

**Artless Gardens:  
Time, space, and the 'ritual of cultural identity'  
in music by Veljo Tormis**

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## Abstract

Attracting such diverse labels as ‘a modern shaman’s call’ and ‘bland inventions,’ Veljo Tormis’s (b. 1930) music has drawn a cult following, in spite – or because of – its simplicity, which may be seen as unchallenging or monotonous. Is this minimalistic, non-linear, monumental, ‘ecological’ music solely based on features of ancient Estonian runic folk song, or does it bear fingerprints of trauma? Does it embody the alleged qualities of indigenous Estonian culture that the poet Jaan Kaplinski has promoted as crucial to an idealized ‘Finno-Ugric mode of seeing’? Or is it just another product of the homogenizing meat grinder of Socialist Realism – ‘glib, bland, and corny’? Is it a Soviet ‘nationalist’ prototype, shunted along the *via negativa* production line and filled with carbon copies of authentic Estonian content? Or is it an invaluable ‘ritual of cultural identity’?

Beyond their superficial correlation with Soviet-approved nation-building projects, their popular accessibility, reliance on folk material, and an apparent general avoidance of the vilified ‘bourgeois formalism,’ Tormis’s ‘bland inventions’ betray a network of connections with the ‘postmodern,’ the post-traumatic, and the (notionally) ‘Finno-Ugric.’ The music itself might at first seem unremarkable, but its relationships with contextual issues are more nuanced and complicated.

This thesis builds on extant scholarship, firstly, by taking a slightly different approach to analysis of this music. Focusing on how Tormis’s work might be perceived can allow for connections to be made with a wider variety of extra-musical ideas – perhaps to a greater extent than a more technical or ‘classificatory’ analysis (which also seems unsuitable given the simplicity of much of the music in question). This study also attempts to broaden the frames of reference of the (English-language) conversation around this music. A more ‘critical’ approach to the study of Tormis’s work and its context here involves engagement with anthropology, philosophy, and literary theory and its borrowings from feminist theory and psychoanalysis. Analytical and ‘critical’ observations are distributed across four chapters dealing with essentially separable but interrelated themes: ‘Repetition and Ritual’; ‘Time and Telos’; ‘Balance and Biophilia’; and ‘Boundaries and Binaries’.

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### List of works mentioned

The majority of Tormis's works, and all of the works listed here, are unaccompanied choral pieces – with the exception of 'Curse Upon Iron,' which includes a part for shaman drum. The selection of pieces represented in this study are taken from the years following the mid-1960s (the beginning of 'the real Tormis style,' according to Lippus), and include several of his most popular and well-known compositions; see pages 287 – 341 of Daitz's *Ancient Song Recovered* for a comprehensive catalogue of Tormis's output. Titles in **bold italics** in this list are 'series of cycles'; *italic titles* are multi-movement cycles, and works listed in 'inverted commas' are stand-alone pieces. Work titles will be given in English translation in this study. The reason for this is that in many places the focus of the discussion is directly related to the descriptive nature of a title or perceived 'referential' elements of the music. As such, consistently referring to a work in Estonian would necessitate constant reminders of the English definition. For reference, Daitz's works list gives titles in both Estonian and English.

#### ***Estonian Calendar Songs*** (series, 1966-7)

-*Swing Songs* (cycle)

-*St Catherine's Day Songs* (cycle)

-*St John's Day Songs* (cycle)

#### ***Nature Pictures*** (series, 1964-9)

-*Autumn Landscapes* (cycle)

-*Spring Sketches/Fragments* (cycle)

-*Summer Motifs* (cycle)

-*Winter Patterns* (cycle)

'Curse Upon Iron' (1972)

'Singing Aboard Ship' (1983)

***Forgotten Peoples*** (series, 1970-89)

-*Vepsian Paths* (cycle, 1983)

'Delicate Maid' (from *Three Karelian Maidens*, 1991)

'Herding Calls' (1985)

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### **Author's declaration**

I, Claire McGinn, declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

## Chapter 1

### 'Sounds Good!'

The historically beleaguered, and only recently independent, nation of Estonia has proclaimed 2015 the 'Year of Music,' with the motto 'Sounds good!' This year over fifty-three music festivals representing diverse genres and traditions will take place in the country, alongside film and literature festivals.<sup>1</sup> 2015 is indeed a meaningful moment for music – it marks not only the eightieth birthday of the internationally-acclaimed Estonian Arvo Pärt, but also the eighty-fifth birthday of the composer whose work is the central subject of this study. Veljo Tormis, born in 1930 in Kuusalu, is one of the most significant musical figures to have emerged from this small country in the twentieth century.

### 'We should know who we are'

*who the hell needs your history Augustus Burchard von  
Dreylöwen Cromwell Hegel Heydrich Höss  
Cain Columbus Mohammed  
Napoleon Nero Philip Stalin Suvorov  
Torquemada  
Genghis Khan whom should we then remember  
not a single one let us remember  
that our kingdom is more than your world  
with all  
its history that Tecumseh is dead and that on  
the last page of all great and famous  
deeds there is always some eichmann who  
counts the corpses  
keep your history for yourself keep for yourself  
your great deeds*

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<sup>1</sup> 'Cultural Events in 2015,' *Estonia.eu*, <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/events-in-estonia/cultural-events-in-2015.html>, accessed 04/10/15.

*kill your dead and destroy your cities  
but let us be*  
Jaan Kaplinski, *Fish Weave their Nests*, 1966<sup>2</sup>

The extract above from Estonian poet Jaan Kaplinski curses various historic invaders of his own country alongside such bloodthirsty autocrats and near-mythologized conquerors as Nero and Genghis Khan. His tirade reflects Maire Jaanus's assertion that Estonians, through centuries of defeat and occupation, have learned not to expect anything from goal-oriented constructs of historical narrative.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, Marek Tamm has suggested that the country's long history of invasion and oppression has led to the construction of a national narrative based around the (relatively few) historic battles in which the Estonians were victorious.<sup>4</sup> In the face of such adversity, composer Veljo Tormis said, it was crucial that his fellow Estonians should 'know who we are.'<sup>5</sup> For brevity's sake, several hundred years of foreign domination can be approximately condensed into the following pivotal events:

- **1208 – 1227** Estonia is converted to Christianity and occupied by foreign powers: Teutonic Orders and Danes. The Germans become landed gentry and wield huge influence for 700 years.
- **1561** Sweden takes control of Estonia.
- **1700-1721** Great Northern War; the war ends with a defeat for Sweden in 1721, leaving Russia as the new major power in the Baltic Sea. After the war, it was estimated only 100 000 Estonians survived.
- **1918 Feb** Germany occupies Estonia.
- **1918 Nov – 1920 Jan** War of Independence. Estonian forces beat back German and Soviet armies.

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas Salumets, *Unforced Flourishing: Understanding Jaan Kaplinski* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 57.

<sup>3</sup> Maire Jaanus, 'Estonia's Time and Monumental Time,' in *Baltic Postcolonialism*, ed. Violeta Kelertas (Amsterdam – New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2006), 219.

<sup>4</sup> Marek Tamm, 'History as Cultural Memory: Mnemohistory and the Construction of the Estonian Nation,' *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 39/4 (2008): 505-8.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Anderson, "'We Should Know Who We Are': Veljo Tormis in Conversation,' *Tempo*, 211 (2000): 26.

- **1920 Feb** - The Treaty of Tartu, between the Russian SFSR and Estonia, recognizes the independence of Estonia.
- **1939** Hitler and Stalin divide Europe into spheres of influence, with the Baltics left to the Soviets.
- **1940 USSR** annexes Estonia.
- **1941 – 1944** German occupation
- **1944** Estonia re-annexed by Soviet Union; tens of thousands of Estonians are deported to Siberia and Central Asia
- **1990** Transition to independence is declared by Soviet Estonian legislature.
- **1991** Estonia joins the United Nations; the KGB ends its operations in Estonia.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 1, below, is a map of Estonia and the surrounding area. The term ‘Finno-Ugric’ may be used to describe all of the languages shown in the chart below (Figure 2), with Hungarians on the Ugrian branch, and (the linguistically closer-related) Finland, and other smaller indigenous groups, listed as Baltic Finns.<sup>7</sup> For clarification, in this study the term is used only to refer to the groups under ‘Baltic-Finnic’ – and since no detailed reference is made to the smaller cultures listed, the reader may assume that ‘Finno-Ugric’ here loosely means ‘Estonian and Finnish.’

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Visit Estonia’ and ‘World Atlas,’ <https://www.visitestonia.com/en/about-estonia/estonian-culture/estonian-history-a-timeline-of-key-events>;  
<http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/europe/estonia/eetimeln.htm>, accessed 16/08/2015.

<sup>7</sup> Mimi Daitz, *Ancient Song Recovered: The Life and Music of Veljo Tormis*, (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2004), pp. 15, 28.



Figure 1.1 (Map template (public domain image) taken from [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7c/Europe\\_polar\\_stereographic\\_Caucasus\\_Urals\\_boundary3.svg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7c/Europe_polar_stereographic_Caucasus_Urals_boundary3.svg)).

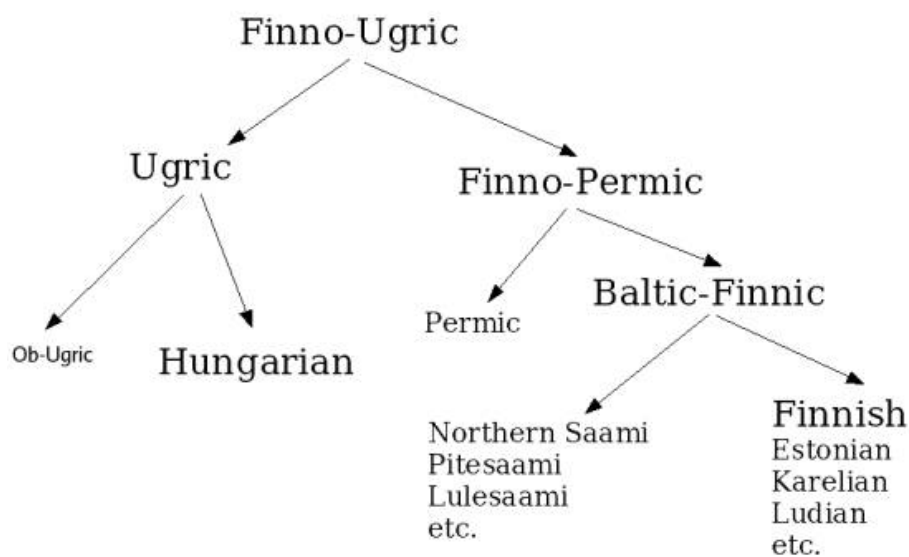


Figure 1.2 - Chart showing Finno-Ugric languages<sup>8</sup>

The first period of independence in hundreds of years, in the early- to mid-twentieth century, meant that Estonia was a free country from the time of Veljo Tormis's birth until the Second World War. By the year of his tenth birthday, his homeland had become a Soviet republic. His musical studies were conducted in the wake of the Soviet promulgation of Socialist Realism, and condemnation of

<sup>8</sup> Image from <http://folk.uio.no/kristaga/finsk.jpg>; accessed online 04/10/15



'bourgeois formalism' and 'bourgeois nationalism' variously<sup>9</sup>; and his time as a student at the Moscow Conservatory (1951-1956)<sup>10</sup> bridged the last years of High Stalinism and Khrushchev's denunciation of the former in his 'Secret Speech.' Mimi Daitz provides a broad summary of the situation facing the newly-qualified Tormis as he began his professional composing career around the time of Khrushchev's 'Thaw.' The following is a condensation of some notable events marking a 'period in which cultural autonomy made considerable progress' – when 'subjects which had previously been forbidden could be discussed and written about.'<sup>11</sup>

- The beginnings of international communication with non-Soviet nations
- Influx of Western tourists
- Establishment in 1965 of a boat line between Tallinn and Helsinki
- The return of some surviving deportees from Siberia
- Publication of works by a 'new generation' of literary artists, including Jaan Kaplinski
- Re-emergence of works by authors who had been refugees of the regime
- Encouragement by the population, and toleration by local officials, of the avant-garde movement in the visual arts.<sup>12</sup>

In comparison with Russia itself, 'greater cultural latitude prevailed in the Baltic republics [...] due partly to a lack of scrutiny by the world press [and insufficient knowledge of Baltic languages both in Moscow and internationally].'<sup>13</sup> In the wake of this period of partial relief came what is popularly known as the Brezhnev 'Stagnation Era' – or, in Estonian, *Stagnaja* – when much of the progress made under Khrushchev appeared to come undone.<sup>14</sup> Later on there will be a brief exposition of directions taken in Baltic musicology around the time of the Stagnation. It is important here to

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<sup>9</sup> Urve Lippus, 'Baltic Music History Writing: Problems and Perspectives,' *Acta Musicologica* 71/1 (1999): 59.

<sup>10</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, pp. 34; 107.

<sup>11</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, pp. 33-5.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Romuald J. Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1980* (California: University of California Press, 1983), 172.

<sup>14</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 36.

acknowledge, though, that a ‘top-down’ model of political control over music in the USSR has been widely discredited as an over-simplification.<sup>15</sup>

### **‘The Singing Nation’**

Choral music and singing have traditionally been of great significance in the Baltic and Nordic regions. There are three points of particular interest regarding this relationship in Estonia. First among these is the deep and sometimes ‘spiritual’ connection felt by some Estonians to their ancient runic folk song, the *regilaul*.<sup>16</sup> This musical tradition is absolutely fundamental to Tormis’s mature output. Most of his works are for unaccompanied chorus, a large proportion of these are *regilaul* or other folk song arrangements, and it is plausible that qualities drawn from runic song also underpin and inform many of his ‘original’ compositions.<sup>17</sup> It should also be noted that many outspoken advocates for *regilaul* have bitterly lamented a widespread trend away from any interest in ancient folk song in modern Estonia.<sup>18</sup> In the article ‘*regilaul*: Music in our Mother Tongue,’ Mikk Sarv elaborates on the runic song’s significance and special features:

When we think of music made in Estonia, the first words to come to mind are Eesti regilaul, as it would be called in the literary language.

[...] In some strange way these tunes are preserved in the hearts of people, and if they dare to ask nature's help - trees, stones, the water around them - they can recover these tunes. [...] The feeling or understanding that music, tunes and songs connect us with the Universe is a common concept that Estonians share with their kindred nations [...] Land, roads and paths, and all the creatures of the world long for singing. If we forget to sing about them, they cannot give us

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<sup>15</sup> Marina Frolova-Walker, ‘The Glib, the Bland, and the Corny: An Aesthetic of Socialist Realism,’ (accessed online at [https://www.academia.edu/6624165/The\\_Glib\\_the\\_Bland\\_and\\_the\\_Corny\\_An\\_Aesthetic\\_of\\_Socialist\\_Realism](https://www.academia.edu/6624165/The_Glib_the_Bland_and_the_Corny_An_Aesthetic_of_Socialist_Realism); see resource list for reference to this article as a chapter published in *Music and Dictatorship in Europe and Latin America*, ed. Illiano and Sala, 2010), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Mikk Sarv, ‘Music in Our Mother Tongue,’ *Estonian Culture* 1 (2003), accessed online at [http://www.estinst.ee/publications/estonianculture/I\\_MMIII/sarv.html](http://www.estinst.ee/publications/estonianculture/I_MMIII/sarv.html).

<sup>17</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 57.

<sup>18</sup> Salumets, *Unforced Flourishing*; Daitz, *Ancient Song*; Sarv, ‘Music in Our Mother Tongue.’

their power and support. However, if we sing about them, they transmit to us the powers of the Universe that are a part of them.<sup>19</sup>

Secondly, a historical factor which arguably contributed to the ongoing popularity of singing in nineteenth-century Estonia was the effect of official restrictions on activity by Russian occupying forces:

During the Russification campaign [starting in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century], the central pressure of censorship and surveillance intensified regarding both German [previous occupying power] and Estonian national organisations, and a number of societies and newspapers were closed down. Besides agricultural societies, only temperance, educational, song and firefighting societies were allowed. Thus various song, music and drama societies were the only forms of societal activity officially available to the Estonians.<sup>20</sup>

Finally significant is the phenomenon of Estonia's Song Festival tradition, which began during the nineteenth-century period of 'National Awakening'.<sup>21</sup> Anu Kolar identifies the first Song Festival in 1869, and major subsequent anniversaries, as vital *lieux de mémoire* ('sites of memory') in the historical blueprints of Estonian cultural identity.<sup>22</sup>

Thanks to the Song Festivals, Estonians consider themselves to be the 'singing nation'. [...] the so-called Singing Revolution began with hundreds of thousands of people gathering at the Song Festival Grounds, to make political demands and to 'liberate themselves through singing' from the Soviet domination. [...] it can be considered that the song festival has been the most conspicuous and massive manifestation of cultural and political nationalism in Estonia. [...] [and is] an important part of the narrative template underlying Estonian

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<sup>19</sup> Sarv, 'Music in Our Mother Tongue.'

<sup>20</sup> Veljo Tormis, *Estonian Song Festivals* (Estonian Insitute, 2004), 5.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*; Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 67.

<sup>22</sup> Anu Kolar, 'Estonian Song Celebrations during the Soviet Era: Two Ways of Constructing Nationalism' (paper presented at the conference 'Nationalism in Music in the Totalitarian State (1945-1989),' at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, January 2015).

cultural memory, which the Estonian historian Marek Tamm defines as ‘The Great Battle for Freedom’ (Tamm 2008: 505).<sup>23</sup>

This ‘Singing Revolution’ as a popular movement apparently helped to facilitate a mass unification, and is believed by many to have been instrumental in bringing about the collapse of the Soviet Union.

By far the largest demonstration came on 23 August 1989, the fiftieth anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact<sup>24</sup>, when Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians joined in a human chain stretching 430 miles from Tallinn to Vilnius.<sup>25</sup>

It is appropriate, then, given the value attached to song in Estonia, that Tormis’s works list is overwhelmingly dominated by unaccompanied choral pieces, many of which are arrangements of, or inspired by, Finno-Ugric folk songs.

### **Modern shaman or bland inventor?**

Tormis’s activities have led to descriptions of the composer as a ‘*regilaul* man.’<sup>26</sup> His work in preserving and re-presenting endangered elements of Estonian culture, alongside, presumably, the attractive accessibility of his music, resulted in an almost cult-like following. This is amply illustrated by the following recollection from Mare Põldmäe, creator of the Estonian Music Information Center at the Composers’ Union: ‘there was such love for this man, such reverence for what he has done culturally for our people, that he could have led us anywhere – even started a revolt against the authorities – and we would have followed him.’<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, the same accessibility, immediacy and simplicity which have helped to make Tormis’s work both generally acceptable to censors and hugely popular with many listeners, simultaneously render it uninteresting to some

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Non-aggression agreement between USSR and Estonia which paved the way for Soviet annexation of the latter (Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 26).

<sup>25</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 36-7.

<sup>26</sup> Daitz, 250.

<sup>27</sup> Daitz, 40.

audiences – and some critics, as in the following extract from a 2003 concert review for *The Guardian*:

[...] there was a naturalistic delicacy in the BBC Singers' world premiere of Edward Cowie's ['picturesque and effective'] Lyre Bird Motet [...]. However, this slight piece was the highlight of a programme [...] that revealed a dispiriting poverty of musical imagination. The bland invention of music by Estonian Veljo Tormis [...] was set against monochrome works by Ysaye M Barnwell and [Bob] Chilcott [...].<sup>28</sup>

A response to this rather offhand criticism necessitates the proper introduction of Jaan Kaplinski. A contemporary of Tormis, Kaplinski is an Estonian poet, linguist, and thinker whose ideas will be referred to repeatedly throughout this study. Further explanation of this figure's significance will follow shortly; most significant at present are his thoughts on the quality of 'blandness' so disparaged by Service. Kaplinski explicitly identifies this very same quality in *regilaul*: 'to capture the essence of its unique appeal for Kaplinski [...] means to recognize and welcome the regi song's astonishing inartistic modality, a remarkable "blandness" [...].'<sup>29</sup> It is nearly impossible in English-language writing fully to divorce the word from its negative connotations – but, for this poet, 'bland' does not have to mean 'boring.' Perhaps it could even be said that, for Kaplinski, 'boring' does not have to mean 'bad.' In fact, this 'inartistic modality' represented a vital way of living and understanding life which he feared would be lost from Estonian culture altogether as a result of the death of *regilaul* as an oral tradition. This 'alternate mode of perceiving the world and expressing themselves,' which 'now lay hidden at the heart of the ancient songs,' comprised 'a sense of human fulfillment that thrives on the ordinary and embraces the unrehearsed and spontaneously unfolding.'<sup>30</sup> The timelessness and artlessness perceived in the *regilaul* is illustrated in the following claim, made by folksong scholar Jakob Hurt in 1902 – which is certainly poetic (if

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<sup>28</sup> Tom Service, concert review for *Guardian*, 2003 (accessed online at <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2003/oct/06/classicalmusicandopera2>).

<sup>29</sup> Salumets, *Unforced Flourishing*, 158.

<sup>30</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 159-161.

slightly problematic in its evocation of the spectre of ‘primitivism’): that the runic song is like ‘tendrils of a primeval forest which refuse to be transformed into artful gardens of modern culture.’<sup>31</sup> Additionally, for Kaplinski, this bland monotony was a crucial factor in connecting ancient song with ritual and magical power (another recurring theme in descriptions of Tormis’s music):

[An] important [aspect] of folk song [is] absolute dispassion in performance – the independence of the manner of singing from the material being sung. By allowing the content to speak for itself, our ancestors sang with equal lack of emotion about trying out a swing, serfdom, or wife slaying. For those of us who consider ‘expressiveness,’ the conventional expression of emotions, to be an integral aspect of singing and of recitation [...] such an approach seems odd. However we must remember that there is a clear connection between ancient folk song and witchcraft, shamanism, and casting a spell [...] All incantation is monotonous and the relationship of our old songs to incantation, to witchcraft’s power of suggestion, becomes more clear precisely because of this initially surprising, dispassionate monotony, which can be associated with many linguistic and poetic characteristics of folk songs.<sup>32</sup>

Another relevant issue for the consideration of any perceived ‘blandness’ (and accessibility, simplicity, etc.) in Tormis’s music concerns the legacies of Russian romantic nationalism and the Soviet model of socialist realism. Marina Frolova-Walker’s article on her understanding of the latter ‘genre’ in music is titled ‘The Glib, the Bland, and the Corny.’<sup>33</sup> For now it should be noted that Frolova-Walker is one of very few major modern musicologists writing in English to claim that musical socialist realism constitutes a distinct and recognizable style.<sup>34</sup> However, there will be

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<sup>31</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 157.

<sup>32</sup> Kaplinski, quoted in Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 60-61.

<sup>33</sup> Frolova Walker, ‘The Glib’

<sup>34</sup> Pauline Fairclough, “‘Don’t Sing it On a Feast Day’: The Reception and Performance of Western Sacred Music in Soviet Russia, 1917-1953, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 65/1 (2012): 84 (footnote).

discussion later on of various elements of Tormis's music which are in keeping with aspects of the compositional ideals she has identified.

### **Regilaul, Jaan Kaplinski, and the 'Finno-Ugric mode of seeing'**

Born in Tartu in 1941, Jaan Kaplinski is a complex and controversial individual who cannot be overlooked in any broad contextual study on Veljo Tormis. There are several important reasons for his inclusion here, the first of which is his enormous significance in Estonian cultural history. 'School children recite his poems. University students choose him as a subject for their essays and theses. Short-listed for the Nobel Prize in literature, the recipient of many [...] stellar distinctions, for Estonians he is a living classic.'<sup>35</sup> Moreover, there is evidence of strong similarities in descriptions and characterizations of the poet and of Tormis. Use of the term 'shaman' and evocation of the 'magical' or 'mystical' to describe both men is common. 'Ever since the 60s, [Kaplinski] has variously been called a meditative intellectual, a mystic, a pagan, a preacher, a prophet, a shaman [...].'<sup>36</sup> These popular descriptions echo similar sentiments expressed by and about Veljo Tormis. The term 'magical minimalism' crops up frequently in the biographical extracts available on websites such as the Estonian Music Information Centre,<sup>37</sup> Daitz and Lippus paint his 1972 work 'Raua needmine' ('Curse Upon Iron') as 'A Modern Shaman's Call,'<sup>38</sup> and Tormis himself expressed similar feelings in an interview with the Estonian producer and 'writer on music,' Madis Kolk. When asked to describe the painstaking time-testing methods he deploys to ascertain how many repetitions of particular fragments he should use in a composition, Tormis was met with a leading question:

MK: Techniques which a shaman must also master. Could you manage  
in that profession?

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<sup>35</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing* (preface), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 17.

<sup>37</sup> 'Veljo Tormis,' Estonian Music Information Centre website, <http://www.emic.ee/veljo-tormis> accessed 04/10/15.

<sup>38</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 153.

VT: Vigala Sass\* says that every third Estonian possesses those powers. He was of the opinion that I do, as well.<sup>39</sup>

Also significant is that Kaplinski and Tormis knew each other, and engaged directly with one another's ideas. They collaborated on a number of occasions, and Tormis has written various settings of Kaplinski's poetry. Mimi Daitz's book on Tormis's life and work interpolates Kaplinski's 1969 article 'Heritage and Heirs' – which Tormis apparently read as an implicit challenge of his own work, as it represented an overt criticism of the practice of arranging folk music material – followed by Tormis's 1972 response, 'Folk Song and Us.'<sup>40</sup> Kaplinski was preoccupied with the idea of an authentic, autochthonous, Finno-Ugric 'mode of seeing,' which he prized in the face of historical occupations, Soviet control and russification, and (post-independence) impending cultural obliteration from the West.<sup>41</sup> The group of concepts which he sees as aligned with this mode include: artlessness; the value of minimal intervention and 'unforced flourishing'; 'blandness'; a lack of concern for strict differentiation or exactitude; ritualistic, monotonous repetition, as opposed to innovation and progress; and respect for the balance of nature.<sup>42</sup> These are ideas which can also quite easily be read into Tormis's compositional approach and the aesthetic experience of his music. Finally, the poet saw this mode of seeing as inherent in the Estonian *regilaul*, and was arguably as much a champion and tireless promoter and defender of the runic song as Tormis.<sup>43</sup>

Before returning to the composer, there must also be a brief disclaimer about the incorporation of Kaplinski's philosophies here. At times he has seemingly positioned himself as a spokesperson for and protector of authentic Estonian-ness and the Finno-Ugric mode of seeing. Obviously, this does not mean that his statements should always be taken at face value, or as the basis for promoting romantic or even damagingly essentialist generalizations about said perceived qualities of 'being-Estonian.' (The same may be said of some of the comments from

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<sup>39</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 249 (Daitz's footnote explains that Sass was a contemporary Estonian shaman).

<sup>40</sup> (Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 59-77.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Salumets, 'Conflicted Consciousness' in *Baltic Postcolonialism* (ed. Kelertas), 435.

<sup>42</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 161-171, and 'Conflicted Consciousness'

<sup>43</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 60-62; Salumets, *Flourishing*, 161-171.



Mikk Sarv.) Nevertheless, these kinds of ideas can still usefully be drawn on here as relevant strands of thought in and about Estonian culture that may enrich an understanding of Tormis's own output and world-view.

For Tormis in his mature period, composition is intimately connected to a deep regard for his country and the *regilaul* – the autochthonous musical tradition which he has dedicated much of his life to studying and reinterpreting, and which he has suggested could function as a 'ritual of cultural identity.'<sup>44</sup> In fact, it wasn't until the 1960s that his relationship with *regilaul* began to evolve beyond the practice of appropriating a folk melody to use as thematic material for development. Estonian musicologist Urve Lippus describes this turning-point in the composer's approach:

In 1958 he led a student expedition to a small Estonian island of Kihnu. The group happened to attend a real traditional wedding with old folk songs and dances. The enchanting effect of this event was so strong that it changed Tormis' relationship to the use of folk material. [...] Some years later Tormis finished his first great cycle [...] (Estonian Calendar Songs, 1967) [...] in which the primeval enchanting power of ancient folk tunes used as the material for original choral composition was fully exposed. That was the starting point for [the] 'real' Tormis style as we know it now [...]<sup>45</sup>

Although this personal experience was a pivotal moment for Tormis, the literary output of ethnomusicologist Herbert Tampere was still an important resource (though not an unassailable authority): 'I had studied Herbert Tampere's books, knew them almost by heart; I began to perceive the structure of *regilaul*, to argue with [...] Tampere.'<sup>46</sup> Figure 3 shows an example of a *regilaul* melody from Tampere's 1960 anthology *Eesti Rahvalaule Viisidega*. This particular melody, 'Miks Jaani oodatakse' ('Why St John is awaited'), forms the basis of the fourth movement from Tormis's cycle *Jaanilaulud (St John's Day Songs)*.

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<sup>44</sup> Veljo Tormis, 'Some Problems with that *regilaul*' (notes from presentation at the Viljandi Culture Academy, 2007, accessed online).

<sup>45</sup> Urve Lippus, biography for 'Veljo Tormis Data Bank' website.

<sup>46</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 251.

## 42. MIKS JAANI OODATAKSE?

Karksi.

MM ♩ = 170

do#'

1-5. Mis-tes jaa-ni oo-de-tes-se, jaa-ni-ka,

Jaa-nil kah-ja kan-ne-tes-se, jaa-ni-ka?

Et o nii är-jä ä-dät-se, jaa-ni-ka,

pii-mä-leh-mä pin-de-jen-nä, jaa-ni-ka-  
sest et jaa-ni oo-de-tes-se, jaa-ni-ka.

Figure 1.3 'Why St John is awaited'<sup>47</sup>

In his 2007 lecture on *regilaul* Tormis explores possible origins of the word itself. *Laul* in Estonian means 'song', while *regi* means 'sleigh'.<sup>48</sup> Sarv settles for this definition, using it as the basis for the charming metaphorical image of two sleigh tracks stretching away to the horizon – always side by side but never meeting – to illustrate the timelessness of runic song.<sup>49</sup> Idyllic though this picture may be, it is something of a stretch to claim (without other supporting evidence) that it is directly connected to the name and origin of *regilaul*. Another avenue that Tormis considers is a Hungarian linguistic root – in this language *regi* means 'old'; 'And this explanation would suit us very well indeed, wouldn't it! Because, after all, the *regilaul* is old, possibly as old as the hills.' He goes on to say that Estonians have

taken great pride in assuming that the *regilaul* must be two or three thousand years old. Because ... it's definitely paganist and pre-Christian, no doubt about it. The paganist lifestyle, however, continued to exist in our country, parallel to the imported

<sup>47</sup> From Herbert Tampere, *Eesti Rahvalaule Viisidega* vol. II, (Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 1960), 162.

<sup>48</sup> Tormis, 'Some Problems.'

<sup>49</sup> Sarv, 'Mother Tongue.'

Christianity, long past ancient times. And it is still alive and kicking in our day and age in the *regilaul*!<sup>50</sup>

Tormis says that ‘singing does not follow the rhythmic rules of spoken language (speaking is one thing, singing something else).’ Nonetheless, one of the features of Estonian runic song is that its metric structure and prosody is connected to the natural patterns of the language. Tormis implies that, in *regilaul*, notes are subordinate to phonetic sounds and words.<sup>51</sup> The text of *regilaul* verses is of paramount importance, despite Sarv’s assertion that ‘the power of *regilaul* is present only when there is a tune.’<sup>52</sup> Kaplinski explores further ways in which *regilaul* text is both peculiarly Estonian, and endangered by the dual threats of Westernization and a perceived sense of internalized cultural inferiority on the part of Estonians. Salumets identifies ‘end-rhyming’ poetry as just one of the things which Estonians found lacking in their culture when compared with the more ‘sophisticated’ Baltic Germans who had dominated their country for so many years.<sup>53</sup>

Other aspects of more ‘developed’ cultures which late nineteenth-century Estonians supposedly coveted in their ‘masochistic desire to belong to Europe’ included ‘stone buildings, ... abstract words, a Protestant ethic, a national epic, song festivals, fraternities, operas, the devil, a standard literary language, a single God...’<sup>54</sup> Kaplinski implies that this cultural ‘inferiority complex’ – with regards to poetry and song – could be perpetuated in a kind of vicious cycle when Estonians would attempt to appropriate German models, only to find that they were technically inappropriate for the Estonian language and produced clumsy or uninspiring results. ‘The irony is, according to Kaplinski, that the German traditional models subsequently borrowed [e.g. the *Volkslied*, with end-rhymes] [...] did not suit the Estonian language [...] Poetry of inferior quality is the potential result of this mismatch.’<sup>55</sup> Despite these obstacles, the *regilaul* has not vanished from national awareness. It is still valued today as ‘an expression and co-determinant of the Estonian and broader Finno-Ugric

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<sup>50</sup> Tormis, ‘Problems.’

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Sarv, ‘Mother Tongue.’

<sup>53</sup> Salumets, ‘Consciousness,’ 437.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, 435.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, 437.

cultural context.’<sup>56</sup>

Runic song harbours another old linguistic idiosyncrasy, or ‘nearly forgotten [asset] of a Finno-Ugric mode of seeing’, which translates poorly into a Western context, and which Kaplinski prizes in the face of impending cultural obliteration from the West. This is a method of representation which Thomas Salumets claims is still within reach through the *regilaul*, and which is known as parallelism. An alternative to the myriad abstract words available to Western counterparts, parallelism in Estonian runic verse helped to convey broad abstract meaning by linking verses through ‘semantic or “thought” rhyme: words belonging to the same semantic field – such as gold, silver, tin, or other words usually thought of as “going together” – appear in subsequent verse[s].’ In this instance a collection of systematically distributed nouns depicting *concrete* materials (such as gold) which would make a person rich who owned them in abundance, are used to signify the *abstract* idea of wealth.<sup>57</sup>

A linguistic feature of *regilaul* texts which appears in Tormis’s own writing is the use of word-pairs: the hyphenation of two semantically related words to denote something broader or more abstract. Salumets cites such examples as ‘sisters-brothers’ (siblings), ‘bogs-marshes’ (wetlands) and ‘livers-lungs’ (internal organs).<sup>58</sup> Incidentally, *Ancient Song Recovered* registers Tormis’s use of word-pairs in the article ‘Folk Song and Us’. Daitz frames the usage rather as part of a strange idiolect on the part of the composer.<sup>59</sup> In fact these word-pairs, though outmoded, are not a peculiar invention of Tormis’s; they are an archaism of the Estonian language. As was mentioned earlier, one of the ways in which nineteenth-century Estonians found their culture to be ‘inferior’ pertained to the lack of abstract words in their language. Kaplinski’s view was that such ‘idiosyncrasies’ that were particular to Estonian culture (rather than Russian or German) were vital parts of a ‘Finno-Ugric mode of seeing’ and should be cherished.<sup>60</sup> Word-pairs would certainly be included in this,

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<sup>56</sup> Salumets, ‘Consciousness,’ 437.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 169.

<sup>59</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 63 (footnote ‘b’).

<sup>60</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 168-171.

and Tormis's use of the same may represent another intersection between the two artists' ideals.

Tormis explains that the authentic *regilaul* 'is' (or was) an oral tradition, but adds that this tradition began to die out across the country around the nineteenth century. This progressive decay sparked a huge movement to collect and store the literary component of the *regilaul*.<sup>61</sup> Some fifty years on, a similar effort was underway to record *regilaul* melodies.<sup>62</sup> A later but significant body of work containing *regilaul* tunes is Herbert Tampere's aforementioned 1963 anthology, from which many of Tormis's melodies for arrangement are taken.<sup>63</sup> The literation and subsequent antiquation, or formalization, of this tradition is an interesting and potentially problematic issue in itself. Sarv insists that 'you cannot learn *regilaul* tunes from a songsheet', and there is a belief, related to ancient Estonian culture, that 'singing means the free flow of nature through the human spirit.'<sup>64</sup> Some Estonian folk singers hold that *regilaul* tunes come directly from trees, stones, and water.<sup>65</sup> Tormis acknowledges various aspects of this distinction between the 'free-flow of nature' in 'true' *regilaul*, and the collection and reinterpretation of recorded examples of the same. He stresses that his work is categorically not folk music; 'it is classical choral music.'<sup>66</sup> The final four points of his list of suggestions (see below) show that he is engaged with the problems and obstacles of 're-inventing' the *regilaul* from collections of seemingly lifeless text sources.

The minute the lyrics of a *regilaul* are written down ... it is no longer oral tradition. It became literature, and as such is stored in the right place – at the Estonian Literary Museum ... By the present day there has been enough collecting and research work done on tunes as well. Now, what are we going to do with all the material?<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Tormis, 'Problems.'

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 176.

<sup>64</sup> Sarv, 'Mother Tongue.'

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Veljo Tormis, notes to *St. John's Day Songs* score (Fennica Gehrman edition, 1996)

<sup>67</sup> Tormis, 'Problems.'

After retiring from composition in 2000, aged 70, Tormis has continued to study, promote, and teach others about Estonian runic song. In a lecture from 2007, he explains what *he* thinks the *regilaul* is – and, crucially, how he thinks it should be handled artistically in order to preserve its vital qualities as a symbol of national identity (or even more holistically, of humanity and ‘supra-individual culture’).<sup>68</sup> Below is his list of fourteen suggestions, or points of departure for further discussion, on the nature, place, and future of Estonian runic song.

- 1) The *regilaul* is an **oral tradition**
- 2) The **format of the *regilaul*** (metre, alliteration, parallelisms, etc.) **is the medium by which the tradition is passed on**, the mnemonic and technical framework for it.
- 3) **The core principle of oral tradition is repetition (reinforcement of information, not development or improvisation).**
- 4) The structure of the *regilaul* consists of an eight-syllable isochronal melody-line, verse repetition, lead singer and a choir.
- 5) It’s not the notes that are sung but phonetic sounds and words.
- 6) Singing does not follow the rhythmic rules of spoken language (speaking is one thing, singing something else).
- 7) The **main thing in stylistic terms is pronouncing the *regilaul* language within the syllables, and not the expressiveness or timbre.**
- 8) The *regilaul* is a **continuous activity, an unbroken flow, a non-stop stream of singing where there is no grammatical phrasing.**
- 9) The *regilaul* is a **ritual song (and not a means of communication).**
- 10) The *regilaul* is **supra-individual culture**, the cultural atmosphere that stretches out above us like the sky. One should not aim for setting a model based on the *regilaul* as performed by a particular singer, and linking it with the so-called ‘great’ singers.
- 11) The *regilaul* has **already undergone its natural historical**

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<sup>68</sup> Tormis, ‘Problems.’

**development once** and reached the point of end-rhyming songs. It has **played its role to the full. We do not need to start developing it all over again. What would be the point – to get somewhere again?**

12) That's why we should **stop imagining that we are carrying on the *regilaul* tradition.**

13) We should therefore **give the *regilaul* new content and meaning as a ritual of cultural identity and independence.**

14) I invite you **not to break up the things that have been preserved so well. We shouldn't substitute our indigenous antique with cheap imitations or industrial mass production.**<sup>69</sup>

### Approaching Tormis studies

The most substantial English-language studies available at the time of writing are Mimi Daitz's *Ancient Song Recovered: The Life and Music of Veljo Tormis*; various studies and translated contributions by prominent Estonian musicologist Urve Lippus (some of which are incorporated in Daitz's work); a doctoral thesis by Mark Lawrence, titled 'Veljo Tormis, Estonian Composer';<sup>70</sup> and *Towards a Monographical Analysis of some Folk-Song Arrangements*, a 1976 collaborative analytical study by a group of ESSR music scholars, Lippus among them.<sup>71</sup> The types of approach taken in most of these works can be roughly categorized as either biographical-contextual or classificatory-analytical, or a combination thereof. Urve Lippus sheds light on some of the directions taken in some Baltic musicological research – for example, the tendency to focus on positivistic approaches toward folk material:

In the 1970s, the authority of science was so high that statistics and formalizing could find high academic recognition as progressive research methods, at least in music analysis and in describing folk music repertoires. [...] Some attempts were made to develop formal

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<sup>69</sup> Tormis, 'Problems,' emphasis mine.

<sup>70</sup> Mark Lawrence (2013) 'Veljo Tormis, Estonian composer.' (Unpublished Doctoral thesis, City University London).

<sup>71</sup> Lippus *et al*, *Towards a Monographical Analysis of Some Folk Song Arrangements*, (Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR, Department of Social Sciences, Preprint KKI-6, 1976).

methods for analyzing art music, but for the most part such endeavours used folk melodies as their objects of investigation. This choice of material also reflected an awareness of possible attacks. To measure and quantify aspects of art music could be labelled formalism. But to explore quantitative methods, formal modelling, means of automatic transcription and such problems for large folk music collections was a very positivist and practical science.<sup>72</sup>

In another article Lippus notes that Baltic music history writing in this period was dominated by a focus on nationalism and 'national qualities' in music. She subsequently qualifies this, adding:

Distancing from the political bias and the axis 'bourgeois formalist'– 'soviet realist,' similar ideas about the relatedness of national spirit, folk music, and art music were current in the Baltic musical discourse of the 1920s-1930s, although in a completely different political context. Even the source was largely the same – many Baltic musicians had been the students of Rimski-Korsakov at St. Petersburg conservatory. Thus, in Soviet time, speaking about national style, national individuality, or relations between art and folk music could be politically ambiguous or obtain double meaning.<sup>73</sup>

The elusive fingerprints of musical 'national style' have proved themselves virtually impossible to pin down in any convincing way. Moreover, taking note of Lippus's observations above, there is clearly an abundance of extant literature on these kinds of topics.<sup>74</sup> As a result, this study will not engage too deeply with banal and/or unanswerable questions such as *how* this music is 'nationalist'; whether or not it *is* nationalist; or what that means, or what value it could have amidst the simultaneous repressions, 'musical nation-building' and encouragement of folkloric

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<sup>72</sup> Urve Lippus, 'Linguistics and Musicology in the Study of Estonian Folk Melodies,' accessed online.

<sup>73</sup> Lippus, 'Baltic Music History Writing,' 59.

<sup>74</sup> See Marina Frolova-Walker 1997 and 1998 for an examination and deconstruction of other Russian and Soviet attempts at creating 'authentic' national styles.



themes, which at times characterized the artistic climate in the USSR.<sup>75</sup> Cutting to the chase, Lippus evokes Dahlhaus:

‘If a piece of music is felt to be characteristically national, that is an inseparable feature of the work, not something extraneous.’ Thus, if a composer and his audience feel some music to be national, it becomes an aesthetic fact, although it may be difficult to establish national elements in the structure of music.<sup>76</sup>

She has also said that to describe Tormis simply as a ‘nationalist’ composer is to detract from the value of his life’s work.<sup>77</sup> Rather than getting drawn into these time-worn debates, then, the extent to which this study will consider ‘national identity’ in Tormis’s music will mostly be confined to the approach of viewing it through the lens of Kaplinski’s ideas. Among the poet’s philosophies are strongly-held convictions about idealized Finno-Ugric ways of being – but these are a set of personal, subjective, literary-poetic *thoughts* from and about a culture, and are categorically not a shopping list of qualities from which to construct a reductive picture of an exotic ‘Estonian-ness.’ Alongside this focused angle on Kaplinski’s ‘Finno-Ugric mode,’ there will latterly be some consideration of ways in which several of the same musical features might also align with aspects of (‘magical’) minimalism,<sup>78</sup> (‘Eastern’) postmodernism,<sup>79</sup> Russian romantic nationalism, and socialist realism. Nattiez wrote that ‘analysis of the neutral level is ‘dirty’ because the musicologist is never neutral vis-à-vis the object being analyzed.’<sup>80</sup> In a rather more general sense, the latter half of this statement is a perennial problem, and of course this is equally if not more true for broader ‘contextual’ associations –

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<sup>75</sup> Daitz; Lippus; Frolova Walker ‘National in Form, Socialist in Content,’ *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 51/2, 1998; and ‘The Glib, the Bland and the Corny.’

<sup>76</sup> Lippus, ‘Baltic Music History.’

<sup>77</sup> Lippus, Urve ‘The Conflict Between “Official” and Ethnographic (Authentic) Folk Music Ensembles in the Soviet Union and Veljo Tormis’s Folklore-Based Compositions in the 1970s’ (paper presented at conference ‘Nationalism in Music in the Totalitarian State,’ Budapest 2015).

<sup>78</sup> ‘Veljo Tormis’ page on Estonian Music Information Centre website (<http://www.emic.ee/veljo-tormis>).

<sup>79</sup> Gregor Pompe, ‘Baltic-Balkan Postmodern Connections: The Music of Bronius Kutavičius and Veljo Tormis in comparison with the Music of Slovene Composer Lojze Lebič,’ *Lietuvos muzikologija* t. 14 (2013): 48.

<sup>80</sup> William Drabkin, Review of Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Towards a Semiology of Music* (transl. Carolyn Abbate, 1991), *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 117/2 (1992): 316.

particularly concerning the fragmented and often bizarre popular image of Soviet artistic life. As Lippus says, 'it takes some cultural experience to read the texts of that time.'<sup>81</sup> Surely the best policy is to attempt to remain aware of the fact that:

our analytical investigations are of necessity restricted, not only by the limitations of our human experience but also by our having to make choices - at any given pass through a musical work - about what we regard as relevant to the insights we have obtained and wish to convey.<sup>82</sup>

Accordingly, we must be prepared to accommodate multiple possibilities. If the end result is a handful of conflicting and intersecting hypotheses, this at least would be true to life (by comparison with the fruits of a quest to prove some point through readings which can never be emancipated from the writer's subjectivity, regardless of their alleged level of systematism.) This study is an attempt to look in different ways at some important pieces by Tormis, and to explore ways in which findings might connect his output to the work of other Estonian artists and thinkers, as well as to the broad picture of the socio-cultural context – the notoriously nebulous and frequently over-simplified 'ideological hall of mirrors'<sup>83</sup> – which is available through secondary English-language sources. The dangers of undertaking a wide-ranging study on art with so complex a political history as that of the music of the USSR are numerous; skating over the uneven surface of such issues in order to paint a bigger or more far-reaching picture might easily result in pitfalls. For instance, around the turn of the twenty-first century it was accepted by many that:

Writing about Shostakovich has become increasingly like a juggling act. To keep all the skittles in the air—the life (personal and professional), the background (political and cultural), and the music (in its historical and aesthetic, analytical and critical aspects)—is possible, if at all, only at the cost of frantic exertion. And given that some of these individual topics are already so slippery, failure is

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<sup>81</sup> Lippus, 'Baltic Music History,' 59.

<sup>82</sup> Drabkin, 'Review: *Music and Discourse: Towards a Semiology of Music*, Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Carolyn Abbate,' 315.

<sup>83</sup> Marina Frolova Walker, 'National in Form, Socialist in Content,' 333.

virtually guaranteed. Yet to confine the act to only a couple of skittles seems like an easy way out and no fun whatsoever for the audience. Michael Mishra [in *A Shostakovich Companion*] has gone for the high-risk option.<sup>84</sup>

However, in contrast with the plethora of ill-founded or ‘outlandish’ fancies that dogged Shostakovich scholarship in the wake of the ‘Shostakovich wars,’<sup>85</sup> there does appear to be more of a ‘high-risk’-shaped lacuna in English-language studies on Veljo Tormis.<sup>86</sup> The major Tormis studies which are currently available have not executed a strongly ‘critical’ approach in the sense I will attempt to explain below. The political aspect of the artistic climate, as has been suggested, was not merely a straightforward matter of top-down control or a simple dualistic opposition between the restrictive occupying forces and the repressed Estonians. Conversely, Tormis’s own comment that ‘the difficulty [for performers] lies in [his music’s] simplicity’<sup>87</sup> could equally apply to anyone wanting to ‘analyse’ it. This simplicity – along with a heavy reliance on borrowed folk material and a tendency towards both extended repetition and brevity – mean that a strict, bar-by-bar, classificatory approach is unlikely to yield fascinating, diverse fruits. Instead, the focus will be directed more towards how the music is perceived. The ‘high-risk’ element here, then, involves negotiating both the complexity of the political situation and the simplicity of the music itself – and hopefully avoiding getting stuck in the quicksand of either – in order to move towards the real goal of exploring alternative perspectives. One aim of this thesis is to expand the frame of reference in the (English-language) conversation around Tormis’s music: to engage a little more with critical

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<sup>84</sup> David Fanning, ‘Review of *A Shostakovich Companion*’ (2008, ed. Michael Mishra), *Notes*, 66/3 (2010): 563.

<sup>85</sup> Marina Frolova Walker, review of *The Cambridge Companion to Shostakovich* (2008, ed. Pauline Fairclough and David Fanning), *Slavic Review*, 69/2 (2010): 493.

<sup>86</sup> ‘High-risk’ is used here in the sense that I think is implied in the extract on Mishra. Daitz’s book certainly was ‘high-risk’ in the sense that it was a huge undertaking, concerned with a still-living composer who had experienced serious health problems within the two decades preceding its publication; it was executed without a team of research assistants, without Estonian-language fluency on the author’s part, and without the help of a comparable extant study; and it evinces a truly impressive amount of individual research into Tormis’s life and Estonian culture. It is now an invaluable resource and a first port-of-call for a Western reader interested in Veljo Tormis.

<sup>87</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 76.

musicological approaches; with anthropology and philosophy; and with literary theory and its borrowings from feminist theory and psychoanalysis. The other is to incorporate a slightly different way of writing 'technically' about this music. Analytical and 'critical' observations are distributed across four chapters dealing with essentially separable but interrelated themes: 'Repetition and ritual'; 'Time and telos'; 'Balance and Biophilia'; and 'Borders and binaries'.

## Chapter 2: Repetition and Ritual

The repetitiveness of Tormis's folk song arrangements is most obviously a result of the way in which he engages with his source material, eschewing a thematic 'developmental' approach as unfaithful to the nature and origins of the folk songs. Ritual, folk song, and repetition as concepts occupy complex intersecting webs – and yet the difficulty in isolating distinct, useful technical observations should not nullify the value of an attempt. Rather, the ease with which tautologies, bald statements of platitudes seemingly too obvious to qualify, and a kind of misty-eyed mysticism creep into this kind of study should motivate us to work towards a more comprehensive understanding of *how* this music works its 'magic' on some listeners – and why it might leave others cold.

Of course, 'ritualistic,' when understood as pertaining to a not-explicitly-functional or non-scientific human activity, actually applies to masses and masses of music which might not readily lend itself to the term as defined by popular cultural imagination. Art itself can share qualities with ritual, though the differences between these phenomena are equally significant; again and again we will return to binary delineations such as this, which are better understood perhaps not even as merely a spectrum, but as a nebulous mass of overlapping possibilities. Some strands of explicitly religious or 'spiritual,' orthodox, or liturgical music are often called 'ritualistic'. Works by Arvo Pärt have acquired this epithet<sup>88</sup>, and yet – unsurprisingly – do not tend to attract part-time cognate pejoratives such as 'primeval,' 'primitive' and 'orgiastic'. But that is of course only a fragment of a much larger conversation. Terms like 'shamanistic' and '[*regilaul* as a] ritual of cultural identity' have been used by and about Tormis, often without any attempt at technical qualification. It could be argued that an intrinsic human understanding of the concept of ritualism renders the following discussion superfluous. Lisa Schirch, in her study on the use of ritual in

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<sup>88</sup> David Dies 'Spiritual Minimalism' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music*, ed. Keith Potter, Kyle Gann, and Pwyll AP Siôn (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2013), 316-7.

peace-building, questions whether she is ‘legitimizing the obvious.’<sup>89</sup> To my mind, though, moving towards a coherent articulation of issues that are so deeply ingrained in our experience of existence is a valuable endeavour – not least because it allows for more intelligible connections to be drawn between such significant and ineffable entities as ritual and music.

A study of repetition in folk music and a study of repetition in Western classical or ‘art’ music are different kettles of fish. A study of repetition in a ‘minimalistic’ Balto-Finnic art music which draws so heavily on folk material, then, should be approached thoughtfully. Repetition readily lends itself to oral traditions<sup>90</sup> like the original *regilaul*. Still, as Tormis says, his output ‘can by no means be labeled as folk [...] music’; ‘it is classical choral music.’<sup>91</sup> Then again (to refer to one of the themes that will resurface repeatedly throughout this study), in a way, this music is standing on or even breaking down some preconceived borderlines and boundaries – maybe not quite between ‘folk music’ and ‘art music,’ but perhaps between composition and arrangement. This latter binary deconstruction both calls to mind Tormis’s famous claim that ‘it is not I that makes use of folk music; it is folk music that makes use of me,’ apparently imagining himself more as a facilitator than composer, creator, or ‘arranger,’<sup>92</sup> and resonates with the plural uses for the Estonian verb ‘loomaa,’ which means both ‘to come’ and ‘to bring about.’<sup>93</sup>

Tormis’s works, particularly his folk song arrangements, are often extremely repetitive. But this feature can mean very different things depending on background and context. John Rahn links certain repetitions to deceit and death, outlining types of repetition to include ‘slavery,’ and pausing along the way to evoke dramatic concepts such as ‘Sartre’s hell.’<sup>94</sup> This is all very salient and interesting, especially in terms of goal-oriented or ‘traditionally’ developmental, progressive classical music – but it doesn’t immediately seem like an appropriate collection of ideas with which to approach the material we have here. Daitz concedes that she wouldn’t recommend

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<sup>89</sup> Lisa Schirch, *Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding*, (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2005), 13.

<sup>90</sup> Richard Middleton, ‘“Play it Again Sam”: Some Notes on the Productivity of Repetition in Popular Music,’ *Popular Music* vol. 3 ‘Producers and Markets,’ (1983): 240.

<sup>91</sup> Tormis, *St John’s Day Songs* score.

<sup>92</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 56; 63.

<sup>93</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 25-6.

<sup>94</sup> John Rahn, ‘Repetition,’ *Contemporary Music Review* 7/2 (1993; published online 2009): 50.

ploughing through an entire CD of Tormis arrangements in one sitting to anyone who is not 'very familiar' with this type of music.<sup>95</sup> Admittedly, for some listeners a concert programme full of Veljo Tormis *might* be akin to 'Sartre's hell.' There is something so different about the way repetition is conceptualized in this music that it deserves a type of listening with an alternate set of temporal expectations; a type of listening more closely related to the way in which we might approach the work of the American minimalists; and one which may help bring to light some of the most interesting and edifying qualities of this music.

Since the repetition and repetitiveness in Tormis's *regilaul* arrangements (if not elsewhere in his output) is arguably more closely related to popular, folk or even to '*magam*-principle' music than to much classical music (an obvious exception being minimalism), some of the approaches in Richard Middleton's article on 'the productivity of repetition in popular music' may prove to be appropriate for this material. Middleton concedes 'the variety of ways in which repetition can be used is potentially infinite,' but adds '[...] however – [...] strictly on the level of theory – we can distinguish certain basic models.'<sup>96</sup> The first pair of distinct theoretical models he outlines consists of *discursive* repetition and *musematic* repetition. The former describes 'repetition of longer units, at the level of the phrase (defined as a unit roughly equivalent to a verbal clause or short sentence, not too long to be apprehended 'in the present'), the sentence or even the complete section.' The latter (in which the term 'museme' is used as analogous to 'the linguists' "morpheme," a "minimal unit of expression") is 'the repetition of short units' (for instance, riffs in some Afro-American and rock musics).<sup>97</sup> Middleton qualifies this distinction further:

The effects of the two types are usually very different, largely because the units differ widely in the amount of information and the amount of self-contained 'sense' they contain, and in their degree of involvement with other syntactic processes. Moreover, musematic repetition is far more likely to be prolonged and

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<sup>95</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 178.

<sup>96</sup> Richard Middleton, 'Play it Again,' 238.

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*

unvaried, discursive repetition to be mixed in with contrasting units of various types. The former therefore tends towards a one-leveled structural effect, the latter to a hierarchically ordered discourse.<sup>98</sup>

The reason for making reference to this pair of terms should become obvious after listening to Tormis's folk arrangements for any considerable length of time, and they will be revisited later. The second model I will take from Middleton is a spectrum of types or degrees of repetition, or *repetitiveness*, (shown in Figure 2.1) which separates the 'monad,' a (theoretical) perpetually sustained sound-object – absolute repetition – from the 'infinite set,' a (theoretically) never-ending stream of innovation, with no repetition at all.<sup>99</sup> Of course, as Rahn reminds us:

All musical structure derives from repetition. Imagine a series of sounds none of whose perceived qualities repeats - where qualities include relational qualities of any kind and any complexity, such as pitch-interval-from-previous-sound, or in-the-key-of-Bb, or of-hexachordal-area-{1 2 5 6 9 10}. Such a non-repeating series can have no structure, by definition; the series is 'random,' if as chimerical as the unicorn (since human perception always structures, and also because even the mathematical determination of randomness is problematic).<sup>100</sup>

The impossibility of the spectrum's extremities notwithstanding, the points between them may still fruitfully be used to discuss types of repetition. One example which we will revisit later on is 'binary switching': the reduction of 'the non-monadic to simple either or choices (e.g. same/different, A or B).'<sup>101</sup> Digital and analogue selection, then, represent decreasing degrees of repetitiveness (increasing amounts of innovation/variety) when read from left to right. Middleton also touches upon the relationship between repetition and ritual:

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<sup>98</sup> Middleton, 'Play it Again,' 238.

<sup>99</sup> Middleton, 'Play it Again,' 235-7.

<sup>100</sup> Rahn, 'Repetition,' 49.

<sup>101</sup> Middleton, 'Play it Again,' 237.



Minutely detailed, often improvised, variability is certainly often a corollary of digitally organised macro-structures – but not always. Here, function might be important. Kiparski, discussing the use of *formula* in oral poetry and song, places it at one end of a scale (fixed → flexible → free) which he correlates with function (on a scale stretching from ‘ritual’ to ‘entertainment’).<sup>102</sup>

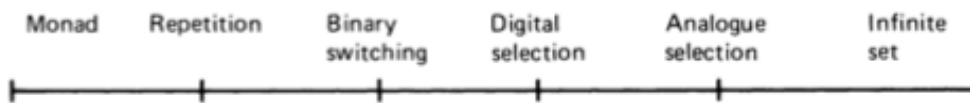


Figure 2.1 - Repetition spectrum (Middleton, 1983: 237)

The central question for this chapter concerns how the temporal paradigms that characterize some of Tormis’s music could be seen as ‘ritualistic’ – and how these temporal effects are created through different approaches to repetition. In order to make relevant observations about the music, we must first try to unpick some salient threads from the dense and often contradictory field of study surrounding ‘ritual.’

## ‘Ritual in form’ or ‘ritual in content’?

*The meaning of ritual is deep indeed.*

*He who tries to enter it with the kind of perception that distinguishes hard and white, same and different, will drown there.*

*The meaning of ritual is great indeed.*

*He who tries to enter it with the uncouth and inane theories of the system-makers will perish there. ...*

Xunzi (third century B.C.E.)<sup>103</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Middleton, ‘Play it Again,’ 239.

<sup>103</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, (Oxford: OUP, 1997), vi.

'Ritual' and 'ritualistic,' (alongside 'magical,' 'shamanistic,' 'primeval,' and similarly evocative terms) have been common descriptors in writings on Tormis's music. They are exciting words to fling about, but pinning them down is another matter. Ritual behaviour is a fundamental, even ubiquitous, component of international traditions and cultures. Indeed, 'to study humanity is to study ritual.'<sup>104</sup> It is both understandable and unfortunate, then, that the sheer diversity – and the breadth and depth of contradiction – that characterize this field have led to complaints that 'there is the widest possible disagreement as to how the word ritual should be understood,' and that 'the term means almost nothing.'<sup>105</sup> Catherine Bell notes that, while the formal study of ritual is a relatively recent development, it soon becomes obvious that there is by no means a universal, or even widespread, agreement on what ritual is or how it should be understood.<sup>106</sup> In fact, 'Bell resists defining ritual at all, and claims scholars and writers have made ritual into whatever they wanted or needed it to be.'<sup>107</sup> Accordingly, rather than dive into such turbulent waters (where, as Xunzi says, we would inevitably drown), I will explore what these kind of ideas can mean for us here, and latterly in relation to music.

Although it is by no means universal, most people have a fairly vivid – if not necessarily a precise – idea of what 'ritual' and 'ritualistic' mean. Among the more commonly recognized functions would be the construction of meaning (encompassing the sacred, 'spiritual,' and secular), and the construction of identity at individual and group levels. However, there is one particular aspect of some once-popular (if now deeply old-fashioned) understandings of the word 'ritualistic' that we should first deal with, shelve, and move on from. This concerns the kind of tropes that can make up the most morbidly fantastical Victorian images of 'primitive,' 'savage' frenzy, ecstatic trance, sacrificial murder, and so on. A vivid evocation of this somewhat fearful attitude towards the 'primitivism' of ritual is offered by Adorno:

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<sup>104</sup> Schirch, *Peacebuilding*, 1.

<sup>105</sup> Schirch, *Peacebuilding*, 15.

<sup>106</sup> Bell, *Ritual*, x.

<sup>107</sup> Schirch, *Peacebuilding*, 16.

Music as the residue of ritual murder is discussed in various of Adorno's critiques of Stravinsky, as well as in the powerful, sinister essay "The Natural History of the Theater," where the component elements of theater and public music events are strikingly assimilated to aspects of violent, archaic ritual. Of the applause for a musician's performance, for example, he writes: 'This act forcibly returns us to the ancient sacrificial rites that have been long forgotten. It is possible that once our ancestors struck their hands together rhythmically as the priests slaughtered the animals who were offered in sacrifice.' And, scarily, 'The radio decisively concludes the demystification of the character of applause. Transmitted over the airwaves, the clapping sound unmistakably [sic] resembles the crackling of the flames that surround the altar prepared to receive the body of the sacrificial victim.'<sup>108</sup>

A marginally preferable alternative term for some of the more allegedly violent – or 'primitive' – aspects of (this idea of) the 'ritualistic' could be 'orgiastic.' Actually the fallacious nature of these kinds of tropes about ritualism lies partly in the focus on and stereotyping of the supposed *content* of some imagined exotic ritual practice – and extrapolating over-generalized definitions and connections from the resultant collection of pejoratives. Focusing on the content, not the form, of rituals, has perhaps at points allowed forward-thinking 'rationalists' to maintain the illusion that ritual is something that 'we,' with our scientific enlightenment and sophisticated technology, no longer do. 'Violent, archaic' rituals whose content included sacrificial murder may share vital *formal* properties with rituals we unthinkingly perform in contemporary life. This does not mean that ritual itself (or, for that matter, applause) is in any way intrinsically violent. The same fallacy of content has, in the past, undoubtedly led to the labeling (or worse, the composition) of art as 'ritualistic' based on content which coincides with this collection of 'primitivist' themes.

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<sup>108</sup> Douglas Collins, 'Ritual Sacrifice and the Political Economy of Music,' *Perspectives of New Music*, 24/1 (1985): 15-16.

Paul Hillier comes closer to a more formal angle on ritualism (here read as encompassing the ‘mystical’ or ‘spiritual’) in his study on Arvo Pärt. Hillier evokes the religious concept of *hesychasm*, which

implies stillness, silence, tranquillity, and also stability, being seated, fixed in concentration. As early as the fourth century it was used to designate the state of inner peace and freedom from bodily or mental passion from which point only one might proceed to actual contemplation.<sup>109</sup>

In Tormis’s, work, as in Pärt’s, the effects under discussion are strongly connected to minimalism. Hillier writes that this genre

itself can already be seen to have deposited a rich legacy, in which the use of non-narrative process structures and a general sense of harmonic stasis are now taken for granted [...] At length, by unfolding the triadic stasis of *tintinnabuli*, Pärt eschewed the agonistic world of dialectic and incident, of narrative and linear time, preferring instead to seek the world of revelation, of circular or mythic time.<sup>110</sup>

This focus on temporal qualities is more in keeping with the approaches that will be taken here. To generalize somewhat: a labelling of ‘hesychasm’ might constitute a *more* formal, and one of ‘orgiast’ a *more* content-based observation. In reality, of course, innumerable rituals which are more religious, ceremonial, or spiritual in nature may involve hesychasm and orgiast in equal measure, or in alternation, or even a combination of the two. One reason for dragging out this clearly problematic distinction between orgiast and hesychasm is that both collections of ideas – based to differing degrees on form or content – have a kind of counterpart in musical tropes, whose identification can lead to the labeling of a piece of music as ‘ritualistic.’ In the case of concepts like the ‘primitivistic’ or ‘orgiastic,’ these might include: immediate and extensive repetition, absence of

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<sup>109</sup> Paul Hillier, *Oxford Studies of Composers: Arvo Pärt*, (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 8.

<sup>110</sup> Hillier, *Pärt*, 2.

development, ostinati, pedals and drones, shouts or cries or ‘trance-like’ chanting, a level of energy approaching orgiastic ‘frenzy,’ and use of ‘folk’ material or instruments. All of the preceding labels can be applied to some aspect or other of Tormis’s music.

These kinds of surface observations are not altogether without value. However, they have already been made, and it would be superfluous to expand on them here. While there is no suggestion that writers who have made these connections are at all in sympathy with Adorno’s words above, it does seem that ‘ritualistic’ may be applied to some of Tormis’s works at least in part by virtue of the presence of ‘orgiastic,’ ‘ritualistic’ signifiers – some of which are more superficial than others. A handful of the more superficial of these musical trappings of ritualism (an example could be the inclusion of a shaman drum in Tormis’s *Curse Upon Iron* – or even the use of *regilaul* itself) are so easily read as ritual signifiers that their identification can comprise the beginning and end of the entire conversation. The aim here is not entirely to eschew this content-based ‘analysis,’ but rather attempt to remain conscious of the *nature* of such observations. It should be added that several points from the above list will be discussed here, mostly in the sense that they lend a particular temporal quality to a piece of music. Branding art as ritualistic based on the presence of ‘primitive’ signifiers is surely almost universally recognized as being a completely outmoded approach – but it must be replaced by a coherent and comprehensive alternative. I would like here to look to a particular definition of ritual which highlights what might be called its formal properties – and to examine how these relate to comparable qualities in Tormis’s ‘ritual’ music.

A critical turning point in ritual studies is reflected in the publication *Ritual and its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*.<sup>111</sup> In what might be considered almost a structuralist approach, this group of authors propose an understanding of ritual which is founded largely on the way in which a ritualistic act or experience is framed, rather than by its specific content:

many diverse forms of behaviour and action can usefully be understood as ritualistic precisely because the term ‘ritual’ *frames*

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<sup>111</sup> Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Bennett Simon, *Ritual and its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*, (Oxford: OUP, 2008).

actions in certain, very specific ways. It is the framing of the actions, not the actions themselves, that makes them rituals.<sup>112</sup>

‘Ritualistic’ in this framework is contrasted with ‘sincere’ – the latter term being used to denote actions and experiences which are part of an ‘as is’ conceptualization of the world, as opposed to the ‘as if’ world of ritual.<sup>113</sup> This allows for an action such as a handshake to exist both as a ‘sincere’ act and a ritual one. Framed as the former, a handshake can be a genuine expression of warmth when shared between two old, long-separated and finally reunited friends. Framed as the latter, the etiquette of shaking hands with strangers at a formal gathering like a conference is a ritualistic behaviour, in that it constructs a vital, subjunctive ‘as if’ world in which politeness, respect, order, and friendliness are unassailably dominant aspects of human nature.<sup>114</sup> The prioritization of ‘framing’ over behavioural or symbolic content is in line with our moving away from ‘ritualistic content’ in Tormis’s works to look instead at what we might call ‘ritualistic form.’ The framing of a ritual act necessitates boundaries – within which, ‘ritual creates a subjunctive, an ‘as if’ or ‘could be,’ universe.’<sup>115</sup> In discussing the commonalities between ritual and play, the authors outline two characteristics which will be fundamental to later observations in this study:

...play is somehow separated from ordinary life. It has its own time and place, its own course and meaning, secluded from the rigors of the everyday. Finally, play creates its own order within its delimited time and space; it is order. These last two points lie at the core of our own discussion of the subjunctive nature of ritual, its construction of an ‘as if’ world that is bounded apart from ordinary life with its own sets of rules and its own space and time. Huizinga [...] is quite explicit and bold with the comparison: ‘Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the “consecrated spot” cannot be formally distinguished from the play-ground. The

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<sup>112</sup> Seligman *et al*, *Ritual*, 5.

<sup>113</sup> Seligman *et al*, *Ritual*, 8-9.

<sup>114</sup> Seligman *et al*, *Ritual*, 5-6.

<sup>115</sup> Seligman *et al*, *Ritual*, 7-9.

arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds, within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart.<sup>116</sup>

Of course it might well be contested 'but what is music in general, if not that?' This is quite obviously salient – and yet, equally plausible is that there are different degrees of 'subjunctivity' in the variety of worlds that can be created and experienced through music. In his article 'Repetition,' Rahn's illustrative protagonist 'Mary' enjoys art as it reflects and thereby enriches her own experience of the narrative pathway of life. 'Life' here, it seems, is conceived as a broad linear story, where recurrence and contrast are mapped out in relation to fears and desires; successes and failures; goals and progress toward the same; and finally, of course, death. In fact, the larger point that Rahn is making is that repetition is crucial to such constructions. However, I use this extract as an example of an aesthetic appreciation of music which is in part a result of the perceived *correlation* between the peaks and troughs of the terrain of the artwork, and the contours of the terrain of life.

Just as deceit teaches us about meaning, death teaches us about time in music [...]. Mary's ongoing project of abstracting and constructing Mary-for-herself and the intelligible world-for-Mary from the open set of all obstinate x-for-Mary is terminated (let us say) by death. Yet the set of all x-for-Mary is essentially open. Mary skis over the unfolding terrain, interacting with the terrain so that the terrain-to-be is conditioned by Mary's actions as her actions are conditioned by the terrain. [...] We admire the grace with which a good novel traces Mary's flight over the terrain, with its particular rhythm of swoops and reverses, its consistencies and inconsistencies of pattern, its varieties of speed, its subtle retards

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<sup>116</sup> Seligman *et al*, *Ritual*, 71-2.

into near-slavery and death only to grasp an opening over to the right that accelerates her life in a new direction. [...] A piece of music for Mary is the life Mary lives alongside of her life. Because music is temporal, Mary can experience it as she experiences (abstracts, constructs) her own life [...] If a piece of music cannot sustain her interpretation, perhaps because its terrain is perceivably limited - closed - and thus unlikelike, she will turn away. She will be attracted to pieces of music whose terrain leads her into ways of refolding, of replication (Deleuze 1988), that can teach her about her life. [...] Music is both temporal and abstract enough to show her the delineaments of telos, the physiognomy of hope.<sup>117</sup>

The type of musical experience most immediately (though arguably not exclusively) evoked by Rahn's description is a more linear one. Listening to any piece of music necessarily involves entering an imaginary, subjunctive world, by virtue of both the temporally-bounded quality and the independent temporality of a musical experience. Mary's preferred music may set up destinations and travel through contrasting states in order to develop and progress towards a catharsis and goal-fulfillment which only exist intra-musically. This constitutes an imaginary, idealized universe since – as Schopenhauer might have it – in reality, closure, freedom, and relief from the struggles of the will to life are only found in death.<sup>118</sup> Ken Kesey reminds us that 'the lives of such stuff as dreams are made of may be rounded with a sleep but they are not tied neatly with a red bow.'<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless I would propose that, in Mary's subjunctive world, musical experiences are valued for the way in which they adhere to and reflect aspects of 'ordinary' or sincere life – life in the world 'as is'. By contrast, many of the Tormis pieces discussed in this chapter can create subjunctive worlds which are more temporally 'other.' Frequently redolent of minimalism, his music often evokes non-linear, circular, spatial, ecological, goalless

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<sup>117</sup> Rahn, 'Repetition,' 53-4.

<sup>118</sup> Dale Jacquette, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, Vol. 6. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 123.

<sup>119</sup> Ken Kesey, *Sometimes A Great Notion*, (Great Britain: Methuen & Co., 1966), 22.



times. These qualities will be revisited from different angles later – but for now what I am trying to say is that the ‘special set of rules’ in the worlds of *these* pieces ascends to another level of ‘as if.’ For brevity, I am (perhaps unfairly) using Rahn’s Mary in conjunction with a template of musical subjunctive worlds which attempt to imitate or reflect a goal-oriented mode of living which is actually in keeping with how the average person goes about their business in a modern industrialized society.<sup>120</sup>

Mary’s subjunctive worlds do construct idealized ways of being, but they are to a larger extent compatible with the linear expectations, aims, and efforts of the ‘everyday’ or ‘realistic.’ Tormis’s music can constitute a universe which requires greater suspension of disbelief – a ‘consecrated spot’ which is further removed from ‘ordinary life’ – because its temporal world is *less like* ‘real life’ in the sense in which our ‘real life’ is constructed and carried out. Linearity in subjunctive musical spaces is closer to how we earnestly try to live our lives in the world ‘as is’: in reasonable accord with clock time, cause, and effect; in pursuit of measurable targets; and all too often under the Damoclean sword of an electrifying awareness of mortality and the impermanence of everything. This sincere mode of life is the norm in 2015 Britain, in Rahn’s and Mary’s 2009 America, and in Tormis’s twentieth-century Soviet Estonia. Conversely, as Maurice Bloch has claimed, ‘ritual contexts encourage cyclical concepts of time in which nothing permanent ever changes.’<sup>121</sup> The suggestion here is that the heightened subjunctivity – the heightened degree of temporal ‘otherness’ – of Tormis’s musical time-spaces situates them closer to, or deeper within, the realms of the formally ‘ritualistic.’

Before moving on to look at some music, a few more important points in our contextual grasp of a ‘ritualistic aesthetic’ should be outlined. Firstly, repetition itself is fundamental in many ways to a ritualistic formal quality. Without wanting to state the obvious, repetition may be a denial of linearity. It can refuse change and goal-orientation, resulting in a more spatial conceptualization of an aesthetic object. This

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<sup>120</sup> By quoting Rahn here I am not suggesting that he would necessarily disagree with what I am saying in this context. I am simply appropriating ‘Mary’ for the useful way in which she can illustrate the aesthetic appreciation of what I see as a more linear or (intra-musically) goal-oriented subjunctive world, which might lie between the terrain of ‘real life’ time and the preternatural ‘timelessness’ of Tormis’s subjunctives.

<sup>121</sup> Seligman *et al*, *Ritual*, 72.

imitation of an idealized and impossible permanence may be crucial to the subjunctive ritual world through which stability, order, safety and certainty are projected onto the real world 'as is' – a world in which, as Bell notes, 'real life keeps threatening to slide into chaos and meaninglessness.'<sup>122</sup> The idea of repetition's predictability as a kind of subjunctive safety net is reflected in Bell's suggestion that 'in some contexts' – perhaps often those involving vulnerable people – 'punctilious concern with repetition may have great utility.' As an example she cites the routine template of a weekly Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, sufficiently well-known as to have become something of a trope.<sup>123</sup> The relationship between the 'vulnerability' of a traumatized nation and the subjunctive security offered by ritualistic musical spaces will be explored in a subsequent chapter.

Repetition (in particular the immediate, extensive type) is ritualistic. It is surprisingly difficult to qualify this statement in a meaningful way, at least from within the confines of symbolic signification. Perhaps in this case the limitations of symbolic signifiers suggest that, as in some of Tormis's own works, a mimetic approach might not finally be much less fruitful than a more 'traditional' use of language. In a way, the psychological phenomenon of repetition as potentially somehow trance-inducing is sufficiently popularly accepted (to start with, think of techno and house music – and, of course, the trance genre itself) that it seems almost redundant to dwell on it. Yet it is such a significant aspect of this music and the way in which – I think – it must be listened to in order to unlock its real quality, that it is worth attempting to illustrate the point further. Historically-oriented discourse at times betrays a frustration with or even contempt for ritualistic-type repetition. This would be especially true if it should occur within a model – like this essay – which is intended to have a broad singular objective, to communicate some ideas (or even points), and systematically to progress towards a set of relatively clearly-defined goals – without significant disruption or digression – in accordance with normalized and 'logical' structural, syntactic, and stylistic parameters that may at times seem sacrosanct. If it transpires, then, that I have unduly *laboured* the point (even *ad nauseam*), perhaps that would be appropriate.

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<sup>122</sup> Bell, *Ritual*, 12.

<sup>123</sup> Bell, *Ritual*, 150.



Repetition is ritualistic. Repetition is ritualistic. Repetition is ritualistic. Repetition is ritualistic. Repetition is ritualistic. Repetition is ritualistic. Repetition is ritualistic. Repetition is ritualistic.

If the reader has actually read even several of the above sentences (and if I may be forgiven this indulgence), perhaps they noticed a shift in focus and perception – or multiple shifts – as they glanced over the page. In fact it is extraordinarily difficult, try as you might, to suppress your boredom and irritation in order to be able to continue reading each individual word or occurrence of the phrase in the same way. Immediately the semantic content is recognized and placed in context. Comprehension will dawn almost simultaneously: the entire passage is comprised of the same sentence. Then, understandably, a reader may feel a burst of annoyance at what may seem too self-consciously atypical (or self-defeatingly predictable) a presentation of an idea, and abandon the page altogether. If they *try* to continue reading/looking at a steady pace, though, they may begin to see differently – to focus on the shapes of the letters, the patterns created by the distribution of black and white on the page, the construction of the words, arbitrary groupings of consecutive letters, the combination of sounds; maybe even the aesthetic quality (such as it is) of the visual pattern. Perhaps their reading will be forced to take on a dimension of rigid, pseudo-mechanical, sentence-by-sentence rhythmic regularity which is not part of the average everyday approach to prose. Meaning may almost be forgotten altogether, an effect redolent of the phenomenon wherein you have written a less-than-quotidian word so frequently during a short period that it begins to dissolve and deconstruct itself before the eyes; its phonemes, syllables, orthography, and the whole lexical object, the word itself, begin to appear somehow alien or new: Repetition. Repetition. Repetition. Repetition. Repetition. Repetition. Repetition. Repetition. R – e – p – e – t – i – t – i – o – n.

Why is repetition considered ‘ritualistic’? Because extensive repetition is not functional, directly/linearly communicative, goal-oriented or scientific – properties considered antithetical to ritualism by many. Rahn unpicks the experience:

The relation between the elements of {a, then-a} is not one of thin succession. I experience a, serene in its self-sufficiency, a context for itself. I experience then-a: in retrospect, a deceived me; I may

never trust a again. Two is not one, two is the principle of division, the number of evil and deceit. Who knows where it all will end? The context has been destabilized, opened. Meaning has descended upon it in thick contours, like a Connecticut snowfall. The *change-of-context* from {a} to {a, then-a} is internal to {a, then-a}, and constitutes its *meaning* as a temporal being.<sup>124</sup>

Contrast this page with the section we are discussing: How many 'clock' seconds will be spent reading this page? How many were afforded to the other? If you tried to read it in its entirety (which I would struggle to believe in the first instance), how long did it feel like it took, compared with this one? They must necessarily be approximately the same length, with roughly the same number of words – but this page is rather more explanatory, more broadly communicative and somehow more linear (even if it somewhat resembles a stream of consciousness). It has greater internal variety, contrast and direction; it represents a different temporal experience. The other section is a homogenous visual mass, a tableau or picture, a spatial object which can virtually (but not quite) be summed up in one sentence: 'Repetition is ritualistic.' At the theoretical extreme, as Middleton writes, repetition – and even music itself – tends towards 'redundancy.'<sup>125</sup> But the very idea of 'redundancy' or uselessness itself may have its roots in the same aggressively goal-oriented linear mode whose supremacy we are perhaps beginning to question here.

Admittedly, we know that reading and listening, and words and music, are not directly comparable experiences or mediums. For a start, you can look at a book without opening it, or a paragraph without reading it, and gauge how long it is. You can glance at a whole double page in a fraction of a second while, in the first aural experience, a piece of music will reveal itself only at its own pace. You also might enjoy an immediately and persistently repeated musical phrase in a way you are unlikely to appreciate an immediately and persistently repeated sentence in conversation (or academic writing). Of course, this essay is neither a piece of art nor

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<sup>124</sup> Rahn, 'Repetition,' 53.

<sup>125</sup> Middleton, 'Play it Again,' 236.

a ritual; it does have aims, ‘objectives,’ and (hopefully) some discernible, ‘sensible’ narrative structure. Repetition here ought to be markedly more irritating than in a piece of music. Yet still there are parallels to be drawn with the aural experience of extensive repetition; both share some corresponding points within the basic model of recognition → comprehension → valuation → re-evaluation (and so on). It seems that a shift to an alternate, *re-evaluated* value system – another mode of seeing – in these terms might be a fundamental aspect of appreciating this music.

Although Tormis does not necessarily repeat the exact same material for minutes at a time without building upon it somewhat – adding a pedal here, or some harmonic layers there, or the like – there is a sense that at bottom these trappings are fundamentally superfluous. This may sound like a strange claim, given that in a traditional understanding of ‘folk song arrangements,’ the elements that Tormis adds, not the extent to which he declines to intervene, should surely be at the absolute root of our understanding of his work’s quality. These same folk tunes sung in isolation would obviously cease to be a piece of music by Veljo Tormis; he did not compose them. And yet the way in which he creates a space in which they can flourish unhindered, ‘unforced,’ and – crucially – continue to be performed, enjoyed and valued in contemporary culture is not, I think, a matter of accident (far less of a lack of imagination). This very absence of any sense of his own entitlement to over-manipulate, exploit, distort or detract from the original material is itself a hallmark of his style. Through extended repetitions, within a sparse texture and ‘ritualistic’ form, the object that is being meditated upon is the *regilaul* itself – and all its connections to the autochthonous culture so valued by Tormis and Kaplinski. Sometimes – as the latter has advised – ‘the less we intervene, the more we flourish.’<sup>126</sup>

A final observation brings us back to the poet: ‘although it cannot and does not pretend to be “the thing itself,” the “natural environment is not background, stage setting, or capework”’ in Jaan Kaplinski’s writing – ‘It is often the focal point.’<sup>127</sup> I will propose that mimesis or imagery in Tormis’s music often operates in a similar way. That is, the imitation of a motion or shape is not necessarily part of a larger, linear

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<sup>126</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, back cover.

<sup>127</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 30.

musical narrative or varied form; nor a loaded poly-semantic symbol for something more important than itself. It is an incident that does not need to be justified by inclusion in a story. This connects with the idea that ritual 'is about *doing* more than about saying something'<sup>128</sup>; that ritual 'meaning' may be derived from form more readily than from content – or even that 'meaning' is not a particularly useful thing to search for in the study of ritual.<sup>129</sup> Importantly, this concept also resonates with Tormis's own statement that the *regilaul* is 'a ritual and not a means of communication.'<sup>130</sup> Having laid out this contextual framework, the next step is to examine some pieces of notionally 'ritualistic' music. Still one of Tormis's most popular works, the pivotal collection *Estonian Calendar Songs* is based around original texts and melodies used in observance of the annual ritual cycle in pre-Christian Estonia.

## **Ritual music**

The *Calendar Songs* series sets *regilaul* which correspond to five significant festival periods, and corresponding practices, from pre-Christian indigenous Estonian culture. The collection comprises *St Martin's Day Songs*, *Shrovetide Songs* (both for men's voices); *St John's Day Songs* (for mixed chorus); and *Swing Songs*) and *St Catherine's Day songs* (both for women's or children's voices). Examples here will be taken from the St John's Day and Swing song cycles. St John's Eve/St John's Day (Midsummer) is one of the most significant occasions in the Estonian 'folk calendar.' The ritual of swinging was not assigned a particular date, but took place in the Spring – at Easter in the south, and from Whitsun to Midsummer in the north. It should be noted that most of the original six swinging melodies of *Kiigelaulud* are *not* explicitly defined as 'ritual songs' – the majority are lyrical or epic – but relate to a specific practice which is broadly defined as ritual in nature. Introductions to the festivals and ritual practices are provided in the Warner/Chappell Music and Fennica Gehrman editions of the scores; the background to St John's Day and the swinging rituals is as follows:

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<sup>128</sup> Seligman *et al*, *Ritual*, 4.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>130</sup> Tormis, 'Problems.'

## St John's Day

*Jaanipäev*, 'Midsummer,' (June 24<sup>th</sup>) was the most important feast in Estonia, celebrating the end of springtime work in the fields and the beginning of haymaking. The name *jaanipäev*, lit. 'St John's Day,' originates from Catholic tradition: the feast itself and the concurrent rituals date further back (the pre-Christian name presumably being *suvised*, 'summertime feast'). Estonian Midsummer celebrations included several rituals, omens, magic rites, and divination. On Midsummer Eve, all over the country bonfires were built, the glow from one bonfire reaching another. The glow was believed to enhance the growth of grain and grass. [...] Bonfires burned all through the night (which is very short in the north); people would eat (mostly milk products – curd, cottage cheese, butter), drink, play games, dance, and sing around the fire, and jump over it.

The Midsummer songs are ritual ones. Motifs occurring in other ritual songs meet here: a call to attend the Midsummer bonfire (1); chiding and crying shame upon those who will not (2). However, in these songs there appear also a mythical *Jaan*, 'John,' who is expected to bring luck to the cattle and provide a good crop. Songs describing the reasons for expecting him (4), his arrival (5) and what he brings with him (7) are ritual songs by nature. The song about a maiden desired (3) is not directly connected with Midsummer, and the fire incantation (6) is not solely associated with this feast.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ülo Tedre, notes to *St John's Day Songs* score.





Figure 2.2 - Fire-jumping at Jaanipaev in contemporary Estonia<sup>132</sup>

### Swinging

Swinging was a customary recreation of village youth, established by the folk calendar. Swinging occurred at springtime – at Easter in the south, and from Whitsun (seven weeks after Easter) to Midsummer in the north. [...] Swinging was accompanied by singing; nearby there was a danceground. Swinging has been associated with sun-worship. The number of swing songs is abundant, covering [an] extensive variety of topics. These songs relate to ritual songs – calling on others to swing; crying shame upon those who will not; requesting gifts for the builders of the swing[,] for the swing, and for those helping to push the swing (eggs, mittens, belts) [...].<sup>133</sup>

Figure 2.3 shows a wooden swing in a 1987 animation by Priit Pärn; in Figure 2.4, two men try out a two-couple swing.

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<sup>132</sup> Image from 'Estonian beliefs and rituals carried on by Jaanipäev,' *Estonian World* accessed 04/10/15 [http://estonianworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/image\\_196\\_ord\\_028-e1370118547839.jpg](http://estonianworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/image_196_ord_028-e1370118547839.jpg).

<sup>133</sup> Ülo Tedre, notes to *Swing Songs* score.



Figure 2.3 - A couple on a swing in Priit Pärn's *Breakfast on the Grass* (1987).



Figure 2.4 - A two-couple wooden swing in Estonia (2005 Wikimedia Creative commons licensing)

## **Switching and swinging**

The ritualistic game, or recreational ritual, of swinging seems a particularly good example of Huizinga's ideas about the permeability or non-existence of boundaries between ritual and play. The *Swing Songs* cycle is characterized not only by extensive repetition but also by mimetic representation of both the motion of a swing and the

exuberant shouts and cries of its riders. Mimesis and motion-shapes in relation to musical space and time will be revisited later, but for the time being what is salient about this quality is the way in which the music ‘embodies’ its subject; again, ‘the *regilaul* is a ritual and not a means of communication.’<sup>134</sup> To generalize somewhat: communication is often a telling, while ritual is rather a doing-and/or-being. This music is not telling a story; it isn’t really ‘telling’ us anything at all. Instead it revels in ‘being’ the swing and swingers, often through close adherence to the type of repetition that Middleton (see Figure 2.1) describes as binary switching. The binary switching and swinging motions/gestures at the heart of this cycle are also connected to Tormis’s general tendency frequently to construct harmonic motion as rocking, switching, sliding or transformation, rather than a more ‘conventional’ linear progression. Below are examples of imitations of swing movements and ‘swinging sounds’.

Binary switching can be seen in the extract below from ‘The Narrow Swing’ (Figure 2.5). The main melodic content of this movement involves each voice part moving (swinging) between two referential pitches a fourth apart, filled in with passing notes (adding to the sense that parts here are swinging rather than simply switching). Reference points are marked A and B in each part.

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<sup>134</sup> Tormis, ‘Problems.’

1. Kitsas kiik (*Muhu*)  
The Narrow Swing (from *Muhu* parish)

Allegro moderato ♩ = 108 VELJO TORMIS (1966)

Figure 2.5 - 'Swinging' melodic contours with referential pitches in 'The Narrow Swing'

In the extract from 'The Swing under the Sea' below (Figure 2.6), the swinging in the accompaniment is around a (non-functional) B minor second inversion axis or 'fulcrum' chord. The melodic part swings between an axial minor third on B and a major third on C, as well between the B and the D of that minor third, latterly with the inclusion of C sharp. This example is also a useful one in which to examine the basis for describing these motions as 'swinging'. Most obviously, the binary switching between two areas, or three areas with one acting as an 'axis,' is swing-like or pendulum-like through the repetitive way it moves back and forth

within a limited space. The case for binary switching as a model is not completely undermined by broadening the span of movement to three reference points: in most instances of ‘axial swinging,’ the motion is generally between points A and B, with C only occasionally lending a circularity to the binary; there is also a sense that the crucial bare bones of the motion are not defined specifically by differentiating between A, B *and* C, but rather between A and ‘not-A’ (it should be added that ‘A versus “not-A”’ is not here intended to imply functional diatonic hierarchy in the sense of ‘tonic versus “everything else”’).

Many older Estonian swings have a horizontal stopping bar above or below the fulcrum of the swing (see Figure 2.4 above) – but in 1993, as swinging (‘kiiking’) was enjoying a renaissance as a national (and latterly defined as ‘extreme’) sport, Ado Kosk developed a sturdier, more secure swing on which riders could safely swing in a full circle, all the way over the top bar.<sup>135</sup> Kosk invented the kiiking swing thirty years after the publication of the *Swing Songs* (and of course a long time after the original *regilaul* tunes were in oral circulation), but Priit Parn’s animation *Breakfast on the Grass* shows riders swinging over the fulcrum on a wooden swing in rapid circles nine years before Kosk’s creation was realised. While it may not have been possible (or safe!) to ‘swing over the top’ using older wooden swing technology, the desire to do so could easily have been a preoccupation, an ideal attached to the practice of swinging, perhaps even since its inception. If it is not too fanciful a suggestion, the inclusion of the reference point C to lend a circularity to some of Tormis’s binary musical swingings might be seen as a reflection of this desire for ‘circularity’ in actual swinging practice (though it should be noted that circularity as a broader abstract concept is itself a key theme in Tormis’s output). This would be in keeping with our contextual understanding of ritual as the construction of an ‘imaginary, “as if,” or “could be” universe’ in which the sincere rules of time and physics may be bent. Figure 2.7 shows isolated soprano parts from ‘The narrow swing’ – another instance of an addition to the binary of a contrasting reference pitch, again creating a circularity which might suggest the image of swing-riders ‘going over the top’.

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<sup>135</sup> Estonian Kiiking Federation Website (<http://www.kiiking.ee/eng/kiiking/> accessed 28/09/15).

The image displays a musical score for 'The Swing under the Sea' with several annotations. The score is divided into two systems. The first system starts at measure 5 and includes vocal lines with lyrics: '1.2. Kii - gā - le.' and 'Kii - gā - le.'. It features a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *pp* dynamic section. Annotations include 'axial chord' with boxes labeled A (red), B (blue), and C (green), and 'axial pitch-pair' with boxes labeled A (red) and B (blue). The second system starts at measure 9 and includes a piano (*p*) dynamic section. Annotations include 'axial pitch' with boxes labeled A (red), B (blue), and C (green), and 'axial pitch-pair' with boxes labeled A (orange), B (purple), and A (orange).

Figure 2.6 - Swinging around axis point 'A' at different levels/layers in 'The Swing under the Sea'



Figure 2.7 - Isolated soprano parts from 'The Narrow Swing' with contrasting reference point C

Axial pitches, pitch-groups or chords around which to swing can be seen in an 'anchored' form in Figure 2.8, an extract from 'A Pretty Girl on the Swing.'

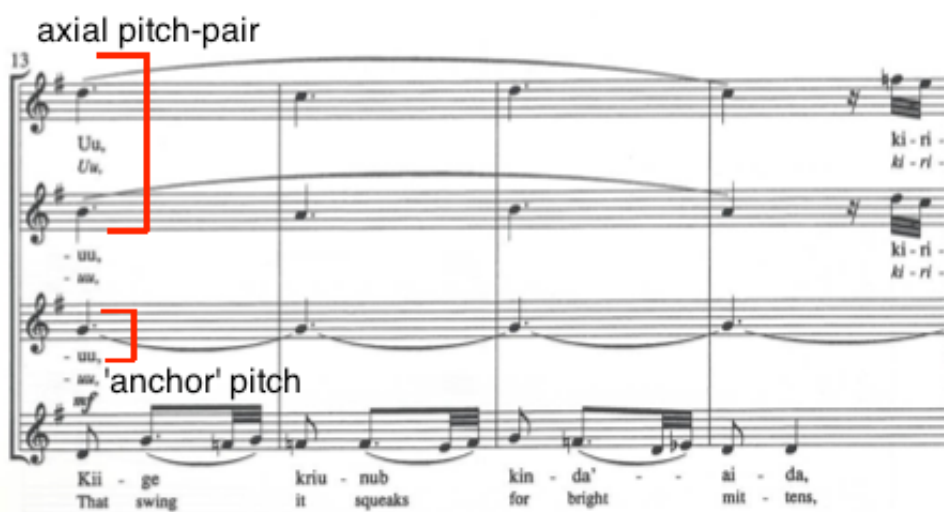


Figure 2.8 - 'Anchored' swinging in 'A Pretty Girl on the Swing'

Different rates or frequencies of swinging patterns between voice parts can be seen in quite succinct form in the opening bars of 'Apple tree,' the final swing song (see Figure 2.9; the longer section is repeated but verse texts have been removed for visual clarity). Elsewhere, as in this case, there may be another stratum of swinging micro-motions within some of these larger gestural 'swinging cells' (in this instance, within the soprano cell labeled 'A' in red, the first of the red soprano 'B' cells, and the first alto part's cell 'B'). I have used the letters A and B across all the layers to denote the two points between which parts are switching (swinging) on that level – the smallest (intra-bar switching) level is orange, the middle level in the alto parts (inter-bar switching) is red, and the largest (the soprano part's broader switching every two bars) is blue. This multiple (yet extremely simple) layering of binary alternations is reminiscent of other instances of *mise en abyme* ('into the abyss'<sup>136</sup>), or the *Matryoshka* ('Russian doll') effect elsewhere in Tormis's work, and is an important part of his often spatially-oriented conceptualizations of musical time (as will be examined more closely later on).

Figure 2.9 - Different patterns/strata of swinging in 'Apple Tree'

<sup>136</sup> Patricia Lawlor, 'Lautréamont, Modernism, and the Function of *Mise en Abyme*,' *The French Review* 58/6 (1985): 829.



In order to swing or switch in this sense, you must necessarily have, if not always a pair of conflicting ‘opposites’ (A *versus* B), certainly at least a spectrum with two distinct end points – as with the scalic contours spanning a fourth in ‘The Narrow Swing’ (see Figure 2.5). Later on it will be argued that a significant aspect of Tormis’s work, which connects him both to Jaan Kaplinski and to the subjunctivity of ritual, is a sidestepping – though not necessarily an outright rejection, as that in itself creates an oppositional binary – of dualist dichotomies and restrictive, absolutist borders/boundaries. It may seem at this juncture as though the musical examples above stand somewhat in opposition to this idea. A more in-depth exploration will be forthcoming, but for now I would like to propose that, although the extreme points A and B, wherever they materialize in space, are a fundamental part of the reality of swinging, the very concept of swinging itself is defined not by those two points but by the way in which the swinger moves between them. Teleporting from A to B is not swinging: the motion is the focus, rather than the extremities A and B. Moreover the swinger or swing is a single object which encompasses A, B and everything in between in the act of swinging. Finally, with regards to movements which are closer to ‘switching’ (for instance, the second alto motion in Figure 2.9), another theme which will be revisited is the idea that even when Tormis sets up two (or more) distinct points which are notionally somehow opposed, they do not necessarily embody a traditionally hegemonic tonal relationship. Although ‘Apple Tree’ (Figure 2.9) is quite clearly centred on Bb, the choice of ‘plagal’ harmony in the bass line may be an exploitation of the ambiguity inherent in the perfect fourth (that is, does it function as I – IV, or V – I, if in fact it ‘functions’ at all? Is the first or second pitch the ‘correct tonic’?). When swinging, you essentially move from one side to the other, not from high to low; point A and point B do not necessarily have a hierarchical relationship.

### **Vocalizations as signifying content**

Having said that this chapter will focus more on formal aspects of ritualism than on signifying content, the use of vocalizations which are non-verbal and lack a strongly ‘melodic’ character should not go unmentioned. Anna Czekanowska identifies shouts, cries and the like as emblems of the ‘transcendental,’ ‘orgiastic’ nature of

pre-Christian folk song traditions in Poland – aspects which were latterly condemned by imported Christianity.<sup>137</sup> Non-verbal glissandi, as either the swing’s motion or the whoops and cries of swing-riders can be seen in ‘Apple Tree’ (Figure 2.10); and, gradually increasing in dynamic, registral and textural extremity, in four extracts from ‘The Swing asks for Gifts,’ shown in Figure 2.11.

The image shows a musical score for the song 'Apple Tree'. It consists of three staves. The first staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 4/8 time signature. It starts at measure 28 and ends at measure 16. The melody begins with a non-verbal glissandi, indicated by a dashed line with a dotted line above it, showing a gradual rise in pitch. The second staff contains the lyrics: 'no - pin / pick - ing / noo - ri - - / young men, / da me - - / pluck - ing / hi - da. / young men,'. The third staff contains the same lyrics as the second staff. The score is marked with a double bar line and the number 16 at the end of each staff.

Figure 2.10- Non-verbal glissandi in 'Apple Tree'

<sup>137</sup> Anna Czekanowska, *Polish Folk Music: Slavonic Heritage – Polish Tradition – Contemporary Trends* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 23.

**Volante** ♩ = 63

*mp*

Soprani I  
Oh, mi - nu kuld - sed  
O, you fine boys who

Soprani II  
*p*  
Uu - - uh,  
Uu - - uh,

Alti I  
*p*  
Uu - - uh, uu - uh, uu -  
Uu - - uh, uu - uh, uu -

Alti II  
*p*  
Uu uu

16 *mf* *Uu*

Mul po - le ven - da kii - ge al - la,  
I have no bro - ther neath the swing now,

- uh, uu - - uh, uu - -  
- uh, uu - - uh, uu - -

*p*  
Mul po - le ven - da kii - ge al - la,  
I have no bro - ther neath the swing now,

uu uu

27 *attacca* *p cresc.*

Uu - uh, uu - uh, uu - uh.  
Uu - uh, uu - uh, uu - uh.

*attacca* *p cresc.*  
Uu - uh, uu - uh, uu - uh.  
Uu - uh, uu - uh, uu - uh.

*mf cresc.*  
kes mind mak - sab!  
pay my ran - som!

*attacca* *p cresc.*  
Uu - -  
Uu - -

Uu - uh, uu - uh, uu - uh,  
Uu - uh, uu - uh, uu - uh.

30

The image shows a musical score for 'The Swing asks for Gifts'. It consists of two systems of music, numbered 34 and 36. Each system has four staves. The top staff is the vocal line with lyrics in Estonian and English. The second staff is a vocal line with vocalizations 'uh, uh, uh, uh'. The third and fourth staves are instrumental lines, likely for piano and bass, with various musical notations including slurs and dynamics. The score is in a key with two sharps (D major or F# minor) and a 4/4 time signature. The page number 29 is at the bottom center.

34

uu uu

pa - le mul mak - sab paa - ri är - gi,  
my face is worth a pair of ox - en,

- uh, uu - - - uh, uu - - - uh,  
- uh, uu - - - uh, uu - - - uh,  
- uh, uu - - - uh, uu - - - uh,  
- uh, uu - - - uh, uu - - - uh,

uu - - - uh, uu - - - uh, uu - -  
uu - - - uh, uu - - - uh, uu - -

36

juuk - sed jook - se va o - bu - se,  
a gal - lop - ping steed my fair tress - es,

uu - - - uh, uu - - - uh,  
uu - - - uh, uu - - - uh,  
uu - - - uh, uu - - - uh,  
uu - - - uh, uu - - - uh,

uh, uu - - - uh, uh, uu - - - uh,  
uh, uu - - - uh, uh, uu - - - uh,

29

Figure 2.11 – Swing motions and/or intensifying cries of swing-riders (ritual vocalizations?) in extracts from 'The Swing asks for Gifts'

'St John's Steed' (*St John's Day Songs*) contains comparable vocalizations, some of which are 'pseudo-onomatopoeic' or mimetic representations of the motion of riding and the cries of a rider to spur on the horse (Figures 2.12 and 2.13)<sup>138</sup>. Some cries, calls, vocalizations, shouts and motion-shapes of this kind – particularly, for instance, the second altos' swing-like octave glissando in bars 35-36 of Figure 2.11 – could express a wider threefold relationship with ritual. Some types may signify the idea of ritual (through their generalized 'ritualistic,' orgiastic or 'non-musical'

<sup>138</sup> A listener whose first language is English might be forgiven for wondering if the glissandi set to 'nöö!' are also intended to evoke the sound of the horse itself. This is not so: a brief excursion into cross-linguistic onomatopoeia reveals that while Anglo-American horses might 'neigh,' in the Estonian language they 'ii-ha-haa.'

quality), some can imitate formal aspects of the ritual (perhaps as features which are ‘*doing*, rather than saying something’), and finally some may embody the content of a ritual (shouts and cries, where applicable), with a blurred ambiguity (and a tripartite-ness) reminiscent of Kaplinski’s ‘world unburdened of difference between man, god and animal; a place where one creature could be all three at once.’<sup>139</sup>



Figure 2.12- 'Riding' figure in 'St John's steed'

<sup>139</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 28.

The image displays a musical score for 'St John's Steed'. It consists of four systems of music, each with a vocal line and an instrumental line. The lyrics are in Finnish and English. The score includes dynamic markings like 'f' and 'Nöö! Gee!'.

System 1 (Measures 40-42):  
 Vocal: Jaa - ni - ke - ne, poi - si - ke - ne, jaa - ni - ko,  
 Lit - tle Jaa - ni, lit - tle fel - low, jaa - ni - ko.  
 Instrumental: Nöö! Gee! Nöö! Gee!

System 2 (Measures 40-42):  
 Vocal: sõi - tu! Jaa - ni - ke - ne, poi - si - ke - ne, jaa - ni - ko,  
 rid - ing! Lit - tle Jaa - ni, lit - tle fel - low, jaa - ni - ko.  
 Instrumental: Nöö! Gee!

System 3 (Measures 43-45):  
 Vocal: jaa - ni - ko, tu - le siis jaa - ni - ku tu - le - le, jaa - ni -  
 jaa - ni - ko, come then to mid - sum - mer's bold bon - fire, jaa - ni -  
 Instrumental: Nöö! Gee! Sõi - tu, sõi - tu,  
 Rid - ing, rid - ing.

System 4 (Measures 43-45):  
 Vocal: jaa - ni - ko, tu - le siis jaa - ni - ku tu - le - le,  
 jaa - ni - ko, come then to mid - sum - mer's bold bon - fire,  
 Instrumental: Nöö! Gee! Nöö! Gee! Sõi - tu, sõi - tu,  
 Rid - ing, rid - ing.

Figure 2.13 - Rider's cries: 'nöö!' ('gee!') in 'St John's Steed'

One of the most important rituals of the midsummer St John's Eve/Day celebrations involves building a fire and taking turns to jump over it, to ensure prosperity, security, and protection from fire itself and other elements.<sup>140</sup> Tormis's setting of a related *regilaul* text is one of his more 'orgiastic.' Dispensing with specific pitch, 'Fire Spell' consists of antiphonal chanting, shouting, and heightened speech (see Figure 2.14). Although relatively little of Tormis's music is functionally diatonic, to completely remove the parameters of harmony and melody naturally narrows the listener's focus to rhythm, repetition, register, text, timbre, and dynamic, and creates a different temporal experience. As with several of the ritual texts, there is little sense of a linear semantic narrative here; rather (in this case) a set of 'assurances' ('fire will not burn me'; 'water will not drown me'). In a musical sense, though, this movement has a greater overall range of contrast than several others

<sup>140</sup> 'The Baltics in Midsummer Mode' webpage, *The Baltic Times* (accessed online 28/09/15, <http://www.baltictimes.com/news/articles/26464/>).

from the Calendar Songs series – arguably greater, for instance, than the symmetrical, static serenity of the first ‘call to the bonfire.’

**Fire Spell** (from *Kuusalu* parish)  
Text adapted by Olli Kõiva

Allegro assai ♩ = 144

*mf* Solo

Tenori

Kas tun - ned tu - le sa - nu - ja, tai - ad rau - va tar - be' - ei - da?  
Can you now cast the spell for fire, can you say the words for i - ron?

Allegro moderato, ben marcato ♩ = 122

Soprani

Ei  
No

Alti

*f* Tutti

Tenori

Tu - li on tum - ma, raud on val - ju,  
I - ron is bru - tal, fire is cru - el.

Bassi

Tu - li on tum - ma, raud on val - ju, tu - li on tum - ma, raud on val - ju.  
I - ron is bru - tal, fire is cru - el, i - ron is bru - tal, fire is cru - el.

*p* (*sempre marcato*)

5

tu - li mi - nu po - le - da:  
fire will ne - ver burn me up:

*p*

mi - na tu - le tut - tu - va - ne, tut - tu - va - ne, tut - tu - va - ne,  
I am fire's own trus - ted cro - ny, trus - ted cro - ny, trus - ted cro - ny.

*f*

mi - na tu - le tut - tu - va - ne;  
I am fire's own trus - ted cro - ny;

tu - li on tum - ma, raud on val - ju, tu - li on tum - ma, raud on val - ju,  
i - ron is bru - tal, fire is cru - el, i - ron is bru - tal, fire is cru - el.

\* Relative pitches

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Fennica Gehrman Oy, Helsinki

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Figure 2.14 - Chanting and shouting in 'Fire Spell'

An important point regarding these signifiers of orgiast is that they would be unlikely to have a comparable effect if they were presented as ‘window-dressings’ – that is, only as surface features in music which did not display other ‘ritualistic’

qualities as defined above. A decidedly non-ritualistic example might be Frederick Delius's 1917 tone poem *Eventyr*, which features 'something like a goblin pack' represented by shouts from 'twenty men's voices backstage.' The subject matter of Delius's work (fairy tales and myths from Scandinavian folklore) amply ensures that it constitutes a magical, subjunctive, imaginary world. However, in temporal terms it is not 'atypical.' Linearity, contrast, tension and release, directed motion towards points of cadential fulfillment; all are present. A reviewer claims that 'Delius's music typically moves neither symphonically nor dramatically, but "associatively."' <sup>141</sup> This may be the case – but it is still 'moving,' and doing so in a comparatively linear fashion. It is easy to imagine Rahn's Mary enjoying this piece for

...its particular rhythm of swoops and reverses, its consistencies and inconsistencies of pattern, its varieties of speed, its subtle retards into near-slavery and death only to grasp an opening over to the right that accelerates her life in a new direction. <sup>142</sup>

The distinction I want to make here is, again, partly based on form/content relationships. Shouts, cries, and chanting may be signifiers of orgiast – but, crucially, not all orgiast is ritualistic, and not all ritual is orgiastic. The proposition, then, is that such signifiers can serve to enhance an already ritualistic musical subjunctive – to add orgiastic content to a ritualistic form. Since, in the example from 'Fire Spell' above, the entire movement is comprised of chanting and shouting, the 'form' is also affected by the lack of functional (or any) harmony (although direction, tension and release are provided in a fashion through rhythmic variety and dynamic and registral contrast).

## **Stasis and movement**

The idea of a musical ritual embodiment may also apply in some abstract and complex (and/or near-redundantly obvious) way to any calls and invitations to ritual

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<sup>141</sup> Review of Delius *Eventyr*, (accessed online 28/09/15 at <http://www.classicalcdreview.com/fddana.htm>).

<sup>142</sup> Rahn, 'Repetition,' 53.



events, such as the two 'Call to the Midsummer Bonfire' movements from *St John's Day Songs* and the first swing song. Playing with a kind of meta-textuality, the piece of music virtually 'is' the ritual action. In the first Midsummer bonfire movement, placing the alto soloists (the only singers with text, and the ones doing the calling) in the distance (see Figure 2.15) is a reification of the invitation ritual within the ritual of performance. The soloists are over there, and we are over here, and they are calling us (the audience and perhaps the rest of the choir as well) to where they are, to the bonfire. Thus the piece itself is inextricably tangled up with the ritual of invitation. Bearing in mind Tormis's relationship with his source material, the ritual event or 'bonfire' to which *we* the listeners are being 'called' may be a spatial, subjunctive time-place, consecrated for the contemplation of the *regilaul* – the ritual of cultural identity. Tormis says of Estonians 'we should know who we are.'<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Anderson, 'Know Who we Are,' 26.

Andantino  $\text{♩} = 72$  VELJO TORMIS (1967)

\* *(in distanza)*

2 Alti soli

Soprani I II

Alti I II

Tenori I II

Bassi I II

*sempre pp* *mm*

*sempre pp* *mm*

*sempre pp* *mm*

*sempre pp* *mm*

*sempre pp* *mm*

Figure 2.15 - 'Call to the Midsummer Bonfire I'; alto soloists *in distanza*.

'The Narrow Swing,' the playful first movement of *Swing Songs*, is far removed in affectual terms from the serene stillness of 'Call to the Midsummer Bonfire I.' However, both are examples of 'inviting songs,' and despite their differences the two pieces display a common emphasis on the span of a fourth in general, as well as a common approach to the mimetic use of antiphony and canon at the fourth or fifth (Figures 2.16 and 2.17). As discussed above, the motions here are strongly suggestive of swinging – yet the textural treatment of the main melodic material in both these movements is also redolent of invitation or of leading and following (to the ritual, swing or fire).

Allegro moderato ♩ = 108 VELJO TORMIS (1966)

Soprani I  
Soprani II  
Alti I  
Alti II

Läh - me se - da kii - ke  
Let's go see the swing now,

Läh - me se - da kii - ke  
Let's go see the swing now,

Läh - me se - da kii - ke  
Let's go see the swing now,

kat - su - mai - e,  
try the swing now,

Figure 2.16 - Leading and following in 'The Narrow Swing'

7 *(in distanza) mf*

Tul - ge jaa - nis - ta tu - le - le, jaa - ni - ke,  
Come to mid - sum - mer's bold bon - fire, jaa - ni - ke,

*(in distanza) mf*

Tul - ge jaa - nis - ta tu - le - le, jaa - ni - ke, jaa - nis -  
Come to mid - sum - mer's bold bon - fire, jaa - ni - ke, jaa - nis -

*mm*

Figure 2.17 - Leading and following in 'Call to the Midsummer Bonfire I'

In the example above (Figure 2.17), the wordless choral parts follow each other in a registral ascent, 'led' by the soloists (who also 'lead' each other in canon at the fourth). This may at first appear to be a counterintuitive presentation of

invitation and leading: surely the 'leader' should be the voice part that we hear first, followed in 'clock time' by the followers? Here is an example of Tormis's characteristically subtle temporal subversion; a virtual reversal of what might initially seem a more typical presentation of 'following' in music. If we imagine that we are at the back of a long line of people (the choral accompaniment) walking to the Midsummer ritual festivities, and are vaguely able to perceive the leaders calling from the front of the line (the soloists, *in distanza*), then this picture makes more sense. It may also be a strategy for drawing the listener in to the construction of ritual embodiment – we, the listeners/followers, are behind the leaders. In fact – in a forwards-looking linear conceptualization – if the 'leaders' were to sing first, wouldn't they in fact be behind the followers, since their material is already in the past by the time the chorus announce themselves? Looking at the two solo parts, the first obvious conclusion is that the second alto is leading, and 'followed' by, the first alto (as is the reality in clock time; the former providing a melodic 'catalyst' for the latter). But if we are at the back of the line of followers, then the later a voice part appears in each reiteration of the material, the further ahead that part is. The soloists lead us forwards and upwards, yet conversely the feeling of this tonally static piece is incredibly calm and still. This, I think, is part of its ritualistic quality – this music is not calling us physically to move, but rather psychologically; to undergo a shift in our perception and priorities. The use of ascending 'cumulative chording',<sup>144</sup> rather than horizontal linear development, also calls to mind Jonathan Kramer's use of the term '*vertical time*' to describe non-linear or goalless temporal paradigms.<sup>145</sup> A ritualistic evocation of the concept of following or journeying is presented without the music having to 'go anywhere' at all. Subjunctive temporality makes possible this simultaneity, redolent of Kristeva's 'multiplicity of instants',<sup>146</sup> wherein concepts like stasis and movement can somehow co-exist across the boundary between them. The subjunctive world of ritual neither absolutizes nor absolutely denies borders, but instead all at once recognizes, embraces, negotiates and transcends them.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Mark Lawrence's term, from 'Veljo Tormis,' 56.

<sup>145</sup> Jonathan D. Kramer, *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies* (New York: Schirmer Books Macmillan Inc., 1988), 54-5.

<sup>146</sup> Lawlor, 'Lautréamont,' 831.

<sup>147</sup> Seligman *et al*, *Ritual*, 84-8.

Harmonic or pitch-centre stasis is primary among those features which are linked to the concept of ritual as 'spatial' – as more of a state of 'being' or 'doing' rather than a narrative 'telling.' This quality is closely connected to repetition through its shared opposition to contrast, innovation and variety. Referring back to Middleton's repetition spectrum (Figure 2.1), a sustained sound which evokes a sense of the perpetual or eternal (within the borders of its own subjunctive temporal world) is a reflection of the archetypal 'monad' – the hypothetically absolute repetition. Much as some of Stravinsky's 'ritualistic' works are described as tableaux (explicitly in *Les Noces*, for example), a ritual can be conceived of as a scene, an image, an icon (further parallels can be drawn here with reflections of iconography in Pärt's music<sup>148</sup>). Perhaps the foremost hallmark of diatonic music lies in its reinforcement of the supremacy of tonal areas by moving away from and back to them in particular ways. Something else altogether can happen to a referential pitch or area which is neither challenged nor reinforced by departure or contrast. A commonly accepted phenomenon relating to tonic pedals, drones or ostinati is the ability of a persistently sustained tonic to undermine itself by virtue of its very persistence. An extended tonic pedal can eventually begin to 'feel' like a dominant; harmonically and tonally static music tends to create strong expectations of change or resolution which, if unfilled, can have a destabilizing effect. The first 'Call to the Midsummer Bonfire' is one such example. The harmonic content comprises a 'tonic' E pedal overlaid with a broadly symmetrical quartal chord, underpinning the alto soloists' canon (see Figure 2.18). This sustained chordal material, which recurs throughout the short piece, has the aural effect of both supporting and undermining E as a tonal centre – in the sense that E is a referential sonority acting very much as a pitch centre, while the non-functional, quartal harmony is implicit of, or seems to anticipate, a motion which is never realized.

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<sup>148</sup> Hillier, *Pärt*, Chapter 1 and page 23.

Figure 2.18 - Quartal figure in 'Call to the Midsummer Bonfire I'

'Why St John is Awaited' is characterized by sectional alternation between two diatonically unrelated pitch centres, and a 'rocking' or 'tilting' harmonic motion between chords 'A' and 'B' (see Figure 2.19). Points A and B here do not have a diatonically functional relationship, but A acts as a kind of 'anchor' or 'hinge.' This is a further example of binary switching at both the structural and intra-phrase levels. The recursive nature of binary-switching repetition (only two steps from the chimerical 'monad' on Middleton's spectrum) is again at a remove from goal-oriented linearity. The effect is enhanced by the absence of an obvious diatonic hierarchical relationship between F minor and A minor, and the 'non-cadential' relationship between the F-C and E-B dyads (or 'F minor' and 'E minor/major' chords). It could be said that this approach represents a kind of freedom through control. Limiting harmonic movement within each phrase to a choice between either the referential chord or a consecutive one, then submitting that choice to a regularly alternating pattern, serves to remove interest from the motion – an indirect disempowerment of functional harmony. Restriction to this (bland?) either-or duality calls to mind the composer's own warning that 'you can't harmonize *regilaul*.'<sup>149</sup>

<sup>149</sup> Tormis, 'Problems.'

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprani, Alti, Tenori, and Bassi. The Soprani part is in 3/2 time and starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The lyrics for the Soprani part are: "Mis - tes Jaa - ni oo - de - tes - se, jaa - ni - ka, Why is Jaa - ni long a - wait - ed, jaa - ni - ka." The Alti part is mostly silent. The Tenori part has lyrics: "Jaa - - ni, jaa - ni, Jaa - - ni, jaa - ni." The Bassi part is also mostly silent.

Figure 2.19 – Binary switching or harmonic 'hinge' in 'Why St John is Awaited'

'St John's Steed,' the fifth movement, expresses circularity on multiple levels. The same melodic phrase is repeated in canon at the octave throughout (Figure 2.20). On a structural level the piece's tonal scheme is a circular, recursive A-B-A (F major, Ab major, F major). Finally, the melodic source material itself evinces a circularity through its 'unfinished,' 'imperfect' harmonic implications. As the authors of *Towards A Monographical Analysis* observe, the original melody does not include a 'tonic' note.<sup>150</sup> As illustrated in Figure 2.21, the dominant harmonic implications at the end of the melodic phrase 'necessitate' or imply a return to F major. Tormis provides this resolution simply by repeating the phrase over and over again, until the end of a section or of the piece, when the tonic pitch finally arrives to put an end to the perpetual cycling.

<sup>150</sup> Lippus et al, *Monographical Analysis*, 16.

Figure 2.20 – *Regilaul* canon in ‘St John’s Steed’

Figure 2.21 – Circular implication of *regilaul* melody from ‘St John’s Steed’

‘St John’s Song’, the titular seventh and last movement of this cycle, is also ostensibly the final piece in the entire *Calendar Songs* ‘series of cycles,’ although



Tormis insists that there is no prescribed order for performance of the series or any of its component movements.<sup>151</sup> Like its companion pieces, 'St John's Song' is highly repetitive. As before, Tormis uses the same melodic material throughout, while gradually building up the texture from sparse octave doubling with tonic and dominant pedals (Figure 2.22) to indulgent, 9-part parallel-motion homophony (Figure 2.23). Especially in the context of the preceding movement (the orgiastic shouts of 'Fire Spell'), these comparatively decadent harmonic clusters are redolent of abundance – which in context conjures up images of healthy crops and livestock, warm weather and fertile earth. In the real-life versions of this idealized rural 'folk' picture, the agricultural calendar and accompanying rituals would have been infinitely more bound up in the lives of individuals and communities than in modern urban societies. As such, sexuality and fertility were closely connected to the Midsummer festival, with its overarching themes of pleasure and plenty as well as birth and new life.<sup>152</sup> The subject matter of this series – changing seasons; the agricultural and ritual/spiritual calendar; the ephemerality of living things and the cycle of life – is very much centred on broad temporal and circular themes.

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<sup>151</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 173.

<sup>152</sup> 'Estonian beliefs and rituals carried on by Jaanipäev' page from 'Estonian World' website, accessed 28/09/15, <http://estonianworld.com/life/it-is-this-time-of-the-year-again-jaanipaev/>.

Soprani  
Alti  
Tenori  
Bassi

*p*  
Lää - mi väl - lä Jaa - ni kai - ma, jaa - ni, jaa - ni,  
Come out, come out, look at Jaa - ni, jaa - ni, jaa - ni,  
jaa - ni.  
jaa - ni.

5  
kas om Jaa - ni kah - har pää, jaa - ni, sis om ma kes - vä  
has that Jaa - ni bush - y hair, jaa - ni, then bar - ley will grow  
jaa - ni.

*p*  
sis om ma kes - vä  
then bar - ley will grow

Figure 2.22 - Sparse texture with pedal in opening of 'St John's Song'

104 *Piu largo* (♩ = 56)  
*poco a poco crescendo e più estatico*  
*p*  
Lää - mi väl - lä Jaa - ni kai - ma, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - ka,  
Come out, come out, look at Jaa - ni, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - ka,  
*poco a poco crescendo e più estatico*  
Lää - mi väl - lä Jaa - ni kai - ma, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - ka,  
Come out, come out, look at Jaa - ni, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - ka,  
*poco a poco crescendo e più estatico*  
Lää - mi väl - lä Jaa - ni kai - ma, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - ka,  
Come out, come out, look at Jaa - ni, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - ka,  
*poco a poco crescendo e più estatico*  
Lää - mi väl - lä Jaa - ni kai - ma, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - ka,  
Come out, come out, look at Jaa - ni, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - ka,

Figure 2.23 - Parallel homophonic additive 'cluster' chords later in 'St John's Song'

'St John's Song' displays a tendency towards minimalism's 'additive construction' technique; repetition of a unit which is gradually augmented or accumulates layers of some kind.<sup>153</sup> The length of the core melodic unit, the *regilaul* tune, suggests the classification of Middleton's 'discursive repetition' (repetition at the level of the phrase). In some ways, though, it embodies characteristics of

<sup>153</sup> Justin Henry Rubin, 'Process Music [Minimalism],' accessed online 28/09/15, at <https://www.d.umn.edu/~jrubin1/JHR%20Process%201.htm>.

musematic repetition: although there is plenty of textural variation, repetition of the melody itself is nothing if not ‘prolonged and unvaried,’ and changes in its surroundings negate the need for it to be ‘mixed in with contrasting units of various types.’ Middleton suggests that ‘[musematic repetition] tends towards a one-leveled structural effect,’ and ‘[discursive repetition] to a hierarchically ordered discourse’<sup>154</sup> – the repetition of ‘St John’s Song’ perhaps lies somewhere between the two. There is something here resembling a process of ‘vertical’ growth, from the initial sparse monophony to dense homophonic ‘cluster’ chords, with the core folk melody repeated as a constant throughout. However, the technique does not function here as a straightforward cumulative process, as one might expect to see in some other minimalist music. In the simplest of terms, the piece represents a string of repetitions of a folk melody within a gradually expanding texture – but there is nothing mechanical, ‘motoric’ or mathematical about this expansion. As well as adding homophonic layers to the melody, Tormis expands on the texture using canonic or antiphonal approaches and adds a (very simple) counter-melodic motif – and two sections present the same kind of material in a ‘minor submediant’ tonal area (the recursive ‘circularity’ of structural binary switching is also relevant here). Although the process is gradual, it clearly does not constitute systematic, layer-by-layer cumulative construction. If it is not entirely fallacious to place these two concepts in opposition, ‘St John’s Song’ is rather more ‘organic’ than ‘systematic’. As such the piece may be considered to use additive construction not as a technique per se, but rather as an idea or a conceptual motivation. The important thing is the omnipresence of the *regilaul* melody in virtually every square inch of this subjunctive world. This musical embodiment of the impossible, imaginary permanence constructed by ritual recalls the claim that: ‘ritual contexts encourage cyclical concepts of time in which nothing permanent ever changes.’<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Middleton, ‘Play it Again,’ 238.

<sup>155</sup> Seligman *et al*, *Ritual*, 72.

## Chapter 3: Time and Telos

### Estonia's Time and Monumental Time

*no one anywhere needs your history, your ends and beginnings.*

*Peace. Simple peace to the jellyfish, and to grouse eggs; peace, to the ant's rushing pathways; peace, to birds of paradise and the ginko*

*peace, to the sky; peace, to you snipe's flight*

*peace, to apples, pears,*

*plums, apricots, oranges,*

*wild roses growing on the railroad guardshack:*

*Requiem, Requiem aeternum*

*(Jaan Kaplinski, *The Same Sea In Us All*, 1984)<sup>156</sup>*

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<sup>156</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 139.



Figure 3.1 - Still from Priit Pärn's *Breakfast On The Grass* (1987)

Various of the musical effects or qualities which will be discussed in this chapter are closely related to those from the previous one. This section moves away from explicit discussion of the idea of ritual – although it is still relevant – to look at some different pieces and ideas. Jonathan Kramer's 'vertical time,' Julia Kristeva's 'monumental time,' and Jaan Kaplinski's 'unforced flourishing' will surface here, forming another set of angles from which to consider the 'timelessness' of some of Tormis's work. Telos, or goal-orientation, is tied up with repetition – and is a fundamental concern in much of the music under consideration here. Aristotle may have conceived of all things in relation to their final causes, but linear movement towards a predetermined goal is no longer absolute or necessarily normative in Western art music.

The diversity of ways in which composers have explored alternate possibilities of motion and direction is documented in part by Jonathan Kramer in *The Time of Music*. Most relevant here is a time-type which Kramer calls *vertical*. Discussed

under the heading ‘Stasis and Eternity,’ these ideas are prefaced: ‘just as the twentieth century has seen explorations of the subtleties of discontinuity, conversely it has seen experiments in extreme consistency.’<sup>157</sup> A close relationship between Tormis’s (as well as Pärt’s) music and minimalism is widely accepted. The musical features explored in this study betray a comparable approach to time (illustrated in Kramer’s evocation of ‘minimal music’ below) – but the differences in the origins of what we might very loosely call ‘American’ and ‘Estonian minimalisms’ invite closer examination here of the connections between non-linear or ‘nonteleological’<sup>158</sup> time and broader patterns of cultural thought. Kramer’s vertical time may encompass quite a wide range of musical features – and, as he says, his wider ‘taxonomy [...] must not be taken too rigidly nor too literally.’<sup>159</sup> The following are a handful of possible qualities and descriptions of this vertical time, several of which recall aspects of Tormis’s music.

- ‘Some recent pieces seem to have adopted the requirements for moments (self-containment via stasis or process) as their *entire essence*.’
- ‘When the moment becomes the piece, discontinuity disappears in favor of total, possibly unchanging, consistency.’
- ‘Vertical music may be defined by process as well as stasis. There is a special type of vertical music, which is sometimes called “process music,” sometimes “trance music,” more often (to the apparently universal disapproval of its composers) “minimal music.”’<sup>160</sup>

A vertically conceived piece or section may lack ‘internal phrase differentiation,’ and instead ‘its sound material’ may be ‘largely unchanged throughout its duration.’ In other examples – and this description is closer to Tormis’s music than the one above – ‘phrases refuse to form a hierarchy and are therefore heard to some extent as arbitrary. Every cadence is of approximately equal weight. No distinction is made

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<sup>157</sup> Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 54-5.

<sup>158</sup> Kramer (as borrowed from Leonard B. Meyer), *The Time of Music*, 56.

<sup>159</sup> Kramer, *Time*, 58.

<sup>160</sup> Kramer, *Time*, 54-7.

as to the degree of closure.’<sup>161</sup> The crux of the matter, in terms of telos, is condensed by Kramer as follows:

A vertically conceived piece, then, does not exhibit large-scale closure. It does not begin but merely starts. It does not build to a climax, does not purposefully set up internal expectations, does not seek to fulfill any expectations that might arise accidentally, does not build or release tension, and does not end but simply ceases. [...] No event depends on any other event. Or, to put it another way, an entire composition is just one large event.<sup>162</sup>

If we attempt a linear hearing of Tormis’s goalless pieces we are confronted with the same conundrum as Kramer’s teleological listeners in a concert of vertical music: ‘We become overloaded with unfulfilled expectations, and we face a choice: either give up expectations and enter the vertical time of the work – where linear expectation, implication, cause, effect, antecedents, and consequents do not exist – or become bored.’<sup>163</sup> Presented with these options – of surrender either to the music on its own, quite obstinate, terms, or to utter frustration – it is unsurprising that ‘bland inventions’ might be the only mention afforded to Tormis’s work even in a contemporary concert review. Connections between his music and more ‘mainstream’ minimalisms are of course relevant here.<sup>164</sup> It is possible to imagine Harold C. Schonberg’s description of both the latter and baroque concerti also being applied to pieces like ‘My Sister, My Little Cricket’ (discussed later in this chapter):

Its excuse for being was that it wrapped the listener in innocuous sound, the busy patterns moving up and down without ever really saying anything. Diddle diddle diddle, diddle diddle diddle... what was there to dislike in this enormous bland field of nothingness?

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<sup>161</sup> Kramer, *Time*, 55.

<sup>162</sup> Kramer, *Time*, 55.

<sup>163</sup> Kramer, *Time*, 56.

<sup>164</sup> Mark Lawrence’s reticence concerning the practice of strictly aligning Tormis’s music with minimalism, which he has described as ‘erroneous labelling’ (see ‘Veljo Tormis,’ 1-2) is understandable. However, evidence of comparable vertical temporalities (or even parallels in compositional ‘techniques’) suggests that the mention of this genre is valid in the context of this study.

Thus it is with Minimalism.<sup>165</sup>

As Kramer has taken great care to establish, the pursuit of a collection of absolute, clearly distinct categories of time or time-experience, which do not overlap or co-exist, will always be a wild goose chase. To begin with, none of the species of musical time he discusses can ever fully transcend their coexistence, for Western listeners, with our engrained sense of linear ‘clock time.’ Moreover, he advises against using any of his time-types as absolute exclusive labels for a whole piece of music or even a section.<sup>166</sup> Bearing in mind these difficulties in categorization, the following theoretical time-type dichotomy may prove to be another useful comparative tool, in spite of its relative simplicity. ‘Historical time’ is not exclusively a Kristevian concept. However, this study will distance itself from wider definitions, using the term in a specific way and in partnership with ‘monumental time.’ This dichotomy has been developed by Kristeva in feminist theory<sup>167</sup> and is usefully refined by Maire Jaanus in an article on the post-Soviet Estonian novel *Piiririik*.<sup>168</sup> Like John Rahn’s categories of repetition, *répétition* and ‘slavery,’<sup>169</sup> historical and monumental time are primarily differentiated in terms of their relation to telos; to directed development, linearity, the meaningfulness of beginnings and endings, and so on.<sup>170</sup> Historical time is linear, narrative, obsessive, concerned with progress and achievement – arguably driven by fear of death and the desire to conquer, succeed and survive. Monumental time, conversely, is more spatial, cyclical, ecological, hysterical, and maternal.<sup>171</sup> Jaanus explains further:

It is either a form or type of eternity or it is a cyclical and recurring time of repetition or resurrection. [...] Above all, monumental time is always present. Presentness is one of its absolute characteristics. It is a now, not past, or the future. It is not outdated or outmoded,

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<sup>165</sup> Schonberg, 1985 quoted in *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 173-4.

<sup>166</sup> Kramer, *Time*, 5-9 and 61-5.

<sup>167</sup> Julia Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’ (transl. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake), *Signs* 7/1 (1981): 13-35.

<sup>168</sup> Maire Jaanus, ‘Estonia’s Time and Monumental Time,’ in *Baltic Postcolonialism*, ed. Violeta Kelertas, Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi 2006, pp. 203-232.

<sup>169</sup> Rahn, ‘Repetition,’ 50.

<sup>170</sup> Jaanus, ‘Estonia’s Time,’ 213-4 and 216-7.

<sup>171</sup> Jaanus, ‘Estonia’s Time,’ 216.



it does not become yesterday or lost time. The massive presence of monumental time gives it the quality of space or of a place. It is a kind of spatial time because it returns to the same place. As a time indissociable from space, a space-time, 'all-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space.'<sup>172</sup>

Jaanus argues further that monumental time permeates Estonia art and thought because Estonians, through the collective cultural trauma of hundreds of years of military defeat, occupation and erasure, have learned not to expect anything from historical time.<sup>173</sup> Preoccupations with spatial, goalless, circular, non-linear time, and with the violence or danger inherent in aggressively linear historical time, do surface repeatedly in the work of Tormis and Kaplinski. A potentially related fixation with looping time, with linear clock-time and with history, narrative and fate can also be read into some of Estonian animator Priit Pärn's films (for instance, see Figures 3.1 and 3.2 to 3.5). It should be noted, though, that Kaplinski would most likely argue for goallessness as a positive value; not as a negative, reactive hallmark of trauma, but as an aspect of the artlessness and 'unforced flourishing' he believed to be characteristic of his idealized picture of autochthonous Finno-Ugric culture. Tormis and Mikk Sarv, similarly, might be more likely to claim that these kind of qualities are simply inherent in the *regilaul*. Of course, different articulations and theories of time have confounded, inspired and obsessed artists and thinkers throughout history and all over the world. While there may be a case for seeing monumental time as a significant recurring theme in some seminal Estonian art, the following quote from Ken Kesey's *Sometimes A Great Notion*, published in America in 1964 (the same year as Tormis's *Autumn Landscapes*) is just one example reflecting the massive transnational trend away from the valorization and supremacy of historical time.

STOP! DON'T SWEAT IT. SIMPLY MOVE A FEW INCHES LEFT OR RIGHT TO GET A NEW VIEWPOINT. Look... Reality is greater than the sum of its parts, also a damn sight holier. And the lives of such

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<sup>172</sup> Jaanus, 'Estonia's Time,' 216.

<sup>173</sup> Jaanus, 'Estonia's Time,' 219.

stuff as dreams are made of may be rounded with a sleep but they are not tied neatly with a red bow. Truth doesn't run on time like a commuter train, though time may run on truth. And the Scenes Gone By and the Scenes to Come flow blending together in the sea-green deep while Now spreads in circles on the surface. So don't sweat it. For focus simply move a few inches back or forward. And once more.... look: ...<sup>174</sup>

Moreover, many earlier and hugely significant Western writers, such as Joyce, Laurence Sterne and La Fontaine, were deconstructing and side-stepping linear time in the decades and centuries before Kesey and Tormis. Nevertheless, by observing reflections of a monumental or goalless temporal mode in Tormis's music, though acknowledging that this is by no means exclusive to Estonia or the Balto-Finnic region, we can situate the composer's work alongside other cultural products of his country which display a similar 'philosophy'. In Pärn's 1984 film *Aeg Maha (Time Out)*, the unfortunate raccoon-like protagonist is driven to distraction by goal-orientation and linear time. It spends the first two minutes of the short animation running around its small room, trying and failing to complete mundane tasks in distressing, dysfunctional loops; and panicking as time slips away. Luckily, the clock malfunctions – and Pärn breaks the 'fourth wall' to remove the source of his miserable character's torment – following which the remainder of the film is a playful psychedelic adventure, a goalless wandering through fantastic imaginary lands (see Figures 3.2 to 3.5).

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<sup>174</sup> Kesey, *Sometimes A Great Notion*, 22.

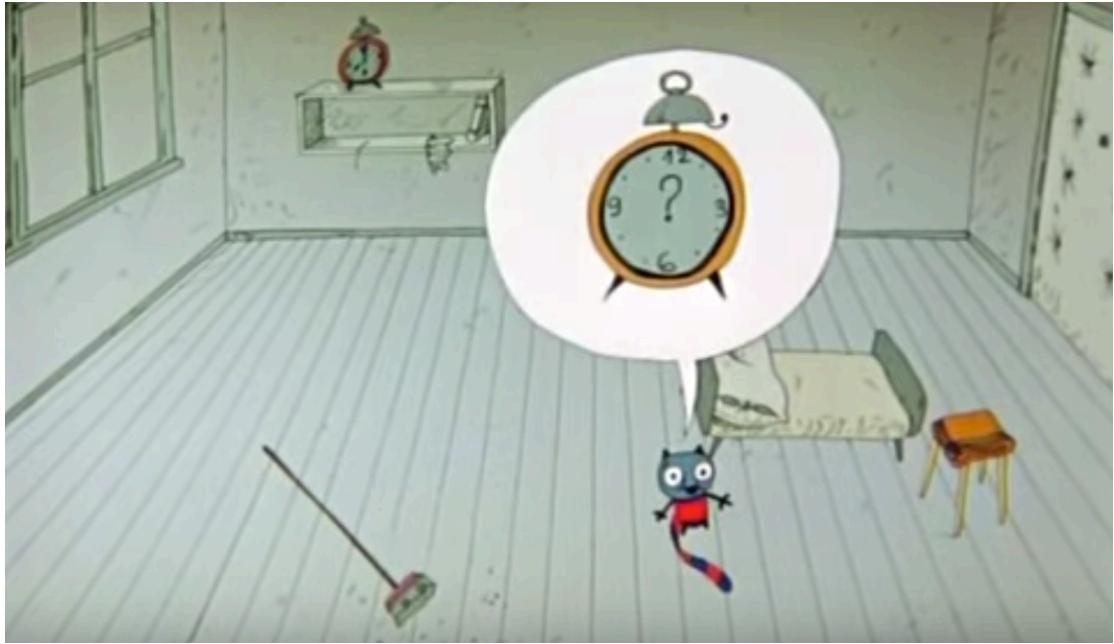


Figure 3.2 - The torment of clock time in *Time Out* (1984)

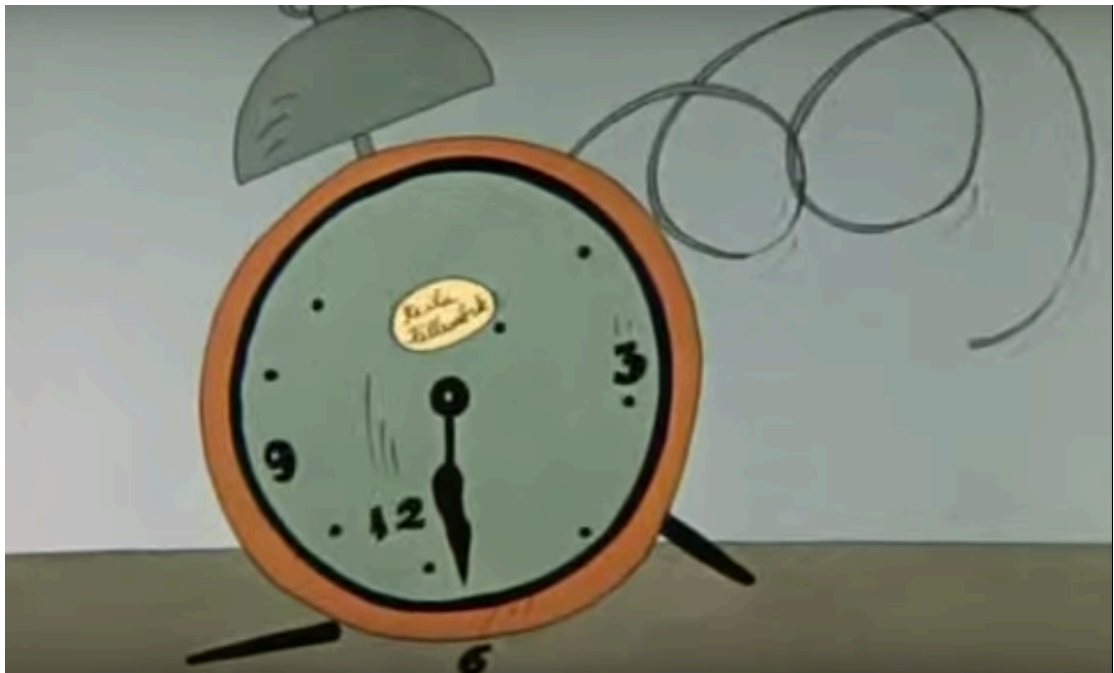


Figure 3.3 - Malfunctioning clock in *Time Out*

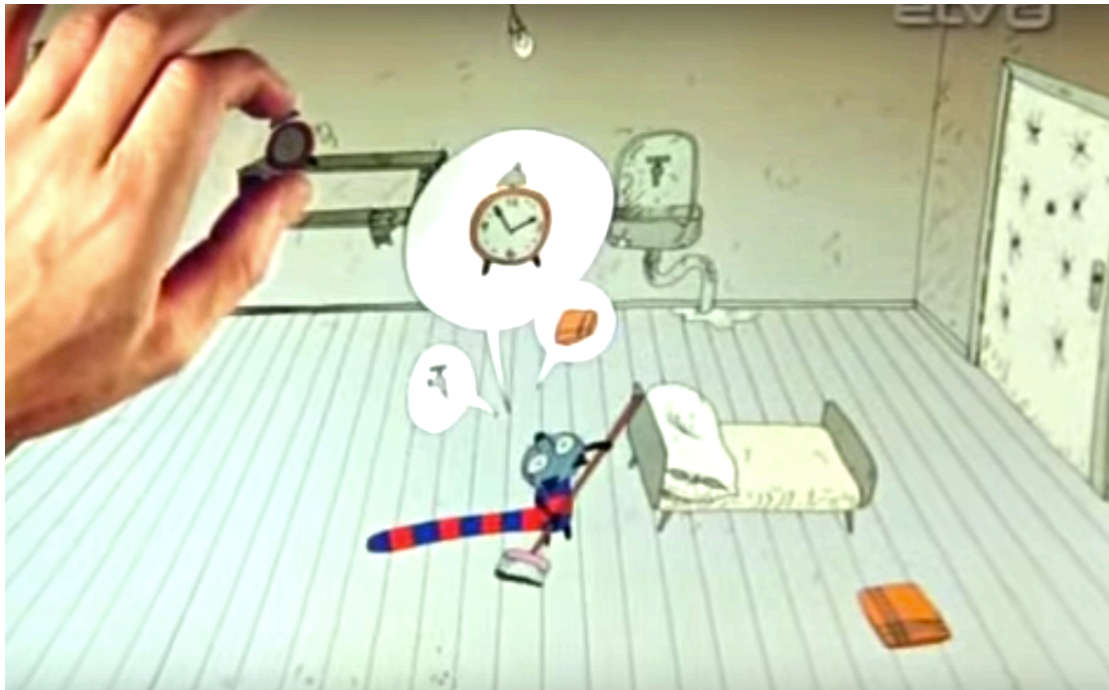


Figure 3.4 Pärn releases the protagonist from linear time



Figure 3.5 - Once freed from the clock, the adventure begins...

### **More monumental and vertical temporalities in Tormis's music**

This section addresses a variety of approaches to telos in Tormis's music: the non-linear, 'vertical,' 'monumental' or non-goal-oriented – primarily, but not exclusively, a characteristic of his folk song arrangements; the notionally process-based

(encompassing circularity and sequence); and binary switching. Latterly we will approach a piece which does have a sense of narrative structure or goal orientation, but which seems to depend on extra-musical motivation in this regard. Later chapters will note the appropriation of *telo* from nature to create musical shapes in the cycle *Nature Pictures*. This study identifies significant differentiated strands, without claiming that all or most of Tormis's music must fit this typology. There are various exceptions to these categories, but they are nonetheless noteworthy in relation to ideas expounded by the composer and by other contemporary Estonian artists and philosophers.

A number of the pieces examined in the context of ritual in Chapter 2 display features which are also relevant to the present discussion. Rather than repeat examples unnecessarily, it bears mentioning here that discussions about 'additive construction,' and of other instances of circularity and binary switching, in the preceding chapter are also applicable to many of the ideas here. In particular the static, pseudo-monadic movements – such as 'Call to midsummer bonfire I,' with its apparent implications of imminent harmonic motion which are never made a reality – represent a sound-world in which *telo* is unimportant or non-existent. Pieces in which specific material or musical qualities (melodic, harmonic, or pitch-centre related) are first presented and subsequently sustained or repeated, without any significant deviation or departure, are some of the most immediately obvious instances of monumental, vertical, goalless musical time. Two very short examples from *Vepsa Rajad* (*Vepsian Paths*, 1983, from the series *Unustatud Rahvad – Forgotten Peoples*), a cycle setting folk material from the Finno-Ugric Vepsian culture, are shown below (Figures 3.6 and 3.7).

8.  
**Laulda teile lauluke**  
**To Sing You a Little Song**

VELJO TORMIS

Andante ♩ = 84

Soprani

Alti

Tenori

Bassi

*Solo f*

*p*

*mm*

*f*

*p*

*mm*

*p*

Pa- ja- ta- da pa- joi- n' e, krii- tsan aa se o- jai- n' e, o- jai- zes se l' äht- kud,

l' äht- ku- des se kät- kud, kät- ku- des se nap- sud, da nap- su- doo se sar- vud,

*p*

*mm*

*f*

*Tutti f*

sar- vu- des se mai- doi- n' e. Kaik jo ku i pa- joi- n' e.

Figure 3.6 - Absence of obvious goal-orientation in 'To Sing You a Little Song'

6.  
**Läksin mina veele**  
**I Went for the Water**

VELJO TORMIS

**Allegro** ♩ = 132

**Solo (ad libitum)**  
*mf*

Alti  
 Tenori  
 Bassi

*p*

Läk - s'in mi - n'ä ve - de - no,  
 e - de - ne - zo me - he - no Tri - kun = Sa - kun poi - gan ta - gu,  
 mu - dai - vet g'õm - hä, hau - gin - ka - nad s'õm - hä. (Solo) Kaik.

Figure 3.7 - Absence of goal-orientation in 'I Went for the Water'

The choral accompaniments in the two movements above are further examples of Mark Lawrence's 'cumulative chording.'<sup>175</sup> In this instance, as elsewhere, the 'cumulative chord' of the static accompaniment simply prefigures (or matches), and then sustains, the entire melodic content of the short movement. This approach can also be seen in 'Delicate Maid' (see Figure 4.29) – and in a sense, it defies narrative, departure, and return, since every notated pitch is already

<sup>175</sup> Lawrence, 'Veljo Tormis,' 56.

introduced and sustained from the very first bar. A handful of the shortest pieces in *Vepsian Paths* verbally, rather than musically, signal their closure – such as it is – with the word ‘kaik,’ meaning ‘that’s all’ (see Figures 3.8 and 3.9 below, and figure 3.7 above). Perhaps the absence of a clear musical telos in movements of such brevity somehow necessitates this notification; simultaneously, the feature acts as a characteristically tongue-in-cheek gesture on Tormis’s part – or perhaps even an implicit challenge to a listener whose expectations of development and longevity remain stubbornly unfulfilled. ‘Unforced flourishing’ and monumental time can exist either in a hypothetical eternity or in the briefest of moments; the clock-time length of the piece of music is often secondary to the internal temporal world it constructs.



Figure 3.8 - 'Kaik' ('that's all') ending in 'Cuckoo and Cuckoo'

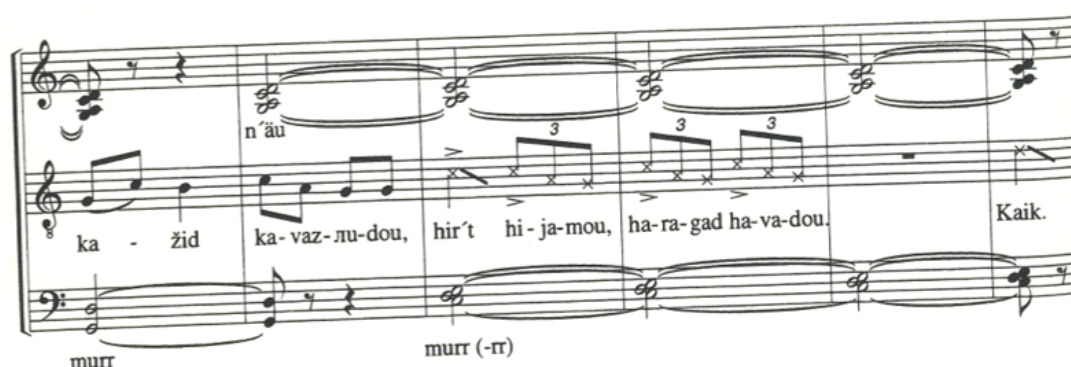


Figure 3.9 - 'Kaik' ending in 'Pussy-cat'

An alternative approach to linearity and goal-orientation is at work in two longer movements from *Vepsian Paths*. Harmonic movement or contrast is virtually non-existent here, and the tonal structure is comprised of potentially endless consecutive, whole-tone or semitone pitch centre shifts in one direction. Tim Howell makes reference to music which can ‘set up destinations without taking any



journeys.<sup>176</sup> There may also be a case for viewing hypothetically perpetual progress in a single direction as the negation of the traditional concept of a 'journey'. In the first movement, 'My Sister, My Little Cricket,' (Figure 3.10) the same twenty-one bars of relatively static material are repeated, first in Db major, then in B, A and G major respectively. Again in the twelfth movement, 'Vägisi mehele' ('Forced to Get Married'), the 'expository' material is simply repeated in consecutive keys (though this instance involves a gradual *accelerando* throughout, and a dynamic contour which is conspicuously absent from the earlier movement) – this time ascending through C, Db, D, Eb, E, F and Gb, coming to rest in G major. In both these contexts the transposition levels (whole-tone or chromatic) are symmetrical, with the effect that the shifts represent merely a change in colour, rather than imparting any sense of direction.

The surface repetition in 'My Little Cricket' is closest to Middleton's musematic type: prolonged repetition of small units, though varied. The melodic material in each section forms an unbroken string of alternating cells, mostly within the span of a major third, and is underpinned by a sustained chord throughout. Again, the cumulative chord which opens each section prefigures virtually all of the pitch content; only the first pitch of the sixth cell (see Figure 3.11) is not included. The sequential repetition of the section may be considered an example of Middleton's 'discursive repetition,' though the length of the sections which are repeated (twenty-one bars), and the lack of conflict or contrast between them, perhaps tend more toward 'a one-leveled structural effect' than 'a hierarchically ordered discourse.' The musematic cells are shown below, numbered in the order of their first appearance (Figure 3.11). These fragments repeat in a regular pattern of alternation, shown in Figure 3.12, where the cells are grouped in fours for visual clarity. However, the aural effect does not necessarily correspond with this grouping. In fact, the similarity between these units, the lack of articulation or breaks between them, and the absence of contrasting pitches or harmonic implications in all but two of the six cells, mean that this pattern is arguably not really processed at all by the listener, let alone divided up into clear sub-groups. Rather the effect is more of a

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<sup>176</sup> Tim Howell, 'Magnus Lindberg: Narratives of Time and Space,' *Contemporary Music Review* 12 (2014): 1-2.

continuous stream of sound within the section – which latterly reveals itself to be part of a chain, after the more noticeable appearance of the differentiated cells v and vi signals the end of the section.

The image shows a musical score for the opening of 'My Sister, my Little Cricket'. It features four vocal parts: Soprani, Alti, Tenori, and Bassi. The Soprani part begins with a rest followed by the lyrics 'Tšitš - koh-t'em,'. The other vocal parts have vocalizations: 'ee- oo- uu' for Alti, 'aa- ee- oo- uu' for Tenori, and 'aa, ee- oo- uu' for Bassi. The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note melody in the right hand and a harmonic accompaniment in the left hand. Dynamics include *f* (forte) and *p* (piano). The score is in 4/4 time and has a key signature of three flats.

Figure 3.10 - Extract from opening of 'My Sister, my Little Cricket'

The image shows a musical score for six mosematic cells from 'My Little Cricket'. The score is for Soprano and is in 5/8 time with a key signature of three flats. The cells are labeled as follows: cell-i, ii, iii, iv, v, and vi. Each cell consists of a specific rhythmic and melodic pattern of eighth notes.

Figure 3.11 - Mosematic cells from 'My Little Cricket' (in chronological order of first appearance)

**Section 1 cell pattern:**

i – ii – ii – ii  
iii – iv – ii – iv  
iii – iv – ii – iv  
iv – v – vi – iv  
iv – v ...

**Sections 2-4 cell pattern:**

i – iv – ii – iv  
iii – iv – ii – iv  
iii – iv – ii – iv  
iv – v – vi – iv  
iv – v ...

Figure 3.12 - Cell repetition patterns from the first and subsequent sections of 'My Little Cricket'

These structurally sequential pieces call to mind Pythagoras's theory on the nature of straight lines – namely that a true straight line, in an abstract sense, is 'infinitely protracted': it goes on forever. The diagram in Figure 3.14 is an illustration of how this music might be perceived conceptually: Tormis demonstrates the 'possibilities' of this material for the listener to experience aurally, in clock time, and the 'mind's ear,' or the 'ear's mind,'<sup>177</sup> is inclined to fill in the blanks. The open-ended process of these pieces may be described as 'Pythagorean'; the relative insignificance of a beginning or ending place in this music represents linearity made almost obsolete, an effect close to Kramer's vertical time. Middleton says of sequence (in music hall song) that it is

at the same time repetitive and non-repetitive: the unit of repetition is *worked into* a larger unit of 'narrative' flow or lyrical symmetry. [...] Sequence *composes* time (rather than marking time or obliterating it, as straight repetition, especially if musematic, seems to do).<sup>178</sup>

But Middleton is talking about sequences contained within more varied macro-structures. If an entire piece of music comprises a non-recursive sequence, it might be more likely to tend towards 'obliterating' time, inasmuch as our learned sense of

<sup>177</sup> Terms borrowed from Richard Taruskin, *The Danger of Music and other Anti-Utopian Essays* (CA: University of California Press, 2009), 349.

<sup>178</sup> Middleton, 'Play it Again,' 244-246.

clock time can possibly be ‘obliterated’ by music. In this instance, the non-hierarchical, symmetrical qualities of the whole-tone scale in its entirety evoke the ‘circular, the mythic, the blank space,’<sup>179</sup> of Middleton’s monadic repetition – while vaguely reflecting the ‘infinite set’ in the sense that there is no return to any tonal area once it has been departed from.

It would be insensible to argue that a straight, unidirectional line is ‘non-linear.’ Linearity as a logical order of events is in fact not the issue here; instead we should look back to telos and closure. A.B. Marx said that a sequence is a *gang* (a process).<sup>180</sup> A complete, recursive cycle-of-fifths sequence may travel through many keys before returning ‘home,’ but can still express a full circularity and as such a kind of finiteness: it is a process with some sort of preordained beginning and ending. A helpfully condensed example of a ‘closed’ cyclical, sequential process from within a linear macro-structure is shown in Figure 3.13, an extract from Tchaikovsky’s *Feuillet D’Album* for piano.



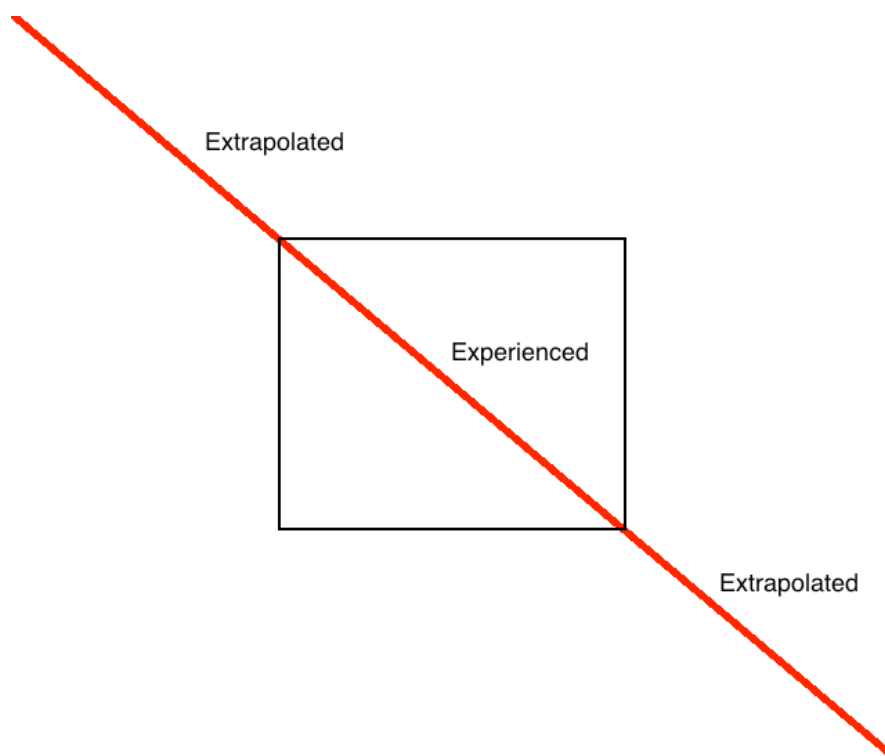
Figure 3.13 – Extract from Tchaikovsky’s ‘Feuillet D’Album’ (Op. 19 No. 3, 1873)

Conversely, the sequence in ‘My Sister, My Little Cricket’ is neither hierarchically discursive nor necessarily ‘finished.’ It is linear in the sense that tonal-area ‘events’ must occur in their specified order of a descending chain, but these sections or events are all equidistant and all of equal importance. There does not seem to be any reason why the piece should not continue with another repeated section in F major, or begin with this same section in Eb major before proceeding through the keys Tormis has in fact written. Of course, to extend it much further

<sup>179</sup> Middleton, ‘Play it Again,’ 235.

<sup>180</sup> Jairo Moreno, ‘Challenging Views of Sequential Repetition: from “Satzlehre” to “Melodielehre,”’ *Journal of Music Theory* 44/1 (2000): 144-5.

would bring pedestrian practicalities such as comfortable vocal range into play (and perhaps leave an audience thoroughly bored). The point is that the 'process' is open-ended, and that the listener can extrapolate these 'Pythagorean' extensions from their aural experience (see Figure 3.14). The effect is reflective of Kaplinskian ideals: of 'unforced flourishing,' and of 'a place where people and things just are, instead of talking about it.'<sup>181</sup>



**Figure 3.14 - Projection of 'experienced' and 'extrapolated' portions of the open sequential 'process' of tonal-centre descent in 'My Little Cricket'**

Structural circularity is another aspect of the process/stasis in Kramer's vertical time; it also reflects the cyclical, spatial, ecological qualities of Kristeva's monumental time. Something resembling a simplification of the minimalistic 'phasing-shifting'<sup>182</sup> approach – in this case, a metrical or temporal shifting of material in relation to a metrical or temporal constant rather than to a copy of itself – characterizes two pieces from *Vepsian Paths*: 'What are they doing?' and 'The Maid Striving to the Boat.' Material is repeated (with very slight variations in the former movement) in regularly shifting positions against a fixed counterpoint of

<sup>181</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 17.

<sup>182</sup> Elliott Antokoletz, *Twentieth-century Music* (Prentice Hall, 1992), 499.

pedal chords or ostinato (see Figures 3.15 and 3.19). These are pieces which could potentially continue to repeat indefinitely. The lack of any contrasting tonal area – or indeed of harmony which functions rather than ‘colours’ – combined with the cyclical shifts create a listening experience which is at a remove from the idea of linear narrative with peaks and troughs, climaxes and contrasts, or tensions and resolutions.

- tab, Vas - sitš bl'i - nad paš - tab, nu - de - ge nu - z'i -  
 Min te - jaa t'e - go - bad? Min te - jaa t'e - go - bad?

- kad pe - zob, t'ai na - van püh - kib, soo - zar haa - god  
 Min te - jaa t'e - go - bad? Min te - jaa t'e - go - bad?

t'ä - kib, ka - na kad - jad omb - nob, kuk  
 Min te - jaa t'e - go - bad? Min te - jaa t'e - go - bad?

ve - den ve - dab.  
*sub. f*  
 Min te - jaa t'e - go - bad? No min te - jaa t'e - go - bad?

- 27 -

Figure 3.15 - Melodic material shifting against regular ostinato in 'What Are They Doing?'

Here the issue of how much music Tormis actually writes in order to convey a potentially 'limitless' musical idea arises. One of the fundamental preoccupations in 20<sup>th</sup> century music concerned 'how non-linear concepts of time may be

accommodated within music which, whatever the composer's aspirations, is bound in performance to the sequential linearity of beginning, continuing and ending.<sup>183</sup> In the case of 'What are they Doing?' (Figure 3.15), the answer seems straightforward. Tormis first introduces the ostinato alone to establish the meter and stress pattern, then presents the 'shifting' material only once in each of its possible permutations – it appears once starting on each crotchet beat of a 4/4 bar; the first appearance is on the first beat, the fourth is on the fourth beat – and ends with a reassertion of the supremacy or normativity of the 'original' metrical alignment by closing with the ostinato. This final iteration of the ostinato, though it clearly signals the movement's end, does not constitute a goal of any real importance, as there has not been any real departure from it at any point. In this sense Tormis has written just or exactly enough music to communicate his concept.

'The Maid Striving to the Boat,' the second movement of *Vepsian Paths*, also uses this shifting approach (see Figure 3.19). In this example, the soprano, tenor and bass pedals recur regularly in 4/4 time, while the altos have 'thematic' material in alternating bars of 4/4 and 5/4. The alto material appears beginning variously at each crotchet beat of the pedal figure's 4/4 bar, repeating this pattern cyclically. Unlike the example above, here there is more than one set or cycle of shifts to different points of alignment. The points in the bar at which the melody appears (hereafter referred to as 'first position,' and so on, numbered corresponding to alignment with a particular beat of a 4/4 bar of the accompaniment) adheres to the following pattern, falling into four cycles; two partial and two complete:

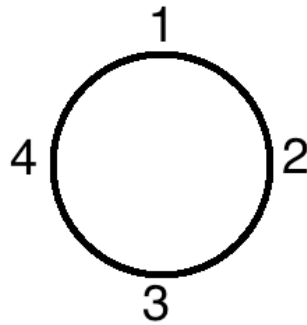
Third position, fourth position;  
first, second, third, fourth position (section repeated);  
first position.

Figure 3.16, below, illustrates the 'crystallized', ideal existence of the phasing pattern formula that applies to both of the above pieces, since they each display four 'positions' for shifting between.

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<sup>183</sup> Darla Crispin in *Unfolding Time: Studies in Temporality in Twentieth Century Music* (ed. Crispin), (Collected Writings of the Orpheus Institute, Leuven University Press, 2009), 7.





**Figure 3.16 - Circular presentation of shifting-positions in 'My Sister, My Little Cricket' and 'The Maid Striving to the Boat'**

Once Tormis has established this abstract ideal in 'The Maid Striving,' he can pick up and leave off part-way through recurrences. It is as though the 'ideal musical object' exists as something like a multimedia installation in an art gallery, and every listener who experiences it just happens to wander into the room for the temporal duration of 2.75 cycles, before drifting off to buy coffee. The same idea is reflected in Witold Lutosławski's self-professed aim of composing music which can exist as an 'architectonic object outside of time';<sup>184</sup> this composer's own analogy of music viewed as a sculpture, or painting,<sup>185</sup> is echoed in Kramer's description of vertically-conceived music as a sculpture which listeners are free to examine from various angles.<sup>186</sup> The longest traditional *regilaul* could consist of 'hundreds or even thousands of verses'<sup>187</sup>; Tormis's psychological approach to timescale is a simple way to present Finno-Ugric folk song in a format which more effectively caters to the duration-expectancy and attention span of (some) modern audiences, while preserving something of its monumental, 'timeless' nature. Figures 3.17 and 3.18 show the portions and repetitions of the 'shifting circle' from Figure 3.16 as they are presented/experienced in 'What are they Doing?' and 'The Maid Striving to the Boat' respectively.

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<sup>184</sup> Steven Stucky, *Lutosławski and His Music* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 127.

<sup>185</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> Kramer, *Time*, 57.

<sup>187</sup> Sarv, 'Mother Tongue.'

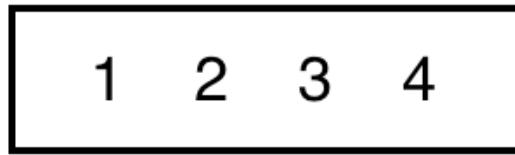


Figure 3.17 - 'Phasing-shifting' positions in linear presentation in 'What are They Doing?'

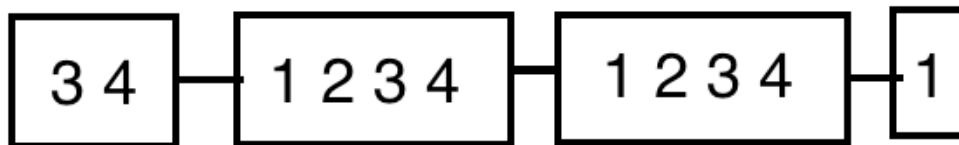


Figure 3.18 - Multiple/fragmented patterns of shifting repetition in 'The Maid Striving to the Boat'

'What are they doing?' basically represents the most coherent presentation of the shifting formula. 'The Maid Striving' (Figure 3.19), on the other hand, more explicitly depicts timeless, perpetual circularity. The latter movement comprises multiple cycles, half of which are fragmented and incomplete. It could be tempting here to deploy the label 'arbitrary' (one of the attractive buzzwords which, for Richard Cohn, 'ring the post-structuralist swimming pool like so many chaise lounges [sic]').<sup>188</sup> However, it must be important that the 'singer-listener' experiences at least one complete cycle; and preferably two, if the remainder are to be 'arbitrarily' distributed. Only then can they be permitted to join and leave the circle at seemingly random points. Having suggested that, the monumental timescale of this piece does not necessarily require the listener to recognize which position the shifting material is in at any given occurrence; the stasis of the accompaniment, the absence of contrast or linearity, does lend a feeling of the arbitrary with regards to 'where' in the circle we are at any point. This is comparable to the apparent unimportance of a listener perceiving any regularity in the alternating musematic cell patterns of 'My Sister, My Little Cricket' – and it may be a significant feature, not just a side-effect, of monumental temporality. Whether or not this circularity is fully perceived by a

<sup>188</sup> Richard Cohn, 'Introduction to Neo-Riemannian Theory: A Survey and a Historical Perspective,' *Journal of Music Theory* 42/2 (1998), 169.

casual listener – that is, whether there is a conscious cognitive link between the regular, systematic nature of the shifting, and the sense of timelessness – is difficult to ascertain. The crux of the matter, though, is that this music cannot sensibly be perceived as linear or goal-oriented.

The image displays a musical score for a vocal ensemble and piano accompaniment. The top system includes parts for Alto, Soprani, Tenori, and Bassi. The Alto part begins with a melodic line in 4/4 time, marked with a dynamic of *p* (piano). The vocal parts (Soprani, Tenori, Bassi) enter with lyrics: "Pau, Piu, Piu, pau, piu, piu, Pomm, pomm, pomm,". The Soprani part has lyrics: "Ü - l'ez ka - tsun,". The bottom system shows the piano accompaniment with lyrics: "päi - voi paš - tab, a - lez ka - tsun, ve - noi sou - dab. Ken hän". The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, both marked with a dynamic of *sim.* (sostenuto).

Figure 3.19 - Melodic material in 'third position' against accompaniment in 'The Maid Striving'

The binary switching discussed in Chapter 2 acts to construct a less goal-oriented framework in many of Tormis's works. Regular alternation between point A and point B does not constitute a journey. The recursive nature of structural, interphrase or intra-phrase binary switching, particularly if the relationship between A and B is less hierarchical, evokes circularity. While in a number of instances the point 'A' might reasonably be said to represent a kind of 'tonic,' Tormis often declines to satisfy the presumption that point A will therefore form a musical telos. For instance, in 'The Narrow Swing,' the key signature and initial prominence of the note D in melodic terms (see Figure 2.5) suggest that this would probably be the most

reasonable choice of an overall pitch centre. Later in the piece, though, G and A are featured as bass pedal notes, and the final arrival at – rather than cadence into – a symmetrical chord built from perfect fifths (Figure 3.20) declines to fulfil any diatonic linear expectations on the part of a listener.

The image shows a musical score for three staves, numbered 27. The top staff is the vocal line with lyrics: "kes - kelt kir - ju lin - nu - ke - ne. / past the cen - ter not a pied bird." The middle staff is a piano accompaniment with lyrics: "kes - kelt kir - ju lin - nu - ke - ne. / past the cen - ter not a pied bird." The bottom staff is a bass line with a long, low note (pedal point) that spans the entire duration. The music concludes with a symmetrical chord built from perfect fifths, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

Figure 3.20 - Symmetrical ending-point (as opposed to 'goal') in 'The Narrow Swing'

Binary switching as the negation of journey and goal-significance also surfaces in 'Under the Bird Cherry Tree' from *Nature Pictures* (see Figure 3.21). Essentially the entire harmonic content of this short movement is a series of switchings from Ab major to A minor; neither pitch centre represents a telos and there is no sense of linear progress, development, or recapitulative finality. Each tonal area represents a state of mind or being, in accordance with the text. As will be explored in more depth later, ideas like balance and coexistence frequently take precedence over development, 'progress' or hierarchy in Tormis's work.

The musical score is for the piece 'Under the Bird Cherry Tree'. It features three vocal parts: Soprano I (S.I), Alto I (A.I), and Alto II (A.II). The tempo is marked 'Andantino' with a quarter note equal to 63 (♩. = 63). The initial dynamic is 'P dolce'. The lyrics are in Finnish and English. The score shows binary switching between different tonal areas, with dynamic markings like 'p' and 'mf' indicating changes in intensity. The lyrics are: 'Is - tuk - sin ter - ve öö / I would sit all the eve', 'Is - tuk - sin / I would sit', 'is - tuk - sin / I would sit', 'is - tuk - sin / I would sit', 'öi - tes too - min - ga all / 'neath the ro - wans a - bloom', 'aa', 'is - tuk - sin too - min - ga all / I would sit ro - wans a - bloom', 'a - ga need sää - sed / oh but these bug - bites', 'aa'.

Figure 3.21 - Binary switching as opposed to linear goal-orientation in 'Under the Bird Cherry Tree'

In 'Where did you Sleep Last Night?' (*Vepsian Paths*), the binary alternation between the two pitch centres of D and G is finally resolved at the end of the movement simply by superimposing one upon the other (see Figure 3.22). A characteristically non-dualistic gesture, this closing material suggests to the listener that they need not after all decide which tonal area has *exclusive* supremacy – although the distribution of harmony and the inescapable dominant-tonic implications do comfortably appoint G major as a final tonic. Another reflection of Kristeva's 'multiplicity of instants,'<sup>189</sup> this ultimate coexistence of points A and B is not a telos in the sense that it has been reached in a logically progressive or linear fashion, but represents instead the ideal of balance to which the movement's binary motions have already alluded.

<sup>189</sup> Lawlor, 'Lautréamont,' 831.

The image shows three systems of musical notation for a song. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: 'ee', 'Ku - na mets ui - d'í?', 'Nii - tšed', 'tšap - l'í - ba.', 'ee', 'Me - he - le', 'ee', 'mä - n'í - ba.', 'ee'. The score is annotated with blue and red brackets and labels 'A' and 'B'. Section B is marked with blue brackets, and Section A is marked with red brackets. The final system shows a combined section labeled 'A/B'.

Figure 3.22 - 'Compromise' of superimposition at end of 'Where Did You Sleep Last Night?'

The binary switching in the berceuse-like 'Lulling' recalls similar aspects of the 'Swing Songs.' Though this movement is not a ritual song, it also constructs a (still simpler) 'Matryoshka effect' of multi-layered, mimetic binary switching – here not redolent of a swing but of a cradle rocking (see Figure 3.23). The absence of goal-directed motion, of departure or return, is highlighted in Figure 3.24, which shows voice parts trailing off at the movement's end.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Lulling'. It features four staves: Soprani, Alti, Tenori, and Bassi. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: 'Baa - juu, baa - juu, baa -', 'ba - ju, Ba - ju,', 'ba - ju, ba - ju, ba - ju,', and '- juu, baa - juu, baa - juu, baa -'. The score is annotated with blue and red brackets and labels 'A' and 'B'. Section B is marked with blue brackets, and Section A is marked with red brackets. The Soprani part has a final 'Ba - ju,' with a blue bracket labeled 'B' and a red bracket labeled 'A' above it. The Bassi part has a final 'baa -' with a red bracket labeled 'A' above it.

Figure 3.23 - Multi-layered binary switching in 'Lulling'

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Lulling'. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system has three staves: a vocal line with lyrics 'ba - ju, ba - ju, ba - ju', a piano accompaniment line with lyrics 'Ba - ju, ba - ju Ta-n'en'-kood', ba - ju, ba - ju, mi-l'en'-kood', and a bass line with lyrics '- juu, baa - juu, baa - juu, baa - juu'. The second system has two staves: 'Soprani' with lyrics 'ba - ju, ba - ju, ba - ju' and 'Tenori Bassi' with lyrics '- juu, baa - juu, baa - juu...'. The third system has one staff: 'Soprani' with lyrics 'ba - ju...'. The music is in a key with three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature.

Figure 3.24 - Parts trail off and 'fade out' in 'Lulling'

### **Music as a semantic conveyor belt**

At this stage, the potential of music to exist as a goalless, monumental space has been discussed without reference to the *text* which is upheld as the core and meaning of the *regilaul*. If a brief digression may be permitted:

the music of Morton Feldman is intentionless; it leaves the listener uninvolved, who regards it like a river on which different types of buds and flowers float by, return, wilt... It is not easy to describe because there is nothing to grasp hold of, everything melts away under the fingers, and no system hides underneath.<sup>190</sup>

The main reason for including this quote, which at first may seem essentially unrelated, is Gronemeyer's description of Feldman's music as 'a river on which different types of buds and flowers float by [and] return.' This image is particularly apt as an illustration of the way Tormis seems to view some of his own

<sup>190</sup> Gronemeyer, 1984: 5, as quoted in Daniel March, 'Beyond Simplicity: Analytical Strategies for Contemporary Music,' (D.Phil Thesis, University of York Music Department 1997), 57.

arrangements (as somewhat like a river) in relation to *regilaul* text (a series of buds and flowers drifting past). This idea is due not merely to the apparent prioritization of text over melody in runic song, but also inextricably linked to a core feature of *regilaul* verse, known as ‘parallelism.’ Further explanation calls for some extracts of *regilaul* texts. Two useful examples are the arranged verses Tormis uses for ‘St John’s steed’ and ‘Can’t be caught by a gun’, from *St John’s Day Songs*.

### ***St John’s Steed***

Jaan was a clever little fellow  
struck a steed from the fire itself  
from a spark its eye he crafted  
from a straw its ear he sculpted  
from some flax its mane he braided  
hammered hooves from bended grasses  
Little jaani, little fellow  
when you mount your steed for riding  
spruce up your steed most handsomely  
set its head in silver bridles  
o’er its eyes have silken tassels  
Little jaani, little fellow  
come then to midsummer’s bold bonfire  
on your knee a silken maiden  
in your arms a precious maiden<sup>191</sup>

We can see parallelism at work in these verses. The concept of the whole body of St John’s magical horse is conjured by the parallel use of ‘eye,’ ‘ear,’ ‘mane,’ and ‘hooves’. An impression of nature or non-sentient earthly things, including fire and plants, is constructed from ‘spark,’ ‘straw,’ ‘flax,’ and ‘bended grasses.’ Wealth, glamour or decadence is represented with silver and silk. Finally St John’s body or person is depicted with ‘knee’ and ‘arms,’ while ‘silken’ and ‘precious’ in conjunction

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<sup>191</sup> Translation taken from *St John’s Day Songs* score.



with 'maiden' may symbolize beautiful, rich women – and the combination of these latter concepts traditionally suggests courtship or romance.

Now, a crucial temporal aspect of this concrete-abstract mode of representation is its tendency to distribute broad abstract meanings across several occurrences of simpler denotations. An interesting result of this approach is the way that two or more 'compound' meanings can coincide and temporarily coexist, before being realigned with something else. The main groups of meaning that coincide with each other in this text could be simplified like this:

Earth/nature (non-sentient) – horse's body

Horse's body – wealth/decadence/beauty

St John's body – wealth/decadence/beauty – women

A second example with clearer connections between the meaning-groups is the text of 'Can't be Caught by a Gun':

Then women came for merrymaking  
maidens came for genial singing  
maidens swaying, gently swinging  
maidens swaying, garlands gleaming  
men are looking boldly from the forests  
little boys beneath the treetops  
with a gun I'd take a maiden  
with a seine I'd claim a maiden  
with a net I'd surely nab her

I understood and I responded,  
no, not a gun will ever take me  
not a seine will ever [claim] me  
not a net will ever nab me  
with a gun a wolf is taken  
with a seine a fish is taken  
with a net a catch is taken.

A very simple but potentially appropriate metaphor for this feature of parallelism is a supermarket conveyor belt. If Jill puts some pork and a few apples on the conveyor belt, perhaps she is going to make pork chops with apple sauce for dinner. When the cashier has scanned the meat, Jill might put a melon and a punnet of strawberries on the conveyor belt with the apples, in which case a passing observer could be forgiven for concluding she was in fact going to have a fruit salad. Once the apples and melon have been scanned, and Jill has put a bottle of Pimms behind the strawberries, another onlooker might have a quite different impression of Jill's dinner plans. This is of course a facetious comparison, and yet we can see that Jill's conceptually evolving purchases within the theme of food:

pork – apples

apples – melon – strawberries

strawberries – Pimms

unfold at a broadly comparable pace to the parallelism in 'Can't be Caught by a Gun':

women – singing/dancing

women – plants/nature (garlands)

[men/boys – plants/nature (forests/treetops)]

\*\*\*

women – hunting equipment

hunting equipment – animals/prey

{women = animals/prey}

Each compound conceptual unit, whether it is a number of items cohabiting temporarily on a conveyor belt, or a group of simultaneously presented concepts in a *regilaul* verse, suggests something different from its neighbours, despite their common elements. Part of the motivation behind suggesting this ungainly image is that it ties in with Gronemeyer's idea of a river carrying a series of buds and flowers past. On top of this, the more methodical, regular motion, and short, isolated

exposed segment, of a conveyor belt corresponds with rhythmic or verse groupings in song, and allows for a clearer delineation between groups of words. It is plausible that for Tormis this music functions in part as the conveyor belt which delivers the gradually evolving text; a text whose gradual evolution is both a reflection of and contrast to music which can be slowly unfolding but not really going anywhere at the same time. The secondariness of this music in relation to the text may also help to account for the feeling that it is 'bland': it is often very much a vessel for the text – though we should remember the earlier proposal that 'the power of *regilaul* is present only when there is a tune.'<sup>192</sup>

In terms of telos, this leads us to Kramer's brief discussion of varying attitudes toward linearity across different languages and cultural systems<sup>193</sup> – as well as to Kaplinski's comment that Europeans perceive 'an A' as 'an A,' while an Estonian might rather evaluate an A as 'an A-like thing'; 'for us the world is more like a cloudy sky than a puzzle with clear-cut component parts.'<sup>194</sup> Precision, clarity and direct goal-orientation are at odds with the parallelism of *regilaul* verse, which instead represents a monumental continuum of overlapping, evolving ideas. Meaning is offered, rather than delivered, in a broad, ambiguous, subjective expanse – while the multiplicity and temporal mode of these intersecting concepts and implications detract from the sense that there might be a single, supreme objective or telos. It implies that 'something else' (in semantic rather than musical terms) could always be about to happen, or already have happened – and that there is little reason to believe this 'something else' is more or less important than the thing that is happening now.

Having examined a number of aspects of goallessness, verticality, and monumentality in the times of Tormis's music, there is a highly significant work which should now be addressed. The (comparatively more) developmental disposition of *Curse Upon Iron* is only one of the features which sets it apart somewhat from many of the works discussed earlier. Others include its initial

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<sup>192</sup> Sarv, 'Mother Tongue.'

<sup>193</sup> Kramer, *Time*, 23-5.

<sup>194</sup> Salumets, 'Consciousness,' 443.

condemnation by Soviet authorities<sup>195</sup>; its unusually current and explicit socio-political message of protest and warning; the incorporation of what Lawrence has called a 'language of raw modernity'<sup>196</sup> (which is accurate at least by comparison with much of the rest of Tormis's popular work); and finally, its popularity today.

### **Curse Upon Iron: Goal-orientation and the violence of historical time**

*Raua needmine* (*Curse Upon Iron*, 1972, for mixed choir, tenor and bass soloists, and shaman drum) was banned for several years after its completion and is one of Tormis's best-known compositions. While it is not obviously a straightforward arrangement of an original *regilaul* melody, the melodic material is similar to and possibly indirectly based on a *regilaul*.<sup>197</sup> With texts from the Finnish Kalevala, 'adapted and augmented' by three contemporary Estonian poets (Jaan Kaplinski among them),<sup>198</sup> this piece is simultaneously rooted in folklore and yet one of the relatively few of Tormis's works in which explicit reference is made to the modern day. The result is that autochthonous cultural heritage and tradition are perhaps viewed by comparison as *historical*, as behind us in time – rather than as omnipresent, monumental and spatial/ecological, as they appear in the *Calendar Songs*).

Daitz's comprehensive study of Tormis's life and work includes several extended interpolations by other authors, among which is Urve Lippus's analytical article on *Curse Upon Iron*. Lippus's comments go into some classificatory detail, identifying the harmonic foundations of the piece as entirely comprised of two octatonic modes (or modes of restricted transposition).<sup>199</sup> She also outlines her interpretation(s) of the structure of the piece, and it is of some interest that she evokes the model of sonata form in the process. This is not of note because the observation appears technically unsound in any way, but rather because the selection of other works covered here has rarely led me to think of classical developmental models as an appropriate classificatory tool. Moreover, the time-

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<sup>195</sup> Lawrence, 'Veljo Tormis,' 46-7.

<sup>196</sup> Lawrence, 'Veljo Tormis,' 103.

<sup>197</sup> Lippus in Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 155 and 160.

<sup>198</sup> *Curse Upon Iron* score (Helsinki: Fennica Gehrman, Warner/Chappell Music Finland Oy, 2003).

<sup>199</sup> Lippus in Daitz, 163.

and-telos-related semantic content of this work, and the connection between its 'message' and linear or progressive conceptualizations of time, *historical* 'development,' innovation and goal orientation, are both crucial to the piece and quite unlike many of his other more 'monumental' works (such as the *Calendar Songs*, *Vepsian Paths* and some cycles from *Nature Pictures*). Further, with reference to the preceding Chapter, both this piece and the *Calendar Songs* are described as 'ritualistic,' in spite of the immediately stark contrast between them.

*Curse Upon Iron* is a piece about humanity in crisis, a civilization which has lost touch with nature and consequently with itself. The *Calendar Songs* are essentially pictures of humanity in harmony with itself and with nature. Having already examined some ritualistic aspects of the latter, we can take those observations and draw comparisons with the former. Extensive repetition, ostinati and drones, shouting and screaming, and the use of the shaman drum are easy targets for the ritualistic label. The score also instructs performers to move (see Figure 3.25) – a bizarre, frenzied pseudo-dance – during the 'development' section; yet despite these and other superficial 'ritualistic' trappings, this work is not really ritual-like according to the loose set of working parameters we identified earlier. It *does* want to communicate something; it is a kind of cautionary tale, a parable warning of the violence inherent in historical time. The subjunctive world of this work is a dystopia. As such – though it may be evocative of some presumed ritual content – it is further removed from the formally ritualistic, since in functional terms the latter tends toward construction of an idealized (if you like, a more utopian) potential world. Perhaps 'orgiastic,' though it may initially seem less obvious or satisfying than 'ritualistic,' is ultimately a less misleading label here.

Soprano Uu - ed ju - ma - lad  
Mo - dern de - i - ties

Soprano len - nu - kid  
air - planes

Tenor tan - kid  
tanks

Bass ka - hu - rid  
can - nons

Alto *fff*  
na - palm ja sü - si  
na - palm and coal

[all bend suddenly at the knees and then straighten up slowly - in 4 bars]

[gesture of fright]

[slow body turn towards the center of the choir and gradual lifting of head]

[sudden turn back]                      [all cower]                      [stand to attention, heads held high]

[sudden head turn left]                      [straight]                      [sudden head turn right]

[irregular movement becoming more and more agitated]

[sudden initial position, frozen expression of fear]

[stamp foot]

[all suddenly lower their heads; slow movement into initial position - during 8 bars]

*Screaming, in fear of death*

*the voice "breaks"*

*imitating the siren*

*hysterically*

*screeching*

**Figure 3.25 - Examples of spoken/shouted material and instructions for performers from *Curse Upon Iron* score**

Lippus expresses some discomfort, as a listener, at what she describes as the ‘avant-garde’ passage;<sup>200</sup> the saturation/climax/collapse section of the piece. Given Tormis’s penchant for mimesis and analogy, and the work’s concern with history, time and development, it is not too far-fetched to read this discomfort as a deliberate, desired effect – perhaps tied to a further layer of metaphor. *Curse Upon*

<sup>200</sup>Lippus in Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 171.

*Iron* opens with text from Kalevala runes, and the kind of simple melody and sparse harmonic writing which characterize countless of Tormis's folk arrangements. However, as evidenced by Lippus's developmental formal categorization, the texture and harmonic density subsequently expand and increase. In a simplified linear reading, Tormis first makes explicit the underlying octatonic modes, next resorting to complete chromaticism, then 'filling in the gaps' with octave glissandi, and ultimately destroys the fully saturated harmonic world, the performers having been driven to shouts and screams by the time the text refers to modern-day warfare (examples in Figure 3.25). It is plausible that Tormis is also making reference here to the saturation and breakdown of tonality in Western art music – a phenomenon which a thinker in sympathy with Kaplinski would probably see as a result of the neurotically forward-looking, historically goal-oriented obsession with development, innovation, progress and growth which has permeated virtually every aspect of European culture as well as so much of our art. Tormis's musical evocation of 'growth' to the point of explosion is analogous to the belief, held by Kaplinski and others, that the final outcome of forced, blinkered, obsessive human innovation must be saturation, meltdown and complete dissolution. Like so many of Tormis's works, *Curse Upon Iron* has time, and particular conceptualizations of time, as a central theme. If this piece is goal-oriented, then what is its goal? Certainly there is some development – and in various places a tangibly desperate forward motion – but the climax of the piece may readily be interpreted as a mimetic representation of an atomic bomb exploding and wreaking death and destruction on humanity and nature alike. The following 'resolution' returns to the sparse, 'primitive/ritualistic' material of the opening, lending a little weight to Lippus's choice of structural definition, and suggesting that the inevitable end result of historically-oriented, militaristic, anthropocentric innovation and 'development' will be our complete undoing – followed, if we survive, by an enforced return to a pre-technological way of life. It seems obvious that this piece represents a 'goal' that Tormis does not *want* to reach – a 'resolution' that he fears.

This work is not a ritual of cultural identity. Unlike the Calendar Songs, it is not really a ritual(istic) work at all. It uses 'ritualistic' *signifiers* liberally, but – to reverse Tormis's own words – it is not a ritual; it is a means of communication. Its

harsh ugliness, the neurotic, unsatisfying nature of the musical ‘development,’ and the subsequent collapse, arguably reflect the composer’s and poets’ own feelings about the way in which many modern-day consumerist societies often define development: that is, in relation to accumulation of capital, to technological innovation, economic growth, more effective weaponry, increased strength – having greater power and opportunity to do violence than your supposed opponent. In a broad sense, these concepts may apply at every level: international and intra-national, political, social and personal. This recursive ‘sonata’ model of initial presentation → ‘development’ → saturation/explosion/collapse → return, I think, is used mimetically, or analogously to developmental conceptualizations of time as historical. Further, the semi-palindromic nature of the very first and very last bars (see Figures 3.26 and 3.27) is a subtle twist on a typical understanding of what Lippus calls a ‘recapitulation.’ It hints at a symmetry, circularity and concern with balance – with ‘doing and undoing’ – which might more clearly underpin other works but which exist in this one too, albeit with an altered set of connotations.

The image shows a musical score for the opening bars of 'Curse Upon Iron'. It consists of five staves: Shaman Drum, Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The time signature is 4/8. The Shaman Drum part starts with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) all begin with a forte (f) dynamic and a crescendo hairpin. The Soprano and Tenor parts have lyrics 'Oo...' and 'O...' written below them. The Alto and Bass parts also have lyrics 'Oo...' and 'O...' written below them. The score is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat).

Figure 3.26 - Opening bars of *Curse Upon Iron*



Sh. Dr. *ff*

S. *ff* *morendo*  
aa...  
ah...

A. *ff*  
aa...  
ah... aa...  
ah...

T. *ff* *morendo*  
8  
aa...  
ah...

B. *ff*  
aa...  
ah... aa...  
ah...

Sh. Dr. *ff* *ff*

S. *morendo*

A. *morendo*

T. *morendo*  
8

B. *morendo*

Figure 3.27 - Closing bars of *Curse Upon Iron*; reversed reflection of the opening

Whether or not this piece was deliberately written to conform to, or to reference, a sonata-form model, it is certainly developmental and linear in a sense – but, it seems, that very quality is itself an indictment of the violence of historically-oriented time, whether it is constructed in music or in ‘real life’. Salumets writes:

‘what, in sum, emerges most forcefully from [Kaplinski’s] essays is this: in contrast to much of contemporary culture, indigenous peoples did not have a fetish for the new and did not view progress as a guiding principle.’<sup>201</sup> *Curse Upon Iron*, a product of both Tormis and Kaplinski’s creative efforts, expounds a philosophy very much in line with this warning.

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<sup>201</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 35.

## **Chapter 4: Balance and Biophilia**

It should already be apparent that the thematic strands which make up the contextual or critical aspects of this study inevitably intersect at various points; the same could be said for many of its musical observations. To argue, for instance, that a really fruitful study of a piece of music could focus exclusively on the ‘horizontal’ or the ‘vertical’ is equally as fallacious as the idea that so broad a concept as ‘balance’ (or repetition, or goal-orientation) can be thoroughly explored purely in isolation – in part since the parameters of such terms are so vaguely defined. The average person (not, for instance, a physicist or mathematician) can probably not satisfactorily separate the concept of space from the concept of time, since an understanding of each is largely formed by our empirical experience of how they interrelate. We learn about ‘space’ by moving through it in time; we learn about ‘time’ by existing, having existed, and continuing to exist, in space. As such, it would be disingenuous, and ultimately unhelpful, to pretend that absolute boundaries can be drawn between particular groups of observations about the music under consideration. The first half of this study accordingly contains various examples that may be reconsidered as equally relevant from another angle here, as we proceed to explore ideas about balance, symmetry and nature.

### **Balance and symmetry in some folk song arrangements**

The static accompaniment from ‘Call to the Midsummer Bonfire I’ (*St John’s Day Songs*; see Figure 4.1) is an example of harmonic writing motivated by balance and symmetry rather than hierarchy or directed motion. The outermost pitch (E natural) forms a clear referential pitch centre; meanwhile, the abundance of quartal harmony initially seems to necessitate movement to a more ‘stable’ construction. As this expectation is never realized, the listeners may choose (as Kramer suggests) to enter the world of vertical time. Otherwise they may well try to continue listening teleologically – which can only end in frustration. Once this harmonic material has been accepted as very likely the only content the accompanying parts will present, the listener can shift their focus away from a set of linear expectations, and instead

take note of how the balanced, semi-symmetrical foundations of this chord can ultimately sound stable and settled – despite the absence of meaningful, functional diatonic relationships or of any cadential reinforcement of the pitch centre.

2 Alti soli

(in distanza)

(in distanza)

Soprani

sempre *pp* mm

Alti

sempre *pp* mm

Tenori

sempre *pp* mm

Bassi

sempre *pp* mm

4

mm

Figure 4.1- 'Call to the Midsummer Bonfire I' ('St John's Day Songs')

The second 'Call to the Midsummer bonfire' evokes a feeling of space as balanced and of time as almost 'multiply-directed'; the latter is not meant here in the more complex sense that Kramer outlines<sup>202</sup>, but in relation to the use of cadences which are harmonic palindromes. Figure 4.2 shows one such cadence (chords are labeled with Roman numerals as though the piece is based on a mixolydian E mode; this is only intended to illustrate the symmetrical pattern in context, not to suggest that the chords are diatonically functional). Although the cadence 'resolves' onto what might arguably be heard as something like a tonic (despite being somewhat undermined by its relatively static persistence) there is no sense of even momentary finality or repose. Conversely, this narrative disruption destabilizes linearity. More specifically, it is as though something has been done and subsequently *undone* in order for the movement only to continue in the same vein. The idea of 'doing and undoing' in relation to balance and spiritual minimalism resurfaces later in this Chapter.

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<sup>202</sup> Kramer, *Time*, 46-9.

Moderato ♩ = 84 - 88

Soprani

Alti

Tenori

Bassi

*f*

Tul - ge jaa - ni - ku tu - le - le, jaa - ni - ku,  
Come to mid - sum - mer's bold bon - fire, jaa - ni - ku,

semi-palindromic cadence point

3

*pp* (eco)

*pp* (eco)

*f*

*simile*

VII ii | I

I ii VII

jaa - ni - ku,  
jaa - ni - ku,

jaa - ni - ku,  
jaa - ni - ku,

jaa - ni - ku,  
jaa - ni - ku,

jaa - ni - ku,  
jaa - ni - ku,

tul - ge tul - da oi - de - mai - e, jaa - ni - ku,  
come this day and tend the bon - fire, jaa - ni - ku,

Figure 4.2 - 'Call to the Midsummer Bonfire II' ('St John's Day Songs')

'St Catherine's Day Songs,' from *Estonian Calendar Songs*, is highly repetitive and demonstrative of Tormis's claim that 'you can't harmonize' *regilaul*.<sup>203</sup> Pedals or drones, non-diatonic harmonic layers, contour symmetry and symmetrical reference points characterize these pieces; some examples are shown in Figures 4.3 to 4.8.

<sup>203</sup> Anderson, 'Know Who We Are,' 26.

Molto meno mosso  
*ff*

60

4th major 3rd major 3rd

4th dim. 5th dim. 5th

4th major 3rd major 3rd

Tu - lõ, Lii - so, kad - ri - ko, kad - ri - ko, nõs - ta lin - ki, kad - ri - ko,  
 Lii - so, come to lift the latch up, kad - ri - ko, kad - ri - ko,

Figure 4.3 - "Thanking, Wishes and Leaving" (St Catherine's Day Songs)



28

*pp*

*div.* *pp*

kad - ri - ko!  
kad - ri - ko!

Kad - ri - ko!  
Kad - ri - ko!

kad - ri - ko!  
kad - ri - ko!

1. Kad - ri küild - se kül - me - tä - vä,  
Kad - ri's nals are free - zing, free - zing,  
2. Kad - ri var - ba va - lu - ta - va,  
Kad - ri's toes are ach - ing, ach - ing,

33

kad - ri - ko,  
kad - ri - ko,

Kad - ri - ko,  
Kad - ri - ko,

sör - mõ - ot - sa söi - tõ - lõ - va, kad - ri - ko!  
Kad - ri's fin - gers cool - ing. cool - ing. kad - ri - ko!  
ja - la - kond - sa kar - gõ - lõ - va, kad - ri - ko!  
Kad - ri's heels are leap - ing, leap - ing, kad - ri - ko!

Kad - ri - ko,  
Kad - ri - ko,

38

*f*

*f*

La - sõ kad - ri läm - me' - es - se!  
Let us in a heat - ed lodg - ing!

kad - ri - ko!  
kad - ri - ko!

La - sõ kad - ri läm - me' - es - se!  
Let us in a heat - ed lodg - ing!

Figure 4.4 - Vertical symmetries in 'Entering' (St Catherine's Day Songs)

Allegro ♩ = 132 - 138

*mf* Staggered breathing: phrases should be linked without any simultaneous cesuras for breathing

Soprani I  
 Siin om kad - ri    lus - ti - li - ne,    kad - ri - ko,    kad - ri - ko,  
 Here stands kad - ri    mer - ry, mer - ry,    kad - ri - ko,    kad - ri - ko,

Soprani II  
 Siin om kad - ri    lus - ti - li - ne,    kad - ri - ko,    kad - ri - ko,  
 Here stands kad - ri    mer - ry, mer - ry,    kad - ri - ko,    kad - ri - ko,

Alti I  
 Siin om kad - ri    lus - ti - li - ne,    kad - ri - ko,    kad - ri - ko,  
 Here stands kad - ri    mer - ry, mer - ry,    kad - ri - ko,    kad - ri - ko,

Alti II

Contour symmetry

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Figure 4.5 - 'Dance' (St Catherine's Day Songs)

contour symmetry

5

siin om kad - ri    lus - ti - li - ne,    kad - ri - ko,    kad - ri - ko,  
 here stands kad - ri    mer - ry, mer - ry,    kad - ri - ko,    kad - ri - ko,

siin om kad - ri    lus - ti - li - ne,    kad - ri - ko,    kad - ri - ko,  
 here stands kad - ri    mer - ry, mer - ry,    kad - ri - ko,    kad - ri - ko,

siin om kad - ri    lus - ti - li - ne,    kad - ri - ko,    kad - ri - ko,  
 here stands kad - ri    mer - ry, mer - ry,    kad - ri - ko,    kad - ri - ko,

Figure 4.6 - 'Dance'

Vertical 'symmetry'

29

min 3rd

maj 3rd

minor 3rd

major 3rd

kui sii tam - mō, kad - ri - ko, kad - ri - ko!  
oak a - danc - ing, kad - ri - ko, kad - ri - ko!

kui sii tam - mō, kad - ri - ko, kad - ri - ko!  
oak a - danc - ing, kad - ri - ko, kad - ri - ko!

kui sii tam - mō, kad - ri - ko, kad - ri - ko!  
oak a - danc - ing, kad - ri - ko, kad - ri - ko!

kad - ri tand - sō kui sii tam - mō, kad - ri - ko, kad - ri - ko!  
kad - ri's dance the oak a - danc - ing, kad - ri - ko, kad - ri - ko!

Figure 4.7- 'Dance'

37

min. 3rd

maj. 3rd

vertical intervallic symmetry

min. 3rd

major 3rd

minor 3rd

taa - de kån - gä, kad - ri - ko, kad - ri - ko,  
fath - er's shoe - soles, kad - ri - ko, kad - ri - ko,

taa - de kån - gä, kad - ri - ko, kad - ri - ko,  
fath - er's shoe - soles, kad - ri - ko, kad - ri - ko,

taa - de kån - gä, kad - ri - ko, kad - ri - ko,  
fath - er's shoe - soles, kad - ri - ko, kad - ri - ko,

kaa - ki tand - sō taa - de kån - gä, kad - ri - ko, kad - ri - ko,  
kad - ri frays her fath - er's shoe - soles, kad - ri - ko, kad - ri - ko,

9

Figure 4.8 - 'Dance'

'Cuckoo and cuckoo' (*Vepsian Paths*) displays both vertical symmetry and horizontal binary switching. The same three-part symmetrical chord recurs as a reference point – some instances are highlighted in red in Figure 4.9, below. Structurally, the antiphonal shape of the movement is a form of binary switching. Figure 4.9 also shows different levels of alternation, in blue (phrase level) and green (within the phrase and/or voice part). This feature was discussed earlier, both in relation to (a perceived lack of) goal-orientation and considered as a ritualistic/mimetic 'embodiment' of swinging. Here we can view the same kind of musical properties from a slightly different perspective: binary switching as

antiphony imbues the shape of this piece with a sense of balance as opposed to hierarchally-ordered linearity. The use of a refrain, and the (non-diatonic, but referential) symmetrical 'anchor' chord, is also connected to other anchoring devices frequently seen in Tormis's harmonic writing.

**Cuckoo and Cuckoo**

VELJO TORMIS

**Allegro** ♩ = 132  
*p unis.*

Soprani  
Alti  
Tenori  
Bassi

*p*  
*p*  
*Solo mf*  
*Tutti mf*

uu  
Ku - ku ka ku - ku  
Ku - ku ka ku - ku  
Ku - ku ka ku - ku  
Ku - ku ka ku - ku

An - da, kä - goi, bar - daš - tain!  
Ku - ku ka ku - ku.  
Ku - na si - niiž bar - dai - n' e? Vi - ka - te - hen vi - heļ - tā.  
Ku - ku ka ku - ku.  
Ku - na si - niiž vi - ka - te - hud? Hii - n' ai - n' e nit - tā.  
Ku - ku ka ku - ku.  
Ku - na si - niiž hii - n' ai - n' e? Leh - mai - n' e s' öt - tā.  
Ku - ku ka ku - ku.

A B A B  
A B A B  
A B A B  
A B A B

Figure 4.9 - 'Cuckoo and cuckoo' (Vepsian Paths)

Again at multiple levels, binary switching informs 'Why St John is awaited' (*St John's Day Songs*). The largest 'switchings' at phrase level are alternations of melodic distribution between upper and lower voices, and between pitch centres F minor and A minor. Within the phrase, the harmonic motion is restricted to a switching between what we could call chord A and what we could call chord B. Figure 4.10 expresses some multi-level alternations (verse texts have been removed in places for visual clarity; each larger 'B' phrase simply repeats the words of the preceding 'A' phrase).

**Lento assai** ♩ = 38 (♩ = 76)

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system includes Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass staves. The Soprano staff has lyrics: "Mis - tes Jaa - ni oo - de - tes - se, jaa - ni - ka, / Why is Jaa - ni long a - wait - ed, jaa - ni - ka." The Tenor staff has lyrics: "Jaa - - - ni, / Jaa - - - ni, / jaa - ni, / jaa - ni,". The Bass staff has a red bracket labeled 'A' spanning the first two measures. The second system includes Soprano and Tenor staves. The Soprano staff has lyrics: "Jaa - nil kah - ja kan - ne - tes - se, jaa - ni - ka? / why an of - fering brought to Jaa - ni, jaa - ni - ka?". The Tenor staff has lyrics: "jaa - - - ni, / jaa - - - ni, / jaa - ni, / jaa - ni,". A red bracket labeled 'A' spans the first two measures of the Tenor staff in the second system. Blue brackets labeled 'A' and 'B' are placed above the Tenor staff in both systems, indicating phrase-level alternations. A red line connects the 'A' brackets across the systems, showing the continuation of the chord A structure.

5

*p* A B A B

B

7

jaa - - ni, jaa - ni.  
jaa - - ni, jaa - ni.

B Jaa - nil kah - ja kan - ne - tes - se, jaa - ni - ka?  
why an of - fering brought to Jaa - ni. jaa - ni - ka?

Figure 4.10 - 'Why St John is awaited' ('St John's Day Songs')

There is some expansion of the texture and other slight variations, but these variations are always balanced in their sectional counterpart (with the exception of the very last bars). The overall pattern of repetition and alternation is as follows:

$$A - B - A' - B' - A''$$

(4 bars - 4 bars - 4 bars - 4 bars - 4 bars)

This is a proportionally balanced and almost-palindromic recursive binary form, but elements within it are reflective of imbalance – such as the differentiation in the last phrase, the final, unprecedented Db chord (Figure 4.11), the limping, non-binary metre, and Tormis's alterations to the *regilaul* tune itself.

17 *sub. p*  
 Sest - ep Jaa - ni oo - de - tes - se, jaa - ni - ka.  
 Here's why Jaa - ni is a - wait - ed, jaa - ni - ka.

*sub. p*  
 Sest - ep Jaa - ni oo - de - tes - se, jaa - ni - ka.  
 Here's why Jaa - ni is a - wait - ed, jaa - ni - ka.

*sub. p*  
 Jaa - - ni, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - - ka.  
 Jaa - - ni, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - - ka.

*sub. p*  
 Jaa - - ni, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - - ka.  
 Jaa - - ni, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - - ka.

Figure 4.11

In the collaborative *Towards a Monographical Analysis of some Folk Song Arrangements* – one of relatively few English-language publications of analyses of Tormis’s music – Jaan Sarv and Leo Semlek note that the composer has made melodic alterations to this *regilaul* as it was recorded by Tampere (Figure 4.12). What would be the second C in the melody becomes a Cb, as in Figure 4. 11 above.

In this tune Tormis uses high and low thirds alternately, unlike the picture presented in Tampere’s original. Such alliterative verse tunes having unstable thirds have been discovered in several places. The third may vary systematically or it may possess a continuously inaccurate intonation. There exist, however, such tunes which are deliberately sung in either this or that manner. In the given choral song the third must be intoned correctly either high or low, as these changes are supported by accompaniment harmony. Naturally one should distinguish between an alternating third and a neutral third.<sup>204</sup>

<sup>204</sup> Sarv, in *Monographical Analysis*, 9.

The melody of the fourth song ['Why St John is awaited'] serves as a characteristic example of the variational scale (while the harmony marks a transpositional scale).<sup>205</sup>

42. MIKS JAANI OODATAKSE?

Karksi.

MM ♩ = 170

do#<sup>1</sup> 1-5. Mis-tes jaa-ni oo-de-tes-se, jaa-ni-ka,  
 Jaa-nil kah-ja kan-ne-tes-se, jaa-ni-ka?  
 Et o nii är-jä ä-dät-se, jaa-ni-ka,  
 pii-mä-leh-mä pin-de-jen-nä, jaa-ni-ka—  
 sest et jaa-ni oo-de-tes-se, jaa-ni-ka.

Figure 4.12 - 'Why St John is awaited' in Herbert Tampere's folk song anthology (source for melodies in *Calendar Songs*) (Tampere, 1960: 162)

Sarv and Semlek appear to be suggesting an ethnomusicological explanation for this adjustment: that it may be reflective of *regilaul* vocal intonation practices or some established modal inflections and variations. On top of that, though, it's also possible that this deliberate destabilization is again indicative of the composer's penchant for mimesis and musical metaphor (which can also be read into the long-held 'waiting' notes at the end of each melodic phrase). There exists a contrast between the regular, balanced binary structure – which might represent the holistic overall balance of nature – and the disturbed or irregular elements within it – a possible reference to natural imbalances such as drought or sickness of livestock, which require St John's intervention if they are to be restored.

'Where did you sleep last night?' (*Vepsian Paths*) was considered earlier in terms of goal orientation; again, the binary switching which underpins the piece's

<sup>205</sup> Semlek, in *Monographical Analysis*, 13.



shape is also a quality suggestive of balance over hierarchy. The final juxtaposition of content A (G major, “tonic,” melody in upper voices) with content B (D major, “dominant,” melody in lower voices; Figure 4.13) shows us that binary switching does not necessarily mean hierarchical dualist opposition; these two elements are in balanced coexistence, not conflict, with one another.

The image displays four systems of musical notation, each consisting of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The key signature is one sharp (F#), indicating G major. The lyrics are in a non-English language, possibly Estonian, and are written below the notes. Red brackets labeled 'B' and blue brackets labeled 'A' indicate binary switching between two musical contents. The lyrics are as follows:

- System 1: *Ko - za hüp - pä's, ka - ži hva - t'i.* (Vocal: *ee* *Ku - na ka - ži*)
- System 2: *Jo - ged-me jok - s'i.* (Vocal: *ui - d'i?* *ee* *Ku - na jo - gi ui - d'i?*)
- System 3: *Här - gäd jüi - ba.* (Vocal: *ee* *Ku - na här - gäd ui - d'i - ba?*)
- System 4: *Mets - ha jok - s'i - ba.* (Vocal: *ee* *Ku - na mets ui - d'i?* *ee*)

Figure 4.13 - 'Where did you sleep last night?' (*Vepsian Paths*)

Harmonic binary switching as a less hierarchical or discursive orientation also characterizes sections of 'Herding calls.' Those phrases which are suggestive of a D-minor mode (highlighted with red and green brackets in Figure 4.14) further detract from a sense of diatonic hegemony. (The phrases in red alternate between the referential 'D minor' and an Eb triad, while those in green switch from D to a C triad.) The C and Eb triads do not appear to be significantly differentiated; what matters is that, in a given context, either of them may represent a consecutive 'point B' to the D minor 'point A'.

*cresc.* *(ff)*  
 pit - kät kuu - set, lat - voin lak - ka - päätt pe - tä - jät sil - lak - si li -  
*cresc.* *(ff)* A B  
 ka - si - joil - le, pai - kak - si pa - hoil - le mail - le, suo - su - li - hin, maa - su - li - hin.  
 B A B *dim.* (sim.)  
*f*  
 la - tak - köi - hin lä - ly - vi - hin! An - na käy - a käy - rä - sar - ven, haa - ra - sar - kan  
 A B A  
*poco a poco dim.*  
 sor - ku - tel - la, jou - tu - a jo - ka sa - vul - le vi - a - toin - na, vil - pi - töin - nä.  
 B *poco a poco dim.* (sim.)  
*p*  
 il - man suo - hon sor - tu - mat - ta, li - ka - han li - tis - ty - mät - tä! → ee —  
*p*

Figure 4.14 - 'Herding calls'

As discussed in Chapter 2, *Swing Songs* relies heavily on binary switching. Revisiting these pieces in the current context, it is already obvious that the act of swinging itself bears a strong relationship to the idea of balance. Pendulum motion is regular and repeating: it is a periodic motion, a motion repeated in equal intervals of time. As such it is not surprising that balance, symmetry and non-hierarchical orientation also surface as musical features in this collection. Some examples of vertical symmetry in this cycle were given earlier; Figure 4.15, below, shows an instance of contour symmetry from the opening of the first movement, 'The narrow swing'. Also of note in Figure 4.15 is the balancing influence exerted by aligning 'point A' from the first alto's melodic cell with 'point B' from the first soprano's initial

material; both points are the pitch D, and their juxtaposition in the second bar is a moment of equilibrium between the two distinct cells.

The image shows a musical score for 'The Narrow Swing' in 2/4 time, marked 'Allegro moderato' with a tempo of 108. The score includes parts for Soprani I & II, Alti I, and Alti II. The lyrics are: 'Läh - me se - da kii - ke / Let's go see the swing now, / kat - su mai - e, / try the swing now,'. Annotations include: a blue double-headed arrow labeled 'contour symmetry' between the first and second bars of the Alto I part; a green bracket labeled 'Unison "balance" between alto 1 point A and soprano 1 point B' spanning the second bar; and red letters 'A' and 'B' marking specific notes in the Soprano and Alto I parts.

Figure 4.15 - 'The Narrow Swing'

## Balance in Nature

Tormis regularly returns to symmetry, prioritizing balance over dualist tonic-dominant hegemony, and the original series-of-cycles *Nature Pictures* displays various approaches to, and degrees of, the same.

### Axial and 'anchored' symmetry

Both 'Spring wind' and 'Flowering blossoms' (*Spring Sketches*) open out from an axial or anchor note. In the former movement, E natural serves as an omnipresent central anchor from which the vocal parts fan out into symmetrical constructions, first with E and finally with G as its centre (Figures 4.16 and 4.17).

The image shows a musical score for 'Spring Wind' in 3/4 time. The score includes parts for Soprani I & II (S. I, S. II) and Alti I & II (A. I, A. II). The lyrics are: 'Su - la - vad / Van - ish - ing / tuu - les / wind - wards / tuu - les / wind - wards'. A red bracket on the right side of the score, spanning from the Soprano II part down to the Alto II part, is labeled 'Symmetrical chord with E axis'.

Figure 4.16 - 'Spring Wind'



Figure 4.17 - 'Spring Wind'

'Flowering Blossoms' does not use symmetrical constructions in this way, but the first note, G, is a (diatonically) central point between the lowest (Bb, a major sixth below) and highest (Eb, a minor sixth above) pitches at the final point of 'opening' (see Figure 4.18). The ascending and descending contours that can be extrapolated from the material also have approximate intervallic symmetry; and the 'stem' note, although presented in different registers, is also always symmetrically central either to the triad (that is, it becomes the third), or to the root-third (that is, it would have been the supertonic degree) of the 'open flower' chord.

**Flowering Blossoms** **Veljo Tormis**

Andantino  $\text{♩} = 63$  *p non legato*

S. I  
*p non legato* raa - mat rest - ing sel - ja - ta - ga but be - hind me

S. II  
*p non legato* Ees pin - gil wait - ing õu - na - puul ap - ple - tree's  
*P non legato*

A. I  
*P non legato* raa - mat rest - ing õu - na - puul ap - ple - tree's  
*P non legato*

A. II  
*P non legato* raa - mat rest - ing õu - na - puul ap - ple - tree's

leht - ti - vad flow - er - ing  
 pun - gad blos - soms  
 pun - gad blos - soms  
 pun - gad blos - soms

Figure 4.18 - 'Flowering Blossoms' (Nature Pictures)

In 'Late Spring,' the 'cuckoo' refrain's first note, A $\sharp$ , is a more precise central point within the octave of the referential pitch centre E (though not explicitly presented within a symmetrical vertical construction; see Figure 4.19).

mm

mm

*più f* Kä - gu veel ku - kub Cuck - oo still call - ing  
*più f* Kä - gu veel ku - kub Cuck - oo still call - ing

*Solo (imitando) p* kuk - ku cuck - oo kuk - ku cuck - oo

Figure 4.19 - 'Late Spring'

'Dry Weather' (*Summer Motifs*) also stops short of vertically highlighting a central tritonic axis with any consistency, though the example below (Figure 4.20) shows a moment of symmetry, subsequently extended to octave doubling of parts.

The musical score for 'Dry Weather' consists of four staves. The first three staves are vocal parts, and the fourth is a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in Finnish and English. The dynamic marking is *p* (piano). The score shows a moment of symmetry and octave doubling of parts.

Staff 1: *p*  
 päi - kest. Al - (l) - la  
 sun - shine. Down - la  
*p*  
 Down down

Staff 2: päi - kest. Al - (l) - la  
 sun - shine. Down - la  
*p*  
 Down down

Staff 3: päi - kest. Al - (l) - la  
 sun - shine. Down - la  
*p*  
 Down down

Staff 4: päi - kest. Al - (l) - la su - rub vai - kus o - ma  
 sun - shine. Down down press-es si - lence with its

Figure 4.20 - 'Dry Weather'

'Painfully red are the leaves' (*Autumn Landscapes*) displays an imprecise or looser horizontal symmetry of phrases (Figure 4.21); the meandering soprano motifs frame palindromically the more conjunct and diatonically suggestive few bars of alto and tenor material at the movement's centre. There is also a satisfying air of balance about the broader position of this moment of 'motivic mirroring,' which falls in the middle of the fourth movement out of seven: the centre of the whole cycle.

Allegretto  $\text{♩} = 92$

Soprani I: po - ri - seks söt - ku - tud ich - ti  
 müd - died and tröd - den this lea - fy

Soprani II: Va - lu - salt pu - na - sed le - hed teel way.  
 Pain - ful - ly red are the leaves on way.

Alti: tal - lan tramp - ling

Tenori: tal - lan tramp - ling

Bassi: tal - lan tramp - ling

Section (B): söt - ku - tud teel way.  
 tröd - den a way.

Section (C): I - met - len neid ma ja  
 Mar - vel - ing, awed I am

Section (A): va - lu - salt pu - na - sel teel way.  
 pain - ful - ly red - strewn a way.

Figure 4.21 - 'Painfully Red are the Leaves'

The appropriately named cycle *Winter Patterns* represents a subtle change in approach from the comparatively melodic examples of *Spring Sketches* and *Autumn Landscapes*, making greater use of extensive textural designs than its slightly more 'tuneful' predecessors. The first three movements all display vertical, intervallic or contour symmetry to varying degrees; 'Blizzard' (Figure 4.22) is an instance of melodic symmetry in which the 'axis' can be viewed either as a pair of consecutive pitches – C and D – or as an unsounded interstice between those two notes.

*ff*

S. I: Vin - ge vöi - gas val - ge hui - le  
 Ghast - ly fierce - some win - try bel - low

S. II: Vin - ge vöi - gas val - ge hui - le  
 Ghast - ly fierce - some win - try bel - low

A. I: tor - mab pea - le hii - gel - pui - le  
 storm - ing on - to mass - ive fir tree

A. II: tor - mab pea - le hii - gel - pui - le  
 storm - ing on - to mass - ive fir tree

*ff*

Figure 4.22 - 'Blizzard'

### Mise en abyme

'Flowering Blossoms' (shown in Figure 4.18) has already been described as reflective of opening flowers, through a series of expansions which encompass register,



texture, and note duration. There is a further observation to be made about these little shapes, which are not merely a succession of three openings. Each instance of unfolding is itself wider than the last; wide enough that each event could vertically 'fit inside' its successor. This creates a set of tiny 'Russian dolls,' the effect of *mise en abyme*. As simple – even 'bland' – as this may seem, it needn't be considered banal; it is rather a fitting embodiment of Kaplinski's biocentric unforced flourishing, particularly appropriate in a setting of the poet's own words. 'Flowering Blossoms' is also suggestive of a circularity by virtue of its possible diatonic implications: the final Ab triad could be heard as leaning towards G (the first pitch both of this movement and of the one which follows it), or even as a kind of 'subdominant' to the first 'tonic' Eb chord. Without wanting to over-romanticize this simple piece, its potential for cyclicity is also connected to the life-cycle of flowers: budding, opening, dying and falling to the ground, eventually to be replaced by new buds, in line with the changing seasons. It is pertinent here to reiterate some of Jaanus's comments on cyclical, monumental time. Parts of this could almost have been written about a phenomenon of psychological 'space-time', or 'time-space', such as *mise en abyme* – or perhaps, by extension, its occurrence in Tormis's music.

It is either a form [...] of eternity or it is a cyclical and recurring time of repetition or resurrection. [...] monumental time [has] the quality of space or of a place. It is a kind of spatial time because it returns to the same place. As a time indissociable from space, a space-time, "all-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space."<sup>206</sup>

### **Stasis, transformation and balance**

Many of Tormis's approaches to harmony seem to comprise some kind of extension of stasis or symmetry: they are largely non-hierarchical, often non-linear or diatonically ambiguous, and concerned with balance rather than conflict. They represent a subversion of boundaries and reflect the ideals of minimal intervention

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<sup>206</sup> Jaanus, 'Estonia's Time,' 216.

and unforced flourishing, as well as Kaplinski's belief that we are all 'born altruists at home in a self-organizing world rather than egoists fundamentally at loggerheads with nature and others.'<sup>207</sup> Various pieces in the *Nature Pictures* series are essentially harmonically and/or tonally static. A movement, such as 'Late Spring,' could be strongly suggestive of E major, but if it contains no functional events to speak of, is it 'tonal'? Richard Cohn reminds us that 'the presence of consonance no more implies tonality than the presence of dissonance implies atonality.'<sup>208</sup> The placid stillness of the more static pieces links them to a conception of time experienced as monumental; as being 'always now' – either not moving, or travelling aimlessly, in circles or without a specific or important goal.

Again like the *regilaul* arrangements, those movements which *do* comprise some discernible harmonic motion or tonal-centre shifts rarely do so in a way which 'makes sense' in the classical hegemonic framework of diatonic tonality. Developmental, functional, or hierarchical relationships are frequently eschewed in favour of stasis, symmetry, balance, and circularity. Looking back again to Tormis's claim that 'you can't harmonize' *regilaul*, it is interesting to observe the ways he approaches harmony in pieces entirely of his own creation, and what comparisons might be drawn between these his 'harmonizing' in folk song arrangements. This may also be an appropriate moment to return to the idea that, like Kaplinski, Tormis side-steps dualism or subverts boundaries – here between such falsely absolute dichotomies as stasis and dynamism, or historical goal-orientation and monumental circularity. Even his most harmonically static works are unavoidably prisoners of historical time to some degree (like all music), since they must begin and end in measurable clock time; but the composer can still play with our perceptions of time by denying us clear signals of when a piece might end. Moreover, those pieces which do 'move' harmonically often do so in a 'transformational' way – that is, they swing between different states of being, a further subversion of the imaginary opposites above.

One of the most significant aspects of the broad contributions of Neo-Riemannian Theory was the development of 'transformational' ways to understand

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<sup>207</sup> Kaplinski, *Flourishing*, 26.

<sup>208</sup> Cohn 'Introduction to Neo-Riemannian Theory,' 168.

movements between pitch-objects in non-diatonic but frequently triadic music.<sup>209</sup> These models provide a more suitable toolkit for approaching some of Tormis's output, and should allow us to avoid searching for absent functional significance in the non-diatonic, tertiary and semitonal shifts in the less static movements (or concluding that a composition is 'a translucent jewel which says: don't touch me. Just listen.'<sup>210</sup>

As well as the primary L, P and R operations, Transformational theory encompasses compound, secondary, 'non-parsimonious' operations. One of these, the 'Slide' transformation, can be seen at work in 'Under the bird cherry tree' from *Spring Sketches*. The slide is achieved by applying operations L, P and R successively, resulting in the transformation from one triad to another which shares its third degree.<sup>211</sup> In this instance, C natural performs as the major third of an Ab triad before transformation, and latterly as the minor third of A minor (see Figure 4.23).

Figure 4.23 - 'Under the Bird Cherry Tree'

Michael Cherlin sees transformation of this sort as 'organic': a shift between states of being (or maybe seeing?), rather than a directed, goal-oriented movement to a different place.<sup>212</sup> Transformation must necessarily have a temporal dimension, but it may not produce the same sense of time as a linear narrative or journey. In the

<sup>209</sup> Cohn, 'Neo-Riemannian Theory,' 167-8.

<sup>210</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 188.

<sup>211</sup> David Lewin, *Generalized Musical Intervals and Transformations* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007; accessed online).

<sup>212</sup> Michael Cherlin, 'On Adapting Theoretical Models from the Work of David Lewin,' *Indiana Theory Review* 14/2 (1993): 20-21.

example above, the triadic transformation reflects the ‘change in state’ in the text with appropriate simplicity. In Ab major, the narrator (Kaplinski) is happy to sit under the bird cherry tree, enjoying the flowers – but in A minor, he is hounded by hungry mosquitos. The relationship between these two keys and the pattern of alternation implies a non-hegemonic conceptualization. The movement begins ‘in’ Ab major, but it ends ‘in’ A minor. For each iteration of the former tonal centre, there is a subsequent iteration of the latter; alternation between the two essentially represents the entire harmonic content of the piece. Neither centre is the *correct* centre, but rather both represent an equally significant aspect of the speaker’s experience in a particular moment under the bird cherry tree.

The apparent absence of a clear ‘power’ relationship between these two centres – and the common centre of C in both triads – suggests a step away from starkly differentiated dualism; a step towards the dissolution of (Western?) delineations between ‘this’ and ‘that’, Ab major and A minor, even between the ‘self’ and the ‘other.’ It should be acknowledged that complications regarding the boundaries between oneself and others has also been identified as a hallmark of chronic trauma<sup>213</sup>; it also resonates yet again with Kaplinski’s suggestion that we ‘remain open to a world unburdened of differences between human beings, gods, and animals.’<sup>214</sup> Finally, this harmonic writing exists at a remove from the obsessive, goal-driven, historical linearity of, say, repeated perfect cadences at the close of a piece of Western classical music. The circular, recursive nature of the non-hegemonic, goalless alternating motion articulates a monumental, not a historical, temporality. The tonal-centre movement in ‘Yellow Flame’ could be described in diatonic terms as a central shift to the submediant. However, the lack of functional cadences or other diatonic modulatory devices suggests that viewing it in this way is not the most useful approach. Figure 4.24 shows the same key shift as a compound transformational operation (P-then-L, displayed as two arrows) mapped on a Tonnetz (or tone network) where each triangle represents a triad.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> See Toni Luxenberg *et al*, ‘Complex Trauma and Disorders of Extreme Stress,’ *Directions in Psychiatry* 21 (2001).

<sup>214</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 28.

<sup>215</sup> I have taken this template of a Tonnetz from Cohn’s ‘Introduction to Neo-Riemannian Theory,’ page 172, and added the arrows and letters according to the transformation in ‘Yellow Flame.’

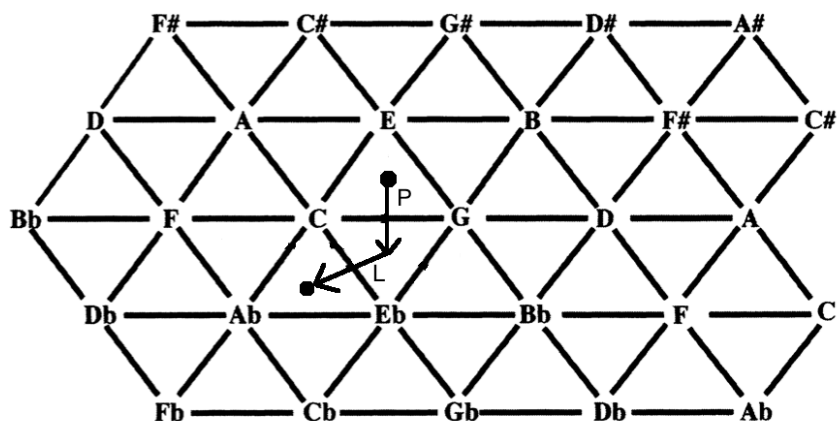


Figure 4.24 Tone-network showing non-parsimonious/compound/secondary transformation as in 'Yellow Flame.'

A fundamental feature of the primary or parsimonious variety of these harmonic operations is that they are also *involutions* – that is, applying the same operation to the object that results from said operation will reverse it, returning the object to its original state.<sup>216</sup> A recursive conceptualization of Tormis's transformations is fitting, and relates to David Dies's comments about the importance of balance in spiritual minimalist music, of 'doing and undoing,'<sup>217</sup> as well as to Kaplinski's 'self-organizing world.' It also evokes Newton's third law of physics (and 'physics' is a word we might well read here simply as part of 'nature'): that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.

Although it is often displayed as 'flat' (as in Figure 4.24), the actual form of the Tonnetz is almost universally conceived as three-dimensional, circular, toroidal; it 'wraps around itself,'<sup>218</sup> as does global cartography in 'real' terms. As an aside, this has parallels with two-dimensional maps that, in a Euro-centric orientation, present the U.S.A. as the extreme West and Russia as the extreme East – when, in actual fact, the Arctic Russian port of Pevek is closer to the West American state of Alaska than East Coast New York is to London. The return to cycles, circularity and balance as themes, and the subsequent abandonment of 'traditional' hegemony

<sup>216</sup> Richard Cohn, 'Maximally Smooth Cycles, Hexatonic Systems, and the Analysis of Late-Romantic Triadic Progressions,' *Music Analysis* 15/1 (1996): 12.

<sup>217</sup> David Dies, 'Spiritual Minimalism,' 330.

<sup>218</sup> Richard Cohn, 'Neo-Riemannian Operations, Parsimonious Trichords, and their "Tonnetz" Representations,' *Journal of Music Theory* 41/1 (1997): 17-21. N.B. this view is contested by Dmitri Tymoczko in 'The Generalized Tonnetz,' *Journal of Music Theory* 56/1 (2012): 1-52.

(transformational operations do not function within a key) situate the Tonnetz alongside the ‘unforced,’ non-hierarchical qualities of Tormis’s music.

### **Octatonic and whole-tone collections**

Lippus identifies the harmonic basis of *Curse Upon Iron* (discussed in the preceding Chapter) as two octatonic scales.<sup>219</sup> The same underlying material can be seen in ‘Dry Weather’ (*Summer Motifs*). Lippus writes that – at least for her as a listener – the modes in *Curse Upon Iron* have a particularly ‘dark’ quality (she contrasts this to the ‘bright, “white”’ sound of Messiaen’s ‘neutral’ use of related pitch collections).<sup>220</sup> Certainly the harmonic writing in ‘Dry Weather’ has a distinct ‘colour,’ but in this case it is more relevant to consider the cyclical, non-hegemonic qualities of its symmetrical foundations, and the way Tormis articulates movement between pitch objects within that framework, than to ascribe positive or negative values to his use of such a mode.

Here, again, the absence of traditional power relationships and a concern with balance are manifested in various ways: the prominence of both C and F♯, clouding the listener’s sense of what the ‘main’ pitch centre is; the cyclical and symmetrical nature of the first octatonic collection; the non-functional diminished pitch arrangements that are offered by octatonic modes, with their lack of diatonic implications; the augmented fourth between the two significant pitches C and F♯, a further remove from diatonicism, but a symmetrically equidistant pair in the octave. Shifts between ‘structural’ or referential (but not diatonically functional) chords are articulated through melodic movement; specifically through the opening motive and slight variations on the same (Figure 4.25). In fact Tormis alternates between two pitch groups here: the octatonic mode, and a very similar (with only one different pitch, but consequently asymmetrical) eight-note scale. The two collections – with the tone (T) and semitone (ST) intervals between pitches marked – are shown below, starting on C as the piece does (though it is not necessarily the most important pitch):

C – (T) – D – (ST) – D♯ – (T) – F – (ST) – F♯ – (T) – G♯ – (ST) – A – (T) – B – (ST)

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<sup>219</sup> Lippus in Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 163.

<sup>220</sup> Lippus in Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 171.

C – (T) – D – (ST) – D# – (ST) – E – (T) – F# – (T) – G# – (ST) – A – (T) – B – (ST)

This difference is arguably imperceptible on listening – but there is room in our interpretation of it for a return to the idea of mimetic representation. The tiny change, moving one pitch down a semitone, destroys the symmetry and circularity of the mode – much in the same way that the fragile equilibrium of ecosystems can be undermined by even mundane human actions, regardless of whether or not this is our explicit intention. As Naomi Klein reminds us, we may all contribute to global warming every time we make a cup of tea,<sup>221</sup> an action just as pedestrian and seemingly innocuous (if a little more quotidian) as shifting a single note in an octatonic collection. A certain amount of ‘Dry Weather’ may be a normal aspect of the average climate in many parts of the world – but by intervening here, the composer has upset the ‘natural’ balance. As a passionate conservationist with a strong ecological conscience, Kaplinski advocates for biocentric equality and unforced flourishing – primary principles of which are maximum respect for the sanctity of nature, and minimal intervention in both art and life.<sup>222</sup> John Cage, a fellow biophile, might add that ‘beauty ends where the artist begins.’<sup>223</sup>

Harmonic movement directed/governed by motivic movement

<sup>221</sup> Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism Vs. The Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 28.

<sup>222</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 26 and 34.

<sup>223</sup> Cage quoted in Bruce Brubaker, ‘Time is Time: Temporal Signification in Music,’ in *Unfolding Time* (ed. Darla Crispin), 115 and 132.

The image shows a musical score for 'Dry Weather' with four staves. The lyrics are: 'En - di - selt on / Once a - gain a / lām - be pōu - a - / sul - try rain-less / il - m. / da - y.' The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *pp*, and *mf*. Red boxes highlight specific melodic lines in the first and third staves.

Figure 4.25 - 'Dry Weather' - motivically driven movement between octatonic and asymmetrical pitch collections

Although Tormis declines to use whole-tone collections explicitly in this series, their nature is implicit in the third-based constructions which bookend the titular thunderstorm in the central movement of *Summer Motifs* (see Figures 4.26 and 4.27). A chord built from major thirds owes what has been described as a 'magical,' 'mystical,' or 'natural' sound to its whole-tone implications (that is to say, filling in the scalic gaps in the most obvious way would result in a whole-tone scale). A pitch collection of this sort has the same kind of relationship to ideas of balance and symmetry as the octatonic mode described above, but is less 'dissonant' and necessarily avoidant of diminished harmonic groupings (although this doesn't mean that it has any diatonic implications<sup>224</sup>). The outer symmetry of the movement, the positioning of these two chords, and the 'step-wise' way in which they are departed from and arrived at, also evokes a sense of inexorable circularity. It is possible to extrapolate a connection with cycles of weather and seasons, or even with the common defining element (water) shared by rising storm clouds and rainbows.

<sup>224</sup> Cohn 'Introduction to Neo-Riemannian Theory,' 168.



a)

kal - las ka - pa - ga, rai - us ra - he - hoog ja vih - ma kal - las  
 rain in buc - ket - fuls, cast a spate of hail, then pour - ing rain in  
 vih - ma kal - las, vih - ma kal - las  
 pour - ing rain and pour - ing rain and

b)

ka - pa - ga. Rak - sus ter - ve ilm. Oi(ii), -  
 buc - ket - fuls. Shat - tered all the world.  
 ka - pa - ga. Rak - sus ter - ve ilm. Pik - se - kih - vad puus - se  
 buc - ket - fuls. Shat - tered all the world. Spike of light - ning strik - ing  
 ka - pa - ga. Rak - sus ter - ve ilm. Pik - se - kih - vad puus - se  
 buc - ket - fuls. Shat - tered all the world. Spike of light - ning strik - ing

c)

- vih - ma sa - das...  
 rain a - fall - ing...  
 vih - ma sa - das, vih - ma sa - das, vih - ma sa - das, vih - ma sa - das...  
 rain a - fall - ing, rain a - fall - ing, rain a - fall - ing, rain a - fall - ing...  
 - vih - ma sa - das, vih - ma sa - das, vih - ma sa - das, vih - ma sa - das...  
 rain a - fall - ing, rain a - fall - ing, rain a - fall - ing, rain a - fall - ing...

Figure 4.26 (three extracts, from top) - Rainfall/hail motif; Db 'lightning bolt'; rainfall thinning

The image displays two musical excerpts from the piece 'Thunderstorm'. The left excerpt features an 8-part 'rising storm' chord, with four staves of music in a B-flat major key signature. The lyrics are: 'ka - ru - kar - va pilv. / brown - ish hues a cloud.' The right excerpt features a 7-part 'rainbow' chord, with four staves of music in a B-flat major key signature. The lyrics are: 'Vi - ker - kaar. / Rain - bow born.' The notation includes dynamic markings such as *f* 2 Solo and *f* 1 Solo, and various musical symbols like slurs and accents.

Figure 4.27 - 8-part 'rising storm' chord and 7-part 'rainbow' chord from 'Thunderstorm'

### **More 'doing and undoing'**

Examples of symmetrical textural inversion in 'Winter Morning' can be seen in Figure 4.28. The first four bars of the movement are transposed and inverted to form the first four bars of the second phrase; the beginning of the 'antecedent' is an upside-down symmetrical reflection of the very opening.

**Larghetto** ♩ = 56

*pp sempre*

S. I  
Ju - ba är - ga - tes tund - sin tal - ve -  
Ear - ly wak - en - ing, sens - ing win - try

S. II  
Ju - ba är - ga - tes tund - sin tal - ve -  
Ear - ly wak - en - ing, sens - ing win - try

A. I  
Ju - ba är - ga - tes tund - sin tal - ve -  
Ear - ly wak - en - ing, sens - ing win - try

A. II  
Ju - ba är - ga - tes tund - sin tal - ve -  
Ear - ly wak - en - ing, sens - ing win - try

Ju - ba är - ga - tes tund - sin tal - ve -  
Ear - ly wak - en - ing, sens - ing win - try

Ju - ba är - ga - tes tund - sin tal - ve -  
Ear - ly wak - en - ing, sens - ing win - try

Ju - ba är - ga - tes tund - sin tal - ve -  
Ear - ly wak - en - ing, sens - ing win - try

Ju - ba är - ga - tes tund - sin tal - ve -  
Ear - ly wak - en - ing, sens - ing win - try

Figure 4.28 – Extracts from 'Winter Morning'

This transposition means that the second phrase does not return to the opening pitch D. Nonetheless, the effect of these opposite motions is still one of balancing, of 'doing' and subsequent 'undoing' – redolent of the meditative 'ying and yang' which David Dies suggests is a characteristic facet of music (such as Arvo Pärt's) to which the 'spiritual minimalist' trope has been applied.<sup>225</sup> It also has parallels with Newton's third law. As well as reflecting the non-hierarchical balance that is the focus of this Chapter, 'doing and undoing' can represent a disregard for anthropocentric goals, and a recognition of the circularity (and supremacy) of nature.

<sup>225</sup> Dies, 'Spiritual Minimalism,' 330.

A similar type of broad contour symmetry, alongside binary switching, also appears in 'Delicate maid' from *Three Karelian Maidens* (see Figure 4.29). The direction of the cumulative chord in the accompaniment parts prefigures and anticipates the soloist as he or she sings one of two potential melodic openings to the verse. At the final iteration, a downward contour in the accompaniment and an upward contour in the melody coincide for the first time, 'reconciling' the dichotomy. This arrangement also demonstrates relatively minimal intervention ('unforced flourishing'), as the entirety of the accompaniment is effectively built from the first five notes of the folk melody and Tormis declines to add any contrasting material.

**Herkka neito** Veljo Tormis 24-1-1991

**Solo**  
 Lin - tu lau - le - li le - hos - sa pie - ni lin - tu

**Choir**  
 Lin - tu lau - le - li le - hos - sa

**S.**  
 pen - sa - has - sa, kui - lais - tan - sa kui - kut - te - li, mar - jais - tan - sa maan - i - te - li, ar - ma - hais - tan -

**A.**  
 A kui - lais - tan - sa lui - kut - te - li A ar - ma - hais - tan - sa ha - la - si

**S.**  
 sa ha - la - si, ar - ma - hais - tan sa ha - la - si Tu - le tan - ne pie - ni lin - tu, len - na tan - ne,  
 Len - na, len - na, lin - tu ruk - ka, len - na pie - ni,

**A.**  
 B Tu - le tan - ne pie - ni lin - tu  
 Len - na, len - na, lin - tu ruk - ka

**S.**  
 lin - tu ruk - ka, haas - te - le ha - lu - si mul - le, i - ka - va - si il - moi - te - le Mie san - on si -  
 paas - ky ruk - ka, len - namin - un kau - la - le - ni, ka - y ka - si var - rel - le - ni Sii - na sail - lyt

**A.**  
 B haas - te - le ha - lu - si mul - le Mie san - on si - nul - le jal - len  
 len - namin - un kau - la - le - ni Sii - na sail - lyt sie par - em - min

**S.**  
 nul - le jal - len, haas - tan mie - li - hai - ki - a - ni sit - te vai - ham - ma va - jo - ja,  
 sie par - em - min, o - let on - nel - la hy - val - la olet kuin kul - lan kuk - ka ros - sa,

**A.**  
 A sit - te vai - ham - ma va - jo - ja  
 olet kuin kul - lan kuk - ka ros - sa

**S.**  
 ka - hen kes - ken Lin - tu lau - le - li le - hos - sa  
 asut kuin ar - ma - han po - ves - sa

**A.**  
 B Lin - tu lau - le - li le - hos - sa

Figure 4.29 - 'Delicate Maid'

Binary switching opens *Singing aboard ship* (see Figure 4.30), and is here easily read as 'tone-painting' reflective of a boat rocking on the waves.

Largo maestoso  $\text{♩} = 52$

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'Singing Aboard Ship'. It features four staves: Soprano (S.), Alto solo (A. solo), Alto coro (A. coro), and Tenor/Bass (T. B.). The tempo is marked 'Largo maestoso' with a quarter note equal to 52 beats per minute. The key signature consists of two flats, and the time signature is 2/4. The Soprano, Alto solo, and Alto coro parts are currently silent, indicated by rests. The Tenor/Bass part begins with the instruction 'sempre p' and 'oo...'. A red bracket labeled 'A' highlights the first measure of the bass line, and a blue bracket labeled 'B' highlights the second measure. The bass line continues with a long melodic phrase that spans across the four measures shown.

Figure 4.30 - *Singing Aboard Ship*

This harmonic switching can be seen as analogous to a ‘hinge,’ which may subsequently extend further away from (but continually return to) its ‘anchor’ (point A; see Figure 4.31). The use of a reference point (not necessarily with tonic hierarchical status), and the way in which it is departed from and returned to creates a symmetry and balance – a sense of involution; of ‘doing and undoing’ – in the harmonic motion. Harmonic contours or phrases in the bass parts are frequently palindromic (like an artist’s impression of rising and falling waves). The folk melody (alto parts, central two lines in Figures 4.31 and 4.32) sails perpetually and inexorably over the waves like a ship, in an unbroken stream of repetitive melodic cells. In a sense it stands in contrast to the accompaniment, as the latter motion

consistently 'undoes' itself, while the melody is merely 'done' and persistently 'done again.'

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'Singing Aboard Ship'. It consists of two systems of music, each with three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, the middle staff is the piano accompaniment, and the bottom staff is the bass line. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats), and the time signature is 4/4. The first system begins with a box containing the number '4' and the instruction '(sempre p)'. The vocal line starts with a rest followed by a melodic phrase. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The bass line provides harmonic support with chords labeled A, B, C, and B. The second system continues the musical development, with the vocal line ending on a note with a fermata. The piano accompaniment and bass line continue with their respective parts, with chord labels A, B, C, B (A), -A, and A.

Figure 4.31 - 'Singing Aboard Ship'

7

kap.tee.ni ky - syi po - ji - l - ta, et - tä vai .vaa.ko tei - tä su - ru ja su - ru,  
 kap.tensee kü - sib pois.te - l - ta, kas see vae.vab ehkteid siin mu - re ja mu - re,  
 su - ru ja su - ru,  
 mu - re ja mu - re,

kap.tee.ni ky - syi po - ji - l - ta, et - tä vai .vaa.ko tei - tä su - ru, ja  
 kap.tensee kü - sib pois.te - l - ta, kas see vae.vab ehkteid siin mu - re, ja  
 mu - re,

8

kuin ei tei - dän ka - sa.r - mil - ta lau - lu .n .ään - tä kuu.lu ja kuu - lu,  
 kui ei tei - e ka - sa.r - mus.ta lau - lu - häält ei kuu.le ja kuu - le,  
 kuu - lu ja kuu - lu,  
 kuu - le ja kuu - le,

Figure 4.32 - 'Singing Aboard Ship'



## **Biophilia: telos from nature**

Tormis's mature folk song arrangements are often goal-less, circular, vertical, ritualistically repetitive, or somehow non-linear – but other of his works display clearer direction towards an end. The 1960s collection of cycles *Nature Pictures* contains examples both of music which is essentially 'telos-less,' and music whose telos is pre-ordained or inspired by linear shapes of natural phenomena. Perhaps Tormis, like Kaplinski, feels that the 'goals' or ends we should be more mindful of as a society are governed by the cycles of nature – and the ideals of achievement, acquisition, and progress which the latter aligns with 'consumerist fundamentalism.'<sup>226</sup> In realigning our focus accordingly, we would decline excessively to intervene in this 'self-organizing world' – achieving instead the ideal of unforced flourishing. In Priit Pärn's 1980 animation *Exercises In Preparation for Independent Life*, images of a young boy imaginatively exploring the world are juxtaposed against a more obsessive, neurotic set of looping activities carried out by his adult counterpart – a man trapped in a pen-pushing, white-collar office job. The boy cartwheels fluidly over the terrain of nature, shape-shifting to become a butterfly, a fish, a red car, a blackbird, a raincloud. The man, conversely, has lost touch with nature, is a prisoner of historical, goal-oriented time, and inhabits a world very much burdened of 'the differences between man, god and animal.' The short film catalogues his mundane and obsessively repetitive exploits (picking up the phone, opening a newspaper, sitting down at his desk, moving sheets of paper from one pile to another), eventually allowing him to return to the happier state of unforced flourishing (see Figures 4.33 to 4.40).

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<sup>226</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 34 and 35-6.



Figure 4.33 – A young boy at home in nature (still from *Exercises in Preparation for Independent Life*)



Figure 4.34 – A goal-oriented man at his desk (*Exercises in Preparation for Independent Life*)

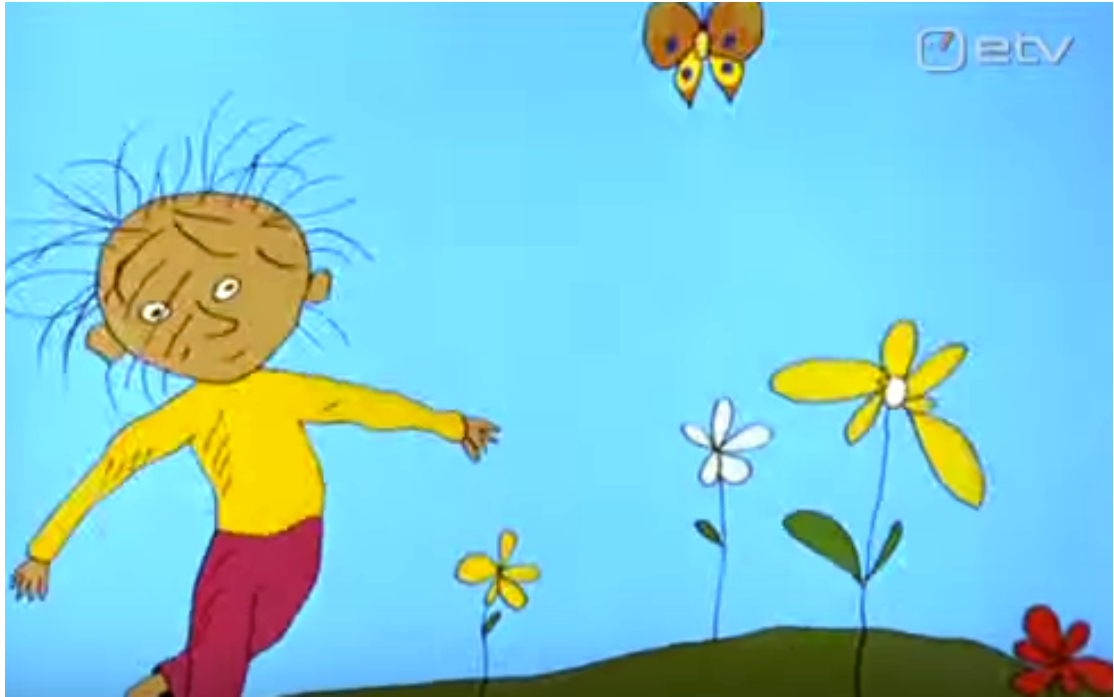


Figure 4.35 - Boy and butterfly



Figure 4.36 - Man and his hat



Figure 4.37 - The boy transforms into a bird



Figure 4.38 - The man practices his telephone skills



Figure 4.39 - The boy attempts to imitate the man's newspaper-reading posture; the newspaper turns into an accordion



Figure 4.40 - The man forsakes his office and returns to 'unforced flourishing'

In several instances in *Nature Pictures*, the mimetic depiction of a 'natural goal' constitutes virtually the extent of the form and content of a movement. Various of these natural phenomena and processes can be viewed as cyclical, or as part of a larger life-cycle on a macro-level, such as flowers opening or storms rising and falling, evoking Kristeva's circular, 'ecological,' 'maternal' monumental time.<sup>227</sup> These natural inspirations are an example of Tormis's fluid yet ever-present '*idée fixe*,' recalling his claim that he always has some other motivation when composing – 'even a political one,' but 'not a musical one'<sup>228</sup> – and echoing his insistence that he acts as 'more a mediator than a creator.'<sup>229</sup> It also belies a connection with Kaplinski's 'embrace of a world extending beyond human design.'<sup>230</sup> The poet himself has spoken forcefully of the violence done to nature in pursuit of anthropocentric 'progress':

In fact trees and shrubs are part of us, they are simply at a greater distance from our body than hands or feet, so it is possible to think that they don't feel pain, that chopping away our branches and trunks doesn't cause us serious injury. But we cannot live without trees. The fewer trees there are, the less we live. In reality we are chopping up and cutting down parts from our own body, we are burning and poisoning ourselves.

(Kaplinski, *Evening Brings Everything Back*)<sup>231</sup>

Salumets in turn proposes that:

Kaplinski's intimacy with nature, and the contentment this relationship brings into his life, reflects what the evolutionary biologist Edward Wilson has called 'biophilia' – a profound, possibly innate, often largely subconscious, and also easily undervalued affective bond with all living things.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Jaanus, 'Estonia's Time,' 216.

<sup>228</sup> Lawrence, 'Veljo Tormis,' 155.

<sup>229</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 63.

<sup>230</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 26.

<sup>231</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 29.

<sup>232</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 28.

Suggesting that biophilia is a hallmark of Kaplinski's work, Salumets further observes that, although this poetry 'cannot be and does not pretend to be "the thing itself,"' nature is evoked by the poet not as metaphor or embroidery to enrich the all-important story arc of human life, but is considered to be fully deserving of as much (if not more) respect as humanity. Non-human nature is pictured not in an anthropocentric framework, but a biocentric one.<sup>233</sup> This set of ideas will serve as part of the contextual backdrop while we examine music in which Tormis arguably pursues similar aims.

As their titles ('landscapes,' 'sketches,' 'patterns,' not to mention 'pictures') suggest, the abundant mimetic features, 'tone-painting,' and imagery in the component cycles of *Nature Pictures* are fundamental to an aesthetic appreciation of the series. As Lippus has noted with regards to symbols in Tormis's *Estonian Ballads*, observing such 'clever associations' for oneself, in their natural habitat, can be an enjoyable pursuit.<sup>234</sup> However, most of these particular shapes and patterns leap off the page with such simple immediacy that the end result of presenting every instance here would be something hopelessly didactic and dry, and even provoke sympathy for Daitz's warning that movements of *Nature Pictures* are 'translucent jewel[s] which say: don't touch me. Just listen.'<sup>235</sup> This may be true for multiple aspects of Tormis's music, few of which are especially radical in their wider historical context; the interest lies more in how these features relate to extra-musical ideas. A handful of examples will suffice to establish the idea of intra-musical directions (or conspicuous absence of the same) taking their lead from natural, extra-musical teloi. Thereafter, I would encourage a reader to explore these simple but rewarding pieces for themselves.

'Thunderstorm,' the central movement of *Summer Motifs*, uses similar-motion, descending melodic units to represent falling rain and hailstones. The bolt of lightning symbolised with a high Db in the soprano part is a striking moment, as

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<sup>233</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 27-30.

<sup>234</sup> Lippus, in *Musical Semiotics in Growth* ed. Eero Tarasti, Paul Forsell, and Richard Littlefield, Vol. 4 (Indiana University Press, 1996), 493.

<sup>235</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 188.

Tormis does not write this far into the upper extremes of the voice elsewhere in *Nature Pictures*. The latter part of this work uses motivic fragments with increasing sparsity to suggest a heavy rainfall gradually thinning out to nothing, revealing a rainbow (see Figures 4.41 and 4.42).

a)

kal - las ka - pa - ga, rai - us ra - he - hoog ja vih - ma kal - las  
 rain in buc - ket - fuls, cast a spate of hail, then pour - ing rain in  
 vih - ma kal - las, vih - ma kal - las,  
 pour - ing rain and pour - ing rain and

b)

ka - pa - ga. Rak - sus ter - ve ilm. Oi(ii), -  
 buc - ket - fuls. Shat - tered all the world.  
 ka - pa - ga. Rak - sus ter - ve ilm. Pik - se - kih - vad puus - se  
 buc - ket - fuls. Shat - tered all the world. Spike of light - ning strik - ing  
 ka - pa - ga. Rak - sus ter - ve ilm. Pik - se - kih - vad puus - se  
 buc - ket - fuls. Shat - tered all the world. Spike of light - ning strik - ing



The image shows a musical score with five staves. The top two staves are vocal lines with lyrics: '- vih - ma sa - das ...' and 'rain a - fall - ing ...'. The bottom three staves are instrumental lines with lyrics: 'vih - ma sa - das, vih - ma sa - das, vih - ma sa - das, vih - ma sa - das ...' and 'rain a - fall - ing, rain a - fall - ing, rain a - fall - ing, rain a - fall - ing ...'. The score is in a key with one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature.

c)

Figure 4.41 (three extracts, from top) - Rainfall/hail motif; Db 'lightning bolt'; rainfall thinning

This is the most clearly structured and goal-oriented movement of the tripartite *Summer Motifs* cycle, and its shape is plainly derived from the natural 'process' of a storm building, raging, and dying away. The piece opens and closes with two almost identical chords. Before the first bolt of lightning, though, the 'rising storm' chord has eight parts. After the rainfall, lightning, hailstones and thunder have faded away, the closing chord – on the word 'vikerkaar' ('rainbow') – comprises seven different equidistant notes (one for each of the colours of the rainbow?), as shown in Figure 4.42. The shape and cyclical implications appear to be mimetically motivated, rather than driven purely by musical convention.

The image shows two musical scores. The left score has four staves with lyrics: 'ka - ru - kar - va piiv.' and 'brown - ish hues a cloud.' The right score has five staves with lyrics: 'Vi - ker - kaar.' and 'Rain - bow born.' The right score includes dynamic markings like 'f 2 Soli' and 'f 1 Solo'.

Figure 4.42 - 8-part 'rising storm' chord and 7-part 'rainbow' chord from 'Thunderstorm'

‘Dry Weather,’ the first movement of *Summer Motifs* (Fig 4.43), could be seen loosely to depict drought through angular but relatively static harmonic writing. This piece, like Kramer’s vertically conceived music, does not build to a climax or seek to fulfill any linear expectations – because, unlike the causal linearity of ‘Thunderstorm,’ dry weather is unchanging: it is a state, not a process or a series of connected events.

The image shows a musical score for the first movement of 'Summer Motifs'. It features four staves: two vocal staves (Soprano and Alto) and two piano accompaniment staves. The lyrics are in Estonian and English. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* (piano) and *f* (forte). The piano part features a prominent tritone interval, which is highlighted by a bracket and the number '4' below it. The lyrics are: 'Korst - na - suits on kar - tu - li põl - lul. / Chim - ney smoke on fields of po - ta - toes.' and 'ras - ke käämb - la. / palm so heav - y.' and 'Läm - - be põu - a - / Sul - - try rain - less'.

Figure 4.43 – ‘Goalless’ tritones in ‘Dry Weather’ (*Summer Motifs*)

‘Summer Night’ (Fig 4.44), the last of the three movements, describes a hazy summer evening. The movement’s harmony is essentially comprised of three note-clusters, each consisting of three consecutive pitches. Like ‘Dry Weather,’ its static, non-linear nature is dictated by the same qualities perceived in the subject matter of the text. It also expresses a tendency towards symmetry in that the complete ‘cluster chord’ is an intervallic palindrome:

**Ab Bb C – Eb F G – Bb C D**

**(tone – tone – minor 3<sup>rd</sup> – tone – tone – minor 3<sup>rd</sup> – tone – tone)**

It must be said that Tormis frequently uses similar non-functional note-clusters, by no means with consistent or recurring reference to any clearly defined theme, weather-related or otherwise. This subjective impression of the text-music relationship – much like any other instance of notionally referential content in this series – conjures up the ‘hermeneutic circle,’ as described by Hans Georg Gadamer,

wherein text informs the interpretation of music and vice versa,<sup>236</sup> in vertiginous loops. Although Siglind Bruhn, recounting Gadamer's theory, values this quality as enriching the hermeneutic experience,<sup>237</sup> many others would use it to discount propositions like the one above; at any rate, it obviously doesn't emphatically support my reading of the 'imagery' in this movement. Nevertheless there is an emphasis on circularity here (and perhaps a lack of concern for 'being precise, clear demarcation'<sup>238</sup>) which Tormis and Kaplinski might find quite pleasing.



Figure 4.44 – Non-functional 'symmetrical' harmony in 'Summer Night'

Two particularly striking examples of musical 'pictures,' each with a different relation to telos, can be found in the second and third movements of *Spring Sketches* (*Kevadkillud*), a cycle based on haiku by Kaplinski. These pieces are of singular interest by virtue of their brevity: each is eight bars or less in length but presents a rich picture of a motion or scene. They also represent an alternate approach to repetition when compared with the monumental, ritualistic *regilaul* arrangements. 'Flowering Blossoms' (discussed above as an example of mise en abyme) is a miniature, compound process of unfolding, from the first iteration of a lone G natural to the final, comparatively dramatic leap from a low Bb to the Ab triad

<sup>236</sup> Siglind Bruhn, *Images and Ideas in Modern French Piano Music: The Extra-Musical Subtext in Works by Ravel, Debussy, and Messiaen* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1997), xix.

<sup>237</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 169.

above. The musical ‘goal-orientation’ here, Tormis’s *idée fixe*, plainly takes its lead from the natural world.

‘Evening sky’ (Figure 4.45) is only five bars long. This tiny piece finally offers just one diatonically meaningless chord, cumulatively built beneath the wandering solo alto melody. This singular musical ‘event’ sees each pitch sustained from its initial unique occurrence until the movement’s end. Virtually devoid of causal relationships, it is very much a picture (purportedly of the night sky) to be viewed, and certainly not a journey – with twists, turns, peaks and troughs, and a significant ending-point – to be undertaken. This movement in particular has parallels with a kind of pictorial quality identified in Arvo Pärt’s music by Paul Hillier, who underlines orthodox iconography as a ‘dominant motif’ in his study on Tormis’s student and colleague.<sup>239</sup> If Pärt’s music can be conceptualized as a series of sacred icons, to be meditated upon from outside the temporal constraints of practical music-making, surely ‘Evening Sky’ can exist in the imagination as a miniature watercolour of the evening view which inspired Kaplinski’s poetry. The piece is still in one way, though necessarily moving in the inescapable dimension of clock-time, and finally also comprises a process of becoming (the final chord), in spite of its refusal to set up or fulfill any particular intra-musical expectations of linearity. This transgression of boundaries reflects Priit Pärn’s whimsical comment that ‘every picture is a small film.’<sup>240</sup>

3. Õhtune taevas  
Evening Sky

Adagio ♩ = 50 Veljo Tormis

Solo o gruppoo

Pun - ga - des oks - te lä - bi pais - tab  
Bud - äing there through the bran - ches gleam - ing

S. I

S. II

A. I

A. II

<sup>239</sup> Hillier, Pärt, 23.

<sup>240</sup> Bradford Animation Festival 2009 Priit Pärn (National Media Museum, UK)  
<http://nationalmediamuseum.blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/baf-09-day-4-priit-parn.html>

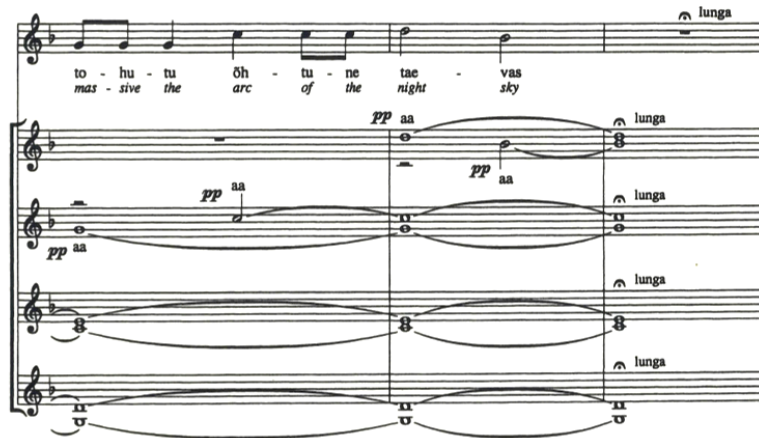


Figure 4.45 - Cumulative single-chord 'picture' in 'Evening Sky'

'Evening sky' can be said to represent a single event by virtue of the fact that once a pitch has occurred (has been introduced by the solo voice) in the course of its five bars, it doesn't stop 'occurring' (that is, it is sustained by the chorus) until the piece's close. In this sense it is almost a microcosm of minimalistic additive construction. In another sense, it is entirely removed from a stereotypical idea of rhythmic, motorically repetitive minimalism: although each note continues to sound from its initial appearance, no pitch is terminated and then repeated in the same register. Thus the piece can simultaneously inhabit different points on Middleton's repetition spectrum (see Figure 4.46): the continuously sustained sounds (within the bounded subjunctive world of the movement) reflect the concept of monadic, 'absolute' repetition (eternal sounding), while pitch repetition in the sense of *re-sounding* (in the same register) is entirely absent, suggesting a position closer to the realms of the equally abstract 'infinite set.'

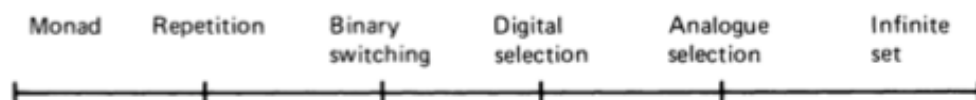


Figure 4.46 - Repetition spectrum (Middleton, 1983: 237)

To a lesser extent, 'Flowering Blossoms' can also be viewed in light of these ideas. Individual pitches are repeated here, and the continuity of recurring or related rhythmic and textural shapes is obviously a fundamental characteristic. However, if each vertical construction is viewed as a whole pitch-object (chord or note) and not in terms of its component parts, as below:

G – Eb major – D – C minor – Bb – Ab major

then there is no repetition of any pitch-object (a 'stem' note or a 'flower' chord).

### **Equilibrium, silence, unforced flourishing**

The kinds of ideas explored in this chapter have connections with spiritual minimalism, as defined by Dies and mentioned earlier in relation to monumental time. Unforced flourishing; ritualistic repetition, circularity and goallessness; and balance and symmetry are features of Tormis's music as much as they may be of Pärt's, though there has existed some precedent for separation of the two composers along the lines of 'nationalist' versus 'religious' categorizations. This study has already touched on the issue of spirituality in Tormis's work – which is not explicitly religious (whether fortunately in accordance with, or as a result of, Soviet restrictions), but shares the ecological, 'spiritual' kind of humanism expounded by Walt Whitman (who has also attracted the label 'pagan')<sup>241</sup> and Jaan Kaplinski. Uku Masing, censored and exiled by the Communist regime, and one of the most significant Estonian poets before Kaplinski,<sup>242</sup> bridges the gap between the tropes of religiosity attached to Pärt and the biophilic spirituality of Kaplinski and Tormis. Masing was a forerunner of the Estonian ethnofuturist movement<sup>243</sup> and a hugely significant role model for Kaplinski. He was a theologian and linguist as well as a literary figure,<sup>244</sup> and his poetry frequently meditates on the natural world (displaying 'lyrical tenderness for botanically specified flowers, dead birds, a cat, a dog [...]'.<sup>245</sup> His work and legacy can act as a 'missing link' when considering the

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<sup>241</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (Cambridge Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1904), 85.

<sup>242</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 89-91.

<sup>243</sup> Kari Sallamaa, 'Uku Masing as the Pioneer of Ethnofuturism,' accessed online 28/09/15 at <http://www.suri.ee/etnofutu/vanaisad/masing/sall-uku.html>.

<sup>244</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 89-91.

<sup>245</sup> Ivar Ivask, 'Review of Uku Masing's *Udu Toonela jõelt*,' *Books Abroad* 49/4 (1975): 814.

ideological or religious gaps between the group of thinkers and artists under consideration here, perhaps allowing for yet closer connections to be drawn between Tormis and his student, colleague and friend, Arvo Pärt.

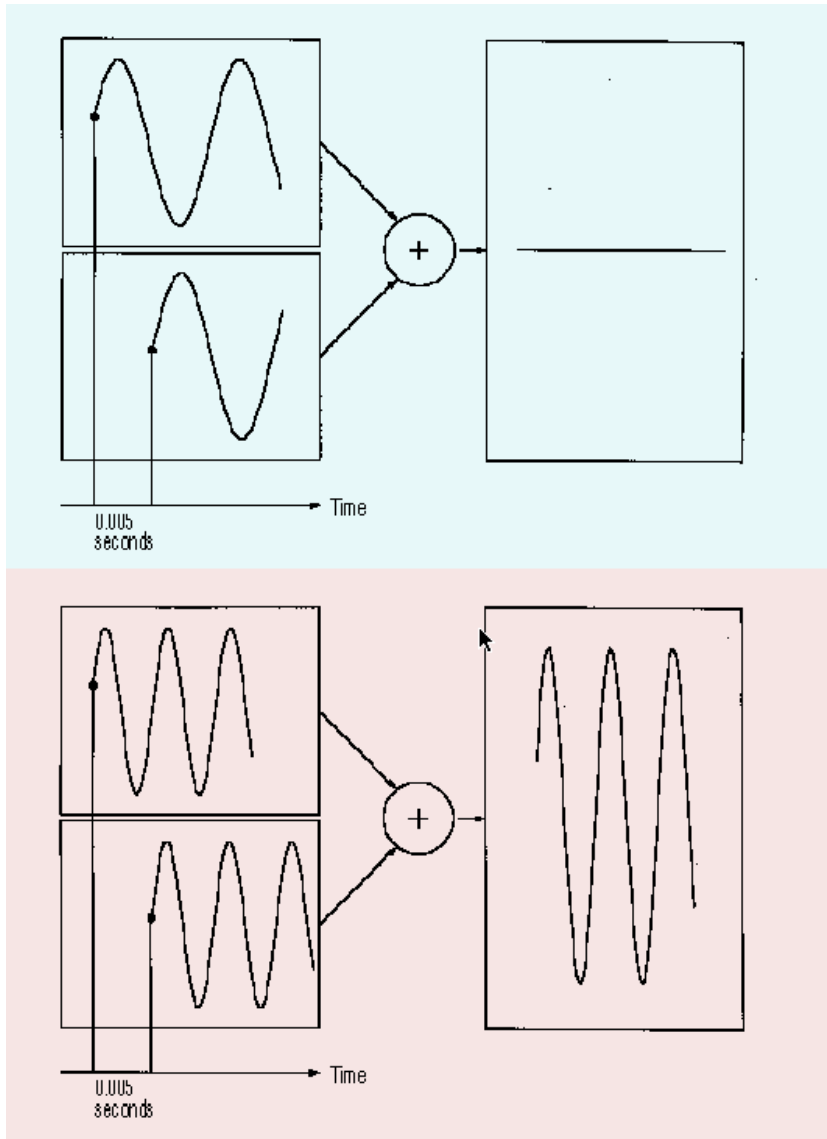
Hesychasm, as outlined in Chapter 2, is a deep meditative state of religious contemplation – almost of trance: ‘The term ‘hesychasm’ implies stillness, silence [...]’<sup>246</sup> Beyond the by-now popularly clichéd example of 4’33”, there are still questions to be asked about how pieces of music can embody the ideal of silence, the absence of sound. Something about the concepts of symmetry, balance, inversion/involution, and of doing-and-undoing, evoke completion, equilibrium, cancellation, and silence. The following illustration (in simple terms for fellow non-specialists in electronic music) explains how juxtaposing two identical sine waves increases volume, while the juxtaposition of a sine wave with its ‘opposite’ or ‘inversion’ – in terms of the temporal position of phase cycles (a complete cycle of peak and trough) – will result in the cancellation of both, eliminating sound altogether.

Let's start by considering what happens when you combine two sine waves using a simple mixer. As you might imagine and as you can see in Figure [4.47] [...], adding together two identical waves produces the same sound, but louder. But what happens if you start the lower wave halfway through the cycle of the upper one? Figure [4.47] shows that, if you add these waves together, they cancel each other out, and you hear nothing. Although, in isolation, these signals would sound identical, combining them results in silence.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Hillier, *Pärt*, 8.

<sup>247</sup> Gordon Reid, ‘Synth Secrets, Part 4: Of Filters and Phase Relationships’ webpage, accessed 28/09/15 <http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/aug99/articles/synthsecrets.htm>.



**Figure 4.47 – Juxtaposition of opposite sine waves cancels sound (from Gordon Reid ‘Of Filters and Phase Relationships; see footnote 46.)**

Tormis was not writing with anything remotely as precise or mathematical as sine waves; his output is almost entirely unaccompanied choral music, and even if he were aware of the above ideas, there is no suggestion that his work is directly informed by music technology, physics, or acoustics. Nevertheless, the ideas of equilibrium, balance, artlessness and – somehow – silence are linked across disciplines, popularly appropriated from Zen Buddhist thinkers like Suzuki, and [in]famously resonating with John Cage as well as Kaplinski. Salumets, discussing Kaplinski’s relationship both with *regilaul* and with ‘Eastern’ art and thought, highlights a contradiction between the appreciation of silence or minimal



intervention, and the nature of the runic song, with its sprawling verses of compound meaning, linked by ‘no-breath’ singing:

If to ‘refrain from even beginning to play’ lies at the heart of Chinese music, the regi song points in another direction: it does not know silence one might say. Rather, it keeps going without pause. As a *perpetuum carmen*, the seam- and endless song, in a ‘call and response’ pattern, one singer sings one line, the next singer or chorus joins in before the first line ends and continues with the second line while the first singer takes a breath before again joining in shortly before the second line ends. There is also no division into strophes. Coinciding with this non-stanzaic verse form, the singing continues uninterrupted, even without the pauses for breathing customary in Western music. The effect of this ‘grammatical phrasing’ is ‘a seemingly endless chain of song,’ evoking ‘an endless and beginningless microcosm,’ Kaplinski wrote in 1999. In this sense, then, the regi song not only aligns itself with the undifferentiated but also presents a ceaseless responsiveness.<sup>248</sup>

This dichotomy of endless sound versus silence is one of those impossible absolute opposites, like the monad (endlessly sustained sound) and the infinite set (eternal innovation without any repetition) outlined by Middleton. Perhaps, like ‘the abject’ and ‘the sublime,’ the very extremity of such abstract polar opposites somehow binds them to each other in the imagination. There can be no piece of music which represents infinite innovation without any repetition whatsoever (see John Rahn’s comments in Chapter 2). It could also be argued that eternity is an empirically impossible concept, since it can never be arrived at for the purpose of confirmation. We know, too, that absolute silence cannot be ‘heard.’ The composer of 4’33” visited an anechoic chamber in 1951; Cage’s own account is as follows:

For certain engineering purposes it is desirable to have as silent a situation as possible. Such a room is called an anechoic chamber,

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<sup>248</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 167.

its six walls made of special material, a room without echoes. I entered one at Harvard University several years ago and heard two sounds, one high and one low. When I described them to the engineer in charge, he informed me that the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood in circulation. Until I die there will be sounds. And they will continue following my death. One need not fear about the future of music.<sup>249</sup>

Impossible in reality, ideals like pure silence or a *carmen perpetuum* can be at least suggested through music. The simplicity of Tormis's work; his minimal intervention in arranging folk material; his circular, symmetrical, non-hierarchical and balanced constructions; and the considerable inspiration he took from the sounds, shapes and motions of natural, extra-musical phenomena in original compositions, arguably reflect philosophies expounded by Kaplinski. Salumets outlines some cornerstones of the poet's thought – namely, ecological concerns and the crucial importance of balance – which can enhance appreciation and understanding of the forces at work (or not at work, as the case may be) in this music.

As a matter of fact, Kaplinski wrote, we have achieved such 'unprecedented command' over nature that we are less and less subject to its 'regulating rules.' This weakens the integrity of the larger planetary ecosystem, and, unless we are able to reverse this downward spiral, we might throw 'the entire world off balance.' The most unsettling problem, then, is that we can no longer rely on nature to act as a counterbalance. Therefore, it is now up to us to restore the lost equilibrium between people and nature.<sup>250</sup>

A deep engagement with balance, with the problems of individualism and anthropocentrism, dualism and absolutism, and with time, timelessness and endlessness, is evident in these pieces. If perfect symmetrical equilibrium in sine

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<sup>249</sup> Brubaker, 'Time is Time,' 114.

<sup>250</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 34.

wave phases equals the cancellation of sound, then the result of a balance *can* be a singularity. Endless song, an endlessly sustained sound, or silence itself can be representative of balance despite not existing as a duality. Tormis himself has garnered something of a reputation as a taciturn man. Upon finally conceding to an interview, to be published by *Teater. Muusika. Kino.* in 1990 as part of the series 'X Answers' (where the titular 'X' would be an artist, writer, or other public creative figure), he insisted on changing the title to 'Veljo Tormis Does Not Answer.'<sup>251</sup> Of his wife, Lea, he has explained '[she] has forced me to write and to speak.'<sup>252</sup> This reticence is mirrored by the protagonist of the post-Soviet novel *Border State*, who Jaanus claims 'is not sure whether he wants to speak at all, or to write.'<sup>253</sup> Silence is also an important concept for Kaplinski. His own political ideals – and Tormis's non-tonal but not-atonal, non-hierarchical but balanced side-steppings of dualism and linearity – are reflected in the poet's feeling that 'dissidence' is not a 'meaningful response to totalitarian rule.'<sup>254</sup> In reference to Tormis's failure to sign the infamous 'Letter of 40,' a 1980 open letter of protest against the authorities (presumed to have been written by Kaplinski), the composer suggested that his music was 'the forty-first signature.'<sup>255</sup>

...I have to admit that the letter made its way also to my table. And had I signed it I would have had to have taken it back later. But I didn't sign it as I had been in a deep depression for over a year already. It's not the right time and place to explain it here. Let's say that I was a coward and I worried about my family. But my anger and powerless resistance became more powerful little by little and I expressed it with a string of songs in 1981.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 243.

<sup>252</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 250.

<sup>253</sup> Jaanus, 'Estonia's Time', 213.

<sup>254</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 116.

<sup>255</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 202.

<sup>256</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 127.

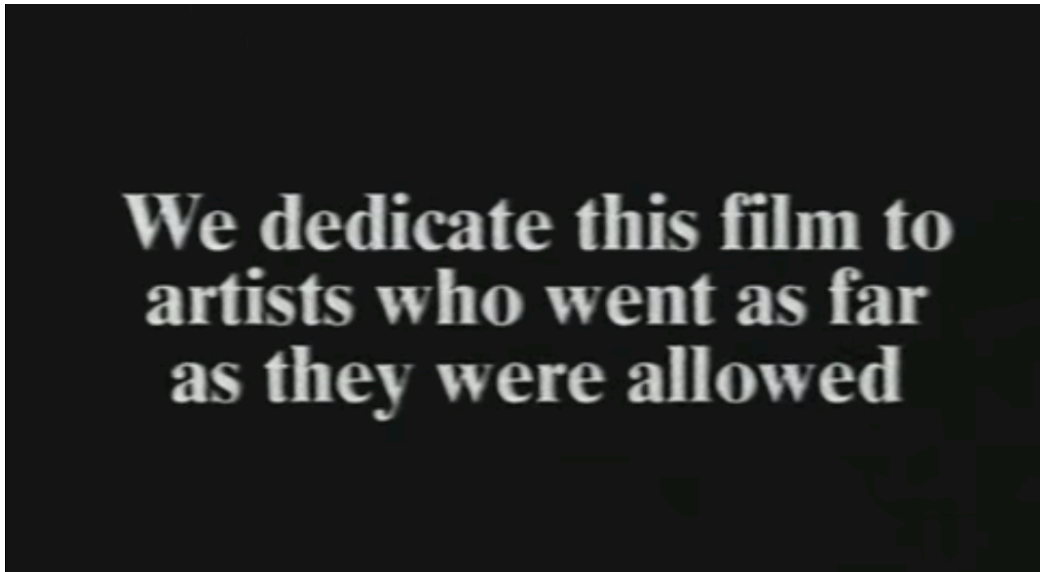


Figure 4.48 - Still from Pärn's *Breakfast On the Grass* (1987)

This composer maintains that his work is always motivated by an *'idée fixe'*; 'even a political one.'<sup>257</sup> An explicitly political or polemical piece like 'Curse Upon Iron' makes immediately obvious its agenda – and, accordingly, was banned by the authorities shortly after its completion. Other works, like the *Calendar Songs* and *Nature Pictures*, are inward-looking, peaceful – even 'bland' – by comparison; but this does not mean that they are absolutely apolitical. For Tormis, as for Kaplinski, it seems the forces that are *not* at work, the things that are *not* said, are often as important as those that are. His body of work is a hugely significant repository of identity, arguably reflecting ideals that were passionately promulgated in more explicit terms by Kaplinski.

Those [...] who are, like Kaplinski, drawn towards the meditative do not attach such a high value to language and the artistry we have learned to perform with words and other modes of communication. At its extreme, they do not believe that human flourishing is best served by signs, silence by sounds, nature by culture, the 'unspeakable' by words, as one might say – no matter how rich and sophisticated the means we deploy. [...] What they

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<sup>257</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 202.

seek is a new sense of balance, one tilted away from human intervention towards the spontaneously unfolding.<sup>258</sup>

The interconnected themes of balance, symmetry and circularity, as we have seen, consistently recur in this music, and they link it (aided, of course, by the texts) to the natural; to the non-hegemonic, non-dualistic and borderless; to Middleton's 'circular,' 'mythic' 'blank space'; to Dies's descriptions of spiritual minimalism; and to Kristeva's monumental time and Kaplinski's unforced flourishing.

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<sup>258</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 41-2.

## Chapter 5: Boundaries and Binaries

### Borders and binaries in Estonian art and thought

*Being precise, clear demarcation is not always and necessarily a virtue*

- Kaplinski<sup>259</sup>

In the Estonian language, there are no gendered words; this also includes pronouns: both 'he/his' and 'she/hers' translate into 'tema' and 'ta.' A general trend towards what Kaplinski might call 'the undifferentiated'<sup>260</sup> crops up in various other linguistic features. Word pairs, like Tormis's use of 'singers-listeners',<sup>261</sup> 'doubts-reservations',<sup>262</sup> and 'choirs-orchestras',<sup>263</sup> are an old characteristic of Estonian, having roots in runic song.

Although as a means of generating a generalization it has become archaic, traces of this concrete abstract mode can still be found in Estonian language today. [...] Formed without a conjunction, the word pair 'kopsud-maksad' (lungs-livers), for example, denotes organs [...] and 'sood-rabad' (marshes-bogs) signifies wetlands. The latter example also illustrates the liminal quality of the word pairs. As Kaplinski explains, although marshes are distinguished from bogs, being bound together in this 'parallel' way could also be an indication that there was no need or desire to separate one from the other. Instead it was meant to emphasize the absence of a clear-cut boundary between bogs and marshes, which only exists in language but not in nature, or else it was meant to draw attention to what bogs and marshes share – both are wetlands.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 169.

<sup>260</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 167.

<sup>261</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 63.

<sup>262</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 75.

<sup>263</sup> Tormis, *Song Festivals*, 20.

<sup>264</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 169.

Parallelism, discussed in Chapter 3, is directly connected to this perceived tendency to distribute broader meanings across multiple occurrences of smaller concrete lexical items. Revisiting another linguistic example from earlier: the Estonian verb 'loom' means both 'to come' and 'to bring about' – the implication being that the difference between them is not necessarily always important. 'Etymologically linked to the word for "nature" ("loodus") and "animal" ("loom"),'<sup>265</sup> it embodies in part Kaplinski's view that we should 'remain open to a world unburdened of differences between human beings, gods, and animals, a world where "one creature could be all three all at once."<sup>266</sup> Speaking of such a permeability between the human and non-human, the figure of a shape-shifting werewolf is the subject of *Libahunt*, a seminal work of Estonian literature with which Tormis has directly engaged.

### **Werewolf**

This idea of blurred boundaries between humans and animals – alongside issues surrounding other lines of difference – appears in August Kitzberg's 1912 play *Libahunt (Werewolf)*. Kitzberg's hugely influential work was the basis for a 1968 film of the same name for which Tormis composed the soundtrack. The story follows two young women – Tiina (the putative 'werewolf') and Mari, her adoptive sister – and Margus, a young man who grew up with the two girls in the same rural household. The dark-haired, tempestuous outsider Tiina, ostracized for her difference, disregard for authority and 'wild' closeness with nature, is possibly the most famous heroine of Estonian literature.<sup>267</sup> Tiina was taken in by the family as a child after her mother was publically whipped to death for being a witch, or some other demonised scapegoat. The implication is that Tiina and her late mother, as free peasants rather than serfs, belong to an 'othered' group in this community – another problematic borderline. Identity, and borders between groups, are significant to the background of the folkloric themes which underpin this work.

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<sup>265</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 25-6.

<sup>266</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 28.

<sup>267</sup> 'European Literary Characters: Tiina' webpage <http://www.literarycharacters.eu/EE-tiina> accessed 28/09/15.

In folklore the werewolves represent the cycle of legends of essentially shamanistic content - a man turning into animal and reverse - that were modified by the xenophobic in-group/out-group hatred and the witch-hunt of the Baroque era church's inquisition, fighting against the loss of power after the scientific progress in Renaissance and the Enlightenment.<sup>268</sup>

As the three characters grow up, a love triangle emerges: the timid but envious Mari wants to be with Margus, but Tiina and Margus want to be together. The bitterly jealous Mari then accuses Tiina of being a werewolf. Local villagers pounce on the presence of a 'witch's daughter' among them to explain any unfortunate events, and Tiina, shunned by both the locals and her own adoptive family (who would rather see Margus married to the blonde, obedient Mari), flees. The end of the play is set several years later; Mari and Margus are now married. On his way home in a snowstorm, Margus shoots a gun to scare away the wolves that are howling in the distance – only to find, on his return, that he has fatally shot Tiina.<sup>269</sup>

Most obviously, Tiina's difference to her surroundings is symbolized in the werewolf metaphor – but another issue of lines and differentiation is touched upon by the *vanaema*, the character of the grandmother. In the first act she reminisces aloud about 'the old religion' (the autochthonous, pre-Christian belief system), in the context of which 'wise people' made distinctions between good and evil, while followers of 'the new religion' (imported Baltic German Christianity) do not recognise the old good/evil, although – she warns – it is still there, 'hidden beneath.'<sup>270</sup> The idea that the 'new' religion does *not* make distinctions, or recognise borderlines, which Margus's *vanaema* thinks are important is interesting. The imported Christianity (to which Pärt's devotion left him with no choice other than

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<sup>268</sup> Wikipedia entry for *Libahunt (Werewolf)* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libahunt>.

<sup>269</sup> The above synopsis, on which I have based my own comments, was extrapolated from <http://www.literarycharacters.eu/EE-tiina>; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libahunt>; and the Estonian-language version of Kitzberg's play text available online at Project Gutenberg (<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/44217>). No English-language translation of either the play text or the film script are available at the time of writing.

<sup>270</sup> August Kitzberg, *Libahunt* (1912) accessed online 28/09/2015 at <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/44217>.



permanently to leave the aggressively atheist Soviet Union)<sup>271</sup> would possibly be described by those sympathetic to Kaplinski's views as an inauthentic facet of cultural identity for an Estonian. The country's multiple, extended occupations by different foreign powers mean that some cultural artefacts which are seen by many as emblematic of Estonian identity (such as the Estonian Song Festival) are held by others (notably Kaplinski) to be residues of 'violent intervention' and symptoms of internalized cultural inferiority.<sup>272</sup>



Figure 5.1 - Promotional images for *Werewolf*

### ***Piiririk***

A significant boundary bridged by Tormis's life and career is the 'borderline' of the year 1991, approximately marking the end of the Soviet Union and the beginning of a new period of Estonian independence. Tormis formally retired from composition in 2000. All of the works explored in this study were written between the 1960s (the advent of his 'real' style)<sup>273</sup> and the 1990s, but there is no room here for a detailed

<sup>271</sup> Heather Maclaughlin Garbes, 'To The Bards: The Choral Works of Estonian Composer Ester Mägi,' *College Music Symposium* 49/50, (2009/2010): 367-368.

<sup>272</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 158-9.

<sup>273</sup> Lippus, 'Veljo Tormis Data Bank.'

examination of how his work or compositional priorities may or may not have changed either side of 1991.

There is scope however, for skipping forward to other art created *after* this date, which arguably reflects a culmination or crystallization of the burgeoning anxieties and struggles of a nation which was occupied for the majority of Tormis's life and career. The novel *Piiririik*, by Emil Tode (a pseudonym for Tõnu Õnnepalu) is characterized by a preoccupation with boundaries and 'a fractured and nearly dissolved civil and personal identity.'<sup>274</sup> Maire Jaanus explains her reluctance to translate the title into a single restrictive English definition:

*Piir* means border, boundary, frontier, threshold, limit, end, terminus, line, borderline. *Riik* is a state, body politic, nation, country, community, kingdom, domain, realm, empire, government. Thus, *Piiririik* could be translated in so many ways (as Boundary Nation, Border State, Limit Realm, etc.) that I feel forced to leave it untranslated.<sup>275</sup>

Although, for clarity and consistency, English titles have been used for works elsewhere in this study, *Piiririik* will be referred to by its Estonian name for the reasons expressed above. Boundaries and the dissolution and transgression of the same are at the heart of this work. The most obvious example is that of the borders of countries, but Jaanus also explores the fragmented nature of the (nameless) protagonist's sense of identity, individuality, or self.<sup>276</sup> Permeable boundaries between human and non-human nature also appear in the novel, as a source of joy, serenity and liberation:

Perhaps ['the want for the more primordial being'] registers above all in the relationship to the ecology, to nature, to landscape, and soil, a relationship that has been constant and profound in Estonian literature. It is in nature, as our nature poetry and literature attests that 'sweet pleasure has conquered deep despair.' It is most often in

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<sup>274</sup> Jaanus, 'Estonia's Time,' 203.

<sup>275</sup> Jaanus, 'Estonia's Time,' 227.

<sup>276</sup> Jaanus, 'Estonia's Time,' 225-7.

the isolation and silence of nature where the inconsolable go to be consoled, and where the unfree have had glimpses of freedom, beauty, and peace (as in Kitzberg's *Werewolf*), however brief. Silence gives the narrator distance from words and gives him back his closeness to natural things. The moments of a feeling of completion in this text are also the moments when the narrator's body and senses interface with the life of nature. They are moments of the now in monumental time.<sup>277</sup>

These statements not only attest to a fixation with the transience of borderlines, but also lend some weight to connections between Kaplinski's biophilia and his 'Finno-Ugric mode of seeing.' Here, as in Priit Pärn's *Hotel E* (discussed below), the lines of difference between what was formerly known as the 'Second World,' and Western Europe are thrown into sharp relief. The petrified state of post-Soviet Estonia has been depicted as overwhelmed by the thrilling possibilities – and distressing, frightening realities – of a new kinship with the capitalist West.

In the course of their 700- year colonizing process, as Kaplinski sees it unfold, Estonians find their culture wanting [...]. Estonia was perceived to be lacking in what Europe's centers took for granted: stone buildings, churches, palaces, poetry with end rhymes, manor houses, cities, abstract words, a Protestant ethic, a national epic, song festivals, fraternities, operas, the devil, a standard literary language, a single God [...]. In the 21st century, the lack is associated with globalization [...]. Among the contemporary colonizers who threaten the cultures of smaller surviving units, according to Kaplinski, are Time-Warner, Microsoft and Walt Disney.<sup>278</sup>

Jaanus asks, 'how much of the otherness of others can Estonia absorb before its own national-cultural difference is blown to smithereens? How other can it be without

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<sup>277</sup> Jaanus, 'Estonia's Time,' 220.

<sup>278</sup> Salumets, 'Consciousness,' 435.

ceasing to be?’<sup>279</sup> *Piiririk*’s Estonian protagonist is bewildered by the strange landscape of Western Europe’s global capitalism, into which he has stumbled or been flung headfirst.<sup>280</sup> These anxieties form an appropriate framework for Jaanus’s evocation of the spectre of postmodernism:

In postmodern works, one frequently encounters a resistance to language as such, which exhibits itself in a new minimalism or miniaturization as well as a new mastery of condensation. [...] The great realist and modernist faith in language [...] is replaced in postmodernism by languagelessness or a stance that is anti-language. Language is merely the best tool for self-deception, lying, playing, or fiction. It can no longer take itself so seriously. Because they are aware of language acquisition as a fundamental mortification and castration, as a power bought with a sacrifice—the loss of the pleasure of our direct contact with being, with each other—postmodernists are no longer invested in language in the absolute way that the 19th century and modernism were. Language is more a testimony to the absence of things than to their presence.<sup>281</sup>

The proposition here is not that Tormis and Kaplinski have necessarily created ‘postmodern’ artworks – in part since postmodernism is so popularly connected with global capitalism, but also largely because the term is so ‘maddeningly imprecise’<sup>282</sup> as to be virtually redundant in the hands of anyone less than an expert in the field. Actually, it could be argued that several of the features of *Piiririk* which Jaanus attributes to a post-traumatic, post-Soviet trend towards postmodernism have been essentially prefigured in some of the ideas outlined earlier in this thesis. The extract above, concerned with the devaluation of language, echoes the issues of balance and silence explored in Chapter 4. *Piiririk*’s narrator is ‘not sure that he wants

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<sup>279</sup> Jaanus, ‘Estonia’s Time,’ 221.

<sup>280</sup> Jaanus, ‘Estonia’s Time.’

<sup>281</sup> Jaanus, ‘Estonia’s Time,’ 223-4

<sup>282</sup> Jonathan D. Kramer ‘The Nature and Origins of Musical Postmodernism,’ in *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought* (ed. Judy Lochhead and Joseph Auner), (New York: Routledge, 2002), 13.

to speak at all, or to write, or, for that matter, to live.<sup>283</sup> His uncertainty about the value of language, words, and of his own voice and intervention, is reflective of Tormis's claim that he acted as a 'mediator' for something more important than his own creation; various strands of Kaplinski's thought also correspond to these ideas (see earlier comments on equilibrium and the value of silence, sense of diminished authorship, diminished importance of the self in relation to natural surroundings, violence of anthropocentric innovation, and so on).

Similarly, the monumental time which Jaanus finds characteristic of the novel will already be familiar to a reader of this study – as it has been proposed at some length that Tormis's music often operates within a comparable spatial, ecological time. The narrator's (tangential, indifferent, ironic)<sup>284</sup> recognition of 'the moments of the passage of the Christ figure through life' as a way to measure time – of 'liturgical time' as 'a cyclical and nonhistorical reiteration of the stages in the life and death of Christ'<sup>285</sup> – reflects the goalless, cyclical and monumental temporal construction of Tormis's *Calendar Songs*. The series is tied to a circular, ritualistic, agricultural timescale, although Tormis instructs that there is no pre-ordained running order. Any number of the songs may be performed in any collection or programme arrangement, in a further denial of linearity.

Through the commonalities between *Piiririik* – described as a fragmented, postmodern, non-linear, post-traumatic anti-narrative – and some fundamental elements of the unforced, artless, goalless, 'Finno-Ugric mode of seeing' which have underpinned so much of the exploration of Tormis's music here, we confront the strange and daunting 'borderline' between these two (extremely) broad collections of aesthetic, artistic and ideological themes. Of course, this borderline is not a line at all; what has actually been arrived at is the impossibility of confidently assigning a really precise origin to such concepts as liminality, non-dualist orientation,

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<sup>283</sup> Jaanus, 'Estonia's Time,' 213.

<sup>284</sup> Jaanus, 'Estonia's Time,' 212.

<sup>285</sup> Jaanus, 'Estonia's Time,' 212.

ritualism, circularity, mimesis, subjunctivity, unrealis mood, diminished authorship, bio-centricity, imprecision, the undifferentiated, goallessness, and vertical and monumental times. Isolated members of this gaggle of contextually cognate terms might be equally at home in a study of Arvo Pärt, John Tavener, John Cage, American minimalism, postmodernism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, or post-trauma (in 'literary' terms rather than those of medical psychiatry) ...and so on. Realistically, of course, Jaanus's analysis is convincing: *Piiririk* is undoubtedly a novel about a loss of identity, of self, of Estonian-ness – but, fittingly, the boundaries between some of the related themes and other notionally 'Finno-Ugric' aesthetic features laid out above cannot be drawn with precision.

### **Hotel E**

A comparable expression of post-occupation anxieties about cultural identity is the subject of Priit Parn's 1992 animation *Hotel E*, in which the E stands for Europe. Estonia is represented as a dark and filthy room, at the centre of which is a circular table, around which huddle black-clad, faceless or disfigured Estonian citizens. Searchlights sweep across the seated figures, and the table is also a huge clock (reflective of a preoccupation with linear time) – the single hand relentlessly disrupting the miserable Estonians as they desperately try to drink their coffee and keep their cups out of its way. Spidery black letters crawl and dart around the room, swarms of flies make up the text in newspapers, no-one speaks (some figures are gagged and have huge holes in their heads), and the soundtrack consists of the buzz of flies and the clatter of coffee cups, overlaid with jerky, neurotic shrieks. The adjacent room, a psychedelic utopian dreamworld of Anglo-American consumerist decadence, represents Western Europe. The accompanying music here is the 'Ode to Joy,' appropriated from Beethoven's 'Choral' Symphony for the anthem of the EU and the Council of Europe, or 'the European Anthem.'

The border between these two worlds is the preoccupation of the film, but another angle here concerns the lack of differentiation between the cringing, uniform Estonian figures. Their homogeneity is juxtaposed in sharp contrast with the highly individualized 'Europeans,' each of whom has a different outfit, hairstyle,

colour scheme, and set of looping recreational activities to perform (playing golf, watching television, reading magazines, and so on). This distinction is telling on multiple levels. The self-oriented nature of 'inner directive' consumer lifestyles, and the focus on individual identity in capitalist societies, has no place in Pärn's depiction of post-Soviet Estonia. In turn, Tormis and Kaplinski's ideas about supra-individual culture and the unimportance (even danger) of anthropocentric innovation are at odds with the glorification of 'unique' selfhood in Pärn's consumerist 'Europe.' Lines between self and other in Pärn's Estonian room are virtually non-existent; the people are drawn as a miserable monolith, and the protagonist develops a stronger sense of individuality only after he has visited Europe. This animation stands beside Kaplinski's warnings about internalized cultural inferiority and the post-occupation rush to be part of the West, and resonates painfully with Tormis's plea that Estonians 'must know who we are.' The common tendency to group the three Baltic States together (when in fact Estonia arguably has more shared cultural heritage with Finland than with Lithuania)<sup>286</sup> is a modern-day example of an uncritical acceptance of 'geographical' borders, in the sense that the Baltics are not separated by water as the Northernmost Finno-Ugric region is. In the light of the eventually intended homogenizing influence of Russia over the Soviet Socialist Republics,<sup>287</sup> a complex balancing act would have been required in order to juggle a respectable (or required) amount of fashionable 'nationalism' (often in a sense that might be described as 'window-dressing')<sup>288</sup> alongside Communist buzzwords, *narodnost'* (the Soviet ideal of 'people-ness')<sup>289</sup> and loyalty to the 'brotherhood' of the USSR:

An understanding and cognizance of oneself is essential for maintaining equilibrium and a capacity for life. Let us know who we are, where our roots are. It will then also be easier to set future goals. National cultural values are not values solely for ourselves, i.e., for internal consumption. The sounding board for every deeply national

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<sup>286</sup> Lippus, 'Baltic Music History,' 50.

<sup>287</sup> Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 521.

<sup>288</sup> Salumets, 'Consciousness,' 437.

<sup>289</sup> Frolova Walker, 'National in Form,' 363.

culture always extends further than its ethnographic boundaries, acquires exchangeable value.<sup>290</sup>

The narrative (itself somewhat disjunct and fragmented, and pitted with non-linear looping motifs) follows one Estonian interloper's breach of the dividing wall, leaving his bare, decaying homeland and stumbling into the blasé glamour of Europe's saccharine pastel-shaded decadence. Amidst a handful of failed attempts to get to and remain in his destination (rejection, injury, pleas from a wife or partner in Estonia), the protagonist begins to develop more clearly defined features, aided by the Europeans who gather round him, 'fix' his clothes and give him a tie. Initially as he tries to speak in Europe, the Estonian opens his mouth to reveal a fly – the devaluation of the Estonian language both at home and abroad, and a symptom of Kaplinski's 'internalized cultural inferiority'? A glamorous green European woman teaches him how best to communicate in his new surroundings; 'How are you?' appears written on her dress in a neat typeface. He responds by scrawling 'FINE' in black marker pen on her back – lacking the casual finesse of his companions, but making some progress in learning how to be a 'European.' The morbid dual outcome of this journey arrives as the Estonian sits down at a circular table with his new friends. Each of them has a coffee cup, and lifts it up out of the way as a beam of light (the hand of a more 'technologically advanced' clock, but a clock-hand nevertheless) sweeps around the circle in a depressing parody of the situation on the other side of the wall. The protagonist opens his mouth to reveal another fly, which makes its way to the door which is the boundary between Western Europe and Estonia – the handle on which is not only now covered in a mass of flies, but made of the same. Within seconds the wall separating European wealth, leisure and egocentricity from Estonian poverty (in multiple senses of the word) dissolves or is eaten by the swarm. As the fabric of the divide is consumed, a horde of desperate

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<sup>290</sup> Tormis, quoted in Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 66. Daitz's footnote to this passage, regarding the phrase 'exchangeable value,' is as follows: 'Marxist term. According to Lea Tormis it was common practice, when one wanted something published, to include Marxist rhetoric along with one's own ideas. Urve Lippus's explanation of this passage differs: "...in this context Tormis is joking with this term, not using it in order to get his essay printed, rather vice versa." (Note to MSD, May 2001.)'



and still largely faceless Estonians is revealed. The only response the Euro-American pastel-people can offer – one of only a handful of utterances in the entire film – is voiced by the green woman: ‘oh, shit.’



Figure 5.2 - Vision of Estonia from *Hotel E* (1992)



Figure 5.3 - Prisoners of the clock in *Hotel E*



Figure 5.4 - Vision of Europe in *Hotel E*



Figure 5.5 - An Estonian in Europe

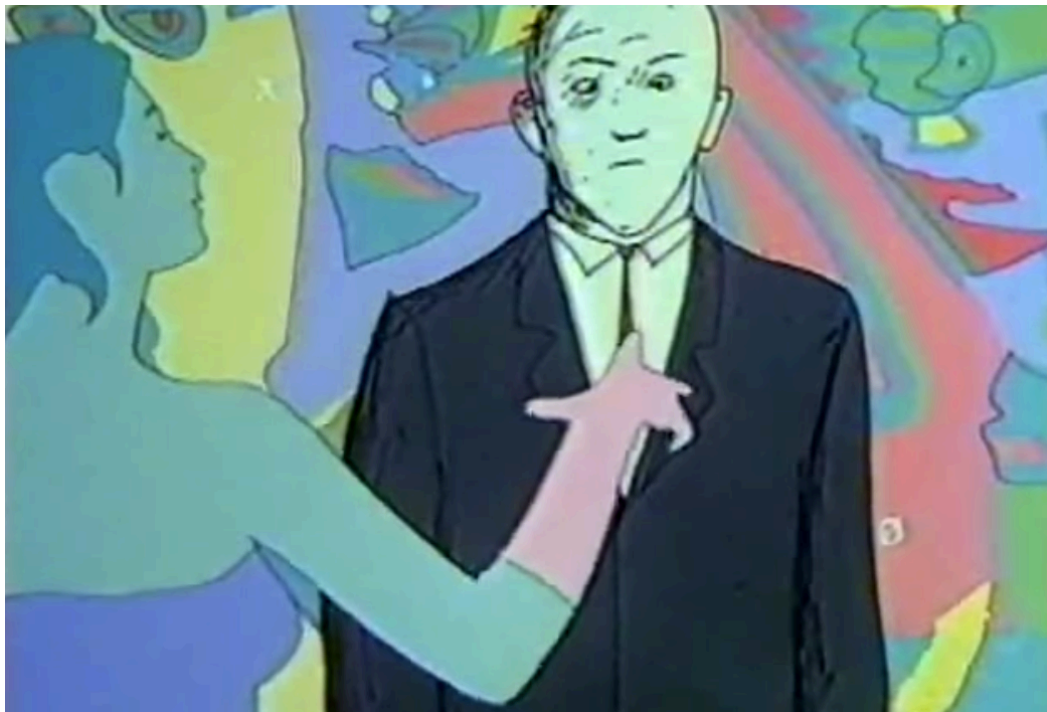


Figure 5.6 - Learning to be 'European'



Figure 5.7 - Clock-time in Europe



Figure 5.8 - Dissolution of the boundary

### **Borders and binaries in Tormis's music and context**

This is an appropriate moment to reiterate some borders, binaries, and related issues particularly pertinent to this study. Some have already been discussed, while others may have been implicit in earlier material but have yet to be explored in more detail.

- The blurred boundaries between, and co-existence of, 'clock' and 'non-linear' times in music. The border between spatial-monumental and narrative-historical times is arguably also a somewhat elusive one, since these times themselves are both subjectively constructed as different ways to make sense of the confusing and fragmentary temporal units which comprise each individual's experience of continued existence.
- The 'real' temporal boundaries around a piece like 'My Sister, My Little Cricket,' and the 'timelessness' or sense of perpetual, 'Pythagorean' continuity constructed by the same. Lutosławski's goal, mentioned earlier, of creating music which can exist as 'an architectonic object outside of time'<sup>291</sup> is grounded in a preoccupation with the boundaries between what is actually heard and what is understood or extrapolated.
- Binary switching's point A and point B, which may occur simultaneously at different textural levels, and may also be juxtaposed as in 'Where Did You Sleep Last Night?' (see Figure 4.13). The traditional ritual practice of swinging recalls Huizinga's claim that the border between ritual and play is permeable, cannot be identified, or does not exist.<sup>292</sup>

Seligman *et al* suggest that a repetitive back-and-forth motion – such as, topically, swinging – can be compared to sociologist Roger Caillois's play-form *ilinx*. They argue that ritualistic repetition which is *ilinx*-like can result in a loss of quiddity – a loss of specificity or 'thingness,' and a blurring of the boundaries around an

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<sup>291</sup> Stucky, *Lutosławski*, 127.

<sup>292</sup> Seligman *et al*, 71-2.

object – and, simultaneously, constitute a reinforcement of the ‘thingness’ of said thing.<sup>293</sup> Loss of quiddity as an effect of extensive repetition may be familiar to a reader who has reached this point via the experimental illustration of this idea in Chapter 2. The boundaries between Caillois’s forms of play are also blurred, and any particular play-like activity may not conform exclusively to one of the types.<sup>294</sup> Another of his categories which is relevant here is *mimicry*,<sup>295</sup> mimesis, which – as we have seen – characterizes Tormis’s *Swing Songs* alongside and in conjunction with *ilinx*. *Ilinx* as a form of destabilization<sup>296</sup> also applies to the narrative disruption of the ‘palindromic’ cadences in ‘Call to the Midsummer Bonfire II’ (Figure 4.2) and perhaps to other examples of doing-and-undoing explored in Chapter 4. Further, *ilinx* may be understood as dizzying, as the inducing of vertigo.<sup>297</sup> Another connection may be drawn here with the ‘vertiginous’<sup>298</sup> nature of mise en abyme or the *Matryoshka* effect, as seen in ‘Flowering Blossoms’ and the *Swing Songs* (discussed in Chapters 2 and 4).

- The lines between composition, arrangement, and ‘mediation’; intervention versus unforced flourishing.

Kaplinski himself, an advocate of inventing nothing in order to receive everything,<sup>299</sup> once claimed that he wanted to ‘write himself free of art,’ explaining ‘art seems so artistic.’<sup>300</sup> Is this related to his Finno-Ugric unforced flourishing, or a symptom of postmodern post-trauma, given that comparable feelings define the narrator of *Piiririik*? Either way, the return here to minimal intervention in the treatment of folk material leads on to the next, particularly elusive, set of boundaries.

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<sup>293</sup> Seligman *et al*, 119.

<sup>294</sup> Roger Caillois *Man, Play and Games* (transl. Meyer Barash), (New York: Free Press, 1961), 11.

<sup>295</sup> Caillois, *Games*, 12.

<sup>296</sup> Caillois, *Games*, 12.

<sup>297</sup> Caillois *Games*, 12.

<sup>298</sup> Lawlor, ‘Lautréamont,’ 834.

<sup>299</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 26.

<sup>300</sup> Salumets, *Flourishing*, 64.

### **Dissent and compliance; ‘authentic’ nationalism and Soviet ‘nation-building’**

‘Genuine’ national characteristics in music may be ‘as chimerical as the unicorn’ (as is a truly random, non-repeating musical series,<sup>301</sup> according to Rahn). Marina Frolova-Walker writes, for instance, that ‘most attempts to prove [Glinka’s] *Ruslan*’s Russianness were fictions.’<sup>302</sup> Questioning the very existence of ‘national character,’ she remarks that ‘every description [...] reads like a horoscope: we rejoice at what fits our preconceptions and ignore what does not.’<sup>303</sup> As pertinent as these challenges are, in the end they are not really crucial to our discussion. It need not concern us whether or not such tropes of national style were ‘authentic’ or in any sense based on ‘reality.’ The fact that they were expounded, and to some extent believed in, may reasonably lead to the conclusion that some of them filtered down into the musical education and training of composers from Soviet republics. Some characteristics of this ‘Russian’ music, and of the results of efforts to create a new breed of nationalist socialist works in Soviet republics from the 1930s to 1950s,<sup>304</sup> correspond to aspects of Tormis’s arrangements. Glinka, ‘the first to set out’ on a quest for a ‘distinctively Russian musical syntax,’ developed the ‘changing-background’ technique as an alternative to symphonic, ‘Germanic,’ developmental progression,<sup>305</sup> which could accommodate not only ‘linear narrative’ but also ‘repetitive incantation.’<sup>306</sup> Repetitive incantation with a changing background is easily as satisfactory a descriptor for Tormis’s ‘St John’s Song’ as the allusions to minimalistic additive construction made earlier. Further, the approach of building chords or ‘harmonizing’ melodies with quartal and quintal harmony has been framed at points in this study (for example, see Chapter 4) as vertical symmetry, illustrative of a concern with balance. However, it also surfaces in Frolova Walker’s discussion of the development of a supposedly nationalistic style in some Soviet Kirghiz music.

Attempting to purge themselves of many compositional techniques that had become second nature, they instead doubled the melody in fourths, on no better grounds than that the fourth separated

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<sup>301</sup> Rahn, ‘Repetition,’ 49.

<sup>302</sup> Marina Frolova-Walker, ‘On “*Ruslan*” and Russianness,’ *Cambridge Opera Journal* 9/1 (1997): 32.

<sup>303</sup> Frolova-Walker, ‘Russianness,’ 34.

<sup>304</sup> Frolova-Walker, ‘National in Form,’ 331.

<sup>305</sup> Frolova-Walker, ‘National in Form,’ 343-4.

<sup>306</sup> Frolova-Walker, ‘Russianness,’ 29.

successive strings of the traditional accompanying instrument, and likewise doubled the composed bass line at the fifth, simply as a means of eschewing the characteristic sounds of Western harmonization.<sup>307</sup>

This study has tended to discuss Tormis's harmonic writing in terms of balance prioritized over hegemony; a 'side-stepping' of the developmental, Classical, hierarchical, or 'traditional.' It should be noted that 'Western' sits comfortably alongside other orientations the composer appears to avoid. Also relatable to Tormis's modal folk arrangements is Vladimir Stasov's 'law of Russian plagalism.' Extrapolated entirely from Stasov's study of Glinka, this idea served to fan the flames under the belief in 'a purportedly fundamental difference between Russian harmony, articulated around IV, and Western harmony, in which the role of V is central.'<sup>308</sup> As outlined in Chapter 1, folk music was a central focus in later Soviet Baltic musicology, perhaps largely because 'to explore [...] formal modelling [...] and such problems for large folk music collections was a very positivist and practical science.'<sup>309</sup> As such there are other plausible origins for modality and the minimal recourse to 'Western' cadential formulae in Tormis's work which do not necessarily imply a direct 'Russian' influence. His claim, for instance, that 'you can't harmonize *regilaul'* may be purely a result of his own intensive study of, and strongly-held convictions about, the runic song.

Nevertheless, the following extract from Frolova Walker is interesting. She explains that the fanciful notion of a true musical 'Russianness,' as extrapolated from the study of great Russian composers, was deftly 'punctured'<sup>310</sup> by Rimsky-Korsakov:

Russian traits – and national traits in general – are acquired not by writing according to specific rules, but rather by removing from the common language of music those devices which are inappropriate to a Russian style. The method is of a negative character, a

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<sup>307</sup> Frolova-Walker, 'National in Form,' 349-50.

<sup>308</sup> Frolova-Walker, 'National in Form,' 344.

<sup>309</sup> Lippus, 'Linguistics,' 113.

<sup>310</sup> Frolova-Walker, 'National in Form,' 344.



technique of avoiding certain devices. Thus, for example, I would not use this turn of phrase:



if I were writing in a Russian style, as it would be inappropriate [...] To achieve a Russian style I would avoid some devices, for a Spanish style I would avoid others, and for a German style, still others.<sup>311</sup>

In particular, the route of minimal intervention frequently seen in Tormis's approach to folk song arrangement – that which has been framed here as a reflection of Kaplinski's 'unforced flourishing' – bears some conceptual similarities to the tendency towards a 'negative' strategy identified in some other Soviet 'nationalist' music based on folk material. 'Their desire to create a Kirghiz style true to the monodies they had in their hands led them back to the strategy Rimsky-Korsakov so candidly revealed: the *via negativa* of avoiding anything that would sound too blatantly Western.'<sup>312</sup>

Tormis was 'encouraged to continue' working with folk material by Vissarion Shebalin, under whom he studied at the Moscow Conservatory.<sup>313</sup> He has made statements aligning himself with the Russian 'greats': 'I am not all that far away from the St Petersburg School – Rimsky Korsakov, Myakovsky, Shebalin, and Tormis.'<sup>314</sup> Tormis's claim that what caused trouble for 'others' paradoxically worked in his favour<sup>315</sup> is in a sense echoed by Ester Mägi,<sup>316</sup> the 'First Lady of Estonian music.'<sup>317</sup> Mägi, a contemporary Estonian composer of music which could be described as more bland than Tormis's (and which also makes frequent use of quartal harmony,

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<sup>311</sup> Rimsky-Korsakov, quoted in Frolova Walker, 'National in Form,' 344.

<sup>312</sup> Frolova Walker, 'National,' 349.

<sup>313</sup> Daitz, *Ancient*, 203.

<sup>314</sup> Daitz, *Ancient*, 258.

<sup>315</sup> Daitz, 255.

<sup>316</sup> MacLaughlin Garbes, 'Mägi,' 368.

<sup>317</sup> Mägi Ensemble website <http://www.magiensemble.com/estermagi>.

modality, and plagalism),<sup>318</sup> met with possibly even higher favour and recognition from the authorities.<sup>319</sup> MacLaughlin Garbes writes that Mägi's 'biggest influence' was composition teacher Mart Saar:

Saar (1882-1963) is known as one of the fathers of Estonian national music. His compositions focus on the natural beauty of the area around him and are based on the folklore and songs from that area. He developed the technique of using a folk melody repeatedly in a composition while varying the melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, and textural elements that accompany it. This technique evolved to become known as the national choral symphonic sound in Estonia.<sup>320</sup>

The approaches described above are indicative of Saar's influence on subsequent generations of Estonian artists, but the 'technique,' which MacLaughlin Garbes suggests 'he developed,' in fact sounds uncannily similar to Glinka's 'changing background.'

These observations have been reserved for so late a point in the discussion because they need not significantly affect the ideas which have preceded them in this study. They are undeniable aspects of the background to this music, and as such should at least be acknowledged. However the extent of their importance here may quickly become as much of a banal question as the wider issue of authentic 'nationalism.' It bears repeating that a simplistic model of authoritarian-restrictions-versus-repressed-artists may be reductive to the point of redundancy, and that the reality was far more complex.<sup>321</sup> Of late twentieth-century Baltic music history writing in general, Lippus warns: 'often we must know the terms and rules of the game in order to understand the author.'<sup>322</sup> The 'cultural experience' required thoroughly to decode 'the texts of that time'<sup>323</sup> is beyond the remit of this study.

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<sup>318</sup> MacLaughlin Garbes, 'Mägi,' 369.

<sup>319</sup> MacLaughlin Garbes, 'Mägi,' 367.

<sup>320</sup> MacLaughlin Garbes, 'Mägi,' 365.

<sup>321</sup> Pauline Fairclough and David Fanning (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Shostakovich*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>322</sup> Lippus, 'Baltic Music History,' 60.

<sup>323</sup> Lippus, 'Baltic Music History,' 59.

Over-dramatizing the situation and becoming fixated on negative aspects may detract from other, positive and interesting, qualities and connections. These ideas are difficult to disentangle, and this is an undesirable area in which to become entangled ourselves. Suffice it to say that, although music from the Soviet republics may be to some extent inextricable from such problematic contextual issues, focusing on them to the exclusion of alternate possibilities is ultimately unlikely to yield new or interesting ideas. The following and final group of boundaries below invites further discussion by virtue of multiple connections to Estonia's history, to Tormis's ritualistic music, and to some significant themes which have not yet been explored in depth:

- The boundaries between the subjunctive world of ritual and the causal, 'scientific' world of sincerity; and their necessary interplay and interdependence.<sup>324</sup>
- Trauma as the violation of physical or psychological boundaries; the multiple foreign occupations of Estonia as a violation of national boundaries.
- Ritual as a simultaneous acceptance, negotiation, transgression, and transcendence of boundaries.<sup>325</sup>

### **Trauma and boundaries**

Modern platitudes about the 'death of God,' and the subsequent rise of consumerism as a meaning system<sup>326</sup> in Western society, seem almost necessarily to lead to the discussion by Seligman *et al* of 'the limits of sincerity.' The point these authors are making is that society cannot function without its subjunctive world.<sup>327</sup> For Wittgenstein, the result of what he sees as the world's total contingency is a 'fundamental powerlessness' on the part of all humans.<sup>328</sup> If, as he would have it, the

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<sup>324</sup> Seligman *et al*, *Ritual*, 7.

<sup>325</sup> Seligman *et al*, *Ritual*, 11.

<sup>326</sup> As opposed to the term 'belief systems,' 'meaning system' here refers to a set of ways in which an individual constructs 'meaning,' purpose, etc. in their life (for instance, religion can form a meaning system). Trauma can result in a loss of meaning systems (see Luxenburg *et al*, 'Complex Trauma,' 387-8).

<sup>327</sup> Seligman *et al*, 10.

<sup>328</sup> Chon Tejedor, *Starting with Wittgenstein* (New York: Continuum International, 2011), 88.

universe is entirely without any necessary causal relationships between what we desire or aim for, and what actually happens,<sup>329</sup> then life would surely indeed slide ‘into chaos and meaninglessness,’ – as Bell warns that it ‘keeps threatening to’<sup>330</sup> – if nobody was prepared buy into the embodiment of idealized, ordered, ‘as if,’ *safer* constructions of being. Neither the sincere nor subjunctive world is more legitimate or important than the other; Seligman *et al* imply that neither can function in isolation.<sup>331</sup> In fact, neither is necessarily more or less ‘real’ (hence, I think, the coinage of the word ‘sincere’).

Seligman et al have taken the term ‘subjunctive’ from the linguistic definition for a statement which is not known to be true by the speaker, as opposed to one which is necessarily known to be untrue. The subjunctive world is the world ‘as if,’ not ‘as isn’t’ or ‘as-couldn’t-possibly-be.’ Perhaps even more importantly, the world ‘as is’ only ‘is’ in the sense that we perceive it in empirical terms, rationalize our experiences (usually in accordance with our extant belief systems),<sup>332</sup> and absorb the ideas of others – with varying degrees of self-reflexivity and critical thought. All of these routes of understanding, of course, are filtered through our fallible minds. The history of sincere, scientific research and knowledge is pitted with revelations which overturned previously unquestioningly-accepted world-views. It could be posited that with our limited brains, blind spots, prejudices, and finite horizons of experience, we are deluding ourselves if we ‘sincerely’ believe that we can not only comprehend, but also fully make sense of, and make peace with, *everything* in sincere and scientific terms.

The reason for this slight tangent is that Wittgenstein’s conception of a contingent sincere world may have quite painful resonance for a traumatized person or group. A crucially relevant issue of boundaries, which here is directly connected to the political and physical borders of states and nations, concerns trauma. The medically diagnosable condition of post-traumatic stress disorder in an individual is

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<sup>329</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>330</sup> Bell, *Ritual*, 12.

<sup>331</sup> Seligman *et al*, *Ritual*, 10.

<sup>332</sup> As opposed to ‘meaning system,’ ‘belief system’ here refers to a set of ingrained assumptions, prejudices, ‘core beliefs,’ etc., through which an individual’s experiences are understood. For instance, the core assumption that ‘most people are essentially good’ might lead an individual to interpret an isolated interpersonal exchange differently than if they held the belief that ‘most people are not essentially good.’

obviously not directly comparable to symptoms of ‘cultural trauma’ for an entire nation. Another set of boundaries which must be mentioned is the collection of intersections and differences between a medical, and what we might call a ‘literary,’ understanding of trauma. Walking the tightrope in the middle means courting the danger of over-generalization and misapplication of ideas, but trauma as a very broad concept is certainly significant to the study of art from occupied nations. Jaanus’s analysis of *Piiririik*, in some ways itself balancing on a similar tightrope, is taken from a larger collaborative volume entitled *Baltic Postcolonialism*.<sup>333</sup> There is some debate about whether ‘post-colonial’ should be co-opted to discuss the post-Soviet,<sup>334</sup> and more to the point, if post-colonialism were applicable to Estonian art from after the Soviet occupation, it wouldn’t apply directly to the majority of the Tormis works considered here. As such the term will be avoided in favour of the contemporary fact of occupation, and the somewhat less polemical ‘post-trauma’ (as some symptoms of protracted historical trauma may surface before the traumatic events are officially ‘over’). Of course, ‘post-Soviet’ and ‘post-colonial’ both also indicate a state of affairs which only existed for Tormis in the last decade of his composing career. Focusing on the experience of trauma, rather than the political borderline of 1990/1, allows for comparable concepts to be introduced with regards to earlier dates. War, occupation, deportation, cultural erasure, and state violence against a people may traumatize their victims and witnesses regardless of what particular political entity currently holds power.

Whether it is experienced by an individual or lived through by a community or group, trauma can be considered through the lens of the sincere-subjunctive dichotomy. It may be experienced as a ripping away of the comfort afforded by the subjunctive world – through a brutal illustration of the contingency, the danger, and the untenable unpredictability, uncertainty and ultimate ‘unknowable-ness’ of life.

Trauma is a violent transgression of physical and/or emotional and/or psychological borders and boundaries. Understandably, this can result in an impaired ability to live with, or comfortably to negotiate, the borders and boundaries between

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<sup>333</sup> 2007, ed. Violeta Kelertas.

<sup>334</sup> See David Chioni Moore ‘Is the post in post-Soviet the post in postcolonial?’ in *Baltic Postcolonialism* (ed. Kelertas).

sincerity and subjunctivity. The traumatized subject may experience psychological and emotional shutdown because something has happened which constitutes so violent a transgression of boundaries, or so complete a shattering of their world-view, that it cannot be processed. If the traumatic event can happen, the subject may reason, then anything can happen – and all societal constructions of routine, order, predictability, safety and idealized niceness are fundamentally unreliable. They have learned in a particularly violent way that nothing is absolutely certain – least of all their own safety. As a result, the traumatized subject may feel rootless or lost, like the protagonist of *Piiririik* – sensing profoundly the absence of any enduring, reliable, and meaningful foundation to their existence. They may either lose their ability to put faith in the subjunctive world, or may develop a dysfunctional dependence on the same in sheer denial of their vulnerability, and of the unacceptable reality of what has happened (and what may possibly happen again at any time: the point is that nobody cannot absolutely or ‘sincerely’ know that it won’t). Either way, it stands to reason that one symptom of trauma may be a heightened awareness of or intensified relationship with the boundaries between the world ‘as if’ and the world ‘as is.’

The experience of life after trauma may be characterized by a perpetual state of hyper-arousal;<sup>335</sup> of being driven to distraction by the perennial question, ‘what is about to happen?’ – or, more specifically, ‘what is about to *happen to me?*’ You might reasonably extrapolate from this a set of anxieties that could loosely be mapped onto a culture with a history of violent occupations like Estonia’s; Jaanus’s analysis of *Piiririik* has connections with these themes. There is clearly a relationship between the members of a collection of rough binary distinctions that have emerged over the course of this study. Although the borders between some of the pairs may be blurred, they are most usefully grouped in this way here.<sup>336</sup>

### Sincere – Subjunctive

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<sup>335</sup> Luxenburg *et al*, ‘Complex Trauma,’ 379.

<sup>336</sup> See Chapter 2 for discussion of why non-linear music which evokes monumental time might be considered, at least in this context, to be ‘more subjunctive’ than the (still-imaginary) closure and finality offered by linear, developmental, goal-oriented music.

<b>'As is'</b>	–	<b>'As if'</b>
<b>Historical</b>	–	<b>Monumental</b>
<b>Linear</b>	–	<b>Non-linear/spatial/ecological</b>
<b>Goal-oriented</b>	–	<b>Goalless</b>
<b>Hierarchy/conflict</b>	–	<b>Balance/symmetry</b>
<b>Less predictable</b>	–	<b>More repetitive/static</b>
<b>Journey</b>	–	<b>Place</b>
<b>Unsafe</b>	–	<b>Safe</b>

Tormis's ritualistic music corresponds most closely with the collection of themes in the right-hand column above. It is a bounded, spatial subjunctive world which exhibits the predictability, security, and safety that a traumatized subject may crave and find to be lacking in the world of sincerity. The music-making or listening context can itself constitute a sort of 'safe space' – but in addition, the monotony identified and prized in *regilaul* by Kaplinski is a factor in the safeness of this music. There are few sudden twists or turns or destabilizations of affect in the Tormis pieces explored in this study. The 'emotional' content of many of the works discussed here is established at the outset and then sustained. In a similar vein, Kramer says of vertical music that it sets up the terms and limits of its own world and subsequently declines to step outside of them.<sup>337</sup> The monotonous, expressionless repetitions of *regilaul*, and Tormis's arrangements of the same, may not only be hypnotic or shamanistic, as Kaplinski suggests,<sup>338</sup> but also 'emotionally safe' by virtue of the very features that lead some to describe them as bland.

Estonians may have 'always remained acquainted with monumental time,' for the reason Jaanus suggests: because they have learned not to expect anything from 'reality' or historical time.<sup>339</sup> However, it is equally plausible that monumental musical time has more positive qualities in this context. The construction and experience of any bordered and reliably safe, dependable, and predictable 'space-time,' or 'time-space,' should not be taken for granted when considering the after-

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<sup>337</sup> Kramer, *Time*, 55.

<sup>338</sup> Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 61.

<sup>339</sup> Jaanus, 'Estonia's' Time,' 219.

effects of trauma. Accordingly, for instance, a fundamental concern in much clinical therapy involves creating safety within the bounded time and space of a therapy session.<sup>340</sup> It may be coincidental that many of the characteristics in Tormis's work which link it to Kaplinski's 'Finno-Ugric mode of seeing' can also be conceived as therapeutic responses to the hyper-arousal and death-fearing linear drive of trauma in historical time.

Tia DeNora writes that Richard Middleton and Antoine Hennion support the notion that the stabilization and consolidation of musical meanings may be achieved 'through ritual procedures and practices over time.'<sup>341</sup> This possibility lends further credence to the idea that *regilaul* – and perhaps by extension Tormis's work – can not only exist symbolically, but also function actively, as a 'ritual of cultural identity.' DeNora also makes repeated reference to the significance of ritual, space, and place.<sup>342</sup> These are connections which clearly have parallels with the bounded subjunctive world of ritualistically-framed activity in the study by Seligman *et al.* However, as well as framing the *act* of music-making in a ritual context, it is possible that a heightened degree of musical subjunctivity, monumental time, and the denial of linearity and change which increases the sense of a musical subjunctive world being spatial, could allow for the form of the music itself (and not just the form and context of the practical activity) to have therapeutically ritualistic, or ritualistically therapeutic, qualities.

Returning to the repetition of ritual practice as the stabilization of meaning, it is a truism in clinical psychology that 'behavioural activation' is a powerful tool for affect regulation, improving mental health, and ameliorating quality of life.<sup>343</sup> The success and popularity of cognitive behavioural therapy, although it may have been supplanted by something newer and more fashionable in therapeutic discourse, is in part founded on the substantial body of empirical evidentiary support for the idea that repeatedly doing certain things, which are often necessarily framed in a particular way, can change people's lives for the better. These acts are often, in fact,

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<sup>340</sup> Luxenburg *et al*, 'Complex Trauma.'

<sup>341</sup> Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 32.

<sup>342</sup> DeNora, *Everyday*.

<sup>343</sup> James Bennet-Levy *et al*, *Oxford Guide to Low Intensity CBT Interventions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 141.



framed as an embodiment of a desired way of being: ‘acting “as if”.’ The name of this type of therapy clearly expresses its foundations in the interactive relationship between what people do and how they feel. It stands to reason that the creation, and repeated, ritualistic construction and experience, of a boundaried, monumental, goalless, repetitive, ecological, spatial – and *safe* – subjunctive world through music could be directly beneficial, even therapeutic, for traumatized individuals and communities. Without wanting to ‘legitimize the obvious,’ there seems to be abundant historical support for this idea, though it may not be founded on scientific or quantitative evidence. Would individuals, communities and groups since the beginning of human history have continued to use music to reinforce identities, bonds, and differences if this medium worked its magic only in some abstract symbolic dimension? Of course this rhetorical question cannot be answered here. Still, extant studies on the use of ritual in trauma therapy and peace-building<sup>344</sup> are a testament to what may be our intuitive understanding of the power of repeated, repetitive, subjunctive construction and embodiment.

#### **‘An A is A-Like Thing’: definition and categorization**

Milan Kundera’s parting comments at the close of *The Curtain* appear to acknowledge the fallacious supremacy of linear, goal-oriented historical narratives. Moreover, he expresses a longing for a form of art which, it might be argued, sounds not unlike the unforced and obstinately artless efforts of Veljo Tormis and Jaan Kaplinski.

In anguish I imagine a time when art shall cease to seek out the never-said and will go docilely back into the service of the collective life that requires it to render repetition beautiful and help the individual merge, at peace and with joy, into the uniformity of being. For the history of art is perishable. The babble of art is eternal.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Schirch, *Peacebuilding*; David Read Johnson *et al*, ‘The Use of Ritual and Ceremony in the Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,’ *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 8/2 (1995).

<sup>345</sup> Milan Kundera, *The Curtain* (London: Faber, 2007), 168.

This study has occasionally reflected the form of Tormis's music in elements of its own structure. However, a lack of ultimate goal-orientation must obviously not be among these. We have reached the point at which the broad abstract ideas that have been unfolding parallel to each other must be drawn into a conclusion of sorts. Does Tormis's monumental, ecological music bear fingerprints of trauma, or is it solely based on the qualities of *regilaul*? Is it an embodiment of alleged autochthonous characteristics of Estonian culture, which Kaplinski packages as a 'Finno-Ugric mode of seeing'? Or is it just another product of the homogenizing meat-grinder of socialist realism – 'glib, bland, and corny'?<sup>346</sup> Is it a Soviet nationalist vessel, shunted along the *via negativa* production line and filled with superficial 'authentic' Estonian content? Or is it an invaluable ritual of cultural identity? Some of these questions are more flippant than others; some may fairly be answered in the affirmative, and some obviously deserve swift dismissal. Rigid borderlines between these groups of possibilities, though, cannot be drawn with confidence and integrity here. Beyond their surface correlations with apparently 'approved' stylistic conventions, Tormis's 'bland inventions' betray a network of connections with the 'postmodern,' the post-traumatic, and the notionally 'Finno-Ugric.' The music itself may at first seem unremarkable, but the ways in which it reflects aspects of its context are more complex and curious. Perhaps in this case, as Thomas Lahusen suggests in his study on literary socialist realism, we might do well to remember anti-Stalinist author Andrei Platonov's gentle rebuke: 'boring books come from boring readers.'<sup>347</sup>

Ultimately, it seems, what is often addressed in much musicological study is a kind of tip-toeing exploration along, around, and across the borderlines and boundaries between the fluid, subjective duality of what may be 'communicated' in words and what may be 'communicated' in music. As Kramer has recommended, another dichotomy within which it may be most fruitful to occupy a liminal position is the divide between formalist and humanist approaches to musical analysis and

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<sup>346</sup> Frolova Walker's article title.

<sup>347</sup> Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur*, as quoted in Thomas Lahusen, *How Life Writes The Book: real socialism and Socialist Realism in Stalin's Russia* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press. 1997), 2.

musicology.<sup>348</sup> It can be uncomfortable to work in this often poorly-defined space between symbolic language and music, between scores and sounds and a variety of extraneous ideas. Moreover, it could be argued that trying to make sense of music through text in this way actually represents the opposite of Kaplinski's 'unforced flourishing.' There are obviously things that music cannot 'say' that can be said in words. Simultaneously there are a great many people (composers abundant among them) who feel that music must be allowed to speak for itself – even that to impose personal interpretations on a work of art is an act of violence. But music exists as 'social text.'<sup>349</sup> It may be that for many listeners, a programme note proclaiming the composer's liberation of the 'primeval enchanting power of ancient folk tunes'<sup>350</sup> in the simplest of terms would feel like more than enough information. Having said all this, the connections that have been uncovered through this process help us to situate Tormis's output more clearly amongst the work of other important composers, poets, authors, visual artists and thinkers. Exposing some of the complexities in pinning down the origins of or motivations behind musical features is a valuable exercise in itself. What has hopefully been achieved here is a coherent survey of some of the diverse reflections within Tormis's work of ideas that were unfolding around him at critical and confusing points in the history of Estonia – and which have continued to evolve and spread in new directions in the past quarter of a century, since the country regained independence.

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<sup>348</sup> Kramer, *Time*, 3-4.

<sup>349</sup> John Shepherd, *Music as Social Text* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

<sup>350</sup> Lippus, 'Veljo Tormis Data Bank,' online.

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