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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Embracing the Outsider:
Framing Conflict in Per Nørgård's Wölfli Works

THESIS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in Musicology

by

Paul David Flood

Thesis Committee:
Associate Professor Amy Bauer, Chair
Professor David Brodbeck
Associate Professor Nicole Grimes

2021

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Wie Ein Kind

Music by Per Nørgård
 Text by Rainer Maria Rilke and Adolph Wolfli
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Symphony No. 4

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Embracing the Outsider: Framing Conflict in Per Nørgård's Wölfli Works

by

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Master of Fine Arts in Musicology

University of California, Irvine, 2021

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When Danish composer Per Nørgård discovered the visually arresting sketches of the schizophrenic Swiss artist Adolf Wölfli in 1979, he felt as though his vision of an “ideal world” had been challenged and thus became completely engrossed in the life and works of Wölfli. Nørgård’s works written between 1979 and approximately 1986 are known as his “Wölfli works,” for they each take inspiration from the fractal construction of Wölfli’s sketches and the spontaneity of his poetry. At the heart of these works is the notion of conflict between idyll and catastrophe, musically expressed through abruptness, fragmentation, and overlapping thematic material. This thesis unearths how Nørgård captured Wölfli’s essence in his work through musical analyses of three Wölfli works in tandem with scholarly literature, psychiatric reports, and artistic interpretations of Wölfli’s life and work. The thesis discusses *Wie ein Kind*, Nørgård’s first Wölfli work; the Fourth Symphony, based on Wölfli’s unfinished book of musical compositions; and the opera *Det Guddommelige Tivoli*, which brings Wölfli and the figures of his imagination to life. Each discussion demonstrates Nørgård’s growing

infatuation with Wölfli's world, highlighting one of the most unique periods of Danish modernism and advancing the dialogue on Nørgård's vast musical output.

INTRODUCTION

A change occurred within Per Nørgård at the turn of the 1980s. The composer, hailed as the ‘father of contemporary Danish music’ and known for his fixed, hierarchical mode of composition, faced an existential crisis which both amazed and embarrassed those who were familiar with his work. Those who were present for the fateful moment feared that Nørgård would go mad over the years to follow, but Nørgård formulated the nature of this change in his own words: “It wasn’t that I had seen the world through rose-coloured spectacles until then, but it was a commitment to reach the goal I had obviously set for myself. I almost felt myself to be a medium... and where I myself stood in all this as a person was actually secondary.”¹

Per Nørgård became completely engrossed in the life and work of the schizophrenic Swiss artist Adolf Wölfli (1864–1930). On October 9, 1979, during a visit to the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art just north of Copenhagen, Nørgård skipped out on a recital and instead spent his time in the *Outsidere* (Outsiders) exhibit that had been on display at the time.² Wölfli, who spent much of his adult life in a psychiatric ward after attempting acts of sexual violence against minors, created visually arresting artworks that struck Nørgård as similar to his “infinity series,” a compositional system based on an integer sequence which used in his works throughout his “hierarchical period” of the 1960s and 70s.³ The term “hierarchical” in this context refers to his use of the infinity series as a means of regulating pitches into a hierarchy.⁴

¹ Quoted in: Jørgen I. Jensen, “The Great Change: Per Nørgård and Adolf Wölfli” in *The Music of Per Nørgård: Fourteen Interpretive Essays*, ed. Anders Beyer (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co, 1996), 11.

² The term “outsiders” refers to visual artists who were mentally ill.

³ Adolf Wölfli was arrested for his attempted sexual assault of a minor, and subsequently admitted to a mental asylum after being diagnosed with schizophrenia. Please note that this will be referenced at various points throughout the thesis. For more details, see: Walter Morganthaler, *Madness & Art: The Life and Works of Adolf Wölfli* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 6.

⁴ An example of one of Nørgård’s most well-known “hierarchical period” works, prominently featuring the infinity series, is *Voyage into the Golden Screen* (1968). Erling Kullberg, “Beyond Infinity: On the infinity series — the



Adolf Wölfli, *General view of the island Neveranger*, 1911.

DNA of hierarchical music,” in *The Music of Per Nørgård: Fourteen Interpretive Essays*, ed. Anders Beyer (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 1996), 71.

Nørgård's works written between 1979 and approximately 1986 are known as his "Wölfli works," for they all take inspiration from the fractal construction of Wölfli's sketches and the linguistic spontaneity of his poetry. Jørgen I. Jensen, present for the moment when Nørgård discovered Wölfli, recalled Nørgård's exclamation that the art "is exactly like the infinity hierarchies."⁵ At the heart of these works is the notion of conflict between idyll and catastrophe within the human experience; the apperception of unhappiness as a necessary part of experiencing happiness.⁶ Nørgård's use of the terms idyll and catastrophe are not to be confused with the poetic concepts of idyll and catastrophe which pervade throughout German poetry of the nineteenth-century: idyll, via Friedrich Schiller, wherein the real and ideal are united, and catastrophe, which bears an etymological double meaning of both destruction and renewal.⁷ Instead, Nørgård's use of these terms situates a binary between two contrasting ideas or states, such as light and dark, happiness and sadness, or order and chaos, which can be musically depicted through abrupt contrasts. While both terms speak to extreme states, not everything that is captured beneath both terms is necessarily extreme; rather, the extreme nature of these terms is meant to exaggerate the notions of contrast and conflict in these works. Idyll and catastrophe are not only contrasted from one another in these works, but Nørgård also allows them to coexist and complement one another. He uses the visual analogy of the Chinese Yin-Yang symbol, which contains a black dot in the white half of the circle and vice versa, and states in a program note

⁵ Quoted in: Jensen, 23.

⁶ Erling Kullberg, "Wie ein Kind for choir a capella," Per Nørgård, accessed May 12, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070522153323/http://www.pernoergaard.dk/eng/udvalgte/167.html>.

⁷ Nicole Grimes, "The Ennoblement of Mourning: Nänie and the Death of Beauty," in *Brahms's Elegies: The Poetics of Loss in Nineteenth-Century German Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019): 67; Nicole Grimes, "Brahms's Ascending Circle: Hölderlin and Schicksalslied," in *Brahms's Elegies: The Poetics of Loss in Nineteenth-Century German Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019): 40.

that “There can never be idyll without hints of catastrophe, never catastrophe without hints of idyll.”⁸

Nørgård’s study of Wölfli’s tormented life influenced his compositional output during the early 1980s, sonically framing his existential crisis of how his “ideal world” may be envisioned in his music.⁹ Nørgård changed his aesthetic stance: the 1980s saw Nørgård’s abandonment of the orderly and hierarchical characteristics in his music of the two decades prior, in favor of chaotic and spontaneous characteristics which inform the works inspired by Wölfli. Ivan Hansen highlights this shift through a comparison between Nørgård’s Third and Fourth Symphonies, composed in 1972 and 1981 respectively: “The harmonic botanizing in lush gardens, expressed with the Third Symphony, yielded to polarized division such as that encountered in the Fourth Symphony (*Indischer Roosen-Gaarten und Chineesischer Hexen-see*).”¹⁰

It is important to note that Nørgård did not necessarily intend for this music to be ekphrastic in its content. Instead, Nørgård appears to take a Sartrean approach to his music’s relationship with Wölfli, indirectly adopting the “existence precedes essence” maxim, whereby one’s essence, determined by their actions, has more significance than one’s mere existence.¹¹ Nørgård’s desire to situate himself as a “medium” through which something is expressed or achieved acknowledges that Wölfli has already done his part in contributing to the world through his own existence, and that what remains of him is accessible via a process of looking back, as it were, and tracing components of his essence. Nørgård’s objective, therefore, was to give agency

⁸ Per Nørgård, *Symphony No. 4* (Copenhagen: Edition Wilhelm Hansen, 1989), 3.

⁹ Jean Christensen, “Part I—New Music in Denmark” in *New Music of the Nordic Countries*, ed. John D. White (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2002), 41.

¹⁰ Ivan Hansen, “Waves, Hierarchies, Interferences,” in *The Music of Per Nørgård: Fourteen Interpretive Essays*, ed. Anders Beyer (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 1996), 121.

¹¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, “Existentialism is a Humanism,” In *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Penguin Group Inc., 1975), 349.

to the “cries and phantasms of a lonely person, afflicted for decades, [who] suddenly demanded entry into Per Nørgård’s music.”¹²

This is not at all to say that documentation of Wölfli’s existence is of no influence nor interest in these works. In fact, no study regarding Adolf Wölfli is complete without the acknowledgment of Walter Morgenthaler, Adolf Wölfli’s doctor during his confinement at Waldau, a psychiatric ward in Bern, and his lengthy report on Wölfli’s life, artwork, and habits under medical supervision.¹³ Morgenthaler was a psychiatrist, not a literary critic or music expert. As a result, Morgenthaler’s observations of Wölfli’s artwork are based on his psychiatric perspective alone. These observations are based on his experience with other schizophrenics in Waldau, and are not to be taken as concrete claims. It is because of Morgenthaler’s report, however, that we have any sort of insight into Wölfli’s artistic process and the various themes which characterize his visual, literary, and musical work.

This thesis on Nørgård’s Wölfli works unearths how Wölfli’s essence is captured through notions of fragmentation, contrast, conflict, and catastrophe in a selection of three important works from this period of Nørgård’s oeuvre. I argue, through multiple different approaches such as score analysis, musico-poetic analysis, and consultation of Morgenthaler’s report and scholarly literature on Wölfli’s life and art, that Nørgård demonstrated a more comprehensive understanding of, and thus a gradually deepening engagement with Wölfli and his world throughout the duration of the Wölfli period.

Chapter One discusses Nørgård’s first Wölfli work, *Wie ein Kind* for mixed choir, composed between 1979 and 1980. I frame *Wie ein Kind* as a transition work between Nørgård’s

¹² Jensen, 9.

¹³ Morgenthaler, *Madness & Art*, 1.

hierarchical period and his Wölfli period, beginning with an introduction to Nørgård's infinity series, followed by an explanation of how the infinity series may be converted to a reduced version called the two-tone infinity series. The two-tone infinity series is present in the work's second movement, indicating Nørgård's existential crisis within his music, following his discovery of Wölfli. This is followed by a musico-poetic analysis of the work's three movements. The first and third movements are set to texts by Wölfli, and the second movement is set to a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke. The chapter examines these movements and points to multiple outbursts from soloists, coding these as catastrophic interferences above an idyllic choral texture. A study of these outbursts provides context for Wölfli's poems in correlation with Morgenthaler's report.

Chapter Two focuses on Nørgård's Fourth Symphony, subtitled "Indischer Roosen-Gaarten und Chinesischer Hexen-see" ("Indian Rose Garden and Chinese Witch Sea"), composed in 1981. The chapter begins with a discussion of Wölfli's musical notation, as it appears in his sketches, as a platform for comparing musical and thematic motifs which appear in both Wölfli's sketches and Nørgård's Symphony. The most prominent thematic connection between the two is the appearance of birds, or "Vögeli." I argue that Nørgård's use of the birdsong, particularly that of the African lark, in his Fourth Symphony is as a transitory device between idyllic and catastrophic passages. The most striking use of this device is in the abrupt transition from the first movement to the second movement. Nørgård, having abandoned the infinity series by this point, is fixated with a sense of spontaneity in this symphony that is driven by the spontaneity exhibited in Wölfli's sketches.

Chapter Three provides an introduction to Nørgård's Wölfli opera, *Det Guddommelige Tivoli* (*The Divine Circus*). I argue that this opera is the culmination of Nørgård's exploration into Wölfli's world, combining various themes from preceding Wölfli works in a portrayal of Wölfli's life. The opera features the anti-hero protagonist Adolf Wölfli himself, and brings many of the characters and figures created in Wölfli's art to life, including the various manifestations of himself: the child Doufi, St. Adolf, and St. Adolf II. The contrast between idyll and catastrophe is used as a plot device to progress one scene, or "episode," to the next. Some of these transitions are situated as "falls" from idyll to catastrophe, through which Wölfli is abruptly shifted from states of elation to psychosis. Glimpses into Wölfli's childhood in the first act, as well as depictions of Wölfli in Waldau in the second act, are consistent with Morgenthaler's report.

In the conclusion, I point to additional Wölfli works that are mentioned in passing throughout the three chapters, as well as other composers who have found resonances with Wölfli in their music. While existing literature has brilliantly assessed the ideological influence of this discovery on Nørgård and answered the question of *why* Nørgård was so struck by Wölfli in the early 1980s, I am interested in asking *how* Nørgård's infatuation with Wölfli manifested in these compositions, and unraveling the ways in which these important works in Nørgård's vast, complex repertoire are parallel to or resonant with Wölfli's artistic output. Through a synthesis of Nørgård's music, Wölfli's artistic output, and the literature on both, I provide further comprehension of this fascinating group of works that may be of particular interest to music and art scholars alike.

CHAPTER ONE: *Wie ein Kind*

Nørgård's compositional persona immediately prior to 1980 was rooted in his hierarchical method of composition, which featured his use of the infinity series and affinity for a sense of order in his music. When he discovered Wölfli in 1979, Nørgård was introduced to an artistic vision of freedom which challenged his own vision of musical subjection. While Nørgård struggled to codify Wölfli's influence on his worldview and composition, he wrote *Wie Ein Kind* for mixed choir between 1979 and 1980. *Wie Ein Kind* is Nørgård's first Wölfli work, and has established itself as one of the most important and popular works in the Danish choral repertoire. This first chapter demonstrates how Nørgård's existential crisis involving his shifting compositional persona, along with his initial exploration into the theme of conflict, manifested in his composition through an analysis of his unconventional use of the infinity series and his use of texts by Wölfli and Rainer Marie Rilke in *Wie Ein Kind*. This analysis situates *Wie Ein Kind* as a transition between Nørgård's hierarchical period, characterized by the intricacies of the infinity series, and his Wölfli period, characterized by conflict and the freedom from compositional structures.

Written on a commission from the Nordiska Körkommittén, *Wie Ein Kind* frames conflict through its exploration of childlike experiences.¹⁴ The first and third movements, "Wiigen-Lied" and "Trauermarsch mit einem Unglücksfall," bear motivic similarities and set a nonsense text written by Wölfli. In the first movement, the soloist's wails and distant cries evoke the image of a street vendor, or a mother calling to her child from a tower. In the third

¹⁴ Kullberg, "*Wie ein Kind*."

movement, the soloist attempts to conform with the choir but suffers from an embarrassing stutter which keeps them rhythmically misaligned with the choir. The second movement stands in contrast to its bookending movements. Set to Rilke's "Frühlings-Lied," the movement's harmonic simplicity and playful texture depicts childlike joy and sensual awareness.¹⁵ A later section of this movement employs a reduced form of Nørgård's infinity series called the two-tone infinity series. Nørgård's reduction of his own technique signifies the manifestation of his crisis in his composition.

The infinity series is a recursive integer sequence built upon the outward projection of intervals, in both directions, beginning from the very first interval of a given row, counted in semitones.¹⁶ This process of intervallic projection can also be used to reduce an infinity series into a two-tone infinity series. I will introduce the infinity series, demonstrate how Nørgård may have reduced his original series into a two-tone infinity series, and discuss the two-tone infinity series within measures 98–129 of "Frühlings-Lied." These measures contain four units with similar motives in the tenor and alto voices that are constructed by the two-tone infinity series. Each successive unit is varied from its predecessor in texture, pitch collection, and rhythm of the outer voices.

¹⁵ Per Nørgård, *Wie ein Kind* (Copenhagen: Edition Wilhelm Hansen, 1996), iii.

¹⁶ For a mathematical explanation of the infinity series, see: Yu Hin (Gary) Au, Christopher Drexler-Lemire, and Jeffrey Shallit, "Notes and note pairs in Nørgård's Infinity Series," in *Journal of Mathematics and Music* 1, 1 (2017): 1.

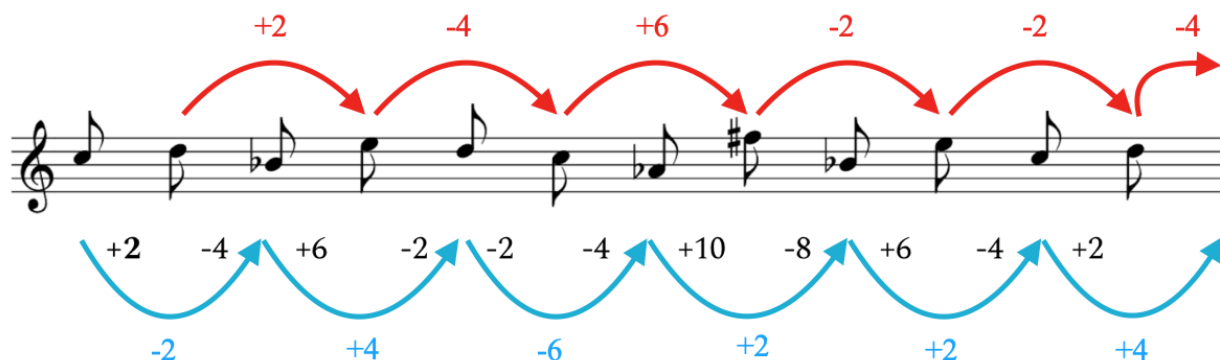


Figure 1.1: The first twelve pitches of Inf. C+2.

Figure 1.1 is an infinity row based on the ascent of two semitones from the starting pitch C. This series will be called Inf. C+2, indicating the starting pitch and the respective ordered pitch interval. The aforementioned process of constructing an infinity series is one in which the ordered pitch intervals from one note to the next are projected forward to determine the succeeding pitches in a series. At the beginning of the series, the ascending interval of two semitones between C to D determines the following two pitches. The projection of intervals occurs in such a way that every other note is related, as shown by the blue and red arrows in Figure 1.1. Each interval projects two notes in opposite directions: the first note to be projected will move in relation to the starting pitch, but in the opposite direction of the interval being projected. In other words, the ascent of two semitones between C and D will project a descent of two semitones between C and the Bb after the D. The next note will be projected in the same direction as the interval between C and D, but will do so in relation to the D. The ascent of two semitones from C to D will project the same interval between D and the E after Bb. Therefore, in the context of Inf. C+2, the two-semitone ascent from C to D will project itself such that the third

note of the series will move two semitones below C, to Bb, and the fourth note of the series will move two semitones above D, to E. The series then continues with the interval between D and Bb, a descent of four semitones, leading to D and C as the next two pitches in the series. The process continues toward infinity (or at least where the composer decides to stop).¹⁷

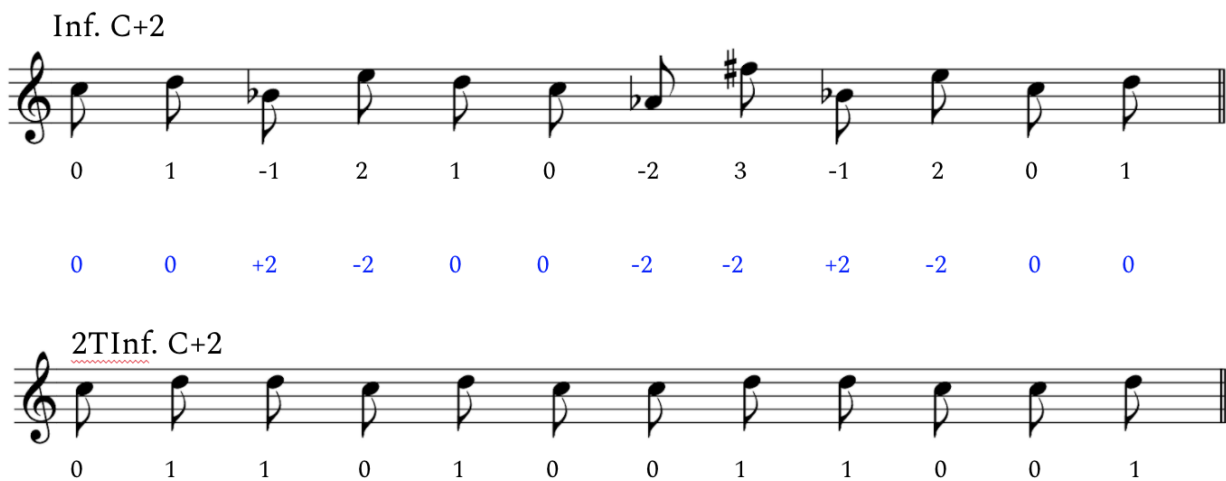


Figure 1.2: Process of reduction from Inf. C+2 to 2TInf. C+2.

In *Wie Ein Kind*, Nørgård uses what is called a two-tone infinity series, a reduced form of the infinity series which contains and repeats the same two pitches which began the original infinity series. The repetitive ordering of these two pitches can be identified through the very process of reduction. To convert Inf. C+2 into a two-tone infinity series, we consider the pitches C and D as numerical values 0 and 1.¹⁸ Each successive pitch will be given a value in relation to the starting pitch; Bb is -1, E is 2, Ab is -2, and so on. Each value will then be added to or subtracted from by a multiple of 2 until it becomes either value 0 or 1, as demonstrated by the

¹⁷ Jørgen Mortensen, “Construction by the projection of intervals,” Per Nørgård, accessed May 12, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070523051434/http://www.pernoergaard.dk/eng/strukturer/uendelig/ukonstruktion01.html>.

¹⁸ Note that these values are not to be confused with pitch class set theory, in which C is also 0 but D is 2.

blue numbers in Figure 1.2. If the value is above 1, it will be subtracted by a multiple of 2, and if the value is below 0, it will be added to by a multiple of 2.¹⁹

Given the above examples, provided for technical context, I now turn to the two-tone infinity series that is present in “Frühlings-Lied.” Between measures 98 and 129 are four units based on the two-tone infinity series. Nørgård sets a larger two-tone infinity series as the basis of these units, including only the consecutively repeating pitches within that series in these units to create what he calls a “pishop” rhythm. A pishop rhythm is the extraction and tying-together of these consecutively repeating pitches from their larger two-tone series. Repeated notes from the larger series are converted into tied notes in the score, creating the pishop rhythm. Pitches that do not have a repetition before or after themselves are replaced by a rest, as shown in the Figures 1.3 and 1.4 in which the pishop rhythm in the tenor line is isolated to reveal the series 2TInf. E-9.



Figure 1.3: Nørgård, “Frühlings-Lied,” mm. 98–105.

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¹⁹ Jørgen Mortensen, “An infinity series with only 4 or 2 different variants,” Per Nørgård, accessed May 12, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070522153340/http://www.pernoergaard.dk/eng/strukturer/uendelig/u4.html>.

Figure 1.4: Conversion between tenor pishop rhythm and 2TInf. E-9.

At first glance, there may appear to be discrepancies in this conversion, but these are intentional and unique to each unit. For example, the pishop rhythm containing an eighth note tied to a quarter note is most likely a textural choice, as it is not an indication that three consecutively repeated pitches exist in the two-tone infinity series (this would not be possible based on the process of reduction). In addition, the large distance between the two pitches of the series used in “Frühlings-Lied” means that neither pitch can be identified with values 0 or 1 as in the technical example above. Nørgård’s use of the two-tone infinity series in other works does allow for this identification of numerical value, and even though the series in question does not

possess this quality, it is still considered a two-tone infinity series for functional purposes.²⁰

Nørgård's use of a two-tone infinity series that is non-derivative is perhaps another representation of his crisis and the transition into his Wölfl period.

The image shows a musical score for three voices (Soprano, Alto, and Bass) in German. The score is divided into three systems, each starting with a measure number (97, 100, and 103). The lyrics are: 'das! das Vie - le viel, und, was ge - druckt, steht in Wur - zeln und lan - gen schwie - ri - gen druckt steht in Stäm - men: sie singts, sie singts, sie singts, Stäm - men: sie singts, sie singts, sie singts, Stäm - men, sie singts, sie singts,'. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *pp*, *fz*, and *f*. A red '1.' is written above the first measure of the first system. At the bottom of the page, there is a footnote: '1) Very distinct ending consonants at Fine'.

²⁰ Kullberg, "Wie ein Kind."

24
2.

106 *pp* *poco accel.*

und *p* was *fz* *p* *fz*
und was ge - druckt steht in Wur - zeln
und was ge - druckt steht in Wur - zeln
mp *mf* *pp* *gliss.* *fz*
und was ge - - druckt

109 (accel.)

ge - - - dru - - - (dr)uckt *fz*
und lan - gen schwie - ri - gen Stäm - men: *fz*
und lan - gen schwie - ri - gen Stäm - men: *fz*
f *p* *fz* *p*
steht in Stäm - men:

112 (accel.) **3.** *a tempo*

steht *fz*
sie singts, sie singts *f* *sub. p* und was ge -
sie singts, sie singts *f* *sub. p* und was ge -
sie singts, sie singts, und *fz* *f* *sub. p*

WH3051 Per Norgård: WIE EIN KIND

115

druckt steht in Wur-zeln und lan-gen
druckt steht in Wur-zeln und lan-gen
was ge - - druckt steht

118

schwie - ri - gen Stäm - men: sie singts, sie
schwie - ri - gen Stäm - men: sie singts, sie
in Stäm - men: sie

121

O, was der
singts, sie singts und was ge - druckt steht
singts, sie singts und was ge - druckt steht
singts, sie singts und was ge -

26

124 *poco accel.*
gliss. Leh - - - rer sie lehr - - - *gliss.*
 in Wur - zeln und lan - gen schwie - ri - gen
 in *ff* Wur - zeln und *f* lan - gen schwie - ri - gen
 druckt steht in
 (accel.)

127 *gliss.* *f* *gliss.* *ff*
 te: sie singts, sie singts, sie singts
 Stäm - men: sie singts, sie singts, sie singts
 Stäm - men: sie singts, sie singts, sie singts
ff *p* *fp* *f* *p* *ff*
 Stäm - men sie singts, sie singts

130 *a tempo*
fp *mf*
 O,- o,- was der Lehr - - rer sie lehr - te
 O,- o,- was der Lehr - - rer sie lehr - te
p *f* *sub. p* *f*
 O, was ge - - druckt

WH30351 Per Nørgård: WIE EIN KIND

Figure 1.5: Nørgård, “Frühlings-Lied,” mm. 97–132
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The introductory unit in mm. 98–105 features two infinity rows in the inner voices while the basses sing in fifths below. The second unit in mm. 106–113 features variation in the outer voices while the content in the inner voices remains the same. Here, the soprano part enters above while the fifths in the bass move by *glissandi*. The third unit in mm. 114–121 sees multiple variations. First, the soprano line from the previous unit does not return. There is an additional pitch B added to the tenor line. A possible explanation for the addition of this pitch is to align with the first bass' Bs on m. 115 and m. 116. The most important variation here is disruption of the pishop rhythm at the end of measure 116, where the rhythmic values proceed from quarter note on G, to eighth note on E, to half note on G, rather than three consecutive occurrences of two tied eighth notes. In addition, the alto and tenor parts fall out of alignment for a brief moment in measure 116, where the alto sings an eighth note on beat two but the tenor holds on for a bit longer with a quarter note. The fourth and final unit in mm. 122–129 sees the return of the soprano line with shorter durations of the material from unit two, and the removal of the *glissandi* from the bass. At the beginning of this unit, the tenor briefly sings a unison D with the alto. This culminating two-tone unit presents slightly obscured inner voice lines, informed by the two-tone infinity series, with motives in the outer voices to provide accompanying texture.

Nørgård's use of his infinity series in its reduced, non-derivative form harkens as a point of no return, a glimpse into something that once was but which cannot be revived in its original form. In much the same way, Jean Christensen notes that Nørgård's study of Wölfli challenged his former vision of the ideal world to accommodate outsiders such as Wölfli.²¹ While the two-tone infinity series demonstrates *Wie Ein Kind's* capacity as a transition between Nørgård's

²¹ Christensen, "New Music in Denmark," 42.

hierarchical and Wölfli periods, the theme of conflict that structures the piece and its setting of both Wölfli and Rilke texts provides a framework on which the rest of the Wölfli period is modeled.

Although visual art was Wölfli's primary mode of artistic expression, he dabbled in poetry, prose, and musical composition. His poems, in particular, can be found on the backs of his artwork. Many of these poems were given thematic names such as "Poem of the Creation of God" or "Waltz of the Dogs-of-God-the-Father," but the text to these poems rarely develops the theme further. Wölfli's poems do distinguish themselves for their distinct sense of rhythm and rhyme.²² Take, for example, Wölfli's unnamed sound poem to which "Wiigen-Lied" is set.

"G'ganggali ging g'gang, g'gung g'gung!

Giigara-Lina Wiyy Rosina.

G'ganggali ging g'gang, g'gung g'gung!

Rittare-Gritta, d'Zittara witta.

G'ganggali ging g'gang, g'gung g'gung!

Giigalarina, siig R a Fina.

G'ganggali ging g'gang, g'gung g'gung!

Fung z'Jung, chung d'Stung."

The sound poem's text is nonsense; it cannot be translated literally. The repeated "G'ganggali ging g'gang, g'gung g'gung" brings a sense of unity to the text, emphasizing

²² Morgenthaler, *Madness & Art*, 51.

consonant sounds [g] and [ŋ]. The lines of text between these repetitions, with their own internal rhymes, are left up for interpretation due to their lack of meaning. Nørgård’s setting of this text in his first Wölfli work is likely an attempt to capture Wölfli’s essence in a way that pits idyll against catastrophe.

The “G’ganggali ging g’gang, g’gung g’gung” text is repeated in all four voices throughout the opening and closing sections of the first movement, as well as throughout the entirety of the third movement. This texture represents the idyllic: the hypnotic rocking of a cradle or the falling into a dream state at which point only incomprehensible language, such as the repeated nonsense text with emphasized consonants, can be heard.²³ The individual phrases from the poem are sung by soloists as strange, distant cries which punctuate the underlying texture. These cries are unpitched, yet Nørgård provides strange instructions such as “Like the cries of a street vendor” on the first instance of these cries.²⁴

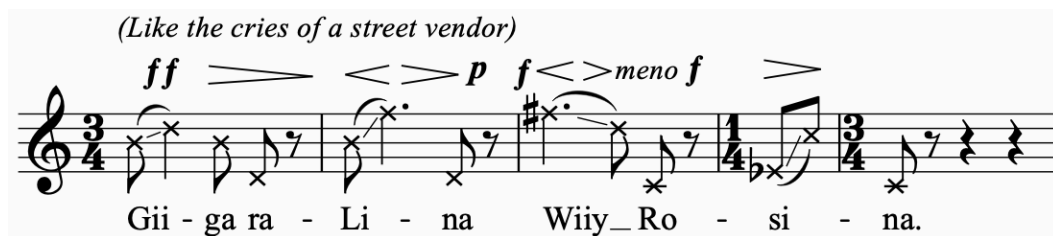


Figure 1.6: Nørgård, “Wiigen-Lied,” mm. 22–26.

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²³ Jean Christensen, “Nørgård’s Choral Music: Lyricism — with a Dramatic Nerve,” in *Per Nørgård: Fourteen Interpretive Essays*, ed. Anders Beyer (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 1996), 105.

²⁴ Nørgård, *Wie Ein Kind*, 3.

This setting of the phrase “Giigara-Lina Wiij Rosina” may be interpreted, per Nørgård’s suggestion, as a street vendor, or as a mother who is calling for her lost child.²⁵ These interjections are part of the dream state, although they add a nightmarish tone. It is also possible that these are voices in Wölfli’s head, perhaps as Nørgård’s attempt to capture Wölfli’s essence through a depiction of schizophrenia. Erling Kullberg, who commissioned the work from Nørgård, believes that Nørgård’s setting of “Fung z’Jung, Chung d’Stung” with a “military” marking is intended to sound like an aggressive, authoritative command, representing the figure who arrested Wölfli for sexual assault.²⁶ This same phrase, first exclaimed by a tenor soloist, is heard in unison from all four voices as a transition into the B section. At the end of the movement, the first three words are sung by the tenor soloist, and the rest of the choir joins in for the concluding “d’Stung.”



Figure 1.7: Nørgård, “Wiigen-Lied,” mm. 41–43.

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If the choral texture represents the idyllic, the soloists’ interjections represent the catastrophic. This same dichotomy appears in the third movement, “Trauermarsch mit einem

²⁵ Nørgård, *Wie ein Kind*, 3.

²⁶ Kullberg, “Wie ein Kind.”

Unglücksfall,” in which the same choral texture is sung but is consistently interrupted by the stutters — “g’ g’ g’ g’ g’ g’ gang” — of the tenor soloist who cannot keep up with the rest of the choir.²⁷

A surface-level reading of *Wie ein Kind* would situate this conflict between idyll and catastrophe in the contrasting settings of Wölfli and Rilke texts. The two outer Wölfli movements depict catastrophe through soloists’ interruptions, which represent the afflictions of someone who cannot ignore the sound of assertive voices or who cannot overcome a speech impediment. The Rilke setting in the second movement suffers no such interruptions — nor does Rilke’s poem alone — depicting the idyllic through its exploration of a child’s joy and sensory awareness. A deeper look into the poetics of the first and third movements shows that these movements are not entirely catastrophic; instead they are characterized by the constant conflict of idyll versus catastrophe, interpreted here as that which is pleasant versus that which is unpleasant, as demonstrated in the vocal writing and use of the sound poem. If the Wölfli movements are characteristic of this conflict between idyll and catastrophe, then perhaps the Rilke movement is comfortably situated in idyll while the two-tone infinity series points to an external source of catastrophe, one situated within Nørgård himself as he struggled with his Wölfli-induced existential crisis.

All of this suggests that Nørgård’s crisis manifested in his composition at the turn of the 1980s. Nørgård’s discovery of Wölfli threatened the orderly world constructed in the hierarchical music of the 1960s and 70s, characterized by the infinity series. *Wie ein Kind* frames Nørgård’s struggle to abandon his fixation with order in favor of the opportunities presented by chaos: to

²⁷ Nørgård, *Wie ein Kind*, 32.

embrace the outsider, Wölfli, and his artistic output as agents of chaos in his shifting ideology and compositional style. The short choral piece introduces listeners to what Nørgård discerns to be the essence of Wölfli, and as Christensen argues, captures the spirit of the 1980s almost before the decade had begun.²⁸ The next two chapters will demonstrate how the conflict between idyll and catastrophe developed further in Nørgård's composition over the next few years as Nørgård embraced Wölfli's artistic influence more closely. *Wie ein Kind* is merely the beginning of a radical shift in Nørgård's worldview.

²⁸ Christensen, "Nørgård's Choral Music," 105.

CHAPTER TWO: Symphony No. 4

Nørgård's first attempt at capturing the essence of Wölfli's sketches into a larger musical work was in 1981, with his Fourth Symphony, subtitled "Indischer Roosen-Gaarten und Chineesischer Hexen-See." This chapter examines the elevation of Nørgård's infatuation with Wölfli and its subsequent influence on his composition of the Fourth Symphony. In this symphony, Nørgård demonstrates a commitment to realizing Wölfli's ideas in one of his unfinished musical compositions. The two images in the title, the "Indian Rose Garden and Chinese Witch Sea," align with the polarity between idyll and catastrophe that is present in Wölfli's work as they present two contrasting scenes. The transition from one movement to the other is shocking, as the work shifts from what Nørgård determines as the idyllic to the catastrophic without warning nor hesitation. Idyll and catastrophe are not only set in contrast to one another in this symphony, but there are moments during which they are codependent. In addition to these thematic contrasts, the symphony presents various motifs, both newly composed and borrowed, which appear spontaneously and in distorted forms. Nørgård's use of numerous motifs throughout the Symphony can be connected to Wölfli's unique musical notation found in most of his sketches, which themselves consist of various musical and visual motifs. I argue that Nørgård's fixation with spontaneity in this symphony is driven by the spontaneity exhibited by Wölfli's musical sketches.

In 1920, Wölfli asked for a pen and paper to begin working on a music book that he planned to write. The title of this book was "Indischer Roosen-Garten und Chineesischer

Hexen-See.”²⁹ Wölfli had no musical upbringing nor training of any sort, but Morgenthaler’s report recounts that Wölfli would make music for hours at a time while alone in his cell by blowing into horns made out of thick paper bags, on which he played arias, marches, waltzes, polkas, and mazurkas.³⁰ He would repeat certain melodies over and over again until he got them right according to his personal satisfaction, and then would notate them. Wölfli’s musical notation took two different forms: in one form, he traced the lines of the staff (usually six lines) and filled them with notes, bar lines, rests, clefs, and so on. In the other form, he would notate pitches with letters of the alphabet, indicating meter by doubling the letters, by underlining once or twice, crossing things out, and adding sharps and exclamation marks.³¹

While this notation may seem illegible and arcane due to its appearance, its significance should not be underestimated. Wölfli’s notation may indeed be ruled by the particularities of his paranoia, as Allen S. Weiss suggests, and is thus perfectly legible and sensible to him only, yet historians and performers alike may approach this notation as though it were part of a larger indeterminate and aleatoric repertoire, akin to the graphic notations of John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Cathy Berberian. Wölfli, however, understood this notation as an exact representation of how his music should be performed, suggesting that this music was by no means indeterminate or aleatoric.³²

Wölfli’s early work featured his signature with an accompanying title, such as “A.W.—Adolf Wölfli. Composer,” found in 1904. His most decorated signature, written in 1908, included “Drawer, -Poet, -Scribe, -Composer, -Allgebrahtor, -Patient, -cast-off accident,

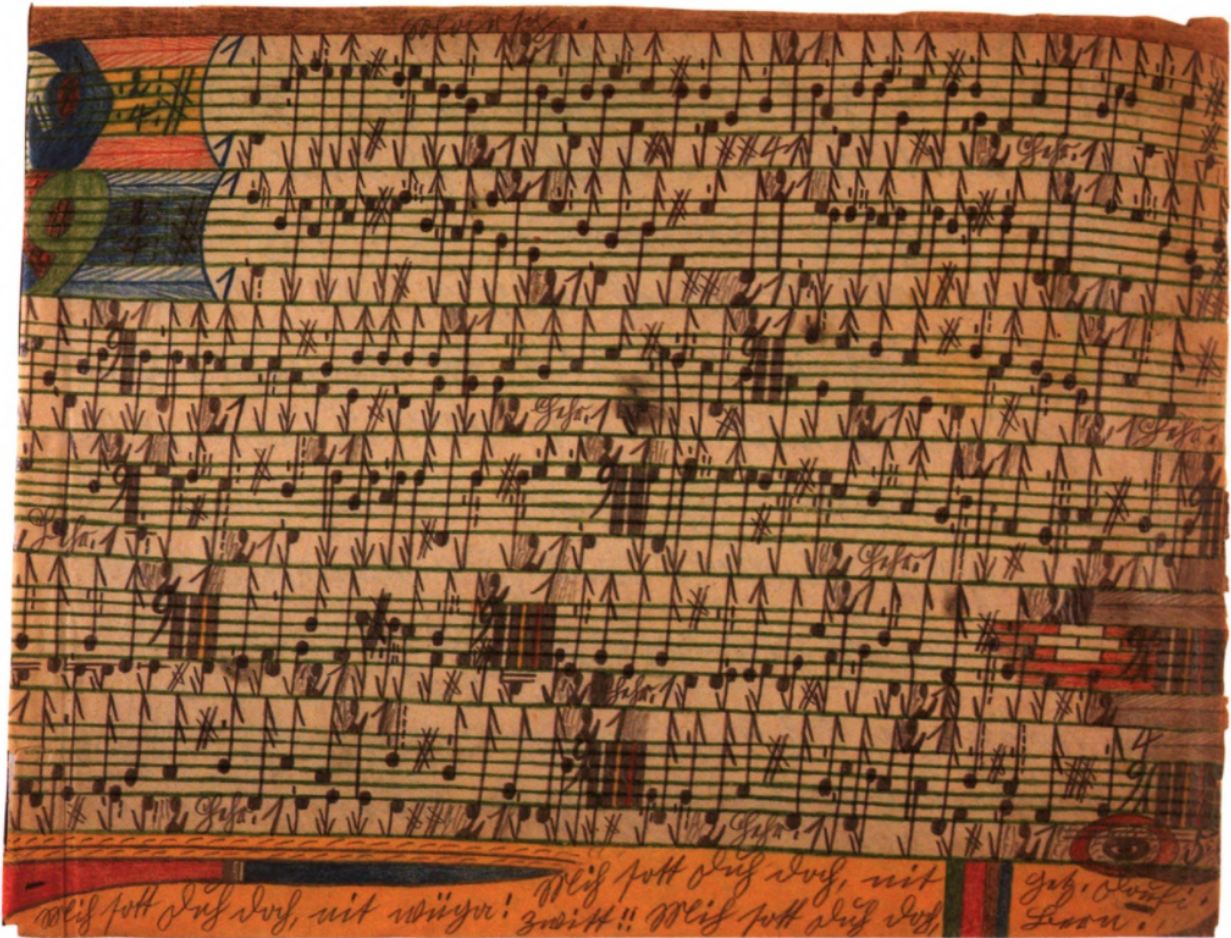
²⁹ Per Nørgård, *Symphony No. 4*, 3.

³⁰ Morgenthaler, *Madness & Art*, 54.

³¹ Morgenthaler, *Madness, & Art*, 55.

³² Allen S Weiss, “Music and Madness” in *Adolf Wölfli: Draftsman, Writer, Poet, Composer*, ed. Elka Spoerri (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 159.

-casualty, -grim casualty, -Doufi.” This plethora of titles following his signature provides a glimpse into Wölfli’s artistic vision while detained in Waldau, and suggests that there are relationships between Wölfli’s musical notation and both his poetry and sketches.



An example of Wölfli’s musical notation, taken from one of his sketchbooks.

Wölfli’s poetry contains various neologisms which derive from disjointing and disarticulating syllables and letters characteristic of Bernese German. Words were not chosen for

their meaning, but rather for their rhythmic, rhymed, and sonorous effect. Wölfli's music uses rhythm to emphasize phonetic rhymes, and will often feature variations or disjunctions of single melodies which could be performed in different registers.³³ This rhythmic disjunction is similar to, if not a direct influence on, that which is found in the two-tone infinity series section of *Wie ein Kind's* second movement, discussed in Chapter One.

The relationship between Wölfli's musical notation and his sketches is far more direct than that between his notation and his poetry. Of the 25,000 sketches found in Wölfli's cell in Waldau, at least 5,000 contained Wölfli's musical notation. The prominence of this notation varies depending on the sketch, but most of the sketches feature his six-lined notation. A study on Wölfli's notation in his sketches conducted by Peter Streiff and Kjell Keller in 1976 demonstrates that this notation is indeed comprehensible through transcriptions of Wölfli's notation into individual lines which, in the sketches, appear close to one another.³⁴

Although Wölfli's notation is a product of his own devising, Streiff and Keller note that Wölfli had access to song books including folk tunes and church hymns while in Waldau. This would explain the visual similarities, which the authors pose, between a four-part chorale and Wölfli's notation — under the assumption that Wölfli recognized the songbooks' musical scores as simply what music should look like — as well as Wölfli's awareness of clefs, key signatures, and meters despite his lack of formal musical training. It would further explain the lack of space between melodic lines, as in the sketches *General View of the Isle of Neveranger* (see pg. 2) or *Adolf=Engel=Biirne*, which look like four-part chorales, or simply two-part contrapuntal lines within each staff. Streiff and Keller's process of breaking these lines apart and notating them

³³ Weiss, "Music and Madness," 159.

³⁴ Peter Streiff and Kjell Keller, "Adolf Wölfli, Composer," in *Adolf Wölfli*, ed. Elka Spoerri (Bern: Adolf Wölfli Foundation, 1976), 81.

individually demonstrates Wölfli's further understanding of key, as some of their extracted examples point to lines in the key of G major.

There have been few interpretations of Wölfli's music as it appears in his sketches. One has been made by Baudouin de Jaer, a Belgian composer and violinist who has transcribed and recorded the music from Wölfli's sketches. In a December 2020 lecture recital at the BOZAR Center for Fine Arts in Brussels, de Jaer described the interpretive freedom implied by these sketches and their lack of tempo and dynamic markings. He demonstrated two of the marches written in *General View of the Isle of Neveranger* on the violin, as well as two additional melodies from two different sketches. Standing alongside a wall of Wölfli's sketches, he explained that many of the notated lines in these sketches have nothing to do with one another, and his process of extracting and playing each line, both individually and "mixed" with one another, is similar to the process of extraction practiced by Streiff and Keller.³⁵

³⁵ "Baudouin de Jaer talking about Adolf Wölfli | Talk | BOZAR," YouTube video, 15:24, posted by "Palais des beaux-arts de bruxelles," December 2020 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_dgNRpUpZk).



Adolf Wölfli, *Adolf=Engel=Birne* (1913)

Motifs and themes are important for our consideration of Wölfli's musical sketches and their relation to Nørgård's Fourth Symphony. Streiff and Keller point out that motivic groups within the sketches are separable from their register of appearance. The authors discern that, based on their interpretation of the treble and bass clef, as well as of which of the six lines is considered as the additional line, the respective motifs are simply two octaves apart from one another.³⁶ This claim contrasts with de Jaer's indication that the two voices written on each staff have virtually nothing to do with one another, emphasizing the complexity of this notation and the variety of interpretive possibilities available to scholars and performers.³⁷

De Jaer also briefly mentions the appearance of birdlike figures in Wölfli's sketches, often surrounding the music. Morgenthaler refers to these as "little birds," yet these figures only resemble birds through their suggestions of feet and some sort of eye or ear in the form of a semicolon (in which the dot represents the eye and the comma, the ear). While these "little birds" enliven Wölfli's sketches, they serve merely to fill space: whenever there was an empty space between two motifs, he would insert a "little bird," a color and eyes and ears.³⁸ Marie-Françoise Chanfrault-Duchet described these "little birds," or *Vögeli*, as phallic, a nod to both his acts of sexual violence and the figure consistently present as Wölfli's childish self-portrait, Doufi.³⁹ Morgenthaler's report aligns with Chanfrault-Duchet's reading, stating that "the 'little birds' are

³⁶ Streiff and Keller's interpretation of the six-lined staff situates the top line as the additional line when set in treble clef, and the bottom line as the additional line when set in bass clef. Streiff and Keller, "Adolf Wölfli, Composer," 86.

³⁷ De Jaer also mentions in his lecture recital that, upon discussion with a Swiss music specialist in Bern, Wölfli's musical sketches are melodically similar to many Bernese folk songs. Unfortunately, no further context or information is provided.

³⁸ Morgenthaler, *Madness & Art*, 61.

³⁹ Marie-Françoise Chanfrault-Duchet, "Wölfli and Autobiographical Writing," in *Adolf Wölfli: Draftsman, Writer, Poet, Composer*, ed. Elka Spöerri (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 154.

symbols serving, first of all, to fill empty spaces, second, to decorate, third, to animate them, and, finally, to charge them with sexual symbolism.”⁴⁰

Understanding both the intricacies and the spontaneities of Wölfli’s sketches, and his musical notation in particular, is crucial for an informed analysis of Nørgård’s Fourth Symphony. Commissioned by the Norddeutscher Rundfunk Sinfonieorchester in Hamburg and premiered in 1981, the Symphony is an “Hommage à Adolf Wölfli” in that Nørgård seeks to realize Wölfli’s ideas in his unfinished “Indischer Roosen-Gaarten und Chinesischer Hexen-See.” Nørgård recognized the polarity between the two images as grounds for an abrupt change between idyll and catastrophe, one which is apparent in the striking transition between the Symphony’s two movements.

The Fourth Symphony is notably shorter than the Third Symphony, composed during Nørgård’s hierarchical period. More importantly, however, is how far the Fourth Symphony sits from Nørgård’s point of departure from the infinity series. “There *was* something that did not work,” stated Nørgård, on his internal struggle with his composition following his discovery of Wölfli. “As I said: it was the single-mindedness of the rhythmic idea that didn’t work, and to throw off all that hierarchic network was at that point a release. Also, I had simply to admit that if I couldn’t compose without that then I’d better stop. So bar by bar I proceeded to write the Fourth Symphony...nobody can pre-determine how such music must be.”⁴¹

Nørgård’s Fourth Symphony is concerned with notions of freedom and spontaneity, emancipated from the shackles of hierarchical order. Just as Wölfli achieved a sense of spontaneity by inserting various visual and musical motifs into his sketches, Nørgård also filled

⁴⁰ Morgenthaler, *Madness & Art*, 94.

⁴¹ Per Nørgård, “A Composer on Inclined Planes,” in *The Voice of Music; Conversations with Composers of Our Time*, ed. Anders Beyer (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 133.

his Fourth Symphony with various musical motifs, both new and borrowed. Nørgård's selection of motifs, ranging from the song of an African lark to motifs from Carl Nielsen's Fourth Symphony, have virtually nothing to do with one another. In much the same way, the lines of musical notation on Wölfli's sketches are drawn so close to one another as to appear connected, but they can in fact be played individually and with no specific tempo or dynamic. Some of Nørgård's motifs, in turn, resemble this expressive spontaneity through their various, sometimes disjointed recurrences in different tempi.

Amid the occurrences of these motifs are instances of catastrophe penetrating idyll and vice versa, in similar fashion to the instances described in the previous chapter. Nørgård's Fourth Symphony begins by settling into an idyllic texture, filled with repeated thirty-second-note semitonal movements in the clarinets (Figure 2.1). Suddenly, there is a catastrophic outburst from the clarinets, followed by a silence among all instruments except for a solo violin. This outburst is gesturally comparable to the dramatic, volatile opening of Carl Nielsen's Fourth Symphony, "Det Uddslukkelige" ("The Inextinguishable," 1916), notably in the clarinet beginning at measure 2 (Figure 2.2).

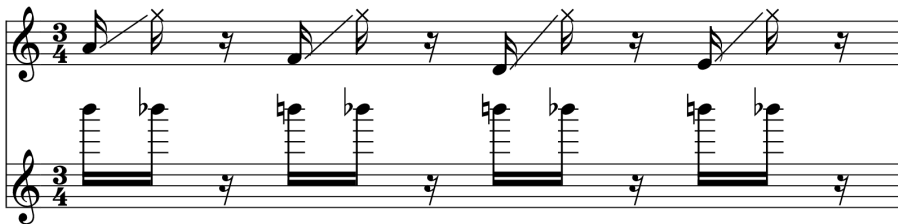


Figure 2.1: Per Nørgård, Symphony No. 4, Mvmt.1, mm. 18
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Figure 2.2: Carl Nielsen, Symphony No. 4, Mvmt. 1, mm. 2–5

Nørgård’s birdsong is later introduced by the piccolo in m. 55 (Figure 2.3). The birdsong is seemingly inaudible on its first occurrence; although repeated twice, the piccolo plays the birdsong in a pianissimo dynamic at the same time as the solo violin plays its own theme, somewhat in unison with the piccolo, in a mezzo forte dynamic.



Figure 2.3: Per Nørgård, Symphony No. 4, Mvmt. 1, mm. 55-57
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Nørgård’s birdsong motif is based on the sung melody of an African lark.⁴² “I have been listening to birdsong for many years,” said Nørgård, “recording the songs on tape and then playing them back at half speed, which shifts the song two octaves down, down to an acoustic range better suited to the human ear. Moreover, the sound is four times slower, so the tempo fits

⁴² It is interesting to compare Nørgård’s use of birdsong with Olivier Messiaen’s *style oiseaux* of the 1950s. Both Nørgård and Messiaen believed that birdsong is inherently musical and thus suitable for thematic material in composed music. In addition, both composers feature birdsong throughout multiple instruments and timbres. Messiaen’s oeuvre features birdsongs from a variety of birds: nightingales, blackbirds, robins, and more in a single work. Nørgård, on the contrary, sticks with one bird, the African lark, in his Fourth Symphony. Birdsong, for Nørgård, was one of many *objets trouvés*, or pre-existing music from nature, for which he found methods of notating in his music. See: Trevor Hold, “Messiaen’s Birds,” in *Music & Letters* 52, no. 2 (1971), 118.

in much better with our nervous system!”⁴³ Nørgård’s only modification to the lark’s melody, made “with the bird’s permission,” comes in the final two notes of the motif, which he added because he felt that the bird’s ending of its melody was not suitable enough for the mood of a rose garden.⁴⁴

This birdsong motif is the dominating theme of the symphony’s first movement. Its second occurrence, played by a solo violin, is more audible than the first. With each occurrence, the motif is increased in duration through the use of longer rests and a greater sustain of the penultimate note. The solo violin repeats the motif throughout the movement, with these durations varying on each occurrence. Between the violin appearances, the motif is picked up by the bassoon, cor anglais, and trumpets, each playing with different rhythmic values; the bassoon’s motif is mostly played in sixteenth notes, while the cor anglais and trumpet play the motif in eighth notes. At one point, the violins and violas are instructed to “fingerstroke” *ad libitum* with the left hand. The motif’s rhythm in this section varies between the three parts. All of this is to say that the birdsong motif finds its way into the rest of the orchestra as the movement progresses.

The moments during which the solo violin plays the birdsong motif are particularly interesting when considering the relationship between this Symphony and Wölfli’s sketches. Most of the orchestra is resting during these instances, allowing the motif to be heard above a loose texture (as opposed to the dense textures that are created when various layers of the motif are played together by the rest of the orchestra), almost as if the birdsong motif is filling space.

⁴³ Quoted in: Leif Thomsen, “Symfoni nr. 4,” Per Nørgård, accessed January 11, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070127091605/http://www.pernoergaard.dk/eng/udvalgte/182.html>.

⁴⁴ Thomsen, “Symfoni nr. 4.”

Wölfli's birdlike figures and Nørgård's birdsong motif provide visual and sonic depictions of, as well as conflict and convergence between, idyll and catastrophe.

The birdsong marks the transition from the first movement to the second movement; the Indian rose garden to the Chinese witch sea; the idyllic to the catastrophic. In the final measure of the first movement, the solo violin plays the first four notes of the motif. The fifth note marks the beginning of the second movement, and is sustained over three measures amid a new, more intense atmosphere than that which is evoked in the first movement.

The catastrophic nature of this second movement, like the idyllic nature of the first movement, is characterized by various motifs and quotations. Peter Edwards has described this second movement in terms of its "overload" aesthetics, meaning that the movement's abundance of motifs and quotations demonstrates Nørgård's ability to engage with the past. Edwards theoretically situates overload as analogous to remembrance; it is a critique of "the kind of linear history that traces the gradual development of musical languages or systems." Overload is not simply characterised by revisiting past musical material, but instead by the manner or perspective on the past that is offered by the composer. This is a relevant utility for understanding Nørgård's interaction with material by both Wölfli and Nielsen in this symphony. Artistic expressions of overload in this movement demonstrate that the knowledge of Wölfli's influence is not enough for a comprehensive understanding of these works; how this influence is *expressed* is key.⁴⁵

One particularly strange instance of this movement's engagement with the past, as well as idyll intruding on the movement's catastrophic landscape, is its quotation of Fermo Dante

⁴⁵ Peter Edwards, "The Orchestral Performance of Overload in Zimmermann and Nørgård," paper delivered at the Seminar "Style and Interpretation: Orchestral Performance Since 1900," Centre Universitaire de Norvège à Paris, 24–26 October, 2016.

Marchetti’s “Fascination” melody of 1904.⁴⁶ The melody appears in the trumpet at m. 41, slightly distorted from its original form in Marchetti’s composition, but is not heard again. Existing literature on Nørgård provides no explanation for why Nørgård may have quoted Marchetti, but the quotation suggests a similar notion of spontaneity that Wölfli achieved in his sketches.



Figure 2.4: Nørgård, Symphony No. 4, Mvmt. 2, mm. 41–43
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This movement does contain a motif that appears more frequently than “Fascination,” and which looks toward the future as opposed to the past. The most prominent motif in this movement is a melody written by Wölfli himself. This melody also appears in Nørgård’s Wölfli opera, *Det Guddommelige Tivoli*, to be discussed in Chapter Three.⁴⁷



Figure 2.5: The Wölfli melody

⁴⁶ While “Fascination” was originally written by Marchetti in 1904, Leif Thomsen and Peter Edwards both attribute this to Annunzio Mantovani’s usage of the melody in 1959 in their analyses of the symphony.

⁴⁷ Thomsen, “Symfoni nr. 4.”

as further distortions of the melody throughout the remainder of the movement break the idyllic melody apart, into disjointed fragments.

Nørgård's references to Nielsen are not exclusive to the second movement: in addition to the birdsong motif, there is a second motif which surrounds the primary instances of the birdsong. This motif contains an ascent of a fourth followed by another ascent of a semitone, the same intervals which are present in Nielsen's clarinet line shown in Figure 2.2. Sometimes, the motif contains an ascent of a fourth, followed by the semitone, followed by another ascent of a fourth. Such an instance occurs mm. 93–97 in the bass clarinet.



Figure 2.8: Nørgård, Symphony No. 4, Mvmt.1, mm. 93–95.

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One potential explanation of Nørgård's use of these motifs, linked to Nielsen's Fourth Symphony, is situated within this concept of engaging with the past. Scholars of Nordic music, as well as twentieth century music more broadly, recognize Nørgård as Nielsen's most significant successor.⁴⁹ He began composing in the 1950s under the tutelage of Vagn Holmboe. Holmboe, a student of Nielsen as well as Finn Høffding and Knud Jeppesen at The Royal Danish Academy

⁴⁹ Anders Beyer, "Attraction and Repulsion," in *The Music of Per Nørgård: Fourteen Interpretive Essays*, ed. Anders Beyer (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 1996), 129.

of Music, heavily influenced Nørgård's style of composition. Influenced by Nielsen, Holmboe, and Sibelius in particular, Nørgård developed the "Universe of the Nordic Mind," an ideology which sought to shield a Nordic musical identity, informed by his predecessors, from being influenced by the avant-garde developments coming from Central and Western Europe. As his range of musical influences broadened and his compositional style matured, he grew distant from this ideology. But his placement in direct continuation of Nielsen's aesthetics, with Holmboe as artistic medium, is potentially evoked in the Fourth Symphony through these Nielsen-influenced motifs. Similarly to how *Wie ein Kind* demonstrates Nørgård's grappling with the transition out of his hierarchical period, his Fourth Symphony recalls his "Universe of the Nordic Mind" period as a means of engaging past with present.

The focal point of Nørgård's Fourth Symphony and its engagement with the past is, of course, rooted in the spontaneity of Wölfli's musical sketches. Wölfli's inclusion of various motifs in his sketches, each distinct from one another yet layered upon each other to varying degrees, is captured in Nørgård's Symphony through his own use of musical motifs. Just as Nørgård engages with Wölfli's past, he engages with his own in order to situate himself as a conduit for Wölfli's essence. The result is a Symphony which thrives on the polarity between idyll and catastrophe, an Indian rose garden and a Chinese witch sea, touching on all that is hidden, exotic, and menacing in the world as constructed by Wölfli.⁵⁰

Nørgård's attempt to honor Wölfli in the symphony is most audibly demonstrated by its abrupt conclusion. The first five notes of birdsong motif reappear in the last measure, just as they had at the transition between movements. However, the motif doesn't continue; Nørgård wrote a

⁵⁰ Jensen, "The Great Change," 14.

double bar and instructed the orchestra to “come to a sudden halt. All remains motionless for 10 seconds.”⁵¹ Wölfli’s “Indischer Roosen-Gaarten und Chineesischer Hexen-See,” remained unfinished at the time of his death. Nørgård’s Symphony, “Indischer Roosen-Gaarten und Chineesischer Hexen-See” pays homage to Wölfli with one final, incomplete birdsong.

⁵¹ Nørgård, *Symphony No. 4*, 64.

CHAPTER THREE: *Det Guddommelige Tivoli*

Most of Nørgård's Wölfli works grapple with the concept of idyll versus catastrophe in ways that resonate with Wölfli's artistic output. The culmination of the various themes present in the Wölfli works resides in Nørgård's opera in which Wölfli himself is the protagonist, *Det Guddommelige Tivoli* (*The Divine Circus*). This chapter provides an introduction to the opera and examines how idyll and catastrophe are pitted against one another as a narrative device. Nørgård's artistic message seems to be that catastrophe lurks behind every idyllic scene; this chapter discusses a selection of scenes, or "episodes," from the opera which depict Wölfli's abrupt falls from idyll to catastrophe, from states of elation to psychosis in a matter of measures. Nørgård's depiction of Wölfli, through a libretto based on Wölfli's own writing, is also considered alongside Morgenthaler's reports on Wölfli in Waldau. The opera also contains thematic references to other Wölfli works, including both *Wie ein Kind* and Symphony no. 4.⁵²

Nørgård's dramatic output is considerably large. His operas include *Labyrinten* (*The Labyrinth*, 1963), *Gilgamesh* (1972), *Siddharta* (1975–79, revised in 1983), *Det Guddommelige Tivoli* (*The Divine Circus*) (1982), *Orfeus: Den uendelige sang* (*Orpheus: The Endless Song*, 1988), and *Nuit des Hommes* (1996). Each opera serves as a marker for Nørgård's compositional development; they each highlight new compositional techniques, supplemented by advancements in his own philosophical and artistic ideals. *Gilgamesh* and *Siddharta* revolve around the stories of heroic protagonists. *Labyrinten* and *Tivoli*, alternatively, concern protagonists who are

⁵² **Content warning:** Please be advised that this chapter explicitly discusses misogyny, sexual assault, pedophilia, and racial animus.

anti-heroes. This is far more pronounced in *Tivoli* than in *Labyrinthen*: Adolf Wölfli himself is the main character, as *Tivoli* is, to a certain degree, Wölfli's life story.⁵³

Act I, subtitled "The Devastation," depicts Wölfli's introduction to the characters of his memory and imagination, followed by the attempted sexual assault and arrest which led to his diagnosis as a schizophrenic and admission into Waldau. Waldau is not explicitly mentioned in the opera, but Act II, subtitled "The Creation," depicts Wölfli's artistic beginnings while in his cell. He is alone, but the figures of his imagination are present throughout, this time acting obediently at the direction of Wölfli's pencil. Act I, therefore, sees Wölfli at his most troubled, while Act II demonstrates his finding solace and comfort in his art. To say that Act I represents catastrophe and Act II, idyll is not a mere generalization because there is something about these acts' subtitles, and their brief plot descriptions, that would reasonably suggest this polarity.

Two productions are available for streaming. First is an audio recording of a 2008 production at Stadttheater Bern, Switzerland. The opera, under the translated title *Der Göttliche Tivoli*, is sung in German for this production.⁵⁴ Second, is a 1988 Danish National Opera production (Den Jyske Opera, in Aarhus) sung in Danish; at the time of writing, this is available on YouTube.⁵⁵ Any visual or staging references made in this chapter are to this production.

The opera's two acts contain titled episodes, or scenes, which are used as devices for indicating Wölfli's abrupt "falls" from an idyllic scene to a catastrophic scene. The episodes, and their titles, are as follows:

⁵³ Jens Brincker, "Per Nørgård's Music Drama: Failures, triumphs, and new beginnings," in *The Music of Per Nørgård: Fourteen Interpretive Essays*, ed. Anders Beyer (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 1996), 214.

⁵⁴ Per Nørgård, *Der Göttliche Tivoli*, Stadttheater Bern, Dacapo Records 6.220572-73, 2010, compact disc, liner notes.

⁵⁵ "Per Nørgård - Det Guddommelige Tivoli - The Divine Circus," YouTube video, 1:44:10, posted by "ArtBEAT," December 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7cXbkOTdSk>.

ACT I: The Devastation

- I. Paeans with Fall
- II. The Automatic Dancing Disk
- III. The Fall of the Air Captain (and the House Doctor's Consolation)
- IV. Lydia Wildermuth's Transformations
- V. Awakening in Heaven ("Behold the god now bursts its chains")
- VI. Catastrophe with Fall / Wölfli - The accident, in the lock-up

Psychosis I - Psychosis II

- VII. The Resurrection

ACT II: The Creation

- VIII. "Ant Fugue"

- IX. The Ride

Psychosis III

- X. Is there an accident doctor in the house?
- XI. The King's comment
- XII. Final Hallelujah Chorus / The dance in Paradise

The psychosis scenes function to depict Wölfli's inner monologues, particularly after a moment of idyll-turned-catastrophe. An example of this when the idyllic tram ride in episode IX quickly turns out of control, with flashing blue lights on the stage, a consistent crescendo and accelerando in the percussion, and an array of vocal and bodily gestures from the cast, all of which forces Wölfli into a state of psychosis. Psychosis II portrays the moment when Wölfli

realizes that the figures of his imagination, surrounding him on stage, are able to be controlled through his drawing with his pencil.⁵⁶

Act I is preceded by a prelude and three prologues. The virtuosic prelude — played by a single percussionist — is the exact same music as in the fourth movement of Nørgård's *I Ching* (1982), a concerto for solo percussion written near the same time as *Tivoli*, yet premiered a year later. The movement, from *I Ching*, is based on the 64th hexagram from the Chinese book of oracles, titled “Towards Completion: Fire over Water.”⁵⁷ Perhaps the inclusion of this movement as the opera's prelude indicates the important role that the percussion plays in this opera: as catastrophe draws near and present, the percussion becomes more rhythmic, aggressive, and eventually becomes the driving, most audibly present sonic force. The listener, in these moments, draws their attention to the percussion. Perhaps the movement's title is not entirely relevant to this discussion of *Tivoli*, but “Fire over Water” suggests a coexistence between two polar elements, in much the same way that *Tivoli* depicts the coexistence between idyll and catastrophe.

The prologues provide glimpses into Wölfli's early life. The first prologue sets a translated poem by Ted Hughes, “A Kill.” This is sung by a mezzo soprano who, in the Aarhus production, appears to be giving birth to Wölfli. Wölfli's mother, to whom he felt a childlike attachment even in his adulthood,⁵⁸ sings of an agonizing pain before declaring “it is a boy.” The first prologue may point to the theme of creation, which is highlighted in the second act of the opera.

⁵⁶ Per Nørgård, *Der Göttliche Tivoli*, Stadttheater Bern, Dacapo Records 6.220572-73, 2010, compact disc, liner notes.

⁵⁷ Leif Thomsen, “*I Ching*,” Per Nørgård, accessed April 13, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20071010091825/http://www.pernoergaard.dk/eng/udvalgte/202.html>.

⁵⁸ Morgenthaler, *Madness & Art*, 77.

The second prologue sets a line of text from Act 2, Scene 2 of William Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*, where Romeo speaks: "How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night, like softest music to attending ears!" This is sung by a soprano, appearing younger in age than the mother, with whom Wölfli is enamored. Morgenthaler's report notes that while working as a poor farm hand at eighteen years old, Wölfli fell madly in love with the daughter of a neighbor. The girl's parents, upon learning of the relationship, forbade the two from communicating. This rejection had a profound impact on Wölfli: "I became downcast, even melancholy, and was at my wit's end. That same evening I rolled in the snow and wept for the happiness so cruelly snatched from me."⁵⁹ The relationship fueled his sex drive, which only accentuated his heartbreak, restlessness, and nervousness. The second prologue, with its reference to *Romeo & Juliet*, demonstrates this experience.

The third prologue introduces Wölfli as he sings Friedrich Nietzsche's poem 'Gondollied.' Wölfli is alone on stage while he sings the first stanza, along with voices from offstage which repeat or harmonize with Wölfli. This begins as an internal monologue, which becomes external in the second stanza (Nietzsche concludes his poem, "Was anybody listening to it?") when Wölfli observes two characters in the center of the stage.⁶⁰

Act I begins abruptly, without transition, following the conclusion of Nietzsche's text. Adolf Wölfli, as the protagonist, is present in each scene. In some scenes he is quietly observing the action on the stage from the background, while in others he is an active member of the scene. The rest of the cast are based on characters derived from his imagination. Aaron H. Esman, M.D., in the introduction to the translation of Morgenthaler's report, notes:

⁵⁹ Morgenthaler, *Madness & Art*, 5.

⁶⁰ F.A.G. Lösel, "Friedrich Nietzsche's 'Venice': an interpretation" in *Hermathena* 105 (1967), 60.

Wölfli's subject matter, in his drawings as well as in his voluminous writings, was always his own autobiography, whether actual or imagined. His central character, the principal figure represented in his work, was his own personification either as St. Adolf II or as the child "Doufi"; other personages appearing in the work include his parents, the women and girls he had desired, and "various gods, goddesses" and other celestial powers who played major roles in his grandiose fantasies.⁶¹

These characters, present in Wölfli's sketches and writing, are also present in the opera. Wölfli is accompanied on stage by three versions of himself: the child "Doufi" and both St. Adolf (doubling as a doctor in the first act) and St. Adolf II (doubling as King Alphonse XII of Spain in the second act). There are two women in the opera's cast, a soprano and a mezzo-soprano, who play a range of roles embodying mothers, daughters, young girls, seductive women, goddesses, Queen Catherine of Spain, and Santa Maria, the mother of Jesus Christ herself. Also present on stage in most scenes are the Vögeli, dressed entirely in white so as to resemble birds. The Vögeli are a dancing chorus, taking up most of the space on stage (similar to the birds which take up space in Wölfli's sketches, as discussed in Chapter Two). Nørgård exploits the multiple meanings of the word Vögeli, particularly as "screwers" and "shaggers," for they prompt many of the opera's sexually-charged scenes.⁶²

Wölfli's actor also doubles as another character who warrants an explanation. Nørgård does not shy away from the taboo nature of Wölfli's story in this opera, and with fair reason. The

⁶¹ Morgenthaler, xiv.

⁶² Per Nørgård, Program Notes for *Det Guddommelige Tivoli*, <https://www.wisemusicclassical.com/work/21617/The-guddommelige-tivoli--Per-N%C3%B8rg%C3%A5rd/>.

scene of the attempted sexual assault, in episode V, is staged abstractly rather than explicitly in the Aarhus production. However, this scene is complicated by the fact that it is not Wölfli who is attempting to rape Margritt, the young girl played by the soprano on stage, but rather his alter ego, named “the Negro.” There is much to unpack here. First, “Negro” is played by one actor; in the Aarhus production, Wölfli’s actor pulls a black mask down from his hat which covers most of his face. This black mask is a direct reference to a number of Wölfli’s sketches in which he presents himself as one of his alter egos, St. Adolf. Only a face is present in most of these instances, and the upper half of the faces are covered by a black mask, almost like a blindfold but with the eyes revealed.⁶³ St. Adolf, in the Aarhus production, does not wear a black mask despite being portrayed with one in Wölfli’s sketches. The Negro is on stage only for this scene and does not reappear afterward. A possible interpretation for this alter ego may situate the Negro, representing the most violent side of Wölfli, as the catastrophic alter ego to a potentially idyllic Wölfli. “Negro,” in this case, would simply represent the black half of the Yin-Yang symbol which Nørgård has used as a visual description of how idyll and catastrophe are separate entities that contain hints of their opposite. In the Aarhus production, the black mask sets Wölfli in contrast from the rest of the cast, all of whom wear white, clownlike makeup. Another interpretation problematizes this character as an example of racial animus in Nørgård’s Wölfli-based libretto; Margritt’s mother, Mutti, addresses the alter ego as “you black negro, you.”⁶⁴ It is clear at this juncture that Nørgård was the one to introduce the racial component to this scene, however there is no scholarly evidence available to explain why this is present.

⁶³ Examples of this can be seen on page 2, featuring *General view of the island Neveranger*, and page [XX], featuring *Adolf=Engel=Biirne*.

⁶⁴ “Du sorte neger, du” in Danish productions, and “du schwarzer neger, duh” in German productions.

The opera is entirely surreal, given both the seemingly strange succession of events and the extremely grotesque nature of certain events in the opera. Perhaps this allowed Nørgård to create such grand and abrupt contrasts between idyllic and catastrophic episodes. Then again, Nørgård seems to emphasize, in this opera, that there is no idyll without hints of catastrophe and there is no catastrophe without hints of idyll. *Tivoli*'s surrealist elements hint at Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, wherein gesture, sound, and lighting are used as tools of sensory disruption. The 'cruelty' in Artaud's thesis is designed to confront the audience's sensory experience in the theatre.⁶⁵

At the outset of Act I, beginning with episode I, Wölfli appears in a room filled with the figures of his imagination. At the center are two lovers: Doufi, the child Wölfli, and a young girl named Bianca, played by the soprano. Wölfli, watching the scene, sings that he had never in his life seen a thing more delightful. The two children sing about being together, arm in arm, and the beauty of their young love. The scene becomes increasingly less innocent, as the Vögeli appear one-by-one to observe Doufi becoming physically invasive toward Bianca. Wölfli, observing the scene from a platform above the two characters, observes the scene hanging upside-down before falling to the ground. Wölfli, unable to get back up, flails his body around while the Vögeli dance and chant around Doufi standing over Bianca.

The Vögeli chant what appears to be a Wölfli text, titled "Mazurka-Tenor-Beginning," similar to those encountered in Chapter 1: "D'jung-Frau hau, Fung Sau Frau! Sung oi oi, Gritta Skridt! Hung noi noi, Bitta Stritt! Flih deh duh niida iih: Giiga? Wiit di Zang?"⁶⁶ This text

⁶⁵ Peter Weiss's play *Marat/Sade*, influenced by Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, bears a similar overwhelming sensory experience to *Tivoli*. Natasha Tripney, "Antonin Artaud and the Theatre of Cruelty," The British Library, accessed April 26, 2021, <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/antonin-artaud-and-the-theatre-of-cruelty>.

⁶⁶ Morgenthaler, *Madness & Art*, 54.

contains words which are recognizably German, but still appears nonsensical. While this text appears in *Der Göttliche Tivoli*, the text is translated to a Danish equivalent for *Det Guddommelige Tivoli*: “Jomfru, hug! Kom, sug, buk...” Translating the Danish text to English reveals the perverted nature of this particular section, with “Maiden, squat! Come, suck, duck,” as an example.

The idyllic scene of the two young lovers enjoying their company gradually turns perverse with the entrance of the Vögeli, and abruptly so when Wölfli takes his first fall. This particular fall may be reminiscent of his forbidden lover from his days on the farm, and the subsequent charge in both sexuality and heartbreak. The soprano who sings to Wölfli in the second prologue is dressed up as Bianca. Another hint toward this is that once Wölfli gets back up, he is surrounded and caressed by the Vögeli. Mathilde, a motherly figure, as well as one of Wölfli’s other selves, St. Adolf, appear on stage and address the catastrophic occurrences between Doufi and Bianca rather explicitly. Shocked by the two, the adults force Doufi and Bianca to dance a waltz with one another at the outset of episode II. As Wölfli recovers from his fall, another version of himself appears: St. Adolf II. St. Adolf II begins to dance with the Vögeli until suddenly, out of seemingly nowhere, a hot air balloon falls, causing an explosion which leads to Doufi becoming unconscious and requiring treatment from a doctor in episode III.

Another depiction of Wölfli, surrounded by the figures of his imagination falling from idyll to catastrophe, occurs in aforementioned episode IX. This episode may reference one of Wölfli’s writings, documented in his autobiography *From the Cradle to the Grave* (1910), in which Wölfli begins by describing the beautiful, luxurious scenery in a festive Spanish town during November of 1859. In the next paragraph, catastrophe hits: word spreads that a bridge

between Zaragosa and Granada has collapsed together with an express passenger train. This fatal fall included the death of St. Adolf, a common occurrence in Wölfli's writings.⁶⁷ Episode IX responds to this through its inclusion of King Alphonse of Spain XII and Queen Catherine of Spain, and a tram ride through the mountains which begins idyllic but gradually turns catastrophic (at least for Wölfli).

Wölfli, who has now discovered his artistic ability, along with Doufi, St. Adolf, Santa Maria, Queen Catherine of Spain, and the Vögeli are invited by King Alphonse of Spain XII to take a tram ride. The scene is purely idyllic: as the characters are moving joyously, smiling, and waving from the tram. Santa Maria, Doufi, Queen Catherine, and King Alphonse sing of living well among the mountain peaks; St. Adolf sings about Santa Maria and the birth of Jesus Christ; and Wölfli sings about how the cast shared laughter throughout the trip. Everyone is in a cheerful mood, and Wölfli once again, with the same theme as in episode I, sings that he had never in his life seen a thing more delightful.

Suddenly, after Wölfli sings this, catastrophe hits: the characters begin to scream, dance, and jump from the tram; the drums become the dominant instrument, gradually accelerating in tempo; and there is a blue light flashing on Wölfli while he suffers a panic attack. Wölfli makes it to the top of the tram with what appears to be a piece of newspaper, and somehow stops time by slamming his fist on the paper. This is the transition into Psychosis III, which concludes with Wölfli falling down from the top of the tram.

⁶⁷ Harald Szeeman, "No Catastrophe without Idyll, No Idyll without Catastrophe," in *Adolf Wölfli: Draftsman, Writer, Poet, Composer*, ed. Elka Spoerri (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 125–6.

The Psychosis scenes in *Tivoli* are interesting because they serve as Wölfli's inner monologues and are preceded by short, handwritten descriptions by Nørgård in the score. Directing our attention back to the first act, Psychosis II is preceded by this text:

A.W. first tried to shut himself off from the scary sounds and images, but without success. After horrors of increasing intensity, he succeeds in "fixing" the figures by ritualizing, or automating, their movements and sound. This he clearly marks by the act of creation, to draw and write. When he calms down and controls himself, A.W. is exhausted and yet without knowledge of his "incomparable discovery" (: Wölfli's Algebra);⁶⁸

Psychosis II therefore provides an idyllic contrast to the "scary sounds and images" of Psychosis I. These two episodes are deliberately contrasted to show that, while in Waldau, Wölfli's periods of calm came when he was creating art.⁶⁹

"Creation," then bears multiple meanings in *Tivoli*'s second act. On the one hand is Wölfli's act of creation, involving his sketches and writings which free him from his inner turmoil. On the other is the presence of creation stories, particularly those related to Christianity with the presence of Santa Maria and St. Adolf's singing about the birth of Jesus Christ in episode IX. These two interpretations of creation meet with St. Adolf II who, in the introduction to Morgenthaler's report, is described as "no mere lowly degraded hospitalized sex criminal; he flew across the universe in the most sumptuous and elegant vehicles. St. Adolf II had not been abandoned by a drunken father; he was the companion and protege of God-the-All-Powerful,

⁶⁸ Translated from Danish.

⁶⁹ Morgenthaler, *Madness & Art*, 15.

who cared for his every need and lavished endless benefits on him.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, the fallen Wölfli is resuscitated by Santa Maria in episode X, demonstrating the significance of holy deities in Wölfli's achievement of balance in his Waldau life and works.

In the penultimate episode of the opera, Wölfli once again becomes entangled in his imaginary world. At the very beginning of this episode, the Wölfli melody mentioned in the previous chapter — as it is present in the second movement of Symphony No. 4 — finally appears. The text, sung by King Alphonse XII of Spain, is idyllic and celebratory. Through engagement with the characters of his imagination, including the young Margritt from episode V, Wölfli comes to terms with his perpetual misfortune. He writes a letter to his brother, spoken aloud, in which he states that he will never get well. Surrounded by the characters, Wölfli begins to sing a melody which he, the real-life Adolf Wölfli, actually composed. In the final episode, the cast joins in harmonious chorus to sing Nørgård's hymnlike arrangement of this melody. Wölfli, surrounded by the characters and dancing with the Vögeli, briefly plays with his own paper horn.

But this would not be a Wölfli work, let alone the Wölfli opera, without one final fall from idyll to catastrophe. Wölfli briefly dances with the soprano, dressed as Bianca, who quickly reveals herself as Margritt. Wölfli and Margritt dance, until Margritt pushes Wölfli down to the ground, much to the amusement of King Alphonse. The dancing and singing around Wölfli continues to be idyllic, but Wölfli lays face down on the floor, reminded of the love he will never have. The cast, holding hands in a circle around the fallen Wölfli, sing the melody a cappella. The cast eventually exits and sings from afar; one of the Vögeli pops a balloon, and the opera is over.

⁷⁰ Morgenthaler, *Madness & Art*, xiv.

This discussion only scratches the surface of the resonances with Wölfli that are present in the opera. There is a question of whether the opera glorifies Wölfli and his actions, and the answer to this may be nuanced. *Tivoli*, as strange and surreal as it is, merely seeks to bring Wölfli's world to life as a method to understanding him and his artistic output more comprehensively. Wölfli is framed as an anti-hero, perhaps no different than the operatic anti-heroes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The ethics of this frame, however, are challenged when we consider that this is an opera about a pedophile with a mental illness.

German composer Georg Friedrich Haas faced a similar challenge when he composed his own opera *Adolf Wölfli* (1981).⁷¹ Haas wrote in his program notes for the opera that he was reluctant to associate himself, through composition, with Wölfli after learning about his history of sexual violence. Upon encountering Wölfli's art in Bern, however, Haas saw an infinitely lonely person, grappling with his feelings of guilt through his art.

Like a drowning man with a straw, he reached for what the institution offered him: religious "edification literature," travelogues, hymnals, atlases and encyclopedias. But everything he grasped broke away from his hands, failed in the face of his guilt (which he presumably had repeatedly been made aware of).

Yes, there was fault. The knowledge of guilt. But there was also the desperate, hopeless attempt to paint this guilt away, to write it away, to compose it away.⁷²

⁷¹ As a result of the popularity of the Wölfli exhibit from 1979, Haas's opera was indeed written and premiered during the early portion of Nørgård's Wölfli period.

⁷² Georg Friedrich Haas, program notes for *Adolf Wölfli*. Wolfgang Müller-Lorenz, Orchester Philharmonique de Graz. Wolfgang Bozic. Graz: Opéra de Graz, Festival d'Automne de la Styrie. November 1, 1981.

Haas, like Nørgård, saw Wölfli's paintings as an expression of idyll through which he tried to escape the catastrophes of his writings. The religious texts he read in Waldau promised consolation, hence the recurrence of the character St. Adolf in his writings (and in both Nørgård's and Haas's operas). But at each instance of idyll, catastrophe is just around the corner. In *Tivoli*'s finale, when Wölfli finds happiness in the figures of his imagination, he is suddenly reminded of his guilt and loneliness when Margritt appears.

As we have seen, Nørgård sought to enliven the "cries and phantasms of a lonely person, afflicted for decades, [who] suddenly demanded entry into Per Nørgård's music."⁷³ *Tivoli* captures the essence of Wölfli's existence through its surreal portrayal of Wölfli's life before and after he discovered his artistic outlets. *Tivoli*, therefore, may very well be the climax of Nørgård's Wölfli works.

⁷³ Jensen, 9.

CONCLUSION

Before summarizing this thesis, I wish to touch upon some of Nørgård's smaller Wölfli works which have been mentioned in passing throughout this document. In addition, I will revisit and introduce other modernist composers who have found direct resonances with Adolf Wölfli in their music.

Chapter Three discussed Nørgård's *I Ching*, a concerto for solo percussion composed in 1982 and premiered in 1983, during the midpoint of Nørgård's Wölfli period. The concerto's fourth movement, "Towards Completion: Fire over Water," features as the prelude for *Det Guddommelige Tivoli*. Embracing the concept of transformation, the concerto is based on the Chinese book of oracles, "I Ching." In this book, it is life itself that is transformed: life is divided into several stages which can be interpreted as different combinations of yin and yang. The book contains 64 possible combinations, or hexagrams, which can be interpreted at 64 possible states or conditions found in all living things. The hexagrams consist of six horizontal lines which could either be broken or unbroken.⁷⁴

Nørgård selected four of these hexagrams for his concerto, structuring the movements in a similar form to most of his chamber works: long first and fourth movements, short second and third movements. In addition, the concerto features various African and Asian percussion instruments, perhaps an influence from Nørgård's many travels to India and Indonesia. The first movement is based on hexagram no. 54, titled "Thunder Repeated: The Image of Shock." This movement begins with a fortissimo shock, a thunderous striking of the drums which eventually

⁷⁴ Thomsen, "I Ching."

transforms into a calming gong melody, only to be interrupted by repetitions of the thunderous rhythms from the beginning of the movement.⁷⁵ The second movement is based on hexagram no. 9, titled “The Taming Power of the Small” with the subtitle “9 sounds,” as the percussionist is instructed to quote, with their voice, the exclamation “number nine” from The Beatles’ song “Revolution 9.” The third movement is based on hexagram no. 57, entitled “The Gentle, The Permanent,” and is played almost exclusively on the kalimba, also known as the mbira, a Zimbabwean percussion instrument that is typically played with one’s fingers.⁷⁶ The fourth and final movement, based on oracle no. 64, encapsulates Nørgård’s rhythmic world, an expressive range of idyll and catastrophe that permeates throughout the work.⁷⁷

An example of a later Wölfli work is *D’Montstrantz Vöögeli*, composed in 1985 as the middle of a three-movement choral suite titled *Den foruroligende Ælling (The Alarming Duckling)*. *Vöögeli* returns to two ideas mentioned in Chapter Two: first, the use of *objets trouvés*, or “found” objects, and second, Nørgård’s infatuation with birdsong and his method of recording birdsong on tape. The piece is accompanied by a long, slightly modified tape recording of birdsong. Voices, whistling in response to the taped birdsong and singing fragments of poems and nonsense rhymes by Wölfli, along with electronic, synthesized sounds and paper trumpets, make up the choral fabric of this piece, a mixture of text and tone.⁷⁸ At the end of the piece, the choir sings a tune set to text by Wölfli: “It is more blessing to die than to live, the Holy Ghost said, since then I see everything in green.”

⁷⁵ Hansen, “Waves, Hierarchies, Interferences,” 120.

⁷⁶ Thomsen, “*I Ching*.”

⁷⁷ Hansen, “Waves, Hierarchies, Interferences,” 120.

⁷⁸ Christensen, “Nørgård’s Choral Music,” 105.

As demonstrated by this thesis, a study of Wölfli's life and works provides a plethora of biographical, literary, and artistic materials for various types of artists to work with. That said, it is interesting to consider how other modernist composers captured and responded to Wölfli in their music. Haas's aforementioned *Adolf Wölfli* differs from Nørgård's *Tivoli* in that it is purely internal: Haas's opera features only one singer, a baritone who sings the role of Wölfli and is all alone for the duration of the opera, while Nørgård's opera features Wölfli surrounded by various figures of his imagination. Nørgård portrays a Wölfli transitioning between idyll and catastrophe; Haas portrays a Wölfli reconciling with his guilt through a recitation of both religious and erotic texts which ultimately lead to his own demise.⁷⁹

Wolfgang Rihm, also in 1981, composed his *Wölfli-Liederbuch*. Seth Brodsky argues that Rihm's *Liederbuch* is to be sonically contrasted with contemporaneous attempts at capturing Wölfli in music because the cycle is more aligned with the Lieder tradition. He also argues that the opening song of the cycle, "Ich habe Dich, geliebt!" features major-minor oscillations and lowered sixths/raised fifths, echoing Schubert's "Auf dem Flusse."⁸⁰ Rihm's *Wölfli-Liederbuch*, therefore, has more resonance to Schubert's *Winterreise* than it may with Nørgård's *Tivoli* in its exploration of one on an internal, psychological journey.

Finally, Brian Ferneyhough's *Allgebruh*, composed for oboe and nine strings in 1996, takes a seemingly less representative approach to Wölfli. Ferneyhough cites Wölfli's "unique synaesthetic blending of aural, visual, and verbal stimuli" as inspiration for his addressing a number of compositional concerns in this work, "among them the opposition of a solo instrument to a larger body of instruments, the overlapping of multiple strata of sometimes highly contrasted

⁷⁹ Haas, program notes for *Adolf Wölfli*.

⁸⁰ Seth Brodsky, "Rihm, Tonality, Psychosis, Modernity," in *Twentieth Century Music* 15, no. 2 (2018): 153.

activity and the application of local acts of emblematic will to the subjective selection of materials from those provided by the twelve-layer precompositional matrix...⁸¹ Ferneybough's title, *Allgebrah*, is one of Wölfli's various terms delineating his creative principles outlined throughout this thesis.

Haas, Rihm, and Ferneybough had not developed as strong of an attraction to Wölfli and his world as Nørgård, the main differences being the number of works written with Wölfli as an influence or subject, and the depth with which Wölfli's world is represented. Works like *Wie ein Kind* bear resemblance to the general aesthetics of Wölfli's art: the stark contrasts between idyll and catastrophe, the nonsensical nature of Wölfli's texts, and a sense of order through the fractal construction of his sketches (parallel to Nørgård's use of the infinity series throughout the 1960s and 70s, as well as his use of the two-tone infinity series in the second movement of *Wie ein Kind*). Works like *Symphony No. 4*, as well as *D'Montstrantz Vöögeli*, pay further respect to the details and themes present in Wölfli's work: the birds and their various meanings, the integration of multiple musical motifs as a nod to the visual motifs and musical notations found in Wölfli's sketches, and the capacity of the work to engage with the past. Finally, *Det Guddommelige Tivoli* is a depiction of Wölfli, himself. Between depictions of the "falls" from idyll to catastrophe that are outlined in Wölfli's writing; the portrayal of events from Wölfli's childhood, leading up to his arrest, and during his confinement in Waldau; and the figures of Wölfli's imagination — Doufi, St. Adolf, etc. — being brought to life, Nørgård demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of, and perhaps a sympathy toward, Wölfli and his world.

⁸¹ Brian Ferneybough, *Allgebrah* (London: Peters Edition Limited, 1996), 2.

Through an analysis of three major works from Nørgård's Wölfli period, in tandem with a review of scholarly and biographical literature on Wölfli, the thesis reveals that throughout the Wölfli period, Nørgård's growing infatuation with Wölfli manifested further with each composition. His music from the middle and later portions of the Wölfli period demonstrates a deeper, more specific engagement with Wölfli's life and work. Remember that when Nørgård first came across Wölfli's sketches at the exhibit in 1979, his first reaction was that the construction of the sketches was "exactly like the infinity hierarchies."⁸²

Nørgård's discovery of Wölfli provided a release, an emancipation from the shackles of order and hierarchy that he had worn for the prior two decades. What began as inspiration to follow a new compositional route, one characterized by a freedom from structures, gradually caused a profound change in Nørgård's aesthetic. In his mission to serve as a medium through which Wölfli is voiced, Nørgård captures the essence of Wölfli's existence through musical notions of fragmentation, conflict, contrast, and catastrophe throughout the works of this period. Nørgård is among the most aesthetically enigmatic composers of twentieth century Europe; his style is quite difficult to describe in a simple manner, and its development is equally difficult to trace given his various stylistic periods, ranging from the "Universe of the Nordic Mind," to the hierarchical, to Wölfli. Through this exploration of Nørgård's Wölfli period, I have aimed to provide context for the intricacies of Nørgård's Wölfli works, and the astounding amount of connections that can be drawn between the work of the two men, in an attempt to advance the dialogue regarding Nørgård's vast musical output, shining a light onto one of Danish modernism's most unique developments and transformative moments.

⁸² Jensen, "The Great Change," 23.

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