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POSTCOLONIAL BIFURCATION: ON JOHN SHARPLEY'S *EMPTINESS*

On 2 February 2003 John Sharpley's *Emptiness* (*Kōng*, 空) premiered at the then recently opened Esplanade concert hall.¹ This is Singapore's premier concert venue, built as part of a sustained government effort to develop the arts industry as a key sector of the economy. As an architectural landmark, the Esplanade (which also includes a theatre and other spaces) expresses the contradiction that arises when cultures meet: in this case, the result of a difference in climate. It is said that the London-based firm Michael Wilford & Partners and the Singapore firm DP Architects, which designed the building with a glass exterior, had not accounted for the disastrous costs of trying to air-condition a tropical greenhouse. Hence a last-minute solution was cobbled together.² Individual shades were secured onto each of the panes that made up the round exterior of the Esplanade, giving an impression of the spiky tropical fruit called the durian, by which name this S\$600 million (approximately £250 million in 2002) building is affectionately known among the local population.

As befitting an artist featured in a building with a global genesis, John Sharpley is himself an international transplant. Born in 1955 in Houston, Texas, he grew up in a family of preachers. He was raised in Texas and completed his musical studies at the National Conservatory of Music (Strasbourg, France, Dip. 1979), the University of Houston (BA 1980, MA 1982), and Boston University (DMA, 1990), where he studied primarily with David Del Tredici. Sharpley initially moved to Singapore in 1986 to serve as the co-director of Boston University's now-defunct Diploma in Music course and has since worked as a freelance composer, with numerous local engagements as well as appearances in Thailand, Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand and the United States.

The trajectory of Sharpley's personal development, gleaned from an interview conducted on 20 May 2013 and which I will argue is expressed in *Emptiness*, is characterised by the split away from one culture to approach another.³ From the Christian background of his youth, which he perceives to be 'monolithic', Sharpley gradually and determinedly found a way out. The path to Singapore consisted of an early childhood interest in India, a 1974 trip to Jerusalem where he had mystical experiences, the dawning realisation around that time that Islam and Judeo-Christianity could be located along a continuum and the discovery of Zen Buddhism in 1982–3, which was augmented by an interest in musical devotees of Asian religions such as John Cage. In 1987 and 1990 Sharpley visited various parts of India, including Chennai, the Tirupati temple in the state of Andhra Pradesh, the Chennakesava temple in the state of Karnataka and a

monastery in the state of Sikkim. During these trips, he studied meditation and had several mystical experiences. His life partner of 21 years, Raj, was of Indian descent and conversant with ancient Indian aesthetics and philosophy. Sharpley feels 'at home' in Singapore and made a point of telling me that he has spent the last three decades in Asia.

Sharpley's life is reflected in *Emptiness*, a sixteen-movement work for Western and Chinese string quartets, a chorus that sings only vowels, a percussionist and two narrators who recite the text. Drawing on the Taoist *Tao Te Ching*, the Buddhist *Heart of Wisdom Sutra* and Japanese Zen poems to explore the concept of emptiness in multiple ways, the work is characterised by a harmonic language drawing on a range of tonal, post-tonal and Chinese pentatonic resources.⁴ As with many new works composed in Singapore, *Emptiness* was first performed at the Esplanade and little heard thereafter.⁵ The music reviewer Dawn Eng described the work at its premiere as 'a stream of emotions [. . .] delicate balance [. . .] unique sensation of pure sound that makes [it] aesthetic yet approachable. Sharpley's eloquence on *Emptiness*, perhaps a reflection of his own personal and spiritual journey, came across as honest, and has left an indelible experience *in the void of my experience*'.⁶ Beyond musical experience, the work provoked Eng to articulate her own understanding of emptiness as 'the void of [her] experience', which accommodates *Emptiness* by allowing it to make an 'indelible' mark. That last tantalising clause gives a sense of how some audience members were 'surprised and curious' (in Sharpley's memory of conversations with them) to encounter the concept of Asian philosophical emptiness, perhaps especially because it was being articulated by an American composer.

While Sharpley heard directly from the 'surprised' audience members, who were generally positive, he was also aware via hearsay of others in Singapore who were surprised in a negative way. Why would an American do this? What is this about? These listeners seemed to feel that there was something untoward about Sharpley's intercultural approach to art. Was it because they felt that an American could not possibly understand Buddhist philosophy? I have been unable to trace these comments, but an anecdote may clarify the thinking of the work's detractors. When I made a presentation on *Emptiness* to my then-fellow graduate students at Duke University, one of them called a particular pentatonic passage 'racist', and another described it as 'cheesy'. From a certain perspective, Sharpley's take on Asian philosophy and Chinese pentatonicism is seen as a form of opportunism, a colonialist appropriation of another culture, possibly without having fully understood it. Why the 'cheesy', stereotypical portrayal of Chinese music through pentatonicism? In fact, pentatonicism is the basic foundation of the ancient music theory of Chinese music (before 221 BCE), the scale tones of which are *gong-shang-jue-zhi-yu*. Nevertheless, the point here is that my colleagues were convinced from the outset, based on their impression of the musical sound and their knowledge of the national origins of the composer, that the work must be presenting a caricature of Chinese culture.

Sharpley's response to the incident is revealing: 'Would it not be racist if I were Chinese? Would Chinese composers writing string quartets in the style of Ravel be racist?'⁷ For Sharpley, the musical syncretism of *Emptiness* reflects the dilemma of what he calls the 'dichotomy [...] of two lives', American and Asian. For him, 'there is nothing absolute about your Chineseness'. 'Western' and 'Asian' musics are not insular 'paradigms' to which he subscribes. Everything is 'interchangeable', 'transferable': Asia is not 'the other side'. Sharpley told me that he had attended Tibetan Buddhist lessons in preparation for the composition of *Emptiness*, and he listens extensively to pentatonic Buddhist music.

Whereas my Duke colleagues had received *Emptiness* in precisely the terms of the 'dichotomy of two lives', with the discrete American identity of the composer coming into contact with the discrete Chinese identity of pentatonicism, Sharpley's discourse emphasises exchange and transfer. In theory, both perspectives should be taken into consideration in any responsible criticism. In practice, however, criticism and analysis of intercultural, hybrid or syncretic music – music that somehow combines elements of two or more cultures – has generally emphasised two-becoming-one, or syncretisation, rather than one-becoming-two, or bifurcation. Furthermore, analytical writing often neglects the *process* of syncretisation and presents its end result or final state. In this article, I analyse how *Emptiness* expresses bifurcation in the musical form of two movements. Furthermore, I connect formal bifurcation to Sharpley's biography, showing how he views East and West as opposed and how he moves across cultural spheres. I should note here that the terms 'East' and 'West' represent regions in the popular global imaginary that are undeniably present in cultural life, even if there is a disjunction between the imagination and the particulars of migration and diasporic existence in variegated social milieus.⁸

The dominance of the framework of intercultural syncretism or 'combination' can be observed both in composers' discourse and in analytical writings. Chou Wen-chung speaks of the 'remerger' of East and West (1968, p. 19), while Toru Takemitsu shifted from an earlier position that Japanese and Western music are incompatible to a late aesthetic attitude of one 'vast universal cultural egg' (1995, p. 91). Yayoi Uno Everett, in the edited volume *Locating East Asia in Western Art Music*, proposes three categories of combination: 'transference', 'syncretism' and 'synthesis'. While transference is based on vague impressions of East Asian musics, syncretism involves the use of actual East Asian instruments and musical elements, and synthesis requires that different musical-cultural elements be integrated in a 'distinctive Western idiom' such that they are 'no longer discernible as separable elements' (Everett 2004, p. 19). It is perhaps against the preponderance of 'combination' discourse that bifurcation or splitting as the precise *opposite* of combination is worthy of remark. (I shall use the term 'syncretism' throughout this article in the general sense of 'combination' rather than in Everett's specific sense.)

Bifurcation is the one of the lesser-known concepts which Gilles Deleuze uses to express his philosophy of difference: 'Because the present and the past

are two inverse degrees, they are distinct in nature; they are the differentiation, the bifurcation of the whole' (2004, p. 48). What this means is that from the perspective of a singular being (say, oneself in the past and oneself in the present), there is not a static but rather a dynamic 'whole', or unity. This dynamic unity is not the same throughout a given time span; rather, any two points should be regarded as distinct because the time interval between them has *changed* one, however incrementally. A dynamic unity is not an insular concept (for instance, a 'masterwork') but is conceptualised as the whole of (musical-cultural) existence in flux. Bifurcation occurs when existence bifurcates, so that something new emerges. The crucial aspect of bifurcation that we should grasp is that it is the process by which something new emerges. The bifurcations related to Sharpley and *Emptiness* in the previous paragraphs should be understood as processes by which something new emerges, whether this is the formal process of musical elements coming apart in the music or the biographical process by which the composer came to see East as distinct from West:

1. Formal bifurcation. How is bifurcation expressed in musical form? This relates to how the fusion of Western dissonance and Chinese pentatonicism bifurcates into entire musical sections in movements 5 and 11 of *Emptiness*.
2. Biographical bifurcation. How did Sharpley emerge from his 'monolithic', Christian, Texan upbringing to arrive at the point where he reached a personal understanding of Chinese culture and was able to express it in *Emptiness*? That is, how did 'China' emerge within his early world view? This is a question of how the East emerges from a process that originated in the West. As I will show below, a concrete answer can be found in the historical particulars of the composer's biography.

Although bifurcation is usually understood as 'splitting into two', and this definition does apply to formal and biographical bifurcation, its Deleuzian meaning implies much more. Unlike simply cutting an apple in two, bifurcation is continuous and intricate. The present points towards an imminent future, bifurcating from the past; every successive moment brings another past-present bifurcation, giving rise, in principle, to endless possibilities for differentiation, which, in Deleuze's ontology, is the actual emergence of the new. What is thus crucial is not that formal and biographical 'splitting' exist, but that the ontology of difference is critically defined by an intricate bifurcatory process which – even more crucially – results in multiplicity. For instance, I use over 2000 words to explain formal bifurcation in movement 5 of *Emptiness*, in which bifurcation occurs repeatedly at different structural levels. The mushrooming of differences is perhaps best captured in Deleuze's explanation of bifurcation via the metaphor of a maze, which consists of endlessly bifurcating paths in a 'baroque labyrinth' (Deleuze 2006, p. 70). Bifurcation is reflected in the many paths which Sharpley has walked in his life; for instance, the several mystical anecdotes he recounts in connection with his understanding of Buddhist and

Taoist philosophical concepts collectively express his biographical bifurcation. Sharpley has reconfigured cultural elements he encountered in his life to create an idiosyncratic world view.⁹

The logical opposite of bifurcation is syncretism. As mentioned, syncretism is often expressed in the analytical discourse on avant-garde, experimental or new music that draws on Asian music, culture and philosophy, such as Chinese calligraphy and the Chinese divination text *I Ching* in Chou's works, or the Japanese garden in Takemitsu's music. Perhaps the most important illustration of how the combinatory discourse of syncretism saturates analytical writing is found by analysing works that are more accurately described as expressing bifurcation or splitting. Peter Burt has traced the evolution of Takemitsu's thinking on the subject of the relation between Japanese and Western music. He uses the composer's relatively early *November Steps* (1967, for orchestra, *birva* and *shakuhachi*) as the sole extended analytical example to elucidate the bifurcatory thinking of the early Takemitsu. In contrast to Takemitsu's later espousal of a 'vast universal cultural egg', the composer expresses his earlier belief in the incompatibility of Japanese and Western music in *November Steps*, which comprises bifurcated sections for orchestra that contrast with sections for the Japanese instruments alone. In his analytical notes, however, Peter Burt leaves the formal bifurcation of the work aside and instead focuses on points of syncretism (Burt 2001, p. 116–17). Microtones are *common* to both Western avant-garde music and Japanese music; in the latter, pitch bending is applied, for instance pulling on strings which have been plucked in order to change the pitch. More important, Takemitsu uses common pitches in *November Steps* to link orchestral sections with the sections for the two solo Japanese instruments. It is not that Burt's observations are inaccurate, but that the impetus to find similarity between musical segments in analytical writing means that there is a constant veering towards syncretism, so much so that the bifurcatory aspect of the music is neglected. This article addresses two aspects that are missing in the current literature: 'topographical' bifurcation, where the musical form (the 'state') is bifurcated (as in *November Steps*), and the process – which I call Deleuzian bifurcation – by which the musical form *becomes* bifurcated repeatedly.

While an account of Sharpley's overall output is beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth noting that his output has shown remarkable stylistic consistency, embracing a mixture of dissonance and modality that harks back both to his mentor, Del Tredici, and to mainstream American composers such as Copland. As is to be expected, not all of Sharpley's works are intercultural in nature, but a significant portion of his output draws on Asian musics, aesthetics and philosophy. His early interest in musical exoticism is reflected in the interlocking 'gamelan' sections of the tuba concerto *Episodes* (1986); and *Emptiness*, which dates from sixteen years later, shows greater compositional and conceptual-spiritual subtlety, particularly in relation to the Buddhist and Taoist texts it incorporates. Before we turn to the work, however, we need to visit its critical and biographical contexts.

Biographical Bifurcation

Sharpley's move away from America, physically and culturally, resulted in his conceptualisation of East and West as separate spheres, and thus orientalism is the obvious starting point for our discussion. Edward Said's (1978) understanding of the exotic Orient as an object of the Western imagination has exercised much influence over the past two decades or so. In musicology, the debate between Jonathan Bellman and Matthew Head over the ethical conundrum of exoticism numbers among the more prominent discussions originating from Said. In the introduction to his edited volume *The Exotic in Western Music*, Bellman argues for an appreciation of orientalism as a mode of Western imagination: orientalism allows us to access the 'elemental' passions of sexuality or violence as embodied in others.¹⁰ For Head, however, the articles in Bellman's volume exhibited 'a tone of defensiveness, a lack of explicitness about critical framework and a recourse to the 'musical' as apparently furnishing some realm free of culture and ideology' (2003, p. 218). We could read Head's criticism as directed against what he views as an uncritical acceptance and appreciation of 'elemental' sexuality or violence, for these traits are embodied in musical Others. In response, Bellman writes of a 'doctrinaire postcolonialism that is most unblinkingly put forward by Matthew Head' (2011, p. 428). Much more can be said about this debate, but the main point here is that the level of critique deployed against musical orientalism can vary quite drastically, from utter castigation of stereotypes to an appreciation of 'elemental' traits of humanity, which can be gleaned in spite of their presentation in stereotypes. Other publications of note include Ralph Locke's extended surveys of musical exoticism in two monographs (2009, 2015), and Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh's *Western Music and Its Others* (200), which deals more generally with musical representations of cultural and racial others across multiple musical genres.

Standing apart from the musicological literature premised on the framework of orientalism is the theory of cultural 'fragmentation' in East Asian new music from the 1970s onwards, as proposed by Christian Utz. Here, Utz suggests, elements of traditional music are deconstructed ('fragmented') by avant-garde techniques, thereby destabilising both Asian nationalist conceptions of selfhood and Western stereotypes of Asian culture (2010). As I will show below, in Sharpley's case we are undoubtedly working with polarised stereotypes of East and West. His outlook is shaped by a world view that emerged in the 1960s in the United States, which had recently acquired a global purview along with the nation's superpower status in the postwar era. This was the era of rock and roll, the sexual revolution, marijuana, the civil rights movement (and in the following decades, the feminist and gay rights movements), white Buddhism and yoga – in a word, the hippie generation. What of the relation between Singapore and United States, as a particular instance of East and West? By the 1960s a vast majority of former colonies had achieved independence. In the case of Singapore, the United States never exercised direct control over the island British ex-colony. It is therefore

more appropriate for us to focus on the topographical bifurcation of East and West within Sharpley's global imagination and to critique Sharpley's world view, which, I will show, is bifurcated into a spiritual East and a dystopic West. Rather than dismissing his music entirely, however, I argue that we need to examine *Emptiness* in terms of bifurcation. It is not so much that we should appreciate Sharpley for what he can teach us about 'elemental' spirituality, but that there is something to be gained from understanding how bifurcation is not only a state but also a repeated biographical and formal process that leads to multiplicity.

For Sharpley, the Buddhist concept of emptiness (*shunyata*) has deep personal resonance and is incorporated into his own self-professed 'mystic' world view.¹¹ Some anecdotes will illustrate this point.¹² He spoke of an experience in the southeast Indian coastal state of Andhra Pradesh at the site of the famous Tirupati temple. Although the busy location received over 20,000 visitors a day at the time of his visit, he felt that, as a white male he was quite visibly different from the rest of the crowd. While he was waiting in a queue to enter a sacred chamber, a priest approached him and led him directly to the chamber, where he lost all sense of space, time and self: 'There was no I'; 'It was all one thing'; 'Space-time reality disappeared'. I have not been to the Tirupati temple myself, but I recall quite vividly the experience of visiting the reconstruction of a similar site in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.¹³ The dimness of the lighting and the uniformity of the stone used to construct the ceiling, walls and floor produced in me a sensation of vertigo, as if the ceiling, walls and floor were moving slightly. Sharpley reported to me that floor and ceiling became indistinguishable and, moreover, he heard the sound of 'a thousand Niagara Falls', a sound which was 'alive' and 'organic'.

Sharpley also recounted to me his experience in the Mexican state of Yucatán in 1980, at the Mayan city of Coba, which was only beginning to be unearthed at the time and was not yet swarming with tourists. After walking through tunnels carved out of the jungle by machetes, all the while hearing what he described as a 'ringing sound', he came to a clearing where he saw a 100-foot pyramid. Climbing past the tree line, he saw an infinite expanse of green from which macaws flew up and dove back down. When he reached the chamber at the top of the pyramid, he had what he called a 'telepathic' connection with a priest from Mayan times, who was, he said, also cognisant of this connection. A voice instructed him to put his hands on the walls of the chamber, after which he saw through the priest's eyes tens of thousands of people performing sacred rituals. This 'energy' stayed with him for six months after he returned to Houston.

The experiences at the Tirupati temple and in Coba are but two of the bifurcatory paths along which his mysticism has led him. While both point to a dissolution of self in some sense, Sharpley's description of his Tirupati experience is particularly instructive: 'There is no I'. This statement is congruent with a number of others he made during the interview. Other pronouncements include 'There is nothing to do'; 'There is no place to go'; 'There is no there'; 'Music is something to do to create nothing to do'. Before discussing his understanding of these statements, however, an explanation of *shunyata* is required.

The eleventh and central movement of *Emptiness* is based on the *Buddhist Heart of Wisdom Sutra*, which begins with the lines: 'Form is Emptiness; Emptiness is Form'. In this context, 'form' refers to our body. According to Thich Nhat Hanh, the concept of *shunyata* in the *Heart Sutra* conveys the understanding that everything is interrelated and thus anything on its own, like a human body, is 'empty'.¹⁴ This is because the body is interrelated with feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. Together, these five things are what are called the five *skandhas*. Because of interrelation, each skandha must be empty in order to contain all the skandhas within it. There is no feeling without perception, no perception without consciousness, no consciousness without a body, and so on. Since everything is interrelated, everything is in flux, and nothing is permanent. Since everything is already interrelated, there is, in Sharpley's words, 'no place to go' and 'nothing to do'. The impermanence arising from the flux in interrelation is understood as emptiness – empty of whatever you think is going to last.¹⁵

My interview moved seamlessly from the 'There is no I' of the temple experience to the non-action of 'There is nothing to do' and the non-place of 'There is no there'. This syncretism of mysticism and *shunyata* is anchored in a determined opposition to Sharpley's understanding of American culture. In relation to the American oligarchy, he regards the 1970s as a 'golden period' before the 'fall'. When I asked him if this meant 'before Reagan', implying the neoliberal turn, he explained that in fact the construction of what he calls a 'feudal system' had begun in the 1890s with the political machinations of large banking and industrial companies.¹⁶ We are 'herded' into the so-called feudal system like sheep and made to stay in our 'unconscious' state so that American oligarchs may prosper. Sharpley also says that 'democracy is a placebo' and that 'the monarchy which we think was destroyed just went underground'. Because of Dick Cheney's involvement in exempting oil companies from clean-water legislation, Sharpley calls him 'probably one of the great evil men of our time'.¹⁷

Whereas the American milieu is tainted by the machinations of the oligarchy, 'Asian' emptiness encompasses mystical self-transcendence ('There is no I') and the Buddhist concept of *shunyata* as interrelation ('There is no there', because 'there' is also 'here'). In fact, this would be a generous reading of Sharpley's understanding of *shunyata*. I had brought up the term *shunyata* and explained it as interrelation (personal communication, 21 April 2015), and it was apparent that this was a new concept to the composer. His understanding of emptiness is more accurately represented as a liberating absence of the striving of what he terms the 'ego' – no 'I', no 'doing', no 'there'. What emerges from the foregoing account can be read as the bifurcation of East and West: an idiosyncratic, syncretised, liberating Asian emptiness which stands in opposition to the oppressive American milieu. Underlying this is a biographical process: Sharpley's dualist world view emerged over a lifetime as he explored the world both physically and culturally.

In the following analysis of *Emptiness*, Sharpley's biographical bifurcation is sounded out in the formal bifurcation of harmonic elements – modes versus

chromaticism – which separate out into distinct pentatonic and Mixolydian sections in movements 5 and 11, respectively. Given our knowledge of the biographical bifurcation, an interpretation of the cleaving of East and West is appropriate in relation to the work's formal bifurcation, which occurs repeatedly at different structural levels in these movements and leads to many mystical paths in Sharpley's life, indicating the intricate and definitional multiplicity of both types of bifurcation. Yet there is a sense in which 'East' and 'West' remain coherent as units of musical symbolism, for which some explication is appropriate. First, Sharpley's portrayal of a pentatonic East in movement 5 harks back to a long tradition of musical stereotypes in Western art music that cannot be dismissed, even if much Chinese music is indeed pentatonic. Another problem is Sharpley's symbolisation of the West using chromaticism, a highly plausible interpretation in view of our knowledge of the parallel bifurcations involved in the biographical and musical-formal realms. While the modernist West is sounded in a variety of tonalities, its extreme dissonance is the most iconic among its features and thus functions as the sonic manifestation of Sharpley's version of a dystopian West, particularly at the opening of movement 5.

Emptiness

I shall use the analysis of musical emotion in *Emptiness* to reveal a narrative of arduous struggle towards the transcendence of embodiment, and how the narrative is embodied in formal bifurcation. Such a focus on the musical analysis of emotion furthers the project articulated in a special issue of *Musical Analysis* edited by Michael Spitzer (2010). While some may continue to consider musical emotion to be subjectively variable and unsuitable for scholarly inquiry, an emerging body of literature on the subject has provided empirical evidence for the emotional impact of specified musical features (see Juslin 2009, pp. 269–71). In relation to the point about the validity of the 'subjective', it is relevant also to emphasise the contingency of any interpretative act. Formulating an interpretation in order to understand fully the *possible* cultural ramifications of a work necessarily involves such contingency (Kramer 1995, p. 11).

'Emptiness' emerges from the formal bifurcation of East and West, with the creation of a purely pentatonic or modal China that makes the escape from American 'feudalism' possible. This narrative aligns with Sharpley's notion of Asian emptiness, which (as shown below) is expressed in the musical feeling of 'transcendence'.¹⁸ Table 1 contains the opening lines of text from the movements of *Emptiness*. *Shunyata* is expressed in movements accompanying the *Heart of Wisdom Sutra* or Zen poems. The related but different Taoist concept of *wu wei* (non-action or non-doing; the idea also appears in Buddhist writings) is expressed in the movements accompanying the *Tao Tè Ching*. Aside from the overture, interlude and postlude, all movements have text, which is assigned only to the two narrators (the chorus sings only vowels). With few exceptions,

Table 1 John Sharpley, *Emptiness*, list of movements and opening lines

Mvt	Title	Instrumentation	Text
1	Overture	<i>Tutti</i>	This is an evening about spiritual wisdom
2	'How long the stars' (Zen poem)	Duet, percussion	How long the stars have been fading, lamplight dimming. There's neither coming nor going.
3	<i>Tao Tè Ching</i> , Ch. 1	<i>Tutti</i>	The Tao that can be told is not Tao The name that can be named is not the eternal name
4	'Light dies in the eyes' (Zen poem)	Duet, percussion	Light dies in the eyes, hearing fades Once back to the source, there's no special meaning Today, tomorrow
5	<i>Tao Tè Ching</i> , Ch. 2	<i>Tutti</i>	Under Heaven all can see beauty as beauty only because there is ugliness All can know good as good only because there is evil Therefore, having and not having arise together
6	Interlude	<i>Tutti</i> (no reciters)	Perfect melody
7	'Perfect melody' (Zen poem)	Violin I solo	Like the mind, mind's washed sky clean.
8	<i>Tao Tè Ching</i> , Ch. 56	<i>Tutti</i>	Those who know do not talk Those who talk do not know
9	What is this mind? (Zen poem)	<i>Erhu</i>	What is this mind? Who is hearing these sounds?
10	<i>Tao Tè Ching</i> , Ch. 24	<i>Tutti</i>	He who stands on tiptoe is not steady. He who strides cannot maintain the pace.
11	<i>Heart of Wisdom</i> <i>Sutra</i>	<i>Tutti</i>	Form is empty Emptiness is form
12	'Frog Croaking' (Zen poem)	Duet	Lichen-crusted frogs croak at moonlight on mountaintops
13	<i>Tao Tè Ching</i> , Ch. 4	<i>Bianzhong</i> , chorus	The Tao is an empty vessel
14	'The wind blows' (Zen poem)	<i>Tutti</i>	The wind blows, the bird sings The sound is soundless
15	<i>Tao Tè Ching</i> , Ch. 76	<i>Tutti</i>	A man is born gentle and weak At his death he is hard and stiff Therefore the stiff and unbending is the disciple of death
16	Postlude	<i>Tutti</i> (no reciters)	

the *Tao Tè Ching* movements use full performing force; the Zen movements feature solos and duets, often with percussion. Among the weightier, fully scored movements, movement 11 stands out as the architectural climax; this movement accompanies the *Heart of Wisdom Sutra*, which expounds directly on the concept of *shunyata*. Among the *Tao Tè Ching* movements, the fifth is exceptional because of long passages of pure pentatonicism, which I will argue is directly expressive of Sharpley's idiosyncratic conception of the mystical/Buddhist transcendence of 'ego'.

In movement 5, the key to achieving emptiness is through a relinquishment of conceptual dualisms, as articulated in the text (Ch. 2 of the *Tao Tè Ching*):

Under Heaven all can see beauty as beauty because there is ugliness.
 All know good as good only because there is evil.
 Therefore, having and not having arise together.
 Difficult and easy complement each other.
 Long and short contrast each other.
 High and low rest upon each other.
 Voice and sound harmonize each other.
 Front and back follow one another.
 Therefore, the sage goes about doing nothing, teaching no-talking.
 The ten thousand things rise and fall without cease, working, yet not taking credit.
 Work is done, then forgotten, therefore, it lasts forever.¹⁹

Beauty and ugliness, good and evil: the placement of these dualist terms in opposition reveals how their meanings derive only from each other. The deconstruction of dualisms is in fact relevant to the work's titular 'emptiness', for the Buddhist concept of *shunyata* was presented in terms of the Taoist *wu wei* when Buddhism was first introduced to China (Lai 2003, p. 8). The relevance of *wu wei* to *shunyata* may be explained as follows. *Shunyata* consists in the interrelation of things (bodies, objects, consciousness) that lose their discrete identities, thereby becoming 'empty'. *Wu wei* refers to another form of emptiness – 'non-doing' in relation to the social sphere. In Chad Hansen's interpretation, *wei* refers to a particular social action that is conditioned by language use, the primary socialising force, which induces certain forms of moral valuation and moral desire (2009, pp. 22–5). This primarily Confucian conception of instinctive, holistic social practice or social *Tao* is rejected in the *Tao Tè Ching*, which espouses the relinquishing of social practice in non-doing – hence the negation of *wei* ('doing') in *wu wei* (*wu* means 'none'). Social relinquishment is effected through the 'theory of opposites' (e.g. good and evil), which reveals the artificiality of language-based social *Tao*.

Rather than instant emptiness, however, the music of movement 5 portrays an arduous emotional struggle to achieve a purportedly Eastern emptiness which is actually musically rooted in Western tonality. At the opening, an extremely dissonant passage is immediately consequent to the opening lines (bar 1) concerning the polar opposites beauty/ugliness and good/evil (Ex. 1).²⁰

Ex. 1 Movement 5, section 1 to beginning of section 2, bars 1–23

Moderato
♩ = ca 66

Sweet, innocent
Menacing
Sweet, innocent

mf *cresc.* *mf* *fp* *f* *fp* *mf* *cresc.* *f* *fp* *mf* *p* *fp*

Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Cello
Gaohu
Erhu
Zhonghu
Gehu
Bianzhong
Chorus
2 Reciters

1. 天下皆知美之为美，斯恶已；
皆知善之为善，斯不善已。
Under Heaven all can see beauty as beauty
only because there is ugliness. All can
know good as good only because there is evil.

Ex. 1 *Continued.*

Loving

The musical score is written for a large ensemble. It includes staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, Caohu, Erhu, Zhonghu, Gehu, Bianzhong, Chorus, and 2 Rec. The score is in 4/4 time and features a variety of musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as *pp*, *mp*, *p*, and *mf*. There are also triplets and other complex rhythmic figures. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines.

Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Caohu
Erhu
Zhonghu
Gehu
Bianzhong
Chorus
2 Rec.

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Ex. 1 Continued.

19

Gentle
♩ = ca 82

Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
GaoHu
Erhu
Zhonghu
Gehu
Bianzhong
Chorus

1. 音乐结构, Voice and sound

2. 长尾结构, 高下结构
Long and short contrast each other
High and low rest upon each other

Ex. 2 Movement 5, reduction of section 1 and beginning of section 2, bars 1–23

SECTION 1

SEGMENT A

Pitch class sets of melody

bar 2 4 6 7 9 13 17 19 20 23

Parallel notes stratum

ip6 ip7

GRATING

Sustained notes stratum

X Y

stack of ip7 plus D #

ip6

ip7

Z - GRATING

Sustained F#, C#, B b, E

O P Q R S

Movement 5 begins with dissonance arising from the initial proximity of two disaffiliated harmonic elements in segment A (bars 1–7): a pentatonic melody in the first violin and *gaohu* (two-string Chinese fiddle) above dissonant chords. In segment B the dissonant syncretism of A is ameliorated, as the meditation on ‘having’ and ‘not having’, ‘difficult’ and ‘easy’, ‘long’ and ‘short’, ‘high’ and ‘low’ continues. The fused harmonic elements of segment A bifurcates in segment B (bars 8–19) into sustained *pentatonic*-derived open fifths supporting modal melodies and an overarching *semitonal* voice-leading pattern governing the successive descent of the sustained fifths. Later in the movement, we will see that the two fused harmonic elements of segment A bifurcate into entire sections. Segments A and B constitute section 1 and are analysed in Ex. 2, which condenses the eight instrumental parts comprising Western and Chinese string quartets. While movement 5 as a whole evinces formal bifurcation, Sharpley deploys the instruments in a syncretic fashion almost through (see Exs 1 and 3), either deploying Western and Chinese strings in unison (first violin and *gaohu*, bars 1–7), or in alternation (the melodic parts in viola, *zhonghu*, *erhu* and second violin, bars 8–19). The overall effect is thus one of timbral unity rather than conflict, indicating perhaps a state of being at peace with cultural bifurcation.

A closer examination of section 1 reveals the processual nature of formal bifurcation. In segment A maximal dissonance is derived from the pitches in use through ‘grating’. In the first of three dissonant grating gestures, labelled X, friction occurs between held notes and parallel augmented fourths. Grating is created by having a linear sequence of descending semitones around held notes. In X, E $\flat$ –D–D $\flat$ in the upper part of the parallel augmented fourths grate against

the same three sustained notes. The second grating gesture, Y (bars 4–5), also consists of parallel movement – now a perfect fifth apart – over the same held notes as X. With the third grating gesture, Z (bars 6–7), the sustained notes are replaced by parallel fifths in a low register, moving more slowly than the higher parallel augmented fourths.

In contrast with the harmonic syncretism of segment A (pentatonicism as parallel fifths in Y, combined with dissonance), segment B (bars 8–19) is much more consonant, displaying bifurcation between *consonant* sustained fifths and semitonal shifts of the fifths (at bars 13 and 17, and twice in bar 19; see again Ex. 2). Segment B consists of five sustained-fifth ‘plateaus’ (labelled O to S). In the first three plateaus, an undulating melody unfurls within the confines of Mixolydian (plateau O) or pentatonic modes (plateaus P and Q; plateaus R and S are minim chords without any melody). In spite of some non-harmonic elements (such as the undulating semitonal shifts around the sustained fifths in O), the relative consonance gives rise to positive feeling. Consonant self-synthesis evinces from the relation of affiliation between the two proximal plateau-parts (melody and harmony) that add up to a positively valenced whole. Semitonal shifts are discerned at the transition points between plateaus Q, R and S; these are but fleeting moments of surprise, as the next plateau immediately reaffirms intra-plateau relations of affiliation. Although surprises are generally negatively valenced, there is enough stability within plateaus for the semitonal shifts to be experienced as interesting, positively valenced phenomena that are mildly surprising. In segment B the pentatonic and dissonant elements of segment A have bifurcated, and there is affinity towards the total impression of the bifurcated elements.

Sections 2 (bars 20–53) and 3 (bars 54–60), which are pentatonic and dissonant respectively, present a higher stage of bifurcation of the fused elements of segment A into *entire sections*. Enlightened emptiness first emerges and is grasped as happiness in section 2, which musically translates lines 7–8 of the text: the ‘voice’ of the chorus is in ‘harmony’ with the ‘sound’ of the instruments, and ‘front and back follow one another’ in the canon. Section 2 is strikingly contrasted with section 1 in the complete absence of dissonance, leaving only the sonorous simultaneities of the pentatonic mode (Ex. 1, bars 20–23).²¹ There is much textural interest, but the harmony can be briefly summarised as comprising (1) proliferating pentatonic melodies in all the parts excepting ceremonial strikes on the *bianzhong*, a pitched metallophone, and (2) F♯–C♯ as structural notes indicating the minor inflection of the F♯–A–B–C♯–E pentatonic scale. (The *bianzhong* is an ancient Chinese instrument consisting of suspended bells with an unusual lens shape; see Fig. 1.) Affiliation between elements is amplified by the one-bar canon between two groups (bars 27ff., not shown): (1) chorus (singing ‘ah’ throughout), second violin and *gehu*; and (2) *gaohu* and cello. Once the regular pattern of canonic statement-repetition has been formed, a positive prediction response derived from musical expectation is triggered at every occurrence of the predicted echo.²² In addition to the positive prediction

Fig. 1 *Bianzhong* (permission granted under GNU Free Documentation License, <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bianzhong.jpg>>). [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

response, the affinity towards this music also arises from the fast motion of the running semiquavers, which are reinforced at different pulse levels by slower moving parts in triplets, quavers, triplet crotchets, crotchets, triplet minims, dotted minims and longer sustained notes. The rousing semiquaver figuration, presented along with euphonious harmony, gives rise to a positive, happy feeling.

The euphonious harmony of section 2 contrasts with the recurrence of dissonance in section 3 (bars 54–60), which translates the perceived asceticism of negating action and speech (line 9 of the text). The opening material returns in section 3, and dissonance is amplified this time by contrastive valence with the euphony of section 2.²³ Following lines 10–11 about the ephemerality of ‘ten thousand things’ at the end of section 3, the next turn of the formal wheel in section 4 (bars 61–89) brings back the pentatonic melody from section 2. Sections 4 and 5 (bars 90–95), pentatonic and dissonant respectively, continue the alternation bifurcated sections.

By the beginning of section 4, the bifurcation of dissonance in alternation with pentatonicism has been established as a pattern in musical expectation. It is now clear that the pentatonic element within harmonic syncretism (with dissonance) – in sections 1, 3 and 5 – bifurcates away repeatedly into entire pentatonic sections which alternate with dissonant sections. As my analysis has shown, bifurcation is a micro-modulating process, moving through initial syncretism of pentatonicism and dissonance (segment A), to bifurcation of pentatonic plateaus versus semitonal shifts of the plateaus (segment B), to the final step of bifurcation into entire sections of dissonance versus pentatonicism. The effect of bifurcation could be to create a feeling of remembrance, whereby later sections recall earlier

ones. However, the effect of memory is not found in section 3 because of the urgency of dissonance, marked 'menacing' and executed with harsh accents (shown in bar 2 of Ex. 1). Rather than fond remembrance, each recurrence is an involuntary re-living of a traumatic event.

While the pentatonicism of section 4 (Ex. A in the Appendix) recalls section 2 by using the same melody, section 4 is infused with a feeling of nostalgia, which Sharpley uses to express the arduous path to Eastern emptiness. Nostalgia is captured in part by the *pianissimo* marking, which suggests the relatively faint colour of memory rather than the intensity of an unfolding event; more important, nostalgia is expressed through harmonic ambiguity. A detailed harmonic analysis in the Appendix reveals how the feeling of nostalgia is actually rooted in Western tonality by means of the syncretism of pentatonic melody with diatonic and chromatic progressions.

With the third occurrence of dissonant syncretism in the first two bars of section 5 (bars 90–91), the musical material is confirmed again as the visceral, recurring nightmare of a traumatic event. Earlier, at the end of section 3, lines 10–11 had marked the end of the text. The recurrence of dissonance in section 5 thus occurs purely on the level of musical emotion: in spite of the completion of the recitation of the text, enlightened emptiness has not come to fruition, and the traumatic process of relinquishing beauty and goodness continues. The feeling at the beginning of section 5 is one of extreme disaffinity and disaffiliation towards repressed elements that suddenly become proximal. In spite of its traumatic opening, however, the initial dissonance in section 5 unexpectedly gives way to the Mixolydian mode on F# which, together with C#, is sustained in the bass from the beginning of the section (Ex. 3). This transformation is amplified by the contrast of valence between the opening dissonance and the subsequent sprightly Mixolydian melodic lines which display an overall rise in register, floating upwards and finally perching on the distant pitches C#₆ and E₆ (part of an F# minor seventh chord).

Movement 5 closes with section 6 (bars 96–108, of which Ex. 3 shows the beginning), in which the string parts have all vaporised into emptiness, leaving only the chorus singing the same pentatonic melody from sections 2 and 4 in canon at the distance of one bar and the *bianzhong* sounding every half bar. Here as before, the echo of the canon arouses a positive prediction response, which is also triggered by familiarity with the pentatonic melody itself, tenderly unfolding with low intensity. The excess weight of the strings lifts, allowing the voices affiliated by canon to transcend the earth and float remotely without any harmonic grounding. The sonic-musical body feels light and evanescent, tenderly receding into the sky.

An analysis of musical emotion in movement 5, showing the transformation from happiness (section 2) to nostalgia (section 4) to tenderness (section 6), and the recurrence of dissonance in between (sections 3 and 5), reveals that transcendence is the process of becoming empty. Movement 5 accords with the several varieties of emotional ambiguity articulated by Jenefer Robinson:

Ex. 3 Movement 5, section 5 and beginning of section 6, bars 90–100

Like the opening

86 ♩ = ca 78

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Gaohe

Erhu

Zhonghu

Gehu

Bianzhong

Chorus

//ic6 clash with sustained notes

sub. ff

ff

ppp

pp

(M V)

mf

pp

ff

pp

blending, conflict and transformation of emotion (2005, p. 293). Nostalgic memory in section 4 involves the blend of happiness and sadness. Conflict of feelings is evinced between the bifurcated sections of consonance and dissonance, and relatively positive (happiness, nostalgia, tenderness) or negative feelings (caused by dissonance), respectively. Transformation of feeling is observed in the pentatonic melody in sections 2, 4 and 6, from happiness to nostalgia to tenderness. The expression of emotional ambiguity (conflict, transformation) is thus structurally underpinned by the process of formal bifurcation at multiple levels. In addition to analysis of the relationship between sections, we can observe

Ex. 3 Continued.

94

With deep compassion
♩ = ca 94

Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Gaohe
Erhu
Zhonghu
Gehu
Bianzhong
Chorus
I.
II.

bifurcation also within them. Section 1 evinces the progression from syncretism in segment A of dissonance and pentatonicism, through the bifurcation away of the latter into pentatonic plateaus in segment B and the final bifurcation into a wholly pentatonic section 2. In section 4 there is syncretism of chromatic harmony and pentatonic melody, which bifurcates away into section 6, where the pure pentatonic melody is presented.

In contrast to the orthodox meaning of *shunyata* and/or *wu wei*, which involves the transcendence of the body ('Form [meaning body] is Emptiness') and of social practice respectively (as explained earlier), transcendence as the substantive, emotional journey towards emptiness, articulated through conventional techniques of tonal Western classical music, indicates the presence of Western aesthetics. This reading of transcendence as an emotional journey reveals the distance between the Asian texts and Sharpley's Westernised rendering of them, expressed in the formal bifurcation of 'Chinese' pentatonicism and menacing 'Western' dissonance. In this reading, formal bifurcation is specious because it marks the move away from interrelation: syncretism of pentatonicism and dissonance proves to be too unstable to be sustained and bifurcates into distinct harmonic identities (especially in sections 2 and 6) that contradict the very definition of *shunyata* as interrelation.

Apotheosis

Between the subsequent purely instrumental movement 6 and the next structural landmark movement 11, Sharpley composes one of three recurring movement blocks consisting in the alternation of a movement that sets a Zen poem with a movement that sets a chapter from the *Tao Tê Ching*, the Zen movement being a light-hearted take on *shunyata* by solo or duet, and the Taoist movement a weightier exploration by the full ensemble. This movement block is also found in movements 2–5, after the opening overture (with movement 5 representing the culmination of that block), and in movements 12–15, before the final instrumental postlude.

The central movement 11, based on the *Heart of Wisdom Sutra*, shows formal bifurcation as in movement 5, with sections of harmonic syncretism evincing ambiguity before bifurcation. Despite these broad similarities, there are key differences between them. In movement 11, the twice-repeated process of bifurcation is not disrupted with sudden affective negativity, as with the recurrence of dissonance in sections 3 and 5 of movement 5. In addition, the bifurcated sections in movement 11 are modally pure, whereas the pentatonic section 4 in movement 5 is coloured with chromaticism. Whereas transcendence in movement 5, as I have proposed, means the arduous journey towards emptiness, the 'final state beyond sorrow' of the *Heart Sutra* in movement 11 is expressed as a pure state of enlightenment which I call 'apotheosis'. But in spite of musical indicators that emptiness is more reachable than before, the

journey to emptiness in movement 11 is narrated through an abundance of musical emotion, as in movement 5.

As mentioned, the *Heart Sutra*, which is set in movement 11, articulates the Buddhist concept of *shunyata*: 'Form is Emptiness; Emptiness is Form'. This means that one's body is 'empty'; there is 'no form, no feeling, no discrimination, no compositional factors, no consciousness. There is no eye, no ear, no tongue, no body, no mind; no form, no sound, no smell, no taste, no tactile object, no phenomenon [...]'. The *Heart Sutra* continues:

There is no eye element and so forth up to no mind element
and also up to no element of mental consciousness.
There is no ignorance and exhaustion of ignorance,
and so forth up to no aging and death and no exhaustion of aging and death.
Likewise, there is no suffering, origin, cessation or path;
no exalted wisdom, no attainment, also no non-attainment.
Therefore, because there is no attainment,
bodhisattvas reply on and abide in the perfection of wisdom;
their minds shall have no destruction and no fear.
Passing utterly beyond perversity
they attain the final state beyond sorrow.²⁴

Structurally similar to movement 5 in its formal bifurcation, movement 11 begins with a section (bars 1–35) featuring the syncretism of modes and chromaticism, which gives rise to harmonic ambiguity. Modality then bifurcates away to become a euphoric plateau section that remains within C-Mixolydian (bars 36–49). Sections 3 and 4 (bars 50–89 and 90–110) repeat the bifurcation process.²⁵ In contrast to movement 5, the chromaticism is mild, and the bifurcated sections are plateaus of pure modality and textural consistency. While there are moments of mixed valence, the focus in movement 11 is on pleasure rather than pain.

Section 1

Movement 11 begins with the constant tension of harmonic ambiguity stemming from tonal mutability in the syncretism of modes and chromaticism, which characterises the material in section 1 (as well as section 3). Formally, section 1 comprises alternation of the following segments: a pulsing motif (A), a sustained fifth with unfurling melodies (B), an imitative motif (C) and a progression of pure parallel fifths without other harmonic or melodic parts (D). The score and reduction are found in Exs 4 and 5 respectively. Segments A–D are described in some detail below to show how the harmonic ambiguity of the syncretism of modes and chromaticism gives rise to many shades of feelings. It is worth noting here that there is already within section 1 a timbral expression of the formal bifurcation which will become self-evident as the movement progresses. Whereas the more palliative-sounding segment A is scored for Western string

quartet, the lively excursions of segments B and C are scored for the Chinese quartet. The rumblings of the Chinese quartet can be heard as the driving force that leads to the emergence of the modally pure section 2; we see this again in the progression from sections 3 and 4.

In the first of three appearances of segment A (bars 1–8), alternation between B₁ and B₂ (indicated by + and –) occurs within a context of G-centricity, giving rise to a sequence of contrastive valences between bright/dark (or major/minor) colours, arousing both an ambiguous blend of interest in the evolving valences and suspense stemming from uncertain alternations. Contrasting with the feeling blend arising from harmonic ambiguity, a soothing, tactile quality that speaks to a feeling of what Charles Nussbaum describes as ‘loving’ is found in the variation in intensity of dynamics in the legato strong–weak chord pattern.²⁶ In addition to the gentle modulation of bow pressure, love is also expressed in the intimate incrementalism of voice leading. The micro-modulation of the gamut from cluster to cluster can be observed although voice-leading patterns are not shown in Ex. 4; registrally spaced-out notes in each chord in the score are condensed into a cluster in the treble staff for easy recognition.

Sudden transitions of the G-centricity of segment A to the B-centricity of segment B, and of the G-centricity of segment A' to the E-centricity of segment B', arouse interest and suspense through the unexpected modulation, which is tempered by the stability of the sustained fifths throughout the two instances of segment B (B–F₁ in bars 9–14 and E–B in bars 18–22). Both instances of the initiation of the stable fifths over fermatas are rendered suspenseful through the sudden drop of dynamics and the expectation of the unfolding of events yet to come.

Segment B, like segment A, is marked by incremental chromatic voice leading in combination with modes. In its first statement, chromatic voice leading marks the transformation from the first unfurling of melody to the second – that is, D₁ (implied) to D₂, or Phrygian mode to the harmonic minor scale on E, both over sustained B–F₁. This transformation gives rise to an intensification of negative valence owing to the diminished intervals formed by the raised seventh degree in the latter mode. Chromatic voice leading and intensification of negative valence is also found in the second instance of segment B, in which the initial E-‘Arabic’ mode (D₂ and G₂) with prevalent augmented seconds transforms into the melancholic B-Aeolian mode (D₁ and implied G₁).

Segment C features a lively dialogue between first and second violins in pentatonic mode on D that modulates to D major with the gradual addition of G (bar 25) and C₂ (bar 26). The accompaniment features parallel fifths moving for the most part by step, creating a gentle undulation. In contrast, the shifts of the bare sustained parallel fifths in segment D (bars 33–35) are emphasised by leaps of a major third and a tritone, intensifying the feeling blend of interest and suspense through the shock effect of a sudden shift in centricity, especially in the latter leap (F₂–C₂ to C–G), which exceeds the diatonic gamut. Segments A–D of section 1 exhibit a negative valence which arises from the syncretism of

Ex. 4 Movement 11, section 1, ABA'B'CA''D form: A = bars 1–8; B = bars 9–15; A' = bars 16–17; B' = bars 18–22; C = bars 23–28; A'' = bars 29–32; D = bars 33–36 (last bar not shown)

Score for Movement 11, section 1, ABA'B'CA''D form. The score is written for Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Cello, Gao-hu, Er-hu, Zhong-hu, Ge-hu, Bian-zhong, Chorus, and 2 Reciters. The tempo is marked "Slow & Meditative". The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (ppp, p, f), articulation (accents, slurs), and performance instructions (e.g., "sul pont.", "p espress."). The score is divided into measures, with some measures containing multiple staves for different instruments. The score ends with a "Form is empty" instruction.

Ex. 4 *Continued.*

14

G.P.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

C.

Goh

E-hu

Z-hu

Goh

Bz.

Chor.

Rec.

A little more movement

(n V)

ppp subito (n V)

ppp subito (n V)

ppp subito (n V)

ppp subito (n V)

ppp subito

p

(n V)

(n V)

(n V)

(n V)

1. 空无是空.
emptiness is form.

2. 空即是空.
emptiness is not other than form.

1. 空即是空.
form also is not other than emptiness.

A little more movement

Ex. 5 Movement 11, reduction of section 1, bars 1–35

Section 1

A

1

6

9

16

18

23

B

A'

B'

C

Phrygian

E harmonic minor

"Arabic" scale

Pentatonic on D

D major

Section 2

A''

D

33

36

modes and chromaticism, giving rise to harmonic ambiguity. Section 3 is similar to section 1.

Summary of Analysis

From the syncretism in section 1 of chromaticism and modality, the latter bifurcates away into a full-blown section 2, where a full texture of strings unfurling in undulating lines gradually ascends to the stratosphere over a sustained fifth, C–G, which grounds a pure C-Mixolydian mode. The flurry of contrapuntal movement across various parts promotes rapid perception, which, in conjunction with modal stability, translates into positively valenced emotion. Sections 3–4 repeat the progression from sections 1–2. Section 4 concludes the movement in B-Mixolydian mode over the sustained fifth B–F# (Ex. 6), the euphoria here amplified by the positive prediction response that arises from the fulfilment of the listener's expectation of just such a passage, predicated on sections 1–2. The positive valence of section 4 is intensified by the use of the exceptionally bright chromatic-major submediant of E major (relative to the G-centricity in sections 1 and 3) as the basis of the B-Mixolydian mode. Happiness and fulfilment of expectations confirm the exalted feeling of a glorious apotheosis, characterised by an intense internal affinity arising from the extreme affiliation of pure modality, absent any tonal ambiguities.

In the global narrative structure of *Emptiness*, movement 11 seems to present a completion of the process initiated in movement 5, these two architectonic points being embedded in a structure created by movement blocks (movements 2–5, 7–10 and 12–15) that are made up mostly (aside from the instrumental movement 6) of the alternation of Zen poems (usually solos and duets) and *Tao Te Ching* chapters (usually by full performing forces). Drawing a narrative line back to movement 5, the full-textured plateaus in movement 11 can be read as expressing the apotheosis which follows the arduous process of transcendence in the former movement; in contrast with movement 5, movement 11 has a relatively positive emotional valence. Yet the purportedly empty state is grasped paradoxically in the emotional fullness of a glorious apotheosis, wherein a rich texture of affiliated, active and rising imitative parts gives rise to a distinctly positive valence. As with transcendence, apotheosis turns out not to be literal emptiness. Not only is the process of achieving emptiness filled with a plethora of feelings of pain and loss, interest in and anxiety about the future, optimistic happiness, nostalgia and tender acceptance, it is also apparently an unending bifurcatory process that never reaches the goal of emptiness.

In movement 11 apotheosis is a kind of happiness that folds back from the heavens to which it has bifurcated onto earthly pleasure. The body, instead of fading away, is the locus of embodied happiness.²⁷ Although happiness may seem banal in relation to apotheosis, the latter has a basis – or is ‘nested’ – in the primary emotion of happiness (Damasio 2003, pp. 37–8). It is the combination

Ex. 6 Movement 11, beginning of section 4, bars 90–92

14 Rhapsodic

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

C.

G.h.

E.hu

Z.hu

Ge.h

Bz.

Chor.

Rec.

of the bodily state of happiness with thoughts of enlightened emptiness that gives rise to the feeling of apotheosis (p. 85). The transcendence-apotheosis pair, while expressing an attempt to achieve emptiness – relinquishing both the world of beauty and ugliness (*Tao Tè Ching*, Ch. 2) and perception, emotion and cognition (*Heart Sutra*) – marks not the smooth passage to emptiness but the struggle to become empty and the irascibility of body and embodiment. This struggle is observed in the persistence of formal bifurcation and the affective ambiguity of harmonic syncretism in both movements 5 and 11. Like movement 5, movement 11 can be understood as expressing bifurcation between the chromatic West and the modal East. (Unlike with movement 5, however, where the referent ‘China’ could be specified because of the pentatonic scale, the referent of modality in movement 11 is perhaps more generalised.)

From Cultural Difference to Cultural Ambiguity

In *Emptiness*, Sharpley uses formal bifurcation to build an emotional narrative that expresses the processes of transcendence and apotheosis, both of which move from the ambiguity of harmonic syncretism (pentatonicism with dissonance, modes with chromaticism) to the positivity of modal purity. While compositional intention is crucial to a narrative understanding of bifurcation, I have chosen to place the music of *Emptiness* in conversation with Sharpley’s biography. The result is a multi-dimensional space where formal bifurcation in the musical work speaks not just to transcendence and apotheosis, but also to the composer’s personal bifurcation from the Christian milieu of his youth to the East-West worldview of his adulthood. Furthermore, the underlying musical language, which is the basis of formal bifurcation and of the narrative of ‘emptiness’, is shown to be rooted in Western tonality. We might call this a big-picture view of the topic of this article, seen from the endpoint of discussion – but there is a different vantage point to be taken.

While many of the ambiguities in *Emptiness* do not relate specifically to the combination of conventionally opposed cross-cultural elements (e.g. the alternation of B $\sharp$ and B $\flat$ in segment A in section 1, and the incremental morphing of modality in segment B of movement 11), in many cases ambiguity does illuminate opposed cross-cultural elements in harmonic syncretism (the incremental bifurcation of pentatonicism and chromaticism at the opening of movement 5, the ambiguous syncretism of pentatonicism and chromatic chords in section 4 of movement 5 and the chromatic centricity shifts of parallel fifths in segment D of movement 11). What if, instead of regarding syncretism as the combination of two elements, we regard it as an ambiguous unity, focusing not on commonalities or differences between the two, but on the musical vagaries of the whole? There is, after all, a strong tradition of music analysis premised precisely on the primacy of unity. Unity for Robert Morgan refers to how ‘distinct and contrasting elements’ combine to ‘produce a common and coherent goal’ (2003,

pp. 21–2). Can a 'limited' unity be advanced as an analytic for understanding how varied musical elements are persuasively combined in sections 1, 3 and 5 of movement 5, and in sections 1 and 3 of movement 11?

Morgan's definition of unity was posed in an effort to fend off analytical strategies that have dethroned unity as the ultimate arbiter of musical artistry. For him, 'to claim that a composition lacks unity [...] is [...] to say that it fails' (p. 27). This defence of unity is a response to what Morgan terms 'postmodern' analytical approaches that differ from musical conventions which are understood to give rise to unity. Briefly, postmodern analytical approaches crack open musical unity by emphasising divergence from a global harmonic plan, digression from a compact thematic statement, 'unexpected' modulation, liquidation as opposed to synthetic growth in a main theme and disintegration of a motive through wide registration. The key point here is that similarity and difference in music analysis are value-laden terms, and so one key question facing us is how to approach works in which cultural differences are expressed musically. How can we ameliorate the bifurcated world view that is expressed formally in *Emptiness*?

One way to negotiate this conundrum of unity and difference is through the concept of bifurcation as it appears in Deleuze's work. Bifurcation occurs when existence *bifurcates*, so that something new emerges, whether in life or in music. It is probably impossible for us to abandon the framework of East-West opposition entirely in addressing cross-cultural works, but there is much that we can learn from the unstable syncretism of modes and chromaticism or dissonance. Harmonic ambiguity is a promising analytic that points us to an unstable, dynamic and Deleuzian whole that accommodates contradiction, uncertainty, unexpectedness, change and newness. Each instance of harmonic ambiguity in *Emptiness* is revealed to be one stage in a progression towards eventual bifurcation. So perhaps in addition to critiquing musical dichotomies, we should look at cross-cultural works more closely to find those moments of promising ambiguity. Perhaps in this way, bifurcation as a process (and not a state) provides a new means of understanding the global oecumene of today, as we navigate the intertwined multiplicities of musical, cultural, economic and political life.

What I am proposing here is akin to a form of temporary amnesia about the dichotomies that eventually emerge from the process of bifurcation both in Sharpley's life and in *Emptiness*. There is no denying that the world today, perhaps as at any other time in history, is sharply divided, and our cultural identities have already been concretised in advance for us based on our skin colour, ancestry and country of origin before we have even encountered the putative East and West. Certainly, recognition of differences of race and nationality are essential to any emancipatory project committed to addressing social injustices suffered by variegated Others both within and beyond one's national borders. But even within racist and orientalist cultural expression – perhaps based on a blueprint containing bifurcated cultural stereotypes – there remains the possibility for

a robust critical inquiry that is not limited to the outdated notion of warm intercultural unity, nor to the important but (by itself) inadequate notion of cultural difference: I argue that music scholarship will be enriched by opening itself up to a vision of complexity that I am advancing with bifurcation (which is not equivalent to the simple dichotomized endpoint). From the perspective of the endpoint, each new step in the process of bifurcation would merely be the repetition of a foregone conclusion, whether this step is Sharpley hearing 'a thousand Niagara Falls' at the Tirupati temple site in India, his having a telepathic connection with the Mayan priest at the city of Coba, pentatonic melody over grating dissonance in segment A in section 1 of the fifth movement, or alternating pentatonic and dissonant sections in the same movement. I am asking readers to suspend their conceptual baggage and make room for the possibility that in analysing music with bifurcations at multiple structural levels and in multiple moments, and in examining a personal life spent travelling the world in many ways over five decades, we may discover a perspective that does not trade difference for unabashed unity (which can be dangerously extrapolated from analytical writing that simplifies musical syncretism by pointing out the many commonalities between different musics in Takemitsu, Sharpley, and others). Instead of that hoary notion of unity, we might discover a new, unresolved and incomplete unity that reflects precisely the cultural ambiguities of the world we live in. It may well be that in the examination of ambiguous musical (Deleuzian) wholes, we can begin better to understand our confusion at being involuntarily thrown into the proximities of the global village. This might be the first step towards a postmodern unity that forgivingly embraces incongruity and finds a way to connect imperfectly across differences.

APPENDIX

The impure pentatonicism of section 4 (Ex. A) is expressed in the syncretism of pentatonic melody with diatonic and chromatic progressions, with a general rate of change of one chord per measure. (Ex. B shows the most audible voice-leading patterns).²⁸ Harmonic ambiguity pervades section 4 in the uncertain affiliation with either F#-Phrygian or -Aeolian mode: the crucial determining second degree of the scale fluctuates between G $\natural$ and G# (bars 73–74 and 80–89), sometimes occurring simultaneously (bars 73 and 83).²⁹ The synthesis of G $\natural$ and G# results in a tension that contrasts with the palliative pentatonicism of the melody; this musical combination expresses the contrastive valence of nostalgia, the painful yearning aroused by the memory of a lost happiness.

G $\natural$ is highlighted twice as an unexpected subdominant of the subdominant within the context of implied major keys, indicated by brackets X (bars 80–81, G major as IV/IV of the implied A major) and Y (bars 83–85, C major as IV/IV of the implied D major) in Ex. B.³⁰ In X, the G# of V conflicts with the eventual G major chord. G $\natural$ and G# are also marked in progression Z at

Ex. A Movement 5, beginning of section 4, bars 62–67

nder, with more compassion, more movement.
= ca 94

61

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Gaohe

Erhu

Zhonghu

Cahu

Banhu

Chorus

1. 万

2. 夫

the end of section 4 (bars 87–89), as the C# diminished chord is transformed into a C# minor dominant at the end. Throughout section 4, G#/G# occurs as a fluctuating second degree of F# as a global tonic in progressions X, Y and Z. The fluidity of the second degree results in (dis)affiliation to either Phrygian [G#] or Aeolian on F# [G#]. Ambiguity arises not only from the fluctuating second degree, but also from a palette of harmonies which arouses positive and negative valences that are especially enhanced by juxtaposition and unexpected chromatic substitution (such as IV/IV in progressions X and Y).³¹ Chromatic chords punctuate the overall melancholic feeling evincing from (1) the melody in minor-pentatonic mode on F#, (2) the slow-moving accompaniment and (3) the 'minor-ish' Aeolian/Phrygian harmony. The brilliance of chromatic major chords slices through the nostalgic atmosphere periodically, accumulating on top of the tension arising from the G#/G# ambiguity and bringing tension to a level bordering

Ex. B Movement 5, reduction of section 4, bars 62–89

Harmonic summary

Phrygian (G $\frac{4}{4}$)/Aeolian (G#) on F#

Melody from bar 62

A+(implied): IV/IV

D+(implied): IV/IV

F#: N/G+ V/C#

E#

on unpleasantness. The beauty of the memory of section 2 – that strong feeling of affiliation and affinity in a remote, non-conjunct section – is countered by the loss of pentatonic purity, as the presence of chromatic ambiguity introduces disaffiliation and a lack of affinity in section 4.³² The object of desire is lodged in the past, yet resurrected in the present as a proximal memory, stirring an ambiguous blend of feelings that constitutes nostalgia.

NOTES

1. For those with institutional access, the score for *Emptiness* can be accessed as an online publication from Alexander Street Press's Classical Scores Library Series.
2. See <<http://alexanderstreet.com>> [accessed 29 August 2015]. Recordings of movements from *Emptiness* that are discussed in this article can be located on soundcloud.com with a search for 'John Sharpley *Emptiness* (2002).' Sharpley maintains a website at <<http://www.johnsharpley.com>> [accessed 29 August 2015]. Sharpley's biography, curriculum vitae, catalogue of works and samples of scores and recordings are available there. The Esplanade opened on 12 October 2002.
3. Subsequent to public criticism after the initial presentation of the Esplanade design in 1994, Michael Wilford & Partners left the project in 1995, giving the impression that the Londoners had forgotten how hot Singapore is. DP Architects later insisted that some form of shade was always intended. 'Esplanade Integrates Modern and Asian Elements – Interview with

Vikas M. Gore', *Asian Building and Construction*, 10/vi (2001), p. 35.
 <<http://www.esplanadesing.com/Downloads/Media%20and%20Publication%20PDFs/ESP%20011000%20ABC%20vol%2010-6%202001.pdf>> [accessed 29 August 2015].

4. All quotations in this section are taken from an interview conducted on 20 May 2013.
5. Of course, Chinese music is not limited to five notes of the scale, but the primacy of the five notes is reflected in Chinese notation, and pentatonicism is the sonic figure representing Chinese music in *Emptiness*.
6. *Emptiness* was performed again at the opening of the Asian Arts Mart, 18–21 June 2003.
7. Dawn Eng, review of John Sharpley's *Emptiness*, *Arts Magazine* (March–April 2003).
8. This presentation was made to a mixed audience of graduate students in musicology and composition at Duke University on 19 October 2012. A composer considered the music to be 'cheesy' because it is 'so pentatonic'. I was told by another composer that the passage in question is 'almost racist'. From these comments, I gather that pentatonicism unmolested by dissonance is redolent (for these commentators) of essentialist stereotypes familiar from art and film music. Additionally, there appears to be a bias among university-trained composers against the ease of perception facilitated by metrical and consonant music.
9. While academics would wish to avoid making claims about large swathes of culture, it remains the case that orientalist imagination retains such generalisations. On the global imaginary, see Appadurai (1990).
10. For a lucid introduction to Deleuze's conception of difference, see Gallope (2010), p. 77: 'As is well known, a very particular conception of difference is central to Deleuze's philosophy – and it is unusual. If we most commonly think of difference as established between two actually represented identities (stars and planets, words and deeds, etc.), Deleuze thinks of difference as immanently *differing* from itself in its very being. [...] He wants to emancipate thought from a philosophy that understands difference through differences *between* or *among* identities, since such a philosophy would be dependent upon a system of representation, and representation relies upon a logic of negation. An example: Stars are *not* planets, planets are *not* stars. In the old-fashioned logic of representation and identity, this is how we would distinguish the two – by negation. But Deleuze suggests instead: before such negative statements, let us *affirm* that stars and planets, and the whole of the universe *differs from itself* in every direction, always. This thesis is the core of his philosophy'. Deleuze's conceptual apparatus involves

terms such as ‘molecularity’, which can be used to describe the intricate process of bifurcation, as well as ‘deterritorialisation’, which is relevant to the way that Sharpley idiosyncratically picks and chooses facets of different American or Asian cultures to form his own world view. I have for the most part avoided Deleuzian terms in order to keep this text comprehensible for readers who are not already steeped in Deleuze’s particular brand of philosophy.

11. Bellman (1998), p. xii: ‘[W]e in the West tend to associate alien cultures with a range of forbidden and desirable sexualities; indeed, well over half the musical exoticism discussed in this volume have [*sic*] a specific and amply demonstrated sexual component. But whether or not we imagine an alien culture to be more sexual, violent, haughty, ancient, pure, or noble than our own, music with that particular tint of exoticism reminds us not merely of a geographic locale or ethnic group but more powerfully of an elemental sexuality, violence, haughtiness, and so on, be such qualities desirable, undesirable, or some measure of both’. The fuller quotation here is from a passage where Bellman attempts to define exoticism as the stereotyping of others, but he also shifts the discourse onto a more abstract plane by arguing that exotic works go beyond stereotyping to give listeners a more fundamental experience of ‘elemental’ human passions, as if what really matters is that ‘we in the West’ get to experience this deep humanity.
12. An example taken from Sharpley’s reading list is the astrophysicist Fritjof Capra’s *The Tao of Physics*, which outlined the perceived congruence between ancient Asian ‘mysticism’ and modern physics (Capra 1975).
13. Sharpley, interview with the author, 20 May 2013.
14. The granite pillars, brackets and slabs that form the temple hall come from the Madanagopalaswamy Temple, a sixteenth-century building complex in the South Indian city of Madurai. <<http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/40202.html>> [accessed 3 December 2014].
15. For elaboration on the *Heart Sutra*, see Thich (2012), pp. 407–42.
16. Impermanence is probably best understood through this little anecdote: ‘A Buddhist [...] complained that life was empty and impermanent[. . .] [O]ne day his fourteen-year-old daughter told him [...] “Daddy [...] [w]ithout impermanence, how can I grow up?”’ (Thich 2012, p. 421).
17. For elaboration on American banks and politics, see Engdahl (2009).
18. As head of George W. Bush’s Energy Policy Task Force, Dick Cheney had a hand in the Energy Policy Act of 2005, which exempted the natural

gas extraction method known as fracking from federal oversight. 'Burning Question: What Would Life Be Like without the Halliburton Loophole?' <<http://stateimpact.npr.org/pennsylvania/2011/12/05/burning-question-what-would-life-be-like-without-the-halliburton-loophole>> [accessed 3 December 2014].

19. For Marcel Zentner, transcendence is one of the primary music-specific emotions grouped into the emotion cluster of sublimity; primary emotions are supposed to be closely related to evolutionary functions, as opposed to secondary emotions (derived from primary emotions), which are defined in social context. A related feeling, also in the sublimity cluster, that is salient for explicating transcendence is 'wonder', a 'peak experience' characterised by 'awe'. There is quite a large degree of overlap between these various and other emotions in that the peak experience of wonder comprises awe in tandem with feelings of 'humility' and 'surrender'; transcendence combines awe with a sense of 'otherworldliness'; and, sublimity as a cluster also includes more grounded emotions, such as tenderness, nostalgia and peacefulness (Zentner 2010, pp. 105–8).
20. '天下皆知美之为美, 斯恶已。皆知善之为善, 斯不善已。故有无相生, 难易相成, 长短相较, 高下相倾, 音声相和, 前后相随。是以圣人处无为之事, 行不言之教; 万物作焉而不辞, 生而不有。为而不恃, 功成而弗居。夫唯弗居, 是以不去' (Lao-Tsu 1989, p. 4). Sharpley used this translation.
21. Dissonance is most intense when the difference between the fundamental frequencies of two tones is 25 Hz, or a quarter of the critical bandwidth of 100 Hz (for pitches up to 1000 Hz or approximately B₅ [988 Hz], about two octaves above middle C) (Juslin and Västfjäll 2008, p. 564). A critical band is a band of frequencies as perceived by the inner ear (cochlea) within which a second tone will make it more difficult to perceive the first tone (Plomp and Levelt 1965).
22. There are many instances of simultaneities between pentatonic notes that exceed a triadic definition of consonance, but the overall effect is still one of consonant relief.
23. On prediction response, see Huron (2006), pp. 131–41.
24. On contrastive valence, see *ibid.*, pp. 21–5.
25. Sharpley uses the translation in Conze (2001), pp. 79ff. In the corresponding original text in Chinese, bracketed words are omitted from Kong's lyrics. '是故空中无色. 无受想行识. 无眼耳鼻舌身意. 无色声香味触法. 无眼界乃至无意识界. 无无明. 亦无无明尽. 乃至无老死. 亦无老死尽. 无苦集灭道. 无智亦无得. 以无所得故. 菩提萨埵. (依般若波罗密多故.) 心无罣碍. 无罣碍故. 无有恐怖远离颠倒梦想. 究竟涅槃'. Originally written in the

Indo-Aryan language of Sanskrit over two millennia ago, the *Heart Sutra* is found in one of the collections of scriptures (Prajñāpāramitā or *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras*) of the Mahāyāna branch of Buddhism, which originated in India, and has evolved into the Zen or *chán* sub-branch in China, whence the sub-branch spread to the rest of East Asia.

26. I am using 'plateau' simply to mean a static state that has relatively little micro modulation.
27. For a reading of musical expression (dynamics etc.) achieved through physical contact with the instrument (the performer's 'touch') as loving in nature, see Nussbaum (2007), p. 211.
28. The emerging scientific consensus is that emotions are embodied phenomena. Damasio, for example, discovered, quite by accident, in the course of treating a Parkinson's patient that the onset of physiological signs (tears) and the verbal report of sadness coincide with stimulation to a very specific portion of the brainstem in an on-off switch pattern (Damasio 2003, p. 67).
29. For ease of recognition, chords are generally shown in root position in the treble staff, unless voice leading needs to be indicated. Following the audible rate of harmonic change at one chord per measure up to bar 79, voice-leading changes within measures are usually treated as passing or neighbor notes.
30. The term 'ambiguity' derives from Meyer's classic study of musical emotion in passages of uncertainty, where effective musical expectation is suspended because there are insufficient musical clues to predict what will come next. On the propensity for ambiguity to arouse apprehension, see Meyer (1956), pp. 27–9. On the propensity for ambiguity to arouse pleasure, see Pressnitzer, Suied and Shamma (2011), p. 1.
31. It is important to note that the F# 'minor'-pentatonic choral melody throughout section 4 undergirds the chromatic harmony, anchoring F# as a centre. Although bars 74–75 could be heard as VI–ii^{#5}–V in B minor if we look at the harmony alone, the 'minor'-pentatonic gamut of F#–A–B–C#–E does not support that interpretation.
32. Positive valence is intensified in chromatic-major chords that expand beyond the gamut of Aeolian/Phrygian on F# because of the 'surprise' factor (relative to modally affiliated chords); see Huron (2006), p. 274. Other examples of expressive harmonies include the alternation of major and minor triads and seventh chords (e.g. D⁶, D maj⁷, and B min⁷ at the beginning of section 4), the F# major *tierce de Picardie* (bar 75) and the juxtaposition of B major and B minor (bar 78).

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ABSTRACT

One of the lesser-known terms used by Gilles Deleuze to articulate his conception of difference – or, more accurately, of differentiation – as the condition of existence is ‘bifurcation’, the continuous process of splitting into ever-more new pathways. Bifurcation is reflected in the life and music of the Texas-born composer John Sharpley (b. 1955), who moved to Singapore in 1986. In his *Emptiness* (2002) for Chinese and Western string quartets, chorus and percussion, which sets excerpts from Buddhist and Taoist texts, musical bifurcation is observed in the continuous splitting of modality from chromaticism at multiple structural levels. Musical bifurcation is paralleled in bifurcation in Sharpley’s life, as reflected in his transcontinental migration and multiple mystical experiences. As a concept, bifurcation represents the diametric opposite of syncretism (combining), which dominates composers’ discourse and theorists’ analyses. By attending to the dynamics of bifurcation as musical and biographical processes, we might come to appreciate in its full ambiguity and complexity music that crosses cultures. In doing so, we gain further insights into musical orientalism.