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The Oeuvre Inspired by Utopias: On the Centennial of Klaus Huber (1924–2017)

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Abstract. The legacy of Swiss composer Klaus Huber (1924–2017) can be presented as one large ecumenical, social, cosmopolitan utopia, based on the ideas of thinkers, mystics, and poets from different eras and countries. Christian humanism, pacifism, and faith in the transformative power of utopian ideals inspired the activities of this artist, who was unswerving in his commitment to a complex and austere musical language, incompatible with any kind

Translated by the author

of “prettiness.” Employing various techniques from the avant-garde arsenal, including unconventional methods of sound production and microchromatic intervals, especially third-tones, Huber would sometimes insert quotations from an “ideal” music of the past into the fabric of his works as signs of higher, enduring values; he himself called such quotations “windows of hope” (for the entry into the utopian Kingdom). In the late 1980s, a peculiar new line emerged in Huber’s oeuvre, related to the prose, poetry, and biography of Osip Mandelstam — a poet who “even in the most terrible conditions managed to preserve the light of utopia”. Since the early 1990s, elements borrowed from Arab culture have established themselves in the system of Huber’s style; his experiments in implanting the “oriental” into the “western” and the “Islamic” into the “Christian” counteracted the tendency to demonize Arab-Muslim culture and testified to the Christian and European artist’s desire to understand the truths of another world religion and enrich his worldview with the values of another great culture. The “Mandelstam” and “West-East” lines merged in the largest composition of Huber’s late period, the opera *Schwarzerde* (*Chernozem — Black Earth*, 2001).

Keywords: Klaus Huber, utopia, “window of hope,” Ernesto Cardenal, Ernst Bloch, microchromatics, Mahmoud Dowlatabadi, Osip Mandelstam, opera *Schwarzerde*, Armenia.

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Научная статья

Творчество, вдохновленное утопиями: к столетию Клауса Хубера (1924–2017)

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Аннотация. Наследие швейцарского композитора Клауса Хубера (1924–2017) может быть представлено как одна большая экуменическая, социальная, космополитическая утопия, основанная на идеях мыслителей, мистиков, поэтов разных эпох и стран. Христианский гуманизм, пацифизм, вера в преобразующую силу утопических идеалов одушевляли всю деятельность этого художника, последовательного в своей приверженности сложному и суровому музыкальному языку, несовместимому с любого рода «красивостями». Широко пользуясь самыми разнообразными приемами из арсенала авангарда, включая нетрадиционные способы инструментального звукоизвлечения и микрохроматические интервалы, в том числе равные 1/3 тона, Хубер вместе с тем эпизодически вводил в ткань своей музыки цитаты из «идеальной» музыки прошлого в качестве знаков высших, непреходящих

ценностей; сам он называл такие цитаты «окнами надежды» (на вступление в утопическое Царство). С конца 1980-х особое значение для него имели проза, поэзия и биография Осипа Мандельштама — поэта, который, по Хуберу, «даже в самых ужасных условиях сумел сохранить свет утопии». С начала 1990-х в системе стиля Хубера утвердились элементы, заимствованные из арабской культуры; его опыты по имплантации «ориентального» в «западное» и «исламского» в «христианское» противостоят тенденции к демонизации арабо-мусульманской культуры и свидетельствуют о стремлении художника-христианина и европейца познать истины другой мировой религии и обогатить свою картину мира ценностями иной, но также великой культуры. «Мандельштамовская» и «западно-восточная» линии объединились в самом масштабном сочинении позднего Хубера — опере «Чернозем» (2001).

Ключевые слова: Клаус Хубер, утопия, «окно надежды», Эрнесто Карденаль, Эрнст Блох, микрохроматика, Махмуд Довлатабади, Осип Мандельштам, опера «Чернозем», Армения

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Introduction

The Swiss composer Klaus Huber was born in the same year as his friend Luigi Nono, he was a year or two younger than Iannis Xenakis and György Ligeti, and slightly older than Pierre Boulez and Luciano Berio.[1] In short, he belonged to the illustrious generation of postwar European avant-garde pioneers, whose supreme task was the radical renewal of music. The idea of distancing from everything created by predecessors and starting the history of music almost from scratch was utopian in itself. However, for the mentioned avant-garde masters, even including the communist Nono, the implementation of the utopian project was more or less a professional matter, focused mainly on problems of musical language and style. Huber, on the other hand, was a convinced utopian in a broader sense. His legacy, taken as a whole, can be seen as one great ecumenical, social, cosmopolitan utopia, based on the ideas of thinkers, mystics, and poets from different eras and countries.

Huber's Essays in Sacred Matters

Unlike most of his avant-garde peers, Huber was religious. His early works, which are available to us (that is, not disavowed by the author), are primarily set to biblical and spiritual texts. His significant scores from the 1950s include the four-movement symphony *Oratio Mechtildis* (*Mechthild's Sermon*) for chamber orchestra with contralto (1956–57) and the seven-movement chamber cantata *Des Engels Anredung an die Seele* (*The Angel's Address to the Soul*) for tenor, flute, clarinet, horn, and harp (1957). Both works use texts by devout German-language authors from the distant past — namely, the thirteenth-century mystic writer Mechthild of Magdeburg and the seventeenth-century poet and theologian Johann Georg Albinus.

The former work is fairly large-scale, colourful and dramatic, while the latter is concise — its seven movements last less than ten minutes —

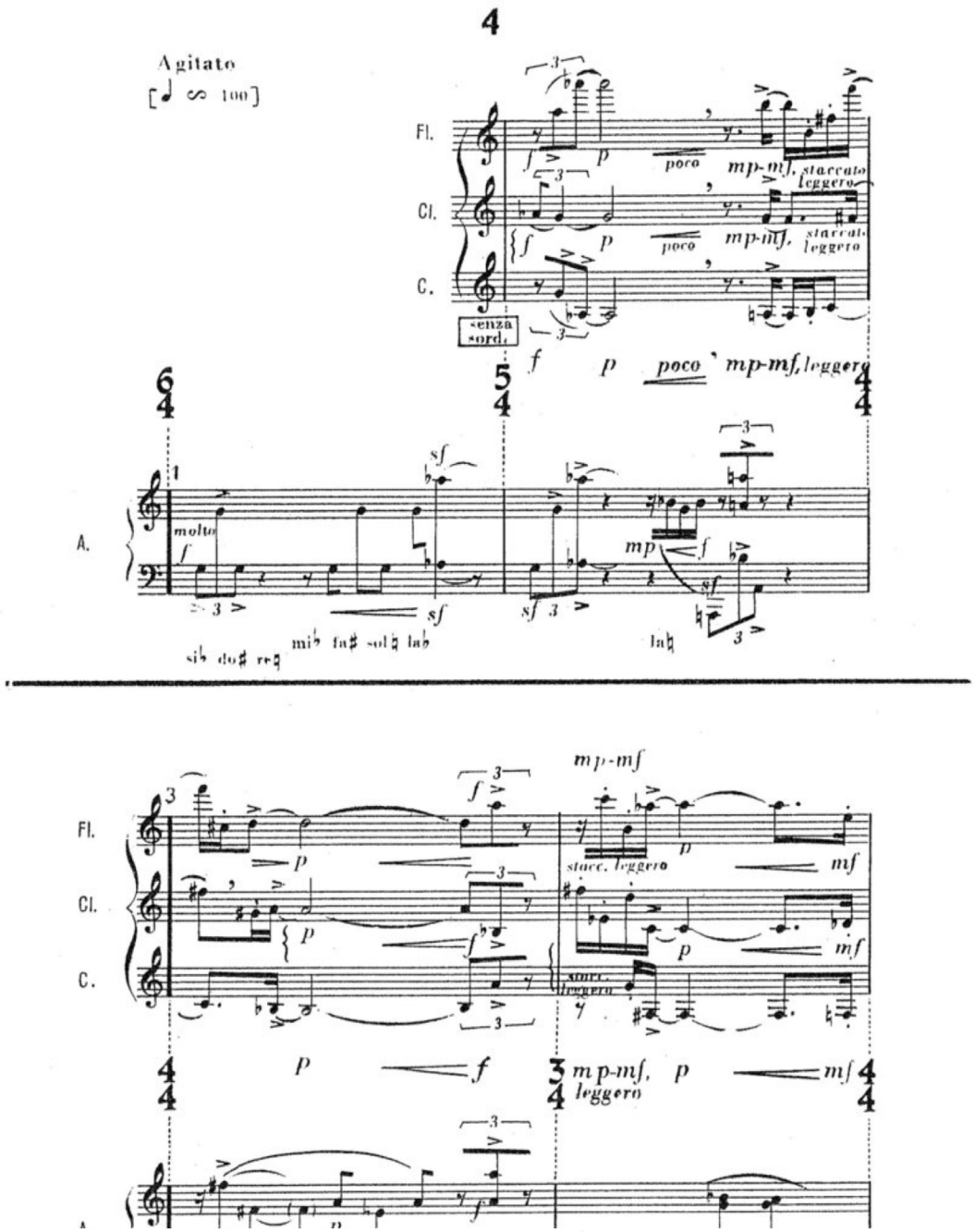
[1] Unlike the other avant-garde classics mentioned here, Huber has not received due attention from Russian musicology. As far as I know, Russian-language literature about him is limited to a couple of articles (one of them, [1], deals with a short, but in its own way symbolic orchestral composition *Protuberanzen*).

and composed with very economical means. A cursory glance at any of the 28 pages of the score is enough to catch the resemblance to the writing of late Stravinsky; the beginning of the fourth movement may serve as a graphic example — see *Example 1* (all instruments in this and other Huber scores are notated *in C*).

The sound world of late Stravinsky is evoked in both the lineup of the ensemble and the generalized serial approach to the organization of pitch: although the main tone row, as is often the case with Stravinsky, is not clearly brought out, the methods of working with pitch configurations (inversions, retrogrades, permutations) suggest the presence of a serial background. The cantata's final movement, just as in Stravinsky's *Canticum Sacrum*, is a retrograde of the first — with the only difference being that in the first movement the tenor is silent, while in the finale his part is added to the instruments. However, the parallels with Stravinsky may indicate not so much the direct influence of the older composer on the younger one, but rather their shared conviction that genuinely spiritual, sacred new music is organically connected with contemporary complex, esoteric technique, which has its roots in ancient archetypes (much later, already in the 1990s, Huber confirmed his kinship with Stravinsky by composing *Lamentationes sacrae et profanae ad responsoria Iesualdi*, though with new texts reflecting his ideological positions of that time).

The premiere of *Des Engels Anredung an die Seele* at a major new music festival in Rome (1959) brought Huber international fame and a prestigious award. His reputation as a serious religious composer, committed to a complex and austere musical language, incompatible with any kind of "prettiness," was confirmed in 1964 by the oratorio *Soliloquia Sancti Aurelii Augustini* (*Monologues of Saint Aurelius Augustine*) for five solo singers, two choirs, and orchestra, based on texts from an early (387 AD) book of the Church Father. This is the first in a series of monumental vocal-orchestral frescoes forming the core of Huber's legacy. Many of his smaller-scale works are preliminary sketches or future excerpts of such frescoes.

The *Soliloquia*..., though ostensibly a complete whole, was also conceived as a preliminary version of a larger "mental object" that remained unfulfilled.



Example 1. K. Huber. *Des Engels Anredung an die Seele*

The first part of the oratorio (in five sections, not counting the short introduction – *Intonatio*) is titled *Invocatio* [to the Lord]; it is followed by the shorter second part (not divided into sections), titled *Glorificatio*. The third part, *Sollicitatio*, remained unwritten. According to Huber, such incompleteness, openness of form, is a fundamental characteristic of works bearing transcendental content, as transcendence cannot be enclosed within the framework of a once-and-for-all completed "object."[2] In light of this statement, any work, regardless of its scale, appears as an imperfect and incomplete attempt to capture and depict a certain transcendental, utopian reality.

In the years following the *Soliloquia…*, Huber produced a number of important scores that adhered to the key tenets of the avant-garde orthodoxy: not to draw from popular sources (that is, first of all, to exclude tonal harmonies and regular rhythms) and to avoid tried and tested formal schemes. Among the scores with direct religious connotations, the orchestral poem *Tenebrae* (1967) is particularly significant; its title refers to the Dark Matins service, held in the last days of Holy Week with extinguished candles, and possibly also (the author's commentary does not mention this) to Paul Celan's deeply tragic poem of the same name, which inspired many composers. The religious background is also evident in the piece for flute and string ensemble titled *Alveare Vernat* (approximately: "Building a Hive — Calling Spring," 1967), dedicated to the memory of St. Francis of Assisi and expressing, as can be understood from the music itself and the author's commentary on it [3, p. 141], a restless yet joyful premonition of a "new spring" in the spirit of Franciscan love for nature. More neutral in religious terms is the *James Joyce Chamber Music* (1967) for harp, horn, and chamber orchestra — a kind of meditation on the early collection of poems by the famous Irish writer.

Huber distanced himself from the avant-garde establishment — in particular, he was not a regular at Darmstadt — but his output during this period fits into the aesthetic line established by the avant-garde classics at the dawn of the Darmstadt enterprise. This does not contradict the religiousness of Huber's music, as the orientation toward the Darmstadt-type avant-garde proved to be a more

[2] The author's comments to the oratorio are summarized in the large-scale piece of scholarship dedicated to it [2, p. 12–16].

significant style-forming factor for him than adherence to the centuries-old traditions of church music. Characteristic is his statement about another, somewhat younger "avant-gardist" with distinctly religious aspirations:

> As a composer, I feel freer among the "left" than in the church environment. I am not Penderecki! The church will not be able to use my *Soliloquia* in its interests as easily as the *St. Luke Passion* [Ibid., p. 16].

Social Utopias of the 1960–70s

At the turn of the 1960s and 70s, Huber made a decisive shift to the "left" — that is, towards socially engaged art. In a later interview, assessing his relatively early work, which was not yet influenced by "leftist" tendencies, he said:

> ...in my early [introverted] works, I started from the premise that the world is bad and I cannot change it, so I withdraw into my own world and seek non-superficial beauty [Ibid., p. 12].

And further:

> For a long time, I strove to exclude from my music the [surrounding] reality, which seemed to me impure, incoherent, distorted. But even after I began to include it in my compositions, I did not want to part with the guiding idea of beauty. Of course, it might seem that if I excluded the aspect of reality from my music, it would be more effective in terms of pure art. On the other hand, it would be weaker from an existential point of view. Art and existence cannot be separated; all my efforts are aimed at bringing them together [Ibid., p. 13].

Obviously, the term "existence" denotes the person's real being in the world, including all of his or her interpersonal connections. The artist of the type Huber identified himself with does not limit himself to the egotistic realization of his own "self" in the creative process — he is open to the surrounding world and actively participates in its life. Huber's role models are mystics of different eras, who proved by their example that mystical introspection is compatible with being among other people, with sociability, and with empathy towards the "other." These include, in particular, St. Hildegard of Bingen, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Teresa of Avila, Simone Weil[3]... Such was also the patron saint of Switzerland, Nicholas of Flüe,

[3] French religious thinker and left-wing activist (1909–1943).

also known as Brother Klaus, whom Huber does not mention in this context, but it may seem that he consciously styled his appearance after this namesake.

Those who held particular authority for Huber, include Dorothee Sölle (1929–2003) and Ernesto Cardenal (1925–2020): representatives of "liberation theology," which combines theology with politics and encourages Christians to be actively involved in the struggle against poverty and social oppression. Evidently, Huber sympathized with Sölle's well-known, often-quoted maxim (from the book *Politische Theologie*, 1971): "Every theological statement must also be a political statement." The Nicaraguan priest and writer Cardenal realized this unity of theology and politics by participating in the so-called Sandinista revolution of the 1970s and in political activities after its victory. Even before the revolution, in the mid-1960s, he founded a peasant community on the Solentiname Islands, whose members, inspired by the Gospel he preached, engaged in various arts. The Solentiname community was conceived by its creator as an embodiment of a utopian vision of the future and the place of the artist in it:

> The artist is always integrated into society, though not into contemporary society, but into the society of the future. The artist, the poet, the scholar, the saint — these are the members of the society of the future, which in its nascent form already exists today, even if it is scattered [...] around the world (quoted in [Ibid., pp. 27–28]).[4]

From a certain moment, Huber sought to realize this idea of an artist "not of this world", and yet fully immersed in worldly affairs in his creative behaviour.

Another significant figure for Huber was the German thinker Ernst Bloch (1885–1977), author of the book *Geist der Utopie* (*Spirit of Utopia*, 1918) and the three-volume treatise *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (*The Principle of Hope*, 1938–47). Bloch conceived utopia not as some vague set of groundless notions about an ideal society or ideal existence, but as "a milieu for the project of alternative possibilities of life, which must be embedded in the historical process itself" (quoted in [4, p. 364]). In other words, the prerequisites for utopia objectively exist in empirical reality and are theoretically accessible to purposeful development. According to another definition, Bloch's utopia is "a 'ferment,' in which there is both a critical element

[4] Let me note in passing that in 1977 the Solentiname community was destroyed by the Nicaraguan dictatorship, but after the revolution's victory it was revived and exists to this day.

towards existing ideologemes and tools, and the image of the future world" (quoted in [5, p. 25]). Hence, utopia is a potentially active factor that can be channeled in the desired direction. An essential support for transforming theory (potential) into practice (actual) is hope — "the affect that connects subjective aspirations with objective tendencies, directing a person [...] to the future world not only in fantasies, but also through active revolutionary transformations that are impossible without hope" [Ibid., p. 59].

In his philosophy of utopia, Bloch combined social (in his case, unorthodox Marxist) activism and eschatological "metaphysics of hope," adding a third pillar — avant-garde art (see [Ibid., p. 23]). He gave preference to music as the most utopian of the arts that allows one to "experience and objectify the 'crystalline note,' which is the utopian image of the inner restlessness of being" [Ibid., p. 22].

A significant part of Huber's oeuvre is based on these same three pillars — with the only difference being that while Bloch's "metaphysics of hope" is fundamentally atheistic, Huber's eschatology is imbued with a Christian spirit, and in this he is close to Cardenal. As a true Christian, he identified utopia with the Kingdom of Heaven, whose earthly image is what he called the "charisma of brotherhood" [3, pp. 20–21]. In addition, his activism was not Marxist but, so to speak, generically leftist: a kind of non-ideological humanism, pure idealism. The composer expressed his stance as follows: "There is no philosophy or ideology in my music; I simply try to express my feelings, to create expressive music, and to shout with all my might" [Ibid., pp. 26–27] — to shout about the endless future of humanity, its enduring fear of the end of the world, and the moral duty to stand in solidarity with the poor and oppressed.

No doubt, Huber was well aware that even the most expressive contemporary art music by itself, and even in conjunction with equally expressive words, is not the most suitable means to make the world a better place. Nevertheless, using Huber's terminology, it contributes to the "expansion of consciousness," which is its primary impact; the secondary impact of music, ideally, could be the transformation of reality

[Ibid., p. 21]. The artist cannot change the course of things in this world, but it is within his responsibility to participate in creating an environment for the anticipated better reality that favours the "charisma of brotherhood." Huber did not agree to make concessions to his hypothetical listeners by sacrificing the originality and complexity of his language, because — and here he referred to Sölle — our sense of the wholeness of the world, the unity of the empirical and the ideal, needs to be "represented, articulated, and expressed each time with a new language," including musical [Ibid., p. 46].

Huber, Adorno, Zimmermann

Such is the spiritual and intellectual motivation that prompted Huber to become an engagé artist. Huber himself contrasts it with the motivations of such engagé musical figures as thinker and critic Theodor W. Adorno and composer Bernd Alois Zimmermann.

Adorno believed that truly new music, embodying social non-conformism in its purest form, cannot have an audience: "no one, neither individuals nor groups, wants to have anything to do with it," because it takes upon itself "all the darkness and guilt of the world [...] all its happiness is in the knowledge of unhappiness, all its beauty is in denial of the semblance of the beautiful [...] it is the true message in a bottle" [6, p. 102]. For Huber, however, the genuine novelty implies, above all, not the denial of anything, but the creation of a new beauty. Rejecting the idea of "vain" beauty (beauté gratuite) [3, p. 14] and asserting that new beauty must be related to the concept of "depth," Huber does not contradict the spirit of Adornian "philosophy of new music." On the other hand, he is keenly interested in conveying his artistic message, articulating the idea of this new beauty, to "individuals and groups" here and now, not in an indefinite future. Therefore, according to Huber, Adorno's metaphor of the bottle does not suit the genuinely responsible art of our time [Ibid., pp. 54–55]. Huber seems to sympathize with Zimmermann and admits that he has some points of convergence with him [Ibid., p. 59], but, of course, he cannot be close to Zimmermann's blatant negativism, whose *Requiem für einen jungen Dichter* (*Requiem for a Young Poet*) contains an epigraph from a novel by the suicide writer Conrad Bayer: "What do we have to hope for? The only thing we will achieve is death."

Huber's most politically charged composition, the oratorio *Erniedrigt–geknechtet–verlassen–verachtet…* (*Abased — Enslaved — Abandoned — Despised…*) for solo singers, narrator, chamber choir, full choir, several orchestral groups, and tape, completed in 1982, evokes analogies with Zimmermann and his *Requiem*.[5] The title refers to the Book of Isaiah: "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isaiah 53:3). As in Zimmermann's *Requiem*, the sources of texts are eclectic, mixing the contemporary with the timeless: writings and statements by Enrique Cardenal are interspersed with the narrative of Swiss proletarian Florian Knobloch, excerpts from the diaries of socially marginalized Afro-Brazilian Carolina Maria de Jesus, and the manifesto of African American radical George Jackson who was killed by prison guards; this conglomerate is supplemented by a passage from Isaiah. Similar to Zimmermann, the sonic substrate for much of the piece is a stagnant "sonoristic" magma, against which the textual content is sung or (again as in the *Requiem*) recited by the narrator, soloists, and choirs.

Naturally, it was hardly possible to do without what Zimmermann called stylistic pluralism (and abundantly applied in his *Requiem*). Whenever it comes to police and military violence, the cacophonous sounds of orchestral brass and distorted marching rhythms come to the forefront. In the moment of catharsis, the treble reproduces the theme of the aria *Es ist vollbracht* from Bach's Cantata BWV 159, though not with the original German text, but with the Latin translation of the "utopian" excerpt from Isaiah: "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the young lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them" (Is. 11:6). This episode is an exact quote from the 1975 piece *Senfkorn* (*Mustard Seed*),[6] whose title also refers to the Bible, namely to the famous metaphor of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 13:31, Mark 4:31, Luke 13:19); it falls on the fifth of the oratorio's seven movements. In the finale, Huber recalls Bach again: the Easter chorale *Christ lag in Todes Banden* (*Christ lay in death's bonds*), functioning as cantus firmus, is overlaid with Cardenal's text, opening with the words "El pueblo es inmortal" — "The people

[5] Concerning this work by Zimmermann, see [7].

[6] For an analysis of this piece, see [8].

are immortal." The appearance of Bach around the oratorio's "golden section" is interpreted by the author himself as a "window of hope" (for the entry into the utopian Kingdom) [Ibid., p. 156]. By contrast, the appearance of elevated, "ideal" music in Zimmermann's *Requiem* — primarily excerpts from *Tristan* and *Ode an die Freude* (*Ode to Joy*) — symbolizes the irretrievable past and illustrates Adrian Leverkühn's well-known thesis about the impossibility of the Ninth Symphony in a dehumanized modern world.[7]

Despite the differences, if not the diametrical opposition, between the ideological attitudes of both composers, each of them resorts to the simple technique of symbolization through direct quotes and easily decipherable allusions. In Huber's case, this technique has a philosophical justification: frequent appeals to elements of past music in the concluding sections of his opuses are analogous to

> ...re-actualized images of a world governed by metaphysics and morality; these images overlay the modernity, striving to encompass it and give it new meaning, a different direction [...] [in Huber's works, unlike in Zimmermann's] the element of subjectivity, the source of anxiety and disorder, is ultimately tamed, restructured, and ordered [9, pp. xiv–xv].

Actually, the name of composers who appeal to aesthetically superior music of the past at the end of their works is legion, and their motivation is more or less the same.[8] The question of how such a play with stylistic contrasts relates to the category of depth, which is so important for Huber, remains open.

Huber, Adorno, Zimmermann

To be fair, in Huber's legacy there are not many works in which specially selected and clearly articulated texts, intended to convey some important extramusical message, come to the forefront, overshadowing the aesthetic qualities of the artistic product itself. Apart from the oratorio *Erniedrigt–geknechtet–verlassen–verachtet...*, one could recall, for example, the apocalyptic work *...inwendig voller figur...* (*...inside a filled figure...*) with texts from the Revelation and Albrecht

[7] Mann, T. (1959). Doktor Faustus. Zhizn' nemetskogo kompozitora Adriana Leverkyuna, rasskazannaya ego drugom [Doktor Faustus: Das Leben des deutschen Tonsetzers Adrian Leverkühn, erzählt von einem Freunde] [transl. by S. Apt & N. Man]. Foreign Literature Publishing House, p. 550

[8] Concerning this matter, see, in particular, [10].

Dürer (1971) and *Cantiones de Circulo Gyrante* (*Songs of the Rotating Circle*) with texts by Heinrich Böll and St. Hildegard of Bingen and musical quotes from the spiritual songs attributed to her (1985).

Artistically, more interesting are those works where the ideological background does not impose itself with such an insistence. Such is, in particular, the composition *Erinnere dich an G…* (*Remember G…*) for double bass and eighteen instrumentalists (1976–77), where "G" can be read as Gautama, the Crucified (Gekreuzigte), the Tortured (Gefolterte), the Comrade (Genosse), Golgotha, etc. [3, pp. 149–150]; the circle of associations is clear and requires no additional commentary. The piece is constructed as a series of four inventions (after the number of young Gautama's visions of human sufferings), developing different types of articulation on the double bass. In the fabric of the last invention (on *pizzicati*), a quote from *Tombeau* (*Tombstone*) by the lutenist composer Sylvius Leopold Weiss (1686–1750) is unobtrusively woven in, without any poster-like declaration: this confirms the implicit programmatic intent of this invention as a funeral song for those tortured under interrogation.

Returning to the idea of depth as an attribute of a genuinely substantive beauty, let us note that Huber associates it with the "depth" of musical sound. Among those who sought to delve into the musical sound, to overcome its externally monadic nature, and to discover multiple dimensions within it, he predictably mentions Giacinto Scelsi [Ibid., pp. 116–117][9] and Nono of his late period. While Huber's Italian contemporaries, acting independently in a similar direction [11, pp. 200–201], used quarter-tone shifts to overcome the "monadic" nature of sound, Huber prefers intervals of 1/3 tones, considering quarter-tone fluctuations merely a superficial decorative technique: they can give the sound an interesting colour [3, pp. 14–15], but there is nothing "deep" in them, revealing fundamentally new perspectives. Huber's logic can be deciphered more or less as follows: if quarter-tones are nothing more than enhanced chromaticism, then dividing the sound space into 1/3 tones is analogous to enhanced hexatonic (whole-tone) scale. The latter, using Messiaen's terminology, possesses the "charm of impossibilities" (what is this if not a generalized formula of utopia?), which is inherent in the modes of limited transposition (the first of which is the hexatonic) and alien to the "flat," one-dimensional chromaticism.

[9] On Scelsi's essays in penetrating the depths of musical sound, see [11].

Microchromatic intervals of both 1/4 and 1/3 tone appear in the aforementioned 1967 score *Alveare vernat*. Quarter-tone microchromatics also appear in Huber's later works, including those created after 1991, when the just-quoted interview with a critical assessment of its possibilities was published. Microchromatic writing based on third-tone intervals — decaoctatonics — was firmly established in Huber's arsenal from the second half of the 1980s.[10] An illustration of this type of writing can be seen in *Example 2* showing the last page of the piece *Plainte…* (*Lament…*) in memory of Luigi Nono (1990), scored for one of Huber's favourite instruments — the seven-string viola d'amore with scordaturas, which facilitate the reproduction of non-standard intervals.[11]

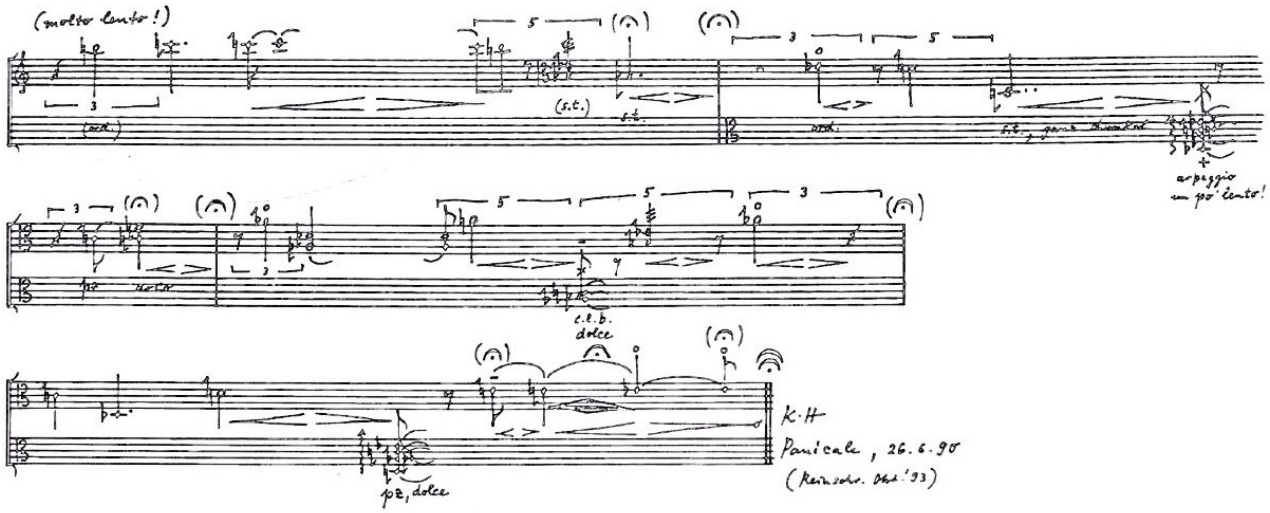
To notate microchromatics based on third-tone intervals, the following symbols are used in this and other works by Huber (not all of them are seen in *Example 2*):

𝄳1/6 tone up from a flat note
𝄬1/6 tone down from a flat note
𝄲1/6 tone up from a natural note
𝄱1/6 tone down from a natural note
𝄰1/6 tone up from a sharp note
𝄯1/6 tone down from a sharp note

The music example itself provides but a very approximate idea of how this music sounds. In any case, it is evident that microchromaticisms here are not just a decorative addition to the basic pitch structure. All the notes of decaoctatonics are full-fledged elements of the overall pitch space. The microchromaticisms, constituting two-thirds of the pitch inventory, do not differ in this regard from the remaining third, which represents the whole-tone scale from *B*: the piece begins with the note *B*[2] and ends, as can be seen from the music example, with the note *E flat*[1].

[10] In this regard, he was preceded by Maurice Ohana, in whose oeuvre the third-tone temperament was established since the early 1960s. About this Spanish-French composer, see [12].

[11] The performance aspects of the piece, related to the tuning of the instrument and the reproduction of microchromatic intervals, are discussed in [13].



Example 2. K. Huber. *Plainte…*

Apart from Nono, the piece has another 'hero' — Osip Mandelstam. In the late 1980s, Huber became fascinated with the oeuvre of a poet who "even in the most terrible conditions managed to preserve the light of utopia, going beyond his Ego" [3, p. 13]. The Mandelstam line in Huber's creative biography began in 1989 with the piece *Des Dichters Pflug* (*The Poet's Plow*) for string trio playing in the decaoctatonic microchromatic system. The epigraph to the piece is a passage from Mandelstam's article *Word and Culture* (1920–21): "Poetry is a plow that turns time so that the deep layers of time, its *chernozem* [black earth], rise to the surface."[12] As we can see, the fragment chosen by the composer from Mandelstam's prose correlates with the important idea for both him and Nono of delving into depth, exploring the depths. In terms of its thematic material, *Des Dichters Pflug* is connected with *Plainte…*, which, in turn, was included in the score for viola d'amore and 13 instruments, also dedicated to Nono's memory and dated the same year 1990. By titling the latter score *Plainte – Die umgepflügte Zeit I* (*Lament – Ploughed Time-1*), Huber combined both themes that occupied him that year —

[12] Mandelstam, O. (2020). Polnoe sobranie sochinenij i pisem [Complete Works and Letters]. (3rd ed., Vol. 2). Internet-izdanie. p. 44. (In Russ.).

the memory of the author of *No hay caminos, hay que caminar…* (*No paths, we must go…*), who by the end of his life was disappointed in the (communist) utopia he had long and devotedly served, and the memory of the martyred poet. The Mandelstam line continued with other versions of *Die umgepflügte Zeit* and pieces with related titles, and its final culmination was the opera *Schwarzerde* (*Chernozem — Black Earth*).

West-East Intersections

I will address *Schwarzerde* below. In the meantime, it should be noted that parallel to the Mandelstam cycle, the composer was developing another thematic line, which owes its origin to the Gulf War of 1990–91. One of the consequences of this war was the demonization of Arab-Muslim culture as an antagonist of Western-style democracy, which became widespread among Western intellectuals and was expressed, in particular, in Samuel Huntington's controversial, scientifically and methodologically dubious, but highly publicized essay on the clash of civilizations (1993). Huber felt it his duty to demonstrate through his own example that this clash can be prevented by expressing an interested and respectful attitude toward foreign spirituality. The pacifist and ecumenical utopia, which became Huber's personal response to the threat of civilizational conflict, is embodied in several works from the 1990s and early 2000s, demonstrating the Christian and European artist's desire to understand the truths of another world religion and enrich his worldview with the values of another great culture.

Before embarking on the development of a new — conventionally speaking, "West-East" — line in his work, Huber studied medieval treatises on the theory of classical Arab music. The first, rather experimental example of this line was the almost forty-minute composition from 1993 titled *Die Erde bewegt sich auf den Hörnern eines Ochsen* (*The Earth Moves on the Horns of an Ox*) for a Sufi singer, three Arab and two European instrumentalists, and a tape. The Arab musicians, playing the woodwind instrument ney, the plucked instrument qanun, and the tambourine, improvise in Arab modes (maqams). The European instruments are represented by the viola and guitar, both having Middle Eastern origins and easily harmonizing with the Arab instruments in terms of timbre; their parts are notated in the usual way and performed strictly according

to the score. At the beginning of the composition, the Sufi singer recites a verse from the Quran, and the material recorded on the tape contains a speech by the Iranian writer Mahmoud Dowlatabadi (b. 1940), delivered in Munich in 1992: a reflection on how not only the fundamentalist regimes like the Iranian one, but also the "new" (read: Western) totalitarianism (the two "horns of the ox") force the creator into silence. The speech concludes with a utopian confession of faith in love, humanity, and simplicity. In addition to the original Persian speech, the tape includes its translations into Arabic, German, and French.

The texts by Dowlatabadi, along with fragments from the Old Testament "Lamentations of Jeremiah" and Ernesto Cardenal, are used also in *Lamentationes sacrae et profanae ad responsoria Iesualdi* (*Sacred and Secular Lamentations on Gesualdo's Responsories*) for six vocal voices, theorbo/guitar, and basset horn/bass clarinet (1993–97), lasting about three-quarters of an hour. The experience of implanting the "Eastern" into the "Western" here is not as overtly declarative as in the previous work; its ideological justification is more religious and cultural than socio-political, and the music does not give the impression of direct and obvious eclecticism. The lines forming the six-part texture of Gesualdo's responsories for Tenebrae (the parallel with the earlier orchestral piece Tenebrae is significant) have been given new contours, differing to varying degrees from the original: Gesualdo's "stile cromatico" appears modernized but recognizable. In the performance of some movements of the cycle, a guitar tuned to third-tones is involved; in two excerpts, differently pitched Eastern membranophones are included introducing an exotic note. The Latin texts of the responsories are at times replaced with French translations and similar fragments authored by the mentioned contemporary writers, obviously in order to emphasize the timeless relevance of the "Jeremiad."

Experiments in implanting the "oriental" into the "western" and the "Islamic" into the "Christian" were conducted by Huber throughout most of the 1990s and the 2000s. They include, in particular, the concise four-movement chamber concerto *Intarsi* (*Incrustations*) for piano and seventeen instrumentalists, dedicated to the memory of Witold Lutosławski (1994). The function of "windows of hope" (by analogy with Bach's aria in the oratorio *Erniedrigt–geknechtet–verlassen–verachtet…*) is performed here by motifs from Mozart's last piano concerto (KV 595), incrusted

into a stylistically alien fabric, with an unexpected oriental shade added in the final movement titled *Giardino Arabo* (*Arab Garden*); only here the wind and string parts contain micro-chromaticisms. Another example of similar synthesis is the large-scale (37 minutes) string quintet *Ecce homines — Behold the Men* (1997–98), where Arabic micro-chromatics interact with motifs from Mozart's G minor String Quintet (KV 516). The use of the plural in the title of the work has, as it is easy to assume, an ecumenical meaning, and the very idea of such "incrustation" seems to be the simplest and most understandable way to demonstrate the utopia of civilizational unity through modern compositional means.

The "West-East" line is represented also by some not so eclectic examples. One of them, stylistically the purest and arguably the most artistically impressive, bears the Latin title *Lamentationes de fine vicesimi saeculi* (*Lamentations on the End of the Twentieth Century*, 1992–94). The form of this twenty-minute piece for four orchestral groups, with two solo cellos, is based, according to Huber, on the plan of the market in the Iranian city of Kashan. As an illustration, a drawing of this market is provided, with its central axis divided into 29 sections — *Illustration 1*.

Huber's score, however, consists of 17 rather than 29 short sections following each other attacca, and its connection to this drawing is not reasonably verifiable. It would be more adequate to perceive the piece as a kind of avaz: a non-metric monologue in some imaginary Eastern mode with micro-chromatic intervals (the score indicates three specific maqams, but their structure, due to the unsuitability of orchestral instruments to the Arab modal system, is simplified in the notation). In this case, the avaz is performed not by a singing voice (the Sufi singer can join *ad libitum*), but by the ensemble of orchestral instruments forming a kind of thickened monody; the process of its slow unfolding is enlivened by sporadic bursts of noisy activity and background sounds of percussion instruments. Like the imagined *Lament of Doctor Faustus* from Thomas Mann's novel, this "Lament" ends with a solitary note, "suspended in silence," — a note symbolizing "hope beyond hopelessness."[13]

[13] Mann, T. (1959). Doktor Faustus. Zhizn' nemetskogo kompozitora Adriana Leverkyuna, rasskazannaya ego drugom [Doktor Faustus: Das Leben des deutschen Tonsetzers Adrian Leverkühn, erzählt von einem Freunde] [transl. by S. Apt & N. Man]. Foreign Literature Publishing House, p. 565.

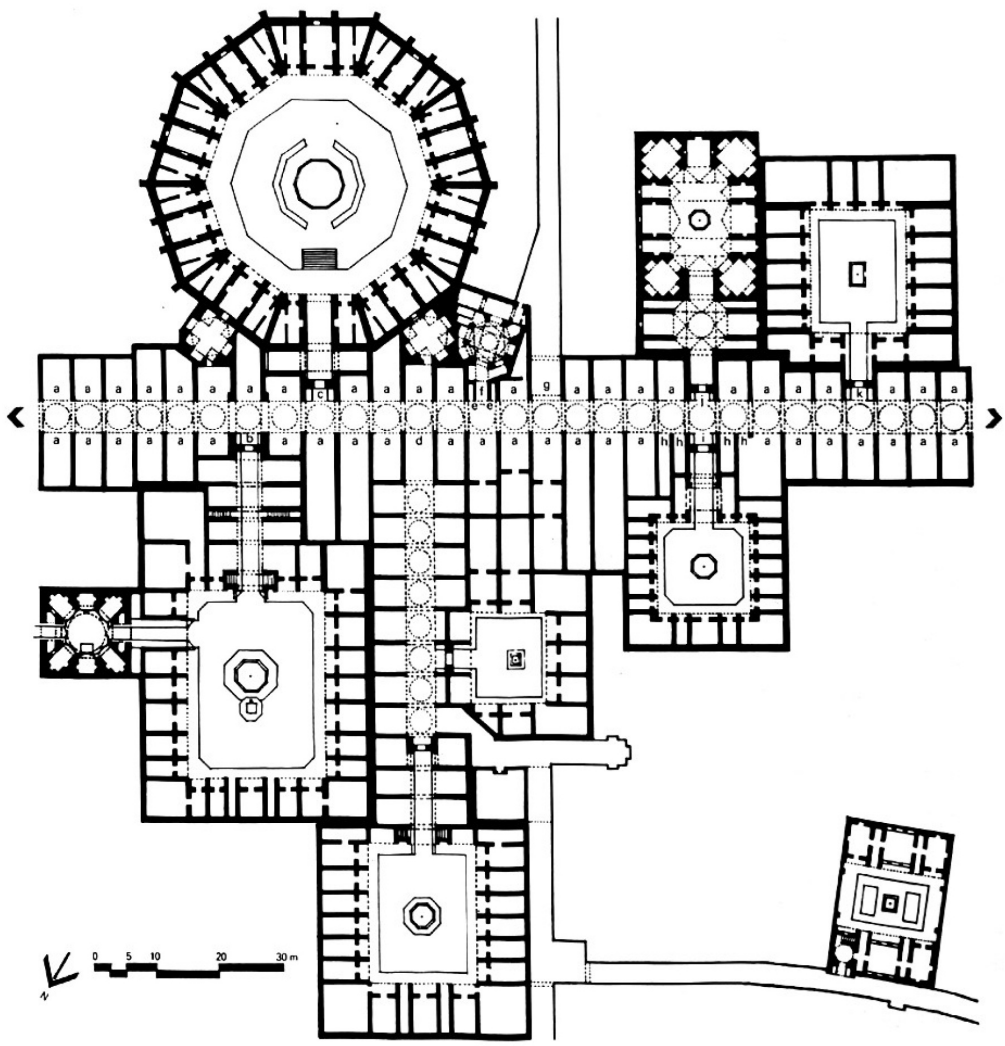


Illustration 1. Plan of the market in Kashan, Iran [14, p. 305][14]

In 2002, Huber produced a stylistically related, but more extensive (around forty minutes of music) and contrast-rich composition titled *Die Seele muss vom Reittier steigen und gehen auf ihren Seidenfüßen (The Soul Must Dismount and Walk on Its Silken Feet)*. In its original version, it is intended for cello,

[14] This dissertation contains also a detailed analysis of the score [14, p. 299–435].

stringed baryton, countertenor, and two orchestral groups; one group consists of modern instruments, the other of baroque instruments.[15] The text is based on a poem by the renowned Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008), performed in German translation and in the original Arabic. Written in besieged Ramallah during the Israeli anti-terrorist operation in the spring of 2002, Darwish's poems conclude with the same motif of "hope beyond hopelessness": "Peace to those who share with me the waiting, the intoxication of light, the light of the butterfly in the darkness of this tunnel."

Schwarzerde

"Hope beyond hopelessness" is the central theme of the opera *Schwarzerde* (2001, Basel), the title of which refers both to the aforementioned metaphor by Mandelstam about the relationship between poetry and time, and to the later tragic chapter in the poet's biography, when he, along with his wife Nadezhda ("hope" in Russian), found himself in the *chernozem* ("black soil") city of Voronezh against his will. The composer and his librettist Michael Schindhelm (b. 1960) — a Swiss writer, filmmaker, and theatre figure originally from the GDR, graduate of the Voronezh University[16] — compiled the libretto as a peculiar patchwork of excerpts from Mandelstam's prose and poetry, with insertions from Nadezhda Mandelstam, Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, and the librettists themselves.

The opera consists of nine episodes, with a total duration of about 107 minutes.[17] The plot, in its most general outline, without external symbolic moments that will be discussed separately, is as follows:

> Episode 1 "Dear, Blind, Selfish Light": The hero, Parnok (the surname is borrowed from Mandelstam's novella *The Egyptian Stamp*), suffocates in utter loneliness.
>
> Episode 2 "In Sleepless Hours Objects Are Heavier": Parnok and Nadya are alone, a sleepless night; people in uniform appear and demand that the room be cleared.

[15] The same work's later versions are reduced in terms of both duration and instrumentation.

[16] As a specialist in quantum chemistry. See Michael Schindhelm. (2025, March 22). In *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Schindhelm.

[17] Such is the duration of its only official recording, made in November 2001 in Basel under the direction of Arturo Tamayo.

Episode 3 “Yes, I lie in the ground, moving my lips”: Parnok [obviously already in exile] is obsessed with a vision of his own death; the lines by Mandelstam from the *Voronezh Notebooks* are set to a fragment from the aforementioned composition on Gesualdo’s *Tenebrae*, with this passage marked “Gesualdissimo…” in the score; the hero is surrounded by his female friends Nadya, Anna [Akhmatova], and Natalia [Shtempel, who preserved the *Voronezh Notebooks*].

Episode 4 “The Night Guards During the Day”: Parnok is in a sanatorium, Nadya is with him; nightmarish dreams.

Episode 5 “Air to Breathe”: Parnok and Nadya decide to go to Armenia — “the younger sister of the Judean land,” where they will be able to breathe [NB: Mandelstam stayed in a sanatorium in 1938, and it was there that he was arrested; the trip to Armenia took place in 1930].

Episode 6 “Ararat”: at the beginning of the episode, the *Plainte*… for viola d’amore is quoted; Parnok is in Armenia, with Nadya and Anna by his side.

Episode 7 “Dream/Trauma” (“Traum/Trauma” in the German original): an idyllic dream turns into a terrifying reality.

Episode 8 “Isolate, But Preserve”: here, in addition to other poetic excerpts (including Akhmatova’s “Voronezh”), the fateful epigram about the “ Highlander from the Kremlin” is heard; unwanted guests in uniform come again, with the order to “isolate, but preserve.”

Episode 9 “Epilogos”: the last letter from Nadya to the (already deceased) poet; an excerpt from the ode “If I Took Coal for the Highest Praise” — a farewell to the world and a confession of utopian hope.

The opera involves solo singers, a sextet of non-personified vocalists, a mixed choir, a relatively small orchestra (2.2.2.2–2.2.1.1–harps, timpani, percussion [3 players]–5.4.3.2.2), and a group of stage instruments consisting of trombone, a percussion battery, and Huber’s favourites: basset clarinet/basset horn, viola d’amore/guitar, and theorbo. Among the characters, besides Parnok, his three female friends, and a man designated in the score as Offizier (in the realities of that time, this would be a Chekist or a militia man), there is a Boy (Knabe), whose part is sung by countertenor accompanied by viola d’amore with scordaturas. The Boy delivers the concluding passage of Mandelstam’s essay *Journey to Armenia*, which, by some miracle, was published in the journal *Zvezda*, 1930, issue 5. For an uninformed reader, this passage is completely enigmatic, as it does not relate to the main text of the essay. It talks about the Armenian king Arshak, who was deceitfully captured and deeply humiliated by the Assyrian king Shapuh; Shapuh’s general,

an Armenian named Drastamat, who saved Shapuh from enemies, asked as a reward for a pass to the fortress where Arshak was held, to give him "one additional day [of life], full of hearing, taste, and smell, as it used to be when he entertained himself with hunting and cared for planting trees."[18]

The source of the excerpt about King Arshak (who ruled from 350 to 367) is *History of Armenia* by P'awstos Buzand (5th century). Its Russian translation was published about fifteen years after Mandelstam's death,[19] but the poet, as indicated in *Journey to Armenia*, met the translator[20] and, presumably, gleaned information about this historical episode from him (in the published Russian translation, the episode is presented differently; besides, Shapuh was not an Assyrian but a Persian king). The allegorical meaning of such a conclusion to the essay about Armenia is clear: finding himself in this absolutely foreign but extraordinarily attractive land, populated by people of "a completely different race, whom you respect, sympathize with, and take pride in from the outside,"[21] — in other words, as close to utopia as possible given the real circumstances, — the poet received additional days of full, vigorous life. The similarity between the fates of the Armenian king and the Russian poet[22] became the basis for introducing into the opera a kind of counterpoint between two planes — the real (biographical) and the transcendental, beyond the hopelessness into which the empirical existence of the hero had turned.

Fragments of the passage about King Arshak are distributed between episodes 1, 2, 6, and 9 (the Boy does not appear in other episodes); stylistically, they are connected to the beginning of episode 5 with a quote from the *Plainte*.... If the texts forming the real plan are sung and spoken in the original Russian and in the German

[18] Mandelstam, O. (2020). Polnoe sobranie sochinenij i pisem [Complete Works and Letters]. (3rd ed., Vol. 2). Internet-izdanie, p. 290. (In Russ.).

[19] Istoriya Armenii Favstosa [History of Armenia by Favstos Buzand] (1953). [transl. from Old Armenian and comments by M. A. Gevorgyan]. Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk Armyanskoj SSR. (In Russ.).

[20] Mandelstam, O. (2020). Polnoe sobranie sochinenij i pisem [Complete Works and Letters]. (3rd ed., Vol. 2). Internet-izdanie, p. 283. (In Russ.). (Here the translator's surname is rendered as "Gevorkyan")

[21] Ibid., p. 263.

[22] The poet's widow also points to this parallelism: Mandelstam, N. (1970). Vospominaniya [Memories]. Izdatel'stvo imeni Chekhova, p. 232. (In Russ.).

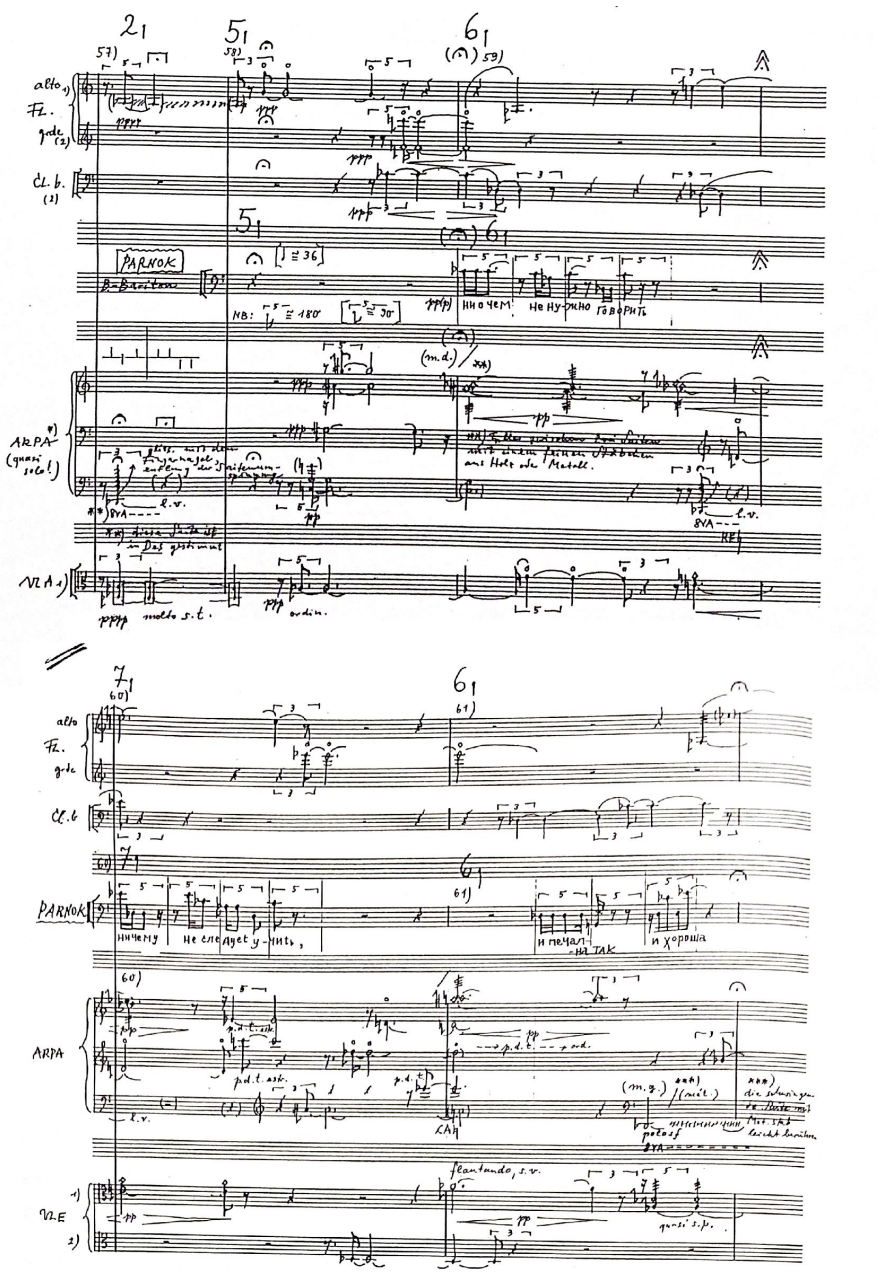
translation, with occasional "foreign" words in French, Italian, English, and Latin, then the Boy, embodying transcendence, sings the text about Arshak in translation from Russian to Armenian — a language transcendent to the European audience (and, apparently, to the composer himself[23].) For Mandelstam, Armenia was a "window of hope" — and the Boy's monologues, in the context of the score, serve as "windows of hope" on the same aesthetic and stylistic grounds as Bach, Weiss, and Mozart in the earlier works mentioned above.

The dominant musical idiom of the opera's real plan can be succinctly characterized by the title of Huber's composition for viola and chamber orchestra (1977): *…ohne Grenze und Rand…* ("…without borders and outlines…"). A significant portion of the material in *Schwarzerde* consists of extensive instrumental and choral sound fields with a granular (thinned by asynchronous internal pauses) micro-polyphonic and micro-chromatic structure. Against this background, the monologues, dialogues, and ensembles of the characters unfold. The solo lines are often angular, deliberately unvocal and also contain micro-chromatic intervals. As an example, here is an excerpt from Parnok's first solo ("There is no need to talk about anything, // Nothing should be taught…") — *Example 3*.

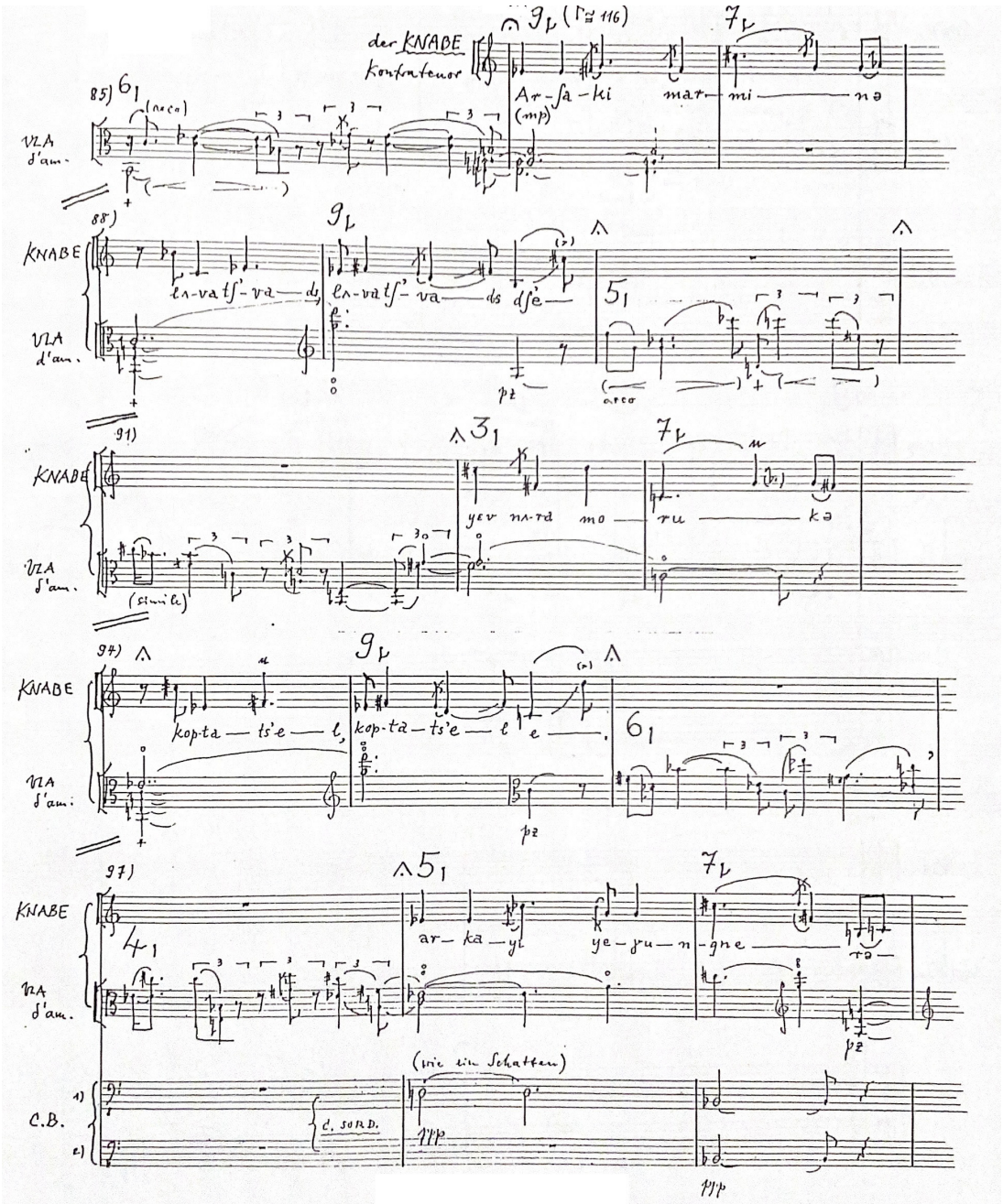
The melodic lines of the Boy, accompanied by the obligatory viola d'amore, unfold in a smoother rhythm and are endowed with conventionally oriental features (glides and oscillations of the voice in a narrow range, grace notes, and other melismas, augmented seconds); an excerpt from the Boy's first solo, which follows directly after Parnok's first solo, is shown in *Example 4*.

A sharp dramatic contrast is introduced in Episode 2, when men in uniform burst into Parnok's and Nadya's apartment: noisy wind instruments, against the background of a clear march rhythm of the drum kit, produce bizarre dotted configurations out of sync — *Example 5*.

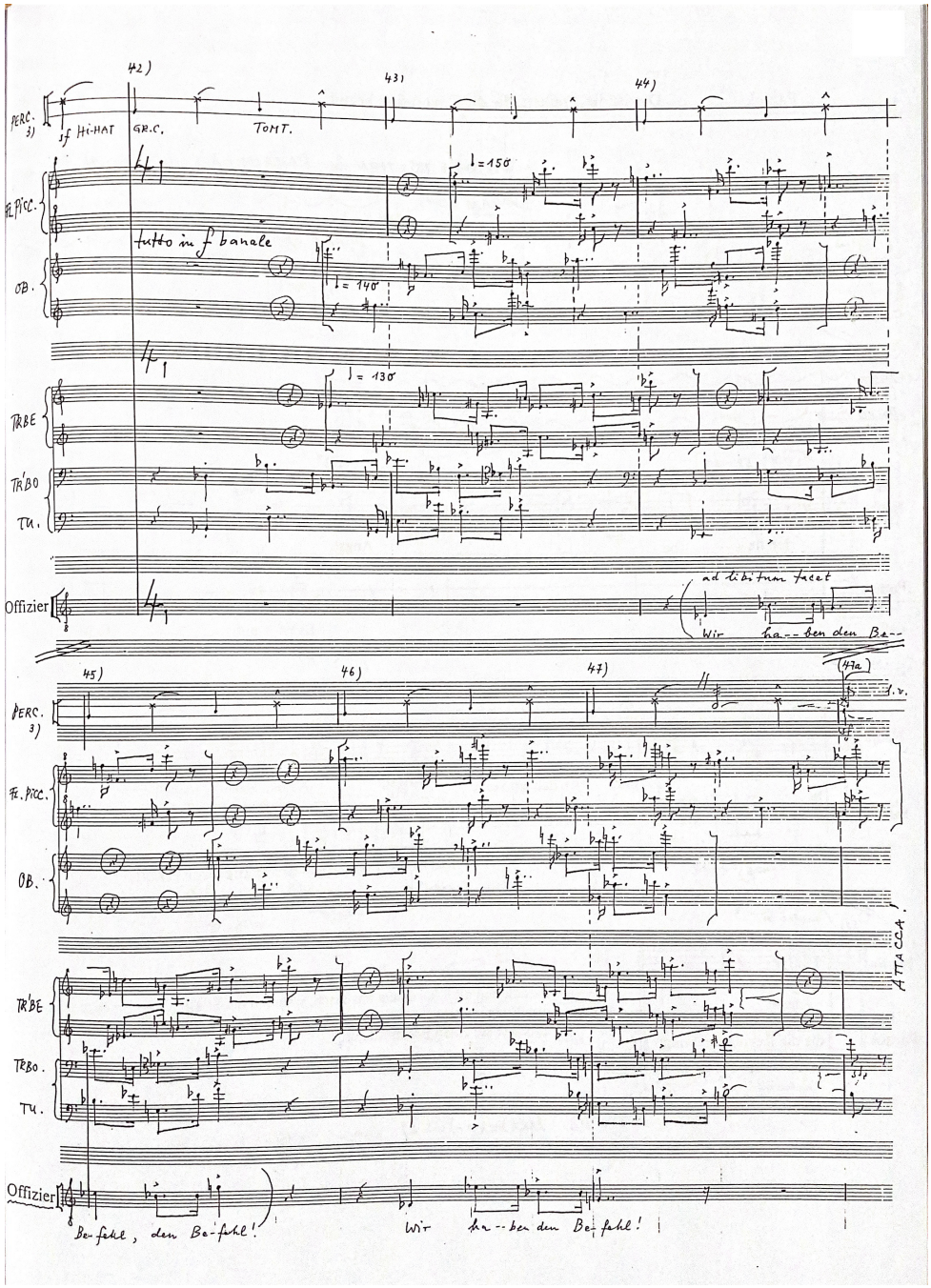
[23] The authorship of the translation is not specified in the score. According to Huber, a "back-translation of Mandelstam's lines into Classical Armenian," in which the work of P'awstos Buzand is written, was done specially for the opera (quoted in [15, S. 79]). In reality, the language of the translation is modern literary Armenian. In the score, the Armenian words, with some minor errors, are given in Latin transliteration. This transliteration is also used for some Russian texts.



Example 3. K. Huber. *Schwarzerde*, episode 1



Example 4. K. Huber. *Schwarzerde*, episode 1



Example 5. K. Huber. *Schwarzerde*, episode 2

An echo of this militant "interlude" is heard in the Boy's solo that concludes this episode, where another invasion is mentioned: "The Kushani people revolted against Shapuh… They broke through the border in an unprotected place, like a silk cord…"[24] This turn of the plot is illustrated by the rhythms of the orchestral drum (Rahmentrommel) and the Arabic drum mazhar — *Example 6*.

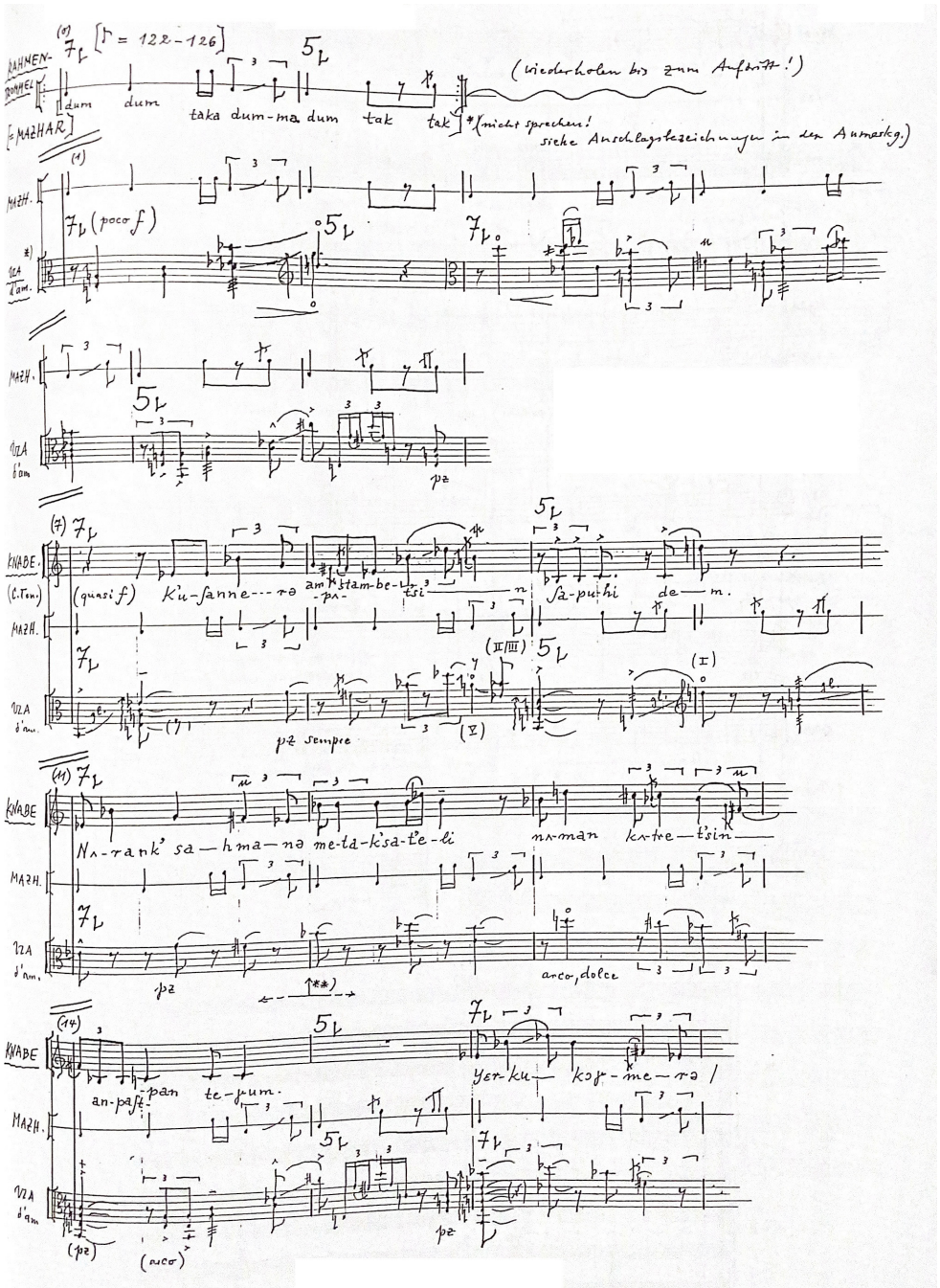
The "Tenebrae" passage (marked "Gesualdissimo") from the next (third) episode is a clear example of how late Renaissance mannerism, so to speak, is taken to the next level: horizontal lines are significantly stretched, dissonances in the vertical plane are intensified, and micro-chromatic progressions appear in some of the instrumental parts added to the vocal lines — *Example 7*.

As a matter of fact, the mentioned basic texture type for *Schwarzerde* realizes the same "Gesualdissimo" idea, raising it to an even higher degree. The continuity of its unfolding is disrupted several times by moments of sudden dramatic intensification. One of them is Parnok's nightmares, leading to a suffocation attack at the end of episode 4 (here the hero's monologue is accompanied by a trombone). Several others occur in episode 8, especially when the hero sings and declaims (Sprechgesang) the famous epigram about Stalin. Anyway, the predominant type of texture throughout most of the episodes is the contracting and expanding sound fields, changing colour and dynamics "without borders and [clear] outlines." At the beginning of the Epilogos, this texture serves as the background for an extraordinarily touching arioso "Osya, dear, distant friend"; it directly and naturally transitions into the Boy's arioso concluding the story of the unfortunate King Arshak. An excerpt from it is shown in *Example 8*. (here the obligatory viola d'amore is joined by the basset horn).

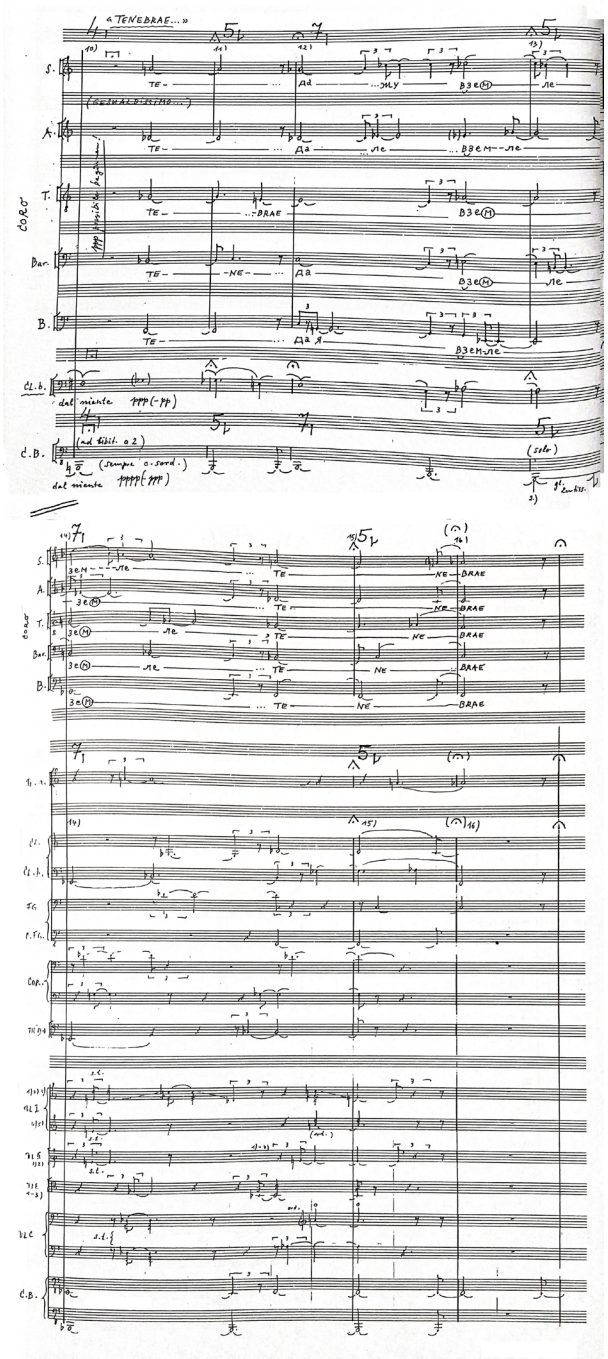
Throughout the opera, the Boy remains offstage and only at the very end of the Epilogos does he appear at the forefront to join the hero, along with the viola d'amore, for his farewell words (in Russian): "The hills of human heads recede into the distance: // I diminish there. They will not notice me anymore. // But in the kind books and children's games // I will resurrect to say that the sun shines."[25] Thus, at the close of the opera, a synthesis of the real and the transcendent planes occurs — what Huber, in another context, referred to as the "charisma of brotherhood."

[24] Mandelstam, O. (2020). Polnoe sobranie sochinenij i pisem [Complete Works and Letters]. (3rd ed., Vol. 2). Internet-izdanie, p. 289. (In Russ.).

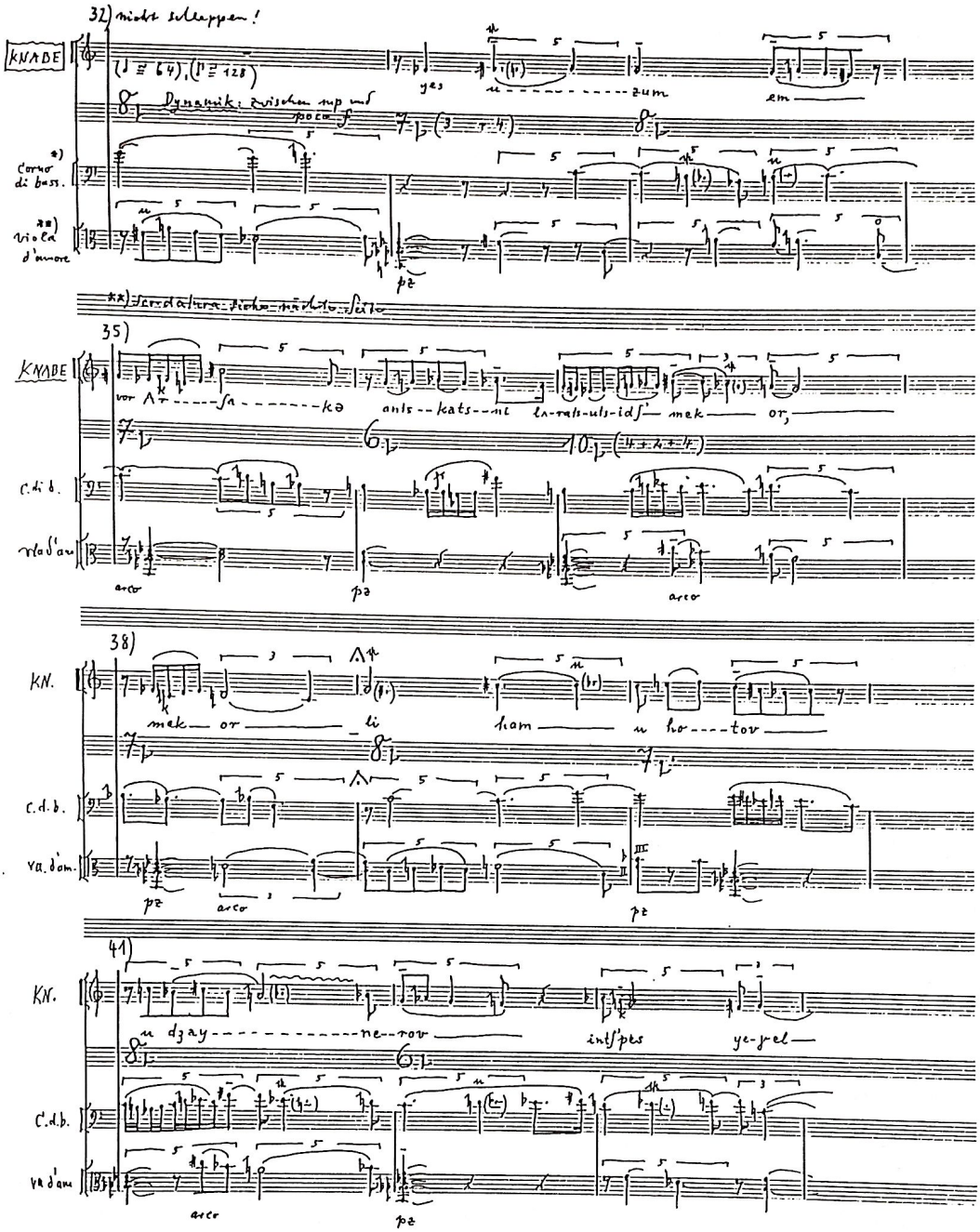
[25] In the original: "as the sun shines." Mandelstam, O. (2020). Polnoe sobranie sochinenij i pisem [Complete Works and Letters]. (3rd ed., Vol. 1). Internet-izdanie, p. 281, 455. (In Russ.).



Example 6. K. Huber. *Schwarzerde*, episode 2



Example 7. K. Huber. *Schwarzerde*, episode 3



Example 8. K. Huber. *Schwarzerde*, Epilogos

* * *

The conglomerate of humanistic and utopian ideas that had inspired the works preceding *Schwarzerde* and the opera itself, found its expression in Huber's last major compositions, as evidenced by their titles: *Miserere hominibus* ("Have Mercy [on us], People") for seven voices and seven instruments, with words from the Psalms, Agnus Dei, Octavio Paz,[26] Mahmoud Darwish, Carl Amery,[27] and Jacques Derrida (2006), *Quod est pax? — Vers la raison du coeur* ("What is Peace? — To the Reason of the Heart") for five voices, Arabic percussion, and orchestra, with words by Paz and Derrida[28] (2007), *Vida y muerte no son mundos contrarios* ("Life and Death are not Opposing Worlds") for mezzo-soprano or countertenor and viola d'amore, with words by Paz (2007). A significant part of the material in these scores is borrowed from *Schwarzerde* and other works representing the "Mandelstam" and "West-East" lines of the composer's oeuvre.

In conclusion, it should be noted that Huber was prolific and succeeded in various genres; the works mentioned on these pages, though of key importance in the context of his legacy, constitute but a small part of it. Huber was also an outstanding teacher. Those who passed through his school include Brian Ferneyhough (b. 1943), Wolfgang Rihm (1952–2024), Kaija Saariaho (1952–2023), and Toshio Hosokawa (b. 1955): composers committed to a complex musical language, high literature, and humanistic ideas.

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[26] Great Mexican poet (1914–1998), laureate of Nobel Prize (1990).

[27] German writer (1922–2005), a prisoner of Nazi concentration camps, author of the book *Beyond Crime and Punishment* (1966).

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