

John Richardson

Refractions of Masculinity:
Ambivalence and Androgyny
in Philip Glass's Opera 'Akhnaten'
and Selected Recent Works

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

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ABSTRACT

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Diss.

This study examines Philip Glass's opera 'Akhnaten' (1983) and various recent works by the same composer, on the one hand as expressions of the composer's self-world-view, and on the other as musico-cultural phenomena. A central concern is to relate the musical procedures employed by Glass to the ideational origins of the individual works as well as to their broader cultural contexts: connections with ideas in postmodern culture, gender theory, and Buddhism -- which the composer practises -- are all explored. As its philosophical foundation, the study draws on ideas from the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur as well as the physicist David Bohm's idea of perception-communication. With regard to music research, the approach is strongly influenced by ethnomusicology, although the study aligns itself most closely with the precepts of poststructural, or critical, musicology. The analysis and interpretation of the opera 'Akhnaten' comprises the heart of the work. An important structural principle is located in the highly ambiguous tonality that pervades much of the opera; more specifically three types of tonal ambiguity are identified: polyphonic polytonality, interpretational polytonality, and modal ambiguity. Corollaries are found in the ambiguous sexualities of the three leading characters, particularly in the androgynous title role itself. Other works, including Glass's scores to the films 'Mishima' and 'Koyaanisqatsi', the opera 'The Fall of the House of Usher', and the solo piano composition 'Metamorphosis', are also discussed, the purpose being to examine how ideas presented in 'Akhnaten' reappear and are transformed in subsequent works.

Key words: Philip Glass, Akhnaten, androgyny, polytonality, ambivalence, critical musicology, gender studies in music.

FOREWORD

My interest in Philip Glass began during the 1980s, making mine undoubtedly a somewhat different perspective on the subject than those scholars who have followed this composer's career right from his experimental works of the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed it is the works of this period that interest me the most, although an understanding of Glass's earlier works is essential in constructing a complete picture of the ideational origins of even his later works. I came to know his music gradually, after seeing extracts from the operas *Satyagraha* and *Akhnaten* which were televised in Britain during the 1980s, through acquaintance with his influential work in film of this period, and after coming across a recording of his piano works which seemed to be demanding a disproportionate quota of my attention. I found myself incorporating discussions of Glass's works into my undergraduate work, my master's thesis (1992), my licentiate thesis (1993), and finally here in my dissertation. Only in this final stage, however, did I feel equipped to tackle what I consider one of this composer's major works, the opera *Akhnaten*. My parallel interest in the study of music as culture and, more specifically, in gender studies has different origins, although I have found the marriage of these interests to be a fertile one.

This study would not have been possible without a great deal of support from various institutions and people. Most significant perhaps are the two research assistantships I was awarded; the first a two year position awarded by the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, and the second a seven month Finnish Academy position. My gratitude to Professor Matti Vainio, Dr. Pirkko Moisala, and Professor Erkki Pekkilä for backing my applications and to the committees of the above institutions for considering them worthy of their support. In addition, the department of musicology at the University of Jyväskylä helped fund a trip I made to the United States in the autumn of 1993, the purpose of which was to collect research material and interview the composer with whom this study is concerned. More recently the Finnish Academy has funded two conference trips of mine, to Manchester (UK) and Riverside (USA). I am much indebted to this institution for its support; meetings such as these are of inestimable worth in increasing awareness of the activities of the field in which one is working, as well as in making one's work known to colleagues in other places. My gratitude also to Professor Jeff Todd Titon and to all the staff at the department of music at Brown University, for making the facilities of their institution available to me during September 1993.

An important aspect of this study is the fact that it was carried out with the co-operation of the composer whose work I am discussing, Philip Glass. The importance of my discussions with the composer will become apparent to the reader during the course of the study. At times our purposes coincided, at others they crossed; on the one hand harmony, on the other counterpoint. These dialogues have proved, nonetheless, to be invaluable in shaping certain of my formulations regarding the works discussed here, and for this I would like to express my profound appreciation to the composer. My gratitude also to Gary Schuster and Jim Keller at Dunvagen Music for going to extraordinary lengths in helping me track down research material. My warm appreciation to

Liz Ihre at Transatlantic Films for sending a video copy of the Peter Greenaway film about Glass without charging the earth or attempting to educate me in copyright law. My gratitude also to Music Theatre Wales for sending photographs of their production of *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

A few people can be singled out as having been particularly supportive at various stages of the research process. I do not hesitate in naming Professor Matti Vainio as the first of these, as it is no exaggeration to say that this study would neither have got off the ground nor been completed without his unswerving support. Dr Pirkko Moisala has on several occasions offered valuable critical comments on my work that have helped me to expand and develop ideas in unforeseen directions. Professor Susan McClary read through a paper of mine containing earlier formulations of some of the ideas which appear in this study. Her urging me towards an approach that engages more directly with the musical procedures themselves was to a large extent responsible for the present orientation. For this piece of advice I am most grateful, as well as for her critical input and encouragement in her capacity as both preliminary and main evaluator of the dissertation. Professor Marcia Herndon advised me to provide a road map of sorts for the reader throughout the work. To what extent I have succeeded in this is not for me to say; I have, however, attempted to keep this advice in mind while writing. I would, in addition, like to thank Dr. Raymond Monelle for the valuable critical comments he offered in his preliminary evaluative report. Most notably, he urged me to engage with the traditional opera repertory in a more tangible way in my discussions. This criticism will not go unheeded in my future work.

Earlier drafts of the dissertation were read by my colleague (lecturer in music) Pekka Toivanen and by the composer Juhani Nuorvala. Both offered valuable critical remarks, pertaining particularly to my music analyses, and to various connections with historical works. I am truly grateful to both for their contributions. Nuorvala, moreover, provided tapes and transcripts of his own interviews with Philip Glass, which, supplemented with the material I collected myself, provides a substantial body of original interview material, much of which addresses issues the composer has not, to my knowledge, dealt with elsewhere. In addition, he pointed out several important sources of which I was previously unaware. Michael Freeman proof-read the dissertation; his interest in the opera led, without any question, to a more connected overview of the work and, thus, more penetrating criticism than ordinarily goes with such a task. For this I would like to express my appreciation. My gratitude also to my colleague (lecturer in music) Petri Toiviainen for accomplishing the tedious task of transliterating my musical examples from the illegible scribbles they were into the form in which they now appear.

From among the staff of the department of musicology at Jyväskylä, I am indebted, for various reasons, to the following people: Professor Erkki Pekkilä, (librarian) Hannele Saari, (senior assistant) Yrjö Heinonen, and (lecturer in music) Riitta Rautio. Professor Erkki Salmenhaara gave some important tips, specifically regarding polytonality, in his capacity as second evaluator of my licentiate thesis. David Ingram and Petri Kuljuntausta helped in tracking down certain important sources. Kuljuntausta, in addition, corrected the language of the Finnish summary, and, moreover, complained

relatively little at being assigned such a thankless task. Steve ("you won't understand Buddhism in Phil's music unless you become a Buddhist yourself") Taylor, of Brown University and the Naropa Institute, corresponded with me for some time by e-mail, offering numerous valuable insights into the position of Buddhism in North American culture, and into Glass's recent collaborations with their mutual friend, Allen Ginsberg. My infinite gratitude for his extraordinary generosity of spirit. If there are others deserving of recognition, and there undoubtedly are, my profound apologies for neglecting to mention them.

My appreciation also to the Jyväskylä Studies in the Arts series for accepting this dissertation for publication. Lastly I would like to thank my family, who have been my greatest source of strength and inspiration during the entire research process.

Jyväskylä, 20 May 1995

John Richardson

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Philip Glass's music theatre: the need for further study

Philip Glass has emerged in the last three decades as one of the most controversial figures in contemporary music. Despite filling opera houses around the world, and boasting record sales rivalling those of artists working in the sphere of popular music, he continues to divide critics into two opposing camps. *Akhnaten* (1983), the third and final opera in a trilogy of "portrait operas" -- comprising this opera, *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) and *Satyagraha* (1980) -- is among the composer's most performed and most loved/hated music theatre works. Robert T. Jones describes this opera as "invok[ing] a mystic, meditative, dreamlike atmosphere shaken by storms of extreme and sustained musical violence" (Jones 1984, 4). For Winton Dean, however, "the most impressive aspect of Glass's opera ... is its resounding success with the public" (Dean 1987, 281); its musical resources are, according to this critic, "so limited that they can scarcely encompass an event as convulsive as the overthrow of a religion, much less two" (ibid., 281). Yet the success of the opera with the public cannot be denied. It has been a repertory piece with two of Europe's most reputable opera companies, Stuttgart's Staatsoper and the English National Opera. At its world premier with the former, the opera and its composer received a fifteen minute standing ovation, while the widespread public interest in the latter led to its returning to the stage of the London Coliseum for a series of rapturously received performances only two years after its British debut. American audiences, although turning out in throngs for performances in Houston and New York, did not respond to the opera with the same degree of enthusiasm as did their German and British counterparts. Despite this fact, *Akhnaten* continues to be performed and to draw audiences around the world.

Glass is still perhaps best known as one of the leading exponents of the style of music that arose in the 1960s and early 1970s labelled "minimalism"; a term whose appropriateness for the highly reductive, abstract music composed at that time is today rarely questioned, but whose continued usage with reference to recent, more structurally complex and interactional compositions penned by the composers associated with the style is more dubious. Glass's more recent work covers the whole gamut of musical activities; from solo performances of his own compositions at the piano, to rock-style concerts with the amplified Philip Glass Ensemble, to string quartets, to concertos and symphonies for traditional orchestra, to film music, to small scale music theatre works and chamber operas, to a full blown opera trilogy.

The music of Philip Glass and those composers conventionally associated with him, is unprecedented, for contemporary classical music that is, in the extent to which it has been assimilated into the broader cultural fabric. What started out as a radical movement within the contemporary music scene, known to only a handful of enthusiasts in the art galleries and lofts of South Manhattan, soon permeated into the languages of musicians working in the spheres of popular and "crossover" (for want of a better term) music, such as Michael Oldfield, Brian Eno, David Bowie, Kraftwerk, David Byrne, Laurie Anderson and, more recently, Suzanne Vega and Blue Nile, not to mention entire musical trends, for instance, Techno and New Age. A myriad of conspicuously Glass-influenced film scores has in recent years appeared, including the Belgian composer Wim Mertens's (*The Belly of an Architect* [1987]) and, in Britain, Michael Nyman's work with director Peter Greenaway (e.g., *A Draughtsman's Contract* [1982]), *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* ([1989]), as well as Richard Robins's transparently derivative scores for the Merchant Ivory trilogy of films based on the novels of E.M. Forster; *A Room With a View* (1986), *Maurice* (1987), and *Howards End* (1992). Television commercials for products ranging from Kellogg's Special K to telephones sound so much like Glass as to verge on the plagiaristic. Glass has, moreover influenced a whole generation of composers, particularly those working in the theatre and film: try, for example, listening to a recording of John Adams's *Nixon in China* (1987) immediately after Glass's *Akhmaten*; Adam's work is more ornate, lush, more Romantic, if less poignant, less austere, less exhilarating; but there can be little doubt where his influences lie. If this sounds like an attempt to vindicate the study of this composer's music on the basis of his profound influence on the musical thinking of his time, so be it: there are other less convincing rationales for taking a composer seriously -- such as that which sees the value of a musical work as inhering in its contribution to the advancement of musical knowledge, in a manner corresponding to the turnover of ideas in the natural sciences¹. There is, moreover, such a thing as

¹ For critiques of the evolutionary/linear view of music history, see Chapters Three and Four of Christopher Small's *Music - Society - Education* (1977, 60-96), and Susan McClary's article "Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Musical Composition" (1989a).

inverse influence: is it likely, for example, that such a fuss would have been made about “new complexity”¹, or “maximalism”², as it is sometimes termed, had it not been preceded by a musical style that, albeit to a large extent unwittingly, broke down many of the barriers Modernism had erected between contemporary concert music and the broader music listening public?

The value of Glass’s achievements is, however, arguably best measured when considering the impact of his own works. John Rockwell has described him as “far and away the most quantifiably successful of living, currently active opera composers” (Rockwell 1988, 1275). Robert P. Morgan, in his survey of twentieth-century music, writes:

All Glass’s operas have been accorded productions in opera houses of international importance, recordings, and enthusiastic public receptions. At a time of much speculation about opera’s viability as a contemporary genre, Glass has played a significant role in revitalizing it, extending and reshaping its conventions to fit his own image of a more ceremonial, nonnarrative, and ritualistic music theatre. (Morgan 1991, 432.)

Despite its unprecedented visibility, scholarly studies of minimal and postminimal music in general, and Glass’s music in particular, are few and far between. The majority of studies done on the subject have concentrated either on the formative years of the minimal style, or what many, although, significantly, not the composer himself, regard as a quintessential work in this style, Glass’s first music theatre work *Einstein on the Beach*.

¹ In writing of the fuss made about “complexity,” I am referring specifically to the recent issues of the journal *Perspectives of New Music* (in particular, vol. 31, nos. 1 and 2 [1993], and vol. 32., no. 1 [1994]), where a number of composers of atonal music use the common theme of complexity as a pretext for scathing attacks on colleagues who compose postmodern and tonal music. Unquestionably the most odious contribution to the discussion is that written by its editor, James Boros (1993). Boros confesses to being “nauseated upon hearing works representative of the “new simplicity,” or of the “new romantic” genre, works which, by aiming low, targeting only the mock-astral plane of musical yuppiedom, ignore the very dangers that make genuine art both human and transcendent” (ibid., 7). Boros perceives the “new complexity” as the antidote to the minimalist problem: the “maximalists,” in his view, “having peeked over the fence surrounding this dungheap, have determined that shovelling shit is not to be their fate” (ibid., 7). That these comments are specifically levelled at Glass, as well as John Adams, is apparent in Part Two of Boros’s discussion where these composers are mentioned by name (Boros 1994, 97). Underlying his remarks is the pervasive Modernist assumption of popular culture (and conventionally prestigious art forms that do not honour the borderline between the popular and the elite) as the quasi-industrialised manipulation of the ignorant masses, and the positing of quality in direct opposition to popularity: thus he refers to Glass and Adams as having “acquiesced to the culture industry’s demand for consumable objects” (ibid., 97). For critiques of this view see McClary’s above mentioned article (McClary 1989a) and Andreas Huyssen’s “Mass Culture as Woman” (1986).

² Ironically, the term “maximalism” appears to have been coined by the critic Tom Johnson in his 1981 *Village Voice* article “Maximalism on the Beach: Philip Glass,” (reprinted in *The Voice of New Music*, Johnson [1989, 467-469]), his intention being to contrast Glass’s *Einstein on the Beach* with this composer’s earlier, more reductive music.

Examples of the former include the Belgian composer Wim Mertens's *American Minimal Music* (1980 [English translation 1983]) which, like so many studies on the subject, groups together the composers La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass -- and in so doing, of course, implicitly excludes a large number of other significant composers¹. Another deficiency of Mertens's study is that it fails to acknowledge the pan-artistic nature of the movement, perhaps one of its most distinctive features: minimalism was, from its genesis, an integrative cultural trend whose reverberations were felt also in dance, the plastic arts, film, and theatre. Positive in Mertens's approach is that his analysis goes beyond the consideration of compositional procedures, which so many of the texts on the subject take as their exclusive concern. Mertens's analytical framework combines Adorno's music sociology, a representative cross-section of Gallic deconstructionist and poststructuralist theory: Jean-François Lyotard's theory of "libidinal economy" is the most central of these, although Deleuze and Derrida are also prominent. Another important Gallic source demonstrating a similar penchant for tying music in with other spheres of human experience, as well as fields of study aside from musicology, is Ivanka Stoianova's (1977) early article on the subject. Aside from perhaps coining the term *musique répétitive*², which many (including Reich³) find more congenial than the pejoratively tainted "minimalism," Stoianova's uses the theories of Kristeva (ibid., 73), Freud (ibid., 66-69), Deleuze (ibid., 65), and Gadamer (ibid., 73-74) to provide a psychoanalytical and socio-symbolic context for the music she is discussing.

Covering the same time-frame and the same composers is Dean Paul Suzuki's doctoral dissertation *Minimal Music: its evolution seen in the works of Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and La Monte Young* (1991). Suzuki's study is a veritable wellspring of information on the subject, a great deal of which is not available elsewhere: his data include, for example, material gleaned from interviews with all four composers. Other important scholarly work includes articles written by K. Robert Schwarz on the music of Steve Reich and John Adams. Perhaps the most important work done by Schwarz is his documentation of the stylistic development of the former of these composers in two articles written for the journal *Perspectives of New Music* (Schwarz 1980-81; 1981-82). In a more recent article Schwarz (1990) demonstrates a willingness to expand his approach to include also the consideration of music as a broader cultural phenomenon. Not to be confused with the above is the scholar David Schwarz, who has written an important article on the same two composers

1 See Tom Johnson's *Village Voice* article "The Original Minimalists" (1982) for a fairly comprehensive list of American minimalists who were prominent figures in the early development of the style. See also Edward Strickland's *Minimalism: origins* (1993).

2 The title of Daniel Caux's article, "cette musique que l'on dit "repetitive"", in the same edition of the journal *Musique en Jeu* (no. 26, 1977) would seem to imply that the term was not at least his invention.

3 See Edward Strickland's (1991, 45) interview with the composer (originally printed in an issue of the magazine *Fanfare*).

from the standpoints of poststructuralist semiotics and psychoanalysis (Schwarz 1993). In addition to these, Brent Heisinger's article "American Minimalism in the 1980s" (1989) is a valuable commentary on recent developments in American postmodern music, although it is highly unlikely that any of the composers discussed in this article would find its title acceptable. Moreover, taking Glass's setting of Suzanne Vega's *Freezing*, from the recording *Songs From Liquid Days...* (1986), as somehow representative of this composers style in the 1980s, as Heisinger does (1989, 438-439), is somewhat questionable, although this is an important recording for reasons I will go into later. Far more significant and far-reaching in their influence, however, are the large-scale music theatre works he composed during this period, such as *Satyagraha* (1980), *The Photographer* (1982), *Akhnaton* (1983), and *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* (1985-86), his film scores for Paul Schrader's film *Mishima* (1984), and the Godfrey Reggio films *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982) and *Powaqqatsi* (1988), as well as a number of smaller-scale music theatre works, including the Robert Moran collaboration *The Juniper Tree* (1984) and *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1988).

Other important scholarship includes Edward Strickland's elucidation of the pan-cultural origins of minimalism, entitled *Minimalism: origins* (1993). Dense, jumbled, and wordy though it is, Strickland's painstaking documentation paves the way for future studies oriented perhaps more towards in-depth analysis on the one hand, and interpretation on the other. A similar, although less important, elucidation of the influence of the plastic arts on musical minimalism is Jonathan W. Bernard's recent article in *Perspectives of New Music* (1993). Among the handful of doctoral dissertation on the subject is Rosalie Edith Bandt's *Models and Processes in Repetitive Music, 1960-1983* (1984). Although Bandt's dissertation is concerned with the same stylistic period as the other scholarly writing on the subject, its value inheres in the emphasis she places on British composers, including Gavin Bryars, John White, Michael Nyman, Christopher Hobbs, The Penguin Cafe Orchestra, The Scratch Orchestra and The Portsmouth Sinfonia. Her discussion of American minimalism deviates from the norm inasmuch as it includes in-depth expositions of music composed by figures such as Jon Gibson and Joan La Barbara, in addition to those penned by the more famous exponents of the style. As is the case in so many of the academic studies on the subject, Glass's *Einstein on the Beach* is considered by Bandt to be the paragon of the minimal aesthetic, and, like most studies of that opera, her discussion of it relies heavily on the composer's own formal exposition of its music in the booklet accompanying the recording (Bandt 1984, 325-344). An indispensable source of information regarding, on the one hand, John Cage's music, and on the other, the British "minimalist" movement -- whose ideological and musical origins nevertheless diverge from those of its American counterpart in certain significant respects -- is provided by composer/critic Michael Nyman's *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (1974). His essay *Against Intellectual Complexity in Music* (1980) is also considered by many an eloquent polemic on

behalf of a more intuitive approach to music composition. Another monograph written by a composer of minimal music, this time focusing on questions pertaining to music education, is the German composer Peter Michael Hamel's *Through Music to the Self* (1978).

It is perhaps not surprising, given the precepts of the style, that some of the most empathic and at the same time informative texts on minimalism in general, and Glass in particular, are non-academic in their fundamental approach. Such texts include *New York Times* music critic John Rockwell's writing on the subject in his *All American Music* (1983) and elsewhere (for instance, 1984, 1988) as well as the chapter from John Schaefer's book, *New Sounds: A Listener's Guide to New Music* (1987), that deals with the style. The discography accompanying the latter is a valuable, although not exhaustive, source of information regarding recordings of the music discussed by him.

In concluding my discussion of the literature on minimalism, it would be an act of negligence not to mention the Finnish composer/scholar Juhani Nuorvala, who has written extensively on this subject in the Finnish musicological literature (1986; 1987a; 1987b; 1991). Acquaintance with Nuorvala's work must in some way have informed my overall understanding of the subject and certainly drew my attention to a number of important sources.

The titles enumerated above are just a few of the most central sources that have contributed to my overall picture of the phenomenon: not mentioned are a myriad of magazine and newspaper articles, concert reviews, programs, radio broadcasts and the like. However, regarding both the above-mentioned body of literature as well as that specifically concerned with Glass, the greater part bears only tangentially on the questions I will be addressing here.

Included in the scholarly body of work pertaining directly to Glass are a master's thesis and two doctoral dissertations on his first opera, *Einstein on the Beach* (respectively, Haskins 1992, Bobak 1992, and Raickovich 1994), as well as a handful of articles concerned mainly with early instrumental works in the minimal style: these include Wesley York's (1981) statistical analysis of an early minimal piece, *Two Pages* (1968), Robert Haskins's (1992) formal analysis of this and an earlier piece, *Strung Out* (1967), Dave Smith's (1975) analytical discussion of several early works, and Marcus Spies's (1983) exegesis of the recording *Glassworks* (1981). Also worthy of mention is Gregory Sandow's succinct but perceptive analytical discussion of the final act of the opera *Satyagraha*, which the *Village Voice* critic seems surprised to notice "has as much detail to analyze as any Beethoven symphony" (Sandow 1982, 95). The paucity of scholarly material pertaining to Glass's more recent works, in particular his sizeable oeuvre of theatrical and interactional, or multi-media, works, would appear to be the single most pressing concern for future research. The most valuable single source of information regarding these remains the composer's own account of the making and music-drama of the Trilogy operas found in his

book, *Opera on the Beach* (Glass 1987)¹. The operas discussed in this book represent, however, only the tip of the iceberg: Glass's influential work in film and a large number of subsequent music theatre works are still wanting of even the most cursory literary exposition.

Regarding *Akhnaten*, there are presently two scholarly articles on the subject, neither of which present a very sympathetic view of the composer, his music, or the opera. The first of these, by a scholar who has written extensively on musical Modernism, Paul Griffiths (1985), begins with a four-bar extract of music deliberately chosen for its overt simplicity, accompanied by the facetious comment, "[w]ith music as simple as this ... what can words add?" (Griffiths 1985, 337). Griffiths's article comprises a short but acerbic introduction to Glass and the style, which is dismissed *in toto* as "regressive and childlike" (*ibid.*, 337), followed by a *reductio ad absurdum* of the action of the opera to the tempos of its scenes (note: there are numerous tempo changes within scenes that Griffiths disregards entirely) and a few selected remarks on the arrangements of singers and orchestra. Griffiths's arguments flounder most conspicuously, however, in his discussion of "intelligibility": according to this writer, there is "no artist who has so abruptly cut himself off from the comprehensible than Glass" (*ibid.*, 338). An assertion such as this begs the obvious question; comprehensible to whom? That Glass's music is incomprehensible to Griffiths there can be no doubt, but there is, as I have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, plenty of evidence that it is everything but incomprehensible to the music-listening public.

The second article on the opera is an attempt by a Danish Egyptologist, Paul Frandsen (1993) to make sense of a composer and a style of which he admits to being completely ignorant, by resorting to criteria borrowed from his own field of study and artistic works divorced in time and space from the one he is discussing: all of which would probably not matter were it not printed in a reputable musicological journal, *The Musical Quarterly*, which had previously and has subsequently disregarded Glass's work altogether. Frandsen's non-specialist status does not, of course, preclude the possibility of a valid exegesis, but it does give rise to the danger of his overlooking or oversimplifying important musical events, and this is unfortunately the case on all too many occasions in this Egyptologist's discussion of *Akhnaten*. Frandsen, who has no musicological training, does have an excuse: the same cannot, of course, be said of Griffiths. I will discuss Frandsen's article in more detail later in the dissertation, as it is, despite its obvious flaws, the most detailed scholarly exposition of the opera written to date.

Important non-scholarly texts on *Akhnaten* include John Rockwell's (1984) *New York Times* discussion of the opera, and the program notes written by Robert T. Jones (1984) for its New York performances. Both are considerably more positive in their tone, and are arguably more scholarly in their approach than either of the two "scholarly" texts discussed above. Perhaps the most

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In the United States, Glass's book is entitled *Music by Philip Glass*.

important source on this particular opera, however, is not a literary text at all but a documentary film: Michael Blackwood's film, *A Composer's Notes: Philip Glass – the making of Akhnaten* (1985), follows the composer on his travels around the world – in India, Egypt, Germany, and America – during the three years (1981-84) in which he was working on the opera; from the early stages of constructing a libretto, to its composition, to rehearsals of both its American and the German productions, to its debut performance in Stuttgart (of which there is considerable film footage). The director and his film crew, cinematographer Mead Hunt and editor Peter Geisman, were so thorough in their work that the end result resembles more an anthropological case study than it does a conventional television documentary. The film is a prerequisite for any serious study of this opera, and, arguably, of any of Glass's post-Trilogy works.

Glass subsequent music theatre works have received virtually no attention from the academy; a deficit that will hopefully be rectified in future years. It is beyond the scope of the present study to remedy the situation in its entirety: even with regard to this one opera, my own study represents just one of many possible approaches. A full picture of the significance of this work will only begin to emerge after scholars interested in and knowledgeable about this composer's work each present their own points of view regarding it. Even then no final truth will be obtained. But by spiralling in on the same work from different angles a more complex and multifaceted picture may perhaps eventually emerge; one that bears a closer resemblance to our perceptions of the work than any unilateral point of view can hope to provide. By then, of course, it will mean something quite different than it does today, or than it did a decade ago.

1.2 A gendered context for the study

Gender being a central issue in my thesis, and one that opens up vistas to a multitude of other considerations, it will be of some benefit to establish a context for the discussion of gender-music interplay in Glass's works already at this early stage. Far from being a tangential concern, it appears in recent years to have occupied a central position in discourse on the subject, and one that offers valuable insights into the broader cultural significance of this phenomenon. As well as being a concern of those writing about Glass's music, it appears to have been a central concern of the composer himself, and one whose implications permeate every aspect of the self-world-view expressed in his works. The centrality of gender thematics is not, of course, something peculiar to this one composer: what is unusual is probably more Glass's frankness in this regard than the presence itself of gender-related themes. A typical feature of this composer's approach is that gender becomes a vehicle for

conveying other pervasive socio-cultural, philosophical, religious, and psychological concerns. In the opera *Akhmaten* this is especially true, although the same principle can be applied to many of Glass's other works, be they abstract, theatrical, or, most often, some combination of the two. *New York Times* critic John Rockwell touches on the interconnectedness of gender thematics with other pervasive concerns of the composer when he writes:

Glass in his private life is a Tibetan Buddhist, and without his in any way imitating the timbres or rhythms of Tibetan music (or his most obvious inspiration, Indian music), it is easy to see a transliteration of oriental precepts into his very Western sound. (Rockwell 1988, 1277.)

In an earlier text he explores the same idea:

As with Cage, the influence [with Glass] was more one of philosophical attitude.(...) The way this Oriental influence most decisively expresses itself in American music of the sixties and the seventies was in a newly meditational mode of perception. Western art music has been built on tension and release, which would be unthinkable without the tonal system, with its balance between consonance and dissonance and its excursions away from and back to a home key. Such music involves considerable variation of dynamics, and rhythmic ideas that, while fairly primitive, still build to an ever more rapid climax. The meditative approach is more quiescent. The listener settles into the flow of a piece rather than tensely awaiting its denouement; a parallel between traditional masculine and feminine love-making suggests itself. Someone accustomed to conventional Western classical music may find this new meditational music uneventful, simplistic and dull; the new listener – and many Orientals – find classical music noisy, clumsy and brash. (Rockwell 1983, 112-113.)

The precepts of Tibetan Buddhism and gender thematics are, as Rockwell implies, elaborately intertwined in Glass's music; not because of any intrinsic affinity between the two, but because they are two modes of discourse that have been excluded from the conventions of artistic expression in Western culture for some time: they both represent the Other by which "we" (patriarchal white males) are accustomed to distinguishing ourselves from "them." Leaving Buddhism aside for a moment, the obvious implication is that there is something "feminine" in the music Rockwell is discussing, and, what is more, that this is a novel state of affairs for music composed by a classically trained musician of the twentieth-century¹. In discussing Laurie Anderson's music, a musician/composer whose career mirrors that of Glass in certain respects (her interest in music theatre; her New York "downtown" background; her interest in performance as well as composition), and one whose common

¹ I enclose the word "feminine" in quotation marks to underscore the fact that this is a socio-symbolic construct whose borders are flexible and whose applicability in no way restricted to the female sex.

background with Glass is, moreover, acknowledged by her¹, Rockwell elaborates on his earlier remarks:

The obvious underlying explanation for the low incidence of women composers has been the general repression of female creativity of all kinds. The romantic ideal, which still shapes our image of the artist, is an exaggeratedly masculine one. It stresses aggression, flamboyance, competitiveness, assertiveness. The conflicts within present-day feminism about what a woman should be – equal to man, or equal but different -- extend far beyond music. But it is tempting to reflect that women are now entering all forms of music, from experimental to mainstream avant-garde to jazz to rock, just when the older ideal of tension and release building to a climax and the aggressive imposition of the artist's will onto the listener are becoming less fashionable. I earlier discussed this shift in terms of Orientalism. It may also have to do with a general feminization of our musical culture, a shift that encourages women to be composers and male composers to become androgynous. (Rockwell 1983, 131-132)

Implicit in Rockwell's closing remark, when taken in relation to his earlier discussion of the Asian influence on Glass's music, to which he explicitly refers in this passage, is the assertion that Glass is an androgynous composer. It should of course be remembered that this is a loosely written, non-scholarly text, so the reader would be well advised to avoid jumping to premature conclusions as to what the writer means when talking of "Orientalism," "feminization," "androgyny," and the like: using such terms in a loose, or vernacular, way does not necessarily imply that one is endorsing an essentialist distinction between the sexes, and in the case of Rockwell's text I would argue that this is not the case². Rockwell's commentary has a special resonance

1 Anderson has described the influence of Glass's first opera on the New York artistic community as follows: "*Einstein on the Beach* left a real mark on the art world.(...) Everyone I saw after that was working on an opera. You'd walk down the street – 'Hey, how's your opera?' 'Fine, how's yours?'" (quoted in Schaefer 1987, 69-70.)

2 The term "essentialism" (meaning to attribute a male or female "essence" to each or either of the sexes that is distinct to and ubiquitous in that sex) is currently one of the most fashionable in gender studies. Although caution in this regard is desirable, objections to gendered exegeses of music *en bloc*, on the grounds that they perpetuate the gender divisions they are calling into question, can all too easily lead to the proscription of even culturally grounded interpretations and a return to formalism. The question seems to be, can we talk about gendered musical constructs at all without being accused of essentialism? Leo Treitler's critique of Susan McClary, in his article "Gender and Other Dualities" (1993, 36-39) is founded on precisely this argument. Despite the large and diverse body of work that has now accumulated in this area of study, Treitler has still "not encountered *any* criticism [emphasis added] that is sensitive to qualities that have their source in gender, but only varieties of adversarial exegesis in which, against some standard of how music should be, one voice is held up as exemplary and the other as defective" (Treitler 1993, 43). One could, of course, easily counter Treitler's argument by drawing attention to the fact that musicology has *always*, implicitly or explicitly, held one voice up as exemplary and the other as defective: the choice of voice advocated and the evaluative criteria used in establishing this has merely changed in feminist accounts. Paranthetically, let it be noted that one of the voices held up by McClary in the chapter of *Feminine*

inasmuch as he is a contemporary of Glass, a fellow New Yorker, and critic who is intimately acquainted with the precepts of this composer's work. The *New York Times* critic's observations were most probably written at exactly the same time Glass was piecing together the music and drama of *Akhmaten*, a work in which the assumptions Rockwell describes are perhaps most eloquently articulated. If one takes the view that ideas correlate in some way with the place and the time of their expression, if, that is, one holds that music is a culturally grounded form of human expression (which for a growing number of musicologists is an intimately experienced given, more than it is a hypothesis that requires verification), and if Rockwell's comments are not viewed as idiosyncratic and untypical of his time-space locus, they can be seen to provide a fitting point of departure for the present discussion.

Musicologist Susan McClary's arguments are very similar to those put forward by Rockwell. Most pertinent to the present concerns are her discussions of the composers Janika Vandevelde and Laurie Anderson. In the chapter of her *Feminine Endings* (1991) devoted to the former, McClary compares Vandevelde's approach to that of Glass as well as fellow New Yorker Steve Reich. What distinguishes the music of these composers is that it "suggests the possibility of *being in time* without the necessity of striving for violent control" (McClary 1991, 122). According to McClary, "Philip Glass often plays with the same two qualities of motion as Vandevelde -- that is, both the cyclical and the teleological" (ibid., 122-123). An example of this is his music theatre work *The Photographer*, where "he repeatedly gives us a typical Mahlerian buildup-to-cadence, only to loop back at the point of promised climax" (ibid., 123). Attention is drawn also to similar passages in Glass's score to the Godfrey Reggio film *Koyaanisqatsi*, where the tonal cadence is robbed of its historically conditioned effect and at the same time infused with a new significance (ibid., 123). In these passages the composer holds up the conventional for our contemplation, at the same time depriving it of its foothold in the nebulous realm of the ahistorical and the acultural; the act of appropriation turning the necessary into the contingent, that with pretensions to the absolute into the transparently relative. Or in McClary's words; "[w]e learn from such passages how very programmed we are to *desire* violent annihilation through the tonal cadence, and our frustration at not attaining the promised catharsis reveals to us the extent to which we are addicts in need of that fix" (ibid., 123). The example of Glass's music shows, for McClary as well as for Rockwell, that

[o]ne need not be a woman ... to be gravely concerned with getting down off the beanstalk. But the deconstructive methods of postmodernism -- the practice of questioning the claims to universality by the "master narratives" of Western culture, revealing the agendas behind traditional "value-free" procedures -- are also beginning to clear a space in which a woman's voice can at last be heard as a woman's voice. (McClary 1991, 123.)

Endings that seems to get Treitler's goat the most ("Getting Down off the Beanstalk: The Presence of a Woman's Voice in Janika Vandevelde's *Genesis II*") is that of Glass.

Which is not, of course, the same thing as saying that the voice heard in Glass's music is a woman's voice; what it does imply is that the postmodern composer does not feel the need to demarcate the boundaries between the masculine and the feminine with the same rigidity as his or her predecessors; she or he does not feel the same imperative to stay on the right side of the fence – be it that which distinguishes the sexes or the one erected by the likes of James Boros to distinguish themselves from the “shit-shoveling” masses¹. From the standpoint of the late sixties and early seventies, the time-frame during which these composers were inventing their style, the prevalent taboo was on the repetitive, the cyclical, and the tonal (or modal). That these same features became almost exclusively associated with the “feminine” was not their doing; they merely inherited a situation whose impact on nineteenth-century philosophy and drama is well documented, and which continued to condition perceptions of art works well into the Modern period. It is unlikely that Glass himself would describe his music as feminine (although he has, as I will show, implied that certain aspects of it are encoded in androgynous terms), but when Andrew Clements, in his review of one of the English National Opera's performances of *Akhmaten*, refers to “the impotence of Glass's score” (Clements 1987, 461), there can be little doubt that masculinity, or its absence, is a criterion employed in establishing the aesthetic worth of the music he is discussing. Similarly, Paul Griffiths's (1985, 337), and others', repeated references to the “childlike” and “regressive,” intentionally invoke a pre-adolescent stage of development in which the boy has not yet developed into a man. This dichotomising of child and man, which is an implicit but clearly recognisable denial of the childlike or playful aspects of adult creative activity (in favour of the serious, the intense, the purposeful, the forward-striving, the goal-oriented, the “masculine”)², becomes, because of the central role of women in infant care, all too easily mapped onto that of woman/man; one wonders, then, whether there is not some Freudian notion of “woman-as-lack” (or the more complex formulation; not-man=lack[=woman]) lurking beneath such assertions. One wonders, that is, if there is not a misogynistic or homophobic “jack” waiting to spring out of his box.

Yet another account that recognises Glass's disregard for received notions of masculinity is David Schwarz's (1993) Lacan/Kristeva-inspired article on the composers Steve Reich and John Adams. Schwarz's approach is constructed from a synthesis of French psychoanalytical theory borrowed from Kaja Silverman's book *The Acoustic Mirror: the female voice in psychoanalysis and cinema* (1988), all of which in some way distinguishes the pre-symbolic

1 I refer here to Boros's (1993, 7) critique of postmodern composers, quoted in the first section of this chapter.

2 For a critique of this dichotomy see Hans-Georg Gadamer's essay “The Play of Art” (1986, 123-130), originally given as a radio talk in 1973, and published under the title “Das Spiel der Kunst” in *Kleine Schriften* (Vol. 4, 234-240). See also Gadamer (1975, 91-119); and Chapters 8 and 9 of Small's *Music - Society - Education* (1977, 182-228).

maternal environment from the later emergence of the child into the symbolic realm of the father. Lacan's hypothesis of the gendered encoding of language in the early stages of child development is used by Schwarz as the basis for psychoanalytically grounded interpretations of these composers' works. According to Lacan's theory, "[t]he symbolic order initiates the infant into language and social structures. The imaginary order is governed by the voice and image of the *mother*; the symbolic order, the name of the *father*" (Schwarz 1993, 26.). The obvious pitfalls of essentialism are avoided in both Schwarz's and Silverman's approaches by their placing a strong emphasis on the reconstructed nature of the pre-symbolic experience, which is actually merely a fantasy of the pre-symbolic enacted within the confines of the symbolic order. In Schwarz's view, the music of Adams's *Nixon in China* and "the operas of Philip Glass refigure the function of opera" (Schwarz 1993, 34) through the counterpoint of cyclical and non-narrative musical structures with the conventional diachronic unfolding of the opera's plot. (Schwarz does well to mention Glass in this regard, as it would be no exaggeration to say that he invented the parameters of the genre in which Adams's work operates.) In Schwarz's view "*Nixon in China* disrupts the diachronic story of a modern hero," through the superimposition of this (patriarchal/linear) narrative onto Adams's presymbolic (therefore "maternal") musical textures, a juxtaposition which "demystifies the structures that produce western, male subjects" (ibid., 35). This view is called into question, however, in the concluding remarks of the article, where Schwarz writes: "One might ask ... whether *Nixon in China* can, in its monumental power and beauty of orchestration, be a critical vehicle, or whether the music is complicit with the glorification of the global politics of America" (ibid., 47). Complicity "with the structures of dominance in the process of gaining distance from them" (ibid., 47), is undoubtedly one of the central problems of the postmodern ethos: I will argue that Glass's solutions to this problem are at times more convincing than are Adams's, due to this composer's more overtly critical, reflexive, or ambivalent stance towards these structures, Master Narratives, or whatever we choose to call them.

Schwarz's conclusions regarding the gender of the minimal ethos are, perhaps not surprisingly given its Gallic post-Freudian foundation, quite similar to those made some years earlier by Wim Mertens in the final chapter of his *American Minimal Music* (1983). The state of pre-Oedipal innocence, bliss, or religious at-oneness brought about by the heavy reliance upon repetitive musical structures in minimal music, quite clearly, in Mertens's account, associates it with the mother and the womb. Mertens, himself a composer of minimal music whose style is strongly influenced by Glass, draws the profoundly Freudian conclusion that the turn towards the maternal, via the infantile, constitutes a psychological regression away from life (masculine?), towards a utopian insular world, and ultimately towards death (feminine?). In

the final page of his book, Mertens writes a diagnosis of minimalism which opponents of the style have been more than willing to exploit¹:

Repetitive music can lead to psychological regression. The so-called *religious* experience of repetitive music is in fact a camouflaged erotic experience. One can speak of a controlled pseudo-satisfaction because the abandoning of dialectical time does not really happen but is only imaginary. The libido, freed from the external world, turns towards the ego to obtain imaginary satisfaction. Freud defined this as a regression and a "return to the infantile experience of hallucinatory satisfaction". (Mertens 1983, 124.)

That Mertens fails to see the imaginary, hallucinatory, or constructed nature of "dialectical" as well as "non-dialectical" time, can be regarded as a major shortcoming of his approach, one that can be attributed largely to his firm theoretical entrenchment within the Modernist linear/patriarchal world view, as evidenced by his uncritical reliance on Freud's psychoanalytical Master Narratives. How he is able to reconcile the Freudian position with his own interest in minimal music, without some degree of distancing from or appropriation of the famous psychoanalyst's theories remains something of a mystery. Needless to say, his views on the subject should not be regarded as representative of the four American composers he discusses, particularly Glass.

In concluding this overview of gendered accounts of minimal and postminimal music, both pro- and contra-Glass, I would like to draw attention to the theories of Julia Kristeva, in particular those pertaining to the gendered encoding of time. Schwarz's Lacan/Kristeva-inspired article on the subject does not draw attention to this specific aspect of Kristeva's writing, even though the temporal dimension is arguably the most pertinent in any discussion of Glass's, Adams's or Reich's music. In her influential, and equally controversial, essay "Women's Time," Kristeva (1981²) differentiates between three modalities of experiencing time; the *monumental*, the *cyclical*, and the *linear*, the first two of which she identifies as conventionally associated with the female sex. The last of these, linear time, as most of us are aware, is that conventionally associated in Western culture with the male sex; it is the modality of "time as project," of striving towards a goal, of departure, progression and arrival, and the one that comes most easily unstuck when it encounters its antithesis -- death, cessation, non-becoming. The linear modality is, according to Kristeva, both civilizational and obsessional, a double bind even feminists, who traditionally associate themselves with the monumental

¹ Wilfred Mellers, for example, seizes upon Mertens's Freudian dichotomy of "the life instinct" and "the death instinct" when, in his review of the book, he remarks: "After some hours' submission to Glass's music one comes up reflecting that although one is not against commercial success one prefers it to be on behalf of life -- as it is with (say) Handel, Beethoven, Satchmo, Ellington, the Beatles, Dylan and perhaps, more modestly, Steve Reich -- rather than on behalf of death" (Mellers 1984, 328). See Gregory Sandow's (1984, 81) eloquent response to Mellers.

² Kristeva's essay was originally published under the title "Le temps des femmes" in 33/44: *Cahiers de recherche de sciences des textes et documents*, 5 (Winter 1979), 5-19.

and cyclical modalities in contradistinction to the dominant patriarchal culture, would, in her view, do well to acknowledge. Kristeva's balance between the three modalities nevertheless places a distinct emphasis on the second of these, the cyclical modality, which is arguably also the most strongly associated with the female sex. The predominance of this modality in women, while allowing them to experience a privileged sense of at-oneness with the parallel processes of nature, and while offering them the consolation of that quasi-sexual form of bliss Lacan refers to as *jouissance*¹, can also result in a schism arising between this and the other modalities. The two strands of feminism mentioned by Rockwell at the beginning of this section -- that which seeks equal rights with men and the possibility to participate in the patriarchal/linear order on the one hand, and that which places an emphasis on women's difference to men and fights for women's rights to live in a modality outside of the patriarchal/linear order on the other -- are, in Kristeva's view, no longer tenable. She envisions a third strand of feminism arising, that -- without resorting to the bi-sexual, which in her view invariably results in the dominance of one of the sexes over the other and thus the obliteration of difference -- in a sense both transcends and combines aspects of all three modalities. Whether such a view is regarded as bi-sexual (or androgynous) or not depends, of course, on one's definition of the bi-sexual. Inasmuch as the approach described by her advocates the transcendence of one's socio-symbolic inheritance her assertion is justified; even her own position regarding the encoding of the modalities, however, implicitly calls into question the extent to which we can rid ourselves of the residue of our enculturation. (Kristeva 1981, 13-35.)

There is no difficulty, of course, in establishing which of these modalities are the most applicable to Glass's early minimal style; Kristeva herself, in a talk she gave in 1977², refers to the non-literary, non-linear conception of art as espoused by John Cage and Robert Wilson as best encapsulating the pre-symbolic, and therefore pre-Oedipal ("maternal"), ethos in art. The reference to Wilson can quite possibly be identified as a tacit

1 The influence of the term *jouissance* in feminist and poststructural musicology can be traced more to its usage in Kristeva's and Barthes's writing than Lacan's. Once again an essentialist understanding of the term is carefully avoided in the vast majority of the literature on the subject, which stresses that writers or musicians of either sex can experience this modality. A strong association with the feminine arises, however, as a result of women's apparent ease of access to the pre-Oedipal state, attributable to their not needing to achieve differentiation from the mother in the early developmental stages to the same extent as men. Important musicological texts that make use of the term include Renée Cox's article "Recovering *Jouissance*: an Introduction to Feminist Musical Aesthetics" (1991), Susan McClary's discussion of Laurie Anderson, "This is Not a Story my People Tell: Musical Time and Space According to Laurie Anderson," in her *Feminine Endings* (1991, 132-147), and Michel Poizat's *The Angel's Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera* (1992). John Shepherd specifically refers to Barthes's usage of the term in his "Music and Male Hegemony" (1987).

2 The talk was originally published in a special edition of the journal *Tel Quel* (1977, 71/73) on the United States. It was first translated as "The U.S. Now: a Conversation in the journal *October* (6, Fall 1978), and retranslated in the anthology *The Kristeva Reader* under the title "Why the United States?" (1986, 272-291).

allusion to Glass, inasmuch as the Wilson/Glass collaboration *Einstein on the Beach* had toured France in 1976 and was probably the best known of Wilson's works in that country in the year in which Kristeva gave her talk.

The present study should, then, in light of the body of literature to which I have drawn attention above, be viewed rather as a contribution to an ongoing dialogue than as an unprecedented departure into a totally unexplored field of enquiry. If my own approach has anything unique to offer, it lies in its specific focus on the opera *Akhmaten*, the opera's composer Philip Glass, as well as in the combination of methods chosen as the multiple lenses through which these will be viewed.

1.3 Aims and research questions

The primary aim of the study is to examine Philip Glass's opera *Akhmaten* on the one hand as an expression of its composer's self-world-view, and on the other as a cultural phenomenon -- thus, in both its personal and interpersonal dimensions (but ultimately in the dynamic interplay between the two).

Breaking this statement down into its constituent parts, it is possible to bring to light a number of subsidiary aims and implicit assumptions. The term "world-view," or its German equivalent *Weltanschauung*¹, is commonly used to denote the particular combination of cultural baggage an individual accumulates during the course of his or her life that becomes moulded into a set of interrelated precepts, or programs, whose function is to facilitate and make sense of the subject's interaction with the world. Sometimes the term is used in a strictly individualistic sense, implying that the individual is free to choose, as if shopping in a supermarket, the precepts she or he will internalise and those best left untouched. There is a sense in which this usage of the term will be adopted in the present study, but there is also a sense in which such freedom is regarded as being limited, framed, or supported by the subject's cultural inheritance. This aspect of the term is closely aligned to the prevalent view in anthropology, that one internalises the assumptions of the culture in which one lives as the foundation for one actions within it. With regard to Glass, the difference between the two positions is easily illustrated: he did not choose to be raised an American Jew, but he did choose to become a Tibetan Buddhist practitioner. In other cases, though, the distinction is not so easily made. In cultural studies, however, it is not always as necessary to distinguish between the two as it is, for example, in anthropology. Establishing that Glass's recent music is representative of the cultural entity known as postmodernism is

¹ The first scholarly usage of the term can be traced to Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Phenomenology of the Spirit).

of more value in itself than is ascertaining whether belonging to this entity is the result of enculturation or of the subject's free will.¹

In appending the affix "self" to the term I am following David Bohm (1985, 149), who does not explicitly define the compound "self-world-view," but whose intended meaning in this regard is, although implicit, reasonably clear. I view the term, largely because of its derivation and the contexts in which Bohm uses it, as encompassing the viewpoints of interpersonal and transpersonal psychology², as well as anthropology and cultural studies. Thus the compound seems to place an emphasis on the interaction of the subject with the world, rather than his or her maintaining an essentially static subjectivity in relative isolation from the world. This is a useful modification of the term as it ties it in with numerous other areas of study; such as psychoanalysis, gender studies, in Bohm's case quantum physics, and, conveniently for the present study, various philosophical and religious ideas, such as poststructuralist hermeneutics, in the case of the former, and Tibetan Buddhism, in that of the latter.

The following cluster of interrelated questions serves as my point of departure. It is characteristic of the hermeneutic orientation of the study, however, to seek connections without feeling shackled in any way to one's presuppositions. Thus, in some places in the study I will explicitly address the questions enumerated below; elsewhere, they are merely an undercurrent to the more specific concerns of the moment.

How does the opera *Akhmaten* function as an expression of the self-world-view of the composer Philip Glass? What is the significance of this opera in musico-dramatic and cultural terms? How does the position taken by the composer in this work stand in relation to the prevalent gender constructs of Western society? How do the assumptions expressed in this work relate to the composer's own cultural background? How does Glass's interest in Tibetan Buddhism come into play in his approach to music theatre? What is the role of the musical procedures employed by Glass in relation to the above considerations?

1.4 Layout of the study

Having examined both the general and the more specific scholarly contexts in which the study is situated, and having articulated some of the more pervasive

¹ A similar definition of "world-view" is one of the basic premises of John Shepherd's approach to music sociology (Shepherd 1977, 7-9: reprinted in his *Music as Social Text* [1991, 14-15]).

² The word "self" is commonly used to refer to a plane of consciousness that in some way transcends, or extends beyond or deeper than, ego consciousness. In this way the term self-world-view, could be seen as encompassing both this plane and that of the socially constructed ego.

questions it will seek to answer, all that remains is to provide a framework for the discussion.

The investigation proper is preceded by a short discussion of the underlying theoretical premises of the study as well as a brief exposition of music research grounded on similar premises.

Chapter three attempts to furnish the reader with a picture, albeit a sketchy one, of who the composer Philip Glass is: from his training in the early 1960s, through the formative years of the minimal style, to his renunciation of the minimal aesthetic in favour of a more expressive outgrowth suited to the requirements of interactive/theatrical art. The explicit concern of this section is to establish a culturally grounded aesthetic-poetic context for the discussion of the opera *Akhmaten* that follows.

Chapter four provides a dramatic and literary/historical context for the interpretation of the opera. It begins with a list of the central characters followed by a short plot synopsis, the purpose being to provide an overall picture of its trajectory in order that the discussion which follows, regarding the origins and sources used in constructing the libretto, can be related in some way to the "final product." The chapter ends with a brief discussion of Glass's handling of the orchestra in the opera.

Chapter five is the analysis and interpretation of the opera itself. The discussion follows the events of the plot in chronological order, the various sections corresponding with the acts and scenes of the opera. Although this aspect of the interpretation is linear/chronological in its construction, at various junctures the text will diverge from the unfolding of the plot in a non-linear or vertical manner: thus as various pertinent questions arise, various musical, dramatic, cultural, historical, aesthetic-poetic, or theoretical connections, they will be dealt with there and then rather than held over until the conclusion. The intention of this approach is to make the connections in question immediately apparent, much as they would be in the actual encounter with the work in a performance.

Chapter six investigates how Glass has explored and elaborated upon themes similar to those addressed in *Akhmaten* in subsequent works. Chapter seven is a more general discussion of the composer's approach, its correlatives in his self-world-view and in the culture of which he is a representative.

2 THEORY AND METHODS

2.1 The hermeneutic approach

This study aligns itself most closely with the hermeneutic direction of philosophy as applied in the humanities and the social sciences. Although the hermeneutic approach is known to cultures other than our own, the Western hermeneutic tradition can be traced back to the Biblical studies of the German theologian Schleiermacher (1768-1834), through the writings of the nineteenth-century philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), to its present day exponents, two of the most influential of whom have been the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer and the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. By far the most influential text in this field of study is the former's *Truth and Method* (Gadamer 1960 [English translation 1975]): the latter has published extensively on the subject, some of his most important texts being his collection of essays *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Ricoeur 1981) and the three-volume *Time and Narrative* (Ricoeur 1984; 1985; 1988). Typical of the hermeneutic approach is that it distinguishes itself from the natural sciences in placing a strong emphasis on the experiencing human subject. Rather than relying solely on empirically verifiable facts it concentrates on the interpretation and understanding of historico-culturally grounded texts.

Characteristic of the hermeneutic approach is an emphasis on relativism. All newly produced texts are regarded as participating in a dialogue with existing texts; by tracing the points of connection between any given text and the culture from which it has emerged one is able to obtain a more profound understanding of its human and cultural significance. Hermeneutists typically distrust claims of absolute significance, preferring to concentrate on the ways in which a text is contingent upon the world of ideas from which it has emerged (Gadamer 1975, 245). Ricoeur epitomises this view

when he writes; “[b]etween absolute knowledge and hermeneutics, it is necessary to choose” (Ricoeur 1981, 193). Even with regard to abstract, or so called “absolute” music, considered by many Western aestheticians the most abstract and autonomous of art forms, the hermeneut is reluctant to proffer the autonomous or “purely aesthetic” status conventionally ascribed to it (Gadamer 1975, 82; 1986, 74-75).

An important concept in hermeneutics is that of the “historical horizon”: Gadamer defines a horizon as “the range of vision that includes everything one can see from a particular vantage point” (Gadamer 1975, 269). Common in his writing are references to the “fusion” or “overlapping” of these horizons, meaning the intersecting of the conceptual constellation of the text with that of its reader. Such a fusion is possible only after the reader has placed herself in the situation of another in order that she might see the world from the perspective of this other (ibid., 273). The other in question can, of course, be a close friend, someone from another culture, or someone from another historical epoch (ibid., 271-272). The fusing of horizons does not, according to Gadamer, imply a total assimilation of the view of the other but rather a parallel awareness, a kind of mindfulness, of the gap between the subject’s perceptions of the horizon of the other and his own horizon, and of the historico-cultural constructedness and relativity of both (ibid., 273). Ricoeur (1992) has taken this idea further, however, undermining the ontological status of the distinct and inviolate centred subject with the assertion that one’s sense of individual identity, or “I-ness” (ego-consciousness), can be related to in exactly the same manner as one would relate to any other other: such a view transcends the conventional bounds of the empathic in so far as the view of “oneself [as] similar to another” is replaced by that of “oneself inasmuch as being another” (Ricoeur 1992, 3). Thus, Ricoeur’s notion of the fusion of horizons clearly goes beyond that put forward by Gadamer: the former’s concept of “appropriation” implies making one’s own what was previously alien to oneself in a more profound way than was postulated by the latter. For Ricoeur appropriating a text requires more than just projecting one’s ego onto it: if “conversing with a text” is to go beyond doggedly maintaining a fixed position, it requires also the relinquishment or dispossession of the reader’s narcissistic ego (Ricoeur 1981, 182-193). Such a view distinguishes Ricoeur from Barthes’s idea of “the death of the author”¹, as well as Derrida’s deconstruction, both of which place the onus heavily on the reader in the encounter between a text and the reading subject. Rather than contradicting these views, however, Ricoeur can probably be regarded as occupying a kind of middle ground between them and traditional author-centred notions of the reader-text encounter, on the one hand employing the notion of “distanciation” to account for the independence of a text from its author, and on the other positing a level or modality of understanding that enables “communication” in the meaning ordinarily ascribed to the word (ibid., 182-192). A compromise

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See Barthes 1977, 142-148.

such as this would appear to be called for in constructing a historico-culturally grounded model.

A second important concept is that of the hermeneutic circle. For the hermeneut, "the movement of understanding is constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole" (Gadamer 1975, 259). Such an interplay occurs on a number of different interpenetrating planes: from the reader to the text and vice versa, from the tradition to which the text belongs (the context) to the text itself and vice versa, and from the parts of the text to its whole and vice versa. According to Gadamer, the task of hermeneutic inquiry

is to extend in concentric circles the unity of the understood meaning. The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of the correct understanding. The failure to achieve this harmony means that understanding has failed. (Gadamer 1975, 259.)

For the hermeneut, meaning arises precisely because of the tension between self and other, reader and text, and text and context. A science rooted solely in objectivity cannot, of course, encompass such a view: as Gadamer puts it; "[t]he circle ... is not formal in nature, it is neither subjective nor objective, but describes understanding as the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter" (Gadamer 1975, 261).

The fundamental assumption of poststructural hermeneutics, that meaning arises from and descends into a vortex of concentric circles -- thus, that the signified of each sign becomes itself another signifier -- finds an interesting parallel in quantum physicist David Bohm's theory of soma-significance. In Bohm's model, meaning arises only as a result of a two-way process

in which movement is carried inward and outward between the aspects of soma [form] and significance and between levels that are relatively subtle and those that are relatively manifest. It is this over-all structure of meaning ... that is grasped in every experience. (Bohm 1985, 78.)

Thus, for Bohm and his collaborator on the book *Science, Order and Creativity*, the author F. David Peat, "[k]nowledge of reality does not ... lie in the subject, nor in the object, but in the dynamic flow between them" (Bohm & Peat 1987, 67). Although originating in research in Bohm's own field of quantum physics¹, the interesting thing about his theory, from the standpoint of the present discussion, is its application to the arts. Even when an artist is ostensibly painting what he or she perceives in the world, all of these perceptions are actually "deeply influenced by a person's background and disposition. In the case of the artist, this includes everything that has gone

¹ My alluding to the theories of a quantum physicist is not an attempt to legitimise my approach through association with the natural sciences. The knowledge that theories from these sciences have influenced musicological inquiry since its inception, may have, however, to a certain extent motivated my holding up a model not grounded in the mechanistic world-view of Newton.

before in the history of art, as well as the artist's relationship to the subject" (ibid., 69.). Thus, "the "artistic vision" arises," on the one hand, "out of an outward communication with a vast matrix of ideas, social predispositions, and so on," and on the other, from the artists "inward perception" (ibid., 69). Ultimately, however, the two bleed into and condition one another to such an extent as to render them inseparable other than in theoretical abstraction. Thus, every artistic, and, indeed, every communicative act is what Bohm and Peat term an act of "perception-communication" (ibid., 70).

A second interesting parallel is with the change in aesthetic assumptions that accompanied the turn to postmodernism in the arts. With this turn came a shift of emphasis from autonomy to interconnectedness, from form to meaning, from necessity to contingency, and from the absolute to the relative, which could easily be viewed as a shift in the direction of hermeneutics. That Glass's view is closely aligned with the hermeneutic position is, as will become increasingly apparent during the course of the study, quite evident from his statements regarding his music. Take, for example, the following:

you take objective music and you take a subjective person, you put them together and it's the interface between the two that becomes the content, not because it's in the music entirely. In other words the person completes the piece. That, as an aesthetic attitude, is actually a very important point.(...) I could write in this very reductive style and I didn't have to worry about it being emotionless. In fact the emotion would be there anyway, simply because human beings are listening to it and it's our predilection to read emotional content into what we experience. (Glass quoted in Suzuki 1991, 529.)

Or the following:

one might venture to say that art objects - be they paintings, string quartets, or plays - don't exist or function by themselves as abstract entities. They function and become meaningful only when there are people present to experience them.(...) Yet many people still act as if Art somehow has an independent existence all its own. Art and Culture are invented. We make them up. Otherwise, they don't exist. We live with our culture so closely that we think of Art as something that has its own natural, independent existence. But, obviously, it does not. I have no doubt that if one lived alone long enough, one would stop making Art, because Art has to do with people. But of course no one lives totally alone, isolated from the society around them. Even a hermit carries Society with him in his extreme solitude, and Art, as we often say, is a form of human communication. Human society and culture consist of things that people create together, and this is truer of Art than of anything else. People talk about criminals being the result of their environment, but they seldom speak of artists being victims of *their* environment, though in fact they are. When things go well, we take all the credit; when things go bad, we blame "society." Rarely does an artist give credit to society, but all too often society gets the credit for our failures. Rembrandt, for instance, didn't drop out of the sky; he came out of a period, from the social context of the world he grew up in. Otherwise, everything about Rembrandt is invented, including the pictures. (Glass 1987, 36-37.)

2.2 Poststructuralist musicology: or “oneself inasmuch as being another”

O Wad some Pow’r the giftie gie us
 To see ousels as others see us!
 It wad frae monie a blunder free us
 An foolish notion:
 What airs in dress an’ gait wad lea’e us
 And ev’n Devotion!

Robert Burns, *To a Louse*¹

While it is possible to identify precursors of the recent hermeneutically-oriented studies in musicology in the earlier musicological practices -- for instance, those of the German musicologists Hermann Kretschmar and Arnold Schering, and the Britain Donald Francis Tovey -- the present movement can be attributed more to the increased awareness of cultural relativism brought about by the findings of anthropology, ethnomusicology, and the emergence of the cross-disciplinary field of cultural studies. This is evidenced by the emphasis placed on anthropology in an increasing number of studies in this area: in his article “The Web of Culture: A Context for Musicology,” Gary Tomlinson (1984) has urged for a contextualisation of musicology based on Clifford Geertz’s hermeneutic view of anthropology; Lawrence Kramer compares the hermeneutic approach to musical interpretation to Geertz’s “thick description” in the theoretical introduction to his *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900* (1990a, 13), the title of which, incidentally, closely resembles Marcia Herndon’s and Norma McLeod’s ethnomusicological textbook *Music as Culture* (1981); Leo Treitler pays lip service to anthropological awareness in the introduction to his recently published anthology *Music and the Historical Imagination* (1989, 9-10); and Susan McClary, in a recent article, has referred to cultural studies in music as “an ethnology of ourselves, a coming home to roost of the anthropological projects of the last several decades” (McClary 1994, 69).

Arguably, though, the new area of study owes more to ethnomusicology than it does to anthropology, not that it is necessary to distinguish sharply between the two disciplines, as ethnomusicology has, since Alan Merriam’s textbook *The Anthropology of Music* (1964), and to a large extent prior to this, aligned itself closely with the theoretical precepts of that discipline. Moreover, ethnomusicologists have long insisted that an awareness of how other music cultures work can help us to see our own music culture in its proper cultural perspective, rather, that is, than as the monolithic truth it has frequently been made out to be. One of the most important figures in this respect is unquestionably the British ethnomusicologist John Blacking (1973, 1987), who consistently related the findings of his research conducted among

¹ Burns 1993, 103.

the Venda tribe of South Africa to his own background in Western classical music. Blacking was, by all accounts, a talented concert pianist, but his experience with the Venda made him also highly critical of the achievement-, competition-, and artefact-weighted -- i.e., the asocial or even *anti-social* -- aspects of his own music culture. The influence of ethnomusicology is also strongly evident in the alternative approach to music education advocated by Christopher Small in his *Music - Society - Education* (1977).

It is no accident, then, that Joseph Kerman (1985, 155-181) treats ethnomusicology and "cultural musicology" in the same chapter of his recently published survey of musicological research; although one hopes that his intention in so doing is not to denigrate the contextual study of Western music to the status of "other" musicology, making it thus a marginal interest with no bearing on traditional forms of musicological inquiry. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary recognise the dangers of such an assumption in their introduction to the anthology, *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception* (1987b):

For the most part ... the findings of ethnomusicology have been acceptable to historical musicology only insofar as they concern *other* cultures. In other words, recognising that other musics are bound up with social values does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that *our* music likewise might be: more often it simply results in a chauvinistic, ideological reaffirmation of the superiority of Western art, which is still widely held to be autonomous. (Leppert & McClary 1987a, xviii.)

Although Kerman has championed the cause of a non-positivistic "academic music criticism"¹, as he terms it, for some time, his criticism of Leo Treitler gives grounds for concern as to just how far he is willing to go in this regard. One of the most significant insights of Treitler's work is his questioning of the objective-subjective dichotomy in music research: for Treitler there are no "musical objects" other than in terms of the listening subject's relationship to them. Treitler frequently writes of "empathy" towards the musical culture one is studying², meaning to place oneself in the historico-cultural matrix of the culture that produced the work in order to arrive at a more contextually grounded interpretation of it. His approach is, as Kerman (1985, 132) correctly observes, closely aligned to Gadamer's idea of fusing historical horizons. Kerman seems unwilling, however, to relinquish the idea of an "objectively" grounded musicology, one that can exist totally unencumbered by subjective or, indeed, cultural considerations. He chides Treitler for "hammer[ing] away at the theme of complicity of observation and interpretation" (ibid., 133), and seems totally mystified by his "refusal to separate the observation of facts (which others might call the 'objective' side of musicology) from the uses to which those facts might be put for purposes of interpretation (the 'subjective'

1 See Kerman's articles "How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out" (1980-81); "The State of Academic Music Criticism" (1981) and his book *Musicology* (1985).

2 See, for example, Treitler's article "On Historical Criticism" (1967, 190).

side)" (ibid., 133). Implicit in Kerman's remarks is the prioritising of a "neutral" or "immanent" level of analysis, as has been postulated explicitly by Nattiez (1990, 10-32 and 46) in his much acclaimed and much disputed tripartite model, but which is implicit in many other musicological studies as well. In Nattiez's defence, it could be argued that his model at least makes provisions for a more contextually-oriented approach (see Nattiez 1990, 111-129). That he does not, on the whole, pursue such an approach but instead endorses one that is heavily weighted towards the neutral (thus, ahistorical and acultural) level on the one hand, and the composer's intention on the other, has been perceived by many as a major defect in his theories, and one that can easily be compared to more overtly positivistic approaches. In general, though, semiologists seem to have been more willing than most to take into account all of the diverse ways in which musical structures can become meaningful in relation to people and culture¹; which can probably be attributed largely to the interdisciplinary foundations of the paradigm combined with the strong historical ties between musical semiotics and ethnomusicology.

The concerns of Treitler regarding the usefulness of the "empathic" approach are echoed in the ethnomusicological literature: ethnomusicologists (for instance, Blacking 1979, 5-6; Robertson 1991, 347; and Titon 1994, 12-13) have long been aware of the need to reduce the distance between the researcher and object of research in order to attain a more connected view of the musical phenomenon one is studying. Which is not, of course, to say that they advocate a complete immersion into the other culture, becoming in essence natives of that culture: the outcome of skilfully conducted ethnographic work, be it ethnomusicological or musicological, is a dialogue between researcher and researched that can and should be recognisable as such². The researcher does well, therefore, to remain mindful of the gap between self and other, that his own view of the other person or culture in question be not projected onto that other, resulting in his putting words into their mouth as a ventriloquist would his or her dummy³.

A balanced approach requires, therefore, a synthesis of both "empathic" and "critical" modes, a kind of doublethink between the historico-cultural horizon of the "object" of study on the one hand, and one's own historico-culturally conditioned horizon on the other. If a historico-cultural truth exists, then it exists in the dynamic interplay between the two. Empathy allows a deep and elaborately interwoven understanding of the phenomenon, at the same time enabling one to temporarily step out of the skin of one's own

¹ See, for example, Raymond Monelle's *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music* (1992). See also Philip Tagg's *Kojak - 50 Seconds of Television Music (towards the analysis of affect in popular music)* (1979), and Eero Tarasti's *Myth and Music: a semiotic approach to the aesthetics of myth in music, especially that of Wagner, Sibelius and Stravinsky* (1978).

² See Ellen Koskoff's important article on Self/Other differentiation in ethnographic work, "Miriam Sings her Songs: The Self and Other in Anthropological Discourse" (1993).

³ For a psychoanalytic perspective on this issue see R.D. Laing's so called "anti-psychoanalytical" classic *Self and Other* (1961).

horizon, thereby bringing its historico-cultural constructedness into sight: an excess of empathy can, however, all too easily result in the illusion that one has arrived at some final truth concerning the phenomenon one is investigating. Criticism, on the other hand, allows one to distance oneself from the other, thus forestalling total identification and its undesirable side effect of denying the otherness of the other.

These questions are every bit as valid to musicologists as they are to the ethnomusicologist: one's next door neighbour is potentially as different as is the drummer in a Venda tribe; a sixteenth-century madrigal is in a very real sense no more the music of our own culture than is the music of a contemporary Balinese gamelan. Taken to its logical conclusion, all music can, in a sense, be viewed as that of another person or culture. Thus, by adopting Ricoeur's precept of "oneself inasmuch as being another," it might be possible to bring a distance and a perspective to studies of music conventionally considered "one's own" that is altogether more convincing than the distance or neutrality claimed by advocates of objectivism¹.

Hermeneutically-oriented studies have, as I have implied already, been the norm rather than the exception in ethnomusicology for some time². In the study of Western classical music isolated non-formalist voices have been heard for some time but have only gathered together into a tangible force in recent years. Some precursors of contextual musicology include Leo Treitler's historical hermeneutics as mentioned earlier; Deryck Cooke's (1959) attempts to formulate a semantics of music; Anthony Hopkins's (1977) animated and informed interpretations of canonical works; the theoretical writings of both Wilson Coker (1972, 10) and Edward T. Cone (1974, 158-175; 1982), because of their willingness to include so called "extrageneric" meaning (Coker 1972, 144), albeit as a secondary consideration, in their discussions of musical meaning; and both Peter Kivy's (1980) and Lewis Rowell's (1983) views of music philosophy, the latter of whom, incidentally, can be listed among those scholars of Western classical music who have taken an active interest also in non-Western musics.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter of the dissertation, the intention of which is merely to place it in a theoretical/methodological category within the field of musicology, to enumerate all of the important work that has accumulated in this area of study during the last few years. It might, however, be worth mentioning a few central figures whose influence on the development of the field is beyond dispute. In addition to those I have mentioned already, Rose Rosengard Subotnik's culturally grounded music criticism has served as an example for more recent exponents of the approach. Typically of studies in

¹ See chapter 7, "Mozart and the Idea of Absolute Music," of Treitler's *Music and the Historical Imagination* (1989, 176-214); McClary's "Narrative Agendas in "Absolute" Music: Identity and Difference in Brahms's Third Symphony" (1993); and Janet Wolff's "The Ideology of Autonomous Art" (1987).

² In addition to Blacking, studies by Herndon & McLeod (1981), Feld (1982), and Moiala (1991) epitomise this approach.

this area, the emphasis in Subotnik's work¹, which concentrates predominantly on late Romantic canonical works, is on practice rather than theory. The first section of her article "On grounding Chopin" (Subotnik 1987, 105-11) serves, however, as an eloquent, if concise, elucidation of the central premises of the hermeneutic approach. Subotnik stresses that contextualism need not preclude rigour in musicological inquiry; the rigour found in contextual musicology, or music criticism, as it is coming to be known, is, however, of a different order than that found in received scientific models (ibid., 106-107). "Criticism," which, "tends to model itself on artistic rather than scientific patterns of connections," is, according to Subotnik, better equipped for the task of contextualising musicology than is a scholarly approach that structures the world in terms of "mechanistic causal explanations or empirical induction" (ibid., 107). "[T]he problem of trying to relate music to society" is, thus, in her view, "fundamentally, a problem of criticism, requiring very much the same sorts of means that one would take to the interpretation of a literary text" (ibid., 107).

A second influential figure in music criticism is Anthony Newcomb. In a series of articles concerned with eighteenth and nineteenth century music, Newcomb (1983; 1984a; 1984b; 1987) has also urged a more contextual approach to the study of historical works; one grounded in the historical assumptions of the culture that produced the works rather than in conceptual world of the analyst. A central concern in Newcomb's writing is the elucidation of narrative structures in music², the purpose being to bring into sight certain pervasive "plot archetypes" similar to those found in other art forms of the same culture, such as literature. Although the specificity of his accounts of abstract instrumental compositions has attracted some criticism (Kramer 1990a, 184-185; Abbate 1991, 25), one senses that the problem is more one of terminology than anything else: Newcomb's narratives are after all not so different from Kramer's "structural tropes" (Kramer 1990a, 10), which I shall shortly discuss, or Abbate's "narrating voices" (Abbate 1991, 19). This question is particularly pertinent to the concerns of the present study, and I shall return to it in more detail later, as the composer whose works I am discussing perceived his early style, minimalism, as challenging or deconstructing, conventional notions of narrative form in music. His more recent work, including the opera *Akhmaten*, does engage in narrative modes of expression, albeit narrative with a difference.

1 See her articles "The Cultural Message of Musical Semiology: Some Thoughts on Music, Language, and Criticism since the Enlightenment" (Subotnik 1978); Romantic Music as Post-Kantian Critique: Classicism, Romanticism, and the Concept of the Semiotic Universe" (Subotnik 1981); and "On grounding Chopin" (Subotnik 1987). See also her book *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music* (Subotnik 1991).

2 See also McClary's "Narrative agendas in "absolute" music" (1993); Jann Pasler's "Narrative and Narrativity in Music" (1989), and "Postmodernism, narrativity, and the art of memory" (1993).

The nearest thing to a theoretical/methodological manifesto of hermeneutic procedures for the interpretation of music -- wherein lies both its strength and its weakness -- can be found in Lawrence Kramer's *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900* (1990a). Kramer (1990a, 1), both a literary critic and a musicologist, enumerates his fundamental assumptions, which are to a large extent shared by other scholars working in this field, on the very first page of his book. They are;

1. that works of music have discursive meanings;
2. that these meanings are definite enough to support critical interpretations comparable in depth, exactness, and density of connection to interpretations of literary texts and cultural practices;
3. that these meanings are not "extramusical," but on the contrary are inextricably bound up with the formal processes and stylistic articulations of musical works;
- 4; that these meanings are produced as part of the general circulation of regulated practices and valuations -- part, in other words, of the continuous production and reproduction of culture.

The first chapter of Kramer's book is probably the most cogent introduction to the hermeneutics of music yet written. It is in the very nature of the pursuit he is describing, however, not to lend itself easily to elucidation in this way. Hermeneutic procedures, as Kramer rightly observes, "cannot be regimented, disciplined or legislated" (Kramer 1990a, 14): a hermeneutic exegesis typically "seizes on any association, substitution, analogy, construction, or leap of inference that it requires to do its work" (ibid., 15). Thus the procedures employed are at least in part determined by the object of study and the researcher's relation to that object. Findings arrived at in this manner cannot, therefore, be verified or disproved in any traditional sense of those words: "Unlike a true account of something, an interpretation can never exclude rival, incompatible accounts" (ibid., 15). This does not, however, mean that anything goes: interpretations are justified "by their power to sustain a detailed scrutiny of a text that also reaches deep into the cultural context" (ibid., 15). As I have already pointed out, those working in this area of study traditionally align themselves in one way or another with the discipline of anthropology, and Kramer is no exception in this regard (ibid., 13).

Even though Kramer perceives that studies interested in elucidating musical meaning have suffered unduly from the comparison with language, more specifically from arguments that compare the "denotative power" of musical and linguistic structures, he nevertheless relies heavily himself upon linguistic terminology and methodology in formulating his approach to the interpretation of music. He does, however, make an important point in so doing: namely that musical meaning often has more to do with the linguistic area of study known as pragmatics than it does with semantics (Kramer 1990a, 2-9). The simplistic bi-polar distinction between syntax and semantics, which

finds few adherents among contemporary linguists, has done much, when grafted onto musicological inquiry, to prevent researchers in this field from even looking for musical meaning, insofar as meaning has conventionally been assigned exclusively to the domain of semantics.

As I have implied already, Kramer's (1990a) discussion is both justified and constrained by its specificity: music criticism being something of a maverick pursuit, it seems unlikely that his jargon-laden theoretical/methodological models will find many adherent among the ranks of fellow music critics, and it is noteworthy that he seldom resorts himself to these, or needs to, in his own exegeses¹. They do, however, give those interested in theorising about musical hermeneutics something to think about, and, moreover, set out the various aspects -- albeit weighted towards the specific time-frame Kramer is discussing (1800-1900) -- of contextualised musicological inquiry in elegant form. According to Kramer (1990a, 9-10) there are three types of "hermeneutic window" through which the interpreter must pass in order to arrive at a contextualised "hearing." They are:

1. Textual inclusions. This type includes texts set to music, titles, epigrams, programs, notes to the score, and sometimes even expression markings. In dealing with these materials, it is critical to remember -- especially with the texts of vocal pieces -- that they do not establish (authorize, fix) a meaning that the music somehow reiterates, but only invite the interpreter to find meaning in the interplay of expressive acts. The same caution applies to the other two types.
2. Citational inclusions. This type is a less explicit version of the first, with which it partly overlaps. It includes titles that link a work of music with a literary work, visual image, place, or historical moment; musical allusions to other compositions; allusions to texts through the quotation of associated music; allusions to styles of other composers or of earlier periods; and the inclusion (or parody) of other characteristic styles not predominant in the work at hand.
3. Structural tropes. These are the most implicit and ultimately the most powerful of hermeneutic windows. By *structural trope* I mean a structural procedure, capable of various practical realizations, that also functions as a typical expressive act within a certain cultural/historical framework. Since they are defined in terms of their illocutionary force, as units of doing rather than as units of saying, structural tropes cut across traditional distinctions between form and content. They can evolve from any aspect of communicative exchange: style, rhetoric, representation, and so on.

It is clearly of value to formulate these areas of inquiry in terms as specific as these, if for no other reason than to illuminate the diversity of contexts that can be taken into consideration in the study of classical music, which is commonly assumed to have no context at all. In my own work, however, a less specific formulation, a kind of continuum between Kramer's first and last categories,

¹ See also his "Culture and musical hermeneutics: The Salome complex" (1990b); "Haydn's Chaos, Schenker's Order; or, Hermeneutics and Music Analysis: Can they Mix?" (1992); and "*Carnaval*, Cross-Dressing, and the Woman in the Mirror" (1993).

between the specific and the abstract, the symbol and the sign, is of more use. Alan Merriam has written:

... it is questionable whether a true distinction can be made between the sign and the symbol, and it seems more likely that we deal here with a continuum in which the sign melts imperceptibly into the symbol on higher and higher planes of abstraction (Merriam 1964, 234).

The widespread current interest in music criticism has gone hand in hand with the belated arrival, and enthusiasm concerning this arrival, of feminism in musicology. Precursors of musicological feminism can be located primarily in film studies, (largely French) literary criticism¹, and (largely British) popular music sociology². What undoubtedly tipped the balance in favour of a feminist approach to the study of Western classical music was, however, the profound impact gender studies was having on the neighbouring discipline of ethnomusicology. The publication of three anthologies, edited by Ellen Koskoff (1987), and Marcia Herndon and Susanne Ziegler (1990; 1991), respectively, made gender a talking point in many departments of musicology, even if many were not sure what a gender studies of Western classical music might look like at that stage. Richard Leppert's and Susan McClary's earlier mentioned anthology, *Music and Society: the Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception* (1987b), published in the same year as the collection of articles edited by Koskoff, provided a foretaste of an answer to this question.

Four years later, however, two books were published that were, each in their own way, to have a profound impact on the development of the field: Carolyn Abbate's *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (1991) and Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (1991)³. The former's predominantly Barthesian approach to canonical works, mainly operas, seeks to illuminate the ways in which women have been able to express themselves within the constraints of the dominant patriarchal order, while the latter places more of an emphasis on the ways in which this order has prevented such expression, at the same time offering examples of contemporary musicians who have broken free from the constraints of the canon by forging new musical languages to which conventional evaluative criteria do not apply. The agenda of the former is to change the way we listen to historical works, that we hear not only the

1 Particularly significant is Catherine Clément's *Opera, or the Undoing of Women* (1979 [English translation 1989]).

2 See, for example, Simon Frith's and Angela McRobbie's "Rock and Sexuality" (1978-9).

3 The controversy surrounding *Feminine Endings* (McClary 1991) and the vehemence of the criticism directed at it are without precedent in musicological inquiry. See Pieter van den Toorn's "Politics, Feminism, and Contemporary Music Theory" (1991) and Ruth Solie's (1991) reply; Elain Barkin's "either/other" (1992) and McClary's (1992b) reply. See also Jann Pasler's "Some Thoughts on Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings*" (1992) as well as Paula Higgins's "Women in Music, Feminist Criticism, and Guerrilla Musicology: Reflections on Recent Polemics" (1993).

monolithic voice of the author (the almost invariably male composer) but also the individual voices of the actors (the female singers) who perform these works: in Abbate's mind, there exists "a realm beyond narrative plot, in which women exist as sonority and sheer physical volume, asserting themselves outside spectacle and escaping murderous fates" (Abbate 1993, 254). The agenda of the latter is, arguably, to identify and hold up for the reader's contemplation contemporary authorial voices (female and male) in which the precepts of male patriarchal culture are challenged or replaced by new precepts, and at the same time to urge a distancing or disassociation from the underlying precepts, or narratives, of historical works, that the values they personify be not perpetuated in a new generation of music listeners. The aims of the two studies are, however, quite closely related: what they have in common, above all else, is a willingness to write about music as the meaningful form of human expression it is.

I have drawn attention to McClary's and Abbate's books because of their impact on the field of study to which this dissertation is specifically addressed. Gender studies in music comprises, however, a broad spectrum of diverse approaches and concerns, of which these studies represent two points of view among many. Some idea of the diversity found in the field can be gained by browsing the pages of the two recently published anthologies that take the issues of gender and sexuality in music as their common theme, Ruth A. Solie's (ed.) *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (1993) and Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou's (eds.) *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music* (1994), as well as by following the debates on the subject in those scholarly journals that have taken an interest in these issues. Topics range from gendered readings of musical works, to biographies, to questions regarding the canon, to questions pertaining to music theory, to ethnographic studies, to gay and lesbian studies, to men's studies, to women's studies, to studies of opera, to studies of abstract works, to studies of popular music, to studies of classical music. I will refer to studies other than those mentioned later, as the need arises, and leave this to suffice as a preliminary overview of the issues most central to those I will be addressing in these pages. Before concluding this section, I should, however, like to mention the important work being done in this area in Finland: particularly significant is a special edition of the Journal of the Finnish Musicological Society, *Musiikki*, edited by Pirkko Moisala (1994), containing articles addressing problems of women's studies, feminist music criticism, and gendered music analysis.

In closing I will return to the title of this chapter, "poststructuralist musicology." Such an appellation does not imply an exact correlation with the precepts of the predominantly French school of cultural and literary criticism, philosophy and psychoanalysis usually equated with it, even though this body of literature has contributed in an important way to the orientation of this study. Much of the Anglo-American literature, while drawing extensively on the work of the French poststructuralists, does not align itself in a one-to-one manner with their theories. For many musicologists the term

"poststructuralism" is freely interchangeable with the terms "postmodernism," "post-formalism," and "contextualism." Poststructuralist literary criticism on the other hand concerned itself almost exclusively with works belonging to the Modernist canon, and was frequently everything but contextual, in the usual sense of the word, in its orientation. As I have shown, poststructural, hermeneutic, or critical musicology aligns itself closely with the theoretical assumptions of anthropology, particularly with the idea of interpretation as "thick description," as advocated by Clifford Geertz (1973). It is poststructural inasmuch as it seeks explanations that go beyond the consideration of musical structures as autonomous entities, exploring the relation of these structures to those aspects of musical experience that extend into historico-cultural and human -- psychoanalytical, psychological, and biological (implying an emphasis on performance and communication) -- spheres. Studies in this area typically place a strong emphasis on cultural relativism -- thus the second half of the title of this section, the quotation from Ricoeur. One's own music culture, the one in which one was raised or received one's musical training, is regarded as one of many existing music cultures, no one of which is intrinsically superior or inferior to any other.

Critical musicology would be critical in only a limited sense if it did not criticise. An important part of the activities of the critical musicologist is thus deconstruction. Although the term is strongly associated with the criticism of Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, it can be employed to describe almost any "anti-universalist," relativising, or decentering project. Far from being a negative pastime, the essence of deconstruction is, as Kramer (1990a, 177) has rightly observed, affirmative; the purpose being to clear a space in which silenced or ignored voices can be heard¹. The deconstructive modality is prominent in much of McClary's work, as well as Marcia J. Citron's (1993) important monograph on the gendered social construction of the canon. An explicit concern of McClary (1991), as well as many others working in the field of music criticism, has been to deconstruct the myth of the autonomy of music. Rather than seeking to explain musical works as if they were transcendental truths, music critics prefer to look for meanings in the interplay between musical structures, human beings, and the cultures in which they live (and which live in them). For music critics meaning is not something that can be excluded from a work of art: significance is something that circulates, as Kramer's puts it "like air or money" (1990a, 17), wherever and whenever there are people present, latching onto human artefacts even when it is not wanted and even when its presence may constitute something of an embarrassment to the people who make and come into contact with them. The traditional

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For a discussion of deconstruction from the standpoint of the semiotics of music see Monelle (1992, 304-323). See also Steve Sweeney Turner's "Music and Deconstruction: some notes on the usage of the term" (1993b), his doctoral dissertation *Music, Enlightenment & Deconstruction: the structural politics of harmony* (1993a), and article "Dictated by Tradition? Identity and difference in Queen's *Innuendo* -- the mercurial case of Farookh Bulsara" (1995).

formalist orientation of musicology, which, as McClary observes, "is grounded on the contradiction of simultaneous positivism (the obsessive search for facts) and radical mystification (belief in the divine inspiration and ineffability of great music)" (McClary 1989b, xv), combined with the exalted position of works that appear to comply with the ideology of autonomy (in contrast to those that do not), have, however, both constituted major obstacles to those wishing to pursue contextually grounded approaches.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 Assimilation

It is not my purpose here to map Philip Glass's history as a composer in a detailed chronological fashion. Those who are interested in the transformation of this composer's early style can consult the literature mentioned in the initial chapter of the dissertation. The purpose of this chapter is rather to identify the aesthetic, poetic, and cultural constellation of precepts that governed Glass's earlier approaches to composition and look for ways in which this has informed, and been transformed in, his later style as manifested in the opera I will be discussing here. To this end, I have found a three-fold distinction useful, between the composer's student years in which the modality *assimilation* is prominent, his early compositions in which *deconstruction* is the dominant modality, and his more recent compositions in which a modality that might be termed *reconstruction* is more to the fore, and in which the parallel creative strategies *distanciation* and *appropriation* are consistently employed. The first category spans the period from his youth to his studies with Nadia Boulanger in Paris in the mid-1960s, the second encompasses the body of music written by him in the late 1960s and early 1970s that has come to be identified with the term *minimalism*, and the final category includes the music theatre and many of the instrumental works composed by him since, and arguably including *Einstein on the Beach* (1975-76). By the time *Akhnaten* (1983) was written the new modality was, as we shall see, already firmly established. This modality, which, following Schwarz (1990, 270), I will term *post-minimalism*, was in evidence in most of Glass's 1980s output, from the opera *Satyagraha* (1980) and its satellite record release *Glassworks* (1981) onwards. These are not, however, exclusive categories: as the sign merges imperceptibly into the symbol, so the

deconstructive modality concedes to the reconstructive in the transformation that has taken place in Glass's approach across the years.

One thing that should be stressed at this early stage is that Glass went through as rigorous a schooling in the compositional techniques of Western classical music as any prominent composer one might choose to mention. Born in Baltimore on January 31 1937, the grandchild of Lithuanian and Russian Orthodox Jewish immigrants, Glass started playing the violin at the age of six. Aged eight he changed to the flute, which he studied formally at the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore, where he also studied harmony. At the same time, the young musician was receiving a non-formal schooling while working on a part-time basis in his father's music shop, General Radio. As the name of the shop implies, Glass's musical upbringing was anything but sheltered: during his youth he came into regular contact with the whole gamut of musical styles, from classical to popular to jazz, at home as well as at work. Regarding classical music, his father had a special liking for Schubert; whose E-flat Piano Trio was the first music Glass remembers hearing, although his father also listened to twentieth-century composers such as Shostakovich and Bartók. As a precocious fifteen-year-old, he entered the University of Chicago where he read for a bachelor's degree in mathematics and philosophy at the same time as studying the piano. At the age of nineteen, Glass transferred to the Juilliard School of Music where he studied composition full-time with Vincent Persichetti, William Bergsma, and, during the summer of 1960, Darius Milhaud. During this period he also came into contact with jazz, attending jam sessions at the Village Vanguard in which influential musicians working in this idiom, such as John Coltrane, took part. He graduated from Juilliard in 1962 with a master's degree and some seventy compositions under his belt, a number of which were published at the insistence of his teacher, Persichetti. After graduating, he moved to Pittsburgh, where he worked for two years as a professional composer, something he was not to do for some years afterwards, writing music for the Contemporary Music Project of the Pittsburgh Public School System. Although his first listed composition, a string trio written at the age of fifteen, is dodecaphonic, as indeed are a number of subsequent compositions¹, Glass preferred at this time to write in a Modern tonal style strongly influence by Copland, early- to mid-period Elliot Carter, who was evidently something of a role model to the aspiring composer, and the music of his teachers at Juilliard². Regarding his student music, Glass has commented:

I never bought the whole 12-tone bag of tricks, though I wrote some serial pieces so I could learn what it was all about. I was, at that point basically just a very good student. As a young man I had no clear voice of my own, but I did feel that it was only a matter of time before one would emerge.(...) So I

1 Strickland (1993, 204) lists Glass's serial compositions as including a *Divertimento for Flute, Clarinet and Bassoon*, *Diversions for Two Flutes and Bass Trombone*, and a *Fantasy and Serenade*, for solo flute.

2 See Coe 1981, 121-122; Gagne & Caras 1982, 210-211; Suzuki 1991, 509-512; and Strickland 1993, 203-205.

wrote music like my teachers', and was rewarded with scholarships and grants, and they were very nice to me. I was a good boy. (Glass quoted in Garland 1983, 17.)

Although Glass considers his student works derivative and uninspired, a good many of them are still in circulation in sheet music form, and one composition, a three-part *Brass Sextet* (1962-64), has even been recorded recently by the London Gabrieli Brass Ensemble¹ -- presumably without its composer's blessing. Anyone who suspects that Glass turned to minimalism because he was unable to write in the Modern idiom would be well advised to acquaint themselves with these early "pre-minimalist" works: suffice it to say that the composer's own pejorative descriptions hardly do them justice. Writing music exactly how his teachers had instructed him was not, however, something Glass wanted to do, and the years that followed saw a questioning of received ideas that a whole generation of composers, and, indeed, a whole generation of those who were not composers of classical music were experiencing.

3.2 Deconstruction

When Glass arrived in Paris in 1965, he became painfully aware of a division between the kind of composer he was training himself to be and the kind of composer he wanted to be. On the one hand he was, like Virgil Thomson and Elliott Carter before him, receiving a rigorous (re-)training in harmony and counterpoint under the watchful and critical eye of Nadia Boulanger, and witnessing the musical results of this kind of training in the *Domaine Musical* concerts of Pierre Boulez; on the other he came into direct contact with non-Western music for the first time while notating the score to the Conrad Rooks counter-culture film *Chappaqua*, composed by the Indian musicians Ravi Shankar and Allah Rakha. Unlike fellow minimalists Terry Riley and La Monte Young, Glass never attempted to compose anything that sounded like Indian music, nor did he enter into a formal Guru-student relationship with an Indian master, although he did take some private lessons on Indian percussion with Rakha. He had no interest in musical "chinoiserie" (Gagne & Caras 1982, 224), but rather became aware through this acquaintance with other musical cultures of the arbitrariness of the rules musical Modernism had invented:

... the whole tyranny of history and the historical imperative of contemporary music was demystified entirely. It didn't matter anymore. If you took one step outside of those institutions it simply didn't matter anymore. That's, of course, what Cage was very good at. He was one of the people that I was reading at the time. (Glass quoted in Smith & Smith 1993, 55.)

¹ Hyperian Records CD R66517.

After this lesson in radical relativisation, he set about translating the precepts of cyclical form and additive rhythmic structure, which he found in Indian music, into a language that would be recognisably Western. Of the (questionable) "famous four" minimalist composers (Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass), Glass is arguably the most Western¹; which should not be viewed as a sign of his narrow-mindedness, but rather of an intuitive awareness of the deeply problematic nature of the valorisation of other cultures simply because of their difference; something the French poststructuralists (including Barthes, Derrida, and Ricoeur) have identified as a kind of inverse racism. And it is noteworthy that the challenge to the taken-for-granted universalist assumptions of Modernism experienced by Glass was two-pronged, stemming not only from his interest in Indian music and culture (which, it should be remembered, predated the Beatles' similar interest by some time), but also from his growing fascination with both European and North American traditions of non-narrative theatre, from Brecht to The Living Theater. The questioning of what Lyotard (1984) has terms the metanarratives of Western culture from the inside which is so characteristic of this genre of theatre -- of striving towards a goal, of cause and effect, of linear development -- can easily be seen as paralleling the precepts of Asian philosophies in their prioritising of what Kristeva (1981) terms the cyclical and the monumental modalities. Needless to say, the compositional training Glass had received did not seem wholly commensurate with the new artistic worlds he was discovering.

For Glass, the kind of music he was being urged to write was premised on negations: the negation of repetitive and cyclical structures, the negation of tonality or modality, and the negation of rhythmic constancy. All these elements, which are almost ubiquitous in non-Western musics, as well as Western pre-Modern and non-classical² styles, but which were avoided like the plague in the High-Modern serialist style, formed the foundations of the style that later became known as minimalism³. Although itself frequently defined by negations -- non-linear, non-narrative, non-developing, non-teleological, post-modern -- the essence of the new style was, like its parallel deconstructive

1 Interestingly, few of the women associated with the minimal movement have sought, in the manner of Riley and Young, to emulate non-Western musics either. Laurie Anderson, Meredith Monk, Annea Lockwood, Pauline Oliveros, and Joan La Barbara, to mention a few of the more famous of these, have all developed approaches that are unmistakably Western.

2 I use the word classical here and elsewhere in its broad, non-specialist sense, to refer to the Western classical music tradition (anything from Bach to Babbitt) rather than Classicism, the style that followed Baroque and preceded Romantic music.

3 Glass himself has defined minimalism by the presence of tonality, repetitive structures, and "a constant steady beat" (quoted in Smith & Smith 1993, 60). One of the most convincing and succinct definitions, however, is the five-point definition given by Dean Suzuki in his sleeve notes to Jon Gibson's recording *In Good Company* (1992), an ellipsis of the formula arrived at in his doctoral dissertation (Suzuki 1991, 12-29). Suzuki (1992) lists the traits *reductive style, repetition, tonal or modal harmonies, steady pulse ("an unflagging, metronomic beat"), and altered time frame.*

tendency in literary criticism, and other reactionary cultural movements that burgeoned at the same time (the civil rights movement, feminism, and the other large scale protest movements of the 1960s) radically affirmative in its effect. And even if minimalism itself, as Glass readily admits, "turned out to be not very important" (Strickland 1988, 76) in its "purest," most reductive manifestations, it cleared a space in which new voices could be heard, albeit voices that were yet to develop a language as elaborate and multilayered as those it was calling into question.

Although frequently assigned to the category of postmodernism, because of its rejection of the precepts of Modernism, more recent commentators on the style, including Charles Jencks (1986, 30-32) and K. Robert Schwarz (1990, 271), have viewed its iconoclasm in this respect as a symptom rather of the Late-Modern ethos, in the same way, for example, as feminism (another Modernist Master [?] Narrative?) has been contrasted by some critics with (postmodern) postfeminism. Schwarz applies the same logic when he assigns John Adams to the category of (postmodern) post-minimalism, but leaves Steve Reich straddling between Modernism and postmodernism, between minimalism and post-minimalism. I will argue, following Jencks (1986, 25) and Pasler (1989, 19), and, implicitly, McClary (1989a, 67)¹, that the interest of postmodern artists in signification, interaction, and memory, are probably the most transparent markers of the new ethos. Jencks writes; "[w]hereas Modernism and particularly Late-Modernism concentrated on the autonomy and expression of individual art form -- the aesthetic dimension -- Post-Modernists focus on the semantic aspects" (1986, 25). It is noteworthy that Glass himself only ever, to my knowledge, uses the word postmodernism when referring to his work in the theatre², and he consistently draws a line between his pre- and post-*Einstein on the Beach* compositions, "because the aesthetics of theatre is additive rather than reductive" (Glass quoted in Strickland 1988, 75)³; meaning, according to my interpretation, that it is semantic more than it is pragmatic⁴ in its fundamental orientation. Moreover, "in almost all of the non-theatrical works," Glass has commented, "you'll find there's actually a subtext

1 McClary (1989a, 67) lists Glass, Laurie Anderson, Steve Reich and Meredith Monk as postmodern musicians, three out of four of whom have worked predominantly in the theatre.

2 For instance, in Glass (1987, 37).

3 Elsewhere he has objected to the use of the term "minimalism" to describe his work in the theatre, on the grounds that "it poorly describes what you are going to hear.(...) Once I began working on large scale music/theatre pieces with *Einstein on the Beach* in 1976, it was pretty much the end of that period for me. I just don't think the aesthetic of Minimalism and the demands of music/theatre go together very well" (Glass quoted in Schaefer 1987, 64-65.).

4 Strickland, in the introduction to his *American Composers: Dialogues on Contemporary Music* (1991, 1-2) employs the word "pragmatic" to describe the prominent modality in minimal music, referring to the derivation of this word from the Greek *pragma* (deed, action), and to the idea of art propagated at the time; one in which the artistic event is intended to affect its audience in a tangible way, rather than being a "formally beautiful construct or artefact" (ibid., 2).

that's theatrical" (quoted in Smith & Smith 1993, 59); meaning even the instrumental works of the post-minimal style invariably engage, in a tangible, reasonably concrete manner, in questions of signification. All of which places Glass the theatre composer firmly in the domain of the postmodern, but not the Glass we are talking about in this section; not, at least to the same extent, Glass the minimalist. However, a more congenial distinction than Jencks's Late-Modern/Post-Modern dichotomy, and one more specifically addressing the North American cultural realities of the time, might be the continuum suggested by Andreas Huyssen (1990), between 1960s reactionary postmodernism at one end, and the more conciliatory strain of postmodernism characteristic of the 1970s and 1980s, at the other. Huyssen (1990, 244-247) lists four distinctive traits of 1960s North American postmodernism:

1. An iconoclastic rupture with received ideas, comparable to earlier avant-garde movements such as Dada and surrealism.
2. An aversion to institutionalised forms of art and their ideology of autonomy; as manifested in both the life/art dichotomy and the unassailable (autonomous) position of an aesthetic intelligentsia whose purpose is to defend the distinction between good taste ("high" art) and bad taste ("low" art).
3. A fascination with technology.
4. Advocacy of popular art forms.

Mapping these traits onto minimalism is not without its problems, but it does, in my opinion, provide a more suitable cultural framework for the discussion of minimalism than those models which force it, screaming and kicking one would imagine, into the domain of Late-Modernism. The dominant modality in these early works (1965-75) was, as I have implied deconstruction, and this was achieved using the strategy, or what Kramer (1990, 10) would refer to as the "structural trope," of non-narrativity. For Glass, in an interview given towards the end of the minimalist stylistic period,

what sets the music apart is the fact that it's non-narrative, we don't hear it within the usual time frame of most musical experiences. As I look at most other music, I see that it takes ordinary time, day-to-day time -- what I call colloquial time -- as a model for its own musical time. So you have story symphonies or story concertos -- even the modernist tradition continues that to a certain extent. There's still almost a compulsion to deal with themes and treatment of themes. The themes become the focus of the listener's attention, and what happens to the theme happens to the listener via a certain psychological trick of identification. This happens in the great concertos of the nineteenth century, with the tortuous journey of the violin and so forth, with happy endings and sad endings. (Glass quoted in Gagne & Caras 1982, 214.)

In a later interview, he specifically locates the term "narrative" within the rhetoric of sonata form:

One of the key notes of this music has been the substitution of repetitive for narrative structures. What I call narrative structures are anything that comes out of the dialectic of sonata form. This links us, as a group of composers, to other contemporary art forms – theatre, dance, and film -- where some artists are also using non-narrative forms. (Glass quoted in Garland 1983, 18.)

These narratives, and the assumptions they embody, are expressed in the rhetoric of the Western symphonic tradition in a highly conventionalised fashion, involving the interplay between the motific and thematic material used in a work, the dialectic of soloist and accompaniment (by which the “concerto” is defined), the unfolding of extended hierarchical structures (involving exposition, development and recapitulation in sonata form), and an elaborate system of harmonic formulae whose purpose is to imbue the music with various degrees of tension and release. Rather than be drawn into a maelström of tension and release, cause and effects, antecedents and consequents, denial and fulfilment of desire, minimal music chose to focus on the continuous Now -- the quality, structure, and sheer physical volume of sound *per se*, what Barthes has termed “the grain of the voice”¹ -- as opposed to the story it is telling. The composer makes it quite clear, however, that this did not imply a total, formalist or positivist, negation of content, as some, for example, Mertens (1983, 92), have erroneously surmised, but rather an emancipation from the constraints of historical forms and the “stories” embedded in such forms. More recently he has commented:

What I meant by that was that the music didn't make references to other kinds of music, to formal structures like sonata form and fugue. I was thinking about music independent of the historical structures.(...) Since then I've spent so much time working in theatre and film projects and now the music clearly connects with subject matter. (Glass quoted in Witherden 1991, 40.)

As Eero Tarasti (1990a, 274) has observed, music which is reduced to its formal fundamentals *in presentia* frequently brings complex referential relationships into play *in absentia*. Minimalism was not, therefore, a music devoid of “meaning.” Rather, it was a music that by omitting the conventionalised semiotic carriers of meaning opened the field to constellations of meaning previously excluded or suppressed. It was unsuccessful inasmuch as the break from traditional could not but be perceived as such (resulting in a vicious counter-reaction): thus, the very shunning of narrative structures became the old recycled narrative of “emancipation” in a new guise (Schoenberg's emancipation of dissonance inverted). It was successful inasmuch as it demonstrated a self-critical willingness to transform itself into a viable art form which previous reactionary artistic movements had lacked: it was open to outside influences as music of the twentieth-century had seldom been; it fostered relationships with other art forms and areas of life which the autonomous ideology of Modernism explicitly proscribed; and it rapidly

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See Barthes 1977, 179-189.

negotiated a reconciliation of sorts with tradition, albeit on its own terms – of which the opera I will be discussing here is evidence. In short, minimalism grew up – without, that is, losing contact with the child it had discovered.

As I have implied already, the genesis of a rival, or alternative, style (the imagined “absolute” does not look kindly on rivals, in religion or music), was greeted with open hostility from the advocates of the Modern idiom from its inception:

I remember in Paris in '65, a young conductor asked me to write a piece, and I wrote him one of these repetitive pieces, and he actually became quite nasty about it. That was the first time I realised what kind of reaction I was going to get with this music. And it's been true as recently as last year [1979], when we did *Dance* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. People threw eggs at us.(...) [O]riginally I was unprepared for that. It seemed to me that the music was so simple, so transparent, what was there to be angry about? Of course, that was precisely what there was to be angry about. I had, perhaps without intending it – although that's really hard to know – challenged so many precepts of the modernist tradition at that point. In fact, you could have almost defined my music in terms of polarities: if Stockhausen jumped all over the place, my music stayed in a very limited range; if his music changed pitches with every note, my music stayed the same; if he never repeated anything, I repeated all the time. I didn't go about inventing a language in those terms, but looking back on it, it looked as if I was dealing with polarities. (Glass quoted in Gagne & Caras 1982, 213.)

As important as the stylistic considerations mentioned above, however, was the socio-cultural impasse at which Modernism had arrived:

The failure of modernism is clear.(...) Modern music had become truly decadent, stagnant, uncommunicative by the 1960's and 70's. Composers were writing for each other and the public didn't seem to care. People want to like new music, but how can they, when it's so ugly and intimidating, emotionally and intellectually. (Glass quoted in Coe 1981, 121.)

Although Glass has throughout his career been interested in reaching a larger audience than was customary for twentieth-century music, suggestions that his primary motivation was mercenary, which are quite often levelled at him, flounder quite easily: given his background and experience, he could -- had he been so inclined and had he continued to write in a recognised Modern style -- in all probability have found himself a comfortable university post upon his return from France. The path he chose, however, led to almost a decade-and-a-half of hardship, with music taking second place to various day-jobs well into the 1970s. Even after filling many of Europe's major opera houses as well as New York's Metropolitan Opera on two consecutive nights with *Einstein on the Beach* -- an achievement few living composers have equalled -- he continued to drive taxis in New York (earlier he had worked in a steel mill, as a plumber, as a carpenter, as a furniture mover, and as a studio assistant to the sculptor Richard Serra) as his primary source of income. The anecdote told by Glass in *Opera on the Beach*, of how a passenger observed that her driver had “the same name as a very famous composer” (Glass 1987, 53) may amuse the composer in

retrospect, but cannot have seemed very funny at the time. It is in this context, then, that Glass's apparently iconoclastic comments made during the 1970s and early 1980s, directed primarily towards his colleagues occupying university posts and supported by foundation grants, should be viewed. Describing Paris under the serialist spell of Pierre Boulez as "a wasteland, dominated by these maniacs, these creeps, who were trying to make everyone write this crazy creepy music," in Robert Ashley's documentary film *Music with its Roots in the Ether* (Makanna 1976 [quoted in Rockwell 1983, 111]), may have been an accurate description of his point of view at the time, but it must have been influenced by the fact that he, who was rapidly becoming one of the world's most celebrated composers, was still driving a taxi cab, while colleagues, many of whom could barely muster an audience for their music from the ranks of their peers and students, continued to direct the full force of their criticism at him from the relative safety of their university chairs.

It is noteworthy that as his position has become more secure, Glass's view has softened somewhat with regard to musical Modernism, even if this reconciliatory tone has not as yet been reciprocated, as the barbed-wire-laced rhetoric of the "new complexicists" or "maximalists" attests. Recently he has commented:

I think the experiments of the dodecaphonic and twelve tone school have been crucial in changing how we listen to music. Though I think that whole school didn't determine the future of music as it had thought. It didn't even develop useful techniques for other composers. But if you go to the movies now, the harmonic language is much denser. People think they're listening to triadic music and they aren't. They just don't know the name for it. It's actually much more complicated than they think because they're hearing differently. But in fact, we all do music in a much more complex way than we used to. (Glass quoted in Smith & Smith 1993, 59-60.)

There is a similar ambivalence in the following passages, between acknowledgement of the expressive power of some of the Modernist works on the one hand, and the alienation of the composer from the broader music listening public on the other.

The middle years of the twentieth-century had basically almost finished off contemporary music for the public. It had been such a disaster that my generation simply couldn't, it was impossible not to see that it had been a complete devastation; in terms of audience, in terms of performance. It wasn't really so hard to figure out. What was surprising was the vehemence that was directed at these composers [of tonal music]. Well, I guess that isn't surprising either. In fact, the academic composers are still very angry about it. But in fact, if you look at it, this revolution, this reformation has been entirely successful, inasmuch as there are a whole new generation of composers who are much more interested in this less orthodox and conventional approach to music. (Glass, interview with the author, 9 September 1993.)

... the spectacle of these huge, enormous pieces that no-one can listen to, and some wonderful music ... I mean, the thing to remember is that some of this is very beautiful music, but it addresses a very narrow audience.(...) That's the problem -- the problem isn't with the music. I think the only problem is that

the composer wants a big public and can't get it with that music. But the composers who don't care about that don't have a problem. But what I've seen is that the younger generation of composers are very keen on participating in the musical life of our time in a very active way. They're not so interested in having the protective environment of a university from which they can write pieces that can have a small audience. And part of the problem is that in order to get away from an academic environment, you virtually have to be a populist of some kind. And there's a strong feeling in the younger [composers], you talk to the people in their twenties and thirties and that's what they want to do. But the danger [is] ... we'll eventually have the pendulum effect, eventually we'll get back to more abstract music. [As for] the very abstract music of the mid-twentieth-century ... you still find it in places like Tanglewood, you still find it being supported by foundations, but I always find it surprising when I find young composers who are still writing in a style which is basically fifty years old. People do, but it's not many. The younger ones really are more interested in [tonality], and the thing about the new tonality that we're talking about is ... the idea of a functional harmony that's not based on the formulas, the I-IV-VI, I-IV-VI-V or I-VI-IV-V-I or German VI, or all the formulas of Baroque and Romantic music that created very strong root-movement functional harmony. I think the thing we're getting at is ... creating a functional harmony based on different rules. And there are lots of ways to do that, so that some of it sounds very unusual at first, but we get used to it very quickly. (Glass, interview with the author, 8 September 1993.)

3.3 Distanciation and appropriation: a reconstructive turn

3.3.1 Opera vs. music theatre

We begin to understand classical music when we realize the rhetorical and even theatrical origin of many phrases which we are apt to dismiss as purely conventional (Tovey 1937, 18).

The thing about operas [is] ... the requirements of dramatic presentation often require you to invent language which then becomes more generally used. I mean, that's true of the history of opera generally. If you look at Monteverdi or if you look at Wagner, the transformation of the language came about for dramatic reasons but then once the language was achieved then it was used in a more general way.(...) There are a lot of spin-off pieces that come. I think it's really in the operas that these ideas get developed. They are like the major works, then around them there are all manner, all kinds of little pieces that get written around the same time, and the operas are really where I get to work out the ideas. That's why I think the operas are so important, because they become opportunities for me to cast a new language in a way. And if you look at *Satyagraha* and *Akhmaten* each of them have a particular character to them.(...) I often find that I can develop a body of work around an opera so to speak. (Glass, interview with the author, 9 September 1993.)

Someone once said to me, "You are interested in theater instead of music in its primary use." And I said, "Primary? No, for me, theater isn't a secondary use; it's a primary use." This person evidently thought abstract music was a

primary use of music and theatrical music was a secondary use of it.(...) I said, "No, no, it's not that way at all. It may be the other way around." (Glass quoted in Ardero 1988, 19.)

Only reluctantly did Glass first employ the term "opera" to describe his work in the theatre. In fact, while working on *Einstein on the Beach* he explicitly rejected it, this particular work becoming identified with the genre only at the insistence of his collaborator on the project, Robert Wilson¹, and because of performances in venues with a strong operatic tradition; such as New York's Metropolitan Theatre, the Avignon Opera House, the Opéra Comique in Paris, the Fenice in Venice, and La Monnaie in Brussels². The opening words of *Opera on the Beach* reveal something of an aversion to the traditional precepts of the genre. Glass writes: "I have often said that I became an opera composer by accident. I never set out to become one, and even today I use the word "opera" with reluctance" (Glass 1987, 3.). Later he writes;

... the operatic tradition seemed to me hopelessly dead, with no prospect for resurrection in the world of performance in which I worked. To me it seemed a far better idea to start somewhere else. As a description of *Einstein*, I preferred "music theater" to "opera." (Glass 1987, 87.)

By the time he began working on *Satyagraha*, however, "the subject of opera was becoming interesting," although allusions to "the great tradition of opera" were still, from his standpoint, "utterly beside the point and best avoided altogether" (Glass 1987, 88). In an interview, given during the early stages of his work on the third portrait opera, *Akhmaten*, one is able to identify a clear gendered subtext in the composer's alienation from traditional precepts of the genre.

The tradition of theatre that I feel a part of is the one that begins with the Living Theater; the Open Theater, the Performance Group, the Mabou Mines, Richard Foreman, Bob Wilson, Meredith Monk. They are the *godparents* [note: male *and* female] of modern American non-literary theatre.(...) Clearly, my idea of opera springs from the very recent past; one that, like a lot of American art, doesn't recognise a *grandfather* [male, patriarchal] of tradition. (Glass quoted in Gagne & Caras 1982, 217.)³

Could it be that like Catherine Clément (1989), Glass simply did not care for the stories historical opera was telling, and so decided, like the contemporaries he mentions, to replace the tyranny of the (patriarchal) Word by his own brand of non-literary theatre; one that counters the symbol with the sign, dialogue with *jouissance*? The "grandfather" metaphor is an interesting one, because it is one he employs in other circumstances as well; namely in reference to the legacy of Webern and Schoenberg:

1 See Shyer 1989, 220.

2 See Glass 1987, 88.

3 Emphases added.

I began by studying Webern and Schoenberg. You have to remember that in 1952/3 we thought that was contemporary music.(...) I think at some point I also began to realize that that was music my *grandfather* [emphasis added] would have written. (Smith & Smith 1993, 55.)

Whether Glass's real grandfather, an Orthodox Jew from Eastern Europe, would have written music like Webern or Schoenberg is perhaps beside the point; or is it? I will leave this question suspended, as it were, for the present, but will return to Glass's Jewish inheritance later on. Far from being an irrelevant biographical detail, the question of Judaism is central to the subject matter treated in this particular opera, as Freud and Velikovsky realised in their own monographs on the same subject, both of which I will discuss in due course.

With *Akhmaten* came a new willingness from Glass to engage in dialogues with historical forms; the title of the British edition of his book, *Opera on the Beach*, is quite telling in this respect, as are his comments concerning the genre in that book. However, the most conspicuous allusions to tradition are to be found in the music and drama of the opera itself, and I will discuss these in some detail during the course of the exegesis. It is difficult to argue with the composer's own observation in this regard; by the end of the Trilogy, he writes, "clearly, I had become a composer of operas" (Glass 1987, 3).

The unknowing opera buff who chanced upon a performance of *Akhmaten* would presumably recognise without any difficulty that what they are witnessing is in some way related to Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*, or Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, or Wagner's *Parsifal*. The very idea of an opera trilogy is, as critics of the new theatre have been quick to point out, a grandiose gesture with distinct Wagnerian overtones; although only an ironic smile or a surreptitious semiotic wink is needed in order to transform the Wagnerian into the post-Wagnerian. The operatic world is, moreover, no stranger to ancient Egypt: Verdi's orientalist classic *Aida* has, since its debut performance in Cairo over a century ago (1869), been a favourite of the historical opera canon. There are some superficial similarities between the two operas: Verdi sought the aid of an Egyptologist, Mariette, when working on the libretto of *Aida*, as Glass was to do over a century later in choosing Shalom Goldman as a collaborator on *Akhmaten*. *Aida*, like *Akhmaten*, probably tells us more about the composer and the culture that produced it than it does about the realities of ancient Egypt, despite its superficial "realist" glaze.

The other canonical work ostensibly set in ancient Egypt is Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, although it is generally recognised that this opera's quasi-Egyptian setting is merely a mask for a sub-text dealing with freemasonry¹. The action

¹ Among the numerous Masonic interpretations of the opera are Jacques Chailley's *The Magic Flute, Masonic opera: an interpretation of the libretto and the music* (1972); Howard Landon's *Mozart and the Masons: new light on the lodge "Crowned Hope"* (1983). See also Jessica Waldoff's "The Music of Recognition: Operatic Enlightenment in the 'The Magic Flute'" (1994); and Chapter 8, entitled "A Masonic Vision," of Robert Donington's *Opera and its Symbols* (1990). For discussions of gender constructs in

of this opera is, therefore, probably best regarded as taking place in mythological or “poetic” time and space rather than in ancient Egypt. The more symbolic, or non-realist approach of the latter of these operas is probably a closer analogy to Glass’s approach to music theatre, in this particular work and in general, than the Romantic “realism” of the former.

3.3.2 Poetry vs. narrative; contingency vs. necessity; symbolism vs. realism

More important than establishing that *Akhmaten* belongs the genre of music theatre we call opera, is establishing how the story Glass and his collaborators are telling works in musico-dramatic terms. The difference between Mozart’s and Verdi’s operas illustrates, to a certain extent, the diversity of approach encompassed by the term: if, however, one includes music theatre works such as John Cage’s *Europeras* under its umbrella, it is clear that the term ultimately reveals very little. As is the case with Cage’s operas, Glass’s first music theatre work (although not his first theatre music¹), *Einstein on the Beach*, has frequently been described using terms such as non-linear², and non-narrative, terms applied also to his early, pre-*Einstein*, compositional style. In *Einstein on the Beach* whatever content there is takes the form of an implied sub-text rather than a clearly defined narrative; although the choice of a non-narrative, as opposed to a received historical structure, can arguably be interpreted as its own kind of narrative whose meaning inheres in the act of negation, or deconstruction, itself. It is important to stress that non-narrativity never, even in Glass’s earliest music theatre works, meant that the work had no “story line” at all: rather it had a story line that was characterised by its non-specific and ambiguous nature. Speaking of *Einstein on the Beach*, he has commented:

You don’t have to tell whole stories.(...) People say, “Why aren’t there any plots?” When I do an opera, there are three thousand plots in the audience. Besides, I give enough of a plot, but I don’t do the whole story.(...) Of course, the risk you run is that people are unwilling to do that. They say, all these obvious negative remarks: “This is simplistic. This is simple minded. This isn’t music.” (Glass quoted in Suzuki 1991, 594-595.)

Mozart’s music see Charles Ford’s *Così? Sexual Politics in Mozart’s Operas* (1991) and Gretchen A. Wheelock’s “*Schwarze Gredel* and the Engendered Minor Mode in Mozart’s Operas” (1993).

¹ From the 1960s through to the mid-1970s Glass worked as resident composer for the Mabou Mines theatre company, setting works by Beckett (*Play* [1965] and *The Lost Ones* [1975]) and other playwrights, as well as various works written by members of the company, such as JoAnne Akalaitis’s *Dressed Like an Egg* (1977).

² Jacqueline Bobak, in her doctoral dissertation, *Radical Evolution: the influence of futurism and dada on the non-linear operas of Philip Glass and John Cage* (1992), links the two composers on the basis of their mutual interest in “non-linear” music theatre. See Jonathan D. Kramer’s article, “New Temporalities in Music” (1981) for an in-depth discussion of the musical implications of the term.

It is clear, however, that the essential character of this work is “abstract,” or “pragmatic,” in comparison to the composer’s subsequent works for music theatre where a more explicitly defined narrative -- albeit still a sketchy, allusive, or, to borrow the composer’s own term, a “poetic” one -- can invariably be perceived.

It is not by chance that Glass characterises his own brand of opera as “a species of poetry” (Glass quoted in Blackwood 1985), and, moreover, distinguishes this conception of art from that of conventional, realistic-looking narrative structure¹. Lawrence Kramer (1990a) has made a similar distinction between conventional “story-telling” narrative and lyric poetry, the latter of which he assumes to be closer to the workings of abstract instrumental music. Lyric, he claims, usually stresses symbolic action, cyclical, parallel, or graduated patterns, while narrative places an emphasis on contingency and causality. In addition to these categories, he lists exceptions such as mixed and hybridised texts (Kramer 1990a, 184-185.).

Kramer’s is not, however, the only way of interpreting these terms; it is possible, for example, to subdivide the category of abstract music using exactly these concepts, resulting in a continuum between more “narrative” musical forms on the one hand, and more “poetic” musical forms on the other. Assigning the attribute “contingency” to narrative rather than to lyric is also highly questionable when it comes to music, particularly if one contrasts the term with that of “necessity,” as Subotnik (1987) has done. Contingency in Glass’s *Two Pages* (1968) or *Music in Similar Motion* (1969), considered by many, including the composer himself, non-narrative works, is clearly of a different kind to that which one finds in a symphony by Beethoven or Brahms, which many would consider narrative works. One could easily argue, moreover, that the kind of master plan (or narrative) -- and its inherent rhetoric of cause and effect, antecedent and consequent, desire and denial of desire -- one finds, for example, in the use of sonata form in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has more to do with necessity than it does with contingency, due to the metaphysical significance frequently attributed to such works. The idea of “absolute” meaning and contingency are clearly not easily reconcilable. By the end of the Romantic period, the necessity of tonal and motivic resolution was, however, as Subotnik (1987, 116-117) has observed, giving way to a musical language that placed a distinct emphasis on the concrete, the physical, the particular, the discrete, the here-and-now, the arbitrary, and the contingent. Subotnik finds evidence of contingency in the music of Chopin, but admits that it is more readily found still in that of Debussy or Satie (*ibid.*, 1987, 126). These

¹ Glass has also used the term to describe *Einstein on the Beach* in an interview for the South Bank Show (UK): “Opera is a species of poetry. It’s a poetic image. *Einstein on the Beach* is really a poetic vision of Einstein. We’re not really trying to explain his theories; we’re not really telling how he lived as a child and how he grows up as a man. We’re taking the images of Einstein that we all know and making a kind of poetry out of them. Let’s put it this way; the whole of *Einstein on the Beach* could have been a dream that Einstein had.” (Glass quoted in Hunt 1986.)

are, of course, the same qualities to which the music sociologist Theodor Adorno objects when he describes Sibelius's symphonic approach as "combin[ing] meaningless and trivial elements with alogical and profoundly unintelligible ones" (Adorno 1976, 172). In ignoring "the advances in compositorial technique that had been made throughout Europe" this composer had, according to Adorno, "mistak[en] esthetic formlessness for the voice of nature" (ibid., 172). Of course, as Adorno fully realises, those of us who prefer the Finnish composer's symphonies to those of many of his central European contemporaries, do so precisely because of the qualities enumerated by him.

It is not difficult to locate Glass's music within the contingency-necessity continuum. The music that he and other composers wrote during the 1960s and early 1970s, which has come to be known as minimal music, is without question music in which each structural event is directly related to, and contingent upon the event that immediately precedes it -- rather, that is, than necessitated by compliance with the dictates of received historical forms regarding the resolution of tonal and thematic material. Although *Akhmaten* is not a minimalist work, its essential precepts are quite closely related to those of its composer's earlier musical style. The predominant musical form in the opera is, as we shall see, that of variation; a form in which the individual changes that unfold from pattern to pattern take precedence over macro-structural considerations, even though they do not exclude larger structural events. Moreover, the same principle can be applied to the tableau-like images that unfold during the course of the opera. Each scene, although related to that which preceded it, and to that which follows it in a quasi-narrative fashion, functions also as an individual vignette, detached, in a sense, from the hegemony of the plot. There is a story line, or narrative, to be found in the opera, but it is one whose constructed, artefactual, and thus contingent, nature is deliberately emphasised, both in terms of musical structure and in terms of the collage-like technique employed in the construction of the libretto. Like the painters of the post-impressionist school, Glass leaves the brush strokes conspicuously in sight. Kramer's analogy of lyric poetry, which Glass himself has used, would certainly appear to be a more appropriate metaphor for his approach to music theatre in this work than that of conventional narrative. That is not to say that "poetic" works exclude narrative or hybridised elements: both *Akhmaten* and *Satyagraha* are examples of works in which there is a deliberate counterpoint between divergent narrative, poetic, and hybridised strategies. It is more a question of which is the dominant strategy, and how this strategy interacts with the others found in the work.

Although loosely termed a non-narrative opera by some critics, *Satyagraha* is distinguished from its predecessor by an increased emphasis on narrative elements; Glass had begun to realise that "subject or content in music theater could remain neither passive nor accidental, so what an opera was "about" began to emerge ... as a major issue" (Glass 1987, 138). Regarding this opera, he has commented:

[The music] has been narrative for the last twelve years [since 1975]!(...) In fact an opera like *Satyagraha*, in a way it tells a [story]. There are many, many ways of telling a story. So to say a piece tells a story does not tell us very much. It's according to how we do it. And also, it has a lot to do with the listener and where the listener is in relation to the story. (Glass, interview with Juhani Nuorvala, New York, April 29, 1987.)¹

The transition from non-narrative collage to poetic narrative is, as the above quotation suggests, only partially accomplished in *Satyagraha*, where non-narrative elements – such as the, to most Western ears, arcane Sanskrit text of the opera, its quasi-mythological setting, and the historico-cultural disjunction involved in combining characters as disparate as Tolstoy, Tagore, and King with texts from the *Bhagavad-Gita* -- are at odds with more traditional, chronologically depicted events in the life of Gandhi. In *Satyagraha*, the political force of the subject matter is, moreover, impossible to ignore, despite Glass's claim that it was the personal charisma of the Mahatma, the power of his personality rather than his "great moral and political consciousness" that originally attracted him to this subject (Glass 1987, 139). The difference in approach between the first two Trilogy operas was sufficient, however, for the composer to describe it as "a fundamental reorientation of my thinking about my relation to theater"(ibid., 139). *Einstein on the Beach* and *Satyagraha* are certainly very different operas; different enough to make some critics – and, implicitly, the composer himself -- wonder whether they even belong to the same genre². The third opera of the Trilogy represents another stage in the gradual transformation of Glass's approach to music theatre in the direction of reconstructed poetic narrative, although, tellingly, he still describes it as "not a "story" opera but an episodic-symbolic portrait ..." (Glass et al. 1987, 16).

Akhnatén is really done, there's something that's very abstract about it in a certain way. There's kind of touching moments with the family and so forth, but basically there's nothing, one doesn't try to reveal motivation or anything like that in that opera. (Glass, interview with the author, 9 September 1993.)

The abstract nature of *Akhnatén* seems to have constituted something of a barrier to the opera's comprehensibility for some critics, particularly those not familiar with the precepts of postmodern music theatre. One such commentary is that written by the Danish Egyptologist Paul John Frandsen (1993). Frandsen's article on *Akhnatén* is a paradigmatic example of both the benefits and the hazards of allowing non-specialists to participate in a field with which they have no prior acquaintance. Positive in Frandsen's interpretation are the

¹ Published as a Finnish translation in Nuorvala (1987a). The passage quoted is taken from a transcript of the original interview Nuorvala kindly supplied me with.

² See Tim Page's (1992) article on *Akhnatén* in the New Grove Dictionary of Opera. In *Satyagraha*, Page observes, Glass developed "his own distinctive mutation of 'traditional' opera" to which all of the composer's subsequent operas, including *Akhnatén*, are more closely related than to the "sui generis *Einstein on the Beach* (Page 1992, 48).

many valuable insights he brings from his own field, that of Egyptology, combined with the freshness of certain aspects of his approach to the field in which he is guest, that of musicology. Less positive is his tendency to graft the assumptions of his own field of study onto his adopted one. One such assumption is that a work of art set in the past should necessarily be regarded as an artistic reconstruction of "historical truth." *Akhmaten* clearly does not comply with Frandsen's standards in this regard. Interestingly, though, the Egyptologist holds up the Finnish writer Mika Waltari's novel *Sinuhe, the Egyptian*, by means of a contrastive comparison. According to Frandsen, "a good artistic interpretation can make a contribution to understanding and insight as valuable as any produced by scholars, and Waltari's book is an admirable example of this" (Frandsen 1993, 241). He continues:

Through his central character, the physician, Sinuhe, Waltari paints a sensuous and detailed picture of life all through the Middle East. An "artistic reconstruction" may ultimately even reflect on the research in which it originated, and *Sinuhe, the Egyptian* is included in the Amarna bibliography of many Egyptologists. (Frandsen, 1993, 241.)

Parenthetically, let us take note of the fact that Waltari's book is included also in Glass's bibliography:

I came across a copy of it in what we call a yard sale – you know, where people just put things out in their front yard -- in Maine. I was driving back from Canada one year, there was a big yard sale, and a table full of books, and I found this book there.(...) I was working on *Akhmaten* at the time and it was a sheer coincidence. A strange story, a strange book. (Glass, interview with the author, 8 September 1993.)

Although nothing specific from the novel ended up in the final version of the opera, this and other texts not physically present in the libretto all, according to the composer, contributed in an indirect way the final product: "at the time I was reading everything that I could, and it all forms a kind of picture for you" (Glass, interview with the author, 8 September 1993).

Let us return, however, to Frandsen's (1993) tacit assumption that the measure of a work of art dealing with historical subject matter is the "reality" of the image of the past constructed by it, and consider some of the dangers that inhere such an assumption. Although Waltari's novel was, posing as an "historical novel," translated into many languages, became an international best-seller, and has even been used as the story line for a Hollywood film¹, it was, and still is, generally understood by many Finns, to whom it was

¹ Director Darryl F. Zanuck's 20th Century Fox film adaptation of Waltari's novel, *The Egyptian*, does not appear to have influenced Glass's approach to the subject any more than did the novel itself. Alfred Newman's and Bernard Herrman's soundtrack (MCA - 1523) is, as one would expect, replete with late Romantic Orientalist imagery. A point of interest is the composers' setting of a radically abridged version of the Hymn to the Sun, which unfortunately fails almost totally to capture the essence of the text.

originally addressed, to be an allegory for the disillusionment of the post-war years in that country: the victory of Horemhab and Aye over Akhnaten came to stand for the victory of pragmatism over idealism in the aspirations of the Finnish people at that particular point in time. Moreover, it is clear from Waltari's memoirs (Waltari 1980, 274-279) that the allegory in question was integral to the writer's conception of the story, and that he looked askance at more literalist theatrical interpretations of it. It is quite evident that the writer himself had a very different "reality" in mind to the one Frandsen imagines him having: he writes; "literary sources were alien to my approach. I wanted to construct my own reality, my own vision"¹. This is not, of course, to say that Frandsen's interpretation of the book is "wrong." *Sinuhe*, like *Akhnaten*, is a complex and multilayered work of art; one that can be interpreted in a number of divergent and even contradictory ways. The interpretation to which I have drawn attention is, however, one that is culturally grounded.

As I have noted earlier, historical validity mattered little also to Glass (1987, 137); a cause of some consternation to the Danish Egyptologist, who complains that the opera "does not ... offer much insight into the "reality" of ancient Egypt" (Frandsen 1993, 263). It is clear, however, that Glass's intention was not merely to rewrite the history books. In the following passage, he makes his position quite clear:

I didn't like the idea of doing just a period piece. We're not pretending it's something that happened; it's something that happened three thousand five hundred years ago. It's something that happened three thousand five hundred years ago, but we're seeing it through our twentieth-century eyes. And, in fact, there's nothing in the story that isn't contemporary really; it's about power, and upholding old ideas, and trying to force new ideas into the world, and what happens to the people that do that². (Glass quoted in Blackwood 1985)

This does not imply that the composer was totally ignorant of historical considerations. In point of fact, he seems to have gone to unprecedented lengths to ensure historical accuracy; collaborating with an Egyptologist, Shalom Goldman, on the libretto, visiting Egypt with the entire production team, and, finally, using untranslated texts gleaned from historical artefacts as the basis for the libretto. What Glass's apparent disregard for historical validity does imply is that his ultimate commitment was to the functioning of the work of art in its present day aesthetico-cultural context. Given such an assumption,

¹ The translation is my own: the original Finnish text reads; "oikeastaan kaunokirjalliset teokset ovat olleet minulle lähteinä vieraat. Olen tahtonut rakentaa oman todellisuuden, oman näkemykseni." (Waltari 1980, 278.)

² I hope the reader will forgive me for reading a deeply personal sub-text into this comment, pertaining to Glass's own difficult position in the 1960s and 1970s -- as referred to in section two of this chapter. That Glass identifies closely with the character of Akhnaten I will demonstrate in due course. It could, furthermore, be argued that the entire opera functions, on one level of understanding at least, as an allegory for the composer's break with the Western musical tradition and his later attempts at negotiating a reconciliation of sorts with this tradition.

the subject matter of the opera should have some relevance, some connection to the world in which the audience lives if it is to go beyond the realm of tidily delineated historical concerns and become a living work of art. In other words, his main concern was not with bringing the past to life -- a valid concern for any historian, and one acknowledged in co-librettist and historian Goldman's description of the opera as "singing archaeology"¹ -- but with creating a dialogue between our perceptions of the past and the contemporary world.

In a similar vein, Glass is chastised by the Egyptologist for using terms such as "our" Egypt: according to the Frandsen, he is guilty of "indulging in the kind of "orientalism" that Western artists and scholars have often employed in their treatment of the Orient" (Frandsen 1993, 245). Ironically, the composer's explicit intention in speaking of "our" Egypt² is the reverse of what Frandsen claims is to be. A brief elucidation of the respective aesthetic assumptions of the two will, I believe, illustrate the absurdity of the Egyptologist's claim. While for Frandsen the main priority of art which deals in historical subject matter should be the accurate and realistic portrayal of historical truth -- an assumption with its roots in eighteenth-century art and philosophy -- Glass's position recognises the inevitability of interpretation, of the creator projecting his or her own experiences onto the object of study. The events in Glass's operas may be related to events that have taken place in the world; they nevertheless make no explicit claims to be anything other than the products of their makers', and ultimately their audiences' minds. Glass's is, one could say, the view of the hermeneut.

Ironically, it is precisely "realistic" art, with its implicit assumption of the detached, all-knowing observer, and his one "objective" truth, which has perpetrated some of the most reprehensible misrepresentations, in art and in science, of cultural "others." When dealing with subject matter that is removed from oneself in space and/or time, one is inevitably dealing with "others" of some sort. In representing such others in what appears to be a realistic manner, one is, knowingly or in ignorance, reconstructing an illusory image of their life. Thereafter one can follow one of two courses: one can fill in the gaps in one's knowledge surreptitiously and attempt to pass off the picture one has constructed as objective reality, or then one can come clean and draw attention to the constructed nature of that image -- including gaps, inadequacies, and biases -- recognising that it is related to certain realities, but that it is ultimately its own reality.

The latter is the course of the postmodernist, and the parallel awareness of the second, "own reality," to which I am referring, is the special brand of self-consciousness (in a positive sense) that has in recent years been referred to as "reflexivity." The danger of what Frandsen, borrowing no doubt from Edward W. Said (1978), terms "orientalism" is far greater in the former case as one is claiming privileged knowledge of the reality of the other, whereas in the

1 Quoted in Glass 1987, 150.

2 See Glass 1987, 153.

latter one does not recognise an absolute reality at all, just a number of interrelated stories, of which the scientist's/artist's account represents but one perspective. Interpersonal psychologists, such as R.D. Laing (1961) have long been painfully aware of the dangers of equating one's imaginary construct of the minds of others with the actual reality experienced by others themselves: when dealing with cultural others, removed in time or space from the culture one experiences as one own, the dangers are every bit as real.

When Glass began working on *Akhnaten* he was confronted with a problem he had not previously encountered: this was how to approach historical subject matter in a manner that does not, in the manner of Romantic art, claim such a privileged "realistic" perspective of the subject matter it is treating. One way of circumventing the whole issue of representation is to minimise the extent of this by maximising presentation: Glass partook of this characteristically Modernist strategy, as we have seen, in extracting his texts directly from their historical sources, retaining even the original languages in the music and merely adding a narrator as mediator, albeit a multivalent and chameleonic one, of the events which take place. The other, more typically postmodern strategy is to juxtapose the past with the present in the work in such a way as to bring into sight the contemporary filter through which all of our perceptions of the past must invariably pass. The following passage clarifies Glass's position further:

One aspect of the opera continued to trouble me for some time. I was aware of the fact that *Akhnaten* as a stage work must inevitably be seen as a period piece. Of course, this is a theater convention that has been hallowed and dignified by countless works for the dramatic and musical stage. Still, to present it as such without some acknowledgement of the special "unreality" of historical pieces seemed to me a little negligent. I wanted to somehow underscore the fact that although we twentieth-century people were looking at an imaginary version of Egypt in 1400 BC, the very real ruins of that Egypt exist today. Therefore I decided to create an epilogue set in the present. (Glass 1987, 154-155.)

The presence of the epilogue set in the present as well as the jigsaw-puzzle-like collection of texts (collage or pastiche is, of course, another characteristic of the postmodern ethos), draw attention to the artefactual nature of the work as well as its foundations in contemporary culture. But it could be argued that the most effective, and at the same time the subtlest way this is achieved, is in the music. Glass may, in part at least (for example, in the Funeral scene; Act I, scene 1), have been attempting to compose music that is in some way evocative of a certain facets of ancient Egyptian life, but he certainly was not trying to write ancient Egyptian music: the music of the entire opera is unmistakably a product of the late twentieth century¹.

¹

The attempts that have been made to reconstruct the music of the pharaonic era – e.g., the recordings *Ancient Egypt* (1978 Lyricord, LLST 7347) by the Egyptian ethnomusicologist Ali Jihad, and *Ankh* (1990 Touch TO:14CD) by another Egyptian, Soliman Gamil – although musically interesting, are, as their makers would no doubt

3.3.3 The Modern and something other than the Modern

As off-target as Frandsen's accusations of Orientalism are his attempts to explain Glass's approach to music theatre using Bertolt Brecht's distinction of Dramatic and Epic opera, whose suitability for the task at hand even he appears to doubt (Frandsen 1993, 262-263). Glass does mention Brecht, along with Samuel Becket and a number of other playwrights, as figures who have influenced his approach to the theatre (Glass 1987, 6-7 and 35). Particularly important seem to have been Becket's assumption of audience complicity, combined with Brecht's questioning of the Aristotelian tradition of theatrical naturalism, the "dramatic" approach of which he contrasted with his own "epic," approach (ibid., 35-37). Both writers foregrounded the artefactual in art, sought to undermine the separate ontological status of "the work," and focused specifically on the moment-to-moment unfolding of events rather than on large scale narrative trajectories; and it is to these specific tendencies that we should look, rather than to Brecht's bi-partite model, which some critics (for instance, Williams 1968, 277-278) regard as inadequate, even as a model for Brecht's own theatrical approach, in seeking precursors of Glass's approach to the theatre.

More frequently, however, the composer identifies with other leading exponents of postmodern theatre, such as Robert Wilson, Meredith Monk, Richard Foreman, and the The Mabou Mines theatre company, with whom he worked as resident composer in the late 1960s, as well as precursors of these such as the maverick theatrical group The Living Theater (Glass 1987, 6-10). Significantly, the label Glass himself selects to describe his approach is that of postmodernism. He writes:

I came to see the idea of art content tied in with our relationship to it, an idea providing the basis of a truly modern, or perhaps postmodern, aesthetic. Furthermore, It was an aesthetic that, in a very satisfying way, tied artists from all fields to other contemporary thought, be it philosophy, science or psychology. (Glass 1987, 37.)

The willingness to take subjectivity into account, the emphasis on connectedness and interpenetration, and the willingness to even articulate the word content (implying the realm of the semantic), all mark the above passage as a cogent if succinct manifesto of the postmodern approach. Even if the word itself had not have been mentioned it would be recognisable as such. The composer's ambivalence as to the Modern and the postmodern itself, is, moreover, a symptom of the postmodern condition, which typically deals with

readily admit, largely speculative in historical terms. The funeral music, for example, in these recordings bear little resemblance to one another or to Glass's Funeral of Amenhotep III (Act I, scene 1). Scholarly studies of Egyptian music (e.g., the Danish Egyptologist Lise Maniche's *Music and Musicians in Ancient Egypt* [1991]) understandably place a strong emphasis on organology, iconography, and socio-cultural questions rather than becoming too involved in speculation as to how the music actually sounded.

the dialectic between the syntactic and the semantic, the autonomous and the related, the Modern and something other than the Modern.

In terms of theatrical influences, the "something other than the Modern" in question is the allegorical form of theatre of the Kerala district of Southern India known as the *Kathakali*. Glass first became interested in the *Kathakali* in the late 1960s, and since that time has visited India on a number of occasions attending performances. The qualities the composer admires in this theatrical form are, revealingly, its ability to combine the sophisticated and the communicative, as well as its connectedness both in terms of music-drama interaction, and in terms of its relation to other aspects of Indian life (Glass interview in Blackwood 1985). According to the composer, his acquaintance with the *Kathakali* must, in some way, have "conditioned the way [he] think[s] about what [he does] in the theatre" (Glass quoted in Blackwood 1985). When one looks closely, it is not difficult to perceive the influence of the *Kathakali* in Glass's approach: in addition to the qualities listed by the composer, suffice it to mention the pronounced emphasis on rhythm (the traditional musical ensemble in *Kathakali* performances is gong, cymbal, two drums, and voices), the emphasis on song rather than the spoken word, the stylised (i.e., artefactual) nature of the gestures (musical and otherwise) employed by the actors, and the ability of this form of theatre to engage its audience on a number of different interpenetrating levels. Significantly, though, Glass's opera does not look or sound like Indian theatre.

In any consideration of influences, it is important to be aware of the dangers of drawing simplistic conclusions. Glass draws together strands from many different theatrical and broader cultural traditions in his approach, but the end result is one that is instantly recognisable as his own. This is as true of *Akhnaton* as it is of any of his other works: in fact, it could be argued that this particular opera represents a coming together of influences, resulting in the genesis of a style that is truly the composer's own. The success of *Einstein on the Beach* can arguably be attributed as much to Robert Wilson and the other collaborators on the project, such as choreographer Lucinda Childs, as it can to Glass, while *Satyagraha* is referred to by the composer himself as "a transitional work" (Glass quoted in Strickland 1988, 72). In *Akhnaton* an operatic style crystallised that is quite distinctive; one that has informed all of the composer's subsequent works.

4 THE GENESIS OF *AKHNATEN*

4.1 Personnel and synopsis

CREATIVE TEAM AND PREMIERE¹

Music by Philip Glass

Libretto by Philip Glass in association with Shalom Goldman, Robert Israel and Richard Riddell

World Premiere: Stuttgart State Opera, March 3, 1984

Directed by Achim Freyer

ROLES

Akhnaten	<i>Countertenor</i>
Nefertiti, wife of Akhnaten	<i>Alto</i>
Queen Tye, mother of Akhnaten	<i>Soprano</i>
Horemhab, General and future Pharoah	<i>Baritone</i>
Aye, father of Nefertiti and advisor to Pharoahs	<i>Bass</i>
Amon High Priest	<i>Tenor</i>
Six Daughters	
Bekhetaten, Meretaten, and Maketaten	<i>Sopranos</i>
Ankhesenpaaten, Neferneferuaten, and Sotopenre	<i>Altos</i>
Funeral Party	<i>8 Men's Voices</i>
Large Chorus	<i>Mixed Voices</i>
Amenhotep, son of Hapu, the scribe	<i>Male speaker</i>

¹ Information regarding the creative team and roles is taken from the libretto (Glass et al. 1984), reprinted in *Opera on the Beach* (Glass 1987, 176-177), and the booklet accompanying the CD recording of the opera (Glass et al. 1987, 3-6).

SYNOPSIS

Act I

The opera comprises three acts, framed by an orchestral Prelude, at the beginning, and an Epilogue, for the three principal characters singing vocalese with the orchestra, at the end. At the beginning of the final cycle of the Prelude music, the curtain opens to reveal the scribe, Amenhotep, son of Hapu, reading a funerary text from the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*. The scribe functions as a liaison between the historical texts, events, and characters of the opera and the contemporary world of the audience. He is also a translator, as, with the single exception of one central scene involving the title character (Akhnaten's Hymn to the Sun), he is the only character who speaks in the language of the audience. All of the texts used in the opera are culled directly from historical sources, and, with the exception of the Hymn, those that are set to music are done so in the languages in which they were originally written; viz., Ancient Egyptian, Akkadian, and Biblical Hebrew.

The first act traces the worldly and spiritual growth of the opera's protagonist. It begins in the year 1375 BC, with the funeral of Akhnaten's father, Amenhotep III¹. The initial scene depicts the religious and political world into which the protagonist is born; that which he seeks to change through the religious and social reformations he initiates later in the opera. The theme of death, which is introduced in this early scene, is a central one in the opera because of its ubiquity in the ancient Egyptian world view. The second scene depicts the coronation of the new king. The ceremony is presided over by the three patriarch guardians of Egyptian tradition; the Amon High Priest, the military commander, General Horemhab, and Akhnaten's father-in-law and adviser, Aye. The new pharaoh's titles are enunciated, after which he is adorned with the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt. In the final scene of the act, Akhnaten appears before his subjects, joined first by his mother, the great Queen Tye, and then by his wife, Queen Nefertiti. All three principals are ardent advocates of a new religious cult; the monotheistic worship of the Aten, or sun-disc. The act finishes with an introspective moment in which Akhnaten is seen gazing at his father's funeral barque traversing a mythical River Nile from the land of the living to that of the dead.

Act II

In the second act we witness the changes propagated during the new pharaoh's reign. Mother and son, Queen Tye and Akhnaten, join forces in a cathartic scourge of the old regime. The two unleash their wrath upon the guardians of the traditional pantheistic religious practices -- the influential and avaricious priesthood of Amon -- causing the roof of the temple of Amon to collapse, thus

¹ Not to be confused with his namesake, the scribe Amenhotep, son of Hapu.

allowing the harsh rays of the Aten to fall upon this once consecrated ground. In the scene that follows, the new order is established. Akhnaten is joined by his wife, Nefertiti, and the two sing a touching, yet strangely elegiac duet, simultaneously professing their love for one another and for their god, the Aten. The scribe announces the founding of the "City of the Horizon", Akhetaten, on the east bank of the Nile. Life in the city is portrayed in an instrumental Dance which is a re-orchestrated reprise of the Prelude music. The second act concludes with Akhnaten at the height of his powers. In a setting of a Hymn to the Sun thought to be composed by the pharaoh himself, Akhnaten extols the virtues of his god as manifested in the diversity and beauty of nature, singing, for the first time in the opera, in the language of the audience. As he leaves the stage, and an offstage chorus assumes the singing, only now to a text taken from Psalm 104 of the Hebrew Bible, thus underlining the similarity of the two texts.

Act III

Act III portrays the fall of Akhnaten. The pharaoh, his six daughters, and his wife, have withdrawn from the realities of the world outside the holy city of Akhetaten and, more specifically, outside the royal palace in which they reside. Voices of dissent, in the form of a series of trumpet interpolations, are heard from afar, which eventually precipitate an abrupt shift of key. Over the new music, the scribe reads extracts from diplomatic correspondence in which representatives of the outermost regions of the Egyptian empire complain of increasing strife in their districts and implore the pharaoh to come to their aid. We are returned to life in the palace, where Akhnaten, now totally oblivious of outside events, is seen alone with his two eldest daughters, with whom he exchanges vocal parts as freely as in earlier exchanges with Nefertiti. The atmosphere is stifling. There is an abrupt key change once again, but this time the new music does not resolve back to the palace music. The crowd outside, which has been growing throughout the initial scene, is stirred into a frenzy by the outlawed upholders of the old order: Horemhab, Aye, and the Amon High Priest. Finally, the assailants break into the palace, carry Akhnaten and the remaining members of his family away, and level the temple dedicated to the sun-god to the ground. The installation of the new king, Tutankhamen, is announced by the scribe with appropriate pomp and ceremony to the accompaniment of a second reprise of the Prelude music. In contrast to "the great criminal of Akhetaten," a suitably militaristic image of the child king is constructed by his aides. The era of the sun-disc is now passed -- a brief aberration in the history of Egypt. The voice of the scribe returns, but now in the guise of a contemporary tour guide. His commentary is addressed to a small group of tourists seen perusing the present day ruins of Akhetaten.

In the Epilogue, the tourists leave and one by one the ghosts of the three principals, Akhnaten, Nefertiti, and Queen Tye, appear. At first they are unaware that they are no longer alive. In time, though, they notice the funeral

cortege of Amenhotep III ascending towards the heavenly land of Ra¹, and realise that they too are dead, after which they follow dutifully in the wake of the procession.

4.2 Origins and sources

4.2.1 A Trilogy is born

It is characteristic of Glass's pragmatic approach to music-making, and arguably also of his philosophy of life, that the idea of writing an opera trilogy was conceived only while planning the third of the "portrait operas," and, more importantly, with the knowledge that such a trilogy would some day be performed. The idea crystallised in a discussion between the composer and the newly appointed music director of the Stuttgart State Opera, Dennis Russell Davies, in the summer of 1979 (Glass 1987, 136). Davies, who had already agreed to stage the second portrait opera, *Satyagraha*, mentioned the possibility of a new opera commission to Glass, who immediately came up with the idea of linking this opera to the other two, and perhaps, ultimately, of persuading the Stuttgart State Opera to perform all three: "if an opera trilogy could happen anywhere," reasoned Glass, "it would be in Germany, where opera projects of this size were not new and where the public was known for its capacity to absorb new work" (ibid., 136). The tacit allusion to Wagner's mammoth serial operas is, of course, an obvious one and one to which the composer draws attention elsewhere as well. In the postmodern intellectual climate, such a conception can hardly be put across without detaching oneself in some way from the ideational world of one's precursors; without, that is, a certain degree of reflexive ambiguity. In the case of Wagner, this could easily be seen as a necessity. It is noteworthy, therefore, that Glass cannot resist poking fun at himself for concocting such a grandiose idea as an opera trilogy in the first place: in the documentary film on the making of the opera, he explains to David Freeman, the director of the Anglo-American production of *Akhmaten*; "when the whole idea came up, I suddenly decided that I had been working on this *vast* project [both laugh]" (Glass quoted in Blackwood 1985).

From the musical standpoint, linking the three operas -- *Einstein on the Beach*, *Satyagraha*, and *Akhmaten* -- would not be difficult: Glass had already carried some of the thematic material from *Einstein on the Beach* over to his next opera, *Satyagraha*. By underlining the thematic relatedness of the third "portrait opera" with the previous two, a triadic musico-dramatic "solar system" would quite naturally emerge. The link between the thematic material

1

Ra is the original name of the falcon-headed Heliopolitan sun god on whom the cult of Aten was based.

of the first two operas is not, however, restricted solely to their music, as the music in question is explicitly associated with the protagonists of both of these operas, Einstein and Gandhi¹. All that was left was to find a third protagonist with whom the same musical material could be unproblematically associated. The unifying factor of the operas was to be the fact that all three protagonists are, in contrast to many of the leading male roles one finds in historical works in the genre -- a disproportionate number of whom seem to be either mythological non-entities, or else rapists, murderers, military leaders, despots, etc. -- Glass's protagonists are "people who changed the world through the power of ideas rather than through the force of arms" (Glass quoted in Smith & Smith 1993, 59²). One could, of course, argue that to cast men as protagonists in all three operas constitutes a fundamentally "androcentric" approach. I will argue, however, that particularly in *Akhnaton* but in a less obvious way in the previous two operas as well, this is far from being the case. What the Trilogy as a whole does represent is a concerted effort by the composer to question conventional notions of masculinity; it could easily be understood as an attempt to remedy what some have termed "the crisis of masculinity," by holding up for its audience's contemplation three alternative male icons. The last of the Trilogy protagonists is, however, clearly more problematic in this respect than were the previous two. He certainly does, like Einstein and Gandhi, possess noble qualities, but his ignoble qualities outweigh those of his Trilogy predecessors by a considerable margin, making him a far more fallible, a far more ambiguous character (in many respects) than either of these men. I will claim that Glass specifically encourages his audience to be critical towards these less desirable qualities, while at the same time urging them not reject the character in its entirety.

4.2.2 Oedipus and Akhnaten – Velikovsky and Freud

Glass chanced upon his third "man of ideas" while reading Immanuel Velikovsky's *Oedipus and Akhnaton: Myth and History* (1960). Velikovsky, a Russian-born Jewish psychoanalyst who lived the latter part of his life in the United States, is perhaps best known for the series of books, *Worlds in Collision* (1950), *Ages in Chaos* (1952), and *Earth in Upheaval* (1955). In these books Velikovsky appropriates methods from scholarly disciplines as diverse as astrophysics, geology, biology, and history, to construct alternative versions of events in the ancient world. In *Oedipus and Akhnaton* (1960), perhaps the most accessible if one of the more speculative of his books, he investigates corollaries between the lives of the fourteenth-century BC Egyptian pharaoh Akhnaten³

¹ I will discuss the implications of this musico-dramatic link in greater detail in connection with the first appearance of Akhnaten in the opera (Act I, scene 2).

² See also Glass (1987, 138).

³ For the sake of consistency, my spelling of "Akhnaten" follows that of Glass where not quoting a text written by another author. There are a number of other spellings in

and the Greek mythological figure Oedipus. The central claim of Velikovsky's book is that many of the distinctive features of the Oedipus myth actually took place centuries earlier in the life of Akhnaten. From this he infers that the various versions of the legend passed down to us in the writings of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were based upon the life of the Eighteenth Dynasty Egyptian pharaoh. Although Velikovsky's methods are at times suspect, his leaps of inference vertiginous, and his imagination unbounded, the sheer weight and detail of the evidence he provides, combined with its elegant presentation, leave the reader at least doubting whether his arguments may not have some foundation in historical truth.

There are certainly a number of uncanny parallels between the two stories, the most important of which I will discuss in more detail during the course of my exegesis of the opera. The most obvious of these, and the most pertinent to the present discussion, is the relationship between Akhnaten and his parents: evidence of an incestuous marriage between the pharaoh and his mother, Queen Tye (Velikovsky 1960, 86-102), is tenuous to say the least, as is the claim that he murdered his father, Amenhotep III, which Velikovsky quite wisely makes no attempt to prove happened, other than in a purely metaphorical sense (*ibid.*, 66-72). Other evidence is, however, more convincing: among the obvious allusions to Egypt in the myth are the riddle addressed to Oedipus by a sphinx (*ibid.*, 31-35), and the name of the city in which Oedipus and his mother-wife, Jocasta, resided, Thebes; of which there were two in the ancient world, one the capital of Boeotia in Greece, and the other considerably more populous city, the capital of ancient Egypt and the royal city of the Egyptian pharaohs (*ibid.*, 36-43). Velikovsky brings numerous other parallels to light, some of which are more convincing than others. One of the most interesting of these is his rationale for the derivation of the name "Oedipus" (Greek: swollen foot or leg), an appellation that has bemused many a twentieth-century scholar. Velikovsky proposes a link between the name of Oedipus and an unusual feature of the art of the Amarna period¹. In the artwork that has survived from the period, Akhnaten and the members of his family are depicted with perceivably enlarged lower limbs. Velikovsky surmises, as many others have done before him, that the pharaoh, and therefore also the mythological Oedipus, was physically deformed (*ibid.*, 55-58). Whether this

the literature, some of the most common of which are "Akhenaten," "Akhnaton," "Aakhunaten," "Ikhnaton," and "Echnaton." Some Egyptologists (e.g. Budge [1923]) follow the post-Amarna period Egyptian practice in which the name adopted by the king subsequent to his endorsement of Atenism as the sole state religion, was deemed unutterable because of the crimes he was perceived to have committed; such studies refer to him as "Amenhetep IV," "Amenophis IV," or some similar variation. The same principle applies to the spelling of other characters, such as Queens Nefertiti and Tye, who are referred to by a host of different names, such as Nefretete, Nefertity, and Tiy, Tiye, and Ti respectfully.

1

The Amarna period is named after the site of Tell el Amarna, where the ruins of Akhnaten's holy city, Akhetaten, were found. The period includes Akhnaten's reign and those of his immediate successors.

was actually the case, or whether the feature in question was an expressionistic/allegorical distortion of the pharaoh's physique remains a moot question. I will return to this on a number of occasions during the course of my discussion of the opera, as, regardless of its historical implications, it is an important -- perhaps the most important -- element of Glass's construction of this character.

Velikovsky's theories are generally considered spurious in scholarly terms, but this mattered little to Glass who liked his writing "because his mind was so lively; he asked so many questions, he turned over so many stones in looking for things" (Glass quoted in Gagne & Caras 1982, 227). "I was reading Velikovsky for the fun of it," Glass has commented, "I think that's a good way to read Velikovsky!" (ibid., 227). It is clear from his comments that the composer's regard for the Russian expatriate is more aesthetically than it is intellectually grounded. Glass found in Velikovsky's account of Akhnaten, a subject compatible with the protagonists of the two earlier portrait operas; one both equal to the dramatic requirements of the genre and sufficiently engaging to hold his interest over the three years it would take to select a production team, research, write, compose, and, finally, stage the opera. In *Opera on the Beach* he writes:

... historical validity hardly mattered to me at all. Practically from the moment I saw Velikovsky's title page, I knew that I had found the subject for my third opera, one that could stand up to the scale of music theater. I was happy to let others squabble over the possible or impossible historical connection between Oedipus and Akhnaten. Theatrically speaking, I knew it made perfect sense. (Glass 1987, 137.)

Glass had hoped to work with the author of *Oedipus and Akhnaton* on the libretto of the opera, as he was to do shortly afterwards with the renowned author Doris Lessing on *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* (1985-86), and he was even in the process of setting up a meeting with Velikovsky when the author died in November 1979 (Glass 1987, 137-138). The original version of the opera was to follow Velikovsky's theory quite closely:

In the first version, the audience would have seen the two operas going on at the same time. Upstage and on a slightly higher level would be the Akhnaten story. Downstage, closer to the audience, would be the Oedipus legend. In this way, their historical relationship could be reflected in their physical distancing from the viewer. As in Velikovsky's theory, the two plots would be similar, though I had arranged that the intermission for each story would occur at different times so the overall stage action would be continuous. I had already begun to work out the coordination of the two different musical elements, one for the Egyptian story and another for the Greek. (Glass 1987, 140.)

This version of the opera was, however, eventually to be discarded. There seems to have been a number of reasons for focusing on Akhnaten rather than Oedipus, all of which make sense in terms of the musico-dramatic functioning of the work; although one senses some ambivalence when Glass

comments in *Opera on the Beach*; "It definitely was an interesting approach for me, and as I write about it now, it still seems so" (Glass 1987, 140). The most pressing reason for the dismissal of *Oedipus* appears to have been clarity of presentation: the obvious difficulties involved in staging a double-narrative and making this work in musical terms evidently outweighed the advantages of such an approach.

What happened is, in the course of working on the libretto, I became increasingly interested in Akhnaten and less and less interested in *Oedipus*. There was actually, there exists somewhere a treatment combining the two. In the end, I decided that what I was really interested in was Akhnaten, and I felt *Oedipus* was becoming a kind of a burden to it dramatically. It became kind of an abstract idea and in the end I just dropped it. (Glass, interview with the author, 8 September 1993.)

Who can blame the composer for not wanting to write another *Oedipus* opera? The myth turns up in a plethora of twentieth-century works for music theatre, including Stravinsky's and (unknowing Glass collaborator¹) Cocteau's neo-classical opera-oratorio *Oedipus Rex* (1928) as well as minimalist precursor Carl Orff's *Oedipus der Tyrann* (1965). Both of these classics of Modern music theatre are, like *Akhnaten*, attempts by their composers to reconcile old and new in their respective musico-dramatic approaches, wherein lies a clue to the attraction of the subject matter.

One can but speculate as to the reasons why the *Oedipus* myth should have attracted so much attention this century. Freud is no doubt largely responsible, but it is tempting to look for explanations that go beyond the intrapersonal boundaries of traditional psychoanalysis into both interpersonal and cultural domains. Marcia J. Citron (1993, 69-70) hypothesises that Western culture (in particular, Western patriarchal culture) is suffering from a kind of collective *Oedipus* complex, in which it becomes increasingly necessary for artists to negate the work of their predecessors in order to establish an individual identity of their own. Borrowing literary critic Harold Bloom's expression "anxiety of influence," she goes on to argue that this metaphorical killing of the father is a characteristic feature of musical Modernism, with its fetish of the new, and one to which it is difficult for women to relate because of the emphasis on co-operation and connectedness in their enculturation (Citron 1993, 69-70). Given such a hypothesis, it could easily be argued that those composers who have treated the *Oedipus* myth in their works have been seeking an antidote to the *Oedipal* malady they perceive in their culture. As culture is not a mere external entity with which the individual interacts, but is an indispensable part of the construction of her or his self-world-view, the myth may be a particularly poignant one because it is one that is experienced on a deeply personal level. Those who believe it to be a psychological universal will, of course, argue that its resonance stems from the *Oedipal* stage of human

¹ Glass has recently set two of Jean Cocteau's films, *Orphée* (1991) and *La Belle et La Bête* (1994), to music and is currently working on a third.

development; this may or may not be true, but it does not satisfactorily explain its ubiquity in Western culture at this particular point in time, nor does it explain its absence in earlier historical periods.

That Glass chose to distance himself from the myth in his final treatment of the opera could well have a broader significance than the musico-dramatic considerations to which he refers. The story of Oedipus is easily recognised as one of the pervasive metanarratives of Western culture -- to borrow Jean-François Lyotard's (1984) apt term. It is a story that is heavily loaded with historical connotations; one that, whether one is aware of it or not, goads one into certain historically conditioned modes of perception. In his early works Glass made it his explicit concern to avoid any such narratives, musical or otherwise. More recently, however, he has demonstrated a willingness to engage in dialogues with historical forms; not accepting them lock, stock, and barrel, but appropriating them and moulding them to serve his own specific purposes. In *Akhmaten* we see plenty of evidence of this kind of appropriation: there are allusions to historical forms but at the same time the composer is able to maintain a critical awareness of their historical and cultural contingency.

I will make two points later in my thesis that bare directly on this question: firstly, if this is a version of the Oedipus myth Glass is telling, then it is one that differs from Freud's psychoanalytical theory in certain significant details, and, moreover, one that may predate this theory by a considerable margin¹: thus, the story of *Akhmaten* as told by Glass is not, in any tangible sense, Freud's Master Narrative (even though it alludes to this narrative). Secondly, and perhaps surprisingly in light of Velikovsky's influence on the conception of the opera, the story of *Akhmaten* is not the Hellenic version of the story of Oedipus, familiar to us from the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. The many covert allusions to the myth, with which the score, the libretto, and the staging of both productions of the opera supervised by the composer (the German and the Anglo-American productions) are peppered, certainly underline the similarities between the two stories but they also highlight a number of significant discrepancies. Thus, it would be a mistake to regard *Akhmaten* simply as a retelling of those familiar Hellenic and Freudian narratives; Glass's version of the character is very much a reconstructed Oedipus, and it is highly significant that this character is not once mentioned by name in the opera.

A possible justification for the avoidance of Greek mythology as subject matter is Glass's explicitly stated concern with deconstructing the myth, or Master Narrative, of an exclusive Hellenic origin to Western culture (see Glass

¹ Particularly significant in this regard may be the Buddhist version of the "Oedipus complex," which I will discuss in more detail in connection with the Temple scene (Act II, scene 1).

quoted in Strickland 1988, 73¹)². The argument that the Oedipus myth originated in Egypt rather than in Greece serves to undermine our culture's pervasive Hellenocentric assumptions to a limited extent, but omitting the mythological character from the story altogether makes the same point in an even more direct manner. I will allow these to stand as given assumptions for the time being, but will return to them both in due course with evidence to support my claims. Velikovsky's book was, as I have shown, the opera's point of departure, and the figure of Oedipus remains, albeit in radically reconstructed form, the key to understanding Glass's musico-dramatic interpretation of his subject matter: it is, therefore, a valuable point of reference also in my own discussion of it, and one to which I shall return on a number of occasions. Velikovsky's *Oedipus and Akhnaton* (1960) should, all the same, be regarded more as the opera's ideational point of departure than its dramatic foundation. Glass's Akhnaten is, in certain significant respects, a very different character to Velikovsky's: the former is a truly ambivalent character, capable of profound religious insight on the one hand, and violent destructive acts on the other; while the latter constitutes, presumably because of the Russian-born psychoanalyst's agenda of relating the historical figure to the pitiful hero of the Oedipus myth, a considerably less sympathetic figure.

The composer's knowledge of the subject was not, of course, restricted solely to Velikovsky's interpretation of it. From very early on in the project Glass expanded his literary base, and even called in specialist help, in the form of historian Shalom Goldman, to assist with his research. The "scholarly" approach that resulted was one familiar to the composer from his earlier operas; in *Akhnaten*, however, this would be taken to new extremes. In the early stages of working on the libretto, the collaborators working on the project were given reading lists in a seminar run by Goldman (Glass 1987, 145). For the greater part of a year the production team devoted their time exclusively to constructing a literary outline of the libretto, at which time Glass had still composed no music (*ibid.*, 145). What is more, the entire production team visited the locations in Egypt where the historical events portrayed in the opera had actually unfolded; including the sight of Karnak in Thebes (the location of the ancient Egyptian capital city), and the ruins of Akhnaten's holy city, Akhetaten, situated near the Egyptian village of Tell el Amarna (*ibid.*, 146). In addition, Glass visited the Cairo Museum, and judging by his comments in the Michael Blackwood (1985) documentary film, to which I shall return in due course, this visit may have had a profound influence on the dramatic construction of the title role. All in all, the visit to Egypt "made a great impression" on the composer, and was to have "a marked effect on the outcome of the opera" (Glass 1987, 146).

¹ Strickland's interview with Glass is reprinted in his book *American Composers* (1991).

² I will return to this question in more detail in my discussion of Akhnaten's Hymn to the Sun (Act II, scene 4).

If the first book read by Glass in his research on the subject was Velikovsky's *Oedipus and Akhnaton* (1960), the second is likely to have been Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), a compilation of two articles (*Moses an Egyptian* [1934] and *If Moses was an Egyptian ...* [1937]) originally printed in *Imago*, the psychoanalytical journal edited by Freud, to which a third section (*Moses, his People and Monotheist Religion*) was added when the articles were published as a monograph in 1939. Glass does mention Freud's monograph in his discussion of the opera (Glass 1987, 148), but the influence of this second Jewish psychoanalyst on its final outcome appears to have been fairly minimal. The main historical hypothesis of Freud's writing on the subject, which we find also in *Akhnaten*, was that the religious doctrine which Moses preached to the Israelites was the same doctrine as Akhnaten and his followers attempted to establish in Egypt¹. According to Freud, the Exodus from Egypt which is recounted in the Old Testament took place in the wake of Akhnaten's reforms and was the direct result of the religious persecution that took place in connection with the restoration of traditional Egyptian religious practices in the years following this pharaoh's deposition (Freud 1939, 267). Freud discovered a number of convincing corollaries between the faith of Akhnaten and early forms of Judaism, including, most significantly, the insistence on a universal god and the proscription of all worship of secondary deities. Included among the psychoanalyst's evidence that the god worshipped by Moses and the Israelites was none other than the Aten, the sun-disc worshipped by Akhnaten, is the Jewish confession of faith, "Schema Jisroel Adonai Elohenu Adonai Echod": "Hear, o Israel: our god Aten (Adonai) is a sole god" (ibid., 263)². For Freud, then, Moses -- whose name itself may well be of Egyptian origin (ibid., 244-245) -- was a disciple and probably a close friend of Akhnaten, who sought to preserve the Atenist faith by leading a group of refugees and followers of the outlawed religious cult over the border into Syria (ibid., 266-267)³. Eventually, however, the people of Israel grew tired of their uncompromising and fear-inspiring leader, as well as his equally wrathful and unbending god, onto whom Moses had consistently grafted traits of his own personality. So when they eventually murdered their leader, as Freud claims they did, the Israelites

¹ Freud writes as follows: "... if Moses was an Egyptian and communicated his own religion to the Jews, it must have been Akhenaten's, the Aten religion" (Freud 1939, 262). And later: "The great religious idea for which the man Moses stood was, on our view, not his own property; he had taken it over from King Akhenaten. And he, whose greatness as the founder of a religion is unequivocally established, may perhaps have been following hints that had reached him -- from near or distant parts of Asia -- through the medium of his mother or by other paths." (Freud 1939, 357.)

² Schoenberg's poignant *A Survivor from Warsaw* (1947), for speaker, male chorus, and orchestra, ends with a choral setting of these words.

³ Freud's hypothesis has recently been taken further by an Egyptian historian, Ahmed Osman (1990), whose claim that Akhnaten and Moses were the same person has not received widespread recognition; due, no doubt, to the largely circumstantial and speculative nature of the evidence presented by him. The paucity of this evidence not only makes it difficult to prove such a hypothesis, however, but also makes disproving it in uncategorical terms virtually impossible.

were at the same time murdering their patriarchal god, a deed from which the Judeo-Christian tradition never, in Freud's mind, fully recovered (ibid., 356-357). For Freud this symbolic act represents the historical birth of the Oedipus complex, at least within the context of the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition; Akhnaten and his Atenist faith, on the other hand, represent a time of pre-Oedipal innocence in the history of Western religion, a garden of Eden to which there could be no return.

Aside from the many covert allusions to Oedipus in the opera, which I have discussed already, the most obvious concrete link to Freud's ideas is to be found in Glass's setting of Akhnaten's Hymn to the Sun, whose juxtaposition with Psalm 104 of the Old Testament using the same musical accompaniment is intended to imply a historical connection between the two texts. Glass has commented in this regard;

Freud wrote a book speculating that Moses may have been a priest of Akhnaten's.(...) That's one reason Act II of the opera ends with Akhnaten's 'Hymn to the Sun' followed by Psalm 104 from the Old Testament. They look suspiciously alike. There's reason to believe that the Old Testament psalms may actually be renderings of Egyptian hymns. (Glass quoted in Jones 1984, 4.)

A direct influence from Freud is in this particular case tenuous, however, as the connection in question was noted some years earlier by the American Egyptologist James Henry Breasted (1909, 371-376), who quoted extensive passages from both of the above-mentioned texts in order to highlight their similarity; a scholarly technique that was emulated by Glass and his collaborators in the setting of the texts in the Hymn scene. Moreover, Breasted's (1909) book is included among the list of references used in constructing the libretto (Glass et al. 1984, "Acknowledgements"; Glass et al. 1987, 35), whereas no mention is made of Freud.

Freud can, nonetheless, be said to have influenced the opera, albeit indirectly, as he is cited frequently in *Oedipus and Akhnaton*, where he appears to have been Velikovsky's (1960) principal intellectual sparring partner. It is interesting to note that Freud himself was never actually aware of a connection between his two heroes, Oedipus and Akhnaten, a testimony either to the nearsightedness of the psychoanalyst or to the tenuousness of the connection, depending on one's point of view. Velikovsky (1960, 196-202), goes with the former point of view, claiming Freud's unwillingness to recognise Akhnaten's identity with Oedipus was a symptom of his own Oedipus complex, manifested in his hostility towards his "father" religion, the Jewish faith, and its physical embodiment in the fierce father-figure of Moses at a time when the very existence of the Jewish community was under threat in central Europe. That Akhnaten may have suffered from an acute case of the Oedipus complex was explicitly pointed out by an associate of Freud's, Karl Abraham, in the first

edition of *Imago*, the journal edited by the psychoanalyst, in 1912¹. However, according to Velikovsky, Freud suppressed any awareness he may have had of such a connection for deeply personal reasons when he chose himself to write about Akhnaten some two-and-a-half decades later (Velikovsky 1960, 196-202).

Before moving on, it is worth mentioning that Velikovsky's rejection of Freud's hypothesis extends beyond the criticism articulated by him in *Oedipus and Akhnaton* (1960). In an earlier book, *Ages of Chaos: From the Exodus to King Akhnaton* (1952), he had already put forward the idea, drawing on controversial evidence of volcanic eruptions in Sinai, that the Jewish Exodus from Egypt had occurred some two thousand years prior to Akhnaten's reign, thus discounting Freud's hypothesis that it occurred in the years immediately following it.

4.2.3 Atenism: the Judaeo-Christian tradition meets Buddhism?

The Jewish connection in *Akhnaten* is an interesting one also with regard to the composer's own ethnic background. Unlike his former collaborator, and long time adversary², Steve Reich³, Glass has never made Judaism as such the subject matter for any of his works, although it could easily be argued that the choice of Einstein as protagonist of his first opera -- rather than Adolf Hitler and Charlie Chaplin, the candidates initially suggested by his collaborator on the project, Robert Wilson (Glass 1987, 29) -- was influenced by his own ethnic background. Einstein, who did not accept the biblical idea of god, but was throughout his life a strong advocate of the Jewish community, may have been something of a role model to Glass, who, as a young Baltimorean growing up in the 1950s, admits to being "swept up in the Einstein craze" (ibid., 29). Glass's second portrait opera, *Satyagraha*, bore no relation to Judaic subject matter. In his third, however, he could well have been attempting to come to terms with his own Jewish inheritance; something both Freud and Velikovsky did before him and with almost diametrically opposed results -- Freud accepted

1 Abraham's article was republished in English in the *Psychoanalytical Quarterly*, IV (1935, 537-569).

2 The animosity between the two composers reached its pinnacle shortly after Glass made his major breakthrough in music theatre with performances around the world of *Einstein on the Beach*, suggesting, perhaps, that professional jealousy may have played a part in the dispute: according to Edward Strickland, Reich threatened Glass with legal action at this time (see Strickland [1993, 218-219]). Glass has recently spoken more kindly of Reich: in my own discussions with the composer, for example, he mentioned Reich twice, without being prompted, and on both occasions in a positive light.

3 Reich treats Judaic subject matter in a number of works: most directly in his first text-setting for live singers, *Tehillim* (1981), sung in Hebrew throughout (for a formal analysis of *Tehillim* see Schwarz [1981-82, 262-278]). Reich touches on Jewish-related issues also in *Different Trains* (1988), which deals with the recollections of a group of holocaust survivors juxtaposed with his own war-time experiences, and in his first music theatre work, *The Cave* (1993), which addresses the recent problems of the Middle East (see Geoff Smith's [1993] interview with Reich).

Akhnaten and rejected Judaism, while Velikovsky rejected Akhnaten and defended Judaism (from Freud's criticism). It appears that Glass has chosen a kind of "middle path" between the two psychoanalysts, highlighting both the positive and the less positive aspects of his chosen protagonist and, arguably, also of the Jewish faith. It could easily be argued that *Akhnaten* constitutes an attempt by the composer to confront his own Oedipus complex by attempting to reconcile his "father" religion, Judaism, with the central Asian philosophy that has interested him more deeply in recent years.

The change in attitude towards Akhnaten, of which we have seen evidence already in the divergent attitudes of the two Jewish-born psychoanalysts Freud and Velikovsky, is even more apparent in the Egyptological literature. The boundary of what, to borrow Thomas Kuhn's (1970) term, could be considered a kind of minor "paradigm shift," is located roughly around the time of the Second World War -- i.e., immediately subsequent to the publication of Freud's controversial monograph. Accounts of the pharaoh preceding the war are almost invariably positive in tone, while those written after it are, on the whole, tinged with scepticism.

The discovery of Akhnaten at the beginning of the last century came as something of a surprise to Egyptologists, as his name had been deliberately omitted from the lists of kings previously available to them. They were quick to realise that this was a ruler who stood apart from the conventional pharaonic mould in just about every possible respect. For the American Egyptologist Breasted, writing at the beginning of this century, the list of firsts is impressive; Akhnaten was

... not only the world's first idealist and the world's first individual, but also the earliest monotheist, and the first prophet of internationalism -- the most remarkable figure of the Ancient World before the Hebrews. (Breasted 1910, 264-265.¹)

The British Egyptologist and Anglican priest, the Reverend James Baikie adds another first to Akhnaten's list of honours when he describes him as "the world's first pacifist ... an idealist dreamer, who actually believed that men were meant to live in truth and to speak the truth" (Baikie 1926, 234). In the following passage, he elaborates:

One pretty obvious implication of a faith in a god who is both universal and loving is that to such a being strife between his creatures, of whatever lands, must be hateful. If god loved all men, then equally there ought to be no place among his creatures for the race hatreds and jealousies which mean war. Accordingly, to all appearance, judging from his action, or rather want of action, in a great emergency, the logical Akhenaten became the first pacifist, and a pacifist who had the power to insist on his ideas being carried into effect by the greatest empire of the ancient world ... (Baikie 1926, 333-334.)

1

The passage from Breasted's *A History of Ancient Egyptians* (London, 1910) is cited in Aldred (1988, 113).

Glass's view of the pharaoh seems at times closely related to the body of literature cited above. In the following passage he describes some of the central tenets of the Atenist faith as espoused by Akhnaten:

On becoming Pharaoh of Upper and Lower Egypt ... [Akhnaten] declared a new religion based upon Aten, associated with the sun but not actually the sun itself, a very important point theologically. His new god was supreme and alone, making Akhnaten the first declared monotheist in recorded history. Just as important, Akhnaten's god was a universal god transcending locale, another first. Finally, by not completely identifying his god with the physical sun but emphasizing his independent nature, Akhnaten's god is the first truly abstract godhead we know. (Glass 1987, 148.)

While the composer seems in passages such as this to be almost paraphrasing Breasted, at other times he explicitly distances himself from such claims. Regarding Breasted's and Freud's claim that Akhnaten was the world's first monotheist, which he appears to unequivocally accept in the passage cited above, he writes; "[l]ike everything else about him, this one-word description hides more than it reveals" (Glass 1987, 137). Similarly, Baikie's claim that he was the world's first pacifist is clearly not altogether commensurate with Glass's view of the character. It is true that he includes the pharaoh in the same category as Einstein and Gandhi, as people who changed the world through their ideas rather than through military might, and it is true that Akhnaten's and his father's policy of military restraint was "an important part of [the] story" for him (*ibid.*, 153). Glass is quick, however, to qualify any misconceptions that might arise in this regard: "[t]his is not," he writes, "to say that he was a pacifist, though some have described him that way, probably incorrectly" (*ibid.*, 138).

Contemporary opinion appears to be as divided as Glass seems to be on Akhnaten's status as history's first monotheist. Velikovsky, in keeping with his agenda of deconstructing Freud, castigates the psychoanalyst for failing to realise "that sun worship cannot be termed monotheism, but only monolatry" (Velikovsky 1960, 198). In the opinion of the Canada-based Egyptologist Donald B. Redford, one of the foremost contemporary authorities on the Amarna period and an expert also on Old Testament studies, "what Akhenaten championed was in the truest sense of the word, atheism" (Redford 1984, 234). While in the words of another contemporary expert, the Scottish Egyptologist Cyril Aldred, what distinguishes the pharaoh from his predecessors was "his insistence on a true monotheism, as distinct from the henotheism of the sun-cult, which he embraced with such a fervour as to arouse the strong suspicion that he was a religious fanatic" (Aldred 1975, 51). Atenism is consistently described by this Egyptologist as an "uncompromising monotheism" (*ibid.*, 88), and as an "austere monotheism" (Aldred 1988, 244). Interestingly, though, Aldred is quite willing to compromise this view when he writes, "Professor Redford is justified in speaking of Akhnaten as a literal atheist" (*ibid.*, 244); and, in the Preface of his recent study on the subject, describes him as "a voluptuary, an intellectual lightweight, an atheist," and "ultimately a maniac"

(ibid., 7). What unites these scholars is a common desire to demolish earlier conceptions of Akhnaten as the paragon of the benevolent humanitarian ruler: in addition, a fundamental concern, one might almost say a bias, of both is the desire to discredit his religion. Redford, in his appropriately entitled study *Akhenaten: The Heretic King* (1984), describes the reign of Akhnaten as a period of "refined sloth," and risks revealing a hidden agenda when he continues; "[i]f the king and his circle inspire me somewhat with contempt, it is apprehension I feel when I contemplate his "religion"" (Redford 1984, 234).

It will be seen that the most vehement objections to Akhnaten's religion stem from an overt or covert desire to distinguish it as sharply as possibly from the Judaeo-Christian conception of monotheism. In doing so one counters the, for many, uncomfortable hypothesis, put forward by Freud and a large body of the Egyptological opinion, that the religious practices of our own culture originated on the African continent; one preserves unassailable biblical truths intact; and one avoids the unpleasant realisation that the earliest historically-traced source of Judaeo-Christian monotheism has more in common with Buddhism in terms of its fundamental assumptions than it does with Christianity and Judaism as they are currently practised.

This dissonance between Atenism and the Judaeo-Christian conception of monotheism is most evident in the writing of the British Egyptologist Sir Wallis Budge (1923, 114-115), whose most ardent objections to Akhnaten's religion stem from the fact that his belief system appears to include no equivalent to the Christian concept of sin -- I say appears as the evidence in this regard is far from convincing. This view is echoed more recently by Sir Alan Gardiner (1961, 229), who chastises Akhnaten's doctrine for not differentiating between "good and evil": he attributes this ethical malaise to the loss of the underworld god Osiris, who was responsible for the weighing of the souls of the dead, for sifting the good from the bad in an ancient Egyptian counterpart to the Christian last judgement. It is Budge, however, who was one of the earliest, and one of the most fervid opponents of Akhnaten's religious view: he objects to Breasted's comparison of Akhnaten's Hymns to the Sun and the Hebrew Psalms on the grounds that there is "nothing spiritual" in the former, "nothing to appeal to man's highest nature" (Budge 1923, 112). Some of the underlying motives behind his views are revealed, however, in his statements regarding the Egyptian people, which are easily recognised as the epitome of Orientalist prejudice: he writes, for example, that the cult of Atenism never caught on because "the Egyptian, being of African origin, never understood or cared for philosophical abstractions" (ibid., 95-96). And in a similar vein; "the abstract conception of thinking was wholly inconceivable to the average Egyptian, who only understood things in a concrete form" (ibid., 114). It is interesting to note, in passing, that such views not only seem incongruous from the standpoint of contemporary culture, but they also astounded Budge's peers: in response to Budge's totally unfounded claim that Akhnaten may have been guilty of wholesale murders using methods "known to Oriental courts since time immemorial" (ibid., 107-108), the Reverend Baikie, despite his own

explicitly stated wish to discourage direct comparisons between Old Testament texts and Akhnaten's teachings (Baikie 1926, 321), writes, "[i]t would be difficult to imagine a more conclusive example of prejudice usurping the place of unbiased judgement" (ibid., 260).

The above is, of course, an extreme example, but there are times when one detects values not dissimilar to those of Budge infiltrating even into contemporary Egyptological discourses; such as those articulated by Redford in the passage cited earlier. Egyptology is, it should not be forgotten, a scholarly pursuit with more than its fair share of "skeletons in the closet." A long list of ethical travesties -- many of them perpetrated by Budge¹ and similar-minded British, German, and French Egyptologists -- have earned this field of study an unhappy reputation as a repository of colonialist and, to borrow an expression to which Edward Said recent work (1978) has imparted new connotations, "Orientalist" sentiments.

Budge (1923, 113-115) is not, however, all that far off the mark when he compares Akhnaten's sun worship to Indo-Iranian religious practices, most notably to the Vedic sun god Surya, who was depicted with sun rays terminating in hands almost identical in appearance to those which emanate from the Aten in the art of the Amarna period. Velikovsky (1960, 101) also looks to the East for precursors of Akhnaten's sun worship, referring to the widespread worship in Mitanni -- a close diplomatic ally of Egypt at the time, situated in what is now northern Iraq -- of the Indian gods Mitra, Varuna, and Indra. Both scholars attribute the origin of the sun cult to Mitannian influence; Budge (1923, 76) through the influence of "Mitannian ladies at the Egyptian court," one of whom, he claims, was Akhnaten's half-Mesopotamian wife, Nefertiti; while Velikovsky (1960, 98-101), following the Oedipus legend of the banished son, suggests that Akhnaten may have spent his youth with relatives in Mitanni, from whom he assimilated not only the idea of an abstract god but also that of a "holy" incestuous union between mother and son, a controversial subject to which I shall return later in the dissertation. The Eastern connection is readily acknowledged also in the newer literature, most notably in Aldred's (1988, 237) exhaustive study of the subject².

¹ Budge's own account of how he acquired a number of valuable papyri, by digging a tunnel into the building in which they had been locked by Egyptian officials after being confiscated from him, can be read in Romer & Romer's illuminating study of Egyptological ethical malpractice, *The Rape of Tutankhamun* (1993, 93-100). Romer and Romer's study presents a very different picture of Egyptological research to that ordinarily presented in the literature, and one which is essential reading to anyone interested in the darker side of this area of study. I particularly recommend chapter IV; "Study and Steal -- A Short History of Egyptology" (Romer & Romer 1993, 73-115).

² Aldred (1988) alludes indirectly to Glass's opera in the Preface of his study. He writes: "From being one whom his people did their best to forget, he has become, thirty centuries later, the celebrated subject of novels, operas and other works of the imagination" (Aldred 1988, 7). The opera to which he refers can be none other than Glass's *Akhnaten*. The novel is presumably Finnish writer Mika Waltari's *Sinuhe: the Egyptian*, and the other works of the imagination probably include the Hollywood

As I have shown, the enthusiasm of scholars at the beginning of the century regarding Akhnaten's religious practices has been tempered in more recent studies by the realisation that Atenism is a very different kind of monotheism, if indeed it is a monotheism, to the Judaeo-Christian monotheism that is so familiar to us. While this appears to have struck a fatal blow to its acceptance within the context of the scholarly community, it may well have added to the attraction of the subject matter for the composer. Glass himself alludes to the East on one occasion only in his discussion of the opera, when recounting his impressions of two statues of Akhnaten in the Cairo museum. In a somewhat cryptic passage, he describes these as looking "curiously Asiatic in profile" (Glass 1987, 150). Taken in isolation this could be construed as a chance remark, but, in light of Glass's ongoing interest in Asian culture and philosophy it is tempting to read more into it. What could be more fitting than for the religious icon of Glass's opera *Trilogy* to have one foot firmly planted on Asian soil? As we have seen, scholars this century, lacking the conceptual framework necessary to formulate religious thought in any but the most concrete terms, have attempted willy-nilly to squeeze Akhnaten and his followers' religious practices into any and every category available, from monotheism to atheism. This is clearly one deity who does not sit comfortably within the Judaeo-Christian/atheist dichotomy, nor does he/she exhibit any of the features we in the Western world customarily, and sometimes mistakenly, associate with pan- or henotheistic "other" religions. Perhaps a closer comparison can indeed be found in the more philosophically and psychologically oriented schools of spiritual contemplation of central Asia, as Glass's was perhaps hinting.

In Buddhism, for example, we find a concept of God not dissimilar to that espoused by Akhnaten, although there are also certain significant discrepancies. The distinction between theism (be it monotheism or pantheism) and atheism is, for example, an equally controversial one for scholars working in Buddhist studies. While some Buddhist theorists find the concept of God perfectly acceptable and are even willing to assimilate gods and prophets from other religions into their own religious conception¹, others find the concept a misleading vulgarity. The following passage, taken from D.T. Suzuki's (1907) early study of Mahayana Buddhism, is an example of the latter:

Buddhism does not use the word God. The word is rather offensive to most of its followers, especially when it is intimately associated in vulgar minds

film adaptation of this novel. Although an eminent scholar of Egyptian history, it is evident that Aldred's knowledge of Glass's opera, and presumably also Waltari's novel, is to some extent wanting. He sees his task, at least in part, as deconstructing the image of the pharaoh these works have constructed, and replacing this with the more realistic portrait recent Egyptological research has constructed, one that sees Akhnaten as "a voluptuary, an intellectual lightweight, an atheist," and "ultimately a maniac" (*ibid.*, 7). I will attempt to show that Glass's Akhnaten is an altogether more complex, three-dimensional and, in many senses, ambivalent figure than his detractors would like him to be.

¹ Sogyal Rinpoche (1992) is an example of such a scholar.

with the idea of a creator who produced the world out of nothing, caused the downfall of mankind, and touched by the pang of remorse, sent down his only son to save the depraved. But, on account of this, Buddhism must not be judged as an atheism which endorses an agnostic, materialistic interpretation of the universe. Far from it. Buddhism outspokenly acknowledges the presence in the world of a reality which transcends the limitations of phenomenality, but which is nevertheless immanent everywhere and manifests itself in its full glory, and in which we live and move and have our being. (Suzuki 1907, 219.)

In a similar vein, contemporary Buddhist teacher Chögyam Trungpa stresses that "Buddhism is perhaps the only religion which is not based on the revelation of God nor on faith and devotion to God or gods of any kind (Trungpa 1991, 9). Like Suzuki, however, he is quick to point out that the Buddha's unwillingness to argue "theological or philosophical doctrines" does not imply that he was "an atheist or a heretic" (ibid., 9): according to Trungpa, he merely chose not to "waste ... time in vane speculation" (ibid., 10).

The abstract conception of God propounded by Akhnaten could easily be compared to such a view: for followers of the Atenist doctrine the object of worship was not the sun itself, nor was it any other manifest form, but the heat/energy (or *Shu*) that was in the disc (Breasted 1909, 361). This same energy was to be found in all living things, including people (of all nationalities and races), and was even considered to be present in inanimate matter, which, of course, as the findings of modern physics have shown, is anything but inanimate on its most subtle levels. What Akhnaten was preaching, then, was the essential equivalence of all forms of energy; a decidedly modern notion. As the Egyptologist Sir Flinders Petrie (1899, Vol. II, 214) has observed, the fundamental precept of Atenism was the deification of Radiant Energy. The symbol of the creator, who was ultimately inseparable from the created, was the sun-disc, or Aten; the epitome of non-discriminating power, an image with which everyone on the planet was intimately acquainted -- unlike the numerous parochial deities of former times, which were invariably restricted to the nation of their origin and were usually, moreover, strongly associated with a particular Egyptian city. Significantly, the Aten was the Mother-Father of all things (Budge 1923, 118), the analogy of the dual human creative forces being extended to the dynamic forces that created and continue to create the cosmos.

I will discuss various aspects of Atenism in more detail during my discussion of the opera. This brief exposition of the central tenets of the religion already, however, brings to light certain conspicuous similarities between Akhnaten's religion and various forms of Asian religious practice. We have seen already that Egyptologists have recognised an Asian influence in Atenism; equally interesting, though, is the very real possibility that Akhnaten's religious practices may have had an influence on Asian religious thought. No Egyptologist has, to my knowledge, put forward such an argument: in Buddhist studies, however, an Egyptian influence on Tibetan Buddhist ideas, more specifically those found in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, has been postulated (Conze 1951, 210). Edward Conze has described Tibetan

Buddhism, the form of Buddhism practised by Glass, as “a fusion between Egyptian magic in its gnostic form on the one side, and the metaphysics of the Mahayana on the other” (ibid., 208). Tibetan Buddhists themselves would probably be justified in objecting to such a coarse definition, but it does draw attention to the very real possibility of an Egyptian influence on Tibetan Buddhist ideas. Whether Akhnaten’s ideas travelled in an easterly direction is, of course, considerably more difficult to prove.

Among the literature on the subject, there is one book, *Son of the Sun: the Life and Philosophy of Akhnaton, King of Egypt* (1946), written by an Indian writer, Savitri Devi, that draws frequent comparisons between Akhnaten’s religious thinking and Buddhist, Hindu, and Jainist ideas. The centrality of this concern is evidenced in the titles of the book’s chapters; for example, “the way of reason,” “the way of love,” and “the way of beauty.” *Son of the Sun* is clearly intended for a lay readership, but actually occupies a position somewhere between the scholarly work on the subject and the more populist literature -- the writer is more conscientious in her citations, for example, than many an Egyptological scholar¹. Published by the Rosicrucian Society, it functions as an unashamedly empathic guidebook to the pharaoh’s life and ideas. Although from a scholarly standpoint Devi’s book is wanting in critical distance, it does offer the scholar a number of valuable insights into the many similarities between Akhnaten’s ideas and those of various Indian schools of religious thought. It seems more than likely that it was read by Glass during his work on the opera, even though he has made no explicit mention of it. I have no concrete evidence to support this assumption, although it is noteworthy that a large number of the texts used in the construction of the opera’s libretto appear also in Devi’s book².

I will return to the parallels between Atenism and Asian religious thought throughout the dissertation. Among the most striking of these are the many references to solar imagery one finds in the Buddhist scriptures. As Joseph Campbell has observed;

[t]he mythology of the Buddha ... is of the sun. He is termed the Lion of the Shakya Clan, who sits upon the Lion Throne. The symbol of his teaching is the Sun Wheel, and the reference of his doctrine is to a state that is no state, of which the only appropriate image is light. (Campbell 1962, 255.)

¹ Baikie’s *The Amarna Age* (1926) is the most dismal offender in this respect, although Budge’s *Tutankhamen: Amenism, Atenism and Egyptian Monotheism* (1923) comes a close second.

² Texts present in both Devi (1946) and the libretto of *Akhnaten* include: the list of titles read in the Coronation scene (Act I, scene 2) (ibid., 39); the inauguration text preceding the City/Dance (Act II, scene 3) (ibid., 70); the text of the love duet (Act II, scene 2) (ibid., 132 and 297); the Amarna letter texts from the Family scene (Act III, scene 1) and Attack and Fall (act III, scene 2) (ibid., 233); the “hymn of hate” from the Ruins (Act III, scene 3) (ibid., 274); and, of course, the Hymn to the Sun itself (Act II, scene 4) (ibid., 304-306).

The aim of all Buddhist teaching is, moreover, to achieve Enlightenment¹; and the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, in particular, can be considered an explicit instruction manual on how to achieve union with the light in question. The ultimate aim of all Buddhist meditative practices, such as the "Yoga of the Inner Fire," described by the Lama Anagarika Govinda, in his *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* (1960, 159-178), is much the same. For the Buddhist practitioner, the radiance of the sun is but one manifestation of "Buddha nature," but it is one whose non-discriminating, enduring, and invigorating nature provides an appropriate metaphor for a power that is even more ubiquitous. In the *Dhammapada* it is written:

The sun shines in the day, the moon shines in the night,
The warrior shines in battle,
the brahmin in meditation.
But day and night the Buddha shines in radiance of love for all.
Dhammapada 387, Easwaran translation (1986, 195.)

And in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*:

My conduct will be like the sun-god who with his universal illumination seeks not any reward, who ceases not on account of one unrighteous person to make a great display of his magnificent glory, who on account of one unrighteous person abandons not the salvation of all beings. Through the dedication (*parivarta*) of all my merits I would make every one of my fellow-creatures happy and joyous.
Avatamsaka Sutra, fas XIV, cited in Suzuki (1907, 371.)

These are just some of many parallels between the two religions that I will discuss in these pages; there are also marked differences, the most important of which is, without any question, Akhnaten's intolerance towards the traditional Egyptian pantheon of gods, which Buddhism, especially in its Tibetan form, would not have hesitated to assimilate as diverse aspects of the One. The comparison is, despite such obvious incongruities, worth making, as it goes some way towards explaining the special resonance of the subject matter of the opera with the ideational universe of its composer.

4.2.4 Akhnaten the man

I have gone to some trouble to bring to light some of the unspoken reasons why it is that Akhnaten's religion has not found acceptance in recent scholarly writing in the West, one of the most central of which may well be the apparently awkward position it occupies between Eastern and Western religious world views. But what of the pharaoh himself? Objections to Akhnaten's personal character are sometimes more strongly voiced than those directed at his religious doctrine.

¹

Not, of course, to be confused with the Kantian idea that goes by the same name.

It has been suggested by certain Egyptologists (for instance, Redford 1984, 193; and Aldred 1988, 234) that Akhnaten fathered children with at least two of his own daughters. It is noteworthy, however, that the latter undermines his own arguments by claiming, on the basis of the expressionistic depictions of the pharaoh alone, that he suffered from an endocrine disorder known as Fröhlich's Syndrome, a condition that almost certainly would have rendered him incapable of fathering any children at all (Aldred 1988, 231-234). This is a highly controversial issue which could easily be construed as a desperate attempt by opponents of Akhnaten's religious thinking to deconstruct the image of the pharaoh promulgated since the beginning of this century of the model family man. It is, however, worthy of consideration, and I will examine the evidence in more detail in my discussion of the Family scene (Act III, scene 1).

Even more controversial is the hypothesis put forward by Velikovsky that Akhnaten not only exploited his own children (Velikovsky 1960, 109), but also wed and impregnated his own mother (*ibid.*, 86-95). Add adultery -- both heterosexual and homosexual (Redford 1984, 188-193) -- to the list of sexual misadventures and we arrive at quite a cocktail of libidinal intrigue. Velikovsky's view of the pharaoh's psychological condition is summarised in the following passage:

Were it possible for King Akhnaten to cross the time barrier and lie down on an analyst's couch, the analysis would at an early stage reveal autistic or narcissistic traits, a homosexual tendency, with sadism suppressed and feminine traits coming to the fore, and a strong unsuppressed Oedipus complex. The proper treatment for the historical Oedipus would not start by breaking down the Oedipus complex but by first demolishing the narcissistic component of the psychoneurosis. (Velikovsky 1960, 201-202.)

Ironically, it is not his excesses of libidinal energy, nor its misplacement, referred to by Velikovsky, that have attracted the most criticism towards Akhnaten, but a perceived deficiency thereof. Thus, he stands accused not of giving too free a reign to his libidinal impulses, but rather of effacing his masculinity, as well as its extensions in Egyptian war-faring and colonialist endeavours. Even the Reverend James Baikie attributes his ineptness as a ruler largely to a subversive female influence: Akhnaten was "a boy bred in the half-lights and dimly seen facts of an Oriental harem, where practical knowledge of men and things are impossible" (Baikie 1926, 238). He continues:

Much of the impracticability of the young king -- and after all it was this which chiefly wrecked his work -- may safely be traced to his early environment, which prevented him from that salutary contact with hard facts and hard men which is part of the necessary equipment of the man who is to be of any practical service to the world, and to the preponderating influence of a crowd of adoring women, always the surest ground for the growth of faith, who would assure the king of his infallibility, and of the triumph of his most impossible schemes. (Baikie 1926, 239.)

Not surprisingly, Budge takes a similar line:

[Akhnaten] ... lacked a practical knowledge of men and things (...). He never learnt the kingcraft of the Pharaohs, and he failed to see that only a warrior could hold what warriors had won for him. Instead of associating himself with men of action, he sat at the feet of Ay the priest, and occupied his mind with religious speculations; and so, helped by his adoring mother and kinswomen, he gradually became the courageous fanatic that tombs and monuments of Egypt show him to have been. His physical constitution and the circumstances of his surroundings made him what he was. (Budge 1923, 77.)

I will return to Akhnaten's physical constitution in more detail later, but for the present let it suffice to state that he chose to have himself depicted in a manner that emphasised what are ordinarily regarded as the secondary female sex characteristics. More important, though, is that the perceived emasculation of the pharaoh is regarded here as the root of all of his other deficiencies. In short, his ineptness as a ruler is blamed on his sexuality, and this sexuality, both in terms of physiological sex (by the physical negation of his masculinity, i.e., his perceived castration) and in terms of gender (by his close association with subversive female elements), is perceived as feminine. Gardiner writes, for example, of the "hideous portraits" of the pharaoh; hideous primarily because they are "the reverse of virile" (Gardiner 1961, 214). Sculptured reliefs of Akhnaten are described by this Egyptologist as showing him "lolling effeminately upon a cushioned chair" (ibid., 214). With Akhnaten's sexual characteristics grafted onto those of his empire, his unwillingness to pursue the expansionist military policies of his predecessors is automatically equated, by Budge and more recent scholars, with his perceived sexual inadequacies. When, for example, foreign powers threaten to invade Akhnaten's emasculated kingdom, national borders are confused with physical ones; the Egyptian nation is, like its ruler, transformed into a woman whose honour is in jeopardy. The only possible solution to an Egypt wallowing in "supineness and apathy" (Baikie 1926, 375), or as Aldred puts it "impotence¹ and supineness" (Aldred 1988, 283), would, according to Egyptological opinion, have been that of swift and emphatic phallic intervention:

What the age demanded was the presence of the Pharaoh as the all-powerful war-lord at the head of his troops with his chariots and his archers, vanquishing the insolent and treacherous, and sustaining the morale of the loyal and resolute (Aldred 1988, 282).

Like Aldred, the other contemporary expert on the period perceives "manly" military action as the only solution to Akhnaten's impotence: Redford writes: "Time and again we glimpse him lounging, completely limp, in a chair or on a stool.(...) Is this effete monarch, who could never hunt or do battle, a true descendent of the authors of Egypt's empire?" (Redford 1984, 234.) It

¹

In one of the less complementary reviews of *Akhnaten*, the pharaoh's physiological condition is grafted also onto the music of the opera. Andrew Clements, in his review of the English National Opera's staging, refers to "the impotence of Glass's score" (1987, 461).

comes as no surprise then, that it is with ejaculatory exuberance that the deposition of Akhnaten and the reinstatement of a pharaoh of the more traditional militaristic bent is greeted. At the hands of General, future pharaoh, and "smiter of the Asiatics," Haremhab, "some vigour was ... injected into war-like operations" (Aldred 1988, 297): thus, with an appropriate dose of military violence some semblance of order was temporarily restored to Egypt's unruly northern colonies. On the accession of Tutankhaten (who was to become the famed pharaoh Tutankhamen after marrying Akhnaten's daughter Meretaten), masculinity was once again restored to the Egyptian monarchy, even if it was to take the unexpected physical form of a pre-pubescent ten-year-old:

... the image of the "sportsman-king" was once again consciously cultivated by the young king. The "strong-man" Pharaoh was imbued with the spirit of imperialism, the sort the king of the gods Amun had put forward and nurtured. No monarch attempting to restore the *status quo ante* could afford to ignore it. And the adolescent Pharaoh was only too eager to step into this role. We see him, in a traditional motif, out hunting in his chariots, or charging in the same vehicle a horde of fleeing enemy. Is the military once again about to provide the ideal of masculine attainment? (Redford 1984, 211.)

The question posed by Redford appears to be an unusual one in the literature on the subject. It seems strange, though, that having asked such a pertinent question, this Egyptologist appears to condone the conservative view of masculinity personified by Tutankhamen, and be barely able to control his contempt for a reformer such as Akhnaten who dared to challenge its most fundamental premises.

If I have given the impression that Glass's portrayal of Akhnaten goes against the grain of current Egyptological opinion -- or vice-versa, if any of the newer literature in that field can be perceived as a reaction against Glass's interpretation -- then I have accurately conveyed my intentions. I believe that the passages cited above may provide some clues to the nature of this divergence. Mine is not, however, intended as a historical exposition of Akhnaten's story, but a culturally grounded interpretation of Philip Glass's account of that story. I am not an Egyptologist, so if there are any skeletons hiding in the museums Egyptologists inhabit, it is the task of others to rattle their bones.

As for Akhnaten himself, monotheist or atheist, family man or sexual deviant, visionary or madman, pacifist or inept ruler, egalitarian or dictator; feminist sympathiser or cruel patriarch, perhaps we will never know, but let us at least attempt to ascertain with more certainty who the composer wants us to think he is. Glass has described his chosen protagonist as a "complex character" (Glass quoted in Gagne & Caras 1982, 227), and as a "very complicated person" (Blackwood 1985)¹; if one understands this as meaning

¹ In the Michael Blackwood documentary, he states: "With Akhnaten I would like to suggest a very complicated person. Someone who was capable of [writing] this Hymn to the Sun ... he's also capable of destroying this other tradition with as much

that he is a character made up of many diverse and even contradictory parts -- a truly ambivalent figure -- then he has furnished us with what I believe is a valuable clue in this regard.

4.3 The orchestra

INSTRUMENTATION¹

Woodwinds:	Brass:	Strings:
2 flutes (doubling piccolos)	2 trumpets	violas
2 oboes (doubling oboes d'amore)	2 horns	cellos
2 Bb clarinets	2 trombones	doublebasses
1 Bb bass clarinet	tuba	
2 bassoons		
Percussion:		Synthesizer
4 tom-toms (2 players)	tubular bells	
snare drum	wood block	
bass drum	tambourine	
cymbal	celeste	
finger cymbals		

As with the idea to make the third of the portrait operas the final work of an operatic trilogy, Glass's initial considerations regarding the music of *Akhmaten* were to have pragmatic foundations. At the time of the opera's debut, the Opera House at Stuttgart was scheduled to be closed for renovation, so performances would have to take place in the neighbouring Playhouse, which had a considerably smaller orchestra pit. Glass visited the venue, painstakingly measuring out the space available for the musicians by placing music stands, chairs, and percussion instruments in their assigned positions. It was clear that concessions would have to be made somewhere, so Glass took the quite radical decision, in orchestral terms, of disposing of the violins altogether, leaving only violas, cellos, and double basses in the string section. This would have the effect of lending the strings a darker, more sullen texture, highly suited to the tragic nature of the opera's subject matter. The counterpoint of low strings and high lyrical voices was appealing also because the resulting thinner orchestral texture would partially alleviate problems of voice projection encountered when arranging for countertenor and contralto voices accompanied by full orchestra. (Glass 1987, 144 and 169-170.)

Another factor which was to have a profound influence on the overall sound of the orchestra was the fact that he needed also to cut back on wind instruments. *Einstein on the Beach* was performed by wind players known by

savagery as any of the other pharaohs. And also capable of having this very romantic attachment with his wife." (Glass quoted in Blackwood 1985.)

1

The list of instrumentation is taken from Glass (1987, 177).

Glass to be adept in circular breathing techniques, which meant they could play the incessant meandering arpeggios of his earlier style without needing to stop for breath. In *Satyagraha*, circular breathing techniques were emulated by tripling the wind instruments and synchronising breathing gaps so that there was always somebody playing. In *Akhnaten*, this would not be possible, which meant a more traditional approach to part writing that would take the human needs of the musicians -- such as breathing and resting -- more explicitly into account; it would also bring about some perhaps unforeseen innovations in Glass's compositional style.

In the brass and percussion sections he was not, however, willing to compromise: these would be needed for dramatic reasons, particularly in the music requiring a strong militaristic or ritualistic feel, of which there is a great deal in the opera (Glass 1987, 169). Moreover, with the synthesiser playing a diminishing role in Glass's orchestral sound ideal, and winds stripped to a minimum, percussion would be needed to provide the kinetic drive characteristic of the style. Unlike Reich, whose *Clapping Music* (1972) is today regarded as a minimalist classic, this would be Glass's first use of percussion since his student compositions of the early sixties, with the single exception of the experimental piece *1+1* (1967), for musician and amplified table top, in which cellular rhythmic techniques¹ also make their first appearance. The absence of percussion in the minimalist arsenal is something of an irony, considering one of the most widely recognised achievements of the style, most notably in the music composed by Glass and Reich, is the return of rhythmic constancy to concert music.

The change in Glass's approach to the orchestra was to be far more deep-seated, however, than mere accommodation to the needs of musicians or to the dramatic action of the opera, although these certainly played an important role in bringing about the transformation in question. The composer asked two of the collaborators on *Satyagraha*, Christopher Keene and Dennis Russell Davies to peruse copies of the score of *Akhnaten* and offer any criticism that came to mind: "[t]hey each," comments Glass, "in different ways, argued for a more "orchestral" approach, one in which individual instruments and sections had a more "soloistic" sound" (Glass 1987, 171). The advice of both was heeded in the final orchestral score, resulting in a greater variety of colour, and a greater use of contrast than in any of the composer's previous works. In

¹ Cellular rhythms were first used in minimalism by Terry Riley in his *In C* (1964). Glass's *1+1* differs from Riley's composition in being comprised of only two (as opposed to fifty-three) cells. Glass's composition is, moreover, considerably more reductive, being comprised solely of rhythmic material. Like *In C*, the performer of *1+1* is free to choose when to switch from one pattern to the next, although in the latter he or she is allowed, in quasi-improvisatorial fashion, to alternate between the two formulae, while the former specifies a number of restrictions, including a prearranged order of performance. Glass's piece anticipates the additive and subtractive rhythmic configurations that were to become a characteristic feature of his early minimal style, as such patterns invariably arise during performances of this work.

Akhnaten, more than any previous work, Glass was to realise the potential of the orchestra as a vehicle for his musico-dramatic imagination. Now more than ever, he was addressing the classical music establishment in a language it knew, but which was nevertheless somehow strange.

5 *AKHNATEN*: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Act 1: Prelude

That *Akhnaten* should be Glass's first opera to open with a prelude, or in conventional operatic terms an overture, should come as no surprise, given the other numerous accommodations to the genre in this work. What does come as something of a surprise is that it was almost an accident that a prelude should be written at all. In the summer of 1982 the literary construction of the opera was well under way and Glass was anxious to begin composing. He had intended to begin with the funeral scene, but Shalom Goldman, the historian working with Glass on the construction of the libretto, was having trouble tracking down an appropriate text, so he would have to wait before setting the first scene to music: To fill in the waiting time," Glass recounts "which turned out to be two weeks, I wrote a prelude to the opera. Until then a prelude had not been planned but it turned out to be a striking beginning" (Glass 1987, 159.).

It is true that the Prelude sets the tone for much of the action that follows, and its import to the overall structure of the opera, in both musical and dramatic terms, cannot be overstated. Firstly, as it is the only totally instrumental music in the opera it plays an important role in channelling the attention and sensibilities of the audience towards what they are about to experience. The convention of beginning an opera with an overture can be no accident: it, ordinarily at least, serves to escort the audience from the "real" world in which they live to the "imaginary" world of drama which they are to enter. That the composer in this case urges his audience to retain some awareness of the distinct nature of these two "parallel universes," even while embarking upon a voyage into the imaginary, we have already established. In this case, though, the prelude may have more to do with breaking down the imaginary world of the audience, in order to facilitate absorption in the

real/imaginary world of the work. Either way, the transition from life to art is one that must be negotiated, and the continuum from relatively abstract music to more concrete musical and textual representation is a fairly effective way of signalling this transition. The Prelude is a frame or a gateway; and, as we shall shortly see, it is specifically pointed out as being one in the text announced by the scribe during its final cycle.

Secondly, it is of import for dramatico-structural reasons, because there are two reprises of this music at significant junctures in the opera – at roughly its centrepoint in the City/Dance (Act II, scene 3) and towards its end, in the Ruins (Act III, scene 3). (It is highly significant, for reasons I will go into later, that this music is not heard at the very end of the opera.) Thus, the same music is heard prior to the accession of Akhnaten, at the height of his reign, and immediately following his deposition. This continuity, or sameness, irrespective of the dramatic changes that are enacted is not only an important key to the drama of the opera: it also keeps the frame, and therefore the picture *as a picture* conspicuously in sight throughout.

The third and final significance this music has to do with the highly ambiguous tonality in which much of the music of the opera is immersed. A large part of the music that falls between these three sections, although modulating to sometimes distant tonal centres, refers nevertheless back to the original tonal centre of A minor. Glass employs a number of compositional strategies, which I will discuss in some detail later, to uphold this ambiguity between the key at hand and the “home” key: in addition to the two Prelude reprises, suffice it for present to mention a number of chaconne ritornellos in this key, preceding each appearance of Akhnaten himself in the first two acts, that serve as additional tonal points of reference.

The composer whose work I am discussing is something of a specialist in triads and trilogies. This being the third opera of an opera trilogy, it might be expected that triadic thematics would be present in certain aspects of the work. Triadic constructs play an important role in both of the previous Trilogy operas as well, but in *Akhnatn* they are almost ubiquitous. As I have noted already, the Prelude music is heard three times in the opera, once in each act. This is, as we shall see, only the tip of the iceberg.

In searching for reasons for this profusion of triads, the first place to look is in the drama of the opera. A valuable clue in this regard is provided by the photograph, taken from Achim Freyer’s Stuttgart production of the opera, which adorns the sleeve of the CBS masterworks recording. In this photograph, Akhnaten and Queen Nefertiti sit face to face with their hands extended towards one another and their palms interlocked. Each free hand, Akhnaten’s left and Nefertiti’s right, is extended upwards towards their god, the Aten, the space enclosed by their arms forming a geometrically sound truncated triangle. Here it represents a kind of “holy trinity” of the two rulers and the unifying principle, as symbolised by the sun god, the Aten. This is no mere invention of Glass or the German production team, but is a pervasive image in the artwork of the time, and one that was presumably sanctioned by Akhnaten himself. The significance of the triangle to the ancient Egyptians is common knowledge, particularly in those areas of Egyptian theology connected with sun worship. In the Atenist religion it played a central role, not

only as personified in the “divine royal family” (see Figure 1), but also in its familiar, more abstract pyramidal guises¹. The reign of Akhnaten and Nefertiti was a renaissance of sorts not only for the sun cult, but also for the triangular and pyramidal imagery associated with it; it is fitting, then, that this facet of Egyptian life should be represented also in the opera.

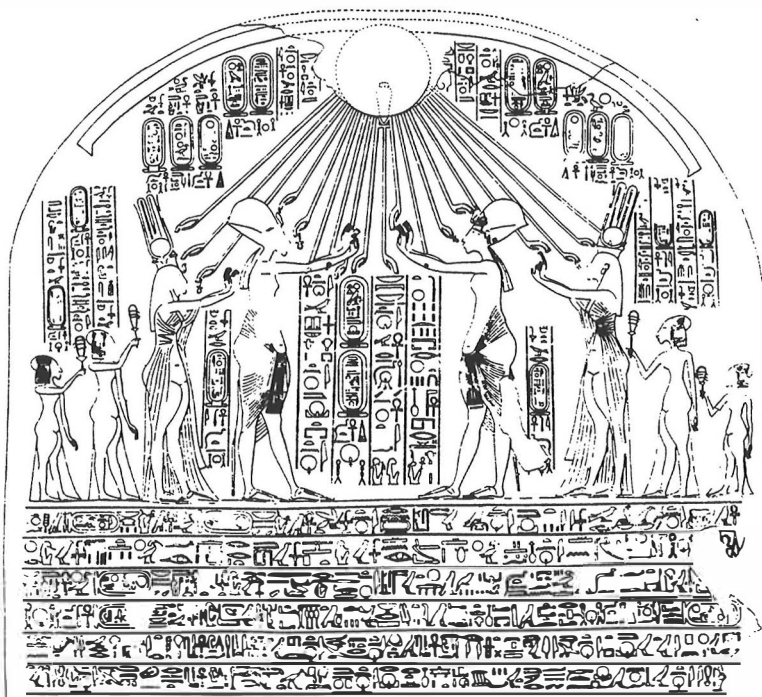


FIGURE 1 Akhnaten, Nefertiti, and their two eldest daughters in a mirror-image relief carved on one of the Stelae at Akhetaten (Aldred 1988, 41).

Another pervasive triadic motif in the opera is the Oedipal triangle of child, mother, and father, as found in both the myth itself and in Freud's psychoanalytical theories that are derived from it. This is a particularly salient subtext of this work, and one that is not fully resolved until the final scene. A less likely allusion might be to Sophocles' trilogy of Oedipus plays, King Oedipus, Oedipus at Colonus, and Antigone; all of which were used by Velikovsky in constructing his theory of a correlation between the myth and the life of Akhnaten, and all of which are arguably alluded to in the opera.

The ubiquity of triadic thematics in Glass's works in general might be explained in part by the composer's interest in Buddhism. The Buddhist "holy trinity" or *trikaya* -- the three-fold body of the Buddha, comprising the *dharmakaya* (the body of *dharma*), the *sambhogakaya* (the body of bliss) and *nirmanakaya* (the body of transformation) -- is one of the most central precepts

1

See Baikie 1926, 335.

across all the various schools of Mahayana teaching¹. As with most Buddhist ideas these are not considered aspects of a totally abstract deity, but rather are planes of experience realised directly by the practitioner in meditation. A further, quite conspicuous triadic coincidence is the use of the triangle in Tibetan Buddhist iconography to symbolise the element fire (see Figure 2). I will argue that all five of the elements known to Tibetan Buddhism – earth, water, fire, air, and ether – are found in the opera, although fire, being the dominant element, due to the concern with solar thematics, is by far the most pervasive of these.



FIGURE 2 The five elements of Tibetan Buddhism as found in *Chorten* (Tibetan) iconography - from bottom to top, earth, water, fire, air, and ether (Govinda 1960, 186).

Triadic imagery is pervasive also in Tantric Hindu and Buddhist yogic practices: in the map of consciousness, or *mandala* (Sanskrit: circle), known as the *Sri-Yantra*, for example, the male and female creative principles are represented in their phallic and yonic symbolic forms by upward and downward pointing triangles respectively (see Figure 3).

A historical comparison in which triadic imagery is an equally ubiquitous musico-dramatic feature, and one of which Glass must have been aware, is Mozart's Masonic allegory, *Die Zauberflöte*. There appears to be a number of deliberate allusions to Mozart's opera in *Akhnaten*. The three solemn B flat chords heard in the middle section of the Overture of Mozart's opera and later, in the Temple scene at the opening of the second act, are paralleled in *Akhnaten* by a number of similarly resolute three-fold chord attacks. B flat is, in addition, an important key in Glass's opera, as it is the key in which the theme of the opera's protagonist, which I will discuss shortly, is generally heard.

¹ See Suzuki 1907, 242-76; Humphreys 1951, 154; and Govinda 1960, 213- 217. In Theravada Buddhism the trinity of "the self" is comprised of spirit, body, and mind (see Humphreys 1951, 87-89). Glass himself has referred to this trichotomy when discussing his morning "exercise regime" in a recent interview (Glass quoted in Black 1993, 123).

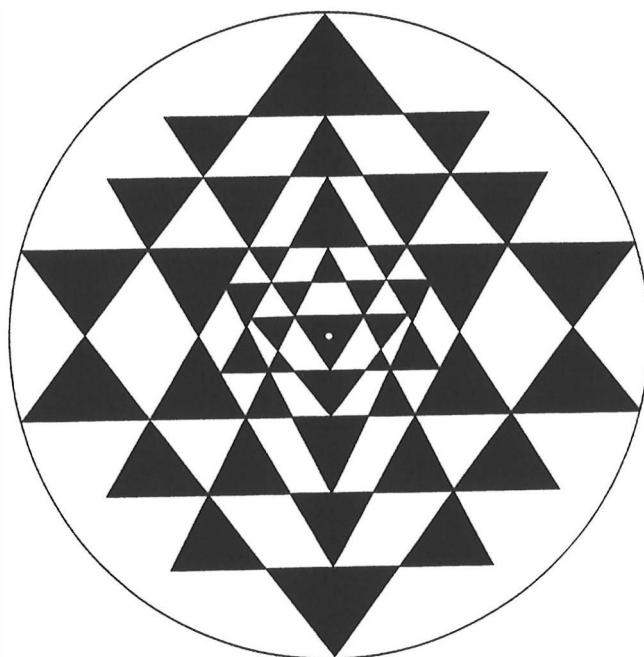


FIGURE 3 The Sri-Yantra (mandala) depicting the fully created cosmos (*sristi*) arising from the union of male and female principles, in which the world of multiplicity is held together by the primordial *bindu* at the centre (Khanna 1979, 73).

EXAMPLE 1



Around this time, musical allusions were starting to become more commonplace in Glass's music, so the allusion to Mozart's opera should come as no surprise. In *Floe* from the *Glassworks* (1982) recording, for example, there is a conspicuous allusion to the final movement of Sibelius's fifth symphony which, to the composer's dismay, hardly anyone seems to have picked up on (see Example 1).

... I called it *Floe* because to me it was an obvious quote from Sibelius. To my great disappointment I found that no-one knew the symphony.(...) Even in my own ensemble, Martin Goldray, he has a Ph.D. in music, and he knows a lot about music, and it turns out that he didn't know that symphony. And then I thought I would call it *Floe*. Now I have to tell you, I've never been to Finland and I had no idea what you would see there. But I thought, if Sibelius looks out (laughs), what does he see? Maybe he sees an ice floe.(...) I tried to imagine what a vision would be that Sibelius ... (laughs) Now that's a silly

idea. But the idea of calling it *Floe* was to associate it with Finland actually. That was the idea. And no-one has figured out what the damn thing meant! So I guess it didn't make a very good title. I should have called it *Sibelius*, and then everyone would have known. (Glass, interview with Juhani Nuorvala, Stockholm, September 14, 1986.)

The overall form of the Prelude is perhaps best characterised as a two-section, or strophic, variation. It comprises five cycles, each made up of an A section, that alternates between A minor and F-major seventh, and a B section, that alternates between A minor and B-flat major/minor. The overall form can thus be schematised as follows: AB AB¹ AB² AB³ AB⁴. The A sections each comprise three subsections, divided further into two identical halves, each of which consists of a single chord change -- thus, there are a total of twelve alternations of the A minor to F-major seventh chord change in each A section. The B sections are also divided into three subsections containing one A minor to B-flat major/minor chord change each, with the exception of the third, which resolves in the final beat of the last bar to an unequivocal B-flat major.

In addition to these two sections, there are a number of transitional passages, which serve to accommodate smoother transitions from one cycle to the next. One noteworthy feature of the transitions situated between the second, the third, and the fourth cycles is what is perhaps best described as a triadic countdown to the beginning of the opera proper. The first of these is marked by a single chord attack on A minor, the second by a double attack, and the third by an emphatic triple attack, thus stating the triadic motif in unmistakable terms already in the opening moments of the opera.

The first music heard is a group of evenly rising A minor arpeggios played by the violas. These are joined after two bars by a stern pedal on the tonic, played by synthesiser and basses in octaves (A₁ and A, respectively), and on the fifth (e), by the cellos. The austerity of these opening bars establishes the mood of the opera from the word go: one anticipates already that this will be a very different opera to the earlier trilogy operas, although the key of A minor -- the relative minor of the key of C major, in which *Einstein on the Beach* begins and *Satyagraha* ends -- suggests that it is related to these operas in some way. A low drone on the tonic remains throughout the entire first cycle, moving only to an even lower B flat in its second section. Against this backdrop, the cellos assert a quarter-note rhythmic anchor of 132 beats per minute, over which violas shoot incessantly upwards. The constant cello pulse proves to be an essential point of reference, as the initially established binary metre is soon undermined by the subtraction of a single note from the four-note viola figuration. The result of this simple subtractive process is a melodically implied polyrhythm consisting of two groups of three eighth-notes in the violas, against the steady pulse of three quarter-notes per bar in the cellos. This two-against-three polyrhythm provides the rhythmic fabric for the entire first cycle, which is orchestrated solely for the brooding lower strings and a fairly innocuous synthesiser sound, whose purpose here appears to be to reinforce the strings.

Further interest is added by an implied melodic line discernible from the top notes of the viola arpeggiation. The syncopation that arises from these melodically accented notes falling on the third eighth-note of the group adds

further interest to the overall rhythmic texture. A gradual accretion of melodic movement acts as a point of focus for the listener throughout the entire A section. In the first of these sections, the pattern unfolds as follows:

I(A)

- | | A min. | F maj. 7 |
|-------|--|----------|
| (i) | a a - a a - a a - a a - ff - ff - g g - ff -
a a - a a - a a - a a - ff - ff - g g - ff - | |
| (ii) | a a - a a - b b - a a - ff - ff - g g - ff -
a a - a a - b b - a a - ff - ff - g g - ff - | |
| (iii) | a b - a b - a b - a b - f g - f g - g g - ff -
a b - a b - a b - a b - f g - f g - g g - ff - | |

In the subsequent A sections there are a number of subtle but significant changes in the pattern. In the second and third subsections of the second cycle, for example, the melody rises a major third, from f^1 to a^1 , and then drops diatonically back to f^1 , hanging tantalisingly on the ninth of the chord (g^1) through the first beat of the final bar before eventually coming to rest on the root:

- | | A min. | F maj. 7 |
|-------|--|----------|
| (ii) | a a - a a - b b - a a - ff - ff - a g - g f -
a a - a a - b b - a a - ff - ff - a g - g f - | |
| (iii) | a b - a b - a b - a b - f g - f g - a g - g f -
a b - a b - a b - a b - f g - f g - a g - g f - | |

In the third cycle, the most elaborate form of the pattern is realised with the addition of a single note to the second subsection; an appoggiatura on g^1 that adumbrates the final stage of the descent from a^1 to f^1 two bars later:

- | | A min. | F maj. 7 |
|------|--|----------|
| (ii) | a a - a a - b b - a a - ff - g f - a g - g f -
a a - a a - b b - a a - ff - g f - a g - g f - | |

In the fourth and fifth cycles the pattern is again simplified in accordance with the overall dynamic arch of the piece.

The chord changes in this section are effortless, requiring the addition of only one note, the root of the new chord – in this case doubled (at F_1 and f) – to transform a root position tonic triad into a sixth-degree six-five chord (remembering, of course, that the pedal on A is still in effect). In the B section, however, the change is more marked, involving parallel movement in two of the voices (a to b -flat, and c^1 to d^1) and a drop to the fifth of the new chord in the bass, resulting in a menacing flatted second-degree six-four chord.

The flatted second-degree major chord has a number of functions in conventional harmonic practice, the most common of which is to proceed the

dominant or the tonic six-four: this would be termed a Neapolitan Second. Closer to Glass's usage, however, are harmonic practices which are still marked as "other" in terms of the conventions of Western classical music. In flamenco music, for example, and its many exotically-tinged evocations in canonical works, parallel movement between the root and flatted or "phrygian" second is commonplace: the classical "taboo" on parallel voice-leading, particularly in fifths, does not, needless to say, apply in such circumstances.

The use of this chord in Glass's compositional style seems to serve a number of purposes. Firstly, the shift from the minor tonic to a major triad a minor second higher can have an unnerving "otherworldly" feel, partly because it is still encoded in terms of otherness to the Western ear, and partly because the minor tonic, being no more inherently stable than the major second-degree, is partially undermined as the unequivocal tonal centre by this movement. This would certainly not be the case with, for example, the customary second-degree diminished chord, whose sole purpose in conventional harmonic practice is to create tension engendering expectations of a move to another more stable chord.

Secondly, and this again involves ambiguity, the more major chords there are available to the composer -- and there are a number of these in the slightly altered aeolian mode Glass seems to favour (i - b II - III - iv - v - VI - VII [or #VII]) -- the easier it is to modulate, and perhaps more importantly, the easier it is to construct harmonically ambiguous chord progression. As such progressions are a cornerstone compositional technique of this work, it is not surprising that this chord should make an appearance already in the Prelude: it provides, as it were, a foretaste of what is to come. It provides also a convenient gateway to the harmonically distant tonality of E flat (or its enharmonic equivalent D sharp), in which it is the dominant. Being a tritone away from the home key of A minor, this key (and its close harmonic neighbour, A flat, which is arrived at with even greater ease, being the altered seventh-degree of A minor) has a special pungency which is exploited to excellent effect later in the opera.

If the shift to B flat has already lent the music an eerie feel, this is underlined further when, in the third bar of this chord, the major third becomes a minor third in its highest voice (the implied melody of the viola) in contrast to the cellos' unflinching major modality (see Example 2). The effect of hearing the two modalities simultaneously is quite unsettling in the tonal context in which it is heard. Glass describes this music, as repeated in its final appearance in the Epilogue, as follows:

... there is a curious play between B^b Major and minor, this major/minor coincidence creating an uneasy harmonic ambiguity, which also occurs in its earlier appearances (in the Prelude, City/Dance, and destruction of the Temple). It is easy to see this as a musical metaphor for that part of Akhnaten's character that was so unusual and unsettling to the people of his time. (Glass 1987, 173.)

It is not necessary to guess what this deeply troubling characteristic of Akhnaten's is, as Glass makes it patently obvious on a number of occasions in his descriptions of the pharaoh (Glass 1987, 155-156; 164-165). That sexual

ambiguity should be portrayed in music using the major/minor dyad should come as no surprise: Glass is merely exploiting a common musico-cultural convention whose roots stretch way back into the history and theory of Western music¹ (a dyad Glass's equivocal harmonic language ordinarily serves to undermine). It is probably necessary neither to see Akhnaten's hermaphroditic body, nor to have knowledge of the precepts of his philosophy in order to recognise that what one is hearing is a musical representation of ambivalent sexuality. When Akhnaten appears for the first time prior to his coronation, and when his ethereal countertenor voice is heard for the first time (in the final scene of Act I) it is merely confirming what has already been established in the music. Glass is merely staggering the accumulative evidence for dramatic effect.

EXAMPLE 2

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The first system is labeled 'a: i' and features three staves: violas synth., cellos, and bass synth. The violas part consists of ascending six-note arpeggios. The cellos and basses parts provide a steady accompaniment of quarter notes. The second system shows a transition with harmonic changes indicated by Roman numerals: $\flat II \frac{6}{4}$, $\flat ii \frac{6}{4}$, and $\flat II \frac{6}{4}$. The rhythmic pattern in the second system is more complex, involving eighth notes and triplets.

At the end of the first cycle, there is a brief transition in which the rhythmic configuration of the next is established (rehearsal mark 7). This is achieved by first reducing the individual elements back to the binary rhythm and four-note rising arpeggios of the opening bars, and then introducing the new musical elements one at a time. Thus, each of the ascending arpeggios of the first cycle is complemented by a descending arpeggio starting on the second beat, whose initial note is also the highest of the six-note group. To these waves of rising and falling arpeggios is once again added the steadfast cello anchor of quarter notes, playing once more a fifth above the tonic pedal, but now in 4/4 time. For eight bars, the effect is of simple triplets against a regular accompanying beat. When the cello pulse is divided into eighth notes, however, an even denser polyrhythmic fabric than that of the opening cycle results, between this and the three eighth notes per beat of the viola.

¹

See McClary 1991, 11-12; and Wheelock 1993.

The strings are joined by the wind instruments at the beginning of the second cycle (rehearsal mark 8). Clarinets double the cello triplets, lending them a more legato, undulating feel. A visual counterpart to this could be the gentle ripples of the Nile dancing under the rays of sun. This analogy is by no means as contrived as it may at first appear. There are, as I will show, explicit references to the river in both of the later reprises of the Prelude music: in the first text read by the scribe, the founding of the royal city, Akhetaten, on the eastern bank of the Nile is announced, while the second refers to barques built by the new King, Tutankhamen, which "make the river shine." The Nile was unquestionably the single most essential factor in bringing about and maintaining Egyptian culture for more than three millennia. The absence of all traces of the river from the score would probably, therefore, be more surprising than its presence. This position is confirmed if one examines the function of this music in the overall structure of the opera. The music, returning, as it does, under very different circumstances, serves to underline the continuity of Egyptian life. What could be a more appropriate symbol of this continuity, of this sameness inherent in change, than the great river itself? Moreover, the river played an essential role in ancient Egyptian funereal proceedings. It was customary, namely, to transport the body of the dead king from the east to the west bank of the Nile in a ceremonial barque prior to burial. It is noteworthy, then, that this music precedes both the burial of Akhnaten's father, and the opera's protagonist's resurrection, in the final scene.

Further evidence that the river is the intended signified is provided by a similar passage in the Godfrey Reggio film *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982), presumably composed by Glass immediately prior to his work on *Akhnaten*. The first appearance of similar arpeggios in the film coincides with the first extended shots of a river. Moreover, this particular music bonds the first half of the film, in which the unspoiled desert landscapes of Nevada are depicted, to the second, which deals with the damage inflicted upon nature by technology. In both *Koyaanisqatsi* and *Akhnaten*, then, water functions as a vehicle of transformation.

EXAMPLE 3

♩ = 132

synth.
fl.
viola
oboe

bassoon
cello
synth.

trumpet
horn

bassoon
trombone
tuba
bass

In *Koyaanisqatsi* the music links the two halves of the film by following the course of the river from its source in the mountains, across the cultivated plains of central America, and finally into the large cities on the coast. The musical textures of the third cycle of the Prelude (see Example 3) and the river music from the Reggio film (see Example 4) are a particularly close match; they are even in the same key.

EXAMPLE 4

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system is for 'org. & ww' (organ and woodwinds) and 'strgs.' (strings). It features a tempo marking of a quarter note equal to 112. The music consists of a complex, rhythmic melody in the upper voice, primarily composed of eighth and sixteenth notes, and a supporting bass line with sustained chords in the lower voice. The second system is a piano arrangement of the same music, showing the same melodic and harmonic structure in a grand staff format.

The lower winds of the second cycle are, in contrast, strongly evocative of the contemporary world. The bassoons play a string of eighth-notes in unison with the cellos, while a rasping bass clarinet reinforces the double basses' and synthesiser's backbeat, producing a compound timbre akin to that of a slightly overdriven bass guitar. This emphasis on the second and fourth beats of the bar, coinciding, as it does, with the apexes of the arpeggios in the top voice, has the secondary effect of highlighting the clarinets' and violas' increasingly elaborate implied melodic pattern. The cycle concludes with a single sustained chord.

The third cycle (rehearsal mark 14) invokes all of the might and glory, not to mention the stern militaristic authoritarianism, of imperial Egypt. The entire brass section -- horns, trumpets, trombones and tuba -- join the string and wind sections in a resounding *forte* declamation of the power and influence of the pharaohs. The main rhythmic motif (♩ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪), stated initially by the horns over the tonic, is transferred to the trumpets over the submediant. Conversely, the trumpets begin playing a motif of driving straight

eighth-notes which is then passed on to the horns for the submediant. This swapping of parts is characteristic of the score, and is one of the many insights that distinguish it from Glass's early writing for the orchestra. The second trombone and tuba reinforce the second and fourth beat syncopations of the bass instruments. The note they play is E, however, in contrast to the earlier pedal on A: the resulting second inversion voicing lends the music a tension not present in the two earlier cycles. This tension is heightened further with a gradual increase in bass movement in each subsection, this line moving in contrary motion to the melodic movement of the top voice.

III(A) BASS LINE

- | | A min. | F maj. 7 |
|-------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| (i) | e e-ee-ee-ee-ff-ff-ee-ff | e e-ee-ee-ee-ff-ff-ee-ff |
| (ii) | e e-ee-cc-ee-ff--ef-ce-ef | e e-ee-cc-ee-ff--ef-ce-ef |
| (iii) | e c-ec-ec-ec-fe--fe-ce-ef | e c-ec-ec-ec-fe--fe-ce-ef |

The change of gear that takes place in this cycle is further indicated by a marked thickening of texture in the orchestration. The undulating arpeggios of the highest voice are nudged up an octave and transferred to instruments more suited to the higher register (flutes, oboes, synthesiser, and violas), while mirror-image arpeggios starting on the fifth (played by bass clarinet, second bassoon, left hand of synthesiser) bustle underneath.

The third cycle introduces one of the central motifs of the opera, anticipated already in the ambiguous major/minor tonality of the two earlier B sections. Consonant with the ambivalent tonality it underpins, this motif (rehearsal marks 17-19: see Example 5) encapsulates certain of the characteristics of the opera's protagonist, the pharaoh Akhnaten, as well as the events that are to befall him. Glass describes the motif as follows:

Its most distinctive feature is the bass line, which ascends and then abruptly drops an octave. This first appears in the Prelude and gives it an ominous quality. Again we hear it in the City/Dance, this time accompanied in unison by the flutes. Finally, it forms the concluding phrases of Act III, scene 2 (Attack and Fall), in which Akhnaten's temple, and finally the pharaoh himself, are destroyed. For me, this music is synonymous with the downfall of Akhnaten. (Glass 1987, 173.)

The motif begins on F, the fifth of the B flat chord, jumps to its root and then onto its minor third, d flat, dislodging at the same time the modality of the chord onto its minor counterpart¹. Akhnaten, to borrow a line from the well

¹ It is perhaps worth mentioning the similarity between Akhnaten's motif and the motif that marks the fall of Oedipus in Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*. Both are derived from second inversion minor triads, the former consisting of a rising B-flat minor arpeggio

known Doors song, in “break[ing] through to the [O]ther side,” has gone beyond the bounds ordinarily granted mortal men – and I am not referring to men in the generic sense of the word, as the other side he has reached is without question encoded in feminine terms. It is inevitable that he be made to pay for his insurrection, and, sure enough, what follows, a drop of nearly an octave (to E, the fifth of A minor) forebodes the pharaoh’s destiny.

EXAMPLE 5

This theme emerges from the depths of the orchestra; tuba, trombones, and bass, shaking the very foundations of the orderly musical scenario Glass has pieced together brick by brick in the opening two cycles. Once heard, however, it is repeated only in weakened form, merely an echo of a stern prophesy of what will later come to pass. In the fourth cycle, it is played only by the tuba and synthesiser and is considerably less potent as a result; in the fifth and final cycle, it accompanies the words of the scribe, and is heard on bass clarinet and bassoon as a murky undercurrent, now almost erased from memory, for the time being at least. The third cycle ends on an emphatic double chord attack, followed by a return in all voices to the rising arpeggios of the opening bars.

The fourth cycle (rehearsal mark 21) is the most pensive. The bass instruments are now silent, replaced by a gently babbling bassoon with cello, playing a slightly denser (three arpeggio waves per bar instead of two) version of the rising and falling clarinet triplets of cycle two, this time using the fifth as the tonal base. In stark contrast are the algorithmic rising flute and clarinet arpeggios, which are closely related to the viola part of the first cycle, although now heard an octave higher. These arpeggios are heard at a number of junctures in the opera when the protagonist is faced either with death, or with extreme solitude. Here they immediately follow what I will term Akhnaten’s bisexual “life-span” motif; the motif that represents for the composer, and perhaps for the listener, his final destiny. One might say, therefore, that the rising arpeggios represent what ever is left of the pharaoh after his death. The

and the latter, a falling B minor arpeggio. Transposed a half-step up (F-sharp - B - D), Akhnaten’s motif can be recognised as partial retrograde of Stravinsky’s descending F-sharp - D - B - F-sharp motif. Whether this is an intentional allusion or not is for the reader to decide. But it seems something of a coincidence that exactly the same intervallic relationships are employed to represent the same dramatic event in two operas dealing in one way or another with the plight of Oedipus. Moreover, the text accompanying this motif in Stravinsky’s opera, “*lux facta est*” (light has come), which paradoxically coincides with Oedipus’ plucking out of his eyes (his metaphorical castration), would appear, Oedipus aside, to tie the subject matter of this theme quite directly in with the thematics of Glass’s opera.

combination of the two broken chord patterns gives rise to probably the most intricate polyrhythmic texture of the Prelude: four groups of three eighth-notes in the Treble Clef set against six groups of three in the Bass (see Example 6). This is essentially a binary-ternary combination, as were the earlier polyrhythmic patterns, but it is slightly more elaborate than these. Of the brass instruments, only horns and trombones remain, both subdued in comparison with the previous cycle, horns evoking the syncopation established earlier by the bass instruments; trombones, in disjunction with these, playing from the "strong" second beat of the bar through to its end.

EXAMPLE 6

The musical notation for Example 6 consists of two staves. The top staff is for flute, clarinet, and synth. and is marked '(non-triplet)'. The bottom staff is for bassoon, cellos, and synth. and features six groups of eighth notes, each marked with a '3' to indicate a triplet. The music is in 4/4 time and consists of eighth notes.

For the three emphatic A minor chords that close the cycle (rehearsal mark 26), however, the trumpets and tuba return, as do the oboes and bass clarinet, lost after the previous cycle's double cadence. As when the young initiate Tamino knocks three times to gain entry to the freemasons' temple in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, so the purpose of Glass's three tumultuous chords is to shake the hinges of his own doors: the "double doors" that separate the living from the dead. Buddhist teacher Sogyal Rinpoche describes the final stage of the dying process -- after the dissolution of four of the five elements; earth, water, fire, and air -- as follows:

Our inbreaths continue to be more shallow, and our outbreaths longer. At this point blood gathers and enters the "channel of life" in the center of the heart. Three drops of blood collect, one after the other, causing three long, final outbreaths. Then, suddenly, our breathing ceases. (Rinpoche 1992, 253.)

We are returned abruptly to the music of the opening cycle with some slight, but important, discrepancies: an occasional interpolation from the trombones, and Akhnaten's motif is heard as if from afar. The atmosphere is of subdued expectation. A solemn voice enunciates the first words of the opera:

Open are the double doors of the horizon
Unlocked are its bolts

Clouds darken the sky
The stars rain down
The constellations stagger
The bones of the hell hounds tremble
The porters are silent
When they see this king
Dawning as a soul

Open are the double doors of the horizon
 Unlocked are its bolts

Men fall
 Their name is not
 Seize thou this king by his arm
 Take this king to the sky
 That he not die on earth
 Among men

Open are the double doors of the horizon
 Unlocked are its bolts

The voice is that of the scribe, Amenhotep, son of Hapu, and the text is from the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*. It is recited in funerary proceedings, its purpose being to ensure the passage of the dead pharaoh to the heavenly land of Ra. It is one of the many religious scriptures discarded during the reign of Akhnaten and represents, therefore, the old order into which he is born. The last reading of the refrain coincides, however, precisely with the last rendering of Akhnaten's theme: thus, the double doors which open only to allow the passage of the living to the land of the dead are heard over the major/minor clash that represents the pharaoh; in particular, his ambiguous sexuality – the trajectory of his motif, passing from masculine to feminine, comes to represent also the transition from the land of the living to the land of the dead. The message is clear: in encountering the "other" within, the bi- or trans-sexual eternal is never far away. The simile of a dual doorway, or gateway, (and it is highly significant that there are two doors or gates) between relative and absolute planes of consciousness, between the living and the dead, is one known both in the East and the West. The Buddha's use of this simile is almost identical to the passage from the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, borrowed by Glass and his collaborators: "Opened are the gates of immortality, ye that have ears to hear, release thy faith ... let your faith, your inner trust and confidence stream forth, remove your inner obstacles and open yourself to the truth" (cited in Govinda 1960, 30). William Blake expressed similar sentiments in his *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (c. 1790): "If the doors of perception were cleansed, Everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern." (Blake 1972, 154.)

But what of our guide? What are his special qualifications as mediator between these two planes; between past and the present; between the world of King Amenhotep III and the very different world of his son, Akhnaten; and between those parallel universes of experience demarcated by the difference between the sexes? Among the servants of Akhnaten's father were, in Breasted's words,

... men of the highest gifts, and one of them, who bore the same name as the king, gained such a wide reputation for wisdom that his sayings circulated in Greek some twelve hundred years later among the "Proverbs of the Seven Wise Men"; and in Ptolemaic times he was finally worshipped as a god, and took his place among the innumerable deities of Egypt as "Amenhotep, son of Hapu. (Breasted 1909, 341.)

Identifying a counterpart to the scribe in the Oedipus myth is no difficult task, given that he was commonly attributed with the gift of foresight, was in Ptolemaic times regarded as the patron of the blind, and is known to have lived far beyond the ordinary life-span of ancient Egyptians (Velikovsky 1960, 114-115). Moreover, Amenhotep appears to have one more essential characteristic of his counterpart in the Oedipus story:

A portrait of Hapu, has come down to us as a young person with long hair arranged not unlike the womenfolk of his time. If the seer was the prototype of Tiresias, this remarkable portrait, which made archaeologists wonder, may explain a curious detail in the legend of Tiresias. (Velikovsky 1960, 114.)

The curious detail to which Velikovsky refers is that of the miraculous transformation of Tiresias into a women after striking two copulating snakes with his cane. The story, recounted also in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, is one of the most pervasive of the antique world. After seven years as a women, Tiresias encountered the serpents again, struck them once more and was this time transformed back into his original male form. He then found himself involved in a dispute between the gods Zeus and Hera (in the Roman adaptation, Jupiter and Juno). The cause of the dispute was Zeus's claim that women's pleasure in intercourse is considerably greater than that of men. Hera disagreed, so Tiresias, who had had experience both as a man and a woman, was called upon to settle the issue. To Hera's chagrin, Tiresias testified that the pleasure women derive from the act of love is as much as ten times that enjoyed by men. Disgruntled at losing her wager, the goddess struck Tiresias blind, but, as a compensation for his blindness, he was granted a number of special skills by Zeus. These skills included the ability to know the future and exceptional longevity.¹

If the mythological Tiresias and Amenhotep are truly one and the same, then this character is certainly singularly qualified to narrate the events of Akhnaten's reign. Having experienced the world as both man and woman, and having himself paid a harsh price -- the loss of his eyesight -- for flaunting the distinction between the sexes, he alone among mortals possesses the perspective (or insight) required to mediate between Akhnaten and his opponents. And, perhaps more importantly, he alone has the longevity necessary to mediate between the ancient Egyptian past and the contemporary world. In the opera he transcends time, appearing both as the scribe of the Amarna period and as a contemporary tour guide, he mediates between the living and the dead, in the funereal passage quoted above, and he is intimately equated with the affairs of the Egyptian royals, as indeed was the historical Amenhotep.

As is the case with Oedipus, the presence of Tiresias in the opera is by no means explicit: knowledge of the connection between Tiresias and Amenhotep as postulated by Velikovsky, is, nevertheless, an important key to understanding the nature of this character and his extraordinary abilities.

¹

This version of the story of Tiresias' transformation is taken from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (trans. 1955, 82-83), from Robert Graves's summary of various versions of it in his *The Greek Myths: 2* (1955, 11) and from Velikovsky's (1960, 114) account.

There can be no visible clue to his extraordinary transformation, except perhaps for his blindness, or, as in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, he could exhibit physical traces of his seven years as a woman -- Eliot's famous "wrinkled female dug" ¹. Having two physically deformed, sexually ambiguous males in one opera may, however, cause some confusion, as well as being an unnecessary complication to a story already steeped in socio-political, religious and sexual intrigue. In the debut performance in Stuttgart, directed by Achim Freyer, the problem was solved in an unabashedly direct fashion, by simply casting Amenhotep as a woman. Glass himself seems somewhat taken aback by this casting, although it is noteworthy that he does not disapprove:

There were some ... things I did not anticipate, though not all of them were off the mark, only a little unsuspected. The narrator was played by a large, deep-voiced woman who was also an excellent actress. Actually, Peter ² and I had discussed that a year before, and I had agreed that it would be workable, though the Egyptian scribes were always male. (Glass 1987, 163.)

There are, I believe, enough allusions to the myth of Oedipus in the opera to leave little doubt that this character doubles as the famous seer Tiresias. That he is not explicitly named as such is of little import. Thus, when Amenhotep, at the beginning of the opera, reads what sounds suspiciously like a damning prophesy ("Clouds darken the sky, The stars rain down, The constellations stagger, The bones of the hell hounds tremble") over the ominous "life-span" motif of Akhnaten, with its abrupt octave descent, the prophesy of Tiresias regarding the similar fate of Oedipus would appear to be the intended point of reference.

Spoken narration has played an important role in twentieth-century music theatre, the most conspicuous precursor of Glass's approach being that of Stravinsky, in his *A Soldiers Tale* (1918), and *Oedipus Rex* (1927). Glass's use of spoken narration in *Akhnaten* is almost certainly influenced by these works, particularly *Oedipus Rex*, with its combination of arcane Latin song-texts and

¹ The role of Tiresias in *The Waste Land* is in some ways similar to that of the scribe in *Akhnaten*; so much so as to make one wonder whether Eliot's character may not have influenced the role. Literary critic Stephen Coote describes the role of Tiresias in *The Waste Land* as follows: "Tiresias is presented in these plays [of Sophocles, Seneca, and Ovid] as a man of great age, and Eliot elaborates this to suggest that Tiresias has existed across all time and space as both the epitome and the observer of mankind's suffering. Because he is also male and female ... he has an intuitive understanding of both genders." (Coote 1985, 59.) The characteristic Modernist abhorrence of both the ambivalent and the sexually ambiguous are, however, more than apparent in Eliot's writing: "Like the unconscious revealed by Freud, he is sexually ambiguous and, in theory, capable of any and all emotional and physical responses. However, far from being, like the unconscious, a well-spring of energies, both acceptable and perverse, Tiresias is an exhausted figure. There is about him a feeling of utter deadness, of an infinite world-weariness." (Coote 1985, 83.) Conversely, Glass's Amenhotep appears to us as a *truly* ambivalent character: he is not only aged but also ageless; he represents not only social decadence and moral depravity but also libidinal vitality and rejuvenation. The difference between the two representations of the sexually ambiguous soothsayer highlights above all else the very different socio-cultural and intellectual climates of the early Modern and postmodern periods.

² Peter Kehr, the dramaturg of the Stuttgart production.

vernacular commentary. (*The Soldiers Tale* is somewhat different case, as there is no sung text in that work.) It diverges, however, from both of the above mentioned operas in certain significant respects.

Carolyn Abbate has observed that "operatic narrators are assumed to be *reliable*, neither lying nor distorting the truth. Put another way: narrating is not seen as an *act within action*" (Abbate 1991, 62). She then goes on to undermine this conception of the narrator, differentiating between "monaural" and "reflexive" modes of narration which, she argues, can even be simultaneously present in a work; when, for example, text and music assume contradictory narrative stances (*ibid.*, 63). The Amenhotep (or Tiresias) who narrates Glass's opera seems to be an even more problematic case: he seems to possess characteristics of both narrative modes and, yet, he is not wholly commensurate with either. Is this the case of the "objective" outside observer -- the omniscient voice of God -- or is it that of the implicated participant-observer? Amenhotep's is clearly not what Abbate would term a "monaural" narrative, as his adventures as a woman call into question the centredness or monolithic nature of his testimony: the nearest we could perhaps come to this category would be that of a "bi-aural" narrative. Does he, on the other hand, draw attention to himself by the unreliability or partisanship of his story, thus differentiating his story from the "meta-story" told by the composer? Is his a "reflexive" narrative? The main problem with this theory is that his (or should I say his/hers?) is not a unified story at all: it is gathered from many different strands and is merely carried by a unified voice (and I mean voice in the narrowest possible sense of the word here).

The answer is probably a combination of the two: his/hers is/are both a "bi-aural" narrative (the voice of god[s]) and reflexive *narratives* -- narratives that are made reflexive by sheer weight of number and by their conspicuous complicity with the actions of the various characters in the opera. Amenhotep assumes many different and, indeed, contradictory stances during the course of the opera; he glides effortlessly from one persona to the next while speaking all the time in the same voice and, ostensibly at least, living inside the same character. He/she is a privileged witness to the intimate secrets of Akhnaten and Nefertiti, an indignant outside observer to the less healthy aspects of the royal family's personal life, an advocate of Aten, an advocate of Amon and the other gods of the pantheistic order, he/she is loyal to Akhnaten, and he/she is complicit in the plot to overthrow Akhnaten. Like the Tiresias of the myth, he/she is not a god but is endowed with certain godly characteristics; like the man Amenhotep, or like the man perhaps any of us would have been, he is divided in his loyalties between the uncompromising and, if current Egyptological opinion is to be believed, unattractive idealist who was his king, and those who opposed the king, whose reality he knew all too well.

The Prelude ends unostentatiously, its cyclical strophic form, as such forms are wont to do, simply ceasing to continue (hence the ubiquitous fade-outs in popular music). The strongest cadential resolution precedes, as I have shown, the entire final cycle. This lack, or disjunction of closure is not unusual in Glass's music and, as we shall see, is a characteristic also of the larger structure of the opera.

5.2 Act 1:1 Funeral of Amenhotep III

5.2.1 The "old" order (I)

The narrator, who remains on stage after the cessation of the Prelude music, continues his invocations unaccompanied:

He flies who flies
This king flies away from you
Ye mortals
He is not of the earth
He is of the sky

He flaps his wings like a zeret bird
He goes to the sky
He goes to the sky
On the wind
On the wind

A funeral procession appears downstage led by two drummers beating out a fervid (160 beats per minute) rhythm derived from the motifs introduced by the brass in the raucous third cycle of the Prelude. The first two bars of the eight-bar pattern are identical to the earlier appearance of the motif, with the first drummer playing a strongly syncopated pattern emphasising the off-beats of the first and third beats of the bar (♩ ♪ ♪ ♩ ♩ ♩), in contrast to a second drummer who plays a steady ground of quarter-notes. The ground continues almost unchanged through the remaining six bars of the pattern, while the first drummer shifts to an apparently haphazard configuration of eighth- and quarter-note cells. Some use of systemic patterning, resembling the quasi-additive/subtractive procedures utilised in the experimental piece *1 + 1*, is, however, present in this configuration. The rhythmic pattern, with the exception of one brief hiatus, persists unabated throughout the entire funeral ceremony.

The drums are joined by cellos doubled with bassoons, whose nervously oscillating ostinato sets the mood for the coming storm. The first two bars of the four-bar patterns vacillate between e and f sharp quarter-notes, dropping to d sharp in the two bars which remain, thus transforming a major second into a minor third (see Example 7). The ostinato continues for only sixteen bars, however, after which there is an abrupt transformation.

EXAMPLE 7



In what is unquestionably the most striking juxtaposition of the opera so far, male chorus (tenors close to the top of their compass [e²]; basses on a resonant

a) and brass enter together in uncompromising fifths. The violence of this music is perhaps best understood in relation to its opposite pole in the opera:

One of the most striking things I became aware of in our studies was the sharp contrast between the sophisticated and refined life of upper-class Egyptians, as shown in tomb paintings, and the militaristic and primitive manner in which Egypt treated its neighbors.(...) [T]his cruel and barbaric side of Egyptian life made me speculate on what a royal Egyptian funeral may have sounded like. Musically speaking I was clearly on my own, since the only hints we have of how Egyptian music sounded comes from pictures of flutes, lyres and so forth found in tombs. To judge from the evidence, Egyptian music was soft, lyrical stuff. About funeral music, no mention is made at all. Thus the music I designed for the funeral of Amenhotep III in the opening scene of the opera does not resemble any funeral music I have ever heard before. The drumming that begins it, the flourishes for brass and wind and the emphatic entrance of the singing, give it a raw, primitive, quasi-military sound. In this music, coming as it does right after the prelude to Act I, my idea was to give an unmistakable and clear image of how, at least in part, "our" Egypt would be portrayed. By vividly portraying that world through the music, I hoped to set off the idealism of Akhnaten even more strongly. The blaring brass and pounding drums introduce the world into which Akhnaten was born. (Glass 1987, 152-153.)

Trumpets and drums certainly seem to have played an important role in ancient Egyptian musical culture, particularly in military and processional music: in point of fact, the presence of these instruments in Western military bands today can largely be attributed to the precedent of ancient Egyptian military culture (Manniche 1991, 74-83). Glass may well be close to the mark in his choice of instruments, although the exact instrumentation used in funeral processions is not known: the more lyrical lyres and harps that appear in much of the iconography of the time would have been totally ineffectual in outdoor processions attended by large number of Egyptian subjects gathered to mourn their departed king. The fact that these instruments carry strong militaristic connotations is a happy coincidence in terms of the musico-dramatic construction of the opera, and one that is fully exploited in the portrayal of the pre- and post-Akhnaten pharaonic world.

In addition to portraying the violence and exploitation of fellow human beings invariably required in establishing and maintaining imperial power (contrary to the *Pax Romana* idea of the benevolent, enlightened and enlightening ruler, which was exploited to its full during the British "Raj"), there is a second, more immediate rationale for the instrumentation of this scene, grounded in the belief system of the world into which Akhnaten was born. The image of ancient Egypt that has been passed down to us is one of a culture infatuated with death; one in which the lion's share of the material and human resources were directed, in addition to imperialistic concerns, towards ensuring the immortality of the dead pharaoh. The evidence that exists to this day attests to the lengths ancient Egyptians went in order to ensure the passage of their kings into the heavenly realm of Ra, from the mummification of their bodies, to the construction of immense and costly edifices, to the recitation of lengthy scriptures intended to invoke the assistance of the deities of the underworld. It is easy to find a corollary of the burial practices of the Ancient

Egyptians in contemporary culture; indeed some have attributed the need to stockpile ancient Egyptian artefacts, particularly mummies, in Western museums to a materialism directly comparable to that of the pharaohs themselves. Jean Baudrillard has observed:

Rameses [II, whose mummy was recently "restored"] means nothing to us: only the mummy is of inestimable worth since it is what guarantees that accumulation means something. Our entire linear and accumulative culture would collapse if we could not stockpile the past in plain view. To this end the pharaohs must be brought out of their tombs and the mummies out of their silence. To this end they must be exhumed and given military honours. (Baudrillard 1983, 19.)

This "death anxiety," as Glass (1987, 154) quite appropriately terms it, be it ancient Egyptian or contemporary, was to form the foundation for his depiction of the "old" Egyptian order and the pantheon of gods worshipped by the Egyptian people. "One aspect of this death thinking especially fascinated me," Glass has observed:

In reading the funeral texts ... I learned that when the pharaoh dies and begins his journey to the heavenly kingdom of Ra, he is urged to employ certain strategies to ensure that the gods will *notice* what is happening. Of course, as son of Ra, he is entitled to a place beside his heavenly father, but what should happen, the texts seem to ask, if for some reason the gods do not notice the pharaoh's passing and are not prepared to assist him in finding his way to them and to welcome him? With that in mind, I strove to make my funeral music capable of drawing attention to itself in every way possible. If any of the gods in the heavenly land of Ra were dozing, I was determined that my music would wake them up. (Glass 1987, 154.)

I have already discussed some parallels pursued by Glass between contemporary and ancient Egyptian musics, of which the above is certainly one of the more speculative, but at the same time, in musico-dramatic terms, one of the most interesting. Equally interesting, however, is what it is that makes the music of this scene sound so unmistakably contemporary. A good deal of the effect can be attributed to its relentless tom-tom beat. While there are a number of precursors of such music in the Western classical tradition -- for instance, in French opera of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries -- the presence of percussive instruments, other than in ornamental or colouristic contexts, remains one of the most reliable litmus tests as to whether one is dealing with, on the one hand, popular, folk and non-Western musics, or, on the other, Western art music. Here the dichotomy is deliberately inverted: what we are hearing is not popular or folk music but the ceremonial music of the Egyptian ruling patriarchy (the pinnacle of ancient Egyptian "high" culture), as the emphatic entry of the male choir, under the leadership of the adviser to pharaohs, Aye, testifies. Glass's use of percussion does not, however, conceal its origins in contemporary popular culture. One could argue, therefore, that in appropriating the language of contemporary popular culture as the voice of a harsh patriarchal regime, Glass is tacitly debasing this language. To do so, however, would be to ignore the fact that the music associated with the old order is some of the most exuberant music of the entire opera; without it the

work as a whole would be decidedly lacklustre. In short, the villains are not intrinsically and thoroughly evil; one might even say that they are *good* at being bad. One senses this ambivalence in Glass's own descriptions of this scene. Compare, for example, the following passage to those cited earlier:

... it was important to make the funeral as odd as it sounds. It's one of the first clues that this is gonna be an unusual work, when the funeral turns out to be a raucous, drum-rattling march. That gives us a clue that the whole order is going to be changed. (Strickland 1988, 72.)

5.2.2 Polyphonic and interpretational bitonality

A more overt marker of contemporary music is to be found in Glass's unconventional use of harmony. I have suggested in the previous chapter that harmonic ambiguity is a cornerstone compositional technique in this work, and it is here that such techniques make their first appearance in the opera. Glass's first acquaintance with polytonality can be traced back to his student days, in particular, to his studies with Darius Milhaud. Indeed, it is primarily to Milhaud that we should look, and not Stravinsky, in seeking precursors of Glass's harmonic practices. The paradigm example of bitonality, Stravinsky's famous "*Petrushka* chord," in which C major and F-sharp major triads are heard simultaneously, is one of jarring dissonance¹. Stravinsky's clashing tonalities, as well as those of other exponents of similar compositional techniques, such as Bartók (in his *Bagatelles* for piano) and Ives (in his *67th Psalm*), can be regarded as largely independent of, and even totally oblivious to one another. In such music, which has earned itself the droll title, "the school of wrong notes," the contradictory element usually outweighs the complementary. This kind of bitonality could be termed *polyphonic bitonality*: it does make an occasional appearance in Glass's music (in *Akhmaten*, there are passages of polyphonic bitonality in the Temple [Act II, scene 1], Attack and Fall [Act III, scene 2], in the fanfare that marks the beginning of the City/Dance [Act II, scene 3], and, most notably, in the Hymn to the Sun [Act II, scene 4]) but it is rarer than the second type I will discuss.

Milhaud's music is marked by his extensive use of polyphonic bi- and polytonality, but he also developed a second kind whose origins can be attributed, in part, to the extended ninth, eleven, and thirteenth chords that were the mainstay of the French impressionist school. The triads that comprise such extended chords are allowed to emerge and submerge from their original tonal context and in so doing assert new tonal bases that call into question the tonality from which they emerge: the new tonality is, in turn, itself undermined by the emergence of a tonal centre from its midst. The result is one of continual "pseudo-modulation": a new key centre is suggested and, depending on its degree of sonority in relation to the original key centre, it is allowed to usurp

¹

Polytonality appears also in Stravinsky's other works of the period: see, for example, Menachem Zur's (1982) study of tonal ambiguity in *Histoire du Soldat*. Zur's (1982, 517). This scholar's complaint that "any new musical language which includes a hint of traditional tonality and structure of triads is interpreted as an extension of old, known patterns" is more poignant still in the case of Glass.

the position of the latter, at the same time rendering its constituent tones either unwelcome dissonances in the new tonal context, or else subsuming them as happy consonant coincidences into the new key centre. The applications and psychological effect of polytonality in Milhaud's music are described by Paul Collaer in the following passage:

Polytonal language does not exclude unitonality. Often, and always according to the expression desired, polytonality is resolved on a single key. In other places, the composer [Milhaud] leaves polytonality aside and holds himself to one key. Polytonality and unitonality are not partitioned off. The same relationships exist between them as between dissonance and consonance. Passing from one to another engenders tension and release. (Collaer 1955, 237.)

According to Collaer, in Milhaud's "bitonality and polytonality one key always dominates -- the one that is most intensely sonorous by its position" (Collaer 1955, 236). This is inarguably the case in Milhaud's music, which flows from key centre to key centre in the ostensibly arbitrary fashion of much of the post-Debussy French music. And it is clear that Milhaud, while developing the compositional procedures required for a less confrontational approach to the problem of simultaneous or parallel tonality, remained, in essence, a devotee of the contrapuntal approach. In his theoretical essay on the subject, *Polytonalité et Atonalité* (1923: republished 1982), for example he concentrates primarily on the technicalities of setting up two usually strongly dissonant tonalities at the same time. The fact that he begins his exposition with Bach's duets attests to the fundamentally contrapuntal assumptions of such an approach (Milhaud 1982, 174-175). The same applies to the approach to polytonality of another teacher of Glass's at Juilliard, Vincent Persichetti, to whom, let it be stated in passing, Glass's mature compositional style -- not just his student works -- owes a great deal. Polytonality for Persichetti (1961, 255-261) is also fundamentally a question of counterpoint.

Milhaud's and Persichetti's approaches to polytonality certainly provide some valuable insights into the mechanics of tonal ambiguity in Glass's music, but it is important to recognise also the differences between the approaches of these two composers and that of Glass, the most important of which is the degree of stability achieved for each tonality in Glass's music, as a result of both repetition and the euphonious diatonic texture of the music. Dominance of one key centre by another is not, therefore, the imperative it is in the music of his precursors -- tonalities are allowed to live together in symbiosis, so to speak. In such circumstances it becomes possible to maintain tonal ambiguity over extended periods of time: however, a prerequisite for such stability within tonal diversity is the emphasis on tones that *remain* sonorous in each of the respective key centres without wandering off on contradictory tonal crusades. I will refer to Glass's conception of tonal ambiguity as *homophonic* or *interpretational polytonality*, in order to distinguish it from more contrapuntally-oriented approaches. I believe this concept to be consonant with the composer's own ideas, as the following passages perhaps illustrate:

When I began writing *Akhmaten* ... I began to think about harmonic language in actually a very different way (...). It had to do with perspective in a certain way, with a point of view.(...) I began to think about polytonality in a very very different way. I began to think about the ambiguity of polytonality. Not the idea that we simply heard two keys at the same time, but in listening to one piece we could hear it in two keys at the same time – that’s not quite the same thing.(...) In other words, if playing the piano, say I play a G major chord in my left hand and an A flat chord in my right hand, I’m playing two chords at the same time. But I began to wonder about writing a piece which, if you could look at it harmonically, is harmonically ambiguous. And depending on how you looked at it, you heard it as being in a different key at different times. And a lot of *Akhmaten* is written in that way. (Glass, interview with Juhani Nuorvala, Stockholm, September 14, 1986.)

While readily acknowledging that the approach he is discussing is not his own invention, having appeared in some guise or other almost as long as tonal, or modal, music has existed, he is justifiably wary of drawing one-to-one correspondences with twentieth-century precursors.

... of course I was [influenced by Milhaud], but I don’t think it sounds very much like him. It’s a very different approach to it. It’s not so much about setting up two keys at the same time, which is what those composers did, but we’re treating a situation where a piece can be viewed as being in more than one key at the same time. In other words, it’s kind of, an example is those kinds of optical illusions where you can look at a stair going one way or you can look at it going the other way but you really can’t look both ways. So basically, you can hear it in one tonality with added tones or you can hear it in another tonality with added tones but the idea is not to hear them going on at the same time. But I did study with Milhaud, I like him very much, I like his music, but that’s a much “notier” way of writing music -- you know, there are a lot more notes in it.(...) You can hear it in *Akhmaten*, for example. (Glass, interview with the author, September 8, 1993.)

Although Glass is more the performing artist type of composer than the theoretician/technician type¹, it is nevertheless possible to construct from comments such as these a fairly specific notion of the kind of ambiguous tonality he has in mind. The most specific example Glass has given of ambiguous tonality in his music is in his analysis of a cadence from *Einstein on the Beach*, which can be found the sleeve notes of the CBS recording of the opera (Glass 1979, 26-27) and in his book (Glass 1987, 60). This may seem on first hearing to be a traditional cadential formula until one takes into account the altered or pivotal chord that occurs in middle, which results in a closing chord a semitone lower than one would normally expect. The composer’s analysis of the cadence is as follows:

¹ When I taxed the composer on this point he responded; “you have to remember that analysis is not my strong point – that’s the kind of thing you fellows probably do better than I do” (Glass, interview with the author, September 8, 1993).

<i>key of F minor</i>					
f	-	Db	-	Bbb	
(I)		(VI)		(bIV)	
				A	-
				(IV)	
				<i>key of E major</i>	
				B	-
				(V)	
					E
					(I)

The disjunction of closure found in this sequence is a characteristic feature of Glass's compositional style and one we shall encounter, in various guises, during the course of the dissertation. Its apparent simplicity belies the psychological disorientation, or distanciation (?), repeated hearings of the sequence, with changes implemented only on the rhythmic and orchestral material, can have on the listener -- especially given the heavy amplification used in performances of the opera and the powerful and relentless rhythmic drive that is so characteristic of the score.

It is true that Glass does not refer directly to bitonality in regard to the *Einstein* cadence, but his comments regarding the idea of an ambiguous bitonality leave little doubt that this is an example of the kind of tonality to which he is referring. Although the essence of this technique is not contrapuntal, but rather a kind of pseudo-modulation, the way we hear music such as this might be closely related to the way we hear contrapuntal lines. When listening to contrapuntal music, we are generally unable to concentrate on more than one line at a time: one line becomes the focus of our attention and the other a kind of background line. Which is not to say that we are totally unaware of its movement: typically attention might flicker between the voice that is prominent, or manifest, at any given moment, and that which is secondary, or latent. An analogy that has frequently been used to describe the cognitive processes involved in listening to contrapuntal music is the idea from *Gestalt* psychology of a visual pattern capable of ground-figure reversal. I would suggest that a similar perceptual process is involved with the kind of interpretational polytonality in which Glass has taken an interest¹. The tonal ground for one's perceptions is governed by the initial key centre until an increasing amount of evidence supporting a second key centre persuades the listener to shift her or his perspective. Provided that the music neither continues modulating nor abandons the initial key centre entirely, modulation has not been effected in any conventional sense of the word, as the initial tonality remains as a latent force, of which the listener is constantly, on some level of consciousness, aware.

1

The same psychological principle can be extended to include also the polyrhythm that is such a pervasive feature of Glass's compositional style. When playing and listening to polyrhythmic music with two parts it is certainly difficult to focus on both parts at the same time. One of them ultimately becomes the more manifest and the other the more latent part. In performance one is required to liaise between the two by means of coincidences in the divergent rhythmic patterns. For the performer, it is only when the fingers have acquired sufficient motoric control and the mind internalised the polyrhythmic pattern and switched to a more intuitive mode of consciousness that the music can be enjoyed without self-conscious concentration.

Glass's example of reversing stairs provides a valid analogy for the cognitive processes involved in listening to music constructed from such principles. In Sandro del Prete's drawing, *Winding staircase up to Belvédère II* (see Figure 4), regardless of whether one begins looking from above or below, at some point one is forced to shift perspective in order to make sense of what one is seeing: a similar shift of perspective is undoubtedly involved in the transition from one tonal centre to another in harmonically ambiguous passages of music. Moreover, as is the case in the optical illusion, the achievement of a more panoramic perspective does not involve shifting from one picture to another: the paradox inheres in the fact that the picture remains the same -- one is simultaneously aware, therefore, of the "congruous" whole and the "incongruous" parts, of the unity and the diversity. In conventional modulation, on the other hand, one could say that one is merely moving from one picture, or perspective, to another.

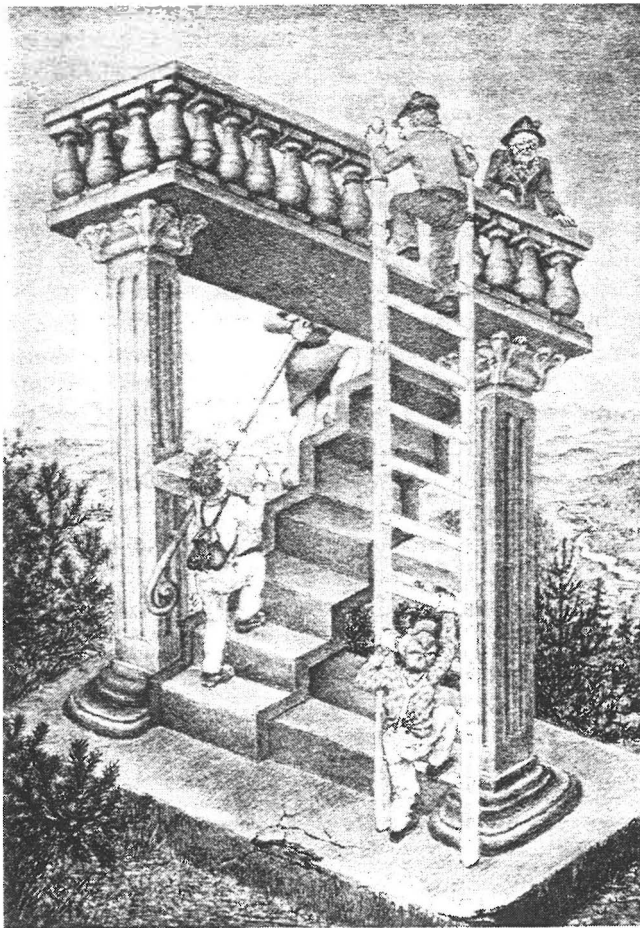


FIGURE 4

Sandro del Prete, *Winding staircase up to Belvédère II*, pencil drawing (Ernst 1986, 90).

It is, perhaps, no coincidence that Glass first made use of this technique while writing the opera *Einstein on the Beach*. A corollary between the "tonal relativity" implicit in this technique and Einstein's *Theory of General Relativity* is not difficult to perceive¹. Just as Einstein's theory forced scientists to relinquish from Newtonian conceptions of space and time as objectively fixed and absolute, so the simultaneous presence of two tonalities, in a symbiotic rather than a competitive relationship, highlights the relativity, and ultimately also the subjectivity, of tonality. That Milhaud conceived of his own concept of bitonality in similar terms is quite apparent from his own statements regarding it:

When I am in the country on a beautiful, calm night like this, I get the feeling that all points on the horizon, of the stars, and in the earth's core send me rays, silent signs. That feeling of the cosmos teeming with life around you, and the feeling that you are in the midst of it, is intoxicating. I have always tried to express these multiple lines of force, these multiple rays that permeate you in the heart of the nocturnal silence. (Milhaud quoted in Collaer 1961, 237.)

Were the above quotation to be inserted in Akhnaten's Hymn to the Sun, it would be extremely difficult to say where one text ends and the other begins. Milhaud's "multiple rays" and Akhnaten's all-pervasive, handed sun rays clearly bear a conspicuous resemblance to one another. The hermeneut would, of course, see in this similarity more than just a coincidence, and might proceed to search for some more abstract structural principle, what Lawrence Kramer (1990a) would call a structural trope, behind both of these manifestations. Collaer (1961, 254) in point of fact identifies exactly such a precept when he writes of "unity in diversity" in Milhaud's music -- although "relativity" might have been an equally appropriate choice. That the somewhat abstract idea of "relativity" can be extended to include, and arguably has its origins in, cultural relativity -- and it is tempting here to draw attention to the common Jewish background of both Milhaud and Glass (and, of course, Einstein), which must, from a very early age, have made each composer more aware of cultural relativity than most -- offers a firm foothold for socially grounded or gendered interpretations.

The association of gender, and particularly androgyny or bisexuality, with tonal ambiguity is a fairly conventionalised one. One need only look at the numerous interpretations of Wagner's ambiguous *Tristan* chord that advocate such an association to realise just how pervasive the cultural coding in question is². In a recent article on harmonic ambiguity in the music of Liszt, Zdenek Skoumal (1994) simply replaces the word ambiguity with androgyny whenever it arises. That he neglects to make explicit any cultural corollaries of which he is aware makes the article in question unsatisfactory from the

¹ The best known exponent of the optical illusions referred to by Glass was the Dutch artist M.C. Escher. This artist's lithograph *Relativity* is a particularly pertinent analogy, given the subject matter of *Einstein on the Beach*.

² For two recent androgynous readings of the chord see Kramer (1990a, 164-165) and Nattiez (1993, 292-297).

hermeneutical standpoint; his reticence in this regard does, however, illustrate the common assumptions on which his arguments are founded.

A more convincing exegesis, and one that bears directly on the questions I am addressing here, is Susan McClary's discussion of Laurie Anderson's *O Superman*, in her *Feminine Endings* (1991). Bitonality in this piece consists of a dialogue between A-flat major and C minor triads over a pedal of middle C. A flat, being the initially stated tonality as well as, in conventional terms, the "stronger" major chord, would appear to have a valid claim to tonicity, were it not for the fact that it appears in its first inversion. As the music progresses, the ear tends to favour the more stable C minor triad rather than the inverted major triad that is ordinarily regarded as the stronger of the two. It is noteworthy, though, that while there are fluctuations in the way the music is heard in favour of one or the other of the tonal centres, the ambivalence between the two is allowed to continue unresolved until the cessation of both (McClary 1991, 141-142.). The similarity between the procedures employed by Glass and Anderson music will become apparent shortly: equally interesting, however, are the dramatico-cultural parallels between the two. McClary calls attention to the androgynous persona adopted by Anderson, as well as noting tacit references to sexual ambiguity in her song texts (*ibid.*, 138). Moreover, she quite appropriately summons the androgynous seer Tiresias -- the slightly disguised narrator of *Akhmaten* -- to assist in her closing argument (*ibid.*, 147).

A similar ambiguity has been found by the *Village Voice* critic Gregory Sandow (1982, 95) in the first scene of the final act of *Satyagraha*. The passage in question

... begins with more than a hundred repetitions of a single two-chord harmonic progression, F minor to E major, light brown to dark blue, which might better be called an oscillation because it has no root; either chord could be home base (Sandow 1982, 95).

Sandow's reference to more than a hundred repetitions is, of course, slightly misleading, as the form of the piece is that of a continuously evolving variation in which only the harmony remains unchanged. Each variation is, moreover, "comprised of small melodic arcs" that create

tangible harmonic movement within each chord, from rest to activity and back again, mirrored by bigger movements within the large musical blocks -- the music getting louder and then softer again, the melodic arcs expanding and then contracting back to where they began -- and mirrored again on the largest scale by the shape of the entire first part of the act, which comes to a climax -- massed chorus, pulsating woodwind chords, a clarion solo soprano line -- in the sixth large musical block and then subsides (Sandow 1982, 95).

Interpretational polytonality in *The Funeral of Amenhotep III* emerges effortlessly out of the A minor tonality of the Prelude. The tonality that is initially stated, and therefore also that with the strongest claim to precedence, is a second inversion of A major. The second inversion is one of the most problematic (i.e., ambiguous) of all the triad inversions, because of which it is traditionally attributed with the dominant rather than the tonic harmonic

function. The opening twenty bars consist, as we have seen, of a straightforward alternation of e to f sharp and d sharp to f sharp ostinatos. The sense of E -- the dominant of the Prelude's key, A minor -- as the tonic in these opening bars is supported not only because it is heard first, but also because of our musical conditioning: it is extremely rare both in Western concert music and Afro-American music, firstly, for a bass ostinato formula to begin on any degree of the scale other than the tonic, and secondly, for the initially stated chord to be in any position other than its root. The chord with which it alternates, a first inversion B major (initially with no root) would, perhaps, appear pallid by comparison were it not for the sense of release we are conditioned to hear when the initially stated major second (e to f sharp) transforms itself into a minor third (d sharp to f sharp), the latter being the more consonant interval of the two. Thus, we are presented with something of a contradiction in tonal terms right from the outset.

This confusion is exacerbated upon the entry of the male chorus and brass (rehearsal mark 4), when the initially stated e to f sharp ostinato of the opening transforms itself into a root position A (initially no third) chord, with the addition of a single note. The shift in perception from the dominant to the tonic makes the effect of the sudden vocal entry even more pronounced. The psychological effect of the original ostinato on e is strong enough, however, to remain for a time in the memory of the listener, undermining the integrity of even the uninverted chord. Although heard only intermittently in the initial cycle, the ostinato movement from e to d sharp (over a constant of f sharp) is heard continuously in the second and the third, and final, cycles of the scene, reinforcing the impression of E rather than A as the tonal base for the initial chord. Towards the end of the scene the ostinato takes on an almost overbearing urgency, resembling the effect of a police siren, when it is reinforced by the full power of the brass and a piercing trill-like motif in the higher winds. Concomitant with the second line of the sung text (rehearsal mark 6) a pedal on c sharp is added, this becoming the major third of A major -- thus differentiating it further from the A minor tonality of the Prelude and reinforcing its candidacy for the dominant function -- and the ninth of B major.

In terms of tonal function, what we are hearing is extremely difficult to pigeonhole: the music fluctuates from tonality to tonality in a manner clearly designed to defy categorisation. Assuming that the tonal base for the scene is the dominant, E, of the opera's A minor "home key," the vacillation between the two chords (in jazz/rock chord terminology, E sus. 4 [no fifth] to B9) would be a fairly standard I - V progression. If the initial chord is not E but A major, however, we are looking at a slightly less conventional stepwise movement from the tonic to the altered, or modal, supertonic (I - II). From the vantage point of B, on the other hand, we are back to a conventional IV - I plagal movement. This is assuming, of course, that the root of its partner is E: if it is A, the progression would be $^bVII - I$, one encountered fairly frequently in Glass's music. Thus, in terms of chord movement, too, both alternatives are equally tenable, given that the integrity of both is undermined by means of inversion, and the latter is additionally called into question by means of temporal order and added (flatted seventh and ninth) or missing notes (its root is missing from the entire first "cycle," comprising 20 chord changes).

The evidence would appear to be stacked in favour of the initially stated chord, whether it is termed E sus. 4 (no fifth) or a simple A major second inversion triad; until, that is, something extraordinary happens. As the chorus returns to its initial emphatic invocations, on the strong first and third beats of the bar (rehearsal mark 7), the entire tonal foundation of the music is shaken by the addition of three noxious D sharp (E flat) notes in the bass instruments (basses, bass clarinet, bassoons and trombones), resolving to a fourth, F sharp (the pedal note of the initial ostinato and the fifth of B) in the final bar of the four-bar pattern (rehearsal mark 7). The relationship between D sharp (E flat) and A, the home key of the opera and the bass pedal of the present scene, is that of a diminished fifth, or a tritone, the *diabolus in musica* of medieval music. This undermines particularly the initial chord of the two, although the resolution onto the second chord, B major, is not complete either, as it moves from its third in the first bar of this chord to its fifth in the second, turning it from a first inversion into a second inversion chord -- a chord which itself demands resolution.

The tritone motif sets the sinister music of the old order apart from Akhnaten's spiritual idealism in no uncertain terms. Moreover, its corrupting influence leads one to believe that the modulation originally initiated, away from the relatively stable A minor of the Prelude, was not a convincing modulation at all, but rather an uncomfortable kind of pseudo-modulation. Viewed from the standpoint of A minor the entire music of this scene can be regarded as an alternation between the dominant (tonic six-four) and altered, or modal, supertonic functions (V - II). The fact that the tonic six-four is preferred over the convention fifth degree dominant can be justified by its ambiguity between tonic and dominant functions, due to the absence of the leading note in this chord; thus, the ambiguity between the home key (A minor) and the scene keys (E and B major) is preserved in this way. The leading note of the dominant chord in the key of A minor (G sharp) is avoided elsewhere in the opera for the very same reason. I am not, therefore, recommending that the music be understood solely from the standpoint of A minor: the earlier interpretations, although threatened, are not entirely invalidated. This parallel awareness of all three tonal centres implies that what one is hearing is not only bitonal, but may even be tritonal from an interpretational standpoint. There is, however, a gradual shift in perception from E as the stronger tonic candidate at the beginning of the scene towards B in the later cycles and eventually towards A minor: the tension between the three is not fully resolved, however, until the next scene.

This second type of tonal ambiguity, between the key at hand and the home key of the opera, is considerably more controversial from a musicological standpoint. I have little doubt, however, that the tonality of this and other similar scenes that modulate away from A minor function, albeit latently, in precisely this way: furthermore, it appears that the tonality of the opera was specifically designed with this mode of interpretation in mind. Glass states, for example, in *Opera on the Beach* that in *Akhnaten* he "began to think about musical material in a different way, exploring key relationships in terms of the overall piece" (Glass 1987, 171); and later refers to *Village Voice* critic Leighton Kerner's description of "the key of A minor envelop[ing] the opera like a

shroud," as "both poetic and accurate" (ibid., 174). When I questioned the composer on this aspect of the work, drawing attention to the restless tonality of this specific scene, his response was cautious but affirmative:

I think there must be some notion of that, though it's not one I've articulated very much. A lot of these ideas are more experiential than analytical ... but I would agree that that's the case in *Akhnaten* -- the feeling of A minor is almost always there somewhere. (Glass, interview with the author, September 8, 1993.)

5.2.3 The "old" order (II)

As the funeral continues the effect is of increasing unease. The text sung over it by the male choir, originally intended as an affirmation of life takes on a decidedly sinister tone as a result of its setting.

Live life, thou shalt not die,	<i>Ahau en heh</i>
thou shalt exist for millions	<i>Ankh ankh, en mitak</i>
of million of years	<i>Yuk er heh en heh</i>
For millions of million of years	

In both metaphorical and physical senses it is clear that the pharaohs succeeded in preserving themselves for thousands of years: moreover, it would appear, if Baudrillard is to be believed, that our own culture is intent on preserving them for millions and millions of years longer. The listener, however, is guided by the music towards Glass's and his protagonist Akhnaten's critique of this view, that the reverse side of the pharaohs' ostensible affirmation of life was their denial of death -- a schism that finds a ready counterpart in the in other binary constructs based on the self/Other distinction. Thus, the necessity of ensuring the pharaohs' immortality, when grafted onto the Egyptian empire, was used justify any number of barbarous acts directed towards neighbouring lands. The uncomfortable symmetrical division of the octave into tritones in this scene, not to mention the relentless bitonal vacillation between equally unsatisfactory key centres, could easily be viewed as a musical representation of the austere dualism inherent in these aspects of pharaonic culture.

After twenty vacillations of the two chords, including four threatening interpolations of the D sharp tritone motif, there is a radical reduction of material (rehearsal mark 10). Cellos, joined later by bass clarinet and bassoons, reiterate on their own the ostinato pattern of the opening bars of the scene. In the hiatus between cycles, the corpse of Amenhotep III enters in the wake of the funerary procession, holding his decapitated head in his arms. The putrescent tritone motif returns followed shortly afterwards by a return of the truculent tom-tom rhythm (rehearsal mark 14).

The second cycle begins with an aggressive responsorial exchange between the male chorus and Aye, the first soloist of the opera, which soon changes into a more traditional, soloist/accompaniment engagement. The rising motif sung by Aye (A - d sharp - f sharp - g sharp) -- who was personal advisor to Amenhotep III, is Akhnaten's father-in-law (Nefertiti's father), and is, following Akhnaten's inauguration as pharaoh, to become his adviser too --

anticipates the changes that are about to take place in the pharaonic world: it is, of course, related to Akhnaten's "life-span" motif. However, the D-sharp diminished triad outlined by the motif, and the leading note (of A major) on which it culminates, make it even more unnerving than when it was heard in its Prelude guise. His singing a variation of the motif that denotes Akhnaten's "destiny" in a stern bass voice, and with added chromatic acerbity, at this early stage in the opera goes some way beyond the conventional friction between father-in-law and son-in-law: it is implicit already at this early stage that he views Akhnaten as a sexual deviant who will eventually have to be disposed of. Implicit then in Aye's rendering of the theme is a premonition of his complicity in the plot to overthrow his son-in-law. That he does not state this in so many words reveals something of his predicament as servant to the rebellious new pharaoh and as upholder of tradition. Aye was evidently something of a straddler between the old religious order and the new cult of the sun-disc. Egyptologists at the beginning of this century (such as Breasted 1909, 355) claimed that he was a priest of the sun cult; due largely to the version of the Hymn to the Sun found in the tomb constructed for him by Akhnaten at the royal city of Akhetaten -- in which he was never buried because of the abandonment of the city following Akhnaten's deposition. This view has, however, recently been disputed (Aldred 1988, 221). By all accounts his character was more that of a shrewd opportunist than a spiritual leader or a humble servant to the pharaoh -- a friend to the new ideas when they were in vogue, but quick to abandon them and return to orthodoxy when it served his interests. That he was ambitious there can be no doubt, as he rose to the position of pharaoh himself after the untimely death of Tutankhamen. Velikovsky claims, moreover, that he caused this death, by initiating a feud between the two brothers and successors-to-the-throne after Akhnaten, Smenkhare and Tutankhamen, ending in the deposition of the former by the latter (Velikovsky 1960, 145-146). Thereafter, in Velikovsky's view, he specifically encouraged the newly crowned child king (Tutankhamen) to risk his life in reckless military campaigns (*ibid.*, 145-146). Having successfully disposed of both of the legitimate heirs to the throne he then usurped the position of pharaoh through wedlock with Akhnaten's daughter (his own grand-daughter), Ankhesenpaaten (Aldred 1988, 298). This, then, is the kind of man we are dealing with. His stern bass voice, his intimate exchanges with the male chorus, his overtly aggressive and declamatory singing style, and the forward-striving chromaticism of his melodic lines set him apart from the lyrical and ethereal voice of Akhnaten in no uncertain terms. His becomes, in a sense, the surrogate voice of Akhnaten's father, who, because he is dead, has no physical voice in the opera.

5.2.4 The second element: air

The text sung by Aye and the male chorus in the second cycle reiterates the wind motif announced by the scribe, Amenhotep, in the gap between the Prelude and this scene (He goes to the sky, He goes to the sky, On the wind, On the wind). Amenhotep, whose true identity we have established to be that of the androgynous seer of Greek mythology, Tiresias, announces not only the

action of the opera but also the second of the elements from which it is comprised. He can do this because he inhabits not only the realm of music-drama as do the characters of the opera, but also the void that falls between each of the opera's scenes (the element ether?) -- the ubiquitous centre from which all of these elements emerge and to which they must eventually return.

If the dominant element of the Prelude was water -- to be more specific, that of the river Nile -- that of the first scene is air, in particular the winds that blow in the turbulent pathways between sentient existence and the afterlife; also the winds of fortune and change that mark the end of one era and the dawning of another. The text of the second cycle, sung by Aye and the male chorus, is as follows:

Hail bringer of the boat of Ra
Strong are thy sails in the wind
As thou sailest over the Lake of Fire
In the Underworld

*Ya inen makhent en Ra
rud akit em mehit
em khentik er she neserser
em netcher khert*

Although a third element, fire, is invoked in this passage, it is not until the third and final scene of the first act that it achieves supremacy, or that any attempt is made at its portrayal in music.

EXAMPLE 8

♩ = 160

fl.
oboe.
cl.

bassoon
cellos

The second cycle finishes abruptly leaving only the tom-toms pounding out the primal rhythm established in the opening bars. Above the drum-beat, woodwind flourishes whirl and dance, coming to rest and then propelling themselves into motion once more, rising to their zenith, stopping dead, and then descending to their nadir -- or rising and then rising again before eventually falling away -- stabbing staccato spurts followed by longer labyrinthine licks (rehearsal marks 19-21: see Example 8). The breathy timbre of the flutes, reinforced with oboes and clarinets in similar motion, can leave one in little doubt that what one is hearing is a musical representation of wind, even if the word is taken in its most literal sense.

The winds of change usher the young successor-to-the-throne (later to become Akhnaten) and the mourning population of Thebes -- including, for the first time, women, anticipating the central role they are to play in the religious revolution -- onto the stage. The funeral procession moves upstage and further away from the audience. The drumming temporarily ceases, leaving only whirling woodwinds and the underlying agitated ostinato -- played initially by cellos and bassoons, but joined shortly by French horns.

Gradually, the musical forces gather once more for a final cycle in praise of the departed king. In this there is an increasing sense of bustle and rhythmic disjunction, the former caused by the addition of restless triplet-based eighth-note arpeggios in the cellos and bassoons, and the latter by four abrupt changes of metre; from 4/4 to 6/4 and back (rehearsal marks 31 & 32). One cannot but surmise that the wind heard in the interlude is the agent of all this instability and the actors and actresses mere conduits for its whims. After rhythmic stability has returned, the wind motif returns once again and the mixed chorus sings wordlessly -- absorbed, as it were, by the wind -- in a manner highly evocative of some of Debussy's music (for instance, the choral passages sung by the *Sirènes* in his *Nocturnes*). Aye's voice returns, at first, in slight disjunction with the chorus, but later merging until it is lost entirely. The tritone motif returns, but now staying firmly locked on D sharp, not conceding an inch to the harmony it underpins (rehearsal mark 36). Eventually, after four chord changes, it begins to move, at first only to F sharp as it did earlier, but in the last four patterns of the scene rising in the final bar to G sharp -- transforming B major into G-sharp minor, the altered seventh degree of A minor, although this chord could equally well be viewed as B with an added note. The wind, which is still spiralling in the background, in the oboes and clarinets, is now joined by a shrill triplet elaboration (piccolo and flute, the former setting out from e³) of the ostinato pattern heard at the beginning of the scene, and in the two final cycles played on horns and trumpets (rehearsal mark 38). (Strains of Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" are perceivable in this combination.) One senses that the course that has been set is now irreversible. In the final bars, the text sung by the chorus is reduced to a single word, *Ankh*, meaning "life," a suitably universalist sentiment for the new order. Once again, the music simply ceases. The tension created is not released -- it simply stops.

5.3 Act 1:2 The Coronation of Akhnaten

5.3.1 The Trilogy theme

The second scene begins with a short transition in which the material of the preceding scene is transformed into one of the most important themes of the opera and, indeed, the entire trilogy. As the bassoon restates the descending (e to d sharp against f sharp) ostinato motif of the previous scene, accompanied by a simple alternation of the root notes of these chords (a and b) on a single horn, Aye, the Amon High Priest, the scribe, and the people of Thebes leave the stage. The epicene figure of Akhnaten remains, soon to be joined by his aides, who prepare the young successor for the coronation ceremony. If the motif heard in the Prelude (and, in transposed form, in Aye's singing in the Funeral) is identified with Akhnaten's anomalous sexuality as perceived by his opponents, as well as foreboding his tragic fate, the music we now hear represents a different side of the character, one that through the use of common musical material ties him in with the other characters of the Trilogy, Einstein and Gandhi. This music appears prior to, or concomitant with each appearance of the future pharaoh, and, even more than the tragic "life-span" motif, can be said to embody not only his physical attributes but also the essence of his revolutionary ideas.

In a manner characteristic of Glass's treatment of musical material in this opera, the A to B chord movement of the previous scene becomes, through a subtle process of transformation, the foundation for new musical ideas. A new bass pattern is created by adjuncting to the diatonically rising horn pattern of the opening four bars two additional notes note, middle C and e¹. A slightly modified version of the cello and bassoon ostinato of the previous scene is heard underneath one four-bar cursus of the newly established pattern, after which the tonal centres of E and B, which it asserted throughout the music of the Funeral scene, evaporate like clouds on a hot summer's day, leaving the home key of A minor to shine through unobscured.

EXAMPLE 9

♩ = 90

The musical score for Example 9 consists of two staves. The top staff is for flutist, oboe, and clarinet (flt., oboe, cl.) and features a melodic line with eighth-note patterns and a final half-note chord. The bottom staff is for horn, viola, and cellos (hmn., viola, cellos) and features a harmonic accompaniment with sustained chords and a final half-note chord. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 90.

What remains is a transformation of the "Trilogy" theme, heard in both *Einstein* and *Satyagraha*, the distinctive musical element being the motif e - g - c, played in the cellos (see Example 9). This motif, which resolves to e in the final bar of the four-bar pattern, is heard only twice, after which it is merely implied in the harmony (A minor - G major first inversion - A minor first inversion - E

dominant seventh). Those familiar with the other two operas of the trilogy may or may not recognise the similarity between what they are hearing, the opening notes of *Einstein on the Beach*, the music that appears in each of that opera's transitional "Knee Plays," and the music that is heard concomitant with important events in the life of Gandhi in the final Trilogy opera, *Satyagraha*. Its importance as a unifying factor for the composer is, however, quite apparent.

This Trilogy theme, linked as it is to scenes in which essential aspects of Akhnaten's character are revealed, is strongly associated with *Akhnaten* himself. This is precisely how the Trilogy theme is used in *Satyagraha* and *Einstein* as well. In *Satyagraha*, it appears in the second scene when the young Gandhi embarks upon his life's work, and again in the final scene at the penultimate moment of his political victory. The Trilogy theme occurs in all five Knee Plays of *Einstein*, scenes that represent the more intimate portraits of Einstein. (Glass 1987, 172-3.)

There is an important point to be made here: if the Trilogy theme is closely associated with Akhnaten *himself*, with Gandhi *himself*, and with Einstein *himself*, then the *true* self must be seen to be comprised of an essentially non-personal, or, rather, a radically transpersonal core. It is noteworthy that Glass refers to the Trilogy protagonists as people who changed the world in which we live "through the power of an inner vision" (Glass et al. 1987, 11), and not through the power of *their* inner *visions*. Glass's implicit assumption of a non-centralised, mutable, and, ultimately, transpersonal foundation to human consciousness is, of course, diametrically opposed to the Cartesian guiding precept of an independent central observer in the brain (located by Descartes in the pineal gland); a view that has held sway in Western thought until very recently. However, if there is no immutable and totally inviolate individual core to the human mind, as Glass is perhaps suggesting, if, in contradistinction to earlier "humanistic" ontologies, we are all made up of the same stuff so to speak, then selfish acts of individualism and discrimination against others take on a distinctly self-destructive appearance, as to do harm to another is tantamount to harming oneself, at least insofar as what one ordinarily regards as oneself is another.

The transpersonal principle is identified in Buddhism with the most subtle plane of consciousness, the highest of the three Buddha bodies, *dharmakaya*. D.T. Suzuki has associated this concept with the notion of "personality," his explicit intention being to challenge our ordinary understanding of this word (Suzuki 1947, 41). Far from being the mask, or "persona," that we present to the world -- the apparently static, but in reality perpetually moving point of reference by which we define both ourselves and others -- personality is regarded by Suzuki as being the inner essence, or voice (Greek: *sonare*), that is channelled and filtered through the confines of this outer facade (*ibid.*, 41). Lama Govinda writes:

'Personality' in this original sense is more than 'individuality', because here no illusory indivisibility and uniqueness of a separate being is postulated, but only the idea that our momentary form of appearance is like a temporarily assumed mask, through which the voice of a higher reality sounds (Govinda 1960, 227).

According to Govinda, the transpersonal force, or *dharmakaya*, "is a living force, which manifests itself in the individual and assumes the form of 'personality'" (Govinda 1960, 227). An interesting parallel can be found in the work of the quantum physicist David Bohm. Bohm proposes just such a transpersonal ground to the mind, although he maintains that all meaning as we are ever likely to understand it is contingent and inherently ambiguous (Bohm 1985, 83). Bohm's vision of the transformation or unfolding of energy from an unambiguous ground, what he terms the "super-implicate order," through an "implicate," to an "explicate," or "unfolded order," has been seized upon by Buddhist scholar Sogyal Rinpoche as bearing a startling resemblance to the Buddhist conception of a continuum of consciousness ranging from the level of coarse matter to ever more subtle planes of experience (Rinpoche 1992, 352-355). It is noteworthy, moreover, that Bohm himself explicitly encourages such comparisons (Bohm & Peat 1987, 255-260). Thus Glass's view of a transpersonal foundation to human consciousness has one foot in contemporary scholarly thought and the other in Buddhist philosophy. Carl Gustav Jung laid the foundations for the assimilation of such a view into Western scholarly discourses with his idea of the collective unconscious¹, and it would appear that the seeds planted in his psychoanalytical theories are beginning to take root even in the so called "hard" sciences.

Glass's protagonists are, despite their transpersonal core, all *him*-selves; they are men who changed the world through the power of ideas rather than arms, but they are, all the same, all men -- or are they? In this the most religious of the Trilogy operas, the androgynous mind and hermaphroditic physique of Akhnaten strongly suggest that the principle we are discussing is one that is common to both sexes. In subsequent operas, such as the Doris Lessing collaboration *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* (1985-86) this assumption is made quite explicit. Unfortunately there is no neuter -- or more appropriately, perhaps, bisexual -- personal pronoun in the English language, but dare I suggest that if there were, Glass would have used it. Particularly in this music, then, the characters of the Trilogy are revealing their true nature -- or, in the words of the popular expression made the subject of a recent song by Cyndi Lauper, they are showing their true colours. These may be different colours, but, like the infinite hues produced as the rays of the sun pass through a prism, the essence of diversity is found in enfolded form in unity: or as it is expressed in Akhnaten's shorter Hymn to the Sun; "[t]hy love is mighty and great ... thy light, of diverse colours, leadeth captive (or, bewitcheth) all faces" (Budge 1923, 117).

5.3.2 The chaconne dance -- a "connubial" of East and West

But what of the music? What musical form does Glass select as indicative of the more meritorious, transpersonal side of human nature as manifested in Akhnaten and the other trilogy protagonists? If it is to serve its purpose, it must be a form that brings opposing forces together, one with both a sense of

¹ See Jung (1959, 42-53) for a definition of the collective unconscious.

refinement and immediacy, one both quiescent and incisive, one that partakes of both the cyclical and the linear modalities; dare I say it, one encoded in both masculine and feminine terms.

The form selected by Glass is the chaconne¹; a genre with a fascinating and colourful history. In the chaconne we find a quite distinctive musical form. One that spread rapidly from its ethnic origins in Spanish guitar music, to the keyboard variations of the Italian composers Foscarini and Frescobaldi, and later infiltrated the musical languages of virtually every notable composer of the Baroque period (including Bach, Biber, Buxtehude, Böhm, Fux, Handel, Pachelbel and Purcell). Eventually the form found its way to opera, where it was usually heard as an instrumental dance form - for example, in the works of the French composers Lully, Lalande, and Rameau (Walker 1968; Hudson 1980a). In Baroque music, the chaconne is recognisable by a number of structural traits, the most important of which is usually the bass ostinato or ground, which moves from the tonic to the dominant, in most cases within a four-bar frame. The ground, in a manner similar to the other prevalent variation forms (such as the *romanesca*, *la folia*, *passamezzo*, and *bergamasca*), serves as a constant factor against the shape-shifting melodic and harmonic material it underpins. The most common bass formula used in the chaconne was that of a descending tetrachord, a formula found throughout the second Trilogy opera, *Satyagraha*, and used, quite appropriately, by Glass as the paradigm example of the genre in his own discussion of it (Glass 1987, 115-117: see Example 10). A myriad of related bass formulae have been identified, however², so it would clearly be a mistake to restrict the discussion of the genre to this one prototype.

EXAMPLE 10



Here the chaconne is initially heard as a slightly reduced (the fourth degree is missing), but nevertheless clearly identifiable, manifestation of a diatonically rising ostinato formula known to Italian composers in the seventeenth-century. The bass formula $a - b - c^1 - e^1$ (1 - 2 - 3 - 5) -- arrived at by inverting the descending tetrachord -- was found in both the chaconne and the passacaglia, and could be related to its historical precursors on the strength of this

1 The chaconne has throughout the greater part of its history been associated with a twin musical form, the *passacaglia*. Although the origins of the two are distinct, they became, subsequent to their appearance in the keyboard variations of Italian composers in the early 1600s, difficult to distinguish from one another in a consistent manner across divergent times and places. Certain "rules of thumb" have been invented by music historians, such as the one that categorises the chaconne as predominantly a *harmonic* and the passacaglia as a *melodic* formula, but these formulations are unreliable to say the least (see Walker 1968, 319-320; Hudson 1980a, 102; 1980b, 268).

2 See Hudson 1981, 263-270.

information alone (Hudson 1970, 312)¹. The harmonic progression (i - VI - i⁶₄ - V⁷) is, because of its minor modality, more readily identifiable with the passacaglia of the earlier Italian period, but it is noteworthy that its twin the chaconne was frequently found in the minor mode in France in the late seventeenth-century; what is more, it was quite commonly used as an orchestrated operatic dance in that country (Walker 1968, 320). Thus, it is to the French operatic tradition, to the use of the form by composers such as Jean Baptiste Lully and Jean Philippe Rameau, that Glass's use of the chaconne can probably be most accurately traced². Bach's famous *ciaccona* from the solo violin sonata in D minor, specifically referred to by Glass in his discussion of the form (Glass 1987, 115), is, it is important to note, modelled on the French orchestral version of the chaconne rather than its Italian precursors (see Hudson 1980, 102).

The way this music functions in relation to the other music of the opera has more, however, to do with a somewhat older tradition, that of the "ritornello," or little return. The ritornello was used in strophic music as an instrumental interlude between verses, a function it serves most obviously in this opera in Akhnaten's Hymn to the Sun (Act II, scene 4), although its intermediary function can be recognised in this context as well, where it is used to weld the music of the Funeral and Coronation scenes together. The origins of the ritornello go back to the formative period of opera as a genre: it was commonplace, for instance, in the music of Monteverdi, appearing in this composer's first opera, *L'Orfeo* (1607), although earlier examples can be found, such as the ritornellos in Emilio de' Cavalieri's *Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo* (1600). Although alluding to historical forms in a quite obvious way, Glass is not merely restating convention, but is adding to it an unmistakable contemporary twist. Thus, after the initially stated trilogy theme, the music of this section alternates between two four-bar patterns, one of which has a distinct contemporary feel, and the other of which could easily have been written in the late seventeenth-century.

EXAMPLE 11

The musical score for Example 11 consists of two staves. The upper staff is for flute, oboe, and clarinet (fl. oboe cl.) and the lower staff is for bass clarinet and bassoon (bass cl. bassoon). The music is in a minor key and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. A dynamic marking 'p' is present at the beginning of the first staff.

- 1 The Trilogy theme (e - g - c¹ - e¹; or [5] - 6 - 3 - 5), although a less convincing example of the chaconne, would be a strong candidate as a passacaglia were it to begin on the first rather than the fifth degree (see Hudson 1981, 269).
- 2 Examples of the orchestral chaconne can be found in Lully's operas *Roland* (1685), *Cadmus* (1673), and *Amadis* (1684), as well as Rameau's *Les Indes Galantes* (1735). A classical example of the passacaglia appears in the famous "choeur de la Passacaille" from Lully's *Armide* (1986). Similar examples can be found in the music of contemporaries such as Lalande, Colasse, and Destouches.

The first of these patterns (rehearsal marks 4 and 6: see Example 11) is made up of flutes, oboes, and clarinets in contrary motion with bass clarinet and bassoons. The motivic foundation for both parts is an inversion of the initially heard chaconne motif, thus transforming it into the favoured descending bass formula. The first eighth-note of each bar descends one step at a time, with the exception of the first eighth-note of the final bar, which drops by a perfect fifth in the higher voice and rises by a nearly an octave in the lower ($a^2 - g^2 - f^2 - b^1$: 1 - 7 - 6 - 2, and A - G - F - e: 1 - 7 - 6 - 5), making the latter a clear example of the prototypical descending tetrachord form. The upper woodwind voice descends the span of an octave from each of these notes, while the lower instruments ascend in contrary motion to these, arriving, once again, in the final eighth-note of the bar, at the octave. This crisp, no-nonsense manipulation of the musical material, although embedded within a traditional form, has to it a distinct Modern flavour. Examples of mirror writing such as this can be found in much of Bartók's music, including his *Concerto for Orchestra* (1943-44), in the music of Glass's teachers Milhaud and Persichetti, and that of another composer whose influence on his student works was profound, Aaron Copland.

The mirror writing found in the music, aside from situating the music in the present day, can easily be heard as a musical representation of complementary pairs. Coinciding as it does with the first solo appearance of the hermaphroditic Akhnaten -- and it is noteworthy that he appeared naked at precisely this point in David Freeman's production of the opera, as he was dressed in preparation for the coronation -- there remains little doubt as to its intended meaning: the protagonist is viewed as not only physically but also in a more profound way personifying dual or multiple perspectives. The ascending scale of E major, heard in the final bar of the pattern (see Examples 9, 11, and 12), is also an important motif in the opera -- one that is heard in its penultimate bars, and that signifies the ascent of the three leading characters to the heavens. Here it has a more abstract effect, that could be described as the spiritual tendency in humanity as embodied in the thoughts and deeds of Akhnaten. It is, one could say, the direct result of walking the middle path between the two poles heard in the initial three bars of the pattern.

The second of the patterns (rehearsal marks 5 and 7: see Example 12) is comprised of strings (violas and cellos) accompanying a descending trumpet line ($c^2 - g^1 - e^1$) which lags a constant eighth-note behind the beat. The trumpet serves the traditional dramatic function of a fanfare announcing the presence of the pharaoh: coupled, as it is, with a stately processional rhythm (a relaxed, or ceremonial, walking pace of 90 beats per minute), a suitably regal atmosphere is invoked. The cellos return to the ascending version of the motif, while the violas, during the first three bars, play a simple homophonic accompaniment including, in their higher voice, the descending mirror image of the cello line. In the final bar of the pattern they reiterate the ascending E major scale heard also in the previous pattern and the Trilogy theme. The music of this pattern has a distinct Baroque feel, and, indeed, there are few tell-tale traces of contemporary music to contradict this impression, making the juxtaposition of this and the earlier, distinctly contemporary pattern quite conspicuous.

EXAMPLE 12

The musical score for Example 12 consists of three staves: trumpet, violas, and cellos. The trumpet part is in the treble clef and features a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes. The violas part is in the middle clef and provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and a melodic line. The cellos part is in the bass clef and plays a bass line with quarter and eighth notes.

The two patterns themselves form a complementary pair, the opposites becoming encoded this time not only in terms of masculine and feminine but also in terms of old and new, past and present, tradition and innovation -- thus underscoring the ultimate sameness and relatedness of these poles. Jencks (1986, 14), would refer to this harmonious combination of old and new as "double-coding", a distinctive feature of the postmodern ethos, and Pasler (1983, 21) would term it "the emancipation of memory"; although it could be argued that such a combination, while constituting an emancipation of sorts, in a way transcends emancipation -- in other words, what we are hearing is not only an emancipation of memory, as Glass is not simply reiterating the past, but also an emancipation *from* memory¹.

But let us return for a moment to Glass's most obvious historical reference: his use of the chaconne. His most extensive use of this form was in the Gandhi opera, *Satyagraha*. Glass found in the chaconne a musical form in which he could unite the principles of stasis and cyclical form -- the characteristic features of his earlier music -- with harmonic structures drawn from the Western concert music tradition. It is significant, though, that he postulates a broader cultural connection as well; one that is as pertinent to the present discussion as it is to the Gandhi opera where it first appeared in Glass's music:

An interesting feature of this progression is that it is the same as one often heard in flamenco guitar music. This particular form of folk music was introduced into Spain by gypsies, who, it is believed, originated in India. There are very few harmonic practices shared by East and West since harmonic practice hardly ever turns up at all in Eastern music. This particular pattern is one of the few I know of that is common in the West and may have had its origin in the East. (Glass 1987, 115-116.)

Glass's association of the chaconne with flamenco guitar music is historically accurate, although the postulation of an Asian origin to this particular form is by no means clear. It is true that the *chacona* dance first appeared in Spain towards the end of the sixteenth-century, but some scholars have traced its origins to the New World, claiming that it was brought back by traders and explorers from their encounters with indigenous Americans in

¹ I will go into this in more detail in my discussion of "mindfulness," in the final chapter of the dissertation.

Mexico and Peru¹. Although many of the song texts refer to specific places or events in the New World, it remains a moot question whether any of the musical characteristics of the dance originated in indigenous American music or whether they were simply invented by the colonial administrators and traders themselves. This connection with the American continent is something of an irony, and one of which the composer was evidently not aware. The Latin American hypothesis does not, however, disqualify Glass's view -- on the contrary. There is little doubt that the dance merged with flamenco music in Spain; moreover, a second, even more tenuous connection with Asia could be argued on the basis of the Native American peoples' Asiatic ancestry -- due to their migration from Siberia, via the Bering Strait, to Alaska and the American continent. Wherever its origins lie, it represents for Glass, and perhaps for the listener as well, a synthesis of Western and Eastern temporal modalities -- the same linear and cyclical modalities to which Kristeva (1981) draws attention in her discussion of the gendered encoding of time in Western culture -- translated into musical form. Harmonic cadences tied together in even cyclical chains impart a sense of stasis and rhythmic vitality we recognise from both our experiences of our own popular music culture and from our encounters with non-Western musics.

Gender seems to have been associated with the dance from its genesis. In fact, early sources indicate that sexual expression was for the *chacona*, like the *zarabanda* before it, the dance's distinguishing feature (Walker 1968, 301). On April 8, 1615, a law was passed banning it, in a series of reformations introduced by the Spanish authorities to improve standards of decency in the theatre, specifically because of the dance's "lascivious and unpure movements" (Hudson 1981, 5); a measure which had the predictable effect of increasing its notoriety. Song texts referred to the power of the dance to corrupt young women, enticing them to perform its sensuous undulating movements. Once under its spell "pure and steady eyes" were invariably transformed "into wandering, flirting eyes" (ibid., 9). Such eyes were said, in the texts of the songs, to have the power to tempt even the most devoted of monks to stray from his vows of chastity. Evidently the dance was strongly associated not only with women but with the lower, peasant classes (ibid., 3-11.). Although the cultural context of the chaconne has changed somewhat with the passing of time, the close link with otherness remains firmly embedded in its principles of construction. This could explain why it was almost totally expunged from Western concert music towards the end of the Baroque period (it is rarely found after 1750, the year of J.S. Bach's death and the oft-cited date of the demise of the Baroque period²): the fact is, the chaconne's repetition, its

¹ See Walker 1968, 301; and Hudson 1981, 4.

² Some rare examples of the chaconne and passacaglia in nineteenth-century music include the passacaglia that is the last movement of Brahms's *Symphony no. 4 in E minor* (opus 98), the last variation of the same composer's *St. Anthony Variations* (opus 56a), Max Reger's *Introduction and Passacaglia in D minor*, Otto Barblan's *Chaconne über B-A-C-H* (opus 10), and Sigfrid Karg-Elert's *Chaconne with variations in C minor* (opus 142,7). The emphasis in Romantic music is usually, however, on macro-structural considerations which extend beyond the boundaries of the individual patterns, in

gradual transformation of musical material, and its steady beat all associate it too closely with popular forms to make its status as prestigious art music defensible¹.

An interesting contrastive comparison is with McClary's recent study of Bizet's *Carmen* (1991, 56-69; and 1992a) In this study, she shows how Carmen's teasing chromatic melodies and engaging sensual rhythms underline her otherness, both in terms of gender and ethnicity. A sharp distinction is made in the opera between Carmen's pseudo-flamenco dance rhythms and the relatively conventional, rhythmically stable and diatonic music of her suitor and eventual murderer, José. His refined white, male, and unmistakably bourgeois musical discourse must eventually prevail, however, as the infectious meanderings of the gypsy do not make for a "happy ending" in terms of the conventions of Western classical music. The opera ends on a triumphant major triad with the inevitable murder of Carmen paralleled by the slaying of the bull in the ring nearby; the crowd cheers and so does the listener -- at least that is what the music would have us believe. (McClary 1991, 56-69; and 1992a)

But what happens if "exotic" flamenco music and familiar Western music are not dichotomised, but, instead, certain principles of construction are appropriated from the former to construct a genre that is unquestionably Western but at the same time is perceptibly *different* -- a form in which the boundaries between self and other become blurred, and even merge imperceptibly into one another? The truth is the chaconne does not sound "exotic," nor is it intended to. For Glass, the dance serves as a meeting place for self and other, subject and object, East and West, popular and elite, and male and female; a meeting place where everything is connected, where contradictions co-exist, and where the boundaries we traditionally regard as sacrosanct blur before our eyes -- thus, a suitable musical environment for the sexually ambiguous protagonist of our story, Akhnaten. Would a sexual metaphor be appropriate under such circumstances? Glass evidently thinks it would:

JR: How did you first discover the chaconne?

PG: It was kind of natural. I had been working with repetitive structures -- well, of course, I have a classical background to begin with but apart from that,

contrast to the Baroque focus on micro-structural change. Glass's use of the chaconne, although containing elements of both, is probably closer to the Baroque usage.

¹ The nominal reappearance of these forms in the music of twentieth-century composers -- such as Webern's *Passacaglia* in D minor (1908), Britten's *Chacony* from the *second string quartet* (1945), Ligeti's *Hungarian Rock : chaconne for cembalo* (1983) -- has rarely meant a return to their fundamental musical *raison d'être* : clarity of expression achieved through repetition contrasted with subtle variation of musical material. Such examples, although including some beautiful music, are barely recognisable as the same form heard in the music of Bach, Buxtehude, and Lully. Even Steve Reich's *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards* (1980), sounds nothing like the traditional chaconne form from which it is supposedly derived: exactly how a "chaconne recurring only three times" in a "twenty-two minute composition" (Schwarz 1981-82, 257) can be considered the same form as its Baroque antecedent, without stretching the definition of the form to breaking point, eludes this writer.

when I began to work with harmonic structures and combine them with repetitive structures that just immediately put it into the idea of the chaconne.

JR: So it followed on from what you'd been doing earlier.

PG: It just came out, because if you have repetitive structures and you add a harmonic structure basically that's it, and that carried through quite a number of pieces, right through to the end of *Satyagraha*, I think.(...) There's a recent one in the *Violin Concerto*, the second movement is a chaconne¹.(...) But it's a very strong idea. You don't see it Renaissance music; it just comes up in Baroque music, it just comes up at that time -- you won't find it before Monteverdi.

JR: Of course there's an interesting connection, which you've mentioned yourself, between Eastern and Western temporal modalities.

PG: That's right, it becomes a connubial.
(Glass, interview with the author, September 8, 1993.)

There can be no doubt that the music of the chaconne is associated by Glass with the element fire. This is particularly the case in its later appearances: in the Window of Appearances (Act I, scene 3), which, although not itself a chaconne, is constructed from motivic material introduced in the chaconne patterns heard now, and in the Hymn to the Sun (Act II, scene 4), a scene framed by three chaconne ritornellos: at its beginning, at its centrepiece, and at its end. Both textual and dramatic references underline the association with the element fire in no uncertain terms. Moreover, it appears that this association is, once again, one that is not restricted to this particular work. In the Godfrey Reggio film *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982), chaconne cadences based on the descending tetrachord formula (d - c - B flat - A) are found at the very beginning and the very end of the film: in both cases fire is conspicuously alluded to. The initial hearing of the sequence is accompanied by shots of an Apollo rocket ascending from its gantry, with close-ups of the fiery emissions from its engines. At the end of the film there are extended shots of the same rocket, apparently after an accident has occurred, descending in flames from the sky. That fire is associated by the composer with the transpersonal principle I believe there can be little doubt either. In the epigraph to the music composed for the opening ceremony of the 1984 Olympic Games, Glass writes:

I can think of no event to compare with the Olympic games which makes us so conscious of our shared humanity, our common fate. The torch lighting ceremony strikes me as the essential symbol, the summing up, of this, our shared consciousness. (Glass 1984.)

The music of this section finishes with what I will term the "finality" motif (see Example 13). This motif -- comprised of two consecutive eighth-notes of a, alternating with two a perfect fourth lower, on e (played here on clarinets and bassoons) -- is heard at various junctures in the opera and imparts a sense of stoicism and resignation. The resolution it provides is not complete however until the very end of the opera, when it is inverted so that the tonic note a is finally heard in its root position. Even though a low pedal on A is

¹

The second movement of Glass's *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* (1987) is based on the prototypical descending tetrachord formula (c - B flat - A flat - G - F : 1 - 7 - 6 - 5 - 4).

heard as the music of this section finishes, the bassoon on which the motif itself is played resolves only the dominant, e.

EXAMPLE 13



Frandsen, in his discussion of the close relationship between tonic and dominant tonalities in this opera, quite accurately observes; “[i]f the “Trilogy” theme represents the religious, revolutionary King Akhnaten, E minor must represent Akhnaten the human being” (Frandsen 1993, 247). I am drawn also to an interpretation in which the home key of A minor signifies Akhnaten’s “spiritual body” and the dominant E minor his “physical body”¹, and I will show that there is strong evidence to support this assertion. A more psychoanalytical formulation of the same idea might refer to the home key of the opera, A minor, as the “self” key, and E minor, which is encoded largely in feminine terms, as the “(M)Other” key. (this very distinction is, it should be stressed, introduced with the explicit intention of deconstructing its fundamental premises.) Frandsen is mistaken, then, when he writes; “[g]iven the close relationship between E minor and A minor, we are tempted to interpret its effect in the scene as Akhnaten’s achieving liberation from his parent” (ibid., 247). While it may be true that Akhnaten rebelled with a vengeance against his father and the patriarchal order he represented, the tragic aspect of this opera is precisely the fact that he is unable to release himself from his incestuous or quasi-incestuous longing for his other parent, his mother Tye -- as we shall observe in the first scene of Act Two. Moreover, I will argue that Akhnaten’s attachment to his mother is paralleled by, and, in symbolic terms, is equivalent to his attachment to his physical body. In Buddhist symbolism, the mother represents the womb, a safe environment for spiritual advancement -- the Mandala circles of Tantric Buddhism are, for example, described as psychic and cosmic wombs -- but the womb is paradoxically also the final and trickiest hurdle for those on “the spiritual path.” The highest form of spiritual attainment can only be realised when the Buddhist practitioner resists the impulse to enter the womb and thus avoids being reborn once again into the world of sentient beings. Paradoxically, the result of this is that one is then able to merge with the greater “cosmic womb.” To realise that oneself and one’s mother are the same, therefore, constitutes the ultimate act of non-differentiation; similarly, Akhnaten’s disaffection with the world of his father into which he is born is an important first step in his spiritual advancement, but his continued aversion and unresolved animosity towards this parent can only be to his detriment. But more about this later.

¹ The third of the triad, the note responsible for the chord’s identification in terms of gender, could possibly be related to the intermediary body of the Buddhist trinity, the “body of bliss” or “beatitude.”

With e^2 as its note of departure, a new motif is now outlined on flute and celeste ($e^3 - c^3 - d^3 - b^2 - e^3 - a^2 - d^3 - b^2$) which anticipates an important motif heard in the next scene on the tubular bells: I will refer to this as the "bell" motif (rehearsal mark 13.3: see Example 14). In short, it represents the new religion Akhnaten is to introduce; the gradual progression from E to A representing the move from the physical to the spiritual. It is noteworthy however that in its final form it contains elements of both -- underlining the ultimate indivisibility of the two.

EXAMPLE 14



The musical material undergoes a gradual transformation now which eventually culminates in the music of the funeral ceremony proper. The first change initiated is a change of meter from 4/4 to 3/4 time (rehearsal mark 14). Over an extended time-frame there is an orderly increase in tempo, realised by means of a number of step-like jumps -- a kind of quasi-accelerando (rehearsal mark 13, 96 beats per minute; rehearsal mark 14, 132 beats per minute; rehearsal mark 18, 176 beats per minute; rehearsal mark 19, 192 beats per minute). The snowball-like acceleration engendered by these changes in tempo is further accentuated by a solo trombone doggedly asserting the binary rhythm of the earlier section against the ternary rhythm of the other instruments, and an increasingly slippery chromatic texture in the alternating wind and string arpeggios. The pedal on A holds out until rehearsal mark 18, when it gives way to a low E, concomitant with a change in harmony from the A minor of the opening section to the new key centre of E. However, although the pedal hold fast, the new tonality remains for some time in a state of limbo, as the note determining the modality of this chord, its third, is missing. At first there is a simple bitonal alternation of E and A minor/major (major in its last bar) chords, but this gradually gives way to a more elaborate tonal scenario.

The A minor chord is replaced (rehearsal mark 20) with the chords G major and F major underpinned by a clear ostinato movement along the root notes of these chords, resolving eventually onto E, the apparent tonic of the new trichordal progression. This is clearly recognisable as a "phrygian" or Neapolitan cadence onto E minor. Enough to confirm the new tonal centre in unequivocal terms? Not really, as this progression is heard twice only, and subsequent to these initial hearings it is heard only in weakened form. The "phrygian" progression is followed by a simple oscillation between E minor and its relative major, G, after which a number of transitional chords are inserted in between the two closely related chords. The first of these is D diminished seventh (no third) in its second inversion (rehearsal mark 23). The lowest note of this chord, A flat, and the next highest, form a pungent tritone, which, in light of its presence in the Funeral scene, seems to have become an identifying feature of the music associated with the old order. The bass note of this chord, A flat, is, in enharmonic terms also the leading note of A minor, G

sharp, suggesting perhaps that the chord would be happier resolving onto the tonic of the opera rather than that of this particular section. Another factor that undermines E minor as the dominant tonality is its minor modality, which we are accustomed, right or wrong, to thinking as inherently less stable than its major counterpart.

The position of E minor as tonic is made even more precarious in the next transformation of the pattern (rehearsal mark 24) when the D diminished chord of the previous pattern is replaced by B diminished in its second inversion. The dominant chord of E minor is B dominant seventh, not the diminished chord we are hearing. B diminished is, on the other hand, a perfectly acceptable supertonic chord in the key of A minor, and is only marginally less acceptable as an altered mediant in G major. Despite this fact, it is undeniable that E minor is the strongest contender here. The question is rather to what extent does the home key remain in the memory of the listener despite the ostensible modulation. I am convinced that some awareness of A minor remains throughout the entire opera, despite modulations such as this. As was the case in the Funeral scene, the modulation affected here is less than convincing.

As far as the motivic development of the opera is concerned, we hear yet another familiar musical element in this pattern: as the highest note of the music moves from d^2 through d^2 sharp to e^2 , the minor third of the diminished chord is transformed momentarily into a major third. This movement from minor to major is related to Akhnaten's tragic "life-span" motif; in particular, that part of it which refers to the pharaoh's ambiguous sexuality.

In the final pattern of the transitional sequence (between Akhnaten's chaconne music and his coronation music), the second bar of the diminished chord is transformed into G-sharp minor in its highest voices (in the wind instruments), thus adumbrating the parallel chord movement of the coronation music which we are soon to hear. This is set off against a linear passing note of F, belonging to an inexorable ostinato descent (G - F - E) which has been prominent in the final few patterns. The transformation of musical material is now complete and the orchestra simply underlines the key at which we have arrived, E minor, alternating three times between wind and string arpeggios.

5.3.3 The three patriarchs and the "imaginary"

The people of Thebes have once again gathered on the stage, led by the three upholders of the old order, the Amon High Priest, Horemhab, and Aye; in terms of archetypes these characters could be said to represent the ecclesiastical, the military, and the administrative patriarchs, respectively. Aye has been discussed earlier so I will not concern myself with him here: suffice it to say that no empire can survive for long without considerable administrative or "pencil-pushing" skills -- Aye served the important function of chief bureaucrat of the empire. Another key figure in the patriarchal trinity was the Amon High Priest. In the years preceding Akhnaten's accession to the throne the authority of the Amon High Priests rivalled even that of the pharaohs. Moreover, of all the three patriarchs -- the ternary pillars holding the Egyptian empire firmly in place -- this is the one who stood to lose most from the

displacement of the traditional religious order by Atenism. The following passage sheds some light on the position occupied by the Amon High Priest in the state hierarchy:

One of Amenhotep III's High Priests of Amon had also been chief treasurer of the kingdom, and another Ptahmose, was the grand vizier of the realm; while the same thing had occurred in the reign of Hatshepsut, when Hapuseneb had been both vizier and High Priest of Amon. Besides these powers, the High Priest of Amon was also the supreme head of the organization including all the priests of the nation. Indeed, the fact that such extensive political power was now wielded by the High Priests of Amon must have intensified the young king's desire to be freed from the sacerdotal thrall which he had inherited. His father had evidently made some attempt to shake off the priestly hand that lay so heavily on the sceptre, for he had succeeded Ptahmose by a vizier who was not High Priest of Amon(...) The High Priesthood of Amon, however, was now a rich and powerful body. They had installed Thutmose III as king, and could they have supplanted with one of their own tools the young dreamer who now held the throne they would of course have done so at the first opportunity. But Amenhotep IV [Akhnaten] was the son of a line of rulers too strong and too illustrious to be thus set aside even by the most powerful priesthood in the land; moreover, he possessed unlimited personal force of character, and he was of course supported in his opposition of Amon by the older priesthoods of the north at Memphis and Heliopolis, long jealous of this interloper, the obscure Theban god, who had never been heard of in the north before the rise of the Middle Kingdom. A conflict to the bitter end, with most disastrous results to the Amonite priesthood ensued. (Breasted 1909, 362.)

I will discuss the disastrous results mentioned by Breasted in connection with the Destruction of the Temple (Act II, scene 1). But first Amenhotep IV, the new pharaoh, must be crowned, and to that end the third patriarch must take his place alongside the other two: when bureaucracy and religion fail to hold an empire together, there is, of course, one final recourse, and one to which Akhnaten's predecessors resorted on numerous occasions; that of military violence.

The commander of the military forces during Akhnaten's reign was a man named Horemhab. Like Aye, this was an ambitious man who is more likely to have been a shrewd pragmatist than a thinking man of any substance, and like Aye he was later to manipulate his way to the exalted position of pharaoh; a position to which he also had no legitimate claim. Moreover, it is unlikely that he was ever a sincere follower of the cult of Aten, even when serving Akhnaten, as during his own reign as pharaoh he did everything in his power to stamp out all remaining traces of it; temples were demolished, history books and laws were rewritten, and stern punishments were prescribed for those who did not follow the letter of the law (Aldred 1984, 225-227). Named by some "Horemhab the rebuilder," from the perspective of the Atenists he might more accurately be termed the Horemhab the demolition man, as there was not a temple to the sun god remaining in the kingdom after his term as pharaoh; Akhnaten's "City of the Horizon," Akhetaten, was abandoned and levelled to the ground during his reign. Because of Akhnaten's dislike of the military, Horemhab must have felt something of a disgruntled outsider during the new pharaoh's reign, as he cannot surely, considering his position as

commander of the armed forces, have condoned the neglect of colonial interests practised at this time. As someone who had a great deal invested in the preservation of Egyptian colonial hegemony, he must have witnessed the gradual fragmentation and disintegration of the traditional strongholds of the empire in Asia Minor with disgust and vengeance in his mind. The portrayal in the opera of the three patriarchs as collaborators appears to be accurate: during Aye's reign as pharaoh, he worked closely with Horemhab to restore the old order to its former position. Horemhab himself was on good terms with the priesthood of Amon and was responsible more than anyone else for carrying out the reinstatement of the pantheon of gods headed by Amon to its former elevated position in the years following the deposition of Akhnaten. Moreover, as close aides to the pharaoh, it is probable that the two men would have been intimately acquainted even earlier than this: both came from military backgrounds, and their outlook on life must have, as a result, been similar: more importantly, perhaps, it must have been markedly different from that of the young pharaoh to whom they were both obliged to pay obeisance, for the time being at least.

According to Redford, "Horemheb is one protagonist of the period who has suffered a "bad press." Thanks to Hollywood and the popular literature he has been unfairly burdened with the image of a red-neck or a Machiavelli, neither of which bears the slightest resemblance to the man" (Redford 1984, 223.). Redford's view of Horemhab is one of a "docile general who worked for his lord" who afterwards "became an energetic, down-to-earth manager who brought the country back to its senses" (ibid., 223), a view consistent with this Egyptologist's project of presenting Akhnaten as an emasculated madman bent on the moral corruption and material destruction of Egypt. Be that as it may, even Redford cannot deny the iron hand with which Horemhab set about erasing the deeds of his predecessor, although for him this was a commendable course of action (ibid., 225-227).

However, the man known as the most accomplished "smiter of the Asiatics" (a title given by the god Horus to the pharaohs, which Amenhotep IV was to relinquish on changing his name to Akhnaten) Egypt has perhaps ever known is clearly quite a problematic character from the contemporary standpoint. Glass's depiction of all three characters emphasises, therefore, the exotic and the illusory rather than the transparent, the "down-to-earth," or, for that matter, the spiritual. This is true of the mirage-like tonality associated with these characters, which, although it is probably some of the most interesting music in the opera in terms of its elaborate construction, unfailingly draws attention to its own vacuity. As the music strays further away from the opera's home key -- from A minor to E minor to B major to A-flat major to E-flat major -- the images we see and hear take on an increasingly translucent or chimerical guise. However, as I have perhaps hinted earlier, there is some ambivalence here: without the aid of such images, what Baudrillard (1983) refers to as "simulacra," the emptiness onto which they are projected would also remain unseen.

There is also a fair amount of what the French criticism refers to as "*jouissance*" associated with the music of these scenes. Here, once again, it is helpful to draw a comparison with Buddhist religious practices. The way these

characters function could easily be compared to the wrathful deities of the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon. The idea of such deities is not to fill the practitioner with aversion or to frighten her or him into submission. Nor is it to present a cautionary vision of the everlasting hell that awaits if one does not lead a pious life. On the contrary, the purpose of these deities is to encourage the practitioner to encounter the Other within -- who can certainly sometimes take on frightening guises -- with complete equanimity and selflessness. Some quasi-sexual sense of coupling with the frightening deity is not only hoped for in such encounters, it is the *sine qua non* of higher spiritual attainment.

This interpretation would seem consonant at least with the Stuttgart production of the opera, where the representatives of the old order appear in garish colours (predominantly red), are wearing masks, have painted faces, or else stand on stilts -- in short they appear like grotesque circus clowns rather than real people. In contrast, Akhnaten's and Nefertiti's appearance is distinctly human: the favourite dictum of the religious revolution, "living in truth," at least as far as this particular staging is concerned, is interpreted literally. This distinction between the "imaginary" world of the patriarchs and the "real" world of Akhnaten, Nefertiti, and their followers is an important one to the overall musico-dramatic conception of the opera, as the following passage illustrates:

The opera *Akhnaten* aims at presenting a strikingly different picture of the "old" order as it appears in Act 1, Scene 1, and the years of Akhnaten's reign. The gods of ancient Egypt were effectively banished by Akhnaten. Their somewhat exotic treatment, both musically and visually, during scenes of the "old" order are meant to highlight this difference. (Glass et al. 1987, 15.)

The three patriarchs of the old order enter once again in fifths with all of the ferociousness of their similar entry in the previous scene. This contrasts sharply with the delicate contrapuntal entry of the three representatives of the new order in following scene. The initial strophe of this section has a distinct liturgical flavour that is appropriate to its function in the opera. The music that follows, however, has more to do with depicting the nature of the empire the new pharaoh has inherited than being associated with the ceremony *per se*. The text, which pays homage to the newly crowned pharaoh, is as follows:

Hail to thee, thou who art in peace	<i>Ya-nedj hrak yemi em hetepu</i>
Lord of joy, crowned form	<i>Neb aut yeb sekhem kha-u</i>
Lord of the <i>wereret</i> crown, exalted of plumes	<i>Neb wereret ka shuti</i>
Beautiful of diadem, exalted of the white crown	<i>Nefer seshed ka hedjet</i>
The gods love to look upon thee	<i>Mertu netcheru maanek</i>
The double crown is established upon thy brow	<i>Sekhti men em weptek</i>

The first strophe of the coronation music is fairly static in musical terms, its declamatory style functioning to underline the ecclesiastical content of the first line of the text. Its chord movement is the same as encountered earlier: E minor to G major to B diminished six-four. In the second bar of the B diminished chord the minor third (D) moves through its modal counterpart (D sharp) once again. The minor/major shift here is strongly evocative of Akhnaten's androgynous "life-span" motif. Concomitant with the words "though who art

in peace" is an abrupt change of rhythm with the vocal parts and cellos changing to duple time while the violas continue playing a ternary rhythm: this suggests that whoever lives in peace must also possess the ability to live with contradiction.

5.3.4 The coronation ceremony: modal or pan-diatonic ambiguity

With the following section (which I will refer to as the A section) comes a new kind of tonal ambiguity, this time modal. This music is heard three times in succession on its first hearing, but in its later manifestations only twice. The early move to G major is no longer followed by an E minor tonic but continues its ascent through A-flat major, B-flat major, back to A-flat major and then to G major, where it remains over four bars before slipping back to E minor with the simple addition of the bass note of this chord, E (later in the scene it remains on G, thus placing a stronger emphasis on this tonal centre). Here as elsewhere, Glass avoids the perfect and plagal cadences that in eighteenth and nineteenth century harmonic practice confirm the fact that modulation has in fact occurred. In this case, the pivotal chord A flat would appear to be the location of the shift in tonal perspective from the key of E minor to its related major key G major. The chord that follows it, B-flat major, is no longer as convincingly interpreted from the standpoint of E minor -- where it is a lowered, or diminished, fifth degree major triad -- as from the alternative perspective of G major, where it is a fairly respectable third degree (modal) chord. The essentially melodic, rather than functional, chord movement in this and other scenes of the opera does much to preserve tonal ambiguity. Of course, neo-modal or pan-diatonic music such as this is not peculiar to Glass; it is not even typical of his style. It is quite apparent also from his own characterisation of this scene in the passage cited earlier, that he has in mind an exotic effect, intended to convey the illusory world-view of the patriarchs (their imaginary constructs of otherness?), rather than being a musical language behind which he wholeheartedly stands. Modality, in the conventional sense of the word, is clearly not something that interests the composer, other than in specific theatrical contexts which require such music:

I actually seem to prefer a stronger feeling of tonality than you get with modal harmony. In modal harmony, you don't really know where the key is very often. It can be in several places but it doesn't, it's not that it can be in several places, but it can be in several places and you don't really care. I don't think that modal harmony makes a very strong statement musically, for me. In some of the early pieces you can see a bit of that maybe -- the early minimalist pieces, which were really very pentatonic ... (Glass, interview with the author, September 8, 1993.)

The strange, or "exotic," sound of this music can be accounted for in a number of different ways. Firstly, throughout the sequence a dissonant ostinato can be heard (on bassoon, first trombone and cellos) oscillating between the notes d and e flat -- the root of A flat and its fifth, E flat, are a tritone and a minor second away, respectively, from the first of these notes, d. Thus the surface texture of the music is already dissonant. The sense of tension

engendered by the ostinato is strengthened by the polyrhythm implied in this simple duple alternation of quarter-notes when set against the ternary rhythm of the bar-lines. Secondly, the shift in perception involved when the key centre changes has, of itself, an unsettling effect on the listener. Thirdly, it is conceivable that some awareness of the original key centre remains, making the chord based on the lowered, or diminished, fifth degree B-flat major (it is a diminished fifth away from the tonic of E minor) a profoundly uncomfortable one. Fourthly -- and this is undoubtedly the most contentious so far, although I consider it a salient factor -- it is possible that there is still some awareness of opera's home key, A minor; in which case the progression can be seen to move in extremely murky tonal waters. The three tonal alternatives are as follows:

	G	-	A^b	-	B^b	-	A^b	-	G	-	e [G]	-	G	-	e [G]	-
E minor:	III	-	^bIV	-	^bV	-	^bIV	-	III	-	i [III]	-	III	-	i [III]	-
Gmajor:	I	-	^bII	-	III	-	^bII	-	I	-	vi [I]	-	I	-	vi [I]	-
(A minor):	(VII)		([#]VII)		(^bII)		([#]VII)	-	(VII)	-	(v) [VII]	-	(VII)	-	(v) [VII]	-

The music is not, of course, heard from all of these perspectives at the same time, not at least with the same degree of attentiveness: two perceptual shifts occur in the course of the repeated sequence, which can be elicited from the above table by following the course of the bold type. Relationships exist, of course, between the key at which one has arrived and the key from which one departs: it is highly unlikely that one's awareness of the earlier key disintegrates in a split second; that one suffers a sudden attack of musical amnesia, as it were. All the more so in the case of repeated music, as the key centre from which one has departed keeps on coming back to remind you where it is. It is therefore reasonable to assume that a good part of the acerbity of the A-flat and, especially, the B-flat chords in this passage can be attributed to the fact that they have not modulated away from E minor in convincing terms -- that some vestige of the "(M)Other" key (and I call it this with good reason) remains in the memory of the listener. It may be secondary to the new key centre of G major, but its presence is felt all the same.

But what of the "home key" of the entire opera, A minor. E minor and A minor are closely related in tonal terms, especially in Glass's music, where the composer uses every means at his disposal to maintain the ambiguity between the two keys. All of the chords presented here are, to a greater or lesser extent, acceptable chords in the key of A minor -- more so, in fact, than they are in E minor. And to claim, for example, that one would have some awareness of the fact that one is straying into dissonant, or less dissonant, tonal areas in relation to that key does not imply that one has, or is required to have, absolute pitch; it simply means that one is remembering. In the analysis of nineteenth-century music, particularly opera, the question of large scale tonal design remains a controversial issue¹; but in music where there are definite and

¹ See the debate on this subject in the journal *Nineteenth-Century Music* (Levarie 1979; Kerman 1979; Marco 1980; and Levarie 1980), republished in Volume Fourteen, *Approaches to Tonal Analysis*, of the Garland Library (1985). A middle path of sorts, including considerations of both micro-structural musico-dramatic events and macro-

consistent road signs placed with the explicit purpose of refreshing one's memory the same problems do not arise. I have, nonetheless, placed my interpretation from the standpoint of A minor in parentheses to emphasise the fact that this is best understood in terms of memory rather than direct perception. However, as *all* tonality is ultimately founded on memory as opposed to direct perception, I encourage the reader to view even these parentheses with the suspicion they deserve. While the specific tonal functions I have given may be somewhat misleading, I maintain that the resolution to E minor in the final bars of the pattern can be recognised as a resolution of sorts to the "dominant" key of the opera.

The tonal emphasis in this section shifts slightly in its later manifestations, with a simple reiteration of the G major triad replacing the earlier vacillation between the two tonal centres E minor and G. (I have marked this change in the table with squared parentheses) This has the effect of strengthening the sense of G as the stronger tonality of the two; it also has the secondary effect of underlining the contrasting tonalities (G major against E minor/A major) of this section (section A) and that which follows it (section B).

The home tonality of A minor returns in the following section to remind one that it was never actually all that far away. The music of the B section is always heard three times in succession, in contrast with the A section described above which is generally heard only twice. This section is also tonally ambiguous, although now there are only two prospective keys, A minor and E minor.

a(a/E) G - F - G - e/E - e -

E minor: iv(iv/i)- III - ^bII - III - i - i -

A minor: i - VII - VI - VII - V - v -

One is able to hear this passage in a number of different ways depending on which part of the music one is concentrating on, on the slightly different inflections in the orchestration, voice-leading, and melodic elaboration of each cadence, and above all else on the bass ground that underpins the progression. The progression is heard at first with exclusively uninverted chords, and with its initial chord appearing as an unequivocal A minor triad (later transformed into a more ambiguous chord). The penultimate E-based triad of the sequence is, nevertheless, lacking its third, which allows it to be interpreted either as minor tonic chord in the key of E minor or as the fifth degree dominant chord in the key of A minor. As the singing enters on the initial uninverted A minor chord, it is, perhaps, the strongest tonic candidate, for the time being at least. However, the switch to E minor at the end of the sequence, by the simple addition of the modal determinator, G, would appear to call such an interpretation into question, as would the duration of this chord in relation to the other chords in the sequence: it is heard for four bars with no third, and then for four more with its minor third, while the other chords in the sequence

structural key relations, is offered in Parker's and Brown's (1983) article on the same subject.

are each heard for only two bars at a time. Mere duration, then, plays a role in confirming the tonal force of E minor in the sequence.

Subsequent to the musical interlude in which the new pharaoh is crowned (which I will discuss shortly) a somewhat different transformation of the sequence is heard. The initial chord is no longer unequivocally categorisable -- it contains the note b^1 , a chord tone of E minor but not of A minor. The result is a kind of A minor/E minor hybrid that is sufficiently unstable to shift the harmonic equilibrium from the standpoint of the former key to that of the latter. It is weakened further as a result also of its first inversion voicing. Moreover, there is a growing gravitational pull towards the uninverted bass note of the E minor chord, due to the fact that there is no longer any serious challenge to its tonal hegemony. The descending bass ostinato $c - B - A - G - E$ leads, down through a transposed version of the tetrachord motif heard in the chaconne, inexorably towards E minor. The result is a driving ostinato groove that brings with it a growing sense of anticipation.

It is noteworthy that the descending tetrachord motif heard in the bass ostinato is mirrored, as it was in the chaconne, with rising tetrachords in the vocal parts. The tetrachord motif, $a^1 - b^1 - c^2 - d^2$, is heard at first in the tenors (rehearsal mark 57), and then, in the next repetition of the sequence, in the sopranos (rehearsal mark 58). Related motivic material is found also in the alto and bass voices. Even more interesting than the reappearance of the motif itself, is the fact that it appears concomitant with the return of the full mixed chorus (SATB). The message is as clear here as it was in the funeral scene: we are moving irrevocably away from the patriarchal hegemony of the old order towards an order in which some semblance of balance between the sexes will be extolled. An alternative way of interpreting this shift in the two scenes would be to surmise that the old order is one in which the patriarchal hegemony calls the shots and the ordinary people of Thebes, and, indeed, throughout the entire Egyptian empire, simply comply with their wishes.

5.3.5 The third element: earth

But let us return to an earlier event; an event that can be regarded as largely responsible for the change of emphasis in the music described above. After two alternation of the A and B sections (AAA BBB - AA BBB), there is an abrupt return to a single A minor chord. During the repetitions of this chord, the new Pharaoh, Amenhotep IV (later to assume the name Akhnaten), receives his crown. Concomitant with a sudden change in tempo (from 192 to 96 beats per minute) and metre (from 3/4 to 4/4 time), the "bell" motif returns once again on flute and celeste. After only eight bars however, the gradual build up of musical material heard earlier in this scene -- subsequent to Akhnaten's chaconne passage -- is once again initiated. The meter changes from 4/4 time back to 3/4 time, and a quasi-accelerando unfolds once more in a series of steps (rehearsal mark 42, 96 beats per minute; rehearsal mark 44, 132 beats per minute; rehearsal mark 46, 144 beats per minute; rehearsal mark 50, 176 beats per minute; rehearsal mark 51, 192 beats per minute).

Although a pedal on A is heard throughout this section in the cellos, this is undermined, after the cessation of the bell motif, by a second pedal alternating between a low E, played on the tuba, and e an octave higher, played on the bass clarinet. At times this movement coincides with the bar lines (rehearsal marks 45 and 47) and at others it is in polyrhythmic disjunction with these (46 and 48-50). The move from the "self" key to the "(M)Other" key, from the real to the imaginary, marks also the journey of Akhnaten from his relatively sheltered private life to the more narcissistic ways of the pharaohs. It represents also the imaginary earthly inheritance that is now bestowed upon the new ruler.

While all of this is going on in the music, the scribe Amenhotep, son of Hapu (whom we know to be the androgynous seer Tiresias), recites the titulary list of the new pharaoh. Amenhotep IV (Akhnaten) receives his crown with all of the traditional Egyptian honours:

Live the Horus, Strong-Bull-Appearing as Justice;
He of the Two Ladies, Establishing Laws
and causing the Two-Lands to be Pacified;
Horus of Gold, Mighty-of-Arm-when-He-Smites-the-Asiatics;

King of Upper and Lower Egypt,
Nefer Kheperu Ra Wa en Ra,
Son of Neb-maet-Ra (Lord of the truth like Ra)
Son of Ra, Amenhotep (Amon is pleased)
Hek Wase (Ruler of Thebes), Given Life.

Mighty Bull, Lofty of Plumes;
Favorite of the Two Goddesses, Great in Kingship in Karnak;
Golden Hawk, wearer of Diadems in Southern Heliopolis;
King of Upper and Lower Egypt.

Thus the third of the elements is introduced; earth. To the water of the Prelude music and the air of the Funeral music is added Akhnaten's worldly inheritance, the land of Egypt, centre of the most powerful empire of the ancient world. By a fortuitous coincidence the crown the new pharaoh inherits is the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, the two parts of the country united in the Old Kingdom. What could be more fitting? That an empire founded on dualism (the dualism of life and death mapped onto the dualism of ruler and ruled) should have a dual crown and be termed a dual land seems to fit Glass's depiction of the old order like a glove. This could also explain the dyadic overall structure of the music of this scene; of the A and B sections and of the two larger structural blocks cleaved by the reading of the titulary list.

As was the case with the "wind" (or air) motive in the Funeral scene, the introduction of the new element, earth, invokes a response from the full mixed chorus, from the women as well as the men of Thebes. It is perhaps also of import that the second half of the coronation music is heard in three macro-structural blocks (AA BBB - AA BBB - AA BBB), thus reiterating the triadic motif of the opera, in contrast to the two blocks which preceded the crowning of Amenhotep IV (Akhnaten). Now, of course, there is only one element missing: the dominant element of the opera, fire.

5.4 Act 1:3 The Window of Appearances

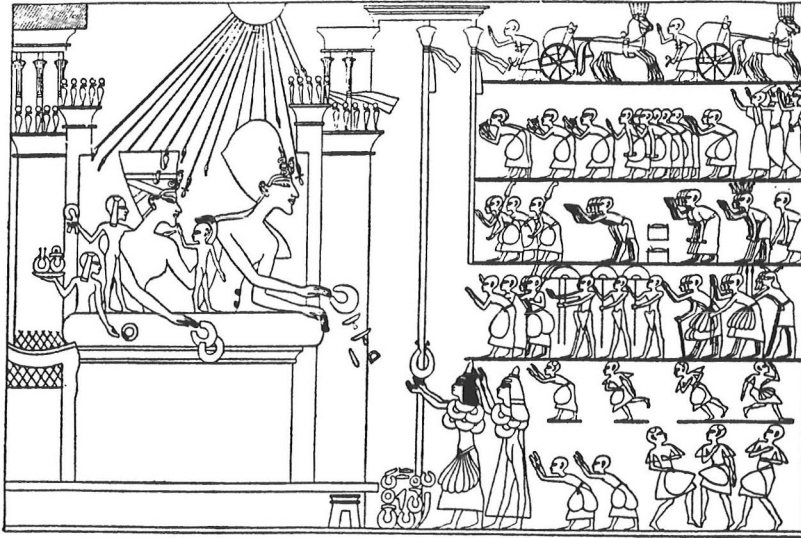


FIGURE 5 The royal pair, Akhnaten and Nefertiti, at the palace balcony, or Window of Appearances, with their three eldest daughters bestowing gifts on their followers (Breasted 1909, 368).

Everything, O monks, is burning. And how O monks is everything burning? The eye, O monks, is burning; visible things are burning; the mental impressions based on the eye are burning; the contact of the eye with visible things, be it pleasant, be it painful, be it neither pleasant nor painful, that also is burning.(...) The ear is burning, sounds are burning,(...) The nose is burning, odors are burning,(...) The tongue is burning, tastes are burning,(...) The body is burning, objects of contact are burning,(...) The mind is burning, thoughts are burning, all burning with the fire of greed, and anger, and of ignorance.

Extract from the *Fire Sermon or Mahavagga*, Rhys-Davids & Oldenberg translation (1968, 58-60.)

In the third scene of Act I, the three representatives of the new religious order appear together on the windowed balcony of the palace used for state appearances (see Figure 5). Amenhotep IV has now renounced his former titles and appears before his people for the first time as Akhnaten (spirit of Aten). In accordance with the dictum of the new regime -- "living in truth" -- all pretences are now stripped away: Akhnaten appears before his subjects as he really is, however shocking that might be to them. He does not appear alone, however. With him stand two women who are both ardent advocates of the

new religious cult; firstly Akhnaten's mother and the wife of king Amenhotep III, the great Queen Tye, and secondly, Queen Nefertiti. Together, the three sing an exquisite trio in which they extol the manifold bounties of creation as manifestations of the power of the Aten. The text which is sung is unlike anything we have heard in the opera up until this point, and, indeed, anything previously known to ancient Egyptian culture:

AKHNATEN:

Oh, one creator of all things
Oh, one maker of all existences
Men¹ came forth from his two eyes
The gods sprang forth into existence
at the utterances of his mouth

*Tut wu-a yeri enti
Wa-a wa-u yeri wenenet
Perer en rem em yertif
Kheper netcheru tep ref*

TYE & AKHNATEN:

He maketh the green herbs to make
cattle live
And the staff of life for the use of man
He maketh the fish to live in the rivers,
The winged fowl in the sky

*Yeri semu se-ankh menmen
Khet en ankhu en henmemet
Yeri ankh-ti remu en yetru
Apdu genekh pet*

AKHNATEN & NEFERTITI:

He giveth the breath of life to the egg
He maketh birds of all kinds to live
And likewise the reptiles that creep
and fly
He causeth the rats to live in their holes

*Redi nefu en enti em suhet
Se-ankh apnentu yeri ankhti
khenus
Djedfet puyu mitet yeri
Yeri kherti penu em babasen*

TYE, AKHNATEN, NEFERTITI:

And the birds that are on every
green thing
Hail to thee maker of all these things
Thou only one.

*Se-ankh puyu em khet nebet
Hrak yeri
Enen er a-u*

As the scene begins, the clouds of the various tonalities heard in the previous scene evaporate once again to allow the A minor rays of the sun to shine through unimpaired. After an eight bar introduction, tubular bells chime out the euphoric "bell" motif ($e^2 - c^2 - d^2 - b^1 - e^2 - a^1 - d^2 - b^1$), heard an octave higher at the beginning of the Coronation ceremony, played then on flute and celeste. It is accompanied initially by trombone fifths (A and e), then it is heard alone, and finally it is joined by a simple arpeggio accompaniment on the violas supported occasionally by trombones (see Example 15).

Bells are a singularly rich musical instrument in both semiotic and acoustic terms. All three of Charles Peirce's semiotic categories -- the icon, the index, and the symbol² -- can be identified with the bell: it represents religious

¹ The male generic form was, to my knowledge, added in the translation.

² In semiotic terminology an index is a sign which has a natural association with its referent; a symbol is a sign which has an arbitrary relationship to its referent; and an icon is a sign which has a formal resemblance to its referent. For Peirce's original exposition of these concepts see the *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (1955, 102). See also Terence Hawkes's *Structuralism and Semiotics* (1977, 123-150). The most thorough discussions of the concepts in the musicological literature are in Raymond Monelle's

insight and ceremony (i.e., it is a symbol); it points to, and actually summons the congregation to, the building in which religious ceremonies take place, the church or temple (i.e., it is an index); and, as it is used in religious ceremonies, it is itself what it represents (i.e., it is an icon). Thus, a great deal of the force of this instrument can be attributed, aside from its acoustic properties, to its semiotic elasticity.

EXAMPLE 15

The bell has been a favourite instrument of what Glass refers to as the European school of “New Mystic” composers (Glass, interview with the author, September 9, 1993). As I will show in the final chapter, Glass explicitly distances himself from this school, although he has expressed respect for the composer Arvo Pärt, and boasts that this composer had once referred to *Akhmaten* as “the *only* modern opera” (ibid.). Pärt’s affinity with the opera should come as no surprise, considering the Estonian composer’s preoccupation with religious subject matter, and particularly with bells, not to mention the presence of the archaic countertenor voice in the opera, which Pärt himself has used in a number of compositions. Pärt’s *tintinnabuli* style is, to an extent, inspired by the musical patterns that arise in bell ringing practices¹, and bells are used as an instrument of themselves in certain of his compositions -- including his poignant *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten* (1977), in which a monotone bell chime forms the ground over which strands of descending string scales cascade. Other composers of a similarly devotional bent, including John Tavener and Henryk Górecki, have either included bells in their respective instrumental arsenals or have written music that is either imitative or evocative of bell chimes².

Linguistics and Semiotics in Music (1992, 193-219), and, in the Finnish literature, in Eero Tarasti’s essay “Semiotiikan Alkeet” (foundations of semiotics) (1990b, 29-31).

1 The Estonian scholar Merike Vaitmaa has written an important article on Pärt’s *tintinnabuli* style, unfortunately published so far only in Estonian and Finnish (1990).

2 Tavener employs hand bells in a number of his compositions (for instance, his *Towards the Son: Ritual Procession* [1982], and *Sixteen Haiku of Serefis* [1984]) while the second movement of Górecki’s famed *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* (*Symphony no. 3, opus 36* [1977]) begins with a passage played on the piano that is evocative of monotone bell chimes. Other composers who have taken an interest in the bell for similar reasons include Messiaen (*Turangalila-symphony* [1946-8]) and Stockhausen (*Musik im Bauch* [1975]).

Another noteworthy example of bell chimes in contemporary music can be found in Mike Oldfield's progressive rock classic *Tubular Bells* (1972-73). It could be argued that there is some reciprocity of influence here, as Oldfield appears to have been influenced by Glass's late 1960s and early 1970s compositional style. Much of the musical texture of *Tubular Bells*, for example, betrays the influence of Glass's early minimal pieces; moreover, Oldfield on one occasion re-arranged and recorded one of Glass's compositions (*North Star* [1977]). The way tubular bells are used in *Akhnaten* can easily be compared with their usage in Oldfield's composition. In *Tubular Bells* the bells themselves are not heard until the very end of the lengthy first part, after each of the other instruments has been introduced, verbally and actually, by Oldfield himself. The effect of the delayed entry of the bells, after their conspicuous absence in the early part of the composition, is in *Tubular Bells* quite striking. In the same way, the tubular bells in *Akhnaten* -- although their motif was heard already in the previous scene played on celeste and flute -- appear only after all the other elements of the opera are in place. When they are finally heard, there is a distinct sense of the pieces of a puzzle falling into place -- the distinctive percussive and at the same time sonorous sound of wood striking metal bars cannot but, for a moment at least, make the listeners sit up straight in their seats¹.

A final symbolic significance of the bell within the drama of the opera lies in the fact that it is an instrument which is cast in fire (the dominant element of the opera). Other metallic instruments appear to bear a similar relation to the sun god -- including the brass instruments (particularly the trumpet and the horn), the triangle (which is significant for other allegorical reasons, as we shall see later [when discussing the City/Dance; Act II, scene 3]), the flute, and the celeste.

If a ceremonial context for this moment is to be envisaged, then the cheerful demeanour of the descending A minor arpeggios heard in this scene, is more closely related to the elated bell-ringing heard after a wedding than to the solemn bell tolls that announce a death. This evocation of this significance of the bell appears to be precisely Glass's intention: the bells we are hearing announce not only the beginning of a new religious regime, but the beginning of a tri-partite marriage between Akhnaten, Nefertiti, and Tye -- a "fatal triangle" if ever there was one.

It is Akhnaten himself who is first to sing. The effect of withholding his voice until the final scene of the first act is quite startling. Glass describes his intentions in delaying Akhnaten's musical entrance in the following passage:

I heightened the effect of hearing that first note by Akhnaten by delaying his vocal entrance as long as possible. He is not heard in the prologue, of course, nor does he sing in the first-scene funeral music. We see him all through his coronation, including the preparations leading up to it, but still we do not hear his voice. Finally, some thirty-five minutes into Act I, in the third scene -- named *The Window of Appearances* (a lovely double-entendre title taken from the Egyptian) -- where he greets his subjects as the new pharaoh, we

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Tubular bells are used in a similar way in Glass's score to the Paul Schrader film *Mishima*. The bells are heard in the film simultaneously with moments of religious realisation.

hear him for the first time as he is joined in duet by Nefertiti, a mezzo-soprano. This becomes a trio when his mother, Queen Tye, a soprano, joins them. (Glass 1987, 156.)

This silent and peculiar-looking figure of the previous scenes is, then, suddenly given a voice. While it remains a matter of dispute whether physical envoicing can be directly equated with envoicing in a broader cultural sense, as Abbate (1991 and 1993) has claimed, in this case, at least, the presence of the pharaoh's physical voice coincides exactly with his envoicing (in the sense of empowerment) in the context of the opera's plot -- the same would be true of Tye and Nefertiti, as well. The envoicing of androgynes in the cultural sense is not, of course, my primary concern here, as they cannot be considered an oppressed socio-cultural/biological group in the same sense as can women (as they are paradoxical constructs of the imagination rather than real people).

Of course, it could be argued that the audience heard his voice earlier in the opera -- not, of course, his physical voice, but the voice of his music: namely, the chaconne that is heard at the beginning of the previous scene. This could be thought of as the character's internal voice, to which the audience has privileged access through the medium of music, as opposed to his external and physical voice, to which the characters of the opera are also granted access. It is noteworthy, in this regard, that the music from which this scene is constructed is closely related thematically to the chaconne theme.

Harmonically speaking, the music of this scene is fairly straightforward, compared, that is, to what we have heard previously. Each verse comprises two cycles, the former of which is quite spartan in terms of its instrumentation, while the latter is more richly orchestrated. The first phrase of each cycle moves from A minor to G seventh twice, and then on a third repeat moves from A minor to E minor ninth (no seventh). In its second phrase the music simply alternates four times between A minor and G seventh: at the beginning of this second phrase it strays temporarily into triple metre but returns to 4/4 time after only four bars. Note that the leading note is explicitly avoided in this scene, resulting in a more static, less goal-directed feel in the music: in short, no dominant means greater equality between chord functions and, hence, less tension in the music. In terms of chord functions and metre the sequence is as follows:

4/4 a: i - VII⁶₅ - i - VII⁶₅ - i - v⁹
 3/4 i - VII⁶₅ - i - VII⁶₅ - 4/4 i - VII⁶₅ - i - VII⁶₅

With little going on in terms of harmonic and rhythmic interest, attention is shifted towards the voices, their particular qualities, as well as the interplay that takes place between them. Indeed, there is plenty of interest to observe in this area. When Akhnaten finally opens his mouth and his ethereal countertenor voice is heard for the first time, it is undoubtedly one of the "high points" of the opera, particularly as it has been so long awaited. Glass explains:

The attraction for me in using a countertenor for Akhnaten must ... be obvious. The effect of hearing a high, beautiful voice coming from the lips of a full-grown man can at first be very startling. In one stroke, Akhnaten would be separated from everyone around him. It was a way of musically and

dramatically indicating in the simplest possible way that here was a man unlike any who had come before. (Glass 1987, 156.)

In the passage which follows, Glass makes it obvious that the intended musical referent in using the countertenor voice is the archaic, "transsexual"¹ castrato voice.

The figure of Akhnaten himself required special care. This was a man so unusual, even unique, as to be virtually unprecedented in Egyptian, and therefore human, history.(...) I thought a long while about how to present our title character. After all, you could use up the better part of Act I just indicating, in various ways, how extremely peculiar Akhnaten really was. There simply was no stage time for that. To demonstrate his strangeness with costuming could work, but that was risky because it left a crucial noninterpretative matter in the hands of people over whom, in future productions, I would have no control. More and more it seemed to me that the problem was best solved musically, and my solution was to make Akhnaten a countertenor.(...) Along the same musical lines were the famous castrati, men who had been castrated as boys so that they could retain the sweetness and strength of their boyish voices while adding the physical force of a mature male physique. This practice continued into this century, the last castrato of note being the Italian Alessandro Moreschi (admiring Italians called him "The Angel of Rome"), a soprano castrato who lived long enough to make a number of recordings that are the only surviving examples of castrato vocalism. (Moreschi died in 1922 at the age of sixty-four.) The last thirty or forty years have seen a renewed interest in music from earlier times, and this has brought about a resulting emergence of the modern countertenor who, through rigorous training of the falsetto part of his voice, can achieve impressive and beautiful vocal results. (Glass 1987, 155-156.)

I quote this passage *in extenso* as evidence that the composer is referring explicitly to the castrato voice in his use of the countertenor, and not employing the voice solely because of its unusual acoustical characteristics. The ability of the character of Akhnaten to partake of the pleasures of the higher register, to partake of *jouissance* as the male voice is rarely able to do, is, however, aside from its gendered reference, a quite obvious way of setting him apart from surroundings. Glass's writing for the countertenor moves, on the whole, close to the top of this voice's compass: the high d²s and e²s in this scene, for example, are well within the compass of the female soprano -- and, I might add, the male castrated soprano. Paul Esswood, the singer of the CBS recording of the opera as well as its Stuttgart premiere, is known among countertenors

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A valid objection to the castrato voice, that has nothing to do with its "artificial" nature, is that it is a symptom of cultural misogyny. The castrati rose to popularity as a direct result of the proscription of women from first, the church, and then, the theatre. While there was little difficulty in dressing men up in drag in the theatre -- Shakespeare, for example, frequently played on the ambiguity between the sex of his leading ladies and that of the boys who played their roles -- in music theatre the problem was not so easily solved. No one seems to have condoned the castration of boys in order that they might sing the parts of women (least of all the Catholic Church), although many a blind eye seems to have been turned towards these practices. See chapter two of Heriot's (1956, 23-37) fascinating study on this subject. See also Poizat's chapter on the castrati in his *The Angels Voice* (1992, 113-119).

themselves for his prowess in the "head" range of the voice and, by some¹, for his slightly effeminate singing style, making him a perfect match for the role. Countertenors may object vehemently to the association of their voice with sexual ambiguity² -- which is perfectly understandable in a culture in which the sexually divergent is so heavily stigmatised -- but there is precious little they can do to strip the voice of the connotations it has acquired over the years. Even Giles (1982, 74-80) in his comprehensive study of the subject, includes a chapter on the castrato voice and professes his admiration for these singers who attempted to transcend the limitations of their biological sex. However badly we may feel about it, the high male voice will always be associated with the female sex, and the low female with the male -- any exception to this, such as in the interplay between Akhnaten's and Nefertiti's voices in this opera, will probably always be perceived as a deviation from the norm. And an increasing number of countertenors seem to have come to terms with their sexually ambiguous voices. After all it is precisely music which is encoded in these terms -- and a large proportion of the contemporary countertenor repertory is, either overtly or covertly³ -- which keeps the pay cheques rolling in, as the expression goes.

Why, then, cast a countertenor in this role? And why the clear reference to the castrato singing tradition: is it possible that Akhnaten himself was actually a castrato? As I have already mentioned there has been a good deal of speculation concerning Akhnaten's sexual make-up, due to the iconography of the time in which he appears to be endowed with certain physical attributes we are accustomed to thinking of as secondary characteristics of the female sex⁴: these include enlarged thighs, hips, and buttocks, something resembling a cleavage in the area of his chest, and in one famous colossus found in Karnak, which has confounded historians since it was rediscovered, he appears naked in his lower parts and is visibly lacking any signs of male genitalia. Glass himself would appear to take such representations at face value, although, as we have already established,

1 See Giles 1982, 166.

2 See Giles (1982, 5-6) and James Bowman's Foreword to Giles's book (*ibid.*, vii).

3 Other works written for the countertenor in contemporary music include Britten's operas *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1960) and *Death in Venice* (1973); Davies's *Taverner* (1972); Weir's *A Night at the Chinese Opera* (1987); and a great number of Tippett's vocal compositions. Note that these are all British composers. The popularity of the countertenor voice in Britain -- which might have something to do with the tradition of choirboy singing in British cathedrals, or on the other hand might be attributable to the British fascination with the eccentric and the uncanny -- could, in part, account for the success of ENO's production of *Akhnaten* compared to its relatively hostile reception in the United States. It should be noted also that the renewed interest in the countertenor has gone hand in hand with the burgeoning interest in historical performance practices: re-recordings of Renaissance and Baroque works with countertenors playing leading roles have appeared in large numbers during the past two decades.

4 Some historians of the nineteenth century have speculated that Akhnaten may have been a woman disguised as a man, a theory to which no contemporary Egyptologist, to my knowledge, subscribes, but one it would be very difficult to *disprove* in unequivocal terms.

historical accuracy is not his primary concern. He asserts in the film on the making of the opera, for example, that "the idea of all these roles [Einstein, Gandhi, and Akhnaten] is never to represent the person -- this is a species of poetry, it's not documentation" (Glass interview in Blackwood 1985). Thus, the question as to whether Akhnaten's physique actually resembled its depiction in the art of the time is perhaps not all that important. To depict him in that way in the opera clearly makes for good drama, and it is, moreover, a highly appropriate allegory for many of his innovative religious and social ideas. Glass is not alone, however, in speculating whether the pharaoh might not have really appeared as he was characterised.

The art of the Amarna period may be the first period of conscious naturalism in the history of art. One of Akhnaten's dictums was "living in truth," and presumably he chose to be portrayed as he really appeared, not in the formal, idealized style of the pharaohs who preceded him. If this is true, he certainly must have been an odd-looking character: swollen thighs, enlarged hips, breasts almost pendulous. At first glance he appears almost hermaphroditic. Medical analysis is not conclusive. Akhnaten's physical appearance could have been genetic in origin, or it may have been the result of disease. In any case he was male and capable of fathering children. (Glass 1987, 149.)

Is it possible, then, that Akhnaten might actually have been a castrato? He does not appear to have been a eunuch, if the children he fathered are assumed to be his own, that is. These are, it should be stressed, consistently referred to in the writings of the period as "the daughter[s] of the King, of his loins" (Aldred 1988, 234). Thus, if he suffered from a sexual disorder, it was certainly not one serious enough to render him incapable of producing offspring. Aldred (1988, 231-232) considers it highly probable, however, that Akhnaten and his daughters suffered from a mild form of a genetic disorder known as Fröhlich's syndrome, which became more severe as the pharaoh aged, and which then began to affect his physical appearance.

It is not simply that Akhenaten had himself represented as effeminate or androgynous, he specified certain distortions that belong neither to normal men nor to normal women. In an exaggerated form these are the abnormalities that have enabled a number of pathologists independently to diagnose that the subject depicted in this way may have suffered from a disorder of the endocrine system, more specifically from a malfunctioning of the pituitary gland. Elliot Smith identified it in 1907 as Fröhlich's syndrome, a complaint in which male patients exhibit a corpulence similar to Akhenaten's. Adiposity may vary in degrees but there is a typical feminine distribution of fat in the regions of the breast, abdomen, pubis, thighs and buttocks. The lower limbs, however, are slender, and the legs, for instance, resemble 'plus fours'. (...) The diagnosis of Fröhlich's syndrome may only be made when the patient, having reached the age of puberty, fails to develop normally, *his voice stays shrill*,¹ body hair does not appear and the sexual organs remain infantile. A later stage of the complaint is the plumping-out of breasts, abdomen, buttocks and thighs. An occasional concomitant is hydrocephalus, which, because it has arisen when the bones of the skull have hardened and closed, does not distort the cranium to the usual globular shape, but results in a bulging of the thinner parietal areas. (Aldred 1988, 231-232)

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The emphasis here is mine.

This explanation would certainly seem to account for Akhnaten's peculiar physical characteristics, as well as shedding some light on the cranial distortions discernible in the illustrations of the royal princesses. Moreover, it provides some "scientific" justification -- if it is needed, which I doubt -- for Glass's decision to cast a countertenor in the title role. If the evidence mentioned by Aldred is to be believed, Akhnaten may well have been a countertenor in real life -- or, perhaps, his voice would have borne a closer resemblance still to the castrated male soprano. Perhaps it is best to let speculation rest here, as this theory is not without its problems.

Aldred maintains that Akhnaten could not merely have been presenting himself as androgynous, and it is noteworthy that this Egyptologist avoids resorting to such explanations wherever it is at all possible. The colossus found at Karnak which is lacking its genitalia, mentioned earlier, is passed off by him as representing Nefertiti rather than Akhnaten, despite its angular facial appearance, which is identical to the statues of the pharaoh, and despite the beard and pharaonic regalia with which it is furnished. Here Aldred states his case:

The colossi uncovered in the 1930s by Chevrier at the sight of Gempaaten in Eastern Karnak have been largely responsible for the 'expressionistic' interpretation of the art of the reign.(...) One specimen, which has become the most notorious of the group, apparently represents the king as nude and without genitals. A theory to account for this epicene form has suggested that this colossus, and other more fragmentary examples of the series, are manifestations of the bi-sexual aspect of the sun god, the demiurge, 'the father and mother and mankind', who impregnated himself in Chaos in order to create the diversity of the universe from the oneness of his self. The most plausible explanation, however, has been offered by J.R. Harris, who takes the view that some at least of the colossi represent not Akhnaten but Nefertiti wearing a close-clinging garment. The holding of kingly sceptres, and the wearing of a heavy beard in each case does not vitiate this argument, since there are other instances where such masculine adjuncts are occasionally arrogated by heiress queens ... (Aldred 1988, 235.)

This interpretation seems somewhat suspect, however, as the evidence found on the statue itself is, by Aldred's own admission, heavily weighted against such an interpretation. Moreover, the figure depicted in the colossus bears little resemblance to the harmonious, and distinctly feminine, appearance of Nefertiti in the other representations of her in the art of the time. Redford, in his recent study of Akhnaten, reserves his judgement on this question, although he implicitly dismisses any claim that the statue is intended to represent Nefertiti (Redford 1984, 104).

More interesting, however, than the accounts of these two Egyptologists, whom we have already established are intent on finding fault in both Akhnaten's doctrine and his person, is Danish Egyptologist-turned-musicologist Frandsen's position:

Although at present we are uncertain as to whether or not Akhnaten's mummy has, in fact, survived, and thus there is no possibility of testing the hypothesis of the androgyny syndrome, there is little probability that he

should have been genetically "defective," as scholars in the 1930s believed. Nevertheless, the choice of the countertenor remains a congenial one. Scholars engaged in research on the Amarna period during recent years do now largely agree that the famous colossi of Akhnaten represents the king as god of creation, and hence androgynous, containing both the male and the female creative principle. The iconography of Akhnaten is the visual rendering of a theological dogma, and the musical rendering could hardly find a more apt expression than a voice that is neither male nor female, the countertenor. (Frandsen 1993, 248-249.)

What we have, then, are two conflicting interpretations of the art of the Amarna period: one which views these works of art as realistic and accurate representations of the pharaoh and his family; and another, which sees the same art as expressionistic portrayals that functioned in much the manner of devotional icons, their purpose being to represent in physical form the religious ideas which these people embraced. I find myself inclined towards the latter point of view. Regardless of whether Akhnaten and his children were deformed, the pharaoh nevertheless found it desirable to have them represented in this manner. Moreover, the evidence that Akhnaten's god -- for whom the pharaoh was the self-appointed conduit -- was androgynous is incontrovertible. The Aten is referred to in a number of texts written at the time as being the Mother-Father of all that exists. What is more, it appears that some contemplative internalisation of the androgynous god -- similar to that found to this day in esoteric alchemical, as well as Tantric Hindu and Buddhist practices -- was an essential part of the doctrine. The objects for such contemplation were, in addition to the Aten itself, the royal couple and the trinity formed by them with the Aten, and, of course, the (androgynous) figure of Akhnaten himself. Here Budge illuminates some of the key points of the doctrine:

Aten, like [the Hindu god] Sûrya, was "the fountain of Living light," with the all-seeing eye, whose beams revealed his presence, and "gleaming like brilliant flames" went to nation after nation. Aten was not only the light of the sun, which seems to give new life to man and to all creation, but the giver of light and all life in general. The bringer of light and life to-day, he is the same who brought light and life on the first of days, therefore Aten is eternal. Light begins the day, so it was the beginning of creation; therefore Aten is the creator, neither made with hands nor begotten, and is the Governor of the world. The earth was fertilized by Aten, therefore he is the Mother-Father of all creatures. His eye saw everything and knew everything. The hymns to Aten suggest that Amenhotep IV [Akhnaten] and his followers conceived an image of him in their minds and worshipped him inwardly.(...) Aten, like Varuna, possessed a mysterious presence, a mysterious power, and a mysterious knowledge. He made the sun to shine, the winds were his breath, he made the sea, and caused the rivers to flow. He was omniscient, and though he lived remote in the heavens he was everywhere present on earth. (Budge 1923, 113-114.)

Here lies the essence of the Atenist doctrine, and the principle reason for its resonance with the belief system of the composer. The idea was presumably to encounter the Aten in oneself, rather than paying obeisance to a deity who was viewed as external and distant in both time and space. The

passage I cited at the beginning of this chapter and elsewhere underscore similarities between this and other religio-philosophical doctrines, particularly Buddhism. In addition to these parallels, however, there are some clear correspondences between a world view that extols holism and connectedness while at the same time revelling in the particular and the different, and current trends in Western postmodern culture. Atenism had its flaws, however, which we will encounter in the very next scene of the opera: clearly an image of worship as powerful and elegant of form as the sun, and a family circle as visible and as focused in on itself as was Akhnaten's, both do much to endanger the possibility of maintaining a totally abstract conception of God because of their own semiotic force.

To understand the character of Akhnaten from the contemporary standpoint – and I believe this to be the best way of looking at the character -- requires some degree of tolerance of the ambivalent, the paradoxical, and the uncanny: Akhnaten is, after all, not the kind of man one runs into every day. And it is noteworthy in this regard that the composer's own comments when viewing statues of the pharaoh in Cairo Museum contrast sharply with the consensus of opinion one finds in the Egyptological literature:

you can see the physical distortion we've read about. The profile is amazing isn't it -- I find that a very handsome profile. I don't know why the people who write about it talk about how misshapen he was. I don't find him misshapen at all. (Glass interview in Blackwood 1985)

Perhaps the most revealing statement of all by Glass, concerning not only the character but also the physique of Akhnaten, is the following one; "he's a very strange guy, he's a very weird guy, but he's also very recognisably a part of all of us" (Glass interview in Blackwood 1985).

Not all of us are so tolerant, however, or wish to perceive ourselves in this way. The truth is that ambivalence -- particularly sexual ambivalence -- makes most of us feel profoundly uncomfortable. When borderlines, sexual or otherwise, start to disintegrate or to merge, it undermines all of those taken-for-granted certainties by which we define ourselves and our place in the world. It threatens what we think we are, and what we work hard everyday to project ourselves as being -- this is particularly true of received ideas of masculinity, which are brittle constructs at the best of times. When Christopher Robson, the courageous countertenor cast in the title role of the American production of the opera, appeared before audiences in an appropriately padded out body suit, the tolerance of some members of the audience was apparently stretched to breaking point.

... both the visual and vocal impression Christopher made as Akhnaten was decidedly startling, especially when Akhnaten sings for the first time at the end of Act I. A number of people in our audiences were quite upset by Christopher's appearance on the stage. One very famous musician, a man who had spent his life in the theater and might have been expected to be aware of the wonders achieved by make-up artists, expressed genuine sorrow that we had not been able to engage a less grotesque-looking singer for our title role! Near the end of the New York City Opera run, we received a letter denouncing us for (1) having found some poor hermaphrodite; (2) forcing him

to display his deformities in public; and (3) making him sing my music! (Glass 1987, 165.)

The first notes Akhnaten sings in the opera are taken from the rising motif heard in the chaconne at the beginning of the previous scene ($a^1 - b^1 - c^1 - e^2$: 1 - 2 - 3 - 5). The melodic line then moves diatonically down to the third, after which it jumps back up to the high e^2 , the root note of the minor fifth degree chord. During the entire second phrase of the sequence, Akhnaten simply resonates on the tonic (a^1). To heighten the effect of the singing, the orchestral accompaniment for this passage is radically reduced. The arpeggio pattern heard prior to Akhnaten's entry on the viola is transferred to flutes and, at the same time, is shifted up an octave in register, resulting in a suitably ethereal texture for the pharaoh's religious proclamations. Occasional interpolations are heard in low fifths on the trombones but that is all.

In the second cycle of Akhnaten's solo verse, the melodic movement is identical to the first, with some slight rhythmic adjustments because of the different text. The flute part is transferred to oboes and clarinets, and drops an octave as a result: it is doubled an octave lower still by the violas heard in the introduction. The "reedy" texture of the oboe/clarinet arpeggios is complemented by the transferral of the low trombone fifths to bassoons. Akhnaten's melodic line is reinforced two octaves lower on the cellos, leaving no doubt as to the relatedness of the motivic material heard now and that heard earlier in the chaconne, as it now appears in the same register as its earlier manifestation (A - B - c - e).

Akhnaten's predominately rising melodic line could easily become associated with the rising of the sun -- not to mention the metaphorical rising of the sun cult -- as a result of the subject matter of the text. It could, in addition, quite easily take on phallic significance in light of the predominantly falling lines heard in the melodies sung by Nefertiti and Tye in the verses that follow. I have hinted already earlier, when discussing the chaconne, that these motifs should be thought of as embodying the male and the female creative principles. Here they become more clearly defined: the rising motif with the "masculine" and the falling with the "feminine," although it is highly important, as we shall see shortly, that Nefertiti's androgynous line challenges the stereotypical assignment of these characteristics to one or the other of the sexes. A useful analogy can be found in Mandala symbolism -- particularly that of the *Sri Yantra* -- where the ascending triangle takes on a phallic significance and the descending a yonic. Creative energy arises as a result of the concatenation between the two.

When Queen Tye enters at the beginning of the following cycle it is on a high e^2 , dropping to d^2 on A minor, in anticipation of the G major seventh that follows (see Example 16¹). Thus, Tye assumes the strong fifth of both chords in contrast to her son, who moves from the root of the first chord to the third of the second. Tye's melodic movement is, of course, the exact mirror image of

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The melodic movement of all three parts is the same in each cycle. Tye's part is, for example, the same in the cycles in which she sings in duet with Akhnaten as when the two are joined by Nefertiti. For this reason, I have given as an example a verse in which all three voices are present.

Akhnaten's (Tye descends by a major second while Akhnaten rises by the same interval), offset by a delay of a half-note. It is highly significant that Tye enters on the fifth and Akhnaten on the root. As I have suggested earlier, the fifth of A minor, E, represents his, largely self-constructed, sexually tinged perceptions of others; in this way, a strong physical bond is suggested between the two. In the second line of the text, Tye leaps up to a high a^2 , and then descends through the tetrachord motif down to e^2 , thus underlining the opposition between this motif ($a^2 - g^2 - f^2 - e^2$: 8 - 7 - 6 - 5) and Akhnaten's rising motif of the opening measures. Akhnaten joins his mother's feminine descent through the final three notes of the tetrachord in lower thirds, as only he would be able ($e^2 - d^2 - c^2$: 5 - 4 - 3). Here occurs one of the most interesting musico-dramatic events of the entire opera: as Akhnaten remains on a steady c^2 -- the third of the A minor chord, which perhaps signifies his gendered, or bliss body -- Tye moves from the fifth of the chord (e^2) in its first two beats, to its root (a^1) in the remaining two, thus surrounding him musically. It is not difficult to find an allegory for this in both psychological and sexual terms -- Akhnaten has re-entered his mother's womb. Thus, immediately following their respective initial statements of sexual identity, the son's sexual identity is blurred in his romantic descent with his mother, after which the act of Oedipal reintegration, return to the mother's womb, is enacted in music -- At Tye's initiative, one might speculate, although it is clear that Akhnaten was more than just a consenting party, in light of his flirtatious bi-sexual descent with his mother. In the measures that follow, mother and son are one, at first in perfect fifths (e^1 against b^1), in the mother's tonal centre (during the E minor cadence), and then in unison in Akhnaten's key, A minor (both sing the note a^1). The two sing three ecstatic wordless notes on the tonic (ah..., ah..., ah...) before reiterating the entire cycle in re-orchestrated and texted form. Of course, Akhnaten's close attachment to his mother can be interpreted both literally and metaphorically; and part of the beauty of this passage is precisely its non-specificity -- the listener (or producer of the opera) can decide for her- or himself which interpretation to pursue.

In the second cycle of this verse, there is a marked increase in musical texture, with all the higher wind instruments (flute, oboe, and clarinet) playing the undulating arpeggio sequence, mirrored by a cello line in contrary motion to this. Akhnaten's voice is reinforced now an octave below by violas and a solo horn: this procedure of doubling the countertenor voice with other solo instruments has its roots in Baroque compositional practices, and particularly in writing for the castrato voice (Heriot 1956, 30). Here it is quite necessary, as Akhnaten's delicate countertenor could easily get lost in the midst of the orchestra and the more powerful female voices with which it interweaves. As the orchestration becomes denser, the horn is replaced by a more penetrating trumpet. Once again, a symbolic significance can be identified: the trumpet, like the tubular bells heard earlier, is an instrument that is cast in fire. It is also the instrument conventionally wielded by the angel, the messenger of God.

EXAMPLE 16

TYE
SE - ANKH PU - YU EM KHET NE - BET

AK
SE - ANKH PU - YU EM KHET NE - BET HRAK

NEF
ANKH PU - YU EM KHET NE - BET HRAK

fl. synth
mp

trmp.
mp

bassoons
mp

HRAK YE - RI EN - EN ER A - U

YE - RI EN - EN ER A - U

YE - RI EN - EN ER A - U

fl. synth
mp

trmp.
mp

bassoons
mp

In the next verse (see Example 16), Tye's romantic soprano voice is replaced by the lowest female voice, the contralto. However, as good contraltos are something of a rarity in the operatic world, this part is usually sung by a mezzo-soprano capable of reaching the lower notes. The most surprising aspect of this casting is that Tye is the soprano and Nefertiti the contralto -- ordinarily one would expect the mother to have the lower voice and the romantic leading lady the higher. Here dramatic conventions are thrown into confusion:

With Akhnaten cast as a countertenor, my three main leading voices were all high. I knew there would be frequent ensembles in the opera: duets and trios with Akhnaten; his mother, Queen Tye, sung by a soprano; and his wife, Nefertiti sung by a mezzo-soprano. (The score calls for a contralto, but true contraltos are rarely found.) By using the middle to upper range of the mezzo-soprano and countertenor voices with the lower and middle range of that of the soprano, voice crossing (where lower voices sing above higher voices, and vice versa) also could happen easily. In the final libretto, we stayed away from the Oedipus theme, since the text already seemed fully freighted with abundant social, religious and philosophical issues. However, a veiled reference to the ambiguous sexual relationship of the three principles does remain in this aspect of the vocal writing. Especially when they are heard together for the first time, in the final scene of Act I (The Window of Appearances), the voice crossings produce a purposely confusing effect, making it sometimes difficult for the listener to follow the separate parts. (Glass 1987, 170.)

Nefertiti enters, as did Tye, on the fifth, thus underscoring, once again, the strong physical bond between the two. The note on which she enters is not the higher fifth however, but e^1 , a perfect fourth lower than Akhnaten's opening note. The main difference between Tye's and Nefertiti's vocal parts, apart from voice compass, is the emphasis on counterpoint in the former compared to the predominantly homophonic orientation of the latter. Thus, although she enters on the fifth like Tye, in the measures that ensue, Nefertiti fairly consistently shadows her husband's melodic line, singing a third below it. This has the secondary effect of making her music, in motivic terms, more "androgynous" than Tye's: the initial four measures of her part are characterised by a substantial rise from e^1 to g^1 to a^1 to c^2 , in accord with her husband's similar ascent. The remainder of her music sees a return, however, to the downward motion that I have characterised as being encoded in feminine terms in this context. She initially follows Akhnaten's descent in seconds -- enacted earlier as a romantic entanglement with his mother -- but then takes two plunges of a perfect fourth on her own, first, from a^1 to e^1 , and then all the way down to b . Thus, like Tye, Nefertiti jumps from the root to the fifth over the A minor chord preceding the cadence chord, but unlike Tye, she does not enclose Akhnaten in so doing. In the cadence chord itself, E minor ninth, she descends to its fifth, b , after which she drops even lower to resonate with her husband on a , an octave lower than him. The octave separating the two is, in this case, also the difference between incest and normal sexual relations. The effect of this low a is as extraordinary as Akhnaten's high e^2 , discussed earlier -- Nefertiti has crossed into the realm of her husband both in terms of register and tonality, as indeed would appear to be the case with Akhnaten who sings an octave higher than his wife. This places her well within the compasses of both of the lower male voices, the baritone and the bass, and doubles the androgynous effect hinted at also in the motivic material of her part. If Akhnaten's countertenor underlines in unmistakable terms what an extraordinary man the pharaoh was, then the same must surely be true of Nefertiti's dusky contralto. Frandsen, as is generally the case in his discussion of the opera, seeks a conventional explanation for this casting, but in

identifying Nefertiti with the mezzo-soprano rather than the slightly lower alto voice he chooses the wrong convention:

The deep female voice is reminiscent of darkness, danger, and sensuality, and Nefertiti, in this context, is seen as a temptress, a seductress representing reform and thus allowing for love between man and women, as opposed to the ritual love between mother and son. (Frandsen 1993, 249.)

There is little, however, in either the libretto or the music to support Frandsen's characterisation of Nefertiti as a temptress or a seductress: if there is a *femme fatale* in this opera then it has to be Akhnaten's mother, Tye, and not Nefertiti -- although to pigeonhole even the latter unequivocally in these terms would be to deny not only her achievements as Egypt's first prominent female figurehead, but also her largely salutary influence on the upbringing of her son¹. If one examines the precedents of Nefertiti's voice, the contralto², as opposed to the mezzo-soprano, in operatic history, its most common association is not with the seductress at all, but with the professional, the elderly, and sometimes the comic woman -- i.e., women who are perceived by the society in which they live as either androgynous, sexless, or sexually uninteresting. A paradigm example of such a role is Arnalta, the nurse from Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. Both contraltos and mezzo-sopranos were also frequently cast as *travesti*, women playing the parts of men: an example of such a role is Cherubino, the womanising woman of Mozart's *Nozze di Figaro*.

The most plausible explanation for the casting of Nefertiti as a contralto -- which, I might add, is strongly grounded in contemporary culture -- would compare her to the deep-voiced, androgynous professional woman of the early 1980s³. However, Nefertiti's voice places an emphasis not only on her competent, matter-of-fact attitude to her role in affairs of state, but it also facilitates a more intimate contrapuntal bonding with Akhnaten in the duet sung by the two. While there can be little doubt that her character is androgynous, she is certainly not intended to be sexually uninteresting (or sexless) -- quite the reverse. Thus, Glass's casting constitutes a significant departure from operatic convention: in this character, the androgynous professional woman and sensuous leading lady (not necessarily the temptress,

¹ In his characterisation of Nefertiti in these terms, Frandsen is presumably falling back on the Finnish writer Mika Waltari's Nefernefernefer as the model for the character, who unlike Glass's Nefertiti is the epitome of the seductress/predator female stereotype. See particularly the fourth part of *Sinuhe: the Egyptian*, entitled "Nefernefernefer" (Waltari 1945).

² The term "contralto" was originally a synonym for "countertenor," and even today their compasses remain almost identical: the former is, however, today reserved for the female and the latter for the male voice whereas previously they were, to a large extent, freely interchangeable.

³ Musicians who emerged at around the time the opera was written in the sphere of popular music include Grace Jones (who often wore a pin-striped suit and had her hair shorn short) and Glass collaborators and fellow New Yorkers Suzanne Vega and Laurie Anderson -- both of whom have distinctive low voices and constructed, each in their own way, androgynous personas. In the British context, the singers Sinead O'Connor and Annie Lennox come to mind.

seductress, or any other predatory female stereotype), those ordinarily incompatible opposites, are effortlessly fused. Combining the sexual and the capable, Nefertiti's is unquestionably the most sympathetic role in the opera. Unlike Akhnaten and Tye, who are guilty not only of forbidden incestuous love but also, as we shall shortly observe, acts of mindless brutality, Nefertiti does little to disenchant her audience during the course of the opera. If her voice has a melancholy tinge not found in the music of the other characters (particularly in the tart chromaticism of her duet with Akhnaten [Act II, scene 2]), it is perhaps not all that surprising: living with a man as strange as Akhnaten cannot have been easy.

In the fourth and final verse of the scene, all three -- Tye, Akhnaten, and Nefertiti -- are at last heard singing together. Akhnaten, wooed first by his mother and then by his wife, remains in a state of ambivalence between the two (see Figure 6). Caught between what he perceives as divine and earthly love, Akhnaten elects to partake of both. What is more, he evidently views this equilibrium between the internal and the external, between inbreeding and outbreeding, as further evidence of his own semi-divine status. One who combines the masculine and the feminine; who traverses the path between the mundane and the eternal; who perceives the seeds of all diversity in his own mind *and* body; and one who confuses ordinary people with archetypes and angels, his own mother with the Great Cosmic Mother, can just as easily confuse the face he sees in the mirror with the face of God. The line that divides insight from madness, profundity from idiocy, and the sublime from the ridiculous, is a thin one indeed; and in stepping over it Akhnaten's fate is, in a sense, already sealed.



FIGURE 6 Nefertiti (left), Akhnaten (middle), and Tye (right) at table (Baikie 1926, plate XIX).

In the Stuttgart premiere of the opera, produced by Achim Freyer, Akhnaten is appropriately equipped with a mirror in the spherical form of the Aten. As he is facing upstage, the audience can only see that he is singing by diverting their attention to his reflected image. Thus, the image of Oedipus becomes mapped

onto that of Narcissus: both mythological characters come to woe as a result of their attention towards the internal and general at the expense of the external and particular. In Oedipus' case the malaise he suffers from is incestuous, in Narcissus' masturbatory, but both are ultimately symptoms of the same libidinal circularity.

The ambivalence between the voices of these three characters -- and the sexual confusion of Akhnaten -- are underlined visually by the fact that all three are facing upstage (i.e., their backs are turned towards the audience). When Akhnaten sings in the first verse, one can see that he is singing only because of the mirror he is holding¹, but when he is joined later by Tye, in the second verse, one can easily make the same mistake as the person who filmed the premiere performance of the opera (for the Michael Blackwood [1985] documentary): thus, when Tye's youthful soprano voice is heard for the first time, one instinctively directs one's attention towards the comely figure of Nefertiti (who is dressed in the same manner as Akhnaten, and whose elegant arm gestures are the mirror image of her husband's) rather than Tye -- from whom the voice actually emanates (who is clothed in the same garish colours as the patriarchs of the previous scene, whose skin is painted, and whose angular gestures are also identical to those of the patriarchs of the "old order"). When one eventually realises that it is the grotesque figure of Tye, and not the beautiful Nefertiti, who possesses the quintessentially wholesome soprano voice, it comes as something of a surprise. This sense of surprise is only re-inscribed when Nefertiti's manly contralto enters in the following verse. If one has not already realised who was singing before, it is easy to assume that this voice is coming from the older, less attractive woman.

The relational ambiguity between the three leading roles is interpreted in an entirely different, although equally ingenious, manner in David Freeman's ENO production of the opera². Here Tye and Nefertiti are similar in appearance -- aside, that is, from the shaven head of the former, which is a feature shared by herself, her son and his daughters, but not Nefertiti. This

¹ Apart from pointing to the Akhnaten's narcissistic proclivity -- and it is tempting here to pursue a Lacanian interpretation in which the Oedipus complex is seen as arising in the "mirror stage" when the subject first becomes aware of his or her separate ontological status (see Lacan 1977, 1-7) -- the presence of the mirror can be explained in a number of different ways. The mirror used in the Stuttgart performance of the opera was circular like the sun-disc. Akhnaten may not, then, have been speaking with his own voice, but selflessly reflecting the voice of the sun god -- in this case the mirror is not only reflecting the image of the subject but also the emptiness of this image. It is noteworthy that the mirror appeared also in ancient Egyptian symbolism. Manniche (1991, 87) draws attention to the influence of 5th Dynasty religious practices on Akhnaten's sun cult. In the "mirror dance" performed in honour of Hathor, the mirrors that were "identical in shape to the sun-disc" apparently played an important allegorical role (Manniche 1991, 87). There is a conspicuous similarity between this kind of mirror symbolism and that found in Tibetan Buddhism. Buddhists in the Tibetan tradition frequently refer to the "Wisdom of the Great Mirror": According to Lama Govinda, "the Great Mirror reflects the Void (*sunyata*) as much as the objects, and reveals the 'emptiness' in the things as much as the things in the 'emptiness'" (Govinda 1960, 131).

² My discussion of this production is based, in part, on extracts from it that appeared in the LWT South Bank Show documentary on Philip Glass (Hunt 1986).

similarity in the appearance of the two leading ladies is a result of the more "realistic," and, hence, less psychological, approach of this director compared to the German production. In general terms, Freeman's production placed a stronger emphasis on narrative and history, while Freyer was more interested in psychological and socio-political allegory. Much of the beauty of the ENO production lies in its choreography. In the initial verse, Akhnaten circumambulates the stage walking alternately forwards and then backwards, but always in the same direction (clockwise), in time with the music. In the second verse, he is joined by Tye, who precedes her son, walking backwards with her face to him when he is walking forwards and turning forwards away from him as he also turns away. In the third verse, Nefertiti replaces Tye, but this time walking behind Akhnaten instead of leading him. The effect is much the same, however: the two alternate between facing each other and facing away from each other, between walking forwards and walking backwards. In the fourth and final verse, Akhnaten is caught between the two in much the same way as he is musically. When walking forwards he is face to face with Tye; when walking backwards he is face to face with Nefertiti. Thus the choreography of this production complements the music beautifully -- together the two media illustrate eloquently the emotional ambivalence of the title character in this scene.

The singing ends with this unlikely *ménage-à-trois* resonating together on three final notes, the constituent notes of the A minor chord that is the "keystone" of the entire opera -- Akhnaten sings the root, Nefertiti the third, and Tye the fifth. With the manifesto of the new order announced to Akhnaten's subjects, the three royals depart to the accompaniment of a majestic, if slightly portentous, brass tutti (horns, trumpets, trombones, and tuba) arrangement of the music sung earlier by the three leading characters. Woodwinds and strings play the arpeggio pattern heard from the beginning of this scene in contrary motion to one another, while cymbal crashes add to the overall quasi-military pomp of the situation. In the final cycle of this music, the tubular bells are heard once again. Now, however, they outline Queen Tye's descending (feminine) motif ($e^2 - d^2 - c^2$: 5 - 4 - 3), followed immediately by Akhnaten's ascending (masculine) motif ($a^1 - b^1 - c^2 - e^2$: 1 - 2 - 3 - 5). The theme, in its entirety is androgynous, but the position of Tye's motif at its head reveals a certain degree of matriarchal dominance, and, therefore, hints at the power Akhnaten's mother still exerts over him. This interpretation will be confirmed in the very next scene.

The orchestral tutti ends abruptly with a return to the music of the opening measures of the scene. The harmony simply alternates between A minor and G major, while the bell motif returns in reduced form ($e^2 - c^2 - d^2 - b^1$), initially over an oscillation of these two chords, and then over a low pedal in fifths, played by the cellos and basses. Finally the other instruments are silenced, leaving only the bells. These gradually fade away, however, until only their upper partials can be discerned. The bells continue to resonate long after the last time they are struck, lending the conclusion of the first act a decidedly austere tone.

The libretto stipulates that Akhnaten should be seen alone at this point, gazing at the funeral procession of his father as it floats on barques "across a

mythical river to the Land of the Dead" (Glass et al. 1987, 55). Thus, after the dissolution of the four elements -- water, air, earth, and fire -- Akhnaten's father, Amenhotep III, is able to embark upon his allegorical journey from the east to the west bank of the Nile, from the Land of the Living to the Land of the Dead. Ralph Lewis, in his Preface to Devi's study of Akhnaten's religious ideas, describes this highly significant part of the funeral ceremony in the passage that follows:

The crossing of the Nile from east to west was a very solemn part of the funeral ritual. It corresponded to the apparent journey of Re (the sun) who rose in the east and sank beneath the horizon in the west. Thence Re was thought to journey in the nether world beneath the earth, rising again in the east. Part of the obsequies consisted of placing the deceased on a bier which, in turn, was placed on a funeral barque. This barque was then poled slowly across the Nile to the west bank. Accompanying were other boats on which were lamenting relatives and friends and the ritualistic mourners. On the west bank a solemn procession, led by the priests, wended its way into the hills to a tomb which had already been prepared for the deceased. Therefore, the west bank of the Nile opposite Thebes (now Luxor) became a virtual grand cemetery. The pharaohs built elaborate mortuary temples in this region, which were their tombs. (Lewis, Preface to Devi 1946, ix-x.)

This stipulation by the composer concerning the reappearance of the funeral cortege, although not enacted in all of the productions of the opera, underlines the symbolic significance of the River Nile, and, accordingly, the importance of water as a unifying factor in the musico-dramatic structure of the opera. I have shown earlier how the music of the Prelude, which is repeated in slightly altered forms in the second and third acts, is strongly associated with the river. The arpeggio waves heard in the orchestral coda of this scene correspond closely with those heard earlier in the Prelude. Here, however, the significance of the river is more explicitly defined: it represents not only the most essential prerequisite for the sustenance of life in ancient Egypt, and not only the continuity of ancient Egyptian culture, but it also serves as a mediating agent between the living and the dead. Aside from its life-sustaining qualities, this element has to it an ominous quality -- water is, after all, capable of extinguishing fire, the dominant element of the opera's protagonist. In staring at the funeral procession of his father traversing the mythical river, Akhnaten is, therefore, confronting also his own destiny.

5.5 Act 2:1 The Temple

5.5.1 A break with tradition

The second act is concerned with years five to fifteen in Akhnaten's reign, the years in which he put into effect his most radical reforms to the social and religious institutions of ancient Egypt. Having already changed his name from Amenhotep IV (spirit of Amon) to Akhnaten (spirit of Aten) -- thus snubbing the local deity of Thebes and its priesthood who had previously held sway over all other deities and churches -- he went further still and rechannelled all state resources towards establishing the new religious order. These measures were greeted with staunch opposition from the Amon priesthood and it is possible that a *coup d'état* was even attempted at this time. Akhnaten's position was sufficiently strong, however, for him to withstand the opposition of traditionalists, for the time being at least: the situation did, nonetheless, seem to beg for retaliatory action and it is here that Akhnaten made perhaps his biggest mistake. With an iron hand, he outlawed the most powerful of all Egyptian religions, at the same time erasing all references to it from Egyptian religious temples and tombs. This act of iconoclasm was without precedent in ancient Egyptian history. While there is no evidence of any actual physical violence (the priesthood of Amon evidently remained a powerful critical force throughout Akhnaten's reign, even when dispossessed of their former material wealth and exalted status), there seem to have been few limits -- short of imprisoning or executing his opponents, which he evidently did not do -- to the lengths to which Akhnaten was willing to go in order to establish Atenism as the sole state religion.

Perhaps the most symbolic act of the religious revolution was the chiselling out of Akhnaten's father's name, Amenhotep III, from all the monuments on which it was found, including his tomb, because -- or so it has been claimed -- it contained within it the name of the outlawed god, Amon. This, of course, tallies with Velikovsky's (1960) theory of the identity of Oedipus and Akhnaten: in the eyes of the ancient Egyptians the act of erasing the name of one's father from his tomb was equivalent to parricide. Velikovsky, citing the Freudian psychologist Karl Abraham¹, claims that these acts of iconoclasm reveal something of the psychological condition of the young pharaoh responsible for putting them into effect:

Abraham assumed that a ten-year-old boy coming to the throne would be dominated by his mother. "His libido became fixed in an unusually strong degree on his mother, and his attitude towards his [deceased] father became equally strongly negative." In Akhnaten's religious reform Dr. Abraham saw a rebellion against the father or, more properly, against the memory of the father.(...) It was generally thought and still is that the erasure of the name of the deity was the consequence of religious zeal and nothing else. But Abraham held that the name of Amon was hateful because it contained within

¹ The quotations from Abraham's article are taken from its English translation, published in the *Psychoanalytical Quarterly*, IV (1935, 537-569). It was originally published in the first edition of the journal, *Imago*, edited by Freud in 1912.

it the name of his father, Amenhotep. "He had the name of Amon and the name of his father, Amenhotep, obliterated on all inscriptions and monuments." In this "purifying" action, as well as in the change of his own name from Amenhotep to Akhnaton, the hidden hatred of the son for his father came to light. "His strongest hatred was directed against his father whom he could not reach because he was no more among the living." By destroying his father's name, the king tried to erase the memory of his sire. By destroying a person's name his *ka*, or soul in afterlife, was also delivered to destruction. (Velikovsky 1960, 67-68.)

What both Abraham and Velikovsky fail to mention, however, is that Akhnaten and his mother may well have had good reason to despise the former's father and the latter's husband. It is clear that Amenhotep III held his wife in extremely high esteem and that she wielded a great deal of influence over him. Budge (1923, 67) has gone so far as to speculate that Tye might even have been Amenhotep's co-ruler, in practice if not in name. In the art of the time, Tye appears almost equal in stature with her husband (in ancient Egyptian art wives are ordinarily depicted as considerably smaller than the pharaohs to whom they are married), she is seen to participate actively in religious and state affairs, and her name is inscribed side-by-side with that of her husband (Budge 1923, 67). According to Budge, "[h]er power inside the country and in the country generally was very great, and there is evidence that the king's orders, both private and public, were only issued after she had sanctioned them" (ibid., 67).

Conflicting with all of this, however, are Amenhotep III's "diplomatic marriages" to both the sister and the daughter of the Mittanian king Tushratta (Budge 1923, 69; Gardiner 1961, 212), as well as one of the most widely acknowledged cases of father-daughter incest in Egyptian history, with his daughter Satamen (Gardiner 1961, 212; Middleton 1962, 604). It would probably, therefore, be more accurate, to attribute the exalted position of Tye to her own extraordinary strength of character rather than to the progressive thinking of her husband. While it cannot be doubted that Amenhotep III was devoted, in his own way, to his wife, he evidently did not hesitate to direct his libido elsewhere whenever he felt the urge to do so, and this cannot but have taxed the greatest of Egyptian queen's loyalty to her husband, especially after his death when she was no longer required to be subservient to him.

After Amenhotep III's death, Tye assumed full control of Egyptian affairs of state: she corresponded with foreign powers, she saw to it that her son was properly betrothed to a woman of her approval (Nefertiti) prior to his installation as pharaoh, and, to all intents and purposes, she evidently ruled the country and the empire on her own while the young pharaoh, who was ten years old at the time, was schooled in the duties and manners of kings (Budge 1923, 76). This, however, was to be a schooling with a difference. We know, for example, that Queen Tye was a zealous follower of the sun cult of Heliopolis, and that she held this god to be superior in every respect to the local god of Thebes, Amon, who had, in her eyes, usurped the position of chief god, and on whom, in her eyes, a large amount of the material and human resources of Egypt were being wasted. We know that Amenhotep III had an artificial lake made on the estate of his wife, outside of Thebes, in honour of the solar god, and that the couple sailed across the lake on a royal barge named Aten-tehen

(Aten sparkles) in a ceremony intended to mark the inauguration of Atenism at the Egyptian capital (*ibid.*, 68). This, however, would appear to be as far as Amenhotep III was willing to go; but not, evidently, his wife, or her son. Four years after the death of Amenhotep III, and with the education of Akhnaten by his mother nearing completion, there appears to have occurred an irreconcilable rift between the monarchic and theocratic seats of power, culminating in a serious challenge to the monarchy from the powerful priests of Amon. This challenge was, as I have already mentioned, quickly quashed, but its reverberations were to trouble Akhnaten throughout his reign and would eventually lead to his downfall.

5.5.2 The King's Mother and Great Royal Wife

But what of the relationship between Akhnaten and his mother? We have seen already at the end of the first act that the two are depicted in the opera as being exceptionally close to one another; so close, in fact, as to furnish doubts as to whether their relationship may have overstepped the boundaries ordinarily regarded as healthy for mother-son relations. But what are the grounds for such accusations? Are they simply an attempt by the disparagers of Akhnaten to tarnish his credibility as a ruler and religious reformer? The evidence of incest is largely circumstantial and susceptible to conflicting interpretations, but it does appear to be difficult to dismiss altogether. Velikovskiy's (1960, 86-107) hypothesis that Akhnaten – like Oedipus – was engaged over an extended period of time in a sexual relationship with his own mother appears to rest primarily on three pieces of evidence:

(1) The appellation "King's Mother and Great Royal Wife" was commonly used to refer to Tye some ten years after the death of Amenhotep III (subsequent, one should not forget, to the removal of Amenhotep's name from his tomb -- an act which was evidently sanctioned by Tye). In itself, this is scanty evidence: those who are familiar with the nomenclature of the British royal family will know, of course, that Queen Elizabeth II's mother is commonly referred to as the "Queen Mother" (not the Queen's Mother, as one would expect), an equally ambiguous title, and one that would appear to imply incestuous relations with her son-in-law, the Duke of Edinburgh. In this case, however, nobody assumes such a relationship to exist. Nomenclature in itself, then, is insufficient evidence, as it frequently has little to do with personal relations between the people to whom it refers, but instead serves either a symbolic or a conventionalised function. It is, possible, for example, that Tye, who was one of the most respected and powerful of all Egyptian queens, retained her title of Great Royal Wife to add weight to her son's radical reforms. By adding her seal of approval to the changes initiated by Akhnaten she was perhaps seeking to underline the continuity and stability of the royal lineage, despite the revolutionary changes that were being introduced in other areas of Egyptian life.

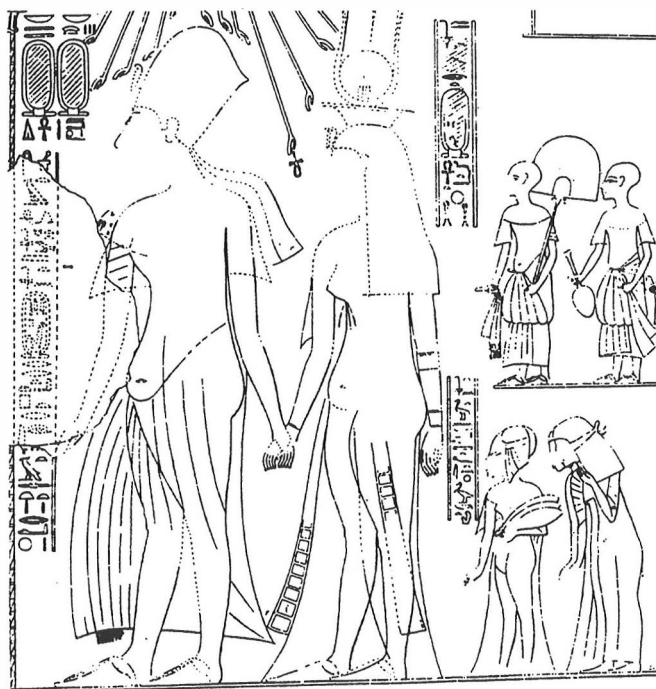


FIGURE 7 Akhnaten leading his mother Tye by the hand to her sunshade, followed by her retinue and that of her young daughter Bekhetaten, who carries an offering of lettuce (Aldred 1988, 285).

(2) Not only does Tye retain the title of Great Royal Wife -- which rightly belongs to Nefertiti -- but she is seen in a number of bas-reliefs carved at the time to occupy a position in keeping with such a title. She presides with her son and his wife over official ceremonies and religious rites, and in one famous portrait of the two she is seen holding her son's hand affectionately as they proceed to a place of worship (see Figure 7). This intimate -- almost erotic -- display of affection between a king and his mother, was unknown to the pharaonic world, where the image of the pharaoh as the paragon of manliness was consciously fostered. From the contemporary standpoint, of course, such portrayals appear perfectly natural, particularly for a boy in his early teens whose mother is his sole parent. Moreover, it appears commensurate with the king's favourite dictum, "living in truth" to depict family relations as they really are rather than in their traditional idealised form. It is a different matter, of course, to establish the nature of the truth that is being depicted. We know that Tye continued to exercise considerable influence over her son not only in his youth but well into the latter part of his reign (when Akhnaten was in his late twenties), and in one letter to Akhnaten from a foreign king she is referred to as "the mistress of [his] house" (Velikovskiy 1960, 97).

(3) The most condemnatory piece of evidence, though, pertains to Tye's daughter, Bekhetaten, born over a decade after the death of Amenhotep III, and

referred to as the "king's daughter of his body, beloved by him, Beketaten" (Velikovsky 1960, 91). That Tye is the mother there is little doubt: the only controversy that remains is in establishing the identity of the father. While the appellation cited above would appear to leave little doubt that it was Akhnaten, this remains a highly controversial issue and one that will probably never be convincingly resolved. Few Egyptologists believe, as Velikovsky did, that Bekhetaten was the offspring of Akhnaten, although their timidity in this respect could be seen as originating in the apparent "impossibility" of mother-son incest in contemporary society: somehow it seems never quite as easy to believe as are the numerous reported cases of father-daughter incest. As Bekhetaten is listed among the daughters of Akhnaten in the libretto of the opera (Glass et al. 1987, 3), one can only surmise that Glass is here, once again, following Velikovsky's theory in his treatment of the subject. It could, of course, be argued that Bekhetaten was Akhnaten's adopted daughter: the scenario of her as Akhnaten's adopted "sister-daughter" is, however, only marginally less intriguing than if she were his own natural offspring.

As a musicologist, I am poorly equipped to argue the case for one or the other of the positions regarding Bekhetaten's parentage. Let us, for the sake of consistency and simplicity, follow Velikovsky's and Glass's line of thought. Our primary concern is, like Glass, not with historical accuracy but with the functioning of this particular work of art. Whether or not the historical Akhnaten was actually married to his mother, it is clear that he is depicted this way in the opera; it is also clear from the presence of Bekhetaten among Akhnaten's daughters in its libretto that, in the context of the opera at least, she begat him a daughter.

Aside from making a good story, what, then, is the rationale for this treatment of Tye and her son, which could well be doing the real historical characters a gross disservice. We have already established that there is a historical connection between the kingdom of Mittani, the Indo-Iranian gods worshipped in that country -- Mitra, Varuna, and Indra -- and the Egyptian royal family. This idea was apparently first put forward by Budge (1923, 113) and it remains undisputed to this day. Velikovsky goes further than this, however, claiming that the idea of an abstract and universal sun god was not the only religious idea of Akhnaten's with its origins in Middle-Eastern religious thought. He observes:

The Iranians (Persians) had an approach to the problem of incest very different to other peoples of antiquity. They had an ethical religious concept and practice of *xvaetvadatha* or *xvedokdas*, which means, according to ancient authors and modern authors alike, the marriage of parents with their children and of uterine brothers and sisters.(...) Marital relations with mother, daughter, and sister among the Persians are reported with odium by Diogenes Laertius, Strabo, Plutarch, and among the Fathers of the Church by Clement of Alexandria and Hieronymous (St. Jerome). Philo of Alexandria wrote that children from the union of a mother and son were deemed by the Iranians to be particularly well born; and Catullus stated that a magus (a Mazda priest) is the fruit of incestuous relations between mother and son. (Velikovsky 1960, 99-100.)

Velikovsky goes on to cite the Zoroastrian scriptures of Dinkart, for whom the union between a son and the woman who bore him is among "the most complete that [he has] considered" (Velikovsky 1960, 101). He surmises that the "kings of Mitanni, being worshippers of the Indo-Iranian gods, must have regarded incest between mother and son not only as a pardonable relation but as a holy union" (ibid., 101). "These kings were," he observes, "on the most intimate terms with Amenhotep III, Tiy, and Akhnaton, because of the family relationships" (ibid., 101). It is quite logical to infer, as Velikovsky does, that the close connection of Akhnaten and his mother with religious thought in the Middle-East would have made them more susceptible to other religious ideas originating in that area of the world. However, those familiar with the work of the scholar Edward Said (1978) on Western constructions of the Orient, might well view passages such as those cited above with some suspicion. Given the paucity of actual physical evidence in this regard, one wonders why Velikovsky chose to take the passages in question literally rather than seeking a symbolic interpretation. Incest symbolism is common to many religious world views, but only rarely is it physically enacted. A passage from the Buddhist scriptures, which is intended solely as a symbolic paradox, states that "the *Sadhaka* who has sexual intercourse with his mother, his sister, his daughter, and his sister's daughter, will easily succeed in striving for the ultimate goal" (quoted in Govinda 1960, 101). Taken out of context a passage such as this might seem somewhat grotesque; but if one understands that the women in question are actually symbolic constructs designed to bring about an integration of the consciousness of the practitioner between his interior visions of selfness and otherness (which are viewed as being harmful both to himself and to others) one gains a somewhat different perspective. The "women" in question are, according to Lama Govinda,

... the elements that make up the female principles of our psycho-physical personality(...). To these principles correspond on the opposite side an equal number of male principles. Four of the female principles form a special group, representing the vital forces (*prana*) of the Great Elements ... 'Earth', 'Water', 'Fire', 'Air', and their corresponding psychic centres (*cakra*) or planes of consciousness within the body. In each of them the union of male and female principles must take place, before the fifth and highest stage is reached. If the expressions 'mother', 'sister', 'daughter', etc., are applied to these forces ... the meaning of the symbolism becomes clear. (Govinda 1960, 103.)

It is unlikely that it will ever be proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that an incestuous union actually took place between Akhnaten and his mother, as Velikovsky seems intent on doing. It may be more beneficial, then, for the purposes of the present discussion, to turn away from historical considerations towards a more symbolically and psychoanalytically oriented approach to incest symbolism.

5.5.3 Oedipus -- in the theories of Freud and in Buddhism

More fruitful than seeking historical proof of incestuous relations between the actual historical protagonists of the opera, is tying the ideas put forward by Velikovsky in with contemporary psychoanalytical theories, as well as with the ideational universe of the composer through the connection with Tantric Buddhism. Freud's psychoanalytical theories have been the cause of some controversy in the field of anthropology, the most vehement objections stemming from the implied universality of theories such as the so-called "Oedipus Complex" -- most thoroughly discussed in his *The Ego and the Id* (1923). In this monograph the famous psychoanalyst puts forward the idea of a universal wish in infancy of the boy to annihilate his father and wed his mother (in metaphorical if not actual terms)¹. Although originally designed to explain the psychological disorders found in his contemporary central European patients, Freud did not hesitate to extend his theory, beyond his small group of patients, to other cultures detached in time and space from his own: thus in *Totem and Taboo* (1913) he observes that the psychological condition of "savages" -- particularly with regard to mother-son and sibling incest -- "reveals a striking agreement with the mental life of neurotic patients" (Freud 1913, 70). In *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), Freud goes a step further still, identifying the Oedipal desire with the entire Jewish faith, and tracing the historical origin of this desire back to the fear, instilled in the Jewish people by their spiritual leader, Moses, of the patriarchal God, Jehovah (Freud 1939, 382-384). The "unnameable crime" of incest is, according to Freud, transformed in Mediterranean forms of Christianity, from the terror of the vengeful father figure encountered in Judaism, to the "shadowy," suppressed guilt complex that came to be called "original sin" (ibid., 384-385). As I have mentioned earlier, Freud failed to acknowledge a connection between the two secondary heroes of *Moses and Monotheism*, Oedipus and Akhnaten, even though such a connection was explicitly pointed out to him, by his colleague Karl Abraham, in a magazine edited by the psychoanalyst as early as 1912. Velikovsky (1960, 202) humorously attributes this unwillingness of Freud's to recognise the real "historical Oedipus" to the psychoanalyst's own suppressed Oedipus complex. Freud, on the contrary, holds Akhnaten up as the paradigm example of a man who has succeeded in overcoming his Oedipus complex -- implicitly, at least, as he is virtually the only historical figure to emerge unscathed from the psychoanalyst's characteristically brusque treatment of the subject.

Freud's idea of an Oedipus complex that is innate in all human beings, and is present in all cultures across all time, has quite understandably attracted widespread criticism. The anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, in his *Sex and*

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I will not go into Freud's reverse formula for girls as it does not pertain to the specific questions I am addressing. Suffice to say that Freud conceives of the girl as an rival of the mother for the affections of the father. Female sexuality seems, however, to have been a particular slippery problem for Freud and one on which he never achieved a convincing grip: in order to solve it he found it necessary to concoct a whole series of unlikely qualifications, one of the most problematic of which is the controversial idea of "penis envy."

Repression in Savage Society (1927) objects to Freud's theory on precisely these grounds. He observes:

The crux of the difficulty lies in the fact that to psychoanalysts the Oedipus Complex is something absolute, the primary source ... the *fons et origo* of everything.(...) I cannot conceive of the complex as the unique source of culture and belief, as the metaphysical entity, creative, but not created, prior to all things and not created by anything else. (Malinowski 1927, 142-143.)

It is easy to sympathise with Malinowski's position. Like so many psychoanalytical theories, Freud's "Oedipus complex" is not as Freud claimed universally applicable, but is largely culturally specific: many of its intricacies are limited to the specific time-space locus in which it originated, while other aspects can undoubtedly be attributed to the psychoanalyst's individual constellation of experience. All the same, there are enough cases of parallelism in diverse and totally unconnected cultures to make many a scholar wonder as to whether human beings -- particularly, or so it would seem, men -- may have some natural propensity for "Oedipus-like" behaviour. I will attempt to avoid the veritable hornets' nest of objections such assertions inevitably attract by speaking of such cases as coincidences, seeing as they do not occur in all cultures, and seeing as they are invariably channelled by cultural experience.

One approach to the Oedipus problem that appears commensurate with the requirements of cultural relativism is that propounded by the psychoanthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere (1990). In this scholar's study of the "Oedipus complex" as found in Sri Lankan Hindu and Buddhist religious culture, Freud's theory is employed more in the manner of a theoretical analogy than of a rigid model -- i.e., a model used to squeeze empirical observations into conformity with the researcher's *a priori* assumptions regarding universal psychological patterns. The difference is that between the traditional positivistic orientation of the natural sciences -- to which Freud evidently aspired in his psychoanalytical writings -- and contemporary hermeneutics. Obeyesekere (1990, xxiv) identifies himself most closely with the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur¹, who rather than taking Freud's theories at face value, deliberately reinterprets and appropriates them in accordance with contemporary scholarly sensibilities as well as the specific questions he is attempting to answer.

Obeyesekere's study (1990) shows how Indian culture, in particular Indian-Buddhist culture, appears to be rife with religious and mythological, not to mention actual historical characters who conform to the pattern of the Oedipus myth -- i.e., characters who metaphorically or actually kill their father and marry their mother. He relates, for example, the biographies of three Indian Buddhist kings -- Asoka, Dutugāmunu, and Kasyapa -- to the Oedipus myth with little difficulty, albeit replacing the father with symbolic figures; an oldest brother, an elderly king, and a lion, respectively (Obeyesekere 1990, 82-88).

The most conspicuous forms of the Oedipus myth, however, are to be found in mythological and religious texts. Unquestionably the most striking

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See Ricoeur's *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (1970).

parallel is in the formulation of Vashubandhu, the fourth-century Indian-Buddhist philosopher. In this formula, the Oedipus complex, as Obeyesekere correctly observes, appears (over a millennium-and-a-half prior to Freud's theory) "in its almost Freudian form!" (Obeyesekere 1990, 164). (It would be more correct, of course, from a chronological standpoint, to invert this statement and say that Freud presented his theory of the Oedipus complex in almost Buddhist form.) Vashubandhu's theory, which originated in Northern Indian Tantric Buddhist practices, was passed on to Tibetan Buddhism where it has for centuries occupied a central position. The reasons for this can be found in the focus in the Tibetan tradition on the "in-between" or *bardo* states, of which the *bardo* between death and rebirth is the most central. James McDermott (1980) describes the Mahayana Buddhist version of the Oedipus complex, first postulated by Vashubandhu, as follows:

Driven by karma, the intermediate-state being goes to the location where rebirth is to take place. Possessing the divine eye by virtue of its karma, it is able to see the place of its birth, no matter how distant. There it sees its mother and father to be, united in intercourse. Finding the scene hospitable, its passions are stirred. If male, it is smitten by desire for its mother. If female, it is seized with desire for its father. And inversely, it hates either mother or father, which it comes to regard as a rival. Concupiscence and hatred thus arise in the *gandharva* as its driving passions. Stirred by these wrong thoughts, it attaches itself to the place where the sexual organs of the parents are united, imagining that it is there joined with the object of its passions. Taking pleasure in the impurity of the semen and the blood in the womb, the *antara bhava* establishes itself there. Thus do the *skandhas* arise in the womb. They harden; and the intermediate-state being perishes, to be replaced immediately by the birth existence (*pratisamdhi*). (McDermott 1980, 171-172.)

Here lies an idea that is quintessential to the Tibetan Buddhist world view: not only is the luckless Oedipus, and his other mythological and human transformations, afflicted with the Oedipus complex, but we all are. Freud himself suggested that the Oedipus complex is formed during infancy (5-6 years); "post-Freudians" such as Klein and Lacan are both of the opinion that it is established some time earlier than this; Tibetan Buddhism goes further still, claiming that it is the result of the karma (or negative evolution) accumulated in previous lives. (I should qualify this by saying that not all practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism take this idea at face value.)

It is interesting to note that Glass's cryptic, although seemingly offhand, statement regarding Akhnaten -- that there is something of him in all of us -- takes on a somewhat different shade of meaning in light of this new piece of information. It could be construed as meaning that we are similar to Akhnaten not only because he is both man and woman, but also that we are all, to some degree, suffering from the same psychological condition as the protagonist of the opera: the condition which Freud termed the Oedipus complex, but which in another part of the world and another time became known by a different name -- *samsara*, the wheel of becoming. The interesting thing about this particular formulation of the Oedipus theory is that it manages to eschew the Freudian imbalance brought about by his definition of woman as "lack" -- i.e., as man who is lacking a penis. In Buddhist theory, *both* sexes perceive

themselves as lacking the distinctive qualities of the other; and it is precisely this lack, which arises primarily as a result of incorrect perception, that is the source of all suffering. Like Freud, Tibetan Buddhism acknowledges the attraction of the child to the parent of the opposite sex and their aversion to the parent of the same sex, but unlike Freud it sees the condition as a whole as stemming from a more profound psychosis, brought about by the subject's relentless and futile attempts to cling to and ossify life, compounded with his or her dread of death. According to the Buddhist version of the theory, both male and female suffering stems from a fundamental attachment to the mother -- i.e., to the womb in which the subject is to be reborn. Thus both man and woman can be said to suffer from the condition that afflicted Oedipus -- even a woman's attraction to her father and, on the other hand, her aversion to her mother belies a more fundamental magnetism towards the archetypal womb in which all rebirths occur.

Escape from the Oedipus complex, and from all other *samsaric* attractions and aversions which stem from "Oedipal attachment," is achieved in the between-states by "blocking the womb doors." This blocking takes on a more profound significance if one remembers that there are six between-states, three of which occur during life itself. Thus we are justified in reading into the account described below a stratagem not only for ensuring a more advantageous rebirth, but also for improving the psychological well-being of the subject in the present life, achieved through a more mindful, less discursive mode of living: a mode of living which is firmly rooted in the here and now; one which does not exclude discursive thought altogether, but remains constantly aware of its ultimate footing in reality -- thus, one which, while it places a strong emphasis on unmediated intuitive wisdom, does not hesitate to use dualistic intellect as a vehicle for enlightenment. The following account is taken from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*:

Hey noble one! At this time you will have visions of couples making love. When you see them, don't enter between them, but stay mindful. Visualize the males and females as the Teacher. Father and Mother, prostrate to them, and make them visualized offerings! Feel intense reverence and devotion! Aim a strong will to request them to teach the Dharma, and the womb door will definitely be locked.(...) If you enter the womb under the influence of lust and hate, whether you are reborn as horse, bird, dog or human, if you are going to be male, you arise appearing to be male; you feel strong hatred towards the father, and attraction and lust toward the mother. If you are going to be female, you appear as female; you feel strong envy and jealousy toward the mother, you feel strong longing and lust for the father. Conditioned by that, you enter the path of the womb. You experience orgasmic bliss in the centre of the union between white and red [male and female] drops, and within the experience of that bliss you faint and lose consciousness. Your body develops through the embryonic stages.(...) Eventually you will be born outside the mother's womb... (Thurman 1994, 184-185.)

Akhnaten (Oedipus) becomes, therefore, because of his clinging to his mother (whom he confuses with the greater Divine Mother), the epitome of the human condition. His vision of a universal power that encompasses all diversity holds promise for his ultimate liberation, but the final obstacle in this

character's spiritual path, his one-sided attachment to phenomenal existence, threatens to be his undoing. In this scene, Akhnaten is joined, tellingly, by his mother and the two join forces to unleash their wrath upon the upholders of the old order.

5.5.4 The attack on the Temple of Amon

The scene opens with a distant bugle call on a¹, played on a solitary horn. A short orchestral introduction follows in which the two alternating chord progressions of the Hymn to Amon are introduced, the first is comprised of and abrupt drop from A minor to A-flat major/A minor. The second chord of this progression is marked by a descending theme in the bass which works its way down through the chord tones of A-flat major, coming to rest on an ominous B flat, before resolving back to the tonic (e flat - c - A flat - E flat - B flat: see Example 17). In the Treble Clef, however, the root and fifth of A minor resolutely hold their positions. The third of both chords, c, is of course the same, but otherwise the dissonance produced by combining three intervals of a minor second is quite disturbing. The tritone motif -- heard in the Funeral and Coronation scenes, where it was strongly associated with the old order -- can be identified in the transition from A minor to the opening note of the fanfare, e flat. It is not difficult to recognise this passage as an example of polyphonic bitonality, in the sense that Stravinsky and Milhaud would define it. This is, to my knowledge, the first occasion on which Glass has used this procedure in his mature style, making its appearance now all the more conspicuous¹.

EXAMPLE 17

The second sequence (A minor - B diminished seventh - E major [i - ii - V]) is more conventional, and is probably intended to represent the stagnant conservatism of the old order. Traditional leading-note harmony (tonic-dominant), which has been conspicuously absent from much of the music so far, makes an appearance through the presence of G sharp, in the violas. The tension created by an insistent, straight eighth-note, 9/8 rhythm (the tempo marked in the score is 88 dotted quarter-notes per minute, although if one

¹ Frandsen describes this passage, erroneously, as "a beautiful piece of "orientalizing" music" (1993, 250). It is difficult to imagine which oriental music tradition Frandsen is referring to; in fact, this particular technique was the mainstay of Stravinsky's pre-serialist compositional style.

counts by the eighth-notes the tempo is a more gripping 264 eighth-notes per minute), and two plaintive double appoggiaturas on the tonic (4-3 and 6-5) reinforces the impression that trouble is on its way (see Example 18). A third pattern is heard in which the dominant tonal function of the previous pattern is confirmed, as is its resolution to the tonic which is no longer drawn out with appoggiaturas. A bugle call is heard again in the distance (*piano*), like the flashes of lightning one sees in the distance when watching a storm approaching from sea.

EXAMPLE 18

violas

mp

ii V7 i $\frac{6-5}{4-3}$ i $\frac{6-5}{4-3}$

pcd: i

The Amon High Priest enters with the other priests of Amon; the former simply reiterating the word "Amen" (implying a connection to the Judeo-Christian tradition) while the latter recite the liturgical text:

Oh Amon, creator of all things	<i>Amen men khet nebet</i>
All people say	<i>Ya-u-nek em em djed</i>
We adore you	<i>Sen er ayu</i>
In jubilation	<i>Nek henu nek en</i>
For resting among us	<i>En wered ek imen</i>

The music sung by the chorus is exclusively syllabic, whereas the High Priest himself occasionally breaks into melismas over the troublesome bitonal chord A-flat major/A minor (a flat - e flat¹ - f¹ - e flat¹ - c¹), invoking the Chants of both Jewish and Christian church services, with their syllabic recitations followed by short melodic cadences, often culminating in the word Amen. The superimposition of the High Priest's melisma over the dissonant chord suggests perhaps that it is the his sanctimonious ruminations themselves that are the source of the discord; and it is precisely this aspect of his countenance which is called into question. In the second sequence as well the High Priest is drawn to the most dissonant notes -- most notably the leading note, g sharp¹.

The priests lamentations are rudely interrupted by the sound of approaching trumpets, which grow in intensity until they can no longer be ignored. There is an abrupt transformation of musical material with the winds entering in high arpeggios and three dissonant brass fanfares announcing the presence of the king. The fanfares, which pass through the "dominant" (E minor) and the seventh degree major chord (A-flat major) are marked as announcing the arrival of Akhnaten by the third of A-flat major, which rises a half-step, from c flat² to c natural² (rehearsal mark 18), nudging it into the --

“feminine,” or in this case androgynous -- minor mode. This shift from major to minor is an unmistakable transformation of Akhnaten’s “bisexual” life-span motif (as heard, for example, in the Prelude). Here, too, it resolves to the tonic of the opera, A minor; although this time from a major chord that lies a minor second below rather than above the tonic.

In the highly rhythmically charged section that follows, Akhnaten makes his presence felt. Accompanied by the priests of his own church, he replaces the sentimental sighing of the priests of Amon with his own aggressive staccato vocalese. Through a bustling backdrop of shape-shifting arpeggios, the dissonant fanfare descent of the opening passages cuts a path once again, only now it is extended over three bars and is otherwise radically transformed. The tonality outlined by the fanfare now places a stronger emphasis on the pungent tritone-based chord (E flat, no third) rather than the raised seventh-degree major chord, due to the omission of A flat and a stronger emphasis on B flat, which appeared earlier only as a passing tone (rehearsal mark 21: e flat² - b flat¹ - a¹ - e flat¹ - b flat - a - e flat - B flat - A - E flat - B flat₁). Spanning over three octaves, as it does, and passing through the ranges of the entire brass section -- from trumpet to tuba -- the effect of this bitonal passage, combining totally incompatible F major (no fifth) and E flat tonalities, is quite striking. If Glass wanted to depict Akhnaten as a revolutionary and as an iconoclast he has certainly written the right music.

The bitonal fanfare is repeated three times (the triadic motif once again signalling change) before a second section is introduced. This is comprised of three repetitions of the B-flat major - B-flat minor - A minor sequence heard in the Prelude. This is without question Akhnaten’s music, and it is intended, in particular, to invoke his peculiarity (in more senses than one) in the eyes of his subjects -- particularly those who are opposed to his radical reforms. Both sections are repeated twice, prior to the entry of the King’s Mother and Great Royal Wife, Tye.

Tye enters on e flat², the tritone of A minor; the fearful symmetry of the tonality (the tritone dissects the octave into equal halves with clinical precision) associating this character more closely with the old order than the new. A similar symmetry can be heard in the brass fanfare, which, instead of descending, pushes its way up from a shuddering E flat in the bass to a piercing trumpet blast on e flat², some three octaves higher (rehearsal mark 28). This is an exact inversion of the theme heard earlier (at rehearsal mark 21), concomitant with Akhnaten’s entry. Thus the descending theme becomes associated with Akhnaten and the ascending with Tye.

The most striking transformation of the theme is heard at the beginning of the following cycle, however, when both ascending and descending versions of it are heard simultaneously, in contrary motion to one another (rehearsal mark 33: see Example 19). Other symmetries include the chord movement itself. In the orchestral introduction we heard two diametrically opposed chordal tendencies: one pushing upwards from the tonic (to B flat), and another pushing downwards (to A flat). In the passages heard now this symmetry pushes outwards farther still from the tonic. On the one hand, down to G seventh, and on the other, up to C major.

EXAMPLE 19

TYE

AK

T

B

violas
w. w.

brass
tutti

VI
a: $\flat V$

i ————— I ————— 4 ————— 3 —————

That is not all. In the surface texture of the music, Tye's entry is marked by a resumption of the mirror-image wind arpeggios heard in earlier scenes. In addition, an important theme is introduced whose essence is defined both by its intervallic symmetry and its dissonance in relation to the tonic. This theme, which orbits -- other than its two brief excursion to the flatted seventh degree, G -- a minor second away from the tonic (A flat - G - A flat - B flat - A flat - G - A flat), is associated by Glass with violence and destruction, and it appears in both of the scenes where violent upheaval is depicted (this scene and Act III, scene 2, Attack and Fall).

The frightening symmetry of Akhnaten and his mother can, however, take on an altogether different significance; one hinted at in the earlier discussion of the King's Mother and Great Royal Wife. The scene depicts not only the horror experienced by the priests as their temples are defiled, but also the furious catharsis of those doing the defiling. To say that the excitement of the attackers borders on the orgasmic would not, I believe, be misconstruing the composer's intentions. As Tye hits her high wordless a²s in the latter part of this scene, it is exactly this sense of all-encompassing rapture that is experienced; what Lacanians call *jouissance*. The wordless bliss of Akhnaten and his mother is contrasted with the Amon priests' reverence of "the Word" -- the word in this case being explicitly defined by the High Priest himself as "Amen." The Atenists dispute this claim, however, asserting that the non-differentiating "It" is more powerful still than the Word -- the priest's earthly *plaisir* is, then, clearly no match for the all-encompassing beatitude of their assailants.

Glass himself describes the events as follows:

The attack is complete, and the roof of the Temple is pulled off as the light of "the Aten" pours into what once was the "holy of holies." The attackers sing a vocalese, no words being necessary here. (Glass et al. 1987, 57.)

If it is acknowledged that the "holy of holies" is intended as a womb-like sacred environment -- and this is a commonly used metaphor for the innermost sanctum of a religious building in both Buddhism and the Judeo-Christian tradition -- one has no trouble in identifying the metaphor Glass is invoking. What has taken place is without any question a metaphorical act of rape. The light of the Aten pouring into the holy of holies requires little elucidation: it is the moment of climax itself, and there should be no problem in identifying this moment more explicitly with the union of Akhnaten in music with his mother. No words are necessary as all distinctions have fallen away: the temple and its assailants are one, as are Akhnaten and his mother.

The victory achieved by Akhnaten and his mother is, however, a hollow one. Instead of resolving to A minor, the key to which the music of this scene resolves is E minor. In his pursuit of worldly influence it appears that Akhnaten has neglected some of his most cherished principles. There follows a sorrowful codetta (rehearsal mark 34), designed, no doubt, to suggest the king's remorse at the shameful acts he has committed. The algorithmic rising arpeggios -- redolent of the opening bars of the opera -- are heard high up in the flute (a jerky jump of an octave, interrupted by the fifth), underpinned by the ascending tetrachord motif (from the Window of Appearances and the

Chaconne ritornello) which we have come to associate with the more meritorious side of the Akhnaten's character. Transposed away from its original key, however, the effect is somewhat different. Here the theme, played in thirds on the violas, begins on the dominant and ends on the tonic ($b^1 - c^1 - d^1 - e^1$). After ascending, however, it quickly drops away, to b flat and then to d. It is as though Akhnaten were brooding on the noble aspirations he has forfeited in his attempts to consolidate his worldly position. The "perfect symmetry" of his sacred marriage with his mother is another cause of concern, and perhaps a related one. The libidinal circularity involved in this relationship, while enveloping Akhnaten in its comforting embrace and providing a fertile, womb-like environment for his spiritual self-searching, is ultimately destructive for all the parties concerned. Tye is not the Divine Mother her son perceives her to be: she is an ordinary woman. And the priests the pharaoh lashes out at are as much a figment of his imagination as they are a real threat.

5.6 Act 2:2 Akhnaten and Nefertiti

Scene Two of the second act begins with a short orchestral transition which exploits the ambiguity between the dominant tonality on which the previous scene ended and the home key of the opera. As I have had cause to note already, modulations to E minor are rarely convincing in this opera, and this scene is no exception. The scene opens with the two tonalities in complete equilibrium: two bars of E (no third) arpeggios in the strings alternating with two bars of A (no third) in the winds (flute and oboe). Both chords are in root position. The isolation motif, defined by the absence of the third in its rising arpeggios, sets the mood for the opening phrases, the disillusionment of the previous scene carrying over into the construction of the new scene as well. After two repeats of the sequence the isolation motif is gradually dissolved with the simple addition of a descending arpeggio after each ascent, initially in the first bar of each chord (rehearsal mark 3) and then throughout (rehearsal mark 4).

In the passage that follows, E minor would seem to be confirmed as the tonic, but certainty in this regard is denied as the prospective tonic appears only in its most ambiguous guise, the second inversion (rehearsal mark 5). The music that unfolds is interesting also in terms of its instrumentation. The solo trombone is an extraordinary choice for an arpeggio pattern such as this: not even the most virtuosic of trombonists would be able to negotiate the string of sizeable intervallic jumps prescribed without occasionally missing the note (the first pattern, for example, includes two jumps of a fourth) and, in addition, maintain the steady flow demanded by the music without running out of breath (there are no rests in the entire twenty-bar passage). One can only surmise that the music is intended to sound clumsy and archaic, and in this it succeeds. The fallibility of the musician, in needing to take breaths and thus disturb the flow of the music, and the instrument played by the musician, which has no valves to facilitate clean jumps, are, then, clearly an integral part of the charm of the music.

The sequence outlined by the trombone takes us from the unsatisfactory E minor six-four chord mentioned already, through C major seventh, to C sharp half-diminished seventh, and finally back to tonic. I am tempted, however, to interpret the C and the C sharp chords as first inversions of A minor from which the root is omitted. (This interpretation is confirmed later on in the scene when the root is added.) Moreover, there is a musico-dramatic rationale for such an interpretation: not only is the move from major to minor strongly associated with the protagonist of the opera and his ambiguous sexuality, but in this context it could easily come to represent some sense of gender balance between this character and his wife, Nefertiti (I will return to this question later). The entire sequence can be regarded, then, as a tonic six-four to subdominant (minor/major) six movement: conversely, assuming that the sense of A minor as root is sufficiently strong to be retained at this stage -- and there has been no convincing cadence to call it into question -- then it can be interpreted as a dominant six-four to tonic (minor/major) six movement. E minor is unquestionably the stronger tonic of the two -- there are

occasional interpolations by the winds (flute and oboe: e² and e³), and, in the final two bars of the sequence, by the bass instruments (cellos, basses and tubas: E and E₁) which confirm that this is the case. I am, nevertheless, of the opinion that some relation to the home key of the opera, some sense of ambiguity, is deliberately retained. Here it remains only a latent force, but it is nonetheless tangibly present. As far as the dramatic significance of this tonal ambivalence is concerned, I concur with Frandsen (1993)¹, who observes:

The relationship between A minor and E minor in Act 1.2 represents Akhnaten as a man torn between a vision of a new life and his roots in old, safe but locked, patterns, a schism exemplified in his ambivalent relationship with his mother. When the duet settles down in pure E minor at the end, Akhnaten has finally left the old realm of Tye for the new love of Nefertiti. (Frandsen 1993, 252.)

This scene marks, then, the coming of age of Akhnaten, and traces his second initiation into the ways of love, but this time an initiation that is at the same time sacred and profane -- instead of being heavily weighted towards the former as he perceived the incestuous relationship with his mother to be. Unfortunately, however, we have not seen the end of this character's libidinal circularity, although we will have to wait until the final act before it emerges once again.

In the passage heard immediately after the orchestral transition, the text of the duet is recited, accompanied by a curiously, yet deliberately, or so I believe, ungainly trombone solo. The scribe Amenhotep, son of Hapu -- who we know to be the androgynous seer of the Oedipus myth, Tiresias -- translates the text, and in true postmodern style, suggests two apparently conflicting interpretations. This particular text, found on a royal sarcophagus initially thought to be that of Akhnaten himself, is one of the most controversial artefacts of the Amarna period². Glass observes that "[it] may well have been written by Nefertiti herself" (1987, 151): its true authorship is, however, by no means certain.

I breath the sweet breath
Which comes forth from thy mouth.
I behold thy beauty every day.
It is my desire
That I may be rejuvenated
With life though love
Of thee.

*Sesenet neftu nedjem
Per em rek
Peteri nefruk em menet
Ta-i nehet sedj emi
Kheruk nedjem en mehit
Renpu ha-i em ankh
en mertuk*

Give me thy hands, holding thy spirit,
that I may receive it and live by it.
Call thou upon my name unto eternity,
And it shall never fail.

*Di-ek eni awik kher ka-ek
Shesepi su ankhi yemef
I ashek reni er heh
Ben hehif em rek*

¹ This is one of the rare cases when the Egyptologist is actually aware of any tonal ambiguity in the opera.

² See Gardiner's article "The so-called tomb of Queen Tye" (1957).

The first reading, accompanied by the trombone solo, presents the text as a hymn in praise of the benevolent sun god, whose spirit is present in all things. It is read in the routine manner one would recite a prayer; the type of prayer one knows back-to-front and has recited perhaps many hundreds of times without ever stopping to think about its meaning.

The effect of the second reading is somewhat different. The musical accompaniment is a lucid string arrangement that is diametrically opposed in its effect to the stammering trombone accompaniment of the first reading. This music owes much of its appeal to its tantalising chromatic bass line. Over the same chord sequence as discussed earlier, cellos and bassoon drop down to the depths of the orchestra twice, before beginning a painfully slow ascent, in half-steps, up again (see Example 20).

EXAMPLE 20

The musical score for Example 20 consists of two systems. The first system includes staves for violas, cellos, and bassoons. The violas part is in the upper register, while the cellos and bassoons are in the lower register. The tempo is marked 'Piu mosso' with a quarter note equal to 108. The second system includes staves for cellos, bassoons, basses, and tuba. The cellos and bassoons part is marked 'mp'. The score is in 4/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes.

The first drop is over E minor, and is of a major sixth: from the root of the chord, e, to its third, G. The same interval is transposed a half-step down (e flat to F sharp) for the second chord of the sequence, C seventh (or A minor ninth). This sequential descent is unsatisfactory, however, and must resolve, in the second half-note of the bar, from F sharp to G -- the fifth of C, or the flatted seventh of A minor, depending on one's interpretation. In the final phrase of the pattern (accompanied by viola arpeggios of C-sharp half-diminished or A major, no root), there is a tortured chromatic climb from A flat through A natural to A sharp, which leads, in the next bar, to the fifth of the tonic, b, and thus back to the beginning of the cycle.

In agreement with the new musical environment, Amenhotep's inflection of the text is now totally transformed. It is now read as though it were an intimate exchange between lovers. And to confirm this interpretation, it is stipulated in the libretto that Akhnaten and Nefertiti appear on the stage at precisely this point in time (Glass 1987, 184). Glass's and his collaborators' dual interpretation of the text would appear to be correct: Frandsen, for example, notes: "the interesting point about this text is that it was altered from what was

probably a prayer to Akhnaten on behalf of a woman, more than likely a queen, to a prayer by Akhnaten to the sun god" (1993, 251). It seems fitting, then, that some notion of ambiguity be preserved in its setting to music, and this is the course Glass has chosen: the author's love of the Aten, be it Akhnaten's or Nefertiti's, is manifested ultimately in his or her love of all living things -- and in its most immediate form, in the couples love for each other. Thus, two ambiguities are superimposed: the ambiguity of religious and connubial love, and the ambiguity of the author's voice -- be it Akhnaten's or Nefertiti's. In Glass's setting of the text all ambiguities are interconnected: it becomes of little consequence whether the subject of the hymn is love of a man for a woman, love of a woman for a man, or love of a man and a woman for their god -- all of these are interconnected.

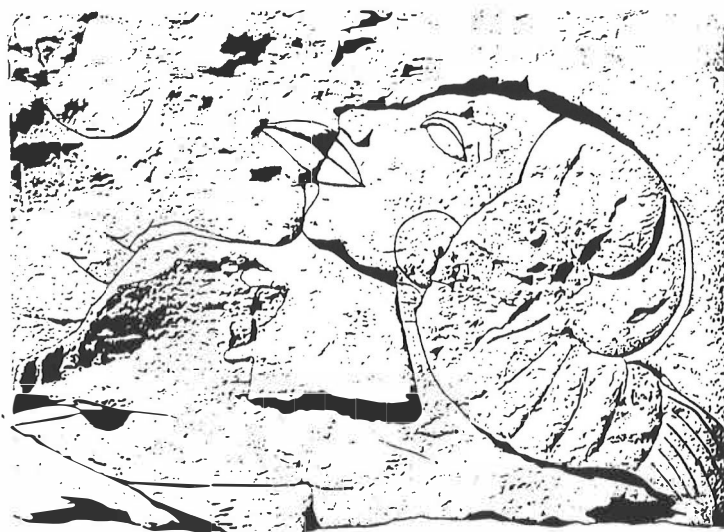


FIGURE 8 An intimate portrait of Akhnaten and Nefertiti (Frandsen 1993, 252).

What, then, are the grounds for Glass's romantic treatment of the couple. We know, for instance, that Akhnaten had himself, Nefertiti, and his daughters depicted in unprecedentedly intimate poses. One famous portrait depicts Akhnaten and Nefertiti in a passionate embrace with their lips touching (see Figure 8). This honest depiction of domestic life in the royal palace can presumably be ascribed to Akhnaten's dictum of "living in truth," a principle about which he felt so strongly that he even had it included in his proper name (Budge 1923, 122). It appears that Nefertiti enjoyed the king's favour to an even greater degree than did her mother-in-law, Tye, in her marriage with Amenhotep III. The couple appear to have been virtually inseparable -- apart, or so it would appear, from when Tye chose to intervene in their affairs. Hymns to the sun god frequently credit the queen with co-authorship, bearing the title "praise of Aton by king [A]khnaten and Nefernefruaten [Nefertiti]" (Breasted 1909, 371). Moreover, the longer version of the famous Hymn to the Sun, thought to be written by Akhnaten himself, is dedicated to Nefertiti,

whom, the text reveals, "he [Akhnaten] loves" (ibid., 123). And small wonder: adjectives seem barely to have sufficed to describe the queen's breathtaking beauty -- her titular list includes the attributes "Fair of Face, Mistress of Joy, Endowed with Favour, Great of Love" (Aldred 1988, 249). The intimacy of the couple compounded with the egalitarian nature of their union are, then, essential aspects of Glass's characterisation:

From the way Nefertiti appears in paintings, we know that Akhnaten thought very highly of her, elevating her to a place equal to his own, and this was highly unusual even in the royal families of Egypt. It is easy to imagine a romantic attachment between these two. If this is so, then Akhnaten and Nefertiti are among the earliest, if not *the* earliest romantic couple in recorded history, predating Antony and Cleopatra by many hundreds of years. (Glass 1987, 151.)

Of equal importance, however, was the symbolic value of Akhnaten's and Nefertiti's apparent marital bliss to the followers of their religious doctrine. With the conventional Egyptian gods supplanted by a faraway disc in the sky -- which itself was not even a god in any conventional sense of the word, but merely a manifestation of the spirit of God -- the people of Egypt, as people of any time or place are wont to do, turned towards more tangible anthropomorphic icons, in order that they might invest in them the characteristics of the benevolent sun-god. The royal family themselves were all too happy to assume the role proffered upon them of "children of the sun"; of particular import was the "holy trinity," mentioned earlier, of Akhnaten, Nefernefruaten (Nefertiti), and the Aten itself. These represented the male, the female, and the unifying principals respectively -- as I have noted already, the Aten was commonly referred to as the "mother [and] father of what thou hast made" (Budge 1923, 118). Aldred (1988) is of the opinion that the holy trinity of the royal couple and their god might well have been deliberately cultivated by Akhnaten or his advisers:

... one gains the impression that Akhenaten, in publicizing his domestic life as the family man with Nefertiti and one or more of their children, is consciously or otherwise creating a significant icon of a holy family as a focus of daily worship, particularly in the chapels attached to the private houses at Amarna. ... [O]ne suspects that the erotic extravagance given to Nefertiti, both in her appearance and in the epithets lavished upon her, have the effect of elevating her into a love-goddess, a Venus figure like Hathor or Astarte. The door-jambs at the entrance to the tombs at Amarna, where they are complete, contain prayers, addressed to this trinity of powers, the Aten, the king and the queen. (Aldred 1988, 241.)

The depiction of the "holy trinity of Aten" in music is as subtle as it is ingenious. The truth is, the love duet of Akhnaten and Nefertiti is not a duet at all, but a trio: a trio for counter tenor, contralto, and trumpet -- that is for Akhnaten, Nefernefru-aten, and the Aten itself. The equilibrium between the three -- as I have had cause to note already when discussing Akhnaten's and Nefertiti's voice ranges -- is accomplished musically by the setting of the three "voices" in roughly the same range.

Dramatically, the "holy trinity" theme was strongly to the fore both in the German première of opera and in the David Freeman production performed in the United States and Britain. In Freyer's Stuttgart production, Akhnaten and Nefertiti are wheeled around the stage on royal thrones. Between the two, a snake is seen writhing on the stage: a symbol of both pharaonic power and of the mutual desire on which their relationship was founded. The couple are thus depicted as an ancient Egyptian counterpart to Adam and Eve, and the snake is the bisexual libido that united them. As their thrones draw together during the final cadences of the coda, the snake disappears between them. Akhnaten's and Nefertiti's hands meet to form the base of a triangle, while the other hand is extended upwards to form its sides. The fingers of the raised hands are splayed to represent the rays of the Aten. In Freeman's production of the opera, the trinity theme was invoked not by the choreography, but by the placement of pyramidal structures on the stage during the appropriate scenes.

The musical construction of the duet proper, is, like the earlier trio (Act I, scene 3), cyclical-strophic; the main musical interest coming from the interaction of the melodic lines, as well as from changes in rhythm and orchestration. Almost the entire scene is, like the trio, based on a single chord progression: the same sequence heard in the introductory passages on the trombone and then in the strings -- E minor six-four - A major - A minor - E minor six-four. Although it suits my purposes to interpret the sequence this way -- primarily because it makes more "sense" in terms of tonal functions -- a more precise interpretation would be the following:

e^6_4 - C maj. 7 - c-sharp half-diminished 7 - [A⁶ a⁶ -]¹ e^6_4 .

Subtle changes in metre occur along with virtually every chord change. The initial cycles -- in which the couple sing texted music -- are, for example, as follows:

12/8: e^6_4 - 4/4: C maj. 7 - 12/8: C-sharp half-diminished 7 - 4/4: e^6_4 .

Subsequent cycles -- in which Akhnaten and Nefertiti sing vocalese -- include the root note of A major/minor, and are constructed from an inverted version of the earlier rhythmic configuration:

4/4: e^6_4 - 12/8: C maj. 7 - 4/4: C-sharp half-diminished 7 - 6/8: A⁶ a⁶
- 12/8: e^6_4 .

These frequent changes in metre are accomplished by dint of the additive and subtractive processes that were the mainstay of this composer's compositional style in the 1970s.

Like the earlier trio, the melodic construction of this scene has its roots in late Renaissance and early Baroque counterpoint -- in light of the

¹ The chord change marked with squared brackets is heard only in the later, vocalese cycles.

pronounced use of dissonance in this scene, Purcell would appear to be a particularly salient point of reference. In contrast to fellow New Yorker and former minimalist Reich, to write music in strict canonical counterpoint would be alien to Glass, who seems to prefer a more intuitive approach. There is a certain degree of imitation between voices, but the voices of Glass's counterpoint are permitted considerable freedom in their movement before they eventually converge in the homophonic cadences that mark the end of each cycle.

In the early stages of the duet, Nefertiti appears to take the initiative; her part is more in the nature of a "subject," while Akhnaten assumes the conventionally female role of "counter," or "second subject." This reversal of gender roles is evident, as I have noted earlier, in terms of voice compasses as well. Akhnaten's voice is predominantly higher than Nefertiti's, although in places the voices cross in the same way that Akhnaten's and Tye's voices did in the trio (Act I, scene 3) (rehearsal mark 8.4). This suggests not only some degree of gender balance (or inversion) between the two, but also that Nefertiti would appear to be replacing Tye in the affections of the opera's protagonist. One can hardly blame Akhnaten for succumbing to Nefertiti's charms: her melodic line combines a number of intriguing attributes. In the opening bar of the initial cycles she enters on a¹, and rises to b¹, which she holds onto resolutely as Akhnaten joins her on a high e², and then descends, in contrary motion, diatonically to c². This agonising minor second dissonance is withheld by her for an entire bar; finally she drops down to another dissonant note, f sharp, before coming to rest on the fifth of C major seventh, g¹. Then there follows a crossing of voices similar to that enacted between Akhnaten and Tye in *The Window of Appearances* (Act I, scene 3), which was then, or so the composer's statements regarding the music would give cause to believe, strongly associated with the sexual foundation of these characters' relationship. Akhnaten rises from the root, a¹, to the third of A minor, c² (thus confirming that the chord is in fact A minor and not C major seventh), while Nefertiti descends from c² to f sharp¹. Preceding the cadence, as it does, it is not difficult to see that some sense of union -- let us assume, once again, that it is a sexual one -- is enacted in this passage. After this brief interplay, they both settle onto the tonic, E minor; Nefertiti taking the root, e¹, and Akhnaten the fifth, b¹. The two have quite literally swapped places: in the trio, the fifth was exclusively the domain of the women (Nefertiti and Tye). Akhnaten was content to stay on the root. It is evident that some more meaningful transaction has taken place in this scene; while retaining their individual identities, the two have succeeded in breaking down the barriers of the ego-consciousness, and crossed into the domain of the transpersonal -- in more conventional terms, one might say that they have fallen in love.

In the third repetition of the cycle (rehearsal mark 9: see Example 21), the transcendental principal emerges with a tangible voice. The trumpet enters on a high g², supplying the missing third to the vocal harmony of the lovers. It holds this note over the next bar, allowing Akhnaten and Nefertiti's clashing counterpoint to distract the listener's attention. As Nefertiti rises, however, from f-sharp¹ to g¹, the trumpet descends in contrary motion, from d² to c². This movement ties the latter in not only with Nefertiti's line, of which it is the

mirror image, but also with Akhnaten's, which two bars earlier descends in a similar manner, from e^1 to d^1 . Over the next chord -- A minor (the tonic of the opera) -- the third voice joins in Akhnaten and Nefertiti's erotic voice-crossing to form a kind of profane-divine *ménage-à-trois*. On the first notes of this exchange it takes the fifth of this chord, e^2 , thus completing the triad and providing the "cosmic glue" that bonds the lovers together. As the lovers' voices cross, the Aten (the trumpet) joins Nefertiti on the octave, reinforcing her low f sharp¹ with a high f sharp². While Nefertiti descends to the root of E minor from this note, the Aten rises to its third, and Akhnaten drops to the fifth. In a very concrete way, then, the third voice becomes the unifying principle of the (so-called) duet; it combines motific elements from both voices, and serves as the binding agent that transforms Akhnaten and Nefertiti's counterpoint into harmony.

EXAMPLE 21

trpt.

AK

NEF

violas

cellos
basses

tuba

NE-HET SEDJ EM-I EN ME

TA-I KHE RUK NE-DJEM EN ME

HIT

HIT

As in the previous scene, sexual transformation renders its participants not speechless but wordless. Akhnaten and Nefertiti's love enters a higher plane where mutual understanding occurs through pure intuition -- words are no longer required. The two lovers cross the barrier, then, from mundane love to divine union, from the symbol to the sign (although a simplistic characterisation such as this belies what is considerably more complex in semiotic terms), and from *plaisir* to *jouissance*. And so does the orchestra: the sparse string accompaniment of the opening cycles remains, apart from the changes in rhythm mentioned earlier, essentially unchanged. The addition of the entire wind section (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon) in total unison with the strings (rehearsal mark 10), suffices to metamorphose the meandering arpeggio pattern, with its supple syncopations, into a formidable musical force.

Nefertiti now resonates on the root note, e^2 , while Akhnaten is perceivably transformed from the encounter. He begins on a low e^1 , more within Nefertiti's tonal territory than his own. That is not all. He deviates temporarily into his spouse's chromatic domain when he stops of at f sharp¹, on his way up to her high e^2 . The love-smitten pharaoh then continues his diatonic ascent up through g^1 to a^1 -- the root of the chord and this character's tonal centre -- where he hesitates a while before resuming his upward motion to b^1 , and then jumping a perfect fourth to join Nefertiti on an ecstatic e^2 .

After two cycles of this, the chromatic bass-line heard at the beginning of the scene returns (rehearsal mark 11). Now, though, the theme assumes a darker persona than in its earlier transformation -- the combination of bass clarinet, trombone, tuba, and basses in unison make this undoubtedly one of the most sombre themes of the opera. And to our surprise, it is heard in the middle of the love-duet. (I will discuss the reasons for this unlikely juxtaposition shortly.) In the final section of duet proper (rehearsal mark 12), the orchestral tutti becomes complete with the addition of the trumpets and horns: as in the trio, withholding the full power of the brass section until the last moment not only allows the music to grow organically towards its climax, but it also reinforces the association of these instruments with the power of the sun god. The cycle is heard four times with brass attacks; in the final two, the tragic theme returns, once again, in the bass.

There then follows an instrumental section in which the bass clarinet plays an eerie reduction of the chromatic theme. It is joined after two cycles by a high counter-melody -- played by flute and piccolo -- constructed from motivic material culled from Akhnaten's and Nefertiti's melodic lines. The accompaniment is a gently bubbling clarinet set against a two-note cello ostinato, which oscillates the whole time between the notes e and g . Apart from confirming the E minor tonality of the scene, this gives rise to a two-against-three polyrhythm.

The dark mood of this section was exploited in much the same way in both of the major productions of the opera. At this particular point in the scene, Tye re-appears. If the melancholy tinge in Nefertiti's voice, and the threatening bass interpolations in this scene, have bemused some members of the audience, the cause of this acerbity now becomes quite apparent. In Freeman's production of the opera, Akhnaten crosses the stage and throws himself at his mother's feet. Tye lifts her son's face to hers and kisses him

passionately on the lips. As the two part, Tye turns away, beside herself with shame. Nefertiti watches on, powerless, as Akhnaten returns to her side, beseeching her forgiveness. In the Stuttgart production, the spectre-like figure of Tye circumambulates the stage, her red gown hanging from her outstretched arms like wings. Here Akhnaten does not actually embrace his mother in anything other than a metaphorical sense. His attachment is probably more akin to the psychological attachment postulated by Freud and, before him, Buddhism; a psychosis that is not so much incest -- in its mundane sense at least (which usually denotes some form of sexual exploitation of a child by its parent) -- but which nevertheless involves a libidinal circularity for which inbreeding is a wholly appropriate metaphor. Here, as I have noted earlier, the mythological figures of Oedipus and Narcissus are one and the same.

The music is reduced to brooding cellos regularly punctuated by piercing high g^2 s on the flute (doubled an octave higher on piccolo) followed by low Es in the basses (doubled an octave lower on the synthesiser). There is a moment of silence (a one-bar tacet in all instruments). When the music resumes we -- and the two lovers -- have passed from the realm of the living into that of the dead. The libretto stipulates that Amenhotep III and his funeral procession be seen in the background ascending on the wings of Ra to the heavens. In the music, the return of Akhnaten's father is greeted by a chord sequence related to that of the Funeral scene (E minor - D major first inversion - B diminished - E: the Funeral music was based on the sequence A six-four - B major) underpinned by a mutation of the bass ostinato from that scene.

Akhnaten and Nefertiti come together musically in a series of canonical cadences resolving onto E minor; the text of the Hymn speaks also at this point of a physical and at the same time spiritual coming together of polarities; and in both productions of the opera this was enacted physically by the characters. In the German production, Akhnaten's and Nefertiti's hands meet to form the symbol of the "holy" (and at the same time mundane) trinity. They sing

Give me thy hands, holding thy spirit, that I may receive it and live by it.	<i>Di-ek eni awik kher ka-ek Shesepi su ankhi yemef</i>
Call thou upon my name unto eternity, And it shall never fail.	<i>I ashek reni er heh Ben hehif em rek</i>

In the music heard subsequent to the "gap" which marked Akhnaten's and Nefertiti's passage into the underworld, the separate identities of the two are now almost, but not completely, effaced. In the domain of the transpersonal, fluidity and interpenetration displace dualistic perception. Akhnaten's descending motif ($c^2 - b^1 - a^1$) is freely passed on to Nefertiti ($d^2 - c^2 - b^1$), and then down to a low bassoon (d flat - c - b) -- signifying the transpersonal principal in its dark, underworldly guise. Moreover, it appears that gender barriers are, on this plane, almost totally interchangeable. Each cadence begins and ends on the octave: at the beginning of each, Akhnaten takes the higher note and Nefertiti the lower (b^1 and b, respectively), while at the end these roles are inverted (Akhnaten sings e^1 and Nefertiti e^2). The dissonance heard earlier has not dispersed though: here Nefertiti's b^1 is heard against Akhnaten's a^1 over a span of two entire bars. This suggests some fundamental, non-reducible tension between the two. The difference between the sexes, or that

between oneself and another, may, ultimately, be as minimal as that which separates A and B, or that which distinguishes an X chromosome from a Y chromosome, but it cannot simply be glossed over. Only by coming to terms with difference can Akhnaten hope to catch a glimpse of a unity that is not illusory and inherently destructive. The divine union, or *hierosgamos*, of Akhnaten and Nefertiti, is like other impossible objects -- the optical illusions of M.C. Escher, the koans of Zen Buddhism, or the ecstatic embraces of Tibetan Buddhist *yab-yum* couples -- ultimately irreducible. Unless, that is, one looks beyond the rational, the analytical, the material, the visible, and even the audible -- unless one listens to the voice of pure intuition.

5.7 Act 2:3 The City/Dance

Following Akhnaten's destruction of the Temple of Amon, his position in Thebes evidently became increasingly untenable. Dissent was spreading, and everywhere the king turned he must have been reminded of his radical break from tradition. Temples dedicated to the worship of the proscribed god stood either in ruins or with doors bolted; vast statues of his father, Amenhotep III, stared down at the young pharaoh accusingly; and across the river the desecrated tombs of centuries of ancestors must have been a constant reminder of the staid conservatism of Egyptian life and the apparent futility of any attempts at innovation. (Breasted 1909, 364.)

It is at this point that Akhnaten attempted to dislodge the centralised church-state complicity of the ancient Egyptian ruling classes by uprooting the capital city and moving a considerable distance downstream. If the Theban doctrine of Amon held too tight a grip on the decision-making machinery of the Egyptian state, then he would move this machinery to where it would not be so readily influenced by corrupting sacerdotal forces. Moving the capital towards the Nile delta would have the secondary effect of taking it closer to the city of Heliopolis, the city where the sun-cult originated and where sympathies for the pharaoh and his reforms must have been strongest. With the capital situated equidistant between Thebes in the South and the densely inhabited flatlands of the North, the king of Upper and Lower Egypt might, in a symbolic sense at least, come to represent both of these regions, and not, as tradition prescribed, be simply imposing the will of the former on the later. Akhnaten did not stop there. Not only did he move the administrative and royal retinue to the new "City of the Horizon," but, in an attempt to decentralise state and colonial power further still, he created two secondary capitals, or "Aten-cities," in the colonial districts of Nubia (Ethiopia) in the South, and Syria in the North-East (Breasted 1909, 364.). These were evidently granted an unprecedented amount of freedom in handling the affairs of their own regions; and, as so often appears to be the case when colonial rule suddenly gives way to some degree of local rule, the situation, particularly in the North-East, rapidly regressed into a series of increasingly bloody tribal squabbles.

It is in this context that Akhnaten founded his new capital, Akhetaten, the "City of the Horizon." With divine guidance as his pretext, the new Egyptian capital was constructed and inaugurated by the pharaoh within the span of a few short years. Thereafter Akhnaten, his family, his mother, the royal entourage, and the administrative personnel of the largest empire in the world, took up residence in their newly constructed capital. In the text read by the scribe -- found on the northern and southern stelae demarcating the boundaries of the royal city -- Akhnaten makes an oath that the residence of the king shall never be moved from this newly consecrated location.

Stela 1 And his majesty said unto them, "Ye behold the City of the Horizon of the Aten, which the Aten has desired me to make for him as a monument in the great name of my majesty forever. For it was the Aten, my Father, that brought me to this City of the Horizon. There was not a noble who directed me to it; there was not any man in the whole land who led me to it, saying, 'it is fitting for his majesty that he make a City of the Horizon in this place.' Nay, but it was the Aten, my Father, that directed me to make it for him." Behold the Pharaoh found that this site belonged not to a god, nor to a goddess, it belonged not to a prince or a princess. There was no right for any man to act as owner of it.

Stela 2 I will make the City of the Horizon of the Aten for the Aten, my Father, in this place. I will not make the city south of it, north of it, west of it or east of it. I will not pass beyond the southern boundary stone southward, neither will I pass beyond the northern boundary stone northward to make for him a City of the Horizon there; neither will I for him a city on the western side. Nay, but I will make the City of the Horizon for the Aten, my Father, upon the east side, the place for which he did enclose for his own self with cliffs, and made a plain in the midst of it that I might sacrifice to him thereon: this is it.

Neither shall the Queen say unto me, "Behold there is a goodly place for the City of the Horizon in another place," and I harken unto her. Neither shall any noble nor any man in the whole land say unto me, "Behold there is a goodly place for the City of the Horizon in another place," and I harken unto them. Whether it be downstream or southward or westward or eastward, I will not say, "I will abandon this City of the Horizon."

While the scribe is still speaking, what Glass describes as "a new city of light and open spaces that represents architecturally and visually the spirit of the epoch of Akhnaten" (Glass 1987, 185) comes into sight behind him. With the king and those close to him unencumbered now by the harsh realities of the outside world, safe, in the womb-like enclave of their "holy city," festivities were evidently called for. Considering the new state religion was founded on the celebration of energy, on universal love, on love of nature, and on the divine union of opposites, it is unlikely that this celebration would have been an altogether serious affair. Glass's intent was to contrast this scene with the opening scene of the act, with its visions of intolerance, conflict, and, finally, destruction (Glass et al. 1987, 82). This he did by setting the music of this scene for light, hand-held instruments - triangle¹, tambourine, and wood block --

¹ The fact that the only appearance of the triangle in the opera is here, at its centrepiece and immediately prior to Akhnaten's Hymn to the Sun, strongly suggests some

which the libretto stipulates should be carried onto the stage as part of the festivities, in addition to the orchestral instruments heard throughout the opera. As this is a dance, dancers would be present too, and so would those principal characters: everyone on stage would participate in a cathartic dance of jubilation.

It is with some disappointment, then, that Glass recounts the omission of the scene from David Freeman's production of the opera, because of this producer's trepidation towards choreographing it himself. Although the scene is "not really indispensable to the Drama," Glass nevertheless emphasises that he "definitely would prefer to have it included" (Glass 1987, 165). If it is not indispensable to the drama, then the primary reasons for its inclusion must be musical or musico-dramatic. There are strong arguments for its inclusion in the opera on both of these counts. As I have mentioned earlier, the music of this scene is strongly reminiscent of the Prelude. Moreover, the penultimate scene of the final act constitutes a third transformation of this music, making the number of times it is heard in the opera three, once in each act. I have already discussed the many intersecting significances of the number three in the contexts of the drama of the opera (including the Oedipal incestuous triangle; the *hierosgamos* of Akhnaten, Nefertiti, and the Aten; the trinity of "Cities of the Sun" in Egypt, Syria and Nubia), the composer's oeuvre (it is the third in a trilogy of portrait operas), and, possibly, also in his world view (the significance of various trinities in Buddhism). I have also contemplated the possibility of its association with the River Nile, which the text read by the scribe prior to this scene would appear to confirm. For instance, the Nile was both a symbol of the continuity of ancient Egyptian civilisation and the most important prerequisite for this continuity. Pharaohs would come and go and so would the ordinary peasant folk, but the Nile would always be there to provide sustenance to whomsoever abided in its vicinity. The Nile was, moreover, a symbol of the ancient Egyptian cyclical world view. Its source was thought to be in the underworld, whence it flowed down through the land of Egypt, out to sea, and eventually back into the Land of the Dead. The river, then, became the connecting principle between the living and the dead, and because of this it played, as we have already seen, an important role in the funeral ceremonies of the pharaohs. In light of its import to the Egyptian people and their culture, it seems fitting that there should be a scene in each act of the opera devoted to its representation. In this particular scene, we have seen how important it was to Akhnaten that the City of the Horizon be founded on the east and not the west bank of the Nile; it should be closer to where the sun rises, not to where it sets, closer to the source of life and energy, not to the point of its depletion. It should, nevertheless, be as close as possible to the river in which the energy of the sun is transformed into life-giving fertility. These two elements, sun and water, were the foundation stones of Egyptian life, and both are prominent in Glass's treatment of his subject matter.

allegorical significance for the instrument. In light of the pervasiveness of triadic thematics in the opera, it seems highly probable that the triangle (made of metal and forged in fire, as are the brass instruments signifying the Aten) is intended to carry such connotations. Glass stipulation that the instrument appear on stage would appear to support this interpretation.

The scene begins with a short fanfare whose overt dissonance points towards the reasons for the founding of the city (see Example 22). The fanfare begins on A-flat major, the (enharmonic) raised seventh degree chord in the key of A minor, passes through G flat major, and finally arrives at a hybrid of E flat and A flat tonalities. The menacing final chord, containing, as it does, the leading notes of both A minor and its dominant, resolves onto a tonic that straddles between these two tonalities, the now familiar second inversion of A minor.

EXAMPLE 22

♩ = 72

trump.
horns
trmb.
tuba

The overall construction of the dance proper is, as in the earlier transformation of this music in the Prelude, strophic. The main difference between the Dance and the Prelude, aside from the overall lighter orchestration and presence of percussion instruments in the latter, would appear to be caused by a subtle change in the voice-leading of the second chord in the initial section. Instead of alternating between a A minor and F major seventh -- by the simple addition of the major third of the latter in the bass -- the chord movement is now complicated by the addition of the note B in one of the upper voices of the F major chord. It would, therefore, be possible to interpret this as a simple tonic to supertonic movement. An alternative interpretation would treat the dissonant B as an added or suspended fourth in relation to the implied F major triad. I do not find it necessary to arrive at an unequivocal interpretation of this chord movement: there are times when it sound more like a tonic to supertonic movement and there are times when it sounds more like a tonic to submediant movement with an added note. In light of the significance of the tension between A to B in the previous scene (the duet), it is hard not to see this tonal relationship as signifying the relationship of Akhnaten and Nefertiti in this scene as well. The implication is that Nefertiti's unmistakably "different" voice is an integral and indispensable part of the new order, and that Akhnaten's reforms are largely dependent upon its presence.

It would appear that Tye's contribution to the establishment of the new paradigm has not been forgotten either. In the bass, the motif heard in the first scene of this act (the Temple) reappears underpinning the B diminished/F major seventh chord. The presence of this motif (F - E - F - G - F - E - F - G - A: see Example 23) can be explained in a number of different ways. We saw earlier that the motif itself was not so much associated with violence as with the cathartic excitement commensurate with violent states of mind. We saw also that there was a strong sexual agenda in the symbolism of the Temple scene, in

which the motif first appears. It is possible, then, that this same sense of catharsis, with distinctly sexual overtones, would not be at all out of place in the fervid, perhaps orgiastic, festivities held in honour of the founding of the new capital city. The motif has to it a more ominous side, however. And perhaps by including it in the height of Akhnaten and his followers' festivities, Glass is implying that the shameful deeds perpetrated in order to bring about the *status quo* cannot simply be swept under the carpet; that the psychological residue of our wrongful acts stays with us even when things would appear to be going well. There is reason to believe, therefore, that Akhnaten's Oedipus complex -- his clinging both to the imagined Divine Mother and to all worldly things -- although latent at present, will later resurface and prove to be his undoing. A third interpretation might appear to be slightly at odds with those just mentioned. It might suggest -- as is written in the Tantric scriptures -- that even the most negatively charged psychic energy, the most base sexual craving or the most violent hostility, can be transformed in the act of divine communion. The scene depicted in the Dance could, therefore, be thought of as a kind of collective transformation: a wiping-the-slate-clean for Akhnaten and his followers. In the frenzy of the festivities, Akhnaten successfully purges himself of his earlier misdeeds. Under such circumstances the pharaoh's intimate relationship with his mother -- or, to be more precise, the Mother archetype he has constructed in his mind -- can be regarded as an essential stage in what Jung would term his individuation. Such a reconciliation of conflicting internal elements must be realised before this character can proceed to the higher spiritual plane on which we find him in the following scene.

EXAMPLE 23



In the second section of this scene, we are returned to the B flat major/minor to A minor sequence heard in the Prelude (rehearsal marks 10 and 19). This effect of this music, which, as we have seen, is strongly associated not only with Akhnaten's awaiting destiny but also with his "deviant" sexuality as perceived by his people, is somewhat different here to its earlier appearance. Here, the "life-span" motif, heard not in the bass but high up in the winds (piccolo and flute doubled: f² - b flat² - d flat³ - e²) has little of the gravity of its earlier transformation. With Akhnaten nearing the height of his powers, the thought of his ultimate fall from grace, as prophesied towards the end of the Prelude by Amenhotep, son of Hapu (or the seer from the Oedipus myth, Tiresias), loses much of its imminence. It is highly significant, though, that this character carries with him, even on the eve of his greatest hour, the seeds of his own destruction. As in its earlier appearance the motif is heard three times, thus reiterating the ternary theme which constitutes the numerical foundation of the opera, on all of its interpenetrating levels.

The first section of the Dance is prolonged by a shift from the A minor six-four to B diminished (or F maj. 7 added 11) sequence described above, to a triple alternation between four-bar phrases of F major seventh and root position A minor. The presence of this section transforms the overall form of the music from the five-cycle two-section form of the Prelude to the two-cycle three-section form heard now: ABCA¹B¹C¹. A musico-dramatic point of interest is a short brass interlude, situated in between the two cycles, which is comprised of simple trumpet, and then trumpet and horn iterations of the A minor home tonality. In light of the earlier associations of these instruments with the sun god, it is difficult not to see them as holding that significance here as well. Moreover, it seems highly appropriate that the unifying principle should occupy exactly this position; in the in-between state when one cycle has finished and another is about to begin. This piece of music, coming as it does at the exact midpoint of the scene, becomes the microcosm of the opera's macrocosm. It should be remembered that, in terms of acts, this scene occupies a position adjacent to the centrepoint of the opera. In light of the pervasive cyclical themes found in the opera -- the cyclical flow of the Nile; the cyclical motif of the sun-disc; and its cyclical movement across the sky, through the underworld and back to its point of departure -- it is tempting to read more into such a pervasive use of embedded symmetries. These are as, I have stressed earlier, not exact symmetries but what Jencks (1987, 23) would term asymmetrical symmetries, a distinction whose importance cannot be overstated.

The infectious syncopations, lightning-fast arpeggios, and pulsating polyrhythms of the Dance are, after two cycles, brought to an abrupt halt. This serves to heighten the sense of expectation one is made to feel in the brief hiatus between this scene and the next.

5.8 Act 2:4 Hymn

5.8.1 Atenism and the Hymn to the Sun

Akhnaten's Hymn to the Sun is in musical, dramatic, and literary terms the high point of the opera. In it the pharaoh elucidates the central tenets of the new religious doctrine, extolling the diversity and beauty of creation and, at the same time, illuminating his own function as intermediary between his god and the Egyptian people. A number of composers have written arrangements of this text, among them the Finnish composer, Erik Bergman¹, and the Dane, Vagn Holmboe². It seems unlikely, however, that these contemporary settings were the first musical arrangements of the Hymn: Manniche (1991, 93), for example, claims that it was almost certainly originally sung, either by Akhnaten himself or, in his absence, by the Temple singers at Akhetaten. There is considerable evidence that the other members of the royal family participated in ritual music-making and possibly also in the performance of the Hymn: the women of the royal family, including Nefertiti and her young princess daughters, are, for example, consistently shown brandishing sistra and sometimes strumming lyres, often within the context of religious ceremonies (Manniche 1991, 85-87). Nefertiti herself is described, in a text found in a tomb near the city of Akhetaten, as "one who unites her beauties and propitiates the Aten with her pleasant voice and with her beautiful hands holding the sistra"³. Thus Glass's treatment of the royal family as a family of musicians (in the family scene [Act III, scene 1] this is particularly true) and his setting of the Hymn to music both appear to have not only a dramaturgical but also a historical foundation.

The universality of the themes treated in the Hymn -- love of nature, love of humanity (irrespective of national, social, and racial divides), the interconnectedness of all things, the wonders of creation and procreation -- adds considerably to the immediacy of its appeal for contemporary audiences. Glass has deliberately chosen to emphasise this aspect of the Hymn by making it the only music in the opera that is set in the language of the audience, the

¹ Bergman's *Aton* (Akhnaten's Hymn to the Sun) was composed in 1959 and first performed by the Helsinki Philharmonic on 29 April 1960 in Sweden. The version of the Hymn set by Bergman is the same as that used by Glass, although Bergman's setting is considerably less abridged than is Glass's. Bergman's chromatic tonal language combined with his selection of a baritone for the role of Akhnaten make his a markedly different interpretation than Glass's. (See Paavo Heininen's article "Erik Bergman's path to the new music" [1981] for analytical comments, and Robert Anderson's "Hathor and Aton for Erik Bergman" [1981] for a historico-ideological discussion on Bergman's setting of the Hymn: both can be found in the anthology "Erik Bergman: a seventieth birthday tribute" [ed. Jeremy Parsons, 1981].).

² See Frandsen (1993, 256 and 266) for details of Holmboe's *Solhymne* (1961). Another well known Hymn to the Sun which should not be confused with settings of Akhnaten's Hymns is Lili Boulanger's *Hymne au Soleil* (1912), a choral work based on a loose interpretation of Hindu mythology. See Rosenstiel (1978, 150-153).

³ This extract (taken from N. de G. Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El Amarna VI*, 29. London, 1908.) is quoted in Manniche (1991, 86).

obvious intention being to make the listening experience as direct and personal as possible, in contrast to the greater part of the opera, which, with its patchwork quilt of archaic texts and quasi-mythological narrator, is decidedly impersonal in its appeal. Glass explains the intended effect of setting the Hymn in the language of the audience in the following passage:

... when Akhnaten sings his Hymn, I wanted it to affect the listener in a special way. The Hymn contains the kernels of Akhnaten's thought and appears as a highly personal statement. By the end of Act II the audience has been listening to more than one and one-half hours of singing which, though accompanied by explicit action requiring little explanation, they can hardly be expected to understand. Suddenly, with the Hymn, the words are intelligible¹. I wanted at that moment to create the effect of entering Akhnaten's mind, sharing his thoughts, and in this way making the moment highly intimate, a direct communication between Akhnaten and ourselves. It can be a very dramatic effect, achieved by the direct presentation of the text itself. (Glass 1987, 158.)

It is important at this point in the discussion to clarify certain theological technicalities pertaining to the Atenist faith. The most important premise of the religion undoubtedly lies in the fact that the true object of worship was not only the sun-disc itself but the "*Shu* (heat and light) [which] is in the sun disc" (Budge 1923, 79). Thus, Atenism cannot be regarded as sun worship in its strictest sense: instead the radiant energy of the sun -- the same energy that inheres within all celestial bodies and, indeed, all matter -- appears to have been the primary object of worship. It is interesting to note that this aspect of the religion -- the positing of energy itself as the divine principle rather than some ineffable magic essence -- which was a source admiration and wonder to those who first contemplated the teachings of the pharaoh, has more recently stirred scholars to deride Atenism as a cold and clinical materialism. Twentieth-century critics have almost unfailingly found fault with the religion on the grounds that it represents, with regard to both ancient Egyptian and contemporary cultures, a kind of cynical rationalism; an ontology that is altogether inadequate as a conduit for the higher spiritual aspirations of any people. Budge appears to have set the ball rolling, when he comments in his discussion of the Hymns: "there is nothing spiritual in them, nothing to appeal to man's higher nature" (Budge 1923, 112). I have already attempted to bring to light some of the hidden colonialist, sexist, and racist agendas lurking behind this Egyptologist's apparently innocuous statements; let it suffice to recount

¹ Strickland (1988, 73) quite rightly points out that in Paul Esswood's rendition of the Hymn, on the CBS Masterworks recording of the opera (1987), the text is anything but intelligible. When rendered by other countertenors, however, this does not appear to be the case, to the same extent at least. Esswood's voice is a good match for Nefertiti's (Milagro Vargas's), though: in their lower ranges, for example, Akhnaten's countertenor and Nefertiti's alto are virtually impossible to distinguish from one another. It is, as we have seen, the composer's specific intention that the voices should become confused in this manner, and Esswood's voice-formation makes his the perfect voice for the part. If the Hymn suffers somewhat from lack of clarity in the "head" range as a result, it is, of course, unfortunate, but only of limited import to the impact of the opera as a whole.

that he perceived Akhnaten's greatest weakness as being the fact that he overestimated the capacity of the simple African folk for abstract thought (*ibid.*, 112 and 114). Akhnaten simply refused to accept his lot as an ethically and intellectually inferior Egyptian, and evidently came to grief because of his unwillingness to conform to the stereotypes constructed by twentieth-century Egyptologists regarding the primitive and superstitious constitution of the African mind. That this same capacity for abstract thought, this same striving towards intellectual and spiritual "enlightenment," commands almost universal respect when situated some centuries later in the context of ancient Greece, or in the Aryan Middle-East, or anywhere as opposed to the "Dark Continent" some 1370 years before the birth of Christ, is an interesting point for contemplation (I shall return to this question in due course).

The contrast between this and earlier attitudes towards the doctrine in the Western scholarly community is, as we have already seen, quite startling. In 1899, the Egyptologist Sir Flinders Petrie was awe-struck by the parallels he perceived between Akhnaten's faith and the scientific world view of his time:

No one -- Sun worshipper or philosopher seems to have realised until within this century, the truth which was the basis of Akhnaton's worship, that the rays of the Sun are the means of the Sun's action, the source of all life, power and force in the universe. The abstraction of regarding the radiant energy as all-important was quite disregarded until recent views of the conservation of force, of heat as a mode of motion, and the identity of heat, light and electricity have made us familiar with the scientific conception which was the characteristic feature of Akhnaton's new worship.(...) Were it invented to satisfy our modern scientific conceptions [Akhnaten's religion] could not logically be improved upon at the present day. (Petrie 1899, Vol. II, 214.)

Similarly, Breasted draws attention to the empirical truths inherent in Atenism, discovered by intuition and mystical experience alone, but leaving little to be desired even from the standpoint of contemporary scientific knowledge with regard to its "fundamental idea" (Breasted 1909, 361). Few scholars of this century, however, seem willing to use scientific criteria to test religious ideas in the manner in which Petrie and Breasted did at the end of the last. On the contrary, contemporary scholars seem to view with the utmost suspicion any aspects of Akhnaten's faith that bear too close a relation to contemporary ideas. This view is epitomised in the writing of the Egyptologist Redford (1984, 234-235), for whom it appears to be something of an annoying anachronism that Akhnaten chanced upon an atheistic world view some thirty three centuries before he was supposed to -- before, that is, the unholy trinity of Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx appeared on the scene. It is with nothing short of disgust that he observes Atenism was not, after all, the world's first monotheism but "in the truest sense of the word, atheism" (Redford 1984, 234). Akhnaten's "religion," moreover, "inspire[s] [Redford] somewhat with contempt"; and the Hymn to the Son is dismissed by him as a "derivative" and "almost "positivist," statement on the beauty of creation" (*ibid.*, 234).

The fact that Akhnaten's reforms find few sympathisers from the ranks of contemporary historians is quite understandable. The pharaoh demonstrated a consistent disregard for historical concerns which, situated in the context of one of the most conservative cultures known in human history,

appears at best foolhardy and at worst arrogant in the extreme. Indeed, Akhnaten's disdain for the ideas of his immediate predecessors, his dismissal of their ideas lock, stock, and barrel, can easily be identified, when coupled with the symbolic act of erasing his father's name from all of the monuments and temples where it was found (ostensibly because it contained the name of the Father God, Amon), as a secondary symptom of his Oedipus complex.

For Akhnaten and his followers, however, there were more important issues at stake than merely perpetuating the religio-cultural *status quo*. Egyptian mythology, as they saw it, had become drenched in the semiotic residue of cultural chauvinism and imperialist exploitation. In its historical context, the running call of the religious reformers, *ankh-em-maat* – living in truth, or reality (Budge 1923, 86) -- can easily be seen as a call for relativisation and for something resembling deconstruction, for seeing things as they really are, for cutting through the obfuscating clouds of a mythology tailored to suit the needs of a pious and warmongering patriarchy in order that a different kind of truth might be perceived.

The truth espoused by Akhnaten was not, however, only for Egyptians, nor was it restricted solely to human beings. Akhnaten's vision of creation encompassed not only people of all races and lands, but the entire animal and plant kingdom, all of whom were regarded as indispensable to the workings of the planet as a whole. Everything that was alive depended upon the benevolent and all-encompassing rays of the Aten for its sustenance. Thus, in the longer version of the Hymn to the Sun (the one set to music by Glass), the neighbouring lands of Syria and Nubia are mentioned prior to Egypt (Budge 1923, 129), not in the customary fashion of lands to be conquered and subjugated by military force, but as creations of the Aten in every respect equal to Egypt. All were a part of the divine plan; people whose "tongues are different in speech, their characteristics (or forms), and likewise their skins [in colour], giving distinguishing marks to the dwellers in foreign lands" (*ibid.*, 130). For the Aten's love was "mighty and great", its "light of diverse colours ... bewitch[ing] all faces" (*ibid.*, 117).¹

The Aten is, moreover, endowed with the characteristics of both sexes. Although loosely referred to as Akhnaten's father², the divine principle is characterised also as a nurse, responsible for nurturing the unborn foetus in its mother's womb and for imbuing it, and all living things, with the breath of life

¹ Martin Bernal (1987), has gone so far as to speculate that Akhnaten and Nefertiti might have been black Africans. As evidence he points to the facial characteristics of the couple; their unusually thick lips, receding foreheads etc. (Bernal 1987, 383-384). On the basis of the depictions of the couple, Bernal would certainly appear to have a case. However, the profusion of evidence that they were related to the royal families of Asia-Minor and to Lower Egyptian nobles seems more convincing still. In either case they would have had some flesh-and-blood connection to cultural "otherness" that must have provided some impetus to their reforms.

² It seems almost certain that the sun god functioned as a divine substitute for Akhnaten's real father, who appears to have fallen into disfavour subsequent to his passing. His real mother, Tye, was, as we have seen, very much alive, although she appears to have served, both for Akhnaten and for his people, the semi-mythological function of the "Divine Mother," if Velikovsky (1960) is to be believed, that is. Whether she knowingly fostered such an image is, of course, open to debate.

(Budge 1923, 127-128). The gender of the Aten is, however, made quite explicit in the shorter version of the Hymn: here it is referred to as the "mother [and] father" of all creation (*ibid.*, 118), whose spirit is manifested in "men and women, beasts of every kind, and trees of every kind that grow on the land" (*ibid.*, 119). Its beams infuse "singing men and singing women" with the *ka* (soul, essence) of the Aten causing them to make "joyful noises" in every temple in Akhetaten (*ibid.*, 119). Although Akhnaten is designated as the chosen one -- the "Son of the Sun" -- it is noteworthy that both versions of the Hymn are explicitly dedicated to the royal couple: to Nefertiti as well as to her spouse. Moreover, it appears that Akhnaten's wife may even have been their co-author. Breasted noted already at the beginning of the century that the Hymns are "regularly entitled: 'Praise of Aton by king Ikhnaton and queen Nefertiti'" (Breasted 1909, 371), but failed, like most scholars who have commented on them, to attribute co-authorship to Nefertiti. Yet the introductory texts accompanying the longer version of the Hymn (Breasted 1909, 376; Budge 1923, 123) provide convincing grounds for precisely such an argument. The only Egyptologist who has drawn the fairly obvious conclusion that the (longer) Hymn to the Sun is the collaborative work of the couple is the Reverend James Baikie (1926): "so far," he writes, "as the inference goes with regard to the authorship of the Hymn, there is nothing in the phraseology used which would not permit us to include Nefertiti as joint author with her husband -- a view which has not been maintained by anybody" (Baikie 1926, 328).

The prominence of Nefertiti in the sun cult and the intimacy of the portrayals of the couple in both the literature and the art of the time were, as we have seen already, quite unprecedented in pharaonic culture. It seems, however, that gender balance was not restricted to relations between the pharaoh and his wife. Akhnaten was, as we have seen, like his Mother-Father the Aten, either metaphorically or actually endowed with the attributes of both sexes and evidently insisted on having himself portrayed in a manner that would place an emphasise on such attributes. The chief sculptor of the period was a man named Bek, who claims to have been "an apprentice who the king himself instructed" (Breasted 1909, 378; Aldred 1975, 55), so there can be little doubt that the unusual physiological characteristics we see in the depiction of Akhnaten and his family were sanctioned by the pharaoh himself, nor that these abnormalities were intended to point to the close relationship between these people and their god who was both male and female.

5.8.2 Glass's setting of the Hymn to the Sun

It would come as something of a surprise if the triadic theme that is so prominent in the opera as a whole were not to play a central role in this the culmination of the title character's spiritual aspirations. And sure enough, the presence of the triad in this scene is made just about as transparent as is possible in formal terms. The structure of the Hymn is divided into three sections, each of which is preceded by a chaconne ritornello in A minor: the same ritornello that was heard at the beginning of the coronation scene (Act I, scene 2), and was then strongly associated with the more meritorious,

transpersonal (and transsexual) facets of Akhnaten's character. The three sections of the Hymn proper are probably, once again, best described as a loose form of variation, framed by three chaconne ritornellos, in which a constant harmonic formula is subtly transformed in consecutive cycles in accordance with textual requirements.

The paradigmatic form of the cycle consists of a bitonal progression from the hybrid chord F-sharp minor/A major to A major and then on to E (no third) (see Example 24). The two tonics are F-sharp minor and A major respectively. E functions as a cadence chord for both tonics, being both the flatted seventh degree in the key of F-sharp minor and the fifth degree dominant in the key of A major. Frandsen, the Egyptologist who analysed the opera, expresses some consternation at the absence of the third of the E chord throughout this scene. He writes,

... even in the Hymn, where we find more thirds than anywhere else in the opera, we still find chords where the third is omitted, sometimes obscuring cadential formulas. Indeed, one is left to consider why Glass uses cadential formulas at all. However, since the harmonizations of the transitions are abrupt and brutal in a pre-Baroque way, while the cadential formulae in the Hymn are more conventional, suitable to its own conventionality of being sung in an understandable language, we might guess that this more "advanced" harmonization of the setting serves to underscore the revolutionary nature of the Hymn text. (Frandsen 1993, 256.)

Frandsen's frustration with Glass at his failure to comply with the chiselled-in-stone laws of Western harmonic practice (at the same time as he facetiously elects to compose in a language that *looks*, by all superficial appearances, conventional) is quite evident. I will attempt to elucidate the composer's intentions by means of a riddle, an appropriate form, as I believe it is precisely a kind of musical riddle, or paradox, that Glass is presenting to his listener. The riddle runs as follows: When is a cadence not a cadence? Answer: when it is a cadence that resolves onto two different chords at the same time. There is no third in the E minor chord because the presence of the third would, as Frandsen seems to realise, instantly deprive this chord of its ambiguity. If the leading-note, G sharp, were added we would have for ourselves a nice, conventional dominant fifth degree chord, which would situate the progression unequivocally in the key of A major. But that does not appear to be Glass's intention. The third of this chord is deliberately withheld, and when it does make a fleeting appearance -- and it does so as a passing note in the scalar ascent that marks the culmination of each cadence -- the note that is heard is not G sharp, with its strong gravitational pull towards the tonic (A major) but G natural. The E minor chord that results resolves just as convincingly onto F-sharp minor as it does onto A major, thus retaining the ambiguity between these two tonalities. But then ambiguity is not easily tolerated in conventional harmonic -- or music-analytical -- procedures, which would appear to make this particular progression anything but conventional. In fact, it is infuriatingly unconventional, as Frandsen's confused analysis of it attests.

EXAMPLE 24

$\text{♩} = 100$

AKHNATEN

THOU DOST AP - PEAR BEAU - TIFUL

fl. oboe clar.

cellos

A: I (vi) ————— ii (vi) ————— I ————— v —————
 f#: i ————— i ————— III ————— \flat vii —————

ON THE HOR - I - ZON OF HEA - VEN (b)

A: I (vi) ————— ii (vi) ————— I ————— v —————
 f#: i ————— i ————— III ————— \flat vii —————

OH LI - VING A - TEN HE WHO WAS THE FIRST TO

A/a: I (vi) ————— i ————— ii —————
 f#: i ————— iii ————— iv —————

LIVE

A/a: I ————— v —————
 f#: III ————— \flat vii —————

Frandsen's knowledge of music history would appear to be as wanting as are his music-analytical skills. The transitions he describes as "abrupt and brutal in a pre-Baroque way" (Frandsen 1993, 256) are, of course, chaconne cadences – a variation form found predominantly in Baroque music. Glass's treatment of the form is, as we have seen, in many senses quite conventional, the intention being to underscore the essential unity of historical and more contemporary musical procedures¹. The reappearance of this music on two subsequent occasions during the course of the scene as an instrumental interlude serves only to reinscribe the historical weight of the reference: the chaconne, and its twin musical form, the passacaglia, were as I have mentioned earlier, commonly used as ritornellos (or returns) in Baroque music, and its function in such circumstances would have been almost identical to its function here. The Hymn is, thus, written in ritornello form, in the original sense of the term.

The scene starts with the dignified, quasi-Baroque music of the chaconne. In the first cadence we hear a solo bassoon playing diatonic scales ascending in streams from the notes of the descending tetrachord motif (A - G - F - E). The bassoon scales are joined in the second cadence (rehearsal mark 2) by an oboe which, after three descending leaps of an octave onto the notes of the tetrachord (a¹ - g¹ - f¹ - e¹), takes over the ascending scales of the bassoon for the final E major chord. In the third and fourth cadences (rehearsal mark 3), the "feminine" principle is joined by the "masculine" as the strings take over from the winds, iterating the descending tetrachord in the highest voice of the violas, only now transposed to the fifth (e² - d² - c² - b²), and its near mirror-image ascending motif in the lower viola voice (a¹ - b¹ - c¹ - e¹) and cellos (A - B - c - e).

I have noted in connection with the earlier appearance of this music (Act I, scene 2) that it is strongly associated with Akhnaten's transpersonal and trans-sexual qualities. It is noteworthy that this aspect of it was once again emphasised, in different ways, in both of the major productions of the opera. Although this is Akhnaten's solo, in the Stuttgart production of the opera, where the physical abnormalities of the pharaoh were not a part of the depiction of the leading role, Nefertiti is present throughout. At the beginning of the scene, when the chaconne is heard for the first time, the couple are seen in profile seated on their thrones, their hand gestures forming an intricate series of mirror images – here we see them playing out the role of the divine royal couple, or *hierogamos*, personifying the unity of opposing forces, the divine "masculine" and "feminine" principles. In Freeman's production, Akhnaten

¹

The most conventional music in the opera is not, as Frandsen seems to be implying, to be found in this scene but in the pathetic leading-note cadences and double appoggiaturas of the earlier Hymn to Amon (The Temple; Act II, scene 1). The prayer to Amon, intended to be strongly associated with the stagnant conservatism of the "old order," is, in contrast to the greater part of the opera, characterised by Frandsen as "beautiful" and "a pleasure to listen to" (Frandsen 1993, 240). One cannot help thinking, therefore, that the Egyptologist is once again sadly missing the point. Glass is, on the whole (but not always, as we shall shortly see), asking the listener to identify with the "new order" and not with the "old." That Frandsen is drawn to the musically conventional is quite apparent throughout his discussion of the opera, and makes his interpretation of it, from the standpoint of contemporary musical practices at least, a slightly skewed one.

stands alone, centre-stage: here he is dressed from the waist down, in contrast to the earlier appearance of the chaconne cadences, at the beginning of the Coronation scene (Act I, scene 2), where he was naked. His physical abnormalities are, however, once again clearly visible. In this production, then, Nefertiti is absent because both the "masculine" and "feminine" principles are incorporated into the physiology of the title character. Both interpretations can be supported by the music and the libretto. One features a man and a woman, and the other a paradoxical man-woman being (predominantly male) -- which of the two is the more favourable I will leave to the discretion of the reader.

The chaconne is followed by the stoic descending fourths of the "finality" motif, played on bassoon, and accompanied by a flowing arrangement on winds and cellos (rehearsal marks 4 and 5). The restful ebb and swell of A minor and E (no third) chords in this section, over a drone of A, gradually gives way to a more goal-oriented leading-note harmony with the addition of G sharp (rehearsal mark 6). A high flute underlines the cadence melodically, and eventually leads the way into the first verse of the Hymn.

The Hymn is characterised by a declamatory style akin, once again, to that of liturgical chant. At the same time as it highlights the importance of the text, the pharaoh's singing style thus draws attention to the theological nature of its content. The trajectory of his melodies is predominantly rising, usually beginning on either the root or the fifth of A major, and culminating on its third, C sharp. In the second bar of the pattern, Akhnaten frequently lingers on the notes b^1 and d^2 , suggesting firstly, the influence of the rising chaconne motif on the melody, and secondly, the G major chord of the Trilogy theme. The melodic trajectory is best understood, however, in relation to the chords accompanying it, the tonal relations in the opera as a whole, and the dramaturgical significance of both of these.

The first two cadences to be heard are the paradigmatic version of the bitonal progression described above (see Example 24). In the cellos we hear an arpeggiation of the progression F sharp (no third), A (no third), E (no third). Above this, Akhnaten moves from a^1 , over the first chord, to b^1 and d^2 over the second, and, eventually, to c sharp², over the third. Given this information alone, it would be tempting to interpret the melody as providing the missing third for the first and final chords of the progression, and the b^1 and d^2 in the second bar as awkward (because they last an entire bar without resolution) passing tones. This interpretation is not, however, altogether satisfactory. The dissonances in the melodic line of the second bar, forming as they do a minor third, would appear to constitute a strong challenge to the F sharp tonality outlined in the cellos. This challenge is confirmed if one re-examines the opening bar: although F sharp is heard in the cello ostinato, the winds (flute, oboe, and clarinet) in the Treble Clef defiantly state the root and the fifth of A major (major because of the C sharp in the cellos), suggesting that Akhnaten's a^1 is more the root of A major than it is the third of F sharp. One could, of course, argue that the As and Es heard in the upper voices are the minor third and flatted seventh, respectively, of F-sharp minor, but when Akhnaten's melody divorces itself from this tonality in the bar that follows, it is made quite clear that this is not the case. Moreover, although the F-sharp minor tonality in the cellos and the A major tonality in the winds and voice, together make up a

sonorous compound chord, the independence of each of these tonal centres is, nonetheless, made quite explicit in their separation in both register and timbre. (These are both "text-book" ways of emphasising the autonomy of bitonal parts.) Bitonality is best justified in dissonant polyphonic tonalities -- as Collaer (1955, 236) rightly observes -- so when the A major of the opening bar moves up to B minor in the next bar, against a ground of F sharp minor, there can be no mistaking Glass's intentions. It would be impossible to maintain the ambivalence between the two tonalities, however, were the cadence chord to resolve more satisfactorily onto one of these chords rather than the other. This it does not do. Regardless of our expectations concerning root-movement functional harmony, E (minor) resolves equally well onto both A major and F-sharp minor. The former is a conventional dominant to tonic movement and the latter a step-wise diatonic movement with a modal feel, but both are equally tenable hearings. If there is some inclination towards F-sharp minor rather than A major as the stronger tonality -- because it is heard in the bass of the initial chord of the progression (i.e., the one that immediately follows the cadence chord) -- this inclination is reversed in the third bar of the pattern when the cello ostinato moves to A (no third) at the same time as Akhnaten arrives at the major third of this chord, c sharp². Thus, ambiguity is preserved throughout the pattern, although there is some fluctuation in favour of one or the other of the tonal centres. It is only in the three chaconne ritornellos, however, between the verses of the Hymn, that A (in this case minor) is established unequivocally as the dominant tonality of the piece.

How, then, should one interpret this use of tonality within the framework of the opera. The sudden shift from the minor to the major modality in the home key of A, accentuated by the presence of the relative minor (F sharp), suggests that Akhnaten has somehow broken through to a different "mode" of perception. As Glass puts it, "this is Akhnaten's finest moment" (Glass quoted in Blackwood 1985): in this moment, the order we have come to regard as irreversible -- with Akhnaten and his followers occupying the minor keys and the representatives of the "old" order, predominantly, the major (with the single, significant, exception of the Temple scene [Act II, scene 1]) -- is, in an instance, reversed. If I am implying that A major is associated with Akhnaten and his reforms, and there is evidence that this is the case, then I am also implying that F-sharp minor is associated with the "old" order and its representatives transformed into a new minor guise. The principle evidence for the latter assertion, with regard to the larger structure of the work, is the association of this note at the beginning of the opera with the violence and ignorance (what Glass terms "death anxiety") of the "old" order in the Funeral of Amenhotep III (Act I, scene 1). The music of this scene is founded on an ostinato in which F sharp serves as a pedal point against the notes E and D sharp. Rather than associating this tonality solely with the violence and ignorance of the traditionalists, however, it could more accurately be said to represent their materialistic short-sightedness. These people are characterised primarily by their attachment to the mundane: their desperate grasping for material wealth and influence, all of their unwholesome acts are merely secondary symptoms of a fundamental (Oedipal) attachment to the mundane. Here Akhnaten, who has earlier in the opera successfully purged himself of his

own (or perhaps his culture's) Oedipal predilection, is able to preach his message with complete equanimity. This latest stage in the spiritual journey of the opera's protagonist can be traced not so much to his ritual sexual intercourse with his mother (Act II, scene 1), which, aside from its salutary effect on his early development, proved ultimately to offer only an imaginary unity with damaging side-effects, but to the tolerance of otherness he learned from his encounter with (the real and conspicuously different) Nefertiti in the duet (Act II, scene 2). It is in this blissful state of pre-Oedipal non-differentiation -- a non-differentiation that does not force difference into compliance but accepts it and values it as it finds it -- that the pharaoh is able to surpass the limitations of the divine and the profane, of *nirvana* and *samsara*, and, like the Buddha, preach his message from the stillness of the Void.

It should be stressed that the unity espoused in Akhnaten's Hymn does not deny diversity: on the contrary. Even while he is pointing to the presence of higher order, he makes it clear that this order is manifested only in the abundant variety of life on the planet. This is made quite explicit in both the text of the Hymn and its setting to music. It is highly significant that the music which was earlier on in the opera associated exclusively with the materialism of the "old" order, is here, in Akhnaten's finest moment, included in the pharaoh's divine plan. The first note sung by Akhnaten, a¹, is a chord tone of both F-sharp minor and A major. Although the B minor tonality that follows appears to take him away from the plane of the mundane (F-sharp minor) towards "enlightenment," the crisp, resplendent tonality of A major which is eventually achieved is held for only one bar, after which it moves immediately on to a restless E (minor) with zig-zagging cellos urging the listener back to the beginning of the pattern. Thus F-sharp minor and A major tonalities form, in linear terms, a complementary pair. It is true that Akhnaten restricts himself predominantly to chord tones of A major/minor in the opening verses; it is only, however, by invoking some higher unifying principle that he is able to undermine the dualistic thinking of his predecessors. Once it is established that all living things are but aspects of the One, Akhnaten goes on, in the text of the Hymn, to enumerate in meticulous detail the abundant diversity in which the unity he extols is manifested. Thus, in the second section of the Hymn, after he has paid homage to the Aten, the pharaoh begins his ascent from a low f sharp¹ (as opposed to a¹), situating himself resolutely within the sphere of the relative, the minor, and the diverse, as opposed to the absolute and the major; thus implying the ultimate inseparability of the two.

The text of the first verse of the Hymn is as follows:

Thou dost appear beautiful
 On the horizon of heaven
 Oh, living Aten
 He who was the first to live
 When thou has risen on the Eastern Horizon
 Thou hast filled every land with thy beauty
 Thou art fair, great, dazzling,
 High above every land
 Thy rays encompass the land
 To the very end of all though hast made

The first two lines of the text are accompanied by the progression described earlier, which is schematised in terms of chordal functions in the table below. The bold print suggests the stronger tonality of the two during each step of the pattern¹:

	f#/ A - f#/ b - A - e
A major:	I(vi) - ii(vi) - I - v -
F sharp minor:	i - i - III - bvii -

The words "beautiful" and "heaven" coincide with Akhnaten's first arrivals at the major third of A, thus supporting the interpretation I have put forward, that the change of mode from minor to major denotes the protagonist's spiritual breakthrough (see Example 24). Coincidentally, or perhaps not, the key Glass chooses for the scene, A major, is the same in which Haydn chose to open both his "*Sun Quartet*" (Op. 20, No. 6) and his "*Fire Symphony*" (No. 59).

The next two lines of the section are longer and therefore demand a prolongation of the cadence: this is achieved by inserting two new chords, A minor and B minor, prior to the two final, or cadence chords, A major and E (minor) (see Example 24). This results in a progression which passes through both modes of the opera's home key. If we pursue the gendered interpretation of minor and major thirds suggested by Glass (1987, 173) himself in connection with the Prelude music, the presence of both minor and major tonics would appear to suggest a bisexual interpretation. As this is the first time in the Hymn the Aten is mentioned by name, one can assume that this is an explicit reference to the bisexual properties of the god, who is the Mother-Father of all that exists. Melodically, these patterns differ from the initial two, in setting out from the low fifth (e¹) rather than the root of A major; in remaining on this note during the second bar and thus avoiding the troublesome B minor chord; in passing through both the minor and major thirds of A; and in ascending to the fifth of B minor, d², between these two chords.

As if summoned down from the heavens by the utterance of its name, the voice of the sun-disc is heard at the culmination of this pattern and throughout the next, in the guise of a short trumpet response to Akhnaten's invocations -- this instrument is, as I have mentioned earlier, closely associated with the sun god. The melody it plays here is identical to Akhnaten's melody of the previous pattern, apart from its initial note, which is an octave higher (e²). Harmonically, too, the patterns are identical:

¹ Chords separated in this and subsequent tables by slashes are bitonal compounds. In this case F sharp and A major chords are heard simultaneously (see Example 24). F sharp precedes A major as it is the stronger of the two tonalities in this particular passage. "Modal" chords are not marked separately due to their ubiquity in Glass's musical language, and due to the fact that diminished and augmented chords are extremely rare. Thus in most cases a simple distinction between major (large case) and minor (small case) suffices. In this passage the final chord would ordinarily be regarded as a modal chord from the standpoints of both key centres.

f#/ A - a - b - A - e -

A major/minor: I(vi) - i - ii - I - v -

F sharp minor: i - iii - iv - III - **bvii** -

In the remaining five patterns, the cello ground remains unchanged (as described above), although what accompanies it varies considerably. In the first of these patterns (rehearsal mark 14), we are returned to a melodic formula resembling that of the initial pattern of the Hymn. Thus, Akhnaten rises from a¹ in the first bar, through b¹ in the second, to c sharp² in the third, on which he resonates over the next two chord changes (to B minor and back to A major). Here we find one of the most obvious cases of word painting in the Hymn: the sustained c sharp² coinciding with the word "horizon" in the line "when thou hast risen on the Eastern Horizon," and the diatonic ascent prior to it with the reference in the text to the rising sun (see Example 25). Harmonically, the pattern as a whole is transformed into the following:

f#/ A - f#/b- A - b - A - e -

A major: I(vi) - ii(vi) - I - ii - I - v -

F sharp minor: i - i - III - iv - III - **bvii** -

A point of considerable interest here is the trumpet, which seems to have been pursuing Akhnaten ever since his first mention of the Aten by name. To say that the voices of the two interweave as if they were partners in a duet would be no exaggeration, and it is noteworthy that the composer himself uses this unconventional term (for a combination of vocal and instrumental parts) to describe their interplay in this scene (Glass 1987, 171). Indeed, the relationship between the two bears more than a passing resemblance to that between Akhnaten and Nefertiti in the duet scene (Act II, scene 2) -- which was, as we have seen, actually a trio between the two lovers and their god, as personified by the trumpet. The same tension we encountered between the two lovers in the earlier scene is present here: in the duet it was between the notes A and B; here it is between Akhnaten's c sharp² and the trumpet's (or Aten's) b¹. This pungent dissonance is held over a period of two entire bars (see Example 25). The analogy of the two as lovers would appear a most fruitful one: the same tension, the same intimate exchange, and, ultimately, the same sense of wholeness is experienced by the protagonist in his dealings with his god as with his lover. For Akhnaten there seems to be little difference between union with a fellow human being and union with the divine "eternal principle" -- what Goethe referred to as the "Eternal Feminine"¹, but to which I shall refrain from assigning a fixed gender identity. The union I am describing is, of course, with the Other within, be it male, female, bisexual or neuter.

1

For a discussion of the musical representation of the idealised "eternal feminine" and its political implications, see the chapter "Liszt, Goethe, and the Discourse of Gender" in Lawrence Kramer's *Music as Cultural Practice* (1990a, 102-134).

EXAMPLE 25

trmpt.

AK

fl.
oboe
clar.

cellos

WHEN THOU HAST RI - SEN ON THE EAS - TERN HOR - I - ZON

In the next pattern (rehearsal mark 15), the duet becomes a trio with the addition of a second trumpet. Hereafter Akhnaten's voice and the trumpets merge; so much so that it is at times difficult to distinguish one from the other¹. Akhnaten steps over the threshold of ego-consciousness and enters the polymorphous realm of the transpersonal. His melody moves from the low e^1 -- which was strongly identified earlier in the opera as the domain of Nefertiti -- up a minor sixth to c^2 , d^2 , and finally down to c sharp². Thus his voice passes through both minor and major thirds. As the Aten traces its trajectory across the sky -- "fair, great, dazzling, high above every land" -- so Akhnaten passes through to a plane where the boundaries between oneself and others, between the "masculine" and the "feminine," blurs. As we reach the cadence at the culmination of the pattern, the pharaoh's c sharp² is held while two streaming descents in thirds by the trumpets iterate its modal opposite, c^2 (see Example 26). Here we witness the intimacy of the relationship between Akhnaten and his god: the mutual attraction of musical incompatibles functioning as a metaphor for the magnetism between the pharaoh and the ultimate Other.

EXAMPLE 26

flute

trumpets

AK

cellos

HIGH A-BOVE EV - RY LAND

1

There is a musical rationale for this merging as well. With the addition of the full wind section in this section of the Hymn it is becoming increasingly hard to distinguish Akhnaten's soft counter tenor voice.

In the final two patterns of the verse (rehearsal mark 16), the text speaks of the Aten's "rays," which "encompass the land to the very end" of all creation. As the verse comes to its conclusion, four diatonic descents are heard in succession on the trumpets. These are related to the chaconne motif, although the tetrachord heard here descends from e^2 , the "(M)Other" tonality of the opera, instead of from Akhnaten's and the opera's home tonality of A. Given the brilliant tone-quality of these instruments, the simile of rays of sunlight streaming down towards the raised arms of the king -- a pervasive image in the art of the Amarna period -- seems almost unavoidable (see Figure 9).



FIGURE 9 The handed rays of Aten giving "life" (*ankh*) to Akhnaten while he is bestowing gifts on his favourite courtiers (Budge 1923, 99).

In the gap between the first and second verses, we are returned to the transpersonal chaconne music once again (rehearsal marks 17 to 20). The ritornello is almost identical to its earlier appearance, except for the addition of a horn in the first two cadences, presumably, once again, intended to evoke the influence of the Aten. The motif played by this instrument (A - B - c - e) is the same as that heard in the first appearance of the ritornello prior to Akhnaten's coronation (Act I, scene 2), which was transformed into a kind of *cantus firmus* when sung by Akhnaten in the trio (Act I, scene 3). Here it differs from its original form only in its rhythmic syncopations. In the second cadence, the simple octave leaps played by the oboe at the beginning of the scene are now filled in diatonically, making their descending streams the mirror images of the rising bassoon lines. The syncopated horn and converging string lines of the final pattern are identical to their earlier appearances. Instead of the finality motif, however, we now hear a cascade of descending trumpets at the culmination of the ritornello. As the rays of the sun pour down on the

adulating king, an ethereal flute ascends to the firmament, imploring the listener to follow its trajectory towards the second verse.

The text of the first and second stanzas of the second section of the Hymn is as follows:

All the beasts are satisfied in their pasture
 Trees and plants are verdant
 Birds fly from their nests, wings spread
 Flocks skip with their feet
 All that fly and alight live when thou hast risen

How manifold is that which thou hast made
 Thou sole God
 There is no other like thee
 Thou did'st create the earth
 According to thy will,
 Being alone, everything on earth
 Which walks and flies on high

At this point in the scene, evidently to underline the theme of diversity, Glass introduces one of the most pronounced polyrhythms of the opera (see Example 27). To the straight-eighths of the cellos is added a jerky triplet pattern in the violas, its off-beat oscillations making abundant use of contrast technique. The cellos in this section are subdivided into arco and pizzicato groups, resulting in a more percussive sound, which, in turn, urges the listeners to direct their attention towards the contradictory rhythmic accents of the music.

The most satisfactory cadential resolution heard in the first section of the Hymn -- to A major in its root position -- is withheld in the first stanza until its final line. Thus, the first two patterns move directly from the compound chord F-sharp minor/A major to the cadence chord, E minor. Melodically, these patterns are characterised by a simple whole-step ascent from the root of A minor to the fifth of E (b¹). The third and final pattern of the stanza, however, introduces a new harmonic pattern in which the complete version of the formula -- that which resolves onto A major -- is finally realised.

f#/ A - F maj7 - a⁹ - b - A - e -

A major/minor: i(vi) - VI - i - ii - I - v -
 F sharp minor: i - #VII - iii - iv - III - b^{vii} -

Significantly this coincides with the very first mention in this section of the sun god. Grazing animals, vegetation, and birds are all drawn together under the watchful solar eye of their creator: all things "live when thou [the Aten] hast risen." The cadence comes to its close with a vigorous criss-crossing of lines in the strings, culminating in a light ascending scale on the flute.

EXAMPLE 27

fl.
oboe
clar.

trmps
horns

trmbns

AK

THOU DOST RAISE HIM UP FOR THY SON

violas

cellos

basses
tuba

A/a: I (vi) VI
f#: i VII

WHO COMES FORTH FROM THY - SELF

ii iv I III

The second stanza is harmonically identical to the first, with the two incomplete cadences -- those which alternate between the compound chord F-sharp minor/A major and E (minor) -- followed by the prolonged cadence that includes the uninverted tonic, A major. Here, again, there is evidence of word painting in Akhnaten's melody: the word "high" in the line "everything on earth which walk and flies on high" being the highest note in the melody of this particular cadence, c sharp².

The texts of the final two stanzas of the section are as follows:

Thy rays nourish the fields
 When thou dost rise
 They live and thrive for thee
 Thou makest the seasons to nourish
 All thou hast made
 The winter to cool
 The heat that they may taste thee

There is no other that know thee
 Save thy son, Akhnaten
 For thou hast made him skilled
 In thy plans and thy might
 Thou dost raise him up for thy son
 Who comes forth from thyself

Harmonically the final three stanzas of the section (the second is repeated), are almost identical to the first two, the most noteworthy divergence being the omission of the A minor ninth chord:

f#/A - e - f#/A - e -

A major/minor: I(vi) - v - I(vi) - v -
 F sharp minor: i - b^bvii - i - b^bvii -

f#/A -F maj7- b - A - e -

A major/minor: I(vi) - VI - ii - I - v -
 F sharp minor: i - #VII - iv - III - b^bvii -

The gradual build in orchestration which has unfolded during the course of the Hymn continues in the second half of the section, when the wind tutti implemented at its beginning is supplemented by the remaining brass instruments, the trombone and the tuba. Aside from orchestration, a good deal of the interest of this subsection arises as a result of the composer's meticulous attention to music-text relations. Here we find, not surprisingly given the importance of the text, the most extensive use of word-painting in the entire opera. In the lines "thy rays nourish the field while thou dost rise" and "thou dost raise him up for thy son" we hear two jumps of a perfect fifth (from e¹ to b¹; and f sharp¹ to c sharp²) concomitant with the words "rise" and "up," respectively. The words "live" and "thrive," in the phrase "they live and thrive for thee," are held for nearly a bar; the longest note durations heard during the

first chord of the pattern (the compound, F-sharp major/A minor). The word "Akhnaten," in the phrase "there is no other that knows thee save thy son Akhnaten," is highlighted by means of a minor third jump (from b¹ to d²) followed by a diatonic descent back to the initial note. This little ego trip by the opera's protagonist reveals a narcissistic proclivity not altogether consonant with the more profound of his spiritual insights. Whatever his reasons, it was important for the king to emphasise his own role as mediator between the Aten and his people. Whether his deeper motives were altruistic, selfish, or even fanatical, as certain contemporary Egyptologists have claimed (for instance, Aldred 1975, 51), we shall perhaps never know for sure. The text of the Hymn reveals, however, a sensitivity to the connectedness of things which suggests, to this reader at least, that he cannot have been all bad. His reluctance to go to war or to hunt game, combined with his close attachment to his family only confirm this impression.

Akhnaten's close relationship to his god is exemplified in the final phrases of the Hymn (in its abridged version as presented here). The penultimate phrase "thou dost raise him up for the thy son" ends on the note c¹, while the final phrase "who comes forth from thyself" ends on c-sharp¹ (see Example 27). Akhnaten is the minor, and Aten the major third¹, but both belong to the same triad.

For the third and final time, we are returned to the music of the chaconne (rehearsal mark 39); the "connubial" in which the complementary modalities converge. The arrangement is the densest so far: strings are present throughout, as is the syncopated descending trumpet whose melodic line invokes the Trilogy theme -- the common musical bond in all three of the Trilogy operas. The foci of musical interest are, in the first cadence, the ascending horn motif (A - B - c - d); in the second cadence, descending clarinet scales setting out from (a¹ - g¹ - f¹ - e¹) and arriving at (a - g - f - e) the notes of the descending tetrachord; in the third cadence, the two-part counterpoint of the rising horn motif and rising bassoon scales, once again setting out from (A - G - F - E) and arriving at (a - g - f - e) the notes of the descending tetrachord; and in the fourth cadence, the three-part counterpoint of the horn, the rising bassoon lines and descending flute lines which are the same as those played by the clarinet in the second cadence only an octave higher. This third transformation of the chaconne, in which all the diverse energies encountered in the opera converge, is a threshold to what follows. Like the weighty three-fold chord attacks in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, the third and final of the chaconne ritornellos opens the doorway to a new vista of consciousness. Once again the "double doors of the horizon" (Act I, Prelude) are ajar, and as we peer through the gap we catch a privileged transtemporal view of the influence of Akhnaten's ideas.

An angelic choir (SATB) now sings verses from Psalm 104 of the Old Testament in the original Hebrew, the subject matter of which is remarkably similar to that heard in Akhnaten's Hymn. It is stipulated in the libretto that

¹ Let us assume that the F-major seventh chord of the initial phrase is A minor with a major third simply added in the bass. The question is more terminological than it is music-analytical.

Akhnaten should leave the stage deserted at this point, while the disembodied choir takes up the singing from the wings (Glass 1987, 186). In David Freeman's production of the opera, Akhnaten leaves the stage, quite appropriately, by climbing up a ladder leading to a skylight that is on a plane with the upper circle of the theatre -- known in theatrical terminology as "the gods." Eventually Akhnaten disappears into the dazzling white light that emerges from the opening, all traces of ego-consciousness dissolving in the all-equalising fire of the sun god. Although Glass's instructions were not followed to the letter in Achim Freyer's Stuttgart production, the overall effect is quite similar. In this version of the opera, Akhnaten quite literally becomes the Aten. He is first encircled by the choir, forming a Mandala-like construct, with Akhnaten occupying the central position (the fiery drop at the hub of the Mandala, known by the Sanskrit term *bindu*) in which all opposites -- the male and female creative principles -- converge. Strands of reflective material -- the rays of the Aten -- emanate from around Akhnaten's collar, linking the pharaoh at the centre of the circle to the choir that is evenly spaced around its circumference. The "Son of the Sun" gradually raises himself to a standing position and the people of Israel prostrate themselves before him. Powerful lights are focused on Akhnaten, whose luminescent presence becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate from the sun-disc itself. As the chorus sing their three final wordless syllables, the pharaoh's mouth falls open, his lips forming the circumference of a perfect circle -- son and sun; "son" and "self"; worshipper and worshipped; subject and object are now one and the same.

The text of the choral section is as follows:

Oh Lord, how manifold are Thy works In wisdom hast Thou made them all The earth is full of Thy riches	<i>Ma rab-bu ma-a-se-kha ha-shem Ku-lam be-khokh-ma a-sita Ma-le-a ha-a-rets kin-ya-ne-kha</i>
Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment	<i>O-te or ka-sal-ma No-te sha-ma-yim ka-yi-ri-a</i>
Thou makest darkness and it is night Wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth	<i>Ta-shet kho-shekh vi-hi lay-la Bo tir-mos kol khay-to ya-ar</i>
Oh Lord, how manifold are Thy works In wisdom hast Thou made them all The earth is full of Thy riches	<i>Ma rab-bu ma-a-se-kha ha-shem Ku-lam be-khokh-ma a-sita Ma-le-a ha-a-rets kin-ya-ne-kha</i>

The harmonies sung by the choir are essentially the same as those heard in the Hymn, thus underlining the continuity between Akhnaten's ideas and those of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. This section comprises four cycles of a chord progression that is essentially the same as those heard in the previous two sections:

	f# - e - f# - e -
A minor:	vi - v - vi - v -
F sharp minor:	i - bVII - i - bVII -

f#/ A -F maj7- b - A - e -

A major/minor: vi(I) - VI - ii - I - v -

F sharp minor: i - #VII - iv - III - bvii -

The music is the same and so are the ideas. Glass intent is quite clear:

I raise a very controversial point, that the Old Testament derived from earlier sources, principally Egyptian. This is a controversial idea and not a particularly popular one, but one that's hard to deny when you compare the texts of the Hymn to Aten and Psalm 104. It's very hard not to see that one came from the other. I was drawing attention to the continuity between the world of Akhnaten and the Judeo-Christian world. (Strickland 1988, 73.)

The controversy to which Glass alludes is one that stretches back as far as the first quarter of the present century. Breasted (1909) was among the first Egyptologists to recognise the correlation between Atenism and Western religious thought. This Egyptologist even went as far as to position the two texts used by Glass in this scene side-by-side on the page in order to highlight their parity (Breasted 1909, 371-376). In his commentary on the Hymn he observes:

These are not thoughts we are accustomed to attribute to the men of some fourteen hundred years before Christ. A new spirit has breathed upon the dry bones of traditionalism in Egypt, and he who reads these lines for the first time must be moved with involuntary admiration for the young king who in such a age found such thoughts in his heart. (Breasted 1909, 376.)

If Budge (1923) is "moved with involuntary admiration" in his own discussion of the pharaoh he certainly does a good job at disguising it: we have already seen how adamantly he resists any comparison of Akhnaten's ideas with Christianity. Freud encountered the same staunch opposition in the 1930s, particularly from representatives of his own Jewish faith, when he put forward the idea, in his *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), that the biblical figure Moses was a disciple of Akhnaten. More recently, the Egyptian scholar, Ahmed Osman (1990), has, as I have mentioned already, taken Freud's arguments a step further claiming that Moses and Akhnaten were actually the same person; although it is unlikely that he has won many friends for himself in so doing. These ideas remain, then, unpopular to this day, despite the substantial body of evidence that backs them up¹; but why? Glass hints at one of the reasons in the following passage:

1

Even Aldred (1988), who is otherwise one of the staunchest contemporary critics of Akhnaten, is forced to admit, on the final page of his exhaustive study on the pharaoh, that his ideas "continued to haunt the minds of others, and eventually prevailed as the ordinances for the conduct of Man *vis-à-vis* God in the decalogue that was part of another 'teaching'" (Aldred 1988, 306).

We always talk about Greece as the cradle of our civilization, when actually it was Egypt. The Greeks themselves turned to Egypt, Herodotus and so forth. They would visit and learn from it. (Glass quoted in Strickland 1988, 73.)

Glass posits, then, an African as opposed to Hellenic origin to Western ideas, a dangerous thing for him to do as many scholars still cherish the notion of the Greek philosophers as the sole precursors of Western rational thought. That the religious ideas which underlie many of our culture's taken-for-granted values and beliefs in all likelihood first crystallised in Africa as opposed to the (Aryan) Middle-East is an equally disturbing proposition. These ideas are dangerous because they undermine the sharp distinction traditionally made in the West between our own culture and that of a primitive Oriental Other. As Edward Said (1978, 1-2) has pointed out, notions of the East as the antithesis of Western civilisation, have frequently been the means by which we have defined our own cultural identity: "European culture," writes Said, "gained in strength by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate or even underground self" (Said 1978, 3). That the traits we recognise as Oriental are tinged by projections from our own darker side is quite obvious to anyone familiar with Jungian psychology. Although Treitler (1993) fails to acknowledge the psychoanalyst by name in the passage that follows, it could easily be Jung speaking when he quite correctly observes:

It is the tendency to build an identity -- individual or cultural -- by positioning the self against a sharply defined Other that is contrasted with the self in essential ways. But what are regarded as the opposite traits of the Other are interpretable as the traits of a surrogate, underground -- we might as well say unconscious -- self. The Other, in effect, is a projection of a suppressed and feared aspect of the self and consequently inspires deeply ambivalent attitudes in the acknowledged self. (Treitler 1993, 30-31.)

The undermining of the concept of the Oriental Other as the antithesis of the Western self, by the Jungian (and decidedly Buddhist) realisation that the two are but aspects of our own minds, is one way of calling into question this classic dualism of Western culture¹. Another is the approach of historian Martin Bernal in his deconstructive account of classical history, *Black Athena: the Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (Bernal 1987). Like Velikovsky (1960), whose postulation that the Oedipus myth of the ancient Greeks depicts events in the life of Akhnaten forms the chief literary foundation for Glass's opera, Bernal (1987) hypothesises that many of the ideas to which we traditionally and unquestioningly attribute Hellenic origin are actually derivative of earlier ideas, whose origins lie in Africa and Asia². These connections have been either knowingly or unconsciously suppressed in order to preserve a feeling of

¹ See McClary (1992a, 29-43) for a discussion of Orientalism in nineteenth-century European art music, particularly that of France.

² For responses to Bernal's *Black Athena* (1987), both pro and contra, see the debate published in the *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (1993); and the special review section devoted to it in the *Journal of Mediterranean Archeology* 3/1 (1991). For a Hellenist's response to Bernal's critique, see Robert Palter's "*Black Athena, Afro-Centrism, and the History of Science*" (1993).

cultural superiority premised on the Occidental/Oriental dichotomy. As Bernal puts it:

For 18th- and 19th- century Romantics and racists it was simply intolerable for Greece, which was seen not merely as the epitome of Europe, but also as its pure childhood, to have been the result of the mixture of native Europeans and colonizing Africans and Semites. Therefore the ancient model has been overthrown and replaced by something more acceptable. (Bernal 1990, 2.)

It is in this light, then, that we should view Glass's comparison of the two texts, Akhnaten's Hymn to the Sun and Psalm 104 from the Old Testament -- one the embodiment of the spiritual aspirations of an Egyptian, who possibly had Asian as well African ancestors and who lived some one thousand three hundred and seventy years before the birth of Christ, and the other -- which is derivative of the first in a quite obvious way -- a religious scripture whose legacy has been passed down to us among the precepts of Judaeo-Christian religious thought.

The scene ends with three blissful pre-Oedipal "ahs," accompanied by the "finality" motif that denotes spiritual attainment and stoicism. There are three weighty chord attacks and the "double doors of the horizon" slam firmly shut.

5.9 Act 3:1 The Family

At the beginning of the final act we find a very different state of affairs to the end of the second. Here we see Akhnaten with his six daughters and Nefertiti, the last of whom disappears towards the end of the scene with four of her daughters, leaving her husband and his two eldest daughters alone in the palace. Glass describes the dramatic intent of the scene as follows:

One interpretation of it, and the one that I've chosen, is that the more he became involved in his ideas and ideals, and involved in his family life, he simply lost interest in the affairs of state, and that lack of interest led to his downfall (Glass quoted in Blackwood 1985).

That the composer stresses the above to be merely "one interpretation" would seem to imply that the music and the libretto are capable of supporting others. I will argue that certain of these other interpretations are quite clearly defined musico-dramatically.

The music that opens the scene is the same as was heard at the end of the Temple scene (Act II, scene 1), in which Akhnaten and Tye joined forces to overthrow the "old" order. We have seen that the violent intrusion perpetrated in that scene invited a sexual parallel. The symbolism of bursting into the temple, of letting the clear white light of the Aten "pour into what was once the holy of holies" (Glass 1987, 183), requires little interpretation. We also saw that the catharsis experienced by Akhnaten and his mother in their acts of mindless brutality, the wordless union of their frenzied staccato voices, the pure non-differentiating bliss, or *jouissance*, experienced by them, were paralleled by the pleasure experienced by the two in the act of "sacred" incestuous union. The religious sacrilege involved in the pillaging of the temple was the same as that involved in the couple's "holy" sexual union. It is noteworthy that the musical foundation for this entire scene is the same music as was heard when Akhnaten was left alone to ponder his shameful acts at the end of the Temple scene (Act II, scene 1). The Family scene begins with the same incessantly rising thirdless arpeggios on E, and the same despondent motif -- a rising tetrachord, played here on oboes d'amore in thirds, the higher voice moving from the fifth to the tonic (b¹ - c¹ - d¹ - e¹) three times, after which it finds its way to a gloomy modal-sounding melodic cadence.

The return of this music at this point in the opera suggests that we have come full circle, and the protagonist is once again experiencing the sense of isolation and shame that he experienced in the earlier scene. Isolation we can perhaps understand; the pharaoh has evidently withdrawn not only to the utopia of his holy city, but also into the comfortable insularity of family life. But why shame? Tye is no longer present, and Akhnaten *appears* to have successfully purged himself of his mother-complex through the "baptisms in fire" he received in his duets with Nefertiti (Act II, scene 2) and his god in the Hymn to the Sun (Act II, scene 4). Is it possible that he is suffering a relapse of his earlier Oedipal affliction? The relentless arpeggios on A suggest an insularity, a libidinal circularity, an incestuous longing for the self (not in the Jungian sense) that would appear to give grounds to such a supposition. We

have seen already that the condition of Narcissus and that of Oedipus are closely related (Velikovskiy 1960, 201-202): they are both, in a metaphorical if not an actual sense, forms of incest. But what is the object of Akhnaten's desire in this scene? It does not appear to be his mother as she is not present; nor does it appear to be directed towards his own person, as he would seem to have lost all desire for worldly things. All that is left are his daughters.

Glass and his collaborators make no explicit references to incestuous relations between Akhnaten and his daughters, but others do. Akhnaten's is one of the most controversial cases of father-daughter incest in Egyptian history, and one that will probably never be satisfactorily resolved -- unlike that of his father, Amenhotep III, who almost certainly imposed connubial "duties" on his daughters. The evidence is far from conclusive¹, but some scholars believe that Akhnaten may have been a paedophile who fathered children with at least two of his own daughters². This is a highly controversial issue, the origins of which lie primarily in the nomenclature of the royal princesses. Akhnaten's daughters' daughters in certain cases inherited their mother's name, to which the suffix "minor" was simply added: thus, Ankhesenpaaten's daughter became Ankhesenpaaten-minor and Meretaten's Meretaten-minor (Redford 1984, 193; Aldred 1988, 287). Appended to these names, however, was a titulary list which in these particular cases included the title "daughter of the king." Whether this title was simply inherited from the mother or whether it was an accurate description is a moot issue and, due to the paucity of the evidence, it remains essentially a question of interpretation. This does not, however, explain how Meretaten came to be called "the mistress of your house" in a letter sent to Akhnaten from the king of Babylon (Redford 1984, 187), although it could be argued that understanding "mistress" as "lover" is just another case of over-zealous interpretation. We know, for instance, that Nefertiti disappeared (left her husband?) towards the end of Akhnaten's reign: it is possible, therefore, that Meretaten merely assumed responsibility for the royal household *in loco parentis*, without taking on her mother's connubial duties as well.

The question of incest is a particularly sensitive one in this case, as Akhnaten comes across in the iconography of the time as being in every respect the model father. One could easily claim that he is the first loving father in history, the first father who openly expresses his emotional attachment to his family. He is commonly shown surrounded by his infant children; embracing them, playing with them, kissing them. This is the line taken by the early studies of the period, although more recent studies, which, it is only fair to say, are bent on deconstructing the image of Akhnaten as the paragon of the benign humanitarian ruler, interpret the same evidence in a very different way. Because of the fragmentary nature of this evidence, I will reserve my judgement on this question, as Glass apparently does. I will argue, however, that there are clear, although tacit and non-specific, musico-dramatic references to incestuous relations between Akhnaten and his daughters, particularly in the

¹ Gardiner (1961, 236) and Middleton (1962, 604), among others, remain unconvinced that there was anything unsavoury in Akhnaten's relations with his daughters.

² The first of these scholars was the German Egyptologist Hellmut Brunner (1932, 104-108).

final section of this scene. I assume that the references in question are merely allegorical, the intention being to use the idea of an incestuous attraction to convey the continued influence of the Oedipus complex on the pharaoh's thinking.

The first voices we hear are those of Akhnaten's six daughters (rehearsal mark 2). The progression sung by them remains essentially unchanged throughout the scene. It consists of a straightforward alternation of E minor (predominantly in its second inversion) and A minor chords, deviating briefly to G minor/major in the cadence that marks the end of the eight-bar pattern. E minor is unquestionably the stronger candidate for tonic, although, as we have seen already on numerous occasions, when these tonalities meet the result is rarely "tonal" in the conventional (eighteenth and nineteenth century) sense of the word. Despite a quasi-pedal on the bassoon alternating for the most part on the octave e-E, the uninverted voicing of A minor in the choral voices compensates for the weakness of its position in the progression: even though it occupies neither the initial nor the final position in the cadence, this tonality is intrinsically more stable than its counterpart, E minor, which is never heard in root position. G is a congenial choice as pivotal chord, its minor triad being the flatted seventh degree of A minor, arrived at by a simple parallel movement in all voices, and its major triad the third degree in E minor, transformed into the tonic by the simple addition of the root of that chord. In functional terms, the gravitational pull of the following two tonal centres is felt:

	e ⁶ 6 ₄ -	a -	e ⁶ 6 ₄ -	a -	e ⁶ 6 ₄ -	a g ⁶ -	G ⁶ e ⁶ -	e ⁶ 5 ₃ -	
e:	i	- iv	- i	- iv	- i	- iv iii -	III i -	i -	-
a:	v	- i	- v	- i	- v	- i b ^{vii} -	b ^{vii} v -	v -	-

Aside from its bitonality, this passage is characterised by the clashing overlaps that occur between the soprano and alto voices. The altos' second inversion E minor of the initial bar is held through the first beat of the second, resulting in two abrasive dissonances; B and G in the altos against A and C in the sopranos. In the second bar, A minor is transferred from the sopranos to the altos, and is carried over the barline to the first beat of the third bar, resulting, once again, in friction with the chord tones of E minor, now in the sopranos. This conflict continues unabated throughout the passage and throughout the scene, given that this passage is repeated *ad nauseam* during its greater part.

In the third and fourth repeats of the pattern (rehearsal mark 4), the motif signifying isolation, remorse, and perhaps incestuous desire is reintroduced on the low oboes d'amore. The oboe motif is retained in the next two patterns (rehearsal marks 6 and 7: see Example 28), which are distinguished also by a return of the algorithmic thirdless arpeggios on E of the flute and synthesiser.

The counterpoint of the static upper tonality and the chordal movement below it transforms the implicit, or interpretational, bitonality of the initial choral patterns into explicit, or polyphonic bitonality, as both tonal centres are now simultaneously present whenever the progression strays away from its stronger tonal centre, E:

$e^6 6_4 - a(e) - e^6 6_4 - a(e) - e^6 6_4 - a(e) g^6(e) - G^6(e) e^6 - e^6 5_3 -$

e: i - iv(i) - i - iv(i) - i - iv(i) iii(i) - III(i) i - i -
 a: v - i(v) - v - i(v) - v - i(v) $b^{vii}(v) - b^{VII}(v) v - v -$

EXAMPLE 28

The musical score for Example 28 consists of two systems. The first system includes staves for flute, oboes d'amore, bassoon, sopranos, and altos. The flute part features a rapid sixteenth-note pattern. The oboes and sopranos play sustained chords, while the bassoon and altos play longer notes. The second system continues the same instrumentation. Below each system is a line of harmonic analysis for the soprano (e) and alto (a) parts, showing chord symbols and figured bass notation.

Harmonic analysis for the first system:

e: $i^6 \frac{6}{4} - iv(i) \frac{6}{4} - i^6 \frac{6}{4} - iv(i) \frac{6}{4} - i^6 \frac{6}{4} - iv(i) \frac{6}{4} - iii(i) \frac{6}{4} - III(i) \frac{6}{4} - i \frac{6}{4} - i \frac{6}{4} -$
 a: $v^6 \frac{6}{4} - i(v) \frac{6}{4} - v^6 \frac{6}{4} - i(v) \frac{6}{4} - v^6 \frac{6}{4} - i(v) \frac{6}{4} - b^{vii}(v) \frac{6}{4} - b^{VII}(v) \frac{6}{4} - v \frac{6}{4} - v \frac{6}{4} -$

Harmonic analysis for the second system:

e: $i^6 \frac{6}{4} - iv(i) \frac{6}{4} - iii^6(i) \frac{6}{4} - III^6(i) \frac{6}{4} - i^6 \frac{6}{4} - \frac{5}{3} -$
 a: $v^6 \frac{6}{4} - i(v) \frac{6}{4} - b^{vii}(v) \frac{6}{4} - b^{VII}(v) \frac{6}{4} - v^6 \frac{6}{4} - \frac{5}{3} -$

What Glass is illustrating in this scene is clearly a predominance of “otherness,” encoded by the opera’s protagonist in “feminine” terms; a gender imbalance weighted towards the familial, the maternal, the cyclical, and the (imagined) pre-Oedipal -- qualities we have been explicitly encouraged to value since the

beginning of the opera as they represent the antithesis of the destructive "masculine" forces of the "old" order. There is, however, nothing intrinsically wrong with the public, the paternal, the linear, and the post-Oedipal; it is how one channels these forces that determines their acceptability. It could be argued, then, that the pendulum, in the psychological equilibrium of our protagonist, has swung too far in the (M)Other direction. The problem is not so much a predominance of the feminine as a predominance of the "feminine": i.e., Akhnaten's perception of the mystical other which he associates so closely with his god. Akhnaten can hardly be admonished for wishing to spend time with wife and daughters -- but his total immersion in otherness results in a skewed view of the world around him and an unconscious suppression of even the positive aspects of the "masculine" qualities enumerated above. By this I do not mean his reluctance to go to war, hunt and so forth -- a common source of criticism in the literature on the subject -- but the complete insularity of the scenario that now unfolds. Akhnaten appears to be totally out of touch with both national and international affairs; rather than travelling around the country rallying support for his revolutionary ideas he remains shut away in the palace at Akhetaten with his family; rarely is he depicted outside of the private chambers of the royal palace and rarely is he seen in the company of outsiders; friends and allies write repeatedly from abroad beseeching his assistance and he does not even reply. The situation is exacerbated by an uncanny twist of fate: Akhnaten and Nefertiti beget six children and not one of them is a son¹. Aside from its obvious symbolic significance (i.e., the perceived "emasculatation" of the king mapped onto his kingdom), this means that there is no male heir to the throne.

It is in this context that we hear the vocalese of Akhnaten's daughters. What we are hearing is the unmistakable sound of Akhnaten's self-constructed "domestic bliss." Not by chance has Glass made this scene a vocalese: the intention is that we and the opera's protagonist be quite literally returned to the womb. Under the lulling spell of his six angelic daughters, Akhnaten is in a metaphorical if not physical sense, back in his mother's embrace. Not, as before, intoxicated by the totalising and cleansing desire Lacan terms *jouissance*, but in the state of suspended animation that goes beyond even this concept (Rose 1982, 51). This "more than *jouissance*" is interestingly, in light of our present concerns, located by Lacan in the Freudian concept of repetition (ibid., 51). Of course, repetition is something you find quite a lot of in Glass's music, but seldom in the same way as in this scene. As the incessant and unchanging waves of E minor (the "(M)Other" key of the opera) wash over him, then, we witness Akhnaten languishing in the (imagined) luxurious domain of "woman"; the absolute realm of the (mystified) Other; and, most importantly, the realm of the gods, as "the place of the Other is", in Akhnaten's eyes at least, "also the place of God" (ibid., 50).

¹ It has been postulated that Akhnaten's immediate successors, Smenkhare and Tutankhamen were his sons (see Gardiner 1961, 235-236). Few Egyptologists, however, accept this explanation. The fact that both pharaohs married daughters of Akhnaten and Nefertiti -- the former Ankhesenpaaten and the latter Meretaten -- would make such a connection unlikely, even though brother-sister marriages were not, as we have seen, unknown to Egyptian royalty.

We find an interesting parallel, once again, in Buddhist thought, where the "realm of the gods" and "the place of God" are two entirely different planes of experience. I have already shown that many Buddhists are reluctant to speak of God at all, other than in negations and paradoxes, because the absolute cannot possibly be described in terms of the relative. For Buddhists, the "realm of the gods" is merely the highest of the six realms of the "Wheel of Life." Far from being a conducive abode for spiritual development, it is a realm in which stagnation, complacency, self-indulgence, egotism, and pride are rife. It is a realm of aesthetic pleasure, of dance and music; but this one-sided devotion to pleasure invariably leads towards erroneous perceptions of oneself and others -- and thus of reality. Those who inhabit this realm do so as a result of past meritorious deeds (of accumulated positive *karma*), but once here they are wont to become desensitised to the sufferings of other, lower life-forms. Buddhists speak of "the misery of the gods" (Waddell 1895, 88); not because they are unhappy as such but because their coveted bliss is imaginary and transitory: what at first appears to be a realm of infinite bliss turns out to be the source of infinite suffering as god-like life forms condemn themselves to numerous non-propitious future births as a result of the selfishness of their actions. (Govinda 1960, 238-239; Thurman 1994, 30-32.)

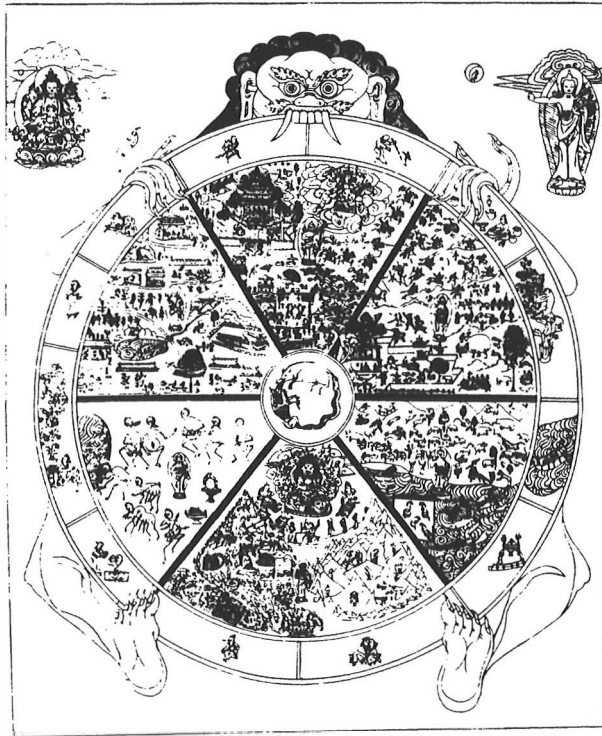


FIGURE 10 The Tibetan "Wheel of Life", with the realm of the gods (top), mirrored by that of hell (bottom). The other realms are those of human beings (top left), animals (bottom left), titans (top right) and pretas (bottom right). (Waddell 1895, 108).

The following description of the god-like plane of consciousness could easily be applied to Akhnaten and his family as we see them now:

Aiming at the ever more peaceful, the ever more subtle, the ever more real, they are not safeguarded by the critical awareness of the constructedness of all states, their emptiness and relativity. They remain within realms of dead calm for extremely long periods of time, untroubled by any concern, secure in their sense of having achieved final ultimacy, of having become one with the absolute. They are most subtly locked by pride and delusion into the ultimate self-constructed world of alienation and self-preoccupation imaginable. Buddhists consider these heavens and the life forms of the gods to be the most dangerous pitfall for meditators, because they are so close to what the philosophically uneducated expect the absolute to be: an infinite objectivity, an infinite subjectivity, nothingness, and an infinite indefinability. Only an understanding of voidness, the relativity of all things and states, provides the critical defence against succumbing to the apparent calm and transcendentalism of these heavens ... (Thurman 1994, 31-32.)

As Akhnaten has deluded himself into believing that he inhabits the realm of the absolute, the music we hear is quite appropriately "absolute" music -- it is the wordless, indefinable, exclusively objective or exclusively subjective (but either way essentially non-communicative), semantically vacuous voices of angels; it is (or at least it has pretensions of being) pure, undefiled syntax. In all of the scenes of the opera so far we have witnessed a continuum between what Kristeva would term the spheres of the symbolic and the semiotic. A scene which begins with a recited text in our native tongue, might become a setting of an ancient Egyptian text with at least some specified dramatic content; eventually it might transform itself into a mass of sheer undifferentiated, non-texted, non-specific, cathartic energy. Thus the two interpenetrate: they bleed into one another, they infuse each other with life. But now we find ourselves deep in the innermost sanctum, the "holy of holies" of "absolute" music, and -- just as earlier in the opera when we found ourselves barricaded within the holy of holies of those who revere the "Word"; the stone-faced priests of Amon who are the reverse of Akhnaten's and his mother's wordless "cult of ecstasy" -- there appears to be no exit, no escape. The voice of Akhnaten's daughters is thus transformed into the voice of his mother, reverberating through the walls of her womb. At first he is comfortable and satisfied -- his every need is catered to: his hunger satisfied, his thirst quenched, his anxieties find no footing; he is completely autonomous, completely self-sufficient, completely at-one; there is no other reality, there is no other; this is All. But this pre-Oedipal sense of all-encompassing perfection -- of the absolute Other that is beyond desire, beyond *jouissance* -- gradually gives way to a growing sense of unease. Is he really experiencing the Real? Is he really, as the pharaoh's own dictum puts it, "living in truth" (*ankh-em-maat*)? Is he really seeing things as they are, or is he merely seeing them as we want?

It is in this state of delusion, of decadence, of suspended animation that we find Akhnaten and his family at the beginning of Act III¹. In the Stuttgart

¹ See the photograph of this scene from the Stuttgart production of the opera in the booklet accompanying the recording (Glass et al. 1987, 78), and in *Opera on the Beach* (Glass 1987, adjacent to page 143).

production of the opera, the Royal Palace assumes the guise of a circle in which Akhnaten and his six daughters -- each of whom wields an angelic lyre -- are enclosed. The obvious referent is the Aten; the family have become the prototypical family of the sun god. A slightly less obvious referent is that which I have suggested above: that of a womb. The latter would be a most appropriate metaphor for the protagonist's state of mind at this stage in the opera, and for the music we are hearing -- ostensibly produced by Akhnaten's daughters, but actually the (imagined) voice of his mother. Nefertiti, who always represented the "healthier," outward-oriented aspect of Akhnaten's desires, is located on the periphery; she is barely visible and her feet straddle outside the circumference of the circle. As far as the historical Nefertiti is concerned, this is probably an accurate representation. Towards the end of Akhnaten's reign the royal couple drifted apart. The consensus of opinion seems to be that Nefertiti left her husband: according to Velikovsky (1960, 105) this was because of her rivalry with Tye. Whatever the reasons, Nefertiti's departure signals a final stage in the isolationism -- both personal and political -- pursued by the king since the founding of Akhetaten.

After six cycles of singing, there are two sudden interjections by the trumpets and horns (rehearsal mark 8): paradoxically, the same instruments which in earlier scenes represented Akhnaten's connection with the divine are now appropriated by those who wish him ill. The E flat tonality announced by them was, as we have seen, associated with the "old" order already in the first act, as was the interval of a tritone -- the devil's interval -- between this tonality and the home key of the opera. The ominous effect produced by the shift in key is underlined in the second horn attack by a low tuba playing a dissonant D flat, dropping down to B₁ before eventually resolving, via the leading note, E flat, onto the root of the family's tonic, E. The overall effect of this passage is one of stark contrast to the family's monotonous monologue. The major triad built on the raised seventh degree (the leading note) of the scale is rarely used by Glass, and when it is, its purpose is invariably to undermine, or threaten, the tonic. The dramatic implications of this musical procedure require little explication.

We are returned to the palace music. There are two duet cycles between Akhnaten and Nefertiti (rehearsal marks 9 and 11) alternating with two cycles for the entire family ensemble (rehearsal marks 10 and 12). In the four remaining cycles of the section, the octet of singers remains, although the musical material they sing is now radically reduced in all of its parts. The gloomy oboe theme returns only doubled now in both of its parts with horns. The relentless A minor arpeggios heard at the beginning of the scene in the flutes return after two cycles in the clarinets (an octave lower), where they remain until the end of the section (rehearsal mark 14). Akhnaten and Nefertiti are evidently still playing the role of the divine couple: this we can tell by the ascending and descending E minor scales in the flute and synthesiser on the one hand, and the bass clarinet and cellos on the other. This music is obviously intended to invoke the same balance, or connubial, of "masculine" and "feminine" energies -- of descending and ascending lines -- as experienced in the chaconne (Act I, scene 2 and Act II, scene 4); but the move from A minor to E minor, from the key that represents the self (in the transpersonal, Jungian

sense) to that which represents the (M)Other, does not appear to have been a wholly successful one. Thus, the descending scales of the first half of the pattern (associated either with Nefertiti or the "feminine" in Akhnaten?) remain in perfect balance, as do the first two ascents (associated with Akhnaten as male or "masculine" principle?), but after this the equilibrium begins to disintegrate leaving the disembodied subject to meander aimlessly about in the stratosphere, apparently searching for a tonal footing but finding none (rehearsal marks 9 and 10). Even when the lines resort to contrary motion (rehearsal marks 12-16) as they did in the chaconne, the centre cannot hold, and the disorientated subject wanders off once again at a tangent.

The family's self-indulgent reveries are interrupted by the sombre E-flat major "call to arms," of the brass tutti (trumpets, horns, trombones, and tuba). The first two attacks resolve to the family's key of E minor, but the third resounding chord finally succeeds in dislodging the tonic. There is a shift to F minor exploiting the ambiguity of the seventh degree chord -- E-flat major being both the raised seventh degree of E minor and the flatted seventh degree of F minor. The abrupt shift in key is accompanied by a marked acceleration in tempo (100 half-notes per minute compared to the 132 quarter-notes of the family music), over which the scribe reads extracts from the so-called "Amarna letters" -- the diplomatic correspondence between Egypt and its colonies found towards the end of the last century buried in the ruins at Akhetaten. It is noteworthy that Akhnaten's ecstatic wordless music is interrupted by the revered "Word" of the "old" order: it is not music that provides the ultimate contrast to Akhnaten's "more than *joiissance*" but language. This stark contrast reveals the breadth and depth of the chasm that has opened between these two poles -- between the "masculine" and "feminine" modalities, between in-breeding and out-breeding, between the particular and the whole, and between the clearly defined and delimited and the infinitely ambiguous. And it appears to be as much Akhnaten's withdrawal into his private pre-Oedipal world of bliss as his adversaries' phallic aggression that is to blame.

The chameleonic figure of Amenhotep, son of Hapu (Tiresias) -- whose prophesy, in the Prelude, of the pharaoh's ultimate fall from grace has haunted the listener throughout the opera -- now addresses the crowd that has gathered outside the royal palace, his clear intent being to incite the people of Egypt to overthrow their hapless king. This cannot have been a difficult task as the disintegration of the Egyptian empire, which began during the reign of his father, Amenhotep III, and accelerated during the seventeen-year span of Akhnaten's reign due to his total neglect of foreign affairs, is now almost complete. Only Nubia in the South remains under Egyptian rule; all of the traditional strongholds in Asia Minor have fallen into the hands of rival powers.

The scribes impassioned renderings mirror the relentless tempo of the music:

Letter No. 1:

I have written repeatedly for troops, but they were not given and the king did not listen to the word of his servant. And I sent my messenger to the palace, but he returned empty-handed -- he brought no troops. And when the people

of my house saw this, they ridiculed me like the governors, my brethren, and despised me.

Letter No. 2:

The king's whole land, which has begun hostilities with me, will be lost. Behold the territory of Seir, as far as Carmel; its princes are lost; and hostilities prevail against me. As long as ships were upon the sea, the strong arm of the king occupied Naharin and Kash, but now the Apiru are occupying the king's cities. There remains not one prince to my lord, the king; every one is ruined. Let the king take care of his land and let him send troops. For if no troops come in this year, the whole territory of my lord, the king, will perish. If there are no troops in this year, let the king send his officer to fetch me and his brothers, that we may die with our lord, the king.

Letter No. 3:

Verily, thy father did not march forth nor inspect the lands of the vassal-princes. And when thou ascended the throne of thy father's house, Abdashirta's sons took the king's lands for themselves. Creatures of the king of Mittani are they, and of the king of Babylon and of the king of the Hittites.

Letter No. 4:

Who formerly could have plundered Tunip without being plundered by Thutmose III? The gods of the king of Egypt, my lord, dwell in Tunip. May my lord ask his old men if this not be so. Now, however, we belong no more to our lord, the king of Egypt. And now Tunip, thy city, weeps and her tears are flowing and there is no help for us. For twenty years we have been sending to our lord, the king of Egypt, but there has not come to us a word -- no, not one.

The music of this part of the scene can be divided into three sections, the first and last of which are centred around the tonality of F minor, and are characterised by a nervous side-stepping line in the upper horn part and violas (c¹ - b - c¹ - b - c¹ - b - c¹ - b - a flat), set off against a motivically related, highly-charged theme in the cellos and trombones (e flat - d - e flat - d - d flat - B - C). The middle sub-section alternates between the submediant of the new key, D flat, and its tonic, F minor. When transferred to the new tonal environment, the side-stepping motif of the previous sub-section sets out from the root of the chord rather than its dominant. Played now on the bassoon, it is also transformed melodically, rising above as well as below its initial note. In its newly acquired form this motif can be recognised as the "catharsis" (or *jouissance*) motif from the Temple scene (Act II, scene 1). This motif is, as we have seen, associated by Glass with violence and destruction, but is actually more evocative of the excitement accompanying violent acts, an excitement that was heavily loaded with sexual overtones in the earlier scene, as I believe it is here. The key of its early appearance was A flat major: now, however it is transposed up a perfect fourth to D flat (d flat - C - d flat - C - d flat - C - d natural - d flat). It is worth mentioning, as does Frandsen (1993, 257), that the tonic onto which this chord resolves, F minor, is the relative minor of A flat major, a prominent tonality in the earlier violent scene (Act II, scene 1). Thus, with respect to its tonality, its motivic material, and its dramatic content there are explicit links between the two scenes: both are scenarios of decadent isolationism, of stagnant insularity, followed by the violent intrusion of

excluded others. Neither act is condoned by the composer, nor is the intention that they be by the listener, but once put into effect we are irresistibly drawn into the intoxicating aesthetic of violence: in both cases we are given grounds to wish for the fulfilment of the violent act, and part of us, if the composer's intention is realised, is complicit in it.

Another unmistakable signal of Akhnaten's impending doom is the return of the "life-span" motif, heard initially in the Prelude music. This motif signifies not only the pharaoh's unusual sexuality as perceived by his people but also his awaiting destiny. It does this, as we have seen, as a result of its melodic trajectory -- a two-tiered rise followed by an abrupt fall -- combined with its explicit association in the Prelude with Amenhotep's (Tiresias') damning prophesy ("The constellations stagger, The bones of the hell hounds tremble"). A significant difference between this and the earlier appearance of the motif is the transformation of the minor third of the second jump (b¹ - d flat²) into a major third (d flat - f). The motif as a whole appears as follows: A flat - d flat - f - d flat - C. The juxtaposition of minor and major thirds, which in its earlier appearance signified Akhnaten's "deviant" sexuality, is still, however, found. In its third iteration, the motif is transposed away the submediant, D flat, to the tonic, F minor: the minor third of this chord (f - a flat) is now the second step of the motif (A flat - f - a flat - d flat - C). Even though its exact intervallic structure is not preserved, the meaning of the motif is quite transparent. Akhnaten's sexual deviation, his flaunting of the most pervasive (in psychological terms) divide known to humanity, is now seen through the censorious eyes of his opponents, and becomes a symbol of everything else they despise. In linear terms, the move from "masculine" to "feminine" mirrors the text which begins talking of the former virility of the Egyptian pharaohs ("As long as there were ships upon the sea the strong arm of the king ..."), but then sinks into despair at the losses incurred as a result of Akhnaten's unwillingness to assert his ("masculine") military might ("For if no troops come this year, the whole territory of my lord, the king, will perish").

After three cadences of Akhnaten's life-span motif, we are returned to the initial pattern of this section. The last of the Amarna letters finishes with a bitter complaint at the inability of its writer to muster a response from Akhnaten, and evidently from his predecessor and father, Amenhotep III, as well: "for twenty years we have been sending to our lord, the king of Egypt, but there has not come to us a word -- no, not one."

There are three piercing clarion calls and we are returned to the royal palace, where Akhnaten is seen alone with his two eldest daughters. If the casting list of the booklet accompanying the recording of the opera is to be believed, one of them is Bekhetaten and the other Meretaten -- these are the first names on the list, and so, one would assume, are the soloists (Glass et al. 1987, 3). Now the interesting thing here is not the presence of the latter, whose close attachment to the king has already been discussed, but that of the former, who is not usually regarded as Akhnaten's daughter at all. Akhnaten was without question on intimate terms with both princesses (just how intimate is open to dispute), but as far as conventional accounts of the family are concerned Bekhetaten is Akhnaten's baby sister (or half-sister), not his daughter. For Velikovsky (1960, 91-95), however, she is both. Egyptologists have attempted

to solve this riddle in numerous different ways, the most ingenious, but at the same time least credible of which is Budge's (1923, 89 and 92) claim that there were two Bekhetatens: one Akhnaten's and Nefertiti's daughter and the other Tye's and Amenhotep III's. As far as their depiction in the opera is concerned, there would appear to be little doubt that Glass is following Velikovsky's formulation of the princess's parenthood. This section is easily associated with the earlier trio of Akhnaten, Nefertiti, and Tye (The Window of Appearances, Act II, scene 1), only now the pharaoh is accompanied by the daughters of these women. The very fact that Akhnaten is left alone with his two eldest daughters is, moreover, an overt allusion to the Oedipus myth; the hero of the myth sought solace in the company of his two eldest daughters, Ismene and Antigone, as Akhnaten is doing with Bekhetaten and Meretaten. Thus the reference is not just a historical one; Glass is once again following Velikovsky's theory of the parity of the myth with the life of Akhnaten¹.

For the Egyptian people to witness this latest (un)holy trinity of Akhnaten, Bekhetaten, and Meretaten is the final straw; it is highly significant that it is this scenario and not the reading of the Amarna letters that immediately precedes Akhnaten's violent deposition. The implication seems to be that it is not so much the pharaoh's neglect of foreign affairs that inspires contempt as what we are witnessing in this section; or maybe they are both to be viewed as symptoms of the same condition. Glass writes that the three "continue to sing, appearing more withdrawn and isolated from the events outside" (Glass 1987, 188), but one senses that there is more to this scenario than we are being told. The deliberately insipid music I have described above appears to confirm this impression. The case of Meretaten is, as I have mentioned earlier, the most easily proven case of incest in the family (Redford 1984 187; Aldred 1988, 287); although, with regard to the actual historical figures, this hypothesis should be viewed with some suspicion, for reasons I have already gone into. Her presence here can therefore be easily accounted for. Not so with Bekhetaten. Were Glass to have included Ankhesenpaaten in the final section of this scene, there would have been little doubt that the object of our contempt is restricted to the pharaoh's relationship with his daughters, as hers is the second most commonly acknowledged case of incest in Akhnaten's family circle. But instead the composer chooses Bekhetaten, with the specific purpose of referring to the only concrete evidence of the pharaoh's union with his mother. Instances of incest between father and daughter, and between brother and sister were commonplace in ancient Egyptian royal circles: examples of the former include the pharaohs Tao II, Ahmose, Amenhotep I, Thutmose I, II, III, and IV, and Amenhotep II; and of the latter, Rameses II and Akhnaten's father, Amenhotep III (Middleton 1962, 604). Incest between mother and son, on the other hand, was totally alien to ancient Egyptian and virtually every other culture. Were such a relationship to be openly displayed to his people by an already unpopular pharaoh, the consequences would, in all probability, have been disastrous. Velikovsky describes his own version of the course of events as follows:

¹ See Velikovsky 1960, 150-160.

After his complete rupture with the priests of Amon, Akhnaton apparently did not wish to keep his relation to his mother a secret. He boasted of "living in truth," and this phrase is an appellation attached to his proper name. After a period of indecision and concealment he made up his mind to bring his relation into the open and to compel the Egyptians to regard this union as holy and admirable. Thus he openly led his mother-wife and their daughter to their shades in the temple of Akhet-Aton, had this procession cut in wall bas-reliefs, and had it written of Beketaten, their child, that she was "the king's daughter of his body." However, this innovation in religion and morals -- incest between son and mother -- was alien to the Egyptians, whose gods, religious customs, and ethics even then went back to grey antiquity; and when under Akhnaton it came into the open, the eruption of discontent was not long in coming. (Velikovsky 1960, 102.)

In the final section of the scene we have before us, on the one hand, a daughter of Akhnaten who is also his wife, and on the other, one who is also his sister -- his mother-wife Tye is not physically present, nor is his sister-wife Nefertiti¹. The real objection for the people of Egypt can, however, as Velikovsky's passage indicates, be located in the higher of the two voices, that of Bekhetaten, as it refers explicitly to the forbidden union of Akhnaten and Tye. With the exit of Nefertiti at this point in time, Akhnaten's only, albeit tenuous, link to the external -- in both sexual and social terms (as she is the daughter of Aye, who now joins the ranks of Akhnaten's adversaries) -- is irredeemably severed.

As regards the musical representation of all of this, the delicately balanced scalar lines of the chaconne, which were already losing their grip on reality in the previous section, are now totally out of control. The disorientated subject (cellos, bass clarinet, and synthesiser) jumps up an octave at the beginning of the pattern and then spirals out of control on an ever widening gyre for its remainder. In the next it falls, begins an ascent, and then falls again before meandering its way up to the dizzy heights of the ether. This reckless roller-coaster ride continues unabated as first the isolation motif (the ascending oboe *d'amore* thirds) and then the thirdless arpeggios on E return (more prominent now because of the cutting timbre of flutes and synthesiser).

In the first pattern of the section (rehearsal mark 29), Akhnaten enters alone in two ungainly jumps, from e^1 to c^2 . This awkward opening demonstrates just how seriously deluded the title character really is. To move directly from the root of the (M)Other key of the opera, e^1 , to c^2 , the "ecstatic" third of the self key -- the note on which Akhnaten's most profound spiritual realisations occurred in the Hymn -- is just not on. Not surprisingly he reaches only the minor third, and thus does not achieve union with his god as he did earlier in the major mode. In the remainder of the pattern he appears to accept his ineffectualness in the home key and thus avoids its stronger tones. The now familiar minor-major shift takes place not in this key but over the pivotal chord G minor-major, from which it resolves into the stronger tonality of this section, the (M)Other tonality of the opera, E (b flat - b natural, over the implied chord progression G minor - G major - E). Thus Akhnaten's delusion

¹ The Reverend Baikie, it should be stressed, is alone in postulating that "Nefertiti was full sister to her husband" (Baikie 1926, 243).

causes him to seek union not with his god but with his mother, whom he, of course, mistakes for his god -- not, I should add, for the first time in the opera. That she has the outer appearance of his two eldest daughters does not seem to matter; in the realm of the (imagined) absolute, everything is ultimately the same as everything else.

Motificaly, one of the most noteworthy events is when the lower soprano, "daughter two" (Meretaten?), takes over Akhnaten's melodic line: more specifically, she takes over that part of it which refers explicitly to Akhnaten's sexuality, the minor-major shift (rehearsal mark 32.5). Could this be a tacit reference to sexual relations between the two? Daughter one's (Bekhetaten's?) melodic line explicitly avoids any such excursions, suggesting perhaps that there was no sexual basis to relations between this daughter and her father. This voice is instead characterised by its exceptionally high tessitura, which could easily be described as shrill; tellingly, the only other character who has reached such high notes (g^2 and a^2) in the opera is Tye (in the Temple scene, Act II, scene 1). If this is Bekhetaten who is singing, then she is explicitly linked to the voice range of her mother, Tye. Meretaten's lower soprano is, on the other hand, well within the range of Nefertiti's contralto. It is Bekhetaten's high soprano, however, which is the hardest voice to ignore; the voice that points explicitly to the Oedipus complex in Oedipus (Akhnaten), and the voice that must have, therefore, been the most abrasive to the ears of Akhnaten's subjects.

At this point, Akhnaten's fate is sealed. The pharaoh even appears to recognise this himself, as in the final pattern of the scene (rehearsal mark 36) his melodic line recalls the prophesy of the scribe (Tiresias); this is the only occasion on which the protagonist himself sings the tragic "life-span" motif ($e^1 - [g^1] - a^1 - c^2 - a^1 - e^1$). In this his final hour, we can only surmise that Akhnaten is fully aware of how his people perceive him and of the destiny that awaits.

There are three final "calls to arms" in the brass, underpinned by a restless chromatic line in the cellos, and then there is a brief moment of silence -- the pregnant calm that precedes a storm.

5.10 Act 3:2 Attack and Fall

What follows is a murderous assault on the temple mastered by the trinity of patriarchs. The Amon High Priest finds a welcome ally in General Horemhab and his military forces. There was always a strong bond between the military and the Church in the former capital Thebes, as Egypt's military conquests had always, prior to Akhnaten's reforms, been glorified in the name of Amon: those prisoners of military campaigns who were sacrificed or enslaved were customarily done so with the blessing of the Theban god. Loyalty to the pharaoh must, therefore, have been pushed to breaking point given his patent disregard for military concerns compounded with his heretic religious reforms. Neither can it have been difficult for the Amon High Priest and Horemhab to talk the bureaucrat Aye over to their side. Although ostensibly a loyal servant

of Akhnaten, his loyalty must have been tested by his daughter Nefertiti's rupture with Akhnaten and by whatever else was going on within the confines of the royal palace. Moreover, he was at heart a military man and it is unlikely that he would have approved of Akhnaten's hands-off policy in Asia-Minor; a policy which must have, when viewed through the lenses of the Atenist doctrine of universal love as extolled in the Hymn to the Sun, looked suspiciously like a deliberate and systematic abdication of colonial power for religio-ideological reasons -- something unprecedented in the ancient world and virtually unknown today. Thus, with the ecclesiastical, the military, and the administrative patriarchs reunited, the stage is set for the scourge of the "new" order grown old. Akhnaten, in lieu of the two charismatic women we saw him with in the Window of Appearances (Act I, scene 2), has only the (un)holy trinity of the two daughters of these women, Bekhetaten and Meretaten, and himself; a trinity which far from commanding the respect of the Egyptian people, fills them with contempt. And one whose manifesto is clearly no match, in its popular appeal, to that of the three patriarchs.

With regard to its text and vocal arrangements the scene can be divided into three sections. In the first of these, the three patriarchs continue where the scribe has left off, inciting to crowd to overthrow Akhnaten by reading extracts from the Amarna letters telling of the loss of Egypt's colonies in Asia-Minor. In the second section, the people of Thebes respond, acknowledging that there is a threat to Egyptian national security and at the same time explicitly calling Akhnaten's masculinity into question. The third section begins with an antiphonal subsection comprised of the three patriarchs' pleas for swift phallic retaliation ("the mighty arm of the king will seize Nahrma and Kapasi") alternating with the people of Thebes' assent to these pleas, and ends with a homophonic subsection in which the patriarchs and the people are in complete agreement. During this final section the crowd breaks into the palace and carries out the violent deposition of their monarch.

AMON HP, HOREMHAB, AYE:

*Lim-lik-mi sha-ri a-na ma-ti-shu
Khal-kat mat sha-ri. Ga-ba-sha
tsa-ba-ta-ni; nu-kur-tu a-na ya-shi
A-di ma-ta-ti She-eri Gin-Ti-kir-mil
shal-mu a-na gab-bi kha-zi-a-nu-ti
u nu-kur-tu a-na ya-shi.*

Let the king care for his land
The land of the king will be lost
All of it will be taken from me
There is hostility to me.
As far as the lands of Seir even to Carmel,
there is peace to all the regents.
But to me there is hostility

SATB:

*Ip-sha-ti e-nu-ma a-mel a-mir-i
u-la a-man i-na sha-ri be-li-ya;
ki nu-kur-tu
a-na mukh-khi-ya shak-na-ti*

Although a man sees the facts
Yet the two eyes of the king, my lord,
do not see
For there is hostility against me.

AMON HP, HOREMHEB, AYE, SATB:

*e-nu-ma e-lip-pa i-na lib-bi tam-ti
kat shar-ri dan-na-tu
Ti-lik-ki Nakh-ri-ma u kapa-si
u i-nan-na a-la-ni sha-ri*

As sure as there is a ship in the midst of
the sea, The mighty arm of the king will
seize Nahrma and Kapasi
But now the 'Apiru are taking the cities

T-lik-ki-u Kha-bi-ru
Ya-nu-mi ish-ten kha-zi-a-nu
a-na shar-ri be-li-ya; Khal-ku gab-bu

of the king.
 No regent is left to the king, my lord,
 All are lost.

Musically, the scene is constructed from a quasi-strophic configuration of four sections followed by an instrumental coda in which a fifth section is introduced. Its overall structure can be schematised as follows: AB AB CD CD AB CD CD:(coda)DE.

An eight-bar introduction by the brass (horns, trumpets, and trombones) introduces the chord movement of the opening section: F minor to D flat major (i - VI). The A section proper lunges immediately into a ferocious assault that will continue unabated until the end of the scene. In this scene there is none of the gradual organic growth of Akhnaten's and his family's music. The closest comparison is with the Funeral at the beginning of the opera (Act I, scene 1) -- our first encounter with Akhnaten's father-in-law, Aye. All instruments are marked *forte* from the initial bar, the only dynamic marking in the entire scene. The entire orchestra is present from the beginning of the scene to its end, with the single noteworthy exception of the percussion section, whose entry I will shortly discuss. Although the brisk tempo of 175 quarter-notes per minute and, more importantly, the relentless torrent of eighth-notes (350 per minute) played by virtually all the instruments of the orchestra, remain until its final coda, the music of the scene is characterised also by its sporadic changes of metre, many of which coincide with raucous scalar nose-dives. These kamikaze descents (there are some ascents but these are in the minority), many of which are chromatically constructed, are clearly transformations of the meandering scalar lines of the previous scene, which, in turn, are related to the "divine" balance of opposing forces of the chaconne. What we are now hearing, then, is libido out of control, out of balance, lashing out at its despised Other.

The three patriarchs -- the Amon High Priest, Horemhab, and Aye -- are a united force right from their violent entry in the very first bar. Their singing is, as before, made all the more oppressive by the predominantly fifth-oriented harmonies of their parts. It is syllabic throughout, usually keeping to quarter-notes, and is predominantly diatonic. This diatonicism is interrupted, however, by each of the scalar lines, the more chromatic of which appear to be co-ordinated with the most emotionally loaded lines of the text: the line "*nu-kur-tu a-na ya-shi*" ("there is hostility to me"), for example, coincides with the melodic line, e - d sharp - C sharp - C natural - A sharp - B, as sung by Aye (rehearsal mark 6: see Example 29).

EXAMPLE 29

AMON
H.P.

HOR.

AYE

U NU U NU

U NU U NU

U NU U NU

The A section comprises three iterations of the chord change F minor to D-flat major; a relatively static and “conventional” tonic to sub-mediante formula. The tension of the music is tangibly heightened in the next section, section B (rehearsal mark 5), however, in which the submediante, D-flat major is replaced by the raised seventh-degree chord, E major. The presence of a major chord constructed on the leading-note, which appears, moreover, in its root position, constitutes a significant threat to the integrity of the tonic, one that demands release. This harmonic formula therefore underlines the urgency of the situation as presented by the three patriarchs: the king *must* be deposed. This formula is, like the previous one, heard three times, after which both sections (A and B) are repeated in their entirety only now accompanying the second half of the initial stanza of the text.

The response to the threat as described by the three men is not long in coming. As the full mixed chorus -- SATB (the people of Thebes) -- enter, they do so not in F minor but in F major (rehearsal mark 11). This chord is heard in conjunction with its related minor, and the home key of the opera, A minor, making this section (section C) a kind of retrograde of the A section of the Prelude which consisted also of A minor alternating with F major. This passage is, like so much of the opera, tonally ambiguous: one assumes at the beginning of the section that F major is the tonic as the music we have heard so far in this scene has been in its modal counterpart, F minor. This assumption is undermined, however, in the next section (section D), when the F major chord functions as a disguised (because of the intermediary A minor) secondary dominant to B-flat major/minor, which in turn yields to A minor.

The harmony of the D section (rehearsal mark 13) is, of course, easily identified as the same as was heard in the second section of the Prelude, and which has resurfaced in various guises during the course of the opera; that which underpins the most pervasive theme of the opera -- what I have termed Akhnaten's “life-span” motif, but could easily be regarded as the “opera” motif, as it encapsulates the most significant events in the opera. Now it is sung by the entire chorus (male and female voices) backed up by the full power of the orchestra. The sudden appearance of the chorus combined with the abrupt shift from the minor to the major mode in the key of F is unquestionably one of the opera's most striking moments of “revelation”; revelation because the Akhnaten that the patriarchs have been describing is at this precise moment revealed to the people of Thebes. It is a moment of quasi-religious (and, perhaps, religious, from Atenism to Amenism) conversion. Now they see him in an altogether different light. The people's new found vision is contrasted, however, with the blindness they perceive in their king. The text of this section is as follows:

*Ip-sha-ti e-nu-ma a-mel a-mir-i
u-la a-man i-na sha-ri be-li-ya;
ki nu-kur-tu
a-na mukh-khi-ya shak-na-ti*

Although a man sees the facts
Yet the two eyes of the king, my
lord, do not see
For there is hostility against me.

As with the solace sought by Akhnaten in the company of his two eldest daughters, the metaphorical blinding of Akhnaten finds a counterpart in the actual blinding of the mythological Oedipus. The luckless hero of the Greek

myth blinded himself with a golden brooch taken from the garment of his mother Jocasta¹ upon realising that he had committed the double crime of parricide and incest. It is interesting that Velikovsky (1960, 121-122) does not seek a metaphorical reading of the myth, as many others have done, but instead -- calling attention to the above and other texts (one of which is the text read by the scribe prior to the next scene) -- claims that Akhnaten became physically blind in the final years of his reign. There is good reason to believe, however, that Glass pursues a somewhat different interpretation. What is noteworthy about the text selected by the composer and his collaborators is the explicit link between the king's two eyes, which "do not see," and the assertion that "a man sees the facts." Thus Akhnaten's ineffectual organs of vision are implicitly associated, by the people of Thebes, with his testicles. A similar interpretation of the Oedipus myth (blinding = castration or emasculation) is so ubiquitous as not to warrant further comment²: what is truly fascinating, however, is that such an association was made by contemporaries of Akhnaten while the king was still alive. Here we see it stated quite unequivocally: Akhnaten is not a man, and being not a man, his two eyes (= his testicles) do not see the facts. Which is the cause and which the effect -- did emasculation precede blindness or vice-versa -- remains open to debate, but there is clearly a link between the two. What is most interesting, though, is Glass's musico-dramatic treatment of this text. It coincides, as I have already mentioned, exactly with Akhnaten's bisexual "life-span" motif; the motif that strays into the minor mode (D flat, the minor third of B flat major), despite its masculine (major) accompaniment, and comes to grief (drops to a low E) precisely because of this insurrection; the motif which, according to Glass, "is easy to see ... as a metaphor for that part of Akhnaten's character that was so unusual and unsettling to the people of his time," and is also "synonymous with the downfall of Akhnaten" (Glass 1987, 173). With this realisation, then, the fate of the pharaoh is sealed. As if to underline the condemnation of the Theban people, the entire sequence (both C and D sections) is repeated; thus the thrice-repeated motif is repeated two times making a total of six hearings.

It is noteworthy that the final two occurrences of the triadic "life-span," or "opera," motif coincide with significant dramatic events in both major productions of the opera. In the Stuttgart premiere, the first appearance of the mixed choir during this section was at the point at which the sun, which has lit the stage in the early part of the scene, sets, leaving it in semi-darkness. The Anglo-American productions of the opera, on the other hand, chose the three-times-three manifestation of the life-span motif that occurs at the very end of

1. The passage from Sophocles' *King Oedipus* is as follows:
Her [Jocasta's] dress was pinned with golden brooches, which the king snatched out and thrust -- from full arm's length, into his eyes -- eyes that should see no longer his shame, his guilt, no longer see those they should never have seen, nor see, unseeing, those he had longed to see, henceforth seeing nothing but night.(...) To this wild tune he pierced his eyeballs time and time again, till bloody tears ran down his beard -- not drops but in full spate a whole cascade descending in drenching cataracts of scarlet rain. (Sophocles [trans. E.F. Watling] 1947, 61)

2. The connection between blinding and castration was first made explicit by Freud in a footnote added in 1914 to his discussion of Oedipus in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900, 398).

the scene to dispose of Akhnaten. His fate is that of Oedipus: he is surrounded by the circle of wrestlers that has circumambulated the stage during the entire opera, whereupon he is coerced into committing the act of self-mutilation that is an allegory for his castration. He can be seen in this attitude -- with fingers delving into his eye sockets -- in the photograph that furnishes the cover of the paperback edition of Glass's book (Glass 1987).

The remainder of the scene culminates, then, in the defilement of the Temple of the Aten, the ransacking of the royal palace, and the bringing to "justice" of the heretic who lives there. This the people of Egypt, led by their three trusted patriarchs, proceed to do. Immediately after the resolution of the first series of "life-span" motifs -- concomitant with the same "transcendental" F major chord on which the chorus entered at the beginning of the previous C section -- the only section of the orchestra not heard so far in the scene finds a voice (rehearsal mark 15). When the bass drum and cymbal enter (and, later, a snare drum), they do so in an uncompromising fashion. Their syncopations are so pronounced that not once does a rhythmic accent chance onto the "strong" beats of the bar -- during both the 12/8 metre of the initial bar of each chord, and the turbulent bar of 6/4 time that follows (usually accompanied by the scalar descent), the rhythmic emphasis remains resolutely first on the backbeat and then on the off-beat.

As we return to the F minor tonality of the initial section, the people of Thebes and their new leaders engage in a series of two-bar responsorial exchanges, the first bar consisting of the extended and predominantly diatonic calls of the people of Thebes, and the second of the chromatically venomous and rhythmically charged (mostly eighth-notes) responses of the Amon High Priest, Horemhab, and Aye. One can feel the patriarchs of the rejuvenated "old" order propelling the people of Thebes to carry the violent deeds through to their ultimate conclusion. As we return to the music of the Prelude and its "life-span" motif, the people of Thebes are in complete accord with the three patriarchs. When they join forces to sing the motif that marks the end of Akhnaten's reign they do so in complete homophonic assent -- altos, basses, Aye and Horemhab all sing the motif in its uncorrupted form, while the sopranos, tenors and the Amon High Priest (i.e., the higher voices of each choral section) resonate on the fifth of the B-flat major/minor chord, F (rehearsal marks 26-27 and 30-31).

When the third, now instrumental, series of "life-span" motifs is heard at the beginning of the coda (rehearsal mark 32), it is a celebration of victory. Water, the dominant element of the Prelude music, has succeeded in extinguishing the fire of the sun god and the fire of the son of the sun god. For the third iteration of the thrice repeated "life-span" motif, the orchestral arrangement is almost identical to third cycle of the Prelude. The metre has changed to 4/4 time and undulating aquatic arpeggios are heard in contrary motion in the winds, synthesiser, and strings. Insistent syncopated brass attacks herald the victory of the righteous assailants over the heretics.

As if stamping out the last smouldering embers of a fire, three final alternations of the raised seventh degree major chord and the tonic are heard, only now transposed to the opera's home key (A-flat major to A minor/major). The second of these attempts to modulate to the opera's (M)Other, or

"feminine" key, E minor, but in vain (rehearsal mark 34). The minor fifth degree chord (to call this chord the dominant would be misleading in both dramatic and musical senses) is quickly displaced by the tonic. The suppressed, disenfranchised, and disembodied Other is seen no more in the opera proper -- in the ancient timeframe that is. The third and final raised seventh degree cadence resolves to A minor, and things are as they were before the religious revolution. In this section of the scene, the side-stepping ecstasy, or "jouissance," motif is heard in three octaves in the bass, trombones, and tuba (A flat - G - A flat - B flat - A flat - G - F - E), but with little of the lustre of its earlier manifestations. There are three emphatic attacks by the brass and percussion sections, accompanied the same persistently rising arpeggios as were heard at the beginning of the opera (the disembodied Akhnaten?), set against a low drone on the tonic. There are two low attacks stated in the trombones, tuba, and percussion: "the double doors of the horizon" slam fast once again and so does Akhnaten's life. The arpeggios continue their ascent undeterred.

5.11 Act 3:3 The Ruins

The age of Akhnaten is over. There are numerous theories as to what became of him after his deposition but the truth is we simply do not know. The same applies to Nefertiti, and to Tye, and to several, but not all, of Akhnaten's daughters: they simply cease to be mentioned or are mentioned only in an obscure way in the records made at the time. Much of the evidence that must have existed was deliberately destroyed by Akhnaten's immediate successors. Glass makes no effort to fill the gap in our historical knowledge of the period. In this sense, as well as in the simple presentation of historical texts in their original languages, the opera can rightly be considered, as Shalom Goldman termed it, "singing archeology" (quoted in Glass 1987, 150). It could easily be argued, as Glass does (quoted in Blackwood 1985), that the reticence of the historical sources, in this and other respects, is more eloquent and more touching than a fabricated story line would have been in its place. The simple omission of Akhnaten's name from the ancient Egyptian lists of pharaohs tells us, for example, a great deal more about his position in history and the attitude of his successors towards him than had he been included in them.

The libretto indicates that the first of the texts read by the scribe should be heard in the silence between the two scenes, an instruction that was not followed in the CBS recording of the opera. This should, in my opinion, be regarded as a compromise to the format of recorded music rather than as a change in the dramatic layout of the opera. The text read by the scribe, who in the composer's words, "appears out of the chaos to announce the end of Akhnaten's reign" (Glass 1987, 190), was found in the tomb of Tutankhamen¹. It has been aptly described by Savitri Devi as a "prayer of hate" (1946, 274), and by the Reverend James Baikie as "little more than a savage howl of joy at the downfall of Akhenaten and all his works" (1926, 398).

The sun of him who knew thee not
 Has set, O Amen.
 But as for him who knows thee,
 He shines.
 The temple of him who assailed
 Thee is in darkness,
 While the whole earth is in
 Sunlight.
 Who so puts thee in his heart,
 O Amen,
 Lo, his sun hath risen.

This text was presumably penned by the boy king Tutankhamen's (formerly Tutankhaten) chief advisor -- the surrogate ruler of Egypt, for the time being, and future pharaoh -- Aye. The new pharaoh is whisked away from the former "City of the Horizon" back to the traditional seat of pharaonic power in Thebes, where he can be kept under the watchful eye of both the military and

¹ The libretto indicates that it was found in the tomb of Aye (Glass 1987, 191), but this appears to be a mistake: see Frandsen (1993, 266).

ecclesiastical authorities. A suitably macho image is constructed for the adolescent Tutankhamen by his aides in order to distinguish him as sharply as possible from his predecessor. Military campaigns are mounted attempting to win back the territories in Asia-Minor that were lost as a result of first, Amenhotep III's self-absorption, and then, his son's pacifistically-tinged foreign policy. Akhnaten's name is deemed inuterrable by the new ruler and is replaced by the title "the criminal of Akhetaten." As was the case with Akhnaten's defilement of his own father's name earlier in the opera, this is more than just a change of name, as to defile a pharaoh's name was, to the ancient Egyptians, tantamount to destroying his soul¹.

The new pharaoh, Tutankhamen, dies young, however, presumably in battle, and is replaced by Akhnaten's father-in-law and advisor to pharaohs, Aye, who weedles his way to the throne by marrying his own grand-daughter and the wife of his immediate predecessor, Ankhesenamun (formerly Ankhesenpaaten), but lives to enjoy his coveted position for only a few short years (Redford 1984, 217; Aldred 1988, 298). Upon the death of her first husband, Akhnaten's daughter, the only legitimate successor to the throne, writes a touching letter to the king of the Hittites asking for a prince to be sent in haste for her to marry, so that she might continue the royal lineage and at the same time prevent her adversaries and those responsible for disposing of her father from seizing power²: a prince is finally sent but is murdered *en route* to Egypt (Baikie 1926, 406-410; Redford 1984, 217-218; Aldred 1988, 297-298). Upon the death of her husband-grandfather, Ankhesenamun mysteriously disappears allowing "smiter of the Asiatics" Horemhab to usurp the throne with no monarchical obstruction. Horemhab reigns for a quarter-of-a-century and during this time sees to it that all traces of the Atenist heresy are erased from his kingdom. The vehemence of Horemhab's actions surpasses Akhnaten's own acts of iconoclasm by a considerable margin: not only does he demolish or defile all edifices and ideas connected in any way with Akhnaten, but also many of those of Tutankhamen and Aye (Aldred 1988, 208).

The music of the final scene begins with the same A minor arpeggios as were heard at the end of the penultimate scene, only transformed in metre (from 4/4 to 3/4 time) by the omission of the fifth. This simple subtractive procedure is a re-enactment of the very first transformation of musical material in the opera. The fifthless rising arpeggios that result could be seen either as representing the disembodied pharaoh, or the absent Other (E). Thus we are back to square one: square, because this geometric form is the one associated most strongly with the materialism and inertia of the "old" order³; one, not

1 See Baikie 1926, 399.

2 Redford's (1984) translates an extract from Akhesenamun's letter as follows: My husband has died. A son I have not. But to thee, they say, the sons are many. If though wouldst give me one son of thine, he would become my husband. Never shall I pick out a servant of mine and make him my husband.(...) I am afraid! (Redford 1984, 217.)

3 The square is, as we have seen, associated in Tibetan Buddhist iconography with the element earth. The same symbolism was exploited in the Stuttgart production of the opera, in which the angular "cubic" gestures of the representatives of the "old" order were contrasted with the flowing cyclical gestures of the Atenists.

because the order that has unfolded is one which encompasses all, but because it is one that recognises no authority other than its own.

The following two texts, presumably taken from the tombs of Tutankhamen and Aye, accompany the first cycle of the Prelude reprise -- a low-key arrangement for strings and synthesiser. They describe the rebuilding and refurbishing of the Amon temples following the downfall of Akhnaten.

The new ruler, performing benefactions for his father Amon and all the gods, has made what was ruined to endure as a monument for all the ages of eternity, and he has expelled the great criminal and justice was established. He surpassed what had been done previously. He fashioned his father Amon upon thirteen carrying poles, his holy image being of fine gold, lapis lazuli, and every august costly stone, whereas the majesty of this august god had been upon eleven carrying poles.

And the property of the temples has been doubled and tripled and quadrupled in silver, gold, lapis lazuli, every kind of august costly stone, royal linen, white linen, fine linen, olive oil, gum, fat, incense, myrrh, without limit to any good thing. His majesty (Life! Prosperity! Health!) has built their barques upon the river of new cedar from the terraces. They make the river shine.

The second cycle of the scene is a musical representation of the zeal with which the restorers of the "old" order set about their reconstructive task. That water is the element appropriated by them in their battle against Atenism should come as no surprise. Akhnaten explicitly rejected the "god of the overflowing Nile," Osiris (Baikie 1926, 305), and all of his Underworld companions in his attempt to bind the power of the river, and all other powers, to the energy that inheres in the sun-disc. No matter how profound the philosophical insight involved in such an assumption, it must have been difficult for many, who were accustomed to thinking of these two central aspects of Egyptian life as distinct entities, to fathom how the power and heat of the sun can be the same power as that which imbues water with its life-sustaining qualities. This ostensible weakness in the Atenist philosophy -- its solar bias compounded with its apparent rejection of the other central element of Egyptian life, water -- was ruthlessly exploited by its adversaries and must have been instrumental in quenching the fire of the sun god. Had Akhnaten shown more tolerance in his attitude towards the gods of the Nile and the Underworld, and somehow sought to incorporate them into his doctrine, it is unlikely that his reforms would have resulted in such widespread dissent.

Thus, we are transported, along with the quasi-mythological narrator of the opera, Amenhotep (Tiresias), upon the sparkling waves of the river Nile, into the underworld and across the bounds of mortality and time. The Prelude music serves as the unifying principle in which the most significant transformations of the opera occur. This music, which is strongly associated with water in all three acts, is the polymorphous, migratory, and catalytic agent that is the source of all change. At the beginning of the opera (during the Prelude), we were transported back 3500 years in time to the pharaonic world immediately prior to Akhnaten's accession; during the second act (City/Dance) the same music served as the medium in which Akhnaten was cleansed and reborn (i.e., baptised) prior to his spiritual apogee, the Hymn to the Sun. Now

we are transported to, or reborn in, contemporary Egypt. There are two instrumental cycles of the Prelude music: the first of these (rehearsal mark 9) corresponds to the bustling third cycle of the Prelude, and is characterised by mirror-image undulating arpeggios (played by the winds and strings) and the polyrhythm that results between the triple configuration of these and the driving straight-eighths of the trumpets and horns. Glass observes with regard to this cycle that the "orchestral music becomes full and no action is indicated" (Glass 1987, 191); both descriptions which tally with the aquatic metaphor I have suggested. The fullness of the orchestra is the fullness of the river, and the stasis is the continuity it represents in the lives of the Egyptian people.

The second instrumental cycle corresponds with the more pensive fourth cycle of the Prelude. This cycle (rehearsal mark 14) is characterised by a marked reduction in orchestral texture, by the polyphonic juxtaposition of bubbling bassoons with darting flute ascents, and by occasional brass interpolations, the most noteworthy of which takes the familiar form of Akhnaten's grim "life-span" motif. When we emerge from the depths of the river we do so in a now familiar fashion: there are two emphatic chord attacks followed by a third double attack. The double doors of the Horizon swing open and we are standing in the midst of the ruined city of Akhetaten (known today as Tell El-Amarna). Tourists are seen perusing the recently excavated buildings, the walls of which stand at waist height.

Amenhotep (Tiresias), the transpersonal, trans-sexual, multivalent, time-traveller, shaman, prophet, translator, scribe, observer/actor, who has been our faithful guide to the action of the opera so far, now appears as a twentieth-century tour guide for the tourists visiting the ruined city. The texts read by him are taken from *Frommer's Guide to Egypt* and *Fodor's Egypt*. The accompanying music, a sombre string arrangement interrupted occasionally by the wind and brass instruments, corresponds to the fifth cycle of the Prelude.

To reach Tell El-Amarna, drive eight miles south of Mallawi to the point where you cross the Nile. On the east side of the Nile the distance is less than a mile and can be covered on foot or on donkey.

Behind the present village, at the ancient site of Tell El-Amarna, the ruins known as the palace of Nefertiti are among the very few remnants from the Akhnaten period. Tables in cuneiform writing, which contain correspondence between Egypt and Syria, were found here and are now in the Cairo museum. (To see any sights on the Eastern bank of the River you must cross by ferry which carries cars along with the usual donkey carts and local traffic. The ferry docking station is located at the southern end of the town. You should arrive there at least one half hour before the 6:00 AM crossing. The ferry does a brisk business and you will need every available second for sight seeing.)

There is nothing left of this glorious city of temples and palaces. The mud-brick buildings have long since crumbled and little remains of the immense stone temples but the outlines of their floor plans.

In addition to the tombs and ruins of the city, there are several stelae scattered around the plain which mark the limits of the land belonging to the city. Most of them are too widely scattered to visit and are also in bad condition.

5.12 Act 3: Epilogue

Were the opera to end at this point the requirements of the large scale narrative forms as they have come to be defined from the seventeenth to the beginning of the twentieth-century would be adequately fulfilled. We have arrived safely back at the home key and the initial musical material has been recapitulated more than rigorously in this key. All the statutory requirements regarding the closure of extended musical and dramatic structures have been dutifully heeded, if in a somewhat unconventional fashion. If one were sufficiently motivated, one could easily find in the tonal construction of the opera a cadential arch encompassing within its trajectory a number of subsidiary, cadences. The entire first act, for example, constitutes one such cadence: the dominant tonalities of each section outlining an easily recognisable, if modally unconventional, authentic cadence (Prelude *a* - Funeral *B* - ritornello [*a*] - Coronation *e* [G]- Window of Appearances *a*: thus, i - II - [i] - v [^bVII] - i). The second act vacillates, on the whole, between the tonal areas of the dominant and the tonic, eventually resolving to the picardian tonic, A major (Act II, scene 4): its governing tonalities are i - v - i - I. The final act begins on the dominant, e minor (Act III, scene 1), and moves to the submediant, f minor/major (Act III, scene 2), before eventually falling back onto the tonic, a minor (Act III, scene 3) -- it forms the cadence, v - vi [VI] - i. Thus a radically reduced tonal map of the opera might look something like this:

Act I: i - II - [i] - v [^bVII] - i

Act II: i - v - i - I

Act III: v - vi [VI] - i

Of course, to reduce the opera's structure to such a formula is only of limited value and leaves a great many important questions unanswered. Unquestionably one of the most fascinating aspects of this opera is the way it ostensibly conforms to the given laws of narrative structure but at the same time contravenes or disrupts the listener's expectations in this regard. A great deal of what is important in this work can be said to unfold on a moment-to-moment basis rather than arising from conventional narrative structures involving expectations and denial of expectations. It is, nonetheless, possible to identify a moment in which musico-dramatic limitations imposed upon the form by the composer are, in a sense, transcended; significantly, though, this effect is achieved in a manner that is directly perceptible in the surface texture of the music. The moment, which is quite appropriately referred to by Glass as "a central moment in the opera" (Glass 1987, 186), occurs not at its end, but at the end of the second act with the shift from the minor to the major mode in the opera's home key. This reversal of the given musical order coincides, of course, with Akhnaten's (and Nefertiti's?) moment of religious insight in the Hymn to the Sun. The resolution to the minor key and the recapitulation that occur in the Ruins scene (Act III, scene 3) are merely a return to things as they were before, not a realisation of things *as they could be*. Thus closure is provided, and we are even encouraged to wish for it by the visions of decadence provided by

the composer at the beginning of the final act (the Family, Act III, scene 1), but we are explicitly denied the full depth of satisfaction, of fulfilment, of having overcome material and human obstacles, that are ordinarily commensurate with it. In short, we are left thinking "if only...", as opposed to "at last!"

Other important structural events are, in a similar way to the shift from minor to major in the Hymn, directly discernible in micro-structural terms: this is the case which the thrice repeated Prelude music, with the chaconne ritornellos, with the other music in the "ground" or home key of A minor, and with those sections of the opera that modulate away from this key, but which invariably refer back to it either manifestly or latently. As Glass himself puts it, "the feeling of A minor is almost always there somewhere": in his book the composer refers to the *Village Voice* critic Leighton Kerner's remark "that the key of A minor envelops the opera like a shroud" as "both poetic and accurate" (Glass 1987, 174). To define the significance of the key relations of the opera in a nutshell is difficult and, to some extent, misleading; however, an interpretation I have found useful is one in which A minor is considered the home or "self" key, in the Jungian or transpersonal sense, and E minor is the "(M)Other" key. A useful Buddhist analogy might be the "clear light" of realisation that makes itself visible to the practitioner in the *bardo*, or in-between, realm: like the key of A minor in *Akhmaten*, "[n]o matter how far you wander, the light is only a split second, a half breath away" (Evans-Wentz 1960, 185). Building on Other tonalities, or modulating away from the base of A minor, is delusory inasmuch as the transpersonal view of psychology regards the construction of "otherness" as a questionable pastime. Such a view does not dispute the existence of others, or difference, *per se*; rather it questions the usefulness of our self-constructed fantasies of what other people, or groups of people, are -- i.e., it questions the other in our own minds, not in the world. It should be stressed that this approach to tonality is inextricably tied up with the pervasive problems of this particular opera -- i.e., with the Oedipus question and its relation to the crisis of masculinity, and with the problems of monotheism in particular, and spirituality in general, in a heterogeneous world. The usefulness of detaching it from this framework is, to a large extent, questionable. It is important to stress that Glass has not duplicated this exact approach in any other work, although I will show that he has borrowed certain aspects of it in various works composed since, particularly in the 1980s.

The centrality of A minor/major as the opera's governing tonality, notwithstanding the central position of the shift in mode from minor to major in the Hymn, of course, render the construction of the opera vulnerable to charges of "centralism." There is, of course, a sense in which such accusations are justified. However, the ubiquitous presence of A minor/major, even when it is not the dominant tonality, as, for example, in the numerous bitonal passages, has, paradoxically, the exact reverse effect. The arrival at A major in the Hymn does not, in a sense, constitute an "arrival" but rather a moment of realisation, as it is merely making manifest what was latent from the beginning of the opera. In a sense, then, the centrepiece is not only in the Hymn, but it is everywhere. A useful comparison, and one to which I shall return in my concluding argument, is that of Tibetan Buddhist mandala symbolism. The centrepiece (or *bindu*, Sanskrit) of the mandala circle is, in point of fact, the

reverse of "centralism," as the centre in question is everywhere and encompasses, in enfolded form, all diversity.

Let us now consider the remaining music, as despite the emphatic closure of the final scene, the opera has yet to finish. Having returned to the home key with crushing brutality, and thus fulfilled both the chiselled-in-stone obligations of narrative structure and Amenhotep's (Tiresias') damning prophesy, the suppressed (triple-)subject does not drop down and die, nor does he/she simply acquiesce and disappear, but, in a sense, ends up having the last word, or, at the very least, the last sound. The "puppet pharaoh" Tutankhamen, and his masters, Aye, Horemhab, and the Amon High Priest, go out with a bang in the bombastic recapitulation of the Prelude, but they go out all the same. The Epilogue serves to break the intimidating symmetry we are left with at the end of the third scene by reminding us of earlier events. The patriarchs of the "old" order have not succeeded in erasing the memory of Akhnaten, Tye, and Nefertiti, and thus destroying their spirits -- on the contrary, it is them that we are most likely to remember when we leave the theatre. The explicit purpose of the Epilogue is to make sure that this is the case.

The Epilogue is an encapsulation, or microcosm, of all of the most important thematic material in the opera: so much so that the composer's discussion of this music in his book (1987, 172-175) suffices, to a large extent, as a key to the thematic material of the entire work; it has, therefore, been a valuable point of reference in my own exegesis. This music of the Epilogue comprises four cycles, each containing three sections, which are further divided into three near-identical subsections. In addition, there is a short introduction and what the composer terms a "final resolution" at the end (Glass 1987, 172). The triadic imagery that has pervaded the opera is thus explicitly underlined in this its final part. The overall form of the Epilogue, which could be described as a three-section variation form, can be schematised as follows: ABC A¹B¹C¹ A²B²C² A³B³C³.

The introduction is the most reductive music heard since the opening bars of the opera: a simple pulse of quarter-notes (132 per minute) on e in the cellos, accompanied by alternating low and high extended As, the former played by basses, bassoon, and violas, and the latter by flutes and synthesiser. The initial section (section A) is closely related to the Trilogy theme as it was heard in the chaconne ritornellos (Act I, scene 2; Act 2, scene 4), and, in slightly different form, in the Window of Appearances (Act I, scene 3). It has a similar harmonic foundation (A minor six-four - G six-four - A minor six-four), the only divergence being the second inversion tonic instead of the fifth degree dominant in its final two bars. The sequence is augmented from the earlier four-bar configuration to span eight bars. The first appearance of this section is characterised also by a surly bass clarinet iteration of the descending tetrachord motif from the chaconne (A - G - F - E). The low final note of the tetrachord is juxtaposed with a high note in the flutes immediately afterwards, continuing the algorithmic alternation of high and low initiated in the introduction. Over the three iterations of this section there is a gradual accretion of both musical texture and instrumentation.

In the first repeat of this subsection (rehearsal mark 29), the binary straight-eighths of the violas transform themselves into a configuration that carries through the entire scene: four bars of rising eighth-note arpeggios metamorphose themselves into ascending-descending triplets for two bars before resolving back to their original configuration in the remaining two bars of the sub-section. In every other sub-section, however, the pattern is reversed: in the next subsection, for example (rehearsal mark 30), triplets play the dominant role, in the next straight-eighths, and so on until the end of the Epilogue and, indeed, the end of the opera. A more eloquent rhythmic expression of complementary opposites is difficult to envision: first one rhythmic pattern takes the initiative and the other yields, and then the roles are reversed. The important thing is, though, that the two interweave: the pattern in which triplets are the dominant force is incomplete without the two-bar rising eighth-note pattern in its midst, and vice versa. The nearest visual comparison which comes to mind is the Tao symbol of Yin and Yang. The darker Yin element contains within it the seed of the lighter Yang element, and vice versa. Moreover the pattern is in perpetual motion: the dark conceding to the light and the light to the dark, the "masculine" to the "feminine," and the "feminine" to the "masculine." In the second and final repeat of the pattern, oboe and synthesiser take over from the violas. In the next section (section B) of the initial cycle it is reinforced by clarinets, and in the final C section of the Epilogue (rehearsal mark 57), at the very end of the opera, the pattern is made even more prominent by the addition of an ethereal (or magic?) flute an octave higher than the clarinet, and a piccolo an octave higher still. It is highly significant that it is with this particular rhythmic configuration that Glass concludes the opera -- that the "final resolution" encompasses these opposing rhythmic elements.

The next section (section B) is the oft-repeated "life-span," or "opera" progression, initially stated in the Prelude, and thus present in both of its later reprises, in the second (Act II, scene 3) and final act (Act III scene 3) as well as in the penultimate scene of the opera (Act III, scene 2). In contrast to the initial section, this music represents Akhnaten as his adversaries see him -- the unusually major/minor ambiguity in B flat representing in musical terms the oddity, or "sexual deviant," he appears to be. What I have termed the "life-span" motif -- the motif which signals his crossing into the realm of the Other and also his "rise and fall" -- appears, however, only in the third and fourth cycles.

The third section is that which the composer identifies with violence, primarily because of its presence at the culmination of both of the opera's violent scenes (the Temple, Act II, scene 1; and Attack and Fall, Act III, scene 2). Its full significance extends, however, beyond this definition, encompassing also the exuberant, adrenaline-filled state of mind of those perpetrating the violent act, notwithstanding an explicitly encouraged sexual subtext: because of this last aspect, and because of its coincidence with the fervent vocalese of Akhnaten and Tye in the Temple scene, I have occasionally referred to it as the catharsis, the "*jouissance*," or the "ecstasy," motif. Regarding its appearance in the Epilogue, Glass notes that it has "taken on a lyrical, almost distant, quality, as if death and the passage of centuries (the Epilogue is set in the present) have

softened the violence of those moments, making them almost beautiful" (Glass 1987, 174). Harmonically, the music of this section gravitates around the most precarious (in relation the home key) and threatening tonalities in the opera, A flat and E flat, eventually resolving to the dominant tonal function (initially E minor, and then A minor in its second inversion). The sequence as a whole can be schematised as follows: A flat - C minor six-four - E flat six-four - C minor six-four - E minor/ A minor (hybrid) - A minor six four (first two times). Glass is correct in noting the change in the effect of this music as compared to its earlier appearances: now it is rendered relatively innocuous by the stately tempo of the Epilogue, combined with the elegant re-arrangement of the "catharsis" motif (A flat - G - A flat - B flat - A flat - G - F - e), whose octave jumps in the bassoon (A flat to a flat, and so on) are now redolent of similar jumps in the oboe at the beginning of the Hymn to the Sun (Act II, scene 4). In its third iteration, the final chord of E minor is held for six bars, after which the addition of G sharp (the leading note) nudges the chord onto the more conventional major fifth degree for its conclusion. Each cycle ends with an ascending E major scale played on the flute, that is strongly redolent, once again, of similar ascents by this instrument at the culmination of each cycle of the Hymn to the Sun. Thus, in the final moments of the opera, even the most undesirable aspects of the protagonist's (or protagonists') psyche are incorporated and resolved into the whole: even violence is transformed into an edifying force.

During the course of the initial cycle, the ghosts of the Atenist trinity -- Akhnaten, Tye, and Nefertiti -- appear on the now empty stage. They wander about the ruins and "seem," at first, "not to know that they and their city all are dead and now a part of the past" (Glass 1987, 193). At the beginning of the second cycle they begin to sing; significantly in vocalese -- this was always their domain, and one to which their adversarial "masculine" trinity could never rise. The counterpoint of their earlier trio (Act I, scene 3) has given way to homophonic euphony. Their singing combines the power and penetration -- why not call it the *jouissance* -- of high wordless tones with the elegiac tone that has characterised so much of the music associated with these characters. Both Tye's and Nefertiti's singing are their highest in the opera: in the B sections, the former reaches b flat² and the latter f². Those who have suggested that the problematic Master Narratives of opera are undermined by the predominantly feminine pleasures of the higher register would be absolutely correct in this particular case: women may seldom be allowed to win the symbolic "war of words" but they do have (almost exclusive) access to a greater power, and this power is used to excellent effect in this the final vocal statement of the opera. I am referring here to accounts of opera by Gallic, or Gallic-influenced, poststructuralist music critics such as Abbate (1991 and 1993) and Poizat (1992). For Abbate, "the overwhelming sound of female operatic voices" creates a resonance that transcends the vicissitudes of the misogynistic narratives within which they are entwined (Abbate 1993, 254). Two central ideas of the poststructuralist criticism that should certainly not be scoffed at are Barthes's catch-phrases "the pleasure of the text" and "the death of the author." Both of these ideas are highly questionable when taken to their formalist extremes -- i.e., ignore cultural context, ignore plot, ignore who the author is, and simply

home in on the pleasure of the voice -- but when combined with more context-sensitive procedures they can offer valuable new insights on the works to which they are applied. According to Abbate, there exists "a realm beyond narrative plot, in which women exist as sonority and sheer physical volume, asserting themselves outside spectacle and escaping murderous fates" (Abbate 1993, 253). This "escaping the hegemony of the plot," or, to put it more bluntly, decontextualisation (although it could be viewed as a kind of radical -- with regard to performance context -- contextualisation), is undoubtedly a stratagem many of us employ in order to be able to come to terms with the stories told to us in historical forms which we are simply unwilling to "re-live." Such a standpoint does not, of course, seek to elucidate the entire truth of a work (whatever that might be) -- it is just one of many strategies available to the listener, or "reader," for its interpretation. Glass appropriates this particular modality of musico-dramatic understanding to transform what promises to be just another story of a suppressed Other into a kind of "unspoken" (or "unsung") victory. Glass's hands are, in a sense, tied as far as the dramatic events of the opera are concerned. He cannot rewrite history and have Akhnaten, Tye, and Nefertiti win, as that is not the way that the historical events unfolded. In a sense, however, this is exactly what he does in the music of the Epilogue. The trinity of the sun-worshippers certainly does not have the last word, but it does have the last sound -- or why not call it the last laugh?

In the B section of the second cycle of vocalese, Akhnaten's gloomy "life-span" motif is heard, played on trombones and bassoon and set against a contrapuntal descending line in the horns, only now it is deprived of much of its former menace. Similarly, a faraway (muted) brass fanfare (horns, trumpets, and trombones) is heard in the C section, echoing the violence that was perpetrated to the accompaniment of this music earlier in the opera. Even the clashing dissonance of these instruments, which doggedly assert the C sharp third of A major against the accompanying instruments' C natural, cannot upset the equilibrium of the music as a whole, or dislodge the high c natural³ of the flute/piccolo compound from its exalted position. After two cycles of vocalese, the three voices end on four ecstatic sustained notes: Akhnaten has evidently overcome the "maternal" aspect of his Oedipus complex, not through differentiation from his mother, but through union at the octave (Akhnaten's e¹ against Tye's e²). Moreover, Nefertiti's troubling b¹, from the duet, does not create the dissonance it did earlier in the opera. Significantly, it is not her that changes but her husband. The final chord we hear from them is a triumphant E major (rehearsal mark 51.9): the Other tonality of the opera, which has appeared, apart from in the chaconne sequences, predominantly in its minor guise, is in the final vocal statement of the opera transformed into a major chord. Might we call this a "feminine ending"?

As if to confirm the victory, a duet of horn and trombone states the three central motifs of the opera, beginning with the rising chaconne motif (a - b - c¹ - e¹) in counterpoint with the Trilogy motif (A - G - C₁) -- the music that is "strongly associated with Akhnaten himself" (Glass 1987, 172), but which is also strongly associated with Einstein and Gandhi *themselves* in the two earlier Trilogy operas. As the instrumental cycle comes to its conclusion, there are four double-attacks on the dominant chord (three on E Minor and one on E

major) by the entire orchestra (rehearsal mark 59.5). This is followed by a marked deceleration of tempo during which the plodding "finality" motif is heard (played by violas, bass clarinet, and bassoon), accompanied by three emphatic chord attacks. A final statement of the Trilogy motif, that is highly reminiscent of its appearance in the Window of Appearances (Act I, scene 3), becomes, according to Glass, "the key that turns the lock, setting the ending firmly in A minor, the "relative minor" of C major, the key in which *Einstein* began" (Glass 1987, 175). The lock in question is, in tonal terms, the second inversion voicing of the "finality" motif: now it is heard in root position, and it is, as a result, considerably more "final" than in its earlier appearances. With the lock successfully picked, "the double doors of the horizon" swing open to the accompaniment of a double chord attack. This is followed by a much elaborated flourish of the flute line from the Hymn, reinforced now by the entire wind section, which in turn yields to three final resolute chords, the last of which is comprised solely of the note A -- significantly, it is articulated in three separate octaves (A, a, a¹).

The final image of the opera is of the funeral cortege of Akhnaten's father, Amenhotep III, ascending to the heavenly land of Ra. The three protagonists are now fully aware that they are no longer alive, and, thus, are ready to follow in the wake of the funeral procession. This final act of reconciliation is highly significant: liberation from the Oedipus complex -- be it the Buddhist or the Freudian version of it -- can be achieved only by remedying both its "maternal" and "paternal" aspects. Union with the Mother is a necessary measure in the process of liberation, but complete liberation can only be achieved after union with the Father has also taken place. In the final verse of vocalese, Akhnaten achieved union with the Mother at the octave, and thus overcame his incestuous longing for her. However, his acts of iconoclasm in the Temple scene (Act II, scene 1), and his withdrawal into the insular worlds of, first, his holy city (Act II, scene 3), and then, the royal palace (Act III, scene 1), reveal an aversion to the Father that is every bit as strong as his inverse attraction to the Mother.

In order to achieve reconciliation with his father, it is necessary for Akhnaten to make peace also with his "Father religion," Amenism. The vehicle for this reconciliation is the Heliopolitan sun god, Ra, on whom the Atenist doctrine was based, and who was appropriated by the Amenists as an aspect of their own deity in order to elevate the local Theban god to the status of supreme God above all others -- thus, Amen became Amen-Ra. In the early days of the sun-cult the appellation Ra was a synonym for the Aten, but later, when Akhnaten wished to differentiate his own faith as sharply as possible from tradition (i.e., when he was in the full throws of his Oedipal affliction), it was explicitly rejected. Towards the end of his reign, however, it appears that Akhnaten grew more tolerant towards traditional Egyptian religious practices and allowed the appellation Ra to be used once again. Evidence of this is the name of his youngest daughter, Sotopen-re, in contrast to the Aten-derived names of the elder daughters. Thus, in the final moments of the opera, the name of Aten is no more; but Ra, the unifying principle common to both his "Mother" and "Father" religions, is the catalyst that finally allows Akhnaten (Oedipus) to overcome his Oedipus complex. Were one to enter Akhnaten's

mind in the final moments of the opera, as he ascends to the heavenly land of Ra, led by his spouse, Nefertiti, his mother, Tye, and his father, Amenhotep III, it is possible that sentiments similar to the following might cross his mind, that is before even they disperse.

Remember the clear night, the pure clear white light from which everything in the universe comes, to which everything in the universe returns; the original nature of your own mind. The natural state of universe unmanifest. Let go into the clear light, trust it, merge with it. It is your own true nature, it is home.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead, Evans-Wentz translation (1960, 179.)

At first a yogi feels his mind is tumbling like a waterfall;
In mid-course, like the Ganges, it flows on slow and gentle;
In the end, it is a great vast ocean,
Where the lights of Child and Mother merge into one.

The Song of Mahamudra, Chang translation (1963, 178.)

6 AFTER AKHNATEN ...

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the ways in which similar thematic to those explored in *Akhnaten* reappear in different guises in Glass's subsequent projects. In itself this is an inexcusably elliptical overview. It does, nevertheless, serve to illuminate certain pervasive themes embedded within what is, ostensibly at least, an uncommonly heterogeneous body of works. It is with this underlying precept of unity in diversity, or sameness inherent within change, in mind that I will proceed with my discussion.

6.1 Moonlight and divided houses

6.1.1 *Mishima*

In 1984, the year of *Akhnaten's* debut performance, Glass collaborated with director Paul Schrader on a biographical film on the life of the Japanese writer Yukio Mishima, known aside from his stark portrayals of post-World War Japan, also for his dramatic ritual suicide after an unsuccessful attempt to seize control of Japanese military power. The story of Mishima's life is interspersed in the film with extracts from his books, the distinction between the two being at times deliberately vague: as his portrayal in the film suggests, Mishima himself confused fiction and reality all too easily.

There are a number of points of convergence between *Akhnaten* and this project, the most obvious of which is the centrality of religious/philosophical subject matter: in this case Zen Buddhism. Musically, the textures are similar to those found in *Akhnaten*, if more jagged, more dogged, and more chromatic. The zig-zagging dissonant strings at the beginning of the film, during the Temple scene, which I will discuss in more detail shortly, and at its end, are

quite similar in nature to the listless broken chords heard in the transition between the first appearance of the Trilogy motif and Akhnaten's coronation (Act I, scene 2), as well as the turbulent "wind" motif from the Funeral scene (Act I, scene 1). Moreover, the tubular bells theme that immediately follows these, although more austere and more threatening than the chimes that mark the dawning of the new religious order in the Window of Appearances (Act I, scene 3), accompanies both Mishima's and his protagonists' moments of spiritual apotheosis, of non-dualistic realisation, in a manner similar to its counterpart in *Akhnaton*. Otherwise, the musical approach seems to have been dictated largely by the subject matter of the film, the driving ostinato descents punctuated by quasi-military snare drum figurations and pounding toms providing a fitting musical complement to the self-destructive activities of the Japanese author's private militia. The music is characterised also by a marked expansion of Glass's repertory of compositional techniques, with harmonic sequence and melodic imitation -- procedures that appear in many of his mid-to late-1980s works, including the tone poem *A Descent into the Maelstrom* (1985), the song cycle *Songs from Liquid Days* (1985), the Doris Lessing opera *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* (1985-6), the *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* (1987), and the score to the Godfrey Reggio film *Powaqqatsi* (1988) -- appearing for the first time in his post-student music.

Aside from their music, *Akhnaton* and *Mishima* are linked by the prominence of solar and conflagratory imagery. Interestingly though, Glass prefers a lunar to a solar analogy, reflected rather than direct sunlight, for the subject matter of this film and the chamber opera which I will shortly discuss, *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1988), his intention presumably being to differentiate the disturbing, yet at times profound insight that characterises Mishima's writing from the more humane insight of Akhnaten and Nefertiti.

After doing the piece about Gandhi and then about Akhnaten, I felt I had to balance that somehow. I did the film about Mishima partly because it was so dark and I didn't understand it. I also began to work with Edgar Allan Poe for the same reason. And I began to think, in a very simple way and maybe a poetic way, that some things are about the sunlight and some things are about the moonlight. Poe is always about the moonlight. *Akhnaton* was about the sunlight. And I was curious about this other side, because the dark side is like, in the Star Wars movie, the "dark force." It's a hard one to think about. (Glass quoted in Clark 1989, 202.)

One of the most striking extracts in the film is taken from Mishima's book *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, the story of a young Zen acolyte, Mizoguchi, who, disillusioned with the hypocrisies of his teachers, humiliated at the hands of the occupying American forces, and frustrated after a series of unsuccessful sexual encounters, becomes neurotically obsessed with the building in which he studies. In an extract which is central to the film the dualistic nature of the temple, a symbol of the protagonist's tortured self (Yourcenar 1986, 37), reveals itself to the Buddhist apprentice in anticipation of his first sexual encounter. Accompanied by Glass's slippery string arpeggios, the entire building divides itself into two near-symmetrical halves. This is followed by an autobiographical anecdote in which the voluptuous and clearly androgynous figure of Guido Reni's St. Sebastian becomes, to syrupy string

quartet accompaniment, the young Mishima's first consummated object of desire. In a skewed interpretation of Buddhist philosophy, Mizoguchi finally seeks oneness with the aesthetic object, his oppressors, and the opposite sex by reducing to ashes what has become to him the symbol of all duality; the temple of the Golden Pavilion. The acolyte, although, like Mishima himself, sadly lacking in Buddhist compassion, had done no more than to take his Zen Buddhist teachings literally, the burning of the temple being a religious act comparable to the burning of the Buddha's holy images as firewood, or the fulfilment of the *Rinzairoku koan*; "When ye meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha! When ye meet your ancestor, kill your ancestor!(...) When ye meet your mother and father, kill your mother and father!(...) Only thus will ye escape the trammels of material things and become free" (quoted in Mishima 1959, 216). The image of the burning temple returns at the end of the film as Mishima commits ritual suicide, or *hara-kiri*, by self-disembowelment. The temple merges into the setting sun and the joyful music of realisation is heard once again: as Mishima's mother put it, "he finally did something that made him happy" (quoted by Glass in Clark 1989, 202). This music gives way, however, to the theme based on the descending tetrachord which is so prominent in both *Akhmaten* and *Koyaanisqatsi*, where it is associated both with the transpersonal principle and with solar and conflagratory imagery. Here, though, the theme drops down to the tritone instead of the perfect fifth of the root note in its final bar (E flat - D flat - B - A), its dogmatic descent in whole-tones culminating in dissonance rather than harmony; suggesting that Mishima, who aims for a state where there is "no more body or spirit, pen or sword, male or female" (quoted in Schrader 1985), appears to have missed the mark.

6.1.2 *The Fall of the House of Usher*

We encounter another divided house in Glass's setting of fellow Baltimorean Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1988). The two act chamber opera is the composer's second Poe setting, the first being the tone-poem *A Descent into the Maelström* (1985), a piece written shortly after the completion of *Akhmaten* for the Philip Glass Ensemble. In the interpretation of the story by Glass and his co-librettist Arthur Yorinks, friction between the male-female twins Roderick and Madeline Usher (in abbreviated form, Rod & Mad) grows as their attempts at fusion through incestuous sexual union are repeatedly thwarted. Roderick seeks solace in the company of his childhood friend William (Will)¹, who offers him a unity in platonic/homosexual love he is unable to achieve in his tempestuous life with his near mirror image Madeline, but whose influence ultimately only pushes him over the brink towards his seemingly inevitable self-destruction. What follows is a typically Jungian scenario. Roderick buries his twin sister alive (see Figures 11 and 12), only to discover that he cannot live without her. Madeline, an archetypal anima figure who sings in the wordless voice of the unconscious, returns from the grave and,

¹ In Poe's short story this character is not named. Interestingly he was given the name "Philip" in the Hollywood horror film (starring Vincent Price) that was made of the story.

in an increasingly penetrating and unmistakably jubilant soprano voice (no shortage of *jouissance* here), seeks in death the union the couple were denied while living. A fissure which had appeared upon William's arrival at the house widens. The house, interpreted by some critics as a symbol of the divided Romantic psyche (Davidson 1957, 196-207; Hoffman 1972, 295-316), finally collapses to the ground leaving only the sexually ambiguous narrator William alive.

Critics seem to have been almost unanimous in their condemnation of Richard Foreman's American production of the opera, with Peter Davis reiterating the party line in his dismissal of Glass's recent music theatre works as "feeble stuff vigorously promoted by fashion victims and musically illiterate intellectuals" (Davis 1989, 65). *Village Voice* critic Michael Feingold (1988), although less obviously prejudiced against Glass, is in agreement as to the failure of this particular production. As with *Akhmaten*, however, the Atlantic crossing seems to have been a favourable one for the opera, thanks to a committed and perceptive series of interpretations by Music Theatre Wales in Britain, Germany, and Norway. *Musical Opinion* critic Brian Hick praises Glass's music for its "pulsating, intoxicating rhythms and tight lyrical phrases," and Music Theatre Wales's interpretation for its "stunning simplicity and immense emotional truth" (1994, 44). Even those unimpressed by Glass's score, such as *Musical Times* critic Keith Potter (1990), seem to have been taken with the overall dramatic impact of the production. As with so many productions of Glass's operas, successful dramatisation seems to have hinged on a non-realist, symbolic, and, in this particular case, psychological interpretation of the opera's subject matter. Music Theatre Wales's solution to the problem posed by the opera was quite ingenious. The entire stage set functioned as a map of the troubled consciousness of the (dual) protagonist of the opera, with Roderick Usher's alter-ego, the wordless Madeline, rising, by means of a mechanical device operated by the man-servants of the house (its ushers), into the suppressed heights of his unconscious and descending in the same way with increasing frequency and intensity to remind him of her existence.

As usual, Glass's musical allusions in the opera seem to have fallen on deaf (or else musically illiterate?) ears. Even Davis (1989, 65), who claims familiarity with the fragments of Debussy's unfinished opera on the same subject, failed to pick up on an allusion to these in the opening bars of the very first scene. Namely, the music that symbolises the protagonist's dividing consciousness (i.e., his schizophrenia), as well as the zig-zagging fissure that runs down the centre of the house, is similar to, although less elaborate than, Debussy's "*musique qu' imagine R[oderick] U[sher]*" from the opening page of his sketches to *La Chute de la Maison Usher*¹. Debussy's mirror-image chromatic movement from an initial a¹, to its upper and lower octaves, is loosely imitated in the mirror-image voice-leading found in the opening bars of Glass's score, in which the descending line e¹ - d-sharp¹ - c¹ is found in counterpoint to the ascending line g¹ - a¹ - b-flat¹ - c¹. Not an obvious allusion, but one a keen musical ear (no literacy needed) would presumably spot given the knowledge

¹

This page of Debussy's sketches is reprinted in Robert Orledge's (1982, 113) recent study of the French composer's work in the theatre.

of the common subject matter of the two operas. There appear to be other allusions to Debussy's opera in the score, but it is unfortunately beyond the scope of the present discussion to elucidate them convincingly here.

Another more surprising allusion, which no-one seems to have noticed either, comes in the very next scene of the opera, when the visitor to the house, William, knocks at its door. The twice-iterated percussive introduction, of three eighth-note triplets followed by a quarter-note and then by a half-note rest, reverberates throughout the music of the entire scene, providing a fitting musical metaphor for the impact the guest is to have on the house and its inhabitants. This is a quite transparent allusion to the Alan Parsons's "progressive rock" composition, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination: Edgar Allan Poe* (1976)¹; more specifically to the second section of the suite on *The Fall of the House of Usher*, "Arrival," where a similar triadic rhythmic configuration announces the arrival of the visitor. As seems to have been the case with the possible allusion to Michael Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* in *Akhnaton*, and the more obvious tribute to David Bowie's and Brian Eno's *Low* in Glass's recent symphony of the same name (*The "Low" symphony* [1992]), the purpose of the allusion seems to have been to return the complement, so to speak. These are all works that have blurred the boundary between popular and concert music, and, arguably, that have been influenced by Glass in some way. In Alan Parsons's recording, the influence of the American composer is clearly perceivable in the very section quoted by him, "Arrival," the agitated high arpeggios of which are strongly evocative of similar passages in Glass's works of the minimalist period. The influence of contemporary concert music is otherwise strongly in evidence in Alan Parsons's recording, the orchestral introduction to the *Usher* suite going some way beyond the sometimes naive sounding efforts of non-classically trained musicians to emulate concert music², although in this case it would be incorrect to speak of imitation or allusion -- Parsons's *Prelude* is competently written concert music. A shame, then, that the "musically trained" seemed to have missed the allusion.

In terms of the compositional techniques employed, the opera is characterised by the prominence of rhythmic structures to an extent that rivals even the composer's propulsive rhythmic music of the 1970s. The quasi-additive compound rhythms heard as William enters the house for the first time (Act I, scene 2) are perhaps the most elaborate of these. In the same scene there is a use of bitonality reminiscent of French music of the first half of the twentieth century: in particular, Glass's teacher at Juilliard, Darius Milhaud, comes to mind, although Debussy would arguably be an equally pertinent point of reference. This bitonality is achieved by stacking thirds on top of one another to form extended chords and then simply pulling out the bass notes to leave a new chord based on the upper notes of the construct (and vice versa). Interestingly, though, Glass keeps the upper and lower chords separate from one another throughout, using instrument group timbre as the distinguishing factor, in a similar way to various sections of *Akhnaton* (for example the Hymn to the Sun [Act II, scene 4]). An example of an extended chord used in this

1 Recently reissued in remastered and partially remixed form (Mercury 832 820-2).

2 The same principle applies reverse-wise of course.

particular scene (Act I, scene 2) is an eleventh chord constructed from the notes B, D, F-sharp, A, C-sharp, and Eb, which is, nevertheless, divided timbrally and by means of voicing into two distinct tonal areas:

E-flat
C-sharp
A
F-sharp F-sharp
D
B

The use of such chords is the primary means of modulation or bitonal quasi-modulation in the opera. There is also some use of non-triadic chord structures, but not to the same degree as in some of the composer's subsequent works. Melodically too, the music is more eclectic than previous works with the predominantly tonal/modal lines of these giving way to a more extensive use of chromaticism. The final scene is a case in point, where dissonant passing-tones sung by Madeline are passed on to the orchestra, which alternates in the final passages of the opera between whole-tone and chromatic (twelve-tone) scales, before giving in to a dizzy, chromatically tinged, scalar descent that signals the collapse of the house. As he did with *Akhnaten's* Hymn to the Sun, Glass has taken the opportunity of setting an English text to explore music-text relations, with considerable use of word-painting as well as more indirect musical invocations of the opera's exclusively male dialogue.

One of the most memorable musical sequences in the opera, and one which links it to *Akhnaten*, and a number of subsequent operas, in a quite unmistakable way, is the music that is heard whenever a music box William brings Roderick as a gift at the beginning of the opera is played. The box, which is adorned in the Music Theatre Wales production with a revolving pair of male-female twins (likenesses of Roderick and Madeline), causes Roderick excruciating pain whenever it is played and invariably summons Madeline from the depths of his unconscious. As the twins on the music box revolve so does Madeline, who is situated precariously above her brother's head, her high wordless soprano tracing infectious, at first predominantly diatonic but as the opera progresses increasingly chromatic, melodies, in contrast to her brother's and William's dry declamatory ruminations. Now the interesting thing here is the music played by the box, which comprises two four-bar harmonic patterns, both of which are almost *too* conventional minor tonic to dominant seventh progressions in D minor, spiced up, in their later manifestations, with two-against-three polyrhythms and chromatically spiked arpeggiations. This music stands out, however, precisely because it is the only conventional functional harmony in the entire opera. It stands out also because of the second and third bars of the sequence, which are not so conventional. These are distinguished by a transition evocative of *Akhnaten's* bi-sexual theme, in which the major submediant transforms itself into its minor counterpart. The first entry of Madeline in the opera is over this sequence (see Example 30).

EXAMPLE 30

clar.
bassoon

p

Mad.

Rod.

mp

AN ILL - NESS HAS COME OV - ER

ME CER - TAIN SOUNDS

SCREAM AT ME THE LIGHT OF A SIN - GLE CAN - DLE BURNS MY

EYES CLO - THING FEELS LIKE POINT - ED

Over the tonic she sings the expected fifth, but as the major submediant moves to its minor counterpart, Madeline comes in on the wrong note, on D natural instead of the D flat. A low bassoon urges her, with its own minor note, to submit to the order played out in the initial cadences, but she refuses to comply. As the music continues, Roderick complains to his friend William of his tortured mental state: "certain sounds," he laments, "scream at me." No sooner has he finished uttering these words than Madeline hits two high and prolonged *f*²s.

In this music, the problem of otherness is enacted, as it is in the Prelude music of *Akhnaten*, via a major-minor coincidence, those conventionally incompatible opposites of Western harmonic practice. Madeline's refusal to accept her lot as his perfect minor Other, to acquiesce to his meticulously constructed rational order, can be interpreted, of course, from both intrapersonal or psychological and interpersonal/social standpoints. It could be construed as illustrating the discrepancy between our imaginary constructs of others and reality. Contrary to Roderick's wishes, the parts are not easily reduced into a coherent whole -- they have a life of their own, and an annoying asymmetry that just will not go away, no matter how hard one tries to ignore it or force it into compliance. But what do we make, then, of Madeline's consignment to the non- or, perhaps, pre-linguistic domain of the sign. One interpretation is this: Madeline, whether a real person or a Jungian anima figure who is the unconscious Other the protagonist has constructed in his mind, has been effectively disempowered in linguistic terms. She has been robbed of meaning; or so those who have done the robbing presume. In part, of course, her representation in these terms is a critique of an state of affairs which has been a pervasive part of Western culture for some time. Interestingly though, Madeline, *à la* Abbate, turns out to be far more powerful than her twin brother, the sheer resonant power of her voice rendering Roderick and his friend's "civilised discourse" barely comprehensible and, in parts of the opera, almost superfluous.

This same scenario is re-enacted several times during the course of the opera, each time with more disturbing results. Significantly, it returns also at its end, when Roderick dies in his sisters arms and the house in which they dwell collapses in on the luckless couple. Here, however, the closure we have come to expect and to wish is denied. The cadence sets out from its tonic, D minor, towards the submediant, B-flat major, but the shift to B-flat minor and to the dominant, A major, is replaced by an extended and emphatic F major, the third degree being the final chord of the opera.

The opera is perhaps best understood as a critique of dualistic consciousness, be it personal or cultural, the (imagined) distinction between symbol and sign functioning in the same way as it did in the Temple (Act II, scene 1) and Family (Act III, scene 1) scenes of *Akhnaten*, respectively, to denote the dangers of prioritising one over the other -- in this case, Kristeva's (1981, 62-73) masculine-encoded symbol over the feminine-encoded sign¹.

1

An inverted version of Poe's story is Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights*, where the protagonist Catherine is the loquacious, "civilised" self, and Heathcliff the suppressed Other.



FIGURE 11 Roderick lowers his alter-ego, Madeline, into her grave (Music Theatre Wales production).

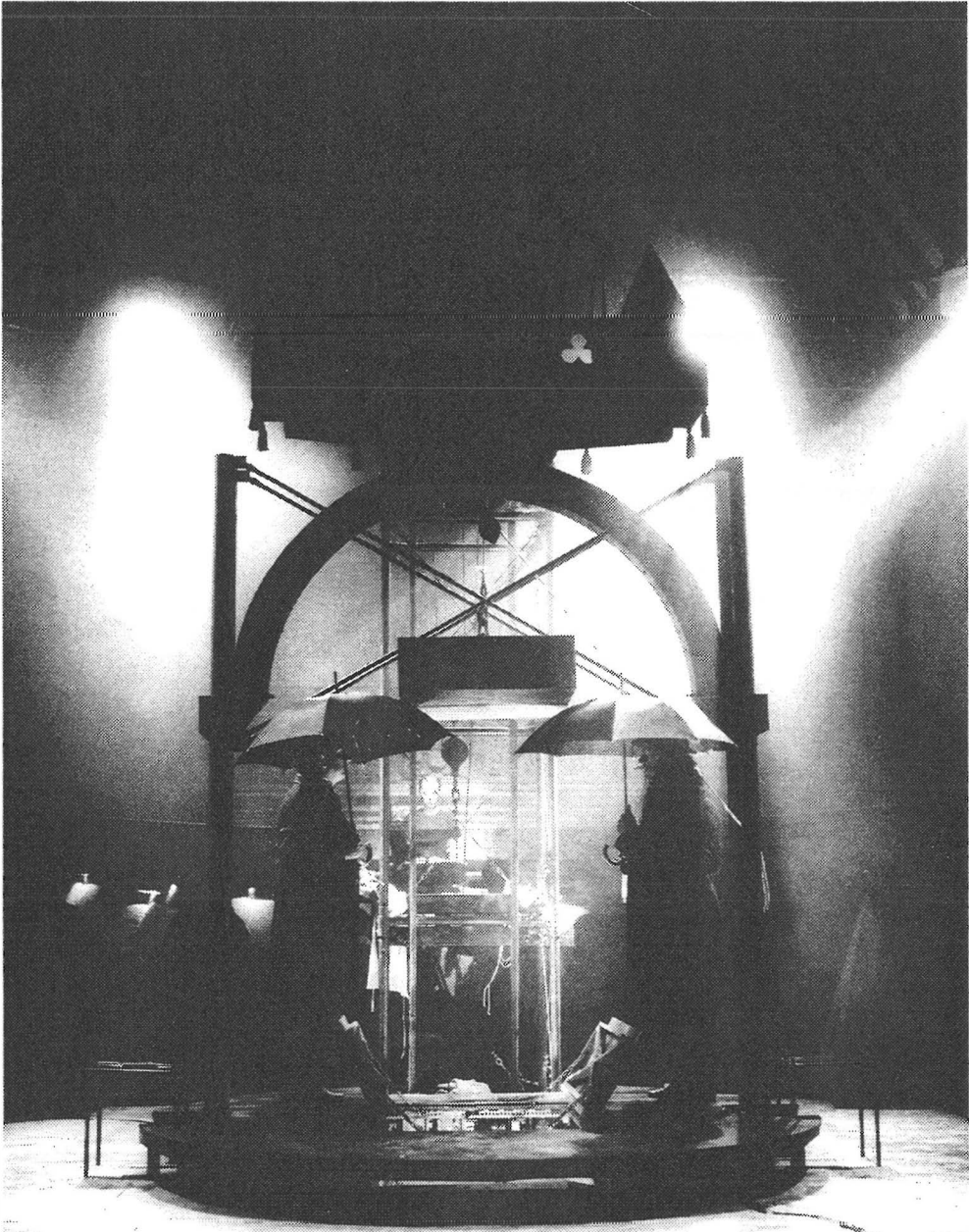


FIGURE 12 The “ushers” of the House of Usher prepare to lower the burial stone (Music Theatre Wales production).

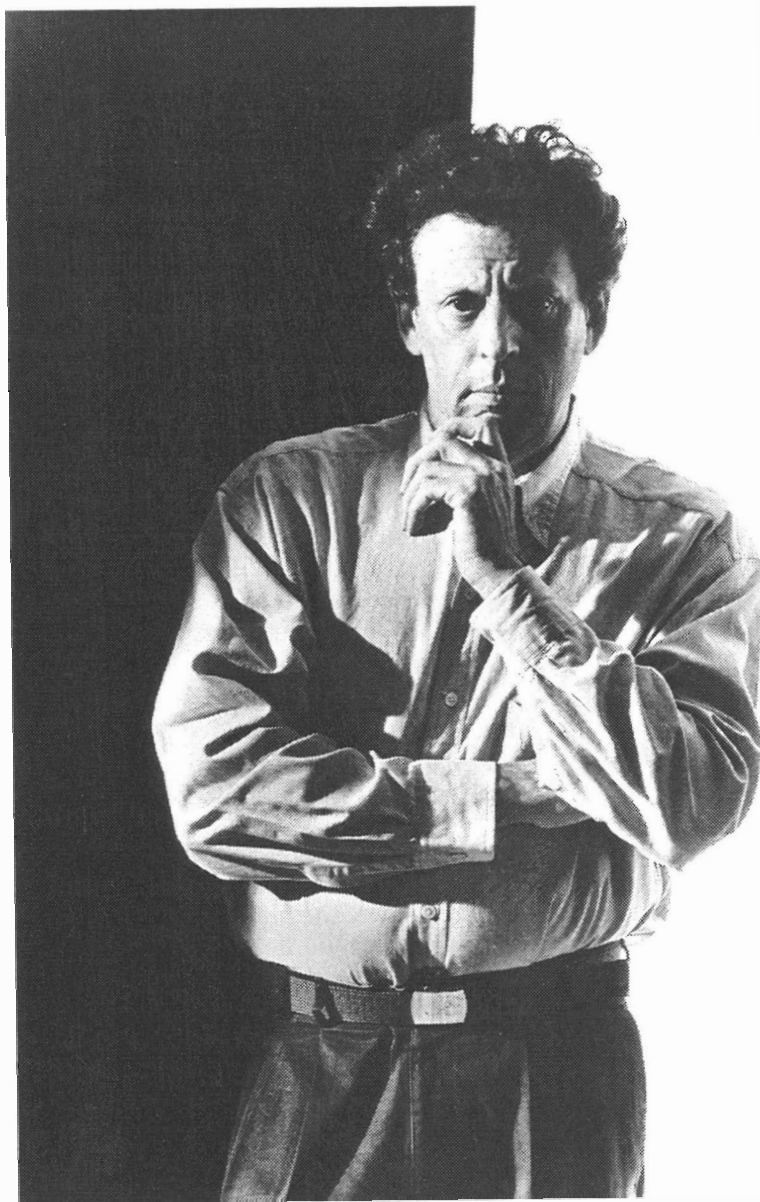


FIGURE 13 A recent photograph of Philip Glass (Tom Caravaglia).

6.2 Images and English

One of the curiosities of Glass's compositional oeuvre is the song cycle *Songs from Liquid Days* (1985). As librettists on the project, Glass invited some of his friends from the New York artistic community, including Laurie Anderson, Suzanne Vega, Paul Simon, and David Byrne. The choice of collaborators seems a wise and, in some ways, quite an obvious one: these are some of the most accomplished song writers and performers of their time. If Glass wanted to rescue a largely forgotten chamber music genre from extinction, he could hardly have chosen a better qualified collaborative team. Unfortunately, though, the project falls some way short of its potential, due mainly to the fact that its participants are not allowed to do what they do best, perform. One can sense the personality of the librettists seeping through into the songs, but not unfortunately to the same extent as in the work done under their own names¹. His subsequent exploration of the genre, the collaboration with fellow Buddhist practitioner Allen Ginsberg, *Hydrogen Jukebox* (1990), is without any doubt a more successful one, the most obvious reason being the conceptual unity provided by a common librettist for all of the songs. The Ginsberg song cycle is more spicy, too, as a result of the physical presence of the poet himself in several of the arrangements and the obvious affinity of the two collaborators in terms of world view.

Songs from Liquid Days is interesting, however, for other reasons. What Glass would term "a theatrical subtext" of a very general kind can be perceived in various aspects of this work; perhaps it is an unintended one, but it is one that connects it with other projects, such as *Akhmaten*, in a very interesting way. If one were looking for what Kramer (1990a) calls a hermeneutic window into the work, an obvious place to start is with the sleeve of the CD recording. This point of departure is all the more obvious because the image of the composer constructed here is one that has been used by Glass's publishers, Dunvagen Music, in publicity material since the time of this recording (see Figure 13).

The front sleeve of the CD recording of the song cycle is adorned with a black and white photograph of Glass sitting cross-legged, the right half of which is in negative. The border between the positive and negative halves is jagged as if ripped in half. The composer's head is immersed in the darker, positive side while each hand reaches into its opposite half: thus, the right hand is sunk into negative portion and appears dark on a light background, while the left hand penetrates the positive portion and appears light on a dark background. Glass is casually dressed, in jeans and a checked shirt composed of light and dark cubes; the cubes, by dint of a fortunate optical illusion, are similar in appearance on both sides of the divide. The only colour is provided by the word "Glass" which is transparent with a turquoise outline: an obvious pun on the composers name, and one which has been exploited in earlier works, such as the recording *Glassworks* (1981), with its prismatic sleeve

¹

Check out, for example, Suzanne Vega's *Fifty-Fifty Chance* from her album *Days of Open Hand* (1990, A & M Records 395 293-2), where Glass's tight string arrangement and Vega's terse but intimate vocal style complement one another beautifully.

imagery, and the ballet compilation *Glass Pieces* (1983). Such joviality, although familiar in popular and jazz idioms (consider Miles Davis's recordings "Milestones," "Miles Ahead," and "Miles in the Sky"), is effectively taboo in the classical or "serious" music world, which often seems to be sadly lacking in self irony. This is an impression the semi-defaced photograph of the composer confirms, the rip that traverses it from top to bottom calling into question both the heroic subjectivity of the Romantic artist and the clinical objectivity of his Late Modern counterpart.



FIGURE 14 Biunity expressed in the subtle body through the two psychic channels, *Ida* (female) on the left and *Pingala* (male) on the right (Khanna 1979, 69).

The photograph is capable of supporting a number of different interpretations, which can nevertheless be gathered together under the umbrella of what, again borrowing our terminology from Kramer, might be referred to as the structural trope of "bi-unity" or "non-dualism." I choose these terms as they are ones that are commonly used in Tantric Hinduism and Buddhism to refer to imagery very similar to that which I am discussing here, but also because of their non-specific or abstract nature. While there are important discrepancies between Hindu and Buddhist interpretations of this iconography, a common factor of both is the centrality of gender coding. The two principles, in Sanskrit *ida* and *pingala* (Tibetan: *rkyan-ma* and *ro-ma rtsa*), the lunar and solar channels, are loosely encoded in "feminine" and "masculine" terms as the divine creative principles (see Figure 14). This kind of stereotyping may not appeal to current sensibilities, and it is noteworthy that a direct association of the sexes with the principles is usually avoided in contemporary interpretations, the binary pair being equally well applied to any self/other distinctions, not just to the archetypal male-female dyad. The important thing from the standpoint of the present discussion, however, is that some degree of harmony, reciprocity, and interpenetration between the principles is a prerequisite for any creative act to

take place. This is not a monolithic or exclusive order but one in which the self/other interface, on both intra- and interpersonal levels, is a guiding precept. When used in meditation, iconography such as this is intended to release the practitioner from the shackles of dualistic thought patterns. Since the male-female dyad is probably the most pervasive known to humanity across cultures, it is one that is deliberately exploited as a kind of key enabling the unlocking of numerous other binary constructs.¹

A different interpretation of the iconography, which is not explicitly tied to Tantric Buddhism, might draw attention to those definitions of postmodernism that place an emphasis on "double coding" or the conceptual dyad "both/and," as opposed to "either/or"; or as Charles Jencks more specific definition puts it, "the combination of Modern techniques with something else" (Jencks 1986, 14). If, as Huyssen (1986) has done, one identifies the other that has been excluded from Modernism as being encoded in feminine terms, then it follows that art which is both Modern and something other than Modern might be viewed as being encoded in polymorphous, bi-sexual, or androgynous terms. This is a position, albeit a controversial one, that Ihab Hassan (1985, 123-124), among others, has taken, and one that the widespread presence of androgynous imagery from the late 1970s through to the early 1990s, from *Akhnaten* to Boy George to Laurie Anderson to the films *Orlando* and *The Crying Game*, would appear to confirm. The androgyne is understandably suffering from a bad press of late, with dyadism being experience by some as every bit as disturbing in its implications as monadism. This is especially true when patriarchally weighted dyadic models have been excavated from the history books with as much thoroughness as in Jean-Jacques Nattiez's (1993) recent study, demonstrating that androgyny in itself is no guarantee of equality -- if indeed Wagner's was a true androgyny and not simply an androcentric fetish. It might, therefore, be more prudent to replace bisexual with multisexual in looking for ways of defining a cultural phenomenon that includes a wide variety of genders or sexualities. Of course, the symbolism I am discussing here is essentially non-dyadic. Dyads are held up for contemplation, an archetype of which might be the male/female, or, perhaps more appropriately, the self/other, dyad, but only for the purposes of calling them into question.

Musically the recording once again bears witness to the expansion of the composer's palette of techniques, with harmonic sequence, interpretational polytonality, melodic imitation, and abundant exploration of music-text relations all coming into play². The score is rife with historical references, one of the most obvious being the dotted rhythm of the song "Open the Kingdom," which those familiar with the *affektenlehre* of the late Baroque period, and

¹ See Khanna 1979, 69; Govinda 1960, 155; and Thurman 1994, 74-75.

² I have discussed the opening song of the song cycle, "Changing Opinion" (text by Paul Simon), in considerably more detail in my article in the *Journal of the Finnish Musicological Society*, "Feminiinisyyden ja maskuliinisyyden androgyyninen avioliitto Philip Glassin musiikissa" (Richardson 1994b). A detailed discussion is not considered necessary here, as many of the issues I addressed regarding this work are more convincingly illustrated in my discussion of *Akhnaten*.

particularly with J.S. Bach's cantatas, will recognise as being a common signifier of the majestic and the royal.

One of the explicitly stated aims of the project was, according to the composer, to learn more about text setting in English, in order that his future operatic projects might benefit in some way from the experience. With *Einstein on the Beach* comprising entirely numerical and solfège recitations, *Satyagraha* in Sanskrit, *Akhnaten* predominantly in Akkadian and Ancient Egyptian, and the Robert Wilson collaboration *the CIVIL warS* (1983) in Latin, this can be recognised as a valid concern. Portions of *The Photographer* (1982) and *The Juniper Tree* (1984) and are in English, but as the first of these was fairly minimal, to say the least, in the text department, and the latter was a collaboration with composer Robert Moran, Glass was audibly lacking in expertise when it came to setting texts in his native language. He improved however throughout the 1980s, and recent works such as the song cycle *Hydrogen Jukebox* (1990), and the opera *The Voyage* (1992) are considerably more convincing in this respect than are some of his earlier efforts, some of which hit and some of which miss. It should be remembered that Glass composed a fairly large number of works for choir when writing for the Pittsburgh Public School System in the early 1960s, so he did have some experience in this area: the problem seems to have been with tailoring his still essentially non-dramatic, largely non-narrative musical style to the needs of textual presentation. Glass has become something of an expert at conjuring up moods, but re-learning the more specific inflections of the English language while retaining his own musical identity seems to have, for a time, constituted something of a problem, and one which gave his ever vigilant and ever vociferous critics plenty of ammunition.

Songs From Liquid Days was followed by another large scale operatic project, the Doris Lessing collaboration *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* (1985-86), which boasts a lengthy and elaborate libretto penned by the author herself¹. Musically the opera is made up of similar elements to those found in *Songs from Liquid Days*, an interesting development, however, being the working out of a cadential formula over an extremely protracted timeframe (Swed 1988, 578), in a manner similar to the piece I will shortly discuss, *Metamorphosis* (1988). Glass's affinity with Lessing can be traced to their mutual interest in non-Western philosophical thought, and, in this particular work, to the composer's interest in transpersonal psychology, which is, as I have shown, an implicit subtext also in the Trilogy operas, particularly *Akhnaten*. In brief, the *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* is the touching story of the inhabitants of a planet who, during a very short period of time are forced to come to terms with their own impending extinction. The libretto is a highly philosophical, and largely metaphysical, reverie on what will remain of the consciousness of the inhabitants of Planet 8 after their death as a people. The composer's description of the opera could equally well apply to *Akhnaten*: "basically the piece starts with death and ends with death. But it's how you get to the final point which matters" (Swed 1988, 578). Questions

¹

A second libretto from Doris Lessing's Canopus series, *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five*, has still to be set to music.

such as these have been an ongoing concern of Glass's since *Akhnaten*, and arguably since *Satyagraha*, and they reappear in some guise or other in virtually all of his subsequent music theatre works.

6.3 Solo piano

The piano is an instrument that has been prominent in the minimal idiom almost since its inception, with La Monte Young's *The Well-Tuned Piano* -- a semi-improvisational colouristic meditation in just intonation, which the composer worked on from 1964 until the early 1980s -- epitomising the interest of the school in extended time-frames. The piano as an instrument has always encouraged the use of repetitive patterns, something the late Romantic and French impressionist and post-impressionist composers, from Chopin to Debussy to Ravel to Satie, realised to their advantage. Even Bartók frequently explored repetitive textures in his writing for the instrument. Accessible writing for the piano has, in addition, always interested the broader music listening public. The popularity of Michael Nyman's (1992) score to the Jane Campion film *The Piano* should hardly come as a surprise. Simple, unthreatening melodious music such as this, that people can actually play on their own pianos at home without years of professional training, has always and probably will always appeal to a wide audience.

Glass's interest in the medium can be traced to the end of the minimal period, his *Modern Love Waltz* (1977), dedicated to the librettist of *Satyagraha*, Constance De Jong, being the first piece of the composer's underpinned by an unchanging ostinato pattern. The waltz, which marks the beginning of the composer's fascination with variation form, of which much of the music of *Akhnaten* is an example, is based on a simple alternation of A major and B-flat major chords in the left hand, over which a series of rhythmic and melodic transformations are carried out in the right. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this piece is the exploration of melodic line as a rhythmic device. Melodically implied syncopations and polyrhythms are something of hallmark of the composer's late 1970s and early 1980s style and one that is ubiquitous in all of the Trilogy operas.

The mesmerising shifting modalities and shimmering polyrhythms of the piano "Opening" of *Glassworks* (1982), however, mark the discovery of a style of writing for this medium that has carried over into a number subsequent works. Of the three piano compositions on the "Solo Piano" recording (1989), two are overtly connected with Buddhist subject matter: *Mad Rush* (1981), an open-ended piece (meaning it goes on for as long or as short as you want it to) originally written for organ, was composed for the occasion of the Dalai Lama's first public address in New York; and *Wichita Vortex Sutra* (1988), which can be found with its accompanying poetry recital in the Allen Ginsberg song cycle *Hydrogen Jukebox* (1990), is strongly grounded in Buddhist ideas.

The third piece on the recording arguably embodies the precepts of the Buddhist world view just as overtly as do the other two, although the theatrical origins of the music can be found elsewhere. The piece takes its name from Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, numbers three and four being adaptations of the incidental music Glass wrote for a play based on the short story¹. Numbers one, two, and five are piano arrangements of music written for the acclaimed Errol Morris documentary film *The Thin Blue Line* (1989).

Despite its diverse theatrical and cinematic origins, the various sections of the composition form an integrated whole in terms of key relations, tempos, and harmonic and melodic material. Parts one and five begin with an extremely enigmatic chord sequence which is very difficult to explain in terms of conventional harmonic practice: E minor - G major six-four - C major seventh (no third) - C flatted, or dominant, seventh (no fifth) (or C augmented sixth -- if the B-flat is interpreted as A-sharp) (see Example 31).

EXAMPLE 31

e: i ——— III⁶₄ ——— VI^{maj.7} ——— It VI ———
 C: v / I⁷ ——— I^{7b}₍₅₎ ———

So far so conventional, but what happens next? The answer is nothing. There is a brief pause, then the same sequence is repeated. If the final chord is a flatted, or dominant, seventh then it is in completely the wrong tonal context; if it is an Italian sixth then one would ordinarily expect it to be followed by the dominant or the tonic six-four, which it is not. In fact the dominant is avoided entirely until the third section of the composition (some fourteen minutes later). In truth, the sequence can be said to "resolve" to the Italian sixth, as the preceding chord, G major, is the secondary dominant of this chord. Thus, this can be thought of both as a quasi-modulating bitonal passage *and* as a "geographical sixth" that never quite gets where it was going -- its destination turns out to be where it already is: namely, Italy. This interpretation is confirmed later when the four-chord sequence is supplemented by a fifth and final chord; the Italian sixth now resolves, not to the dominant as we would expect but to a French sixth (see Example 32), thus confirming the stability of what is ordinarily a very unstable chord.

¹ An earlier formulation of this interpretation appears in my "Metamorphoses by Philip Glass: some psychological and ethnomusicological observations" (Richardson 1994a).

EXAMPLE 32

e: i — III₄ — VI^{maj.7} — It VI — Fr VI —
 C: v / I⁷ — I^{7b}₍₅₎ — I^{7b}₍₃₎ —

There is no dominant and, what is more, there is no need for one. Closure is not so much denied as arrived at in the last place you would expect to find it. This apparently conventional harmonic formula is what Cone (1982) would call "a promissory note": a cadence that promises some future event, some future resolution. Glass is in a sense, however, taking functional harmony as we know it and standing it on its head, as the secondary dominant combined with the simple interruption of the sequence on the geographical chord provide quite a satisfactory resolution where one should not be. The effect could be compared to those paradoxes where a question is inverted, becoming an answer. The geographical chord is a very definite question in conventional harmonic procedures, one that begs for an answer in the shape of the dominant tonal function. But this is omitted, the answer being not where you are trying to get but where you are; or, to be more accurate, in the act of asking itself. All of which imparts to the music a hazy, otherworldly feel, somewhat akin to a half-remembered dream. The composer is remembering something that once seemed important -- for example, the heroic quest of the (invariably white and male) Western subject as enacted in musical narrative -- but with a subtle twist; one brought about by his forgetting how the story ends, or where it was going, or why it was going there in the first place. If one is to talk about the demystification of the subject, then one should, I think start by looking at the musical procedures themselves rather than depending on accompanying story lines; this, I believe, is an indisputable example of such a procedure.

The same scenario is played out in terms of the larger structure of the piece. During its five sections the promise of a cadence is gradually realised; the initial sequence expanding in the second part into the two-phrase sequence; a: i - III - VI - ^bVII; VI - ^bVII - i. Melodically too, a transformation of sorts takes place, the melody of the opening parts, a haunting thrice-repeated minor third descent followed by a fourth minor third that sets out from the fifth of the flattened seventh degree, expands in the second part into a slightly more melodious line, which in turn gives way to gently rippling arpeggios. In the third section, the harmonic pattern is augmented over as much as sixteen bars. Here we find the first appearance of the unflatted leading-note in the composition, which signals some transitory semblance of conventional functional harmony, and, some fourteen minutes late, the dominant that was promised in the opening bars of the composition (d: i - III - iv - ^bII - ^bVII V - i; D: I - III). Interestingly too, we find the same Schubertian major to minor shift

that marked the moment of apotheosis in Akhnaten's Hymn to the Sun, the moment in which the A minor home key of the opera switched to A major and the opera's protagonist sang for the first time in the language of the audience, transcending, in a sense, the barriers of his own time/space locus. Is a similar shift of point of view, a similar moment of insight implied here? This would seem to be the case. This part of *Metamorphosis* stands out as well because we find here the most complex rhythm of the composition so far; a two-against-three polyrhythm which simultaneously states the fastest and the slowest tempos of all five parts: 132 quarter-notes per minutes in the right hand against 88 dotted quarter-notes per minute in the left. Number four contains the strongest cadential resolution yet (c/C: i - I - iv - ^bII; i - I - ^bVII - ^bII; i - V⁹ - i), extended now over as much as twenty-four bars, and, significantly, in the key that was insinuated in the opening bars of the first part. This part also contains a number of changes of metre, polyrhythmic passages, violent syncopations, and some of the darkest chordal timbres (i.e., the lowest notes) of the piece. As well as working out a cadential formula in additive terms during the course of the piece, offering with each section a more elaborate formulation of the initially stated pattern, the key relations of the parts themselves trace a cadential arch (e: i - iv - ^bvii ^bVII ^bvii ^bVII ^bvii - vi/VI - i) of the same kind Gregory Sandow, in his discussion of the final scene of *Satyagraha*, describes as "a gigantic "Amen"" (Sandow 1982, 95). This is no mere abstraction, however, known only to the composer and a few perceptive musicologists: the changes in question are directly perceivable on what Chomskyan transformative/generative analytical paradigms might refer to as the surface structure of the music, or what Schenkerians call its foreground.

Having arrived back at home base, however, the closure one ordinarily expects of a final movement is denied. Firstly, the favoured form for many of the large scale structures found in Glass's music is usually either the plagal, or else a melodically (or modally) based cadence, as opposed to the more conventional perfect cadence, with the attendant tension caused by leading-note- or tritone-based voice-leading. Secondly, the passage to which we are returned is the same as that heard in the opening bars of the piece, but now in its second transformation, with the Italian sixth/tonic resolving to a French sixth/tonic right from the outset. Thus, there is no resolution. Or rather, in order to find resolution it is implied that one must come to terms with contradiction, with lack, with ambiguity -- dare I say it, with a reality that encompasses both the "masculine" and the "feminine."

It seems likely that Glass will continue to compose and perform solo piano works and that he will continue to find audiences who are responsive to this type of performance. His latest work in this idiom, *Now So Long After That Time* (1994), inspired by John Ashbury's poem *No Longer Very Clear*, is perhaps one of his most convincing to date¹. In the solo piano he has found a clarity of expression and, with no intermediary standing between composer and audience, a communicative immediacy that sharply distinguish this kind of

¹ My gratitude to Juhani Nuorvala for drawing my attention to this work, and for having a tape recorder at hand when it's debut performance (played by Christopher O'Riley) was broadcast in connection with WNYC's 50th Anniversary Gala (13, June 1994).

performance from the rigmarole of staging large scale operatic works or touring with the Philip Glass Ensemble.

Touring by myself is very easy. With the ensemble there is about two tons of equipment to transport as well as eleven people. But when I travel by myself, there is no tour manager and I carry no music -- it's all in my head. (Glass quoted in Dalton 1989, 2.)

6.4 Anima-animus scenarios

6.4.1 *The Voyage*

Perhaps Glass's most ambitious operatic project since the Trilogy operas is the collaboration with the *M. Butterfly* (1988) playwright, David Henry Hwang, in *The Voyage* (1992). Commissioned to commemorate the 500 year anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the New World, it is actually more of an abstract tribute to the spirit of discovery as personified not only in Columbus's voyage, but also in a Lessing-influenced science-fiction counterpoint to this as well as in the scientific discoveries of the paraplegic physicist Stephen Hawking¹. In this opera, Glass retains the androgynous imagery of the earlier operas, at the same time offering an antidote to the decadence of Poe's divided house and Akhnaten's inward-looking family circle. In an amusing sci-fi counterpoint to the story of Columbus's voyage to the American continent, aliens embark upon a similar voyage to earth. The earth at which they arrive is that of ancient Egypt immediately prior to the first traces of pharaonic civilisation -- thus linking the opera to *Akhnaten* in a very obvious way. Upon their arrival in the New World, Columbus and his crew are greeted by an archetypal Adam/Eve couple, while the aliens and their earth hosts, led by a soprano commander intended, no doubt, to counterbalance the male leading role, indulge in an orgiastic dance of celebration culminating in their (implied) ritual cross-marriage. This theme is returned to later in the opera (in the year 2092) when brother-sister twins from earth, having discovered the remains of the alien spaceship, themselves embark upon a space expedition in search of the alien's planet: awaiting them at their destination are a similar pair of alien twins. Exogamy is finally achieved but with a distinctly incestuous flavour. The opera closes, as does Milhaud's *Cristophe Colomb* (1930; revised 1968), in Columbus's death chamber where the disillusioned explorer confronts his female alter ego, or anima -- in the form of Queen Isabella of Spain -- for the last time. Only after relinquishing his earthly passions and coming to terms with the negative effects of his deeds is he free to embark upon his final voyage to the heavens.

As in *Akhnaten*, triadic thematics play a central role in *The Voyage*, both dramatically and musically. The navigational devices used by the space travellers, for example, are luminous crystals, any two of which, when they

¹

Glass has recently scored an Errol Morris documentary film based on Stephen Hawking's book *A Brief History of Time* (1988).

come into contact, will point the direction home, at the same time producing a three-note chord. The musical foundation of the opera is, moreover, an augmented triad:

It's a fascinating construction -- two major thirds. While composing the score, I discovered that the only way you can resolve an augmented triad is to think of it as two simultaneous tonalities. And it doesn't resolve until the epilogue, where the monks' chorus outlines the augmented triad melodically, finally breaking it apart into two scales, each in a different key. (Glass quoted in Scherer 1992, unpaginated)

The music of *The Voyage* seems to have pleased more critics than is customary for a Glass opera: *Opera* (UK) critic Rodney Milnes describes himself as being converted from a "Glass-atheist" (implying, of course, that he is religiously devoted to the music he actually likes) to an "agnostic" after hearing this opera (Milnes 1992, 1414), and characterises its "vocal lines" as "more rewarding than ever before" (ibid., 1416). *Herald Tribune* critic Edward Rothstein writes of "tender, lyrical music that is among Glass's best" (Rothstein 1992, 20). The score of the opera is characterised by increasingly complex, although never gratuitously difficult, harmonic and rhythmic writing, the latter of which appears to have caused the singers some major headaches in rehearsals (Guinther 1992, 41); long meandering melodic lines (at times reminiscent of similar lines in *Satyagraha*); Glass's characteristic euphonious diatonicism splashed with more dissonant hues than ever before; proficient and effective handling of voices; rich orchestral textures; and an engaging rhythmic drive that keeps the whole thing turning from beginning to end. Mirroring the subject matter of the opera, Glass's music is here more extroverted, more outward going than in earlier works. If it lacks the spartan charm and the power of *Einstein on the Beach*, the exuberance of *Satyagraha* and the poignancy of *Akhnaten*, the additions I have mentioned offer at least some compensation to the listener, and one that evidently pleased enthusiasts of historical opera.

6.4.2 Cocteau

The anima, who we met earlier as Madeline and Queen Isabella, is reincarnated once again in Glass's adaptation of Jean Cocteau's film *Orphée* (1991) as "La Princesse" -- also referred to in the film as "Orphée's death." This character is such a clear example of the "anima"¹ (the dark, or unconscious, side of male consciousness) that she is used to illustrate the concept in M.-L. von Franz's (1964, 188) article on the subject edited by Jung himself. If the female characters who appear in Glass's operas seem objectionable stereotypes, then they are, at

¹ Jung refined the concept of the anima throughout his career: some of the most important writings are Jung 1953, 296-340; 1959, 54-72; and 1963, 104-133. Important feminist commentaries on Jung's theories appear in the writing of June Singer (1976, 20-31; 1983, 89-95). See also Mary Anne Warren's article "Is Androgyny the Answer to Sexual Stereotyping?" (1982, 179 and 183) and Alice Echols's "The New Feminism of Yin and Yang" (1983) for critiques of both of these writer's positions.

least, transparently so, the intention being that they be viewed primarily as what they are, in dramatic terms: products of their male authors' minds. Moreover the recognition of such negatively charged constructs is intended, from a Jungian standpoint, to prevent the subject from projecting them onto people and things in the real world; i.e., from projecting male constructed stereotypes onto real women, who are emphatically *not* anima figures. Jung has been widely criticised on two counts with regard to the anima-animus dyad: that he is considerably more enthusiastic towards the integration of the ("feminine") anima into male consciousness than he is towards the integration of the ("male") animus into female consciousness; and that the male-female dyad imposes an inflexible dualism onto gender constructs, and in so doing ignores genders and sexualities that fall outside of the dichotomy. Both are valid critiques. A post-Jungian position, however, might view the constructs as more symmetrical, on the one hand, and more flexible, on the other, than Jung himself originally envisioned them as being. Jung, after all, was primarily seeking to remedy the polarised gendered realities of the culture in which he lived. Here I have adopted the terms as a useful analogy rather than as a model. An equally valid analogy might be with the female *dakinis* (Tibetan; *khadomas*) of Tibetan Buddhism¹, whose purpose is to escort the practitioner to higher levels of consciousness through the realisation of their ultimate transparency, their ultimate grounding in emptiness. Like Jung's anima, the female figures of the Buddhist pantheon -- be they subsidiary *dakinis*, the head *dakini* or *Vajra Yogini*, or the feminine aspect of the Buddha himself, *Tara* -- are not considered to be external beings but are merely aspects of the practitioner's mind. As with Jung's archetypal figures, the purpose of these is to promote non-dualism. Such figures are of course unnecessary in a world in which there is no duality; in which people no longer dichotomise. There might be reason to believe, however, that we have not arrived at such a world just yet, in which case *dakinis*, *Taras* and animas, *Buddhas*, *Bodhisattvas* and animuses, not to mention copulating *yab-yum* couples, still have their work cut out deconstructing the fantasies of otherness it seems to be our predilection to construct.

The way these relations are realised musically is similar in *Orphée* to the other operas I have discussed. The duet of Orphée and the princess (Act II, scene 3) is replete with minor-major clashes, which are enacted over a harmonically ambiguous vacillation of F major six-four and B-flat major changing to B-flat minor. As with so much of Glass's recent theatrical music, there is considerable use of word painting. In the scene I have mentioned, some of the most abrasive clashes coincide exactly with the protagonists' direct textual references to one another using the personal pronouns "*nous*" and "*toi*." Moreover, in the same scene, the word "*miracle*" causes an abrupt change of key to a sparkling D major. The score is otherwise characterised by considerable use of counterpoint (in part, bitonal or -modal), long lyrical lines, chromaticism, extended tertian chords, and modulation or quasi-modulation exploiting these chords. There are also the obligatory musical allusions, this

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For a comparison of Jung's theories and Tibetan Buddhist ideas see Radmila Moacanin's *Jung's Psychology and Tibetan Buddhism* (1986). See also J.J. Clarke's *Jung and Eastern Thought* (1994, 119-140).

time to Gluck's *Orfeo*, in the flute solos at the beginning of the piece, a feature that seems to have been carried over from Auric's original score to the film (Swed 1993, 51).

A similar scenario in reverse could be said to be enacted in a second Cocteau adaptation (a trilogy has been promised), *La Belle et la Bête* (1994). In this music-theatre(-cinema) work -- the music is performed and sung in coordination with a projection of the original Cocteau film -- the inbreeding/outbreeding binary pairs found in *The Voyage* return once again, and they are once more deconstructed. Beauty must overcome her aversion to Beast before she can find fulfilment. Only when her earthly love and her heavenly love merge, however, is the true nature of the Beast, as opposed to the Other she has constructed in her mind, revealed. At the end of the work, the blissful couple ascend to the heavens entwined in one another's arms where they finally dissolve into the ether, the boundaries between subject and object, self and other, male and female finally dissolving. As was the case in *Akhmaten* and *The Voyage*, the blissful union of the individual subject with reality is predicated upon his/her realisation of the illusory and transitory ontological status of his/her centred subjectivity.

Of late, Glass seems to be turning more to abstract, or not so abstract, instrumental music, with a concerto grosso, a new solo piano piece, and a fifth string quartet all recently completed and performed, as well as a new symphony in progress, a two-movement work based this time on his own thematic material (Glass, interview with the author, 9 September 1993). There is no sign, however, of the composer's interest in the theatre diminishing: he clearly feels that this is where his calling lies.

... I think it's important to remember that I'm really more a theatre composer than anything else. If you look at the music, the percentage of theatre music to concert music is very very high indeed. There are a few string quartets and a few symphonies, but even *Itaipu* (for SATB chorus, 1988) is programmatic in a way, and so was *The Canyon* (for orchestra, 1988). There are very few pieces that aren't related to subject matter in some way ... (Glass, interview with the author, 9 September 1993.)

That this interest has some foundation in pragmatism as well, certainly does not preclude sincerity, as some have suggested. Being responsive to the needs of one's audience and to the realities of the world in which one lives are just as much a part of being an artist as are lofty ideas.

Theatre music has always had a larger audience. I mean, I can go to a city and do five or six performances of a new theatre work but only one concert. I mean, you're talking about four or five times in terms of audience, there's no doubt about that. By theatre we mean any work that is interactive with other art forms; it could be dance, it could be film, it could be a combination of dance, film, and music or all these things. There's a strong movement of that generally in the world. I think it's partly the powerful stimulus of visual imagery in our time. That's one thing, and another element is that the whole entertainment business in this country has been dragging everything along with it, including people who supposedly write "serious" music. But twenty years ago you could scarcely find a composer who was writing an opera, and today you can't find anyone who isn't writing an opera [laughs]. It's amazing what's happened in twenty years [*Einstein on the Beach* was written in 1975].

Twenty five years ago people routinely said that opera was dead. I don't know anyone who isn't writing an opera right now, and finding producers. And I think there's a tremendous exhilaration for composers to find that audiences really like, they really enjoy this. I mean, last year, the new opera that was done in Chicago, the Bill Bolcome opera -- that was sold out. And the John Corigliano opera, or my opera [Orphée] -- there's so many. John Adams gets big audiences, and then younger composers writing in music theatre can readily find audiences for music theatre works. There's simply a big audience. Although interestingly, I'm still writing symphonies and string quartets ... but I kind of do it for the fun of it in a way. (Glass, interview with the author, 8 September 1993.)

7 IN-CONCLUSION: PERSPECTIVE IN NEW MUSIC AND NEW MUSIC IN PERSPECTIVE

As much as opera doesn't want to be part of the rest of the world, it inevitably has to be (Glass quoted in Coe 1981, 1).

In the introduction to his book "A Year From Monday," John Cage says, "here's to the day when America becomes just another part of the world, no more and no less." Well I could say the same about European art music; here's to the day when European music becomes just another part of the world of music, no more and no less. (Glass, interview with Juhani Nuorvala, Stockholm, September 14, 1986.)

A central concern of this dissertation has been to relate the musical procedures employed by Glass to their ideational origins in the dramatic contexts of the individual works, in postmodern culture, in feminist theory, and in Tibetan Buddhism. I have argued that gender thematics not only occupy a privileged position in the works in question but appear to be at the centre of the composer's self-world-view as expressed in these works. A particularly useful point of reference in this regard has been the analogy of Tibetan Buddhist ideas with some of the ideas expressed in the works. I word of warning is, however, in order. Glass has very rarely, if ever, attempted to represent specific Buddhist ideas in music; he has not, for example, set Buddhist scriptures to music, nor has he, in *Akhmaten* or anywhere else, sought to invoke the metaphysical using musical means. If some sense of the unrepresentable is conveyed by means of strategies such as musical paradox, that is a different thing. It would be extremely misleading to categorise the music he writes as "religious music" in any conventional sense of that concept, and it is noteworthy that he goes to great lengths to avoid any such characterisations. This is most apparent when he is discussing those colleagues in Europe and America who write in a similar style, but who have explicitly associated their music with religious ideas. Glass acknowledges that the "new tonal" composers, everyone from "Andriesson to

Górecki to [him]self," were all a part of a "reform movement in contemporary music" (Glass, interview with the author, September 9, 1993), but he is also very careful to identify the separate socio-cultural realities that inform their respective approaches. The Eastern European "new mystic composers" were, according to Glass,

... very much on their own track. And I think that that had to do with that kind of spiritualism that was reacting against the very depressing social situation that they had come out of. There's a lot to be said for that. And in the West we weren't reacting against society in that strong a way.

JR: Although the American minimalist movement was associated with the "spiritual awakening" of the sixties to a certain extent.

PG: Yes, but not really. Less so than with Pärt: I mean, these people actually dedicate their pieces to the glory of God and stuff like that! I mean, you don't find Steve Reich doing that.

JR: How about Terry Riley?

PG: Well Terry's a hippy [laughs], though that's a different thing. Terry's basically a reconstructed hippy from the West coast.
(Glass, interview with the author, September 9, 1993)

Even in *Akhmaten*, Glass's only opera that explicitly deals with religious subject matter (although it is noteworthy that current Egyptological opinion considers its protagonist an atheist), the composer claims no privileged insight into matters pertaining to the metaphysical. In fact a specific agenda of bringing out the relativity of that conventionally invested with transcendental status can be identified in this opera and many of its composer's other works of the 1980s. In this respect, deconstruction might still be recognised as an ongoing concern, even in those works that specifically deal with questions of representation. Postmodern music composition as expressed in Glass's musical style of the 1980s sanctions the use of representation, narrativity, and memory; just as long, that is, as one remains vigilant as to the groundedness of these potentially destructive modalities in human imagination and culture. The difference between this and previous views is a subtle but important one, and one that can be illuminated by comparing two American composers who have brought ideas from Buddhism into play in a recognisably Western, and, ultimately, American, context: John Cage and Philip Glass. The approach of the former is in part inspired by Zen Buddhist philosophy/psychology, while that of Glass is correspondingly influenced by Tibetan Buddhist philosophy/psychology¹. I use Buddhism as an analogy because I know it has influenced the respective approaches of both these composers, but it is important to keep in mind that these ideas tie in with other nascent ideas. It could be argued that Cage, as well as many of his contemporaries, such as the Canadian composer/scholar Murray Schafer, made it his primary concern to bring to light, and, to a certain extent, call into question the historical constructedness of received ideas about art, and about life as experienced through art. Such a concern is inextricably bound up with the American cultural milieu of the post-World War years, and with the realities of multiculturalism as experienced in that country. If from the

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I am disregarding the metaphysical/speculative side of Buddhism here because it does not bear on the questions I am addressing.

European perspective such ideas take on a threatening appearance, it is not surprising: it is the hegemony of our culture as grafted onto American art and life that was and is the most prevalent received truth experienced by American artists, and it is, therefore, the one that comes under the strongest fire -- just as American popular culture comes under fire in Europe, so European "high" culture does in America. There is, however, an ambivalence here that should not be overlooked, and one that is much more in evidence in Glass's music than in Cage's, but from which the latter was never entirely able to free himself. These composers are highly trained in compositional procedures developed in Europe, and their fundamental assumptions regarding the position of the artist *vis-à-vis* society are still unmistakably conditioned by European ideas.

Buddhist-tinged deconstruction became a form of aesthetic-cultural critique for American composers (everyone from Cage to Oliveros), one that undermined not only Eurocentrism but also any other monolithic point of view. Cage pulled the mat out from under conventional modes of representation, from European-derived procedures as the only way of composing "serious" music, and from the art/life dichotomy. Glass's position can be regarded as post-Cagean inasmuch it recognises the inevitability of representation arising, whether the artist wishes it to or not, and he is therefore willing to engage in dialogues with conventional modes of representation. The very existence of a dialogue, however, robs the conventional of its monolithic status and infuses it with a new significance. This viewpoint could be compared with Lyotard definition of the postmodern, according to which it "puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself (...) search[ing] for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to present a stronger sense of the unrepresentable" (1984, 81). If there is a spirituality in Glass's music then it is one that partakes of emptiness; one that can be found in the gaps between representations as much as in the representations themselves; one that is not to be found in the sign or the symbol but in the dynamic interplay between the two; one located not only in what Baudrillard¹ refers to as the simulacra but in the emptiness onto which they are projected. The only drawback with Lyotard's definition, as quoted above, is that it does not take into account the very definite pleasure experienced by postmodernists in the new mode of expression they have discovered, the immediacy of which, the *jouissance* of which, the sheer visceral pleasure of which was certainly in the early years of the style almost its *raison d'être*, but in more recent transformations has been complemented by other modalities as well. If minimalism was music that celebrated Barthes's "grain of the voice" as concert music of the twentieth-century seldom has done, then the newer developments, as represented by *Akhnaten*, try to remember what the voice was saying, and, if they do not like what they hear, are ever willing either to allow the voice to reflect back on itself, or else simply fall back into forgetfulness. Given such a quicksand ontological foundation, the production of new images (be they characters or tonalities) may appear precarious; indeed, the subject's death is an ever-present possibility, although seldom menacingly so as in the Late Romantic/Modernist world view. Existential angst is an extremely rare

¹ See Baudrillard's *Simulations* (1983).

condition in Glass's music. What may appear to some as a constant preoccupation with death is certainly not a morbid death-fixation but rather an affirmation of life if one understands the philosophical precepts under which the composer is operating. A certain degree of (non-Orwellian) "doublethink" would appear to be required in maintaining the simultaneous virility and vacuity of the subject; it should not be forgotten, though, that this is essentially a non-dualism, as its specific agenda is to avoid dichotomising between the life and death of the subject. Glass's subject is not dead, he/she is merely, metaphorically speaking, on life-support.

Here the Buddhist concept of "mindfulness" is a useful tool; to borrow a useful dictum from the Tibetan Buddhist teacher and scholar Sogyal Rinpoche, this mode of thinking involves not only remembering but also remembering that one is remembering¹. Images are acknowledged but so is their grounding in the strictly relative domains of the historical, the cultural, and the biological -- those domains musicology has been telling us for years to ignore. Of course, if one is heavily invested in the stories a culture is telling, then there appears to be a great deal to lose from such an encounter; if, on the other hand, one somehow falls outside the compass of these stories, or experiences them in some way as oppressive, or else simply wishes for a more panoramic perspective, then there is much to be gained. The following quotation epitomises Glass's "mindful" approach:

I look for those things that unconsciously we aren't allowed to do, and it's very very difficult to do that because it's like trying to catch yourself thinking. Our normal way of thinking is the hardest thing to see. If we can only discover our own patterns of thinking, then we can maybe think in a new way. So a lot of my musical thinking has to do with this way of thinking. (Glass, interview with Juhani Nuorvala, September 14, 1986.)

This self-conscious (in a positive sense) Buddhist ethos is close, of course, to the postmodern idea of reflexivity. Compare, for example, Rinpoche's dictum, "[r]emember to remember, when you remember" (Rinpoche 1994, x) with Umberto Eco's (1984, 67-68) colourful description of two lovers' encounter in the postscript of *The Name of the Rose*, who in an age of lost innocence can still profess their love but only with the aid of quotation marks -- borrowed in this case from Barbara Cartland. They have, nonetheless, succeeded in conveying their sentiments, albeit with the aid of the semiotic strategy Charles Jencks (1986, 14) has termed "double-coding." Of course, Glass is not, on the whole, taking the products of popular culture and simply superimposing an ironically tinged layer of meaning: much of his music is explicitly concerned with learning to see the products of Western "high" culture in a new way; from a contingent, ambivalent, and decentered rather than a monolithic vantage point -- wherein lies a clue to the controversy over this music.

Given the ambivalent foundations of the composer's musical style, it should come as no surprise that the post-Cartesian consciousness of Glass's

¹ See Sogyal Rinpoche's foreword to transpersonal psychologist Charles T. Part's *Living the Mindful Life* (1994, ix-xi). See also Rinpoche's own *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (1992, 56-81).

characters themselves frequently comprises disparate and even contradictory elements. This is perhaps not true of Gandhi in *Satyagraha*, an opera the composer himself describes as an "idealisation" of the Mahatma (Glass, in Blackwood 1985). Akhnaten, however, is the physical embodiment of ambivalence, possessing as he does both male and female sex characteristics. More important, however, are the contradictory facets of his personality: he is allowed to be *both* a visionary *and* a madman, *both* a family man *and* a sexual deviant, *both* an egalitarian *and* a despot, *both* a feminist precursor *and* a misguided patriarch. Although capable of profound religious insight (as in the Hymn), he vacillates, as many of us do, between extreme arrogance on the one hand (in the Temple), and blind self-absorption on the other (in the Family). Many of Glass's other theatre works deal with similar composite, as opposed to monochromatic, characters: Einstein in *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) is both valorised as perhaps the greatest scientific thinker of our time and taken to trial as an advocate of the nuclear bomb; Eadweard Muybridge in *The Photographer* (1982) is both the slayer of his wife's lover and a singularly innovative thinker; Yukio Mishima in the film *Mishima* (1984) is a perceptive writer and someone bent on his own and others' self-destruction; and Christopher Columbus in *The Voyage* (1992) is, once again, both a visionary and someone whose deeds caused a great deal of suffering to others. In dealing with the present crisis of masculinity, to which feminism has drawn our attention in recent decades, I would argue that it is insufficient simply to hold up paragons of the new, revised edition of the perfect man. Similarly, pointing the finger at those who have offended in this regard, without drawing attention to their more admirable, or at least innocuous, qualities, is just another way of patting ourselves smugly on the back and saying "look how far we have come." This kind of dichotomising, grounded in the Cartesian fallacy of a centred subjectivity, from which the essence of the human soul (which is considered intrinsically good or bad) emanates, can be seen as a way of forgoing the responsibility of serious critical self-examination. If we see others as comprising disparate parts, then it follows that we too might be. Women and minority groups, who have often had to negotiate their way between their own point of view and the dominant view of a culture are generally well acquainted with such ambivalences, but for many men stepping outside of ourselves is something to which most of us are unaccustomed and which most of us are unwilling to do. The most urgent task, then, of "men's studies," for want of a better term, and perhaps of art which deals with these questions, is not to seek out misogyny and other forms of discrimination in others, but rather to locate the other in ourselves that is still perpetrating these deeds on a day-to-day basis and bring him into view. To this end, of course, it is essential to locate the bastions of masculine self-congratulation in one's own culture which it is forbidden to call into question, and try to work out how they are put together; it is here that one is most likely to find incongruences. Another good place to start looking is with those representatives of a culture who seem to make a dominant, established or institutionalised group angry for some reason (Glass has managed to do this for three decades now, without even trying), and from whom the representatives of this group feel compelled to differentiate themselves as sharply as possible. The obvious thing to ask in such cases is

what is making these people so angry -- invariably one will find that it is more than just syntax that is at stake.

How, then, does Akhnaten fit in with all of this. As we have seen, this is a man who challenged his culture's received ideas of masculinity (among other things), who, as the recent Egyptological literature bears witness, to a certain extent challenges our own culture's ideas in this respect, and who ultimately comes to grief because of this fundamental defect in his personality. Although clearly a man, he is someone who appears in the works of art of his time, and certainly in his representation in the opera, to partake of certain qualities we conventionally think of as feminine or female. I should stress that Glass let out a sigh of exasperation on the one occasion I mentioned the word androgyny in my interviews with him, and quickly turned the conversation in a different direction. Whether he would have done this ten years earlier, I have no way of knowing. It is important to remember, however, that androgyny was an idea that was much discussed in feminism, psychology, education and the artistic world in the late seventies and early eighties, when *Akhnaten* was being written, and one that was only really starting to fall into serious disrepute, largely due to the influence of post-Freudian French cultural criticism on the one hand, and gay and lesbian studies on the other, as we entered the nineties. I have no doubt that the composer is aware of the sensitivity of the question in the current cultural debate, and of the objections that have been raised in this regard, some of which I mentioned briefly in the previous chapter. And it seems unlikely, were Glass to tackle the same subject matter today, that he would do it in precisely the same way.

Having said that, it is important when voicing any objection to androgyny to state exactly *which* androgyny it is to which we are objecting. In his recent study of the aesthetico-ideological foundations of Richard Wagner's operatic works, *Wagner Androgyny* (1993), Jean-Jacques Nattiez identifies no less than three *androgynies*, a male-dominated one, a female-dominated one, and an asexual one, endorsed by this composer alone (Nattiez 1993, 178 and 288). At the same time he admits that this composer's androgyny "of totality" was contradicted by an androgyny "of ambiguity," espoused by others during the same historical period (*ibid.*, 289). It seems hardly surprising, then, that in searching for a definition of androgyny he is forced to fall back on as non-specific a formulation as "X is to Y as man is to woman" (*ibid.*, 288)¹. Having established that androgyny does not really mean anything, he goes on, in the final pages of his study, to condemn all androgyny (*not* androgynies) unilaterally as "endorsing an absolute utopia," as wishing to "abolish the difference between the sexes," and of denying "the inexorable march of time" in favour of a romantic vision of some lost or future paradise (*ibid.*, 300). All of which is somewhat surprising given Nattiez's familiarity with non-Western cultures through his work in ethnomusicology. It is noteworthy, namely, that ethnologists, such as Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty in her *Women, Androgynes, and*

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A typology of androgynes far more useful than Nattiez's reductive formulation can be found in Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty's *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts* (1980, 290-309). Nattiez's formulation could be improved upon, with regard to many androgynous self-world-views, by adding the qualification, "X contains aspects of Y in enfolded form and vice versa."

Other Mythical Beasts (1980), as well as ethnomusicologists who have studied the phenomenon of androgyny in cultures other than their own¹, while recognising the dangers articulated by Nattiez, are considerably more careful in making generalisations or passing judgements on androgyny *en bloc* than he is. Literary studies of Western culture have, moreover, recognised the expressive opportunities adopting an ambiguous gender persona has offered both women and men who have not experienced their culture's dominant gender binarism as congenial: Carolyn Heilbrun (1964), for instance, draws attention to the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, E.M. Foster, and the entire Bloomsbury group, including Virginia Woolf, as examples of literary figures who have, all in their own way, benefited enormously from defying received ideas of gender roles.

So when Nattiez writes that "[t]here is an irreducible difference between the sexes, and one that no androgyne will ever succeed in transcending" (Nattiez 1993, 301), and, furthermore, bemoans the "effeminate man" or the "woman endowed with male characteristics," he may, biologically speaking, be in the right, but from the standpoint of gender he is in danger of slipping into a biological determinism not encountered in scholarly discourses for some decades. Even the French advocates of *écriture féminine*, who have frequently been criticised on this count, were willing to concede that the style in question was one open to men as well as to women. Difference is, as Nattiez rightly observes, "an inescapable part of our lives" (ibid., 301), but this notion is not limited to the sphere of the biological; the difference of women or men who wish to express themselves in ways excluded by dominant bi-polar cultural norms is every bit as worthy of our defence as is the right to express one's belonging to the sex of one's birth.

I should stress that there are many aspects of Nattiez's study that are commendable: firstly, the undeniable deftness and wit of his argumentation, which very nearly had this reader agreeing with even the most patently objectionable of his conclusions before realising that I had been partially taken in by scholarly sleight of hand; secondly, his raising questions of gender and ethnicity at all when discussing Wagner's music, which is a significant advance on previous studies in this area, many of which have ignored these issues altogether. Nattiez's is not, however, the final word on androgyny and it seems unlikely that it will be the final word on Wagner either. One final point should be made. That is that androgyny and scientific paradigms that Nattiez interprets as being androgynous seem to be objectionable to him more because of their ambiguity than their androgyny: this is the case in his discussions of Freudian bisexuality (Nattiez 1993, 196-209), of the Jungian anima/animus dyad (ibid., 219-226), of Levi-Strauss's structural anthropology (ibid., 248-253), of androgynous feminism (ibid., 258-261), and of deconstruction (ibid., 263-274). The enemies are "liberty and laxity of interpretation" (ibid., 253); "androgynous ambivalence" which "allows one to say what one likes" (ibid., 258); the "Romantic myth of androgyny" which, again, "allows us to say

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See also ethnomusicologists' Marcia Herndon's (1990) and Carol Robertson's (1991) studies of "mixed-gender" in Cherokee, and Hawaiian and Argentinian cultures respectively, for examples of androgynies that challenge oppressive bi-polar cultural orders. And for a broader discussion see June Singer's (1976) discussion of androgyny in various religious and philosophical world views.

whatever we want" (ibid., 261), and hermeneutic "freedom of interpretation ... which is explicitly acknowledged to be androgynous" (ibid., 235). Moreover, he pines, in the final words of the monograph, for "an age of certainties" in which the ambiguities he bemoans have been eradicated entirely (ibid., 301).

The reappearance of androgynous iconography in postmodernism, whether it is found in the music of classically trained musicians such as Philip Glass and Pauline Oliveros, or in popular musicians such as Annie Lennox and David Bowie, or those who are more difficult to categorise, such as Laurie Anderson, has little to do with Romantic nostalgia, totalising Master Narratives, the suppression of difference, or any of the other attributes Nattiez (1993, 260-261) grafts onto it from Wagner's "androgynies." Quite the opposite. What it does address is a problem Jung recognised when he asked; "[i]s God really dead, because Nietzsche declared that he had not been heard of for a long time? May he not have come back in the guise of the superman?" (Jung 1953, 480.) Anderson specifically addresses this question in her *O Superman*¹, but it is a subtext in most of the androgynous manifestations of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The question seems to be, if we are to represent the unrepresentable at all, which is undeniably a dangerous thing to do, might we at least have the decency to grant the figure in question the characteristics of both sexes, seeing as every one of us is either a man or a woman?

Which is not to say that androgynes are entirely without their problems; clearly they are not. What they do, in their postmodern ambivalent guise, imply is that any vision of a shared project or aspiration for all humanity, any idea of "certainty," must, in contradistinction to early views, explicitly take different, even contradictory views into account: it must include "feminine" as well as "masculine" realities or truths. Rather, then, than frowning at androgynes, a wry smile might be more in order -- given that they embody not only the distinctly Modern search for unity, but also the postmodern recognition of diversity. And this, I believe, is the expression Glass has in mind in the opera I have been discussing.

Romantic philosophers and artists certainly did not, as Nattiez on numerous occasions seems to imply, invent androgyny; neither is theirs the definitive androgyny. Wagner's androgynous self-world-view was strongly influenced by the philosophy of Schopenhauer, which in turn was influenced by the few poorly translated Buddhist texts that were available in the West at the time. Romantic androgyny, be it the kind advocated by Wagner, or that found in the pictorial program to Skriabin's tone poem *Prometheus*², can, to some degree at least, be considered a Western Orientalist distortion of the precepts of Buddhist philosophy.

If there is an androgyny in *Akhmaten*, or any other of Glass's works, it is predominantly one of ambivalence, of contingency, and, ultimately, of difference. It does, however, have a less pleasant face; one that the composer readily admits is not so different from the totalising, self-absorbed monster we find in Nattiez's study. We find both of these extremes in the character of

1 See McClary's interpretation of this piece in her *Feminine Endings* (1991, 141-147).

2 See Kristyna Tarnawska-Kaczorowska's article "Aleksandr Skrjabinin Prometheus -- tulen runoelma op. 60" (1989, 12-14).

Akhnaten. The pharaoh paints a shimmering picture in his Hymn to the Sun of unity in diversity; of a world that consists of a multitude of distinct but nevertheless connected entities and life forms. Musically this is portrayed with some of the most tonally ambiguous music of the entire opera: F-sharp minor and A minor/major tonalities state two separate but nevertheless connected arguments, neither one of which cancels the other out. The message is clear: finding unity, order, coherence, Truth, Reason, certainty and all those other much sought after but ever elusive Enlightenment, Romantic and Modern chimeras, is largely a question of point of view, and is ultimately predicated on acceptance of ambiguity, diversity, contingency, and, yes, difference. Akhnaten's bisexual countertenor voice and countenance hint to us that Truth exists only in the interface between different stories. At the same time, his uncanny appearance reminds us of the limitations of phenomenal existence, in which there will always be irresolvable differences. "Emancipation," in its many guises, has been one of the most cherished Master Narratives of Western culture, but one that Zygmunt Bauman has recently sought to redefine from the standpoint of postmodernism:

Emancipation means such acceptance of one's own contingency as is grounded in recognition of contingency as the sufficient reason to live and to be allowed to live. It signals the end of the horror of alterity and to the abhorrence of ambivalence. Like truth, emancipation is not a quality of objects, but of the *relation* between them. The relation opened up by the act of emancipation is marked by the end of fear and the beginning of *tolerance*. (Bauman 1991, 235.)

Coming to terms with ambivalence should not be such a hard thing to do; after all it is all around us. One thing Nattiez's exhaustive search demonstrates is that no matter how hard Western theorists have tried to reconcile opposites, to incorporate the incongruous parts into the whole, to locate certainty, they are always in the final analysis faced with ambiguity. Quantum physics is telling us much the same story. Even the smallest molecules currently known to science are characterised by a fundamental ambiguity: they are capable of behaving both as waves and as particles. If some final unambiguous order exists, we have yet to find it.

When Akhnaten falters, he does so because of his intolerance or ignorance of others; because of his need, on the one hand to pressure an unruly other into conformity, and on the other to shut the realities of this other from his own purview. Defects that are all too human. In the Temple we find him in the full throws of his Oedipal iconoclasm, lashing out at the priesthood of Amen with all of the arrogance of those whose order he is calling into question. Here the patriarchal Word occupies an unassailable position; one that explicitly excludes Akhnaten's and his mother's cult of ecstasy, and one that, in all fairness, begs for a counter-reaction. In the progression from the Window of Appearances, to the Duet with Nefertiti, to the Hymn we find an equilibrium between these two modalities emerging: Akhnaten, his mother, and Nefertiti drift from texted music to vocalese, from cyclical to linear modalities, with apparent ease. In the Family scene, however, the balance is upset, and our protagonist, in the aftermath of his spiritual apotheosis in the Hymn, sinks into complacency. The emphasis on the cyclical modality, on the sign over the

symbol, and the nagging doubt that something untoward may be happening between Akhnaten and his daughters, all forebode the violence that is about to be unleashed. When the advocates of the old order storm into Akhnaten's temple, brandishing the Word as their weapon, they do so with a vehemence that appears justified by their exclusion from the new order. In the end, however, Glass uses historical distance as a device for gaining perspective. The victory of the three patriarchs turns out to be short-lived; it is quickly countered, once again, by the pleasures of the upper register in the final vocalese sung by the Atenist triad. It is highly significant, though, that Glass, like Kristeva (1981), is not content to simply let the gendered semiotic order stand unchallenged. Only when Akhnaten has come to terms with the ambivalence between the world of his father and that of his mother, only when the hegemony of the binary order is revealed in all of its brittle decadence can he achieve his final liberation. So even though Akhnaten's female characteristics are used as a marker to suggest that he may have a broader-than-average perspective, and his ethereal counter tenor voice gives him privileged access to realms of pleasure ordinarily denied to men, realms known only to one other character in the opera, the scribe Amenhotep (who Velikovsky tells us is none other than the famed androgynous seer, Tiresias), it might be more accurate to speak of non-androgyny in this particular case than it is to speak of androgyny, in the same way that non-dualism would be a more accurate characterisation than dualism for many of the structural principles found in this and other of the composer's works.

Musically too, the opera revels in ambivalences: ones conventional tonal procedures tell us must, at all cost, be resolved. These same procedures have, of course, appeared earlier in the history of Western music, and in many other music cultures of the world. What is of interest, though, is not so much the development of new procedures as an end in themselves, but rather the particular combination of procedures found in any given work that mark it as the product of an individual as well as a collective mind. In many parts of *Akhnaten*, Glass retains tonal ambiguity over extended periods of time, feeling no compulsion to resolve them into any single tonal area. This easily becomes an apt metaphor for the state of contemporary music, and perhaps of interpersonal/-cultural relations in general, at the end of the twentieth century. No one compositional approach, no one model can hope to provide the future of music -- no single technique is intrinsically an advance on that which preceded it, and no composer has all the answers; each is merely addressing the specific concerns he or she experience as relevant to where and whenever they happen to be. In this spirit, one might do well to say, "the old complexity is dead, long live the new complexity": whether this complexity is that of Brian Ferneyhough, Harrison Birtwhistle, Michael Finnissy, Milton Babbitt, Meredith Monk, Judith Weir, Madonna, Neil Young, Peter Maxwell Davies, Kaija Saariaho, Joni Mitchell, Györgi Ligeti, Pauline Oliveros, Arvo Pärt, Scott Johnson, Tracy Chapman, Laurie Anderson, Lou Harrison, Björk, or Philip Glass makes no difference -- long live their complexity (and their simplicity).

It is here that I will end my discussion. I am painfully aware of the inadequacies of the map I have provided of my chosen subject, and of my limitations as a cartographer. I have found, moreover, that the particular

subject I have chosen has raised a whole host of methodological questions I had no way of anticipating when setting out on this journey. I feel that I have solved a number of these problems as I have been writing, while others continue to elude me. The most I can hope is that my particular slant on this subject will have raised some new questions regarding the specific phenomenon I have been discussing, and will encourage others to look for solutions in places where we are either not accustomed to, or else are explicitly or implicitly proscribed from, looking for them.

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MASKULIINISUUDEN HEIJASTUKSIA: AMBIVALENSSI JA ANDROGYNIA PHILIP GLASSIN AKHNATEN-OOPPERASSA JA ERÄISSÄ MYÖHEMMISSÄ TEOKSISSA

Philip Glass on aikamme tunnetuimpia säveltäjiä, mutta tästä huolimatta hänen musiikkiaan on tutkittu hyvin vähän. Niissäkin tutkimuksissa, joita Glassista sekä muista minimalisteina tunnetuista säveltäjistä on tähän mennessä tehty, ollaan keskitytty lähes ainoastaan 1960- ja 1970-luvulla sävellettyihin, tyyllillisesti hyvin reduktiivisiin instrumentaaliteoksiin. Glassin ensimmäisestä musiikkiteatteriteoksesta, *Einstein on the Beach*'ista (1975-76), on tosin tehty opinnäytetöitä, mutta paljon huomiota herättäneistä 1980-luvun oopperoista tai laajasta teatterimusiikin tuotannosta ei ole juuri lainkaan tehty tieteellisiä kirjoituksia. Tämä tutkimus edustaa yhtä askelta pyrittäessä kohti näiden teosten perusteellisempaa kartoitusta.

Tutkimuksen keskeisimpänä tehtävänä on Glassin ooppera-trilogian (*Einstein on the Beach*, *Satyagraha* [1980], *Akhnaten* [1983]) viimeisen teoksen, *Akhnaten*'in analysointi ja tulkinta. Oopperan lisäksi tutkimuksessa huomioidaan säveltäjän esteettis-kulttuurillisten lähtökohtien transformaatio 1960-luvun minimalismista 1980-luvun ekspressiivisempiin musiikkiteatteriteoksiin ja tarkastellaan miten *Akhnaten*'in musiikillis-dramaattiset teemat ilmenevät sekä sellaisinaan että transformoituneina myös säveltäjän myöhemmässä tuotannossa.

Tutkimuksen päätavoitteena on siis analysoida Philip Glassin oopperaa *Akhnaten*ia ja tämä tapahtuu kahdesta näkökulmasta käsin: ensinnäkin teosta analysoidaan säveltäjänsä "minä-maailmankuvan" (self-world-view) ilmentymänä ja toiseksi teosta analysoidaan musiikillis-dramaattisena ja -kulttuurillisena ilmiönä.

Tieteellis-filosofisen pohjan tutkimukselle muodostaa saksalaisen filosofi Hans-Georg Gadamerin ja ranskalaisen filosofi Paul Ricoeurin hermeneutiikkaan perustuva viitekehys, mihin on otettu vaikutteita myös

englantilaisen fyysikkona ja filosofina tunnetun David Bohmin havainnointi-kommunikaatio -teoriasta. Perusoletuksena sekä hermeneutiikassa että Bohmin teoriassa on se, että taideteoksen merkitys ei sijaitse yksinomaan teoksessa, eli objektissa, vaan se syntyy vasta teoksen ja sen kokijan, eli subjektin, keskinäisessä vuorovaikutuksessa. Näin ollen taideteoksen merkitystä ei voi pitää yksinomaan "esteettisenä"; myös kulttuuris-historialliset ja ruumiilliset tekijät vaikuttavat teoksen syvään ymmärtämiseen. Musiikintutkimuksessa tämä oletus on vakiintunut etnomusikologian lisäksi siinä tutkimushaarassa, joka tunnetaan nimellä poststrukturalistinen musiikkitiede (tai musiikkikritisismi). Tämän suuntauksen edustajiin kuuluvat mm. Joseph Kerman, Lawrence Kramer, Leo Treitler, Rose Rosengard Subotnik, Anthony Newcomb, Carolyn Abbate ja Susan McClary. Erityisen merkittävää suuntauksen teorian ja metodologian kehittämisen kannalta on ollut feminismin vaikutus musiikkitieteessä viime vuosina.

Vaikka tämän tutkimuksen teoriaan ja metodeihin on vaikuttanut eniten poststrukturalistisen ja sukupuolistuneen musiikintutkimuksen paradigma, vaikutteita on otettu myös muista eri tutkimustraditioista kuten etnomusikologiasta, semiotiikasta, kognitiivisesta musiikkitieteestä, oopperatutkimuksesta ja perinteisestä musiikkianalyysistä.

Teoreettisen tarkastelun jälkeen tutkimuksessa siirrytään pohtimaan Glassin tyylin transformaation vaiheita sekä tarkkailtavan teoksen suhdetta säveltäjän kokonaistuotantoon nähden. Myös tyylin laajempia kulttuurikontekstuaalisia siteitä tarkastellaan ja erityisesti kiinnitetään huomiota moderni-postmoderni kysymykseen. Ennen varsinaista teosanalyysiä ja tulkintaa pohditaan vielä oopperan historiallisia, kirjallisia ja aatteellisia lähtökohtia.

Oopperan päähenkilö on 1300-luvulla eKr. elänyt egyptiläinen faarao Akhnaten, jota luonnehditaan usein maailman ensimmäiseksi monoteistiksi. Akhnaten on ollut keskustelun aiheena kautta tämänkin vuosisadan ja kiinnostus faaraon ei ole rajoittunut pelkästään egyptologiseen kirjallisuuteen: kiihvasta keskustelua ovat aiheuttaneet mm. psykoanalyytikko Sigmund Freudin kirja *Moses and Monotheism* ja Glassin oopperan keskeisiin lähteisiin kuuluneen kirjailija Immanuel Velikovskyn *Oedipus and Akhnaton*. Edellisen teesi siitä, että Akhnatenin uskonnolliset ajatukset vaikuttivat juutalais-kristillisen tradition varhaiskehitykseen ja jälkimmäisen teesi että muinaskreikkalainen Oedipus-myytti pohjautuu itse asiassa Akhnatenin elämänkertaan, ovat molemmat vaikuttaneet Glassin materiaalin käsittelyyn. Näiden teosten lisäksi tutkimuksessa käydään läpi myös laajemmin faaraota käsittelevää kirjallisuutta, aina egyptologisista tieteellisistä kirjoituksista Mika Waltarin *Sinuhe*-romaniin saakka. Kirjallisuuden tarkastelun tavoitteena on tunnistaa piirteitä, jotka ilmenevät myös Glassin rakentamassa Akhnatenissa. Huomattavaa on se, että suurimmassa osassa aiheen kirjallisuudesta, mukaan lukien myös tieteelliset kirjoitukset, otetaan yleensä voimakkaasti kantaa joko Akhnatenin puolesta tai häntä vastaan. Glassin Akhnaten-karakterit poikkeaa "kaavasta" siinä, että hänessä on sekä positiiviset mutta myös negatiiviset piirteensä. Tämä pohjimmainen ambivalenssi tulee myös esille Akhnatenin sukupuolesta: sekä faaraon fyysisissä ominaisuuksissa että hänen ajattelussaan on piirteitä joita pidetään yleensä feminiineinä ominaisuuksina. Myös

musiikissa tämä ominaisuus tuodaan selkeällä tavalla esille (mm. hahmon kontratenoriaäänessä). Samassa luvussa käsitellään myös Akhnatenin uskonnon perusoletuksia ja tuodaan esiin yhteyksiä juutalais-kristilliseen perinteeseen ja buddhismiin.

Seuraava ja keskeisin osa tutkimuksessa on Akhnaten-oopperan varsinainen eksegeesi. Oopperaa käsitellään pääosin kronologisesti, eli esitysjärjestyksessä. Tästä käytännöstä kuitenkin poiketaan aina silloin kun esille tulee tärkeitä musiikillisia, dramaattisia tai kulttuurillis-historiallisia yhteyksiä, jotka vaativat yksityiskohtaisempaa pohdintaa.

Vallitsevana piirteenä oopperan musiikissa on sen tonaalinen moniselitteisyys eli ambivalenssi. Tämä piirre kietoutuu miltei koko oopperan musiikkiin, joskin sen ilmentymismuodot vaihtelevat eri musiikillis-dramaattisissa ympäristöissä. Tonaalinen ambivalenssi useimmissa tapauksissa syntyy siitä, että oopperan vallitsevaan tonaaliseen keskukseen, Amolliin/duuriin, palataan tai siihen viitataan aina säännöllisin aikavälein siitäkkin huolimatta, vaikka musiikki jo "harhailisi" muissa sävellajeissa. Modulaatioita harvoin vahvistetaan vakuuttavalla tavalla niin, että jännitys kahden tai joissakin paikoissa kolmen sävellajin välillä voisi purkautua.

Teoksesta on tunnistettavissa kolme tonaalisten ambivalenssien pääluokkaa: (A) polyfoninen bi- tai polytonaalisuus, mitä esiintyy esimerkiksi temppele-kohtauksessa (II: 1), "Attack and Fall"-kohtauksessa (III: 2) ja Akhnatenin auringon hymnissä (II: 4); (B) homofoninen tai tulkinnallinen bi- tai polytonaalisuus (säveltäjälle ja kyseiselle oopperalle ominaisin näistä kolmesta), mitä esiintyy esimerkiksi hautajais-kohtauksessa oopperan alussa (I: 1), Akhnatenin ja Nefertitin duetossa (II, 2), Akhnatenin auringon hymnissä (II: 4) ja perhe-kohtauksessa kolmannen näytöksen alussa (III: 1); (C) modaalinen eli pan-diatoninen moniselitteisyys, mitä esiintyy harvemmin Glassin musiikissa, mutta Akhnatenin kruunajaisissa (I: 2) tätä tekniikkaa on käytetty.

Dramaattiset rinnakkaisilmiöt ovat oopperan päähenkilön Akhnatenin ja vähemmässä määrin hänen vaimonsa Nefertitin androgyynisissä sukupuoli-identiteeteissä, mutta myös Akhnatenin jumalassa, joka on kaikkien luomuksien "äiti-isä". Oopperan moniselitteinen tonaliteetti myös osittain palvelee kolmen päähenkilön, Akhnatenin, Nefertitin ja Akhnatenin äidin Tyen, ambivalenttien ihmissuhteiden kuvailemista. Akhnatenia, joka Velikovskyn teesin mukaan oli Oedipuksen prototyyppi, kuvaillaan oopperan musiikissa ja draamassa miehenä, joka oli seksuaalisesti kiintynyt sekä äitiinsä että vaimoonsa ja joka oopperan suurimmassa osassa on, näistä kahdesta rakkaussuhteesta johtuen, ambivalenttisessa mielentilassa.

Rinnakkaisuuksia löytyy myös säveltäjän maailmankuvallisissa ja kulttuurisissa tasoissa: ambivalentti mielentila sopii hyvin yhteen postmodernistiseen ajattelutapaan, mikä pitää käsitteparia 'sekä-että' mielekkäämpänä kuin perinteistä 'joko-tai' asetelmaa. Jälkikartesiolainen, osittain harmoniassa olevista ja osittain ristiriidassa olevista aineksista koostunut subjekti tarjoaa sen lisäksi maskuliinisuuden mallin, joka ei noudata perinteisiä kaavoja erehtymättömästä sankarista, ja joka ei toisaalta vähättele maskuliinisuuden positiivisempia piirteitä: Akhnaten, joka on enemmän eräänlainen arkkityyppi kuin todellinen ihminen, haastaa tällä tavalla perinteisiä maskuliinisuuden käsitteitä. Samalla tavalla Akhnatenin ja

Nefertitin symbioottinen, vaikkakaan ei täysin ongelmaton, avioliitto tarjoaa jonkinlaisen vaihtoehdon perinteisiin asetelmiin.

Akhnaten-ooppera edustaa myös toisella tavalla eräänlaista vastakohtien sovintoa. Glass nimittäin käyttää ooppera-trilogiansa viimeisessä teoksessa enemmän perinteisiä aineksia kuin missään muussa aikaisemmassa teoksessaan, joita hän ei mielellään edes luonnehdi oopperoiksi, vaan musiikkiteatteri-teoksiksi. *Akhnaten* kuitenkin täyttää selvästi perinteiset kriteerit oopperan suhteen, samalla kun se tarjoaa myös joitakin selvästi uudennaisia dramaattisia ja musiikillisia ratkaisuja, joista esimerkkejä on jo mainittu edellä. Tasapaino tradition ja innovaation välillä tulee esille ennen kaikkea Glassin sävelkielessä ja oopperan musiikillis-dramaattisessa rakenteessa itsessään. Lisätodisteita tästä on löydettävissä myös oopperan sitaateista ja sävellysteknisistä viitteistä (mm. yhteydet Mozartin ja Stravinskyn teoksiin). Chaconnen käyttö ritornellona *Akhnatenin* auringon hymnissä ja muualla oopperassa viittaa myös selvästi barokin käytäntöön (vaikutteita mm. Monteverdilta ja Lullylta).

Akhnaten-oopperan analyysin ja tulkinnan jälkeen tarkastellaan joitakin Glassin myöhempiä teoksia, joissa ilmenee ja transformoidaan samankaltaisia musiikillisia ja dramaattisia ideoita kuin on esitetty *Akhnaten'issa*. Esiin tuodaan mm. Paul Schraderin *Mishima*-elokuvaa varten sävelletty musiikki, Edgar Allan Poen novelliin perustuva kamariooppera *The Fall of the House of Usher* ja soolopianoteos *Metamorphosis*. Samassa asiayhteydessä tarkastellaan laajemmin Glassin lähestymistapaa, eli miten säveltäjän ”minä-maailmankuva” ilmenee tutkimuksessa käsitellyissä teoksissa ja erityisesti *Akhnaten'issa*, sekä oopperan relevanssiudesta kulttuurisissa konteksteissaan. Esiin nousevat mm. seuraavat kysymykset: amerikkalainen musiikki *vis-à-vis* eurooppalaisen musiikin traditio, buddhalainen filosofia kulttuurikritisminä (mm. John Cagen, Pauline Oliveroksen ja Glassin musiikissa), ja miten käsitellään uskonnollisia aiheita musiikissa (mm. *Akhnaten'issa*) tekemättä kuitenkaan ”uskonnollista musiikkia”.