

Music and Modernism, c. 1849-1950

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Edited by

Charlotte de Mille

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P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

CHARLOTTE DE MILLE

Do you think music is so different to pictures? ...

What *is* the good of the arts if they're all interchangeable? What *is* the good of the ear if it tells you the same as the eye? Helen's one aim is to translate tunes into the language of painting, and pictures into the language of music. It's very ingenious, and she says several pretty things in the process, but what's to be gained, I'd like to know? Oh its rubbish, radically false. If Monet's really Debussy, and Debussy's really Monet, neither gentleman is worth his salt.¹

When Edward Morgan Forster gave this vehement statement to Margaret Schlegel, the vivacious elder sister in his fourth published novel, *Howard's End* (1910), the author voiced a problem which was remarkably conscious of current debate. Reflecting further upon music transposed into literature verses music as music, Forster's protagonist holds Richard Wagner responsible for the "muddling of the arts."² That Forster considered the subject sufficiently widespread to be included in a work of fiction is telling. Moreover, it was *Howard's End* which confirmed its author as a serious force in modernist literature. But to follow the vein of Forster's novel, what is to be gained from embarking on a scholarly study of exchange between the arts? It is this question which has exercised the writers in this volume. Whether in marvelling at the works produced by artists and composers who were convinced by the synaesthetic ideal, or in uncovering the shrewd manipulation of the forms and expectations of the other medium in order to appropriate them to differing creative conditions, each chapter asserts richness and diversity belied by Margaret's contention that any such endeavour may be "radically false."

Of course, this is far from the first volume attentive to intermedia and nor is artistic exchange restricted to a particular cultural moment, despite the exclusively nineteenth-century references in Forster's novel. Following the early work of Edward Lockspeiser, Peter Vergo has been quietly insistent in his advocacy for this field of study in a series of publications spanning thirty years. It is therefore with great pleasure that I

am able to hand over to him for a lengthier introduction to cross-disciplinary composition at the turn of the last century. Daniel Albright, Lydia Goehr, Gabriel Josopovici, Richard Leppert and Simon Shaw-Miller provide strong support to a subject which continues to attract serious scholarship. In companion, Andrew Bowie's extensive work between music and philosophy is invaluable for its lucid exposition of modernist semiotics; Carl Dahlhaus' discussion of "absolute music" key to nineteenth-century studies of the arts; and Brad Bucknell's *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics* equally indicates the scope of a parallel field of research from a literary perspective. The authors of this volume share backgrounds in aesthetics, art and architectural history, film and media studies, and musicology. Taken as a series of case studies spanning a period from the 1850s to the 1960s, the book traces the emergence, flowering, and consolidation of correspondence between music and fine art. Periodisation is consistently problematic, and exponentially difficult the moment one works across disciplines. For the purposes of this volume, "Modernism" has been limited to commence with Wagner's "Art and Revolution" (1849), and to close with the advent of electronic music. From disparate examples common themes - critical discourse, formalism, subjectivity, affect, and sensation - unite to form a cohesive argument not only for the significance of the interchange of the arts in this period, but, I would suggest, to cast new light on Modernism itself.

Angus Fletcher in his probing discussion of allegory defines the term as that which "says one thing and means another".³ It is useful to bear this definition in mind when considering the claims or ideals of both musicians and painters of the modern period. Alexander Scriabin scored a "luce" part for *Prometheus* (1910), for which, according to visitors to his studio, he made a modified organ to play coloured light; comparatively, František Kupka's *Amorpha, Fugue in Two Colours* (1912), orchestrates red and blue - colours a fifth apart on most colour wheels - to render a visual equivalent to the relation of tonic and dominant, a basic premise of fugal structure. Sound is coloured, these works say, just as colour is audible. Painters recognised the potential in the expressive but non-narrative quality of instrumental music. Composers rediscovered chromaticism, making use of microtones which may be most easily understood through their correspondence to the multitude of densities and shades of colour. By taking on the qualities of another medium both arts defied expectation: and through these novel forms and intentions works proclaimed their avant-garde pretensions. It can be of little surprise then, that critics of modernist painting and music turned to a shared language to account for the works they sought to describe. Colour, harmony, line, rhythm, and tone were

applied interchangeably, accruing additional meaning as they were applied outside their usual context. Just as surely as the critical vocabulary expanded, so too was music increasingly valued for what it said outside language: what Dahlhaus, following Richard Wagner on Ludwig van Beethoven, has discussed as being “inaccessible”.⁴

Wagner found in Beethoven’s music (and the C sharp minor quartet in particular), an “ideal subject” of “innermost processes”, a transcription of Beethoven himself that eluded any other means of access to it. Wagner was not alone in thinking of music in this way. In his seminal study on consciousness *Matter and Memory* (1896), philosopher Henri Bergson contended that if any “image-centre” in the brain existed, then it should be “like a keyboard, played upon by memories.” Once struck by external stimuli, this sense organ “executes at once its harmony of a thousand notes, thus calling forth in a definite order, and at a single moment, a great multitude of elementary sensations corresponding to all the points of the sensory centre that are concerned.” What we would today call neurones, Bergson terms “strings”, ready to “vibrate”.⁵ Music is the appropriate metaphor for mental process so integral to our being we are barely able to trace it. Compare now Wassily Kandinsky’s memorable definition of the working of his concept of “Inner Need”, the guiding quality for every profound response to experience: “Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul.”⁶ Whether or not Kandinsky was cognisant of Bergson’s earlier description is a consideration for another place; what is significant in this correspondence of ideas is the role of musical metaphor to express the affect of experiences, memories, and works of art. These three descriptions share a conviction that our response is bodily. Seized by the moment, we are physically transported, almost in spite of ourselves. Psychologically this implies a change in the mode of comprehension, from one understood rationally and in space, to one that takes full account of the subjectivity and temporality of consciousness. With regard to theories of perception, it implies a shift from the emphasis on the finished product to interest in the process of making inherently bound in compositional form.

To a greater or lesser degree, each author has problematised the structure, value and intention of musical and visual form. Opening the section which most thoroughly considers the legacy of Wagner’s *gesamtkunstwerk*, Diane V. Silverthorne considers formal relations between music and book design at the Vienna Secession. She offers not only a prescient reading of the stylistic synonymy of painters, illustrators, designers and composers, but brings to light their actual joining in the

publication of art song at the *fin de siècle*. Silverthorne argues that the Secessionist journal *Ver Sacrum* was inherently musical, transposing musical characteristics to the medium of design. Writing on Arnold Böcklin, Spyros Petritakis offers a foil to Secessionist concerns. The chapter excavates the origins of the discussion of music and painting in the art criticism of a newly unified Germany. For Petritakis, such association is intimately bound with the forging of a Germanic cultural identity, understood firstly according to the history of great Germanic composers, and secondly through a framework of what he terms “mythological realism”. Placing Böcklin beside the compositional interests of Richard Strauss, Petritakis considers that both artist and composer offer “an ironic comment to the Wagnerian world view”. Part One closes with a return to broadly Wagnerian interests as they were transposed into late nineteenth-century scientific investigations into synaesthesia. Isabel Wünsche demonstrates the significance of Hermann von Helmholtz and William Wundt’s prioritisation of sensory perception for Russian artists Wassily Kandinsky, Nikolai Kulbin and Mikhail Matyushin in their advocacy of art as a means to transcendental knowledge. For these artist-theorists, the unification of sensory perception in a *gesamtkunstwerk* not only had extraordinary affective power, but the power to further the evolutionary progress of those who experienced it.

The second section considers the correspondence of visual art and music in late nineteenth-century France through the lens of contemporary criticism. In the first of two case studies, James H. Rubin suggests that Gustave Courbet hoped to encompass a more-than-visual experience by evoking, if not music, sound. By returning to the writing of François-Joseph Fétis and Champfleury (Jules François Felix Fleury-Husson), Rubin advocates that Courbet and Wagner shared the desire to animate a totalising and utopian world, whereby Courbet’s landscapes find proximity with the “‘forest voices’ of Wagner”. Champfleury is central to the second case study, Corrinne Chong’s multi-faceted essay on the mid nineteenth-century concept of the vague. Reviewing the correspondence between auditory sensation, visual perception and formal expression, Chong brings a wealth of contemporary criticism to light in order to re-assess the critical reception of artist Henri Fantin-Latour. She argues that Fantin-Latour developed a unique style that belonged exclusively to the domain of music in a score of lush and atmospheric lithographs, pastels and paintings that are unified by a pervasive, vaporous mist. Influenced by Hector Berlioz, Fantin-Latour sought to simulate what he perceived as music’s vagueness: a defect which Chong argues only became a virtue when purely instrumental music was deemed superior by the formalist proponents of absolute music.

We remain in the late nineteenth-century for Ayla Lepine's study of the aspiration to transformative experience embedded in both architecture and music. Focusing on two ecclesiastical commissions in Cambridge undertaken by Gothic Revival architect G. F. Bodley, Lepine's subjects combine text, image and sound in site-specific work which invites multi-sensory perception. Utilising Richard Leppert's play on "site" and "sight" in his description of the human body, Lepine is attentive to the "liminal" quality of sacred spaces as both physical and visionary. If the arts allow us to glimpse that which is beyond cognition, then for Bodley and his Ecclesiologist colleagues, it is through artistic endeavour that the reality of God is best expressed. It is of course the transcendental that determined Wassily Kandinsky's canonical *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. In the second chapter of this section, Charlotte de Mille reviews the redefinition of beauty in this book and others to emphasise a turn to interiorisation at the heart of Modernism. Continuing the discussion of the relation between text, image and sound, the chapter offers a comparative analysis of work by an unlikely combination of German Expressionists and the central protagonists of the Bloomsbury group, namely Wassily Kandinsky, Arnold Schönberg, Roger Fry, Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell. From this specific context de Mille considers how structural innovations rendered spatial, multi-perspectival music, and temporal symphonic painting. The chapter argues that operating according to possibility rather than resolution, Modernism involved a radical change in perception that was fundamental to the re-writing, re-painting, and re-composing of art for contemporary times.

In Section Four, "Music and Modern Life", Malcolm Cook and Jody Patterson discuss the use of music in instances of art forms intended for a mass audience, cinema and mural, yet in neither case is this art for mere entertainment. Cook's detailed exposition of avant-garde films by Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling and Walther Ruttmann demonstrates just how engaged each work was with questions of musical form. Distinguishing medium specific or material analogies between the arts from the endeavour for synthetic unity, Cook questions the accepted reading of these film makers. Whereas Richter's *Rhythmus 21* (1921) is often regarded a less sophisticated experiment than Ruttmann's *Lichtspiel Opus I* (1921), the former exhibits attention to the characteristics of a new medium in line with Greenbergian Modernism, while the latter arguably remains closer to the out-moded nineteenth-century search for a synaesthetic *gesamtkunstwerk*. For Patterson, the "visual equivalence" of Stuart Davis' painting to American hot jazz is far from innocent, but tightly bound to the importance of jazz as an indigenous music appealing to and co-opted by

the political left during the Great Depression and after as a voice for democratic change.

The final section considers the waning of Modernism with the advent of the renowned ad-hoc performances of Fluxus artists and the early electronic experiments of Iannis Xenakis. For Melissa Warak, the explicitly multi-media events of La Monte Young and his contemporaries both operated from within the legacy of modernist debates surrounding synaesthesia and made significant innovations in the realm of multi-sensory performance. Warak offers a reading of these visual-musical activities as a modern type of Zen meditation, where audience and performers alike entered into universal connectivity with the cosmos as well as one another. Young's Theatre of Eternal Music combined light, abstract images, sound, and physical vibration, harnessing technological advances and Eastern metaphysics simultaneously. It is the scope of technological experimentation which underpins the explorations of composer-architect Xenakis. Olga Touloumi charts the immediate context of Xenakis' collaboration with Le Corbusier on the Philips Pavilion as formative for the composer's invention of a new compositional tool: the *Unité Polyagogique Informatique du CEMAMu* (UPIC). She argues that not only did the drawing board of UPIC promise to bring design into musical composition, but also to fulfil a certain synaesthetic promise; to write sounds and to read traces.

Although Xenakis' collaboration with Le Corbusier places him biographically within an enviable legacy of Modernist artists, there can be no doubt that the artists of Fluxus regarded Modernism historically: self-consciously distant from any claim to artistic genius. Yet just as this book could have argued that Modernism should take account of the rise of "absolute" music from the beginning of the nineteenth century, so too are there instances of "late" Modernism, such as Benjamin Britten's work from the 1970s. Conceptually, as the series editor to a recent compendium on Arnold Schönberg commented, "Modernism created its own precursors; it made the past new, as well as the present."⁷ In spite of radically altered circumstance we continue to operate in its legacy, whether in working against its limitations or responding to its enthusiasms, that "present" is reconstructed in each new interjection into Modernist debate.

Notes

¹ E.M. Forster, *Howard's End*, (London: Penguin, 2000), 33.

² *ibid.*, 33.

³ Angus Fletcher, *Allegory, the theory of a symbolic mode*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 2.

⁴ Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Roger Lustig, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 133.

⁵ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (1896), trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer, (New York: Dover, 2004), 165.

⁶ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911), trans. M.T.H. Sadler, (New York: Dover, 1977), 25.

⁷ Daniel Albright in C. M. Cross and R.A. Berman, *Political and Religious Ideas in the Works of Arnold Schoenberg*, (New York: Garland, 2000), xi.

HOW TO PAINT A FUGUE

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I. Praeludium

In 1912, the Czech painter František Kupka, then living in Paris, showed two epoch-making canvases at the Salon d'Automne. They had very similar titles: *Amorpha: Warm Chromatics* and *Amorpha: Fugue in Two Colours* (Fig. I.1). These were pictures to which the artist himself attached particular importance. He even described them as his “painter’s *credo*” – not surprising, perhaps, since these two works were undoubtedly among the most advanced examples of abstract art created anywhere in Europe at this time. The following year, 1913, Kupka gave an interview to the Paris correspondent of the *New York Times*, a writer by the name of Warshawsky. In the course of that interview the artist declared: “I believe I can find something between sight and hearing and I can produce a fugue in colors, as Bach has done in music.”¹

The boldness of this statement is breathtaking, with its allusion to “a fugue in colours”. Kupka simply takes for granted that it is possible to translate the vocabulary of one art form into the language of another, as if it were the most self-evident thing in the world – which, quite clearly, it isn’t. And yet, if we look across a wide range of writings about both the theory and practice of art, we will find similar assumptions occurring almost everywhere, in every period and in quite different contexts. For example, in his often-quoted letter to Matteo de’ Pasti concerning the completion of the church of S. Francesco in Rimini, Leon Battista Alberti wrote about the problem of how to reconcile the existing building with his new design for the façade. The façade, he insists, cannot be integrated with the dimensions of the nave, because “the widths and heights of the chapels disturb me”. But he is adamant that the “measures and proportions” of the pilasters must be respected, since “we want to help that which has been made and not spoil that which has to be made ... Otherwise, anything that you change will bring all this music into discord.”²

When Alberti writes about being disturbed by the widths and heights of the chapels, he evidently means that he finds their proportions

aesthetically displeasing. Likewise, the “music” of his newly designed façade, which he was so anxious to preserve at all costs, depended on observing the correct proportions: in this case, those of the pilasters. This idea of music as proportion – and hence as synonymous with order – still prevailed right up until the Baroque period and beyond. Even in the Romantic era, the notion of music’s essential orderliness did not entirely disappear but continued to play an important role in thinking about the relationship between it and the visual arts.

But by the latter part of the nineteenth century, other ideas about music began to assume ever-increasing importance. Of these ideas, the most influential concerned the essentially abstract nature of music and its innately expressive character – that is, its ability to touch our emotions directly by means not immediately susceptible of rational explanation. Of course, one can easily cite numerous examples of music that is not abstract: the kind of vocal music whose task is to underline or to convey more effectively the meaning of some poem, text or libretto. Opera, oratorio and song all fall into this category. But it was immediately obvious that music without words – non-vocal music – was not meaningless simply because it lacked any kind of text or narrative. On the contrary, as the nineteenth century drew towards its close, purely orchestral or instrumental music with its self-referential tones, its “abstract” patterns of melodic lines and well-defined formal structures, was increasingly cited as the paradigm of an art that was immediately expressive, coherent and meaningful without any dependence on narrative or representation.³

It is easy to see why the idea of an inherently expressive and at the same time essentially abstract art was of considerable interest to visual artists, especially those who were increasingly turning away from the depiction of subject-matter or any kind of representation. And not just abstract artists or those who, during the early years of the twentieth century, began toying with the idea of an “entirely new art” that, as the architect and designer August Endell wrote, would “mean nothing and represent nothing and remind us of nothing”, but that would “move our souls as deeply and as powerfully as only the tones of music have hitherto been capable of doing”.⁴ Even painters like the Nabi Maurice Denis, who were certainly not advocating an entirely non-representational style of painting, drew attention to the purely abstract resources of pictorial art, while querying the more traditional tasks of painting, regarded primarily as a means of telling stories or conveying messages of some kind. In his famous manifesto entitled “Definition of Neo-Traditionism”, published in 1890, Denis reminded his readers of precisely this point when he wrote

It is important to remember that a painting, before being a war horse, a nude woman or any other kind of representation, is essentially a flat canvas covered with colours arranged in a certain order.⁵

II. Exposition: The “Art” of Fugue

The idea of music as a fundamentally abstract art evidently captured Kupka’s imagination – scarcely surprising, given that he himself started experimenting with the possibility of abstract painting during the years from around 1910 onwards. But that was not his only reason for being interested in this topic. What intrigued him even more, or so I would argue, were the formal structures characteristic of music: structures for which visual art could propose no convincing equivalent.

What music could boast, but what painting seemingly lacked, was the possibility of exploiting in all sorts of ingenious and inventive ways a number of ready-made forms and procedures which, from the eighteenth century onwards, assumed ever-increasing importance for composers of the Classical and Romantic eras. While some of these forms – for example, variation form, as used by Beethoven in the slow movement of his *Seventh Symphony* or by Brahms in his *Haydn Variations*– were relatively fluid, others were more strictly determined in ways that artists searching for new structuring principles in painting began to regard with barely disguised envy. Of these ready-made forms, by far the most significant, sophisticated and intriguing were the sonata and the fugue – and here, inevitably, one thinks of the quotation from Kupka’s 1912 interview, cited above, in which he declared his ambition to paint “a fugue in colours, as Bach had done in music”.

Musicians and musicologists will object – as well they might – that, strictly speaking, a fugue in music is not a *form* but a *procedure*: that is, a way of organising one’s musical material according to well-defined principles, but which still left composers a considerable degree of freedom as regards what kind of material and how it should be handled. These principles were, none the less, not just abstract theoretical propositions about how music in general ought to be composed; they were clearly reflected in specific pieces of music which, despite the many differences of style and approach that might serve to distinguish one from another, had in common a number of easily recognised characteristics. These, for the most part, had to do with the juxtapositions (and often repetitions or adaptations) of certain kinds of melody – which is why visual artists tended to think of fugue as a form rather than a procedure, since those

juxtapositions and repetitions tended to call to mind the shapes and forms on which pictorial composition depended.

The most important principle that governs the method of fugue composition is that of canonic imitation: that is, one part or “voice” imitating another. The first voice enters with a well-defined and hence easily recognized melody; once that melody is complete, a second voice enters, imitating the tune that we have just heard. (In order for fugue to exist at all, it is necessary to have at least two parts or voices, but there may be more: three, four, even five voices, each imitating its predecessor in turn until all the voices have entered with either an exact repetition or some variant of the original melody.) When the first voice has completed its exposition of the melody, however, it does not fall silent; on the contrary, it continues to expound further musical material that, in the majority of cases, is derived from or closely related to the original melody (the “fugue subject”; in some cases, there may be two or even three distinct “fugue subjects”, but this additional complexity need not vex us here). Once all the voices have been heard, there follows a further development of the same material, which typically will take us through a succession of increasingly distant keys until finally all the threads of melody are drawn together again in a final reprise that in some ways resembles the recapitulation of the opening section of a sonata-form movement.

Most people tend to associate the term “fugue” with the name of Johann Sebastian Bach, just as Kupka did. Again, this is scarcely surprising, since Bach, although he did not actually invent the form of the fugue, is generally acknowledged to have been its greatest master. Even in his own lifetime, he was referred to admiringly as “that learned musician” largely because of his mastery of the complex rules of fugal composition and of polyphony generally. Perhaps the most striking examples of Bach’s virtuosity in manipulating – even, to some extent, reinventing – the rules that governed how a fugue should be composed is his last major, unfinished keyboard composition entitled *Die Kunst der Fuge*, *The Art of Fugue* which was left unfinished when the composer died in 1750. Remarkably, every one of its constituent movements – nineteen in all – is ultimately based on a single musical theme, the simplest and least adorned version of which is heard at the beginning of the first fugue. But if that suggests a degree of sameness about the work overall, nothing could be further from the truth because of Bach’s remarkable facility in varying not just the shape of the melody but also the structure of the fugue itself with each new movement. Sometimes he will juxtapose the original melody with an upside-down version of the same tune, as in the case of the fifth

movement, *Contrapunctus V*, where a rhythmically altered variant of the theme is followed immediately by its inversion. Even more strikingly, in *Contrapunctus IX*, four successive statements of an intricate new fugue subject, itself ultimately derived from the original theme, are followed by four further statements of the theme itself, here extended by means of very long note values and treated as a secondary fugue subject in its own right. These re-statements of the unadorned original theme sound against (or, rather, in conjunction with) the continuing development of the more intricate initial fugue subject in the other three voices: a “double fugue”. Long before the end of this magisterial but uncompleted work, the listener is convinced that there can be no end or limit (other than the limits imposed by a composer’s lack of inventiveness or imagination) to the formal possibilities offered by the method of fugue composition, widely regarded as the strictest and most demanding – but, in reality, the freest – of all musical procedures.

III. Development: The “Bach Revival”

Given the esteem he enjoyed in his own lifetime, which included the favour and patronage of Frederick, King of Prussia, it seems astonishing that Bach’s reputation was partly lost to sight for half a century or more after his death. The first milestone in the modern Bach revival was Mendelssohn’s epoch-making performance of the *St Matthew Passion* in Berlin in 1829, which opened the ears of German audiences to the beauty and expressive power of Bach’s choral music. But there was also the equally remarkable phenomenon of the early twentieth-century Bach revival, one of the centres of which was Paris. In an article recalling the heyday of Symbolism and the origins of the Nabi group, Maurice Denis remembered how, in the French capital, “Bach was performed to capacity audiences, while Romantic music was held up to ridicule”.⁶ This explosion of interest among an enlightened public may have been partly due to the passionate advocacy of the eminent Belgian composer César Franck, a stalwart champion of Bach, while Franck’s pupil Vincent d’Indy became the director of a school in Paris, the “Schola Cantorum”, founded in 1896, which was dedicated to the study and performance of early music.

During the first years of the new century, pupils and former members of the “Schola” founded both a Bach Society and a Handel Society in Paris; the organist of Gustave Bret’s *Société Bach*, established in 1904, was the great Albert Schweitzer, whose famous monograph on Bach first appeared in French the following year.⁷ Another major figure in the Parisian Bach revival was the Polish-born pianist Wanda Landowska. At

the Bach Society's inaugural concert in 1905, Landowska played the composer's *Concerto in G minor* on her specially borrowed Pleyel harpsichord, one of the first authentic performances in modern times. In the years that followed, her legendary interpretations of Bach's keyboard works helped greatly to increase the popularity of his secular and instrumental music generally.

Visual artists then living in Paris were, of course, interested in music to varying degrees (Picasso, for example, stoutly maintained throughout his life that he knew "nothing whatever" about it), but clearly many painters responded enthusiastically to the vibrant musical life of the capital and to the concerts and recitals taking place all around them.⁸ One of them was Georges Braque, who paid tribute to Bach not only in his major Cubist painting entitled *Hommage à J. S. Bach* (1912) but in at least half a dozen further paintings, drawings and *papiers collés* created between 1912 and 1914, all of which make explicit reference to the German composer. At least some of these works suggest that the painter was intrigued by the rhyming analogy between Bach's name and his own: Bach and Braque. Often the letters B – A – C – H are woven into the pictorial structure, sometimes accompanied by fragments of notation and other references to music. In certain instances these written characters, although actually drawn or painted, have the appearance of being stencilled, a feature typical of both Picasso's and Braque's *œuvre* of around 1912. On other occasions, the name Bach forms part of a longer inscription, as in Braque's oil painting known as *Violon et clarinette*. Here, the fragmentary "... mme de Soire ... Bach" calls to mind an advertising poster or a programme printed to accompany a recital of Bach's music, lending further support to the hypothesis that the frequent musical events associated with the Parisian Bach revival may have played a significant part in drawing Braque's attention to the great master of fugue.

Other artists sometimes included equally specific – and, on occasion, specifically verbal – allusions to Bach as integral components of their pictorial works. One especially striking example is a work by the American painter Marsden Hartley, entitled *Musical Theme No. 2* (1912; Fig. I.2). Many of Hartley's paintings are known to have been inspired by music or incorporate musical allusions of one kind or another. In this case, however, the words "*Bach Préludes et Fugues*" are actually inscribed on the canvas, as if the artist feared that the musical reference might otherwise be lost on the uninitiated viewer. Equally telling is the fact that this work was created in Paris since Hartley's works done prior to his arrival there make no allusion to musical subject-matter of this kind. Nor is it a matter simply of style, even though the restricted range of colours

and the predominance of geometric elements, consisting mainly of large, sombrely painted planes of brown and ochre, betray the unmistakable influence of Parisian Cubism, especially the work of Picasso and Braque. Hartley could have seen recent works by both artists during his visits to the legendary apartment on the rue de Fleurus occupied by the poetess Gertrude Stein and her brother Leo – or, in somewhat greater numbers, at Kahnweiler’s gallery in Paris. But the verbal allusion to Bach speaks equally clearly of the Parisian milieu in which the work was created, the composer’s keyboard works, in particular, being a staple ingredient of the rich diet regularly offered to consumers of the varied musical delights available in the French capital.⁹

Other than this inscription, however, there is nothing in the picture itself to link it with music. It is certainly not a portrait of Bach nor are there any identifiable depictions of musical instruments or fragments of notation. If anything is meant to suggest music, it is rather the painting’s rigid disposition of abstract rectilinear forms, which Hartley perhaps saw as the visual counterpart of the strict compositional principles that governed the structure of Bach’s fugues.

IV. Recapitulation: “A Fugue in Colours”

Hartley’s painting may have been conceived as an abstract and generalised act of homage to Bach. Or perhaps it was meant as a tribute to the power of music more generally. However, we must look elsewhere in order to find artists who attempted quite consciously and literally to translate the forms and procedures of music into their own – that is, visual – language. One place to look is among works produced at the Bauhaus in Weimar (subsequently in Dessau) in Germany during the first decade of that institution’s existence (1919-1928). The Bauhaus had an extraordinary knack of attracting musically minded artists as teachers and professors, Lyonel Feininger, Johannes Itten, Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky among them. Bach, in particular, was constantly on their minds. Feininger kept a harmonium in his studio, on which (or so he claimed) he could play all of Bach’s 48 Preludes and Fugues from the *Well-Tempered Clavier* by heart, sometimes practising for between six and eight hours a day.¹⁰ This was evidently no new preoccupation: one of his early humorous drawings, dating from around 1890, shows the perspiring artist seated at the keyboard. Its caption reads: “Leo studies Bach fugues”.¹¹ Another drawing is entitled simply “The Ill-Tempered Clavier”. During the 1920s, Feininger also composed his own keyboard fugues in emulation of Bach, several of which were performed by the artist’s son Laurence on the organ

of the parish church in the little village of Ost-Deep in Pomerania, a favourite summer holiday destination. In December 1924 the pianist Willi Apel included Feininger's *Fugue IX in E minor* as part of a recital given in the Meistersaal of the Weimar Bauhaus.¹² The following year, the artist allowed his *Fugue XI* to appear in Carl Einstein and Paul Westheim's landmark publication *Europa-Almanach* in a facsimile reproduction.¹³ But long before that, he had clearly been immersing himself in the study of Bach and of fugue. For Christmas 1919, his wife presented him with a musical score, inscribed "Leo Dear from Julia, 24.12.19". It was a copy of Max Ritter's critical edition of Bach's *The Art of Fugue*.¹⁴

Johannes Itten was also an accomplished musician and a fine pianist. Paul Klee's father, who had been the young Itten's music teacher, maintained that the boy could just as soon have turned to music as to painting for a career. By his own account, Itten could easily sight-read at the piano a wide range of music including difficult pieces by avant-garde composers, in addition to the classics: Bach's *Toccatina in D minor*, the "Song of the Wood Dove" from Schönberg's *Gurrelieder* and works by the contemporary Viennese composer (and friend of Itten's) Josef Matthias Hauer. In a letter to his pupil Anna Höllering, he wrote that he had been spending whole days in his studio "playing Bach and Hauer on the magnificent grand piano ... Yesterday, I even started composing."¹⁵

The level of musical talent to be found among the staff of the Bauhaus is truly astonishing, given that the institution, although it had a department of theatre studies, had no music department as such. Klee was a violinist of professional standard, who had played with the Berne municipal orchestra before the First World War; like Itten, he too was obsessed by Bach, whom he sometimes compared favourably with the famous painters of his own day. "I play solo sonatas by Bach", he had written in a brief diary entry dated 10 November 1897. "What is Böcklin, compared to them? It makes me smile."

However, Klee went beyond either Itten or Feininger in seeking a precise pictorial equivalent for musical forms including the strict procedures of fugue. His painting *Fugue in Red* of 1921 exhibits several easily identified "motifs" which it is tempting to compare to the subjects and counter-subjects of a fugue composition. These motifs are not only repeated but also adapted and transformed in various ways which include extension and diminution, inversion and retrogression, just as in music, while Klee's skilful use of transparent washes of colour and subtle gradations of tone enabled him to exploit the overlapping repetition of visual forms in a way that immediately recalls the successive entries of the overlapping "voices" of a fugue in two, three or four parts. And in the

fourth of the series of lectures he gave at the Weimar Bauhaus in the winter of 1921-2, he also devised a “graphic transcription” of the fugal slow movement (marked *adagio*) from Bach’s *Sonata no. 6 in G major* for violin and cembalo, *BWV 1019*, as a way of impressing upon students his notion of what he called “visual rhythm”.¹⁶

But perhaps the most remarkable instance of an artist trying literally to translate the forms of music into the language of visual art can be found in the work of the lesser-known Hungarian-Romanian artist Henrik Neugeboren. Like Itten, Neugeboren was both a painter and a gifted pianist, who had studied piano and composition in Berlin with the famous Italian composer (and editor of Bach’s keyboard works) Ferruccio Busoni. Neugeboren visited the Bauhaus briefly in the course of 1928, attracted no doubt by the lively musical life of that institution. He may also have been drawn there by the presence of artists such as Kandinsky and Klee, both of whom he greatly admired and who, like Neugeboren himself, were preoccupied with the relationship between painting and music.

The following year, the school’s house magazine *bauhaus* published an article by Neugeboren entitled “A Bach Fugue Depicted”. What it described was a system of the artist’s own devising, whose aim was to depict, note for note and measure for measure, four crucial bars (52-55) of the eighth fugue from Book 1 of Bach’s *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier*, a three-part fugue in the taxing key of *Eb* minor. The three parts or “voices” of the fugue were to be represented by three lines on a piece of graph paper, each drawn in a different-coloured ink. The vertical sides of each square of the graph denoted two semitones or one whole tone (pitch), the horizontal sides two quavers or one crotchet (duration).

However, this “graphic representation” was not conceived as a musical drawing in its own right, as had been the diagrams Klee used in order to flesh out his lectures or the illustrations from Kandinsky’s Bauhaus treatise *Point and Line to Plane* (1926, Fig. I.3) It was, in fact, a first idea for a sculpture: not just any sculpture, but a monument to Bach. Such a monument, Neugeboren thought, would be a more fitting tribute to the composer than what he called all the “familiar trashy figures on pedestals with their rolls of manuscript paper”.¹⁷ At the same time, it was intended to serve as a more vivid representation of Bach’s music itself. But since he himself lacked the requisite technical competence, Neugeboren relied upon two members of the Bauhaus to bring this idea closer to realisation: Konrad Püschel, a student of László Moholy-Nagy, who produced a stereometric drawing that showed what such a monument might look like, and Gerda Marx, who created a small three-dimensional model. Both of these were illustrated in the 1929 issue of *bauhaus* magazine that also