Acousmatic vs. Cinematic:
Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony in William T. Vollmann's War and Music Studies

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In *Europe Central* (2005), William T. Vollmann narratively transposes several musical works by his protagonist, the fictionalized Dmitri Shostakovich, in the mode of "imaginary content analogies" (Wolf). One passage of Vollmann's "verbal music" (Scher) focuses on the (in)famous ostinato in the first movement of the Seventh Symphony, which is traditionally pictured as the German advance on the USSR in 1941. Straightforward cinemations of the music along these programmatic lines – from Varlamov's *Stalingrad* (1943) to Paradzhanov's *Cinemaphony of the Seventh Symphony* (2005) – are available online. Regarding imaginary content analogies as a case of narrative focalization, I investigate how Vollmann replaces the habitual filmic imagery of Shostakovich's movement with "acousmatic" (Scruton) imaginary content, which idiosyncratically turns the 'invasion theme' into a 'formalist' piece of absolute music. I show how Vollmann's disregard of boundaries between narrative levels and focalization types helps him to strip Shostakovich's life and music of their most stereotypical interpretations.

In his comprehensive theorization of musicalized fiction, Werner Wolf scrutinizes Steven Paul Scher's notion of "verbal music" (1970: 149)[1] and with surgical precision separates its referential aspects from the functional and technical ones (cf. Wolf 1999: 59–70). While doing so, Wolf

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[1] Scher defined verbal music as "any literary presentation (whether in poetry or prose) of existing or fictitious musical compositions: any poetic texture which has a piece of music as its 'theme.' In addition to approximating in words an actual or fictitious score, such poems or passages often suggest characterization of a musical performance or of subjective response to music".

discovers and somewhat cautiously describes "imaginary content analogies", a "peripheral form" to complement Scher's "word music" and "structural analogies" in a typology of intermedial imitation. Imaginary content analogies are "a literary exploitation of the general capacity of music […] to trigger visual images", and Wolf's distrust of them results from the fact that "these imaginary 'pictures' are on the one hand culturally conditioned but on the other hand also highly idiosyncratic and difficult to decipher as the transposition of music" (63).

There are two important observations to be made with respect to these extremely useful theoretical points.

Firstly, imaginary content analogies are not confined to the realm of verbal music. Initially, they occur in musical response as part of real-life listening experiences. 'Movies' playing in an individual listener's head are what is primarily "culturally conditioned" and "idiosyncratic", in various proportions. In verbal music, we find their *fictional* counterparts. In 'representing' imaginary content analogies within a storyworld, narrative discourse appropriates their music 'source', now reassigned to a textual entity. The words we read 'report' some fictional visual images moving through a presumably fictitious listener's mind: this simple chain of mediations, in the spirit of Derridian differences/deferrals (*différance*), may explain Scher's indiscriminative treatment of real and imaginary pieces as subjects for verbal music, once "there is nothing outside the text" (Derrida 1966/1998: 158). Like historical characters in fictional narratives (cf. Schmid 2003/2010: 31f.), actual works of music cannot but become fictive.

Secondly, and in the light of the aforesaid, imaginary content analogies are not only a technical vehicle for verbal music to arguably prompt "the experience of effects of music" to the reader (Scher 1970: 149), of which Wolf appears to be more than skeptical (cf. 1999: 72), but they *already are* such effects upon a recognized, inferred or at least hypothetically assumed consciousness – the (implied) author's, narrator's, or a character's (cf. Nelles 1997: 9)[2]. Therefore, imaginary content analogies

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[2]   As Nelles puts it, "the historical author writes, the historical reader reads; the implied author means, the implied reader interprets; the narrator speaks, the narratee hears". The

are a particular outcome of narrative *focalization* (cf. Genette 1972/1980: 189; Nelles 1997: 75–98; Hühn et al. 2009)[3], a programmatic visual emplotment of music occurring *within* the fictional narrative prior to our success or failure to relate it to a piece we might ourselves recall or mentally generate in the course of reading. Embedded in fictional narrative as an inseparable attribute (since the attribution has already occurred) of someone's listening, these unfilmed videotracks are not just the *form* but also the *substance* of diegetic musical experience thus objectified. In this way, imaginary content analogies may be less peripheral to intermedial imitation of music than its other forms, and than Wolf initially suggested.

Mental pictures accompanying music up to the point of superseding the aural experience in the recipient's mind may be seen as an undesirable by-product of musical perception rather than its integral part. In real-life listening, they indeed may assume a parallel flow unrelated to musical events, a digression of someone who has simply stopped attending to the music. With fictional narrative, though, which verbally constitutes the music *in absentia*, we have little choice but to assume the listening is focused, once the text indicates the images were invoked by the music.

That the center of attention (etymological overtone of 'focalization') may lie in the visual rather than auditory domain of the listener's imagination does not necessarily contradict even such an essentialist

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implied/abstract author is the entity inferred from the text of the narrative, not from biographical data about the author 'in the flesh'.

[3] Introduced by Gerard Genette in his groundbreaking *Discurse du récit* (1972) as an alternative to the notions of "point of view", "vision", "aspect", "narrative perspective", etc. to denote the "focus of narration", the term has been multiply redefined, developed and dropped in the subsequent decades of narratological research. I refrain from using its extensions in postclassical narratology, although some of them, such as "auricularization" coined by François Jost (cf. Nelles 1997: 95) are particularly promising in application to verbal music. Genette's understanding of focalization is character-centered, since modes of focalization are defined in terms of how much the narrator knows (or rather says) in comparison with what the character knows (or "sees"). Since verbal music is, by definition, diegetic (i.e. it is part of the narrative referring to the music within the storyworld), attribution of imaginary content analogies to a fictive entity is crucial, hence the importance of focalization.

concept of musical perception as Roger Scruton's *acousmatic experience*, purged of not just arbitrary visual representations, but of the physical sounds in the acoustic space. According to Scruton, who adopts the term from Pierre Schaeffer's extension of Pythagoras, (tonal) music obliges the listener to perceive it acousmatically, as emancipated from its physical causes – sources of sound situated in real space. Listening to music, we attend not to sounds but *tones*, which grant us with an overwhelmingly experiential but in no way literal sense of organized movement we only fail to identify by describing it in spatial terms (cf. Scruton 1997: 2–3, 11–20, 49–51, 74–79, 95–96, 221, 229–236). Sounds are caused by objects in the real acoustic space; tones are caused by their own intrinsic order as they 'move' metaphorically through the acousmatic non-space. Yet Scruton himself, while denying music spatiality, is unable to avoid using spatial notions, which suggests that spatial (and therefore visual) conceptual metaphors provide a natural language for us to account for the acousmatic experience. Since this spatially informed language is so indispensable, it must enter the experience itself, making Scruton's crucial divide artificial.

However, the proportion of spatial concreteness in talking about music could be varied, as well as there must be a scale of perceptual experiences grading sound-to-tone ratios. In practice, it is probably as difficult for a listener to completely ignore the acoustic dimension of musical sounds and their spatially situated sources as to remain totally immune to the acousmatic abstraction of music tones: like many other binaries, listening *only* acousmatically and *only* non-acousmatically are both likely to be idealized extremes. A practical acousmatic experience is probably that in which the listener tunes up the mind to favor tones over sounds, with surrounding sight-stimulating and sound-emanating objects being sent to periphery of attention or blocked in order to summon the imaginary acousmatic coordinates. But what could this blindfolded 'space' of tonal 'movement' 'look' like? Or, more precisely, what are the perceptual and descriptive/narrative terms to register and communicate a concrete musical experience, negotiated among overtly irrelevant extra-musical associations and the philosophical and/or musicological jargon Scruton adds on top of the still inescapable spatial metaphors?

I suggest that even a sequence of wildly stylized cinematic images is a legitimate way of keeping individual musical experience out of oblivion. In fiction, where such content is objectified as solely accessible, the implied author's choice of more or less 'acousmatic' perception, which is a matter of focalization ('who hears?'), is tightly bound to the narrator's ('who speaks?') choice of more or less 'acousmatic' language ('how hear/speak?'), since languages to account for tones and the perception of tones are poorly distinguished. In life, the decision of either suppressing or unleashing 'cinemation' of music is normally unconscious and determined by acquirable listening habits; but in the fictional medium of verbal music, the distribution of attentional focus between hearing and seeing is due to focalization. To denote the ideal opposites ends of the scale, I shall draw a distinction between *acousmatic* imaginary content analogies (since the acousmatic 'space' is definitely imaginary and subject, although resistant, to some degree of visualization), and *cinematic* ones (since the "imaginary pictures" Werner Wolf undermines as inept "transpositions of music" must at least be dynamic in order to invoke musical motion). In what follows I will briefly outline a contrasted application of both types in the same literary work, with paradoxical displacement of culturally conditioned components, to illustrate the above considerations. I will focus more on the example of the apparently rarer acousmatic mode, as the marked member of my lax binary, referring to the parallel cinematic case only in passing.

Among the four Shostakovich pieces William T. Vollmann selects to transpose in a number of condensed passages of verbal music in his award-winning *Europe Central* (2005), the Seventh "Leningrad" Symphony, with its vast ostinato in the first movement's development section, is probably not only the best known, but also the most cinematic. In tracing the biography of another historical character in the book, Soviet documentary film-maker and war correspondent Roman Karmen, Vollmann catches an early stage of the symphony's literal cinemation: in Varlamov's film *Stalingrad*, the "enemy advance" is said to be "mated in the soundtrack to the Rat Theme of Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony"

(Vollmann 2005/2006: 243). Although in the 1943 Russian documentary (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-FJT1yVVg4o) the looped several measures in the respective scene are only vaguely identifiable as a distorted fragment of the most notorious Shostakovich tune more habitually called the "invasion theme" or "Fascist march", ascription of the historical Seventh with this very specific cinematic imagery started nearly as soon as the symphony was composed in 1941.

The process may be considered complete in 2005, when *Cinemaphony of the Seventh Symphony by Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich* – a full-scale film assembled mainly of archive footage by director Georgy Paradzhanov – was premiered with live orchestra conducted by Maxim Shostakovich in St. Petersburg and London. The film reaffirms the long-recognized official content of the Leningrad Symphony as representation of Russia's Great Patriotic War, now enabling the listener to watch the video track *outside* the head, as an externalized and reified entity. What many listeners would habitually visualize upon hearing the tune (Hitler's troops marching on Leningrad) – an example of cultural conditioning *par excellence* – is now available on YouTube: (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Ol4GCgq-P0).

The initial program attached to the symphony from the start, authorized by the composer and publicized heavily during World War II (cf. Gibbs 2004: 60–76), has thus proven to be inerasable, no matter how much interpretive controversy was caused by *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich as Related and Edited by Solomon Volkov* (1979). Volkov's (re-)construction of the composer's first-person voice reframed Shostakovich's political image in the West, and its publication was followed by over two decades of the so-called 'Shostakovich Wars' – the debate in Shostakovich studies around the authenticity of Volkov's endeavor (cf. Fairclough 2005). Several publications from the debate are acknowledged in *Europe Central*'s fifty-page "Sources" appendix (cf. Vollmann 2005/2006: 753–806[4]). With Shostakovich as a major character

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[4] Apart from quoting (and often "retranslating") Volkov intensively among his "Sources", Vollmann refers, most notably, to Richard Taruskin's *Defining Russia Musically*, Laurel Fay's and Elizabeth Wilson's biographical studies, Isaak Glikman's correspondence with the composer, and Ian MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich*. One

of what might be called *Europe Central*'s postmodern 'war and music studies', Vollmann frames his passages of verbal music with thick layers of historical facts and fictions, words and images, and such ambiguous narrative devices as an ominous diegetic narrator in the Russian chapters, NKVD agent Comrade Alexandrov.

That imaginary content analogies are not a faithful reproduction of the original score but a result of a music recipient's focalization is illustrated by how the apparent Shostakovich source is treated in Vollmann quantitatively. In the chapter entitled "The Palm Tree of Deborah", the verbal movements of the Seventh Symphony are scattered along with intermedial imitations of the 1943 Eighth Symphony, varying in size from a single sentence to slightly under two pages. Compared to the actual Shostakovich work, omissions are vast. The third and fourth movements of the Seventh are given little narrative attention, characterized very generally in sections 31 and 40. The promise of the "first two movements of his Seventh Symphony, played on the piano" in section 28 (Vollmann 2005/2006: 195) is simply unfulfilled: Vollmann's verbal music drops the second movement entirely, while the passage of verbal music rendering the opening movement is dominated by the symphony's best-known "invasion theme" march of the development section, disproportionally at the expense of the exposition and recapitulation. This repetitive crescendo is indeed the most memorable tune of the Shostakovich piece, the well-established synecdoche representing the whole by its part; here Vollmann's focalization conforms to a stereotypical listening to the real Seventh Symphony, such as the biographical author himself may well have come up with. A trace of this extrafictional listening by Vollmann-the-man is buried in *Europe Central* as a tiny lapse of accuracy in reproduction of the source symphony, which may well have been part of the author's intention – a lapse completely lost in fictionalization, as the fictive avatar of the Shostakovich symphony is verbally established. However, characterizing it can provide empirical evidence of a theoretical inevitability: that there is no way verbal music can refer to the real composer's score.

more reference to Taruskin is in the subsequent paratextual commentary, "An Imaginary Love Triangle: Shostakovich, Karmen, Konstantinovskaya".

In "The Palm Tree of Deborah", Vollmann contradicts the score by calling the ostinato "the marionette in eleven variations" (185), whose "twelfth round changed key" (197), whereas in Shostakovich it is the *thirteenth* presentation of the theme that takes it away tonally from repeating itself, finally briefly developed, so that there are twelve, not eleven, variations/"re-orchestrated repetitions" (Mishra 2008: 135). Arithmetically, variations are a slippery matter: the returns of the melody could certainly, and even more justifiably, be counted not from the first presentation of the theme, which is thus implicitly numbered zero, but from the first time it comes back, i.e. the theme's second appearance. However, a close comparison between the Shostakovich score and the Vollmann text shows that one round is missing, and the verbal "approximation" (in Scher's definition) counts the "flirtatious knocking" of the violins' *col legno* and violas' *pizzicato* in the section's opening in rehearsal figure 19 as "this first go-round" (Vollmann 2005/2006: 196). The apparently missing fragment is between the music passage when "a woodwind lurked dissonantly beneath the high sweetness" (the flute's contrapuntal melody below the piccolo playing the main theme in fig. 23) and the immediately subsequent "brassy life" the theme leads in the next round (the trombone and trumpets picking up the melody in fig. 29, from which Vollmann's creative hearing subtracts the piano, but where it adds "horns, piccolos, clarinets […] and xylophone creeping in en route to the *ostinato*", quite prematurely for the original Shostakovich). Occasional explicit ordinal numbers across the narrative passage ("[t]he fifth repetition", "the seventh go-round", "the tenth incarnation" etc.) also suggest that the listener, who in relation to the actual Shostakovich music we take to be Vollmann himself, counts "one" from the beginning, but also that the listening aims at pedantic precision. How could he possibly miscalculate and omit the whole fourth presentation of the theme in mm. 214–253 (figs. 25–27), where the oboe and the bassoon take it in turns to play each phrase of the melody, thus literally doubling its length?

The simplest explanation is that the author must have relied on a particular recording of the symphony. This was most likely Leonard Bernstein's 1962 performance with New York Philharmonic, released on

CD in 1993. With his habitual grace[5], Bernstein felt free to improve Shostakovich's score by cutting out the entire lengthy statement between figs. 25–27: perhaps he thought it an annoyingly redundant retardation of the movement's rising dynamics. If this conjecture is right, Vollmann's fictional Shostakovich playing the piano reduction of his symphony movement to an audience of friends and colleagues in September 1941 anachronistically accepts Bernstein's 1962 critique. This contradiction is powerless in fictional discourse, though, considering the latter's overt capacity for fictionalizing whatever aspects of reality it pretends to depict, be it 'real people' or music scores. Fully appropriating its 'source', verbal music is immune to accusations of getting things wrong. Since even the very composer of the 'original' is now a fictional character, so is his music. What comes flawed in reality, is made flawless in fiction.

In terms of focalization, the incomplete rendering of the musical prototype in Vollmann, who takes further liberties to 'reorchestrate' the music now of his own authorship, is external proof that verbal music originates from an individual understanding of the 'source' piece, bound to accidental flaws and perceptual limitations, and thus negotiates between the "culturally conditioned" and "idiosyncratic" associations processed by and retained in the listener's memory prior to verbalization. The deviations from the score I have described so far are a matter of the author's choice and chance, so the listener initially responsible for setting music to words is in this case decipherable as Vollmann himself – somewhat metaleptically (cf. Gennette 1980: 234–235)[6], since we thus violate the virtual but strict borders between narrative levels: historical

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[5]   Bernstein was famous, even notorious, for bringing similar corrections to the pieces he conducted. In Gunther Schuller's characterization, "Lenny, as a composer, has a fundamental respect to the creative process but when he expresses himself, he leaves no room for argument or discussion. Lenny's ego is such that he feels the need to revise and recompose other composer's music in his own terms" (Peyser 1987: 259). Notably, Bernstein's later recording of the Seventh with Chicago Symphony Orchestra from 1988 has no cuts.

[6]   In Genette, metalepsis is a "transition from one narrative level to another", such as "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narrate into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into metadiegetic universe, etc.) or the inverse".

author and textual entities, namely the implied/abstract author and the narrator (cf. Nelles 1997: 9–43; Schmid 2003/2010: 34–50, 57–77). With a kind of Freudian slip, the narrator alerts us to the author's participation in focalization; although what is narrated is Shostakovich-the-character's music performed by its diegetic creator, the peculiar imaginary content analogies in the passage are thinly related to Vollmann. The peculiarity of the passage is that it mediates the first movement of the Seventh via a performance of its piano reduction, but speaks of the music as if a symphony orchestra was playing. The listening we encounter is marked as *acousmatic* in two ways: first, it uses a lot of abstract notions rejecting the culturally conditioned war imagery in favor of musical events; second, it manages to keep the physical cause of the sound in the scene out of focus for most of the time: the focal character in the scene hears the orchestra where the piano is seen, thereby replacing sounds with tones, whose movement somehow necessitates imagining certain timbral characteristics of orchestra instruments. This also results in a tension between Genette's three types of focalization related to characters' standpoints in the narrative: zero, internal and external (1972/1980: 189f.). The living author of the book, who was certainly listening to the orchestral version of the real Shostakovich piece (most probably Bernstein's 1962 interpretation) is responsible for the hearing outside the fictional world. But who is the narrator independent of the real author's world (presumably taking the diegetic world as existant)? And which focalization is used – that is, who hears the composer's piano in this peculiar way?

Let me first deal with Vollmann's displacement of culturally conditioned cinematic imaginary content analogies of the "invasion theme" in Shostakovich.

Throughout his book, Vollmann insistently uses the "Rat Theme" tag to refer to the first movement's long ostinato passage (mm. 144–429 with the exit modulating variation developing the theme up to m. 497), which seems to have been suggested but once in Shostakovich criticism, by Soviet writer Alexey Tolstoy (cf. Gibbs 2004: 74). In his passage of verbal music, Vollmann intertextually unpacks this:

The fifth repetition was like the second but much louder, more confident. The Pied Piper had entered his stride (and for the sake of our loves, to say nothing of our musical careers, we'll call him Adolf Hitler, because otherwise we'd, you know). (196f.)

Unlike the widely accepted "invasion" or "Fascist theme" titles, the allusion to the German legend of the Rat-Catcher leading away the children of Hamelin provides room for ambivalence in assigning the music with programmatic meaning. The swallowed reference to Stalin is here attributed to Shostakovich himself, as the clause in brackets is recognizably the free indirect speech stylizing the composer's stumbling diction: like his historical prototype, Vollmann's Shostakovich is helpless with words. This is also a formal signal that, if there is internal focalization in the verbal music episode, it may be Shostakovich's own, not necessarily his diegetic listeners'.

Shostakovich's audience in the scene is anonymous except for the composer's friend Isaak Glikman and "a man he scarcely knew" called Ivan Borisovich, both characters singled out for a short exchange at the end of the performance, when a similarly elliptic hint to the victims of Stalinism as the music's imaginary content is provided:

Thanks to the war, Dmitri Dmitriyevich, and thanks also to you, for the first time we can cry openly. Not one of us here hasn't lost somebody, somebody killed by the Fascists or else before –

My God! cried Glikman in terror. Please watch what you are saying, Ivan Borisovich! (197)

The audience's spokesman parallels the music with the life experience he shares with his contemporaries, so that some extra-musical imagery may, by this indirect evidence, be ascribed to the listeners in the scene. However, cinematic imaginary content analogies are excluded from the episode, except its very beginning, which covers the movement's exposition, focuses for a moment on the pianist himself (the physical source of sound in the scene), and hurries to take us into the "Rat Theme" as soon as possible:

> And he played a theme like a field of tall flowering grass in which consciousness and premonition browsed together like wild deer. Then his hands rushed up from the piano, the fingers twitching out the beat of silence as he played a rest as black and square as the silhouette of the pillbox, and then came what in the orchestra version would be faint snare drums, and the Rat Theme commenced. (196)

Considering the highly acousmatic flavor of what goes on further in Vollmann's passage, apart from occasional takes at Shostakovich playing, its content can hardly be known, heard or seen by the audience, although such is the narrator's rigorous claim:

> […] you must believe me when I tell you even though he had no orchestra on that day, only an out-of-tune piano whose cover had been nicked by shell fragments, he played in such a way that it was all there; this was the true premiere even though hardly anybody was there to hear it. (196)

The anonymous first-person narrator here is hard to place. He may be non-diegetic, i. e. not belong to the storyworld and use *zero focalization*, saying "more than any of the characters knows" (Genette 1972/1980: 189). However, this omniscience is deliberately restricted by not going into the audience's (Glikman's or Ivan Borisovich's) inner perceptions and refraining from portraying their cinematic imaginary content analogies, so that an *external focalization* of looking at characters from the outside is applied. In *Europe Central*, on the other hand, omniscience is often claimed by Comrade Alexandrov, who is not explicitly identified as a man in the audience, but might be one. Alexandrov's secret police informers and, generally, his aggressively mystifying manner and his capacity for lying we may infer from his professional affiliation with the NKVD make this unreliable diegetic narrator an option to consider, hence Glikman's terrified remark. Whether Comrade Alexandrov is concocting himself or someone else as a channel of *internal focalization*, confining the imaginary content analogies to a mind of an agent present in the episode he is narrating, is uncertain, too. What is clear at this point is that the acousmatic listening of Vollmann's verbal music of the "Rat Theme" tends to block the culturally conditioned cinematic analogies so deeply inserted into the music (within as well as outside of the fictional reality),

but still consciously sets the imagination beyond the picture of the pianist and the sound of the piano.

Unlike Vollmann in the pre-YouTube era before 2005, we are lucky today to have an easy access to the 1941 Soviet newsreel of Shostakovich hastily playing a fragment of the same music, namely the thirteenth (i.e. the twelfth in Bernstein/Vollmann) 'round' of the theme, at last properly varied and developed, up to the beginning of the recapitulation's Moderato, from bar 430 to 511

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOKL_q-Ribs).

This footage demonstrates that the non-fictional composer's piano performance, at least in front of the official cameras, could be somewhat less glamorous than how the author of *Europe Central* imagined it while listening to the orchestral recording. Yet the experience of watching the newsreel is instructive: even those of us who know the music fairly well and recall the auditory image of the full orchestral sound are likely to visually focus on the *actual* sound source and the image of the pianist. What Vollmann does in his fictional passage is quite unrealistic, yet unmistakably acousmatic: the physical source of the sound corresponds to what is actually neither seen nor even heard, namely, proleptically to the interaction of orchestral sonorities (see Genette 1972/1980: 40[7]) originating from a future symphony orchestra performance. In the text of *Europe Central*, the full-scale premiere follows (Vollmann 2005/2006: 254); beyond it, as I metaleptically suppose, there is the author's listening to the Bernstein orchestra reinvented as the Shostakovich piano.

The conceptual metaphor unfolding in the passage is not "Music as War" but "Piano as Orchestra," a music-to-music relationship instead of music-to-reality. Vollmann's verbal passage from the Seventh revises Shostakovich's music as non-representational and self-referential. The imaginary content analogies are not shaped into a film of advancing German troops or, as an alternative Volkovian reading goes, "a satirical picture of Stalinist society in the thirties" (MacDonald 1990: 159) with the NKVD convoying enemies of the people to execution or GULAG, but into a succession of orchestral events and tonal relationships. In the text, it

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[7] In classical narratology, prolepsis is "any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later".

was not the Panzer tanks, but the Rat Theme itself that "assumed a brassy life, shrugging off its former tentativeness, with celli, horns, piccolos, clarinets, brasses and xylophone creeping en route to the *ostinato*" (Vollmann 2005/2006: 196) and later, "already very far from what it had been before, scuttled back into anti-programmatic formalism", so that "a slow Sibelius-like dirge returned, mirroring the opening theme of the movement" (197). In the seventeen-sentence rendition of the Shostakovich crescendo, the majority of grammatical subjects are generic orchestra instruments, sonic or otherwise abstract notions, such as music form constituents: "motif", "knocking", "the Rat Theme's second iteration", "a woodwind", "the Rat Theme" (six times), "the snare drum", "the orchestra's processional drums", "fragments", "cymbals", "silent contemplation", "mournful woodwinds", "a reprise". Visuality is constrained: apart from the five sentences referring to the diegetic performer's actions, there is nothing to be feature-filmed, which does not necessarily mean there is no visual imaginary content in the passage; rather, the visual domain is internalized as a set of musical entities cartoonishly interacting within the listener's mental space. The passage is not just metaphorical (piano as orchestra) but also allegorical (abstract concepts behaving as characters), which both dehumanizes and anthropomorphizes music at the same time. Extra-musical reference is handed over to adjectives ("coaxing", "sadistic", "sweet and beautiful", "confident", "national-patriotic", "stern", "impressionistic", "creepy and horrid", etc.), which are attributed to nouns without taking the whole movie of antecedents outside of the musical realm.

At the same time, visuality is there, since the acousmatic dimension of tones is only perceived and described in spatial parameters. Musical instruments, which would perfectly qualify for objects causing physical sound, are mentioned over and over. Yet Vollmann's trick is that those instruments are absent from the episode's diegetic space: it is the piano not woodwinds and brasses that is situated and played in the Leningrad room accommodating the premiere of the symphony movement. (Could that be the reason why the piano, which in the Shostakovich score is listed among the orchestra and contributes to the accompaniment of the varied theme, does not figure in Vollmann's set of acousmatic imaginary content

analogies?) The instruments and sounds in the verbal description stand metaphorically for timbres of the ideal sonorities of tones that color the black and white palette of the keyboard reduction.

Vollmann's verbal music completely and emphatically dismantles and removes the culturally conditioned cinematic content analogies that by 2005 had been associated with this music for over sixty years. The "invasion theme" is no longer the familiar audio-visual meme. The intriguing thing is that earlier in the same Vollmann chapter, "The Palm Tree of Deborah", the whole invasion cinematic imagery has already been fully developed in section 20, relocated to the first three movements of Symphony No. 8, which historically failed to retain the programmatic title of "Stalingrad" (imposed by Soviet authorities when Shostakovich completed it in 1943) and has traditionally enjoyed a higher reputation as absolute music. This deliberate narrative permutation fighting against stereotypical attitudes to the Shostakovich 'war symphonies' is announced in Vollmann through the recognizable narrative voice of Comrade Alexandrov, who obviously excels here in Orwellian doublethink:

> Although it was the program music of the Seventh Symphony which would make him famous, the course of the war is better symbolized by the first three movements of his incomparably greater Eighth Symphony in C Minor (the unwholesome work, to be sure, for its pessimism deviates from the Party line). (179f.)

In compliance with the overwhelmingly dual nature of Vollmann's novel, there are two ways of explaining why the Seventh Symphony is stripped of its culturally stuck programmatic imagery. If internal focalization is implied in the passage (which with imaginary content analogies is quite necessary, still a listener's consciousness is found to perceive diegetic music from within diegesis), the only plausible vehicle for such a hearing is the performing character of Shostakovich himself. In this case, the narrator (either the non-diegetic anonymous we could identify either with the author's paratextual alter-ego of "WTV", who signs the Notes of the "Sources" section at the end of the book, or the diegetic but unreliably omniscient/telepathic Comrade Alexandrov) has us perceive the music through its composer's mind. Shostakovich, who had a reputation for

composing his orchestral scores in his head and quickly writing them down (cf. MacDonald 1990: 143), is definitely the only character fully capable of literally hearing his own piano as orchestra before the symphony is ever performed by one and adequately follow the movement of its tones. If in this postmodern time of ours and Vollmann's, which favors postclassical narratology, we allow a metaleptic focalization to smash narrative boundaries, the narrator could be omniscient enough to know and hear what none of his characters, nor their historical models, can: that is, for instance, the Bernstein CD, which, in my hypothesis, the author is likely to own. This playful reading is exciting, considering that in *Europe Central* the author-like narrator WTV of "Sources", when his presence can occasionally be deduced from recognizably Vollmannian attitudes so different from "fabrications of my narrator, Comrade Alexandrov" (764), has to compete with the diegetic NKVD narrator in terms of narrative power, and can even be seen, from time to time, as losing the battle for the higher place in the hierarchy of the book's narrative frame.

In conclusion, by suppressing images – both the perceptual ones of Shostakovich playing the piano and the culturally conditioned pictures of a military offensive – Vollmann has the Seventh Symphony, and particularly its "invasion theme" episode, escape the cinematic program insistently attached to it ever since the 1940s. Using the ambivalent acousmatic imaginary content analogies that his narrative setting inherits as traces of extra-fictional entities (either the historical composer's fine recognition of the orchestra score in the piano reduction or the author's idiosyncratic hearing of a particular orchestra recording fictionally reinterpreted as a solo piano performance), and problematizing the institution of the narrator, Vollmann leaves Shostakovich's music in the same fundamental ambiguity it enjoys until this day, no matter how hard culture tries to stabilize its meaning. Reversing some stereotypes of musicology in his own 'war and music studies', Vollmann configures his fictional Shostakovich as a programmatic socialist realist in his Eighth Symphony and a self-referential formalist in the Seventh. Consequently,

like his prototype, Vollmann's protagonist is destined to perpetuate the dualism of either/both in a poststructuralist aporia.

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