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## Issues and Problems in Practice.

The man that hath no music in himself,  
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,  
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils;  
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,  
And his affections dark as Erebus:  
Let no such man be trusted. Mark the music.  
*The Merchant of Venice, Act V, Scene 1*

That music is a source of inspiration for human, or even divine endeavours, is an idea that is inherent in the word's etymology. The Muses, according to Classical mythology, were begotten by Zeus at the request of the other gods immediately after the creation of the universe, in order to sing the creation into completion<sup>1</sup>. In Christianity their role could be seen as, in some respects, being transferred to the angels, although these were a little lower in a divine hierarchy, being servants and celebrators of God rather than participants in creation. On a more abstract level is the equally long-standing notion of a relationship between music and the planets - the 'music of the spheres', or in Boethius's terms 'Musica Mundana' - a constant of mathematical relationships which derives from the harmony of the cosmos, and which is considered to be a fundamental quality of both music and the human soul. Its proportions are reflected in the ratios of much Classical architecture. There are also resonances of this divine order in both the Golden Section and in the related Fibonacci sequence, which have been guiding principles in the proportions of the works of numerous artists and musicians, including the twentieth century composer Bela Bartok.

It is music (and particularly the string quartets of Bela Bartok) that has been the source for my printmaking during the last two years. So it seems appropriate and possibly useful for me to look at some other instances in which art and music have been associated. Such associations have taken a myriad of forms; rather than attempting a comprehensive survey of these, which could only be superficial in a paper of this length, I basically intend to discuss the associations in which art is somehow derived from music. This field is rife with woolly theoretical speculation, outstanding failures, and occasionally some degree of success. It is also this problematic area which is closest to my own practice.

A broad area is occupied by this kind of association, but at the base of all its more conscious manifestations<sup>2</sup> there must be both desire for some quality of music that is

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<sup>1</sup>As in Pindar's *Hymn to Zeus*; see Ildiko Ember, *Music in Painting*, Corvina, Hungary, 1989, p.5

<sup>2</sup>I am aware of the less conscious but enormously widespread influence that 'background' music has on the visual arts. This is not just a phenomenon of the age of recorded music; Leonardo's comparison of painting and sculpture describes the disadvantage of the sculptor, who is unable to enjoy the accompaniment of music when at work 'without the interference of hammering and other noises' (In Leonardo's *Paragone*, in *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, compiled and edited from the original manuscripts by Jean Paul Richter, vol. 1, Third Edition, Phaidon, London, 1970, p.91.)

perceived as lacking in visual arts, as well as a conviction that there can be a similarity in what Kandinsky calls an 'inner identity' of different forms of art, which would enable the transcendence of external variations. This internal similarity may, according to Kandinsky, exist even between one period and another, in which case 'the logical consequence will be a revival of the external forms which served to express those insights in the earlier age'.<sup>3</sup> The concept that there can be some inner correspondence between different forms of art is not unique to Kandinsky; it is intrinsic to the frequently quoted phrase 'Ut Pictura Poesis' (as a painting, so also a poem), attributed to Simonides of Keos and used, for example, by Horace in his epistle on the art of poetry, *Ars Poetica*. Leonardo, in his book on painting *Paragone*, also demonstrated an awareness of a common denominator between different art-forms. He extended the Classical analogy between painting and poetry to include music (as well as science and sculpture) in his comparisons. By the mid-nineteenth century the predominant analogy was between painting and music, rather than painting and poetry, as epitomised by the title of an article which appeared in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* of 1859; *Ut Pictura Musica*. The motivation for uncovering an hypothesised core of correspondence which would allow a translation from music to painting seems to have been a covetousness for the very nature of music, which is at once so abstract and esoteric in its operation, yet is so evidently a part of everyday life. It seems that the form of music, while it is made up of rational, and even mathematical elements and structures that can be analyzed and categorized (e.g. harmony, rhythm, counterpoint, keys, modulations, etc.), is nevertheless able to transcend normal rational, conscious thought, and speak more directly than other artforms to some primal, centrally contained part of ourselves, which may variously be called the psyche, the subconscious, or the soul.

It is this intangible side of music which makes any attempt to uncover its 'inner necessity', in order to translate its complexities, a highly ambitious project. Efforts to do so have varied from a concentration on tangible elements to the vaguest of metaphorical connections. There have been endeavours at translating one medium into another; either by the rather artificial and often dubious means of transposing a formal element of one medium to what is perceived as an equivalent element of another medium (e.g. pitch to colour or tone), or by translating the common basic components such as structure, rhythm, harmony, proportion. Less concerned with formal elements are translations which depict images that are evoked by a piece of music. Even less specific are instances in which one work of art, or its underlying concept, simply acts as a trigger, or point of departure, for another. Perhaps the vaguest connection of all is in the metaphoric concept of the 'musicality' of

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According to Vasari, the *Mona Lisa* was painted while both Leonardo and his sitter were entertained by music. See Ludwig Goldscheider, *Leonardo, Paintings and Drawings*, Phaidon Press, London, 1959, p.20

<sup>3</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, George Wittenborn, Inc., New York, 1947, p.23

particular types of visual art. An exploration of these various types of musical art will be a concern of the remainder of the paper.

While I am not aware of any particular works of Classical art that consciously have their inspiration in some work in another medium, the relationship between proportions and harmonies in art and music was at this time a source of some speculation. Pythagoras, in the sixth century before Christ, was aware of the mathematical proportions of musical intervals<sup>4</sup>. Periods of revival of classical models, such as the Renaissance, have also spawned theories on such relationships. Leon Battista Alberti explored the relationship between musical intervals and architectural proportions. He wrote,

The same numbers which by their relation in the harmony of voices sound pleasing to the ears of man also fill his eyes and soul with rare pleasure.<sup>5</sup>

In keeping with the spirit of the Renaissance, Leonardo's comparison of music and painting in his work *Paragone* is concerned with rational rather than esoteric elements. Like his Classical forebears he relates harmonies, proportions and rhythm. He likens, for example, the harmonic rhythm of music to the contours of figure drawing. He compares his laws of linear perspective to musical intervals; 'The painter measures the distance of things as they recede from the eye by degrees just as the musician measures the intervals of the voices heard by the ear'<sup>6</sup>.

Perhaps the most specific analogy between music and the visual arts is a perceived relationship between melody and colour. For centuries this has been a source of fascination. While this relationship has usually been on the level of analogy or metaphor, it has become an obsession with some artists and musicians, who have attempted to make a more concrete translation from one to the other.

Goethe, in his *Theory of Colours*<sup>7</sup>, cites Aristotle, who wrote;

It is possible that colours may stand in relation to each other in the same manner as concords in music, for the colours which are (to each other) in proportions corresponding with the musical concords, are those which appear to be the most agreeable.<sup>8</sup>

Goethe also mentions the Milanese painter Arcimboldo who, in the late sixteenth century, invented a 'colorific music'. The exact nature of this invention is not known, since the only existing documentation is second hand - in a treatise on art by Comanini, published in

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<sup>4</sup>*The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, compiled and edited from the original manuscripts by Jean Paul Richter, vol. 1, Third Edition, Phaidon, London, 1970, p.72

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, opus cit, p.73

<sup>6</sup>ibid, p. 77

<sup>7</sup>Goethe's Color Theory, Arr. & ed. Ruprecht Matthaei, Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., New York, 1970, p.274

<sup>8</sup>ibid, p.274



1591. Arcimboldo's invention seems to have been a kind of code of colours, with a scale of gradations, which was reportedly deciphered into music on a harpsichord.<sup>9</sup> While Aristotle's and Arcimboldo's equivalences were still on a level of metaphor, or perhaps a substitute musical notation, the eighteenth-century scientist and Jesuit priest Père Louis Bertrand Castel is attributed with inventing a 'clavecin oculaire', which really was concerned with making a translation. It followed Newtonian principles of a physical/mathematical correspondence between the seven notes of the musical scale and the seven colours of the spectrum. Castel constructed a keyboard instrument - like a harpsichord - which produced colours instead of notes.<sup>10</sup>

A century later, in 1844, an Englishman D. D. Jameson also invented a keyboard instrument for playing colour-music. This specimen apparently used artificial light sources to illuminate glass globes which were filled with coloured liquids. Twelve round apertures were connected to keys which controlled the illuminations.<sup>11</sup>

For himself, Goethe perceived a strong relationship between sound and colour, but felt the inadequacy of contemporary science to resolve the characteristics of music as we hear it ('...a character resulting from the achievements of practical skill, from accidental, mathematical, aesthetical influences...'<sup>12</sup>) into a representation in colours. However, he considered that it might yet be accomplished.

Baudelaire, writing a few decades later, makes frequent mention of a 'correspondance' between the arts. Far more flamboyant in style than Goethe, he was also much more definite in his speculations on the possibilities of translating music to colour.

What would be truly surprising would be to find that sound could not suggest colour, that colours could not evoke the idea of a melody, and that sound and colour were unsuitable for the translation of ideas, seeing that things have always found their expression through a system of reciprocal analogy ever since the day when God uttered the world like a complex and indivisible statement.<sup>13</sup>

Baudelaire's predilection for some form of synaesthesia anticipated the jealousy for the essential nature of music which has been especially evident since the late nineteenth century. This coincided with the decline in emphasis on the representational qualities of

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<sup>9</sup>The exact nature of this instrument is the subject of much dispute; see the arguments put forward in *Music for Eyes*, by Tonino Tonitore, in *The Arcimboldo Effect*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1987, p.355

<sup>10</sup>See Tom Douglas Jones, *The Art of Light and Color*, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, New York, 1972, pp.16, 17

<sup>11</sup>*ibid*, p.18

<sup>12</sup>Goethe's Color Theory, *opus cit*, p.257

<sup>13</sup>Quoted in Maurice Tuchman, *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890 - 1985*, Abbeville Press, New York, 1986, p.32

art. In the face of crumbling traditions, of the dissolution of naturalism as a goal, some artists looked to other artforms in the hope of finding structures and forms that could be transferred to painting. There was a strong desire to discover 'universal' laws which might provide security in the face of a new-found freedom that bordered on anarchy. The age-old desire for a system of colours that paralleled the laws of musical harmony was rekindled by a more scientific realization of the similarity in their essential nature - that both colour and musical notes are vibrations, with the characteristic features of wavelength, frequency, etc. Explorations of this commonality have varied from simple recognition (such as that of Gauguin,<sup>14</sup>) to an association of sound and colour vibrations with some kind of 'soul vibrations' (a significant proportion of the artists working in this field were associated with spiritual movements such as Theosophy), to a supposedly more scientific charting of equivalences between specific colours and notes than those of Newton and Castel.

From the late nineteenth century there was an increasing frequency in the re-invention of colour keyboard instruments. Technological advances made possible the development of increasingly complex and impressive machines. In 1877 the American Bainbridge Bishop built a colour organ that used both artificial and natural light to project colours onto a screen. Also in America, Van Deering Perrine made a machine that used hydraulic pistons to blend liquids in a tank. A complicated and expensive colour-organ was developed in 1893 by A. Wallace Rimington. He used arc-lamps, colour filters, lenses, and reflectors, to create effects which were inspired by the luminous paintings of Turner, and which were used in conjunction with the music of Dvorak, Chopin and Wagner. Even an Australian, Alexander Hector, devised a colour/music machine early this century. He used incandescent lamps, Geissler and X-ray tubes for his colour projections which were supposed to correspond to music produced at the same time<sup>15</sup>.

A far more integrated use of a colour organ with music, and one which really harks back to the notion of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, was by the Russian composer Alexander Scriabin. For him, the relationship between particular colours and notes was very real; so real that, like virtually all others with a sense of 'colour hearing', he believed that his particular associations must be shared with all other truly sensitive souls.<sup>16</sup> His orchestral work *Prometheus, The Poem of Fire*, includes at the top of the score a part for 'luce' - a colour

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<sup>14</sup>'Think also of the musical role that will henceforth be played by colour in modern painting. Colour is vibration just like music, and is in the same way able to attain to that which is most general and consequently most vague in nature, viz., its interior form.' Gauguin, quoted in H. R. Rookmaaker, *Gauguin and 19th Century Art Theory*, Swets and Zeitlinger, Amsterdam, 1972, p. 215

<sup>15</sup>All the examples in this paragraph are drawn from <sup>15</sup>Tom Jones, opus cit, p.18

<sup>16</sup>However, a cross-referencing of different charts of such equivalences does not bear this out. See appendix A.

organ. It was intended that the piece be played in the dark, with both the audience and the performers dressed in white; coloured lights were to be projected onto a screen.<sup>17</sup>

The notion of a precise relationship between colour and notes was not universal to those artists and musicians working with colour-organs. Their use became increasingly independent of both a musical source and a musical accompaniment. As they became increasingly sophisticated and impressive machines they also gained a wider credibility, acquiring more than just a curiosity value with the art world and the public. The American pianist Mary Hallock-Greenewalt won a gold medal for her colour-organ at the Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition at Philadelphia in 1926<sup>18</sup>. More famous was Thomas Wilfred, who coined the term 'lunia' to describe this form of art. Wilfred refused to attach specific meanings to either colours or keys. He wrote,

Green is generally considered a restful colour, but green has a thousand qualities. It may be stirring rather than restful. Blues may mean one thing when applied to a square and another thing when applied to a circle. The key of C major has no especial meaning, but can be made to mean anything that one wishes to make it mean.<sup>19</sup>

With the increasing sophistication of electronic technology this century has come an explosion of colour/music devices. Since the nineteen sixties electronic sound and colour projections have become commonplace in such venues as discotheques. The association of light and colour with music has thoroughly infiltrated popular culture, while continuing to be explored in the 'high art' areas of avant-garde electronic media.

Kandinsky also undertook a study of colour theory, applying it within the more traditional area of painting on canvas. Unlike some of the 'colour musicians' working with light, he very sensibly linked colour and form, since only an abstract, mental picture of a colour can exist without boundaries. His study is well documented in his book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, first published in 1912<sup>20</sup>. He speaks of the physical effect of colour, which he sees as being the superficial extent of perception of the 'average man'. For a 'more sensitive soul' there will also be a psychological effect, and it is in this area that translations from one sense to another become possible. For highly sensitive people even the sense of taste will evoke a colour, or a colour may suggest a particular scent. For Kandinsky a heightened sensitivity leaves one's soul open, so that something like the sympathetic vibrations between musical instruments can take place between different senses. He sees the study of the effects of colours as a starting point for an exercise of the spirit, with the aim of developing the sensitivity of the soul, and assisting the journey to the

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<sup>17</sup>Tom Douglas Jones, opus cit., p.103

<sup>18</sup>ibid, p.21

<sup>19</sup>ibid, p.21

<sup>20</sup>Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, opus cit.

‘inner necessity’. Analogies with music and musical instruments are interwoven into his study. Kandinsky divides colours into four main ‘notes’: warm and either light or dark; cold and either light or dark. He qualifies his comparisons of colours and musical instruments;

A parallel between colour and music can only be relative. Just as a violin can give various shades of tone, so yellow has shades, which can be expressed by various instruments.<sup>21</sup>

While he realizes that colour associations are not universal, he is confident of some general agreement on the types of relationships;

The sound of colours is so definite that it would be hard to find anyone who would express bright yellow with bass notes, or dark lake with the treble.<sup>22</sup>

An intense yellow he describes as having a painfully shrill note, ‘like that of the bugle’. The shades of blue are progressively compared to a flute, a cello, a double bass, then an organ. White and black he sees as two different aspects of silence; white is the great silence, ‘like a cold, indestructible wall going on into the infinite’; black is the ‘silence with no possibilities’. They are the tones of birth and of death.

Australia, too, has had its share of colour-music enthusiasts. Apart from Alexander Hector and his colour organ were the painters Roland Wakelin and Roy de Maistre, who were for some years obsessively involved in developing their own antipodean colour theories. De Maistre’s interest seems to have evolved from a time he spent in hospital recuperating from tuberculosis. Together with a Dr Moffat he became interested in the possibilities of using colour therapy as a treatment for victims of shell-shock. De Maistre also had some interest in music, having studied the viola for some time. How much his colour theories were influenced by overseas trends has not really been established, but his own version of equivalences between musical notes and colours seems to have little common ancestry with its predecessors.<sup>23</sup> Together with Wakelin, de Maistre developed an elaborate colour harmonizing wheel, which was even patented and marketed as an aid to interior decoration. Significant features of this system were the equation of tonic/dominant relationships with complementary colours, as well as the refinement of a simple equivalence of a particular colour with a note into a scheme where different octaves of that note were represented with lighter or darker tones of the same colour.

Like Kandinsky, de Maistre sensed a spiritual quality in colour. In an exhibition catalogue he wrote of colour as enabling an understanding of ‘the deepest underlying principles of

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<sup>21</sup>ibid, p.58

<sup>22</sup>ibid, p.45

<sup>23</sup>See appendix.

nature', and as the 'source of deep and lasting happiness ... the song of life ... the spiritual speech of every living thing.'<sup>24</sup> However, his spiritual tendencies don't seem to have reached the apocalyptic level of Kandinsky's utopian vision; de Maistre was on the whole more hard-headed. His art came more out of an interest in rational, controllable processes. As Sir John Rothenstein observed,

... his drawings and paintings, so far as I have been able to ascertain, were not expressions of things he saw or imagined; they were schematic representations of his active analytical intellect.<sup>25</sup>

The application of these theories resulted in paintings with such titles as *Synchromy in Red Major, Caprice in Blue Minor*. These works are historically significant because they included what were probably the first abstract paintings done in Australia. Apparently the only surviving example by de Maistre is *Rhythmic Composition in Yellow Green Minor* (1919).

It seems to me quite fantastic that the notion that there is a specific relationship between colour and music has been so enduring. In spite of centuries of speculation, no literal or scientific correlation between the vibrations of colour and the vibrations of sound has ever been clearly demonstrated. This point is succinctly argued by Tom Jones, who is yet another exponent of the colour organ;

...colour wavelengths or frequencies are natural phenomena, to be objectively measured. The diatonic scale in music, however, is an arbitrary concept of Western culture, and even though certain frequencies bear relationship, one to the other, any possible alliance with colour would be presumptuous.

Yet this is not so with reference to emotional and psychological associations, to what persons may 'feel' about colour and sound.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, the strong relationship between music and various movements in the visual arts towards abstraction extends well beyond an obsessive search for an equivalence between colour and musical notes. Already in the nineteenth century artists such as Whistler, Gauguin and Redon were attracted by music as a medium which so successfully conveyed their own goals - an expression of less tangible ideas. Such desires could be seen as a symptom of a general reaction against the harsh realities of an industrial society, or, more specifically to the arts, as a reaction against the stifling realism of the academies, as well as the facile mechanical realism of the camera. As with the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a theory promoting a combination of the arts into, for example, opera, there was also an underlying utopian idealism; many of the artists who explored relationships of art and music were also involved with Eastern mysticism and the occult,

<sup>24</sup>Quoted in Heather Johnson, *Roy de Maistre, the Australian Years 1894-1930*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1988, p.31

<sup>25</sup>Quoted in Robert Hughes, *The Art of Australia*, revised ed, Penguin, Middlesex, 1970, p.118

<sup>26</sup>Tom Douglas Jones, op. cit., p.100

most often through Theosophy. While the goals of visual artists were moving away from representation, towards more 'musical' concepts, music itself was undergoing a metamorphosis. Its own more rational structures were being stretched and distorted; traditional forms became convoluted, harmonic principles disintegrated with increasing chromaticism. Around 1910 both these tendencies culminated in works of art which broke with representation, paralleled in music by works which abandoned tonality. An example is seen in the correspondence between Schoenberg's move to atonality and Kandinsky's to abstraction. This must be one of the closest parallels in the history of the arts; their most important breakthroughs in these areas were reached at almost exactly the same times. It is as if tonality in music equates with the representational qualities of visual art, even though (with the possible exception of programme music) music was already considered to be an abstract art-form. There was a common perception that music was inherently comprehensible. As Kandinsky saw it, 'Musical sound acts directly upon the soul and finds an echo there, since music is innate in man'.<sup>27</sup> This conviction, however, collapses under the questions, which music; whose soul? While the desire to make music and art certainly seem to be innate to humanity (perhaps even a defining quality for membership of the species), the way this desire has been manifested in different cultures is by no means universal. Even within particular cultures the individual members have varying degrees of interest in the arts in general, as well as having biases towards particular forms. There are any number of examples which contradict Kandinsky's notion. The most apt of these must be the continuing unpopularity and inaccessibility of the music of the 'Second Viennese School', including that of Kandinsky's colleague and friend Arnold Schoenberg. While it is undoubtedly great music for anyone familiar with the 'language' in which it is written, its appreciation, even at this end of the century in which it was written, is confined to a very small minority of the population. It seems that not even Kandinsky had much innate appreciation of these compositions, in spite of the considerable communication of ideas between the two that took place both in correspondence and face to face. While Schoenberg was excited by the developments in Kandinsky's painting, Kandinsky's appreciation of Schoenberg's atonal compositions was more intellectual than spiritual; it was the theories on unresolved dissonance rather than the actual music which aroused interest. Indeed, Kandinsky was far more appreciative of Schoenberg's rather amateurish paintings, even inviting him to exhibit in one of the *Blaue Reiter* exhibitions. Music, the role model for a move to abstraction, was concurrently mutating into something that doesn't seem to have acted at all directly on Kandinsky's soul.

An exception to the apparent parallel between atonality in music and abstraction in painting is seen in the intentions of N. Kulbin, one of the contributors to the *Blaue Reiter* almanac.

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<sup>27</sup>Wassily Kandinsky, opus cit, p.46

He sought to free music not only from tonality, but also from the constraints of the steps of the chromatic scale. By stages, moving from semitones to quartertones to microtones, he sought the introduction into music of the whole continuum of pitch. In his article *Free Music*,<sup>28</sup> he lists as one of the advantages of such a music the increased representational capacity of music.

.. The voice of a loved person can be rendered; the singing of the nightingale, the rustling of leaves, the delicate and stormy noise of the wind and the sea can be imitated. The movement of man's soul can be represented more completely.<sup>29</sup>

He also sees a potential relationship between music and painting in the vibration of closely connected tones.

In such processes the irregular beat and the interference of tones (which is similar to that of light) are of great significance.

The vibration of close connections, their unfolding, their manifold play, make the representation of light, colors, and everything living much more effective than customary music does. ....

These close connections also create musical paintings, which consist of special planes of color that merge to form progressing harmonies, similar to contemporary painting.<sup>30</sup>

It is in some sense odd to find this article in an almanac that was principally edited by Kandinsky, who had a distaste for programme music in its narrow sense, and who particularly derided attempts to 'imitate nature'. For Kandinsky, '...nature has its own language, which affects us with its inexorable power. This language cannot be imitated'.<sup>31</sup> Rather, a work of art aiming to recapture the mood of nature would succeed 'not by the external imitation of nature, but by the artistic re-creation of this mood in its inner value'.<sup>32</sup>

Kandinsky, together with other members of the *Blaue Reiter* group, was fascinated on both a philosophical and a practical level with all areas of interaction between the arts. Like Wagner, he was attracted to the expressive potential of an art which would act on various senses with different manifestations of a core idea. This interest is evident in his book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* ;

In the impossibility of replacing the essential element of colour by words or other means lies the possibility of a monumental art. Here, amidst extremely rich and different combinations, there remains to be discovered one that is based upon the principle just established. I.e. the same inner sound can be rendered at the same moment by different arts. But apart from this general sound, each art will display that extra element which is essential and peculiar to itself, thereby adding to that inner sound which they have in common a richness and power that cannot be attained by one art alone.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>In *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, edited by Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, English translation Thames and Hudson, 1974, p.141

<sup>29</sup>ibid, p.142

<sup>30</sup>ibid, p.144

<sup>31</sup>Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, in *Complete Writings*, Vol 1, ed. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, Faber and Faber, London, 1982, p.155

<sup>32</sup>ibid, p.155

<sup>33</sup>ibid, p.191

However, it is in his less monumental forms, in his paintings rather than in his stage productions, where he explores the correlations between the arts rather than their synthesis, that his success has been more generally acknowledged. The titles of his paintings often come from the field of music; for example, *Improvisation*; *Composition*; *Impression*; *Fugue*. For Kandinsky each of these titles typifies a particular way of working that is close to the style of composing to which they refer.<sup>34</sup> He doesn't seem to have painted specific pieces of music (as did, for example, Gustav Klimt, in his frieze based on Beethoven's Ninth Symphony). Rather, he sought a common denominator in different artistic means; what he so often referred to as an 'inner necessity'. He saw a value, 'the richest lesson', in relating the elements of painting to those of other arts, particularly music;

...the richest lessons are to be learned from music. With few exceptions and deviations, music has for several centuries been the art that uses its resources not to represent natural appearances but to express the inner life of the artist and to create a unique life of musical tones.<sup>35</sup>

Kandinsky's excursions into other forms (prose poems, stage works, even musical performance - he had played cello from early in his childhood, and was proficient, though not at a professional standard, on the piano) were part of a desire to 'change instruments' that he seems to have shared with several other artists working in the early nineteen hundreds. Apart from the general interest shown by many artists, writers and composers in forms of art other than their own, a number of these artists, like Kandinsky, dabbled in other fields. Kokoschka wrote plays and poems, Schoenberg painted, the playwright Barlach made sculptures. Both Johannes Itten and Paul Klee were talented in the field of music. Kandinsky hoped that his inexperience in a new field would liberate him from its traditions, and assist him in making a breakthrough in his artistic practice. Music, with its lack of concrete concepts, served as a role model for his move away from representation. As the Russian composer Thomas von Hartmann put it in an article about his friend and compatriot, 'Painting is put on the same level as music, which seeks only the purity and appropriateness of sound combinations.'<sup>36</sup> Kandinsky sought to introduce the temporal element, a fundamental quality of music, into his art. While visual arts obviously operate in time when they are enmeshed with other forms, Kandinsky realized that time could also be an element of the static forms of visual art. He first understood this when he was in front of a Rembrandt painting. He sensed that it 'lasted a long time' because of the way that he was manipulated by the artist into viewing first one part, then another.<sup>37</sup> Again,

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<sup>34</sup>See p 218, *ibid*

<sup>35</sup>*ibid*, p.154

<sup>36</sup>From the article *The Indecipherable Kandinsky* cited in *Arnold Schoenberg Wassily Kandinsky*, ed Jelena Hahl-Koch, Faber and Faber, London, 1984, p 141.

<sup>37</sup>"Rembrandt moved me deeply ..." etc *Complete Writings*, opus cit, p.366



this view contrasts with that espoused by Leonardo in his work *Paragone*. For Leonardo, music is inferior to painting because of its very dependence on time.

Music suffers from two maladies, one of which is fatal and the other subjects her to deterioration. Her death is always linked to the moment which follows her creation and her deterioration caused by repeated performance makes her hateful and vile.<sup>38</sup>

Kandinsky, being such a prolific writer and theorist, is one of the best documented examples of what was, early this century, a widespread interest in making tangible a relationship between music and painting. Artists who demonstrated such a preoccupation ranged from the most esteemed to the most obscure. The Italian Futurist Luigi Russolo, apart from instigating the phenomenon of 'noise music', attempted to depict music in his 1911 painting titled, simply, *Music*. Picabia's interest in the analogy between painting and music, which was nurtured by his musical wife Gabrielle Buffet, surfaced in interviews given during his visit to New York in conjunction with the Armory Show<sup>39</sup>. Delaunay, rebelling against the subdued palette of the cubists, hoped to find 'more flexible laws, based on the transparency of colour, which can be compared to musical tones'<sup>40</sup>.

Frantisek Kupka was interested in formal translations. He sought to '...find something between sight and hearing ... produce a fugue in colours, as Bach has done in music'.<sup>41</sup> Musical structures were also the basis of the paintings of the Lithuanian M. Ciurlionis, as in *Sonata of the Stars*. The time/space dichotomy was resolved in a work by Duncan Grant. His *Abstract Kinetic Collage Painting with Sound* unrolled itself to the accompaniment of a slow movement by Bach. The rather obscure American I.J. Belmont made paintings which were interpretations of specific pieces of music. He too wrestled with the difficulty of the space/time dichotomy between art and music. His solution was not to paint an entire musical composition, since

... that would require an immense amount of canvas. I abstract only a snatch of the music; .....musical paintings accept the fact that music is fugitive and expression on canvas of this type must be either integral through the parts or in staccato form as required.<sup>42</sup>

Like Scriabin, Belmont saw himself as being 'endowed with an inherent perception' which allowed him to 'see' music. In his exposition of 'what colour music is', the tone of which is at times quite defensive, even tetchy, he claimed to have had his first synaesthetic experience with colour hearing at the age of six. Arthur Dove's interest in synaesthesia dates from his early abstract works, such as *Music* (1913). His later paintings which were

<sup>38</sup>Leonardo da Vinci, *Paragone*, in *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, compiled and edited from the original manuscripts by Jean Paul Richter, vol. 1, p 73.

<sup>39</sup>As discussed in *Music and the Development of Abstraction in America: The Decade Surrounding the Armory Show*, by Howard Risatti, in *Art Journal*, XXXIX, Fall 1979

<sup>40</sup>Quoted in *Music and Abstract Painting*, in *Towards a New Art*, Tate Gallery, p.43

<sup>41</sup>ibid, p.43

<sup>42</sup>I. J. Belmont, *The Modern Dilemma in Art*, Bernard Ackerman, New York, 1944, p.228

responses to the music of George Gershwin bear an uncanny resemblance to Kandinsky's musical paintings<sup>43</sup>.

The list could continue. If there is any generalization which could be made from an overview of such works, it is that the most deliberate, self-conscious attempts at translation are often the least successful. Paul Klee provides an apt illustration. To me, his painting *Fugue in Red* is a stodgy, cloying work which completely lacks his usual poetic delicacy and his rather orderly lyricism. Any interest in the work must be gleaned from a more cerebral reading of Klee's analytic processes which allowed a translation of this fairly mathematical form of music into something visual. Frankly, I'd rather listen to the music, or even read a score. It is when Paul Klee is just being Paul Klee, 'taking a line for a walk', allowing the expression of his strong sense of rhythm, that his works exude such a delightful quality of music.

Paradoxically, the most successful kind of 'musical painting' is often one in which the connection is not intentional; where a painting seems to possess a musicality, but when the analogy between the artforms has been made by an outside observer, not the artist. For me, the paintings of Jackson Pollock, with their strong rhythmic qualities, their dynamic sense of movement, and their fluid gestures that suggest the passage of time rather than a frozen moment, are strongly suggestive of music. While Pollock's strongest and most overt aesthetic sources were Native American Art, Mexican muralists, Thomas Benton, Picasso, Surrealism, as well as spiritual philosophies including Theosophy, it is not really surprising to learn that he had a sometime interest in colour music. His high school art teacher, Frederick Schwankovsky<sup>44</sup>, was a colour music enthusiast who was interested in the more literal kind of translations. He and his wife gave performances in which she played notes on a piano to match the colours he painted. Later, Pollock became interested in Thomas Wilfred's<sup>45</sup> rather mystical 'lunia compositions', and frequently spent hours mesmerised by his displays of light in his studio on Long Island. Pollock also saw Fischinger's colour music films in the Guggenheim Museum. Whether or not colour music had a direct influence on Pollock's work, his interest in this rather esoteric, even numinous type of art is somehow consistent with the nature of his abstract paintings.

Music as an inspiration for particular works of art is and has been for centuries both fruitful and problematic. It seems to be most problematic when the relationship is one of attempted translation. There are difficulties even in linguistic translations. Just as the notes of any

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<sup>43</sup>See Judith Zilczer, *Synaesthesia and Popular Culture: Arthur Dove, George Gershwin, and the "Rhapsody in Blue"*, in *Art Journal*, Winter 1984

<sup>44</sup>Who, like Kandinsky and Skriabin, had an interest in Theosophy.

<sup>45</sup>Who, again, had an interest in Theosophy. See Tom Douglas Jones, *opus cit*, p.21.

musical scale mark off points in a continuum of pitch, so too a word will mark off either an area or even a point in a continuum of meaning. The meaning of a word in one language will often lie between the words of another. A translation can only surround this meaning. It would seem inevitable that even more difficulties would be encountered in any translation from music to art; the two forms are so intrinsically diverse. The complexity of a piece of music could be compared to that of a life form - perhaps even to a human being. Attempts at reconstructing this form tend to be as clumsy as the mythical creation of Frankenstein - except that the results are often more pathetic than horrifying. Yet it seems that a translation which ignores the complexities of music and focuses only on translating one of its elements, such as notes to colour, merely produces a sterile, simplistic exercise of the intellect which is neither poetic nor scientifically justifiable. The most success in the area under discussion in this paper seems to be where a piece of music feeds the creation of a work of art in a way that is more vague than specific; more by analogy than by creating artificial equivalents such as colour and notes.

In as much as art is a reflection of a particular culture or society a translation from one form of manifestation to another ought to be possible. Yet it could be argued that these translations are not necessary; that if the various external manifestations of a particular moment in a particular culture are reflecting that culture then they ought to have an intrinsic affinity anyhow. To a certain extent this does seem to be true. While they don't always exactly coincide chronologically (often music lags behind the visual arts), there are qualities which transcend the different forms. An emphasis on clarity of structures, for example, is common to movements which value a 'classical' sense of aesthetics, whereas in both the art and music of Impressionism formal boundaries tend to dissolve. Common denominators may also exist across a broader span of time; in the history of art and music there are recurrent manifestations of iconoclastic tendencies, also of either a predominance or a lack of emotionalism. The justification for any attempt at a translation from one art form to another lies in the very nature of 'creative' activities. Art, no matter how original or revolutionary, is still an expression of at least a niche in a particular culture, and it evolves with a fertilizing consciousness of other expressions of that culture - not necessarily in the same external form. A non-specific translation is the product of a cross-fertilizing consciousness of a different art form; such a translation will take a different path to and from some intangible 'inner necessity' which seems to lie beyond the conscious mechanics of creation. Goethe has made an apt analogy.

Colour and sound do not admit of being directly compared together in any way, but both are referable to a higher formula, both are derivable, although each for itself, from this higher law. They are like two rivers which have their source in one and the same mountain, but

subsequently pursue their way under totally different conditions in two totally different regions, so that throughout the whole course of both no two points can be compared.<sup>46</sup>

In the place of 'colour and sound' could be substituted 'art and music', and the simile extended; the mountain, or at least a filtered view of it, becomes the subject in a connection between the two forms.

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<sup>45</sup>Goethe, op. cit., p.257

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## APPENDIX; MUSICAL NOTES AND ANALOGOUS COLOURS.

Newton Maistre and Lind	Castel	Field	Rimington	Klein	Skriabin	Wilkinson	Belmont	de
C Red	Blue	Blue	Deep red	Dark red	Red	Red	Red	Yellow
C#	Blue-green		Crimson	Red	Violet		Red/orange	
D Orange	Green	Violet	Orange-crimson	Red-orange	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Green
D#	Yellow-green		Orange	Orange	Steely with metal	the glint of	Yellow- orange	
E Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Pearly blue, the shimmer of moonshine	Yellow	Yellow	Blue
F Green	Yellow- orange	Orange	Yellow-green	Yellow-green	Dark red	Green	Yellow- green	Indigo
F#	Orange		Green	Green	Bright blue		Green	
G Blue	Red	Yellow	Bluish green	Blue-green	Rosy orange	Blue	Blue-green	Violet
G#	Crimson		Blue-green	Blue	Purple		Blue	
A Indigo	violet	Yellow- green	Indigo	Blue-violet	Green	Indigo	Blue- Violet	Red
A#	Pale violet		Deep blue	Violet	Steely with the glint of metal		Violet	
B Violet	Indigo	Green	Violet	Dark violet	Pearly blue, the shimmer of moonshine	Violet	Red-violet	Orange

## Clouds of Fish. (The Work in its Context)

In the conclusion of the preceding paper I briefly discussed the difficulties that may be encountered in translating even from one language to another, let alone between different art forms. In this paper I intend expanding on this discussion, and extending it into the areas of interpretation, hermeneutics, and performance practice in music. In parallel, I plan to discuss, discover and disclose just how and where my own visual dialogue with the string quartets of Bela Bartok fits into these fields.

### 1. 'Falls the Shadow'; Translation and Language.

Between the idea  
And the reality  
Between the motion  
And the act  
Falls the Shadow<sup>1</sup>

Any language is simultaneously both empowering and a limitation. It is so empowering that it is even considered that our thoughts are determined and formulated by our language (although it is difficult, if not impossible, to know whether language determines thought or whether thought and culture determine language). For the same reason a language is also a limitation; any one language amongst the plurality of languages occupies a limited space in an ideal continuum of meaning, something like that imaginary entity which Walter Benjamin has described as 'pure language', or 'the one true language'. Any individual's grasp of his or her own language is further restricted; it occupies a confined space inside an already limited area. This throws up a strong argument for education, learning other languages, and also for the value of translation.

The operation of a language is mysterious. A spoken language relies on so much more than just its words; its meanings are contained as much in its inflections, its contexts, its gestures, as in any little phonemic parcels of meaning. So too, when language is written down, or as Socrates put it, when 'an intelligent word' is marked off from the jumble of words 'tumbled out anywhere ... no parent to protect them'<sup>2</sup>, meaning is found as much between the words, in their careful associations with each other, in their implications and connotations, as it is in the words themselves. It is the 'shadows' of meaning that fall between and around the words, as well as the unsynchronized meanings of words themselves between a plurality of languages, which complicate the task of the translator.

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<sup>1</sup>T. S. Eliot, *The Hollow Men*, in *Collected Poems, 1909 - 1962*, Faber and Faber, London, 1963, p92

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1983, p131

A simple example is in the difference between the Italian 'casa' and the English 'house' and 'home'; these two separate meanings are both embraced by the one Italian word. The area of sexuality provides a more expansive example of the subtle differences of flavour between meaning in one language and another, as well as illustrating the way the language of a culture can determine the way people perceive things, the way they think. I have chosen this field not simply because it is mildly shocking, nor just for its entertainment value, but because, being a particularly emotive subject, it contains an especially rich vocabulary with a dense abundance of subtle (and crass) innuendos of meaning to cover even one basic action; sexual intercourse. Much of its vocabulary is also extremely volatile, and typically has a short tenure in the language.

'Sexual intercourse' describes the act, stripped bare of passion and sensuality. 'Copulation' sounds biological, something a rhinoceros beetle might do. 'Fuck' is more of an expletive than a description; an expression of frustration. 'Bonk' is almost onomatopoeic, and self-deprecating, whereas 'root' is a bit furtive; it could happen on the back seat of a car. 'Carnal knowledge' is redolent of Catholicism, guilt, sin, the law courts, even of paedophilia. 'To know' sounds biblical; 'to consummate' reeks of sex as property; to 'knock off' is the action of a male chauvinist, the raider of the family jewellery box. 'To go' is Shakespearian (sex as a voyage), 'to couple' sounds a bit stuck, 'to screw' is fairly casual, as is 'to lay'. 'Making love' is romantic and precious; it happens in Mills and Boon books. 'Porking' is positively animal. There's much more; from the euphemistic 'intimacy', 'liaison', 'affair', 'sleep with', to the coy remoteness of 'have it off', 'get it off', 'bed with', to the emotive 'ravish', 'deflower', to the criminality of 'rape', to the numerous colloquialisms such as 'horizontal folk dancing', 'a poke in the bloomers', 'sink the sausage', 'cream the clam'.

'The French have a distinct advantage [in their choices]', says Richard Howard.<sup>3</sup> They 'have a vocabulary of eroticism, an amorous discourse which smells neither of the laboratory nor of the sewer, ... we lack *joissance* and *joire*'. Howard is by no means the only one to bemoan this difference; translators' notes to such authors as Lacan and Barthes are littered with explanations of the difficulty. Since my school French is distinctly lacking in this area of vocabulary I will turn instead to Italian. (My university Italian isn't much richer in erotica, but I have an Italian friend to assist me in my research.)

'Rapporti sessuali' equates fairly well with 'sexual intercourse'. 'Penetrazione del pene nella vagina' is even colder; a masculine way of saying it in pure Italian. 'Una relazione amorosa' is quite matter-of-fact. 'Accoppiarsi' is appropriate both for animals and people,

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<sup>3</sup>In 'A Note on the Text' which precedes Roland Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans Richard Miller, Hill and Wang, New York, 1975, p.v



'congiungersi carnalmente' is a more human coupling. 'Fare all'amore' is romantic, pure Italian, and very close to 'make love'. At the violent end of the scale are 'spogliare', 'violentare', and 'stuprare'. The verb 'rapire', which has the same root as the English 'ravish' and 'rape' (the Latin *rapere* - to seize), encompasses a wide range of meanings, from 'steal', 'abduct', 'plunder', 'kidnap', to (perversely!) a theological 'rapture' and 'ecstasy', but not rape in the usual sense that it has in English. As far as I can tell, it is only in the less current senses of the English word 'rape', where it means to carry off by force, or rapine, that there is any equivalence with the Italian 'rapire'. While the English word 'ravish' also encompasses most of the meanings of 'rapire', its usage has tempered them towards the side of enrapture, but sexual rather than sexually theological. But the most interesting expressions from the point of view of the idiosyncrasies of languages are found in the colloquialisms, which, as in English, are almost inevitably metaphorical to some degree. On the humorous side are 'il fare alla palla'<sup>4</sup>, and 'il fare a capo a nascondere'<sup>5</sup>. 'Ti metto il ciellone dentro la figa'<sup>6</sup> is a mildly vulgar, metaphorical, typically male but still sweet, and yet a very immodest expression, which has a typically Southern taste to it. Similar, but ruder, is 'ti metto il cazzo nella figa'<sup>7</sup>. 'Ti lo metto nel culo'<sup>8</sup> is neither very pleasant, nor very rude. 'Chiavare'<sup>9</sup> is a vulgar verb used more in Northern Italy, as is 'scopare'<sup>10</sup>. 'Quando sborro lo vuoi dentro' is a more elegant, Northern expression. While 'fottere' is 'to fuck', the terse economy of 'fuck' as an expletive translates to the more elaborate 'vai a fatte fottere', or 'vai a fancullo'.

While I don't pretend that there is enough rigour in this comparison to make any meaningful generalizations about how either language influences the society's mind-set, or vice versa, the interminable desire to find yet another way of expressing basically the same thing, when both languages are already dense with words that describe the act, suggests a desire to pull out still more meaning from the obscure depths between the words. It is in the colloquialisms that the flux in the language which is caused by this desire is most volatile; it is also in colloquialisms that the greatest national differences are to be found in the types of meaning which are favoured. The Australian vernacular expressions seem to be more humorous and de-mythologising than the Italian, which, particularly when they derive from a Southern dialect, tend to be both more poetic and flamboyantly ambitious. The intimate interaction of Italian with dialects is part of the reason for its particular diversity of expression in this field, and indeed in the Italian vocabulary as a whole. Such

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<sup>4</sup>Literally, 'play ball'.

<sup>5</sup> - which describes a hidden pleasure.

<sup>6</sup>'I put the heavens into your fig'.

<sup>7</sup>'Cazzo' is dialect for penis.

<sup>8</sup>'I put it in your cunt'.

<sup>9</sup>'Chiave' is key.

<sup>10</sup>'Scopare' = to sweep, the analogy with a broom (a stick in a brush) being significant.

a contact brings a language closer to Benjamin's ideal language. Historically, the eclecticism and hybrid nature of both English and Italian has provided them with particularly abundant vocabularies. In the present, the Italianate dialects and Italian supplement one another, enriching in their intermingling in a way that is more profound than the relationship between formal and informal English. Yet there are still limitations, whatever the language, and these are often highlighted in the process of translation.

Pannwitz writes:

... The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue. ... He must expand and deepen his language by means of this foreign language.<sup>11</sup>

Just as the problematic evolution of the Italian language (the eternal argumentation surrounding 'la questione della lingua') is both perplexing and promising, the difficulties of the task of a translator also provide a positive (though idealistic and unattainable) potential.

The complementary nature of languages is a theme of David Malouf's poetic novel *An Imaginary Life*. While he doesn't directly refer to translation, Malouf's insight into the diversity of operation between different languages is valuable. The imaginary life is of Ovid, sent into exile to live with Northern barbarians. Gradually, and with some difficulty, he learns their language.

I now understand these people's speech almost as well as my own, and find it oddly moving. It isn't at all like our Roman tongue, whose endings are designed to express difference, the smallest nuances of thought and feeling. This language is equally expressive, but what it presents is the raw life and unity of things. I believe I could make poems in it. Seeing the world through this other tongue I see it differently. It is a different world.<sup>12</sup>

The imaginary Ovid has been enriched by his contact with this strange language. He has, in Walter Benjamin's terms, moved some distance into that ideal collective of languages, 'the one true language'. It is the contact that a translation has with that super-language which justifies and validates this activity for Benjamin. He writes;

Although translation, unlike art, cannot claim permanence for its products, its goal is undeniably a final, conclusive, decisive stage of all linguistic creation. In translation the original rises into a higher and purer linguistic air, as it were. It cannot live there permanently, to be sure, and it certainly does not reach it in its entirety. Yet, in a singularly impressive manner, at least it points the way to this region: the predestined, hitherto inaccessible realm of reconciliation and fulfilment of languages.<sup>13</sup>

The relationship of a translation to the original he likens to the way a tangent lightly touches a circle at one point, then continues along its infinite path. The point of contact is the sense of the original, which is then liberated into the area outside the circle; it is set on the tangential path towards the 'freedom of linguistic flux'.

<sup>11</sup>Rudolf Pannwitz, quoted in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Schocken Books, NY, 1969, p81

<sup>12</sup>David Malouf, *An Imaginary Life*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1978, p65

<sup>13</sup>Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Schocken Books, NY, 1969, p75

There is a strong kinship between Benjamin's notion of an 'ideal language' and Johann Mattheson's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. It was Wagner who, in his operas, brought this theory to its best known practical fruition. Wagner's ideology for the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was both nationalist and socialist. It was believed that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* had the potential to speak to all the people through all the arts, and hence to act as a powerful force for national unity. Wagner saw the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as deriving from Greek tragedy, where, in the unity of words, music and gestures, something that was accessible to the whole community was created out of common experience. The expressive range of what Wagner anticipated would be an ennobling art-form would extend beyond the limitations of any one particular form, giving the potential for a monumental work of art, but without stretching or distorting the boundaries of the expressive capabilities of any one element to the point of incomprehensibility or absurdity. In a sense, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is a tower of babel, a polyphony of translations of a core idea.

A kind of inversion of this view is that there is some invisible inner centre from which all the separate arts arise. This is the underlying premise behind any attempt at translating what is expressed in one art form (say, music) into another (say, an etching). While my own printmaking has moved well away from any intention of making a faithful translation of a particular piece of music, I suppose I still reluctantly believe that there is some truth in this holistic, romantic and somewhat hazy idea, which Kandinsky (via Conrad Fiedler, Adolf von Hildebrand, and Wilhelm Worringer) has named the 'inner necessity'<sup>14</sup>. Perhaps this 'inner necessity' is closely related to the 'shadow' which falls between the words. Whatever terms I may find to best describe the relationship between the String Quartets of Bartok and my prints, any intended equivalence is in a personal perception of their abstruse basis.

It is at this stage of my investigation that the term 'translation' seems to be sliding into its adjacent and encompassing field; interpretation, and it seems necessary to try to describe and define the relationship between translation and interpretation. There is certainly a considerable overlap; translation is largely a sub-set of interpretation. There is some difference in intention - a translation aims at faithfully expressing the sense of something in another language or form, whereas an interpretation expounds, explains or renders a meaning. The outcome of an interpretation will be either in a different language or form, or perhaps a different permutation of the same one. While art and music do not qualify as languages according to a strict linguistic definition, they are nevertheless systems or forms which in many ways behave like languages. They are like languages in that they reify

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<sup>14</sup>As referred to in the preceding paper; see Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, George Wittenborn, Inc., New York, 1947

abstract human experiences. They are also like languages in that, at least some extent, they are systems which express themselves in structures. But it is possibly in relation to these structural aspects of art or music that any attempt at a schematic translation from art to music or music to art tends to be unsatisfactory. My own least successful endeavours have been in pursuing any formal equivalence; in trying to translate, for example, the A B A form into a triptych.

## 2. On Interpretation.

'What does the fish remind you of?'  
 'Other fish.'  
 'And what do other fish remind you of?'  
 'Other fish.'<sup>15</sup>

*Hamlet:* Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?  
*Polonius:* By th'mass, and 'tis like a camel indeed.  
*Hamlet:* Methinks it is like a weasel.  
*Polonius:* It is back'd like a weasel.  
*Hamlet:* Or like a whale?  
*Polonius:* Very like a whale.<sup>16</sup>

I have borrowed these two examples from Umberto Eco<sup>17</sup>, who used them to illustrate the two poles in the attitudes to interpretation. On the one hand there is the assumption that to interpret is to uncover and reproduce the author's original intentions. Translation fits into this approach to interpretation. The other side maintains that interpretation is potentially infinite, and even that the text itself is retroactively modified by its reception. The author's intentions, and the original text, become a point of departure rather than a holy relic. But the two quoted fragments of text also illustrate another fundamental axis of debate, concerning the nature of texts. Some texts are more open to the 'infinite' of interpretations than others. As an object for interpretation, a particular fish is less open to interpretation than is a cloud, which is intrinsically evanescent, temporal, and in continuous flux. Until recently, a self-conscious openness in a work of art was seen as something that was largely confined to modern texts. In the last few decades, amongst the polemic smorgasbord of hermeneutics, aesthetics of reception, reader-response criticism, semiotic theories of interpretive co-operation and deconstruction, there has arisen the notion that any text can operate as an open work of art. A fish is not just a fish; it reminds me of that piscatorial religion which is the forbear of postmodern hermeneutics, and which I now see promoted in the form of a fishy symbol on the rear window of cars. These two axes of debate fit into a triangle of relationships between the rights of the author, the rights of the text, and the rights of the interpreter.

The notion that the author's intentions are crucial to any interpretation is represented by E. D. Hirsch in his book *Validity in Interpretation*. For Hirsch, the author's meaning is an objective entity, unchanging and reproducible, and has an existence which is completely independent from the interpreter. The interpreter's task is one of 're-cognition', to approach the object, the author's intentions, and as much as possible to reproduce these.

<sup>15</sup>Joseph Heller, *Catch 22*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1961, p290

<sup>16</sup>William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. act III, scene 2

<sup>17</sup>In Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1990, p23

Hirsch sympathises with a traditional view of the stages of the interpretive process. He stresses the importance of the distinction between *subtilitas intellegendi* and *subtilitas explicandi* - understanding and interpretation. Understanding defers to the rights of the text and the author. A reconstruction of the original meaning of the text is sought through a psychological bridge of empathy between the author and the reader - a kind of transposition into the author's world in order to recreate the creative act. *Subtilitas explicandi* is for Hirsch the act of interpretation, in which understanding is explained. *Judgement* is an evaluation of the text in relation to things outside the text. Hirsch calls a discussion of this judgement *criticism*. These four stages of criticism Hirsch pairs into 'meaning' and 'significance'. Meaning is the object of understanding and interpretation; significance is the perception of the relationship of this meaning to something outside the text; in other words, it is the object of judgement and criticism. The separation of understanding and interpretation is essential to Hirsch's quest for a science of interpretation, in opposition to interpretation by guesswork, which relies on intuitive, imaginative, subjective and unmethodical processes. With the separation of interpretation and understanding comes the possibility of various interpretations. These will not necessarily conflict with one another; indeed, their differences can contribute to a deepening of understanding. Where interpretations are incompatible, however, Hirsch would appeal to an understanding of authorial intentions in order to make a value judgement. Unlike Renaissance theorists, he doesn't accept that an ability to support conflicting interpretations indicates strength in a text. For Hirsch, conflicting interpretations demand a value judgement, a choice of one construction of meaning over another, which can be arrived at by 'careful scrutiny in the light of the relevant evidence'.<sup>18</sup> Yet Hirsch admits that, in order to find such evidence and decide if it is relevant, imagination - a 'divinatory talent' - is required. He doesn't claim certainty in this endeavour; rather, he sees a 'science' of hermeneutics as a series of probability judgements. While it is true that probability judgements (or rather, statistically significant pieces of evidence) are a feature of much science, what Hirsch has returned to is really nothing more than interpretation by guesswork.

When the author is a composer and the text a piece of music, the rights of the author (composer) seem to exert a formidable influence. The idea of a psychological bridge of empathy between the author and reader (musician), which sounds incredibly old-fashioned and romantic when applied to literature, still holds sway in the field of musical performance. This probably has something to do with the nature of music; that it is a reproductive art. Without a mediator (the musician/performer) a piece of music is incomplete, in a more fundamental sense than is a piece of literature without a reader. From the point of view of a musician, the extensive and intimate contact that he or she has

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<sup>18</sup>E.D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1967, p206

with a particular piece of music in order to bring it to a performance standard can bring about a strong psychological association both with the work and with some concept of the composer and his or her intentions, whether or not they have been correctly surmised. A strong tradition of both truth to the text and truth to the author is intrinsic to the profession of a musician, whose responsibility it is to complete the creative process, to 'concretize' the text. The technical feat of correctly reproducing the notes is only a small, though significant, part of this strongly felt responsibility. Those black marks on a stave, even with their accompanying instructions concerning tempo, volume, accents, etc, are only a scanty indication of the composer's 'vision'. The musical score began its existence as a guide to memory, as an objectification of something imaginary and ineffable, rather than as a watertight set of instructions for performance. Even with the progressive elaborations of detail in instructions that have appeared since, this is still to a large extent the case now. The musician, interpreting any score, either from outside or inside his or her immediate time or culture, still relies strongly on a tradition of performance practice, on role models, and on interaction with other musicians, or, in the case of new works, on either the composer or someone familiar with such works. Ultimately, his or her own imagination is called on, in order to fill in the space between the sparseness of graphemes on paper. The act of filling this space also invites disputation over how it could best be achieved.

Probably the most contention in this area in recent times has concerned 'authenticity' in performance. Some twenty-five years ago the polemics of performance practice amounted to little more than heated arguments over the rather trivial question of whether a Baroque trill should start from the upper or lower note. This is not really surprising, since there was relatively little information in a Baroque score to guide a performer, compared to most Romantic or Modern scores, which are relatively replete with instructions. A rupture in the continuity of performance practice of Baroque music meant that when it was revived by the romantics (Mendelsohn's rediscovery and performance of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* being the most cited instance) the unwritten elements of a performance remained invisible and inaudible. Generally speaking, the Romantics' interest in times and styles of the past was more a part of a general exotic eclecticism than a passion for authenticity. Delacroix's *Dante and Vergil in Hell* may be inspired by the *Divine Comedy*, but it certainly doesn't emulate anything of late medieval style. Similarly, in Greig's *Holberg Suite* the material may be a genuine 'antique', but its realization is thoroughly Romantic.

Since (roughly) the early seventies, there has been a passion for the discovery and revival of performance practices authentic to their period. Many long-lost manuscripts have also been recovered from the bowels of European libraries and museums. Early attempts at 'authentic' performance had no aural role-models, and relied instead on contemporary manuals on performance, such as C.P.E. Bach's *The True Manner of Keyboard*

*Performance, or The True Art of Flute Playing*, written by Quantz in 1752. The first stages of this revival sounded overwhelmingly strange, for three reasons. Firstly, the initial sparsity of research, information and evidence meant that what there was took on an exaggerated importance. When applied with a fundamentalist zeal, particular stylistic features such as the 'swell', or the absence of vibrato, became dominant characteristics instead of being part of a coherent whole. Secondly, original instruments were revived in preference to their modern counterparts. They too contributed to the eccentricities of the sound; gut strings and shorter necks on violins made them sound softer, more mellow, but with their own peculiar stridency; wooden flutes replaced silver, gold and chrome, and also sounded softer and sweeter. Horns without valves were much more difficult to play, since they could only blow overtones, which become more fickle the higher they were. The intonation was also altered, since the higher they were the less these upper partials corresponded to a tempered scale. Squawks and odd intonation were almost considered a valid feature of authenticity. Sometimes modern counterparts of original instruments were substitutions, rather than modifications in order to increase the volume or to facilitate technique. Harpsichords, fortepianos, viola da gambas, krummhorns, etcetera, all contributed to the novelty value of the music. The third reason for the music's strangeness was simply that no-one alive had heard it played that way before. It was radically different from the norm of the day. Paradoxically, 'authentic' music could only sound authentic, not authentically normal, as it would have sounded in its day, until such performances settled into being commonplace out of their *Zeitgeist* but as a part of ours. This is roughly the state of affairs now. Enough diverse, even conflicting research has been done, there have been enough performances in this formerly 'strange' manner, to allow performers and listeners some freedom from the initial polemics and ideological zeal. The return of some latitude in individualities of style within the new framework of 'old' performance practices provides a refreshing and welcome variety. There is still, of course, disputation, but it is on the whole much better informed, less fanatic, and more productive.

The close connection between intention and meaning that is promoted by Hirsch is challenged by other views of the processes of creation and interpretation. There are two stages to this challenge. The rights of the text may still be considered sacrosanct, while those of the author are disregarded. The most radical and challenging position is when the rights of the interpreter/receiver take precedence over both the author and the text.

The first of these positions stresses the importance of the text. Any author will be either more or less successful in realizing and communicating intentions in the text, and while this may result in an artistic failure, it may incidentally produce something that is unintentionally inspired. This second outcome is even considered by many to be the normal way in which something extraordinary is produced. The mystery of creativity, and the concept of artistic



genius have a long history of attribution to something or someone outside the humble individual artist; the muses, divine inspiration, divine love, medieval courtly love (such as Petrarch's Laura, Dante's Beatrice), the Neoplatonic 'One', 'Being', or nature. The artist is seen as mediator, rather than creator, between something omniscient and the text. Even on the more moderate, commonplace level of talent, rather than genius, something of this idea persists. In Plato's *Apology of Socrates* his Socrates can't get a sensible answer as to what the poets meant in their best poetry. Socrates concludes that

they did not make what they made by wisdom, but by a certain nature and while inspired, like the diviners and those who deliver oracles. For they also speak many beautiful things, but they know nothing of what they speak.<sup>19</sup>

Kant, in turn, believed that he could understand parts of Plato better than Plato himself, saying that

it is by no means unusual, upon comparing the thoughts which an author has expressed in regard to his subject, whether in ordinary conversation or in writing, to find that we understand him better than he has understood himself.<sup>20</sup>

The child prodigy is an extreme example of this phenomenon. The exceptional precocity of, for example, Mozart, or Menuhin, does not necessarily indicate a corresponding wisdom, nor an equivalent intellectual understanding of what has been brought into being. In spite of the awe in which a prodigy or a genius may be held, the notion of creativity as an extra, trans-intentional element really invalidates an emphasis on this human author's intentions. In this sense, the awe for a genius is like reverence for a holy relic; here is something 'touched by the hand of God' (or at least by a saint). More appropriate would be a reverence for the text, as a manifestation of something extra-human (the Bible and the Koran being supreme examples; a sublime moment in a piece by Mozart offers a more secular occasion for respect).

Genius and inspiration, whatever they may be, are only part of the processes of making art, music or literature. A different meaning of genius defines it as a *Zeitgeist*; as the prevalent feelings, opinions, spirit, or characteristics of a time or place. It is this context that provides a more realistic view of the nature of artistic production and, by extension, of interpretation. Whether consciously or unconsciously, a work of art is produced as part of a chain of influences, a manifestation of at least a niche of a particular society, in a bed of norms and rules against which the artist may revolt, but which nevertheless provide the point of departure. Mozart's genius wouldn't have manifested itself in the way it did if he had spent his life in some isolated corner of the Himalaya.

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<sup>19</sup>Plato, *Apology of Socrates*. 22b-c, in Thomas G. West, *Plato's Apology of Socrates*, Cornell University Press, London, pp 26, 27

<sup>20</sup>Quoted in E.D. Hirsch, *opus cit*, p19

This social view of the author/composer's originality as arising from a cultural inheritance is a prototype for a panoply of attitudes towards the three traditional strands in interpretation; *intentio auctoris*, *intentio operis* and *intentio lectoris*. With the reproductive arts in mind, this trio could be extended to a chain of author - text - mediator - interpreter - receiver, any of the links of which might overlap, be combined, overturned or usurped, according to both the nature of the text and the attitude to interpretation.

While the works of the Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello are predominantly concerned with the fickle nature of reality, he also manages to thoroughly disrupt this chain. In his play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* these six characters manifest themselves, some fully developed, others still partly formed, without a text or an author. I would see them as fitting into the interpretive chain as part-text part-interpreters, ahead of the missing part of the text and its author, who becomes mediator between them and the audience. Of course, it's all an elusive fiction, with the perplexing 'real' author (Pirandello) nevertheless claiming that these characters just arrived as they were in his fantasy, begging to be allowed to live on stage.

Within the parameters of reception theory, the text (let alone the author) is no longer seen as a fixed location of meaning. The author is like a parent - a vital element in the process of creation, but from whom ultimately the child (the text) breaks free, taking on an independent existence, in which he or she is subject to the re-formative vagaries of existence, of interaction with his or her world, which is no longer the parental home. As Paul Ricoeur has expressed it;

...the text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author. What the text says now matters more than what the author meant to say, and every exegesis unfolds its procedures within the circumference of a meaning that has broken its moorings to the psychology of its author.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, Roland Barthes, in his much feted essay *The Death of the Author*, sees the text not as a transmitter of a single meaning, but as 'a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.'<sup>22</sup> Meaning is seen as existing in the dialogue, or the interaction, between the interpreter and the text, rather than in the text itself. If the author is like a parent, then for Barthes she died during childbirth; 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.'<sup>23</sup>

Umberto Eco takes a more moderate standpoint. In his book *The Limits of Interpretation* he argues against the intemperance of reader-response criticism. He suggests that it is at

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<sup>21</sup>Quoted in G.B. Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity, Figures and Themes*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1990, p22

<sup>22</sup>Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, in *Image Music Text*., trans Stephen Heath, Hill and Wang, N.Y. 1977, p146

<sup>23</sup>ibid, p148

least possible to agree on which meanings a text discourages, if not on those it supports. An interpreter is not entitled to say that a particular text means *everything*. There is at least something which a specific text cannot positively say. He argues that there are two levels of interpretation, semantic (or literal) and critical. A literal interpretation is the blatant meaning. A critical interpretation delves into the tenebrous spaces behind the literal meaning, seeking out further meanings, which are in turn expressed in words. Every text is susceptible to being interpreted at both these levels, although only some texts intend both a literal and a critical response. A phone book is, at the semantic level, simply an organized list of subscribers, and this is probably the extent of interpretation which its compilers would expect. It may be critically interpreted, say in an analysis of the distribution of people with a particular surname. It may be further interpreted in its contextual relationship with other phone books; perhaps to ascertain demographic trends, or the appearance and disappearance of particular surnames from a certain location. But there is another possible attitude to a text (the phone book), which for Eco defines the limits of interpretation. Its pages may be read as the subject of onanistic musing, or they may simply be torn out and used to wipe an etching plate. These, for Eco, are not acts of interpretation, but the use of a text. While he admits that it is sometimes difficult to make the distinction, he sees use as starting from a text in order to get something else, even accepting the risk of misinterpreting it on the literal level. To interpret critically, on the other hand, is to read in order to discover.

It is at least as hard for me to distinguish between use and interpretation in my printmaking as it can be for Eco. The way in which I am using Bartok string quartets to generate prints is operating somewhere around the extreme limits of interpretation, although I really seem to be both a user and an interpreter to some limited extent. I am using the music in order to get something else, risking a misinterpretation on the literal level by disrupting and even ignoring the sequential flow. Yet I am certainly reading in order to discover. It may be in Sontag's unfavourable view of the recent plethora of interpretation, which she sees as 'the revenge of the intellect upon art', that (unfortunately) I more clearly qualify as an interpreter. Sontag's view is that interpretation arose from the need to reconcile ancient (redundant) texts to 'modern' demands. Am I revamping the old text that is my life as a member of a string quartet, too precious to discard, and imposing another meaning - the activity of image-making - on top of the literal one? I suppose I am.

The polemics of reception theories, and the associated erosion of categories, are very applicable to both musical performance and texts. While the traditional view of the musician is as interpreter of the text and, almost incidentally, as receiver, he or she could also be seen as playing the role of part text, part interpreter. Indeed, this role could be extended to a participation in all the parts of the chain of author - text - mediator - interpreter

- receiver. The musician is co-author, because, whatever the intentions, all performances manifest the idiosyncrasies of the performer to some extent. I don't agree that any performance is only an approximation of an ideal performance, valid for all times and circumstances. Having the biases of a musician, I am very aware of the authorial input of the musician into the parts of music that cannot be written down, but only hinted at. The organic complexities of these, the subtle nuances of tempo, articulation, dynamics, rubato and phrasing, are in the hands (literally!) of the musician-as-composer. The musician is text because it is only in him or her that these complexities exist; mediator because of the intermediary role between author and receiver; interpreter because he or she begins with one text to produce another, receiver because he or she is also the audience for all the preceding elements in the chain. In other words, the performance of music involves both production and reproduction, which are united in the completion and realization of the black marks which make up the score. It is with this view of the musician as receiver-mediator-author-text in mind (which is very similar to Barthes' notion that meaning exists in the dialogue between interpreter and text) that I can, without apology, make any limited comparison of my activities as an artist to those of a performer or interpreter.

Just as fish and clouds are inherently different texts in the degree to which they invite interpretation, so too a score will tend to determine the bias of a musician's (or the musicians', since it is mostly a collective activity) role within the chain of production. Generally speaking, Baroque music requires a degree of 'authorship' from the performer in its ornamentation, which at times amounts to improvisation within stylistic parameters. Simultaneously, the stylistic paradigm which currently dominates performance practice of Baroque music is a restriction on personal input; emotionalism in this field is decidedly passe. In its instrumentation the Baroque score is typically flexible- Bach rearranged music of Vivaldi, as well as his own works, according to the demands and possibilities of a particular occasion. Bach's music also seems to withstand more contemporary reworkings, such as those of the Jaques Loussier trio, faring much better than, say, Mozart. Jazz, like Baroque music, demands considerable 'authorial' input from the musician; to the point where there may not be any score at all! Flexibility of instrumentation is a hallmark of jazz, whereas in Romanticism instrumentation is fundamental to providing particular 'coloration'; the combination of sounds and timbres is intrinsic to the composition. To change the instrumentation would be like reproducing Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* in purple, green and brown. It is in the heroic and individualistic nature of Romantic music that the performer becomes part composer. Inspired emotional input is desirable in the performance of this music from the age of the virtuoso. The role of the performer is extremely variable in music of this century. Barthes' 'death of the author' has been paralleled by a self-imposed death of the composer in works such as those of the American Morty Feldman, whose scores are so devoid of information

that they resemble pieces of minimalist wallpaper, throwing the responsibility for any musical outcome well and truly onto the musician's shoulders. The other extreme derives from the formalism of twelve-tone music, where every note is integral to the structure, and interpretation becomes largely redundant, in favour of straightforward realization. While this compositional method has been enormously influential on most composers this century, it has also been decidedly unpopular with both performers and audiences, with the exception of small enthusiastic cliques. It has been unpopular with musicians because, apart from their typically conservative temperament, their role as interpreter has shifted to that of an extremely technically skilled translator, requiring much effort for very little creative satisfaction. This unpopularity extends to much twentieth-century music, and is at least partly responsible for a style of musical composition for which the ideal interpretation is a mute reading. A famine in the pragmatic process of translating a highly complex and difficult score to the sensory experience of a performance has led to the growth of a style of composition which is like a kind of puzzle for analysis, intellectually stimulating rather than appropriate to sensory perception. The cultivated banality of minimalist music can be seen as a reaction to such complexity. As with Pop Art, its self-conscious triviality defies interpretation. The extreme minimum of interpretation in performance this century is in electronic music, where both interpreter and mediator are completely by-passed, and anything to do with performance practice is either integral to the process of composition, or concerns the electronic competency of a technician.

Overlaying the diversity of these texts in the degree to which they invite interpretation are the idiosyncrasies of the interpreters. Independently of the magnitude of their talent, the personalities of some performers will resound in every note they play, whereas others will maintain an inconspicuous presence. I suppose it could be compared to the difference between a hot mango pickle and a bechamel sauce, both spread on the same kind of bread. The analogy has more life in it (even if it is a bit simplistic); just as a hot mango pickle goes well with a curry and rice, bechamel sauce is appropriate to some delicate sort of fish. The emotional tendencies of one player will best suit something like Brahms, while the lyricism and sensitivity of another will be an asset in playing Debussy. Of course, musicians are also versatile; like actors they can adopt different characters, for different styles. Then again, some actors always seem to play the same part, no matter what the script!

Where do I fit into this interpretive scheme? I make prints in reaction to pieces of music which I have in the past performed, and hence rehearsed, practiced, struggled with and interpreted, both on my own and together with fellow musicians. The music is familiar to me in a way that can only come from the physical and mental processes of playing, as against the very pleasant but less arduous and ultimately less rewarding activity of just listening. It is perhaps the common denominator of both practical and thought processes in

making a print and in making a performance of music which has led me to be a printmaker rather than a painter. Am I still an interpreter? Long ago I gave up trying to get a whole piece of music into an image, or even into a series of images. The incompatibility of time and space makes such attempts extremely ambitious. Progressively, the size of the sections of music to which I refer have become smaller and smaller. I now find myself peering between the notes, into a space which is taking on the dimensions of an ontological abyss.

.... Falls the shadow.

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## **Documentation.**

### **Outline of Programme, M. F. A.**

I propose making a series of works which relate to the String Quartets of Bela Bartok.

It is not my intention simply to illustrate these pieces. Nor do I want to make works which are purely a translation of the music into my own visual language, although inevitably this will be an element in the process. Rather, I intend to draw from these pieces themes and ideas which have personal relevance, making works which stand independently of their source.

An exploration of ways of layering meaning will be a concern. This may be approached in either a literal sense (perhaps, for example, by superimposing or juxtaposing imagery, as a visual parallel to Bartok's layering of formal, or esoteric ideas over music that derives from folk cultures), or on a more abstract level, integrating different layers into one image in one medium. Where it is useful or appropriate I may wish to translate a musical form into a visual format; for example, the musical form ABA could be realized as a triptych. While I plan to work using printmaking techniques (especially etching), I may wish to incorporate other techniques and media as a way of drawing the viewer into different levels of interaction with the work.

If there is time, I am also interested in using the 'Four Quartets' of T.S. Eliot as a source. The differences in the kinds of problems and their solutions that I would almost certainly encounter would allow for some comparison between the use of literary and musical sources for my work.

On a theoretical level, an examination of parallels and relationships between different art-forms, either in their combination or in crossovers, would be pertinent to my practical work.

## **Background.**

My fascination with the idea of using music as a source for visual art came about for largely biographical reasons. For some ten years before coming to Art School I was a member of a string quartet, the Petra String Quartet, which was resident at the Tasmanian Conservatorium of Music. The extremely intense, almost familial nature of the interaction both with music and musicians which is a normal part of being a member of such a group left an aftermath when funding was discontinued and the quartet was disbanded. As well



as regretting what was somewhat like the break-up of a family, I mourned the loss of opportunity to experience the delights of the string quartet repertoire on that most intimate of levels; as a performer. As I subsequently developed as a visual artist, I acquired a taste for making images which ‘bounced off’ other sources; at first literary, and later musical. In retrospect, I think this evolved partly out of a kind of nostalgia for the condition of being a member of a string quartet (more intimate and more deeply involved than playing in an orchestra, which is a grander, but more dictatorial institution), which encompasses the privilege of close, almost proprietorial contact with really great music. Making prints from music or literature was rather like rehearsing and performing it, complete with the isolated moments of inspiration wedged between the laboriousness of processes. The music which I chose to work with was nearly always a piece that I had previously performed.

### **Chronology of Work Processes.**

There is a significant difficulty in any attempt to translate music into a static form of visual art; that is, the fundamental difference between a time-based art and a spatial medium. While it was never my intention to attempt a comprehensive translation of any piece of music, I was at first interested in exploring ways of incorporating something of the accumulation of ideas, information, or images which came from a piece of music into some visual equivalent. Working with Bartok’s Sixth String Quartet, I began by exploring two possible ways of achieving this; through a consideration of form, and by a layering of imagery.

In my Honours year I had used a late Beethoven String Quartet as a source for my work, and had adopted its unusual form of seven movements, making a seven-panelled, frieze-like print. The idea of again making a kind of strip-narrative was one formal possibility. But there were some particular features of Bartok’s Sixth String Quartet which were attractive in their potential for translation into a visual equivalent. One was recurrence of the ABA form. Another was the use of a ritornello at the beginning of each movement. This interlude is first played simply and starkly by unaccompanied viola. It gradually develops in complexity and emotion at each manifestation until the last movement, when it evolves into the main thematic material for the movement. I considered using these two formal features both separately and in combination. The progressive development of the ritornello seemed particularly adaptable to the medium of printmaking, either through the means of making different states of the same plate, or by making one plate and then enriching the imagery by superimposing further plates, perhaps of different colours. A combination of such a progression with a series of prints derived from the main movements was a possibility, and I played around with different ways of incorporating the two formal structures. Some of the ideas I came up with were;

- one large image for each of the movements, perhaps triptychs, punctuated by four separate plates which would represent the ritornello;
- four large triptychs, juxtaposed into a huge, faceted image, with the ritornello represented by smaller images physically separated from the main piece;
- a kind of installation-come-collage, with the wall as its field, made up of images derived from moments in the music;
- on a smaller scale, a completely linear strip-narrative, following the basic structures of the music, perhaps folded into a concertina.

During these early stages of investigating possible directions I was also very interested in making prints which were visually dense, as a way to include both the intensity of the music, as well as the layering of meanings and influences which are in Bartok's music. I began some investigation of the background to his music. This could be the subject for an essay in itself; rather, I will just briefly outline those circumstances which I found most pertinent, or with which I found an affinity.

Bartok, being a Hungarian, was culturally caught between East and West. His early music very much followed a European tradition of late Romanticism. He was also strongly affected by the late string quartets of Beethoven, the scores of which he apparently carried around in his pocket. However, he also became fascinated with the folk culture that surrounded him, and together with the composer Kodaly he made an intensive study of the peasant music of the region, travelling from village to village and transcribing thousands of folk melodies. He found this study liberating, and welcomed the freedom of this music from what he called 'the tyranny ... of the major and minor modal systems.'<sup>1</sup> (These are the two systems of keys which had dominated most Western music from the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century.) He also delighted in the rhythmic complexities of folk music of the area - its strong dance rhythms, its asymmetrical construction, its free and varied changes in measure, its complex measures built on five, seven, or eleven rhythmic units, its strong syncopations. Gradually, this folk music began to infiltrate his own compositions, at first through a self-conscious synthesis, with wholesale quotes, or 'settings' of melodies he had collected, and eventually as an integrated part of his own language.

Apart from the East/West polarity that was the cultural heritage of an educated Hungarian, Bartok's music displays a duality of cerebral versus passionate elements. His music is very tightly constructed, in spite of the apparent freedom and passion of the parlendo-like

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<sup>1</sup>Serge Moreux, *Bela Bartok*, pref. Arthur Honegger, trans. G.S. Fraser and Erik de Mauny, London, Harvill Press, 1953, p60

passages (such as the middle section of the second movement of the sixth quartet). The structure of his music is often symmetrical; there is often a central section to a movement which Bartok describes as being like a kernel, on which hang the outer sections. This symmetry may even hold for an entire piece, as in the architectonic arch-form of the fourth and fifth quartets. One analysis of his mature music has also found that the relationships between the duration of its sections, even between the scales and chordal structures, follow the proportions of the Fibonacci series<sup>2</sup> (the same proportions as are frequently found in nature, as in, for example, a cross-section of a chambered nautilus sea-shell), although it hasn't been established as a conscious construction.

A quality of Bartok's music which I found most influential was the sense of awe, of mystery, which is so lyrically expressed in parts of his music. It was no surprise to discover his secular fascination with the concept of infinity. He wrote of this in a letter to his sister.

Who is the man who knows, or may one day know, the whole world? There is no such man! For the world is infinite in space and time. A finite brain can never conquer the infinite. In planetary space, we can traverse a hundred and thirty light years, and we can analyse the chemical composition and calculate the movements of the stars that distance away. But what is that in comparison with the infinite?<sup>3</sup>

There is something of this sense of awe in the passages of music which have been called 'Nightmusic'. This term describes a kind of slow movement which is first found in a piano piece from 1926, *The Night's Music*, from which followed many versions. The mood of these sections of music can be nightmarish, but also gentle, quiet, or lyrical; evocative of the sounds of the night, of crickets and frogs, of wind rustling in leaves; of the night sky, where a monumental but infinitesimally small corner of infinite space becomes defined by the visibility of cosmic bodies.

In my attempt to visually express something of the complexity of Bartok's music, I began looking for ways to superimpose levels of meaning in images. I experimented with the idea of using four colour woodblock prints, overlayed with etching; I tried printing on both sides of translucent paper; I worked with waxes and varnishes to make the printed paper translucent and allow one image to appear behind another. I also considered printing on hand-made paper that had traces of recycled images incorporated in the pulp. On a more sculptural level, I thought about using inked-up etching plates and wood blocks as relief sculptures, as architraves surrounding prints made up of miniature, detailed elements incorporated into larger, broader imagery. Another idea was to present the prints as a

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<sup>2</sup>See Erno Lendvai, *Bela Bartok, An Analysis of his Music*, Kahn and Averill, London, 1971

<sup>3</sup>Serge Moreux, op. cit., p47

double-sided, curved screen, with colour relief prints on one side, and black and white etchings on the other.

A further possibility was to make intricate, dense, and complicated images. I looked at works by Bosch, Chagall, Breughal, Durer, Grunewald, Mantegna, Francesco del Cossa, Aldorfer, El Greco, Rauschenberg, Juan Davila, as well as anonymous medieval altarpieces, for examples of complex imagery which might be a suitable role-model.

Eventually, amid such a plethora of possibilities, any of which I believed might work well, I felt that it was time to chose one and run with it. I opted for the idea of making separate prints (etchings) in response to the ritornello, which would sit between larger, multi-panelled, mixed media prints, derived from the main movements.

The easiest place to begin was with sections of music which to me were particularly evocative of imagery. I found such passages in the ritornelli, and also in the middle section of the second movement, from which I moved out in both directions. I decided to work on a large scale (according to the norms of a printmaker), partly as an antidote to the preciousness which is, frequently, although not inevitably, the heritage of the medium, and also as a way of extending myself, taking advantage of the access to the facilities of the Printmaking department which included a reasonably large press.

From the second movement I had the idea of making a large central section, and narrow surrounding panels. This would correspond to the ABA form, but not to the proportions of the music, since it would be a gargantuan and visually undesirable project to include all my reactions to all of the music. The central section was to be an etching, made up of three plates because of the limitations of the size of the bed of the largest press that was available. Two thirds of this section survive, much reworked, as one of the prints in the series *The Night's Music*. In the outer panels I attempted to superimpose etching over four-colour woodblock prints. While these were little short of an unmitigated disaster in their degree of success, I am sure that there are positive possibilities in this technique, and I may try to use it again in the future.

All the manifestations of the ritornello I found particularly moving. Its permeating melancholy develops from the stark simplicity of solo viola, through the progressive addition of instruments, to its tragic but profoundly beautiful presentation in the last movement, when it evolves into a kind of slow motion fugato, interweaving with thematic reminiscences from other movements. My initial ideas for a visual presentation were for some kind of development of the figure in the landscape, with the emphasis progressively shifting from landscape to figure. In realizing this, I made large etchings which vaguely

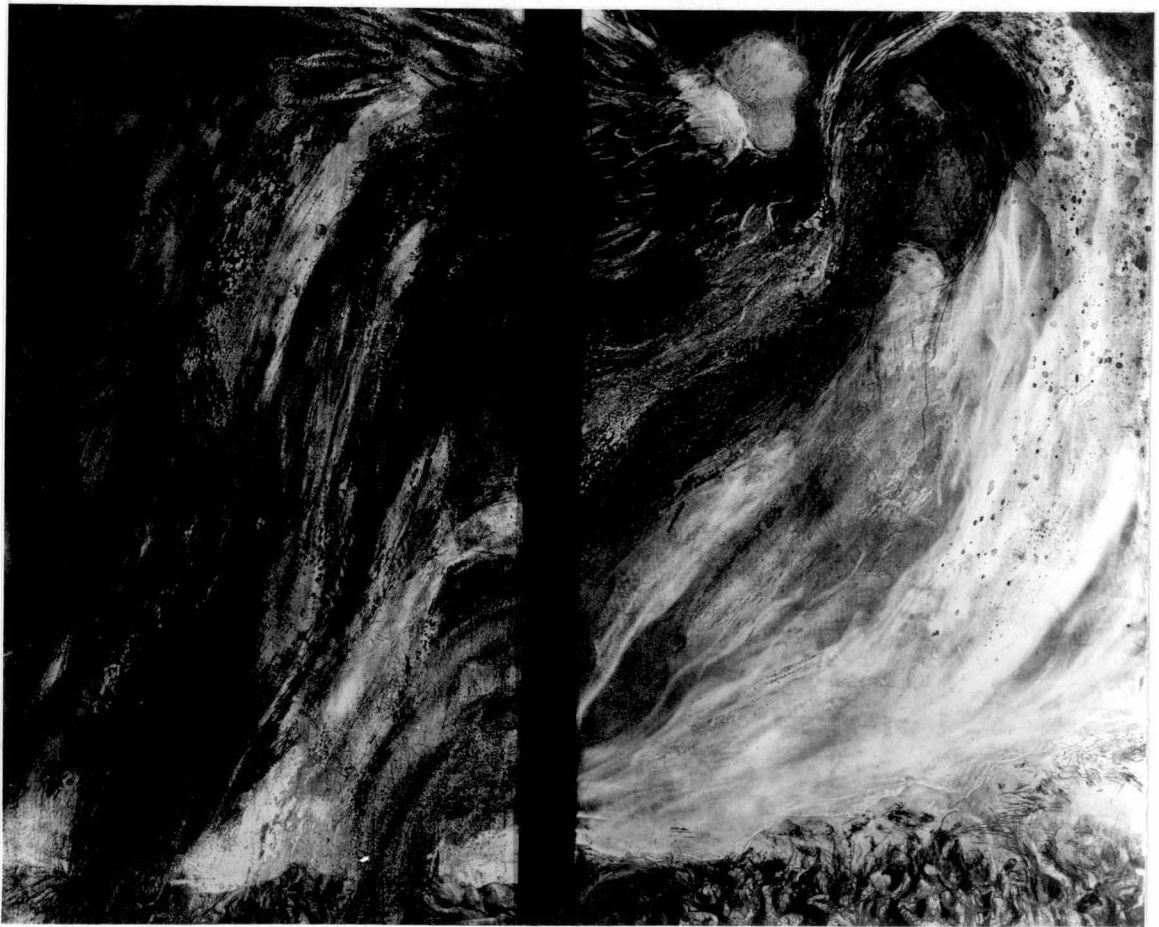
resemble washed out woodblock prints. Of these, there are two with which I am reasonably happy. A third, a three-panelled print derived from the last movement, has since evolved into a smaller work which is now part of *The Night's Music*. Its evolution is indicative of a significant shift in my work. About halfway through the course I came to the realization that the abstract qualities of my work were more important and more successful than the figurative elements. I reworked this third print, eliminating the figures which were mainly on the left-hand panel; this resulted in an almost square, fairly abstract print. I was very happy both with the shift to abstraction and with the square format, which paradoxically seems to be a form that contains innate tension. I chose this as a direction to take, and have continued to work somewhere between abstraction and representation (but closer to abstraction) and generally with a square or nearly square format.

By this stage I had also come to the realization that complicated images were not successfully expressing what I felt most strongly about the music. What most drew me to using music as a source for my work was the power it has to totally absorb one's attention, so that one becomes completely immersed in the moment. I am not interested in working using music as a background, where it operates as an element in a polyphony of influences and perhaps diversions. More and more it has become the intense and essential nature of particular passages of music in which I find exciting and meaningful possibilities for making images. Complex and compound imagery can be very interesting in a quite different way, but it offers too many distractions to adequately disclose those engrossing qualities of music which I found most attractive. My original interest in stratification of meanings and influences seemed like too much of an artificial imposition on the music, a too analytical, yet simplistic approach to something that was more poetic, more mysterious than intellectual. The attraction of the square format was for similar reasons. While I continued to play around with the idea of using ternary forms, and was most recently interested in an asymmetrical, vertical triptych, I found it to be too formally loaded; that is, its formal elements were too conspicuous, and distracted too much attention from those essential qualities which I now sought to convey. Less is more.

The Series *The Night's Music*.

*The Night's Music I*

This piece derives from the first part of the slow nocturno-fantasy which is the central section of the second movement of the Sixth String Quartet. It is a very passionate and exciting moment in the quartet, dream-like in its fantastic qualities, and suggestive of a tempestuous struggle without a conclusive outcome. To me the music evokes the simultaneous exhilaration and terror of dreamed or imagined flight. The print is the earliest and most figurative in the series. *Refers to Musical example no. 1.*



*The Night's Music I* , 1993  
diptych, 66x118, 74x118(cm)

### *The Night's Music II*

Of all Bartok's String Quartets I find the last movement of the last quartet the most poignant. The print which originates in this movement was the first to break with figurative elements, although there is still a sense of landscape in this and subsequent works. The music is also quite abstract, and I find it difficult to verbalize the qualities which I was trying to convey through the print. I suppose there is some kind of melancholy and nostalgia, but completely beyond any sentimentality; deep depression and intense pain, but expressed positively, with some sense of hope. The ritornello, interweaving with slow motion whisperings of themes from other parts of the quartet, at one point sits on a bed of parallel major sevenths, which throb and beat in their quiet but pungent discord. The aphoristic ending to the piece epitomises its characteristic duality of dark and light; under the ethereal clarity of a sustained perfect fifth, rising pizzicato chords in the cello intermingle major and minor in a gesture of uncertainty.

*Refers to Musical example no. 2*



*The Night's Music II*  
1993 118cmx112cm



***The Night's Music III.***

From this piece on, Bartok's music became more of a trigger, a starting point for the engrossing processes of making a print; these processes now resembling a journey, instead of an attempt to realize an initial vision. While the starting point was still a specific moment in the music (in this case the middle section of the third movement of the sixth quartet), I moved through these notes, consciously allowing compatible events from outside the music to exert their influence. A late-night phone call from a distressed friend had a profound impact. The impression I was left with was of the poignancy of an awareness of the value and beauty of something that was potentially to be lost; simultaneously the acuteness of the perception of beauty and the accompanying pain depended on the impending loss of the very object which was so esteemed. In the print which I made I attempt to express something of this impression through a rather abstract, ambiguous depiction of air or water, with an underlying emotional turbulence. *Refers to Musical example no. 3*

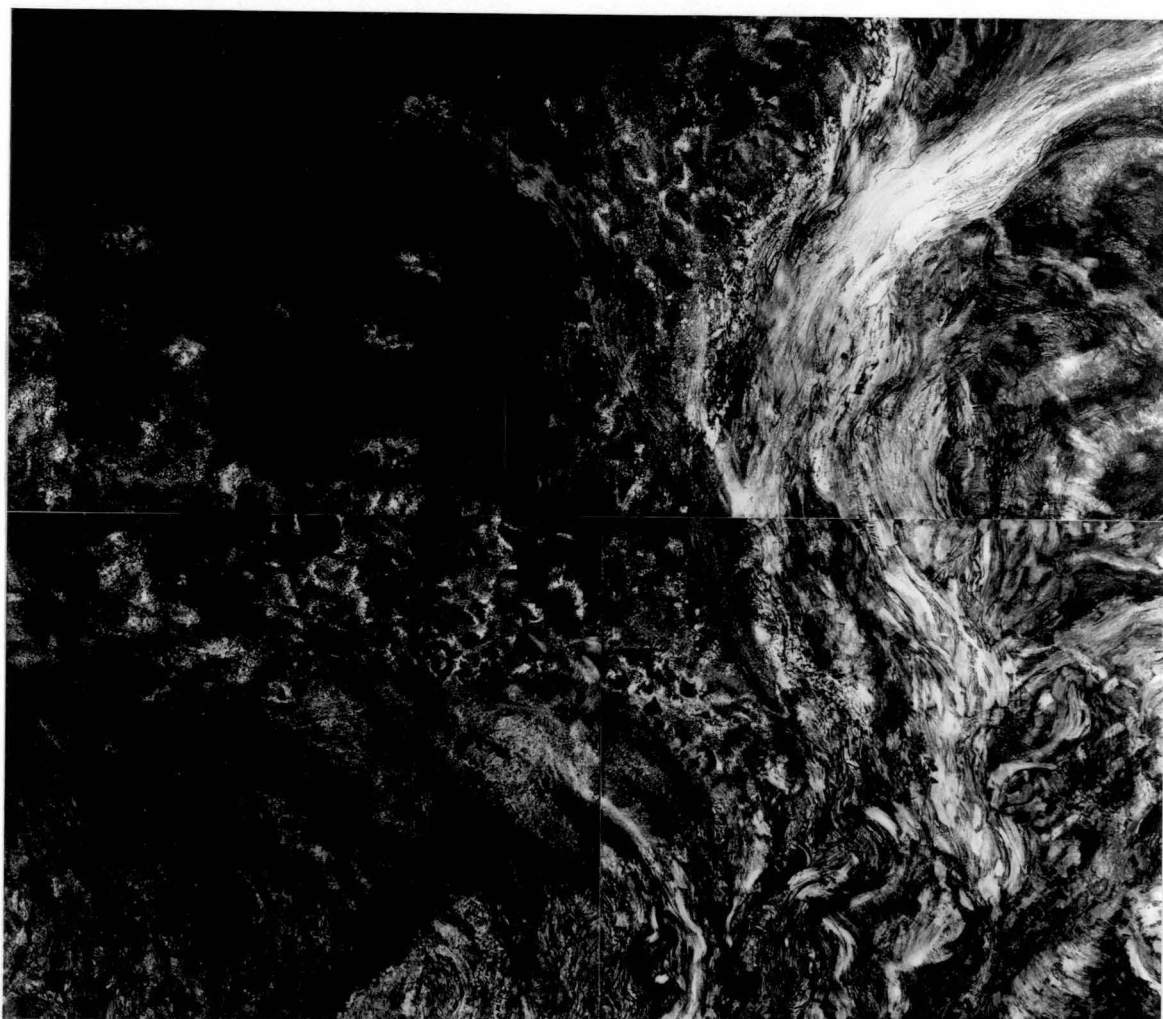


***The Night's Music III***  
1993 118cmx118cm



### *The Night's Music IV*

This print returns towards the mood of *The Night's Music I*, but its exhilaration is less lyrical, more intense and impersonal. Even more than the preceding work, its evolution was a journey from a point of departure in Bartok's music. It derives from a short section in the fourth movement of the fifth quartet in which the night music is more like the narration of a disturbingly tempestuous dream than the quieter, evocative passages which surround it. Originally I had attempted to convey the growth of a sense of tension and drama, choosing a long, three-panelled format. However, this strong horizontal shape detracted from the sense of excitement; I became less concerned in the building up of tension and more interested in its explosive eruption. I reworked the print into a large, four-panelled rectangle, the scale and shape of which emphasise a more intensely dramatic mood. *Refers to Musical example no. 4*



*The Night's Music IV*  
1993 1.5mx1.7m

*The Night's Music V*

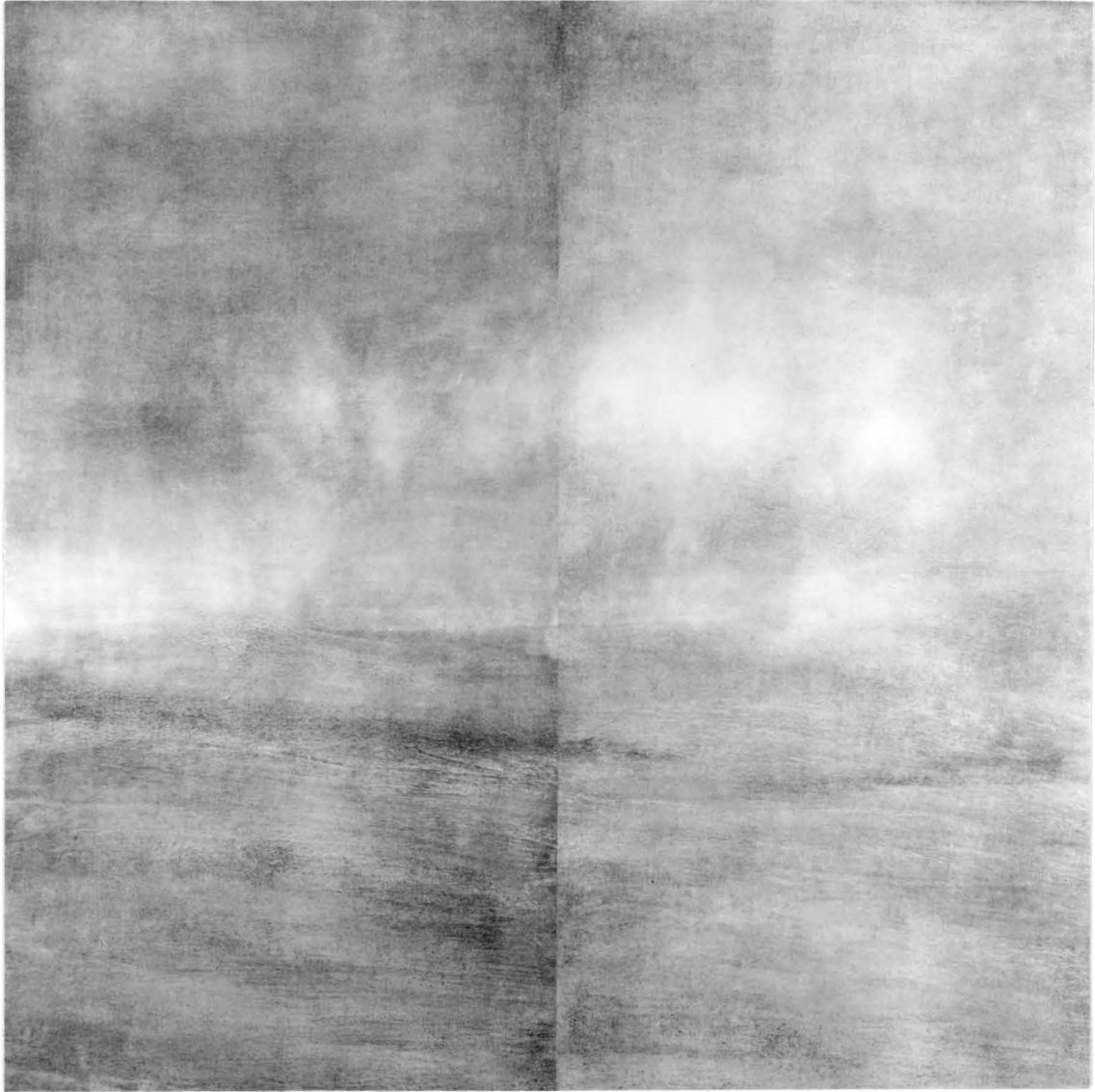
The opening section of the second movement of the fifth quartet was the point of departure for this print. As with the third print in the series, there is in this piece a rather ambiguous suggestion of water and air, but within its ambiguity there is more definition. Its movement is more flowing, less internalized, and with less underlying turbulence.

*Refers to Musical example no. 5*



*The Night's Music VI*

A quieter, more introspective moment of Bartok's music was the impetus for this work. It refers as much to the silences between the notes as to the uttered sounds themselves. The suggestive potency of these silences is reflected in a minimal image; I was fascinated by the realization that the less space is defined, the more it seems to approach a suggestion of infinity.



## In Conclusion

Looking back over my proposal, I find that it is in the first two paragraphs that I have best fulfilled my intentions. I have made prints which draw from Bartok's string quartets those 'themes and ideas which have personal relevance, making works which stand independently of their source'. Out of the wealth of music that is contained in the six quartets, I have found ample material in just a few sections, even moments, from the sixth and the fifth quartets. T. S. Eliot remains a source for future use; while the small amount of reading of his poetry that I managed to fit in was possibly a subliminal influence on my work, there was in the event not enough time and no necessity to deliberately make artworks derived from his *Four Quartets*.

While my initial concerns were with a layering of imagery in a literal sense, I discarded this direction in favour of simpler, large works. Any layering is now on a more abstruse level, and intrinsic to my chosen medium, etching. I opted for this medium because of its versatile repertoire of marks, the possibilities in its comprehensive tonal range, and its potential for a range of textures, the peculiarities of which are exclusive to this practice. I am also (mostly) very fond of the processes, both physical and mental, which are an integral part of making etchings. I enjoy the progressive development of an image through states, the challenge of finding new ways to achieve marks on a plate; I take pleasure in manipulating the metal. Finally, I decided to work in black and white (with the exception of some subtle changes in the ink, which make it warmer or cooler, but still leave it in an area which would on the whole be called black). This decision was partly a negation of the long history of dubious analogies between colour and music, which I have discussed in the first paper, but more positively because I relish both the drama and the seductive qualities of black and white; these are especially apparent in the medium of etching, which is so capable of providing all the intermediary subtleties of tone.



## Appendix 1: Influences and affinities.

Apart from the artists I have looked at either because they shared an interest in making visual art derived from a musical source, and apart from those whose work I considered in relation to formal concerns, there are artists with whom I find an affinity more in terms of style, or artistry.

Particular details of Chinese and Japanese landscape painting have impressed me. I am especially drawn to the minimalist brevity of an ambiguous but vast space which is found between the more defined passages. I also enjoy the loose, suggestive mark-making, which in places seems like the random traces of some unknown object.

### Illustration 1.

*Two Geese Flying over a Beach.* Ink-picture on a four-fold screen (detail), Kyoto school, 18th century.

### Illustration 2.

*Bright Mists in a Mountain Village*, by Yu-chien (detail), Southern Sung dynasty.

Similarly, it is the evocative brevity in some of the paintings of Turner and Gerhard Richter which I find fascinating. While the luminous atmospheres of Turner's paintings rely on qualities of paint, of impasto surfaces and subtlety of colours, which I could not emulate in black and white etchings, I was inspired by the courageous minimalism of his late works, particularly the undated sketches.

### Illustration 3.

Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Yellow Sky?*, c. 1840- 45? British Museum.

Another quality of Turner's paintings with which I feel an affinity is his highly Romantic sense of drama, and of total involvement in the moment. I was particularly impressed by the legend attached to the following illustration; that Turner, Ulysses-like, had himself lashed to the mast of a steam boat in order to extend the limits of his experience<sup>4</sup>.

### Illustration 4.

Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Snow Storm: Steam Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*, 1842.

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<sup>4</sup>See *The Paintings of J.M.W. Turner*, rev. ed., Martin Butlin and Evelyn Joll, Text, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1984, p.247

I discovered the works of Gerhard Richter quite recently. Out of the work of this chameleon I most enjoy the quiet but intensely suggestive qualities of the minimal, grey paintings from the 1970's, as well as the bold and colourful abstract paintings of 1990.

**Illustration 5.**

Gerhard Richter, *Vesuv*, 1976.

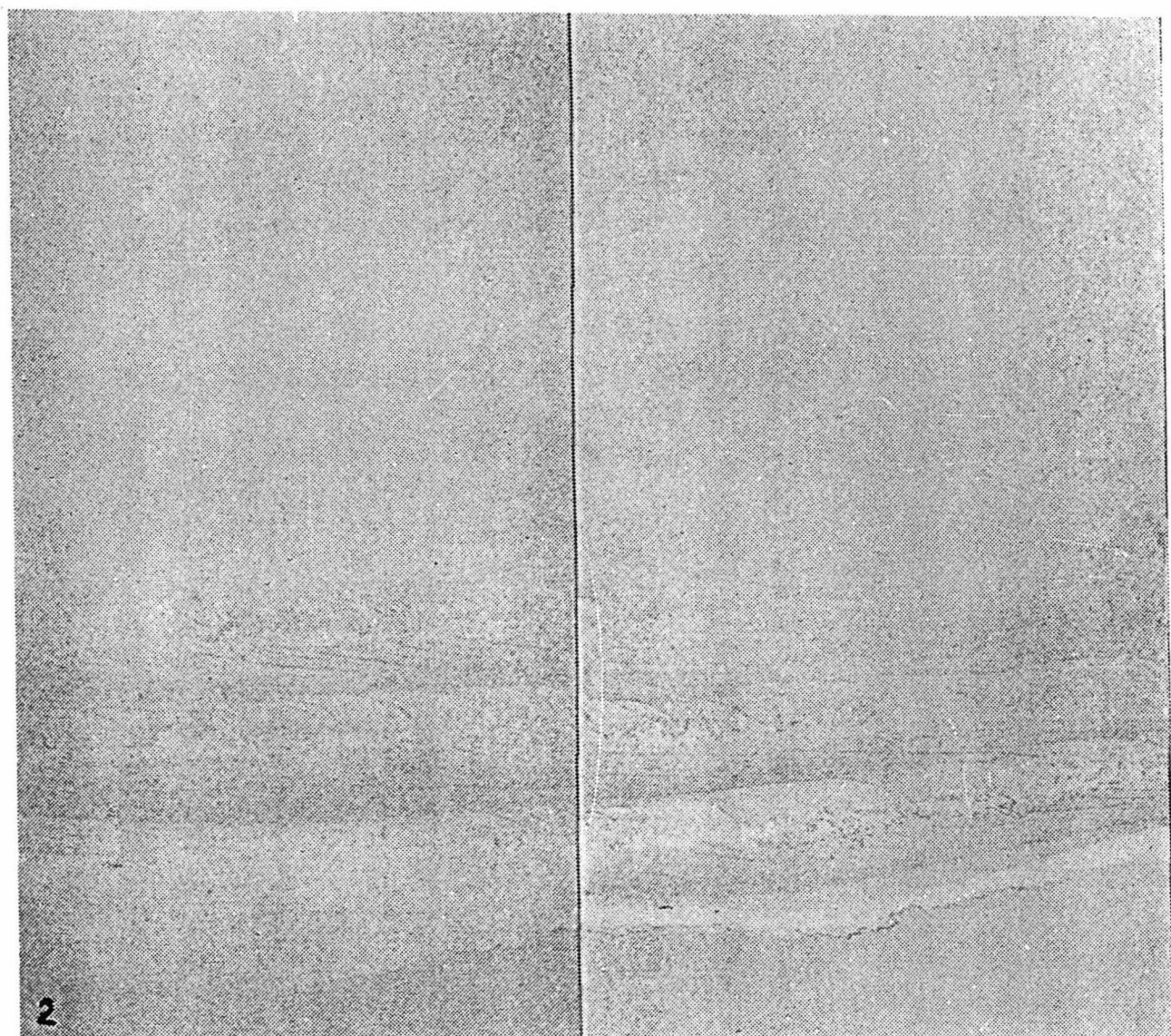
**Illustration 6.**

Gerhard Richter, *Abstract Painting (726)* 1990, diptych.

More generally, the sense of drama that is present in many of the paintings of Turner is also one of the qualities that I appreciate in works by both El Greco and Delacroix. In the paintings of El Greco, it is the high drama of light and shade, as well as the daunting sense of vertical space, of upsurge into this space, which I much admire.

**Illustration 7.**

Domenico Theotocopolis ('El Greco'), *Assumption of the Virgin*, c.1608.



**Illustration 1.**

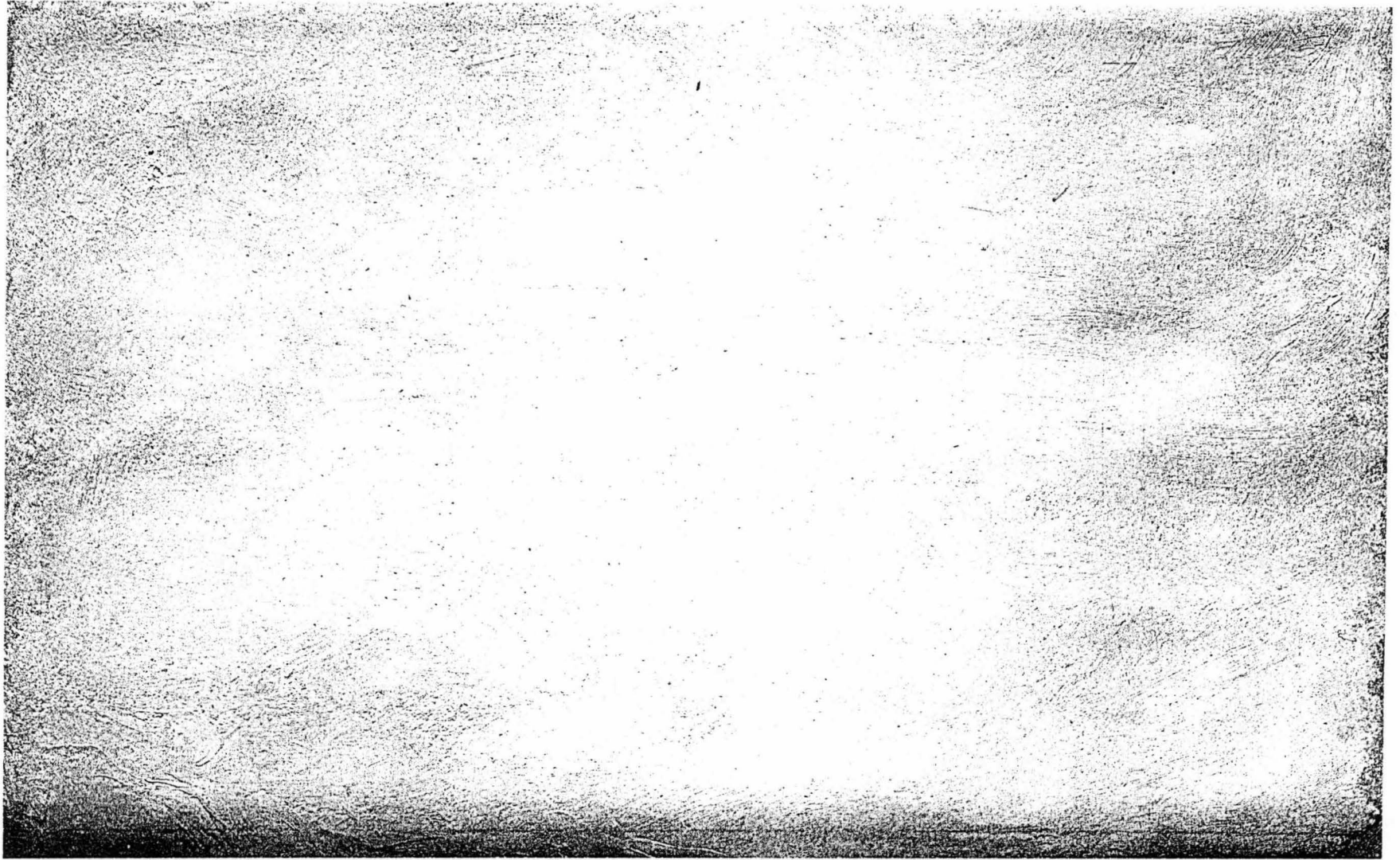
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**Illustration 2.**

*Bright Mists in a Mountain Village*, by Yu-chien (detail), Southern Sung dynasty.





**Illustration 3.**

Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Yellow Sky?*, c. 1840- 45? British Museum.



**Illustration 4.**

Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Snow Storm: Steam Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*, 1842.



**Illustration 5.**

Gerhard Richter, *Vesuv*, 1976.





Illustration 6.

Gerhard Richter, *Abstract Painting (726)* 1990, diptych.



**Illustration 7.**

Domenico Theotocopolis ('El Greco'), *Assumption of the Virgin*, c.1608.

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