

RENATA SKUPIN

Department of Conducting, Composition and Music Theory, Academy of Music, Gdańsk

Giacinto Scelsi – homo viator and his musical itinerary

ABSTRACT: Giacinto Scelsi was a “traveller to the East”, who tied his life inextricably to creative work. As a composer, he sought a path for the renewal of his own musical language, shaped during his youth under the powerful influence of other composers’ styles. On becoming a *homo religiosus*, in the Eliadean sense, he found his own path to transcendence through art (creation), deeply inspired by those great traditions of the Orient in which art was a reflection of the artist’s spirituality.

The topos of the path is one of the main keys to interpreting Scelsi’s work. His works for large orchestra and choir contain distinct traces of a Scelsian “voyage to the East”. They form one great cycle, integrated by the motif of the path, expressed through meanings added in the content of the individual programme-titles. The cycle’s finale, the eschatological *Pfhat* (1974), is the musical depiction of a journey that ends with “a clear, primordial light,” symbolising man’s encounter with a higher reality and “great liberation” as the goal of his spiritual path.

The chronotope of the path is revealed in the very musical material of his orchestral works: in their quasi-visual soundspace. It is manifest, among other things, in the processual form – one might even say the storyline – and the consistently applied procedure of transforming sonorities, texture and rhythmic structures. A fundamental symbolic function is discharged by various forms of “upwards path”, linked to the dramaturgical role of an upwards motion pattern in the melody and an upwards movement in the tonal-harmonic plan of the orchestral works. The most crucial of all the variants of the motif of the path is the direction “into the core”, that is, towards the “inner space” of the sound. This carries significance both in the dimension of the harmonic spectrum of a sound and also its spiritual depth – the mystical dimension. The journey to the centre acquires the status of an emblematic topos of the Scelsian poetic of the *viaggio al centro del suono* [journey to the centre of the sound].

KEYWORDS: Scelsi Giacinto, twentieth-century music, Italian music, *homo viator*, Orient, orientalism.

Giacinto Scelsi was one of the “Eastern travellers” of his times.¹ Like Carl Gustav Jung,² Erich Fromm, Hermann Hesse and Mircea Eliade, he embarked on a “journey to the East”. Those journeys were manifold and singular, since in order for one’s destination to be truly reached, the path had to be delineated indi-

¹ See Renata Skupin, *Poetyka muzyki orkiestrowej Giacinto Scelsiego. Dzieło a duchowość kompozytora – między Wschodem a Zachodem* [Poetics of Giacinto Scelsi’s orchestral works: Composer’s oeuvre and spirituality – between East and West] (Kraków, 2008).

² See Leszek Kolankiewicz, “Wstęp. Carl Gustav Jung – wędrowiec Wschodu,” [Carl Gustav Jung – Eastern traveller], in Carl Gustav Jung, *Podróż na Wschód* [Journey to the East], trans. Wojciech Chelmiński, Jerzy Prokopiuk, Erdmute and Waclaw Sobaszek (Warsaw, 1989), 7–27.

vidually and walked alone. But the motifs of those wanderings were shared, determined by the same desires to arrive at beginnings, origins and archetypes, since all journeying to the East is an endless process of “setting oneself at the beginning.”³

For Scelsi the composer, the start of his *iter ad Orientem* was linked to a search for the sources of a renewal of his own music, which was initially influenced by the styles of other composers (Scriabin, Stravinsky, Bartók, Berg) and by aesthetics, styles and techniques currently in vogue (futurism, neoclassicism, dodecaphony). Having embroiled himself in composing by means of twelve-tone technique,⁴ he gradually fell into a state of creative stagnation, and thence creative crisis. It became obvious that he had to find his own true creative path. One can find traces of Scelsi’s deliberations and inclinations in this matter in the two collections of his reflections from the years 1953–54: *Son et musique* and *Art et connaissance*. In these texts, Scelsi’s language is at times opaque, Aesopian, and the composer spins out erudite, but often enigmatic, and highly generalised, considerations.⁵ One of his *idées fixes*, however, is quite clear – formulated, indeed, almost like a postulate: “Music cannot exist without sound, but sound exists very well without music. It would seem, therefore, that the sound is more important. Let us begin with it.”⁶ Scelsi understood this as a return to the pre-material of music – to the sound as its “primary cause”.

³ Ibid., 9.

⁴ Scelsi probably encountered twelve-tone technique through the intermediary of Walther Klein, and he used it for composing at least from 1937 (the dates of some works from that period have yet to be verified) to 1948. Although Klein is seen as Scelsi’s teacher in composition, details of their contacts remain poorly documented. After Friedrich Jaecker, “Giacinto Scelsi et Walther Klein,” in *Giacinto Scelsi aujourd’hui*, ed. Pierre-Albert Castanet (Paris, 2008), 295–301.

⁵ The metaphoric, eccentric and at times downright provocative nature of some of Scelsi’s wordings, and also the spread of utterances related by people visiting him in his home on via di San Teodoro in Rome that were not authorised by the composer, made quite a significant contribution to the emergence of a sort of mythology surrounding his figure. Particularly deep-rooted was the myth of Scelsi’s mental illness and of the so-called “improvisations” that replaced for him traditional composing. But since any resolution to the question of the composer’s *maladie nerveuse* can be provided solely by psychiatrists, and none of his doctors ever issued him with such a diagnosis, his mental illness can at most be no more than speculation. Work on setting in order and documenting the whole collection of tapes containing recordings of Scelsi’s “improvisations” on the piano or ondiola, which in fact are merely a record of very short trials of sounds or ideas, usually lasting for two or three minutes, is drawing to a close, and before long it should influence the definitive verification of opinions on the exceptional character of Scelsi’s way of composing. An increasing role in the ongoing process of demythologising the figure and music of Scelsi is being played by the work of the Fondazione Isabella Scelsi, which is coordinating the final editorial work on the source material gathered in the archive in Scelsi’s Rome apartment, currently the foundation’s headquarters. See Renata Skupin, “Giacinto Scelsi i jego muzyka – mity i rzeczywistość,” [Giacinto Scelsi and his music – myths and reality] *Ruch Muzyczny* 10 (2008): 6–10.

⁶ “La musique ne peut exister sans le son, mais le son existe très bien sans la musique. Donc il semble que le son soit plus important. Commençons par celui-ci...” [trans. R. Skupin]. Giacinto Scelsi, “Son et musique,” *1985 la musica: trimestrale di musica contemporanea* 17 (1988): 51.

For him, the model became those oriental conceptions in which sound was identified with “the cosmic force that is the basis of everything”, with “the first movement of the Immutable” and with the “beginning of Creation.”⁷ It is Hindu tradition in particular that emphasises the role of the “primordial SOUND, spreading forth in the Great Vacuum like a creative WORD (the first vibration), from which emerge all the “*Names and Forms*” of the cosmic phantom.”⁸ Scelsi was fascinated also by oriental practices of sound meditation, especially sound yoga.⁹ In his text “Son et musique”, the composer explains:

In the Yoga of Sound, neophytes acquire the ability [...] to hear their personal sound and then Devic sounds. The personal sound leads to perception of the supranormal world, whilst at the same time producing inner balance, which is precisely what this Yoga is based on.¹⁰

And indeed, in the Hindu Nada Bindu Upanishad, representing “the mythical personification of the mystical syllable OM, depicted as a bird,”¹¹ we find examples of this type of phenomenon. According to Eliade, “The most interesting part of this Upanishad is the description of the acoustic phenomena that accompany some yogic exercises.” In certain yogic environments specialising in “mystic hearing,” yogis achieve ecstasy by concentrating on sounds; that is, “the transformation of the whole cosmos into one great theophany of sounds.”¹² A fascination with this same practice of sound meditation was shared by Scelsi’s close friend and artistic-spiritual kinsman Henri Michaux, who invokes the same Upanishad in his essay “Un certain phénomène qu’on appelle musique”:

In *Laya-Yoga*, the yogi anticipates liberation from sound. But this concerns listening to an *inner sound*, in which he is to define and transcend himself: “Relinquishing all thought, all effort, meditating on that single tone, his soul melts into the sound.”¹³

⁷ Ibid., 52. Scelsi would later include these definitions of the sound in the subtitle of *Konx Om Pax*.

⁸ Swami Anirwan, “Mistycyzm Indii,” [The mysticism of India] in *Antologia Indyjska. Sanskryt* [Indian anthology. Sanscrit], trans. Wanda Dynowska (Madras, 1959), xx.

⁹ The practice of meditating on “mystic sounds,” known as *siabdyoga*, and so “the yoga of sound,” is described by Mircea Eliade, among others. See Mircea Eliade, *Joga. Nieśmiertelność i wolność*, trans. Bolesław Baranowski (Warsaw, 1984), 393–394; Fr. orig *Le Yoga. Immortalité et Liberté* (Paris, 1972).

¹⁰ “Dans le Yoga du Son, les adeptes parviennent [...] à entendre leur son personnel et ensuite les sons Déviques. Le son personnel amène à la perception du monde super-normal, en même temps qu’il produit équilibre intérieur qui, justement, est à la base de ce Yoga. [...] Selon le Yoga du Son, l’extase et l’illumination sont les effets du son ‘juste’”. Scelsi, “Son et musique,” 53.

¹¹ M. Eliade, *Joga*, op. cit., 146–147.

¹² Ibid. Similar mystic auditory phenomena are also familiar in Arabic tradition (see Eliade, *Joga*, 394).

¹³ See Henri Michaux, “Zjawisko zwane muzyką,” trans. Krzysztof A. Jeżewski, *Res Facta* 2 (1968), 32n.1 (in *Nada-bindu-Up*, 31.41; cit. after Alain Daniélou, *Yoga*, chapter IV); Fr. orig.

Scelsi was inspired by the Eastern perception of sound as a mystic phenomenon and by the practices of sound meditation focussed on the search within a sound for a “spiritual element transcending physicality.”¹⁴ He compared this with his (Western) knowledge of the internal structure of a sound, of the complexity and dynamics of its harmonic spectrum, and he was particularly intrigued by the “third dimension” of the sound – its depth, or “spherical quality.”¹⁵ He was of the opinion that Western music focussed mainly on the “organisation of sounds” by means of intervals, which are merely “empty chasms,” and on “musical shapes” and “covers,” which, although they can be beautiful, are empty inside. In his opinion, one should, in keeping with oriental traditions, think about the sound itself, understood as a transcendent phenomenon, and seek its spiritual heart. He was intrigued by a vision of music exhibiting *l'Energie Sonore*, that is, the energy that lies in the “inner space” of the sound.¹⁶

The first composition in which Scelsi fully realised his new compositional conception was *Quattro pezzi (ciascuno su una nota)* for chamber orchestra, from 1959. This is a work considered pioneering today, and which marks a watershed in the composer’s oeuvre. It is essentially an abstraction of the aesthetic of the contemplation of a sound focussed on its *énergie sonique* – an aesthetic that is emblematic of Scelsi.¹⁷ This concentration on the duration and quality of a sound shown as if in maximum close-up – revealing its inner structure, variable in its harmonic spectrum and its dynamics – and then placed in a broader harmonic context (an impression analogous to the optical effect of zoom), and this sensitivity to the nuanced changeability of the timbre, texture and rhythm of the sound material, a microtonality that helps to forge a network of expressive tensions, are the basic strategies of Scelsi’s original, and audibly recognisable, style. At first, the composer gave this work a subtitle-commentary: “Tanmantras, mot qui signifie: ‘Les choses subtiles desquelles les plus grossières precedent,’ (Tanmatra, a word that means “the subtle things from which grosser things derive”)¹⁸ which he ultimately removed. One should add here that in Sanscrit *tanmatra* literally means “pre-matter.”¹⁹ All the subsequent orchestral compositions, like most of

“Un certain phénomène qu’on appelle musique,” *Passages* (Paris, 1963).

¹⁴ Scelsi, “Son et musique,” 55.

¹⁵ Cf. an utterance of the composer during an interview with D. Cohen-Levinas and M. Levinas in Paris, in 1985. After Danielle Cohen-Levinas, “Ecce suono Giacinto Scelsi. Ecouter battre le cœur du son,” in *Notations musicales: Frontières et singularités* (Paris, 1996), 220.

¹⁶ Scelsi, “Son et musique,” 54.

¹⁷ This is another term of Scelsi’s. See Scelsi, “Son et musique,” 54.

¹⁸ See Luciano Martinis, “Il poeta nell’armadio,” *I suoni, le onde.... Rivista della Fondazione Isabella Scelsi* 1 (1990): 6.

¹⁹ “the basic principles or subtle elements from which gross elements (mahabhuta) derive. There are five tanmatras: 1. śabda (sound); 2. sparśa (touch); 3. rupa (sight); 4. rasa (taste); 5. gandha (smell):” Kurt Friedridrichs, “Tanmantra,” in *Encyklopedia mądrości Wschodu. Bud-*

Scelsi's other works, possess a title-programme, and sometimes commentaries. *Quattro pezzi...* is the exception: deprived of suggestions of extramusical meanings and references, listeners are to focus their attention on the absolute sound, on its immanent properties. One may assume that this work was to stand as a sort of technical manifesto. The titular confinement of the sound material of the individual *pezzi* to a single sound (literally: a note) was the most radical realisation of Scelsi's idea of a return to the elementary material of music – to the individual sound. In further works, the composer expanded the sound material, not infrequently to the full twelve-degree universe (expanded by quartertones), but he highlighted single notes (or pitch classes) at nodal points in the narrative, which enhanced the effect of the zooming of the picture of the sound events.

Hurqualia, written in 1960, is the first of six works by Giacinto Scelsi for large orchestra – works that were composed over the fifteen peak years in the mature phase of his oeuvre and are considered his *opus magnum*. The last of these works is *Pfhat*, from 1974 – a work that is also one of the composer's last creative utterances. Over the same period, Scelsi also composed a body of smaller works for solo instruments and chamber ensembles, a considerable number of which were written with some collaboration from performers fascinated by the music and figure of Scelsi – virtuosos of their instruments “pilgrimage” to the home of their “guru” along the via di San Teodoro in Rome²⁰ (many compositions are dedicated to individual performers). They are characterised by a hefty dose of experimentation in sonorities and the ways in which sounds are articulated, and their formal shape and narrative technique is at times close to improvisation. The orchestral works were written without those external impulses and are marked by a high level of organisation to the acoustic material, constructivism, and a decidedly greater weight. This results not just from the involvement of a larger performance apparatus – a large orchestra and, in some works, also a choir – but above all from the special status of these compositions. They fulfil the role of an artistic and personal (spiritual) *itinerarium*.

I

The six compositions for large orchestra perfectly represent the various and extensive inspirations that typify Scelsi's poetic – in each of them the composer evokes a different geographical-cultural-religious area. This multiplicity is lent unity by the constant presence of title-programmes: the mystery of being,

dzym. Hinduizm. Taoizm. Zen, trans. Mieczysław J. Künstler (Warsaw, 1997), 334; Ger. orig. *Lexikon der östlichen Weisheitslehren: Buddhismus, Hinduismus, Taoismus, Zen* (Bern, 1986).

²⁰ e.g. Michiko Hirayama, Frances-Marie Uitti, Joëlle Léandre, Marianne Schroeder and Stefano Scodanibbio.

a sense of holiness, seeking the sources of one's own identity, the figures and forms in which absolute reality manifests itself. There is no doubt that Scelsi sought similarities between cultures and found them in transcendental experiences – related to one another in their deepest essence. This search for transcendence became an *idée fixe* of Scelsi the composer, and at the same time the life's motto of Scelsi the man: "I live only for transcendence,"²¹ he declared. This attests the transformation undergone by the Count d'Ayala Valva: in his youth a *bon vivant*, dandy and philanderer, residing in the cultural centres of Europe and succumbing to the charms of the bohemian life, writing verse as an amateur and playing the piano for fun (his skill on the piano was part of his home education, and he began composing at the urging of his family), he commenced the process of gradual inner transformation inspired by his travels, what he read, and what he experienced in life. From a light-minded aristocrat, he turned into a creative artist wrestling with the material of his art, although free forever from material worries and the need to earn a living through work. During the post-war years, he took the difficult decision to return to Italy (this meant leaving his wife), and in 1952 he settled in a modest apartment on via di San Teodoro in Rome and concentrated on his own creative work, convinced that art was one of the "great paths" to cognition and transcendence.²² The East is where the beginning and the goal of existence revealed itself to him, as it had almost a century before to Gérard de Nerval and many other artists sensitive to the *Lux ex oriente*. He inscribed a trace of his journey to the East in his *opus vitae*: the orchestral works that in chronological order constitute one great cycle integrated by the motif of the path, expressed in their individual programme-titles. This is the path as an expression of religion, the path of spiritual life, *ergo* the path to salvation. The first work in this macrocycle, *Hurqualia* (1960), shows the direction and the sense of that path; the last work, *Pfhat* (1974), reveals its ultimate, soteriological goal.

Hurqualia (Un royaume différent) is the musical depiction of a journey to the titular "different realm," a mythical land known in Arabic and Persian tradition. The path to Hurqualia represents "a symbol of a process of initiation, of overcoming one's 'I' and merging with the Absolute."²³ In order to reach the mythical land of Hurqualia and the "tree of immortality" that grows there, the pilgrim must conquer his own "I" and see, beyond the dense layer of the material world, the delicate web of connections of the "other world." He must understand that the things he beholds are just symbols, a veil of the true things. In order to immerse himself in the greenish glow of the "other world," inaccessible to the senses, the neophyte

²¹ "je ne vis que pour la transcendence." Quoted after Jean-Noël von der Weid, "Entretiens avec Giacinto Scelsi," *Dissonance* 43 (1995), 10.

²² See Giacinto Scelsi, *Art et connaissance* (Rome and Venice, 1982).

²³ Elżbieta Wnuk-Lisowska, "Qaf," in *Zaświaty i krainy mityczne* [The other world and mythical lands], ed. Małgorzata Sacha-Piekło (Kraków, 1999), 195.

must pass through a difficult process of initiation, symbolised by the misadventures, dragons, witches and monsters encountered along the way.²⁴

Aion (*Quatre episodes d'une journée de Brahma*) is the only orchestral work in the title of which Scelsi gives specific names of the "Highest." The title thus becomes a symbol of longing for the Supreme Being – the preacher and teacher of the path leading to liberation (salvation).

For just as He, the "Only with no successor", is one, by whatever name man's infantine mind may call Him, so the yearning for Him of His living particle, the human soul, is one. Whether that yearning is called a desire for liberation or a hunger for happiness, a dream of beauty and perfection, or that ineffable and elusive yearning towards the unfathomed, unattainable and immeasurable, towards the fullness and boundlessness of existence.²⁵

Brahma is an exceptional deity, in that he is "abstract" – without any attributes or peculiar behaviour. He is "immeasurable", "boundless."²⁶ The Greek Aion – the supreme, all-seeing and all-knowing universal god – is regarded as a mysterious and untold being. Aion is also considered to be a god of time and eternity, and Brahma is he who is himself Time and Space. The word "aion" is also Time itself raised to divine status.²⁷ So both gods, each in his own peculiar way, are also linked to the aspect of time in its sacred dimension.

Hymnos, as a work of enigmatic religious content, became a symbol of Scelsi's religiosity. It is a religiosity that is esoteric, hermetic and geared towards personal experience and an individual way of realising the path to perfection. In both *Hymnos* and the next work in the grand orchestral cycle, *Uaxuctum* (*La Légende de la cité Maya, détruite par eux-mêmes pour des raisons religieuses*) [The legend of the city of the Mayas, which they themselves destroyed for religious reasons], the cultural context evoked by the work's title clearly eludes a dichotomous arrangement of the categories of East-West,²⁸ pointing to a broad, universal understanding of the sacred. That which Eliade explained in terms of "the unity of mankind's spiritual history."²⁹ In the title-programme of *Uaxuctum*,

²⁴ Elżbieta Wnuk-Lisowska, "Dżabarsa i Dżabalaqua," [Jabarsa and Jabalqa] in *Zaświaty*, 101.

²⁵ Wanda Dynowska (Umadewi), "Hinduska Bhakti," [The Hindu Bhakti] in *Antologia Indyjska. Sanskryt* (see above, n.7), 24.

²⁶ See Raffaele Pettazzoni, *Wszechwiedza bogów*, trans. Barbara Krzymowska (Warsaw 1967), 70; It. orig. *L'onniscienza di Dio* (Turin, 1955).

²⁷ See Imre Trencsenyi-Waldapfel, *Mitologia*, trans. Jan Śląski (Warsaw, 1967), 423; exp. Ger. edn *Die Töchter der Erinnerung. Götter – und Heldensagen der Griechen un Römer mit einem Ausblick auf die vergleichende Mythologie* (Budapest, 1964).

²⁸ The Hellenic epoch evoked by the title of *Hymnos* was a time when the wall between East and West had yet to be erected, and there was an intellectual continuity of the regions perceived today as the Orient and the Occident.

²⁹ See A. B., "Słowo od wydawcy. Człowiek – dzieje – 'sacrum' – religia" [A word from the publisher. Man, history, the "sacred" and religion], in Mircea Eliade, *Historia wierzeń i idei*

Scelsi gives prominence to the motif of the strength of religious spirit, bending the historical truth slightly to that end, or over-interpreting the facts relating to the causes of the fall of the Mayas' city-state. One may guess that in the context of the composer's conceptual universe, those "religious reasons" for the destruction of Uaxuctum, and so religious spirit *in concreto*, symbolise the causative power of faith *in abstracto*.

Konx Om Pax (Trois Aspects du Son: en tant que premier mouvement de l'Immuable; en tant que Force Créatrice; en tant que la syllabe 'Om') [Three Aspects of the Sound: as the first movement of the Immutable; as Creative Force; as the syllable "Om"] is the quintessence of Scelsi's conception of sound. It focusses on a cosmogonic vision of the Sound, as the "first movement of the Immutable," "Creative Force," "cosmic force," "the sacred, mystical syllable Om."³⁰ Scelsi refers here explicitly to mystical correspondence in sounds, familiar perhaps even since megalithic civilisations,³¹ namely to Hindu practices of sound yoga and mystic hearing, and indirectly also to Western conceptions derived from Pythagoras' idea of the harmony of the spheres. Thus the penultimate orchestral work anticipates the last phase in the process of symbolisation, and at the same time the last stage on the path to salvation: becoming one with the Cosmos (the Absolute).

In *Pfhat ('Un éclat... et le ciel s'ouvrit')* ["A flash... and the sky opened"], Scelsi returns to the realm of Tibetan culture³² and ends his "travelogue" written in music. This composition brings to a definitive close the grand orchestral cycle, which reaches an eschatological level. The musical image of a journey concluding with a vision of a "Bright, primordial light" that is presented in this work³³ symbolises the meeting with supreme reality and "great liberation" as the goal of one's spiritual path.

religijnych, vol. 1, *Od epoki kamiennej do misteriów eleuzyńskich*, trans. Stanisław Tokarski, (Warsaw, 1988), XV; Fr. orig. *Histoire des croyances et des idées religieuses*, tome 1, *De l'âge de la pierre aux mystères d'Eleusis* (Paris, 1976).

³⁰ See Scelsi, "Son et musique," 52.

³¹ After Victoria Cirlot, "Posłowie. Z dziejów wydań *Słownika symboli*," [Afterword. A history of the editions of the *Dictionary of Symbols*], in Juan Eduardo Cirlot, *Słownik symboli*, trans. Ireneusz Kania (Kraków, 2001), 500–501; Sp. orig. *Diccionario de símbolos* (Barcelona, 1969).

³² Scelsi first reveals his inspirations from the culture of Tibet in the work with which he returned to creative activity after a period of crisis and a break from composing, at the same time revealing a completely new sphere of artistic interests. This was the piano work from 1952 *Suite n° 8 (Bot-ba) Une Evocation du Tibet avec ses monastères sur les hautes montagnes – Rituels tibétains – Prières et danses* [An evocation of Tibet with its monasteries on high mountains – Tibetan rituals – Prayers and dances].

³³ Jacques Brosse, "Bar-do T'os-grol," in *Mistrzowie duchowi. Leksykon*, trans. Ireneusz Kania (Katowice, 2000), 23; Fr. orig. *Les maîtres spirituels* (Paris, 1988).

II

The chronotope³⁴ of the path reveals itself in the musical material as if *en temps réel* – in a vertical-horizontal quasi-visual soundspace. Thus it becomes a technical-formal category. Within the context of Scelsi's poetic, the formal processuality of his composition is already expressive of the path. The essence of the form of the individual movements of orchestral cycles and of one-movement works is based on processes and transformations of various kinds. Despite its ostensible staticity (associated with the aesthetic of the contemplation of sound), Scelsian form is characterised by its dynamic, although this can be seen most spectacularly on the micro scale. The development of form is propelled by movement of all kinds: melodic, rhythmic, movement in the orchestral space through the methodical transformation of sonorities, including on the smallest scale, and it is this micro-movement, this micro-processing, that dominates. The unfolding of the musical chronotope occurs through the methodical organisation of the sound material, and not through its filling out as a result of unmethodical variability, free ornamentation or the continual changing of sound patterns, engendering a “vegetative growth of the music”, typical of form-state.³⁵ Scelsi's form represents the type of form-process, evolutionary-dynamic form. It is always created by *dráma* [Gr. action], some musical action, the compositional centre³⁶ of which is a climax. One outward manifestation of the processual nature of this form is its energetic profile, which in Scelsi's orchestral compositions takes on one of three shapes: 1) an architectural arch comprising several smaller arches, one of which is dominant, becoming the peak of the macro-arch, 2) a crescendo with climax at the end or a diminuendo with climax at the beginning, 3) an oscillation of tension between a series of climactic points, none of which is more prominent than the others. It is the first type that is clearly dominant, namely form with a distinctively arched energy profile.

With Scelsi, the overriding principle governing the organisation of the sound material is sound centralisation – understood quite specifically by the composer as a sort of tonal gravitation. The very change to the tonal axis describes a path, as the movement of the sound material through the tonal space (i.e. within a pitch class set).

A changeable tonal axis is a compositional strategy employed by Scelsi in all the works under discussion (see Table 1 [place table 1 about here]). This applies

³⁴ After Mikhail Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin and London, 1981), 84–254.

³⁵ See Maria Piotrowska, *Neoklasycyzm w muzyce XX wieku* [Neoclassicism in twentieth-century music] (Warsaw, 1982), 73–74.

³⁶ I use this term in the meaning it possesses in literary theory; that is, “a basic term employed in the composition of a literary work or a distinctive part thereof.” After Janusz Sławiński, “Ośrodek kompozycyjny,” [Compositional centre] in Michał Głowiński, Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska and Janusz Sławiński, *Słownik terminów literackich* [Dictionary of literary terms] (Wrocław, 2000), 363.

Table 1. Tonal centres in the orchestral works of Giacinto Scelsi

	movt I	movt II	movt III	movt IV	movt V
<i>Quattro pezzi</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>a flat</i>	<i>a</i>	
<i>Hurqualia</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>b→c sharp</i>	<i>f→e flat</i>	<i>e flat→f-f sharp-g sharp</i>	
<i>Aion</i>	<i>f→g sharp-c</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>e flat-e</i>	<i>g sharp</i>	
<i>Hymnos</i>	<i>d→f</i>				
<i>Anahit</i>	<i>b flat→g-b</i>				
<i>Uaxuctum</i>	<i>D flat→E→G</i>	<i>B flat major polychord</i>	<i>c→g→(H) e</i>	<i>e flat→a flat→b flat→a flat→e flat [e flat-a-b flat-b] [e flat-g flat-g-b flat]</i>	<i>B flat major polychord</i>
<i>Konx Om Pax</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>A</i>		
<i>Pfhat</i>	<i>a flat</i>	<i>f→b flat→c</i>	<i>e[e-b flat-d-e flat-e]→f-c</i>	<i>semitone cluster in the range e flat³-d⁴</i>	



Figure 1. Selection of tonal centres of the outer movements of orchestral works by Giacinto Scelsi

both to the perspective of the orchestral cycles or macroforms (in the case of one-movement works: *Hymnos* and *Anahit*) and also the tonal plan of individual movements of cyclic forms. Only *Quattro pezzi...* and *Konx Om Pax* are characterised by a constancy of the tonal centre within the individual movements of a cycle; in these two works, the topic of the path is manifest on other levels, as in those few isolated instances which are further justified by the harmonic conception of the whole cycle. The tectonic-formal significance of the harmony is manifest above all in the determination of the particularisation of the form. This is linked mainly to a change in the tonal axis or a distinct onset of the process leading to that change. Ascending motion is manifest already on the tonal plan of works, through the choice of their sound centres. In the Scelsian cyclic orchestral form, the sound centre of the finale is always situated above the tonal axis of the first movement (see Figure 1), and always in the relationship of a third.³⁷ This is invariably linked to a real upwards movement of the sound mass, since Scelsi's rule is to situate the beginning of the first movement of a cycle in a low register and to close the finale in a high register.³⁸ An analogous principle behind the rising of musical events within the soundspace also obtains within the individual movements of orchestral cycles.

A strategy of an “upwards path” can be discerned also in the distinctive technique that Scelsi employs for distributing tension. One of its main procedures, and perhaps the most characteristic, is a central tone's collision with neighbouring tones, which wrecks its primordial character. These are most often neighbouring tones lying above the tonal centre, at the distance of a major second, minor second or quartertone. In the last case, the result is dissonant, rumbling tone clusters, which are more prominent the longer they sound and the more their loudness grows (and the composer usually heightens tension of this kind through crescendo). Also when Scelsi introduces simple melodic structures, it is those that rise above the central tone which are clearly predominant. Now the rising motion pattern grasps the listener's attention only by dint of its incidental character and its otherness in relation to the dominant single tones, isolated with rests, and it usually grows to the importance of a pivotal moment in the musical action. One example of such a rising above the tonal centre as an expression of an “upwards path” can be observed in an essential form in *Quattro pezzi per orchestra (ciascuno su una nota)*. It should be emphasised that a selected pitch class discharges the function of a central tone, clearly dominating in each of the movements, but not an only tone. In reality, the sound material of each *Pezzo* ranges from 4 to 7 degrees around the central tone, and in *Pezzo III* one even finds complex melodic motifs that depart

³⁷ Only in *Pfhat* is this rule not observed. In the last movement of this work, one cannot determine the tonal axis – a cluster ranging from *e flat*³–*d*⁴ resounds throughout the whole movement.

³⁸ Only *Konx Om Pax* departs from this principle; this is linked to the role of the syllable OM, intoned by the choir, which is constitutive of the form and drama of the finale. At the beginning and the end of the work, it is sung by the low voices of the choir, analogously to the way it is performed by Tibetan Buddhist monks.

a long way from the central sound axis. Of course, the frequency with which these other tones appear is much lesser, yet it is significant, and even crucial, to their dramaturgy. Their occurrence is one of the elements in the heightening of tension and the building of climaxes. The central tone, meanwhile, always initiates and closes each of the movements, and in the course of the form it constitutes a constantly sounding (in *Pezzi I* and *II*) or constantly recurring (in *Pezzi III* and *IV*) point of anchorage and reference for all the harmonic events.

Despite the apparent monotony and “monochromaticity” of all the *Pezzi*, a certain action can be discerned in them – a narrative plot, in a musical sense. When listening to the *Quattro pezzi...*, one gains the almost overwhelming impression that the sound is “imprisoned,” held on a single pitch, which is different in each of the movements. The action is propelled by attempts to “liberate” this sound, made in various ways and to a varying degree in the individual *Pezzi*. This “liberation” is expressed in a departure beyond the bounds of the central tone, especially above it, and so the manifesting of the melody in its rudimentary form. If we treat the central tone of each movement as a phenomenon independent of pitch – the phenomenon of the tonal centre – then the cycle is apprehended as a one-way process, and the individual *Pezzi* are its successive phases (stages) in the “liberation” of the sound and the birth, development and enhancement of the ascending melodic motion.

The principle of the “upwards path” is expressed in an emblematically intensified way in *Pfhat*, particularly in its second movement. Among the static and intermittent musical events that dominate in this work (long-held notes and chords isolated with rests), significance is gained by events that are linked in a continuous way. This is always a rising melodic motion in a pure form, consistently *glissando*, exposing the pitches (degrees) that stand in analogous relations to the functional order (the pitches *f-b flat-c* as the degrees I–IV–V, see Figure 2). This suspension on the fifth (quasi-dominant) degree finds its harmonic and dramatic continuation in the third movement, linked *attacca*.³⁹

The image shows a musical score for Giacinto Scelsi's *Pfhat*, movement II. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. The melodic line is highlighted with a box, showing a rising sequence of notes: G (I), C (IV), and G (V). The notes are highlighted with a box. The score includes parts for Tutti, Timpani, Cor, Trbn, Cl. b, Vc., and Org.

Figure 2. Giacinto Scelsi, *Pfhat*, movt II.
Notes highlighted by continual melodic movement

³⁹ *Pfhat*, like Scelsi's other orchestral works, also contains many other reminiscences of the tonal system.

A journey to the “centre” is regarded as the archetypal voyage.⁴⁰ This variant of the topic of the path is of fundamental importance to Scelsi’s poetic, and the path “within,” towards that “inner space” of the sound, is emblematic of that poetic. This path itself is defined in its essence metaphorically as a *viaggio al centro del suono* [journey to the centre of the sound].⁴¹ The impression of an inner “life of the sound” is best conveyed by the medium of a large orchestra, which gives great possibilities for shaping the volume of sound. In Scelsi’s compositions, the sound seems to gravitate naturally between two opposite poles of property: movement-stagnation, homogeneity-polygeneity, continuity-discontinuity, a flat, “dead,” “clean,” unvibrating “matt” sound – a “vibrant” sound, living thanks to its own inner energy (in continual fluctuations of crescendo-diminuendo), moving in time (rhythmic dynamisation) and “space” (changes to the volume of sound, giving a zoom effect), a vibrating note of a “graininess” that is close to the point at which it would split into an almost audible series of component tones. Between these extremes of the sound’s properties, one finds a whole series of transitional states, of compound forms. At times, the sound’s “excess” inner energy breaks through the boundaries of a single pitch – the sound “escapes” that pitch through quartertone or semitone movement, only to return a moment later whence it came, “retiring” and stabilising in the tonal centre. These exits and returns, this oscillating around a central tone, give the effect of a circling around a centre, of circular movement, and consequently evoke the impression of the “spherical” character of the sound.

So in the continuum of form, the macrosound undergoes a quasi-deconstruction – a disintegration into a rudimentary shape, its very “core”, a single “pure” sound of the narrowest volume possible and a flat, unvibrating timbre, and it then undergoes a sort of synthesis. The “core” either just “swells” in three-dimensional space, growing “spherically” in the sound field by increasing the volume of sound and adding upper and lower octaves, or else takes on the significance of a basic tone, to which further pitches resembling quasi-aliquots are added, creating that macrosound. Thus one gains the impression of the continual pulsation of the sound, which passes through successive stages of internal transformation, emanating its own, inner energy. Even if the sound disappears for a moment, it is then reborn in a different form, with altered sonority, and is then once more subjected to a process of change. Several times as the form unfolds, the listener’s attention is riveted by procedures of this kind, with the composer creating a wealth of macrosounds of varied timbre. And so Scelsi develops the idea of the *Klangfarben melodie* in a wholly new dimension. Fully aware of the structural complexity and inner dynamic of the sound, he designed a *melody of timbres*, within the dimension of the inside of

⁴⁰ See Juan Eduardo Cirlot, “Podróż,” [Journey] in Cirlot, *Słownik*, 322.

⁴¹ See Pierre Albert Castanet and Nicola Cisternino, *Giacinto Scelsi. Viaggio al centro del suono* (La Spezia, 1993).

the sound – on the level of its harmonic spectrum. One might say that he achieved, in an intuitive way, an orchestral quasi-synthesis of the sound (emblematic of the output of composers of the later “spectral school”). Such a compositional concept, first employed by Scelsi in 1959 in *Quattro pezzi...*, broke new ground in twentieth-century compositional practice, and the sonorities it produces help create the original, auditively recognisable idiom of Scelsi’s music. It should be emphasised, however, that varied sonority and changeable sonic material is not an end in itself. In none of the orchestral works by Scelsi analysed here is a *Klangfarbenmelodie* the exclusive essence of the development of form; it is just one of the ways in which timbre is shaped (*recherche sur le timbre*). Those ways are generally subordinated to a specific musical action – the overriding idea of a given work, suggested to a certain extent also by the title-programme. This idea determines the direction to the change undergone by the tone quality or in general the character of the sonic technique employed in particular compositions.

The journey as initiation (ascension) is also “a search that departs from the obscurities of the mortal world [...] to head towards the light.”⁴² The musical symbolism of the passage from darkness to light can be sought in the transition from dark to light timbres, which is usually linked to a passage from low to high registers of the sound field. Scelsi’s orchestral works are marked by a generally dark timbral colouring and the dominance of a low register. In two of them, however, the composer highlights also bright, even glaring timbres and sequences of sounds in a very low register. Reference here to the first and, above all, last works in the orchestral macrocycle: *Hurqualia* and *Pfhat*. This is linked to the special symbolic role of these works: the former heralds the goal of the path, the latter constitutes the musical image of that goal. The luminous sound of the finale of *Pfhat* appears like a vision of “the light of salvation shining in the depths of the soul.”⁴³

III

Pfhat (*‘Un éclat... et le ciel s’ouvrit’*) is one of the two compositions by Scelsi in which sacred Tibetan music (the liturgical music of Tibetan Buddhist monks) resonates most powerfully.⁴⁴ The word *pfhat* (which tends to be translated in the literature as *phat*⁴⁵), although not elucidated by the composer himself, is one of the Tibetan mantras, and so a sort of “mystical sound”, regarded as a “tool of salvation.”⁴⁶ The mantra *phat* (*pfhat*) belongs to the “secret vocabulary” ut-

⁴² See Juan Eduardo Cirlot, “Podróż,” [journey] in Cirlot, *Słownik*, 322.

⁴³ Juan Eduardo Cirlot, “Wprowadzenie,” [Introduction] in Cirlot, *Słownik*, 30.

⁴⁴ The other is *Konx Om Pax*.

⁴⁵ See Philip Rawson, *Sacred Tibet* (London, 1991).

⁴⁶ After M. Eliade, *Joga*, op. cit., 226–227.

tered during meditation.⁴⁷ It is a formula marked by particular efficacy, gifted with divine or magical power, and it means “something that – if one ponders it in the right way – liberates or protects.”⁴⁸ It is a “prop”, a “seed”, a “symbol in the archaic sense of the word: it is at the same time both symbolised “reality” and symbolising “sign.”⁴⁹ The initially enigmatic combination of Tibetan mantra with the flash, illumination and “sky opening” of the work’s subtitle inevitably triggers associations with a traditional Tibetan soteriological text: *Bar-do Thos-grol* (*The Tibetan Book of the Dead*). The musical plot of the work and the peculiar way in which its material is shaped are explained by means of the paradigm of *Bar-do Thos-grol*.

In Scelsi’s times, this singular and remarkable text began to gain considerable popularity in the West among psychologists, historians and also creative artists, largely thanks to Carl Gustav Jung, who wrote to it a “psychological commentary.”⁵⁰ *Bar-do Thos-grol* is considered a classic initiation scenario, as it contains all the right elements: a dying man’s descent into the “space after life”, a journey within that space, during which he is subjected to many trials, and his liberation, or “altered status of being.”⁵¹ The Tibetan “posthumous space” is *bar-do*, which means precisely “that which is between (two),” “intermediate space,” “between-being.”⁵² It signifies the situation of someone who has not yet departed this life and has also not entered a new form of existence. Before him are the six spheres of samsara, or the possibility of freeing himself from the millstone of existence and attaining nirvana. Breaking the cycle of rebirth depends to a large extent on one’s good and bad deeds (good and bad karma) in all previous lives, but also on one’s own choice. That choice, in turn, is determined by a successful passage through the series of trials to which a dying man is subjected, which amount to recognising the true

⁴⁷ Mantras, as Giuseppe Tucci writes, “protect (*tra*) the mental process (*man*) from the seductions of the world and thus aid the process of liberation.” Giuseppe Tucci, *The Religions of Tibet*, trans. Geoffrey Samuel (Berkeley, 1988), 264.

⁴⁸ Alexander Thannippara, “Mantra,” in *Leksykon religii*, ed. Hans Waldenfels, trans. Andrzej Ługowski (Warsaw, 1997), 237–238; Ger. orig. *Lexikon der Religionen* (Freiburg, 1987).

⁴⁹ M. Eliade, *Joga*, op. cit. 229.

⁵⁰ Jung prepared this commentary (*Psychologischer Kommentar zum ‘Bardo Thodol’*) in 1935, for a German version of *Das tibetanische Totenbuch* translated from the model edition of Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup and Walter Y. Evans-Wentz (1927) and published by Louise Goepfert-March in Zurich, in 1935. In 1939, he wrote this commentary in English (*Psychological Commentary on The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*) for the English edition of this book, prepared by Walter Y. Evans-Wentz, which was eventually published in 1954, in London and New York. Dating from Scelsi’s times, before *Pfhat* was composed, is another English edition of the book with Jung’s commentary: Walter Y. Evans-Wentz, ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation or the Method of Realising Nirvāna Through Knowing the Mind* (London, 1968). After Leszek Kolankiewicz, “Nota,” [Note] in Carl Gustav Jung, *Podróż na Wschód* [Journey to the East], ed. L. Kolankiewicz (Warsaw, 1989), 213–214.

⁵¹ See Ireneusz Kania, “Bar-do Thos-grol czyli Tybetańska Księga Umarłych,” [*Bar-do Thos-grol*, or *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*], *Literatura na świecie* 8–9 (1985), 4–9.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 7.

essence of the wrathful tantric deities, peaceful deities and many-hued luminosities that appear before him. All these phantoms and sanguivorous divinities are merely forms of his own mind, emanations of his inner anxieties, fears, tendencies, passions, neuroses and complexes, and so projections of the deep layers of his subconscious (hence Jung was so interested in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*).

If a person in *bar-do* does not take fright at the apparitions, nightmarish spectres, demons and she-devils of horrifying appearance that appear in equally monstrous, macabre acts and fill him with fear, is not led astray by the lights of various colour that tempt him, and does not seek, in flight, rebirth, then a vision of the “Bright, primordial light” will appear to him.⁵³ This will be his ultimate Liberation. *Bar-do Thos-grol* is a sort of guidebook, which should be read to a dying man during his sojourn in the “intermediate space,” in order to help him, by means of hints and instructions (or rather to remind him of them, as he should become acquainted with them during his life), to pass all the tests and reach the ultimate goal: the state of Buddha.⁵⁴ However, this is conditioned by recognition, knowledge and understanding, as “recognition and liberation are simultaneous.”⁵⁵

Pfhat seems to be an image of the initiation scenario contained in the *Tibetan Book of Great Liberation*⁵⁶ represented by Scelsi in music. The first movement of the cycle, which is confined almost exclusively to very low, clean, single sounds of a dark, muted, matt timbre, set only against silence, corresponds to the descent into *bar-do*. This timbral colouring, the highly ascetic musical tissue and also textural features of the initial movement in the cycle distinctly refer, like none of the subsequent movements, to the sonorities and texture of Tibetan ceremonial music. The timbre of the tubas, playing long, static sounds, modified by mutes, resembles the drawn-out timbre of the calling sounds of the large telescopic *dung* trumpets (tubas),⁵⁷ which emit very low sounds of indefinite pitch, and large shells (*dung-dkar*).

The force contained in ceremonial music is used during the ritual of “detaching one’s I,” that is, separating body from soul, which is part of the ceremony for the dead. This is linked to the significance that is traditionally ascribed to the role of sound in that culture. Sound, itself being vibration, symbolises the vibra-

⁵³ Brosse, “Bar-do,” op. cit., 23.

⁵⁴ For Tibetan Buddhists, death is not a momentous event, but a slow disintegration (see J. Brosse, “Bar-do,” op. cit., 23). The time spent in the “intermediate space,” that “between-being,” can last up to seven weeks.

⁵⁵ *The Tibetan Book of the Dead. The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo*, trans. Francesca Fremantle, comm. Chögyam Trungpa (1975; Boston and London, 1992), 142.

⁵⁶ That is how this book was called by Jung.

⁵⁷ Names of instruments given after Peter Crossley-Holland, “Tibet,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, xviii (London, 1980), 799–811.

tion of nature and of the whole universe. As Lama Anagarika Govinda explains, Tibetan ritual music

is built upon the deepest vibrations that an instrument or a human voice can produce: sounds that seem to come from the womb of the earth or from the depth of space like rolling thunder, the *mantric* sound of nature, which symbolise the creative vibrations of the universe, the origin of all things [...] If the *radong* or the human bass-voice represent the primeval cosmic sound, in which we experience the infinity of space, the drum represents the infinity of life and movement, governed by the supreme law of its inherent rhythm, in which we experience the alternating cycles of creation and dissolution, culminating in manifestation and liberation.⁵⁸

In this way, music is also to remind the Tibetan that he should not fear death, because it does not mean the end. The beginning and the end of beings and things is just illusion, and life and death are not opposites, but two aspects of the same reality.

That sound symbolising cosmic vibration is produced by breathing, and the bearer of sound is air, which also “sows” the benevolent power of the mantras that are traditionally written on flags, including those for prayer.⁵⁹ The presence of such distinctly prominent *soffio neutro* effects – puff and breath – in the first movement of *Pfhat* is explained by reference to the understanding of the power of breath and the role of air in Tibetan tradition.⁶⁰ It should be added here that in no other work does the composer employ this effective way of articulating vocal sounds.

The text of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* prepares us for the singularly dramatic spectacle that the dying man will experience on his journey through *bar-do*, as it names and describes very vividly, even realistically, the constantly changing visions of various male and female deities, alternately formidable and gentle, and visions of beasts of prey shown in continuous movement. The countless hordes of these figures are accompanied also by auditory experiences:

⁵⁸ Lama Anagarika Govinda, *The Way of the White Clouds* (1966; London, 1992), 29–30. “Radong” is the name the author uses for the long telescopic metal trumpets otherwise known as *dung*.

⁵⁹ See Ph. Rawson, *Sacred Tibet*, op. cit., 19 and 36.

⁶⁰ In his score, Scelsi gives a precise description of the way in which the voices of the choir are emitted to achieve the effect of *il soffio neutro*: “The choir – with the exception of a single note of the contraltos – performs the sound of a “puff”. This is the variety of that sound which results from a neutral emission; it should not be connected with the enunciation of the consonants S, F, H or any others. If the singers are not able to produce this kind of *neutral puff*, their voices should be mixed by the choirmaster in such a way that the effect of neutrality arises through the combining or blending of various ways of emitting it.” [Il coro – salvo una nota dei Contralti – eseguire un ‘soffio’. Tale soffio do risultare di emissione neutra; non deve cioè avere pronuncia consonantica, né di S, né di F, né di H o altro. Se gli artisti non saranno in grado di produrre il soffio neutro, provvederà il Maestro del coro a smistare le voci, di modo che le varie emissioni – sommandosi – vengano neutralizzate].

With drums, thigh-bone trumpets, skull-drums, banners made from the skins of youths, canopies made from human skin, ribbons of human skin and incense made from human flesh, with countless different kinds of musical instruments, filling all the regions of the universe so that they rock and tremble and shake, making all the instruments vibrate with music so as to split one's head, dancing various dances, they will come to invite those who have kept the samaya practice and to punish those who have let it degenerate.⁶¹

This is followed by “sounds of mountains crumbling, of lakes flooding.”⁶² This is the image to which the middle movements of *Pfhat* refer, marked as they are by an unexpected, startling drama and extraordinary dynamic, movement and change. The second movement of the work begins with the abrupt “explosion” of a huge and dense – especially in relation to the previous movement – sound mass, forming a cluster that stretches over four octaves ($F1-f^2$), produced by most of the instruments of the orchestra and the choir and strengthened by the striking of a Chinese gong, five bells, tam-tams and brass. This initial harmony is the expressive-dynamic climax of the form, like the striking of a great bell, which dies down slowly over the whole space of the movement, to the final sound that fades in isolation. So the idea of the form is remarkably clear: the resolution of the climax built up in the first chord. Most crucially, however, the separate groups of instruments, and at times individual instruments, produce single bands of sounds with an individual dynamic shape – as the cluster resounds, they independently build a number of partial microclimaxes, eluding each other or overlapping, often according to the principle of opposition (“< >” at the same time as “> <”). In effect, this gives a multi-layered pattern of highly mobile, individually pulsating, mutually counterpointing bands of sounds, which swell then die down a moment later. The whole thing gives the impression of dramatic chaos. At several points, the dynamic microclimaxes converge in most of the groups or in individual instruments and, further enhanced by an appropriate elaboration of the sound material, become points of the action of centrifugal forces, in opposition to the macroformal decrescendo, that are crucial to the whole form.

The third movement in the overall plan presents a reverse process in respect to the previous movement, whilst being internally just as mobile and dynamic. This time, the narrative heads consistently towards a climax that falls on the final chord. The form is created by a succession of eleven audibly distinguished sequences. Each of them is initiated distinctly by the striking of a bell, complemented in colouristic terms by the striking of a string of the piano and the sound of a celesta, and ending with a *diminuendo*.

The cries of the choir's voices, combined with the roar of the orchestra's clusters, crashes and glissandos, of a monumental volume, followed a moment later

⁶¹ *The Tibetan Book*, op. cit., 129–130.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 177.

by soft, ethereal sounds, then further waves of escalating tension and culmination – this all forges the disturbing and alarming sound aura of both movements. Their musical sense, which boils down to showing the permanent variability of the sound material, movement in various forms, and transformations of some qualities into others, corresponds to the state of a person in *bar-do*, constantly tossed by the “great tornado of karma,”⁶³ thrown “into states of joy and sadness alternately,”⁶⁴ as a result of which his awareness is disturbed and distressed. If, however, he comprehends the real sense of what is happening to him, then his journey through *bar-do* will end in an encounter with a blinding light, in which he should recognise the refulgence of ultimate reality. At that point, he will rise into the “Pure Realm of Space.”⁶⁵

The final movement of *Pfhat* comes across as an acoustic representation of that ultimate brightness, Scelsi’s individual vision of “the great liberation from *bar-do* through listening.”⁶⁶ The irresistible impression of luminosity is linked to the piercing, bright, high, “pure” and ringing sound of small bells, which all the members of the orchestra and the choir ring continuously throughout the whole space of the fourth movement. The sound of those *campanelli* (evoking irrepressibly the sound of *dril-bu* bronze Tibetan bells) is enhanced and timbrally enriched by the five triangles, celesta, piano and organ. The last three instruments focus the musical material on definite pitches, forming semitone clusters of a very high register, within the range *e flat*³–*d*⁴. The sound of this garish cluster, which fills the whole of the last movement in the cycle, is pierced by the continual – albeit broken up by caesurae – notes of piccolo and flute, creating dissonant extremes of the range of the sound field (major seventh *e flat*³–*d*⁴). The intermittent, signalling entrances of these two instruments give an additional effect of impulsive micro-flashes.

Bar-do Thos-grol is first and foremost a practical guidebook for a dying man, linked to the traditional Tibetan funeral rite. But *bar-do*, that is, the “intermediate space,” can be everywhere and nowhere, including within us, in the space of our own ego, of our mind, “unfathomable like the luminous space of the heavens.”⁶⁷ An authority in the field of thanatology, the Tibetan master Chögyam Trungpa, explains this as follows:

Bardo means gap; it is not only the interval of suspension after we die but also suspension in the living situation; death happens in the living situation as well. The bardo experience is part of our basic psychological make-up. There are all kinds of bardo

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁶⁵ *The Tibetan Book*, op. cit., 216.

⁶⁶ See “Tybetańska księga umarłych. Wielkie wyzwolenie z Bar-do przez słuchanie,” [The Tibetan book of the dead. The great liberation from Bar-do through listening] trans. Ireneusz Kania, *Literatura na świecie* 8–9 (1985), 10.

⁶⁷ After J. Kania, “Bar-do,” op. cit., 7.

experiences happening to us all the time, experiences of paranoia and uncertainty in everyday life; it is like not being sure of our ground, not knowing quite what we have asked for or what we are getting into. So this book [*The Tibetan Book of the Dead*] is not only a message for those who are going to die and those who are already dead, but it is also a message for those who are already born; birth and death apply to everybody constantly, at this very moment.⁶⁸

This is the main reason why *Bar-do Thos-grol* is considered to be a quite singular book, different to other texts of its kind. And it explains, to a great extent, its popularity in the West, among both psychologists and artists, and also people who simply observe reflectively the manifestations and experiences of their lives. *The Tibetan Book of Great Liberation* reflects, as Ireneusz Kania suggests,⁶⁹ the overall and increasingly widespread (since the times in which it befell Scelsi to live and write) state of existential consciousness of man in both the East and the West: a state of sensing danger, both in the individual dimension and in groups.

In his last orchestral composition, Scelsi highlighted Tibetan Buddhism as a source of inspiration and a context of musical symbolism. One may assume that it was not by accident that he referred to meanings linked to light, luminosity and illumination that are typical of the culture of Tibet, partly because the symbolism of light and experiences of spiritual enlightenment are universal, familiar in many traditions and cultures of the world, and they concern encounters with an ultimate reality. From the point of the view of the West, and “in a spatial sense, illumination corresponds to the East. In the psychological sense, to obtain illumination is to become aware of a luminous centre, and so of one’s spiritual strength.”⁷⁰ In the religious, Christian tradition of the West, eternal light is above all a symbol of eternal life after death.⁷¹

Scelsi was a religious man in the Eliadean sense: he believed “in the existence of an absolute reality, in the existence of a *sacrum* that transcends the world, but also reveals itself to the world, illuminating it, making it holy, making it real.”⁷² Towards the end of his path through life, Count d’Ayala Valva, raised in Catholic Italy and educated by a Catholic priest, wished to consider himself a Buddhist, but mainly because Buddhism is autosoteriology, and not so much religion as philosophy. He was an individualist, who sought his own, individual experience of the Absolute. His path to transcendence led through art, and in his understanding

⁶⁸ *The Tibetan Book*, op. cit., 2–3.

⁶⁹ See J. Kania, “Bar-do,” op. cit., 6.

⁷⁰ Juan Eduardo Cirlot, “Światło,” [Light] in Cirlot, *Słownik*, 408. After Carl Gustav Jung, *Psicologia e Alchimia* (Rome, 1950).

⁷¹ See Władysław Kopaliński, “Światło(śĆ),” [Light], in Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik mitów i tradycji kultury* [Dictionary of myths and cultural traditions] (Warsaw, 1987), 1156.

⁷² Mircea Eliade, *Sacrum i profanum*, trans. Robert Reszke (Warsaw, 1996), 167–168; Ger. orig. *Das Heilige und das Profane. Vom Wesen des Religiösen* (Hamburg, 1957).

of it he was inspired by the great traditions of the Orient, in which art reflects the artist's spirituality, is a trace of his spiritual path.⁷³ In Tibetan tradition, so close to the composer, the content and form of art verify and confirm the degree of the artist's spiritual development.⁷⁴

Scelsi did not reject his roots and his background, both as a man and as a composer. He was not a dilettante, hastily succumbing to models from other civilisations and fascinated with the "otherness" of Eastern religion. He did not stand before the dilemma East or West? He saw himself being "between," in order to connect. He was one of the "Bridge Builders."⁷⁵

Translate by *Aneta Ptak*

⁷³ The great Eastern thinker Zeami taught that the ultimate goal of art was to enlighten the artist himself and make the viewer aware of that fact. After Bogna Dziechciaruk-Maj, "Japonica, japonica," *Literatura na świecie* 1–3 (2002), 356.

⁷⁴ Marek Kalmus, "O sztuce buddyzmu tybetańskiego," [On the art of Tibetan Buddhism] in *Buddyzm* [Buddhism], ed. Jacek Sieradzan, Wit Jaworski and Marina Dziwisz (Kraków, 1987): 187–188.

⁷⁵ See Anne Bancroft, *Współcześni mistycy i mędracy*, trans. Maria Kuźniak (Warsaw, 1987), 11–12; Eng. orig. *Modern Mystics and Sages* (London, 1976).

