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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Pascal Dusapin's *O Mensch!* — An Investigation in Analysis, Translation, and Interpretation

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts

in

Contemporary Music Performance

by

Jonathan Nussman

Committee in charge:

Professor Philip Larson, Chair
Professor Susan Narucki
Professor Roger Reynolds
Professor Katharina Rosenberger
Professor Ulrike Strasser

2020

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University of California San Diego

2020

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VITA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Pascal Dusapin's *O Mensch!* — An Investigation in Analysis, Translation, and Interpretation

by

Jonathan Nussman

Doctor of Musical Arts in Contemporary Music Performance

University of California San Diego, 2020

Professor Philip Larson, Chair

This dissertation offers a thorough investigation of Pascal Dusapin's song cycle *O Mensch!* (2009) for baritone and piano. By examining the score's music and text, I summarize and clarify important musical features within the work, delineate the source of generative harmonic and motivic material, identify normative musical behaviors as well as departures from the normative, and present detailed analysis of several representative songs taken from the larger cycle. I also provide new English translations of the cycle's source texts, which were selected and assembled by the composer from the writings of poet-philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. These translations were informed and shaped by Dusapin's musical setting and are intended for use in performance as projected text for an English-speaking audience. While *O Mensch!* presents itself as a traditional cycle of lieder in its form and construction, it remains a

work of theater in spirit. As such, I offer thoughts on the work's characterization and narrative structure, and describe important visual and dramatic elements from my performance of the work in its American premiere in January of 2019. Dusapin's music presents considerable challenges of execution and interpretation for the singer and pianist, and through analysis and translation I elucidate the process by which I, as a performer, arrived at my interpretative representation. I also suggest that this process might be used as a model for structuring future investigations into other works of a similar musical and theatrical nature.

1. Introduction

Pascal Dusapin's song cycle *O Mensch!* (2009) is a 70-minute work for solo baritone voice and piano. The text is drawn from the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, and the challenging ideas of this formidable poet-philosopher crackle and flash through every song. The words are rich and vibrant; they simultaneously conceal and reveal truths. Dusapin's musical setting is no less rich, vibrant, secretive, and revelatory. It is a work of imposing scale and depth which offers considerable challenges of execution and interpretation for both singer and pianist.

O Mensch! bears the subtitle "An unreasoned inventory of some Nietzschean passions"¹, and as such it attempts to create an evolving musical and dramatic space for exploring the enigmatic poetry of one of the greatest literary and philosophical voices of the nineteenth century. The composer selects texts drawn from Nietzsche's lifetime of writings. Some of these poems are well-known, excerpted from Nietzsche's major works including *Also sprach Zarathustra* and *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*. Other selections come from Nietzsche's fragmentary notebooks and more obscure collections of his early poetry.

Dusapin has professed a love of "wandering" through Nietzsche's poetry, and the manner in which he has compiled and arranged the texts in *O Mensch!* suggests a meandering journey.² Longer poems are dispersed evenly throughout the cycle and offer extended passages of existential and emotional investigation. Interlaid among these longer selections are shorter poems, fragments of thought, and aphorisms which offer brief flashes of insight into Nietzsche's restless intellect and mercurial emotionality. A single distich taken from one of Nietzsche's 1888 notebooks is repeated three times in the cycle, and functions as a bemused refrain, seemingly in observation of the cycle's heavy and often arcane proceedings:

Ist für solchen Ehrgeiz
diese Erde nicht zu klein?³

Is for such ambition
this world not too small?

¹ "Inventaire musical non raisonné de quelques passions Nietzscheennes"

² Pascal Dusapin. Correspondence with the author. October 3, 2017.

³ The Nietzsche Channel. "Sommer 1888 20 [1-168]." No. 115. <http://www.thenietzschechannel.com/notebooks/german/nache/nache20.htm>.

In many ways, *O Mensch!* sits comfortably within the tradition of the nineteenth-century Germanic song cycle. Dusapin arranges the text into a series of twenty-three songs, each with its own distinct musical arc and character. The boundaries between songs are generally concrete, although there are several groupings of songs that flow from one to the next without interruption. Interspersed within the songs are four solo piano interludes, which divide the work into five sections of relatively equal length. As a collection of lieder in the mode of Schubert and Schumann, the songs offer an intimate exploration of Nietzsche's poetry and require a delicate and nuanced interpretation from the two performers. However, as the song cycle progresses Dusapin imbues the score with subtle dramatic and theatrical elements which add unexpected layers of operatic intensity. The vocal part in particular places considerable demands on the performer to embody a series of intense emotional states, often transitioning from one extremity to the next with erratic speed. While a traditional performance of *O Mensch!* in a recital setting would be entirely appropriate, the intrinsic theatricality of the work's characterization lends itself to a fully-staged realization. The cycle's premiere performance was presented as a sort of mono-opera, staged by Dusapin himself.

My relationship to *O Mensch!* has spanned many years. I encountered it in a recording made by Georg Nigl and Vanessa Wagner, for whom the cycle was written, and soon thereafter I began to plan for a performance in which I would not only sing but also serve as stage director and designer. I now stand on the other side of that first performance, and find that my relationship with the cycle and its text continues to grow and evolve. A work of such profound musical and philosophical depth—with its acute requirements of virtuosity, stamina, interpretative sophistication, and detailed characterization—deserves a deep and immersive intellectual exploration in order for a performer to truly understand and embody the cycle's constituent parts as well as its composite whole. What follows in this document is a summary of the results of my investigation into this remarkable work; translation and interpretation of Nietzsche's source text, an extensive musical analysis, and a brief description of my performative realization. In the process of summarizing these endeavors, it is my goal to

provide a framework for anyone who wishes to better understand *O Mensch!* as a work of music and theater. Furthermore, I suggest that this framework might be applied as a model for the investigation of other works of a similar nature, and that extensive analysis might become a powerful tool in the performer's preparatory process.

2. Translation

REGARDING THE ACT OF TRANSLATION

Early in the process of preparing a study of *O Mensch!* it became clear that translation would become an important aspect of my interpretive process. A reliable translation is essential to any singer performing a work in a foreign language, but in the case of my performance of *O Mensch!*—which was conceived with projected interactive supertitles for an English-speaking audience—the translations were also central to the design and staging of the performance itself. While multiple printed English editions exist of Nietzsche’s major writings, these translations seemed inadequate for my specific purposes because they often failed to satisfyingly match the temporal or emotional qualities of Dusapin’s music. Additionally, many of the original texts chosen by the composer are fragments taken from Nietzsche’s extensive collection of notebooks. These “Nachlaß”, of which there are over one hundred, were never published during the author’s lifetime and have since been compiled in several German editions. Published English translations of these fragmentary notes are rare or nonexistent.⁴ In light of this, the first step in my preparative process was to make a rough word-by-word translation of the entire song cycle, which I continued to develop and refine over the course of several years as my understanding of the music and its text evolved through analysis, rehearsal, and performance. My translations are far from perfect, and I am sure that at times they miss the mark of Nietzsche’s true intention, but to my mind they are a document of my own personal interpretation of the text as it is informed and shaped by the music.

The act of translating a poem from one language to another is complex. The problem lies in the need of the translator to convey not just the content of the actual words themselves, but the resulting impact and implication of the words’ context. In his essay “On Translation”, Walter Benjamin describes the function of language in a work of literature as an attempt to bridge the gap between the original language of intent, and that of the existing language,

⁴ Daniel Fidel Ferer. “Nietzsche’s Notebooks in English: a Translators Introduction and Afterword.” Afterword to *Nietzsche’s Notebook of 1887-1888* by Friedrich Nietzsche. archive.org. PhilArchive copy v1: <https://philarchive.org/archive/FERNNOv1>.

specifically the chosen words of the author. Benjamin says, “In the individual, unsupplemented languages, meaning is never found in relative independence, as in individual words or sentences; rather, it is in a constant state of flux—until it is able to emerge as pure language from the harmony of all the various modes of intention.”⁵ This “pure” language, which conveys the work’s artistic or philosophical aim, is only ever approximated by the words of the author, who assembles words that aggregate in order to hopefully lead the reader towards the intended discovery. Benjamin goes on to say,

The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect [Intention] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original. This is a feature of translation which basically differentiates it from the poet's work, because the effort of the latter is never directed at the language as such, at its totality, but solely and immediately at specific linguistic contextual aspects. Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one.⁶

With this in mind, the task of translating Nietzsche from German to English becomes particularly daunting. Nietzsche uses his poetry as a tool for exploring and interrogating philosophical ideas, and the poems are often designed to illicit an emotional reaction which will then provoke a state of introspection. When considering *O Mensch!*, the poems chosen by Dusapin generally lack significant narrative details, but rather tend to deal with moments of existential quandary, despair, and discovery. Nietzsche is able to convey, often with surprising concision, feelings of both bleak frustration and thrilling philosophical realization. A stirring example is this short fragment taken from Nietzsche’s notebook in 1888:

Was geschieht? Fällt das Meer?
Nein, mein Land wächst!
Eine neue Gluth hebt es empor.⁷

⁵ Walter Benjamin. “The Task of the Translator” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, tr. Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken Books, 1968, p. 74.

⁶ Ibid, p. 76

⁷ The Nietzsche Channel. “Sommer 1888 20 [1-168].” No. 126. <http://www.thenietzschechannel.com/notebooks/german/nache/nache20.htm>.

These brief lines employ a powerful image of massive geologic upheaval as a metaphor for an expanding philosophical worldview. Nietzsche's language is concise and does not adhere to any formal scheme or meter, and so a rather direct word-for-word translation works well:

What is happening? Is the sea falling?
No, my land is expanding!
A new glow uplifts it.

In comparison, another fragment taken from the same notebook, also set by Dusapin, proves more challenging to translate:

Auf Höhen bin ich heimisch,
nach Höhen verlangt mich nicht.
Ich hebe die Augen nicht empor;
ein Niederschauender bin ich,
Einer, der segnen muß:
alle Segnenden schauen nieder...⁸

One published English translation by Daniel Fidel Ferrer attempts to take a direct approach. While the result is useful for an English speaker wishing to use the translation as a resource for understanding the original German side-by-side, it is lacking in clarity on its own:

I am at home on the heights,
to heights not ask me.
I lift my eyes [not] up;
A low-look I am,
One who has blessed:
Blessing all look down.⁹

If a translator wishes to achieve a more satisfying result, it becomes necessary to take some liberty with the translation, and depart from the source's original sentence structure. A possible solution:

In the heights I am at home,
for the heights I have no desire.
I do not raise my eyes upwards,
I am the one who looks down,
One who must bless others:
All who bless look downward...

⁸ The Nietzsche Channel. "Sommer 1888 20 [1-168]." No. 53. <http://www.thenietzschechannel.com/notebooks/german/nache/nache20.htm>.

⁹ Daniel Fidel Ferrer and Friedrich Nietzsche. *Nietzsche's Notebook of 1887-1888*. archive.org. PhilArchive copy v1: <https://philarchive.org/archive/FERNNOv1>.

In translating the phrase “Ein Niederschauender bin ich”, I chose to forego an attempt to recreate the compound word “Niederschauender”, and instead adapted the word order to fit a more conventional English construction (“I am the one who looks down”). The next line has also been adjusted to bring a bit more clarity by specifying who it is that is being blessed (“others”). To my mind, these changes bring the English speaker closer to the intended meaning of the original German, even if they represent a departure from Nietzsche’s original sentence structure.

In this way, it becomes clear that the act of translating involves both interpretation and creation on the part of the translator. Paolo Bartoloni argues that both imagination and invention, two qualities fundamental to the creative process, are also essential to the act of translation. He says, “Imagination is nothing other than that which fills the gap in our understanding of the unknown and which goes some way toward translating the unknown into the known. Invention is propelled by imagination and can only be so when directed exclusively toward knowledge of the unknown. That is why invention is creation.”¹⁰ To return to Benjamin’s metaphor of the “language forest” and its echo, the translator must activate the voice with their own unique imagination as they seek the best tones to produce a satisfying reverberation amongst the trees. The translation itself is a distinct creation, but one that should resonate with the original author’s intent.

Bartoloni also describes the act of arts criticism, or critical interpretation, as a type of translation. He says that interpretation of a work involves a search for the “essence by stripping the work bare, by going toward the origin and the infancy of the work.”¹¹ To my mind, this process of translation, of searching for the essence by seeking the work’s origin (i.e. the intent of the creator’s imagination), is analogous to that of a musician interpreting and performing a musical score. The performer must try to understand the composer’s intent by examining the language of the score. This language, like the words employed by a poet, is an imperfect tool

¹⁰ Paolo Bartoloni. “Translation.” In *On the Cultures of Exile, Translation and Writing*, 9-41. Purdue University Press, 2008, p. 26.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 12.

that can only point the interpreter in the direction of the creator's imagination and intent, or what Benjamin would call the "pure language" of the music. When I, as a performer, interpret Dusapin's score, I am seeking to discover his intention. But because of the imperfect nature of language I must use my own acts of imagination and creation to complete the process. Dusapin's score is itself a document of his own interpretation of Nietzsche's poetry, realized through his imagination and captured in musical language. As the performer, I must also make my own interpretation of the poetry, an interpretation which is inevitably shaped by the music which is its receptacle. However, because of the complex nature of Nietzsche's text, it is possible that my interpretation might misalign with Dusapin's own, and lead my imagination towards a realization of the music which might depart from the composer's original intent. Thus my performance of *O Mensch!* is the result of several nesting layers of translation and interpretation, beginning with the words of Nietzsche, mediated through Dusapin's score, and realized in the embodied actions of the performer. An additional layer is added when the performance is observed by the listener, who must translate and interpret the performance to ascertain and understand the intention of the poet, composer, and performer alike.

In understanding and celebrating these complex layers of interpretation, it becomes doubly important that care is given to the act of creating translations designed to enhance the experience of an English-speaking audience. It is necessary that these translations strive to faithfully reflect (or echo) the poet's intention. However, unlike a poetic translation that is intended as a literary recourse for someone who is unable to comprehend the original German, these translations must also take into account the music in both its character and temporal qualities. My personal translation of Nietzsche's text is naturally shaped and colored by Dusapin's interpretation. In the same way, my own interpretation (both textual and performative) shapes and colors the way that the audience receives and interprets both the text and the music. There is a powerful result in the accumulation of all of these layers: The original text, in combination with its multiple translations (textual, musical, performative), can work together to draw the mind toward the ineffable nature of the original creation (Nietzsche's

intention). Bartoloni argues that in considering multiple translations and their unique implications, we can be drawn closer to the original or “pure” language that proceeds even the words of the original poem. He calls this composite the “language-that-comes” and suggests that the summation of the language of the author with the languages of its translators “brings with it the traces of the other language which is invariably the language which cannot be.”¹² Thus composer, performer, and listener work together to discover the intention of Nietzsche’s imagination.

In making my English translations, I set for myself a series of guidelines:

- (1) I tried to make as direct a translation as possible, adhering to the original ordering of words whenever it did not obstruct the meaning of the phrase, but adjusting the word order to fit traditional English structures if needed for clarity.
- (2) When a construction or expression unique to the German language proved impossible to translate directly, I tried to find a substitute that would express the same idea in English, but which would simultaneously fit the temporal and expressive nature of the music.
- (3) For selections in structured verse with set meter and rhyme schemes, I opted to ignore considerations of both meter and rhyme in favor of direct translations, knowing that those qualities would remain apparent sonically in Dusapin’s musical setting.
- (4) In instances when a direct translation of a single word seemed to obfuscate Nietzsche’s intent in the new language, I sometimes sought to find a new word which would point a bit more clearly to my interpretation of that intent.

On this fourth point, I would like to offer a bit of explanation. In the selection of certain words, I tried as best I could to ascertain what Walter Benjamin calls the “mode” of Nietzsche’s intention in his word choice. Benjamin says,

While all individual elements of foreign languages—words, sentences, structure—are mutually exclusive, these languages supplement one another in their intentions. Without

¹² Paolo Bartoloni, “Translation”, p. 37.

distinguishing the intended object from the mode of intention, no firm grasp of this basic law of a philosophy of language can be achieved. The words *Brot* and *pain* "intend" the same object, but the modes of this intention are not the same. It is owing to these modes that the word *Brot* means something different to a German than the word *pain* to a Frenchman, that these words are not interchangeable for them, that, in fact, they strive to exclude each other. As to the intended object, however, the two words mean the very same thing. While the modes of intention in these two words are in conflict, intention and object of intention complement each of the two languages from which they are derived; there the object is complementary to the intention.¹³

A notable example of a choice that rejects a direct translation in favor of a word substitution that seems to better fit the mode of the author's intention can be found in the aphorism "Aus der Tonne des Diogenes" / "Drawn from the barrel of Diogenes":

"Nothdurft ist wohlfeil, Glück ist ohne Preis:
Drum sitz' ich statt auf Gold auf meinem Steiß."¹⁴

The word in question here is "Steiß", a somewhat archaic term which best translates to "rump". In an attempt to avoid any connotation of quaintness or unintended humor, I chose the much more aggressive and modern English word "ass". To my mind, this word better fits the subversive mode of Nietzsche's intention when viewed from a contemporary perspective, while also underscoring the seriousness of Dusapin's setting (a discussion of which can be found in the next chapter). Thus my complete translation of the aphorism reads:

"Need is cheap, happiness is without price:
Therefore I sit, instead of on gold, on my ass."

It is also worth noting that the second line of this aphorism is a case in which I worked to preserve the original Germanic word order (as opposed to the more naturally flowing "Therefore I sit on my ass, instead of on gold") in order to emphasize the importance of the final word "ass" both as it appears in Nietzsche's original construction and as it is highlighted in the climax of Dusapin's musical setting.

¹³ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator", p. 74.

¹⁴ The Nietzsche Channel. "Frühjahr 1882 19 [1-14]." No. 5. <http://www.thenietzschechannel.com/notebooks/german/nache/nache20.htm>.

What follows is my complete translation of all of the text in *O Mensch!*. These translations were employed as projections in my fully-realized performance.

TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

1. O Mensch! Gib acht!

O Mensch! Gib Acht!
Was spricht die tiefe Mitternacht?
"Ich schlief, ich schlief,
aus tiefem Traum bin ich erwacht:
Die Welt ist tief,
und tiefer als der Tag gedacht.
Tief ist ihr Weh,
Lust tiefer noch als Herzeleid.
Weh spricht: Vergeh!
Doch alle Lust will Ewigkeit,
will tiefe, tiefe Ewigkeit!"

1. O mankind! listen!

O mankind! listen!
What is the deep midnight saying?
"I was sleeping, I was sleeping,
from a deep dream I was awoken:
The World is deep,
and deeper than the thoughts of day.
Deep is your sadness,
Joy, deeper still than heartbreak.
Your sorrow speaks: Go!
Yet all joy longs for eternity,
a deep, deep eternity!"

2. Ein Spiegel ist das Leben

Ein Spiegel ist das Leben.
In ihm sich zu erkennen,
Möcht ich das erste nennen,
Wonach wir nur auch streben!

2. Life is a mirror

Life is a mirror.
To recognize yourself in it
This I declare as the first thing
To which we all should aspire!

3. Ehrgeiz

Ist für solchen Ehrgeiz
diese Erde nicht zu klein?

3. Ambition

Is for such ambition
this world not too small?

4. Der Wanderer

Es geht ein Wanderer durch die Nacht
Mit gutem Schritt;
Und krummes Tal und lange Höhn—
Er nimmt sie mit.
Die Nacht ist schön—
Er schreitet zu und steht nicht still,
Weiß nicht, wohin sein Weg noch will.

4. The Wanderer

There is a wanderer moving through the night
With steady steps;
And crooked valley and stretching heights—
He takes them as they come.
The night is beautiful—
He strides forward and never stands still,
Not knowing where his path will lead.

Da singt ein Vogel durch die Nacht.
"Ach Vogel, was hast du gemacht!
Was hemmst du meinen Sinn und Fuß
Und gießest süßen Herz-Verdruß
In's Ohr mir, daß ich stehen muß
Und lauschen muß—
Was lockst du mich mit Ton und Gruß?"

There sings a bird in the night.
"Oh bird, what have you done!
Why do you hinder my mind and foot
And pour sweet heartache
Into my ear, that I must stand
And must listen—
Why do you lure me with sounds and greetings?"

Der gute Vogel schweigt und spricht:
"Nein, Wanderer, nein! Dich lock' ich nicht
Mit dem Getön.
Ein Weibchen lock' ich von den Höhen—
Was geht's dich an?
Allein ist mir die Nacht nicht schön—
Was geht's dich an? Denn du sollst gehn
Und nimmer, nimmer stille stehn!
Was stehst du noch?
Was tat mein Flötenlied dir an,
Du Wandersmann?"

Der gute Vogel schwieg und sann:
"Was tat mein Flötenlied ihm an?
Was steht er noch?
Der arme, arme Wandersmann!"

5. Das eherne Schweigen

Fünf Ohren — und kein Ton darin!
Die Welt ward stumm...

Ich horchte mit den Ohren meiner Neugierde
Fünf Mal warf ich die Angel über mich,
Fünf Mal zog ich keinen Fisch herauf—
Ich fragte — keine Antwort lief mir ins Netz—

Ich horchte mit dem Ohr meiner *Liebe*

6. Zürnt mir nicht

Zürnt mir nicht, daß ich schlief:
ich war nur müde, ich war nicht tot.
Meine Stimme klang böse;
aber bloß Schnarchen und Schnaufen war's,
der Gesang eines Müden:
kein Willkomm dem Tode,
keine Grabes-Lockung.

7. 1st Interlude

The good bird falls silent and says:
"No, wanderer, no! I lure you not
With these sounds.
I lure a mate from the heights—
What does it matter to you?
When I am alone the night is not beautiful—
What is it to you? You should walk on
And never, never stand still again!
Why are you still standing there?
What does my flute-song do to you,
You wandering man?"

The good bird was silent and thought:
"What did my flute-song do to him?
Why is he still standing there?
The poor, poor wandering man?"

5. The Brazen Silence

Five ears — and no sound within them!
The world is quiet...

I listened with the ears of my curiosity
Five times I cast the fishing line over me,
Five times I pulled out no fish—
I asked — no answer came to my net—

I listened with the ear of my *love*

6. Do not be angry with me

Do not be angry with me, that I was sleeping:
I was only tired, I was not dead.
My voice sounded unwell;
but it was merely snoring and gasping,
the sound of the weary:
not a greeting of death,
not an enticement to the grave.

7. 1st Interlude

8. Heiterkeit

Heiterkeit, güldene, komm!
du des Todes
heimlichster süssester Vorgenuss!
—Lief ich zu rasch meines Wegs?
Jetzt erst, wo der Fuss müde ward,
holt dein Blick mich noch ein,
holt dein Glück mich noch ein.

Rings nur Welle und Spiel.
Was je schwer war,
sank in blaue Vergessenheit,
müßig steht nun mein Kahn.
Sturm und Fahrt – wie verlernt er das!
Wunsch und Hoffen ertrank,
glatt liegt Seele und Meer.

Siebente Einsamkeit!
Nie empfand ich
näher mir süsse Sicherheit,
wärmer der Sonne Blick.
—Glüht nicht das Eis meiner Gipfel noch?
Silbern, leicht, ein Fisch
schwimmt nun mein Nachen hinaus ...

9. Was geschieht?

Was geschieht? Fällt das Meer?
Nein, mein Land wächst!
Eine neue Gluth hebt es empor.

10. Auf Höhen

Auf Höhen bin ich heimisch,
nach Höhen verlangt mich nicht.
Ich hebe die Augen nicht empor;
ein Niederschauender bin ich,
Einer, der segnen muß:
alle Segnenden schauen nieder ...

11. Ehrgeiz (2)

Ist für solchen Ehrgeiz
diese Erde nicht zu klein?

12. 2nd Interlude

8. Serenity

Golden serenity, come!
you of Death
most secret, sweetest foretaste!
—Did I run my paths too quickly?
Now first, where the foot has grown weary,
bring your gaze on me yet,
bring your happiness on me yet.

Around me, only waves and games.
That which was heavy,
sank into blue oblivion,
my boat now stands idle
as if it has forgotten storm and sailing!
Desire and hope are drowned,
smooth lie soul and sea.

Seventh solitude!
Never have I felt
such sweet security nearer to me,
or the sun's rays warmer on my skin,
—Does the ice on my summit not still glow?
Silver, light, a fish
my barge now floats away...

9. What is happening?

What is happening? Is the sea falling?
No, my land is expanding!
A new glow uplifts it.

10. In the Heights

In the heights I am at home,
for the heights I have no desire.
I do not raise my eyes upwards,
I am the one who looks down,
One who must bless others:
all who bless look downward...

11. Ambition (2)

Is for such ambition
this world not too small?

12. 2nd Interlude

13. Das Nachtlid

Nacht ist es: nun reden lauter alle springenden Brunnen. Und auch meine Seele ist ein springender Brunnen.

Nacht ist es: nun erst erwachen alle Lieder der Liebenden. Und auch meine Seele ist das Lied eines Liebenden.

Ein Ungestilltes, Unstillbares ist in mir; das will laut werden. Eine Begierde nach Liebe ist in mir, die redet selber die Sprache der Liebe.

Licht bin ich: ach, dass ich Nacht wäre! Aber diess ist meine Einsamkeit, dass ich von Licht umgürtet bin.

Ach, dass ich dunkel wäre und nächtig! Wie wollte ich an den Brüsten des Lichts saugen!

Und euch selber wollte ich noch segnen, ihr kleinen Funkelsterne und Leuchtwürmer droben! — und selig sein ob eurer Licht-Geschenke.

Aber ich lebe in meinem eignen Lichte, ich trinke die Flammen in mich zurück, die aus mir brechen.

Ich kenne das Glück des Nehmenden nicht; und oft träumte mir davon, dass Stehlen noch seliger sein müsse, als Nehmen.

Das ist meine Armuth, dass meine Hand niemals ausruht vom Schenken; das ist mein Neid, dass ich wartende Augen sehe und die erhellten Nächte der Sehnsucht.

Oh Unseligkeit aller Schenkenden! Oh Verfinsterung meiner Sonne! Oh Begierde nach Begehren! Oh Heisshunger in der Sättigung!

Sie nehmen von mir: aber rühre ich noch an ihre Seele? Eine Kluft ist zwischen Geben und Nehmen; und die kleinste Kluft ist am letzten zu überbrücken.

Ein Hunger wächst aus meiner Schönheit: wehethun möchte ich Denen, welchen ich leuchte, berauben möchte ich meine Beschenkten: — also hungere ich nach Bosheit.

13. The Song of the Night

It is night: now the voices of all gushing fountains speak louder. And my soul is also a gushing fountain.

It is night: now all of the songs of new lovers awaken. And my soul is also the song of a lover.

Something unappeased, unappeasable is in me; it wants to raise its voice. A longing for love is in me, which itself speaks the language of love.

I am light: oh, that I were the night! But this is my solitude, that I am encircled by light.

Ah, that I were shadows and darkness! How I would suckle from the breasts of light!

And you yourselves would I bless, you little twinkling stars and glowworms up there! — and be blessed in return by the gifts of your light.

But I live in my solitary light, I absorb back into myself the flames that from me burst forth.

I do not know the happiness of one who takes; and often I have dreamed of it, that stealing must be even holier than taking.

That is my poverty, that my hand never rests from giving; that is my envy, that I see waiting eyes and the illuminated nights of longing.

Oh unholiness of all who give! Oh eclipse of my Sun! Oh desiring after desire! Oh burning-hot hunger in the satiation!

They take from me: but do I yet stir their soul? A gap is between giving and taking; and the smallest gap is the most difficult to be bridged.

A hunger grows out of my beauty: I would like to do injury to those whom I illumine, I would like to rob those whom I have gifted: — thus I hunger for wickedness.

Die Hand zurückziehend, wenn sich schon ihr die
Hand entgegenstreckt; dem Wasserfälle gleich
zögernd, der noch im Sturze zögert: — also
hungere ich nach Bosheit.

Solche Rache sinnt meine Fülle aus; solche Tücke
quillt aus meiner Einsamkeit.

14. Das Wort

Lebend'gem Worte bin ich gut:
Das springt heran so wohlgemut,
Das grüßt mit artigem Geschick,
Ist lieblich selbst im Ungeschick,
Hat Blut in sich, kann herzhaft schnauben,
Kriecht dann zum Ohre selbst dem Tauben
Und ringelt sich und flattert jetzt
Und was es tut — das Wort ergötzt.
Doch bleibt das Wort ein zartes Wesen,
Bald krank und aber bald genesen.
Willst ihm sein kleines Leben lassen,
Mußt du es leicht und zierlich fassen,
Nicht plump betasten und bedrücken,
Es stirbt oft schon an bösen Blicken —
Und liegt dann da, so ungestalt,
So seelenlos, so arm und kalt,
Sein kleiner Leichnam arg verwandelt,
Von Tod und Sterben mißgehandelt.
Ein totes Wort — ein häßlich Ding,
Ein klapperdürres Kling-Kling-Kling.
Pfui allen häßlichen Gewerben,
An denen Wort und Wörter sterben.

15. Desperat

Fürchterlich sind meinem Sinn
Spuckende Gesellen!
Lauf' ich schon, wo lauf' ich hin?
Spring' ich in die Wellen?

Alle Münder stets gespitzt,
Gurgelnd alle Kehlen,
Wand und Boden stets bespritzt —
Fluch auf Speichelseelen!

Lieber lebt' ich schlecht und schlicht
Vogelfrei auf Dächern,
Lieber unter Diebsgezücht,
Eid- und Ehebrechern!

Withdrawing the hand, from those to whom it has
already been extended; the waterfall similarly
hesitates, in its hesitant fall: — thus I hunger for
wickedness.

On this revenge my prosperity meditates; this
malice pours forth from my solitude.

14. The Word

I am good with a lively word:
It springs forth so joyously,
It greets with a courteous bow,
Is lovely in its clumsiness,
Is full of blood, can breathe heartily,
Crawls into the ears of the deaf,
And twirls and flutters nows,
And what it does — the word delights.
Yet the word remains a delicate being,
Easily ill and just as easily recovered.
If you want to save its tiny life,
You must gently hold it
Not roughly gasp and clench it,
It dies often from angry looks —
And then lies there, so misshapen,
So soulless, so poor and cold,
Its small corpse painfully transformed,
From death and dying mishandled.
A dead word — an ugly thing,
A rattlingly dry clang-clang-clang,
Fie on all those awful occupations,
Where words, great and small, are murdered.

15. Desperate

I am horrified by the thought
Of people who spit!
I am already running, but where to?
Do I leap into the waves?

All mouths stay clenched,
All throats gurgling,
Wall and floor remain splattered —
Curse on saliva-soaked souls!

I prefer to live poorly and simply
Free as a bird on rooftops,
I prefer broods of thieves,
Oath-breakers and adulterers!

Fluch der Bildung, wenn sie speit!
Fluch dem Tugendbunde!
Auch die reinste Heiligkeit
Trägt nicht Gold im Munde.

16. 3rd Interlude

17. Das nächtliche Geheimnis

Gestern Nachts, als Alles schlief,
Kaum der Wind mit ungewissen
Seufzern durch die Gassen lief,
Gab mir Ruhe nicht das Kissen,
Noch der Mohn, noch, was sonst tief
Schlafen macht — ein gut Gewissen.

Endlich schlug ich mir den Schlaf
Aus dem Sinn und lief zum Strande.
Mondhell war's und mild — ich traf
Mann und Kahn auf warmem Sande,
Schläfrig beide, Hirt und Schaf:
— Schläfrig stiess der Kahn vom Lande.

Eine Stunde, leicht auch zwei,
Oder war's ein Jahr? — da sanken
Plötzlich mir Sinn und Gedanken
In ein ew'ges Einerlei,
Und ein Abgrund ohne Schranken
That sich auf: — da war's vorbei! —

Morgen kam: auf schwarzen Tiefen
Steht ein Kahn und ruht und ruht...
Was geschah? so riefs, so riefen
Hundert bald: was gab es? Blut? —
Nichts geschah! Wir schliefen, schliefen
Alle — ach, so gut! so gut!

18. Lied des Ziegenhirten

Da lieg ich, krank im Gedärm —
Mich fressen die Wanzen.
Und drüben noch Licht und Lärm:
Ich hör's, sie tanzen.

Sie wollte um diese Stund'
Zu mir sich schleichen:
Ich warte wie ein Hund —
Es kommt kein Zeichen!

Curse education, if it spits!
Curse the league of virtue!
Not even the purest holiness
Has a mouth full of gold.

16. 3rd Interlude

17. The Nocturnal Secret

Late last night, while all were sleeping,
The wind barely stirred with an uncertain
Sigh through the streets,
The pillow gave me no rest,
Nor the poppy, nor what usually makes
For a deep sleep — a good conscience.

Finally I drove the thought of sleep
From my mind and ran to the beach.
It was moon-washed and mild, — I met
A man and a boat on the warm sand,
Both sleepy, shepherd and sheep:
— Sleepily the boat departed from the shore.

An hour passed, easily two,
Or was it a year? —
There my mind and thoughts suddenly sank
In an endless monotony,
And an abyss without boundaries
Opened itself: — then it was over! —

Morning came: over the black depths
Floated a boat, at rest and resting...
What has happened? So came the cry,
Hundreds soon cried out: what is that? blood? —
Nothing happened! We slept, and slept,
All of us — ah, so well! so well!

18. Song of the Goat Herder

There I lie, sick in the stomach —
The bugs feast on me.
And in the distance there is light and noise:
I hear it, they are dancing.

She said at this hour
She would sneak off to me:
I waited like a dog —
No sign ever came!

Das Kreuz, als sie's versprach!
Wie konnte sie lügen?
Oder läuft sie Jedem nach,
Wie meine Ziegen?

Woher ihr seidner Rock? –
Ah, meine Stolze?
Es wohnt noch mancher Bock
An diesem Holze?

Wie kraus und giftig macht
Verliebttes Warten!
So wächst bei schwüler Nacht
Giftpilz im Garten.

Die Liebe zehrt an mir
Gleich sieben übeln –
Nichts mag ich essen schier,
Lebt wohl, ihr Zwiebeln!

Der Mond ging schon in's Meer,
Müd sind alle Sterne,
Grau kommt der Tag daher –
Ich stürbe gerne.

19. 4th Interlude

20. An Richard Wagner

Der du an jeder Fessel krankst,
Friedloser, unbefreiter Geist,
Siegreicher stets und doch gebundener,
Verekelt mehr und mehr, zerschundener,
Bis du aus jedem Balsam Gift dir trankst –
Weh! Daß auch du am Kreuze niedersankst,
Auch du! Auch du – ein Überwundener!

Vor diesem Schauspiel steh' ich lang
Gefängnis atmend,
Gram und Groll und Gruft,
Dazwischen Weihrauch-Wolken,
Kirchen-Duft,
Hier wird mir bang:
Die Narrenkappe werf' ich tanzend in die Luft!
Denn ich entsprang –

21. Ehrgeiz (3)

Ist für solchen Ehrgeiz
diese Erde nicht zu klein?

The cross, on it she swore!
How could she lie?
Or does she run after everyone,
Like my goats?

Where is her silken skirt? –
Oh, where is my pride?
Does it live like so many rams
In this woodland?

How twisted and poisonous
Is loving made in waiting!
So in the sultry night
Toadstools grow in the garden.

Love consumes me
Like the seventh hell –
I eat almost nothing,
Farewell, you onions!

The moon goes into the sea,
All the stars are weary,
The day breaks in grayness –
I would like to die.

19. 4th Interlude

20. To Richard Wagner

You who grow ill under every restraint,
Peaceless one, unfree spirit,
Victorious always, and yet bound,
Disgusted more and more, bruised,
By every balsam poison you drink –
Woe! That you also on the cross sank lower,
Even you! Even you – a subdued-one!

Before this drama I stand long
Breath imprisoned,
grief and resentment and tomb,
Surrounded by clouds of incense,
Church fragrances,
Here I am afraid:
I throw the dunce cap dancing into the air!
Because I have escaped –

21. Ambition (3)

Is for such ambition
this world not too small?

22. Die fröhliche Wissenschaft

Dies ist kein Buch: was liegt an Büchern!
An diesen Särgen und Leichentüchern!
Vergangnes ist der Bücher Beute:
Doch hierin lebt ein ewig Heute.

Dies ist kein Buch: was liegt an Büchern!
Was liegt an Särgen und Leichentüchern!
Dies ist ein Wille, dies ist ein Versprechen,
Dies ist ein letztes Brücken-Zerbrechen,
Dies ist ein Meerwind, ein Ankerlichten,
Ein Räderbrausen, ein Steuer-Richten,
Es brüllt die Kanone, weiß dampft ihr Feuer,
Es lacht das Meer, das Ungeheuer!

23. Wer hier nicht lachen kann...
(Vorsicht: Gift!)

Wer hier nicht lachen kann,
soll hier nicht lesen!
Denn, lacht er nicht,
packt ihn "das böse Wesen."

24. Seine Gesellschaft zu finden wissen

Mit Witzbolden ist gut zu witzeln:
Wer kitzeln will ist leicht zu kitzeln.

25. Aus der Tonne des Diogenes

"Nothdurft ist wohlfeil, Glück ist ohne Preis:
Drum sitz' ich statt auf Gold auf meinem Steiß."

26. Ruhm und Ewigkeit

Diese Münze, mit der
alle welt bezahlt,
Ruhm —,
mit Handschuhen fasse ich diese Münze an,
mit Ekel trete ich sie unter mich.

22. The joyful science

This is no book: what is the purpose of books!
These coffins and shrouds!
The past is prey for books:
Yet within here lives an eternal present.

This is no book: what is the purpose of books!
What is the purpose of coffins and shrouds!
This is a wish, this is a promise,
This is a final bridge, crumbling,
This is an ocean wind, a floating anchor,
A roaring wheel, a course to steer,
The canon roars, its fire evaporates into smoke,
The ocean laughs, the monster!

23. Those here who cannot laugh..
(Caution: Poison!)

Those here who cannot laugh,
should not be reading this!
Because, he who does not laugh
will be snatched by the "evil spirit."

24. Knowing how to find your companionship

With jokers, it is easy to make jokes:
Those who like to tickle are often ticklish.

25. Drawn from the barrel of Diogenes

"Need is cheap, happiness is without price:
Therefore I sit, instead of on gold, on my ass."

26. Glory and Eternity

This coin with which
all the world pays,
glory —,
only with gloves do I grasp this coin,
with disgust I trample it under my feet.

27. Still!

Still! —
Von grossen Dingen — ich sehe Grosses! —
soll man schweigen
oder gross reden:
rede gross, meine entzückte Weisheit!

Ich sehe hinauf —
dort rollen Lichtmeere:
— oh Nacht, oh Schweigen,
oh todtenstillen Lärm! ...
Ich sehe ein Zeichen —,
aus fernsten Fernen
sinkt langsam funkelnd ein Sternbild gegen
mich ...

27. Silence!

Silence! —
Among great things — I see greatness! —
one should remain silent
or else speak greatly:
speak greatly, my delighted wisdom!

I see above me —
there are rolling oceans of light:
— oh night, oh silence,
oh deathly-quiet noise! ...
I see a sign —,
out of the distant distance
sinking slowly toward me a sparkling
constellation...

3. Analysis

FOUNDATIONAL OBSERVATIONS

The eighty-two pages of this score contain an astounding amount of detail with much to explore. My aim in this particular analysis is to focus on four specific selections drawn from the larger song cycle. The goal of this process is to gain increasing insight into the work itself, both its individual components and the cumulative sum of those parts, and to use this analytic perspective as a tool for informing a performative interpretation. The selections that I have chosen are ones that grabbed my attention during my very first focused listening, searing their way into my memory and shaping my growing conception of the work as a whole. The first is the substantial “Das Nachtlied”, its sudden explosive volatility shattering the quiet introspection which dominates the first half of the cycle. I will also look at the beautiful “Das nächtliche Geheimnis”, the mysterious, mystical heart of the piece. Next I will examine three short and interconnected songs which form the work’s penultimate moment, serving to clear the heavy air of all expectations. I will conclude with an investigation of “Still!”, the cycle’s enraptured finale. But before I begin these explorations I feel it is necessary to take a look at some of the general normative features of the music as a way of providing a base of context for the coming analysis.

Perhaps the most important thing to understand about *O Mensch!* from a compositional standpoint is that Dusapin prioritizes at all times a clear and intelligible declamation of Nietzsche’s text. This point is absolutely key to discerning the way in which his music is constructed, the behaviors of the voice, and its intimate relationship to the piano. His text-setting is mostly syllabic with minimal flourishes of melisma, and his attention to the rhythms and inflections of the German language shows a keen interest in adhering to conventions of linguistic construction and patterns of oration. There is nowhere in the entirety of the work in which Dusapin indulges in a vocalism, be it extended technique or extreme gestural figure, which would in any way interfere with the poetry’s intelligibility. Perhaps most surprising of all, the composer eschews the use of long, extended tones in the voice. With but one exception,¹⁵

¹⁵ Song 23, “Wer hier nicht lachen kann...,” p. 75, mm. 11-12.

there is no occurrence of a single note which is sung and sustained for a duration longer than a double-dotted half-note.

If the voice's primary role is to present the text clearly and to convey its meaning, it is generally the role of the piano to heighten and shape that meaning through its expressivity. In addition to providing harmonic support, the piano complicates and deepens the sonic world of the music by adding timbral and temporal elements that embellish and amplify the meaning and emotional character of the singer's text. The piano's material manifests in a relatively limited number of archetypal behaviors which establish a mechanical consistency to the material despite its wide range of mood and texture. Malleable in expressive character, these archetypes are primarily concerned with shape, gesture, and the relationship between pitches in vertical and horizontal space. The four archetypes, as I have identified them, are:

- (1) Sustained chords, often punctuated with single notes or colored with changing or resolving pitches.
- (2) Single lines, melodic and non-chordal, which are decorated with grace notes and detailed articulation.
- (3) Duet between the two hands, or the counterpoint of two melodic lines.
- (4) Alternating chords between the left and right hands.

It is worth noting that the piano's four solo movements—the interludes—each predominantly feature one of these four archetypes.¹⁶ Unlike the piano's case, there is no truly “archetypal” musical behavior for the voice. The voice is used primarily as a medium for expressing the text, and the development of generative musical material is generally left to the piano.

As a final preparation for the analysis to come, I would like to look at the opening measures of the cycle, the first phrase from Song 1, “O Mensch! Gib acht!”. [See FIGURE 1] This phrase is particularly illustrative of several key elements of Dusapin's compositional approach, and serves to establish the predominant harmonic and poetic tone for the entire work. Here we find a setting of lines from Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*. These stirring

¹⁶ The “First Interlude” features Archetype 3; the “Second Interlude” features Archetypes 2 and 1; the “Third Interlude” features Archetype 4; the “Fourth Interlude” features Archetypes 2 and 1.



FIGURE 1: The opening measures of the first song, p. 1, mm. 1-4.

words are often referred to as “Zarathustra’s Roundelay”, a poem with a rich musical history, most famous for its appearance as the text in the fourth movement of Gustav Mahler’s Third Symphony. Nietzsche’s interpretation of the character of Zarathustra is the cornerstone of his output as poet-philosopher, and Dusapin will return to this character at another key moment in the cycle.

The song begins with a prolonged silence. When the singer and piano enter, they do so as a single voice in quiet unison, calling softly from the depths of the stillness. The effect is akin to a point of light appearing in a darkened expanse, and can be heard as a gentler, more intimate counterpart to the iconic opening burst of light in Richard Strauss’ tone poem *Also sprach Zarathustra*, inspired by the same source material. This first entrance, even in its relative simplicity, is illustrative of the way that Dusapin conceives of the relationship between the voice and the piano. They are presented here at the outset not as two separate entities, but as one single composite, two parts of one whole sharing a single source of origin. It is in this moment that we experience not only the synthesis of music and poetry, but the fusing of two performers with vastly different instruments, who will present a unified and embodied interpretation of the character of the work, two-as-one. This brief moment will define their relationship as they go forward, despite the fact that they will never return to an explicit unison of this kind.

The singer intones the words, “Oh mankind, listen! What is the deep midnight saying?” and gently ascends a minor third, the piano blossoming into a harmonically rich five-note chord in response. The opening bars of the song immediately establish a tone of expansiveness, and

there is a sense that the music occurs outside of the rigors of metric time. This temporal sense is accomplished in part with a subtle shift in meter, and is heightened by the unexpected placement of the first chord, which occurs off of the beat and aligned with an unstressed syllable of text. These rhythmic characteristics prevent the listener from comprehending the metric architecture of the music, which exists only as a notational necessity to allow for the precise coordination of the two performers. This approach to crafting a sense of freedom is employed throughout the cycle, where meter functions as a tool for prescribing duration, but does not necessarily indicate such things as phrasing and linguistic stress or emphasis.

Here also the vocal line exhibits extremely precise rhythmic and articulatory notation which is sharply contrasted with the relative rhythmic freedom of Dusapin's approach to setting multi-syllabic words (as in "tiefe Mitternacht", mm. 3-4). We see that the composer has precisely prescribed the moment when a word should begin and what its duration should be, but has left the internal rhythm of its syllables to the singer's discretion. This is typical of Dusapin's general approach to text setting in the expansive moments of *O Mensch!* and can also be found in his other vocal works. It places the onus of execution on the singer, who becomes responsible for activating the rhythm with a natural, speech-like inflection. If sensitively executed, this approach brings a heightened naturalness to the text delivery which could never be achieved through meticulously prescribed rhythmic structures.

The combined effect of these elements results in the evocation of an expansive, free, and timeless state, a deeply intimate and introspective mood which uncoils the mysteries of its text slowly and carefully. The poetic idea encapsulated in this first phrase, that the depths of night conceal a universal wisdom waiting to be discovered by those willing to seek it out, becomes one of the major themes of subsequent songs. Nighttime, darkness, sleep, and the ocean are frequently evoked as metaphors for the depths of the subconscious and its concealed truths.

This opening phrase also contains musical structures which will come to play important roles in subsequent songs. Dusapin uses this phrase to establish two recurring figures which reappear throughout the cycle, one each for the voice and piano:

- (1) The “tiefe Mitternacht” figure: The voice part intones the text on a repeated pitch D4, with unstressed syllables occasionally inflected downwards by a half-step. This figure will be a defining feature of Song 17, “Das nächtliche Geheimnis”, and will return in at least five other songs, sometimes transposed down one octave. Much like the “deep midnight” of the opening phrase, this figure seems to occur in passages with texts that reference the ocean, water, or great depths. See Songs 1, 8, 13, 17, 20, and 22 for examples.
- (2) The “blossoming figure”: The piano strikes a single, sustained tone, and then after a significant duration it is surrounded by other pitches to form a five-note chord. Figures like this occur in at least five of the songs, and are exhibited elsewhere in variation. See Songs 1, 4, 8, 13, and 15 for examples, as well as 17, 19, and 26 for variations.

Finally, it is essential to note that this example exhibits the generative source of much of the harmonic material of the song cycle. The piano plays a pentachord in measure 3 which contains the pitches D, A#, B, C#, and G#. These five pitches will become the foundational material used to assemble much of the work’s harmonic language. At important moments Dusapin will quote this chord directly in various voicings, but much more commonly he divides the pentachord into smaller groupings of pitches, and combines them with other notes to create new but related harmonies. Dusapin uses the pentachord to construct a series of four dyads which become the building blocks for practically all of his harmonic structures:

- (1) C# + D
- (2) G# + B
- (3) G# + A#
- (4) B + D (only important in songs from the second half of the cycle)

At least one of these dyads plays a prominent role in every single song in the cycle, and sometimes a combination of more than one is employed. These dyads can be used harmonically or melodically, and can be found standing alone or embedded within denser harmonies. Although the harmonic quality of the pentachord resists being heard as part of any pre-existing tonal structure, Dusapin will often use the derived dyads to evoke specific tonal references, a concept which will be demonstrated in the discussion that follows. The near omnipresence of at least one of these dyads gives the entire cycle a sense of harmonic continuity, relatedness, and at times suspended stasis.

The opening song's sense of harmonic stasis and its expansive temporal qualities dominate the music of the first half of the cycle. Dusapin continues to explore this state of existential investigation in the slowly-unfolding "Der Wanderer", "Das eherne Schweigen", and "Heiterkeit". These substantial songs are interrupted by brief episodes of sudden activity ("Ein Spiegel ist das Leben", "Zürnt mir nicht", and "Auf Höhen"), but moments of emotional volatility are fleeting and quickly dissipate back into an introspective and restrained mode. Slow pacing, harmonic ambiguity, and metric inscrutability lend a sense of atemporality and suspension to much of this music, and this suspended state will not be interrupted in a significant way until the arrival of another Zarathustra text, "Das Nachtlied".

SONG 13 — "DAS NACHTLIED"

The longest of all the songs in *O Mensch!*, "Das Nachtlied" straddles the exact midpoint of the cycle. Its evocative text is linked to the opening song in that it is an excerpt from *Also sprach Zarathustra*, and it functions as a major turning point in the work as a whole. Its central location within the song cycle suggests its importance within Dusapin's overall conception, and this combined with its placement immediately following a solo piano interlude suggests that it could easily be thought of as the beginning of a second act, the arrival of a new chapter. In much the same way that the opening song "O Mensch! Gib acht!" seems to determine the tone

and trajectory of the first half of the song cycle, “Das Nachtlid” has a discernible, even measurable effect on the pacing and emotional arc of the second half. The explosion of activity which begins around measure 80 of “Das Nachtlid”, situated as it is at the exact midpoint of the cycle, represents a sudden peak in the music’s overall rate of text delivery. A graph of the number of syllables set per minute of music visualizes the impact of this dramatic moment clearly, as well as the echoes of activity it triggers across subsequent songs. [See FIGURE 2]

In *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, Nietzsche’s title character is a reimagining of the ancient prophet Zoroaster whose teachings contributed to an important Islamic and Judeo-Christian philosophical conception of the world. In Zoroaster’s teaching, the world is placed in the midst of a battle between good and evil. Good will inevitably prevail, ushering in an apocalypse in which those who choose evil perish as the good enter into eternity. Nietzsche’s philosophical beliefs were a reaction to the moral absolutism of this system, and thus he recreates the prophet Zarathustra, having him return to mankind with new knowledge to be used in the creation of a post-Judeo-Christian, post-Platonic world.¹⁷ The philosophical novel is a meandering blend of Zarathustra’s new teaching, accounts of his travels, and collections of his poetry. “Das Nachtlid” is one of these poems, and it depicts Zarathustra in a moment of crisis. As Laurence Lampert describes it, the poem situates the character in a surprising state of melancholy, having just returned from a period of intense self-imposed solitude and personal reflection. The poem makes clear both Zarathustra’s love for the world and his profound sense of isolation from it, as he laments that his role as a giver-of-gifts (i.e. wisdom and knowledge) prevents him from being one who receives. Within the context of the novel, this period of weakness sets the character up for new discoveries and renewed purpose.¹⁸

Dusapin’s setting begins in a quiet place of wonder, but grows increasingly indignant and bitter. Here in the cycle the words are divorced from their original context, and this decontextualization changes the interpretation. In the voice of Dusapin’s singer, these words

¹⁷ Laurence Lampert. “Thus spoke Zarathustra,” in *A Companion to Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Paul Bishop, Rochester: Camden House, 2012, pp. 201-202.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 204.

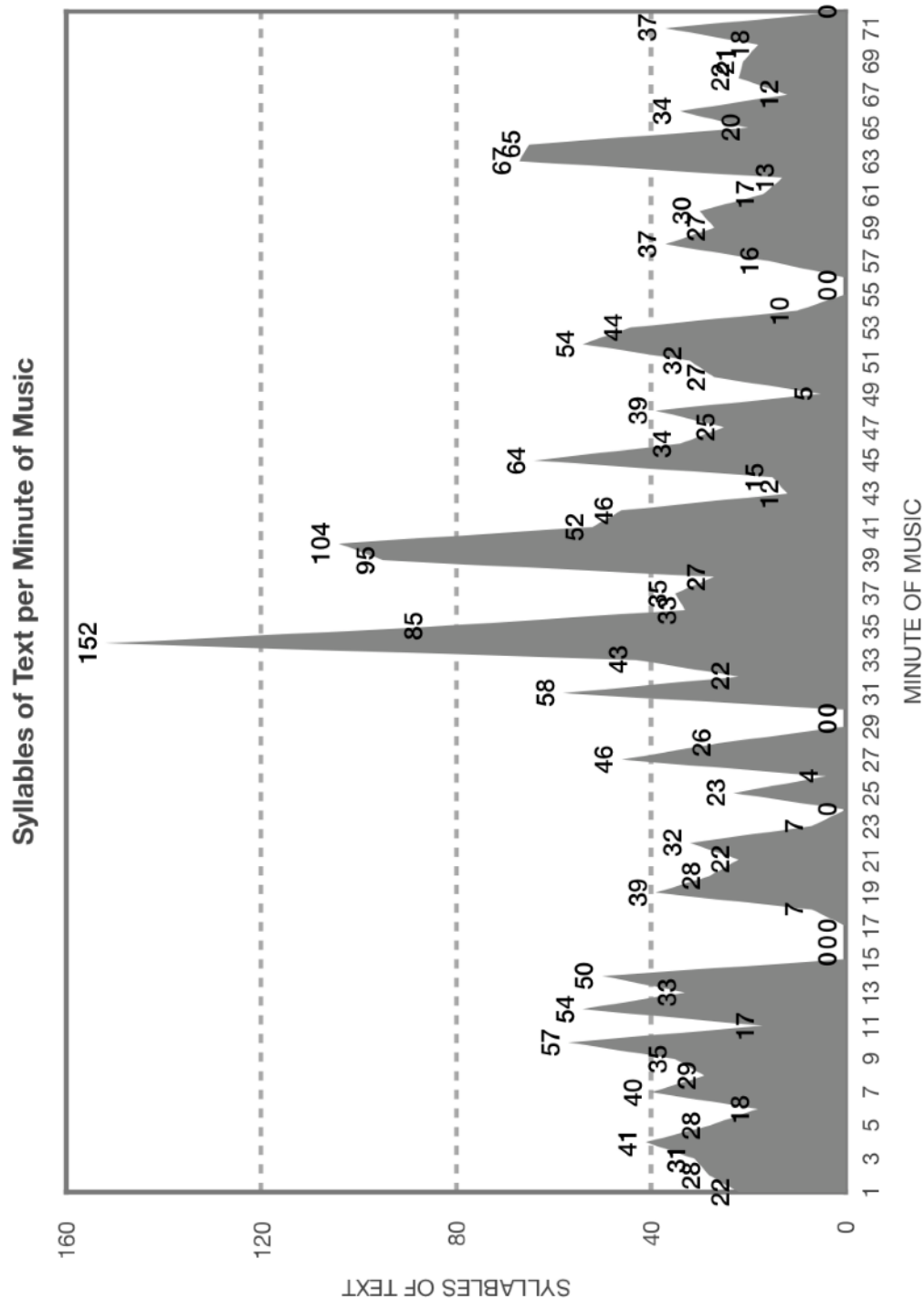


FIGURE 2: This graph visualizes the rate of text setting over the course of the song cycle. It indicates a sharp peak of activity at minute 34, which coincides with the arrival of fast material in "Das Nachtlied". While this central moment represents maximum text density in the cycle as a whole, it also indicates an increase in density in subsequent songs, particularly when compared to the first half of the cycle.

This data has been collected from the 2012 Nigl/Wagner recording.

take on a new layer of meaning, a growing sense of self-delusion. By the end of the song, his lofted ravings and the tumultuous outbursts of the piano seem far removed from the dignified lamentations of a lonely prophet. Rather, they seem to depict a man desperately trying and failing to regain his grip on reality, coming up with only large handfuls of bitterness in the process. The emotional ramifications of this episode permeate through the rest of the cycle, triggering additional songs of crisis, self-pity, and acrimony, which continue to build until they ultimately culminate in a final moment of transformative redemption.

Dusapin's markings suggest that he thinks of this song as a dramatic monologue, almost a self-contained operatic *scena*. Instructions for the singer appear above the staff throughout (in both French and English), in much the same way that stage directions appear in an operatic score. They are meant to suggest the singer's state of mind as he sings; "dreaming...", "like a vague threat", "very contained", "as if he is speaking to himself", "very resolutely", and finally "with an ironic and rather caustic tone". These markings contrast notably with the type of descriptions that are given to the piano ("always fairly resonant", "dry and snappy, very articulate", etc.) which are exclusively concerned with the mechanical aspects of interpretation. Markings in the vocal line of this nature do not appear internally within the body of any of the preceding songs, further suggesting that "Das Nachtlied" is a dramatic turning point in the cycle. After this song, dramatic and interpretive markings and even explicit stage directions become much more common.

The structure of the song is not unlike a microcosm of the cycle as a whole, with discretely defined sections, each exhibiting its own unique but interrelated musical character. We begin *a cappella*, with the opening words "Nacht ist es" set to the recurring "tiefe Mitternacht" figure from the opening phrase of the first song, this time transposed down one octave. This first section is harmonically ambiguous, as the voice's unaccompanied melody lilts through a somewhat circular series of intervallic relationships, eventually touching on all five pitches from the opening pentachord. This section concludes with the words "und auch meine Seele ist das Lied eines Liebenden"/ "and my soul is also the song of a lover", the melody here

outlining the pentachord in its entirety. [See FIGURE 3] Dusapin presents the pentachord here in such a way that the A# and D are heard as a passing tones, and the result is the invocation of a strong C#7 harmony, first presented in the minor but transitioning to major as the singer moves from the E of “Lied” to the F of “Liebenden.” The arrival of this stable harmony after so much meandering imbues these words with hope and anticipation.



FIGURE 3: “Das Nachtlied”, p. 27, mm. 43-45.
All five pitches from the pentachord are present (D, A#, B, C#, and G#).

A new section begins with the arrival of the piano in measure 46, commencing a beautiful interlude. Dusapin marks the beginning of this interlude with the words “it is night...”, a rare invocation of physical setting. The gently moving chords are a perfect manifestation of piano Archetype 1 (sustained chords, colored with resolving pitches), and they settle into a clear A $\flat$ -minor tonality. Note that an A $\flat$ -minor chord contains enharmonic spellings of Dyad 2 from the pentachord, and that the arrival of this tonality after the C#7 chord which ends the previous section creates a dominant-to-tonic effect. The sudden harmonic stability of the interlude, combined with its distant and melancholic quality, seems to invoke the “song of lovers” referenced in the text of the previous section. The singer, having fallen silent in night’s stillness, listens to this song with growing longing and envy.

The voice enters again in measure 56, the final chord of the interlude still hanging in the air. In this next section, the singer acknowledges his unappeasable longing and laments that his status as light-giver condemns him to a life of loneliness. The piano continues to play the song of lovers, but it has now been distorted through the lens of the singer’s increasing anguish, growing more distant, dissonant, and higher in register. The section ends with the singer sinking to a low C#, intoning his lamentations in a threatening whisper. The piano responds to each new utterance with increasingly dark chords—the song of lovers has ended

and will not return. The final chord of this section is a dense, foreboding cloud made up of all pitches in the pentachord plus an added G. It should be noted that this exact collection of six pitches make up the same chord which ends Song 1, “O Mensch! Gib acht!”, though they have been transposed to a lower, more claustrophobic and ominous register. The chord is repeated a second time, as if to seal its finality (mm. 69-71).

The song could easily end here, but the growing fire of the singer’s longing impels him to continue, again *a cappella*. This time he sings very clearly in the key of A $\flat$, as if attempting to conjure into existence a return of the piano’s song of lovers. The text, faintly sexual and striking in its imagery of light and darkness, begins to come faster and faster until it explodes in a flurry of sprechstimme, destroying all sense of pitch. This sudden increase in energy and activity, which reaches its height in measures 80-83, launches the singer and pianist together into the next section, a fast and frenetic explosion of text and music which will last for several minutes. The piano now manifests as Archetype 2, playing a wild and wide-ranging single-note melodic line. The rhythm in the piano is extremely complex, seemingly unhinged from its common-time meter, particularly when compared to the more regular and constant rhythm of the singer. Both proceed at breakneck speed, and what the two parts lack in rhythmic or melodic cohesion they share in gut-level emotional quality—two simultaneous and uncoordinated diatribes, seething in bitterness, jealousy, contempt, self-loathing, and self-righteousness. The voice seems to float around a tonal center on B, but every single measure from 82 to 93 contains at least one complete statement of the pentachord, giving the entire section a sense of ambiguous harmonic stasis despite its vigorous motion. [See Figure 4]

The image shows a musical score for a song. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: "und oft träum - - - te mir da-von, dass Steh - len noch se - li - ger sein mü - sse, als Neh-men." The piano accompaniment features a complex, single-note melodic line. Circles and arrows indicate complete statements of the pentachord.

FIGURE 4: “Das Nachtlied”, p. 31, mm. 84-86.
Circles and arrows indicate complete statements of the pentachord.

The chaos is momentarily abated as voice and piano come suddenly into surprising rhythmic and harmonic union (mm. 94-99). The single-note melodic line of the piano suddenly bursts into rich chords—a variation of the recurring “blossoming figure”—while the voice is overtaken with ecstatic sweeping gestures of blazing desire. [See FIGURE 5]



FIGURE 5: “Das Nachtlied”, p. 31, mm. 93-95.

These paroxysms reach their climax in measure 99, but yield no release. The piano continues on as it had before the arrival of the blossoming chords, a single-note melodic line that is now punctuated by violently stabbing, dissonant chords. Deflated, the singer continues his diatribe, this time “with an ironic and rather caustic tone.” A remarkable moment occurs when the singer delivers the line “and the smallest gap is the most difficult to be bridged.” The piano suddenly breaks into Archetype 4, with alternating chords between the two hands. This is the first time this kind of figure appears in the cycle; its presence here is fleeting, but this archetype will come to play an important role in subsequent songs. Just as this new figure appears in the piano, Dusapin momentarily frees the voice from the bonds of conventional notation, providing a squiggling line instead of notated pitches and rhythms. [See FIGURE 6]



FIGURE 6: “Das Nachtlied”, p. 32, mm. 107-108.

This is also unlike anything else that has proceeded it. Dusapin will return to this kind of graphic notation at a few key moments in Song 14, and again at the end of Song 24.

Dusapin's use of this improvisatory notation is surprising given his typically detailed attention to rhythm and articulation, even in moments which are intended to register to the listener as seemingly free and out-of-time. What is a performer to make of this sudden freedom of interpretation? To my mind it suggests the culmination of what the composer has been building toward ever since the beginning of this fast section, a moment where the singer is overtaken by the power of his emotions, his rage, despair, and contempt. It is a brief but violent flash of extreme vocalism which should be visceral and shocking.

The considerable momentum of the previous measures come to an abrupt halt, as the sixth and final section of the song commences at measure 116. The sustained activity dissipates into something more brooding but still volatile, and there is a return to a tonality built on A $\flat$. The piano has a lengthy interlude in which slowly meandering single-note melodic lines are punctuated with surprising bursts of grace-notes and sharply articulated chords. The singer delivers the final lines with his composure seemingly regained, but the brooding piano suggests a deep emotional undercurrent surging with bitterness, barely contained. After a prolonged coda, the final measures of the song offer a twisted reimagining of the opening of Song 1: The piano part presents the exact same pitch material from the opening, a sustained B which blossoms into the pentachord, this time grotesquely transformed through octave displacement and a jarring rhythmic figure. [See FIGURE 7] The beautiful mystery of Dusapin's opening gesture has been perverted nearly beyond recognition, almost as a signal of the changes of tone in the music to come. For the remainder of the cycle, until we reach the stunning and transformative finale, Dusapin's songs are dominated by frenetic energy and neurosis, languishing in sickly self-pity and loathing, caustic irony, or bitter despair.



FIGURE 7: “Das Nachtlied”, p. 32, mm. 107-108.
Compare this moment to the opening phrase found in FIGURE 1.

SONG 17 — “DAS NÄCHTLICHE GEHEIMNIS”

The text for “Das nächtliche Geheimnis” comes from *Lieder des Prinzen Vogelfrei*, a book of poetry first written by Nietzsche in 1884, then reworked and published in an appendix to the second edition of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* in 1887.¹⁹ Of all of the texts selected by Dusapin, this poem is notable for its strong narrative structure, presented in the first person. The singer relates the events of a sleepless night, in which he finds himself shepherded onto a boat which floats over a great open abyss. The ocean and its profound depths return here as principle image, suggesting the unbounded, unsounded limits of the human psyche. In his setting, Dusapin’s evocation of a timeless, expansive state reaches its pinnacle.

The poem has its mysteries and secrets—there are lines that are not easily interpreted. Nietzsche describes a limitless abyss opening before him, the source of the “nocturnal secret” referenced in the poem’s title. What this secret is, he is not prepared to tell us. We only know that in the poem’s closing lines, as the boat is drifting in the early morning light, the exhausted speaker is finally rewarded with restful sleep. But further questions remain: Who are the hundreds who cry out? And what of the blood? Is the vision in the night actually a foretaste of death’s ultimate rest?

This song has a clear three-part structure. The first section is completely *a cappella*, the most extended moment of unaccompanied singing in the entire cycle. The opening three lines

¹⁹ Martine Prange. “Méditerraniser’: The Flight from North to South. A Reading of Nietzsche’s Poems ‘Prince Vogelfrei’ and ‘In the South,’” Nietzsche Circle, http://www.nietzschecircle.com/AGONIST/2011_03/Prange-Mediterraniser.html.

of the poem are set to a gentle melody in the F-Lydian mode. This is our first encounter with this harmonic structure, which will return memorably in the final song, “Still!”, the last stanza of which unspools beautifully in the F-Lydian mode. This indicates that Dusapin considers “Das nächtliche Geheimnis” connected in some way to the emotional and philosophical destination of the cycle as a whole. The brief moment of clear tonality is fleeting, and as the singer describes his insomniac state in the following lines, Dusapin begins to complicate the harmonic language by inserting pitches which are unrelated to F-Lydian, each drawn from the pentachord. This act of complication progresses over several measures until the original threads of harmonic structure have been lost, as if the singer’s sleepless mind has lost its way. The singer describes his arrival at the beach and a prolonged silence follows. When he begins to sing again, he describes the beauty of the moon-washed shoreline and his encounter with a man and his boat. These dreamy lines are set with an abrupt and unprepared change in key, to a very clear A-minor tonality (m. 14). The voice part will remain in this tonal world for the rest of the song. Dusapin reinforces this new key not so much with the presence of its foundational tonic harmony, but rather with the pitches of its dominant, a chord which overlaps significantly with the pentachord (G#, B, D). This is a notable example demonstrating the flexibility of Dusapin’s primary compositional conceit, one of the many ways he is able to take a portion of his pentachord and use it to build unexpected tonal relationships. The section ends on a half-cadence, as the boat leaves the shore, and at that precise moment the piano enters with a sparkingly dissonant chord, signaling the arrival of the next section and the beginning of the journey over the abyss.²⁰

The second and third sections feature quiet, ringing chords in the piano which pierce the silence at unpredictable moments. Built with three or four pitches, each chord contains at least one pitch selected from the pentachord. Dusapin spaces these chords with wide-open registration, placing the distance of an octave or more between each note, stretching up into the piano’s highest registers. [See FIGURE 8] Dusapin constantly varies the temporal location

²⁰ This effect, where the piano’s entrance corresponds to the final note of an extended *a cappella* section, is also used in Song 5, “Das eherne Schweigen”, another song with nautical references.

of their placement, both within the measure and in relationship to the voice's fragmented statements. The voice's material changes drastically with the arrival of the piano. He sings only fragments of text with long silences hanging between words. Here Dusapin also employs a notational curiosity, diamond-shaped note-heads. [See FIGURE 8]



FIGURE 8: "Das nächtliche Geheimnis", p. 51, mm. 21-23.

This is only the second time we have encountered this notation, after it briefly appears in "Das Nachtlid".²¹ Here the technique is featured prominently, dramatically coinciding with the arrival of the "ew'ges Einerlei" / "endless monotony" and the opening abyss. In an instructional note at the beginning of the score Dusapin explains that the diamond-head notation indicates a sound that is "purely breath". While this kind of vocal production is not problematic in a general sense, the way that Dusapin employs the indication—by pairing it with precisely prescribed pitches—contains an irreconcilable conflict. In practice, a singer has no means of controlling the pitch of a fully breathy, or completely whispered sound. Pitch in this manner of production, to the extent that discernible pitch is possible, is fixed and determined by the formants of the vocal tract. Specific pitches cannot be achieved without the addition of phonation in the vocal folds, which would result in a production that is no longer "purely" breath. Dusapin in fact acknowledges this conflict in his opening note to the score, saying;

I am not unaware that this last annotation is almost utopian. It is however a vocal style quite natural for singers. One can easily find moments in Baroque singing in which the voice is no more than the extinction of itself, like an exhalation. The singing seems to be nothing more than the shadow of the note. I have a great love of Monteverdi, and by listening to this music for a long time I was able to apprehend this type of vocalism,

²¹ "Licht bin ich...", p. 28, mm. 64-72.

which indeed singers know well. But as all singers understand, this style is inseparable from the lyricism and expression that the text implies. From what is said by the music with the text ...²²

The performer is left to discover for himself the appropriate execution of this marking. Considering the importance of pitch relationships during this section, it seems imperative that the actual pitches of Dusapin's chosen notes be heard. This necessitates a production which is in actuality only *partially* breath, but a clear distinction must be made between this diamond-head notation and the more commonly occurring indication, "breathy" circled note-heads.²³ I believe that the interpretive solution here is based in expressive character rather than sonic signature. To my mind, it is the correlating opposite to Dusapin's "squiggling line" graphic notation, an extremity of vocal production motivated by the emotional content of the musical moment. The dramatic arc of this song supports this interpretation, as the notation occurs in the pivotal section where the quiet monotony of the open ocean transitions into the awe and fear of the suddenly expanding abyss. The vocal quality is thus determined by dramatic, not musical content—or, as Dusapin says, it is "inseparable from the lyricism and expression that the text implies." This reveals the limitations of notation, and illustrates the responsibility of the singer to convey the dramatic elements required to elevate the material.

A third and final section begins after the singer's encounter with the great abyss has ended. He has remained silent for some measures as the piano's chords continue their irregular tolling. He enters again in measure 40 with the words "Morgen kam" / "morning came", intoning all of his text on a single pitch, D4, with a handful of unstressed syllables and grace-notes inflected a half-step downwards. This is the recurring motif from the opening of the song cycle, the "tiefe Mitternacht" figure. [See FIGURE 1, FIGURE 9] This motif has been briefly referenced elsewhere, including several moments in "Das Nachtlid", but here it becomes primary material. For the final eighteen measures, the singer stays on this pitch, as if in a state

²² Pascal Dusapin. "Note du compositeur" in *O Mensch!*, translated from French, p. x.

²³ Examples of the circled note-head can be found in FIGURES 9, 14, and 16.



FIGURE 9: “Das nächtliche Geheimnis”, p. 53, mm. 51-54.

of stunned suspension. The effect is striking and otherworldly, and is unmatched by any other moment in the cycle.

In using the motif in this way, at this moment, Dusapin is connecting the secret revelation of “Das nächtliche Geheimnis” with Zarathustra’s command from the opening of the cycle for mankind to listen for the wisdom spoken by the deep midnight. The nocturnal secret is thus the singer’s first encounter with this wisdom. However, tellingly, the moment of revelation and transformation here in the boat is not yet complete. The final moments of the song have the singer drifting into a peaceful sleep, in direct opposition to Zarathustra’s exhortations to wakefulness. His transformation is only momentary, further confirmed by the extreme misery on display in the subsequent Song 18, “Lied des Ziegenhirten”. The singer’s emotional journey is still incomplete, and will not be fulfilled until the cycle’s finale.

SONGS 23, 24, AND 25—THE SEQUENCE OF APHORISMS

The next focus of my analysis is a sequence of three songs, “Wer hier nicht lachen kann...”, “Seine Gesellschaft zu finden wissen” and “Aus der Tonne des Diogenes.” These short songs make up the penultimate moment in the cycle, and I find it useful to consider them as a single, cohesive group. They are built from the same musical material, which Dusapin develops progressively by preceding from one song to the next without a break. The texts of each song, while not directly related in poetic character, share a common rhetorical style. They are aphorisms; short, proverb-like statements of pithy wisdom and observation. Lampert

describes Nietzsche's prodigious use of the aphorism as "a frugal art that does its reader the favor of allowing him or her to experience the exhilaration of discovery."²⁴ The three aphorisms selected by Dusapin are excellent examples of this frugal art form.

The sequence begins with a truly jarring and memorable moment—a sudden and abrupt change in tone, harmonic language, and style. The entrance of the piano at the beginning of Song 23, with its steadily plodding rhythm and its banal C-minor harmony is unlike anything heard previously in the cycle. It is as if Dusapin is suddenly embodying some other composer—as if he has spun the dial and landed in some dark corner of the early 20th century. [See FIGURE 10] The marking at the top of the song reads "precise but ironic...", and Dusapin's music drips with irony in its sheer out-of-placeness.



FIGURE 10: "Wer hier nicht lachen kann..", p. 74, mm. 1-4.

In a piece where virtually every harmonic reference can in some way be traced back to structures derived from the opening pentachord, where could this strange music possibly come from? There are of course two pitches from the pentachord present here at the outset (the devilish tritone, D and enharmonic G#), and we are clearly functioning in the mode of Archetype 4, an increasingly important figure in the second half of the cycle. But this sound world is entirely new in its morbid blatancy, somehow both shockingly unexpected and obnoxiously cliché. The entrance of the voice, displaced from the beat by an eighth note, causes a brief shudder in the rhythm's predictability, but the music gets quickly back on track.

²⁴ Laurence Lampert, "Thus spoke Zarathustra," in *A Companion to Friedrich Nietzsche*, p. 204.

The singer intones in fragmented bursts “those here who cannot laugh should not be reading this.” If this is Dusapin’s attempt at humor, it is a very dark humor indeed.

As the song progresses, Dusapin begins to complicate the plodding rhythm in small and large ways. This process begins with the singer’s lurching entrance and continues in the piano, with increasing numbers of accents on awkward fractions of beats, inscrutable subdivisions, and grace notes which destabilize the arrival of downbeats. But every time the music threatens to break apart, its lumbering rhythm and seesawing harmony manage to right themselves. The singer is content to state the text simply and with minimal variance of pitch, although it should be noted that in measure 10 he unexpectedly extends the word “ihn”, holding it out across the bar-line. This is the one moment in the entire song cycle when the composer extends a note for any significant duration. The effect further heightens the strange otherness and discongruous style of the song.

Song 23 dies away with little fuss, and after an expectant silence, “Seine Gesellschaft zu finden wissen” begins. The oscillating C-minor harmony continues as if uninterrupted, a continuous thread of thought pulled through from the previous song. However, the tempo is quicker and there is no trace of the former drab rhythm—instead Dusapin employs increasingly complex rhythmic structures that seem to strain against their metric framework. [See FIGURE 11A]

The singer delivers the aphoristic text in much the same disjointed style as before although a bit more aggressively, with a pair of plunging melismas and sudden changes in dynamics. [See FIGURE 11B] The pitch material of the vocal melody is nearly identical to that of the previous song, and despite the piano’s increasingly volatile and erratic behavior, this creates a sense of continuation, familiarity, and déjà vu.

The song suddenly wrenches to a halt, and almost immediately “Aus der Tonne des Diogones” explodes out of the resulting gap of silence, faster and even more aggressive. The material here is related; piano Archetype 4 still dominates, and the right hand shares similar pitch material and register with the previous two songs. However, the tonal center anchored in



FIGURE 11A: "Seine Gesellschaft zu finden wissen", p. 75, mm. 17-18.

FIGURE 11B: "Seine Gesellschaft zu finden wissen", p. 76, mm. 26-29.

the left hand has suddenly shifted downwards from C to B, and when the singer enters it is in a booming sprechstimme. [See FIGURE 12] The piano's harmony is muddled with an abundant use of Dyads 1, 2 and 4. The voice seems to attempt to make up for what the piano lacks in harmonic clarity, singing a clear descending scale in B-minor with a tauntingly flattened fifth scale degree. The shortest of the three songs, it ends suddenly with a strong cadence in the tonic and one final improvisatory "squiggling line" gesture on the word "Steiß".

FIGURE 12: "Aus der Tonne des Diogenes", p. 77, mm. 31-32.

The cumulative effect of these three songs slices through the cycle like a blade. By establishing a completely new sound-world beginning with Song 23, and then quickly complicating and ultimately destroying it over the next two songs (a process which takes less than two minutes total), Dusapin clears the stage of expectations about what might come next. Musical material which begins steady and predictable becomes increasingly turbulent, while each song grows shorter in length and faster in tempo. Piano Archetype 4, in its functional familiarity, is gradually obfuscated beyond the point of intelligibility. The voice also undergoes a similar process, its restrained phrasing and long-tones giving way to short, choppy fragments, sprechstimme, and finally a sweeping guttural shout. The performers should also craft a matching emotional and dramatic trajectory, beginning the sequence in cool irony and steadily growing increasingly deranged, unpredictable, spitting and biting through the final bars. The aphorisms used here, brief in their wit, barbed in their wisdom, and concerned with the realms of worldly experience, are the perfect white-hot flashes of humanly brilliance to sear a hole in the cycle's presumptive trajectory. The evocation of the Greek philosopher Diogenes in the third song is an appropriate point of reference for informing this interpretation. A controversial figure, Diogenes wrapped his Cynical ideas in layers of contempt for societal niceties, illustrating his considerable disdain with public behavior that was unpredictable, erratic, and often obscene.

All of these elements (musical, poetic, structural, temporal, vocal, dramatic) build to a sort of cadential figure within the larger architecture of the cycle as a whole—a sudden ramping up of momentum following an abrupt, ninety-degree change in direction. This action expands the possibilities of Dusapin's soundworld, shaking the certainty of any listener who might feel that, sixty minutes in, they have figured the piece out.

SONGS 26 AND 27 — “RUHM UND EWIGKEIT” AND “STILL!”

The finale of *O Mensch!* is comprised of two conjoined songs, Song 26, “Ruhm und Ewigkeit” and Song 27, “Still!”. Like the preceding sequence of aphorisms, these songs are

constructed around the same motivic material, and the music proceeds from one to the next without interruption, leaving the listener with no clear line of demarcation. The text for both songs is taken from a single larger poem titled “Ruhm und Ewigkeit”, which comes from the collection *Dionysian-Dithyrambs*, written by Nietzsche in 1888 and first published as an appendix to the 1891 edition of *Also sprach Zarathustra*.²⁵

In the short stanza that comprises Song 26 the singer, like Diogenes before him, rejects the allure of worldly glory (“Ruhm”). The musical atmosphere here is appropriately ominous and oppressive. After a brief reference to material drawn from the fourth interlude, Dusapin employs a steadily repeating tone in the left hand of the piano which is startling in its metric regularity. [See FIGURE 13] These repeating quarter notes, placed on the highly resonant string of the piano’s lowest F, will continue through to the final bar of the cycle, remaining fixed in tempo and essentially invariable. Occasionally Dusapin stacks a darkly hued diminished chord on top of this repeating drone, but he eschews any harmonic development. The rhythmic steadiness of the pedal tone, and the lack of harmonic progression, bring a sense of heavy stillness to the music. It is an intriguing effect, especially considering that this atemporality is accomplished through a steady metric pulse, whereas previously in the cycle Dusapin has frequently invoked a similar effect by completely obscuring all sense of meter. The simple rhythm and harmony are



FIGURE 13: “Ruhm und Ewigkeit”, p. 78, mm. 7-9.
The voice floats somewhat freely over the steady bass line, employing diamond-head notation.

²⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche. *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*. KSA. Vol. 6: *Der Fall Wagner. Götzen-Dämmerung. Der Antichrist. Ecce homo. Dionysos-Dithyramben. Nietzsche contra Wagner*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. 10th edition. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 2011, pp. 377–410.

starkly minimalistic, especially when compared to the rhythmic and harmonic complexity of the preceding hour of music, and the result is an unexpected sense of heightened tension and anticipation. This is minimalism employed for maximum dramatic effect.

With the arrival of Song 27, “Still!”, the piano’s harmonic material gradually disappears, and all that is left is the singer’s diaphanous melody floating above the steadily throbbing bass notes. In the first stanza, as the last of the diminished chords fade away, the singer’s melody is predominantly built around pitches taken from the pentachord. The text echoes the opening statement of the cycle (“O Mensch! Gib acht!”), and the singer implores the listener to remain silent, in order to discover “Grosses” / “greatness”. After a 20-second interlude in which the repeated bass notes make a massive crescendo to *fortissimo* and then return to their quiet tolling, the singer intones the following text in shimmering falsetto;

Ich sehe hinauf —	I see above me —
dort rollen Lichtmeere:	there are rolling oceans of light:
— oh Nacht, oh Schweigen,	— oh night, oh silence,
oh todtenstiller Lärm! ...	oh deathly-quiet noise! ...
Ich sehe ein Zeichen —,	I see a sign —,
aus fernsten Fernen	out of the distant distance
sinkt langsam funkelnd ein Sternbild gegen	sinking slowly towards me a sparkling
mich ...	constellation...

These stunning lines represent the culmination of the emotional trajectory of the cycle, an expansive vision of celestial epiphany. Nietzsche’s words draw together his frequently used images of nighttime, ocean, and glimmering lights to craft a metaphor for philosophical enlightenment. This is the culmination of the cycle’s opening requisition—the answer to the question “Was spricht die tiefe Mitternacht?” / “What is the deep midnight saying?”.

Dusapin sets these lines with a melody in the Lydian mode, built on a tonal center anchored by the repeating F in the piano. [See FIGURE 14] The use of this particular pitch material draws a strong line of connection back to the opening of Song 17, “Das nächtliche Geheimnis”, which features an *a cappella* section which begins in F-Lydian. The seven pitches of this modal scale have two notes in common with Dusapin’s pentachord, B and D. These are the two tones which open the cycle, and which call from the silence with the words “O

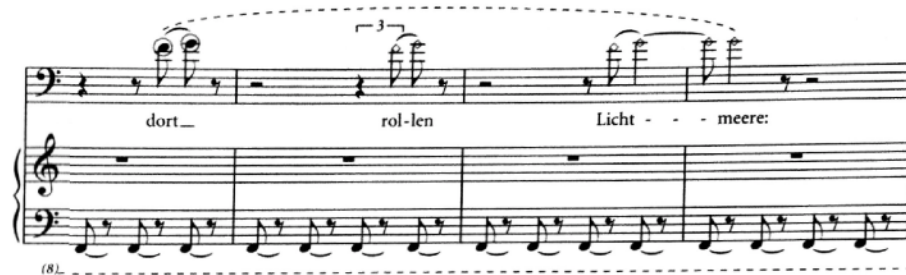


FIGURE 14: “Still!”, p. 81, mm. 46-49.

Note the use of circled and diamond-head notation. The phrase begins with a “partial breath” execution, and then transitions to “purely breath”. The distinction between the two is left to the performer to ascertain.

Mensch! Gib acht!“. In this way, Dusapin is using his harmonic and melodic choices to bring a sense of circular closure to the piece as a whole.

While *O Mensch!* lacks an overarching narrative in the traditional sense, Dusapin has assembled Nietzsche’s text in a way that suggests an emotional trajectory which is then reinforced by musical and harmonic choices. The cycle begins with a command from Zarathustra who implores the listener to wakefulness and meditation, and the singer responds with a sustained period of existential quandary. At the midpoint of the cycle, Zarathustra’s impatience and despair derail this introspective mood, and the ensuing music is characterized by restless bitterness. In a moment of insomniac weakness the singer encounters a “nocturnal secret” which hints at the possibility of the transformations to come. Transfixed, he sings in faltering repeated tones, but the revelation is ultimately incomplete and he falls asleep. Finally, at the penultimate moment, the searing wit and wisdom of Nietzsche’s aphorisms serve to clear the oppressive atmosphere, and Dusapin fills the resulting empty space with a new idea—the steadily repeating tone in the piano which ultimately brings about the final transformative experience promised in the cycle’s opening measures.

As the final breathless lines of text come to an end, Dusapin transitions into a simple postlude and offers one last surprise. As the pianist continues to play the repeated low F, its steady rhythm slowly breaking down as it grows continually softer, Dusapin instructs the singer to move to the piano, where the singer sits and plays a simple melody in the upper register. It is a lilting, circular tune in the F-Lydian mode, and its gentle simplicity imbues the song’s final

moments with a sense of warmth. This melody is a lullaby, one of tremendous personal significance to the composer. Dusapin first improvised and transcribed this lullaby when holding his newborn son, who was born a few months before the completion of the score. By placing it here, the composer is suggesting a return to a childlike state for the singer, a desire to escape the oppressive melancholy and despair which have dominated much of the cycle, and to return to a place of peace.²⁶

²⁶ Pascal Dusapin. Correspondence with the author. April 25, 2020.

4. Interpretation

O Mensch! was premiered in November 2011 at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in Paris, in a theatrical realization staged by the composer himself. The origin of this performance can be traced back to a request from the singer Georg Nigl for a short cycle of songs by Dusapin to present in recital. However, Dusapin explains that after composing the first few songs, it became clear that the material deserved a treatment that was larger in scale. He says, “I quickly realized that I could not stop there, that it was necessary to invest quite a bit more time into this project, basically, I needed to build this like a theater.”²⁷ Thus from its early compositional phases the work was conceived as a hybrid of traditional art song and modernist theater, and it was ultimately premiered as a fully-staged chamber opera in a traditional theatrical setting.

In contrast, my performance of *O Mensch!* was conceived for a different kind of space—a recital hall. I made this choice early on, as I was keenly interested in crafting a performance that blended the traditions of recital, theater, and opera by subverting the expectations of the audience and transforming the recital hall into an evolving theatrical space through the use of lighting, projections, and staging. In my mind, this blending was a fitting approach to *O Mensch!* in that it mirrors the piece’s hybrid genesis as both song cycle and work of theater.

What follows is a description and explanation of some of the artistic choices I made during my performance of *O Mensch!* in its American premiere on January 11, 2019. This discussion will be primarily concerned with visual and dramatic elements which were inspired by the music and text, and rooted deeply in the analytical and translative work that precedes this chapter. This performance was conceived and staged for the Conrad Prebys Concert Hall in the UC San Diego Department of Music, with Kyle Adam Blair as the pianist, technical support from Jessica C. Flores and David Espiritu, and stage management by Jonathan Moore.²⁸

²⁷ Pascal Dusapin. Correspondence with the author. October 3, 2017.

²⁸ Several significant visual components of this staging were first developed in a prior performance, a recital in the same venue on October 2, 2015, in which selections from the work were performed alongside early experimentations with lighting and projections.

LIGHTING AND PROJECTIONS

The visual language of my performance was inspired by a unifying principal image; that of a single point of light illuminating the corner of a darkened expanse. This image was inspired by the opening musical phrase, where singer and pianist enter the silence as a single composite voice, and was reinforced by frequent textual references to light throughout the work:

from No. 13, "Das Nachtlid"

Licht bin ich: ach, dass ich Nacht wäre!
Aber diess ist meine Einsamkeit, dass ich von
Licht umgürtet bin.

I am light: oh, that I were the night!
But this is my solitude, that I am
encircled by light.

from No. 27, "Still!"

Ich sehe hinauf —
dort rollen Lichtmeere:
— oh Nacht, oh Schweigen,
oh todtenstillen Lärm! ...
Ich sehe ein Zeichen —,
aus fernsten Fernen
sinkt langsam funkelnd ein Sternbild gegen
mich ...

I see above me —
there are rolling oceans of light:
— oh night, oh silence,
oh deathly-quiet noise! ...
I see a sign —,
out of the distant distance
sinking slowly toward me a sparkling
constellation...

In order to radically shift the environment of the recital hall, several new lighting instruments were brought into the space to supplement and sometimes completely replace the existing lighting setup. Primary among these was a small hanging lamp with a woven bamboo lampshade which was suspended from the ceiling just right of center stage. Additional instruments included several Parabolic Aluminized Reflectors (PARs) hidden in the space to produce unexpected and highly directional beams of light, a series of rope lights laced underneath the first two rows of seating in the house to create a glowing effect beneath the seats, and spotlights hung from the ceiling to create moments of strong spatial emphasis. An additional special lighting effect was developed by pointing a PAR downward into a pan of water which contained submerged pieces of broken mirror. This produced a rippling water effect reflected on the ceiling of the hall.

Of these elements, the most important to the overall concept of the design was the hanging lamp. The color of the lampshade was chosen to match the wooden surfaces of the recital hall, and when it glowed it produced a spectrum of light that added warmth to the entire space. Each lighting cue involving the lamp was designed to make it appear as if all light in the room was emanating from the lamp itself, even when additional overhead instruments were in use. The level of brightness of the lamp was variable, and its level of intensity was often cued to underscore important words, emotions, or dramatic moments in the music. By establishing a reciprocal link between the lamp's intensity and the emotions of the singer, and by crafting an illusion in which the lamp was the source of all light in the room, the result was a highly variable environment in which the lighting was constantly changing in synchronization with the dramatic trajectory of the performance—at times bringing the space to near darkness, and occasionally producing a blinding flash in moments of emotional extremity. When cued to its highest levels the lamp also produced a dappled effect on all the surrounding surfaces in the hall, not unlike a disco ball. By gently rotating the lamp, this effect was used to create the “rolling oceans of light” in the work's ecstatic climax.

Equally important to the overall visual design were the high-definition projections which worked in counterpoint to the ever-changing lighting. My English translations of Nietzsche's text were projected into the space, to guide and enhance the audience's understanding of both the poetry and music. Unlike traditional operatic supertitles, which generally display only one line at a time and remain in a fixed position above the stage, these projections populated the entirety of the rear wall and would display multiple lines, sometimes allowing the text to accumulate until the entire poem was visible. This process gives the audience more time to investigate the text, to go back and revisit previous lines, and to develop a deeper connection with the words—a process that is similar to the way one would interact with poetry on the page, without music. The text was projected directly onto the wooden surfaces of the recital hall as a way of integrating it into the theatrical world without the mediation of a screen. While the font and color of the text stayed essentially the same throughout, the placement and

arrangement of the text within the space was constantly shifting in order to establish a unique visual language for various sections of the work. The timing of the projections—when they appeared, and the rate at which they faded in and out—was painstaking coordinated to the character and temporal qualities of the music.

Generally, the function of the projections was to effectively convey the English text, while adding a shifting aesthetic layer to the visual environment of the performance. Projected images were not employed, with but one exception. During the gentle postlude in which the singer joins the pianist in playing the final lullaby, the projector displayed an expansive view of the universe taken by the Hubble telescope along the entirety of the rear wall. This image slowly faded in over the course of the music's final minutes, as every other light in the hall gradually dimmed to black. This dramatic visual moment recreates the singer's final words, where he describes seeing a "sparkling constellation" descending upon him. As the last notes of the piano died away to silence, the audience and performers alike were cloaked in darkness and glittering starlight, as the projected image very slowly, almost imperceptibly, rotated along the surface of the upstage wall.

CHARACTERIZATION AND STAGING

Before I describe and explain some of the choices made in the staging of my performance, I want to briefly explore the idea of characterization in *O Mensch!* and the way that it informs concepts of persona and continuity in relationship to the identity of the performers within the work's theatrical world. Many of the cycle's poems are written in the voice of specific characters (e.g. Zarathustra in "Das Nachtlied", or the lonely herdsman in "Lied des Ziegenhirten"), while others are clearly written from Nietzsche's own personal perspective. How then is the performer to reconcile these varying identities as *O Mensch!* proceeds from one song to the next? Does the singer's persona change with each new song, true to Nietzsche's original context? Or has Dusapin, through the act of compilation, repurposed these texts to fit his compositional vision, in the process crafting a new unified

persona that persists throughout? Might that persona ultimately be an embodiment of Nietzsche himself?

The composer has been deliberate in the assembly and ordering of his songs. In the absence of any concerted narrative, he seems to suggest instead a certain continuative emotional arc. The first half of the cycle, dominated by philosophical musings and expanded states of existential quandary, gradually gives way to reactive emotional outpourings, biting personal observations, and ultimately a moment of celestial epiphany. In this way, the structure is circular—the lofty promises of the first song are realized in the transformations of the finale. However, this emotional journey is far from linear, and the abrupt musical and dramatic changes that occur at the boundaries between songs gives the work a highly episodic and fluctuant emotional trajectory. When asked about this emotional journey and the persona of the singer, Dusapin said,

The only thing I can say is that I did not try to make a portrait of Nietzsche (what a presumption...) but that in the end, these texts might say a little bit about me ... It was indisputable for me that the singer had to go through various emotional and passionate states. I had already heard and seen Georg [Nigl] in two of my operas... and I knew that he was able to change states incredibly fast. For example, from sweet to extreme violence, or from laughter to torrential tears and then return to rage. I had not forgotten this whilst composing *O Mensch!*, for this reason, no doubt, this cycle is so contrasted in these various emotions, to the most extreme melancholy.²⁹

Thus Dusapin presents us with a collection of songs which are tangentially related in character and mercurial in their emotional states, while still maintaining discreet boundaries of musical and poetic identity. Experienced in isolation, each song (or grouping of conjoined songs) has its own distinct perspective, while the cumulative experience offers a detailed exploration of a growing composite identity and emotional journey. In this way, *O Mensch!* is comparable to the song cycle *Winterreise*, and the latter can be a useful tool for understanding the former. Franz Schubert composed *Winterreise* in 1827, when the concept of a song cycle was still nascent. He chose poems from a collection by Wilhelm Müller, and they tell a

²⁹ Pascal Dusapin. Correspondence with the author. October 3, 2017.

deconstructed story of a young man seeking to outrun his miseries in the icy wilderness. In Ian Bostridge's book *Schubert's Winter Journey*, a rambling exploration of the song cycle, he describes Müller and Schubert's presentation of this despondent journeying man as an experience of "fractured reality".³⁰ The individual moments of the cycle, the songs in isolation, combine to create a detailed portrait of a disconsolate man in the bleakest of environments. However, the songs themselves are intentionally non-linear, the circumstances of the man's story are purposefully vague, and the emotional states are fleeting. Bostridge points out that this deconstructionist, fragmentary approach so favored by modernist writers like Samuel Beckett, David Mamet, and David Barnes, has origins in many 19th-century literary and musical works, of which *Winterreise* is a prime example.³¹ Elements of this fractured construction can be found in the poetry collections of Byron and Müller, and of course in Nietzsche. *Also sprach Zarathustra* certainly exhibits this kind of fragmentation. As Graham Parkes says in his introduction to the novel, *Zarathustra* invites the reader to pursue "a train of thought through fields of imagery, and participate in a play of imagination that engages the whole psyche rather than the intellect alone."³² This description can easily apply to *Winterreise*, and also to *O Mensch!* as both a musical and theatrical experience.

With this in mind we return to the question of the singer's persona. As the cycle progresses from one song to the next, the singer must experience and embody each emotional state in turn, finding and building connections between songs where they exist, and embracing the moments of disjoint and fracture as they inevitably arise. While the narrative is fractured, the "character" of the singer is singular throughout—he is a person of full humanity, blazing brilliance, and emotional volatility, not unlike Nietzsche himself. The audience follows this character through an unreasoned and fragmented exploration of his psyche, or "a train of

³⁰ Ian Bostridge. *Schubert's Winter Journey: anatomy of an obsession*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015, p. 25.

³¹ Ibid, p. 25.

³² Graham Parkes. "Introduction," in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and Nobody*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005, p. xvii.

thought through fields of imagery”, within a theatrical world unconfined by the rules of linear narrative but possessing an emotional logic of its own.

My approach in mounting a performance of *O Mensch!* was to design an immersive and malleable environment for the characters to inhabit, and then to place the characters within the space in unusual and unexpected ways in order to heighten the sense of “fractured reality”. The performers were given the freedom to subvert and break from traditional hierarchies and normative behaviors of the recital hall. The opening image of the piece, which accompanied the inceptive musical phrase of the first song, immediately established this hierarchical break. The piano was placed in the rear corner of the stage, angled so that the audience could see the pianist’s face, and the singer stood behind, looking out over the pianist’s shoulder, his features obscured in shadow. As the piece progressed, the singer was then free to move about the entirety of the stage, to turn his back on the audience, to sit on the floor, and eventually to leave the stage, opening up the playing space to include the central aisles of the house and its first few rows of seating. A second upright piano was also placed in the very center of the auditorium, which allowed the pianist to move to a new location, in the process creating a stark and unexpected sonic shift.

In keeping with the emotional trajectory of the work, it was my goal to establish clearly defined relationships between the singer and pianist, and to allow the pianist to become a distinct character within the emotional narrative. I imagine these characters as two parts of a composite whole—the persona of the singer split into his conscious and subconscious mind—an idea reinforced by the unison entrance of the work’s opening phrase. [See FIGURE 1] Typically, as at the opening, these two performers work together to express a single train of thought, two aspects of the same persona. But as the work transitions from profound existential quandary into acrimonious rage and despair, I wanted to find ways to allow for the singer and pianist to come into conflict and confrontation with one another.

This concept—singer and pianist as adversaries—was first inspired by the Third Interlude, which is the shortest of the piano’s four solo movements, and also the most

thematically and musically uniform. An ostinato creates a harmonically ambiguous cloud of sound which seems to go nowhere, while a wandering melody hangs suspended above. Musically this enigmatic interlude is an effective and absolutely necessary sonic palate cleanser, a bridge between the despondent vulnerability that permeates the ending of the previous Song 15, “Desperat”, and the exposed singing which opens Song 17, “Das nächtliche Geheimnis”. At the top of the interlude, the composer places a cryptic instruction: it reads, “He waits for it to pass but gets impatient...” [See FIGURE 15] It is not entirely clear if this is a direction for the pianist or for the singer, but if we assume the latter, this suggests that while the movement is a solo for the piano, the singer is still very much a part of the action. How are we to interpret this in performance? It implies that the music is diegetic and that the singer is aware of the physical presence of pianist. This has significant ramifications on the approach to staging in the rest of the song cycle.³³



FIGURE 15: Third Interlude, p. 48, mm. 1-2.

In response to these considerations, I chose to have the arrival of this interlude, which comes nearly forty-five minutes into the performance, function as a major point of departure for the staging, creating a rupture in audience expectation and opening up new possibilities within the theatrical world. The pianist abruptly stood and walked off the stage, down the side aisles of the house, and took up a new position at the upright piano placed amongst the seats. He played the interlude from this position, leaving the singer alone onstage to observe and ponder this new situation in confusion and growing impatience. For the following song, “Das

³³ As an example, in my staging the pianist and singer maintained a constant awareness of each other's presence. Throughout the performance they made frequent eye contact, and when one was performing solo material, the other would turn to watch. This is a departure from most traditional operatic contexts, in which the characters are generally not aware of the music and its source.

nächtliche Geheimnis”, the singer took a seat at the abandoned onstage piano, at first singing *a capella* but eventually accompanying himself in gentle quavering tones. This moment freed the pianist to take up a position by the pan of water with the broken mirror, in order to make the gentle ripples on the surface which were then reflected onto the ceiling. The resulting tableaux, with the singer alone at the piano underneath a literal “rolling ocean of light”, made an excellent visual counterpoint to the poetry and foreshadowed the transformative finale.

The rift between singer and pianist which began dramatically with the Third Interlude continued until the revelations of the finale. For five consecutive songs, the singer and pianist were not permitted to occupy the same space. When one performer was on stage, the other was placed in the house, and they often faced each other adversarially with direct eye contact. Even when they both returned to the stage for the final “Erhgeiz” refrain and the sequence of caustic aphorisms, the lighting suggested their continued schism by confining each performer within the boundaries of distinct pools of light. Their disunion was finally mended by the arrival of the throbbing repeated low note of the final song “Still!”, whose text mirrors Song 1, “O Mensch! Gib acht!” in its call for deeper listening and understanding. This triggered a return to the opening tableaux, with the singer behind the pianist’s shoulder, the two reunified into a single musical and dramatic entity.

5. Conclusion

The preceding pages offer a summary of the results of my investigation into Pascal Dusapin's *O Mensch!* as well as a description of the major visual and dramatic elements of my first performance. Musical analysis and translative work were crucial steps in my preparation for the performance, as they deepened my understanding of the infrastructure of the song cycle and brought awareness to musical and poetic details that I might have otherwise overlooked. My understanding of the work continued to expand during the intensive processes of rehearsal and staging, as well as in the act of performance itself. My relationship to *O Mensch!* continues to grow and develop to this day, and I suspect that I will spend the rest of my life exploring the score, making new discoveries and deepening my characterization and interpretation.

This song cycle is now a large presence in my artistic life, and I find myself continually drawn to its score. I am attracted to the cycle's direct lyricism, its meditative qualities, as well as its sudden fits of operatic volatility. I am also deeply fascinated by its blending of traditions —its hybrid status as a cycle of lieder and work of theater— and by Nietzsche's challenging and provocative texts. As an interpreter of new music, I am excited by the rich detail in Dusapin's notation, which simultaneously pushes the performer to the limits of their virtuosity, while also leaving space open for the crafting of an interpretation that is unique to the individual's perspective. A personal favorite example of this can be found in Song 8, "Heiterkeit", where the singer is instructed to crescendo from *piano* to *forte* at the top of his range, while employing a partially breathy tone, within the duration of a single eighth note. [See FIGURE 16]



FIGURE 16: "Heiterkeit", p. 18, mm. 7-10. The circled note-head indicates the use of a partially breathy tone. This example also exhibits an excellent manifestation of the piano's "blossoming" figure.

This rapid, breathy crescendo is nearly impossible to execute technically, and in my opinion any attempt to realize the notation faithfully would achieve a sonic result that would be antithetical to the gentle, awestruck tone that pervades the song. However, much like the “squiggling line” and diamond-shaped note-heads, this extreme notation seems to me to implore the singer to employ the imagination in order to craft an expressive realization that is based in emotional, rather than sonic, impetus. Additionally, this example exhibits Dusapin’s characteristic duality of notational precision and subjectivity of interpretation. As is often the composer’s approach, the rhythmic execution of the first two multi-syllabic words is left to the discretion of the singer. Dusapin also places perforated ties across the rests, imploring the singer to build a connection of thought through the silences, unifying an otherwise disjointed phrase. To my mind, an execution of these ties is based in the dramatic intention of the singer’s approach to the text, rather than any particular musical affect. It is left to the singer to take the instructions of the score, with its considerable technical challenges, and employ the imagination to fill in the gaps left behind by the limits of notation, in order to execute a satisfying interpretation.

Dusapin has a history of composing music for specific performers and collaborating with the same performers across multiple projects. This is the case with *O Mensch!*, written for Georg Nigl and Vanessa Wagner, who are both frequent interpreters of Dusapin’s music. Dusapin has said that the extreme detail in his scores is a response to his performers, and to the great care and attention they give to executing those details. When speaking about his role in the rehearsal process, he says “I like to spend time on some bars, and afterwards I like to let go. I say, ‘Okay, now it’s over to you, do it as you wish.’ And they do just that, I hope, all the while respecting the text. That’s what I hope, anyway...”³⁴ Dusapin expects the performer to bring their own personal perspective into the work, to implement their own creative process within the boundaries of the score. The success or failure of this exercise is largely dependent

³⁴ Pascal Dusapin, interviewed by Patricia Alia, “Pascal Dusapin à propos de “Wolken” et “By the Way” avec Accroche Note”, presented by Durand-Salabert-Eschig, tr. Georgi McCarthy, August 28, 2014, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJhYeZYbnYw>.

on the strength of the performer's interpretation, as well as the interpretation's respect of the score, both in terms of its notational content and its underlying meaning.

Philosopher Jerold Levinson asserts that when the word "interpretation" is applied to music, it can describe one of two distinct activities. Levinson identifies *critical* interpretation as being linguistic in nature, the process of articulating "an account of a work's import and functioning".³⁵ Alternatively, *performative* interpretation deals with the execution and presentation of musical material, and it is generally shaped by the aesthetic values of the performer.³⁶ Critical interpretation thus deals with the analytical process, and the subsequent articulation of the results of an analysis, whereas performative interpretation is concerned with the realization of a musical score in time and space. Levinson concludes that the two activities are unrelated, and the fact that they are both labeled "interpretation" is essentially a linguistic curiosity.³⁷

It should come as no surprise that I disagree with this last point. While it is possible for performative interpretation to exist without the presence of critical interpretation, it is also possible for a performer's realization to be informed—even founded—in a critical perspective. In his refutation of Levinson's stark delineation, Paul Thom notes that it is the role of the performer to create an embodied representation of the musical object, in the process selecting certain features to emphasize and others to ignore or distort, in order to state or reveal the meaning of the object.³⁸ In my performance of *O Mensch!*, the choices that I made—what I selected to emphasize and to ignore—were based on critical investigation into the music and its text. While I would never expect the listener to immediately grasp all of the information compiled in my musical analysis, my analytical insights served to deepen my sense of the

³⁵ Jerrold Levinson. "Performative vs. critical interpretation in music", in *The Interpretation of Music*, ed. Michael Krausz, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, p. 34.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 36.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 33

³⁸ Paul Thom. "Toward a Broad Understanding of Musical Interpretation", *Revue internationale de philosophie*, vol. 238, no. 4, 2006, pp. 439 and 445.

work's structure, trajectory, values, and ultimately its meaning—in the processes shaping my realization.

To illustrate the reciprocal relationship between the critical and the performative, I offer one example: After discovering that most of the harmonic material in *O Mensch!* was derived from the opening phrase of the first song, I gained valuable critical insight into what gives the work its continuity and pervading sense of harmonic stasis. In performance, I would not expect the listener to be consciously aware of Dusapin's compositional architecture (i.e. the near-omnipresence of dyads derived from the opening pentachord). However, from a theatrical perspective, my performative interpretation of the score was designed (a) to underscore the importance of the opening phrase with a striking visual tableaux, (b) to use that tableaux as a basis for deriving a visual language for the rest of the work, in much the same way that the cycle's harmony is derived from the opening phrase, and (c) to present staging that emphasized and embraced moments of stasis while also making instances of departure from that stasis more readily apparent. In this way, my realization was rooted in my analysis, and my performative interpretation was informed by my critical interpretation.

Levinson and Thom both remark on the inherent “plurality” of interpretation.³⁹ One interpretation, whether critical or performative, need not supersede another. A performer's representation of a musical object will uniquely reflect their own aesthetic and critical choices, and may differ, in both small and significant ways, from the representation made by another performer. The musical object itself is the creation of the composer, but the performer necessarily re-creates it, and in the process takes a certain amount of ownership. I believe that my interpretation of *O Mensch!* was strengthened by the extensive analytical and translative work I completed in advance of the first performance, and that my future performances will continue to evolve alongside my critical perspective. I also believe that this kind of critical

³⁹ Jerrold Levinson, “Hypothetical intentionalism: statement, objections, and replies”, in *Is there a single right interpretation?*, ed. Michael Krausz, University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006, p. 310. Paul Thom, pp. 450-451.

interpretation can serve as a model for the preparation of future large-scale performances of works of a similar musical and dramatic nature.

From a theatrical perspective, an analytical approach of this kind offers a supplement, or perhaps even an alternative, to traditional dramaturgy, with its emphasis on a work's context (historical, material, social, political), as well as its dramatic structure, development of character, and thematic content. A dramaturgical approach based in musical analysis may be particularly useful for theatrical presentations of works like *O Mensch!* which lack traditional narratives, because I have shown how critical interpretation can offer a framework for the structuring of visual and dramatic elements. An analytical approach may be particularly effective when applied to the staging of song cycles from both traditional and contemporary repertoire. Although these works are generally intended for performance in non-theatrical contexts, they can be repurposed to make compelling theater. *Winterreise* is a work that is frequently staged today, but what possibilities might lie in applying its sense of “fractured reality” to a staged performance of Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* or Schoenberg's *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*? One could imagine a performance of Messiaen's *Harawi* in which the staging is built around the concept of musical recurrence, or of Schumann's *Dichterliebe* in which the pianist takes on the role of embodying the singer's lost lover. In contemporary practice, there is exciting potential in the commissioning and performance of new vocal works which exist at the intersection of chamber music and theater—works which, like *O Mensch!*, blend past and contemporary traditions to offer exciting new theatrical and musical experiences, engage in profound explorations of text, and challenge the listener to reevaluate and reframe the contexts in which we encounter classical music.

Georg Nigl speaks of the “naked, bare” quality of contemporary music as one of the reasons he enjoys collaborating with composers on new pieces.⁴⁰ It is true that a work like *O Mensch!* comes to the performer unfettered by centuries of performance practice, and this can

⁴⁰ Volker Hagedorn, “The Abyss: an interview with George Nigl,” *VAN Magazine*, tr. Anna Glazova. <https://van-us.atavist.com/the-abyss>.

make interpreting the work a liberating and empowering experience. However, the process of re-creation through thoughtful interpretation can and should apply to any performance the singer undertakes with dedication and commitment, including the presentation of canonical works like *Winterreise*. Ian Bostridge describes interpretation as an act of sublimation, saying, “There is no neutral way of presenting this music, and it cannot be impersonal. The performer has to access and transform private aspects of his or her own self (just as, I would argue, the composer does).”⁴¹ To my mind, this personal access can be achieved through immersion in the text and investigation of the score, with the result being the deepest possible understanding of the work itself, and a corresponding depth of interpretation.

⁴¹ Ian Bostridge, *Schubert’s Winter Journey*, p. 488.

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