

The Imaginary Life of Nineteenth-Century Virtuosity

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ABSTRACT

Nineteenth-century virtuosity can be understood as a form of subjection under a musical law whose power could only be broken by hyperbolic responses of self-annihilating over-fulfilment of this law's relentless demands. Such excesses of the Romantic imagination (Hoffmann, Heine, Lyser, Andersen) had to be domesticated in Realism's responses to virtuosity (Stifter, Grillparzer).

Virtuosität kann im neunzehnten Jahrhundert als Unterwerfung unter ein musikalisches Gesetz begriffen werden, dessen Macht nur in zu Selbstausslöschung führender Übererfüllung zu brechen ist. Das für solch exzessive Visionen verantwortliche romantische Imaginäre (Hoffmann, Heine, Lyser, Andersen) musste geradezu in Virtuositäts Erzählungen des Realismus (Stifter, Grillparzer) domestiziert werden.

Paganini: N'accordait jamais son violon.
Célèbre par la longueur de ses doigts.¹

»Unsere Beziehung zum Virtuosen ist ambivalent«, writes Vladimir Jankélévitch. The virtuoso

begnügt sich nicht nur damit, das Werk zu interpretieren, er schafft es neu, unter solchen Bedingungen, die manchmal übernatürlich scheinen. Während der Dauer einer Sonate sind der Interpret und der Schöpfer nur noch einer. Daher empfinden wir zugleich Bewunderung und Groll: [...] wir werfen uns selbst unsere eigene Bewunderung vor; vielleicht ist der Virtuose ein Scharlatan, der uns zum Narren hält, ein Akrobat, der uns mystifiziert? Wir bewundern die Großtat und wollen keinen Sand in den Augen. Diese Ambivalenz resümiert im Grunde unsere Beziehungen zur Musik: wir werden durch sie in ihren Bann geschlagen und wir werfen dies ihr vor, beides zusammen.²

Nineteenth-century discourses on musical virtuosity can be characterised by their concern with the virtuoso as a *false artist*. Unfaithful to the composer's, or ›true‹ artist's, will, virtuoso musicians drew much criticism for being more obsessed with their own personality than with the immaterial realm of musical imagination. With Ludwig Tieck's publication in 1796 of Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder's *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*, musical immateriality ascended to the heights of art as substitute religion. »Wahrhaftig, die *Kunst* ist es, was man verehren muß, nicht den Künstler«, declares Wackenroder's exemplary musician Joseph Berglinger.³ Such views sat in direct

¹ Gustave Flaubert, *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, Paris 1966, 200.

² Vladimir Jankélévitch, Béatrice Berlowitz, *Irgendwo im Unvollendeten*, trans. Jürgen Brandel, Vienna 2008, 211–212.

³ Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, *Das merkwürdige musikalische Leben des Tonkünstlers Joseph Berglinger. In zwey Hauptstücken, Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Richard Littlejohns et al., Heidelberg 1991, I, 130–145, here: 141.

opposition to displays of virtuosity wherein the performer received the kind of admiration that only music itself was thought to deserve. E.T.A. Hoffmann's statement on the task of the musician continues this strand of thought:

Der echte Künstler lebt nur in dem Werke, das er in dem Sinne des Meisters aufgefaßt hat und nun vorträgt. Er verschmäh't es, auf irgend eine Weise seine Persönlichkeit geltend zu machen, und all sein Dichten und Trachten geht nur dahin, alle die herrlichen holdseligen Bilder und Erscheinungen, die der Meister mit magischer Gewalt in sein Werk verschloß, tausendfarbig glänzend ins rege Leben zu rufen, daß sie den Menschen in lichten funkelnden Kreisen umfängen und seine Phantasie, sein innerstes Gemüt entzündend, ihn raschen Fluges in das ferne Geisterreich der Töne tragen.⁴

Yet the line between performer and composer was seldom as clear-cut as these passages suggest. Virtuosi were often cunning composers, even if they wrote primarily for themselves, driven by the desire to showcase their specific skills in the best possible light. When playing or singing from an existing score, virtuosi achieved their greatest triumphs by blurring the boundaries between interpretation and invention, introducing variations on a scored theme. Without being notated, such performative events were in turn imitated, and transmitted between musicians. One of the most telling anecdotes in this regard is opera singer Henriette Sontag's personal version of the end of the Masks Trio in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, which was soon adopted by other sopranos across Europe. Asked by a conductor one day whether she had forgotten her part, she famously answered:

»No, Monsieur, I'm singing the Sontag version.«

»Oh, I see. But may I be so bold as to ask why you should prefer the Sontag version to the Mozart version, which is after all the one we are concerned with?«

»Because hers is better.«⁵

As we will see, lack of respect for the score opened up a fictional space just as potent as the »Geisterreich« of true music described by Hoffmann. This fictional space was triggered by musical performances that were inseparable from their reception and re-creation in the audience's imagination. Because of its complex yet under-researched impact on the cultural imagination, virtuosity has recently come into focus in cultural critical studies, and it is to this emerging discourse that my article contributes.⁶ The following investigations of journalis-

⁴ E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Beethovens Instrumental-Musik, Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Wulf Segebrect et al., Frankfurt a.M. 1993, II, 52–61, here: 61, quoted as »SW«, by volume and page number.

⁵ Alistair Bruce (ed.), *The Musical Madhouse: An English Translation of Berlioz's »Les Grottesques de la Musique«*, Rochester, NY 2003, 22–23. On the predominance in virtuosity of the performative event over authorial intention, see Gabriele Brandstetter, »The Virtuoso's Stage: A Theatrical Topos«, *Theatre Research International* 32/2 (2007), 178–195, here: 183–185.

⁶ See Hans-Georg von Arburt et al. (eds), *Virtuosität: Kult und Krise der Artistik in Literatur und Kunst der Moderne*, Göttingen 2006; Gabriele Brandstetter, Gerhard

tic and literary writings will engage with representations of virtuosity as a type of ›mastery‹ that relied on aesthetic, political, and psycho-social commitments. My enquiry aims to flesh out a polyvalence that has not yet been fully explored.

In the nineteenth century, this article argues, virtuosity was not just a performative phenomenon that impressed through outstanding skill. Its appeal also stemmed from a political unconscious that found expression in fantasies of power and submission. The virtuoso master was met by an audience that did not only accuse him of casting a charlatan's spell.⁷ First and foremost, the public *enjoyed being subdued*. Public fantasies thrived on a newly personalised type of aesthetic experience that I would like to call the ›virtuoso sublime‹, and which was epitomised in the performances of Nicolò Paganini. At a time where the representations of political life dramatically changed, the virtuoso sublime provided an outlet for the affective charges both of feudal power and of revolutionary uprising. Accordingly, what equally emerges from the written accounts is a public that, while positioning itself as receptive to a performance, concurrently also *enjoyed feeling powerful*. A reciprocal relationship was generated between audiences and performers that rested not so much on the public's experience of being empowered *by*, but *with* the artist, just as much as experiences of submission were less about being subjugated *by*, than *with* the one on stage.

Theodor Adorno produced the most acute definition of the dialectic that is at the heart of such processes of identification: »Virtuosität, die absolute Herrschaft als Spiel, verurteilt den Herrschenden zugleich zur vollkommenen Ohnmacht. In aller Virtuosität, auch der kompositorischen, bestimmt das Subjekt sich als bloßes Mittel und unterwirft dadurch verblendet sich dem, was zu unterjochen es sich vermisst«.⁸

The Romantic – or romanticising – visions of virtuosity that form the main site of my article follow this dialectic to its most radical endpoint. They explore a ›musical law‹ of difficulty and skill that gives shape to the »was« of Adorno's statement. In addition to the philosopher's focus on mastery and subjection, however, the textual examples introduce a third element. They give expression to a force that at once motivates and challenges Adorno's dialectic, and that might be best approached under the title of ›artistic drive‹. As will be shown, it was through representations of drive that musical law could be broken. But this was only possible by paradox, by hyperbolic responses of obedience and over-

Neumann (eds), *Genie, Virtuose, Dilettant: Konfigurationen romantischer Schöpfungsästhetik*, Würzburg 2011; Gabriele Brandstetter, Bettina Brandl-Risi, Kai van Eikels, *Szenen des Virtuosen*, Bielefeld 2013; Norbert Haas et al. (eds), *Virtuosität*, Eggingen 2007.

⁷ I am using the male form deliberately, as I will be focusing on male virtuosi in the first half of this article, while also addressing female virtuosi in the second half.

⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: Eine musikalische Physiognomik, Die musikalischen Monographien*, Frankfurt a.M. 1991, 149–317, here: 305–306.

fulfilment of law's relentless demands. Both self-aggrandising and self-annihilating, such performative responses to musical law generated figures of extinction and spectral return, as shall be explored below. It is here that the sublime topples over into the uncanny; that aesthetic experiences of terror move over into literary articulations of death drive. Thus while the virtuoso remains a sovereign if haunted – and haunting – figure in Heinrich Heine's and Johann Peter Lyser's recreations of popular myth, he (or she) is condemned to more explicit forms of self-destruction in E.T.A. Hoffmann and Hans Christian Andersen.⁹

Finally, the imaginary life of Romantic virtuosity reached such violent heights that forms of containment had to be found: as Franz Liszt's ultimately more controlled and charitable model superseded that of Paganini, and Clara Schumann came to be praised for a new type of pacified performance from the mid-century onwards, Adalbert Stifter and Franz Grillparzer formulate domesticated versions of musical obsession that encase and transform the phenomenon. Marked by melancholia about what was lost, but also offering to move outstanding skill into realms beyond the aesthetic, these authors eschew virtuosity's ostentatious displays on the public stage. They reconnect virtuosity to the ›virtue‹ at its etymological core by turning to private ethical acts of care of the self and of others; to acts no less extraordinary than the public ones that had powered their imagination. Yet their writings also *preserve* aspects of the otherness of a phenomenon that they sought to keep in check.

I.

How can we explain the effect of virtuoso performance? An exploration of nineteenth-century sources suggests that much more was at stake than music alone. A specific kind of what we now call charisma, both performative and discursive, surrounded the superlative musician. This charisma was nourished in a reciprocal relationship between the one on stage and the mass public. Let us begin by considering the legendary violinist Paganini as the prototypical early nineteenth-century virtuoso.¹⁰ At once celebrated and ripped apart in countless reviews, his fame would have been unthinkable without the rapidly increasing power of the press.¹¹ The production of journal and newspaper articles on Paganini's concerts, on his life, his physique, and the legends that surrounded

⁹ Hans-Georg von Arburg considers such ›radical decentring of the subject‹ one of the most surprising aspects of the discourse on virtuosity, see ›Einleitung‹, in: Arburg (note 6), 7–15, here: 15.

¹⁰ For historical and biographical approaches to Paganini's career, see Geraldine I. C. de Courcy, *Paganini, the Genoese*, 2 vols, Norman 1957; Alan Kendall, *Paganini: A Biography*, London 1982; Paul Metzner, *Crescendo of the Virtuoso: Spectacle, Skill, and Self-Promotion in Paris during the Age of Revolution*, Berkeley 1998. For a musicological perspective, see Camilla Bork, ›Überbietungen: Zu einem Hand-

him came to its peak during his European tour from 1828 to 1835. The following journal article by Christian Karl André concluded Julius Max Schottky's 1830 *Paganini's Leben und Treiben*. Together with Georg Harrys' travel journal and Carl Guhr's *Über Paganini's Kunst die Violine zu spielen* (equally 1830), Schottky's book was among the first publications on the artist. Here, André gives the most precise description of what seems to have constituted Paganini's specific charisma; he writes about the »soulfulness« of the violinist's play as follows:

Dieses Seelische ist es, was bei zarteren Gemüthern so unbeschreiblich einwirkt, was seinem Tone jene eigenthümliche Charakteristik gibt und deshalb unnachahmlich bleiben wird, weil er nur *seine* Seele reden lässt, nur *sein* Ich ausspricht. Er hat nämlich seine Violine zum Sprachorgan seiner innersten Empfindungen und seines eigenthümlichen Gemüths- und Bildungszustandes gemacht. [...]. Als jener [Virtuose, L.R.] spricht er auf seinem Instrumente eine Seelensprache, welche ihre Anklänge in andern dafür gestimmten Gemüthern wieder findet, von diesen, wenn auch nicht klar verstanden, doch dunkel gefühlt wird, und jenen tiefen, sonderbaren Eindruck, vorzüglich auf Frauenzimmer, macht, der eher wehmüthiger, als beruhigender, oder gar aufheiternder Natur ist, und bei welchem Einem etwas unheimlich zu Muth wird, wozu die eigene Persönlichkeit Paganini's wohl auch das Ihrige beitragen mag. Zwei sehr verständige Damen, wovon die eine als musikalische Kennerin anerkannt ist, versicherten mich, ohne voneinander zu wissen, dass sie auf die ange-deutete Art tief ergriffen und die ganze Nacht hindurch der erhaltenen Eindrücke nicht ledig werden konnten. Wer solches bewirken kann, ist ein höherer Künstler, insofern er durch seine Kunst, mit der er das Instrument beredt macht, den Zustand seines Gemüths auf ein anderes zu übertragen weiß.¹²

Paganini's charisma is defined as the transmission of the performer's state of mind onto his listeners, especially those who were disposed towards yielding to such an influence. The gendering of this process in André also received more nuanced treatments that will be discussed in due course. Significantly, the violinist's production of feeling was praised not because it may have provoked individual, and individually different experiences of affective engagement. Instead it is described as dictating these experiences, and streamlining them according to its own logic. A critique of 14 December 1829, published in the *Morgenblatt*, locates Paganini's genius in this particular type of exerting influence. A »wahrer Geisterbezwinger«, the artist subdues his listeners by controlling their feelings and rules over them through the power of his play.¹³

lungsmuster in der Violinvirtuosität um 1800«, in: Brandstetter, Neumann (note 6), 127–151.

¹¹ For the relationship between virtuosity and journalism, see Susan Bernstein, *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century: Performing Music and Language in Heine, Liszt and Baudelaire*, Stanford 1998.

¹² Julius Max Schottky, *Paganini's Leben und Treiben*, Prague 1830; reprint Walluf 1974, 410–412.

¹³ Quoted in Schottky (note 12), 75. For the shift that has occurred between Berglinger and Paganini, see Wackenroder (note 3), 140–141.

Music's power over the minds of listeners is a topic that can be traced back to classical antiquity. Its revival at the beginning of the nineteenth century is certainly not uniquely associated with the person of Paganini. As Nicola Gess has shown, there were wide-ranging journalistic and literary debates on musical power that preceded the rise of the virtuosi.¹⁴ Yet although they included discussions of the seductive impact of singers such as Sontag, these debates did not predominantly address specific performers. They focused on the threatening potential of self-loss associated with listening to music as such. Gess concentrates on the underlying fears that inform the ambivalent fascination of music around 1800. She links them to the physical and psychic dangers faced by the autonomous post-Kantian subject when confronted with three musically-induced excesses: aural pleasure, irrational imagination bordering on madness, and forms of violence associated with the sublime that might overwhelm those who expose themselves to its force. Views such as those quoted above were not born with the nineteenth-century virtuoso, that is; yet when they re-emerged in association with virtuosity, they gained a new potency by being closely attached to specific agents – agents through whom the power of music became personified. The virtuoso soloist entered a discursive stage infused by an aesthetic, literary and journalistic prehistory. He reanimated cultural topoi by embodying and performing them to unparalleled effect, catering for existing desires but professionalising their fulfilment in a type of cultural consumerism that was entirely new.¹⁵

The assumption that the imaginary world opened up by the concert experience was animated by the performer's inner life and reminiscences also figures in the best known literary account of Paganini, a substantial passage in Heinrich Heine's 1835 novella *Florentinische Nächte*.¹⁶ Max, the narrator, recounts his experience of one of Paganini's Hamburg concerts in 1830. He too is drawn into a series of imaginary sequences, of key instances of Paganini's past and personality. As is well known, this type of visual listening holds a systematic status in Heine, forming part of the author's indebtedness to Romantic synaesthesia. Here, Heine's »wunderbare Transfigurazion der Töne« (DHA V, 221) works in tandem with virtuosity's power over minds and hearts.¹⁷ Accordingly, Max

¹⁴ See Nicola Gess, *Gewalt der Musik: Literatur und Musikkritik um 1800*, Freiburg i. Br. 2006.

¹⁵ For the changing structures in 19th-century concert culture, see Hanns-Werner Heister, *Das Konzert: Theorie einer Kulturform*, 2 vols, Wilhelmshaven 1983; Tomi Mäkelä, *Virtuosität und Werkcharakter: eine analytische und theoretische Untersuchung zur Virtuosität in der Hochromantik*, Munich 1989.

¹⁶ Heinrich Heine, *Florentinische Nächte*, *Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*, ed. Manfred Windfuhr et al., Hamburg 1994, V, 197–250, quoted as »DHA«, by volume and page number.

¹⁷ On Franz Liszt's effect on Heine, see a parallel passage in DHA XIV/1, 288. On the intense visual imaginarity of Paganini's performances, see Peter Cersowsky,

does not give himself over to thoughts and feelings about his own life when listening to the artist's playing, but loses himself in the legends surrounding Paganini's skills: »daß er vor mir gleichsam ein farbiges Schattenspiel hingaukeln ließ, worin er selber immer mit seinem Violinspiel als die Hauptperson agierte« (DHA V, 217). In the appendix to *Die romantische Schule*, Heine the cultural critic comments on the mechanics of such legends by addressing the need for myth-making as a narrative strategy that could be deployed in the face of an incommensurable alterity: here of superhuman giftedness (see DHA VIII/1, 246). In *Florentinische Nächte*, Heine the literary writer indulges in recreating their fantastical nature. Yet the author also shows that the performer's ostensible transmission of the state of his soul onto his listeners was itself nourished by the audience's projection of its own popular knowledge of Paganini back onto the person on stage.

Most potent was the tale about Paganini's eight-year stint in prison after killing his young unfaithful lover – or his rival, depending on the version – and making a pact with the devil in order to become the best violin player on earth; a story that had gained solid ground in the public imagination after being included in Stendhal's *Vie de Rossini* of 1823.¹⁸ Max's visions follow this model. They accompany each of the four pieces that feature in Heine's literary rendering of the Paganini recital. True to the imaginary quality of the experience, the reader is not told which works of music he might actually have played.¹⁹ In *Florentinische Nächte*, the musical phantasmagoria begins with a tryst that ends with the young Paganini killing his lover out of jealousy; this is followed by a prison scene with the devil controlling Paganini's bow, culminating in the strings exploding; the third piece presents the violinist as a monk who, by playing on the G-string, conjures demons buried in the ocean floor; finally there is an idealised apotheosis with a regal saviour figure who is calling forth the music of the spheres.

»Mehr als Musik«. Paganini in der deutschen Literatur seiner Zeit«, *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 156/241 (2004), 157–167, here: 166; my findings differ from Cersowsky's emphasis on the individuality of the listening experience.

¹⁸ See Metzner (note 10), 125–126.

¹⁹ The omission of the actual music is a common feature in literary accounts of Paganini, see Cersowsky (note 17), 163. Heine's description in *Florentinische Nächte* does not coincide with the programme of the Hamburg concert on 12 June 1830 that the author presumably attended himself; for historical records of this recital, see DHA V, 975–976.

Gerhard Neumann has read Heine's presentation of the virtuoso as a Romantic counter-image to classicism's idea of genius, setting artificiality and technical skill against the inspirational power of natural creativity.²⁰ Neumann considers the narrator's writing strategy as a virtuoso response in its own right, one that echoes virtuosity's logic of superseding that which went before – in this case the concert event. This transfiguration of the aural and visual into narrative was the only way for Max to »withstand« the surge of Paganini's play, Neumann claims.²¹ The choice of term indicates a »manly« reaction in the face of something that is experienced as a threat. This threat, however, remains ambiguous, and ambiguously gendered. Before the writerly reaction can set in, the listener has to protect himself from the unsettling spectacle: »Diese Erscheinung war so sinneverwirrend, daß ich, um nicht wahnsinnig zu werden, die Ohren mir zuhielt und die Augen schloß« (DHA V, 221). The most drastic moment in Max's concert experience, this statement concludes the third tableau of the virtuoso as conjurer of demons. If the need to stop one's ears suggests an association of Paganini's music with the dangerous lure of the siren song, the shielding of one's eyes is reminiscent of the need to protect oneself against a medusa's gaze: »die lockigen Haare, im Winde dahinflatternd, umringelten sein Haupt wie schwarze Schlangen« (DHA V, 220). The mythical fantasy that turns Paganini into a performer of uncertain gender does not divide his powers, but doubles them. Their sexualised nature conjures a reaction that is equally uncertain, a type of narrative imagination that may indeed be read as phallic resistance or mastery, but one that allows the male listener to indulge in and submit to the spectacular temptation of a »séducteur-virtuose«.²²

In *Das Medusenhaupt*, Freud reads the medusa's serpent-like locks as an image of phallic multiplication associated with the female genitals and therefore indicating castration anxiety; rigid response represents not so much mortifying shock as phallic stability and reassurance in the face of the threat of castration.²³ The French language is able to retain the mythological concept while denoting a type of astonishment that holds us in thrall. Jankélévitch writes about the virtuoso's audience as a »public ébloui, ébahi, médusé«.²⁴ In Heine,

²⁰ See Gerhard Neumann, »Der Virtuose als Denkfigur in der Romantik«, in: Nicole Haitzinger, Karin Fenböck (eds), *Denkfiguren: Performatives zwischen Bewegung, Schreiben und Erfinden*, Munich 2010, 104–116, here: 107, and also his »Konfigurationen romantischer Schöpfungsästhetik II: Vom Genie zum Talent zum Virtuosen. Der Fall Heine: Natur- oder Kulturvirtuose«, in: Brandstetter, Neumann (note 6), 27–42.

²¹ Neumann, »Der Virtuose« (note 20), 108.

²² Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Liszt et la Rhapsodie: Essai sur la virtuosité (De la musique au silence*, V), Paris 1979, 32.

²³ See Sigmund Freud, *Das Medusenhaupt, Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Anna Freud et al., Frankfurt a.M. 1999, XVII, 47–48.

²⁴ Jankélévitch (note 22), 31.

the reaction to the medusa's dreadful thrill in the unrestrained flow of the narrator's prose is one of arousal as much as of disempowerment, produced as it is under circumstances of a coercion apparently experienced as stirring.²⁵ It describes a tormented kind of sensual engagement, tinged by a homophobic refusal to acknowledge from a man's perspective another man's erotic appeal (see DHA V, 208). Denied acknowledgment returns with a vengeance, then, in a type of intense pleasure that is compelled to mock itself. This pleasure is both disrupted and driven to extreme heights by images of violence: the »schmelzende, wollüstig hinschmachtende« (DHA V, 218) quality of the sounds that give rise to the first tableau is interrupted by a »wehmütig seufzender Ton, wie Vorgefühl eines heranschleichenden Unglücks«; this is followed by music »in den schneidendsten Jammertönen« (DHA V, 218), a bleating laugh and tones that »immer schmerzlicher und blutender aus der Violine hervorquollen [...] in deren bodenloser Untiefe weder Trost noch Hoffnung glimmte«. These musical torments are made up of an »entsetzliches Seufzen und ein Schluchzen, wie man es noch nie gehört auf Erden« (DHA V, 219); »Das heulte, das kreischte, das krachte, als ob die Welt in Trümmer zusammenbrechen wollte« (DHA V, 220). The cacophony is finally superseded by calm, majestic, »wogend und anschwellend[e]« (DHA V, 221) sounds, infused by indescribable, sacred longing, sometimes shivering inaudibly, sometimes swelling up »süßschauerlich«, then bursting out into »ungezügelter[n] Jubel [...] Klänge, die nie das Ohr hört, sondern nur das Herz träumen kann, wenn es des Nachts am Herzen der Geliebten ruht« (DHA V, 222). If the imaginary encounter with Paganini's passions is thus an equally passionate one,²⁶ the at once jubilatory and tortured nature of this encounter revives discursive markers of the aesthetic experience of the sublime.

II.

Heine uses the term »erhaben« twice with reference to Paganini, both times during his description of the artist's sacralised apotheosis at the end of the concert, when he speaks of a »leuchtende Kugel, worauf riesengroß und stolzerhaben ein Mann stand [...] und wie er da fest und sicher stand, ein erhabenes Götterbild, und die Violine strich: da war es als ob die ganze Schöpfung seinen Tönen gehorchte« (DHA V, 221). Texts on virtuosity, even if they do not name the sublime, are replete with associations that are closely linked to the concept: its power that defies description; its sovereignty, as in Heine, but also its vio-

²⁵ Michael Gamper also includes the aspect of coercion, but with reference to Heine's reception of Liszt, in »Der Virtuose und das Publikum: Kulturkritik im Kunstdiskurs des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts«, in: Arburg (note 6), 60–82, here: 72.

²⁶ Jankélévitch (note 22), 33, writes of the audience's »travail passionnel de cristallisation admirative tout semblable à la cristallisation amoureuse«.

lence; its immediate, coercive impact, and its capacity to induce ambivalent feelings of submission. The nineteenth-century discourse on virtuosity does not maintain aesthetic distinctions between the naturally-occurring sublime (as formulated by Edmund Burke or Immanuel Kant) and technically-produced astonishment. Writings on virtuoso performances repeatedly resort to the natural sublime in order to evoke superlative technical skill that leaves the audience at a loss for words: »Beschreibt, wenn ihr könnt, die volle Majestät des Donners, der stürzenden Katarakte, des aufgebrachten Oceans« writes a critic about Liszt's piano playing – closely echoing Burke's »noise of vast cataracts«, »raging storms«, and »thunder«.²⁷

In the present context, it is most useful to sketch the sublime's pre-Kantian definitions in as much as they relate to their appropriation by writers on virtuosity. The empirical psychology of Burke's 1757 *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* did not only provide many keys to the later adaptation of the sublime in German idealist thought; it has also forged, after Dionysius Longinus' treatise *On the Sublime*, a certain type of vocabulary for describing sublime qualities and experiences. The *Enquiry* is essentially a text on passions and emotions, terms used indiscriminately and with a wide range of references by Burke. Although in the course of his argument he defines specific characteristics of sublime objects such as vastness, limitlessness, or darkness, he starts by concentrating on the relational quality of the experience, on the reaction caused by the sublime: »whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling«.²⁸ A few pages later, we find a slightly toned-down specification of this reaction: »that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force«.²⁹ Burke's description of a mind that is drawn towards a single element or experience, unable to step

²⁷ Carl Kunt, *Witthauer'sche Zeitschrift* 1839, 1173, quoted in Eduard Hanslick, *Geschichte des Concertwesens in Wien*, Vienna 1869, 335; Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips, Oxford 2008, 75. Hugo von Hofmannsthal's 1889 homage to Nikolaus Lenau, *Der Geiger vom Traunsee*, still calls upon – and may be read as pastiche of – tropes of the virtuoso sublime, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Bernd Schoeller, Rudolf Hirsch, Frankfurt a. M. 1979, VII, 13–18. For the programmatic character of virtuoso music particularly in Liszt, see Jankélévitch (note 22), 94–100; Dana Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt*, Cambridge 2004, 78–116.

²⁸ Burke (note 27), 36.

²⁹ Burke (note 27), 53.

back and thus under a type of aesthetic ›dictatorship‹ echoes Longinus' evocation of the sublime literary composition that wins a »complete mastery over our minds«;³⁰ as we have seen, the topos re-emerges in almost identical fashion in writings on virtuosity. Heine's allusion to the medusa's head reconfirms the sublime's paralysing potential as »a literally stunning invasion«.³¹

The 1829 *Morgenblatt* critique by André that was introduced at the beginning also speaks of a state of mindless trance, provoked by the fact that Paganini »trennt und isolirt gleichsam die Gefühle und Empfindungen seiner Zuhörer von ihrem Verstande, so daß diese, so lange er sie beherrscht, zu keiner Besinnung kommen«.³² Recovering their ability to reflect upon what they experienced only in retrospect, Paganini's listeners are overwhelmed by an imaginary force that causes what Burke called a state of »delightful horror«.³³ This horror is related to feelings of »self-preservation«, and therefore indeed delightful, Burke argues, as long as the sublime experience is an aesthetic one. What in real life would be mortal fear can be enjoyed in »tranquillity tinged with terror«.³⁴ The metaphorical realm of pain and death, rather than the actual confrontation with their impact, is instrumental here,³⁵ and the conflation of blood and sea in Heine's account of Paganini ties in with this demand (see DHA V, 220).

»I know of nothing sublime which is not some modification of power«³⁶, writes Burke. The specific lust that belongs to the Burkian idea of the sublime is the *lust for exposure* to power, which lays precisely in the opportunity to succumb to the drastic influence without being actually crushed. Gess has pointed out that it is this type of pre-Kantian yielding to sublime violence that emerges in musical discourse after 1800, and not Kant's enlightened reformulation of the sublime as the *pleasure in resistance* felt by the autonomous individual who gains contentment by victoriously defying the overwhelming force.³⁷ This holds true also with regard to the personification of the sublime by the virtuoso performer. The virtuoso sublime, however, did not simply arise in the performance

³⁰ Longinus, *On the Sublime*, Aristotle, *Poetics*, Demetrius, *On Style*, ed. and trans. Stephen Halliwell et al., Cambridge, Mass. 1995, 143–307, here: 287, § 39.

³¹ Adam Phillips, »Introduction«, in: Burke (note 27), ix–xxiii, here: xxi.

³² Schottky (note 12), 75.

³³ Burke (note 27), 123.

³⁴ Burke (note 27), 123.

³⁵ See Burke (note 27), 36.

³⁶ Burke (note 27), 59.

³⁷ See Gess (note 14), 257–261, 321. See also Hartmut Böhme, »Das Steinerne: Anmerkungen zur Theorie des Erhabenen aus dem Blick des ›Menschenfremdesten‹«, in: Christine Pries (ed.), *Das Erhabene: Zwischen Grenzerfahrung und Größenwahn*, Weinheim 1988, 119–142; Winfried Menninghaus, »Zwischen Überwältigung und Widerstand: Macht und Gewalt in Longins und Kants Theorien des Erhabenen«, *Poetica* 23/1,2 (1991), 1–19.

of a masterful musician who conquered his audience. Following the logic of projection and identification that characterises the charisma of the virtuoso, the virtuoso was seen to succumb *along with* the public, and with it managed yet to remain undefeated. Much criticism of Paganini's concerts focused on the problem of how »safe« the experience actually was, noticing with dismay the feverish devotion of an over-excited audience, one which was considered pathological.³⁸ Yet Paganini's own survival, despite his ill health and post-performance exhaustion, provided a model here. By the time Paganini emerged onto Vienna's concert stages, he was in his late forties, and signs of age and illness had inscribed themselves in what one may call the performer's sublime physique.³⁹ Yet these markers of fragility were also seen as indices of negligent superiority, of the effortless, aristocratic habitus of someone who could, and deserved to, rule.⁴⁰ The following observation by Adolf Bernhard Marx shows how defining Paganini's appearance was in creating an image of decay coupled with dominance; with draining yet ultimately controlled exposure to extreme experience:

Man muß ihn im überfüllten Opernhause unter tausenden von Zuhörern erwarten, von Bank zu Bank die seltsamsten Gerüchte laufen hören und nun nach langer Pause den seltsamen, krank verfallenen Mann mit leisem, eiligen Schritt durch die Musiker hervorgleiten sehen, das fleisch- und blutlose Gesicht im dunklen Locken- und Bartgewirr mit der kühnsten Nase voll Ausdruck des wegwerfendsten Hohnes, mit Augen, die wie schwarze Edelsreine aus dem bläulichen Weiß glänzen. Nun sogleich hastiger Anfang des Ritornells, und nun der schmelzendste und kühnste Gesang, wie er nie auf einer Geige gedacht worden ist.⁴¹

If the eighteenth-century re-emergence of the concept of the sublime can be regarded as a bourgeois strategy of retaining forms of heroic aura while detaching them from the person of a feudal ruler⁴² – Burke, after all, derived the sublime's authoritarian, terror-inducing qualities from the institutional charisma of »kings and commanders«⁴³ – this process of bourgeois abstraction seems to be partly reversed in cases where sublime qualities are re-attached to the superior performer who is waging his battles on stage. Not least through »the illusion of assault« created by his use of the bow, Paganini's performances were able to be violently commanding, even in spite of his fragile appearance. Maiko Kawabata writes about the performer's signature bowings such as *jeté* and *ricochet*, which »involved ›throwing‹ the bow at the string, thus motivating the impression of the player ›lashing‹ at the instrument with a weapon«. Such technical and visual codes of playing must have contributed to phantasmatic identifications of

³⁸ See Hanslick (note 27), 243; Gamper (note 25), 71; Gooley (note 27), 201–262.

³⁹ See Schottky (note 12), 269–270, 411.

⁴⁰ See Hanslick (note 27), 339.

⁴¹ *Berliner Musikzeitung* 16 (1829), quoted in Hanslick (note 27), 242.

⁴² See Böhme (note 37), 126.

⁴³ Burke (note 27), 62.

violinists not only with rulers, but also with murderers, an association that emerged for the first time with Paganini.⁴⁴

Terry Eagleton defines the political unconscious of the sublime in the Burkian context as »a suitably defused, anesthetized version of the values of the *ancien régime*. [...] The sublime is an imaginary compensation for all the uproarious old upper-class violence, [...]. Its social connotations are interestingly contradictory: in one sense the memory trace of an historically surpassed barbarism, it also has something of the challenge of mercantile enterprise to a too-clubbable aristocratic indolence.«⁴⁵ At once protective shield and new outlet, the aesthetic displacement of feudal power denied as much as preserved the old order. It arose as a type of aesthetic displacement, one is inclined to say, for genuine political change. Similar to experiences of the sublime, experiences of virtuosity played out at this intersection of the aesthetic and the political. As Jörg Wiesel has shown with respect to nineteenth-century theatrical practice, the idiosyncratic habitus of the virtuoso actor was seen to mark the two extremes of political economy that mid-century modest liberal thinking wished to avoid: the absolutism of the tyrannical ruler, but also the sovereignty of the people with its potential for revolutionary violence.⁴⁶ As opposed to sustaining a durable and controlled representational order, both extremes lean towards the explosive nature of the performative moment cultivated with such unique mastery by virtuoso artists. Such performers assumed individual power that was detached from or modified regulatory frameworks. Schottky claims that Paganini's genius began where he ceased to follow commonly accepted rules; the *Berliner Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* cites a Viennese critic who calls the violinist »Gesetzgeber seines Instrumentes«, treating his violin according to laws invented by himself.⁴⁷ Virtuosi were perceived to do what they and they alone desired, but their show-

⁴⁴ Maiko Kawabata, »Virtuosity, the Violin, the Devil...What Really Made Paganini »Demonic«?, *Current Musicology* 83 (2007), 85–108, here: 99–100.

⁴⁵ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Oxford 1990, 54.

⁴⁶ See Jörg Wiesel, *Zwischen König und Konstitution: Der Körper der Monarchie vor dem Gesetz des Theaters*, Vienna 2001, 141–172. According to all accounts, Paganini was not a political man; yet his variations at his first public concert in 1794 on *La Carmagnole*, a French folk song that with new words had become an anthem of the Revolution, marked him in the public eye as a supporter of revolutionary France, see Metzner (note 10), 119; Hanslick (note 27), 414, too speaks of Paganini's revolutionizing effect, although this arguably refers to a musical context. On the virtuoso between aristocratic and bourgeois values, see also Fleister (note 15), 213–214; Dana Gooley, »The Battle Against Instrumental Virtuosity in the Early Nineteenth Century«, in: Christopher H. Gibbs et al. (eds), *Franz Liszt and his World*, Princeton 2006, 75–109.

⁴⁷ Schottky (note 12), 74; *Berliner Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* 26 (1828), 208–209. On virtuosity's disrespect for moderation, see Kai van Eikels, »Freie Bereicherung, raffinierte Glückseligkeit: Das Virtuose im ökonomischen und politischen Denken der Romantik«, in: Brandstetter, Neumann (note 6), 67–98, here: 72.

manship also catered for the desires of their audiences, or more precisely told them how to desire. Their power was resonant with aspects of the two poles of the political spectrum, and blurred them in a disturbing way in performances of aristocratic flamboyance fuelled by the impulse of revolution.⁴⁸ But what exactly was at stake in the fantasies of power and submission that were at the heart of the virtuoso sublime? The following two sections will explore in greater detail the violence that articulated itself in the imaginary life of nineteenth-century virtuosity, considering its association with a musical law sustained by »(per)versions of love and hate«.⁴⁹ Aesthetic and political aspects will thus be re-envisioned through the lens of the psycho-social.

III.

In *Florentinische Nächte*, Maria's question »Lieben Sie Paganini?« (DHA V, 213) triggers Max's narration of his experience of the virtuoso's recital, a narration that offers every detail one could wish for – without answering its initiating query. Instead of a response, painter, musician and writer Johann Peter Lyser is invoked, whose drawings' »wenige[n] Kreidestriche[n]« (DHA V, 214) are considered the only appropriate means to capture Paganini's physiognomy; after which the report follows its course. Lyser had in fact also written about Paganini. Just as his drawings, his writings isolate the bare essentials from the publicly circulating anecdotes surrounding the artist. His novella *Fantasien aus D-Moll* (1833) recasts the legendary primal scene that linked the musician's superhuman skill to the trauma of murdering his lover.⁵⁰ Lyser extracts this event from its presumed context at the court of Lucca and displaces it onto an altogether more fantastical stage, a forlorn heath at witching hour, where it acquires the aura of a haunting curse that weighs upon the violinist and condemns him to enact his crime over and over again. Cold, lonely and motionless, Paganini is depicted as an undead revenant who only awakes after midnight when summoned by the forces of the underworld. While the violinist recalls in his music the pleasures and pains of his relationship with his lover, the woman arrives to sink down at his feet. Her declaration of love and innocence renders her former companion heartbroken: he admits that after her alleged unfaithful-

⁴⁸ On political aspects more generally, see Michael Gamper, »Genies und Virtuosen der Macht: Über die Emergenz einer politischen Figur der Moderne in den Medien der Romantik«, in: Brandstetter, Neumann (note 6), 99–113; Hanslick (note 27), 349; Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, London 2003, 195–218. On comparisons of virtuosi such as Liszt and Boucher with Napoleon see Gooléy (note 27), 78–116; Maiko Kawabata, »Virtuoso Codes of Violin Performance: Power, Military Heroism, and Gender (1789–1830)«, *Nineteenth Century Music* 28/2 (2004), 89–107.

⁴⁹ See Renata Salecl, *(Per)versions of Love and Hate*, London 1998.

⁵⁰ Johann Peter Lyser, *Fantasien aus D-Moll, Musikalische Novellen*, ed. Ludwig Frankenstein, Berlin 1913, 191–200.

ness, he had sworn to the devil to kill those whom he loves, and received in exchange the latter's promise of superhuman virtuosity. Paganini shatters his violin in despair and thrusts his dagger into his lover's heart. The early morning hours see him as godforsaken as he was before the concert started.

What kind of drama is enacted in the encounter between a public and a virtuoso whose charisma thrives on fantasies that associate violin playing with destruction and murder? The insistence of the popular imagination, on a traumatic subtext of a passionate crime as the defining moment of Paganini's turn towards virtuosity, suggests that his public was caught in the reiteration of a relationship just as ambivalent as the one it persisted in conjuring. The virtuoso needed to produce and sustain, that is, an affective attachment to his authority that kept his audience under his spell. The audience in turn had to imagine him as a sublime figure whose violence was irresistible. Burke's *Enquiry* was still troubled by the dilemma of how the sublime's power is actually to be explained if an authority we respect (such as the sublime, or the ›father‹) is one that we also do not love, and conversely if an authority we love (such as beauty, or the ›mother‹) is one that we do not respect. As Eagleton argues apropos Burke's predicament, it is only love that will »truly win us to the law, but this love will erode the law to nothing«. ⁵¹ The only solution to this problem is a love not *despite*, but *because of* submission; and while Burke may have denied this love in his argument, the »erotic empiricism« of his discourse indeed betrays its presence in the *Enquiry*. ⁵² The phenomenon gains urgency in the imaginary space of the virtuoso sublime. The success of virtuoso performance nourished itself from the »unnennbare heilige Inbrunst« (DHA V, 222) with which public and performer felt attached to, and were complicit in that which subdued them.

Considered from this perspective, the verbose meandering of the discourse of the virtuoso sublime (as it also finds expression in Max's report) might thus be a prolific screen that covers under so many words—astonishment, admiration, reverence, and respect—a form of love that is difficult to admit. Underneath revolutionary, royalist, or sacred terminology lays a form of awkward libidinal engagement. Heine considers such a predisposition and its celebration of »Wollust des Schmerzes« (DHA VIII/1, 126) quintessentially Romantic. If it affected the discourse of the concert-going public, it only did so because the virtuoso master himself performed it to great effect on stage. His power implied subordination.

While the preceding section on virtuosity's political unconscious has touched upon the artist's propensity to dismiss or transgress rules, we are now shifting attention to the anterior process, of following the rules of technical training,

⁵¹ Eagleton (note 45), 55.

⁵² In his introduction to Burke, Phillips (note 31, xi–ii) speaks of images of constraint and release in a text that takes »stroking as seriously« as no other philosophical enquiry.

which enables their transgression in the first place. This is to say that the mastery of technical skills, which formed the necessary condition for the virtuoso to emerge, implied a simultaneous submission to the demands of technique; to the demands of what I would like to call a ›musical law‹. »The more a practice is mastered, the more fully subjection is achieved«, argues Judith Butler in her enquiry into the psychic life of power, echoing Adorno's above-quoted definition.⁵³ A virtuoso's training is indeed a process where the enabling acquisition of mastery is coupled with forms of utmost submission. Paganini's refusal to practice (audibly) in public can thus be seen as a myth-enhancing denial of the subordination that was at the root, technically at least, of his skill.⁵⁴ The dialectic of subordination and mastery may have been given away, though, in the violinist's association with a specific psycho-physical posture.⁵⁵ A type of bending where the body seemed to draw away from an impacting force but also find support could have been among those difficult-to-chart physical markers of Paganini's performance that were not only necessary for practical reasons; they were also potent creators of meaning that must have enhanced the ambivalent impression of the artist's personality. Schottky and others comment on the musician's peculiar countenance, whose mixture of attentiveness, submissiveness and will to succeed bore fascination: »Bei schwierigen Stellen bildet sein Körper eine Art Dreieck, da sich der Leib dann übermäßig einbiegt während der Kopf und der rechte Fuß voranstehen.«⁵⁶

The musician's own affinity, with the structures that ensnared his public, helps to understand better the effectiveness of the imaginary construction of the murderer-performer. The public was not only affected by a popular discourse of passionate crime; people also witnessed a performed pledge for acquittal. Heine's description of Paganini as someone whose concerts were an exercise in atonement is revealing. When he paid reverence to his audience before beginning to play, Paganini's face, Max claims, »hatte alsdann so etwas Flehendes, so etwas blödsinnig Demüthiges«, such a »bittende[n] Blick«, which was however at once forgotten when the »wunderbare Meister« (DHA V, 216–217) turned to his music. The virtuoso's plea leads us back to a moment before the murderer's

⁵³ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Stanford 1997, 116.

⁵⁴ See Georg Harrys, *Paganini in seinem Reisewagen und Zimmer, in seinen redseligen Stunden, in gesellschaftlichen Zirkeln, und seinen Concerten*, ed. Heinrich Sievers, Tutzing 1982, 28.

⁵⁵ See Butler (note 53), 66–67.

⁵⁶ Schottky (note 12), 2. This posture seems to have been closely connected to the musician's technical proficiency, see Roberto Grisley, »Paganini«, in Ludwig Finscher (ed.), *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Kassel 2004, XII, 1547–1552. Paganini's extraordinary technical skills were associated with his hyperflexibility, which was linked to Marfan's syndrome, a disorder in the connective tissues; see Kendall (note 10), 52–53.

guilt, where guilt is occasioned by the shameful position of the one who has not yet answered the call of musical law to become proficient in the technique that is imposed upon him. Submission to the rules of this law might then be understood, with Butler, as a spectacular way to publicly re-enact a type of subject formation on the concert stage. It is

a submission to the necessity to prove innocence in the face of accusation, a submission to the demand for proof, an execution of that proof, and acquisition of the status of the subject in and through compliance with the terms of the interrogative law. [...] to become a ›subject‹ is to be continuously in the process of acquitting oneself of the accusation of guilt. It is to have become an emblem of lawfulness [...], but one for whom that status is tenuous indeed, one who has known—somehow, somewhere—what it is *not* to have that standing and hence to have been cast out as guilty.⁵⁷

Such is the psychic life of virtuosity: the artist *has to play*, for reasons other than to draw the money from his public's pockets (see DHA V, 216). He has to play, rather, as he too has to love and derive pleasure from that which subdues him, but also defines who he is: the subject of virtuosity. It is this undercurrent that is spelled out in biographical terms by a passionate violinist who proffered the view of his father as a *tiranno in casa*, insisting on the gruesomeness of his musical regime; and who also insisted on never forcing his own son to become a concert musician.⁵⁸

If subjection is thus a ›power exerted on a subject‹, it is nevertheless also a ›power assumed by the subject‹, a condition necessary for the subject to emerge.⁵⁹ It is precisely this double agency that seems to have been at work when a public was not only subdued by – and with – but also empowered by – and with – the virtuoso. Jankélévitch emphasises this process of identification between the public and the virtuoso as an important aspect of the performer's aura: ›Tel est l'effet du charisme virtuose! En célébrant le triomphe de la vedette, les auditeurs fêtent d'une certaine manière leur propre triomphe‹.⁶⁰ What attracted the audience to the virtuoso was undoubtedly his success; but on a less circumscribed level, a level beyond the possibility of failure that this technical successfulness still implied, desire went out to a more fundamental dynamic embodied in the performer, a dynamic that *will have always achieved success*. As Renata Salecl has argued in her analysis of musical melodrama, the public desires someone for whom music-making is a libidinal activity, someone obsessed with, devoted to and potentially consumed by his drive. The satisfaction that such drive will find may have constituted what we would now perceive as the specific *jouissance* of the virtuoso.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Butler (note 53), 118.

⁵⁸ See Harrys (note 54), 32; Schottky (note 12), 250–251; Courcy (note 10), 12–18.

⁵⁹ Butler (note 53), 11.

⁶⁰ Jankélévitch (note 22), 103.

⁶¹ See Salecl (note 49), 50.

In *Florentinische Nächte*, Heine talks of an artistic »Trieb« (DHA V, 210), operating within the unfortunate artist who is compelled to seek perfection until his death. Additional literary formulations of destructive artistic drive will be discussed in due course.⁶² Where desire – in its dual relevance as desire *of* and *for* the virtuoso – must be linked to law, to the subordinating economy of orders and prohibitions that provoke or channel what we want, but prevent its attainment, drive does not care about law. In the post-Freudian reading, it is an agency that does things anyway, whether they are willed or not, and thereby unleashes (painful) satisfaction. It seems to have been such an exceedingly solipsistic (dis)pleasure of the virtuoso in thrall with his own performance that people projected onto Paganini when commenting on his stage persona's self-sufficient arrogance or his equivocal occasional laughter where it was not quite certain whether he laughed with or at the audience.⁶³ Wiesel puts this more generally in view of the virtuosity of the single actor, when he points up the virtuoso's pleasure in breaking the law of the ensemble.⁶⁴ If »Wollust des Schmerzes« (DHA VIII/1, 126) arose in interaction with a force of law, drive grants a type of bliss not concerned with dependency on the other, which accounts for its attractiveness for a public that paradoxically, by submitting to the virtuoso, also rises with him above those structures of mastery and submission upon which social being depends. As the fantasies about the transmission of Paganini's inner world onto his listeners have shown, this kind of attraction was a fascination with *seeing the performer*. Writings articulate the beguiling possibility of partaking in the (potentially destructive) nature of the virtuoso's »Trieb«.

While this psycho-social drama of power might also be explained by its recall of foundational and passionate moments of subject formation, its specific potency seems to have consisted in its capacity to both recollect and retract the mechanisms on which these moments relied. The display of virtuosic drive may have constituted just such a retraction, a turn of the law against itself.⁶⁵ The virtuoso's fervently driven over-fulfilment of expectations (fatherly, public, personal) does not escape, then, the musical law upon which it is founded; yet in its excessive nature, virtuosic drive represents a form of resistance. It is among the unanticipated effects of the demands of musical law, and therefore constitutes a form of subversion. Drive, in the literary scenarios that will form the core of the

⁶² When developing the dark side of drive in his 1919 essay on *Das Unheimliche*, Freud famously also turned to nineteenth-century literature, to E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*.

⁶³ See Ludwig Börne, *Briefe aus Paris, Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Inge Rippmann et al., Düsseldorf 1964, III, 1–867, here: 325. For a different reading of Paganini's laughter with respect to musical humour, see Dana Gooley, »La Commedia del Violino: Paganini's Comic Strains«, *Musical Quarterly* 88/3 (2005), 370–427.

⁶⁴ See Wiesel (note 46), 157.

⁶⁵ See Butler (note 53), 22, 88, 99, 202, footnote 4; 208, footnote 22.

next section, comes to *sustain* the musical order of difficulty and skill, but in such a hyperbolic way that it simultaneously undermines this order, to point towards a refuge of self-indulgent, and potentially self-destructive expenditure. The freedom that comes into focus here is by definition ambivalent and very different from Jankélévitch's much more affirmative description of virtuosity as »l'activité triomphante de l'homme libre«. ⁶⁶

IV.

Contrary to Jankélévitch's initially-quoted claim about virtuosity's spell, much criticism of virtuoso performance was actually based on the understanding that this spell was too shallow, not truthful or real enough. This kind of enlightened criticism appears to deplore that it has not been wooed over in a proper way, that the mysterious magnetiser is not more than a charlatan. Interestingly, it was the most »perfect« virtuoso, the one who submitted best to the demands of technique in order to become the most reliable master, who seems to have lacked the kind of charisma which made a performer ultimately convincing. Notwithstanding the appeal of the supremely functioning *homme-machine*, those virtuosi who were most machinic also disappointed most. Heine is an eloquent hater of this type of virtuosity, of the »Sieg des Maschinenwesens über den Geist« or the »Instrumentwerdung des Menschen« (DHA XIV/1, 45), as he puts it in *Lutezia*. The following passage contrasts such technical security with what the author deems truly masterful performances. It starts by praising the violin as an instrument which is held closer to the heart and is therefore more sensitive than the piano, which occupied the royal place in the kingdom of far too often mediocre virtuoso performance.⁶⁷ Yet this sensitivity of the violin can only inform musical performance, Heine continues, in those artists who do indeed possess heart and soul: »Je nüchterner und herzloser der Violinspieler, desto gleichförmiger wird immer seine Exekuzion seyn, und er kann auf den Gehorsam seiner Fiedel rechnen, zu jeder Stunde, an jedem Orte. Aber diese gepriesene Sicherheit ist doch nur das Ergebniß einer geistigen Beschränktheit, und eben die größten Meister waren es, deren Spiel nicht selten abhängig gewesen von äußern und innern Einflüssen. Ich habe niemand besser, aber auch zu Zeiten niemand schlechter spielen gehört wie Paganini [...].« (DHA XIV/1, 47)

A precarious balance is responsible for the charisma of the greatest masters, Heine claims. In Jankélévitch's emphatic bind between virtuosity and the human, similar elements come to the fore: aspects that are not at the artist's disposal, that exceed calculation, and therefore also include the dangers that are intrinsic to any live performance. Jankélévitch repeatedly lingers on the horror

⁶⁶ Jankélévitch (note 22), 13.

⁶⁷ Jankélévitch (note 22), 12.

of solitary exposure, and on the proximity of glory and fall.⁶⁸ Debussy contends »the attraction that binds the virtuoso to his public seems much the same as that which draws the crowds to the circus: we always hope that something dangerous is going to happen«,⁶⁹ and Adorno writes »Virtuosität und Verzweiflung aber ziehen sich an. Denn jene balanciert stets am Rande des Misslingens, des Sturzes wie von der Kuppel im Zirkus; in jedem Augenblick kann der Virtuoso sich vergreifen, aus der Geschlossenheit herausfallen.«⁷⁰ What emerges in the circus vocabulary of Debussy's and Adorno's observations, and in Jankélévitch's and Heine's emphasis on the human, is a concern with authenticity, with the fact that behind the artistic persona of the virtuoso there is a real person, and behind the perfectly functioning physical apparatus a fragile body. In Heine's view, the quality of virtuoso performance is not threatened, but enhanced by this potential return of the real.

Paganini's fragile body, however, seems to have remained invested with the imaginary. Its emaciated appearance suggested a physique consumed by, and moving over into its devotion to technique. Schottky proposes the following characterisation: »Er ist so mager, daß man nicht füglich magerer seyn kann; dabei hat er eine blaßgelbe Farbe, eine große, weit hervorstechende Adlernase und lange knochige Finger. Kaum scheint er in der Kleidung zusammenzuhängen, und macht er seine Verbeugungen, so bewegt sich der Körper auf eine so sonderbare Art, daß man alle Augenblicke fürchtet, die Füße könnten sich vom Rumpfe trennen, und der ganze Mensch würde in einen Knochenhügel zusammenstürzen [...] Paganini tritt als die verkörperte technische Fertigkeit auf; alles ist bei ihm Leidenschaftlichkeit: daher wäre es ein wahrer Fehlgriff der Natur, hätte sie ihm etwas mehr Fleisch gegeben.«⁷¹

The association of skill, morbidity and passion is most revealing in our context, as it points up the ultimate fantasy of superlative performance: a virtuosic body of drive that not only permanently courts its own dissolution, but comes crashing down at the moment of its greatest triumph, of becoming virtuosity as such. A physique that appeared to be eaten up by its devotion to skill gave rise to fantasies of derealisation – of a human being collapsing into a heap of bones while the music went on, one is almost ready to assume. The type of disembod-

⁶⁸ Jankélévitch (note 22), 13, 77–78, 90, 100–106.

⁶⁹ Claude Debussy, *Debussy on Music*, ed. and trans. Richard Langham Smith, London 1977, 26.

⁷⁰ Adorno (note 8), 305; 163.

⁷¹ Schottky (note 12), 2–3. The anti-Semitic stereotypes in this quotation were common fare in a discourse that conflated virtuosity with otherness, and otherness with illness and Jewishness (despite Paganini being a Roman Catholic). See Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, »Blemished Physiologies: Delacroix, Paganini, and the Cholera Epidemic of 1832«, *The Art Bulletin* 83/4 (2001), 686–710; Kawabata (note 44), 89; Wiesel (note 46), 165.

died, automatic passion that is at play here must be distinguished from Heine's heartless mechanical virtuoso, whose technical reliability implied the solidity of the body which sustained it. The consumption of the artist by his skill, in contrast, demands the body's disappearance or transformation into a spectral state. This kind of spectrality draws out an ardent *driveness* or, in Heine's words »Getriebe« (DHA V, 227). What is uncanny here is the oscillation between life and death, an oscillation brought about by the constant movement of a potentially self-sacrificial drive. It is a force of repetition and return whose demonic drift echoes the public association of the overachieving artist with a person under the influence of a devilish curse, as in Lyser's ghostly Paganini, who has to perform his deadly deed again and again.

The most spectacular desperation of virtuosity's psychic life is neither the constantly impending possibility of fall and mistake, nor the sacrifice of the other, then, but self-destructive outperformance. And it is in cultural fantasies of the virtuoso's death where this outperformance finds its fulfilment; where musical law »turns against itself and spawns versions of itself which oppose [...] its animating purposes«. ⁷² One of the more recent versions of this fantasy, Klaus Kinski's final film, *Kinski Paganini*, stages this logic of musical drive most drastically. ⁷³ Whereas the real Paganini died on 27 May 1840 in his bed in Nice after a long illness, Kinski's Paganini literally plays himself to death with ever increasing speed, ramming his violin into his sore and finally bleeding throat until he collapses to the floor. Similar instances of self-sacrifice that can be found in nineteenth-century writings are less literal. One of their defining narrative figures is an interminably propelling dynamic that has to end in disappearance. A passage in Hoffmann's *Kreisleriana*, from his *Fantasiestücke* exemplifies this. Among Hoffmann's musicians, Kapellmeister Kreisler comes closest to the artist who is both gifted virtuoso and inspired composer, without being able to live up to this ideal synthesis. ⁷⁴ The opening chapter of the *Kreisleriana*, entitled *Johannes Kreisler's, des Kapellmeisters musikalische Leiden*, published in 1810, offers rarely formulated insights into musical experience from the point of view of the virtuoso. Kreisler is executing a bravura piece *par excellence*, Bach's *Goldberg Variationen*, in front of an ever-diminishing audience; and is unable to stop his recital:

Ich hätte glücklich geendet, aber diese Nro. 30, das Thema riß mich unaufhaltsam fort. Die Quartblätter dehnten sich plötzlich zu einem Riesenfolio, wo tausend Imitationen und Ausführungen jenes Themas geschrieben standen, die ich abspielen mußte. Die Noten wurden lebendig und hüpfen um mich her – elektrisches Feuer

⁷² Butler (note 53), 100.

⁷³ See *Kinski Paganini*. Dir. Klaus Kinski, Scenta/Reteitalia/Président Films/Scena Film, 1989.

⁷⁴ See Dominik Müller, »Dubiose Virtuosen bei E.T.A. Hoffmann«, in: Arburg (note 6), 129–146, here: 140.

fuhr durch die Fingerspitzen in die Tasten – der Geist, von dem es ausströmte, überflügelte die Gedanken – der ganze Saal hing voll dichten Dufts, in dem die Kerzen düsterer und düsterer brannten – zuweilen sah eine Nase heraus, zuweilen ein paar Augen: aber sie verschwanden gleich wieder. So kam es, daß ich allein sitzen blieb mit meinem Sebastian Bach, und von Gottlieb, wie von einem spiritu familiari bedient wurde! – ich trinke! (SW II/1, 38–39).

This passage holds a key position within Hoffmann's discussions and representations of virtuosity. The author's (as well as Kreisler's) anti-virtuösic stance, especially clear in *Beethovens Instrumental-Musik*, has been quoted above; yet both content and narrative strategies of Hoffmann's writings also betray a certain degree of fascination for virtuoso skill. In the Goldberg passage, the Kreisler of the *Fantasiestücke* starts to fantasise – improvise, that is – himself, turning into a virtuoso consumed by his own variations on a given theme. But his intoxicated, Burgundy-saturated performance has little to do with the empowered confidence of a ›Kreisler version‹. Here, the virtuoso's neglect of the original script only leads to his subjection to another one, whose might is even more imposing. Although Kreisler's self-presentation as someone who is *forced* to indulge in virtuosic excess might come down to Hoffmannesque irony, we still have to acknowledge the fact that the musician is caught in compulsive play. He is under the dictatorship of an imagined score which colonises his field of vision, demanding to be performed and driving on its slave while everything else recedes into the twilight. Notes that begin to skip and move evoke the unwritten or un-writable, a characteristic of notation-free musical production which Hoffmann's musician shares with Paganini, who mostly abstained from publishing his scores during his lifetime. Yet it does not, in this context, signify the virtuoso's emancipation from the score, nor does it allude to Hoffmann's musical metaphysics. The Goldberg passage is an indication of instability and madness, pointing up Kreisler's inability to produce lasting works. The composer who largely destroys his compositions, or delays their notation, is so volatile that we lose sight of him for good as he is carried away by an exaggerated, »lustig [...] hüpfen[de] Beweglichkeit«: »Auf einmal war er, man wusste nicht wie und warum verschwunden.« (SW II/1, 33) His eventual disappearance is prefigured in the concert scene; what is holding Kreisler back on this and other occasions is Hoffmann's understanding of music not only as curse but also as salvation. Music may include the dangers of solipsistic monomania – the dangers of drive – but it also enables encounters with the infinite. The Goldberg passage stages this option as an encounter with the composer; the status of this ›meeting‹ must remain undecided, however. At once spiritual experience and solitary hallucination, music's ambivalent potential is defined by the impossibility of making a clean distinction between madness and metaphysics.

In Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale *The Red Shoes* (1845), we find a more explicit association of artistic drive with the devil's work. Andersen attaches vir-

tuosic proficiency to an agency whose self-propelled otherness emerges in two ways: firstly, in the shape of an incarnation of the devil, and secondly, in the autonomous momentum of feet that become detached from the subject when clad in red dancing shoes. The emphatic otherness of drive that is given shape here and in Hoffmann's vision of a ghostly score resounds with aesthetic accounts of virtuosity where hypostatized technique develops a mechanistic surge detached from art and artist alike. Friedrich Theodor Vischer's discussion of virtuosity in his *Asthetik oder Wissenschaft des Schönen* is particularly telling in this respect:

[D]ie Geschicklichkeit [...] emanzipiert sich von dem, an was sie sich anempfinden muß, um zur wahren Kunstleistung fähig zu sein, ihre Freiheit von Mühe nimmt sie für positive, inhaltvolle Freiheit, und wie sie nun jenes Band sprengt, ist es, als ob ein Dämon in sie führe, wie in die Beine des Betrunkenen, die dem Willen nicht mehr gehorchend auf eigene Faust absonderliche Figuren ausführen. So werden die Finger des musikalischen Virtuosen toll, die gereizten Nerven handeln für sich und in losgelassenen Capricen, Seltsamkeiten, Überraschungen und Sprüngen aller Art täuschen sie mit dem Afterbilde des ächten Genius das Ohr des Hörers [...].⁷⁵

The Red Shoes transforms such impressions into narrative. A red-bearded soldier welcomes Andersen's girl protagonist at the church door, uttering what will turn out to be a spell: »Just look at those beautiful dancing shoes!« the soldier said. »May they stay on tight when you dance;« and he tapped the soles of the shoes.« On leaving the church, the girl »had to take a few dance steps. But once she started, her feet could not stop. It was as if the shoes had taken control.«⁷⁶ A narrative vision of unstoppable movement that is unique in its intensity follows. It is embedded in the story of poor Karen, who admires a pair of red shoes worn by a princess and is finally given such a pair despite her lower status by her half-blind stepmother. Under the soldier's spell, the girl's initial pleasure in dancing turns into a punishing compulsion that prevents her from participating in her former life, and steers her away from attending church. She finally asks the executioner to strike off her feet. Karen receives wooden feet and crutches, and takes on work in the parsonage to repent for her sins. To make good her indulgences, her wish to join Sunday mass is eventually granted by an angel. Karen's heart is so full of joy that it breaks at the moment of her redemption. Having disassociated herself from the evil agency of drive, she dies the transfigured death of the repenting sinner. Karen's paradise is unlikely to include a dance floor; for what kind of dance should be able to match the experience of a soul that flies »on the rays of the sun up to god« (RS 262)?

⁷⁵ Friedrich Theodor Vischer, *Asthetik oder Wissenschaft des Schönen: Zum Gebrauche für Vorlesungen*, Reutlingen 1851, III, 118.

⁷⁶ Hans Christian Andersen, *The Red Shoes*, in: Maria Tatar (ed.), *The Annotated Hans Christian Andersen*, trans. Maria Tatar, Julie K. Allen, New York 2008, 251–262, here: 257, quoted as »RS«, by page number.

However, her spectral shoes will continue their less pacified trajectory, dancing »across the fields and into the deep forest, with her feet still in them« (RS 260).

Andersen's text dismisses virtuosity as individual achievement based on practice. It focuses on virtuosity as curse. Triggered by the diabolical figure, Karen's drive is transposed onto her shoes; yet the shoes cling onto her feet and cannot be removed. The girl is under the spell of an agency that is at once of, and not of her body. Her feet in the red shoes acquire a state between the self and the other, organs that wander off on their own, like those that Freud called partial objects. They do not seem to belong to Karen as she is not able to keep them under her control; but once they are gone, her body is left behind injured. The metonymies of red enhance this ambivalence. Karen's ankles are red, but so is the soldier's beard; an initial pair of shoes is made for her from red cloth, but while she can take them on and off at will, the cursed pair of red shoes, made after the red shoes worn by the princess, stay on permanently; and her incessant dancing will inflict bleeding injuries on her legs and feet, culminating in the wounds caused by the amputation that are left to the readers' imagination. In *The Red Shoes*, virtuosic drive turns into a traumatic experience. The text spells out virtuosity's passionate move away from desire, and towards the blind, destructive insistence of drive. The cruel imperative of *jouissance* – ›by enjoying your dance so much, you will be undone as a person‹ – is kept in check by Karen's self-mutilation. Yet it also comes true in the on-going dance of severed feet. Death drive emerges as ›an uncanny excess of life, an ›undead urge‹ [...] beyond the (biological) cycle of life and death«. ⁷⁷ It is indeed a deadly excess of life that is played out in the dancierly élan of the perpetually moving red shoes, and in Kreisler's endless improvisations that are mirrored in his skipping over into disappearance.

Paradoxically, these movements recast the power that constitutes the virtuoso as the power that he opposes. At virtuosity's most extreme edges, obedience to the tyranny of musical – or dancierly – law can only be challenged through the even more excessive tyranny of drive. Yet drive does not only annul this law's oppressive power, but also its life-affirming, self-preserving character. It thus performs an answer to law's demands that is potentially lethal in its exaggeration. ›Death‹ here does not imply an encounter with the real (as arguably staged at the end of *Kinski Paganini*), but becomes manifest in the imaginary iterations of undeadness, of the haunting derealizations of immortal and indestructible life. The virtuoso sublime topples over into uncanny spectrality, an experience so often invoked with reference to Paganini's »grauenhafte[m] Zauber[]«. ⁷⁸

⁷⁷ As Slavoj Žižek comments in view of both Andersen's story and its adaptation in Michael Powell's and Emeric Pressburger's film *The Red Shoes*, in *How to Read Lacan*, London 2006, 62–63. For an analysis of the film in the context of virtuosity, see Lucia Ruprecht, »Virtuosität als blinde Bewegung in der Romantik«, in: Brandstetter, Neumann (note 6), 199–212.

The violinist's appearance was such that it allowed at once for fantasies about a man whose death was rapidly approaching or had just loosened its grasp, a lethally ill person or an undead revenant. The artist's proverbial old-fashioned, shabby dark coat – »his black dress was of an old-fashioned make, and seemed rather negligent, and his appearance was that of a skeleton from the grave«⁷⁹ – together with his unusual »chevelure à l'enfant«⁸⁰ produced an image of the unfamiliar familiar, of the outworn that persistently reincarnated itself. In this sense, Paganini appeared always also as his own spectral presence, a relic from a never-ending past animated by the uncanny vitality of his virtuosic music. Often hailed as prototypically Romantic, Paganini did not embody Romanticism's musical metaphysics, but its spectacularly animate agony.

V.

It was Franz Liszt, the nineteenth-century's other most stellar musical performer, who better succeeded at raising virtuosity's respectability. His art, which he modelled not least after that of Paganini, relied on forms of enchantment as powerful as the ones of his predecessor. Yet the integrity of Liszt's personality, his charitable activities, his religious affinities and his decision to retreat from the concert stage at the height of his career in 1847 in order to have more time for serious composition, all contributed to the image of this artist as domesticated virtuoso.⁸¹ If Eduard Hanslick's *Geschichte des Concertwesens in Wien* is to be believed, however, even Liszt's type of virtuosity did not produce a lasting model. In addition, his compositions were considered second-rate, and remained disputed throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and beyond. The virtuoso's promotion of composers such as Beethoven or Schumann contributed more to his esteem than his own works. Hanslick welcomed what he calls the new earnestness in concert culture that emerged after 1848, a more sober mood that reflected music's less inflated, more dignified status at a time of social and political slowdown.⁸² The virtuoso that survived the historical break is exemplified, in Hanslick, not by sensational types à la Paganini, but by a

⁷⁸ Hanslick (note 27), 242. Compare André's description of Paganini's effect in Schottky (note 12), 411. On the conjunction of the sublime and the uncanny, see Hans-Thies Lehmann, »Das Erhabene ist das Unheimliche: Zur Theorie einer Kunst des Ereignisses«, *Merkur* 43 (1989), 751–764.

⁷⁹ »Paganini at Prague«, *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* 10/38 (1828), 204.

⁸⁰ Harrys (note 54), 81.

⁸¹ See Gesa von Essen, »...wie eine melodische Agonie der Erscheinungswelt: Literarische und feuilletonistische Liszt-Paraphrasen aus der ersten Hälfte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts«, in: Arburg (note 6), 187–216.

⁸² See Hanslick (note 27), 433. Hanslick defines the period between the revolutions of 1830 and 1848 as the prime era of the virtuosi.

woman with an extraordinarily durable concert career, Clara Schumann.⁸³ If Clara Wieck received only a few, albeit amiable, lines when introduced as unusual representative of the era of the virtuosi (she gave her first concert in Vienna in 1837, aged 18), Clara Schumann returns with aplomb in Hanslick's discussion of what he perceives as the musical renaissance of the second half of the century. What had been a curious feminine type of virtuosity, defined in stark contrast to the male proponents as a display of innocence and poetry combined with the aura of a girl who had hardly grown out of her child prodigy years, is now praised as mature art, wholly dedicated to executing the will of the great creators – next to her husband, Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. Virtuosity's uncannily sublime is superseded here by beauty, bathing music in »ruhige[m] Sonnenlicht« rather than seeing it wasted like the »Feuerbrand von Kometen«.⁸⁴

It is in this context that virtuosity's own creativity as an art of performance is finally redeemed. Hanslick's enthusiastic support for recitals that were executed without resorting to notation restores value to the illusion of ad-hoc composition in the moment of live performance that demanded a specific kind of autonomy from the performer. The dialectic of mastery and submission re-emerges under more harmonious conditions when the serious musician renders musical works of others by heart. Musical reproduction is now called »nachschaufende[s] Schaffen«, which has to hold up, in the moment of performance, »den schönen Schein des eigenen begeisterten Hervorbringens«. This is only possible if the virtuoso »sich so vollständig in die vorzutragende Dichtung einlebt [...], daß er [...] sie wie ein Stück seiner selbst loslösen und begeistert freigeben kann«.⁸⁵

Two literary texts, both published around 1848, comment on the mid-century move away from sensationalist virtuosity: Adalbert Stifter's *Zwei Schwestern*, which appeared first under the title *Die Schwestern* in the journal *Iris* in 1846, and then in revised form in 1850 in the sixth volume of *Studien*; and Franz Grillparzer's *Der arme Spielmann*, published in 1848 (equally in the journal *Iris*) but written over a period of more than fifteen years. Both authors are known to have been critical of virtuosity. Stifter's narrator can be seen to stand

⁸³ The three men that Hanslick (note 27), 414–418, hails as respectable post-1848 virtuosi – Johannes Brahms, Joseph Joachim and Julius Stockhausen – started their careers after the political watershed.

⁸⁴ Hanslick (note 27), 414.

⁸⁵ Hanslick (note 27), 421. Hegel, writing significantly before Paganinian virtuosic excess peaked in the German-speaking countries, formulated similar views of successful performance in the music chapter of his lectures on aesthetics, see Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox, Oxford 1975, II, 957–958.

in for his author when expressing his general dislike for mere technical skill.⁸⁶ Grillparzer directly addressed Paganini (whom he witnessed in Vienna) in his poem *Adagio und Rondo auf der G-Saite*. The author may have projected his own disposition onto the performer here, but his judgement of Paganini as murderer of others – and of himself – is entirely in line with the imaginary world that has been explored in the previous sections of this article.⁸⁷

Let us start with *Zwei Schwestern*. Stifter's novella showcases the feminine type of tamed virtuosity that is representative of the post-Romantic attitude. Here, too, beauty and the feminine are called upon to supersede the sublime. At the centre of the novella is a pair of dissimilar sisters, both beautiful, but using this beauty to opposite ends. Maria, the older one, manages to turn around the family's misfortune in Stifterian fashion: she cultivates a small piece of barren land, and sets up a flourishing agricultural business. While her beauty has acquired the healthy and slightly weathered looks of an open-air worker, she displays the quiet serenity of the person who has found purpose and balance in life. Her sister Camilla in contrast has a more fragile, translucent and sickly appearance; she engages in virtuoso violin playing that damages her health. This means that Camilla too has a task of cultivation to fulfil, and even if this does not come as easily as in her sister's case, she will succeed in keeping her virtuosic drive in check. By domesticating both forms of the sublime, wild nature and artistic drive, *Zwei Schwestern* keeps the Romantic heritage in sight, that is, but also at a safe distance. It is not the youthful daughter but the aging father who carries the nickname Paganini, a designation derived from his black coat and melancholic demeanour at the time of his family's financial ruin (but caused also by a son that predeceased him, as we later learn).

Stifter's narrator meets this father at a recital by the celebrated sisters Milanollo, who created a sensation in Vienna's 1843 concert season.⁸⁸ Especially the older of the Milanollo sisters, Theresa, demonstrates an emotional knowingness in her play that goes far beyond her age, and that imbues her audience »mit einer tiefen schönen sittlichen Gewalt« (HKG I/6, 224), in Kantian rather than Burkian or Paganinian fashion. But it does not lack a melancholic kind of pain (see HKG I/6, 225) that affects both listeners. The father fears at the time of the concert that he will need to trade in Camilla's youth and talent in similar ways

⁸⁶ See Adalbert Stifter, *Die Schwestern, Studien: Journalfassungen*, ed. Helmut Bergner, Ulrich Dittmann, *Werke und Briefe, Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Alfred Doppler, Wolfgang Frühwald, Stuttgart 1980, I/3, 139–234, here: 146; *Zwei Schwestern, Studien: Buchfassungen*, ed. Helmut Bergner, Ulrich Dittmann, *Werke und Briefe, Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Alfred Doppler, Wolfgang Frühwald, Stuttgart 1982, I/6, 215–378, here: 223. Quoted as »HKG«, by volume and page number.

⁸⁷ For the poem and brief comments, see Cersowsky (note 17), 158.

⁸⁸ Hanslick (note 27), 342.

for the family to survive; the narrator is strangely touched by the girl's expressivity, and he will immediately recognise the disturbing emotion when discovering Camilla's playing years later during a visit at his Viennese friend's house.⁸⁹ Yet his description of her music that he overhears during his sleepless first night at the family estate is characterised by markers of cleansing, moderation, and finiteness:

Das Spiel [...] wurde immer besser und geläuterter, als machte sich doch nach und nach die Kunst geltend, die das menschliche Herz so beseligt und sänftigt, und als dränge sie die Leidenschaft zurück. Endlich wurde einmal jene Stärke, jene Begeisterung und Emporhebung, die gerne dem Ende einer Musik [...] vorausgeht, weil gleichsam die Seele sich selbst überholt hat, und das Werkzeug, wodurch sie sich ausgesprochen hat, weglegt. [...] Der Schluß, den ich selber als einen solchen erkannt hatte, offenbarte sich wirklich als einen solchen. Gleichsam wie ein goldener Bliz war der letzte Ton der Saiten über die Gegend hinaus gegangen – und es blieb still (HKG I/6, 278).

As opposed to Heine's call for protection against Paganini's overwhelming sounds, Stifter's narrator longs to hear more of this display of a passion that is held at bay: »Ich hielt meine Ohren bereit, um sie, wenn sie doch wieder begänne, aufnehmen zu können« (HKG I/6, 279); but he only confirms, twice more, that the music has ceased.

Michael Minden has explored the unusual importance that Stifter's description places on the recital's ending, on its carefully policed flow that will not allow for any *encores*. The »golden lightning« of this ending marks its mastery of the sublime, as Minden has it, which is here »contained, rounded out, in beauty«. This moment »separates the closure of beauty from the significant indistinctness of the Sublime«. ⁹⁰ Stifter's preoccupation with music's »Einfassung« (HKG I/6, 277) – echoed in the fence that runs around the dark terrace on which the musician stands –, with playing that is »so ungemein genau begrenzt, kein Har darüber und kein Har darunter, es prägte sich klar, bestimmt und gegenständlich aus« (HKG I/6, 276) speaks for the author's »aesthetic will«, as Minden puts it, to contain through formal discipline the psychologically debilitating effect of the sublime's infinitude.⁹¹ This trajectory is also practically achieved when the endangered, musical sister begins to devote more time to the mundane sides of life after her marriage to a farmer who is of both sensitive and sound character. Camilla's bodily appearance too is now well-defined, and, when asked, she offers to play something cheerful and robust on her violin (see HKG I/6, 376).

⁸⁹ Stifter modelled his Camilla after Theresa Milanollo, see HKG I/9, 382.

⁹⁰ Michael Minden, »Stifter and the Postmodern Sublime«, in: *History, Text, Value: Londoner Symposium 2003*, ed. Michael Minden et al., London 2006, 9–21, here: 11.

⁹¹ Minden (note 90), 10.

Stifter's movement from the sublime to the beautiful in his description of the nightly recital can be understood in two ways: as a comment on the preceding discursive field of the virtuoso sublime, and therefore as an expression of the need for containment; but also as a comment on his own earlier version of the novella, whose musical passages are still substantially affected by their Romantic heritage, and whose focus on limiting cultivation is less strong (see HKG I/3, 200ff.).⁹² In *Die Schwestern*, the direct emotional effect of Camilla's music is more powerful; and her trajectory is likely to end in death. Yet if the sense of closure that the reader gains from the formal and narrative restraints of the second version is based on its limitation of virtuoso drive through viable forms of compensation that are not necessarily self-destructive, an awareness of renunciation remains. The text's marriages do achieve forms of control of the untamed, but they are ones of reason rather than of feeling. Even though he shows genuine commitment when finally paired with the musical sister, her husband had originally sought to win Maria's hand in marriage; and even though the endings of both versions suggest instead the narrator's eventual union with the hands-on sister, his heart in fact had been captured initially by Camilla (an inclination more explicit in the original, see HKG I/3, 227, 233). The contrived nature especially of the afterword in the *Studien* version adds to the impression that the rewards of cultivation come at a cost. There is a subtle sense of pain that is perceptible in the feeling of lack with which the narrator is left after the first nightly music had stopped. Similarly, the moral achievement of renunciation is melancholically aware of the losses that it must incur, and that remain as an absence at the core of its efforts.

Stifter's countertext to the more drastic Romantic fantasies of virtuosity thus still bears their traces.⁹³ Grillparzer's *Der arme Spielmann* rewrites those traces with acute deliberation. This novella domesticates virtuosity by disabling its myth-making potential. Yet it does so in its own ambivalent fashion. While the portrait of a musician who displays a striking lack of talent also undercuts the logic of musical consumerism (an aspect close to the hearts of both Stifter and Grillparzer), this lack of talent does not prevent musical excess. But if excess had been defined, before, by the relentless drive towards overachievement, it

⁹² For a complementary reading of *Zwei Schwestern*, see Fabian Lampart, »Erzählte Musik, erzählte Bilder: Zur Reflexion medialer Konjunkturen in Stifters *Zwei Schwestern*«, in: *Zwischen Gattungsdisziplin und Gesamtkunstwerk: Literarische Intermedialität zwischen 1815 und 1848*, ed. Stefan Keppler-Tasaki, Berlin 2013 (forthcoming); more generally, Mathias Mayer, »Die Angst vor der Musik oder Statisches Erzählen«, in: *Stifter und Stifterforschung im 21. Jahrhundert: Biographie, Wissenschaft, Poetik*, ed. Alfred Doppler et al., Tübingen 2007, 201–212.

⁹³ This echoes Christian Begemann's more general insight into Stifter's economy of containment: »was auf intentionaler Ebene der Kritik verfällt«, remains »tatsächlich aber in ihr aufgehoben«; *Die Welt der Zeichen. Stifter Lektüren*, Stuttgart 1995, 290.

now re-emerges in a stupendous subscription to underachievement. Grillparzer's fiddler Jakob is virtuosic only in as much as virtuosity implies outperformance, which might realise itself in playing better, but also in playing worse than anyone else. However, it might be more to the point to start with the assumption that Jakob is the exemplary anti-virtuoso in German-speaking literature, if not its first anti-hero.⁹⁴ Again, figures of limitation are significant. In Stifter, they indicate both renunciation and reward. They are necessary for keeping the pleasures of sublime and potentially self-harming excess in moderation, channelling them into something sublimated and beautiful. In Grillparzer, the limiting agency itself becomes excessive, and intensely pleasurable. To put this in the theoretical terms developed in the previous sections, both Jakob and his virtuosic predecessors enjoy their responses to musical law, whether by breaking its demands, or, as in the case of Grillparzer's protagonist, by painstakingly trying to fulfil its orders. While Camilla's musical activity is still modelled on the precarious performances of mastery, Jakob never reaches such heights. He is caught in a type of musical engagement marked by failure. Similar to its Romantic model, this engagement is overshadowed by trauma, but of a much less sensational kind. Jakob tells the narrator of his traumatic experience in some detail, describing a failed exam performance when he was a child. Significantly, this was a recital by heart of a Latin passage, hampered by the boy's inability to remember one word, »Cachinum«, meaning »laughter«, a term laden with implications of mockery and ridicule, but also with the actual absence of its more exhilarating variety during Jakob's childhood.⁹⁵ The failed exam remains a defining moment in the musician's life, as it initiated his father's decision to deprive his son of his love and respect once and for all. Yet Grillparzer's anti-hero is also surprisingly assertive when it comes to fighting its continued impact. In some respects, he is being presented as an insecure person, ostensibly unfit for life, and pursuing a profession that persistently reiterates his original humiliation as he is laughed at by his listeners; but in others, he shows forms of resilience. His appearance is one of a poor but well-kept and healthy man. His utmost devotion to scores and notation, first as scribe and then as performer, does not only propel him back to the »primal«, Latin score; it is also a vigorously defended anti-virtuosic habit to guard him against possible repetitions of his childhood trauma. What he finds in this habit is pleasure not of mastery, but in and as routine, as permanent »Exerzitium« (AS 153).

⁹⁴ See Hans-Jürgen Schrader, »Naive und sentimentalische Kunsterzeugung: Grillparzers *Armer Spielmann* und einige seiner Brüder als verhinderte Virtuosen«, in: Arburg (note 6), 147–171, here: 161.

⁹⁵ Franz Grillparzer, *Der arme Spielmann*, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Peter Frank, Karl Pörnbacher, Munich 1964, III, 146–186, here: 160, quoted as »AS«, by page number.

This devotion to the letter of the law also becomes obvious in Jakob's pedantic sense of order that is visible in a set of material and immaterial enclosures, which are given an even more prominent narrative place than in Stifter. The narrator first meets the musician on the border of a narrow causeway, which is crowded with people who are eager to reach the festivities set in the suburb that opens up behind the passage. Jakob, though, is quite happy where he is; and notwithstanding the monetary promise of the busy night, he will not extend his dismal recital beyond his usual schedule. »Sunt certi denique fines« (AS 150), he utters before packing up his things. Later, when the narrator enquires about a visit to his house, Jakob informs him about his tightly structured daily musical practice, conducted in his shared room that is separated by chalk demarcations, and kept scrupulously tidy on the musician's side. The most interesting element of Jakob's musical practice is his nightly improvising. Although this is his only exercise that does not rely on sheet music, it sticks firmly to the structures of the musical system; more than experimenting, it is an insisting on, a persistently repeated testing out of given harmonic relationships:

Ein leiser, aber bestimmt gegriffener Ton schwoll bis zur Heftigkeit, senkte sich, verklang, um gleich darauf wieder bis zum lautesten Gellen emporzusteigen, und zwar immer derselbe Ton, mit einer Art genußreichem Daraufberuhen wiederholt. Endlich kam ein Intervall. Es war die Quarte. Hatte der Spieler sich vorher an dem Klange des einzelnen Tones geweidet, so war nun das gleichsam wollüstige Schmecken dieses harmonischen Verhältnisses noch ungleich fühlbarer. Sprungweise gegriffen, zugleich gestrichen, durch die dazwischen liegende Stufenreihe höchst holperig verbunden, die Terz markiert, wiederholt. Die Quinte daran gefügt, einmal mit zitterndem Klang, wie ein stilles Weinen, ausgehalten, verhallend, dann in wirbelnder Schnelligkeit ewig wiederholt, immer dieselben Verhältnisse, die nämlichen Töne (AS 155).

This is only a faint echo of Romanticism's rich musical imaginaries. The narrator's single explicit metaphorical comparison, »wie ein stilles Weinen«, does not distract our attention away from the fact that this kind of musical endeavour is useless when it comes to meaning-making and myth-building.⁹⁶ Where individual peak-performances à la Paganini gave rise to universal fantasies about the self's condition between triumph and trauma, we are faced here with pure idiosyncrasy. Hence Jakob's performance is meant »für den Spieler, [...] nicht auch für den Hörer« (AS 155), whose lack of gratification is contrasted with the performer's own enjoyment of his task: »Der Alte genoß, indem er spielte« (AS 156). Grillparzer's musical passage is not about *what* the performer might play; it is about *how* he plays. Absent content is compensated with abundant information about quality and approach. It is in the amount of libidinally charged detail that the fiddler's ascetic practice reflects the virtuoso's excess: both partake in the pleasures of immoderate expenditure.

⁹⁶ For a more detailed exploration of this aspect, see Eva Geulen, »Stellen-Lese«, *MLN* 116/3 (2001), 475–501, here: 494–501.

Yet in contrast to Paganini, who famously appeared to destroy his violin when he broke strings while playing, and also Liszt, who often needed more than one piano during a concert evening, Stifter's and Grillparzer's musicians take great care of their instruments. Much attention is given in Stifter's *Zwei Schwestern* to the beautifully-made, velvet-lined encasings of Camilla's violins that provide cover and rest. After Jakob's death, his fiddle goes to Barbara, the one, never consumed love of his life – a woman who had taught him a simple folk song, the single tune that he was able to play in a pleasing manner – where it is neatly arranged at the wall, next to crucifix and mirror, forming perhaps a tripartite *memento mori*. When the narrator offers a sum of money for the instrument, the woman refuses and protects the violin by locking it away in a drawer. This gesture speaks of more than only emotional involvement. In Grillparzer, precaution, but also attentiveness and slowness reach an incapacitating degree. Jakob's hesitation (together with his financial losses) is responsible for the break with the beloved Barbara before a more consolidated relationship had even begun. The speed with which he executes the same set of tones when improvising is the modest gain of endless practice; it is a unique occurrence in a man who defines himself as someone who is unable to disregard detail, and is therefore slow. Jakob explains this twice, first when talking about his studies as a boy: »Mich nannte man einen langsamen Kopf; und ich war langsam. [...] Meine Brüder sprangen wie Genssen von Spitze zu Spitze in den Lehrgegenständen herum, ich konnte aber durchaus nichts hinter mir lassen, und wenn mir ein einziges Wort fehlte, mußte ich von vorne anfangen« (AS 159). He returns to this disposition when reporting about his occupation as a scribe: »Ein unrichtiges Unterscheidungszeichen, ein ausgelassenes Wort im Konzepte, wenn es sich auch aus dem Sinne ergänzen ließ, machte mir bittere Stunden« (AS, 161). His musical practice is described as a task that does not omit a single note, and is therefore conducted in »viel zu langsame[m] Zeitmaß« (AS 157).

Slowness, attentiveness, precaution, and proficiency in a single, well-practised task thus become guards against the speedy surge of virtuosic drive. Yet they also preserve, in less self-harming fashion, the specific (dis)pleasure that is attached to responses to musical law that at once yield to and undo its demands, whether by way of outperformance or underperformance. Jakob's qualities might then be seen as different manifestations of the same predisposition. Grillparzer's gestures of containment maintain a significant ambivalence. Do locked-up drawers protect *from* virtuosity, or indeed do they *protect* virtuosity, allowing for different but similarly »suspect« forms of gratification, and providing places of rest out of which the virtuoso might be born again?

If this must remain an open question, Grillparzer and Stifter are less undecided when it comes to their re-evaluation of virtuosity as ethical commitment. Grillparzer's Jakob does not in Romantic manner play himself to death. He dies from the cold that he contracts after putting down his violin to rescue the chil-

dren of his neighbourhood and his landlord's belongings from flooding. At the end of the novella, Jakob becomes the virtuoso that he is meant to be, a virtuoso of the heart rather than of music.⁹⁷ Only then does he display the »männliche[] Entschiedenheit« (HKG I/6, 276) that had characterised Camilla's ability to delimit the virtuoso sublime through beautiful musical form. It is, however, in his novella *Kalkstein* where Stifter most explicitly joins Grillparzer's ethical turn. Modelled after *Der arme Spielmann*, *Kalkstein*, initially called *Der arme Wohlthäter*, features as protagonist a priest who reminds the reader of Jakob in many ways, without being an aspiring artist. The priest's most extraordinary achievement is his protection of the region's children from drowning, culminating in his contribution towards the endowment of a new school building. That this should be seen as a novel type of virtuoso performance of a man who had lived a good part of his life to make possible this task, is suggested by the obviousness with which Stifter's *Kalkstein* emulates its subtext, beginning with a reference to the »sogenannten Virtuosen« (HKG II/2, 62). Yet the priest also has a second obsession that might be called virtuosic, epitomised in his devotion to a considerable dowry of the finest white linen that he keeps in impeccable condition as it reminds him of a singular emotional attachment (see HKG II/2, 80–81, 119). As in Grillparzer, this love was never consummated.

It is in such writing of moderation where the imaginary life of nineteenth-century virtuosity finds its own nostalgically ambivalent corrective, surrendering to the demands of gentler laws (see HKG II/2, 12). Beyond ethical reinvestments, virtuosity remains marked by (dis)pleasure in Grillparzer. Stifter's beauty is melancholically aware of its abjection of the sublime. Paradoxically, the *preservation* of musical and emotional expenditure seems to be among this writing's most cherished and cared-for possessions: almost, but not entirely hidden, just as *Kalkstein's* priest's peeping cuffs, white, well-kept, and incommensurate under their dark coating (see HKG II/2, 65). Where Grillparzer takes apart and indulges, Stifter honours what he lays to rest: »und dann werden die zusammengelegten Stücke mit den alten ausgebleichten rothseidenen Bändchen, die noch vorhanden sind, umbunden, und wieder in den Schrein gelegt. –« (HKG II/2, 131).⁹⁸

⁹⁷ See Schrader (note 94), 161.

⁹⁸ I would like to thank Cathy Caruth, David Ferris, Michael Gamper, Mary Jacobus, and Andrew Webber, whose comments in various contexts have shaped the final version of my argument. Special thanks go to Annie Ring for reading the entire manuscript. My work on virtuosity has profited from my association from 2005–2010 with the project »The Virtuoso's Stage«, directed by Gabriele Brandstetter, at the Research Network *Kulturen des Performativen* at Free University Berlin.