MUSIC AND SPIRITUALITY

THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES, EMPIRICAL METHODS, AND CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

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10. The Concept of 'Atmosphere' as a Bridge between Music and Spirituality

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Although we naturally intuit a close relationship between music and spirituality, it is difficult to specify exactly in what it consists. The concept of 'atmosphere', as developed by authors such as Hermann Schmitz, Gernot Böhme, and Tonino Griffero can help here. It is about a feedback relationship with the environment, about feeling and reacting to the mood and its reciprocal effects. It is thus a matter of integrative interaction between the subject and the environment: in the case of music, it will be the experience of being composer, performer, or listener; in the case of spirituality, it will be a spiritual experience, involving and connecting the subject with spiritual reality (in a religious key or not). In both cases, there is a synaesthetic synthesis of cognition and feeling, perception and activity. This brings us to the common structure of spiritual and musical experiences, which turns out to be a unique and transformative participation in something that transcends matter. The notion of atmosphere adds a new dimension to metaphors and symbols attempting to describe both musical and spiritual experience. It evokes new areas of meaning, already present in the scholarly literature on both domains, but now integrable. These areas include concepts such as mood, presence, inhabitation, and landscape. Their meaning takes on a new quality, moving symbolism into the realm of concrete experiences. Speaking finally of atmosphere, the discourse on music and spirituality itself moves from the purely descriptive sphere

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into the realm of experience, shedding new light on its specificity and effects. Consequently, one can speak of a reinterpretation for spirituality and theology of such key concepts as the body, incarnation, and transformation (conversion). Music can help us to understand and express such concepts more effectively.

I. The Definitions of 'Atmosphere'

Let us first clarify what is meant by the term 'atmosphere' in these deliberations, especially when we want to apply it to aesthetic issues. Böhme, the pioneer of atmosphere research, observes:

> The introduction of "atmosphere" as a concept into aesthetics should link up with the everyday distinctions between atmospheres of different character. Atmosphere can only become a concept, however, if we succeed in accounting for the peculiar intermediary status of atmospheres between subject and object.[1]

Its natural linguistic connotation plays an important role in understanding the concept. Gumbrecht and Butler note:

> English offers 'mood' and 'climate'. 'Mood' stands for an inner feeling so private it cannot be precisely circumscribed. 'Climate', on the other hand, refers to something objective that surrounds people and exercises a physical influence. Only in German does the word connect with *Stimme* and *stimmen*. The first means 'voice', and the second 'to tune an instrument'; by extension, *stimmen* also means 'to be correct'. As the tuning of an instrument suggests, specific moods and atmospheres are experienced on a continuum, like musical scales. They present themselves to us as nuances that challenge our powers of discernment and description, as well as the potential of language to capture them.[2]

As can be seen, in addition to the original etymological meaning of the term 'atmosphere', it also carries a strong musical component, which is present in the German term *Stimmung*. This term technically denotes a tuning but, in a wider sense, suggests a mood, an ambience;

1 Gernot Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 12.

2 Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature*, trans. by Erik Butler (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 3.

for instance, it gestures towards a kind of congruence, a harmony that can arise between two subjects, between two objects, or between an object and a subject. Here the first meaning of 'atmosphere', a meaning simultaneously spiritual and ethical, is revealed: the experience of closeness, or at least the search for it; the possibility—or perhaps rather the longing—for intimacy. As Gumbrecht notes,

> The yearning for *Stimmung* has grown, because many of us—perhaps older people, above all—suffer from existence in an everyday world that often fails to surround and envelop us physically. Yearning for atmosphere and mood is a yearning for presence—perhaps a variant that presupposes a pleasure in dealing with the cultural past. To quell this yearning, we know, it is no longer necessary to associate *Stimmung* and harmony.[3]

This musical dimension of 'atmosphere' is clearly present in Böhme's definition which, alongside tuning, refers to 'resonance':

> The atmosphere is henceforth a space with its own emotional tone, i.e. what suggests a certain impression here is a mood. That is, first of all, not as my mood, but rather as the arrival of a mood as something I perceive precisely by entering into a mood. We have thus identified a further peculiar element of atmospheres: they are dispositions of mind indefinitely extended in objective space. But there is also another experience of atmospheres, one that is based on discrepancy. What is meant here is that because of an atmosphere I experience an urge to turn to a different disposition of mind from the one I am in. ... This is an experience that has something paradoxical about it if one wants to understand the perception of atmospheres as a kind of resonance phenomenon.[4]

Thus, the 'atmosphere' necessarily has both an ethical and a spiritual dimension, located in the 'in-between' space explored ever more boldly and fruitfully by philosophers and theologians.[5] It is the space where

3 Ibid., p. 20.

4 Gernot Böhme, *Atmosfere, estasi, messe in scena. L'estetica come teoria generale della percezione* (Milano: Marinotti, 2010), p. 84.

5 See, for example, William Desmond, *Being and the Between* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995); William Desmond, *God and the Between* (Hoboken, NJ: Willey-Blackwell, 2008); William Desmond, *Ethics and the Between* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001); Carl F. Starkloff, *A Theology of the In-Between: The Value of Syncretic Process* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press 2002).

our relationships and interactions are born, and consequently it locates our emotions and our 'being-in-the-world'. Not coincidentally, Böhme refers to Martin Heidegger:

> Specifically, I am referring to Heidegger's view of temporality as a constitutive feature of atmospheres and moods. To explain what he means by *Stimmung*, Heidegger writes of 'fear' and 'anger', 'hope', 'joy', 'enthusiasm', 'cheer', and 'boredom'. Then he declares, somewhat surprisingly, that analysis of these different moods will lead to a particularly profound understanding of the 'thrownness' of human existence—that is, to a position between 'ecstatic' dimensions of time: a future that has nothing to offer but 'nothing', and the past, which, as 'tradition', has always already limited and determined what we may do in the present. Answering the question—'What do the various *Stimmungen* have to do with "time"?'—Heidegger seeks to show how, in different ways, they are all formed by something belonging to the existential dimension of the past.[6]

In this sense, atmospheres are unavoidable ways of our being in the world and contacting it, as well as the world's effect on us.

Böhme then distinguishes five 'generators' of atmospheres:

> a) the states of mind produced by so-called 'mise-en-scène'; b) synesthesia, the effectiveness of which is explained on the example of Goethe's conception of the sensible and moral effects of colours (probably one of the main inspirational motifs of the entire Bohemian philosophy) and of the evocative as well as almost forgotten 18th-century reflections on the art of gardens; c) the motor impressions in the assumption of a precise pathic counterpart to the presence of forms and volumes; d) the social characters, arouse—be they power, wealth, elegance, etc.—especially by insignia and symbols—finally e) communicative characters, which include gestures, mimicry, timbre of voice, physiognomic traits in the broadest sense.[7]

Our emotions, impressions and interactions with the world are constituted on the basis of these five categories. They encompass a wide range of feelings and our entire psycho-physical structure. At the same time, there is a constant interplay between the appearance and the

6 Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung*, p. 92.
7 Böhme, *Atmosfere, estasi, messe in scena*, p. 22.

concreteness of our experiences, often with profound consequences.[8] In the paradoxical nature of its identity, atmosphere is akin to music, which also 'appears' (resounds) in a way that is difficult to define, but which leaves such a lasting mark on the heart and on life.[9]

Atmospheres allow us to feel the concreteness of the objects that surround us and the situations in which we find ourselves. They are in a sense, therefore, the natural tissue of human bonds. In this way, atmospheres become the core of all aesthetic experience, situating it simultaneously at the heart of all our relationships. Again, according to Böhme:

> The primary subject of sensuality is not the things you perceive, but what you feel—the atmospheres. When I step into a room, I am in some way tuned by that room. Its atmosphere is decisive for how I feel. Only when I am in the atmosphere, so to speak, will I also identify and perceive this or that object. Atmospheres, as they are felt in environments, but also in things or in people, are—this is my second thesis—the central theme of aesthetics.[10]

> Atmosphere as that which emanates from things and people, which fills spaces with affective tint, is at the same time that which the subject, by being in such and such a place, becomes aware of its own presence. With the basic theme of atmospheres, aesthetics becomes itself more than ever: The doctrine of aesthesis.[11]

Moreover, an atmosphere is born between the objective and the subjective—yet another dimension of the 'in-between'!—both levelling and transforming them into a new quality. This is another of the spiritual dimensions of atmosphere: the experience of presence, which, while being something very personal, is at the same time always something very concrete. As Böhme argues:

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8 All that touches us affectively, that we feel threatening, depressing, moving, exciting, that involves us, all that is the world of appearances. But all of this in itself is also the world of mere appearance, the world of play, which only becomes something serious when it calls into question physical reality, which is also perceived as such. See Böhme, *Atmosfere, estasi, messe in scena*, p. 240.

9 This touches on the fractious subject of the identity of a musical work, cf. Roman Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of Its Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986).

10 Gernot Böhme, *Atmosphäre, Essays zur neuen Ästhetik* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013), pp. 15–16.

11 Böhme, *Atmosphäre*, p. 147.

> The atmospheres are thus conceived neither as something objective, namely properties that things have, and yet they are something thing-like, belonging to the thing, insofar as things are conceived through their properties as ecstasies—articulating the spheres of their presence. Atmospheres are still something subjective, such as determinations of a state of soul. And yet they are subjective, belong to subjects, insofar as they are felt in bodily presence by people and the feeling is at the same time a bodily feeling of the subjects' space.[12]

This presence seems to be nothing more than experiencing specific situations, occurring in different spaces and contexts.[13] The correlation of atmosphere to music is clear, as music is also a carrier of past emotions and memories, feeding on memory itself. And yet, music has been accompanying various situations since time immemorial, giving them colour, hues, flavour, and being, as it were, an organic component of their atmosphere. Böhme recognises this aspect as well:

> The term atmosphere originates from the logical realm and refers to the upper air envelope that is susceptible to weather. Only since the 18th century has it been used metaphorically, for moods that are 'in the air', for the emotional tone of a room. Today, this expression is common in all European languages, no longer seems artificial and is still regarded as a metaphor. One speaks of the atmosphere of a conversation, the atmosphere of a landscape, of a house or the atmosphere of a celebration, of an evening, of a season. Yet the way we talk about atmospheres is highly differentiated—even in everyday language. An atmosphere is tense, cheerful or serious, oppressive or uplifting, cold or warm. We also speak of the atmosphere of the petty bourgeoisie, the atmosphere of the 1920s, the atmosphere of poverty.[14]

Another dimension of the encounter between music and atmosphere is the way it interacts with space: filling it, managing it, and thus making sense of it. Our lives run in specific places. Various situations and encounters also have specific spatial contexts, both coloured by and through them. Our every presence has a spatial character. For Schmitz,

12 Ibid., pp. 33–34.

13 Ibid., p. 167: 'Voice is the atmospheric presence of something or someone, it is one of the dimensions in which something or someone emerges from itself and the atmosphere in the environment is essentially emotionally tinged. In contrast to verbal forms of expression, it is highly individual, so that the atmosphere it determines can be described and recognised as one's own'.

14 Ibid., pp. 101–02.

atmosphere *occupies* space in a way that gives articulation to both positive and negative experiences:

> Feelings are spatially poured atmospheres and bodily gripping powers. What is meant here by 'atmosphere', 'spatial' and 'bodily' must first be specified. I refer to the occupation of a space or area without surface in the realm of experienced presence as atmosphere. I speak of occupation instead of fulfilment so that there is also room for an atmosphere of emptiness.[15]

Another way to speak of this kind of space is in the latent yet constant search for safe places to live, to 'be at home', even when continually wandering from one place of residence to another; a constant longing to be rooted. Space is necessary, moreover, for a musical phenomenon to exist. Without it, there is no resonance. Our well-being, the first direct and often intuitive effect of the atmosphere, is precisely linked to the experience of space, either positively or negatively. Every concrete space in which man finds himself, be it outer space or inner space, has as such a certain character of emotional tonality (*Stimmung*); it has, so to speak, its own human qualities which, in turn, condition, among other things, the form of the most elementary determinations, the experiences of narrowness and vastness of a certain space.[16]

There is no experience of space without a concrete experience of the body. The body is the axis of every experience of atmosphere. It is the body that allows all the aforementioned generators of atmosphere to function. Atmosphere allows us to feel our own body concretely, in all its rich context. For Griffero, this means that 'to perceive the atmospheric always means to co-perceive (pre-categorically, synesthetically, kinesthetically) one's own affective own-body situation and to ascertain how one feels in a certain place by means of a bilateral perception that has nothing metaphorical about it'.[17]

Another musical dimension of atmosphere is also worth mentioning: the so-called 'soundscape'. The sounds around us, to which we have become so accustomed that we no longer notice them, are an important component of the atmosphere of the places in which we live, be they

15 Hermann Schmitz, *Atmosphaere* (Freiburg/München: Karl Alber, 2014), p. 30.
16 Tonino Griffero, *Atmosferologia. Estetica degli spazi emozionali* (Sesto San Giovanni, MI: Mimesis Edizioni, 2017), p. 849.
17 Ibid., p. 3009.

voices from the street, birds singing in the forest, bells from a distant church, or, even, the footsteps or other sounds of life of the neighbours living one floor above us. Böhme describes it thus:

> What is generally true for atmospheres is an everyday reality for acoustic atmospheres: The characters of a space are responsible for how one feels in a space. In the meantime, it has been discovered that the feeling of home is essentially conveyed by the sound of a region and that the characteristic feeling of a lifestyle, of an urban or rural atmosphere is essentially determined by the respective acoustic space.[18]

Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer popularised the term 'soundscape', and regularly used immersive environments in his compositions. As Schafer explains:

> The keynote sounds of a given place are important because they help to outline the character of men living among them. The keynote sounds of a landscape are those created by its geography and climate: water, wind, forests, plains, birds, insects and animals. Many of these sounds may possess archetypal significance; that is, they may have imprinted themselves so deeply on the people hearing them that life without them would be sensed as a distinct impoverishment. They may even affect the behaviour or life style of a society.[19]

Therefore, in many musical works, the soundscape resonates in a variety of ways. Many composers besides Schafer have admitted to being inspired by it. After all, it can be the hallmark of their national and cultural identity. Filtered through their personality, it becomes the basis of a unique personal style, well distinguishable, at once local and universal.

II. The 'Atmospheric' Dimension of Music

As we have seen, atmospheres are closely related to music. However, music itself can also be a source of atmosphere. Atmosphere is a part of the nature of music, both in music's connection to and in its participation in life. This bond between music and life is written into the structure of

18 Böhme, *Atmosphäre*, p. 267.

19 R. Murray Schafer, *Soundscape. Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1977), p. 245.

atmosphere; it is, as it were, its genetic code. Increasingly, one could say that music is being consciously used to generate atmosphere in order to 'help life' and to make the various situations in which we find ourselves more easy or more pleasant. This is a phenomenon well known to music psychologists. They recognise that 'people can play mental songlists to alter mood, including in difficult conditions such as isolation or during extreme stress'.[20] The imagination is involved, which in turn 'draws' other areas of our personality and psyche into the musical experience. In this sense, everything that happens during the resounding of music has its repercussions in the imagination and, consequently, in our perception of the atmosphere. As Rolf Godøy suggests, 'we may assume that there are variable degrees of acuity in such mental images, for example, that they may be vague recollections of overall "sound" or "mood" of large-scale works, or they may be salient images of particular details'.[21]

Atmosphere in music, then, is mainly the fruit of imagination, which naturally links our musical perception with extra-musical reality. This is how emotions similar to those brought about by the various 'non-musical' situations of our lives are born. Music visualises this emotional dimension of the atmosphere:

> The contrast between the emotion or mood that music induces in listeners, and the emotion a listener understands some musical performance to express, is complicated by the fact that the listener also often gets a certain satisfaction from the music whatever emotion it is conveying. Furthermore, such satisfaction occurs even when nothing that could be called an emotional state is felt or understood by the listener.[22]

Let us try to identify, therefore, a provisional taxonomy of the atmospheric dimensions of music. These atmospheric dimensions would include: a) tonality (modality); b) the event of performance (and particularly the relationship between performer and listener); and c) the role of the title and of the biography of the composer or performer in musical perception.

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20 Andrea R. Halpern, 'Foreword', in *Music and Mental Imagery*, ed. by Matts B. Küssner, Liila Taruffi, and Georgia A. Floridou (London & New York: Routledge, 2023), pp. xviii-xx (at xix).

21 Rolf Inge Godøy, 'Intermittent Motor Control in Volitional Musical Imagery', in *Music and Mental Imagery*, ed. Küssner, pp. 42–53 (at 46).

22 Siu-Lan Tan, Peter Pfordresher, and Rom Harré, *Psychology of Music: From Sound to Significance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 264.

(a) Tonality (Modality)

Since the beginning of musical history, the sound material from which a piece of music was created—scales, modes, or tonalities—has always played a fundamental role in musical expression, especially in Europe. Two salient examples are the scales of ancient Greece[23] as well as the modes of Gregorian chant.[24] Aware of the expressive potential and ethos of scales from other musical traditions as well, and of the fact that this is an area for further exploration, we will limit our considerations to Gregorian modality, illustrating thereby how much the strictly musical structure intermingles with various aspects of our lives in the phenomenon of the mode.

At this point, the peculiar 'problematic nature' of Gregorian chant must be mentioned. We know it today mainly from reconstructions created initially in monastic circles (as at Solesmes Abbey) and now in the studios of lay singer-musicologists. Gregorian chant, steeped in various myths, is, therefore, an area of constant research.[25] Nevertheless, its modal dimension, which we would like to address, seems to be the element of expression that has survived rather unchanged through the various turbulences of history, and especially in the face of the turmoil over its identity that has taken place in recent decades.[26]

23 Curt Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World. East and West* (New York: Dent, 1943), pp. 216–72; Thomas J. Mathiesen, 'Harmonia and Ethos in Ancient Greek Music', *The Journal of Musicology* 3.3 (1984), 264–79.

24 Jean Claire, 'Évolution modale des antiennes provenant de la corde-mère DO', *Revue grégorienne* 41 (1963), 49–62; Jean Claire, 'Évolution modale des antiennes provenant de la corde-mère MI', *Revue grégorienne* 41 (1963), 77–102; Jean Claire, 'L'évolution modale dans les répertoires liturgiques occidentaux', *Revue grégorienne* 40 (1962), 196–211, 229–45; Alberto Turco, *Il canto gregoriano. Toni e modi* (Rome: Edizioni Torre d'Orfeo, 1996); Daniel Saulnier, *Les modes grégoriens* (Solesmes: Éditions de Solesmes, 1997).

25 See Enrico Correggia, 'Inaudite banalità sul Canto Gregoriano: ovvero della necessità di osservare sempre le piccole ovvietà', in *VII Ciclo di Studi Medievali. Atti del Convegno 7–10 giugno 2021* (Florence: NUME, 2021), pp. 623–27. About the reconstruction of Gregorian chant, see Marcel Pérès and Jacques Cheyronnaud, *Les voix du plain-chant* (Paris: Desclé de Brouwer, 2001); Fulvio Rampi and Alessandro *De Lillo*, *Nella mente del notatore. Semiologia gregoriana a ritrorso* (Rome: Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019).

26 Bernard Sawicki, 'Chorał gregoriański—dziedzictwo coraz bardziej ... problematyczne?', *Teofil* 1.41 (2024), 81–105 (at 105): 'Looking at the complicated status of chant and the ambiguous perception of its identity today, it is impossible not to feel a sense of concern. Despite the many activities in the various fields

A scale (modus) is a group of sounds characterised by the distinction of at least one of them as central, and by a specific configuration of intervals. It is the arrangement of these intervals that determines the expressive and, therefore, the emotional profile of works based on any given scale. These intervallic arrangements have their own characteristics, style—or, using today's terminology, tonality. In fact, today's Western tonalities are derived from the modal system; although, due to their even temperament, they do not differ in the arrangement of intervals, they have their own character, not to say 'colour', which is felt by many musicians.[27] The modal ethos is thus an expression of synaesthesia, one aspect, as we noted above, of the atmosphere.

Let us investigate what constitutes the atmospheric dimension of the modus by analysing a description of the first of the Gregorian modes:

> It is described as *gravis*, which means heavy, serious. After all, there is more maturity and responsibility in it than overwhelming heaviness. It has something of dignity and nobility about it. It is reflective, but also full of energy. It expresses piety without sentimentality. It befits great things, though it is far from pompous. There is much grandeur in it, but also richness, as well as inner depth. There is something solid and reliable about it — dependability and certainty, groundedness in what is important, adult and credible, momentum and solemnity. It is not lacking in brilliance, but also in persuasiveness, often leading to enthusiasm.
>
> The compositions resounding in this tone are an expression of clearly stated principles, as well as an accompanying awareness of the ever-present tensions in life. The basic polarity marking the character of this tone is always a sharply delineated fifth *re - la*. According to Ansermet's

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of chant, it is difficult to see its future clearly. Perhaps we should rejoice in the fact that it has not disappeared after all, that it invariably inspires and seeks new ways and forms of existence? It remains a legacy, but... whose legacy? There is a problem here too. "Certainly it remains the Roman liturgy's own chant" (SSC 116), but in practice banished from it, it is constantly being rediscovered as a heritage of European culture and spirituality, and even world culture and spirituality'.

27 See, for example: Chris Caton-Greasley, 'A Mapping Between Musical Notes and Colours', *Stalybridge Music Academy*, 20 June 2020, https://www.stalybridgemusicacademy.com/post/colours-and-keys; Katie Gutierrez, 'The Colors of Music', *Bright Star Musical*, 24 October 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20221024225859/https://brightstarmusical.com/the-colors-of-music-do-musical-notes-have-color/. It works in both directions: Science of Colour, 'Tonality of Colors in Painting', *Science of Colour*, https://sites.google.com/site/scienceofcolour/tonality-of-colors-in-painting

typology,[28] the positional tension of the ascending fifth has an active extravertedness in its character, as it is carried by an active determination of the self to occur in the future. The descending fifth, on the other hand, appears as its immediate past, characterised by a positional tension that is passive and introverted in its reflexive return to itself and in its reference to the past only on the basis of its 'recognition'. The value of this tension is 1. The presence of the fifth is an expression of boldness and determination, of courageously looking the truth in the eye — including the truth about life, about the uneasy tension between its practice and theory, the starting point and the arrival point. Here we have a definite distinction between what is necessary and asked for and what is possible or what one would like. In comparison to the movement of the seconds, prevailing in chorale melodies, the intonation of the fifth requires effort and a greater concentration of imagination. This results in a kind of independence and greater internal coherence for it, compared to the relationship linking the notes that make it up to the other notes of the scale. It is also not surprising that the intonation of the ascending fifth, typical of the first tone, is usually marked by a single emphatic mark (*pes*).

The stability and predictability of this tone is due to the embedding of the *finalis* sound between notes a whole tone away from it (*do* and *mi*). The dominant, on the other hand, is ambivalent in character. Depending on whether there is a *si* (B) sound over it (and thus distant by a whole tone), or *sa* (B flat distant by a semitone), it can lean upwards (usually even towards the *do* sound) or gravitate towards the *finalis*.

In such an arrangement, the role of the *finalis* as both base and target point is reinforced. The possibility of deviating from stability or shaking it up always brings a semitone. In the first tone, it appears exactly midway between the *finalis* and the dominant. Thus, it cannot directly affect either of the two, but remains an expressive quality in its own right. However, it never manages to be able to surpass the expressive power of the *la-sa* semitone, if it appears in the melody, as well as — although to a much lesser extent — the *si-do* semitone. Everything in the first tone — is therefore forced to revolve around this crucial and unshakeable fifth of the *re-la*. Certainty and decisiveness are firmly at their basis here. Combined with the expressive liveliness of the aforementioned semitones adding to this fifth, they give an image of positive seriousness and boldness without audacity. This is music of conscious planning, of good discernment of one's own possibilities, of a vision concretely supported. Everything

28 Cf. Ernest Ansermet, *Les fondments de la musique dans la conscience humanie et autres écrits* (Paris: Robert Lafont, 1989), pp. 491–502.

> is under control, however, allowing some elements of freedom (the movement and striving of the semitones). Hence a sense of security, peace and even trusting and responsible love. There is a mobilizing and dynamiting festivity in this tone, a kind of opening towards great things.[29]

In this description, many images and metaphors carry unambiguous emotional associations: heaviness, seriousness, tension, bold determination, and so on. They outline a particular attitude, which has a clear ethical dimension. In this way, the configurations of the intervals and their relationships become a network of metaphors: 'swollen', or rather saturated, with life. In a medieval treatise by William of Auxerre, the meaning and atmosphere of the first modus grows out of the symbolism of the number of that modus (the number 1). This extends beyond a purely musical sense, and undoubtedly alludes to the Pythagorean tradition according to which numerals express the harmony and sense of music:

> The first tone can allude to the semantic area of the beginning, of the origin and, in fact, we can highlight four allegorical references which express just that. Two of them use the neuter noun *principium* which sees *primus* in its etymology, one sees the use of alpha and a further the same *primus*. Of these, three are clearly Christological and see the principle associated with the antithetical counterpart, i.e. with the end: *principium et finis*, *primus et nouissimus* and *alpha et omega*. The remainder, of a moral nature, sees conversion as the *principium*, the starting *locus* of the good life The first tone can also symbolize the day of the Resurrection. In fact, we find in three points a precise connection to the first day after Saturday: *mane prima sabbati*, *prima die* and *valde mane*. Finally, we meet two further temporal references symbolized by the *protus authenticus*. William, in fact, associates it both with the first Resurrection, that which, as Augustine also explains, belongs to souls, both at an early age, that is, still according to Augustinian presentation, infancy.[30]

Symbols, especially numerical symbols, are the natural language of theology. Through abstraction, they are able to transcend the natural limitation of matter—be it linguistic, conceptual or, as in our case, musical. Thus, the very structure of the musical matter (scale, modus),

29 Bernard Sawicki, *W chorale jest wszystko* (Kraków: Tyniec Wydawnictwo Benedyktynów, 2014), pp. 102–03. English translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

30 Claudio Campesato, *Allegoria modale* (Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2021), pp. 86–88.

if put in order, gives place to numbers that give it a higher meaning and introduce a corresponding atmosphere.

We have deliberately quoted these lengthy descriptions of the first Gregorian modus to demonstrate the multi-layered nature of its atmosphere. Most importantly, everything grows out of a pure configuration of sounds and the interval relationships between them. The rest, through associations with life, is completed by the imagination.

(b) The Event of Performance

As for the impact of the work itself, that is, the interaction with the listener that takes place over the perceptual space, this is not as easily grasped as the structure and sonic configurations of the scale. It has the character of personal, subjective sensations and feelings, often difficult to express. We can be helped in documenting such impressions by literature and texts that are devoted exclusively to music. They are not few in number, and usually describe the author's impressions of listening to or perceiving a particular work.

Here follow three such examples of the transfer, or rather the rendering, of musical atmosphere in literary prose. The first dates from over half a century ago and is a description of one of Frédéric Chopin's special works, the Barcarolle in F-sharp major, Op. 60. We are dealing here more with the atmosphere of the work itself rather than of a specific performance:

CHOPIN'S BARCAROLLE

> Some works of art give the impression of greatness because they enclose something unknown and undefinable, which acts on man in a liberating way, communicating to him with another world, the existence of which we would not know if the works of certain artists did not become such a revelation. The elements that cause such a revelation can also sometimes be other aesthetic or artistic things: nature or a work of craftsmanship. It is extremely difficult for an artist, and even more so for a critic, to notice and capture and finally recreate this element that opens up the spaces of artistic revelations; Proust's description of church towers (*les clochers de Martain-ville*) is unforgettable in this respect, which — suddenly appearing during a horse walk against the sky purple from the west — become for the artist a discovery of his world and his ability to feel, leading to creativity. What is this element that the author puts

> into the work so that it penetrates us with fear and longing? Is it only fear and longing, as Spengler means it? Anxiety created in the pre-existence of genus, when the murmur of an unfamiliar stream or the sight of an unfamiliar tree on the horizon evoked deep traumas in the primitive soul, traumas implanted in our genus and awakened to this day in the artist, terrified by an unfamiliar sight? It is a longing... but for what? To the paradise from which we were expelled, or to impossible realizations, or to a sense of community and oneness with people or with God? Where to look for explanations, we do not know, and we search in vain. Neither Nietzsche nor Spengler nor Proust explain this to us. At most, they can point us to certain phenomena taking place in artists and through their works that affect us, the listeners; inexplicably frightening us, *pavor nocturnus*. It is a fear that fills us with sweetness, like the thought of walking on dark water on a summer night. Imagine a black sheet of water and stars above the water and clouds, all immersed in the night as in a great day, distant and taking away our sense of reality. Echoes of childhood expeditions will now resound in us, be it delayed walks in the woods or unnecessary stops by dark water; or simply sitting on the front porch as the nightingale sings in the shadows, the frogs croak, the fragrant 'night ornaments' open as witnesses to the unknown nocturnal activities taking place beyond us. Those old memories, and then the fears of youth, when we first become aware of the power and omnipresence of the eternal night, we notice in this night passing in the mirror of water, in everything that surrounds us. It detaches our body from us, and we remain disembodied as our boat floats noiselessly over the ink. The murmur of trees set like shadows on the edges reaches us as a fragrance, rather a scent of leaves, soft and noisy, a greeting to that which is green by day and rustling by night. The nearby reeds do not tie us to the ground with their frail threads and we walk on water into nothingness. Everything is already in such a range that death ceases to bother us. Chopin's "Barcarolle" is more or less such a walk.[31]

This is a description of a certain existential state, which consists of a deep and multifaceted interaction with the environment caused by a particular interaction of imagination, memory, and reflection. This interaction has a great impact on the person experiencing it—both the listener and the performer: it opens new horizons, it engages, it transforms. It is thus the evident germ of an experience that goes beyond acoustic and artistic matter, thus acquiring a spiritual character.

31 Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, 'Barkarola Chopina', in Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, *Pisma muzyczne* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1958), pp. 522–27.

Atmosphere becomes an introduction to a deeper experience, permeating the whole person and even capable of permeating all of life. It helps to make the experience of the environment, the space around the listener, more profound and concrete. By inspiring the imagination, atmosphere gives this space a broader character that goes beyond the moment of listening to the piece. It is a space tinged with the emotions of relationships and related reflections. These are what give it meaning, colour, and flavour. Synaesthetic sensory experiences lead to interaction, leaving a lasting, transformative mark on the heart. The structure of the musical experience configures the imagination and the images and sensations that arise, collecting various memories from the past and catalysing them into an acoustic experience.

In the following examples, we are presented with descriptions of an imaginary piece, which, however, aptly capture the process of the interweaving of musical and imaginary experience leading to the creation of an atmosphere; namely, the experience of a specific extra-musical situation:

> How beautiful the dialogue which Swann now heard between piano and violin, at the beginning of the last passage! The suppression of human speech, so far from letting fancy reign there uncontrolled (as one might have thought), had eliminated it altogether; never was spoken language so inexorably determined, never had it known questions so pertinent, such irrefutable replies. At first the piano complained alone, like a bird deserted by its mate; the violin heard and answered it, as from a neighbouring tree. It was as at the beginning of the world, as if there were as yet only the two of them on the earth, or rather in this world closed to all the rest, so fashioned by the logic of its creator that in it there should never be any but themselves: the world of this sonata. Was it a bird, was it the soul, as yet not fully formed, of the little phrase, was it a fairy—that being invisibly lamenting, whose plaint the piano heard and tenderly repeated? Its cries were so sudden that the violinist must snatch up his bow and race to catch them as they came. Marvellous bird![32]

> The arietta theme, destined for adventures and vicissitudes for which, in its idyllic innocence, it seems never to have been born, is immediately called up and for sixteen bars says its piece, reducible to a motif that emerges toward the end of its first half, like a short, soulful cry-just

32 Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff (New York: Modern Library Edition, 1992), p. 481.

> three notes, an eighth, a sixteenth, and a dotted quarter, that can only be scanned as something like: 'sky of blue' or 'lover's pain' or 'fare-thee-well' or 'come a day' or 'meadow-land' — and that is all. But what now becomes of this gentle statement, this pensively tranquil figure, in terms of rhythm, harmony, counterpoint, what blessings its master bestows upon it, what curses he heaps upon it, into what darknesses and superilluminations, where cold and heat, serenity and ecstasy are one and the same, he hurls and elevates it-one may well call it elaborate, miraculous, strange, and excessively grand without thereby giving it a name, because in actuality it is nameless.[33]

Literature provides many such descriptions, aptly demonstrating the fecundity of music for our imagination and affectivity, the main components of atmosphere in exploration of the 'in-between' space, the sense of presence, the longing for rootedness, and the particular experience of one's own body. In this approach to music, we can simultaneously find the five 'generators' of atmosphere. The imagination develops and expands the landscape in which the atmosphere appears, thereby intensifying it. A synaesthetic sensory interaction with the environment interacts with this, organically linking to the motor response of the body. In this way, the experience of presence is concretised and communicated.

One does not necessarily need literary texts to portray the atmosphere associated with musical experience, although these too still play a great role; for instance, in Riku Ondas' *Honeybees and Distant Thunder*.[34] Communicating the atmospheric experience of music is most often done at the level of reviews or even short quotations from them. Here are some examples from two short review describing the pianism of a recent winner of the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition (2022), Yunchan Lim:

> The sighing phrases of the Dowland were transmuted into subtly coloured, immaculately voiced arcs, while the Bach miniatures were imaginatively dispatched with a different mood or temperament for each — jaunty, good-humoured, pensive and so forth — ending with a poignant reading of the F minor, with its anguished chromaticisms. (Barry Millington, *Evening Standard*)

33 Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, trans. by John E. Wood (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), p. 58.

34 Riku Ondas, *Honeybees and Distant Thunder* (New York: Doubleday, 2023).

> There was, in his performance of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3, the juxtaposition of precise clarity and expansive reverie; the vivid scenes and bursts of wit; the sense of contrasting yet organically developing moods; the endless and persuasive bendings of time—the qualities that tend to characterize night-time wanderings of the mind. (Zachary Woolfe, *New York Times*)[35]

The word 'mood' appears in both these descriptions, as well as associations with nature and space, and various metaphorical depictions of movement.

(c) The Role of Title and Biography

Musical works function in a broader historical, social. or cultural context. They are usually inextricably linked to their creator, so that when performing a piece — or even thinking about it — we naturally enter the space of the composer's life, conveyed through various stories that create a special and unique atmosphere around this figure and, in effect, their works. In a sense, the composer functions as a 'brand', signifying with its own character all its products, offering what in advertising is called a mood-board.

In the history of music, we have many examples of composers' biographies or even titles of works functioning in this way. They carry with them particular stories, associations, situations, emotions. For instance, the lives of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Schubert, or Frédéric Chopin demonstrate how genius is combined with the extraordinary fragility of the human condition, the difficulty of material situation, or the hostility of the environment. This creates an atmosphere of sensation and emotion at the same time, awe and horror, compassion and reflection. The atmosphere generated by a brilliant personality and his interaction with the world when creating masterpieces is interwoven through the history of mankind and art — from saints to artists to contemporary celebrities. The atmosphere evoked by one person can include a multiplicity of situations, their associated emotions engaging, attracting, and transforming at the same time. Perhaps this is why there is such a commitment to finding details

35 IMG Artists, 'Yuanchan Lim', *IMG Artists*, https://imgartists.com/roster/yunchan-lim/

from the lives of musicians, so that their creations take on a new and deeper human dimension.

This, then, is the all-important interaction of atmosphere with music. Growing out of life, it expresses itself in the sound configuration but then it is also needed so that the full meaning of this configuration can be understood. This is well illustrated by an episode from Glenn Gould's private, affective life accompanying his recording of Brahms' Intermezzi. If a listener is familiar with this episode, he or she can get a better feel for the atmosphere of these interpretations—and thus understand and absorb it better:

> Back in Toronto in 1959–60, Gould introduced Sandercock to what she would call her and Gould's music—Brahms' Intermezzi. It was an intimate, personal album he was preparing to record in New York, and he had only played samples of it in live concerts. 'We were at his St. Clair apartment one night when he played it all for me', Post said. 'He was going to New York the next day to record it and he was excited. When he finished playing, he said to me, "God, wasn't that sexy!" I thought to myself, "This music is mine!"' What she didn't realize was that the Chickering piano Gould used for the seductive music had once belonged to his former girlfriend Frances Batchen.
>
> Later he told an interviewer that he played the Intermezzi, 'as though I were really playing for myself, but left the door open ... I have captured, I think, an atmosphere of improvisation which I don't believe has ever been represented in a Brahms recording before'. Gould never said that Verna influenced his music, but he was usually slow to credit people and the influence they had on him. Critics noted that Gould's version of the Brahms Intermezzi created an atmosphere of nostalgia, intimacy and melancholy, although John Beckwith in the Toronto Daily Star dismissed it as 'supper music'.[36]

In listening to this recording and learning about Gould's story, we enter a space of something more than a purely musical experience—we are touched by the discreetly delineated intimacy of the artist and its unique expression. It thus becomes more concretely present to us, more moving.

At the same time, many 'in-between' spaces are activated—from the intimate, interpersonal one, to the one connecting the performer to the score, to the listener's reception. They all intertwine and interpenetrate

36 Michael Clarkson, *A Secret Life of Glenn Gould* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2010), pp. 83–84.

each other, creating a rippling web that delights, entwines and moves: here we feel that we are in front of something extraordinary, one of a kind, and we do not want to part with it. The music has to reverberate, of course, but its lasting imprint in the heart remains and we cannot help but return to it, and the atmosphere of this performance becomes part of us.

In such a perception of music, its extra-musical context—knowledge of the culture, life, history of the creator or works—plays an important role. At this point we become involved in the classical dispute between absolute and programmatic music, most intensified in the second half of the nineteenth century.[37] All human experience of music, however, needs to be hooked into a non-musical reality: the atmosphere. Therein lies the greatness and at the same time the irrevocably human character of music.

The historical, cultural, and biographical contextualisation of a musical work expands the palette of its perception, enriching it with a symbolic dimension. In this way, the atmosphere transcends a specific time and place, rooting the piece or musical experience in a wider area of social or national consciousness. From symbolism it is a short step to spirituality, which it provides a natural key. This establishes another link between atmosphere and spirituality, an example of which we have in Cyprian Norwid's poem describing Chopin's music:

> And then, when you played—what? said the tones—
> what? will they say,
> Though stand the echoes might in different array
> Than when your own hand's benediction made
> Quiver each chord your fingers played—
> And when you played, there was such simplicity—
> Periclean—perfection—sublime
> As if some Virtue from Antiquity
> Stepped into a country cottage's confine
> And on the simple threshold swore:
> 'This day in Heaven I was reborn:
> The cottage door—a harp to me;
> My ribbons—the winding lane;

37 See Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen. Ein Beitrag zur Revision der Aesthetik der Kunst* (Leipzig: Rudolph Weigel, 1865); Carl Dalhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

> The Holy Host—in the corn I venerate
> And Emmanuel will reign
> On Tabor incarnate!'[38]

Here we are presented with an eloquent depiction of a specific space—a country house, shrouded in the serene glow of the sky, which also becomes the setting for an Arcadian idyll. This is superimposed on a similar tonal image (sky glow, grain) of the Transfiguration of Jesus which, according to tradition, took place on Mount Tabor. In this case, the music, through the personal context of the composer (Polish countryside), opens up an atmosphere of not only spiritual, but also religious, mystical character. At the same time, all the spiritual atmospheric references of the previously presented musical atmospheres are present here. Being aware of their transience and complexity at the same time, we can now—carefully and gently—try to outline their spiritual orientation.

III. The Spiritual Overtones of Atmosphere

In the above descriptions one can perceive a transcending of the materiality of events and situations. The descriptions are evocative, emotionally saturated, and yet lead on somewhere beyond, directing the attention to a transcendent dimension. It is good to recognise and support this dimension today, otherwise music and the experience of it can be reduced to a background or a mere superficial stimulation of affectedness.[39] It is therefore useful to link atmospheres with the concept of spirituality. To do so, let us juxtapose different insights, more intuitive than scientific, with what we understand by 'spirituality'. We will refer here to Kees Waaijman's definition:

> 'Spirituality' is the basic word which has forced all other names for the field of spirituality into the background. The basic word 'spirituality'

38 Cyprian K. Norwid, 'Chopin's Grand Piano', trans. by Teresa Bałuk, *Visegrad Literature,* https://www.visegradliterature.net/works/pl/Norwid%2C_Cyprian_Kamil-1821/Fortepian_Szopena/en/1593-Chopin_s_Grand_Piano

39 On this, see, for example, Douglas Bachorik Jr, *Emotion in Congregational Singing: Music-Evoked Affect in Filipino Churches* (Durham, NC: Durham University Press 2019): 'the use of music for the creation of atmosphere, the attraction of a specific demographic of people, and a powerful sense of worship or an experience with God' (p. 89); 'the overall affective atmosphere of the church service' (p. 214).

> has a comprehensive semantic range: it embraces the divine and human spirit; overarches asceticism and mysticism; integrates biblical traditions (*ruach*) with Hellenistic intuitions (*nous*); exceeds the boundaries of religions and philosophies of life. The core process evoked by the term 'spirituality' is the dynamic relation between the divine Spirit and the human spirit.[40]

Thus, Waaijman identifies 'spirituality' with 'the rational process between God and man', adding that 'this relational process is understood as an intensive, purifying and unifying process of interiorisation (*kabbala,* inner life, mysticism)'. Waaijman also delineates three further features of the spiritual: first, 'the spiritual stands for a sphere of its own with language and logic of its own, one that exists in tension with the rational theology of universities and the instrumental rationality of Western culture'; second, 'the spiritual "way" includes the purification of one's faculties (intellect, will, memory) and the formation of one's conduct'; and, third, 'spirituality is situated in the intimacy of the relational process (*kabbala,* mysticism) and in the inwardness of the human spirit (inner life, spirituality); it withdraws itself from the external world: from public order and from objectivity'.[41] In these definitions, spirituality is firmly located in the various 'in-between' spaces, having as its task the dynamic integration of different polarities, permeating all the powers of the human personality, involving the whole person and influencing his or her behaviour.

One cannot deny that the concept of atmosphere functions best in the spirituality of religions based on personal contact with God. Not only does spirituality spring from such contact, but, in its own way, spirituality is an opportunity for the development of intimacy with God. In the case of music, its personal character is clear. At the same time, the concept of 'atmosphere' is not merely descriptive. It can have a practical dimension, stimulating both the musical or spiritual experience and at the same time facilitating its interpretation by opening it up, through synaesthesia, to the sensations and language of other arts.

The intimate relationship of presence in relation to a transcendent being—God—is the ultimate bearing of this spiritual experience. We

40 Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality. Forms, Foundations, Methods*, trans. by John Vriend (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2002), pp. 360–61.

41 Ibid., p. 364.

can therefore read the reality of the 'atmosphere' as a spiritual key, facilitating an opportunity to open up in a special way, and augmenting our sensitivity and hospitality with regard to meeting the Other and experiencing his presence to the fullest. In the broadest possible sense, this would not only be an encounter with another person, but also a deepened experience of the world and, ultimately, an encounter with God. Here, the common resonance of atmosphere and music, along with their mutual, inseparable relationship, can lead naturally toward the realm of mysticism, where it is not so much the atmosphere itself that matters, but the sheer, pure experience of presence in its deepest form: loving union. Then the full meaning and integrity of the 'musical matter', its historical, social, and cultural context and the workings of the imagination, are revealed. Then, perhaps, all questions about their interrelationship will find a final answer.