
ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVES

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**C, F-SHARP AND E-FLAT: THE TRAGIC, THE SUBLIME AND
THE OPPRESSED (WITH C-SHARP AS NEMESIS):
REFLECTIONS ON *EINE KLEINE TRAUERMUSIK*
BY MILAN MIHAJLOVIĆ**

Abstract: In the present paper, I will discuss tonal centers and referential sonorities in the composition *Eine kleine Trauermusik* (1992) by one of the leading Serbian composers Milan Mihajlović. Even though its pitch structure may appear rather straightforward with its octatonic scale and the primary tonal center in C, and with referential (quasi-tonic) chords derived from the harmonic series, I intend to highlight intricate narrative trajectories and dramatic conflicts between various tonal centers (treated as actors/characters). These narratives can be related to certain archetypal plots, with the

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conclusion that there exists ambiguity between the tragic and the ironic archetype. On a higher plane, similar conflict/interplay/ambiguity exists between different principles of pitch organization, i.e. the octatonic and functionally tonal. The unresolved ambiguities and simultaneity of conflicting interpretations are examined from the psychoanalytic perspective, which postulates isomorphism between musical structures and processes and the processes unfolding in the unconscious mind. Finally, the effect of these narratives, especially the overwhelming impact induced by the excerpt from Mozart's piano concerto is linked with the idea of sublime as conceived by Kant, but also including other approaches (Burke, Lyotard etc.).

Keywords: Milan Mihajlović, harmonic series, narrativity, psychoanalysis, sublime

1. A Plethora of Perspectives

There is something peculiar about my involvement with *Eine Kleine Trauermusik* by Milan Mihajlović (born 1945).¹ I was deeply impressed when back in 1992 I heard its premiere. Ever since, I have used it as classroom material, and made it the subject of several conference presentations and two more extensive texts. The thread running through most of these papers is post-tonal teleology: the ways in which music written outside functional tonality projects goals of musical motion, and steers the course of music toward these goals. In my 2015 article I discussed *Trauermusik* in the context of broader post-tonal teleological issues, and particularly my “completion model.”² The second one was part of the 2016 book on post-tonal prolongation that I co-authored with Verica Mihajlović.³ Since prolongation is very much concerned with continuity, direction, connections over longer spans and large-scale goals, prolongational analysis is a useful tool in teleological investigations. Teleology is still a concern in this article, but in a specific sense of “rescuing meaning from tem-

¹ The sound example is available online at the official New Sound YouTube channel. Please find the playlist here: <https://youtu.be/q4HlptNHYPo>

² Miloš Zatkalik, “Teleological Strategies of Non-tonal Music: The Case of Milan Mihajlović”, *New Sound* 45, I/2015, 119–137. The completion model itself was first put forward in Miloš Zatkalik, “Reconsidering Teleological Aspects of Non-tonal Music”, in: Denis Collins (ed.), *Music Theory and its Methods: Structures, Challenges, Directions*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang Publishers, 2013, 265–300.

³ Miloš Zatkalik and Verica Mihajlović, *Prolongacija i strukturni nivoi u posttonalnoj muzici*, Banja Luka: Akademija umjetnosti Univerziteta u Banjoj Luci, 2016, 220–246.

poral flux”⁴ Indeed, the quest for meaning is a teleological process although it will lead us beyond, into domains in which the logical ordering of events ceases to exist, the unfolding of a process can lead into any direction, and means are indistinguishable from the ends.

It is inevitable that I will help myself – very generously – to my previous work. Embarking on this article, I was convinced I could still offer some novel insights, and while writing it, I realized I could not make myself intelligible without copious self-quotations. For their part, these novel insights will embrace various perspectives. They will largely incline towards a narrative approach. Narrativity in music is, of course, a contentious issue. I will skirt the core theoretical questions of musical narratology; I will spare little time providing a methodological framework, and I do not intend to consistently exploit any specific narrative theory. It will suffice that in this composition we can easily identify certain musical events sequentially arranged according to a logic, arousing expectations, producing emotional impact, and therefore suitable for discussing in terms of plot, or rather several parallel or interwoven plots. Certain elements are comparable to actors/characters who act or undergo action, or perform certain functions within the plot. We can think of narrative as, for instance, “the transvaluation of culturally meaningful differences through a sequence of actions”⁵ or “a representation of temporal development”⁶ As long as we can define it in such broad terms, as long as we agree that narrative is not so much something that exists *in* music as a mode of listening and comprehending, and as long as we see it not in terms of binary oppositions (narrative/non-narrative), but as a question of degree,⁷ I do not find any further justification necessary.

Linearity and forward motion is integral to the concept of narrative. Narrative is always experienced as being goal-oriented, as unfolding toward a certain denouement,⁸ striving, in Tzvetan Todorov’s terms, toward a rees-

⁴ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984, 90.

⁵ Byron Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, University of Indiana Press, 2009, 230.

⁶ Vincent Meelberg, *New Sounds, New Stories: Narrativity in Contemporary Music*, Leiden University Press, 2006, 39.

⁷ Vera Micznik, “Music and Narrative Revisited: Degrees of Narrativity in Beethoven and Mahler”, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 126.2, 2001, 193–249.

⁸ Cf. “we are able to read present moments (...) as endowed with narrative meaning only because we read them in anticipation of the structuring power of those endings that will retrospectively give them the order and significance of plot”. Brook, op. cit., 94.

tablishing of equilibrium (different from the initial one). As such, it is very appropriate for the aforestated teleological interests.

As can already be surmised from the title of this article, I have ascribed something like character traits to certain elements of this composition. This may seem like carrying anthropomorphism too far, and I will return to that question later. For the time being, I will indicate that once assumed, such an approach warrants inclusion of psychology, in the present case precisely psychoanalysis. This does not mean, of course, that I treat events in this composition exactly as if they were characters in a novel, nor do I make any attempt to link this composition with the psychology of the individual who created it. The psychology of the unconscious enters into the picture in the following manner: there exists – as repeatedly argued in literature – isomorphism between musical structures and processes, and the functioning of the unconscious mind.⁹ Virtually any aspect of music – thematic process, modulation, form – can be linked to the unconscious, primary-process mechanisms.

The title of the article refers to tragedy, and given the title of its object of enquiry, this should be no surprise. Yet, between the Aristotelian tragedy, the tragic *topos* and the narrative archetype of tragedy, this aspect offers sufficient food for discussion. Alternatives to tragedy must also be taken into account (irony, trauma...).

Finally, the *sublime* featuring in the title inevitably invokes Immanuel Kant, although other concepts of the sublime may prove to be even more fruitful. Thus, in the last section of this article, we will include the notions of “alternative sublime”, which derives its essential ideas from a number of other sources: British eighteenth-century authors such as Edmund Burke, the “post-modern sublime” originating with Jean-François Lyotard, and more.

2. Actors and Characters

The fundamental purpose of the cyclical form, says Heinrich Schenker, is to represent the personal fate of a motif, or several motifs simultaneously. Mo-

⁹ Just a few examples: Stuart Feder, “‘Promissory Notes’: Method in Music and Applied Psychoanalysis”, in: Stuart Feder, Richard L. Karmel and George Pollock (eds.), *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Music*, second series, Madison, International University Press, 1993, 3–19; Miloš Zatkalik and Aleksandar Kontić, “Is There a Wolf Lurking behind These Notes: The Unconscious Code of Music”, in: Miloš Zatkalik, Denis Collins and Milena Medić (eds.), *Histories and Narratives of Music Analysis*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, 628–644; Miloš Zatkalik and Aleksandar Kontić, “Psychoanalysis and Music: Discourse about the Ineffable”, *Muzikologija*, 19, 2015, 127–146.

tifs are represented in ever changing situations in which their characters are revealed:

Just as in a drama, where human beings are led through situations in which their characters are tested in all their shades and grades... the life of a motif is represented in an analogous way. The motif is led through various situations. At one time, its melodic character is tested; at another time, a harmonic peculiarity must prove its valor in unaccustomed surroundings; a third time, again, the motif is subjected to some rhythmic change: in other words, the motif lives through its fate, like a personage in a drama.¹⁰

This is a typically organicist view and Schenker did carry it really far with his *Tonwille* and similar concepts. While it seems to properly belong to the nineteenth century, it is true that similar views have never completely faded away, and with the proliferation of musical narratologies over the past few decades, they gained considerable traction.

Another point from the above quotation that may puzzle an attentive reader is the fact that I am talking about narrative, whereas Schenker mentions drama. However, the distinction between mimesis and diegesis is not always crucial, and, as for instance Michael Klein argues, not always easy to maintain: "...on the one hand music's limited capacity to represent actions and actors is a failure of mimesis, yet on the other hand music's inability to project a narrator is a failure of diegesis. Thus, music exists in a shadow realm between mimesis and diegesis."¹¹ Replace "drama" with "story" and the gist of Schenker's statement will remain untouched.

In a literary work we usually have no problem identifying protagonists and following their actions. When we talk about music, we also talk about musical events and musical plot, and a few paragraphs back I have even ascribed "something like character traits" to "certain elements". What are these elements? Who or what performs the action?¹² Consider the following, imaginary but plausible description of the unfolding of a piece of music. "The first **theme starts** with a dominant seventh resolving into submediant. The flute

¹⁰ Heinrich Schenker, *Harmony*, Oswald Jonas (ed.), Elisabeth Mann Borgese (trans.), Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1954 [1906], 12–13.

¹¹ Michael Klein, "Chopin's Fourth Ballade as Musical Narrative", *Music Theory Spectrum* 26.1, 2004, 24.

¹² Note that I am not discussing how to construe the narrator ("who speaks") and focalizer ("who sees") in a piece of music, or whether such concepts are applicable in music at all. Important as they are, these questions are beyond the scope of this article.

states the principal motive which is subsequently developed in the clarinet. After the half cadence, the movement proceeds with a bridge section. The **music** abruptly **stops** in bar (such-and-such) and the **composer introduces** a new theme, which **we will soon hear** transposed to a different key.” There are no less than six different grammatical subjects (bold, with corresponding verbs), plus one passive construction (underlined): no less than five or six agential categories. Why is the agent so elusive? Why do we feel there is action, but can never pinpoint the agent?¹³ A plausible explanation is based on the idea that the origin of music lies in the archaic psyche, ruled by unconscious and preverbal primary processes. One of the characteristics of this primitive experience is the feeling of coalescing with the external world, without clear distinction between internal and external realities. Gilbert Rose, a musically competent psychotherapist, links music with interplay between primary and secondary processes and talks about “fusing [in music] of subject and object”,¹⁴ echoing “the original oneness with the mother”.¹⁵ Individuation and separateness are closely associated with the development of secondary processes, and especially the acquisition of language.¹⁶ Insofar as music partakes of secondary (rational, verbal, reality-oriented) processes, it will display rational organization of discrete and individualized elements. Contrariwise, its preverbal, archaic roots will never allow the formation of subjects that would be anything but vague and indeterminate, and any sweeping identification of musical themes or motives with human characters will remain flawed. Yet, as Karol Berger says of arts in general, “we want the presented world to be not just any world, but *Lebenswelt*, the world of man”.¹⁷ We want to populate the sonic world of a composition with anthropomorphic entities; the chain of events that we perceive is also “a series of

¹³ Miloš Zatkalik and Aleksandar Kontić, “Beyond Music and Beyond Words: A Psychoanalytic Inquiry”, *Proceedings of the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad*, 2018, 101. The idea of describing the course of music in such a way is borrowed from a source I am no longer able to identify. The exact wording, however, is mine.

¹⁴ Gilbert Rose, *Between Couch and Piano: Psychoanalysis, Music, Art and Neuroscience*, London, New York, Routledge, 2004, 190.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20

¹⁶ See, for instance, Marjorie McDonald, “Transitional Tunes and Musical Development”, in: Stuart Feder, Richard Karmel and George Pollock (eds.), *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Music*, Madison, International University Press, 1990, 79–95.

¹⁷ Karol Berger, “Diegesis and Mimesis: The Poetic Modes and the Matter of Artistic Presentation”, *Journal of Musicology*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 1994, 431.

emotional states that account for the ways the listener unites a musical text with human values".¹⁸

Schenker, as we have seen, has no doubts that protagonists are motifs. A number of authors think in similar terms, identifying sometimes the musical actor not strictly with a motif, but more broadly with entities of the thematic plane.¹⁹

This approach is, however, too restrictive. It excludes some other possible plots that we can distill from a composition. It removes from analytical purview certain types of music and implicitly favors functional tonality. We need a broader framework for our definition of musical actors, and there I find the ideas of Vincent Meelberg most helpful.²⁰ He draws on Mieke Bal's narratology in considering the actor as the function which causes or experiences events. A musical actor is, therefore, "the musical parameter or parameters that cause closures". Closure is necessary for the creation of events since:

event is not complete until it has reached some kind of closure, and it is closure that makes the listener recognize the event. At the same time, a musical actor can also be the musical parameter(s) that change(s) during a musical event, since an actor not only can cause, but also can experience events [and I add: invoking the above stated psychoanalytical considerations, we must allow for ambiguity between causing and undergoing]. In this case the musical actor consists of those musical elements that are governed by the principle or principles by which the sounds are grouped.²¹

¹⁸ Eero Tarasti, *A Theory of Musical Semiotics*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994, 304. This is his definition of modalities, the concept I am not using in this analysis, but the definition itself has broader applicability.

¹⁹ Gregory Karl, "Structuralism and Musical Plot", *Music Theory Spectrum*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1997, 13–34; Anthony Newcomb, "Schumann and Late Eighteenth-Century Narrative Strategies", *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1987, 164–174. The latter says (237): "We do well to think of the thematic units as characters in a narrative... They interact with each other, with the plot archetypes, with their own past guises, and with convention of musical grammar and formal schemes analogously to the way the characters in a novel interact with each other."

²⁰ Meelberg, op. cit., 83.

²¹ Mieke Bal makes a distinction between actor and character: an actor causes or undergoes a change, whereas a character is an actor provided with distinctive characteristics. Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Toronto, Buffalo, London, University of Toronto Press, 1995 [1985], 8. Meelberg, op. cit., 224, follows this distinction, but this is not essential for my analysis.

Eine kleine Trauermusik has no proper themes and no motifs delineated clearly enough for the listener/analyst to be able to follow their transformations. Rather than working with motifs and themes, Mihajlović slowly spins and interweaves continuous melodic yarns. Pitch, however, remains the parameter whose organization is decisive for the unfolding of music, and this meets Meelberg's criteria for being the actor. Therefore, the two plots I am primarily investigating concern, firstly, tonal centers, and secondly, the principles of pitch organization. If not functionally tonal, *Trauermusik* displays pitch centrality, i.e. certain pitches are projected as focal intonations. These quasi-tonics can be conceived of as individual pitches, particularly when placed in the lowest voice at strategic points, or they can be chords constructed on these pitches according to certain principles and given the status of referential sonorities (henceforward RS). They can also be understood in a more abstract sense as pivotal pitch-based concepts, which are assigned special teleological value. Admittedly, this makes them less than clearly determined, but psychoanalysis has already prepared us for that.

In the way I have described the RS chords, they are not substantially different from tonics in tonality. The difference is that they are not part of an external, hierarchical, a priori given system as functional tonality is (although this statement will later be somewhat qualified). They acquire their referential status contextually, or through a combination of a priori and contextual factors.

The second plot that we will follow concerns interplay between the octatonic scale that governs most of the piece, and functional tonality of the Mozart quotation.

3. *Trauermusik* and Pitch Centrality

Milan Mihajlović's *Eine kleine Trauermusik* for flute, oboe, clarinet, piano and percussion exemplifies perfectly the compositional procedures of its creator as we have known them for the greater part of his career. Among them are the octatonic scale, obsessive ostinati, melodic lines evolving over long time-spans, quotation from a classical piece – in this case from the slow movement of Mozart's Piano Concerto in A major, KV488.

Of special importance is the octatonic scale, to which the composer seems to have a life-long attachment. It does, arguably, provide some kind of external frame of reference, although far from the (pseudo)-natural quality of functional tonality. From the point of view of goal-directedness it poses a problem since its symmetrical structure makes it highly entropic, with little opportunity for creating hierarchic relationships and pitch-based patterns of

tension and resolution. However, as I have indicated above, there are contextual means whereby a given pitch – *c*²² in this case – is promoted into focal intonation. For roughly one third of the composition it is prominently placed in the piano’s sonorous lowest register; it is located at the beginnings and endings of major formal sections and of the entire piece (the opening *c*-sharp in the clarinet is to be discussed later). This pitch, together with the RS chord based on it, is the most frequently recurring event in the piece, hence, as David Huron would argue,²³ the event that the listener expects the most, thus constituting the goal of musical motion.

Before I proceed with further discussion of pitch organization, an overview of the form will be in order.

Table 1. *Trauermusik*, synopsis of form²⁴

intro.	A	A₁	B/developm.	Mozart +	coda	
0-24	24-61	61-92	92-155	156	(180)	190
	C	A	C	A	F# minor	C (+F#)
octatonic ₀ -----			oct. _{1,2,0} ----- (-----)			
37			+	33		+
			64 ≈ n + n + 2n			

The piece opens with an introductory solo clarinet section. The A section beginning in bar 24, (quasi)-modulates to the tonal center A, and is followed by its varied repetition. For reasons that will soon emerge, bars 92–155 can be conceived of as development. The arithmetic says 37+32+64, the last addend being nearly the sum of the previous two (the summation structure). Let it be mentioned in passing that such a formation may impart some sense of completion and stability: on a smaller scale, it is typical of the Schoenbergian musical sentence; on a larger, long spans of music – entire sonata developments, for instance – are sometimes constructed in accordance with this formula. Mihajlović emulates tonal procedures: well into the piece, he uses the initial transposition of the octatonic scale, an equivalent of the home key, let

²² When a given note is considered to be the intonational pivot it is represented by uppercase italic, individual pitches are lowercase italic.

²³ David Huron, *Sweet Expectation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2006, 138.

²⁴ From Zatkalik, op. cit., slightly adapted.

us call it the “home transposition” (oct_0). The development is characterized by heightened instability (to be discussed later), as would be the case in a tonal piece. It is within this portion of the work that the other two octatonic transpositions rapidly succeed each other. A return to the home transposition follows, and in a while enters the tonal Mozart episode. Predictably, the composition ends with a final return to the basic form of RS.

This focal intonation is presented in Example 1²⁵

Example 1

a) b. 24 (beginning of A section, first harmonic event)

b) b. 92 (beginning of development)

²⁵ This was extensively discussed in Zatkalik, op. cit. and Zatkalik & Mihajlović, op. cit. It was inevitable to repeat the main points, but now the emphasis is on different aspects.

c) end

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is for Clarinet (Cl.), the middle for Bassoon (F.), and the bottom for Piano. The piano part includes dynamic markings 'p' and 'pp', and features slurs and accents over the notes.

RS appears in several variants. Reduced to the harmonic skeleton they can be represented as in Example 2:

Example 2. Variants of RS

Example 2 shows four variants of a chord (RS) in a two-staff format. Each variant is labeled a), b), c), and d). The treble clef has a sharp sign (#) and the bass clef has a flat sign (b). The chords are represented by circles on the staff lines, with some variants including a question mark and a sharp sign in parentheses, such as (#-?) in variant d).

The makeup of this chord shows clear resemblance to the harmonic series. The second, third and seventh partials are virtually omnipresent throughout the composition, the fifth is somewhat less prominent (possibly to underplay the association with the dominant seventh), whereas the ninth is foreign to the given octatonic transposition. The emphasis is on the odd-numbered partials: the even-numbered ones only duplicate lower portions of the spectrum. In a way, harmonics reinforce the fundamental frequency, provide support for the root.²⁶ The lower the partial, the stronger the support, and in this case, the support is quite robust.

The harmonic series was a major preoccupation of a number of important composers and theorists, not least Schenker himself. Most recently – and

²⁶ This is especially noticeable when the fundamental is not present, but owing to its harmonic spectrum, we still perceive it as the fundamental: the phenomenon known as *missing fundamental*. See Richard Parncutt, “Revision of Terhardt’s Model of the Root(s) of a Musical Chord”, *Music Perception*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1988, 65–93, 70; Ernst Terhardt, “The Concept of Musical Consonance: A Link between Music and Psychoacoustics”, *Music Perception*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1984, 276–295, 287–8.

drawing on extensive psychoacoustic research – Finnish theorist Olli Väisälä demonstrates how chords approximating the harmonic series serve as consonant referential sonorities and provide criteria for distinguishing between consonance and dissonance.²⁷ The fact that in the natural system the frequencies differ from our customary equal-tempered tuning is of no particular concern: research has shown that for the listener there is a margin of tolerance of approximately 3% of the frequency.²⁸

While the first nine harmonics are significant supporters, the eleventh one – *f-sharp* in our case – is ambiguous in the sense that it can be conceived of either as still a root-support, albeit a weak one, or too weak to be one. Needless to say, this ambiguity proves to be a huge resource, both for composers and theorists.

In *Trauermusik*, as in virtually all cases analyzed by Väisälä, the stable sonorities are approximations, rather than the exact replications of the harmonic series. Insofar as the chords can resemble the series more or less closely, they can be assessed as more or less consonant, i.e. more or less stable. It will be noted, for instance, that the proper root for *B-flat* – including the most strategic occurrences of RS – should be an octave lower.²⁹ Even the pitches foreign to the harmonic series – *root detractors* in Väisälä's terminology – need not constitute a major destabilizing factor, as long as other tones provide significant support and especially if placed in the uppermost voice.

This brings our attention to the elephant in the room. It comes in the guise of *c-sharp*, appearing in all instances of RS (see Example 2). Clearly not a member of the harmonic series, it is nevertheless nearly omnipresent throughout the piece. It is, of course, reassuring to know that a dissonance of this kind can be easily assimilated, given the overall shape of the chord. Yet, such an explanation does not suffice in this case. It will transpire that the status and role(s) of this pitch is the crux, or one of two cruxes of the entire analysis. I will defer any discussion thereof until later, mentioning only that I have arbitrarily chosen the diamond shape to draw attention to its enigmatic role.

²⁷ Olli Väisälä, "Prolongation of Harmonies Related to the Harmonic Series in Early Post-Tonal Music," *Journal of Music Theory*, Vol. 46, No. 1/2, 2002, 207–283; Olli Väisälä, *Prolongation in Early Post-tonal Music*, Studia Musica 23, Helsinki, Sibelius Academy, 2004. He offers convincing analyses of works by Scriabin, Debussy, Berg etc.

²⁸ Parncutt, loc. cit.

²⁹ The tritone placed immediately above the fundamental as in Example 2b is typical Scriabin's manner. It does not occur literally in *Trauermusik*, but I have identified it as a middleground event, see Zatkalik & Mihajlović, op. cit.

Within the given transposition of the octatonic scale, RS can be transposed to *A*, *F-sharp* and *E-flat*; therefore, I interpret these chords as consonant, and eligible for the role of tonal centers, yet subsidiary to *C* (Example 3). This enables a more discriminating scale of stability, a more complex hierarchy. These subsidiary centers are indeed treated as such. As evident from Table 1, sections A and A1 “modulate” to *A* (much like a tonal piece modulating to submediant), whereas *F-sharp* is the key of the Mozart quotation. The remaining four pitches from the scale receive very little support: their entire spectra, save for the ninth partial, fall outside the given transposition.³⁰ Accordingly, they cannot bear the burden of referentiality, as stipulated in this analysis.

Example 3. Transpositions of RS



It is remarkable how this pitch-based hierarchy presented above overrides the inherent non-hierarchy of the octatonic scale. I speculate that these opposing forces – hierarchic and anti-hierarchic – contribute to the overall mood: tense to the point of being oppressive.

4. Octatonic Transpositions and Tonality

Conditions for establishing hierarchy, hence stability, can be additionally created on two higher planes. Let us make the following comparison. In tonal music, we define a piece as being in, say, *C* major, and we have thereby defined both the focal intonation – the tonic – and the corresponding transposition of the diatonic collection. It is not so in the octatonic. As is well known, there are three different transpositions of this scale. Intonational focus can shift from one pitch to another, while the transposition of the scale remains the same. A different procedure for creating pitch centrality could have se-

³⁰ Note that the set of supported vs. unsupported pitches corresponds to the tonic and dominant axes, respectively in the axis system of Ernö Ledvai.

lected any one of the eight pitches within the scale for the role of the quasi tonic. Both the transposition and the tonal center can be challenged independently. On one level, by shifting the focus from C to A, the composer creates a certain degree of tension, to be resolved by the return to C. The change of transposition can thus be saved for creating contrast on a higher level, for heightened tension, and longer-span processes of departure and return.

Finally, a shift from the octatonic to the functionally tonal operates on yet a higher level. All these shifts will be further discussed in due course.

So far, we have established pitch centricity, and a sufficiently complex system of hierarchic relationships. This enables the creation of areas of stability and instability, which translates into the ubiquitous model of departure and return, which in turn translates into the most fundamental mode of experiencing music, namely, tension and release.

To sum up, the departure/return model manifests on the following levels:

- C – A, F# – C
- octatonic₀ – octatonic_{1,2} – octatonic₀
- octatonic – tonal – octatonic

The areas of stability/instability are created by the following:

- RS as opposed to RST_{3,6,9}
- RST_x (any transposition) vs. other sonorities
- oct₀ vs. oct_{1,2}
- instability created by the fragmentation of pitch organization: rapid succession of octatonic transpositions, absence of referential sonorities, dual harmonies.

5. Tragic Plot and Struggle for Power

Assuming now a less technical and more hermeneutic perspective, one possible interpretation of this composition would be as struggle for power between eligible tonal centers.³¹ As in any tonal piece, the home key is temporarily overpowered by a competing key, but in the end reestablished. Ostensibly, this is by no means remarkable, as the outline of a story it promises little beyond what any tonal piece could accomplish, and probably with more success. Yet, we are not talking about tonal musical language. We are not dealing with a

³¹ The outline of this struggle for power was laid down in Zatkalik, op. cit. Here, it is considerably expanded.

consistent set of syntactic rules governing how music will move away from the focal intonation and return to it: this system is only weakly teleological in comparison to functional harmony. The supremacy of C is not derived from an a priori source. Admittedly, we have attributed some kind of “natural” quality to RS through the harmonic series, but the hierarchical system thus produced is feeble compared to harmonic functions. C establishes its dominance not so much by virtue of its consonant quality, as through its assertiveness. As previously mentioned, it occupies about one third of the piece, and it is expressed through obsessive ostinato figures. It is obtrusive, aggressive perhaps. This certainly makes it the protagonist, the central character, but its overall “behavior pattern” makes me somewhat reluctant to call it the hero.

When the title of a composition contains the word *Trauermusik*, tragedy can never be too far. Certain clarifications are, however, necessary. As Byron Almén cautions, we ought to distinguish between narrative and topical signification. He enumerates certain stylistic conventions associated with the tragic *topos*: minor mode, sigh figures, descending gestures, chromaticism, expressive dissonances, funeral march, low register, exact repetition... They create the tragic mood. For the narrative tragedy to exist, however, it is necessary to have “a strategy of signification in which temporality is implicit and full recognition requires the unfolding of the piece in its totality”.³² In our present case, some of the above enumerated elements of the tragic *topos* do exist, and they do create the tragic mood, but what would be the signs of the tragic plot? In Greek tragedy, the downfall of the hero is brought about by *hamartia*: the tragic error or tragic flaw. While this error can be due to misperception, lack of an important piece of information and so on, it often takes the form of *hubris*: excessive pride, arrogance before gods, transgression of their commands. Precisely the assertiveness, the overconfidence of C, its endeavors to be heard all the time can be seen as its tragic error. Divine retribution follows.

Enter *c-sharp*. It is the initial and final tone of the introductory clarinet solo,³³ and the initial and final melodic tone of the entire composition. Not belonging to the frequency spectrum of C, it nonetheless weighs down heav-

³² Almén, op. cit., 139.

³³ Until the piano enters with RS, we can plausibly assume it to be the central pitch. In a way, we could think of it as the false hero, in Propp’s taxonomy of functions. See Владимир Пропп [Vladimir Propp], *Морфология волшебной сказки* [Morphology of the Fairy Tale], Москва, Лабиринт, 2001 [1928].

ily on RS throughout the piece. It occupies a special position in the following sense. We have seen (Example 3) that four pitches are “incapable” of carrying RS. Out of these four, *e*, *g* and *b-flat* are strongly supportive of the root *C*. The pitch *c-sharp* is not, but it does provide support to the competing tonal centers as the seventh partial of *E-flat*, fifth of *A* and the third of *F-sharp*. The strength of support is proportional to the relative strength of these competitors.

The pitch *c-sharp* is not exactly the opponent to *C*. It never attempts to establish itself in its stead. Even when conspicuously placed in the bass for a longer stretch of time it is only to pave the way for *F-sharp* as its dominant preparation. Dissonant and persistent in upper voices, it never lets *C* extricate itself from its grip. *C-sharp* is its Nemesis.

In his analysis of myth – adapted for music by Byron Almén – James Liszka talks about “four basic strategies used by the ... narrative imagination, in playing out the tensions between the violence of a hierarchy that imposes order and the violence that results from its transgression”.³⁴ The origin of this idea is in the Jungian-influenced essay by the Canadian literary critic Northrope Frye³⁵ in which he classifies narrative plots into four narrative archetypes. The classification is based on the intersection of two fundamental oppositions: victory/defeat and order/transgression, yielding four categories: Comedy, Romance, Tragedy and Irony/Satire.

Emphasis on victory

Comedy – victory of transgression over order

Romance – victory of order over transgression

Emphasis on defeat

Tragedy – defeat of transgression by order

Irony/satire – defeat of order by transgression

The opposition innocence/experience is also involved, and thus, for example, the tragic archetype is a transition from innocence to experience, whereas irony is the narrative of experience. This is well suited for music. There is no danger of extramusical “contamination”, since the notions of hierarchy, order, transgression or transvaluation can easily be conceived of as inherent to music. Almén consistently applies this archetypal approach: it con-

³⁴ James Jakob Liszka, *The Semiotics of Myth*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, University of Indiana Press, 1989, 133.

³⁵ Northrope Frye, “Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths”, in: *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2000 [1957], 131–242.

stitutes the narrative level of his analyses.³⁶ These analyses are illuminating, but for my purpose they are useful insofar as they can be taken flexibly, without clear-cut boundaries between categories, and without any “obligation” on part of the composition to adhere strictly to one single archetype.

Elements of the tragic archetype certainly exist in *Trauermusik*. As I suggested above, hubris is the transgression committed by the protagonist. Furthermore, most listeners will agree that we are left with a sense of defeat, rather than victory. In addition, there is innocence in our initial assumptions about *c-sharp* in the opening clarinet solo. It takes the whole tragedy to unfold before we realize its true nature of Nemesis. And we are likely to innocently overlook the signs that point to *F-sharp* as a formidable opponent. Transgression, defeat, initial innocence: so far, this works well for the tragic plot, but what constitutes the order? The harmonic stability of RS does provide at least a semblance of order, but then, is it not precisely this order that is defeated by the transgressing *c-sharp*? As the defeat of order by transgression, this would amount to the ironic archetype. There is a subtlety in the score that reinforces the ironic perspective. Namely, if we look at the two very last bars, we can see that RS resonates for a second or two after the last of *c-sharp* expires. Does C in its most stable form achieve a victory after all? An ironic victory, I would say, mock victory: victory that is long overdue, long past the moment at which it could have provided any sense of triumph.

Thus, a tragic or an ironic archetypal plot? Both, perhaps. Or shall we say, this composition transcends such oppositions and dichotomies. After all, we know of music’s predilection for simultaneity, for expressing many things at once, of its “ambivalence of content which words cannot have”.³⁷ Invoking the psychoanalytic perspective, we can ascertain that music’s affinity with the unconscious mind makes it free from the constraints of formal logic. Even contradictions can exist simultaneously.

6. More Struggle for Power: A, F-sharp, E-flat

The next actor to be considered is A. Capable of being a consonant harmony, it is the target of modulation in both A sections. With the entrance of the

³⁶ As opposed to the agential level, where he identifies agents and their morphological and syntactic features, and actantial level at which they interact and acquire their narratological roles and functions. Almén, op. cit., following Liszka, op. cit.

³⁷ Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, New York, The New American Library, 1954, 197.

alto flute, it becomes melodically emphasized, but at that point it is dissonant against RS. “Pacified” by being displaced to the bass, it is thus promoted to a significantly higher rank, at the price that its theater of operation is strictly circumscribed. Music effortlessly flows in and out of it, it substitutes for C at two specific points when the central intonation briefly retreats. Its function within the plot is, therefore, not one of the true antagonist.³⁸

F-sharp persistently wants to impose itself as a rival of C. It advances strategically towards the peak of its career, the Mozart quotation, when in the guise of F-sharp minor it takes the control over this entire section. It begins its career quite “innocently” as the melodic climax of the introduction (Example 4a). It is transferred to the bass in the A section, allowing us an early glimpse at its future role as a tonal center (4b). In the repeated A section, the tones that make up the *F-sharp* minor chord: *c-sharp*, *a* and (to a degree) *f-sharp* are given a certain amount of melodic emphasis. In the first phase of the development it forms the upper layer of the dual harmony (4c), where we also get a sense of its minor-mode version. An exchange of layers then occurs (4d), and *F-sharp* becomes the harmonic basis. Before it is elevated to the tonality of the quotation, it performs what I call a “tactical retreat”: the *f-sharp* pitch withdraws to the inner voice and the *f-sharp* chord appears in inversion.

Example 4. Advancement of *F-sharp*

a)

Musical notation for Example 4a: Clarinet in La, Largo, quarter note = 50. The notation shows a single melodic line for the clarinet with dynamics *mp*, *pp*, *mp gliss.*, and *pp*.

b)

Musical notation for Example 4b: Piano and Clarinet in La, Largo, quarter note = 50. The notation shows a piano accompaniment and a clarinet line. The piano part features a bass line with dynamics *p* and *pp*. The clarinet part is marked with a box 'A'.

³⁸ In Propp’s taxonomy of narrative functions it could be thought of as the helper.

c)

Flute (Fl.) part: $\text{♩} = 72$ (Andante), *poco a poco accelerando*, *p*

Oboe (Ob.) part: *p*

Clarinet (Cl.) part: *p*

Bassoon (Fg.) part: *Elegia*, *sep*

Piano accompaniment: *sep*

d)

Bassoon (Fg.) part: *[♩ = Moderato]*, *p*

Piano accompaniment: *sep*

e)

Bassoon (Fg.) part: *3*, *5*

Piano accompaniment: *sep*

The establishing of the key F-sharp minor is not only a new focal point: with it, the previous octatonic order is irreparably shaken. This requires analysis on a higher plane, to be presented soon.

So far, we have seen that in the home transposition, RS can be *and is* transposed to C, A and F-sharp. It can be transposed to E-flat as well, but where is E-flat?

The first attempt to establish that chord as referential fails, as it leads to an unstable 6_4 chord, and thus amounts to a neighbor to the structural A (Example 5a). E-flat asserts itself at important structural junctions, the ends of sections A and A₁, but in the upper voice: where it cannot perform the harmonic role, not to mention that according to the criteria we have adopted for this piece, it is dissonant. The bassoon solo begins with a few bars of an arpeggiated E-flat major, but its potential referentiality is undermined by the piano harmony in the lower register (5b). This pitch is, shall we say, eloquently avoided in the bass: even the chromatic descent towards C-sharp, bb. 110–122: *f-sharp - f - e - d - d-flat* (enharmonic equivalence assumed throughout the piece) omits E-flat. Only once does it appear in the bass in the quotation, but merely as the sixth degree of the melodic minor: unstable and functionally weak. It is offered one last chance in the concluding ten bars of the composition (5c): it is again part of an octatonic context, it is given some prominence in the bass, it attempts to establish itself across three octaves, but fails, and through voice exchange, once more ends up in the wrong place, where it simply fades away.

Example 5. Vicissitudes of E-flat

a)

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: Flute (Fl), Clarinet (Cl), and Piano (P). The score is in 3/4 time and includes the tempo marking 'poco accelerando' and a dynamic marking 'D' with a quarter note equal to 60. The measure number '8' is indicated at the end of the first system. The piano part features a complex arpeggiated texture in the lower register, while the flute and clarinet parts have more melodic lines.

b)

c)

Given the above account, E-flat can be considered as an oppressed minority, whose voice is constantly being silenced, or a character too weak to incur the responsibility of being the tonal center.

7. Octatonic vs. Tonality: Struggle for Power on a Higher Plane

Three potential competitors challenge the supremacy of C, with unequal vigor and unequal success. The very principles of pitch organization – “musical languages” – enter into similar competition. The octatonic and the tonal do not simply succeed each other. The storyline of their relationships includes the almost unbearable, suffocating atmosphere of the home transposition (75%) and the octatonic sound in general (virtually throughout the piece); the foreshadowing of *F-sharp minor*, its rise to power (as described above); its brief reign and the enigmatic ending. Of special interest is the octatonic/tonal ambiguity: the dominant preparation of *F-sharp minor* of which the listener is unaware while it unfolds. Again, we need to focus our attention on *c-sharp*. In addition to being so obtrusive in upper voices, it is also the second most

frequent and longest sustained pitch in the bass, after the pivotal c itself. This becomes obvious in bb. 96–102. As the quotation approaches, it assumes the role of the dominant pedal in bb. 122–150 (interrupted in bb. 126–136 with pitches c and d that I interpret as the lower and upper neighbors, and bb. 148–149 as foreshadowing the tonic). Note that I am talking about the bass only: other voices are not included, probably to prevent tonal associations from emerging too strongly and too early. The dominant function remains unbeknownst to the listener until the tonic arrival in b. 156 (the moment of anagnorisis!?). While *c-sharp* definitely belongs to the home transposition of the octatonic scale, it actually undermines the octatonic organization by slowly and unobtrusively ushering functional tonality. In this Shakespearean double plot (pitch centers and musical languages), *c-sharp* seems to play a similar destructive part in both.³⁹ And if we further speculate about the role of *c-sharp*, we can also see it as the master of ceremonies, a manipulator, *spiritus movens*, a force behind the scene, grey eminence, or a puppeteer. It prevents C from achieving full stability, blocks *E-flat* from becoming the true RS by providing weaker support than it does to A, and maneuvers *F-sharp* into the position of the true antagonist.

For the further discussion of the octatonic/tonal relationships, I cannot help quoting an extensive portion of my previous work:

The most direct clash between the two principles of pitch organization, tonal and octatonic, takes place immediately before the quotation. After a rather long absence, RS returns in the original C-transposition, and with greatest emphasis; the melodic climax of the entire composition is reached at that point, with g in the flute. We are witnessing dramatic peripeteias: at the critical point when we may expect the implied dominant-tonic relationship to be confirmed, the whole construction seems to collapse and the original RS prevails. And the next moment, it retreats again and yields to *F-sharp* minor. This twofold preparation of the tonal quotation may carry the message ‘all roads lead to Rome’. To Mozart, that is. Tonal path, modal path, we end up with Mozart. Or do we? Even as Mozart reigns, the octatonic figures lurk in the background. There are two parallel processes, and they dissolve – not resolve! – together. Perhaps the ultimate statement is: tonal or nontonal, Mozart or Milan Mihajlović, we are doomed to fade into nothingness. The outcome is unquestionable and inexorable, as befitting a *Trauermusik*.⁴⁰

³⁹ If I could give myself free rein to speculate, I would say that on the “language” plane *C-sharp* is to octatonicism what Iago is to Othello; on the pitch-center plane it is more like Claudius to Hamlet. This comparison should not be taken literally: I do not intend to attribute this type of extramusical content to this composition.

⁴⁰ Zatkalik, op. cit., 133, slightly adapted.

8. On Ego Split, Trauma and Symmetry

Other layers of meaning are there for us to probe. I will begin with an observation that this music flows rather seamlessly, well-organized within strict formal and tonal constraints. As the ultimate guarantee of unity and coherence, on previous occasions we have even attempted to construct a quasi-post-Schenkerian *Ursatz*.⁴¹ This notwithstanding, the composition is divided along several fault lines. There is a split between melody and harmony, as the melodically ubiquitous *c-sharp* is dissonant against the referential harmony, and also in the sense that there exists “division of labor” between piano (harmony) and woodwinds (melody). Occasionally, harmony itself is split into two distinct chords. There is a split between tonal centers; between octatonic transpositions, and a “hypersplit” between centers and transpositions; on top of that, octatonicism and tonality are pitted against each other. At some level of meaning, the music remains irreconcilably fragmented. Searching for psychological meanings and relying on the premise of isomorphism mentioned at the beginning, we can assess the overall experience as being closer to trauma than to tragedy. Tragedy implies catharsis – of which I am doubtful in this case. For its part, trauma is linked with dissociation, failure of synthesis, “splitting off”, and generally involves overstimulation and flooding.⁴² Flooding in this music comes from some of its important features, such as oversaturation with the octatonic sound, a sense of unbearable uniformity of sound in the long bassoon solo, and more.

To follow psychological implications further, we need to pay attention again to the relationship between *C* and *F-sharp*. The pitch *f-sharp* is the eleventh partial of *c*, but symmetrically, *c* is also the eleventh partial of *f-sharp*. According to the Chilean-British-Italian logician-psychoanalyst Ignacio Matte-Blanco, the logic of the unconscious is the logic of symmetrization and reversibility.⁴³ Namely, if a moment in time, let us label it with B, follows the moment A, the unconscious can reverse it so that at the same time, A follows B. This collapses all temporal relations, obliterates distinctions between past, present and future: unimaginable in everyday life, but readily found in those mental products that are strongly informed by primary-process think-

⁴¹ Zatkalik & Mihajlović, op. cit.

⁴² Gilbert Rose, op. cit., 11 9–20.

⁴³ Ignacio Matte-Blanco, *Thinking, Feeling, Being: Clinical reflections on the fundamental antinomy of human beings and world*, London and New York, Routledge, 1988.

ing (dreams, myth; cf. Freud's dictum that the system unconscious has no reference to time). Likewise, if spatial relations of up and down or left and right can be reversed, any point in space can be interchangeable with any other. Very importantly, relations between part and whole can be reversed. This accounts for *pars pro toto* representation (i.e. part of the object stands for the object as a whole): again something that frequently occurs in dreams. We can view *f-sharp* as expelled from the *C* environment as a menacing part of the self: a bad part of the split self, considering its "impure" intonation; and at the same time, according to the unconscious, symmetrical logic, it is *c* that is also expelled from *F-sharp*. They are mutually exclusive, repel each other, yet they are caught in an inextricable grip. The true antagonist is thus not necessarily an outside entity, it is precisely this bad, menacing part of one's own self. This brings us back to our introductory psychoanalytical view of music as an art of fusion, permeation, of internal-external ambiguity. Briefly retracing our steps, we can now observe, first, that goal-directed processes easily lend themselves to narrative interpretations. Narrative interpretations naturally invite psychological vantage point. However, having probed the depth of the unconscious, we are no longer certain how to distinguish between subject and object, between past, present and future; we can no longer discern beginnings and ends, departures and arrivals. Teleological investigations undermine themselves.

Other psychological interpretations are also viable. Consider the following: a) there exists the *c*-based referential sonority; b) *c-sharp* is foreign to RS, yet often accompanies it; c) when the tonal center is *F-sharp*, whether as RST_6 or as *F-sharp* minor, *c-sharp* is its very prominent element. We can take this as a metaphorical representation of, or a process isomorphous with projective identification, as defined by the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein: inserting parts of oneself into an external object in order to control, possess or harm it. In this case, *c-sharp* as an important component of the *F-sharp* spectrum, is inserted into *C* where its effects are harmful. The exigencies of space, however, demand that we stop here.

9. The Sublime

These same exigencies apply to the last portion of this article in which I am taking the risk of treating a profound subject in an almost cursory manner. It is not only that the subject itself is irresistible. If we want to follow this analysis through, complete with actors/characters and "the musical text con-

nected with human values”, we must not overlook the overwhelming effect of the Mozart excerpt coupled with the surrounding musical tissue. It is true that the emphasis now is no longer on pitch centers, but on thematicism. Yet, the sublime experience is brought about by various factors, among which a specific role is played by the polar relationship between *C* and *F-sharp*. Let us examine how Mozart is ushered.

Our senses are already flooded with the octatonic uniformity, when the strained sound of the irritatingly protracted (about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the entire composition) bassoon solo brings them to the breaking point. The melodic climax is reached, the musical space is stretched to its maximum, but the motivic content is condensed to the repeating three-note cells. There is a strong feeling that something momentous is about to happen. Out of this Mozart precipitates: an event we somehow felt coming, but are shocked when it actually comes. We are transported, overwhelmed to the point of self-annihilation. We stand in awe, as before something beyond our comprehension, flooded with emotions too powerful to be appreciated as beautiful. There is majesty and grandeur, but also the feeling of an imperious, irresistible force. In a word, sublime. It is how the sublime was conceived by authors from (pseudo)-Longinus to Edmund Burke to Immanuel Kant.

We have already seen how the reciprocity between *C* and *F-sharp* collapses spatial relations. Thus symmetrically juxtaposed, they mirror each other, space is expanded into infinity, and there is a sense of greatness beyond any comparison. Despite all formal and tonal constraints the music overflows any boundaries, becoming something boundless and immeasurable, therefore sublime. Of course, we know that the idea of reciprocity is faulty in the sense that it is valid only under the 12-tone equally-tempered tuning. In the natural system, polar keys are not *exactly* reciprocal. Therefore, *C* and *F-sharp* see each other through a distorting mirror with us caught in between seeing, ourselves doubly transformed. Transmogrified may be the word.

The sublime is beyond grasp. The grasp is mental and emotional, but there may be a physical aspect to it. Not only are the extreme registers in question: remember that the proper fundamental for *b-flat* in RS is an octave below than actually sounding, and it falls outside the range of the piano. And if the sublime is associated with immense power, with vastness and boundlessness, it is no wonder that it has been involved with the idea of genius. Who could, then, be more emblematic of the idea of genius than Mozart?

Following the Kantian line further, we can identify both of his types of the sublime. The infinity mirror and the boundless quality in general, cou-

pled with the feeling of an immense power: this is the mathematical vs. dynamic sublime.

Throughout this article we have talked about oversaturation and flooding and linked it with trauma. We have talked about tragedy and irony, we have even talked of shock. Obsessive repetitions readily connote some kind of superhuman, mechanical monster (or perhaps a Sisyphus rolling his stone), not to mention the strain and anguish conveyed by the very sound. Listening to *Trauermusik* is not a pleasurable experience. The sublime experience involves a significant degree of unpleasure. However, as Kiene Brillenburg Wurth (henceforward KBW) interprets Kant, “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”.⁴⁴ This self-revelation, the awareness of our own capacities is the chief source of pleasure: “the soul is amazed by the unexpected view of its own surpassing power.”⁴⁵

Kant, of course, could not have known of the symmetrical logic of the unconscious. Taking this into account, in my free interpretation, the sublime object overwhelms us, even as we overwhelm the object. Furthermore, our unconscious mind does not require a turning point where frustration yields to liberation and transcendence. Condensation, even the conflation of opposites, is a well-documented unconscious mechanism. Therefore, we can talk about simultaneity of pain and pleasure: pleasure that is mediated through, and intensified by, a displeasure. This is precisely what KBW attempts to offer in her already quoted study as the “alternative sublime”, drawing both on earlier authors, like Burke, and on the postmodern perspective derived mostly from Jean-François Lyotard (but not referring to psychoanalysis). She is largely concerned with this interplay of pain and pleasure, particularly on irresolvability. She claims that the sublime feeling “need not, as in the dominant Kantian model, necessarily be framed as a narrative of overcoming, moving from terror to relief, or frustration to elevation. Rather, it can also be conceived as an unresolved, self-conflicting oscillation of pain and pleasure at once.”⁴⁶ Elsewhere, she remarks on “resistance to closure typical of the

⁴⁴ Kiene Brillenburg Wurth, “The Musically Sublime: Infinity, Indeterminacy, Irresolvability”, Dissertation, Groningen University, 2002, vii.

⁴⁵ Ibid., xvi.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 74.

sublime feeling” and “interlocking of two conflicting intensities ... opposites intertwine [as do chords on C and *F-sharp*; as do Mozart and the surrounding motifs – MZ], the one principle can here be said to be always and already at work in the other”.⁴⁷

We can see how well it resonates with our dilemma between tragedy (catharsis) and unresolved conflicts (trauma) and more broadly with questions of indeterminacy. Vagueness, indecision, dream-like quality (the unconscious again!) – this is what authors like Burke as well as KBW look for in the sublime art, and for which they (together with Schopenhauer, Wagner and Nietzsche) find music especially suitable. While this is a general statement on music, there are so many analytical observations about this composition to corroborate it. Let us recall the irreconciled splits, the indeterminacy (tonal/octatonic), the undecidability between tragic defeat and ironic victory. Let us, furthermore, think of the treatment of dissonance. It connotes tension and indeterminacy.⁴⁸ Admittedly, indeterminacy may not be quite true within the laws of tonal harmony and voice leading, but with the criteria of consonance adopted herein, we are left with salient, yet non-resolving dissonances. And while the music – as demonstrated above – does unfold a kind of plot, the incessantly repeating figures – in fact all that was said about repetition, uniformity and saturation – thwarts the progress, and prevents it from reaching a final resolution. There is something life-negating about it, and it is duly shattered by the shock of the sublime. Yes, the appearance of the Mozart excerpt is a shock, and I am not the first to make this claim.⁴⁹ And if anxiety in *Trauermusik* reaches the point when we feel traumatized, the very ability to construe a narrative provides if not the means for the healing of trauma, then at least a way of coping with it. Letting Kant have the final word: confronted with the overbearing, irresistible nature – and what can be more irresistible than death? – “the humanity in our person remains undemeaned even though the human being must submit to that dominion.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid., 245.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 235.

⁴⁹ Ana Stefanović, Milan Mihajlović *Eine kleine Trauermusik*, linear notes CD 201, Beograd, SOKOJ, 1996.

⁵⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, Cambridge University Press, 2000, 145.

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Summary

Functional tonal music basically operates under an external, a priori given referential system, and the authority of the tonal center may be challenged but will almost inevitably be reasserted. Post-tonal music may also seek to establish tonal centers and referential sonorities, but these are to a large extent contextual, and so are the means

whereby they are established (or challenged). The “tonal plot” of such compositions tends to be more intriguing. Competing tonal centers may enter into a kind of power play the outcome of which is less predictable and more amenable to interpretation.

In the present paper, I will discuss tonal centers and referential sonorities in the composition *Eine kleine Trauermusik* (1992) by one of the leading Serbian composers Milan Mihajlović. Even though its pitch structure may appear rather straightforward with its primary tonal center in C (displaced by other intonational pivots, but ultimately reestablished), and with referential (quasi-tonic) chords derived from the harmonic series, I intend to highlight intricate narrative trajectories traversed by various tonal centers (which are, accordingly, treated as actors/characters); their dramatic conflicts; the stories of their rise to and decline from power. These narratives can be related to certain archetypal plots, with the conclusion that there exists ambiguity between the tragic and the ironic archetype.

A specific feature of this composition is the collaboration/interplay/conflict/ between different principles of pitch organization, i.e. octatonic and functionally tonal. The narrative of referential sonorities is thus projected onto the higher plane of “musical languages,” where again we can observe “struggle for power” and ambiguity about the outcome.

These unresolved ambiguities, simultaneity of conflicting interpretations and generally, situations involving ambivalence and indeterminacy are examined from the psychoanalytic perspective, which postulates isomorphism between musical structures and processes and the processes unfolding in the unconscious mind.

Finally, the effect of these narratives, especially the overwhelming impact induced by the excerpt from Mozart’s piano concerto is linked with the idea of sublime as conceived by Kant, but also including other approaches (Burke, Lyotard’s postmodern sublime etc.).