Eero Tarasti:

Body and transcendence in Chopin

(from Eero Tarasti: Signs of Music. A Guide to Musical Semiotics. Berlin:Mouton de Gruyter, 2002, sixth chapter, p. 129-1154)

Continuing our theme of corporeality, this chapter presents a two-dimensional view of Chopin. His music is examined both in terms of its bodily connections, and also as a more spiritual and philosophical, in a word, transcendental phenomenon. The word “corporeal” might call to mind gender studies, though one hastens to add that the gendered body is not the only channel for expressing corporeal meanings of music. The transcendental aspect is something that, if not directly Kantian, at least approaches the “existential”. My aim here is to show that both corporeality and transcendence are semiotical in nature, and that semiotics can provide answers to the interpretive challenges presented by those phenomena.

Musical aestheticians have traditionally been divided into those who believe that music can “represent” something in the external world, and those who deny its ability to do so (from Eduard Hanslick to, say, Roger Scruton). According to this division, Chopin is seldom considered a “representational” composer. He is most often taken to be a non-programmatic composer, with Liszt as the most obvious counter-example. Some even say that Chopin is stylistically a classicist and not a romantic composer at all.

Contrasting voices are also heard. Is not the *barcarolle*, for instance, related to water images in music, as Gunnar Larsson (1986) has asked? Are not Chopin’s Ballades musical metaphors of Mickiewicz’s poems? Do not march and galloping rhythms, nocturnes, chorales, military signals (as in polonaises), and so on all have extramusical connections to social conventions of nineteenth-century life, or to oneiric and subconscious impulses, and the like? Moreover, these connotations often have a corporeal origin: the *barcarolle* is based on the ostinato rhythms of rowing a gondola (see Bücher 1909, on the rhythms of manual labor). The languid style of the nocturne is related to the dream state of the relaxed body, almost a musical illustration of the free play among khoratic-kinetic elements, as Julia Kristeva proposes (more on this, below). Polonaises may in turn reflect extreme masculine virility. Listen, for instance, to the *Polonaise in F sharp minor*, with its drumming pulsations and frenetic melody; the extremely marked rhythms typical of the genre are so accentuated here that they transgress the limits of social conventions. As to transcendental meanings, Chopin is often said to represent romantic melancholy. But let us remember that Friedrich Nietzsche, in his anti-Wagner period, considered Chopin both “heiter und tief”. Thus, under closer scrutiny the stereotypes shatter.

It is trivial to consider Chopin as a model of an effeminate composer. Yet Marcia Citron relates Chopin to stereotypes of feminine musicality in her *Gender and the Musical Canon*: “The early nineteenth century, for example, might be considered a period of varying musical gender: the masculine vigour of Beethoven’s music and the feminine, or perhaps effeminate grace of Chopin’s compositions. We could consider the Italian lyricism of Mozart in the late eighteenth century a feminine trait, to be quashed by the masculine energy in Beethoven. In the 1830s and 1840s the feminine elegance of French culture takes hold in much of the music of Chopin” (Citron 1993: 163). Citron lists more qualities of a feminine aesthetics, one of which is a fascination with process: an intuitive, whimsical approach that values fantasy and experimentation above received structures and techniques. Another “feminine” quality is a lyricism that recalls styles practiced in such female spheres as the salon, and that is marked by long melodic lines and horizontal connectedness. Citron tries to prove how arbitrary such categories are; but it is undeniable that they are often echoed in writings about Chopin. For instance, the fascination with process – certainly a characteristic of Chopin, but also of his “masculine” counterpart, Beethoven – relies on a general episteme of romantic culture; namely, the Goethean idea of art imitating the growth processes of a living organism, and thereby providing the ultimate category of aesthetic enjoyment and value. The way musical narration unfolds in the Ballades, for example, has something unquestionably “organic” about it – and not necessarily anything that genders the pieces in an effeminate way. Far from being strictly feminine, “organicism” is an episteme of all Western culture, and a shared value in most nineteenth-century thought.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, the gender-relatedness of corporeal meanings in symbolic representations such as music rests on theoretically shaky ground, to say the least. No theory exists of how the body is reflected in the signs it creates. To put it simply, if the male and female bodies create, represent, and express themselves via certain kinds of *signs*, then what is the nature of that sign-relationship? In Peircean terms, is it iconic, indexical, or symbolic?

6.1 Are corporeal signs iconic?

Are certain qualities of the male or female body iconically represented more or less directly by their appropriate signs? For instance, are military rhythms and signals, galloping horses, and the like conventionally masculine? When Chopin exploits such musical devices, is that when his male body is “speaking” to us? Roland Barthes (1986), in his famous essay on Schumann, speculated similarly, that in the rhythmic quality of *Rasch* the Schumannian body starts to speak to us via its particular *somathemes*. Here, as with Barthes, this issue raises many questions. Is it certain that in such cases only Chopin is speaking, rather than the social conventions and topics of military and other types of music? And are such signals always masculine? Let us recall that, in Wagner’s *Walkürenritt*, female bodies are portrayed by precisely such rhythms. Thus the idea of iconic signs of the gendered body seems to fail, and even more so when we remember that every woman has some male characteristics, as every man has female ones.

Very often in Chopin, such corporeal signs as dancing and rowing rhythms reflect the social sphere of musical topics. Chopin was no doubt fully aware of the topics of the Classical style such as military calls, hunting signals, dances, Storm and Stress, *galant*, learned, *Empfindsamkeit* and so on, and he richly exploited them in his music (see Ratner 1980). In this sense, the body in his music is often the socialized “body” of norms and stylistic constraints – which he just as often tries to transgress. This is one way that his music reaches the other category of our study – the transcendental realm. Chopin often wants to go beyond such conventional signs, sometimes taking a radical distance from them, as in the Polonaise-Fantasy, where the polonaise is but vaguely evoked by its traditional markers. At other times Chopin expands or exaggerates conventional signs in a way that transforms them into something else. Dialectically, a new quality emerges from the endless repetition of such conventional corporeal signs. This occurs, for example, in the triple, “balladic” rhythm in the last movement of the B minor Sonata. There the dance-like figure, which as such has an almost pastoral quality, turns into a fanatic, frightening, and obsessive process which takes the subject of enunciate, and often of enunciation as well, under its power, bringing both to a state of ecstasy. Another case would be the repetitive, didactic figures in the Etudes. In Chopin these become more than mere exercises in idiomatic figures; they surpass the quality of etude-likeness and gain a new, emergent meaning that attains the sphere of the transcendental.

6.2 Are corporeal signs indexical?

Indexes are signs based on continuity (smoke as an index of fire, e.g.). Musically, they stem directly from the composer or performer as emanations of his/her bodily or emotional state. In the same manner, they directly influence the receivers of the musical message, to the point of impacting them in what Roman Jakobson described as the conative function of communication. This category of possible corporeality leads us to consider not only the utterance itself but the whole process of uttering. This is something to be taken seriously, for when interpreting corporeal signs in this manner we should engage the act of musical performance as well as that of reception. Is it here that the Chopinian body is manifested?

Let us first make an important theoretical distinction: when speaking about the “Chopinian body”, what do we mean? Is it Chopin as a physical, biographical person, or is it Chopin as the subject of enunciation? Chopin as the subject of enunciation can mean two further things: Chopin as the composer and Chopin as the pianist. We should not underestimate the latter, since there is abundant evidence, in Eigeldinger’s studies among others, of Chopin as a pianist and piano teacher, which certainly represents an “act of uttering” or “enunciating” music. In addition to the “Chopinian body” understood as either the flesh-and-blood Chopin or as Chopin the composer/pianist, we have a third category: namely, the bodily signs of the aforementioned two or three species *within* the utterance. Chopin has left signs of his body in the music itself, as the analyses below will elucidate. Thus, Chopin’s body is represented in the musical text. For instance, he writes passages which we know were easy for him to play, those which best suited his abilities as a pianist. But even here the indexical signs of him as a performer do not necessarily always reflect just his individual body. What about such intertexts as the vocal gestures in his melodies? And there is also the well-known passage in the Polonaise-Fantasy where a cryptic crescendo appears between two notes an octave apart, a crescendo which only could be rendered by a singing voice.

Such bodily meanings are thus not only a reflection of Chopin as an instrumentalist, but also of what he imagined to be the ideal *bel canto* of his time. This third category of corporeal signs would be the *symbols* of the body, that is to say, the body as a completely cultural entity, like the body of the speaker in rhetoric, for instance, or the bodily expressions of social spheres such as balls and other festivities of nineteenth-century life as found in his mazurkas and polonaises. When encountering such signs in Chopin’s music, we do not connect with his individual, physical existence at all, since the body appears there as a certain corporeal technique.We may conclude that the body is something extremely complicated, not only in Chopin but in music altogether. Concerning the body, Kristeva speaks of the “semiotic sphere” of prelinguistic kinetic rhythms, gestures, expressions, and fluctuating pulsations, which for her constitute the field of “significance”, a feminine space which she calls, following Plato, the *khora*. The latter represents the archaic level of consciousness, which is our prevailing state in early childhood but which is present even in later developments of our psyche, after we have entered the social sphere of the *symbolic order*. This order represents the penetration of language and all its social norms into our existence. In gendered terms, it is also the patriarchal moment, since, according to Kristeva, it is through the father that this symbolic order is attained in a child’s development. In this scheme, the “semiotic” is the vast area of indefinite, non-verbal meanings in their purely kinetic form. The musical counterpart would be what Ernst Kurth, in his *Musikpsychologie* (1947), called the energetic-kinetic impulses of music. As noted before, these inner tensions, not the sounding manifestations, were for Kurth the authentic moments of music. That is certainly also the sphere of the body in the process of signification. The superimposition of the symbolic order thus represents a denial of pure corporeal reality, by the social norms and constraints set upon it. For Kristeva, the khoratic realm, not the symbolic order, is the essential one. The symbolic order is merely the tip of the iceberg. “Real” meaning emerges only when the khoratic, unsocialized body breaks with social conventions.

Whatever we mean by “body” in music, in Chopin it always appears via the pianoand its idioms. The passages in which we feel the presence of the body in Chopin resemble what Heinrich Besseler called playing-figures (*Spielfiguren*). These are figures that, in clear contrast to vocal style, are purely instrumental and even idiomatic to certain instruments, especially piano and violin. For instance, those played on the piano are easily repeated, and their unified rhythms often lead to sequences. Such playing-figures often show up in the Preludes of the *Well-Tempered Clavier,* where their musical logic is more improvisational than that of the fugues which follow. In romantic music they appear often in the accompaniment to a melody. (Besseler gives an example from Chopin, the Prelude Number 8 in F sharp minor.) In many of Chopin’s Etudes, merely passing through a *Spielfigur* constitutes the main idea of the piece. The level of *Spielfiguren* represents the presence of the body amidst an otherwise esoteric, spiritual, and transcendent musical expression.

All the theories mentioned thus far might prove relevant to a study of the body in Chopin. The body in his music, as said above, often appears as a “socialized” and conventional body, a tamed entity. Conversely, in Chopin it can also mean the appearance or breakthrough of the khoratic body, which occurs when socialized bodily conventions are rejected. In music this would signify moments when the topical logic of the surface levels collapses, as well as the syntax of other musical parameters, and normal tonal logic gives way to something else.

Here we also encounter in musical terms the problem of the classical and the romantic in Chopin. Following the definitions by Guido Adler (see Ch. 2.1), we could say that the classical style appears as a congruence of parts and subparts, in balanced formations such as periodic phrasing, in the mastery and economy of the devices, and in a certain reserved way of expression, a kind of aversion to excess or to transgressing certain limits of beauty. The classical style was for Adler the “perfect style”, in which all the parts manifested the purity, equality, and congruence between content and form.

There is obviously much of the classical in Chopin. But just as obviously his music displays the romantic style, of which Adler says: “it aims for blending of all the forms, rejection of all strict norms of classical art forms, irregularity and devoid of rules, the favouring of colorism and tone painting … and inclination to programs”. By these criteria, we could easily classify Chopin as “romantic”, though the programmatic aspect might be more questionable, and should perhaps be replaced with the idea of narrativity.

Adler’s theory becomes interesting in the present context if we link it to Julia Kristeva’s notions of *khora* and symbolic order. For our purposes, the *khora* in music is the sphere of the body, and the symbolic order is the realm of stylistic norms and constraints. The *khora* would represent the acceptance and affirmation of the body, in a certain sense, and symbolic order the repression of the body in favour of the patriarchal order, which feminists identify with the musical canon. Yet we must always remember that in music the body can also appear in a tamed form, as conventionalised mannerisms or topics. To say that Chopin accepts these norms means that he also accepts the symbolic order in the guise of corporeal schemes in his music. But if we consider the most important moment in music to be its unique message, which transgresses the norms of *langue*, then those moments in which the Kristevan khoratic body is affirmed are also those moments in which the logic of the symbolic body disappears and is replaced by the logic of kinetic energy and tension. Perhaps this might be the “true Chopin”. Of course, one would hardly claim to have found the “true Chopin”. But to paraphrase Carl Dahlhaus, no one attends a concert to listen to documents of nineteenth-century life, but rather to experience the *ästhetische Gegenwärtigkeit*, the aesthetic now-moment of music. Music provides such moments by speaking to us directly. I believe that it is the Chopinian “khoratic” body that makes his music still so impressive to listen to. As Marcel Proust put it, “Every musician is in search of a lost fatherland; sometimes they find it, sometimes they only approach it, and sometimes they do not reach it. The music really moves us only when we have that feeling of being united with this lost “fatherland” – And how well this fits Chopin, quite literally, who could sigh in the most beautiful moment of his Etudes, E major op 10: O ma patrie!” (Eigeldinger 1979: 105). Composers can either accept or reject their body in the music.

In searching for the counterpart of body – namely, the moments of transcendental, or *existential*, meaning – in Chopin’s music, we could apply one of my models of existential semiotics. The Chopinian body is something that appears philosophically as the musical *Dasein* of his subjectivity. In logical terms, this body can be either denied (negated) or affirmed (accepted). Much recent feminist writing has cantered on how women composers have been forced to deny their body and its particular signs, because they have been silenced by the dominant musical canon. Such a thesis presupposes that, if these women composers had been able to create freely, following their own bodily inspiration, then they would have created different musical signs from those that eventually emanated from their pens. The same could be said of Chopin, if only hypothetically. We could say that, by accepting certain stylistic constraints of genre, he allowed the patriarchal order, the musical canon, to force him to deny his real musical “body”. At other times, and in fact rather often, he affirmed his real body in his music and by doing so reached a transcendental moment that takes us beyond the surface of topics, genres, and traditional forms. Much has been written, for instance, about Chopin’s transgressing the norms of genre. This could be portrayed as follows:

To affirm or to negate the khoratic, primary body is to commit a transcendental act. The affirmation of the body, in this sense, signifies implicitly the rejection of the “social body”; the denial of the khoratic body means subjection to the rules of the social body. Thus, when the primary, archaic body – that which is *sans sexe* (Kallberg 1996) – is affirmed, the normal syntactic-logical discursive order of the music is disrupted and an individual moment of creation enters, transcending the social norms. When this body is denied then music remains on the level of *langue*, genre and style norms. Still, these acts are in mutual need of each other in the dialectics of enunciation.

What does this mean concretely, at the textual level, in the music itself? Ruptures in discursive logic also appear as moments of *estrangement*, or what the Russian formalists called “making strange” (*ostranenie*).Such moments contradict our expectations of a given code. Nothing is more common in Chopin, for instance, than for something in the music to go against the very title of the piece. Suddenly amidst a polonaise we lapse into a nocturne or mazurka – not a literal nocturne or mazurka, but merely a faint evocation of those genres. Or amidst a ballade there intrudes a development in the polyphonic, learned style. A chorale might show up in a scherzo, and in a nocturne a Storm and Stress passage, and so on. Such estrangements, which go against our expectations of a genre, characterize not only the late Chopin but are present in his music from the very beginning. In bodily terms, the social-corporeal meanings are negated and replaced by individualized, khoratic entities.

Estrangement is related to another interesting aspect of nineteenth-century culture, though one not often related to Chopin, namely, the idea of romantic irony. By this, we do not necessarily mean humorous, parodistic, or grotesque devices – Chopin remained too “classical” a composer to use such a vocabulary. Still, the philosophical principle of romantic irony is applicable here. After the transcendental act, the moment when artists sink into the eternal, ahistorical time of their creation, they return to their respective worlds of *Dasein.* But now that world looks quite different. What used to be meaningful is now viewed as completely unnecessary, indifferent, valueless, and relative. Søren Kierkegaard spoke about romantic irony as an attitude toward life, stemming from the transcendental act. Man is always aspiring towards transcendence, and when everyday life is suddenly illuminated by the feeling of the transcendental, it may even appear ridiculous. For Kierkegaard, “to exist” is not easy, as one might think, but is in fact our most difficult task. In the Kierkegaardian manner, Chopin aimed for “existentiality” in his music. At every moment he struggled to transcend the social body of musical topics so as to reach the individual khoratic body. In her preface to Sénancour’s *Obermann*, George Sand gave a sociological interpretation of romantic irony in her discussion of typical romantic heroes, from Werther to René and Obermann. According to Sand, these heroes, abandoned to their individual sufferings, were powerless to act, to make choices, to live in society: “There is one disaster which has not yet been officially noticed. It is enjoyment without power, it is the exhaustion of failed passion.” Sand thought that civilisation and society were to blame for this disaster. In modern terms, such heroes were left in their primary, khoratic bodily sphere, and rejected by the symbolic order. They were unable to transform their individual, kinetic bodies into conventional, socialized bodily expressions, and this was due to the “canons” established by the patriarchal order. Chopin’s romantic irony includes both the Kierkegaardian notion of looking down at the social world from transcendental heights, as well as Sand’s idea of the powerlessness of being accepted by the social-corporeal sphere.

These reflections bring me to the idea of a *transcendental subject*. By this I mean that, behind the various types of “Chopinian bodies” mentioned above, stands a transcendental subject which makes it possible for the same subject to express him- or herself in what may sometimes be contradictory ways, both with the estrangements of romantic irony, and as a positive agent expressing his or her own message. This complicated play among various “bodies” in Chopin’s music, as well as their metamorphoses and in some cases genuinely romantic journey, from the material world to the spiritual sphere, almost forces us to hypothesize the existence of a Chopinian transcendental subject. The latter is the methodological construct that is needed to make all the utterances of this subject cohere.

Various kinds of music can have various types of subject. Via­tches­law Medushewski (1989) has identified at least seven categories of musical subject: (1) the spiritual “I” (or “We”), as the hidden subject of polyphonic music; (2) the meditative subject of inner monologue; for instance, in recitative-like passages in Beethoven; (3) the ecstatic-motoric “I”, as in the strikingly kinetic music of dance; (4) the lyrical hero, found in romances such as Bizet’s *Pêcheurs de perles*; (5) the reader, as at the beginning of Bach’s C minor Partita; (6) the narrator, as in Chopin’s Ballades; and (7) the personage “he”, as projected in clearly programmatic narrative situations. All of these “subjects” appear in Chopin’s music as well, each with its own way of speaking and of calling attention to its own utterances.

6.3 Analysis

Let us now look at the different ways this transcendental subject “speaks”. My method here approaches that used by Roland Barthes in *S/Z* (1980), his study of a Balzac novella.7 Much like Barthes parsed Balzac’s text into “lexemes,” I shall examine Chopin’s music through its various *utterances*. “Utterance” designates a unit whose length can vary from one bar to whole phrases, sections and even whole pieces. The length of a musical utterance is unimportant. Sometimes the composer may require extensive passages to utter something; at other times it is said at once, in a moment.

Nor are utterances connected to specific musical parameters. Utterances may involve only one parameter, say, melody alone; or they may include several or all musical elements: melody, rhythm, timbre, and so on. The levels of pertinence are determined by what our “transcendental subject” wants to utter. At the same time, utterances are meeting-points of all that has been “spoken” by the body, the genre, the stylistic norms, the topics, and also the acts of enunciation.

What is important here is not so much the syntagm and its “horizontal” workings, but rather the dimension of depth. In other words, the goal is to construct the transcendental significations indicated by the surface of the music, by its physical signifiers. If the “surface” of the work is something physical, or corporeal, then every piece constructs, so to speak, its own subject. Here we shift from the apparent modalities of the surface – whose grammar can be formulated – to the *metamodalities,* which pertain to the transcendence of the work.8 This may sound overly “metaphysical”, but in every composition a kind of atmosphere, aura, or poetics characteristic of the piece emanates from its concrete signs, from the traces of its creation, in a word, from the enunciation.

Transcendence is not bound to the isotopies of a work, since the transcendental is a living, organic, continuously changing semiosis, which has its own micro- and macroprocesses. Isotopies, on the other hand, are historically determined, recurrent classemes of meaning (see Tarasti 1994; Grabócz 1996).

Our analytic procedure can be sketched as in Figure 11. A crucial question remains: by what metalanguage can we describe the emergent, transcendental qualities that emanate from the musical surface? Can they be grasped by verbal discourse? In general, they can be described by intertextual analogies such as colour, movement, light, and so on. These intertextual fields are opened in certain situations of de-enunciation. This “atmospheric” level is also the Other, the Double of the work in question, that which we remember, and because of which we want to hear the piece again and again. It is like a domain of energy that we wish to enter, similar to what Umberto Eco calls a “semantic field”, yet one in which nothing is fixed or definite.

The following statements summarize some theses of the method followed here: (1) Chopin’s music consists of utterances. (2) Utterances are meeting places of corporeal (social and “khoratic”) and stylistic (topical) meanings. (3) Utterances are kinds of lexemes. (4) Utterances constitute musical situations (cf. Ch. 3). For instance, the syncretism of Chopin’s style consists in an utterance no longer occurring in its original situation, but being shifted to a new one: a nocturne or mazurka topic amidst a polonaise, and so forth. (5) One can study utterances by reducing them to semes. (6) Utterances have a subject, ultimately a transcendental subject, which is construed to explain situations in which various subjects seem to have enunciated the text. For instance, a subject can utter something contrary to expectations, such that the aural realization differs from the pathemic state of the enunciator. (7) Chopin’s utterances share the following aspects: (a) the utterance as such, with its stylistic and normative background topic (genre) as its legisign; (b) pianistic corporeality; (c) other types of corporeality serving as presign(s) of an utterance; for instance, dance-likeness alluding to a polonaise, or nocturne-likeness as reference to dream states; (d) each utterance has a pathemic content: sublime, gracious, dignified, tragic, and so on; (e) each utterance has a transcendental dimension, a reference to the fact that there are no utterances without a subject. (8) When an utterance goes beyond its proper musical *Dasein* it always evokes transcendence; any deviation from the commonplace stylistic or the generic represents the voice of a transcendental subject in Chopinian discourse. (9) A work may consist of only one utterance (as do some of the Preludes); larger pieces are series of utterances. (10) Sometimes utterances overlap and coincide: our transcendental subject speaks polyphonically, with several voices. (11) Ultimately, utterances are organic, “self-organizing” entities.

For a practical analysis, we take a piece from late Chopin, his Fantasy in F minor. Here again, Chopin is playing with the title. “Fantasy” leads one to expect something rather free, but in fact this piece follows a clearly defined sonata design. So at least the formal outline is not at all like that of a fantasy.

The Introduction is a dirge, “Polishmen as prisoners in Siberia”, as described by Jules Gentil. (1) The *funeral march*, with its clear-cut, periodic phrases, is a recurring utterance in Chopin, from the B flat minor sonata to such vaguely funereal marches as in the Nocturne Op. 48 No. 1 or in the C minor Prelude. Chopin never repeated himself exactly, but always provided something new upon repetition. This principle of enunciation is seen in the enunciate here, where it is realized as early as bars 7–8. There the “response” to the heavy and sinking, unison march motive rises from F minor to A flat major. At the same time, this response serves as an (2) *affirmative* utterance in relation to the foregoing musical “question”.

Within this funeral march, a (3) *colourful change* takes place in bar 17, accomplished by the enharmonic transformation of C flat into B. This highlights Chopin as a synaesthetic, “colouristic” composer. According to Olivier Messiaen, Chopin writes many modulations whose purpose is not functional but colourful (as in the transitions to B-sections in the Scherzos). The latter half of the funeral march constitutes a special (4) *understatement*. It is like a brief aside that comments on the main phrase, but in a negative or tentative way, like a sentence that starts with “but” or “however”. Chopin often emphasized the language-likeness of music. The following statement by Kleczynski says a lot about this type of utterance: “The entire theory of style Chopin taught to his pupils was based upon the analogy between music and language, on the necessity to separate different phrases, punctuate and render in a nuanced manner the voice … they were the main principles of musical punctuation and declamation” (cited in Eigeldinger 1979: 70).

After the funeral march comes a transition (bars 43–67) in which something begins gradually. Such a “beginning” section could be called an (5) *inchoative* utterance. These bars show Chopin as a composer of (6) *linear* expression, as opposed to strictly periodic *Lied*- and march-phrases. Essential here is the linear impulse stemming from the polyphonic structures reminiscent of Palestrina (cf. Kurth 1922). But the linear impetus is abruptly interrupted by the falling, *sforzato* octaves. Only on the repeat does the linear impulse grow so strong as to become the real *passage à l’acte* in this musical narration (Claude Brémond’s term) .

The main part starts with a motive that unites two ancient topics: (7) the *learned style* in the contrapuntal motion and suspended notes between the melody and bass lines, and the (8) *Storm and Stress style* manifested in the syncopated melody, its agitation, and its passionate, upward, octave leaps. Compared with this one, the second motive is more “feminine”, an example of a (9) *bel canto* utterance in the glimmering upper register, a melody phrased and punctuated like that of an Italian soprano singing an aria. The descending movement especially, with its lingering stops, triplets and hemiolas, attempts to restrain and counterbalance the eagerness of the enthusiastic rising gesture. This is a special instance of Chopinian (10) *rhythmic ornamentation*, as one finds in the first movement of the B minor Sonata (bars 63–64). But here it also has a centrifugal nature due to the pianistic holds of consecutive intervals in the right hand. There is also a feeling of (11) *rubato*, which is written into the time values. This is certainly a passage of which Chopin would have said, “One has to sing with the fingers!” (Eigeldinger 1979: 73). What Chopin supposedly said to Mathias might elucidate this musical utterance: “Rubato is a nuance of movement. It has anticipation and delay, disquietude and relaxation, agitation and calmness… Chopin often demanded that when the left hand rigorously maintained the rhythm, the singing upper part had liberty to alter the time values” (Eigeldinger 1979: 78).

The arpeggiated diminished seventh chords in bar 85 are something that Chopin also uses in transitions. It is transition as a marked gesture, and it sometimes appears together with the learned style, as in the Ballade in F minor. This passage also exhibits a virtuoso playing figure, one of the rare moments in Chopin where (11) *virtuosity* is foregrounded as such. This transition leads effortlessly to the passionate, almost Wagnerian (12) *chromatically falling* *melody*. (Chopin also exploits the power of this “Wagnerian” figure in other contexts. For example, it can refer to falling asleep or to another state of relaxation, as at the end of the C sharp Nocturne Op. 48 No. 2 in bars 119–126, where it evokes Wagner’s Wanderer and the chromatically descending sleep motive.) If the first two themes portray “Chopin” and “George Sand”, the masculine and the feminine, then this chromatically descending melody may show their relationship as a representation of musical desire. This utterance means (13) *abandonment to desire*. Psychoanalytically this would signify a paroxysmal impulse (see Szondi 1986, on *Schicksalsanalyse*). If the music in bars 93–98 still shows some hesitation, in its movement towards and withdrawal from something, from bar 99 we are thrown headlong into the paroxysmal and manic fulfilment of desire. This culminates in the *fortissimo* octaves in bars 109, 111, 113 and 115, where the excitement reaches its peak, and the *khora* breaks the chains of the symbolic order. But what follows is the negation of desire in the catatonic stasis of the repeated chords in bars 116–123. However, there is a means of escaping this catatonic state, namely, the strong (14) *cadence utterance* in bars 124–125. (Such a cadence utterance becomes a common device in Chopin’s Preludes, which often start totally “disengaged” and at the end require a moment of stabilization.) This leads to the positive transformation of the funeral march into its counterpart, the (15) *triumphant march*. At the same time, the main theme of this passage is a major-mode version of the syncopated, very actorial main theme from the beginning of the principal section, our “Chopin” theme. Here, in a Lisztian manner, the hero reveals a new side of himself – certainly *himself*, since there is no doubt about the masculinity of this utterance. The following idiomatic figure (bars 143–147) is one of the *Spielfiguren* utterances in Chopin, in which the hand assumes its most comfortable position on the keyboard, with long fingers on the black keys and short fingers on the white keys.

The whole exposition is repeated, and then comes the “slow” movement nested within this one-movement piece. The slow section is a kind of (16) *lullaby* that enharmonically shifts from a flatted to a sharpened key.

The rest of the piece provides no new types of utterance. It is in fact redundant to the point of belying the “fantastic” aspect announced by the title of the piece (Chopin’s romantic irony?). Only in the *adagio sostenuto* of the coda, in bar 321, do we find a (17) *recitativo* utterance, in which the musical declamation is completely language-based, on the order of the famous recitative passage in Beethoven’s “Storm” Sonata in D minor. Here the melodic formation is clearly *logogenic*.

Within this single late piece by Chopin we have found 17 different types of utterance. When we scrutinize other pieces where they recur, a new question arises: Are these utterances *commutable*? That is to say, could we exchange an utterance from one piece for that of another in the same category? For instance, could *virtuoso, lullaby, Storm and Stress, linear, funeral march, cadence* and so on perform *functions* independent of their musical substances, so that such interchange or substitution among them would be possible? Naturally music is made up not only of functions but also of thematic materials, which help form the coherence of each piece’s musical narration. Nevertheless, these utterances are clearly determinable beyond the boundaries of normal musical parameters.

Let us now turn to another late piece by Chopin, the F minor Ballade, the beginning of which forms the “key” to all that follows. This work appears to be more on the side of linear, polyphonic art than are the *Lied* and march articulated by the Fantasy in F minor. Ernst Kurth neatly clarified the world-views of this artistic dichotomy. The classical periodic style emphasizes joy of life, mere being in *Dasein*. amidst its desires, worries and victories. In contrast, the linear art of the polyphonic masters evokes a world-view that strives for eternity and transcendence, with the Gothic cathedral as its arche-symbol.

Even the title “Ballade” can be understood as a gesture to the world of the past. Permeating this polyphonic texture is the romantic search for the “blue note” on the repeated G in the soprano and its counterpart in the tenor. At the same time, the unit as a whole resembles a homophonic *bel canto* utterance, in which the melody is supported by bass arpeggiations. Thus, this passage belongs to the category of (18) *mixed, syncretic* utterances, just as it is also *inchoative*.

The main theme, too, is complex. A slow dance in triple meter, it is waltz-like, but not a true waltz (like the main theme of the G minor Ballade). It moves in the walking rhythm typical of some dirge topics, but it is not a pure funeral march. Hints of learned-style utterances can be heard in the suspended notes (in bar 8, the melodic B against the F in the bass). This “axial” melody (in Leonard Meyer’s sense) hovers around the diminished-seventh chord tones of E, B flat, and D flat, a chord which resolves to A flat at the end. This basic motive thus has the kinetic energy that arises from a search for something. It is unstable as such, and this inner disquietude provides forward momentum. The utterance lasts so long (until bar 37) that it gives the overall impression of a pacing lion imprisoned in a cage.

Then comes a mystical, *pianissimo* transition on the black keys. It seems to prophecy something to come, as soon happens with the entrance of the lullaby theme in bar 81. That utterance could be heard as a special *understatement*, but in the corporeal sense it is like a brief (19) *oneiric* state, in which the body is completely freed from desire and the musical subject has sunken into something like a Bergsonian*memoire involontaire*, a state in which all kinds of surprising ideas circulate in one’s mind. It is at once a remembrance and an anticipation, during which time seems to stand still.

The following section starts to ornament the simple melody, while keeping its structure unchanged. Bars 46–54 and 58–72 constitute an (20) *unfolding* or *organic growth* utterance. After the second theme comes a lullaby section in triple meter, which also has a tinge of the pastoral. It exhibits typically Chopinian rhythmic ornamentations, such as those in the “George Sand” theme of the F minor Fantasy.

In bar 134, with the metrically free small notes, we encounter a new type of utterance, an imitation of (21) *coloratura* singing style, here beautifully transformed into a pianistic texture. Bars 135–144 display a polyphonic development, in which Chopin employs the German (22) *Durchführung* idea with a reference to the fugue-like, or at least imitative, learned style. We catch only a glimpse of this style, however, for the music soon shifts to a homophonic texture (bar 145).

Bars 152–167 constitute an interesting mixture of (23) *logogenic, bel canto, coloratura* and *improvised* utterances. In what follows the second actor seems to “win” the narrative struggle between protagonists. It is glorified by all kinds of congenially pianistic devices, such as the ascending scale passages in the bass (bars 169–171), arpeggiations, hemiola rhythms, and centrifugal, syncopated melodic articulations (bars 175–176). (The same idea occurs in the subordinate section of the *Fantaisie impromptu* and in the A flat major Etude Op. 10.) This represents an utterance of (24) *song amidst sound*.

The essentially vocal impulse of this Ballade is overtaken by the instrumental figuration in bars 191–194. Here again the body abandons itself to *Thanatos*, to the paroxysmal, manic desire for destruction. The chords in bars 203–210 do not restore complete calm after this extremely violent activity. They represent a *cadence* utterance, but their position in the narrative process is (25) *non-terminative.* Thus we have the paradox of something that serves as closure but that is not performing as such.

The long coda constitutes what we might call a (26) *destruction* utterance, in which the musical substance dissolves into its smallest atoms. It is thus a kind of symbolic representation of death. In corporeal terms, here the body undergoes aggressive, destructive forces. But at the same time, the instrumental utterances are extremely rich and full of new innovations. In narrative terms, neither of the two actorial protagonists survive: not the first theme (axis-melody), with its archaic, polyphonic style, nor the second theme (the pastoral lullaby). They both come apart under this process of total dissolution. Metaphysically, this signifies what we have called the first transcendental act: negation, or the encounter with Nothingness.

The foregoing analysis shows how relatively new types of utterance can arise. Chopin combines utterances in new ways, thereby creating an aesthetics of ambiguity, which is also a characteristic of his “romantic irony”. Now we shall look at some less complicated pieces and at other genres. Chopin’s Preludes, for example, often consist of only one utterance. Before composing, Chopin played music by other composers, particularly J. S. Bach, and one can easily see the preludes from the *Well-Tempered Clavier* as the “legisign” or “type”, of which Chopin’s own Preludes are “tokens”. Strengthening this view is the fact that all the keys are represented in Chopin’s Preludes. Vladimir Jankélévitch says the following about Chopin’s Preludes:

Le Prélude ne cesse de préluder… Le préambule est devenu la pièce elle-même. La concision, l’improvisation, c’est-à-dire l’état inspiré durant lequel la phrase en travail germe et tatônne et subit d’incessantes retouches. – telles seront les seules règles du Prélude. Cette forme n”a aucune forme. (Jankélévitch 1957: 90)

[The Prelude never stops warming up… The preamble has become the piece itself. The concision, the improvisation, that is to say, the inspired state during which the phrase slowly germinates and feels its way around, going through incessant alterations – such are the only rules of the Prelude. This form has no form.]

Jankélévitch lists some examples, indicating how chaotic the Preludes are in their mixing of genres. Numbers 2, 4, 9, and 13 are nocturnes; 7 is a mazurka; 23 an impromptu; 20 a funeral march; 10, 18 and 24 are scherzos; 1, 5, 8, 12 and 19 are etudes. Perhaps our analyses of Chopinian utterances can add something new to Jankélévitch’s classifications.

Prelude 1 is an example of *bel canto*, played with the thumb of the right hand, of which there are many instances in Chopin, ranging from the middle section of the *Fantaisie impromptu* to the middle section of the B minor Scherzo. The texture is very “Bachian” in its counterpoint, but the overall impression is of a painting on canvas, inasmuch as the layers of texture form a unified (26) *sound field*, which itself forms a pre-sign for subsequent impressionistic devices.

Prelude 2 exemplifies what Jankélévitch calls improvisation, but may be better described as *in medias res*: the piece starts in the middle of the action, without any kind of preparation. In Greimassian terms, it starts with “disengagement”. There is no “inchoative” section, or what Asafiev would call “initium”; rather, we start in the middle of “durativity” or “motus”. At the end such preludes have a strong “engagement” in the form of a cadence consisting of a simple chord progression that reinforces closure. A similar narrative program is found in Preludes 4, 8, and 11. But some preludes do not have even that; for example, Prelude 14 in E flat minor has only durativity, without beginning or end. Such utterances could be called (27) *durational* or *disengaging*, and the former kinds viewed as (28) *terminative* or *engaging.*

Prelude 3 represents a special *Spielfigur* employing the “jeu perlé” technique, such as one finds in the first movement of Bach’s G major Partita and in the Preludes in his *Well-Tempered Clavier*. This is Chopin’s “Forellen” style, which calls to mind the Rhine Daughters swimming. Preludes 4 and 6 are very *cantabile*, their songs not evoking *bel canto* voices, however, but rather a stringed instrument. Thus they are a kind of (29) *intertext*. Prelude 5, with its centrifugal and disengaged texture, has an etude-like quality. Prelude 7 is a “mazurka oubliée”. Number 8 is an example of the “singing-thumb” voice in the middle, surrounded by a particular *Spielfigur* texture. Prelude 9 illustrates a simple (29) *crescendo* narrative program. Prelude 10 is an ornamented mazurka, in which the embellished figure is more important than the main topic itself. Prelude 11 vaguely evokes the delicate pastorale of Bach’s F sharp major Prelude and Fugue from Book I of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*. This Prelude is an etude for the fourth and fifth fingers of the right hand (like the Etude in A minor Op. 10), while at the same time “balladic” in narrative content.

Because we are encountering few new types of utterance in the Preludes, let us skip to some more interesting moments. Number 17, towards the end, with the pedal point on A flat, represents the aforementioned case of a pre-sign for impressionist painting. Prelude 18 is a declamatory recitative, recalling such moments as the dialogue between piano and orchestra in the slow movement of Beethoven’s Fourth Piano Concerto – here, in a much accelerated guise. A kind of post-sign for this prelude might be the portrayals of the rich and poor Jews in Musorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

Prelude 23, with its “jeu perlé” techniques, refers to the previous G major Prelude (no. 3), but it has one more utterance, which is very short – only a single note. This is the famous E flat at the end, which does not resolved, but vibrates freely as a special tone colour – a splendid example of how a colourful utterance can create an entire sound field.

The theme of the last prelude, number 24, has a clear pre-sign – the opening motive of Beethoven’s “*Appassionata*” Sonata – which almost makes the piece *Musik über Musik*. Here the performer should remember that Chopin always viewed *forte* as a relative dynamic, to be determined by context. The balladic ostinato in the left hand evokes the F minor Etude Op. 10 as its *Spielfigur*, but its almost demoniacal dramatic effect approaches that of the Finale of the B minor Sonata (notice also that the key is D minor, the same as Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*). But the ending is very sinister, like that of a saga. In terms of corporeality, a very violent, eruptive body is “speaking” here.

Some of the preludes prove conclusively that Chopin’s narrative programs do not necessarily follow the scheme of an initial problem followed by its eventual resolution. Sometimes the narrative program does not move linearly, along the syntagmatic chain of the piece, but vertically, in the dimension of depth. It may proceed from surface to deep structures, as in those short “improvisatory” and “disengaged” preludes which at the end find stability in a clear-cut tonal cadence. Or the narrative may run from surface to “super-structure”, that is to say, into the transcendental sphere. At such moments, corporeality is sublimated into expression (as Adorno used to say about Wagner). As the musical material thins out, the body is transfigured, so to speak, into spirit. This is the case, for instance, in the F minor Fantasy. The body also can be transcendentalised to the point of reaching its utmost expression, after which the corporeal process can no longer continue, but something new must emerge from it. This seems to occur in many of the Etudes as well, which by their very title evoke corporeality in the form of pianistic devices, but at the end transcend such materiality. This phenomenon happens in some of the Ballades, too, and very clearly in the Sonatas.

For instance, the Etude in A flat major Op. 25 is an example of *bel canto*, in spite of its heavy texture. Essential to the piece is the overall aesthetic quality of *Schönheit und Poesie*, as the Polish master Jan Hoffman used to describe it. In some cases, the *bel canto* expression and the tonally stable pastoral field shift to a search for the first minor harmony in a piece, which after a long time spent in the major mode comes to the listener as a surprise, as a nostalgic glance at the past. A similar passage is the introduction to the *Andante spianato et grande polonaise*, when the bass turns to E flat minor after the long-held G major field. The same idea is powerfully used by Wagner in the *Rhinegold*, with a similar move from E flat major to C minor, on the words “des Goldes Schlaf”. Both cases recall something dysphoric.

Jankélévitch argues that in the Scherzos “le vol de l’imagination est le plus puissant, le plus audacieux… Les symptomes du scherzo – caprice, verve, ironie sombre, liberté – sont présents dans beaucoup d’œuvres de Chopin” [“the flight of imagination is the most powerful, the boldest, the most audacious… The characteristics of the scherzo – caprice, verve, dark irony, freedom – are present in many of Chopin’s works.”] (Jankélévich 1957: 92–93). The scherzo quality is present almost everywhere in Chopin, and it relates to a special *souplesse* in playing style (Jankélévich 1957: 30). Very often it is embodied in cambiata-like figures that are easy to play with a relaxed hand. It appears in the C sharp minor Scherzo in the figure ornamenting the Chorale (Ex. 14). (Also, sometimes new utterance types, like the just-mentioned *chorale*, emerge in the Scherzos.)

The B flat minor Scherzo employs two new types of utterance. It uses the (32) *Faustian question* as its opening phrase (similar to the device used in the C sharp minor Scherzo), which recalls certain Lisztian topics (see Grabócz 1996: 121). The B flat minor Scherzo also makes use of the (33) *heroic gesture*, as in bars 544–553. There, after an intense passage, the music dwindles to mere repetition of the same figure. It finally breaks out of this vicious circle by moving along the circle of fifths, as an heroic solution to the problem. Such moments exhibit a Berliozian aesthetics of the “imprevu”, or unexpected. Take, for instance, the B minor scherzo, which opens bombastically, with two chords that are like a sudden outburst or cry (as the symbolist poet Prszybyszewski described them). This utterance of (34) *pathogenic exclamation* rarely occurs in Chopin. Another unique type of utterance would be the (35) *syntagmatic juxtaposition of extremes*, like the “cry” of those two chords immediately followed by a scherzo-like, ironically playful texture. There is certainly nothing effeminate or even organic in such an aesthetics of contrasts. What Jankélévitch says about the Scherzos is particularly appropriate here: “Les nerfs sont rudement secoués par cet electro-choc du sombre délire” [One’s nerves are rudely shaken by the electical shock of this dismal frenzy.] (1957: 94).

We could continue our inventory until we amass a systematic paradigm of all the utterance types in Chopin. Here we have listed only 35 of them. In some cases, one hears the topics of baroque, classical and romantic music in the background. Of course, the body is always present in any musical utterance, but in some it is marked, and in others it is un-marked. This means that in every utterance we encounter a struggle between the socialized, civilized body – the patriarchal order, so to speak – and the freely pulsating, *khoratic* body. We could go on to study the musical “semes” of these utterances, which would extend our interpretation beyond the level of musical signifieds. But however far we extend our analysis, the richness of such messages will always exceed explanation by any one methodology.