of imagination. Given the obscurity that conditions the possibility of sublime evocation, Grosse remarks, "the ear is more suitable than the eye to create images and agitate the passions": a painted image, an image that can be seen with the eye, "rarely conceals something; it satisfies the soul too easily", while sounds, tones, or words heard would still require an image to be made (Grosse 1990: 41-42). Obscurity, in this way, presents the difficulty, the incitement to imaginative 'labour', without which the delight of the sublime cannot be felt, obstructing as it does the easy and instant satisfaction that is alien to the feeling of the sublime as well as the Romantic feeling of *Sehnsucht*. Both require a tension of indeterminacy, of invisibility, an openness in which something has not fully materialized just yet. Acting primarily on the ear, such obscurity thus favours the audible over the visual when it comes to the sublime: as with Burke, the aesthetics of the sublime here involves a privileging of the poetic and the musical as associated with the unseen and indefinite, over the pictorial as associated with the clear, and already-fulfilled (*ibid.*: 42).

nothing, or at least nothing empirical or verifiable, as its tones would imitate nothing. At the most, I have shown with respect to Tieck, they vaguely allude to something as yet unknown and undefined. If, as such, the tones constituting this separate and so-called autonomous other-world lack a definable empirical content (i.e. lack a precisely mediated, and determinable, content), and have at best an “indirect” referential capacity, their semantically incomplete or fragmentary status should stand as an example for a new form of literature:

Tales, without coherence, yet with associations, like *dreams*.  
Poems – merely *sounding well* and full of beautiful words – but also without any sense or coherence – at the most single stanzas intelligible – they must be like pure scraps [*Brockstücke*] of myriad things. At best, true poetry can have an *allegorical* sense on the whole, and an indirect effect like music, etc. (ibid.: 354)

In *The Romantic Generation*, Charles Rosen has already fully described how this notion of the fragment, of mostly incoherent, unintelligible, at best indirectly communicative ‘scraps’, is wound up with the construction of instrumental music as an art free “to manipulate its own forms and symbols, apparently without reference to a reality outside itself” (Rosen 1995: 76).<sup>11</sup> An art in which, to speak in present-day terminology, access to the signified is cut off as it encloses itself in “an endless metonymy of signifiers” that can be freely and endlessly manipulated (De Mul 1999: 189). To recall Tieck: “In instrumental music...art is *independent and free, it writes its own laws, it fantasises playfully and without purpose*” – and without unequivocal referential ties (Tieck 1886d: 95). Rosen in this instance detects a tendency in earlier nineteenth-century Germany to model the arts of literature and painting after instrumental music: writers and painters “try to liberate the elements of [their] art from external reference [i.e. the eighteenth-century concept of imitation] and to acquire the same power over them that the musician had over his notes” (ibid.: 76). To acquire, that is, ‘independence’, to create a world that “does not depend on reality..., but runs parallel to it” (ibid.: 78).

Thus, Ludwig Tieck’s *Verkehrte Welt (The Upside-Down World)* stands as a “genuine homage to the art of music”: not so much because of its

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<sup>11</sup>For the aesthetics of the fragment, see Rosen (1995: 48-51). As Rosen observes, the Romantic fragment – captured by Schlegel in the image of a hedgehog which, when threatened, retreats into itself, yet its quills pointing outward at the same time – is “a closed structure, but its closure is a formality: it may be separated from the rest of the universe, but it implies the existence of what is outside of itself not by reference but by [semantic] instability. The form is not fixed but is torn apart or exploded by paradox, by ambiguity” (ibid.: 51). Or differently said, while the fragment was, for Schlegel, to be a “finished form”, it is “the content that is incomplete” – the fragment thus at once posits and undermines its own limits (ibid.: 50). Schlegel, though, differs significantly from Novalis.

incorporation of musical genres, as because it disturbs and questions "the relation of part to whole, of art to reality" through, for instance, "paradoxical self-references" (ibid.: 76, 77). If such disturbances in the art-reality relationship in literature problematized direct and unequivocal referentiality to a stable outside world, critics also projected the instability of meaning ascribed to contemporary instrumental music onto the field of painting. For one, as Rosen points out, Friedrich Schiller's 1794 review of Friedrich Matthisson's poems makes a case for the liberation of the "arts of poetry and painting from a narrow dependence on a fixed content [that] allows free range to the possibilities of meaning" and meaning-making on the part of the reader or viewer (ibid.: 130). In this way, the suggestiveness that Twining had attributed to music five years earlier becomes, or is propagated to become, symptomatic of all the arts. The more 'incomplete' and ambiguous the sign, it seems, the better.<sup>12</sup>

True, I hasten to add, Schiller here argues not so much for instrumental music as for the (Kantian) aesthetic idea as a 'model' for the arts. He even states that the poet has an advantage over the composer and painter in that s/he "can put a text to each feeling, can support the symbol of imaginative power by the content and give it a specific direction" (ibid.: 130). However, Schiller continues in a fashion remarkably similar to Burke and Beattie, the poet

must not forget that his interference in these affairs has its limits. He may...allude to these feelings, but he must not spell them out himself, must not intrude on the imaginative powers of his readers. Every closer definition [*nähere Bestimmung*] will be felt here as a burdensome limitation, for the attraction of such *aesthetic ideas* lies precisely in the fact that we look into the content itself as into a bottomless depth [*eine grundlose Tiefe*]. (ibid.: 130)

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<sup>12</sup>By way of example, Rosen refers to the more advanced landscape painters such as Richard Wilson, John Robert Cozens, and later, John Constable and J.W. Turner, whose landscapes in Rosen's view "conveyed feelings and ideas like music, without reference to history or myth, merely by the arrangement of the elements of nature on canvas" (Rosen 1995: 131). Indeed, Rosen shows, in a letter of 1824 written to a friend on account of the first exhibition of his pictures at Paris, Constable considers the French reproach that his pictures lack a well-defined content as the highest praise: "they want the objects more formed & defined, &c., and say that they are like the rich preludes in musick, and the full harmonious warblings of the Aeolian lyre...Is not some of this *blame* the highest *praise*?" (ibid.: 75). It should in this instance, however, be realized that nineteenth- and twentieth-century composers ranging from Hector Berlioz to Richard Wagner, Claude Debussy and Igor Stravinsky looked to *painting* to achieve through instrumental timbre "a certain vagueness or lack of precision in conveying sensations" (Lockspeiser 1973: 15). Carl Maria von Weber was, for that matter, an important source of inspiration for especially Wagner and Debussy: his "orchestra 'in primary colours', so to speak, provides classic examples of instrumental timbre suggesting atmosphere or character...His use of timbres in operatic works may nowadays strike us as rudimentary, yet it was precisely these rudimentary notions of instrumental colour that opened the way to the opulent instrumental orchestra of the Impressionists" (ibid.: 15).

It just so happens that to the early Romantics this “bottomless depth” is considered paradigmatic of the allegedly abstract and conceptless art of instrumental music:<sup>13</sup> the abyss [*Abgrund*] of the Kantian sublime in which imagination fears to lose itself becomes, in the hands of writers like Tieck, a bottomless depth or without-ground [*Ungrund*] in which the listener *longs* to lose herself, expanding her imagination in an open space of infinite interpretation. Indeed, the ‘bottomless depth’ that Schiller clearly adapts from Kant’s third *Critique* appears like the distant, open future of the *Sehnsüchtiger*. A future in which anything can yet still occur or take shape – in which things may never stop becoming and the Goethian ‘mists’ of youthful promise find their aesthetic equivalent. Or, as Roland Barthes – like an echo of Novalis – has more recently inscribed these mists into the musical genre of the *Fantasie*: “*Fantasieren*: at once to imagine and to improvise:...to hallucinate, i.e., to produce the novelistic without constructing a novel...in short, a pure *wandering*, a becoming without finality: at one stroke, and to infinity, to begin everything all over again” (Barthes [1976] 1991: 291).

### **Expectation Without End**

So far, I have tried to show in what ways instrumental music in its later eighteenth-century conceptions is represented as being especially conducive to a feeling of *Sehnsucht*. This feeling of *Sehnsucht*, in turn, parallels in many respects the aporetic structure of Burke’s inconclusive experience of artificial infinity and Usher’s unresolved sublime feeling as a mighty unknown want. It is an experience at odds with itself, in so far as imagination fails to grasp something as a whole, to fix a boundary, yet at the same time – and because of this inability – joyfully deems itself ever-expanding in an open, undetermined space ahead.

In chapter 2, with reference to Burke, I have represented this process as an expectation without end. The power of imagination here operates in a suspension that indefinitely postpones any full and definite determination of a figure or form. Interestingly, it is precisely this process which music-critic, writer, and composer E.T.A. Hoffmann will put to the

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<sup>13</sup>This intricate relation between instrumental music and aesthetic ideas was in fact put forward by Christian Friedrich Michaelis. In the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* vol. 9, no. 44, of 1807, Michaelis links instrumental music to the aesthetic idea in the following way: “it is precisely on account of this representational vagueness that music more nearly approaches aesthetic ideas the more it distances itself from intellectual concepts. For aesthetic ideas, products of reason and imagination, transcend all the constraints that bind the intellect to the everyday world. Now if music arouses the imagination by its images, which are wordless and merely internally felt and perceived, it simultaneously arouses reason..., hinting at or projecting in shadowy detail that very attractive element which is never expressed in full detail and cannot be realized with absolute clarity” (Michaelis [1807] 1981: 287). That is to say, because the ‘images’ of music are not of this world, are empirically empty, music ostensibly has an inherently transcendent quality that brings it closest to the aesthetic idea. See also Neubauer (1986).

fore in his Beethoven-criticism between 1810 and 1815. As I have already argued in the last chapter, Hoffmann here formulates a musical experience of *Sehnsucht* while drawing on the discourse of the sublime. In fact, elaborating on the Romantic, impossible longing for the infinite, he will capitalise on the then established notion of the “sublime style” as – Carl Dahlhaus has put it long ago – really being the “symphonic” (i.e. purely instrumental) style in his famous 1810 review of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony (Dahlhaus 1978: 63).<sup>14</sup> Before, however, turning to this review, I will first explore the idea of an expectation without end in Hoffmann’s lesser known 1812 review of Beethoven’s *Coriolan* Overture. While it remains unclear if Hoffmann was in fact familiar with Burke’s *Enquiry*, I will show that thematically his analysis nevertheless overlaps quite tellingly with Burke’s idea of the artificial infinite as evoked through sounds.

To start with, the *Coriolan* review in many ways recalls what James Harris and James Beattie (whose illustrations on sublimity from the *Dissertations* already circulated in Grosse’s translation as of 1785) had defined as the ‘preparatory’ role of instrumental music: it is to create the right anticipatory mood for a story yet to be told or a spectacle yet to be performed (Zelle 1990: 82). Indeed, Hoffmann observes, “every truly meaningful play should have an overture, which would tune [*stimmte*] the mind precisely in the way that the nature of the play requires” (Hoffmann [1812] 1988: 94, my translation). In the *Enquiry*, Burke had already explained how the steady repetition of similar, sonorous strokes could make for precisely such a tense anticipating conducive to the sublime feeling:

When the ear receives any simple sound, it is struck by a single pulse of the air, which makes the ear-drum and the other membranous parts vibrate according to the nature and species of the stroke. If the stroke be strong, the organ of hearing suffers a considerable degree of tension. If the stroke be repeated pretty soon after, the repetition causes an expectation of another stroke. *And it must be observed, that expectation itself causes a tension... But though after a number of strokes, we expect still more, not being able to ascertain the exact time of their arrival, when they arrive, they produce a sort of surprise, which increases this tension yet further.* For, I have observed, that when at any time I have waited very earnestly for some sound, that returned at intervals, (as the successive firing of cannons) *though I fully expected the return of the sound, when it came, it always made me start a little;* the ear-drum suffered a convulsion, and the whole body consented with it. The tension of the part thus increasing at every blow, by the united forces of

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<sup>14</sup>Dahlhaus further observes that in Hoffmann’s texts the “idea of absolute music – the thesis that instrumental music is the ‘real’ or ‘proper’ [*eigentliche*] music – is...associated with the aesthetics of the sublime. Music ‘released’ from verbal and functional determinations ‘elevates’ [*erhebt*] itself above the limitations of the finite as a hint [*Ahnung*] of the infinite” (Dahlhaus 1978: 63).

the stroke itself, the expectation, and the surprise, it is worked up to such a pitch as to be capable of the sublime; it is brought just to the verge of pain. (Burke 1990: IV, sect. XI, 126-127, my italics)

Burke is here once more describing the effect created by the artificial infinite, adding to this the effect of suspense: when he hears a stroke steadily repeated, he almost automatically expects an other one, and this expectation alone strains him to such an extent that the next stroke – however much anticipated – surprises him just the same. “We still wonder”, to speak with Adam Smith, “though forewarned of what we are to see”, or rather, in this case, of what we are to hear (Smith [1795] 1996: 233). Surprise, in this instance, comes not from a complete absence of fore-knowledge but from a partial fore-knowledge provided by a hint of something ‘next’ to come – though one does not know exactly when or how it will arrive. As in twentieth-century cinematic thrillers, one half expects something (horrid) to happen and it is precisely this expectation which builds up tension to “the verge of pain”, causing one to “start” (not) a little when it happens after all.

Knowingly or unknowingly transposing such a Burkean enervation of expectation to the *Coriolan* Overture, Hoffmann points out how tension is created by means of repeated, shrill F minor *tutti*-chords. The chords are preceded by a dim, deep and unharmonized C played by the violins, cello’s, and double basses, and succeeded by a teasing silence that Hoffmann immediately labels a “death silence” [*Totenstille*] (Hoffmann 1988: 95). This process is repeated three times, the intermittent silences building up tension, and the F minor chord mounting harmonically, until finally two *tutti*-chords prepare for the Allegro theme:

Allegro non tanto

The image shows a page of a musical score for a symphony. At the top, the tempo marking "Allegro non tanto" is centered. Below it, there are eleven staves of music, each labeled with an instrument: Fl. (Flute), Oboe, Clar. in B (Clarinet in B-flat), Bass., Horn in F. (Horn in F), Trpt. in C (Trumpet in C), Timp. in C/G (Timpani in C/G), Vla. I (Violin I), Vla. II (Violin II), Vla. (Viola), and Cel. (Cello). The music is written in a standard musical notation with a key signature of one flat and a 3/4 time signature. The score is complex, with many notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

All this, for Hoffmann, strains mind and body: “everything winds up expectation, yes, it oppresses the listener’s breast; it is the terrifying, threatening murmuring of approaching thunder” (ibid.: 95). That is to say, it is as *if* a thunderstorm were approaching, something that will suddenly break through, overwhelming the listener, the scope and force of which cannot be fully predicted. Or, as Peter Schnaus has observed in his *E.T.A. Hoffmann als Beethoven-Rezensent* (1977), this concerns not so much a physical as a “mental thunderstorm [*Geistergewitter*]... truly surprising, too direct, almost like a sudden change of style [*Stilbruch*], for which no plausible explanation can be given” (Schnaus 1977: 105, my translation). If, moreover, expectation is raised to a near unbearable pitch here, tension according to Hoffmann by no means subsides with the presentation of the Allegro theme to which the introductory chords lead. On the contrary, this theme only enhances excitement: it “has the character”, Hoffmann maintains, “of an unrest that cannot be stilled, of a *Sehnsucht* that cannot be satisfied” (Hoffmann 1988: 97). Unexpected transitions, syncopations, and continually ascending and descending

scales in eights, repeated in various keys would, amongst others, account for this sustained sense of irresolution.

Writing in the Romantic tradition of Wackenroder, Tieck, and Jean Paul, Hoffmann would not want it otherwise, would not want rest or resolution. As I will explain more detailedly below with respect to Hoffmann's review of Beethoven's Fifth, he wants the tension of expectation and unfulfilled desire to continue not till but till *after* the close of the music. For this reason, Hoffmann doubly denies the *Coriolan* Overture the sense of an ending. Firstly, he argues that though the Overture directs its listener to a determinate end or idea – namely the ensuing play – it also transcends that end: “the dark, terrible seriousness of [the *Coriolan* Overture], the horror-rousing resonances [*Anklänge*] from an unknown spiritual world allow one to intimate [*ahnen*] more than is afterwards fulfilled” (ibid.: 94). That is to say, somewhat like the Kantian aesthetic idea, the Overture allows one to think (and feel) more than what Collins's play presents. It apparently captures the tragic in such a general – yet exact – way that it could equally, and for Hoffmann more appropriately, be linked to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*.

Secondly, Hoffmann tries to show how the Overture would deny its own musical ending in directing the listener not to a satisfying conclusion but taking her back to the initial state of nervous expectation. Approvingly, he observes how the Overture ends with a sinister tone of the bassoon, here relating to the fundamental tone as fifth, the ‘plaintive’ tone of the violins, and the dim, short strokes of the double basses: all this would not bring about relief, but reinforce once more a tense expectation of that which is about to come, of that which is still hid behind the curtains on stage (ibid.: 100). The listener is allegedly as (half-)blind and uncertain as s/he was at the beginning.

### **A Performance of Infinity**

This idea of an endless, tense expectation also dominates Hoffmann's 1810 review of Beethoven's Symphony in C minor. Notably, if the feeling of *Sehnsucht* requires a without-destination or -limit in which one can desire, anticipate without end, then for Hoffmann – as for his Romantic contemporaries – instrumental music, rather than music with words, is of all the arts its most appropriate medium. Vocal music, he maintains, does not allow for “indefinite yearning” [*unbestimmtes Sehnen*] but can only “present affects signified through words as experienced in the realm of the infinite” (Hoffmann [1810] 1988: 25). This does not merely imply that contemporary instrumental music such as Beethoven's captures the real emotional thing, the emotion ‘itself’, while words are one step removed from it. It also means that words do not allow for that indeterminacy which, translated into existential terms, can make for infinite desire. Differently said: instrumental music is more successful in the deferral of determination.

To this extent, instrumental music is for Hoffmann the most “Romantic” of all arts, if not “the only *purely* Romantic” art – which is to

say, to recall Jean Paul, expansive in the sense of an indefinite continuation into a distant yonder:

Music opens up an unknown realm to [wo/]man; a world which has nothing in common with the surrounding, external world of sense, and in which [s/]he abandons all conceptually determinable feelings to devote himself [or herself] to the unsayable. (ibid.: 23)

Or, as Hoffmann remarks in “Beethoven’s Instrumental Musik” (“Beethoven’s Instrumental Music”) (1813) – a reworking of the 1810 review – on the same issue: the sole subject of music is the infinite [*nur das Unendliche ist ihr Vorwurf*], so that when one speaks of music as an independent art, one should in fact be specifically referring to music purely instrumental (Hoffmann [1813] 1947a: 57, my translation).<sup>15</sup> Have you, Hoffmann rants, ever realized this ‘true’ nature and subject of music, “you miserable composers of instrumental music, as you toil to present determinable emotions, yes even concrete events? – How could it ever have dawned on you to treat the very art which stands in opposition to the plastic arts in a plastic manner?” (ibid.: 57). You have sinned, for you have degraded that God which – in the Romantic mind – is music, to the realm of the visible and sayable.<sup>16</sup> Pictures show, make known, words name, define, but instrumental music intimates and, in Hoffmann’s rendering of it, becomes most true to its Romantic ‘nature’ when ever and only preparing for, or working toward, instead of confirming or concluding something. When, that is, allowing for a continued unresolvedness and ambiguity in which infinite *Sehnsucht* thrives.

It should here be kept in mind that this idea of instrumental music as, if you will, infinite movement is – in relation to musical practices of the later eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century – hardly ever more than just that: an idea. As Daniel Chua argues in *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (1999), Romantic theorists like the Schlegel brothers, Novalis, Tieck, or Hoffmann

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<sup>15</sup>To be sure, when Hoffmann thus links instrumental music to the infinite, he is thinking of some metaphysical realm ‘up there’ to which the Romantic listener is elevated when captured and transported by sounds-without-words. As with most of his Romantic contemporaries, R. Murray Schafer observes, Hoffmann deems music to have “descended from some higher realm to infuse the world”, and “whoever would experience its quintessence must rise to meet it” (Schafer 1975: 161). To my mind, however, Hoffmann also connotes the idea of the infinite as the indefinite, which is to say, as an infinite postponement of resolution allowing for the sustenance of tensions – and pleasures – of uncertainty. I will here focus on this interpretation of the idea of infinity.

<sup>16</sup>For the religious significance which Hoffmann, like Jean Paul, attributes to music, and for his reconception of musical listening in terms of the *Andacht* (attention) required for praying, see Hoffmann’s “Alte und neue Kirchmusik” (“Ancient and Modern Church Music”) (1814).

did not hear a 'Romantic music', for Romanticism, so they claimed, is not an epoch or a style but an essence that pervades all art that is genuinely Art... What they heard were basically symphonies of a Stamitz or Haydn, and they renamed the music as their own. So for Hoffmann, Haydn and Mozart are Romantic composers in retrospect, for they were instrumental composers, writing a music latent with Romantic concepts... (Chua 1999: 178)

Thus, Chua concludes, "by the time someone like Schumann [born in 1810] produced those cyclical, open-ended fragments that emulate Romantic philosophy, it was already too late. In Schumann, Romanticism had become a literary device", as, perhaps, it had for Chopin (ibid.: 178). His second Ballade, op. 38, opens with a siciliano melody in F major that suggests in musical sounds the Lockean-like idea of infinity of stasis and progress at once, defying not just the sense of an ending but also that of a beginning :



Here, Peter Rummenh ler observes in *Romantik in der Musik* (1989), "the start avoids beginning" in a triple upbeat, a prelude-without-origin which delays, postpones its 'next': the listener "misses [vers umt]" a beginning, and the music as it were surfaces "out of eternity into temporality" (Rummenh ler 1989: 119-120), my translation). Throughout its 42 measures the Andantino defies "musical memory", in so far as it undermines the listener's ability to integrate what has already been heard into the present moment and, at the same time, to anticipate what will come after: what comes is the recurrence of the same, "and yet slightly different, as if it had never started and will never end" (ibid.: 120). Appropriately, the ending of the Andantino in measure 46 is not an ending but rather a rupture, a bridgeless transition, one could say, to the violent second theme, which, Rummenh ler rightfully observes, "is just as sweet as it is arbitrary" (ibid.: 120).



Nevertheless, if this unresolved experience of infinity – what I would call an Usherian ‘alternative’ sublime experience – can be related to Chopin’s ‘Romantic devices’, then Hoffmann already grants similar devices to that early-nineteenth-century symphony which for him opens up a field of unending yearning: Beethoven’s Fifth. Thus, Hoffmann repeatedly alludes to a persistent tactic of delay in the Symphony, which creates precisely the tense experiential effect that Locke and Burke attributed to the idea of infinity: the feeling of never coming one jot closer to an end, the illusion of endless progress which ultimately builds on stasis. Chua, in this instance, accounts for the “intensifying effect” that Hoffmann attributes to especially the Symphony’s third movement by pointing to the phrase extensions repeatedly postponing resolution: as “anticipatory structures”, he observes, they are “anacrusic in content and form, delaying and deferring the downbeats both within the phrase and as part of the structure” (Chua 1999: 252, 253). These structures are, moreover, “repeated end on end, piling up anticipation after anticipation, with each repetition extended to intensify the force of expectation” (ibid.: 253). As with the *Coriolan* Overture, repetition makes for anxiety. Here, in parallel to the C minor Symphony, the sense of a speedy and seemingly unstoppable thrust forward was excited by “rapidly progressing modulations”, yet what these modulations offered was a steady return of “the same phrase” – albeit ever new and different (Hoffmann 1988: 100). Restless and relentless [*rastlos*], Hoffmann remarks, the same phrase hurries from one key to another and arguably it may be this (false) impression of a modulation-without-end, stasis and progressive movement in one, that makes for an anxiety-without-end.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, Hoffmann continues in his 1810 review, in Beethoven’s Fifth this anxiety persists all the way through. It is again intensified, firstly, after the climax to the development of the fourth movement’s opening theme – when Beethoven quotes the theme of the preceding Scherzo – and, secondly, during the coda of the finale. Here, Hoffmann claims, an ending is ever postponed. The chord which the listener hears as the final chord is sounded three times over, with full-measure silences in-between, and again over three measures in quarter notes, then silence, then once more the same chord, and finally once more silence, followed by the

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<sup>17</sup>Within the tonal bounds of the Classical style, unending modulation – which would deny a tonal centre – is of course impossible: somewhere, namely at the close of the Overture, the ‘relentless’ modulation is bound to return to the home key. Tension, differently said, is bound to be resolved.

last *tutti*-chord on C (ibid.: 40). Thus, as the music cannot seem to get it over with, the mind is stirred anew through these chords which for Hoffmann recall the earlier Allegro strokes: “they act like a fire which one believed to have been put out but repeatedly bursts forth again in bright tongues of flame” (ibid.: 41).

A Burkean artificial infinite, if you will, announcing itself toward the close of the Symphony thus appears to subvert the tranquillity attending (gradual) conclusion and even conclusion itself. For now, or so it seems, the listener’s expectation of inevitably repeated strokes is roused once more and even the final chord apparently cannot successfully counter this uncertainty with an ultimate and conclusive sense of resolution: the same “nameless and ominous *Sehnsucht*” captures Hoffmann to the very end, and, yes, even after it “he cannot release himself from that wondrous spiritual world where pain and pleasure envelop him in sounds” (ibid.: 41). Though the music has already died away, Hoffmann continues to feel the pains and pleasures of uncertain anticipation – of, to speak in Wertherian terms, presentation or *Darstellung* ever deferred: the end never really comes for Hoffmann, and so fixation, revelation, and relaxation remain suspended. Only this unrest, Hoffmann remarks in 1813, “excites that unknown, that wonderful premonitory [*ahnendes*] feeling” which is an end in itself, the “spirit willingly surrendering itself to dreams in which it deems to recognize the...infinite” (Hoffmann [1813] 1947: 84, my translation). Or, as Chua recaptures Hoffmann’s analysis: the C minor Symphony has no end, its final chord is “not the end”, its

final “cadences can only be repeated as finality without end; the music keeps on ending – even after the final barlines” (ibid.: 255). Instrumental music here outwits itself, as it appears to perform what theorists like Hoffmann perceive of as its Romantic ‘essence’: infinitude.

### **Hoffmann’s Sublime-as-Sehnsucht**

There is, of course, something extremely doubtful about the reality of this performance. For clearly and undeniably conceived within the traditional framework of sonata form – no matter how “fantastically” its parts have, according to Hoffmann, been interconnected here – the C minor Symphony gravitates around a tonal centre to which the music inevitably returns at the close: a triumph over uncertainty and ambiguity, one might say, hammered out over and over again during the finale in the home key (ibid.: 41). Seen in this light, the finale embodies an ultimate mastery over tension incessantly worked up, a heroic gesture that wipes out all the conflicts encountered along the way. It is, as such, far from sustaining any tension of indeterminacy till after its own sounding. Indeed, harmonically speaking, tension (harmonic ambiguity) is required and introduced here only in so far as it constitutes a necessary occasion to re-instate rest and resolution; to allow for an eventual delight of relief and confirmation.

If this echoes the principle at work in the Kantian sublime, that is no accident: here too, tension is introduced for the benefit of an ultimate, decisive re-affirmation of self. To recall Theresa de Lauretis, not despite but precisely due to intermittent conflicts and ambiguities, this is an experience impelled by a movement forward toward resolution. Hoffmann’s continued sense of expectation, in this instance, likewise points to such a forward motion. Indeed, it might well be argued that his unresolved feeling of *Sehnsucht* – passing by the Symphony’s concluding strokes – is only seemingly unresolved, impelled by a resolution of a different kind: a resolution yet to be accomplished, a process yet to be fulfilled.

To illustrate the point, consider Reinhold Brinkmann’s observations on the idea of form as process in Beethoven’s symphonic works: a form which concerns the “compositional fleshing out” of the temporal process in music (Brinkmann 2000: 17). Characterised by “the metaphor of an arrow”, rather than that of a self-enclosed circle, form as process feeds on an openness that is only apparent and in fact misleading. What it does is that it gradually unfolds an ultimate finality in

a chain of events which invariably refers beyond itself, a chain of events that does not conclude but progresses, continually pressing forward, in which the processes create a dynamic experience of time. The goal of a form originated in this way lies at the end of the work, or even beyond the work itself. Finality is its organising principle; all symphonies organised as processes are ‘finale symphonies’. (ibid.: 17)

Connected to this could be Hoffmann's repeated allusions to a whole, a *Ganze*, dominating the C minor Symphony which can, however, not in any way make itself apparent [*dartun kann*] on the level of sensibility: a whole beyond the individual parts and phrases heard, and which these parts and phrases can only gesture toward (Hoffmann 1988: 41). Thus, Hoffmann states with respect to the Symphony's first movement, "all secondary ideas, all intermediary phrases" rhythmically relate to the simple *short-short-short-long* theme, and only serve to gradually "unfold the nature of the whole [*Ganze*]" that this theme "can only allude to" (ibid.: 33). In themselves, the "elements" of the Symphony hardly make any sense, only create the impression of something "fragmented, hard to grasp": they only have their function and significance within the "structure [*Einrichtung*] of the whole...which captures the mind in a nameless *Sehnsucht*" (ibid.: 33). This whole, however, can only be hinted at even by the central theme, as if it were something absolute hovering beyond the music heard – something as yet unreachable that holds the mind suspended till after the music's very end.

To understand this organicist idea of an imperceptible whole determining the development of a musical work (and justifying its internal complexities), one can compare Hoffmann's experience of Beethoven's Fifth to the way in which the nineteenth-century left-wing historian and critic of music Franz Brendel represents the feeling of musical *Sehnsucht* in Beethoven's symphonic works. Brendel (in)famously focused on the political, so called 'revolutionary' movements in Beethoven's music. In his introductory editorial for the *Neuen Zeitschrift für Musik* (*The New Journal for Music*) of January 1, 1845 he already claimed: "Until the year 1830 Mozart ruled, and Beethoven failed to achieve general recognition. Revolutionary movements installed the revolutionary Beethoven on the throne, and year by year Mozart receded ever more into the distance" (Schmitt 1990: 175).<sup>18</sup> In his well-known *Geschichte der Musik* (*The History of Music*) (1852, 1889), Brendel more specifically defined the difference between Mozart and Beethoven by branding the former a composer of the past, and the latter a composer of the future, inspiring unending *Sehnsucht*:

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<sup>18</sup>In so far, Ulrich Schmitt points out, as the *music* of the French Revolution of 1789 actually resounded in Beethoven's work – Schmitt points to Cherubini's *Hymn du Panthéon* (1794) antedating the so called *klopf*-motif in Beethoven's Fifth, the parallels already detected by Robert Schumann between Beethoven's Fifth and Méhul's G minor Symphony, the French 'fear and trembling' opera resurging in Beethoven's *Fidelio*, and what has more generally been called the French musical *élan terrible* echoing in Beethoven's symphonies – it shared, in the eyes of early-nineteenth-century critics, a tendency toward the colossal, new, and out-of-bound with the work of Cherubini, Grétry, and Méhul: massive sonorities, rapid modulations, abrupt harmonic transitions, startling dissonances, fast-forward thrusting rhythmic figures, sharply contrasting dynamics and giant crescendos (Schmitt 1990: 191-220, 52-64). It was, however, only with Brendel that the *political* movements of Revolution are explicitly heard and read into Beethoven's work.

Beethoven is filled with the substance of the nineteenth century, with the striving for freedom, for the realisation of this highest aim of humanity; that is why there is in his music a break with the already-existing [*mit dem Bestehenden*]...; he does not bring the satisfaction of pleasure, of the full possession of presentation [*Darstellung*], he only sings the craving for yearning [*Sehnsucht*]. Beethoven therefore opens up to us a window on an unending future, while Mozart stands arrested in his own time. (Schmitt 1990: 174)

Beethoven in Brendel's representation breaks with the old, the new not having yet been fully realized. It is a music of discontinuity with the past and continuity with the future. As such, as a music of the future, it resists the pleasurable possession of complete presentation or concretisation. It points to something beyond imaginative grasp, something as yet unaccomplished that transcends any known standard: the idea of freedom as the highest human destiny. It is a music signalling a not-yet, though this not-yet is not something entirely unknown and other but rather something that can be envisioned as homecoming, as utopia. Indeed, Brendel states, Beethoven's music signals a future "heaven on earth" (ibid.: 174). If, however, it is this hint of a future homecoming that invokes the feeling of *Sehnsucht*, then this *Sehnsucht* comes uncomfortably close to the Kantian model of sublime experience – especially as concerns the absence of the full possession of presentation in the face of a destiny ahead or above. Thus, just as in Kant's third *Critique* the felt impossibility of full imaginative grasp points to a higher, supersensible vocation, so Brendel here posits Beethoven's music as pointing to a high destiny *in* its very tendency to resist the pleasure of imaginative or presentational possession. Freedom remains as task, as destiny, as future, and this future already fulfils the lack felt on account of the absence of presentation.

Seen in this light, the idea of an "unending future" is not the idea of a radically open or undetermined space ahead but a fixed goal that will have been reached: a goal not yet accomplished that determines the movements of the present as necessarily and inadvertently, to Brendel's mind, moving toward it. Or, differently said, as a glorious or fulfilling future, the unending future stands as an end or culmination. This end defines the present in typically modernist fashion as a progressive, ever-forward moving struggle. Paradoxically, therefore, Brendel's representation of Beethoven's work as a music of the unending future stresses the momentousness of the future as closure; the all-resolving moment of apotheosis. Comparable to the idea of form as process, the tension of indeterminacy and ambiguity here ultimately reveals itself as a purposeful, intermediary tension: it pertains to a larger, gradually unfolding process that finds its destiny in the future.

Hoffmann's review of Beethoven's Fifth, it is true, likewise tends toward such an inherent destiny located not simply at the end but beyond the work. This destiny must, as it were, be heard as projected

backward onto its individually 'fragmentary' parts and elements for these parts and elements to be experienced as a meaningful whole. Thus, though apparently lacking or at least resisting any finality, the Symphony ultimately seems to be determined by an imaginary point of focus which, as yet beyond scope, motivates its complexities and difficulties.<sup>19</sup> The consequence of this could be that Hoffmann's musical *Sehnsucht*-experience of the C minor Symphony, constituted by the gradually unfolding process of an absolute whole, is determined by a moment of closure which stands as a closure in the future. The absence of 'possession' might here refer to the incompleteness of an ongoing, as yet un-finalized process. This incompleteness is, though, nevertheless motivated by the presence-in-absence of an eventual goal 'beyond'.

Such a reading of Hoffmann's *Sehnsucht* will, however, not do full justice to either his specific experience of Beethoven's Fifth or to the idea of *Sehnsucht* as I have traced it so far. Thus, for one thing, Brendel connects the feeling of *Sehnsucht* to a future homecoming that will have been accomplished. Yet I have shown in the preceding pages that the feeling of *Sehnsucht* does not imply a construction but a deconstruction of the future as *destiny*: it is pervaded by the ironic awareness of not or no longer having a future, of never coming closer to an end or goal, as this end or goal is itself always uncovered as illusory rather than affirming. Romantic *Sehnsucht*, as Jos de Mul puts it, is pervaded by a sense of "the fundamental *finiteness* of aspiring to the infinite", of "the fundamental unachievability" of such aspirations (De Mul 1999: 11, 10). It is, in turn, this "self-critical" irony which subverts "the illusion" of those final goals and all-embracing, absolute destinies that critics like Brendel invoke to colonise the future (ibid.: 10).

In Hoffmann's review of Beethoven's Fifth such a self-critical irony manifests itself in the idea of progress – a process gradually unfolding toward its future destiny – ultimately revealing itself as *stasis*. The dominant trope here is return, an incessant return to a starting point, which constantly blocks the possibility of advancement, let alone an all-resolving apotheosis. This is, secondly, reinforced by the internal duality of the experience that Hoffmann describes. As if an internally splitting feeling, Hoffmann's *Sehnsucht* oscillates between a pleasure and a pain that often amounts to rather more than the pangs of desire: expectation here not only connotes eagerness but also fearful distress. Thus, at the introduction of the second theme of the symphony's first movement, the restless anticipation inherent to Hoffmann's *Sehnsucht* almost automatically flows over into a terror – an *ängstlicher Sehnsucht* – that can never be entirely removed (Hoffmann 1988: 30). Beethoven's instrumental music, Hoffmann claims in one, "moves the levers of horror, of fear, of dread, of pain, and rouses that endless *Sehnsucht* which is the essence of Romanticism" (ibid.: 41). It is as if the openness or indeterminacy required for endless *Sehnen* can instantly and almost

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<sup>19</sup>See for this Burnham (1995). I will get back to Burnham in chapter 8.

imperceptibly change colour, now providing a limitless space in which imagination longs to lose itself, intimating the infinite, now exciting a dread of the unknown: a fearing the worst.

Thirdly, and in relation to this, Hoffmann's musical *Sehnsucht* lacks a linear, internal development. Displaying an even more radically provisional character than Weiskel's liminal sublime feeling, it never evolves beyond being on its way, trapped as it is in its own repetitive structure. As such, this experience cannot be easily overcome by the listening subject. Thus, Hoffmann reports being steeped in one and the same "persistent" feeling of *Sehnsucht* oscillating between pain and pleasure, rather than progressing to a higher self-realisation (ibid.: 41). In so far as this double-sided feeling can thus neither be resolved nor transcended, it lacks the narrative unfolding that typifies Kant's variety of the sublime feeling. There is, for Hoffmann, no climactic breakthrough, no definitive 'sublime turning'; there is only a continued frustration relative to what he experiences as an ever-deferred relief or resolution. What, in Kantian terms, is emphasized here is the *sustained failure* of imagination's desire to grasp the ungraspable. Or, as Carl Dahlhaus has proposed, in his 1810 review Hoffmann reworks Kantian sublime experience by trading what I have called the final victorious moment of closure-in-transcendence for a perpetual "unrest" – an unrest that already mimes the flux and instability typical of the Romantically infinite (Dahlhaus 1988: 108, my translation).

Hoffmann thus, so to speak, (accidentally) decapitates the Kantian sublime feeling by denying any follow-up to the subject's painful sense of inadequacy. This is what recalls the idea of an 'alternative' sublime as I have traced it so far: comparable to Burke's unresolved experience of infinity (which itself assumes the indeterminacy associated with the infinite), Hoffmann presents an experience not just of the infinite, but one which takes on *itself* the openness, inconclusiveness, and namelessness of that infinite systematically eluding the desiring subject.

Other Romantic critics and writers such as Jean Paul, Wackenroder, and Tieck, I have tried to show in this chapter, likewise described such an unsettled experience of the infinite. An infinite, which was thought to be embodied or exemplified by the indefinite or ambiguous ways of instrumental music. This idea of the infinite, we have seen, was in turn generally considered a primary source of the sublime in the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth centuries. In this way, the indefiniteness ascribed to instrumental music would increasingly grant it a special position with respect to the sublime in nineteenth-century German aesthetics.

However, I will show in the next chapter, the (proto-)Romantic concern with indeterminacy primarily manifests itself as a concern with invisibility in the (post-)Romantic critical works of Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. This invisibility not so much pertains to the terrors of uncertainty roused by darkness, but to what was deemed to be instrumental music's radical alterity from the empirical world of sight, the world of perceivable forms. Starting from Schopenhauer's philosophy of

music, I will show, composers like Richard Wagner and philosophers like Nietzsche were indeed to argue that on account of its invisibility, its alleged otherness from the world of appearances, instrumental music required a different aesthetic categorisation than the visual and sculptural arts. Tracing the idea of the beautiful to sensible forms, and the idea of the sublime to that which transcends form and recedes from sight, they accordingly proposed that instrumental music can only be located in the realm of the latter.

On the face of it, this connection between transcendence and the sublime would seem to re-install Kant's dominant notion of the sublime as elevation. However, I will argue, though the idea of elevation can still be heard to echo in Schopenhauer and Wagner, Schopenhauer's account of the sublime also allows for a different reading. Indeed, both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche can be seen to rewrite the sublime feeling as an irresolvably conflicting feeling that stresses the impotence rather than the superiority or autonomy of the subject. In this way, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are of relevance here not only because they emphasize a 'special relation' between the sublime and contemporary music, but also because they point a dramatic move away from the Kantian sublime.