

# Szymanowski's Third Piano Sonata and First String Quartet and the Artistic Theory and Practice of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz: 'Pure Form', Subjectivity, and the Burlesque

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**Abstract** Karol Szymanowski and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz were leading figures in Polish modernism. A thorough review of their relationship and an examination of Witkiewicz's theory of 'pure form' and its applicability to music (via Witkiewicz's literary portraits of Szymanowski, his attempts at composition, and the critical and theoretical extensions of his work by Konstanty Regamey) provides the basis for analysing the form and content of Szymanowski's Third Piano Sonata and First String Quartet.

## Introduction

Karol Szymanowski's Third Piano Sonata op. 36 and First String Quartet op. 37, both written in 1917 during the composer's final months on the ancestral estate at Tymoszkówka (the family fled the advancing Bolsheviks in October), stand as a pair of works in the composer's output whose form and character have long challenged critics and analysts. In particular, the motivations and ramifications of an overt return and radical transformation of traditional form in two works given abstract titles has remained a source of contested debate, right from their first performances. Few of Szymanowski's compositions occupy such an enigmatic and strongly marked position in his output. Raising especially bold challenges to central aspects of formal tradition, they have attracted notably diverse and disputing readings. Both pieces are ripe for a new analytical and hermeneutic interrogation.

Between the highpoint of Szymanowski's enthusiasm for Austro-German modernism (when he wrote his Second Symphony, op. 19 (1910), Second Piano Sonata,

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op. 21 (1910–11), and the post-Straussian opera *Hagith*, op. 25 (1912–13)) and a turn to Polish folk inspirations in the early 1920s (in his song cycle *Słopiewnie*, op. 46b (1921), and the piano *Mazurkas*, op. 50 (1923)), his composition mostly focused on exotically inspired song cycles, an array of overtly programmatic instrumental music, and the opera *King Roger*, op. 46 (which is set in twelfth-century Sicily). Even in his contributions to genres such as the symphony and concerto during this period, traditional formal structures are at best very partially evoked (as in the setting of al-Din Rumi in the Third Symphony, 'Pieśń o nocy' ('The Song of the Night', op. 27, 1914–16) or arguably jettisoned in favour of novel formal design (in the First Violin Concerto, op. 35, 1916).

The formal freedom in these works has often been identified with emphasis on a Dionysian impulse, in the familiar Nietzschean opposition with Apollonian formal control, a dualism which was an especially important idea for Szymanowski.<sup>1</sup> The Apollonian side is reflected in a strain of critical literature arguing that the works of 1913–16 demonstrate a sustained interpretative dialogue with classical formal principles. In a reading of the formal design of the Third Symphony, for example, Paul Cadrin counters Christopher Palmer's view that 'no attempt is made to approximate to sonata structure.'<sup>2</sup> Cadrin argues for a 'derivation' from classical formal models, but that Szymanowski offers a 'reinterpretation' of such a 'distinctive' manner that it has been analytically elusive. In Cadrin's analysis, the opening section of the symphony's continuous multi-movement structure is presented as a sonata exposition and development.<sup>3</sup> There is, however, no recapitulation and no clear tonal dialectic driving an obligation to resolve (whether denied or achieved). The only parallels or remnants of sonata form are two contrasting thematic groups and a distinction between expository and developmental materials (but the difference between the relative stability and instability of these materials is greatly attenuated). The presence of sonata form features is greatly weakened, undermining the persuasiveness of Cadrin's reading.<sup>4</sup>

For Alistair Wightman, the First Violin Concerto is Szymanowski's 'most original formal concept', and is 'uniquely' organized in five spans, each designed around a climactic highpoint.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, Stanisław Golachowski was convinced that

<sup>1</sup> Broadly, this is the interpretation in Alistair Wightman, *Karol Szymanowski: His Life and Work* (Ashgate, 1999). Szymanowski considered Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* to be one of the 'most beautiful books in the world': Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, *Spotkania z Szymanowskim* (PWM, 1976), 29. See Bartosz Dąbrowski, *Mit dionizyjski Karola Szymanowskiego* (Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2001). Szymanowski's Dionysianism reflects his close association with Młoda Polska (Young Poland) aesthetics, which dominated the early, pre-war twentieth century: see Michał Głowinski, 'Maska Dionizyosa', *Młodopolski świat wyobraźni*, ed. Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska (Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1977), 353–406.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Palmer, *Szymanowski* (BBC, 1983), 57.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Cadrin, 'Between Dawn and Dusk: *The Song of the Night* and the Symphony at the Turn of the Century', in *The Songs of Karol Szymanowski and His Contemporaries*, ed. Zofia Helman, Teresa Chylińska, and Alistair Wightman (Polish Music Center at USC, 2002), 112–21.

<sup>4</sup> For a counter view, see Stephen Downes, 'Sonata Form', in *The Szymanowski Companion*, ed. Stephen Downes and Paul Cadrin (Ashgate, 2015), 201–06 (p. 204).

<sup>5</sup> Wightman, *Karol Szymanowski*, 177–81.

traditional sonata principles inform the concerto.<sup>6</sup> Zofia Helman tempers Golachowski's reading, noting that the concerto's design represents a 'considerable departure' from formal norms (and in this regard is comparable with the novelties of the Third Symphony).<sup>7</sup> Helman does, however, hear 'La fontaine d'Aréthuse' and 'Narcisse' (the first two of the three *Mythes*, which Szymanowski subtitled 'poems for violin and piano', op. 30 (1915)) as 'lyrical miniatures fused with elements of sonata allegro'.<sup>8</sup> But Helman's interpretation relies almost solely on the presence of two contrasting themes. As with the Third Symphony, little else remains of sonata principles. A similar problem informs Alan Michael Reese's sonata form reading of 'Narcisse'.<sup>9</sup> Adrian Thomas's summary of the works of the 1913–16 period is closer to the mark when he writes that in this 'middle period [...] perhaps most significantly, [Szymanowski] seemed to have shed the structural formalities of earlier symphonic works, such as the Second Symphony, and developed a wondrously seductive developmental process that was both static and mobile'.<sup>10</sup>

Given the absence or (alternatively) the greatly disguised presence of classical designs in the works of 1913–16, Szymanowski's turn to a clearer yet unusual deployment of traditional forms and the use of abstract titles in the 1917 sonata and quartet is read in classic Polish readings<sup>11</sup> and pioneering English studies<sup>12</sup> as manifesting a fresh neoclassical impulse. But these works were followed by a quick return in 1918 to exotic-poetic worlds (song settings of Rabindranath Tagore op. 41, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz's *Pieśni muezina szalonego* ('The Songs of an Infatuated Muezzin', op. 42), and early work on *King Roger*) and a subsequent compositional block during several years of creative and personal crisis, until the creative kick-start given by the stimulus of Polish folklore in the early 1920s. Helman is much more sceptical about interpreting the quartet (and later works of the 1920s and 1930s, the Second String Quartet op. 56 (1927), Fourth Symphony op. 60 (1932), and Second Violin Concerto op. 61 (1932–3)) as neoclassical. She cautions that assigning this term to these pieces leads to obfuscation and simplification rather than insightful critique. Across Szymanowski's work, rather than the sense of distance, parody, restoration, or irony in the relationship with 'old' forms that characterizes the neoclassical aesthetic, Helman identifies continuous engagement with an aesthetic of formal clarity, a manifestation of what she calls 'contemporary Classicism', even if the closeness of that engagement varies and is

<sup>6</sup> Stanisław Golachowski, *Karol Szymanowski* (1948), Eng. trans. Christa Ahrens (Paganiniana, 1986), 33–34.

<sup>7</sup> Zofia Helman, *The History of Music in Poland: Between Romanticism and the New Music*, trans. John Comber (Sutkowski Edition, 2015), 306–07.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 281, 283.

<sup>9</sup> Alan Michael Reese, 'Analytical Approaches to the Middle-Period Compositions of Karol Szymanowski' (PhD dissertation, Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester, 2018), 59–62.

<sup>10</sup> Adrian Thomas, *Polish Music since Szymanowski* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Golachowski, *Karol Szymanowski*; Stefania Łobaczewska, *Karol Szymanowski: życie i twórczości* (PWM, 1950).

<sup>12</sup> Jim Samson, *The Music of Szymanowski* (Kahn & Averill, 1980). For Wightman, the sonata shows 'faith in a cultural tradition' and a 'herculean transformation of received traditions', while 'the quartet gives voice to a more explicit classicizing tendency'. *Karol Szymanowski*, 201.

sometimes obscured or weakened.<sup>13</sup> Teresa Chylińska is similarly sceptical of interpreting the sonata and quartet as returns to ‘absolute’ music, noting that after completing these pieces Szymanowski quickly went back to Dionysian themes with the unfinished cantata *Agave*, a precursor to the early work on *King Roger*. For Chylińska, however, while the Third Sonata continues the formal ‘experimentation’ of his earlier work, the First Quartet, by contrast, is an ‘astonishing retreat’ from his stylistic and formal advances.<sup>14</sup>

The preceding survey paints a conflicting picture, leaving the sonata and quartet as seemingly resistant to analytical consensus. Their tantalizing formal novelty and structural ambiguities therefore encourage a more speculative and metaphorical approach. Didier van Moere argues that it is unhelpful to characterize Szymanowski as a romantic forcing himself in the Third Sonata towards ascetic abstraction (*l’abstraction ascétique*), and proposes that the composer did not hide behind *la forme pure*, but remained ‘true to himself’. Van Moere supports his hearing through identifying a ‘figurative’ element in the sonata, and lists similarities between its subjects and characters depicted in programmatic and poetic works of the preceding years. But he also argues that thematic integration is pushed further in the Third Sonata than in Szymanowski’s earlier work, and provocatively suggests that this level of ‘constructivism’ might be explained by inspiration drawn from recent paintings of the Russian avant-garde, in particular those of the Suprematists, which had recently been introduced to the composer by his long-time close associate Natalia Davydova.<sup>15</sup>

Van Moere does not pursue this fascinating idea. But it does suggest that a potentially productive yet unrealized way to negotiate Szymanowski’s new formal experiments in 1917 lies in considering their relationship with his broad artistic ambitions and enthusiasms. The composer had numerous close intellectual and personal relationships with significant Polish artists at that time. In response, this article offers critical interpretations of the sonata and quartet through analyses and elucidations based on developing comparisons with the contemporaneous artistic theory and practice of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885–1939; only three years younger than the composer). Szymanowski’s relationship with Witkiewicz is recounted in all the major biographies,<sup>16</sup> but the critical and interpretative potential of Witkiewicz’s ideas for Szymanowski’s music remains largely unrealized. Their

<sup>13</sup> Zofia Helman, ‘Szymanowski und der Neoklassizismus’, *Szymanowski in Seiner Zeit*, ed. Michał Bristiger (Wilhelm Fink, 1984), 137–47, and ‘Preface’ to Karol Szymanowski, *Gesamtausgabe: B6* (PWM and Universal Edition, 1984), ix. For further discussion of Szymanowski’s relationship with neoclassicism, see Zofia Helman, *Neoklasycyzm w muzyce polskiej XX wieku* (PWM, 1985), 58–61.

<sup>14</sup> Teresa Chylińska, *Szymanowski: His Life and Works*, trans. John Glowacki (University of Southern California Press, 1993), 118.

<sup>15</sup> Didier van Moere, *Karol Szymanowski* (Fayard, 2008), 240. Szymanowski’s relationship with Davydova, to whom he dedicated his Second Piano Sonata, is traced in vivid depth by Teresa Chylińska, *Karol Szymanowski Romans, którego nie było? Między Tymoszwówką i Wierzbówką* (PWM, 2018). On Davydova’s relationship with Kazimir Malevich’s Suprematism, see Myroslav Shkandrij, *Avant-Garde Art in Ukraine, 1910–1930: Contested Memory* (Academic Studies Press, 2018), 110.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Anna Micińska, *Witkacy. Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz: Life and Work*, trans. Bogna Piotrowska (Interpress, 1990), 23–26.

friendship was especially close in early 1917. Szymanowski composed his sonata and quartet in the months which followed. A critical comparison of Witkiewicz's and Szymanowski's artistic aspirations can form the context and method for illuminating both the striking differences and the common ground exhibited by the forms and subjective manipulations in Szymanowski's sonata and quartet. In particular, the peculiarities of these works can be richly interpreted through focusing on Witkiewicz's notions of 'pure form', subjective crisis and the burlesque. Each of these ideas relate to widely held concerns in modernist art, but Witkiewicz gave them a notably individual, even idiosyncratic spin. They combine to form a constellation highly resonant with the formal and subjective characteristics of two of Szymanowski's own most idiosyncratic works. Such comparisons also facilitate broader insights into Witkiewicz's and Szymanowski's shared interests in understanding and developing potential cross-currents between artistic forms and media in the styles and ideas of early twentieth-century modernism. The parallels or synergies between contemporary arts were a key stimulus for their creative development. For both, the most interesting musical works were those which benefit from and relate to advances in this multi-media milieu.

What follows begins with brief biographical information on their relationship. An elucidation of Witkiewicz's theories, and their relationship to contemporaneous currents in Polish modernism, will then provide the ground for comparisons with Szymanowski's thinking. Formal and hermeneutic readings of Szymanowski's sonata and quartet will be preceded by considerations of Witkiewicz's thoughts on music, and what survives of his own compositional attempts. The article will conclude with a consideration of the sustained presence and importance of Witkiewicz's ideas in Szymanowski's later writings and music.

### **Szymanowski and Witkiewicz: A Torrid Relationship**

Witkiewicz (who commonly went by the name Witkacy, which distinguished him from his father, Stanisław Witkiewicz, 1851–1915) was a prominent and provocative figure in Polish artistic life. His prolific activity encompassed painting, novels, theoretical essays, plays, and photography. Ideas about modern musical form and expression played a vital role in his thinking (taught the piano by his mother, he was always eager to give improvisatory performances and at times aspired to compose). Szymanowski was his main musical model, inspiration, and sounding board. In 1917, both artists were at crucial personal and creative junctures. Witkiewicz, recovering from traumatic experiences in the Tsarist army, began to theorize his aesthetic more fully in tandem with exploring new forms and styles in paintings and theatrical works. For Szymanowski, the painful destruction of the family estate by the Bolsheviks in the autumn of that year was followed by a struggle to clarify and pursue his artistic aims.

Szymanowski first met Witkiewicz in Zakopane during the summer of 1904. The composer dedicated his First Piano Sonata in C minor, op. 8 (1904) to his friend and they took a trip to Italy together the following year. But cordialities were broken in 1914 by the suicide of Witkiewicz's fiancée, Jadwiga Janczewska, then pregnant and

who may, disastrously, have fallen for the homosexual Szymanowski.<sup>17</sup> In the aftermath of the tragedy, Witkiewicz himself expressed suicidal impulses (not for the last time, he was to kill himself the day after the Soviet army invaded Poland on 17 September 1939. He was acutely aware that his engagement in the First World War on the side of the White Army would lead to persecution or even execution.). He sought escape from the psychological turmoil of Jadwiga's tragic end by embarking on travels to Ceylon and Australia with the anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski. At the outbreak of war in the autumn of 1914, however, he returned to St Petersburg and became an officer in the Tsarist army. He was seriously wounded at the front near Minsk in 1916, and while on military leave in February–March 1917 there was a reunion with Szymanowski in Kiev. Their relationship was remarkably restored and reaffirmed, with Witkiewicz staying at the Szymanowski family's town home.<sup>18</sup> After Witkiewicz had departed, in response to a letter from Witkiewicz now sadly lost, Szymanowski wrote to him:

I was delighted with your laconic letter! [...] You have no idea what a weight was lifted from my mind after your stay here! [...] Have you not noticed how, in spite of such simply catastrophic misunderstandings, life continually brings us together! Perhaps some of our insignificant character traits are mutually jarring – but we should put up with this patiently for the sake of more important matters. I tell you frankly that in the most profound spheres of life, *no one* is as close to me as you [...] You once told me in a conversation that I am now more sympathetic for you than I was previously. This is true.<sup>19</sup>

The letter shows that at this time Szymanowski and Witkiewicz clearly shared closely similar views on the most important and pressing issues of art and life. But Witkiewicz was a capricious and exasperating character who delighted in goading, infuriating frivolity, and rebel rousing. Superficially, their moment of deep agreement seems to have been fleeting. In a letter of 9 May 1923, Szymanowski wrote to his cousin, the poet Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz:

Yesterday we spent the entire afternoon and evening at Staś's [Witkiewicz's] nameday party, with whom I'm reconnecting following yet another breakdown in relations. What an oddball! [...] [the party] which initially wasn't gelling [...] was one of the most pleasant.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> For an account, see Teresa Chylińska, *Karol Szymanowski i jego epoka*, vol. 1 (Musica Iagellonica, 2008), 292–94. A collection of extracts from letters and reminiscences concerning the affair is translated in Wightman, *Karol Szymanowski*, 125–27.

<sup>18</sup> See Chylińska, *Karol Szymanowski i jego epoka*, 425–26.

<sup>19</sup> Letter of May or June 1917. From a draft version in the composer's notebooks (emphasis in original); Teresa Chylińska (ed.), *Karol Szymanowski: Korespondencja 1 1903–1919* (PWM, 2nd enlarged and rev. edn, 2007), 565. Translation from Alistair Wightman (ed. and trans.), *Karol Szymanowski: Correspondence Vol. 1, 1902–1919* (Smashwords, 2016) <<https://www.smashwords.com/extreader/read/622747/231/karol-szymanowski-correspondence-volume-1-1902-1919/334>> (accessed 13 May 2024).

<sup>20</sup> Teresa Chylińska (ed.), *Karol Szymanowski: Korespondencja 2 (1920–26) \* do 1923* (PWM, 1994), 586.

Iwaskiewicz, who collaborated with Szymanowski on the libretto of *King Roger*, saw clearly, however, that though Szymanowski and Witkiewicz were of widely differing character (and were therefore always likely to get on each other's nerves, often trading in jibes), they nonetheless held each other in sustained high regard. Witkiewicz's wilfully aggravating and erratic behaviour led Szymanowski to write to the conductor Grzegorz Fitelberg in August 1930 expressing disenchantment and bewilderment as to why Witkiewicz seemed to hold him in such contempt.<sup>21</sup> The meeting in 1917 in all probability therefore marked the highpoint in their understanding, admiration, and mutually positive influence.

Witkiewicz painted prolifically on his return from the Front in 1916 but soon moved to a focus on plays and novels (posterity has granted him considerably higher status as a playwright than as a painter). Many of these literary outputs include musical figures who are plainly modelled on Szymanowski (though Witkiewicz hardly dealt in flummery and flattery). For example, in 1918 Witkiewicz clearly had Szymanowski in mind when creating the character of Baron Hibiscus, a composer of nine symphonies and three operas, in his play *Maciej Korbowa i Bellatrix*. But the most important of the post-war 'Szymanowski' caricatures are the composers Istvan Szentmichalyi, in the play *Sonata Belzebuba* (*The Beelzebub Sonata*, 1925), and Putrycydes, in the novel *Nienasycenie* (*Insatiability*, completed in 1927, published 1930), a hunchback with a deformed leg (a reference to Szymanowski's physical impediment, which originated in an injury sustained in his youth).<sup>22</sup> In these musical characters, and their imaginary music, Witkiewicz mercilessly parodies, and thereby ironically celebrates Szymanowski's style and aesthetic. In so doing he makes pungent comment on how the new music of these *ersatz* 'Szymanowskis' relates to his own ideas on artistic form, in particular as reactions and counter-reactions to the late romantic legacy and to the deep psychological anxieties of modern existence.

Witkiewicz used the term 'pseudomorphism' to describe the creation of new artistic shapes within old forms, in the manner of magma intruding upon, bending, and stretching ancient rock structures, new molten masses filling and distorting pre-existing spaces. In *Pożegnanie jesieni* (*Farewell to Autumn*, 1927), Witkiewicz discloses that he drew the geological imagery from Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, a book Szymanowski also greatly admired.<sup>23</sup> Later, in *Jedyne wyjście* ('The Only

<sup>21</sup> Teresa Chylińska (ed.), *Karol Szymanowski: Korespondencja 3 (1927–31) \*\*\* 1930, 1931* (Musica Iagellonica, 1997), 372. A rich array of anecdotes concerning their squabbles in Zakopane is recounted in Jerzy Rytard, *Wspomnienia o Karolu Szymanowskim* (PWM, 1947).

<sup>22</sup> There are other 'Szymanowskis'. The early novel, *622 Upadki Bunga, czyli demoniczna kobieta* (*The 622 Downfalls of Bungo, or the Demonic Woman*, 1910–11) includes the composers Bałwanow and Anodion, *Pożegnanie jesieni* (*Farewell to Autumn*, 1927) the musicians Azalin Pepudrech and Ziezio Smorski, and in *Jedyne Wyjście* (*The Only Solution*, incomplete, 1931–33) we encounter the pianist Roman Tępniak-Cyferblatowicz.

<sup>23</sup> In Spengler's words: 'Thus there arise distorted forms, crystals whose inner structure contradicts their external shapes.' *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (*The Decline of the West*) (1918), trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (George Allen, 1980), 189. On Spengler and Witkiewicz, see Daniel Gerould, *Witkacy: Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz as an Imaginative Writer* (University of Washington Press, 1981), 74. Gerould's work remains the most complete and authoritative study in English.

Solution', incomplete, 1931–33), Witkiewicz declared that Szymanowski 'alone possesses in that metaphysical kernel – terrible with its tension of forces – a black, hot and formless abyss filled with a pulp of unearthly feelings, a lava which gives rise to constructions of sounds'.<sup>24</sup>

For Witkiewicz, these formal metamorphoses can potentially be applied in all artist media. Witkiewicz and Szymanowski were both connoisseurs of a wide range of art and were convinced of the importance of relationships in developments across contemporary art forms. In a 1923 essay on Chopin, Szymanowski observed that recent art is moving from symbolic forms to 'abstract formalism' and that, as Chopin's work foreshadows, music can have a special role to play in these formal concerns (this claim is part of his strategy for rescuing Chopin from romantic epigones and positioning him as relevant for the modernists).<sup>25</sup> And in a 1924 essay on music in Paris, he declared that 'the autonomous study of any single field of art is out of the question: everything is inextricably interlinked by the often elusive, but no less binding, chains of what are fundamentally psychological and sociological developments'.<sup>26</sup> In a wide discussion of Szymanowski's enthusiasms and insights into contemporaneous visual arts, Juliusz Starzyński noted that Szymanowski's 1923 Chopin essay is indebted to the thinking of the Polish 'Formists'.<sup>27</sup> However, Starzyński did not take the relationship between Szymanowski and Witkiewicz into consideration, something Jerzy Skarbowski notes with regret.<sup>28</sup> Given Szymanowski's long association with Witkiewicz, and that the latter was for a while a leading member of the Formist group (many others of whom Szymanowski knew quite well), it is a surprising omission. (Starzyński simply includes Witkiewicz in a list of members of the Formist group.) Skarbowski's work partially fills that gap but leaves much scope for further extension. In order to move to a richer and

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On Spengler and Polish arts more broadly, see Agnieszka A. Marczyk, 'Encounters at the Threshold of Modernity: The Self, Literary Innovation, and Polish Transition to Independence, 1905–1926' (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2011), 264–65.

<sup>24</sup> Cited by Edward Boniecki, 'The Lyrical, Young Poland "I" in Songs by Szymanowski to Words by Tadeusz Miciński', in *The Songs of Karol Szymanowski*, ed. Helman and others, 11–23 (p. 16). 'Pseudomorphism' is also the term used by Daniel Albright for when an artistic medium is 'asked' to 'do the work of another': 'this typically involves a certain wrenching or scraping against the grain of the original medium'. Albright is, however, cautious about the word because of its negative application by Adorno (who also stole it from Spengler) in discussing Stravinsky. Daniel Albright, *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts* (Yale University Press, 2014) 141–48, 212; Theodor Adorno, 'On Some Relationships between Music and Painting' (1965), trans. Susan Gillespie, *The Musical Quarterly*, 79 (1995) 66–79 (p. 67).

<sup>25</sup> Karol Szymanowski, 'Fryderyk Chopin', *Skamander* (1923), no. 28, 22–27, and no. 29/30, 106–10. Reprinted in Karol Szymanowski, *Pisma 1: Pisma muzyczne*, ed. Kornel Michałowski; revised and completed 2nd ed. by Teresa Chylińska (PWM, 2018), 90–103; Eng. trans. in Alistair Wightman (trans. and ed.), *Szymanowski on Music* (Toccata Press, 1999), 177–95.

<sup>26</sup> Karol Szymanowski, 'Z życia muzycznego w Paryżu' ('On the Musical Life of Paris'), *Wiadomości Literackie*, 29 and 30 (20 and 27 July 1924), in Szymanowski, *Pisma 1*, 118–26; trans. in Wightman (ed. and trans.), *Szymanowski on Music*, 228.

<sup>27</sup> Juliusz Starzyński, 'Szymanowski a problematyka plastyki Polskiej w XX-leciu międzywojennym', *Księga Sesji Naukowej poświęconej twórczości Karola Szymanowskiego (Warsaw 25–26 Marca 1962)*, ed. Zofia Lissa and Zofia Helman (PWM, 1964), 261–73, (pp. 267–69).

<sup>28</sup> Jerzy Skarbowski, 'Stanisław I. Witkiewicz a muzyka: Witkiewicz a Szymanowski', *Muzyka* 37/1 (1992), 41–51.



fuller comparison, an outline of Witkiewicz's aesthetic theory and artistic practice will provide a context for the consideration of the place of music within his thinking. With this context and status of music established, Szymanowski's formal and stylistic experiments of 1917 can then be comparatively analysed.

### Witkiewicz and the Formal Question in Polish Modernism

Witkiewicz's early excitement on seeing the canvasses of Paul Gauguin and Pablo Picasso in Paris in 1911<sup>29</sup> was rekindled on visiting a Picasso exhibition while on leave from the army in Moscow during the spring of 1917. His admiration for the formal experiments of cubism combined with an attraction to the aims of expressionism. Together these impulses drove an aspiration to make his own contribution to modernist experiments in form and artistic explorations of psychological disturbance. In developing his aesthetic theory through a series of essays, he was greatly indebted to Wilhelm Worringer, whose *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (1908) had wide influence in Poland.<sup>30</sup> Several passages of this book are echoed in Witkiewicz's work. Worringer argued that the 'urge to pure geometric abstraction' was 'the outcome of a greater inner unrest inspired in man by the phenomena of the outside world'. He described this unrest as driven by 'an immense spiritual dread of space' generated by 'the extended, disconnected, bewildering world of phenomena' of 'unending flux' and 'restlessness'. In visual art this disturbance also inspired the technique of extracting an object from its 'contingent position in relative space', eschewal of representation in 'three-dimensional corporeality' (the illusion of 'depth'), and avoidance of 'closed unity'. For Worringer, the history of art represented a 'continuous disputation' between these tendencies to abstraction and those towards 'naturalism', which, by contrast, he saw as 'the outcome of the need for empathy' with the world.<sup>31</sup>

Enthused by both the Worringerian urge to abstraction and Cubist spatial distortions, Witkiewicz joined the Formist group of Polish artists in April 1919. The shared ambition in the group was to learn from, and to become part of, the international avant-garde. As an inveterate seeker of the spotlight Witkiewicz soon developed a rivalry with the already influential Leon Chwistek for the position of primary theoretical spokesperson for the group. Witkiewicz contributed to the last three issues of their magazine, *Formiści* (1921), and the development of his ideas of 'unity in multiplicity' manifest in 'pure form' (*czystą formą*) was in part a direct response to Chwistek.<sup>32</sup> In his contemporaneous creative work, Witkiewicz moved between

<sup>29</sup> On which, see Piotr Piotrowski, "Art in the Crucible of History": Witkacy's Theory and Practice of Painting', *The Polish Review*, 33 (1988), 123–42, especially p. 139.

<sup>30</sup> On Worringer and Witkiewicz, see Grzegorz Sztabiński, 'Metaphysical Feeling and Image: Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz and his Esthetic Concept', in *Witkacy, Logos and the Elements*, ed. Teresa Pękala, trans. Jerzy Adamko (Peter Lang, 2017), 171–95 (pp. 192–95).

<sup>31</sup> Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, trans. Michael Bullock (Martino Publishing, 2014), 15, 35–45.

<sup>32</sup> Chwistek first published his 'Wielość rzeczywistości w sztuce' (Plural Reality in Art) in the magazine *Maski*, 1/1–4 (1918), and then as a book in 1921. Excerpts are translated in Timothy O. Benson and Éva Forgács (eds.), *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910–1930*

disturbing expressionism and riotous, and no less unsettling, humour. Both aspects were often also explicitly erotic and diabolic. Witkiewicz voraciously consumed, transformed, and deployed an eclectic range of contemporary techniques. In the texts of his theatrical works, he sometimes used different typographical styles ostensibly to reveal their relative closeness to 'pure form'. Those which are closest to such formal ends eschew rational and narrative connections of cause and effect and the 'natural' geometry of three-dimensional space in their staging.<sup>33</sup>

Witkiewicz was convinced that all arts share common aesthetic and philosophical problems, the most fundamental of which was the expression of what he termed 'metaphysical feeling' (*uczucie metafizyczne*) in 'pure form'. The former concept should not be equated, as Grzegorz Sztabiński has explained, with notions of the transcendental but rather with the deepest personal sense of dread and existential crisis. Art in 'pure form' is characterized by expressions of this 'deep' feeling (rather than superficial, everyday emotional expressiveness) manifest in a multiplicity within unity. Neither religion nor psychology can do these metaphysical feelings justice; they are most powerfully approached through art since the finest artistic works are similarly based on the highest forms of diversity in unity. But it is not possible for an artist to look straight into the eye of the mystery of existence, for it compares with the sublime in its dreadfulness: of necessity it must be artistically combined with 'life feelings', 'intellectual contents', and relatively simple 'sensual components', all of which are secondary, facilitating factors for successful artistic realization. For Witkiewicz, therefore, the fundamental creative challenge lies in finding the most powerful balance of these features, one in which the role of the secondary aspects remains only to allow the approach towards metaphysical feelings expressed in art of 'pure form'.<sup>34</sup>

For Witkiewicz, 'pure form' cannot actually be attained, only more or less closely approached. Soon after the reconciliation with Witkiewicz, Szymanowski expressed similar views on the problems of moving towards total abstraction in painting. In a fragment of 1919 associated with his unfinished novel *Efebos*, he wrote:

The absolute (metaphysical) value 'in itself' of a picture is based neither on anecdote (literary content), nor even less on photographic realism (the illusion of reality regarding its subjects). It needs to be sought in attributes that are specific to painting: in the play of colours, lines, shapes (independent of their implementation). So theoretically, painting could be removed from the constraint of imitating nature, with the aim of completely

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(MIT Press, 2002), 253–59; and Jean G. Harrell and Alina Wierzbianańska, *Aesthetics in Twentieth-Century Poland: Selected Essays* (Associated University Press, 1973), 66–97. Under the name 'Formism' (established by 1919), Polish artists combined and transformed tendencies from expressionism, cubism, and futurism. There were six issues of *Formiści* between 1919 and 1921, the first two included major statements from Chwistek, including, in the second, 'Formism', an exposition of the debts and differentiations from the European avant-garde. See Przemysław Strożek, 'The Magazine *Formiści* and the Early International Contacts of the Polish Avant-Garde, 1919–1921', trans. Klara Kemp-Welch, *A Reader in East-Central-European Modernism 1918–1956*, ed. Beata Hock, Klara Kemp-Welch, and Jonathan Owen (The Courtauld Institute of Art, 2019), 126–38.

<sup>33</sup> See Marek Bartelik, *Early Polish Modern Art: Unity in Multiplicity* (Manchester University Press, 2005), 66–68.

<sup>34</sup> Sztabiński, 'Metaphysical Feeling and Image', 171–95.

emancipating the values that purely relate to painting. However, this complete emancipation immediately introduces the notion of anarchy (everything is allowed!) and comes into direct contact with that sphere of undeniably creative impulses not implemented in a work of art or with the intellectual justifications for recent movements in art – which as such, are the same negation of it. Thus the inessential [*nieistotna*], conventional attribute of painting: the copying of nature, is a condition for the existence of painting.<sup>35</sup>

These musings are remarkably close to passages Witkiewicz published in his *Szkice estetyczne* (1922) where he argues that, while realistic images or anecdotal content are not the source of the metaphysical value in painting, 'pure form' is not feasible in a painting – the secondary features of imitation are a necessary but subordinated element for the work to avoid being incomprehensible and falling into incoherence.<sup>36</sup>

Witkiewicz published a series of essays expounding his ideas of pure form in both painting and theatre. In *Nowe formy w malarstwie* ('New Forms in Painting', 1919) he provided both a contemporary context and historical background for his theory. The horrors of modern existence are described in either apocalyptic tones or in term of the soulless boredom and mechanical life in the city: in these present conditions people have neither time nor inclination to sense the metaphysical mystery of existence. Witkiewicz despaired at the fevered realistic quality of much modern art. He also described a protracted historical decline of art due to the demands of realism, dating back to the Renaissance and the move to perspectival and figural mimesis.<sup>37</sup> In response, he urged that the artist needs to be pushed to the verge of madness, to be pervasively 'perverse', insatiable yet already intoxicated. Dissatisfied with both total formalist abstraction and unbounded expressionist subjectivity, he sought rather a dynamic mediation. And though he always held unity in multiplicity as the foundation of pure form, he demanded that this unity be pushed hard towards its limits through deliberately disharmonious compositions which included 'empty' as well as 'overburdened' areas, the play of dynamic forces between elements rather than stasis. As a result, his paintings are 'disquieting in their cacophonous syntax and overproduction of motifs' and their 'deconstruction of forms'.<sup>38</sup>

Witkiewicz was very clear in his understanding of both the role and the limitation of 'deformation'. In the lecture 'Odczyt o czystej formie w teatrze' ('On Pure form in the theatre', 1921), he argued that the pursuit of pure form, though an ideal not fully achievable in art at the current time, is based on the rejection of naturalism and

<sup>35</sup> Szymanowski, 'Efebos' (1919), *Pisma 2; Pisma literackie*, ed. Teresa Chylińska, 2nd edn., revised and completed (PWM, 2018), 129.

<sup>36</sup> Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, *Szkice estetyczne* (Spolka Wydawnicza, 1922).

<sup>37</sup> Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, *Nowe formy w malarstwie* (Gebethner i Wolff, 1919). Translated excerpts are available in Benson and Forgács (eds.), *Between Worlds*, 245–50; and Daniel Gerould (trans. and ed.), *The Witkiewicz Reader* (Quartet, 1993), 107–16.

<sup>38</sup> Bartelik, *Early Polish Modern Art*, 57–91. On Polish expressionism and formalism, see also S. A. Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans c. 1890–1939* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 96–108.

therefore dissolves away the artistic need for ‘deformation’.<sup>39</sup> Witkiewicz identified ‘deformation’ with the distorted representation of objects as seen in much modern art (in music, where there are no ‘objects’, the equivalent, he argues, is the perverted expression of emotions identifiable with everyday feelings). Deformation is inessential to pure form but it is useful in the artistic approach towards the partial realization of pure form, where deformed objects are dynamically disposed within the work’s design. In the short article ‘O “deformacji” na obrazach’ (‘On “deformation” in Pictures’, 1920), he proposed a notion of ‘multi-directional tension’ in a composition between more or less deformed objects, with movements starting in one place and finishing in another along ‘main and subsidiary axes’.<sup>40</sup>

In pursuit of these aims, the new artistic forms in Witkiewicz’s paintings from 1916 and theatre pieces of the early 1920s are proclaimed as evoking ‘non-Euclidian’ space.<sup>41</sup> It was far from a new idea. Mathematicians had been talking of such things since the 1830s, and there was wide artistic interest in its potential as a metaphor for new formal experiment across a range of media at the *fin de siècle*. The language of the new maths and physics was deployed to describe an art of the counter-intuitive and irrational, art which is decentred and non-teleological.<sup>42</sup> The first of Witkiewicz’s ‘Non-Euclidian Plays’ to be staged, *Tumor Mózgowicz* (written in 1920), is described as a ‘fantasy on the theme of the revolution in mathematics and physics’.<sup>43</sup> *Nowe Wyzwolenie* (*The New Deliverance*, also written in 1920 and dedicated to Szymanowski) is a one-act play which explores spatial intersections and forms of multiple perspective after the manner of Cubism (simultaneities, juxtapositions, and discontinuities). On stage, a shocking contrast is created as a scene of modern-day bourgeois banality is set beside a historical scene in which Shakespeare’s Richard III, the ‘deformed’ king, is subjected to brutal treatment. These two seemingly disjunctive scenes absurdly interact, with actions and sounds from one impacting on the other. One crucial result is the failure of heroic

<sup>39</sup> Lecture given at the Mały theatre in Warsaw, 29 December 1921; published in Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, *Teatr* (Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza, 1923), 106–27. There is wide critical literature on Witkiewicz’s theatrical theory and practice. See, for example, Christine Kiebuszinska, ‘Witkacy’s Theory of Pure Form: Change, Dissolution, and Uncertainty’, *South Atlantic Review*, 58 (1993), 59–83; Janusz Degler, ‘Witkacy’s Theory of Theatre’, *Russian Literature*, 22 (1987), 139–56; Anna Schmidt, *Form und Deformation: Zum kunsttheoretischen und dramatischen Werk von Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz* (Verlag Otto Sagner, 1992); Frank Gelassi, ‘Sexual Politics in Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz’s *The New Deliverance*’, *The Polish Review*, 18 (1973), 112–30. On relationships with Russian Formalism (Victor Shklovsky’s *ostranenie*) and alienation in Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt*, see G. M. Hyde, ‘The Word Unheard: Form in Modern Polish Drama’, *Word and Image: A Journal of Verbal Visual Enquiry*, 4 (1988), 719–31, esp. pp. 722–24.

<sup>40</sup> Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, ‘O “deformacji” na obrazach’, *Gazeta Wieczorna* (1920), trans. in Benson and Forgács (eds.), *Between Worlds*, 251–52.

<sup>41</sup> Witkiewicz’s paintings are widely reproduced; for example, see Irena Jakimowicz, *Witkacy the Painter* (Wydawnictwa artystyczne i filmowe Warszawa, 1987).

<sup>42</sup> See Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidian Geometry in Modern Art*, rev. edn (MIT Press, 2013). In the section ‘Form and Actuality’ in volume 1 of *The Decline of the West*, Spengler writes of the ‘non-Euclidian’ nature of experiential depth in music and lyric poetry as contrasted with the perceptual depth of Renaissance painting.

<sup>43</sup> Gerould, *Witkacy*, 77.

greatness: in the play the character of Florestan is a critique of the Beethovenian hero ('Beethoven' is repeatedly encountered in Witkiewicz's work).<sup>44</sup> A comparable technique is at play in *Wariat i Zakonnicca* (*The Madman and the Nun*, 1923), which Witkiewicz at one time hoped Szymanowski would set as an opera, as different parts of the play shift between multiple realities and the style swings between impressionism and expressionism, changes which not only challenge traditional notions of unity of style and place but are also designed to raise the stakes of metaphysical anxiety or insatiability.<sup>45</sup>

In his painting and theatrical works from 1917 into the early 1920s, then, Witkiewicz explored the creative potential of his new theories for artistic form and content with prodigious and provocative results. But what of music? The notion of 'pure form' has been at the centre of existing comparative studies of Szymanowski and Witkiewicz.<sup>46</sup> Skarbowski's view is that Szymanowski was likely to have been influenced from early meetings with Witkiewicz, when the latter was already developing embryonic ideas of 'pure form' and aspiring to a new general aesthetic theory of art. Skarbowski identifies the continued importance of this influence by considering Szymanowski's much-favoured French term *métier* to be a close equivalent to Witkiewicz's 'pure form'.<sup>47</sup> Szymanowski used *métier* repeatedly in his writings of the 1920s. It is especially prominent, for example, in the 1923 Chopin essay, where he argues that the achievement of artistic 'depth' is dependent upon *métier*, defined as the highest kind of artistic 'craft' required for the creation of 'formal perfection'.<sup>48</sup> *Métier* is therefore not strictly equivalent to Witkiewicz's 'pure form' but rather is the technical and creative facility necessary to achieve the combination of a 'deep' expressive quality (an idea which seems very close to Witkiewicz's 'metaphysical feeling') with 'perfect' form. Szymanowski's revaluation of Chopin as a model for such higher artistic achievement includes firm warnings against over-emphasis on secondary expressive contents because that leads to imperfect artistic forms. Skarbowski points to the very close comparisons between Szymanowski's repeated caution against the sentimental emotional symbolism found in weaker works of romanticism and Witkiewicz's insistence that the 'life' feelings – equated with subjective emotional effect in music and the 'visible world' in painting – remain secondary to the construction, and the expressive outcomes, of pure form. But the comparisons with Szymanowski can go further if the place of music in Witkiewicz's theory and practice is given closer analysis.

<sup>44</sup> A translation of the play text is available in Gerould (trans. and ed.), *The Witkiewicz Reader*, 125–42. Critical discussion can be found in Gerould, *Witkacy*, 100–14, to which my summary is indebted.

<sup>45</sup> Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, *The Madman and the Nun* and *The Crazy Locomotive: Three Plays (including 'The Water Hen')*, ed., trans. and with intro. by Daniel Gerould and C. S. Durer (Applause, 1989).

<sup>46</sup> For a short comparison, see Paul Cadrin, 'Form', in *The Szymanowski Companion*, ed. Downes and Cadrin, 94–99.

<sup>47</sup> Skarbowski, 'Stanisław I. Witkiewicz a muzyka'.

<sup>48</sup> Szymanowski, 'Fryderyk Chopin'.

## The Significance of Music in Witkiewicz's Thinking

Witkiewicz's hopes for operatic collaboration with Szymanowski reflect his respect for a composer with whom, at vital moments, he shared similar aesthetic ideas and artistic aspirations. But the aspiration conceals his placing of opera as a lower type of music because of its pervasively dominant 'real life' content. Several passages in the essay *O czystej formie* ('On Pure Form') are crucial for their clarification of Witkiewicz's understanding of music. Early in the essay he describes how music originates from the painful scream of the suffering man, moving through intermediary vocal-melodic sound forms to the 'perfectly constructed piece of music', which is the symphony.<sup>49</sup> It is a description closely comparable with the section in Wagner's *Beethoven* essay (1870) where screams are identified as the immediate expression of the Schopenhauerian 'Will', from which, through transformative stages, arises profound art (for Wagner, of course, the highest form of which was his music dramas).<sup>50</sup> Both Szymanowski and Witkiewicz (like many of their generation) were ardent Schopenhauer enthusiasts in adolescence and as emerging artists.<sup>51</sup> Witkiewicz's 'metaphysical feeling' is a close cousin of Schopenhauer's 'Will'. Both are inner forces of incessant struggle which underlie the world of outer phenomena. For Schopenhauer, music is the sounding of the Will in 'pure form', of the ineffable world beyond phenomena, of emotion without the substance and contingency of specific human feelings (of joy, love, suffering, terror, etc.). He warned that the tendency to ascribe such feelings to music inhibits the understanding of music as pure and immediate.<sup>52</sup> Witkiewicz's mature theory of 'pure form' in art is an idea which has its embryonic expressions in his 1902 essay 'O dualizmie' ('On Dualism'), in which several passages venerate Schopenhauer.<sup>53</sup> Witkiewicz's repeatedly espoused view that as the expressions of deepest pain assume representations of more 'everyday', superficial qualities, they become secondary to the formal shaping of unity within complexity, reflects the continuing legacy of Schopenhauer.

Lech Sokół compares Witkiewicz's understanding of beauty in 'pure form' with Eduard Hanslick's *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, which was published in Polish translation in 1903 (Witkiewicz probably read it; Szymanowski certainly did). Sokół argues that Schopenhauerian metaphysics and Hanslickian formalism did not present a problematic contradiction for Witkiewicz.<sup>54</sup> Szymanowski, however, held a relatively

<sup>49</sup> Witkiewicz, *O czystej formie*, 10.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Wagner, *Beethoven*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Dodo Press, 2008), 7–15.

<sup>51</sup> In 1902, Witkiewicz wrote an essay 'Filozofia Schopenhauera i jego stosunek do poprzedników' ('Schopenhauer's Philosophy and his Relation to his Predecessors'). On the importance of Schopenhauer in Szymanowski's early work, see Stephen Downes, *Szymanowski, Eroticism and the Voices of Mythology*, RMA Monograph 11 (Ashgate, 2003), 19–37.

<sup>52</sup> For a useful summary, see Lawrence Ferrara, 'Schopenhauer on Music as the Embodiment of Will', *Schopenhauer, Philosophy, and the Arts*, ed. Dale Jacquette (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 183–99.

<sup>53</sup> Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, 'O dualizmie' ('On Dualism') (1902), trans. in Gould (trans. and ed.), *Witkiewicz Reader*, 47–49.

<sup>54</sup> Lech Sokół, 'Muzyka jako Sztuka Czysta: Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz i Konstantin Regamey', *Przestrzenie Teorii*, 14 (2010), 33–84.

low opinion of Hanslick. In an incomplete note, 'O Hanslicku i jego Estetyce' ('Concerning Hanslick and his Aesthetic', 1925–26), he judged that Hanslick's aesthetics did not offer sufficient 'depth' on which to base a satisfactory counter to the form-content problem found in weaker aspects of romantic music.<sup>55</sup> It is a view he reiterated in 'Romantyzm w dobie współczesnej' ('Romanticism in the present day', 1928). Hanslick's importance is noted for encouraging a re-balancing after the errors of romanticism and its naïve symbolism and sentimentalism, but Szymanowski continues that the 'only soil in which real art can grow, and therefore a great musical work, is the most profound, mysterious human emotion of dread (perhaps panic) in the face of the very fact of existence.'<sup>56</sup> In a deleted note in the autograph of this essay, using a shorthand for Witkiewicz, Szymanowski comments: 'as our friend St Ign Witk calls the strangeness of life [*dziwność życia*]'.<sup>57</sup> Witkiewicz's theory of form, with its underlying Schopenhauerianism, offered the depth Szymanowski felt was missing in Hanslick's aesthetic. (The deletion may be another manifestation of the volatility of their relationship, with Szymanowski by this time reluctant to reveal publicly his debt to, or similarity with Witkiewicz.)

In later passages of *On Pure Form*, Witkiewicz distinguishes higher and lower types of music, a hierarchy dependent on the handling of 'life elements', commonplace subjective feelings which can 'pollute' even the most 'abstract pure forms'. Lower forms of music are principally vehicles for expressing these secondary feelings; in purer musical forms these feelings are only a pretext for the 'dynamic tensions' and 'qualitative colours' of the formal elements. Painting approaches this level of form where 'directional tensions' allow the artist to move towards 'eliminating the concept of an object and its deformation from aesthetics'.<sup>58</sup> The 'pure forms' of music are raised as the artistic ideal in the face of 'inextricable chaos' of modern times. Witkiewicz insists on the 'spatial character' of all arts, including music, and of the necessity of 'artistic perversity', by which he meant 'bad juxtapositions' of the 'bizarre' the 'dissonant' and 'disturbing', necessary because of the 'feverish pace of life, social mechanization, the exhaustion of all means of action, and a blasé attitude toward art'.<sup>59</sup> In effect, this is a description of how Witkiewicz thinks modern music should sound. In *Szkice estetyczne* (*Aesthetic Sketches*, 1922) he laid his musical allegiances on the table, identifying Schoenberg, Prokofiev, and Szymanowski (three strange bedfellows perhaps) as those at the forefront of the new music, as composers of the most advanced, non-mimetic artistic forms, in whose music those seeking to wallow in 'inessential [...] personal feelings' will be frustrated.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> 'O Hanslicku i jego Estetyce', unpublished fragment; in Szymanowski, *Pisma* 1, 508–09.

<sup>56</sup> 'Któż dziś poda w wątpliwość, iż jedyną glebą, na której może wyrósć prawdziwa sztuka, a więc i wielkie dzieło muzyczne, jest najbardziej głębokie i tajemnicze "paniczne" ludzkie wzruszenie wobec samego faktu istnienia?' 'Romantyzm w dobie współczesnej', *Muzyka* 517–9 (1928); repr. in Szymanowski, *Pisma* 1, 243–44.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 245 n. 6.

<sup>58</sup> Witkiewicz, *O czystej formie*, 16.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 21; this passage trans. from Jean G. Harrell and Alina Wierzbianańska, *Aesthetics in Twentieth-Century Poland; Selected Essays* (Associated University Press, 1973), 41–65 (p. 55).

<sup>60</sup> Witkiewicz, *Szkice estetyczne*, 108–09, trans. in Benson and Forgács (eds.), *Between Worlds*, 261–64.

The pre-war novel *622 Upadki Bunga, czyli demoniczna kobieta* (*The 622 Downfalls of Bungo, or the Demonic Woman*, 1910–11) already makes clear Witkiewicz's exaltation of the formal qualities of music, of its sounds moving in an unreal, multi-dimensional deep space. After lauding the formal qualities of Beethoven's Sixth Symphony (by contrast with the 'cows, tails in the air, gambolling across a green meadow' in its pastoral programmatic content) and Gauguin's painting (the lines and colours aside from 'heavy-set, cigar-coloured women playing on a billiard cloth'), he writes:

The young composer Anodion had just finished the second theme of his sonata and after repeating the entire section, he began the development of the first theme. Bungo opened his eyes. Anodion looked magnificent. His face grew monstrous and took on a fierce, cruel look. His whole body bent over, he seemed forcibly to tear the sounds out of the piano in a frightful effort [...] Bungo closed his eyes again and only began to listen in earnest. After a moment he completely stopped knowing where he was, and what he, or his life, or anything else was. He lost all feeling of real space and existence. It seemed to him there was nothing except the sounds filling the universe, but the medium in which there occurred the succession of phenomena that defied being grasped in any form was itself something that defied being defined and analyzed in any fashion. The combination of sounds produced in him the sensation of a totally separate world incapable of being reduced to any simpler elements, and that sensation was for him the characteristic trait of pure art, free of all decidedly emotional coloration. Only music and pure painting gave him this kind of sensation.<sup>61</sup>

He then continues: 'after the scherzo came a sombre Andante, as if slightly influenced by Szymanowski's *Sonata no. 3*'. The real Szymanowski was at that time still working on his *second* sonata, but it is clear that Witkiewicz is convinced that his compatriot's music fits with his aesthetic convictions, or at least might do so in the future, in an imagined 'Third Sonata'.

Witkiewicz theatrically explored his ideas about music in *Beelzebub Sonata* (1925), set in Mordovar (Hungary), an *ersatz* Zakopane, the centre of the Tatra region whose folk culture had a long-established symbolic status in Polish arts and was inspirational to both Witkiewicz and Szymanowski through the 1920s.<sup>62</sup> The composer character in the play, Istvan, again irreverently modelled on Szymanowski, declares 'I feel within me a spatial-auditory vision of sounds which I cannot capture in duration [...] I see the absurd shreds of something, as though on a chaotically mixed-up puzzle made of blocks.' In a moment of exalted inspiration he says: 'I don't want life to be expressed by sounds, I want the musical notes themselves to live and fight among themselves over something unknown.' In such terms he expresses his desire to create pure form. *Beelzebub* proposes this can be achieved through an insane decentring of coordinates, to which one character retorts: 'I've just taken analytical geometry and your comparisons don't impress me. Changing the center of coordinates used to be

<sup>61</sup> Witkiewicz, *622 Upadki Bunga, czyli demoniczna kobieta*, trans. in Gerould (trans. and ed.), *Witkiewicz Reader*, 69.

<sup>62</sup> On the late nineteenth-century rise of Zakopane, see David Crowley, 'Finding Poland in the Margins: The Case of the Zakopane Style', *Journal of Design History*, 14 (2001), 105–16.



called simply going nuts.' At the end of Act 2, Istvan ('Szymanowski') composes the sonata and declares: 'now I know what is meant by the formal spatial conception in music'. The sonata itself is described as emerging from a folk theme and moving into 'non-Euclidian' decentred forms.<sup>63</sup>

In the novel *Nienasylenie* (*Insatiability*, completed 1927) Putrycydes Hardonne is a composer who knows the secret of how to convert 'metaphysical insatiability', 'astronomical anxiety' aroused by the infinite spaces of the cosmos into music, 'into sound patterns, which usually appeared to him initially in the form of vague *spatial* potentials and then fanned out into time sequences'. Pushed to such extremes (responding to the vocation of the Witkiewiczian artist as madman), 'he had not yet rejected thematics in the traditional sense, but he was already teetering on the brink of the abyss, about to plunge into a teeming morass of musical abstruseness [...] verging on complete chaos and a purely musical (but not *emotional*) absurdity'. In an ironic historical timeshift, Hardonne's modern music of extremes is compared with 'Stravinsky' and 'Szymanowski', historical characters who are composers of 'simple' music from a 'bygone era'. As he plays his symphonic poem 'Diarrhoea of the Gods' at the piano, Hardonne declares: 'For my stuff you either have to be savage or a hyperultrasophisticated [*sic*] expert – to hell with those in between.' Primitivism or esotericism: take your pick of musical extremities. Whichever is chosen, form is the key:

Form - don't you see? [...] It's a question of form, which even has to deform itself in order to satisfy itself. Worse yet, it has to deform reality [...] Form, intrinsic form conveying the Mystery of Existence! The rest is darkness! Concepts aren't enough here. Philosophy's defunct [...] Officially there are no more philosophy departments in any of the universities. The only thing still capable of expression is form!<sup>64</sup>

Thus spoke the limping, hunchback composer, mouthpiece of Witkiewicz's peculiar brand of formalism.

In the light of these writings on music, it is fascinating to observe, in the handful of surviving manuscript pages, Witkiewicz's attempts at composing. An undated fragment, written in Witkiewicz's hand, presents the opening eight bars of a piano 'Maestoso' in E $\flat$  minor, labelled 'Op. 13' (Figure 1). The opus number may refer to Beethoven's 'Pathétique' Sonata, since the pathetic-heroic characterization of Beethoven is a frequent target for mimicry in the plays. The top of the sketch carries an

<sup>63</sup> Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, *Beelzebub Sonata: Plays, Essays, Documents*, ed. and trans. Daniel Gerould and Jadwiga Kosicka (Performing Arts Journals Publications, 1980), 26, 31, 41. Which sonata might be Witkiewicz's possible model? The play has a misquotation from Beethoven as its epigraph, 'Musik ist höhere Offenbarung als jede Religion und Philosophie', so could it be the 'Tempest' Sonata, op. 31 (given the relationship of the play to Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata*). Alternatively, because the key is said to be F $\sharp$  minor, Gerould suggests Schoenberg's Second String Quartet, op. 10 (1908); Gerould, *Witkacy*, 256. Christine Kiebużińska, however, goes for Szymanowski's Second Piano Sonata; 'Witkacy and Ghelderode: Goethe's *Faust* Transformed into a Grotesque Cabaret', *Estetyka i Krytyka: The Polish Journal of Aesthetics*, 31 (2012), 207–20 (p. 213); repr. in *Witkacy: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Perspectives*, ed. Kevin Anthony Hayes and Mark Rudnicki (The Witkacy Convention and Heritage Company, 2014), 207–20 (p. 213).

<sup>64</sup> Witkiewicz, *Insatiability*, trans. Louis Iribarne, with an introduction by Czesław Miłosz (Quartet, 1985), 38, 45, 50, 54.

Figure 1. Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, sketch of the opening of a piano ‘Maestoso’. Polish Academy of Science, The Kornik Library, BK 12385, p. 123.

annotation, again in Witkiewicz’s hand: ‘one of the themes of the *baliwernia* that will never be written’. The unrealizable work (‘*baliwernia*’ is linguistic nonsense) recalls the status of the Beelzebub Sonata as an ‘impossible’ piece of music. Though the fragment reveals Witkiewicz’s limitations as a composer, it contains some interesting features. The dissonant harmony on the downbeat of bar 2 is notated as a bitonal construct, B minor over the dominant B $\flat$ . Enharmonically, however, the chord is a relatively straightforward dominant minor ninth with B natural functioning as C $\flat$  (i.e., the minor form of the conventional  $\flat$ VI) and the ‘F $\sharp$ ’ resolving as a G $\flat$  to F at the end of the bar. It seems, nonetheless, that Witkiewicz is attempting to compose in a double tonality: the climactic bars 5–7 are clearly conceived in B major-minor (there probably should be a change to the treble clef in the LH of bar 7). These bars begin by re-harmonizing the D–E $\flat$  melodic move of bar 3 as D–D $\sharp$  in B (downbeats of bars 6 and 7). Witkiewicz is attempting a late nineteenth-century piano style and harmonic

idiom, one close to Szymanowski's pre-war works. Comparisons are close with many of the 'Maestoso' passages in the first movement of the First Piano Sonata, op. 8, dedicated to Witkiewicz, but the passage is especially similar to bars 80–84 of Szymanowski's *Fantasy*, op. 14 (1905).<sup>65</sup> The attempted double tonality is particularly interesting as it suggests the multiplicity in unity so central to Witkiewicz's idea of pure form, and also the multi-perspectivism commonly found in his paintings and plays. The annotation adds to this suggestiveness: with the word 'baliwernia', Witkiewicz conjoins the French for nonsense (*baliverne*) with a Polish suffix.<sup>66</sup> (It is an invention he uses again in *Nowe formy w malarstwie* (1918), which suggests the musical sketch may be of similar date.) It is a double-sided neologism of macaronic absurdity.

A second undated sketch of music by Witkiewicz, in the hand of the dilettante aristocrat Stefan Raczyński,<sup>67</sup> dedicatee of the Maestoso fragment, is titled *Sonata fantastyczna*. The notated music on this page is less coherent (Figure 2). Given the title, are these attempts at a 'Beelzebub' sonata? Witkiewicz was an enthusiastic improviser at the piano, which from reports seem to have included both caricatures of contemporary music (Szymanowski surely amongst them) and frenetic dances of his own. With what he called the 'splash', he sought to dazzle, shock, or enrapture his audience.<sup>68</sup> There are two attempts at notating the theme, the second (in a lower key) with no accompaniment. These are plausibly Raczyński's attempts to transcribe one of Witkiewicz's improvisations. The block chords in the left hand are probably shorthand for extemporized arpeggio figurations of harmonies, a scalar flourish is written in parenthesis, and the repetitions of the theme's main motive (which, it must be said, is initially rather mundane) become more extravagant, 'splashy', and intense. The title may partly be a homage to Scriabin's *Sonata-Fantasy*, op. 19 (1898), Scriabin's music being a shared enthusiasm of Witkiewicz and Szymanowski, but also relates the music to the titles of several of Witkiewicz's paintings, *Fantastic Vision* (1917), *Fantastic Composition* (1915–20), and *Fantastic Composition with Wild Boar* (1920), in which the pure form of dynamically arranged colours and shapes partially emerges from the deformation of objects (disturbing and sometimes satanic human-animal hybrids, for example).

Witkiewicz's aesthetic theory, his astonishing descriptions of imaginary music, and his own attempts at composing combine to a present compelling context for reconsidering the music of his sparring partner, Szymanowski. Their 1917 reconciliation would undoubtedly have recalled Szymanowski's dedication of his First Piano Sonata to Witkiewicz and hence also the other large-scale works he composed in creative dialogue with sonata form before their acrimonious split in 1914: his first two

<sup>65</sup> Further resonances can be identified between Witkiewicz's 'op. 13' and Szymanowski's op. 14, but the point of comparison is sufficiently made.

<sup>66</sup> Tomasz Bocheński, 'Kompozycje muzyczne Witkacego', *Teksty*, 4 (2000), 159–66.

<sup>67</sup> There are several compositions of his stretching from the war years and into the early 1940s, but his settings of Młoda Polska poetry, for example, are considered by Bocheński to be those of an eccentric epigone.

<sup>68</sup> Skarbowski, 'Stanisław I. Witkiewicz a muzyka', 42.

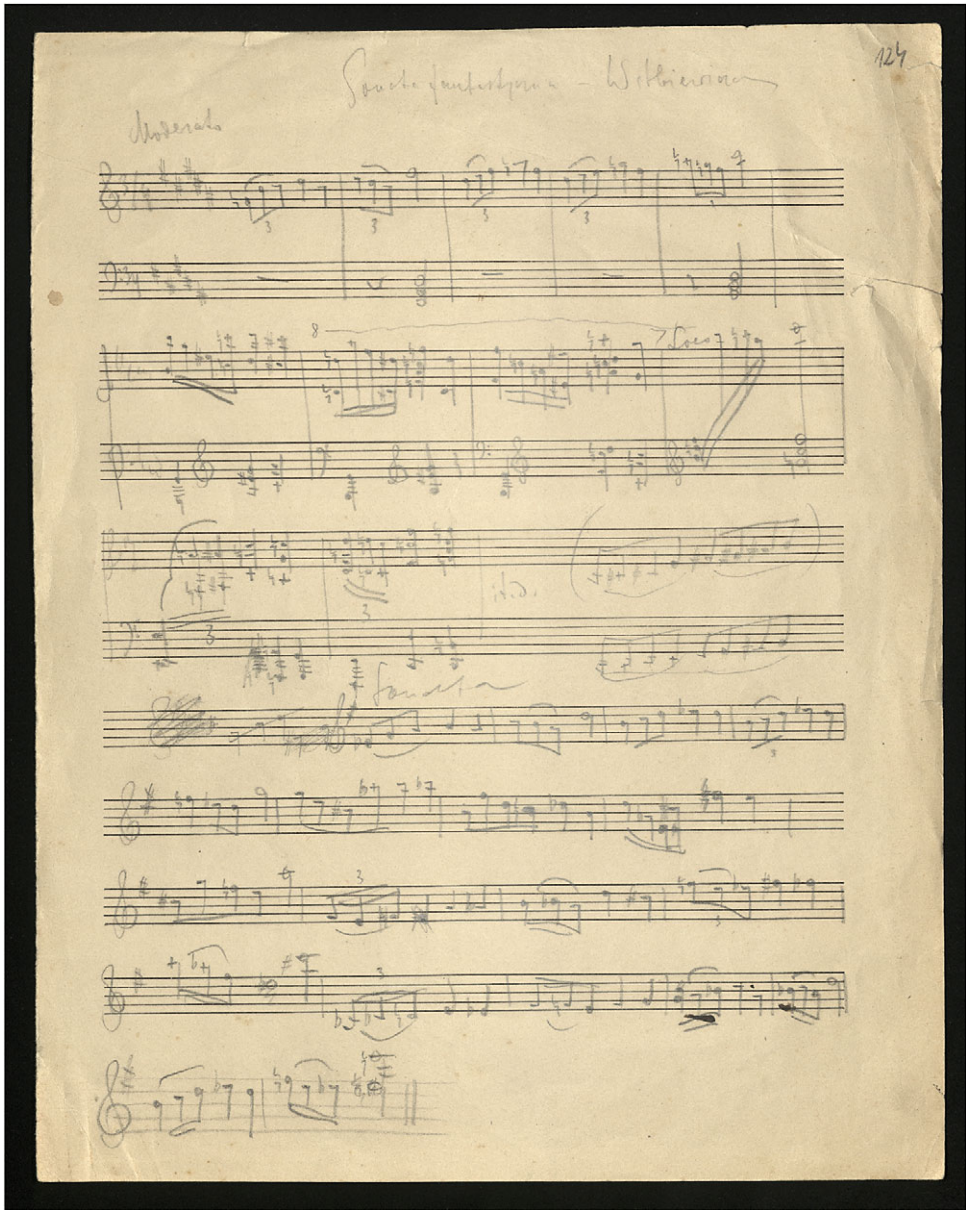


Figure 2. Witkiewicz, sketch of a *Sonata fantastyczna*. Polish Academy of Science, The Kornik Library, BK 12385, p. 124.

symphonies (1905, 1910) and the Second Piano Sonata (1911). But in the sonata and quartet of 1917, Szymanowski returns to such forms to reform and deform them in ways which, through passages that can be heard as Witkiewiczian in character, are remarkably different to his earlier, pre-war works.

## Szymanowski's Third Piano Sonata: Thematic Character and Subjective Multiplicity in Unity

Szymanowski worked on his Third Sonata during the months immediately following the reconciliation with Witkiewicz, completing the piece in August 1917 (when work on the quartet, however, was still at the planning stage).<sup>69</sup> There are certain similarities with the First and Second Sonatas (most obviously, they all have fugal finales), but the thematic characters which inform the first movements of the Second and Third Sonatas in particular reveal not only some resemblances but also significant differences.

The first movement of the Second Sonata conforms to what Józef Chomiński described as the 'decadent' phase of sonata form, in which the distinctions between exposition, development, and recapitulation are blurred through continuous thematic alteration, so that formal articulation through the differences between presentation, transition, and development, and the harmonic contrast between dissonance and resolution all become weakened. Chomiński explains how these characteristics are manifest in Szymanowski's Second Sonata through deploying a metaphor of competing forces: 'centrifugal' forces are generated by the continuous chromatic alterations (suggesting the energetic spinning out from an increasingly remote and weakened controlling centre), and these are greater than the 'centripetal forces', those that pull the music back towards the tonal home.<sup>70</sup> Pervasive, dynamic development undermines the patterns and functions of traditional sonata form, which relies on the controlling force of a tonal centre and the contrast between thematic stability and developmental instability.<sup>71</sup> As in the aesthetics of musical energetics (Ernst Kurth and Hans Merzmann were both major influences on Chomiński), development begins from the outset of the exposition and is sustained through the recapitulation.

The overt parallels with the concepts of musical prose and 'endless melody', in which cadential closure and formal articulation are eschewed (or disguised) to generate pervasive eloquence based on deferred harmonic and formal resolution, are just one aspect of the sonata's post-Wagnerian idiom and aesthetic. Szymanowski's treatment of climax in his sonatas can also be heard in post-Wagnerian fashion, as driven by the desire to express Nietzsche's Dionysian forces or the striving of the Schopenhauerian 'Will'. Both these aspects led to formal emphasis on the function of climax where the

<sup>69</sup> Letter to Stefan Speiss, 30 July/12 August 1917: 'I wrote a sonata, I am very curious what you will say about it – I have a few more things on the agenda: songs with an orchestra and maybe a small quartet'; Chylińska (ed.), *Korespondencja* 1, 576.

<sup>70</sup> Józef Chomiński, 'Fortepianowa twórczość Szymanowskiego' ('Karol Szymanowski's Works for Piano'), *Muzyka Polska* 5 (1936), repr. in *Studia nad twórczością Karola Szymanowskiego* (PWM, 1969), 165–79.

<sup>71</sup> Similar issues pervade the Second Symphony, op. 19 (1910–11), which on its premiere gleaned positive critical judgement concerning Szymanowski's manipulation of musical form. Reviews by the influential Henryk Opieński and Aleksander Poliński both commented on the symphony's formal originality. The symphony's overriding characteristic is developmental continuity through almost relentless contrapuntal complexity. On these reviews see Wightman, *Karol Szymanowski*, 85–87. It is also characteristic of the First Symphony op. 15 (1906–07): see Stefan Keym, "'A Contrapuntal-Harmonic-Orchestral Monster'?: Karol Szymanowski's First Symphony in the Context of the Polish and German Symphonic Tradition', *Musicology Today* (2008), 5–25.

work is organized around a sublime moment which is characteristically one of ecstasy, epiphany, transfiguration, or apotheosis (or in more pessimistic Schopenhauerian fashion, of cataclysm). In a programme note sent to his friend the musicologist Zdzisław Jachimecki, Szymanowski describes how the opening movement of the Second Sonata builds to a *Höhepunkt* (Szymanowski uses the German term) at the transition to the second subject, that is, at a moment of transport from one emotional and thematic state to another.<sup>72</sup> These climactic moments tend to distort or deform the proportions and rhetoric of 'classical' sonata form.<sup>73</sup> In the first movement of the Third Sonata, *Höhepunkten* play comparably significant formal and expressive functions. The largest of these highpoints occurs at the coincidence of arrival on the final, chromatically intensified, structural dominant harmony (B) and thematic superimposition through the return of opening theme, a moment followed by traditional kind of dissolution (bb. 190–197). This highpoint also marks the climactic moment in the apotheosis of the recapitulated second theme (a staple feature of late romantic sonata form which, *contra* Szymanowski's description, is also the real highpoint of the Second Sonata's first movement).

The manipulations of *Höhepunkten* therefore clearly identify the Third Sonata as continuing some of the techniques deployed in the Second. For Chomiński, however, in the Third Sonata Szymanowski 'conducted what was probably his longest-running battle in trying to overcome the difficulties caused by the new sound resources and the old formal conception'.<sup>74</sup> Tadeusz Zieliński considers the Third to be problematic because of its 'bizarre synthesis' of 'contradictions' produced by a return of formal principles from earlier works which seem 'alien' to the new style.<sup>75</sup> The 'problem' is manifest in a particular way. The sonata's first movement exposition is clearly composed of two contrasting subjects separated by a transition and followed by a

<sup>72</sup> Letter of 2 November 1911; Chylińska (ed.), *Korespondencja* 1, 305; trans. in Wightman, *Correspondence*, vol. 1, 156–57. Samson hears the first movement of the Second Symphony as built around two climactic highpoints, the first in the development, the second in the coda; *The Music of Szymanowski*, 58. Wightman's formal reading of the First Violin Concerto is also built around its series of graded climaxes; Wightman, *Karol Szymanowski*, 181.

<sup>73</sup> On these aspects of the Second Piano Sonata, see Stephen Downes, 'Revitalising Sonata Form: Structure and Climax in Szymanowski's Op. 21', in *After Chopin: Essays on Polish Music*, ed. Maja Trochimczyk (Polish Music Center at USC, 2000), 111–41. As Leonard B. Meyer noted, romantic music's increasing emphasis on 'statistical climax' (generated by processes of textural, dynamic, and/or rhythmic intensification) led to a reinterpretation or undermining of the syntactical and formal obligations of the sonata design: *Style and Music: Theory, History and Ideology* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989). This might also be heard to perpetuate the characteristic romantic formal strategy of the recapitulation building to a redemptive transfiguration of the 'feminine' second subject. See, for example, James Hepokoski, 'Masculine-Feminine', *The Musical Times*, 135, no. 1818 (August 1994), 494–99. Theoretical consideration of Szymanowski's works in the light of James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy's *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the late Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (Oxford University Press, 2011) lies outside the scope of this article.

<sup>74</sup> Józef Chomiński, 'Szymanowski i muzyka europejska XX w' (1962), in *Studia*, 1–11, trans. in Zdzisław Sierpiński (ed.), *Karol Szymanowski: An Anthology*, trans. Emma Harris (Interpress, 1986) 1–12.

<sup>75</sup> Tadeusz Andrzej Zieliński, *Szymanowski: lyrika i ekstaza* (PWM, 1997), 140.

codetta containing a closing theme and remnant echoes of the first subject. So far, so traditional. But as Samson points out, there is an 'absence of any clear tonal dialectic and of an obvious recapitulation [...] the dialectic of contrasting thematic groups, linked by common motivic shapes [...] is Szymanowski's real debt to sonata thinking.'<sup>76</sup> However, of the characteristic elements in the thematic dialectic which drives the Second Sonata (the first subject's heroic striving *contra* the second's lyrical ecstasy) the Third retains only the latter. The 'paradoxes' of the Third Sonata, as Zieliński notes, 'begin with the first subject'. A 'static', 'oriental' theme is presented and then re-presented in 'various transformations'; Zieliński suggests that this material sounds out of place as a sonata first subject, it 'seems to belong to an alien world.'<sup>77</sup> The unusual subject is presented in a kind of rotation. It is heard four times, as if it is being approached from multiple perspectives. Wightman describes the section as a theme followed by three 'variants',<sup>78</sup> but there is neither a sense of continuous development nor recourse to the stable thematic designs of Classical formal tradition (the sentence and period). A formal chart of the exposition reveals the overt debt to traditional form, but also striking difference in the manner of presentation of the two subjects:

First Subject area (bb.1–59)

1–23 *presentation 1*

24–35 *presentation 2*

36–49 *presentation 3*

50–59 *presentation 4*

Codetta and transition (bb. 60–79)

Second Subject area (bb. 80–116)

80–91 *presentation 1*

92–109 *development*

110–116 *presentation 2* (climax and dissolution)

Codetta and dissolution (bb. 117–48)

The first subject is initially presented in two-part texture. Arabesques surround a melodic shape characteristic of Szymanowski's 'middle period' works (aspirational ascending sequences after whose peak there is a chromatic descent, a yearning expiration; [Example 1](#)). The second presentation is more thoroughly static, richer in pianistic sonority, more overtly 'impressionistic' in its textural debts to Debussy and Ravel. After a third presentation which is more obviously a varied return of the first, the subject appears in a fourth guise, now assertive and virtuosic, perhaps even satanic in the style of Scriabin. The manner in which the subject is multiply presented, distinguishable from the 'changing background' technique often described as a Russian alternative to Germanic developmental music in that each statement grinds to a halt, as if fixed within a space, to a 'plane' or surface, is a remarkable divergence from

<sup>76</sup> Samson, *The Music of Szymanowski*, 110. Wightman describes the first movement as an 'abridged sonata form' with no 'self-contained' development section, as this is made 'redundant' by the pervasively developmental character of the material, *Karol Szymanowski*, 200–1.

<sup>77</sup> Zieliński, *Szymanowski: lyrika i ekstaza*, 140

<sup>78</sup> Wightman, *Szymanowski*, 193–95.

## Example 1 Karol Szymanowski, Piano Sonata no. 3, op. 36: presentations of opening theme.

**Presto** (*leggiero e delicatamente*)

Klavier

*ppp*

*dolcissimo marcato*

5

4

*cresc. poco*

6

8

*mf*

*dimin. molto*

*poco riten.*

*sf ten.*

12

**a tempo**

15



Example 1 (cont.)

18

*poco cresc.*

*mf*

*dimin.*

*sf ten.*

22

*Meno mosso (molto sosten.)*

*dim. molto*

*poco riten. ppp*

*ten.*

*ppp*

*pp (Ped.)*

26

*poco cresc.*

*ten.*

*sub. pp*

30

*sf*

*rall.*

*dimin.*

## Example 1 (cont.)

(8)

32

*ten. ppp*

*ten. pppp*

*rall. dim.*

**a tempo**  
*(come prima)*

36

*poco f*

*cresc.*

40

*cresc.*

*tr*

(8)

44

*sf*

*sf*

*cresc.*

Example 1 (cont.)

47 *sf* *cresc.* *sfz* *cresc.* *sff*

50 **(Poco sosten.)** *f* *(velocissimo)* *sf*

*marc. la tema*

52 *cresc.* *sf*

54 *cresc.*

## Example 1 (cont.)

56 *sf* *cresc.* *sf* *sf*

58 *cresc.* *sf* *sf*

60 *poco rit.* *sf* *ff* (*sempre con Pedale*) *sf* *ff* *sff* *Ped.* *(Ped.)* *(Ped.)*

63 *poco allargando* *sf* *sf*

Detailed description: This musical score is for a piano piece, likely in G major or D minor. It consists of four systems of music, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs).  
 - System 1 (measures 56-57): The right hand plays a melodic line with slurs and accents, marked *sf*. The left hand has a bass line with a *cresc.* marking. A large slur encompasses the right hand's melody across both measures.  
 - System 2 (measures 58-59): Similar to the first system, with *sf* dynamics and a *cresc.* marking in the left hand. The right hand continues its melodic line with slurs and accents.  
 - System 3 (measures 60-62): The tempo is marked *poco rit.*. The right hand features a triplet of eighth notes marked *sf*, followed by a *ff* dynamic. The left hand has a *ff* dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes. Pedal markings *(Ped.)* are present under the right hand's notes. A *sff* marking is at the end of the system.  
 - System 4 (measures 63-65): The tempo is marked *poco allargando*. The right hand has a *sf* dynamic and a *sf* marking. The left hand has a *sf* dynamic. The system concludes with a final chord in the right hand.

Szymanowski's thematic procedures in previous sonata form movements. Though there is a progressive tonal dimension across these collective subjective images (broadly generated by a rising bass from C to D (image 2), through D $\sharp$  (image 3) to the goal E (reached at the end of image 4, which will prove to be the tonic of the sonata) this directional quality is greatly attenuated by the presentation of a series of thematic variants like panels offering a subject posed in various guises. Samson, who notes the opening theme's debt to Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy* and a genealogy within Szymanowski's own works which includes the *Fantasy*, op. 14, argues that 'the linking thread throughout this harmonically complex group is thematic working, the development and transformation of a single idea presented at the outset'.<sup>79</sup> Certainly the opening theme is transformed, but any 'thread' between each transformation is broken by hiatus or dissolution. The resulting effect, rather than one of a single developmental impulse, is of a static subject viewed through four different lenses.<sup>80</sup>

The highly unorthodox form and character of Szymanowski's first subject encourages a hermeneutic response. Its composition immediately after the warm reunion with Witkiewicz (during which, it is clear from Szymanowski's letter after Witkiewicz's departure, conversation was both convivial and intense) emboldens the possibility that it is a sounding version of Witkiewicz's notions of multiple perspective and split personality. A year before their reconciliation Witkiewicz had posed for his most famous photographic self-portrait (it is reproduced in every book on the artist) in which he is viewed clothed in Tsarist army uniform in multiple reflected planes (Figure 3). The image may originate as a commercial studio portrait (the use of mirrors in this way had become a fashionable device) but it is significant that Witkiewicz repeatedly used it for self-promotion. Szymanowski's first subject comparably fashions a subject through assembling multiple sonic images of a single shape. As the sonata continues, however, this unusual manner of constructing subjective identity is supplanted by procedures more characteristic of precedents in nineteenth-century sonata form. Instead of static sound planes of subjective reflexivity, the transition and second subject are generative in a more progressive manner. The second subject (from b. 80) is a lyrical dancing theme in irregular metre which proceeds by a series of intensifying transformations. Such dance tunes, in lilting versions of compound time, were a favourite of

<sup>79</sup> Samson, *The Music of Szymanowski*, 108, 110.

<sup>80</sup> Helman interprets the opening paragraph as a three-part design, *The History of Music in Poland*, 320. Horatio Antonio Cruz-Perez describes Szymanowski 'rethinking of sonata form' through 'the recasting of the tonal structure, in which the conventional dialectic between two related keys is replaced by one where tonal opposition is nearly absent', an absence compensated by motivic and rhythmic contrasts. Cruz-Perez's analysis splits my first presentation of the opening theme into two statements (bb. 1–12 and 13–23) on the basis of a shift between the two whole-tone collections. From bar 25 he proposes a 'contrasting theme'; but as he notes, it shares motives, melodic, and harmonic aspects of the preceding bars. Only the tempo and texture is contrasted. Overall, Cruz-Perez considers what I call the first subject area to be a rondo-like form: A theme (twice): B textural contrasting theme (from b. 25): A theme returns (from b. 36): C developmental contrast (from b. 50). Horatio Antonio Cruz-Perez, 'The Piano Sonatas of Karol Szymanowski' (PhD dissertation, Northwestern University, 1987), 202–07. It is therefore a reading based on hearing greater contrast in thematic content than in mine.



Figure 3. Witkiewicz, photographic portrait, 1916.

Szymanowski's in his programmatic works of the preceding years, in particular in 'portraits' of frolicking and erotic feminine figures of mythic metamorphosis.<sup>81</sup> After a limpid codetta theme to the exposition (b. 60ff) a more developmental section proceeds in which the second subject emerges to displace the attempts to recapitulate the first subject. There is no recapitulation of the first subject. As in the exposition, developmental transformations of the second subject assume the role of climactic intensification, building to the biggest climax of the movement (the *Höhepunkt* previously noted).

The sonata's first movement therefore exhibits a tension between divergent types of subject/identity formation radically different to the dynamic thematic dialectic normally found in the inherited formal tradition. Helman describes the thematic groups as 'closed entities', as 'static in character', indeed that the opening movement is dominated by static elements, so that the developmental is 'almost eliminated'.<sup>82</sup> Her description suggests that the sonata shifts away from Thomas's characterization of the works of 1913–16 as displaying a 'developmental process that was both static and mobile', to processes which are non-developmental and immobile. But it is the combination of formal experimentation with novel thematic oppositions which marks the sonata as especially groundbreaking for the composer. The multi-perspectival but static presentation of the first subject contrasts with the developmental process which transforms the dancing second subject into a climactic statement of monumental abundance. The sonata exposes a response to the challenge of how to construct a form which embraces innovative and conflicting types of subjective constructions, in

<sup>81</sup> For specific comparisons with thematic characters in Szymanowski's earlier works, see van Moere, *Karol Szymanowski*, 240.

<sup>82</sup> Helman, *History of Music in Poland*, 320, 323.

particular, a Witkiewiczian anti-developmentalism which is provocatively placed in the first subject formal area, thereby offering strong contrast with the opening thematic paragraph of the Second Sonata.

Szymanowski and Witkiewicz shared deep distrust of emancipatory narratives offered by idealism, recent forms of insular nationalism, communism or urbanism. As Daniel W. Pratt has analysed, under these conditions of scepticism a challenge arose as to how to construct the modern subject 'among those who could not buy into the various narratives offered, from national narratives to Marxism, from technological progress to rational development of the world'. The artistic question was how to realize a formal construction of the self in the fictional exposition of 'identity creation' which is not dependent on traditional or suspect narrative models.<sup>83</sup> The problem of subjectivity and self-creation is a crucial theme in Witkiewicz's essays and works. If this subjectivity was 'self-ironic and allusive, resisting the very idea of providing an authoritative synthesis', Witkiewicz nonetheless persisted in exploring with how an 'authentic' self could be expressed in the face of the mechanization and absurdity he saw in the world and in the work of many of his contemporaries.<sup>84</sup> The self-creating subject of romanticism is dismantled through increasing technological, social, and political pressures that were felt as forces which sought to impose on personal freedom. In the photographic image of Witkiewicz, the subject has his back to us: we observe him only in multiple reflections. In similar fashion, in the first movement of the Third Sonata, Szymanowski has radically re-shaped traditional form by embracing subjective content of multiple, self-reflective character. A 'drama' of subjective crisis is played out in multiple and conflicting formations and deformations of the subject. Something is retained of the old dialectical process of thesis, antithesis moving to synthesis through dynamic transformation, but it coexists with new, static, reflective rather than propulsive subjective formations.

The repeated parodic figuring of Beethoven in Witkiewicz's plays personifies the problems attaching to the old manner of 'heroic' self-creation. The Beethovenian heroic sonata was raised during the nineteenth century as the form in which musical expression was given to the bourgeois subject in a Utopian unity of individual subject expression and formal convention, especially in the resolution of the recapitulation, so that the form appears to be generated through the process of becoming a unified subject.<sup>85</sup> Szymanowski's Second Sonata sustains aspects of this formal character. But in the Third Sonata, complexity and contradiction are created by the conflicting coexistence of remnants of that tradition with new subjective forms which offer an alternative to that of subjective becoming through development.

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<sup>83</sup> Daniel W. Pratt, 'Aesthetic Selves: Non-narrative Constructions of Identity in Central Europe', (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2014), 3. On wider manifestations of this crisis, see Michael L. Klein, *Music and the Crises of the Modern Subject* (Indiana University Press, 2015).

<sup>84</sup> Marczyk, 'Encounters at the Threshold of Modernity', 11, 17, 208–09, 220.

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, Janet Schmalfeldt, *In the Process of Becoming: Analytic and Philosophical Perspectives on Form in Early Nineteenth-Century Music* (Oxford University Press, 2011) and the now classic text, Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton University Press, 1995). This is, of course, a partial view of Beethoven's forms.

The sonata's concluding fugue intensifies the stress and strain on traditional formal unity. Nonetheless, the prevailing critical trope on the sonata's ending has been one of synthesis.<sup>86</sup> Such readings place the Third's fugue as continuing a line from the fugues of the First Sonata, which moves from *trionfando* to *maestoso*, and the Second Sonata, which though initially marked *poco scherzando e capriccioso*, and moves through passages *con fuoco*, *energico*, and *tumultuoso*, ends again in a closing and clinching *maestoso*. More ambiguous hearings of the Third's fugue include Chylińska's, who notes how 'the old polyphonic voice texture is replaced by [...] colouristic contrapuntal sonorities'. But she still hears a 'substantial unity'.<sup>87</sup> Wightman goes further towards problematizing synthesis when he notes how repeated returns of the second subject of the first movement and, before the final paragraph, a relaxing into the subdominant, generate traditional forces of synthesis and closure, but that they are suddenly cut off in the 'raging' final bars, with the sonata ending *Subito Prestissimo*. In summary, Wightman describes the sonata as both 'Protean' (that which derives its power from forces of upheaval, disorder, deformation) and as a 'reworking of received forms' that, rather than representing a 'retreat', is an 'epic re-forging of outworn material to produce something hard, enduring and brightly shining'.<sup>88</sup> Van Moere hears the fugue reaching a 'paroxysme', the climax of tensions between Apollonian and Dionysian forces.<sup>89</sup> The cluster of metaphors across these interpretations are striking: suddenness, colourful explosions, molten materials as if in a furnace. They are phrases which echo the widespread transference of concepts and images across artistic media in modernism on the chaotic end of the order–disorder spectrum, as in the molten motivic metamorphoses in Kandinsky's *Fugue* (1914),<sup>90</sup> and in Witkiewicz's powerful, volcanic image of 'pseudomorphism', in which old forms a distorted, imperilled, by magmatic intrusions. Witkiewicz's characterization of Szymanowski, previously cited (from *Jedyne wyjście*), as the only artist he knew who 'possesses in that metaphysical kernel – terrible with its tension of forces – a black, hot and formless abyss filled with a pulp of unearthly feelings, a lava which gives rise to constructions of sounds' is especially apposite.

The fugue certainly becomes fevered and frantically over-heated, but it opens *scherzando e buffo* and the ability to switch expression and cock a snook at overbearing earnestness (for example, at the *subito*, *scherzando*, b. 393) always seems to be a possibility. The music shifts between the ludic and the catastrophic, by turns offering *buffa*, bluster, and bombast. In its moments of playful irreverence, the sonata's finale lies on the edge of the burlesque.

<sup>86</sup> See Helman, *The History of Polish Music*, 323, and Agnieszka Chwiłęk, 'Struktura i funkcja fugi z cyklu sonatowego w twórczości Karola Szymanowskiego', *Muzyka*, 42 (1997), 55–78, esp. pp. 67–74 where she discusses the sonata as exemplifying her second type of synthesizing finale, the integration of motive and tonality across a multipart form, 'maximalized' in the fugue.

<sup>87</sup> Chylińska, *Szymanowski*, 120.

<sup>88</sup> Wightman, *Karol Szymanowski*, 200–1.

<sup>89</sup> Van Moere, *Karol Szymanowski*, 239.

<sup>90</sup> As discussed, with other examples, but none by Szymanowski or Witkiewicz, in Yoel Greenberg, "'Ordo ab chaos": The Fugue as Chaos in the early Twentieth Century', *Music & Letters*, 99 (2018), 74–103.



## Form, Chaos, Burlesque: Szymanowski's First String Quartet

In striking sections of the First Quartet, Szymanowski ventures more overtly into the manner of a Witkiewiczian burlesque. Interpretation of this aspect of the quartet can be especially fruitfully informed by drawing ideas from theoretical work published in the 1930s by Konstanty Regamey, which represented the most extensive application of Witkiewicz's ideas to music. Regamey, a composer, critic, and theorist born in Kiev in 1907, first met Szymanowski in 1921. It was only later in the decade and into the 1930s, however, that he began fully to appreciate and advocate the composer's achievements. In his first published review of Szymanowski's music, of the premiere of the Fourth Symphony (*Symphonie Concertante*), op. 60, in the November 1932 issue of the Warsaw journal *Zet*, the main categories that Regamey uses to discuss Szymanowski's new symphony are 'the direct feeling of the work's unity', 'aesthetic shock' (*wstrząs estetyczny*), and 'pure music', which together reveal his indebtedness to Witkiewicz's theory of 'pure form'.<sup>91</sup> Witkiewicz's ideas pervasively informed Regamey's treatise *Treść i forma w muzyce* ('Content and Form in Music') published by the same journal in the following year alongside a reprint of Witkiewicz's essay *O czystej formie* ('On Pure Form'), which *Zet* had first published in 1921.<sup>92</sup> A full appreciation of Regamey's work lies outside the scope of this article, but considerations of both his extensions of Witkiewicz into a more coherent aesthetic theory of music and his reviews of Szymanowski's compositional achievements will be valuable in so far as they facilitate the revelation of further parallels between Szymanowski and Witkiewicz and help to interpret the idiosyncratic characteristics of the quartet.

The Third Sonata's engagement with subjective development and the formal function of *Höhepunkten* supports Regamey's view, outlined in a retrospective reflection published in the immediate aftermath of Szymanowski's death in 1937, that the sonata represents a summation of a broad first period in Szymanowski's compositional career. So, too, does the contrasting importation into the sonata of the static,

<sup>91</sup> Konstanty Regamey, 'Piątkowy koncert symfoniczny. Pierwsze wykonanie IV symfonii Szymanowskiego', *Zet*, 16 (1932), 6. Cited and discussed in Katarzyna Naliwajek, 'Konstanty Regamey jako kontinuator idei Karola Szymanowskiego', in *Szymanowski w perspektywie kultury muzycznej przeszłości i współczesności*, ed. Zbigniew Skowron (Musica Iagellonica, 2007), 289–307 (p. 292). On the relationship of Regamey and Szymanowski in the discourses of Polish modernism in the 1930s, see also Lisa Cooper Vest, *Awangarda: Tradition and Modernity in Post-War Polish Music* (University of California Press, 2021), 11–19.

<sup>92</sup> Stanisław I. Witkiewicz, *O czystej formie* (*Zet*, 1921); Regamey's 'Treść i forma w muzyce' is reprinted in Konstanty Regamey, *Wybór Pism Estetycznych*, ed. Katarzyna Naliwajek-Mazurek (Universitas, 2010), 4–50. Regamey wrote a post-war appreciation: 'Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885–1939)', *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 7 (1946), 9–20. An important interlocutor between Regamey and Witkiewicz (and to a lesser degree Szymanowski, whom he knew less well) was the essayist Bolesław Miciński. He outlined an interesting critical comparison of Witkiewicz and Szymanowski in notes written during 1941–42 (he died in 1943); see Stanisław I. Miciński, *Pisma Zebrane 1: Podróże do Piekieł* (Biblioteka Więzi, 2011), 230–37. Sokół offers a lengthy comparison of Regamey, Witkiewicz, and the role of Miciński in his 'Muzyka jako Sztuka Czysta', a discussion which in part builds on the essays collected in K. Tarnawska-Kaczorowska (ed.), *Oblicza polistyliżmu. Materiały sympozjum poświęconego twórczości Konstantego Regameya*. Warszawa, 29–30 maja 1987 (Sekcja Muzykologów Związku Kompozytorów Polskich, 1988).

decorative, thematic style of the song cycles and programmatic works of 1913–16. For Regamey, the sonata represented the most complete example of Szymanowski ‘synthesizing’ these techniques within formal coherence (rather than in an undigested stylistic mixture). But in Regamey’s interpretation, the Sonata was an end point, with the First String Quartet beginning a new, second period. In the quartet, Regamey hears Szymanowski, with the acquisition of an advanced technique and modern ‘European’ aesthetic now complete, pursuing a new individual style in ways which point towards the creation of a modern ‘Polish’ body of work in the 1920s and 1930s.

Regamey considers the quartet to be the initiating work of this second phase in Szymanowski’s output because he hears signals of the later tendency for simplifying textures and for deploying harmonic and melodic materials of greater clarity, notably through introducing more pellucid polytonal effects.<sup>93</sup> Regamey also made it clear that, for all its new simplicity, the quartet does not prefigure a neoclassical phase.<sup>94</sup> In fact, he argued that Szymanowski’s ‘modern romanticism’ remained the prevailing characteristic and dominant achievement right through the later stages of his career. But there are weaknesses in Regamey’s interpretation. First, hearing the sonata as a summation of preceding works obscures the important ways in which it diverges from Szymanowski’s earlier sonatas and how it experiments with new subjective forms. And second, it is only partly persuasive to hear the quartet as the initiation, or even as the adumbration of a ‘Polish’ period, since it does not account for its startling and rapid juxtapositions of markedly contrasting styles, particularly in its first movement, a quality unmatched by any of Szymanowski’s later works.

As Regamey emphasizes, Szymanowski’s achievement up to the Third Sonata lies in his individual synthesis of Austro-German, Russian, and French aspects of modernism. When disposed in the manner heard in the Third Sonata, however, this synthetic quality is problematized. Unity becomes greatly imperilled by multiplicity. In this way, the conflicts of subject formation in the sonata’s first movement foreshadow the more overtly Witkiewiczian innovations of the First Quartet, where the paradox between old forms and new content (Witkiewicz’s ‘pseudomorphism’) is further heightened and now found not in the conflicting thematic character of the exposition but in a dismantling of the expectations of the development section of sonata form.

When the Szymanowskis fled the family’s beloved Tymoszkówka estate at the threat of Bolshevik invasion in October 1917, Karol left the First Quartet without a projected fourth movement. The planned finale was never composed and the quartet was published in 1924 as a three-movement work, with the order of the original scherzo second movement and slow third movement switched. In this form the quartet received its first performance in Warsaw in March of that year. It met with a decidedly mixed

<sup>93</sup> Konstanty Regamey, ‘Twórczość Szymanowskiego’, *Prosto z mostu*, 17 (11 April 1937). The same views are reworked in ‘Stanowisko Szymanowskiego w muzyce europejskiej’, *Ateneum* 2 (1938), 1–15, repr. in Regamey, *Wybór Pism Estetycznych*, 248–62, esp. p. 255.

<sup>94</sup> Regamey, ‘Stanowisko Szymanowskiego’, 260. The question of Regamey’s understanding of neoclassicism is too large to address here; see, for example, his essay ‘Neoklasycyzm a romantyzm’, *Ruch Muzyczny*, nos. 15–16 (1947), 2–6, repr. in *Wybór Pism Estetycznych*, 107–17. For a summary evaluation see Helman, *Neoklasycyzm w muzyce polskiej*, 58, 197–98.

reception. It is no surprise to read the conservative Piotr Rytel, who was involved in some of Szymanowski's most vitriolic polemics, describing the first movement as 'ugly' and 'weak', as presenting the 'tiring' and 'unpleasant' results of experimentalism, after which the lyrical slow movement was an 'oasis' of 'normal music' in a 'desert of lifelessness'.<sup>95</sup> Even cousin Iwaszkiewicz dismissed the first movement as 'chaos', as a failure which he contrasted with the 'beautiful formal solution' of the second movement.<sup>96</sup> Zieliński, by contrast, considers the quartet to be one of Szymanowski's most profound and inspired works, one which, like the Third Sonata, is an attempt to reconcile divergent styles, but now in a more refined, elaborate, and sophisticated manner, with results more poetic and lyrically inward than those of the exuberant and extroverted sonata.<sup>97</sup> But Zieliński describes only the two themes of the exposition of the first movement and does not consider the startling effects of the development section, which were, in all likelihood, a principal reason for Rytel's and Iwaszkiewicz's attributions of ugliness and chaos.

The quartet opens with a slow introduction in the quiet manner highlighted by Zieliński (Example 2). Despite the declaration of key in the title of the quartet, 'in C', the initial C triad is difficult to hear as a tonic. It is the first chord in a rising parallel progression to an E major tonal area which, sounding as the local goal or resolution of this progression, is subsequently expanded by chromatic and whole-tone harmonies. The introduction presents a double vision, opening up both an archaic pastoral (evoked by the parallel fifths beginning on C) and a subject of heightened yearning (evoked by the chromatic chords on a 'higher' tonal plain, a *poco avvivando* subjective bringing to life). The sharp-side rise of the opening phrase is then countered by a flat-side fall from E♭ (b. 12) to confirm a modally inflected C (with flattened third and seventh scale degrees) as the introduction's tonal home. A formally conservative exposition follows in which these two tonal worlds are contrasted (modal, melancholic C versus chromatic, yearning E), their opposition taking over the functional role of the Classical tonic–dominant polarity. Once again, a thematic dialectic is established through stylistic diversity and formal variance. The first subject, a sentence form in a modally inflected tonic minor, marks the clarity and simplicity of a return to traditional formal designs (but one tinged with a mournful tone). The second subject is one of Szymanowski's typical *dolcissimo* remnants of Wagnerian chromatic yearning, whose counterpoint and harmonic move from dominant quality harmony on E to F are both so close to the Prelude to Act 1 of *Tristan and Isolde* as to suggest that allusion not only moves to modelling but also even approaches a thinly disguised quotation.<sup>98</sup> The two carefully counterpoised subjects therefore offer expressions first of loss and second of unfulfilment. Both possess qualities of retrospective regret. And as allusions to Wagner accrue towards the end of the exposition, so the parallels with Witkiewicz's infusion of pure form with Schopenhauerian 'love–death' become unmissable.

<sup>95</sup> Piotr Rytel, *Gazeta Warszawska*, 16 April 1924.

<sup>96</sup> Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, 'Kącik Szymanowskiego', *Wiadomości Literackie*, 23 March 1924, 2.

<sup>97</sup> Zieliński, *Szymanowski: lyrika i ekstaza*, 148–49.

<sup>98</sup> See Paul Cadrin, 'Music about Music: The First String Quartet, Op. 37, in C, by Karol Szymanowski', *Canadian University Music Review/Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, 7 (1986), 171–87.

## Example 2 Szymanowski, String Quartet no. 1, op. 37: introduction.

**Lento assai**

The musical score is written for four string instruments: Violino I, Violino II, Viola, and Violoncello. The time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked "Lento assai".

**System 1:**

- Violino I:** Starts with a melodic line in the treble clef. Dynamics: *ppp* (pianississimo) and *pp* (pianissimo). Instruction: *dolciss.* (dolcissimo).
- Violino II:** Enters in the second measure with a melodic line in the treble clef. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Viola:** Enters in the second measure with a melodic line in the alto clef. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Violoncello:** Enters in the second measure with a melodic line in the bass clef. Dynamics: *pp*.

**System 2:**

- Violino I:** Continues the melodic line. Dynamics: *pp*. Instruction: *poco avvivando* (poco accelerating).
- Violino II:** Continues the melodic line. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Viola:** Continues the melodic line. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Violoncello:** Continues the melodic line. Dynamics: *pp*.

*Pace Iwaszkiewicz*, the exposition is hardly 'chaotic' – its formal debt to tradition is overt. Indeed, it is more traditionally formed than the first movement of the Third Sonata. In the development section, however, that part of sonata form in which the music would traditionally progress teleologically towards subjective resolution and reconstruction, Szymanowski moves into what is the most provocatively

## Example 2 (cont.)

The musical score for Example 2 (cont.) is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 10-13) is in 4/8 time and features four staves. Above the first staff, the tempo changes from *rall.* to **Tempo I**. The first three staves are marked *f dolce* and the fourth *f dolce*. The second system (measures 14-18) is also in 4/8 time and features four staves. The first staff has dynamics *p*, *p*, and *p*. The second staff has dynamics *p* and *p*. The third staff has dynamics *pp* and *sim.*. The fourth staff has dynamics *pp* and *sim.*. A trill marked *tr* is indicated above the first staff in measure 15.

Witkiewiczian territory in all his output. Instead of ‘development’ the music presents a series of sudden shifts of character (Example 3).<sup>99</sup> Although it begins with the fragmentation of motives which closed the exposition, a common enough gesture with which to launch a ‘development’ section, it soon becomes iconoclastic, landing on

<sup>99</sup> Wightman describes the development as ‘Dionysian’ in its ‘rapid movement through a wide range of moods, from subdued to weird and fantastical.’ Wightman, *Karol Szymanowski*, 202.

## Example 3 Szymanowski, String Quartet no. 1: first movement 'burlesque'.

9 subito scherzando alla burlesca

73

*sf* *f marc. ass.*

[ord.] *f marc.* *marc.*

*mf*

76

*marc.* *marcatiss.*

79

cre - scen - - do

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is for a string quartet, consisting of four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The piece is marked 'subito scherzando alla burlesca'. Measure 73 begins with a forte dynamic (*sf*) and a marcato (*marc.*) character. The Violin I part has a melodic line with slurs and accents, while the other parts provide harmonic support with rhythmic patterns. Measure 76 shows a continuation of the rhythmic complexity with a triplet in the Violin II part. Measure 79 features a crescendo leading to a fortissimo (*sf*) dynamic. The score includes various performance instructions such as accents, slurs, and dynamic markings.

Example 3 (cont.)

82 *sf* sul pontic. **10** *subito dolce* ord. *sub. p*

85 *ord.* *marc.* *poco cresc.*

88 *poco buffo* *cre - scen - do sempre* *sempre cre - scen -*

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is written for piano and consists of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 82-84) features a piano part with a forte (*sf*) dynamic and a 'sul pontic.' instruction. A circled measure number '10' is placed above the first measure of the second system, with the instruction 'subito dolce' above it. The piano part transitions to a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system (measures 85-87) continues the piano part with a 'marcato' (*marc.*) tempo marking and includes a 'poco cresc.' instruction. The third system (measures 88-90) begins with a 'poco buffo' instruction and includes the lyrics 'cre - scen - do sempre' and 'sempre cre - scen -'. The piano part continues with a steady rhythmic pattern.

Example 3 (cont.)

11 *poco rall., sempre crescendo*

91 *sf*

94 *do*

95 12

96 *sf* *ff*

97 *sf* *ff*

98 *sf* *ff*

99 *sf* *ff*

100 *sf* *ff*

12 *poco slentando*

97 *ff*

98 *ff*

99 *ff*

100 *ff*



Example 3 (cont.)

Musical score for Example 3 (cont.) measures 100-102. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features four staves: two treble clefs and two bass clefs. The first two staves are marked *sf*. The third staff has a *sf* dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes. The fourth staff has a *sf* dynamic and a long note. Above the first staff, the tempo markings *dolce* and *rallentando* are written. Measure 100 starts with a *sf* dynamic. Measure 101 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 102 has a triplet of eighth notes and a *sf* dynamic.

13 a tempo, più mosso

Musical score for Example 3 (cont.) measures 103-104. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features four staves. The first three staves are marked *sf*. The fourth staff is marked *sf* and has a long note. Above the first staff, the tempo marking *a tempo, più mosso* is written. Measure 103 starts with a *sf* dynamic. Measure 104 has a *sf* dynamic and a *p dolce* dynamic.

Musical score for Example 3 (cont.) measures 105-107. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features four staves. The first two staves are marked *sf marc.*. The third staff is marked *en dehors cantab.*. The fourth staff is marked *pp*. Above the first staff, the tempo marking *a tempo, più mosso* is written. Measure 105 starts with a *sf marc.* dynamic. Measure 106 has a *sf marc.* dynamic. Measure 107 has a *pp* dynamic.

the tonic C (here an ‘alien’ harmony; it is in the wrong formal place) and winding up to a rollicking ‘buffo’ theme which in turn leads to bright and bold climax on F♯, a tritone from the tonic C. Whole-tone dissolutions then lead to V of v, G minor, the key of the recapitulation (which thereby delays the return to the tonic, to balance the prominent role of C in the development).

It is a sequence far removed from the ‘wondrously seductive developmental process’ Thomas aptly described as the essence of the works of the ‘middle period’.<sup>100</sup> The opening of the section is marked *Subito scherzando alla burlesca*, a performance instruction which summarizes the overall effect of sudden change to rapid-fire juxtapositions across this formal section. Burlesque is defined by a coarsening through exaggerated use of high style to deliberately absurd or humorous ends. In burlesque the language of serious art is turned to provocatively ridiculous, comic, or deflating purpose.<sup>101</sup> As meta-music, music about music, self-referential, and potentially ironic, in the early twentieth century, burlesque became an attractive way of debunking late Romantic (especially Wagnerian) earnestness and pomposity.<sup>102</sup> The quartet’s burlesque opens with fragments of material in thorny, dissonant counterpoint. As these materials intensify and build climactically (in other words, begin to take on traditional developmental aspirations by suggesting teleology), there is a sudden break, marked *subito dolce*. The music is now static over a tonic pedal (C) – a move which cocks a snook at the traditional expectations of a tonally unstable development outside the home key. The comic potential becomes overt at the next character shift, to *poco buffo* (b. 88). The pedal C remains, but over it the music now builds by motoric repetition. At the climax (b. 97; fig. 12) the pedal C finally moves up to C♯ as the bass of an ecstatic F♯ six–four chord. Passionate expression finally breaks through. Such climactic major six–four chords have a track-record in Beethoven and romantic music as symbols of expressive arrival suggesting salvation or apotheosis,<sup>103</sup> and Szymanowski frequently turned to these kinds of harmonic signifiers at climactic points in his earlier work.<sup>104</sup> In the quartet, the F♯ harmony is bright and the C♯ bass an uplift from the preceding pedal, but its preparation is unorthodox and unsettling – the principal of logical connection is weakened.

Rytel was in one sense correct: this is a decidedly experimental section. Its realization presented considerable challenges to Szymanowski’s ‘métier’. The pencil sketch of the quartet shows him struggling with how to manipulate the first of the juxtapositions (Figure 4). The problems begin at the arrival on G major harmony (b. 80), the first clear harmony since the start of the section and the dominant of the movement’s home key, C. In bar 80 the cello continues with the motivic content of the preceding bars as the

<sup>100</sup> Thomas, *Polish Music since Szymanowski*, 5.

<sup>101</sup> For a useful survey of definitions, see John D. Jump, *Burlesque* (Methuen, 1972), 1–2.

<sup>102</sup> See, for example, Joel Haney, ‘Slaying the Wagnerian Monster: Hindemith, *Das Nusch-Nuschi* and Musical Germanness after the Great War’, *The Journal of Musicology*, 25 (2008), 339–93.

<sup>103</sup> See, for example, Robert Hatten, ‘Interpreting Expression: The Adagio Sostenuto from Beethoven’s Piano Sonata in Bb op. 106 (“Hammerklavier”)’, *Theory and Practice*, 19 (1994), 1–17, esp. p. 6.

<sup>104</sup> See Downes, *Szymanowski, Eroticism, and the Voices of Mythology*, 22–36.

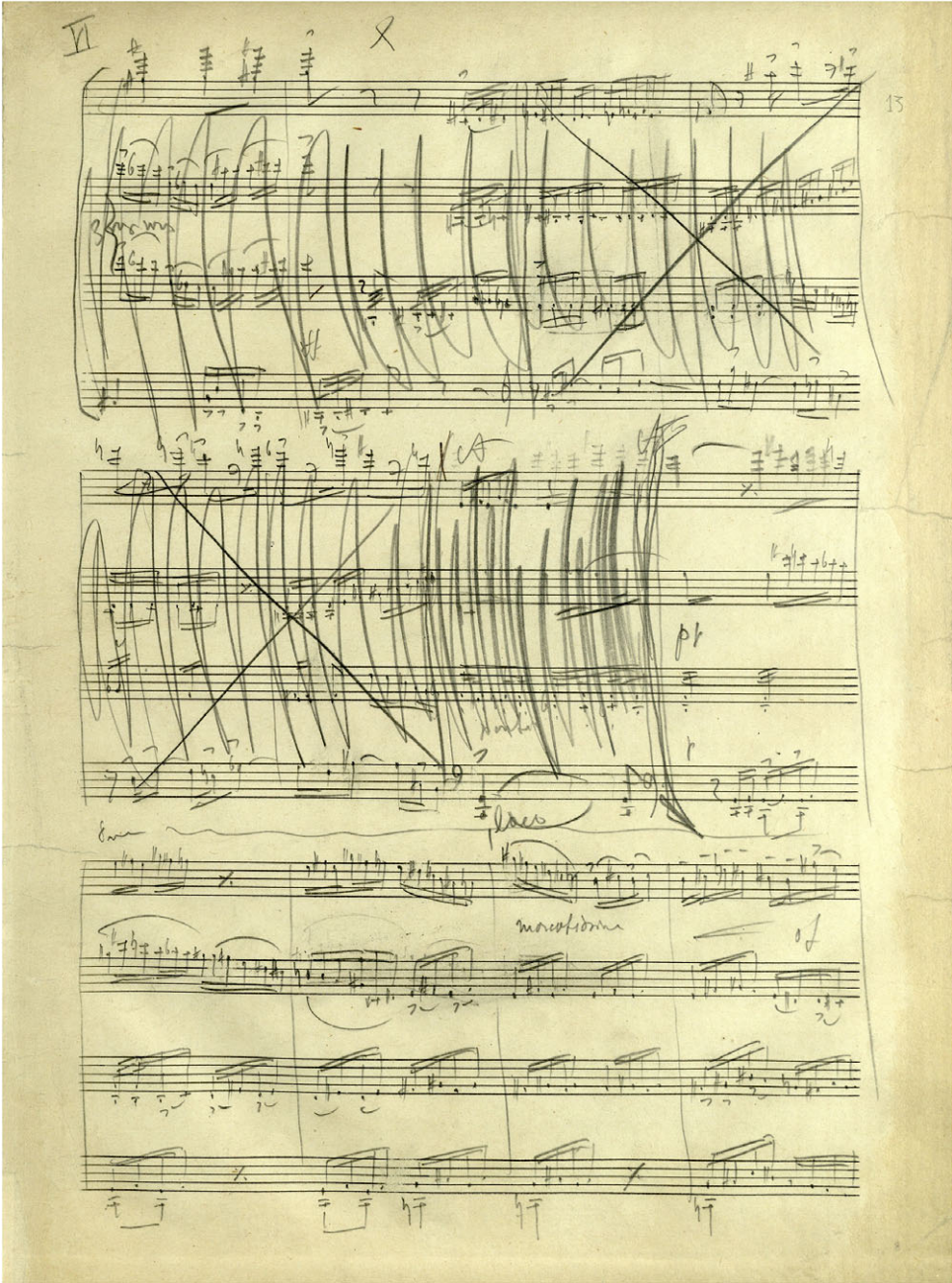


Figure 4. Szymanowski, String Quartet no. 1, pencil. Archive of Polish Composers, University of Warsaw Library.

basis for elaborating the G triad. In the sketch two levels of cuts follow. The next two bars in the sketch will ultimately be restored in the final published version (as bb. 81–2), but vertical scribbles cover these and the following five bars of sketched material (so a total of seven bars are cut). Diagonal crossed lines over two pairs of bars indicate an alternative cut of the third and fourth, and fifth and sixth bars, within the larger cut: this produces the published version (also indicated by the two 'X's written above the system). There are therefore three versions of this passage. The first sketched continuation in its complete form (i.e., ignoring both the scribbled and the diagonal line erasures) contains four bars omitted in the published version, music which continues the climactic development begun in the preceding bars and incorporates (in the third bar of the pencil sketch in the violins) a foreshadowing in pliant parallel thirds of the melodic character which is played over the C pedal in the next section. This version is both more developmental and more connective than the final published one. The version indicated by the vertical scribbles on the sketch, meanwhile, produces a cut from the end of bar 80 (as published) to bar 84, generating a connective high first violin line from the F–E in bar 80 to the high E in bar 84. It also connects the G chord of bar 80 directly with the C harmony, producing a stronger sense of progression through cadence. This version cuts short the developmental character, but it does so in order to create more coherent harmonic and melodic connection. The juxtaposition in the published version (generated in the sketch by the diagonal crossings out) is the most radical in Szymanowski's eschewal of his established techniques of 'seductive development' and the style of delicate poise between stasis and motion which characterizes so much of his music of the previous years. It is perhaps no surprise that he had second and third thoughts before boldly opting for this final version.

The buffo theme in the first violin (b. 88) is a variant of the melody stated in sequence in bars 8–10 of the slow introduction, where it suggested the music of subjective life emerging from an archaic pastoral (see again, [Example 2](#)). This recollection of the introduction is strengthened by the C–G open fifth in the cello from bar 83. The buffo theme emerges from elaborations of the 'nature' open fifth as it did in its original form in the introduction (connected by the G♯–A♯–B in the cello bb. 6–9). The passage also relates to the introduction in that the sequences over the C pedal offer parallel moves to D (b. 89) and to E (b. 91) generating an expanded elaboration of the C–D–E move of the quartet's opening bars. The sequential ascent is then continued to the next whole-tone step at the climax in F♯ harmony (where the C pedal finally moves; bar 97). This is a moment suggestive of transfiguration – its tone is ecstatic and fulsome, a *verklärung* echoing many similar passages in Szymanowski's earlier work. The disconcerting disconnection lies in the fact that this *Höhepunkt* has been reached via passages whose motoric ostinato and comic motivic 'deformations' are negations of the organic world and the expressive subject heard in the introduction.

The sketch contains no indication of the section being *alla burlesca*, or of *poco burla* (as indicated in the published version in b. 88); the instruction at the beginning of the 'development' in the sketch is simply *più mosso*. These telling instructions of burlesque performance are clearly therefore a late addition, a decision made after Szymanowski had wrestled with how to produce the section's disconnective character. Burlesque had

previously featured overtly in the variations of Szymanowski's Second Symphony and in the seventh of the *Etudes*, op. 33. The models for the former are likely to be the rather heavy-handed late Romantic examples of Max Reger's *Burlesken* for piano duet, op. 56, (1902) and Richard Strauss's *Burleske* for piano and orchestra (1885–86). The Etude, op. 33 no. 7, is closer to the iconoclastic style of 'Tantris der Narr', the second of the *Masques*, op. 34, and in this respect one of the first examples in Szymanowski's work of an overt relationship to the juxtapositions of Stravinsky's burlesque ballet, *Petrushka*, which Szymanowski greatly admired. 'Tantris der Narr' was inspired by Ernst Hardt's 1907 play of that name, in which Tristan appears disguised first as a jester, then as a leper. Szymanowski writes in a *buffo e capriccioso* idiom in which sudden juxtapositions of dissonant humour and yearning eroticism are resolutely unresolved. (Tantris's dancing in various compound metres also prefigures the 'limping' dance of the second subject of the Third Sonata.) This ridiculous, deformed Tantris would fit well in any number of Witkiewicz's plays or paintings. Or, indeed, in one of the improvised burlesque reviews that we know from Iwaszkiewicz's recollections were a regular part of the social scene at Tymoszkówka. (They included ribald travesties of Gounod's *Faust* and a performance of the famous dance of the seven veils from Strauss's *Salome* by Karol's brother Felix cross-dressed in a black wig.)<sup>105</sup> Through a sequence of five sudden shifts in a mere twenty-five bars, the quartet's 'development' section plays like a Witkiewiczian burlesque ensemble of dubious musical characters:<sup>106</sup> prickly, dislocated, sweet, ludicrous, robotic, impassioned.

Szymanowski is composing in a radically new manner. Development in his previous work most often tended to a smooth, continuous process in which changes were gradual, connective, and progressive. The music of [Example 3](#) is especially resonant with passages in Witkiewicz's 'Wstęp do teorii czystej formy w teatrze' (1919) ('An introduction to the theory of Pure Form in Theatre'). In that essay, Witkiewicz described the abandonment of 'thematic logic' (*logika tematyczna*) as a manifestation of liberation from subjective emotional expression. The more the 'insatiability of form' grows the stronger the tendency to 'aconstructionality'. The 'rebirth of pure form' is found in a 'frantic rush': there is destruction, a 'death-bed convulsion', but it is 'better to end in beautiful madness than in grey, boring banality'. He offers speculations specifically about new directions in music: 'Is the thematic logic related to a certain logic of the consequences of emotional

<sup>105</sup> 'Tymoszkówka', *Wiadomości literacki* 1939 (no. 34). Vladimir Jankélévitch identifies Szymanowski's 'Tantris', alongside examples by Prokofiev and Tansman, with a 'sarcastic Burla', that part of the 'modernist Burla' which 'seeks buffoonery' and in which clowning displaces the devilish 'bizarre' burlesque of the romantics. In these burlesque pieces he hears not only anti-romanticism but also anti-impressionism: 'sharp pizzicati that prick pinholes in the gently shaded-off mist of musical impressionism, just as Picasso's angular lines and wicked dots prick the vagueness, the subtle gradation of colour and the cottony fog that drowns Moner's countryside or Carrière's portraits.' The music's 'dry jabs' create a version of 'pointillism', with emphasis on the 'discontinuous instant'. Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton University Press, 2003), 44.

<sup>106</sup> Paul S. Hoffman and Jack W. McCullough, 'Visual Images in Witkiewicz: *They* in Production', *The Polish Review*, 18, 1/2 (1973), 52–57. In *Oni* ('They', 1920) burlesque elements are identified with the comic, but these are juxtaposed with elements of 'menace' and extreme 'sensuousness'.

states of life, which are the non-existent content of music, which is dying out in music at present?’ He modestly decides he cannot answer:

whether the abandonment of it [thematic logic] by some composers does not express the final release from the yoke of emotionality in music is a question which we do not dare to resolve due to the lack of professionalism in this sphere. However, we believe that the lethal analogy prevails in all pure and complex arts, as long as they are viewed from the point of view of pure forms. In the borderline and in music, complete a-construction is threatened with the further proceeding of insatiability of form.<sup>107</sup>

The passage is characteristically saturated with a wide array of terms, but a key idea is that thematic logic as the basis for construction of form can be rejected in new music. Szymanowski’s quartet as a whole does not move to ‘a-construction’ but, tellingly, the formal space traditionally reserved for ‘development’ through thematic process is radically re-thought in Witkiewiczian convulsions.

The burlesque section raises the stakes in the chaos–order dialectic. In this regard, Regamey’s extensions of Witkiewicz in his *Treść i forma w muzyce* and reviews of Szymanowski are especially useful in two ways. First, the notion of ‘aesthetic shock’ (*ustrząs estetyczny*), which Regamey restricts to effects produced by novel formal processes and metaphysical feelings (the two components of Witkiewicz’s art in pure form) and not to attempts to express mundane life feelings. The burlesque section of Szymanowski’s quartet is multiply ‘shocking’. (The sensibilities of neither Rytel nor Iwazkiewicz could cope.) Second, Regamey’s idea of a ‘transcendental centre’ which draws together the elements in a Witkiewiczian unity in multiplicity like a magnet, with dynamic moves between and around these nodes. The function of climaxes is key in this model, as the most intense moments in a dynamic formal process, with the *Höhepunkt* now acting as a ‘magnetic centre’. The F♯ climax in the quartet is an intense counter-polar axis to the tonic C around which the ‘buffa’ and ‘burla’ elements are arranged. The resonances with Witkiewicz are again clear, for example with his discussion in ‘O “deformacji” na obrazach’ (‘On “deformation” in Pictures’, 1920), of the ‘multi-directional tensions’ in a composition between more or less deformed objects, with movements starting in one place and finishing in another along ‘main and subsidiary axes’.<sup>108</sup>

Regamey extends the musical application of Witkiewicz’s ideas by combining them with derivations from the ‘energetic’ music theories of Ernst Kurth and Hans Mersmann, then currently highly influential.<sup>109</sup> The relevance of Regamey’s post-

<sup>107</sup> Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, ‘Wstęp do teorii czystej formy w teatrze’ (1919) (‘An introduction to the theory of Pure Form in Theatre’), in Witkiewicz, *Teatr*, 49–50.

<sup>108</sup> ‘O “deformacji” na obrazach’, *Gazeta Wieczorna* (1920), trans. in Benson and Forgács (eds.), *Between Worlds*, 251–52.

<sup>109</sup> Their influence on Chomiński is noted previously. When, in the mid-1920s, Szymanowski attempted to write a book on the ‘new music’, he was greatly influenced by Mersmann’s *Musik der Gegenwart* (1924), a copy of which he borrowed from the Polish musicologist Adolf Chybiński. Szymanowski’s comments on form in his notes for this project are imbued with metaphors of force, energy, and space. In this regard they not only reveal the debt to Mersmann but also the sustained importance of Witkiewicz’s contemporaneous writings on painting and theatre. Szymanowski was no doubt in strong part impressed with Mersmann’s book because it included an example from his own *Pieśni muezzina szalonego* (‘Songs of an Infatuated Muezzin’, op. 42, 1918), whose vocal arabesques are

Witkiewiczian musical energetics to the *Höhepunkten* at the heart of the formal process in the first movement of the Third Piano Sonata is overt. In the quartet's burlesque, energetics and climaxes are playfully problematized, with two *Höhepunkten* at tonal polar opposites, a first in C, the second in F♯. The struggles illustrated by the multiple versions in Figure 4 fundamentally arise from the problem of how effectively to undermine the burlesque's first highpoint by cutting off process and connection through juxtaposition. In the second, greater *Höhepunkt* of the quartet's burlesque, however, Szymanowski appears to struggle both with the more radical Witkiewiczian formal context and also with limited sonorities of the quartet ensemble. The violinist Paweł Kochoński, a long-term friend and collaborator (on the *Mythes* and both violin concertos) wrote of his surprise on Szymanowski telling him of the plans to write a quartet, since he had always said the sound is 'too small' (*mało brzmienia*).<sup>110</sup> In the pencil sketch of what, after Regamey, can be identified as the burlesque's 'transcendental centre' (the transfiguration a tritone from the tonic C), Szymanowski was originally seduced into attempting to write in much thicker textures (reminiscent of the density at the main climax of the sonata), with rapid and wide-ranging arpeggations in both cello and second violin (Figure 5). The removal of these textural extravagances in the final version certainly leads to more idiomatic writing and to contrapuntal as well as textural clarity.

Burlesque returns in the quartet's finale (the original second movement, also marked *scherzando à la burlesque*). As Cadrin notes, through its eye-catching (but aurally deceptive) use of multiple coexisting key signatures (the first violin is notated in C, the second violin in E♭, viola in F♯ and cello in A), the movement extends the planes of tonal layering explored in 'Tantris'.<sup>111</sup> Four keys also suggest multiple viewpoints like the subject of the Third Sonata, the photographic mirrors in Witkiewicz's portrait, or even perhaps a 'non-Euclidian' tonality, extending the C–F♯ symmetrical polarity which underpins the highpoints of the first movement's burlesque. It is the only occasion Szymanowski attempted this trick of the eye/ear (to the innocent ear the music does not really sound like a quadruple polytonality). The movement is launched in fugal manner, in a typical burlesque deployment of high art technique for playful, subversive ends. A possible comic allusion to the fugato from the scherzo of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony was quickly spotted by critics. In the first monograph on Szymanowski, published just three years after the quartet's first performance, Jachimecki described the quartet's fugal theme as 'almost a persiflage' of the Beethoven.<sup>112</sup> If the allusion is accepted (and some may find it rather tenuous), then the movement compares with the many Beethoven caricatures in Witkiewicz's work of the time. The fugal opening, however, soon runs out of steam. In the contrasting section which follows, a stylized dance tune strikingly pre-empts the explicit use of folk materials in the works Szymanowski composed after 1920. The music is also

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compared and contrasted with the melodic writing in Schoenberg's setting of Maeterlinck's *Herzgewächse*, op. 20: see Hans Mersmann, *Musik der Gegenwart* (Julius Bard, 1924), 71–72.

<sup>110</sup> Letter of 11/24 July 1917; Chylińska (ed.), *Korespondencja* 1, 573.

<sup>111</sup> Cadrin, 'Music about Music'.

<sup>112</sup> Jachimecki, *Karol Szymanowski: Rys dotychczasowej twórczości* (PWM, 1927).

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation, identified as a pencil sketch for Szymanowski's String Quartet no. 1, page 15. The page is filled with ten staves of music, each containing complex rhythmic and melodic patterns. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings. A large Roman numeral 'IV' is written in the top left corner, and the number '15' is in the top right. The paper is aged and shows some staining and wear. The handwriting is in pencil, and the overall appearance is that of a working draft or sketch.

Figure 5. Szymanowski, String Quartet no. 1, pencil sketch. Archive of Polish Composers, University of Warsaw Library.



increasingly comparable with the dance manner of many passages in Stravinsky's *Petrushka*. Indeed, across the quartet, Cadrin argues that, 'lacking an extra-musical programme to guide his inspiration, Szymanowski reckons with his own evolution as a composer' with a deliberate stylistic multiplicity moving between those of his early Germanic influences, through impressionism (in the second movement), and the 'French-Russian avant-garde', that is, Stravinsky.<sup>113</sup> In Cadrin's reading, the quartet is a self-portrait of the artist in multiple musical guises. It is an ensemble of 'Szymanowskis', one to complement the 'Szymanowskis' so frequently encountered in Witkiewicz's work.

Regamey's 1932 review of Szymanowski's Fourth Symphony is certainly rather gushing in tone (the sustained 'beauty' of the work, he writes, marks Szymanowski's 'genius'), but it demonstrates that he considered an aesthetic and critical language indebted to Witkiewicz to be appropriate for assessing the composer's latest style, in which – as he describes – Szymanowski's earlier predilection for open-ended themes based on 'rhythmically undefined' and 'overlapping' motives (in essence, post-Wagnerian 'musical prose') is replaced by clearer formal articulations of melodic form, to project a 'directly perceived' unity.<sup>114</sup> Regamey was convinced that Witkiewicz's aesthetic theory could form the basis for a critical approach to myriad modern musical styles. While the wider value of Witkiewicz's ideas for analysing early twentieth-century music is a consideration requiring further work, the insights they provide into the divergent form and style of the Third Sonata and First Quartet suggest Regamey was right.

## After the Quartet

The terrible experience of leaving the family estate and the turmoil of civil war (with an armed and highly strung Szymanowski out patrolling the family's town house at night) were understandably not conducive to sustained creative work. The compositional energies Szymanowski was able to summon in 1918 produced settings of Tagore (*Four Songs*, op. 41) and Iwaszkiewicz (the *Muezzin* songs, op. 42). During 1919 he produced precious little music, with work on *King Roger* progressing at a frustrating pace (in no small degree because of Iwaszkiewicz's tardiness with the libretto). Through the 1918 songs and the opera, Szymanowski extends his earlier inspirations (exoticized eroticism, Młoda Polska poetics, Hellenism, Nietzsche and, more ambivalently, Schopenhauer). Witkiewiczian ideas are not overtly apparent. Only in the incidental music for the pantomime *Mandragora*, op. 43 (rapidly written in May 1920), does Szymanowski compose in a manner with aspects overtly similar to Witkiewicz's contemporary work. Wightman hears the music's 'humorous grotesquery' as a 'touching final glance back to the magical world of the Tymoszkówka home entertainments'.<sup>115</sup> Helman considers the stylistic combination of overt parody with

<sup>113</sup> Cadrin, 'Music about Music'.

<sup>114</sup> Cited in Naliwajek, 'Konstanty Regamey', 292, n. 8.

<sup>115</sup> Wightman, *Karol Szymanowski*, 241.

sometimes startling simplicity, comically gestural qualities and ironic twists, to be unlike anything else in Szymanowski's output.<sup>116</sup> Perhaps only the 'Witkiewiczian' sections of the quartet's burlesque are closely comparable with *Mandragora*.

The incidental pantomime music is an occasional piece, a peripheral work in Szymanowski's catalogue. But Witkiewicz's aesthetic remained deeply in Szymanowski's thoughts. In an unpublished essay on Stravinsky written in June 1921 he wrote admiringly of the opposition of mechanical (puppets) and organic (humans) in *Petrushka*, the bold mixing of comic and tragic levels which create what he called a strange 'absurdity'. There are echoes here of Witkiewicz which become overt later in the essay, where he explains the formal aspirations of modern theatre (the implied comparison is again with Witkiewicz, to the non-Euclidian plays) in which folk elements sound as if they were 'brutally' 'torn' from wailing mouths, heard as 'naked' fragments, not smoothly sentimentalized in the manner he heard in late romanticism. In this way, Szymanowski seeks to demonstrate how Stravinsky's music relates to the dominant trends of 'formism' and 'expressionism', the binary which lies at the heart of Witkiewicz's theory and practice.<sup>117</sup> The essay was written a month after he had seen the revival of *Le Sacre du Printemps* choreographed by Léonide Massine during a stay in Paris when he met Stravinsky several times (playing through *Les noces* with him at the piano). A central aim of the Stravinsky essay was to highlight the composer's mastery of new formal techniques in a critical strategy designed to distance the music from the realist and directly emotional aspects of contemporary art. (His strategy echoes the wider Parisian 'rereading' of *Le Sacre* in the 1920s.) Szymanowski described the music of *Le Sacre* as 'almost ascetic in its primeval simplicity (however paradoxical this may sound in light of its technical apparatus)': he heard the expression of 'terrible' 'depths of truth' combined with a 'tenacious battle for individual "form"'. In the manuscript he crossed out a reference to Witkiewicz's phrase the "strangeness" of life' (*dziwność życia*) to identify the subject of the music, which he sees as the manifestation of Stravinsky seeking forms which are independent from the ephemeral trends of the day.<sup>118</sup>

Szymanowski preferred a concert performance of *Le Sacre* since he considered staging to be a detrimental diversion from the music. This view may seem surprising from a composer who would soon write his own ballet, *Harnasie*, op. 55 (1923–31), but it chimes with Witkiewicz's high valuation of music's 'pure forms'. When, a year later, Szymanowski stated that 'music in essence is already pure form' (*Nawet tyle dyskutowany problemat czystej formy nie istnieje w niej wcale jako 'problemat', gdyż jest ona w zasadzie swej już czystą formą*),<sup>119</sup> he sustains his identification of the main

<sup>116</sup> Zofia Helman, 'Incidental Music', in *Szymanowski Companion*, ed. Downes and Cadrin, 118.

<sup>117</sup> Szymanowski, 'Igor Strawiński' (1921), *Pisma 1*, 47–54 (pp. 51–2). It is not clear when Szymanowski would have known Stravinsky's *Three Pieces for String Quartet* (composed in 1915), which have passages whose extensions of techniques found in *Petrushka* come close to effects heard in the burlesque section of Szymanowski's quartet. Szymanowski met Stravinsky in 1914, but the war made further contact impossible until the 1920s.

<sup>118</sup> 'Igor Strawiński', 51–3.

<sup>119</sup> 'Karol Szymanowski o muzyce współczesnej' ('Karol Szymanowski on Contemporary Music'), *Kurier Polski*, 12 November 1922. *Pisma 1*, 59; trans. in *Szymanowski on Music*, 199–200.

achievement of Stravinsky's *Sacre* and directly echoes the terms of Witkiewicz's view of music and his anti-realist 'formist' theories. Agnieszka Chwiłək views this as a passing allusion to Witkiewicz, casually expressed in an interview, and therefore without deeper consequences.<sup>120</sup> But Szymanowski further notes that Stravinsky's 'artistic fortunes have inseparably bound him with modern theatre, its modern aspirations, and its passionate search for new forms',<sup>121</sup> a comment which compares with Witkiewicz's contemporaneous pursuance of new forms in theatre. In short, Szymanowski's appraisal of Stravinsky in 1921 carries many echoes of Witkiewicz. It directly presages the composition of his own song cycle *Słopiewnie*, Szymanowski's most Stravinskian work to date, and in interesting ways an extension of the more radical techniques explored in the quartet.<sup>122</sup>

Stravinsky is raised as the great model for moving forward with positive hopes for the musical future. Szymanowski confirmed this view in a published study of the composer in 1924. In this role, Stravinsky forms a perhaps unlikely alliance with Chopin. In the 1923 Chopin essay, with its debt to the Polish Formists, Szymanowski countered those 'melancholics' who see the new 'abstract formalism' as a dead end: 'this state of affairs does not warrant such dark pessimism'.<sup>123</sup> The Chopin and Stravinsky essays are part of a multi-dimensional turn to greater optimism from Szymanowski as he approached the mid-1920s, signalled dramatically by his change to the end of *King Roger*, where he replaced Iwazskiewicz's original Schopenhauerian ending with a regenerative sunrise. The individual sunlit prospect for Roger is also envisaged for the community, as subsequently expressed in the political hopes he placed in 'Pan-Europeanism',<sup>124</sup> and socially in the educational role he believed music could play in binding and developing society.<sup>125</sup> The marked contrast with Witkiewicz's prevailingly bleak pessimism through the 1920s and 1930s was noted by their mutual friend, the essayist Bolesław Miciński.<sup>126</sup>

That there is no extant correspondence between Szymanowski and Witkiewicz from the 1920s and 1930s is a source of great regret. One can, however, consider the artistic relationship of Szymanowski and Witkiewicz as a Polish equivalent of the famous ones between Stravinsky and Picasso (whom Szymanowski discussed as pursuing analogous

<sup>120</sup> Agnieszka Chwiłək, 'Kilka uwag o formie muzycznej w refleksji estetycznej i praktyce kompozytorskiej Karola Szymanowskiego', in *Karol Szymanowski w perspektywie*, 121–33 (p.125).

<sup>121</sup> Szymanowski, 'Igor Strawiński', 51.

<sup>122</sup> A comparative analysis would require a separate article.

<sup>123</sup> Szymanowski, 'Fryderyk Chopin', *Pisma 1*, 96–97, in *Szymanowski on Music*, trans. and ed. Wightman, 192.

<sup>124</sup> See Stephen Downes, 'Eros and Paneuropeanism: Szymanowski's Utopian Vision', in *Musical Constructions of Nationalism: Essays on the History and Ideology of European Musical Culture 1800–1945*, ed. Harry White and Michael Murphy (Cork University Press, 2001), 51–71; 'Cultural Affiliations and National Filiations: Textuality and History in Edward Said's "Secular Criticism and Szymanowski's Poetics of "Paneuropeanism" ', *Karol Szymanowski w perspektywie kultury muzycznej przeszłości i współczesności*, 93–104.

<sup>125</sup> Szymanowski, 'Wychowawcza rola kultury muzycznej w społeczeństwie' ('The Educational Role of Musical Culture in Society'), *Pamiętnik Warszawski* (November 1930); *Pisma 1*, 275–303, in *Szymanowski on Music*, trans. and ed. Wightman, 281–307.

<sup>126</sup> Miciński, *Pisma Zebrane 1*, 235.

'revaluations' of aesthetics<sup>127</sup>), Schoenberg and Kandinsky, or, given the Mephistophelian *Beelzebub Sonata*, as a parallel with that between Thomas Mann's Adrian Leverkühn and Adorno's Schoenberg.<sup>128</sup> A reconstruction and theoretically informed amplification from what is known of Szymanowski and Witkiewicz's relationship, their aesthetic connections and shared convictions, can provide a fertile basis for analysing prevaillingly puzzling formal and expressive strategies in two of Szymanowski's most important works. The interpretative results thereby generate an enriched contextualization of Szymanowski's compositional challenges and achievements within early twentieth-century Polish art.

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<sup>127</sup> Szymanowski, 'Igor Strawiński', *Warszawianka*, 1 November 1924; *Pisma* 1, 142-3, in *Szymanowski on Music*, trans. and ed. Wightman, 223.

<sup>128</sup> This parallel is suggested by Gerould, *Witkacy*, 254.