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## **Between Intangible and Corporeal: Word, Body and Music in German Romanticism**

Some of the first German Romantic writers refer to the intangibility and incorporeality of music as qualities that distinguish it from other arts, arguing that it allows the spirit to access “the pure form of the movement of the heavenly bodies, freed from any object or material” (Schelling, *Philosophie der Kunst*, 1802/3). This paper explores how Novalis, W. H. Wackenroder, Johann Wilhelm Ritter and E.T.A. Hoffmann reinterpret this assertion: either by saying that music allows human beings to separate themselves from their bodies and thus reach an ethereal and harmonious state; or, on the contrary, by considering music a physical phenomenon that flows within the human body, visibly affecting it and leading to altered states of (self)awareness.

Keywords: Music, body, illness, Novalis, W. H. Wackenroder, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Johann Wilhelm Ritter

“Every illness is a musical problem.”

Novalis

“Hearing is a way of seeing from within.”

Johann Wilhelm Ritter

When speaking of music, some writers of the German Romantic period posit a relationship between the art of music and certain transformations that take place in the human body. In some of these descriptions the body becomes a place of resonance, a conductor of musical sound subject to sympathetic vibration. In other descriptions

exposure of the body to music produces conflict, violence or pain. In yet other cases the physical body and verbal discourse seem to undergo a contamination and to take on intrinsically musical aspects, in particular its intangibility and the absence of definite contours.

To discuss these interconnections I have chosen texts written by four authors that have two traits in common: they were all born in the 1770s and, while still young, they opened a new chapter in aesthetic thought and judgement which would play a key role in European artistic taste. Here I will handle some ideas of Novalis (1772-1801) and of the physicist Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1776-1810) – both of whom wrote fragments that helped to make this genre characteristic of Romantic style – as well as of Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder (1773-1798) and E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776-1822), two writers who devoted a significant amount of literary and critical prose to the question of music.

When Friedrich Schlegel, in the first issue of the journal *Athenäum* (launched in May 1797), affirms, in a fragment, that “[a] fragment must, like a small work of art, be complete in itself and cut off from the rest of the world, like a hedgehog”<sup>1</sup> he seems to draw on the definition of an aphorism, an 18<sup>th</sup> century genre par excellence, which corresponds nicely to its etymology, from Greek *aphorizein*, meaning “mark off by boundaries,” “determine, define.”<sup>2</sup>

For the first German Romantics, including the Schlegel brothers and the young Novalis,<sup>3</sup> the fragment is one of the preferred ways of developing and presenting to the public a thought that intentionally defies neoclassical style, which was anchored in the rationalist Enlightenment. The image of delimitation used by Schlegel – the spines of the hedgehog – is significant. The spines of the hedgehog defend it against external aggression, but hardly present a form neatly closed off

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<sup>1</sup> [206] “Ein Fragment muß gleich einem kleinen Kunstwerke von der umgebenden Welt ganz abgesondert und in sich selbst vollendet sein wie ein Igel.” Schlegel, *Fragmentensammlungen. Fragmente*.

<sup>2</sup> LSJ, *Aphorizo* 1 and 2.

<sup>3</sup> In 1797 and the following year Novalis publishes in *Athenäum* the collections of fragments “Pollen” [*Blüthenstaub*], “Fragments” [*Fragmente*] and “Ideas” [*Ideen*]. The set “Critical Fragments” [*Kritische Fragmente*] was not published in *Athenäum* but rather in the first issue of the journal *Lyceum der schönen Künste* (Berlin 1797).

and delimited. Rather, the discontinuous star-like arrangement of spines paradoxically conveys an image of diffuse boundaries.

In the chapter that he devotes to the fragment in *The Romantic Generation*,<sup>4</sup> Charles Rosen notes that it is not just a verbal phenomenon, but also occurs in music, where some forms are deliberately fragmentary, for instance certain passages of Robert Schumann.<sup>5</sup> Highlighting the nature of the fragment, at once closed and open, Rosen<sup>6</sup> sees the entire Romantic aesthetic developing under the sign of this apparent contradiction, expressed in the definition of the fragment, which unlike the focused aphorism<sup>7</sup> follows a centrifugal motion and “[...] expand[s] as if with some kind of inward pressure.”<sup>8</sup> Incomplete by definition, the fragment, says Rosen, “[...] sets in motion a process to which the end is not in sight.”<sup>9</sup> Its power derives from the fact that it handles an object which is potentially in a state of expansion and which “[...] expand[s] as if with some kind of inward pressure” and moreover “[...] implicitly shows the act of interpretation already in motion.”<sup>10</sup>

Used to texts that aim at semantic stability, especially in philosophy, the 18th-century reader (and also today’s) might feel a certain perplexity when faced with a text that, as Rosen puts it, “expands” in the act of reading and which deliberately promotes a certain permeability between the ideas of author and interpreter.<sup>11</sup> What the reader often finds is not explicit meaning but phrases that trade on an intangibility that characterizes things like the hedgehog,

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<sup>4</sup> Based on the Charles Eliot Norton lectures given at Harvard in 1980-81.

<sup>5</sup> Rosen gives the first two *Lieder* of the cycle *Dichterliebe* as examples.

<sup>6</sup> Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, 51.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the aphorisms of La Rochefoucauld.

<sup>8</sup> Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, 50.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>11</sup> In fragment 116 Schlegel claims that the incompleteness of Romantic poetry is a way of insuring its *progressive* quality and infinitude: “Romantic poetry is always in a state of becoming; that is really its essence: that it is forever only becoming and can never be complete.” [“Die romantische Dichtung ist noch im Werden; ja, das ist ihr eigentliches Wesen, dass sie ewig nur werden, nie vollendet sein kann.”], *Erstdruck* in: *Athenäum* (Berlin), 1. Bd., 2. Stück, 1798.

pollen,<sup>12</sup> or music – things taken to represent seeds of life and the movement of body and soul.

“Every illness is a musical problem – the cure is a *musical solution*.” So begins fragment 386 of *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, a set of 1151 fragments written and organized by Novalis to create an encyclopedic work in line with his conceptual approach. Ranging over all areas of learning, this open-ended work, posthumously published, invokes Enlightenment objectives but proposes an innovative organization of knowledge,<sup>13</sup> articulated in fragments and establishing links between concepts that are usually kept separate. This accords with his proposition that “to romanticize the world means to see it as a continuum, where everything is connected to everything.”<sup>14</sup> The fragment in question establishes an intimate relation between medicine and music, but if its beginning is enigmatic, the entire fragment hardly clarifies the question:

MEDICINE. Every illness is a musical problem – the cure is a *musical solution*. The more rapid, and yet more complete the solution – the greater the musical talent of the doctor. Illnesses allow various solutions. The choice of what is most appropriate determines the talent of the doctor.<sup>15</sup>

Before attempting a progressive expansion of the possible meanings of this fragment, let’s look at another fragment (no. 245) of the same set.

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<sup>12</sup> Title of one of the collections of fragments by Novalis, published in *Athenäum*. Cf. note 3.

<sup>13</sup> Barbara Naumann (*Musikalisches Ideen-Instrument*, 213) argues that the sequence of fragments from 342 to 387 is itself organized with a musical rhythm.

<sup>14</sup> “Die Welt romantisieren heißt, sie als Kontinuum wahrzunehmen, in dem alles mit allem zusammenhängt.” Novalis, *Fragmente und Studien*, 384.

<sup>15</sup> “MEDIZIN. Jede Krankheit ist ein musikalisches Problem, die Heilung eine *musikalische Auflösung*. Je kürzer und dennoch vollständiger die Auflösung, desto größer das musikalische Talent des Arztes. Krankheiten lassen mannigfaltige Auflösungen zu. Die Wahl der zweckmäßigsten bestimmt das Talent des Arztes.” Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia. Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, 58 (fragment 386).

MUSIC. Consonants are fingerings and their sequences and alternations belong to the *application*. Vowels are strings of sound, or *air tubes*. The lungs are a *bow in motion*.

The numerous strings on an instrument are only there for convenience – they are abbreviations. There is really only *one string*. A choral organ is an imitation of a stringed instrument. [...] *Duration of the stroke – the point at which the bow makes contact*.

Why is it that waves and streams of water do not *resound*? Acoustics of air. *Vibrations of an electrically charged bell*.

On the universal *language* of music. The spirit becomes free, *indeterminately* stimulated – which is so beneficial for it – and seems so familiar to it, so patriotic – that for this short moment it is transported to its Indian homeland [*Heimat*<sup>16</sup>] [...] Attempts to speak *musically*. Our language – was much more musical to begin with, and has gradually become so prosaic, *so damped down*. It has now become more like *noise* – mere *sound* [*Laut*] if one wishes to degrade this beautiful word. It must become *song* once *again*. The consonants transform *tones into noise*.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Heimat* referred (and still does) to the hypothetical homeland of the Indo-European languages.

<sup>17</sup> The entire fragment reads as follows: “MUSIK. Die Consonanten sind die Fingersetzungen und ihre Folge und Abwechslung gehört zur Aplicatur. Die Vocale sind die tönenden Saiten oder Luftstäbe. Die Lunge ist der bewegte Bogen. Die mehreren Sayten auf einem Instrument sind nur zur Bequemlichkeit – es sind Abbreviaturen. Es ist eigentlich nur eine Sayte. Die Orgeln sind Nachahmungen der Sayteninstrumente. Über den karacterisirenden Ton der Sayte – der Grund dieser Individualitaet – Masse – länge – Dicke etc. Über die Mittönungen. Tonreihe jedes Saytenstrichs. Dauer des Strichs – Ansetzungspunct des Bogens. Steg. Bau des Instruments. Harmonika. Euphon[ie]. Über den Glockenton. Theorie des Harmonikaspielens. Die tastirte Harmonika. Warum die Wellen und Ströme des Wassers nicht tönen? Acusticitaet der Luft. Schwingungen einer mit El[ectricitaet] geladenen Glocke. Über die allg[emeine]n Sprache der Musik. Der Geist wird frey, unbestimmt angeregt – das thut ihm so wohl – das dünkt ihm so bekannt, so vaterländisch – er ist auf diese kurzen Augenblicke in seiner indischen Heymath. Alles Liebe – und Gute, Zukunft und Vergangenheit regt sich in ihm – Hoffnung und Sehnsucht. Vers[uch] bestimmt durch die Musik zu sprechen. Unsr Sprache – sie war zu Anfang viel musicalischer und hat sich nur nach gerade so prosaisirt – so enttönt. Es ist jetzt mehr Schallen geworden – Laut, wenn man dieses schöne Wort so erniedrigen will. Sie muß wieder Gesang werden. Die Consonanten verwandeln den Ton in Schall.“ Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 36-37 (fragment 245). Translation slightly revised.

This fragment shows that Schlegel's comparison with the hedgehog is right on the mark: ideas are strewn like seeds that can grow into different thoughts. Novalis alludes here to the much debated question of the origin of language and its possible connection with music.<sup>18</sup> But going beyond that, he distinguishes between different parts of the body, comparing them to different modalities of sound, namely music and noise: on the one hand, the fingers, which shorten and alter the original sound of the whole vibrating string; on the other hand, the lungs, which he calls "the bow in motion." If the lungs produce vowels, open musical sounds, the rest of the phonic apparatus produces consonants, sound that is interrupted and filtered. The consonants play a purely linguistic role, and therefore, according to this fragment, they have lost their sheer musicality. In the analogy with a string instrument, this logic introduces an opposition: the moving bow, in the right hand, maintains contact with the original full sound of the string; the fingering, in the left hand, produces sounds which, although they display variety, distance themselves from the primordial sound of the whole string.

The human body, essential to the production of music, is here split up into parts that perform different kinds of functions: bowing and fingering. The first of these functions reflects direct contact with sound in vibration. The second, for Novalis, is associated with a human tendency towards "convenience" and consequently the creation of "abbreviations," techniques that serve the objectives of language by facilitating communication without the need to pronounce words in their entirety.

By beginning his fragment with an analogy between consonants and fingering and ending it with the phrase "the consonants transform tones into noise," Novalis suggests that the human body, insofar as it can produce music, is endowed with two functions: one favors music by seeking entire sounds, for example, in bowing; the other, linked to fingering (even if with virtuosity), distances itself from music. Language

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<sup>18</sup> Beginning in the second half of the so called pedagogical 18<sup>th</sup> century this had been the subject of so many publications that the *Société de linguistique de Paris* informed its members in 1865 that it would no longer accept any more *communications* on the origins of language (see <http://www.axl.cefan.ulaval.ca/monde/origine-langues.html>).

itself, assumed here to be composed of vowels and consonants, is described as moving away from music and therefore impoverished, since linguistic communication uses sounds that are increasingly shortened and abbreviated.

Is this an aesthetic judgement regarding music? And what relation is there between fragment 245 and fragment 386 (cited above), entitled *Medicine*?

In his *Philosophy of Art*, published between 1802 and 1803, Schelling argues that of all the arts music is most free of a physical, bodily element: pure movement in and of itself, detached from any object, borne on invisible, almost spiritual wings.<sup>19</sup> Earlier texts by Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder illustrate this idea in poetic form. In the narrative “A Wondrous Oriental Tale of a Naked Saint” [Ein wunderbares morgenländisches Märchen von einem nackten Heiligen],<sup>20</sup> included in *Fantasies on the Subject of Art for Friends of Art* [Phantasien über die Kunst für Freunde der Kunst], published in 1799, just a few months after his death at the age of 24, it is through music that the main character frees himself from the suffering inflicted by the fetters of materiality and temporality. He rises aloft, shedding his body and with it all the pain he had suffered. In the essay “The Marvels of the Musical Art” [Die Wunder der Tonkunst], published in the same volume, Wackenroder writes:

[...] I consider music as the most wondrous [of the fine arts], because it portrays human feelings in a superhuman way, because it shows us all the emotions above our heads in incorporeal form, clothed in golden clouds of airy harmonies.<sup>21</sup>

Echoing this ideal, the enigmatic fragment 386 of Novalis might at first glance seem to suggest that music can cure illness, since it frees the spirit from the body and its pains. This approach would fit into a

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<sup>19</sup> “Die Musik ist insofern diejenige Kunst, die am meisten das Körperliche abstreift, indem sie die reine Bewegung selbst als solche, von dem Gegenstand abgezogen, vorstellt und von unsichtbaren, fast geistigen Flügeln getragen wird.” Schelling, *Philosophie der Kunst*, 146.

<sup>20</sup> Wackenroder, *Confessions and Fantasies*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

tradition that goes back to Pythagorean theories (referred to by Greek neo-platonic thinkers) about the power of music. Using mathematics as a basis, such theories held that music could cure disease, considered a perturbation of harmony in the body.<sup>22</sup> In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle mentions Pythagorean philosophers who held “the whole world to be harmony and a number.”<sup>23</sup> This tradition regarding music reappears in highly influential work of Boethius, who distinguishes three kinds of music: *musica mundana*, *musica humana*, and *musica instrumentalis*,<sup>24</sup> a tripartite distinction which would exert a lasting influence on Western music.

During the German Baroque period these ideas appear in force in the practice of *musica poetica*, which follows principles of musical Rhetoric that seeks to affect the listener’s emotions.<sup>25</sup> The notion that the harmony of the spheres is the ultimate origin of music and of its inexorable power on human beings also had important repercussions in German Romanticism. According to Boethius, *musica instrumentalis* – a resonance of the harmony of the spheres inaudible to humans (*musica mundana*) – can set in order *musica humana*, the harmony felt inside each individual. If illness is understood to be a lack of harmony in the body and/or the soul, music can restore that harmony, as happens in the Biblical story where David, by playing his harp, relieves the suffering of King Saul who is afflicted with an evil spirit (presumably a mental disease with fits of insanity).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> References to this doctrine in Plato are brief and, some argue, ironic (Dover, *Symposium*, 105). After that the first reference seems to be a fragment of Aristoxenus. Most of the material is late – Proclus, for instance. Cf. Tornese, “Music as therapy: the analogy between music and medicine in Neoplatonism” and also James, *Music of the Spheres. Music, Science and the Natural Order of the Universe*.

<sup>23</sup> At *Metaphysics* 985b Aristotle begins to talk about the Pythagoreans and mathematics. The phrase cited occurs at 986a: καὶ τὸν ὅλον οὐρανὸν ἁρμονίαν εἶναι καὶ ἀριθμὸν.

<sup>24</sup> The terms derive from Boethius, *De institutione musica*, I.2.

<sup>25</sup> According to Dietrich Bartel, this practice was rooted in the musical theology of Luther – *Musica Poetica: Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music*, IX-X.

<sup>26</sup> 1 Samuel 16.13-23.



Kant's aesthetic theory, which underlies the thinking of many Romantic authors, also posits a direct continuity between music and the health of the human body. In paragraphs 53 ("Comparison of the Aesthetic Value of the Various Fine Arts") and 54 ("Comment") of the *Critique of Judgement*, this connection is said to operate through a pleasure mechanism which stems from a free play of sensations. Yet, although music activates the lively play of sensations and works on the listener in a more intimate [*inniglicher*] way than poetry, "in reason's judgment it has less value than any other of the fine arts,"<sup>27</sup> since "it speaks through nothing but sensations without concepts, so that unlike poetry it leaves us with nothing to meditate about."<sup>28</sup> Placing music and wit (sense of humor) on the same plane, Kant attributes to them faculties whose effect is clearly therapeutic, though "merely bodily."<sup>29</sup>

But music and something to laugh about are two kinds of play with aesthetic ideas, or for that matter with presentations of the understanding, by which in the end nothing is thought; it is merely the change they involve that still enables them to gratify us in a lively way. This shows rather clearly that in both of them the quickening is merely bodily, even though it is aroused by ideas of the mind, and shows that all the gratification [...] consists [merely] in the feeling of health that is produced by an intestinal agitation corresponding to such play. It is not our judging of the harmony we find in tones or in flashes of wit [...] but the furtherance of the vital processes in the body, the affect that agitates the intestines and the diaphragm, in a word the feeling of health (which we cannot feel without such prompting), which constitutes the gratification we find in the fact that we can reach the body through the soul as well, and use the soul as the physician of the body.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> "[...] durch Vernunft beurteilt, weniger Wert, als jede andere der schönen Künste" – Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, 198.

<sup>28</sup> "Denn, ob sie zwar durch lauter Empfindungen ohne Begriffe spricht, mithin nicht, wie die Poesie, etwas zum Nachdenken übrig bleiben lässt." – *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>29</sup> "bloß körperlich" – *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>30</sup> "Hingegen Musik und Stoff zum Lachen sind zweierlei Arten des Spiels mit ästhetischen Ideen, oder auch Verstandesvorstellungen, wodurch am Ende nichts gedacht wird, und die bloß durch ihren Wechsel, und dennoch lebhaft vergnügen können; wodurch sie ziemlich klar zu erkennen geben, daß die Belebung in beiden bloß körperlich sei, ob sie gleich von Ideen des Gemüts erregt wird, und daß das

While, according to Kant, music benefits the body by stimulating “aesthetic ideas”<sup>31</sup> but does not go further since it does not provide “determinate concepts,”<sup>32</sup> for Romantic writers like Novalis and Ritter the corporeality of music justifies an inversion in the hierarchy of arts as posited by Kant and other rationalist thinkers. The conceptual indeterminacy of music is precisely what makes it an art nearer to truth. A distinction that the fragment as a genre would, by this logic, share.

If we agree with Rosen that the fragments are centrifugal devices, fragment 386 can be taken in different ways, which are not necessarily incompatible. One way is to understand it in light of the doctrine that an ill person can be cured by retu(r)ning the body to a universal harmonious order (the mystical *Heimat* onto which Novalis projects the primordial unity of language and music), thus restoring the original health that was lost when language became detached from music. But we can also read fragment 386 using the explicit analogy between illness (mental or physical)<sup>33</sup> and a musical problem. This analogy, which likens a doctor to a composer, is strengthened by the term *solution*. Just as a composer develops a musical composition by using harmonic sequences (preferably with dissonances) that lead to a resolution (the cadence), the doctor tries to use the most appropriate cure, which – if we follow the analogy – depends on understanding the illness and the form which it assumes in a given individual. Illness and its (re)solution would thus be part of the same phenomenon, just as a given piece of music succeeds by

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Gefühl der Gesundheit, durch eine jenem Spiele korrespondierende Bewegung der Eingeweide, das ganze, für so fein und geistvoll gepriesene, Vergnügen einer aufgeweckten Gesellschaft ausmacht. Nicht die Beurteilung der Harmonie in Tönen oder Witzeinfällen, die mit ihrer Schönheit nur zum notwendigen Vehikel dient, sondern das beförderte Lebensgeschäft im Körper, der Affekt, der die Eingeweide und das Zwerchfell bewegt, mit einem Worte das Gefühl der Gesundheit (welche sich ohne solche Veranlassung sonst nicht fühlen läßt), machen das Vergnügen aus, welches man daran findet, daß man dem Körper auch durch die Seele beikommen und diese zum Arzt von jenem brauchen kann.” – *Ibid.*, 202-203.

<sup>31</sup> “Ästhetische Ideen” – *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>32</sup> “bestimmte Begriffe” – *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>33</sup> Since for Novalis, “[e]very illness can be called an illness of the soul” [“Jede Kranckheit kann man Seelenkranckheit nennen.”] – Novalis, *Fragmente und Studien*, 555.

proceeding gracefully between harmonic tension (*arsis*) and moments of resolution (*thesis*).

As we shall see, there is a strong affinity between this line of thought and certain reflections of Johann Wilhelm Ritter. At precisely the time when Novalis is writing fragments for his *Allgemeine Brouillon*,<sup>34</sup> in November 1799, he begins a close friendship with Ritter, another young man from the Jena circle, a physicist and philosopher of science who would become known for his discovery of ultraviolet light. Due, in part, to using his own body to carry out experiments with electrical current,<sup>35</sup> Ritter dies quite young, just after publishing a collection of 700 fragments which (anticipating his imminent death) are entitled: *Fragments from the Archives of a Young Physicist* [Fragmente aus dem Nachlass eines jungen Physikers]. In the preface, written in the third person, where he pays homage to his masters Novalis and Herder, he declares that these fragments are not meant to be conclusions but rather processes and, moreover, are not written for any reader or even for himself but for the object of study itself.

The description of music, as oscillating between tension and resolution, in Novalis's analogy between a body that is ill/not ill and music differs radically from the supposed incorporeality of music advocated by Schelling (however great his influence over both Novalis and Ritter). But Ritter, in his *Fragments of a Young Physicist*, goes well beyond Novalis, although he does not develop a full-fledged theory in this respect. Drawing on ideas of Pythagoreans and others, he believes that sound really does circulate inside the body, and is alive and self-aware:

Like light, sound is awareness. Each sound is a life of the resonating body, lasting in it as long as sound, but vanishing when it does. Each sound is an organism made up of oscillation, figure and form, just like every organic living thing. It expresses its own existence. If I mechanically stimulate a body to make it resonate, it is like asking a sleepwalker a question. It wakes up from a deep

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<sup>34</sup> See note 14.

<sup>35</sup> Alessandro Volta had just created (in 1800) the first electric battery, the "Voltaic pile;" and Luigi Galvani, his contemporary and collaborator, realizing that electromagnetic phenomena take place in living organisms, had discovered bioelectricity.

eternal-like sleep; it answers; and in answering not only is it conscious of itself, but life, the organism that awakens within it, becomes conscious of itself.<sup>36</sup>

According to Ritter, light and sound are impulses that run through the body and have their own life and awareness; but, even more than light, sound reveals a body's innerness. The description of this process leads to a synaesthesia in true Romantic mode: "Every resonating body, or rather its sound, is like a colored shadow of its inner quality."<sup>37</sup>

By analogy with the string of an instrument, the human body becomes alive by virtue of its sound: "The human being is a vibrating string, life is the sound [...]."<sup>38</sup>

In his view, one kind of *harmonia humana* is the motor force that makes a body function, similar to the *vis motrix* which, according to Heinrich von Kleist, animates marionettes and which every ballet dancer should find within himself in order to resuscitate a lost grace of human movement.<sup>39</sup> This force ought to replace individual will, the decision-making power set in motion by the mind's self-awareness. So, for Ritter, sound is converted into a musical conductor who has power over the body:

Sound calls to us, as does a word or an order.<sup>40</sup>

Will has no power in the face of pulsation.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> ["Wie das Licht, so ist auch der Ton Bewusstsein. Jeder Ton ist ein Leben des tönenden Körpers und in ihm, was so lange anhält, als der Ton, mit ihm aber erlischt. Ein ganzer Organismus von Oscillation und Figur, Gestalt, ist jeder Ton, wie jedes Organisch-Lebendige auch. Er spricht sein Daseyn aus. Es ist gleichsam Frage an die Somnambüle, wenn ich den zu tönenden Körper mechanisch afficiere. Er erwacht vom tiefen, gleichsam Ewigkeits-Schlafe; er antwortet; und im Antworten ist er nicht sowohl sicher seiner, sondern das Leben, der Organismus, der oder das in ihm hervorgerufen wird, ist sich seiner bewusst." – Ritter, *Fragmente aus dem Nachlass eines jungen Physikers*, frag. 476. (All translations of Ritter are by Rip Cohen.)

<sup>37</sup> "Jeder tönende Körper oder vielmehr sein Ton ist gleichsam der gefärbte Schatten seiner innern Qualität." – Ritter, *Fragmente*, fr. 250.

<sup>38</sup> "Der Mensch ist eine schwingende Saite, das Leben der Ton. Aber erst zwei Töne geben ein Akkord." – *Ibid.*, fr. 669.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Kleist, "Über das Marionettentheater."

<sup>40</sup> "Der Ton ruft uns hervor, wie irgendein Wort, ein Befehl." – Ritter, *Fragmente*, Anhang.

<sup>41</sup> "Der Wille ist ohne Macht über das Pulsierende." – *Ibid.*, fr. 480.

According to him, composers are most able to tame that power of music.

Composers can achieve an infinitely exalted position. They beget an entire species akin to human beings; they make their servants and angels appear and they can invoke their demons.<sup>42</sup>

By the beginning of the 19th century it was already known that the propagation of sound takes place in a medium. Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742-1799) had just presented to the scientific world his *Klangfiguren*, regular forms generated by sound, also known as Lichtenberg-figures. Applying recent theories about galvanic currents, Ritter argues that sound and music circulate in the body through the bloodstream. Carried by iron in the blood, sound (along with electric currents) is driven by animal magnetism, whose pole of attraction Ritter takes to be the heart:

The true magnet of all bodies in the cosmos must be a heart, and in the human body (*inter alia*) the heart is the magnet.<sup>43</sup>

The concept soprano: bass = - : + shows that true music is nothing other than the actualization of the power of opposites. The most complete music is that which goes from iron into the human being. [...] <sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> “Komponisten können zu einer unendlich hohen Würde gelangen. Sie verwalten ein ganzes dem Menschen verwandtes Geschlecht; seine Diener und seine Engel lassen sie erscheinen, und auch seine Teufel können sie aufrufen.” – *Ibid.*, Anhang (478 - 479). There is no better justification than the last three fragments cited for what the protagonist of Tolstoy’s *Kreutzer Sonata* does: carried away by (the autonomous awareness of) music, he kills the woman he loves.

<sup>43</sup> “Der wahre Magnet aller Weltkörper muss ein Herz sein, und im Menschenkörper, u. a., ist das Herz der Magnet.” – Ritter, *Fragmente*, fr. 386.

<sup>44</sup> “357. (1801) Der Begriff, Diskant: Baß = -: + zeigt: daß alle rechte Musik nichts sein könne, als eine Potenzierung beider Gegensätze. Die vollständigste Musik ist die, welche vom Eisen bis zum Menschen geht. [...]” – *Ibid.*, fr.357.

The affinity between Novalis and Ritter (which deserves further study)<sup>45</sup> is reflected in various fragments written by both authors, who evidently influenced one another. For instance, Novalis sees illness as part of the individualization of the human being:

The ideal of perfect health is only interesting from a scientific point of view. Illness belongs to individualization.<sup>46</sup>

And, apparently glossing this thought, Ritter writes:

In a state of *perfect* health, we would very probably not be alive; we would be dead.<sup>47</sup>

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Unlike the other authors considered here, E.T.A. Hoffmann was a musician and a music theorist. In his writings there are some clear reverberations of ideas drawn from Ritter and Novalis regarding the interaction between music and the body.

The idea that sound is propagated through the bloodstream and makes the iron in the blood vibrate (being attracted by the central magnet, the heart) is taken up in several literary creations of Hoffmann, whose alter-ego Kreisler, in the final passage of the *Kreisleriana*, refers directly to Ritter<sup>48</sup> when making his final recommendations to composers:

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<sup>45</sup> There is little critical bibliography regarding the influence of Ritter's literary and philosophical work on other writers of his generation. Worthy of note is Alexis B. Smith, "Ritter's Musical Blood Flow Through Hoffmann's Kreisler."

<sup>46</sup> "Das Ideal einer vollkommenen Gesundheit ist bloß wissenschaftlich interessant. Krankheit gehört zur Individualisierung." in *Fragmente und Studien 1799-1800*, n.º 637. Compare Goethe's remark: "Classical is healthy; Romantic is sick." ["Klassisch ist das Gesunde, romantisch das Kranke"]. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen* 1031 (published posthumously in 1833), 117.

<sup>47</sup> "Bei *vollkommener* Gesundheit würden wir höchstwahrscheinlich nicht mehr leben, sondern tot sein." – Ritter, *Fragmente*, fr. 407.

<sup>48</sup> Hoffmann, "Johannes Kreislers Lehrbrief," 276.

Just as, according to the words of a brilliant physicist, hearing is a way of seeing from within, so for the musician seeing is a way of hearing from within, the most intimate consciousness of music which, in regular vibration with the spirit, resonates with everything that his eye falls upon.<sup>49</sup>

The fragment of Ritter referred to here by Hoffmann is no. 358:

Everything, including the invisible, is contained in each body. In oscillation, vibration, etc., everything vibrates. [...] Everything that can be excited is excited here. [...] Hearing is a way of seeing from within, the innermost consciousness. [...] The sense of hearing is, among all the senses in the universe, the highest, greatest, most comprehensive, the only one which is general, the universal sense. There is no other vision of the universe as complete and immediate as the acoustic.<sup>50</sup>

Explicitly developing Ritter's position that music is a vibration of bodies in sympathy with nature, Hoffmann repeats the idea that it is only through contact with that physical vibration that a composer can truly learn the art of creating music.<sup>51</sup> Like Ritter, he uses the image of a sleep-walker as a body that is reawakened when it is set vibrating. Hoffmann asks himself:

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<sup>49</sup> "So wie, nach dem Anspruch eines geistreichen Physikers, Hören ein Sehen von innen ist, so wird dem Musiker das Sehen ein Hören von innen, nämlich zum innersten Bewusstsein der Musik, die mit seinem Geiste gleichmässig vibrierend, aus allem ertönt, was sein Auge erfasst." (Translation by Rip Cohen) – *Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>50</sup> "358. [...] In jedem Körper ist alles, so auch das Unsichtbare, enthalten. Bei der Oszillation, Vibration, usw., schwingt alles. [...] Alles, was nur irgend erregt werden kann, wird hier erregt. [...] Das Hören ist ein Sehen von innen, das innerstinnerste Bewußtsein. [...] Der Gehörsinn ist unter allen Sinnen des Universums der höchste, größte, umfassendste, ja es ist der einzige allgemeine, der universelle Sinn. Es gilt keine Ansicht des Universums ganz und unbedingt, als die akustische." – Ritter, *Fragmente*, fr. 358.

<sup>51</sup> Noteworthy is the passage where Kreisler, remembering how he was tortured during his childhood by studying piano, conjures up the image of a child that closes the top of the piano and listens to the sound coming from inside it. The child understands that the music he is looking for comes from there. Cf. Hoffmann, "Johannes Kreislers Lehrbrief," 274.

[...] Might not the musician stand in the same relation to Nature that surrounds him as the magnetiser to the sleep-walker, to whose quickening will is put a question that nature never leaves unanswered?<sup>52</sup>

The answer will always lie in nature, since the art of musical composition is “the ability to grasp, with a special spiritual power, those stimuli [of nature] and capture them in signs and writing [...]”<sup>53</sup> The art would not then consist in techniques drawn from theories of composition, but in a predisposition for hearing, within and without, involving the entire body.<sup>54</sup>

Published in 1809 in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, Hoffmann’s short story “Ritter Gluck” tells the tale of an eccentric composer, who in the denouement turns out to be the spirit of Christoph Willibald Gluck. Wandering through the streets of Berlin, he articulates a theory about music as pain and therefore as illness. This might seem the meaningless product of delirium offered up by a bizarre character with traces of madness but his theories draw on ideas of both Novalis and Ritter. The title in German is a *double entendre*: Ritter qualifies the main character, Gluck, as a knight (*Ritter*) and also invokes the physicist’s surname.

In this story, the description of musical experience is clearly physical. At the beginning, the entire performance of the street orchestra evokes illness and pain. The flutes are described as “consumptive,” the bassoon is “spastic” and “snores” and the effect wrought by these instruments “lacerates the ear” and causes “burning pain.”<sup>55</sup> Music is not felt as an object of intellectual appreciation, but rather lived as a deeply physical experience. In this case, what seems to be at stake is a criticism of music

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<sup>52</sup> “[...] mag der Musiker sich dann nicht zu der ihn umgebenden Natur verhalten wie der Magnetiseur zur Somnambule, indem sein lebhaftes Wollen die Frage ist, welche die Natur nie unbeantwortet läßt?” – *Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>53</sup> “[...] die Fähigkeit, jene Anregungen wie mit einer besonderen geistigen Kraft festzuhalten und festzubannen in Zeichen und Schrift, ist die Kunst des Komponierens.” – *Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>54</sup> On the Romantic *topos* of a mutual resonance between nature and the listening subject, see Vieira de Carvalho, “O engano dos significados ou a prisão da linguagem: Da poética musical de Eichendorff à poética musical de Adorno.”

<sup>55</sup> Hoffmann, “Knight Gluck. A Recollection from the Year 1809,” 49-50.



that is meant merely to entertain. This supposed debasement of music represents an illness of the art, which is cured when the charismatic composer picks up the baton and clothes the skeleton-like overture “with flesh and color.”<sup>56</sup>

The following description of the gentleman-composer in the act of conducting portrays with the precision of a seismograph the transformations that music, as it flows within him, brings about inside his body:

With half-closed eyes, his folded arms resting on the table, he listened to the *andante*. Tapping his left foot gently, he signalled the entrance of the voices; then he raised his head – quickly casting a glance around – he rested his left hand with fingers spread apart on the table as if he were playing a chord on a piano, and he raised his right hand up high. He was the *Kapellmeister* signalling the orchestra the start of a new tempo – his right hand dropped and the *allegro* began. A burning glow flushed his pale cheeks; his eyebrows met on his wrinkled forehead; an inner storm inflamed his wild expression with a fire that increasingly consumed the smile that still hovered around his half-opened mouth. Then he leaned back and raised his eyebrows; the play of muscles around his mouth began again; his eyes shone; a deep inner pain was released in a voluptuous pleasure that convulsively shook his inner being. He drew a breath from deep within his lungs; drops formed on his forehead; he signalled for the entrance of the *tutti* and other major places; his right hand kept the beat, and with his left hand he pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his face. Thus he clothed with flesh and color the skeleton of the overture played by the pair of violins. I heard the soft, melting elegy which the flute utters when the storm of the violins and the bass viols has exhausted itself and the thunder of the drums is silent. I heard the softly played tones of the cello and the bassoon which filled the air with ineffable sadness; the *tutti* returned; the *unissono* strode on like a sublime and lofty giant, the somber lament died away under his crushing tread. The overture was over; he let his arms fall and he sat there with his eyes like a person exhausted by excessive exertion.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 51. Kant’s assumption that music is entertainment of the senses, and therefore keeps the body healthy, is also ironically challenged here, when what is supposed to be musical entertainment inflicts severe pain on the musician.

<sup>57</sup> “Mit halbgeschlossenen Augen, die verschränkten Arme auf den Tisch gestützt, hörte er das Andante; den linken Fuß leise bewegend, bezeichnete er das Eintreten

The story is punctuated by such interactions between musical experience and its effects in the body. Gluck narrates the suffering he feels when, as a composer, he pursues the dream of reaching the deepest essence of music. “When I was in the kingdom of dreams, a thousand aches and worries tortured me.”<sup>58</sup> The wakening of pain corresponds to overcoming a dream, something which few can do and which for him corresponds to “attain[ing] the truth:”

(...) only a few, awakened from the dream, arise and stride through the kingdom of dreams – they attain the truth – highest moment is there: contact with the eternal, the ineffable! Look at the sun; it is the triad from which the chords, like stars, shoot out and entwine you with threads of fire. You lie as in a cocoon of fire until the soul swings up to the sun.<sup>59</sup>

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der Stimmen; jetzt erhob er den Kopf – schnell warf er den Blick umher – die linke Hand mit auseinandergespreizten Fingern ruhte auf dem Tische, als greife er einen Akkord auf dem Flügel, die rechte Hand hob er in die Höhe: es war ein Kapellmeister, der dem Orchester das Eintreten des andern Tempos angibt – die rechte Hand fällt, und das Allegro beginnt! – Eine brennende Röte fliegt über die blassen Wangen; die Augenbraunen fahren zusammen auf der gerunzelten Stirn, eine innere Wut entflammt den wilden Blick mit einem Feuer, das mehr und mehr das Lächeln wegzehrt, das noch um den halbgeöffneten Mund schwebte. Nun lehnt er sich zurück, hinaufziehen sich die Augenbraunen, das Muskelspiel auf den Wangen kehrt wieder, die Augen erglänzen, ein tiefer, innerer Schmerz löst sich auf in Wollust, die alle Fibern ergreift und krampfhaft erschüttert – tief aus der Brust zieht er den Atem, Tropfen stehen auf der Stirn; er deutet das Eintreten des Tutti und andere Hauptstellen an; seine rechte Hand verläßt den Takt nicht, mit der linken holt er sein Tuch hervor und fährt damit über das Gesicht. – So belebte er das Skelett, welches jene paar Violinen von der Ouvertüre gaben, mit Fleisch und Farben. Ich hörte die sanfte, schmelzende Klage, womit die Flöte emporsteigt, wenn der Sturm der Violinen und Bässe ausgetobt hat und der Donner der Pauken schweigt; ich hörte die leise anschlagenden Töne der Violoncelle, des Fagotts, die das Herz mit unnennbarer Wehmut erfüllen; das Tutti kehrt wieder, wie ein Riese hehr und groß schreitet das Unisono fort, die dumpfe Klage erstirbt unter seinen zermalmenden Tritten. – Die Ouvertüre war geendigt; der Mann ließ beide Arme herabsinken und saß mit geschlossenen Augen da, wie jemand, den eine übergroße Anstrengung entkräftet hat.” – Hoffmann, *Tales of E. T. A. Hoffmann*, 5.

<sup>58</sup> “Als ich im Reich der Träume war, folterten mich tausend Schmerzen und Ängste!” – *Ibid.*, 7. Slightly modified.

<sup>59</sup> “[...] nur wenige, erweckt aus dem Traume, steigen empor und schreiten durch das Reich der Träume – sie kommen zur Wahrheit – der höchste Moment ist da:

Ritter, too, describes the sun as the center of a musical colossus, of which our music is only an allegory. Following the ancient concept of the harmony of the spheres, he writes:

Only inside the sun can this music be heard as a harmony. For the sun, the whole planetary system is a musical instrument.<sup>60</sup>

Such contact between the artist and the ineffable and eternal inspires him to sublimate the materiality of bodies. This common *topos* of Romanticism permeates the ideas formulated by Hoffmann, Schelling, Ritter and Wackenroder. A paradigmatic musical example occurs in Schumann's *Humoreske* in B-flat major, Op. 20, where a melody is written in the score but not to be physically played (*Innere Stimme*).

Still, Romanticism embodies the awareness that reality, like the hedgehog, is multifaceted and hard to approach, and that its beauty lies, at least in part, in living with its paradoxes and with the possible irony that stems from them. In another short story, "Baron of B.," Hoffmann paints an acutely (self-)ironic portrait of the Romantic artist, in this case, an eccentric violin teacher. By insisting on the importance of bowing, or sustaining a single note as if it were a long breath, and rejecting "jumps and new-fangled nonsense of that sort,"<sup>61</sup> Baron of B. certainly seems to invoke Novalis's enigmatic fragment 245 (cited above, cf. note 17), which favors bowing (compared to the action of the lungs) over virtuosic fingering (chopping up a primordial string). This technical aspect highlights a deeper philosophical point. Touching upon the ancient debate on the hierarchy of the arts, it reinforces the (Romantic) statement that music does not have to emulate language (with its consonants and Kant's "determinate concepts") in order to

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die Berührung mit dem Ewigen, Unaussprechlichen! – Schaut die Sonne an, sie ist der Dreiklang, aus dem die Akkorde, Sternen gleich, herabschießen und Euch mit Feuerfaden umspinnen. – Verpuppt im Feuer liegt Ihr da, bis sich Psyche emporschwingt in die Sonne." – *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>60</sup> "Diese Musik kann, als Harmonie, wohl nur in der Sonne gehört werden. Der Sonne ist das ganze Planetensystem ein musikalisches Instrument." – Ritter, *Fragmente*. (fr. 360).

<sup>61</sup> Hoffmann, *The Serapion Brethren*.

attain high rank as an art. Paradoxically, it is precisely music's ability to live inside the body and to affect it physically that will liberate the subject from the materiality of references and the imposition of fixed concepts, thereby offering a closer approximation to truth through art.

Hoffmann's whole story is constructed with an eye to the unexpected twist that comes at the end. The moment of the Baron's final revelation turns out also to be a revelation of Romantic irony and self-awareness within contradictions. Though he preaches a musical execution worthy of the harmony of the spheres, at the climax of the story his ethereal ideas dramatically collide with the materiality of his body.

Through irony, in a literary take, two conflicting approaches to the Romantic ideal of music are, at least for this fictitious moment, resolved: Music is presented, accepted and admired as both a desirable expression of immateriality and a corporeality beyond any intellectualization.<sup>62</sup>

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