Transnational Emotions in Times of Conflict: an Afterword

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As the authors of this volume have shown, the entanglements between cosmopolitan sentiment and political conflict call for a transnational perspective, an approach which invites us to question the explanatory value of methodological nationalism without at the same time losing sight of the interests and motives of authors and agents rooted in a particular historical context. In concluding this volume, I return once more to Immanuel Kant's definition of 'orientation in thinking', examined at the start of this volume's introduction. For Kant, cosmopolitanism seems to serve as a moral compass; and as such it remains a driving force for humanity as a whole. An inherent element of cosmopolitan sentiment is passion, a dimension that goes beyond pure reason and one that is communicable across national boundaries. One way to give expression to passion is through aesthetics, where the context of a transnational idiom seems especially relevant. Aesthetic cosmopolitanism becomes *Sinnstiftung*, understood as an attempt to make the experience of changing times meaningful.

In recent decades, much has been written on music as a sphere of national cultural production in nineteenth-century Europe, a perspective which has often been based on thin empirical evidence concerning music's perceived semantic content or function, where theoretical and historiographical parameters seem to have dictated the agenda of research.[1] In order to illustrate how aesthetic cosmopolitanism works in a transnational context, I wish to stay in line with this volume's central theme of war and conflict, using the example of Giacomo Meyerbeer's experience of international crisis during the mid-nineteenth century as well as the public expression of cosmopolitan sentiment generated by his death in 1864.[2]

[1] For a critical response see *Opera and Nation in Nineteenth-Century Italy.* Special Issue: *Journal of Modern Italian Studies,* 17/4, September 2012. Also Axel Körner, "The Risorgimento's literary canon and the aesthetics of reception: some methodological considerations", *Nations and Nationalism*, 15/3 (July 2009), 410-418

[2] On Meyerbeer's response to political events see in particular Anselm Gerhard, "Religiöse Aura und militärisches Geprämge: Meyerbeers Ouvertüren und das Problem der rein musikalischen Form", in: Sieghart Döhring / Arnold Jacobshagen, eds, Meyerbeer und das europäische Musiktheater. Laaber: Laaber, 1998, 201-230, 203. On the international reaction to his death see Axel Körner, From Hindustan to Brabant: Meyerbeer's Africana and Municipal Cosmopolitanism in Post-Unification Italy", *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 29/1 (2017)

Meyerbeer was the Prussian father of French *grand opéra*, a German Jew with an italianised first name, equally at home among the social elites of Paris and Berlin, director of music at the Prussian court with residence on the Pariser Platz, just next to the Brandenburg Gate.[3] Commenting on Meyerbeer's capacity to combine German techniques of orchestration with Italian vocal tradition through French melodramatic stage works, his contemporaries regularly remarked upon the cosmopolitan language of his works, which had the capacity to communicate across different national cultures.[4] Undoubtedly, some critics and composers did not like this aspect of Meyerbeer's success, most famously Richard Wagner and Robert Schumann, but also Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy.[5] Meanwhile, Meyerbeer's *grands opéras* were the works most frequently performed on the stages of nineteenth-century Europe, leaving a lasting legacy on techniques of orchestration, conducting and dramatic form.

In December 1863, while completing his opera on Vasco da Gama, *L'Africaine*, Meyerbeer wrote to his wife that the new year was unlikely to bring peace.[6] At the time the entire world was following the events of the American Civil War, shocked to see a nation of brothers killing each other in the hundreds of thousands. In Italy likewise national Unification had resulted in civil war, with the former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies still under the siege of Piedmontese troops. Civil war also raged in Mexico, where Archduke Maximilian of Austria would assume the imperial throne, only to be executed three years later. Closer to Meyerbeer's home in Berlin there were uprisings against the Russian imperial government in Poland and a show-off between Prussia and Denmark about Schleswig-Holstein, that within weeks would result in another major European war. In this sinister atmosphere, in May 1864, the composer suddenly died, leaving his greatest operatic project incomplete, the opera on which he had worked for over thirty years. 'Music is without its master,'

[3] For an overview of his social milieu in Paris and Berlin see in particular Sabine Henze-Döhring and Sieghart Döhring, *Giacomo Meyerbeer. Der Meister der Grand Opéra*. Munich: C.H.Beck, 2014, 93-119, 154-170

[4] For a particularly influential assessment of his music's alleged cosmopolitanism see Eduard Hanslick, 'Meyerbeer', in *Die moderne Oper: Kritiken und Studien* (Berlin, 1875), 138-73

[5] For Wagner's changing attitude towards Meyerbeer see in particular Henze-Döhring / Döhring, *Giacomo Meyerbeer*, 143-153

[6] See Reiner Zimmermann, *Giacomo Meyerbeer. Eine Biografie nach Dokumenten*. Berlin: Parthas, 1998, 319

the *Ménestrel* of Paris commented, a master who had succeeded 'in writing cosmopolitan art.'[7]

Against the background of these conflicts involving numerous global powers, the composer's death became a world event, reported across the globe. Thousands of people attended the procession from Meyerbeer's Parisian home on the Champs-Elysées to the Gare du Nord, from where his body was transferred to Berlin. French National Guards and their corps de musique headed the march. Black horses pulled the carriage, accompanied by the Prussian ambassador Robert Heinrich Ludwig von der Goltz, the Minister of the French Emperor Marshall Jean-Baptise Philibert Vaillant, by the composer Daniel Auber, as director of the Conservatoire, and Émile Perrin, director of the Opéra, followed by family and further delegations of France's cultural institutions. The Gare du Nord was covered in black draperies showing the composer's initials. Extracts from his operas were played and the Rabbi of Paris spoke. When the coffin arrived in Berlin, the funeral procession from the station to the opera house Unter den Linden, and from there on to the Jewish cemetery on Schönhauser Allee, was greeted by the Prussian King and the Queen, and joined by several other members of the royal household. The streets were again flocked with mourners. Presumably an extremely rare occasion, two countries, France and Germany, granted the composer of cosmopolitan music official state exequies. Meanwhile, similar to the examples presented in some of the other contributions to this volume, these cross-national reactions to Meyerbeer's death also serve as an example of urban cosmopolitanism, where not the nation but the city becomes the site to articulate cosmopolitan sentiment.

Commenting on the strong emotional response evoked by Meyerbeer's death, the future French Prime Minister Émile Ollivier wrote in the *Revue et Gazette Musicale* that the composer had created a 'harmonic connection' between France and Germany, and that his name stood for an ever-lasting bond between 'sister nations.'[8] Within less than a year later, the world-premiere of *L'Africaine* took place in Paris and was attended by the French Emperor and the Empress, with many of the nineteenth century's greatest musicians in the audience, including Liszt, Verdi, Gounod, Anton Rubinstein. After the last act the curtains went up once more to show a bust of Meyerbeer and the audience honoured the composer with fifteen minutes

[7] Quoted in Zimmermann, *Giacomo Meyerbeer*, 321
[8] Quoted in Heinz and Gudrun Becker, *Giacomo Meyerbeer. A Life in Letters*. London: Helm, 1989, 14

silence, not an easy task after having sat through a monumental opera in five acts. Everywhere in Europe the premieres of *L'Africaine* assumed a similar function, uniting people to commemorate the master of a cosmopolitan aesthetic. Audiences and politicians across the continent articulated their strongly felt need to be part of these events.

Meyerbeer's death and the posthumous premiere of *L'Africaine* became France's last cultural manifestations of international significance before the Second Empire disappeared, five years later, in the Franco-Prussian War. Émile Ollivier, who by then had become the Empire's last Prime Minister, was proved wrong about the harmonic connection between France and Germany. By now he supported France's party of war, instrumental to the escalating conflict with Prussia. Cosmopolitanism had once more proved an illusion. But Meyerbeer's supporters remained convinced that the deeply felt humanity of his music had the capacity to overcome frictions between nations. His work was understood as an aesthetic response to the experience of crisis and conflict, a point of reference that offered people orientation in the dark.

In much of the scholarship on nineteenth-century music, opera in particular has been reduced to the product of an age of nationalism, where the nation is used as almost the sole prism to make music meaningful. This approach often mistakes later readings of a particular work of art as evidence for a presumably self-evident, ahistorical and perpetual semantic content. An especially prominent example is Giuseppe Verdi's *Nabucco* of 1842, credited with patriotic meaning to the extent of having anticipated the Revolution of 1848 in Milan, despite the fact that not a single contemporary source offers evidence that the 'Va pensiero,' the famous chorus of the Hebrew slaves was understood at the time of the opera's premiere as a reference to Italy's national liberation from the Habsburgs.[9] Similar examples from different European contexts are easily added. What does nationality explain if Bedřich Smetana, as director of a theatre specifically created for the Czech nation,

[9] The main work criticizing this approach is Roger Parker, *'Arpa d'or dei fatidici vati': The Verdian Patriotic Chorus in the 1840s*. Parma: Istituto di studi verdiani, 1997. Also, Mary Ann Smart, "Liberty On (and Off) the Barricades: Verdi's Risorgimento Fantasies", in: Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg, Hg, *Making and Remaking Italy. The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento.* Oxford: Berg, 2001, 103-118. For a summary of the debate see Axel Körner, "Oper, Politik und nationale Bewegung. Mythen um das Werk Giuseppe Verdis", in: *Themenportal Europäische Geschichte* (2013), URL: http://www.europa.clio-online.de/2013/Article=673

conducted less than of a handful of works of Slavonic origin, using instead the international repertoire to show that the Czech nation was one with the family of European nations? Where national style in music served to affirm identity within a deliberately multi-national political setting?

Since the 1980s, a renewed interest in nationalism has encouraged historians to read too much nationality into culture, pressing almost every act of social behaviour or symbolic representation, every piece of literature, art or music into national categories. Transnational history also means questioning the categories of analysis that form the basis of this approach. Amartya Sen's book *Violence and Identity* provides a powerful critique of this way of thinking. Offering a reflection upon its author's experience of the violent division of the Indian subcontinent, the book also serves as a comment on the emergence of more recent ethnic and religious conflicts, to show how people suddenly kill neighbours with whom they had previously lived peacefully together.[10] Sen criticises the reduction of human experience to single identities based on religion or nationality, arguing that we are made of multiple overlapping identities - political, cultural, social, sexual identities - which connect us across national or religious boundaries through a humanitarian and cosmic dimension. We often forget about the possibility of consensus across differences. Sen's passionate plea for the recognition of shared identities also critiques a form of multi-culturalism where different communities live next to each other without ever crossing the boundaries between them.

Investigating how art and culture assume meaning across different contextual settings is not to say that the same music sends one message across different boundaries, in the same way as Richard Hoggart has demonstrated that the same artefact might assume different meanings according to the social context in which it is read.[11] Instead, culture works as an anthropological tool for what Germans call *Sinnstiftung*, or what Kant described as offering 'orientation in thinking': making sense of the world depending on a specific contextual reading. Painting, gestures, symbols, art and music are all about interpreting the world. They are read through experience and a priori knowledge, and this experience differs according to social and cultural context; but this context does not need to be national, because there is

[10] Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence. The Illusion of Destiny*. London: Penguin, 2007
[11] Richard Hoggart, *The uses of Literacy*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1957

never just one meaning to a cultural artefact. The fact that the context does not need to be national offers the possibility of a transnational reading, a reading across borders.

This emphasis on a transnational reading of artefacts brings us to the core of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. In his *Estetica come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale* (1902) Benedetto Croce compared aesthetics to language, arguing that art has an expressive function and serves as a means of communication between human beings. As the product of individual artistic intuition, art enables others to follow its aesthetic force. Literature communicates at least on one level through content, and only in its fuller understanding through content as well as form. Music, however, operates on a more abstract level, where content and form cannot easily be separated. This is not to suggest that musical aesthetic does not involve a process of translation, or that music therefore automatically communicates the same message across different cultural contexts.[12] But it includes the possibility of communication across linguistic and national boundaries. For a long time the idea of communication across boundaries has inspired philosophers and, on a different level, has resonated with political actors.

What I wished to add to this collection in terms of an afterword is to foreground the importance of affective communication in generating cosmopolitan sentiment during times of conflict. Cosmopolitan sentiment is generated by means of reason as well as affective communication. This process itself occurs in specific temporal and local situations, just as each example of cosmopolitan thought discussed in this volume. As the introduction has argued, cosmopolitanism frequently evolved in a functional relationship with war and conflict, a situation that gave rise to transnational connections whilst also reinforcing partisan perspectives on social and political order. Within such situations cosmopolitan ideas offered a sense of certainty during periods of international conflict. Most chapters in this collection encourage readers to endorse a sceptical reading of Kantian cosmopolitanism, exercising caution concerning the capacity of a universal

[12] In this respect I wish to distinguish my approach from the idea that shared appreciation of cultural artifacts creates global or transnational communities, as suggested by Akira Iriye, *Japan and the wider world : from the mid-nineteenth century to the present*. London: Longman, 1997, 48. On the notion of global community see also Akira Iriye, *Global community: the role of international organizations in the making of the contemporary world*. Berkeley, Calif. / London : University of California Press, 2002. Also Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History. Historians Create a Global Past*. Basingstoke: Palgrave 2003, 3

philanthropic attitude to bring about international justice and peace.[13] But they also show that times of conflict facilitated the emergence of cosmopolitan ideas and sentiments, which cut across national boundaries, generating new, hybrid forms of subjectivity.

[13] When referring back to texts discussed in the introduction or the preceding chapters this afterword abstains from repeating details of bibliographic references.