

## Joan Grimalt Santacana

Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1375-7171>

# Penderecki's *Sekstet* (2000): a Hermeneutic Analysis

## Presentation

The thesis of the present analysis is that *Sekstet* shares a post-romantic outlook with most of Penderecki's mature works, as much in the asthetic as in the poietic sense – not only in the way they invite themselves to be heard, but also with regard to how the work was made. In other words, this music can be understood as a personal statement about our contemporary world and its relationship with a sensitive individual. More to the point, I hear in this music a representation of the shock experienced between a chaotic, senseless World and a virtual 'Subject'<sup>1</sup> or musical persona, reacting plaintively to it. The displacement of such late romantic stances into a contemporary historical context demands a hermeneutic explanation. How come somebody is giving the same answer to the conflict between world and subject, with practically the same expressive tools, a century later?

To share my findings, I have presented below a description and classification of some of the musical topoi in *Sekstet* that, to my knowledge, have not been de-

---

1 Throughout the article, single inverted commas are used to designate a represented entity. An actual Subject can thus be distinguished from its represented image in art or music, a 'Subject'.

scribed to date. This will include rhetorical and dramaturgical aspects, which seem to be a fundamental part of *Sekstet*'s expressive message.

## Analysis 1: A Dualistic Work

Let us begin with a look at the cast of this drama. As Ewa Wójtowicz pointed out,<sup>2</sup> the diversity of the instruments here (clarinet and horn, three strings, piano) does not respond to any sextet tradition. On the contrary, the work's disposition could be interpreted symbolically as a group of heterogeneous soloists standing in opposition to a well-organised, homogeneous society. Echoes of the latter can be found in Mozart's *Divertimenti* for wind sextet, or to Brahms's *String Sextet* op. 18. Possible precedents of the mixed ensemble instead include Bohuslav Martinů's *Revue de cuisine* (1927) for piano, trumpet, clarinet, bassoon, violin and violoncello; or Manuel de Falla's *Concerto for Harpsichord and Five Instruments* (1923–26), namely flute, oboe, clarinet, violin and cello.

As a secondary result, the cast changed the piano score to adapt it to the other, monodic instruments and set it on a more equal footing. In fact, every one of the instruments can be understood in dramatic terms, as individual characters. The clarinet often plays a leading role. In the first movement, it is a B-flat clarinet, and it sounds as if it is responding to Berlioz's idea of this instrument as a 'chamber trumpet'.<sup>3</sup> In the mournful second movement, the clarinet switches accordingly to the smooth sound of the A-clarinet, but still performing the role of a protagonist, both acoustically and with regard to the texture.

Rather than standing in sharp contrast to the clarinet, the three string soloists appear to represent its antithesis, the 'Subject' to whose world the larger, second movement is devoted. The strings appear more often in the form of three separate soloists than as a group, with the the viola and the cello seeming to perform primary roles. The displacement of the violin in favour of two instruments that are

2 Ewa Wójtowicz, "Sextett für Klarinette, Horn, Streichtrio und Klavier", *Twórczość Krzysztofa Pendereckiego. Od genezy do rezonansu* [The Creativity of Krzysztof Penderecki. From Genesis to Resonance], volume 7: *Nowy początek 1993–. Faza Credo, Sekstetu i Pieśni przemijania* [A New Beginning 1993–. The Credo, Sextet and Songs of Passing], ed. by T. Malecka, M. Tomaszewski (Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie 2013), 118.

3 "La clarinette est peu propre à l'idylle, c'est un instrument épique comme les cors, les trompettes, et les trombones." Hector Berlioz, *Traité d'instrumentation et d'orchestration modernes* [Treatise on Instrumentation] (Paris: Lemoine 1855), <http://conquest.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/c/c5/IMSLP88915-PMLP28373-Traite1855REc.pdf>. (last accessed: 20.06.2025): *Chapitre 1, Les instruments à vent*.

usually assigned a secondary role might be indicative of their symbolic meaning, and thus represent a subjective, rhetorical statement. The piano acts as a commentator, as if following the nineteenth-century tradition, especially in the piano song, embodying an 'inner voice.'<sup>4</sup> Finally, the French horn appears often as a mediator between the worldly clarinet and the subjective strings and piano. At other times, the horn sounds as the voice of the 'other,' in connection with the romantic tradition of the woods (or the *forest*, from Latin *foris*, the outside), that irresistible territory where the rules of civilisation do not apply.<sup>5</sup> All in all, however, the need to represent two opposite worlds forces all the instruments occasionally to perform quite different roles than those bestowed on them at first. One could say they are not characters, but rather *represent* characters, just as actors do.

Both movements oppose each other in tempo (*Allegro/Larghetto*), in character (wild/ introverted), and also in their proportions: the second is twice as long as the first. The considerable role granted to the *Larghetto* can be interpreted programmatically as a subjectification of the world. Dramaturgically, the second movement sounds like a subjective reaction to the representation of a chaotic, inhuman world in the first. Moreover, the *Larghetto* is anticipated in the *Allegro*, and the *Allegro* is recalled painfully in the *Larghetto*.

## Analysis 2: Enlarging Mahler's Topical Map

In the following topical analysis a Mahlerian paradigm is tested. I described it in my analysis of Mahler's *Wunderhorn* music in my thesis (2011). The analogy came to mind the first time I listened to *Sekstet*, before I read the composer's words corroborating my intuition. In the last of Penderecki's *For the End of the Millennium* lectures he speaks about Mahler as a central musical figure, perhaps even a role model for him:

Mahler's cycle of nine symphonies constitutes the most absorbing and [...] the most autonomous record of the world and mankind in a dramatic moment of crisis – a record in which we can find ourselves. Mahler is our contemporary. [...] I find myself unable to see a better example to which we could turn at the present crossroads than Mahler.<sup>6</sup>

---

4 The isotopy of the 'inner voice' has been described as a fundamental category in a hermeneutic of nineteenth-century music. See Joan Grimalt, *Mapping Musical Signification* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020), 207, 254, 270, 340, 342.

5 More about the forest and its symbolic implications in Raymond Monelle, *The Musical Topic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2006), 101.

6 Krzysztof Penderecki, *Labyrinth of Time. Five Addresses for the End of the Millennium* (Chapel Hill: Hinshaw Music, 1998, 58-59). Quoted by Marcin Gmys, "Penderecki and

My final topical analysis of Mahler's early output resulted in this semiotic square<sup>7</sup>. It groups together four great topical groups – or isotopies – that, I observed, stand in relations of opposition, affinity, or contrariety with one another: see figure n. 1.

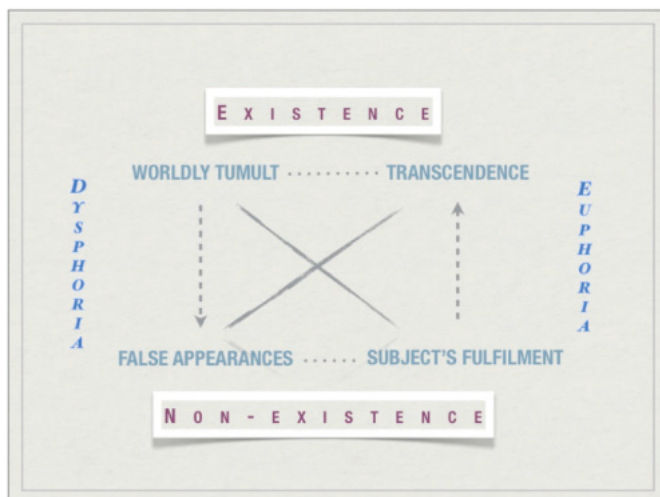


Figure 1. A semiotic square with four semantic fields, based on a topical analysis of Mahler's *Wunderhorn* music<sup>8</sup>

In Penderecki's *Sekstet*, perhaps in a more specific, direct way than in Mahler's cosmography, the opposition between the Subject and the *Wordly Tumult* seems to offer a valuable hermeneutic clue. Not only does it allow us to classify the topical findings regarding the work, but it also provides a dramaturgical clue to how to interpret those findings in their temporal sequence. Many might speak here of a narrative thread. Rather than a narrative, however, I see here the representation of an inner discourse. This discourse reproduces images, characters and situations that respond more to musical-theatrical traditions than to any literary narrative. That is why I prefer to use the expression musical *dramaturgy*, instead of musical *narrative*. Penderecki's discourse, analogously to Mahler's, sounds rather like a representation of certain unpleasant external phenomena (in the first movement) and a plaintive reaction to them (in the second movement) from a subject-

Mahler: Drawing Parallels", in Krzysztof Penderecki – *Music in the Intertextual Era*. *Studies and Interpretation*, ed. by M. Tomaszewski, E. Siemadaj (Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 2005), 266. Marcin Gmys dedicates his valuable paper specifically to "drawing parallels" between Penderecki and Mahler.

<sup>7</sup> More about semiotic squares in Joan Grimalt, *Mapping Musical Signification*, 116f.

<sup>8</sup> Joan Grimalt, *Gustav Mahler's Wunderhorn Orchestral Songs: a Topical Analysis and a Semiotic Square*, unpublished PhD (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona 2011).

tive, inner perspective. Both the external and the internal descriptions mimic the stream-of-consciousness style of early twentieth-century literature (Schnitzler, Proust, Woolf, Joyce) and therefore make extensive use of rhetorical devices, to convey a sense of genuine, ephemeral live temporality.<sup>9</sup>

### Analysis 3: Two Isotopies and Some Examples

After the aforementioned opposition, there follows a list containing some of the most remarkable topical references found in Penderecki's *Sekstet*. The list and its classification appear to update two typically Mahlerian categories. In the first movement, the representation of a loud, brutal world seems to have the upper hand. The second movement, on the other hand, appears to give voice above all to the subject's plaintive reaction to the predominant state of things in the first part of the work. These two categories can be approached as isotopies, that is, as groups of different topical findings that share a common semantic root.<sup>10</sup> In my thesis, I called both isotopies in mutual opposition the 'Worldly Tumult' and the 'Lyrical Subject', respectively.

The original German for 'Worldly Tumult' is *Weltgetümmel*, following the lead of Adorno, who describes it as that which Mahler's music seeks to transcend.<sup>11</sup> In his turn, Adorno took the term from two different Mahler songs: *Das himmlische Leben*, which closes the fourth symphony, and *Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen*, where the term appears as the antithesis of everything desirable.

#### WORDLY TUMULT

- Naked Dysphoric March as a symbol of inhumanity, following the tradition of Schubert's, Mahler's, or Shostakovich's music (I, b. 1–4, see ex. 1; b. 245ff.).

---

9 For more about the literary stream-of-consciousness, see Melvin J. Friedman, *Stream of Consciousness. A Study in Literary Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955); Robert Humphrey, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955). I am indebted to Cristina G. Rojo for these references.

10 For more about the semiotic categories of *isotopies*, see Joan Grimalt, *Mapping Musical Signification*, 16f.

11 Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler. Eine musikalische Physiognomik* [Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy], transl. by E. Jephcott, in *Die musikalischen Monographien. Gesammelte Schriften* [The Musical Monographs. Collected Writings], volume 13 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2003), 154. "Mahler's Symphonien [...] haben ihr Substrat an dem, worüber Musik hinauswill, am Gegenteil von Durchbruch, das doch von diesem mitgesetzt wird. Die Vierte Symphonie nennt es das "weltlich Getümmel," Hegel den verkehrten "Weltlauf," der vorab dem Bewußtsein als ein "Entgegengesetztes und Leeres" gegenübertritt.

- Grotesque March alla Mahler (*Burgmusik*)<sup>12</sup> (I, b. 50–55, 354–367; II, b. 181–183).
- March and *Dubitatio* (incongruous pairing), (I, b. 77–84).
- Laughter as a symbol of stupidity (I, b. 10–16, see ex. 3; b. 165–169).
- *Deutsch* waltz as a symbol of worldliness, as in Chopin's *Ballades*, as well as in Mahler's songs and symphonies (I, b. 10–18, see ex. 3; b. 84–87, 165–172).
- Chaotic, cacophonous clusters of soloistic manifestations as a symbol of the inability to communicate adequately (I, b. 43–50, b. 71–75, 97–105).
- Shouts and blows as symbols of violence (I, b. 291ff., 381–388; II, b. 87f., 256f.).
- Mechanical movement as a symbol of dehumanisation (I, b. 133–142, 193–215, see ex. 6).
- Slapstick parody of tonal, banal music as a symbol of a foolish, superficial world (*Burgmusik*)<sup>13</sup>, (I, b. 50–55, 231ff., 394ff.; II, b. 140–142).
- Absence of any logical discursive rationale, as a symbol of an absurd world (I, b. 274–281).

Allegro moderato (♩ = 104)

Example 1. K. Penderecki, *Sekstet/I*: beginning

- 12 More about the *Burgmusik*, a Mahlerian emblem that would also inspire Shostakovich or Schnittke, in Joan Grimalt, *Gustav Mahler's Wunderhorn*.
- 13 Schoenberg was initially taken aback by this aspect of Mahler's vocabulary, which struck him as 'vulgar'. Later he would correct his opinion: see Arnold Schönberg, *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg* (New York: Philosophical Library, 2008): chapter 2. For more about the *Burgmusik*, a Mahlerian emblem that would also inspire Shostakovich or Schnittke, see Joan Grimalt, *Gustav Mahler's Wunderhorn*.

## LYRICAL SUBJECT

- Rhythmic motionlessness as a symbol of reflection at a distance from the world (II, beginning: see ex. 2; b. 97–106).
- Lament, *passus duriusculus*, katabasis. (I, b. 122–127, 158–164, 249–259; II beginning, b. 108–115, 222ff., 246–248, 269ff.).
- Elegiac tone, *funebre* (II, b. 200ff. 'Elegy' 1st stanza, b. 222 2nd stanza; b. 249ff., see ex. 7).
- *Tremolo* as a traditional symbol of fear and psychological alarm (II, b. 82–85, 90ff., 119–125, 143–147).
- Internalization to the piano (I: b. 85ff).
- *Lontano*, far-away music<sup>14</sup> (II: 238–248).
- French Overture as a symbol of seriousness and of a connection to a splendid, European past (II, b. 11–13).
- The same signified, with multi-tonal references and consonant minimalism (II, b. 125ff.).
- Intertextual quotations of Mahler (II, b. 173ff., 185ff., see ex. 4 and 5).
- Traditional rhetorical gestures, i.e. fragmentation or *dubitatio*, as signs of a subjective, genuine, spontaneous statement (II b. 64–72, 148–153, 249ff.).
- Heroic knock-motif (I, b. 256ff., final elegy; II, b. 222ff.).
- Anger (*feroce* II, b. 260).
- Lack of a bass as a traditional symbol of a spiritual desire (II, b. 269ff.).

With regard to movement, the first part features two different marches, a swift *Deutsch* waltz and some mechanical movement. They all fit the isotopy of *Worldly Tumult*. The naked, dysphoric march that opens the *Sekstet* is significative of what it does not do. It does not sing or speak, and there is no harmony, only this tragic, apparently senseless marching in the void, approaching the listener *in crescendo* as a symbol of growing dehumanisation: see ex. 1.

---

14 This Mahlerian musical topos – or *Charakter*, in his own terminology – was described by Constantin Floros as *Musik aus weitester Ferne* ('music from a remote distance'). See Constantin Floros, *Gustav Mahler*, 3 volumes: II. *Mahler und die Symphonik des 19. Jahrhunderts in neuer Deutung. Zur Grundlegung einer zeitgemäßen musikalischen Exegetik* [Mahler and 19th-Century Symphonic Music in a New Interpretation. Towards the Foundation of a Contemporary Musical Exegesis] (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1987), 387.

This beginning can be related to the dysphoric march in A minor that opens Mahler's Sixth Symphony. In *Sekstet*, however, the reference to Mahler's most tragic symphony appears to be altered down to A flat.

**Larghetto** (♩ = 58)

Clarinetto (in La)

Corno (in Fa)

Violino

Viola

Violoncello

Pianoforte

*p*

*dim.*

*pp*

6

5

Example 2. K. Penderecki, *Sekstet*/II: beginning

Instead, right from the beginning the second movement is characterised by a distinctive sense of motionlessness. The lack of a perceptible pulse could be understood as correlating with a reflective, mournful attitude at a distance from the world, maybe even as a symbol of a disconnection from the body and the ground: see ex. 2. In the first movement, a reference to the *Deutsch waltz* and 'laughter' are encapsulated as a second idea, right after the introductory 'naked march' we just heard: see ex. 3.

Cl.

Hr.

*mf*

*cresc.*

*f*

Example 3. K. Penderecki, *Sekstet*/I: b. 9–15



Another quotation in the second movement of *Sekstet* corresponds to Mahler's Fifth Symphony. Equally, the second movement appears to convey both the *Wordly Tumult* and a subjective reaction to it. Even the diastematic and the hint at F minor match: see ex. 4.

Bedeutend langsamer

Example 4. G. Mahler, Symphony n. 5/II: b. 74–82

This characteristic gesture (c3 – d-flat4 – c4) on the clarinet, and then on the flute, French horn and bassoon, combines a rhetorical *exclamatio* with the *pianto*, i.e., the dissonant second-interval that acts as a traditional correlate to 'weeping'. It accompanies the elegiac march that functions as the secondary theme in the second movement of Mahler's Fifth.<sup>15</sup> Penderecki quotes it in b. 173–192 of *Sekstet*'s second movement, combined with a tritone-distorted version of the bass accompaniment in Mahler's 'elegiac march': see ex. 5.

15 Constantin Floros set this musical gesture in a list of Mahlerian *Schreie und Wehrufe* [Screams and Cries of Pain]. See Constantin Floros, *Gustav Mahler*, 392.

[illegible]

Example 5. K. Penderecki, *Sekstet*/II, b. 173–175

Two more examples. The topos of ‘mechanical movement’ as a condemnation of a dehumanised society is not to be found in Mahler, only makes its appearance later in the twentieth century. And here, in the first movement of *Sekstet*: see ex. 6.

133  
*f*  
*pesante*  
*ff pesante*  
*sim.*  
*ff pesante*  
*sim.*  
*f*  
*cresc.*

Example 6. K. Penderecki, *Sekstet/II*, b. 133–138

Cl. *funebre*  
*p*  
*mf*  
*p*  
*p*  
*mf*  
*p*  
*f*  
*mf*  
*cresc.*  
*p*  
*funebre*  
*mf*  
*p*  
*mf*  
*cresc.*  
*p*  
*funebre*  
*mf*  
*p*

Example 7. K. Penderecki, *Sekstet/II*, b. 249–252

Instead, towards the end of the second movement, a passage bears the indication *funebre*. Besides the obvious reference to Chopin's funeral march, since that work is also set in B-flat minor, the passage is marked by a rhetorical, highly subjective version of the main elegiac theme that contrasts sharply with the dehumanized, mechanical sounds of the first movement: see ex. 7.

In summary, what I hear above all else in *Sekstet* is a representation of an inner discourse, i.e., a discourse intended not as a message to the world outside, but rather as a monologue to oneself.<sup>16</sup> This discourse reproduces images, characters and situations that can be related to musical-theatrical traditions.<sup>17</sup>

Penderecki's discourse, analogously to Mahler's, sounds rather like the representation of certain unpleasant external phenomena (in the first movement) and the plaintive reaction to them (in the second movement) from a subjective, inner perspective. These two isotopies and some of the musical topoi they gather together can be described as standing in a structural relationship of mutual exclusion: see

Table 1. Two opposing isotopies in Penderecki's *Sekstet*

<b>'Worldly Tumult'</b>	<b>Plaintive, subjective reaction</b>
Naked Dysphoric March	Rhythmic Motionlessness
Grotesque March	
<i>Deutsch</i> Waltz	French Overture
Mechanical Movement	Internalisation
Slapstick Parody	Mahler Quotations
Laughter, Shouts, Blows.	Elegiac Tone, <i>passus duriusculus</i> .
Chaotic, Cacophonous Clusters.	Tonality, Consonant Minimalism.
Absence of Discursive Logic	Rhetorical Gestures
Tremolo	Heroic Knock-Motif

16 With regard to the isotopy of the 'inner voice,' see footnote n. 2.

17 For more on this theoretical model of musical representation, see Joan Grimalt, "Schubert's Impromptu op. 90 n. 1 in C minor: A Performer's Analysis", in *Musical Analysis. Historia-Theoria-Praxis*, volume 8, ed. by A. Granat-Janki (Wrocław: The Karol Lipiński Academy of Music in Wrocław), 2024.

## Conclusions

In his mature works, Penderecki leaves behind his youthful avantgarde endeavours. As a consequence, he also gives up his famous 'absolute music,' which was one of the most cherished myths of mid-twentieth century music. Henceforth, his works now follow an idea that strives to be delivered, a musical message that prioritises communicating a life experience, *Muzyka jako doświadczenie* from which the title of our conference in Kraków derives its name.

As regards dramaturgy, this music brings to mind the literary technique of stream-of-consciousness that was typical of the narrative of the early twentieth century, and which was anticipated and developed in the instrumental music of Gustav Mahler and Aleksandr Skriabin. It implies eruptions and interruptions, a seemingly spontaneous discourse, without clearly delimited sections; many rhetorical gestures, signalling the direct agency of a subject represented as staggering and struggling for their means of expression; the lack of a perceptible pulse; as well as the anticipating vision of the second movement's elegy in the first, and the retrospect of the first in the second movement.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, in Mahler's Fifth and Sixth symphonies there seems to be no way out of the violent crush between a cruel, dumb world and the suffering subject. In these works, as will be the case with the late *Song of the Earth*, a refined aestheticism appears as the only comfort for the artist as creator. The promise of salvation proposed in Mahler's Second and Eighth symphonies seems to be out of reach in the middle period of his output. In another remarkable parallel the music in Penderecki's *Sekstet*, seems to exhaust itself in a similar way, where a lamenting tone wades into traditional sounds and references, in a retrospective move. This matches the plight of a represented postmodern subject, forced to react and to interact creatively with a world that does not respond to the expectations of a sensitive, educated musician. In Penderecki's own words,

The earlier intention of refounding the world gives way to the need for internalization and to describe the drama of existence. I could say, in Mahler's words, that my music refers to "the whole man," to the "feeling, thinking, breathing, suffering man."<sup>19</sup>

Seen from a hermeneutical perspective, Penderecki's subjective, internalising shift away from a life without a transcendent horizon might point to an aesthetic occu-

---

17 About the 'inner voice' isotopy, see footnote n. 2.

18 Penderecki, *Labyrinth of Time*, p. 60f., quoted in Marcin Gmys, "Penderecki and Mahler", 266f.

pation, to music in particular. To his own words, that seem to confirm our interpretation, we could add the famous question and answer of the Viennese Robert Musil (1880–1942), as he wonders “What remains of art?” And he replies, “We remain, modified.”<sup>20</sup>

### Bibliography

- Adorno, Theodor W. *Mahler. Eine musikalische Physiognomik* [Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy], transl. by E. Jephcott. In *Die musikalischen Monographien. Gesammelte Schriften* [The Musical Monographs. Collected Writings], volume 13. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2003.
- Berlioz, Hector. *Traité d'instrumentation et d'orchestration modernes* [Treatise on Instrumentation]. Paris: Lemoine 1855, <http://conquest.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/c/c5/IMSLP88915-PM-LP28373-Traite1855REc.pdf>. (last accessed: 20.06.2025).
- Floros, Constantin. *Gustav Mahler, 3 volumes: II. Mahler und die Symphonik des 19. Jahrhunderts in neuer Deutung. Zur Grundlegung einer zeitgemäßen musikalischen Exegetik* [Mahler and 19th-Century Symphonic Music in a New Interpretation. Towards the Foundation of a Contemporary Musical Exegesis]. Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1987.
- Friedman, Melvin J. *Stream of Consciousness. A Study in Literary Method*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955.
- Gmys, Marcin, “Penderecki and Mahler: Drawing Parallels”. In *Krzysztof Penderecki – Music in the Intertextual Era. Studies and Interpretation*, ed. by M. Tomaszewski, E. Siemadaj. Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 2005, 265–286.
- Grimalt, Joan. *Gustav Mahler's Wunderhorn Orchestral Songs: a Topical Analysis and a Semiotic Square*, unpublished PhD, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona 2011.
- Grimalt, Joan. *Mapping Musical Signification*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer 2020.
- Grimalt, Joan. “Schubert's Impromptu op. 90 n. 1 in C minor: A Performer's Analysis”. In *Musical Analysis. Historia–Theoria–Praxis*, volume 8, ed. by A. Granat-Janki. Wrocław: Akademia Muzyczna im. Karola Lipińskiego we Wrocławiu, 2024.
- Harnoncourt, Nikolaus. *Mozart Dialoge* [Mozart Dialogues]. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2009.
- Humphrey, Robert. *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955.
- Krzysztof Penderecki – Music in the Intertextual Era. Studies and Interpretation*, ed. by M. Tomaszewski, E. Siemadaj. Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 2005.
- Malecka-Contamin, Barbara. *Krzysztof Penderecki: Style et matériaux* [Krzysztof Penderecki: Style and Material]. Paris: Éditions Kimé 1997.
- Monelle, Raymond. *The Musical Topic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2006.
- Penderecki, Krzysztof. *Labyrinth of Time. Five Addresses for the End of the Millennium*. Chapel Hill: Hinshaw Music, 1998.
- Schönberg, Arnold. *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*. New York: Philosophical Library, 2008.
- Tomaszewski, Mieczysław. “Penderecki. Changes and Nodes in His Creative Path”. In *Krzysztof Penderecki – Music in the Intertextual Era. Studies and Interpretation*, ed. by M. Tomaszewski, E. Siemadaj. Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 2005, 21–38.

19 Robert Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. Quoted by Nikolaus Harnoncourt, *Mozart Dialoge* [Mozart Dialogues] (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2009).

Tomaszewski, Mieczysław, *Penderecki. Bunt i wyzwolenie* [Rebellion and Liberation], volume 2: *Odzyskiwanie raju* [Reclaiming Paradise]. Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne SA, 2009.

Wójtowicz Ewa, "Sextett für Klarinette, Horn, Streichtrio und Klavier". In Tomaszewski, Mieczysław; Małecka, Teresa (eds.), *Twórczość Krzysztofa Pendereckiego. Od genezy do rezonansu* [The Creativity of Krzysztof Penderecki From Genesis to Resonance], volume 7: *Nowy początek 1993–. Faza Credo, Sekstetu i Pieśni przemijania* [A New Beginning 1993–. The Credo, Sextet and Songs of Passing]. Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie 2013, 117–124.

## Summary

In its two complementary movements, Penderecki's *Sekstet* (2000) presents a dualistic cosmovision, instead of the triadic one common to Christian culture. In this dualism, which goes back to Plato and Aristotle and finds its modern climax in Descartes' philosophy, mind and body are considered connected, but distinct. In *sekstet* the first movement appears to enact the World while the second correlates with the Subject reacting to it. Within such a chaotic, inhuman world the Subject cannot be satisfied, hence the mourning tone in the second movement. The subjective reaction is already announced in the initial movement. Similarly, the World makes a parallel appearance in the second movement, maybe as some kind of reminiscence. In other words, the late romantic 'Inner Voice' that was announced in the first movement finds an extended development in the second.

*Sekstet* includes intertextual references to Mahler's music, as well as to a number of earlier models. Some of these allusions are plausibly conscious. The represented Subject, one could say, turns to the music of the past to find a genuine voice within the problematic World depicted in the first movement. It is hardly a coincidence that the isotopy of the 'Worldly Tumult' (*Weltgetümmel*) has been categorised as a central focus in Mahler's output.<sup>21</sup> There, as here, it appears in contrast to the lyrical subject, and is manifested in grotesque marches, violent blows and exclamations, mechanical movements, and strepitous laughter. For Mahler, the Transcendent appears as a horizon that, a century later, is no more in sight. In *Sekstet's* cosmovision, however, the only way out of post-modern nihilism seems to be a certain aestheticism, i.e., art as a shelter for humanity.

In this hermeneutic, topical, rhetorical, and intertextual analysis I was able to adapt and use traditional methods originally conceived for late romantic music, and even earlier. This retrospective stance seems to match the work's musical style, as well as a significant part of Penderecki's oeuvre. In his decision as a composer and as a conductor to leave all that is avantgarde behind, it is easy to see an implicit critical questioning of our contemporary world.

---

21 Joan Grimalt, *Gustav Mahler's Wunderhorn*.

**Keywords:** Penderecki, Mahler, hermeneutics, analysis, Sekstet

**Joan Grimalt Santacana** – Orchestra conductor (Vienna University), linguist (Barcelona University), and PhD in musicology (UAB) with a thesis on Gustav Mahler supervised by the late Raymond Monelle.

After a decade devoted exclusively to interpretation and conducting, primarily opera in Central Europe, Joan returned to Catalonia where he combines practical musicianship with teaching and research at the Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya. Notably, he was involved with the Vienna Volksoper from 1995 to 1997. As a pianist, his focus has been on German art song.

Joan's primary research area is Musical Hermeneutics, particularly focusing on the intersections with language and literature such as rhetoric, prosody, and dramaturgy. In recent years, he has also participated in research projects on performance studies, where his experiences as a performer and teacher converge in a hermeneutical, performer-oriented analysis.

Grimalt is a member of the international research group on Musical Signification led by Eero Tarasti. He has presented and published much of his research at the group's regular international conferences. In his book *Mapping Musical Signification* (Springer, 2020), Joan compiled his colleagues' and his own research on musical interpretation into a systematic textbook. A follow-up volume, *Analysing Musical Signification. A Hermeneutical, Rhetorical Approach to Western Art Music*, which focuses on a theory of musical discourse and dramaturgy, is scheduled for publication in 2025.