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**THE TRANSFORMATION OF GIACINTO SCELSI'S
MUSICAL STYLE AND AESTHETIC, 1929–1959**

by

GREGORY NATHAN REISH

B. M., The University of Miami, 1988

M. A., The University of Georgia, 1993

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Georgia
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

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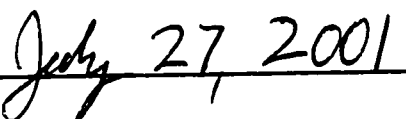
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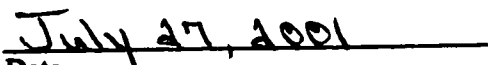
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GREGORY NATHAN REISH

**The Transformation of Giacinto Scelsi's Musical Style and Aesthetic, 1929–1959
(Under the Direction of DAVID HAAS)**

In 1948 Italian composer Giacinto Scelsi (1905–1988) suffered a psychological and artistic crisis that precipitated a four-year compositional silence. He had already traversed a wide range of compositional idioms of the early twentieth century, including impressionism, machinism, neoclassicism, and free atonality. Realizing that no single style would indicate a future course for European music, he sought to fuse them into a coherent language in works of the 1940s. His efforts produced admirable but, for Scelsi, ultimately dissatisfying results. Resuming composition in 1952, he gradually devised a compositional style focused on increasingly concentrated sounds, culminating in the seminal *Quattro pezzi (ciascuno su una nota sola)* (Four Pieces [each one on a single note]) (1959) for chamber orchestra, in which isolated pitch axes serve as foci for entire movements.

This study traces Scelsi's artistic transformation, manifested both in his musical compositions and his aesthetic texts, from the beginning of his career to his stylistic breakthrough of 1959. All five of his principal aesthetic texts are addressed, accompanied by complete translations into English. The *historicist* texts of the 1940s are interpreted as Scelsi's attempts to place himself at the forefront of a stylistic evolution that began in the nineteenth century. The *spiritualist* texts of the 1950s evince Scelsi's newfound emphasis on the metaphysics of sound, combining ideas from Hinduism, Yoga, Theosophy, Rudolf Steiner, and Dane Rudhyar, among other sources. Critical and contextual evaluations of selected compositions demonstrate Scelsi's grounding in the prevailing contemporary styles of the period and track his path through modality, microtonality, and ultimately to music based on a single note.

INDEX WORDS: Scelsi, Contemporary music, Italian music, Sonorism, Microtonality, Atonality, Theosophy, Musical aesthetics, Exoticism

DEDICATION

To my parents, Martin and Ralda

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- Triphon: Movement I; pp. 1, 9-11
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- Movement II: mm. 32-39

There are a great many people who have my profound appreciation for their help and support in the completion of this project. Among these, my advisor Dr. David Haas deserves special mention for his guidance, advice, and enthusiasm—not only in the completion of this dissertation but in all aspects of my graduate career. It was he, more than anyone else, who taught me what it means to be a musicologist. The members of my graduate committee also deserve special thanks for their continued encouragement and input: Dr. Leonard Ball, Dr. Richard Graham, Dr. William Power, and Dr. David Schiller. I would also like to acknowledge two former members of the UGA faculty who served previously on the committee, playing important roles in the early stages of the project: Dr. Glenda Goss and Dr. Lewis Nielson. And I certainly would not be writing these pages were it not for the invaluable, unfailing, and always warmhearted assistance of Jennell Hutchins.

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CHAPTER 1

PURPOSES, METHODOLOGIES, AND CONTEXTS

In 1948 Italian composer Giacinto Scelsi (1905–1988) suffered a mental collapse brought on in large part by the artistic impasse he had reached. He had spent nearly two decades experimenting with a number of distinct compositional idioms of the early twentieth century; his efforts to fuse them into a coherent language in his First String Quartet (1944) and *La nascita del verbo* (1948) produced admirable but, for Scelsi, ultimately dissatisfying results. Realizing that no contemporary style, nor any amalgamation of styles, would establish a clear path for the future of European music, Scelsi experienced a debilitating psychological and artistic crisis that precipitated a four-year compositional silence. When he resumed composition in 1952, he began the formation of a musical style predicated upon his new spiritual interests, chiefly Theosophy, Anthroposophy, Hindu metaphysics, and the meditative practices of Yoga. Between 1952 and 1959 Scelsi gradually devised a compositional approach intended to focus the listening experience on increasingly concentrated sounds, believing that their resonant properties could provide a pathway to spiritual achievement. Scelsi's compositional evolution during these years culminated in the seminal *Quattro pezzi (ciascuno su una nota sola)* (1959) for chamber orchestra,¹ in which isolated pitch axes serve as foci for entire movements.

This study traces Scelsi's artistic transformation from the start of his compositional career in 1929 to his stylistic breakthrough of 1959. Its primary purpose is to elucidate how, from a grounding in the prevailing contemporary styles, Scelsi eventually came to

¹ *Four Pieces (Each One on a Single Note)*.

compose what has been called “some of the most original music of our time.”² The full extent of Scelsi’s transformation manifests not only in his musical works but also in the aesthetic texts that he used to justify his compositional approaches before and again after his crisis.³ Therefore, I address both the music and the aesthetic texts of this crucial thirty-year period, seeking to establish where correspondences between the two bodies of work exist, and where they do not. Numerous influences, both musical and conceptual, are identified and discussed in an effort to put Scelsi’s narrative into its proper historical, cultural, and compositional contexts. Moreover, because his situation emblemizes to some degree the splintered state of European music near mid-century, bringing Scelsi’s transformation into sharper focus helps to clarify our picture of the period as whole.⁴

Biographical Sketch

Scelsi’s biography naturally provides the most immediate context for his artistic transformation, but the details of his extraordinary life remain scant and practically impossible to document. Scelsi was normally reluctant to share information about his life,

²Robin Freeman, “Tanmatras: The Life and Work of Giacinto Scelsi,” *Tempo* 176 (March 1991): 18.

³Giacinto Scelsi, “Sens de la musique,” *Suisse contemporaine: revue mensuelle* 1 (January 1944): 31–38; Giacinto Scelsi, *Évolution de l’harmonie*, ed. Adriano Cremonese (Rome: Fondazione Isabella Scelsi, 1992); Giacinto Scelsi, *Évolution du rythme*, ed. Adriano Cremonese (Rome: Fondazione Isabella Scelsi, 1992); Giacinto Scelsi, *Art et connaissance*, ed. Luciano Martinis (Rome: Le parole gelate, 1982); Giacinto Scelsi, *Son et musique*, ed. Luciano Martinis (Rome: Le parole gelate, 1981). An introduction to these sources appears on pp. 18–20 below.

⁴The period immediately following World War II may be viewed as an exciting time in Western music, characterized by such revolutionary developments in composition as integral serialism, indeterminacy, and electronic music. Many of the aesthetic changes of the period, however, stemmed from a pervasive feeling of uncertainty and detachment in the arts. Robert Morgan has observed that with post-war composers “the tendency was to distrust the past. With the world in physical and cultural ruin, the best hope seemed to be to make a radical break with what had gone before, to make a new start” (Robert Morgan, “The Modern Age,” in *Modern Times: From World War I to the Present*, ed. Robert Morgan, Music and Society, ed. Stanley Sadie [London: The Macmillan Press, 1993], 19–20).

and whatever documentary evidence may exist has generally not been made available to scholars.⁵ In addition, when Scelsi did speak about his past, it seems that he was prone to exaggeration and distortion. The small number of important biographical sources all present problems of incompleteness, inaccuracy, and unreliability. The most intriguing of these, perhaps, is the one-page autobiographical outline in poetic form that Scelsi provided for the published catalog of his works, but its seventy-three words are hardly definitive.⁶ The published interviews Scelsi conducted with Luciano Martinis and Franck Mallet are fascinating but enigmatic; they certainly warrant a high degree of skepticism.⁷ Similarly, the biographical content of Robin Freeman's article on Scelsi's life and music came primarily from the composer himself, and much of it appears dubious.⁸ One can certainly turn to the people who knew and worked with Scelsi closely—indeed, interviews with his friends and collaborators inform this study—but the composer rarely confided in even his closest friends about the details of his past.

We do know that Scelsi came from a family of southern Italian nobility, and that his financial independence allowed him great freedom to travel and pursue his manifold

⁵Most of the documentary evidence pertaining to Scelsi's life and creative output remains in the guarded possession of the *Fondazione Isabella Scelsi* in Rome. No one, not even the governing board of the *Fondazione*, seems to be quite sure of what these holdings contain, as none of the work of cataloging the materials to create a usable archive has been done. To date they have been disinclined to allow scholarly access to any of the materials, even for the purpose of helping with the cataloging process. Adriano Cremonese has had the greatest success yet of any scholar not intimately tied to the *Fondazione* itself. For my own research I was granted access to Scelsi's personal library to compile the inventory given in Appendix B of this study. But until the *Fondazione* decides to encourage rather than inhibit scholarly archival work, many of the mysteries and misconceptions surrounding Scelsi's life and work will persist.

⁶*Giacinto Scelsi* [Catalog] (Paris: Éditions Salabert, 1993), 4–5. The autobiography appears in French and English. The former was Scelsi's preferred language both for literary pursuits and conversation. The English translation could have been Scelsi's own, for he knew the language, or it could be the work of an unidentified translator.

⁷Giacinto Scelsi, interviews with Luciano Martinis, "Due frammenti di dialogo: con alcune osservazioni pertinenti la musica," *i suoni, le onde: Rivista della Fondazione Isabella Scelsi* 2 (1991): 3–5; Giacinto Scelsi, interview with Franck Mallet, "Il suono lontano: Conversazione con Giacinto Scelsi," trans. Marco Montaguti (French to Italian) in *Giacinto Scelsi: Viaggio al centro del suono*, ed. Pierre Albert Castanet and Nicola Cisternino (La Spezia, Italy: Luna Editore, 1993), 19–28.

⁸Robin Freeman, "Tanmatras: The Life and Work of Giacinto Scelsi," *Tempo* 176 (March 1991): 8–19.

interests.⁹ His education, both musical and non-musical, consisted of sporadic private instruction, the rigor and depth of which remain difficult to assess. Scelsi himself indicated that his most important early musical experiences consisted of improvising at the piano from a very young age.¹⁰ As a child or teenager spending time in Rome, he apparently received his first proper musical instruction from Giacinto Sallustio (1879–?), a composer and friend of Respighi.¹¹ Scelsi also reported to Freeman that during his youth he had heard the futurist concerts of Luigi Russolo with his *intonarumori* (noise intoners), but there is reason to doubt the verity of this claim.¹²

Scelsi spent the majority of the 1930s and 1940s abroad absorbing influences. He may have arrived in Paris as early as 1929, the year of his first published composition, *Rotative*. While there he befriended several distinguished figures, especially the post-symbolist poets Henri Michaux and Pierre-Jean Jouve and the surrealist artist Salvador Dalí. At some point in the mid 1930s Scelsi traveled to Geneva to study the music and ideas of Scriabin with

⁹Scelsi was the last Count of Ayala Valva; neither he nor his only sister Isabella had any children. Their ancestral home in the countryside of Campania, near Naples, was destroyed in the great Neapolitan earthquake of 1980.

¹⁰In one interview, Scelsi specifies that he began improvising when he was three and a half (Scelsi, interview with Franck Mallet, "Il suono lontano," 19).

¹¹See "Sallustio, Giacinto," in Alberto de Angelis, *L'Italia musicale d'oggi: Dizionario dei musicisti* (Rome: Ausonia, 1918), 301–302. Robin Freeman reports that as a boy Scelsi spent time at Respighi's house, growing attached to the eminent composer's wife, Elsa San Giacomo (Freeman, "Tanmatras: The Life and Work of Giacinto Scelsi," 8). Apart from this account, which presumably originated with Scelsi himself, there is no clear evidence to suggest that he ever actually studied with Respighi, despite such assertions in the literature.

¹²Freeman, "Tanmatras: The Life and Work of Giacinto Scelsi," 8. Russolo's concerts were not affairs attended by a large public audience, and they took place in Modena, Milan, and Genoa, while Scelsi spent his youth in Rome and Campania. Moreover, the Italian concerts occurred between 1913 and 1915, when Scelsi was only eight to ten years old. It may be, however, that Scelsi heard a concert by Russolo with his *rumorarmonio* in Paris in 1929, when he was likely in the French capital. See Stefano Bianchi, *La musica futurista: Ricerche e documenti*, Musica Ragionata, ed. Alberto Basso, no. 8 (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 1995), 56–62 and 66–67; Rodney Payton, "The Music of Futurism: Concerts and Polemics" *The Musical Quarterly* 62 (1976): 25; and Barclay Brown, "The Noise Instruments of Luigi Russolo" *Perspectives of New Music* 20 (1981–82): 31–49.

Egon Koehler, who introduced the young Italian to Theosophy and Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy. Scelsi later recalled that Koehler was a follower

of Scriabin, just as Sallustio was of Debussy. But [he followed] Scriabin not [just] as a musician, but also for the conceptions that Scriabin had of the world, of philosophy, and particularly of Theosophy. It seemed unbelievable to him to have a pupil like me in Geneva—especially in that I too had great admiration for Scriabin, who represented the opposite of the extroverted and rather provincial aesthetics of Respighi and the neoclassical [aesthetics] of Casella. As for Pizzetti and Malipiero, their music was not in a position to have any lasting influence, unfortunately not even with their students.¹³ This was the quartet that was teaching then in Italy, not at all what I was looking for. With Koehler I spoke chiefly about music, particularly the theory—partly attributable to Goethe and Steiner—of the pre-existence of sounds and colors, which would manifest under certain conditions, but are not caused by them. A metaphysical theory, certainly, but fascinating.¹⁴

In the mid 1930s Scelsi also spent time in Vienna investigating the music of the Second-Viennese composers under the guidance of Walter Klein, a little-known student of Schoenberg. The secondary literature has collectively placed considerable emphasis on this tutelage, presumably because it so cogently symbolizes Scelsi's immersion in the modern idioms he eventually came to reject. Its symbolic importance, however, may have led to an overestimation of its duration and substance. Most citations in the literature indicate that Scelsi studied with Klein in 1935 *and* 1936, but Luciano Martinis, who was close to Scelsi, marks the time frame as 1935 *or* 1936. More importantly, Martinis reports that Scelsi once told him that the period of study lasted only three days.¹⁵ Elsewhere Scelsi recounted that

¹³Ottorino Respighi (1879–1936), Alfredo Casella (1883–1947), Ildebrando Pizzetti (1880–1968), and Gian Francesco Malipiero (1882–1973) were all members of the *generazione dell'ottanta*, so called because they were all born in or around the 1880s.

¹⁴Quoted in Luciano Martinis, "Art de Musique," *i suoni, le onde: Rivista della Fondazione Isabella Scelsi* 3 (1992): 9. Martinis reports that this fragmentary passage remains in his possession, and he suspects that it originally formed a part of Scelsi's late literary work, *Il sogno 101* (1982). The specifically autobiographical information conveyed in the passage, however, is inconsistent with the dream-like, metaphorical, and poetic mood of *Il sogno 101*. It is perplexing that Martinis's own editorial note in the published version of *Il sogno 101* (which does *not* contain the fragment above), indicates that Scelsi recorded the original text on audio tape during the nights of 27 and 28 December 1980, and that subsequently they were "faithfully transcribed by R. S." See Giacinto Scelsi, *Il sogno 101: Il parte: Il ritorno*, La vena rota, ed. Luciano Martinis, no. 1 (Rome: Le parole gelate, 1982).

¹⁵Martinis, "Art de Musique," 9.

the academic nature of his study under Klein induced an early bout with the psychological malady that eventually caused Scelsi's breakdown, lending support to the account of a truncated tutelage.

But after having been in Vienna to study dodecaphony with Walter Klein, a student of Schoenberg, I became obviously ill. It was normal. One who is filled by an extraordinary force, passing hours at the piano without being conscious of what he is producing, having to think about a [problem of] counterpoint or the resolution of a seventh, will inevitably become stifled. I was ill for four months. I was thinking too much. From then on I stopped thinking; all of my music and my poetry was created without thinking.¹⁶

Still, Chapter 4 will show that Scelsi's engagement with the music of the Second-Viennese composers was at first laudatory and ultimately consequential for Scelsi's compositional development. We shall also see that his claim to have created all of his music from the mid 1930s onward "without thinking" is difficult to reconcile with the meticulous craftsmanship that characterizes so many of his works.

Secondary sources have also placed particular emphasis on Scelsi's travels to Asia and Africa in the 1930s. Generally, it is implied or even explicitly stated that these experiences aroused Scelsi's interests in Oriental mysticism and other exotica, interests that helped to shape his mature aesthetic and style. The details of these journeys, however, remain especially meager. In Scelsi's autobiographical sketch, he mentions visits to Nepal and India, while other sources cite trips to a variety of other locations including Tibet, Egypt,

¹⁶Scelsi, interview with Franck Mallet, "Il suono lontano," 19. Luciano Martinis cites another version of this passage in what is presumably the original French: "J'ai même été à Vienne étudier la dodécaphonie avec Walter Klein, qui était l'un des élèves de Schoenberg. J'ai fait ça et plus je suis devenu malade. Bien sûr. C'est la conséquence normale. Lorsque quelqu'un peut rester des heures au piano sans savoir ce qu'il fait, mais en faisant quand même quelque chose, c'est qu'il est animé d'une force hors du commun, qui passe à travers lui. Mais si vous la bloquez cela en songeant à un contrepoint ou à une résolution de septième, on n'arrive à rien. Je pensais trop. Depuis ce moment-là, je n'ai plus pensé du tout. Toute ma musique et ma poésie ont été faites sans penser" (Martinis, "Art de Musique," 9). Martinis indicates that this version derives from a transcription provided to him by Mallet. Mallet's own "faithful transcription" as it appears in *Giacinto Scelsi: Viaggio al centro del suono* (translated into Italian by Marco Montaguti), differs from the French version in several details that do not seem attributable merely to the act of translation. A number of writers have quoted this passage without its first sentence, presuming that Scelsi must have been describing his major breakdown in 1948. The first sentence strongly suggests, however, that he is referring to another episode that occurred shortly after his time in Vienna with Klein in the mid 1930s.

Arabia, and Persia. Given Scelsi's professed admiration for the cultural and spiritual traditions of the Orient, it seems peculiar that he would have assumed such a secretive posture when it came to his extra-European journeys and the supposed discoveries he made there. Michiko Hirayama, the Japanese singer who worked closely with Scelsi for many years, has even expressed doubt as to whether Scelsi ever made such journeys at all.¹⁷ He certainly had money and freedom enough for such adventures. But he also could have appropriated the stories of other people—like his friend Henri Michaux, who chronicled his travels in the 1930s to India, Ceylon, China, Japan, and Malaysia in the poetic diary, *A Barbarian in Asia*¹⁸—in an effort to lend credence and validity to his particular brand of orientalism.¹⁹

Sometime in the mid to late 1930s Scelsi traveled to London, where he took a British wife named Dorothy. Her noble lineage, reportedly a distant relation to the British royal family, earned them a wedding reception at Buckingham Palace. Scelsi moved primarily between London and Paris until the outbreak of the war, at which time he fled to Lausanne, safely passing the remainder of the war in Switzerland. According to Freeman, Scelsi's wife "grew to detest life abroad—particularly with an Italian who, according to her, could not help but be the accomplice of the regime."²⁰ After the German surrender, she left him and returned to England. Nevertheless, these were fairly productive years for Scelsi, who

¹⁷Michiko Hirayama, interview with the author, Rome, 3 May 1997. In the Scelsi literature, only Julian Anderson has viewed with a skeptical eye Scelsi's reports of traveling to the Orient: "Scelsi claimed to have visited Tibet, India and Nepal at some unspecified time before the 1959 Chinese invasion. Whether he actually did or not (and he certainly could have afforded to) he became a devotee of Zen Buddhism" (Julian Anderson, "La Note Juste: Julian Anderson Celebrates the 90th Anniversary of Giacinto Scelsi's Birth," *The Musical Times* 136 [January 1995]: 22–23).

¹⁸Henri Michaux, *A Barbarian in Asia*, trans. Sylvia Beach (New York: New Directions, 1949).

¹⁹I use the word *orientalism* deliberately and in the sense that Edward Said uses it in his seminal book, as "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience" (Edward Said, *Orientalism* [New York: Vintage Books, 1979], 1).

²⁰Freeman, "Tanmatras: The Life and Work of Giacinto Scelsi," 9.

wrote all three of his early aesthetic texts during this time as well as his String Quartet No. 1 (1944), a major compositional achievement.

The nature of the breakdown Scelsi suffered in 1948 and the details of his convalescence in a Swiss sanatorium remain largely unclear. He had experienced bouts with some kind of nervous disorder before, and there is some suggestion that his mid-career crisis may have been exacerbated by physiological symptoms. Hirayama reports that after his crisis Scelsi endured ongoing muscular tremors, particularly in his hands, which was the primary reason that he enlisted an assistant to notate his scores during his later years.²¹ Scelsi himself rarely spoke of the event and his malady, though he did relay an anecdote about having “played billiards with the crazies,” who were permitted to use the billiard balls, but not the sticks. Of the institution itself, Scelsi revealed only that “it was a highly regarded and luxurious clinic. I cannot give its name because that would be free publicity.”²² He claimed that when scores of doctors failed to help him, he cured himself

²¹Michiko Hirayama, interview with the author, Rome, 3 May 1997. Beginning some time in the 1950s or possibly the late 1940s, Scelsi's compositions typically began as tape-recorded improvisations on the piano or the ondiola, a petite electric keyboard capable of microtonal manipulation. He then modified and combined sections of these improvisations to create notated scores, accomplishing much of the work with the help of an assistant. This method has resulted in a dearth of Scelsi manuscripts and produced considerable controversy. A notorious article appeared shortly after Scelsi's death by Vieri Tosatti, Scelsi's primary assistant for many years, in which Tosatti claims essential authorship of many of Scelsi's works. The article quickly produced a deluge of responses from defenders of Scelsi's musical integrity. See Vieri Tosatti, “Giacinto Scelsi c'est moi,” *Il Giornale della Musica* 5/35 (January 1989): 1 and 10; Aldo Brizzi and Carlo Fischetti, “Altre verità su Scelsi,” *Il Giornale della Musica* 5/36 (February 1989): 1 and 10; Giulio Castagnoli, “Lettere: Quell'articolo ottocentesco su Giacinto Scelsi,” *Il Giornale della Musica* 5/36 (February 1989): 31; Roman Vlad, “Quelle ‘lezioni’ di Vlad a Scelsi,” *Il Giornale della Musica* 5/37 (March 1989): 1; Vieri Tosatti, Robin Freeman, Giuseppe Gavazza, and Federico Biscione, “Lettere: Caso Scelsi: il dilettante e i ‘professionisti’,” *Il Giornale della Musica* 5/37 (March 1989): 31; Harry Halbreich, and Aldo Clementi, “Lettere: Caso Scelsi: intervengono Halbreich e Clementi,” *Il Giornale della Musica* 5/39 (May 1989): 30; Francesco Leprino, “Lettere: Ancora su Scelsi,” *Il Giornale della Musica* 5/40 (June 1989): 31; Guido Zaccagnini, ed., “Il compositore è una cooperativa? A proposito del Caso Scelsi,” *Piano Time* 7/72 (March 1989): 33–42; Lorenzo Ferrero, “Il re è nudo,” *Piano Time* 7/72 (March 1989): 36; Sergio Cafaro, “Io, Sergio Cafaro, dichiaro . . .,” *Piano Time* 7/72 (March 1989): 36; Michele Porzio, “Dilettanti artisti e professionisti accademici,” *Piano Time* 7/72 (March 1989): 37; Richard Trythall, “World View: Italy,” *Keyboard* 15/11 (November 1989): 25.

²²Scelsi, interview with Franck Mallet, “Il suono lontano,” 23.

through Yogic exercise and by immersing himself in the psychoacoustic powers of sound.²³

In 1951 or 1952 Scelsi returned to Rome, where he lived the rest of his life, traveling infrequently. Working in relative isolation, he undertook the development of his new style and cultivated his interests in Oriental mysticism and various Western spiritualist movements. In the 1960s he became involved with the *Nuova Consonanza*, a coterie of Roman composers led by Domenico Guàccero (1927–1984) and Franco Evangelisti (1926–1980).²⁴ The left-wing political inclinations of the group generated some animosity toward Scelsi, particularly from those who resented his money, his title, and his Swiss refuge during the war. But Evangelisti and a few others admired Scelsi's unusual work and insisted on his continued participation, even helping to arrange a few sporadic performances.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Scelsi's work began to earn attention from enthusiastic young composers and performers. A number of prominent Americans who had come to Italy as Fulbright scholars or as Fellows of the American Academy sought him out, most notably Alvin Curran (b. 1938) and Frederic Rzewski (b. 1938). Scelsi's music also inspired a group of radical young French composers who called themselves *L'itinéraire* and whose compositional interests lay in the resonant properties of sound.²⁵ In 1982, Scelsi's music was performed in Darmstadt at the *Ferienkursen für Neue Musik*, where it apparently created quite a stir. In October 1987, less than a year before his death, several of Scelsi's large-scale orchestral works of the 1960s were performed at the inaugural concert of the

²³See Chapter 5 below.

²⁴See Daniela Tortora, *Nuova Consonanza: Trent'anni di musica contemporanea in Italia (1959–1988)*, Musicalia, no. 2 (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana), 1990.

²⁵The most prominent of these composers were Tristan Murail (b. 1947) and Gérard Grisey (1946–1998), who later formulated an aesthetic of what they called *spectral music*. See Pierre Albert Castanet, "Musiques spectrales: nature organique et matériaux sonores au 20e siècle" *Dissonanz-Dissonance* 20 (May 1989): 4–9.

International Society for Contemporary Music in Cologne, with the composer in attendance.²⁶

Survey of the Literature

In part because Scelsi's music has been known outside of Rome for a relatively short time, the body of literature devoted to it remains meager, especially sources in English. Robin Freeman's article has commendably introduced Scelsi and his music to an English-speaking audience, but it has also generated and perpetuated a number of misconceptions. In particular, its biographical content should be treated with skepticism. Todd McComb's series of essays on Scelsi's music has been widely read on the internet, where his assertions have gone unchallenged.²⁷ Julian Anderson has provided another English-language introduction to Scelsi's music that seems more reliable, despite a few erroneous dates.²⁸ Within this article, Anderson's brief discussion of *Anahit* (1965) for violin and chamber orchestra offers a limited but persuasive view of the work's underlying structural process. Of particular consequence, his analysis provides a useful model for illustrating the structures of Scelsi's mature music with linear graphing techniques.

William Colangelo's dissertation, the only one devoted entirely to Scelsi before the present study, focuses on one intriguing issue: Scelsi's extraordinary working relationship with a number of performers.²⁹ Given that many of Scelsi's most compelling works from

²⁶See Adriano Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva e riflessione teorica fino alla metà degli anni '40*, Quaderni Perugini di Musica Contemporanea, no. 1 (Palermo: L'Epos, 1992), 77.

²⁷Todd McComb, *Modern Music: Scelsi* (27 January 2000). Available [Online]: <<http://www.medieval.org/music/modern/scelsi.html>> [24 March 2001].

²⁸Julian Anderson, "La Note Juste: Julian Anderson Celebrates the 90th Anniversary of Giacinto Scelsi's Birth," *The Musical Times* 136 (January 1995): 22–27.

²⁹William Colangelo, "The Composer-Performer Paradigm in Giacinto Scelsi's Solo Works," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1996). Starting in the early 1960s, Scelsi worked closely with a number

his later years were the products of collaborative efforts, Colangelo asks, "What did the score mean to Scelsi, and what does it mean to performers interpreting his music today?"³⁰ Two primary methodologies inform Colangelo's study: qualitative evaluation of interviews with some of the performers who worked directly with Scelsi, and quantitative comparison of computer-aided analyses of various recordings of Scelsi's pieces. Among Colangelo's conclusions, he finds that "performers who worked directly with Scelsi [believe] in a greater degree of performer freedom, while performers who learned of Scelsi's music through the scores [take] a more traditional approach in interpretation."³¹

To date the most enlightening studies of Scelsi's musical style and aesthetic have been German- and Italian-language sources. Hans Rudolf Zeller's essay "Das Ensemble der Soli" traces the development of Scelsi's solo works from the 1930s through the 1970s.³² Zeller argues that Scelsi's concentration on isolated tones in his later works for ensemble stems directly from similar techniques that appeared first in works for a single instrument. The solo medium, he suggests, was conducive to the distillation of the harmonic and melodic parameters.

Scelsi composed more or less for thirty years [1930–1959], with few exceptions, pieces very rich in sonority for *one* instrument, which allowed him to write around 1959, and then in the sixties and seventies, pieces for a single tone or sound for *more* instruments

performers who seem to have a hand in the final formation of some of his solo pieces. The most significant of these collaborators, whom Colangelo makes his focus, are Michiko Hirayama (voice), Frances-Marie Uitti (cello), and Marianne Schroeder (piano).

³⁰Colangelo, "The Composer-Performer Paradigm," 1.

³¹Colangelo, "The Composer-Performer Paradigm," 141. It should be noted that Colangelo's dissertation is not a musicology document *per se*. He earned his degree from New York University's School of Education.

³²Hans Rudolf Zeller, "Das Ensemble der Soli," in *Giacinto Scelsi*, ed. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn, *Musik-Konzepte: Die Reihe über Komponisten*, no. 31 (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1983), 24–66. The essay appears in Italian as "L'ensemble dei 'soli'," in *Giacinto Scelsi*, ed. and trans. Adriano Cremonese (Rome: Nuova Consonanza and Le parole gelate, 1985), 29–74.

or for a larger ensemble, along with other solo works. The reduction to a single tone was therefore preceded by the reduction to a single instrument.³³

Zeller's argument proceeds through discussions of the piano works of 1930–1941, the piano works of 1952–1955,³⁴ the solo works for strings and winds of 1954–1967, and the vocal works of 1960–1973.

Because he deals with a majority of Scelsi's compositions from a forty-three year period, Zeller's treatment of individual works remains somewhat cursory, rarely penetrating beyond mere surface description. But more importantly, Zeller all too easily dismisses the fundamental differences in style and aesthetic that distinguish the works of Scelsi's early phase from those composed after 1952, treating the entire body of work as an unbroken stylistic continuum. Though it does contain moments of useful insight, Zeller's article seems misguided in its attempt to demonstrate the merit of Scelsi's early music and the evolutionary correctness of his later style.

Adriano Cremonese's succinct monograph addresses Scelsi's compositional practice and theory in the years before his crisis and makes the first significant attempt to correlate Scelsi's early aesthetic writings and musical compositions.³⁵ Four chapters comprise the book: the first deals with Scelsi's earliest published works (1929); the second focuses on the years Scelsi came under the influence of Scriabin and Berg (1936–1944); the third addresses the three aesthetic essays of the 1940s; and the fourth offers conclusions about

³³Zeller, "Das Ensemble der Soli," 28. Emphasis in original. ("Scelsi komponierte rund dreißig Jahre lang mit nur wenigen Ausnahmen Stücke mit zumeist vielen Tönen für *ein* Instrument, um 1959—und hernach in den sechziger und siebziger Jahren—Stücke über einen Ton oder Klang für *mehrere* Instrumente oder größere Ensembles schreiben zu können—und weitere Soli. Der Reduktion auf den einen Ton ging mithin die auf ein Instrument voraus.")

³⁴Zeller published his article before certain details of Scelsi's catalog came to light. Therefore, he treats *Action Music* of 1955 as Scelsi's last piano work, not taking into account the Suite No. 11 for piano (1956) and *Aitsi* for electronically-treated piano (1974).

³⁵Adriano Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva e riflessione teorica fino alla metà degli anni '40*, Quaderni Perugini di Musica Contemporanea, no. 1 (Palermo: L'Epos, 1992).

the period and possible connections between the music and essays.³⁶ Cremonese also provides a well-researched and thorough catalog of Scelsi's compositional output, an invaluable contribution to the literature.

Cremonese argues in Chapter 1 that Scelsi's earliest works already betray a marked interest in sonority and timbre. He suggests the conceptual influence of Debussy, but emphasizes that the actual musical style of Scelsi's *Rotative* (1929) did not reproduce that of the French composer.

The fact that Scelsi . . . did not compose deliberately in an atonal fashion but made liberal use of chromaticism, the whole-tone scale, and the tonal system . . . , that the chords ultimately do not derive their meaning from being inserted into a functional harmonic progression, but carry specific sonorous weight and quality really confirms in an evident manner how much light was shed by such profound study of Debussy's work. . . .

. . . [Nevertheless], it remains very important to emphasize that Scelsi did not recreate Debussy's language as much as he had cultivated its spirit . . . , that perception of sound.³⁷

He maintains that the dense and dissonant harmonic language of *Rotative* evinces Scelsi's preoccupation with sonorous resonance from the very start of his career—a position I dispute.³⁸ In Chapter 2, Cremonese confirms the influence of Berg on Scelsi's work after his tutelage with Walter Klein in Vienna. He demonstrates a convincing thematic affinity between Berg's Sonata, Op. 1 and Scelsi's *Quattro poemi* for piano (1936–1939), and

³⁶Cremonese's chapter titles are as follows: I. The Beginnings: *Rotative* and *Chemin du coeur* (Gli inizi. *Rotativa* e *Chemin du coeur*); II. The Influence of Scriabin and Berg: The *Quattro poemi* and the Quartet No. 1 (L'influenza di Skrjabin e Berg. I *Quattro poemi* e il *Quartetto n. 1*); III. The First Phase of Scelsi's Poetics: *Sens de la Musique*, *Évolution de l'harmonie*, *Évolution du rythme* (La prima fase della poetica di Scelsi. *Sens de la Musique*, *Évolution de l'harmonie*, *Évolution du rythme*); IV. A Preliminary Assessment (Un primo bilancio).

³⁷Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva*, 16–17. ("Il fatto che Scelsi . . . non componga deliberatamente in modo atonale ma faccia un libero uso di cromatismo, scala per toni interi e sistema tonale, . . . , che gli accordi infine non derivino il loro significato dall'essere inseriti in una linea armonica funzionale ma abbiano un peso specifico sonoro e una qualità sonora propri concorda infatti in modo evidente con quanto messo in luce dagli studi più approfonditi sull'opera di Debussy. . . .

. . . [A]ppare molto più importante sottolineare come Scelsi non ricrei il linguaggio di Debussy quanto piuttosto ne abbia colto lo spirito, . . . , quella percezione del suono.")

³⁸See my Chapter 4 below.

textural similarities between the fifth movement of Berg's *Lyrical Suite* and several passages from Scelsi's First String Quartet.³⁹ Ultimately, Cremonese suggests that the most consequential aspect of Berg's influence on Scelsi was a fascination with sonority, which Cremonese describes rather ambiguously: "The profound nature of the relationship between Scelsi and Berg is hidden, however, in more internal references, in a dimension less apparent: it is rooted in the deep level represented by the perception of sonorous material."⁴⁰ The case for the influence of Scriabin is rather less developed and relies on the importance of fourths—which comprise Scriabin's mystic chord—in Scelsi's *Quattro poemi*.⁴¹

Cremonese's consideration of the early aesthetic essays in Chapter 3 consists mainly of summaries of their content. Though he does not undertake to identify any of the specific sources that may have influenced Scelsi's thinking, he does argue for its placement within the "general psychic and rhythmic orientation [that was] characteristic of the modern spirit."⁴² In the concluding chapter Cremonese makes the only attempt yet to connect Scelsi's aesthetic essays of the 1940s with his musical style of the period. Underscoring the importance Scelsi places in the essays on the psychic and rhythmic elements of human nature, Cremonese suggests that the corresponding musical elements—in Scelsi's view, harmony and rhythm respectively—are given corresponding weight in the early compositions.⁴³

³⁹Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva*, 22–23 and 35–40.

⁴⁰Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva*, 34. ("La natura profonda del rapporto tra Scelsi e Berg si cela però in rimandi più interni, in una dimensione meno appariscente: essa è radicata nello strato profondo ripresentato dalla percezione della materia sonora.")

⁴¹Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva*, 29–30.

⁴²Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva*, 55. ("generale orientamento psichico e ritmico, caratteristico dello spirito moderno")

⁴³Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva*, 71.

Along with Cremonese's book, the only other secondary source to deal directly with Scelsi's aesthetic texts is the recent article by Alessandra Montali in the *Rivista italiana di musicologia*.⁴⁴ Montali takes up Scelsi's entire literary output, which she divides into three groups: the "conceptual and historical reflection" of the aesthetic essays of the 1940s;⁴⁵ the "definition of [Scelsi's] human and artistic identity and the approach to spirituality" in the two aesthetic texts of the 1950s and the three volumes of French poetry published around the same time;⁴⁶ and the "hermetic stage" of the chimerical works published in the 1980s.⁴⁷ In addition to the summaries of content that Montali provides of each of these collections, she also discusses a number of possible influences on Scelsi's thinking. She suggests that in the 1940s Scelsi came under the influence of his friend Pierre-Jean Jouve, whose essay "La musique et l'état mystique" of 1938 Scelsi certainly would have known.⁴⁸ Scelsi's texts of the 1950s are examined in relation to various notions in the works of Rudolf Steiner, Sri Aurobindo, and the philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch, though Montali does not establish any of these influences absolutely. In all, the article does an adequate job of conveying the essential subject matter of Scelsi's texts and suggesting some possible influences, but its broad scope prevents the thorough treatment of any single text.

Giulio Castagnoli's important article on the *Quattro pezzi*, which has special relevance here because it addresses a work discussed in some detail in this study, constitutes an

⁴⁴ Alessandra Montali, "Riflessione concettuale e percorso letterario in Giacinto Scelsi" *Rivista italiana di musicologia* 34 (1999): 347–387.

⁴⁵ "Sens de la musique," *Évolution de l'harmonie*, and *Évolution du rythme*.

⁴⁶ The aesthetic texts of the 1950s are *Son et musique* and *Art et connaissance*. Scelsi's three volumes of French poetry are *Le poids net* (Paris: GLM Éditions, 1949; Rome: Le parole gelate, 1988), *L'archipel nocturne* (Paris: GLM Éditions, 1954; Rome: Le parole gelate, 1988), and *La conscience aiguë* (Paris: GLM Éditions, 1962; Rome: Le parole gelate, 1988).

⁴⁷ *Il sogno 101: Il parte: Il ritorno*, *La vena rota*, no. 1 (Rome: Le parole gelate, 1982); *Cercles* (Rome: Le parole gelate, 1986); and *Octologo* (Rome: Le parole gelate, 1987).

⁴⁸ Pierre-Jean Jouve, "La musique et l'état mystique," *La nouvelle revue française* 51 (1938): 135–139; reproduced in translation in Joscelyn Godwin, *Music, Mysticism, and Magic: A Sourcebook* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan, 1986).

admirable attempt to deal expressly with the workings of Scelsi's music.⁴⁹ Castagnoli endeavors to explain the impetus of each of the work's four movements through the identification and examination of its most prominent compositional feature. He considers Movement I the alternation of two modes of expression: *potential motion* and *actual motion*. Each of these he divides into a number of *zones*, based upon particular compositional criteria such as density of instrumentation. With regard to Movement II, Castagnoli draws attention to Scelsi's exploitation of the harmonic series, articulated by registral placement of F $\sharp$ above the movement's fundamental B $\natural$. Two features distinguish Movement III according to Castagnoli: the introduction of sub-harmonics in the bass clarinet and the extensive use of oscillatory tones above and below the movement's A $\flat$ axis. Movement IV presents a "recapitulation" of all of the previous movements' prominent features such that "the processes that previously occurred separately are now superimposed and made to resonate among themselves."⁵⁰ Castagnoli's approach sheds light especially on the well-proportioned structures of the *Quattro pezzi*, but the article's lack of illustrative examples and periodic factual errors weaken its overall persuasiveness.

Despite moments of insight in these contributions, analytical discussion of Scelsi's music has been generally hampered by a perception that its novel conception and metaphysical associations render it indecipherable. Carl Dahlhaus has expressed this concern with regard to Scelsi's late music, emphasizing its rejection of traditional Western compositional goals.

One can certainly describe the music of Scelsi—exposing oneself to the danger of intensifying with words the image that such music presents in the score—but one cannot in the strict sense analyze it. Concepts such as theme and development, series and derivation, harmony, rhythm, and even *Klangfarbenmelodie* fall irritatingly short

⁴⁹Giulio Castagnoli, "Suono e processo nei *Quattro pezzi per orchestra (ciascuno su una nota sola)* (1956) [sic] di Giacinto Scelsi," in *Quaderni di Musica Nuova*, ed. Giulio Castagnoli, no. 1 (Turin: Compositori Associati, 1987), 87–103; reprinted in *Giacinto Scelsi: Viaggio al centro del suono*, ed. Pierre Albert Castanet and Nicola Cisternino, (La Spezia, Italy: Luna Editore, 1993), 246–259.

⁵⁰Castagnoli, "Suono e processo nei *Quattro pezzi*," 100. ("i processi allora trattati separatamente vengono adesso sovrapposti ed entrano fra loro in risonanza.")

when applied to music whose most prominent characteristic is an attitude of rejection: the exclusion of everything that analysts uncover or piece together in a score such as musical “cohesion.”⁵¹

At the end of his illustrative article on the orchestral work *Konx-om-pax* (1969),⁵² Harry Halbreich seems to suggest the inadequacy of his own analysis: “But how can one describe with words or diagrams the activity of the sacred syllable [*Om*] that little by little makes the entire universe vibrate and resonate?”⁵³ There can be little argument that Scelsi’s late music challenges many of the conceptual premises of Western music, and that this poses a particular problem for the analyst. Nonetheless, I maintain that a type of musical “cohesion” does in fact obtain even in Scelsi’s late music and that style traits such as structural design can be demonstrated.

Much Scelsi criticism has been plagued by the tactic of eluding analytical difficulties entirely by resorting to a cryptic, predominantly metaphorical mode of writing that Scelsi himself was rather prone to employ. Zeller, Cremonese, Castagnoli, and Anderson largely resist this tendency, but they comprise the exceptions. Halbreich’s rhetorical query is more typical, as is this remark by Heinz-Klaus Metzger:

Scelsi heard the single [element] . . . not as an element to combine in a composition with other elements, but as a world structured internally, containing centers and peripheries that become infinitely small, a world that, thanks to its disintegration, permits the articulation of the most sublime.⁵⁴

⁵¹Carl Dahlhaus, “Entdeckung,” *Die Zeit* 46 (November 1983); quoted in Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva*, 7.

⁵²Harry Halbreich, “Analyse de *Konx-om-pax*,” *Dissonanz-Dissonance* 19 (1989): 15–20. Italian translation in *Giacinto Scelsi: Viaggio al centro del suono*, ed. Pierre Albert Castanet and Nicola Cisternino, trans. Marco Montaguti (La Spezia, Italy: Luna Editore, 1993), 184–197.

⁵³Halbreich, “Analyse de *Konx-om-pax*,” 20.

⁵⁴Heinz-Klaus Metzger, “Das Unbekannte in der Musik,” in *Giacinto Scelsi*, ed. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn, *Musik-Konzepte: Die Reihe über Komponisten*, no. 31 (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1983), 15. (“Scelsi hingegen hörte das Eine . . . nicht als Element, das mit anderen Elementen zu Kompositionen zusammenzufügen wäre, sondern als eine nach innen strukturierte, Zentren und Peripherien bis ins unendlich Kleine enthaltende Welt, die vermöge ihrer Auflösung zu artikulieren das Sublimste verheißt.”)

And this more extreme example from Paolo Maurizi:

In fact, there emerges in the [single] sound a multiplicity that appears as the mask of an absolute unity, always identical with itself in its infinite transformations; transformations that in their time constitute the very essence of this invisible One whenever it is meant as supreme Absence or as Potentiality itself, based upon every mutation that remains, however, untouchable.⁵⁵

Scelsi's own use of such enigmatic language certainly proceeded from his reading of mystical and occult texts. In the secondary literature it often stems from the analytically elusive character of his music, which make it as resistant to traditional manners of discourse as it is to existing analytical methods. Because Scelsi's approach to the art of musical composition, particularly from 1952 onward, was grounded in mystical concepts and beliefs, some use of metaphorical language is appropriate and, to a degree, unavoidable. In the present study, however, I have sought to strike a balance between such language and musical descriptions that are objective, clear, and precise.

Scope and Methodologies

Because Scelsi's artistic transformation encompassed both his musical style and his aesthetic outlook, the scope of this study includes his major compositions and all five of his aesthetic texts from the years 1929 to 1959. Three of these texts are essays dating from the years before his crisis: "The Meaning of Music" (1942–44), *The Evolution of Harmony* (1942), and *The Evolution of Rhythm* (1942).⁵⁶ The remaining two—which date from the

⁵⁵Paolo Maurizi, "Klang, Atman e Quark," in *Giacinto Scelsi: Viaggio al centro del suono*, ed. Pierre Albert Castanet and Nicola Cisternino (La Spezia, Italy: Luna Editore, 1993), 35. ("Emerge infatti nel *klang* una molteplicità che appare quale maschera di un'unità assoluta, sempre identica a sé stessa pur nelle sue infinite trasformazioni; trasformazioni che a loro volta costituiscono però l'essenza medesima di quest'Uno invisibile qualora lo si intenda come suprema Assenza o come Potentialità in sé, fonte di ogni mutamento dal quale resta comunque inattaccabile.")

⁵⁶Giacinto Scelsi, "Sens de la musique," *Suisse contemporaine: revue mensuelle* 1 (January 1944): 31–38; Giacinto Scelsi, *Évolution de l'harmonie*, ed. Adriano Cremonese (Rome: Fondazione Isabella Scelsi, 1992); Giacinto Scelsi, *Évolution du rythme*, ed. Adriano Cremonese (Rome: Fondazione Isabella

early 1950s, just after his return to composition—originated as recorded conversations, edited and ultimately published only in the 1980s: *Sound and Music* (1953–54) and *Art and Knowledge* (1953–54).⁵⁷ These texts, along with the published scores, constitute the primary sources that form the core of this study. Scelsi's secondary texts and the published interviews conducted by Franck Mallet and Luciano Martinis supplement this core.⁵⁸ Additionally, I cite my own interviews as well as published interviews with a variety of Scelsi's friends, colleagues, and collaborators. Discussions of Scelsi's aesthetic refer to the artistic, philosophical, esoteric, and religious sources that he knew or may have known, along with a body of secondary literature that deals with them. My assessment of Scelsi's evolving musical style focuses primarily on the scores themselves, but also responds to the secondary literature.

Scelsi's fascination with arcane concepts might lead one to wonder about the relevance of his professed aesthetic for an understanding of his music.⁵⁹ The metaphorical language of the texts seem to restrict their potential as points of departure for musical analysis. The

Scelsi, 1992). See Chapter 2 for a more thorough discussion of the origins and current editions of these sources.

⁵⁷Giacinto Scelsi, *Art et connaissance*, ed. Luciano Martinis (Rome: Le parole gelate, 1982); Giacinto Scelsi, *Son et musique*, ed. Luciano Martinis (Rome: Le parole gelate, 1981). See Chapter 3 for a more thorough discussion of the origins and current editions of these sources.

⁵⁸Giacinto Scelsi and Franck Mallet, "Il suono lontano: Conversazione con Giacinto Scelsi," in *Giacinto Scelsi: Viaggio al centro del suono*, ed. Pierre Albert Castanet and Nicola Cisternino (La Spezia, Italy: Luna Editore, 1993), 18–28; Giacinto Scelsi and Luciano Martinis, "Due frammenti di dialogo: con alcune osservazioni pertinenti la musica," *i suoni, le onde: Rivista della Fondazione Isabella Scelsi* 2 (1991): 3–5.

⁵⁹In the case of Scriabin—an obvious parallel—Richard Taruskin values critical investigation of the composer's ideas and their sources only inasmuch as it might shed light on his music. Taruskin argues that scholars of Scriabin's work "have mainly confined themselves to the amassing of quotations testifying to a general kinship of ideals between the composer and some of the poets and thinkers who were his contemporaries. This can be valuable *only as the prelude* to a musical discussion" (Richard Taruskin, "Scriabin and the Superhuman: A Millennial Essay," in *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* [Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1997], 317 [emphasis added]). Certainly, there would be little interest in the ideas of composers like Scriabin or Scelsi had they not produced music of some merit. But Scelsi's interests in Theosophy, Anthroposophy, and Oriental mysticism were not motivated solely by what he perceived as their potential benefits for his work as a composer; they should not be approached in this manner by scholars.

purpose of the careful consideration given to Scelsi's aesthetic texts in Chapters 2 and 3 of this study is not, however, solely to elucidate the details of his unusual compositional style. Scelsi's texts do not explain his music, but they do contribute to a more complete picture of the artist and his environment. Despite the abstruseness that characterizes the aesthetic texts, the ideas they contain tell us much about the impetus and direction of the composer's artistic evolution during the 1940s and 1950s.

Chapters 2 and 3 address Scelsi's changing aesthetic outlook as it manifested in his three aesthetic essays of the 1940s and two aesthetic texts of the 1950s. Discussions draw upon my own translations of Scelsi's texts from the original French; the complete translations appear in Appendix A. The primary methodologies are to extract and clarify the main lines of argument and to identify their sources through consideration of a wide range of contextual sources that Scelsi may have known, discerning similarities of conception or phraseology. My inventory of the books in Scelsi's personal library informs the discussions, providing documentary evidence of his familiarity with particular sources; this inventory appears in Appendix B.⁶⁰

In Chapter 2 I examine "The Meaning of Music," *The Evolution of Harmony*, and *The Evolution of Rhythm* sequentially, illustrating the fundamentally historical orientation of Scelsi's first aesthetic phase. In these essays Scelsi attempted to validate contemporary compositional trends by positing their natural evolution from the most progressive styles of the late nineteenth century. He declared his *historicist* belief that the most progressive trends of contemporary music, no matter how diverse, were integral parts of an ongoing evolution that had reached a crucial moment at the time of his writing. Fundamentally, Scelsi understood the music of early twentieth century music as the product of a

⁶⁰The inventory provided in Appendix B should not be taken as an exhaustive list of everything literary that Scelsi read or owned. Certainly he could have been exposed to literature through means other than purchase, and some of his purchases may have been lost or discarded over the years. He also left a large number of belongings in his family's apartment on Viale Mazzini, across town from his and Isabella's palazzo on Via di San Teodoro.

fundamental shift in the hierarchy of the musical elements, away from the primacy of melody and structure and toward the primacy of rhythm and harmony.

Chapter 3 focuses on the two aesthetic texts of the 1950s: *Sound and Music* and *Art and Knowledge*, in which Scelsi articulated his newly formed *spiritualist* tenets. Because these texts originated as recorded conversations, they lack the structural coherence of carefully considered essays. Therefore, I address them concomitantly in Chapter 3, organizing the discussion according to three primary concepts that permeate both texts: first, the conception of sound as a cosmic force containing limitless acoustic potential; second, the view of the artwork as the material projection of supersensible knowledge intuited by a person endowed with extraordinary ability; third, the rejection of musical formalism in favor of a new kind of music based on the resonant properties of sound. The striking shift from a historical orientation in the essays of the 1940s to a primarily spiritual one in the texts of the following decade is made clear by a far-ranging discussion of Scelsi's new influences. The chapter traverses concepts from sources as varied as Hindu metaphysics, Yoga, Theosophy, Anthroposophy, Sufism, Goethe's color theory, Dane Rudhyar's musical orientalism, Ferruccio Busoni's futurism, André Breton's surrealism, and Benedetto Croce's philosophy of intuitive knowledge. Finally, Chapter 3 addresses the notion of music on a single note, identifying its sources and elucidating its aesthetic implications for Scelsi's stylistic evolution.

Chapters 4 and 5 comprise critical and contextual evaluations of Scelsi's changing compositional style between 1929 and 1959, dividing his output according to his crisis and compositional hiatus. Chapter 4 begins with an overview of Scelsi's complete musical *oeuvre*, intended both to familiarize the reader with a largely unknown repertory and to place the more detailed discussions that follow into the context of Scelsi's entire career. The detailed examinations of Scelsi's evolving style that form the bulk of Chapters 4 and 5 emphasize those compositional features that provide the most compelling evidence of change. While references to numerous works inform these discussions, I have selected one

composition from each successive stage of Scelsi's transformation as my focus. These works have earned their prominent position in this study not because they necessarily typify the stages of Scelsi's evolution but because each work constitutes, in some way, an important milestone along the composer's stylistic path.

Following a general survey of Scelsi's compositional output, Chapter 4 deals with his music from the start of his career in 1929 to the onset of his crisis in 1948. Two primary areas of inquiry frame the discussion. First, I seek to determine the extent to which Scelsi absorbed various compositional idioms of early-twentieth century *modern* music: *machinism*, *impressionism*, *neoclassicism*, *polyharmony*, and *Second-Viennese atonality*. The discussion proceeds through each of these, identifying which of Scelsi's works manifests it most cogently. Various analytical methods inform the discussion, the most prominent of which is *pitch-class set analysis*, used to demonstrate the motivic cohesion that characterizes a number of these works. Second, I respond to numerous claims in the literature that certain works of Scelsi's early period foreshadow his later style in their occasional emphasis on isolated notes or sonorities.

My traversal of Scelsi's multifarious stylistic background begins with some general critique of Scelsi's impressionistic and neoclassical tendencies. More extended treatment is then given to *Rotative* (1929) for three pianos, brass, and percussion, which exhibits most clearly the composer's penchant for *machinistic* rhythmic processes. There follows a discussion of two piano works, *Quattro poemi* (1936–39) and *Variazioni e fuga* (1941), which indicate Scelsi's assimilation of the style of the Second Viennese school. Among the arguments presented, I seek to refute the putative claim that Scelsi composed these works using Schoenberg's *dodecaphonic* method, arguing instead that they manifest a unique type of *free atonality*. Attention then turns to Scelsi's tendency to emphasize isolated pitches through assertion and reiteration in the piano suites and sonatas of the 1930s. I respond to arguments in the secondary literature that these works contain early signs of his mature style, specifically Hans Zeller's and Michelle Biget's critiques of Suite No. 2 (*I dodici*

profeti minori) (1930),⁶¹ and Martin Zenck's treatment of Suite No. 6 (*I capricci di Ty*) (1939).⁶² Confirming the importance of these works as well as Sonata No. 2 (1939), I contend nonetheless that this importance has been somewhat misconstrued in the literature. The chapter concludes with a thorough examination of Scelsi's String Quartet No. 1 (1944), demonstrating its extraordinary stylistic fusion, thematic transformations, and historical allusion.

Chapter 4 traces the various methods Scelsi developed in order to focus on the resonant properties of increasingly concentrated sounds. Of the piano works of 1952 to 1956, I evaluate Suite No. 9 (*Ttai*) (1953) as Scelsi's most radical departure. A thorough examination of the work's nine movements reveals his efforts to focus sound through oscillation around pitch axes and seemingly motionless reiteration of consonant structures. In 1956 Scelsi stopped writing for piano—his own instrument—as his search for what he called the third dimension of sound led him decidedly into microtonal composition. Initially, he concentrated on solo works for wind, brass, and string instruments, the most significant of which were *Triphon* (1956) and *Dithome* (1957), the first two parts of Scelsi's *Trilogia* for cello.⁶³ My discussion treats *Dithome* in greater depth, emphasizing the fundamental importance of microtones to the work's conception. Additionally, I demonstrate the palindromic process that constitutes the work's structure using the graphic techniques of linear analysis.

With the ensemble works of the late 1950s Scelsi completed the formulation of his mature style based on microtonal and harmonic oscillation around highly concentrated tonal

⁶¹Zeller, "Das Ensemble der Soli," 24–66; Michelle Biget, "Giacinto Scelsi, un approccio al pianoforte," in *Giacinto Scelsi: Viaggio al centro del suono*, ed. Pierre Albert Castanet and Nicola Cisternino (La Spezia: Luna Editore, 1993), 198–227. Robin Freeman erroneously refers to Zeller's analysis of Piano Sonata No. 2 (1939), when in fact Zeller devotes much more attention to Piano Suite No. 2 (1930) (Freeman, "Tanmatras: The Life and Work of Giacinto Scelsi," 11).

⁶²Martin Zenck, "Die andere Avantgarde des Giacinto Scelsi: Analytisch, ästhetische Reflexionen zum Klavierwerk," in *Musik-Texte Zeitschrift für neue Musik*, no. 26 (Cologne, 1988).

⁶³Scelsi composed the third piece of the *Trilogia*, entitled *Ygghur*, in 1965.

axes and on the subtle exploitation of timbre. Of these works, my focus is the *Quattro pezzi (ciascuno su una nota sola)* of 1959, widely accepted as the breakthrough work with which Scelsi reached his mature style. Written for chamber orchestra, the *Quattro pezzi* affords the opportunity to discuss Scelsi's treatment of timbre in a rich sonorous context.

The present study endeavors to provide a thoroughgoing assessment of Scelsi's essential period of transformation, informed by careful study of the music, the aesthetic texts, and the artistic and intellectual climate in which the composer worked. In so doing, I have sought to elucidate the complex relationship between Scelsi's music and aesthetic outlook and contribute to a more informed understanding of his mature style by tracing its evolution. As the first broad investigation of Scelsi's artistic output in English, it is hoped that this dissertation will also serve, in a more general sense, as a useful introduction to a composer whose works and ideas remain largely unknown in the United States, and poorly understood everywhere. At the same time, the new insights into Scelsi's career offered here should help to illuminate broader trends in twentieth-century aesthetics, art, and music that still demand reckoning, particularly the radical changes and new directions of the post-war era.

CHAPTER 2

SCELSI'S FIRST AESTHETIC PHASE:

THE HISTORICIST TEXTS

The literary output of Scelsi's first aesthetic phase comprises three aesthetic essays, all in French: "Sens de la Musique" ("The Meaning of Music," 1942–44), *Évolution de l'harmonie* (*The Evolution of Harmony*, 1942), and *Évolution du rythme* (*The Evolution of Rhythm*, 1942). "The Meaning of Music" was the only one published within a short time of its composition, appearing in the inaugural issue of the journal *Suisse contemporaine* in January 1944.¹ Adriano Cremonese has established that work on "The Meaning of Music" began in June 1942, a conclusion based primarily on a typescript draft of the essay dating from that month.² This early version of "The Meaning of Music" was followed by *The Evolution of Harmony* and *The Evolution of Rhythm* later in 1942. These were not published during Scelsi's lifetime, but have been issued recently by the Fondazione Isabella Scelsi as short monographs edited by Cremonese. They include facsimiles of the typewritten originals with Scelsi's handwritten corrections and Cremonese's translations from French into Italian.³

¹Giacinto Scelsi, "Sens de la musique," *Suisse contemporaine: revue mensuelle* 1 (January 1944): 31–38. All translations of material from Scelsi's texts are mine; the original text of excerpts will be given in footnotes. For the complete translations, see Appendix A. All citations from Scelsi's texts will list the page number of the original publication, followed parenthetically by the corresponding page number from my translation in Appendix A.

²Giacinto Scelsi, "Sens de la musique (prima stesura)," *i suoni, le onde: Rivista della Fondazione Isabella Scelsi* 2 (1991): 14–18. See also Adriano Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva e riflessione teorica fino alla metà degli anni '40*, Quaderni Perugini di Music Contemporanea, no. 1 (Palermo: L'Epos, 1992), 53.

³Giacinto Scelsi, *Évolution de l'harmonie*, ed. Adriano Cremonese (Rome: Fondazione Isabella Scelsi, 1992); Giacinto Scelsi, *Évolution du rythme*, ed. Adriano Cremonese (Rome: Fondazione Isabella Scelsi, 1992).

One must approach Scelsi's aesthetic texts with a degree of caution. While it may be tempting to ascribe to them a profundity of expression equal to that of Scelsi's music, several factors render this inefficacious. Taken individually or even collectively, Scelsi's texts fall short of outlining a comprehensive artistic philosophy. The ideas they contain and the influences they suggest vary considerably and are not always well-integrated. From the standpoint of musical analysis, the texts offer no technical insights into Scelsi's evolving compositional style; he deals with music only in the broadest terms. But if the aesthetic texts do not provide adequate explication of Scelsi's music itself, they nonetheless contribute to an understanding of how this composer came to write such music, and what induced him to seek a new path.

Study of Scelsi's texts can present immediate and substantial problems of inconsistency, illogic, ambiguity, and seemingly deliberate mystification. Scelsi often frustrates with the enigmatic language he absorbed from his reading of mystical and occult texts. The meaning he apparently intends for key terms and phrases in any given passage may contradict his usage of the same terms and phrases elsewhere, even within the same text. We must also beware Scelsi's proclivity for employing philosophical and theological jargon with apparent understanding, which upon closer consideration frequently proves specious. On the other hand, these texts contain many instances wherein Scelsi neglects to use the characteristic phraseology of a particular philosophical system yet seems to express the essence of its concepts and familiarity with its sources.

I have characterized the two phases of Scelsi's aesthetic output—from before and after his crisis—as *historicist* and *spiritualist*. The terms are not meant to suggest complete opposition, but contrasting orientations. In his earlier phase Scelsi sought to justify various progressive trends of Western musical composition by recounting something of the history that led to them, with individual composers as the protagonists of that history. His orientation evokes the early twentieth-century trope of inevitable artistic progress, and by inference he places himself at the forefront of this evolution. In the later phase, Scelsi's

artistic outlook became heavily indebted to Hindu mysticism, Yoga, and the work of various Western spiritualists. In this spiritualist phase, Scelsi's aesthetic was guided by the notion of art as a fundamentally spiritual activity reserved for those blessed with special creative abilities. Thus Scelsi's historicist and spiritualist phases each address the nature of art and the role of the artist (i.e., Scelsi's own role) within a larger context.

That Scelsi first felt compelled to espouse his own artistic aesthetic in the years shortly before his crisis of 1948 may signify its onset. In the three essays of the 1940s, Scelsi attempted to validate early twentieth-century compositional trends by appealing to history, assessing the music of Debussy, Stravinsky, Scriabin, and others both as the logical outgrowth of the most advanced styles of the late nineteenth century and as a reaction against them. In assuming such a historicist position, he sought to justify his own experimentation as an extension of these trends. More urgently, however, the historical perspective seems designed to account for the advent of a drastic change, a broad transformation of compositional orientation in Western music. Scelsi's early aesthetic phase suggests an imminent crisis not only in his own development as a composer, but in the whole of contemporary music.

"The Meaning of Music"

In the first version of "The Meaning of Music," Scelsi laid the groundwork for *The Evolution of Harmony* and *The Evolution of Rhythm* by classifying the musical elements and outlining their correspondence to a proposed set of four fundamental elements of human consciousness: rhythm, emotion, intellect, and the psyche. While the emotional and intellectual elements seem rather straightforward, the remaining two require some explication. As a "human" element, rhythm for Scelsi signifies a type of Bergsonian dynamism, a connection to the temporal vitality of the cosmos. The psyche, the most

recondite of the elements, seems to encompass purely spiritual or supernatural experience. If these human elements seem closely related to external phenomena, it is because Scelsi understood all four elements as primordial cosmic forces passing through human beings in the form of vibrations, which renders them intrinsically sonic.⁴ In music, these fundamental forces manifest through the four fundamental musical elements: rhythm, melody, form, and harmony respectively (see Table 1).

Table 1. Correspondence of the fundamental elements

<u>Human Elements/Primordial Forces</u>	<u>Musical elements</u>
rhythm (vitality)	rhythm
emotion	melody
the psyche	harmony
the intellect	form

Thus music is accorded special status because of the sonic nature of these cosmic forces and because “music does not pass through the filter of the intellect.”⁵ Interestingly, Scelsi’s reference to music’s exemption from intellectual perception contradicts his inclusion of the intellect among the four fundamental elements.

The view that music bypasses the intellect betrays a debt to Schopenhauer, Goethe, and Rudolf Steiner. Scelsi mentions both Schopenhauer and Goethe in his texts of the 1950s; it is likely that he knew their ideas in this earlier phase as well. Scelsi may have gained exposure to their ideas directly, or possibly gleaned them from the work of Steiner.⁶ Like Schopenhauer, Steiner did not regard all the arts as functioning identically with respect to

⁴Scelsi, “The Meaning of Music,” 32 (261).

⁵Scelsi, “The Meaning of Music,” 32 (261). (“Si la musique ne passant pas par le philtre de l’intellect”)

⁶Scelsi recalled that he was exposed to some of Steiner’s ideas while studying with Egon Koehler in Geneva in 1936. See Chapter 1.

their dependence on representation. That the artist reproduces archetypal forms “is the case with all the arts except music. The other arts must pass through the mental image, and they therefore render up pictures of the will. Tone, however, is a direct expression of the will itself, without interpolation of the mental image.”⁷ In the tradition of Goethe and Schopenhauer, Steiner placed music first among the arts because it is fundamentally non-representational and can bypass the intellectual world of ideas. The priority that Scelsi gives to music is at least partially based upon a similar viewpoint, although his system of four fundamental elements conflicts with Schopenhauer’s essentially dichotomous world of will and idea.

Scelsi considered music a projection of images generated by the fundamental human elements. He held that all art and all aesthetic systems result from a particular balance of these fundamental forces, determined by a “particular human orientation and by various artistic expressions.”⁸ This orientation may be individual or collective: “It is acceptable to examine . . . not only works and artistic realizations individually in their expression or particular characteristics, but even all general or collective orientations.”⁹ In other words, the characteristic balance of forces that constitutes a work of art or a general aesthetic derives from cultural and historical factors as well as the creative personality of the individual artist. Such consideration allows us to understand individual works, individual artists, and even general trends in “the *historic evolution* of the art.”¹⁰ Because the fundamental forces are common to all artists, they pertain equally to the specific and the collective, the contemporary and the historical.

⁷Rudolf Steiner, “December 3, 1906, Cologne [Lecture],” *The Inner Nature of Music and the Experience of Tone*, ed. Alice Wulsin, trans. Maria St. Goar (Hudson, New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1983), 2–3.

⁸Scelsi, “The Meaning of Music,” 38 (267). (“Un équilibre différent détermine chaque fois une orientation humaine particulière et des expressions artistiques diverses.”)

⁹Scelsi, “The Meaning of Music,” 38 (267). (“qu’il convient d’examiner à notre avis non seulement les œuvres et réalisations artistiques individuellement dans leur expression ou caractéristique particulières, mais encore toute orientation générale ou collective.”)

¹⁰Scelsi, “The Meaning of Music,” 38 (267). Emphasis added. (“l’évolution historique de l’art.”)

Scelsi begins his discussion of the individual elements by defining rhythm in characteristically Bergsonian terms as “the primal impulse,” the “vital pulsation,” which emerges from “vital dynamism” as the “expression and manifestation of *durée*.”¹¹ In *The Evolution of Rhythm*, Scelsi reiterates these associations, writing that “through rhythm man participates in the life of the universe that is vibration, in the life of nature, in the *élan vital*, in *durée*.”¹² I preserve Scelsi’s original French for these terms to underscore the evident influence of Bergson’s philosophy on the young composer’s musical ideas. Indeed, Bergsonian terminology appears throughout Scelsi’s aesthetic texts, in both phases. The use of such Bergsonian terminology as *durée* and *élan vital*, however, does not necessarily indicate Scelsi’s absorption of genuine Bergsonian thought. Indeed, it has been widely observed that by the 1940s, and even the 1930s, Bergson’s popularity had declined considerably from its peak shortly after the appearance in 1911 of *Creative Evolution*, his most widely-read book.¹³ By the time Scelsi wrote his earliest essays, the only palpable vestige of Bergson’s influence on the intellectual life of the public was the continued usage—and frequent misuse—of such terminology as *durée* and *élan vital*. To assess the extent to which Scelsi’s use of Bergsonian terminology truly indicates the direct influence of Bergsonian thought rather than the mere survival of such terminology in

¹¹Scelsi, “The Meaning of Music,” 33 (262). (“l’impulsion première,” “la pulsation vitale,” “dynamisme vital,” “l’expression et la manifestation de la durée.”)

¹²Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 34–35 (277). (“par le rythme l’homme participe à la vie de l’univers qui est vibration; à la vie de la nature, à l’*élan vital*, à la *durée*.”)

¹³Irwin Edman has described the extent of Bergson’s popularity in educated lay circles as well as with philosophers: “There was a whole epidemic of books about Bergson; his themes and his terms became clichés in philosophical discussion all over the world; and all over the world, too, *Creative Evolution*, with its gleaming mellifluous stream of thought, entranced many more than could understand it” (Irwin Edman, Foreword to Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell [New York: Random House, 1944; Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1975], x).

common parlance—especially in France and French-speaking Switzerland, where Scelsi had spent much of the 1930s and 1940s—we must examine the ideas more closely.¹⁴

Bergson distinguished *durée* from the traditional conception of time as a linear, homogeneous, measurable phenomenon. The latter he considered a distortion that does not reflect accurately our cognitive and sensory experience, but merely symbolizes the true nature of time, which Bergson called *durée*. Bergsonian *durée* consists of a multiplicity of psychic states, flowing one into the next with no clear distinction in an ongoing process.

Pure *durée* is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states. For this purpose it need not be entirely absorbed in the passing sensation or idea; for then, on the contrary, it would no longer endure. Nor need it forget its former states: it is enough that, in recalling these states, it does not set them alongside its actual state as one point alongside another, but forms the past and the present states into an organic whole.¹⁵

Bergson underscored most strongly that the unending process of *durée* consists of continual, dynamic change. We do not normally perceive this dynamism, however, because change impresses itself upon our consciousness and draws our attention only sporadically.

It is expedient to disregard this uninterrupted change, and to notice it only when it becomes sufficient to impress a new attitude on the body, a new direction on the attention. Then, and then only, we find that our state has changed. The truth is that we change without ceasing, and that the state itself is nothing but change.¹⁶

¹⁴Significantly, Scelsi did not leave behind any of Bergson's books in his personal library at Via San Teodoro 8, although this does not rule out the possibility that Scelsi had familiarized himself with some of Bergson's writings years earlier. Conversely, the absence of Bergson's books in Scelsi's library could indicate that Scelsi had simply picked up the jargon secondhand.

¹⁵Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (London: George Allen, 1913), 100.

¹⁶Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Random House, 1944; Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1975), 4.

The true state of *durée*, rather than consisting of separate moments of experience, as we inaccurately perceive them, is one “in which *succeeding each other* means *melting into one another* and forming an organic whole.”¹⁷

Scelsi's *durée* evidently refers to a cosmic temporal flow, to which the artist's personal sense of time—the element of human consciousness Scelsi calls *rhythm*—can relate through the rhythm of music. Human rhythm “unites and fuses the personal and relative time of the creative artist—through its essence and through the images it creates—to cosmic *durée*, to absolute time.”¹⁸ Thus Scelsi contraposes the artist's personal experience of time with “absolute time,” “cosmic *durée*,” “the real sense of rhythm, which is above all a primordial physical force.”¹⁹ Bergsonian *durée*, by contrast, does not exist externally, as Bergson made explicit: “What *durée* is there existing outside us? . . . To put *durée* in space is really to contradict oneself and place succession within simultaneity.”²⁰ Scelsi seems to have essentially reversed Bergson's concepts. Bergson's *durée* is anything but absolute; it is a psychological and experiential phenomenon that contrasts sharply with Scelsi's use of the term to indicate a metaphysical, temporal reality.

Bergson devised the concept of *élan vital* as an alternative to an unsatisfactory Darwinian evolutionary model. He linked our awareness of the evolutionary process to the experience of *durée*, summarized here by T. A. Goudge:

When we focus upon what intuition discloses of ourselves, we find not only continuous becoming and real duration, but also a consciousness of a vital impetus (*élan vital*), of our own evolution in time. We are thus led to the idea of ‘an original impetus of life’

¹⁷Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 128. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸Scelsi, “The Meaning of Music,” 33 (262). (“il unit et relie par son essence le temps personnel et relatif de l'artiste créateur et des images créées à la durée cosmique, au temps absolu.”)

¹⁹Scelsi, “The Meaning of Music,” 33 (262). (“le sens véritable du rythme qui est avant tout une propulsion physique primordiale.”)

²⁰Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 227.

(*un élan original de la vie*) that pervades the whole evolutionary process and accounts for its dominant features.²¹

Bergson found Darwin's notion of random selection insufficient to account for the coadaptation of the various parts of a more complex mechanism (such as the human eye). He observed a marked contrast between "the complexity of its structure and the simplicity of its function," which the Darwinian model did not address.²² All of the many parts of such a mechanism must have evolved contemporaneously for its function to be preserved. Therefore, Bergson proposed the *élan vital*, the force that preserves function in the evolutionary process. But as with *durée*, Scelsi's employment of the phrase *élan vital* diverges from Bergson's original intention. Scelsi uses the phrase with no reference to the biological process of evolution, essentially equating it with what he calls *durée*, a cosmic flow to which humans relate through the rhythmic element.

In his individual treatment of the remaining three musical elements, Scelsi attempts to clarify their associations with the fundamental forces and begins to establish hierarchies of importance. He associates the melodic element with "the expression of emotion . . . of which man is most directly and easily conscious after that of rhythmic order."²³ Compared to harmony and form, Scelsi considers melodic expression "more immediate, more direct."²⁴ He emphasizes that his use of the term *harmony* is not meant to imply the technique of counterpoint nor the harmonic system under tonality, which are constructions of the intellect. Harmony, as "the expression of the psychic element," deals with "images

²¹T. A. Goudge, "Bergson, Henri," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards, vol. 1 (New York: The Macmillan Company and The Free Press, 1967), 292.

²²Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 98.

²³Scelsi, "The Meaning of Music," 33 (262). ("La mélodie est l'expression de l'affectivité. . . . dont l'homme est le plus directement et facilement conscient après celles d'ordre rythmique.")

²⁴Scelsi, "The Meaning of Music," 33 (262).

of more obscure origin": dreams, the subconscious, or other "indirect" sources.²⁵ The intellect, by contrast, recognizes and creates constructive relationships, which manifest in various types of structure. Understood here more broadly than just tonal design, structures can manifest at many levels and involve any of the musical elements as objects. Scelsi uses rhythm as one example:

For given a particular rhythm, by purely rational operations one can make a construction, a structure, establishing new relationships between identified objects each time and then proceeding with the mental operations characteristic and appropriate to their nature, applying to these objects schemes previously established, or even proceeding with constructions based on physical laws or imitations thereof.²⁶

The intellect, therefore, creates structural contexts for all of the other elements.

Scelsi next attempts to describe how differing circumstances affect each of the fundamental elements as well as their interactions. While his language and mode of expression in this portion of the essay become somewhat more vague and elusive, that he attempted to give comprehensive treatment to these possible interrelationships is itself significant. Because these circumstances and types of interaction partly determine the perceived balance among the elements, the nature of the interrelationships stands at the implied center of Scelsi's historical argument. Perhaps even more importantly, Scelsi repeatedly asserts that each one of the musical elements generates and incorporates the others, *even in a simple sound*. The unity of all sound inferred here portends one of the central tenets of Scelsi's later aesthetic phase and transformed compositional style: that a single sound contains a multidimensional and inexhaustible musical richness.

²⁵Scelsi, "The Meaning of Music," 33–34 (262–263). ("L'harmonie est l'expression de l'élément psychique . . . l'expression d'images d'origine plus obscure.") Scelsi's reference to images derived from dreams and the subconscious hints at the possible influence of surrealism. This influence becomes more decisive in Scelsi's second aesthetic phase and is addressed in Chapter 3.

²⁶Scelsi, "The Meaning of Music," 34 (263). ("car d'un rythme ou d'une donné quelconque il peut, par des opérations purement rationnelles, faire une construction, une architecture, et cela, soit en établissant chaque fois des rapports nouveaux entre les objets identifiés, et en procédant ensuite aux opérations mentales caractéristiques et propres à sa nature, soit en appliquant à ces objets des schémas établis antérieurement, ou encore en procédant à des constructions basées sur les lois physiques ou en imitation de celles-ci.")

Since all of the musical elements depend to some extent on dynamism and participation in *durée*, Scelsi assigns musical rhythm (temporality) a fundamental role in the expression of the other three elements. A "simple sound," which exists in time and therefore connects to *durée*, produces a harmonic series that carries melodic and harmonic implications. With more than one such sound, the interaction of the multiple overtone series produces a type of polyphony. In turn, the intellect perceives even the simplest sounds and establishes melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic relationships, which manifest as structures. He acknowledges, however, that the primary, causal function of rhythm may somehow be obscured.

If it is the basis of the activity of all other elements, it can sometimes appear relatively subordinate to emotion, the intellect, and the psyche. In this case, rhythm loses part of its character, its significance, and its real strength; but through the primal impulse of the original rhythmic cells and by its quality of "*durée*" it forms an indispensable foundation to the expression of the other elements.²⁷

Although melody does not function as a basis for the activity of the other elements, Scelsi maintains that its manifestation can vary widely. At times, melodic activity seems inextricable from rhythm, "participating in or connecting to the domain more particularly physical." In these instances "the melodic intervals and the rhythmic dynamism merge intimately and appear to possess equal importance."²⁸ On the other hand, melodic activity can manifest in a manner that approaches more closely the psychic (harmonic) and intellectual (structural) elements, such that "the melodic intervals disengage to a certain degree from rhythmic dynamism, sometimes arriving at the emancipation of the melodic lines."²⁹ In another significant example of the interdependence of the musical elements,

²⁷Scelsi, "The Meaning of Music," 35 (264). ("S'il est à la base de l'activité de tout autre élément, il peut parfois apparaître relativement subordonné à l'affectivité, à l'intellect, au psychisme. Dans ce cas, le rythme perd en partie son caractère, sa signification et sa puissance véritable; toutefois, il apporte par l'impulsion première des cellules rythmiques originales et par sa qualité de 'durée' une base indispensable à l'expression des autres éléments.")

²⁸Scelsi, "The Meaning of Music," 35 (262). ("Ainsi, quand l'expression affective est liée étroitement, participe ou s'apparente au domaine plus spécialement physique, l'intervalle mélodique et le dynamisme rythmique fusionnent intimement et paraissent posséder une importance égale.")

²⁹Scelsi, "The Meaning of Music," 35 (264). ("les intervalles mélodiques se dégagent jusqu'à un certain point du dynamisme rythmique pour arriver parfois à des lignes mélodiques émancipées.")

Scelsi points out that melody and harmony share an acoustic foundation in the overtone series; thus they cannot exist entirely independently of one another.

All melody forms chords, constitutes harmonies, and inversely all chords contain melody. Furthermore, a melody quite often implies a harmony—awakens it, so to speak—just as some harmonies call forth and awaken melodies, relationships corresponding exactly to those existing between the emotional and psychic states.³⁰

Melody can also “infiltrate” chords, both individually and in harmonic progressions, just as “psychic images [can] approach or participate in emotion.”³¹

Scelsi’s view of harmony—as an expression of psychic, preternatural images—seems at least partially indebted to the ideas of Scriabin. For the Russian composer, harmony offered a means of achieving a mystical release from the time and space continuum. Richard Taruskin has noted that Scriabin’s conception of harmony was intended to generate a sense of timelessness and quiescence, by which “we seem to experience an eschatological revelation, a gnosis that only music can impart: the full collapse of time and space.”³² Efforts to obtain a similar sense of timelessness characterize Scelsi’s later period, when he adopted the notion of an atemporal sonic realm from Hindu metaphysics.³³ Nevertheless, the burgeoning importance of harmony as an expression of the ethereal is apparent even in Scelsi’s essays of the 1940s.

As a result, Scelsi’s descriptions of the relationships between harmony and the other elements remain particularly abstruse. That between harmony and rhythm has particular

³⁰Scelsi, “The Meaning of Music,” 36 (264–265). (“car toute mélodie forme des accords, soit des harmonies, et inversement tout accord contient une mélodie. De plus, une mélodie appelle le plus souvent une harmonie, l’éveille pour ainsi dire, de même que des harmonies font surgir et réveillent des mélodies, rapports exactement correspondants à ceux existants entre émotions affectives et psychiques.”)

³¹Scelsi, “The Meaning of Music,” 36 (265). (“Lorsque les images psychiques se rapprochent ou participent de l’affectivité, on remarque une infiltration de l’élément mélodique dans les accords, qui se manifeste tout autant dans leur composition que dans leur enchaînement.”)

³²Richard Taruskin, “Scriabin and the Superhuman: A Millennial Essay,” in *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 349.

³³See Chapter 3.

significance, for Scelsi considers these the predominant elements of progressive twentieth-century music. Once again, Scelsi suggests the unity of all sound by locating one element within another.

Harmony contains rhythm, and if a chord can at first appear independent of the rhythmic factor, it is because one forgets that there is an expression of psychic images that participate in *durée*. But in the temporal progression of harmonies the full gamut of possibilities and relationships appears.³⁴

Harmony can be bound closely to rhythm "when psychic images are close to the physiological and terrestrial realm." In such instances neither seems to dominate the other; rather, "one sees harmony and rhythm dominate alternately."³⁵ Harmony depends less obviously on rhythm than does melody, for when "the images are of the entirely psychic type, the series of chords or groupings of sonorities could appear unbound by dynamism, even more free of rhythm than melody could ever be."³⁶ Harmony can exist somewhat independently of the structural element (the intellect) when it "appears to be completely irrational in the composition of chords and groupings of sonorities, in their succession and progression."³⁷ Scelsi does not indicate here what qualifies a harmonic conception as "irrational." Based on the attention he gives Debussy and Scriabin in *The Evolution of*

³⁴Scelsi, "The Meaning of Music," 36 (265). ("L'harmonie contient le rythme, et si un accord peut donc à première vue apparaître indépendant du facteur rythme c'est qu'on oublie que c'est là une expression d'images psychiques qui participent de la durée. Mais c'est dans l'enchaînement des harmonies dans le temps qu'apparaît de nouveau la gamme entière des possibilités et des rapports.")

³⁵Scelsi, "The Meaning of Music," 36 (265). (quand les images psychiques sont proches du plan physiologique et tellurique, ou fusionnent avec celles surgies de l'élément rythmique, on voit harmonie et rythme dominer alternativement.")

³⁶Scelsi, "The Meaning of Music," 36 (265). ("les images sont d'ordre psychique intégral, les enchaînements d'accords ou groupements de sonorités peuvent apparaître exempts de dynamisme, dégagés du rythme encore plus que ne pourra jamais l'être la mélodie.")

³⁷Scelsi, "The Meaning of Music," 37 (265). ("apparaît dégagée du dynamisme rythmique comme de la mélodie et surtout paraît être totalement irrationnelle soit dans la composition des ces agrégations et groupements de sonorités, soit dans leurs succession et enchaînement.")

Harmony, however, “irrational” may suggest the more intuitive, non-functional, extra-tonal harmonic language that Scelsi observes in these composers.³⁸

The intellect relates to the other elements by providing or creating a mental framework for their realization. Scelsi considers rhythm and the psyche the less rational elements, for such images are not intended to pass through the filter of reason and its logical thought processes. Thus, music that manifests rhythm and harmony most prominently—such as that of the modern era—is inherently less dependent on intellectual structures. Scelsi affirms, however, that the intellect frequently creates constructive relationships when it does not perceive them to be previously established.

For the intellect tends by its very nature to construction, to the “system,” to structure. So, when the intensity of the creative impulses bursts the mold established, in this material, for containing the expression and the manifestation of these impulses, thus producing new forms and destroying precedents, the intellectual element by its particular faculties begins indefatigably to reconstruct and form new schemas once again.³⁹

Scelsi directly stated his broad purpose for categorizing the musical elements in “The Meaning of Music”: “[to] recognize and establish the relationships that alone might be the basis for the understanding of *all* music, ancient or modern, . . . and thus to arrive at a more accurate and *objective understanding* of music.”⁴⁰ This goal of a comprehensive and objective basis for the evaluation of music from any time period and of any style reflects the general trend in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century musical aesthetics toward

³⁸See pp. 43–48 below.

³⁹Scelsi, “The Meaning of Music,” 37 (266). (“Car l’intellect tend par sa nature même à la construction, au ‘système,’ à l’architecture. Ainsi, quand l’intensité des impulsions créatrices fait éclater le moule établi pour contenir, dans la matière, l’expression et la manifestation de ces impulsions, produisant ainsi des formes nouvelles, bouleversant les précédentes, l’élément intellectuel recommence infatigablement par ses facultés particulières à reconstruire et former des schémas nouveaux.”)

⁴⁰Scelsi, “The Meaning of Music,” 31–32 (260–261). Emphasis added. (“reconnu et établi les rapports qui seuls peuvent être à la base de la compréhension de toute musique, ancienne ou moderne, . . . et d’arriver ainsi à une compréhension plus exacte et objective de la musique.”)

reductionism, such as those systems Edward Lippman classifies as “theories of meaning” and “theories of inherent musical law.”⁴¹

To take but two prominent examples, Arnold Schering and Ernst Kurth each attempted to establish laws governing musical meaning through the application of a fundamental taxonomy and system of correspondences. Lippman has summarized Schering’s “four large categories of symbolism,” outlined in the 1927 work “Symbol in der Musik”:

(1) the sensuous tonal progression . . . ; (2) elementary musical manifestations . . . ; (3) musical forms or techniques . . . ; and (4) melodies or musical configurations with associations outside the work.⁴²

Like Scelsi after him, Schering stressed the importance of historicism, seeking to apply his taxonomy in the construction of a history of musical symbolism that goes beyond the limited concept of style.

There seems to be a limit beyond which the concept of style, as we conceive it today, does not lead us. Behind it something further opens up. I mean the intuition of the actual essence of the artistic. Under this there is understood the search for the roots of the musical work.⁴³

Ernst Kurth preceded Scelsi in emphasizing the psychic dynamism of musical expression. According to Lippman, Kurth understood music to be “the sensuous expression of underlying psychic energy . . . [arising] from powerful unconscious forces.”⁴⁴ And as Scelsi would do later, Kurth made associations between these forces and specific musical elements, saying that “the vital basic events of harmony consist in letting

⁴¹Edward Lippman, *A History of Western Musical Aesthetics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 351–414.

⁴²Lippman, *A History of Western Musical Aesthetics*, 360. See Arnold Schering, “Symbol in der Musik,” *Zeitschrift für Aesthetik* 21 (1927): 380–381.

⁴³Arnold Schering, “Musikalische Symbolkunde (1935),” in *Musical Aesthetics: A Historical Reader*, vol. 3: *The Twentieth Century*, ed. and trans. Edward Lippman (Stuyvestant, N.Y.: Pendragon Press, 1990), 186.

⁴⁴Lippman, *A History of Western Musical Aesthetics*, 396.

us feel always the upward forces that are translated from the unconscious underground of formativity into sensuously perceptible tonal forms.”⁴⁵ Lippman describes Kurth’s view of melody as “the objectification of the duality in music of spiritual and sensuous content; it is the first projection of the will into material, into the temporal and spatial form of appearance.”⁴⁶ Ultimately, Kurth also applied his theory toward historicist ends: “The different historical epochs reveal vast differences also in the significance and independent effect they permit to the tonally sensuous component of music as opposed to its inner dynamic component.”⁴⁷

Despite Scelsi’s efforts to provide a comprehensive set of circumstances accounting for every possible interrelationship among the four musical elements, his aesthetic classification seems simplistic compared to Schering’s and Kurth’s elaborate conceptual frameworks and extended discussions of specific examples. Scelsi’s ideas do have their place within a genealogy of similar tendencies in twentieth-century musical thought, particularly in their connection to historical understanding. But Scelsi was no aesthetician. He was, unlike Schering and Kurth, a composer continually in search of validation for his artistic endeavors. In the 1940s he sought such validation in a historicist aesthetic, placing himself in a demonstrable and explicable line of stylistic evolution. Beginning in the 1950s, he sought validation in the ahistorical role of the artist and in the metaphysical conceptions of sound he adopted from various Hindu traditions, Theosophy, and Anthroposophy.

Scelsi’s exposure to Rudolf Steiner’s work and the ideas of Anthroposophy may have affected his categorization of the musical elements even in this first aesthetic phase. In a

⁴⁵Ernst Kurth, *Romantische Harmonik und ihre Krise in Wagners “Tristan”* (Bern: Paul Haupt, 1920); quoted in Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (New York: Mentor Books, 1942), 34.

⁴⁶Lippman, *A History of Western Musical Aesthetics*, 397.

⁴⁷Kurth, *Romantische Harmonik*; quoted in Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 362.

lecture given in 1920, Steiner had also identified four fundamental musical elements and established their particular correspondences to aspects of the human being.

Melody corresponds to representation, emotion corresponds to harmony, the will corresponds to rhythm, and tonal structure corresponds to the complete human being. Thus we have a partial human being = thought, a partial human being = emotion, a partial human being = desire, and the complete human being.⁴⁸

He stresses that melody, rhythm, or harmony alone reflect an incomplete human makeup, while tonal structure—apparently because it incorporates all other musical elements—reflects the complete human. Though Steiner and Scelsi agree on the four fundamental musical elements, their systems of correspondence do not (see Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of Scelsi's and Steiner's correspondences of the fundamental elements

Scelsi:	<u>Human Elements/Primordial Forces</u>	<u>Musical elements</u>
	rhythm (vitality) emotion the psyche the intellect	rhythm melody harmony form
Steiner:	<u>Human elements</u>	<u>Musical Elements</u>
	the will representation (thinking) emotion (feeling) the complete human	rhythm melody harmony tonal structure (form)

⁴⁸Rudolf Steiner, "Dornach, 29. September 1920 [Lecture]," in *Das Wesen des Musikalischen und der Tonerlebnis im Menschen*, Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe, ed. Helmut Wartburg, no. 283 (Dornach: Verlag der Rudolf Steiner-Nachlassverwaltung, 1969), 56. ("dem Vorstellen entspricht die Melodie, dem Fühlen entspricht die Harmonie, dem Wollen entspricht der Rhythmus, die Tonform entspricht dem ganzen Menschen. Nun haben wir also einen partialen Menschen = Denken, einen partialen Menschen = Fühlen, einen partialen Menschen = Wollen, und den ganzen Menschen.") This lecture appeared in 1952 in the *Blätter für Anthroposophie* (Numbers 7/8), but may have been circulated in Switzerland during Scelsi's time there in the 1930s and 1940s. The tremendous importance of this article for Scelsi's second aesthetic phase is addressed in Chapter 3.

Steiner's system shows more clearly the influence of Schopenhauer and Romantic philosophy in his inclusion of the will and representation. Scelsi's system, as we have seen, betrays the likely influences of Bergson and Scriabin. Interestingly, Steiner proposes tonal structure as a composite of the other musical elements, just as the complete human is comprised of the will, thinking, and feeling. Scelsi, on the other hand, distinguishes musical form as a distinct element, just as the intellect is distinct from vitality, emotion, and the psyche. Both Steiner and Scelsi enhance their taxonomies with discussions of how the elements might interrelate. In another lecture, Steiner noted that melody

leads the musical [phenomena] from the realm of feeling [=harmony] up to that of thinking. . . .

However, just as harmony can tend upward toward thinking [=melody], so can it tend downward toward willing [=rhythm]. . . . Melody thus carries harmony upward; rhythm carries harmony [downward] in the direction of willing.⁴⁹

Perhaps most significant, Steiner, like Scelsi, perceived a fundamental change taking place in the early twentieth century with regard to "the musical experience of civilized humanity."

Truly a great change in the musical experience of civilized humanity is underway. I believe that currently we do not understand the musical experience of the past well enough. . . . [W]e are probably still in the middle of a transformation, if I may put it like this, of mankind's musical needs.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Steiner, "March 8, 1923, Stuttgart [Lecture]," in *The Inner Nature of Music*, 65–66; Steiner, "Stuttgart, 8. März 1923 [Lecture]," in *Das Wesen des Musikalischen*, 122–123. ("Das Melodische leitet das Musikalische aus dem Fühlensgebiet hinauf in das Vorstellen. . . .

Ebenso nun aber, wie die Harmonie nach dem Vorstellen hinauftendieren kann, kann sie nach dem Wollen hinuntertendieren. . . . So daß also die Melodie die Harmonie nach oben trägt, der Rhythmus trägt die Harmonie nach dem Wollen hin.") This lecture—along with that of March 7, 1923—was certainly available to Scelsi sufficiently early, as it was published in Dornach in 1928, 1954, and 1966 under the title "Das Tonerlebnis im Menschen. Eine Grundlage für die Pflege des musikalischen Unterrichts."

⁵⁰Steiner, "Dornach, 29. September 1920 [Lecture]," in *Das Wesen des Musikalischen*, 47; Rudolf Steiner, *L'essenza della musica e l'esperienza del suono nell'uomo*, trans. Dante Vigevani (Milan: Editrice Antroposofica, 1973), 51–52. ("[E]igentlich im musikalischen Erleben der zivilisierten Menschheit ein sehr großer Umschwung eingetreten ist. Ich glaube, daß man nur das frühere Musik-Erleben heute noch nicht genug kennt; . . . vielleicht stehen wir mitten drinnen in einer Umwandlung, wenn ich so sagen darf, des musikalischen Bedürfnisses der Menschen.")

Although Steiner did not correlate this change with the balance of the fundamental elements as explicitly as did Scelsi, Steiner nonetheless recognized the historical and evolutionary importance of harmony as “the center of music today.”⁵¹ Scelsi also emphasized the harmonic element, as well as the rhythmic one, in the evolution of musical expression, a fact made clear by his two other essays of the 1940s. He concludes “The Meaning of Music” with the crucial observation that rhythm and the psyche constitute the predominant elements of the modern era, with emotion and intellect becoming increasingly subordinate. Scelsi understood the music of the early twentieth century as manifesting a fundamental shift in the hierarchy of the musical elements, away from the predominance of melody and structure and toward the predominance of rhythm and harmony. Furthermore, he suggests that as of the mid-1940s this shift had not yet been fully accomplished.

The Evolution of Harmony

Scelsi’s two remaining essays of the 1940s recount what he understood as the historical developments that generated this musical-evolutionary condition. In *The Evolution of Harmony* Scelsi outlines the insurgence of the psychic element, which began in Wagner’s music dramas and became fully manifested in the works of Debussy. Wagner’s harmony was still based fundamentally on the tonal system, though Scelsi also asserts the importance of the eleventh chord in Wagner’s conception. Scelsi interprets this as an element of bitonality, which represents a significant departure from traditional tonality.

Technically his harmony results from the constant use of chromaticism and the chord of the natural eleventh. This chord, which can be considered from one perspective a product of traditional harmony since it is formed by the addition of a third to a ninth chord, nonetheless introduces the feature of exhibiting bitonality, for it can be

⁵¹Steiner, “March 8, 1923, Stuttgart [Lecture],” in *The Inner Nature of Music*, 64; Steiner, “Stuttgart, 8. März 1923 [Lecture],” in *Das Wesen des Musikalischen*, 121. (“Dasjenige, was heute für die Musik im Mittelpunkt steht . . . , das ist die Harmonie.”)

considered the conjunction of two chords of different tonalities. It constitutes, therefore, the first chordal departure from distinct tonality.⁵²

More importantly, Scelsi maintains that while Wagner's "powerful lyricism and imposing structures," corresponding to the emotional and intellectual elements, still dominated his music and thus linked him to the nineteenth century and earlier eras, the richness of his harmonic expression tended toward the psychic order, and thus planted the seed for this element to gain importance.⁵³

At the same time, Scelsi emphasizes that Russian and Oriental music, especially as they influenced West-European composers like Debussy, should not be underestimated for their roles in establishing the supremacy of harmony and rhythm. Russian music constituted an important catalyst "through its rhythmic violence and the explosion of colors and timbres."⁵⁴ The influence of Oriental music lay in its new technical elements (scales, modes, rhythms), new types of musical meanings and perspectives, and—particularly significant for Scelsi—stimulation of interest in new spiritual and philosophical systems. He observes that interest in Oriental music "had repercussions for the fashion and the whole spirit of the era, and it is because of this moment that the different contexts and forms of Oriental religions, philosophies, doctrines became interesting to the milieu."⁵⁵ Scelsi

⁵²Scelsi, *The Evolution of Harmony*, 7 (267–268). ("Techniquement son harmonie résulte de l'emploi constant du chromatisme et de l'accord de onzième naturelle. Or cet accord, qui peut être considéré d'une part comme un développement de l'harmonie traditionnelle, puisqu'il ne présente toutefois que l'adjonction d'une nouvelle tierce à l'accord de neuvième, présente toutefois la particularité de posséder une bi-tonalité, car il peut être considéré comme l'agrégation de deux accords de tonalité différente. Il constitue donc le premier départ de la tonalité nette dans un accord.")

⁵³Scelsi, *The Evolution of Harmony*, 7 (268). ("son lyrisme puissant et dans ses architectures grandioses.")

⁵⁴Scelsi, *The Evolution of Harmony*, 7 (268). ("par sa violence rythmique, l'éclat des couleurs et des timbres.")

⁵⁵Scelsi, *The Evolution of Harmony*, 8 (268–269). ("cet art eut des répercussions sur la mode et l'esprit entier de l'époque, et c'est depuis ce moment qu'on s'intéressa dans les milieux et sous les formes les plus différentes aux religions, philosophies, doctrines orientales.")

also assigns great importance to African and Asian art for contributing to the shifting balance of fundamental elements then underway.

African and Asian art taken in their entirety are expressions of the rhythmic and psychic characters that generally dominate these races. The discovery of this particular expression at the moment when, in its own evolution, the European mind was becoming increasingly conscious of the creative strength of these elements indeed had a decisive effect on and contributed immensely to this new evolution.

At this moment, therefore, we in Europe are at the beginning of a general orientation tending ever closer to a polarization of the rhythmic and psychic elements. We are even in the beginning of a period of conscious and unconscious exploration into the means of expression of these elements.⁵⁶

Scelsi alludes to technical influences on Debussy from Oriental music, Wagnerian harmony, and Musorgsky's timbral richness, but indicates that these are only surface details. The greater significance of these influences is that they provide evidence of Debussy's search for new and more direct means of expression, less dependent on the intellectual, formalist element.

It appears therefore that, among the problems posed by Debussy, the principal one was perhaps that of *emancipation from formalism*, which still reigned and which he felt to be arbitrary more from the rhythmic point of view than the harmonic.⁵⁷

Debussy's questioning, his search for new means of expression, did not *result from* the influences, but *led him to* the influences. Therefore, Scelsi suggests that we focus attention not on the responses to Debussy's questioning but on the questions themselves. What was Debussy looking for that led him to Wagner, to Oriental music, and to the Russians?

⁵⁶Scelsi, *The Evolution of Harmony*, 8 (269). ("L'art africain et asiatique pris dans leur ensemble sont une expression des caractères rythmiques et psychiques qui dominent généralement chez ces races. La découverte de cette expression particulière au moment où, par sa propre évolution, l'esprit européen devenait de plus en plus conscient de la puissance créatrice de ces éléments eut en effet prépondérance sur celui-ci et contribua grandement à l'évolution nouvelle.

A ce moment nous nous trouvons donc en Europe au début d'une orientation générale tendant toujours plus vers une polarisation sur les éléments rythmiques et psychiques, ainsi qu'au début d'une période de recherche consciente ou inconsciente des moyens d'expression de ces éléments.")

⁵⁷Scelsi, *The Evolution of Harmony*, 8 (270). Emphasis added. ("Il apparaît donc que parmi les problèmes qui se posaient à Debussy le principal était peut-être celui de l'affranchissement d'un formalisme qui régnait encore et qu'il sentait être arbitraire tant au point de vue rythmique qu'harmonique.")

However sincerely he posed the question, the argument may certainly be read as Scelsi's preemptive defense of his own "searches" and "influences."

What did [Debussy's] adoption of strange scales signify besides a conscious or unconscious means of liberation from traditional harmony, the search for new possibilities of more direct expression? Nevertheless, all historical research concerning the influences that an artist probably experienced is secondary in our opinion. . . . It is natural and understandable that the creator discovers and accepts all technical means that can help him on the path of realization. [It is natural that he] should guard these discoveries and means. . . . In other words, the artist is never "influenced" by another thing that [provides] direct or indirect answers to his questions, whether they are conscious or unconscious. Therefore it is not the "influences" on the artists that are necessary to study, but the evolution of the questions that elicit the answers, the "influences." The importance of the "influences" lies only in how accurately they answer the proposed question.⁵⁸

According to Scelsi, Debussy questioned the emphasis that had long been placed on tonal structure and melodic expression; he turned to Russian and Oriental music as possible means to reject such intellectual and emotional types of expression.

We often think that the music of Debussy was a revolt against Wagnerism. It would be much more precise to say that it was especially a reaction against classicism—insofar as this means formalism and is conditioned by the intellectual element—and also a reaction against Germanic or Italian lyricism, an exuberant expression of emotion.⁵⁹

In Scelsi's view this represented the end of Romanticism and the end of music that is descriptive to the senses, for Debussy's references to "exterior images were not rendered

⁵⁸Scelsi, *The Evolution of Harmony*, 8–9 (270). ("Que signifiait d'autre part l'adoption de gammes étranges sinon un moyen conscient ou inconscient de libération de l'harmonie traditionnelle, en quête de possibilités nouvelles d'expression plus directe? D'autre part, toute recherche rétrospective sur les influences subies probablement par un artiste est à notre avis secondaire. . . . Il est naturel et compréhensible que le créateur accepte ou fasse sienne toute découverte ou moyen technique qui puisse l'aider sur le chemin de la réalisation; soit gardant ces découvertes et moyens tels quels. . . . En d'autres termes, l'artiste n'est jamais 'influencé' par autre chose que par des réponses directes ou indirectes à ses questions, celles-ci soient-elles conscientes ou inconscientes. Ce n'est donc pas les 'influences' qu'il faut étudier chez les artistes mais l'évolution des questions qui appellent les réponses, les 'influences.' L'importance des 'influences' est toujours en rapport avec le degré d'exactitude de la réponse donnée à une question posée.")

⁵⁹Scelsi, *The Evolution of Harmony*, 9 (271). ("On a l'habitude de penser que la musique de Debussy était une révolte contre le wagnérisme; il serait beaucoup plus exact de dire que c'était surtout une réaction contre le classicisme dans la mesure où celui-ci formalisme et conditionné par l'élément intellectuel, réaction aussi contre le lyrisme germanique ou italien, expression exubérante de l'affectivité.")

objectively, but . . . from memory, that is, already transformed by and in possession of psychic characteristics.”⁶⁰

In *The Evolution of Harmony* Scelsi turns also to Scriabin, whose music and aesthetics he had studied in Geneva in the mid 1930s. He venerates Scriabin’s contribution as an extension of Wagner’s harmonic achievements taken to extremes, paralleled by Scriabin’s increasing interest in Theosophy and occultism. While Scelsi does not explicitly acknowledge his own growing interest in these areas, we clearly sense his empathy with the Russian composer.

It is said that he dove into Theosophy, magic, and occultism, and that the second part of his work is probably only a tentative expression of transcendent religious, esoteric, and even satanic metaphysics. Suffice it to say that these assessments of the ideas and the music of Scriabin above all mask the ignorance, the incomprehension, and the traditional hostility of those for whom all such research is diabolical. . . . It is quite possible that in his progression toward knowledge [Scriabin] encountered or pursued various psychic, religious, or esoteric experiences, but it was only in order to arrive at a type of knowledge and a psychic conception of the cosmos, the idea of total unity that haunted him.⁶¹

As Scriabin’s quest for the mysteries of creation and the unity of all arts led him ever more deeply into what Scelsi considered the psychic realm, his late music became increasingly characterized by the predominance of the harmonic element. Significantly, Scelsi’s main criterion for assessing achievement in the evolution of harmony is its emancipation from dependence on the intellectual element. Despite Scriabin’s obsessive systematizing, Scelsi

⁶⁰Scelsi, *The Evolution of Harmony*, 9–10 (272). (“les images extérieures n’étaient point rendues objectivement mais elles étaient le plus souvent peintes et rendues de mémoire, c’est-à-dire déjà transformées et possédant des caractères psychiques.”)

⁶¹Scelsi, *The Evolution of Harmony*, 11 (273–274). (“On dit qu’il fut plongé dans la théosophie, la magie et l’occultisme et que la deuxième partie de son œuvre ne serait qu’une tentative exprimer le Transcendant religieux métaphysique, ésotérique et même satanique. A ce propos nous dirons que ces appréciations sur les idées et la musique de Scriabine couvrent surtout l’ignorance, l’incompréhension et l’hostilité traditionnelles de tous ceux pour qui toute recherche est diabolique. . . . Il est fort possible que dans sa progression vers la connaissance il ait rencontré ou poursuivi des expériences psychiques religieuses ou ésotériques diverses, mais ce n’était que pour arriver à une connaissance et à une conception psychique du cosmos, à l’idée de l’unité totale qui le hantait.”)

felt that Scriabin's mystical pursuits took him further and further from the intellectual realm.

Midway through *The Evolution of Harmony*, Scelsi makes an isolated, suspenseful reference to a third stage of harmonic evolution: "Before going on to the third stage of harmonic evolution, let us cast a glance at the musicians and the works that we have analyzed."⁶² From this point, Scelsi proceeds to discuss the stylistic evolutions of Richard Strauss and Scriabin. He never returns to the topic of a third stage of harmonic evolution, nor does he specify what or who comprises the first two stages. It would seem, however, that Wagner's accomplishments in tonal harmony represent the end of the first stage, while Debussy's and Scriabin's ventures into extra-tonal harmony represent the second. Presumably, in this third stage the balance would have shifted completely toward the psychic and rhythmic elements, a shift just at its commencement in 1942 with Scelsi leading the way.

The Evolution of Rhythm

In the third essay of his first aesthetic phase, Scelsi traces the emerging importance of the rhythmic element in Russian music, the power of which is direct and primal, even barbaric and violent. According to Scelsi, such rhythmic intensity appeared first in the music of Musorgsky and progressed to its most powerful manifestation in the music of Stravinsky, in which rhythm is treated as the primary element, attaining almost complete independence from the other elements. The crux of Scelsi's historicist account is that rhythm in the modern era no longer functions subordinately, merely as a factor contributing to the expression of the melodic or structural elements. Rather, the emancipated rhythmic

⁶²Scelsi, *The Evolution of Harmony*, 10 (272). ("Avant de passer à la troisième étape de l'évolution harmonique jetons un coup d'œil autour des musiciens et des œuvres que nous avons analysés.")

element “pursues its particular expression by progressions obeying only its own impulse and laws.”⁶³ Moreover, in its emancipated treatment the rhythmic element relates to the vital force of nature not metaphorically but directly. “[T]hrough rhythm,” Scelsi concludes, “man participates in the life of the universe that is vibration, in the life of nature, in the *élan vital*, in *durée*.”⁶⁴

Scelsi acknowledges the limited role played by Wagner, Debussy, and other composers discussed in *The Evolution of Harmony* in the ascendancy of rhythmic expression. Isolated moments of rhythmic significance in the music of Wagner (the Overture to *Die Meistersinger*) and Liszt (the third movement of the *Faust* Symphony) nevertheless remain subject to a rational, structural treatment and are dependent upon the melodic element for much of their power.⁶⁵ Scelsi admits that Debussy was not drawn to Russian music because of its rhythm, and its effect on Debussy’s music might easily be overlooked. Debussy’s contribution to the evolution of the rhythmic element was, rather, more indirect. His overt efforts to reject traditional harmonic language and formalism contributed to the “relative emancipation of rhythm from the structural processes of academic usage” as a type of by-product.⁶⁶ Scelsi observes that “in some passages of the [string] quartet the rhythmic element already achieves an independent expression.”⁶⁷ Rather than consciously adopting the violent rhythmic expression of Russian composers, Debussy’s efforts to treat

⁶³Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 8 (277). (“poursuit son expression particulière par des enchaînements n’obéissant qu’à son impulsion et lois propres.”)

⁶⁴Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 8 (277). (“par le rythme l’homme participe à la vie de l’univers qui est vibration; à la vie de la nature, à l’*élan vital*, à la *durée*.”)

⁶⁵Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 7 (275).

⁶⁶Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 7 (275). (“un relatif affranchissement du rythme des procédés de construction d’usage scolastique.”)

⁶⁷Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 7 (275). (“dans certains passages du *Quatuor* l’élément rythmique atteint déjà à une expression indépendante.”)

harmony and form more flexibly led to a “more supple, fragmentary” treatment of rhythm and a proclivity for syncopation.⁶⁸

Despite his brief nods to Wagner, Liszt, and Debussy, Scelsi maintains that Russian composers were truly responsible for the insurgence of rhythm and its independence from the other elements. Having credited Musorgsky for the first significant achievements in this direction, Scelsi clearly focuses attention on the music of Stravinsky, in which “the manifestation of rhythm appeared in all its violence for the first time.”⁶⁹ This does not, however, preclude the importance of other elements. Scelsi acknowledges the importance of harmony in the music of Stravinsky, but does not grant his achievements with this element the same weight. “Indeed, if in Stravinsky harmony is significant and essential, rhythm is determinant.”⁷⁰

Scelsi traces the evolution of rhythm in Stravinsky’s works, beginning with *The Firebird*. He observes that certain unspecified passages along with the “Dance of the Kastchei” evince a degree of rhythmic independence, but at this early stage of Stravinsky’s evolution the rhythmic element generally remains bound to the emotional, melodic one.⁷¹ The nature of this relationship between the rhythmic and melodic elements in *The Firebird*, however, had inaugurated the evolutionary process of emancipation. Scelsi suggests that in *The Firebird* rhythmic interruptions and metrical changes provoke thematic conflicts and fragmentation. Stravinsky continued this approach in *Petrushka*, where the fragmentation driven by the rhythmic element reaches its limit, suggesting that the complete emancipation

⁶⁸Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 7 (275). (“Il devint plus souple, fragmentaire, et parfois tendit à la syncope.”)

⁶⁹Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 8 (276). (“C’est par Stravinsky que la manifestation du rythme devait apparaître dans son entière violence, pour la première fois.”)

⁷⁰Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 8 (276). (“En effet si dans Stravinsky l’harmonie est essentielle et significative, le rythme est déterminant.”)

⁷¹What Scelsi observes here seems to be Stravinsky’s early inclination toward the square phrasing of his teacher Rimsky-Korsakov.

of rhythm is imminent. "One clearly has the impression of a vital element which progressively assaults and destroys the barlines . . . , its inclination to attack and upset the established order [the balance of the elements]." ⁷² Scelsi's exposition at this point in the essay pushes urgently forward to *The Rite of Spring* with a language designed to capture some of the rhythmic urgency, the uncontrollable power of Stravinsky's music.

Rhythmic eruption of Prometheus enchained, primal motion, dynamic impulse, a veritable giant pulling on its chains—to humans it would appear stripped, terrifying, immense. And it would be *The Rite*. Emotion and intellect were to be swept away. Men would live the cosmic primordial breath, the *élan vital*. ⁷³

Scelsi contends that, in *The Rite of Spring*, Stravinsky intensified his emancipated use of the rhythmic element to the point where a sharply heterogeneous "means of expression," combining the harmonic and rhythmic elements, "renders the rhythmic language chaotic, the different planes not always surviving entirely in their juxtaposition." ⁷⁴ Thereafter, he retreated to smaller-scale works—Scelsi mentions those that show the influence of jazz—in which Stravinsky pursued the rhythmic element deprived of all other elements. But in these pieces, the powerful rhythms assimilated from African music and jazz "occur just on one plane; rarely are there more than two real rhythms superimposed." According to Scelsi, the dilemma Stravinsky ultimately faced was how to "apply this rhythmic language—released, regained, and ultimately understood in its true significance" in a manner concordant with the expression of the other elements in the European tradition. Stravinsky's solution came

⁷²Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 8 (276). ("On a nettement l'impression d'un élément vital qui successivement frappe et détruit ses barres . . . , et chaque fois son souffle s'approche et bouleverse l'ordre établi.")

⁷³Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 8 (276). ("Souffle rythmique de Prométhée enchaîné, mouvement premier, impulsion dynamique, véritable géant arrachant ses dernières chaînes il paraîtra au milieu des hommes nu, terrifiant, immense. Et ce sera le *Sacre*. Affectivité, intellect seront balayés, les hommes vivront le souffle primordial, l'élan vital.")

⁷⁴Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 9 (278). ("Dans cette œuvre, en effet, une certaine accumulation de moyens d'expression et de procédés hétérogènes, soit rythmiques soit harmoniques, atteint une complexité qui malgré sa puissance musicale extraordinaire rend parfois le langage rythmique chaotique, les différents plans ne subsistant pas toujours entièrement à leur superposition.")

with *Les Noces* and through a profound study of Bach, who inspired a number of remarkable works in what is called [Stravinsky's] neoclassical period. In *Les Noces* Stravinsky applied the [African and Oriental] rhythmic language in a European context, creating a true masterpiece.⁷⁵

Bach's accomplishment, which served as a model for Stravinsky, was in creating a high degree of rhythmic independence: "Through his contrapuntal genius he created separation among the levels, which in another sense created relationships of space and time."⁷⁶

Scelsi not only assesses Stravinsky's principal role in the emancipation of the rhythmic element, he also discusses the nature of this emancipation. He clarifies that emancipated treatment of the rhythmic element in contemporary music does not mean simply the advent of entirely new types of surface rhythms. Indeed, he maintains that there is no type of syncopation in jazz that did not already appear in the music of Bach, Mozart, or Beethoven.⁷⁷ In truly emancipated treatment, rhythmic ideas operate independently, no longer merely offering a supportive, temporal framework for melody, harmony, and form. Such emancipated rhythm incorporates both sound and silence, which have equal expressive value. As he would do later in the aesthetic texts of the 1950s, Scelsi turns here to contemporary painting for analogy and illustration. Contemporary painters had rejected the traditional reliance on objects as the sole foundation for their works, having begun to rely equally on the contrast of "positive and negative spaces."⁷⁸ Analogously in music, sound and silence exist in relief, each putting the other into rhythmic perspective. In this way,

⁷⁵Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 10 (279). ("ne pourrait-on pas appliquer ce langage rythmique délivré, retrouvé et enfin compris dans sa signification réelle? . . . Strawinsky répondit par *Les Noces* et par une étude approfondie de Bach, qui amènera par la suite un nombre d'œuvres remarquables, ce qu'on a appelé sa période néoclassique. Dans *Les Noces* Strawinsky applique le langage rythmique à un texte européen, réussissant un véritable chef-d'œuvre.")

⁷⁶Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 10 (280). ("Par son génie contrapuntique il crée des distances entre les plains qui dans un autre sens créent des rapports d'espace et de temps.")

⁷⁷Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 8 (276).

⁷⁸Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 8 (277).

“they form a reality, an entirely new strength, integrating and participating in the universal rhythmic life.”⁷⁹

Scelsi observes that African and Oriental cultures have traditionally had a stronger “intuitive knowledge” of the power of the rhythmic element and its ability to connect man to the “universal rhythm.” This produces an intrinsic and enviable ability that Scelsi attributes to race:

African and Oriental people have a more profound and more immediate consciousness of this [power of the rhythmic element] than do Europeans, for whom rational intellectualism offers a more external conception than [true] knowledge. . . . We are still far from obtaining African and Oriental people's more intuitive knowledge in this domain, just as in the rhythmic domain of music nothing can even compare to the strength of the rhythmic language of black music.⁸⁰

Assuming an exhortative stance, Scelsi lays out what the European must do to achieve that which the African and Oriental accomplish instinctively. The power of the rhythmic element

must be interpreted and understood as a means of achieving a state of collective consciousness by the deregulation of the individual physiological rhythms and their synchronization with the tellurian and universal rhythms. . . . Ecstasy or euphoria is produced by the sensation of the disruption of personal rhythm, that is, of individual and relative time, and by of the fusion of the being with a current of cosmic rhythm, in time and *durée*.⁸¹

Technically, this “disruption of personal rhythm” is accomplished through the disorienting effects of polyrhythm. Interestingly, Scelsi judges the capacity of Oriental music to achieve

⁷⁹Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 8 (277). (“Ils prennent ainsi une réalité, une puissance toutes nouvelles, s'intégrant et participant à la vie rythmique universelle.”)

⁸⁰Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 8 (277). (“Les peuples africains et orientaux ont de cela une conscience plus profonde et plus immédiate que les européens, chez lesquels l'intellectualisme rationnel a porté à une conception plus extérieure de la connaissance. . . . Pourtant nous sommes encore loin d'atteindre les connaissances plus intuitives des peuples africains et orientaux dans ce domaine; également en musique dans le domaine rythmique rien n'est encore comparable à la puissance du langage rythmique nègre.”)

⁸¹Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 8–9 (277–278). (“doit être interprété et compris comme un moyen d'atteindre un état de conscience collective par le dérèglement des rythmes physiologiques individuels et leur synchronisation sur des rythmes telluriques et universels. . . . L'exaltation ou l'euphorie est produite par la sensation de la rupture du rythme personnel, c'est-à-dire du temps individuel et relatif et par là de la fusion de l'être dans un courant de rythme cosmique, c'est-à-dire dans le temps et la durée.”)

this effect superior to that of African music, which is more commonly associated with polyrhythmic procedures. He maintains that in Oriental music—Indian, Javanese, and Arab music in particular—one can often find instances of “several rhythms that take place concurrently on different planes, while each one maintains its particular features through a contrapuntal technique of extraordinary subtlety.”⁸² Moreover, he notes that the rhythmic primacy of Oriental music is reinforced by its harmonic sophistication, a feature lacking in the music of Africa.

The harmonic element [in Oriental music] is infinitely more developed and this includes an interpenetration and absorption of rhythm into *durée*. . . . For the harnessing by the consciousness of several rhythmic elements and their subsequent projection involves a more powerful and precise absorption of creative forces. Through this rhythmic multiplicity [polyrhythm] and its harmonic elements, Oriental music not only seems to possess a tellurian character but perhaps an even more vast pulsation. . . . With its continuous and ethereal dynamism, its irresistible force, where it skirts and crosses infinite trajectories, man’s personal time not only seems to melt into that of nature, of the earth, but it seems to lose and confound itself with the vast breathing and its vital cycles of cosmic absolute time.⁸³

Scelsi next surveys popular and programmatic music that has employed the rhythmic dynamism of African music only at the surface level, without exploiting its full potential. Much of Scelsi’s discussion in this section strikes the modern reader as a racially charged attempt to devalue various African-American musical traditions.

⁸²Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 9 (278). (“La musique orientale par contre est constituée généralement de plusieurs rythmes qui se déroulent contemporanément sur des plans différents, tout en gardant chacun ses caractéristiques particulières, par une science contrapuntique d’une subtilité extraordinaire.”) It is tempting to speculate on which specific types of Oriental music Scelsi had in mind. His description seems to fit Indonesian gamelan music most appropriately, but it could also apply to Hindustani instrumental genres, Sufi Qawwali music, or various types of Andalusian dance music. All of these often feature polyrhythm, but, with the exception of gamelan music, are generally not contrapuntal.

⁸³Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 9 (278–279). (“l’élément harmonique est infiniment plus développé et celui-ci comporte une interpénétration et absorption du rythme dans la durée. La complexité plus grande de cette musique constitue une supériorité sur la musique africaine. Car la captation par la conscience de plusieurs éléments rythmiques et leur projection comporte une absorption plus puissante et exacte des forces créatrices. Par cette multiplicité rythmique et ses éléments harmoniques la musique orientale ne semble pas seulement posséder un caractère tellurique mais peut-être une pulsation encore plus vaste. Cela expliquerait pourquoi, si la musique nègre produit une sensation d’euphorie panique, l’orientale par contre ne semble pas avoir des caractères ou limites terrestres. Avec son dynamisme continu et éthéré, sa marche inéluctable, où se côtoient et se croisent les trajectoires infinies, non seulement le temps personnel de l’homme semble se fondre avec celui de la nature, de la terre, mais celui-ci même paraît, avec sa vaste respiration et ses cycles vitaux, se perdre et se confondre avec le temps cosmique absolu.”)

Indeed, Jazz is not an African product. One does not find it in Africa; the blacks of the tropical forests do not know it. Musicologists concur in the opinion that jazz had its origin in Mississippi. It was invented by the slaves of the families of French origin. The blacks instinctively superimposed the rhythms of their tam-tams on the European songs that they heard, for the black is not an inventor of melody. The rhythmic songs or sometimes the tam-tam which accompany the rowers of canoes have nothing [to do with] the blues nor even with spirituals, which have some of their sources in the Gregorian chant of the psalms. The blues like the spiritual is as much the work of whites as of blacks, not only in the contribution of melodic motives but also in its harmonic realization.⁸⁴

Even if we overlook Scelsi's factual errors regarding the origins of jazz and spirituals, what remains particularly troubling is Scelsi's desire to strip African and African-American musicians of any creative, imaginative ability. While Scelsi does admire the rhythmic power of African music, he attributes its creation to racial instinct. Any melodic or harmonic features located in its descendant American idioms (jazz, blues, spirituals) he reasons must be the contribution of whites. Somewhat paradoxically, Scelsi bemoans that the melodic flavor of blues, jazz, and the Tin-Pan-Alley composers has infiltrated European concert music, yielding an "epidemic of descriptive music" and a "questionable brown exoticism."⁸⁵ Nevertheless, he acknowledges that in "the best of these works" (Scelsi names Weill and Krenek), the rhythmic power of black music infiltrates, "producing a strange and often acute sensation of release from time."⁸⁶ Scelsi's motivation here is Europocentric and self-aggrandizing, though certainly typical of the time. The only value he

⁸⁴Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 11 (281). ("Le jazz en effet n'est pas un produit africain; on ne le retrouve point en Afrique; les nègres des forêts tropicales ne le connaissent pas. Les musicologues sont d'accord dans l'opinion que le jazz a eu son origine au Mississippi [*sic*]; il a été inventé par les esclaves des familles d'origine française. Les nègres superposèrent instinctivement les rythmes de leurs tam-tams sur les airs européens qu'ils entendaient, car le nègre n'est pas un inventeur de mélodie. Les chants rythmés qui accompagnent les rameurs de pirogues ou parfois le tam-tam n'ont rien des blues ni même des spirituals qui ceux-ci ont leurs sources certaines dans le chant grégorien des psaumes. Le blues comme le spiritual est autant l'œuvre du blanc que du noir, non seulement dans l'apport des motifs mélodiques mais aussi dans sa manifestation harmonique.")

⁸⁵Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 11 (281-282). ("une épidémie de musique descriptive"; "de suspect cet exotisme cafardeux.")

⁸⁶Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 11 (282). ("produisant une sensation étrange et souvent aiguë d'évasion dans le temps.")

assigns to African-American music lies in what European musicians can learn from it: chiefly that rhythmic energy can overcome melodic banality and contribute to the type of dissociative experience Scelsi also associates with harmony.

Finally, Scelsi addresses the “idolatry of the machine” that led many composers to explore rhythmic energy from another perspective. He summarily dismisses the futurist and machinist aesthetic, however, for its reliance on depiction and imitation of external images. This aesthetic

takes the machine or the mechanical object in opposition and as a substitution for the [traditional] subject: landscape, nature, etc. The works of this category are based on imitative rhythms and harmonies and proceed from a desire for reaction or from the anti-sentimental, anti-emotional aesthetic, as much as from the need for purely rhythmic expression. The proof of this is that the rhythmic language, being imitative like harmony, is not expressed according to its own laws but is submissive to the descriptive and exterior conception of patterns. In other words, it is the depiction of a dynamism but not the dynamism itself.⁸⁷

Rather than offering emancipated treatment of rhythm and a complete reorientation of the fundamental elements, futurism and machinism, as musical styles, represent only a continuation of the Romantic tendency toward extra-musical depiction. Only the object of that depiction has changed. The true evolution of rhythm, Scelsi concludes, is found in those works in which the “external rhythm of a machine or human industry is developed or expressed subjectively, according to its own law and experiences. . . . It is therefore not a depiction or a description . . . [but] the establishment of relationships and consonances between man and the universal dynamism.”⁸⁸

⁸⁷Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 12 (283). (“prend la machine ou l’objet mécanique en opposition et comme substitution au sujet paysage, nature morte, etc. Les œuvres de cette catégorie sont basées sur des rythmes et harmonies imitatifs et proviennent d’un désir de réaction ou de l’esthétique antisentimentale, antiaffective, tout autant que du besoin d’expression rythmique pure. La preuve en est que le langage rythmique, comme l’harmonie, étant imitatif n’est point par ce fait exprimé selon ses lois propres mais est soumis à la conception descriptive et extérieure du modèle. En d’autres termes, c’est la peinture d’un dynamisme et non le dynamisme même.”)

⁸⁸Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 12 (284). (“le rythme extérieur d’une machine, d’un jeu ou d’un travail humain est développé ou exprimé selon sa loi propre et ressenti subjectivement. . . . Il ne s’agit donc plus ici d’une peinture ou d’une description . . . [mais] l’établissement de rapports et consonances entre l’homme et le dynamisme universel.”)

The three historicist texts of the 1940s collectively identify and describe the first major shift in the fundamental bearing of Western music since at least as far back as the Renaissance. If at times Scelsi seems to vacillate in locating the precise historical moment of this change anywhere from the mid-nineteenth century up to the time of his writing in the 1940s, it is because the change is necessarily a gradual and evolutionary one. Along this path Scelsi recognizes occasional evolutionary breakthroughs in the output of individual composers, emphasizing particularly those of Scriabin in the field of harmony and Stravinsky in rhythm. More broadly, though, one senses an urgency in Scelsi's tone that a decisive moment had arrived in the collective evolution of the musical art. He intimates that the dawn of a new era is imminent, and that it will be characterized by the repudiation of emotional (melodic) and intellectual (structural) modes of expression. What he envisioned as a third stage of harmonic evolution, presumably complete in its adjusted balance of the fundamental elements, is all the more intriguing because he did not—*could not* yet in 1942—identify precisely its nature.

When Scelsi started writing the historicist essays in 1942, he had just completed thirteen years of experimentation with various progressive styles of composition. The essays constitute his first significant attempt to deal with the diversity he had assimilated. The impending change that he projects in the historicist essays may be the strongest indicator of his own artistic crisis. Scelsi's assessment of which two fundamental elements were gaining prominence and which two were becoming less and less appropriate to contemporary expression suggests which paths and models he would accept and which he would renounce. Of the latter, Second-Viennese atonality is perhaps the most glaring case. Although Scelsi never openly repudiated the path of the Second Viennese—and even came to acknowledge Webern's strides in "investigating sound and its energy" in *Sound and Music*⁸⁹—his historical account of the decreasing relevance of the constructive, intellectual

⁸⁹Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 5–6 (290).

element may be read as his own growing dissatisfaction with the aesthetic of atonality. Conversely, the prominent position he assigns to Debussy, Scriabin, and Stravinsky in the elevation of harmony and rhythm point to what he perceived as the most promising paths for the creation of a new compositional language.

CHAPTER 3
SCELSI'S SECOND AESTHETIC PHASE:
THE SPIRITUALIST TEXTS

Shortly after his return to composition in 1952, Scelsi once again expressed his aesthetic views in an apparent attempt to justify the new musical language he was then forming. The two aesthetic texts of the period—*Art and Knowledge* (1953–54) and *Sound and Music* (1953–54)—originated as edited transcriptions of recorded conversations and therefore do not read as rigorous and systematized expositions.¹ Published only in the 1980s by Scelsi's friend Luciano Martinis, each of these documents is prefaced by the following brief description of its inception:

These spontaneous conversations between friends were recorded during 1953/54 and then transcribed with small and insignificant corrections. The questions are omitted because they were not always expressed with clarity; however, they can be deduced or sensed from the answers.²

The extent of the editing remains difficult to discern, as neither the original tapes nor the complete transcriptions are currently available to scholars.

In *Art and Knowledge* and *Sound and Music* Scelsi betrays numerous influences both openly and furtively; their scope is imposingly vast and eclectic. Concepts and terminology from ancient religious traditions appear alongside references to the twentieth-century philosophies of Henri Bergson (1859–1941) and Benedetto Croce (1866–1952), the

¹Giacinto Scelsi, *Art et connaissance*, ed. Luciano Martinis (Rome: Le parole gelate, 1982); Giacinto Scelsi, *Son et musique*, ed. Luciano Martinis (Rome: Le parole gelate, 1981).

²*Art and Knowledge* and *Sound and Music*. ("Queste conversazioni improvvisate tra amici furono registrate nel 1953/54 e poi trascritte con poche ed insignificanti correzioni. Le domande sono tralasciate perché non sempre espresse con chiarezza; dalle risposte però si possono arguire ed intuire.")

visionary aesthetics of Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924), and the anti-intellectual ideals of surrealism. The perspicacious reader of Scelsi's spiritualist texts may detect even more sources than those discussed below. But Scelsi himself seems to have been unconcerned with the potentially disorienting effects of such a wide-ranging approach. He moves freely among topics, such that an integral picture of the spiritualist aesthetic emerges only when the two texts are considered together. Reflecting his increasingly intuitive approach to composition, the spiritualist texts have a quality of spontaneity that is at once captivating and befuddling. Moreover, their conversational tone is made abstruse by Scelsi's use of the spiritualist and occult jargon he had gleaned from his readings, while incongruously maintaining some of the terminology he had used in the historicist phase.

The most ancient sources of Scelsi's spiritualist aesthetic include the sonic mysticism of the Hindu and Sufi traditions and the meditative practices of Yoga. Scelsi's collection of books provides evidence of his interest in these areas, as do explicit references and clandestine borrowings throughout the spiritualist texts.³ In particular, Scelsi emphasized the work of Patañjali, the Indian scholar of the second-century B.C. generally regarded as the founder of Yoga as a philosophical system. Scelsi owned two different editions of Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtra*, including one in an annotated translation by the Theosophist Alice Bailey.⁴ He refers to Patañjali's work specifically in *Sound and Music*.⁵ In the early

³The growing importance of Yoga to Scelsi's outlook during the early 1950s is evident in the publication dates of many of the books he owned on the subject. A few of the more intriguing examples are: Alain Daniélou, *Yoga: Méthode de réintégration* (Paris: L'Arche, 1951); C. Kermeiz, *Les asanas: Gymnastique immobile du hatha Yoga* (Paris: Editions Jules Tallandier, 1946); Jacques Masui, ed., *Yoga: Science de l'homme intégral* (Paris: Les cahiers del sud, 1953); Swami Pavitranaṇḍa, *Common Sense about Yoga* (Mayavati, India: Advita Ashrama, 1944); Yoghi Ramacharaka, *La respirazione e la salute: manuale completo di filosofia orientale per ottenere lo sviluppo fisico, mentale, psichico, e spirituale a mezzo della respirazione*, trans. G. B. Penne, 8th ed, Problemi dello spirito, no. 4 (Milan: Fratelli Bocca Editori, 1953); Paramhansa Yogananda, *Autobiographie d'un Yogi*, trans. C. Desquiere (Paris: Adyar, 1955). See Appendix B.

⁴Patañjali, *La luce dell'anima: la sua scienza ed i suoi effetti. I sutra Yoga*, paraphrase and commentary by Alice A. Bailey, trans. Elena Zanotti, Scrittori italiani e stranieri: Filosofia (Lanciano: Dottore Gino Carabba Editore, 1945) and Patañjali, *Gli aforismi sullo Yoga (Yogasūtra)*, ed. and trans. Corrado Pensa, Enciclopedia di autori classici, ed. Giorgio Colli (Turin: Boringhieri, 1962; reprint 1968). Although this second edition did not appear until some years after the genesis of the spiritualist texts, it does indicate Scelsi's continued interest in Patañjali and Yoga.

1950s Scelsi also had begun to study and practice the system of “Integral Yoga” expounded by Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950), who has been called “the mystical philosopher *par excellence* of contemporary India.”⁶ A strong interest in Aurobindo endured until the end of Scelsi’s life.⁷ Scelsi’s knowledge of Sufism and that tradition’s attention to sound came primarily from the work of Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882–1927) and Clara Lombardi-Giordano.⁸ The latter’s *La signification du son*, two copies of which Scelsi owned, was published in 1964, a decade after the genesis of Scelsi’s two spiritualist texts.⁹ She based this book, however, on an earlier work by Khan entitled *Le mysticisme du son*, providing a compendium of highlights along with commentary. Striking similarities between Scelsi’s phraseology and Khan’s as expressed by Lombardi-Giordano suggest that Scelsi must have been familiar with Khan’s original work. Perhaps Scelsi knew

⁵Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 4 (288). See p. 92–93 below.

⁶R. Puligandla, *Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1975), 263. Born in Bengal as Akroyd Aurobindo Ghose and educated at Cambridge, Aurobindo sought a synthesis of Western philosophy and Eastern mysticism, chiefly that of Yoga, in a system he called “Integral Yoga.” Together with the French woman Mirra Richard (1878–1973), who became known as “The Mother,” Aurobindo established an *ashram* (Hindu religious retreat) at Pondicherry in southeastern India. From there, he and Richard undertook a program of spiritual rejuvenation and social activism that garnered attention from some of the brightest minds of the time. Books by or about Aurobindo that Scelsi owned and were published in the 1950s include: Sri Aurobindo, *Lettres*, trans. Jean Herbert, *Maitres spirituels dans l’indie contemporaine*, ed. Jean Herbert and Lizelle Reymond (Paris: Adyar, 1950); Sri Aurobindo, *Le guide du Yoga*, trans. Jean Herbert, vol. 3 of *Œuvres complètes*, *Spiritualités vivantes: série hindouisme*, ed. P. Masson-Oursel and Jean Herbert (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1951); Sri Aurobindo, *A Practical Guide to Integral Yoga: Extracts Compiled from the Writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1958); G. E. Monod-Herzen, *Shri Aurobindo* (Paris: Les Cahiers du Sud, 1954).

⁷Massimo Coen, interview with the author, Rome, 21 May 1997. Scelsi continued to read *Domani*, the Italian-language journal of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, until well into the 1980s.

⁸Khan, an accomplished sitarist and vocalist, came from a Sufi family of musicians who had served in the royal courts of central India for several generations. He traveled to America and Europe where he played Indian music and collaborated occasionally with Western musicians. See Gerry Farrell, *Indian Music and the West* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 147–155. Lombardi-Giordano was a pianist, composer, and musicologist in Rome. In 1936 she joined The Western Sufi Order (l’Ordre-Soufi en Occident), which Khan had founded in 1910. She was also the director of the Sufi Center of Rome and the Italian branch of the International School of Sufi Meditation. See Clara Lombardi-Giordano and Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan, *La signification du son* (Rome: L’ordre-Soufi centre de Rome, 1964), 5.

⁹Clara Lombardi-Giordano, and Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan, *La signification du son* (Rome: L’ordre-Soufi centre de Rome, 1964).

Lombardi-Giordano herself, whose ideas would have interested Scelsi and whose activities were centered in Rome.

Numerous modern spiritualist and occult movements intrigued Scelsi, but he focused most intensely on Madame Helena Blavatsky's Theosophy and Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy. Blavatsky (1831–1891), a Russian emigrant, founded the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875.¹⁰ Its purpose was the spiritual rejuvenation of the West through the establishment of a new religion that drew freely from the great religious traditions of the Orient, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism. The movement swept through America and Europe, reaching its zenith in the late 1920s and attracting some of the outstanding thinkers, artists, and musicians of the era. For many Westerners, Theosophy provided a path to more genuine encounters with Oriental religions. Anthroposophy also drew upon Oriental spiritual traditions, though less heavily than did Theosophy. Roughly contemporary with the heyday of the Theosophical movement, Anthroposophy formally began in 1924 with the founding of the General Anthroposophical Society by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) in Dornach, Switzerland. He declared its purpose to be the achievement of humankind's individual and collective potential in all endeavors, including spirituality, art, agriculture, and education.¹¹

Scelsi's interests in Theosophy, Anthroposophy, Hinduism, and Yoga recall similar investigations by Scriabin, whose music and aesthetics Scelsi had studied in the 1930s.¹²

¹⁰Bruce Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 78.

¹¹Richard Leviton, *The Imagination of Pentecost: Rudolf Steiner and Contemporary Spirituality* (Hudson, N.Y.: Anthroposophic Press, 1994). Among the most enduring of Steiner's contributions was the creation of the Waldorf system of education. The Anthroposophical movement still boasts a worldwide following.

¹²While Theosophy was clearly the most important of these to Scriabin's artistic outlook, his interest in and exposure to Rudolf Steiner, Yoga, and the *Vedas* is well-established in the literature. See Faubion Bowers, *The New Scriabin: Enigma and Answers* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 53, 92, and 106. Malcolm Brown has suggested that an equal or even greater influence on Scriabin's ideas was Russian symbolism, chiefly the works of Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900) and Vyacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949) (Malcolm Brown, "Scriabin and Russian 'Mystic' Symbolism," *19th-Century Music* 3 [1979–80]: 42–51). Certain notions of the Russian symbolist tradition presage central tenets of Scelsi's outlook, such as

Scriabin's fascination with Theosophy and the books of Madame Blavatsky in particular has been well documented and carefully considered for its profound effect on his thought. Several themes central to Scriabin's outlook occupy equally prominent positions in Scelsi's spiritualist phase: magical powers of the ancients recaptured through art, music revealed from other-worldly sources, the artist as initiate, and music based on the psychic potency of static harmony. The similarity of the two composers' ideas, however, might not indicate direct influence as much as reflect their common interests.

The aesthetic writings of Dane Rudhyar (1895–1985) and Cyril Scott (1879–1970)—Western composers guided by their fascination with Scriabin, Theosophy, Eastern mysticism, and the occult—also helped to shape Scelsi's spiritualist aesthetic. Born Daniel Chennevière in France, Rudhyar came to the United States in 1916 and acquired citizenship in 1926 under his Hindu name. He became involved in Henry Cowell's West-coast circle of avant-gardists, and was a founding member of the International Composer's Guild and the California New Music Society.¹³ Rudhyar's influence in the United States as a composer and advocate of musical spiritualism was widespread and has been cited particularly for its role in Ruth Crawford's early development.¹⁴ Joseph Straus has

Solovyov's prophesy that "the artist of the future would invoke 'supernatural forces' to transfigure the existing world" and his view of artistic creation as "the transfiguration of material through the embodiment in it of some other, higher-than-material principle" (James West, *Russian Symbolism: A Study of Vyacheslav Ivanov and the Russian Symbolist Aesthetic* [London, 1970]: 47 and 39; quoted in Brown, "Scriabin and Russian 'Mystic' Symbolism," 48). No evidence exists, however, to establish or even suggest that Scelsi knew the work of the Russian symbolists. Furthermore, Scelsi never subscribed to what Brown considers "two other central themes of 'mystic' Symbolism" that were essential to Scriabin's creative life: "the aspiration to a synthesis of the arts and the desire for a collective, popular participation in the artistic act" (p. 49).

¹³Robert Stevenson, "Rudhyar, Dane," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. 4: 103–104; Alfred Morang, *Dane Rudhyar: Pioneer in Creative Synthesis* (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1939), 7–9. See also Shan Eileen McCalla, "The Piano Works of Dane Rudhyar: An Overview and Stylistic Study" (D.M.A. thesis, Arizona State University, 1988).

¹⁴Judith Tick, "Ruth Crawford's 'Spiritual Concept': The Sound-Ideals of an Early American Modernist," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 44/2 (Summer 1991): 233–239; Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 44–50; and Joseph N. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger*, Music in the Twentieth Century, ed. Arnold Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 207–208.

characterized Rudhyar in the 1920s and 1930s as “a major figure” and “a leader of America’s musical avant-garde.”¹⁵ Rudhyar promoted Theosophy, Hindu philosophy, and Hindu music, some of which he had known even before his arrival in the United States.¹⁶ Though not actually a student of Scriabin, Rudhyar championed the Russian composer’s music, which influenced Rudhyar’s own compositional style.¹⁷ Scott, an English composer and pianist, disseminated his music and ideas primarily in England and Germany. Like Rudhyar, Scott found inspiration in Scriabin, particularly in the use of a dense, dissonant, and relatively static harmonic language.¹⁸

It is difficult to establish precisely when and how Scelsi first gained exposure to these varied influences. His familiarity with some of them surely dates to the years before his crisis, but their full effect on his aesthetic becomes clear only in the second phase. Croce’s philosophical writings and Busoni’s “Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music”—to take two examples—were both widely read in Italy in the early decades of the century; Scelsi would likely have been familiar with these aesthetic theories early on.¹⁹ Nonetheless, they seem to

¹⁵Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 207.

¹⁶Judith Tick has indicated that Rudhyar’s discovery of Theosophy came in the early 1920s through his friendship with Crawford’s piano teacher Djane Herz (1888–1982) (Judith Tick, “Ruth Crawford’s ‘Spritual Concept’,” 233). Rudhyar’s interest in Hindu music, however, was sparked somewhat earlier by Maurice D  lage (1879–1961), the French impressionist composer and friend of Ravel. In his book on Hindu music, Rudhyar recounts this first exposure, referring specifically to D  lage’s *Quatre Po  mes Hindous* (1914), a marvelous example of impressionistic exoticism in the early twentieth century: “My first contact with Hindu music had been in Paris, early in 1914, when I met a young French composer, D  lage, who had traveled to India and written a few lovely songs based on his remembrances of the vocal and instrumental music that had fascinated him” (Dane Rudhyar, Foreword to *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 2d ed. [Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1928; New York: Samuel Weiser, 1979], viii).

¹⁷Stevenson, “Rudhyar, Dane,” 103–104.

¹⁸See Michael Hurd, “Scott, Cyril (Meir),” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* 17: 81–82. Hurd identifies the “rich harmonies, languorous melodic lines and the rhapsodic diffuseness of form” as the salient features of Scott’s compositional style.

¹⁹Croce, one of the leading Italian intellectuals of the early twentieth century, is known chiefly for his anti-fascist political views, his theories of idealism, and his critiques of historiography (see Benedetto Croce, *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression and of the Linguistic in General*, trans. Colin Lyas [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992] and David D. Roberts, *Benedetto Croce and the Uses of Historicism* [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987]). Scelsi may have had Croce partly in mind when he said that “there are hundreds of books on the problems and limitations of criticism, and on aesthetic theories that might be used to make choices or value judgments,” and when he later made

have had little importance to Scelsi's outlook until the spiritualist texts. Likewise Bergsonian thought figures heavily in Scelsi's spiritualist phase, even though his use of Bergsonian terminology had ironically become less pervasive than in the texts of the 1940s.

Scelsi also became acquainted with the tenets of surrealism early in his career. It is tempting to consider what Luciano Martinis calls the "bizarre and disquieting" nature of Scelsi's *Extraits de son journal*—four French-language fragments written in 1928 when the composer was twenty-three—as evidence of the influence of surrealism on Scelsi's artistic expression as far back as the 1920s.²⁰ Martinis doubts, however, that an Italian aristocrat would have been drawn at so young an age to a movement aligned with Marxist and anarchist politics. He attributes Scelsi's *Journal* instead to the influence of Cocteau, "the key figure in Scelsi's cultural formation," whom Scelsi reported having met as a teenager in Naples.²¹ Still, Martinis maintains that "one thread remained constant in Scelsi's life: "a certain surrealist mood," manifested chiefly in Scelsi's predilection for

reference to "the current and classic theories regarding works of art" (Scelsi, *Art and Knowledge*, 2 [298] and 6 [302]). ("Il y a des centaines de livres sur les problèmes de la critique et ses limites, ainsi que sur les théories esthétiques qui devraient déterminer le choix ou le jugement des valeurs." "des théories courantes et classiques par rapport aux œuvres d'art."). Scelsi owned a copy of the Dover English edition of Busoni's "Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music" (In *Three Classics in the Aesthetic of Music*, trans. Th. Baker [New York: Dover, 1962]). Written in 1905, Busoni's essay appeared first in German in 1907, followed by a second German edition in 1910 (Ferruccio Busoni, *Entwurf einer neuen Aesthetik der Tonkunst* [Trieste: Schmidl, 1907] and [Lipsia: Insel Verlag, 1910]). It first appeared in Italian in 1913 in the Italian musical journal *Harmonia*, where the essay was divided into two articles (Ferruccio Busoni, "Cenni di una nuova estetica musicale," *Harmonia* 1/3 [October 1913]: 1–15 and "Libertà alla musica [Cenni di una nuova estetica musicale]," *Harmonia* 1/4 [November 1913]). The essay also appeared in an Italian collection of Busoni's writings in 1941 (Ferruccio Busoni, *Scritti e pensieri sulla musica*, ed. Luigi Dallapiccola and Guido M. Gatti [Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1941]). For an account of Busoni's pervasive influence on early twentieth-century musical thought in Italy, see Giorgio Sanguinetti, "L' 'Armonia Modernissima.' La ricerca teorica nell'Italia del primo novecento," *Rivista italiana di musicologia* 30 (1995): 171–211.

²⁰Luciano Martinis, "Art de Musique," *i suoni, le onde: Rivista della Fondazione Isabella Scelsi* 3 (1992): 3. See Giacinto Scelsi, *Extraits de son journal* (Rome: Le parole gelate, 1983).

²¹Martinis, "Art de Musique," 4; Giacinto Scelsi, interview with Franck Mallet, "Il suono lontano: Conversazione con Giacinto Scelsi," trans. Marco Montaguti (French to Italian) in *Giacinto Scelsi: Viaggio al centro del suono*, ed. Pierre Albert Castanet and Nicola Cisternino (La Spezia, Italy: Luna Editore, 1993), 23. Scelsi recounts the excitement of Naples in the 1920s, as numerous artistic figures passed through on their way to the islands of Ischia and Capri. Along with Cocteau, Scelsi reports having met Virginia Woolf, Norman Douglas, and Mimi Franchetti.

improvisation and automatism as artistic method, as well as his taste for the occult.²² While these affinities are unmistakable in both the music and thought of Scelsi's spiritualist phase, surrealist ideals seem to have played little role in the conception of the earlier historicist texts.

Scelsi almost certainly knew something of Theosophy and Anthroposophy—two of the most profound influences on his spiritualist aesthetic—as early as the 1930s.²³ Yet most of the books on these subjects that Scelsi owned were published in the late 1940s and after, suggesting that only during this later phase did his interests in these areas grow keen.²⁴ It remains unclear whether Scelsi's readings in Theosophy and Anthroposophy drew him to Hinduism, Yoga, and Sufism as a consequence, or whether he developed these interests

²²Martinis, "Art de Musique," 7. The surrealists' interest in the occult has been well-documented. See Nadia Choucha, *Surrealism and the Occult: Shamanism, Magic, Alchemy, and the Birth of an Artistic Movement* (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1992). Scelsi maintained a lifelong friendship with Salvador Dalí.

²³Scelsi indicated that these were fundamental topics of his tutelage under Egon Koehler in the mid 1930s. See Chapter 1.

²⁴That a book appeared in the late 1940s or early 1950s does not establish conclusively that Scelsi acquired his copy within a short time of its publication, but the preponderance of Theosophical and Anthroposophical books in his collection date from this period and show signs of considerable use. Moreover, several of these books went out of print in subsequent years or appeared in later editions. A few of the more telling examples from the book inventory are: Alice A. Bailey, *L'iniziazione umana e solare*, trans. Elena Zanotti, Collezione "Lucis," no. 1 (Milan: Fratelli Bocca Editore, 1950); Helena P. Blavatsky, *La dottrina segreta: Sintesi della scienza, della religione e della filosofia: L'evoluzione del simbolismo universale*, trans. Roberto Hack, Problemi dello spirito, no. 51 (Milan: Fratelli Bocca Editori, 1947) (Scelsi also owned a 1951 edition of this book. The binding of both copies had begun to separate and was being held together by tape.); Mabel Collins, *La luce sul sentiero: Trattato scritto ad uso di coloro che ignorano la sapienza orientale e desiderano ricevere l'influenza*, trans. Elena Zanotti, Problemi dello spirito, no. 43 (Milan: Fratelli Bocca Editori, 1945); Jean Herbert, ed., *L'enseignement de Râmakrishna: Recueil des paroles de Shri Râmakrishna Paramahansa*, vol. 1: Les grands maitres spirituels dans l'inde contemporaine (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1943); Jiddu Krishnamurti, *La vita liberata*, trans. Lucia Tranquilli (Milan: Edizioni Alaya, 1937); Charles W. Leadbeater, *Le monde céleste: ou plan mental*, 3d ed. (Paris: La Famille théosophique, 1923); Artur E. Powell, *Il corpo mentale*, (Milan: Edizioni Alaya, 1952); Sri Ramakrishna, *Words of the Master: Selected Precepts of Ramakrishna*, comp. Swami Brahmananda, 11th ed. (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, Baghbazar, 1951); Rudolf Steiner, *L'initiation: ou Comment acquérir des connaissances sur les mondes supérieurs*, trans. Marie Steiner (Paris: La science spirituelle, 1948); Rudolf Steiner, *Théosophie: Introduction à la connaissance suprasensible du monde et de la destinée de l'homme*, trans. Elsa Prozor, Les documents anthroposophiques (Paris: Association de la science spirituelle, 1949); Rudolf Steiner, *The Theosophy of the Rosicrucians*, trans. M. Cotterell, D. S. Osmond (London: Rudolf Steiner Publishing Company, 1953); Carlo Soares, *Krishnamurti et l'unité humaine* (Paris: Le cercle du livre, 1950); J. I. Wedgwood, *La méditation à l'usage des commençants*, (Paris: La Famille Theosophique, 1946). See Appendix B.

concurrently. There is little doubt, however, that concepts from all of these sources intermingled freely in his thought, reinforcing one another. Consistent with the Theosophical outlook, Scelsi made little distinction among the various spiritualist movements and Eastern religions that intrigued him, focusing instead on what he perceived as their common ground.²⁵

In the spiritualist texts Scelsi retains two basic assumptions from the historicist phase: first, that a historically variable hierarchy of the musical elements largely determines compositional style, and second, that these musical elements fundamentally correspond to elements of human consciousness. The emphasis and tone of the spiritualist texts, however, differ markedly from those of the 1940s. Stimulated by his newfound enthusiasm for Western spiritualism and Eastern religions, Scelsi transformed the evolutionary, historicist orientation maintained in the essays of the 1940s to one based on sonic mysticism and the spiritual role of the artist.

In the present discussion I consider the two spiritualist texts jointly, educing three primary themes of Scelsi's new orientation. First, Scelsi considers sound itself an eternal, unbounded, creative force, the most powerful manifestation of a transcendental reality and a multidimensional source of cosmic energy. Second, he stresses the spiritual elitism of the artist as someone capable of extracting and projecting an instant of this sonic metaphysical reality. Through an intuitive process akin to meditation, the artist merges his inward experience with this external force, achieving higher states of consciousness. The artwork obtains as a materially projected glimpse of this higher state, and should be judged not according to the contexts surrounding the artist and artwork but according to the strength and veracity of the artist's ability to project. Third, Scelsi rejects musical formalism of all kinds and urges a new kind of composition based on exploration of the intrinsic qualities of sound itself: resonance and harmonics. Though never mentioned specifically in the

²⁵Theosophy teaches that such distinctions are not tenable, encouraging integration of the wisdom of all the world's great spiritual traditions.

spiritualist texts, the search for a new kind of composition led him to increasingly concentrated sounds and eventually to music focused on a single note.

The Nature of Cosmic Sound

At the foundation of Scelsi's spiritualist aesthetic lies the conception of sound as a latent metaphysical force, the cause of all motion and existence. Scelsi employs the Hindu term *anāhata*, which he translates as "limitless sound," when he speaks of "the doctrine that places sound at the source of all revelation that is revealed internally. In the *Vedas* this sound is called *Anahad*, which means *limitless sound*."²⁶ Appearing in the Sanskrit lexicon as "unstruck," *anāhata* denotes sound in its timeless, quiescent, inactivated state, perceptible only by Yoga practitioners and by musicians.²⁷ Scelsi's translation of the term and erroneous attribution of its origin to the *Vedas* borrow plainly from Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan, who recognizes a parallel in the Sufi tradition. Like Scelsi, Khan associates the concept with mystical, internal revelation.

This sound [*Surmad*, abstract sound] is the source of all revelation for the Masters, to whom it is revealed internally. . . .

²⁶Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 3 (288). ("C'est la base de la doctrine, car selon celle-ci le son est à la source de toute révélation révélée de l'intérieur. Dans les Védas ce son est appelé 'Anahad' qui signifie: son illimité.") The origin of the term *anāhata* is commonly ascribed to the *Vedic* corpus, but in fact does not appear there explicitly. Perhaps the earliest explicit reference to *anāhata* comes not from the *Vedas* but from the *Tantrāloka* of the Kashmiri sage Abhinavagupta (fl. 1000), who described it as the one form of cosmic sound in which all other sonic manifestations lie. "As it is ceaseless, it is called *Anāhata*, i.e. unstruck, natural, spontaneous, uncaused." See Guy L. Beck, *Sonic Theology: Hinduism and Sacred Sound*, Studies in Comparative Religion, ed. Frederick M. Denny (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 168.

²⁷Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899; reprint, 1964), 29 and 162.

Abstract Sound is called *Anahad* in the *Vedas*; its meaning is “limitless sound.” The Sufis call the same sound *Surmad*, a name which suggests the idea of spiritual ecstasy.²⁸

In the Hindu tradition, cosmic sound is also referred to as *Nāda-Brahman*, a mystical appellation translated variously as “causal sound,” “supreme sound,” “sacred sound,” and “the primal sound of being.”²⁹ Scelsi does not use the phrase *Nāda-Brahman* explicitly, but the concept is implicit in his use of the term *anāhata* and in many of his basic assumptions about the properties of cosmic sound.

Though Scelsi possessed at least basic knowledge of the Hindu scriptures, it seems likely that he developed his understanding of cosmic sound partly from the influence of Theosophy. Blavatsky incorporated the term *Nāda* into her Theosophical writings, translating it as “the Soundless Sound,” “the Soundless Voice,” “the Voice of the Silence,” and “Voice in the Spiritual Sound.”³⁰ In a book that Scelsi owned, the Theosophist composer Cyril Scott identifies sound as the vehicle for creation and attributes knowledge of this to the ancient Indians: “In the *Vedas*, said to be the oldest scriptures in the world, it is stated that the whole cosmos was brought into manifestation through the agency of sound.”³¹ The theme is common in Theosophical writings, particularly in works

²⁸Lombardi-Giordano and Inayat Khan, *La signification du son*, 44–45. Khan describes the Sufi concept in terms almost identical to those commonly used to describe *anāhata*: “The Sufis call Abstract Sound *Saute Surmad*, which fills all space. As this sound contains extremely subtle vibrations, the physical eyes and ears have great difficulty in perceiving and seeing the form and color of these etheric vibrations, which are reflected on the exterior plane” (p. 44).

²⁹Lewis Rowell, *Music and Musical Thought in Early India*, Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology, ed. Philip V. Bohlman and Bruno Nettl (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 43–47; Suresh Chandra Dey, *The Quest for Music Divine* (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1990), 2–8; S. Shankar Raju Naidu, “Supreme Sound: The Ultimate Reality,” *Indian Philosophical Annual* 10 (1974–75): 59; Beck, *Sonic Theology*, 81–92; Joachim-Ernst Berendt, *Nada Brahma: The World Is Sound: Music and the Landscape of Consciousness*, trans. Helmut Bredigkeit (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1987), 18.

³⁰Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence: Being Chosen Fragments from the “Book of the Golden Precepts”* (London: Theosophical Publishing Company, 1889; Wheaton, Illinois: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1973), 18 and 79.

³¹Cyril Scott, *Music: Its Secret Influence throughout the Ages*, 6th ed. (London: Rider and Company, 1951), 24. This book’s date of publication, precisely at the beginning of Scelsi’s spiritualist phase, may

dealing with the supernatural powers of music. Their authors frequently invoke the “music of the spheres” and the Judeo-Christian notion that God created the universe through the Word in support of the Hindu concept.

The importance of sound to Hindu cosmology and cosmogony extends back to the earliest Hindu scriptures, the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads*.³² In them, *Nāda* simply means “sound,” but generally carries with it the connotation that sound constitutes the metaphysical essence of the universe.³³ The compound term *Nāda-Brahman* unites metaphysical sound with the *Upaniṣadic* designation for the Divine (the metaphysical Absolute), indicating the intrinsically sonic nature of God and of reality itself. Furthermore, since *Brahman* is “identified with the origin of the universe,”³⁴ the coupling of *Nāda* with *Brahman* throughout the Hindu literature confirms that sound functions primarily as a type of creative energy. Sound is understood as a causal force transmitted through *akasa*, commonly translated as “ether” and described by Lewis Rowell as “a subtle and ethereal fluid that pervades the entire universe as the special vehicle for life, energy, and sound.”³⁵ Guy Beck has indicated that much of the exegetic discourse on *Nāda-Brahman*

be of considerable significance. Scelsi's copy was well-used, with numerous passages highlighted. See Appendix B.

³²Four *Vedas* comprise the basic corpus, which dates back at least as far as 1500 B.C.: the *Rig Veda* (the *Veda* of hymns and creation mythology), the *Yajur Veda* (the *Veda* of sacrificial formulae), the *Sāma Veda* (the *Veda* of musical chants), and the *Atharva Veda* (the *Veda* of magical spells and incantations). The *Upaniṣads*, which number over two hundred, are mystical commentaries on the *Vedas*. The fifteen principal *Upaniṣads* probably date from the sixth or seventh century B.C. See Dominic Goodall, ed., *Hindu Scriptures* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), x.

³³As Jaidev Singh points out, “In its essence, [*Nāda*] means the stir or impulse of the Divine Will which manifests itself to the ear at a gross level as sound” (Jaidev Singh, “*Nada* in Indian Tradition,” in *Psychology of Music: Selected Papers Sangeet Natak Akademi, Delhi Seminar, 1975*, ed. R. C. Mehta [Bombay: Indian Musicological Society, 1980], 37).

³⁴Goodall, Introduction to *Hindu Scriptures*, xvii. Goodall identifies the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, one of the early prose *Upaniṣads*, as the primary source for this identification. Shankar Raju Naidu mentions also the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, which “regards Sound as a womb or the Source of Creation” (Naidu, “Supreme Sound,” 66).

³⁵Rowell, *Music in Early India*, 48.

“describe[s] the universe as an emanation from cosmic sound.”³⁶ Such descriptions appear in the earliest scriptures, as in the *Rig Veda* wherein sound itself declares:

All the deities have their abode in me: I am supporting them all; it is I who am moving the whole creation; it is I who am imparting impulse to everything that is going on; all knowledge, all actions, are being inspired by me.³⁷

Similarly in the *Atharva Veda*:

It is I who created all the spheres of creation and all the bodies of living beings and it is I who am permeating the bodies of their vital force and the whole world like the air everywhere in a special and complete manner. And it is I who living beyond the sun etc. and also beyond this earth, i.e., existing from before the creation of these, . . . am now manifesting myself in a complete manner after giving shape to creation on such a large scale.³⁸

The association of cosmic sound with creation persists in more recent Hindu literature as well. The nineteenth-century Indian mystic Soamiji Maharaj wrote: “Sound has created three worlds and the entire universe. From sound has emanated the endless illusion. . . . Realise that sound is the beginning and end of all.”³⁹

Scelsi expressed these ideas most clearly in *Sound and Music*: “Yes, one might consider sound the cosmic force that is the basis of everything. There is a beautiful definition that says: ‘Sound is the first movement of the unmoveable,’ and this is the beginning of creation.”⁴⁰ The definition was a favorite of Scelsi’s to which he returned in other instances;⁴¹ its source remains unidentified. The wording, which may in fact be

³⁶Beck, *Sonic Theology*, 7.

³⁷The *Vagambhrinīya Sūkta* of the *Rig Veda* 10: 125; quoted in Naidu, “Supreme Sound,” 67.

³⁸*Atharva Veda* 4: 30; quoted in Naidu, “Supreme Sound,” 67.

³⁹Soamiji Maharaj, *Sar Bachan*, 9: 2–3; quoted in Naidu, “Supreme Sound,” 59.

⁴⁰Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 2 (287). (“Il y a une belle définition qui dit: ‘Le Son est le premier mouvement de l’Immobile,’ et ceci est le début de la création.”)

⁴¹See Giacinto Scelsi, “La forza cosmica del suono,” *i suoni, le onde: Rivista della Fondazione Isabella Scelsi* 4 (1993): 31.

Scelsi's own, recalls the famous "Unmoved Mover" of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, but its specific connection of sound with motion and creation reflects more compellingly the Hindu tradition. Jaidev Singh has summarized a Hindu cosmogonical view that associates motion with sound, and sound with the very act of creation.

After the great cosmic night or *pralaya* (dissolution of a world-system), the desire of the Divine for a vision again of the lost world is associated with a sense of *void*. The vision of void is accompanied by an indistinct sound designated *para nada* or Supreme Sound which fills the entire *akasa*. This is the first *spanda* or motion. The subjective Divine Will takes an objective form as *spanda* or motion. And wherever there is motion, there is sound.⁴²

The interrelatedness of sound, motion, and creation is evident also in the figure of *Śiva*, one of the primary gods of Hinduism, who is "often described as passive and immobile until his *Śakti* [divine power] in the form of *Nāda-Śakti* [sonic power] begins the movement towards creation."⁴³

Hindu theories of cosmic sound include eternity and atemporality among its properties. The concept of a universe without a beginning (*Anādi*) inheres in the *mantras* (meditative sounds and recitation formulae), which are considered uncreated and eternal. Krishnamurti, in his early Theosophical text *At the Feet of the Master*, associates sonic infinity with *akasa*, which he defines as "endless space and sound."⁴⁴ Guy Beck reasons similarly: "Since the ether [*akasa*] is all-pervading and timeless, and sound fundamentally resides in it, it logically follows that [cosmic] sound is also universal and nontemporal."⁴⁵

⁴²Singh, "Nada in Indian Tradition," 37.

⁴³Guy L. Beck, personal correspondence with the author, 8 October 1999. See also Beck, *Sonic Theology*, 160–163.

⁴⁴Jiddu Krishnamurti, *At the Feet of the Master* (Chicago: The Theosophical Press, 1922), 34. The true authorship of this book has been questioned. Krishnamurti, hailed early in life as a Theosophical messiah by Annie Besant and other prominent figures, reputedly wrote the book in 1910 while still a child. Numerous commentators have suggested, however, that its actual author was Charles Leadbeater, the Theosophical "visionary" who was later discredited as a charlatan and pedophile. Krishnamurti renounced Theosophy and his role as "world teacher" in the 1920s.

⁴⁵Beck, *Sonic Theology*, 88.

For Scelsi, the critical issue of temporality distinguishes worldly sound—such as music—from cosmic sound: “Music evolves in time; [cosmic] sound is atemporal.”⁴⁶ This differentiation between temporal music and atemporal sound emerges as a fundamental tenet of Scelsi’s developing aesthetic. Atemporal sound indicates the eternal, cosmic sound existing in the ether; in a typically Scelsian incongruity he refers to this eternal sound temporally in *Art and Knowledge*, using the Bergsonian term *durée*. In *Sound and Music*, however, Scelsi employs the Hindu term *anāhata*, “limitless sound.” His use of this term presupposes a fundamental dichotomy between cosmic sound that is latent and infinite (*anāhata*; unstruck), and worldly sounds that are actual and finite (*āhata*; struck). Elsewhere Scelsi distinguishes between cosmic sound in a state of “rest” and “activated” sound, which presumably includes music. “Though cosmic in nature, [sound] can be activated and utilized, so to speak, by humans.”⁴⁷

To elucidate the causal and creative relationship between cosmic and activated sound, Scelsi cites Goethe’s theory of colors.⁴⁸

According to [Goethe], all things exist first in their manifestation, that is, things appear when the “terrain” is conducive. . . . Everything seems to exist in a latent state. Everything in the cosmos seems to preexist in all possible forms, and the manifestations seem to be produced—whether materially or mentally and no matter to what degree—when the “terrain” is favorable.⁴⁹

⁴⁶Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 4 (289). (“La musique évolue dans les temps, le son est intemporel.”)

⁴⁷Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 2–3 (287). (“Tout en étant de nature cosmique, il peut être activé et utilisé disons par les hommes.”)

⁴⁸Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe’s Color Theory*, ed. Rupprecht Mattaei, trans. Herb Aach (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1971); see also Ronald Gray, *Goethe: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 116; and Frederick Burwick, *The Damnation of Newton: Goethe’s Color Theory and Romantic Perception* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1986).

⁴⁹Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 2 (286). (“Selon lui tout chose préexiste à sa manifestation, c’est-à-dire: n’importe quoi apparaît quand le ‘terrain’ est correspondant. . . . Tout existerait en puissance latente; tout préexisterait dans le cosme sous toutes les formes possibles, et leurs manifestations se produiraient—à toutes les échelles—de la matière à l’esprit lorsque le ‘terrain’ est favorable.”)

The theory to which Scelsi refers comes from Goethe's 1810 work *Zur Farbenlehre*, conceived as an extension of his botanical studies. Though based on the Platonic notion of an *ideal form* existent for all natural phenomena, Goethe's theory goes beyond Plato's in postulating that this philosophical *idea* might actually be found in concrete form. Using complementary colors to support his assertions, Goethe also maintained the existence of "'polar' forces everywhere in the universe, opposed yet complementary powers which were in conflict and which could nevertheless be brought to a synthesis, to a unity in which their opposition was subsumed."⁵⁰ The notion inheres in Neo-Platonic thought, and appears also in the writings of occult figures such as Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) and Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), both of whom interested Scelsi.

Scelsi's use of the word *terrain* with regard to Goethe's theory may have derived from the work of Steiner, who began his career as a Goethe scholar. Like Scelsi, Steiner draws upon Goethe's color theory, employing the term *ground* rather than *terrain* in his disquisition on the manifestation of sound.

Picture the tone here on earth, even the tone that reveals itself as sound: on earth it lives in the air. The scientific concept, however, that the vibration of the air is the tone is a naive concept indeed. . . . You would not want to comprehend man . . . by the ground he stands on. Likewise, tone needs air for support. Just as man stands on the firm ground, so—in a somewhat more complicated way—tone has its ground, its resistance, in the air. Air has no more significance for tone than the ground for the person who stands on it. Tone rushes toward air, and the air makes it possible for the tone to "stand." Tone itself, however, is something spiritual.⁵¹

Though Scelsi's knowledge of Goethe's theory may have come by way of Steiner, the very mention of it tells us much about Scelsi's conception of sound and its metaphysical

⁵⁰Gray, *Goethe: A Critical Introduction*, 117–118. See also Ferdinand Weinhandl, *Die Metaphysik Goethes* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1965), 32; Herbert Witzmann, *Goethes universalästhetischer Impuls: Die Vereinigung der platonischen und aristotelischen Geistesströmung* (Dornach: Gideon Spicker Verlag, 1987), 43–44; and Burwick, *Goethe's Color Theory*.

⁵¹Rudolf Steiner, "December 2, 1922, Dornach [Lecture]," *The Inner Nature of Music and the Experience of Tone*, ed. Alice Wulsin, trans. Maria St. Goar (Hudson, New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1983), 40. Emphasis in original. This lecture does not appear in the Italian or German editions, but may have been available in Switzerland.

properties. Sound, like color, manifests as vibration, and all vibrations are contained within the unified cosmic vibration: in Hindu metaphysical terminology, *Nāda-Brahman*. For Scelsi this belief in the ultimate unity of all sound was not metaphorical, just as the unity of all color was not metaphorical for Goethe.

Goethe's color theory helps Scelsi to explain how "activation" makes inaudible cosmic sound become audible through the agency of vibration. Focusing on musical sound, Scelsi explains the process in the following way: Given that a certain frequency of vibrations produces a particular pitch, vibration is *not* the product of that pitch but the phenomenon that allows the pitch to manifest. Vibration, in other words, is the "terrain" upon which the pitch "stands," the medium through which it exists. Basic acoustic theory informs us that vibration *causes* the phenomenon of sound, but Scelsi never explicitly designates vibration a cause; he asserts only that it is not a product. Interestingly, this seems to contradict diametrically the classical Hindu view, in which vibration is understood as the product of sound—*not* as its cause—as sound itself is eternal and causal. Because Hindu cosmic sound, *Nāda-Brahman*, gives rise to all physical manifestations, it must precede—and cause—vibration accessible to human perception. Through this process, inaudible cosmic sound (*anāhata*) becomes audible worldly sound (*āhata*). Jaidev Singh has summarized the opposing conceptions of Western science and Hindu metaphysics:

[Western] physics of sound says that sound is the effect of vibration, but the Indian metaphysics of Nada says that Nada is the cause of vibration, not its effect. There can be Nada without vibration. Gross sound cannot be heard without a receiver like the ear and without a perceptible medium. But Nada in its essential nature is perceptible to the Divine Mind without any medium or receiver. It is the primordial causal stress, the creative energy of all manifestation.⁵²

Thus an apparent conflict arises between Scelsi's assertion that a particular sound does *not* produce the vibration and the Hindu contention that it does. The conflict, however, is largely semantic. Scelsi uses the term *vibration* to mean something quite distinct from its

⁵²Singh, "*Nada* in Indian Tradition," 38.

usual denotation within the field of acoustics. Scelsi's vibration, clearly if not explicitly posited as the *cause* of pitch, denotes the sonic component of *akasa*, the manifesting vehicle through which latent sound becomes audible sound. Furthermore, it must be underscored that Scelsi speaks of vibration as the agent for producing a particular *pitch*, i.e., an actual physical sound rather than sound in the cosmic sense. The latter Scelsi calls *anāhata*: cosmic sound existing eternally and boundlessly within *akasa* and containing all sound potential.

What Scelsi came to regard by 1959 as a single "note" he understood as an infinitesimal particle of an atemporal, infinite, sonic force, and therefore as a limitless world of sound. He conceived the timbral, dynamic, microtonal explorations of single notes in his mature works as "activations": temporal, bounded projections of an atemporal, unbounded sonic reality.⁵³ Because the very nature of the artwork had taken on spiritual and metaphysical dimensions, Scelsi's conception of the artist and the creative process also transformed radically during this period. More than a mere craftsman or artisan, the artist emerged as someone blessed with rare mystical powers, able to descry a supernal reality and to transmit those experiences through art.

⁵³Of course the notion of sound (and, potentially, music) existing eternally, lying dormant in the universe until activated, had appeared also in the aesthetic traditions of Western music. In a discussion of Romantic aesthetics, particularly those of E. T. A. Hoffmann, Rey Longyear observes that "the concept of music slumbering in the universe itself is a sort of Romantic reawakening of archaic ideas about the harmony of the spheres" (Rey M. Longyear, *Nineteenth-Century Romanticism in Music*, The Prentice-Hall History of Music Series, ed. H. Wiley Hitchcock [Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973], 111). Busoni had written of music as "part of the vibrating universe" and advocated composition through activation of this etheric music: "For, behold, the myriad strains that once shall sound have existed since the beginning, ready, afloat in the aether, and together with them other myriads that shall never be heard. . . . And myriad strains are there since the beginning, still waiting for manifestation." (Busoni, "Sketch of a New Esthetic," 82 and 100.)

The Spiritual Role of the Artist

In *Art and Knowledge*, Scelsi pronounces his view that artists are distinguished by the extraordinary ability to catch momentary glimpses of the cosmic realm and then activate them materially. He refers to this capacity as the *creative faculty* and defines it as “the faculty of arresting motion, of crystallizing an instant of *durée*, to extract it oneself—and of projecting this instant by an effort of the entire being in a verbal, sonorous, or plastic medium.”⁵⁴ A work of art, therefore, exists as the “visible crystallization and the material incarnation of a process of direct and unique knowledge of creative cosmic forces.”⁵⁵ Employing the Bergsonian term *durée* erroneously to indicate an atemporal concept akin to *akasa* and *anāhata*, Scelsi likens the creative faculty to mystical experience as a method of gaining direct and unencumbered knowledge of a transcendental reality. “It is this faculty that joins the artist, as with the mystic although in a different way, to the domain that we call *supernatural*.”⁵⁶ For Scriabin, too, the artistic act had become essentially a mystical experience, “outside of ordinary modes of perception.”⁵⁷ In other words, both Scriabin

⁵⁴Scelsi, *Art and Knowledge*, 2 (299). (“C’est la faculté d’arrêter le mouvement, de cristalliser un instant de la durée, de l’arracher de soi—et de projeter cet instant par un effort de tout l’être, dans une matière verbale, sonore ou plastique.”) While Scelsi admits his preference for this definition, he also offers an alternative method of artistic creation more characteristic of the Oriental artist. In this method the artist creates “by transmitting motion and *durée*, not by an effort of one’s entire being, but, on the contrary, by the most complete submission to *durée*, to motion, in which one participates, penetrates, and is filled” (*Art and Knowledge*, 2–3 [299]). Though he does not pursue this second definition, at the end of *Art and Knowledge* he returns to the theme of submissiveness, which he considers a type of spiritual asceticism. “It constitutes a search and a type of asceticism—if one wants—the purpose of which must not be conquest, but surrender and submissiveness. Surrender and submissiveness are then transformed into victory, but humility and impersonal renunciation must come first. . . . Thus for the artist it is a matter of searching. It is in the higher realms of vibrations and of knowledge that he must exercise his faculties of perception and identification, and work through humility at the service of the same faculties that conditioned him, for the most marvelous task that one can be given is to be alive to accomplish this on earth” (*Art and Knowledge*, 14 [313]).

⁵⁵Scelsi, *Art and Knowledge*, 13 (311). (“la cristallisation visible et l’incarnation matérielle d’un processus de connaissance directe et unique des forces créatrices cosmiques.”)

⁵⁶Scelsi, *Art and Knowledge*, 12 (310). (“Finalement c’est cette faculté qui relie l’artiste, ainsi que le mystique même, de si différente façon, au domaine que nous appelons *supernaturel*.”)

⁵⁷Boris de Schloezer, *Scriabin: Artist and Mystic*, trans. Nicolas Slonimsky (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 110.

and Scelsi attributed artistic creation to the perception of a supernal realm through extrasensory and non-intellectual means.

Despite the obvious importance he places on the mystical nature of artistic inspiration, Scelsi believed that the artist's ability to *project* glimpses of a limitless sonic reality—not just perceive them—is the true measure of the creative faculty. He stresses that the difference between the artist and the non-artist “resides less in the quality or variety of the states of consciousness and of images than in the artist's *desire and capacity to project out of himself* and to crystallize, as I said, in a sonorous, verbal, or plastic medium.”⁵⁸ Through a process of reincarnation the artist has been conditioned by external forces to act as receptor and transmitter, a medium through which these divine forces may guide the spiritual evolution of humankind.

The entire organism of the artist is made, so to speak, to receive and to collect—and desires to receive and to collect. Everything is open to him and he receives and collects everything that interests him and is within reach. But if he is conditioned for creating, he has been conditioned by complex processes and by physical and spiritual nature since birth, in life, and, I believe, probably also through the course of a long, prior evolution.

The forces use this conditioned organism for their own goals that are beyond us, but we must serve these goals for we are, in short, conditioned by them.⁵⁹

Furthermore, the artist's conditioned need to achieve these goals produces a desire, a psychic craving to manifest these cosmic forces.

Scelsi's belief that the artist functions as a passive receptor or conduit recalls earlier ideas in the work of Baudelaire and Bergson,⁶⁰ but it seems to echo most strongly the

⁵⁸Scelsi, *Art and Knowledge*, 12 (310–311). Emphasis added. (“Ce qui différencie l'artiste créateur . . . de l'homme qui ne l'est pas, réside moins dans la qualité ou la variété des états de conscience et des images que dans le désir et la capacité de les projeter hors de lui-même et de les cristalliser, comme je l'ai dit, dans une matière sonore, verbale ou plastique.”)

⁵⁹Scelsi, *Art and Knowledge*, 13 (311–312). (“Pour ainsi dire, l'organisme entier de l'artiste est fait pour recevoir et capter—et désire recevoir et capter. Tout en lui tend à cela et il reçoit et capte tout ce qui est à sa portée et qui l'intéresse; mais, s'il est conditionné pour le faire, c'est qu'il a été conditionné par des processus complexes, de nature matérielle et spirituelle, dès sa naissance dans cette vie, et, je crois moi, probablement aussi au cours d'une longue évolution antérieure.

Les forces emploient cet organisme ainsi conditionné pour des buts propres qui nous dépassent, mais que nous devons servir car, en somme, nous sommes conditionnés par elles.”)

surrealist technique of automatism. Scelsi's exposure to the work of the surrealists probably extends back to the movement's heyday during the years 1924–1940. He seems not to have adopted anything resembling the detached technique of automatism in his own compositional method, however, until the 1950s. In *Art and Knowledge* Scelsi commends the surrealists for throwing off the shackles of the intellect in the automated creation of their art.

With surrealism, creation ultimately offers man conquest of the infinite, crossing into the powers of non-reason, the irrational, automated writing. Through psychic automatism it is therefore completely protected from any intervention of the intellect, [and this] becomes the goal for which surrealist poetry and all surrealist artwork must strive, as Breton affirmed in his first manifesto.⁶¹

Scelsi likely had in mind Breton's famous lexicographic definition of surrealism:

SURREALISM, *n.* Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.⁶²

⁶⁰Scelsi specifically cites Baudelaire, whose emphasis on imagination and the dream world inspired the surrealists and was in turn derived partly from the occultist Swedenborg, whom Scelsi read. For Baudelaire, imagination constituted "a divine and mysterious faculty; for it is in dreams that man communicates with the shadowy world that surrounds him" (Charles Baudelaire, *Le paradis artificiels, Oeuvres complètes*, 2: 497; see also Lois Boe Hyslop, *Charles Baudelaire Revisited*, Twayne's World Authors Series: French Literature, ed. David O'Connell [New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992], 40). Scelsi's interest in Baudelaire extends at least as far back as his 1933 song cycle *L'Amour e le crâne*, a setting of Baudelaire's poetry. Bergson, too, emphasized non-intellectual cognition in the creation of art. He describes the artistic act as a receptive, essentially hypnotic state: "We shall perceive that the object of art is to put to sleep the active or rather resistant powers of our personality, and thus to bring us into a state of perfect responsiveness, in which we realize the idea that is suggested to us and sympathize with the feeling that is expressed. In the process of art we shall find, in a weakened form, a refined and in some measure spiritualized version of the process commonly used to induce the state of hypnosis" (Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 14).

⁶¹Scelsi, *Art and Knowledge*, 5 (302–303). ("Avec le surréalisme, la création tend, en dernière analyse, à la conquête de l'infini de la part de l'homme, à travers les pouvoirs de la non-raison, l'irrationnel, l'écriture automatique; par son automatisme psychique elle est donc complètement protégée d'une intervention quelconque de l'intellect, devient le but auquel doit tendre la poésie surréaliste et toute œuvre d'art, selon ce que d'ailleurs affirmait Breton dans son premier manifeste.")

⁶²André Breton, "First Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)," in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), 26.

According to Nadia Choucha, surrealist automatism “borrowed both from the psychological technique of free association and from spiritualist mediums, [and] was considered to be the best way of releasing creativity and inspiration.”⁶³ J. H. Matthews has observed that automatic writing “seemed to invest those practicing it with *special powers*. . . . Engaging in automatic writing convinced the surrealists of automatism’s capacity to bring them into contact with *a power that spoke through them*.”⁶⁴

The notion of the artist as a mere transmitter of information from external sources, embodied in Scelsi’s rejection of the labels *composer* and *creator*, recurs throughout Breton’s writings. He describes himself and other practitioners of the automatic technique as those “who have made no effort whatsoever to filter, who in our works have made ourselves into simple receptacles of so many echoes, modest *recording instruments* . . . [who] render with integrity the ‘talent’ which has been lent to us.”⁶⁵ Despite the objective, scientific, and mechanical connotations of Breton’s language (“filter,” “receptacle,” “recording instrument”), he has approached quite closely the ideas and metaphors of the spiritualists. Breton contends that the surrealist artist functions as a “receptacle” and, by extension, a conveyer of distant, *external* “echoes.” Like Scelsi’s artist-projectionist, the surrealist’s activity is twofold: first receiving and then rendering images imparted to him from some mysterious source. Elsewhere in the *First Manifesto*, Breton writes of the “magical surrealist art,” and urges the artist, “put yourself in as passive, or *receptive*, a state of mind as you can.”⁶⁶

⁶³Choucha, *Surrealism and the Occult*, 52.

⁶⁴J. H. Matthews, *The Surrealist Mind* (Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania: Susquehanna University Press, 1991), 51. Emphasis added.

⁶⁵Breton, “First Manifesto of Surrealism (1924),” 27–28. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁶Breton, “First Manifesto of Surrealism (1924),” 29. Emphasis added.

In other passages, however, Breton intimates a self-contradiction, maintaining that the automatic technique allows the artist to gain access to *internal* forces, psychological in nature.

Under the pretense of civilization and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind everything that is rightly or wrongly termed to be superstition, or fancy; forbidden is any kind of search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practices. . . . If the depths of our mind *contain within it strange forces* capable of augmenting those on the surface, or of waging a victorious battle against them, there is every reason to seize them.⁶⁷

The language seems in line with that of spiritualism, but for the crucial distinction that the "strange forces" at man's disposal hide deep within his own psyche, an idea for which Breton expresses his indebtedness to Freud and the interpretation of dreams. Breton, in fact, openly rejected spiritualism, a point on which Scelsi sharply diverged from the surrealist aesthetic. Breton wrote in his *First Manifesto* of "certain ridiculous tendencies of spiritualism," and elsewhere confessed his "inaptitude for religious meditation."⁶⁸ Even though the surrealists derived the technique of automatism in part from spiritualist mediums who "transcribed" messages from the spirit world, the surrealists believed "that these messages and drawings came from the unconscious mind of the medium as a result of dissociation of the personality."⁶⁹ That is, the messages emanate from an internal rather than external source. Scelsi did acknowledge that his own receptive state hinged fundamentally on the dissociation of personality, but, being grounded in the Theosophical and Yogic traditions, he believed that such dissociation made him more receptive to *external, extra-sensory* stimuli. The creative faculty of the artist involved only the ability and desire to *project* this moment of contact with the astral plane.

⁶⁷Breton, "First Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)," 10. Emphasis added.

⁶⁸Breton, "First Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)," 6; André Breton, "Preface for a Reprint of the Manifesto (1929)," in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), xi.

⁶⁹Choucha, *Surrealism and the Occult*, 53.

Although Scelsi applauds the surrealists for their rejection of intellectualism, he directly criticizes them for taking only a single tentative step in the direction of psychic artistic expression. He identifies their error in restricting themselves to just one superconscious state, that of dreams. Mary Ann Caws identifies as a basic premise of surrealist thought the mediation between two modes of consciousness, two realities: the world of empirical knowledge and the world of dreams and imagination. Breton expressed his hope that the surrealist movement would one day “be considered as having tried nothing better than to cast a conduction wire between the far too distant worlds of waking and sleep.”⁷⁰ The idea had already appeared in the famous neological proclamation of Breton’s *First Manifesto of Surrealism*: “I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak.”⁷¹

Scelsi recognized this fundamental, dichotomous tenet of surrealism. But on the basis of his Theosophical and Anthroposophical understandings of the multiple planes of psychic existence,⁷² Scelsi faulted Breton and the rest for exploring the dream state *only*, merely the first plane beyond that of everyday, waking consciousness.

⁷⁰ André Breton, *Communicating Vessels*, trans. Mary Ann Caws and Geoffrey T. Harris, A French Modernist Library, ed. Mary Ann Caws, Richard Howard, and Patricia Terry (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 86.

⁷¹ André Breton, “First Manifesto of Surrealism (1924),” 14. Coinage of the term *surrealism* is actually attributable to Guillaume Apollinaire, who used it in the program note to the premiere of *Parade* in May of 1917 (see Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000], 244.) Nonetheless, Breton certainly was the first to use the term in relation to an artistic movement. The notion of “passing back and forth between two modes” forms the central thesis of Breton’s 1932 book *Communicating Vessels* (*Les Vases communicants*). Its title derives from the scientific principle whereby a gas or liquid, passing freely between two vessels joined by a tube, rises to the same level in each. Mary Ann Caws, introduction to André Breton, *Communicating Vessels*, ix.

⁷² Blavatsky’s seven planes of Cosmic reality are as follows: (1) Divine plane, (2) Monadic plane, (3) Spiritual plane, (4) Intuitional plane, (5) Mental (Devachanic) plane, (6) Astral plane, and (7) Physical plane. For an excellent summary, see Maria Carlson, “No Religion Higher than Truth”: A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875–1922 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 120–121. Steiner adopted the principle of man’s sevenfold nature, acknowledging the similarity of his conception to that of the Theosophists. See Rudolf Steiner, “March 8, 1923, Stuttgart,” *The Inner Nature of Music*, 69; Rudolf Steiner, “Stuttgart, 8. März 1923 [Lecture],” in *Das Wesen des Musikalischen und der*

No, I do not believe that the surrealists reached their goal. In poetry and literature, despite certain works by Breton, Desnos, Soupault, L  ris and others, they did not get beyond the superficial layers of dreams and the unconscious. They overlooked a more profound psychological technique for reaching states of conscience in a different realm of space and time. In painting, they overlooked an additional graphic dimension that can depict motion and dreams. They remained in the traditional dimension, anachronistic and without meaning.⁷³

Thus, he recognized the surrealist project as a step in the right direction, toward higher, alternative planes of consciousness, but lamented that it did not go farther. Moreover, Scelsi objected to Breton's assumption of an "emphatically antireligious position."⁷⁴ In his surrealist *telos* of mediated worlds, Breton explicitly disallows traditional forms of religion as well as, curiously, mystical experience. His emphasis remains decidedly on humanistic and political action. For Scelsi, mystical practice offered the ideal means for achieving free passage between everyday existence and the higher planes, an apolitical message strongly promoted in Yoga and Theosophy.

The goals of circumventing the intellect and making oneself a passive receptacle in order to achieve higher states of consciousness figure prominently in the Yogic and Theosophical traditions. Pata  jali outlines the "discipline of making *  vara* [a central Hindu deity] the motive of all one's actions. It is as though one is to become an 'empty channel' through which *  vara* . . . acts."⁷⁵ Puligandla has made the following summary of the importance of intuition and non-intellectual knowledge in the Yogic tradition:

Tonerlebnis im Menschen, Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe, ed. Helmut Wartburg, no. 283 (Dornach: Verlag der Rudolf Steiner-Nachlassverwaltung, 1969), 125–126.

⁷³Scelsi, *Art and Knowledge*, 6 (303). ("Non, je ne crois pas que les surr  alistes aient atteint leur but. Dans la po  sie et la litt  rature, malgr   certains r  cits de Breton, Desnos, Soupault, L  ris et d'autres, ils n'ont pas d  pass   les couches superficielles du r  ve et de l'inconscient. Il leur manquait une technique psychologique plus approfondie pour atteindre des   tats de conscience dans un ordre de temps-espace diff  rent. Dans la peinture, il leur faisait d  faut une dimension graphique autre, pour pouvoir repr  senter le mouvement et le r  ve. Celui-ci restait, dans la dimension traditionnelle, anachronique et sans signification.")

⁷⁴Mary Ann Caws, *Andr   Breton*, Twayne's World Authors, ed. David O'Connell, no. 117 (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 40.

⁷⁵Harold Coward and David Goa, *Mantra: Hearing the Divine in India* (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania: Anima Books, 1991), 41.

The knowledge obtained through *prajñā* (intuition) is based on neither testimony nor inference but on direct cognition. This cognition is different from direct cognition through sense organs and is free from the error and illusion which bedevil the latter. The Yogi's knowledge is thus through and through intuitive and nonconceptual. One may say that this kind of knowledge is nonrational. It should be noted that "nonrational" is not the same as "irrational," whereas the former means something that is outside the province of reason and intellect. This simply means that the intuitive knowledge of the Yogi is radically different from conceptual, mediated, intellectual knowledge. It does not mean that Yogic knowledge is necessarily opposed to intellect and reason, but simply that it transcends reason and intellect.⁷⁶

Sri Aurobindo describes the process by which the poet loses his sense of technique, his connection to the intellect, replaced by inspiration, spontaneity, and revelation.

In the heat of creation the intellectual sense of [technique] becomes a subordinate action or even a mere undertone in [the poet's] mind, and in his best moments he is permitted, in a way, to forget it altogether. For then the perfection of his sound-movement and style come entirely as the spontaneous form of his soul: that utters itself in an inspired rhythm and an innate, a revealed word, even as the universal Soul created the harmonies of the universe out of the power of the word secret and eternal within him.⁷⁷

Drawing upon the Hindu tradition by way of Theosophy, composer Cyril Scott came to view artistic creation similarly. In the book owned by Scelsi, Scott describes musical composition as the direct result of inspiration received from higher planes and transmitted through the unwitting musician.

Composers and executants alike are not always able to discriminate among the innumerable influences to which their subtler vehicles are open. The composer in particular finds himself upon an uncharted sea whilst awaiting inspiration. What he *receives and transmits* may uplift and inspire, or it may do the reverse. His responsibility is great, yet for the most part he is unaware of the fact.⁷⁸

The notion that artistic knowledge is inherently non-rational figures prominently also in non-spiritualist thought of Benedetto Croce. Beginning with the publication of his *Estetica come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale* in 1902 and his founding of the journal

⁷⁶Puligandla, *Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy*, 142.

⁷⁷Sri Aurobindo, "The Essence of Poetry," in *The Essential Writings of Sri Aurobindo*, ed. Peter Heehs (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 345.

⁷⁸Scott, *Music: Its Secret Influence*, 89–90.

La critica in 1903, Croce was among the most widely read and influential philosophers of the early twentieth century. His public involvement with the Italian anti-fascist movement prolonged his renown until well after his death in 1952. Croce posited a fundamental dichotomy between intellectual and non-intellectual forms of knowledge, which he called *logical* and *intuitive*.⁷⁹ Intuitive knowledge he describes as fundamentally artistic and spiritual (though not in any religious or theistic sense); it is associated with the capacity to create representations. Logical knowledge, by contrast, he describes as essentially scientific and intellectual; it is concerned with universals, with the production of concepts. According to Croce, intuition inheres in the artistic act, for only this form of knowledge aspires to expression.

Intuitive activity intuits only insofar as it expresses. . . . And whether it be pictorial or verbal or musical, or however else one describes or labels it in any of these guises, expression cannot lack intuition, from which it is strictly speaking indivisible.⁸⁰

Like Scelsi, Croce considers the need to *express*—Scelsi’s “crystallization” or “projection”—a *sine qua non* of the creative faculty itself. In other words, the artistic act necessarily involves making intuited knowledge *external*, regardless of the artistic medium. However, whereas Scelsi distinguishes the artist from the non-artist according to the capacity to express, Croce makes this determination according to the capacity to intuit (artistic) knowledge. He precludes the non-artist even from having the ability to acquire the type of non-intellectual knowledge that is expressed in art. The non-artist remains incapable of artistic expression because he lacks intuition.

One often hears people claim to have in their heads many important thoughts but not to be able to express them. But the truth is that if they *truly* had them, they would have coined them in so many ringing words, and thereby expressed them. . . . Equally, it is believed that all of us ordinary mortals intuit and form mental pictures of landscapes,

⁷⁹Benedetto Croce, *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression and of the Linguistic in General*, trans. Colin Lyas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1.

⁸⁰Croce, *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression*, 9. Croce’s understanding of art as a type of intuitive knowledge may relate to Scelsi’s title *Art and Knowledge*.

figures, scenes as painters do, and bodies as do sculptors, except that painters and sculptors know how to paint and sculpt those mental pictures, whereas we carry them in our souls unexpressed. . . . Nothing could be further from the truth.⁸¹

For Croce the artist stands apart from others principally because of his special ability to intuit beauty. Once intuited, its expression is inevitable, given the indivisibility of intuitive knowledge and expression. In Scelsi's spiritualist orientation, which owes much to the traditions of Hinduism, Yoga, and Theosophy, intuitive knowledge can be attained by anyone who undertakes the necessary steps: chiefly the practices of meditation. The artist stands apart only by his ability and consequential need to materialize and project this spiritual knowledge.

Because the artist's volition plays little or no role in Scelsi's spiritualist conception of artistic creation, he maintains that the artwork itself must be assessed according to the artist's creative faculty, his ability to project faithfully a message received from external sources. In the most conspicuous departure from the historicist orientation of the first phase, Scelsi advocates aesthetic judgment based on the artist's spiritual achievement, rather than the artist's or the artwork's historical or geographical position.

Consider the artist independently of the artwork, so that it can be understood without regard to which historical period or to which moment of aesthetic evolution [it belongs]. [The artwork] can be created without regard to nationalistic or foreign influence, or the influence of a group or of individuals. It is necessary to consider the artist in and of himself, with his own faculties, and [to consider] the artwork more as the result of the creative faculties of this artist.⁸²

⁸¹Croce, *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression*, 9–10. Emphasis in original. It must be underscored that Croce's illustration assumes the equation of intuitive knowledge and artistic creation, which he states unequivocally in Chapter 2 (p. 12).

⁸²Scelsi, *Art and Knowledge*, 3 (300). ("Donc, considérer l'artiste indépendamment de l'œuvre qui peut se placer à n'importe quelle période de l'histoire, à n'importe quel moment de l'évolution esthétique, qui peut être créée sous n'importe quelle influence nationale ou étrangère, de groupe ou d'individus. Il faut considérer l'artiste en soi, avec ses propres facultés et l'œuvre en tant que le résultat des facultés créatrices de cet artiste.")

The artist's importance lies in his function—the transmission of a message in the form of an artwork—and in his ability to perform it. While the artwork is subject to contexts that inevitably shape it, the message, the “content,” transcends such contexts.

The work of art is valid only in relationship to this extraordinary experience, this effort by the artist to crystallize motion and *durée* and project it materially, even somewhat independently of “content” as it connects to a moment in history, or to the historical and geographical position of the artist within human society.⁸³

The foremost criterion for judgment of the artwork, therefore, should be the puissance of the artist's creative faculty, i.e., the artist's ability to transmit the message. If the artist's ability is genuine, then the transmission will be accurate and the verity of the message cannot be doubted, for it emanates from cosmic forces outside of the artist himself.

I would say that it is not overly necessary to try to judge the work of art—one would only succeed in deception and [wind up] looking ridiculous at the next turn in history—but to examine the artistic, creative faculty of the artist. If it is powerful and true, the work will have it also.⁸⁴

Scelsi's language and viewpoint here demonstrate his debt to Busoni. In “Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music,” Busoni advocates the evaluation of a work of art according to the creative spirit of its maker, insisting that the implications of a particular style, structure, and era do not truly reflect the work's value.

*The spirit of an art-work, the measure of emotion, of humanity, that is in it—these remain unchanged in value through changing years; the form which these three assumed, the manner of their expression, and the flavor of the epoch which gave them birth, are transient, and age rapidly.*⁸⁵

⁸³Scelsi, *Art and Knowledge*, 4 (301). (“L'œuvre d'art est valable seulement en rapport à cette extraordinaire expérience d'effort de cristallisation du mouvement, de la durée, par l'artiste et à sa projection dans la matière, indépendamment même, en partie, du «contenu» du mouvement perçu à tel moment de l'histoire, ou de la position historique et géographique de l'artiste au sein de la société humaine.”)

⁸⁴Scelsi, *Art and Knowledge*, 2 (299). (“Je dirais qu'il ne faut pas trop essayer de juger l'œuvre d'art—on n'arriverait qu'à se tromper et à se rendre ridicule au prochain tournant de l'histoire—mais examiner la faculté artistique créatrice de l'artiste et, si celle-ci est puissante et vraie, l'œuvre le sera aussi.”)

⁸⁵Busoni, “Sketch of a New Esthetic,” 75. Emphasis (of the entire passage) in original.

Scelsi's abandonment of a historicist orientation may also show the influence of Croce's strongly anti-historicist position. In Scelsi's early essays, the historicist aesthetic is based primarily on the evolution of aesthetic universals as exemplified in the works of certain major composers: Wagner, Debussy, Scriabin, and Stravinsky in particular. But under the possible influence of Croce, whose philosophy fundamentally rejects the notion of historicism as aesthetic principle, Scelsi veers away from historicism in his later texts, pointing out the equivocality and ultimate futility of such a view. Instead, he advocates evaluation of the creative faculty of the individual artist, whose historical and cultural contexts have little significance.

In particular, Scelsi's ideas concerning the flawed methodologies of art criticism and historiography seem to have some basis in Croce's attacks on the tenability of systematic classification of art. Scelsi and Croce agree on the inutility and fundamental error of art historiography in its positivistic development and application of aesthetic rules. Croce criticized art historians for focusing on categories and genres, for "claiming to provide the history, not of actual and particular literary and artistic works, but of those empty phantasies which are their genres."⁸⁶ Unlike science, art does not "exhibit concepts" or "universals" such as historical categories.⁸⁷ Because they are fundamentally flawed, these categories cannot be used as criteria by which to judge individual works of art, which are not subject to historiographical assessment.

Scelsi admits the existence of aesthetic universals, but concludes that their multiplicity and often discordant nature render them essentially meaningless.

Yes, one can uncover certain rules of balance in all worthwhile works, certain aesthetic laws—only these rules of balance, these laws of aesthetics, are very numerous and sometimes seem, or are, contradictory. The fact is that in reality it is very difficult to

⁸⁶Croce, *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression*, 42.

⁸⁷Croce, *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression*, 37.

establish schemes, if they are numerous, by which to decide if a work adheres to any of these schemes and therefore qualifies as a work of art.⁸⁸

As a result, Scelsi advocates evaluation of the artist's creative faculty, whereas Croce advocates evaluation of the artwork itself and the individual character of its expression. But Scelsi and Croce may not differ much in their viewpoints after all. Though Scelsi emphasized the evaluation of the artist's creative faculty, in his own life he always tried to divert attention away from himself, to suppress his already modest celebrity, and to downplay his role in the creative act. A paradox thus arises: Scelsi exhorts us to evaluate the creative faculty of the artist, but dismisses the figure of the artist as unimportant. To assess the artist's creative faculty, therefore, one must look closely at the artwork, rather than the artist's personality, historical position, influences, or working method. When Scelsi suggests not focusing on the artwork, he apparently means precisely what Croce advocates: not judging the artwork according to its conformity to or divergence from some historical or aesthetic universal.

Because Scelsi considered the creative faculty an extraordinary ability, he came to view the artist as a person of exceptional spiritual achievement. A similar notion appears in the Bergson's philosophy, wherein he equates the *élan vital* with divine purpose. Although the concept of *élan vital* does not pertain to art and artists, he nonetheless attributes the discovery of this divine purpose to a non-intellectual, mystical experience reserved for exceptional persons. He associates this knowledge with the collective evolution of the human race, as Goudge has summarized:

The discovery of this [divine] purpose [impetus for the evolutionary process] and of the reality of God cannot be made by the intellect. It can be made only by the sort of intuition that is the mystical experience. For the vital impetus, Bergson contended, is communicated 'in its entirety' to exceptional persons. These are the mystics who

⁸⁸Scelsi, *Art and Knowledge*, I (298). ("Oui, on peut retrouver dans toutes les œuvres valables certaines règles d'équilibre, certaines lois esthétiques; seulement ces règles d'équilibre, ces lois d'esthétique sont très nombreuses et parfois semblent, ou sont, contradictoires; ce qui fait qu'en réalité, il est fort difficile d'établir des schémas, si nombreux soient-ils, par lesquels, ou suivant lesquels, décider si une œuvre appartient à l'un ou l'autre de ces schémas et peut donc se qualifier d'œuvre d'art.")

achieve contact and partial coincidence with the creative effort that 'is of God, if it is not God Himself.' This experience does not terminate in passivity, but leads to intense activity. The mystics participate in God's love for mankind. They are therefore impelled to advance the divine purpose by helping to complete the development of man. They want to make of humanity what it would straightaway have become if humanity had been able to reach its final form without the aid of man himself. The spirit of the mystics must become universal in order to ensure man's future evolution.⁸⁹

Bergson's view, however, grants no special status to the artist or the work of art.

In this regard, Scelsi's view of the artist as an initiate, one of the "elect," probably resulted from his immersion in various esoteric belief systems and the occult. The nineteenth-century occultist and Rosicrucian Joselin Péladan expressed the veneration for the artist and the creative process that was typical of such traditions: "Artist, thou art priest: Art is the great mystery; . . . Artist, thou art magician: Art is the great miracle and proves our immortality."⁹⁰ Elevation of the artist to the level of priesthood was a common theme in Theosophy as well, with roots in the Romantic glorification of the artist.⁹¹ Indeed, Rey Longyear has described a view of the Romantic composer's role that is remarkably similar to Scelsi's own:

The root of all music draws its strength from the "primal sound" (*Urklang*), which is transformed into real sound by a secret process. It lies with the artist whether he is able to awaken it and give it form. Therefore the musician must feel at one with the "All," he must experience the awe of the beyond through the Voice of Nature and must himself become the voice of the Universe.⁹²

In Theosophical writings, one finds the artistic act emphasized as a method for attaining spiritual knowledge. Jinarājādāsa, president of the Theosophical Society from 1946 to 1953, writes that "mankind is being taught to attain to THAT, which exists out of time and

⁸⁹T. A. Goudge, "Bergson, Henri," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: The Macmillan Company and The Free Press, 1967), Vol. 1: 293.

⁹⁰Quoted in Robert Pincus-Witten, *Occult Symbolism in France: Joselin Péladan and the Salon de la Rose+Croix* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1976), 105.

⁹¹See Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 49.

⁹²Longyear, *Nineteenth-Century Romanticism*, 112.

space, by using time and space. Our highest tool of cognition, so far, is creative art.”⁹³ Elsewhere, he ascribes this ability to a special faculty—using musical ability as an example—invested by deities called the Lords of Karma during the embryonic development of a spiritually advanced human being.

If the next stage in [reincarnate] evolution for him is by developing some particular gift—as, for instance, that of music—then they [the Lords of Karma] select for him the appropriate factors; the musician will need an abnormally sensitive nervous system and a special development of the cells of the ear.⁹⁴

Of course, Theosophical ideas concerning innate faculties reserved for extraordinary human beings were themselves rooted in the Indian notion of purposive reincarnation and in the Hindu caste system. In the Hindu tradition, the term *adhikāra* indicates “the right and the duty to *perform something* [such as studying a religious text], . . . determined by status, wealth, birth.”⁹⁵ And in the *tantric* tradition, “the term *tantra* is popularly supposed to refer to the magical acquisition of supernatural powers and pleasures by means of transgressive rites.”⁹⁶

Scelsi seems to have been conflicted as to whether the creative faculty exists as an innate gift or a cultivable skill. In the Hindu and Theosophical traditions, mystical consummation and the faculties that accompany it can be awakened through spiritual exercise, but only by those who are spiritually predisposed for such achievement. The Yogic tradition remains somewhat more egalitarian in its teachings, although the neophyte is cautioned that the path is long and arduous. As Scelsi’s aesthetic outlook and musical style underwent a simultaneous transformation in the 1950s, he seems to have interpreted these events as the

⁹³C. Jinarājadāsa, *First Principles of Theosophy*, 10th ed (Adyar, India: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1956), 318.

⁹⁴Jinarājadāsa, *First Principles of Theosophy*, 113.

⁹⁵Goodall, Introduction to *Hindu Scriptures*, xxviii. Emphasis added.

⁹⁶Goodall, Introduction to *Hindu Scriptures*, xxxii. See also Chapters 5 and 6 of Beck’s *Sonic Theology* for a thorough discussion of the importance of sound and music in these traditions.

effects of a more fundamental transformation of the self, an awakening of hitherto dormant knowledge brought about by meditative practice and increased attention to the transcendent potential of sound. He believed that the attainment of such knowledge is open to anyone willing to undertake the rigorous course necessary, but that the ability to project the knowledge externally and materially remains the exclusive province of the consecrated artist.

The primary method that Scelsi offers others for achieving higher knowledge and for gaining access to the metaphysical realm of *anāhata* or *durée*, is that of Yoga, specifically, *Nāda-Yoga* (the Yoga of sound). Dey defines *Nāda-Yoga* as “the science and philosophy of Causal Sound and the Yogic path to the realisation of *Nāda-Brahman*.”⁹⁷ This branch of Yoga focuses on sound and increased auditory sensitivity, not only as by-products of Yogic meditative practice, but as meditative method. Sound and extraordinary auditory capacity have been important components of Yoga from its earliest stages. In *Sound and Music* Scelsi mentions Patañjali, whose *Yoga-Sūtra* (second century B.C.) offered the first systematic exposition of Yogic theory and practice. According to Scelsi, the method for attaining spiritual cognition derives from

Yoga and includes certain very advanced breathing exercises and knowledge of the effect of sounds on our physical organs and our nerve centers. There are Hindu and Tibetan texts that one would have to read. I would just recommend to you those of Patañjali, which are classics, but I assure you that a few simple daily exercises are more beneficial than a dozen books.⁹⁸

In the *Yoga-Sūtra*, Patañjali lists increased sensory ability, including “higher hearing,” among the immediate benefits of meditative practice.

[Book III, verse 36:] As the result of this experience [of opposites] and meditation [upon it], the higher hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell are developed, producing intuitional knowledge.

⁹⁷Dey, *Quest for Music Divine*, 75.

⁹⁸Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 3–4 (288). (“Elle fait partie du ‘Laya et Krya Yoga’ et comporte des exercices particuliers de respirations très poussées et la connaissance de l’effet des sons sur nos organes physiques et nos centres subtils. Il y a des textes hindous et tibétains qu’il faudrait lire; je me borne à vous conseiller ceux de Patanjali qui sont classiques, mais je vous assure que quelques petits exercices journaliers sont plus profitables dans ce ses que douze livres.”)

[Book III, verse 41:] By the means of one-pointed meditation upon the relationship between the akasha and sound [*Nāda*], an organ for spiritual hearing will be developed.⁹⁹

Later commentators Vyāsa and Vācaspati both explain the notion of higher hearing as “the hearing of divine sounds,”¹⁰⁰ which Scelsi also recognizes. The *Nādabindu-Upaniṣad*, one of the canonic *Yoga-Upaniṣads* and an extensive treatment of the Yoga of sound, prescribes a meditative method in which the Yogi listens to a series of increasingly subtle internal sounds, what Scelsi calls “personal sounds,” focused in the right ear.¹⁰¹ The fifteenth-century *Siva-Samhita*, one of three central treatises of *Hatha-Yoga*, describes a similar practice along with its outcome.¹⁰²

Let [the Yogi] close the ears with his thumbs. . . . From practicing this gradually, the Yogi begins to hear mystic sounds. The first sound is like the hum of the honey-intoxicated bee, next that of a flute, then of a *vina* [a South-Indian chordophone]; after this, . . . he hears the sounds of ringing bells; then sounds like the roar of thunder. When he fixes his full attention on this sound, being free from fear, he gets absorption. . . . When the mind of the Yogi is exceedingly engaged in this sound, he forgets all external things and is absorbed in this sound.¹⁰³

⁹⁹Patañjali, *The Light of the Soul: Its Science and Effect*, paraphrase and commentary by Alice A. Bailey (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1927), 322 and 333. For a discussion of the central importance of music and sound in Yogic practice, see “Indian Devotional Music as ‘Yoga’” in Dey, *The Quest for Music Divine*, 73–106.

¹⁰⁰Beck, *Sonic Theology*, 88. Two important theoretical works of the Yoga school were Vyāsa’s *Yoga-bhāṣya* (a seventh-century commentary on the *Yoga-sūtra*) and Vācaspati Misra’s *Tattva-vaiśārādī* (a tenth-century commentary on Vyāsa’s *Yoga-bhāṣya*). See Puligandla, *Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy*, 134.

¹⁰¹*The Nadabindu-Upanishad*, verses 31–41, in T. R. Srinivasa Ayyangar, trans., *The Yoga Upanishads* (Madras: Adyar, 1938).

¹⁰²*Hatha-Yoga* (physical Yoga) involves the practical application of the philosophical and theoretical principles of the Yoga school. Emphasizing physical control, breathing exercises, and gymnastic poses, it is the most well-known branch of Yoga today.

¹⁰³Rai Bahadur Srisa Chandra Vasu, trans., *The Siva-Samhita* (Allahabad: Panini Office, 1914), 57–58.

As in many such accounts in the Yogic literature, this description includes allusions to worldly sounds both natural and musical. Jaidev Singh has summarized the various stages of *Nāda-Yoga*, in which the practitioner develops the ability to perceive *anāhata* directly.

When *prana* becomes steady, *anahata nada*, i.e., unstruck sound or sound without any impact, is audible. . . . One should continue listening to it attentively with the right ear. At first, . . . the Yogi hears gross *anahata* sound. This is the first phase or *arambhavastha*.

The second phase is known as *ghata*. . . . [In it] one hears subtle sound. When the Yogi goes on listening to it, his mind is absorbed in it, and he loses interest in any external phenomenon. He experiences great delight in listening to this sound. His mind is, therefore, deeply concentrated on it.

The third phase is known as *paricaya*. Here the *prana* enters the void or *akasa*. . . . [The Yogi] hears a sound like that of a *mardala* drum and his mind is deeply absorbed in it. . . .

The fourth phase is known as *Nispatti*. . . . [The Yogi] now hears sweet *anahata nada* like that of a flute or *vina*. The mind is now completely absorbed.¹⁰⁴

Finally, Blavatsky's "ladder of mystic sounds" in Fragment 1 of *The Voice of the Silence* seems clearly derived from this Yogic practice:

Before thou set'st thy foot upon the ladder's upper rung, the ladder of mystic sounds, thou hast to hear the voice of thy *inner* God in seven manners.

The first is like the nightingale's sweet voice chanting a song of parting to its mate.

The second comes as the sound of a silver cymbal of the Dhyanis, awakening the twinkling stars.

The next is as the plaint melodious [*sic*] of the ocean-sprite imprisoned in its shell.

And this is followed by the chant of *Vina*.

The fifth like sound of bamboo-flute shrills in thine ear.

It changes next into a trumpet-blast.

The last vibrates like the dull rumbling of a thunder-cloud.

The seventh swallows all the other sounds. They die, and then are heard no more.¹⁰⁵

Rudolf Steiner also seems to have borrowed from the Eastern contemplative traditions in suggesting that man can awaken higher faculties, including aural capacity, through meditation. "Man is capable," he wrote, "of awakening higher faculties of the soul that ordinarily slumber . . . through meditation, concentration, and so forth."¹⁰⁶ Because

¹⁰⁴Singh, "*Nada* in Indian Tradition," 41.

¹⁰⁵Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence*, 24–25. Emphasis in original. Blavatsky indicates in a footnote that "thy *inner* God" refers to "the higher SELF."

¹⁰⁶Steiner, "December 3, 1906, Cologne [Lecture]," in *The Inner Nature of Music*, 3.

Steiner considered music a direct portrayal of the “essence of the cosmos” rather than the mere representation offered by other art forms, he held that the act of composition necessarily involves contact with a higher spiritual realm. Using essentially meditative techniques, the musician gains access to “worlds that are imperceptible to the senses.”¹⁰⁷ Elsewhere, Steiner betrays an Eastern influence in describing this discipline as the “great-stillness.”¹⁰⁸ Even more provocative for Scelsi, Steiner asserts that the “student on the path of spiritual training” develops awareness of higher realms, of a spiritual world of which humans are ordinarily unaware, and which consists primarily of *sound*. “This new world is not one of light and colors but announces itself first as a *world of tone*. In this state of consciousness, man develops the faculty to hear spiritually and to perceive tone combinations and varieties of tone inaudible to the physical ear.”¹⁰⁹

Scelsi prescribes a rigorous and disciplined method, a path consisting of “experiences where the conquests are laboriously acquired,” that he associates with Yoga. Scelsi’s method allows human beings

to attain certain superior levels of consciousness by which it is possible for them to obtain glimpses of divine worlds, in which sounds and colors are not at all excluded, but on the contrary manifest with a force of unimaginable beauty.¹¹⁰

Specifically, he outlines a practice associated with the “Yoga of sound,” but makes a crucial distinction from the orthodox Yogic teaching. Possibly under Steiner’s influence, Scelsi

¹⁰⁷Steiner, “December 3, 1906, Cologne [Lecture],” 3.

¹⁰⁸Steiner, “November 12, 1906, Berlin [Lecture],” in *The Inner Nature of Music*, 15.

¹⁰⁹Steiner, “December 3, 1906, Cologne [Lecture],” 4. Emphasis added. *Devachan* is the term Steiner borrowed from Theosophy to indicate the highest of the spiritual planes, and he affirmed in another lecture that “resounding tone is the particular characteristic of Devachan” (Steiner, “November 12, 1906, Berlin [Lecture],” 16). The 12 November lecture appeared in 1945 in *Das Goetheanum* (Numbers 28/29). See editorial notes in Steiner, *Das Wesen des Musikalischen*, Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe, ed. Helmut Wartburg, no. 283 (Dornach: Verlag der Rudolf Steiner-Nachlassverwaltung, 1969), 149.

¹¹⁰Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 11 (296). (“Il est loisible aux hommes d’atteindre certains niveaux supérieurs de conscience par lesquels il leur est possible d’avoir des aperçus des mondes divins, dans lesquels sons et couleurs ne sont nullement exclus, mais au contraire manifestés avec une force de beauté inimaginable.”)

presents this practice as a means of accessing those sounds that lie *beyond* normal sensory experience.

In the Yoga of sound [*Nāda-Yoga*], the adepts succeed in hearing [first] their personal sound and *then* Devic sounds. Personal sound induces perception of the supernatural world at the same time that it produces an interior balance, which is precisely at the core of Yoga.¹¹¹

According to Scelsi's understanding of the Yogic tradition, personal sound exists *internally*, and through proper spiritual exercise it can provide the gateway to the cosmic sounds that exist *externally*, sounds of the divine. In the Yogic literature, sounds in the early stages of the process do emanate from within, but the ultimate goal of such meditation on sound remains monistic consummation in the form of absorption, ultimate transcendence of the distinction between personal and divine sounds such that the two merge. Scelsi insists on the dichotomy of the personal and the divine, on the distinction between internal and external sound. The impetus for Scelsi's position may have come partly from Steiner, but also may stem from Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan. As quoted by Lombardi-Giordano, Khan also maintains a distinction between internal and external sound.

The sound which exists externally, in space, becomes manifest also internally. Ecstasy, enlightenment, complete calm, courage, joy, and revelation are the effects of this sound. This sound is the only thing which raises those who open up to it, through the practice of sacred duties known by the mystics.¹¹²

The wording reflects a statement of Scelsi quite closely: "According to the Yoga of sound, ecstasy and enlightenment are the effects of 'correct' sound."¹¹³

¹¹¹Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 3 (287–288). Emphasis added. ("Dans le Yoga du son, les adeptes parviennent à entendre leur son personnel et ensuite les sons Déviques. Le son personnel amène à la perception du monde super-normal, en même temps qu'il produit un équilibre intérieur qui, justement, est à la base de ce Yoga.")

¹¹²Lombardi-Giordano and Inayat Khan, *La signification du son*, 13. ("Le son qui existe extérieurement dans l'espace, devient alors manifeste aussi à l'intérieur. L'extase, l'illumination, le repos complète, le courage, la joie et la révélation son les effets de ce son. . . . Ce son est le seul qui élève ceux qui s'ouvrent à lui, par la pratique des devoirs sacrés, connus par les Mystiques.")

¹¹³Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 3 (288). ("Selon le Yoga du son, l'extase et l'illumination sont les effets du son 'juste.'")

The notion of “correct” sound occupies a place of importance in Scelsi’s spiritualist aesthetic, but he neglects to explain precisely what constitutes it. Apparently, he considered correct sound the true internal or personal sound of which he spoke, the sonic gateway to the divine. And being personal—i.e., individual—in nature, correct sound “is concerned with the human voice or with a [solo] instrument.”¹¹⁴ Thus Scelsi assigned particular significance to what he called *monody*, understood to indicate composition for a single voice or instrument. Speaking in 1953/54, Scelsi offered spiritual justification for his concentration on solo works during the period: they resulted from accessing his own personal sound, presumably through Yogic and other meditative practices. Of course, from another perspective one may explain his emphasis on solo works during the mid-1950s as a simplification of musical means conducive to the formation of a new compositional language and style. If we accept Scelsi’s justification, however, and with the benefit of hindsight we extend his justification beyond the period in which he was speaking and consider his return to ensemble works and eventual outpouring of orchestral music in the 1960s, we may speculate that for Scelsi these orchestral compositions were the result of his progression beyond the realm of personal sound and into the eternal sound-world of the divine.

The Creation of a New Music

Underlying much of the discourse in *Sound and Music* is Scelsi’s prophesy of a new kind of music, inspired by other-worldly powers and created by newly transformed artists. It is a common notion in Scelsi’s spiritualist and aesthetic forebears. Theosophy and Anthroposophy both taught that mankind in the twentieth century stood on the brink of a

¹¹⁴Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 3 (288). (“Tout cela explique naturellement l’importance du son ‘juste,’ qu’il s’agisse de la voix humaine ou d’un instrument.”)

new spiritual age. Because artistic creation was appreciated as a fundamentally spiritual activity with the artist upheld as a human of higher spiritual ability, the new age was to bring with it a transcendent new art and music. Many composers of the early twentieth century entertained similar thoughts rooted in the abandonment of tonality. For Scriabin, the notion of a new age became a guiding principle; he sought to bring about mankind's spiritual awakening through the powers of art in his *Mysterium*.¹¹⁵ Busoni had written of music's "unawakened capacities,"¹¹⁶ observing that "all signs presage a revolution, and a next step toward that 'eternal harmony.'" ¹¹⁷ He refers to common-practice tonality as "nothing more than a set of 'signs'; an ingenious device to grasp somewhat of the eternal harmony."¹¹⁸ And later he concludes: "For our whole system of tone, key, and tonality, taken in its entirety, is only a part of a fraction of one diffracted ray from that Sun, 'Music,' in the empyrean of the 'eternal harmony.'" ¹¹⁹

Though Scelsi does not reveal the precise nature of this new supernal music in the spiritualist texts—at the time it remained "a music we cannot even imagine"¹²⁰—he does indicate that its conception will transcend structuralism, and that its impact will be entirely psychic rather than intellectual. "Yes, there is truly another, transcendental music that defies

¹¹⁵Scriabin conceived *Mysterium*, his final work, as a Wagnerian music-drama encompassing all of his philosophical and metaphysical ideals, steeped in Theosophy and Russian Symbolism. He intended it to be performed in India over seven consecutive days, believing that such an event could bring about a universal spiritual transformation. Once he realized in 1913 the logistical and philosophical impossibility of the undertaking, he focused his efforts on the *Preparatory Act*, which would make humanity ready for spiritual communion but would not itself be the agent. He completed only a draft of the libretto for the *Preparatory Act* and fifty-five pages of compositional sketches. See Simon Morrison, "Scriabin and the Impossible," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51/2 (Summer 1998): 284–285.

¹¹⁶Busoni, "Sketch of a New Esthetic," 76.

¹¹⁷Busoni, "Sketch of a New Esthetic," 93.

¹¹⁸Busoni, "Sketch of a New Esthetic," 89.

¹¹⁹Busoni, "Sketch of a New Esthetic," 91.

¹²⁰Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 10 (295). ("une musique que nous ne pouvons même pas concevoir.")

all structural analysis, just as it defies all human understanding.”¹²¹ At the same time, he does not impugn the music of the past for its intellectualism and emphasis on logical construction, conceding that such expression was appropriate to earlier stages in the spiritual evolution of mankind.

Every civilization, every era including this one, has its own ground to cultivate, and for Europe since the Middle Ages, a mind of stern logic has had to assert and manifest itself in art—in its entirety as well as in its parts. Thus fugues, imitation, the interplay of contrapuntal voices, formed a part of a *modus operandi* that was intended for them, rather like expression in the romantic era, the depiction of psychological human emotions.¹²²

He then affirms that through the medium of the human artist the Devas (Hindu deities) engender new kinds of artistic expression, which may require completely new technical approaches for their realization.

[The individual] is the chosen channel, which is to receive inspiration or transmit a new type of music. As this channel is rather imperfect for the complete reception of a Devic message, it is incapable of bearing them fully, partly because this would be contrary to all of its conditioning, and also because it would almost completely lack the technical means to manifest [these messages].¹²³

In place of structuralism, Scelsi advocates an approach to composition in which the musician becomes like Patañjali's “empty channel,” free from the restrictions imposed by technique.

¹²¹Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 10 (295). (“Oui, il est vrai qu'il y a aussi une autre musique de caractère transcendantal qui échappe à toute analyse d'organisation; comme elle échappe à toute compréhension humaine.”)

¹²²Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 6-7 (291). (“Chaque civilisation, chaque époque de celle-ci, a un terrain propre à cultiver et, pour l'Europe après le Moyen-Age c'était un esprit de sévère logique qui devait s'imposer et se manifester dans l'art—et cela dans l'ensemble comme dans ses parties. Ainsi les fugues, les imitations, les mouvements de voix contrapuntiques, faisaient partie d'un *modus operandi* qui leur était réservé, comme d'ailleurs à l'époque romantique l'expression, le portrait des sentiments psychologiques humains.”)

¹²³Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 9 (294). (“Celui-ci est le canal choisi, pour autant qu'il peut être inspiré, ou transmettre une nouvelle forme de musique. Ce canal étant fort imparfait pour la réception totale d'un message Dévique, il serait incapable de le supporter entièrement: d'une part, parce que cela serait contraire à l'ensemble de ses notions acquises, et d'autre part, parce qu'il manquerait presque totalement des moyens techniques pour le manifester.”)

For if the artist were restricted by technique, he would be like any other conscientious craftsman, but he would be unaware of these particular faculties that allow him to come into contact with schemes and forces that transcend technique and that only he can manifest.¹²⁴

If the artist cannot transcend structuralism and technique, “the work that results might be anything, except art. It could be a piece of craftsmanship, something academic, a work of deception, of exploitation, of plagiarism—any of these—but it is not art.”¹²⁵ Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan similarly observes that “music loses its freedom being subject to technical laws, but the mystics, carefree in their attitude toward the world, *improvise* the compositions of their sacred music, thus *released from the limitations of technique*.”¹²⁶

Scelsi proposes a music based on the cosmic energy and spiritual power of sound itself. Thus exploited for its spiritual potential, it constitutes what Scelsi calls “correct sound.” He clarifies that “this has nothing to do with the correct ‘note’ with regard to any European tonal or atonal system, nor any African or Asian system, but with the very essence of sound. Sound is energy.”¹²⁷ For centuries Western musicians had ignored the intrinsic energy of sound, focusing instead on the organizational system that contained it. The result is emptiness, “music rather devoid of the sonorous energy.”¹²⁸ Any isolated exceptions

¹²⁴Scelsi, *Art and Knowledge*, 14 (312). (“Un but qui transcende le travail technique et son habileté, car s’il se bornait à cela, il serait comparable à tout autre ouvrier consciencieux, mais il ignorerait ces facultés particulières qui lui permettent justement d’entrer en contact avec des plans, des forces, qui le transcendent et que lui seul peut manifester.”)

¹²⁵Scelsi, *Art and Knowledge*, 4–5 (302). (“l’œuvre qui en résulte peut être tout, sauf de l’art. Cela peut être de l’artisanat, de l’académie, de la tromperie, de l’exploitation, de la copie—ou tout ce que vous voudrez—mais pas de l’art.”)

¹²⁶Lombardi-Giordano, and Inayat Khan, *La signification du son*, 39. Emphasis added. (“La Musique perd sa liberté étant sujette à la loi technique, mais les Mystiques, dans leurs musique sacrée, insouciants de la considération du monde, improvisent leurs compositions, libérées de la limitation technique.”) Scelsi’s employment of improvisation as his primary compositional method of the 1950s and beyond is addressed in Chapter 5.

¹²⁷Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 3 (287). (“Il ne s’agit pas du tout de la ‘note’ juste par rapport à un quelconque système tonal ou atonal européen, africain ou asiatique, mais bien de l’essence même du son. Le son est énergie.”)

¹²⁸Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 6 (291). (“la musique assez vide de cette énergie sonore”)

must be ascribed to fleeting moments of Devic inspiration, of which the vessels were probably not even aware. This view leads Scelsi to an astounding conclusion that reveals just how sharply he had turned away from history.

You ask me then if the music of Bach, Beethoven, or Mozart is empty. I would answer that among the enormous quantity of music they wrote, one finds effectively a large number of empty works. And when they are not [empty], it is because in a certain state of consciousness the composers received elements of perception of a superior order, which have, in part if not totally, compensated for the system of [compositional] organization.¹²⁹

Scelsi's assessment of structuralism in the common-practice music of the Western tradition depends heavily on the aesthetic treatises of Dane Rudhyar, who had criticized Western musicians' attention to structure years earlier. Rudhyar labeled European music "an architectonic of sound . . . [whose] notes have no individual power of life." He called it "a music of holes, some larger, some smaller, yet all equally empty, like bare rooms where no one is living—soulless, as far as its substance is concerned."¹³⁰ Scelsi's debt to Rudhyar, however, does not stop at his ideas, as can be plainly observed in the following key passages. First, Rudhyar's original, published in 1930:

Western classical music has given practically all of its attention to the frame work of music, what it calls musical form. It has forgotten to study the laws of Sonal Energy, to intuit music in terms of actual sound-entities, in terms of energy which is life. It has thus evolved mostly splendid abstract frames in which no painting is to be seen.

Therefore the Oriental musicians often say that our music is a music of holes. Our notes are edges of intervals, of empty abysses. The melodies jump from edge to edge. It neither flies nor glides. It has hardly any contact with the living earth. It is a music of mummies, of preserved and stuffed animals which look alive enough perhaps, yet are dead, and motionless. *The inner space is empty.*¹³¹

¹²⁹Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 6 (291). ("Vous me demandez si alors la musique de Bach, Beethoven ou Mozart est vide. Je vous répondrai que, parmi l'énorme quantité de musique qu'ils ont écrite, se trouvent effectivement un grand nombre d'œuvres vides et, quand elles ne le sont pas, c'est que dans un certain état de conscience les compositeurs ont reçu des éléments de perception d'ordre supérieur qui ont, en partie sinon en tout, compensé le système d'organisation.")

¹³⁰Dane Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music* (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1928; New York: Samuel Weiser, 1979), 17.

¹³¹Dane Rudhyar, "The New Sense of Space," in *Art as Release of Power: A Series of Seven Essays on the Philosophy of Art* (Carmel, California: Hamsa, 1930), 26–27. Emphasis in original.

Then, Scelsi's striking recapitulation in 1953/54:

I will say only that in general, western classical music has devoted practically all of its attention to the musical framework, which it calls the musical form. It has neglected to study the laws of sonorous energy, to think of music in terms of energy, which is life. Thus it has produced thousands of magnificent frameworks which are often rather empty, for they are only the results of a constructive imagination, which is very different from the creative imagination. The melodies themselves move from sound to sound, but the intervals are empty abysses for the notes lack sonic energy. The inner space is empty.¹³²

We may at least partially forgive Scelsi for this appropriation inasmuch as *Sound and Music* consists of Scelsi's half of a transcribed conversation. Thus the case does not constitute one of true literary plagiarism. Nevertheless, that he was able to recall the passage almost verbatim in conversation indicates how carefully he had read Rudhyar's book and how profoundly he was impressed by the ideas it contains.

Scelsi's co-option of Rudhyar's ideas continues with subsequent references to church bells and Asian gongs to illustrate the concept of sonorous energy. Though the phraseology here does not correspond as strongly as in the previous passages, the borrowing is obvious. First, Rudhyar's original:

If you listen to the wondrous throbbing resonances of Oriental gongs and even of old Christian bells before the intellectualization and the spiritual decadence of European culture, you find yourself confronted with living tones which are fullness of sonal energy, whose inner space is organically differentiated according to the laws of cosmic resonance.¹³³

Then Scelsi's reiteration:

I will give you an example. Throughout Europe we have quite beautiful church bells, though many of them were melted to make cannons or shells. The rest of them, however, whether ancient or modern, are treated in the same manner, that is, mistreated

¹³²Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 4-5 (289). ("Je dirai seulement qu'en général, la musique classique occidentale a consacré pratiquement toute son attention au cadre musical, à ce qu'on appelle la forma musicale. Elle a oublié d'étudier les lois d'énergie sonore, de penser la musique en termes d'énergie, c'est-à-dire de vie, et ainsi elle a produit des milliers de cadres magnifiques mais souvent assez vides, car il n'étaient que le résultat d'une imagination constructrice, ce qui est très différent de l'imagination créatrice. Les mélodies mêmes passent de sons en sons, mais les intervalles sont des abîmes vides car les notes manquent de l'énergie sonique. L'espace intérieur est vide.")

¹³³Rudhyar, "The New Sense of Space," 27.

by sacristans who pull the rope however they wish, without rhythm, in any manner, and the heaviest ones are made to work by an electric motor.

In the Orient, in India, Japan, China, or Tibet, gongs—which have the same role in temples [as bells have in churches]—are struck with the greatest respect and in a rather special way. And up to the smallest high-pitched bell, every sound produces its own effect entirely.¹³⁴

In order to transcend structuralism, Scelsi indicates that composers of the new music must find a way to explore the interior of sound. He mentions *depth*, metaphorically a third dimension of sound hitherto ignored by the Western musical tradition. The resulting *sphericity of sound* became a concept and an image that Scelsi returned to often to explain his understanding of sound.

Sound is spherical, but in listening to it, it seems to us to possess only two dimensions: pitch and duration. The third, depth, we know that it exists, but in a certain sense it escapes us. The superior harmonics and less-audible inferior [sub-]harmonics sometimes give us the impression of a vast and complex sound [with properties] beyond that of pitch or duration, but it is difficult for us to perceive this complexity. Moreover, one would not know how to notate it musically. In painting they discovered perspective, which gives the impression of depth. But so far in music, despite all the advances in stereophonics and all the subsequent experiments, we have not managed to escape from the two dimensions of pitch and duration, and to create a sense of the real spherical dimension of sound.¹³⁵

Scelsi's reference to the third dimension of sound may stem from a common theme of nineteenth-century occultism. Nadia Choucha has pointed out that the movement was

¹³⁴Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 5 (289–290). (“Je vous donnerai un exemple: nous avons partout en Europe de très belles cloches d’église—du moins, il y en avait beaucoup qui ont été depuis fondues pour en faire des canons ou des obus. Il en reste toutefois mais, anciennes ou modernes, elles sont traitées de la même manière, c’est-à-dire maltraitées par des sacristains qui tirent une corde comme ils peuvent, sans rythme, n’importe comment, et les plus lourdes on les fait marcher par un moteur électrique.

En Orient, aux Indes, au Japon, en Chine, ou au Tibet, les gongs—qui ont le même rôle dans les temples, sont frappés avec le plus grand respect et d’une façon toute particulière, et cela jusqu’à la plus petite clochette aiguë, chaque son devant produire entièrement son effet propre.”)

¹³⁵Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 1 (285–286). (“En plus, le son est sphérique, mais en l’écoutant, il nous semble posséder seulement deux dimensions: hauteur et durée—la troisième, la profondeur, nous savons qu’elle existe, mais dans un certain sens elle nous échappe. Les harmoniques supérieures et inférieures (qu’on entend moins) nous donnent parfois l’impression d’un son plus vaste et complexe autre que celui de la durée ou de la hauteur, mais il nous est difficile d’en percevoir la complexité. D’ailleurs, musicalement, on ne saurait comment la noter. En peinture, on a bien découvert la perspective qui donne l’impression de la profondeur, mais en musique, jusqu’à présent, malgré toutes les expériences stéréophoniques et les essais successifs de toutes sortes, on n’a pas réussi à échapper aux deux dimensions durée et hauteur et à donner l’impression de la réelle dimension sphérique du son.”)

characterized by a widespread search for an additional, fourth dimension of space, which “was seen as the corroboration of the idea of the astral plane.”¹³⁶ Because music was conventionally understood to exist in two dimensions—the horizontal (melodic) and the vertical (harmonic)—Scelsi’s affirmation of a third musical dimension ran parallel to the more general search for a fourth physical dimension. Scelsi’s metaphors may also have been borrowed partly from Busoni, who wrote years earlier of the depth of sound. He associates the concept with sonic resonance and a preference for low registers, and ascribes its aesthetic origins to Beethoven and his followers.

The Apostles of the Ninth Symphony have a peculiar and not quite clearly defined estimate of “depth” in music. *Depth* becomes *breadth*, and the attempt is made to attain it through *weight*; it then discovers itself (through an association of ideas) by a preference for a *deep register*.¹³⁷

The notion of sound as spherical, possessing a third dimension, clearly rests on the acoustical properties of resonance and the harmonic series. Like Busoni, Scelsi also recognizes the importance of deep registers when he instructs his interlocutor to immerse himself in the resultant harmonics of such a sound at the end of *Art and Knowledge*: “And now listen, so that you will hear the resonance of the harmonics of this deep note.”¹³⁸ Rudhyar had written extensively about the importance of harmonics in the metaphysics of sound. According to Rudhyar, the cosmic sound that saturates the sonic spectrum emanates from the harmonic series and its geometric progression of pitch density.

Within the first octave of the [harmonic] series we find no subtones [i.e., only the two frequencies that form the boundary of the octave itself], but if we examine succeeding octaves we find that an ever increasing number of overtones are contained therein, until we come to the point where the interval between overtones becomes negligible and the octave selected seems as a compact mass of continuous sounds.

¹³⁶Choucha, *Surrealism and the Occult*, 5.

¹³⁷Busoni, “Sketch of a New Esthetic,” 99.

¹³⁸Scelsi, *Art and Knowledge*, 14 (311). (“Et maintenant écoutez, tant que vous pourrez l’entendre, la résonance des harmoniques de cette note profonde.”)

The Harmonic Series is thus seen as the ceaselessly accelerated multiplication of one tone (primary [or fundamental]) adding itself to itself continuously until the whole universe is filled with its progeny.¹³⁹

Scelsi speaks of harmonics as “the oscillations at the interior of sounds,”¹⁴⁰ and contends that through harmonics the composer of the new music can penetrate into the interior of sound itself, a fact long recognized in the more spiritually oriented musical cultures of Asia. “For the westerner in general, harmonics are [merely] an acoustic phenomenon. The Oriental, on the other hand, finds in harmonics a spiritual element that surpasses the physical.”¹⁴¹ What Scelsi discusses spiritually and abstractly as *anāhata*, the single sound understood as an unbounded sonic world containing limitless variety and potential, he identifies technically with harmonics, the myriad sounds contained within a single note.

The Notion of Music on a Single Note

Nowhere in *Art and Knowledge* or *Sound and Music* does Scelsi explicitly describe or propose musical composition on a single note. Though he intimates the notion in his discussions of *anāhata*, harmonics, the interior of sound, and limitless sonic worlds contained in a single instant of *durée*, in 1953 and 1954 the explicit realization of the idea in the *Quattro pezzi* of 1959 was still several years away. Still, the transformed aesthetic beginning to take shape in the spiritualist texts may have been precipitated by his discovery

¹³⁹Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 67–68.

¹⁴⁰Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 1 (285). (“l’oscillation à l’intérieur des sons”)

¹⁴¹Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 5 (290). (“Pour l’occidental en général, les harmoniques sont un facteur acoustique; l’oriental, par contre, recherche dans les harmoniques un élément spirituel qui dépasse la physique.”)

of Rudolf Steiner's and Dane Rudhyar's ideas concerning music on a single note. Scelsi's close reading of Rudhyar's writings is confirmed by the conspicuous similarities of those passages mentioned above; it is unlikely indeed that Rudhyar's comments about the sonic potential of the individual note would have escaped Scelsi's attention. Steiner's proposal that the single note might serve as ample material for musical composition is found chiefly in a series of lectures he gave on musical topics in the early 1920s. Scelsi owned a 1973 Italian-language compendium of these lectures,¹⁴² but several of the most salient ones had been published earlier in German, a language that Scelsi knew. The lectures of 7 and 8 March 1923 appeared in 1928, 1954, and 1966 in Dornach under the title "Das Tonerlebnis im Menschen: Eine Grundlage für die Pflege des musikalischen Unterrichts" ("Man's Experience of Tone: A Foundation for the Continuance of Musical Education"), and that of 16 March 1923 was published in Dornach in 1928 under the title "Die Welt der Hierarchien und die Welt der Töne" ("The World of Hierarchies and the World of Tone").¹⁴³ Even more compelling is Steiner's lecture of 29 September 1920, the first in which he advances the idea of music on a single note. The lecture appeared in print in the 1952 (!) edition of the *Blätter für Anthroposophie*,¹⁴⁴ precisely at the beginning of Scelsi's return to composition, his spiritualist phase, and his immersion in the ideas of Steiner and others.

Steiner foresaw the advent of music on a single note as the culmination of a long musical-spiritual evolution of the human race. He outlined a history of mankind's

¹⁴²Rudolf Steiner, *L'essenza della musica e l'esperienza del suono nell'uomo*, trans. Dante Vigevani (Milan: Editrice Antroposofica, 1973). The original German compendium appeared as Rudolf Steiner, *Das Wesen des Musikalischen und der Tonerlebnis im Menschen*, Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe, ed. Helmut Wartburg, no. 283 (Dornach: Verlag der Rudolf Steiner-Nachlassverwaltung, 1969). An English edition exists as well: Rudolf Steiner, *The Inner Nature of Music and the Experience of Tone*, ed. Alice Wulsin, trans. Maria St. Goar (Hudson, New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1983). The three editions differ slightly as to which lectures each includes.

¹⁴³See the publication information in Steiner, *Das Wesen des Musikalischen*.

¹⁴⁴*Blätter für Anthroposophie* 7/8 (1952). See editorial notes in Steiner, *Das Wesen des Musikalischen*, 149.

intervallic sensitivity, beginning with the experience of the seventh in the ancient and spiritually advanced civilization of Atlantis: "If you could go back into the Atlantean age, you would find that the music of that time, which had little similarity to today's music, was arranged according to continuing sevenths; even the fifth was unknown."¹⁴⁵ The effect of such an orientation, according to Steiner, was spiritual transportation, freedom from earthly existence and the physical body. In the early post-Atlantean age, man began to obtain greater control over his physical body and thus the less transcendent experience of the fifth became more pleasant. In the modern age, man has sought greater subjectivity in musical expression, and this has led to the contemporary era of the third. From this, Steiner portends an evolutionary process of intervallic concentration during which man will develop sensitivity to the second, the octave, and finally the single tone:

Only in the future will man experience the octave's full musical significance. A bold experience of the second has not yet been attained by him today; these are matters that lie in the future. When man's inner life intensifies, he will experience the second, [the octave,] and finally he will be sensitive to the single tone. . . . I once said during a question-and-answer session in Dornach [probably that of 29 September 1920] that the single tone will be experienced as something that is musically differentiated, that already musical differentiation resides within the single tone.¹⁴⁶

Like Scelsi in *Sound and Music*, Steiner draws attention to the interior of the individual sound, which reveals a richness like that of contemporary melody and constitutes a spiritual gateway to a sacred sonic realm.

Man must develop a consciousness . . . of how that which has become inward can once again find its way to the divine-spiritual. In *one* realm, for example, this will be accomplished when the inner wealth of feeling experienced in a melody one day will be discovered in the single tone, at which time the secret of individual tone will be experienced by man. In other words, man not only will experience intervals but will be

¹⁴⁵Steiner, "March 7, 1923, Stuttgart [Lecture]," 51 (Steiner, "Stuttgart, 7. März 1923 [Lecture]," 108). See also pp. 51–56. ("Wenn Sie in die atlantische Zeit zurückgehen würden, so würden Sie finden, daß man dort—es schaut sehr wenig dem, was heute Musik ist, ähnlich, eigentlich alles abgestimmt hat in fortlaufenden Septimen. Man kannte noch nicht einmal Quinten.")

¹⁴⁶Steiner, "March 8, 1923, Stuttgart [Lecture]," 71. Steiner's reference to an earlier lecture in Dornach during which he discussed these ideas is almost certainly that crucial one of 29 September 1920, published in 1952.

able to experience the single tone with the same inner richness and inner variation of experience that he can experience today with melody.¹⁴⁷

This final stage of a progression “from the seventh to the fifth, from the fifth down to the third, and from the third down to the prime, the single tone” constitutes no less than “a rediscovery of the divine.”¹⁴⁸

Using terminology that later came to characterize Scelsi’s spiritualist phase, Steiner contends that the evolution of man’s sensitivity to tone had reached the point (in 1920) where even the single note might be perceived differently by different people.

I would like to state that one might form an opinion while experiencing music today as to how different men experience a single tone differently (for now I do not take regard of anything musical). That they experience it in different ways is beyond a doubt; but they experience it in ways so different that this different experience acts in some way on their comprehension of music.

Indeed, I believe that one can clearly accept that there exists a tendency today, precisely among those who experience music, to penetrate in some sense more deeply into sound. It is clear that upon hearing a sound one can remain more on the surface, so to speak, or penetrate into it more deeply.¹⁴⁹

He then goes on to describe how one penetrates the single tone to create music through a process of extraction:

By immersing oneself in the depth of the sound, . . . [one] certainly hears something in the sounds . . . , something that one might draw out. . . .

¹⁴⁷Steiner, “March 16, 1923, Stuttgart [Lecture],” *The Inner Nature of Music*, 91. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴⁸Steiner, “March 16, 1923, Stuttgart [Lecture],” 91.

¹⁴⁹Rudolf Steiner, “Dornach, 29. September 1920 [Lecture],” in *Das Wesen des Musikalischen*, 48. (“Ich möchte meinen, daß man sich heute im musikalischen Erleben eine Ansicht darüber bilden könnte, wie verschiedene Menschen—ich will jetzt mehr vom Musikalischen zunächst absehen—einen einzelnen Ton verschieden erleben. Nun, daß sie ihn verschieden erleben, das ist ja ganz zweifellos; aber ihn so verschieden erleben, daß dieses verschiedene Erleben in irgendeiner Weise in ihr Musikverständnis hineinspielt.

Man kann nämlich, glaube ich, deutlich wahrnehmen, daß heute die Tendenz besteht, gerade bei dem musikalischen erlebenden Menschen, gewissermaßen in den Ton tiefer hineinzugehen. Nicht war, man kann bei einem Ton mehr an der Oberfläche bleiben, oder tiefer in den Ton hineingehen.”)

... If one penetrates sound more deeply, one can divide it up in the most diverse ways through the isolation into neighboring tones. In this way one could obtain a more active musical life.¹⁵⁰

Steiner's use of the term *neighboring tone* is enigmatic; clearly he does not mean traditional non-chord tones (auxiliary tones) as they occur in common-practice music. He seems at pains to describe the multitude of tones that in reality comprise a single musical sound by virtue of the harmonic series and subtle microtonal fluctuations. Steiner wonders aloud whether the final stage of his intervallic evolution toward the single tone had already begun to manifest in the vanishing distinction between melody and the single tone.

In certain circumstances, can even the single sound be heard as a melody, in that, as a man penetrates into the depths of sound, he picks up a partial component, in a certain sense partial sounds, whose relationship, whose harmonization itself can represent, for the man in question, a type of melody?¹⁵¹

Possibly motivated by Steiner's ideas, Scelsi may have asked himself this very question upon his return to composition in 1952.

The possibility of composing music by extracting a tiny portion of an unbounded sonic reality—which led Scelsi to the idea of a single note as a limitless world of sound—occupied a prominent position in the aesthetic of Dane Rudhyar, who wrote extensively on the *pleroma* of sound. It seems likely that Rudhyar's employment of the term stems from Scriabin's, who referred to the so-called "mystic chord" as "the chord of the pleroma" during an early rehearsal of *Prometheus*.¹⁵² Scriabin and Rudhyar both

¹⁵⁰Steiner, "Dornach, 29. September 1920 [Lecture]," 49 and 53. ("er in die Tiefen des Tones hineintaucht, ... allerdings etwas findet in den Tönen, ... das er sich herausuchen kann. ... Man kann ja, wenn man sich in die Tiefen des Tones nun eben hineinfindet, ihn in der verschiedensten Weise verteilen, indem man ihn nun wieder heraussetzt in Nachbartönen. Auf diese Weise würde ein bewegliches musikalisches Leben herauskommen.")

¹⁵¹Rudolf Steiner, "Dornach, 29. September 1920 [Lecture]," 49. ("Wenn man sagt, es kann unter Umständen schon der einzelne Ton als eine Melodie empfunden werden dadurch, daß man sich, indem man in seine Tiefen geht, Partiales heraushebt aus dem Tone, gewissermaßen partiale Töne, deren Verhältnis, deren Zusammenklang einem dann selbst schon wiederum eine Art von Melodie sein kann?")

¹⁵²Richard Taruskin, "Scriabin and the Superhuman: A Millennial Essay," in *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 341.

would have known the term also from Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*.¹⁵³ Simon Morrison has amplified the importance of "the chord of the pleroma" in Scriabin's conception: "It was to establish a relationship between the mobile, temporal world of perceptible phenomena and the immobile, nontemporal world of essences."¹⁵⁴ For Rudhyar the pleroma of sound meant "*fullness of conjoined tones within certain limits*."¹⁵⁵ From this saturation of the sonic spectrum a tiny portion is carved out in the act of artistic creation, and in this manner the single tone becomes a tiny universe of sound.¹⁵⁶

Rudhyar combined concepts borrowed liberally from various Asian musical traditions with the Western practices of atonality and pandiatonicism to arrive at an understanding of single tones as living entities. He proposed a path to living tones through a type of music that is truly dissonant in that it achieves synthesis of the most disparate elements. Moreover, since dissonances in the common-practice idiom are defined as intervallic relationships that require resolution, they are necessarily dynamic rather than static; they become and indicate motion. This most spiritual of musics Rudhyar labels "syntonic music," in which "all tones are free, independent, *living* realities and not intellectual abstractions; and they come together into vast groups according to cosmic laws of organization which, when recognized intuitively by the hearer, unify them into great brotherhoods of tones [pleromas]."¹⁵⁷ In *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, Rudhyar explains

¹⁵³Helena Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* (London: Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888), 79 and 196.

¹⁵⁴Morrison, "Scriabin and the Impossible," 314.

¹⁵⁵Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 64–66. Emphasis in original. Rudhyar attributes the term *pleroma* to the Gnostics, defining it as a "brotherhood of tones, resonances which are like ova of sound, and what we might call toneful space—space filled in its fullness by tones."

¹⁵⁶Rudhyar viewed the creative act "as setting apart, as cutting out (as by means of scissors almost) a portion of substance, of live, fertile substance" (Rudhyar, "The New Sense of Space," 5).

¹⁵⁷Dane Rudhyar, "Dissonant Harmony," in *Art as Release of Power: A Series of Seven Essays on the Philosophy of Art* (Carmel, California: Hamsa, 1930), 11. Emphasis in original. For Rudhyar, Scriabin "was the father . . . of what we have called *syntonism*, the spiritual attitude towards dissonant harmony. He was the first to discover the basic law of dissonant chord-building and his later works are filled with this regenerative mystic power to which, however, so few are able as yet to respond. Handicapped as he may

the concept of living tones and describes the multitudinous sounds contained within the single tone using a series of corporeal metaphors.

A tone is a living cell. It is composed of organic matter. It has the power of assimilation, of reproduction, of making exchanges, of growing. It is a microcosmos reflecting faithfully the macrocosmos, its laws, its cycles, its centre. . . . A tone is a solar system. It is composed . . . of a central sun, of planets, and of a magnetic substance which circulates rhythmically within the limits of the system and relates itself to the magnetic substance of some vaster system. Because of this, a tone is not a mere mathematical point [as in a Western score] without dimensions or density, but it is a living reality, a sound. It is defined by various sets of characteristics, pitch and [tone] quality being only the outer one[s].¹⁵⁸

Rudhyar finds fault with the Western musical tradition for exploiting only the *external* relationships between one tone and other tones, rather than the *internal* potential of individual living tones. He observes that the single sound matters to the Western musical mind only in "the relationship between this sound and other sounds, in other words a certain sequence or group of sounds." The Western musical note, named and designated as a point in space in a score, "has no meaning in itself. It has meaning *only in relation to other notes*."¹⁵⁹

The verity of Rudhyar's observation concerning the Western musical conception is confirmed in the theoretical work of Arnold Schoenberg, for whom any type of composition based on the relationships among different tones constitutes tonality, a fundamentally Western approach to composition.

Everything implied by a series of tones constitutes tonality, whether it be brought together by means of direct *reference to a single fundamental* or by more complicated connections. . . . A piece of music will always have to be tonal, at least in so far as a

have been by European tradition, yet the very essence of his music is non-European, non-cultural and truly *sacred*" (p. 20). Emphasis in original.

¹⁵⁸Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 18.

¹⁵⁹Dane Rudhyar, *The Magic of Tone and the Art of Music* (Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala, 1982), 13.

*relation has to exist from tone to tone by virtue of which the tones, placed next to or above one another, yield a perceptible continuity.*¹⁶⁰

Schoenberg allows for a kind of tonality in which the network of relationships extends outward from a “single fundamental.” His language clearly implies a music whose construction depends heavily and overtly on the overtone series. Yet Schoenberg also requires that tonal music, in his broad sense of the phrase, consist of relationships *among different tones*. The clear implication is that no single note, in and of itself, can carry any musical significance apart from its position relative to other notes. For Schoenberg, this and only this may “yield perceptible continuity.”

Inspired by Asian music, Rudhyar objects to Western approaches, such as Schoenberg’s, which consider “the interval between the units of the musical scale as mere nothingness, as the abyss of ‘wrong notes.’”¹⁶¹ He urges composers to focus their musical attention instead on “complex tones,” each of which “is different from another complex tone because the *inner space* within the tones themselves is differentiated in various ways, according to various proportions.”¹⁶² He correlates the “mass of elements constituting the inner space of the tone” with timbre, but admonishes that “the ordinary conception of timbre is a very crude and insufficient one, among Western people.”¹⁶³ Rudhyar’s accentuation of timbre as the parameter of music with perhaps the greatest potential for future compositional exploitation was not lost on Scelsi. We shall see that timbre emerged as one of the compositional priorities of Scelsi’s evolving style during the 1950s.

¹⁶⁰Arnold Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, trans. Roy E. Carter (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 432. Emphasis added.

¹⁶¹Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 65.

¹⁶²Rudhyar, “The New Sense of Space,” 24. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶³Rudhyar, “The New Sense of Space,” 25. Emphasis in original.

The ideas of Steiner and Rudhyar provided Scelsi with a general sense of how he could make manifest the beliefs of his spiritualist aesthetic. Steiner's view of music on a single note as the denouement of a great musical-spiritual evolution reinforced Scelsi's notion of music as the transmission of a divine and purposive message. Moreover, it validated Scelsi's transformed understanding of his own role as an artist and spiritual messenger. A solitary glimpse of the cosmic realm intuited and projected by the enlightened artist might manifest musically through the single note. As a portion of the pleroma of sound, of *anāhata*, the single note contains limitless sonic, compositional potential, which can be activated and made audible. Rudhyar's conception of single tones as "living cells," tiny "solar systems" open to exploration of their "inner space" through manipulations of timbre, microtones, and the overtone series offered Scelsi some hint of a viable compositional approach, but to a large extent Scelsi set out in 1952 into uncharted musical territory.

Over the next seven years, Scelsi undertook the spiritual practices necessary for developing the means to project the message faithfully while concurrently developing the compositional method. Increasingly dedicated to the techniques of Yoga, he sought to employ these meditative practices for conductive ends, to make of himself something akin to Patañjali's "empty channel" and Breton's "modest recording instrument." Compositionally, Scelsi began to distill his musical material, to suspend normal perceptions of musical time, and to focus his attention on timbre. Impelled by Hindu and Sufi sonic philosophy and by Rudhyar's denunciations of Western musical aesthetics, Scelsi had come to realize that sound itself is "dynamic in essence," and that any type of directed motion generated through harmonic progression or melodic impulse is in fact artificial and vacuous, a music of "empty abysses." Gradually stripping away the conventions of melody and harmony, he searched out ways to intensify the experience of sound by rejecting traditional methods of combining musical notes and immersing himself in the

metaphysical properties of sound itself. The search led him down a path through modality, into microtonality, and ultimately to music that Steiner and Rudhyar could only imagine.

CHAPTER 4

SCELSI'S FIRST COMPOSITIONAL PHASE:

THE MODERNIST STYLES

The compositional career of Giacinto Scelsi falls conveniently into two main divisions: the early period before his crisis of 1948, and the late period beginning with his return to composition in 1952. Though one can certainly identify sub-periods—according to Scelsi's experimentation with free atonality beginning in 1936, his adoption of microtonality in 1956, or his realization of music on a single note in 1959—the striking fissure represented by Scelsi's artistic crisis and four-year compositional hiatus in the middle of his career invites such a large-scale and dichotomous division. His output in each of these two broad periods was the product of a sharply different set of compositional goals and, as we have seen, a fundamentally transformed aesthetic orientation. In many ways, Scelsi's early and late music hardly seem like the work of the same composer.

Because Scelsi's two style periods are each subject to generalization, the appellations *modernist* and *sonorist* may prove helpful and convenient. Fully aware of the contention surrounding the term *modernist*, I employ it here simply to describe Scelsi's experimentation during his early period with numerous contemporary idioms that are commonly labeled *modern*. On the whole, Scelsi's modernist period is remarkable less for its stylistic originality than for its breadth. His works up to 1948 cover an astonishingly wide range of stylistic ground, touching upon a number of compositional trends of the early twentieth century. The works of Scelsi's later period, by contrast, share a common concern with the sonorous properties of individual sounds—timbre, resonance, overtones, dynamic shape, and microtonal fluctuation—in place of a traditional focus on generating melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic interest. While many of the modernist works of Scelsi's early

period certainly have compositional merit, it is the strikingly original style of the sonorist period that has earned him attention from scholars, performers, and audiences alike.¹

The urge to look for signs of Scelsi's sonorist style in his earlier works is irresistible. Scholars such as Cremonese, Zeller, Zenck, and Biget have sought to prove the value of Scelsi's early music by uncovering in it some forecast of the distinctive later style.² For other composers, such evolutionary assessments of their complete outputs have become putative; changing styles and well-demarcated style periods are balanced by evidence of continuity. In the case of Schoenberg, to take a well-known example, each successive style is understood as the explicit product of the previous one: his dodecaphonic style emerged logically from his freely atonal period, which in turn can be traced back to his early works in a highly chromatic idiom.³ We conclude with admiration that the composer managed to resist stagnation while maintaining a considerable degree of constancy. In the case of Giacinto Scelsi, however, the transformation was radical. His compositional output up to 1948, itself stylistically heterogeneous, bears little obvious resemblance to his music of the 1950s and later decades. Careful scrutiny of selected early works reveals isolated features that seem to offer hints of what was to come; such features doubtlessly deserve attention

¹The majority of Scelsi's works that have been recorded or performed publicly date from 1952 or later.

²Adriano Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva e riflessione teorica fino alla metà degli anni '40*, Quaderni Perugini di Musica Contemporanea, no. 1 (Palermo: L'Epos, 1992); Hans Rudolf Zeller, "Das Ensemble der Soli," in *Giacinto Scelsi*, ed. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn, Musik-Konzepte: Die Reihe über Komponisten, no. 31 (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1983), 24–66; Martin Zenck, "Das Irreduktible als Kriterium der Avantgarde: Überlegungen zu den vier Streichquartetten Giacinto Scelsis," in *Giacinto Scelsi*, ed. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn, Musik-Konzepte: Die Reihe über Komponisten, no. 31 (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1983), 67–81; Martin Zenck, "Die andere Avantgarde des Giacinto Scelsi: Analytisch, ästhetische Reflexionen zum Klavierwerk," in *Musik-Texte Zeitschrift für neue Musik*, no. 26 (Cologne, 1988); Michelle Biget, "Giacinto Scelsi, un approccio al pianoforte," in *Giacinto Scelsi: Viaggio al centro del suono*, ed. Pierre Albert Castanet and Nicola Cisternino (La Spezia: Luna Editore, 1993), 198–227.

³See Ethan Haimo, *Schoenberg's Serial Odyssey: The Evolution of his Twelve-Tone Method, 1914–1928* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). Of course, Schoenberg himself went to great lengths to make this case. See Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), especially "How One Becomes Lonely" (pp. 30–53), "Heart and Brain in Music" (pp. 53–76), "My Evolution" (pp. 79–92), "Composition with Twelve Tones (1)" (pp. 214–245), and "Brahms the Progressive" (pp. 398–441).

and several are discussed below. But the critic or historian hoping to discover a stylistic concatenation in Scelsi's complete output will be disappointed. Early hints of Scelsi's sonorist style are few, largely confined to the piano works of 1939. Moreover, such clues become apparent only with the generous benefit of historical hindsight; their importance is easily overestimated. Based solely upon Scelsi's output up to 1948, one would scarcely have any idea where his style was headed. The degree of change in Scelsi's style far exceeds that of similarity—and is much more compelling.

An Overview of Scelsi's Compositional Output

The stylistic diversity in Scelsi's output is matched by an equally wide variety of genres and media.⁴ At its core lies music for solo piano: twenty-six extant pieces before he abandoned the instrument in 1956.⁵ The piano, of course, was Scelsi's own instrument, and he seemed most comfortable composing for it until its tempered limitations rendered it ineffective for his microtonal language. Among Scelsi's works for piano are the Suites Nos. 2, 5, 6, and 7, dating from the years before his crisis, and Nos. 8, 9, 10, and 11 from the years immediately following it. The remaining suites were never published, presumably lost or destroyed by the composer. Spanning the years 1930–1956, the extant suites form a central repertory of Scelsi's output up to the mid 1950s in which some of his most distinctive and progressive musical ideas found expression. The sectional and rhapsodic

⁴For this overview of Scelsi's compositional output, I have used the titles and dates given in Cremonese's works list (Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva*, 79–82). Readers may also wish to consult Castanet's and Cisternino's list (in *Giacinto Scelsi: Viaggio al centro del suono*, ed. Pierre Albert Castanet and Nicola Cisternino [La Spezia: Luna Editore, 1993]), which differs from Cremonese's list in a relatively small number of details. Metzger and Riehn's older list (in *Giacinto Scelsi*, ed. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn, *Musik-Konzepte: Die Reihe über Komponisten*, no. 31 [Munich: edition text + kritik, 1983]) is both inaccurate and incomplete.

⁵Scelsi did make a brief return to the piano late in his life with three small-scale works: *Aitsi* (1974) for amplified piano, *To the Master* (1974) for cello and piano, and *Un adieu* (1988) for piano.

nature of the genre seemed to appeal to Scelsi's fondness for spontaneity and extreme contrast. Along with the early suites, the Piano Sonatas Nos. 2, 3, and 4 figure prominently in Scelsi's modernist period; Sonata No. 2 in particular contains some of the most compelling signs that elements of his sonorist style may have already begun to manifest as early as the 1939, albeit inchoately. Around the same time, Scelsi employed the piano for his first significant works in an atonal idiom following his study of the Second Viennese school: *Quattro poemi* (1936–1939) and *Variazioni e fuga* (1941). Noteworthy, too, is that his resumption of composition in the early 1950s began with a return to the piano in Suite No. 8 (*Bot-ba*) (1952), *Quattro illustrazioni* (1953), *Cinque incantesimi* (1953), Suite No. 9 (*Tiai*) (1953), Suite No. 10 (*Ka*) (1954), *Action Music* (1955), and Suite No. 11 (1956).

With a few exceptions, Scelsi's compositions for orchestra date preponderantly from two time periods: the early 1930s and the years 1959–1966. Those from his early period include *Notturmo* (1931), *Rapsodia romantica* (1931), *Sinfonietta* (1932), *Poema romano* (1933), *Concertino* for piano and orchestra (1934), and *Ouverture* (1934). Their titles alone suggest the influence of the Italian impressionists and neoclassicists, particularly Respighi, Casella, and other members of the *generazione dell'ottanta*. Scelsi's foray into orchestral composition at this early moment in his career may indicate the young composer's emerging self-confidence. From the beginning of his studies of Second-Viennese atonality in 1935 until the monotonal breakthrough of the *Quattro pezzi* in 1959, however, Scelsi composed only a handful of works for large ensemble. The cantata *La nascita del verbo* for chorus and orchestra of 1948, Scelsi's final composition before his crisis, stands out among these few as a piece he considered a landmark. It seems to have constituted for him a culmination of all that he had learned up to that point, his mid-career *magnum opus*. After devoting himself to solo and chamber works during much of the 1950s as he developed his new style, Scelsi's realization of monotonal music sparked a return to orchestral composition. The *Quattro pezzi* for chamber orchestra was the first of a minor flood of works for orchestra or other large ensemble in his fully transformed style.

Some of Scelsi's most highly regarded works, they include *Hurqualia* (1960), *Aiôn* (1961), *Hymnos* (1963), *Chukrum* (1963), *Anahit* (1965), and *Uaxuctum* (1966). These were followed by what may well constitute Scelsi's crowning achievements in orchestral music: *Konx-om-pax* (1969) and *Pfhat* (1974).

Whereas Scelsi's efforts in orchestral composition were generally confined to watershed periods in his career, chamber music occupied him almost continually. The earliest examples are instrumental duets, all involving piano: *Chemin du couer* (1929) for violin and piano, *Dialogo* (1932) for cello and piano, and the Violin Sonata (1934). These were followed by two piano trios, in 1936 and 1939. Scelsi's five string quartets, which have rightly garnered attention from scholars and as well as performers, display the full compass of Scelsi's compositional vicissitude. The First Quartet (1944) is a large-scale work for small-scale forces, and represents Scelsi's first attempt to integrate what he had learned during his modernist period into a distinctive compositional voice. For all its stylistic eclecticism, the First Quartet remains a remarkably coherent work, unified by the cyclical return of thematic material and by numerous allusions to the heritage of Western music. Scelsi did not compose again for string quartet until after his crisis, the development of his new style, and the single-note breakthrough; a period of seventeen years separates the First Quartet from the Second (1961). Quartets Nos. 2, 3, and 4 provide the chamber counterpart to Scelsi's significant orchestral output of the early 1960s; they are highly accomplished works in the mature sonorist style. The Fifth Quartet was the last significant piece that Scelsi composed, written in 1984–85 in response to the death of Scelsi's lifelong friend Henri Michaux and dedicated to his memory.⁶

Chamber and solo works for a broad assortment of instruments characterize Scelsi's output of the 1950s, as he apparently felt the need to constrain his forces while developing a new compositional language. In *Sound and Music* Scelsi tried to justify his devotion to

⁶It should be noted that the Fifth Quartet consists of reworked material from Scelsi's *Aitsi* (1974) for amplified piano.

solo music during the period as a more accurate transmission of the “correct” sound perceived during Yogic practice.

In the Yoga of sound, . . . [p]ersonal sound induces perception of the supernatural world, at the same time that it produces an interior balance, which is precisely at the core of Yoga. . . . It naturally explains the importance of “correct” sound, which is concerned with the human voice or with an instrument. Here is why I think that monody [*monodie*] can more easily give this correctness than can orchestral and symphonic works.⁷

As we have noted, the retreat to solo works began in 1952 with Scelsi’s return to piano music. From 1954 to 1957 he took up writing for solo strings and winds—instruments that offered the possibilities of sustain and microtonality, unattainable with the piano—composing sixteen solo works for such instruments as violin, viola, cello, flute, alto flute, E♭ clarinet, B♭ clarinet, soprano saxophone, trumpet, French horn, and trombone.⁸ As Scelsi drew closer to the breakthrough of 1959, he began to compose for small groups of instruments, starting with *Rucke di Guck* (1957) for oboe and piccolo, *Elegia per Ty* (1958) for violin and cello, and the String Trio (1958). From there he proceeded to larger chamber ensembles with *I presagi* (1958) for ten instruments, *Kya* (1959) for solo clarinet and seven instruments, and the *Quattro pezzi* (1959) for chamber orchestra, before resuming large-scale orchestral composition in earnest.

⁷Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 3 (287–288). (“Dans le Yoga du son, . . . [l]e son personnel amène à la perception du monde super-normal, en même temps qu’il produit un équilibre intérieur qui, justement, est à la base de ce Yoga. . . . Tout cela explique naturellement l’importance du son ‘juste,’ qu’il s’agisse de la voix humaine ou d’un instrument. Voilà pourquoi je pense que la monodie peut plus facilement donner cette justesse que les œuvres orchestrales et symphoniques.”) Given that Scelsi’s output of the 1950s consists predominantly of solo works that are not necessarily monophonic, he seems to use the term *monody* here to signify music for a solo instrument or voice. The French word *monodie* is conventionally employed either to indicate monophony or, as it is in English, to describe solo song with simple chordal accompaniment. Jacques Chailley, for instance, uses the word in both senses (*40,000 Years of Music: Man in Search of Music*, trans. Rollo Myers [New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1964]): first to describe medieval monophonic singing (p. 154) and later in reference to the vocal homophony of the Florentine camerata (pp. 159–160). Scelsi’s use of the term is ambiguous as far as texture.

⁸Double-reed woodwind instruments are conspicuously absent from this list. Perhaps Scelsi felt that their timbres did not offer the types of overtone-rich sonorities he pursued at the time.

Despite Scelsi's espousal of the "correctness" of vocal music, his output in this category remained sporadic and stylistically rather distinct from his instrumental works. In the modernist period, the year 1933 stands out for his nearly exclusive devotion to Italian and French song: five pieces (including small cycles) for voice and piano with texts by Sibilla Aleramo, Charles Baudelaire, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Charles Silvestre, and an anonymous Arabic poet. Scelsi returned to the genre twice in the following years with *Trois vocalises sur des mélodies nègres* (1936), a wordless *chanson*, and *Perdus* (1937), a setting of text by Jaan Wahl. He did not write for the voice again until *La nascita del verbo* (1948), in which a large mixed chorus singing Scelsi's own text adds considerable weight to an already grand orchestral palette. His vocal output of the 1950s consists of just three works: *Tre canti popolari* (1958) for four-voice mixed choir, *Tre canti sacri* (1958) for eight-voice mixed choir, and the remarkable *Yamaon* (1954–58) for bass voice and five instrumentalists. *Yamaon* remains a singular work in Scelsi's *oeuvre* that strongly recalls Varèse's *Ecuatorial* (1934) both in style and in its reference to an ancient civilization.⁹

Scelsi's most celebrated vocal works date from the years after the *Quattro pezzi* and resulted from his close collaboration with the Japanese singer, Michiko Hirayama. Having studied both Western music and traditional Japanese singing in her native country, Hirayama came to Europe in the early 1950s to study opera and song literature at the Accademia Chigiana in Siena and the Mozarteum in Salzburg. After meeting Domenico Guaccero and other members of the *Nuova Consonanza*, she resolved to study contemporary Western music and quickly became a prominent interpreter of avant-garde repertory.¹⁰ She met Scelsi in 1960, just after his monotonal breakthrough, and their

⁹The text of *Ecuatorial* is the Spanish translation of a prayer from the *Popul Vuh*, a sacred book of the Mayan Quiché, in which the gods are implored for peace among the tribes. Though Scelsi's piece is textless, the vocal part employing phonemes, its subject is the prophet Yamaon, who forecasted the conquest and destruction of the Sumerian city of Ur to its inhabitants. Scelsi returned to the theme of ancient destruction in *Uaxuctum* (1966), an orchestral piece whose title refers to the lost Mayan city.

¹⁰Michiko Hirayama and Stefania Gianni, "Michiko Hirayama/Giacinto Scelsi: In una istintiva comunicazione il ritrovamento della propria identità," *i suoni, le onde: Rivista della Fondazione Isabella Scelsi* 5 (1994): 3–7.

collaboration yielded several of the most unusual vocal works in Scelsi's *oeuvre*—indeed, in all of the contemporary literature. These include *Hô* (1960) for soprano solo; *Khoom* (1962) for soprano, horn, two percussionists, and string quartet; *Pranam I* (1972) for soprano, twelve instruments, and tape; and the extraordinary song cycle *Canti del Capricorno* (1962–1972) for soprano solo with occasional accompaniment.¹¹ All are textless, employing phonemes alongside groans, shrieks, glissandi, and sharp consonantal articulations that evoke the ritualistic chanting of various Asian traditions as well as the vocal techniques of traditional Japanese song and *Nôh* theater. Working closely together, Scelsi and Hirayama combined elements of his sonorist style—microtones, extremely wide vibrato, carefully controlled manipulations of timbre—with her astounding vocal agility and deep knowledge of Japanese guttural inflection to produce music of overwhelming force and immediacy.

To appreciate fully the extent of Scelsi's artistic transformation, one must consider how remarkably his early output represents the splintered state of European music of the 1920s through the 1940s. Far from establishing a clear and directed path, Scelsi's modernist period serves as a case study of the diffusion of musical style between the world wars. In an effort to position himself among the musical avant-garde, he pursued nearly every path that opened to him, no matter how divergent, and even tried to devise his own grand syntheses. As mid-century approached, however, Scelsi's predicament increasingly reflected that of European music as whole. He found that none of the early century's explorations offered a common practice, not even an amalgamation of all their most

¹¹ According to Hirayama, Scelsi had already composed the first version of *Hô* when she met him in 1960 (Hirayama, "In una istintiva comunicazione," 3–7). The nineteen songs of *Canti del Capricorno* include the following instrumental accompaniment: percussion in Nos. 1, 14, and 18; saxophone in Nos. 5 and 7; and bass recorder in No. 19. The tape part for *Pranam I*, Scelsi's only piece of studio-generated electronic music, was produced at Franco Evangelisti's studio in Rome. Scelsi was quite pleased with the result, but never returned to the medium because he found it too tedious, the antithesis of improvisation (Hirayama, interview with the author, 3 May 1997).

appealing attributes. For Scelsi, the solution came only after a crisis, four-years of silence, and the discovery of music's spiritual dimensions.

Scelsi's Modernist Experimentation up to 1941

The works of Scelsi's early years as a published composer demonstrate his desire to assimilate several of the most progressive compositional trends of the early twentieth century. His travels in the late 1920s and 1930s to Paris, Vienna, and Geneva and his periods of study under Walter Klein and Egon Koehler evince a young composer eager to learn and absorb. Not surprisingly then, the works of these years encompass an impressively wide range of styles that includes elements of impressionism, neoclassicism, machinism, and Second-Viennese atonality. The period also contains several piano works that show affinities with Scelsi's sonorist music, particularly the piano music of the early 1950s. The strongest examples of such prefiguration—chiefly the reiteration of cluster chords, minor-second dyads, and single tones—appear in Suite No. 6 and Sonata No. 2, both dating from 1939. Nevertheless, these works form an exceptional group in the midst of Scelsi's modernist period; in 1940 he resumed his experimentation with free atonality and other modernist styles. Scelsi's output in 1941 included the *Variazioni e fuga* for piano, perhaps his most thorough application of atonal counterpoint in the manner of the Second Viennese school, followed by a period of three years without composition and his first attempt to amalgamate his knowledge in the String Quartet No. 1 (1944). He did not return to the ideas he tentatively explored in 1939 until after his crisis, when his transformed aesthetic orientation gave them newfound spiritual significance.

The milieu of Scelsi's early development as a composer led understandably to his adoption of impressionistic and neoclassical techniques. The influential figures in modern Italian music in the 1920s, particularly instrumental music, were chiefly representatives of

the *generazione dell'ottanta*: Alfredo Casella (1883–1947), Ottorino Respighi (1879–1936), Giorgio Ghedini (1892–1965), Ildebrando Pizzetti (1880–1968), and Gian Francesco Malipiero (1882–1973). Though diverse, these composers all showed the imprint of Debussy and other French composers in their works. Casella had spent nineteen years in France, travelling in circles with Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky, and others before returning to Italy as a champion of French music in 1915.¹² Of course, Scelsi's exposure to French music increased markedly after his arrival in Paris in 1929. His use of impressionistic techniques is already apparent in the pandiatonicism of *Chemin de coeur* (1929) for violin and piano and the extended tertian chords and parallelism of *Dialogo* (1932) for cello and piano. The harmonic and melodic austerity of these works produces an uncharacteristic simplicity, utterly different from the aggressive dissonance of contemporaneous works such as *Rotative* (1929) and *Piano Suite No. 2* (1930). The influence of French music is apparent also in Scelsi's songs of 1933 and 1937 on French poetry. The inclusion of impressionistic traits in Scelsi's early music may also have come from his study of Scriabin's style. Though not truly an exponent of musical impressionism, Scriabin's harmonic language overlapped with that of Debussy, particularly in the use of quartal voicings, which figure prominently in some of Scelsi's piano works of the 1930s.

Neoclassical attributes manifest in Scelsi's absolute music of the 1930s and 1940s, in which concern for counterpoint, variation, and form replaces the suggestiveness and fluidity of impressionism. The music of the *generazione dell'ottanta* served as a model for Scelsi in this regard as well, for much of it shows strong neoclassical tendencies. While some Italians looked to the music of Italy's medieval and Renaissance past for inspiration, Ghedini and Malipiero became known for their overt efforts to recapture the objectivity of

¹²John C. G. Waterhouse, "Italy from the First World War to the Second," in *Modern Times: From World War I to the Present*, ed. Robert P. Morgan, Music and Society, ed. Stanley Sadie (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1993), 114.

17th and 18th century music, issuing editions and transcriptions of music by Monteverdi, Bach, and others. Even Casella, who had been an outspoken critic of such retrospection, succumbed to the neoclassical aesthetic in his *terza maniera* (third phase) beginning in the 1920s.¹³ Evidence of a neoclassical inclination in Scelsi's output appears perhaps as early as the *Sinfonietta* (1932) for orchestra, but the appeal of neoclassicism was certainly enhanced by his study of the Second Viennese school in the mid 1930s. Compositions such as *Preludio, arioso, e fuga* (1936) for orchestra, *Variazioni* (1940) for piano, *Variazioni e fuga* (1941) for piano, and *Introduzione e fuga* (1945) for string orchestra represent Scelsi's attempts to apply an atonal language using neoclassical forms and contrapuntal techniques.

Before considering Scelsi's atonal works, however, we must turn our attention to a style that manifested in his music even earlier: *machinism*.¹⁴ Scelsi's interest in the rhythmic intensity and harmonic solecism of the machinistic style is clear in his first published composition, *Rotative* (1929), given its premiere in Paris on 21 December 1931 by members of the Orchestre Symphonique de Paris, conducted by Pierre Monteux.¹⁵ Consistent with the programmatic tendency of the style, Scelsi labeled the work a *symphonic poem* for three pianos, brass, and percussion.¹⁶ Recalling the genesis of the piece in a 1987 interview, he

¹³Waterhouse describes Casella's use of "clearcut linear textures" during this period in such works as *Scarlattiana* (1926). See Waterhouse, "Italy from the First World War to the Second," 118.

¹⁴I use the word *machinism* (*machinisme*) in the sense that Scelsi uses it in *The Evolution of Rhythm*: to indicate a compositional style rooted in Italian futurism and based upon "the appeal of the machine in which rhythm is the essential, conspicuous, and dominant element" (12 [285]).

¹⁵Felix Aprahamian, "Scelsi, Giacinto" in *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 5th ed., vol. 7: 461–462; Nicolas Slonimsky, *Music Since 1900*, 4th ed. (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1971), 541. Slonimsky offers the following information regarding the piece: "*Rotative*, symphonic poem by the 26-year-old Italian composer Giacinto Scelsi [*sic*], inspired by the phrase from a poem by Rupert Brooke: 'the keen impassioned beauty of a great machine' and written in a mechanistically romantic manner to portray the transformation of the reciprocating motion of the piston into a continuous rotary motion of a steam engine, with the rhythmic pulsation humanly faulted by occasional asymmetrical meters."

¹⁶The title, *Rotative*, may be construed in Italian as a plural noun meaning *printing presses*, or in French as a plural adjective meaning *rotary*.

dated its composition to his eighteenth year (1923) and admitted its stylistic affinity with the programmatic machine music of the 1920s.

I composed a piece, *Rotative*, given its premiere by Pierre Monteux. It was originally conceived for three pianos, and was one of my first works, almost a kind of dare or joke. I wanted to call it *Coitus Mechanicus*! It was . . . mechanical music (this was the era of Honegger's *Pacific 231* and Mossolov's *The Steel Foundry*)—in fact, I really wanted to depict the sexual act! I wrote it when I was eighteen.¹⁷

Scelsi seems eager to dismiss the work as youthful drollery, the frivolous product of an anxious teenage imagination. On the other hand, that he once held *Rotative* in high regard is confirmed by his return to it in 1930 to produce a version for solo piano and again in 1944 to produce a version for two pianos and percussion. Moreover, he cites its premiere under the esteemed Monteux with pride, and goes out of his way to associate *Rotative* with two well-known works in the machinistic style. If indeed Scelsi composed *Rotative* in 1923 as he claimed, it is doubtful that Honegger's *Pacific 231* could have been a direct influence on the young Italian, for it was written in the same year, and impossible that Mossolov's piece could have influenced him, for it dates from 1926–28. More likely, Scelsi composed or possibly revised *Rotative* after his arrival in Paris in 1929, when he may have had exposure to those works by Honegger and Mossolov, as well as other pieces in a similar vein.

The most salient and striking features of *Rotative* are its incessant polyrhythms, its dense and dissonant harmonic language, and its lack of distinctly melodic gestures. This is music of polychordal sound-blocks, juxtaposed and reiterated such that nearly all harmonic sensibility disintegrates. Rhythmic tension is generated almost continuously by the

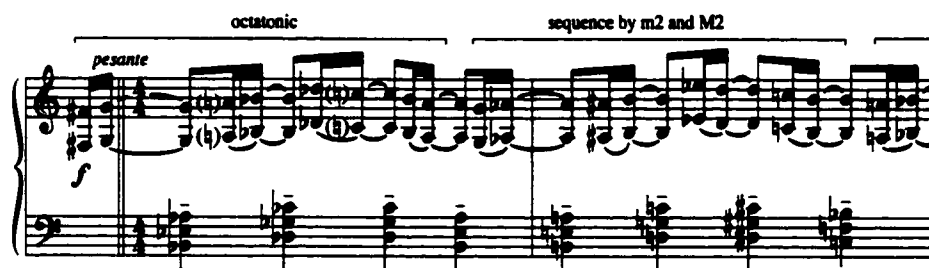
¹⁷Giacinto Scelsi, interview with Franck Mallet, "Il suono lontano: Conversazione con Giacinto Scelsi," trans. Marco Montaguti (French to Italian) in *Giacinto Scelsi: Viaggio al centro del suono*, ed. Pierre Albert Castanet and Nicola Cisternino (La Spezia, Italy: Luna Editore, 1993), 23. ("Composi un'opera, *Rotative*, eseguita in prima assoluta da Pierre Monteux. Essa era stata originariamente concepita per tre pianoforti. Era una delle mie prime opere, quasi una scommessa, una plaisanterie. Volevo intitolarla *Coitus Mechanicus*! Era musica . . . meccanica (era l'epoca di *Pacific 231* di Honegger e delle *Fonderies d'acier* di Mossolov)—in realtà voleva veramente rappresentare l'atto sessuale! La scrissi a diciotto anni.")

asynchrony of two distinct parts, easily seen in the two hands of the solo piano version, even from the opening measures.¹⁸

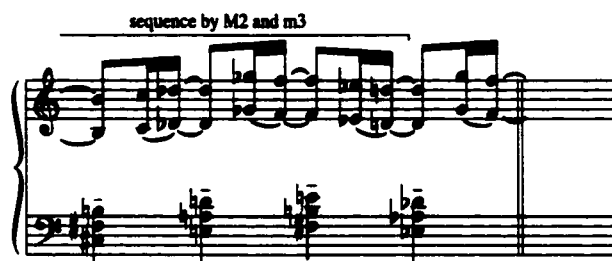


Example 1. Scelsi: *Rotative*, mm. 1–4

By measure 29, the polyrhythm has undergone a rotational transformation, a process suggested by the work's title. The rhythmic counterpart to the straight quarter notes of the left hand has shifted mechanically from the triplets of the opening bars to a syncopated sixteenth/dotted-eighth note figure.



¹⁸Examples from *Rotative* are taken from the version for solo piano: Giacinto Scelsi, *Rotative* (Rome: Ricordi, 1933). A copy is retained in the library of the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome.



Example 2. Scelsi: *Rotative*, mm. 29–31

The bewildering diversity of pitch structures in *Rotative*—all of them characteristic of early-twentieth century post-tonality—undermines the work’s harmonic and melodic intelligibility. One can find examples of whole-tone, octatonic, extended (e.g., ninth), quartal, and secundal structures as well as polyharmonic combinations of conventional triads and seventh chords. In Example 2 above, quartal harmonies comprised exclusively of perfect intervals coincide with a line that begins octatonically in m. 29 but is obfuscated by an intervallically expanding sequence—another rotation of sorts—in the following bars. In all, the sonorities in *Rotative* tend to be densely packed, with tertian and quartal structures in one part frequently obscured by the addition of seconds in another. Adriano Cremonese has aptly described the effect as a desire “to dirty up the sound.”¹⁹ Indeed, Scelsi seems intent on disallowing any type of harmonic discernment on the part of the listener. Cremonese misinterprets this feature, however, when he suggests that the dissonant harmonic language of *Rotative* provides evidence of “an intense perception of sound” that portends Scelsi’s sonorist music of later decades.²⁰ Scelsi devised such a perplexing harmonic language for this work not because he wanted to draw the listener’s attention to the resonant sonorities, but precisely because he wanted to draw attention *away* from them.

¹⁹Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva*, 12. (“sporcare il suono”)

²⁰Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva*, 14. (“una percezione intensa del suono”)

In *The Evolution of Rhythm* Scelsi describes the emancipation of rhythm in twentieth-century music. He argues that rhythm, no longer subservient to harmony and melody, had become free to “pursue its particular expression by progressions obeying only its own impulse and laws.”²¹ In *Rotative*, the harmonic language remains so frenetic that its morphology seems almost impenetrable. As a result, the readily perceptible rhythmic processes necessarily emerge as the essence of the work.

In his discussion of the machinistic style in *The Evolution of Rhythm*, written thirteen years after the publication of *Rotative*, Scelsi cites the historical importance and artistic success of the same two works he recalled in the 1987 interview quoted above: Honegger’s *Pacific 231* and Mossolov’s *The Steel Foundry*.²² Clearly Scelsi considered these models for the kind of descriptive rhythmic expression he had pursued in *Rotative*. Yet in the essay Scelsi underscores the prominent role of Stravinsky in liberating rhythmic expression from its hitherto subordinate position. He identifies *The Firebird*, *Petroushka*, and particularly *The Rite of Spring* as milestones, then goes on to praise *Les Noces* as “a true masterpiece.”²³ Scelsi likely had the opportunity to hear *Les Noces* after arriving in Paris in 1929, or perhaps even before leaving Italy. Casella presented the work, along with Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire*, on a tour of Italian cities under the auspices of his *Corporazione delle Nuove Musiche* in the mid 1920s, and also conducted it at the Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in Siena on 14 September 1928.²⁴ The influence of *Les Noces* is suggested in part by the scoring of its instrumental parts, which bears a strong resemblance to the combination of multiple pianos and percussion in

²¹Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 8 (279). (“poursuit son expression particulière par des enchaînements n’obéissant qu’à son impulsion et lois propres.”) See Chapter 2.

²²Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 12 (285); Scelsi, “Il suono lontano,” 23. See note no. 17 above.

²³Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 10 (281). (“un véritable chef-d’œuvre”)

²⁴Waterhouse, “Italy from the First World War to the Second,” 114; Slonimsky, *Music Since 1900*, 477.

Rotative. Furthermore, the concomitance of rhythmic disjunction and polyharmony, central to the conception of *Rotative*, occurs often in *Les Noces*, as in this excerpt from the end of the second Act.

The image displays a musical score for four pianos, labeled Piano I, Piano II, Piano III, and Piano IV. The notation is complex, featuring numerous accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and dynamic markings such as 'v' (forte) and '8va' (octave). The score is written in a single system with four staves, each containing a grand staff (treble and bass clef). The music is characterized by dense polyharmonic textures and rhythmic disjunction, typical of Stravinsky's style in *Les Noces*.

Example 3. Stravinsky: *Les Noces*, Act II, Reh. 62

These affinities of instrumentation and style between *Rotative* and *Les Noces* suggest that Scelsi may have been more impressed by this work than by Stravinsky's more notorious ballets during the earliest phase of his career.

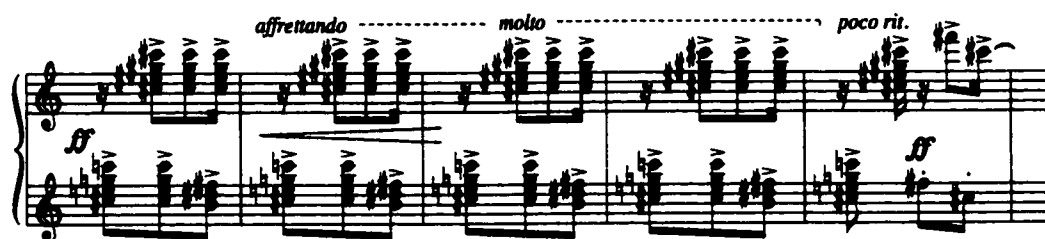
By the time he wrote *The Evolution of Rhythm* in 1942, Scelsi had renounced the type of programmatic machinism at work in *Rotative*. He maintained that the employment of rhythmic processes for the purpose of depiction merely

takes the machine or the mechanical object in opposition and as a substitution for the [traditional] subject: landscape, nature, etc. The works of this category are based on imitative rhythms and harmonies and proceed from a desire for reaction or from the anti-sentimental, anti-emotional aesthetic, as much as from the need for purely rhythmic expression. The proof of this is that the rhythmic language, being imitative like harmony, is not expressed according to its own laws but is submissive to the descriptive and exterior conception of patterns. In other words, it is the depiction of a dynamism but not the dynamism itself. Often the works of this category, [programmatic] depictions or symphonic scenes, offend just as much as the exotic images of photography.²⁵

Scelsi's awareness that rhythmic energy could serve as the primary subject of a composition may have come via programmaticism, but within thirteen years he realized that the descriptive element itself was, in his opinion, superfluous to rhythmic dynamism and may even detract from it. Although traces of the machinistic style remained in Scelsi's music even into the early 1950s, he dispensed with its programmatic imitations of the external world considerably earlier.

Examples of rhythmic impulsion similar to those of *Rotative* but devoid of depictive content appear in Scelsi's piano suites and sonatas from the 1930s. The remarkable Piano Suite No. 2 (*I dodici profeti minori*) (1930), notated with only sporadic use of barlines and even scarcer time signatures, sustains intensity throughout its twelve movements principally by means of rhythmic activity and momentum. Distinctive melodic gestures and teleological harmonic progression occur infrequently if at all, yielding to the assertive repetition of motives and sonorities in patterns ranging from deceptively simple to enormously complex. In this example from Movement II, an uncomplicated metrical misalignment generates considerable disunity.

²⁵Scelsi, *The Evolution of Rhythm*, 12 (283). ("Il faut donc distinguer dans l'exaltation du machinisme ou du dynamisme deux catégories. La première prend la machine ou l'objet mécanique en opposition et comme substitution au sujet paysage, nature morte, etc. Les œuvres de cette catégorie sont basées sur des rythmes et harmonies imitatifs et proviennent d'un désir de réaction ou de l'esthétique antisentimentale, antiaffective, tout autant que du besoin d'expression rythmique pure. La preuve en est que le langage rythmique, comme l'harmonie, étant imitatif n'est point par ce fait exprimé selon ses lois propres mais est soumis à la conception descriptive et extérieure du modèle. En d'autres termes, c'est la peinture d'un dynamisme et non le dynamisme même. Souvent les œuvres de cette catégorie, peinture ou tableaux symphoniques, pèchent tout autant que les chromos exotiques du défaut de l'art photographique.") See Chapter 2.



Example 4. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 2, Movement II, p. 10

More often in the piano works of the 1930s, rhythmic activity is coordinated between the two hands, which work synchronously to produce the assertive reiteration and rotational shifting of the machinistic style. The entire tenth movement of the Piano Suite No. 5 (*Il circo*) (1935), for instance, consists of the metrical dislocation and ultimate deconstruction of a simple rhythmic figure launched at the beginning of the movement. With the two hands in rhythmic unison, a trochaic figure (♩.♩ or ♩.♩) followed by uniform eighth notes appears in each measure. After the establishment of this machinelike pattern in triple meter at the beginning of the movement, the figure becomes increasingly irregular as grace notes are introduced and the meter begins to shift.



Example 5. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 5, Movement X, mm. 1-8

It must be underscored that in the piano suites and sonatas of the 1930s, Scelsi generally does not strive to focus the listener's attention on rhythmic processes by obfuscating the harmonic language in the manner of *Rotative*. On the contrary, here rhythmic processes often accompany more consistent pitch materials; through sheer repetition the listener's ear is drawn to the unchanging combination of tones. This feature has prompted some scholars to ascribe a kind of nascent sonorism to these works, the most prominent of which date from 1939 and will be discussed below. It seems reasonable that the rhythmic assertion of machinism might have precipitated a rejection of harmonic mutability, which, ironically, led to increased awareness of the individual sonorities. The tendency also seems indebted to Scriabin, who had demonstrated that long stretches of music, or even entire compositions, might be based upon the reiteration and reformation of a central sonority. Scelsi's pursuit of this path was delayed, however, by his concurrent experimentation with interval-based atonality, a compositional approach that discouraged the successive repetition of individual pitches and sonorities in favor of motivic and intervallic development.

The extent to which Scelsi's encounter with Second-Viennese atonality contributed to his eventual stylistic and aesthetic transformation is as fascinating to consider as it is difficult to assess. Commentators in the secondary literature have ordinarily assigned special significance to this component of Scelsi's modernist background; his adoption and subsequent rejection of the style never seem to escape mention in even the most cursory program note. Scelsi eventually came to renounce composition according to the external relationships among different notes, so his erstwhile interest in a style that so exemplifies this principle underscores the severity of his transformation. As I have suggested, the symbolic importance of Scelsi's experience with the atonal style has generated considerable

misconception, most importantly the erroneous suggestion that he adopted then quickly abandoned Schoenberg's dodecaphonic method.²⁶

After studying the music and compositional approaches of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern with Walter Klein in Vienna around 1935 or 1936, Scelsi began to incorporate rudimentary serial procedures and pointillistic textures in his music. There is no evidence, however, that Scelsi ever employed Schoenberg's method of composing with twelve tones in its purest form: he rarely used a complete twelve-tone row and never explored such techniques as combinatoriality. Scelsi preferred to work with small intervallic cells and long strings of notes, which often included pitch repetition. Moreover, he limited the number of serial manipulations he used in a single composition, focusing on just three or four basic operations.

The first of Scelsi's compositions to show the influence of the Second Viennese school was the *Quattro poemi* (1936–39) for piano.²⁷ Cremonese has correctly pointed to the second of the work's four movements as the source of its thematic and pitch materials.²⁸ The movement opens with a serial statement of the twelve chromatic pitches, presented in four clear segments of three notes each (see Example 6). Arguing for the *Quattro poemi* as a direct product of Scelsi's tutelage under Klein, Cremonese shows that the second movement's opening trichord is identical to the opening gesture of Berg's Piano Sonata,

²⁶Freeman, for instance, states that Scelsi composed "the first 12-tone piece by an Italian. But an abstract approach to composition, based as it was on the tempered scale and veering already towards neo-classicism, could not interest him long" (Freeman: "Tanmatras: The Life and Work of Giacinto Scelsi," 8.) See Chapter 1.

²⁷A number of Scelsi commentators have seized this opportunity to repudiate the putative claim that Luigi Dallapiccola (1904–1975) was the first Italian to write twelve-tone music. Dallapiccola's earliest efforts in dodecaphony were tentative—Antokoletz calls them "experiments" (Elliott Antokoletz, *Twentieth-Century Music* [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1992], 358). The first of these was his *Canti di prigionia* (1938–41), which is not dodecaphonic throughout, but does employ twelve-tone rows and standard Schoenbergian manipulations of them. Scelsi's composition of *Quattro poemi* began earlier, but contains fewer truly twelve-tone operations. Ultimately, the determination as to which composer was the first Italian to use Schoenberg's approach remains impossible to make with certainty.

²⁸Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva*, 22.

Op. 1, a compelling observation in light of the fact that Scelsi dedicated the last movement of his piece to Berg's memory.²⁹ Cremonese suggests that the intervals of this trichord, an ascending perfect fourth followed by a tritone, serve as the main "thematic cell" of the movement. His point is both convincing and worthy of amplification.

The image shows a musical score for Scelsi's *Quattro poemi*, Movement II, measures 1-9. The score is written for piano and consists of three systems. The first system is marked "Lento misterioso" and "p" (piano). It features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Brackets and labels identify specific pitch-class sets: [0,1,6] and [0,2,6]. The second system is marked "poco meno lento" and "rall." (rallentando). It continues the melodic and bass lines. A label "Opening hexachord (transposed)" points to a specific passage in the second system. The third system is marked "Agitato" and "a tempo". It features a more active melodic line. A label "Opening hexachord (untransposed)" points to a passage in the third system.

Example 6. Scelsi: *Quattro poemi*, Movement II, mm. 1-9

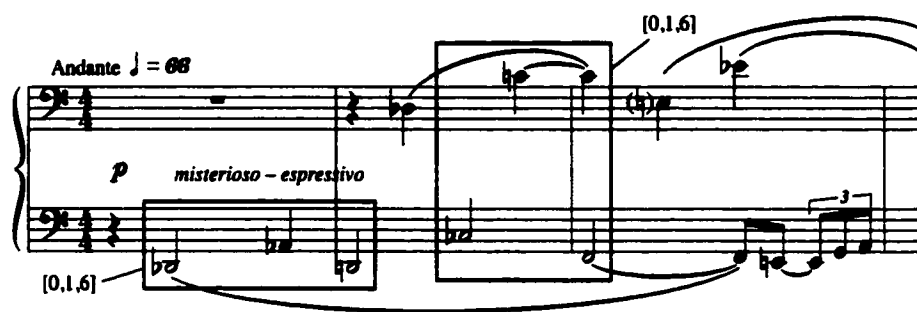
The opening cell (G-C-F $\sharp$), which forms the pitch-class set [0,1,6], provides the basis for the complete twelve-note series presented in measures 1-4 and for the remaining material of the entire movement. After its initial statement, the cell reappears transposed and inverted as the second segment of the serial theme (A-E-B $\flat$). The order of intervals is unchanged (P4-

²⁹Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva*, 22-30. In his discussion of the *Quattro poemi*, Cremonese also argues that the work provides evidence of Scriabin's influence as much as Berg's. He points chiefly to the predominance of quartal harmony in the piece, and gives particular emphasis to a restatement of the twelve-tone theme toward the end of Movement II in which the addition of an F $\sharp$ before the final note generates a melodic trichord of perfect fourths (C $\sharp$ -F $\sharp$ -B).

TT), yielding another [0,1,6] set. The third segment of the series (Eb-A $\flat$ -D) restates the main cell without inversion, but transposed down a major third to begin on Eb, forming the [0,1,6] set again. The fourth segment (F-C $\sharp$ -B) differs from the previous three by a single interval class (one semitone): a diminished fourth replaces the perfect fourth, thus forming set [0,2,6].

The material in measures 5–6 does not constitute a complete twelve-note series, but it does derive from the opening series and its prominent [0,1,6] trichord. The notes of measure 5 (A-E-Eb-F $\sharp$ -G-C) present six of the first seven notes of the opening series (G-C-F $\sharp$ -A-E-[B $\flat$]-Eb) in an untransposed permutation (reordering). The first trichord of measure 5 (A-E-Eb) consists of a transposed permutation of the primary cell, also forming set [0,1,6]. The second trichord of measure six (F $\sharp$ -G-C) is an untransposed permutation of the primary cell—another occurrence of [0,1,6]—consisting of the same pitch classes as the original. The last trichord of measure 6 (C $\sharp$ -A-G) forms a transposed permutation of the last trichord of the original series—the [0,2,6] set—with one pitch class in common (C $\sharp$). Measures 7–8 present the opening hexachord of the series, transposed down by one semitone, and in measure 9 this hexachord appears again, now at its original pitch level with some octave displacement.

The remainder of the second movement features similar reworking of material from the opening series, much of it over an ostinato of [0,1,6] trichords transposed to various pitch levels. It culminates in a grand restatement of the series shortly before the movement's conclusion. The other three movements, though not as motivically concise as the second, reiterate the [0,1,6] set at significant moments, such as the main theme of Movement IV, shown in Example 7.



Example 7. Scelsi: *Quattro poemi*, Movement IV, mm. 13–15

Thus in the *Quattro poemi* Scelsi employed fragmentation, permutation, inversion, and transposition, but eschewed the characteristically serial operations of retrograde and retrograde inversion. Furthermore, he chose to work with small intervallic cells in the manner of free atonality rather than complete twelve-tone rows, despite having already been exposed to Schoenberg's dodecaphonic method.

The *Variazioni e fuga* for piano of 1941 evinces the influence of Anton Webern, to whose memory the work is dedicated.³⁰ In this work, Scelsi experimented with relatively long atonal themes rather than concise intervallic motives as in the *Quattro poemi*. A set of sixteen short variations followed by a fugue on atonal themes, *Variazioni e fuga* is a pointillistic study in canonic procedures. Scelsi employs two primary themes, designated A and B in Example 8, along with the inversions of A and B and two secondary themes designated C and D. Devoid of characteristic rhythms and octave placement, the themes are conceived as pitch series, much like dodecaphonic tone-rows. Yet they are not twelve-tone, for they feature repetition of some pitch classes and omission of others. Moreover, Scelsi treats them more pliantly than Schoenberg's method typically allows: the themes appear with alternate endings and are subjected to fragmentation, intervallic modification, and free

³⁰Of course, Webern died in 1945, so Scelsi must have added the dedication a few years after composing the work, probably for its initial publication in 1947 by Edizioni de Santis.

harmonization. The particular expressions of themes A and B given in Example 8 may be considered the primary ones, for they appear prominently in the first variation and in the exposition of the fugue.

Primary theme A

Inversion of A

Primary theme B

Inversion of B (transposed to begin with same dyad as inversion of A)

Secondary theme C

Secondary theme D

Example 8. Scelsi: *Variazioni e fuga*, primary and secondary themes

Whereas Schoenberg's dodecaphonic method relies chiefly on intervallic consistency, allowing for transposition of the primary row, Scelsi maintains pitch-class invariance in the employment of his themes in the *Variazioni e fuga*. Each theme always appears at the same pitch level, with the exception of the fugue exposition wherein the subject answers occur transposed up a perfect fourth. Scelsi also uses particular pitch classes to correlate the various themes. Themes A, B, and D all begin with the C-B $\flat$ dyad, while the inversion of Theme B is transposed so as to begin with the same C-D dyad (the inversion of C-B $\flat$) that begins the inversion of Theme A.

A sampling of the various canonic procedures Scelsi employs in handling these themes demonstrates the extent of Webern's influence on the conception of the piece. Scelsi begins directly with Variation I, a pointillistic presentation of all of the themes: Theme A in

the first five measures, Theme B in the last six measures in retrograde (made visible by starting with the final measure and proceeding backward), Theme C beginning at measure 6, and Theme D beginning at measure 12.

Moderato *deciso ma con spirito* (♩ = 72)

Theme A →

mf staccato

Theme C →

Theme D →

← Theme B

Example 9. Scelsi: *Variazioni e fuga*, Variation I

Variation II consists of an exact retrograde of Variation I in its entirety, both its pitch and its rhythm. Variation III begins with the inversions of A and B in counterpoint between the two hands. In Variation IV, Theme A serves as a measure-long ostinato in the left hand,

while several of the themes and thematic fragments are strung together melodically in the right hand. In Variation V, Theme A is presented harmonically in trichords to accompany another melodic chain constructed from statements and fragments of the themes. Similar processes characterize the remaining variations as well as the fugue with which the piece culminates.

Scelsi's *Quattro poemi* and *Variazioni e fuga*, dedicated to the memories of Berg and Webern respectively, provide the best indications of the extent to which Scelsi absorbed the atonal style of the Second Viennese school. However uninterested in the full application of Schoenberg's dodecaphonic method, Scelsi seemed eager to explore the canonic techniques, intervallic operations, and pointillistic texture of the style. Moreover, his dedication of two large-scale piano works to members of the Second Viennese triumvirate demonstrates the importance Scelsi once assigned to their influence.

Scelsi's attitude towards the atonal style in ensuing years seems to have vacillated considerably. There are signs that by the early 1940s he had begun to turn away from the idiom: *Variazioni e fuga* is the last of Scelsi's works in a severely pointillistic texture, and his last overt employment of the variation form so favored by the New Viennese. Perhaps more importantly, the names of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern remain conspicuously absent from the roster of historically determinative composers that Scelsi provides in *The Evolution of Harmony* and *The Evolution of Rhythm*, written only a year after the composition of *Variazioni e fuga*.³¹ On the other hand, motivic cohesion and atonal counterpoint persist quite prominently in the String Quartet No. 1 (1944), perhaps his most important work of the decade.

Despite Scelsi's ambivalence toward the Second-Viennese composers in the 1940s, their lasting influence manifested during his sonorist period, when timbre became one of his

³¹Scelsi does make one passing reference to Berg in *The Evolution of Harmony* (p. 10 [273]), but only for the purpose of underscoring Scriabin's great compositional foresight in anticipating some of Berg's accomplishments.

priorities. The compositional potential of *Klangfarbenmelodie* and timbral sensitivity, explored most thoroughly by Webern, largely eluded Scelsi in the 1930s and 1940s, but became fundamental to his musical conception in later decades. It is telling that, after omitting the Second Viennese composers from the historicist texts, Scelsi *did* underscore Webern's importance—not Schoenberg's or Berg's—in *Sound and Music*. In this spiritualist text, Scelsi praised Webern for “investigating sound and its energy,” which seems to refer to the use of *Klangfarbenmelodie*.³² Only after his crisis and aesthetic transformation had Scelsi begun to appreciate Webern's exploitation of timbre as a compositional parameter.

Sonorist Prefigurement in the Piano Works of the 1930s

Alongside the intricate motivic and contrapuntal explorations of the *Quattro poemi* and *Variazioni e fuga*, Scelsi's piano suites and sonatas of the 1930s exhibit an uncontrived impetuosity that suggests improvisation. Scelsi reported that he had been improvising at the piano since childhood, and this was to become the characteristic working method of his sonorist period.³³ The degree to which improvisation figured in the composition of his works from earlier decades, however, has never been established nor even contemplated by scholars.³⁴ Clearly, improvisation was not the primary compositional technique used for

³²Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 6 (290). In the passage, Webern is mentioned alongside Varèse, whom Scelsi always held in high regard for making timbre an aesthetic priority (Hirayama, interview with the author, 3 May 1997).

³³See Chapter 1.

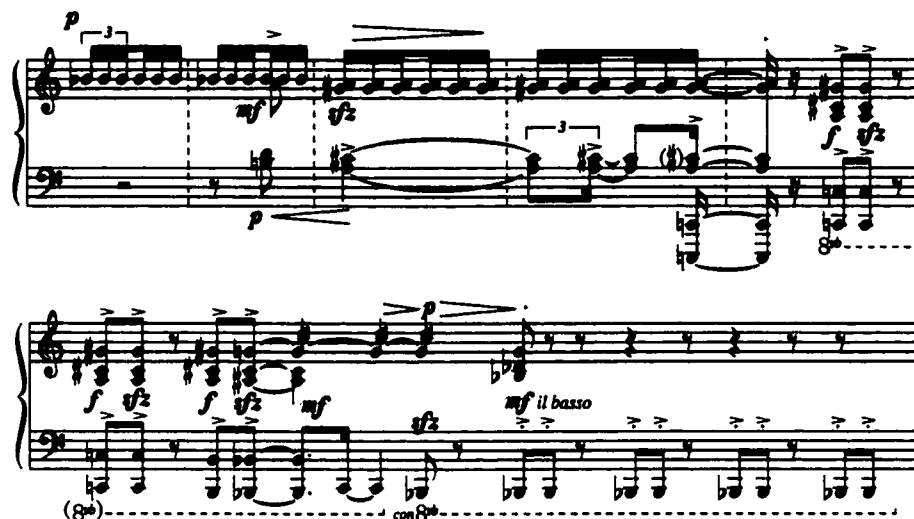
³⁴Frances-Marie Uitti—who has enjoyed greater access to the tapes of Scelsi's improvisations than anyone else to date—suspects that Scelsi began the practice of recording his improvisations in the 1940s while living in Switzerland (Frances-Marie Uitti, interview with William Colangelo in “The Composer-Performer Paradigm in Giacinto Scelsi's Solo Works” [Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1996], 52). The works of that period, however, almost certainly did not originate as improvisations, as they show an abiding concern with counterpoint, form, motivic manipulation, and other highly calculated types of musical expression. See my discussion of Scelsi's String Quartet No. 1 on pp. 154–178.

the majority of Scelsi's modernist works, which are fastidiously crafted. The canonic processes of *Variazioni e fuga*, for instance, bespeak careful planning and compositional premeditation. The suites and sonatas, on the other hand, are replete with signs of spontaneity, the most conspicuous of which is their lack of motivic development.

The apparently improvisational genesis of the suites and sonatas may explain their most compelling feature: the repetitive emphasis of aggregate sonorities or isolated tones. Without the motivic, formal, melodic, harmonic, and contrapuntal cohesion afforded by compositional forethought, a penchant for reiteration materialized as an uncomplicated unifying device. Because this feature resembles the isolated notes in Scelsi's piano music of the early 1950s, several writers have suggested that the seeds of his sonorist style were already planted early in his compositional career. Hans Zeller and Michelle Biget have drawn attention to Piano Suite No. 2 (*I dodici profeti minori*) of 1930.³⁵ Zeller argues that Scelsi's use of ostinati in this suite may have its roots in machinism, but his characteristic manner of employing them produces "the emancipation of single sounds or complex sonorities."³⁶ Though Zeller does not single out the fifth of the suite's twelve movements, it contains much of what he describes: reiterated notes and harmonic intervals that germinate and grow into rich and dissonant sonorities, and then dissolve back into dyads or single tones (see Example 10).

³⁵Hans Rudolf Zeller, "Das Ensemble der Soli," in *Giacinto Scelsi*, ed. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn, *Musik-Konzepte: Die Reihe über Komponisten*, no. 31 (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1983), 24–66; Michelle Biget, "Giacinto Scelsi, un approccio al pianoforte," in *Giacinto Scelsi: Viaggio al centro del suono*, ed. Pierre Albert Castanet and Nicola Cisternino (La Spezia: Luna Editore, 1993), 198–227. Robin Freeman erroneously refers to Zeller's analysis of Piano Sonata No. 2 (1939), rather than Piano Suite No. 2 (1930) (Freeman, "Tanmatras: The Life and Work of Giacinto Scelsi," 11).

³⁶Zeller, "Das Ensemble der Soli," 33.



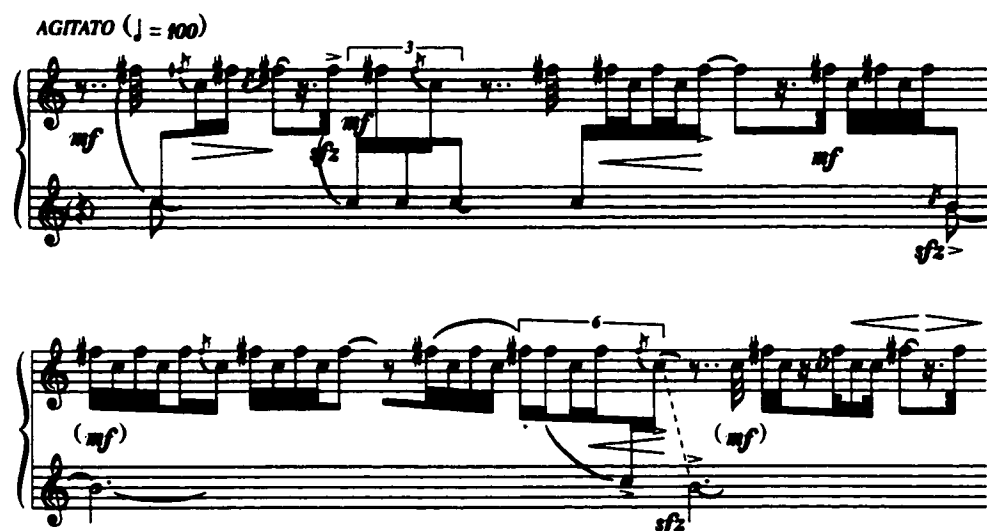
Example 10. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 2, Movement V, p. 21

Building upon Zeller's argument, Biget attempts to illustrate specific affinities between Suite No. 2 and two sonorist piano works of the 1950s that Scelsi completed shortly after his return to composition: Suite No. 8 (*Bot-ba*) (1952) and *Cinque incantesimi* (1953).³⁷ Like Zeller, Biget underscores Scelsi's use of ostinato as a means to isolate certain sounds, to give them a degree of "autonomy." To illustrate the supposed consistency of Scelsi's approach in his piano music from the 1930s to the 1950s, she offers the following examples from the second movement of Suite No. 2 and the first movement of Suite No. 8.



Example 11. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 2, Movement II, p. 7

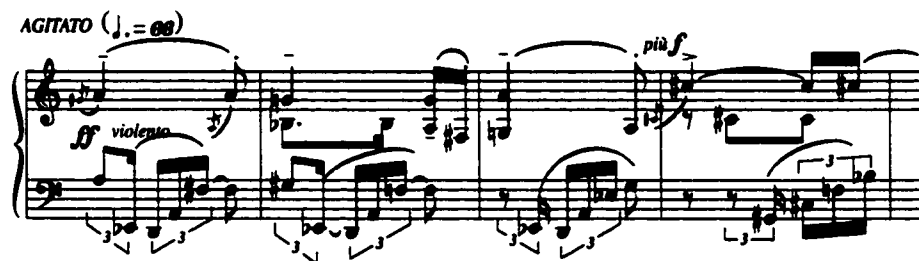
³⁷Biget, "Un approccio al pianoforte," 200–205.



Example 12. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 8, Movement I, p. 1

Even though both excerpts show the use of a two-note ostinato—which forms the crux of Biget’s argument—their contexts differ significantly. As Biget herself points out, the ostinato from Suite No. 2 (Example 11) serves as *accompaniment* to the primary idea of the passage, the melodic gesture of the right hand. In Example 12 from Suite No. 8, however, the F4-C ostinato itself constitutes the primary musical material; it is the essence of the passage rather than mere accompaniment. Furthermore, the ostinato from Suite No. 2 quickly metamorphoses: it begins an intervallic expansion in the subsequent bars, a fact that Biget also underscores, but for the wrong reasons. Rather than demonstrating a sonoristic predilection for the saturation of the sonic spectrum, as Biget suggests, the widening intervals and changing pitch content of Scelsi’s ostinato show that he was not concerned with maintaining a consistent sonority—at least not in this instance. The effect of this ostinato remains largely a rhythmic one, still traceable to the influence of machinism, and its intervallic augmentation serves chiefly to intensify the directed motion of the passage. This expansion of the ostinato is, in fact, one of several dilations working synergetically to propel the music toward an eruption marked *agitato* and *violento* (Example 13). By this time, the

ostinato has expanded from its opening major third to an array of wider intervals including fifths, sixths, tenths, and elevenths, the tempo has correspondingly increased from $\text{♩} = 48$ to $\text{♩} = 66$, and the dynamic level has risen from *p* to *ff*.



Example 13. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 2, Movement II, p. 9

As was the case with *Rotative*, rhythmic assertion in Suite No. 2 should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence of sonorous accentuation. While there are some noteworthy instances of focused pitch assertion and constancy in the suite, the pitch structures in other passages, such as the ostinato in Biget's example, are too mutable to be perceived as isolated focal points.

In the piano works of 1939, however, the reiteration of particular pitches in isolation and in relief—as the primary component of a larger structure such as a dyad or chord cluster—assumes greater significance than in works from earlier in the decade. Martin Zenck has identified the importance of Suite No. 6 (*I capricci di Ty*) in this regard.³⁸ The work is cast in fifteen remarkable movements, which contain some of the most dense and frenzied utterances of Scelsi's entire output. Yet in the midst of even the most the furious passages, single tones emerge from the barrage as fleeting points of convergence around which the textures seem to rotate, fixed references in an otherwise tumultuous dispersion of

³⁸Martin Zenck, "Die andere Avantgarde des Giacinto Scelsi: Analytisch, ästhetische Reflexionen zum Klavierwerk," in *Musik-Texte Zeitschrift für neue Musik*, no. 26 (Cologne, 1988). Ty was Scelsi's pet name for his wife Dorothy.

notes. In Example 14 from the twelfth movement, G⁴ dislodges from a flurry of activity—including varying emphasis of the E⁴-F⁴-G⁴-G⁴-A cluster that encircles G⁴—to become a momentary, reiterated focus.

Example 14. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 6, Movement XII, mm. 21–28

A more important feature of Suite No. 6 is that, in four instances, a particular tone occupies a central position for an entire movement: D in Movement I, B^b/A[♯] in Movement III, F[♯] in Movement VI, and C in Movement XV. In each case the central tone is reiterated profusely, appearing in various octaves and occasionally as part of a minor-second dyad or larger structure. The tone serves as an anchor for the diffuse activity of the movement; it seldom disappears and lingers in the memory when it does. As we shall see, such use of a single tone as a focal point for a complete movement became one of the hallmarks of Scelsi's sonorist period.

Also dating from 1939, Piano Sonata No. 2 features equally notable projections of central tones. Its three movements, roughly of classical proportions, are longer than those of the suites, but frequent changes of tempo and texture, particularly in the impetuous first

and third movements, give the work a similarly rhapsodic impulsiveness. Because of the movements' length, Scelsi does not attempt to establish one central tone for each, supplying instead a series of foci that emerge with varying degrees of clarity and intensity.

The first movement—marked at the outset *con estremo impeto, agitatissimo*—opens with sixteenth-note reiterations of F♯ set against a C♯-D harmonic semitone, dissonant and aggressive echoes of machinism. The strident semitone dyad migrates to the F♯ itself in conjunction with G♯, then to A♯-B, which are set against a series of three-note sonorities, all of which contain F♯. The reiterated F♯ sixteenth notes eventually return, reached by way of passing emphasis on E and F♯. A much quieter section in $\frac{3}{4}$ briefly projects the whole-tone dyad of D♭-E♭, and builds in intensity until E♯ becomes the new focal point, pounded out in various triplet rhythms at a dynamic level of *molto f*. In passages marked *più tranquillo*, A is asserted in the right hand against a succession of F♯s in the left, set into relief by its dominant note, C♯. The A and F♯ continue briefly as an emphasized pair, out of which the A emerges in isolation, repeated monotonally until joined by other notes in increasingly dissonant clusters. There follows a remarkable *Moderato* section (Example 15) that projects B as its focus, first against a chromatically descending succession of pitches, then in detached isolation. After the other pitches have died away, the solitary B is hammered out in irregular rhythmic patterns and with varying articulations and dynamic levels, as if Scelsi were trying to forge a unique sound with each consecutive strike of the same piano key.³⁹

³⁹Martinis reports that Scelsi used this idea as a “test” for pianists who wanted to work with him (Luciano Martinis, “Marianne Schroeder, pianista: intervista di Luciano Martinis,” *i suoni, le onde: Rivista della Fondazione Isabella Scelsi* 4 [1993]: 28). He would sit them down at the piano and instruct them to play a single piano key numerous times, producing a different sound each time. It seems that he was testing the pianists' receptivity to novel ideas as much as their performance abilities. Scelsi probably also enjoyed the unnerving effect this exercise almost certainly had on overeager and overconfident young musicians.

Moderato (♩ = 72)

Example 15. Scelsi: Piano Sonata No. 2, Movement I, mm. 90–115

The *Moderato* episode reaches a climactic *sforzando*, the force of which pushes the focal B $\sharp$ up to B $\natural$, and the movement resumes after a *Generalpause* with repeated statements of the F-G $\flat$ (F $\sharp$) dyad in a very high tessitura. This leads to reiterated B $\flat$ s set against the F $\sharp$ -A

pair that had occupied a prominent role earlier in the movement. Approaching its conclusion, the movement returns to its original pitch focus, now written as $G\flat$ and repeated in a low register, followed by a momentary focus on C. The final sonority of the movement is an isolated $F-G\flat$ ($F\sharp$) dyad, played at a *pianissimo* dynamic level and left to decay into imperceptibility.

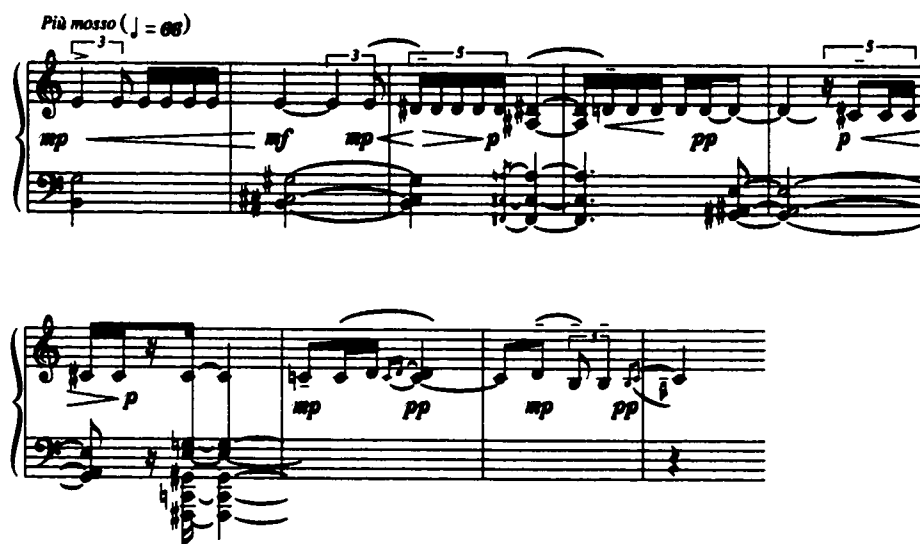
The second movement, an expansive *Lento meditativo*, provides a contemplative repose from the ferocity of the outer movements in the manner of a classical sonata. Notated without a time signature and for long stretches without barlines, the movement's slow tempo fluctuates between $\text{♩} = 40$ and $\text{♩} = 66$. The pitch foci of this movement are less pronounced, perhaps because the unhurried tempo and sustained notes allow for resonance without emphatic reiteration. The movement opens with a melodic statement, its pitch content blurred by its presentation in first-species counterpoint at the interval of a major, then a minor, second.



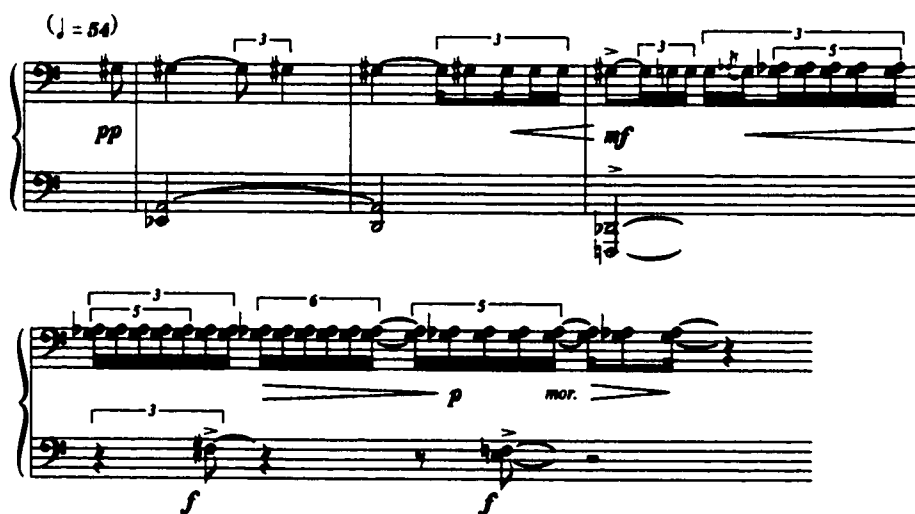
Example 16. Scelsi: Piano Sonata No. 2, Movement II, opening

Eventually, Scelsi establishes E as a fleeting focal point, then uses this pitch as the starting point for a chromatic descent of reiterated tones (Example 17). $A\flat$ then becomes the focus, approached from above by another, more abridged chromatic descent, after which $A\flat$ yields to repetitions of other tones, too transitory to be perceived as foci. When $A\flat$ resumes its central role, now as $G\sharp$, it is subjected to a process that later became characteristic of Scelsi's sonorist-period piano music: a type of mitotic division of the single tone into two,

the G $\sharp$ -A $\flat$ semitone dyad, which Scelsi seems intent on projecting as a single, more complex sound (Example 18).



Example 17. Scelsi: Piano Sonata No. 2, Movement II, pp. 14–15



Example 18. Scelsi: Piano Sonata No. 2, Movement II, p. 17

The third movement of Sonata No. 2, marked *Vivace tempestuoso*, is the briefest and most turbulent of the three. On the whole, the music of this movement depends less heavily on the clear projection of pitch foci and the use of ostinati. Still, there occurs some reiteration of individual tones, particularly B $\flat$ in the movement's opening section and E $\flat$ in the ensuing *presto*. Here, the central E $\flat$ pounds violently and erratically in accented right-hand octaves at a *fortissimo* dynamic level, until it is ultimately absorbed into a thicker sonority.

Example 19. Scelsi: Piano Sonata No. 2, Movement III, mm. 54–65

Approaching the end of the movement, A emerges as the new focal point against a variable counterpoint line that seems to oscillate around A, C $\sharp$, and F $\sharp$. Significantly, Scelsi provides

specific instructions to accentuate dynamically the central tone, A, indicating convincingly that its projection is crucial to the passage.

(♩ = 132) (molto *f* i LA marcati, meno *f* il resto)

molitissimo pedale

(senza dim.)

Example 20. Scelsi: Piano Sonata No. 2, Movement III, mm. 127–140

The sonata concludes with a return to the *Lento* tempo of the middle movement, allowing A to resonate quietly in various octaves, enriched by the addition of its major seventh.

Più Lento (♩ = 50) *rall.*

pp *p* *pp* *pp*

Example 21. Scelsi: Piano Sonata No. 2, Movement III, mm. 160–166

The piano works of 1939, especially Suite No. 6 and Sonata No. 2, suggest that Scelsi had begun to explore the possibility of using individual pitches as sonorous anchors within a labyrinthine, freely chromatic idiom. As such, they seem to constitute incipient signs of what would eventually develop into the central feature of his style in the years after his crisis. Nonetheless, to ascribe undue significance to these works, however tempting, would be to misrepresent the true complexion of Scelsi's modernist period. Their most provocative features remain *isolated* features, and the pieces themselves constitute a small percentage of Scelsi's output during the period. The bulk of his music up to 1948 is more accurately understood as the result of experimentation with the foremost compositional trends of the day. What's more, some scholars have judged the stylistic similarities between these piano works of the 1930s and Scelsi's early sonorist music so strong that they have come to doubt the verity of the facts as presented. Cremonese, for instance, questions the generally accepted date of composition for the Suite No. 6 (1939) based entirely on stylistic evidence. The piece, he suggests, not only bears affinities with Scelsi's later piano music but evinces a stylistic conception "much more advanced than that of the *Cinque incantesimi* [1953]."⁴⁰ Of the same Suite No. 6, Robin Freeman recalls—perhaps getting the impression directly from Scelsi—that the piece originally dates from the 1930s but was subjected to revision in later years, resulting in two versions of the piece.⁴¹

But even if the similarities are genuine—i.e., if the listed dates of composition are accurate and if the published scores represent the works in their original form, free of sonorist-period revisions—by the early 1940s Scelsi seems to have concluded that no new paths lay open to explore. If he demonstrated an early compositional proclivity for

⁴⁰Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva*, 79. ("che mostra una scrittura assai più avanzata di quella dei *Cinque incantesimi*.")

⁴¹Robin Freeman, conversation with the author, 6 May 1997. In his article of 1991, Freeman also refers to Scelsi's revision of earlier works, without mentioning any specific pieces (Freeman, "Tanmatras: The Life and Work of Giacinto Scelsi," 17). If an earlier version of Suite No. 6 does exist, it has not yet come to light.

emphasizing individual notes in certain works of the 1930s, he did not recognize the potential of the idea at the time, for he made no effort to develop it between 1939 and 1952. Perhaps the clearest evidence that Scelsi had come to a roadblock in the early 1940s is the period of three years that separates the composition of *Variazioni e fuga* (1941) from his next piece, the First String Quartet (1944). Personal hardships during these years may partly explain the lapse: Scelsi's marriage to Dorothy was deteriorating just as the expansion of the war into Paris necessitated his escape to Lausanne. Still, Scelsi himself maintained that this first compositional hiatus stemmed from an artistic dilemma, a less severe harbinger of the breakdown that came in 1948. With the future of Europe uncertain, Scelsi felt equally unsure about the future of his music and European music as a whole. If, in all of his searching, he had not uncovered a common practice, perhaps it lay in a synthesis of what he had assimilated.

Eclecticism and Synthesis: String Quartet No. 1

Although Scelsi composed only six new works between 1944 and 1948, two of them were conceived on a grander scale than anything else he ever attempted. With his String Quartet No. 1 (1944) and *La nascita del verbo* (1948), Scelsi sought to reconcile the incongruities among the various styles he had learned by synthesizing them into a coherent and original language. He hoped to demonstrate that the various influences he had been exposed to, all of the composers he admired, were not actually incompatible. This hope first materialized in the historicist texts of the early 1940s: "Meaning in Music," *The Evolution of Rhythm*, and *The Evolution of Harmony*. In these essays, Scelsi tried to account for the divergent trajectories of modern music with one all-encompassing thesis: that twentieth-century music embodied a fundamental shift of compositional priorities, away from melody and structure, and toward rhythm and harmony. The historical context that frames his

argument—made clear by his use of the word *evolution* in two of the titles—implies that he felt the time had arrived for the next, decisive step, not only in his own career, but in the course of European music.

As he approached and then passed his fortieth year, Scelsi must have been eager to put his apprenticeship behind him and to create from his latitudinous musical education something masterful and comprehensive. That his first attempt to compose such a synthesis manifested in the medium of the string quartet underscores Scelsi's historicist orientation and changing self-image. String Quartet No. 1 constitutes his first chamber work without piano, a reflection of his assurance in an inherently contrapuntal setting. More significantly, no chamber genre offered a nobler heritage, a more venerable context within which to demonstrate his abilities and to contribute to the progress of Western music. Since the early nineteenth century, composers of string quartets had grappled with the imposing legacies of the past; the very spirit of the genre had become, as Paul Griffiths has expressed it, "centered in its history."⁴² To compose a string quartet worthy of the genre's tradition was to graduate from a kind of compositional novitiate and take one's place alongside the great masters—to write oneself into the history books. Scelsi certainly knew the illustrious history of the genre, particularly the Austro-German tradition perpetuated into the twentieth century by Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern. And he believed, as is clear from the historicist texts, that every significant stride in the evolution of musical style must be taken on the ground broken by one's predecessors.

To that end Scelsi's First Quartet displays great historical awareness and deference, embodied in its thematic allusions to Berg's *Lyric Suite* and the late quartets of Beethoven, its use of learned contrapuntal techniques, and its adherence to the four-movement sonata design. Within the historically informed framework of the sonata—which provides further evidence of the influence of neoclassicism—Scelsi managed to intermix and even fuse

⁴²Paul Griffiths, *The String Quartet: A History* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1983), 80.

elements of the modernist styles he had traversed. Despite the contrariety of its stylistic ingredients, the quartet succeeds as an extraordinarily unified work, due in no small part to Scelsi's use of cyclical thematic transformation.⁴³ The energetic first movement is cast as a type of sonata-rondo built upon the two main cyclical themes of the piece: a repetitive statement of triadic polychords that recalls both the rhythmic aggressiveness of machinism and the lush harmonies of impressionism, and an atonal melody of concise motivic construction in the manner of the Second Viennese school. Together, these two themes provide the source material not only for the first movement, but for the remaining ones as well. The slow and expressive second movement, marked *quasi funebre*, is anchored by the shimmering resonance of its post-impressionistic harmonies—transformed from the polychordal theme—and a broad melodic idea derived from the atonal melody of the first movement. An impetuous *scherzo* of inversional counterpoint follows, its asymmetrical *perpetuum mobile* effect punctured by sharp intrusions of the polychordal theme. The finale presents a fugal study in semitones, a severe linear compression of the primary cell of the atonal theme, crowned by a reverent extended coda of learned polyphony.

In light of Scelsi's argument in the historicist texts that composers of modern music had begun to give priority to rhythm and harmony over melody and form, it is curious that he concentrated so heavily in this quartet on matters of structural design. Equally perplexing, one of the two primary themes of the work is fundamentally melodic in nature. Much of the quartet, in fact, consists of linear counterpoint employed in traditional structural contexts. While these disconcerting anomalies may seem irreconcilable, we must remember an important aspect of the historicist texts: Scelsi does not describe the complete rejection of melody and structure, but their subjugation to the harmonic and rhythmic modes of expression. Melodic and structural concerns do not disappear; they become dictated by the

⁴³Scelsi's essential use of the cyclical principle may have descended from the French tradition of Franck and D'Indy by way of Debussy's String Quartet, a piece he specifically mentions in *The Evolution of Rhythm* (p. 7 [275]).

motivations of harmony and rhythm. In some ways his First Quartet accomplishes this goal wonderfully. The composition is permeated both by a resplendent harmonic language, whose polychordal density seems to envelop all contrapuntal activity, and by an impressive rhythmic dynamism, which frequently infuses the other parameters with a violent intensity.

Scelsi's intention to integrate disparate styles as an appropriate methodology for such a rearrangement of compositional priorities is confirmed in the first movement, in which the drastically different conceptions of the two primary themes are accentuated and also commingled. The movement begins with the gradual unfolding of a series of polychords comprised of superimposed triads, cautiously but steadily revealing their mellifluous harmonic content (see harmonic reduction in Example 22).

mm.1 2 3-4 5 6-8 8 9-10 11-12 13 14 15-20

Bbm
G

Bm
A $\flat$ 64

C
A $\flat$ 64

Db
D

D
Cm

Eb6
Bm6

D6
Cm6

Eb6
Bm6

Ab6
F $\sharp$ m6

G6
C+64

Ab6
F $\sharp$ m6

G6
C+64

$\text{D}\sharp 64$
C+64

Example 22. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement I, mm. 1-20
(harmonic reduction of the polychordal theme)

Cremonese has demonstrated the similarities between Scelsi's polychordal theme and the second idea from the fifth movement of Berg's *Lyric Suite*.⁴⁴ This connection is primarily a textural and rhythmic one, most apparent when Scelsi's polychords begin their rhythmic assertion several measures into the movement. I would suggest that the sonorous richness of Scelsi's tentative *opening* gesture recalls more strongly the exotic phrygian harmonies that begin Debussy's String Quartet, Op. 10, though Scelsi's chords are thicker, more

⁴⁴Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva*, 35.

dissonant, and more slow-moving. Their construction of stacked triads also suggests the influence of Stravinsky or even Bartók, but without defining the bitonal superimposition of two distinct keys, so characteristic of these composers' harmonic language. Devoid of distinctly melodic gestures, Scelsi's progression has the effect of a polyharmonic *chaconne*, which, once established, might provide a luxuriant foundation for melodic invention.⁴⁵ But at measure 6 the forward motion of the harmony begins to decelerate, giving way to the syncopated reiteration of individual polychords. It becomes apparent that the theme is characterized as much by forceful rhythmic assertion as by polyharmonic density. As the dynamic level grows, the reiterations of the final polychord increase in frequency. Finally, the theme yields to atonal melodic fragments, as if the dynamic force of the final polychord had somehow managed to shatter its harmonic concretion.



⁴⁵In his rather curious discussion of the quartet (which appears in an essay intended to provide a survey of Scelsi's orchestral music), Todd McComb has advanced the notion that this opening section is somehow based upon Bach's Chaconne in D minor for solo violin, an observation he attributes to Angelo Frascarelli. See Todd McComb, *Scelsi: Orchestral Works (survey)* (8 November 1992). Available [Online]: <<http://www.medieval.org/music/modern/scelsi/orch.html>> [2 February 2001]. Indeed, the opening few bars do seem to capture the spirit of a *basso ostinato*, but I find no convincing evidence that Scelsi's progression derives specifically from Bach's.

Example 23. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement I, mm. 10–22

After an abridged, but incisive, return of the polychords, the other primary theme of the piece arises in the violins. Their statement begins in measure 37 with the repetitive assertion of B $\flat$ s—a continuation of the amelodic machinism of the first theme—after which B $\flat$ becomes the point of departure for the new, linear idea. By imbricating the rhythmic dynamism of the first theme with the melodic current of the second, Scelsi succeeds in fusing the contrasting musical gestures almost seamlessly. Beneath this atonal melody an accompaniment of reiterated G $\sharp$ s in the viola and cello functions as neither a harmonic foundation nor a contrapuntal adjunct, but a rhythmic device held over from the opening to propel the new theme.

Violins: *molto sosten. ed intenso*, *ff*, *meno f espress.*, *4. corda*

Viola/Cello: *mf ma marcato*

Example 24. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement I, mm. 37–40

As with Scelsi's atonal themes in *Quattro poemi* and *Variazioni e fuga*, this melodic statement is motivically and intervallically concise. Its first two trichords form the [0,1,6] pitch-class set that Scelsi had already explored in *Quattro poemi*, while the last two trichords, which overlap, constitute semitonal compressions of the initial cell: [0,1,6] becomes [0,1,5] then [0,1,4].

Violins: *molto sosten. ed intenso*, *meno f espress.*, *4. corda*

Pitch-class sets: [0,1,6], [0,1,5], [0,1,4]

Example 25. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement I, mm. 37–40

By the fourth movement of the quartet, the primary cell becomes so compressed that it reduces simply to its initial semitone, which is common to all three pitch-class sets presented here. It has been erroneously suggested that this theme is dodecaphonic or otherwise serial,⁴⁶ but one can easily observe that it comprises only eight discreet pitch classes of the chromatic scale and includes pitch repetition (B $\flat$, F, and D $\flat$ /C $\sharp$), as was Scelsi's preference. Furthermore, it is not subjected to any of the characteristically serial

⁴⁶McComb, *Scelsi: Orchestral Works (survey)*.

manipulations other than transposition and fragmentation. Rather, its motivic cohesion, its emphasis on recurrent dissonant intervals such as major sevenths and tritones, and its sweeping angularity all indicate a debt to the freely atonal style of the Second Viennese composers.

Throughout *String Quartet No. 1* Scelsi exploits the contrastive attributes of the work's two primary themes introduced at the opening of the first movement. The tension between the polyharmonic and machinistic first theme—with its tendency toward sonorous density and rhythmic aggression—and the linear and atonal second theme—with its tendency toward fragmentation, intervallic compression, and contrapuntal treatment—dictates the work's basic structures and impels much of its dramaturgy. At the same time, however, there exists a clandestine relationship between the two themes that is crucial to the notion of synthesis that Scelsi pursued in the work. One may readily understand the opening sonority of the first theme, and of the entire work, as a straightforward combination of B $\flat$ minor and G major triads. Given that the remaining sonorities of the first theme are also constructed as polychordal triadic pairs, the listener naturally perceives the opening chord as the same type of structure (see Example 22 above). But one can also segment this sonority into two interlocking trichords that each form the [0,1,6] pitch-class set, the primary set of the second theme (Example 26). Moreover, the first five pitch classes of the second theme (B $\flat$ -B $\natural$ -F-D $\flat$ -G) reproduce five of the six pitches of the quartet's opening sonority.

The image shows a musical score for four staves. The first two staves are connected by a solid line to a label [0,1,6]. The last two staves are connected by a dashed line to another label [0,1,6]. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and accidentals.

Example 26. Scelsi: *String Quartet No. 1*, Movement I, m. 1

In this way Scelsi demonstrates that polyharmony and atonality, two seemingly distinct modernist compositional techniques, can in fact consist of the same material; only its manner of presentation distinguishes the styles. At the same time he undermines the distinction between the vertical and horizontal dimensions of music, a maneuver that seems equally indebted to Scriabin and Schoenberg. Both composers had discovered the compositional potential of expressing discrete combinations of pitches or intervals as harmonic as well as linear entities. Scelsi's achievement in his First String Quartet was to use the same principle to generate strikingly dissimilar themes, representing disparate styles of modern music, and then to employ the themes' constructional cohesion as a means to integrate the styles.

After the introduction of the two main themes, the remainder of the first movement proceeds as an idiosyncratic sonata-rondo form based on alternating variations of the themes, with a development section articulated by changes in texture, tempo, and dynamics. Following the initial presentation of the second theme at measure 37, it is subjected to a polyphonic *Fortspinnung* in the violins and viola, while the cello continues to reiterate its syncopated rhythm. The repeated notes of the cello line descend chromatically from G♯ to E♯, at which point the first violin takes over the cello's machinistic rhythm on B♭—the pitch that launched the second theme in measure 37, and which forms a tritone (interval class 6 from the [0,1,6] set) with the cello's final E♯. Beneath the first violin, the cello and viola restate the theme in its original version, but transposed up a semitone to begin on B♯ at measure 48. The rhythmic assertion of the first violin then leads the entire ensemble to the rondo-like return of the polychordal theme. With occasional splintering into triplet melodic fragments, the first theme continues until it reaches a *fortissimo* climax at the end of the movement's first large section. The theme's dynamism finally spent, it is left to idle in low tremolos accompanied by exhausted utterances of the [0,1,6] trichord.

Example 27. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement I, mm. 83–94

The developmental middle section begins athematically at measure 95 with the *pianissimo* fluttering of the lower parts *alla tastiera*. The [0,1,6] set and its compressions are molded into a precarious ostinato, above which the violins' *pizzicato* punctuations grow slowly into tetrachordal fragments of the first theme's superimposed triads. A succession of rising figures and glissandi leads to another contrapuntal disquisition on fragments of the second theme. From this emerges a complete restatement of the second theme, an octave above the original, in the first violin, an event which might be perceived as a recapitulation were it not for the ongoing developmental counterpoint in the other parts.

The genuine recapitulation, at measure 170, does in fact reverse the order of themes, beginning with the second theme in a *fugato* series of variations. *Stretto* entrances of the theme in all four parts spaced vertically in irregular intervals—outlining, curiously, a $C\sharp$ fully-diminished seventh chord in first inversion (in descending order: G-B $\flat$ -C $\sharp$ -

E)—proceed immediately to a second stratification—outlining a G dominant seventh chord in second inversion (in descending order: F-G-B-D).



Example 28. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement I, mm. 170–175

Another *stretto*, this time on a derivation of the second theme, begins shortly thereafter with staggered glissandi in the four parts. The effect recalls Bartók's use of glissandi in the second movement of his String Quartet No. 4, with which Scelsi's quartet has many textural similarities. A hushed, tremolo polychord of interposed E minor and G♯ minor triads then accompanies a lyrical cello line that derives somewhat distantly from the [0,1,6] set and its compressions.

The recapitulation of the machinistic and polychordal first theme begins at measure 197 and is sustained, even magnified, for an astounding forty-two measures of powerfully reiterated chords (a representative excerpt appears in Example 29). In what may constitute the most marvelously violent passage of Scelsi's modernist period, increasingly dissonant harmonies serve to reinforce an expression of pure rhythmic dynamism, the intensified residuum of *Rotative*, made even more pronounced by its placement alongside elaborately imitative counterpoint.

Example 29 shows a musical score for Scelsi's String Quartet No. 1, Movement I, measures 217–228. The score is in 4/4 time with a tempo of quarter note = 60. It features four staves for string quartet. The first system is marked *violento e rabbioso* and the second system is marked *Stringendo e precipitando*. Both systems include dynamic markings like *ff* and *f*.

Example 29. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement I, mm. 217–228

As they did at the end of the movement's first section, the polychordal repetitions wind down from their sustained eruption (Scelsi even uses the word *stanco* [tired] in the score). But there remains one final outburst: a highly condensed coda, in which the agitated gesticulations of the first theme merge with the intervallic content that connects the two themes—the tritone and semitone from the [0,1,6] set.

Example 30 shows a musical score for Scelsi's String Quartet No. 1, Movement I, measures 239–241. The score is in 4/4 time and features four staves for string quartet. It is marked *Violento - feroce* and includes dynamic markings like *ff*.

Example 30. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement I, mm. 239–241

The slow and reflective second movement of the quartet (*quasi funebre*) provides additional examples of the fusion of styles and the integration of thematic content between the vertical and horizontal dimensions. On the surface, the movement proceeds as another sectional alternation of the contrastive themes, one harmonic and immobile, the other linear and contrapuntal. The movement begins with quietly sustained sonorities, muted and played with a peculiar type of controlled vibrato, a technique that portends a central trait of Scelsi's sonorist style (see Example 31). The shimmering stillness of the harmonies suggests the polychordal theme of the first movement, though this manifestation is not constructed of superimposed triads.

Although Cremonese has shown that this passage also relates to the fifth movement of Berg's *Lyric Suite*,⁴⁷ its full effect remains uniquely Scelsian. The desire to emulate the sound of a gong, expressed in the footnote explaining the unusual manner of articulation, provides the earliest explicit reference to Oriental culture in Scelsi's *oeuvre*.

Molto lento (♩ = 80) (*quasi funebre*)

○ A gong effect is to be obtained by using a vibrato sulla corda for 1st half of measure, no vibrato for 2nd half

Example 31. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement II, mm. 1–4

⁴⁷Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva*, 37–38. Specifically, he points out the strong rhythmic, textural, and timbral similarities between the opening of Scelsi's second movement and the *Tenebroso* section of Berg's fifth movement.

Dane Rudhyar had used the gong as an icon of Oriental sonorism, a single sound that is infinitely rich and various.⁴⁸ If Scelsi had discovered Rudhyar's books as early as 1944, he may have been trying to project that sonic image here. For this reason the passage provides, I believe, a considerably more satisfying indication of Scelsi's sonorist direction than any of the monotonal repetitions in the piano works of 1939. He seems concerned here not with a harmonic construct, in the conventional Western sense, but with generating a single, multifaceted sound, struck sharply (with *pizzicato* notes in the violins) and left to pulsate resonantly. The effect is almost pure sonority, transcending its pitch content into a realm of *Klangfarbenharmonie*.

Yet the pitch content possesses tremendous significance, for its intervals are those of the work's atonal second theme shifted from the horizontal to the vertical plane. This theme, we recall, originally consisted of the *linear* presentations of two [0,1,6] trichords followed by single [0,1,5] and [0,1,4] trichords, the first set's semitonal compressions (see Example 25 above). Here, the two [0,1,6] trichords and then the [0,1,5] and [0,1,4] trichords have been transformed into overlapping vertical simultaneities.

mm. 1-2 mm. 3-4

violins

viola & cello

[0,1,6] [0,1,6] [0,1,5] [0,1,4]

NB: The notes of measures 3-4 sound together, but have been separated here to show the pc sets.

Example 32. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement II, mm. 1-4, pitch-class sets

⁴⁸See Chapter 5.

Thus, in this remarkable moment, Scelsi reverses the process which had generated the second theme in the first movement. There, the distinctive intervallic cell of the opening sonority was made linear, then extended by means of its intervallic compressions to form the second theme. Here, at the opening of the second movement, the melodic second theme is reabsorbed into the realm of harmony from whence it came in an expression of sonorous color. Consistent with Scelsi's historicist thesis of a changing compositional hierarchy, the harmonic element that gave birth to the melodic element now reingests it. Stylistically, this process allows for the fusion of the disparate modern styles that the two themes represent. Scelsi manages to integrate the post-impressionistic richness of the first theme with the atonal content of the second theme in a musical gesture that transforms and transcends the substance of both.

This outstanding example of stylistic synthesis, thematic transformation, and sonorist prefigurement is short-lived, however, as another lyrical melody soon emerges in the cello. Constructed entirely of the [0,1,6] trichord, this melody also derives from the quartet's main themes.

The image displays musical notation for a cello part, consisting of two staves. The notation is in bass clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The music features several six-note motives, each enclosed in a box and labeled with the intervallic cell [0,1,6]. The first staff begins with a *p* (piano) dynamic and an *espress.* (espressivo) marking. The motives are constructed from the [0,1,6] trichord, which corresponds to the intervals of a semitone, a tritone, and three semitones. The notation shows how these motives are partially overlapping and transformed throughout the passage.

Example 33. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement II, mm. 16–23

The six-note motive generated by the partially overlapping [0,1,6] trichords at the beginning of this thematic transformation (a semitone followed by a tritone and three more semitones,

all descending) serves as the subject of contrapuntal variations for the balance of the second movement, alternating with the recognizable return of the machinistic first theme. Beginning at measure 62, the new motive is explored in a *fugato* treatment, the cello and viola entering first with the motive in inversion, followed by the violins with the motive in its original, descending form (Example 34).

Example 34 shows a musical score for a string quartet. It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 60. The music is in a fugato style, with the Cello and Viola entering first with a descending motive in inversion, followed by the Violins with the motive in its original, descending form. Dynamics include *p*, *mp*, and *espress.* markings.

Example 34. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement II, mm. 62–66

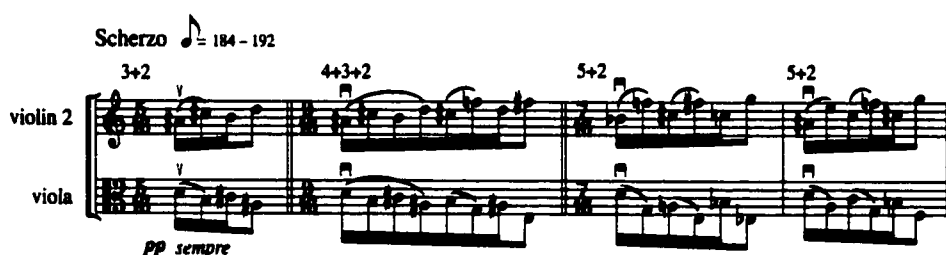
At measure 123 the motive is subjected to another canonic variation, this one in rhythmic diminution and augmentation among the parts, with the motive inverted in all parts but the cello (Example 35).

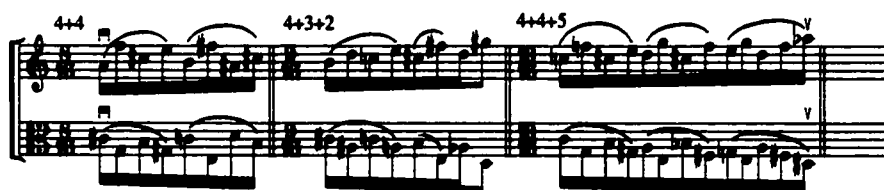
Example 35 shows a musical score for a string quartet. It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 60. The music is in a canonic variation style, with the motive inverted in all parts but the cello. Dynamics include *p*, *mp*, and *cresc.* markings. The score also includes markings for *Sordina* and *alla tastiera*.



Example 35. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement II, mm. 123–125

Scelsi designated the third movement a *scherzo* and cast it in the conventional tripartite form: scherzo-trio-scherzo. The main section features the viola and second violin presenting a line of expanding intervals in inversive counterpoint, i.e., each line constitutes the inversion of the other. Yet the most remarkable feature of this scherzo is neither its pitch content nor its contrapuntal intricacy, but its asymmetrical meters and additive rhythms. In each measure, strings of consecutive sixteenth notes, sometimes with an eighth note at the beginning or the end of the bar, form asymmetrical meters that change every measure or two. The number of sixteenth notes in these meters ranges from four to thirteen per measure, generated by the addition of smaller groupings that Scelsi indicates in the score for the performers' benefit (see Example 36).





Example 36. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement III, mm. 1–7

The result, splendidly unpredictable and disorienting, resembles the ametrical rhythms with added values used by Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992) and described in *The Technique of My Musical Language*, which predates Scelsi's quartet by two years.⁴⁹ In Messiaen's approach, the Western concept of meter is replaced by the consistent use of a small note value (typically a sixteenth note) in inconsistently sized groupings. Many of these groupings are generated by adding the common value to an otherwise square rhythm (e.g.,  becomes ). Scelsi's scherzo achieves a similar effect, though he uses rapidly shifting asymmetrical meters to curtail any sense of metrical regularity, whereas Messiaen dispensed with meter altogether. As is well-known, Messiaen's rhythmic ideas arose partly from his study of Hindustani classical music, in which the cyclical rhythmic patterns called *tala* are constructed by the addition of small, often asymmetrical, groups of beats called *anga*. I do not believe that Scelsi's quartet owes any debt to Messiaen's ideas, but the

⁴⁹*The Technique of My Musical Language* was first published in 1942, two years before Scelsi's String Quartet No. 1, but contemporaneous with Scelsi's historicist texts (Robert Sherlaw Johnson, *Messiaen* [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975], 13). The similarities between the situations of Messiaen and Scelsi are fascinating: both men came up in the Parisian musical environment of the 1930s, both were profoundly influenced by Debussy as well as the Second Viennese composers, both felt the need to declare their aesthetic orientations during the early 1940s in published texts, both perceived a crisis in contemporary music by the late 1940s, and both found satisfaction composing music with a strongly spiritual component. Probably the most glaring difference in their backgrounds is that Messiaen's was firmly connected to the musical institution of the *Conservatoire*, whereas Scelsi's musical training was sporadic, individualized, and largely unstructured.

similarity may reflect a common interest in Indian music, if in fact Scelsi had begun to investigate it as early as 1944.⁵⁰

The dazzlingly uneven *perpetuum mobile* of the viola and second violin, once established, is accentuated by irregular harmonic intrusions by the remaining two instruments. At first, these isolated accents occur sparsely. But as the scherzo progresses, they increase in frequency, until at measure 49 the harmonic thrusts overpower the asymmetrical counterpoint and establish themselves as the cyclical return of the polychordal theme, condensed into the space of a single measure. In the trio that follows, fragments of the scherzo material interweave in free counterpoint, more regularly metered than the scherzo itself. The counterpoint of the trio stops abruptly, after which a more extended statement of the polychordal theme, now *pizzicato*, leads back to the return of the scherzo. The inversional counterpoint that occurred earlier in the viola and second violin now appears in the cello and first violin, joined shortly thereafter by the other instruments. The four-part counterpoint in shifting asymmetrical meters reaches a frenzied level, and suddenly stops as the trio had done. The movement concludes with a brief but intense restatement of the polychordal theme at a dynamic level of *fff*.

In the fourth movement, the process of compression that has intermittently reduced the quartet's main [0,1,6] set to [0,1,5], [0,1,4], and even tighter derivations reaches its extreme: the single semitone. The interval has become a complete motive, and with it Scelsi constructs a fugue that demonstrates both his mastery of counterpoint and his esteem for the music of the past. Melodically, the fugue theme consists entirely of semitones in isolation; any larger intervals between consecutive notes—such as the cello's doubly

⁵⁰Scelsi and Messiaen were friendly acquaintances. Hirayama recalls that in later years, Messiaen made a point to call on Scelsi whenever visiting Rome (Hirayama, interview with the author, 3 May 1997). Their amicable relationship may go back as far as Scelsi's years in Paris in the 1930s. Messiaen had made himself something of a public figure in the musical world of Paris in 1936, when he and three other young French composers established themselves as "La Jeune France," seeking to infuse French music with a humanistic and spiritual quality they found lacking in much French music of the time. Such an agenda would certainly have appealed to Scelsi. It is quite possible, even likely, that Scelsi and Messiaen met around that time.

diminished 5th in measures 2–3 (G $\sharp$ -D $\flat$)—are concealed by intervening rests. As a result, one perceives nothing but the stratification of linear semitones.



Example 37. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement IV, mm. 1–8

Though generated as an extremely concentrated expression of the [0,1,6] structure that governs most of the piece, Scelsi's fugue theme also bears an unmistakable resemblance to the subject of Beethoven's celebrated *Große Fuge*.



Example 38. Beethoven: *Große Fuge*, Op. 133, fugue subject

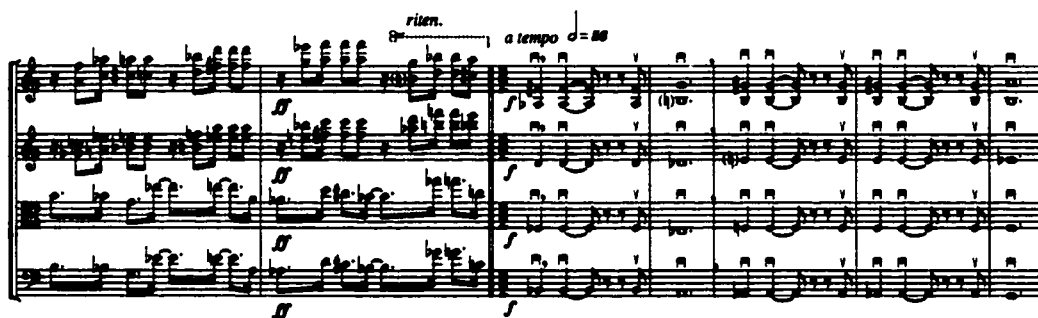
The similarity is so striking, in fact, that we might consider it not a derivation but a quotation; it seems impossible that Scelsi meant for it to go unnoticed.⁵¹ If the earlier movements had evoked the music of Scelsi's immediate predecessors rather obliquely, the

⁵¹ McComb has also recognized the similarity of Scelsi's theme to Beethoven's, but does not confine this feature to the fourth movement. He contends that material from the first movement onward, presumably what I have designated as the second theme, consistently recalls the *Große Fuge* (see McComb, *Scelsi: Orchestral Works (survey)*). I believe the correspondence is obvious in the fourth movement—and intended to be so—but I remain unconvinced that any of the material of the first three movements derives from Beethoven's theme.

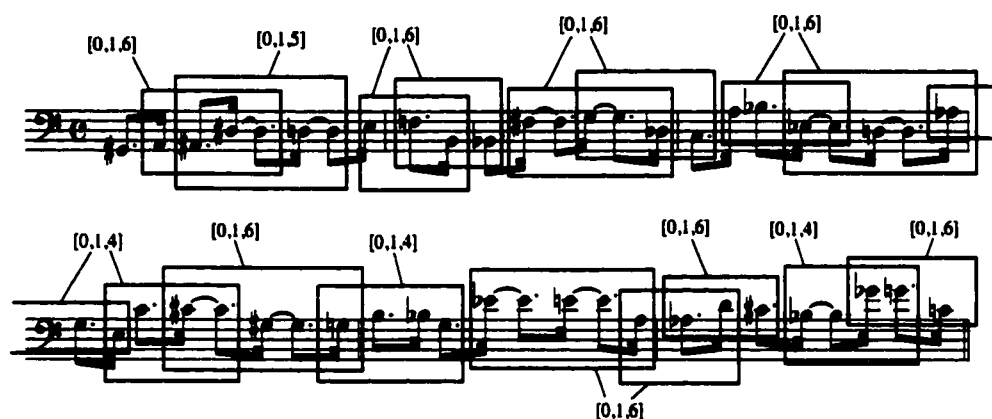
fourth movement openly affirms the consequence of the musical past. In this way, Scelsi endorses the historicist view that the evolution of musical style, the great march forward, is dictated by the achievements and the spirit of those who have already made great contributions to it. And he accomplishes this with a distillation of the [0,1,6] pitch-class set, the structure by which he had fused elements of disparate modern styles in the earlier movements, as if to demonstrate in the intervallic material of his quartet the very continuity of musical history.

The activity of the fugue intensifies quickly, until the rests that separated statements of the semitonal motive at the outset disappear. The texture becomes less conventionally contrapuntal, proceeding instead as a succession of overlapping sustained tones that rise chromatically but asynchronously in each part. With the violins and viola stretching into their highest registers, the music approximates the kind of sonorous acclivity that characterizes some of Scelsi's later music, particularly String Quartet No. 4 (1964). Soon the effect starts to dissipate, however, and the semitonal exclusivity of the counterpoint begins to open up to larger intervals. From this eventually emerges a new transformation of the melodic second theme, a syncopated line constructed of a tangled web of interlocking [0,1,6], [0,1,5], and [0,1,4] trichords (see Examples 39 and 40).



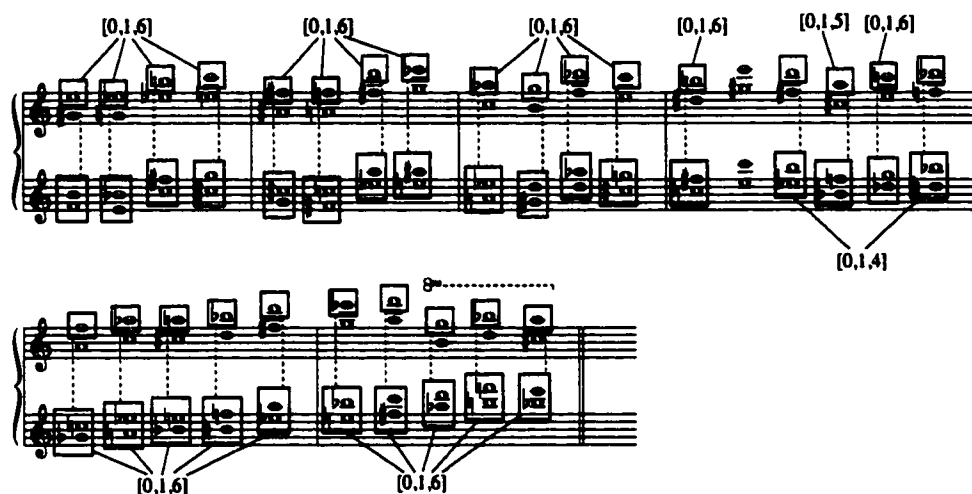


Example 39. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement IV, mm. 78–88



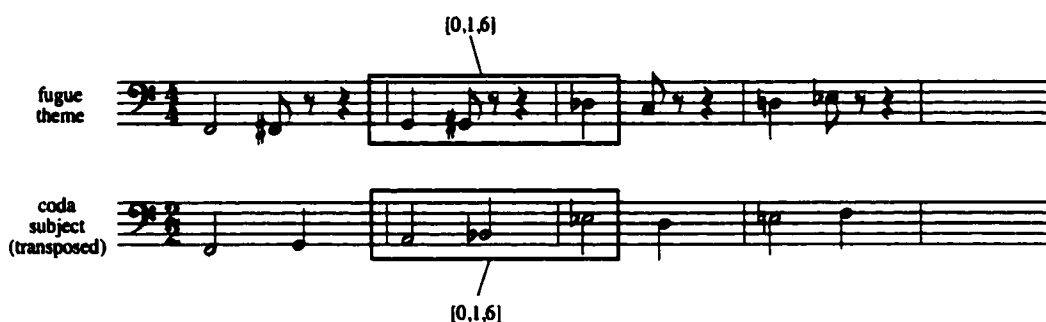
Example 40. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement IV, mm. 78–83,
pitch-class sets (viola and cello)

Thus, after commencing the movement with a severe compression of the linear set, Scelsi gradually lets the content unfold and expand back to a semblance of its earlier manifestation. Against this thematic transformation in the lower parts, the violins iterate staccato derivations of the machinistic polychordal theme, now reduced to tetrachordal simultaneities that also contain the [0,1,6] set (see Example 41). The violins' insinuations of the polychordal theme soon induce its last complete return, which brings the movement's main section to an end.



Example 41. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement IV, mm. 78–83,
pitch-class sets (violins)

The extended coda that follows offers a final, wondrous reworking of the quartet's atonal thematic material into the quasi-tonal subject of a learned and retrospective manner of counterpoint. The rising semitones of the earlier fugue theme expand to form an ascending diatonic tetrachord. The new subject maintains the shape of the fugue theme, both encompassing the [0,1,6] trichord, yet has the spirit of a *stile antico* cantus firmus (see Example 42).



Example 42. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement IV
(derivation of coda subject from fugue theme)

The counterpoint that Scelsi employs is clearly intended to evoke an austere and archaic mood. The imitation features the overlapping of the main subject with a subsidiary one, a countersubject presented simultaneously with the opening statement of the main theme, in what one might label a double fugue. The simple rhythms, predominantly conjunct motion, and frequent nonharmonic tones created by ties across barlines all contribute to the retrospective spirit of the passage.



Example 43. Scelsi: String Quartet No. 1, Movement IV, mm. 109–132

As the counterpoint progresses, the pitch content begins to embrace increasing levels of chromaticism, gradually moving away from the archaic sound established at the outset. Then the process reverses, stripping away the accidentals in a type of purification that renders the last twenty-two measures of the piece exclusively white-key diatonic. The overall result is an exquisitely anachronistic sound that Cremonese describes as existing

somewhere “between tonality and atonality.”⁵² It remains a singular moment in Scelsi’s entire output, providing the most compelling evidence of the influence of Malipiero’s neobaroque solemnity on Scelsi’s conception, yet also evoking the humility and poignancy of the *Heiliger Dankgesang* of Beethoven’s String Quartet, Op. 132. More importantly, it confirms the profoundly historical orientation that frames Scelsi’s integration of styles and his efforts, through such integration, to advance the evolution of Western music.

The extraordinarily unified thematic content of Scelsi’s First Quartet permits the coexistence of disparate styles not as an uncomfortable hodgepodge but as a cohesive and comprehensive musical utterance. In the context of this hallowed genre, Scelsi managed to bring together elements of the various modernist styles he had investigated individually between 1929 and 1941 in an effort to invent a style that would be uniquely his, and at the same time acknowledge his place within a historical continuum. To a certain extent he succeeded. Scelsi’s First Quartet sometimes has the whiff of Beethoven, Bartók, Berg, or Debussy, but taken as a whole it is unlike any other work; it deserves a place among the great quartets of the twentieth century. Scelsi evidently remained proud of the accomplishment of this quartet even in later years when his style had drastically changed, returning to it in 1962—at the height of his sonorist period—to create a version for string orchestra.⁵³ Still, the First Quartet remains an exceptional work in his *oeuvre*, and provides little indication of the direction he would pursue so prosperously in later decades.

Four years after the composition of String Quartet No. 1, Scelsi attempted another, even grander synthesis with *La nascita del verbo*. Quantitatively, this large-scale work constituted his most ambitious undertaking: it runs some forty-two minutes in performance

⁵²Cremonese, *Giacinto Scelsi: Prassi compositiva*, 44. (“un linguaggio armonico tra il tonale e l’atonale.”)

⁵³Castanet and Cisternino date the string orchestra version to 1972 (*Giacinto Scelsi: Viaggio al centro del suono*, 263), but this discrepancy does not alter my point that Scelsi retained pride in the quartet well into his sonorist years.

and requires a full mixed chorus alongside an orchestra of piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two B♭ clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, tuba, piano, two harps, vibraphone, xylophone, celesta, Glockenspiel, timpani, miscellaneous percussion, and strings.⁵⁴ Scelsi apparently devised the text of the work to demonstrate artistically the emanation of language from a type of primeval phonemics.⁵⁵ The conjecture that *La nascita del verbo* has a philosophical basis in Alain Daniélou's writings on the origins of European language in the Indian tradition of Vedic chanting would, if confirmed, establish that Scelsi's interest in Hindu scripture and metaphysics had begun even before his breakdown.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the stylistic components of *La nascita del verbo* affirm that Scelsi was still trying to forge ahead with an idiom derived from his years of modernist experimentation. Robin Freeman has alluded to the "passages of bleak relentless counterpoint" that coalesce with the surrealistic uncanniness of the text.⁵⁷ And

⁵⁴Castanet and Cisternino, *Giacinto Scelsi: Viaggio al centro del suono*, 262.

⁵⁵Julian Anderson, "La Note Juste: Julian Anderson Celebrates the 90th Anniversary of Giacinto Scelsi's Birth," *The Musical Times* 136 (January 1995): 27. Anderson refutes Freeman's description of a wordless phonetic text (Freeman, "Tanmatras: The Life and Work of Giacinto Scelsi," 9), asserting that "The first part uses only vowels, the second and third the three words 'Deus, Amor, Lux' and the fourth a traditional Latin prayer."

⁵⁶Denise Jourdan-Hemmerdinger, "Philosophie et écriture musicale chez Giacinto Scelsi," in *Du baroque à l'époque contemporaine: Aspects des instruments à archet*, ed. Anne Penesco, 149–178, *Musique-Musicologie*, ed. Danièle Pistone, no. 23 (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 1993), 168. In a rather curious footnote, Jourdan-Hemmerdinger suggests that "Alain Daniélou's study ('La théorie métaphysique du verbe et son application dans le langage et la musique,' in *Approches de l'Inde, Les cahiers du Sud*, 1949, pp. 151–166) should serve as the basis for a philosophical and musicological analysis of *La nascita del verbo*." This article, however, postdates *La nascita del verbo* by one year. Despite this inconsistency, Daniélou's work on the origins of language appeared in earlier publications and were widely read in France. Scelsi did own a copy of Daniélou's slightly later book, *Yoga: Méthode de réintégration* (Paris: L'Arche, 1951). See Appendix B.

⁵⁷Freeman, "Tanmatras: The Life and Work of Giacinto Scelsi," 9–10. Pierre Boulez knew of Scelsi's composition and apparently attended a rehearsal before its premiere. He wrote to John Cage about it, quite disparagingly and in broken English, in November of 1949: "Do you remember Scelsi, the italian musician, with whom we eated on 1 evening in July, before going to see Marina Scriabine (!) and Boris de Schloezer? And of whom we heard the stringquartet [sic] with Souvtchinsky? Désormière plays a 'Cantate' by him; the title is 'Naissance du Verbe'; you must not understand the word 'Verbe' as λογος (in Apocalypse!), but only as birth of the words!—The first movement is for unarticulated sounds and 'Voyelles'; the second for the 'consonnes'; and the third for the ensemble of these various elements. As you can see, it is very happy! But no funny! But I criticize it before having heard! And I go to-morrow

Claudio Annibaldi has described the work as “an attempt at a large form capable of synthesizing opposing tenets of Western music.”⁵⁸ The constructional tendency of Scelsi’s early period, manifested in the counterpoint that so distinguishes many of his modernist works from the sonorist ones, is driven here to its practical and conceptual limits. At the piece’s climactic moment, there occurs a monumental forty-eight-part polytonal canon in twelve simultaneous keys, a contrapuntal *tour de force* and the apogee of Scelsi’s experiments with modernism.⁵⁹

Having reached such a compositional and conceptual extreme, Scelsi faced the impossible challenge of how to proceed. Much like Scriabin, Scelsi apparently realized that he could not bring about epochal change in the evolution of music (or humankind) by the sheer weight of his accumulated forces. But unlike Scriabin, who recognized the impossibility of the endeavor and abandoned his *Mysterium*, Scelsi completed his piece and witnessed its performance in a state of near delirium.⁶⁰ The realization that the formalist extremes of *La nascita del verbo* had not opened up a new world of possibilities but, to the contrary, had cut off any potential for progress in this direction left Scelsi in a fragmented mental state and rendered him compositionally mute for the next four years.

The artistic crisis that Scelsi suffered in 1948 was deeply personal and at the same time clearly emblematic of the troubled state of modern European music. The end of the war and

to the repetition [i.e., rehearsal]” (Jean-Jacques Nattiez, ed., *The Boulez-Cage Correspondence*, trans. Robert Samuels [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], 33–35).

⁵⁸Claudio Annibaldi, “Scelsi, Giacinto,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1980), vol. 16, 581.

⁵⁹See Slonimsky’s description in *Music Since 1900*, 806.

⁶⁰See Simon Morrison, “Scriabin and the Impossible,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51/2 (Summer 1998): 284–285. *La nascita del verbo* received its only performance at the 24th Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in Brussels, 28 June 1950, conducted by Roger Desormière (Slonimsky, *Music Since 1900*, 806). Freeman relays the composer’s own recollection of the concert, during which Scelsi “lay on the floor of the men’s loo . . . imperiously ordering out the theatre personnel who had found him there” (Freeman, “Tanmatras: The Life and Work of Giacinto Scelsi,” 9). Freeman states incorrectly that the performance took place in Paris, though this likely stems from Scelsi’s flawed memory of the event.

the deaths of Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, Ravel, Strauss, Prokofiev, and Bartók near mid-century signaled to many the end of an era. Composers were left “in search of a common practice.”⁶¹ During the late 1940s and early 1950s advances in musical style seemed to herald the dawn of a new period, intensely rational on the one hand and wonderfully liberated on the other. Yet by the late 1950s the ultra-modernist approach of integral serialism led even its most ardent champions to disillusionment. For his part, Scelsi had already determined that the compositional excess and theoretical indulgence of modernism could no longer be sustained; he had no use for the manneristic preciousness of the Darmstadt school. Contrary to the argument he made in the historicist texts, he had begun to realize that the recent history of twentieth-century music did not necessarily indicate its future course, and that some fresh aesthetic stimulation had become vital. His exposure to various spiritualist teachings and Oriental religions, which may have started before his crisis, now offered a possible escape from the malaise in which he found himself. Scelsi began to understand that a viable path might lie in a direction not dictated by the past, and that he might find his solution outside of the European tradition.

⁶¹Glenn Watkins, “Europe: In Search of a Common Practice,” chapter 24 in *Soundings: Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1988), 506.

CHAPTER 5

SCELSI'S SECOND COMPOSITIONAL PHASE:

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SONORIST STYLE

When Scelsi resumed composition in 1952, he undertook the development of a musical style no longer plainly rooted in the modernist idioms and historicist aesthetic that had grounded his first two decades of creative work. Instead, Scelsi's new style had its conceptual basis in the spiritualist teachings of Theosophy and Anthroposophy, the metaphysics of Hinduism, and the meditative practices of Yoga, all of which had helped him emerge from his crisis. Scelsi seemed to require firm aesthetic convictions in order to compose; the collapse of his historicist aesthetic had much to do with his compositional hiatus. Thus the fundamental tenets of his spiritualist aesthetic were likely in place when he started composing again, a hypothesis supported by the relatively early dates of the spiritualist texts (1953–54). With an aesthetic foundation reestablished, Scelsi spent the remainder of the 1950s gradually forging a compositional style that suited his transformed conception of sound's cosmic properties. The period from 1952 to 1959 constitutes, perhaps, the most musicologically fascinating of Scelsi's career, for in it we can trace the evolution of an extraordinary musical language through each of its formative stages: sonorous focus, microtonality, and finally music on a single note.

Scelsi faced two primary compositional challenges during the 1950s, one of which was how to create a sense of timelessness that would reflect his understanding of *anāhata*, the atemporal and infinitely bountiful sound of the cosmos. He sought ways to suspend the traditional Western conception of musical time as a teleological process, essentially renouncing such conventional techniques as thematic development, melodic variation, contrapuntal elaboration, harmonic progression, and cadential resolution. Believing as he

did that individual sounds contain limitless potential, Scelsi wanted to dispel the aesthetic premise that sounds must progress to other sounds in order to have any significance. As he focused on increasingly limited spectra of pitch, he hoped to inhibit the normal sense of music's forward motion. The essence of music became for Scelsi the immediate experience of sounds themselves, as themselves, by themselves—rather than the process of what happens to them in relation to one another over time.

Yet as Scelsi refined his methods for projecting focused sounds, it became apparent that some manner of structural cohesion would be necessary to sustain extremely concentrated musical expressions over spans of time. He apparently did not want his works to be overly brief, as this would not produce the effects of sonic immersion and meditative calm he now pursued. He found a solution in stringing together relatively short movements—generally between two and five minutes—into longer works. Indeed, with a few notable exceptions, the majority of Scelsi's sonorist compositions do comprise multiple movements. To make sense of them as parts of a unified whole, however, a demonstrable relationship among the movements became imperative. Likewise, within each movement, or within single-movement works, Scelsi generally required some type of structural process to convey the dynamic, rather than static, nature of sound as he understood it. As a result, at every structural level Scelsi found himself in a compositional and conceptual predicament: he needed structural processes for his musical expressions to cohere, yet he also wanted to undermine the teleology that defines such processes. He faced the impossible task of reconciling his aesthetic of timelessness with the fundamentally temporal nature of musical expression. As we shall see, it was a dilemma that Scelsi handled with varying degrees of success.

Scelsi's other main compositional challenge—equally problematic—was how to focus on isolated sounds without leading inevitably to musical tedium in the mind of the listener. The belief that individual sounds contain unlimited richness and variety formed an essential part of his spiritualist aesthetic, but how to convey this belief compositionally was not immediately obvious. His efforts to focus on isolated sounds began in 1952 with a series

of piano works that feature the reiteration of particular notes or sonorities. This compositional tendency had already surfaced in the piano suites and sonatas of the 1930s, where it served to anchor the frenetic activity of those freely chromatic works. In the piano music of the 1950s, however, such reiteration provided a starting point for his efforts to filter out the diffusion of his earlier styles. His radical new priorities manifest most prominently in the Piano Suite No. 9 (*Tai*) of 1953, wherein Scelsi replaced the aggressive dissonance of his earlier music with conventionally consonant structures and seemingly stationary oscillation around fixed pitch axes. As it became clear that the piano's tempered tuning and inability to sustain would not permit extremely refined sonic manipulations, Scelsi turned his attention to solo works and duets for wind and string instruments. Liberated from the constraints of equal temperament, he gradually incorporated microtones into his evolving compositional language, first with vibrato and glissando, then with increasingly pervasive use of quarter-tones. By the time of *Triphon* and *Dithome*—two critical works for solo cello of 1956 and 1957—microtonality had become an essential feature of Scelsi's style, integrally bound up with timbral metamorphosis and dynamic shaping. What remained was for Scelsi to transfer these techniques to ensemble settings, where his timbral and dynamic ranges broadened considerably and where the resonance of the harmonic dimension could contribute to the animated presentation of isolated sounds. Having developed a compositional style in which every musical parameter was subject to manipulation even at the most refined level, Scelsi was at last able to reveal the inexhaustibility of an extremely concentrated sound, even a single note.

Focusing Sound: The Piano Music of 1952–1956

That Scelsi began composing again in 1952 with a series of piano works indicates a desire to return to a fundamental and familiar medium. The formation of a new, largely

unprecedented style informed by a radically transformed aesthetic must have been a daunting prospect, one that would only be complicated by concerns about instrumentation. Moreover, Scelsi's return to the instrument that he had used for improvisation since childhood signals a change in his primary compositional method. Though the piano suites and sonatas of the 1930s frequently suggest spontaneous origins, this does not hold true for the majority of Scelsi's modernist works. Before his crisis he seems to have placed much more value on meticulous compositional craftsmanship. After his crisis, however, Scelsi began to see himself not as a craftsman but as a transmitter. His role as an artist in this invigorated aesthetic required, he believed, no cognition on his part. Instead, the artistic process called for a spiritual openness and receptivity, and improvisation provided a suitable methodology. Improvisation also may have served him as a kind of psychological therapy. The notion is supported by the oft-repeated but still unconfirmed account of Scelsi's convalescence, during which he reportedly spent hours at the piano striking a single key repeatedly and listening intently to the sound of one note.¹ Such focus on a solitary sonic object, as with a *mantra* in the Indian meditative traditions, may have offered Scelsi a means to filter out the turmoil and confusion of his artistic and psychological debility.

In some ways the first few piano works of the sonorist period resemble the enigmatic piano works of 1939, but isolated traits suggest a changing conception. The most conspicuous signs of change are certainly the pieces' programmatic titles and subtitles, which proudly announce the composer's new aesthetic orientation. The explanatory subtitle of Suite No. 8 (*Bot-ba*) (1952), the first piece Scelsi completed after his crisis, suggests a type of spiritual travelogue, snapshots of Scelsi's journeys to the East: "An evocation of

¹The origins of this account lay with Scelsi himself; it will probably never be corroborated with any documentary evidence. Its particular allure as a kind of musical *satori*, a Zen-like moment of enlightenment, has given it a certain mystique, a mythical quality that Scelsi undoubtedly enjoyed. It makes good fodder for poorly documented program notes, but does not satisfy as an explanation of how he arrived at his sonorist style.

Tibet with its monasteries on high mountains. Tibetan rituals. Prayers and Dances.”² Scelsi followed this in 1953 with *Quattro illustrazioni sulla metamorfosi di Visnú* (Four Illustrations of the Metamorphoses of Vishnu), and *Cinque incantesimi* (Five incantations). With these three piano works, he resumed the dense and dissonant chromaticism of the piano music of 1939, at times intensified as the music assumes programmatically ritualistic significance. Moments in these pieces reach a level of aggression and violence unmatched even by Scelsi’s most frenzied works of the 1930s. Scelsi’s penchant for repetition also resumes, its use now more prominent than in Suite No. 6 or Sonata No. 2, but not necessarily more focused. In *Cinque incantesimi*, for instance, emphatic iteration occurs frequently, but usually without concentration on a particular tone or immutable sonority for more than a few seconds. Instead, Scelsi employs narrow bands of descending pitch clusters, as in the following example, which typifies the work’s strident cascades of sound.



Example 44. Scelsi: *Cinque incantesimi*, Movement V, p. 23

²(“Un’evocazione del Tibet con i suoi monasteri sulle alte montagne. Rituali tibetani. Preghiere e danze.”) Thus far I have been unable to determine conclusively the origin or meaning of the work’s title, *Bot-ba*. It probably derives from the Tibetan name for the country itself, *Bod*. On the cover of Werner Bärtschi’s recording of the piece (Accord 200802), *Bot-ba* is translated parenthetically as *Tibet*.

In Suite No. 8, however, certain critical passages suggest that the reiteration of particular notes is no longer intended to stabilize an otherwise dizzying array of pitch activity, as in the works of 1939, but to draw the listener's attention to an isolated sound and its resonant qualities. In the excerpt from Movement III shown in Example 45, a low C♯ focal note pulsates quietly but briskly with a depressed pedal. As the dynamic level grows, the overtonal richness of the piano's lowest register causes the reiterations to dilate into a wash of sound. Within this expanding sound-mass, C♯ provides a resonant foundation while the right hand's E♭s and B♭s are presented as coloristic upper partials. These notes, as well as the low D♭s and D♭s clustered around C♯, are not meant to be perceived harmonically in any conventional sense, as discrete pitches in combination. Rather, their effect simulates timbral variation.

The musical score for Example 45 is presented in two systems. The first system is marked 'Pesante (♩ = 60)' and 'poco movendo al'. It features a low C♯ pedal point in the left hand, with a 'ped. tenuto' instruction. The right hand plays a series of notes, including E♭ and B♭, with dynamics ranging from pp to p. The second system is marked '♩ = 60' and 'percussivo, come xilofono'. It features a more active right hand with dynamics ranging from f to ff, and a left hand with a 'più f' instruction. The score includes a 'ped. tenuto' instruction and a 'più f' instruction.

Example 45. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 8, Movement III, pp. 19–20

In the passage the listener experiences not the development of musical material—a teleological process—but the richness of an isolated sonority. Instead of producing an inert musical effect, such focus generates a continually fluctuating sonic mass, teeming with gradations of dynamics, color, and density. Consistent with Hindu metaphysics (and

Bergsonian thought), what seems static on the surface is shown in reality to endure in a constant state of flux. As the listener is drawn into the sonic envelope of the C $\sharp$ fundamental, its richness unfolds temporally only inasmuch as the listener's response occurs in time. The process of revelation is temporal, but the sound's sonic richness exists in perpetuum.

In the remarkable fourth movement of the suite, Scelsi explicitly calls for the simulation of a gong. He had, of course, placed a similar indication at the beginning of the second movement of the First String Quartet, but there the effect remained localized and underdeveloped. Here, by contrast, the evocation of a gong frames and sustains the entire movement. It begins with percussive attacks of a low B at a *fortissimo* dynamic level, no doubt meant to simulate the ritualistic world of Tibetan monasteries (see Example 46).³ Just as the sound of an actual gong swells and thickens with repeated strikes, the overtones accumulating and compounding, Scelsi increases the density and volume of his piano sonority with each successive attack. He inhibits the discernment of traditional harmonic relationships among the pitches of these simultaneities through the use of dissonant intervals (seconds and sevenths), the low register, and the sustain pedal. As in the previous example, the result of these pitch aggregations is not conventionally harmonic, but sonorist. Instead of producing a chord, they produce a complex but largely undifferentiated sound.

³Large gongs of the type Scelsi seems to emulate in this passage are not, in fact, characteristic of Tibetan ritualistic music. They play a much more prominent role in the music of East Asia, particularly Indonesian *gamelan* music and various types of traditional Japanese and Chinese music (See James Blades, "Gong," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments*, vol. 2: 60–63). Scelsi's apparent error may be attributed simply to his willingness to blend together all of the cultural products of "the East" into an indiscriminate whole—a trait that typifies Western exoticism. On the other hand, in a more reproachful interpretation one could cite this as evidence of Scelsi's ignorance of the true practice in Tibetan monasteries, offering another reason to doubt whether he ever really visited such places.

Lento ($\text{♩} = 54$)

ff percussivo, come gong
(stacc. e lasciar vibrare col ped.)

ff

(h)

(8^a)

Example 46. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 8, Movement IV, p. 27

The central section of the movement departs somewhat from the sound-world introduced at the beginning, even incorporating moments of rhythmic frenzy that hearken back to Scelsi's machinistic works (although he endeavors to replace the mechanical detachment of earlier works such as *Rotative* with a suggestion of spiritual transcendence, marked *orgiastico*). At the end of the movement, the gong effect returns. Scelsi recreates the gong's decay by filtering out the notes that were introduced as resonant components of the expanding sonority at the beginning of the movement; we are left with the initial tone, the fundamental from which the sonic richness emanated and into which it now recoils.

($\text{♩} = 60$)

mp secco **f non troppo sfz** **più f** **p** **più p** **pp**

(h)

(8^a)

Example 47. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 8, Movement IV, p. 33

Scelsi's efforts to evoke the sound of a gong using reiterated piano sonorities with depressed pedal go beyond the picturesque sound painting of an exotic programmaticism; they almost certainly indicate the direct influence of Dane Rudhyar and point the way toward Scelsi's single-note music. Discussing the Asian concept of "living tones" in his 1928 book, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, Rudhyar gives repeated and passionate emphasis to gongs, which

represent an aspect of the highest and most spiritual music, that of *single tones* which are one and many, which throb and live, which are at times the perfect dynamic bodies of celestial entities, the *chakras* of the Deity. Single living tones!⁴

Specifically, Rudhyar draws attention to the overtone complexity of the gong's timbre, infinitely rich and various. To him, the gong constitutes the perfect embodiment of the Hindu concept of *Nāda-Brahman*, the monistic, undifferentiated *pleroma* of sound containing limitless potential.

[T]he tone of a gong is one and many. Touch it lightly at the center, then farther, farther away until you reach the outer edge. You hear an infinite gradation of sub-tones usually within the limit of a fifth or fourth all of which concur to form the compound tone of the gong. In other words you have a great hieratic brotherhood of tones, each tone an individual being yet all bound in a perfect metallic solidarity, all blending their voices into the great tone-entity, the *Nada*, heard when the center is struck. In a single tone you have a complete organic symphony. Such a tone is the beginning and end of all music, the seed of all music.⁵

In an essay published two years later in 1930, Rudhyar declared that Western musical culture was beginning to develop "a new sense of music based on the feeling of tone-

⁴Dane Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music* (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1928; reprint, New York: Samuel Weiser, 1979), 23. Emphasis in original. The Sanskrit word *chakra*, which translates literally as *wheel*, signifies a number of different concepts in the Hindu and Yogic traditions. Most prominently, it is used to indicate the seven basic types of psychic energy that exist in conjunction with the physical body. One of the goals of Yoga is to bring the body into harmony with the *chakras*.

⁵Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 23–24. Later in the same book, Rudhyar returns to this idea: "A gong or bell produces a true *pleroma* of sounds. If you strike it at various points of its surface, various tones are released; yet all these tones converge to the one central tone, which is the key note or heart of the brotherhood of tones. Here you have a mass of vibrating substance, throbbing with multitudinous lives united in a compact group (or lodge or host). Sonorous space is thus made tangible" (p. 67).

fullness.”⁶ In this new music the piano was to play a primary role as a Western analogue to the Asian gong: a monolithic resonant palette from which an inexhaustible range of sonorous colors might emerge.

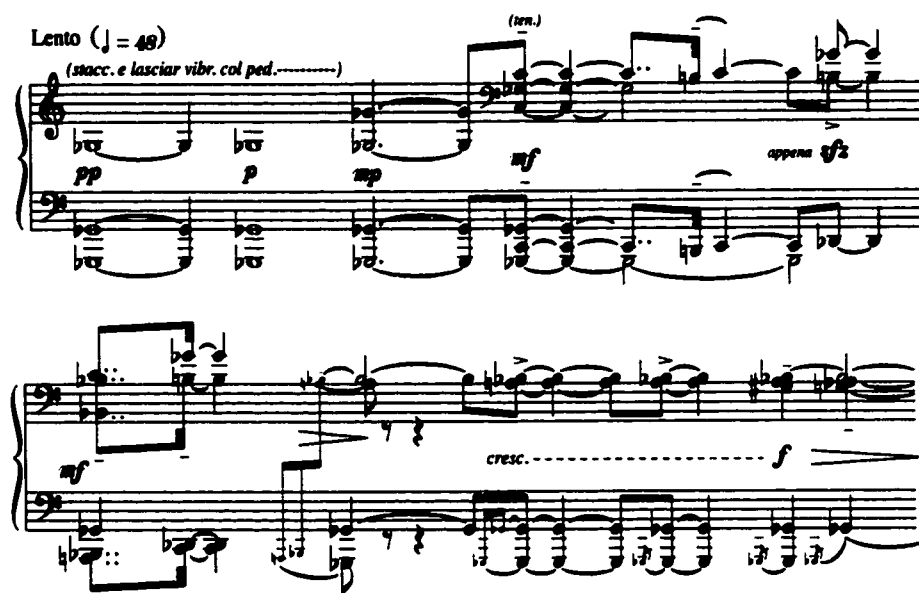
This new sense of tone-fullness, of synthetic resonance is manifest for instance in a new type of piano playing based on the realization that *the piano is a sort of big gong*, that the important factor in the instrument is not the keyboard [i.e., not the potential relationships among the notes], not even the separate strings, but *the homogeneous sounding-board or table of resonance which, especially with the help of the pedal, gives birth to tone-masses, to complex, synthetic entities of sound.*⁷

Rudhyar rightly points out that the piano can only achieve this gong-like effect if played in a manner antithetical to its tempered, keyboard design, and he later praises Henry Cowell’s experiments with piano tone-clusters as an important step in the right direction. What distinguishes Scelsi’s approach in Piano Suite No. 8 from Cowell’s is that Scelsi anchors his sound-mass to a particular fundamental tone—B $\sharp$ in Movement IV, G $\flat$ in Movement V. Conversely, Cowell’s well-known secundal clusters obliterate any sense of pitch definition. From this perspective, Scelsi’s approach more accurately reflects the harmonic series, the acoustic phenomenon that undoubtedly lies at the heart of this conception of “tone-fullness,” for he provides an unambiguous fundamental at the bottom of his complex sound. Above this Scelsi never simply piled up pitches according to the precise arrangement of overtones in the harmonic series, but his method does resemble the intervallic compression that occurs as the series ascends through its upper partials.

Consider, for instance, the opening of Movement V of the Eighth Suite, shown in Example 48.

⁶Dane Rudhyar, “The New Sense of Space,” in *Art as Release of Power: A Series of Seven Essays on the Philosophy of Art* (Carmel, California: Hamsa, 1930), 29.

⁷Rudhyar, “The New Sense of Space,” 29. Emphasis added.



Example 48. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 8, Movement V, p. 34

Scelsi begins by establishing a fundamental in a low register: G $\flat$ reinforced with octave doubling. With the third attack, another octave is added, as occurs with the second harmonic partial. With the fourth attack, C $\sharp$ s are added, forming augmented fourths with the G $\flat$ fundamental, close in intervallic size to the perfect fifth that occurs as the third harmonic partial.⁸ From this point, Scelsi introduces smaller intervals (seconds and thirds), approximating the increasing density of the ascending harmonic series. In this way, the listener is compelled to perceive the newly introduced pitches not in relation to the fundamental, but as components of it. The notes, in a sense, lose their individual identity and become parts of a single expanding sound-mass.

Yet despite such examples of sonorism in Suite No. 8 as those of its fourth and fifth movements, the majority of the work retains unmistakable stylistic ties to Scelsi's modernist-period piano music. Its aggressive dissonances and frequently diffuse pitch

⁸A piano tuned to equal temperament would, of course, only approximate the true intervals of the harmonic series, even if one were to pile up the partials in precisely the order of their occurrence in the series.

content provide little sense of where his style was headed. Suite No. 9 (*Ttai*) of 1953, however, constitutes a far-reaching and radical departure that patently indicates Scelsi's new direction. The rhythmic dynamism that traces back to his piano music of the 1930s is gone, replaced by a mood of meditative restraint and tranquility. In a striking deviation from the strident dissonance of his earlier piano music, Scelsi makes extensive use of traditionally consonant structures, including triadic harmonies, pentatonicism, and diatonic modality. Remarkably, his search for the resonant core of sound led him to discard the wildly free chromaticism of the previous suites and sonatas. Realizing that frenetic dissonance would not conduce the type of focused musical experience he now pursued, Scelsi retreated to more familiar sonorities presented in unfamiliar ways. He rejected the Schoenbergian "emancipation of the dissonance"⁹ and began to explore the sonorous qualities of structures whose consonance had been linked to natural, acoustic phenomena at least as far back as Rameau, if not Guido, Boethius, and Pythagoras.

Although the title and explanatory note of Suite No. 9 still constitute programmaticism in the strictest sense, its extramusical content is less conventionally pictorial. Instead, the "program" of Suite No. 9 directly reflects Scelsi's spiritualist aesthetic and his new conception of sound as a timeless, cosmic entity. He provides the following brief description of the suite: "A succession of episodes alternately expressing Time (or more precisely Time in Motion) and Man, as symbolised by cathedrals or monasteries, with the sacred sound—*Om*."¹⁰ Scelsi also includes a prefatory note of caution to prospective

⁹Schoenberg explained the concept as follows: "The term *emancipation of the dissonance* refers to its comprehensibility, which is considered equivalent to the consonance's comprehensibility. A style based on this premise treats dissonances like consonances and renounces a tonal centre" (Arnold Schoenberg, "Composition with Twelve Tones (1)," in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984], 217).

¹⁰("Une succession d'épisodes qui exprime alternativement le Temps ou, plus précisément, le Temps en mouvement; et l'Homme, comme symbolisé par des cathédrales ou des monastères, avec le son du -Om-sacré.") The English given above appears alongside Scelsi's original French in the preface to the published score of the suite; the translator is not identified. This translation is eminently preferable to those that have appeared in liner notes to the recordings of the piece, for its syntax and punctuation make clear that the alternation occurs between Time/Man, on the one hand, and the sacred sound of *Om* on the other. As with

performers and audiences: "This suite should be listened to and played with the greatest calm. Nervous people stay away!"¹¹

The programmatic alternation that Scelsi describes in the introductory note manifests in the layout of the suite's nine movements. A discernible contrast of style distinguishes the odd-numbered movements from the even-numbered ones. The odd-numbered movements, corresponding in Scelsi's description to man's perception of time, feature persistent oscillation around various pitch axes executed with a dispassionate regularity of rhythm and articulation. The even-numbered movements, representing "the sacred sound—*Om*," are more dynamic in conception, occasionally resembling the gong-like expansions and contractions of the Eighth Suite. Scelsi's characterization of the Ninth Suite's movements as "episodic" is fitting, for collectively they exhibit no architectonic design other than the simple alternation he identifies. What ties the entire suite together is not a teleological structural process but a spiritualist aesthetic premise: that time as man experiences it in regular segments is illusory, and that all things exist infinitely in the timeless realm of *Nāda-Brahman*, the sacred sound represented by *Om*.¹²

The first movement begins gently with tranquil undulations around its B $\flat$ axis, as if Scelsi had slowly turned up the volume of an ongoing sonic flow (see Example 49). The evenness and regularity of the rhythms, articulations, and dynamic levels (which vary only slightly) suggest "Time (or more precisely Time in Motion) and Man" in the following way. Our everyday perception of time is much like the temporal dimension of this music: uniform, measured, predictable. Yet the *quasi ostinato* nature of the musical material

Suite No. 8, the title of Suite No. 9 (*Tai*) has proven difficult to trace. It is rendered on the cover of Werner Bärtschi's recording of the piece (Accord 200802) as *Paix* (Peace).

¹¹("Cette suite doit être écoutée et jouée avec le plus grand calme intérieur. Les agités s'abstiennent!")

¹²See Anindita Niyogi Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), 13–18 and 44–53. Balslev distinguishes two basic views of time in Indian philosophy. Scelsi's implied premise corresponds more closely to "the view which dialectically rejects the ontological reality of time pointing to its phenomenal character" (p. 13). See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of the timeless attribute of *Nāda-Brahman*.

suggests that it lacks temporal momentum; it neither advances nor unfolds. Because of its rotation around a stationary pitch axis, the music remains, in a sense, fixed in one place. Man's perception of time as an incremental, measurable phenomenon is similarly flawed: the progress of time is illusory, for all things exist in a single instant.¹³

CALMO, senza espressione (♩ = 63)

pp *poco* *sempre molto p*

sempre con due pedali

pp *impercettibilmente movendo*

Example 49. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 9, Movement I, opening

The nature of the rotation around B $\flat$ in each of the two staves differs significantly. The right hand hovers in a narrow orbit around B $\flat$, moving predominantly by semitone and never drifting farther than a whole step from the tonal axis. The effect is rather like an exceptionally wide, decelerated vibrato—something that Scelsi exploited thoroughly in later years. The left hand pivots around B $\flat$ in disjunct motion, primarily by thirds and fifths, resulting in what look like conventional arpeggiations suggesting, at times, B $\flat$ minor. Elsewhere in the movement, the harmonic context around B $\flat$ implies other triadic frameworks, including A $\flat$ minor (with B $\flat$ as an added second) and E $\flat$ minor (with B $\flat$ as its fifth). Thus the first movement includes two distinct manners of projecting its tonal axis:

¹³See Balslev, *A Study of Time*; see also Chapter 3.

one establishes a narrow bandwidth within which the music vacillates around the central note; the other places the central note into relief against a changing harmonic backdrop.

The coexistence of these two types of oscillation in the opening moments of the suite produces a unique kind of sonorist polyphony—music that is in constant flux and at the same time suggesting a degree of pitch focus. The achievement has significance not only for the musical language of this suite, but for the evolution of Scelsi's sonorist style as a whole. The approaches represented here on the two staves anticipate the two most prominent techniques that Scelsi used in later years for the exploration of a single note. With the pedal depressed, the semitonal undulations of the right hand effectively saturate the spectrum of pitch between $A\flat$ and $B\sharp$. Scelsi strives to project not four discreet pitches ($A\flat$ - $A\sharp$ - $B\flat$ - $B\sharp$), but the entire space between $A\flat$ and $B\sharp$ as a single sonic entity with $B\flat$ at its core. In this way, perception of the central $B\flat$ becomes fluid and supple, subject to inflection and variation; from here the adoption of microtonality lies only a small step away. Likewise, the disjunct rotation of the left hand anticipates the harmonically enriched drones of Scelsi's monotonal music, in which the timbral makeup of the fundamental is manipulated through careful control of its upper partials and its harmonic environment. Thus the seeds of Scelsi's mature sonorist style, which did not bloom fully until the *Quattro pezzi* of 1959, were already planted in Suite No. 9 of 1953.

The solemn $F\sharp$ octaves that initiate the suite's second movement quietly suggest the Hindu *Om*, "the Divine seed sound from which all other sounds are said to arise."¹⁴ Unlike the first movement, whose regularity gives the superficial impression of time passing, the opening of this movement seems perfectly still. The protracted note values occur at a tempo so slow and deliberate that the progress of time is rendered almost imperceptible.

¹⁴Harold Coward and David Goa, *Mantra: Hearing the Divine in India* (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania: Anima Books, 1991), 3.

• *Lentissimo* (♩ = 42)

pp *p* *pp* *p* *ppp*

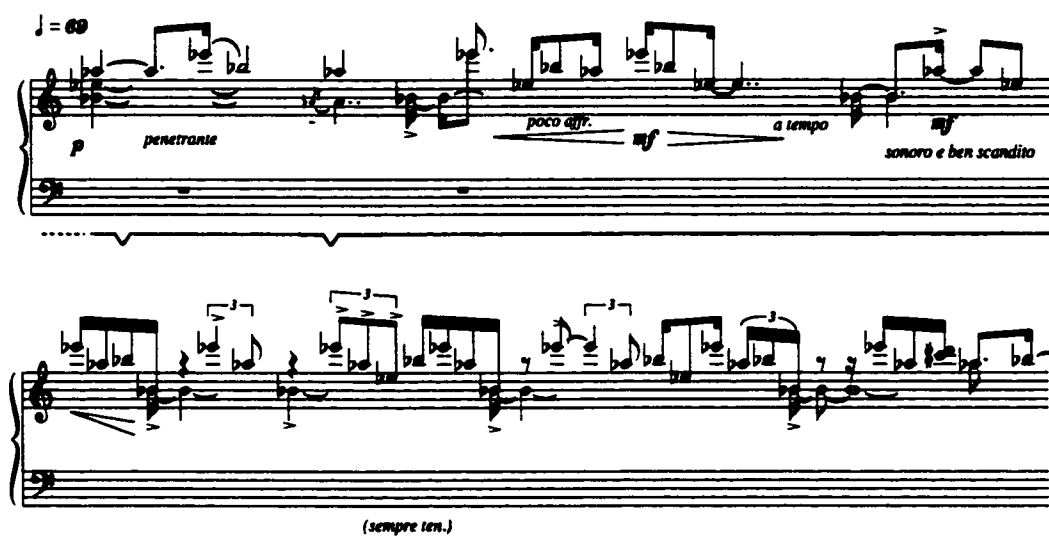
con ped. ten.

• NB: Appoggiare le dita sui tasti, premere profondamente, e poi lasciar vibrare

Example 50. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 9, Movement II, opening

Such a passage denies nearly every aesthetic premise of Western musical convention. It is utterly devoid of melody and harmony, and lacks any purposeful sense of musical rhythm. The listener is gently immersed in a single, static sound. There occurs no development or impetus of any kind, not even the expansions and contractions that characterize the Eighth Suite's gong evocations. Only the arrangement of octaves and the dynamics undergo slight modifications, which manifest essentially as variations of timbre. Because of the extremely novel manner of expression, the performer receives special instructions: "Rest your fingers on the keys, press deeply, and then let vibrate." Scelsi was clearly aware that with this passage he approached a new kind of music that required a different kind of performance.

At this stage in the development of his sonorist style, however, Scelsi was not ready to sustain an entire movement using a single note. Immediately following the introduction of the F's, the music shifts to a rhythmically irregular oscillation of three notes: A♭, B♭, and E♭, which form a [0,2,7] subset of the pentatonic scale. Indeed, this section of the movement invokes a Debussian type of Oriental exoticism; its limited pitch content is even announced at the beginning of the section with an impressionistically quartal structure.



Example 51. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 9, Movement II, p. 7

Scelsi's desire to focus the musical experience takes him, in this section, from the unrestrained chromaticism and harsh dissonance of his earlier piano music to the expurgated consonance of a three-note collection comprised chiefly of perfect intervals.¹⁵

After a series of tremolos emphasizing the B $\flat$ -E $\flat$ perfect fourth, the monotonal representation of *Om* on F $\sharp$ returns midway through the movement. In this recurrence, however, it undergoes the kind of sonorous dilation that Scelsi had used in Suite No. 8: the initial octaves expand into denser sonorities, then contract back into their simplest form (see Example 52). The composer specifies that the effect should simulate the sound of a bell (*come campane*), which Rudhyar and Scelsi had both identified as a Western corollary to the gong.¹⁶

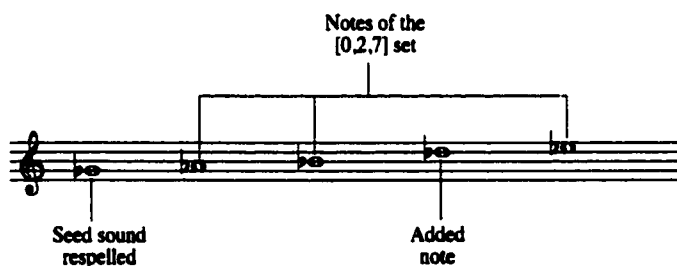
¹⁵The interval vector of the [0,2,7] pitch-class set is <010020>. It contains one perfect fifth (invertible to a perfect fourth), one perfect fourth, and one major second.

¹⁶As I have shown, Scelsi appropriated this notion from Rudhyar. See Chapter 3.



Example 52. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 9, Movement II, p. 8

The components of this expanding sound-mass have particular significance, for they are the notes of the previous [0,2,7] set ($A\flat$, $B\flat$, and $E\flat$), now supplemented with $D\flat$. The consonant trichord from the preceding section, with its impressionistically exotic flavor derived from the pentatonic scale, is thus absorbed into the seed sound. Rather conspicuously, this circumstance induces an enharmonic shift of the fundamental note from $F\sharp$ to $G\flat$. Combining $G\flat$ with the other four notes, Scelsi generates a complete $G\flat$ major pentatonic scale (the anhemitonic scale, played entirely on the black keys of the piano).



Example 53. Formation of $G\flat$ major (anhemitonic) pentatonic

In the passage shown in Example 52, Scelsi presents the elements of this scale in various harmonic combinations. Despite the presence of seconds in all of these constructs, the collective effect is relatively consonant (all of the seconds in the scale are major). Furthermore, the $G\flat$ major pentatonic scale contains two conventionally triadic possibilities: a $G\flat$ major triad and an $E\flat$ minor triad, the latter having been used in the first movement to

put the B $\flat$ axis in relief. While neither of these chords appears here as a simple triad, they both occur embedded in the chords located at the center of the passage (marked with asterisks in Example 52).

Scelsi's reason for respelling F $\sharp$ as G $\flat$ must have been something other than notational convenience and syntactical accuracy, for he could have started the passage with G $\flat$ s and avoided a sudden shift midway. Perhaps he intended to indicate the precise moment when the pentatonic material dissolves into the seed sound with a conspicuous visual cue. Or perhaps he wanted to suggest that because of the music's expansion and contraction—revealing some of the inner life of the seed sound—the octaves at the end of the passage are necessarily heard in a new way. Alternatively, the switch from F $\sharp$ to G $\flat$ could imply that the two are not precisely the same sound, and that the passage does not begin and end in the same sonic location. On a piano tuned to equal temperament, these two notes are certainly equivalent, but with Scelsi's developing sensitivity to tone he may have thought otherwise. While there exists no evidence that Scelsi ever explored the resonant possibilities of alternative tuning systems, the “modulation” in this passage nevertheless may indicate the radicalness of Scelsi's conception.¹⁷

¹⁷One of the fascinating problems concerning Scelsi's aesthetics in relation to his compositional practice is that he chose not to employ alternative tuning systems. One could certainly argue that his full adoption of microtonality (and abandonment of the piano) in the mid 1950s invalidated the issue of tuning entirely. Nevertheless, it remains surprising that Scelsi made no effort to transmit the true nature of sound by using intervals in their acoustically pure forms. This issue separates Scelsi's practice from that of LaMonte Young, a composer who otherwise has much in common with Scelsi aesthetically.

Interestingly, Scelsi was aware of Young's employment of just intonation and its relation to the listener's perception of the harmonic series. Scelsi owned a copy of a book of selected writings by Young and his wife Marian Zazeela, in which he highlighted the following passage in pencil (the only highlight in the entire book): “One factor that shapes the use of the system of just-intonation and what the audience hears at my concerts is amplification. It happens that the audibility of harmonics can be a function of amplification—the louder a sound is, the more likely you are to hear the harmonics that sound makes, which is to say that they increase as the amplitude goes higher. At ordinary volumes they are so soft that you don't even hear most of the higher partials. In fact, if you listen closely to my singing voice without amplification, the seventh harmonic in my voice and often the ninth harmonic in Marian's voice become [next page—highlight ends] clear and audible for everyone. That's the only reason we play the Tortoise piece so loud” (LaMonte Young, interview with Richard Kostelanetz [1966] in LaMonte Young and Marian Zazeela, *Selected Writings* [Munich: Heiner Friedrich, 1969], pages unnumbered).

It is also worth mentioning Marianne Schroeder's recollection of her first attempts to play Scelsi's music (specifically, Piano Suite No. 10) in his Roman apartment: “From the beginning he was not fully satisfied and made me repeat it several times; then all of a sudden, while playing in that room full of things, with *that piano that was slightly out of tune* that was giving me trouble, I began to understand. It

Scelsi's marking at the beginning of Movement III—*uguale* [even], *senza espressione*—signals a return to the stolid vacillations and rhythmic regularity of the first movement. The harmonic content, reminiscent of Scriabin, comprises an ongoing juxtaposition of two tritones, separated by a semitone ($E^{\sharp}-B^{\flat}$ and $E^{\flat}-A^{\sharp}$). $E^{\sharp}$ and $E^{\flat}$ seem to contend for a position of prominence, the former projected resolutely in the right hand with periodic inflection up to F, while the latter provides a harmonic foundation stabilized by its perfect fifth.



Example 54. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 9, Movement III, p. 10

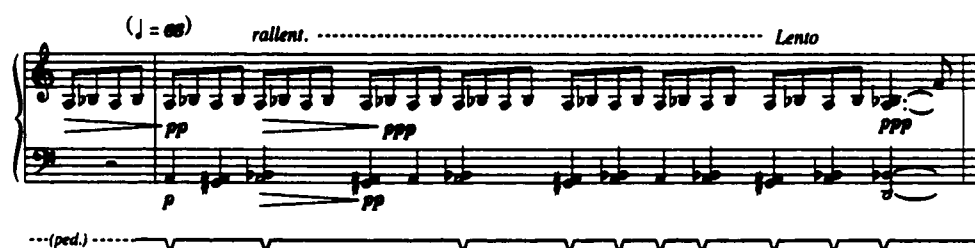
The competing pitch centers and fluctuation between stable and unstable intervals create a precariousness comparable to that of the first movement. After reaching a restrained dynamic peak of *quasi f*, the harmonic irresolution of the music settles down into a steadfast and consonant diatonic modality. The $E^{\flat}$ s disappear, replaced by low $D^{\sharp}$ s that provide a firm harmonic foundation, and the $F^{\sharp}$ s that began as coloristic inflections of $E^{\sharp}$ now alternate with it more regularly. Thus D becomes the new pitch center, not as an axis of rotation but as the tonic of a stationary Aeolian minor, emphasizing the D-minor triad with its seventh ($C^{\sharp}$), major ninth ($E^{\sharp}$), and minor sixth ($B^{\flat}$).

continued like this for the next few days, and *the piano kept getting better*" (Marianne Schroeder and Luciano Martinis, "Marianne Schroeder, pianista: intervista di Luciano Martinis," *i suoni, le onde: Rivista della Fondazione Isabella Scelsi* 4 [1993]: 27–28; quoted in and translated by William Colangelo, "The Composer-Performer Paradigm in Giacinto Scelsi's Solo Works" [Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1996], 157. My emphasis added). Certainly what changed for Schroeder was not the piano itself but her ability to perceive the kinds of extremely subtle variations that lie at the core of Scelsi's sonarist conception.



Example 55. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 9, Movement III, p. 11

When E^b returns in the bass, the modality begins to falter. The conflictive E^b - E^b dyad, now occurring against the D-minor triad with added minor sixth, forces the stable modality into a vacillation between D Aeolian and D Phrygian. After this dissipates, we are left only with the ambiguous alternation of A and B^b , beneath which minor-second dyads vibrate harmonically in the low register.



Example 56. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 9, Movement III, p. 12

I would suggest that in this rather innocuous moment Scelsi provides the key to an accurate perception of the entire movement. The notes of the A- B^b pair, which alternate evenly in the right hand, are presented in the left hand as a harmonic semitone along with the semitonal pair just below it ($G^{\sharp}$ -A). Put another way, each note of the A- B^b dyad is presented in combination with the note a semitone beneath it (A with $G^{\sharp}$; B^b with A). Scelsi articulates each of these harmonic semitones in the left hand as a *single sound*, the perception of which is aided by the obfuscatory acoustic properties of the low register. In this way he demonstrates that the linear alternation in the right hand is in fact not an

alternation at all; A and B $\flat$ simply serve as the lower and upper boundaries of a single sound. He asks us to listen to the sonic space *between the notes*, whether its ambitus is outlined horizontally or vertically. In so doing he reveals that the semitonal conflicts that seemed to destabilize so much of the movement are actually reducible to the same sonic material.

In Movement IV, the expression of *Om* is once again rendered with the consonance of the pentatonic scale. Scelsi employs the same black-key pitch collection that provided the substance of the second movement, but here he notates it, extraordinarily, with a standard key signature of five sharps. Nowhere else in Scelsi's entire sonorist output did he use a key signature. That he chose to use one here demonstrates the unusually concentrated and conventional pitch content of the movement, with which Scelsi once again seeks to create a particular kind of stasis. Additionally, his shift from flats in Movement II to sharps in Movement IV for the notation of what we normally consider the same scale lends further support to the hypothesis that Scelsi thought of enharmonic correlates as discrete sounds.

In the opening section of the movement, shown in Example 57, four of the five notes of the black-key pentatonic scale (lacking only C $\sharp$) occur in what appears to be a linear and monophonic presentation. As in previous movements, however, Scelsi uses the depressed pedal to transform the linearity implied by the notation, allowing the consonance of the pentatonic subset to resonate and accumulate freely. In performance, what looks in the score like a kind of melody becomes harmonic—or, more accurately, sonorist.

(♩ = 68)
non molto legato, ma sempre appoggiando profondamente

mp > mp > p > pp p < < < < mf

ped. sempre tenuto



Example 57. Scelsi, Piano Suite No. 9, Movement IV, opening

In this opening section, D# functions as a tonic, with particular emphasis given to the articulation of the D#-minor triad. For the bulk of the movement, however, the tonic is G#, reiterated as a foundation in the bass register. The pitch content eventually expands to include C#, completing the black-key pentatonic scale, then proceeds beyond its pentatonic boundaries to include B, producing G#-minor triads. The small number of accidentals in the movement function preponderantly as components of a semitonal dyad. Each accidental lies a minor second from one of the primary tones of the scale and occurs with it harmonically (e.g., F# occurs with G#). These extraneous notes do not exist as distinct sounds, but as sonorist dilations of the primary tones with which they are paired. They act as sonic thickening agents, so to speak, and do not alter the fundamentally limited pitch content of the movement. At the end of the movement, Scelsi presents the unadorned consonance of the primary material voiced impressionistically in quintal harmony built on G#.





Example 58. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 9, Movement IV, p. 18

The two subsequent movements continue with the programmatic and stylistic alternation previously established. In the fifth movement, three semitonal vacillations (G-A $\flat$, D-E $\flat$, and A-B $\flat$) weave together in another unsteady, sonorist *Fortspinnung*, out of which a hollow kind of E $\flat$ Lydian sonority eventually emerges (without its major third). The sixth movement mirrors the content and structure of the second. It opens and closes with protracted octave B $\flat$ s that gradually expand and contract. The interior of the movement features passages of more rhythmic activity and limited pitch content employed in a higher register, interrupted by a return of the motionless B $\flat$ s midway through the movement.

The seventh movement—marked *uguale, inespessivo*¹⁸—stands out as the most dissonant and retrospective of the suite. Its harmonic instability suggests the persistent influence of Scriabin and recalls, distantly, some of Scelsi's earlier piano music. Though the music consists largely of semitonal dyads—as do the other odd-numbered movements—they are now strung together into larger portions of the chromatic scale. In a surprising departure from the decidedly sonorist and nonlinear conception of the suite, the seventh movement features a distinct melodic motive in the top voice, clearly indicated in the score with phrase markings. Through the course of the movement, this motive undergoes sequencing, intervallic modification, and fragmentation (the first few manifestations of the motive are shown in Example 59).

¹⁸Scelsi's other marking at the beginning of this movement—*sempre morbido e con molto pedale, ma non troppo legato*—could be misleading to the performer or scholar who does not read Italian. Despite its cognate in English, the word *morbido* simply means “soft” (to the touch, not dynamically).

The image displays six systems of musical notation, each featuring a single melodic line on a five-line staff. The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). A large, sweeping slur arches over the entire sequence of notes across all six systems, indicating a continuous melodic exploration. The systems are labeled on the left as follows:

- initial motive
- systems 1-2
- system 2
- systems 2-3
- systems 3-4
- system 4

The melodic material consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together, creating a sense of rapid, chromatic movement. The intervals between notes are varied, contributing to the 'erratic' quality mentioned in the text.

**Example 59. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 9, Movement VII
(melodic motive and its manipulations)**

Despite Scelsi's use of conventional techniques of melodic invention, the nature of the material and copious use of the pedal still give the seventh movement a sonorist disposition in keeping with the suite as a whole. The chromatic undulations of the right hand combined with the intervallically erratic accompaniment of the left produce a sonic cloud that envelops the ongoing motivic exploration.

In Movement VIII the expression of *Om* centers on G^4 , which begins in slow and quiet octaves in the manner of the previous even-numbered movements. In this case, however, the dilation of the sonority embraces astoundingly consonant and conventional structures: root-

position G-major triads and a second-inversion C-major seventh chord, pounded out forcefully in a deep and sonorous register.

Lento ($\text{♩} = 40$)

pp p mf quasi f f più f p ppp

• Appoggiare le dita sui tasti, premere profondamente e poi lasciar vibrare

Example 60. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 9, Movement VIII, opening

Having contracted back into a single octave, the seed-sound material gives way to a post-impressionistic section, in which predominantly quartal structures move in parallel. Once again, Scelsi invokes Debussy, although the primarily dissonant relationships between the two hands give the music a certain piquancy that also suggests Bartók.

($\text{♩} = 58$)

Example 61. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 9, Movement VIII, p. 32

The vagrant parallelism then settles into a B $\flat$ -major sonority, with the seed sound G $\sharp$ as an added sixth at the top of the texture. As the B $\flat$ foundation mutates into a perfect fifth with an added G $\flat$, the right hand presents stark parallel octaves. Though not explicitly indicated,

the high register and accented articulations suggest a bell effect and recall Scriabin's use of high registers for the creation of a spiritualist atmosphere.¹⁹



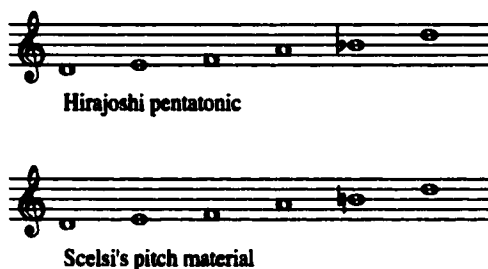
Example 62. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 9, Movement VIII, p. 33

The diatonic pitch material of the right hand forms an unusual pentatonic scale that includes the half-step between E and F.²⁰ Evidence points to D as the tonic of this scale (e.g., the A-D motion at the apexes of the line, and the A-D-A sonority that concludes the passage), in which case its construction resembles the Hirajoshi scale of traditional Japanese music, but with a major sixth.²¹

¹⁹Richard Taruskin has identified in Scriabin's music from the Fifth Sonata onward a frequent "sense of sudden elevation," what the Russian spiritualists called a "transporting burst": "Rapid ascents and a predilection for high registers are conspicuous in [Scriabin's] music from the moment he became interested in explicitly sublime moods and occult revelations." (Richard Taruskin, "Scriabin and the Superhuman: A Millennial Essay," in *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* [Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1997], 346).

²⁰The music of the right hand includes one C⁴. It serves only to thicken the sound of D, with which it is paired, and thus does not constitute an independent note of the scale.

²¹If one thinks of the Hirajoshi scale as Aeolian without scale degrees 4 and 7, then Scelsi's scale can be considered Dorian with the same omissions.



Example 63. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 9, Movement VIII
 (comparison of Hirajoshi scale and Scelsi's pitch material)

As in the other even-numbered movements, the seed-sound material returns midway. Scelsi brings back the G-major triads at a *fortissimo* dynamic level, after which the recoiled G octaves elide seamlessly with the parallel octaves of the recommencing pentatonic material. The movement ends peacefully with low Gs two octaves apart, gently enfolding the mellifluous sound-world that the movement had just revealed.

In the ninth and final movement, a less precarious oscillation obtains, anchored by a four-note ostinato in the right hand (see Example 64). The pitch material of the ostinato—consisting of two ascending semitones separated by a major third—remains constant. Its rhythm, though regular and generally uncomplicated, undergoes several transformations that anticipate the mutating patterns of so-called minimalist music. In the following example, simple metrical modifications twice displace the basic ostinato by an eighth note. The first note of the pattern rotates from the initial F♯ to G and then to C♯. While Scelsi provides no time signature for this (or any other) movement, the beaming of the eighth notes makes the shift unmistakable in the score.

♩ = 80

pp ppp

(con poco ped.)

♩ = 84 *poco movendo* *a tempo* (♩ = 84)

cresc. mf

più ped.

Example 64. Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 9, Movement IX, pp. 36–37

Approaching the end of the movement, Scelsi reapportions the ostinato into irregularly sized note groups—another minimalist technique—and even employs the staccato articulations that later became so characteristic of minimalist music.

♩ = 82

poco movendo *rallent. molto ...*

sempre pp ppp

(non troppo stacc.) senza ped.

Example 65 — Scelsi: Piano Suite No. 9, Movement IX, p. 38

Underneath the ostinato, a bass line comprised predominantly of half notes winds its way through a series of semitonal trichords: G-A $\flat$ -A $\sharp$, E $\flat$ -D-C $\sharp$, and D-E $\flat$ -E $\sharp$ (the first two of which appear in the left hand in Example 64). The vacillation of semitonal dyads in earlier movements expands here to a range of three pitches, but the idea and the effect remain essentially unchanged. The slow but persistent fluctuation by half-step and major

seventh delimits a contiguous portion of sonic space; Rudhyar had envisioned the process “as cutting out (as by means of scissors almost)” a portion of the *pleroma*, the fullness of sonic substance.²² At the same time, the divagation of the left hand throws the unchanging pitch content of the ostinato into varying harmonic relief, similar to the technique employed in earlier movements.

Within the simple alternation of material that guides the nine movements of Suite No. 9, Scelsi began to establish some of the most prominent compositional techniques of his mature sonorist style. These include the narrow orbit of oscillation and the changing harmonic relief used in the odd-numbered movements to define tonal axes. The sense of motionlessness created in the even-numbered movements also points toward his fully developed sonorist style, as do the expanding and contracting sound-worlds that represent the mellifluous sound-world of *Om*. Based loosely on the acoustic properties of the overtone series, the inner world of the seed sound is shown to be a fundamentally consonant realm open to exploration. And, perhaps most important, Scelsi demonstrates that both horizontal and vertical expressions of pitch clusters can delimit a perceptible portion of an infinite sonic reality.

What Scelsi was *not* able to do convincingly in Suite No. 9 was to liberate himself from the timbral and tempered confines of the piano. Despite the work’s conceptual advancements, many of its sonorist features rely on simulation rather than realization for their effect. In particular, his use of the pedal in conjunction with semitonal vacillations and increasingly dense pitch aggregates implies a greater subtlety of timbre and pitch than the piano can actually produce. The medium itself restricted Scelsi’s further exploration of these areas. Although he went on to write three more large-scale works for the piano, the Ninth Suite remained the most progressive and radically sonorist of Scelsi’s piano works of the 1950s. His Suite No. 10 (*Ka*) (1954), *Action Music* (1955), and Suite No. 11 (1956) all

²²Rudhyar, “The New Sense of Space,” 4–5.

retreat in some degree to the less satisfying combination of dissonant reiteration and rhythmic aggressiveness that had characterized Suite No. 8. By the time of the Ninth Suite, Scelsi had probably begun to realize that his aesthetic path would necessitate his abandonment of the piano; the three piano works of 1954–56 represent his last, futile efforts to cling to his own instrument.

The desire to break free of the restrictions imposed by the keyboard had been expressed years earlier by several people who influenced Scelsi's aesthetic in other ways. Rudolf Steiner referred to the piano as "the Philistine instrument" because of what he perceived as its poor reflection of the spiritual world. Steiner argued that unlike wind and brass instruments, the piano has no connection to the primeval and quintessentially human act of singing. And unlike percussion instruments, the piano does not reflect man's rhythmic, cyclical nature. The piano is an abstraction, a product entirely of the physical world that continues to hinder the musical evolution of humankind.

The [other] musical instruments are derived from the spiritual world; the piano, however, in which the tones are abstractly lined up next to each other, is created only in the physical world by man. . . . [I]t is the one instrument that actually, in a musical sense, *must be overcome*.²³

Similarly, Ferruccio Busoni bemoaned the piano's tempered limitations, which in his view place it essentially at odds with nature.

[We] have constructed our instruments in such a way that we can never get in above or below them [the twelve divisions of equal temperament]. Keyboard instruments, in particular, have so thoroughly schooled our ears that we are no longer capable of hearing anything else—incapable of hearing except through this impure medium.²⁴

²³Rudolf Steiner, "March 8, 1923, Stuttgart [Lecture]," *The Inner Nature of Music and the Experience of Tone*, ed. Alice Wulsin, trans. Maria St. Goar (Hudson, New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1983), 75; Rudolf Steiner, "Stuttgart, 8. März 1923 [Lecture]," in *Das Wesen des Musikalischen und der Tonerlebnis im Menschen*, Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe, ed. Helmut Wartburg, no. 283 (Dornach: Verlag der Rudolf Steiner-Nachlassverwaltung, 1969), 131. Emphasis added. Though not explicitly stated here, one senses that Steiner's objection to the piano, to its abstract construction, lay at least partly in the instrument's inherent subjection to equal temperament, its inability to produce microtones, and its inefficacy in conveying subtleties of timbre.

²⁴Ferruccio Busoni, "Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music," trans. Th. Baker, in *Three Classics in the Aesthetic of Music* (New York: Dover, 1962), 89. Interestingly, Busoni backs away from his

And even Rudhyar, who had proclaimed the piano “a sort of big gong,” mitigated his enthusiasm with the recognition that it must be played unidiomatically to achieve this effect.²⁵

Scelsi’s belief, adopted from Rudhyar, that the creation of a new kind of music would involve carving out portions of a limitless sonic realm essentially dictated his abnegation of equal temperament, and with it, the piano. Dividing the infinitely plentiful sonic continuum into any number of stepped degrees unquestionably conflicted with this radical view of composition. Even with the accumulating overtones Scelsi managed to generate in his sonarist piano music, the chromatic scale offered only a skeleton of the *pleroma*. With the piano he simply could not get at the space between the notes, no matter how cleverly he implied it. He needed media that could move seamlessly about the sonic spectrum, and whose sustain would allow pitch focus and dynamic intensification without requiring reiteration. For his own improvisations, he began to use the ondiola and ondioline, small electronic keyboards capable of vibrato, glissandi, sustain, and timbral variation.²⁶ For his written compositions, he turned to wind, string, and brass instruments, all of which afforded microtonal possibilities.

condemnation of keyboard instruments at the end of his essay with the dictum “Respect the Pianoforte!” (p. 101).

²⁵Rudhyar, “The New Sense of Space,” 29. See pp. 190–191 above.

²⁶Hugh Davies describes the ondioline as a “monophonic, three-octave piano attachment developed by Georges Jenny around 1938–40 and manufactured by Les Ondes Georges Jenny (later known as La Musique Electronique) in Paris from 1941 until about 1976 (when Jenny died). . . . The sound is generated by a single oscillator. The range of the touch-sensitive keyboard can be set within a total compass of eight octaves by means of an octave transposition switch, and octave doubling is possible. Complex waveforms are produced with up to 50 overtones. Volume is controlled by a knee-lever, and percussive attacks can be produced by means of a finger-wire. Sideways movement of the finger moves the keyboard itself and produces a vibrato similar to that obtainable from the ondes martenot” (Hugh Davies, “Ondioline,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments*, vol. 2: 818). The ondiola, probably built by the same company, differs slightly in that it is free-standing rather than attached to the piano (but still quite small) and has a pitch wheel that is controlled by the foot. Scelsi owned at least one of each type.

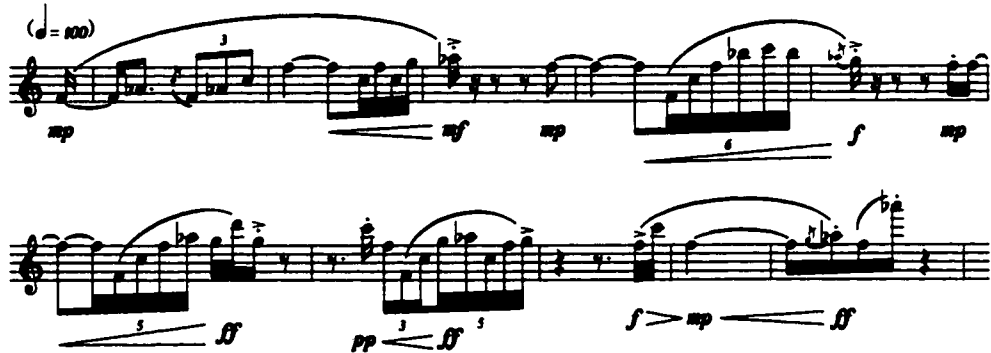
Into Microtonality: The Music for Winds and Strings of 1953–1957

Scelsi had already commenced writing solo works and duets for wind and string instruments a few years before he gave up composing for the piano. Perhaps, under the influence of Steiner and Busoni, he began to recognize the instrument's inherent artificiality and sought other media more appropriate to his new aesthetic. Because the bulk of his solo works for orchestral instruments date from the very years he was forging his new style, it seems clear that he preferred simplified contexts for the development of his ideas. He also may have drawn inspiration from various types of Oriental music, in which solo string and wind instruments predominate.²⁷

He first branched out beyond the piano in late 1953 and 1954 with several pieces for flute and clarinet (solos and duets) and the *Divertimento No. 2* for violin. In these works Scelsi endeavored to focus the experience of pitch in a linear, predominantly monophonic setting, without amassing notes into expansive sonic clouds as he was then doing at the piano. Instead, he explored the stationary consonance of familiar linear structures, such as tertian arpeggios, tonal scales, and the church modes. These structures are not used conventionally, however, to imply tonal or modal harmony, as Scelsi had little interest in the teleology of harmonic progression. In an effort to suggest a kind of stasis, Scelsi often concentrated on the linear outline of a single consonant sonority—generally the tonic triad of a conventional scale, with other notes of the scale included as coloristic additions. *Pwyll* (1954) for solo flute derives almost entirely from the F melodic minor scale, with only a few chromatic inflections. The harmonic outlines of the piece remain so focused on the F-minor

²⁷Scelsi's interest in non-Western music apparently focused on the traditions of Asia, particularly the music of India, Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan. The extent to which Scelsi's sonorist music owes any demonstrable stylistic debt to the musical traditions of these regions remains a difficult problem and is addressed in Chapter 6.

sonority that extended passages contain little else but the notes of the F-minor triad with its added second (G^b).²⁸



Example 66. Scelsi: *Pwyll* for flute, mm. 113–123

In Movement IV of the Suite (1953) for flute and clarinet, stable arpeggiations of the G-minor triad in the clarinet lead one to perceive the flute's undulatory melody as G Aeolian.

Example 67. Scelsi: Suite for flute and B $\flat$ clarinet, Movement IV, mm. 25–31

²⁸The opening section of the piece projects G as its reiterated and sustained focus, though the music still derives from the F melodic minor scale. Thus for the remainder of the work, in which F serves as the pitch focus, G continues to be a prominent note, particularly at phrase endings.

Elsewhere in these early sonorist works, Scelsi projects rotational pitch axes by using linear oscillations within a narrow band around a central note, as he had done in the even-numbered movements of Piano Suite No. 9. Along with the rapid reiteration of the pitch axis, wind and string instruments now afforded the possibilities of sustain, controlled dynamic shaping, and greater variety of articulation. Scelsi began to exploit these capacities as means to project and enliven the axial pitch. At times, the oscillation occurs not around a single pitch but around a semitonal dyad. In such cases, the axis lies somewhere between the two notes, or, even more provocatively, it comprises *the entire space* circumscribed by the semitonal boundaries. In Example 68 from Movement III of the same suite for flute and clarinet, the pitch axis seems to exist in the space between E $\sharp$ and D $\sharp$. The two instruments alternately sustain these pitches, which are animated by narrow pitch oscillation, trills, and dynamic fluctuations. Because the sounds of the flute and clarinet generally do not overlap one another, their alternation gives the impression of a continuous sound with fluctuating pitch and timbre, rather than genuine contrapuntal interplay.

Example 68. Scelsi: Suite for flute and B $\flat$ clarinet, Movement III, mm. 58–70

As in the contemporaneous piano music, Scelsi seemed perched upon the precipice of microtonality with such subtle and concentrated musical expressions. From a sustained musical gesture so condensed that it occurs predominantly within the space of a half-step,

the explicit use of smaller intervals seems almost inevitable.²⁹ Scelsi had already begun to use glissandi and vibrato to gain access to the space between the notes of equal temperament, and these remained essential features of his sonorist style for the rest of his career. But by themselves these techniques were too imprecise. They did not provide sufficient control over the complete sonic spectrum, the limitless realm of *anāhata* from which he now sought to carve out portions in a sonorist kind of *soggetto cavato*. Scelsi adopted microtonality because the evolution of his style led him to it—and because his aesthetic demanded it.

Although the impetus for adopting microtonality came primarily from Scelsi's own stylistic path and spiritualist aesthetic, he certainly would have been familiar with the notion from his influences and background. Theories of microtonality were widespread in the first half of the twentieth century, and numerous composers had experimented with micro-intervals as far back as the late nineteenth century.³⁰ In "Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music," Busoni proposed a system of third-tones, recognizing the unsuitability of equal temperament for the music of the future.³¹ Microtones had also been proclaimed an essential feature of the new, more spiritual music expounded by the Theosophists. In a book that Scelsi owned,³² Cyril Scott had written of the notes "between the notes," which he argued were implicit in Scriabin's *Prometheus* of 1910.

²⁹This characterization of Scelsi's semitonal vacillations brings to mind the micropolyphony of György Ligeti (b. 1923), whose music has been compared with Scelsi's by more than a few commentators. Both composers claimed ignorance of the other's achievements until long after their mature styles had been established. At the same time, they expressed admiration for each other's work.

³⁰Charles Ives (1874–1954) is today among the most celebrated early exponents of microtonality, but his work was scarcely known at the time. In Europe, Czech composer Alois Hába (1893–1973)—a Theosophist—began microtonal experimentation in 1914. Quarter-tone pianos were built in Vienna by von Möllendorf in 1917, and in Paris by Russian emigrant Ivan Vishnegradsky in 1922 (*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2d ed., s.v. "Microtone").

³¹Busoni, "Sketch of a New Esthetic," 93. It should be underscored that Scelsi worked only with quarter tones and imprecise microtonal inflections such as glissandi and wide vibrato; he never adopted Busoni's proposed scale of tripartite tones.

³²See Appendix B.

Scriabin had already discovered that harmonic system which is pre-eminently Devic in character, and in this work he put it to the fullest use. The effect is one of almost continuous *false relation* [by which Scott means chromatic friction among various parts]. . . . And yet only through this device . . . is it possible to obtain that sense of between the notes which is essential to the portrayal of Deva-music.³³

Even the Theosophist Annie Besant, a non-musician, celebrated the arrival of a strange new compositional style involving microtones.

[Music] is beginning to show signs of the coming art—subtler harmonies, minuter distances between notes, tendencies to quarter-notes as well as half-notes, quarter-tones; and already there are one or two musicians who are beginning in their melodies to play with these subtler kinds of tones, making strange new music—music which the public ear is not yet accustomed to, which it challenges when it hears it, but which is the Music of the Future, when a vaster range of sound shall appeal to the ears more finely organised than ours, and when the ears of a new race shall demand from its musicians greater delicacies of musical sound than have yet been mastered amongst us.³⁴

Scelsi may have also found models for microtonality in his encounters with Asian music, in which microtones often serve as a subtle but essential kind of ornamentation, a technique for the vivification of individual tones.³⁵

Having already begun to use glissandi and vibrato to get “between the notes,” Scelsi’s decisive step into categorical microtonality came in the second and third movements of the *Tre studi* for Eb clarinet of 1954. Thus his first use of microtones occurred considerably earlier than has been suggested—a full two years before he abandoned the piano.³⁶ The

³³Cyril Scott, *Music: Its Secret Influence throughout the Ages*, 6th ed. (London: Rider and Company, 1951), 82. Emphasis in original.

³⁴Annie Besant, *The Changing World: Lectures to Theosophical Students* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1910), 72. Besant’s somewhat ambiguous use of *quarter-note* and *half-note* seems to refer to intervals rather than rhythmic values. Had she intended the latter, she probably would have described them using the British terminology *crotchet* and *minim*, respectively.

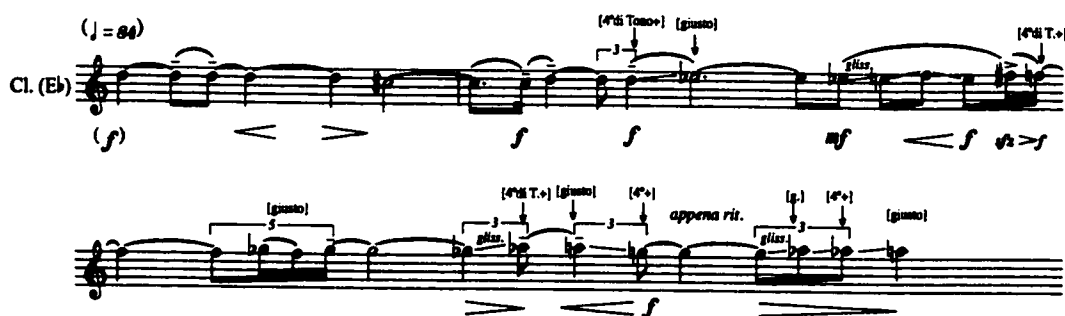
³⁵See Chapter 6.

³⁶Several writers have asserted that Scelsi began to use microtones at exactly the same time that he gave up composing for the piano, in 1956 or 1957 (see, for instance, Harry Halbreich, liner notes to Accord CD 200622, trans. Elisabeth Buzzard [1989]: 7). While these two crucial developments in his career certainly correlate—two sides of the same coin, one might say—they did not precisely coincide. The period between 1954 and 1957 was one of gradual realization for Scelsi; he was equally slow in his adoption of microtones and his abandonment of the piano.

first movement of the *Tre studi* evinces the same techniques of pitch focus and oscillation that characterize Scelsi's other woodwind works of the period, without microtonal inflection. His decision to introduce quarter-tones in the second movement, rather than the first, may have been an effort to demonstrate the correctness of this critical step. As Schoenberg had done with his move into atonality in the last movement of his String Quartet No. 2, Scelsi may have wanted to show that his employment of micro-intervals was dictated—logically and inevitably—by his stylistic direction. Indeed, even the title of the *Tre studi* gives some indication of the work's tentative and didactic nature.

Scelsi's use of quarter-tones in the second movement of the *Tre studi* is fairly extensive; the difference in overall sound between the first and second movements strikes one immediately. Yet microtonality does not play a crucial role in the second movement's basic structure. However prominently they infuse the surface sound, quarter-tones do not serve as vital elements of the movement's underlying pitch organization. They function only as ornaments, stepping stones between conventionally tuned pitches. They are rarely sustained for longer than a quarter note, and they almost always move to one of the adjacent tempered scale degrees (usually upward) in much the same way that dissonances resolve by step in conventional counterpoint. The purpose of the quarter-tones is to fill in the gaps between the essential pitches, so that the music no longer "jumps from note to note," as Rudhyar put it.³⁷ The structural outline of Example 69 from Movement II comprises a chromatic ascent from the clarinet's D[♯] to A[♯]. Without affecting this outline, the quarter-tones turn the ascent into a slow and carefully controlled glissando.

³⁷Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 27. See Chapter 3.



Example 69. Scelsi: *Tre studi* for Eb clarinet, Movement II, p. 6

Interestingly, Scelsi retreated from microtonality in the solo works of 1955 (*Divertimenti* Nos. 2 and 3 for violin; *Coelocanth* for viola; *Hyxos* for flute, gong, and bell). Perhaps he did not yet feel entirely comfortable with the technique or was not entirely convinced of its usefulness. Beginning in 1956, he resumed using quarter-tones in his solo works, where they took on considerably more constructional significance. In these works, the focus on isolated pitches sharpens considerably. Single pitch axes are maintained for longer stretches, and the nature of the activity around them becomes less and less diffuse. Conventional arpeggiations, scales, and modality are replaced by increasingly subtle and refined sonic variations of more concentrated pitch material.

Such is the case with the last of the *Quattro pezzi* for trumpet of 1956, a significant milestone in the evolution of Scelsi's sonorist style. The entire last movement—which occupies only one page in the score—centers on F $\sharp$, never venturing farther away than Eb. In this context, microtonal inflections assume tremendous significance, even though their use is less plentiful than in the *Tre studi* for clarinet. As the listener is drawn into the concentrated world of a single note, the slightest variations of dynamics, articulation, and pitch convey an abundance of musical information. Quarter-tones no longer serve as mere ornaments, providing smooth passage between primary tones; they have become substantive elements of the concentrated sound-world. As Example 70 shows, they are often sustained and they do not necessarily resolve to an adjacent pitch.

Example 70. Scelsi: *Quattro pezzi* for trumpet, Movement IV, p. 8

Thus it would appear that Scelsi arrived at a conception of sonorist monotonicity as early as 1956, three years before the celebrated *Quattro pezzi* for chamber orchestra. Yet Scelsi's accomplishment in the *Quattro pezzi* for trumpet did not provide the breakthrough he needed. Adherence to a single note occurs in only one, particularly brief movement. And while microtonality plays an important role in that movement, helping to convey the pliability of the central note, its use remains sparse. Most significantly, the medium of the work is both monophonic and timbrally limited. Though Scelsi managed to generate some timbral variety with the meticulous control of articulations, dynamics, and muting, a solo trumpet simply could not provide enough harmonic and coloristic variety for Scelsi to cultivate the subtle variation techniques that would later become hallmarks of his mature style.

More consequential achievements during this crucial period in Scelsi's career were the cello works *Triphon* (1956) and *Dithome* (1957).³⁸ These eventually became the first two

³⁸Cremonese lists the date of composition for both of these works as 1957, as do Castanet and Cisternino. According to Frances-Marie Uitti, however, *Triphon* was actually composed in 1956, and it is listed this way in the Salabert catalog. Uitti met Scelsi in 1975 and subsequently worked closely with him for several years on these pieces, also helping him to prepare some of his other works for publication. She gave the world premieres of these pieces—which Scelsi dedicated to her—in Como in 1976 (see Frances-Marie Uitti and Stefania Gianni, "Intervista di Stefania Gianni alla violoncellista Frances-Marie Uitti," *i suoni, le onde: Rivista della Fondazione Isabella Scelsi* 1 [1990]: 7–10). Because of Uitti's close association with Scelsi and intimate knowledge of these pieces, I will use the dates she provides.

parts of the *Trilogia* for solo cello, which Scelsi completed in 1965 when he added the third piece, *Ygghur*. Together the works of the *Trilogia* came to represent “the three stages of man,” each with its own programmatic subdivision:

Table 3. Scelsi: *Trilogia* (*The Three Stages of Man*) for cello

Triphon (1956): Youth–Energy–Drama

Dithome (1957): Maturity–Energy–Thought

Ygghur (1965): Old Age–Memories–Catharsis–Liberation³⁹

It remains unclear whether Scelsi originally conceived *Triphon* and *Dithome* as parts of a trilogy, and whether their programmatic associations were present in their initial formulations. Frances-Marie Uitti—the American cellist who has become the primary interpreter of these works—recalls that once all three parts of the *Trilogia* were complete, Scelsi “considered them an autobiography in sound representing his own passage through life.”⁴⁰

The particular importance of *Triphon* and *Dithome* in the evolution of Scelsi’s sonorist style lies in the greatly refined means by which he energizes and animates the sound of a single note. Perhaps the most significant of these techniques is the carefully controlled employment of microtones, which infuse the two works. Both *Triphon* and *Dithome* include more extensive and essential use of microtones than do any of Scelsi’s other solo works of the period, pointing the way toward his fully developed style. His increased attention to microtonality surfaces even in the preface to the published score of *Trilogia*,

³⁹*Trilogia: I tre stadi dell'uomo*

Triphon: Giovinezza–Energia–Dramma

Dithome: Maturità–Energia–Pensiero

Ygghur: Vecchiaia–Ricordi–Catarsi–Liberazione

⁴⁰Frances-Marie Uitti, liner notes to Etcetera CD 1136 (1992): 1.

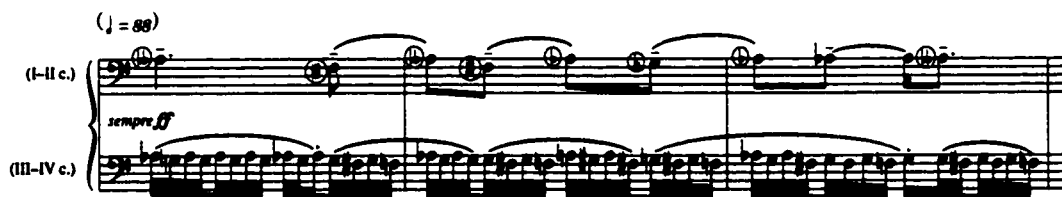
which presents a more elegant manner of notating quarter-tones, replacing the cumbersome approach of Scelsi's earlier microtonal works.

Graphics for Accidentals

- ⊕ 1/4 of a tone higher
- ⊖ 1/4 of a tone lower
- ⊕♯ sharp + 1/4 of a tone higher
- ⊖♭ flat + 1/4 of a tone lower

Example 71. Preface to *Trilogia*

Example 72 from the first of *Triphon*'s three movements helps to demonstrate the fundamental importance of microtones to the work's conception.



Example 72. Scelsi: *Triphon*, Movement I, p. 9

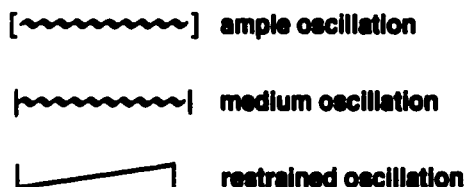
The function of the microtones in this passage is not ornamental but essential; they lie at the epicenter of the oscillatory activity. They form a sonic core, precisely filling the space delimited by the rapid semitonal vacillations on the staff underneath.⁴¹ Despite the

⁴¹Beginning with *Triphon* and *Dithome*, Scelsi's notation of string music expanded to multiple staves. In the 1960s and 70s, he frequently used four staves to notate string music, one staff for each string.

profusion of notes in the score, their combination results in a single animated sound that effectively saturates a narrow portion of the sonic spectrum.

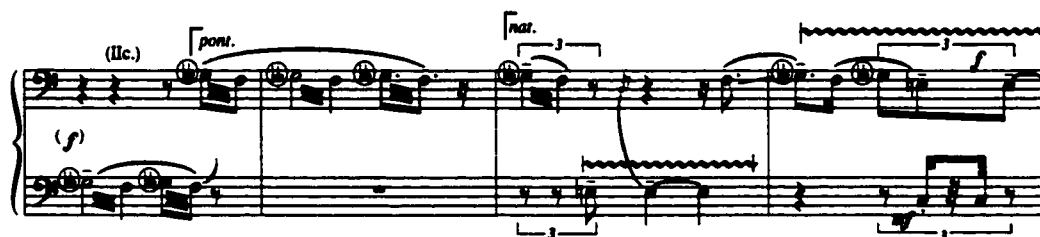
The preface also distinguishes three degrees of vibrato, illustrating the notational symbols for each.

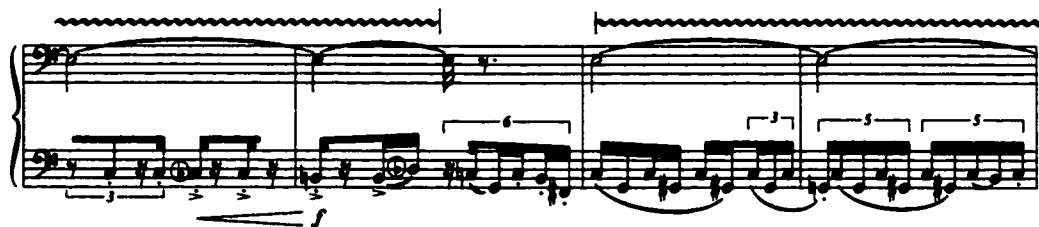
Special Effects



Example 73. Preface to *Trilogia*

The term *oscillation* underscores that these “special effects” evolved from the vacillating semitones of his earlier sonorist works. These vibrati act as sonic catalysts, activating an otherwise static note such that it becomes the axis of a narrow orbit. What distinguishes these oscillations from those in earlier works is that they are continuous, rather than stepped, with respect to pitch. In Example 74, the close relationship between stepped oscillation and controlled vibrato appears clearly: the stepped alternation of quarter-tones (notated as tremoli) gives way to the continuous fluctuations of the vibrati (“medium oscillations”).





Example 74. Scelsi: *Triphon*, Movement I, pp. 10–11

In *Triphon* and *Dithome* Scelsi added to the techniques at his disposal for the animation of individual sounds by exploiting the multiple-stop potential of the cello. In solo works for wind or brass instruments, the strict linearity of the medium prevented him from exploring the harmonic dimension, though he tried at times to imply it (e.g., the F-minor arpeggios of *Pwyll*). With a solo cello, however, Scelsi was able to activate and enrich the sound of a particular note by placing it into explicit harmonic relief. Because timbre is chiefly a product of the harmonic series—i.e., the particular vertical configuration of a fundamental and its upper partials—Scelsi's use of harmonic intervals on different strings of the cello proceeded naturally from the subtle timbral variations he had already effected in earlier works, for such variations amount to harmonic manipulations of a very subtle type. In *Triphon* and *Dithome*, he simply expanded these manipulations to the harmony of pitches actually produced on different strings. While the four strings of the cello still restricted Scelsi's full exploration of harmonic resonance, the techniques introduced in these works anticipate the more complex vertical activations he used in ensemble music of subsequent years.

Scelsi's concern with the subtleties of pitch inflection and harmonic resonance relates closely to his growing interest in timbral metamorphosis, which guides much of the activity in *Trilogia*. In addition to the conventional assortment of articulations and bowing techniques—which he exploits meticulously—Scelsi extends the timbral range of the cello through the use of steel-guitar plectrums and specially designed mutes, particularly in

Triphon. These unusual performance accessories enrich the instrument's timbre by affecting the overtone makeup of the sound. The preface to the score includes the following explanation:

The mutes required by Scelsi for the strings in certain works do not function as ordinary mutes; their forms are different and also the material with which they are made. They are metallic objects that rub against the string and produce a grating, buzzing sound; *harmonics are added, not taken away*.⁴²

In addition to modifying timbre, the mutes also have the unexpected effect of altering the pitch of particular sounds. Uitti has remarked that in *Triphon* "the cello is divided by the use of a metallic mute that vibrates on top of the G and C strings creating a 'rumble' in energy and *altered microtonal intonation*."⁴³ Because mutes are generally acknowledged to have an effect on timbre and dynamics,⁴⁴ her comment implies that change in one musical parameter (timbre or dynamics) can give rise to change in another (pitch).

The significance of this implication extends far beyond the use of metallic mutes. By the time of *Triphon* in 1956 this principle had become fundamental to Scelsi's sonorist style. He had already approximated the effect in his sonorist piano music, wherein the accumulating overtones of increasingly dense sonorities simulate a transformation of timbre. But with the piano he remained limited by the pitch constraints of equal temperament, which cannot convey microtonal subtleties. Having freed himself from these constraints with the adoption of microtonality, Scelsi moved ever closer to the projection of an extremely concentrated sound, within which the slightest changes in any one parameter

⁴²Preface to Giacinto Scelsi, *Trilogia* (Paris: Éditions Salabert, 1985). Emphasis added. It seems likely that the author of this comment was Uitti, who knew these works intimately and helped Scelsi prepare them for publication. It appears also in the general introduction to Scelsi's catalog with Salabert, where it is meant to apply to *Trilogia* as well as other string works. Thus it may have been written by Sharon Kanach, who compiled the catalog.

⁴³Uitti, *Etcetera* CD 1136, 2. Emphasis added.

⁴⁴"A mechanical device used on musical instruments to muffle the tone, i.e. to alter the timbre; the volume is usually somewhat decreased in the process" (*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2d ed., s.v. "Mute").

reverberate in others and therefore have a profound impact on the intensely focused listening experience.

The principle of interdependence among the musical parameters is neither scientific speculation nor metaphysical fancy. Studies in psychoacoustics have confirmed that variation in one acoustic parameter can affect the perception of another. Gerald Murch has pointed out that the perception of pitch “varies not only with frequency but also with intensity. If a tuning fork is sounded and moved closer to the ear, a change in pitch occurs.”⁴⁵ Likewise, Leonard Meyer submits that the perception of each sonic parameter actually depends upon a network of interrelationships.

Pitch, for instance, is a complex function of both frequency and intensity. One can keep frequency constant and, by changing intensity, alter pitch. Similarly, loudness and volume, which probably combine to form what we designate as the dynamic level (though this is obviously also a function of context), are complex tonal attributes which cannot be equated in any simple way with any single physical characteristic of sound. And so it is also with the other qualitative attributes of sound.⁴⁶

The effects that Murch and Meyer describe are extremely subtle, and require an intensified type of listening to become apparent. Thus they have little bearing on conventional musical idioms.

Scelsi, however, had been pursuing just such intense aural focus since the beginning of his sonorist period. Drawing upon the practices of *Nāda-Yoga*, in which the practitioner refines his auditory capacity by concentrating intently on the subtlest of sounds, Scelsi sought to reach a sound-world where the supposed independence of the musical parameters vanishes. The science of psychoacoustics verifies what Scelsi understood from his study of Yoga: at a supremely refined level of listening (for Scelsi, *anāhata*), musical parameters that we normally consider autonomous and finite reveal themselves to be interdependent and

⁴⁵Gerald M. Murch, *Visual and Auditory Perception* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1973), 154–163.

⁴⁶Leonard Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas: Patterns and Predictions in Twentieth-Century Culture*, 2d ed. (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 246.

infinitely variable. Subtle changes in pitch, like those produced by the vibrati and microtonal inflection of *Trilogia*, generate perceived, if not actual, changes of timbre. Likewise dynamic swells and timbral mutations generate perceived fluctuations of pitch, and so on.

Thus in addition to microtonal inflection, timbral metamorphosis, dynamic shaping, and harmonic relief as separate techniques for energizing and animating sounds that might otherwise be perceived as immobile, Scelsi also exploited the interaction among these parameters. Consider Example 75 from *Triphon*:

Example 75. Scelsi: *Triphon*, Movement I, p. 1

By conventional standards, the pitch content of this passage appears rather static, largely confined on the staff to the space between $F^{\sharp}$ and a quarter-tone above. In reality the “medium oscillations” and “ample oscillations” produce constant variations of pitch. But even the constancy of this oscillatory state does not produce a sense of stagnation, for it combines with continual changes in the bowing and the dynamics. All of these parametric alterations produce timbral metamorphoses, which in turn are enhanced by the alternation and overlapping of the two strings (notated on the two staves), the lower of which includes

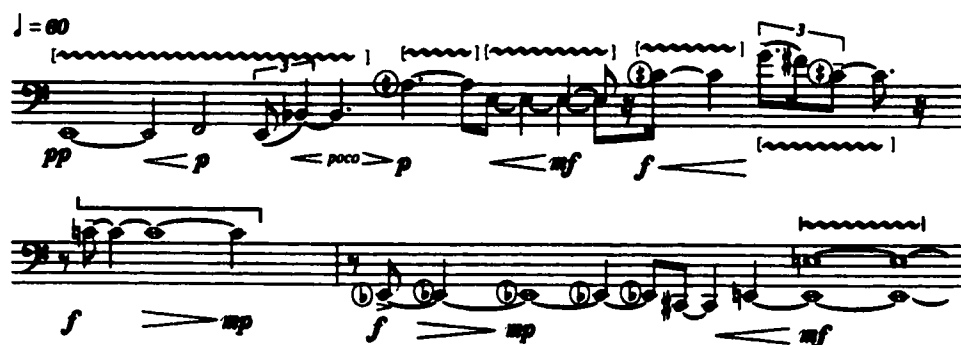
the buzzing metallic mute. Every parameter persists in an ongoing state of change, each one enhanced by changes in the others. The accumulated result is the marvelously detailed shaping of a single sound that is sharply focused, yet remains in constant flux in all of its parameters.

In most of Scelsi's mature sonorist works, broad structural relationships and processes play a significant role in the music's ability to maintain coherence as concentrated sounds are projected over extended periods of time. Of the two cello works of the 1950s, *Dithome* represents a particularly important step in the evolution of this trait. While the tripartite structure of *Triphon* ("three sounds") manifests conspicuously in its three separate movements, the bipartite structure of *Dithome* ("two sections") is not immediately obvious. The work is cast in one long movement lasting approximately thirteen minutes, one of the longest single movements of Scelsi's sonorist period.⁴⁷ In the liner notes to her definitive recording of the piece, Uitti identifies the work's structure as a type of mirror form, but she provides little detail about it.⁴⁸ The structure comprises, in fact, a continuous and nearly exact palindrome. It includes essentially three types of material: broad, predominantly linear statements focused on E $\sharp$; harmonic passages focused on D $\sharp$ or F $\sharp$ that take full advantage of the cello's double-stop capacity; and moments of turbulent and extremely virtuosic string crossing from which no focal pitch emerges.

The opening moments of the piece include a gesture of particular interest: the linear tritone from the focal pitch E up to B $\flat$.

⁴⁷The single movement of *Anahit* (1965), for violin and chamber orchestra, lasts roughly as long as *Dithome*; which of these is longer depends only upon the tempi of a particular performance. Scelsi's longest continuous movement is certainly not *Hymnos* (1963) for orchestra—a one-movement work lasting approximately eleven minutes—as has twice been asserted (Harry Halbreich, liner notes to Accord CD201112, trans. Elisabeth Buzzard [1990]: 7; Riccardo Schulz, liner notes to Mode CD 95 [2001]: 3).

⁴⁸Uitti, *Etcetera* CD 1136, 2.



Example 76. Scelsi: *Dithome*, opening

With the “ample oscillation” applied to the opening sound, the initial motion from E up to F is perceived essentially as an inflection, the slight bending of a continuous sound. When E leaps up a tritone to B $\flat$, however, the linear interval has a space-opening effect almost like that of a Schenkerian *Anstieg* (initial ascent).⁴⁹ Because every interval above or below E can be reduced to an interval no larger than a tritone,⁵⁰ the space between E and B $\flat$ comprehends the entire sound-world of the focal pitch. I would argue that the gesture serves a symbolic, rather than perceptible, purpose, but it is one that Scelsi used fairly often in his mature sonorist works to introduce a focal note.

The fulcrum of the work’s structural palindrome occurs during an expansive return of the E-centered linear material. To generate a clear sense of convergence on E, Scelsi enters into this section by closing the space he opened at the beginning in a slow descent from B $\flat$.

⁴⁹I offer this analogy for the purposes of illustration, but it should not be taken too literally. Schenker’s initial ascent extends up to and serves to prolong the primary melodic tone (*Kopftone*). In *Dithome*, E is the primary tone (though not in the Schenkerian sense), and B $\flat$ functions only as an element of it.

⁵⁰Any interval larger than a tritone can be reduced, by inversion, by conversion from a compound to a simple interval, or both.



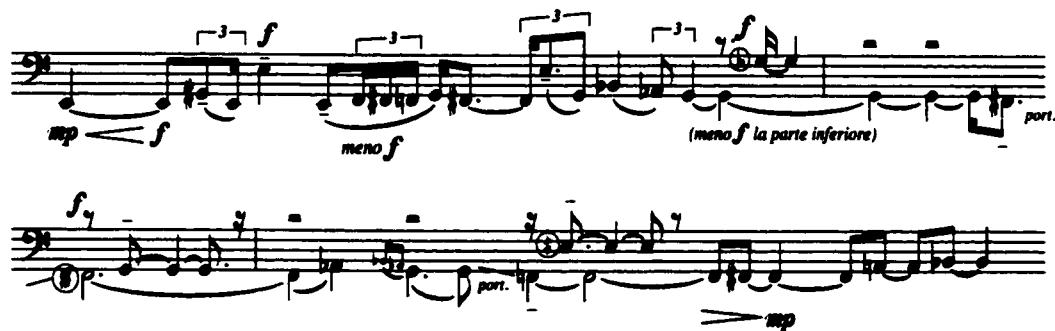
Example 77. Scelsi: *Dithome*, p. 27

Shortly thereafter, the palindrome reaches its pivot point: quietly sustained and sharply focused E^bs, approached and exited from a quarter-tone below (indicated in Example 78 with an asterisk).



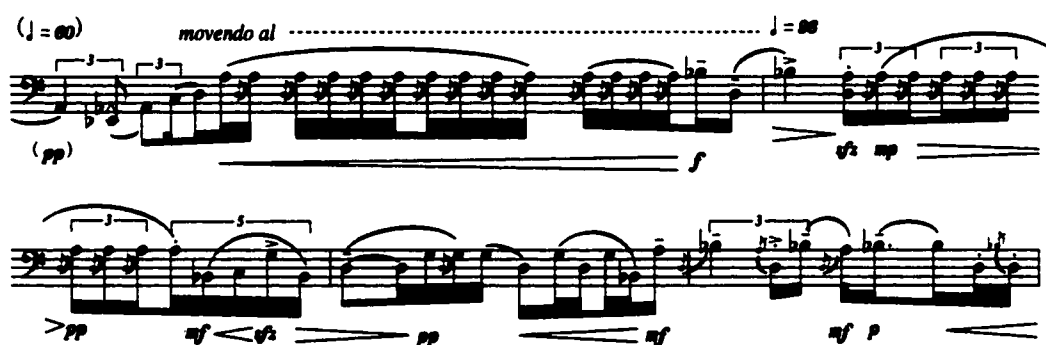
Example 78. Scelsi: *Dithome*, pp. 27–28

As this central section concludes, the space between E and B^b naturally reopens, as the palindromic structure simply reverses the previous motion (compare Examples 77 and 79).



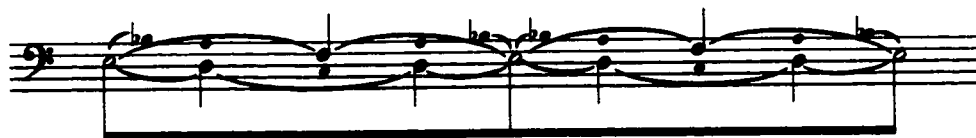
Example 79. Scelsi: *Dithome*, p. 28

Thus the palindromic structure of the piece begins and ends with the E-centered material, which also returns at the center of the movement where the palindrome begins its reversal. Between these sections, there occur passages centered alternately on D $\sharp$ and F $\sharp$. In these passages, the pitch axis is projected and enlivened primarily through harmonic relief, which Scelsi generates with copious use of double-stop techniques. But instead of notating these straightforwardly as harmonic intervals, Scelsi uses rapid and energetic reiterations of fixed pitches and grace notes combined with dynamic shaping to avoid any suggestion of stasis.



Example 80. Scelsi: *Dithome*, p. 21

Around the D and F axes, harmonic fifths, sixths, and octaves are emphasized, particularly the A above D (shown in Example 80) and the C below F. All of these harmonic intervals are subject to slight detuning and other phasing effects produced through microtonal inflection. The significance of D and F as the interim focal points is that they lie on either side of the work's primary axis pitch of E. Thus there emerges a palindromic background structure in which the interim axes of D and F—animated primarily through harmonic means—generate a large-scale oscillation around E—animated primarily through linear means and the space-opening motion up to B $\flat$.



Example 81. *Dithome* (background structure)

The revelation of such a well-formed background structure raises a troubling issue: it directly conflicts with Scelsi's anti-teleological and anti-formalist aesthetic. Borrowing freely from Rudhyar, Scelsi argued in the spiritualist texts that the new, more spiritual music he envisioned should be based upon the internal world of isolated sounds, not the external relationships between one sound and others. The suggestion that the different pitch axes of *Dithome* relate to one another structurally seems impossible to reconcile with the composer's aesthetic as he stated it. Indeed, I suspect that Scelsi himself struggled with this vexing problem. Perhaps for Scelsi, as for the critic or analyst, this simply remained an anomaly. On the other hand, Scelsi may have found some way to bring such structural relationships into accord with his spiritualist aesthetic. If Scelsi thought of localized activity around a pitch axis not as a vacillation comprising distinct sounds but as the animated, fluctuating projection of a single sound, then the same would hold true for the macrostructural oscillation around E in *Dithome*. From this perspective, the entire work constitutes a projection of E—a prolongation in Schenkerian terminology—within which elements of its sound-world become localized points of convergence.

The projection of one primary pitch axis in *Dithome* as a frame for its macrostructure apparently confirmed for Scelsi that a single axis might feasibly serve for a complete movement. If one long movement like that of *Dithome* could maintain one primary axis with periodic departures to secondary ones, then a shorter movement could certainly maintain a single axis throughout simply by expunging the secondary axes. Thus in the instrumental works that followed *Dithome* directly (*Tre pezzi* for trombone, *Elegia per Ty*, the String Trio, *I presagi*, the *Quattro pezzi* for chamber orchestra, and *Kya*), Scelsi chose

not to use one structural process for a single long movement, but to return to the three- and four-movement designs that characterize the majority of his solo works of the mid 1950s. This tendency might indicate Scelsi's persistent reliance on a structural norm of Western musical convention that he had employed since the beginning of his career. In his modernist period, the neoclassical use of the sonata cycle formed an important part of the historicism that underlies such works as the First String Quartet. One could certainly argue that Scelsi's continued use of multi-movement schemata constitutes an element of the neoclassical aesthetic that survived long into his sonorist period. Nonetheless, Scelsi may also have believed that a series of individual movements, each one relatively brief and using a single axis, would effectively project the anti-teleological sonorous focus he desired.

Yet Scelsi never fully resolved the questions of whether single- or multi-movement works suited his aesthetic of timelessness more convincingly, and whether to employ structural processes within one movement, among separate movements, or not at all. In the multi-movement designs of many of Scelsi's apogean instrumental pieces of the 1960s (*Hurqualia*, *Aiôn*, String Quartet No. 2, String Quartet No. 3, *Chukrum*, *Uaxuctum*, and *Konx-om-pax*), a significant relationship among the axes of the different movements often exists, though not necessarily with one primary axis for the entire work. In a few cases, individual movements from these works even exhibit an autonomous structural process, such as the palindromes that occur in the first movement of *Chukrum* and the third movement of String Quartet No. 2. At the same time, Scelsi continued to compose works built upon the model of *Dithome*: one-movement with a single structural process unfolding as in *Hymnos*, String Quartet No. 4, and *Anahit*.⁵¹

⁵¹For analyses of the underlying structural processes of these works, see Harry Halbreich, liner notes to Accord CD 201112, trans. Elisabeth Buzzard (1990): 7 for *Hymnos*; Martin Zenck, "Das Irreduktible als Kriterium der Avantgarde: Überlegungen zu den vier Streichquartetten Giacinto Scelsis," in *Giacinto Scelsi*, ed. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn, *Musik-Konzepte: Die Reihe über Komponisten*, no. 31 (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1983), 69–73 for String Quartet No. 4; and Julian Anderson, "La Note Juste: Julian Anderson Celebrates the 90th Anniversary of Giacinto Scelsi's Birth," *The Musical Times* 136 (January 1995): 22–27 for *Anahit*. Scelsi also used one-movement structures in three works for string ensemble of the mid 1960s: *Anagamin*, *Ohoi*, and *Natura renovatur*.

In addition to providing a kind of structural paradigm for a movement fixed on a single pitch axis, *Dithome* paved the way for Scelsi's monotonal works in its incorporation of the full range of techniques for the animated projection of a single sound. These now included vibrato, glissando, quarter-tone inflection, narrow orbital oscillation, dynamic shaping, timbral metamorphosis, and harmonic relief. Most importantly, Scelsi had begun to exploit the infinite possibilities of combining these techniques interdependently. With his methodology in place, Scelsi turned to instrumental ensembles, more expansive media where the possibilities afforded by these techniques and their combinations multiplied exponentially.

The most significant work to follow *Dithome* directly was the remarkable String Trio (1958), cast in four movements. In the first two movements, a severe monotonicity obtains, the first movement focused on B $\flat$ and the second on F $\sharp$. The three instruments never stray farther than a half-step from the axis, the activity converging on the axis itself and the quarter-tones adjacent to it. Sustained unisons and octaves (rarely more than one octave at a time) are animated with techniques Scelsi had already explored on the separate strings of the cello in *Dithome*, chiefly vibrato and microtonal detuning: one instrument holds its pitch while another diverges by a quarter-tone (as in Example 82).



Example 82. Scelsi: String Trio, Movement II, mm. 32-39⁵²

⁵²In the String Trio and the subsequent *Quattro pezzi*, Scelsi used the symbols 4- and 4+ to indicate quarter tones and the letter "g" (*giusto* [correct]) to cancel a previous quarter tone.

In the trio's third movement, pitch axes of B $\sharp$ and D $\sharp$ alternate, suggesting not opposition but an underlying consonance that occasionally emerges as a harmonic major third or minor sixth. As Halbreich has pointed out, the harmonic dimension of this movement points toward similar techniques that appear in later sonorist works such as the Third String Quartet and *Hymnos*,⁵³ though the same is true for the double-stopped harmonic explorations of *Dithome*. The trio's fourth movement focuses, extraordinarily, on the pitch a quarter-tone above C $\sharp$, one of the only movements in Scelsi's sonorist output that uses as its axis a pitch extrinsic to the chromatic scale.⁵⁴ Equally notable, in the middle of the movement, a slow *portamento* ascent by all three instruments from the axis up nearly a minor third to E $\flat$ and then back down anticipates an important gesture in the first of the *Quattro pezzi* and also the axial ascent that occurs in the Fourth String Quartet.⁵⁵

Despite the attainment of monotonality and the anticipation of later techniques in the String Trio, its rather uniform timbral complexion did not conduce the full realization of Scelsi's single-note music. The work features a limited variety of bowing techniques,

⁵³Halbreich, "The String Quartets, String Trio, *Khoom*," liner notes to Salabert/Actuels CD 8904-5, trans. Elisabeth Buzzard (1990): 30. Halbreich does not mention any specific works in which this harmonic technique later appears, saying only that the trio's third movement "is a first step leading to the reconquest of the harmonic parameter, which will develop ever more strongly in the following works." The implication here is that in strictly monotonal movements, such as the first two of the trio and all four of the ensuing *Quattro pezzi*, Scelsi sacrificed the harmonic parameter for the sake of sonorous focus. I would argue, rather, that Scelsi's increasingly focused expressions in these works amount to a distillation of the harmonic parameter rather than an abnegation of it, and that the conventionally harmonic intervals in works like the Third String Quartet and *Hymnos* proceeded from Scelsi's exploitation of the consonance of the harmonic series. As we have seen, the inception of this technique actually extends back through the double-stops of *Dithome* to the gong evocations of the Ninth Piano Suite.

⁵⁴Halbreich and Freeman both maintain that the tempered C $\sharp$ serves as the axis of the fourth movement (Halbreich, "The String Quartets," 30; Robin Freeman, "Tanmatras: The Life and Work of Giacinto Scelsi," *Tempo* 176 (March 1991): 15–16). The movement opens, however, with the violin and viola both playing a quarter-tone above C $\sharp$, and this microtone continues to sound more copiously than C $\sharp$ itself in the movement. Moreover, the movement concludes with the violin playing the quarter tone above C $\sharp$ and the cello playing a low D $\flat$, not a C $\sharp$ as Halbreich asserts.

⁵⁵See pp. 243–244 for a discussion of this gesture as it occurs in the *Quattro pezzi*. In place of a stationary pitch axis, the underlying structure of the Fourth Quartet comprises a gradual ascent by the entire ensemble from C $\sharp$ up to B $\sharp$. See Zenck, "Das Irreduktible," 69–73.

sparse use of double-stops, and a relatively narrow pitch compass. The result is considerably less timbral diversity than even that of *Dithome*. Although the String Trio represents an important precursor of the *Quattro pezzi*, Scelsi's employment of monotonicity in the work still seems somewhat tentative, a cautious first attempt to apply his recent discoveries to ensemble music.

Scelsi certainly knew that the effective projection of the limitless sonic potential of a single note would require the timbral variety of a larger and more diverse ensemble of instruments. Indeed, Rudhyar had already affirmed it. Even though Rudhyar's suggestion to treat the piano as a big gong had launched Scelsi on his sonorist path, Rudhyar ultimately envisioned the piano as a stepping stone to "the Western orchestra as a supreme gong; but that is only the future."⁵⁶ He felt that the orchestra's extensive timbral variety offered the greatest potential among all conventional Western performance media for achieving a music in which "the energy of sound flows uninterrupted."⁵⁷ Writing in 1928, Rudhyar also realized that

[t]he big modern orchestras are far, very far indeed, from fulfilling such requirements. . . . The sonorous substance does not flow consistently: neither melodically nor harmonically. Western composers have not yet fully learnt how to produce an organic body of sounds, though Wagner and a few recent composers have come very near it, especially Scriabin. They will hardly ever attain to such a mastery of sonorous metallurgy as long as Western melodies are series of jumps from note to note with sonorous emptiness in between.⁵⁸

Scelsi likely had this exhortation in mind throughout the 1950s, as he progressed from the piano to solo winds and strings to chamber ensembles and finally to the orchestra. He could not have taken up orchestral writing immediately in 1952, for he first needed to devise a compositional approach that would permit the "sonorous substance" to "flow

⁵⁶Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 27.

⁵⁷Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 27.

⁵⁸Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 27–28.

consistently” and not jump “from note to note.” After *Diithome* and the String Trio, Scelsi had gathered all of the compositional tools he needed to realize the music that Rudhyar foretold.

The Monotonal Breakthrough: The *Quattro Pezzi* for Chamber Orchestra

Though Scelsi had already accomplished music on a single note in the String Trio and other selected works, the *Quattro pezzi (ciascuno su una nota sola)* [*Four Pieces (each one on a single note)*] of 1959 represents a particularly important milestone in his compositional career and signals the attainment of his fully developed sonorist style. Scelsi himself always looked back on the work as perhaps his most important,⁵⁹ and a number of external features indicate that he intended it to serve as a landmark. It was his first composition for orchestra (albeit chamber orchestra) since *La nascita del verbo* of 1948, another piece in which Scelsi attempted to synthesize his compositional knowledge. Yet unlike *La nascita del verbo*, the *Quattro pezzi* did not mark the end of a traversal of styles but the complete maturation of a newly formed style. The didactic nature of the *Quattro pezzi* manifests explicitly in its declaratory subtitle. The work provides a methodical demonstration of the compositional techniques Scelsi had painstakingly devised over the course of the previous seven years, applied to the highly concentrated sound that he referred to as a “note.” At the same time, it serves to illustrate one of the central tenets of Scelsi’s spiritualist aesthetic: that a single “note” is not vapid and static but complex and dynamic, a limitless microcosm of sound.

The importance of the *Quattro pezzi* as a compositional milestone, exceeding that of the String Trio, lies in its application of the techniques for animating a focused sound in a

⁵⁹Michiko Hirayama, interview with the author, Rome, 3 May 1997.

timbrally diverse context. The work requires twenty-six players comprising a brass- and woodwind-dominated chamber ensemble of alto flute, oboe, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, bassoon, four horns, saxophone (alto and tenor, one player), three trumpets, two trombones, bass tuba, saw (or flexatone⁶⁰), timpani, bongos, tumba,⁶¹ hanging cymbal, small and large tam-tams, two violas, two cellos, and double bass. Except for the percussion, all of the instruments in the ensemble have the capacity to produce quarter tones, as indeed they all do at some point in the composition. Each of the four movements features a unique combination of instruments; a few remain tacet in each movement but the fourth, which involves all twenty-six performers. Scelsi exploits the timbral variety of the ensemble by using a stratified approach to orchestration that resembles Schoenberg's celebrated realization of *Klangfarbenmelodie* in the third of his *Fünf Orchesterstücke*, Op. 16. Because of the extremely limited pitch spectra in each of Scelsi's pieces, even more distilled than Schoenberg's slowly changing harmonies, the overlapping entrances and cessations of different instruments manifest primarily as mutations of timbre. Another noteworthy feature of Scelsi's orchestration in the *Quattro pezzi* is the use of percussion to activate certain timbres. Important entrances and timbral changes are seemingly sparked by a simultaneous attack in the percussion, a technique that appears prominently in the music of Varèse among others.⁶² In the context of Scelsi's spiritualist aesthetic, these percussive activations may represent the moment when an "unstruck" sound (*anāhata*) is "struck" (*āhata*).⁶³

⁶⁰"A modern instrument for special effects consisting of a small flexible metal sheet suspended in a wire frame ending in a handle. A wooden knob mounted on a strip of spring steel lies on each side of the metal sheet. The player shakes the instrument with a trembling movement which causes the beaters to strike the sides of the metal sheet. An eerie tremolo is thus produced, and the pitch altered by variable pressure on the sheet of metal" (*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2d ed., s.v. "Flexatone").

⁶¹A large conga drum.

⁶²See Jonathan Bernard, *The Music of Edgard Varèse*, Composers of the Twentieth Century, ed. Allen Forte (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) 159–163.

⁶³See Chapter 3.

Scelsi dealt with the problem of structure in the *Quattro pezzi* by using four axes that suggest an interrelationship: F-B-A $\flat$ -A $\sharp$. The axes of the first two movements form a tritone, an interval that Scelsi had already drawn on in *Dithome* to suggest the opening up of sonic space. Just as the tritone divides the octave in half, the third movement's axis of A $\flat$ divides the F-B tritone equidistantly into two minor thirds, an interval that also makes a prominent linear appearance in the first movement at the same pitch level. The A $\sharp$ axis of the fourth movement remains more difficult to explain. Giulio Castagnoli suggests that this note provides further subdivision of the minor third into its two intervallic segments: a semitone (A $\flat$ -A $\sharp$) and a whole-tone (A-B).⁶⁴ It is an intriguing hypothesis, although it assigns an uncomfortable level of importance to the intervals of equal temperament, which the division of the octave by the tritone and the division of the tritone into two minor thirds do not. Alternatively, since the F-B space-opening motion of the first two movements implies the primacy of F as the initial axis presented, the A $\flat$ and A $\sharp$ of the last two movements might suggest, by structural analogy, the consonance of major and minor sonorities. Support for this hypothesis appears in the localized motion from F to A $\flat$ in the first movement, and the furtive yet significant return of F in the timpani in Movement IV.⁶⁵

The first movement comprises four increasingly powerful surges of sonic energy (beginning at measures 5, 11, 17, and 27), articulated by a combination of means.⁶⁶ The most prominent techniques are those that simply generate more sound, such as dynamic

⁶⁴Giulio Castagnoli, "Suono e processo nei *Quattro pezzi per orchestra (ciascuno su una nota sola)* (1956) [sic] di Giacinto Scelsi," in *Quaderni di Musica Nuova*, ed. Giulio Castagnoli, no. 1 (Turin: Compositori Associati, 1987), 101.

⁶⁵See Examples 84 and 86.

⁶⁶Castagnoli designates these surges as *actual motion (moto esplicito)* (Giulio Castagnoli, "Suono e processo nei *Quattro pezzi per orchestra (ciascuno su una nota sola)* (1956) [sic] di Giacinto Scelsi," in *Quaderni di Musica Nuova*, ed. Giulio Castagnoli, no. 1 [Torino: Compositori Associati, 1987], 93; reprinted in *Giacinto Scelsi: Viaggio al centro del suono*, ed. Pierre Albert Castanet and Nicola Cisternino, [La Spezia, Italy: Luna Editore, 1993], 251). He distinguishes only three passages of *actual motion*, however, beginning at measures 5, 18, and 27. What I consider a second surge beginning at measure 11, Castagnoli regards as a continuation of the first.

swells and increased instrumental density. These combine with more distinctly Scelsian techniques for the animation of concentrated sounds: active and energetic articulations (vibrato, trill, flutter tonguing, tremolo), and pitch inflection up a quarter-tone above the $F^{\sharp}$ axis. One senses in listening to these surges that the dynamic swells and overall increase in sonic force somehow push the note up from its axis, as if bending it. Of course the principle of interdependence among the sonic parameters had already been incorporated into earlier compositions of the sonorist style, and its manifestation in the *Quattro pezzi* confirms its importance. Indeed, this trait continued in most of Scelsi's later sonorist music, in which microtonal inflections tend to move upward rather than downward and are usually accompanied by, perhaps even caused by, dynamic intensification.

To demonstrate Scelsi's employment of these techniques, Example 83 shows the fourth surge, the final and most active one of the first movement. It begins with the dynamic swell and upward microtonal inflection of the instruments already sounding (tenor saxophone, second trumpet, trombones, violas, and cello) with immediate reinforcement and timbral alteration supplied by the bass clarinet. Upon reaching the quarter-tone above the axial F , the second trumpet begins a vibrato, energizing the pitch and joining the continued vibrati of the cello and saxophone. In measure 28, the upper woodwinds enter, affecting the volume, density, and timbre of the aggregate sonority. Three of these instruments enter directly with the quarter-tone, while the second clarinet oscillates on either side of it. The climax of the surge begins in measure 29, where the large tam-tam activates the horns and double bass. Their second articulation on the downbeat of measure 30 (each horn sounding with a different manner of articulation) accompanies strikes of both the small and large tam-tams. In measure 31, the small tam-tam and hanging cymbal activate the *fortissimo* dynamics and flutter tonguing of the brass instruments.

Example 83. Scelsi: *Quattro pezzi*, Movement I, mm. 27–31

Alternating with the four surges in Movement I are five passages of relative calm (beginning at measures 1, 9, 15, 22, and 32), distinguished by quiet dynamic levels, sparse instrumentation, less active modes of sustain, and—with an important exception—adherence

to the F $\sharp$ axis.⁶⁷ These moments seem designed to evoke a certain stillness and quiescence from which the surges emanate. Yet these calm passages never suggest complete stasis, which would conflict with Scelsi's understanding of the nature of sound.⁶⁸ At the opening of the movement, for instance, four measures of seemingly static F $\sharp$ s covering one octave are enlivened by subtle dynamic fluctuations, a quarter-tone oscillation in the cello, and the timbral mutations of the *Klangfarbenmelodische* overlapping of clarinets, horns, and trumpets.

The second calm passage, in measures 9–11, features a distinctive gesture: a two-stage linear sweep that Halbreich apparently considers melodic,⁶⁹ but in fact constitutes a brief expansion of the sonic space to a minor third above the F $\sharp$ axis (see Example 84). The sweep begins with the strings and second clarinet sliding up a half step to G $\flat$, while the trombone concurrently slides up only a quarter-tone and the first clarinet remains fixed on F $\sharp$. The combined result in this first stage is the momentary dilation of the axial note, expanding upward to fill the space between F and G $\flat$. The third horn serves both to reinforce the other instruments' arrival back on F and to modify its timbre. The strings and trombone immediately slide upward again, this time as far as A $\flat$, and back down to F, their arrival marked by the third and fourth horns. During this second stage of the sweep, the first clarinet and bass clarinet remain fixed on F, while the second clarinet slides down a

⁶⁷Castagnoli characterizes these as *potential motion (moto latente)* (Castagnoli, "Suono e processo," 93). Again, his breakdown differs from mine: he identifies only four such passages, beginning at measures 1, 15, 21, and 36.

⁶⁸On this point I find Castagnoli's characterizations and choice of vocabulary flawed. In describing these passages as well as similar ones in the second movement, Castagnoli uses the term "stasis" in an absolute sense ("la stasi vera"[true stasis] [p. 93]). Not only does this assessment contradict Scelsi's spiritualist aesthetic, it is not borne out by the music itself. Even when the amount of activity decreases sharply, as it does in these sections, there always remains some ongoing fluctuation in at least one parameter.

⁶⁹Harry Halbreich, liner notes to Accord CD 200162, trans. Elisabeth Buzzard (1989): 24. Halbreich refers only generally to the melodic "unfolding" that takes place in the first movement. Because this sweep (and another like it towards the end of the movement) constitutes the only truly linear activity, I would assume that Halbreich has this passage in mind.

half-step to E $\flat$, once again suggesting the momentary expansion of the central note. The importance of the minor third interval outlined in this passage (F up to A $\flat$) is difficult to assess, but equally difficult to ignore. It mirrors the large-scale structural relationship between the axes of the first and third movements, dividing the F-B tritone equidistantly. At the same time, its localized articulation provides the linear suggestion of the minor mode, traceable perhaps back to Scelsi's use of minor modalities in early sonorist works such as *Pwyll* and the *Suite for flute and clarinet*.⁷⁰

Example 84. Scelsi: *Quattro pezzi*, Movement I, mm. 8–11

The second movement, focused on B, includes a similar range of techniques along with the subtle exploitation of the harmonic series. Castagnoli has convincingly outlined a three-

⁷⁰See p. 215.

part structure for the movement.⁷¹ The first section subdivides into three parts, articulated by registral expansion from one octave (B^3 - B^4) to two octaves (B^3 - B^4 - B^5) and back again.⁷² As Castagnoli observes, the second of these two subsections (measures 12–43) roughly triples the length of the first (measures 1–11) and third (measures 44–55). The movement's central section (beginning at measure 55) comprises a sustained surge that drives all of the sounding instruments up from the axial pitch. Reaching a climax of density, volume, and activity in measures 62–66, the thick texture includes sustained pitches a quarter-tone above B, sustained C^4 s, semitonal oscillations between B and C, and quarter-tonal oscillations between B and the pitch above, all occurring simultaneously. The sonority is animated by *forte* and *fortissimo* dynamic levels, a variety of energized articulations, and activations by the percussion. After this surge, the third section returns to the axial B and continues with an especially calm type of *Klangfarbenmelodie*. Comprising the last twenty-four measures of the movement, the third section contains no microtonal departures from the axis and only one use of vibrato (the saw in measures 91–93).

The third section does feature, however, timbral enhancement of the axial B by the articulation and sustain of its third partial, F^4 . It begins in the waning measures of the second section (at measure 73), as the surge subsides and returns to the axis. The cello articulates the overtone in measure 73 and again in measure 75; it is sustained alternately by the first and second horns until measure 99, just five measures from the end of the movement. Scelsi clearly did not intend this F^4 to be perceived as a separate note forming a conventional harmony with the B below it. It is played as a string harmonic in the cello, and the horns sustain the pitch at a dynamic level of *ppp* marked *quasi impercettibile* (almost

⁷¹Castagnoli, "Suono e processo," 97–98.

⁷²I employ here the system that designates middle C as C^4 . Therefore, the first octave presented in the movement (B^3 - B^4) comprises the notes that lie a half-step below and a major seventh above middle C. Strictly, there are intervals in this opening section other than the perfect octave, as some microtonal fluctuation (up by a quarter-tone) does occur. Recognizing that their function here is to thicken the sound of the axial pitch, Castagnoli rightly simplifies the pitch content to perfect octaves in order to facilitate understanding of the registral expansion.

imperceptible). With this $F\sharp$, Scelsi delicately accentuates an overtone that already exists in the timbre of the B fundamental, enhancing an effect that occurs naturally in the perception of complex sounds.

Movement III begins with relatively wide oscillations, reaching a semitone below and a whole-tone above its $A\flat$ pitch axis.⁷³ The movement's most distinctive feature, however, is the emergence of sub-harmonics in the bass clarinet. On the whole, the music in Movement III remains in the upper registers of the ensemble. When the oscillations reach their highpoint at measure 24, the bass clarinet enters two and a half octaves below the rest of the ensemble (Example 85).

Example 85. Scelsi: *Quattro pezzi*, Movement III, mm. 24–28

⁷³Castagnoli has traced the fluctuating ambit of this oscillation in the first forty measures (Castagnoli, "Suono e processo," 99). Despite the detail of Castagnoli's breakdown, it is inaccurate. First, he takes no account of quarter-tones, outlining only which tempered scale degrees occur in which measures. Second, he makes outright errors in the details of this outline. He indicates, for instance, that bars 6–9 include $A\flat$ s and $G\flat$ s, when in fact they include $A\flat$ s and $G\sharp$ s, as well as the quarter-tone in between. He also asserts that the oscillation reaches as high as $B\sharp$ in measure 24, but it goes only as high as $B\flat$.

The bass clarinet's pitches (E-F $\sharp$ -G-A $\flat$ in measures 24–25, and B $\flat$ -A $\flat$ -E-C $\sharp$ in measures 27–28) do not derive specifically from any acoustical calculation; they are not, for instance, the differential tones produced by the pitches sounding in the higher register. In this sense, the effect differs from that of the overtone enhancement of the previous movement, in which the F $\sharp$ third partial accurately reflects the physics of the harmonic series. Here, the notes of the bass clarinet create a resonant context for the tightly packed microtonal clusters of the horns, trumpets, and alto saxophone, suggesting that they exist as part of a more complex sonic envelope.

The fourth movement comprises one sustained and particularly forceful surge, with the full power of the twenty-six performers brought to bear. Castagnoli describes the movement as a “recapitulation” of the first three, in which the sonorist processes previously introduced coalesce, reinforcing one another.⁷⁴ While most of the isolated features of the fourth movement do occur in earlier ones, certain distinctive techniques such as overtone and sub-harmonic enhancement do not. Thus the final movement is perhaps best characterized not as a recapitulation of the earlier movements but as an intensification of *selected* features, especially those that Scelsi uses to energize sonorities. The registral expansion across here extends to cover as many as five octaves (measure 29). Rapid reiterations in groups of five or six sixteenth notes had previously occurred only in the brass (in the third movement), but now manifest across the full range of the ensemble. The percussive triggering of certain timbres also intensifies, the sharp attack of the bongo even preceding by a thirty-second note the *sforzando* entrances of the woodwinds in measure 32, reinforcing the perception of a causal relationship.

Like the other movements, the fourth begins quietly and with sparse instrumentation, but there are signs that the energy of the movement is already building. The triplet semitone oscillation of the third horn and the rapid staccato reiterations of the first viola provide the

⁷⁴Castagnoli, “Suono e processo,” 100.

first indications of developing intensity. The reiterations are taken over by the second horn in measure 9, where the axial pitch is pushed up a full semitone to B $\flat$ in the double bass and low woodwinds at a *forte* dynamic level. Entrances of the timpani in measure 11 and the large tam-tam in measure 16 support the thickening texture. In measures 24–48 the movement, and indeed the entire work, reaches the apex of its power. To sustain intensity over a relatively long span, Scelsi combines nearly every technique at his disposal for the animation of isolated sounds, here layered atop one another in torrents of sound. Registral saturation expands to its widest compass of five octaves (measure 29). The percussion instruments increase the range of their activity beyond isolated timbral activations, now providing continuous impetus to the sustained notes of the ensemble. With this activity, the timpani articulates the cyclical return of F from Movement I, alternating with the current axis of A (Example 86).



Example 86. Scelsi: *Quattro pezzi*, Movement IV, mm.37–39 (percussion)

The rhythmic dynamism of the percussion then extends to the rest of the ensemble beginning in measure 41, where rapid reiterations are taken up by the horns and double bass, quickly spreading to other instruments. The visceral energy of the fourth movement's giant surge during these climactic bars is almost overwhelming. Whereas the first three movements of the *Quattro pezzi* provide somewhat methodical demonstrations of the means by which Scelsi was able to animate and sustain a concentrated sound, the fourth movement reveals its full intensity and sonic power.

Scelsi had already devised the techniques necessary for sustaining concentrated sounds in earlier works, but their consummation required transference to a timbrally diverse medium—the chamber orchestra of the *Quattro pezzi*. Scelsi's control of the wide range of timbral possibilities in this and subsequent orchestral works seems to be an extension, perhaps even the perfection, of Schoenberg's concept of *Klangfarbenmelodie*. Indeed, from this perspective the lasting influence of the Second Viennese style on Scelsi's conception becomes clear. Schoenberg's well-known explication of *Klangfarbenmelodie* seems appropriate not just in relation to the surface features of Scelsi's orchestration, but to the very core of his compositional aesthetic.

The distinction between tone color and pitch, as it usually expressed, I cannot accept without reservations. I think the tone becomes perceptible by virtue of tone color, of which one dimension is pitch. Tone color is, thus, the main topic, pitch a subdivision. Now, if it is possible to create patterns out of tone colors that are differentiated according to pitch, patterns we call "melodies," progressions whose coherence evokes an effect analogous to thought processes, then it must also be possible to make such progressions out of the tone colors of the other dimension, out of that which we call simply "tone color" [timbre], progressions whose relations with one another work with a kind of logic entirely equivalent to that logic which satisfies us in the melody of pitches. That has the appearance of futuristic fantasy and is probably just that. But it is one which, I firmly believe, will be realized.⁷⁵

Schoenberg articulates in this passage the notion that a single *tone* is multidimensional, comprising both timbre and pitch (as well as volume). The notion is, of course, fundamental to Scelsi's sonorist aesthetic. To this Scelsi added the principle of interdependence, that variations in one dimension can produce changes in another. The *Quattro pezzi* constituted a compositional breakthrough not simply because each piece adheres to a single note—which Scelsi had done in earlier works—but because the full control of timbre allowed him at last to reveal that note's infinite variety.

Having achieved the consummation of his style in the *Quattro pezzi*, Scelsi went on to compose some of his most remarkable music during the 1960s. In orchestral works he

⁷⁵Arnold Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, trans. Roy E. Carter (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 421–422.

expanded his timbral and dynamic palette even further, adding orchestral instruments (generally low-pitched ones, with more resonant qualities), the organ, and even chorus. Yet he clearly did not feel bound to the orchestral medium, completing three string quartets between 1961 and 1964 that crown his achievements in chamber music. In 1960 he began working with Michiko Hirayama, whose background and extraordinary abilities demonstrated that the compositional principles of Scelsi's sonorist style could be applied to the solo vocal medium to great effect. In all of his works he expanded the harmonic dimension of his style and devised ingenious structural designs both between and within movements. It is particularly interesting that, following the *Quattro pezzi*, Scelsi felt free to explore his unique brand of sonorism in any medium and without strict adherence to a single pitch axis. The *Quattro pezzi* had demonstrated not that a piece of music *must* adhere to a single note, but that it *could*. For even in the most infinitesimal portion of the *pleroma*, carved out by the spiritualist artist, there exists limitless potential.

CHAPTER 6

ASSESSMENTS

While the attention performers and audiences have paid to Scelsi's music in recent years has understandably focused on his extraordinary late style, from a historical perspective the period leading up to it is perhaps even more intriguing. Scelsi's realization of a musical style that rejects many of the fundamental principles of conventional Western composition seems all the more remarkable when one considers the nature of his early career. Although he lacked formal training, Scelsi nonetheless emerged from a background steeped in the prevailing trends of the early twentieth century. Like many of his generation, he faced the plurality of his milieu with a mixture of excitement and consternation. At various times in the 1930s and 1940s he came under the influence of some of the most distinctive compositional voices of modern music. Unable to discern one style that would itself determine the evolutionary course of European music, he sought to establish their common ground. The dissatisfying results of this endeavor had a debilitating effect on him, which ultimately led to his pursuit of an alternative path.

His first significant effort to make sense of the stylistic multiplicity confronting him in his early years manifested in the historicist texts of the early 1940s. In these essays he tried unsuccessfully to account for the fractured condition of contemporary music by placing it within an ongoing evolutionary process that would, by its very nature, provide a forecast for the future. His argument in "The Meaning of Music" strikes one as quixotic and overly ambitious; in eight pages he attempts to devise a critical system that "might be the basis for the understanding of all music, ancient or modern," predicated upon a tenuous reduction of

all human experience to a set of four fundamental elements.¹ His application of this system in *The Evolution of Harmony* and *The Evolution of Rhythm* seems equally assailable; the reductionism of these essays greatly oversimplifies the complexions of twentieth-century music. Still, his thinking displays a certain inventiveness. By the time Scelsi wrote the historicist essays in the early 1940s, he had already traversed an impressive range of styles, each of which he absorbed with a measure of enthusiasm. Believing in the evolutionary development of artistic style, he reasoned that some basic historical condition must account for all of this diversity. Thus he formulated the notion of a fundamental shift away from melody and structure and toward rhythm and harmony, then applied it to his somewhat narrow view of recent music history.

The conspicuous absence of the Second Viennese composers undermines the persuasiveness and conviction of the historicist texts and raises perhaps the most perplexing issue of Scelsi's early period. In the 1940s he remained very much under the influence of Webern and Berg compositionally, as the *Variazioni e fuga* and String Quartet No. 1 unequivocally confirm. Yet their contrapuntal idiom clearly did not suit Scelsi's neatly conceived assessment of modern music history as expressed in the historicist texts. If Scelsi omitted the Second Viennese composers from these essays simply because they complicated the argument he was trying to make, then the persuasiveness of that argument, already weak due to the reductionism of Scelsi's reasoning, diminishes even more. Scelsi did not, as the literature frequently suggests, simply take up the atonal style of the Second Viennese only to reject it completely within a short time. This account might suit Scelsi's narrative conveniently and tidily, but it amounts to an erroneous oversimplification. The true nature of Scelsi's encounter with the style remains, as the incongruity of his essays and compositions of the 1940s attests, complex and enigmatic.

¹ Scelsi, "The Meaning of Music," 31 (260–261).

Like the historicist essays, Scelsi's music of the 1940s demonstrates a desire to integrate the diversity of his knowledge and compositional experience. If his argument in the historicist essays seems strained, his music of the period conveys considerably more assurance. In the String Quartet No. 1 he successfully combined a heterogeneity of styles through an ingenious method of thematic cohesion and transformation. As a truly consummatory work of Scelsi's modernist period, it is an impressive demonstration of his assimilation of established styles and conventional techniques, and a profound expression of his reverence for history. Yet the remarkable achievement of the quartet left Scelsi clearly dissatisfied with the promise the path of stylistic synthesis offered for his compositional future. The First String Quartet is innovative in its means of integration, but its substance remains retrospective—often explicitly so.

When Scelsi returned to composition after his crisis, he had essentially abandoned the notion that his musical style would henceforth be determined by the idioms he inherited. The esoteric ideas of Anthroposophy and Theosophy, which he had probably encountered as early as the mid 1930s, suggested a new direction that did not rely on the models of the European musical past. In lectures published around 1950, Steiner had posited a radical new idea about the possibilities of deriving a complete musical experience from a single sound. Scelsi's exposure to the idea came at an opportune moment, for it offered him a fresh alternative to the historically oriented styles he felt had been exhausted. Moreover, Steiner's suggestion that a single sound contains infinite variety befitted the Hindu metaphysic that Scelsi had gleaned from his study of Theosophy, Yoga, and probably other sources as well.

The decisive encounter in Scelsi's transformation, however, was with the writings of Dane Rudhyar. We do not know precisely when Scelsi first gained exposure to Rudhyar's books, but Scelsi's intimate knowledge of them and their profound influence on his aesthetic are indisputable. The fact that Scelsi appropriated entire passages from Rudhyar's writings has significance not because it exposes Scelsi as a charlatan or

dilettante—characterizations that continue to cloud his reception²—but because it indicates convincingly the importance Scelsi assigned to Rudhyar's ideas during the crucial period when he began to devise his new style. Of the myriad sources that contributed to Scelsi's transformed aesthetic, only the composer Rudhyar offered useful suggestions as to how Scelsi might proceed in the creation of a new musical style. In his discussions of the Oriental gong, Rudhyar sought to describe how a limitless sonic source and the monistic unity of all sound could be perceived, not as metaphysical concepts but as actual musical experience. Rudhyar's characterization of the piano as a sort of big gong, more than any other image, launched Scelsi on his new course.

Scelsi first brought Rudhyar's ideas to fruition in the fourth and fifth movements of the Eighth Piano Suite, where he simulated the overtone complexity of a gong's timbre by stacking up pitches over a stable and seemingly motionless fundamental. In the Ninth Piano Suite, this idea pervades the work, alternating increasingly protracted gong evocations with movements of oscillatory activity around localized pitch axes. In *Sound and Music* Scelsi spoke of the "oscillations at the interior of sounds," and in the Ninth Suite he attempted to simulate that effect.³ It was a crucial first step, but the tempered design of the piano restricted him from developing the idea and refining his means to achieve it.

Turning therefore to solo works for winds and strings, Scelsi began to incorporate micro-intervals into his works as he developed the means to project increasingly concentrated sounds. Of particular importance, he achieved in *Dithome* a level of such concentration that the slightest variations in one musical parameter influence the others in a perceptible manner. He had already broached the idea in the early 1940s in one of the more fascinating passages from "The Meaning of Music." In an effort to describe the network

²Charges of dilettantism continue to surround Scelsi primarily because of the controversy sparked by Vieri Tosatti's now notorious article (see Chapter 1). It is hoped that the appropriations from Rudhyar revealed in Chapter 3 of this study will not be used to support this unjust accusation.

³Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 1 (285). ("d'oscillation à l'intérieur des sons")

of relationships among what he then designated as the four fundamental musical elements, he realized that

a simple sound already produces a harmonic series that constitutes a melodic element in some way. Moreover, variation of intensity in a sound causes a fluctuation of the sound's pitch, which constitutes an interference and another connection with the melodic element. As soon as a rhythm is struck with a solitary note, it forms a rudimentary but audible melody (a strike, for example, on two drums of different size), while at the same time the harmonic relations, by the crossing and coincidence of the melodic lines, form a type of polyphony of the sounds and resultant chords again by interference between rhythm and the other elements.⁴

Scelsi's realization that the principle described here might serve as a fundamental and perceptible manner of musical expression did not manifest until thirteen years after the publication of this essay.

A number of scholars have tried to establish that Scelsi's fascination with resonance in general or with isolated notes in particular reveals itself from the very start of his career. Cremonese suggests that the dense non-functional harmony of *Rotative* indicates the influence of Debussy and at the same time anticipates Scelsi's exploration of resonance in later decades. Thus Cremonese implies that Scelsi's late style can be traced back to Debussy's exploitation of color. While the influence of Debussy does manifest in Scelsi's Ninth Piano Suite, the work with which he commenced development of the sonorist style, Cremonese's view denies the clear derivation of *Rotative* from the polyharmonic and polyrhythmic models of Stravinsky, whom Scelsi praised in *The Evolution of Rhythm*.

More compelling examples of prefigurement appear in Scelsi's early piano suites and sonatas, whose episodic spontaneity sets them apart from the meticulous craftsmanship apparent in the majority of Scelsi's early works. Zeller, Zenck, and Biget all argue that the

⁴Scelsi, "The Meaning of Music," 35 (263–264). ("un simple son produit déjà une série d'harmoniques qui constituent en quelque sorte un élément mélodique. De plus, la différence d'intensité d'un son provoque une fluctuation de la hauteur du son, ce qui constitue une interférence et un autre rapport avec l'élément mélodique. Dès qu'un rythme n'est plus frappé sur une seule note, il forme un mélodie rudimentaire mais perceptible (une percussion, par exemple, sur deux tambours de grandeur différente) tandis que, en même temps, les harmoniques relatifs, par les croisements et les rencontres des lignes mélodiques, forment une sorte de polyphonie dont les sons et accords résultants constituent encore des interférences entre le rythme et les autre éléments.")

repetitive emphasis of single notes that occasionally surfaces in these works prefigure the sonorist piano works of the early 1950s, from which Scelsi formulated his late style. While the apparently improvisational inception of the early suites and sonatas links them to Scelsi's later music by virtue of compositional method, it also weakens the premise that those early works portend the later ones substantively. The similarities between the two bodies of works comprise surface features only, easy to illustrate but difficult to explain. To assert that Scelsi had already begun to show signs of sonorist focus as early as 1930 implies the spuriousness of his experimentation with modernist idioms and the majority of his modernist music. If Scelsi had already begun to discover the powerful effect of sonorist focus and reiteration at the beginning of his career, it seems unlikely that he would have continued his searches for a stylistic mainstream. Rather, the early suites and sonatas constitute an exceptional body of work in which Scelsi indulged his affinity for improvisational invention. In this context, the periodic emphasis of isolated sounds served simply to anchor the diffuse activity of the freely chromatic, highly dissonant language he employed in those works.

When he returned to composition in 1952, his recent adoption of Yogic meditative techniques provided aesthetic validation for his improvisational approach. When he resumed his piano improvisations, the reiterative emphasis of isolated sounds naturally resumed as well. In the 1950s, however, this proclivity assumed tremendous significance in the context of his transformed aesthetic. Having developed a conception of sound as a limitless realm and having discovered Steiner's and Rudhyar's suggestions that the single sound contains infinite potential, Scelsi simply took advantage of a feature that had been present in his improvisational style all along as a starting point for his new direction.

In Chapter 3 I sought to elucidate the nature and dimensions of Scelsi's encounter with Oriental philosophies, among others; still, there remains a related question: to what extent does Scelsi's transformed musical style owe any demonstrable debt to Oriental music? Certainly one would assume that a musician like Scelsi who developed such an intense

interest in the aesthetics of various Asian traditions would have investigated, to some extent, the music itself. Indeed, some evidence exists to establish that Scelsi did undertake such investigations. Uitti, for instance, has alluded to Scelsi's impressive collection of non-Western instruments and recordings of music from India and Tibet.⁵ Yet Scelsi's music generally does not include the kinds of surface features that have typified twentieth-century musical exoticism. He did not employ any Oriental instruments in his works beyond those normally found in Western concert halls (gongs, for instance). Other than his brief exploration of pentatonicism, which probably derived from Debussy, Scelsi did not use exotic scales, Indian ragas, or the cyclical rhythms of Indonesian *gamelan* music. On the other hand, precedents for some of the most distinctive features of Scelsi's mature style can be found in various types of Oriental music. Chou Wen-Chung, for example, has described the "emphasis on the production and control of single tones" that characterizes much Asian music for wind instruments:

The attack and the release of a tone on [Japanese] instruments are frequently accomplished in conjunction with a sliding pitch adjustment, which is accompanied by modifications in timbre and loudness. Even during the course of a so-called "sustained" tone, the embouchure may be altered, thereby causing deviation in timbre as well as in pitch. In the Indonesian *gamelan* . . . the microtonal flattening or sharpening of certain tones of the scale by means of altered fingering or half-holing on the *suling*, an end-blown flute, so as to momentarily deviate from those [tones] played on instruments with fixed pitches is an interesting example of how pitch deviations are used structurally. . . . In solo music Japanese and Korean wind players . . . often display a dazzling agility in varying the lip aperture and air pressure to control various types of vibrato and tremolo in addition to fluctuations in pitch and loudness. These capacities on their instruments . . . are sometimes even used as basic compositional ideas.⁶

These descriptions suggest quite strongly that the techniques Scelsi developed for the projection and animation of single tones may have derived from specific Oriental models. A

⁵Frances-Marie Uitti, quoted in Kyle Gann, "One-Note Wonder (Giacinto Scelsi)" *The Village Voice* 42/8 (February 25, 1997): 58.

⁶Chou Wen-Chung, "Single Tones as Musical Entities: An Approach to Structured Deviations in Tonal Characteristics," in *American Society of University Composers: Proceedings, 1968*, ed. Elaine Barkin, Hubert S. Howe, and Paul Lansky (New York: Lipsius Press, 1968), 89.

thorough investigation of this question lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, but its potential value for our understanding of Scelsi's late style certainly warrants further study.

Given the relatively small number of scholarly works that deal with Scelsi and his music, there naturally remain many intriguing issues that deserve further investigation. Perhaps the most fundamental is the composer's biography, which remains remarkably sketchy for someone who died so recently. But until more documentary sources come to light, there is little promise that further details of Scelsi's life will emerge. The precise nature of Scelsi's controversial working method also warrants examination, particularly the meticulous study of his compositional "sketches"—the hundreds of taped improvisations that remain in the occlusive possession of the *Fondazione Isabella Scelsi*.⁷ Many of Scelsi's compositions still have not received any treatment in the literature, partly, I presume, because there has yet to emerge an appropriate and effective analytical method with which to approach his unusual late music.

Scelsi's importance in the overarching narrative of twentieth-century Western music also has not yet been given adequate consideration. In the present study I have endeavored to place Scelsi's music and aesthetic within several broad contexts—historical, philosophical, and compositional—but a large number of contextual issues deserve more extensive treatment. Perhaps the most intriguing is what Scelsi's transformation might tell us about the general malaise that beset the arts near mid-century and the fundamental changes that this condition precipitated. His story also can help us to understand how and why so many Western musicians and artists have turned Eastward since the turn of the twentieth century in an effort to breathe new life into their work. In this study I have sought to contribute to our understanding of these larger issues in some way. The story of Scelsi's artistic transformation, manifested in his music and his aesthetic texts, provides an

⁷See Frances-Marie Uitti, "Preserving the Scelsi Improvisations" *Tempo* 194 (October 1995): 12–14. See also Chapter 1. In this article, Uitti recounts the process of transferring roughly one hundred of Scelsi's improvisation tapes to Digital Audio Tape (DAT). These have not yet been made available to scholars.

instructive case study of the complex set of problems surrounding twentieth-century music and one composer's extraordinary solutions.

APPENDIX A
SCELSI'S AESTHETIC TEXTS (TRANSLATIONS)

"The Meaning of Music"

It is now common to give to concert audiences and to radio listeners certain indications as to the aesthetic or the technique of a new work by means of a text included in the program, or by some words read by the "announcer." The audience or listener, thus informed of the classical, romantic, or modern orientation of the work, of the derivation, the school, and the style of the work, seems satisfied, and this justifies these explanations amply. However, since music, like every artwork, is on the one hand a sonic entity, and on the other hand a projection of images or states of consciousness, to demonstrate the form, the structure of a work, its diatonic or chromatic character, to describe the harmonies, the harmonic combinations or stratifications, the polyphony, the atonality or polytonality, does not tell us very much. Likewise, broad declarations of the "noble and profound thought" of the composer, his "freshness," his "poignant tones," his "spontaneity" or his "cerebralism" do not contribute to the real understanding of the work. What relationship can the audience establish between these human expressions and the technical components by which one endeavors to explain the work? How is the latter a demonstration and representation of the former? By the same token, without in any way disregarding the great value of such work concerning music or musicians, and the studies and investigations of music's intimate secrets and source of inspiration, we have always thought that the explanations offered by such studies were usually on this point inadequate for the description of more elevated notions. Until the moment we recognize and establish the relationships that alone might be the basis for the

understanding of all music, ancient or modern, when we affirm that there exist correspondences between the elements that constitute music and the types of images projected by the composer through the sonic medium, all attempts to analyze or explain the real meaning of a work seem extremely tenuous. Genuine knowledge compels us to establish these relationships and thus to arrive at a more accurate and objective understanding of music.

* * * *

Without trying to summarize the work and research of modern psychology on creative or imaginative activity, let us simply say that it is possible to distinguish in man four fundamental elements through which he interacts with the universe: rhythm, emotion, intellect, and the psyche. We do not know what these fundamental forces are in essence, but they appear to pass through man continually in a variable flux. Through his sensitivity, man registers a greater or smaller part of these vibrations and recognizes or identifies them in the form of sensations, emotions, and psychic states—images. In reality, sensations, emotions, and psychic states are only virtual images, the remainder, that part not acknowledged and identified and not registered by the vibrations. For, indeed, these last could produce states of consciousness of the same nature and can elsewhere pass in an instant from the realm of the unknown to the known.

Thus the word “image” is not unjustified when it is applied to music. As music does not pass through the filter of the intellect, neither identifying nor defining, it expresses some, maybe the grandest, of the images produced in the consciousness by creative forces.

Before going on to the examination of the different types of images, let us say that this is only the creation and the particular expression of the four elements cited above.

One can therefore find in every artistic expression the manifestation of these creative forces in various appearances. Since we are dealing with music, we may say that rhythm,

emotion, intellect, and the psyche are manifested and realized by rhythm, melody, form or structure, and harmony [respectively].

Rhythm, which can be defined essentially as an alternation of thrusts, is musically an alternation of sound and silence. It is also the primal impulse—[there is] no point of existence, no point of art without rhythm. One can conceive of the absence of one or several other elements in an organic being reduced to its simpler physical expression, but not the absence of rhythm, of vital pulsation. Thus in music rhythm also appears up to a certain point to be able to exist independently of the other elements (for example, rhythm produced by a drum, woodblock, or a gong, struck to several refrains without accompaniment). The rhythmic language is the expression of the profound rhythms emerging from vital dynamism. But, on the other hand, rhythm is also the expression and the manifestation of *durée*. Therefore, as it is partly the first condition of existence for man or for the work of art, it also unites and fuses the personal and relative time of the creative artist—through its essence and through the images it creates—to cosmic *durée*, to absolute time. It is apparent that an intellectual structure, an arbitrary series of rhythmic cells, has little to do with the real sense of rhythm, which is above all a primordial physical force.

Melody is the expression of emotion. An older and in a certain sense simpler element than harmony, it is the expression of emotional reactions, that is, those belonging to the emotional realm, of which man is most directly and easily conscious after that of rhythmic order. For emotional sensibilities are more immediate, more direct, and have a character of causality more apparent than those originating from the intellectual or physical realms. Melody is inconceivable without rhythm, as is emotion without existence; it needs rhythmic impetus like emotion needs vital pulsation.

Harmony is the expression of the psychic element. This does not stem from the discipline of “harmony,” which involves the coincidence of two or more melodic or rhythmic lines. The chords and combinations deliberately formed by the “science of

harmony" or of counterpoint belong to the intellectual conception and cannot be considered direct, psychic, and real expression. Harmony is the expression of images of more obscure origin, less identifiable. They are also more unexpected and baffling, not only for oneiric [dream-associated] images or those of the integrated psychic order, which are quite easily recognizable, but also for the sensations and images of the rhythmic and emotional order, which, having passed through the subconscious, reappear or often manifest a long time after, by the effect of resonance or by an uncontrollable interpenetration. Then these images emerge as unexpected and baffling not only in time but also in space, that is, in terms of form. In other words, if emotional images can be considered direct, the psychic are indirect.

The intellect is manifested and realized in structure. A means of identification, [the intellect] recognizes and establishes relationships, thus, by the successive operations of rational order, tending to a conception and thereby to a structure. Therefore the intellectual element, just as rhythm or harmony, can appear independently of the other elements up to a certain point. For given a particular rhythm, by purely rational operations one can make a construction, a structure, establishing new relationships between identified objects each time and then proceeding with the mental operations characteristic and appropriate to their nature, applying to these objects schemes previously established, or even proceeding with constructions based on physical laws or imitations thereof. One can conceive of the impressive structures that might be the integral expression of the intellectual element.

If it is possible to recognize and to analyze these four elements separately, it seems obvious and nearly superfluous that there exists between them no continuity. Much to the contrary, one finds [among these elements] constant interdependence, interference, and interpenetration.

We said that rhythm could exist independently of the other elements up to a certain point. In reality, a simple sound already produces a harmonic series that constitutes a

melodic element in some way. Moreover, variation of intensity in a sound causes a fluctuation of the sound's pitch, which constitutes an interference and another connection with the melodic element. As soon as a rhythm is struck with a solitary note, it forms a rudimentary but audible melody (a strike, for example, on two drums of different size), while at the same time the harmonic relations, by the crossing and coincidence of the melodic lines, form a type of polyphony of the sounds and resultant chords again by interference between rhythm and the other elements. The rhythmic element does not always necessarily manifest this way in its entirety. If it is the basis of the activity of all other elements, it can sometimes appear relatively subordinate to emotion, the intellect, and the psyche. In this case, rhythm loses part of its character, its significance, and its real strength; but through the primal impulse of the original rhythmic cells and by its quality of "*durée*" it forms an indispensable foundation to the expression of the other elements.

One might also say that all possible relationships of equilibrium exist between the melodic element and the others. So, when emotional expression is bound closely, participating in or connecting to the domain more particularly physical, the melodic intervals and the rhythmic dynamism merge intimately and appear to possess equal importance. If, on the contrary, emotional expression approaches the intellectual or physical realm, the melodic intervals disengage to a certain degree from rhythmic dynamism, arriving at the emancipation of the melodic lines, just as human emotion can be [emancipated] from existence. There are, therefore, infinite nuances in the nature of melody: all the possible range of emotional expression, from that closest to the rhythmic element to that closest to the intellectual or physical element, exactly as it is for the nuances of emotion for man.

The interpenetrative relationships between melody and harmony exist as naturally as those between melody and rhythm. All melody forms chords, constitutes harmonies, and inversely all chords contain melody. Furthermore, a melody quite often implies a

harmony—awakens it, so to speak—just as some harmonies call forth and awaken melodies, relationships corresponding exactly to those existing between the emotional and psychic states. It is even more subtle with the characteristic of image association, associations and correspondences which themselves are unknown and that seem to have as a result the transpositions of language.

The whole gamut of relationships exists also between rhythm and harmony. If rhythm is the basis of all activity, being the primal impulse, harmony is less subject to it than melody, just as the mind is less bound to and dependent on physiological activity than emotion. Harmony contains rhythm, and if a chord can at first appear independent of the rhythmic factor, it is because one forgets that there is an expression of psychic images that participate in *durée*. But in the temporal progression of harmonies the full gamut of possibilities and relationships appears. Indeed, when psychic images are close to the physiological and terrestrial realm, or merge with those that have arisen from the rhythmic element, one sees harmony and rhythm dominate alternately or appear in certain characteristic superimpositions. If, on the contrary, the images are of the entirely psychic type, the series of chords or groupings of sonorities could appear unbound by dynamism, even more free of rhythm than melody could ever be. In this case, the harmony regains, in its essence, the rhythmic principle of *durée*.

The relationships between harmony and melody are just as subtle. When psychic images approach or participate in emotion, one notices an infiltration of the melodic element in the chords, which is manifested just as much in their [individual] composition as in their progression. Moreover, if psychic expression is entirely independent, or, more precisely, as independent as any other element can be, harmony appears just as free of rhythmic dynamism as melody, and in particular appears to be completely irrational in the composition of chords and groupings of sonorities, in their succession and progression.

The relationship of the intellect to the other elements has the same feature of constant interpenetration that we recognized among rhythm, melody, and harmony; all the relationships of equilibrium exist in relation to these elements. The varying intensity of the contribution or of the intervention of the intellectual element is demonstrated by how important structure is in a work of art, or inversely, by the degree of realization reached by the other elements in their particular manifestation, that is to say, of the lesser or greater emancipation of their language by the intellectual filter and by rational elements. When rhythm or the psyche are the dominant elements (as is the case in most of the artistic expressions of our era), the structure and all intellectual construction appear secondary or remote; the images are not at all intended to pass through the filter of reason and its processes. These images then maintain, in the extreme case, their own limits and dimensions, logical or illogical. In this case, the role of the intellect is limited by the activity of identification and establishment of relationships, of methods, in other words, of the means allowing the manifestation and realization of the other elements—operations by which the intellect is not partially realized, but which are natural to it and are the basis of its activity. For the intellect tends by its very nature to construction, to the “system,” to structure. So, when the intensity of the creative impulses bursts the mold established, in this material, for containing the expression and the manifestation of these impulses, thus producing new forms and destroying precedents, the intellectual element by its particular faculties begins indefatigably to reconstruct and form new schemas once again.

Apparently one can continue to listen to music, whether or not one enjoys it, understanding and interpreting it independently of the real significance of the composition. In this case, all explanation seems superfluous (except maybe for those that concern programmatic music), since, by its nature, this acts automatically on the sensitivity of the listener. But if one recognizes the necessity, through man’s objective understanding, of not limiting intuitive impressions and of pursuing specific research on

the human mechanism for a more exact interpretation and appreciation of its activities and various manifestations, it is just as necessary that a more exact knowledge of artistic creations should permit the objective understanding of their essence and their real significance.

In conclusion, we may say that all art is only the material projection, sonic or plastic, of images created by the fundamental elements. Through analysis of these elements in the work of art, one discovers that the creative impulses are externalized and crystallized by the artist. Variations of the intensity of the fundamental elements are the reason for the change in their states of equilibrium. A different balance is induced each time by a particular human orientation and by various artistic expressions. In other words, all works, all aesthetics, all art, are determined by the projection of the images resulting from the particular balance of the fundamental elements.

It is from this angle that it is acceptable to examine, in our opinion, not only works and artistic realizations individually in their expression or particular characteristics, but even all general or collective orientations to the course of the historic evolution of the art.

The Evolution of Harmony

Without going back very far in the examination of the evolution of harmony, we may consider Wagner the powerful catalyst of a technical progress in a terminal direction, progress which has continued since then to an accelerated cadence. Technically his harmony results from the constant use of chromaticism and the chord of the natural eleventh. This chord, which can be considered from one perspective a product of traditional harmony since it is formed by the addition of a third to a ninth chord, nonetheless introduces the feature of exhibiting bitonality, for it can be considered the

conjunction of two chords of different tonalities. It constitutes, therefore, the first chordal departure from distinct tonality.

We cannot presently examine these ideas, Wagner's artistic and philosophical conceptions. His works and writings provide evidence of the extent to which the cult of race, of ancestral blood, his particular brand of mysticism, etc., have primordial importance. However, the impulses and psychic images appear to be sufficiently close to emotion and subordinate to the intellectual element. These last elements are realized in Wagner's powerful lyricism and imposing structures. The impulses of the psychic and rhythmic order point clearly through these two preponderant elements [emotion and intellect] but often function jointly with and are dominated by them. Likewise the harmonic element tends to a particular expression, but was still manifested in the framework of traditional, functional, tonal harmony. This phase of harmonic evolution, therefore, appears to correspond perfectly to the parallel phase of the evolution of the psychic element in the general balance of the fundamental elements. Wagner can reasonably be considered the father of contemporary harmony, for this developed directly and logically through a progressive evolution corresponding to the compelling necessity for new expression.

In the evolution that followed one should not ignore the contribution of Russian and Oriental music, which stunned and upset musicians and the public just before the beginning of the century. The first, through its rhythmic violence and the explosion of colors and timbres, provoked reactions as profound as those of Wagnerism and hastened the general evolution of the arts toward the rhythmic and psychic elements. The second provoked especially the study of the scales, modes, and rhythms of Oriental music, for many, not only musicians, realized that this art had a particular meaning, another perspective, and that it extended in an unknown direction. This technical study and research offered Debussy as well as Stravinsky other benefits and realizations. Furthermore, this art had repercussions for the fashion and the whole spirit of the era, and

it is because of this moment that the different contexts and forms of Oriental religions, philosophies, doctrines became interesting to the milieu.

This study is concerned solely with examining the evolution of the balance of the fundamental elements in European society and art. African and Oriental manifestations are therefore cited or examined here only in relationship to the contemporary evolution of Western art. The extraordinary rhythmic language of the Africans, or the subtle Oriental harmonies of quarters, eighths, or sixteenths of a tone result from a particular evolution and are not subject to examination here. Equally, certain characteristics of Russian music show influences the origins of which we will not be tracing. African and Asian art taken in their entirety are expressions of the rhythmic and psychic characters that generally dominate these races. The discovery of this particular expression at the moment when, in its own evolution, the European mind was becoming increasingly conscious of the creative strength of these elements indeed had a decisive effect on and contributed immensely to this new evolution.

At this moment, therefore, we in Europe are at the beginning of a general orientation tending ever closer to a polarization of the rhythmic and psychic elements. We are even in the beginning of a period of conscious and unconscious exploration into the means of expression of these elements. "Impressionism, symbolism, and poetic realism were confounded by great enthusiasm for curiosity. Painters, poets, and sculptors decomposed the material, bent it, distorted it, and reformed it, devoting themselves to furnishing words, sounds, and colors with new nuances and feelings" (Paul Dukas).

Here are a few revealing sentences written by Debussy: "A music truly free of motive or formed solely from a continuous motive that is not interrupted and that does not ever return on itself. Development will no longer consist of this amplification of material, this rhetoric of the professional formed by fine lessons, but one will take it in a more universal, and finally psychic, acceptance."

It appears therefore that, among the problems posed by Debussy, the principal one was perhaps that of emancipation from formalism, which still reigned and which he felt to be arbitrary more from the rhythmic point of view than the harmonic.

We do not know what real influence Russian and Oriental music had on Debussy. If correspondences surely exist with the whole-tone scale and the Oriental pentatonic scales, it is also certain that he used processes that emanate from the hyperchromatic chords of *Tristan*, the harmonic conglomerations of the choirs in *Parsifal*, and he himself admitted to having been impressed by the Russians and particularly by Musorgsky. But what did he ultimately take from Wagner besides the harmonic elements that he developed, and from the Russians besides their orchestral sophistication of colors and timbres? On the other hand, what did the adoption of strange scales signify besides a conscious or unconscious means of liberation from traditional harmony, the search for new possibilities of more direct expression? Nevertheless, all historical research concerning the influences that an artist probably experienced is secondary in our opinion. The search for these [more direct] means of expression is naturally parallel to the evolution of the new balance of the fundamental elements and is rendered necessary by this fact. It is natural and understandable that the creator discovers and accepts all technical means that can help him on the path of realization. [It is natural that he] should guard these discoveries and means, which, if he answers to the expression that is sought, he takes and uses as the point of departure, transforming and developing them to their high point. In other words, the artist is never "influenced" by another thing that [provides] direct or indirect answers to his questions, whether they are conscious or unconscious. Therefore it is not the "influences" on the artists that are necessary to study, but the evolution of the questions that elicit the answers, the "influences." The importance of the "influences" lies only in how accurately they answer the proposed question.

The general evolution was distinct; the rhythmic and psychic elements tended more and more to dominate. This produced an anti-rational, anti-structural reaction. The

intellect not only lost its supremacy in the aesthetic hierarchy of artists, but was compelled, through new impulses, to the formal and rational reconstitutions that led quickly to their rejected and outdated culmination.* Thus harmony, if it is still of the rational order and evolves in the tonal framework, tends irresistibly to deviate from this. We often think that the music of Debussy was a revolt against Wagnerism. It would be much more precise to say that it was especially a reaction against classicism—insofar as this means formalism and is conditioned by the intellectual element—and also a reaction against Germanic or Italian lyricism, an exuberant expression of emotion. The music of Debussy was not an anti-Wagnerian reaction, for the opposition of two elements, the intellectual and the emotional, is still all-powerful in this music. In reality it was much closer to [Wagnerism] than we think in terms of the elements that came to determine all future artistic manifestation.

The harmony of Debussy is constituted technically (1) by chords of thirds stacked atop one another like blocks, thus forming double harmonies usually connected by the notes that belong to either tonality, double harmonies that can also be considered chords of the eleventh, thirteenth and even fifteenth; and (2) by the division of the scale into two, three, four, and even six equal parts, this last division giving the whole-tone scale. This scale already implies a type of atonality in its elimination of the dominant and subdominant. This tendency to atonality also appears in the inter-tonal harmonization in which no three successive chords belong to the same tonality, and in the use of the chromatic scale and Oriental scales that lack definite tonality.

Thus on one hand the creative impulse and images are still most often of the emotional order but are brought together with the psychic characteristics to the point of borrowing, partly, their particular language. On the other hand, harmony is more of the rational order but tends greatly toward emancipation and already possesses its own characteristics. We see therefore how the interior evolution of creative forces corresponds exactly to the exterior evolution of technique.

Debussy crystallized this phase of human development with such intensity that, comparable to what Chopin did in his era, he fixed it immutably out of time, thus achieving the completely magnificent sound destined by the creator.

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Additions concerning Debussy

*After Debussy there has been no music that is descriptive to the senses as Beethoven, Liszt, or Wagner understood this genre. This is due not only to the absence of romanticism in Debussy, whereas the descriptive musicians were romantic by definition, but especially to the fact, as with his contemporary painters, that exterior images were not rendered objectively but were painted and rendered most often from memory, that is, already transformed by and in possession of psychic characteristics. [The images] do not project direct emotions, and even {Debussy} in his scenes entitled *Jardins sous la pluie*, *La Mer*, *Nuages*, or *Bruyères* interprets them from the point of view of psychological realism.

The ninth chords, the repeated measures, the muted strings and brass, and other exterior aspects of his style are nothing more than the scales of Mozart, the arpeggios of Schumann, etc.

In art, however, the accidental always retains some aspect of the essential. The form is always, according to the expression of Remy de Gourmont, the “formality of the essence.” In other words, the means of expression of an artist always has indicative value. When Buffon said that “the style is the man himself” he means this precisely: that a thought has only one possible expression and that this expression has its source just as the thought has its vehicle. The processes used with systematic constancy are apparent to us. (*End of the additions concerning Debussy*)

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Before going on to the third stage of harmonic evolution, let us cast a glance at the musicians and the works that we have analyzed. For if we examine more closely the

manifestation of this evolution in certain composers rather than others, it initially appears in a more striking and intense way, [and is] therefore more easily controllable. But this evolution is also visible with Richard Strauss, whose early works possess a quite Wagnerian character, whether in the technique or in the balance of the musical elements, that is of the images expressed. Departing from Wagner with an ever greater freedom of modulation, of unresolved dissonances, of new superimpositions, but always evolving within the framework of functional, tonal harmony, [Strauss] arrived at the dreams of *Electra*. Here the Wagnerian concepts are brought to their final consequence and complexity in Strauss's work. The dominant element was manifested by him in the most intense way possible with the conceivable interior evolution of a man of {45} years. Strauss could not go further; after his masterpiece there were only increasingly light and superficial, even banal, expressions from *Rosenkavalier* to *Crème fouettée* to *Arabella*.

The evolution and output of Scriabin are extraordinary. Departing even further from Wagner—for the early works up to Opus 35 often make one think of Chopin despite a personal imprint—[Scriabin] managed in the course of a brief period of time, say precisely from Opus 36 written in {1903} to Opus 74 completed in {1914}, to arrive at some achievements that anticipated those of Alban Berg.

It is difficult to say how this evolution took place. Apparently in his numerous preludes one can discover elements suggesting Wagnerian chromaticism applied in its later developments, as well as altered chords of elevenths and thirteenthths or even some Debussian harmonies. But if one can find all these elements as well as explorations in the harmonic extremes, explorations even initiated by Debussy as well (and this last path may have been for [Scriabin] the most important), one cannot find a technical evolution consistently and progressively followed. It is necessary to consider the interior development of the musician in particular in order to explain this evolution that brought him in such a short time to the realization of *Prométhée*, and the last preludes and sonatas. It is said that he dove into Theosophy, magic, and occultism, and that the second

part of his work is probably only a tentative expression of transcendent religious, esoteric, and even satanic metaphysics. Suffice it to say that these estimations of the ideas and the music of Scriabin above all mask the ignorance, the incomprehension, and the traditional hostility of those for whom all such research is diabolical, [and for whom] the analysis of hidden forces or even the contemporary exploration of the subconscious and introspection [is] demonic. Scriabin seems to have been especially preoccupied by certain broad and fundamental ideas, such as those of the mystery of creation and the unity of the arts. It is quite possible that in his progression toward knowledge he encountered or pursued various psychic, religious, or esoteric experiences, but it was only in order to arrive at a type of knowledge and a psychic conception of the cosmos, the idea of total unity that haunted him. It seems well established, for even his biographer wrote: "Scriabin toward the end of his life was committed to the preparation of a text that he called *L'Acte Initial* or *Mystère*, which would have been played to the Indians. There would have been a hemispherical temple reflected in water, thus reproducing the complete globe, the most perfect shape of all."

It is certain that the psychic element had become in him clearly dominant, and his music is characterized consequently by the harmonic element. In the space of ten years his states of consciousness, or more exactly the imperious necessity of finding suitable means of expression, brought Scriabin to an expansion of the tonal, traditional harmonic system to the point of the newest developments and the most recent triumphs.

The Evolution of Rhythm

While one can certainly say that current harmony is the progressive and logical outgrowth of Wagnerian chromaticism, one cannot, on the other hand, find anything in Wagner's rhythm that foretells especially the contemporary evolution of this element.

With Wagner the most powerful rhythmic gestures, as in the Overture to *Die Meistersinger*, always manifest a rational structure, or else they are conjoined to the lyric impulse which thus emphasizes their strength. In Liszt, rather, and particularly in the third movement of the *Faust Symphony* one may find some astonishing and portentous passages. But it was Russian music that first provided a fundamentally rhythmic expression; [Russian music] possessed an elemental violence that was called barbaric, but its power was shocking. When the dances of *Prince Igor* first appeared, performed with their massive chorus, they surpassed in violence everything heard before then. The rhythm, while still being subject to structure, already seemed to achieve a particular character of expression, a manifestation of something of primal, nearly physiological—as far as its physical hold on the public. This hold grew in strength until *The Rite of Spring* and certain works based on black rhythms. It reached the same degree of intensity in the rhythmic domain as the lyricism of *Tristan* possessed in the emotional domain. We saw how Debussy was particularly interested in the harmonic element of Russian and Oriental music; their rhythmic significance appears to have escaped him in large part. However, his reaction against traditional harmony and form also led to a relative emancipation of rhythm from the structural processes of academic usage. His [music] became more supple, fragmentary, and sometimes tended to syncopation. In some passages of the [string] quartet the rhythmic element already achieves independent expression. But aside from these suggestive exceptions, Debussy's contribution to rhythmic evolution would be negligible were it not for the importance of his accomplishments in the emancipation of rhythm from the other elements, principally the intellectual, for the realization of its particular possibilities and of its integral manifestation. On this point some reproached Debussy for the absence of dynamism, of rhythmic backbone. This dynamism, however, did not have to wait long to reappear, but how much different and with what increased violence! For what was called an anti-Debussian reaction was in reality the appearance at

the first plane of the consciousness of the rhythmic element, which constitutes the second of the two dominant elements in the new equilibrium.

With Stravinsky the manifestation of rhythm appeared in all its violence for the first time in European music, if one so considers Russian music. Indeed, if in Stravinsky harmony is significant and essential, rhythm is determinant. The evolution and the realization of its integral expression are so important and evident in the music of this composer that it warrants examination over the course of the works in which this happened. In *The Firebird*, despite the rhythmic character of the music in certain passages and the "Dance of Kastchei" in its entirety, rhythm does not yet appear separate from the emotional element, which is expressed conjointly and concatenate with the psychic character. Truly when rhythm does not appear directly in its characteristic manner, it manifests abruptly through continuous metric breaks and interruptions, the constant projection of fragments, and a celerity of extraordinary and ebullient language, provoking elemental conflicts which are rapid and quickly exhausted. In *Petroushka* it is the same thing again, especially in the second scene where the rhythm underscores and contribute to the fragmentation of harmonic expression, providing a sense of extreme [rhythmic] freedom and absolutely imminent [rhythmic] emancipation. One clearly has the impression of a vital element which progressively assaults and destroys the barlines, striking mightily with one arm and then the other, its inclination to attack and upset the established order. Rhythmic eruption of Prometheus enchained, primal motion, dynamic impulse, a veritable giant pulling on its chains—to humans it would appear stripped, terrifying, immense. And it would be the *Rite*. Emotion and intellect were to be swept away. Men would live the cosmic primordial breath, the *élan vital*. . . .

All types of rhythms have always existed. I do not believe that there is in jazz any manner of syncopation which cannot be found in Mozart, Beethoven, or Bach. However, the importance of this [modern] syncopation is something completely different: it is in the place of its emergence like an accident, in its appearance as the effect of contrast or in

the melodic element as a rest, a stoppage of the heart. [Thus it] becomes the basis of all movement, of all rhythmic continuity. The initial rhythmic cell is no longer treated as the dynamic basis for the melodic or structural element, but pursues its particular expression by progressions obeying only its own impulse and laws. Indeed, exactly the same thing happened in painting. At about the same historical moment objects were no longer relied on as a foundation, but were conditioned by it, such that the equal importance of positive and negative spaces [develops]. Thus rhythm does not consist of a series of sounds interspersed with emptiness, but an alternating set of pauses and of sounds, all of equal value. We can even say that the silences, the pauses, are connected to the sonorities. This might seem like semantics, but it is not. Between sound and silence there is simply a new perspective, comparable to the existing difference between ordinary and stereoscopic photography. The sonorities and silences exist in relief, so to speak, and their relationship is different. They form a reality, an entirely new strength, integrating and participating in the universal rhythmic life.

We said that through rhythm man participates in the life of the universe that is vibration, in the life of nature, in the *élan vital*, in *durée*. African and Oriental people have a more profound and more immediate consciousness of this than do Europeans, for whom rational intellectualism offers a more external conception than [true] knowledge. Certain contemporary scientific works have begun to clarify the nature of this participation of man in the universal rhythm. But we are still far from obtaining African and Oriental people's more intuitive knowledge in this domain, just as in the rhythmic domain of music nothing can even compare to the strength of the rhythmic language of black music. Without lingering on this, everyone knows the shocking power of the tam-tam, and we can say that in all its varieties (rituals, musical, and instrumental) this must be interpreted and understood as a means of achieving a state of collective consciousness by the deregulation of the individual physiological rhythms and their synchronization with the tellurian and universal rhythms. The pauses in this music are really a portion of

space measured by time. Ecstasy or euphoria is produced by the sensation of the disruption of personal rhythm, that is, of individual and relative time, and by of the fusion of the being with a current of cosmic rhythm, in time and *durée*.

Stravinsky, after having discovered the true sense of rhythmic language, understood that it was necessary to intensify the particular possibilities of this element, even more than he had done in the *Rite*. In this work, a certain accumulation of means of expression and of heterogeneous rhythmic and harmonic procedures achieves a complexity, which, despite its extraordinary musical power, sometimes renders the rhythmic language chaotic, the different planes not always surviving entirely in their juxtaposition. Stravinsky therefore composed some works of the smallest scale, in which he set out to study rhythmic expression divorced from all other elements, relegating it to harmonic and orchestral outbursts. *[It was at this time that he assimilated jazz and black music.]* But those African rhythms derived from vital rhythms, elementary, all-powerful as they are, occur on just one plane; rarely are there more than two real rhythms superimposed (when there seem to be more of them, in reality there are two or even just one shared among different instruments). Oriental music, on the other hand, is comprised generally of several rhythms that take place concurrently on different planes, while each one maintains its particular features through a contrapuntal technique of extraordinary subtlety. Hindu, Javanese, or even Arab music, each distinctly different from the others, all possess the rhythmic consciousness of time like African music. *[It is worth remembering that nearly all percussion instruments are of Oriental or African origin.]*

The violence of the tam-tam compared to these types of music is more shrill, so to speak, an optical illusion of sonority. An Arab or Hindu rhythm isolated from others and extended as desired produces the same effect, but it often coexists with several other rhythms. Furthermore, as we saw, the harmonic element [in Oriental music] is infinitely more developed and this includes an interpenetration and absorption of rhythm into *durée*. The great complexity of this music constitutes an aspect of superiority over

African music. For the harnessing by the consciousness of several rhythmic elements and their subsequent projection involves a more powerful and precise absorption of creative forces. Through this rhythmic multiplicity and its harmonic elements, Oriental music not only seems to possess a tellurian character but perhaps an even more vast pulsation. It would explain why, if black music produces a sensation of wild euphoria, Oriental music by contrast seems not to have terrestrial characteristics or limits. With its continuous and ethereal dynamism, its irresistible force, where it skirts and crosses infinite trajectories, man's personal time not only seems to melt into that of nature, of the earth, but it seems to lose and confound itself with the vast breathing and its vital cycles of cosmic absolute time. With this we are approaching the fourth dimension; we will have the opportunity to return to this later.

*[Stravinsky momentarily came close to Chinese music with *Le Rossignol*, the sound of which uses harmonic and contrapuntal possibilities of the Chinese sort. Schaeffner put it like this: "*Le Rossignol* only makes more clear that which *The Rite* revealed in places: a rigorously equal pulsation which preceded all metric organization and which would nearly imply a measure of one beat at a time, a sort of living metronome."] Having reached this point, two likely questions pose themselves to the musician: can one not apply this rhythmic language—released, regained, and ultimately understood in its true significance—differently from the African or the Oriental? And must the rhythmic element, in order to keep its true features and expression, necessarily be separate from the other expressive elements? Stravinsky answered these questions with *Les Noces* and through a profound study of Bach, who inspired a number of remarkable works in what is called [Stravinsky's] neoclassical period. In *Les Noces* Stravinsky applied the [African and Oriental] rhythmic language in a European context, creating a true masterpiece.

The point here is not to examine the musical heritage received from and transmitted through Bach. Concerning our topic, we might only point out that of all European musicians Bach is the only one who possessed a rhythmic dynamism, which, though not

based on syncopated progressions, miraculously approaches an independent, truly rhythmic language. Through his contrapuntal genius he created separation among the levels, which in another sense created relationships of space and time (these would perhaps not result otherwise, with one rhythmic line taken in isolation). It is the appeal of this counterpoint, *[its necessity that would allow {Stravinsky} to achieve, following Bach and not the Hindus or the Chinese, separation between the planes,]* that attracted Stravinsky to these experiences and his various pursuits in this direction. But, along with the fact that already in *Les Noces* the use of a European context and the preoccupation with form had resulted in a harmony that, compared to those of *The Rite* or of *Rossignol*, was in some ways simplified and less psychic, the growing appeal of the structural element, owing to [Stravinsky's] intellectual study of Bach, brought Stravinsky unconsciously to realizations that perhaps were outside of his original pursuits. The evolution of the rhythmic and harmonic elements did not clearly and undeniably manifest more with him; [his music] constitutes more of their essential expression, *[but {the evolution} appears clearly to continue with other musicians.]* With Stravinsky, the reappearance of the structural element and sometimes even of the melodic idiom seems to constitute his primary preoccupation, whereas harmony tends to a simplification that, in certain cases, might be considered a regression in that the rhythm even loses the particular character it seemed to have acquired. We will therefore leave Stravinsky here to pursue his glorious path. Despite the indisputable value of works like *Oedipus* and the *Symphony of Psalms* and probably of those that will follow, it is rather less likely that Stravinsky could reach the same degree of intensity in the intellectual and emotional elements that he possessed in the rhythmic and harmonic domains, which were for him dominant, for it would require a total reversal for him in the balance of the fundamental elements. *[To date the last work that we know, *Jeu de Cartes*, seems to support this.]* We believe therefore that one might say that if his harmony rather than his orchestral timbres and colors constituted a very large share of the evolution of the psychic element,

it is especially by his rhythmic realizations that Stravinsky responded to Debussy, crystallizing a phase of the evolution of this element, revealing the passage of the elementary and cosmic forces across the human consciousness.

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The discovery of the sense of rhythm which we have traced through history up to now naturally affects more or less all musicians. Little of its real significance, however, is understood. Certain [musicians] have imitated black rhythms, taking them as a topic of folklore. An epidemic of descriptive music, both white and black, accompanied by rituals or warrior dances has taken over concerts; not to mention Indian tribal celebrations and the full gamut of exotic flavors. Some of these compositions certainly have a great deal of color and liveliness, especially insofar as the dances were copied from original rhythms, and where the orchestration does not disguise the costumed dance. Jazz, on the other hand, seemed to captivate an enormous number of musicians. If Stravinsky had assimilated the rhythmic and therefore essentially black aspect of it, by contrast most of the others accepted wholesale the native and original aspect of this music along with the much less interesting and meaningful European importation. Indeed, Jazz is not an African product. One does not find it in Africa; the blacks of the tropical forests do not know it. Musicologists concur in the opinion that jazz had its origin in Mississippi. It was invented by the slaves of the families of French origin. The blacks instinctively superimposed the rhythms of their tam-tams on the European songs that they heard, for the black is not an inventor of melody. The rhythmic songs or sometimes the tam-tam which accompany the rowers of canoes have nothing [to do with] the blues nor even with spirituals, which have some of their sources in the Gregorian chant of the psalms. The blues like the spiritual is as much the work of whites as of blacks, not only in the contribution of melodic motives but also in its harmonic realization. In pieces by Ellington, who is perhaps the best black composer, one even often finds an echo of Debussy. Jazz, soon revealed throughout world by the vogue of dance, has evolved and

quickly become something that it was not in the beginning. Commercialized, the fruit of multiple collaborations and combinations of interest, the melodic themes end up slowly losing nearly all of what they had originally. Their European origin becomes more and more easily recognizable, and, in the end, the best-known songs even of classical music are frankly borrowed and jazzy. Thus spreads out over all the earth the plague of the "crooners," who sob with the voices of saxophones the deformed European songs with syncopated rhythms that have become standardized and conventional. In reality, the very great majority of these productions are the product of whites and much more appreciated by them than by blacks. The latter, when exposed to such songs, return quickly to the less eviscerated songs and to the more original rhythms. A lot of European composers have not realized this, so this questionable brown exoticism has emerged, in entire concertos, even in some operas, where the adagios, the arias, or the recitatives are the blues, and the duets and the finales the fox-trot. But the rhythmic language has such a power by itself that the best of these works (especially in the parts where the pseudo-African melodic motives disappear, where the singing is employed rhythmically or is constituted by some vocalizations with the mouth open or closed, or employed as a pedal with agonizing, long-held notes) attain a real dramatic intensity, producing a strange and often acute sensation of release from time, not on the psychic plane of dreams but on the perceptible one of our physical time. When images of the emotional order combine with this sensation it creates a hallucinatory atmosphere, or a sort of frantic joy or incommensurable despair seizing the listener. It is from this angle that one might relate or compare *L'Histoire du soldat* to the works of Kurt Weill, Krenek, etc.

Another manifestation of rhythm's hold on artists was the idolatry of the machine, of the mechanical; one finds this in all the arts. Here futurism was a precursor, for already in. . . . Marinetti exalted the locomotive, the song of the pistons and the dials in a rhythmic form of imitative poetry. But futurism was not just the imperious desire for rhythmic manifestation above everything and for itself. It was the result of the irresistible

thrust of this element and the men who felt it in particular necessarily submitted to the appeal of the machine in which rhythm is the essential, conspicuous, and dominant element. This aesthetic of machinism, furthermore, relates to the aesthetic of work, of sport, of human effort, of the dynamism of the anonymous crowd. Several reasons led to this aesthetic—we can see it when we consider poetry. Suffice it to say for now that there exists in this a transposed lyricism, for a factory, a sports match, a locomotive are as valuable a subject as a café, a battle, or a horse. It is necessary therefore to distinguish two categories in the exaltation of machinism or of dynamism. The first takes the machine or the mechanical object in opposition and as a substitution for the [traditional] subject: landscape, nature, etc. The works of this category are based on imitative rhythms and harmonies and proceed from a desire for reaction or from the anti-sentimental, anti-emotional aesthetic, as much as from the need for purely rhythmic expression. The proof of this is that the rhythmic language, being imitative like harmony, is not expressed according to its own laws but is submissive to the descriptive and exterior conception of patterns. In other words, it is the depiction of a dynamism but not the dynamism itself. Often the works of this category, [programmatic] depictions or symphonic scenes, offend just as much as the exotic images of photography. On the other hand, thanks to their true talent and their virtuosity, some artists have produced some remarkable scenes which are striking. Among the best known are *Pacific 231* by Honegger and *The Steel Foundry* by Mossolov.

What we said about the subject of the machine is equally true about illustrations of the human effort or activity. Certain works effectively depict games or work. Musically there are some spirited scenes, such as *Rugby*, *Skating Ring*, and the *Nouvelles du Jour*. However, here again, it is not the dynamism itself but a depiction, a description of it. The rhythms are imitative rather than the harmony. Both proceed from the exterior and are conditioned by it.

The second category is the one where the external rhythm of a machine or human industry is developed or expressed subjectively, according to its own law and experiences, the artists not worrying at all in this process whether the primal or material origin of rhythm disappears completely. It is therefore not a depiction or a description but the realization of a rhythm which could belong to the machine or to industry as to the dance; the origin is not important. The musicians connect to the real sense of rhythm insofar as they disengage from the subject and its inherent context in order to obtain a purely rhythmic expression, the establishment of relationships and consonances between man and the universal dynamism being the primary goal of rhythmic language. In this case the role of imitative harmony, if it exists, is completely secondary just like the title of the work sometimes suggested to the composer by its rhythmic origin. In reality these compositions should be called simply "motion" or "rhythm."

The best of the works belonging to this category and to the one based on jazz constitute, as far as the evolution of rhythm, authentic realizations and manifestations of this [evolution]. In most cases it is the expression of vital processes, of the moment of birth or death. One might consider them the European interpretation of the tam-tam, for the occidental mind cannot help but to structure, to circumscribe. But these realizations do not seem to pass substantially the point reached by Stravinsky in the finale of *The Soldier's Tale* or *Les Noces*. In the same way, when several rhythms are played and superimposed concomitantly, their characteristics are still often lost, despite the diversity of timbres and registers which are not always sufficient to obtain or to maintain the distance between the planes consistently. It follows that the rhythmic language becomes chaotic in places, though without otherwise attaining the exceptional power of *The Rite*.

Sound and Music¹

You talk about music? But first: what do you mean by sound and what do you mean by music? Music cannot exist without sound, but sound exists perfectly well without music. So it seems that sound is more important. Start with this. As you know, there is physical sound, which is produced by a vibration or frequency in the air. The vibrations or frequencies provoke sonorous waves of different types. It would take me several days to examine them phenomenologically.

A fundamental sound provides harmonics, as you know—octave, fifth, third, etc. If the sound is complex, the quantity of harmonics is enormous.

You are probably not thinking of a pure sine-wave sound, which neither generates harmonics nor has the complexity required to obtain them scientifically.

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Yes, the spectrum of sounds audible to our ears is limited, although in reality [the true spectrum] is infinitely vast. Animals generally hear more sounds naturally, as do instruments constructed for this purpose. It is even possible to differentiate and measure the vibrations transmitted by certain invisible rays to our eyes and to measure the oscillations at the interior of sounds, etc. . . . Really this would bring us too far [from the discussion].

In addition, sound is spherical, but in listening to it, it seems to us to possess only two dimensions: pitch and duration. The third, depth, we know that it exists, but in a certain sense it escapes us. The superior harmonics and less-audible inferior [sub-]harmonics sometimes give us the impression of a vast and complex sound [with properties] beyond that of pitch or duration, but it is difficult for us to perceive this complexity. Moreover,

¹The following editorial comment is given: "These spontaneous conversations between friends were recorded during 1953/54 and then transcribed with small and insignificant corrections. The questions are omitted because they were not always expressed with clarity; however, they can be deduced or sensed from the answers."

one would not know how to notate it musically. In painting they discovered perspective, which gives the impression of depth. But so far in music, despite all the advances in stereophonics and all the subsequent experiments, we have not managed to escape from the two dimensions of pitch and duration, and to create a sense of the real spherical dimension of sound.

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There are already eyeglasses that allow one to see photographic images in relief. Surely some little microphones will be invented that will permit the third dimension of sound, or even some new instruments which will produce this result without need of auricular devices.

I am convinced that one way or another it will be possible before the end of century, specifically by the acquisition of a more subtle perceptive faculty or by a state of consciousness that permits a greater approximation of reality.

I would like just to mention a theory that goes back to Goethe, though specifically it deals with colors, which are in fact vibrations. According to him all things exist first in their manifestation; that is, things appear when the "terrain" is conducive. In other words, a number of vibrations x produces the [note] C or the color green. The vibration x is not the product, but allows it to manifest. It is this way for all notes and colors, even illnesses and events.

The theory modifies our mental habits in particular. This can be demonstrated in numerous cases, especially when the "terrain" element prevails, to say nothing of the religious or mystical experiences that prove it quite often.

Recently some biological discoveries in which new elements appeared in certain conditions also seem to confirm it. In other words, everything seems to exist in a latent state. Everything in the cosmos seems to preexist in all possible forms, and the manifestations seem to be produced—whether materially or mentally and no matter to what degree—when the "terrain" is favorable.

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Man can expand and enlarge the spectrum of “terrain.” Certainly other sounds, other colors will be discovered and demonstrated. Just think of it!

But let us return to sound. It consists of other components. The psychic component of internal sounds: those that one hears in meditation and those that exist at superior and transcendent levels. We will talk about all of it during this hour.

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Yes, one might consider sound the cosmic force that is the basis of everything. There is a beautiful definition that says: “Sound is the first movement of the unmoveable,” and this is the beginning of creation. Sound at rest (if one can say this) is spherical, but, being dynamic in essence, might take any form and [thus] become multidimensional. Though cosmic in nature, it can be activated and utilized, so to speak, by humans. In a certain occult tradition one finds very interesting idea—that sound possesses three bodies: the physical body, the psychic body, and the logical body that is creative at all levels.

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Yes, equally from the esoteric point of view sound is employed in Tibetan tantric magic, by some blacks, by shamans, and according to some occultists, on supernatural and extrasensory planes as well.

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Now pay attention! One must not produce a confusion of sounds. I could say quite a lot about “correct” sound. This has nothing to do with the correct “note” with regard to any European tonal or atonal system, nor any African or Asian system, but with the very essence of sound. Sound is energy, and this can produce some very negative and dangerous effects when it is employed wrongly.

In the Yoga of sound, the adepts succeed—as I said already—in hearing their personal sound and then Devic sounds. Personal sound induces perception of the supernatural world, at the same time that it produces an interior balance, which is

precisely at the core of Yoga. Often the sound also manifests its color, but this is something else. It naturally explains the importance of “correct” sound, which is concerned with the human voice or with an instrument. Here is why I think that monody can more easily give this correctness than can orchestral and symphonic works.

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According to the Yoga of sound, ecstasy and enlightenment are the effects of “correct” sound. Vibrations create a form that is shaped according to the law of resemblance, corresponding with and also transforming its resonant structure.

This is the basis of the doctrine that places sound at the source of all revelation that is revealed internally. In the *Vedas* this sound is called *Anahad*, which means *limitless sound*.

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I cannot tell you which technique to use to attain it. It is part of *Laya* and *Krya* Yoga and includes certain very advanced breathing exercises and knowledge of the effect of sounds on our physical organs and our nerve centers. There are Hindu and Tibetan texts that one would have to read. I would just recommend to you those of Patañjali, which are classics, but I assure you that a few simple daily exercises are more beneficial than a dozen books.

But let us get back to the musical elements. I spoke once of their correspondence in man—rhythm to vitality, melody to emotion, harmony to the psyche; and structure to the intellect. [I also spoke] of the effect these elements have on the human organism.

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Yes, from this originate therapeutic applications, etc. There are already some books on the therapeutics of sounds. Sonorous vibrations affect living cells. This is demonstrated in their effect on the most material element in matter and in man, rather than the most spiritual element. I could sustain a long digression on these therapeutic qualities, which have already been scientifically established. But one cannot say as much

about the other [qualities] empirically, although—for me—they are all real, even when they are not recognized by official science.

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But we must return to music. Music evolves in time; sound is atemporal. But what exactly do we mean by *music*? A fugue by Bach, is this music? And are the high-pitched virtuosités of a “coloratura” also music? And the stylized “Nô” songs of Japan? What about Arabic or Persian chants, and the performance of players of Turkish drums, or the Hindu tabla? . . . And Tibetan percussion, and the choirs of old Pygmy women? . . .

Would you like me to tell you which of these are music and which are not? Rather than speaking of *music*, one would eventually have to speak of *organized sounds*—and sounds are organized in very different ways, from the Incas or the Tuaregs² or the Chinese up to electronic sounds organized on eight magnetic [tape] tracks.

Now, one can talk about this different organization of sound. That is all. It goes without saying that I am not going to analyze these different types of organization, nor make any value judgments.

I will say only that in general, western classical music has devoted practically all of its attention to the musical framework, which it calls the musical form. It has neglected to study the laws of sonorous energy, to think of music in terms of energy, which is life. Thus it has produced thousands of magnificent frameworks which are often rather empty, for they are only the results of a constructive imagination, which is very different from the creative imagination. The melodies themselves move from sound to sound, but the intervals are empty abysses for the notes lack sonic energy. The inner space is empty.

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I will give you an example. Throughout Europe we have quite beautiful church bells, though many of them were melted to make cannons or shells. The rest of them, however,

²A nomadic group of the Saharan region who practice Islam.

whether ancient or modern, are treated in the same manner, that is, mistreated by sacristans who pull the rope however they wish, without rhythm, in any manner, and the heaviest ones are made to work by an electric motor.

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In the Orient, in India, Japan, China, or Tibet, gongs—which have the same role in temples [as bells have in churches]—are struck with the greatest respect and in a rather special way. And up to the smallest high-pitched bell, every sound produces its own effect entirely.

Yes, it is true that we have the Stradivarius, the Guarneri, etc., [instruments] of marvelous character [made by] unrivaled craftsmen, but the composers did not know how to exploit these superb instrumental creations from the point of view of sound, using them [instead] to write and perform an enormous quantity of *pieces* for violin or cello.

I must add that what the European wanted was indeed a *piece* of music, and the virtuosi were not really concerned about whether the *piece* to be played was good or bad.

Moreover, despite all the admiration for the Stradivarius, the Guarneri, and the rest, I suspect [the admirers] are scarcely interested in the beauty and perfection of sound from the acoustic point of view. For the westerner in general, harmonics are [merely] an acoustic phenomenon. The Oriental, on the other hand, finds in harmonics a spiritual element that surpasses the physical.

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Yes, for some time here in Europe and even more in America they have been investigating sound and its energy. In this sense they are approaching the oriental conception—I am thinking of Webern and Varèse up to [composers of] electronic music. They are occupied less with framework, and one could say that recently they have even violently destroyed it with the aleatory technique, etc. . . . But in most of these cases, it is once again an intellectual or scientific pursuit, [either] mathematical or in the domain of pure acoustics.

The world may have been created with numbers, but not by numbers. . . (this is Goethe).

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You ask me then if the music of Bach, Beethoven, or Mozart is empty. I would answer that among the enormous quantity of music they wrote, one finds effectively a large number of empty works. And when they are not [empty], it is because in a certain state of consciousness the composers received elements of perception of a superior order, which have, in part if not totally, compensated for the system of [compositional] organization.

I would say also that Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, and others do not comprise all of western music. With the exception of the best, the most consistently inspired (who are also superior), the remainder is effectively music rather devoid of the sonorous energy that is separate from the mastery of certain forms of sonatas or symphonies. [Such music] has nothing to do with either rhythmic violence, melodic effusion, or orchestral magnitude.

Do you want me to tell you whether the music of Bach and Mozart could have brought down the walls of Jericho? Yes, it is a bit like that.

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But let us understand each other well. I have often affirmed that the structure—the form—is an expression of the intellect, and melody of emotion. Every element is fundamental to man and no one of its manifestations is in itself inferior to another.

Every civilization, every era including this one, has its own ground to cultivate, and for Europe since the Middle Ages, a mind of stern logic has had to assert and manifest itself in art—in its entirety as well as in its parts. Thus fugues, imitation, the interplay of contrapuntal voices, formed a part of a *modus operandi* that was intended for them, rather like expression in the romantic era, the depiction of psychological human emotions.

As for myself, I cannot confine myself to Europe, thus preventing myself from viewing the history and development of music from a completely different perspective from that of historical criticism.

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Which? I said one time that I was a finalist. Therefore I believe that historically all civilizations might be examined and studied from different angles, as much in the [collective] evolution of the arts as in that of individuals who are called to play a role in this evolution. Most of them play it without realizing the occult reason for which, at any moment of their lives or the life of world, they are brought to this *modus operandi* and, through this and nothing else, to carry out their work and their creations.

I spoke to you already another time of the constant evolution of man's fundamental elements, their alternation or predominance. In a general way this naturally manifests with varying clarity in all domains, but is more apparent particularly in artistic works. For fundamentally, these remain as appreciable testimonies of the past.

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Yes. Apparently in the case of pioneers, new perceptions cross the first plane of their consciousness years or decades earlier than with others. It follows that with these pioneers, variations in the relationships among the fundamental elements, at their high point, establish a different way of looking at things and a new *modus operandi*.

And it is through these pioneers that the evolution of the world and of art continues, through the radiance of their thought and their works. Sooner or later, this produces in the whole society a new *Weltanschauung* and consequently a new *modus operandi*.

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Yes, of course, there are a thousand theories on the evolution of man and of human society. If you want, you can start with the apes and wind up with Einstein, or [think] of the tribes' [migration] to the United States of America.³

As for your speaking about one or another classical or modern composer individually, it would presume a certain kind of analysis, the principles of which I have indicated to you but which would be long and difficult. Moreover, I said at the beginning that for me it has nothing to do with historical or critical studies, but with understanding as well as possible the meaning of things.

Therefore one cannot really speak of music, of what music is, of when something qualifies as music, but only of the organization of sounds.

As for the evolution of music in the world, I would not know how to construct a theory of Devic activity. What can one say of this activity? No one could—nor would have the right—to say anything at all. I can only assure you that most “inspiration” comes from elevated planes and from contact with the Devas. Their role—in a few words—is to introduce new types of vibrations into the world, through sounds. Since sound operates by laws of correspondence with the human elements, and since, on the other hand, it is proven that the repetition of a formula produces a particular physical, mental, or spiritual result (for instance, Coué’s simple theory of the repetition of one sentence for the improvement of health and, naturally, all the doctrines of Hindu *japa*,⁴ which are based on such repetition and involve absolutely spiritual realizations), music, by the repetition of one sound or one sonorous form, through its correspondence with the fundamental elements in man, tends to produce and to reproduce certain modifications in their relationships of balance.

³Scelsi is apparently referring to the theory that American Indians are in fact the lost tribes of Israel who migrated across the Bering strait into North America.

⁴“The act of repeating mantras or divine names, counted normally on rosary beads or the joints of the fingers” (Beck, *Sonic Theology*, 247).

Moreover, the words of the formulas, the *japa*, can provoke a spirit of antagonism.

Apparently this is the reason for the perpetual existence of music both in religious rituals and in secular celebrations, and its use as military and combative motivation.

Generally it is believed that music and all art are products of their era. In reality, for a part—the only part that can truly be considered art—the opposite is true. All change, all innovation in musical style has invariably been followed by innovations in morals and in politics. This is logically the consequence of what I explained to you.

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Devic action concerns only the evolution of the world and not the benefit or glorification of the individual. [The individual] is the chosen channel, which is to receive inspiration or transmit a new type of music. As this channel is rather imperfect for the complete reception of a Devic message, it is incapable of bearing them fully, partly because this would be contrary to all of its conditioning, and also because it would almost completely lack the technical means to manifest [these messages]. Its psychophysical organism would be dangerously shaken and risk destruction. This is frequently what happens to the genius who dies young, or who suffers terrible misfortunes. Therefore, for musical evolution just as for all other evolution, the Devas take into account the weakness of these creatures and proceed gradually, occasionally choosing some to be particularly gifted, or prepared. This choice applies to the individuals whose qualities and aspirations we previously examined.

Among the artists who have certainly perceived Devic activity, many have not succeeded in dominating their energetic inferior vehicles (to use Yoga terminology). This explains why the Devic contact is intermittent and [the artists'] inspiration inconsistent and very sporadic. Their psychophysical organisms are incapable of completely becoming the vehicle necessary for Devic manifestation. This explains the problem that often bothers people: why some men of genius who manifest extraordinary

abilities in art, thought, or something else, are not models of integrity and drop down to life on a middle plane or lower.

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As I explained in other conversations, ignorance of things spiritual, of means of contact with higher realities, is so great even among the most admirable artists and cultivated men, that they are incapable of considering the importance of maintaining the contact that their very nature occasionally offers them.

The work that the Devas accomplish through artists is only a preparation, on the intellectual, emotional, and psychic plane, for the evolution and final manifestation of a music we cannot even imagine.

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Yes, there is truly another, transcendental music that defies all structural analysis, just as it defies all human understanding.

Certain privileged beings have heard sounds, melodies, or harmonies that one might qualify as "outside of this world," along with colors belonging to this same plane. From the saints there are extremely numerous accounts and an entire literature and iconography to support this: angelic musicians with trumpets, harps, or flutes; Swedenborg's or Jacob Boehm's accounts of the marvelous music heard by them and sometimes by entire crowds in different locations. According to the contemporary accounts, these melodies had an inconceivable delicacy and a sonorous power impossible to achieve humanly.

Reports of hearing supernatural choirs in chapels, when close to death, or near saints are innumerable. One can also count by the thousands the individual experiences of persons who have heard music that was not of this world. They all said it is impossible to describe the extraordinary power of these sonorities, which were like an ocean of marvelous music that no orchestra could ever reproduce. Even more when one hears it, the essence of this music is a living sensation beyond auditory perception.

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I do not think that music of “the other world” exists only for the senses or the spiritual intellect of incorporeal beings, nor can it be just an expression for the glorification of the Divine. Rather it is probably the synthesis of all the harmoniously vivified vibrations, possessing unlimited creative power on the plane where it is utilized for an unknown transcendental evolution according to the hierarchy to which it belongs.

Now, as far as we on earth are concerned, these sonorous illuminations resemble certain mystical states of consciousness, in which the realities of the greater, super-terrestrial, perhaps divine worlds are manifested. There are surely—and this concerns music—some different spheres and planes: from the astral world up to the most elevated, where silence and sounds may be unified as it is with form and formlessness, movement and stasis.

In certain moments these manifestations make us conscious of the super-worldly realities which sooner or later men are chosen to reach.

There is a difference, however, among these extra-physical illuminations: those which manifest spontaneously (such as those mystical revelations that occur suddenly, without conscious preparation, providing evidence of divine grace and power), and other experiences where the conquests are laboriously acquired. [This is true] as much in the mystical domain as in the perception of super-terrestrial realities by sounds, shapes, or colors.

In the first case, which concerns songs or supernatural instruments played in an angelic way, these manifestations are generally related to those unknown events of grace or glorification.

In the second case, on the other hand, men are allowed to attain certain superior levels of consciousness by which it is possible for them to obtain glimpses of divine worlds, in which sounds and colors are not at all excluded, but on the contrary manifest with a force of unimaginable beauty.

In this work of attaining [divine realms] that certain beings were chosen to accomplish by their past, by their aspiration, and by the established plan of evolution, the Devic element seems particularly active, collaborating (as much as the human instrument permits) in the progressive realizations on the path of a music that cannot be compared to any other on earth.

But man must certainly be prepared in order to receive these experiences and these revelations that emanate from the superior worlds for his evolution and that of the Universe.

Art and Knowledge⁵

What is art and what is knowledge?

Total knowledge cannot be obtained by man in this life.

There are several approaches: the scientific path, the mystical path, the philosophical path, the path of gnosticism, the path of yoga, the path of Zen, and others. Then there is the path of Art.

This evening we will speak about it because you want to, and keep it as simple as possible.

What is Art?

But what is thought? What is life? Can one define the essence of things?

One can catalog artworks, analyze them, but still! It takes courage to characterize this as a work of art and that as not. Judgment is usually impaired and affected by time and by the evolution of knowledge.

⁵The following editorial comment is given: "These spontaneous conversations between friends were recorded during 1953/54 and then transcribed with small and insignificant corrections. The questions are omitted because they were not always expressed with clarity; however, they can be deduced or sensed from the answers."

But what must be said of this essence? First, that there exist several types of art—and [we must] admit, a priori, that this is truly about art; that the works [we are considering] belong in this category [of art], without worrying for now about the fact that there is art that is testimony, popular art, folk art, fantastic art, visionary art, magic art, religious art, and other types as well.

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Yes, there are some remarkable works that belong to each category, those works which demonstrate that art is not limited to particular designs, rules, or aesthetic doctrines.

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Yes, one can uncover certain rules of balance in all worthwhile works, certain aesthetic laws—only these rules of balance, these laws of aesthetics, are very numerous and sometimes seem, or are, contradictory. The fact is that in reality it is very difficult to establish schemes, if they are numerous, by which to decide if a work adheres to any of these schemes and therefore qualifies as a work of art.

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In reality it is extremely difficult. There are hundreds of books on the problems and limitations of criticism, and on aesthetic theories that might be used to make choices or value judgments. One could make mountains of it. But we must not forget that, despite this, most great works were not appreciated for their vision—the way Rembrandt or Vivaldi are appreciated today, as eternal. This transcends all theories of aesthetics.

One need only consider that until 1900, all African art was considered ridiculous and that marvelous pre-Columbian gold jewelry was sold to the Bank of England for smelting, having—according to some very eminent critics—absolutely no artistic value. Now this jewelry, these works of goldsmithing, are priceless and their beauty is reputedly incomparable. This really shows the very narrow limit of all aesthetic conception, and the very great limit of the most qualified criticism regardless of the period.

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Yes, in particular it concerned the art of other continents, and the critics were European. But the number of great starving artists is as numerous, or nearly so, as in Europe: painters, poets, musicians. . . . This does not really result from lack of critical attention. Do not believe that they were not known by the competent critics of their time; nearly all were judged and condemned for being bad artists.

Therefore it is necessary to take another point of view. I would say that it is not overly necessary to try to judge the work of art—one would only succeed in deception and [wind up] looking ridiculous at the next turn in history—but to examine the artistic, creative faculty of the artist. If it is powerful and true, the work will have it also. Evidently one cannot judge the faculties of past artists; but sooner or later time renders justice. On the other hand, this is possible for contemporary artists and would avoid blunders, mistakes, and injustices.

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I mentioned the artistic, creative faculty. What is it?

IT IS THE FACULTY OF ARRESTING MOTION [*MOUVEMENT*], OF CRYSTALLIZING AN INSTANT OF *DURÉE*, TO EXTRACT IT ONESELF—AND OF PROJECTING THIS INSTANT BY AN EFFORT OF THE ENTIRE BEING IN A VERBAL, SONOROUS, OR PLASTIC MEDIUM.

This is really the best definition. However, there is apparently another possibility, another method of creation: it is by transmitting motion and *durée*, not by an effort of one's entire being, but, on the contrary, by the most complete submission to *durée*, to motion, in which one participates, penetrates, and is filled. This second method is the one generally adopted by the oriental artist.

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Yes, it is. It is a bit like natural childbirth and painless childbirth. For the latter, as you know, a particular sort of technique is necessary, a preparation—and I do not mean

anesthesia, which can at its high point correspond more or less to the trance of a medium. In painless childbirth, consciousness remains present but it is accomplished without the anguish, the screaming, and the drama that accompany the other [natural childbirth]. Yes, it is a bit. But such comparisons are always very approximate and I use them—as with analogies and examples—very little and rather unwillingly.

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Yes, the essence of art is still not very clear, of course, but it will become somewhat clear if you listen to me. The answer is not simple.

I told you that [the creative faculty] was the crystallization of an instant of *durée* and its projection by the artist out of himself. That is already problematic, unless we can define *durée*, motion, and all that creates the phenomenology of the universe and its life. But I will tell you again, with another very approximate and not very applicable analogy, that there is no art without the artist. The sick person lives if he rids himself of death; the artist dies if he does not give birth to life.

Therefore we must return from the object of art to its creator. (I use the word *creator* here in order to simplify things. I can tell you that this word is not really applicable and that in reality no one creates what [the artwork] is. For the moment, I will continue to say that the artist creates and to speak of the creative faculty, in order not to complicate the argument, which is very complex.) Consider the artist independently of the artwork, so that it can be understood without regard to which historical period or to which moment of aesthetic evolution [it belongs]. [The artwork] can be created without regard to nationalistic or foreign influence, or the influence of a group or of individuals. It is necessary to consider the artist in and of himself, with his own faculties, and [to consider] the artwork more as the result of the creative faculties of this artist.

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Yes, how can one analyze the creative faculties of artists, living or dead?

For dead artists it is more difficult; but I find that traditional criticism can no longer rely too much on its own criteria. Does an Egyptian or Khmer sculpture, a Ming or Tang object, need to be considered in the context of the era during which it was created, under which Emperor, and judged according to its genealogy, the family to which it belongs—or [should it be judged] in and of itself? Would it be less beautiful if one did [not] know that it had been produced under the reign of some particular Emperor, during some particular century, in certain historical conditions and under certain aesthetic influences? Or if one did not know positively to which era it belongs? No, that is the “result,” the “manifestation” of particular faculties of the creative artist.

The work of art is valid only in relationship to this extraordinary experience, this effort by the artist to crystallize motion and *durée* and project it materially, even somewhat independently of “content” as it connects to a moment in history, or to the historical and geographical position of the artist within human society.

* * * *

Yes, of course. It is difficult to isolate the artist from his milieu. We know all too well about [the artist's] position in a corner of world, at a point in history—especially in history as we understand it—in which city he learned the profession, who were his teachers or his contemporaries—one cannot isolate of all it. Everything that preceded him and that surrounded him is researched in order to obtain a historic vision of his output and his works. In reality, however, it is easy to see that time diminishes [the quality of this vision], but even ignorance of all these factors does not destroy the really essential quality of the work that proceeds from the fundamental elements of the artist himself.

But enough of that. You asked me what is art. I gave you the definition that I believe to be the best and the most accurate, but for all art and all works of art it is not absolute. There is no absolute definition of art just as there is none of life. I told you once more that the work of art results from the creative artist's own psychophysical operations,

which allow him to halt the course of *durée* and to project an instant of it through some medium. If the artist is not able to accomplish this, the work that results might be anything, except art. It could be a piece of craftsmanship, something academic, a work of deception, of exploitation, of plagiarism—any of these—but it is not art.

Perhaps I am letting myself get a bit carried away with a polemic as to the current and classic theories regarding works of art. Evidently, the critics are partly correct. But as I already said, they do not take into account other factors that, in my opinion, are more essential.

Besides, polemics are always to be avoided. An idea, a new or different conception, must be self-affirmed and established with evidence. It is not necessary to attack other ideas, which, are sometimes complementary anyway.

I am flatly opposed to all sustaining theory that it is necessary to wipe the ground clean first. Unfortunately, on the other hand, it is good that this is done every so often. This destruction—this clearing—is immediately considered a new contribution, a new idea. But in reality, this action most often stops there, becomes the end in itself. What is destroyed is not replaced by anything. One idea is not replaced by another, except by the very idea of destruction, which is not really an idea at all.

Certain aesthetic movements have introduced some new and interesting ideas. Take surrealism, for example. What remained of this movement, and what still remains sometimes rather lively, is not the polemic, the violent attack on society, but a certain aesthetic contribution that results from a new conception of artistic creation.

The denial not just of discursive and logical reason, but reason in its entirety, constitutes the movement's essential character, separating it from others.

With surrealism, creation ultimately offers man conquest of the infinite, crossing into the powers of non-reason, the irrational, automated writing. Through psychic automatism it is therefore completely protected from any intervention of the intellect, [and this] becomes the goal for which surrealist poetry and all surrealist artwork must strive, as

Breton affirmed in his first manifesto. Its goal was really to take to the limit the famous “vaporization” of Baudelaire—the term that he posited as the opposite of “concentration.”

Of course this project was extremely ambitious, for in reality it surpassed all aesthetics and even offered a type of revelation of the powers that are present in the human unconscious and equally bound to the cosmic whole. It seems that within this automism, this “vaporization,” forces of all types, of all classes, can be manifested. Baudelaire already said it:

“Through this completely wide open door may pass angels as well as demons.”

* * * *

No, I do not believe that the surrealists reached their goal. In poetry and literature, despite certain works by Breton, Desnos, Soupault, L  iris and others, they did not get beyond the superficial layers of dreams and the unconscious. They overlooked a more profound psychological technique for reaching states of conscience in a different realm of space and time. In painting, they overlooked an additional graphic dimension that can depict motion and dreams. They remained in the traditional dimension, anachronistic and without meaning. To depict dreams and certain connections through a type of association capable of expressing motion and the unconscious would require a four-dimensional graphical perspective.

* * * *

Yes, the dadaists also attacked society, and everything else, but this too is the idea of a dislocation of logical discourse brought to its extreme consequences as well as the idea of continually free action elevated to principle of art.

The revolt against the past and present—or the established order—does not concern art at all. We might say the same for certain demagogic aesthetic movements.

* * * *

There have been some amusing gags that managed to please certain minds as spectacles or as artworks. But there was also a certain masochism, a will for destruction, for self-destruction. I must add, however, that without realizing it the surrealists and dadaists almost certainly sought to achieve something very great and profound (but blindfolded by their revolt they were without the means to reach it).

I think that this could be a subject for study: how readily violence, destruction, and self-destruction proceed from an unconscious but powerful desire, from an internal need to penetrate a barrier, [a need] to leave the self and its confines without having the knowledge how or the ability to return. Not knowing how to do this, you either shatter everything around you or you commit suicide.

Yes, of course, art is not a matter of ideas, but I said that some works of quality were spawned by these ideas. But again, it is not really about ideas. We define [art] this way as an afterthought, but it is imprecise. It is about experiences that rise to a certain level of consciousness and actually become consciousness. One might speak of a "new box" that illuminates the self. Yes, don't laugh, man is a matter of boxes, of drawers. He is full of boxes by the hundreds, by the thousands. A good number are open, illuminated for a long time, several millennia. But if he constantly opens and illuminates others, he becomes aware of their content. This content becomes apparent to him. Sometimes he doesn't understand it immediately; he doesn't know that this is a good thing. He manages to identify it as something new and this novelty jostles other things. He is forced to re-establish relationships, to modify them, to accept changes in his own modes of thought or of living, and apparently this causes some confusion when it happens.

However, there is nothing one can do. When a box is opened, its contents temporarily assume the primary position until a new box is illuminated and the process begins again eternally.

* * * *

Do you want to know how these boxes are illuminated or opened? Ah well! It is a long history that begins with the perception of interior and exterior phenomena, and for the artist finishes with the work of art. We will get to this later.

* * * *

Yes, I believe that in all the arts the problems are the same. Sometimes the solution is found first in painting, or in music, or in poetry. Sometimes there is a span of time between the appearance of the problem and the solution. Sometimes it happens quickly or more slowly, in one or another of the art forms. But currently—under the influence of continental and intercontinental communication through radio, the press, exhibitions, concerts, conferences, and travels by artists to other countries—the problems appear in practically the same way and at the same moment to everyone.

It is interesting to note, for instance, the parallel and progressive disappearance of the subject in painting and the theme in music. Or the concept of equivalence in painting (positive and negative space) and the equal importance of the note and of rest (emptiness and plenitude). This leads to the concept of integrated space or the white and black surface in painting and silence in music. Or even the concept of collage, where everything is combined: newspapers, posters, advertisements, [photographic] clippings of scenery and people. In music, noises of the street, the radio, bits of melody, words, and machine noises are combined or superimposed.

Currently in painting one can observe the nearly complete disappearance of color, replaced by paper, sacks, and iron that is scorched, scraped, or torn; or else by nails, toothbrushes, and even pieces of medical instruments.

Equally in music, the disappearance of the melodic or harmonic interval, replaced by strings that are beaten, struck, filed, and scraped with tools or more unusual objects. Even the wood of the instruments is treated in a manner that is sometimes appalling considering that its destruction is voluntary, as were several pianos in a session of “music” that remains rather famous.

It is in the same way in poetry. The same problems, and the same types of solutions that are graphic, typographic, etc. I don't want to keep treading on this, but everyone knows that this is affirmed by numerous texts.

There is a very interesting parallel that I had researched at the time, and that belonged to a study that probably will never be completed. I was flying a group of manuscripts to Paris. They were in a suitcase full of documents, music manuscripts, books autographed by Michaux, Reverdy, Jouve, and other friends, poets, and writers. The suitcase was in very good condition, but its contents perished in the Seine—I am sure of it—unless some thief was a collector of autographs. They were souvenirs of my life in Paris, but in the end, in one way or another, souvenirs always end up in the ocean of oblivion.

* * * *

Yes, why are the problems the same and practically concurrent in all the arts?

This is not easy to say, but as I tried to explain, the artist effects a process of crystallization of motion, and this motion is discerned by all artists and projected by each artist in material suitable to his faculties and psychophysical organization.

* * * *

Yes, I understand that in the life of one man, one artist, very different things happen, things very different from those that happen in the life of another. Therefore, each artist can crystallize and project elements of very different motion and must face a nearly infinite variety of problems and solutions.

Yes, but it is not. You correctly said that certain things are in the air, but this is a rather vague way of expressing a [particular] reality.

The concomitance of certain discoveries, of certain manifestations, is not due to luck. Rather it is due to the faculties of perception of artists who, at a particular [historical] moment, synthesize the frequency of certain wavelengths and, at the same time, the quality of these waves, which are suddenly recorded very intensely by an extremely large number of people.

I could give numerous examples of works that evince parallel aesthetic inquiry in the different arts during the same era and in a single country. But even more surprising [are examples] of the appearance of artistic expressions that yield the same tendency, such that similar designs and symbols appear concurrently in different countries and even in distant continents. It has been this way since antiquity.

In part this involves art history; I have just attacked many such works, encyclopedias, etc. But there are also passionate hypotheses concerning the evolution of man, of society, and of the world that perhaps we can take up another time.

* * * *

Why are artists' faculties synthesized at the same moment in a way that is nearly identical, and what is this quality of waves—or content of motion—that is recorded so intensely everywhere at the same moment?

Ah well, we have entered another domain that really belongs to the origin of art, to be sure, but which no longer has anything to do with either criticism or with aesthetics. . . . The discourse would become quite lengthy—the one about boxes, exactly. It will be for another time.

There is in man—apart from the soul—the monad, the spirit, the atman, or whatever you wish to call that which is intransient in man and which survives through all his lives. Of this, there are four fundamental elements:

1) The Vital Element—which has a rhythmic character in its physiological manifestations. Rhythms that go from simple to the very complex, that are sometimes measurable only with very complicated methods or with electronic instruments, such as the cellular rhythms of thought, the emotions, the senses, etc.

2) The Emotional Element—which includes all categories of what we call sentiment. These are products of experiences in the purely emotional realm, or of those in the vital physical element, or of those that may be called psychic.

3) The Psychic Element—which is very difficult to delimit and to define, and which includes all experiences stemming from the domain of intuition, of the subconscious, of dreams, of the superconscious, of clairvoyance, even mystical enlightenment.

4) The Intellectual Element—which is the rational part, the superior intellect that is closer to the psychic element—and which includes the will and memory.

Clearly these four elements are not in insulated compartments, keeping each one from participating in the manifestation of the others. So it is not that emotional, psychic, or intellectual manifestation would be impossible if the vital element were absent or vice versa. In the same way, all psychic or sensory manifestation creates emotional states that belong to the emotional realm, and so on.

Of course, there exist some experiences that one can call total, in which all the elements participate with maximum intensity. In this case, it is almost impossible to determine the respective importance of each affected element, for the interpenetration of the elements nearly produces absolute fusion in the consciousness.

Yes, but if total experiences exist, there are others in which one only element seems to dominate, or be directly affected, or that may exist independently of the others, taking into account the psychophysical unity of man. It would really take too long to go through all the possible examples of these reciprocal relationships that occur with the experiences that our perception passes to the consciousness.

Yes, what is consciousness? [It is] very difficult to define as it involves both the physical and the nonphysical.

How can I put it succinctly? Consciousness is a living reality that reacts to all physical and nonphysical impressions, and thus undergoes continuous modification.

All theory that considers only the physical element of consciousness cannot convey the entirety of its manifestations. If an organic or functional change in the human organism reduces its faculties, a psychic change produces the same result. On the other

hand, if certain cerebral localization constitutes the physical pole of consciousness, then the opposite pole—the nonphysical element—is neither isolated nor any less present.

It must be said that only the perception of an experience produces an undistinguished state of consciousness, and here we can speak of the theory of engrammes⁶ and so on—which would be unhealthy—and different theories of perception as well. But all such differentiated experiences belong to one or another of the four elements that I consider *fundamental*.

It can all be developed, of course. Piles of books exist, all sorts of works that address these questions. Unfortunately I must discuss this briefly and perhaps with some inaccuracies, for I want to return as quickly as possible to the man/artist. However, it is necessary to take something else into account: what I call the *faculty of identification*. Without this, all interior or exterior experiences that belong to one category or another would remain vague and indefinite in the consciousness. These states that we occasionally feel are difficult to define and are painful to imagine ourselves prolonging for an extended time, for the faculty of identification intervenes as soon as possible.

It is also difficult to say what it consists of, for its character is irreducible. One can only say that it does not proceed solely by the mechanism of association, nor is it the mechanism itself.

It would seem that [to understand] the nature of a relationship as a means of identification is not just a purely rational abstraction. The activity of identification essentially determines the relationship, that is, [the activity] possesses—or implies—real qualities of cognition.

Identification appears to be a real manner of vital and immediate cognition, a limited relationship with the intellect. One can therefore consider the states of consciousness

⁶“Memory trace; *specif*: a hypothetical change in neural tissue postulated in order to account for persistence of memory” (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* [1977], s.v. “engramme”).

produced by different perceptions as given to passing in each instant from the unknown to the known—that is, constituting virtual images.

Now we can return to the last question from the other time, which is: why are artists' faculties of perception synthesized at the same moment in a specific way, recording certain categories and certain qualities of perception? And why do certain artistic experiences manifest in more or less the same way, and more or less at the same time? Why is it so? Ah well! For many reasons.

First, there are cycles—they occur in everything, you know. In the life of a man, these four fundamental elements, which condition the faculties of perception, vary in activity according to the course not only of his life, but of a single day.

* * * *

Yes, the faculty of identification of perceptions also appears to vary in intensity and in clarity according to its own laws, which seem to be conditioned particularly by the character of the perceptions—that is, principally by those of the psychic order. For as we saw at the time, the faculty of identification involves both the physical and the nonphysical, and through the nonphysical aspect, it is therefore one of the faculties of man that, more than others, links him to the highest cosmic forces.

Finally, it is this faculty that joins the artist, as with the mystic although in a different way, to the domain that we call *supernatural*. [This faculty] does not become conscious, does not appear to our consciousness, when it is identified, clarified, and known by the proportions or limits of what is possible.

* * * *

How does all this concern the artist apart from all other men? You are right, everything I have said is common to everyone. What then is the difference for the artist?

What differentiates the artist/creator (which can be considered the same since the terms are imprecise) from the man who is not, resides less in the quality or variety of the

states of consciousness and of images than in the artist's desire and capacity to project out of himself and to crystallize, as I said, in a sonorous, verbal, or plastic medium.

It is good that this desire and this capacity, which imply a particular nature and the activity of certain functions and certain abilities, place so much value on the experiences themselves, their crystallization, and their sensory manifestation.

It would take much too long to analyze what this capacity involves. I will say that all intellectual, emotional, or physical faculties—such as the muscles or the brain—all faculties require activity. The psychophysical conditioning of the artist is such that his elements are suited to a particular activity and crave it. This desire is an impulse and a natural dynamism that leads to its own manifestation.

In the same way, the faculty of identification tends to manifest more intensely certain experiences, or states of consciousness, that are related to the desires and the activity of certain faculties of consciousness.

Again this seems difficult, but in reality it is not as recondite as it appears.

As I said, by the very nature of the faculty of identification, the experiences and images that result form a large part of "cognition," and thus of meaning or sensory content. This is why one can speak of poetry, or of art, as a means of knowledge. The peculiar value that one assigns to works of art, to artistic creations, stems precisely from the fact that they are the visible crystallization and the material incarnation of a process of direct and unique knowledge of creative cosmic forces.

But there is even more. If, on the one hand, the artist arrives at this cognitive link through creative forces, there is also, on the other hand, activity by these very forces that concern the human organism, particularly the artist.

The entire organism of the artist is made, so to speak, to receive and to collect—and desires to receive and to collect. Everything is open to him and he receives and collects everything that interests him and is within reach. But if he is conditioned for creating, he

has been conditioned by complex processes and by physical and spiritual nature since birth, in life, and, I believe, probably also through the course of a long, prior evolution.

The forces use this conditioned organism for their own goals that are beyond us, but we must serve these goals for we are, in short, conditioned by them.

We don't deprive the muscles of exercise, the legs of walking, nor the brain of study, the lack of which would contradict nature and result in unfortunate consequences. It is the same for these higher activities, but even more urgent.

We don't know why we exist—and we know even less about the search for knowledge serving as our theme this evening. But we do know that all men must do something, that the entire organism must act in one way or another, by the law of nature. It must exercise, must work, with varying intensity according to its constitution, but it must act, must function. If by one's own will, or the will of others, one prevents or refuses action, or one is restricted, or one denies this functioning, it is either suicide or homicide.

So, all human organisms must function, perform exercises and work—whether this is good or bad is another question—but it must function.

What is the purpose of all this work? This question relates to the one about existence. There is a purpose, for the idea of luck is really insufficient. The purpose of the artist—as I said at the beginning—is the purpose of these faculties, which is to crystallize a moment of *durée* and project it through a medium. This purpose transcends technical work and its ability. For if the artist were restricted by technique, he would be like any other conscientious craftsman, but he would be unaware of these particular faculties that allow him to come into contact with schemes and forces that transcend technique and that only he can manifest.

The manifestation of these forces, which through the artist influence the world, has a purpose that we can only imagine or glimpse.

The power of artistic radiance and vibration on the collective human psyche is indisputably great, larger than we assume, in the general economy of the cosmic forces, for the evolution of the planet and of human thought.

It constitutes a search and a type of asceticism—if one wants—the purpose of which must not be conquest, but surrender and submissiveness. Surrender and submissiveness are then transformed into victory, but humility and impersonal renunciation must come first.

Yes, it may be considered asceticism. The work of art is the fruit of a supersensible creative intuition, which one arrives at progressively if one does not have the good fortune to be one of the “elect.”

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Thus for the artist it is a matter of searching. It is in the higher realms of vibrations and of knowledge that he must exercise his faculties of perception and identification, and work through humility at the service of the same faculties that conditioned him, for the most marvelous task that one can be given is to be alive to accomplish this on earth.

And now listen, so that you will hear the resonance of the harmonics of this deep note.

APPENDIX B

INVENTORY OF SCELSI'S BOOKS AND PERIODICALS AT

VIA DI SAN TEODORO 8, ROME¹

Music and Music History

Attali, Jacques. *Bruits: essai sur l'economie politique de la musique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1977.

Auditorium: Critica Discografia e Attualità musicali. Vol. No. 2/3, February–March 1972. Also no. 1 (January 1972).

Austin, Larry, ed. *Source: Music of the Avant Garde*, no. No. 3, January 1968.²

Benvenuti, Giacomo, ed. *Andrea e Giovanni Gabrieli e la musica strumentale in San Marco. Tomo 1: Musiche strumentali e "per cantar e sonar" sino al 1590*. Vol. 1. Milan: Ricordi, 1931. Vol. 1 of *Istituzioni e monumenti dell'arte musicale italiana*.

———, ed. *Andrea e Giovanni Gabrieli e la musica strumentale in San Marco. Tomo 2: Canzoni e sonate a più strumenti di Giovanni Gabrieli contenute delle "Sacrae symphoniae" del 1597*. Vol. 2. Milan: Ricordi, 1932. Preface by Gaetano Cesari. Vol. 2 of *Istituzioni e monumenti dell'arte musicale italiana*.

Boni, Guido. *Musica e pensiero*. Rome: Giovanni Semerano, 1962.

Busoni, Ferruccio, Claude Debussy, and Charles Ives. *Three Classics in the Aesthetic of Music*. New York: Dover, 1962.³

Les cahiers Raymond Abellio: recherches pour la nouvelle gnose. Vol. 1, November 1983.⁴

¹Compiled by the author, March and April 1997.

²Includes music by Harold Budd, Frederic Rzewski, Steve Reich, Pauline Oliveros, and Musica Elettronica Viva.

³Includes Debussy's "Monsieur Croche the Dilettante Hater," Busoni's "Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music," and Ives's "Essays Before a Sonata."

Castagnoli, Giulio, ed. *Quaderni di musica nuova*. Vol. no. 1. Turin: Compositori Associati, 1987.⁵

Chatterji, Priya. *La musica classica indiana*. Milan: À la chance du bibliophile, 1959.
Preface by Giulio Confalonieri.

Cremonese, Adriano, ed. *Giacinto Scelsi*. Rome: Nuova Consonanza and Le parole gelate, 1985.⁶

Croix, Thierry de la, ed. *Silences: musiques contemporaines*. Paris: Editions de la Différences/Silences, 1985.⁷

Daniélou, Alain. *Anthologie de la musique classique de l'inde*. Paris: Microsillon, 1955.
Preface by Serge Moreux.

Daumal, René. *Rasa or Knowledge of the Self: Essays on Indian Aesthetics and Selected Sanskrit Studies*. Introduction by Luise Landes Levi. Translated by Louise Landes Levi. New York: New Directions, 1982.⁸

Domaine Musical: Festival Schoenberg. Paris: Domaine Musical, 1961.⁹

Douzième festival international d'art contemporain de Royan.¹⁰

Drailles. Vol. 10, 1988.¹¹

⁴French Journal. Includes Eric Antoni's article "L'atonalité et le sens de la musique" (pp. 29–47), which deals with Bartók, Scriabin, Schoenberg, Ansermet, et al—but *not* Scelsi (despite the occurrence of "sens de la musique" in the title).

⁵Includes Adriano Cremonese's "*Il allait seul: introduzione all'opera di Giacinto Scelsi*" (pp. 79–86), Giulio Castagnoli's "*Suono e processo nei Quattro pezzi per orchestra* (1959) di Giacinto Scelsi" (pp. 87–103), and a catalog of Scelsi's works and writings, edited Adriano Cremonese.

⁶Italian translation of *Musik-Konzepte* volume, with articles by Metzger, Zeller, Zenck, de Velde. Translated from the German by Adriano Cremonese, from the French by Maria Luisa Contivecchi-Reale.

⁷Includes Scelsi's "Poèmes" (pp. 87–89) and "Le regard de la nuit" (pp. 83–85; extracts from *Son et musique*).

⁸Includes essay "On Indian Music." Inscription: "July 1983, To Mr. Scelsi, A Music Master, Love, Louise with many grateful thanks."

⁹Concert program from December 6, 1961 at the Odéon-Théâtre de France. Helga Pilarczyk, soprano; Louis Jacques Rondeleux, bass; Maria Bergmann and Yvonne Liorod, piano; Pierre Boulez, conductor. Program included Schoenberg's Suite, Op. 29, Serenade, Op. 24, and *Pierrot lunaire*, Op. 21.

¹⁰Program booklet from the world premiere of Scelsi's *Ohoi* (1967), performed by l'Orchestre de Chambre de Radio-France.

¹¹French Journal. Includes Scelsi's autobiography for Salabert and complete *Son et Musique* (both in French).

East-West Music: La Monte Young, Phil Glass, T. R. Mahalingam, Charlemagne Palestine, Pandit Pran Nath, T. N. Ramachandra Iyer, Terry Riley. Rome: L'Attico, 1974.¹²

Fano, Fabio, ed. *La camerata fiorentina: Vincenzo Galilei 1520?–1591: La sua opera d'artista e di teorico come espressione di nuove idealità musicali.* Milan: Ricordi, 1934. Vol. 4 of *Istituzioni e monumenti dell'arte musicale italiana.*

Fedeli, Vito, ed. *Le cappelle musicali di Novara dal secolo XVI a' primordi dell'ottocento.* Vol. 3. Milan: Ricordi, 1933. Vol. 3 of *Istituzioni e monumenti dell'arte musicale italiana.*

Gregorat, Claudio. *L'expérience spirituelle de la musique.* Translated by Michèle Mathieu. Serie Art, no. 7. Paris: Triades, 1980.

Guàccero, Domenico, ed. *Di Franco Evangelisti e di alcuni nodi storici del tempo.* Rome: Nuova Consonanza, 1980.

Heimbächer, Irmela Evangelisti, and Ennio Are, eds. and trans. *I Lieder di Hugo Wolf.* Introduction by Margaretha Saary. Rome: Istituto della Voce, 1985.

The Indo-Asian Culture. Vol. 11, no. 2, October 1962.

Key Notes, no. 6: Donemus Foundation, 1977.

La Biennale di Venezia: 33° Festival internazionale di musica contemporanea. Venice, September 6–13, 1970.¹³

La nouvelle revue française. Vol. 110, February 1962.¹⁴

Lombardi, Daniele. *Il rumore del tempo: Un'antologia di segno/gesto/suono.* Florence: Centro Di, 1983.

Lombardi-Giordano, Clara, and Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan. *La signification du son.* Rome: L'ordre-Soufi centre de Rome, 1964.¹⁵

¹²Interviews, published for the Festival of East-West Music, Rome, June 3–17, 1974.

¹³Program booklet from the festival, which included the world premiere of Scelsi's *Konx-Om-Pax* on September 10, 1970, performed by the Zagreb Philharmonic and Chorus of the Zagreb Radio-Television, conducted by Mladen Basic. Scelsi's program notes: "*KONX OM PAX* è stato composto che si seguono quasi senza interruzione. Nella prima, la complessità crescente del suono centrale con i quarti di tono e gli armonici superiori ed inferiori che ne risultano, è evidente. Il Suono è il primo movimento dell'Immobile. Nella seconda il Suono, ove riposa la potenza cosmica, si sveglia, lascia allora la sua condizione di statico equilibrio e diventa una forza dinamica creatrice che nulla arresterà. Nella terza, il suono si manifesta con la sillaba *OM*, il Suono totale, che con i suoi armonici, ripresi infine anche del coro, abbraccia la sinfonia dell'Universo poiché *OM* significa la Verità Impersonale. Giacinto Scelsi." The program notes also provide basic biographical information, probably taken from the 1954 Grove article by Felix Aprahamian.

¹⁴Includes André Pieyre de Mandiargues's "Une musique monophone" (pp. 342–343), a review of Scelsi's *Quattro pezzi* for chamber orchestra, performed in Paris.

- Lucciano, Anna-Martine. "Jani Christou: Oeuvre et personnalité d'un musicien grec de notre temps." M.M. thesis, Université de Provence I, Aix-Marseille, 1983.
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¹⁶Includes a letter from Scelsi to Mollia (p. 254), with corrections in pen: "Anahhit, Paul Zukofsky, "intende ^{ciò} spiega [ciò is added]."

¹⁷Journal founded by Louis Pauwels. This issue includes Lorenzo Ferrero's article, "La fabbrica dei suoni" (pp. 11–22), on electronic music (especially in Italy) and its relation to the problems of contemporary music.

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Source: Music of the Avant Garde. Vol. Issue no. 2.²¹

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¹⁸Numerous highlights in red and regular pencil.

¹⁹Concert on 3 October included Scelsi's *Pranam* performed by Hirayama, Curran, et al.

²⁰Journal. Includes article by Jean-Pierre Dautun and Eric Antoni on pp. 276–287, "Scelsi ou la presence." The authors report on several days they spent in Rome with Scelsi.

²¹Anthology of scores, including music by John Cage, Morton Feldman, Harry Partch, Alvin Lucier, Alvin Curran, Gordon Mumma, David Tudor, Ben Johnston, and Toshi Ichiyanagi.

²²Performance of Scelsi's *Pranam I* on 11 May 1977. Performance notes by Alvin Curran on pp. 33–34: "I was asked to speak about Giacinto Scelsi whose music is to be performed in this year's Zagreb Biennale. As we are good friends and mutual admirers, I went to see him in the hope that he would provide me with some fundamental information about himself and his music. He was extremely reluctant at this request and all I obtained, practically, was this drawing (see drawing) [Scelsi's Q]. So from the very start he made it quite clear: he does not give interviews or photos nor does he ever send program notes. In short, he does not speak about himself at all. He'd rather that his music isn't played, than to have to submit himself to writing about it or providing his photographed image. In fact, when the Royan Festival questioned his obstinate position and referring to the drawing asked, 'What is this all about, it's so difficult to understand,' Scelsi replied that looking at this design is the same as looking at him. To some it may call to mind a zen

Religion, Philosophy, and Spiritualism

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symbol, or an ideographic sketch of a sunset or sunrise, it could also be a big zero underlined. Scelsi would likely agree with all these interpretations. Furthermore he claims he does not compose at all and shuns the very title 'composer' noting that the word is derived from the Latin 'componere' which means putting one thing with another, and this he reasons is merely artisans work; and though this interpretation may be very fashionable in art nowadays, Scelsi feels he is not an artisan at all, but merely an intermediary between two worlds—a sort of 'mailman' as he quaintly puts it. This, then, explains his peculiar antipathy for program notes and publicity in general, since for him, 'one should not care about the mailman but only the mail.' So what is there to say about him? He's an elderly man, small in stature with thinning white hair and piercing blue eyes. He gets irritated if asked personal questions but otherwise is quite courteous and kind."

²³Numerous highlights in colored pencil, especially in the first half of the book.

²⁴Signed by Scelsi. Includes some highlights in pencil and red pencil. Also a second copy, same edition but slightly different cover, also signed by G. Scelsi and with some penciled highlights.

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⁴⁶Inscription: "Per Giacinto, compaesno di Altri Paesi, il suo Vieri."

⁴⁷Pencil highlights in works by Pierre-Jean Jouve.

⁴⁸Highlights on pp. 160–163. On p. 55 the following is underlined: "when a thought occurs to your mind, do not follow it outwards, but turn inwards on yourself."

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⁵⁰Inserted within this book were the following maps, rather lacking in detail and apparently clipped from newspapers: Egypt, India/Burma, area of Moscow down to Stalingrad, Northern Egypt, Caucas mountain range up to Stalingrad, Morocco/Algeria/Tunisia, Belgium/Holland, Australia/New Zealand, Western USSR (including Leningrad, Moscow, Ukraine), Caucas mountain range up to Stalingrad and a bit beyond, Burma, Borneo/Indonesia/New Guinea, Malaysia, Western USSR.

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⁵¹ Photocopied pages from something originally published as *Divers traités de piété* (Cologne, 1666). Also a typed copy on 7 pages. At the top is the typed name "Blaise Pascal."

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⁵²The author was a member of Scelsi's family: "Francesco d'Ayala Valva, Cavaliere di Grazia e Devozione del Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta."

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