



On Music and Perfection: Adorno's Dialectics, the notion of the Sublime in Slavoj Žižek and in the Cinematography of Werner Herzog

Allaerts W*

Biological Publishing A&O, The Netherlands

*Corresponding author: Wilfried Allaerts, Biological Publishing A&O, Nijverdal, The Netherlands

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Abstract

This paper continues two preceding papers, devoted to (1) the notions of mathematics and computability in music, and (2) the problem of inclusiveness in music, or more specific the difficult integration of soul and jazz in so-called Western music, as experienced in certain 'European' circles of classic music. Also in accordance with the previous, the present paper is about what defines 'perfection' in music. Although the individual qualities of musicians and composers are of primary importance for an excellent performance, this is not what this paper is about. Starting from both T.W. Adorno's dialectic analysis of Arnold Schoenberg and the music of the second Viennese school, and the notion of the Sublime in opera, as worked out by Slavoj Žižek, we elaborate on the relationship between the Sublime and perfection in music and in the literature referring to it. Moreover, S.A. Kierkegaard's Wolf's Glen metaphor plays an important role in this comparison between the perfect and the Sublime and in the softening and eroding work of time. L.N. Tolstoy's Kreutzer Sonata is a classic example of this transformation. An interesting analogue is also found in the cinematographic work of Werner Herzog.

Keywords: Adorno's dialectics; Wolf's Glen metaphor; Kantian Sublime; Kreutzer sonata(s); Werner Herzog and ecstatic truth in cinematography

Introduction

What is good music? This is probably a question that almost everybody has asked once in a while, or, hopefully, once in a lifetime. And if we would have a pretty fair impression of 'good', is there also a 'better' possible? Can we say that 'less' is always 'more'? And if the answer to the latter question is affirmative, what would be the final result of a road leading to perfection? The notion of perfection – as a retro-grade reconstruction of the music performance [1]– not only follows from certain attempts to reduce music to digitalized music [2], nor from other idealization attempts, such as the importance of the second Viennese school modeling for the New music and its counterpoint, as opposed to the so-called

consumer music [2]. It is a legitimate question with a long standing tradition in esthetics and in the philosophy of music. Obviously, this question is older than the present-day habit of measuring quality and perfection by its market value, such as it is suggested to work in all kinds of popularity indices of social media. The aim of the present paper nevertheless, is to investigate how these old questions can be re-formulated in a contemporary world, with its modernistic features, without being biased by one or another cultural or political prejudice, if possible.

In the Western tradition of musicology, according to Slavoj Žižek (° 1949, Ljubljana) [3], the notion of the sublime goes back to the Kantian notion of the Sublime. We

will not fully elaborate on Žižek's differentiation between the Rossinian and Wagnerian versions of the 'encore' (as an obscene interpretation of the sublime in interpersonal, intimate relationships) [4]. Also in Theodor Adorno's (1903-1969) *Kranichsteiner Lecture on Schoenberg's Counterpoint* (1956) [5], a so-called 'demonic kinship' exists between music, sensuality and philosophy (see ¶ 2. Adorno's dialectics and the Young Schoenberg). Hereby, Adorno refers to Schoenberg's saying of the 'sexual life of sounds' [5], a reference that clearly alludes to a theme by Leo Nikolai Tolstoy's (1828-1910), elaborated in his novel *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1891) [6] (see ¶ 4. The Kreutzer Sonata, times four). Similarly, the notions of the sublime and perfection have found an esthetic and psychological substratum in the themes of a self-defying, ego-annihilating unification of man and woman, when involved in a truly affective relationship. This has been beautifully worked out in e.g. W.A. Mozart's (1756-1791) opera *Die Zauberflöte* (1791), but most particularly in Richard Wagner's (1813-1883) *Tristan und Isolde* (1865) [3] (see ¶ 3. Slavoj Žižek's notion of the Sublime in (opera) music). The *Liebestod* prelude of *Tristan und Isolde* indeed has been a theme that in itself filled the shelves of certain libraries. Moreover, the grounding, meta-musical substrates of these operas mirror some of the philosophical ideas found in Nietzsche's (1844-1900) construction of the *Zarathustra* personification (1883) [7], as it was sharply analyzed in the posthumously published, seminal work of Sabina Spielrein (1885-1942) [8]. But, in contrast to the inspiration of the philosophers, where truth has become an illusory metaphor, of which we have forgotten it is an illusion [9], neither following the sublime objects of ideology [10], that build upon the Lacanian analysis of Marxist and Christian ideologies, the musical developments of the twentieth century didn't cease to find an endless impetus in the perennial themes of love and human affection.

Again, it was due to another work of Adorno [11] to formulate the necessity of finding novel expression forms for some old or obsolete dramas of the iniquities that stratified past- and possibly also the present – socio-economic relations. One of the earliest musical examples Adorno finds suitable, is Alban Berg's (1885-1935) opera *Wozzeck* (1921), based on the nineteenth century, unfinished drama play *Woyzeck* (1836) by Georg Büchner (1813-1837). "*In today's society, it is no more appropriate to pay primary attention to the paralysis of the petit bourgeois individual in the face of his domination by the bourgeoisie – since the suffering of that individual has long since entered into the class struggle and turned against the permanence of that bourgeoisie - ...*," Adorno explains [11]. No longer the individual story of the soldier Woyzeck in his nineteenth century social environment, but the "*totality of the tragic drama has collapsed*", making it accessible to music, "*which enters through the cracks and catches fire more easily on the old material of the sentence structure than it would be*

able to with self-assertive living material" [11]. Interestingly, the music of Alban Berg's opera, that may be considered outdated or belonging to a distant musical era [3], became an inspiration to the cinematographer Werner Herzog (°1942, München) to create his movie picture *Woyzeck* (1979) and to create a new formula for storytelling about an 'ecstatic truth' (see ¶ 5. Werner Herzog and the cinematography of the Unseen).

Adorno's Dialectics and the Young Schoenberg

In the first of Adorno's legendary *Kranichsteiner lectures* [12], Adorno opens with the remark that "*all of Schoenberg's decisive innovations can already be found in his early works (roughly up to opus 10)*". Then, quite surprisingly Adorno continues with a quotation of the Wolf's Glen Metaphor of S. A. Kierkegaard (1813-1855): "*The original inner tension that once spawned this material will pass.*" The Wolf's Glen Metaphor is cited explicitly in Adorno's work. It refers to a threatening place, a wolf's cave or canyon, that once 'yawned' terribly: but now, as it is crossed by a railway bridge, for the tourists looking into the depth, it is merely an adornment of the landscape. We will come back to this Kierkegaard metaphor and Adorno's reading of it. Adorno favors a dialectic logic, and he adds 'somewhat against tradition': "*these chords, these musical constructs, fundamentally change in their forms, it is equally true that something of this element must be preserved (...)*" (p. 5).

What is so important, according to Adorno, in the music of Arnold Schoenberg, to devote several lectures on this particular composer and make him into a corner stone of the New Music and paint him as one of the most influential composers of the twentieth century? But before giving an answer to these considerations, the philosopher opens his plea with several caveats. First, one should not separate the composer (Schoenberg) from his compositions (both early and later works), because "*one cannot enter the realm of objectivity by simply crossing out the subject*" (p. 7). Moreover, and Adorno uses strong language "for heaven's sake, one should no longer consider it an achievement today, or a matter of great boldness or sophistication, to operate with a certain material that means nothing in itself (...)" (p. 8). Adorno here declares himself a Hegelian philosopher, as "a bud disappears in the bursting-forth of the blossom (...)"¹ [13], "as Hegel describes in his *Phänomenologie*, allowing the new to emerge in pure form"². Another aspect of the young Schoenberg, according to Adorno, is his 'naïveté': "*any normal New German composer would have been clever*

1 Hegel GWF, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Eng. transl. A.V. Miller, 1977), p.2.

2 Adorno TW (ibidem), p. 8.

enough, shall we say, to hide (the Brahmsian and Wagnerian passages in Schoenberg's Abschied song, Opus 1)" (p. 10), merging "the chromatic, expressive and highly sophisticated material of Wagner's harmonic language with Brahmsian compositional principles". Likewise, one could call Adorno's honesty to name the fact that he knows only one of these songs of Schoenberg's *Opus 1*, but he writes about these songs in plural, is also a demonstration of Adorno's naïveté, a deliberate exposure of himself and demonstration of the principle of elaborating on the material of Schoenberg, while this material in fact recedes from the foreground and transforms into the textual description of Adorno's lecture. It is no longer an exposé 'about the young Schoenberg', but an exposé 'about Adorno writing about the young Schoenberg'.

Finally, also the *Zeitgeist* is of primary importance: Schoenberg's work has to be situated as "an attempt to break out of the realm of conventionalized bourgeois forms but still (staying) within the circle of forms predetermined by the bourgeois world" (p. 12). This is what Adorno calls the "element in Art Nouveau which is viewed today as so complacently laughable by the gaze that finds anything strange if it contains a contradiction" (p. 12). The contradiction here is "between breaking out and respecting the conventions after all, this decision to stay within the established world of the nineteenth century". One could easily project this contradiction onto the figure and position of Adorno's philosophy, as a late representative of a certain circle of 'conventionalized bourgeois philosophy'. For, the appreciation of the New Music of the twentieth century as long as it falls within the traditions of the second Viennese school, but the impossibility to embrace Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) and other composers as well as a myriad of New Music genres – including jazz – of the second half of that century, made new music composers sigh and call Adorno "one of the most negative intellects to excavate the creativity of the past 150 years (...)" [2].

But it is far more interesting to have a closer look at the role of Schoenberg and the poems of Richard F.L. Dehmel (1863-1920) and Jens Peter Jacobsen (1847-1885), that Schoenberg used in his 'shocking' compositions, respectively in *Verklärte Nacht* (1899) and in the *Gurre-Lieder* (1900-1910). The *Gurre-Lieder* refer to the saga of King Valdemar (1320-1375) and his mistress Tove (murdered by Valdemar's jealous queen) at the medieval, Danish Gurre castle. Adorno explains why these textual message were very shocking – 'shocking' at least for the bourgeoisie class of the first half of the century – because of the references to forbidden themes like extra-marital affairs, love and suicide. We will not recall Adorno's analysis of the exquisite harmonic progressions and dedication to the unity of (harmonic) key, which link the music of Schoenberg more to the compositions of Richard Wagner than to the similar (*Vier letzte Lieder* by Richard

Strauss (1864-1949), but rather stick to the element of shock in the literary narrative. This is especially true in another *Lied* by Schoenberg, which was also based on an 'erotic' (sic) poem by Dehmel, named 'Give me your Golden Comb'. In this poem, reference is made to the theme of Mara Magdalena as the lover of Jesus Christ, or, where a sense of sensuality in their encounter is suggested³.

And here we return to the Kierkegaard's metaphor of the Wolf's Glen. When reading Kierkegaard's *Skriifter* [14], and in particular his master piece *Enten-Eller* (1843) [15], or, when reading T.W. Adorno's first *Kranichsteiner Lecture* in contrast, a huge difference in experiencing the existential abyss may be sensed. For Kierkegaard, the passing of the railway bridge is accompanied by looking into the abyss with awe, like travelling in a train that may be lacking windows and shields, e.g. the little yellow tourist train crossing the Pyrenees even today, and Adorno, rather being seated in a luxurious carriage of an Orient Express, perhaps may have only a slant view on the abyss while savoring his brandy and cigar? For Franz Kafka, the mystery of Jesus has to be regarded as an abyss filled with light, making it impossible to look into it, "although the mystery of God, life and truth... resides in darkness"⁴ [16,17].

In the dialectical narrative of Slavoj Žižek, the distancing within the Wolf's Glen metaphor goes even further (see also ¶ 3. Slavoj Žižek's notion of the Sublime in (opera) music). Žižek's analysis of the 'hysterical' Kundry character in Wagner's opera *Parsifal* (1882), a medieval transformation of the Magdalena figure (originally, Kundry appears in the work by Wolfram von Eschenbach, ca. 1170-1220) diverges from preceding analyses, such as those made by F. Nietzsche (1888) [18] and S. Spielrein [8]. Žižek (2006) denounces the hysterical framing of Wagner's work by Nietzsche, and also denounces the characterization of Kundry's compulsive, crazy laughter as hysterical, because: "Kundry has discovered his obscene enjoyment (...). She is looking desperately for men, capable of resisting the diversion from suffering into enjoyment"⁵ [4,19].

We'd rather denounce the objectivation and obscene

3 "The actual title was 'Jesus Begs', but Schoenberg evidently relegated it to a subtitle because of its shocking narrative," Adorno explains, referring to Richard Dehmel's poem *Erhebung* (*Vier Lieder*, 1899, opus 2, nr. 3) (fide T.W. Adorno, *ibidem*, p. 18).

4 Janouch G (1968, 1981), p. 57. For a testimony of the trustworthy of this source, see Ernst Pawel, *The Nightmare of Reason* (1984), referred to in W. Allaerts (2016).

5 This rather awkward, non-conventional explanation of Žižek (2006, p. 96) is in line with his earlier analysis of the 'perverse' relationship between 'courtly love' and masochism, and with the objectivation of sensuality as expressed in 'Courtly Love, or Woman as Thing' (1994), published in S. Žižek (1994, 2005), p. 94, see W. Allaerts (2012).

impersonalization of human beings in Žižek's analysis of the notion of 'the Sublime' in music. For, any person coming to the age of that excruciating wisdom, must have learned to live with the Orpheus experience of leaving Eurydice behind, while turning the head away from the Sublime. Has he? Or, after crossing out the binary signifiers: to live within the orphan experience and leaving erudition behind, while abandoning all knowledge in the existential abyss (Kierkegaard). But how is this painful experience sublimed into music? And what is the relation to perfection: we'll discover that perfection (in music) is only attainable under the wings of, but when turning a blind eye to the Sublime. Otherwise, it becomes unbearable (see Wagner's remark on the doom of success of his opera *Tristan und Isolde* (1865)⁶ [20]).

Slavoj Žižek's Notion of the Sublime in (Opera) Music

At the beginning of the twentieth century in Russia, several avant-garde composers and brilliant minds were changing the times and the music⁷. One of these Russian avant-garde composers was Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915). In the *Poem of Ecstasy* (op. 54), written between 1905 and 1908, according to the composer, a synesthetic experience or concert illusion was proposed. Although the Himalayan concert illusion, as planned, never took place, Scriabin's mysterious work influenced several others, including jazz composers like John Coltrane (1926-1967) (for his LP record *Giant Steps*, Atlantic, 1960) [2] and Gerard Badini (° 1931, Paris, France) (on the album *Scriabin's Groove*, 2007)⁸ [21]. Scriabin's work was inspired by his close involvement with the Theosophical Society, a society going back to the third century AD and also encompassing wider religious philosophies like Vedānta Mahāyāna, Buddhism, Quabbala and Sufism.

In contrast to Scriabin's reverting to pre-Kantian and other-than-Western philosophies, Slavoj Žižek [3] grounds his analysis of the notion of the sublime on the work of Kant and post-Kantian European philosophers. Three elements are important in understanding Žižek's interpretation: the Lacanian notion of 'the Real' as the absent cause of 'the Symbolic' [22], a post-Marxist reading of G.W.F. Hegel's (1770-1831) notion of 'mediation' and the Kantian (1724-

1804) distinction between the mathematical and dynamical notions of 'the Sublime' [4]. The objects of his analysis are the characters represented and performed as such in Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*. Following his post-Marxist take-no-prisoners-analysis [23] of this work, and the terminology of Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), the symbolic encounter between the 'petit mort' (symbol of the orgasm) and the 'grand mort' (death itself) are represented by the sexual and dramatic characteristics of the Tristan personage. Žižek asks where to find the Lacanian Real in this story: "*Is it the Night into which the love couple, Tristan and Isolde, wants to disappear, or the unexpected interruption of the 'ecstatic' auto-annihilation of the lovers?*" The question is rhetorical, therefore Žižek answers for himself: "*Paradoxically, the Real is not the abyss of the Night, where into reality disintegrates, but the contingent obstacle emerging over and over again, preventing the two from the 'ecstatic', phantasmagoric immersion into the Night (...). Because, Tristan (in Act III) is not afraid of dying, but he abhors a condemnation to an eternal longing, if Isolde would expire..."*⁹.

It is the excess of information and sensations that is overwhelming the subject, who is incapable of grasping the superfluity, which Žižek links to the Kantian notion of the Sublime¹⁰. But there are two notions of sublimity in the *opera seria*, one corresponding to the music of Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868) and one corresponding to Wagner's music (like in the exuberant character of Tristan). And, most surprisingly, these two notions of the Wagnerian and Rossinian Sublime correspond well, according to Žižek, with the Kantian opposition between the mathematical and dynamical notions of the Sublime: "*the Rossinian Sublime is mathematical (expressing the incapacity of the subject to grasp the quantity of demands that are overflowing him); the Wagnerian Sublime is dynamical (expressing the irresistible force of the unique exigency, the exigency of unconditional love"*¹¹. But, a more distanced listener might ask, what is the point in representing 'unconditional love' in music, albeit on a stage or in private, when that person has no significant other to share this love with, or when that loved one has deceased or the love is forbidden? Neither the Rossinian, mathematical urge, nor the Wagnerian, dynamical force or exigency are providing answers here. For Žižek, these obstacles are not the Lacanian Real (see above), but fabrics of the mind. In an objectified, materialistic view on humankind, these are no real obstacles, but society has to do a better job on ethics, for instance to become more inclusive. A good point to start with, according to the Slovenian Socrates, is the problematic nature of marriage, called "the darkest and most hazardous

6 Richard Wagner feared the prohibition of his opera *Tristan und Isolde*, if the performance would be too good, because then the audience would turn mad. On the other hand, a bad performance or a parody, would possibly save the composer (in the public opinion and media) (after I. Vetter, 1992, p. 153).

7 Circus Charms program of Dutch pianist Pauline Post and ensemble Seasession at www.seasession.nl (2021-2022).

8 Quoted by Leonard Evers at AVROTROS Vrijdagconcert, NPO Radio 4, February 18, 2022.

9 Žižek S (2006), p. 42

10 Žižek S (ibidem), p. 22

11 S. Žižek (ibidem), p. 23.

of all transgressions, (...) the last fortress of a binary logic..”¹².

We already mentioned the problematic nature of this proclamation and identification of the Sublime in music, and embarked on the view that perfection in music is rather attainable by an opposite movement, under the wings but blindfolded in the light of the Sublime (see above). In the next paragraphs we proceed with how these two notions of sublimity work through history and emerge as well in other regions of culture (see below).

The Kreutzer Sonata, Times Four

How does the Sublime work in time? Or, rephrasing the Kierkegaard metaphor of the Wolf’s Glen, and, adhering to that metaphor, the notion of an overwhelming fluidity grasping the listener (Žižek, 2006) (see above): how do we proceed from here? “Time is impenetrability!”, said Humpty Dumpty to Alice, meaning “we’ve had enough of that subject (...)”¹³ [24,25]. Life goes on, says the orphan experience, with a smile directed to the future.

We already pointed at Adorno’s associations between sensuality and music and the literary work of L.N. Tolstoy *The Kreutzer Sonata* (see ¶ 1. Introduction) he was referring to [5]. Tolstoy’s work is inspired by Ludwig van Beethoven’s (1770-1827) *Violin Sonata* (1803), nr 9, op. 47 (named the ‘Kreutzer Sonata’, as Beethoven dedicated this work to Rodolphe Kreutzer [1766-1831]). This work in turn inspired Leoš Janáček’s (1854-1928) *String Quartet* (1923), nr 1, also named *Kreutzer Sonata*, as well as other novel authors, theatre play-writers and film makers. Common themes in the literary works, as well as in the confidential commentaries (e.g. of Janáček, in his letter to his young friend Kamila Stösslová) are the psychological drama, characterized by emotional outbursts, passionate moments and finally leading to an ultimate climax and catharsis. In the Tolstoy novel, a fortuitous passenger on a night train starts expounding on his dramatic experiences in his marriage, culminating in the murder of his wife. His jealousy and mind sickness form the conditions for his misogyny. A coincidental performance¹⁴ of

Beethoven’s Kreutzer Sonata by a violin player, accompanied by his wife on piano, forms only the trigger to his horrendous deed. Interestingly, Tolstoy describes how in the sick mind of the man, the specific part of the music didn’t assuage his mood nor ease his painful heart but, on the contrary, aggravated his anger. These thoughts are well in line with Wagner’s premonitions about the public responses to his opera *Tristan und Isolde* (see ¶ 2. Adorno’s dialectics and the Young Schoenberg), or as it was visualized in the nerve-racking movie *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) by Stanley Kubrick (after the novel by Anthony Burgess [1917-1993]) [26].

In the works of these influential novelists and movie makers, the superfluity of the sensations experienced in the Kantian Sublime, indeed, may lead into a trigger mechanism. In time, the railway bridge crossing the Wolf’s Glen, as it was also remarked by Adorno in his *Kranichsteiner Lecture*, nr 1 (see above), results in assuaging the minds and softening the landscape, as the existential abyss is perhaps no longer touching our nerves and senses.

Werner Herzog and the Cinematography of the Unseen

Fortunately, the unpredictable ingenuity of the scarcely present, brilliant and creative minds helps us to stay away from boredom, stay away too from the *Biedermann* culture and the institutional shackles and enclosures designed to contain and entertain the masses [2]. Perfection in music performance therefore is not a matter of mathematically mastered optimization, as some have defended [1], but remains at arm’s length of its inspiratory source, occasionally represented by the sublime Icarus, the ancient mythical figure that once ascended to icy altitudes¹⁵.

How do these mechanisms work in a culture dominated by images and visual communication? On a road paved by Adorno himself (see ¶ 1. Introduction), elaborating on the work that wasn’t a ‘work’¹⁶ [27], the Woyzeck theme became

12 Žižek S (ibidem), p. 55.

13 Full quotation: < “Impenetrability! That’s what I say!” “Would you tell me, please,” said Alice, “what that means?” “Now you talk like a reasonable child,” said Humpty Dumpty, looking very much pleased. “I meant by ‘impenetrability’ that we’ve had enough of that subject, and it would be just as well if you ‘d mention what you mean to do next, as I suppose you don’t mean to stop here all the rest of your life.” “That’s a great deal to make one word mean,” Alice said in a thoughtful tone! > The passage is from Lewis Carroll’s work *Through the Looking Glass* (1872), following a quote of Alan Turing in a letter to R.O. Gandy (early 1952) (Cambridge King’s College Archive Centre, rek. K/1 (Gandy)/NO. 82). See (Allaerts, 2012), for discussion.

14 Tolstoj L (1891, 1965), p. 106.

15 “Like Icarus ascending/ On beautiful foolish arms/ Amelia, it was just a false alarm (...)” Lyrics from Joni Mitchell’s song *Amelia* (1976)(from Hejira album, © 1976, Elektra/Asylum/Nonesuch Records, Los Angeles, CA).

16 In these phrases, Adorno refers to Alban Berg’s opera *Wozzeck* (1925) in *Zur Philosophie der neuen Musik* (1949). Quote: “Die einzig verbindlichen Werke heute sind die, welche keine Werke mehr sind. (...) Aber es waere Berg beim Gedanken, er habe im ‘Wozzeck’ erfuehlt, was in Schoenbergs expressionistischen Stuecken als blosse Moeglichkeit angelegt war, nicht wohl gewesen. Fuer seine extensive Fuelle und die contemplative Weisheit der Architektur hat das komponierte Trauerspiel den Preis zu zahlen. Die unvermittelten Aufzeichnungen des expressionistischen Schoenberg werden zu neuen Bildern der Affekte vermittelt. Die Sicherheit der Form erweist sich als Medium der Absorption von Schocks. Das Leiden des ohnmaechtigen Soldaten in der Maschinerie des Unrechts beruhigt sich zum Stil. (...) Im gebaerdelosen Mitleid des Tons wacht tapferer Defaitismus. Trotzdem nimmt der ‘Wozzeck’ die eigene Ausgangsposition zurueck, gerade

the subject of one of the early movie pictures of the German cinematographer Werner Herzog.

In the cinematography of Herzog, a peculiar perspective on story-telling is followed. In an interview Herzog narrates on *“the importance of spending 90 minutes or so, seeing and following a person in a context (such as in the world of blind and deaf) allowing your mind and spirituality for experiencing something extraordinary”* [28]. Or, apparently, for experiencing something which isn't caught easily in the mind by a sole image. Therefore, virtually it is 'unseen'.

Herzog had a long and intensive working relation with the actor Klaus Kinski (1926-1991). Kinski played the leading role in five movie films directed by Herzog, among which *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972), *Woyzeck* (1979) and *Fitzcarraldo* (1982). Also in *Aguirre (...)*, *“very early in the beginning, there is a shot of the ferocious river, boiling. You see it for a long time. Seeing it for three seconds would be enough to know it is an angry river. But I believe you see it for thirty seconds or so. It is completely out of proportion. But having seen that so early in the film, you accept more easily as an audience all of the disproportion to come”*¹⁷. The relationship between the actor and the director was problematic, not only because of the intense performance style of Kinski, which is very characteristic for the Herzog - Kinski films, but also because of the volatile and tumultuous personality of Kinski. The actor is not playing the role of a troubled character, he was the troubled character. This resulted in iconic movie pictures that might stand the times (if still available).

In the *Offscreen* interview, the term 'ecstatic truth' is used, literally referring to another Herzog's documentary *The Great Ecstasy of Woodcarver Steiner* (1974), but the term applies to nearly all of Herzog's movies. Like the gravity defying Fitzcarraldo personage (performed by Kinski), where a steam boat of 320 tons is actually lifted up out of the (Pachitea) river, a side-river of the Amazon, dragged up a 40° slope over the mountain and plunged again in the (Ucayali) river, to disappear into the rapids of the Ucayali. The disproportionality of the events, whether historical or fictitious, are chosen to tell a different story than we are used to. Without spoiling its plot, the narrative is about the relation of humanity with its presence in this cosmic reality, and how Nature is not understood.

Returning to the film *Woyzeck*, and the recurrent theme

of sensuality and musical perfection, this is beautifully captured in a phrase, which is told to the soldier Woyzeck (Kinski again): *“Running through creation like a razor (blade), you will (eventually) cut someone”*. This is also what happens in the Woyzeck story, very much like the plot in Tolstoy's novel *Kreutzer sonata* (see above). Love has a cutting edge, it is said, which also holds for music and cinema.

Concluding Remarks

A lot has been said in this paper on 'music and perfection' and much more hasn't been said: we haven't told yet about virtuosity, skill, talent, persevering hard work, endurance, training and physical condition. But, who am I to write about these necessary qualities for a musician to give an excellent performance or for a composer to write the "music for the million years to come"¹⁸. Could someone decide what good music is for his fellow listeners on the planet or for some unknown encounters outside our solar system? Or, should we have a voting system, to decide what most people like, and what is the relevance of such a referendum for the musical choices and tastes of tomorrow, or of next year, or in a hundred years, or for eternity?

This paper, together with the preceding papers [1,2], is about a few fundamental issues that go along with music irrespective of its appreciation of the present moment. Hopefully, these issues stand for a period long enough to call it a culture: our culture! After the paper on 'music and computability' [1] and 'music and soul' [2], also about the mathematics in music [1] and the phenomenon of inclusiveness for all possible cultures in music [2], we embarked on the notion of perfection and the idea of the Sublime. It appears not only that at least two kinds of 'sublimity' exist, in music and beyond, called the Rossinian and Wagnerian kind. After Slavoj Žižek these two forms are analyzed as mathematical (the idea of superfluity by more of the similar), which appears to be the current paradigm of the present, neo-liberal, consumption-based economy, and the dynamical (the idea of superfluity by the unique, unattainable). For those few, who might think they own the planet and half of our solar system with it, this paper is not intended.

This paper is also about the relation between the Perfect and the Sublime, and most of it all: "what has love to do with it?"

in den Momenten, in denen er diese entwickelt. Die Impulse des Werkes, die in seinen musikalischen Atomen leben, rebellieren gegen das Werk, das aus ihnen zusammenschiesst. Sie dulden kein Resultat. (...) (Typeskript of original study, Ts 1302-1303, TW Adorno Archiv, Berlin, published as [Adorno, 1958, 1975 ed.] p. 36 a.f.).

17 Werner Herzog in interview with *Offscreen* (Renaud et al., 2004), p. 9.

18 This is a quote referring to Scriabin's (see ¶ 3) other mystery work, *Mysterium* (composed between 1903 and 1915), broadcast of the Alexander Nemtin composition of Scriabin's sketches in Amsterdam, November 28, 2015 by Dutch Radio 4 (Matinée)

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