



Conclusions

*...what a different Conception must the Soul
have of herself, when...with Pain she must hurry
from part to part, and with Difficulty acquire
even an incomplete View? John Baillie*

In *The End of the Line*, Neil Hertz epitomizes the sense of the Kantian mathematical sublime as

arising out of the sheer cognitive exhaustion, the mind blocked not by the threat of an overwhelming force, but by the fear of losing count or of being reduced to nothing but counting – this and this and this – with no hope of bringing a series or a vast scattering under some sort of conceptual unity. Kant describes a painful pause – ‘a momentary checking of the vital powers’ – followed by a compensatory positive movement, the mind’s exultation in its rational faculties, in its ability to think a totality that cannot be taken in through the senses. (Hertz 1993: 79)

This pattern of ‘blockage’ and subsequent release or exultation is typical of the Kantian sublime feeling as a narrative experience leading to pleasure through an intermediary, purposeful pain: “a painful pause...followed by a compensatory positive movement”. The delight of the Kantian mathematical sublime, I have shown, is a delight of self-elevation and self-revelation – or rather, a self-elevation brought about by a self-revelation: the Kantian subject recognizes its superior, supersensible capacity to “think a totality” that sensibility cannot form. This self-revelation, in turn, arises out of the moment of blockage or “cognitive exhaustion” that – as the painful awareness of a limit, of an imaginative frustration – becomes a turning point: a turning point that signals a sublimation of pain into pleasure. Feeling a formative or imaginative limit, the subject also feels what is not limited in itself: it recognizes and indeed becomes affectively aware of its supersensible destiny. In this way, to recall Andrew Bowie, freedom – the sense of one’s own *Erhabenheit*, one’s elevated-ness beyond the ‘merely sensible’ – “emerges from a situation which seems empirically to be nothing but constraint” (Bowie 1993: 37).

This Kantian model of the sublime feeling has largely dominated twentieth-century conceptions, criticisms, and (critical) histories of the sublime. True, under the banner of postmodernism the centrality of the supersensible as an end-point or destiny in the experience of the sublime has, during the last 20 years or so, been firmly questioned, problematized, and undermined. Postmodern theorists of the sublime, I have shown in chapter 7, have indeed been at pains to write the idea

of the supersensible out of the sublime in the 'war against totality'. They relocate the sublime feeling in the sphere of the sensible, in the here and now. The sublime feeling no longer signals a breaking through to the other side of the sensible but – in the declared absence of the supersensible and, hence, of any dichotomy between the sensible and supersensible – a break *within* the sphere of sensibility.

And true, at least since the 1980's critics, historians, and theorists are no longer inclined to take seriously Samuel Holt Monk's celebration of the third *Critique* as the apotheosis of eighteenth-century speculations on the sublime. Monk's argument, Hertz also contends, must be strictly seen in the context of an age that still represented the eighteenth century "teleologically, as if it were *en route* to writers like Wordsworth and Kant...That mode of historical argument has been sufficiently challenged, so that Monk's argument may seem dated" (Hertz 1993: 84). Yet, Hertz adds immediately and not-so-disapprovingly, "intelligent" works on the sublime such as those by Thomas Weiskel still find their "organizing figures in Kant...and more particularly, in their accounts of the mind's movement, blockage, and release" (ibid.: 84). In, that is to say, the peculiar structure of the Kantian sublime feeling as a narrative structure of introduction-crisis-resolution. Perhaps, the implication is, Monk's argument is not so dated after all.

One aim of this book has been to debunk the myth of the Kantian sublime more decisively and, at the same time, to show how this myth has nevertheless retained its force, perpetuated itself, in recent theories, histories, and criticisms of the sublime. I willingly grant that in making this one of my aims I have, too, used the Kantian sublime as some sort of "organizing figure": even, if not especially, in trying to resist traditions, one is inevitably part of them, cannot do without them, has to figure them out. The third *Critique* is there – the history of the aesthetic has put it there – and one cannot get past it without having come to terms with it. One is, indeed, almost forced to. Yet what I have tried to show in this way is that if not the third *Critique* itself then at least its *consecration* in twentieth-century theories, histories, and criticisms of the sublime has blocked an open debate on the sublime from both an historical and theoretical perspective. Indeed, I would add, isolating the third *Critique* so rigorously from other eighteenth-century texts on the sublime – so as to emphasize its unique position as a singular but lonely landmark surrounded by never more than 'standard' or 'ordinary' texts – has in part contributed to its noted difficulty and complexity. Situating Kant's text more firmly within the network of eighteenth-century treatises on the sublime, I have suggested in the introduction and chapter 1, may help to reduce that difficulty.

Most pertinently, however, the dominating shadow of the third *Critique* in twentieth-century accounts of the sublime has largely obscured viable, eighteenth-century British and German alternatives. Till now, the dominant way to think the sublime feeling has been the Kantian (and to a lesser degree also the Burkean) way. Here, we have

seen, sublime experience is framed in a canonic narrative structure of beginning-middle-ending (exposition-crisis-resolution) that leads to a triumphant moment of closure-in-transcendence. If, as I have said, the element of the transcendental has largely disappeared from postmodern reworkings of the sublime, critics nevertheless still seem conditioned, or accustomed, to represent the sublime feeling according to this structure. Unquestioningly, they hold fast to the model of a pleasure mediated by, and itself removing, a displeasure.¹ This is, for instance, illustrated by Hertz, Crowther, Guyer, and Van de Vall.

Yet, it should be recalled, an alternative proposed by Lyotard and by Van de Vall with reference to Kant's notion of the aesthetic idea seemed promising. Seeking to unburden the Kantian sublime from what is now familiarly considered its totalitarian, supersensible weight, Van de Vall suggested that it may be the aesthetic idea rather than an idea of reason which spins off the sublime feeling. In this way, I have shown, the main 'players' of the sublime would be productive imagination and understanding (rather than imagination and reason), the former – set free by a power called genius – confounding the latter with an excess of 'secondary presentations' that breaks through its synthesis of recognition (Van de Vall 1994: 330). As Lyotard has suggested as well, in this alternative experience of the sublime thought is interrupted on account of a genius run wild in the free possibility of creating a multiplicity of forms that understanding cannot process or recognize. The latter is blocked in performing its primary synthesizing function. As such, the 'material' that imagination produces remains indeterminable, excessive.

Within the context of the third *Critique*, I argued in chapter 1, such an alternative sublime feeling would be hard to imagine. As Kant emphasizes, in case of such an excess of secondary presentations, the power of judgement would – by definition – intervene to clip the wings of genius. Thought, in this instance, would thus *not* be interrupted all that dramatically in the safeguarding presence of the power of judgement. In its absence, however, a kind of madness would ensue.

Nevertheless, as I have tried to show in chapter 2, in so far as the aesthetic idea concerns a vague or ambiguous representation that can be (freely) developed by a listener, reader or viewer, notions of representational darkness, vagueness, or 'incompleteness' were of no little significance to previous, eighteenth-century British theories of the sublime. Indeed, the ambiguity and indeterminacy associated with the Kantian aesthetic idea was already situated at the heart of the *artistic sublime* in the work of Edmund Burke, James Usher, and James Beattie: conceived of more broadly as an indeterminate representation, the

¹Notable exceptions, I have noted in chapter 1, are Pries and Lyotard. They try to rework the Kantian sublime as a *critical* feeling in which the unbridgeable gap between sensibility and reason is reinforced, not resolved. For Pries, the conflict between the sensible and supersensible as expounded in the first *Critique* is continued and elaborated on an experiential level in the third *Critique*: Kant here explores the specific feeling which the *Widerstreit* occasions (Pries 1995: 159).

aesthetic idea here functions as a condition of possibility for the evocation of the sublime in art.

As I have shown, for Burke, Usher, and Beattie the idea of the sublime is an *obscure* idea that can only be made felt in a sphere of radical darkness – through a blindness or an inability to see, foresee or over-see, to know what or if something is going to happen. It requires a tension of uncertainty. Elaborating on Dennis, Burke (and later Usher and Beattie as well) translates such an (epistemological) uncertainty into a visual and semantic indeterminacy in the region of poetic representation. This boils down to, on the one hand, a not-showing and not-saying (or a partial showing or saying) preserving the tension of uncertainty that fosters terror, and, on the other, an indefiniteness, a deferral of ‘complete’ presentation that measures up to the idea of the infinite as the ever-unaccomplished.

As I have argued, this centrality of indeterminacy – instead of elevation – opened up a new perspective on both eighteenth-century discourses of the artistic sublime *and* the idea of the sublime feeling: a new perspective that inextricably intertwined the aesthetics of the sublime with eighteenth-century speculations on the ‘open’, ambiguous sign of contemporary instrumental music. To substantiate this claim, I showed how these speculations, firstly, have informed eighteenth-century theories of the artistic or artificial sublime and, secondly, may help to illuminate the ways in which the sublime feeling can be rethought as a feeling that is *itself* typified by a structural indeterminacy: by a systematic unresolvedness.

Thus, with respect to the first, I indicated how the anti-pictorialist poetics developed by Burke in the *Enquiry* and by Beattie in *Dissertations Moral and Critical* in specific relation to the sublime is a poetics infused by mid- and later eighteenth-century reflections on the ‘incomplete’ or ‘imperfect’ mode of mediation ascribed to contemporary instrumental music (cf. James Harris). Such an anti-pictorialist poetics, I explained, centred on the obscurity (and the absence) of image-ideas raised by words: on the claim that words, operating in the absence of (clear) image-ideas, evoke the unseen and unknown as unseen and unknown. Or, to put this in current semiotic terms, on the claim that a verbal sound – the signifier – can operate in the absence of a fixed, (visually) determined signified. Based on eighteenth-century conceptions of the ‘open’ sign of instrumental music, this visual and semantic indeterminacy thus attributed to words in general and poetry in particular, granted the latter a special position with respect to the sublime: poetry, it turned out, was ‘by nature’ equipped to evoke the sublime in the realm of art in so far as it paralleled the uncertain, affective and non-pictorial mode of mediation ascribed to instrumental music in eighteenth-century critical theory. As I have argued, this signalled a (tentative) shift from the Horatian *ut pictura poesis* to a proto-Romantic *ut musica poesis* in the service of the sublime.

Kevin Barry has rather depreciatingly referred to this preoccupation with the obscure and undetermined in Burkean poetics as merely serving to crush an audience with unspeakable terrors of uncertainty: “the consequence of such a poetics is to place the reader or listener under a compulsion to attend to the text with nothing less than awe, reverence, a stunned assent” (Barry 1987: 18). An alternative consequence, Barry posits, is that such an essentially suggestive “mode of language allows its readers to perceive the active and imaginative power of their own minds” – rather than being reduced to sheer helplessness (ibid.: 18). Barry detects this alternative in theorists and poets from Oliver Goldsmith (familiar with *The Enquiry*) and William Collins to Thomas Twining, Dugald Stewart and Wordsworth. I have suggested, though, that it also and already surges in Burke’s reflections on the experience of the artificial infinite: the partly painful, partly joyful and elative experience of a potentially indefinite repetition of similar parts, in which the Burkean pseudo-creative power of imagination plays a leading role.

Here, I have pointed out, the idea of indeterminacy acquires a richer if also more ambiguous significance: it does not inspire terrors of uncertainty, it not only connotes a ‘negative’ tension that needs to be relieved in order to bring delight. Rather, it is productive of a pain and a pleasure (a tension and a tensionlessness) *at once* bearing on a constant deferral of resolution, a constant deferral of an ending. Thus, I argued that on the one hand the pattern of ceaseless repetition suggestive of the (Lockean-Burkean) idea of the infinite frustrates the Burkean imagination to ‘fix a boundary’, to form this pattern into a graspable or over-see-able whole. This was the pain, the tension or labour of Burke’s experience of the artificial infinite: imagination was activated without becoming productive in a conclusive sense. It remained wanting in its restlessness. On the other hand, however, and at the very same time, the absence of an encompassing form tricked imagination into a delightful illusion: in the constant reiteration of the same, it met no obstacle which might hinder its extending any given number of parts to infinity. This I called the pleasure of Burke’s experience of the artificial infinite: the absence of an ending created an open horizon that made for an agreeable and even joyful suspension in which, firstly, imagination was deemed to expand itself without effort, and, secondly, the tension or labour required for change or renewal was happily postponed. Instead, the subject could painlessly revel in a continuous return that was felt as a progression without end, a tireless and endless projection of ideas.

In this way, I postulated, the experience of the infinite – which Burke deems a prime source of the sublime – brings the Burkean imagination into conflict with itself. It wants to go forward (toward an ending) and it wants to remain in place at the same time; it tries (fruitlessly) to fix a boundary yet it also and at once relishes in the absence of any perceivable bounds. This internal conflict suggested a *simultaneous*, rather than a successive, double-feeling of pain (frustration, tension) and

pleasure (respite, tensionlessness): an unresolved and endless vacillating in-between two apparently irreconcilable intensities, instead of the latter removing and thus relieving the former in a sublime 'turning'. On the basis of this, I concluded that the Burkean experience of the artificial infinite does not revolve along the lines of an Aristotelian plot, but is instead typified by a systematic un-accomplishedness: it lacks the triumphant ending typical of what has come to be known as the normative sublime feeling, but takes on itself the indeterminacy or unresolved-ness that, according to Burke, characterizes the idea of the infinite.

In this way, the Burkean experience of the artificial infinite presented an alternative to what has, over the years, become the dominant Kantian norm: while Kant proposes two different faculties of mind, imagination and reason, whose respective limits and limitlessness make for the mediation of a pleasure through a displeasure, it is in Burke's experience of artificial infinity that the same power of mind – imagination – gets caught in a contradictory and irresolvable double-bind. Fulfilment here signals at once the beginning and the end of pleasure, or, conversely, the end and the beginning of tension or displeasure: both 'intensities' feed on the same indeterminacy that holds a limit in suspense, that preserves an open space in which a 'next' remains ever-possible.

A similar aporia or irresolvable hesitancy, I have shown, manifested itself in James Usher's reading of the sublime feeling in *Clio*. Arguing that the sublime object is not simply obscure but open or vacant – he calls it a 'fugitive object' – Usher also argued that this openness at once makes for an anxious want and a joyful suspension. An anxiety, I have said, which holds an uneasy, frustrating distress and an eager, endless desire in one. Thus, Usher rewrites the sublime feeling in terms of a 'mighty unknown want' and a 'wandering desire' that is always in search of its object. This search is tense or painful to the extent that it precludes relief (the fugitive object will never materialize itself), but it is at once its own respite: as with Burke's experience of the artificial infinite, the constant deferral of an end, or in this case revelation, sustains an openness in which an (unknown) 'next', a 'something more' remains ever-possible. As such, it interlocks a delight of infinite hope with a frustration of systematic want or un-fulfilment.

Significantly, this Usherian sublime feeling could not only be seen to antedate the vicissitudes of Romantic desire, but also related to contemporary instrumental music in a very special way. The latter becomes, in Usher's account, the very equivalent of the vacant or fugitive object of the sublime, kindling and stirring imagination but at the same time continuously resisting to be appropriated as an object of knowledge. At once very close and elusive, it can at best be *intimated*: comparable to Thomas Twining's later observations on the delights of infinite interpretation in relation to music, and comparable to Usher's fugitive object of the sublime, the listener forever labours to bring an

object (mentally) into view, yet never succeeds in drawing a complete picture, in experiencing a satisfying sense of resolution. A difficulty can here not be surmounted.

However, I have shown in chapter 3, if this amounts to the formulation of a musically sublime experience, it stands quite apart from eighteenth-century *practices* and early-nineteenth-century criticisms of the musical sublime. True, the special connection between music and the sublime was here reinforced through the unifying concept of *pathos*. Of central significance to the rhetorical sublime since the days of the pseudo-Longinus, and of renewed importance to eighteenth-century theorists such as James Burgh and Robert Lowth, the pathetic formed a cross-roads where the Longinian rhetoric of violent transport and contemporary aesthetics of instrumental music intersected. This intersection, though, did not so much bear on the alternative sublime feeling traced in chapter 2 as on the rapture of (self-)elevation informing more traditional notions of the sublime. What dominated here, I have shown, was a Longinian rhetoric of rapture, manifesting itself as an instrument of massive seduction in musical performance practices from the 1750's onward. I have illustrated this on the basis of eighteenth-century musical performances and critical receptions of the music of Handel and Haydn in Britain, and the immense music festivals during the reign of Terror in France.

In this way, I have hoped to show – with reference to Johnson (1986), Johnson (1995), and Huyssen (1997) – that and how the cult of the sublime infused and to no small degree transformed eighteenth-century musical culture. In France, at least, the appropriation of the 'elevated style' in what can best be called totalitarian performance practices, witnessed the birth of a mass media (and mass control) fixing the audience in an enforced participation. An early and unexpected precedent, perhaps, of what Theodor Adorno was later to call the culture industry.

In eighteenth-century German musical practice and criticism, conversely, the cult of the sublime helped to bring about a revolution of a rather different kind: it propelled the (steady) rise of music purely instrumental in the hierarchy of the fine arts. The canonization of the symphony, and more in particular the Beethovenian symphony, I have shown, cannot be disconnected from the canonization of the sublime (Dahlhaus 1988, Brinkmann 2000). Inscribed into an already-available discourse of the new, the unexpected, and the surprising, the symphony was made into a vehicle of the sublime, while Beethoven's allegedly wild, capricious, and difficult turns were – in the early nineteenth century – indeed legitimized through that same discourse. In the hands of theorists like Friedrich Michaelis, Beethoven's music was made into a musical epitome of the sublime as signalling a 'too big' or 'too much' requiring a strenuous and indeed painful imaginative effort.

Though the canonization of Beethoven would only really occur during the late 1820's and early 1830's, a handful of early German

Romantic writers and (music) critics such as Jean Paul Richter, Ludwig Tieck, Wilhelm Wackenroder, and E.T.A. Hoffmann already largely shared Michaelis's fascination with the strange, awesome or difficult, and wonderful in music. However, I have shown in chapter 4, in so far as Hoffmann appropriated the discourse of the sublime in his famous Beethoven criticisms of 1810-1815, he used it not to describe a feeling of (self-)elevation but a feeling of interminable longing: a feeling of *Sehnsucht*.

This redirected my steps to the idea of an alternative sublime feeling in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetics. Emphasizing how Georg Sulzer already represented powerful longing as a modality of the experience of the sublime, I argued that *Sehnsucht* bears an elective affinity with the sublime feeling as traced in Burke's account of the artificial infinite and Usher's account of the sublime as a mighty unknown – and ever-unresolved – want. If not related to the aesthetics of shock and mighty bombast, *Sehnsucht* can nevertheless be firmly positioned in the realm of the aesthetics of the infinite that – in the Romantic era – evolved ever more explicitly into an aesthetics of the vague and indeterminate.

Thus, I have shown how the feeling of *Sehnsucht* intersects with the Burkean and Usherian alternative sublime feeling in its being typified by a systematic unaccomplishedness. This unaccomplishedness parallels or repeats the indeterminacy and indefiniteness associated with the (Romantic) idea of the infinite. It materializes in the experience of *Sehnsucht* as an unending desire that feeds on a paradoxical and irresolvable mixture of pleasure and pain. Showing how this experience of *Sehnsucht* turns on an openness or emptiness that hurts (tension, want) but at once helps against hurting (respite, deferral), I have presented it as an instance of the *liminal sublime* (Weiskel 1976). This is a (Romantic) sublime that does not revolve around a climax of self-elevation and self-revelation, but rather around a constant hesitating at the limit of revelation and fulfilment: a feeling that never evolves beyond being on its way, constantly undermining its own resolution, and sustaining its own, internal conflict.

As I have argued, in early German Romantic thought this unaccomplished sublime feeling relates to instrumental music in a very intimate way: the semantically open sign of contemporary instrumental music, writer-critics like Tieck and Hoffmann argued, and the material indeterminacy of musical sounds, writer-theorists like Jean Paul claimed, made it into an art whose sole subject (*Vorwurf*) ought to be the infinite. Instrumental music here *embodied* the idea of the infinite and in this way, in its openness and indeterminacy, fostered the ambiguous experience of *Sehnsucht*. In Hoffmann's criticism of Beethoven's Symphony no. 5, I have shown, this experience can be seen to evolve into an alternative to the Kantian sublime: as much as Beethoven's Fifth accommodates, precisely, to Kant's epic variety of the sublime feeling, Hoffmann interprets the music differently and dispenses with the

climactic moment of closure-in-transcendence. He trades it for a sustained frustration and restlessness that captures the listening subject in a conflicting simultaneity of pain and pleasure.

The close connection between instrumental music, the idea of the infinite, and the sublime as posited in the work of Hoffmann and others, I have described in chapter 5, continues beyond the early German Romantics. Thus, Arthur Schopenhauer presented music – with tragedy in second place – as a mouthpiece of the sublime in *The World as Will and Representation*. Directly embodying the Will, music would on the one hand embody and make felt the perpetual torment and suffering instigated by that Will but on the other hand, and in one and the same movement, would make one momentarily forget this torment and suffering. This corresponded significantly to Schopenhauer's conception of the sublime feeling as a basically self-conflicting feeling of pleasure (a blissful oblivion to one's Will-rootedness) and pain (a constant, subtending awareness of one's being tied to the Will). In this way, I have shown, and in contrast to Kant, Schopenhauer offered the idea of a sublime feeling that paradoxically combines a forgetfulness with an inability to forget, without the former being (fully) capable of removing or relieving the latter. For it was precisely *in* the effort required for a sublime transcendence that the painful memory to the Will re-asserted itself.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche could be seen to take a similar course. Associating the sublime with an intoxicating Dionysian *Rausch* and the beautiful with enticing Apollonian illusions, Nietzsche offered a way to think the unaccomplishedness of the sublime feeling as an intense, consciousness-suspending feeling of joy and suffering in one that the subject cannot control, retain, or remember. Embedded within a specifically tragic world view, the self-conflicting experience of the sublime here took on a more profound and irresolvable aspect in its relation to an irremovable conflict that defines, and in a way sustains, existence. The same, for that matter, applied to Schopenhauer.

As much influenced by Schopenhauer as by Richard Wagner, the early Nietzsche also preserved a special place for music in the realm of the sublime. Music, he claimed in direct imitation of Wagner, was not to be judged according to the principles of the beautiful. These principles would only apply to the plastic arts, while music was to be linked to an altogether different aesthetic category. To demand from music the arousal of pleasure in beautiful forms would, for Nietzsche, be nothing less than to undermine and remove its essential, Dionysian character: to degrade and mould it illegitimately into the 'rules' and norms of the plastic and visual arts. It belonged, instead, to the realm of the sublime.

In his *Beethoven* essay, I have shown, Wagner had argued for this privileged connection between (contemporary) music and the sublime on the basis of an almost casual remark made by Schopenhauer on the – for him – inordinate parallels drawn between architecture and music (Goethe). In a passage that has remained, till now, unnoticed in the

history of music aesthetics, Schopenhauer claims that if one were to draw a parallel between the two art forms it would at best be a parallel in 'external form': symmetry is to architecture what rhythmic regularity is to music. He even pushes things a bit further, stating that music without the ruling principle of rhythm is like buildings without symmetry. Released from rhythmic constraints, Schopenhauer claims, and dwelling in a free-floating, timeless space, such a music could be called a frozen cadenza.

This, I have argued, was to be the basis of Wagner's self-concocted history of music out of the alleged 'architectonic' dominance of rhythmic regularity into the sublime freedom of harmony and melody: the more music would release itself from an unlawful architectonic dominance, the more it would approach the formlessness of the sublime, the more it would come to 'itself'. All it had to do to bring about a felt sense of timelessness in its listeners was to cast off its illegitimate spatial aspect, to unburden itself from the architectonic. After all, if rhythmic regularity derived from an 'improper' analogy between music and architecture, this regularity was music's illegally spatial aspect. Breaking this aspect, as Wagner learned from Schopenhauer, also breaks the consciousness of time extended in space, of movement in space. This break constituted for Wagner the sublime moment, the moment when the visible world disappears, when sight is disrupted, when the subject, like a somnambulist, momentarily walks with eyes wide shut.

In contrast to Schopenhauer, however, Wagner did not conceive of this sublime moment as an internally split moment of forgetfulness and un-forgetfulness at the same time. By contrast, he represented the subject's musical immersion into the realm of the sublime in terms of a complete, blissful oblivion that rather recalls the Schopenhauerian feeling of the beautiful. Still, as I have pointed out, the Prelude to Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* nevertheless performs, as it were, the Schopenhauerian dictum that a brief and untenable moment of ecstatic release is already undermined as it is 'lived' in a frustrating, counter-active memory to the Will relentlessly pulling from the other side. Though the Prelude may simulate an illusion of timelessness through a continued deferral of narrative time, I explained, this illusion is nevertheless constantly subtended – and indeed sustained – by a drone of endless time, by a painful awareness of not being able to transcend time as constant flux. One dominant here constantly turning into the dominant of a next chord, the Prelude brings about an immobile movement that not only signals a reduction of tension, an eternal remaining-in-place, but also an increase of tension, a restlessness, in the constant failure to move along or ahead, to 'oversee', being stuck before an 'ever-next' that obstructs a cathartic release.

It was the – now largely forgotten – Arthur Seidl, I have shown in chapter 6, who took up Wagner's reflections on the sublime and music to pose an alternative to Hanslick's dominant notion of the musically

beautiful in his dissertation on the musically sublime: a sublime not just *in* but *of* music. A sublime, more specifically, that would be contained in a 'specifically musical' impression – an impression, indeed, of music's 'essence', instead of a sublime feeling brought about by means of association in the musical simulation of a mighty impression (the heaving of wild waters, a storm, or any wild and awesome visual impression) that is 'external' to the musical material. In this way, I have traced an unsuspected lineage of the musically sublime in nineteenth-century German philosophy and musical thought that leads from Schopenhauer's casual remarks on the 'frozen cadenza', to Wagner, to (the early) Nietzsche, and to Seidl. The latter may have been of little interest to my theoretical explorations into the possibility of an alternative sublime, yet his concept of *Formwidrigkeit* has proved instrumental to describe a specifically Romantic practice of the sublime in nineteenth-century musical culture and practice. Mirroring my account of eighteenth-century modes of the musical sublime in chapter 3, chapter 6 thus focused on the ways in which the typically Romantic breaking of ruling artistic, aesthetic, and even physical laws may be reconsidered in the light of a form-contrariness that can be posited as symptomatic of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetics of the sublime.

This idea of form-contrariness, in turn, led me to the philosopher who is claimed to have rescued the idea of the sublime from twentieth-century obscurity in his essays on the postmodern, the avant-garde, and the sublime as a breaking of 'good' form and a revelling in endless, groundless experimenting: Jean-François Lyotard. A philosopher, too, who is claimed to have recast the sublime feeling in a way that marks a decisive departure from the traditional, Kantian sublime tied to the totalising thought of the Enlightenment. In chapter 7, this once again redirected my steps to the possibility of an alternative sublime feeling that may be conceived in specific relation to (instrumental) music.

As it turned out, however, Lyotard's theory of the sublime and the avant-garde could not in the end solve the problems at stake in the Kantian sublime. Granted, the striking feature of Lyotard's essays on the sublime in *The Inhuman* was that they – in a rather unexpected, quasi-Formalist way – reinforced the intricate link between (the 'ways' of) instrumental music and the (artificial) sublime. As I indicated, Lyotard represented Barnett Newman's pictorial stagings of the sublime in a way that builds on Romantic and Formalist notions concerning the so called 'method' of instrumental music. He even went so far as to circumscribe the sublime moment as a specifically sonorous moment, referring to Barnett Newman's paintings as sounds coming out of the silence, and the sublime feeling as – basically – an experience of the ear. Granted, too, as a material sublime celebrating the sudden, unforeseen, and uncontrollable happening of the Now, Lyotard's postmodern sublime had an interesting and immediate bearing on twentieth-century American experimental music. This, we have seen, was a music explicitly savouring the happening of sound 'in itself' in an undetermined gesture

(Cage, Feldman). As such, Lyotard could point the way toward the conception of a postmodern musical sublime that has, till now, remained unexplored.

However, I have objected, the Lyotardian sublime occurrence of the Now, the *it happens*, rather relates to a traditional, successive experience of sublime relief – a threat that something will not happen, and the subsequent relief that it has happened after all, however untenable – than the irresolvable double-feeling that I have been considering. I have explained this problem with respect to Van de Vall's elaboration on the Lyotardian sublime as a creative experience. Historically, I have shown, this is a perfectly legitimate way to think the sublime feeling. Thus, elaborating on Longinus, John Dennis already proclaimed the delight of the sublime moment as the delight of a creative moment, while Seidl suggested as much. However, though presented as an alternative to the Kantian sublime, Van de Vall's reworking of the sublime feeling as a creative feeling, firstly, could not dispel the narcissistic implications of the Kantian sublime and, secondly, did not undermine the process of dialectic reversal. Holding fast – like many other contemporary theorists – to the canonic narrative structure of the Kantian sublime, Van de Vall's theory could finally only change Kant's moment of closure-in-transcendence into a moment of closure-in-immanence.

By way of alternative, I turned to Lyotard's concept of the *différend* or differend that, though never mentioned in so many words, always hovers at the background of his essays on the sublime. Fittingly, this notion of the differend connoted an irresolvable conflict that Lyotard has elsewhere (1994) explicitly projected onto the Kantian sublime as an unsolvable conflict between imagination and reason. Though in this way Lyotard entirely bypassed the ultimate, subjective finality of the Kantian sublime feeling, the idea of the differend nevertheless suggested the possibility of an alternative sublime feeling as the feeling of an irreducible difference. Thus, as James Williams has suggested, the effect of the interruption of the sublime concerns a felt gap between two 'sides' or 'positions' that cannot be integrated as one, and it is this gap that halts the mind. Two feelings – such as hope and despair – co-exist without a means to bridge their differences. It is this felt awareness of a rupture that cannot be removed, or a difference that cannot be traversed, that would typify the sublime feeling.

On the face of it, this re-rendering of the sublime feeling as a 'sign' of the differend seemed more than adequate to account for the sublime feeling as an irresolvable double-bind of pleasure and pain. However, in contrast to Williams and Lyotard, I maintained that this double-bind does not bear on an irresolvable conflict alone. As I have shown with respect to Burke, Usher, and also the feeling of *Sehnsucht*, the resistance to closure typical of the sublime feeling was not so much due to an unbridgeable difference alone, but to a difference that manifests itself as an interlocking of two conflicting intensities. It was not

a matter of an unsolvable opposition per se, but an unsolvable opposition that is, as it were, entangled or ensnared in itself – a deadlock or an untiable knot rather than an abyss with two opposites standing, if you will, separately on either side. Seen in this light, the paradox of pain and pleasure in the experience of the sublime could no longer be thought as pertaining to a mixture of two opposing principles with a fixed and autonomous 'existence' or 'position'. Rather, this paradox was to be reconsidered as an endless shimmering or colour-switching of two unstable, ambiguous intensities that are somehow inscribed into each other.

In chapter 8, I have explored this paradox in two related ways with specific reference to both Romantic and contemporary music. These explorations explicitly served as an alternative to Kant's analytic of the dynamical and mathematical sublime. Thus I have put forward, on the one hand, the idea of a failed or unclaimed experience of an excess that cannot be overcome (the aesthetics of shock; the dynamical sublime reconceived as a traumatic shock) and, on the other hand, an internally divided experience of tension and respite that cannot be concluded as one (the aesthetics of the infinite; the mathematical sublime reconceived in terms of what can best be called *différance*). With respect to the first, I have used recent readings of traumatic 'experience' and the sublime by Frank Ankersmit and Cathy Caruth to posit the experience of the sublime as an experience *that is not an experience*: an experience that cannot become a narrative experience and remains, as such, unaccomplished or 'unclaimed'. I have explored the musical implications of such an unclaimed experience in relation to the Andantino from Franz Schubert's Sonata in A major, focusing on the possibility of both the musical embodiment of a traumatic rupture, and on a broken, 'traumatic' listening. Showing how the traumatic implies a paradoxical double-bind of forgetfulness and un-forgetfulness, I have indicated how a sublime feeling rethought along the lines of traumatic shock does not lead to a moment of closure-in-transcendence, but to an endless, helpless repetition. Essentially irretrievable, the traumatic event precludes a full, cathartic overcoming.

However, I continued, if this figure of repetition can thus be termed a mark of a failure of transcendence – a symptom of a traumatic shock that cannot be integrated and removed – it can on a more general level also be thought on its own terms in relation to the sublime. Indeed, I have shown with respect to Burke, the figure of repetition holds its own right in the aesthetics of the sublime: it signals not (only) the after-effect of a shock of astonishment, it is also of central significance to a rather different aspect of the sublime as an aesthetics of the infinite. Reading the experience of the infinite as an experience *that is not one*, I have related it to Sigmund Freud's observations on the repetition compulsion as a movement pointing in two contradictory directions: backward (life-negating) and forward (life-affirming) at the same time, without a way to reconcile the two. It was this peculiar structure of the repetition

compulsion – rather than its specific directedness to a traumatic shock – that allowed it to be (re)thought in relation to the Burkean alternative sublime feeling: an experience without end or resolution that is trapped in its own, internal conflict and that, for Burke, can be most immediately evoked in the continued repetition of similar sounds.

Relating the forward-backward paradox of the Freudian – and Burkean – figure of repetition to Jacques Derrida's notion of *différance*, I finally pointed out with reference to present-day repetitive music how the feel of the infinite turns on a simultaneity of conflicting 'principles' of stasis and mobility, return and progression, constancy and tension, which do not so much oppose as presuppose each other. Thus, works like Terry Riley's *In C* made explicit in experiential terms the ambiguity, the two-sidedness of a movement gesturing ahead without limit, without end, that is paradoxically motivated and 'kept going' by a tendency to return: like the irresolvable double-bind of Freud's life (tension) and death (tensionlessness) instincts, this music moves in inclining, tending, to return, its shifting motifs creating a tension that, precisely, the music seeks to ward off in a texture of constant reiteration. Or more specifically, within the texture of repetition a movement is created that continuously tries to cancel itself out, to un-become through reiteration and return, yet in this very way becomes a movement that is felt as extending indefinitely, without relief. What this in fact means, I argued, is that a tension or displeasure brought about by the feel of an unending, ever-unaccomplished movement here already includes the respite or pleasure fostered by a (deadly) constancy: pain is here firmly interlocked with its other in a suspension without end that constantly precludes a relief or resolution.

It is in these respective ways that, to my mind, the sublime feeling can be thought as a truly paradoxical experience of pain and pleasure. A feeling, in the words of John Dennis, "of different emotions...viz. a delightful Horror, a terrible Joy, and at the same time" (Kenny 1991: 65). Mixture, *mélange*, Derrida has said, is madness, but it is in the experience of the sublime that a mad mixture manifests itself, displacing the subject – to recall John Baillie – as a subject of contradictions, rather than affirming it as a subject of autonomous integrity (Derrida 1987: 290). A mad mixture, too, manifesting itself in the paradox that the sublime at once feeds on and breaks through the terms set, or the context allowing for 'ordinary', which is to say, mediated, masterful experience. If the sublime signals an irremediable rupture it is, almost inevitably, never a rupture 'on its own' but a rupture that is inextricably intertwined with the forms, bounds, or limits conditioning the possibility of experience which are violated by it: the sublime, to recall Ankersmit (2001), may break through the mediating, narrative networks of experience – thus allowing for an un-mediated experience that cannot be borne or mastered – but it is always and already *within* the context of these networks that the sublime can manifest itself as break or rupture. It needs and is interlocked with that which it does violence to – and it is perhaps due to

this very interlocking that the sublime feeling can, in the end, not be a neatly structured experience of beginning-middle-ending, but rather one of 'mad' simultaneity in which two (apparently irresolvable) opposites paradoxically presuppose and reinforce each other.