# Stylistic Morphology in the Music of Henryk Górecki, 1960-1974

by

Tyler G. Versluis, M.Mus.

Supervisor: Norbert Palej, D.M.A.

A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Graduate Department of Music

University of Toronto

# List of Figures

**Stylistic Morphology in the Music of Henryk Górecki, 1960-1974**

May 14th, 2018
Tyler G. Versluis
Supervisor: Norbert Palej

The musical output of Henryk Mikołaj Górecki (1933-2010) is commonly perceived and evaluated in the West from the point of the astounding commercial success of his Symphony No. 3 "Symfonia pieśni żałosnych" (1977), resulting in a fixed and highly limited reference point to the composer's earlier musical output.

The musical trajectory of Górecki's stylistic development is often mythologized in the press and media to create a narrative of divinatory or spiritual "revelation" surrounding Górecki's post-Symphony No. 3 output (1977-2010), grouping him rather erroneously as a "holy minimalist", along with John Tavener (1944-2013) and Arvo Pärt (1935-).[1] While these characterizations helped bolster Górecki's mystique and reputation in the West, it frequently undermined and occasionally disparaged the composer's roots in the Polish avant-garde and his artistic contribution to this musical environment.

From a surfaced viewpoint, it appears that Górecki's earlier and later works are like oil and water, but in reality they form a continuous stream of artistic progress, unified by both an ardent personality and an unrelenting hunger for reconfiguration and development as a composer. This paper will argue that Górecki's mature works are the result of a *gradual stylistic morphologization*, passing through periods of various aesthetic fixations that define several "eras" in his composition output. The most critical

[1] William Robin, "How a Somber Symphony Sold More Than a Million Records," , June 9, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/09/arts/music/how-a-somber-symphony-sold-more-than-a-million-records.html.

period of this morphology includes several works composed between 1962 and 1971, beginning with the Genesis series and ending with the Symphony No. 2 “Copernican”, in 1971. During this period, Górecki begins and concludes a codification of musical and cultural items that would define the rest of his composition:

- An increasing disinterest in atonality, serialism, and rhythmic/polyphonic complexity, causing a withdrawal from his participation in an “Internationalist” conglomeration of contemporary composers

- An increasing interest in the local culture and religion of Poland, specifically southern Poland and adjoining regions. A “provincial”, local, focus instead of a broader, international focus. This manifests in two separate but co-existing worlds that define quintessential Polish culture: church and vocal music, and traditional folk music.

- A stylistic swaying from the dense, “omni-directional” formal landscapes of his serialist works towards large, bipartite structures of contrasting material (ie. Muzyczka IV, Symphony No. 2 “Copernican”).

- A powerful concentration of musical material, often with a forceful and deliberately “unsophisticated” application (block sonorities, small cells of repetition instead of the organicist, developing-variation approach of much of 20th century art music).
- A harmonic palette increasingly based on diatonic and whole tone sonorities but still very much rooted in instrumentally homogenous clusters of sonorities, and melodic

material based on repetitive, highly limited and fixed intervallic patterns. Melodic development is frequently based on symmetrical contours and intervallic “inversions” carried over from the rhetoric of 12-tone composition.

In this crucial period of Górecki’s life between 1959 and 1974, the technical methods used to construct his music begin to shift from a purely formalistic and technical purpose, to one of metaphor and symbol. This includes the usage of mirror and geometrical forms through the 1960’s, and the execution of violent and extreme musical content for expressive purposes, beginning most obviously with 1970’s Muzyczka IV. This essay will include a stylistic survey of the above time period in Górecki’s compositional output, including general survey and in-depth musical analysis, as well as a cross-referencing study of the cultural and musical landscape of Poland during this time period. This paper will argue and extrapolate on the following points, bringing attention specifically to the morphology of Górecki’s personal musical style:

1. The beginning point of Górecki’s artistic life, including his artistic “role” in the post-social realist sphere of 1950’s Poland
2. An attempt to identify the core elements of a “Polish musical avant-garde” and its contrasts with both a Western and Soviet style
3. The output and relationship between Górecki’s compositions and the generalized stylisms of Sonorism and the so-called “Polish School”
4. The gradual pulling away of Górecki’s interest in the abstractions of avant-garde serialism and dodecaphony, towards visual and constructive symmetry (which,

argued here, begins Górecki's interest in symbolistic and expressive compositional hybrids)

5. Górecki's artistic battle to articulate the struggles and realities of Poland's welfare during and after World War II
6. Górecki's relationship with Polish culture: church and folk music- Górecki as the the quintessential "Polish man"

To begin, it becomes necessary to correctly describe and define the musical environment that gave birth to Górecki's work and style. The 1960's in Poland became a crucial period in the emergence of a definitive and categorizable "Polish School" of music, although this term is used with some reservation, since it suggests a unification of style and output in the music of Polish composers. In reality the situation was more complex, but still defined by a unified spirit to move past the enforced dogma of social realism, which was extrapolated at a composer's conference in Łagów Lubuski in August 1949 and distributed in a 30-page article in *Ruch Muzyczny*.[2] In Poland, social realism was mainly met with resistance or apathy, as composers were expected to compose music free of formalism, abstraction, and pessimism, and to build a foundation of musical realism for which to manifest a national Polish music style. Problems arose not from these concepts operating in isolation, but from the technicality that social realism operated mainly as a political device rather than artistic.[3] In these early years, authorities struggled to motivate Poland's young composers towards success, as many appealed to the lowest common denominator of their artistic abilities in order to appease

[2] Adrian Thomas, *Polish Music since Szymanowski* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 159.
[3] Ibid., 45.

the tastes of Poland's Ministry of Culture. Composers like Witold Lutosławski and Andrzej Panufnik turned towards folk materials, but found themselves frequently targets of criticism based on the musical language used to highlight these materials. Panufnik's 1947 Nocturne for orchestra, arguably one of the first pieces of identifiably "Polish" pieces of the new post-WWII state, received mixed opinions and was judged formalistic by Minister Włodzimierz Sokorski. Other pieces criticized by Sokorski include Zbigniew Turski's Symphony No. 2 "Olympic" (1948) which had been entered into the international arts competition at the Olympic games in London that year.[4]

The problem for many Polish composers in this era, as mentioned above, was not about composing accessible, tuneful music or using folk idioms, but rather the political implications of such artistic activities in the sphere of Stalinist social realism. As Polish music scholar Adrian Thomas points out, it was much easier for authorities to point out what was wrong with a piece of music than to iron out the specific parameters of the ideology.[5] Henryk Górecki officially entered this musical environment when he left his teaching post in 1953 to train as a music teacher in Rybnik in the Silesian Voivodeship, southern Poland. At this point, the small city was far removed from the dictates of social realism which emanated mainly from the big cities, so Górecki was able to begin his compositional career uninhibited to its demands.[6] In 1955, Górecki applied to study composition at the Higher School of Music in Katowice, where he fell under the influence and mentorship of composer Bolesław Szabelski (1896-1979). On

---

[4] Adrian Thomas, *Polish Music since Szymanowski* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 159.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Adrian Thomas, *Górecki* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), xvii

February 27th 1958, the Higher School of Music dedicated a solo concert to Górecki, premiering six works: The Op. 2 Toccata for two pianos, Op. 4 Variations for violin and piano, Op. 5 Quartettino for two flutes, oboe and violin, Op. 7 Songs of Joy and Rhythm for chamber orchestra, the Op. 10 Sonata for Two Violins and the Op. 11 Concerto for five instruments and string quartet. In the audience were composers Witold Lutosławski (1913-1993) and Włodzimierz Kotoński (1925-2014) who praised the music, but were shocked by the post-Webernian techniques of the concerto and the masses of sound in Songs of Joy and Rhythm.[7] Górecki had baffled his first audience and raised the eyebrows of the previous generation of composers- he had entered the realm of the musical avant-garde.

By 1960, there was a sensation that Poland had fully absorbed the dodecaphonic experimentations of the Western avant-garde, and Poland was now fully ready to unleash a generation of composers onto the international scene.[8] This was preceded by a gradual cultural thaw since 1955 (with a slight re-thaw in late 1957).[9] The strongest impulse of Polish music society- as is the case with most of Polish history- is to mediate between the domains of its western and eastern influences, that is, to resist the tyrannies on both its borders. Piotr Grella-Możejko reaffirms these sentiments, attributing Polish resistance to Soviet social realism on at least five levels: suspicion of centralized authority, the “supremacy” of the Catholic church in Polish culture, anti-Russian behaviour and attitudes, historically pro-Western attitudes, and the creative

---

[7] Adrian Thomas, *Górecki* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 16

[8] Lisa Jakelski, "Górecki's Scontri and Avant-Garde Music in Cold War Poland," *The Journal of Musicology* 2 (2009): 210.

[9] Ibid., 207-8

advantage of music as a non-verbal art form, abstract and naturally resistant to political appropriation.[10]

Lisa Jakelski points out the interest in Western avant-garde practices within Poland stemmed not from a desire to import Western ideas about the "freedom" of artistic practice, but rather to ask questions of how avant-garde art could function in a socialist country.[11] Others, like Lutosławski, stressed the argument that the vitality of Poland's young composers was rooted in Polish patriotism and not German or Soviet.[12] In addition, it was also a question of dialogue and stereotypical Cold War competition: speaking the same cultural "language" of dodecaphony, aleatoricism and avant-gardism generated challenging discourses on either side of the Iron Curtain. Because of these ongoing discourses, Poland's artistic sphere became more dialogic with its Western neighbours, while developing a reputations as an "alternative avant-garde". The reason for this label is complex, but it stressed that Poland was not simply importing the experimentations of Darmstadt, but that Polish composers were developing something home-grown. In reality, most Polish composers responded coolly and cautiously to the dodecaphonic method: Tadeusz Baird developed a unique lyricism with the technique with his 1958 Four Essays, while Lutosławski and Kotoński developed their own idiosyncratic approaches with the 1958 Funeral Music for string orchestra and the 1957 Six Miniatures for clarinet and piano, respectively. The rest of Polish dodecaphony

---

[10] Piotr Grella-Możejko, "Fifty Years of Freedom: Polish Music After 1945," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* Spring 97 (1997): 183.

[11] Lisa Jakelski, *The Changing Seasons of the Warsaw Autumn: Contemporary Music in Poland, 1960-1990*, PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2009, 1.

[12] Lisa Jakelski, "Górecki's Scontri and Avant-Garde Music in Cold War Poland," *The Journal of Musicology* 2 (2009): 225-231.

blended the technique with rather modest neo-classical idioms.[13] At this time, few composers were willing to advance much further with the technique. The emergence of the second Warsaw Autumn festival in 1958 painted an idiosyncratic portrait of Polish and Western music practice at the time, but its main purpose- to be a "festival of ideas"- nevertheless took off. What was perceived to be a conglomeration of musical antagonism and inaccessibility actually sparked the imaginations of Polish musicians, raising enthusiasm as well as ire from cultural critics.[14] Later the emergence of the Polish School also signified a new era of composers who were musically educated almost solely in Poland- Henryk Górecki, Krzysztof Penderecki (1933-) and Wojciech Kilar (1932-2013), among others.[15]

What are the characteristic differences of the Polish musical avant-garde in comparison with say, the Darmstadt musical avant-garde? A more basic question must be posed here first, as the roots of a Polish "style" necessitate description. Grella-Możejko argues the foundation of a contemporary Polish musical identity originates in the works and philosophy of Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937). Although Szymanowski's music represents the synthesis of a cosmopolitan personality- blending Impressionism, atonality, and polytonality- the most important work by Szymanowski involved his synthesis of "sophisticated Western compositional techniques with primeval elements of Poland's native music".[16] Szymanowski's 1926 work for contralto, baritone, chorus and

---

[13] Adrian Thomas, *Górecki* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 16-17

[14] Lisa Jakelski, *The Changing Seasons of the Warsaw Autumn: Contemporary Music in Poland, 1960-1990*, PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2009, x.

[15] Eva Mantzourani, *Polish Music since 1945* (Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 2013), 53.

[16] Piotr Grella-Możejko, "Fifty Years of Freedom: Polish Music After 1945," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* Spring 97 (1997): 184.

orchestra, Stabat Mater, is considered the best representation of these ideas. Grella-Możejko writes,

> "In general, Szymanowski's music epitomizes virtually all the contradictions characteristic of a typical Polish work of the second half of the century- spiritual poignancy and eruptive narration; technical refinement and violent emotive force; creative curiosity and attachment to traditional ways; tendency to experiment but within an often limited range of preselected possibilities." [17]

While many Polish composers digested 12-tone and serial techniques into their music- mainly as a way to organize pitch content- the summation of their experiments left radically different results, musically and theoretically. The argument presented here is that many Polish composers absorbed the direct, emotional impact of 12-tone and serial music without the same level of theoretical rigour or conceptualization that many Western composers of the 50s and 60s utilized. In 1961 in the music periodical *Ruch Muzyczny*, Tadeusz A. Zieliński argued for the uniqueness of the Polish avant-garde, saying that Polish composers wrote with "the aesthetic reaction of the listener in mind", contrasting their experiments with the Western avant-garde who composed for solely technical reasons while ignoring aesthetic experience.[18] These comments coincide with the emergence of the Polish *sonorist* school, who, like their Western counterparts, often expressed their music in extreme parameters, but who chose to focus on tone colour as opposed to the formation and permutation of an abstract musical system. Danuta Mirka writes on this topic:

---

[17] Piotr Grella-Możejko, "Fifty Years of Freedom: Polish Music After 1945," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* Spring 97 (1997): 184.

[18] Tadeusz A. Zieliński, "Nowa Sytuacja Polskiej Muzyki Współczesnej," *Ruch Muzyczny* 5, no. 2 (1961): 4.

"The unifying features of this music were sought chiefly on the aesthetic plane, in its strong, ardent expression and the dynamism of its formal processes. Both of these qualities were equally strange to the experimental 'asceticism' of Western music in the 1950's and hence were all the more noticeable in the music coming from Poland…"[19]

To give two examples of this argument, one can glance at the opening gesture of Henryk Górecki's Symphony No. 1 "1959", which presents all 12 tones of the piece's tone-matrix in a dense homophonic block, "denying it the conventional linear or contrapuntal subtleties" of 12-tone practice.[20] The other example, Penderecki's eight-minute Strophes (1959) for singer, speaker and ten instruments, contains a stylistic appropriation of 12-tone and Webernian textures, but neglects to conform to its suggested constructs. Instead, Strophes is interested in the emotional edge of standard 12-tone vocal writing- angular, dissonant leaps, disjointed rhythms and Sprechgesang.[21]

---

[19] Eva Mantzourani, *Polish Music since 1945* (Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 2013), 159.

[20] Adrian Thomas, *Polish Music since Szymanowski* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 187.

[21] Ibid.

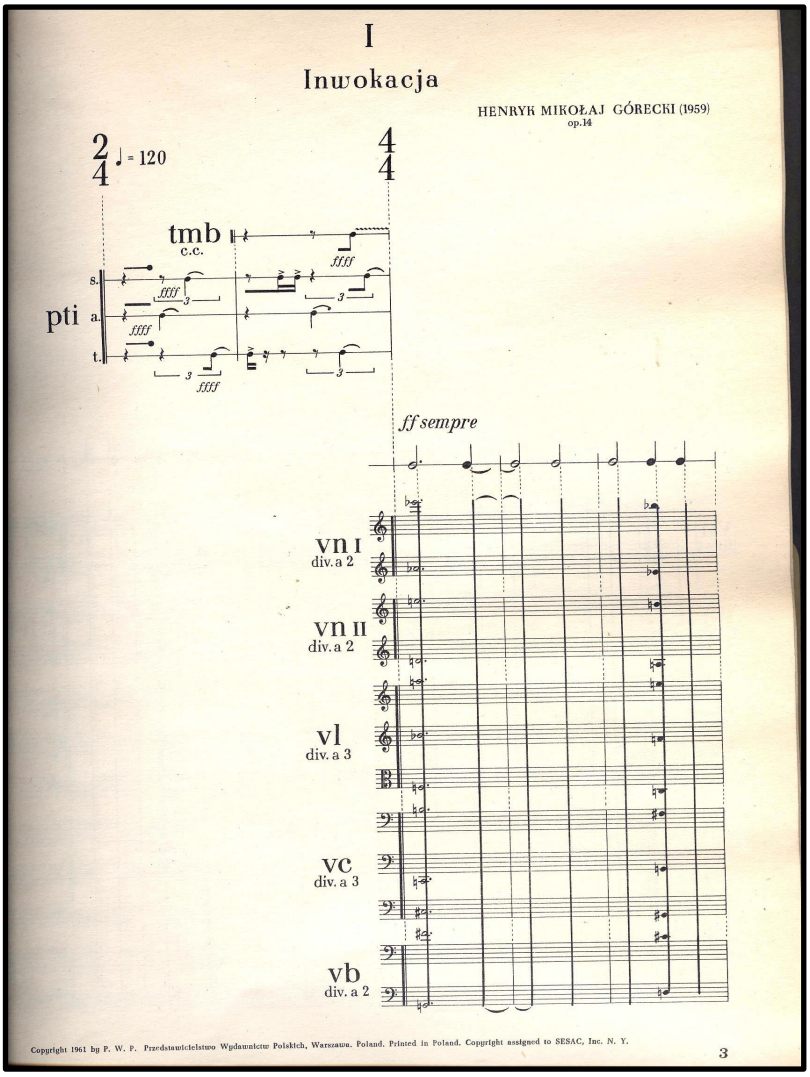


Fig. 1: Henryk Górecki, *Symphony No. 1 "1959"*, opening.

This is an emerging point for Polish composers, who, under the blanket of social realism, often forced to write affirming, positive music, were ultimately unable to express the combinations of horror, grief and terror that the Polish people personally suffered. While the musical products of social realism frequently addressed the past conflicts, it was often in a depersonalized manner that emphasized the struggles of a faceless collective group and which ultimately failed to capture the existential traumas of an individual. With the conflicts of World War II "going beyond the pale", it seemed necessary to respond culturally in the same manner, an epistemological war on the

parameters of a previously well-cushioned artistic tradition. Sonorism, especially in the context of Górecki and Penderecki, was about embodying a shocking, violent and occasionally unpredictable mode of musical violence that stressed not only a "Promethean" means of making art, but also increased the tension of instruments and music-making to the virtual edge of aural-physiological destruction.

In its original definition in the mid-1950s by Józef Chomiński, *sonorism* was used to describe the composing of new sound qualities as embodying the key idea of a musical work.[22] This was achieved not only by the overwhelming use of extended instrumental techniques and extremes of dynamics and register, but through a crucial usage and division of **homogenous** and **polygenous** musical texture.[23] Homogenous texture can be further subdivided in into cohesive (or continuous) or discontinuous. Often this orchestrational technique hinges on the saturation of musical perception, making the sonority so dense or compact that the listener is unable to individually identify the instruments making the sound (ex. the opening chords of Górecki's Symphony No. 1 ('1959'). Another example of continuous homogeneity frequently involves large bodies of instruments participating in a polyphonic texture that is so tangled and dense that perceptively only a mass of discontinuous, moving sonority is heard (ex. The opening of Włodzimierz Kotoński's Oboe Concerto (1972), where the orchestra repeats 26 rapidly moving gestures contained in a narrow band of registral space). The more rare discontinuous homogeneity can be heard in Lutosławski's Livre pour orchestre, where initially homogenous forces differentiate over musical time.

---

[22] Jadwiga Paja-Stach, *Polish Music from Paderewski to Penderecki* (Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 2010), 199.

[23] Ibid., 275

Homogenous textures, which rely on a blending or saturation of sound objects, can be contrasted with the use of polygenous textures, which rely on a juxtaposition of radically different (frequently striking) tonal contrasts, for example, a flute and clave or soprano and metal sheet. This technique relies in a differentiation and individuality of tonal colour and can be employed in both continuous or discontinuous musical texture.[24]

Focusing on Górecki's music in the 1960's, Krzysztof Droba uses the term 'catalogue sonorism' to describe the composer's identifiable use of building sonoristic pieces from sections of various and usually contrasting types of sounds (like in the Genesis cycle and Scontri), and later on, a reduction or limitation of sound qualities down to its most elementary contrasts (like the Muzyczka series, Refrain, and Muzyka Staropolska).[25]

Emotional and rhetorical implications arise from the musical discourse of sonorism. In the case of homogenous textures, the listener is overwhelmed with an overload of musical data, reducing musical lines to either swarms of musical chaos or clusters of grinding tones. In the case of polygenous texture, the ear is shocked by a novelty of sound in a forced recalculation of musical orthodoxy. In either case, the musical intent is always extroverted and reveals a surface-level, emotional response of a frequently extreme, almost impossibly strained character. The most well-known example of this being Penderecki's piece Threnody, which was originally titled "8"37", indicating the exact length of the piece. Penderecki, by switching a title typical of much

---

[24] Jadwiga Paja-Stach, *Polish Music from Paderewski to Penderecki* (Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 2010), 277-281.

[25] Beata Boleslawska-Lewandowska, *The Symphony and Symphonic Thinking in Polish Music After 1956*, PhD diss., Cardiff University, 2009, 128.

avant-garde music of the time- one that revealed either the character of the music or the musical construction- to one that is openly narrative and expressive, transformed the dramatic and extreme musical content from one of materialistic, experimental exploration, to one that is narrative and emotional. According to Lidia Rappoport-Gelfand, the threnody genre also roots Penderecki's piece in Polish cultural traditions, the threnody as a form dating back to Renaissance-era poet Jan Kochanowski. One begins to hear dramatic and narrative colourations in Penderecki's Threnody: long melodic lines reminiscent of funeral chants, sharp cries and moans from the strings, wide *vibrati* in the violoncelli invoking the back and forth rocking of mourners.[26]

There is a gradual paradigm shift here in the music of Penderecki and Górecki: *an increasing unwillingness to divorce a musical tone or sound from its traditional, representational mode of emotional response*. Tones of extreme register, dynamic or tone colour are meant to evoke extreme emotions and often extreme narrative contexts. In the case of Penderecki, this formated most of his music from the 1960's onward, to the point where critics accused the composer of creative shallowness or sensationalism.[27] In the case of Górecki, a series of shifts occurred where certain constructive preoccupations were replaced with new ones. In this circumstance, perhaps both composers felt that sonorism had become another common victim of the modernist obsession with novelty and "newness", and that it was time to root their rebellious experiments in historical and representational contexts.

---

[26] Lidia Rappoport-Gelfand, *Musical Life in Poland* (Routledge, 1991), 73.

[27] Adrian Thomas, *Polish Music since Szymanowski* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 163.

According to Krzysztof Droba's article on Górecki for the *Encyklopedia muzyczna Polskiego Wydawnictwa Muzycznego*, the composer's interest in serial constructions lasted roughly from 1957 to 1962, to be replaced by an interest in sonorism from 1962 to 1964.[28] These two periods contained the following works in Górecki's accepted oeuvre:

**Serial Constructivism**

Sonata for two violins, Op. 10 (1957)

Concerto for five instruments and string quartet, Op. 11, mixed ensemble (1957)

Epitafium, Op. 12, chorus and ensemble (1958)

Five Pieces, Op. 13, piano duo (two pianos or piano four hands) (1959)

Symphony No. 1 '1959', Op. 14, string orchestra and percussion (1959)

Three Diagrams for solo flute, Op. 15

Monologhi, Op. 16, soprano and three groups of instruments (1960)

Scontri, Op. 17, full orchestra (1960)

Diagram IV for solo flute, Op. 18 (1961)

Chorale in the Form of a Canon for string quartet, WoO (1961)

Miscellaneous Piano Pieces, Op. 52 (compiled in 1980, contains 3 miniatures from 1957 inspired by dodecaphonic/serial techniques)

**Sonorism**

Genesis I: Elementi, Op. 19, string trio (1962)

Genesis II: Canti Strumentali, Op. 19, 15 players (1962)

Genesis III: Monodramma, Op. 19, soprano, metal percussion and six double basses (1963)

[28] Krzysztof Droba, *Encyklopedia Muzyczna Polskiego Wydawnictwa Muzycznego*, s.v. "Henryk Górecki."

Trzy tance w dawnym stylu (Three pieces in the old style), string orchestra, no Op. number(1963)

There are several things to note here, the most noticeable being the relatively short period with which Droba classifies as Górecki's sonorist period (1962-4). The period directly following after 1963 (the works which Polish music scholar Teresa Malecka begins referring to as Górecki's mature works),[29] are labelled by Droba as "reductive constructionism". Evidently Droba considered these pieces separately. While this label is not incorrect, it should be noted that there is a significant sonoristic "sound" to many of the compositions after 1963, arguably including works like the Muzyczka series, Choros, Refrain, Muzyka Staropolska, Cantata for organ, and Canticum Graduum for orchestra. According to Danuta Mirka, Droba's classification refers primarily to the sound material with which Górecki is operating.[30] Pieces composed with indefinite pitches, like the Genesis series, give way around 1964 to a re-discovered interest in tone, and even more importantly, musical line and text.

In between this gradual 10 year transformation, Górecki gradually replaced his interest in 12-tone and serial procedures with an investment in the "geometric organization of performance and graphic space",[31] which encompassed spatialization, graphic notation, palindromic organization of pitch and rhythm, and symmetric organization of pitch, largely replacing his traditional 12-tone methods. One can assume that this method of organization agreed better with Górecki's burgeoning interest in

---

[29] Teresa Malecka, "Henryk Mikołaj Górecki. Styl Późny," *Res Facta Nova* 11 (2000)

[30] Danuta Mirka, "Górecki's "Musica Geometrica"," *The Musical Quarterly* 87, no. 2 (2004): 329-330.

[31] Ibid., 305.

sonorism, as it decentralized the 12-tone style's emphasis on pitch and allowed for a more respectable absorption of noise and space in a compositional setting. In addition, this decentralization of pitch and emphasis on the physicality of performance- a methodology that placed demands on the complete gamut of a musician's instrument-required shifts to a more proportional and diagrammatic method of notation to emphasize these parameters. Polish composer Bogusław Schaeffer (1929-) was one the first to introduce time-space or proportional notation into his music, followed shortly by Penderecki.[32] Górecki's use of this notation was standard, often using thick black lines to signify held pitches in pieces such as Scontri and Genesis: Canti strumentali, or the "frame" notations of the Three Diagrams for flute.[33] It should be noted that although these "graphic" forms of notation bore some resemblance to the graphic notation experiments of earlier American and European composers such as John Cage (1912-1992), Earle Brown (1926-2002) and Roman Haubenstock-Ramati (1919-1994), the Poles remained primarily uninterested in the philosophies behind aleatoricism. In a similar sentiment to their relationship towards 12-tone music and serialism, Polish composers were more interested in the sounds and textures generated from such procedures- the experiments in notation were attempts to notate ideas as simply and clearly as possible- outside the confines of standard notation.[34]

In the case of Górecki, the experiments with notation from 1959 onward meant a loosening grasp on the complex polyrhythms of the Symphony No. 1 and the Op. 13 Five Pieces, towards a rhythmic and metrical simplicity that would dominate his late

---

[32] Eva Mantzourani, *Polish Music since 1945* (Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 2013), 316.

[33] Ibid., 315-317.

[34] Eva Mantzourani, *Polish Music since 1945* (Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 2013), 315-317.

music. In good judgment, it should be said that this predilection was frequently present in Górecki's earlier pieces, for example, the motoric ostinati of the Op. 6 Piano Sonata (1956, rev. 1984 and 1990) or the slow contemplative piano accompaniment in the Op. 3 Three Songs (1956), which lends a shocking glimpse into the music Górecki would be writing twenty years later.

In many pieces of this "geometric" period from 1959 to 1969, Górecki utilized a notation system that would emphasize attack and not rhythmic placement or duration-allowing players a proportional sense of when to play the note within the bar or time frame, but not an exactly rhythmic one. With Genesis: Monodramma (1963) the instrumental accompaniment consists of two aggressively loud "choirs" of metallophonic instruments, a soprano singer (not so much acting as a soloist as another sonoristic layer), and another choir of six double basses. The resulting sound produces an extensive, almost monotonous exposition of aggressive sound production, the emotional impact emphasized by the shocking contrasts brought by the soprano line singing almost meaningless syllables: "LI-TO-ME-TA-LE-FO-NI-TY-GRA-NI-TY-GRAANITY" (noticeable in this tangle of syllables are words such as "metalefon", "granity", etc.). This was characteristic of Górecki's "style" of sonorism: a polygenous soundscape of aggressive, contrasting tones, in a constant eruptional flux. This contrasts with Penderecki's sonorist works of the same period, which are dominated by restricted tone pallets and (generally) a sense of musical stasis.[35]

The system of attacks that Górecki notates in the metallophone parts are generated by inversion, retrograde and retrograde inversion:

[35] Eva Mantzourani, *Polish Music since 1945* (Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 2013), 187.

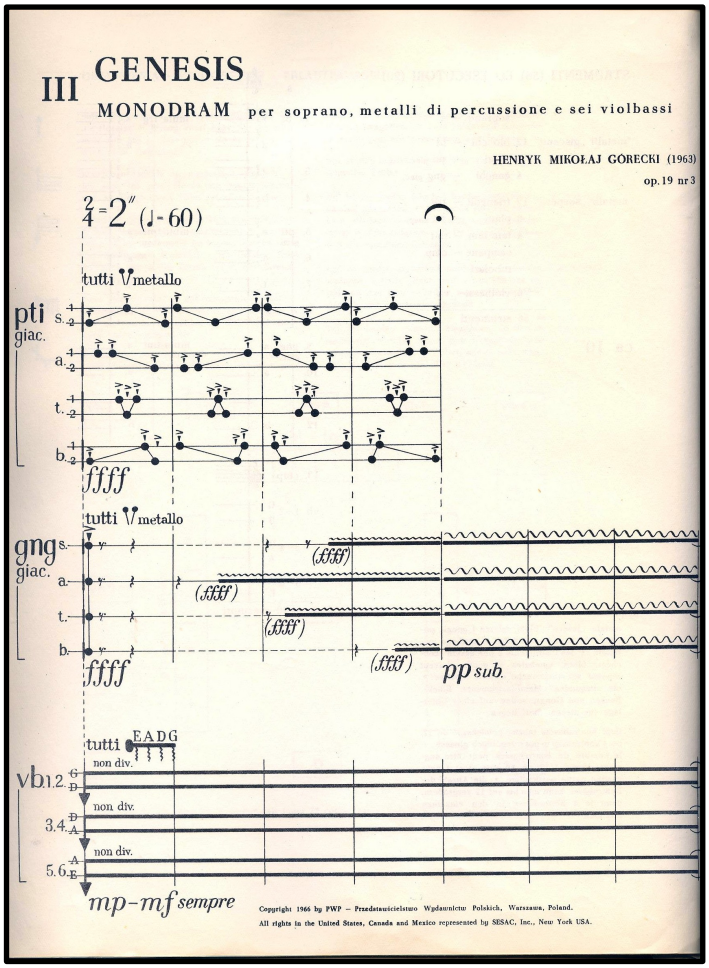


Fig. 2: Henryk Górecki, *Genesis: "Monodramma"*, opening measures.

Genesis: Monodramma presents a fairly blatant example of the geometrization of Górecki's score, including symmetrical pitch and rhythm structures, realized in a brutal, almost ritualized musical aesthetic that is unconventional but not necessarily non-narrative or abstract. Górecki also experimented with geometric concepts of performance space. Organization of instruments and spatialization had interested Górecki since his student years.[36] Pieces like Epitaph, Symphony No. 1 '1959', Monologhi and Scontri all require specific spatial arrangements. However, none of these arrangements emphasized symmetrical placements or other geometric suggestions.

[36] Danuta Mirka, "Górecki's "Musica Geometrica", *The Musical Quarterly* 87, no. 2 (2004): 305.

With the Genesis cycle, all three pieces require specific setups with “great internal symmetry, or[...] a symmetry in relation to an axis determined by the center of the stage[...]”.[37] While these spatial arrangements are interesting experiments, it begs the question why Górecki insisted on such instructions when they seem to generally not embody “true” spatialization, that is, instruments or groups of instruments spread stereophonically or in very distinct bodies. The results of these spatial experiments seem negligible, but when one considers what Górecki was attempting at this period- to replace the framework of 12-tone and serial composition with new concepts- we can perhaps view these experiments of pitch, rhythm and spatial symmetry as an extension of total serialism- an extreme ordering of musical parameters.

There are important differences between Górecki’s geometrism and the serialist compositions of other contemporaneous composers. Integral serialism was based on the constant variation and permutations of an internalized cohesive system, the results of which stressed musical difference and non-repetition, an “intersection between systematic order and the unforeseen”.[38] With Górecki’s geometrism, a new system develops which is almost suggestively representational or visual, symmetry being integral to the study of painting, sculpture and architecture, and also a system that relies on closed systems, based on the repetition of coagulations of musical information. With Górecki’s music of this period, the perception is almost one of ossification: the pointillistic, multi-layered serialism of his Symphony No. 1 replaced by larger, symmetrical blocks of material. Musical ideas become mirror-imaged or inverted but

---

[37] Danuta Mirka, "Górecki's "Musica Geometrica", *The Musical Quarterly* 87, no. 2 (2004): 306-307.

[38] Sandra Louise Kaji-O'Grady, "Serialism in Art and Architecture: Context and Theory" (PhD diss., Wabash University, 2011), 12.

remain non-malleable. In the Muzyczka series there is a fascinating sense of monotony to the musical discourse as ideas are repeatedly and incessantly explored to the point of the exhaustion of a musical idea's potentiality. Often this monotony is emphasized by sudden changes of texture and mood, with little or no preparation or developmental transitions. For Górecki, these musical explorations were an opportunity to authentically wrestle with the most elementary concepts of musical composition, albeit in an aggressive and often disturbing aesthetic manner. The content of the Muzyczka series, therefore, is held together by an intriguing contradiction of modest, almost meager musical material, and a highly extroverted, aggressive realization that inflicts epistemological violence on its subject material.

"It all began with conversations among musicians belonging to the same circle. Someone remarked that every new piece nowadays wants to strike "the big bell". So it seems as if there are no longer any ordinary musical statements that "enlarge", so to speak, the character, features, and mood of everyday life. Acceptance of these everyday events and acceptance of these everyday events and musical happenings does not in any way represent a flight from "big themes", but is - at least for me - an attempt to rehabilitate those"minor problems" which at a certain moment or in a specific situation may turn out to be, for the composer, the most important problems." [39]

Reflecting on this interview with Marek, David Drew speculates further on the meaning of the Muzyczka (or the anglicized "Musiquette") series, hypothesizing that Górecki, as usual, was saying as little as possible about his true musical intentions.[40] From the early 1960s onward, Górecki was preoccupied with at least two large-scale compositions, a "Barbaric Mass" for choir, soprano soloists and large orchestra, and

[39] Tadeusz Marek and David Drew, "Górecki in Interview (1968) - and 20 Years after," *Tempo, New Series* 168 (March 1989): 25.

[40] Ibid.

another large orchestra piece, tentatively titled “In Memoriam”. Both of these works, as revealed in the Marek interview, seemed to be related to an Auschwitz memorial concert that was planned in the future. However, as Drew writes, Górecki was potentially overwhelmed by the gravity of the project and by 1966 seemed to have given up on the project altogether. On April 18th, 1967 a cenotaph was unveiled in Auschwitz: part of the ceremony involved the world premiere of Penderecki’s Dies Irae. Potentially this was the event that Górecki was composing for, although neither Marek nor Górecki drop any hints about this in the interview.[41] What is important to mention here is that throughout much of the 1960’s, Górecki was steeped in the process of writing these pieces, and the “Auschwitz theme” remained of cruciality until 1966. Drew argues that Górecki’s compositions of the 1960’s are steeped in the violence of Auschwitz without making any overt references to its subject:

“It is surely from the standpoint of the Auschwitz material that one can best understand Górecki's reasons for turning in 1967 to 'everyday' matters, in short, to the 'Musiquette' series. With that as the undisclosed background, the audience at the 1967 Warsaw Autumn was inevitably disconcerted by the apparent discrepancy between the title 'Musiquette' and the concentrated, violent, and ascetic character of the music. No wonder Górecki felt obliged to reaffirm, through Marek, his commitment to the Auschwitz theme, without, however, touching on the background. The logic is clear: to have discussed that background with Marek, and even to have hinted at a connexion with Penderecki's Dies irae, would have been to misrepresent and devalue the nature of his commitment by implying that his own quest for a solution to the literary, aesthetic and human problems posed by this most terrible and ineradicable of 'large themes' was subject to a time-frame altogether inappropriate to its character.” [42]

For consideration, the score of Muzyczka III embodies Górecki’s intentions well. Overall, the piece is dominated by two polarities of extreme rhythmic suspension and movement. Górecki’s emphasizes the core affect of these impulses with musical

---

[41] Tadeusz Marek and David Drew, "Górecki in Interview (1968) - and 20 Years after," *Tempo, New Series* 168 (March 1989): 27.

[42] Ibid.

extremes: the suspended sections consist of a low mezzo-piano drone on the viola's two lowest strings, and a "melody" oscillating on Db (C#) and D natural. The contrasting sections in the piece contain sharp, *fortissimo*, bariolage attacks, the notation indicating to play the highest possible positions on all four strings. The rhythm of these attacks is free, but the implication and interpretation of the notations produces an elongating and contracting stream of 32nd note attacks:

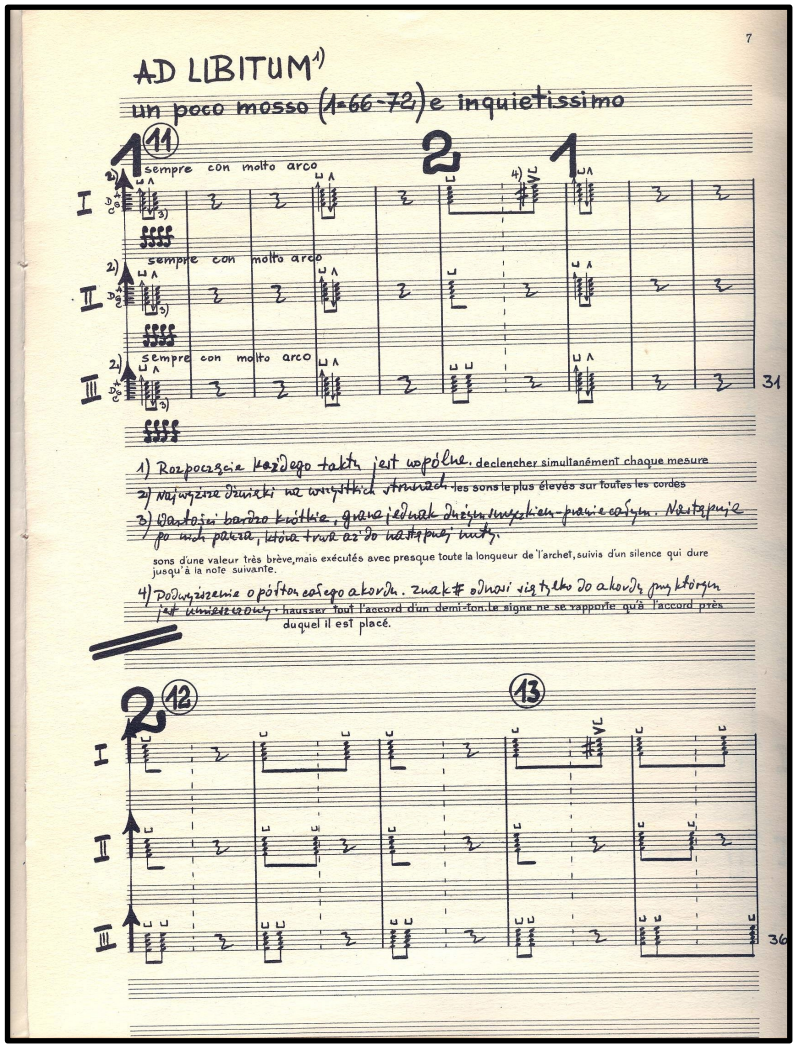


Fig. 3: Henryk Górecki, *Muzyczka III*, rehearsal number 11.

This method of development sets the framework for the musical discourse of much of Górecki's later music- the interaction of short, repeated cells of material elongated or contracted, but rarely developed. In this first "energetic" section of Muzyczka III, one notices the penchant for a constant variation of rhythmic combinations, inserted with a repeated "motto", where all 3 viola parts play in unison. The effect of this construction is one of controlled aleatoricism, a thread which continued to connect Górecki to the music of the Polish School and his peers Lutosławski and Penderecki. The contrast is that there is very little aleatoricism actually present in the score; there is only a slightly ambiguous approach to rhythm, as Górecki chose to notate the attacks almost proportionally in spacial notation. The contrasting sections of Muzyczka III begin to reveal Górecki's growing interest in early music: the *appogiaturas* surrounding a low C-G perfect fifth drone, and the slow, chant-like recitations anticipating the extrovertedly archaic hockets of 1969's Muzyka Staropolska for brass and strings.[43] All of this musical discourse is submerged in a sea of anxiety as the violists play on detuned strings, creating a subtle distortion of sound.

Górecki's concept of musical time was also shifting, exploring more frequently the idea of suspending musical time, or at very least slowing down the rate of musical information to an extreme degree. While these concepts were present earlier, such as the loud, grinding pedal notes that open 1962's Genesis I and Genesis II, the idea climbs to the forefront starting with the 1963 Three Pieces in the Old Style and the following orchestral pieces, 1964's Choros I and Refrain from 1965. Górecki's Three Pieces in the Old Style is a strange piece in Górecki's catalogue, because of the work's

[43] Adrian Thomas, *Górecki* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 62.

general popularity (it remains one of his most performed and most recorded pieces) and the fact that the composer never assigned the piece an opus number, thus excluding it from his official works. Ironically, the pieces lends the most to the direction Górecki would take his music in the future, with Adrian Thomas describing it as "essentially immune from the avant-garde world around it".[44] The music contains a tenor from the Polish Renaissance evening hymn, "Już się zmierzcha", but most noticeably all three pieces are composed in a "white-note" modalism, clearly a reference to archaic music, but also representative of the extremities of style and content that Górecki was attracted to. The third movement, a setting of a four-part sixteenth century Polish wedding song, contains a harmonic pedal of the D-E-F-G-A, which hovers in the background for the entire movement.[45] There is a fusion here of Górecki's interests: archaic music and its modalities, as well as the compact bands of sound from the Sonorism School.

At this point, it is important to mention the influence and parallels between Górecki's "geometric" music of this period and the realm of visual art. Musicologists Krzysztof Droba and Danuta Mirka both use the term **constructivism** to describe Górecki's stylistic periods. Droba's classification implies that most of Górecki's early music falls in this constructivist period:

1. Moto perpetuo constructivism (1955-57)
2. Serial constructivism (1957-61)
3. Sonorism (1962-63)
4. Reductive constructivism (1964-70)

---

[44] Adrian Thomas, *Górecki* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 59.
[45] Adrian Thomas, Polish Music since Szymanowski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 191.

5. Synthetic constructivism (1971 onwards) [46]

Mirka chooses instead to categorize Górecki's music based on the influence of symmetry and geometry and subdivides the works from 1955 as 1971 as "pre-geometric" (1955-1961) and "geometric" (1961-1971).[47] Mirka's primary criticism of Droba's classification stems from the fact that his subdivisions ignore the influence of geometry in Górecki's music and instead focus perhaps too strongly on the sonic material with which Górecki operates (ie. pitch, non-pitched, heterogenous sound materials, homogenous).[48] The term **constructivism** may conjure several ideas and philosophies that seem at odds with Górecki as a composer and personality, including ideas like functionality of art, cubism, neo-plasticism, architecture, futurism, and graphic design. Constructivism as an art movement in Poland has its origins in Vilnius, at the opening of the New Art Exhibition in 1923, which featured artists such as Karol Kryński, Kairiūkštis, Maria Puciatycka, Henryk Stażewski, Władysław Strzemiński, Mieczysław Szczuka, Teresa Żarnowerówna. Although the art styles of these painters was quite diverse, thematically they were joined but an interest in geometric forms. Later this developed into more elaborate artistic philosophy on logic, construction and utility:

---

[46] Krzysztof Droba, *Encyklopedia Muzyczna Polskiego Wydawnictwa Muzycznego*, , s.v. "Henryk Górecki."

[47] Danuta Mirka, "Górecki's "Musica Geometrica"," *The Musical Quarterly* 87, no. 2 (2004): 329-331.
[48] Ibid.

"The paintings were to be translatable into the language of arithmetic or mechanics; other works were to based on reason, much like a machine. The category of beauty was replaced by the notion of an organic and logic form, while the creative purpose was not the aesthetic experience or contemplation, but a product designed for social use. The creator took the position of a constructor and his job was to fulfill specific functions of the social circuit. This vision assumed unity in art, work and social life." [49]

To be expected, the movement had difficulty maintaining cohesion, as the artists had widely divisive ideas about the role of utilitarianism in the Constructivist movement, and the movement was dead in Poland by 1924.[50] Górecki's ties to the movement are likely non-existent, but the insistent use of geometry, placed at the forefront of the composition, the harsh contrasts of colour, form and construction, draw serious parallels between the the Constructivist movement and its aesthetic relatives. No doubt, Górecki and the sonorist experimentation with notation also creates resonance with the artistic style as well. To diversify, Jadwiga Paja-Stach makes connections to Sonorism and the works of Grupa Krakówska painter Maria Jarema (1908-1958),[51] while Adrian Thomas makes connections towards Górecki's work Choros I and the colour-field paintings of Mark Rothko (1903-1970)- a uniformity of tone-colour, a bubbling, kaleidoscopic approach to sound generation, and strict, geometric divisions of proportion and musical form.[52] Glancing at the cover art of *Polskie Wydanictwo Muzyczne*'s edition of Górecki's Genesis III: Monodramma and Refrain also reveals unattributed paintings in a constructivist style. To add to these visual allusions, I would also like to suggest

---

[49] Magdalena Wróblewska, "Blok Group," Culture.pl, May 9, 2011, , accessed April 16, 2018, http://culture.pl/en/artist/blok-group.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Jadwiga Paja-Stach, *Polish Music from Paderewski to Penderecki* (Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 2010), appendix.

[52] Adrian Thomas, *Górecki* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 51.

comparisons to the art of Kazimir Malevich (1879-1934) and especially German-American abstract expressionist Josef Albers (1888-1976), who, like Górecki, pursued an artistic practice of an ascetic reservation of material guided by an intentional though covertly-applied Roman Catholic spirituality.

Like Górecki, Albers' works invoked a preoccupation with simplification- "distillation" of material, an interest in timelessness, ritualization of creative process, and a focus on the "simple miracles" of geometry, line and colour.[53] Like Górecki's works from his geometric period, the subjects of Albers' works regularly manifest themselves in blocks suspended in an undefined space, detached from other objects with a total lack of shading. We are instead struck by the starkness and individuality of the square and colours themselves.

[53] Nicholas Fox Weber, *The Sacred Modernist: Josef Albers as a Catholic Artist*, in The Sacred Modernist: Josef Albers as a Catholic Artist, ed. Josef Albers (Cork: Lewis Glucksman Gallery, 2012), 35.

Fig. 4: Josef Albers, *Study to Homage to the Square: Warm Welcom*

It should be pointed out the Albers' mature methodology was already fully steeped in spiritual realization, while Górecki was either deliberately covert or undeveloped in realizing spiritual ideas in his music. However, it can be argued that Górecki's interest in "distillation" and simplification are manifestations of a spiritual and cultural awakening that would take place nearly a decade later. Like in Albers' work, the inclusion of symmetry and geometrization certainly heightens the atmosphere to a mystical degree in works like Refrain and Canticum Graduum. These parameters of symmetry also arrive from the music of Messiaen, who, like Górecki was Catholic and whose work must have represented a "solution" for Górecki: a composer who was undeniably radical but was able to work in ideas of order and beauty through a codification of theological principles. In Messiaen's case, most of these codes arrive

through forms of symmetry. To contrast, listening to Pierre Boulez's Pli Selon Pli reveals an constant unfolding of musical gestures and ideas towards an unattainable horizon, "[...]endless semi-arrivals and semi-returns", as described by Catherine Pickstock:

"The constant frustration of these, and revelation of yet another turn in the non-plot, is indeed delightful, and yet the constant drive to undo, not to arrive and not to return, means that one feels that anti-music has the last word. Irony triumphs: there may be music within non-music, but the whole piece seems not to be music; in which case it falls apart and its elements seem arbitrary and non-revealed or non-loved."[54]

Pickstock contrasts this with the music of Messiaen, which, through its emphasis on return, reflects central ideas of the Christian faith: the redemption of human sin through Jesus Christ, the Second Coming, and so forth, condensed into a durational metaphor that ultimately reflects both timelessness and return: the palindrome (1-2-3-4-4-3-2-1). Within these concepts of both return and an foundational concept of harmonic "finality" which Messiaen sophisticated over his lifetime, there is distinct "overcoming" of the "Kantian-ism" of musical modernism which manifests as a varied sort of musical *mathesis*.[55] The difference is return and non-return, but also the division between the non-expressive use of "series" and Messiaen's usage of "modes", which provided not only a link to the historical usage of the term in Western church music and the established variety of pitch content, but also "[...]a pre-selection of something with a certain colour, a certain mood, tendency, hierarchical bias or tilt".[56]

---

[54] Catherine Pickstock, "Messiaen and Deleuze: The Musico-theological Critique of Modernism and Postmodernism,"*Theory, Culture & Society* 25 (2008): 184.

[55] Ibid., 186.

[56] Ibid., 183.

The most clarified use of symmetry and mirror forms in Górecki's music are manifested in several major pieces the composer wrote between 1965 and 1971: Refrain (1965), Canticuum Graduum (1969), Old Polish Music (1967-69), Muzyczka II (1967), and Ad Matrem (1971). Anna Maslowiec's 1998 paper, "The Utmost Economy of Material: Structural Elements in the works of Górecki from Refrain (1965) to Ad Matrem (1971)" best illustrate how these elements are extrapolated in these pieces. For example, palindromes or "mirror forms" are the primary mode of structure in Górecki's Refrain, both rhythmic and harmonic. As typical with Górecki, the work is dominated large blocks of material arranged in a A B A form, the A sections dominated by slow, almost immobile "refrains" of mirrored harmonic and rhythmic structures and the fast, aggressive B section dominated by palindromic *ostinati*. The opening A sections consists of six of these "refrains", each separated by a pause. As mentioned, each refrain is a rhythmic and harmonic palindrome, the numbers in the rhythmic palindrome indicating beats per metre (at a glacial 26-28 beats to the quarter note), and the harmony dictating a symmetrical "spreading out" of pitch from the central pitch of C.[57]

[57] Anna Maslowiec, ""The Utmost Economy of Musical Material:" Structural Elements in the Works of Górecki from Refrain (1965) to Ad Matrem (1971)," *Polish Music Journal* 6, no. 2 (2003): , 2003, accessed April 16, 2018, http://pmc.usc.edu/PMJ/issue/6.2.03/Maslowiec.html.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1st** (metre) | GP | 5 | **3** | 5 | GP | | | | | | | | | |
| Pitch content | - | C | **Db** | C | - | | | | | | | | | |
| **2nd** | 5 | 3 | **2** | 3 | 5 | GP | | | | | | | | |
| Pitch content | C | D | **C** | D | C | - | | | | | | | | |
| **3rd** | 5 | 5 | 2 | **3** | 2 | 5 | 5 | GP | | | | | | |
| Pitch content | C | Db | C | **D** | C | Db | C | - | | | | | | |
| **4th** | 3 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 3 | **2** | 3 | 1 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 3 | GP |
| Pitch content | C | Db | C | D | Db | Eb | **D** | Eb | Db | D | C | Db | C | GP |
| **5th** | 3 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **1** | 4 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2* | GP | | | |
| Pitch content | C | D | C | Db | **Db** | Db | C | D | C | C | - | | | |

Górecki's breaks the palindrome in the 5th refrain, adding an extra metre of 2 on the end. The 6th refrain consists of two palindromic series followed by a coda, with the two series separated by a three beat measure. Maslowiec notes that the first palindrome in the sixth refrain is a variation on the first refrain, while the coda combines and varies the two series, creating a "microcosm of the whole piece".[58]

As mentioned previously in this essay, the formation of the identity of the Polish avant-garde arose out of a series of confrontations with social realist artistic policy, the practices of the avant-garde in Western Europe and North America, including the philosophies of dodecaphony, serialism, electronic music and aleatoricism, as well as recollections and syntheses of Polish identity and culture. As Soviet avant-garde figures

[58] Anna Maslowiec, ""The Utmost Economy of Musical Material:" Structural Elements in the Works of Górecki from Refrain (1965) to Ad Matrem (1971)," *Polish Music Journal* 6, no. 2 (2003): , 2003, accessed April 16, 2018, http://pmc.usc.edu/PMJ/issue/6.2.03/Maslowiec.html.

like Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998), Sofia Gubaidulina (1931-), Alexander Knaifel (1943-), Galina Ustvolskaya (1919-2006) and Arvo Pärt were writing music after the *Khrushchev thaw* in the Russian Soviet Union and neighbouring socialist states, it became more apparent that the values and practices of avant-gardism remained inherently varied as each camp strove to meet the needs and desires of their own musical identities and cultures.

Sonorism, as a Polish musical practice, has been described as a type of "sonic hedonism"[59], producing a strong physiological effect in the listener that overrides any sort of abstract or intellectual framework that might systemize it, like the distinctly German systems of dodecaphony and musical serialism. The separation between Western and Eastern avant-garde musical thought does not have origins in the 20th century, but is rather the product of an ancient bifurcation in European culture. Germany, and other associated German states, are a product of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, and its culture and thought is dominated by a cultural history of rigorous "inwardness", an asceticism which stresses the poverty of empirical senses and stresses that what is essential manifests inside the heart and soul. Frijthof Schuon argues that Martin Luther, with his doctrine and essays, essentially sought out to "Germanize" Christianity, taking away its manifestations in Roman and Italian culture and its excessive incarnations in Baroque ecclesiastical art:

"There is also a fundamental tendency in the Gospel that responds with particular force to the needs of the Germanic soul: namely, a tendency toward simplicity and inwardness, hence away from theological and liturgical complication, formalism, dispersion of worship, and the too often comfortable tyranny of the clergy." [60]

---

[59] Józef Patkowski, writer, *Horyzonty Muzyki*, October 14, 1962.

[60] Frithjof Schuon, "The Question of Protestantism," in *Christianity/Islam: Perspectives on Esoteric Ecumenism*, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2008), 28.

Ironically, Luther was most inspired by Medieval Catholic mystics such as Bernard Clairvaux, who advocated for barren, sober places of worship and stressed the concept of Christ within the heart.[61] Luther interpreted these theological ideas by pushing them further, by denying the manifestation of Christ in the Eucharist and emphasizing the presence of Christ "in the heart". Here we have the beginning manifestations of German "inwardness" which would later extend into German analytical philosophy and the hierarchical value of abstract, conceptual musical systems like dodecaphony and serialism. All this remained wholly antithetical to cultural and religious thought in Eastern Catholic and Orthodox nations, where the representative splendour of the iconostasis is almost emblematic of Eastern Christian theology.

There is a fundamental core with Eastern European culture, as the importance and fetishisistic centrality of the *ikon* means there is an immobile fixation on representation in art. While Western and Protestant Europe has a lengthy history of abstracting God and Christ by emphasizing the "inwardness" of God and the Word, Eastern Europe is noticeably "outward" in its cultural manifestations of religion and spiritual life. Poland, being a country informed by both Western and Eastern cultural streams, represents ideally a synthesis of both camps. For Górecki however, there remained a fundamental problem with the avant-garde and his own personal artistic goals: the inherent reality of representation and his desire to express religio-spiritual content in his music. There is a deep spiritual crisis in the music of Górecki's "geometric" period, because Górecki is constantly attempting to find abstracted and "closeted" ways of expressing an spiritual ideal- through concepts of symmetry- a

[61] Frithjof Schuon, "The Question of Protestantism," in *Christianity/Islam: Perspectives on Esoteric Ecumenism*, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2008), 30.

geometric and visual allegory of “perfection”- palindromic structures, which arrive second-hand from Messiaen’s religious ideas about eternity, and covert allusions to sacred music in the content and titles of his pieces.

“Regardless of how “eternally changing”, “fluid”, “schizoid” or “tehomic” God might be perceived or described to be, the object-focus as such, the search for God, still persists. This in turn explains why a painting by Kandinsky should not be hanging above an altar if it wants to stay out of the game of representation.” [62]

At this point, it is important to discuss Górecki’s chamber work Muzyczka IV for clarinet, trombone, violoncello and piano, Op. 28 (1970), as the piece not only represents a conclusion of the Muzyczka cycle, but the work acts as a metaphorical signpost for where Górecki’s music would turn to in the future. The piece had relatively modest beginnings, commissioned by the ensemble *Warztat Muzyczny*, which featured most noticeably fellow pianist and composer Zygmunt Krause (1938-). The work stands in contrast to most of the works that Górecki was composing at the time, which featured large ensembles or instruments capable of producing heavy blocks of homogenous sound (ie. Old Polish Music for strings and brass, Refrain for orchestra, Choros I for string orchestra, Muzyczka III for three groups of violas, the Cantata for organ).[63] The work bears the subtitle “Koncert Puzonowy”, although this label is applied in an idiosyncratic fashion. Lacking a full score, the piece rather consists of a series of coordinated repeated parts, delineated into sections or “events” of which the trombonist triggers and terminates. Thus, the trombonist has a leader-like role which does not cross into soloist territory.

---

[62] Petra Carlsson Redel, *Mysticism as Revolt: Foucault, Deleuze and Theology Beyond Representation* (Aurora, CO: Davies Group, Publishers, 2014), 166.

[63] Adrian Thomas, *Górecki* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 66.

Muzyczka IV is subdivided into two large contrasting movements. In the first movement, each instrument's part is built rhythmically and motivically on a series of expanded or contracted themes which embody an explosive energy. The clarinet part is built mainly on fragmented streams of 32nd notes, the short grouping being of 2 notes and the longest 6. The other instruments are more varied: the piano alternates between aggressive appoggiaturas and low-range cluster trills (sections 1, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 5, second half of 6B), and longer tones proceeded by grace notes, which highlight either a semitone relation or tritone (sections 2, 6A, first half of 6B). The second movement is dominated by long, hymn-like recitations in the clarinet, violoncello and trombone, while the piano solemnly accompanies with black-note clusters.

According to David Drew, "the static modality of [Muzyczka IV's] coda clearly represents a transcendence of the previous events and a critique of the violence that informs them".[64] In this statement we unlock an integral insight into a shift in Górecki's thinking. Firstly, that it was now time, whether in Górecki's personal life or in the cultural milieu of Poland as a whole, to reflect and offer aesthetic "solutions" to the immense cultural and physical violence in Poland's recent history, and secondly, to deeply question Górecki's own relationship to the avant-garde movement. In many ways, the artistic avant-garde generated its own violence- a savage attack on the past, on representative art, and an almost self-destructive obsession with autonomy, complexity and freedom, a hegemony that almost rivalled the intensity of European politics that it acted as a phalanx against. While Górecki was very much part of the avant-garde scene in Poland, his success as a composer in these early years bears more witness to his

[64] Tadeusz Marek and David Drew, "Górecki in Interview (1968) - and 20 Years after," *Tempo, New Series* 168 (March 1989): 28-29.

distinct musical personality rather than the sophistication and ease of the styles which he composed in. Instead we see, like Górecki's contemporary Arvo Pärt, a deep dissatisfaction with the musical status quo in both directions, the dictations of social realism and the reactionary avant-garde. As a composer, Górecki was too young to bear much influence on the philosophical and cultural origins of the 20th century avant-garde in Poland, and thus had less sentimental attachment to its milieu. There was something worth discovering that lay outside of the spectrum. Throughout the 60's, the explosive and energetic character of Górecki's music was always carefully restrained by a rigorous control of musical parameters. However, beginning with pieces like Muzyczka IV, there awakens a desire to transform this energy to explore representations of violence and tension.

Catastrophe and the human response to it bears a long tradition in Eastern European art and culture. In 1960, Polish cultural critic Bohdan Peciej, in a commentary on Polish avant-garde music, spoke thusly about Górecki and his contemporaries:

> "Of the three composers who represent our avant-garde… Górecki is the most contemporary... He strongly feels the feverish, accelerated rhythm of the age, the pulsing of a great anxiety, and the 'cosmic catastrophe' of modernity." [65]

With several massive cultural and political upheavals in the 20th century, the attitudes and activities of Eastern Europe's artists reflect the tension between these large scale national and political forces and the reactions of the individual. In "Music Mourning and War: Henryk Górecki's Third Symphony and the Politics of Remembering", Maria Cizmic describes Górecki's Third Symphony as bearing witness

---

[65] Lisa Jakelski, *The Changing Seasons of the Warsaw Autumn: Contemporary Music in Poland, 1960-1990*, PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2009, 213.

to “trauma by formally and sonically performing analogies to psychological and emotional responses to trauma”.[66] In contrast to other contemporary works reviewed by Cismic, including Alfred Schnittke’s Concerto for Piano and Strings and Arvo Pärt’s Tabula Rasa, Górecki’s Symphony No. 3 is by far the most overt, directly referencing scenes of war, trauma, loss and death in its texts. The music’s repetitiveness and harmonic stasis act as sonic metaphors for psychological and emotional responses to trauma and loss. Consider the third movement, where wave after wave of predictable, lovingly orchestrated chords cascade downward in A major. The music is not simply an expression of grief and loss, but a type of sonic therapy, not only a cradle of consonant expression, but a bundle of musical symbols marking various points of history in which Poland struggled to maintain its existence in the midst of catastrophe.[67] Because of this, Cizmic argues that Górecki’s Symphony No. 3 is about coming to terms with historical events: this requires deep contemplation. Whether Górecki intended this is hard to tell: we can only assume that Górecki was expressing a creative necessity.

Much has been written about Górecki’s Symphony No. 3, to the point of ignorance of the importance of earlier works where most of its contained ideas have their origin. For example, the sound-world of Muzyczka IV’s first movement can only be described as apocalyptic- each instruments plays *ffff* for its entire duration, the trombone in its high tenor, the clarinet in the altissimo register shrieking like an animal in distress, the cello in the treble clef, while the pianist attacks the low register of their instrument with trilled clusters and open tritones. The trombone’s symbolic history as a

---

[66] Maria Cizmic, *Performing Pain: Music and Trauma in Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 133.

[67] Ibid., 137

herald of doom only adds to this sentiment. The piece is an exercise in barely controlled chaos- something that borders almost on the artless, were it not for the trombonist's role in periodically silencing the rampage. The second movement represents a total contrast to the first, in tempo, mood, construction and pitch content. Here we have a symbolic aesthetic apocalypse where the music seeks to perform not only a purifying violence against the listener, but against the epistemological foundations of classical music itself: the incoordination of parts, the usage of extreme pitches and ranges, the almost unrealizable dynamic (ffff sempre). In reality, Muzyczka IV bears more resemblance to the music of Galina Ustvolskaya (1919-2006) than to any other work Górecki would attempt in the future, but the subject of trauma remains. For example, in Ustvolskaya's Piano Sonata No. 6 (1988), the pianist is required to execute a series of clusters with the forearm, fist and fingers, often at extremely loud dynamics. The result is a frequently uncomfortable contact with the physical limit of the pianist themselves- they are required to physiologically embody the pain and violence that the sonata seeks to express.[68] It is tempting to see this parallel in Muzyczka IV. Like Ustvolskaya, it seems that the "inadequacies" found in their music are in reality its integral merits: "the maximum expression using the minimum of resources", and its "coarse-grainedness".[69] Turning to other post-war works in literature and film, we can witness how artists sought to embody trauma in their works: Paul Celan's Todesfuge and Alain Renais's film Hiroshima mon amour (1959) communicate their trauma through a breakdown in linearity into a series

[68] Maria Cizmic, *Performing Pain: Music and Trauma in Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 79.

[69] Valeria Tsenova, ed., *Ex oriente: Ten Composers from the former USSR* (Berlin: Kuhn, 2002), 100.

of disjunctions and repetitions.[70] This is certainly visible the musical material of Muzyczka IV, as individual instruments violently vocalize the fragmentary motives into an unorganized musical space. In the context of Eastern Europe, this element of trauma connects to a broader cultural tendency among artists to embody crisis in their works, on a scale that has been described as "apocalyptic" by Natalia Koltakova. She writes that the pessimism felt about art in culture by *fin de siècle* artists and the Symbolists predicted the massive aesthetic and cultural upheavals that were to unfold in the rest of the 20th century.[71] In the case of Poland, reflections on culture's decay and disintegration proceed from this crisis, as is the realization of an evil that has grown to "a cosmic scale".[72] This movement in literature and art, catastrophism, contains not only the realization of apocalyptic upheaval, but the sensation of searching and purification, a quest of anguish to discover something new. Górecki's Muzyczka series, and especially Muzyczka IV, embody both a tortured display of destruction but also a quest for something new, symbolized in the binary of the first and second movements. This remains consciously separate from pessimistic works by artists like Zdiszlaw Beksiński (1929-2005) and writer Czesław Miłosz (1911-2004), who sought mainly to articulate the disorientation resulting from crisis:

---

[70] Maria Cizmic, *Performing Pain: Music and Trauma in Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 19.

[71] Natalia Koltakova, "Catastrophism as a manifestation of the crisis of consciousness in Russian and Polish culture", in Apology of Culture: religion and culture in Russian thought, eds. Artur Mrówczyński-Van Allen, Teresa Obolevitch, and Paweł Rojek, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 138.

[72] Ibid.

I didn't believe that I would cross that bridge,
And now that I am standing on the other side,
I don't believe I crossed it.[73]

The point is, what is Górecki's "answer" to the catastrophism of his proceeding works? The response is discovered by distilling the stylisms and tendencies in his post-1970's work, which can be broken down into two large and central main points:

- The prioritization of Polish culture and its idioms: dance and church music
- The centralization of text and human voice: logocentrism

It is tempting to say that Górecki's music radically changed in the 1970's, but a better description would be a re-orientation of elements that were already present in Górecki's first works. It is also tempting to imply that Górecki's future works were a postmodern critique towards the high modernism of his past works, and indeed this was common response to many composers of Górecki's era:

"Composers enacting a postmodern response to high modernism did not typically make manifesto-like pronouncements - George Rochberg and Steve Reich are two notable and early exceptions, however. Most offered a personal story in which a moment of revelation and soul searching prompted an aesthetic realignment, and typically each composer felt alone in this decision." [74]

In the case of American composer George Rochberg (1918-2005), his own personal issue was that much of the music composed in his era sounded merely like "sounds and sound manipulation" and that the goal of music extended much farther than that. In a

---

[73] Natalia Koltakova, "Catastrophism as a manifestation of the crisis of consciousness in Russian and Polish culture", in Apology of Culture: religion and culture in Russian thought, eds. Artur Mrówczyński-Van Allen, Teresa Obolevitch, and Paweł Rojek, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 143.

[74] Judy Lochhead, "Naming: Music and the Postmodern", New Formations [66] (2009): 160.

letter written in 1961 to Canadian composer Istvan Anhalt, Rochberg expressed his dissatisfaction in the 12-tone method as it represented a mere stylism that would be eventually washed away by another fad or method of composition.[75] As a composer and listener, Rochberg could not "take [his] music objectively - calmly". In reality, Rochberg's dissatisfaction with the technique extended as far back as 1957, when he criticized Pierre Boulez's Structures Book 1 in a review, remarking that the composer had substituted a "remarkable cerebration" for "a deeply felt creative necessity". Fifteen years later, Rochberg delivered his frequently quoted aphorism on the music of his era: "the past refuses to be erased. Unlike Boulez, I will not praise amnesia."[76] While Rochberg's judgments about Boulez are perhaps tinged with bitterness and naivety, what becomes clear is that Rochberg as a composer became preoccupied with music of the past and his own personal connection with it. In some cases like the String Quartet No. 3, this is manifested by the appropriation of the music of Beethoven and other stylistic icons. What is questionable is how much of Rochberg's later music is about a connection with the past, and how much of it is about creating a musical language based on a free combinatorial mixture of historical styles. Is there a "continuation of the past" here, or an "end of time" scenario, where the measure of time is ineffective in curating cultural and artistic relevance?

By contrast, the music of Sofia Gubaidulina represents a free synthesis of current musical practices- microtonality, *glissandi*, free and expressive use of dissonance- with an evocation of a sombre, almost primitive pre-modern spirituality. Because of this,

---

[75] Alan Gillmor, "The Apostasy of George Rochberg", Intersections [29] 1 (2009): 33.

[76] Ibid., 34.

Gubaidulina's music is frequently included in the discourse about musical postmodernism, as her music also enters a dialogue with the past- albeit an ancient and foggy one.[77]

This viewpoint can be mapped on to Arvo Pärt's work as well. Like Rochberg, Arvo Pärt also had a public rejection of modernism: his epiphany discovering the *tinntinnabuli* system and his fervent rejection of his past styles was sensationalized by the Western press and media in later years. In his lecture, "Crisis averted? Arvo Pärt and serialism", Christopher J. May presents a similar argument to this paper, that classifying Arvo Pärt's works into two camps- pre-*tinntinnabuli* and *tinntinnabuli*- presents an unfair reality of Pärt's craftsmanship as a composer and an unrealistic mythologization of Pärt's personal life and compositions. This ruptured approach to Pärt's work was aggravated by sensational programme notes on commercial recordings, and the failure of many English writers and commentators to critically analyze Pärt's music. Instead, May argues, Pärt's later music is highly influenced and even a direct translation of his varied 1960's output, where serial technique forms the foundation of *tinntinnabuli*'s musical "grammar".[78]

Like Pärt, it is tempting to sort Górecki's music into an A and B column, but it is integral to view Górecki's later music as a direct continuation of his previous works and to avoid similar mythologizations, artistic epiphanies and the sort, which arrive far too frequently with the importation of Eastern European art music into the Anglosphere. The first roots seem to appear in the Op. 3 Three Songs for voice and piano, which stresses meditative intensity, slow, concentrated development of small motives, and a

---

[77] Judy Lochhead, "Naming: Music and the Postmodern", New Formations [66] (2009): 166.

[78] Christopher J. May, *Crisis averted? Arvo Pärt and serialism*. (2009), abstract.

harmonic scheme derived from tonality. This work is Górecki's first notable display of "Polishness", the use of the texts by Polish poets Juliusz Słowacki and Julian Tuwim. From the time period stretching from Górecki's Op. 1 in 1955 to his Symphony No. 3 in 1976, a total of seven works display an open relation to Polish culture: the aforementioned Symphony No. 3, with its Polish texts, the Op. 33 Two Little Songs of Tuwim (1972), the Op. 31 Symphony No. 2 "Copernican" (1972) with its centralization on the Polish Nicolaus Copernicus, the Op. 30 Two Sacred Songs (1971) with texts by Polish poet Marek Skwarnicki, the Op. 24 Old Polish Music (1969) and Three Pieces in the Old Style (1963) with quotational material from old Polish musical sources, and finally the Op. 3 Three Songs (1956).

Górecki's desire to express Polishness did not generate in isolation. Artur Grabowski writes about dramatist, writer and cartoonist Sławomir Mrożek (1930-2013), who in the 60's and 70's was confronted by similar questions of Polish identity. Mrożek realized that his attempts to escape his Polishness was not so much about escaping its perceived oppressiveness but rather coming to terms with it, to "spit out, so to speak, it's toxins".[79] Mrożek's work in this era, therefore attempted to embody both the dark and light sides to the national Polish character. According to Grabowski, Poland in the 1950's was a "land of the mediocre people who are neither particularly good nor particularly bad but who have a grotesquely high opinion of themselves".[80] Mrożek's works are full of "broken and brutal characters", creating a composite portrait of

---

[79] Artur Grabowski, "*What Kind Of A Hero Am I? Polishness As An Existential Situation: The Case Of Sławomir Mrożek"*, in New perspectives on Polish culture : personal encounters, public affairs, ed. Tamara Trojanowska (New York: PIASA Books, 2011), 113.

[80] Ibid.

"primitive" creatures of "brutal stupidity" and "simplistic moral reactions", trapped in an all-pervasive "ill-fitting" reality of Communist rules and principles.[81] Polishness is a type of nihilism, a victim of self-inflicted aggression, trapped between extremes of grandiosity and depression, idealism and skepticism. The Pole's adventures are always "grotesquely tragic".[82] In addition to Mrozek's work, these ideas pervade works by Cyprian Norwid and Stanisław Wyspianski.

"Pathetic seriousness and no-less-pathetic pure nonsense characterize a personality that, while inclined toward maximalist challenges, has no tools and opportunities to achieve them." [83]

While this self-diagnosis of Polishness is brutal and caricatured, it reveals a rare portrait of self-characterization undistorted by Cold War politics and Western-opposed concepts of Slavic and Communist behavior. It is important to distinguish, however, that Górecki's "Polish" works, unlike Mrożek's "Polish" works, are not critical or satirical in any sort of fashion. Rather, Mrożek manages to pinpoint fairly accurately the wellspring of Górecki's own personality and quite possibly the hermeneutic principles of the Polish avant-garde itself, especially sonorism. By pinpointing the key modes and methods of expression in Górecki's music, we are able to view not only the desires and expressions of the quintessential Polish personality, but the morphology by which they came into being. Referencing Grabowski, we read of the maximalist tendencies of the Polish

---

[81] Artur Grabowski, "*What Kind Of A Hero Am I? Polishness As An Existential Situation: The Case Of Sławomir Mrożek"*, in New perspectives on Polish culture : personal encounters, public affairs, ed. Tamara Trojanowska (New York: PIASA Books, 2011), 114.

[82] Ibid., 117.

[83] Ibid., 116.

personalities: this is certainly true when considering Górecki's search of pure, simple, and concentrated expression and the Gothic complexities of Penderecki's mature works, but with Górecki we unlock predilections for grotesquery and extreme simplicity. There is a certain winking irony in these predilections, as they frequently take listeners and performers off-guard- as mentioned by James Harley:

The music of Henryk Górecki, while often based on materials of the utmost simplicity, poses certain problems to the performer[...] Strangely, for all the straightforward appearance of the actual notes, Górecki's music is not easy to perform. A number of what may seem to be definitive recordings of his works are, in fact, flawed representations of the music." [84]

In his 1988 essay, "The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship and Beyond", Boris Groys talks in earnest about the "Little Man" in the world of Soviet and Polish avant-garde art, a caricature of an artistic individual disintegrated by a "loss of horizon", a man who is deprived of meaning by the complete liberation of his art from an external and visible reality. This artist is crushed as the pre-modern mono-myth of artistic heroism is bifurcated endlessly into a myriad of trivial, confusing and often contradictory perceptions of reality.[85] Groys argues that this reality began decades ago as Duchamp and others dragged "ready-made" objects from "lower" reality into galleries and museums. In the Soviet era, Groys argues, everyday life is not only a mundane reality but rather an expression of socialist ideology. In his own period and context, Górecki as an artist and personality emerges as the "little man" of the Polish musical avant-garde, as his own thoughts about music- particularly the

---

[84] James Harley, "Charting the Extremes: Performance Issues in the Music of Henryk Górecki", Tempo, New Series [211] (2000) 2.

[85] Boris Groys, "The Other Gaze: Russian Unofficial Art's View of the Soviet World", in Postmodernism and the postsocialist condition: politicized art under late socialism, ed. Aleš Erjavec (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 37.

Musiquette series- reveal an inner grappling with the struggles of the micro-element rather than the macro. And like Groys' avant-garde "little man", the tenants of the principles of avant-gardism have no choice but to self-destruct and totally erase itself, the "pure light of death".[86] The rough-edged simplicity of Górecki's mature style- whether impulsive or reflective- are indicative of the Eastern-bloc avant-garde's roots in the soil of a localized, common existence, expressed through "common" touchstones such as church music, with its exhortation of sacred texts, and its dualized partner, traditional folk music. While Górecki clearly had a difficult relationship with Poland's Soviet leadership- particularly during his rectorship at the Higher State School of Music in Katowice from 1975-78- understanding the tenants of Soviet avant-gardism reveal a much more complex relationship with the revolutionary character of the art itself and its place within the cultural sphere of the Eastern bloc.

The second principle of Górecki's music, **movement**, also experiences a new awakening in the late 70's. In a July 1962 interview, Leon Markiewicz notes several references to the musical principle, one on the score of Genesis: Elementi in Górecki's home, "In the beginning, there was Movement", and another in a nearby notebook: "The fundamental element linking [the works] into a whole is constantly evolving Energy existing through Movement: a symbol of Manifestation of Life". Markiewicz noted the aptness of these statements and how it seemed to accurately describe his own perceptions of Górecki's music at the time.[87] However, these statements demand elaboration. It is difficult to claim that Górecki's music from this 1960's period embody

---

[86] Boris Groys, "The Other Gaze: Russian Unofficial Art's View of the Soviet World", in Postmodernism and the postsocialist condition: politicized art under late socialism, ed. Aleš Erjavec (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 38.

[87] Leon Markiewicz, "Conversation with Henryk Górecki", Ruch Muzyczny 4 [1962]: 7-9.

movement in any sort of conventional form- pulse, ostinato, dance idioms. Rather, the term movement seems to suggest a type of growth occurring over musical time, from an embryonic stage to a predetermined conclusion. In Genesis: Elementi there are explosive contrasts between stasis, grinding pedal points executed on all three instruments, and flurries of agogic attacks. “Organic” growth, as one might imply as being related to thematic development, is not present but instead is supplemented by the expansion and contraction of pitch material and gestural ideas.

The piece opens with a strident unison D pitch in all three instruments, which gradually fans out chromatically: D, C# Eb, and then D, C#, Eb, C and E. This pitch class set [01234] is then transposed up a 5th to the pitches G, G#, A, Bb and B and then again downwards by a semitone to F#, G, G#, A, Bb and B. Later in the piece at rehearsal 17, there is a total saturation of chromatic material, which acts as a pivot for the piece- the rest of the work’s pitch material hinges on perfect 5th sonorities, exploiting the “open string” sounds of the instruments, in various transpositions:

| **Progression of pitch content** | **Rehearsal Number** |
|---|---|
| Viola: G<br>Cello: C<br>Violin: A+E | 20 |
| Viola: G+D<br>Cello: C+G | 20 |
| Violin and Viola: D+A<br><br>Cello: C+G | 21 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Interlude: unpitched material | 22-23 |
| Violin: G#+D#+A#<br>Viola: G#+D#<br>Cello: D#+A# | 23 |
| Violin: A+E, G+D<br>Viola: D+A, C+G<br>Cello: D+A, C+G | 24 |
| Violin: Bb+F<br>Viola: Eb+Bb<br>Cello: F#+C# | 25 |
| Violin: G+D<br>Viola: C+G<br>Cello: E+B | 25 |
| Violin: G#+D#<br>Viola: A+E<br>Cello: F+C | 25 |
| Violin: C#+G#<br>Viola: Eb+Bb<br>Cello: C+G | 25 |
| Violin: D+A<br>Viola: A+E<br>Cello: B+F# | 25 |
| Violin: A+E, D+A, G+D<br>Viola: G+D, D+A, C+G<br>Cello: C+G, G+D, D+A | 26 |
| Violin: G | 26 |
| Violin: G | 27 |

In general, the movement of pitch material switches from clusters of gradually expanded minor 2nds to an abundance of “open fifth” sonorities. Even within these

abstract and tightly controlled systems of pitch hierarchy, we still receive the impression that Górecki's music is commenting on the chaos and violence present in his own music, as early as 1963. The clusters of minor seconds giving way to the "natural" fifths of the string instruments, a relaxing of rhythm and volume: this is a composer pulling away and giving context to the extremities present in his own music.

As Górecki's music passed into the composition of the Muzyczka cycle, there is an important transferral of musical ideas from aggressive, noisy tone colours back towards a more traditional use of tone- this coincided with a focus on the human voice in solo and choir formats (out of the 11 pieces composed between 1971 and 1979 in Górecki's official opus list, 9 have integral parts for the human voice). As this change occurred, Górecki's use of rhythm and energy transferred from a explosive, "magmatic" state to large-scale development based on the slow expansion of pitch content and dynamics. Very slow and deliberate expansions of pitch content- usually from a central pitch and spreading out symmetrically- coupled with terraced dynamics, are alternated with sections of repetitive and additive motivic development. Once again, musical "energy", as we might traditionally consider it, is largely vacant but manifests itself in a "luminescent" state: a powerful but dormant form that occasionally and suddenly explodes into action. It is necessary to stress the importance of folk dance culture in Poland- it is so indicative of Polish culture that Glinka stereotyped the Poles in his opera with Polish dance leitmotifs in his 1836 opera, A Life for the Tsar.[88] It is also arguable that the forms and rhythms of traditional Polish music- albeit in a highly fragment and distilled format- make their way into Górecki's most avant-garde works. After all, many of Górecki's youthful works bear the mark of Stravinsky and Bartok with the foundation

[88] Stephen Walsh, *Musorgsky and His Circle* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 16.

of dance ostinati and melodies: the outer movements of the Piano Sonata (1956, rev. 1984, 1990), the Sonata for Two Violins (1957) and the Quartettino (1956). Consider the mazurka-like second beat accent that pervades the Cantata for solo organ (1968), or the agogic, rhythmic tribalism of Genesis III: Monodramma and the energetic sections of Muzyczka III and Refrain. In general, the connection is not found by pastiches and recollections of these dances (although this was utilized as well in Górecki's music, such as in the 1973 Three Dances and the second movement of 1963's Three Pieces in the Old Style), but rather by similar associations with what Górecki in 1962 considered to be the three main characteristics of his music: agogics, dynamics and color.[89] Listening to, for example, the performance of a Polish highland band, one is immediately struck by these three characteristics: the playful interaction of agogic and syncopated rhythmic accents (typically from the violinist or vocalist), the explosive dynamic energy of the ensemble, and the distinctive characteristic tonal colour of highland fiddle playing and folk singing, which relies heavily on subtle inflections of colour and timbres that fall outside classical music performance standards. It is here that the connection between the explosive extroversion of Górecki's music and the traditional music of southern Poland is made.

The second idea of Górecki's later music lay in the centrality of the human voice. With the emergence of the avant-garde in Western Europe, a new troubling relationship with the human voice also emerged. Opera, with its trappings in theatre, melodrama and bourgeois culture, remained relatively absent from the experimentations of the Darmstadt avant-garde. The criticisms of the 1950's European avant-grade are highly

[89] Markiewicz, *Conversation with Henryk Górecki, 7-9.*

varied and multi-disciplined, but much of its ire is generated by the "hermeticism" of the style, where ideas and concepts worked out in a piece do not transfer to shared experiences or even to other pieces of music.[90] It is because of these observations- and no doubt the source of trouble for many composers of the era, that their music was cold and unrelatable- that a number of prominent serial and early electronic pieces contain central parts for the human voice (Karlheinz Stockhausen's 1955-56 Gesang der Jünglinge, Milton Babbitt's 1964 Philomel, to name a few) as an attempt to root the musical experiments in a more "human" context.

Górecki's centralization of the human voice is no secret- from the Op. 44 Miserere for large choir, to Symphony No. 2 and 3, to the Op. 3 Three Songs, vocal music is present in Górecki's oeuvre in every compositional period and on every conceptual scale, from voice and piano works to works for choir and large orchestra. In reality, the focus on the voice in Górecki's later works remains indivisibly separated from the religiosity which pervades it. Vocal music requires secondarily a text to sing, and primarily, someone to sing it, a "subject" from which the content of the text emanates through. These concepts are ingrained deeply in Christian worship, where the Word must firstly be spoken or "sounded", and secondarily heard. In Górecki's 1971 piece for orchestra, choir and solo soprano Ad Matrem, this relationship is fully realized. The orchestra trades off with dissonant brass fanfares, militaristic percussion, shocking declamations from the choir ("Mater mea!"), contrasted with reflective passages in the strings, harp and piano. Near the final section of the piece, the music freezes in a moment of poignant revelation as a solo soprano sings "*Mater mea- lacrimosa*

[90] Allan F. Moore, "Serialism and Its Contradictions", International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music [26] 1 (1995): 91.

*dolorosa*". The dramatic intention, as usual in Górecki's music, seems obvious, but the importance of this moment is monumental. Like in the coda of Muzyczka IV, we hear a transcendance of the violence and ugliness of the previous heard musical "events", a clearly defined drama of musical poetics. This work is also important for its inherent "Polishness", although one has to look into the beginning of the 20th century to notice this. With works similar to Ad Matrem, such as the Symphony No. 2 and No. 3, Two Sacred Songs, Beatus Vir, Sanctus Adalbertus, Salve, Sidus Polonorum, and the Op. 83 Kyrie, Górecki establishes himself as the most faithful disciple of the ethos of Szymanowski's Stabat Mater: not so much in the musical style itself, but rather the seamless synthesis of contemporary musical techniques with a primeval Polish character.

The prioritization of the word above all other forms of communication and information- **logocentrism**- wraps together several expressive intentions in Górecki's music. With the speaking of the word, the musical idea is communicated as simply and representationally as possible- the human becomes the centre of the musical concept (in contrast to much of modernism's focus on scientific, proportional, and mathematic concepts). With Górecki, the word reflects an uttered truth, and the music composed around it represents a reality of that truth.

French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) even defined logocentrism as "the metaphysics of phonetic writing".[91] Roxana Preda writes further,

[91] Roxana Preda, *Ezra Pound's (Post)modern Poetics and Politics: Logocentrism, Language, and Truth* (Peter Lang Publishing, 2001), 25-26.

"The valorization of truth as "hearing oneself speak" is synonymous with logocentrism: the presence of the spoken word to the mind, the presence of the signified at the uttering of the signifier, are mirrors of the ultimate identity between the world and the primary signified, the Logos, the word of God." [92]

In conclusion, Górecki's creative journey is a microcosmos of the artistic struggles dominating the second half of the 20th century: the questioning and criticisms of artistic and philosophical modernism as filtered through a Polish mixing ground of Western, Social Realist and Soviet avant-gardism, the dismantlement of a singular musical narrative as represented by the several "fixations" of Górecki's stylistic periods, and a coming-to-terms with the issues and realities presented by nationalistic and globalistic identities.

As outlined previously, the composers of Górecki's generation were the first to move beyond the question of social realism, which permitted a development of radicalized music that both absorbed and criticized the avant-garde music being composed west of the Iron Curtain. Throughout the 1950's, 60's and 70's, Górecki's music retained this spirit of radicalism but managed to filter this into different channels of aesthetic fixations- serialism and pointillism, sonorism, symmetry combined with energy and stasis, and finally a rhetorical, poetic and logocentric synthesis which defines his later output. Lastly, Górecki's work defines an ongoing struggle with Polishness and Catholicism, the result of a long mediation of the historical violence inflicted on the Polish identity, as well as reflection on the aesthetic "necessities" of the artistic living and working today. The world of contemporary classical music in 2018 seems less of an ideological battleground than it was in cold war era Poland, but questions surrounding fluidity and co-existence of musical "style" remains. While the

---

[92] Roxana Preda, *Ezra Pound's (Post)modern Poetics and Politics: Logocentrism, Language, and Truth* (Peter Lang Publishing, 2001), 25-26.

partial goal of this paper was to dispel the false historicity and “mythology” of Górecki and his music, another goal was to highlight how artistic intention, personality and heritage can permeate through seemingly disparate manifestations of “style” and artistic philosophy. The bottom line is, a composer with an ardent personality such as Górecki has the ability cut through these restraints.

# Bibliography


Boleslawska-Lewandowska, Beata. *"The Symphony and Symphonic Thinking in Polish Music After 1956."* Ph.D. diss., Cardiff University, 2009.

Carlsson Redel, Petra. Mysticism as Revolt: Foucault, Deleuze and Theology Beyond Representation. Aurora, CO: Davies Group, Publishers, 2014.

Cizmic, Maria. *Performing Pain: Music and Trauma in Eastern Europe.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Dziębowska, Elżbieta, ed. Encyklopedia Muzyczna Polskiego Wydawnictwa Muzycznego Krakow, 1st ed. Krakow: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1979. S.v. "Henryk Górecki," by Krzysztof Droba.

Fox Weber, Nicholas. "The Sacred Modernist: Josef Albers as a Catholic Artist." in The Sacred Modernist: Josef Albers as a Catholic Artist, ed. Josef Albers, 14-29. Cork: Lewis Glucksman Gallery, 2012.

Gillmor, Alan. "The Apostasy of George Rochberg." Intersections [29] 1 (2009): 32-48.

Górecki, Henryk Mikołaj. Genesis, III: Monodram. Warsaw, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1966.

Górecki, Henryk Mikołaj. Muzyczka 3, na altówki. Warsaw, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, c1969.

Górecki, Henryk Mikołaj. Pierwsza symfonia, "1959". Warsaw, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1961.

Grabowski, Artur. "*What Kind Of A Hero Am I? Polishness As An Existential Situation: The Case Of Sławomir Mrożek*, in New perspectives on Polish culture : personal encounters, public affairs, ed. Tamara Trojanowska. New York: PIASA Books, 2011.

Grella-Możejko, Piotr. "Fifty Years of Freedom: Polish Music After 1945." Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue canadienne des slavistesXXXIX (Spring 1997): 181-208.

Groys, Boris. "The Other Gaze: Russian Unofficial Art's View of the Soviet World." In Postmodernism and the postsocialist condition: politicized art under late socialism, ed. Aleš Erjavec. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

## Bibliography cont'd

Harley, James. "Charting the Extremes: Performance Issues in the Music of Henryk Górecki." Tempo, New Series, no. 211 (January 2000): 2-7.

Jakelski, Lisa. "Górecki's Scontri and Avant-Garde Music in Cold War Poland." The Journal of Musicology, no. 2 (2009): 205-39.

Jakelski Lisa. "The Changing Seasons of the Warsaw Autumn: Contemporary Music in Poland, 1960-1990." Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2009.

Kaji-O'Grady, "Serialism in Art and Architecture: Context and Theory." Ph.D. diss., Wabash University, 2011.

Koltakova, Natalia. "Catastrophism as a manifestation of the crisis of consciousness in Russian and Polish culture." In Apology of Culture: religion and culture in Russian thought, eds. Artur Mrówczyński-Van Allen, Teresa Obolevitch, and Paweł Rojek. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015.

Lochhead, Judy. "Naming: Music and the Postmodern." New Formations [66] (2009): 158-172

Malecka, Teresa. "Henryk Mikołaj Górecki. Styl Późny." Res Facta Nova [11] (2000): 135-147.

Mantzourani, Eva, ed. *Polish music since 1945*. Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 2013.

Marek, Tadeusz and David Drew. "Conversation with Henryk Górecki." Ruch Muzyczny [4] (1962): 7-9.

Marek, Tadeusz and David Drew, "Górecki in Interview (1968) - and 20 Years after." Tempo, New Series [168] (1989): 28-29.

Markiewicz, Leon. "Conversation with Henryk Górecki." Ruch Muzyczny [4] (1962): 7-9.

Maslowiec, Anna. ""The Utmost Economy of Musical Material:" Structural Elements in the Works of Górecki from Refrain (1965) to Ad Matrem (1971)," Polish Music Journal [6] 2 (2003)

## Bibliography cont'd

Moore, Allan F. "Serialism and Its Contradictions." International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music [26] 1 (1995): 77-95.

May, Christopher J. "Crisis averted? Arvo Pärt and Serialism." (2009), lecture.

Paja-Stach, Jadwiga. *Polish Music from Paderewski to Penderecki*. Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 2010.

Patkowski, Józef, *Horyzonty Muzyki*, radio broadcast. October 14, 1962.

Preda, Roxana. *Ezra Pound's Postmodern Poetics and Politics: Logocentrism, Language and Truth*. Peter Lang Publishing, 2001.

Rappaport-Gelfand, Lidia. *Musical Life in Poland.* Abingdon, Routledge, 1991.

Robin, William. "How a Somber Symphony Sold More Than a Million Records," New York Times, June 9, 2017, available from Internet: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/09/arts/music/how-a-somber-symphony-sold-more-than-a-million-records.html.

Schuon, Frithjof. "The Question of Protestantism." In Christianity/Islam: Perspectives on Esoteric Ecumenism, ed. James S. Cutsinger, 23-54. Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2008.

Thomas, Adrian. *Górecki.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

Thomas, Adrian. *Polish music since Szymanowski*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Tsenova, Valeria, ed. *Ex oriente: Ten Composers from the former USSR*. Berlin, Kuhn, 2002.

Walsh, Stephen. *Musorgsky and His Circle*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.

Wróblewska, Magdalena. "Blok Group," Culture.pl, May 9, 2011, , accessed April 16, 2018, http://culture.pl/en/artist/blok-group.