

Can Lyotard's characterisation of the time of the sublime experience allow for a musical sublime?

"The avant-gardist task remains that of undoing the presumption of the mind with respect to time. The sublime feeling is the name of this privation." (Lyotard, *The Sublime and the Avant-garde*, pg 464)

"A new music as discord, and as a discordant accord, the source of time." (Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy*, pg xiii)

Jean-Francois Lyotard's revival of the sublime as part of his project of postmodernism provides for the first time an analysis of the sublime work of art as the site of an intersection of various times. This analysis is built up from the work of Kant and Burke, into the sublimity of natural phenomena and poetry respectively, and takes as its own object painting, primarily the work of American painter Barnett Newman. In concerning himself with this medium, Lyotard splits decisively with both Kant, for whom there could be no constructed sublime, no sublime *work*, and Burke for whom painting was forever shackled by the constraints of representation and as such did not have the freedom necessary to induce a profoundly new, sublime experience. Lyotard maintains Burke's concern to an extent, but shows that the advent of non-representational painting precisely allows for sublime painting. Transposing this concern to another medium, that of music, we find that it has this quality of being non-representational, at the very least to the same extent ascribed to poetry by Burke, in as far as we consider lyrical compositions. However, if we discard any overlap with poetry and consider the possibility of a sublime experience engendered by a purely instrumental composition, or what we might call a purely musical sublime, we encounter a characteristic of the experience which is absent from the other media. As much as Lyotard's analysis makes the experience of the sublime inherently temporal, there is a kind of temporality involved in music which is not present in painting. Although any aesthetic experience involves a progression in time, the musical experience takes as its element this sensible progression, the auditory differences from one moment to the next are constitutive of the work. More than this, the temporal progression is external to the subject, it is a movement in and of itself. Whereas in painting the eye is free to roam, to take the painting in in

any order, to go back to specific parts, to fixate, the ear has order imposed on it, it cannot go back, slow down, speed up, or skip. The imposed progression is the essential character of music. In this essay I will show that, because of this essential aspect of music, Lyotard's characterisation of the time of the sublime is not adequate to musically sublime experience. For methodological reasons I will explicitly concern myself with what I have referred to already as the purely musical sublime. This is to ensure that the analysis is at no point confused with that of poetry, though it does not rule out a future analysis of lyrical music. I will demonstrate this inadequacy by elaborating Lyotard's theory with regard to how it develops the Kantian sublime. Finally I will show how Lyotard's analysis is undermined and try to develop an adequate analysis based on Lyotard's themes.

In his essay *Newman: The Instant*, Lyotard presents the most clear explication of how his particular elaboration of the sublime applies to art, focusing on Newman's own work. He opens the essay by distinguishing between the different times which are involved in the experience of the of work - "the time it takes the painter to paint the picture (time of 'production'), the time required to look at and understand the work (the time of 'consumption'), the time to which the work refers (a moment, a scene, a situation, a sequence of events: the time of the diegetic referent, of the story told by the picture), the time it takes to reach the viewer once it has been 'created' (the time of circulation) and finally, perhaps, the time the painting *is*"¹, what we might call *constitutive*. Lyotard intends that this distinction of different strands of time: production, consumption, reference, circulation, and constitutive time, will enable him to "isolate different 'sites of time'"², which are the junctures at, or 'places' in, which these different times intersect. The site of time that Lyotard locates within Newman's work is contrasted with those from various other artists, notably Duchamp, in whose work referential time is very important in terms of providing a 'not yet' or 'no longer', presenting an 'other', and as such extending the time of consumption to infinity³. However, Lyotard determines Newman's work as non-representational, as not setting up a referential time - "Newman is not representing a non-representable annunciation; he allows it to present itself"⁴. If we were to determine the difference between the works of Duchamp and Newman in this respect, we might characterise the former as belonging

1 *The Inhuman*, pg 78

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., pg 79

4 Ibid.

to the aesthetic of genius and the latter to that of the sublime, if we understand the differences between these aesthetics as Lyotard presents them in his *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*: "[These] two aesthetics can be described on the basis of these two tensions, two aesthetics that are always possible, that always threaten art, periods, genres and schools whatever they may be, a figural aesthetic of the 'much too much' that defies the concept [genius], and an abstract or minimal aesthetic of the 'almost nothing' that defies form [sublime]"⁵. This adequacy of this distinction is further reinforced by the contrast Lyotard draws between the times of consumption, where, as has been mentioned, Duchamp's works extend it to infinity, but in Newman's work there "is almost nothing to consume"⁶ - a 'much too much' and an 'almost nothing'. As such, we can be certain that referential time cannot intersect at the 'site' of the sublime. If we follow his analysis of Newman further we find that further times are excluded from the site of the sublime: "[Newman] is no longer a painter-prince, an 'I' who displays his glory... to a third party (including himself, of course) in accordance with the 'communication structure' which founded classical modernity... Newman's space is no longer triadic in the sense of being organized around a sender, a receiver and a referent. It is not Newman who is speaking, or who is using painting to show us something. The message (the painting) is the messenger"⁷. In the constitution of the site of the sublime, both the time of production and the time of circulation are irrelevant, as the work presents itself. This leaves us with just the time of consumption and the constitutive time of the painting, to consider in their interaction. However, at the opening of the essay when listing the different times he says: "and finally, *perhaps*"⁸. This indicates that the list is not exhaustive, and that there may be another time to consider in the analysis of the sublime. What this time is, and how it relates to the other two times in the site of the sublime will be returned to later. First we must turn to the status of Lyotard's relation to Kant.

In his essay *The Sublime and the Avant-garde*, Lyotard addresses his debt to Kant directly⁹, but importantly he also directly diverges from him, and returns to Burke, with regard to the handling of the time of the sublime. Specifically he states: "the question of time, of the *Is it happening?*, does not form part - at least not explicitly - of Kant's problematic"¹⁰. This is

⁵ *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime (LAS)*, pg 76

⁶ *The Inhuman*, pg 80

⁷ *Ibid.*, pg 81

⁸ *Ibid.*, pg 78 (My own emphasis)

⁹ *The Continental Aesthetics Reader (CAR)*, pg 458-459

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pg 459

interesting because in his own *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, Lyotard not only acknowledges, but demonstrates the intricacy of Kant's thought with regard to the time of the sublime experience. This indicates that rather than not being explicitly sensitive to time in general, Kant is not explicitly sensitive to a certain kind of time, the time that concerns the question 'Is it happening?', namely the time that we have identified as missing from the introduction to his essay on Newman. It will as such be necessary to determine exactly how Kant explicitly determines the working of time in the sublime experience, both that we may trace the precise areas where Lyotard differs, and in order that we may uncover the implication of this other time.

Kant takes up the theme of the sublime from Burke, but changes it notably as he integrates it into his theory of taste and his critical project as a whole. Most importantly, as has already been stated, there is no such thing as the sublime work for Kant, the sublime is purely a subjective feeling aroused in the subject by a specific state of the faculties (a discordant accord¹¹), which is itself brought about by the apprehension of certain natural phenomena. Kant divides the sublime into two different forms: the mathematical, which involves the attempted apprehension of an object of theoretical knowledge in accordance with the faculty of cognition under the rule of the understanding, and the dynamical, which involves the apprehension of an object of practical knowledge in accordance with the faculty of desire under the rule of reason¹². The general structure of both of these experiences is that in synthesizing the object of knowledge the imagination is led into a relationship with reason whereby it becomes directed by an Idea of the absolute, of the absolutely great and the absolutely powerful respectively. The 'voice of reason' thus demands that the imagination, in combination with the power of judgment as the faculty of presentation, provide a presentation of the absolute in intuition, that is in inner sense. In its attempt to do so the imagination recoils back on itself, causing a feeling of pain, as its inadequacy is *counter-purposive* to judgment in its empirical exercise, as such causing it in its *heautonomy* as the higher faculty of feeling to produce the sensation of pain. However, this pain is counter-balanced as the imagination finds in its own inadequacy and absence of presentation (formlessness) a *negative presentation* of the Idea of the absolute. This is in turn *purposive* for the power of judgment in its transcendent exercise, demonstrating the *supersensible vocation* of the mind, in that, through the power of reason, it can think beyond any possible sensible

¹¹ Deleuze, pg xiii

¹² *Critique of the Power of Judgment (CPJ)*, pg 131

presentation, and additionally that through the power of the imagination it can present the unrepresentable, if only in a negative fashion. As such, the sublime feeling constitutes an oscillating feeling, a "movement [that] (especially in its inception) may be compared to a vibration, i.e. to a rapidly alternating repulsion from and attraction to one and the same object"¹³. Yet the judgment/feeling of sublimity is still only reflective in that it does not determine the object as an object of knowledge under a concept, and as such is merely subjectively referred to the relationship of the faculties in their discordant accord, as they give rise to the state.

However, this basic characterisation does not explain the specific uniqueness of the time of the sublime. For this we will have to turn to a more detailed analysis of the mathematically sublime. Firstly, let us relate this back to our concern with the two times we have isolated so far: consumption and constitutive time. If we know that the third time is not explicit in Kant, it seems that these two will be. As such, we can characterise the time of the synthesis as a whole (what in the first critique is known as the threefold synthesis¹⁴) as that of consumption; constitutive time is thus the time which is synthesized by the syntheses. This will enable us to better characterise Lyotard's own analysis of these times later.

Firstly, we need to understand the different syntheses involved in determining an object of knowledge. As has been mentioned, in the first critique this is elaborated as "a threefold synthesis which must necessarily be found in all knowledge; namely, the *apprehension* of representations as modifications of the mind in intuition, their *reproduction* in the imagination, and their *recognition* in a concept"¹⁵. In order this involves: the action of the imagination (in its transcendental, or productive exercise) upon the sensibility, unifying the diverse manifold of intuition under the pure forms of intuition (space and time), as such creating out of it spatio-temporalized *appearances*; followed by the *reproduction* of these appearances (and past ones from memory) within the imagination (as its empirical exercise) as a spatio-temporal continuity which covers both the immediate past and the immediate future as a space of expectation; completed in the action of the understanding, bringing the continuity under a concept as a *recognized* object. This final synthesis is made possible by the schematism¹⁶, which, again as an action of the imagination in its transcendent (or productive) exercise, unites the concept and

¹³ Ibid., pg 141

¹⁴ *Critique of Pure Reason (CPR)*, pg 130-131

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., pg 180-187

intuition by schematizing the continuity as object, that is delimiting its *form* as a temporalized concept. This format is changed in the third critique, where three new syntheses are presented: "1. the **apprehension** (*apprehensio*) of the manifold of intuition; 2. the **comprehension**, i.e., the synthetic unity of the manifold of intuition; 3. the **presentation** (*exhibitio*) of the object corresponding to this concept in intuition"¹⁷. Unfortunately as the quote indicates, these do not correspond directly to the previous syntheses, but rather combine their elements in different ways¹⁸. Firstly, the synthesis of apprehension has been modified in that it now includes the synthesis of reproduction, but this comes under the name of *composition*, as pointed out by Lyotard¹⁹, and proceeds in parallel with the apprehension of appearances (parts); apprehension, in both its modes, is a *progressive* movement. The syntheses of comprehension and presentation are more difficult, in that they are not strictly correlated to a either recognition or the schematism, but divide up their functions differently. Kant states that the understanding governs the synthesis of comprehension, but as becomes clear in the elaboration of the mathematically sublime, it also involves the imagination. Essentially comprehension selects a particular spatio-temporal continuity as it is composed in the (reproductive) imagination and brings it under the transcendental unity of apperception, that is, by bringing it under the concept of an object. This is not the same as recognition however, in that the continuity (or manifold) is not fully schematized (delimited) as an object, although schemas must be employed in the selection of the concept²⁰. The synthesis of presentation, as such, fills in the gaps; it schematizes the concept, uniting it with the manifold as delimited object, and presenting it as an intuition in inner sense. Again, although Kant states that this synthesis is governed by the faculty of judgment, he also locates the action of the imagination in it (necessarily so in the schematism). This is the order of the determinate judgment, the time of consumption in as much as it is made up of the times of the individual syntheses as they relate to one another. As such the determinate judgment of the object of knowledge is located in a synthesized time, a moment, which is fully situated within the continuity of lived experience as provided by apprehension. We might describe this moment as

¹⁷ CPJ, pg 23

¹⁸ It may seem odd that I have introduced the original syntheses from the first critique at all, but beyond merely providing additional clarity, this has a usefulness which will become apparent later, particularly with regard to the synthesis of reproduction.

¹⁹ LAS, pg 105-109

²⁰ This is not explicitly mentioned, but can be assumed given the necessity of a 'third thing' to mediate concept and intuition.

the constitutive time of the judgment.

The sublime experience occurs when the integration of the times of the different syntheses breaks down. This is detailed in Kant's second characterisation of the mathematically sublime, where he analyzes it in terms of the measurement of magnitude in space. He describes it thus: "The measurement of space (as apprehension) is at the same time the description of it, thus an objective movement in the imagination and a progression; by contrast, the comprehension of [the composed manifold] in the unity not of thought but of intuition, hence the comprehension of in one moment of that which is successively apprehended, is a regression, which in turn cancels the time-condition in the progression of the imagination and makes **simultaneity** intuitable. It is thus (since temporal succession is a condition of inner sense and of an intuition) a subjective movement of the imagination, by which it does violence to inner sense, which must be all the more marked the greater the quantum is which the imagination comprehends in one intuition"²¹. It is best to describe this in virtue of one of Kant's examples, I will use that of the apprehension of the pyramid²². If I were to view a pyramid from an appropriate distance that I could see the whole thing, but be close enough to relate it to the magnitudes of other things, I could attempt to estimate its magnitude, in fact, in attempting to grasp it as an object, I would be obliged to. This would pose no problem for my faculty of apprehension, for, as Kant remarks, "it can go to infinity" because its apprehension of parts and composition of them in continuities proceeds by the same time, in parallel, yet "comprehension becomes ever more difficult the further apprehension advances, and soon reaches its maximum, namely the aesthetically greatest basic measure for the estimation of magnitude"²³. This limit is that of the reproductive imagination, which, as it composes continuities, abandons the former parts so that new ones can be introduced. This is not a problem for apprehension because it proceeds progressively without concern for delimited continuities. The problem begins if comprehension tries to exceed the limit. The to be asked is why would it do this? This can be answered by further determining how estimation takes place. In the progressive movement of apprehension the imagination is led by the understanding through the schematized concepts of number. The imagination picks an initial measure whose rough size it can intuit, in this case perhaps a tree near the pyramid. It then progressively uses this measure to apprehend successively larger parts of the object in

21 *CPJ*, pg 142

22 *Ibid.*, pg 135-136

23 *Ibid.*, pg 135

accordance with the schemata (1 tree, 2 trees, 4 trees, etc.). Here it is important to understand Kant's distinction between logical comprehension and aesthetic comprehension²⁴. In the former, the comprehension merely employs understanding in trying to think the magnitudes, gaging the object mathematically without trying to present it in intuition, e.g. calculating the size of the pyramid without visualizing it relative to the measure of the tree. In the latter, the imagination is employed and the whole object is comprehended in composition before being presented in intuition. The question again is why would the imagination attempt to comprehend the whole object? This is because at some point in the apprehension it ceases being led by the understanding and is brought under reason. This takes place because of the rapid apprehension of successively larger measures in an exponential progression. This brings to mind the Idea of a final magnitude that cannot be progressed beyond, the whole or absolute.

It is important to distinguish here, as Lyotard does²⁵, between the subjectively absolute measure, which is determined by the limit of the reproductive imagination, and the objectively absolute measure, which is the Idea of reason. Now, in being led by the Idea (the objective absolute), the faculty of comprehension attempts to enable the presentation of the whole under the Idea, by selecting a continuity larger than the limit (the subjective absolute). This is, as such, a *regressive* movement, in that the imagination extends back beyond its own limit in an attempt to reconstitute the parts of the continuity it has lost in its progression. This creates a dissonance between the time of the comprehension and the time of the apprehension, which, as Kant said, is larger the greater the attempted measure of comprehension. This dissonance results from the location of the beginning of the comprehended time outside of the time of apprehension as constituted in composition. The register of this dissonance is inner sense, which is the intuition of constant succession, and as such the regressive movement does violence to it in disrupting the integrated time of the syntheses. The simultaneity that imagination has synthesized (the 'now'), rather than being integrated in a progression, is disjointed from the progression. It has stopped at the disjointed 'now' and has stopped. This is the imagination confronting its inadequacy and recoiling back on itself.

The violence which constitutes the overreach and recoil of the imagination synthesizes a 'now' which is also an absence of time. This is then judged as counter-purposive for the faculty of judgment in its empirical exercise, and as such is felt as pain. However, this 'now' is taken up as a

²⁴ Ibid., pg 137-138

²⁵ LAS, pg 110

negative presentation of the Idea of the absolute, and as such is purposive for the transcendental exercise of judgment - "the very same violence that is inflicted on the subject by the imagination is judged as purposive **for the whole vocation** of the mind"²⁶. Importantly, both feelings occur simultaneously, as they are judgments of the same synthesized 'now', yet they are subsequent in inner sense. So the experience of the time of the sublime is this tense oscillation between pleasure and pain in the constituted time of the 'now'.

The question remains as to where the third, supposedly implicit, time is. This can be located if we try to determine why the progressive apprehension of an exponential series brings forth the Idea of the absolute. According to Kant, this is culture²⁷. For Kant, culture provides us with a "healthy understanding, namely in the predisposition to the feeling for (practical) ideas, i.e., to that which is moral"²⁸. Yet, again for Kant, this is not to say that the Ideas are purely determined by culture, but rather are an innate possibility of man's reason which is brought out by the appropriate environment and education. What does this have to do with time however? Although Kant has a very synchronic understanding of the potential of culture, Lyotard does not. For Lyotard, culture constitutes a time in itself, and it is in this that he favors Burke over Kant, for in Burke's sublime, in the experience of terror one is confronted with the end of cultural time, at least the end of time for an aspect of culture, say the end of language for poetry, the lack of anything new. This is offset by delight, the negative pleasure of relief that is gained when the new appears, signalling the continuation of poetry's time. Lyotard considers our constitution of this time of culture - "There is a tradition and an institution of philosophy, of painting, of politics, of literature. These 'disciplines' also have a future in the form of Schools, of programmes, projects, and 'trends'. Thought works over what is received, it seeks to reflect on it and overcome it. It seeks to determine what has already been thought, written, painted, or socialized in order to determine what hasn't been... One can strive to determine this something by setting up a system, a theory, a programme, or a project - and indeed one has to, all the while anticipating that something. One can also inquire about the remainder, and allow the indeterminate to appear as a question mark"²⁹. Lyotard recognizes that, in a sense, we constitute the horizon of cultural time as that which is possible within art, given what art *is*. Just what art *is* is determined by culture, by

26 *CPJ*, pg 142

27 *Ibid.*, pg 148-149

28 *Ibid.*, pg 149

29 *CAS*, pg 454

the various institutions, artists, and the interactions between them.

As such, however, does this mean that art is like the Kantian Idea? Even if it *is* relative to culture? No. The clue to this is provided in Lyotard's appendix to *The Postmodern Condition - What is Postmodernism?* In this work he tries to situate modern art, in its sublimity, as postmodern. Continuing from his analysis of Newman, who allows the non-representable to present itself, Lyotard locates the sublime in this presentation of the unrepresentable, and as such the vocation of the postmodern artist (or the avant-gardist) is to find ways of doing precisely this: attesting to the fact of an unrepresentable. Lyotard puts forward the question of how this is possible, and finds the answer in Kant - "Kant himself shows the way when he names 'formlessness, the absence of form', as a possible index to the unrepresentable"³⁰. Lyotard has seen the potential in Kant, but has altered his analysis subtly. Instead of locating the role of culture in the conditioning of the Ideas of reason, which remain concepts, Lyotard locates it in conditioning the forms of the imagination. This is not to say that culture exhausts this, but merely that with regard to art, it plays a dominant role in determining what is art, and the possible forms of future art. As such, the sublime experience in the confrontation with the unrepresentable is engendered not by the inability to synthesize an *abstract* whole in presentation, but rather in its inability to synthesize a *concrete* whole of the painting as work of art in accordance with culturally conditioned forms. This is what enables the sublime to be an 'almost nothing', to be consumed in a glance.

Now we can begin to really delve into Lyotard's analysis. Again, for him the sublime "is [a] feeling of 'there' (*Voilà*). There is almost nothing to 'consume', or if there is, I do not know what it is. One cannot consume an occurrence, but merely its meaning. The feeling of the instant is instantaneous"³¹. The sublime experience is the feeling of a pure occurrence, a pure 'there', 'here', or 'now'. It is a pure event, a site of time at which three times intersect: consumption, constitution and cultural. What remains for us is to understand how it is that these times intersect, and what the effects of it are. Lyotard maintains both Kant and Burke's understanding of the feeling of the sublime as contradictory, composed of two feelings, a terror and a delight, but sides with Burke in that the resulting feeling is "no longer a matter of elevation", in the manner of a transcendent supersensible vocation, "but a matter of intensification"³². The event of this

³⁰ *The Postmodern Condition*, pg 78

³¹ *The Inhuman*, pg 80

³² *CAS*, pg 459

feeling is "at very least a sign, the question mark itself, the way in which *it happens* is withheld and announced: *Is it happening?*... The mark of the question is 'now', *now* like the feeling that nothing might happen: the nothingness now"³³. There are two moments in one, the question mark (?), the indeterminate remainder that sits on the horizon of cultural time, disrupting it in its withholding of the event, and the 'it happens', the presentation of the unrepresentable; one terror, the other delight; together they ask 'is it happening?'. The key to understanding this is found once more in the essay on Newman: "For Newman, creation is not an act performed by someone; it is what happens (this) in the midst of the indeterminate"³⁴. If we take the meaning of this creation as it is indicated, as a beginning, a *genesis of time*, that appears amidst the indeterminate (?), we can see how the different times connect. The time of consumption is the time in which the time of the painting, the constitutive time, the time of the sublime, is synthesized (this need not imply the full Kantian framework). The synthesis which takes place in the consumption of the work attempts to synthesize it as a work of art within the progression of cultural time, as being within its horizon. The sublime work is constructed to deny such a subordination to conventional forms, and as such the horizon of cultural time is disrupted by the indeterminate, the perceived progression is brought to a halt and we are left confronting an abyss, the possibility of nothing happening, of their being nothing more. This terror is relieved giving way to delight, when the very minimal occurrence of this disruption is itself taken as a negative presentation of the unrepresentable, a presentation of the promise of art beyond the end of time. This is the moment of genesis, the beginning of a new cultural time filled with new possibilities. This further mirrors the Kantian sublime in that because the two moments are combined in the one moment of the 'is it happening?'. The 'now' which is both disruption and the presentation of itself, in itself, is dissonant with the time of consumption. The two moments are both subsequent and simultaneous, and, as such, the synthesized time of the painting is 'now', but a 'now' that is dislocated from the time of the synthesis itself. This is why the painting is always just 'now', it can't be situated in the time outside. Finally, the opening up of possibilities experienced in the 'now' is what was described as the feeling of intensification. The confrontation with the indeterminate unleashes the power of the imagination with regard to form. As Lyotard describes it: "the work [the postmodernist/avant-gardist] produces are not in principle governed by

³³ Ibid., 455

³⁴ *The Inhuman*, pg 82

preestablished rules... Those rules... are what the work of art itself is looking for"³⁵. The postmodern is the nascent modern, the vanguard of the modern, perpetually disrupting conventional forms so that new forms can emerge. In this sense, the 'is it happening?' is always the 'is *art* happening?'. This would make Duchamp's *Fountain* an icon of sublimity, at least at its time.

At last we arrive at the central question of this essay: can this account of the sublime allow for a musical sublime? Earlier in the essay I suggested that an imposed progression was the primary character of music, that is, that the music has a constitutive time which is not just a 'site' but which is a continuous progression that is external to the subject. To say this is to say that the progression is contemporaneous with the time of consumption (or the synthesis), and yet independent of it. What makes this problematic for Lyotard's analysis is that any such progression which is constitutive of the work automatically disrupts the possibility of a perpetual 'now' that is dislocated from external time. Secondly, to talk about the intersection of cultural time with the time of the music can no longer be to talk about a single point of intersection, as already said, there is no 'site'. Lastly, with music there is no consumption of the whole, not even attempt, as the length of a composition (in the musical sense) always exceeds the length of retention (what was called the reproductive imagination by Kant). I would go so far as to suggest that this is a criterion for the musical experience. Although a song such as *You Suffer* by Napalm Death, in lasting less than a second might provide the musical equivalent of Duchamp's *Fountain*. Such a song that was within the limits of retention could potentially count under Lyotard's analysis, but the 'now' that it constituted would be fleeting and unsustainable. Ultimately, the fact that the musical experience is constituted by the differences from moment to moment within the progression makes it incompatible with Lyotard's sublime, either leaving no musical sublime, or the need for a more inclusive analysis.

In conclusion, I will sketch an outline of such an analysis by developing some of the themes of both Lyotard and Kant's characterisations of the sublime. First of all, it is not necessary to adopt all of Kant's doctrine of the faculties in order to build a working theory of the sublime. However, the notion of synthesis crucial, even if we only take it to be the constitution of temporal experience. Secondly, we do require something analogous to Kant's reproductive imagination. This is the space of the retention of past moments of intuition in order, as well as

35 *The Postmodern Condition*, pg 81

providing a space of expectation on the other side of the present in which intuitions of expectations can be constructed with reference to the temporal continuity. This minimally specified imagination is the where the ordering of the continuity of experience with regard to the culturally conditioned forms of the imagination takes place. Given this, we can develop an adequate characterisation of the musically sublime.

To begin with, we need to reiterate that music is constituted by the differences between the moments of its progression as they pass, and that as such any ordering (schematizing in Kant's terminology) of music with regard to cultural forms must itself be progressive. As has been determined, there cannot be a 'site' of time, in which cultural time intersects the musical progression, but rather there must be a progressive synthesis of cultural time with the musical progression, progressively organizing the music in terms of cultural forms, and as such situating it within the horizon of musical possibility. This intertwining can be said to characterise music as such, that is as far as it has form, but the sublime experience of music is characterised by the disruption of this synthesis. We can model this disruption on that of the mathematically sublime, as it involves the same overreaching of the imagination. The way this works is that the progressive synthesis of the musical progression with cultural time constantly gains and loses parts of the progression in accordance with its limit. This synthesis just is the imposition of form. When the synthesis cannot apply forms within the time scale demanded by the progression it tries to push its limit, holding older elements for longer so as to incorporate them within a recognisable form. We may assume that this limit is somewhat elastic, but even given this there is an absolute limit whereby the imagination will try to hold on to parts that it cannot, overreaching its limit and recoiling back, out of step with the musical progression, in other words dissonant (we might say it is 'shocked' out of sync). This dissonance, rather than creating a 'now' as in either Kant or Lyotard's analysis, causes the loss of the now, as one is continually dislocated, following the musical progression, until the imagination can reassert itself and close the dissonant gap. The feeling of the musical sublime is as such the feeling of being lost to time, as if being adrift on a boat in a storm, the ebb and flow of time ungoverned. It is the passing of parts while the imagination tries to impose form on them that causes this disruption, the more involved the imagination is, the more frantic its activity, the more intense the disruption. This effect can be produced in an uncountable number of ways, but it is important to note that the imagination is more concerned, i.e. will overreach further, if it almost can impose form on a

sequence. This is to say that deformations of traditional forms can induce intense disruptions³⁶. It might be better to say that the imagination is not taxed by what is uninteresting, or barren. It should be noted that this necessarily abandons Lyotard's "almost nothing" approach to the sublime.

True to the medium, the musical sublime displays not just one form of temporality, but diverse forms of temporal disruption. As opposed to manifesting a 'site' or 'sites' dislocated from outside time as such, the musical sublime is made up of a fluctuating, dislocating movement. The composition is not sublime 'here' and 'there', nor is there a uniform character to the feeling, but a flow of variable intensities, a flow which is itself disrupted by cultural time as they intersect and overlap. Essentially, in music the time of the sublime ceases to be a moment or a set of moments and becomes manifest as a temporal movement itself; it intersects, rather than being an intersection. It is the counter-movement to cultural time, the time of the deformed, or the unlimited.

Returning to the issue of totality, or the consumption of the whole composition, it is important to recognise that it is not the case that the work must be perceived to be sublime as a whole, or even as a continuous sublime experience all of the way through. This should be obvious at least in as much as it is possible to incorporate conventional sections into a wholly unconventional piece. This can be used in itself to generate an effect, a disruption, in its contrast. However, this does raise the question of such transitions between sublime and non-sublime experience: the points of intersection. Can they constitute a 'site' or 'now' in Lyotard's sense? Potentially, but only in specific circumstances and never in the full sense Lyotard intended. In cases of transition/intersection, if either the dislocating movement carries on further beyond its introduction, or is the end of a dislocating movement, then they cannot constitute a 'now' in Lyotard's sense, because they have only either beginning or end, never both. This means they can never be moments or 'sites' where interaction 'happens', because they are themselves interactions. There is the possibility of the constitution of a sublime moment or moments, but it involves the duration of the disruptive movement being beneath a certain threshold, that of the time of retention. An example of this would be a sharp violent sound in the midst of silence, or even a rapid change between two more or less conventional styles³⁷. Such sounds are still dislocated from

³⁶ A good example of this being the band Mesuggah, who combine classic elements of heavy metal with divergent timings in which different instruments play in different times, creating sublime effects.

³⁷ This is exemplified in the work of bands such as The Dillinger Escape Plan, and is a recurring theme in the work

cultural time, but they can be synthesized as moments, having both a beginning and an end that can be presented at the same time relative to the time of the synthesis. Such a moment can present itself as a negative presentation of the unrepresentable in exactly the way Lyotard shows, however it passes, as it cannot dislocate itself from the musical progression as such. What is important to remember is that given the myriad possibilities of musical compositions, there can be many such moments or none, and they simply go together with the more sustained disruptive movements to form the topography of the musical experience.

The final question is, where exactly do terror, delight, intensification and the genesis of cultural time come into this analysis.

of Frank Zappa (For example, the album *Lumpy Gravy* which has various combinations of different genres throughout, rapidly interspliced with dialogue and other noise).