



Introduction

Music is to be assessed according to entirely different principles than all the plastic arts and not at all according to the category of the beautiful, although an erroneous aesthetics, in the service of a misleading and degenerate art, has become accustomed to the idea of beauty ruling in the world of images, and demands from music an effect [Wirkung] similar to the effect of the plastic arts, namely the arousal of pleasure in beautiful forms.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Yet, Palemon, it seems strange that a Being so simple, so much one as the Mind, shou'd at the same time feel Joy and Grief, Pleasure and Pain, in short be the Subject of Contradictions; or can it be true that the Mind can feel Pleasure and Pain at the same Instant? or rather, do they not succeed each other by such infinitely quick Vicissitudes, as to appear instantaneous; as a lighted Globe, moving in quick Revolutions, seems one continued Circle of Fire? John Baillie

Orientations

Presenting the musically sublime, this book presents at once a systematic and historical exploration. On a most basic level, it aims to show that a critical history of the idea of the sublime in Western-European thought remains necessarily incomplete without an attending focus on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophical notions of (contemporary) instrumental music. More specifically, it aims to show how the aesthetics of the sublime and the aesthetics of music have mutually informed each other in the eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth centuries, and how this interaction between the two can be used as a basis to question traditional, normative conceptions of the sublime feeling.

Within these parameters, I have ordered my account around a triple thesis. *First*, I have posed the question if, and in what ways, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cult of the sublime has at all informed contemporary musical practices and criticisms in Britain and on the Continent, and in how far it has contributed to the canonization of instrumental music. *Second*, and in reverse, I have set out to consider the ways in which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notions of instrumental music may have infused contemporary speculations on the conditions of possibility of an artistic sublime: the ways in which the

semantically indeterminate 'ways' attributed to instrumental music came to function as a basis for evocations of the sublime in the arts of poetry and painting. Or, differently and more pregnantly put, the ways in which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theorists and philosophers presented the sublime as being *already at work* in instrumental music, and how in this way the latter started to function as a 'model' for the literary and pictorial arts where evocations of the sublime were concerned.

The ambiguity of the term 'musically sublime' sums up this double nature of my enquiries into the interactions between the sublime and 'musical' in the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries. It refers not only to the sublime in (or of) music, but also to – what I would like to call – the musicality of the sublime: to the manner in which (proto-)Romantic conceptions of contemporary instrumental music have largely informed theories and practices of the artistic sublime, and to the manner in which instrumental music was eventually made into a privileged vehicle, if not an embodiment, of the sublime in the nineteenth century.

Third, but from a more systematic perspective, I have probed the idea of the sublime feeling in relation to (proto-)Romantic and postmodern varieties of musical experience. In this matter, I have critically distanced myself from ruling notions of the sublime feeling as a successive feeling of a pleasure mediated by – and thus removing – a displeasure. By way of alternative, I propose to (re)read the sublime feeling as a *simultaneous* and *unresolved* experience of pleasure and pain (or: tension and respite) that, precisely due to its paradoxical double-nature, precludes a definite and satisfying moment of closure. My aim is to show, firstly, how this alternative sublime feeling can be traced in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theories that have not been given (full) credit in present-day criticisms of the sublime, and, secondly, how this alternative sublime feeling – as an unresolved or indeterminate feeling – can be thought from a current critical perspective in relation to both Romantic and contemporary instrumental music.

Approaching the musically sublime in this triple way, I hope not only to point out how ideas of the sublime and 'musical' have mutually inscribed – and perhaps also reinforced – each other in the history of the aesthetic. Rather, I also hope to transform the aesthetics of the sublime, now normatively thought as either an aesthetics of elevation (John Baillie, Immanuel Kant) or of intensification (John Dennis, Edmund Burke), into an aesthetics of indeterminacy. To show, more precisely, that the experience of the sublime can not just be thought as a conclusive feeling of transcendence or existential rejuvenation, but can instead be (re)read in terms of an aporetic structure of hesitancy or irresolvability. To illustrate my point, I will start out here by presenting an overview of the dominant varieties of sublime experience, indicating in what ways, and on what grounds, I will deviate from – what has grown into – normative standpoints and approaches. Subsequently, I will elaborate in more

detail on my approach to the musically sublime in particular, followed by an outline of the book's structure and contents.

The Sublime as Elevation

Ever since the late-seventeenth century, the sublime has been associated with mighty and (apparently) boundless nature: deserts, oceans, mountains, volcanoes, earthquakes: everything overwhelming that made one feel vulnerable and small, but exerted a fascination and attraction at the same time. Yet what precisely made up the sublime feeling? A pain (tension) released in a pleasure (relief), a terrible ecstasy, a delightful terror, a sense of elevation, or a frustration and elation at the same time? Even a brief historical overview shows that the possibilities to circumscribe the sublime feeling are – surprisingly – diverse. 'The' sublime feeling does not exist, even though nowadays it has become customary to think the general structure of the sublime feeling in a rather monolithic way.

This general structure boils down to (what Samuel Holt Monk has long ago presented in *The Sublime* (1960) as) a successive pattern of "effort and difficulty overcome": a pleasure (a sense of relief or elevation) mediated through a displeasure (a painful effort or sense of difficulty) (Monk 1960: 9). No matter how dated Monk's account is now considered to be, this successive pattern of effort and difficulty overcome detected "from time to time" in eighteenth-century British debates, but most "brilliantly" in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790), has quietly cemented into a normative conception of the sublime feeling (ibid.: 9).

However, present-day critics have little realized that the structure of 'the' sublime feeling as outlined above is in part the product of a selective historical reading recasting the "extremely diverse and individualistic theories of sublimity" in eighteenth-century Britain, Ireland, and Scotland into the framework of the Kantian sublime (ibid.: 3). Thus, nowadays the structure of the sublime feeling is familiarly represented as a three-stepped process of, successively, confrontation, conflict, and resolution paralleling the pattern that Monk had described: a subject is confronted by an object too great for comprehension, or too mighty to be resisted, experiences a painful 'difficulty' in trying to measure itself up to, or resist, this object, but then overcomes the pain in a delightful moment of release or self-transcendence. This is something of a textbook sublime. It is typified by what has been commonly referred to as a sublime 'turning' that signals a (guaranteed) transformation of 'negative' into 'positive' feelings – a pivoting point leading from a painful conflict to a new-found opening, a newly felt sense of freedom or joy.

In whatever ways the sublime feeling may have been rethought during the last two decades of the twentieth century, this (narrative) pattern of effort and difficulty overcome has firmly stood its ground. Up to this day, the structure of the sublime feeling is still familiarly thought of

as a successive structure, with the moment of 'bafflement', the pain or difficulty, functioning as an *intermediary* stage in a larger process of being lifted upward, or delightfully relieved and invigorated, by negative means. And up to this day, the necessity of a 'turning' signalling a move from pain to pleasure has not been questioned. Why has it been so persuasive, and how precisely has it informed the structure of sublime experience?

To start with the last question, Neil Hertz (1993) has proposed to trace the idea of a climactic turning in 'the' experience of the sublime to early modern discourses of religious conversion – not an unusual proposal in the light of the religious connotations of sublime experience in the seventeenth- and eighteenth centuries (cf. Hope Nicolson [1959] 1963). Thus, Hertz refers to the discourse of conversion as a "literature that describes a major experiential transformation, the mind not merely challenged and thereby invigorated but thoroughly 'turned round' " – a challenge and a turning that is accompanied by physical or psychic pain (Hertz [1985] 1993: 85). This is an experience of an opening, of another way, that is achieved through a 'difficult' passage-way, a *rite de passage* leading to a radically altered perspective or outlook: a pleasure mediated by a displeasure.

A similar pattern can be detected in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tourist accounts of the sublime. As Malcolm Andrews has shown, the comfortable way was not the way for the adventure-seeking travellers to the Alps, the Lake District, and the Scottish Highlands: "In Sublime scenery particularly, much of the Sublimity arose from the sense of difficulty, even peril, in negotiating a way into the landscape" (Andrews 1989: 219). Sublime landscapes were not to be 'packaged' but instead to be rough and hostile, hard to resist, and hard to traverse. In this way, in the absence of all too obviously prepared, easily accessible paths and viewpoints, at least the illusion of "accidental discovery", of suddenly and delightfully hitting on a 'new', impressive view would be preserved (ibid.: 233). Consider, for instance, Mrs. Henry Warwick Cole's account (from *A Lady's Tour Round Mont Rosa*, 1859) of her 1850 climb of the Aeggischhorn in Switzerland:

On reaching the summit, one's first difficulty is to discover a secure resting-place from which to make observations, for there is no level spot on which to stand; but having done this, I found myself poised on a pile of huge, loose rocks, which are heaped together on the top of the mountain in so strange a fashion that one wonders the heap does not separate and tumble down the Aletsch Glacier below. This feeling of insecurity is however soon forgotten, and the mind becomes absorbed in admiration and delight at the wonderful view. This is almost unparalleled in extent and variety. (Mazel 1994: 29)

The delight is an exclusive delight, enjoyed in and because of its exclusiveness, and 'earned' precisely through an act of self-defiance –

the whole uneasy setting adds to it, the difficulty, the over-stepping of one's insecurity, one's possible fears and real (or imagined) dangers being an integral part of the experience of wonder.

This comes even more dramatically to the fore in Jacques Balmat's (self-centred) account of his 1786 ascent of Mont Blanc with Michel Gabriel Paccard, dictated to Alexandre Dumas as follows:

I felt as if my lungs had gone and my chest was quite empty. I folded my handkerchief over my mouth, which made me a little more comfortable as I breathed through it. The cold got worse and worse, and to go a quarter of a league took an hour. I kept walking upward, with my head bent down, but finding that I was on a peak which was new to me, I lifted my head and saw at last I had reached the summit of Mont Blanc!

I looked around, trembling for fear that there might yet be further some new unattainable *aguille*. But no! no! I had no longer any stretch to go higher; the muscles of my legs seemed only held together by my trousers. But behold I was at the end of my journey; I was on a spot where no living being had ever been before, no eagle, nor even a chamois! I had come alone with no help but my own will and my own strength. Everything around me belonged to me! I was the monarch of Mont Blanc! (Kenny 1991: 85-86).

Perhaps the pains of physical exertion in climbing mountains or negotiating rough terrains – which John Evelyn, John Dennis, and later Thomas Gray and Horace Walpole had already described in the seventeenth- and earlier eighteenth centuries – followed by the delight of reaching the top and being rewarded with a marvellous, surprising, and elevated view, were inscribed into the tension of terror or frustration, followed by relief or transcendence, in eighteenth-century theories of the sublime. Or perhaps, conversely, what Herz calls the “rhetorical concept of difficulty” central to the discourse of religious conversion, but also to the labour involved in biblical exegesis, was absorbed into an “experiential notion of blockage” in eighteenth-century literatures and tourisms of the sublime (Herz 1993: 85).¹ One way or another, the idea of

¹An early example of this absorption would be Petrarch's ascent of Mount Ventoux. Thus, in a letter to an Augustinian monk (written when he was around 32 years old), Petrarch reports how he was constantly, but vainly, tempted to linger on 'easy paths' during the ascent of Mount Ventoux with his brother, as if constantly postponing the arduous climb upward: “I was simply putting off the trouble of climbing; but no man's wit can change the nature of things, and there is no way to reach the heights by going downwards” (Musa 1985: 13). In Petrarch's hands, this becomes a metaphor for the struggling journey toward the “blessèd life”: “straight is the way that leads to it. Many...are the hills that stand in the way that leads to it, and we must ascent from virtue to virtue up glorious steps. At the summit is both the end of our struggles and the goal of our journey's climb” (ibid.: 14). When he finally reaches the summit, standing there “like a dazed person”, Petrarch's initial bafflement is succeeded by a double illuminating insight, triggered by a recollection and a reading respectively of the words of St. Augustine. Thus, first, he recalls his “perverse and wicked” desires and expresses

a cathartic 'turning' brought about with pain or labour features frequently – thought not exclusively – in treatises on the sublime feeling from Joseph Addison to Immanuel Kant (ibid.: 85). In their hands, the sublime feeling is represented as a feeling with a high 'difficulty degree' – a feeling involving a painful check or 'blockage' – that is its own reward: the difficulty *conditions* an eventual feeling of invigoration or elevation.

To illustrate the point, Hertz refers to a passage from Alexander Gerard's *An Essay on Taste* (1764). Gerard here posits the feeling of the sublime as a triple process of confrontation, opposition, and transcendence: the mind is presented with a large object, tries to expand itself with great difficulty to grasp or match it, overcomes the difficulty or opposition, and finally identifies itself with the object contemplated. As Gerard says, the mind "sometimes imagines itself present in every part of the scene which it contemplates; and from the sense of this immensity, feels a noble pride, and entertains a lofty conception of its own capacity" (Herz 1993: 86). The mind is blocked, does battle, and expands beyond its own limits. Experiencing the sublime, it experiences its own limitless potential.

Before Gerard, John Baillie (1747) had already stated as much. The greatness of nature and immensity of the heavens, he argued, may affect the mind in such a way as to remind it of its own grandeur and lift it far above the physical world:

Hence comes the name of the *Sublime* to every thing which...raises the Mind to Fits of *Greatness*, and disposes it to soar above her *Mother Earth*; Hence arises that *Exultation* and

the wish to "tell the truth" about them – just as Augustine had done so about his "foul past and the corruption of his soul" (ibid.: 15). A literal and liberating ex-pression, one could say, a release, and perhaps also a confronting of "past storms" that can not yet be recollected in full tranquillity (ibid.: 15). Contemplating a hopeful, calm future, Petrarch is then once more absorbed by the view, but is also 'awakened' to turn his eyes away, to turn inside. For while his thoughts are "divided thus, now turning my attention to thoughts of some worldly object before me, now uplifting my soul, as I had done my body", the inner conflict is resolved – or broken through – when Petrarch reads the following words from Augustine's *Confessions*: "And men go about admiring the high mountains and the mighty waves of the sea and the wide sweep of rivers and the sound of the ocean and the movement of the stars, but they themselves they abandon" (ibid.: 17). This once more brings about an in-sight, a turning round or conversion from outside to inside, which boils down to this: "I closed the book, angry with myself for continuing to admire the things of this world when I should have learned a long time ago from pagan philosophers themselves that nothing is admirable but the soul beside whose greatness nothing can be as great" (ibid.: 17). It is this conversion from outside to inside, and the felt awe for an external greatness that is really a misplaced awe for a greatness within, forcing the subject into introspection, that will resurge most prominently in the Kantian sublime feeling: a self-experience turning the eye of the (now half-secularised) subject inward to admire the supersensible destiny of 'man'. As with Petrarch on the mountain-top, the experience of effort and difficulty overcome becomes, in Kant's analytic, an experience of groping insight and delusion (or, as he calls it 'subreption') overcome: the soul, not nature, deserves to be the object of the respectful awe typical of the sublime feeling. I thank Arjo Vanderjagt for pointing me to Petrarch's text.

Pride which the Mind ever feels from the *Consciousness* of its own *Vastness* – That *Object* can only be justly called *Sublime*, which in some degree disposes the Mind to this *Enlargement* of itself, and gives her a lofty *Conception* of her own *Powers*. (Baillie [1747] 1953: 4).

Although Baillie is not willing to renounce the idea of sublime *objects*, and only embrace the possibility of sublime subjects, the sublime feeling here nevertheless boils down to an “Effort of the Soul to extend its Being” and, in this way, realize its own supersensible capacities (ibid.: 8). Delight and exaltation arise out of a newly felt self-consciousness: the subject looks into the mirror of nature and sees that it is not bound to the confines of (significantly enough) Mother Earth. It becomes aware of the vast extent of its own mind as it finds its soul stretching itself to ever “larger scenes and more extended prospects”, quitting “the narrow earth”, darting “from planet to planet” and taking in “worlds at one view!” (ibid.: 4).² A restlessness and insatiability attest to a side of its being that transcends the sense-bound world, and in this way makes it aware of its own, exalted position above that world. Vast nature here thus only functions as an occasion to awaken the subject to its ‘higher’ faculties of mind: a “great part of the Elevation raised by vast and grand Prospects, is owing to the Mind’s finding herself in the Exercise of more enlarged Powers, and hence judging higher of herself” (ibid.: 11).

The idea of a (laborious) exercise of self-expansion and self-elevation thus elaborated in British critical theory would be taken up by the German writer-theorist Carl Grosse in his *Über das Erhabene (On the Sublime)* (1788) – a work recently retrieved from obscurity by Carsten

²These remarks could well be traced to the Classical text *Peri Hypsos (On the Sublime)* attributed to the pseudo-Longinus that – through the translation of Boileau – (partly) triggered the eighteenth-century debate on the sublime. Though familiarly classified as the rhetorical sublime, the discourse on the sublime style by the pseudo-Longinus also anticipates the sublime feeling that I am here describing. Thus, in the last chapter of *Peri Hypsos*, the pseudo-Longinus describes what would, in the eighteenth-century, be frequently referred to as a ‘sublime sense of self’ on viewing the grandeurs of nature and contemplating the vastness of the universe: “...nature has adjudged us men to be creatures of no mean or ignorance quality. Rather, as though inviting us to some great festival, she has brought us into life, into the whole vast universe, there to be spectators of all that she has created and the keenest aspirations for renown; and thus from the first she has implanted in our souls an unconquerable passion for all that is great and for all that is more divine than ourselves. For this reason the entire universe does not satisfy the contemplation and thought that lie within the scope of human endeavour; our ideas often go beyond the boundaries by which we are circumscribed, and if we look at life from all sides, observing how in everything that concerns us the extraordinary, the great, and the beautiful play the leading part, we shall soon realize the purpose of our creation” (Dorsch 1965: 146). It is for this reason, the pseudo-Longinus continues, that ‘we’ do not admire small streams and confined vistas, but are drawn to such spectacles of grandeur as the Nile, the Danube, the Rhine, and the Ocean (ibid.: 146). This is what answers to ‘our’ great purpose or destiny, this is how ‘we’ come to recognize that purpose.

Zelle (1990). Grosse here reflects on a “sublime sense of self”, and emphasizes that the sublime feeling revolves above all around a felt and active “enlargement” (*Erweiterung*) of the soul (Grosse [1788] 1990: 63, 14, my translation). Thus, he states, one calls sublime (*erhaben*) only “the actual extension [*Ausdehnung*] of the soul, the exertion [*Anspannung*] of higher, noble [mental] powers, the enthusiasm [*Begeisterung*] to perform great acts”, as well as the effects of this enthusiasm on others (*ibid.*: 15). Sublime is what inspires admiration: for the operation of the ‘higher’ mental faculties, and for great, heroic deeds – in others, but perhaps mostly in oneself. Thus, the pattern of effort and difficulty overcome is inscribed into a discourse of transcendence and heroism, a discourse of introspection and (triumphant) self-recognition.

It is in this tradition that the Kantian analytic of the sublime can be situated. Not, as Monk would have it, as the apotheosis or the “unconscious goal” of eighteenth-century British, Irish, and Scottish critical theory, but as an(other) exponent of an already-established variety of the sublime feeling that can be most aptly called the *sublime as (self-)elevation* (Monk 1965: 6).³ I will tackle this Kantian version of the sublime as elevation in chapter 1, but here it should already be emphasized that Kant – in my view – never so much presents a revolutionary ‘turn’ in the aesthetics of the sublime as elaborates in not all too surprising a fashion on well-known, and well-thought, eighteenth-century themes. One cannot, of course, think away Kant’s systematic inclusion of the aesthetic in his critical project, or the Kantian construction of the transcendental subject as an autonomous subject that was to be reinforced in and by his reading of the sublime. To that extent the ‘revolution’ holds its ground. Nevertheless, the feeling of the sublime revealed as a ‘sublime sense of self’ is by no means the Kantian invention that Monk, Guyer (1996), and others have made it out to be.

³Despite the obvious datedness of its teleological thrust, Monk’s history of the sublime as a history slowly but inevitably progressing toward its Kantian end-point has strangely persisted in present-day conceptions of the ‘development’ of the aesthetics of the sublime. If anything, this can be witnessed by the fact that the third *Critique* continues to stand as the apotheosis of eighteenth-century aesthetics in the work of (leading) present-day critics (cf. Guyer [1993] 1996), and is almost by implication taken as a landmark or starting point in historical and theoretical explorations of the sublime (cf. Lyotard [1983] 1999). Recently, in 1996, Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla openly and critically distanced themselves from, what they still consider to be, a ruling “scholarly tradition that has repeatedly told a story about the beginning of aesthetics in eighteenth-century Britain in terms of the gradual shift towards the Kantian critique of judgement. Such a story invokes a teleology, explicitly casting the British discussion as a kind of dress-rehearsal for the full-fledged philosophical aesthetics of Immanuel Kant and his heirs...As a result of this, pre-Kantian texts are read through the lens of the third critique thereby distorting the differences between the English and the German traditions” (Ashfield and De Bolla 1996: 2). The reader of British, Irish, and Scottish theories of the sublime that Ashfield and De Bolla have compiled - *The Sublime: a Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory* (1996) – has proved invaluable in countering this distorted vision of eighteenth-century aesthetics. Interestingly, they have put forward Adam Smith’s writings on the sublime as an alternative to the Kantian climax.

Most tellingly, the hackneyed presumption that the third *Critique* embodies the 'full becoming' of a subjective approach – as contrasted to earlier, presumably objective approaches – to the sublime, easily collapses in view of the theories put forward by Baillie, Gerard, and Grosse. What Kant has to say is, basically, what these writers had to say: a subject contemplates vast nature, feels frustrated in its laborious but fruitless attempts to take in at a glance this vast extent, but then experiences a turning from outside to inside that parallels a turning from frustration (or intimidation) to transcendence and liberation, an overcoming of a felt difficulty. What this subject realizes is that not even nature's vastest extent can measure up to the power of its own mind (more particularly, for Kant, its supersensible faculty of reason to think the infinite). The delightful awe it then experiences is, consequently, not directed at 'sublime' nature, but at the extent of its own mind. In this way, just as with Baillie and Gerard, nature here only serves as an occasion and a setting for a self-experience in which the subject is triggered to exercise and become aware of its own mental capacities: to transcend nature by trying to measure up to its apparent limitlessness and then rise above it. Indeed, I will point out in chapter 1, with Kant the spectacle of 'sublime' nature becomes a mere screen for the subject on which to project its felt superiority or *Erhabenheit*.

Thus, if anything, the sublime as elevation revolves around a turning or conversion from outside to inside (a liberating self-insight achieved after painful labour in the face of nature), which posits the soul, rather than the 'worldly' sight of nature, as the true object of the sublime. This will, perhaps, also account for the persuasiveness of the pattern of effort and difficulty overcome informing the sublime feeling here considered: as Hertz observes with respect to Gerard, this pattern seems like a strategy "designed to consolidate a reassuringly operative notion of the self" (Herz 1993: 86). Adjusted to what Kant would label the autonomy of the transcendental subject, it revolves around a pain or crisis that never so much undermines as reinforces the privileged, self-sufficient status of the (Kantian) subject as a rational and moral being. For the crisis is a *purposeful* crisis: not despite, but because of it, the subject is triggered to break free from the bounds of the sensible world and experience a delightful, 'sublime sense of self'.

The Sublime as Intensification

In more and less obvious ways, the idea of a sublime 'turning' central to the pattern of effort and difficulty overcome also defines other varieties of sublime experience. Most well known, in this respect, is the Burkean intensifying experience of terror and terror relieved as outlined in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Though honourably marginalized as a sensational sublime, a cosy shivering in the face of distanced or imagined terrors, it has continued to capture the popular and critical imagination. Briefly put, Burke's sublime of terror boils down to a painful

anxiety arising out of a confrontation with one's own mortality. This anxiety is subsequently moderated in the awareness of one's own safety from any real mortal danger. The moderation may concern a moderation in place (witnessing a terrible spectacle from a safe distance, or in the presence of a safety net or framing device, as is the case in art) or a moderation in time (reflecting on dangers and perils that are past), but it is always this moderation that signals the 'turning' from a painful experience of terror to a delightful feeling of relief that would invigorate a sense of being alive.

This variety of the *sublime as intensification* or *invigoration* – the sublime feeling as a moderated terror – harks back to John Dennis's *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704). Dennis's significance to eighteenth-century theories of the sublime is little realized today (Simon Schama has referred to him as "one John Dennis") but his presence in the British debate is not to be underestimated (Schama 1995: 449). Thus, fifty years before the *Enquiry*, Dennis already stated with reference to the text on the sublime attributed to the pseudo-Longinus (ca. 1st century BC) that "[i]deas producing terror, contribute extremely" to the sublime (Dennis [1704] 1939: I, 361). He goes on to argue how terror involves admiration, astonishment, and surprise all at once, and then observes the following.

First, Dennis remarks, "as Terror is perhaps the violentest of all the Passions, it consequently makes an impression which we cannot resist, and which is hardly to be defaced": terror captures the soul and makes an indelible impression, which in fact make up the fourth and fifth marks respectively that the pseudo-Longinus attached to the sublime style (ibid.: 361, 360). Second, Dennis maintains that no passion is attended by a greater joy than terror, because this joy "*proceeds from our reflecting that we are out of danger at the very same time that we see it* [i.e. the terror-inspiring object or scene] *before us*" (ibid.: 361, my emphases). All this evidently antedates Burke's famous dictum that "whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*" – and that this terror, "the strongest emotion", can become delightful when "it is not conversant about the present destruction of the person" (Burke [1757] 1990: I, sect. VII, 36; I, sect. IX, 38; IV, sect. VII, 123). When, that is to say, a threat is kept at bay and the terror is moderated by relief.

However, what Burke would add to this is that terror can be considered the strongest emotion because it turns on *self-preservation*: on ideas of pain and danger, on ideas, more specifically, bearing on the crude fact of mortality. The experience of terror has such a strong impact because, in one way or another, it is an experience of the possibility of one's own death. Precisely because of this, however, terror can also have a positive effect: it would violently awaken the urge to preserve life. For Burke, terror breaks through the possible dullness of daily existence that may dull the desire and passion to live that existence: the dullness that can bring about the boredom and melancholy signalling a rejection of life. As Burke maintains, moments of terror can thus

effectively release one from a deadly monotony of everyday life: something happens, something shocks one out of the routine of experience, and, without being actually hurtful, reminds one of (the joy of) being alive. This, Paul Crowther has shown, adds a deep existential dimension to the experience of the sublime as an experience of terror-once-removed:

Horrible events involving death and destruction – be they actual, or mere representations – cast an especially profound spell on us. We are fascinated, and unable to look away, even though we may want to. This fascination extends far beyond any sense of pity for real or imagined victims of the horror, or any sense of relief at the fact that it is not we who are suffering. For here, a spectacle of mortality – of life under attack or threat – rejuvenates our sensibility. In such an experience, the present moment of consciousness – our very sense of being alive – is intensified into a felt quality, precisely because it is directly underscored by some actual or represented negation of life. (Crowther [1993] 1996: 127)

In chapter 2, I will consider this existential sublime in more detail. For now, it will suffice to state that the pattern of effort and difficulty overcome becomes especially meaningful in this context. For on answering the question how pain can be a cause of sublime delight, Burke observes: the best remedy for evils such as melancholy, despair, dejection, boredom is “exercise or *labour*; and labour is a surmounting of *difficulties*, an exertion of the contracting power of the muscles; and as such resembles pain” (Burke 1990: IV, sect. VI, 122). The delight of the sublime is achieved through a surmounting of difficulties rejuvenating sensibility, it is a lived experience, to put this in twentieth-century phenomenological terms, of one’s being-in-the-world.

The Sublime as Inspiration

As the aesthetics of invigoration thus casts the model of effort and difficulty overcome into a no less dramatic but perhaps less ‘rational’ existential context than the aesthetics of elevation, this model has also informed a variety of sublime experience that has come prominently into view during the last two decades of the twentieth century. Thus, the French philosopher Jean François Lyotard (1988) and, in critical elaboration on him, the Dutch philosopher Renée van de Vall (1994) have reworked the sublime feeling into an experience pertaining to the vicissitudes of the creative process: sublime experience as a *creative experience*.

Indeed, Van de Vall has hypothesized that in the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries the experience of the sublime may have been a creative experience in disguise. More precisely, she has suggested that poets and theorists “started to experience the fascination of sublime nature or art as a combining of...a feeling of self-loss or fragmentation

with...a feeling of transcendence, just as it occurs in every form of creativity. And that, in reverse, one started to conceive of creativity in terms of sublime phenomena and processes of nature" (Van de Vall 1994: 402, my translation). More than Van de Vall realizes, this hypothesis holds ground: the experience of the sublime as an experience of – one's own – creativity takes root in the late-seventeenth century in elaboration on the text of the pseudo-Longinus.

Thus, the pseudo-Longinus had already stated that "by some innate power the true sublime uplifts our souls; we are filled with a proud exaltation and a sense of vaunting joy, just as though we had ourselves produced what we had heard" from an orator or a poet (Dorsch 1965: 107). While this already pushes the sublime into the direction of creative conception – the listener or reader experiencing the sublime in identifying her- or himself with a product of genius – John Dennis would do so even more explicitly in his reworking of the Longinian sublime. As I will show in detail in chapter 7, Dennis relates "poetical genius" to the sublime by defining the former as "the expression of a furious joy, or pride, or astonishment, or all of them, caused by the conception of an extraordinary hint" (Dennis [1696] 1996: 31). What may happen in the creative process, Dennis argues, is that the poet suddenly hits upon a thought or image that surpasses everything s/he had expected or intended to present. The soul, he comments, is "transported upon it, by the consciousness of its own excellence, and it is exalted...and lastly...the soul is amazed by the unexpected view of its own surpassing power" (ibid.: 30). 'Something' happens that overtakes the soul, arrests it in astonishment, but then exalts and elevates it: it is awed by the consciousness of the depth and extent of its own creative capacity. The "well-timed stroke of sublimity" that the pseudo-Longinus described as scattering "everything before it like a thunderbolt" becomes, essentially, a self-revelation (Dorsch 1965: 100).

This connection between the sublime feeling and the experience of one's own creativity – perhaps already crystallized in the possibility of an artistic sublime – can be easily recognized in the poetry of William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley. It would, however, not be until the late twentieth century that the idea was fully elaborated in the philosophical debate on the sublime. Mainly informed by the postmodernist rejection of the supersensible, the rewriting of sublime experience as a creative experience meant a rewriting of the sublime out of the sphere of transcendence into that of immanence: it is an experience that takes place strictly in the sphere of sensibility, in the sphere of imagination, rather than an experience lifting the subject above the bounds of sense. Nevertheless, in spite of this, the *pattern* of transcendence as a pattern of effort and difficulty overcome, of pain turned into pleasure, curiously persisted.

As I will show in chapter 7, Lyotard set the terms for this rewriting of the sublime in relating the sublime feeling to a feeling of *passibilité*: a (creative) mind emptying itself of its intentions, a mind willing to be will-

less, so as to create an open space in which something (unexpected) may announce itself. A mind, more precisely, suspending the known and familiar to allow itself to be impressed and overtaken by something wholly other (Lyotard [1988] 1998: 18). The Lyotardian sublime thus no longer turns on a mind suspended by shock but on a mind willingly suspending its own intentions to welcome the unknown. This more or less matches the open receptivity that – the Romantics had already ordained – is required for the ‘visitations’ of inspiration informing creative conception.

With reference to the paintings of Barnett Newman, I point out in chapter 7, Van de Vall has used this notion of passibility to recast the sublime feeling as the experience of a self-surpassing imagination, as an experience of creative *inspiration*. Briefly said, this creative experience is thought along the lines of a triple process which, in the first instance, applies to the productive act of creativity, but also to the ‘receptive’ act of reading, looking, or listening. A production-aesthetics, in a word, that at once (and to my mind all too easily) bears on a reception-aesthetics. The first phase of this experience, which I here restrict to the productive act of creativity, consists of an unproblematic phase, a safe stability. The second phase, however, heralds the uncertainty that Lyotard associated with passibility: there is a sudden disturbance in the creative process that leads into a crisis of indeterminacy, into an unknown way that had not been planned or programmed in advance. The artist stands arrested, disoriented, not knowing precisely how to proceed. For Van de Vall, this is “the moment that constitutes the pivoting point of the sublime turning. There is an emptiness which contains the threat of chaos, but also the possibility” of an opening leading to the conception of something wholly other or different (Van de Vall 1994: 401).

Out of this emptiness then arises the third phase of stability and orientation regained: the delight of creative release. Something has happened, a difficulty has been overcome, and one senses the joy of having baffled or surpassed – as Dennis already said – one’s own expectations. In this way, significantly, sublime experience as creative experience retains the self-affirmative import of the sublime as elevation: here too, to recall the words of Herz, the pattern of effort and difficulty overcome tends to consolidate a reassuringly operative notion of the self. A self, that is, confronted with but subsequently surmounting the anxieties of creative blockage in what remains essentially a process of self-transcendence.

Alternatives

Glossing these varieties of sublime experience, they all feed on the same, narrative pattern of confrontation–crisis–resolution that, in my view, takes the sting out of the sublime feeling as a paradoxical mix of pain and pleasure. If the sublime, as theorists now generally tend to agree, breaks through the forms and networks of ‘ordinary’ experience, it would

certainly have to break through the kind of *narrative* networks that – twentieth-century philosophers like Paul Ricoeur claim – *condition* ‘ordinary’ experience: that allow one to shape experience and process it into a meaningful whole with a beginning, a middle, and an ending. As Antoine Mooij has remarked with reference to Paul Ricoeur in an essay on experience and experience disrupted: “Feelings are articulated in, and habits are part of, a narrative that gives meaning to them. The world of...experience – though in itself not textual in nature – is nevertheless dependent on language and narrative” (Mooij 1993: 10, my translation). Elaborating on the postmodernist notion of the ‘world as text’, Mooij suggests that ‘ordinary’ experience is built on a “narrative infrastructure”, allowing one to digest the world of experience in a (pre-)structured way (ibid.: 10).

Seen in this light, it seems strangely artificial to present the sublime feeling as, precisely, evolving along the lines of an Aristotelian plot: a feeling by definition involving a narrative ‘turning’ from pain to pleasure – and thus ultimately conforming to, rather than irrupting, the narrative rhythm of ‘ordinary’ experience. Could not, instead, the pain and the pleasure be said to be intersecting and intertwining in such a way as to become interlocked, inseparable, indeterminate?

Seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century accounts of the sublime do seem to point in that direction, though the twentieth-century focus on the sublime as an experience of effort and difficulty overcome – no victory without a struggle – has typically blocked this possibility from view. And yet, such pioneers of the natural-religious sublime as Thomas Burnet (1690-1691) already attested to the paradoxical double-bind of the sublime feeling as a mixture of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ affections *at once*, gluing apparent opposites like pleasure and debilitating stupor:

...whatever hath but the shadow and appearance of INFINITE, as all things have that are too big for our comprehension, they fill and over-bear the mind with their Excess, and cast it into a pleasing kind of stupor and admiration. (Burnet [1690-1691] 1965: 109-110)

Crossing the Alps in 1688, John Dennis was even more explicit:

In the very same place Nature was seen Severe and Wanton. In the mean time we walk'd upon the very brink, in a literal sense, of Destruction; one Stumble, and both Life and Carcass had been at once destroy'd. The sense of all this produc'd different emotions in me, viz. a delightful Horrour, a terrible Joy, and at the same time, that I was infinitely pleas'd, I trembled. (Kenny 1991: 65)

In eighteenth-century theories of the sublime, this possibility of a coexistence of terror and joy would be frequently addressed, but never unambiguously resolved. Thus, though elaborating the sublime as

elevation in terms of effort and difficulty overcome, John Baillie (1747) nevertheless also wondered if the feeling of the sublime could not be thought as a *simultaneity* of pain and pleasure:

...it seems strange that a Being so simple, so much one as the *Mind*, shou'd at the same time feel *Joy* and *Grief*, *Pleasure* and *Pain*, in short be the Subject of *Contradictions*; or can it be true that the Mind can feel *Pleasure* and *Pain* at the same *Instant*? or rather, do they not *succeed* each other by such infinitely quick *Vicissitudes*, as to appear instantaneous; as a lighted *Globe*, moving in quick *Revolutions*, seems one continued *Circle of Fire*? (Baillie 1953: 31).

The question is therefore: can the mind, which in its eighteenth-century conception is typically represented as integral or unified rather than potentially self-conflicting, be subject to two (apparently) opposite feelings of pain and pleasure at the same time, can it be, after all, the "Subject of Contradictions"? Or is the coexistence of pain and pleasure not an actual but *imaginary* coexistence, brought about by an infinitely quick succession of the two, so that the one cannot be distinguished from the other? Some forty years later, Frances Reynolds – Sir Joshua Reynolds's sister – would suggest in her *Enquiry* (1785) that the sublime is to be thought not so much in terms of a neatly organized development from pain (bafflement, terror) to pleasure (transcendence, relief), but as an *interplay* of apparent opposites that paradoxically meander back and forth. The sublime, she observes, is "composed of the influence of pain, of pleasure, of grace, and deformity, playing into each other, that the mind is unable to determine which to call it, pain, pleasure, or terror...It seems to stand, or rather to waver, between certainty and uncertainty, between security and destruction" (Reynolds [1785] 1951: 17-18). The sublime feeling vacillates in-between coexistent 'states'.

It is this idea of vacillation that I will explore in the following chapters as an alternative to the pattern of effort and difficulty overcome that structures dominant varieties of the sublime feeling. This alternative, I hope to show, resists the movement of transcendence as a movement from crisis to resolution, and instead addresses the *impossibility* of a satisfying, or clearly articulated, sense of closure: as a Janus-faced experience of pain and pleasure, the experience of the sublime here remains ultimately dogged in its own internal duality, oscillating between conflicting intensities that are paradoxically at work in each other.

In chapters 2, 4, and 5, I will trace this alternative in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theorists, critics, and philosophers, each in their very own way illustrating how the allegedly binary opposition between pain and pleasure (marked by the climactic turning from the one into the other) is really no binary opposition at all but rather a complex and ambiguous interlocking that resists a dialectic moment of reversal and – subsequent – closure. In chapter 7, I will show that it is perhaps Jean-François Lyotard's notion of the *différend* or differend (1983) that comes

closest to articulating the sublime feeling in this self-contradictory way: as a feeling without end or purpose that is trapped in its own aporia or irresolvable double-bind. Thus, referring to an unsolvable conflict between two 'parties', or at least to a conflict that cannot be solved without causing one of the parties to suffer an injustice, the differend epitomizes a pattern of contradiction that lacks a redemptive moment of closure. Indeed, Lyotard observes in his *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (1994), the quality of the sublime feeling can be defined as such an internal conflict: "Violent, divided against itself, it is simultaneously fascination, horror, and elevation" (Lyotard [1991] 1994: 231).

With reference to William Jones (2000), I will explain how the differend can thus recast the feeling of the sublime as the feeling of an irreducible difference: of 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, or tension and respite – co-exist without a means to bridge their differences, because there is no 'third instance' to mediate their respective positions as (successive) stages in a finalized process that, for instance, typifies the sublime as elevation or – as it can also be called – the sublime as a spiritualising moment of sublimation.

Nevertheless, despite its focus on irresolvable conflict instead of resolution, my objection to the Lyotardian sublime as differend will be that it casts the double-bind of pain and pleasure (terror and fascination, frustration and elation) *only* as an opposition between two 'moments' located, as it were, on either side of a felt gap. To my mind, however, the double-bind of the sublime should be thought as a criss-crossing between and an interweaving of apparently opposite intensities that, precisely, constantly *reinforce* and even presuppose each other. Rather than a felt gap, I show in chapter 8, the feeling of the sublime boils down to a felt *intertwining* of conflicting intensities. It is this intertwining – rather than a mere absence of mediation – that precludes an articulated, harmonious sense of closure. To illustrate my point, I deconstruct the binary opposition of pain and pleasure in dominant varieties of the sublime feeling by showing that the feelings of pain and pleasure cannot be thought as separate entities or principles, but rather as tones in a fluctuating rhythm that are already inscribed in each other: the criss-crossing between them comes before an opposition can at all be thought.

Approaching the Musically Sublime

Embedded within the current, interdisciplinary debate on the sublime, my approach to the musically sublime is philosophical and historical rather than (strictly) musicological in nature. On the one hand, I try to situate music firmly in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cults of the sublime through an analysis of contemporary music criticisms and performance practices. This involves, amongst others, the reception of Handel and Haydn in eighteenth-century British musical culture, the

massive music festivals during the Reign of Terror in France, the canonization of the symphony through the discourse of the sublime, and the reception of Beethoven in the late eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries (chapter 3). Peter Gay (1969) as well as Jean-François Lyotard (1999) have suggested that the sublime in nineteenth-century art can be generally thought as a rule for breaking or evading the rules of tradition and convention: the sublime resists and contradicts 'good' or 'agreeable' form. This has, in turn, led me to reconsider the subversive musical practices and transgressive virtuoso performances of the Romantic era (Paganini, Liszt) in the light of the cult of the sublime as a cult of – to use a term coined by Arthur Seidl (1887) – *Formwidrigkeit* or form-contrariness: a form undermining or turning against itself, contradicting the senses in such a way that it gives rise to an idea of something other resisting (imaginative) formation (chapter 6). Perhaps not surprisingly, the sublime here manifests itself in its more traditional aspects of (Longinian) transport, power and might, difficulty and elevation, or in the intensifying thrills of the horrific, the uncanny, and unheard-of.

On the other hand, however, I show how eighteenth-century aesthetics of music have contributed extremely to a poetics of indeterminacy in which an alternative sublime feeling can be seen to announce itself. This contribution is, for one, witnessed by the fact that – as Kevin Barry (1987) has shown – mid- and later eighteenth-century British poetics (in the service) of the sublime depended heavily on contemporary conceptions of the so called 'empty' or (as I prefer to call it) 'open' sign associated with then dominant and emerging forms of instrumental music. Growing into a suggestive mode of mediation that would, for instance, epitomize Burke's account of verbal mediation in his *Enquiry*, this 'musical' mode of mediation has played an unsuspected but significant role in the development of a poetics of obscurity and indeterminacy that evolved under the banner of the artistic sublime during the latter half of the eighteenth century (chapter 2).

A condition of possibility for artistic evocations of the sublime in the work of Burke, James Beattie, and Usher, this indeterminacy gradually evolved into an artistic norm in early German Romantic poetics. A poetics, most theorists have till now failed to notice, that has been duly influenced by British critical theorists and their fascination with the fragmentary, unseen, unsaid, and unknown: an unsuspected Romanticism, one could say, of the British Enlightenment. In the nineteenth century, blindness, obscurity, and indistinctness gained pride of place in a fully blown Romanticist poetics that inclined more and more toward the 'uncertain' ways of instrumental music than – as the Horatian tradition dictated – the 'method' of the pictorial arts. Thus, the visual and semantic indeterminacy associated with the 'open' sign of contemporary instrumental music no longer pointed to its supposed inferiority to the other arts, but rather signalled the sublime (Dahlhaus 1978). In this way, I explain in chapters 2 and 4, the idea of

indeterminacy proved of central significance to an aesthetics of the sublime that grew more generally into an aesthetics of the 'musical' in the Romantic era, with the latter becoming something of an epitome of the idea of the sublime in the writings of E.T.A. Hoffmann and other German Romantics.

Within this setting, the alternative sublime feeling as I will trace it in its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century manifestations often notably converges in one way or another with contemporary notions of musical experience. As a defeated and self-defeating experience of (the idea of) the infinite, or as a consciousness-suspending shock that cannot be borne or overcome, the experience of the sublime becomes a quintessentially musical experience in the work of Schopenhauer, Wagner, Nietzsche, and Seidl (chapters 5 and 6). Even in Lyotard's postmodern writings on the sublime, I will point out, traces of this Romantic connection between the sublime and 'musical' can be seen to persist (chapter 7). Against this background, my objective is not only to show how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetics of music have informed the conditions of possibility of an artistic sublime, but also how these aesthetics may – or may not – help to illuminate the peculiar mechanisms of an alternative sublime feeling.

Finally, as for my approach to individual musical texts, I have taken as a starting point the more imaginative, literary approaches to music as exemplified by Rosen (1995) and Kramer (1990, 1995). The former has shown how Romantic music *embodies* and *enacts* structures, processes, and experiences highlighted in Romantic poetry, (travel) literature, and (landscape) painting as well, thus firmly situating music in the context of contemporary cultural practices (Rosen 1995: 1-236). A professional performer, Rosen also prominently focuses on issues such as execution, sonorous textures, and the paradoxical (inter)play of the audible and inaudible in (Romantic) music that have been a true eye-opener for my own analyses of the sublime in musical texts, sonorities, and performance practices.

Kramer, in turn, has taken a more pronouncedly postmodernist stance to reread the musical in relation to the literary. Deconstructing the distinction between the sign of language as a 'full' sign, and the sign of music as an 'empty' sign – which, Barry has shown, was also and already deconstructed in eighteenth-century British critical theory – Kramer has indicated how musical texts, no less than literary texts, are open to hermeneutic and deconstructive reading strategies. Though he has, in this way, opened up a new and critical, less rigidly formalist approach to music that I have (in part) adopted here, I do not agree with Kramer's surprisingly foundationalist project to project onto ('classical' instrumental) music "meaning: concrete, complex, and historically situated" (Kramer 1995: 2). This rather appears to fit the critical project of the Frankfurt School – Kramer's references to Theodor Adorno are telling in this respect – than the tactics of the postmodern that Kramer wants to incorporate in his argument. A postmodernist – or more

correctly, poststructuralist – perspective radically rejects the idea of ‘meaning’ as “concrete” or in any way retrievable, and rather embraces a plurality and indecidability of meanings caught in a texture of in(de)terminable differences.

Indeed, and most ironically, it will be seen, it is precisely this idea of ‘meaning’ as radically unstable and endlessly deferred, instead of solid and given, that already emerges in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourses on contemporary instrumental music, notably extending to reflections on literary texts as well. Andrew Bowie has, for that matter, already rightfully claimed that much “of the appeal of post-structuralism...seems to me explicable in terms of its re-awakening of the issues in Romantic aesthetics, particularly concerning music and language” that can be seen to re-emerge in the work of Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Derrida as concerns the indecidability of the linguistic sign (Bowie [1990] 1993: 257). In this context, I approach musical texts not simply in terms of their “historical determinations” but rather adopt a more eclectic stance respecting musical ‘meaning’ as meaningful differentiability (ibid.: 257).

Overview

In the make-up of the book, I have wanted to reflect, firstly, the integration of a historical with a systematic and more speculative approach to eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century discourses of the sublime in relation to the ‘musical’. Secondly, I have wanted to reflect the deconstruction of the twentieth-century myth situating the third *Critique* as the end-point of eighteenth-century critical theory. With respect to the first, I have construed the chapters on the basis of eight themes relative to the idea of the sublime that I have tried to give both a historical and systematic cohesion: sublimation, indeterminacy, might, desire, (un)forgetfulness, excess, materiality, and anxiety. These themes, it could be suggested, mirror different conceptions of the sublime as practised and elaborated in more and less well-known ways during the last three centuries. As such, they also present different possibilities to think and approach the varieties of sublime experience, and, more specifically, the varieties of musically sublime experience.

With respect to the second – the deconstruction of the Kantian myth – I have I have refrained deliberately from presenting the ‘development’ of the aesthetics of the sublime and its relation to music in a strictly chronological order. Such a chronological order, I believe, would precisely reinforce the myth in the writing of the sublime that presents eighteenth-century British, Irish, and Scottish critical theory as slowly but inevitably progressing toward the third *Critique*. Seeking to break this tradition, I open with a chapter on Kant to subsequently leave him behind and proceed on an alternative route. This route proceeds from British, Irish, and Scottish debates, to early German Romantic reworkings of the aesthetics of the infinite, to Arthur Schopenhauer, Richard Wagner, and Friedrich Nietzsche, up to postmodern revaluations

of the sublime, and my own alternative. It is, in my view, by way of this wayward route that both the interlocking of the sublime and 'musical', and the idea of a 'different' musically sublime feeling as an inconclusive double-feeling can be given shape in a most meaningful way.

Thus in chapter 1, *Sublimation*, I analyse the various aspects of the Kantian mathematical and dynamical sublime – bearing on the aesthetics of the infinite and the aesthetics of shock and terror respectively – and explicate the ways in which it reduces the paradoxical double-bind of sublime experience to a narrative of overcoming, culminating in a moment of closure-in-transcendence. In chapter 2, *Indeterminacy*, I point out how in British, Scottish, and Irish discussions the sublime is embedded in an anti-pictorialist poetics that, firstly, heavily draws on and intersects with contemporary speculations on the 'open' sign of instrumental music and, secondly, significantly predates the Kantian notion of the aesthetic idea. Mainly bearing on the ambiguous pleasures of infinite interpretation, I relate these musical speculations to an aesthetics of the sublime pronouncing itself as an aesthetics of indeterminacy in the work of Edmund Burke and James Usher. It is in these aesthetics that, firstly, an intimate connection between the ideas of the sublime and 'musical' can be made manifest, and secondly, an alternative sublime feeling of pain and pleasure interwoven and interlocked can be thought.

In so far, however, as this alternative sublime feeling amounts to a self-divided and unresolved feeling in critical theory, I show in chapter 3 – *Might* – that eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century practices and criticisms of the musically sublime point into quite another direction. Here, the sublime is mainly sounded and conceived in terms of pathos and rapture, in terms of might, the monumental, the wild and ungraspable, and the awesome. Music becomes a second nature, and the discourse of the sublime becomes a vehicle for the canonization of the symphony as the pinnacle of musical achievement.

In contrast to these more traditional manifestations of the sublime I point out in chapter 4, *Desire*, that an alternative can be proposed in the form of Romantic musical *Sehnsucht*. Sketching the elective affinities between *Sehnsucht* and an alternative sublime feeling as traced in chapter 2, and pointing out how the discourse of musical *Sehnsucht* draws heavily on an already-available discourse of the sublime, I propose to read the former in terms of the so called *liminal* sublime: a sublime not of transcendence but of hesitancy and suspension.

Chapter 5, *(Un)forgetfulness*, continues this exploration into a 'different' sublime feeling in relation to music. On the one hand, it focuses on the ways in which Schopenhauer and Nietzsche recast the sublime feeling in terms of an internal duality, rather than a narrative of overcoming, which precludes a sublime 'turning' from pain to pleasure. On the other hand, it shows how in the work of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, but also prominently in that of Richard Wagner, the art of music is argued to 'belong' in the realm of the sublime instead of the

beautiful: in the realm of formlessness and, most importantly, sightlessness.

Chapter 6, *Excess*, shows how this association of the 'musical' with the sublime is elaborated in Arthur Seidl's theory of the musically sublime. The counterpart of Eduard Hanslick's doctrine of the musically beautiful, Seidl's theory basically builds on the Wagnerian argument that music only really comes to, and reveals, 'itself' in the otherness of the sublime. Such otherness, I have already noted above, is for Seidl relative to the idea of form-contrariness, to the fact that the sublime resists imaginative, and for Seidl most of all, visual formation. While Seidl relates such form-contrariness to the realm of the transcendental, I will recast it in more material or physical terms to consider Romantic composition and performance practices in the light of the sublime: as a sonorous excess breaking the coherence of a musical chord or sequence, as a physical excess defying muscular grasp in the per-forming of music, or as something other or unheard-of, breaking through existing rules of musical form – a shock of the new.

Chapter 7, *Materiality*, shows how this shock of the new as a shock within the realm of sensibility has dominated the postmodern reworking of the sublime: a reworking which would signal a move away from the Kantian sublime in its rejection of the supersensible. Probing Lyotard's postmodern reading of the sublime in relation to the avant-garde, I also probe the ways in which it may be brought to bear on, firstly, music and, secondly, the possibility of an alternative sublime feeling as a feeling that is locked in its own internal conflict. While, indeed, the Lyotardian sublime seems made to fit the processes of American experimental music of the mid-twentieth century, it nevertheless remains wanting with respect to the possibility of a sublime feeling in which pain and pleasure do not so much oppose as paradoxically presuppose and reinforce each other.

Chapter 8, *Anxiety*, explores this possibility in detail with respect to both Romantic and contemporary instrumental music. On the one hand, it reworks the traditional aesthetics of shock and terror as an (an)aesthetics of trauma, on the other hand it represents the aesthetics of the infinite as an aesthetics of *différance* (Jacques Derrida), comprising endless difference and endless deferral in one. The discussion will centre on the Andantino of Franz Schubert's Sonata in A major, D 959 (1828, 1838) and Terry Riley's *In C* (1964) respectively, with special attention to the process of listening as a broken and aporetic listening respectively. Though I present this 'other' sublime feeling in terms of anxiety (etymologically comprising a distress and an eagerness in one), it can nevertheless be considered a legitimate variety of sublime experience as a paradoxical double-feeling of pain and pleasure, tension and respite, at the same time.⁴ Indeed, it presents the paradox

⁴Writing on the religious experience of dazzlement or *éblouissement* – which, as an experience of 'breakthrough' can be thought in more than one way in relation to the sublime – in the music of Olivier Messiaen, Sander van Maas has (with reference to

of the sublime as a paradox, rather than a paradox which turns out to be a dialectic reversal of apparently opposite moments.

Augustine) likewise stressed a paradoxical double-bind. *Eblouissement*, he argues, is Janus-faced: "On the one hand it signals our encounter (and dwelling) with the divine in eternal life; on the other hand it signals our removal from (and break with) the divine, in the vertigo of our sinfulness" (Van Maas 2002: 383). This compares significantly to Arthur Schopenhauer's aesthetics of the sublime as a double-bind of elevation and frustration at the same time (see chapter 5). For Van Maas, however, the double-bind is already manifest in the etymology of the term *éblouissement*: "etymologically, the term not only refers to the overwhelming and blinding, but also to weakness, lack, darkening, and also to *deception* and *error*" (ibid.: 383). "This double structure of *éblouissement*", he continues, "brings to light a subtle aporetic in the figure of breakthrough [relevant to *éblouissement*] (*percée*). The latter is, not, as such, conceivable in itself, but is always already inscribed in the closure (*cloture*) of the frame (i.e. the 'fallen' subject with its bodily senses)" (ibid.: 383). Translated into the discourse of the sublime, this would mean that elation is not thinkable in itself but is instead always already inscribed in the failure of transcendence or oblivion relative to a subject bound to the body and the limits of sense.