Before Their Ears and Minds: Sublation in the Musical Praxis of José Maceda and Mathias Spahlinger

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to construct an analytic framework for new music based on Hegel's dialectics and focusing on José Maceda's *Music for Gongs and Bamboo* (1997) and Mathias Spahlinger's *Gegen Unendlich* (1995). This unlikely opposition between two important composers, José Maceda (1917–2004) from the Philippines and Mathias Spahlinger (b. 1944) from Germany, becomes an entry point into discussing the nature of the dialectical process in Hegelian thought, which is rooted in the principle of sublation (German *aufheben* or *aufhebung*). Music is seen as a potent human endeavour that underscores sublation when musical works are experienced and the transformations of musical material emerge in the ears and the minds of the listeners. It is for this assumption that the matter of perception pervades through the analysis and the discussions in the paper. Examining the unique compositional processes in both works demonstrates how sublation is a most effective tool in the understanding of the praxis and the composer's mind-work, especially in both cases where each uniquely challenges the Western traditional harmonic gestalt.

Keywords: gestalt, Maceda, perception, Spahlinger, sublation

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to construct an analytic framework for new music composition based on the Hegelian principle of sublation.[1] Its main focus is José Maceda's *Music for Gongs and Bamboo* (1997–1998) and Mathias Spahlinger's *Gegen Unendlich* (1995).[2] Both works present challenges to the gestalt of traditional European harmonic practice, though each in its own and rather unique way; the ramifications on the respective creative consciousness on the material and the musical structure of each of the pieces will be the basis in demonstrating how sublation is underscored in the very praxis of music composition.

Maceda and Spahlinger seem to be an unlikely pair to be the subject of a single analytic inquiry such as this one. While both are modernist late twentieth century composers, they each come from rather distinct and in many ways, incommensurable

socio-cultural and economic milieus; differences that result in their varying worldviews. However, both are critical of capitalist-induced modernity—a fact that is reflected in many of their musical compositions and their writings. They both stand out as composers whose works conflate critical concepts and perspectives with artistic creation in a manner that is rather seamless so that the total creative product that results from concept and music naturally or powerfully interlocks concept with music. It is for this reason that I find Maceda and Spahlinger to be just about as much similar as they are different, a fact that leads this inquiry into the very nature of Hegelian dialectics.[3]

In Hegelian thought, a dialectical process is more complex and non-linear than the mere simplistic or triangular formulation of thesis +/- antithesis = synthesis. Hegelian dialectics are rather about the process of transformation which comes from within the very entity in question, a fact that I give much emphasis on the analytic framework I am presenting. It is grounded from a basic postulate that every entity contains within itself its own negation and contradiction. Its nature, therefore, results in what Radnik (2016) describes as a "double movement", where thesis and anti-thesis equally determine and define each other (p. 194). The nature of this transformative process is, therefore, more dynamic and even ambivalent in that there is always a potential for an entity to negate itself and become something other than what it initially was, while at the same time maintaining its true nature, which Hegel labels as its "essence" (see Blunden, 2019, p. 78). With that in mind, the transcendence between difference and similarity that I have earlier described with regards to Maceda and Spahlinger—which simultaneously "cancels out" and at the same time "upholds" their similarity into difference and vice-versa—points to one very significant principle that is at the helm of the dialectical transformation according to Hegel: sublation (German: vb. *aufheben* or n. *aufhebung*). This inquiry is therefore theoretically framed according to that Hegelian principle to be further illustrated in the analysis sections below. Moreover, it is likewise within this principle that I intend to cover the discourse of music composition as praxis, in other words, as the theoretical consciousness that defines and gives direction to the process and practice of creation.

Sublation is the conceptual mechanism by which the Hegelian dialectic is realised. This concept is rooted in the notion that self-contradiction is at the heart of everything—both material and immaterial. For Hegel, this dialectic is the formal structure of reality and the essence of everything that exists, and this essence refers to the belief that every entity is in a constant process of change by means of self-contradiction, an aspect that has a significant bearing on the analytic process I wish to propose. While the basic understanding of Hegelian dialectic is the formulation of thesis + anti-thesis = synthesis, sublation further nuances this rather simplistic formulation.

As a dialectical process, sublation goes even deeper and further towards understanding the result when a thesis and an antithesis interact. This principle has been elaborated on the whole by Hegel in *Phenomenology of Mind* (1807/2009). Robert Fine (2001) sees in the process the relationship between preservation and transcendence in both simple and complex contradictions within itself (p. 33). As a result, the loss of certain qualities become the gain of others in this constant transformative negotiation. The original German word for the concept, *aufheben* (vb.) or *aufhebung* (n.), when translated into English carries the double and contradictory meaning of "lifting up or preserving" as well as "abolishing or cancelling"—a fact that points to the very nature of the dialectical process as one of transformation.

Sublation, therefore, refers to that very mechanism by which the transitions in the dialectical process are enabled. As it is a process that goes even deeper into the transformation that occurs when a thesis and an anti-thesis interact, the mere fact that for Hegel, everything material or immaterial contains within itself its own contradiction resonates the nature of sublation as occurring and I emphasise, within the entity itself, therefore underscoring its very nature as self-transformative.

My reading of sublation goes further to be an understanding of the process of "becoming". The development of how in Europe the binary dance forms of the Renaissance becomes the sonata-allegro form in the 18th century and reaching its apotheosis in the hands of Beethoven in the early 19th century exemplifies this transformative process. The rather simplistic binary structure of the dance forms of the Renaissance—generally featuring a departure from a home key to a contrasting key and a return to this home key in the end—becomes a more complex process that entails a deeper sense of cognition in the sonata-allegro form. Borne out of the Weltanschauung of the Enlightenment, the sonata-allegro form becomes a pre-determined framework of a creative process that has an emphasis on logical interaction through the sublation of its components or its thematic materials. This formal process comes into the composer's consciousness and in turn, is transmitted into the ears and minds of the listener as an aesthetic experience. The sonata-allegro form exemplifies how self-contradiction—in fact, sublation—is central to the creative and perceptive process of music in this era of the Enlightenment. In this mode of creation and perception, the experience of the binary dance form of the Renaissance cancels out its former function for dancing, into the sonata-allegro, which is experienced by listening and appreciating. In this article, I will show how that same principle of sublation is also useful in the understanding of the creative processes and the perception of "new music", especially by the likes of José Maceda and Mathias Spahlinger.

I have utilised sublation as an analytical tool in an article about a celebrated case of intellectual property rights in the 1930s in Manila (Baes, 2017). Transcending the main actors of that dispute, my study drew out an understanding of the transformative conditions of modernity in the Philippines, especially in the process of music composition of that period where traditional, communally-owned "folk" music is appropriated into individually-owned notated music within the backdrop of an emerging capitalist market-driven economy. As that study has shown, sublation allows one to see development and change as dynamic and transformative processes, resulting from how entities contradict themselves and, as a result, "transform" and thus, "become", albeit temporarily. In that view, the process of becoming is also intermingled with environmental and socio-political forces that take part in the transformation. In this paper, however, I will apply sublation in a different way: by gazing on the analysis of the creative process of music composition.

Since musical modernity from the early twentieth century has been bent into challenging the gestalt of European musical praxis, the very notion of making such a challenge may also be useful in developing an analytic framework for the study of music by Maceda and Spahlinger. Similar to the visual field, gestalt in music refers to how elements are organised into groups of unified "wholes", the elements of which have to do with tonal and temporal organisations: i.e., "scale" and "key" in the harmonic aspect of music; and then "beat" and "metre" in the temporal aspect of music. At the turn of the twentieth century, most especially with the work of the Second Viennese School (Schönberg, Berg and Webern), the traditional frames of organisational references have

been eradicated, leading to what is known in the early 1900s as "atonality". This later developed into the 12-note system of Schönberg in about the 1920s, which, to a great extent, became "serialism" in the hands of Anton Webern. Such a development gave a strong impact on music during the post-war period to about the end of the twentieth century.

Both Maceda's and Spahlinger's music are however strongly bent on post-serialist developments for their more critical stance regarding the approaches to musical modernity in the 20th century. However, one might still ask how sublation as an analytic framework serves the purpose of understanding the compositional processes of such works as those of Maceda and Spahlinger. In the next section, I explore how the principle of sublation characterises the very nature of the creative process of music, especially in the modernist sense. Also, despite its analytic and technical bent, making the paper more appropriate to address the discourse of modern music composition and analysis, I believe this paper might also touch on significant aspects of musical perception, as it makes many references to how things might appear cognitively in the minds of listeners, especially with the works in question.

Music and Hegel's Sublation

In the chapter "Form and the Reconstruction of Form", Adorno articulates how Beethoven's practical notion of structure is essentially dialectical: "a true synthesis … arises from the collision between the act of composing and the pre-existing schema" (Adorno, 1998, p. 60). This kind of synthesis is immediately qualified by Adorno as sublation (*aufheben*), where such pre-existing schema while being in the very roots of the genre and musical structure, is at the same time altered, abolished and at times even cancelled in the works of Beethoven (Adorno, 1998, p. 60).

In this section, I would like to describe the nature of music creation as a dialectical process and, in doing so, build a theoretical framework from which to draw perspectives in the analysis of *Music for Gongs and Bamboo* and *Gegen Unendlich*. The theoretical perspective I intend to advance builds from the dialectical principles in music creation—with reference to Adorno's take on Beethoven—which serves as the underlying impetus in the analysis of Maceda and Spahlinger.

Music, because of its temporal nature, is perhaps one of the most significant human creations where the principle of sublation is inherent to its experience and appreciation. Because the experience of music occurs within the passage of time, sublation as a principle potentially unfolds before one's ears and mind, a process in its creation that is carried over in its perception and its aesthetic experience.

In this regard, it just might be important to suggest that the classical concert experience—with its behavioural preferences for an audience to sit and listen to performers on stage—is an important enabler that facilitates a mode of perception in which music is experienced as sublation. I might as well add that the same is potentially possible in this current age where musical perception is also made via earphones attached to gadgets that stream music from platforms like YouTube or Spotify, as the listener hears this music privately even in public spaces like trains, buses, restaurants or libraries. Such modes of perception potentially provide the condition of listening privately and intently to underscore the dialectical processes that lead towards an appreciation and possibly an understanding of musical works in a way that might give one a glimpse of the composer's cerebral process and musical praxis. The consciousness of this musical process on the

part of the listener might come in varying levels but the end product of the experience is one of appreciation and some level of understanding. The deeper level of consciousness obviously comes initially from the composer as the creator of the musical work, but the understanding and appreciation will always come from the listeners.

The selection of the particular pieces by Maceda and Spahlinger for this inquiry is primarily based on how each deliberately foregrounds some kind of liminality in the identities of the very basic elements of music: the tonal (pitch, key) and the temporal (beat, metre). The gestalt of traditional European harmony defines the identity of pitches (i.e., what part of a key it is: a root, a third, a fifth, a seventh, etc.) and the identity of beats (i.e., what part of a metre it is: a downbeat, a weak beat, etc.). At the same time, and in a broader sense, gestalt also defines its larger parts like syntactic phrases or even whole "macro structures" in terms of how one part differs from another. In the perception of music, I assume that listeners somehow consciously group those elements in the mind, so that they can derive what I would like to refer to as "structural meaning" when experiencing the identities of those elements in relation to those of their opposing elements. Discarding the gestalt of traditional harmonic practice for more than a century has discarded that notion of structural meaning in the traditional harmonic and temporal sense. However, as I will attempt to show in the following analysis, other categories of structural meaning may potentially be derived from constructions and negations that are outside the gestalt of traditional European harmony, if seen within the gaze of sublation.

My application of gestalt, a concept in psychological theory, stems from Spahlinger's use of this concept mainly to denote the aural perception of harmonic elements in the European tradition up to the 19th century. As the meaning of gestalt even in popular dictionaries is, "an organised whole that is perceived as more than the sum of its parts" (see for instance in the Oxford Languages online or the Cambridge Dictionary) and the fact that in German, the word for "shape" or "form" brings the notion of perceiving a given harmonic key to be a "whole" which results from the hierarchical significance of its component parts (tonic, subdominant, dominant, etc.). As a "whole", therefore, any given key can function as a reference from which a perceiver can define the place of any pitch within this whole; a fact that entails the further notion that it is the mind that organises pitch entities within such "reference whole". Spahlinger refers to this in his discourse of development in twentieth-century music, whereas he has always stated, the (traditional) gestalt is in effect "annihilated" with the emergence of atonality, opening the possibilities of constructing other processes and parameters outside it (Spahlinger, 2015, pp. 131–133). This is expounded in Spahlinger's paper in English on the materials of new music, in the section "tonal and atonal chords" (Spahlinger, 2015, pp. 133–136). This notion of gestalt is also used as a reference in a number of Spahlinger's talks in German. Subsequent sections will further illustrate gestalt in relation to the analytic process of sublation in the discussions on the two selected pieces by Maceda and Spahlinger.

Music for Gongs and Bamboo

In *Music for Gongs and Bamboo*, Maceda creates layers of a variety of gong and metallophone sounds from the Javanese gamelan tradition in combination with those of a variety of Southeast Asian bamboo instruments, then with a mixed choir singing haiku texts and set to a Japanese scale, plus a Japanese traditional flute *ryūteki* (which can also be replaced by a Western piccolo) and finally, a Western concert bassoon. This work

results from Maceda's fascination in the 1990s with the phenomenon of difference in and of tonal categories in music cultures; and as such, it is an exploration into combining together those various pitch and scale constructions made unique by culture. The instrumentation derives its aesthetics from the resulting sound colours when the various pitch and scale constructions "cancel-out" each other in the process of layering and combining. *Music for Gongs and Bamboo* is therefore bent towards the mixing together of cultural-specific tuning and/or tonal systems that derive new meaning when seen within the "macro structure" of the piece. Within such a conceptual framework, the layering of the various unique sounds from different tonal or sonic constructions (Javanese instruments, Japanese scales, Southeast Asian bamboo sounds and a Western equal temperament) is the most significant aspect of its compositional process.

While Maceda relies mainly on the sound colours of the indigenous instruments to defy Western tonal principles, he also constructs his compositions by means of procedures that defy conventional metrical systems associated with the Western tradition, despite the fact that most of his works are still notated in the Western system. The most remarkable of these procedures is what Maceda himself refers to as the "odd notes on even beats" procedure. This utilises tuplets in a larger proportion, for instance, "3 in 2" (three quarter notes fitted equally within a frame meant for two quarter notes) or "5 in 4" (five quarter notes fitted equally within a frame for four quarter notes). However, those two examples are relatively simple ones.

Maceda systematically diagrams the procedure for the performers, for instance, in "3 in 2" (Figure 1), performers are to make each of the two beats in triplets, therefore the two beats having a total of six equal portions (three portions per beat); then each of the beats that are asked for occurs at points where the six portions are divided equally into three (therefore each of the three beats occurring every two portions). In "5:4", shown in Figure 2, each beat is divided into quintuples, resulting in twenty equal portions, then each of the five beats is asked to occur after every four portions.
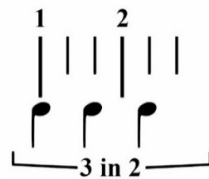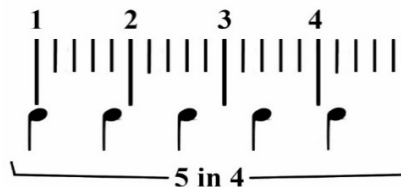

Figure 1: Configuration of 3:2.

Figure 2: Configuration of 5:4.

As mentioned earlier, the above examples are in fact just the simplest formulations of Maceda's "odd notes on even beats" principle. Certain more complex formulations like "7:4" or other even more complex formulations are utilised.

These single entities are then subjected to methods of layering. A common procedure of Maceda is to have the figures imitated by each instrument in what he calls "time delays" (played a beat or two apart, as shown in Figure 3 taken from *Music for Gongs and Bamboo*), reminiscent of an interlocking pattern in indigenous music practices in Southeast Asia. This is quite different from the notion of traditional Western polyphony where contrapuntal parts are framed by and as a result, builds up the harmonic structure in reference to its gestalt. In Maceda's music, the resulting displacement of beats and cancellation of metric feeling and accent associated with metre in Western music rather produces some semblance of "arbitrariness", from which the density of parts can be within his control; this in fact is one significant aspect of Maceda's aesthetics.

Figure 3. Time delays in *Music for Gongs and Bamboo* indicated by descending lines (used with permission, University of the Philippines Center for Ethnomusicology).

It should however be noted that with regards to the manner of execution, the effectiveness of cancelling a metric feeling in the "odd notes on even beats" principle paradoxically relies very much on the performer's very steady feeling of the metre. This is to say that the achievement of that aesthetic for a semblance of arbitrariness is

dependent on how skilled the performer is with regards to having a steady (or "non-arbitrary") beat.

   This semblance of arbitrariness, which in my observation is carefully crafted and utilised by Maceda so as not to have any suggestion of completeness is also very much felt when he employs what he calls "hanging melodies" with regards to his vocal lines. In earlier works like *Pagsamba* (1968), *Kubing* (1967), *Aruding* (1981) or even in *Ugnayan* (1974), all of which employ singers and are notated in the Western system, melodic materials come as fragments that are however not subject to any syntactic structure that would have alluded to a notion of completeness. Rather than to syntax, and again to give a semblance of arbitrariness, more emphasis is given to the layering of these melodic materials. All those procedures are employed in *Music for Gongs and Bamboo*.

   What I find very striking however is how on a microcosmic level, Maceda composes parts for particular instruments based on—or at most times taken directly from—actual musical patterns of particular indigenous instruments. Looking back for instance on the piece *Agungan* (composed in 1965), the gong parts are actually patterned after actual gong playing traditions from among the Maguindanao, Tirurai and Kalinga peoples in the Philippines. This observation has as well been noted in all the other works of Maceda that utilise indigenous instruments. In closely examining micro elements of Maceda's work, therefore, I gain the impression that he has translated into actual live performance the methods used in musique concrete, where recordings of gong music or other traditions would have been spliced and then layered or processed in various ways. Micro elements taken indigenous music cultures of those residing in the rainforests from the rural backlands are processed into broader macro structures and then, in performance, brought into modern landscapes. Such is the dialectic of Maceda's creative consciousness and aesthetic.

   In *Music for Gongs and Bamboo*, the variety of sound materials come from: (a) the various bamboo instruments, (b) the gamelan instruments like the *saron* (metallophone), *gender* (metallophone with a "fainter" sound), *kethuk* (small gong whose sound quality is unique in that it is played with a mallet that is used to immediately mute the sound), *suwukan* (large gongs), (c) the Japanese *ryūteki* (a small bamboo flute with a piercing sound/may be replaced with a Western piccolo), (d) the Western bassoon and (e) a mixed chorus divided into male and female parts. Gamelan instruments are tuned to the pelog scale, the *ryūteki* and the voices utilise the *hirajoshi* scale, adding up to the palette of a Western-tuned bassoon and then the sounds of bamboo instruments.

   Maceda constructs further groupings and combines these into what I would call two general layers that oscillate one after another. The first layer is instrumental in nature, combining punctuating sounds from bamboo instruments with Javanese *kethuk* and *suwukan* plus melodic sounds from the Javanese *saron* with the *ryūteki* (or piccolo) and bassoon. There are no contrapuntal relationships with all the instruments in this layer. The second layer is more vocal in nature, featuring the mixed chorus singing Japanese haiku verses layered with the sustaining metallic sounds of the *gender* (Figure 4). Those two layers generally alternate with each other, the first one serving as sort of an instrumental prelude or interlude to the second where verses are sung.

Layer	Instruments
1	bamboo, kethuk, suwukan, saron, ryuteki, and basoon
2	gender and voices

Figure 4. Basic subgrouping layers in *Music for Gongs and Bamboo*.

There are two levels of describing the structure of the whole piece. It is necessary to construct these two levels to understand Maceda's creative process from the perspective of self-negation or sublation. First is by constructing a "General Graph", which is a rather sketchy rendering of the flow of events as they occur, minute by minute. This General Graph is merely a skeletal outline of the musical events, excluding much of the details of the actual music. Figure 5 represents the General Graph indicating the general opposition between the beginning (Minute 1) and the ending (Minute 14) of the music and the general alternate appearances between Layer 1 and Layer 2.
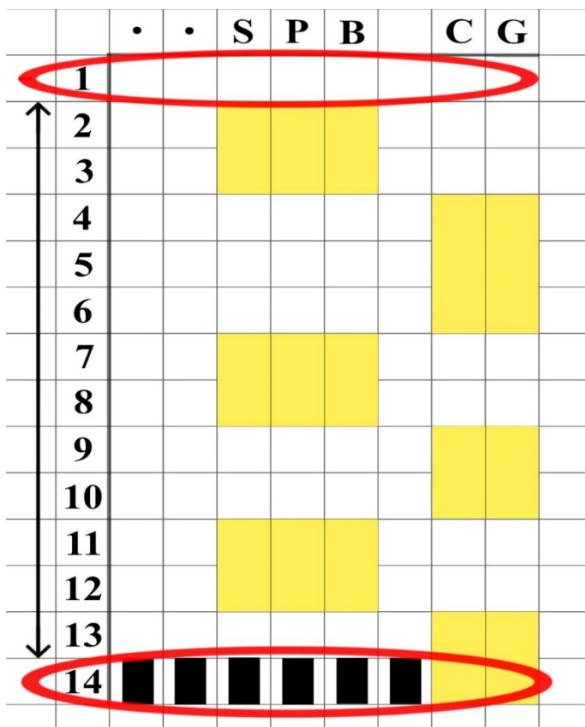

Figure 5. General Graph for *Music for Gongs and Bamboo* where numbers in the left column stand for minutes of the piece, dots in the next two columns stand for bamboo instruments and various punctuating instruments (*kethuk*, etc.), respectively; S stands for *saron*, P for piccolo (or Japanese *ryūteki*), B for bassoon, C for choir and G for *gender*. The circles on Minute 1 and Minute 14 indicate the dialectical opposition between the opening section (which is relatively empty) and the closing section (which is full, in tutti).
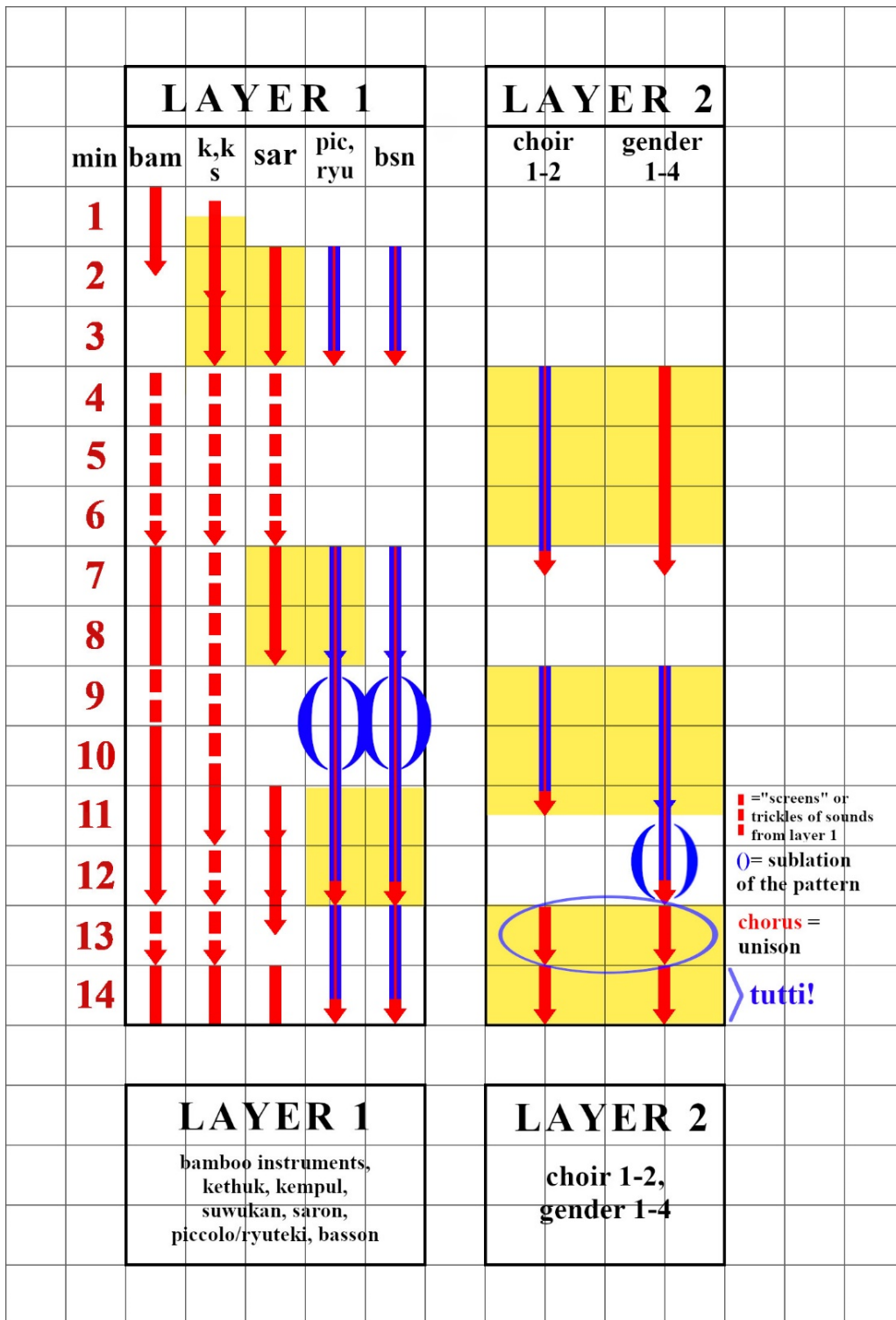
Figure 6. Actual Graph of *Music for Gongs and Bamboo*, showing its "inconsistencies" such as "screens" (represented by dotted arrows) and "sublations" (represented by a parenthesis).

In reality, however, the macro structure of *Music for Gongs and Bamboo* exhibits what I would call, for lack of a better term, "inconsistencies". Some of those inconsistencies include what Maceda refers to a "screens", or residual sounds that represent a decay of musical material, vocal or instrumental sounds. These screens are a significant indicator of musical development that connects one section from another coherently. I have also noted sublations of the musical material (indicated in parenthesis in the graph) which represent the contradictions in the appearances of specific musical parts within the general pattern that had been established. This is where the second level of description is called for. The graph in Figure 6 shows the actual occurrences of musical events, including inconsistencies. Those inconsistencies that are rather foregrounded seem to cloud the basic oscillations (or, alternate appearances) between Layer 1 and Layer 2. However, that would not be the case.

I would argue that this basic oscillation remains persistent as a kind of recurring pattern—or what Maceda would refer to as a "drone" (Maceda, 1979, p. 164)—that would have been embedded in the minds of the listeners. The inconsistent occurrences of the other instrumental groupings paradoxically render this basic drone (or the oscillation or alternate appearances of Layer 1 and Layer 2) a kind of metaphysical existence. The oscillations between the *saron* and *gender* groups, each occurring within their respective layers actually persist. At the same time, those inconsistencies cancel out the rather simplistic and mechanical "machination" of the simple alternating pattern of Layer 1 and Layer 2. That kind of machination would have rendered the piece too predictable, leaving us to conclude that the major aesthetics of the piece is its way of contradicting its own established basic pattern (of oscillations between Levels 1 and 2). The "life" of the piece, so to say, actually emerges from those inconsistencies—a matter I attribute to the principle of sublation. In effect, those inconsistencies also transform the general graph of this piece into what we might consider to be, for lack of a better term at the moment (and I know I am taking a great risk saying this here), "music".[4]

Gegen Unendlich

If the macro structure in Maceda's *Music for Gongs and Bamboo* appears to be rather complex with oscillations of drone patterns appearing as metaphysical, in Spahlinger's *Gegen Unendlich* however, the "macro structure" appears to be rather simpler. There are just two opposing main sections: the first focusing on the notion of pitch and of relative stasis, while the second on beat elements and perpetual movement. With this particular work, Spahlinger goes even deeper into the most minute configurations of pitch and beat as "objects", therefore its "micro structures" (as opposed to Maceda's piece whose construction gravitate towards its "macro structure"). Stating that the gestalt of traditional Western music has essentially been eradicated with the advent of musical modernity, Spahlinger (2015) builds from the resultant infinite number of possibilities that occur in the construction of new music (p. 33). A priori to this is the knowledge that the traditional harmonic gestalt strongly determines structure in the development of European music. *Gegen Unendlich* however builds from an open field, where the very identity of pitches and beats—of them being identical or being in opposition with each other and of being one section or another—becomes rather fluid. This is facilitated by the use for instance of microtones in the first section and of what he describes as a *doppio movimento* in the latter section.

To begin with, the title *Gegen Unendlich* appropriately describes the nature of the material itself in this work. If we consider the title to translate as "going against infinity", Spahlinger here confronts infinity by using it as a backdrop, or as a pre-condition, from which he builds his material in such a way that defines the very ontology of the work. If this were so, I would like to see this work to be about "power", for it addresses infinity as some kind of gravitation from which to build his materials. Moreover, in such precondition, the micro entities used in the work would have been rendered as identities that are also "non-identifiable" because one pitch is never repeated exactly the same as another. This is exemplified at the very start of the piece, which opens with various articulations of the single note D. This indicates that the very existence of those micro entities is rather transient, so that we can see them all as mere isolated moments within a continuum, that are en route to, or within, this powerfully unending condition of transformation. This is, I believe, how Spahlinger shows the impact of the annihilation of the traditional harmonic gestalt through its ramifications on the identities of the most basic elements of music. And such also embodies the process of sublation.

As a result of this annihilation, the pitch and temporal materials in this work struggle to go "against" infinity and their rather transient identities hinder their capacity to be reproduced. A priori to this assumption, again, are the basic premises that the traditional Western harmonic gestalt produces a specific identity of each of the pitches, as well as points in time, therefore rendering those entities reproducible. For instance, the pitch D5 remains to be a D5 not only because of its being itself, but also because it is not an E♭5, nor an E4, nor a C#2, etc. nor any other thing but itself. Just the same, the "downbeat" in a metre remains to be felt as stressed and used as a reference to a metric structure. Other beats in a metre have less stress in reference to this downbeat. In any occurrence of this D5 or this downbeat, they shall respectively have the same identity and function given that they remain within their gestalt.

The nature of pitch materials being rather transient or non-reproducible in *Gegen Unendlich* is expressed in Spahlinger's visual representation of pitch material as plotted out in a peculiar six-lined staff with the lines coming from a common point of origin but progressing further away from each other. In Figure 7, taken from Spahlinger's own visual graph of this six-lined staff (Spahlinger, 2015, p. 142), we assume that this common point of origin is this rather off-tangent pitch "D5" rendered in turns and layers by the four different instruments in the first six bars that open the piece (Figure 8).[5]
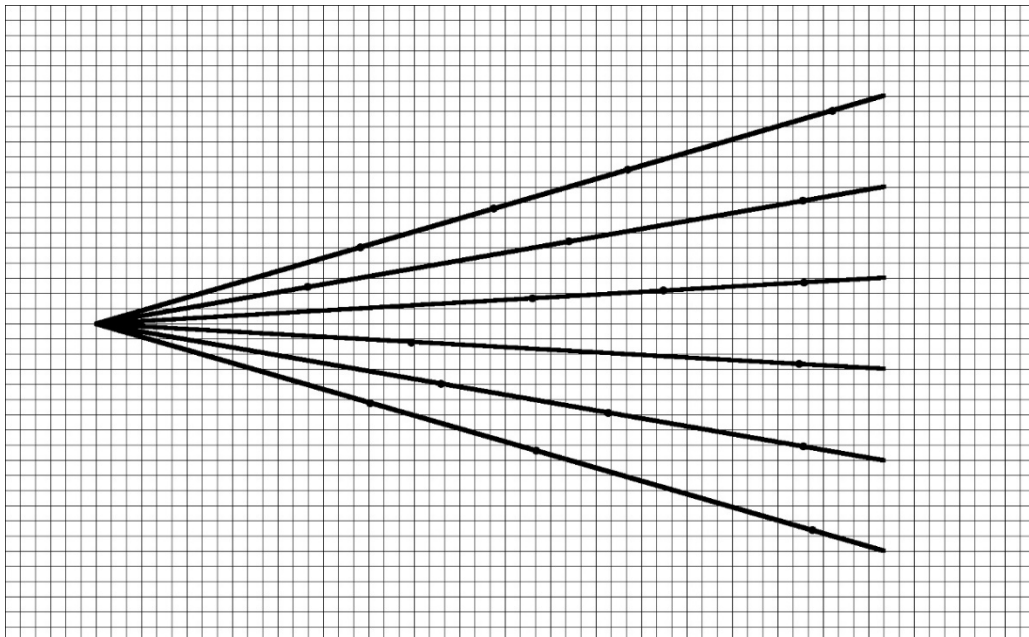
Figure 7. Six-lined staff representing the pith material of Spahlinger's *Gegen Unendlich* (used with permission from the composer).

Again, as mentioned earlier, that first part of *Gegen Unendlich* opens with the four instruments taking turns playing in various densities on a pitch that roughly suggests this "D5" with pauses in between those moments. In subsequent measures, we find pitches that seem to move away in both directions from this point of origin, with occurrences of roughly E♭ and C# in the next few measures from this D5. As this progresses, other pitches appear in subsequent measures. The pitches appear as microtones, owing to the very rich use of articulations and advanced playing techniques on all four instruments. Those articulations render those single pitches infinitely transforming and appearing to be rather unique and non-reproducible, in the sense that the pitches can never occur exactly the same twice. Transforming towards what one cannot predict, as any kind of transformation appears to be possible at any point in time, a general progression of "moving away" however seems to be the general pattern of the occurrences. While one can sense this general direction, there is also a semblance of an arbitrariness, combined with a bit of restraint. This means that Spahlinger chooses every pitch and articulation rather delicately, so one can sense that each event connects to another within a musical coherence.

Figure 8. Some examples of articulations in the opening bars of Part 1 of *Gegen Unendlich*.

Pauses that come from time to time seem to suggest some kind of syntactic structure, though, at the same time, their occurrences also look rather arbitrary. The dialectical construction of such occurrences—pitch gestures against pauses—defines the nature of those two opposing elements, which as a result gives the listener a semblance of a pre-determined compositional structure. By its nature, the music might need several hearings to be able to feel or determine this character; or perhaps it is also possible for one to just allow for the sensation of ambiguity. When pauses are no longer used, a certain kind of build-up is suggested, such as in the second system of page 3, especially when the trombone and the piano continuously render semblances of C#, then culminating in some kind of convergence in the last four bars of the first system and into the second system of the fourth page.

At the last five bars of the first system of page 7, we feel some kind of "urgency" seemingly indicating preparation for some forthcoming musical event. This continues to

another convergence at the last five bars of the first system of page 8, building up to what would be a transition into the second part of the piece. The strongest indication of a transition into the second part is this semblance of a cadence (though theoretically not actually a dominant-tonic progression, see Figure 9) marked by the trombone (*posaune*) on the last note of the fourth measure (G♭, or an off-tangent dominant because G♭ is not really the dominant of E, but the gesture of going from this note in the low-register of the trombone to a middle E suggests a dominant-to-tonic resolution) to the first note of the fifth measure (E).

Figure 9. Semblance of a cadence in the transition to Part 2 of *Gegen Unendlich*.

The second part of *Gegen Unendlich* begins with lines in a virtual unison on all four instruments consistently moving in sixteenth-note values. Virtual unison is how I would put it because it shows varying images of inconsistencies and non-togetherness, despite the suggestion that they are moving together. A piano solo emerges from the last four bars of the first system on page 10, followed by punctuations on the other instruments; then all seem to be set loose into another round of this virtual unison, where some instruments catch up with the others. This culminates into a "break" at the second system of page 16, where longer held notes surrounding the note E3 seem to prepare for the subsequent motion that is to follow. Glissandos suggest an infinite number of pitches that surround this E3 (Figure 9); it is then from this E3 that a constant (yet still inconsistent) movement follows. This consistency/inconsistency is further broken up at the first system of page 19, where some instruments vary their speed even within the framework of a consistent tempo. Returning to total synchronisation, it then breaks up into the surrounding pitches of E5, while at the same time the consistent temporal aspect is also broken down. Subsequently, the whole thing returns to the same temporal motion, though no longer in the pitch of E5, then breaks up once again at the end, but this time with longer notes that seem to slightly suggest Part 1.

Figure 10. Converging pitches in Part 2 of *Gegen Unendlich.*

There appears to have two distinct ways by which both works by Maceda and Spahlinger become "works" or become "music"; both ways unique, but still rooted in sublation. While the inconsistencies of the main structural graph and the metaphysical presence of a basic structural pattern in Maceda's *Music for Gongs and Bamboo* transforms this graph "into music", it is, on the contrary, in the seemingly determined events (transitions, convergences, etc.) that transform that infinity or arbitrariness alluded to in the micro entities of Spahlinger's *Gegen Unendlich* into "music". In both cases, we see the workings of sublation in the respective creative processes of each composition.

As I have therefore attempted to show how sublation figures out in the creative process of the two compositions in question, I have also alluded to how those two pieces become "wholes" or "complete"; in other words, how these two compositions become "works". I must however clarify that with those statements, I run the risk of encroaching upon grounds where the perennial problematic question of what music "is or is not" is invoked. I have no intentions whatsoever of addressing that problematic question. I merely want to show how in the creative process of music composition, works become what they are by contradicting themselves. In a more expanded version of this inquiry, I attempt to push the boundaries of this analysis by exploring further the aspect of perception, particularly on how conceptual and material (or musical) elements are interlocked to become a seamless creation, a quality that I would like to consider as being natural or musically coherent. I however would conclude this present paper focusing on the analysis aspect of the study.

Conclusion

In the analysis of *Music for Gongs and Bamboo* and *Gegen Unendlich*, I have attempted to show how Maceda and Spahlinger respectively construct those works through various levels of negation. We find those in the way Maceda has deliberately combined Javanese, Japanese and Western tunings, which along with bamboo instruments cancel out each other to create a unique tonal environment. We further see this in the way Maceda layers those sonic forces to create musical events that recur, or more appropriately, oscillate as drone patterns, which define the listening experience of this piece.

We further find such negation in the way Spahlinger in the first part of his piece utilises non-reproducible pitches, the nature of pitch identity being negated by displacing these within an infinite number of possible placements, in turn within the infinitely progressing range and spectrum, as shown in his diagram in Figure 7. This kind of non-reproducibility of pitch identities is also demonstrated in the second part (which I did not tackle much in the analysis) in terms of "beat identity", where a "perpetual motion" clouds any sense of metre, even further developing into a *doppio movimento* towards the latter portion of the piece. Spahlinger's *Gegen Unendlich* is paradoxically a piece in unison, though the instruments are not really "together".

What I find further striking is how both pieces become constructed within what I would consider as "perfect" constructions (for lack of a better term at the moment) precisely because of their "imperfections". I find what I have termed "inconsistencies" in *Music for Gongs and Bamboo* the appropriate ingredient that enables the transcendence of the oscillations between the two basic layers of this structure; so that in the perception of the piece, these oscillations remain persistently present, despite those inconsistencies. In *Gegen Unendlich*, the occurrences of pitches that are "transient" within an unseen, yet ever-present infinite possibility, makes the nature of the materials rather indefinite, even as the very structure of the music uses these materials in the utmost precision. My analysis shows that in both cases, the principle of sublation is an important lens for the understanding of their respective constructions and the appreciation of the level of praxis that both Maceda and Spahlinger espouse.

What I have further realised in the course of this inquiry is the metaphysical aspects that seem to find their way in the construction of both pieces: first in the persistence of a drone pattern of oscillations between the two layers in *Music for Gongs and Bamboo* (Figure 6); and second with the imagined movement represented by a six-lined staff that diagonally progresses as representing the position of the materials in *Gegen Unendlich* in relation to the reality of infinity (Figure 7). These significant aspects show how both composers negate the very constructions that they had laid out in doing these particular works. The key element in the understanding of such, I believe, is sublation.

Admittedly, a more pertinent factor in realising those metaphysical phenomena in musical creation through the principle of sublation is the conditions of perception. I have mentioned time and again that one can experience the process of sublation in music when one listens to a certain level as to journey "with" the music. It is for this reason that I have also assumed earlier that a classical concert hall setting or a private listening with earphones through gadgets tuned in to streaming music via platforms like Spotify, might be the best venues for this level of perception and understanding. I have yet to find out if

this analytic framework would have any use in the context of music performed in other social contexts like a rock concert, or with elevator music.

Finally, this analytic framework based on the principle of sublation might also be useful in the analysis—and even as importantly—the perception and understanding of musical works outside the new music category; and in fact, even revert to such musics that expand (rather than expunge) the traditional harmonic gestalt. This level of analysis and understanding might perhaps shape a listener's deeper appreciation of those musics in question. When one experiences music perhaps within a classical concert hall or possibly even on earphones through streaming platforms like Spotify, it is possible that layers of thought emerge in the minds of the listeners as the experience unfolds. Those layers of thought on the part of the listener might expand exponentially, with either his or her knowledge of the artist (composer or performer), with the kind, genre, style or form of any music, even potentially invoking the musical experiences of the listener stored somewhere in the listener's mind. Building again from Adorno's dialectical interpretation, one might possibly determine and appreciate how Beethoven rather transcends the sonata-allegro form in, let's say his Opus 110. With this kind of awareness, one might potentially understand the intricacies of the Chick Corea Akoustic Band's rendition of Joseph Kosma's "Autumn Leaves" in their self-titled album (GRP Records, 1989), or how Donald Fagen of Steely Dan created the song "Josie" (ABC Records, 1977) from basic blues progressions. The perception and the analysis of such examples, through a realisation of the principle of sublation, does much to heighten the level of awareness of the creative process and in turn, the appreciation and the aesthetics in the musical works as they are revealed before the listener's ears and minds.

Endnotes

[1] This paper is part of a research project that is supported by the University of the Philippines through its Enhanced Creative Work and Research Grant (ECWRG 2019–2020). The discussions presented in this paper are but part of a more extended study that will be published as a book. This article version is dedicated to Feliz Anne Macahis.

[2] Biographical data on José Maceda (1917–2004) and Mathias Spahlinger (b. 1944) can be obtained through many different online sources. I would however recommend Maceda's entry in *The Living Composers Project* (http://www.composers21.com/compdocs/macedaj.htm) and Spahlinger's personal webpage (https://mathiasspahlinger.de/biography/?lang=en).

[3] José Maceda and Mathias Spahlinger were both my postgraduate teachers at the University of the Philippines (1982–1985) and the Staatliche Hochschule fuer Musik in Freiburg, Germany (1992–1995) respectively. I have always imagined myself to be a product of my dialectical experience with both great masters.

[4] I have basis for this argument however, from Maceda himself when he said, *"Mas nagiging musika yan dahil hindi nag-u-ugnay, o binabadya ang inaakalang pag-uugnay"* ("That becomes more as music because it transgresses what is expected as coherence"); he said this to me verbally during one of our discussions of another composition of his in 1998. When I mentioned to him this observation of inconsistencies in *Music for Gongs and Bamboo*, he smiled.

[5] I am discussing particular portions of *Gegen Unendlich* in reference to its published score, printed in facsimile by Peer Musikverlag (1995) © Copyright 1997 by Peer Musikverlag GmbH International Copyright Secured. Reprinted with Permission.

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Biography

Jonas Baes, composer, ethnomusicologist and cultural activist; studied at the University of the Philippines and the Freiburg Musikhocschule in Germany. In 2004, he completed his doctorate at the University of the Philippines with the dissertation *Modes of Appropriation in Philippine Indigenous Music: The Politics of the Production of Cultural Difference*. His compositions mostly utilise Asian instruments and vocal techniques, and have been widely performed in contemporary music festivals in Asia, the United States, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. These compositions also explore the participation of the audience as integral to the performance. He has published numerous academic writings, especially on the Iraya-Mangyan of Mindoro in the Philippines and their peripheral place in the global political economy. Baes is currently a professor at the University of the Philippines. He is also the founder of the Manila Composers Lab, an organisation that provides annual workshops for young composers in Southeast Asia.