

Un royaume différent (A Different Realm) —
about *Hurqualia* in the Context of the Musical
Style of Giacinto Scelsi

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Hurqualia is the first of Giacinto Scelsi's six works for the grand orchestra — compositions which took shape over the period of fifteen peak years of his mature phase, and which constitute the composer's *opus magnum*. Scelsi finished *Hurqualia* in 1960, that is, a year after *Four Compositions* for chamber orchestra, a work which constitutes a turning point and is a harbinger of the future, in which he speaks in an idiom totally different from the previous one — this one unquestionably his own — in its most radical form. *Quattro Pezzi per orchestra (ciascuno su una nota)* is the abstract of the aesthetic of contemplation of sound, emblematic of Scelsi's work. This focusing on a single sound, concentration purely on its timbre and duration, exploration of its internal structure (harmonic spectrum), sensitivity to nuances of colour change, texture and rhythm of sound material, microtonality which co-creates the net of expressive tensions, these are the basic 'rules', to use Meyer's terminology, of the original, auditively recognisable Scelsian style. The distinctiveness of his idiom came about as a result of a diametrical change in compositional thinking — now directed, in the words of the composer, 'towards the interior of a sound, but through meditation on it, through looking in it for the spiritual element which goes beyond physicality [...]'¹. This way of thinking concentrates not only on that which Debussy described as *mise en place sonore*², but reaches further — it is directed towards searching for the sound's third dimension, its 'depth', towards what might be described as its sphericity. *Four*

Compositions for Orchestra represent the first musical example of the Scelsian idea of *viaggio al centro del suono* (journey to the centre of the sound).

The stylistic turning point in Scelsi's music came about primarily through the inspiration of and deep fascination with Eastern meditation techniques, yoga, and in particular the so-called yoga of sound, the symbolic, soteriological function of music and sound in Eastern cultures, especially Hindu and Tibetan ones. The spatiality of sound was for Scelsi linked primarily to the impression received during contemplative reception; the 'depth' of sound had for him a transcendental value and a cosmic dimension. And he perceived the Cosmos in a sacral perspective. Although he was aware of the physical, acoustic features of sound, its rational 'measurability' and scientific definition, he was fascinated by the oriental conception of sound as a 'Cosmic force, which is the basis of everything'³, — i.e. the 'spiritual' dimension of sound. A feature of Scelsi's music after the turning point of 1959 is the constant and essentially unchanged (although differentiated as to its intensity in individual works) presence of elements of music from different cultural areas of the East. The nature of this presence is best conveyed by the Huberian term 'resonance', adopted by Mieczysław Tomaszewski. What this refers to is 'an approximate evocation of certain musical worlds' — evoking a stylistic resonance⁴. In Scelsi's *opus vitae* — his orchestral works — the strongest resonance is from the music of Tibet: more precisely the religious orchestral music of Tibetan Buddhist monks⁵.

Hurqualia, with its subtitle *Another Realm*, is a different kind of composition. Contrasted with the concentration, balance and contemplativeness of *Four Compositions...* this is truly a different musical world. The work is characterised by violence, impulsiveness, speed of action, and above all by the eruption of melodic movement in its melismatic form, a very dynamic melodic line which is accompanied by the rhythmic beating of membranophones, particularly energetic in the first part. The melic and rhythmic character of this line brings inescapable associations with the melismatic melodies of traditional Arabic music. The subtle evocation of this cultural region is also linked to the instrumental colouring and timbre which characterise *Hurqualia*. It is close to the colours typical of Arabic music — soft, 'nasal', 'bleating' and a lit-

tle strangled, which results mainly from the performance apparatus, in which reed aerophones play a significant part, particularly the native type of oboe (*zurna*)⁶. In his composition Scelsi clearly accentuates reed woodwind instruments which makes the instrumental apparatus of this composition different from all other orchestral compositions dominated by the sound of low-register brass instruments. Moreover, the sound of these instruments is intensified through the use of amplifiers. Here we find another distinguishing feature of *Hurqualia*, namely the obligatory requirement for augmentation of the sound of eleven instruments chosen out of the orchestra's complement with amplifying apparatus⁷. Among these amplified instruments, concentrated around three microphones, it is the wind reed which are the dominant ones: the oboe and cor anglais.⁸ The prominence given to the sound of the viola and the double bass — instruments either of secondary importance or omitted altogether in some of Scelsi's orchestral works — can be explained by reference to the sound of another instrument typical of Arabic music, namely the string instrument *rebab*⁹. On the other hand, *Hurqualia* has many features which are invariant¹⁰ in Scelsi's musical language. It is a cyclical, four-part composition, which constitutes an organic whole linked together through both the material and the dramatic structure, as is the case with most of Scelsi's large forms. One could even talk of allusions to symphony, not so much because of the four-part structure, but above all because of the internal dynamics of the cycle — its development through crescendo¹¹, with the last part playing the role of the finale of the cycle¹². The essence of the form of particular parts is based on a variety of processes and transformations. The driving force of the development of the form is movement of all kinds — melodic, rhythmic, through orchestral space, movement through methodical transformation of sound qualities, even on the smallest scale. It is a type of form-process, evolutionary-dynamic form, where the compositional centre¹³ is the climax. The harmonic factor has a particular significance both among the tectonic means and in the shaping of the tension structure of the form. The narration is built on the variability of consonances, or through the variability of tonal axes. The superordinate principle of organising the pitch material is sound centralisation. The harmonics are also characterised by a number of close as-

sociations with tonal harmonics, apparent in, among other things, selection of harmonic devices, interdependence of dissonance and consonance, the logic of harmonic sequences based on the leading role of the harmonic base, or, lastly, flashes of functional syntax.

Hurqualia, like other compositions by Scelsi, brings many examples of structural accuracies and numerical regularity. Interval structuralism mainly concerns here, as usual, the construction of microsystems directly, but manifests itself also indirectly as the regulator of the selection of sound material. There are also examples of proportionality based on round numbers¹⁴: particular formal segments of *Hurqualia* have their beginnings in bar 25 (second segment — *Agitato*), 50 (third segment — *Più agitato*) and 100 (fourth segment — *Meno mosso*). Scelsi's numerical compositions reflect his preference for six and eight — his symbolic numbers (Scelsi was fascinated by the 'Pythagoreanism of numbers', arhythmology, or the mysticism of Number¹⁵). The compositional principle of the first part of *Hurqualia* is constituted by number 24, a multiple of both six and eight, and also a number whose sum of digits equals six. The first segment of *Hurqualia* has 24 bars, the second segment is of the same length, while the length of the third segment is doubled 24 (i.e. 48 bars), and the number of bars in the final segment is the reverse of 24, i.e. 42.

Scelsi shapes the musical time of *Hurqualia*, as in his other compositions, in an a-metric manner. The music gives the impression of sound magma, which expands and contracts to the point of total disappearance; on other occasions it sounds like musical tissue created out of the summing up of single, unsynchronised emissions of sounds which only momentarily coincide with the framework of periodicity. But it is an organised musical time, ergo fully defined in all its traditionally recognised aspects: pulse (tempo), metre and rhythm¹⁶. In this area, as in all others, the composer does not leave the slightest margin for aleatoric elements. The tempo (neutral pulse) of orchestral works was established by Scelsi in metronomic values of the duration of the rhythmic unit. Moreover, in *Hurqualia* all the parts of the cycle are additionally given traditional, verbal agogic-expressive descriptions (parts I and IV *Moderato*, part II *Intenso*, part III *Largamente*).

The features of harmony, rhythm, metre, form and structure discussed above make up Scelsi's particular stylistic idiom.

The musical distinctiveness of *Hurqualia* manifests itself in paroxysms of dynamism, expressively extraverted moments, and also in the expansion of melodics with a piercing timbre colouring, which is surprising, when one bears in mind the label of 'monosonarity' and contemplatively static character ascribed to Scelsi's output. But the significance of this composition in the evolution of his work is also distinctive: it is the first composition of the 'new' Scelsi for such a large orchestra. After the extreme reduction of musical matter and concentration on elementary sound phenomena in *Quattro Pezzi* for chamber orchestra, *Hurqualia* marks the opposite pole of Scelsi's mode of expression — the drama of pure melodic and rhythmic movement. This kind of movement of sound material will keep returning in the composer's later work in significant moments of narration, which bind the musical action, but not in such extreme form.

Scelsi was not in the habit of explaining the enigmatic, exotic-sounding titles of his compositions. In the case of *Hurqualia* the music itself indicated Arabic inspiration. The title of the work turned out to be the name of Arabic mythical country — the emerald land¹⁷, or cosmic mountain, familiar from Arabic mythology '*Hurqalya* (*awest.* Hukairya) — in Iranian mythology 'the towering Huqar' — the mountain of the original waters, where grows the tree of everlasting life'¹⁸. This is the cosmic mountain¹⁹,

the highest peak, reaching to the stars, onto which flow the waters of Aredwa Sura Anahita and above which circles the constellation of Sataweas [...]. In Arabic mythology beyond the emerald mountain Qaf there spreads a mysterious emerald land in which lie two emerald cities, Djabarsa and Djabalaqa?²⁰

Both these cities 'are lit by the emerald light of Qaf mountain (we perceive the base of Qaf mountain as our sky)'²¹.

There is no sunrise and no sunset, people have no knowledge of evil [...] and live in a permanent state of bliss. In order to reach the emerald cities of eternal bliss, the pilgrim must cross beyond the boundary of senses, of that which is familiar and visible²².

The unusual dramatic nature of the musical action of *Hurqualia* is thus

linked to the semantic context called up by Scelsi in the work's title. It appears as a musical picture of a dramatic journey to this mythical 'other realm'. For Muslim mystics the journey to Hurqualia constitutes a 'symbol of the initiation process, overcoming one's own self and becoming one with the Absolute'²³. In order to reach that land and the 'tree of eternal life' which grows there, the pilgrim

must overcome his own self and see, beyond the thick layer of material world, the subtle web of interconnections of 'the other world.' He has to understand that the things which he sees are merely symbols, a curtain hiding things as they are. In order to immerse himself in the greenish glow of the 'other' world, inaccessible to worldly senses, the initiate must undergo the difficult initiation process, and the misadventures, dragons, witches and monsters which he encounters on the way are its symbols²⁴.

The idea of a dramatic journey and trial is expressed through the musical devices used in *Hurqualia*: the internal contrast of sound material, its exceptional melodic and rhythmic mobility, and sharply delineated harmonic and timbre tensions. The particular prominence given to the high register of the acoustic field of the composition, somewhat untypical for Scelsi, can be explained by the 'spatial' location of Hurqualia: it is 'the highest peak, reaching the stars'²⁵. The dispersion of orchestral mass in the higher registers of the acoustic field, its movement upward in the ending of the cycle's finale, symbolises an analogical movement towards the peak of that mythical mountain, which is at the same time 'the cosmic way and the vertical cosmic axis [...] which supports the vault of heaven'²⁶.

The metaphor of a road as an expression of religion, a road-journey to the East, the road of spiritual life, *ergo* the road to salvation, so clearly present in the music and the symbolism of *Hurqualia* — appeared to me to be the most appropriate key to interpreting Scelsi's poetics in general. The topos of a road is most clearly apparent in Scelsi's orchestral works viewed in chronological order and regarded as one enormous cycle. *Hurqualia*, as the first work in this macrocycle, indicates the direction and the meaning of that road, while the last work (*Pfhat*), with its references to themes from the Tibetan Book of the Dead, reveals its final, soteriological purpose.

‘The mythologem of ‘another world’ has a universal character — it appears in almost all religions’²⁷. Mythical countries are usually described as kingdoms, cities, towns or villages. The belief into the existence of those ‘worlds of a radically different status, which also in some way interpenetrate the familiar reality, is one of the characteristic features of religious imagination’²⁸. The Islamic Hurqalya owes its fame to Suhrawardi (1155–1191) — a medieval Iranian philosopher and mystic Sufi²⁹. In his mystical texts he described it as a mythical city situated in the middle sphere of the Cosmos, in the so-called intermediate ‘suprasensory world’. Here I will refer to Henry Corbin, an expert on Suhrawardi’s works and Arabic-Persian mysticism, who provides the following explanation:

between the world accessible to pure intellectual perception [...] and the world accessible to the senses, there is an intermediate world, the world of ideas-Images, archetypal figures, subtle substances, ‘immaterial matter’. This world is as real and objective, cohesive and substantive as the worlds which are understandable and accessible through the senses. It is an intermediate world, ‘where what is of the spirit is embodied, and what is of the body is spiritualised’, a world of real matter and real dimension, although in comparison with the imperfect matter accessible to the senses it is subtle and immaterial. The organ of that world is the Active Imagination. This is the place where theophanic visions take place, the stage where visionary events and stories appear in their true form³⁰.

This intermediate sphere, which exists in the spatial dimension, is called *alam al mithal - mundus imaginabilis*³¹.

The symbols which fill the intermediate world do not exist [...] autotelically, for themselves. They exist by virtue of mediating. Their purpose is to uphold the links between the Absolute and his earthly admirer (Arab.: *rabb* and *marbub*). These two cannot exist without each other³², just as there cannot exist a meaning which nobody understands or a sight (vision) without the eye which can see it³³.

Scelsi’s *Hurqualia — Un Royaume différent* is ‘different’ from that which is regarded as typical for the music of that composer, but it is also truly Scelsian. It is suffused with musical and symbolic archetypes of his poetics³⁴, even though the spirit of Arabia resonating through the work makes it stand away from others, since Scelsi’s stylistic idiom relies fundamentally on Indian-Tibetan evocations. *Hurqualia* is heterotelic — it acquires full ‘meaning’ only

in the context of the whole of Scelsi's poetics. The 'otherness' of *Hurqualia* thus helps our understanding of his poetics.

Notes

- 1 Giacinto Scelsi, 'Son et musique' (1953–54). Roma-Venezia 1981, in: '1985La musica'. Trimestrale di musica contemporanea, giugno 1988 No. 17, p. 55.
- 2 Cf. Stefan Jarociński, *Debussy a impresjonizm i symbolizm*, Kraków 1976, p. 146.
- 3 Giacinto Scelsi, *Son et musique*, op. cit., p. 52.
- 4 Mieczysław Tomaszewski, 'Na temat *Pieśni perskich* Konstantego Regameya', in: *Konstanty Regamey. Oblicza polistylisty*, Warszawa 1988, p. 87.
- 5 I used the following recordings as musical sources and examples: 1) *Tibetan Buddhism. The Ritual Orchestra and Chants*. 7559-72071-2 Nonesuch Explorer Series, 1995 (Recorded at Khampagar Monastery, Tashi Jong Community, Himachal Pradesh, India, 1976), 2) *Tibetan Buddhism. Tantras of Gyütö*. 7559-79198-2 Elektra/Nonesuch, Explorer Series, 1988 (Recorded at Gyütö Tantric College, Dalhousie, Himachal Pradesh, 1973, 1975), 3) *Tibet: Musiques sacrées*. Ocora C559011, 1989 (recorded in North-East Nepal in two monasteries: Thami and Tengboche) 4) *Traditions rituelles des Bonpos*. Ocora C 580016 (recorded in Tibet, in March 1981 and in April 1983) 5) *AMDO Monastère tibétain de Labrang*. Ocora 560101 6) *Tibetan Ritual. Invocation to the Goddess Yeshiki Mamo (Tantric Puja)*. Auvidis, UNESCO Collection D 8034.
- 6 After: Anna Czekanowska, *Kultury muzyczne Azji*, Kraków 1981, p. 189.
- 7 Amplification of this kind is used by Scelsi later only in *Uaxuctum* — also in the first of the group of three compositions for orchestra and choir, where the solo voices separated out of the choir are amplified.
- 8 In the first and last parts, oboe and cor anglais are by the first microphone, and by the second one there is a French horn F and tenor saxophone B flat. In the second part there is no change in the set by the first microphone (oboe and cor anglais), while by the second one there is a musical saw (sega), viola and tenor saxophone B flat. In the third part the first microphone amplifies the sound of the oboe and piccolo-clarinet in E flat, and the second — the tenor saxophone and double bass (con la corda grave). The set of instruments amplified by the third microphone is permanent: these are two trumpets and a trombone.
- 9 Anna Czekanowska, op. cit., p. 188.
- 10 Term taken from linguistics:

Invariant (Lat. *invariant* — unchanging [...]) — a term used in structural linguistics to refer to an element which remains unchanged in a given area of language, contrasted with variable elements (variants). When applied in literary research it refers to the basic element of a given literary form (e.g. literary genre) which does not undergo transformations. Invariant appears in the context of variable elements, and is the decisive factor in establishing the identity of a given form in the course of its historical evolution. [...].

Cf. the entry 'Inwariant', in: M. Słowiński, T. Kostkiewiczowa, A. Okopień-Sławińska, J. Sławiński, *Słownik terminów literackich*, Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków 2000.

- 11 On the subject of the internal dynamics of a symphonic cycle, see Maria Piotrowska, *Neoklasycyzm w muzyce XX wieku*, Warszawa 1982, pp. 128–129.
- 12 The last part of the cycle supplements and closes the processes which have taken place in the preceding parts (*Quattro Pezzi*) or provides the dramatic target of the musical and symbolic development; at the same time linking back in terms of material and structure to the first part and ensuring the balance of the cycle (*Pfhat*). It is characterised by the most dynamic course and the greatest complexity of formal structure (*Hurqualia, Aion*).
- 13 I use this term as it is used in theory of literature, i.e., as ‘the fundamental approach employed in the composition of a literary work or its particular part.’ [After:] ‘Compositional centre’, entry in: M. Słowiński, T. Kostkiewiczowa, A. Okopień-Sławińska, J. Sławiński, op. cit.
- 14 On the subject of round numbers, see: Curtius Ernst Robert, *Literatura europejska i tacińskie średniowiecze*, trans. and ed. Andrzej Borowski, Kraków 1997, pp. 532–533.
- 15 The concept of arhythmology as mysticism of Number is used by Matila C. Ghyka (see *Złota liczba. Rytuały i rytmy pitagorejskie w rozwoju cywilizacji zachodniej* by that author, trans. Ireneusz Kania, Kraków 2001, p. 36 and others.).
- 16 Krzysztof Droba’s research into establishing and categorising the issues of organisation of musical time was helpful in examining this problem in relation to Scelsi’s music (Krzysztof Droba, ‘Podstawowe zasady organizacji czasu w muzyce: czas metryczny i ametryczny czyli rytmiczny’, in: *Księga Jubileuszowa Mieczysława Tomaszewskiego*, Zeszyt Naukowy No. 7, Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 1984, pp. 234–244).
- 17 Elżbieta Wnuk-Lisowska, ‘Hurqalia’, entry in: *Zaświaty i krainy mityczne*, ed. Małgorzata Sacha-Piekło, Kraków 1999, p. 121.
- 18 Ibidem.
- 19 The Cosmic mountain

in the cosmologies of particular mythical-religious traditions is the central mountain of the universe, which links all the levels of existence and all the worlds; it is the model of the Cosmos, the cosmic way and the vertical cosmic axis [...], which supports the vault of Heaven.

(After: Andrzej Szyjewski, Małgorzata Sacha-Piekło, ‘Góra kosmiczna’ [‘Cosmic mountain’], entry in: *Zaświaty i krainy mityczne*, op. cit., p. 112).

- 20 Elżbieta Wnuk-Lisowska, op. cit.
- 21 Ibidem.
- 22 Ibidem.
- 23 Elżbieta Wnuk-Lisowska, ‘Qaf’, entry in: *Zaświaty i krainy mityczne*, op. cit., p. 195.
- 24 Elżbieta Wnuk-Lisowska, ‘Dżabarsa i Dżabalaqua’, entry in: *Zaświaty i krainy mityczne*, op. cit., p. 101.
- 25 Ibidem.
- 26 Andrzej Szyjewski, Małgorzata Sacha-Piekło, ‘Góra kosmiczna’, entry in: *Zaświaty i krainy mityczne*, op. cit., p. 112.
- 27 Cf. *Zaświaty i krainy mityczne*, op. cit., p. 5.
- 28 Ibidem.
- 29 ‘Sufi — when a man has cleansed his heart through Rememberance of God dikr Allah, has travelled the Path of Return and achieved True Knowledge marifa, he is called a

Sufi. Many seek Wisdom and Truth, but only those who have sought Him for His own sake deserve that name. Paradoxically, those who deserve the name of Sufi have never felt themselves worthy of such honour. Since a Sufi reaches a high level of the Knowledge of God, he knows with full certainty that 'a slave is a slave, and the Master is the Master'. (Quoted after: Andrzej Saramowicz, 'Glosariusz terminologii sufickiej', *Gnosis*, No. 12, December 2000).

- 30 Henri Corbin, *L'Imagination creatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn'Arabi*, Paris 1958. English translation by R. Manheim, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn'Arabi*, London 1969, p. 4. After: Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, 'Henri Corbin, czyli o potrzebie aniołów w naszym życiu', *Gnosis* No. 4, May 1992.
- 31 Henri Corbin, *Face de Dieu, face de l'homme. Hermeneutique et soufisme*, Paris 1983, p.16 etc. After: Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, op. cit.
- 32 Henri Corbin, *L'Imagination creatrice...*, op. cit., footnote 47, p. 308 and footnote 48, p. 309.
- 33 Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, op. cit.
- 34 I understand poetics (or the art of composing, following Aristotle) to refer to 'the general rules governing the manner of creative expression' (cf. *Słownik terminów literackich*, op. cit.), both the technical and supratechnical ones, conditioned by the biographical and cultural context. Here I refer to Kurt Huber who claimed that every musical composition is 'an expression of a particular spirituality', (after: Tomaszewski Mieczysław, *Nad analizą i interpretacją dzieła muzycznego. Myśli i doświadczenia*, and also other texts in: Mieczysław Tomaszewski, *Interpretacja integralna dzieła muzycznego. Rekonesans*, Kraków 2000, p. 14).