



Correspondences: Music Inspired by Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night*¹

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Abstract

This article presents the conclusions of a comparative analysis and interpretation of musical works inspired by Vincent van Gogh's painting *Starry Night*, created over the last half-century, along with reflections on the similarities resulting from a common source of inspiration. These works include Henri Dutilleux's *Timbres, Espace, Mouvement ou La Nuit étoilée and Correspondances*, mov. V: *De Vincent à Theo*; Einojuhani Rautavaara's opera *Vincent* and Symphony No. 6 *Vincentiana*, mov. I: *Starry Night*; George Crumb's *Starry Night* from *Metamorphoses* (Book II) and the song *Shenandoah* from *The Winds of Destiny*, as well as pieces by Matthew Harris, Alan Hovhaness, and Alla Pavlova.

On the one hand, they are considered – together with van Gogh's painting – on a higher, transmedial level as manifesting an archetype of the cosmic night, as an expression of the "poetic imagination" (Bachelard), evoking a certain atmosphere (Böhme). On the other hand, the musical works are viewed from the perspective of intermedial transposition (Wolf, Rajevsky), in which elements of content and structure are transferred from the painting to music.

The "correspondences" that the article aims to explore are on multiple levels: between the painting and musical works, between different musical works, between life and work, between van Gogh's views as expressed in his *correspondences* and the painting's possible interpretations and, finally, between the composers' reflections and their music.

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Keywords

Dutilleux; Rautavaara; Crumb; Harris; Hovhaness; Pavlova; Van Gogh; *Starry Night*; intermedial transposition; transmediality; music analysis and interpretation; musical hermeneutics; painting and music; Böhme

The theme of night has been frequently explored by composers – whether through titles, programmatic references, texts, genres or musical topics. Beyond genres traditionally associated with the night (such as the nocturne, but also the serenade, *Nachtmusik* and the lullaby), night-related connotations appear in musical works – inter alia – through expressive categories, choices of instrumentation and timbre, and specific forms of musical narration that allude to modes of perception or states of consciousness during the night or while sleeping.

When attempting to take a panoramic view of musical compositions related to the theme of night, various aspects of night represented by them emerge: cosmic/mystical night; frenetic/ecstatic night; the lyrical night / the night of love; the night of nature; the entertaining night/nightlife; the night of fears and dangers (including nightmares and somnambulism); and the transfiguring night.

Musical works inspired by Vincent van Gogh's painting *The Starry Night* belong primarily to the first of these categories, although they can also be frenetic and are close to the category of the night of nature.

“Correspondences,” which the article aims to explore, manifest themselves on multiple levels: between the painting and musical works, between different musical works, between life and work, between van Gogh's views as expressed in his *correspondences* and the painting's possible interpretations and, finally, between composers' reflections and their music.

The fifth movement of Henri Dutilleux's orchestral song cycle titled *Correspondances: From Vincent to Theo* is written to the words from the artist's letter to his brother:

As long as autumn lasts, I shall not have hands, canvas and colours enough to paint the beautiful things I see [...] It does not prevent me from having a terrible need of [shall I say the word – of] religion – then I go outside in the night to paint the stars... And all the same to feel the stars and the infinite high and clear above you. Then life is almost enchanted after all.²

Dutilleux wrote in the introduction to the score: “The work's general title, ‘Correspondances,’ beyond the different meanings which could be given to this word,

² Henri Dutilleux, *Correspondances* pour soprano et orchestre, study score (Schott, 2009; English translation by R. G. Harrison).

refers to Baudelaire's famous poem, 'Correspondances' and to the *synaesthesia* he himself evoked.³

The vision of the starry sky and the way it was understood by van Gogh (as evidenced by his correspondence) and composers (as evidenced by their self-reflection) is connected with a mystical, even pantheistic understanding of nature, space and time, expressed by Charles Baudelaire:

Nature is a temple in which living pillars
Sometimes give voice to confused words;
Man passes there through forests of symbols
Which look at him with understanding eyes.

Like prolonged echoes mingling in the distance
In a deep and tenebrous unity,
Vast as the dark of night and as the light of day,
Perfumes, sounds, and colours correspond.⁴

Van Gogh's *Starry Night* as a Source of Inspiration for Composers



Illustration 1 Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night* (1889), oil on canvas, 73.7 × 92.1 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Source: MoMA, Public Domain.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Charles Baudelaire, sonnet translated by William F. Ageller, <https://artofeurope.com/ baudelaire> (accessed September 18, 2025).

Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night* has achieved the status of a cultural icon, one of the most widely reproduced and instantly recognisable images. As Lauren Soth writes, "the visionary nature of Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night* has always been recognised,"⁵ although, paradoxically, van Gogh considered it a "failure."⁶

The painting, described by its creator as a "night study,"⁷ was created in 1889 (a year before the artist's death) at the Saint-Paul-de-Mausole psychiatric hospital. The sky and the arrangement of stars corresponded to the view that van Gogh had from the window of his cell at the time, while the village (church tower) and cypress trees must have been painted from imagination or memory – they could not have been visible from that location.⁸

Painted with dense, expressive, visible brushstrokes directly on canvas in intense colours, the painting depicts large, yellow, whirling stars against the sky, above a village plunged into darkness. As Dominik Witek notes: "Undoubtedly, the spirals are the first aspect of the painting that captures our attention. The large whirling shapes engulf the painting like a wave."⁹ The soaring church tower and tall cypress tree in the foreground reach for the sky.

Both the painting and Van Gogh's life inspired composers. Henri Dutilleux had admired the painting *Starry Night* since his twenties, as Caroline Potter reports.¹⁰ In the mid-1970s (when he was over sixty), the composer received from his friend Irène Joachim an illustrated edition of Vincent van Gogh's letters to his brother Theo. Seeing the reproduction of the painting again, he experienced a profound emotional shock [as he put it, "un choc emotif"]¹¹ which inspired him to write an orchestral work. According to Dutilleux, the painting "triggers a kind of 'osmosis' in the composer, a long, dark, almost unconscious exploration of this inner world."¹²

⁵ Lauren Soth, "Van Gogh's Agony," *The Art Bulletin* 68, no. 2 (1986): 301–313, see p. 301.

⁶ Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Van Gogh: The Life* (New York: Random House, 2011), 784.

⁷ Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, Saint-Rémy, September 19–20, 1889, letter no. 805, English translation by Johanna van Gogh-Bonger, ed. Robert Harrison, transcribed online at *The Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, <https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let805/letter.html> (accessed September 18, 2025).

⁸ Dominic Witek, "Artwork Analysis: *Starry Night* by van Gogh," <https://blog.artsper.com/en/a-closer-look/artwork-analysis-starry-night-by-van-gogh/> (2019; accessed September 18, 2025).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Caroline Potter, *Henri Dutilleux: His Life and Works* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 18.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Siglind Bruhn, *Henri Dutilleux: Jede Note auf der Goldwaage gewogen* (Waldkirch: Edition Gorz, 2016), 172.

He described it as follows:

“Mouvement” and “space” are both there. The action of the picture is nearly all in the sky, between the monstrous, outsize stars, and to a smaller extent on the ground, with the little church and then the immense cypress tree, which follows the line of the church spire, giving the impression of aspiring towards the infinite – a mystic, vertiginous sensation, such as you can feel when you’re alone in the countryside or by the sea.¹³

Einojuhani Rautavaara, himself an amateur painter, was fascinated by the life and work of van Gogh. He read and viewed all available materials on the artist. He made him the subject of his opera, for which he also wrote the libretto, trying to make the most of van Gogh’s correspondence. Van Gogh’s life is treated here in a mythical dimension. Some events and circumstances are based on reality, others are fictional. The opera begins at the end of his life in a psychiatric hospital (where van Gogh painted *Starry Night*), followed by a flashback. As Rautavaara writes: “Almost everything either is or could be Vincent’s dream and flashback.”¹⁴ The three-act opera opens with an orchestral prelude entitled “Starry Night” (the first part of the later *Vincentiana* symphony will be based on this material).

An important scene related to the painting *Starry Night* takes place in Act I: Night falls. Vincent delivers an expressive monologue, against the backdrop of which, as indicated in the stage directions: “Vincent van Gogh’s painting *Starry Night* will begin to glow in the background, colossal.”¹⁵ Vincent says:

Only the night is left. Come to me, Night! I want... I want to fly home to your stars, home, home, home. Theo, how do you ascend to the stars? [...] It must be simple, as inevitable as death, as birth, to ascend to the stars.¹⁶

While working on the opera, finishing Act II, Rautavaara did not know for a long time what the ending should be. His friend Jorma Hynninen, who played the lead role, encouraged the composer to see an exhibition of Van Gogh’s paintings from the last months of his life at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, writing that “here is Act III.”¹⁷ In his autobiography, the composer recalled the

¹³ Roger Nichols, “Progressive Growth. Henri Dutilleux in Conversation with Roger Nichols,” *The Musical Times* 135, no. 1812 (1994): 87–90, see p. 89.

¹⁴ Quoted from Anne Sivuoja, text in the recording booklet, *Einojuhani Rautavaara, Vincent: Opera in Three Acts*, Finnish National Opera Chorus & Orchestra, conducted by Fuat Mançurov, Jorma Hynninen (Ondine ODE750-2, 1990), 12.

¹⁵ Quotations from the opera libretto included in the recording booklet (English translation by Erkki Arni); *ibid.*, 39.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁷ Einojuhani Rautavaara, *Omakuvia* (Kirjapainoyksikkö: WSOY, 1998), 346.

incredible impression he had when viewing the original canvas, so different from all the reproductions he had seen throughout his life. He wrote: "This painting is very powerful, it exudes an incredible presence, a certain substance. [...] Absolute quality, the only copy that radiates!"¹⁸

He also described the experience of looking at the material of the painting up close: the thick, almost brutal brushstrokes, cracks in the paint.

Looking at other paintings, he had a revelation about how an opera about van Gogh should end:

Now I see it; these paintings radiate incredible luminosity – *The Reaper* and *Sunrise!* And what soft tenderness in *Almond Blossom* or *Irises*. What a hedonistic, colourful vision of beauty in these *Boats on the Oise*, in fact in all the landscapes from Auvers, depicting alleys and courtyards. – No, this is not a man seeking death, disappointed, gloomy, a neurotic plunged into mental illness. This is a strong, yet sensitive being – someone who sees joy, light and beauty all around him! Now I understand what the last act wants to be: a hymn, an apotheosis!¹⁹

The opera closes with Vincent's words taken from a letter to Theo: "The day of the sun! And he who dies today shall never disappear, but will join those who once had the courage to go on and live! To live!"²⁰

Thus, Rautavaara interpreted Van Gogh's life and work as Icarus' mythical journey towards light and the sun.²¹

Musical Works Inspired by the Painting

Table 1 contains a list of titles of non-popular music works created from documented, direct inspiration from this famous painting, identified in the course of my research to date.

¹⁸ Ibid., 347.

¹⁹ Ibid., 348.

²⁰ Opera libretto in the booklet accompanying the recording: Rautavaara, *Vincent*, op. cit., 88.

²¹ Einojuhani Rautavaara and Sini Rautavaara, *Saveltaja ja Muusa* (Helsinki: Werner Soderstrom Osakeyhtio, 2001), 132.

Table 1 List of compositions inspired by Vincent van Gogh's painting "Starry Night."

Composer	Work	Date	Genre	Cast	Statements indicating inspiration from the painting
Henri Dutilleux (1916–2013)	<i>Timbres, Espace, Mouvement ou La Nuit étoilée</i>	1976–8 (rev. 1990)	"composition pour orchestre"	Orchestra: 2 fl. picc., 2 fl., 3 ob., ob. d'amore, cl. in Eb, 2 cl. in Bb, cl. b., 3 fg., c. fg., 4 corni, 3 tpt., 3 tuba, 4 timp., crocchi, piatto sosp., tamtam, bongos, tom, cassa chiara, gran cassa, marimba, glock, celesta, arpa, vc., db.	"[...] Written [...] under the influence of the famous painting <i>The Starry Night</i> ." ²² "I had the painting constantly in mind when I was composing." ²³ – H. Dutilleux
Matthew Harris (b. 1956)	<i>Starry Night: Seven Paintings for Violin, Cello and Piano. Mov. I: Van Gogh: Starry Night (Canto)</i>	1984	Suite	Vl, vc, f/p	"I based this work on paintings from the Museum of Modern Art in New York." ²⁴ – M. Harris
Alan Hovhannes (1911–2000)	<i>Starry Night</i> op. 384	1984	Chamber miniature	flute, arpa, xylophone	"Was inspired by Vincent van Gogh's <i>Starry Night</i> ." – H. F. Hovhannes ²⁵
Einojuhani Rautavaara (1928–2016)	<i>Vincent</i>	1986–7 Premiere: Helsinki 1990	Opera	Solo voices, choir, large orchestra, synthesizer	"[...] The life and works of van Gogh acted as the starting point for my opera <i>Vincent</i> – as motif but not form, background but not action..." ²⁶ – E. Rautavaara
	<i>Symphony No. 6 Vincentiana, mov. I: Starry Night</i>	1992 (rev. 1996)	Symphony	2 fl. 2 ob. 3 cl. 3 fg. 4 cor. 4 tpt. 3 tuba, timp. tamtam, crocchi, vib, glock, tomtom, xyl, campanelle, gran cassa, guiro, piatto, woodblock, flexaton, marimba synthesizer, arpa, strings	The painting <i>Starry Night</i> appears in Act I. "My point of departure for the first two movements was the 'depiction' [...] of one particular painting by van Gogh." ²⁷ – E. Rautavaara

²² Dutilleux, *Correspondances*, Study Score, op. cit.²³ Quoted from: Potter, op. cit., 124.²⁴ Matthew Harris, programme notes, in *Montage Music Society, Starry Night Project: Music Based on Visual Art* (MSR Classics MS1264, 2009), booklet.²⁵ Hinako Fujihara, programme notes, in *Alan Hovhannes, Hovhannes Treasures* (Crystal Records CD811, 1995), booklet.²⁶ Einojuhani Rautavaara, *Symphony No. 6: Vincentiana* (Helsinki: Fazer Music Inc., 1992).²⁷ *Ibid.*

Composer	Work	Date	Genre	Cast	Statements indicating inspiration from the painting
Henri Dutilleux (1916–2013)	<i>Correspondances</i> , mov. V: <i>De Vincent à Theo...</i>	2002–2003	Orchestral song cycle	Soprano, orch.: 1 piccolo flute, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 1 English horn, 3 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 3 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, suspended cymbals, tam-tam, 3 bongos, 3 tom-toms, snare drum, bass drum, marimba, accordion, celesta, arpa, strings	"[...] In the centre of the pages devoted to van Gogh's letter, the composer used, as a quotation, the main motif of his own score <i>Irribies, Espace, Mouvement ou La Nuit étoilée</i> written in 1978 under the influence of the famous painting <i>The Starry Night</i> ." ²⁸ – H. Dutilleux Lyrics: "[...] It does not prevent me from having a terrible need of [shall I say the word – of] religion – then I go outside in the night to paint the stars. ... And all the same to feel the stars and the infinite high and clear above you." (from van Gogh's letter) ²⁹
George Crumb (1929–2022)	<i>The Winds of Destiny, American Songbook IV</i> , song IX: <i>Sherandoah</i>	2004	Song	Voice, Percussion Quartet (including large gongs, Japanese Temple Bells) and Amplified Piano	Performance indication in the score: "Serenely majestic, like a larger rhythm of nature (luminous, incandescent; like van Gogh's <i>Starry Night</i>)." ³⁰ – G. Crumb
Alla Pavlova (b. 1952)	<i>Symphony No. 6, Vincent</i>	2007	Symphony	fl. picc 2 fl., 2 ob., 2 cl., 2 fg., 4 cor., 2 tpt., 3 trb., tuba, timp., gran cassa, piatti, tom, triangolo, vib arpa, org (har), archi	" <i>Symphony No. 6</i> is dedicated to Vincent van Gogh. A reproduction of his painting <i>The Starry Night</i> is above the piano in my study. [...] Vincent's life is like a flash of lightning in the night sky. [...] Vincent once wondered why one could not travel to the stars. [...] There is no programme behind the music, but perhaps they share, to some degree, the same view: that life, filled with endless energy and creativity, is a synthesis of joy and sorrow." ³¹
George Crumb (1929–2022)	<i>Metamorphoses (book II), Ten Fantasy-Pieces (After Celebrated Paintings), No. 10: Starry Night</i> (Vincent van Gogh)	2018–20	"Fantasy-Pieces"	Amplified Piano	" <i>After Celebrated Paintings</i> ." "My <i>Metamorphoses</i> [...] is [...] a direct descendant of Mussorgsky's <i>Pictures at an Exhibition</i> ." ³² – G. Crumb "Musical interpretations" of paintings ³³ – G. Crumb

²⁸ Dutilleux, *Correspondances*, op. cit.²⁹ Ibid.³⁰ From Eric Bruskin, liner notes to *George Crumb: American Songbooks II & IV* (Bridge Records, 2005); cf. Marta Szoka, *George Crumb: Muzyka onirycznych wizji i magicznych formuł* (Łódź: Grażyna and Kiejstut Bacewicz Academy of Music, 2011), 126. Information about this work became available too late for me to obtain the score, which is not accessible in my country.³¹ Alla Pavlova, *Symphony No. 6 / Zhumbelina Suite*, Mikhail Shestakov (violin), Moscow Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra, cond. Patrick Baton, Naxos 8.579003 (recorded June 10–14, 2008; released June 1, 2010), booklet.³² George Crumb, *Notes on Metamorphoses, Book 1* (New York: Edition Peters, 2017).³³ George Crumb, *Notes on Metamorphoses, Book 2* (New York: Edition Peters, 2021).

As can be seen in the table, these are works of so-called contemporary music, created since the late 1970s. There are more compositions entitled “Starry Night,”³⁴ that don’t necessarily refer to van Gogh’s painting, at least not directly, or in an undocumented way. “Starry Night” is also a slogan, an emblem: for example, the Montage Music Society organised the “Starry Night Project,” releasing an album in 2009 with music by contemporary composers inspired by famous paintings. This album includes a suite by Matthew Harris entitled “Starry Night,” although only the first movement refers to van Gogh’s painting, while the rest refers to other paintings. Finnish composer Jouni Kaipainen, author of the song “Starry Night” to the words of Edith Södergran’s poem of the same title, wrote:

Ever since the first time I heard Henri Dutilleux’s orchestral work *La nuit étoilée*, I have wanted to compose something under the same title myself. Now Södergran just happened to have a poem of the same name – and so I was able to fulfil my wish on that score as well.³⁵

In my analyses and interpretations, I have taken into account *Music of the Starry Night*, i.e., the fifth part of George Crumb’s 1974 *Makrokosmos III: Music for a Summer Evening* for two amplified pianos and percussion. Although there is no information about the inspiration of van Gogh’s painting in this work, it is an important intertextual reference. In fact, many of Crumb’s works take up the theme of night – he is one of the composers who follow the “paths of the night.”³⁶

It is significant that Crumb’s last composition was the cycle *Metamorphoses. Book II* (2020), in which the “last word” belongs to the piece *Starry Night*, based on van Gogh’s painting, with an expressive note in the score: “desireless, with infinite calm.” In Mieczysław Tomaszewski’s model of “Życia twórcy punkty węzłowe” [“The Life of the Creator of Node Points”], this would be the final phase of creativity, characterised by “a return to the sources and a foray into the realm of barely sensed possibilities.”³⁷ In this phase, creativity “takes on

³⁴ Composers who have written pieces entitled “Starry Night” include Mark Collin (1985), Jouni Kaipainen (1989), David Robert Coleman (1999) and Matthew Whittall (2017).

³⁵ Jouni Kaipainen, linear notes to *Stjärnenatten (Starry Night)*, Op. 35, Karita Mattila (soprano), Lahti Chamber Ensemble, dir. Osmo Vänskä, Ondine ODE792-2, 1992.

³⁶ Mieczysław Tomaszewski uses the term “paths of the night” after Ireneusz Kania in reference to Szymanowski’s music. As he writes: “There are artists who have wandered the ‘paths of the day’ all their lives and those who have preferred to wander the ‘paths of the night.’” (Translated from Polish by Aleksander Ptak.) Mieczysław Tomaszewski, “Szymanowskiego ścieżki nocy” [“Szymanowski’s Paths of Night”], in *12 spojrzeń na muzykę polską wieku apokalipsy i nadziei* (Kraków: Academy of Music in Kraków, 2011), 39. Apart from Szymanowski, composers who followed the “paths of the night” include, for example, Béla Bartók, Arnold Schönberg, George Crumb, and Henri Dutilleux.

³⁷ Mieczysław Tomaszewski, “Życia twórcy punkty węzłowe: Rekonesans,” in *Muzyka w dialogu ze słowem* (Kraków: Academy of Music, 2003), 35–47, 42.

a soliloquial and farewell character, one might say: testamentary [...]; mystical and metaphysical accents come to the fore.”³⁸ *Correspondances* by Henri Dutilleux, one of his last major works, can be classified in this model as a late work, characterised by “increased spirituality and a preference for pantheistic, philosophical and sacred themes.”³⁹ The five songs in the cycle are written to different texts, which are united in their inspiration by mysticism and reflection on the place of man in the cosmos. These include two songs to texts by Rainer Maria Rilke, a poet particularly sensitive to the spiritual perception of the cosmos in the *Weltinnenraum*, which breaks down the boundary between the inner and outer worlds.⁴⁰ Crumb also placed an epigraph from Rilke at the beginning of the aforementioned *Music of the Starry Night*: “Und in den Nächten fällt die schwere Erde aus allen Sternen in die Einsamkeit. Wir alle fallen. Und doch ist Einer, welcher dieses Fallen unendlich sanft in seinen Händen hält.”⁴¹

The two works listed in the table, i.e., those inspired by van Gogh's painting, come from the series of compositions “after celebrated paintings,” such as Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* – Harris's suite and Crumb's *Metamorphoses*. In these, the music is declaratively intended to be an interpretation of the painting. In the case of some other works, however, composers are cautious in their self-reflection when approaching the relationship between painting and music. Although Dutilleux, when composing *Timbres...* “had the painting constantly in mind when [...] composing,” he stipulated that it was not programme music⁴² – similarly to Alla Pavlova.⁴³ Dutilleux added the subtitle *La Nuit étoilée* to *Timbres...* only after the first performance, and the titles of the two parts, *Nébuleuse* and *Constellations*, were added in 1990 during a revision of the work (at which time he also added an *Interlude* between the two parts). Einojuhani Rautavaara, although he clearly emphasised that it was van Gogh's life and works that were the “starting point” – in the case of the first movement of the Symphony,

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ As Marcin Trzęsiok writes in his essay “Do Rainera Marii Rilkego. List” [“To Rainer Maria Rilke. A Letter”]: “*Das Herzwerk*, setting in motion the inner sense, which vibrates like a membrane exposed to fluids that ignore the boundary between ‘I’ and ‘not-I’. [...] And when the work of the heart begins to bear fruit, then the cosmic, *Weltraum*, and the most personal, *Innenraum*, are identified in inner perception. *Weltinnenraum*.” Marcin Trzęsiok, *Muzyka doświadczenia. Eseje i studia* (Kraków: PWM, 2023), 291. (Translated from Polish by Aleksander Ptak.)

⁴¹ German quotation from the score. Translation: “And in the nights the heavy Earth is falling from all the stars down into loneliness. We are all falling. And yet there is One who holds this falling endlessly gently in His hands” – George Crumb; excerpted from the liner notes to *George Crumb, liner notes to George Crumb: Music for a Summer Evening* (Bridge Records, Inc.; reprinted with kind permission from Bridge Records, Inc. and George Crumb).

⁴² Potter, *Henri Dutilleux*, 124.

⁴³ Pavlova, *Symphony No. 6; Thumbelina Suite*.

it was the painting *Starry Night* – wrote that in the symphony “the intention is not to tell a story which would be translatable into words or ideas.”⁴⁴

The connection between Dutilleux’s *Correspondances* and the painting *Starry Night* is indirect; the fifth movement is written to Vincent van Gogh’s words to his brother, associated with the painting *Starry Night* (although they could also refer to the painting *Starry Night Over the Rhône*); there is a quote from *Timbres...*

The most surprising connection with van Gogh’s painting is found in the song *Shenandoah* from Crumb’s *The Winds of Destiny*: here, *Starry Night* becomes an expressive cue, written by the composer in the score: “Serenely majestic, like a larger rhythm of nature (luminous, incandescent; like van Gogh’s *Starry Night*).”⁴⁵

It is symptomatic that in the literature on composers brought together by their shared inspiration from van Gogh’s painting, there is information about Debussy’s influence on the formation of their language (mainly: Dutilleux, Rautavaara, Crumb). These composers are also united by their unorthodox approach to religion, individual faith and a kind of mysticism, as in van Gogh.⁴⁶

From Painting to Music

An attempt at an analytical and interpretative look at musical works inspired by painting refers to the issues of transmediality, intermediality and ekphrasis. Each of these terms has its own literature and more than one possible definition. This discussion is beyond the scope of this text, but it is worth clarifying here how I use the above terms.

⁴⁴ Rautavaara, *Symphony No. 6: Vincentiana*, op. cit.

⁴⁵ Source: Bruskin, op. cit. and Szoka, *George Crumb*, 126.

⁴⁶ For example, Rautavaara, as Wojciech Stepień writes, claims that he has been fascinated by metaphysical and religious subjects as well as texts from childhood, and that this fascination has influenced his music and aesthetics. Although he grew up in the Lutheran tradition and faith, he does not belong to any religion or church: “My background was Lutheran, but I never really worried about different ‘creeds.’ I fear that my ecumenical relationship to the various churches meant indifference to their dogmas and theology.” Wojciech Stepień, *The Sound of Finnish Angels: Musical Signification in Five Instrumental Compositions by Einojuhani Rautavaara* (Boydell & Brewer, Pendragon Press, 2011), 69. As Szymon Borys writes, Dutilleux, in turn, said: “I was raised in the Roman Catholic faith, but I have long been a non-practising person, even though I often go to church to reflect. [...] So my faith is rather individual, quite the opposite of Messiaen, who declared himself a Catholic composer with great force and sincerity.” Szymon Borys, “I Feel a Terrible Need of Religion: The Symbolism of Spirituality in Henri Dutilleux’s *Correspondances*,” *Scotri* 5 (2018): 36.

Transmediality, with reference to the writings of Werner Wolf⁴⁷ and Irina O. Rajewsky,⁴⁸ concerns phenomena that are non-media specific. They can “appear in more than one medium and can therefore form points of contact or bridges between different.”⁴⁹ As Wolf writes, “transmediality as a quality of cultural signification appears, for instance, on the level of ahistorical formal devices that occur in more than one medium, such as motivic repetition, thematic variation or, to a certain extent, even narrativity [...],” as well as through “characteristic historical traits that are common to either the formal or the content level of several media in given periods.” It “can equally appear on the content level alone.”⁵⁰

“Intermedial transposition” refers to “cases in which discernibly similar contents or formal aspects appear in works of different media and where at the same time a clear origin can be attributed for them in another medium.”⁵¹

How does *ekphrasis*, in a wider sense understood, as Siglind Bruhn writes, as “a representation in one medium of a real or fictitious text composed in another medium,”⁵² fit into these concepts? It would be a special case of “intermedial transposition,” with the proviso that certain aspects of content or formal devices that are transposed could be of a transmedial nature.

Some of the musical works discussed in this text (Table 1) can be considered in terms of *ekphrasis*, but the phenomenon of *Starry Night* in music seems to go beyond the mere representation of a specific painting in music. It seems that both the musical works and Van Gogh's painting can be interpreted on a higher, transmedial level as manifesting an archetype of the cosmic night, as an expression of “poetic imagination,”⁵³ to use Gaston Bachelard's term.

⁴⁷ Cf. Werner Wolf, “Intermediality Revisited: Reflections on Word and Music Relations in the Context of a General Typology of Intermediality,” in *Word and Music Studies: Essays in Honor of Steven Paul Scher and on Cultural Identity and the Musical Stage*, eds. Suzanne M. Lodato, Suzanne Aspden, and Walter Bernhart (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2002), 13–34; Werner Wolf, “Narrative and Music,” and “Intermediality,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan (New York: Routledge, 2008 [2005]), 324–29, 252–56.

⁴⁸ Cf. Irina O. Rajewsky, “Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality,” *Intermedialités / Intermediality*, no. 6 (Fall 2005): 43–64.

⁴⁹ Wolf, “Intermediality Revisited,” 18.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵² Siglind Bruhn, “A Concert of Paintings: ‘Musical Ekphrasis’ in the Twentieth Century,” *Poetics Today* 22, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 551–605, 559.

⁵³ Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de la rêverie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960).

1 Transmediality. Manifesting an Archetype

The starry sky is a symbol. As Mircea Eliade writes: “a symbol speaks to the whole human being and not only to intelligence.”⁵⁴ Moreover, according to Eliade:

Simple contemplation of the celestial vault already provokes a religious experience. The sky shows itself to be infinite, transcendent. It is pre-eminently “the whole other” than the little represented by man and his environment. [...] The higher regions inaccessible to man, the sidereal zones, acquire the momentousness of the transcendent, of absolute reality and of eternity.⁵⁵

The transcendental category of height, of the superterrestrial, of the infinite, is revealed to the whole man, to his intelligence and his soul. It is a total awareness on man’s part; beholding the sky, he simultaneously discovers the incommensurability and his own situation in the cosmos. For the sky, by its own mode of being, reveals transcendence, force and eternity. It exists absolutely because it is high, infinite, eternal and powerful.⁵⁶

In works of art, a certain transmedial quality can be found in *Stimmung*, atmosphere,⁵⁷ certain overarching expressive categories.

Performance and expressive guidelines from scores come in handy. For example, in Dutilleux’s *Timbres...* there are sections *Misterioso*, *Lontano e misterioso* (alternating with dynamic, “pulsating” ones), in Crumb’s *Starry Night* “slowly pulsating; desireless, with infinite calm,” in *The Winds of Destiny* (song IX) – let us recall: “Serenely, majestic, like a larger rhythm of nature (luminous, incandescent; like van Gogh’s *Starry Night*),” in Harris’ *Starry Night* “celestial,” in Alla Pavlova’s *Maestoso*. Alongside these “mystical” qualities, there are also “ardent” ones, which can be associated with the intensity of van Gogh’s canvas (colours, texture, whirling): in Pavlova’s *impetuoso, volando, focoso, energico*, in Harris’s *drammatico and molto fuocosso*, in Crumb’s *Music of the Starry Night* “fantastic, oracular” and “joyous, ecstatic; with a sense of cosmic time” (although here, let us recall, there is no documented inspiration from this painting).

⁵⁴ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959), 129.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵⁷ Cf. Gernot Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature* (Stanford University Press, 2012). Dutilleux also spoke about “atmosphere” in the context of the correspondence between the arts, in reference to his concerto *Tout un monde lointain...* “I didn’t initially think of the Baudelaire lines, but it is true that I was saturated with Baudelaire when I started to work. Then, I said to myself, ‘Very well, I’m in this atmosphere!’ and later, when I had nearly finished writing, I looked for connections [correspondances]. I thought about the poetry a bit when I was composing, but the last thing I wanted to do was illustrate the poems.” Quoted in Potter, *Henri Dutilleux*, 82.

Atmosphere seems to be particularly important in works without a detailed, verbally specified “programme” or text – in painting and instrumental works. In the introduction to his *Symphony No. 6 Vincentiana* – in which he used material from the opera – Rautavaara wrote:

The musical character of the sixth is indeed “narrative,” musically epic, but the intention is not to tell a story which would be translatable into words or ideas [...] The opera’s music – its substance [...] cried out for a new treatment, an expression outside the confines of drama, a new fate. It found it here, in the sixth symphony.⁵⁸

What Rautavaara wrote in his autobiography about the opera *Vincent* is significant: Van Gogh’s life was the inspiration for the text and dramaturgy, while his paintings inspired the music.⁵⁹

The atmosphere in the works in question is created in particular by the choice of instrumental timbres and their textural disposition, which gives the impression of vastness and spaciousness. A characteristic feature is the wide range, the juxtaposition of low registers with high ones (often omitting the “middle”): in *Timbres, Espaces, Mouvement* by Dutilleux (where violins and violas are missing, see Example 1), in *Starry Night* by Crumb (Example 2) and Harris (here: low cello and high piano register – “celestial,” Example 3), in *Starry Night* by Rautavaara. Dutilleux himself revealed that his intention was “the search for contrasts between the extreme registers of the orchestra.”⁶⁰ He wrote (in the third person):

By a play of timbres, opposing the clear and luminous quality of the wind instruments in their high register with the mass of low strings, he tried to create an impression of vast space which the extraordinary visionary painting which is *La nuit étoilée* suggested to him. Besides, van Gogh himself was torn between his ardent desire to rise above earthly concerns – an almost spiritual state of mind – and “the appalling human passions” of the world (see his letters to his brother Theo).⁶¹

⁵⁸ Rautavaara, *Symphony No. 6*, op. cit.

⁵⁹ Rautavaara, *Omakuva*, 334.

⁶⁰ Quoted from: Potter, *Henri Dutilleux*, 125.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Example 2 George Crumb, *Metamorphoses (Book II): Ten Fantasy-Pieces (after Celebrated Paintings)*, No. 10: *Starry Night (Vincent van Gogh)*, New York: Edition Peters, 2021 (bars 1–2).

10. STARRY NIGHT (Vincent Van Gogh)

Slowly pulsating; desireless, with infinite calm [♩ = ca. 72]

Example 3 Matthew Harris, *Starry Night. Seven Paintings for Violin, Cello, and Piano*, Mov. I: *Van Gogh: Starry Night (Canto)*, unpublished full score, PDF courtesy of the composer (bars 4–5).

In the shimmeringly changing texture of *Timbres*, the cellos⁶² at times remain almost alone or play high-chorale-like passages for twelve or six cellos “as if the cellos are completely suspended in space,”⁶³ as the composer wrote (Example 4).

⁶² Incidentally, the cello seems to be the preferred instrument in the context of the works discussed (this applies in particular to *Timbres*... Dutilleux and Harris’s work).

⁶³ Potter, *Henri Dutilleux*, 126.

Example 4 H. Dutilleux, *Timbres, Espace, Mouvement...*, mov. I, p. 48.

The image displays a musical score for Example 4, H. Dutilleux's *Timbres, Espace, Mouvement...*, movement I, page 48. The score is divided into two measures, 30 and 31, separated by a vertical dashed line.

Measure 30: The time signature is 3/4. It includes parts for Cymb. susp. aiguë, T. Tam médium, Harpe, and six Divisi Violins (labeled "6 Violins" on the left). The strings play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Dynamic markings include *mp*, *molto*, and *ff*. A fermata is placed over the first measure.

Measure 31: The instruction "Garder le mouvement des notes" (Keep the movement of the notes) is written above the staff, with a note value of approximately 126. It includes parts for Flageolet (labeled "(bag. de bois)"), Harpe, and six Divisi Violins. The Flageolet part has a *marc.* (marcato) marking. The strings continue with the same rhythmic pattern.

Crumb expressed himself in a very similar way about his beloved song *Shenandoah* (the one with the interpretative hint “like van Gogh’s *Starry Night*”): “The music is just floating there in space in a strange way.”⁶⁴

⁶⁴ From an interview conducted by the author of the doctoral thesis in Jamie Diane Van Eyck, “The Twenty-First Century Vocal Compositions of George Crumb: ‘Voices From Forgotten Worlds’

Long, drone-like sounds often persist in the low register (in Rautavaara's *Starry Night*, Example 5, in Dutilleux's *Timbres...*).

Example 5 Einojuhani Rautavaara, *Symphony No. 6 "Vincentiana,"* mov. I: *Starry Night* (Helsinki: Fazer Music Inc., 1992), reproduced from the composer's manuscript (bars 1–8).

30

31 Garder le mouvement des notes (notes) soit environ 126 à la note

3/4

Cymb. aigüe
T. Tam médium

Harpe

(bas, de bois)

ff marc.

30

31 Garder le mouvement des notes (notes) soit environ 126 à la note

1. div. *mp* *mezzo* *ff*

2. div. *mp* *mezzo* *ff*

3. div. *mp* *mezzo* *ff*

4. div. *mp* *mezzo* *ff*

5. div. *mp* *mezzo* *ff*

6. div. *mp* *mezzo* *ff*

Cb. div. en 3 *mp*

5 Pages

and the Seven-Volume American Songbook Series" (DMA diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2012), 90.

On the other hand, delicate timbres with a wealth of high overtones, are produced by instruments with long resonance and reverberation: idiophones (mainly: celesta, glockenspiel, crotales, xylophone, tam-tam) and harp.

The choice of timbres often evokes the “surreal,” the “otherness:” in addition to the instruments mentioned above, the DX 7 synthesiser (Rautavaara), amplified piano and Japanese temple bells (Crumb). Harmonics are often used to introduce an aura of transcendence, otherworldliness, luminosity (richness of overtones and natural sound). For example, in Rautavaara’s symphony *Starry Night*, at bar 20, the score indicates “whistle tones: on harmonics” for the flutes and for strings “tremolo – glissando on the harmonics,” and in Crumb’s *Starry Night* a 5th partial harmonic – thus the ethereal sound of a slightly detuned major third. The composer himself claimed that “when an instrument is amplified, an interesting aura is created [around the sound]; it is more than just a multiplication of the real or natural sound – another dimension appears.”⁶⁵ In addition, Crumb incorporates a whistling effect into his pieces, which he himself describes in relation to *Starry Night*: “The final few bars contain ‘a ghostly wind singing’ (a faint, breathy whistling effect) by the pianist and the dynamic becomes incredibly soft (eventually reaching *ppppp!*)”⁶⁶ (Example 6). *Nota bene*, the ending of Matthew Harris’ *Starry Night* is also at a low dynamic level of *ppp* (slightly earlier it is *pppp*) – in both pieces, the sound seems to dissolve into eternity.

Example 6 G. Crumb, *Metamorphoses (Book II)*, No. 10: *Starry Night* (bars 17–23).

The musical score for Example 6, G. Crumb's *Starry Night* (bars 17–23), is presented in two systems. The first system (bars 17–20) features a piano part with a right-hand melody and a left-hand accompaniment. The right hand includes instructions such as "(on keys)", "pizz. (etc)", and "gliss. over str. (1 ft)". The left hand includes "(Ped. I, Ped. III sempre)". Above the staff, there is a circled note with the instruction "A ghostly 'wind music' (like a pitched whisper on the syllable 'whoos') (sounds but without notes)". The second system (bars 21–23) continues the piano part with similar instructions, including "(on keys)", "pizz. (etc)", "gliss. over str. (1 ft)", and "ppppp". A circled note at the bottom of the second system reads "A pitched 'wind singing' on the sound 'whoos' (like 'ho-hoo, hee-hee whistling?")". The score concludes with a "fine" marking and a copyright notice for "© 2021 - Muth, Pamyryama".

⁶⁵ Crumb, quoted in Szoka, *George Crumb*, 288.

⁶⁶ Crumb, *Notes on Metamorphoses, Book 2*, op. cit.

The special atmosphere of musical works inspired by *Starry Night* is also influenced by the metrorhythmic structure and, more broadly, by the musical time in the narrative of the works. They feature polymetry and polyrhythm, both in large orchestral works (*Timbres...*) and in small ensembles by Crumb or Harris – with a different metre almost every bar. Characteristic features include the lack of a steady pulse, fluctuations in “mouvements” and timbres, variability, and the flickering of fragmented rhythms juxtaposed with long tones. Indeed, the title of Dutilleux’s work *Timbres, Espace, Mouvement ou La Nuit étoilée* (“timbres, space, movement”) points to the syndrome of constitutive features of works inspired by this painting.

Crumb spoke about the last song from *The Winds of Destiny* (the one with the interpretative clue “like van Gogh’s *Starry Night*”): “*Shenandoah* might be my favourite of all the songs in all the books. It uses layers of different rhythms. I think Charles Ives called it ‘music of the spheres.’ Instruments are never playing the same rhythms together. It’s like a drifting continuum.”⁶⁷

Daria Dobrochna Kwiatkowska, author of a doctoral dissertation on the idiom of night in Crumb’s music, points out that in some of his pieces “the ecstatic character is related to the notion of the mystic quality of nature,” and his “night music” idiom is clearly inspired by Bartok. As she writes, it is “characterised by the typical ‘night music’ features: sparse, transparent textures; short, isolated motifs reminiscent of the sounds of nature; and trembling sounds creating a mysterious atmosphere.”⁶⁸ She refers to the concept of *Natura naturans*, mentioned by Maria Anna Harley with respect to Bartok’s night music.⁶⁹ The irregularity of certain minor rhythmic motifs – seemingly random – gives the impression of organicity (for example, in *Music of the Starry Night*).

In the composers’ self-reflection and in the voices of reception, there is another aspect associated with the image of the starry night: the sense of *l o n e l i n e s s*, associated with the vastness of space and with *t i m e l e s s n e s s*. Hinako Fujihana Hovhaness writes about Alan Hovhaness’s work: “The flute is playing a long melodic line accompanied by the harp as if going into the starry night, travelling further into lonely space, joined by the xylophone. This piece expresses the timelessness of space.”⁷⁰ Crumb’s description of the song *Shenandoah*, where “the music is just floating there in space in a strange way,” continues as follows:

⁶⁷ Van Eyck, op. cit.

⁶⁸ Daria Dobrochna Kwiatkowska, “The Symbolism of Night and Its Musical Representations in the Works of George Crumb” (Doctor of Musical Arts diss., Cornell University, 2002). Distinction: MP. As the work is from 2002, it could not include *The Winds of Destiny* or *Metamorphoses*.

⁶⁹ Maria Anna Harley, “Natura Naturans, Natura Naturata’ and Bartók’s Nature Music Idiom,” *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 36 (1995): 329–49.

⁷⁰ Hovhaness, op. cit.

And yet when the tune comes in, you hear all the traditional relationships in the singer's notes, but the surrounding sound is like it's in another world. It's like the two worlds are colliding, and they don't have much to do with one another. I love that sense and the loneliness that it projects. The voice is there, yet it's so estranged from the music in the background.⁷¹

The collision of two worlds that Crumb spoke of is also felt in Rautavaara's works, where lyrical, "long-breath," cantilena melodies of romantic provenance with pantonal⁷² harmony meet atonal, serial or sonoristic passages (Example 7).

⁷¹ Van Eyck, op. cit.

⁷² Pantonality, Cf. Rudolph Reti, *Tonality, atonality, pantonality – a study of some trends in twentieth century music* (University of California: Rockliff, 1958), 118–119.

Example 7 E. Rautavaara, *Symphony No. 6 "Vincentiana,"* mov. I: *Starry Night*, p. 8–10.

The image displays a handwritten musical score for Example 7, E. Rautavaara's *Symphony No. 6 "Vincentiana,"* movement I: *Starry Night*, pages 8–10. The score is written on multiple staves and includes the following elements:

- Flutes (Fl):** Two staves at the top, labeled '1' and '2', showing a continuous, wavy melodic line.
- CROTALES:** A staff with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 60$ and a dynamic marking of *pp*. It features a series of notes with a 'rit.' (ritardando) marking.
- CALISPEL:** A staff with a dynamic marking of *pp* and a 'rit.' marking.
- TIMPANO:** A staff with a dynamic marking of *p* and a '(Timp. Pedal)' marking. It includes a 'PIATTO SUL TIMPANO' marking and a '(cymal)' marking.
- ARPA:** A staff with a dynamic marking of *f* and a note with an upward-pointing arrow. Below it, a note is marked with a downward-pointing arrow and the text: "GLISSANDO UPON THE STRING WITH A METAL TUNING KEY."
- DX (DXCello):** A staff with a dynamic marking of *dim.* and notes with various accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals).
- VI (Violins):** Two staves, labeled 'I' and 'II', showing a continuous, wavy melodic line.
- Alc (Alto):** A staff with a dynamic marking of *dim.* and notes with various accidentals.
- Vc (Violoncello):** A staff with a dynamic marking of *dim.* and notes with various accidentals.
- (Cb) (Contrabasso):** A staff with a dynamic marking of *dim.* and notes with various accidentals.

30

Poco più mosso
♩ = 69

CO
F 3:

pp

Ti Amo
sul
Timp

DX7

VL
DUE
SOVI

Poco più mosso
♩ = 69

VI I
3/8

II
3/8

AL

Vc

CB

um
p

capriccioso

capriccioso

box

box

It seems that a category of *nostalgia* emerges, noticeable also, for example, in Crumb's *Music of the Starry Night*, with quotations and quasi-quotations of familiar, tonal music (e.g., Bach's *Das Wohltemperierte...*), distancing the familiar and close from the different and distant.

A style such as impressionism or expressionism can also be transmedial. Traces of both can be found in van Gogh's work and in musical interpretations.

2 Intermedial Transposition

In the works discussed, we find certain qualities which – everything indicates – have been transposed from image to music. They concern both content and structure, or – in Wolf's terminology – “formal devices.”⁷³ We can consider the so-called *quasi-painting-like*⁷⁴ structural features of music, which in this case may refer to compositional space, colour scheme, background and foreground, an attempt to translate painting techniques, brushstrokes and their direction, texture.

We have mentioned the spatiality of music as a means of conveying a particular atmosphere at the transmedial level, but it is also worth considering the intermedial aspect related to space. As Katarzyna Kaczmarczyk, author of a doctoral dissertation on the relationship between music and painting in Polish instrumental works, writes: “According to the traditional classification of the arts, music is a field related to time, while painting is related to space.”⁷⁵ However, she notes that 20th-century concepts brought about a significant shift, leading to a breaking of the dichotomy of time and space in thinking about art. She cites Jacek Szerszenowicz's observation that the categories of time and space in the process of perceiving works of art reveal their complementary functions, and Janina Makota's concept that illusions which are primary for certain arts – such as space for painting or time for music – may appear as secondary in other arts.⁷⁶ Therefore, as Kaczmarczyk concludes: “in painting, a secondary illusion of time is possible, and in music, a secondary illusion of space.”⁷⁷

⁷³ Wolf, “Intermediality Revisited,” 18.

⁷⁴ According to Katarzyna Kaczmarczyk “This term, used by Teresa Malecka in reference to the music of Zbigniew Bujarski, was coined in reference to concepts falling within the scope of Roman Ingarden's concept of the identity of a work of art and based on the theses put forward by Susan Langer and Janina Makota concerning the issue of space-time in art.” Katarzyna Kaczmarczyk, “Relacje malarstwa i muzyki w polskiej twórczości instrumentalnej drugiej połowy XX wieku” [“Relations between painting and music in Polish instrumental works of the second half of the 20th century”] (PhD diss., Academy of Music in Kraków, 2013), 27.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁶ The concepts of “illusion of time” and “illusion of space” were introduced by Susan Langer.

⁷⁷ Kaczmarczyk, “Relacje malarstwa i muzyki w polskiej twórczości instrumentalnej.”

The register span described earlier can be treated as an intermedia transposition of the phenomenon of space, in particular the contrast between above (sky) and below (earth, village). Dutilleux himself spoke of the “vertigo-inducing impression of space” between the ground and the starry sky in *La nuit étoilée*,⁷⁸ which he conveyed through the contrast between low strings (the town) and the starry night (woodwinds), see Example 1. Textural diversity and the coexistence of several planes with distinct instrumental groups are also associated with space in music. In the first movement of Rautavaara's *Vincentiana Symphony*, the illusion of space is created not only by the aforementioned distance between the depth of the low string sounds and the high sounds of the woodwinds, but also by the percussion instruments, which introduce a third dimension (all coloured by the hypnotic tone of the synthesiser). In the lyrical sections of Romantic provenance, the choice of instruments in this multi-layered texture is also important for the spatial effect: two pairs of horns (culturally connoted as signalling instruments – in nature, in open space) lead long-breath legato melodies against a background of harp passages and tremolos of colourfully varied string chords – reminiscent of the topic *da lontano* (from bar 72).

Another spatial dimension of painting is depth, i.e., the relationship between planes (foreground and background). Dutilleux described the static, sonoristic section (bars 5–10) as constituting “la toile du fond”⁷⁹ (the backdrop) [cf. Example 8, bars 5 ff.]. In Hovhaness's work, for example, the accompanying harp part provides the backdrop (landscape).

⁷⁸ Potter, *Henri Dutilleux*, 126.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

As can be seen, spatial metaphors appear in the language of description and in thinking about music. The blurring of the boundaries between phenomena belonging to particular media results from the human way of thinking and physical experience, from neurobiological conditioning. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson write about *o r i e n t a t i o n a l m e t a p h o r s*, mainly related to spatial orientation: up-down, to-from, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central-peripheral. As they note:

These spatial orientations arise from the fact that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function in our physical environment. Orientational metaphors give a concept a spatial orientation; for example, *happy is up*. The fact that the concept *happy* is oriented *up* leads to English expressions like “I’m feeling *up* today.”⁸⁰

A s c e n s u s in musical works inspired by this image may be associated with the aspiration to move towards the stars, towards the sky, combined with the soaring nature of cypress trees and church towers. This ascension occurs repeatedly in the score of *Timbres...* Dutilleux, starting from the first bars: the orchestral composition and registers are additively expanded upwards (Example 8 – beginning). At the beginning of Part II: *Constellations*, the ascent – in addition to the textural and register build-up – is also manifested in rapid scale passages: for example, in the cellos over two octaves, with the oboe joining in the second octave (Example 9).

⁸⁰ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (London: The University of Chicago Press 2003), 16.

The apotheosis at the end of Rautavaara's opera – semantically related to light – is also characterised by upward movement (choir in the high register, percussion, imitation of bells ringing).

The works in question also show an attempt to translate colours from painting into music. In the case of the works discussed here (*Vincent* and *Vincentiana*), Rautavaara decided to use tone series as analogues of “pigments.” He did so exceptionally, because, as Wojciech Stępień writes, “unlike Messiaen, Rautavaara does not see colours when listening to or creating music and has no colour associations with scales, harmonies and instruments, but neither does he reject the existence of colours in music.”⁸¹

In this case, there are rows that are characterised by certain interval vectors. These are extremely difficult to discern in the score, not to mention in auditory perception. As Anne Sivuolja-Gunaratnam explains: “Rautavaara scatters the notes vertically among several orchestral instruments, so that many of the notes sound simultaneously;” “often the rows divide up into trichords, which may – contrary to the rules of orthodox dodecaphony – be repeated several times during one statement of the row,” and “the vocal parts are no help [...] for the ties connecting them are very loose.”⁸²

Information about the existence of these series and the composer's intentions comes from the source itself – the composer's *Autobiography*. As Rautavaara wrote:

Music in opera is interdisciplinary in nature. It can be compared to the visual arts in that, among other things, it uses many different 12-tone rows and their derivatives as musical material, serving a similar function to the paints on a painter's palette. Usually, in 12-tone technique, the aim is to use a single row, but here there are many. The music of each row [...] has its own character. For each specific, a specific interval content is planned, expressed by an “interval vector,” so that [...] they can then be mixed together in various ways, just as a painter mixes paints.⁸³

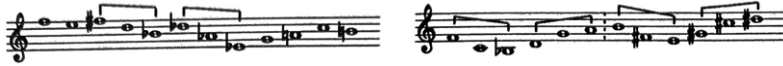
⁸¹ Stępień, *The Sound of Finnish Angels*, 87.

⁸² Anne Sivuolja-Gunaratnam, “Vincent – Not a Portrait,” *Finnish Music Quarterly* 2 (1990): 5–11, see p. 9.

⁸³ Rautavaara, *Omakuva*, 335–336.

Rautavaara gives examples of such rows:

Example 10 Exemplary rows in Einojuhani Rautavaara's opera *Vincent* and *Symphony No. 6 "Vincentiana."* After: Einojuhani Rautavaara, *Omakuvva* (Kirjapaino Oy WSOY, 1998), p. 336. a) The row containing almost all intervals. b) The row dominated by major seconds and fourths.



Undoubtedly, colour is important in all the works discussed, and some sections seem to focus exclusively on exploring colour values, as in bars 5–10 of *Timbres...* (mov. I), about which Dutilleux himself said: “this static period is in fact intended to be an exploration of colours”⁸⁴ (cf. Example 8, bars 5 ff.).

In the fifth song of *Correspondances*, Dutilleux, between the text from Van Gogh's letter about painting stars at night and the letter with words of admiration for the colours in Johannes Vermeer's paintings, there is a fundamental change in colour. With the introduction of a quotation from *Timbres, Espace, Mouvement* in the soprano's wordless vocalisation, sonoristically treated woodwind and brass instruments gradually join in (Example 11), building a chord on sustained notes in *pp*, leading to the expansion of the *tutti* sound mass over seven bars.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Potter, *Henri Dutilleux*, 125.

Example 11 H. Dutilleux, *Correspondances* for soprano and orchestra, mov. V: “De Vincent à Theo,” study score (Paris: Schott, 2009), (bars 24–29).

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The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. At the top, a box indicates the time signature $\frac{6}{4}$ and tempo $\text{♩} = 56$. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (bars 24-29) includes staves for Flute (Fl.), Horns (Hrb.), Clarinet in A (Ca.), Clarinet in Bb (Cl.), Bassoon (Bns.), Cor Anglais (Cors.), Trumpets (Trp.), Cello (Ccl.), and Voice (Voix). The second system (bars 30-35) includes staves for Violin I (VI. I), Violin II (VI. II), Alto (Alto), and Viola (Vlc.).

Key performance markings include *pp* (pianissimo) for the woodwinds and strings, and *ppp* (pianississimo) for the strings in the second system. The voice part has the instruction *un poco cresc.* above the staff. The string parts in the second system are marked *(sans sound.)*, indicating they are silent.

Additional markings include a rehearsal mark 4 above the first staff, and a note for the trumpets: "aux 3 Trp. sourd. Robinson".

In his introduction to the score of *Correspondances*, Dutilleux himself draws attention to the colouristic aspect of the fifth song in the *Correspondances* cycle:

Each of these episodes is the object of a slightly peculiar orchestration privileging such or such family of instruments. So, the evoked images and colours in Vincent van Gogh's letter will mainly find their echo in the wood timbres and in the brass section as well.⁸⁵

On the word “jaunes” (“yellow”), there is a consonance of the seven notes forming the E flat major scale (Example 12), while on the word “le soleil” (“the sun”) there is a melodic *ascensus*, where the highest *A2* (“A” double sharp) is harmonised with the notes forming the pentatonic scale (or the D major triad coloured with a major second and major sixth). As can be seen, words associated with brightness are accompanied by rather consonant harmonies.

Example 12 H. Dutilleux, *Correspondances*, mov. V (bar 37).

The image displays a musical score for Example 12, focusing on the word "jaunes" in bar 37. The score is arranged in a system with eight staves. The top staff is the vocal line, with the lyrics "éc - les - tes... et des jau - nes" written below it. The vocal line features a melodic line with a slur and a fermata over the word "jaunes". The remaining seven staves represent the orchestration, with various instruments and parts. A red vertical box highlights a specific section of the orchestration, which includes a double bass part marked "div." and a piano part marked "pp". The orchestration consists of strings, woodwinds, and brass, with the piano part providing a harmonic foundation. The overall texture is rich and consonant, reflecting the coloristic aspect mentioned in the text.

⁸⁵ Dutilleux, *Correspondances*, op. cit.

Most often, it is not specific colours, but shades or variations of darkness and lightness that are intermedially transposed from image to music. Charles Spence wrote in a 2011 article that “psychologists have known about the existence of cross-modal correspondences for many years”⁸⁶ He quoted Erich Moritz von Hornbostel’s intuition from 1927:

What is essential in the sensuous-perceptible is not that which separates the senses from one another, but that which unites them; unites them among themselves; unites them with the entire (even with the non-sensuous) experience in ourselves; and with all the external world that there is to be experienced.⁸⁷

Spence then analyses and compiles research findings confirming that there is a cross-modal correspondence between the perception of sound pitch (and sometimes its loudness) and visual dimensions (elevation, brightness, lightness, shape/angularity, size, spatial frequency, direction of movement). For example: “people consistently match high-pitched sounds with small, bright objects that are located high up in space.”⁸⁸

This is related to the physical, acoustic parameters of sounds and our biologically conditioned way of perceiving them, apart from established cultural connotations. We perceive sounds with a high spectral centroid and clear, orderly overtones as bright, and those with a predominance of low frequencies, a lack of upper harmonics and more irregular sounds as dark. This is why the sound of the harp, celesta, orchestral bells [glockenspiels], crotales, high woodwind instruments [woodwinds] (flute, piccolo, piccolo clarinet) or harmonics is perceived as bright, and that of the trombone, bassoon, cellos and double basses or tom-tom as dark. The grand piano itself, due to its wide range, can reveal this contrast (especially the amplified piano, using, among other things, harmonics). In Van Gogh’s painting, the village is submerged in darkness, while the sky – although at night-time – is illuminated by stars. Thus, the arrangement of contrasting instrumental planes corresponds to the layout: bottom – dark, top – bright (Examples 1, 2, 3).

These contrasts in the interpreted works are also sometimes semantically related to objects in Van Gogh’s painting and the painting’s overall expression. Harris writes about his work in the programme notes: “The piano and violin create the dizzy, swirling sky of oversized stars while a plaintive

⁸⁶ Charles Spence, “Cross-Modal Correspondences: A Tutorial Review,” *Attention, Perception, & Psychophysics* 73 (2011): 971–95, 973; emphasis M. P.

⁸⁷ Quoted after Spence, *ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

cello melody reveals the painting's inner torment"⁸⁹ (Example 3). Crumb, in turn, explains his *Starry Night*: "Gentle lines, rising and falling at the opening, are the swirls across the sky, while the darkness at the foot of the painting becomes low bass figures. The stars are bright sounds picked out of the darkness until, at the end, it all blows away with the pianist's light whistling, ghostly sounds in the moonlight" (Examples 2 and 6). The whirling of stars can also be interpreted from the obsessively repeated motifs in Pavlova's symphony (rapid ascending scales – downward leap) or in the recurring melodic motif on the word "étoiles" ("stars") in Dutilleux's *Correspondances*. In turn, a melisma appears on the word "infini" ("eternity").

The expressive nature of van Gogh's painting (precursory to expressionism), with its mesmerising, large, swirling stars, painted with distinct brushstrokes and visible texture, is translated into music in sections of often dense texture, kaleidoscopic and expressive colour changes, and fast, obsessive motifs. Thus, we find here an intermedial transposition of some formal devices.

Eric Bruskin writes about the last song from Crumb's *The Winds of Destiny*: "The lavish layering of musical lines may be an aural translation of van Gogh's famously thick brushstrokes."⁹⁰ Dutilleux sees "intense pulsation" in van Gogh's painting; he expresses his conviction that "palpitation of the medium, and especially the almost cosmic whirling which springs from it, could be expressed in musical terms."⁹¹ Caroline Potter notes that this movement is expressed in the form of *pointillist* passages and "could be interpreted as a musical translation of the hundreds of tiny stars in the painting"⁹² (Example 13).

⁸⁹ Harris, op. cit.

⁹⁰ Bruskin, op. cit.

⁹¹ Potter, *Henri Dutilleux*, 125.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 128.

Example 13 H. Dutilleux, *Timbres, Espace, Mouvement...*, mov. I, p. 46.

This musical score is for the first movement of H. Dutilleux's *Timbres, Espace, Mouvement...*. It is a large-scale orchestral work featuring a variety of instruments. The score is written in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The instrumentation includes:

- Flutes: 1st and 2nd Flutes (Fl.), 1st and 2nd Flutes in C (Fl. C).
- Woodwinds: 1st and 2nd Clarinets (Cl.), 1st and 2nd Bassoons (Bons 1, 2), 1st and 2nd Cor Anglais (Cors), 1st and 2nd Trumpets (Trp.), and Timpani (Timb.).
- Brass: 1st and 2nd Trombones (T. 1, 2), 1st and 2nd Trumpets (Trp.), and Cymbals (Cb.).
- Strings: Violins (Vie.), Viola (Vie.), and Cello (Cb.).
- Other: Percussion (Perc. Cl.), Glockenspiel (Glock.), and Harp (Harpe).

The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines. Dynamic markings such as *mp*, *mf*, *f*, *cresc.*, and *poco* are used throughout. Performance instructions like *pizz.* and *rec.* are also present. The score is written for a full orchestra, with multiple staves for each instrument family.

According to Siglind Bruhn, the composer saw the pulsation of celestial bodies particularly in the endings of the two main parts of *Timbres*.⁹³ At the end of Part I, *Nébuleuse*, they take the form of motifs passing through various instruments in a dense texture. In turn, Dutilleux understood the ending of Part II, *Constellations* (and the entire work), as follows, according to Bruhn, based on an unpublished text:

The contour, initiated by the bass clarinet and rising in a frenetic whirl, unites an increasing number of instruments in colourful unison in movement II (“Constellations”) is intended [...] to be heard as an allusion to van Gogh’s hymnic vision of the great spiral of stars and nebulae.⁹⁴

“Frenetic whirl” and the sense of throbbing from the painting can also be seen in the gradually increasing textures in this work, in the multi-layered overlapping of individual instrumental groups (for example, in Rautavaara’s symphony, Example 14), or in Harris’s chromatic, fast and loud piano passages *sempre fuocososo* (Example 15).

⁹³ Bruhn, *Henri Dutilleux*, 171.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Example 14 E. Rautavaara, *Symphony No. 6 "Vincentiana,"* mov. I:
Starry Night, p. 4.

The image displays a page of a musical score for Example 14, E. Rautavaara's *Symphony No. 6 "Vincentiana,"* movement I, *Starry Night*, page 4. The score is arranged in systems, with woodwinds at the top and strings at the bottom.

Woodwind Parts:

- Fl 1/2:** Flute 1 and 2, playing a continuous, wavy, tremolo-like line.
- CROT.:** Clarinet in C, playing a similar wavy line.
- TR C:** Trumpet in C, playing a similar wavy line.
- VIOR.:** Violin, playing a similar wavy line.
- QL. OP.:** Viola, playing a similar wavy line.

String and Brass Parts:

- DX 7:** Double Basses, starting with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and quarter notes, then transitioning to a wavy line. Dynamic markings include *POCO STRINGENDO* and *MULTO STRINGENDO*.
- VI I/6:** Violin I, playing a complex, rhythmic pattern with many notes, including triplets. Dynamic markings include *pp*, *crusc.*, and *f*.
- VI II/8:** Violin II, playing a complex, rhythmic pattern with many notes, including triplets. Dynamic markings include *pp*, *crusc.*, and *f*.
- AL/6:** Alto Saxophone, playing a complex, rhythmic pattern with many notes, including triplets. Dynamic markings include *pp*, *crusc.*, and *f*.
- Vc/3:** Violins, playing a wavy line. Dynamic marking includes *pp*.
- cs/3:** Cellos, playing a wavy line. Dynamic marking includes *pp*.

Performance Instructions:

- POCO STRINGENDO* (gradually increasing intensity)
- MULTO STRINGENDO* (greatly increasing intensity)
- crusc.* (crescendo)
- pp* (pianissimo)
- f* (forte)
- AL NORMALE* (normal dynamics)

Other markings: *GO* (Go), *(d.)* (diminuendo), *cruc. (d.)* (crescendo diminuendo).

Example 15 M. Harris, *Starry Night* (bar 16).

The musical score for Example 15, M. Harris, *Starry Night* (bar 16), is presented in three staves. The top staff is for Violin (Vn.), the middle for Viola (Vc.), and the bottom for Piano. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked *a tempo* and the mood is *con sord.* (con sordina). The Violin part features a melodic line with triplets and a dynamic marking of *mf*. The Viola part has a few notes with a dynamic marking of *ff*. The Piano part is highly textured with rapid sixteenth-note passages, including triplets, and a dynamic marking of *f*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, triplets, and dynamic markings.

Musical representations in the interpreted works may be viewed from the perspective of Charles Peirce’s triadic approach to signs (*i c o n - i n d e x - s y m b o l*), as explained by Eero Tarasti in his translation into music.⁹⁵

I c o n i c i t y, understood as the isomorphic similarity of musical structures to objects, would manifest itself, among other things, in the “spinning of the stars,” in the presentation of the top *versus* the bottom of the image through the selection of registers and instruments, partly through the *ascensus* movement (although this may also be symbolic), and also by providing specific words of the text of *Correspondances* with appropriate motifs (melisma on the word “infini”).

I n d e x i c a l i t y, defined by Tarasti after Vladimir Karbusicki as referring to the state of the object, including all that which belongs to the area of musical expression, would manifest itself, for example, in the “soft” colouring (instrumentation, harmony) and low dynamic level of sections evoking night – for example, on the words “Alors je vais la nuit” (“Then I go outside into the night”) in *Correspondances* (Example 16).

⁹⁵ Eero Tarasti, “Some Peircean and Greimasian Semiotic Concepts as Applied to Music,” in *The Semiotic Web 1988*, eds. T. A. Sebeok, D. J. Umiker-Sebeok, and E. P. Young, *Approaches to Semiotics* 85 (1988): 455–59.

Example 16 H. Dutilleux, *Correspondances*, mov. V (bars 15–19).

14

Fl. *pp legato* *pp*

Hrb. *pp legato* *pp*

C.a. *pp legato* *pp*

Cl. *pp legato* *pp*

Cl. b. *pp legato* *pp*

Bss. *pp legato* *pp*

Cors. 1. (sourd.) *pp* *pp*

Voix *un poco cresc.* *dim.*
A - lors je vais la nuit, de - hors pour pei - dre les é - toi - les.

VI. I. la moitié *pp*

VI. II. la moitié *pp*

Alto. la moitié *pp*

Vlc. la moitié *pp*

2

Examples of symbolic signs would be: the quotation from *Timbres, Espace, Mouvement* in *Correspondances* together with its context, the two-part structure of *Timbres...* in reference to the image and the endings of many pieces. Furthermore, as mentioned, *ascensus* in music can be understood not only as an icon – an imitation of upward movement – but also as a symbol – of the sublime, the heavens or the paradigm, *nomen omen* – “per aspera ad astra.”

The 12-note quotation from the beginning of Dutilleux’s *Timbres, Espace, Mouvement* appears in the fifth song of *Correspondances* (both in the melodic and harmonic layers) as a symbol of the painting *Starry Night* or the archetype of cosmic night (cf. Examples 8 and 11). The use of the full 12-tone scale in this melody (already in the original) symbolises fullness, the cosmos, especially in the context of the earlier appearance of this quotation – in the fourth part of *Correspondances* – in an incomplete, 11-note version.⁹⁶ This symbol is all the more significant because in the later phase of the fifth part of *Correspondances*, on the words associated with “the power of darkness” (from the description of the painting *Night Café* and the place “where one can ruin oneself”), this quotation appears in inversion, as noted by Siglind Bruhn.⁹⁷

Dutilleux’s *Timbres...*, in its essentially two-part structure, symbolises two soaring elements of van Gogh’s painting, as the composer himself explains⁹⁸ – these elements are in turn symbols of spirituality: the church tower and the cypress tree.

Finally, the endings of the pieces – written in an otherwise extremely complex musical language – are symbolic, ending in unison (Dutilleux: *Correspondances, Timbres...*) or in perfect fifths (Crumb’s *Music of the Starry Night*). Such natural sounds – including overtones – can function as symbols of *Naturlaute*,⁹⁹ metaphors for the “original sound of the world.”

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⁹⁶ Cf. Borys, “Odczuwam straszliwą potrzebę religii.”

⁹⁷ Bruhn, *Henri Dutilleux*, 172.

⁹⁸ From an interview with Pierrette Mari, Siglind Bruhn, *ibid.*, 172.

⁹⁹ Cf. H. H. Eggebrecht’s Concept: Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, *Die Musik Gustav Mahlers* (München: Piper, 1986), 23 and cf. Kinga Kiwała, *Pokolenie Stalowej Woli. Knapik, Krzanowski, Lasoń. Studia estetyczne* [The Stalowa Wola Generation: Knapik, Krzanowski, Lasoń. Aesthetic Studies] (Krakow: Academy of Music in Krakow, 2019), 258.

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