

Conclusion

Although few would agree with White that there is a harmonic miscalculation at the end of *The Inextinguishable*, it is easier to sympathize with the notion that the Symphony lacks the pacing and control of its successor.¹ In the concluding section of this dissertation I attempt to tease out the subtle differences between the final paragraphs of Nielsen's Fourth and Fifth, the sort of work for which the methodologies I have explored are particularly well suited. It is also my intention to treat this analysis as a springboard for a wider discussion of issues arising both from the endings themselves and the methodologies employed in their description.

All the main semiotic concepts introduced in this dissertation can be brought to bear on this analysis: from the deepest level of Greimas's generative trajectory, the modulations of musical 'becoming'; from the semionarrative level, the modalities that have been central to my Tarasti-inspired musical adaptation of Greimas; from the surface level, the narrative operations of aspectualization that establish times and places within a story; and, finally, the semiotic square as a tool for exploring underlying relationships and operations.

Example 108 outlines the music that leads to the codas of the Fourth and Fifth symphonies, a blaze of E and E \flat major respectively. Both passages involve a broadly diatonic idea that, having been challenged by sustained tonal instability, finally and briefly triumphs. In each case the music preceding the coda has been dominated by highly chromatic quavers, which in *The Inextinguishable* form the subject of the 'mad fugato' (see p. 293). Another point of connection between the two symphonies is prominent repeated notes: in the Fourth, sporadic octave unison B \flat s decorated by appoggiaturas, in the Fifth, a relentless pulsing of crotchets B \flat s.

¹ Indeed John Waterhouse criticizes the end of the work in more general terms in his article 'Nielsen Reconsidered' (1965: 516).

As discussed in Chapter Four, Greimas and Fontanille's model suggests that discourse is the product of a bringing-together (or convocation) of modalities and 'modulations' of becoming (as discussed in Chapter Three, see p. 168). It is not only the modalities themselves that are important in describing a narrative situation but also the manner of their combination. The modalities of *non-pouvoir* and *vouloir*, for example, might manifest in discourse either as despair or obstinacy (1993: 36): for a despairing subject, *non-pouvoir* follows *vouloir*, but for an obstinate subject there is a continuous overlapping of the two modalities. Greimas and Fontanille suggest that such surface temporal orderings and fluctuations originate at a deeper level, so that obstinacy, for example, is the result of a "resistant" and "durative" semiotic style' (: 39). Passional 'meaning effects' therefore 'correspond to different ways of modulating becoming' (: 43:), with the 'resistance' of the obstinate subject understood as prior to the semionarrative level of the modalities, rather than merely a result of their surface interaction.

It can be seen from Example 108 (and even more clearly from the scores) that the underlying organization of the relatively similar musical material of these extracts differs considerably. In the Fourth Symphony, each subsection is strongly closed by abrupt changes in motivic material, dynamics and orchestration, whereas in the Fifth Symphony, they are linked into one continuous passage. In the earlier work, a pause and change of tempo at b. 1035 marks the end of the first section, and the end of the second is marked by the timpani glissando and a sudden change of texture at b. 1110. The more continuous nature of the ending of the later symphony is emphasized not only by the repeated B♭ crotchets that persist unbroken from b. 799 until the penultimate bar, but also by the way the material is woven into a developmental unfolding rather than a series of juxtapositions. In Greimas's terms, the modulation of 'becoming' could be described in the Fifth at this point as 'cursive' and in *The Inextinguishable* as 'closing'. There is, in other words, a tendency to sustain musical becoming rather than to demarcate it into closed-off blocks.

Ex. 108

Both extracts move from tonal stability (*savoir être*) to instability (*non-savoir être*) and back again. The bands at the top of the diagrams on Example 108 decrease in thickness as the music moves from *savoir être* to its negation, showing graphically how this transition is almost immediate in the Fourth Symphony but more gradual in the Fifth. In the earlier work, the timpani suddenly treble in volume at b. 1059 as they move from a tonally anchoring B to a roar of D minor, which more or less obliterates B, despite the insistent repetition of its tonic note in the winds and strings. The regaining of tonal stability at the end of the extract is likewise fairly rapid, as motif X(a2) suddenly emerges from the chromaticism of the preceding fugato. In the Fifth symphony, the transition from one modality to the other is much more gradual. The harmony increases in mobility (from b. 750) before the level of chromaticism begins to obscure tonal hierarchy at b. 798, and the regaining of tonal assimilation is also more gradated, with the B \square dominant pedal exerting increasing influence from around b. 1110. The contrast between gradual and sudden changes in *savoir être* might be understood as reflecting deep level ‘cursive’ and ‘closing’ modulations of becoming.

The beginnings of both passages employ material from the opening of their respective movements, and in both cases this elaborates an ascent from \wedge^1 to \wedge^5 with a series of upward leaps (*vouloir faire*). In the Fifth Symphony this motif (A) is also found at the beginning of the coda (b. 896), and on both occasions *vouloir faire* is reinforced by the *pouvoir* of a ***fortissimo tutti***. In the Fourth Symphony it is not the opening X(a2) that brings the work to its culmination, but a theme from the second subject of the first movement (motif Y shown in b. 996 of Example 108a), which likewise projects the modality of *vouloir faire* (\wedge^8 to \wedge^5). The *vouloir faire* in the Fourth Symphony, however, is undermined from the beginning of the extract by consistently low dynamics (*non-pouvoir*) and a tendency for the melodic material to chase its own tail.

Another contrast with the later symphony is that, rather than continuing to strive for the tension (i.e. *vouloir faire*), motif Y in the coda of *The Inextinguishable* is modified so that it projects the closure of *vouloir être* (\wedge^5 and finally \wedge^8 to \wedge^1). The prominent horn figures in the last bars of both extracts underscore this: in the Fourth Symphony a

descending arpeggio from $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{1}$ (*vouloir être*), in the Fifth the powerfully energetic *vouloir faire* of $\hat{1}$ to $\hat{5}$.

At the surface narrative level, it is hard to imagine a reading of these passages that does not turn on the triumphant arrival at the beginning of the coda of motif Y in the Fourth Symphony and motif A in the Fifth. It is the impact of these moments that I particularly wish to concentrate on, and Figure 51 summarizes the foregoing discussion from the point of view of these motifs at their moment of climax.

Fig. 51 – Comparison of extracts from Nielsen IV and V (see Example 108)

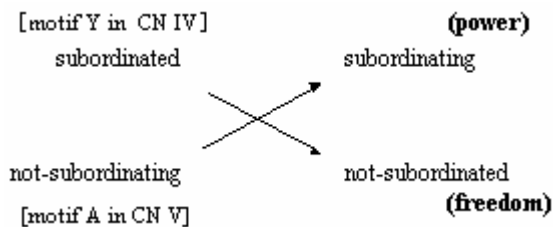
Motif Y in Fourth Symphony (b. 1140)	Motif A in Fifth Symphony (b. 880)
sudden restoration of <i>savoir être</i>	culmination of gradual restoration of <i>savoir être</i>
motif projected <i>non-pouvoir</i> at beginning of extract (<i>p</i> at b. 990)	motif projected <i>pouvoir</i> at beginning of extract (<i>ff</i> at b. 731)
motif projects <i>vouloir être</i> ($\hat{5}$ to $\hat{1}$) having previously projected <i>vouloir faire</i> at b. 996 ff. ($\hat{8}$ to $\hat{5}$)	motif projects <i>vouloir faire</i> ($\hat{1}$ to $\hat{5}$) as at b. 731
passage as a whole characterized by ‘closing’ modulation of becoming (material tends to be presented in discrete, closed-off blocks)	passage as a whole characterized by ‘cursive’ modulation of becoming (material tends to be joined, dovetailed and integrated)

In Chapter Two, the relationship between $\hat{3}$ and $\hat{2}$ in Beethoven’s Fourth Symphony was discussed in terms of subordination, and in the above extract from Nielsen’s Fourth Symphony, motif Y is largely subordinated by the surrounding music. Its weakness at the beginning of Example 108a is emphasized by the way in which it tails off as this section closes, and it is similarly ineffectual when it is drowned-out by the violence of the timpani duel. The result of this is that one is led to interpret its final emergence from the fugato that begins at b. 1110 as an end to its previous subordination – moving on Figure 52 to the position of ‘not-subordinated’. The alteration in modality

from *vouloir faire* to *vouloir être*, adds to the sense that the theme has finally escaped into a more amenable musical environment.

In the Fifth Symphony extract, on the other hand, motif A persistently projects high *pouvoir* and *vouloir faire*. Rather than emerge from chaos like motif Y in the Fourth, it subsumes, and as Fanning puts it, ‘engulfs’ its challenges (1997: 75). In moving from ‘non-subordinating’ to ‘subordinating’ on Figure 52, the Fifth Symphony embodies not the freedom at the end of *The Inextinguishable*, but power.²

Fig. 52 – The endings of Nielsen’s Fourth and Fifth Symphonies on a semiotic square of subordination



This power stems not only from the modalities of *pouvoir* and *vouloir faire* but also from deep-level ‘cursive’ modulation of becoming, which sustains a process of integrating and subsuming. Whereas the texture in the Fourth is liable to change abruptly, there is only one point in this part of the Fifth that is anything like as fractured. At b. 798 the *tutti* is suddenly cut off by octave unison quavers in the strings, but the pulsing pedal from this point ensures that the material is progressively ‘contained’ by the dominant (Fanning 1997: 76), and this simplest of cursive devices helps pull the texture together. The contrast is also highlighted by the tempo markings on the approach to the coda. In the Fourth, the four bars into this final section are marked *accelerando* (a dash for freedom?); at the beginning of the coda of the Fifth, Nielsen asks for a *poco allargando*, suggesting an assured exercise of power.

² In this context, the freedom at the end of *The Inextinguishable* is not, of course from major-minor tonality but from the tension of tonal closure denied.

If I have described more precisely the differences between the two endings, I have not addressed the question of whether this has any bearing on the relative merits of the two works. Before I do so, I want first to step back in order to reflect on the framework and vocabulary of the analytical methodology itself. Having taken advantage of the freedom offered by doctoral research to explore relatively esoteric theoretical islands, I am keen to address the question, at least briefly, of building bridges back to the wider world of musical scholarship. Whilst I consider that finding analogies in tonal music for the processes and structures of Greimas's narrative models is an interesting exercise in itself, I hope that some valuable descriptive tools have emerged. In considering the potential analytical application of these tools outside the present study, it is important to evaluate to what extent the jargon that they have so far entailed is an integral part of what they have to offer.

Three distinctive analytical tools emerge from this dissertation:

- 1) the descriptive employment of the modalities
- 2) the analysis of combinations of musical parameters in terms of Greimas and Fontanille's three-part model (modulations of becoming, modalities and aspectualizations)
- 3) the use of the semiotic square to structure musical oppositions on all levels of musical discourse.

The strength of the modalities as an analytical metalanguage is that they draw out the latent anthropomorphic qualities of technical descriptions of music, reshaping them within a narrative framework that, although highly reductive, offers scope for considerable subtlety. In describing a tension-resolving tonal progression, for example, it is helpful to be able to distinguish between normative resolution that is only expected (on the strength of previous experience), suggested (a progression from $\hat{7}$ to $\hat{8}$ is present), and fully realized ($\hat{7}$ to $\hat{8}$ is harmonized by V-I), whether or not one couches such differences in terms of *devoir*, *vouloir* and *pouvoir*.

In my earlier analyses of Beethoven symphonies, this sort of separation facilitated the tracing of tensions across different Schenkerian levels of the work; in the study of Nielsen's Second Symphony it helped facilitate interesting mappings between modal descriptions of tonal progressions and the four temperaments. In both cases, the essential properties of the descriptive language were the encapsulation of musical features within a relatively narrow range of terms and the structuring of these terms on the semiotic square.

In this dissertation, I have used Greimas's categories of narrative thought (the modalities of *wanting*, *having*, *knowing* etc.) to throw a new light upon the potential meaning of musical detail. In order to keep a clear separation of technical metalanguage and informal description, I have retained Greimas's original French for the modalities, but one obvious way of widening their possible application is not only to translate them into English (as Tarasti does) but to come up with informal equivalents of such constructions as 'not-want not-to-do'. The problem is, however, that the essence of the semiotic square is in relationships rather than fixed points – 'hyperactive' for example, would not adequately capture the possible meanings of 'not-want not-to-do'. Another possibility is to retain the idea of a limited number of terms structured on semiotic squares, but choose musical terms relevant to the given situation, whether general (tension vs. resolution) or more specific (sharpwards vs. flatwards). In my analyses the motivation for the employment of modalities is clear - I am asking how the music can be understood as broadly narrative. Any choice of alternative terms would have to be motivated by equally clear underlying questions.

Moving to the second of the analytical tools listed above, the descriptive power of the modalities is greatly increased when they are incorporated into Greimas and Fontanille's model of discourse, which combines them with the deep level of 'becoming' and surface aspectualization. I use this model to bring such parameters as changes in texture and tempo into play. Unlike the modalities, this part of my approach is not wedded so tightly to the language of its expression – the jargon ('modulation of becoming', 'semiotic style' etc.) is a convenience rather than an integral part of the theory. It is easy to

imagine, then, how this sort of analysis might feed unobtrusively into more traditional approaches.

In my discussion of *The Four Temperaments*, Greimas and Fontanille's model, developed as part of a semiotics of passion, was particularly useful for unpacking what is reckless about the 'Choleric Temperament' (see Example 44 on p. 219), and, in the Fourth Symphony, it helped define why the climax in E major towards the end of the *Poco adagio quasi andante* section is unsatisfying (see Example 85 on p. 284). As with the modalities, what is provided is an interesting framework for detailed analytical observations, with the semiotic square again proving to be a vital tool for mapping out the potential meanings of the various different types of interaction. Whilst many semiotic approaches take the ascription of meaning to musical features as their starting point, Grabocz's employment of Greimasian semiotics, for example (see p. 48 above), my adaptation of Greimas and Fontanille's model results in specific meanings emerging only in the final phase of investigation.

The analysis of recklessness in the 'Choleric Temperament', and the comparison of the endings of the Fourth and Fifth symphonies with which this conclusion began, raises a final question that straddles the boundary of what the methodology developed in this dissertation is able to explore. In his programme note for the Second Symphony, Nielsen voices the hope that listeners will not find his depictions of the extremes of temperament as ridiculous as he found the woodcut that initially inspired them (see p. 185 above). What does my semiotic approach have to say about whether the recklessness of the notional musical subject in the 'Choleric Temperament' is astute musical characterization or poor judgement? To return to the case of the endings of the Fourth and Fifth symphonies, whilst I have tried to show how the differences can be understood in terms of narrative programmes of freedom and power, this does not necessarily confirm or deny the doubts of the earlier work's critics.

The only formal role that aesthetic judgement has played so far in this dissertation has been in the form of 'moralization' – part of the 'pathemic trajectory' discussed in

Chapter Four (Figure 22, p. 180). This is intrinsic to discourse, however, and the judgements that we are discussing presumably take place in the context of the relationship of a sender and receiver outside the text. However, as Tarasti has noted, this sort of relationship is multiply embedded, and we must therefore be clear whose performance is being judged: it might be that of the composer himself, or of an ‘implied composer’, or it might be that we are confusing either with a subject within the discourse (2002: 75). If the work is judged to be unsuccessful in some way, the theoretical ramifications are complex, whether we consider that this is unwitting or something deliberately written into the musical text. Unlike orthodox Schenkerian analysis, which explicitly makes aesthetic judgements on the basis of its findings, one of the strengths of my approach so far has been that quite divergent views of a piece might rest on the same foundations.³

A theoretical discussion of the semiotics of aesthetic success and failure is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it is an issue that is of particular interest in the case of Nielsen. Whilst the integrating and subsuming power of the Fifth Symphony is certainly one important side to his aesthetic, so too is the intrusion of the incongruous, imperfect or even capricious. If the way in which the ending of the Fourth ‘*records* a spiritual dichotomy instead of resolving it’ (Waterhouse 1965: 516) is judged as an aesthetic miscalculation that is rectified in the Fifth, one would not expect to find similar closing strategies in later works.

However, to take two prominent examples, the Flute Concerto, written four years after the completion of the Fifth, has attracted criticism for its ending, and the Sixth Symphony offers quite a different take on the symphonic conclusion. My purpose in raising these comparisons is to support the notion that the Fourth is not an inferior version of its successor, but that it is the work of a composer who delights in being able to offer distinctive aesthetic experiences that are not necessarily constrained by totalizing ideologies of unity and integration.

³ A colleague told me at a recent conference that my analysis of recklessness in the ‘Choleric Temperament’ identified precisely what he found unsatisfactory about the passage in question.

Gunnar Heerup wrote of the Flute Concerto in 1927 that ‘the last third of the [second] movement [of the concerto] seems without justified connection to the rest and along with the rhapsodically abrupt ending gives the movement a strangely short-tailed impression’ (cited in Petersen 2002: p. xxxii). Like the Fourth Symphony, the final blaze of E major does not sound like the process of assured logic, emerging as it does on the back of a blundering trombone intervention. Simpson interprets this as a kindly joke on the work’s fastidious dedicatee (1979: 142), but I prefer to understand it as a pointer to a more elemental conflict.

Normative tonal closure in the Flute Concerto, as in *The Inextinguishable*, is revitalized by its juxtaposition with more unpredictable elements. As I suggested in Chapter Five, the dichotomy of unruly exuberance and fastidious good taste recalls Schenker’s opposition of Artist and Nature, in which the former offers a restraining influence for the sake of artistic comprehensibility (see p. 310). In these terms, both works challenge this restraint, and ultimately are invigorated, as the composer allows more elemental forces (of Nature) to intrude.

Whilst it is important to the dramatic trajectory of the Flute Concerto and the Fourth Symphony that there is a triumphant coda, this does not have to entail a culminating subjugation of everything that has gone before. Order may have prevailed but I suggest that Nielsen deliberately leaves the listener with strong memories of previous disorder, and with a sense that the closure is only temporary.

If this is Nielsen’s strategy, it is a risky one, because it is open to misreading as poor judgement. But risk was not something to which the composer was averse, either in life, or, as the following quotation demonstrates, in art:

even if we were to agree that we had achieved the best and the most beautiful that it is possible to achieve, we should be impelled, in the end, thirsting as we do more for life and experience than for perfection, to cry out: Give us something else; give us something new; for Heaven's sake give us something bad, so long as we feel we are alive and active and not just passive admirers of tradition!” (1953: 66)

This strategy also foreshadows the dark drama of the Sixth Symphony, in which, victorious resolution of tensions is not temporary but non-existent. As Jonathan Kramer suggests, ‘tensions may relax, simplicity may return, but true and total resolution is forever eluded’ (1994: 322).

Whatever Nielsen is trying to achieve at the end of the Fourth Symphony, his success or failure is rightly beyond the semiotic methodology developed in this dissertation. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that analysis is nothing more or less than complex description; I can flesh out my assertion that I think that Fourth Symphony is a different type of masterpiece from the Fifth rather than a lesser one, but I am no closer to proving it.

The extent to which Nielsen’s musical risks pay off is dependent upon individual performers and listeners, but, as Fanning suggests in the context of the Fifth Symphony, the contingencies of reception and indeed theoretical explanations are, in a sense, secondary:

what is just as important as the theoretical justification [for closure in E♭] is Nielsen’s inner conviction ... which enables him to make the explicit thematic associations he does with the confidence that they are founded on the bedrock of a convincing tonal scheme (1997: 77).

This sense of conviction is, for me, present also in the Fourth Symphony. Drawing on Tarasti’s model of the sign as an act (Figure 1, p. 42) one can understand the symphony as falling between two transcendences – Nielsen’s belief and my own that this is a convincing work. Whilst analysing music in terms of modalities or semiotic style can never pin down this shared conviction, it can still describe more precisely the musical features onto which it might be projected.