

## KAPITTEL 6

# Unity in Music and Religion: A Pansemiotic Inquiry

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**Abstract:** The concept of unity, central to philosophy, religion and music, requires ontological differentiation for it to become meaningful. Influenced by the dialogue 'Parmenides' by Plato and the philosophies of Cusanus, Kant and Fichte, the Norwegian philosopher E. A. Wyller developed a branch of philosophy called 'henology', a dialectic philosophy of the universe logically leading to a religious stance; in the case of Wyller, Christianity. However, the henological perspective is also central to a considerably more recent religion, the Bahá'í religion, in which unity is the core concept. This paper demonstrates how the henological differentiation of the concept of unity has parallels in music. In a pansemiotic context, these parallels may point to a world with a hologrammatic structure, in which the macrocosmos mirrors itself infinitely in the microcosmos of the material world.

**Keywords:** unity, henology, music theory, Bahá'í Faith, pansemiotics

Le mystère est la chose de la musique.

—Jankélévitch, 1989, p. 17

## Introduction

Unity is a central theme in religion and music. Unity may appear to be a simple theme, but closer scrutiny reveals that it demands a great deal of articulation. Addressing unity in music, this essay reflects on the genesis

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of sound, tone and tune of the willow flute, a Norwegian folk music instrument. There is a general discussion of unity in the tradition of Western classical music, followed by a demonstration of how the concept of unity in these traditions corresponds to various aspects of unity from a *henological* perspective (Wyller, 1981) by employing knowledge of the Bahá'í scriptures, in which the concept of unity is central. Lastly, there is a discussion of the apparent parallels between musical unity and *henological* cosmology from a pansemiotic perspective: could the structure of the universe, like a hologram, be reflected within its constituent parts?

## A lesson to be learnt from the willow flute

The willow flute (Norwegian: *seljefløyte*) is a folk instrument. It takes its name from the willow from which it is usually produced. The willow flute has no finger holes; thus, changes in pitch are mainly produced through varying the intensity of breathing, similar to how brass instruments are played without valves. The instrument produces harmonics (i.e., multiples of the fundamental frequency) up to harmonic number 8, and then, by stopping the end of the flute with a finger, it produces harmonics 9 to 16 with a fundamental frequency one octave below. The sound genesis of the willow flute can be described as follows: first, there is the breath – the energy coming from outside of the flute. When channelled into the flute tube, the air is confronted by a slit in which a vibration is produced. This results in the formation of a sound wave heard as a clear pitch. This is the fundamental note of the instrument and can only be heard when the flute is blown extremely softly, so it is never used in the typical playing of the instrument. The fundamental pitch is, however, essential, since all the pitches produced using the instrument are its multiples. When the energy of the breathing is raised, the wave inside the instrument cracks, first in two, then in three, then in four (and so on). This produces a set of new pitches that bear a close resemblance to the series of overtones but are successively slightly higher than what a mere mathematical multiplication by integrals of the fundamental frequency would produce. The harmonics used in playing range from 6 to 16. While the fundamental is not heard, it is nevertheless present through its higher-energy representations,

most importantly as harmonic number 8, three octaves above the fundamental.

The tonal affordances of the instrument enable the creation of music: pitches produced can be grouped into small motives, *units*, and they in turn are grouped into larger units. A hierarchy of units creates the form of the musical 'work', the highest unity in sound production and composition. Within the folk music tradition, there is a certain *uniformity* of the musical language that ensures its comprehensibility to a community of listeners who are *united* by their common fascination with the music.

In sum, there are many lessons to learn about unity from the willow flute:

1. Unheard energy sustains the flute sound, representing a unitary creative force that is maintained beyond the instrument and the sound waves it produces. The translation of the breath into sound happens through the passage at a point of resistance that causes the energy to attain a specific and observable form, as a tone, a pitch. The fundamental frequency is not normally heard, but it provides the *unitary ground* for the audible sounds, whose frequencies are its multiples.
2. The diversity of pitches creates a demand for a new level of organisation. They form a scale with a centre pitch (a tonic). The centre pitch is harmonic number eight, the same pitch class as the fundamental, but three octaves higher. Thus, the hidden origin reappears as an organising force in the musical universe.
3. Pitches are gathered into units that form phrases and sentences; what is diverse and scattered has been *unified*.
4. *Uniformity* in musical style provides the ground for common understanding in a listener community and can therefore play a role in uniting a group of people into a community.

## The concept of unity in the theory of Western classical music

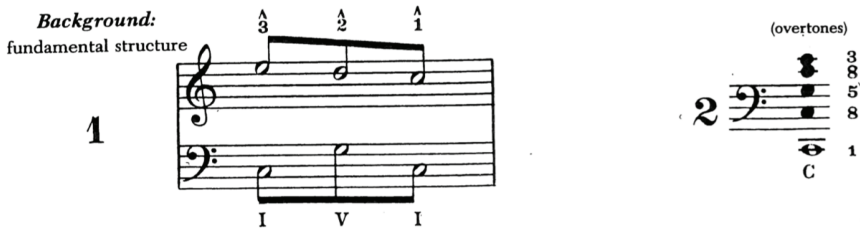
So far, the reader has been made aware of how a twig, when properly cut and played, is capable of making advanced analogue calculations to produce harmonics. The willow flute effectively reveals several phenomena

related to various aspects of unity. These basic features are also present in the following characterisation of unity as an organising factor in Western art music. Two music theorists will be referred to, who, to an exceptional degree, have studied the inner structures and workings of classical music: Heinrich Schenker and Arnold Schoenberg. They both formulated their thoughts during a period in which classical and romantic music reached its apex. Briefly, Schenker wanted to reveal the genius of classical harmony and consolidate tradition; Schoenberg wanted to extract experiences from the organic musical form and harmony of classical music, in order to transfer these to a new style of music.

The musical theories of Schenker (1868–1935) on the nature and role of harmony in classical music have been influential and inspired many related approaches to music analysis (e.g., Forte & Gilbert, 1982; Salzer, 1952; Schachter, 1999). His champions have managed to purge his valuable method of musical analysis of its German nationalist leanings. According to Schenker (1954), musical tonality proceeds from natural harmonics (as seen in the lesson of the willow flute in the preceding chapter). First there is the fundamental, then the harmonics that are contained in the acoustic spectrum of the fundamental; the major triad is found to occur as harmonic numbers 3, 4 and 5. With C as a fundamental, the resulting triad consists of G, C and E, listed from the bottom up. The fundamental thesis asserted by Schenker is that tonal music is the ‘composing-out’ (*Auskomponierung*) of this naturally given affordance. The fundamental note will always have a prominent presence in a piece of tonal music, if not physically, then by aural implication as a centre of reference and attraction. A G-major chord in the context of the C-major scale would have a different functional quality (as a dominant) than a G-major in the context of, say, a D-major scale (where it would have a subdominant function).

The composing-out of the point of origin, the major triad, would consist of turning the simultaneously sounding interval E–C into a melodic progression by inserting a D between them (Figure 1, no. 1). D does not have a simple harmonic relationship to the harmonics of the fundamental C (Figure 1, no. 2), so it demands harmonic support, which it finds in the bass note G, which is another harmonic of C. This is the result

of a so-called *bass arpeggiation*. While the fundamental C is not present in the interval G–D, the context implies that C is the fundamental – an attractor that gives the listener the expectation that the fundamental will soon be attained. Thus, composing-out engenders a phenomenon, *prolongation*, through which the effect of a fundamental or prioritised scale degree may exert an effect beyond its physical presence by creating a listener expectation (Bent, 1990, p. 112). This type of expectation is what in phenomenology would be termed a ‘protention’, as it is preconscious, i.e. hardly registered as such by the conscious mind.



**Figure 1.** The notes presented in number two above (Schenker, 1935), are the overtones of the fundamental (C). The numbers refer to the intervals in scale steps: fundamental (1), octave (8), fifth (5), second octave (8) and major third (3). The notes presented as Background in number one, shows the composing out that engenders the fundamental structure of allegedly all tonal music: The third (3̂) descends to the fundamental (1̂), passing through 2̂, which now demands a harmonic support in the bass (V) ('bass arpeggiation').

A full explanation of composing-out techniques in different manners of prolongation is beyond the scope of this essay. However, a picture of how Schenker reduces a complex composition by peeling away layer after layer until he arrives at *Ursatz*, which explains the underlying tonal *unity*, can be intuitively grasped by studying a graphic music analysis made by Schenker himself. The Chopin *Etude* (op. 10, no. 8) analysed here (Figure 2) is characterised by rapid 16<sup>th</sup> note passages running through several octaves. All of this has been removed from Schenker's first analytical reduction, as represented in 3. *Schicht*, i.e., the third layer. The lower (fourth line) of the example displays only the skeleton of chord progressions. Thus, the tonal essence of a two-and-a-half minute long piece covering several pages of the score is rendered in a single line.<sup>1</sup> On the upper

<sup>1</sup> Score and sound available on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Op1qBQRJNLM>



generalised. One effort of such a transfer is the development of ‘spectrotonality’, a composition technique designed to engender prolongation applicable to contemporary harmony (Thoresen, 2015, p. 323–326). A basic premise for this attempt is a phenomenologically based interpretation of the concept of prolongation (Thoresen, 2015). The music must be organised to facilitate the ability of the listening consciousness to retain a simplified idea of what has just transpired as a mental background to contextualise what is heard in the moment and predict what will happen next. Here, harmonic constructions play a crucial role.

Whereas Schenker tended to reduce all that matters in music to harmony, the composer Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951) insisted on the unity of the work as an idea whose form results from the interaction of several dimensions (i.e., parameters). In his notebook, he writes:

THE TWO-OR-MORE-DIMENSIONAL SPACE IN WHICH MUSICAL IDEAS ARE PRESENTED IS A UNIT [sic]. Though the elements of these ideas appear separate and independently to the eye and the ear, they reveal their true meaning only through their co-operation ... The elements of a musical idea are partly incorporated in the horizontal plane as successive sounds, and partly in the vertical plane as simultaneous sounds. (Schoenberg, 1995, p. 60)

The ideas Schoenberg (1995, p. 22) held about musical forms are founded on two principles: comprehensibility and coherence. The concern for unity in each single work of music was essential to him. He insisted that a piece of music should have organic unity, stating:

Used in the aesthetic sense, form means that a piece is organized; i.e., that it consists of elements functioning like those of a living organism. Without organization, music would be an amorphous mass, as unintelligible as an essay without punctuation, or as disconnected as a conversation which leaps purposelessly from one subject to another. (Schoenberg, 1967, p. 1)

An excellent composer, Schoenberg was able to precisely describe the creative process. The musical work is conceived as a whole in a momentary, inspired vision (or rather, an ‘audition’) that contains the basic idea of the music. Musical unity is now conceived of as the embryonic idea that inspires each individual musical work:

The form in its outline, characteristics of tempo, dynamics, moods and the main and subordinate ideas, their relation, derivation, their contrasts and deviations – all these are there at once, though in embryonic state. The ultimate formulation of the melodies, themes, rhythms and many details will subsequently develop through the generating power of the germs. (Schoenberg, 1995, p. 7)

The embryonic idea must be worked out during the composition process while observing the appropriate constraints. Schoenberg (1967) insists that music needs delimitation, subdivision and simple repetition, and that musical comprehension is impossible without repetition.

While Schoenberg affirms ideals of musical unity and organic differentiation with regard to the nature of each individual work, listeners may have trouble perceiving these qualities in his dodecaphonic music. The 12-tone series guarantees *conceptual* unity, but this is not evident in the music-as-heard. At best, the series guarantees a certain uniformity, an overall impression of a non-centred tonal universe. However, the role of tonality as a slowly moving, underlying context that is aurally perceived as a unifying element is lost. This loss, to a degree, is rationalised in the aesthetic philosophy of Theodor Adorno (2003) as the removal of an illusion of the meaningfulness of human existence. After the atrocities of World War II, the belief in beauty and unity as organising factors in society and existence in general was radically shattered. The music philosopher Jens Kjeldsen summarises the late aesthetic positions of Adorno and Schoenberg succinctly, stating:

For Adorno and Schoenberg, music is not the presence of a metaphysically grounded harmony. It is, on the contrary, a symptom of a real disease conditioned by the self-conceit of society. (Kjeldsen, 1999, p. 23; my translation)<sup>2</sup>

Despite its negativity, this quotation reflects a basic premise underlying the Western musical tradition and several non-Western ‘high cultures’ of music. The inner organisation of music reflects a greater order, be it of society, as Adorno suggests, or of a cosmic order, as was the paramount case in the musical theories of Pythagoras (c. 570–c. 495 BCE).

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2 ‘For Adorno og Schönberg er musikken ikke et nærvær av en metafysisk begrundet harmoni. Den er tværtimod et symptom på en reel lidelse, der er betinget af samfundets selvbedrag.’



These became the very basis of the tonal organisation of Western music in defining the diatonic scale, which is omnipresent in modern popular music. The ideas of Pythagoras are summarised by Alexander Polyhistor, writing in the first century BCE:

The first principle of things is the One. From the One came an Indefinite Two, as matter for the One, which is cause. From the One and the Indefinite Two came numbers; and from numbers, points; from points, lines; from lines, plane figures; from plane figures, solid figures; from solid figures, sensible bodies. The elements of these are four: fire, water, earth, air; these change and are wholly transformed, and out of them comes to be a cosmos, animate, intelligent, spherical, embracing the central earth, which is itself spherical and inhabited round about. (James, 1995, p. 39)

Pythagoras was known to have worked out his ideas of the cosmos by working on sounding bodies, determining the ratios of harmonic intervals between them. In his dialogue, *Timaeus*, Plato (1999) elaborates on the myth of the demiurge fashioning the cosmos with simple, harmonic proportions: 1:2:3, in a Pythagorean spirit. The resulting list of proportions corresponds to the Pythagorean scale, which is the basis of the modern diatonic scale, only slightly modified with regard to intonation. Music and cosmos are understood to reflect the same cosmogonic principles. This idea was carried through in the learned sacred music of mediaeval Europe, and traces of it are still found in the harmonic system of the era of tonal music, as discussed above. Throughout history, man has created models of the universe: sounding models, as Pythagoras and later Kepler are reported to have constructed, and mathematical models in contemporary science. Moreover, ideas created by religions have, over time, shaped the conception that human beings have of the cosmos and their place within it. In the next chapter, the focus shifts from unity in music to the concept of unity in religion.

## Henology

One finds concepts of unity formulated in different ways and vocabularies in Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism,

Christianity, Islam and the Bahá'í Faith. The Norwegian philosopher Egil A. Wyller (1925–2021) developed a philosophical approach to cosmic unity, which he called 'henology' (derived from the Greek *hen*, meaning one) (Wyller, 1981, p. 21).<sup>3</sup> Wyller postulates that philosophy in general is directed towards wholeness (Greek: *holon*), distinguishing it from mysticism, which is directed towards unity (Greek: *hen*) and science, focused on totality (Greek: *pan*). His analysis of *Parmenides* by Plato became the foundation for his later studies of the philosophies of Cusanus, Kant and Fichte, of which he made a synthesis in his main work, *Enhet og Annethet*. His henological synthesis may be condensed in the dictum '*Amo ergo es: Jeg elsker, altså er Du.*' (Wyller, 1981, p. 299). The consummation of his philosophy is expressed in his love of Christ.

The broader features of henological philosophy are, however, also present in the sacred scriptures of the Bahá'í Revelations,<sup>4</sup> although these, being spontaneous and inspired utterances, are evidently not structured as a consistent philosophical system. Unity is indeed the main concern of this religion, which is essentially monotheistic, while incorporating certain aspects of a monistic worldview. What follows is a correlation of the different ontological levels of unity in henology elaborated on by Wyller and those of Bahá'í scripture. In the presentation of the latter, the essay leverages English sources in which Arabic terms are inserted for the sake of clarity, as the Arabic language has precise terminology for different ontological levels of unity, while no precise equivalent terms are found in English.

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3 The term 'henology' was originally coined by Étienne Gilson to characterise the neoplatonic ideas of mediaeval Christianity (Wyller, 1981, p. 153).

4 The Bahá'í Revelations started with Siyyid 'Alí Muhammad, known as the Báb (1819–1852), and continued with those of Mirza Husayn 'Alí, known as Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892). The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh were interpreted and disseminated by his son, Mirza 'Abbás (known as 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1844–1921), and further expounded by the grandson of the latter, Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957). The surviving works of the Báb are known to comprise around 2,000 items, those of Bahá'u'lláh tallying nearly 20,000 items, and those of 'Abdu'l-Bahá tallying over 30,000 items. Published works in English are available on the websites 'Bahá'í Reference Library' and 'A partial inventory of the works of the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith'. There is no authorised theology nor priesthood in the Bahá'í Faith. However, an administrative institution (The Universal House of Justice), situated in Haifa, Israel, directs the development of the organisation of the Faith on a global basis and collects and catalogues its writings. Scholarly works that correlate the revealed writings with Western philosophy include Saiedi (2000) and Saiedi (2008).

## 1. Absolute unity

Wyller describes the first part of the dialogue *Parmenides* by Plato as an ascension from absolute multiplicity via wandering in the light towards absolute unity. Absolute unity excludes all other attributes, including that of being (Plato, 1966). The equivalent ontological level described in the Bahá'í writings is that of a unity beyond numbers (Arabic: *ahadíyyah*), totally inconceivable to the minds and hearts of men, as follows:

... that Essence of Oneness [*dhát-i-ahadíyyah*], or divine Being, is eternal and everlasting—that is, as it has neither beginning nor end ... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 2014, p. 207)

The realm of Divinity is an indivisible oneness, wholly sanctified above human comprehension ... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 172)

In the World of *ahadíyyah*, they [the Names and Attributes] are identical to the Essence. In the World of *wáhidíyyah*, they are distinguished. These stations of *ahadíyyah* and pillars of *wáhidíyyah* and Divinity have always remained and will continue to endure. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, provisional translation in Momen, 1985, p. 25)

## 2. Logos, Primal Will, Being

According to Wyller's analysis of *Parmenides*, the second hypothesis declared by Plato is that the 'One might have a share in Being'. The hypothesis is posited as 'provided that the One is, what would be the consequences?'<sup>5</sup> The reality of Being described at this ontological level seems to correspond with some aspects of the transcendent, eternal and ahistorical Logos described in the opening of the Gospel of St John. In Bahá'í scripture, this reality is variably referred to as the 'Word of God', the 'Primal Will', and the 'Primal Point'. The Báb explains the nature of the Primal Will as '[God] hath fashioned the Will from nothingness, through Itself, and ordained It to be the Cause of all that is other than It,

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5 My translation of Wyller's Norwegian translation: 'Sett at det Ene er, hva følger så?'

with no descent of anything from His Essence unto the Will' (quoted in Saiedi, 2008, p. 192).

Whereas the essence of God is inaccessible, it is through this intermediary stage that the Divine enters the world of creation in its originated, transcendental eternity. The transcendent Primal Will or Logos (Latin: *Verbum*) is the beginning of the created universe, symbolised by the number 1.

According to various writings of the Báb, all numbers proceed from 1, and 1 proceeds from the absolute One that transcends the limits of numbers. That absolute One is the Point; thus all proceed from the Point ... The most important implication of this idea is the principle of the unity of all things. All things proceed from the Primal Unity, which in turn proceeds from the Point. All things thus would be regarded as manifestations, reflections and mirrors of the Point. We enter the realm of truth when we see in all things nothing but the Point. (Saiedi, 2008, p. 282)

This level of reality (Arabic: *wáhidíyah*) is the unity that underlies, sustains, creates and pervades all of creation.

### 3. Diversification

The Primal Will (described in the *Writings of the Báb* as having no phenomenal content or objects) interacts with the level of essences or archetypal patterns with which it is joined in a dyadic relationship, and thus diversifies creation *in potentia* (i.e., not yet actualised in phenomenal existence), be it transcendent or manifest. The image of light being filtered through a prism and revealing its colour spectrum comes to mind. The Arabic terms inserted in the following text by the editor Moojan Momen refer to the terminology used in the writings of the prominent Muslim philosopher Ibn'ul-Arabi (1165–1240).

... the Essential Dispositions have, through the Divine Outpouring (*fayd-i-aqdas*), manifested themselves out of the station of Essence into the station of Divine Knowledge [*hadrat-i 'ilm*]. This is the first manifestation of the Absolute from the Hidden Treasure in the Divine Knowledge. And from this manifestation the Eternal Archetypes (*'ayán thabitah*) came into intellectual being. And

each one, according to its inherent capacity, is distinguished from the others in the mirrors of the Divine Knowledge. And this secondary station is set up along the lines of the first stage, the stage of the Mystery of Primary Oneness (*ahadíyah*). And this [second] stage is known as the Secondary Unknown, Manifested Oneness (*wáhidíyah*) and the Eternal Archetypes. And the Eternal Archetypes are the Forms of the Divine intellect, which have not inhaled the breezes of existence but have come into being as intellectual existences [within the Divine Consciousness]. And they have become distinct from each other. (Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in Momen, 1985, p. 12)

## 4. Manifestation

At this point, the henological philosophy of Wyller takes a different turn from the philosophies of Plato, Cusanus and Kant, and Husserl and Heidegger. These have, according to Wyller (1981), some elements of truth, but not *'the Truth'*. He recognises the henological fundamentals of Judaism, Christianity and Islam but ultimately concludes that only Jesus Christ is the revealed unity-truth (Wyller, 1981). It is evident that henology moves beyond traditional philosophical discourse and enters the mystical dimension through the affirmation of a religious confession.

The henological worldview is also essential in the Bahá'í Faith, but it differs from Wyller, not in his affirmation of belief, but in his dismissal of religious revelations other than those connected to Christianity. The light that shines in the darkness is not limited to Jesus Christ. In the following quotation, the manifestation of the cosmic unity between the unknowable God, the transcendent Word of God and its historic manifestation in a prophetic figure is referred to as the First Remembrance, and the universality of divine revelation is affirmed:

... the First Remembrance, which is the Primal Will of God, may be likened unto the sun. God hath created Him through the potency of His might, and He hath, from the beginning that hath no beginning, caused Him to be manifested in every Dispensation through the compelling power of His behest, and God will, to the end that knoweth no end, continue to manifest Him according to the good-pleasure of His invincible Purpose... In the time of the First

Manifestation the Primal Will appeared in Adam; in the day of Noah It became known in Noah; in the day of Abraham in Him; and so in the day of Moses; the day of Jesus; the day of Muhammad, the Apostle of God; the day of the 'Point of the Bayán'; the day of Him Whom God shall make manifest; and the day of the One Who will appear after Him Whom God shall make manifest. (Báb, 1976, p. 126)

The position of the Bahá'í Faith is made clear here: The Word of God, His Primal Will, has manifested itself in historical reality many times and will continue to do so in the future. This principle is often referred to as 'progressive revelation'. Divine revelation establishes a link between the absolutely transcendent God, the transcendent Word of God and physical creation, and thus it unites absolute transcendence within the contingent world. This, then, is the most comprehensive definition of Divine Unity (Arabic: *tawhid*):

... The whole universe reflecteth His glory, while He is Himself independent of, and transcendeth His creatures ... All existence is dependent upon Him, and from Him is derived the source of the sustenance of all things. This is what is meant by Divine unity (*tawhid*); this is its fundamental principle ... The essence of belief in Divine unity (*tawhid*) consisteth in regarding Him Who is the Manifestation of God and Him Who is the invisible, the inaccessible, the unknowable Essence as one and the same. (Bahá'u'lláh, 1971, p. 166–167; Arabic terms inserted according to Phelps, 2020)

## 5. Unification

The term 'religion' is, according to one interpretation of its etymology, derived from the Latin verb *religare*, meaning binding together (Kværne & Vogt, 2002). Religion, then, would designate the reconnection of man with unity lost in the process of creation. In historic reality, religion establishes a centre of unity in the contingent physical world. The believer is drawn towards this centre by the light of love; the Light that shines in darkness establishes a universal focus in the world of humanity. The claim put forward in Bahá'í scripture is similar:

The Tongue of Wisdom proclaimeth: He that hath Me not is bereft of all things. Turn ye away from all that is on earth and seek none else but Me. I am the Sun of Wisdom and the Ocean of Knowledge. I cheer the faint and revive the dead. I am the guiding Light that illumineth the way ... (Bahá'u'lláh, 2006, p. 9)

The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Verily I say, whatsoever leadeth to the decline of ignorance and the increase of knowledge hath been, and will ever remain, approved in the sight of the Lord of creation. Say: O people! Walk ye neath the shadow of justice and truthfulness and seek ye shelter within the tabernacle of unity. (Bahá'u'lláh, 2006, p. 9)

This is a vision of human love (*agape*) and justice. The spiritual love between humans reflects the very origin of the unity of the cosmos:

And above all other unions is that between human beings, especially when it cometh to pass in the love of God. Thus is the primal oneness made to appear; thus is laid the foundation of love in the spirit. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1978, p. 119)

The establishment of institutions that aim to uphold spiritual values and eventually establish universal peace on the planet is indeed what constitutes the main historical mission of the Bahá'í religion. Much more could be said about the requirements for the fulfilment of this vision but, at this point, the discourse turns towards the theme of this essay: a synthesis of the musical and theosophical elements presented thus far.

## The pansemiotic view of the universe

There is a clear similarity between the theosophical vision of cosmogenesis presented in the previous chapter and the analysis of the genesis of sound and music presented at the end of the first chapter: the breath as an analogy of undifferentiated unity; the creation of a fundamental tone as the progenitor and sustainer of the observed pitches as parallel to the sustaining power of the transcendent Word; the diversification of pitches through higher harmonics; the appearance among the higher partials of the fundamental, now functioning as of the tonic and modal centre; the unification of tones into a tune; and the music unifying listeners into a

community. Tonal unity as an organising background was demonstrated by Schenker's approach. Schoenberg highlighted the organic relationships between musical elements that were essential for creating unity of form and thus comprehensibility.

The final reflections in this essay discuss whether these observations are simply conveniently selected examples or reflect a deeper and more universal feature of reality. This essay argues that, considered through the vision of a cosmos illuminated by the light of the Word, humanity may be witnessing the intrinsic qualities of creation:

Know thou that every created thing is a sign of the revelation of God. Each, according to its capacity, is, and will ever remain, a token of the Almighty. Inasmuch as He, the sovereign Lord of all, has willed to reveal His sovereignty in the kingdom of names and attributes, each and every created thing hath, through the act of the Divine Will, been made a sign of His glory. So pervasive and general is this revelation that nothing whatsoever in the whole universe can be discovered that doth not reflect His splendor. (Bahá'u'lláh, 1971, p. 184)

Based on this perspective, the lesson of the willow flute and the visions of unity of Pythagoras, Schenker and Schoenberg all demonstrate how the macrocosmos mirrors itself in the microcosmos. This being the case, one may infer that an endless number of such instances may be uncovered by a discerning mind. In fact, one can postulate that humanity is endowed with the potential to relate to the universe from a pansemiotic perspective. This way of viewing reality is also suggested in the Bible: 'The heavens declare the glory of God' (Psalm 19:1) and '... the God of glory thundereth' (Psalm 29:3).

The pansemiotic vision of the world was not uncommon in the Middle Ages.

In the Middle Ages, this view developed into an elaborate pansemiotic system of world interpretation. Not only the words of the Bible but also the objects designated by those words (thus Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae* I, 9.1. art. 10) and finally the whole universe became signs of divine revelation. Medieval theology interpreted these universal signs on the basis of *exegetic codes* of manifold scriptural meaning ... The medieval doctrine of universal



symbolism ... which ascribed pansemiotic meanings to natural objects in the universe, became codified in lapidaries, bestiaries, and other pseudoscientific treatises. (Nöth, 1990, p. 382)

The present essay does not propose the formation of pseudoscientific treatises but seeks to demonstrate how a pansemiotic attitude is a source of enrichment to the individual's experience of being-in-the-world and a source of inspiration to literature, the arts and music. The observable world could possibly be seen to possess hologrammatic qualities, in which an image of the whole reappears – slightly modified – in the constituent parts of the whole:

God hath created in the truth-sign of any thing that is called a thing, the signs of all beings, that it would not be difficult for anyone to recognise the manifestations of the tokens of His grace, and the effulgences of His modes of justice, so that all beings may witness the revelation of His sovereignty in the creation of all things, manifestly and truly, in such wise that none may see anything but that he would behold Him before seeing that object. (Báb, quoted by Saiedi, 2008, p. 60)

A lens of classical semiotics – the science of signs and their signification – would principally be concerned with the interpretation of signs produced with an explicit communicative purpose. Natural phenomena would not fall into this category. Thus, a sunrise is explained by its physical properties not as a symbolic utterance addressing man and, accordingly, it is not an object of relevance to semiotics. In the examples of the willow flute and Western art music theory presented above, a subtle synthesis between nature and human culture is demonstrated. The underlying dimensions of unity are not immediately provided in musical experience, but they can be uncovered and brought to attention by a specific hermeneutic act. The pansemiotic view of the world therefore depends on a specific interpretive intention that differs in essence from the approach to reality current in the natural sciences. There is no way to scientifically prove the validity of a pansemiotic interpretation of the world, nor is it the point to do so. The natural sciences, however, uncover the anatomy of the physical world. The pansemiotic turn, then, means transforming scientific findings into *signs* consisting of a *signifier* (the observable fact) and

a *signified* (a mental correlate). From this perspective, the physical world contains metaphors and symbols that may serve as vehicles for acquiring knowledge of a metaphysical reality.

It is worthwhile to note that the pansemiotic view of the cosmos is not a pantheism. The world is not God; neither is God the ‘substance’ of creation. However, observable reality is nevertheless divine, revealing the dynamics of the Primal Will that permeate all life and illumine the consciousness of man. Such a view of the world is, beyond having evident ethical consequences for how humans treat nature, other humans and varied cultures, infinitely enriching for the individual who has opened their heart to the light of unity.

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