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Source: *Music & Letters*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (Feb., 1989), pp. 46-57

Published by: [Oxford University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/735640>

Accessed: 19-10-2015 02:14 UTC

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CONSIDERATIONS OF TEXTURE

BY JONATHAN DUNSBY

THE TITLE of this study implies a diffuse enquiry, which will offer ideas for historical, conceptual and musical examination rather than pursue a single argument or even a single set of arguments.¹ The 'considerations' nevertheless cohere into two themes, a largely theoretical investigation of our understanding of the domain of musical texture, and a more empirical survey founded on a single though not simple idea about the qualities which render textural effect a potent force of musical structure. Both themes are pursued continually, if not continuously, so that the following narrative must be understood not as a plain exposition but as an interplay between the theoretical and the empirical. If such an approach can be justified, it is on the plea of prematurity, since to consider texture as a paradigm of musical enquiry at all appears to be rather new.² Nor can even a preliminary philological account of 'texture' as a musical term be presented: that important musicological work remains and deserves to be done. Nevertheless, an overview is possible which will aim to avoid the more obvious pitfalls of historical distortion.

'Texture', a familiar and easy term among modern English-speaking musicians, is more or less language-specific. There is no direct equivalent in French, nor in German (though the post-Ligeti German of today does of course recognize the term *Klangstruktur*), nor in Italian, from which we have borrowed the word 'tessitura' with its precise meaning—the particular range of a vocal or instrumental part. It might therefore be asked what it is that English-speaking musicians have concerned themselves with while others have not. Some of these 'considerations' will form a partial reply to that question, as well as indicating that the question is based to some extent on false premisses.

In fact texture as a musical term belongs principally to the modern age. It does not appear as a separate entry in the 1954 edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, and even its treatment in *The New Grove* (1980) is innocent of much information or indeed the conviction that the term has any important meaning. Dictionaries of the English language tell the same story. No musical reference is supplied for the word 'texture' in the 1933 *Oxford English Dictionary*, in which, however, its long-standing use as a term in the fine arts is in evidence. 'Texture' does appear in the 1986 supplement to the *OED*, the earliest musical reference being recorded from 1934 in Constant Lambert's *Music Ho!*. The next reference offered in the supplement dates from 1959, long after the publication of Donald

¹ I am grateful to faculty and students of the graduate theory seminar at King's College London (KQC) for their lively discussion of a draft of this article.

² Further to the literature discussed and noted throughout this article, it is difficult to assemble a rational bibliographic guide to 'texture'. A few modern writings are specific to the topic, for example Anne Trenkamp, 'Considerations Preliminary to the Formation of a Textural Vocabulary', *Indiana Theory Review*, iv (1980), 13–28, and W. Dean Sutcliffe, 'Haydn's Piano Trio Textures', *Music Analysis*, vi (1987), 319–32. However, the large majority of dissertations in which 'texture' is a keyword or category in the familiar listings of research material turn out to be studies of the sonic aspects of music of the twentieth century, often of one composer or even one work. In the last few decades, manuals of musical composition customarily discuss sonority, line and other aspects of the subject, as does much music criticism about new scores from the 1950s and '60s.

Tovey's book *Musical Textures*, which, in 1941, enshrined the term in a title, and four years after the influential volume *Orchestration* by Walter Piston, in which 56 pages were devoted to the study of seven types of orchestral 'texture'. Indeed, one of the definitions of texture to be considered later dates from an American textbook of 1956. What is intriguing about the *OED*'s 1959 reference, a citation from *The Listener*, is that 'texture' appears in quotation marks: it was not to be assumed that the intelligent and articulate reader interested in the arts would be familiar with the use of the word in the context of a musical discussion.³ This and other evidence points to the impetus which gave us the term 'texture' as we have it today. To put it initially at its most cursory and obvious, 'texture' probably arose as a feature of the critical vocabulary spawned by post-tonal music starting in the early years of this century. Many of the familiar terms and concepts in music criticism had become irrelevant, and in the search for an assimilation of modern music, what we now think of as texture was often the only hook on which critics, reviewers, and teachers too, were able to hang their musical understanding of the new. Yet texture has become a highly valued field of interest in all repertoires, as is indicated by the frequency with which almost any general musical commentary is criticized when it fails to deal with matters textural.

This much is clear and indeed worth noting only as a preliminary to further historical considerations in which the matter of defining 'texture' will be deferred, though implicitly confronted. Given our understanding of texture, what were the principal agents in the evolution of our perception of it? First, Romantic drama. Dramatic expression in the nineteenth century was pursued as much in texture as in other domains, so evidently so that it is unnecessary to offer many vivid examples from Berlioz, Wagner, Zemlinsky and the like. But one small case is offered, from Verdi's *Otello*, to ensure that the discussion is clearly focused on texture in as specific a sense as possible, something more concrete than 'sound worlds', 'harmonic colourings', 'rhythmic interactions' and all related terms, which are peripheral here though without doubt valuable for other musical purposes. The final scene in Act I of *Otello* is introduced by a passage for four solo cellos, imposing calm on a fast-moving, epic act, and a mood of intimacy for the private declarations in the love duet which is to follow. In Act IV, on the last occasion that Otello and Desdemona are to sing together, his awesome entrance into her bed- and death-chamber also carries a mood-changing introduction (or transition), following her 'Willow Song' and 'Ave Maria'. This time the introduction is a monody for double bass. Its immediate impact aside, and suspending consideration of the web of musico-dramatic relationships covering all the meetings of Otello and Desdemona, and of the complex of resonances linking and contrasting all the duets in the opera, there is a special significance in the way in which Verdi concentrates our musical attention on the dramatic contrast between the first and final meetings, exploiting an absolute opposition between homophony and monody, between living love and lonely death. It is a classic textural device.

To claim a special excellence in this kind of device in late Romantic opera is not to denigrate its embryonic excellence in Gluck or Mozart. Indeed, the fertile sequence of origin and moment has continued. The exploitation of texture as a structural force in nineteenth-century dramatic music served to reveal texture's

³ The reference is to Robert Simpson, 'Thoughts on Composing', *The Listener*, No. 1602 (10 December 1959), 1033-5. Simpson observes that terms such as 'texture' are used 'loosely until they cease to mean much, yet we still go on repeating them as slogans'.

inherent structural potential within the mainstream of new Western music, which reached its moment only relatively recently, most conspicuously in those compositions of a composer already mentioned, Ligeti, which are consciously conceived as textural structures.⁴

The second agent in the evolution of a new role for texture was impressionism and in particular its latent pictorialism. An outstanding novelty of the early twentieth century in this respect was *La Mer*. Variety and complexity of texture were commonplaces of the period, yet it is in pictorialism that the illusion of an expression arises, rather than its mere exposition. The variety and complexity of, for example, Berg's Three Orchestral Pieces is at least as extreme as that in Debussy's three symphonic sketches, yet in Debussy the illusion is of an actual shared experience. Similar considerations arise in cases of, for instance, 'bell' music. The sound of the bell is easy to suggest in ways which we might nowadays find musically primitive, though manifestations such as the midnight chime at the end of Schumann's *Papillons* and Musorgsky's carillon over the Great (and in fact bell-less) Gate of Kiev do carry the sincerity of simplicity. With more sophisticated attempts, it is the textural pictorialism that lends integrity to the result, be it German or French, Schoenberg's Op. 19 No. 6 or Ravel's 'La Vallée des cloches' from *Miroirs*. In arguing towards the view that pictorialism of one kind and another was a principal agent in what at this stage could well be termed 'the emancipation of texture', I take note of Dahlhaus's judgement about what he calls 'simple imitation', that 'its peripheral character renders it almost entirely irrelevant to a discussion of musical realism',⁵ and observe that this simply confirms the degree to which Dahlhaus sticks to his plot, a strictly nineteenth-century one in principle.

It hardly needs to be said, therefore, that at issue here is the origin and moment of our century's fascination with real texture, with music as a mirror of nature.⁶ The list of composers touched significantly by this historical moment, from early Ives to the still active Messiaen, is too long to contemplate in this context. Let Messiaen serve as an index of the general condition, for his attitude to composition entails one compelling proof that textural illusion is a principle of music, not merely an empirical necessity. Messiaen happens to live in an age when he could choose to include actual—at least, actually recorded or synthesized—bird-song to form some of the textural arabesque of his music, yet he believes that bird-song can never be heard as he wishes it to be heard elsewhere than in his musical manipulations. No wonder that *musique concrète* was perhaps the shortest-lived style in the history of Western music, logged by the authoritative Vinton as lasting from 1948 to 1955.⁷

Drama and pictorialism are often associated with programmaticism, yet I shall argue that the development of programme music has not been another principal origin in the development of our perception of texture. It is a secondary matter. This is clear from its most auspicious beginnings—to take a narrow view of musical history—in Beethoven. The 'mehr Empfindung als Malerei' of the Pastoral Symphony, an *obiter dictum* which has been discussed more times than it may merit, is

⁴ For a recent example of how this point has become absorbed in the historiography of our times, see Bryan R. Simms, *Music of the Twentieth Century: Style and Structure*, New York, 1986, for example p. 135.

⁵ Carl Dahlhaus, *Realism in Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. Mary Whittall, Cambridge, 1985, p. 18.

⁶ This last point is not the diagnosis of a hidden motivation but the statement of one trend which has been a conscious fact of composition, at times a frank intention: see, for example, Busoni's views, including the comment that 'all arts, resources and forms ever aim at the one end, namely, the imitation of nature and the interpretation of human feelings': *A New Aesthetic of Music* (1907); Eng. trans. (1911), reprinted in *Three Classics in the Aesthetic of Music*, New York, 1962, p. 76.

⁷ See *Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. John Vinton, London, 1974, pp. 505–6.

taken by Dahlhaus to fit into a 'peripheral' category of realism in music, that of 'simple imitation'.⁸ Yet in this rare verbal defence of his compositional intention Beethoven was presumably stimulated, in part at least, by his recognition that the brook, the storm and other pictorial elements in the Pastoral outclassed the emotional programme of the music. His more restrained approach to programme in the 'Les Adieux' Sonata may represent a better response to the danger of combining pictorial elements with stated or implied emotional characterizations amounting to a programme—the danger simply being that pictorial elements will always tend to dominate. In 'Les Adieux', Beethoven is as safe as in any aria of *Fidelio*, for the 'Lebewohl' motif refers not to natural sound or images (the 'horn' effect of the motif being conceded) but to verbal language, which has always safely combined with music precisely because it is so distinct from it. Programmes are disembodied stories, narratives too close to musical narrative. They cannot be brought into an ideal fusion with music because their form of narrative must then become indiscernible (the physical narrative of dance in ballet, by comparison, is eminently discernible). Thus programme could never have been expected to stimulate unforeseen developments in musical style which might stand comparison with those stimulated by alternative, rather than implied narrative, by drama rather than programme. One need only compare Schoenberg's *Erwartung* with *Verklärte Nacht* to experience the difference between these strong and weak forces. The romantic programme, therefore, is not counted here as a principal force. And this argument strongly supports Dahlhaus's dialectical contention that expressionism in music is better understood as an outgrowth of naturalism than of Romanticism, an idea that becomes 'comprehensible', as he notes, 'if one recognizes that romantic expressiveness and expressionistic expressiveness—for all that a historical link exists between them in Wagner—are two fundamentally different things'.⁹

In discussing forces of history, considering the work that composers actually undertook in legitimizing future uses of texture that they could not themselves have foreseen, I have also intertwined assumptions about what musical texture actually is, or at least how it may now be understood. However, this needs more investigation. It is instructive to ask what other terms in our language contribute to a definition of texture. The answer seems uncontroversial. Four terms circumscribe the concept for Western music: monophony, polyphony, homophony and heterophony. These are not categorically distinct. For instance, from one point of view polyphony, homophony and heterophony are the same compared with monophony, since they involve more than one strand of sound. Similarly, polyphony and heterophony are musically exclusive in a way which does not hold true of the other two terms. Polyphony is the combination of strands of sound (and not 'melodies', as *Webster's Dictionary* would have it) such that they are discernible the one from the other: this is true of heterophony, but with the further condition that in heterophony the strands should be perceptibly elaborating the same musical material. Monophony and homophony, however, are mutually exclusive only in the sense of the distinction between singularity and multiplicity.

That we are not dealing here with a logical set of categories is only to be expected, since these four terms represent, to some extent, historical evolution. A tendency to list them chronologically has some historical credence: monophony is what the human voice can produce and presumably always has done, requiring only

⁸ Op. cit., pp. 21–22.

⁹ Ibid., p. 119.

the individual; polyphony, implying something to do with comprehensible musical relations between voices that goes far beyond the territory of texture, appears to be a subsequent achievement—requiring social interaction; homophony is associated with the relatively recent manipulations of major–minor tonality in the Baroque and Classical periods (but for faburden and non-Western activities of course); and heterophony, for all its ubiquity in non-Western cultures, was brought to our attention by Boulez on Debussy and by many writers of the 1960s who dealt with contemporary music. We do have a four-term complex, and I would not seek to undermine its function in musical discourse, though what might be called ‘applied texture’ always tends to imply a proliferation of categories: recall the reference to Piston’s *seven* types of texture (unison, melody and accompaniment, secondary melody, part-writing, contrapuntal texture, chords, complex textures).

One implication of the above points is that texture, like other musical domains, depends for its meaning and differentiations on our perception of it. It has thus come under the scrutiny of psychological studies, for instance those of Leonard Meyer:

Texture has to do with the ways in which the mind groups concurrent musical stimuli into simultaneous figures, a figure and accompaniment (ground), and so forth. Like other music processes textural organization, or the lack of it, may give rise to expectation.¹⁰

This comment, drawn from a book which expounds a behaviourist theory of musical communication, naturally pinpoints ‘grouping’ as a corner-stone in the understanding of textural process. So much may be clear-cut. Another commentator pursues the argument (which is basically a mentalist argument amounting to a contradiction of Meyer’s stance) that a refined cultural sensitivity to that interplay of figure and ground which forms texture actually represents a surplus, something in and of itself worthwhile, in relation to our everyday need for texture—to our need, for instance, to avoid catastrophe by being able to distinguish the noise of an approaching automobile from the obtrusive, confusing and therefore perceptually suppressed soundscape of modern city life:

It should be noted that figure, ground and texture can be perceived both in the world of daily experience and in artificial displays, but that our interest inheres in the perception of such artificial or man-made displays as poems, paintings and piano concerti.¹¹

The understanding of texture must, therefore, take explicit account of perceptual mechanisms (or, for a behaviourist, *the* perceptual mechanism). Must it also, the question arises, therefore take account of mechanisms—if such they are—of evaluation, of ‘criticism’? If so, it will become increasingly tempting to suppose that to understand texture is, in one way and another, to analyse the music. Such a position in the account of musical texture is taken implicitly by Lewis Rowell. He warns that ‘*texture, surface or grain* is a useful concept for the plastic and tactile arts but requires careful definition when applied to music or literature’.¹² Eight headings are offered under which textural matters can be understood. Three of these may be

¹⁰ Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, Chicago, 1956, p. 185, and see pp. 185–96 in general.

¹¹ Howard Gardner, ‘On Figure and Texture in Aesthetic Perception’, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, xii (1972), 45.

¹² Lewis Rowell, *Thinking about Music: an Introduction to the Philosophy of Music*, Amherst, Mass., 1983, p. 27.

called 'featural': one is orientation, by which Rowell means the particular music's tendency towards either 'vertical' or 'horizontal' factors, and in which he is setting homophony apart from monophony, polyphony and heterophony; the second is so-called tangle, an effect that results from the 'contrapuntal interweaving' of melodies; and the third is figuration, that is, patterning, which may characterize musical texture but which, as he fails to note, may also be a separate structural feature, since monody can often be patterned without this necessarily representing a particular or identifiable texture—the finale of Chopin's Second Piano Sonata is one unusual example. Rowell's other five headings are perhaps more notable in that they deal with absolute distinctions held in balance in any one manifestation. He writes about the distinction between focus and interplay, between economy and saturation, between the thin and the dense, between the smooth and the rough, in which can be discerned the etymology of the musical term 'texture' in the physical term; and he offers the distinction between simple and complex texture.

This last distinction is a particularly interesting one because, while being self-evident in the common parlance of musicians, it confesses a critical position. The terms 'simple' and 'complex' may appear to be relatively neutral (unlike, for instance, 'complicated', by which we would imply that a composer is aiming for an effect that is not in fact achieved), but they are inevitably evaluative when applied to particular examples. 'Simple' is an especially elusive epithet from this point of view. Ex. 1, by way of a miniature case-study, shows a 'simple' texture from the finale of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony. It is standard homophony, played by instruments of the same family. Yet if we could come to some working definition of what is and what is not a textural matter, it is likely that Ex. 2, from later in the same movement, would be called 'even simpler' than Ex. 1. Our absolute judgement of Ex. 1 is undermined once relativities are brought into play: the end result of such a process might be that one has nothing much to say at all about texture as such, since all depends on what is being compared with what. No doubt this is why musicians have found texture difficult to contemplate except self-reflexively in essentially technical and intuitive ways—how to compose a certain kind of sound, or how to achieve it in performance.

In wishing to avoid the barren ground of relativistic description and to go beyond the praxis of purely self-reflexive musical language (which may be the highest, but is not the only good), I suggest that there is one aspect of musical texture which above all others seems to make it amenable to the understanding. This aspect is, quite simply and as has already been illustrated in passing, 'illusion'. An illusion, informally defined, is an effect which induces in us an apperception which we know cannot be the case. The depth and degree to which musical texture is a playground of illusion is so extreme that what follows can be no more than an adumbration of the topic, though one that is nevertheless overdue.¹³

Consider, for instance, the textural illusion which characterizes that entire repertory of Western tonal music in which the male voice combines with an instrument or instruments. When the voice is below the instrument, it does not usually have the structural function of a bass line. Has anyone ever understood the second song of Schumann's *Dichterliebe*, performed by tenor and piano, as opening with an A major chord in 6-3 position, or perhaps an F sharp minor chord in 6-4 position? The

¹³ It was reassuring to discover at a late stage in the preparation of this article that Boulez recently aired the idea of textural illusion, though as one compositional resource rather than as a fundamental property of musical texture: see 'Timbre and Composition—Timbre and Language', *Contemporary Music Review*, ii (1987), 161–71.

Ex. 1

Adagio poco meno che prima (♩ = 60)

20

Fag.

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Vle.

Vc.

Cb.

Ex. 2

G Andante non tanto

1

2

Corni in F

3

4

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Vle.

Vc.

Cb.

history of this massive textural illusion which has been sustained for centuries, of how composers have played with it sometimes, of how post-tonal composers have dealt with it, would make a study in itself. There are many gross illusions of this kind which are part of our cultural values—we are all consciously unaware of how we move between the sustained amplitude of the voice and the radical decay of the piano, taking them both to be smooth and in a sense equivalent melodic textures; or of how we switch between hearing a string group as three or four strands of sound and hearing it, in the hands of a skilled composer, for certain purposes as one instrument of giant range from low bass to high violin.

Among the virtues of thinking in terms of illusion is that we can begin to relate the familiar with the unfamiliar. Textural identity is an example. The very act of composition often implies the attempt to create, quite independently of any kind of mimesis, new types of sound—the rasping low voices in Okeghem, the twisting dissonances of Monteverdi's new style, the unprecedented speed in Beethoven's glistening piano figuration, the swirling antiphonies of Charles Ives. Where illusion enters here is in the listener's awareness of the cause of the sound. Do we know what is making the sound that makes the texture? Do we recognize it as the familiar made new, or are we faced with the new which is also unfamiliar since we are unable to recognize how the texture is assembled? These are, admittedly, ethnocentric questions: when it comes to hearing a recording of Inuit throat games, which many listeners—to recordings—will tend to hear as instrumental music rather than 'vocal', the concept of textural identity hardly matters. Yet it surely does matter in a case such as the opening of the slow movement of Schoenberg's Fourth String Quartet where, but for visual evidence, very few listeners, even skilled musicians, could be sure that the long first note was being played (at the unison) by two violins, a viola and a cello. We know that in reality the texture of the first note must be made up in some determinate way, but we cannot actually determine it purely musically—only the score or the performance as seen will help. That illustration from a relatively modern piece nevertheless represents a constant resource of Western music, which indeed provides a means of locating historical evolution from one point of view. For instance, by 1790 it must have been aurally critical to cognoscenti of Mozart and the post-Mannheim taste that in orchestral texture a bass line in some contexts has a certain edge: bassoons will double cellos. In 1690, such specificity of texture in a ripieno bass line was not wanted, needed or cared about in general. We find a similar, though reversed development in chamber music, comparing for instance the second decade of the nineteenth century with the second decade of our own. The various chamber music media, with all their textural connotations, were established in Beethoven's middle years and held sway long after. Yet by the time of *Pierrot lunaire* and *L'Histoire du soldat* the norms of sound production were already historical rather than actual: the illusion of necessary combinations of instruments was once again in disfavour, that is, it was beginning to be disbelieved.

Having assigned a rather grand role to the idea of illusion in considering musical texture, and having resisted the temptation to comment on pigeon-hole cases—Bach's contrapuntal writing for solo violin or cello for example,¹⁴ Thalberg's 'three-hand' effect at the piano—I also recognize the difficulties of the concept. To return to Exx. 1 and 2, it is worth asking under what circumstances one may

¹⁴ Bach's writing for solo violins has been discussed in remarkable depth, and ideologically narrow terms, in Karl-Otto Plum, *Untersuchungen zu Heinrich Schenkers Stimmführungsanalyse*, Regensburg, 1979.

distinguish between them. We are probably compelled to look at performance factors rather than analytical ones in trying to understand Ex. 1. It is not likely to be as in tune as Ex. 2, or intoned in quite the same way. It will probably be especially vibrant, since each line of violins will privilege downbeats (semiquaver or quaver) of which the listener will hear an unusually quick succession. Second violins will feel that they carry the melody and will strive all the harder for being in the aural spotlight. Firsts will play the terminal *sforzato* C# with special gratification, but they will have been determined to keep their standard up in the semiquaver anacrusis. It is masterly compositional psychology, one of the best examples I know (as does everyone else, of course) of textural illusion—the creation of a line out of lines. Ex. 2, on the other hand, is a display of compositional stringency: the initial textural illusion in the finale of the ‘Pathétique’ is not, for all its cunning, inherent in the musical idea of the movement, not a feature that can be played on in any way, or so Tchaikovsky conceived it—to repeat it would have been an everyday mistake. Thus it has been possible to discuss the Tchaikovsky examples without recourse to critical notions of simplicity or, if preferred, of relative complexity. Rather, there has been an appeal to function—scoring (Ex. 1) as the articulation of an idea, and rescoring (Ex. 2) as the pursuance of an idea itself, the pitches, rhythms, shape and tonal context, rather than its presentation (as with Ex. 1).

Another case takes this form of arguing one step further, and it is perhaps the decisive step. In the ‘Gloria’ which closes the first of the two acts of Stravinsky’s *Oedipus Rex*, the texture is saturated with the instruments of a large orchestra and the voices of a male chorus. Ex. 3¹⁵ is the first page of the score of this item. In the ‘Laudibus’ sections the piano provides a resounding bass ostinato. The bulk of the chorus seems to be singing in the key of C major with no sixth added to the tonic triad, yet the bass of the piano part is A. On most modern pianos (excluding the Bösendorfer Imperial) A is the actual lowest note. In Ex. 3 it is not heard as a pitch anyway; if the piano usually had a G available at that deep and mainly inaudible register as regards pitch, presumably Stravinsky would have written G. Yet what seems to be a simple case of textural illusion, and composerly pragmatism, is belied by the very last chord of the ‘Gloria’, shown in Ex. 4, where the melody moves from G to A and the harmony changes from C with added supertonic to the same chord-type on G. Such a case takes us that final step into analysis, into reading a textural feature as what turns out to be a pitch-structural device. The relationship between the piano opening and the eventual melodic and harmonic goal of the ‘Gloria’ is no illusion: that is, it is plain enough on paper.

A final consideration enters even more labyrinthine regions, those of textural expectation and the creation of illusory significance by means which seem to be so varied that they may never be captured in a formula or a theory. Various authors have noted that, because Western music is habitually complex texturally, a special effect often arises in the use of monody (a monodic Chopin movement has already been mentioned). Messiaen exploited this cultural feature in the ‘Dance of Fury’ from the *Quartet for the End of Time*, his vision of stark violence, music designed to express hurt and which does hurt players and listeners, both physically and aesthetically. It is not just the linear dissonance, the excess and persistence of volume, the wildness of line, but also, perhaps fundamentally, the sustained monody which creates such a powerful effect. Long before the movement ends we

¹⁵ Exx. 3 and 4 are reprinted by kind permission of Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd.

Ex. 3

90

$\text{♩} = 69$

The musical score for Ex. 3 is arranged in a standard orchestral format. It includes parts for Piccolo (Picc.), Flute (Fl.), Grand Trumpets (Gr. 1, 2), Oboes (Ob. 1, 2), Clarinet in A (Cl.), Bassoon (Fag.), Horns (Corni), Trumpets (Tr. 1, 2, 3, 4), Trombones (Trb. 1, 2), Percussion (amb. B., Cymb., Timp.), Piano, Tenor (T.), Bass (B.), Violins (Vn. 1, 2), Viola (Vie.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The score is in 3/4 time with a tempo of quarter note = 69. The key signature has one flat. The vocal parts (T. and B.) enter with the lyrics "Glo - ri - a, glo - ri - a, glo - ri - a!" and "Lau - di - bus," respectively. The woodwinds and strings play rhythmic patterns, while the brass instruments have specific melodic lines. The piano part features a complex rhythmic accompaniment. The percussion includes a cymbal and timpani. The strings play a steady accompaniment. The vocal parts are marked with *f al fine*.

Ex. 4

glo - ri - a, glo - ri - a!

Ex. 4

are thirsting for a chord or a counterpoint. Textural expectation of this kind is deeply embedded in our response to certain kinds of music. A Baroque fugue subject, for instance, will probably stimulate in the listener who has never heard it before the expectation of a second voice entering with the same material, then a third and perhaps a fourth. Indeed textbooks, as Bukofzer noted 40 years ago, had described fugue, not as a form but a texture: as has been discussed by other authors, he did not entirely solve the question in implying that a fugue is in fact a contrapuntal procedure, since that is just a matter of focus or attention; any contrapuntal procedure implies a specific texture, but one might as well say that the specific texture is at issue and can be achieved according to this or that contrapuntal procedure. To return to the question of expectation, however, and bearing in mind the example in Messiaen of monody used, as it were, contra-culturally, we do not have to look far for the archetypal intra-cultural use of textural expectation, which is to be found in the treatment of the main theme of the finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Even this falls within the paradigm of illusion, since the exposition of the theme, once set in motion as a monody, has the mysterious quality of an inevitable development. The theme is announced solo and low. It is a self-repeating theme (ABA), not amenable to unvaried repetition. Because it is solo, the introduction of counterpoints is bound to happen. Because the symphony so far has been, informally put, basically homophonic, counterpoint here will give way to homophony, as happens on the third run through the theme. Because the theme starts low, the tessitura must expand upwards. Once all these procedures have been carried out, the theme must be over in the sense that any further treatment is likely to be texturally redundant.

Reviewing the ground that has been traversed here, one might claim a little progress in charting the still largely undiscovered world of the fabric of sound. Perhaps it is a world that can never be made fully amenable to the kind of understanding that is claimed of pitch- and rhythmic structures. Yet there would be

a degrading of our image of music if critical despair took root over these issues. Over a century ago, Edmund Gurney outlined what is at stake:

After our full discussion of musical *form*, and after the definition (which can hardly be simplified or amplified) of musical *colour* as consisting in the various sorts of *timbre* or quality of tone which various instruments can produce, it might seem hardly necessary to begin the detailed discussion of the latter element by more particularly marking its distinction from the former. As a matter of fact, however, the confusion in the use of the words and in the ideas connected with them is so common, and is so much unconsciously fostered by the language of art-critics whose paramount interest lies in the arts of the eye, that a brief notice of it, and of the sort of expressions in which it takes shape, is unavoidable.¹⁶

In all Gurney's splendid discussion, though, one feels that there is a missing element, a struggle but failure to achieve focus in his picture of the fabric of music. That missing element is the very shared value which has been the topic of the present enquiry, the common understanding of 'texture', no longer the sign of a confusion of distinct paradigms of criticism (visual art/music) but of a conspiracy of meaning (musicians now all talking about more or less the same phenomena) that offers a real opportunity, not only for research on new music where textural structure is often a cardinal characteristic, but on all repertoires reinterpreted by our modern musical consciousness.

¹⁶ *The Power of Sound*, London, 1880; reprinted New York, 1966, p. 286.