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A NARRATOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF *PNIMA...INS INNERE* BY CHAYA CZERNOWIN

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Abstract

Chaya Czernowin's opera *Pnima…ins innere* is about the encounter between a young Israeli boy and his grandfather, a Holocaust survivor so traumatized by his past that he cannot speak. Fittingly, the opera does not contain any words: the four singers in the work instead sing phonemes and other non-verbal sounds. This document provides an analysis of the opera from the perspective of musical narratology (the study of musical narrative), seeking to discover how Czernowin enacts the encounter between the child and the old man by means of music alone. In particular, narratological concepts from Byron Almen's *A Theory of Musical Narrative*[1] are adapted for application to *Pnima.* Three primary musical agents are identified and analyzed in detail: two instrument groups that respectively embody the psyches of the old man and the child, and the string orchestra, which functions as a collective presence rather than enacting the psychology of an individual. Interactions among and changes to these musical agents over the course of the three scenes of the opera are analyzed and interpreted in light of Czernowin's statements about the work and other contextualizing texts. Using *Pnima* as a case study, this document comments on both the potential and the limitations of musical narratology with respect to the study of post-tonal music; it also suggests ways in which the analysis it contains might assist in the creation or criticism of productions of the opera.

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[1] Byron Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008).

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Introduction

Pnima…ins Innere

Chaya Czernowin's *Pnima…ins Innere* (2000) is an opera with no libretto, although it is based on a literary source: the first section of David Grossman's novel *See Under: Love*. In this portion of the novel, we meet Momik, a nine-year-old Israeli boy whose psyche is permanently transformed through interactions with his great-uncle, a Holocaust survivor so traumatized that he cannot communicate verbally.[2] Czernowin's decision to avoid verbal text in *Pnima* – the four singers instead utter isolated phonemes and other non-verbal sounds – is thus directly prompted by her source material: the two central characters cannot communicate using language.

While the traditional, dialogue-based libretto is still common in contemporary opera, *Pnima* is one example of a larger turn away from conventional libretti by several prominent opera composers in the second half of the twentieth century. Frequent characteristics of libretti produced by or for these composers include the use of partially or entirely non-dialogic text and the combination of texts from multiple sources, which creates a collage effect and avoids the hermetic nature of a libretto with unitary authorship. Operas whose libretti display these features include Phillip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach* (1975), which employs a non-dialogic libretto comprised of numbers, solfege syllables, and extracts of poetry; Luigi Nono's *Prometeo* (1981-85), which includes texts by Aeschylus, Walter Benjamin, and Rilke (among others); and Helmut Lachenmann's *Das Mädchen mit den Schwefelhölzern* (1988-96), which integrates texts by Gudrun Ensslin and Leonardo da Vinci into Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Match Girl," frequently breaking words into their constituent sounds rather than presenting them in whole, intelligible form. Unconventional libretti have also tended to use less text than a traditional

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[2] David Grossman, *See Under: Love*, trans. Betsy Rosenberg (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989).

libretto. Morton Feldman's *Neither* (1977), for example, sets a 16-line text by Samuel Beckett.

But by avoiding *any* delivery of verbal text in *Pnima*, Czernowin takes this trend to its most

extreme conclusion, asserting a more radical vision of opera that denies the necessity of words to

the genre. Without considering the details of the work any further, the simple fact that *Pnima*

challenges the assumption that text is an essential part of operatic content recommends it as a

potentially fruitful subject for music academics and opera practitioners alike.

Opera practitioners have indeed embraced *Pnima*. Since its premiere at the 2000 Munich

Biennale, the opera has been given three subsequent productions: at the Nationaltheater Weimar

in 2008, the Stuttgart Opera in 2010, and the Luzerner Theater (in conjunction with Czernowin's

residency at the Lucerne Festival) in 2013. The original production was released on DVD by

Mode Records in 2006. *Pnima* has also received significant critical praise and awards: in 2000,

Opernwelt named it the "best premiere of the year," and it received the Bayerischer Theater Prize

in the same year.[3]

Despite its warm critical reception, continued programming by major festivals and opera

houses, and the fascinating re-definition of genre it proposes, *Pnima* has barely been addressed in

scholarly work. In a paper delivered at the 2011 conference of the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute

for Holocaust Studies, Golan Gur positions the opera both within the larger field of art about the

Holocaust and within the complex artistic response of the European musical avant-garde to the

horrors of war in the twentieth century.[4] Noirin Bairéad, in her 2011 thesis, constructs a

phenomenology of *Pnima* that draws on scholarship about theatrical sound and, like Gur's paper,

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[3] Jacket notes for *Pnima…Ins Innere*, directed by Claus Guth/performed by Beek, Maurides, Larson, Sol, Wassermann, Stolz, Münchener Kammerorchester/Kalitzke (New York: Mode, 2006), DVD.

[4] Golan Gur, "Composing Trauma: The Holocaust and the Commitment of the Avant-Garde in Chaya Czernowin's *Pnima... ins innere*," paper presented at the Simon Wiesenthal Conference "Partituren der Erinnerung: Der Holocaust in der Musik", Vienna, Austria, October 4-6, 2001, conference video, 34:37, accessed Feb. 26, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiD0U4GRyhE.

relates the opera to broad themes across art about the Holocaust.[5] Many ideas explored in the

work of these two scholars are echoed in program-book articles about Czernowin's music written

by critic Max Nyffeler and musicologist Jörn Peter Hiekel.[6] Yet while these writings illuminate

the aesthetics and cultural context of *Pnima*, none of them undertakes analysis of the music.

There is, potentially, much to be gained from engaging the opera's musical detail in conjunction

with existing aesthetic and cultural discourse about the work.

To me, all these justifications for the present study—the success of *Pnima*, the interest

inherent in its position at the edge of the operatic genre, the paucity of existing scholarship—are

strong, but not primary. The impulse toward analysis, for me, is a personal response to my

ongoing experience of this work as one of the most affecting and phenomenologically powerful

pieces of art I have encountered. Czernowin does not simply set the story of Grossman's novel to

music, but instead, in Golan Gur's words, "transforms [it] into an epic statement about the

universal experience of trauma and its incommunicable nature."[7] My wish to look deeper into the

musical means by which Czernowin makes this statement in *Pnima* is first and foremost

motivated by my own experience of its powerful testimony. However, the centrality of the theme

of incommunicabilty in *Pnima* raises points of caution for a potential analysis, as will be

explained in the following paragraphs.

Momik, the young protagonist of *See Under: Love*, is the child of Holocaust survivors.

His parents seek to shield him from the past, but he is aware of an unknown horror in their

biographies and fills in the detail of this horror though imagination: a vicious animal called "the

[5] Nóirín Bairéad, *The Power of Sound to Speak the Unspeakable: A Phenomenology of the Opera Pnima*, (MA thesis, National University of Ireland, 2011)

[6] Jörn Peter Hiekel, "Ins Herz der Geschichte. "Pnima" von Chaya Czernowin," published in program book in conjunction with production of the opera (Stuttgart: Stuttgart Opera, July 2010); Max Nyffeler, "Der starke Widerhall im Inneren. Zur Musik von Chaya Czernowin," published in *Programmbuch Salzburg Passagen* (Salzburg: Salzburger Festspiele, 2005) p. 42ff.

[7] Gur, "Composing Trauma."

Nazi beast" terrorized his family in a land called "over there." Grossman focalizes the refusal or inability of Momik's elders to tell him what happened "over there" in the silent presence of the boy's great-uncle (whom he calls "grandfather,") who cannot speak as a result of the trauma he experienced. This second-generation experience of the Holocaust—piecing together the horrific, unspoken past of one's parents through the lens of childhood imagination—is autobiographical for both Grossman and Czernowin.

Noirin Bairéad links this second-generation experience to complementary yet paradoxical themes in Holocaust art and literature: the simultaneous unspeakability of this trauma on the one hand, and the urgent need to offer testimony to it on the other.[8] She finds that in Holocaust-related critical theory, the "semantic void" created by the incommunicability of something one must communicate "is consistent with the enigma of silence"; though it is given many names— "abyss," "lacuna of language,"—it is present in the work of multiple writers, significant in its lack of direct signification, occupying "the space that exists before words attempt to conceptualize it."[9] According to Bairéad, the musical landscape of *Pnima* also exists in this pre-verbal world, "penetrating the silent space of Czernowin's uninhabitable past through sound."[10]

Indeed, Czernowin attributes the absence of a libretto in the opera to "the impossibility of communicating…the Jewish holocaust."[11] Rather than using words to directly convey a series of plot events, she attempted to "create an internal theater inside the child."[12] The opera thus

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[8] Bairéad, *The Power of Sound to Speak the Unspeakable*, 11.

[9] Ibid., 13. The specific descriptors that Bairéad cites come from the following sources. "Semantic void" and "abyss": Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust*. (London: Routledge, 1999), 225; "lacuna of language": Leslie Morris, "The Sound of Memory," *The German Quarterly*, 74: 4 (2001), 372. Morris adopts the term "lacuna" from: Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive,* Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone, 1999).

[10] Bairéad, *The Power of Sound to Speak the Unspeakable,* 6.

[11] Chaya Czernowin, liner notes to *Pnima…Ins Innere*, (New York: Mode, 2006), DVD, 1.

[12] Chaya Czernowin, "Chaya Czernowin on *Pnima…Ins Innere*", interview by Brian Brandt, in *Pnima…Ins Innere* (New York: Mode, 2006), DVD.

becomes a sonic tracing of the boy's psychological journey into his imagined holocaust, catalyzed by encounters with his "grandfather," a personification of that profoundly fraught, pre-verbal silence at the heart of Holocaust-related art and literature. But the wordlessness of this opera does not simply relocate theatrical content from external plot to internal psychology: by avoiding direct representation of specific plot events or intelligible dialogue, the work places listeners in the same psychological position as the boy, attempting to make sense of events that are communicated incompletely. For Czernowin, this experiential parallelism between character and listener is central to the "overall metaphor" of the opera:

> Overall Metaphor: the resultant web could place the listener in a parallel conceptual location to the child in the opera. There is a strong experience which one can only half comprehend, an attempt to communicate something, but the essential part of this communication is covert, so that the listener, too, is engaged in the experience, but is not able to easily understand, categorize, or dismiss it. One is rather caught in this indecipherable dream which needs to be deciphered. Perhaps a metaphor for art, or for the inherent failure of any form of communication which tries to convey an experience so powerful that it resists being forced into an objectifying mold.[13]

Herein lie both the phenomenological power of *Pnima* and also the latent danger of subjecting it to analysis. Analysis has the potential to become an objectifying force, which mitigates the inherent discomfort of needing to figure out, or to explain, the "indecipherable" and inexplicable. A musical analysis that seeks to explain this opera via objective labeling and categorizing of musical materials and processes is antithetical to Czernowin's "overall metaphor" and what that metaphor proposes about the nature of art. Responsible analysis of *Pnima* requires an analytical approach that can accommodate the "lacuna of language" at the heart of the work and embrace the inherent subjectivity of both analyst and method, while still operating on theoretical ground sufficient to provide insight into the relationships between musical detail, structure, content, and meaning. Musical narratology, or the study of narrative, is one analytical approach that takes these challenges into account.

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[13] Czernowin, liner notes to *Pnima…Ins Innere*, 2.

Chapter 1

Methodology

Why Narratology?

Originating in Formalist and Structuralist literary studies, modern narratology analyzes

and theorizes narrative structure and method across media, including typically non-verbal art

forms such as music and dance. If *Pnima* tells the story (in the broadest sense of that phrase) of a

boy's internal psychological transformation, narratology offers existing theories for

understanding *how* that process of interior change could be projected in sound and time, as well

as suggestions for the analytical application of those theories. Though the adoption of

narratology by musical scholars in the 1980s has led to little theoretical agreement in the ensuing

decades, one point upon which nearly all musical narratologists concur (and a valuable

inheritance from literary structuralism) is the fundamentally interpretive nature of narratological

analysis. Recognizing that the subjectivity of the listener or analyst is unavoidably involved in

the creation of musical meaning, narratology self-consciously offers *readings*, not *explanations*,

of musical works. It thus provides a theoretical approach to *Pnima* that can directly address the

phenomenon of its wordlessness while still honoring its resistance to facile categorization and its

anti-positivistic testimony to the failure of language in the face of traumatic experience.

Although narratology seems well-suited to *Pnima* for the reasons outlined above, one

cannot ignore the fact that Czernowin herself has described the piece as "non-narrative"; Noirin

Bairéad also says that the opera "moves beyond…the linearity of narrative."[14] Given these

descriptions, it might seem that I intend to bring to bear upon *Pnima* a body of theory whose

topic is antithetical to the nature of the opera. This seeming incongruity between subject and

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[14] Czernowin, liner notes to *Pnima…Ins Innere*, 1; Bairéad, *The Power of Sound to Speak the Unspeakable*, 5.

method vanishes if one considers the differences between the colloquial and discipline-specific uses of the word "narrative." Common dictionaries inevitably give some variation of "a story or account of events" as the primary definition of "narrative"; while dictionaries do not necessarily predict usage, the ubiquity of this definition is a good indicator for how the word is most frequently employed.[15]

The discipline-specific use of "narrative" is both broader and more complex. Although few narratologists define "narrative" identically, a rough consensus emerges from recent narratological writings favoring a broad definition under which the depiction of specific plot events is not a requisite criterion and un-texted media can co-exist with texted. "As a general rule, the minimal condition of narrativity is the transformation of an object or state of affairs into something else through a process that requires a certain amount of time," writes Eero Tarasti.[16] Few scholars would accept this definition without further qualification and discussion (which Tarasti subsequently provides), but in isolation it illustrates the outer boundaries of the broad narratological definition, as well as the appeal of this definition for those who wish to study narrative within a medium that, like un-texted music, resists being perceived as an "account of events." A more detailed discussion of narrative and narrativity follows; suffice it to say here that although *Pnima* is clearly "non-narrative" in the colloquial sense, that fact does not disqualify the opera from taking on features of narrative in the broad, discipline-specific sense. Indeed, Czernowin's writings and statements about *Pnima* yield substantial evidence that it does.

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[15] "Narrative – definition of narrative by the Free Online Dictionary, Thesaurus and Encyclopedia", Accessed Feb. 21, 2014, http://www.thefreedictionary.com/narrative. Entries accessed here include: "A narrated account; a story" – American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011); "an account, report, or story, as of events, experiences, etc." – Collins English Dictionary - Complete and Unabridged (HarperCollins Publishers, 2003); "a story or account of events, experiences, or the like, whether true or fictitious" – Random House Kerneman Webster's College Dictionary (Random House, 2010).

[16] Eero Tarasti, "Music as a Narrative Art," in *Narrative Across Media*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 283.

In her preface to the score, Czernowin briefly summarizes the three scenes of the opera:

> In the first part, the boy and the old man are near each other, but they are almost unaware of each other's presence. In the second act, they attempt to connect; the boy is trying to understand the urgent message that his grandfather is trying to convey – failed attempts. In the last act, the boy is alone on the stage, with the limited and estranged pieces of information which he could internalize from his grandfather,…creating his own private holocaust which destroys and defines him.[17]

Tarasti's condition for narrativity is fully met in this summary. An initial "state of affairs" (the two characters are proximate without interacting) undergoes change over time, as the characters fail to communicate and the boy sinks into an internal horror, the synthesis of his imagination and the fragmentary knowledge of the past he has acquired. This minimal synopsis, already barely a plot, is not represented verbally in the opera. According to Czernowin, the boy's changing psychological states throughout its course are instead enacted in the music. She is "not interested in the accuracy of the words," but rather in "trying to create an accurate music to go through the various undercurrents of emotions…minute changes that are going through the child when he meets his grandfather."[18] Musical changes thus become sonic metaphors for psychological changes. The fact that the initial "state of affairs" in *Pnima* and the subsequent changes of that state are projected in sound is not problematic for our broad definition of narrative: despite its wordlessness, the opera amply satisfies Tarasti's narrativity condition.

Exploring in detail *how* Czernowin creates these sonic metaphors for psychological change in *Pnima* is the primary goal of the present analysis. Before exploring how narratological theory can be fruitfully applied toward that goal, it is worth pursuing the initial clues toward answering this question that Czernowin has already provided herself. In an interview with Brian Brandt that is included on the Mode DVD release of *Pnima*, Czernowin states that each of the

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[17] Chaya Czernowin, *Pnima…ins Innere (inward)*, Mainz: Schott, 2002
[18] Czernowin, "Chaya Czernowin on *Pnima…Ins Innere*."

characters—the boy and the old man—is assigned a "complex" of instrumentalists and singers

that projects the character's internal state through sound. The boy's complex (hereafter referred

to as the Child Complex) includes two female singers and five instrumental soloists—clarinet,

saxophone, trombone, violin, and cello—while the grandfather's complex (Old Man Complex)

includes the singing saw soloist, two male singers, and the six double basses of the string

orchestra. The rest of the string orchestra, percussion (two players) and live electronics complete

the instrumentation without explicitly being part of either complex. According to Czernowin,

using these vocal/instrumental complexes instead of directly representing each character with

one onstage singer means that the boy's changing psychological states do not need "to be

highlighted by words…they are highlighted through the music, the musical processes, the

relationship inside the different musics of the man and the child."[19] A path forward for analysis

emerges: in tracking the play of relationships within and between the musics of the old man and

the boy, one could learn much about how the music is technically constructed and, perhaps, how

it metaphorically portrays the encounter between these two characters.

Compelling as this program for analysis might be, it is not complete: the old man and

boy complexes do not comprise the opera's full instrumentation, nor do their interactions account

for the entirety of the music in the score. The final paragraph of Czernowin's preface to the score

offers at once clues to understanding the presence of the string orchestra as well as an additional

hermeneutic through which one might interpret *Pnima*:

> Besides being an account of the boy-grandfather encounter, PNIMA would like to be a window of thought
> on the way we respond to a traumatic experience. At first there is resistance, anger, pushing away, not
> accepting. This is materialized in the old man's character, dominating the first scene. This wall of
> resistance slowly melts to reveal vulnerability and pain – materialized in the child's character, which
> dominates the second scene. Mourning opens the internal stage to the appearance of a third voice, a more
> universal one (materialized in the orchestra, which dominates the third scene), which might be described as

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[19] Czernowin, "Chaya Czernowin on *Pnima…Ins Innere*".

> the voice of overcoming, going on. However, coupled with the impulse of life that this voice brings about is also the shadow of hopelessness, for even though the world continues to exist, yet, it has not changed.[20]

Czernowin's "third voice" expands the dramaturgy of interaction between contrasting elements in *Pnima* beyond a simple dialectic between the binary of "boy" and "old man." Taking this voice into account in analysis will provide a fuller understanding of Czernowin's use of the entire instrumental ensemble, as well as the roles that subgroups of the ensemble play in the work. Additionally, this "third voice" is a crucial element in Czernowin's suggestion for reading *Pnima* as an "epic statement" (to return to Golan Gur's characterization) about the human experience of trauma that allows the work to address far more than the particularities of interactions between two individuals.[21] As the ensuing analysis attempts to "read" the musical details of *Pnima*, it will be helpful to remain engaged with both hermeneutics – the particular and the universal – that Czernowin outlines in the preface to the score.

Another set of clues can be found in the chapter titles of the Mode DVD release of *Pnima*, which reflect Czernowin's own partitioning of the opera into sections.[22] Some of these titles are purely structural (e.g. "Transition") while others intimate the composer's perception of what is happening in a given area of the piece. I have not slavishly followed these titles to determine structural divisions within the opera, but have referred to them in cases where they offer confirmation of formal divisions that are abundantly clear in the score. The most descriptive titles, such as "Child's Aria" and "Drowning in the Orchestra," offer valuable suggestions for reading the music to which they append.

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[20] Czernowin, *Pnima…ins Innere* (score).
[21] Gur, "Composing Trauma."
[22] Chaya Czernowin, in conversation with the author, Dec. 15, 2014; Czernowin, liner notes to *Pnima…Ins Innere* (DVD), back cover.

Given my intention to use Czernowin's writings about *Pnima* as a resource for analysis, one might ask: why not simply ask her how the music is constructed, how it projects the boy's psychological change, what exactly the orchestral "third voice" says about the ambivalence of moving beyond trauma, or any number of other questions about the opera's musical features and their relation to its subject matter? First, Czernowin works in a realm of musical metaphor, in which several layers of abstraction separate her extra-musical influences from the network of musical relationships she builds among her materials. Her music is thus not directly representational, begging authoritative translation of its symbols, but rather invites subjective interpretation. Recalling Czernowin's description of the "overall metaphor" of the opera is useful here: she describes the parallel, paradoxical position of the boy and the listener, "caught in this indecipherable dream which needs to be deciphered."[23] Using an analytical methodology that does *not* seek authoritative authorial exposition of musical meaning reflects a corollary of this paradox: the opera simply does not contain one definitive, immanent meaning for an analyst to uncover or for Czernowin to reveal. Narratology, an inherently interpretive discipline, is thus an appropriate methodological choice for analyzing *Pnima*. As Michael Klein writes:

> …a narrative analysis of music is a form of hermeneutics…The larger question of music as narrative, then, is not whether or not music *is* a narrative but whether it is productive to our hermeneutic understanding of music to invoke those narrative metaphors.[24]

Through a review and synthesis of several strands of narratological thought, the following sections of this chapter will develop a theoretical approach to *Pnima* in an endeavor to show that in the case of this opera, narratological analysis is indeed productive to a hermeneutic understanding of the work.

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[23] Czernowin, liner notes to *Pnima…Ins Innere*, 2.

[24] Michael L. Klein, "Musical Story," in *Music and Narrative since 1900*, ed. Michael L. Klein and Nicholas Reyland (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 22.

Criteria for Evaluating Theoretical Approaches

Before embarking on a discussion of various facets of narratology and their relation to *Pnima*, it will be helpful to present the criteria I have used for evaluating different theoretical approaches. First, narrative theories that require music to fall on one side or the other of the old "absolute" vs. "programmatic" binary are not eminently applicable to a work that defies these simple categories. Second, theories predicated on Common Practice Era harmonic and structural norms are not useful in this case; similarly unhelpful are theories that may not explicitly refer to tonal harmony, but yet rely upon one or more of its premises that the compositional style of *Pnima* eschews, such as the assumption of pitch hierarchy as an integral component of musical organization. I have embraced theoretical approaches that seem consistent with Czernowin's music in general and with *Pnima* in particular, taking her writings and statements about her work into consideration.

For example, when attempting to situate in theory the instrumental "complexes" that project the psyches of the old man and boy characters, I am looking for theoretical frameworks that both help explain how music *can* characterize and are relevant to the musical material found in *Pnima*. My mission is not evaluative—I am not trying to determine whether Czernowin successfully uses instrumental characterization—but both analytical (by what means does she characterize? Are her means consistent with previously developed theories of musical characterization, or do we need to expand or adjust existing theory to accommodate her methods?) and hermeneutic (how can we better understand this work, and move toward an informed interpretation of it, through a constantly renewing engagement with narratological theory, score analysis, study of the composer's musical thinking and the context of this work in her catalog?). Ultimately, this analytical and hermeneutic project has a practical end: suggesting

new ways to confront the task of producing or critiquing a production of *Pnima*, and yielding a

deeper understanding of the new conception of opera Czernowin proposes in this work.

Narratology: Origins and Issues

Modern narratology has its roots in Russian formalism of the early twentieth century;

Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* is commonly cited as a jumping-off point for the

discipline. Early formalist and structuralist studies focused on plot archetypes, seeking common

structural characteristics among texted narratives rather than defining them by their specific

content: characters, images, etc. Post-structuralist scholars such as Roland Barthes and Gérard

Genette moved narratological discourse beyond the study of archetypes, although despite their

interest in the multivalence of textual meaning (Barthes) and the importance of the anomalous

(Genette),[25] their theories are still essentially taxonomic, enumerating and creating terminology

for the ways a text creates meaning (Barthes) or the discursive strategies it employs (Genette).[26]

Emma Kafelenos locates the infiltration of narratology into musical scholarship in the

1982 MLA essay collection titled *Interrelations of Literature*, which she says "heralded and

encouraged…interdisciplinary studies."[27] She credits the coining of the term *melopoetics* ("a

musical/literary criticism") by musicologist Lawrence Kramer in 1989 with opening the door to

music, texted or un-texted, as the object of literary theory.[28] This attribution is most

appropriately taken as an indication of Zeitgeist rather than cause-and-effect, as Fred Maus,

Carolyn Abbate and others had already published on musical narratology by 1989.[29]

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[25] Jonathan Culler, Foreword to Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 13.
[26] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974); Genette, *Narrative Discourse*.
[27] Emma Kafalenos, "Overview of the Music and Narrative Field," in *Narrative Across Media*, 275.
[28] Kafalenos, "Overview of the Music and Narrative Field," 275.
[29] e.g. Fred Maus, "Music as Drama," in *Music Theory Spectrum* 10 (1988): 56-73 and Carolyn Abbate, "What the Sorcerer Said," in *19th-century Music* 12 (1989): 221-30.

In the late 1980s and 1990s the field expanded; this period saw a great deal of publication by (but little agreement among) a variety of scholars on the subject of music and narrative. Summaries of the discipline published toward the end of the 1990s reflect some of the primary divisions in the field at that time. Gregory Karl, in his article "Structuralism and Musical Plot," allies himself with a group he terms the "narrativists"—including Fred Maus, Anthony Newcomb, and Leo Treitler—who, in very broad terms, are concerned with *story* (i.e., plot or content, as opposed to *discourse*, or the manner of delivering the content) in music.[30] Karl summarizes the position of the "narrativists" as a belief that the dichotomy between content and structure is false, and that plot or narrative/expressive content itself constitutes structure.[31] This position led some scholars, notably Maus, to argue that music may be closer to drama, which presents plot events with less discursive intrusion than literary fiction.[32]

Karl opposes the "narrativists" with those scholars who question the presence of narrative in music at all, including Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Lawrence Kramer, and Carolyn Abbate.[33] Nattiez argues that music lacks referential specificity, and thus cannot be narrative: in other words, if one cannot identify who or what the story happens to or exactly what events take place, there is no story.[34] This view places him in direct opposition to Maus, who argues that although music indeed has indeterminate agency, that is not an impediment to reading its events as constitutive of musical plot.[35] Kramer offers the view that music can be narrative, but that its narrativity cannot illuminate its structure, while Abbate argues that because music has no "past tense," the resultant absence of a perceptible dichotomy between story and discourse limits the narrative

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[30] Gregory Karl, "Structuralism and Musical Plot," in *Music Theory Spectrum* 19 (1997): 13-14.
[31] Karl, "Structuralism and Musical Plot," 14.
[32] Maus, "Music as Drama"; "Music as Narrative," in *Indiana Theory Review* 12 ( ): 14.
[33] Karl, "Structuralism and Musical Plot," 13.
[34] Jean-Jacques Nattiez, "Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?" in *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 115:2 (1990), 240-257.
[35] Maus, "Music as Drama," 68-70.

capacities of music.[36] Nonetheless, Abbate spends a great deal of time examining rare

instances of such discursive distance in nineteenth-century music, making apparent her at least

partial alliance with post-structuralist critical theory through her elevation (qua Genette) of the

anomalous to a position of great theoretical significance.[37] These summaries of individual

authors' ideas are extremely brief and do not communicate either the full breadth or nuance of

their work, but they show, in the manner of their presentation in Karl's article, the degree of

divergence found among writers on musical narrative in the late twentieth century.

Compounding these divergent opinions regarding the nature of musical narrative, the

wide spectrum of academic orientations among scholars publishing on the subject has led to a

range of (often incompatible) methodologies for narrative analysis. In contrast to Abbate's

search for anomalous moments of "discursive distance" in music, other scholars have identified

musical analogues to the plot archetypes of early literary narratology in Common Practice Era

music, such as Susan McClary's assertion of the recurring "subordination of feminine themes to

masculine ones."[38] Yet another group of scholars, including Robert Hatten and Eero Tarasti,

have developed a semiotic strain of musical narratology that appeals to existing semiotic theories

of narrative and adapts them for application to music.[39]

Almost all examples of analyses that apply these methods in practice exclusively address

Common Practice Era music. Some theories, like that of McClary mentioned above, are

predicated on melodic and formal conventions of the Common Practice; these simply cannot be

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[36] Lawrence Kramer, "Musical Narratology: A Theoretical Outline," *Indiana Theory Review* 12 (1992): 162 and Abbate, *Unsung Voices* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 53.

[37] Abbate, *Unsung Voices*

[38] Maus, "Narratology, narrativity." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online.* Oxford University Press, accessed February 27, 2014, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.turing.library.northwestern.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/40607.

[39] e.g. Robert Hatten, "On Narrativity in Music: Expressive Genres and Levels of Discourse in Beethoven," in *Indiana Theory Review* 12 (1991): 75-98 and Eero Tarasti, *A Theory of Musical Semiotics,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

applied to *Pnima* or any other works that do not make use of those conventions. Other

approaches, like Abbate's, do not explicitly exclude application to post-tonal music in theory, but

are never employed to study that repertoire in practice; Abbate's case studies are drawn from

standard nineteenth-century operatic and orchestral repertoire, and her analyses are heavily

engaged with the formal and harmonic language characteristic of that musical period. Eero

Tarasti, in *A Theory of Musical Semiotics* (1994), does apply his theory to Debussy's *Preludes:*

Book 2 (No. 7, "*La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune*") and makes an argument for

twentieth-century minimalism being anti-narrative.[40] However, Tarasti analyzes the *Prelude* in

terms of motivic development, identifying several motive-actors that are transformed over time;

the analysis thus addresses the piece from within premises of musical organization inherited

from the Common Practice. And while Tarasti's discussion of minimalism does venture into

theoretical territory that does not rely at all on Common Practice Era conventions, it is so

specific to a given style—one extremely far from Czernowin's—that it has little relevance for

Pnima.

In the first two decades of its existence, then, the field of musical narratology was divided

upon such basic questions as whether or not music can be narrative at all; if it can be, which

texted medium (and thus which body of existing theory) provides the most appropriate analogue

to music; what methodologies might be most fruitfully employed in narrative analysis; and, most

crucially, what defines or constitutes narrative (or narrativity—that is, the *quality* of being

narrative) in the first place. The fragmentation of the field is aptly illustrated by the fact that no

consensus seemed to exist among scholars during this wave of publication regarding the meaning

of the very word that names their field of inquiry. Additionally, the possibility and means for

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[40] Tarasti, *A Theory of Musical Semiotics*, 266-287.

narrative analysis of post-tonal music were barely explored; many theories developed during this time preclude application to anything other than music of the Common Practice.

Further developments in narratology and their applicability to *Pnima*

Given the internal conflicts and limitations of this first wave of musical narratology, it will not be a surprise that my theoretical approach to *Pnima* is largely derived from more recent scholarship. Although many of the theoretical battles outlined above continue to rage, publications have emerged since the early 2000s, from both musical narratologists and scholars focused on narrative in other media, outlining a broad, interdisciplinary understanding of narrative as well as a set of three clear, widely applicable criteria for its presence in a work of art, quelling at least some of the earlier divisions within the field. Byron Almén's *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (2008), which begins with a critique of the musical narratology of the 1980s and '90s, is an excellent focal point from which to approach this emergent conception of narrative.[41]

Almén's critique of musical narratology is founded on the premise that many of its writings implicitly or explicitly posit a "descendant model" of musical narrative, wherein musical narrative is viewed as a hierarchically lesser "descendant" of literary narrative.[42] Under the descendant model, the non-referential signification of music is perceived as a "lack"—a problem to be solved—rather than simply a *difference* between music and other narrative media.[43] Almén proposes instead what he calls the "sibling model" of musical narrative, which puts musical narrative on equal footing with literary narrative and acknowledges both

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[41] Byron Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008).
[42] Ibid., 12.
[43] Ibid., 12-13.

"foundational principles common to all narrative media and principles unique to each

medium."[44] Summarizing the principles that can be found across narrative media, Almén states:

> I will understand narrative as articulating the dynamics and possible outcomes of conflict or interaction between elements, rendering meaningful the temporal succession of events, and coordinating these events into an interpretive whole.[45]

Almén's summary is very similar to Eero Tarasti's minimal conditions for narrativity ("the

transformation of an object or state of affairs into something else through a process that requires

a certain amount of time") but, crucially, it also adds an interpretive aspect to the basic concept

of initial conditions or objects that change over time. Narrative not only presents changes over

time, but it also engages the subject who encounters those changes (viewer, reader, listener) in

developing an interpretive understanding of their relatedness and/or causality. Furthermore,

Almén argues that under the "sibling model," traits unique to music that have previously been

seen as problematic for narrative could instead be viewed favorably:

> Music's lack of semantic specificity might, for example, be viewed as a positive characteristic, in that music can display narrative activity without being limited to specific characters and settings.[46]

The "sibling model" of musical narrative thus aims to negate arguments that reject musical

narrative on the basis of music's indeterminate agency or lack of semantically specific plot

events, and eliminates the need to determine whether music ought to be considered in the light of

literary or dramatic narrative: in Almén's model, music can be considered a narrative medium in

its own right that happens to possess the particular trait of non-specific referentiality.

To state this point more bluntly, Almén's basic definition does not directly posit

representation or referentiality as necessary criteria for narrative works – that is, we can infer

from his definition that representation of specific referents need not be immanent in the work in

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[44] Ibid., 12.

[45] Ibid., 13.

[46] Ibid., 13.

order for it be understood narratively. Almén's particular mention of the non-specific referentiality of music implies that representation and reference are closely related to narrative, but (also by implication) places the burden of identifying the objects of representation on the interpreter instead of requiring the work itself to provide that identification, making representation a subjective category. Accordingly, I will discuss the nature of representation in *Pnima* in the context of my analysis, rather than posing it as a tenet of my theoretical approach.

One further corollary that results from excluding representation as a criterion for narrative is that the category of "narrative music" becomes incredibly broad: almost any piece of music will exhibit characteristics of narrative under Almén's definition, begging the question of how useful the definition actually is. I will address this concern after discussing key elements of Almén's theory, their potential applicability to *Pnima*, and their connections to other narratological texts.

In chapter four of Almén's book ("A Theory of Musical Narrative: Analytical Considerations"), he identifies three "levels," or degrees of analytical scope, that relate to the underlying properties he finds across narrative media.[47] Almén derives terms for these three levels—agential, actantial, and narrative—from the work of semiotic theorist James Jacob Liszka, a scholar of myth; Almén adapts them for application to music. In the most basic terms, the agential level articulates initial conditions, including agents (as the term suggests) and objects; the actantial level identifies interactions between elements that cause change to the initial conditions; and the narrative level deals with the analytic and interpretive coordination of the other two levels into a coherent, overarching "story."[48]

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[47] Ibid., 55-67.
[48] Ibid. 55-67.

Fascinatingly, the basic substance of these three narrative levels can also be found in Marie Laure-Ryan's editorial introduction to *Narrative Across Media,* a 2004 collection of essays in transmedial naratology. Ryan suggests three functions that a text (implying a verbal medium) must fulfill in order to be construed as narrative; when a text fulfills them, it constitutes what Ryan calls a "narrative script."[49]

1. A narrative text must create a world and populate it with characters and objects. Logically speaking, this condition means that the narrative text is based on propositions asserting the existence of individuals and on propositions ascribing properties to these existents.
2. The world referred to by the text must undergo changes of state that are caused by nonhabitual physical events: either accidents ("happenings") or deliberate human actions. These changes create a temporal dimension and place the narrative world in the flux of history.
3. The text must allow the reconstruction of an interpretive network of goals, plans, causal relations, and psychological motivations around the narrated events. This implicit network gives coherence and intelligibility to the physical events and turns them into a plot.[50]

Although Ryan's list implies the presence of more referential specificity than we might realistically be able to expect of music, the analogies between its contents and Almén's narrative levels are clear. The first condition is analogous to the agential level (identification of initial actors and conditions); the second corresponds to the actantial level (events that project change over time); and the third is essentially identical to the narrative level (providing interpretive coherence.)

Ryan clearly does not espouse a "sibling model" of narrative with regard to un-texted media, and she thus perceives an incompatibility between their lack of semantic specificity and the contents of the list above. To get around this problem, she distinguishes between "being a narrative" and "possessing narrativity," saying that un-texted media have narrativity because they can "evoke" a narrative script, but that they may not be able to claim the ontological status of narrative. However, if one subscribes to Almén's sibling model, Ryan's semantic distinction

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[49] Marie-Laure Ryan, introduction to *Narrative Across Media*, 9.
[50] Marie-Laure Ryan, introduction to *Narrative Across Media*, 8-9.

poses little threat: for example, the fact that music may not introduce specific human characters with names, occupations, and personalities does not mean that music cannot introduce sound objects with defining characteristics that serve equally well, though qualitatively differently, as the actors or agents of a narrative work. Thus in the overlap between the two scholars' lists, we can identify a common set of transmedial conditions for narrative that double as a program for narrative analysis: one might seek to identify in a piece of music an initial environment made up of elements with unique characteristics as well as events that temporalize the changing relationships between elements in that environment; the final (or concurrent third) step would be interpretively summing those events into a coherent trajectory.

This analytical program is especially attractive for application to *Pnima* because of the correspondences between Almén's three narrative levels and Czernowin's overview of the three sections of the opera. The Old Man and Child Complexes (characters/agents) are introduced in the first scene (establishing initial conditions), in the second scene the old man and boy attempt to interact (temporalization of changing relationships among elements), and in the third scene the boy synthesizes the fragmentary knowledge he has gained from the old man within his imagination, creating a "private holocaust" (interpretation). This is not to assert some metaphysical significance in the poetic confluence of subject and method, or to suggest that these three analytical levels are somehow separable and applicable only to the corresponding section of the work, but simply to acknowledge that an analysis conducted in these terms seems likely to yield rich results upon engaging with the substance of the music, as the composer herself invites us to hear the music in these terms.

Before one can implement this analytical program, however, one must have a clear sense of where to begin seeking the three narrative levels in *Pnima*. Musical agents, for example, can

assume myriad guises within the broad stylistic range of both tonal and post-tonal music.

How, then, should one direct a search for musical agency in Czernowin's music specifically?

Having extracted the agential, actantial, and narrative levels from Almén's theory of musical

narrative, one might logically ask whether the rest of his theory cannot be concurrently employed

to answer this question. A fuller discussion of the context of the three narrative levels within

Almén's larger theory will help explain why I am reluctant to adopt it as a whole despite the

utility of his "sibling model" for musical narrative and of the three narrative levels in isolation.

Although I am comfortable divorcing the three levels from the rest of Almén's theory (in

part because of their corroboration, without any broader theoretical assumptions, by Ryan), he

himself argues that they are predicated on narrative being defined, in essence, as

"transvaluation"—a semiotic term borrowed from Liszka that refers to the re-valuing of objects

within a hierarchical sign system.[51] Thus the agential level connotes the exposition of

hierarchically ranked values, and the actantial level comprises events that "revaluate the scale" of

values. The narrative, or interpretive, level involves determining how these events fit into one of

a pre-defined set of narrative archetypes that each reflect a different transvaluative process.[52]

While "transvaluation" and "hierarchy" are used here as technical terms within the

discourse of semiotics, they unavoidably carry the connotative implication that power dynamics

(and perhaps even conflict) are immanent in the relationships between musical elements. In other

words, these terms *already contain* narrative metaphors that have the potential to prejudice

analysis and interpretation, imposing a covert narrative upon music at the level of theory before

attempting analysis of any specific work. As the wording of my initial presentation of Almén's

three levels indicates, I prefer a less metaphorically loaded way of saying something similar—as

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[51] Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative,* 51.
[52] Ibid., 55-67.

in the vocabulary used for Tarasti's minimal conditions for narrativity, or Ryan's three functions of a narrative text—that focuses on the initial conditions of objects or agents in an environment, change in those conditions over time, and an interpretive understanding of the teleology of those changes. I am simply not convinced that conflict between hierarchical elements is prerequisite for narrative, and I am concerned that this conception of narrative has the potential to limit interpretive flexibility. More than a semantic complaint, my concern also entails the recognition that most musical narratology (including the vast majority of the analyses in Almén's book) deals with Common Practice Era music, where there is a well-established precedent in analytical discourse for speaking of pitch relationships and relationships between musical materials in terms of underlying hierarchies: scales, primary and secondary key areas or themes, etc. There is less precedent for hierarchy-based metaphors to describe the relationships between materials in post-tonal music; indeed, the music of the twentieth-century European avant-garde, in whose legacies Czernowin's music is steeped, explicitly aims to do away with these traditional hierarchies of musical organization. While transvaluation may describe *some* of the interactions between musical materials in *Pnima*, the subsequent analysis will not take up the identification of transvaluative processes as a primary goal.

A comprehensive theory of narrative for post-tonal music is a tempting prospect, but no such theory exists; given the wide divergence of styles and aesthetic orientations among composers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it may not be possible to generate a responsible one. While a detailed exposition of the issues surrounding the application of narrative theory to contemporary music is beyond the scope of this study, many of these issues

are capably addressed in *Music and Narrative since 1900* (2012).[53] The first book-length

publication to tackle this topic in detail, it offers a kaleidoscope of theory and method, applied by

a wide range of scholars to a wide range of repertoire. In fact, the absence of a comprehensive

theory of narrative for post-tonal music does not necessarily pose a problem for analysis of

Pnima, as Czernowin's views on style and the autonomy of the individual work suggest the need

for a theoretical approach to her music that is tailored to the specific piece and does not depend

upon a body of cultural conventions or theoretical archetypes. This attitude can be applied more

broadly: the narrativity of almost any given post-tonal work can be understood only via

engagement with the particular terms upon which that work operates.

In her 2007 lecture "The Other Tiger" (subsequently published as an essay), Czernowin

explores "the relationship of the poetic and political " in her music through a non-linear series of

anecdotes, images, and sections of exegesis. In a section entitled "Theory: An Excerpt from an

Imaginary Composition Book of Changes Accompanied by Secret Translations," Czernowin lays

out a prescription for the construction of musical form:

> **1) Instead of tonality and its fixed forms,** every composer in every piece must determine the framework
> of the work. Every piece has to teach the listener how to listen to it: what matters, what does not matter,
> what is at work…This is done absolutely with no words. This means that each composer has to learn to
> create a context for each piece, and to make this context apparent through the minute details of the work
> and its unfolding. Thus, no words attached.[54]

Czernowin's prescription for composers can also be read as a prescription for analysts of her

own music: if her goal is to create such a highly individuated context within each work, it seems

logical to develop work-specific analytical approaches rather than applying ready-made

theoretical taxonomies to any given piece. Czernowin not only argues against the musical

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[53] Michael L. Klein and Nicholas Reyland, eds., *Music and Narrative Since 1900*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012).

[54] Chaya Czernowin, "The Other Tiger," in *The Second Century of New Music*, ed. Franklin Cox et al., (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011): 186.

conventions of "tonality and its fixed forms," but also decries using words to prescribe a manner of listening. These rejections are connected: musical convention and verbal convention have in common the potential for prescriptive, positivistic use and interpretation that denies the multivalence of meaning and the subjectivity (and by extension, the humanity) of a potential listener. There is thus political as well as practical justification for developing a work-specific analytical approach to Czernowin's music that does not rely upon taxonomical categories or appeals to musical convention.

In this rejection of taxonomic categorization lies the final argument against wholesale adoption of Almén's theory, despite the utility of some of its basic principles. His theory is taxonomic not of *what* music means or the methods by which we should seek its meaning (he is careful to acknowledge the multivalence of signs, the importance of hermeneutic approaches to interpretation, and methodological eclecticism in analysis) but of *how* it means. For example, all musical narratives are categorized as one of four narrative archetypes, which in turn can be grouped into subtypes, and he appeals to conventional musical meanings in his employment of the concept of "musical topic," etc. This approach is effectively ruled out by Czernowin's previously-cited description of the "overall metaphor" at work in *Pnima*: applying pre-formulated meaning-making categories to a piece that is overtly about resisting categorization seems, at best, a recipe for frustration, at worst, a way of doing violence to the work.

Having determined to adopt Almén's three narrative levels but not the entirety of his theory, the next question is: what work-specific analytical approach will replace the rejected portions of his theory and help determine how best to seek the three narrative levels in *Pnima*? Rather than posing an answer immediately, I would like to return to the potential problem of over-inclusivity raised by the broad approach to narrative I have adopted, as addressing this

problem will also help provide an answer to the question above. Carolyn Abbate, writing in

1991, frames the issue eloquently:

> Broad definitions of narrative…are so broad as to enable almost all music, all parts of any given work, to be defined as narrative. Put bluntly: how much intellectual pleasure do we drive from a critical methodology that generates such uniformity and becomes a mere machine for naming any and all music?[55]

Under a broad definition of narrative, where more artworks are included under the narrative

umbrella than excluded, intellectual pleasure lies not in producing vapid confirmation of a

work's narrative ontology (a project I find as futile as Abbate seems to), but in determining how

the specific details of that work project a unique instance of narrativity: what story does *this*

piece tell, and by what means? As argued above, in the case of *Pnima*, an understanding of these

details must be obtained though a work-specific approach, but this is not a call for the radical

separation of analysis from any broader scholarly discourse. Rather—to return to the essentially

hermeneutic nature of this enterprise—understanding the unique iteration of narrativity present

in *Pnima* will be assisted by mediation between the musical "text," elements of narratology and

other bodies of theory, the contextualizing information provided by Czernowin's other music,

writings and statements about the work, and (inevitably) my own interpretive subjectivity. In the

following chapters, I will concurrently address the details of the music of *Pnima* and Almén's

three narrative levels, using the resources described above to discover how each one is

articulated in the specific context of this particular work.

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[55] Abbate, "Unsung Voices," xi.

Chapter 2

The Agential Level: Musical Agents and Characterization in Scene I

Identifying Musical Agents

To adequately consider the agential level of narrative in *Pnima*, one must address two separate but interrelated questions. First, what constitutes a relevant musical agent in this work? And second, how are the agents, or characters, in Czernowin's scenario (hereafter referred to as the Child and the Old Man) characterized musically? The distinction between musical agent and character-agent is primarily one of scale. Almen's musical agents are of varying sizes, but are in general relatively small in scale, at the cellular structural level of, for example, a motive or a musical topic.[56] One can identify in *Pnima* musical agents at a cellular structural level comparable to that of Almen's agents, but one can also identify musical agency at higher structural levels (at the level of "organism," to continue the biological metaphor). As suggested by the fact that complexes of multiple instruments project the psyches of Old Man and Child, the musics that introduce these two characters take the form of multifaceted trajectories or gestalts articulated through the interaction of instrument- or complex-specific musical materials over time. So while the music defining each character will certainly be comprised of cellular musical agents, it cannot be fully analyzed without engaging the actantial and interpretive levels of narrative to some degree. Despite this blurring of analytical categories, it seems safe to ascribe agency to these larger musical characterizations, in part because Almen also identifies the agential level of narrative on multiple levels of musical structure, but primarily because they do

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[56] Almen 56, 102-103. In the latter excerpt, Almen identifies "themes, motives, and cells in Mahler, Symphony no. 3, sixth movement," invoking the same biological metaphor for the agential level. He also invokes linguistic metaphors for the various levels of narrative in his headings above discussion of each level of narrative, e.g. "Agential level (Morphological: cells); I have adopted similar linguistic metaphors in my description of the agential content of the Old Man music as a "limited morphology."

in fact interact with and influence each other in Scene II of *Pnima*, thus behaving as we would expect musical agents to behave.[57] Those interactions will be examined in detail in chapter three.

Czernowin's large-scale musical agents are in some ways comparable to musical topics: they contain identifiable musical features that collectively embody "Old Man music" or "Child music," just as a specific set of musical features make up the "Sarabande" topic in the context of Common Practice Era musical convention. But Czernowin's musical characterizations are not conventional. They are defined within the musical conditions of this particular work and are interpretable through their context and their metaphorical enactments of non-musical aspects of human experience, which I will discuss in more detail below. Thus the terms of each musical characterization in *Pnima* must be established and identified without appeals to prior musical representation of similar characters. The introductions of each character's instrument complex in Scene I provide convenient opportunities to both identify cellular musical agents that are relevant to the music of the opera and to define the nature of the large-scale, character-associated musical agents.

Scene I can be divided into an introduction and three significant sections of music, the boundaries of which are defined by changes of musical gestalt, changes of instrumentation (and the resulting presence of either the Child or Old Man instrument complex), and the use of silence, or near-silence, to create divisions in time between each section. Figure 1 shows the location of these sections within the scene in terms of the dominant presence of one character complex or the other. Appearances of the string orchestra are also included.

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[57] Almen, 102-117
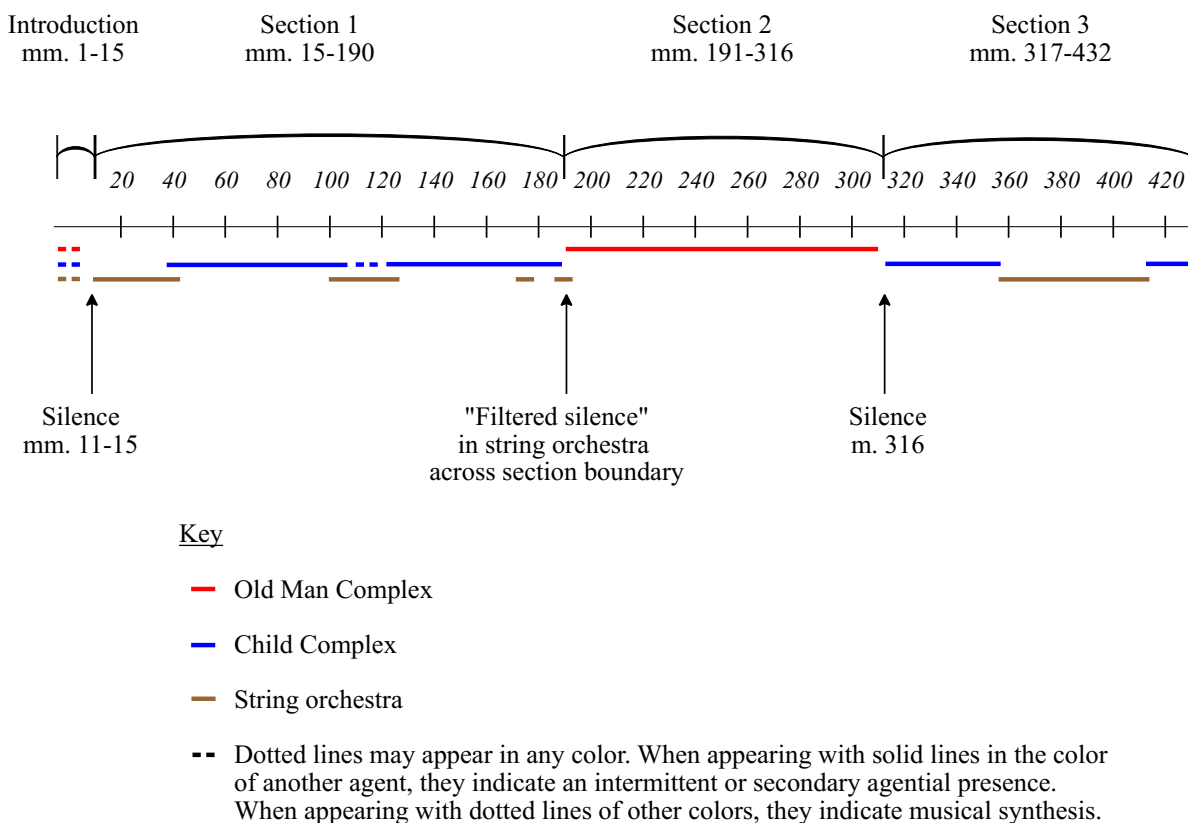
Figure 1 – Scene I sections according to primary character complex

The division between sections 1 and 2 is not clearly marked by one long silence, as are

the other divisions. Instead, at the end of Section 1, between mm. 180 and 191, Czernowin places

several shorter moments of actual silence (m. 180 beats 1-2; m. 183 beats 3-4) and periods of

quiet, filtered white noise produced by extreme bow pressure figures that are distributed in time

ad libitum by the violins, violas, and cellos of the string orchestra (mm. 184-187; m. 191). These

intermittent periods of actual silence and "filtered silence" signal the sectional division, along

with a shift to the instrumentation of the Old Man Complex as well as new musical gestalts and a

new tempo (from ♩ = 100 to ♩ = 40 at m. 191).

As figure 1 makes clear, the presence of the string orchestra across these sections complicates the divisions I have offered above. The string orchestra does not play constantly through each section in which it participates, but enters in intermittent waves, playing tectonically-long blocks of white noise and filtered pitch that disrupt the local flow of musical time. One could potentially assign different sectional divisions to Scene I so as to emphasize the disruptive formal role of these orchestral entrances. For the moment, I have chosen the divisions above to facilitate discussion of musical agents and characterization in the music of the Child and Old Man Complexes. The role of the string orchestra will be addressed in chapter four.

The Old Man

The Old Man instrument complex dominates Section 2 of the first scene (mm. 191-315). Musical ideas specific to this section are introduced at its outset by the contrabasses, musical saw, and percussion; these ideas accrue and change, incorporating gradually more instruments, until the section culminates with 18 repetitions of one bar of material that involves the entire instrumentation of the opera except for the female singers.

What constitutes a cellular musical agent in this section? The music does not include many of the elements traditionally assigned agential roles in narrative analysis: melodic themes, conventional *topoi*, recurring harmonic progressions, or motives whose development can be tracked in terms of the evolution of pitch, rhythm, or even contour. But there are recurrent elements, namely gestures, or sonic materials, that are defined by envelope and timbre (which should also be considered in terms of instrument-specific playing technique), and to a lesser degree, pitch. Nearly all of the sounds heard in mm. 191-315 can be classified into one or more of the four following gesture categories: crescendi (often abruptly stopped at their peak), glissandi, dry impulses, and trembling sounds. Clear examples of each of these categories can be

found within the first ten bars of Section 2, which are reproduced in score example 1 with each

category of gesture identified. Crescendi in this excerpt include the saw gestures in m. 192 (and

in fact most of the short saw gestures, whether or not a crescendo is marked, due to the natural

envelope of the instrument) as well as the crescendo gestures in the six double basses between

bars 195 and 199, most of which are cut off at their peak. Glissandi include nearly all gestures

played by the saw (again, this is true whether or not a glissando is explicitly marked, as glissando

is endemic to the instrument), and the composite cello and bass gesture in m. 199, which is also a

crescendo. Dry impulses are mostly limited to the percussion, which introduces them in mm.

193-195; the primary techniques used to create dry impulses are beating stones together and

hitting a set of suspended cans with a metal beater, both generally performed in an irregular

pulse. Later in the section, dry impulses are also performed on bass drums, placing them in a

lower register and giving them slightly more resonance. Finally, trembling sounds in the first 10

bars of Section 2 include the "uneven ir[regular] vibrato" performed by double basses 1-3 in mm.

192-3 and by all the double basses in bar 197, where it is coupled with a crescendo. Trembling

sounds are the most open of the four categories with regard to playing technique, as the effect of

uneasy oscillation can be produced in multiple ways on most instruments, including vibrato,

tremolo of the left and right hands on string instruments, quasi-periodic embouchure changes,

fluttertongue, timbral trills, etc. Despite this openness with regard to technique, the trembling

sound is also particularly native to the musical saw, which produces fluctuating sounds more

readily than stable ones. The saw is the first instrument to present clear gestural material in

section 2 (m. 191), and as a result has the appearance of being the source for much of its sound

world.

Score example 1 – introduction of Old Man Complex gesture categories, mm. 191-199[58]

Chaya Czernowin PNIMA… INWARDS
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Mainz, Germany

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[58] Note: All score examples are from the 2009 edition of *Pnima*, although the 2002 edition was also used for analysis. Any relevant discrepancies between the two editions are discussed in the preceding chapters.

These four musical agents, or sound categories, bear narrative implications for the music of the Old Man Complex independently of their interactions with each other. Taken together, they create a remarkably limited morphology, appropriate for music that depicts the psyche of a character whose verbal communication is limited and in stark contrast with the music of the Child Complex, as will be discussed later in this chapter. For Byron Almén, the process of identifying musical agents includes determining their initial "markedness": their compliance with, or deviation from, culturally-defined norms.[59] Almén argues that these changes affect the "rank" of agents, or their hierarchical position; as discussed in chapter 1, I prefer to consider the environmental behavior of musical agents without the implicit assumption of hierarchy, but identifying the relative normativity of musical agents is still relevant to that task despite my adjusted terminology for the end goals of such analysis. Moreover, the largely hermetic nature of Czernowin's work with respect to convention begs the analyst to address how agential normativity could be identified within her ouvre. Crescendi, glissandi, dry impulses, and trembling sounds cannot really be conceived as normative or non-normative with respect to themselves – for what is a "normal" glissando? Instead, they can be read as marked, or non-normative, with respect to traditional Western concepts of musical tone and instrumental technique: in other words, the ways in which instruments in Western music traditionally "communicate."

A glissando disrupts traditional sound ideals of stable intonation and clearly defined pitch. The trembling sound, when its unsteady oscillation is rendered within the parameter of pitch, does the same, distorting the regular, continuous vibrato expected in modern performance

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[59] Almen, 56. The actantial and narrative levels of analysis thus involve tracking changes of the markedness of musical agents.

practice of Common Practice Era repertoire. Czernowin often achieves trembling sounds in

this section by specifying a method of playing that explicitly counteracts normative instrumental

technique: "extremely slow bow" (frequently used throughout the section) and "trembling bow"

(m. 189) or "shaky bow" (m. 295) for the strings; "highest pitch poss., air only" for the trombone

(m. 268); "it is OK (even welcome) for the bow to get stuck because of pressure" for the saw (m.

271.) While extended techniques are normative within Czernowin's compositional language, the

presence of such explicit verbal instructions to dispense with traditional playing in association

with trembling sounds shows the inherent markedness of this sound category with respect to

traditional instrumental technique at large. And while trembling sounds have a long semiotic

history in opera (often in the form of string tremolos,) the temporal irregularity in the sounds

produced by the playing techniques Czernowin specifies renders them marked with respect to the

periodic oscillation of traditional operatic tremolo.

There is nothing particularly marked about a crescendo when taken purely as an increase

of volume over time, but in the context of Section 2, other parameters—namely pitch and timbre

(i.e., playing technique)—contribute to the markedness of the crescendo category. While the saw

plays a few micro-crescendi in mm. 192-193, the crescendo gesture type is definitively

introduced (and twice reiterated) in the double basses between bars 195 and 197, where it is

applied to a microtonal chord placed quite high in the bass register (D4, D quarter-sharp 4, D♯4,

G4, G quarter-sharp 4, A♭4). This combination of register and pitch already challenges a

normative concept of sound and intonation, but more importantly, each crescendo is layered with

changes in bow technique that further destabilize the sound. The peak of each crescendo

corresponds with an arrival at *sul ponticello*, played with extreme bow pressure; pitch becomes

less audible under these conditions. The increase of effort and resistance associated with the

changes to extreme bow pressure and *sul ponticello*, combined with the cutting off of sound at the peak of each crescendo, give the effect of a series of sounds that attempt to grow, but are crushed under their own weight.

Taken together, the crescendo, glissando, and trembling sound categories all suggest a fundamental instability with respect to traditional concepts of musical tone and sound production, i.e. the "voice" of the instruments involved. The specific ways that these musical agents display markedness thus already offer potential sonic metaphors for the Old Man's inability to communicate. There is enough audible pitch and timbral reference to traditional playing in these sounds to hear the potential for normative tone production, but enough deviation from it to hear that potential being constantly thwarted. In the case of the crescendo gesture, there is a metaphorical insinuation of a failed attempt to produce sound—the "excessive" effort expended to make the sound louder ultimately crushes it. It is worth noting that this "failure" of the sound results from Czernowin's parametric separation of pitch, dynamics, and bow technique. Bow technique is controlled separately, changing while pitch is held constant in each of the bass parts, and to some degree counteracting the dynamic indications: playing with extreme bow pressure causes a reduction in string vibration, preventing the instrument from producing a full, resonant fortissimo. The interaction of these separately controlled parameters invites us to identify agential information not only at the level of gesture but also within isolated musical parameters, the interaction of which over the course of one gesture (actantial level) can create meaning with respect to the Old Man character (narrative level).

My identification of musical agents in the preceding paragraphs makes use of biological metaphors (e.g. "cellular" musical agents) for musical structure. It places a premium on the physical mechanisms of sound production (i.e. playing technique) and the semblance of physical

attributes or motions in sound ("weight," "trembling") as elements of the music that illuminate character psychology. I have used the word "gesture," often applied axiomatically to music, with the awareness that it can connote either a literal or metaphorical relationship between sound and physical motion. The assertion implicit in these collective uses of language is that meaning in *Pnima* relies upon multiple layers of musical metaphor, in which physical and biological metaphors enacted in sound operate in turn as metaphors for the psychology of her characters. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that human conceptual systems are inherently metaphorical, and that we tend to metaphorically structure our understanding of abstract emotional concepts, such as love, in terms of concepts that we experience directly through our bodies or our interactions with others—e.g. "love is a journey."[60] My reading of *Pnima* applies a similar model of conceptual transference to the music of the opera, finding in it sonic metaphors that draw on our direct physical, biological, and cultural experience and which can be secondarily interpreted as metaphors for more abstract concepts, such as character attributes or psychological states.

Steven Takasugi's article *"Afatsim" by Chaya Czernowin: Melodic Resynthesis and Temporal Disfigurement* sets a precedent for reading Czernowin's work in this way. In the opening paragraph of the article, Takasugi writes:

> *Afatsim* is the Hebrew word for gallnuts, the grotesque swellings and protrusions found on branches, stems, and leaves of plant life infected with parasites, insects, fungi, or other diseases from within the host organism. It will be significant to compare the biological disfigurement with the perceptual disfigurement (of the lines of expectation and prediction) as it dislodges and defies the listener's assumptions domestic to linear continuities. This would be to locate certain key correspondences between the metaphor from biology and a disfigured musical perception of time.[61]

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[60] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 85, 115.
[61] Steven Kazuo Takasugi, "*Afatsim* by Chaya Czernowin: Melodic Resynthesis and Temporal Disfigurement," trans. Steven Kazuo Takasugi, unpublished translation, 1. Published in German as "Chaya Czernowins "Afatsim". Melodische Resynthetisierung und Zeitenstellung," *Music und Ästhetik*, issue 3 (July 1997), 66-81.

Takasugi goes on to analyze the fragmentation and reformulation of initially-composed blocks

of musical material in *Afatsim*, describing Czernowin's compositional procedures in terms of the

biological metaphor of "disfigurement" and the disfigurement of perceptions of musical

continuity those procedures engender. He also classifies musical materials extracted from the

initial blocks using a linguistic metaphor for levels of scale and completeness that comes from

Czernowin herself: "half-words, words, half-sentences, and sentences."[62] Both of these are

metaphors based on direct experience—the physical processes and appearances of organic

disfigurement and the levels of structure in human language that we engage daily in speech.

Concluding the article, Takasugi describes large-scale formal disfigurement in *Afatsim* as the

disfigurement of a narrative latent in much of Czernowin's work, in which musical processes

with some necessary degree of linearity lead to an elemental, psychological revelation. In

Afatsim, he argues, "disfigurement has invaded and deformed the conventions of the narrative,

though again, not to the extent that a narrative is indiscernible. A covert epiphanic moment

remains."[63] The musical processes he describes via biological metaphor thus bear a second layer

of interpretation as the disfigurement of a psychological narrative that is normative in prior

music by Czernowin and relies upon an elemental convention of Western music: the linear

perception of time. His reading not only corresponds to my model of layered metaphorical

interpretation, but also resembles my account of markedness in the musical agents of Section 2

as a nearly constant destabilization of elemental musical conventions—in this case, traditional

tone quality and clear pitch—without destroying them. *Afatsim* was composed in 1996, two years

before Czernowin began writing *Pnima*; given the temporal proximity of their composition, it is

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[62] Takasugi, 4.
[63] Takasugi, 12.

reasonable to find methodological support in the similarities between Takasugi's analysis and my own.

As a first step in identifying and interpreting layers of sonic metaphor in *Pnima*, one could analyze the assignation of instruments to each character complex. The instruments in the Child Complex tend to play in higher registers than those in the Old Man Complex; in this case, relative register serves as a sonic metaphor for the characters' relative age: high = young, low = old. This metaphor has multiple experiential bases: the voices of men tend to be lower in register than the voices of boys, and the slower vibrations of lower sounds metaphorically correspond to the typically slower movements of elderly people compared to those of children. This is a very simple example, hardly at the level of interpretive sophistication Takasugi achieves, but serves as an illustration of the pervasiveness of such metaphors in the music of the opera.

For a more complex example, let us consider the end of Section 2, which culminates in 18 quasi-mechanical repetitions of a single bar of material (mm. 295-315) involving the entire instrumentation of *Pnima* with the exception of the female singers. This dramatic concluding event offers a more nuanced characterization via sonic metaphor that is in turn mediated by experiential metaphor. In my description of the repetition as "mechanical," its experiential basis in human behavior and cultural meaning begin to surface: repetition in human behavior, in the form of repetitive thoughts, actions, or speech-acts, is not considered natural or normal, but instead is culturally construed as the result of mental distress or disability. The rarity of direct repetition in *Pnima*, and in Czernowin's work in general, corroborates this reading—the music behaves in a way that deviates from norms established by its context. This musical metaphor for abnormal, repetitive behavior allows us to associate the psychological origins of such behavior with the character of the Old Man. It would be going too far to ascribe direct representation of a

specific action or condition to this musical moment. Assertions such as "the old man is saying something over and over again" or "the Old Man has PTSD and is having flashbacks" contain a degree of plot specificity that exceeds the representational capacities of the musical medium (and that the composer has no interest in conveying). But through the layers of metaphor, we can associate repetitive behavior, and some unspecified psychological damage or disorder—a fixation, rigidity, or "stuck-ness"—to the Old Man. Listening and attempting to interpret this moment in the Old Man music puts one in much the same situation as the character of the child in Grossman's novel, who sees the strange behaviors of his elderly relative but can only gradually and partially interpret what they imply about his history and psychology.

While mm. 295-315 contain a larger number of immediately concurrent repetitions than any other instance of musical recurrence in *Pnima*, the repetitions are not in fact wholly periodic. While the rhythmic notation and pitch material of the recurring material remains the same, always fitting within a bar of 2/4, Czernowin inserts brief silences between a few of the 2/4 bars and adjusts the tempo several times, adding a degree of unease to the overall temporal regularity; figure 2 summarizes the metric structure, tempi, and inserted silences in this area of repetition.
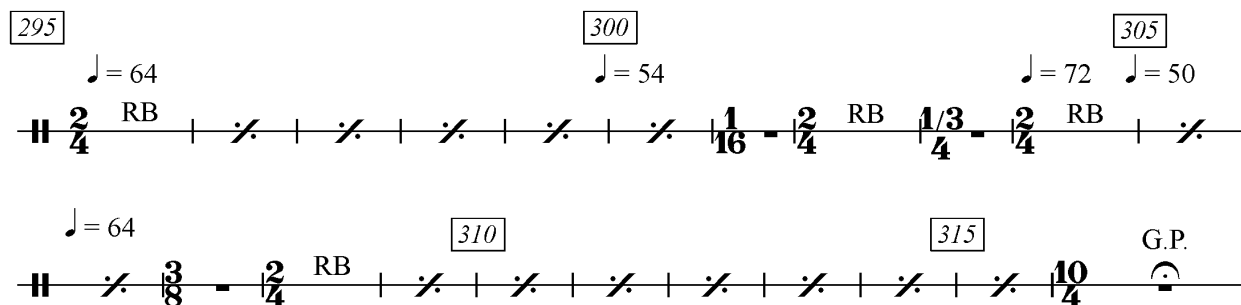
Fig. 2 – Meter and tempo changes and inserted silences, mm. 295-316. RB = repeated bar of layered gestural materials (dynamics vary among repetitions).

Score example 2*A*-*B*: gesture types in Old Man Complex repeated bar (mm. 295-315)

2*A:* Upper half of score, m. 297   2*B*: Lower half of score, m. 297

The repeated bar is composed in layers, with each solo instrument, voice part, and string orchestra section given its own repeating gesture(s) with characteristic pitch and rhythm patterns. As shown in score example 2, all of the layered gestures fit into one or more of the four categories described earlier (crescendo, glissando, dry impulse, and trembling sound), linking the repeated bar—the object of fixation—with the limited morphology of the Old Man Complex music in Section 2. As repetitions of the bar unfold, individual gestural layers change dynamics independently, creating kaleidoscopic changes of balance within the ensemble. But while these balance changes, tempo changes, and inserted silences allow the listener to (metaphorically) view the repeated material from different angles and in different lights, they do not fundamentally change the material. The Old Man's fixation and limited morphology persist: perceptually, the variations of the repeated bar amount to no more than a generalized instability—an irregular pulse (like those found throughout this section as the rhythmic manifestation of the dry impulse sounds), or the wavering of a trembling sound made structural.

Irregular repetition is in fact subtly embedded throughout Section 2 on multiple structural levels, from the intra-sound level of irregular vibrato to the organization of mid-level structural units. Section 2 can be divided into seven subsections defined by instrumentation, tempo, and musical content. The first four of these subsections are similar enough in content as to seem like irregular variations of one another. These four subsections range in length from 11 to 21 bars, with their material dovetailed such that the last bar of the preceding section doubles as the first bar of the next. More importantly, they share formal attributes. Each subsection begins at $\quarternote = 40$, with layered materials drawn from the four cellular agent categories described above assigned to the saw, contrabasses (periodically joined by the string orchestra cellos), and percussion. After a series of dynamic waves (i.e., crescendi) in these materials, the male singers enter, joined or

slightly preceded by wind soloists from the Child Complex and in conjunction with a slowing

of the tempo. These similarities between the first four subsections of Section 2 are summarized

in table 1, which compares salient structural characteristics across all seven subsections.

Table 1 – Structural comparison among subsections of Scene I, Section 2

Subsection	Location	Bars before vocal entrance	Bars after vocal entrance	Tempo before vocal entrance	Tempo after vocal entrance
A	mm. 191-211	16	5	♩ = 40	♩ = 35
A'	mm. 211-226	11	5	♩ = 40	♩ = 35
A"	mm. 226-236	6	4	♩ = 40	♩ = 30
A'''	mm. 236-254	5	13	♩ = 40	♩ = 30; 3 bars later ♩ = 32
B	mm. 254-270	3	13.5	♩ = 32	—
A''''	mm. 271-283	0	13	♩ = 32	—
A/B, repeated bar	mm. 283-315	2	32 (10 before repeated bar)	♩ = 32	— (see fig. 2 for tempo changes in repeated bar)

Reading down the "bars before vocal entrance" column of table 1, it becomes clear that

the number of bars of music prior to the vocal entrance in each subsection gets progressively

shorter from A-A'''', where the voices enter at the outset with no instrumental preamble.

However, this proportional trajectory is complicated by the appearance of subsection B, which is

anomalous in context due to its materials: an extremely quiet assemblage of trembling sounds in

the male voices, alto sax, trombone, and saw threaded along the constant strand of a

stratospherically high violin harmonic. The extremely soft dynamics of subsection B cause it to

function as a large-scale structural version of the already-discussed brief silent bars inserted

between repetitions in the culminating subsection. Besides its structural role, this subsection

foregrounds sounds that are quite delicate and fragile—perhaps signs of the Old Man's

vulnerability. This is in sharp contrast to the following subsection, which begins with a loud

outburst in the percussion and voice parts (bearing the expressive marking "in extreme anger.")[64]

Besides taking part in a large-scale iteration of irregular repetition, the juxtaposition of these two

sections shows us two extremes of the Old Man's psychological world without leaving the

context of that character's limited musical language.

 Localized instances of irregular repetition accrue and increase in scale across the A

subsections. As already discussed, irregular vibrato (a repetitive oscillation or trembling sound),

is introduced in subsection A. In subsection A', contrabasses 2 and 3 alternate between wide,

irregular vibrato and non-vibrato at a constant rate of quintuplet 8th notes, coupled with

alternating ff and mp dynamics (mm. 213-214, shown in score example 3*A*). In subsection A",

the six contrabasses perform four nearly identical crescendo gestures, including that gesture's

typical move from *ordinario* playing to extreme bow pressure and *sul ponticello*, in rhythmic

unison from m. 231 into the downbeat of m. 232 (shown in score example 3*B*). Each crescendo is

the length of a quarter note except for the last (quarter note plus dotted quintuplet 8th), and each

has the same dynamic marking (*mp* < *f*), creating a temporally irregular repetition of otherwise

identical crescendo gestures. A similar irregular looping of crescendi occurs in subsection A"' in

the contrabasses (mm. 240-242, shown in score example 3*C*), with durations ranging from one to

one-and-a-half beats. By gradually extending the maximum length of repeated material from the

micro-oscillation of vibrato to a span of more than a quarter note, Czernowin subtly prepares the

culminating repetition of two beats of material in mm. 295-315 and progressively exposes the

structural connections between trembling sounds and larger-scale repetition, underscoring the

limited number of gestural shapes that make up the music of the Old Man Complex.

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[64] Pnima score 53

Score example 3*A-C*: expanding durations of irregularly repeated material, Sc. I, Sec. 2

3*A*: m. 214, contrabasses 2 and 3 – repetition in mostly quintuplet 8th notes

3*B*: m. 229-231, contrabasses – repetition in mostly quarter notes

3*C*: m. 239-242 – repetition in durations of a quarter note or longer

Several other trajectories that operate across Section 2 take the form of structural-level crescendi. Overall, the section expands in register, beginning with the contrabass cluster ranging from D4-Ab4 and reaching its widest span in 271-279 (subsection A""). Here contrabass 6 has a D quarter-flat 1, less than a step above the lowest note available within the ensemble, and the alto saxophone plays notes of indeterminate pitch at the very extreme of its altissimo register, notated without ledger lines but placed approximately a 5th to a 12th above the staff and marked 15ma. This expansion of register can be heard as a crescendo shape operating within the parameter of pitch or as a large-scale interrupted glissando moving out to the registral extremes of the ensemble. Instrumentation also expands across the section, as the music of the Old Man Complex subsumes more and more instruments that are not explicitly part of that complex, perhaps foreshadowing the influential effect the Old Man will have on the Child in Scene II. The

increasing instrumentation causes an actual crescendo to take place over the course of the section, which begins mezzo-piano in the contrabasses, saw, and percussion and reaches a dynamic peak in bar 306, the tenth of the final 18 repetitions, in which all parts are marked fortissimo. None of these trajectories is even remotely linear, but all are audible over the course of Section 2 as a whole. And just as the potential growth inherent in the initial crescendo gesture is crushed by the weight of extreme bow pressure, these large-scale trajectories do not propel the music of the Old Man to a new place, but instead collapse into the uneasy repetition that ends Section 2, which vehemently insists yet again upon the same gestural shapes and materials that have governed the section from the beginning.

In examining how the cellular musical agents of Section 2 are embedded within it at multiple levels of musical structure, and in discussing how this contributes to Czernowin's characterization of the Old Man, this analysis has necessarily engaged Almén's actantial and narrative levels as well as the agential. Because the music of the Old Man Complex operates as a large-scale musical agent in *Pnima*, hopping between the three analytical categories in this initial analysis is helpful for establishing the musical relationships that define the psychology of the character over time. The music of the Old Man Complex constantly returns to the same small set of ideas, and the embedding of those ideas at multiple levels of musical structure suggests a conflation of local and global time: a blending of past and present, or an indistinct separation between memory and present experience. The music appears to make ineffectual attempts to grow or express, to "get something out," in the form of the thwarted crescendo gesture. Thus the music is stuck, yet unstable; appears to change, yet in fact constantly repeats the same few ideas; expends effort, yet that effort is largely ineffectual; displays extreme vulnerability, yet also

extreme anger. In these musical appearances, Czernowin portrays the psyche of the Old Man, who is constantly reliving his traumatic past, unable to communicate what he has witnessed.

The Child

The music of the Child Complex differs significantly from that of the Old Man complex, starting with its formal dispersion across multiple sections of Scene I, as can be seen in figure 1 (p. 34). Four of the Child Complex solo instruments dominate Section 1 (mm. 15-189): viola, bass clarinet, alto saxophone, and cello; the string orchestra also takes part in this section, but enters in three distinct waves (mm. 15-41, 103-128, and 172-196), while the Child complex instruments play nearly continuously. These four solo instruments return in Section 3 (mm. 317-432), augmented by the percussion and the female voices. Appearances of the Child Complex thus bookend the Old Man Complex music heard in Section 2, but the second appearance contains a fuller instrumentation.

Superficially apparent differences between the music of the two complexes signal the need for a different approach to musical agency in the Child Complex. While the Old Man Complex was characterized by narrowly varied consistency—a limited set of gesture types, an overall slow tempo (most frequently $\quarternote = 40$), a prevailing 4/4 meter, and mid-level units of structure of comparable size (in the range of 10-20 bars)—the Child Complex bursts onto the musical scene in m. 38 with a rapidly changing, multivalent musical surface. Fragmentary, contrasting musical gestalts appear in rapid succession, availing of the full registral span and timbral spectrum of the four solo instruments; time signatures and tempi change constantly. As Section 1 unfolds, it becomes apparent that some of these gestalts recur—for example, the rhythmically repetitive (periodic) textures of white noise (or "filtered noise" with some pitch) that seem to pause the otherwise rapid musical action in mm. 43, 74-75, and 83, or the complex,

speech-like composite gesture heard in mm. 67, 68, and 70. Might these and other similarly recurring gestalts function as musical agents in Section 1? Due to their recurrence, they are at the very least the musical elements that first emerge as audible entities within the constantly changing musical environment of the Child Complex.

These recurrent gestalts differ from the musical agents of the Old Man Complex most significantly in their structural complexity. Whereas the gesture categories of the Old Man Complex are simple shapes that can be replicated with infinite variation in any given instrumental part, recurring ideas in the Child Complex music are polyphonic entities, requiring the participation of multiple instruments to achieve their distinct musical surface. A composite rhythm created among all four instruments defines the white noise textures mentioned above, and the speech-like gesture comprises specific linear materials for each instrument that recur simultaneously as a contrapuntal unit.

Relationships between the Child Complex music of Sections 1 and 3 drive home the structural significance of these recurring gestalts. Not only do similar blocks of material recur within Section 1, but blocks of material introduced in Section 1 come back in virtually identical form in Section 3, with the addition of parts for the female voices (and, less significantly, the percussion). In fact, nearly all the music played by the four soloists in Section 3 has been previously introduced, and can be classified into seven blocks that engage at least two of the four solo instruments and recur with varying degrees of specificity. Score example 4 shows examples of each block, labeled A-G, as they first appear in Section 3 so as to include the recurring vocal elements that are not present when the blocks first appear in Section 1.

Score example 4*A-B*: Recurring blocks of Child Complex material in Scene I, as first heard in Scene I, section 3

4*A*: Blocks A-E, Block G

4*B*: Block F

Table 2 – Meter and tempo in appearances of recurrent blocks A-G in Scene I

Section 1			
Block	**Location**	**Tempo**	**Meter**
B	m. 40	♩ = 100	4 + 8/5 over 4 4
D	m. 40	♩ = 80	4 + 8/5 over 4 4
G	m. 42	♩ = 80	1 + 3/5 over 4 4
A	m. 43	♩ = 100	4/4
B	m. 45	♩ = 40	2/4
C	m. 50	♩ = 80	2 + 1 over 4 16
D	m. 52	♩ = 100	3/8
D	m. 67	♩ = 100	5/16
D	m. 68	♩ = 100	6/4
D	m. 70	ca. ♩ = 72 (accel.)	4/4
E	mm. 90-95	♩ = 80	4/4
E	mm. 113-114	♩ = 40	4/4
F	mm. 145-147	♩ = 100	4/4
A	m. 152	♩ = 100	2/4
E	m. 169	♩ = 60	4/4
C	m. 170	♩ = 60	4/4
Section 3			
Block	**Location**	**Tempo**	**Meter**
A	mm. 317-318	♩ = 100	4/4 5/4
B	mm. 320-323	♩ = 88, ♩ = 40	Mixed
C	mm. 325-325	♩ = 80, ♩ = 50	5/8 2/4
D	m. 326	♩ = 88	5/16
E	mm. 330-334	♩ = 80	3/4 4/4
G	m. 336	♩ = 80	1 + 3/5 over 4 4
A	m. 337	♩ = 100	4/4
B	mm. 337-339	♩ = 60	Mixed
C	mm. 340-342	♩ = 80	Mixed
D	m. 346	♩ = 40	5/16
D	m. 347	♩ = 100	6/4
F	mm. 353-354	♩ = 84	2/4 4/4
B	m. 412	♩ = 60	4/4
D	mm. 414-416	♩ = 100	4/4
E	mm. 418-421	♩ = 80	4/4
D	m. 421	♩ = 40	4/4

Recurrences of these blocks display textural variety: individual lines may be removed or extended; in some cases, as the instances of Block E at mm. 113-114 and m. 169, as little as a single motive is extracted from the block and reproduced by one instrument (here the alto saxophone). But despite these differences in their appearance, many of the blocks display similarity across appearances in the categories of meter and tempo. They also often appear in similar order, though each consecutive block may be separated from the next by multiple bars of other material. Table 2 charts the clearest appearances of each block in chronological order through sections one and three. Although one could identify other, less obvious potential recurrences, the relatively concrete appearances charted here provide enough information to interpret the role of the blocks in creating music that characterizes the Child. Looking down the left column of table 2, one can see a tendency for the blocks to recur in alphabetical order, though this is clearly not a rule. Comparing the tempi and meters across multiple appearances of individual blocks (each shaded in an identifying color), it becomes clear that many of the blocks are associated with specific tempi and meters. In the realm of tempo, Block A is always at ♩ = 100, Block C is most often at ♩ = 80, Block D is usually at ♩ = 100, etc. Only Block F is not associated with a specific tempo in the majority of its occurrences. As for meter, Block E is always set in 4/4; Block D is associated with 5/16, 4/4, and the recurring pattern of 5/16 followed by 6/4; Block B tends to be associated with irrational and mixed meters.

The association of certain tempi and meters with certain musical materials contributes to the sense of rapidly changing gestalts within the Child Complex music in sections one and three. It also suggests that these materials may have been pre-composed, with distinct time-structuring information (i.e. tempo and meter), then fragmented, re-ordered, re-composed, and positioned within Sections 1 and 3 during the compositional process. While it is not necessarily possible (or

useful) to deduce the "original" form of each block nor uncover a pre-existing ur-order of the

blocks from the score alone, one can detect the background presence of original versions. Steven

Takasugi tracks the results of a similar compositional process in *Afatsim*, in which Czernowin

"creates 'pre-composed' highly gestured and characterized materials…from which fragments are

extracted and subjected to various degrees of transformation or none at all, [and] scrupulously

emplaces and reorganizes these."[65] This description appears to aptly describe a significant part of

the compositional process for the Child Complex music in Scene I of *Pnima*, and given the

temporal proximity of *Afatsim* and *Pnima* in Czernowin's catalogue, it is unsurprising to find

similarities of working method between the two.

The frequent association of specific blocks of material with specific tempi and meters

helps illuminate Czernowin's compositional process. However, the fact that these associations

are not entirely consistent means that subtle variations in temporal structure occur among the

various instances of each block. Some blocks are more variable than others. Block D, for

example, nearly always begins with a recognizable motive in the viola and bass clarinet

(exemplified in mm. 67, 346, and 326, which is shown in score example 4), but is sometimes

extended with similar material that follows an overall descending contour. By contrast, the

characteristic cello motive in Block C recurs with durational differences created by compressing

or extending one of its perennial component sounds (a "tail motive" of pizzicato tremolo applied

to a single pitch), and not by the addition or subtraction of components. Durational differences

between the recurrences of each block are largely imperceptible because the recurrences are

separated by other music, dulling one's memory of their exact duration while listening in real

time. But besides contributing to the overall capricious nature of the Child Complex music, these

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[65] Takasugi, 1.

differences matter to the larger narrative of the opera because they constitute the embedding of

irregular repetition into the Child Complex at an imperceptible (one might say subconscious)

level. The latent potential for irregular repetition—a structural feature of the Old Man Complex

music—in the Child Complex music becomes more significant as the Complexes begin to

interact in Scene II.

As table 2 makes clear, the appearances of Blocks A-G in Section 3 are highly condensed

in time compared to their appearances in Section 1. Throughout Section 1, the number of bars

between appearances of any of the blocks grows gradually larger, culminating in the 30-bar gap

between blocks E and F from mm. 115-144, then becomes slightly smaller toward the end of the

section. This expansion and contraction of time intervals between appearances of recurring

materials is to some degree attributable to the presence of the string orchestra in bars 102-128,

whose drawn-out sonic materials have a decelerating effect on the Child Complex music, but

even in the areas of Section 1 where the string orchestra is not present, intervening musical

material separates appearances of the blocks, with the result that it takes over one hundred bars

for the first instances of each block to appear. By contrast, Section 3 cycles through blocks A-G

(minus block F) in its first 20 bars, then again through blocks A-F in its next 20; very little

intervening music that cannot be traced to one of the seven blocks. After an interlude by the

string orchestra (mm. 358-108), the remaining Child Complex blocks of Section 3 are also

contiguous.

The materials presented in Section 3 are not only condensed in proximity to each other

compared to Section 1, but also represent a *selection* of the materials in Section 1. Other musical

ideas recurrent in Section 1 do not appear in Section 3, such as the sustained wind

fluttertongue/string tremolo idea in mm. 56-58 and 96-99, the triple-pizzicato gesture in the viola

part in m. 100, m. 103, and other locations, and the white-noise textures marked "air organ" that appear in mm. 69, 70, and 85-89. Gestures involving a crescendo through a chord, generally including a multiphonic (winds) or multiple stop (strings) become more frequent toward the end of Section 1 (mm. 155, 156, 159-160, 161, 165, 171, 188-9). These gestures prepare the related crescendo gesture type of the Old Man Complex music that will feature prominently in Section 2, but do not recur with the return of the Child Complex in Section 3. Section 3 thus appears to select among, condense, and reinforce the order of materials from Section 1, but crucially, the materials selected are explicitly unlike elements of the Old Man Complex music. Moving from this actantial observation to the narrative level, the Child Complex music thus seems to illustrate a process of identity formation, in which musical elements are tried in rapid succession, juxtaposed in various ways, and finally selected among and reinforced, creating a musical identity in Section 3 that contrasts with the surface appearance of chaos that begins Section 1, but in fact includes many of the same musical elements.

As in my analysis of the Old Man Complex music, my analysis of the Child Complex music jumps rapidly between the agential, actantial, and narrative levels. Rapid transitions between levels were necessary in the Old Man Complex analysis due to the embedding of similar gestalts on multiple structural levels. Here they are necessary because the individual musical agents carry less meaning for characterization on their own, and more in their overall diversity of gestalt and in their relationships to one another. The musical agents of the Child Complex are treated compositionally as an aggregate—a permutated series of polyphonic materials—and they create meaning in aggregate.

An incredibly wide variety of musical materials are available to the Child Complex soloists that play in Section 1. Continuing the layered-metaphor approach introduced with

respect to the Old Man complex, we might consider how the behavior of the Child Complex music metaphorically relates to human behavior, thus implying character traits. Rapid changes of tempo, meter, musical gestalt, pitch and interval content, and playing technique suggest behavior that is similarly variegated—moving one's body in many different ways, switching rapidly between activities, suddenly changing one's patterns of motion or stopping unexpectedly. From these behaviors, we might infer traits of curiosity, exuberance, caprice, or a lack of inhibition in one's action or utterance, all traits easily associated with childhood, and in clear contrast to the limited range of expression found in the Old Man Complex music.

The reduction in the number of recurring musical ideas available to the Child Complex in Section 3 might seem to move the Child in the direction of a limited palette of musical resources like that of the Old Man. However, this narrowing of resources differs from the Old Man music in two significant ways. First, the disappearance of materials that resemble the Old Man music suggests a degree of agency on the part of the character in making this selection—the Child Complex rejects the Old Man's musical materials—which the Old Man complex does not have, but is instead stuck with its limited set of gesture types. Because it contains musical elements exclusively unlike the Old Man music, the emergent musical identity of the Child Complex in Section 3 contrasts with the preceding Old Man Complex music more than it resembles that music. Second, the Child Complex's repetitions in Section 3 also include new additions—the percussion and female voice parts, the latter of which fill out the complement of Child Complex-associated instruments present in the texture to its largest in Scene I. With the addition of the female voice parts in particular, which add new recurrent elements to several of the previously established blocks, Section 3 does not appear to represent the formation of a fixed identity, but one that can admit of new elements while reinforcing old ones. In short, the Child Complex

appears capable of *learning*, suggesting a malleable psyche in contrast to the Old Man's

fixation and rigidity.

The specific nature of the vocal lines added to the Child Complex in Section 3 further

differentiate the music of the two character complexes. Although the vocal materials are mostly

tied to specific polyphonic blocks, they retain similarities across the boundaries of each recurrent

object that place them in contrast with the materials of the male vocal parts in the Old Man

Complex. A vast majority of the Child Complex vocal music is pointillistic, comprising notes of

short duration scattered in groups of irregular number; the two female vocal parts are often

related by short bursts of hocket or close canon. Vocal register in Section 3 is not extreme (the

parts range from E4 to G quarter-flat 5) but the voices leap about that range freely, giving the

impression of ease of motion through register. The phonetic materials most frequently heard are

the nasal consonants "m" and "n" and the vowels "i" and "a": combinations of these four

phonemes can be easily produced with minimal motion of the lips, allowing a variety of phonetic

sounds to be made without engaging the vocal apparatus in more complex ways. Taken together,

these characteristics of the Child Complex vocal parts reinforce the sense of freedom of motion

and ebullience conferred by the rapidly changing music that defines the character. By contrast,

the male voices, as elements of the Old Man complex, sing lines and gestures that nearly all fit

into the Old Man's emblematic glissando, crescendo, and trembling sound categories. The first

male vocal entrance serves as a characteristic example. It is constantly loud (fortissimo and

above), one singer "speaks" a glissando while changing vowels from "a" to "e", and the other

sings a glissando on a breathy tone before switching to loud, effortful ingressive breathing. These

techniques, combined with the loud dynamics, give the appearance of significant effort; they

allow one to hear the effort of expelling and taking in air across a protracted duration. The

sounds they produce are ciphers for the physical effort of vocal expression, which is in turn an experiential metaphor for the Old Man's internal struggle to express. As nearly all people have direct experience using their voices, the vocal writing in *Pnima* is a powerful tool for creating embodied metaphors for the traits of the opera's two characters.

Yet, perhaps with the exception of the vocal writing in Section 3, the Child Complex as a large-scale musical agent is harder to define than the Old Man, because its music in Scene I is primarily defined by relationships among materials rather than the specific content of those materials. This fact in itself provides an overarching metaphor for Czernowin's characters: the Old Man is defined by his internalized past and resultant disconnection from his present surroundings, while the Child is defined by what he learns and internalizes from observing and interacting with the people around him. In other words, the most significant musical information in the Child Complex operates on the actantial level. The relative markedness of cellular musical agents is less relevant here: blocks A-G become marked insofar as they are selected and recur, but this markedness does not render any one of those blocks more important, meaningful or successful within a hierarchy of selection; rather, it contributes to the nature of the relationships among agents changing and becoming more meaningful over time. Scene II further engages the actantial level of analysis at a larger-scale level of musical structure, as the Old Man and Child complexes begin to interact with and affect one another.

Chapter 3

The Actantial Level: Interactions Between the Child and Old Man in Scene II

Signs of Interaction Between the Complexes

Czernowin provides the following information about Scene II in her preface to the score of *Pnima*: "In the second act, they attempt to connect; the boy is trying to understand the urgent message that his grandfather is trying to convey—failed attempts."[66] The project of this chapter is to find musical evidence for the existence and nature of these interactions, which one might logically expect to take the form of interaction or mingling between the music of the Child Complex and that of the Old Man Complex as defined in Scene I.

Superficial evidence for such interaction abounds. Whereas Scene I could be divided into sections based on the presence of one complex or the other, with separating silences between appearances of each complex, Scene II cannot: there are fewer silences, and those that appear correlate less clearly with changes of complex and musical gestalt, as instruments drawn from the two complexes are frequently combined. To name one example out of many, Scene II opens with a short section of music involving the violin and cello soloists (Child Complex instruments), the musical saw (Old Man Complex instrument), and the percussion (neutral instrument). Due to the larger percentage of Child Complex instruments than any other kind in this section and to its musical syntax (discussed below), it is most logical to assign this music to the psyche of the Child, but with the understanding that it contains something of the Old Man that it did not before, perhaps suggesting a newly close physical proximity between the characters, or their emergent ability to influence each other.

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[66] Czernowin, *Pnima…ins Innere*, preface.

The two complexes are also layered, and their vertical overlapping makes it more difficult to define sections of music on the basis of one complex alone. Remnants of the cello, violin, and saw materials that open the scene in m. 433 continue sporadically through m. 521, overlapping with several other instrument groups and musical gestalts in the course of those bars. These remnants dovetail into an entrance of the string orchestra in mm. 444-449, make up one of several layers of information in the Child Complex-dominated music of mm. 459-508, and mingle with materials drawn from Old Man Complex music in mm. 508-522. Similarly, the string orchestra is less isolated from the action of the two character complexes than in Scene I (which will be taken up in more detail in chapter four). Yet despite these complexities, it is still possible to propose areas of Scene II that are defined primarily by the presence of one complex or the other, the interaction of the two complexes, or by the string orchestra. Figure 3 shows the areas within Scene II that are dominated by one of the two complexes or the string orchestra, as well as places where those groups overlap or interact so thoroughly that it is impossible to designate a primary group. This is not to imply that areas dominated by one group are devoid of instruments or material drawn from another group—far from it—but it provides an overview of the foremost "voice" heard in each area; further actantial complications of these areas will be discussed in the ensuing text.

Because the instrumentations of the Old Man and Child Complexes are frequently combined, and because the string orchestra sometimes joins the music of the character complexes rather than operating as an independent unit, other considerations must factor into the identification of each character-agent. Appearances of the characteristic pair of singers assigned to each complex help locate the music in the psyche of one character or the other: as the literal "mouthpieces" of their respective characters, the male voices and female voices perceptually

retain their character affiliations even when they adopt elements of the other character's vocal writing, while the non-vocal instruments are more likely to be perceived as switching affiliations when they appear among a group of instruments primarily from the other complex.
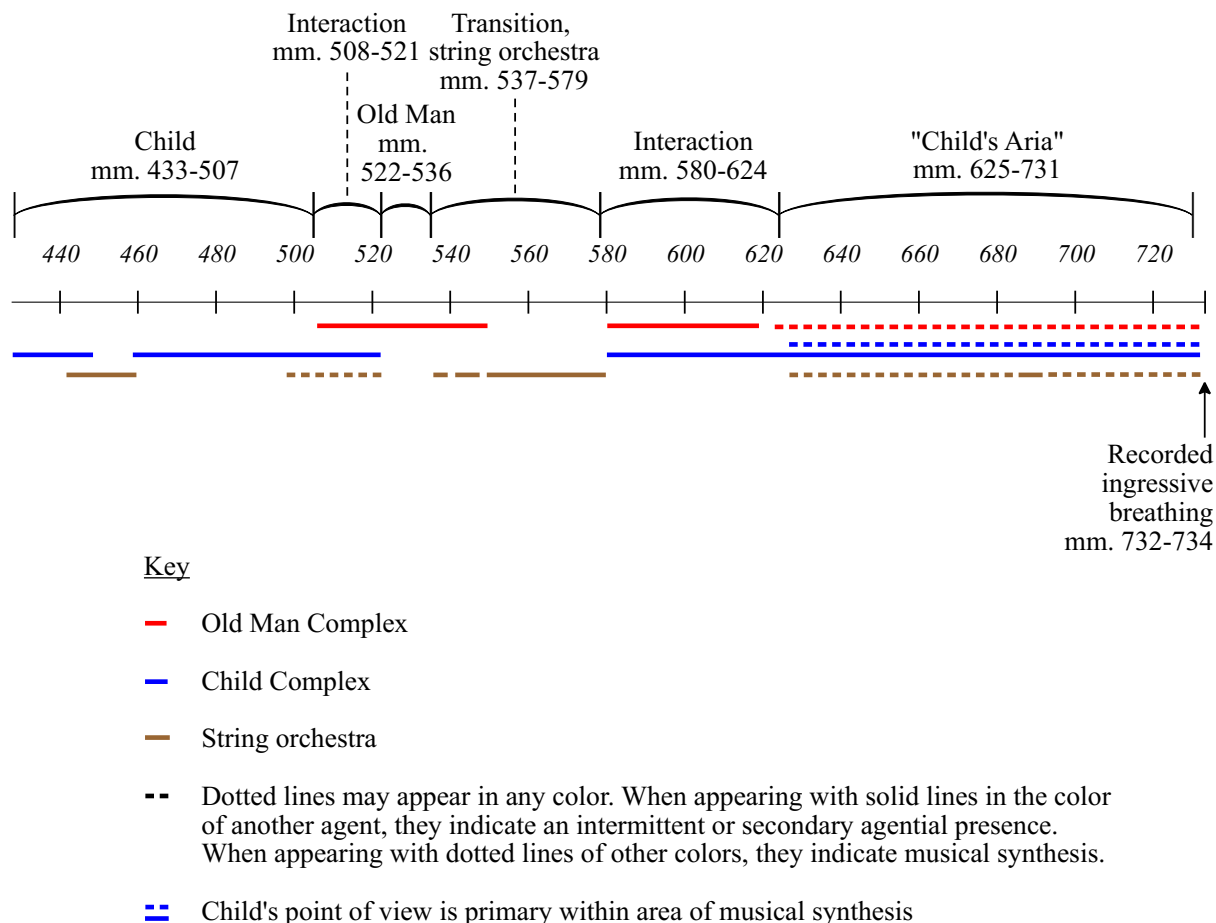
Figure 3 – Areas of Agential Primacy and Interaction in Scene II

In the case of the Old Man Complex, the four sound categories that defined it in Scene I return in Scene II, using the same or similar instrumentations and combined in syntactically similar ways. In mm. 504 and 508-9, for example, the percussionists return to the bass drum, stones, and cans for first a single dry impulse (m. 504) and then a series of them (m. 508-9); both instances are shown in context in score example 5. Besides bearing the same instrumentation as

they did in Scene I, these impulses are marked by their loud dynamic (forte), separating them from the surrounding music that consists primarily of instruments from the Child Complex. Soon after these interruptive entrances, elements of the Old Man Complex music take over the texture at m. 522; the Old Man's primacy here is supported by a tempo change to $\quarternote = 32$, which last occurred in the Old Man complex music of Scene I, Section 2. Besides exemplifying the degree of similarity between the Old Man's music across the two scenes, the interpolation of these dry impulses within Child Complex music display a degree of horizontal proximity between the musical agents not found in Scene I.

Identifying the Child Complex in Scene II is a more complicated task. The Child Complex instruments do appear as a group at the beginning of Scene II, most clearly from mm. 433-449 and from 459-507. Both of these sections contain few incursions of instruments or material from the Old Man Complex or string orchestra, with one major exception: the consistent adoption of the saw into the Child Complex. The fact that the saw is the adopted instrument is significant, because the gesture types that characterized the Old Man music in Scene I are particularly idiomatic to the saw. The presence of the saw within the Child Complex practically ensures that its music will begin to incorporate elements of the Old Man Complex music, which it had previously rejected in its selection of polyphonic materials at the end of Scene I. Moreover, the music now played by the Child Complex differs somewhat from its music in the previous scene. Rapid changes of tempo and time signature are gone; instead, the vast majority of these two sections are in 4/4 meter at $\quarternote = 60$. Perhaps more surprisingly, none of the recurring polyphonic blocks that characterized the Child's music in Scene I can be found in Scene II. Other than instrumentation, how might one identify this music as belonging to the same character?

Score example 5: Old Man interruptions, mm. 504-508

The answer lies in musical syntax. Although the polyphonic blocks from Scene I do not return, a different set of materials take their place, exhibiting similar syntactic behavior to the prior set in their juxtapositions with one another and in their patterns of recurrence. Three selected examples of new, recurring Child Complex materials will serve to show these syntactic similarities and to illustrate the narrative implications of the new materials. The first two instances of each example in the scene are shown in score example 6. First is a composite glissando gesture in the saw, viola, and cello that opens Scene II. This is followed by the second example, a B5 in the percussion played by spilling rice onto that vibraphone bar. These two gestures are identifiably repeated in mm. 440-442 (with other recurring gestalts in the intervening space), but the repetition contains several variations: the saw, viola, and cello glissando is extended over nearly two bars, the viola now joins in the pitch material of the other two instruments, and the end of the glissando now intersects with the beginning of the vibraphone B. A final variation on this pair of gestures occurs in 460-62, after an interpolated wave of sound from the string orchestra. The vibraphone note returns once more, in mm. 470-471, separated from its preceding gesture and proving that, like the recurrent polyphonic blocks in Scene I, elements of the Child music in Scene II *often* return in the same order, but do not *always* do so; unlike the Scene I blocks, the recurrent materials here are not necessarily polyphonic. In another example of a monophonic recurring material, a set of two nail pizzicati played near the tuning pegs on the viola A string are first heard in m. 434, then return in mm. 437, 459, 476, and 510, remaining part of the Child Complex's musical language nearly until musical primacy shifts to the Old Man in m. 522. So although specific polyphonic blocks found in the Child Complex music do not cross the double bar line between the scenes, the actantial

nature of the Child Complex – its tendency to be defined by relationships among materials as

much as the materials themselves – does cross that boundary.

Score example 6: selected recurrent Child Complex materials in Scene II. (Materials are identified as Blocks H-J, in keeping with prior labeling of Scene I blocks as A-G.)

Yet, as suggested by the introduction of the saw into the Child Complex, the nature of the specific materials selected for or by this complex in Scene II are not without significance. The first Child Complex gesture in Scene II is a glissando; the vibraphone B5, with its stream of tiny irregular impulses created by grains of rice falling on a metal bar, hints at a pointillistic, irregular repetition: both are delicate echoes of gesture types drawn from the Old Man. As the music of the Child Complex grows and develops prior to m. 522, these initial gestures are subsumed or complicated by added layers of material in the other instruments of the complex, such as the quartet of bass clarinets (one live, three recorded) that play in raucous quasi-canon with one another; these additional layers obscure perception of the recurrences that intimate syntactic similarities between the Child Complex music in both scenes. However, the delicate opening of Scene II ensures that these similarities are sufficiently audible to hear the syntactic connections, while the nature of the new semantic materials signal a growing immediacy in the Child's relationship with the Old Man, whether that be increasing awareness of his presence, coming under his influence, or simply being in proximity to him. And although the music played by the four bass clarinets resembles the Scene I Child Complex music in its chaos and quickness, it also constitutes a registral move toward the Old Man, balancing the overall register of the Child Complex towards the low end of its spectrum with an artificial (i.e. electronically produced) over-abundance of idiomatically low-register instruments. The utterances of the Child-associated female voices prior to m. 522 also display shifts toward the vocal style and register of the Old Man Complex, incorporating more "e" vowels than in Scene I and introducing glissando gestures that rise out of or fall into the lowest extreme of the female vocal register.

Two Areas of Direct Interaction

In two areas of Scene II, the Child and Old Man appear to interact. Multiple musical factors signal these interactions: local alternation of the male and female voices, the concurrent presence of instruments and musical elements derived from the two complexes, and clear moments of musical connection among the elements drawn from the two complexes that go beyond simple propinquity. The first area of connection occupies mm. 504-536, beginning with the Old Man's intrusion into the musical texture with dry impulses in the percussion, as discussed above and shown in score example 5. Between mm. 509 and 521, elements of the two complexes are vertically layered and horizontally juxtaposed, relating musically in ways that suggest interpersonal interaction. For example, in m. 510, the cellos and basses perform a composite gesture that is characteristic of the Old Man's music: a microtonal cluster in the cellos makes a crescendo to fortissimo, followed by a rapid glissando ornamented with a fast vibrato (trembling sound); the basses join the end of this gesture with a low crescendo/glissando performed with extreme bow pressure. The Child Complex immediately answers with a recurrence of the paired viola nail pizzicati and a few soft, short notes from the female voices (score example 7*A*). In m. 516, the male and female voices overlap for a brief moment, as the male voices end a series of quasi-repetitive crescendo/glissando gestures and the female voices begin a series of more pointillistic sounds that nonetheless culminate in a brief crescendo/glissando. This gesture reads as an imitation of the Old Man Complex gestures, crystallizing the Old Man's ability to influence the Child (score example 7*B*). Reinforcement for the female voices' crescendo/glissando is provided by the double basses, whose concurrent crescendo within the filtered white noise of left-hand string muting creates a ghostly echo of the

Old Man music, complicating the timbre of the female voices and recalling the source of the

gesture in the Old Man Complex.

Score examples 7*A*-*B*: examples of interaction between the complexes

7*A*: Child Complex answers Old Man Complex, mm. 510-511

7*B*: Female voices "imitate" male voices' glissando gesture, mm. 515-516

Examples of similar, local musical connections continue until the aforementioned tempo change at m. 522, where the Old Man Complex instrumentation and musical language begins to dominate. Yet within this area of primarily Old Man music, a moment of potential interaction occurs at m. 534, made all the more significant by its preparation over a longer span of time. Between m. 522 and m. 534, the basses perform characteristic gestures of the Old Man complex—thwarted crescendi, glissandi, trembling sounds, and combinations thereof—beginning from their lowest available pitch, C1. Cellos and violins of the string orchestra increasingly join in with Old Man Complex gestures, widening the registral span of these gestures in a manner reminiscent of the large-scale registral crescendo that spanned the Old Man Complex-dominated Section 2 of Scene I. The strings reach their registral peak in bar 534, with a G♯8 in the violins and a four-part microtonal cello cluster sweeping rapidly up to F quarter-sharp 6 (shown in score example 8).[67]

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[67] In the 2009 edition of the score, the staves containing this material are marked as double bass instead of cello parts. The composer has confirmed that this is an error, and the relevant material in m. 534 is indeed performed by the cellos.

Score example 8: the male voices enter the Child's vocal register in m. 534.

Throughout most of this registral trajectory from low to high, the male voices participate in the gestural world of the strings, aligning vertically with them at key moments of gestural repetition, such as a series of crescendo/glissando gestures in mm. 525-526, 527, and 529-531. Descent marks the male voices' glissandi in these examples: they typically descend from E4 or F4, nearing the top of the average male non-falsetto vocal range. At the peak of the strings' registral trajectory in m. 534, however, the male voices jump into falsetto, with male voice 2 ascending in a fluctuating glissando—reminiscent of the directional freedom of the Child Complex vocal glissandi—all the way to E♭5. The phonetic material for this falsetto move exclusively uses the IPA characters "m," "n," and "i," typical of the Child Complex. In this moment, the Old Man ventures into the Child's registral and phonetic territory—perhaps in an attempt to "speak his language"—but hits the limits of his own. Significantly, this moment of potential connection, in which the Old Man seems to adopt some aspects of the Child's music, collapses into silence after a few periodic, transposed repetitions of a gesture in the clarinet and hi hat that recalls the Old Man's repeated bar in Scene I. Bar 536 is almost entirely soundless, and a long fermata further augments its final 8th note. It appears that for the Old Man, the effort of connection cannot be sustained in the face of memory.

Elements of both the Child and Old Man complexes return in the ensuing bars, but the musical trajectories that marked the Old Man's overture into the Child's territory do not continue. In m. 537, the wind soloists of the Child Complex return to capricious, extroverted gestures reminiscent of the Child Complex music in Scene I. The clarinet, bearer of the Old Man's repeated gesture a few bars before, is now exchanged for the stubbornly high-register E-flat clarinet, belying further recurrence. Old Man-associated gestures return to the low register, with a microtonal cluster glissando down to a C♯2 in the cellos in m. 537. Gradually, the

character complexes recede from the texture, leaving the string orchestra alone from mm. 548-579; as they recede, the male voices softly and haltingly utter what are perhaps their most speech-like sounds of the entire opera (mm. 542-547). But the Child Complex has already largely withdrawn from the texture and is not there to listen; whatever the Old Man may be trying to "say" here is subsumed into the monolithic presence of the string orchestra. Here are examples, perhaps, of "failed attempts" at communication: the Old Man begins an approach, but cannot sustain it; the syntactic conditions that enabled the potential connection disappear in the silence that follows. It is as though the Old Man, after much effort, breeches his communicative barrier for a moment—but freezes, unable to proceed in the face of the "lacuna of language" that inevitably separates him from the Child. In that moment of void and uncertainty, the potential for communication is lost.

The second significant area of interaction between the complexes (mm. 580-624) displays fewer of the small hints of musical influence or cooperation between the complexes that can be seen in the first. Elements of the complexes are again juxtaposed horizontally in time and layered vertically in space, but in such a way that their differences and incompatibilities become increasingly apparent. In bar 582, male voice 1 enters in the falsetto register just before the cellos, which briefly appear to join the voice in a nascent crescendo gesture on a microtonal cluster, but then exit after a duration of only one triplet 16th-note, marked "choked" (score example 9*A*). This moment of potential coordination among elements of the Old Man Complex within the registral space of the Child goes nowhere. At m. 587, a slow, minutely irregular glissando in the double basses is layered with contrasting, periodic aspiration in the female voices, pitting incompatible concepts of temporal organization against each other (score example 9*B*). In a similar contrast of layered gestalts, the trombone in m. 589 plays a rhythm comprised

entirely of regular 16th-note subdivisions of the beat, primarily on A3 with straight mute; the

timbral clarity and rhythmic regularity of this line is incongruous with the simultaneous

crescendo/glissando gestures in the double basses, with their implied heterophony and the

timbral distortion caused by increasing bow pressure and a move to extreme *sul ponticello* bow

position (score example 9*C.*) Contrast, rather than connection, defines these layered materials.

Score example 9*A-C*: moments of musical disconnection in mm. 580-624

9*A*: cello participation in Child Complex register is "choked," m. 582

9*B*: contrasting forms of temporal organization in female voices and basses, m. 587

9*C*: trombone and saw contrast with double basses, m. 589

Simultaneous utterances of both male and female voices are more frequent in this section than at any other point in *Pnima*, but the material of each pair of voices is kept distinct. The female voices primarily make sounds of short duration and change register and dynamic freely; when they do incorporate glissandi, they are relatively short in duration (the longest is just short of three beats, in m. 596) and they fluctuate up and down in pitch rather than being unidirectional. The male voices produce longer, more continuous, insistently loud sounds; when these sounds are glissandi, they are consistently directional—see, for example, the male voices' phrase in mm. 590-591 (shown in score example 10), which offers continuous sound and dynamic intensity (fortississimo) for nearly two bars, including a directional glissando, in contrast with the female voice parts above it. The utterances of the male voices are less consistently supported by the string orchestra in this section, and are often more continuously loud than their immediate surroundings, lending them an intensity that seems out of place— perhaps even inappropriate—given its context. Musical coordination *within* the Old Man Complex seems just as elusive here as does coordination *between* the complexes, as though the Old Man cannot recover himself after previously expending so much effort to connect.

Score example 10: contrast between the male and female voices in mm. 590-591

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The final appearance of the male voices in this section underscores the illustration of

failed communication provided throughout the section as a whole. From mm. 605-612, the music

indicates denouement, becoming gradually softer in dynamic and thinner in texture amidst brief

instrumental glissandi and continuous trembling sounds. As the texture narrows to a

pianississississimo soprano sax whistle tone supported by fluttertongued air-noise in the trombone,

male voice 2 breaks the delicate atmosphere with a forte crescendo/glissando, marked "rude" and

partially reinforced by aggressive rim-shots in the percussion and Bartók-pizzicato glissandi in

the double basses (m. 613, score example 11). This area of interaction as a whole reinforces the

fact that the Old Man Complex's music—and by interpretive extension, the psyche of the Old

Man—is inflexible; it ultimately cannot adapt to its surroundings or be influenced by them. In

the first interactional area, the Old Man Complex appeared to reach out into the Child Complex's

music. In this second area, despite seeming insistence on the part of the Child Complex—

particularly in mm. 595-598, which feature the return of the raucous, register-bridging electronic

bass clarinet parts—the Old Man's music engages less and less with elements of the Child's.

Overall, this section of music offers a record of the characters' proximity, but not of communication or understanding between them.

Score example 11: "rude" interruption by the Old Man Complex, m. 613

The Child's Aria

Scene II ends with a section of music whose chapter heading on the DVD of *Pnima* is "Child's Aria" (mm. 625-731). The name implies that the music somehow belongs to the Child—is from his point of view, or embodies his psychology. To an extent, the instrumentation of this section supports reading it as dominated by the Child Complex: the only voices present are the female voices, and the Child Complex soloists have significant parts. Complicating the instrumentation are the six double basses—remnants of the Old Man Complex that play through nearly all of the Child's Aria—and the intermittent presence of the rest of the string orchestra. As the final stage of the Old Man-Child encounter depicted in Scene II, Czernowin's combination of instruments from all three primary agents in a section of music located within the Child's inner world suggests a crisis of identity: the Child engaging in an internal confrontation with musical elements that come from outside himself. Combinations of characteristic elements of the Child and Old Man Complexes' music throughout the Child's Aria reinforce this image of internalization.

As suggested by the title "Aria," voices figure prominently into this section (specifically, the female voices of the Child Complex). Their parts reflect significant changes to the typical vocal writing for the Child Complex, suggesting the incorporation of elements from the Old Man's music. In particular, long, unidirectional glissandi—hallmarks of the male voice parts— figure much more heavily in the female voice parts in this section than they have before. In the middle of the Child's Aria, the female voices sing a combined glissando gesture that lasts 10 beats at ♩ = 40 (mm. 678-680); it is the longest continuous glissando gesture they have sung in the piece up to that point. The onset of this gesture in m. 678 also corresponds with the double basses, Old Man-associated instruments, in pitch: the singers enter on D4 and D quarter-sharp 4,

forming a "fuzzy octave" with the basses, which hover around D3 midway through a microtonal cluster glissando (score example 12.) Pitch correspondence with the basses reinforces the connection of this moment to the Old Man's music, and while the basses often operate as a separate layer of musical information in the Child's Aria, there are multiple instances of integration between Child and Old Man elements in the vocal parts that also correspond to the basses in pitch.

Although the vocal glissando gesture in mm. 678-680 is one of the longest continuous glissandi found in the female vocal parts, the voices also sing several broken glissandi whose unidirectional pitch trajectories last for even longer spans of time; some of these are also shadowed in pitch by the double basses. Over the course of mm. 633-642, the voices perform a broken glissando from G4-B4, recalling the bookending pitches of the very first gesture in Scene II (a glissando performed by the saw, viola, and cello soloists that is shown in score example 6). This extended broken glissando, shown through m. 639 in score example 13, marries myriad elements of the two complexes. It is articulated pointillistically, in durations shorter than an 8th note; like its durations, the majority of its phonemes are typical of the Child Complex—"l," "n," and "m." Besides the glissando gesture type, it also incorporates crescendo and trembling sound gesture types from the Old Man complex, in the form of a gradual crescendo extending from mm. 633-640 and an indication to the singers to perform *sempre poco vibrato*. The vocal parts also receive pitch support from the basses here. In m. 636, contrabass 1 enters simultaneously with the singers' A4 in beat 4, matching them in pitch and register on a sustained artificial harmonic. Subsequent entrances of individual bass parts through m. 642 behave similarly, entering in rhythmic unison with one or both of the singers and matching their pitch.

Score example 12: pitch correspondence between voices and basses, m. 678

Score example 13: broken glissando in the female voices, Child's Aria, mm. 633-639

Homophonic, periodic repetition in vocal parts

Pitch coordination between voices and basses

An even longer pitch trajectory is outlined in the female voices from m. 690, where the voices begin on C# and C5, respectively, to m. 720, where female voice 1 briefly touches a B5 at the peak of a narrowly arch-shaped local glissando. The basses also begin on various microtonal versions of C in m. 690, and though they diverge from the voices and exit the texture along the course of the pitch trajectory, they return for its culmination, with bass 6 playing an A in m. 719 that acts as the lowest pitch of a microtonal cluster in the basses, but matches the pitch class of the singers. The large-scale vocal pitch trajectory is articulated as a complexly broken glissando—rather than being divided continuously into individual "points," the singers make a gradual, overall ascent through clusters of gestures with different gestalts: first, though multi-directional groups of micro-glissandi (mm. 696-702), then an extended continuous glissando gesture in female voice 1 (mm. 703-708), and finally a series of stable pitches with progressively longer durations, set in irregular canon between the two voices and moving gradually from G5-A5 (mm. 711-719). Each of these mid-scale areas of the meta-glissando reflects a different combination of elements from the music of the Old Man and Child Complexes. Micro-glissandi reflect the Child's relatively free registral motion, but several groups of them are styled as Old Man-derived crescendo gestures. The extended, continuous glissando in female voice 1 is also an extended crescendo. The culminating A5 in the series of pitches with progressively longer durations is performed poco vibrato, making it a trembling sound. Overall, these stages of gestural language along the vocal meta-glissando show a progression from material that recalls the freedom of the initial Child Complex music to materials which resemble those elements of the Old Man's music most expressive of vulnerability, thereby summarizing the psychological transformation of the Child over the entire first two scenes of the opera within this subsidiary formal unit.

Repetition, another hallmark of the Old Man Complex, is for the first time

foregrounded in the Child Complex vocal parts in the Child's Aria. The broken glissando in mm.

633-642 (figure 13) resembles the repetition of a single point, but is not exact; only for a brief

three beats in mm. 636-637 do the voices actually repeat the same rhythm, pitch, and phoneme.

The music behaves in a manner suggesting hesitance or careful exploration: over a long stretch

of quasi-repetitions of a single point, minute changes in pitch, timbre, phoneme, dynamic, and

rhythm gradually transform the music's identity within a narrow range of differentiation in each

parameter. Compared to the freedom with which the Child Complex previously flitted among

gestalts and traversed wide registral spans, this minute and cautious musical motion seems

incredibly limited and fragile. The above examples demonstrate changed behavior on the part of

the Child Complex vocal parts particularly clearly, but similar alteration is evident throughout

the Child's Aria.

The instrumental soloists' roles in the Child's Aria are more complex. At times their

music exhibits the typical gestural freedom of the previous Child Complex music, such as in the

soprano sax and viola duet that forms a contrasting layer in the texture in mm. 678-681. But

overall, the soloists' parts also incline toward the Old Man music: their lines traverse register less

freely, and tend toward Old Man Complex gesture types or variations of them, such as the

broken glissando. In a structurally significant example, the aforementioned soprano saxophone

and viola duet undergoes a non-linear, yet definitive transformation into bursts of rhythmic

quasi-unison that outline points along underlying, large-scale pitch trajectories (mm. 704-710).

Even more significantly, the activities of the instrumental soloists in the Child's Aria

signal a fundamental change in the organization of the Child's music: recurring polyphonic

blocks have disappeared from use as a primary structuring method. They are hinted at in the

beginning of the section: a fortississimo, scream-like composite trembling sound in the bass

clarinet, soprano saxophone, and trombone at mm. 625-627 recurs—beneath the female voices'

broken glissando and minus the trombone—in mm. 633-634. And although it does not involve

Child Complex instruments, a block immediately preceding the Child's Aria (mm. 622-623),

comprised of the six contrabasses, orchestra cellos, and the lion's roar in the percussion, recurs

with variation in mm. 629-631, also layered with the vocal parts. Following these recurrences,

there are no clear repetitions of pre-composed blocks of music in the Child's Aria. The upheaval

occurring in the Child's music is thus not limited to gestural material, but extends to the

structural foundations of its identity. Long, broken glissandi emerge as the most readily audible

form of musical organization in the Child's Aria; as structural principles, they are very simple,

but their pointillistic, tentative articulation points to the difficulty of finding a musical identity

when the previous one has been stripped away, like making one's way along an unfamiliar path

in the dark.

Despite significant changes to the vocal and instrumental writing and musical structure of

the Child Complex music in the Child's Aria, one element that connects this music to prior

iterations of both character complexes is the preponderance of trembling sounds. All manner of

tremolos, oscillations, vibratos, etc. have already been heard in several of the Child Complex's

recurrent blocks, and comprise one of the four gesture types of the Old Man Complex. Their

significance, read through the hermeneutic of layered experiential and psychological metaphor,

depends in part upon other parameters: when they are expressed as loud clusters, they resemble a

scream; when rendered softly by a single instrument, they resemble whimpering, or enact the

behavior of trembling. In either case, these sounds suggest utterances or behaviors associated

with the psychological states of pain and fear. The cautious musical behavior exhibited by the

vocal parts in the Child's Aria perhaps indicates a new awareness, or fear, of the potential to be hurt.

Another similarity between the Child's Aria and prior iterations of the Child Complex is that the Child's music here again represents a *selection* of previously introduced musical ideas. Unlike Section 3 of Scene I, the Child's music no longer avoids elements of the Old Man's – they are instead inextricably combined. Integration of characteristics from the two complexes is so thorough as to suggest dialectic synthesis as an appropriate structural model for the relationship of the two complexes in the Child's Aria, thus casting Scenes I and II as a single (albeit complex) dialectic process. A dialectic understanding of the first two scenes can be effectively extended to include the string orchestra, which also participates in the synthesis of the Child's Aria. Chapter four will discuss the nature of the string orchestra as a musical agent in *Pnima* and track its involvement with the character complexes throughout the first two scenes.

Chapter 4

The String Orchestra: a "Third Voice"

The String Orchestra as Musical Agent

Present in all three scenes of *Pnima,* the string orchestra forms the third large-scale musical agent of the opera. Unlike the Old Man and Child Complexes, however, it does not embody the psyche of a single human character, and its behavior cannot be as easily separated into an introductory phase in Scene I and a relational phase in Scene II. Czernowin, in her preface to the score, describes the presence of "…a third voice, a more universal one, (materialized in the orchestra, which dominates the third scene)."[68] However, one cannot begin to adequately parse the string orchestra's dominance of Scene III without examining its appearances across the two scenes that come before. As previously discussed, portions of the string orchestra sometimes join the music of the two character complexes in Scenes I and II—in particular, the cellos and violins often join the Old Man Complex as a registral extension of the six double basses—but the primary interpretive significance of the string orchestra derives from its behavior when operating as an independent unit, providing its own stream of musical information that intersects with the streams of the character complexes. Figures 1 (p. 34) and 3 (p. 61) show the areas of the first two scenes in which the string orchestra acts in this capacity.

One defining feature of the string orchestra as musical agent is its timbral world, which ranges from completely unpitched sounds—bowing the body of the instrument in its first appearance in mm 15-41, for example—to sounds in which elements of both pitch and noise are present, such as that produced by a technique Czernowin dubs "unsuccessful harmonic," in which the performer sets up the left hand as though to play an artificial harmonic, but puts the

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[68] Czernowin, *Pnima…ins Innere* (score).

finger touching the string with harmonic pressure in the "wrong" place. This technique, found in the string orchestra's second appearance in mm. 102-128, "results mainly in hair sound with some notion of pitch."[69] Although individual parts are frequently written for each player within a section, the string orchestra music tends to employ very few playing techniques at a time, assigning slightly different time or pitch information to each part using the same playing technique. Rich, broadband layers of noise or filtered pitch result; these layers are acoustically complex, yet consistent in gestalt. The sound world of the string orchestra is thus inherently *collective* (to use a word Czernowin applies to the string orchestra), as individual parts are nearly impossible to discern.[70]

A second defining feature of the string orchestra music is the extended durations of its relevant musical units. Its first and second appearances offer illustrative examples of it acting as an extended block of sound. In the two minutes and six seconds of music between mm. 15 and 37, where the entrance of instruments from the Child Complex jumps into the foreground over a diminuendo in the string orchestra, the sound of slowly bowing the bodies of string instruments is continuous. The volume of this sound builds toward m. 37 as more and more instruments are layered into it, but individual entrances and exits are virtually inaudible. Small groups of both periodic and aperiodic pulses, also performed on the body of the instrument, occasionally break the continuity of the wood-and-hair noise, offering way-stations of rhythmic detail along a large-scale dynamic trajectory from the pianississississimo of a single viola in m. 15 to the mezzo-piano of the full string orchestra in m. 37, then back down to *niente* in m. 41. This entire orchestral appearance from m. 15-41 can thus be heard as one period of a wave expressed in volume. At the written tempi, it lasts two minutes and thirty-six seconds.

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[69] Czernowin, *Pnima…ins Innere*, Explanation of signs and directions.
[70] Chaya Czernowin, in conversation with the author, December 15, 2014.

Similarly, the second appearance of the string orchestra also takes the form of a large-scale dynamic wave within a continuous block of sound. Between mm. 102 and 128, the string orchestra texture builds from three violins playing a piano dynamic on the body of the instrument to a dynamic peak of mezzo-forte or mezzo-piano (depending on the individual part) in mm. 123-124, and back to pianississimo as the string orchestra exits the scene. This section lasts approximately two minutes and thirty seconds, and the material in the string orchestra (excluding the Child Complex material layered over it for the moment) is even more continuous than in the previous one, with no added pulse details.

The length of these waves of sound is significant because it far exceeds the plausible length of a human breath (or the string-playing analogue, an individual bow stroke). Only the most freakish performer could produce continuous sound for two and a half minutes; the length of these waves thus further marks them as inherently collective, but also places the length of a musical unit in the string orchestra outside of a human scale of musical time, in significant contrast with the music of the Old Man and Boy Complexes, which have different durational characteristics but are largely built out of musical lines and gestures that exist within the typical time frame of the individual, breath-length phrase. Considering the relative markedness of the three large-scale musical agents in *Pnima*, the string orchestra is clearly the most marked, or divergent from musical norms, due to the scale of its musical units, which cannot be easily broken down into mid-level sections because they lack mid-scale musical information. The string orchestra's music is thus a music of temporal extremes: on the one hand, collective "phrases" beyond the scale of individual breath, and on the other, minute, intimate sonic detail in the complex layers of noise and filtered pitch.

Before discussing how the string orchestra interacts with the music of the character complexes, it will be helpful to consider how Czernowin connects the musical makeup of the string orchestra to her own personal history:

> It had to include an element which was threatening, because that was the universal voice, the voice of the collective, and the voice of the collective is very, very scary for me. Whether it is the Nazi or whether it is me standing in those huge ceremonies for school, for the Holocaust…those things were very, very scary for a child.[71]

The threat posed by the string orchestra, in my reading, is the void of musical semantics and syntax created by the imbalance between the vast scale of its waves and the intimacy of its sound world. We hear the continuous sounds of bow hair on wood, or "unsuccessful" harmonics, which in traditional string playing would be momentary mistakes, audible only when standing very close to the instrument. Here, the sounds are foregrounded and amplified by layering. They thus appear to be quite close to our ears, but they do not speak: that is, they offer no discrete semantic objects, and therefore nothing that could structured by a comprehensible musical syntax. Instead, the instruments offer vast expanses of sound, implying time-scales beyond that of any individual human, perhaps intimating something of our collective past (history) or our collective future. The string orchestra thus suggests the paradoxically close presence of something larger than life, but which does not fully reveal itself; in the covertness of this monolithic collective voice—or, as Czernowin says, its "opacity"—lies its threat.[72]

Function and Trajectories of the String Orchestra in Scenes I and II

The primary actantial function of the string orchestra, as delineated by its activity in Scene I, is disrupting the local organization of time and musical material of (primarily) the Child Complex. Orchestral waves affect Child Complex music almost exclusively, while the Old Man Complex intermittently incorporates instruments of the string orchestra into its musical language.

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

This disparity is consistent with the characters' backgrounds—the Old Man has already been victimized and permanently scarred by a collective ideology, while the Child is encountering the threat of the collective voice for the first time; it is precisely this disparity which leads me to ascribe the weight of history to the collective voice of the string orchestra.

Section 1 of Scene I, which is dominated by four Child-Complex instrumental soloists, also contains the first two appearances of the string orchestra. When the Child Complex soloists enter at m. 38, they appear to do so in spite of the orchestra, with no real musical relationship to it other than utter contrast, rendering the gesture-saturated, ebullient nature of the Child's music all the more striking. The string orchestra's disruptive function is not fully defined until its second wave, which begins in m. 102. This wave enters without any seeming connection to the concurrent music of the Child Complex soloists, but as it continues, meter and tempo stabilize into 4/4 at $\quarternote = 40$ and the soloists' musical gestures elongate in duration and flatten in registral scope, morphing into multi-measure, intermittently articulated glissandi (mm. 109-118) before flat-lining in mm. 119-120 into barely audible long tones that merge with the sound world of the string orchestra. While the Child Complex quickly regains its initial character in m. 121 (supported by a tempo change to $\quarternote = 100$, a tempo associated with the Child in Scene I), this moment announces the power of the string orchestra to dull the intricate detail and slow the quick changes of gestalt that characterize the Child. Exertions of such musical disruption, and consequent influence, over the Child by the string orchestra continue throughout the work, in the context of a complex dialectic between the three large-scale musical agents.

Despite its lack of differentiating information at the time-scale of gesture or phrase, the string orchestra music exhibits glacial trajectories of change over the course of the first two scenes that bring it subtly closer to the music of the two character complexes, facilitating

synthesis between elements of all three agents in the Child's Aria. One such trajectory is a

gradual increase in the ratio of pitch to noise produced by the string orchestra's playing

techniques. Table 3 charts each major appearance of the string orchestra in the first two scenes

and the playing technique within each appearance that results in the greatest degree of pitch.

Czernowin's notes in the score about the intended degree of pitch are included in quotation

marks where available; where there are no notes from her in the score I have provided a note

about the relative degree of pitch.

Table 3 – Unpitched to pitched sounds across Scenes I and II string orchestra waves

Location of string orchestra wave	Playing technique producing greatest degree of pitch	Notes on relative degree of pitch
mm. 15-41	bow on body of instrument	no pitch
mm. 102-128	"unsuccessful harmonic", extreme *sul ponticello*	"no pitch"
mm. 172-196	Brief bow glissandi played with extreme slow bow and extreme bow pressure	"no pitch but a woody-cracking sound"
mm. 358-408	Very slow LH glissandi, played in the lower part of bow; extreme bow pressure, bow as slow as possible, *sul ponticello*	Heavily filtered pitch
mm. 445-459	Very slow LH glissandi; brief transition to *ordinario* out of overall *molto sul ponticello*	Brief, staggered emergences of clear pitch out of heavily filtered pitch
mm. 498-522	Horizontal bowing in the violins and violas	"only hair" (no pitch)
mm. 542-578	Glissandi and microtonal clusters, *ordinario* bow position, *col legno battuto*	Pitch broken up by attacks of bow wood on string
mm. 625-731 (Child's Aria)	*Arco ordinario*, both fingered pitches and harmonics	Clear pitch

Several appearances of the string orchestra also contain an internal move toward a greater

degree of pitch, both supporting and lending subtlety to the large-scale trajectory. Within mm.

358-408, the area of greatest pitch is at the end of the segment (mm. 397-408); within mm. 445-

459, clear pitch emerges, staggered throughout the individual cello and contrabass parts, in the last third of the segment (mm. 455-456).

Bars 498-522, which contain an unpitched, horizontal bowing technique that makes them an outlier in the overall trajectory toward clearer pitch, also differ from the typical string orchestra appearance in other ways. Stretches of horizontal bowing appear sporadically, rather than in a consistent wave, and are performed by the upper strings rather than the group as a whole. These small insertions of string orchestra activity coincide with the first area of Child/Old Man interaction in Scene II, and appear to function more as connective tissue than a disruptive force. What links them to the prior appearances of the string orchestra is their internal elongation of time, exemplified in score example 5 (p. 72): the horizontal bow strokes within each orchestral insertion get progressively longer, as though urging the characters' music toward the time-scale of the collective voice.

Continuing the trajectory towards engagement with the characters' music, the very next appearance of the string orchestra, which bisects the two areas of interaction between the Child and the Old Man in Scene II, contains subtle references to the characters' interaction, articulated within its customary extended time-scale. Between bars 557 and 578, the string orchestra alternates between two distinct blocks of music, each defined by a specific instrumentation, set of playing techniques, pitch contours, and tempo. The first block, from mm. 557-563, involves the upper strings alone; it consists of several distinct gestures (brief microtonal chords and swooping glissandi) performed col legno battuto, such that the bow bounces throughout the duration of each gesture. Its tempo is ♩ = 60, typically found within the Child Complex. The second block, found in mm. 562-567, comprises circular bowing of a consistent chord in the cellos and basses, with a tempo found elsewhere in association with the Old Man Complex, ♩ =

32. One more successive alternation of these two materials and tempi occurs in 568-578;

their instrumentations are reduced (the first block to violins alone and the second block to two

contrabasses), but their pitch and technique identities remain.

Multivalent relationships to the Child and Old Man musics emerge from this alternation.

It is dialogic in form, enacting a highly simplified, essentialized version of the interaction

between the character complexes it interrupts and providing the closest thing to mid-level syntax

in which the string orchestra has thus far engaged. The material of the first block synthesizes

elements of both character complexes: the pointillism of the Child is reflected in the individual

impulses of *col legno battuto*; many of the individual gestures are glissandi, endemic to the

music of the Old Man. Because the string orchestra is a relatively featureless, collective force, it

does not seem appropriate to describe its incorporation of elements of the character complexes as

the result of their influence upon it—if the string orchestra is involved in any kind of influential

relationship with the characters, it bears the exclusive power to influence. It would also be a

mistake to ascribe too much anthropomorphic agency or intent to the string orchestra's move

toward the musics of the character complexes, such as insinuating that the orchestra is actively

preparing to assert its power over their interaction. Instead, I would like to interpret this moment

at face value: it is a crude reenactment of the characters' interaction, which *universalizes* that

interaction, in the sense of reducing individuating detail and rendering the interaction and its

participants as generic archetypes. Thus, although this moment seems to bring the string

orchestra closer to the semantic and syntactic content of the character complexes, it in fact serves

the same function of dulling detail as it did in its first appearance in Scene I. Moreover, the

"universal," a concept that sometimes carries the positive connotation of common understanding,

is critiqued here as an instrument of dehumanization.

The String Orchestra in the Child's Aria

Though the magnitude of changes across appearances of the string orchestra is relatively small and the pace of these changes is glacial, their trajectories prepare the participation of the string orchestra in the dialectic synthesis found in the Child's Aria. Perhaps the most obvious point of synthesis involving the string orchestra in this section of music is the use of the bass section, which has up to this point fulfilled a double role as part of both the Old Man Complex and the string orchestra. In the Child's Aria, the bass parts combine characteristics of the Old Man Complex and the string orchestra. As in the Old Man Complex, the basses here operate almost exclusively as an independent layer, musically distinct from the other string orchestra sections. Long tones and long-term glissandi, often expanded vertically into microtonal clusters, form the bulk of their material; the pitch content is filtered—but not completely masked—by variations in bow technique, including *col legno tratto*, uneven vibrato, and alterations of bow placement and pressure. Pitch is thus present to a relatively low degree compared to the Old Man Complex's use of the basses, but to a relatively high degree for the string orchestra, fitting neatly into the string orchestra's trajectory of increased clarity of pitch over the course of the first two scenes. These pitch materials are organized into waves as defined by the parameter of dynamics, recalling the shape of prior string orchestra appearances. Nine successive waves occur in the basses from their entrance in m. 636 until the beginning of the meta-glissando for which they join the voices; these waves begin softly and build to a dynamic peak, then either drop in abruptly in dynamic or become softer over the course of a brief diminuendo. The peaks of these waves occur in mm. 644, 651, 654, 660, 670, 674, 678, 681, and 685, all spaced between four and ten bars apart. In terms of scale, these waves thus split the difference between the shorter,

gestural crescendi typical of the Old Man Complex and the longer duration of prior string

orchestra waves – which have also appeared in isolation rather than as a group, as they are here.

Given how thoroughly aspects of the two agents appear to be integrated here, it might be

tempting to speculate which of them is "really" present, or which one is subsuming the other.

Ultimately, because this section is located within the Child's psyche, the answers to these

questions do not matter—the Child begins to feel the threat embodied by the string orchestra in

this section, but the Old Man is his conduit to perceiving that threat, for he is the personification

of the fear it engenders and the wounds it can inflict. Inextricable musical synthesis of the string

orchestra and the Old Man Complex is thus utterly appropriate in the Child's Aria, as the Old

Man is the gateway to the string orchestra in the Child's perception.

Synthesis also exists among elements drawn from all three agents. The extended broken

glissandi, already discussed in chapter three as a fusion of Old Man and Child characteristics,

seem to take their combination of minimal change occurring over durations of monumental scale

from the string orchestra. A particularly striking example of triple-agent synthesis occurs toward

the end of the Child's Aria in the orchestral violins, which engage in their own extended

trajectory of change in multiple parameters between mm. 711 and 731. In the parameter of pitch,

the violins articulate a broken glissando from G quarter-sharp 7 to F♯8; the section is broken into

three groups which traverse this span at different rates, resulting in three-part microtonal chords.

In terms of instrumental function, this gradual ascent by the violins recalls their use as an

extension of the double basses for the Old Man Complex's venture into the Child Complex's

musical territory, while their participation in a large-scale formal trajectory links them to their

original function within the string orchestra.

Changing approaches to duration and gesture within this broken glissando divide the trajectory into smaller formal units. The first two units, from mm. 711-717, beat 1 and mm. 717-721, are series of Old Man Complex-derived crescendo gestures with progressively extended durations, ranging from one 8th note in m. 711 to nearly six beats in mm. 720-721. The shortest of these durations recalls the pointillism of the Child Complex, and the progressive extension of their scale suggests the temporally disruptive influence of the string orchestra. Between mm. 722 and 731, the violins' broken glissando is set in durations that grow gradually shorter: the majority of durations in m. 722 are quintuplet 16th notes; in mm. 730 and 731, thirty-second notes, tending toward the pointillism (and newly acquired irregular repetition of points) of the Child Complex. Many of these shorter values are themselves micro-glissandi, thus infusing the Old Man Complex gesture type into the Child's Aria at multiple structural levels (which is itself an organizational technique of the Old Man Complex.) As the violins approach the zenith of their meta-glissando, rests of one to three beats begin to puncture the continuity of points, thus also breaking the glissando at multiple structural levels. Given the short durations of notes and the fuzziness of pitch caused by the violins' microtonal chords and micro-glissandi, each group of notes also resembles a composite trembling sound. Synthesis is thus achieved among the three agents within a multiplicity of musical parameters and levels of organization of time.

Dialectical synthesis of the three primary agents in the Child's Aria is the result of a complex process of introduction, interaction, and miscegenation of their musical identities. Creating this synthesis is also, to recall an element of Byron Almén's theory, a transvaluative process: the examples of synthesis I have discussed incorporate a common set of elements culled from the three musical agents, and the selection of these elements for participation in the moments of synthesis gives them a higher contextual value than those which were not selected.

Their value (or one might prefer to say, their significance) lies not only in the fact of their

selection, but in their meaning as an aggregate of musical signs, read through the hermeneutics

of experiential metaphor and its prior application in this paper. Long, slow glissandi figure

heavily in the Child's Aria; compared to the fast, rhetorical, multi-directional glissandi found in

earlier Child Complex music, these extended pitch trajectories connote a slow—perhaps careful,

perhaps labored—motion through space, whether physical or psychological. Breaking these

glissandi, often into individual points, connotes halting or hesitant motion, while the

preponderance of trembling sounds implies pain and fear. The extended durations of glissandi

and other trajectories that define form, infused into the music by the temporally disruptive force

of the string orchestra, preclude the prior organizational principles of the Child's music, stripping

it of the musical agency required for self-definition. Taken together, these elements define the

crisis at the heart of the Child's Aria: the Child has already begun to be fundamentally changed

by his encounter with the Old Man and, consequently, by the threatening presence of the string

orchestra. He is caught at a point of no return: his identity has fragmented, and there is no clear

way forward.

"The Center of the Piece": Concluding Scene II

The Child's aria does not "end" in the sense of attaining formal closure; rather, it is

abruptly cut off by the onset of the final section of Scene II—a section of music that is

anomalous within *Pnima*. Entirely electronic for the first and only time in the opera, this music

comprises two minutes of a heavily amplified small group of voices (8-10) performing an

ingressive whisper, filtered through the mouth shapes of specific phonemes: thirty seconds of

"i": forty seconds of "n": fifty seconds of "u." It distills the essential characteristics of the string

orchestra: the sound of whispering voices is at once quite intimate, yet once amplified and

layered, it becomes a monolith of aggressively continuous micro-detail, entirely devoid of semantic or syntactic content. Acousmatic presentation adds to the eeriness of the sound.

Formally, this section reasserts the threat and the power of the collective, "universal voice" in the face of the individual psychological struggle depicted in the Child's Aria. Its presence complicates the dialectic form, belying any potential for finality implied by the synthesis achieved in the Child's Aria and creating a narrative "need" for the third scene. Due to its anomalous nature and phenomenological intensity, I felt it must have a very particular meaning for the composer, and thus it is the only section of the piece about which I have asked for her personal interpretation. Here are her words on the subject of its meaning:

> This is so close to my skin, in a way, because this is the story of my life as a child. My father had lost all his family [in the Holocaust]. Whenever we would talk about it, there would be this dreadful –*awfulness* in the air, that you could hear….Basically, what we were given to understand as very, very small children, is that here is something that we will never get to understand – how awful it is….And here I am trying to – with that center of the piece – I am trying to experience it. That's the fear, and that's how it is for me. And by making it into music, here, I can experience it – am experiencing it. I am not experiencing what my father lived, but I am experiencing my notion of that experience, as far as I can give it life.[73]

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[73] Ibid.

Chapter 5

The Narrative Level: Interpreting Scene III in Context

Defining the "Narrative Level" in Relation to *Pnima*

Almén's third level of narrative analysis, eponymously named the "narrative level,"

involves synthesizing the details of the agential and actantial levels into one conceptual category

that summarizes the changing relationships among elements over the course of the work. In the

context of his entire theory, this means categorizing the work in terms of a large-scale

transvaluative process—"the playing out of tensions between an order-imposing hierarchy and a

transgression of that hierarchy."[74] Almén poses as potential categories four narrative archetypes

that James Liszka employs in the study of myth; these archetypes hinge upon permutations of the

combined binaries of order/transgression and victory/defeat:

> Romance: the victory of an order-imposing hierarchy over its transgression (victory + order)
> Tragedy: the defeat of a transgression by an order-imposing hierarchy (defeat + transgression)
> Irony: the defeat of an order-imposing hierarchy by a transgression (defeat + order)
> Comedy: the victory of a transgression over an order-imposing hierarchy (victory + transgression)[75]

Applying these archetypal categories to *Pnima* is problematic for numerous reasons, not

least of which is the fact that the work itself is profoundly resistant to and critical of the lack of

individuation archetypal categories imply, as discussed in chapters 1 and 4. As will be discussed

below, the profound ambiguity of the ending prevents easy classification according to one of the

four categories. Additionally, because this work is an opera and embodies an extra-musical

scenario, there is less to gain from its archetypal classification than that of concert music with no

explicit extra-musical content: the specific interactions of the agents presented in *Pnima* have

more potential cultural meaning than does their assignment within a classification scheme.

Finally, the presence of dialectical synthesis is problematic for a taxonomy reliant on binary

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[74] Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative,* 74.
[75] Ibid., 66.

oppositions. Almén does address musical synthesis as a possible "discursive strategy" in his discussion of comic narratives, but poses synthesis as a resolution of tension; this approach to synthesis cannot apply to *Pnima*, which is not a comic narrative and in which synthesis serves to intensify latent tensions in the work or as a pathway to new dialectical oppositions. In other words, synthesis may follow crisis in *Pnima*, but it is not inherently cathartic.

If the identification of narrative archetype is a problematic endeavor in the case of this opera, what other tools can assist reading the third scene in light of the first and second? I do not intend to completely abandon Almen's theory, as considering the ways in which it is and is not congruent with *Pnima* may help clarify an understanding of the opera, but other interpretive means are also needed. In Czernowin's preface to the score, two strands of thought emerge in connection with the third scene that can serve as guides. First, the Child's psychological transformation continues: he "is alone onstage, with the limited and estranged pieces of information which he could internalize from his grandfather…creating his own private holocaust which destroys and defines him."[76] Second, Czernowin identifies the string orchestra as embodying a final stage of response to trauma: it is "the voice of overcoming, going on."[77] The opposing concepts in these two strands of thought—destruction and continuation—suggest the opening of a new dialectic in the third scene that remains heavily dependent upon the events of the prior scenes. The goal of the narrative level of analysis for this particular work is thus to determine where these combined dialectic processes leave us at the end of the piece: what changes has the Child undergone, and how can he—or one—go on after such an encounter, as the vessel of an inherited trauma, which, in fragmentary and ineffable form, becomes his (one's)

[76] Czernowin, *Pnima…ins Innere*, preface.
[77] Ibid.

own? In order to address these questions, one must first examine what happens musically in Scene III, and how it both continues and abandons conditions established in prior scenes.

Musical Structure and Content in Scene III

Czernowin tells us that the Child is alone in the Third Scene, struggling to integrate what he has received from the Old Man into himself. Accordingly, the original instruments of the Old Man Complex are distributed among and absorbed into the other two primary musical agents. The male voices now operate in tandem with the female voices of the Child Complex, and sing almost exclusively in falsetto—a change that not only signals their incorporation into the Child Complex but also supports my prior reading of vocal register as an identifying category for the two complexes. In a move already well underway in Scene II, the singing saw joins the Child Complex's instrumental soloists. Finally, the double basses operate in Scene II as members of the string orchestra rather than the now-diffused Old Man Complex. While the characteristic gesture types of the Old Man complex do appear in Scene III, they are more isolated, divorced from their original syntactic and orchestrational contexts and appearing as adoptions of the Child Complex. Opposition between the Child Complex and Old Man Complex has ended, and the Child Complex now faces the string orchestra—the mercurial, un-personified force whose existence has been revealed to the Child via his encounter with the Old Man.

Formally, Scene III has a clearer, more traditional structure than Scenes I and II. It is cyclic and episodic: three relatively short sections that begin with audibly similar material in the Child Complex instrumentation are separated by three progressively longer episodes of music involving both the Child Complex and the string orchestra. The form of the scene, depicted in figure 4, thus loosely resembles a rondo, with three statements of the rondo "theme" and three intervening episodes. Almén describes the "order-imposing hierarchies" at play in his narrative

archetypes as "cultural": as discussed in chapter 1, Czernowin tends to avoid making compositional use of culturally-defined musical hierarchies, but the form of Scene III appears to deviate from that tendency. The progressive elongation of the episodes recalls, at a larger scale of temporal organization, the elongation of individual points into sustained pitches in the Child's Aria, which was in turn associated with the temporally entropic function of the string orchestra. It is tempting to ascribe the imposition of this cyclically expanding, quasi-rondo form to the string orchestra here, thereby increasing its historical weight and rendering it a chilling metaphor for Nazism, a simultaneously orderly and destructive force.
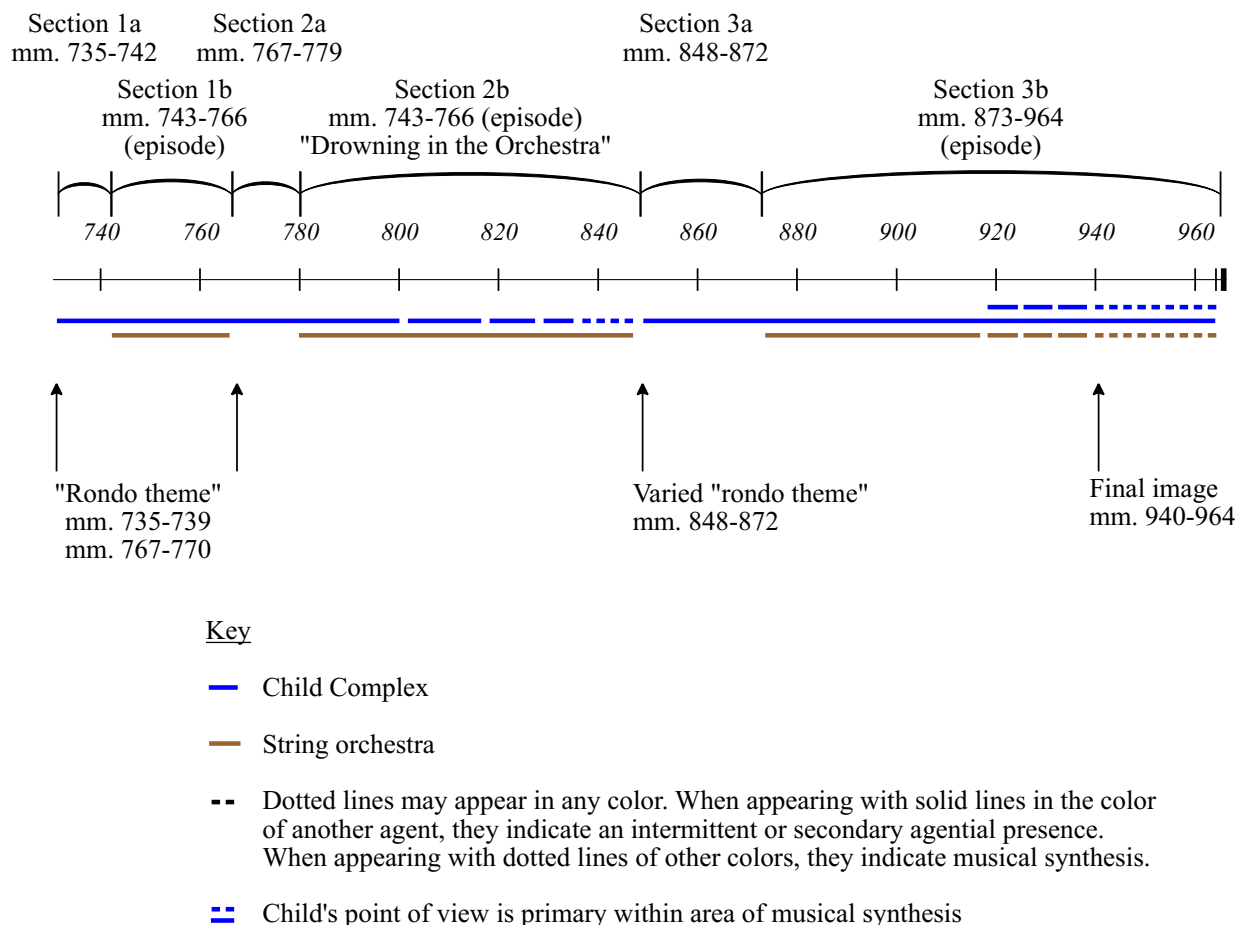
Figure 4 – Quasi-rondo form and areas of agential primacy in Scene III

Complicating this reading is the fact that the recurrent material takes place in the voices and percussion, not in the string orchestra. In its first two instances, it takes the form of four regular inhalations by a single singer, spaced two quarter-notes apart and followed by a single strike of the bongos, tam-tam, and timpani; the natural decay of the percussion instruments is supplemented by air noise in the trombone. Rhythms, tempo, and dynamics across these first two instances of the material (mm. 736-739 and mm. 767-770) are virtually identical (see score examples 14*A* and 14*B*). In its third appearance (mm. 848-852; score example 14*C*), this material changes: all four singers perform periodic repetition of an exhale-inhale cycle on 8th notes; the percussion continues the pulse with five strikes of the cans and the stones; and the trombone enters a bar later, in an incongruously loud outburst of glissandi played with the plunger mute, marked "rude" and, in my hearing, darkly humorous. This moment is aurally identifiable as both a variation of the recurrent "rondo theme" and, in its periodic repetition of breath-sound (a form of filtered noise), as a variation on the regularly pulsed white noise played by the string orchestra on the body of their instruments in Scene I (mm. 23-28). Regular pulse performed across multiple parts is so rare an occurrence in this work that these moments, also unified by a similar timbre, establish a connection despite their significant separation in time. A simple 1:2 tempo relationship between them supports their connection: the string orchestra pulse in Scene I is rendered in triplet 8th notes at $\downarrow$ = 40, or a pulse of 120 beats per minute; the breaths in Scene III are 8th notes at $\downarrow$ = 120, producing a pulse of 240 beats per minute.

Score example 14*A-C*: recurrences of the Scene III "rondo theme"

14*A*: mm. 736-739, section 1a

14*B*: mm. 767-770, section 2a

14*C*: mm. 848-852, section 3a

Given the chronology of these events, the Child Complex appears to imitate (albeit with variation) the string orchestra's pulses at m. 848, supporting the origination of Scene III's quasi-rondo form in the insidious combination of order and destruction that the orchestra embodies. This imitation calls to mind events from the first section of *See Under: Love* – Momik, the boy in Grossman's novel who is analogous to Czernowin's Child, captures animals and keeps them caged in his parents' basement, thinking he can rouse from these animals "the Nazi beast" that

scourged his family's past life.[78] Though Momik begins with valiant plans to vanquish the

beast and save his family from their mysterious, painful history, he is overcome by hatred and

fear of the beast and fervor for its destruction. He neglects the animals; some die in their cages.

Momik thus inadvertently begins to enact the cruelty he fears in his shadowy adversary. Just as

Momik's thoughts and actions are gradually warped by the unspeakable presence of his family's

past, the original organization of the Child's music—seemingly freely and un-systematically

repeated blocks of polyphonic material—is warped in the Scene III rondo, its freedom of

recurrence and non-recurrence reduced by the imposition of a historically freighted structural

principle. Nearly identical proportional relationships between each successive pair of "theme"-

initiated Child Complex section and Child-orchestra episode further evince the rondo's

orderliness: excluding fermatas, the combined duration of the second pair (232") is 1.86 times

that of the first (125"); the combined duration of the third pair (430") is 1.85 times that of the

second.

The Child Complex-dominated sections that begin with iterations of the "rondo theme"

continue beyond that theme, each time with material comprised of various trembling sounds.

Changes of playing technique, dynamics, and orchestration of the trembling sounds between

successive appearances of these parallel sections evince a growing gulf between the Child's

music prior to the encounter of the Old Man and the Child's music as influenced by the

encounter. In the first of these sections (Section 1a in figure 4), the playing techniques employed

produce mostly white noise or heavily filtered remnants of pitch. Dynamics are generally soft;

the only dynamics above mezzo-piano are momentary and do not apply to pitched sounds. It is

worth noting here that given its playing techniques, timbre, and gesture type, section 1a of Scene

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[78] Grossman, *See Under: Love,* 4-86.

III resembles the opening 15 bars of *Pnima* more closely than any other part of the work,

although the opening bars are texturally denser and more fully orchestrated. A non-linear

discursive strategy is revealed here, wherein the opening section of the work offers a snapshot of

the fallout of its central crisis, then the scenario moves back in time during the first orchestral

wave (further supporting the historical connotations of the string orchestra) and begins

chronological progression toward the crisis, starting with the first appearance of the Child

Complex soloists.

Section 2a of Scene III offers a greater range of dynamics and degrees of pitch produced

by its playing techniques than does section 1a. Dynamics range from pianississimo to fortissimo,

and the sounds range from unpitched (e.g. clarinet fluttertongue without mouthpiece) to fully

pitched (the diamond notehead in the trombone signifies a fluctuating degree of pitch between

breathy tone and *normale)*. Section 3a removes the middle ground from these spectra,

contrasting quiet breathing – both periodic pulsed breathing and an irregular breath-tremolo –

with "inappropriately" loud, rhetorical gestures from the trombone (with occasional support from

the saw). The rhetorical nature of the trombone material recalls the initial appearance of the

Child Complex clarinet, saxophone, viola and cello soloists, but its transference to the less agile

trombone and its stark contrast with its surroundings makes it come across in context as darkly

ironic, as though signaling that this mode of expression has lost its authenticity for the Child.

The three episodes that follow sections 1a, 2a, and 3a each set the Child Complex and the

string orchestra in a different relationship to each other, culminating in an uneasy synthesis of the

two agents in section 3a. Section 1a (mm. 743-766) sets fragmentary blocks of material in the

Child Complex voices and trombone against truncated orchestral waves; while the entrances and

exits of these overlapping entities are occasionally coordinated in time (as in mm. 758 and 764),

they maintain distinct musical identities as established in the previous scenes. Functionally,

the section establishes the two agents as independent voices that nonetheless have the potential

for coordination. In section 2a (mm. 780-847), fragments of music characteristic of the Child

Complex are again layered against the string orchestra, but this time they are dwarfed in

temporal scale by the nearly continuous orchestral presence that dominates the section (with the

exception of one break in mm. 701-709) and operates without connection to temporal

information provided by the Child Complex. The DVD chapter containing this section of music

is titled "Drowning in the Orchestra," and sure enough, as the section progresses, the

appearances of the Child Complex become shorter in duration and involve fewer and fewer

instruments, until only the female voices remain in mm. 838-847; the Child Complex appears to

have been overwhelmed or subsumed by the orchestra.[79] Musical connections between the agents

in this section are few, but the most significant one is perhaps the incorporation of a variety of

trembling sounds—trills, tremolos, and vibrato—into the music of both agents. Layered into the

acoustic complexity of the string orchestra's composite sound, these oscillations lend textural

instability to the orchestral group, referencing the operatic trope of tremolo as harbinger and

increasing the immediacy of the threat the orchestra poses.

   The final episode (section 3b; mm. 873-964) can be further divided into three sub-

episodes, the musical content of which moves progressively toward a final synthesis of the Child

Complex and string orchestra. In sub-episode 1, the Child Complex and string orchestra form

separate layers of information, each with distinct gestural and pitch language, but their

differences have been reduced in comparison with the second episode (section 2b). With the

exception of the voices, whose wavering inhalations last ca. 2-3 beats at $\quartnote = 40$, the basic

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[79] Czernowin, liner notes to *Pnima…Ins Innere* (DVD), back cover.

material is the Child Complex-associated individual point – notes of short duration that appear either in isolation or in groups of regular or irregular pulses. Pulsed crescendi characterize the string orchestra in much of this section. Rendered across long strings of a repeated pitch or very slow glissando, these gestures formalize the delicate irregular repetition and broken glissandi of the Child's Aria into ominous, seemingly goal-directed trajectories. The Child Complex instruments and string orchestra are unified in their use of points as primary material, and the voices and string orchestra are unified by the relative lack of pitch motion within individual gestures. Although pitch is constant or changes only within a very narrow band in these pulsed crescendo figures, the section as a whole admits of a wide register, from the low D1 of the basses (m. 874) to an E7 in the E♭ clarinet (m. 906). The isolated orchestral points that end the section are in rhythmic and pitch unison (or "fuzzy" pitch unison, with microtonal variations of one pitch in each point), but change register frequently.

In the second sub-episode (mm. 916-939), the separate layers of Child Complex and string orchestra begin to converge. Vocal material is reduced to points and the orchestral pulse trajectories do not return, making isolated points the exclusive material across all parts and eliminating the gestural separation of the two musical agents. Points are nearly always articulated by more than one voice or instrument in the section, creating an emergent sense of collective homophony, although the instrumentation of these groupings are not consistent or patterned. Harmonic material within these isolated points consists of "fuzzy" unisons and octaves, with microtonal variation of one pitch class or two adjacent pitch classes, but again lacks registral consistency. Beginning in m. 920 with a unison point in the string orchestra, percussion, and trombone, subsets of the Child Complex and string orchestra increasingly operate in rhythmic unison, although they do not do so continuously at any time. Dynamics are also variegated across

the isolated points. The two musical agents now resemble each other and are nominally coordinated, but do not yet have a consistent, collective identity across multiple musical parameters. In the 2009 edition of the score, grand pauses are indicated over all full bars of rest in this section, affirming the uneasiness of its nascent synthesis through the addition of disruptions to the regular progression of musical time.

A more stable synthesis between the Child Complex and the string orchestra arrives in the last sub-episode (mm. 940-964), which I have come to think of as "the final image"—a portrait of the Child's psychological state at the close of the opera. It is entirely instrumental, including the five instrumental soloists and the string orchestra. The basic material is again the point, and subsets of the ensemble articulate individual points, or groups of points, homophonically. In terms of pitch and timbre, the spectrum of possibilities available to the ensemble has been further reduced, and thereby further unified. Pitch hovers around D3 (the violin G strings are tuned down to Db to accommodate this) with the individual parts slowly slewing between C#3 to Eb3 over the course of several individual points, creating a homophonic articulation of multiple narrow, broken glissandi. Pitch is almost always filtered via the application of instrument-specific playing techniques that produce a combination of pitch and noise elements: extremes of bow pressure and placement in the strings, over-blowing in the winds, and partial scratch tone in the saw. Dynamics are *pianississimo sempre*. While the points do not appear in a consistent pulse, the distance between them occupies a narrow enough range (between ca. one 8th note and two quarter notes) to give them the same sense of hesitant, imperfect repetition that characterized the micro-repetitions in the Child's Aria. This final synthesis between the Child Complex and the string orchestra offers a stark contrast to the initial appearance of the Child Complex: the Child's musical language has been reduced and limited in

every possible musical parameter; its semantic units dismantled; its syntactic and structural principles destroyed. Interpreted through the hermeneutic of behaviorial and psychological metaphor, this final image of hesitant motion through a confined and narrow space suggests a near-paralysis of the Child's psyche.

Yet within this image of the Child's psychic disintegration, small remnants of his musical language remain, or appear to begin anew. Although the instrumentation of individual points changes throughout this last sub-episode, it does not change constantly; rather, groups of several points share an instrumentation, creating areas that emerge slightly from the texture due to their timbre and the number of instruments present. In one of the clearest examples of contrast between two such areas, the texture thins to just the solo cello in m. 951, then rapidly expands to encompass the full instrumentation of the section from m. 952, beat 2 to m. 951, beat 2 (although the cello gets in one final solo point between iterations of the full ensemble). Differentiating areas of the final image by orchestration reasserts the barest hint of mid-level syntax, counteracting the anti-syntactic tendency that the string orchestra infuses into the opera by reducing local differentiation while simultaneously increasing the duration of relevant formal units. The approximate rate of the points also fluctuates locally, creating further differentiation among areas of the music. In mm. 960-961, the duration between points and the duration of each point both expand progressively; the first point is a dotted 16th note followed by a 16th rest, while the last is a quintuplet dotted 8th note tied to a 16th; this note (whose duration begins to stretch the concept of "point") is preceded by nearly a beat and a half of rests. In the next bar, the orchestration increases its numbers significantly and the average duration of the points and the spaces between them becomes much shorter, suggesting an increase of energy or liveliness—a literal "quickening," shown in score example 15. It is also significant that the points never recur

periodically. If periodic, homophonic repetition is associated with the universalizing tendency of the string orchestra, as discussed above, the aperiodicity of the final image could be seen as resisting that tendency. Finally, the survival of the point, the last significant legacy of the Child Complex vocal parts, as the basic material for this synthesis suggests at least the potential for continuation: a point is both a fragment of what has come before and a raw material—a building block with which a potential future might be constructed. The Child's psyche has been broken by his encounters with first the Old Man and then the collective, historical voice of the string orchestra, but it has not been utterly subsumed or erased.

Score example 15: a quickening of the pulse at the end of the final image, m. 962

Interpreting the Final Image

To help clarify the possible meanings of the final image, it is helpful to at least consider how it might potentially be cast as the culminating point of one of Almén's narrative archetypes, applied to the work as a whole. Considering the four narrative archetypes, the two that could apply to *Pnima* are the tragic archetype (the defeat of a transgression by an order-imposing hierarchy) and the ironic (the defeat of an order-imposing hierarchy by a transgression).[80] In a subtle use of languge, both of the other archetypes—the romantic and the comic—involve a *victory* rather than a *defeat*; I think it is clear that no victory occurs in *Pnima*.[81] Almen notes that "transgression," in the context of the tragic archetype, is a positive or sympathetic concept; Czernowin's Child could occupy this category in the sense that the Child Complex music is transgressive of the types of order wrought by the string orchestra, which is the obvious candidate for labeling as an "order-imposing force" within the opera. If thus assigning the Child and the string orchestra to the poles of the archetypal binary, determining whether the opera is a tragic or ironic narrative hinges upon a choice to hear certain elements of the work more loudly, so to speak. One could choose to focus on the brokenness of the Child's music in the final image, and the proportionally huge amount of the work devoted to illustrating the trajectory toward brokenness; these elements would signify the Child's defeat, and thus the tragic narrative archetype. Conversely, one could choose to hear, in the small suggestions of the Child's musical resistance to the string orchestra, an implication of the orchestra's defeat in the sense that it participates in the "quickening" of the music, and thus takes part in a move toward individuation, contradicting its previous tendencies.

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[80] Almen, 66.
[81] Ibid., 66.

Besides the fact that these choices require one to ignore the fundamental ambiguity of the final image, they are also not satisfactory because they do not account for the presence of the Old Man. It is simply not clear how the agential voices in *Pnima* could be accurately mapped onto a basic binary of opposing forces. Should the Old Man, as the victim of history who leads the Child toward an awareness of the string orchestra's collective threat, be grouped with the orchestra as part of the order-imposing force? If so, the choices outlined above would still essentially hold: choosing the tragic narrative would mean focusing on the Child's musical breakdown, while choosing the ironic would place emphasis on the Child's slight resistance. Another possibility would be to view the interaction between the Child and the Old Man as the transgressive element in the work, with their attempts at communication constituting an attempt to transcend history, the communicative limitations it has placed on the Old Man, and by extension, the "lacuna of language" at the heart of much art about the Holocaust. While the idea of communication as the transgression of culturally- or historically-imposed limitations offers a potentially fruitful hermeneutic through which to approach *Pnima* (and indeed, much of Czernowin's music), it makes classification of the opera according to Almén's narrative archetypes more difficult. While the work certainly portrays a failure of communication between the Child and the Old Man, thus implying a tragic narrative, so much music is left in the piece after this failure that classifying the entire opera as tragic on this basis would seem to ignore significant portions of the work (including all of Scene III). Furthermore, the fact that *Pnima* itself is a form of testimony about the experience of Holocaust survivors and of their children is a strike against reading it as an expression of the futility of attempting such testimony. The ironic narrative seems moot in this instance, as the work most certainly does not constitute a defeat of failed communication or of the ineffability of trauma.

Ultimately, the binary of victory and defeat is just as unsatisfactory as the binary of transgression and order: these terms are simply too absolute to apply to a work that deals in complex musical dialectics and minute nuances of differentiation within each musical parameter. Furthermore, the specific characters and situation that the opera presents makes the concepts specious: there is little to "win" in this scenario. The Old Man has already lost so much of himself that he will never get back; the Child cannot save his family from their history or turn back the clock on his own awakening to its horror. Imagining a future for the Child character beyond the boundaries of the opera, perhaps the best one could hope for would be that he finds a way to move on, acknowledging the terrible truths of his family history, without being crushed by their weight or by the guilt of their distance from his direct experience. But ultimately this, or any vision of the nature of the Child's future, is imaginary: the final image tells no fortunes and makes no promise of hope. What it does do is signal the existence of a future, if not its quality. Though the Child's psyche has been wounded, its expression limited, its structure broken, its slight resistance in the final image to the flattening, universalizing power of the string orchestra—especially after being totally subsumed in the second episode—suggests, at the very least, that it is capable of going on in this severely limited form. The profound ambiguity of the final image leaves a vacuum into which some may read hope, and others, despair and futility. To the end, *Pnima* maintains its aura of indecipherability, thrusting listeners into the "lacuna of language" and allowing us to directly experience the paradoxical need for and impossibility of communication that trauma engenders.

Conclusion

In keeping with the theoretical positions laid out in chapter one, this analysis has addressed Almén's agential, actantial, and narrative levels in relation to *Pnima*, forgoing wholesale application of his theory in favor of a more work-specific, hermeneutic approach. The analysis identifies three large-scale musical agents—the Old Man Complex, the Child Complex, and the string orchestra—that are introduced in the first scene and can be understood as metaphorically enacting behaviors that intimate the psychology of the human characters and the nature of the mysterious, threatening force embodied by the string orchestra. Tracing the interactions of the three agents throughout the second scene, the analysis suggests ways those interactions can be read as "failed attempts" at communication and posits the first two scenes as a large-scale dialectic process that culminates in musical synthesis (but psychological crisis) in the Child's Aria. Finally, it observes the difficulty of categorizing the opera according to narrative archetypes, due to the ambiguity and non-catharsis that result from the continuation of dialectic processes in the third scene in the context of a quasi-rondo form. The analysis had been carried out using a methodology that does not seek or claim to uncover a definitive interpretation of *Pnima*, acknowledging that interpretation by nature cannot be definitive, and that if any truth is immanent in the work, it is its fundamental resistance to positivistic meaning and generic categories. I have, however, attempted to provide a reasonable interpretation of the opera, supported by engagement with Czernowin's writings and statements, other scholarship about her work, the theoretical tools of musical narratology, and my own detailed examination of the score.

Certain things this analysis does *not* do are worth mentioning here, as they point towards potential areas of future scholarship about *Pnima*. I have not identified any one aspect of the music that "unifies" the work and could be consistently traced throughout. Because the opera

critiques formalism and convention—embodied in the collective, historically charged voice

of the string orchestra—as instruments of de-individuation, this omission is in large part

intentional: it would be odd to impose conventional, historical musical values via analysis upon

music that eschews those values. A narrative analysis of *Pnima* cannot be, for example, the story

of a set of themes or of a unifying organizational principle, as in much narrative analysis of

Common Practice Era music. Instead, it is a story of non-linearly articulated trajectories;

meaningful gradations of detail and nuance in every musical parameter; constant disruption of

the local organization of time, and the fragmentation, synthesis, and re-synthesis of materials. In

other words, the musical features that make *Pnima* resistant to traditional analysis are the very

features that lend the opera the quality of "indecipherability" that Czernowin ascribes.

Yet certain compositional strategies emerge across *Pnima* that one could potentially

isolate and trace in a more comprehensive way. Czernowin creates a finely graduated spectrum

of pitch audibility and clarity, obscuring pitch harmonically via microtonal clusters of varying

width around a central pitch or pitch class, and through the application of instrument-specific

playing techniques that act as filters, obscuring pitch with noise and distortion. There are also

recurrent pitches or pitch areas that seem significant in the piece—B5, for example, and

microtonal variations on G-G♯. Although it is important not to overstate the importance of pitch

in *Pnima* at the expense of highly meaningful parameters such as timbre and register, pitch

recurrence, pitch relationships, and degrees of pitch obscurity could be addressed in much more

detail than the scope of this project allowed. Degrees of regularity of pulse and repetition are

another set of spectra that operate across the work. Czernowin suggests that she had in mind "at

least four kinds of repetition" with respect to *Pnima*; I have discussed differences in quality

among several instances of repetition, but it may be possible to devise a more comprehensive

work-specific theory of repetition that could serve as another hermeneutic through which to interpret the content of the opera.

It is my hope that this document offers a useful contribution to the ongoing scholarly conversation about how best to apply narrative theory to post-tonal music. As a work that resists tradition and category in many ways, beginning with its challenge to the necessity of text in opera, *Pnima* is a useful case study of the problems encountered in applying taxonomic, purportedly universally applicable theories to post-tonal works. Given the plethora of compositional methods and aesthetics that have developed within the concert-music world since 1900, theories that aim to be comprehensive, no matter how flexible they claim to be, may prove blunt tools for analysis compared to work-specific approaches that consider whether or not the work is compatible with the fundamental premises that undergird a given theory.

This study might also be useful to those embarking on the creation or criticism of productions of *Pnima*, clarifying the nature of the music and suggesting ways in which the theatrical medium could best support it. Many concepts identified in this analysis could be translated in interesting ways to the stage: examples include the limited, repetitive set of gestures that define the Old Man, the fundamentally relational, malleable nature of the Child, the faceless threat of the string orchestra that exceeds "human scale," spectra of degrees of clarity and regularity, and the constant disruption to any perceivable continuity of time. Conversely, a staging that offers too clear of a structure, too "loud" of a visual presence, or very overt or conventional symbolism may obscure the musical subtleties that carry meaning in *Pnima* and lend the opera its inherent mysteriousness. Ultimately, I hope this document can, in some way, help *Pnima* to speak its powerful message about the simultaneous necessity and difficulty of communicating trauma, and perhaps encourage others to listen.

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