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Violins, Venues and Vortexes: Interrogating Pre-reflective Relationality in Orchestral Work

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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in
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David Francis Gilling
ID Number 

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Abstract

This thesis explores the social structures of organizing through an analysis of pre-reflective relationality in orchestral performance across three exemplary settings. These are: the opening stanza of a performance by the orchestra in which I play; a highly regarded performance by a well-known orchestra and conductor; and a concert performed under the shadow of COVID-19. Within these contexts, the player's relationship with instrument and score, the role of the conductor, relations between conductor and player, and the player's relations with audience, artifact and colleague are discussed.

The study draws on autoethnography and the descriptive phenomenological method of Giorgi (2012). This framework allows work practices that are specialized, tacit, and entrenched to be interrogated through the theoretical lens of Merleau-Ponty's (1968) late ontology as represented by the constructs of reversibility, *écart*, and *Flesh*.

The research contributes to organizational knowledge on three dimensions. The contribution to *theory* is made through the interrogation of the pre-reflective relational bonds in symphony orchestras, first between individuals and artifacts, and then between individuals and colleagues, which shape the inter-collegial 'between space' (Ladkin, 2013) where the organizing of performance – the music-making itself – happens. The contribution to *method* is made in the exploration of specialized personal experience for research purposes through Giorgi's framework and Merleau-Ponty's constructs, while the contribution to *practice* builds on this foundation by using Merleau-Ponty's ideas to acknowledge the inanimate alongside the human and so offer a fresh starting point for the understanding of organizational relationality. This approach also allows orchestral performance to emerge as a primordially interwoven, inherently reversible meshwork of relational connectivity harnessed in pursuit of a collective purpose.

As organizations look beyond COVID-19 to a world where the virtual and hybrid must be accommodated alongside the longstanding and traditional, holistic approaches such as the one offered here will resonate with researchers and managers alike as they come to terms with relational structures and organizational contexts transformed by the combined effects of pandemic-related disruption and technological change.

Keywords Orchestra, Merleau-Ponty, coordination, pre-reflective relationality, reversibility, autoethnography, COVID-19 pandemic, between space, hybrid work practices

In lieu of a dedication: Spender on Merleau-Ponty

Stephen Spender, from *One more new botched beginning*

Their voices heard, I stumble suddenly
Choking in undergrowth. I'm torn
Mouth pressed against the thorns,
remembering

Ten years ago, here in Geneva
I walked with Merlau-Ponty [sic] by the lake.
Upon his face, I saw his intellect.
Energy of the sun-interweaving
Waves, electric, danced on him. His eyes
Smiled with their gay logic through
Black coins flung down from leaves.

He who
Was Merlau-Ponty that day is no more
Irrevocable than the I that day who was
Beside him – I'm still living!

(Spender, 1971, p. 32)

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Statement of originality

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- Conductor Carlos Kleiber and the Concertgebouw Orchestra. In Bathurst, R. J., Gilling, D. F., & Rasmussen, S. J. (2019). *Orchestras: A model for social and organizational development* (pp. 107–116) Hauppauge, NY: Nova.
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A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Gilling".

Candidate:

Date: 18/01/22

A handwritten signature in black ink that appears to read "R. Bathurst".

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Chapter 1: From title to thesis

1.1 Overview

1.1.1 *Violins, venues and vortexes*: The title explained

The title *Violins, Venues and Vortexes: Interrogating Pre-Reflective Relationality in Orchestral Work* has its origins in my journey with a musical instrument that has been my lifelong companion, although when I first picked up a *violin* at the age of 10, I had no idea that this was to be the start of a relationship that is now entering its fifth decade. That changed three years later, when I began learning the second violin part of the Bach *Concerto for Two Violins*, BWV 1043 – the ‘Bach Double’ as it is affectionately known in the violinist’s world. Something about the second movement of the piece, the opening melody of which is given to the second violin, resonated: to the (initial) consternation of neighbours and loved ones alike, an obsession took hold, and the rest is history.

The importance of a musician’s instrument to performing is self-evident. The concert *venue*, however, also plays a key but oft-forgotten role, with the ability to adjust to the acoustic differences between one hall and another being a tacit ‘given’ for any orchestral player. But those very differences are part of what gives each concert space its individual character; seeing the traumatic impact of the 2011 Christchurch earthquakes and, later, the symbols of the COVID-19 pandemic, on venues that have been central to my life as an orchestral performer has, as a result, provided a motivating influence for me throughout the present study.

My fascination with orchestral *relationality* started soon after I began violin lessons. As I explain in section 1.2, in rehearsing for my first professional ‘gig,’ I encountered a directive

from the conductor which, though it defies easy definition to the non-musician, still achieved exactly what it was supposed to; this revealed a responsiveness on the part of the entire cohort of players that showed a unity of intent which I still find to be one of the miracles of orchestral music-making.

That explains violins, venues, and orchestral relationality, but what of *vortexes*? My acquaintance with the work of the phenomenologically-oriented philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), began during research for my Master’s degree (Gilling, 2010), and is grounded in what is considered the culmination of his early work, the *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012) – the published version of Merleau-Ponty’s own PhD thesis.

In 1952, just a few years after publishing *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty was appointed to the Chair in Philosophy at the Collège de France. He held this, the pre-eminent academic position in French philosophy, until his death in 1961. His application for the post contained a prospectus of his work, later published as ‘An Unpublished Text’ in *The Primacy of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a), in which he writes:

My first two works [*The Structure of Behaviour* (Merleau-Ponty, 1965) and the *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012)] sought to restore the world of perception. My works in preparation aim to show how communication with others, and thought, take up and go beyond the realm of perception (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 3).

Later, he expands on this, alluding to

a series of further studies [post *Phenomenology of Perception*] which will definitively fix the philosophical significance of my earlier works while they, in turn, determine the route and method of these later studies (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 6).

The suggestion that knowledge gained from the earlier *The Structure of Behaviour* and the *Phenomenology of Perception* and the possibility of this underpinning a deeper understanding of ‘communication with others, and thought’ encouraged me to start delving

into Merleau-Ponty's later, post *Phenomenology of Perception*, work. This began with the essays 'Eye and Mind' from *The Primacy of Perception* (1964a) and 'The Philosopher and his Shadow' from *Signs* (1964b) – despite his stating in the former that “music ...is too far beyond the world and the designatable to depict anything but certain outlines of Being” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 161), a position which almost had me looking elsewhere for theoretical support.

But it was 'The Chiasm – the Intertwining,' the central chapter in the posthumous *The Visible and the Invisible* (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), that really struck home. One passage in particular leapt off the page:

We do not possess the musical or sensible ideas ... they possess us. The performer is no longer producing or reproducing the sonata: he feels himself, and the others feel him to be at the service of the sonata; the sonata sings through him or cries out so suddenly that he must 'dash on his bow' to follow it. And these open vortexes in the sonorous world finally form one sole vortex in which the ideas fit in with one another (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 151).

To the musician, Merleau-Ponty's description of Proust's violinist 'dashing on his bow' is remarkably close to what happens when musical performers – of whatever genre – are 'in the zone,' bringing the audience with them into 'the one sole vortex' that is the lifeworld of an orchestral performance. This passage thus carried the seed of a conceptual trajectory for my nascent PhD project which would soon begin to germinate. The encounter also made me think back on performances I knew or had been part of that could illustrate the ideas that Merleau-Ponty almost breathlessly crams into these words, while at the same time helping us understand the relational substructures, and thus the pre-reflective organization, of orchestral performance.

One example stood out: the 1983 performance of Beethoven's 7th Symphony by the Concertgebouw Orchestra conducted by Carlos Kleiber (YouTube, 2012), analysed in

Chapter 5 below. On several occasions, what could be described as a succession of ‘open vortexes’ of musical material is woven by Kleiber and the orchestra into ‘one sole vortex’ of thematic statement; if not possessed by the musical ideas, there is certainly an intense concentration on the part of these performers that leaves room for little else besides Beethoven’s masterwork. Of all the performances I could think of, this was the one which, for me, shows most clearly how the lifeworld Merleau-Ponty is describing is organized.

1.1.2 Summary of the chapter

Having offered a rationale for the title of the study, I now briefly summarise the rest of this chapter, in which I set out the literary and methodological bases of the study, alongside an outline of the structure of the thesis itself.

I begin with the setting, drawn from my own experience, for the primary question that this research seeks to answer. This is followed by a brief statement of that question.

I then move to a discussion of the literature that has shaped the conceptual framework on which the study is based. This body of work addresses the broad parameters of the research only; the work concerned with the more subject-specific material of a particular chapter is discussed within that chapter. Aside from the work of Merleau-Ponty himself, the literature is drawn primarily from two fields: the orchestral organization, and the commentary on the part of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy that has informed this thesis. The contribution from relationality as encountered elsewhere in organization studies is also discussed as while small in quantity, this material has proven to be significant in influence.

The methodological orientation of the study, from its foundations in autoethnography and the late work of Merleau-Ponty through to the structure provided by the

phenomenologically inspired method of Giorgi, is then discussed, alongside a consideration of the reasons why this layered approach was necessary.

The framing of the argument of the thesis is then outlined, together with a brief guide to the relationship among the chapters and why they are presented in the order that they are. The chapter concludes with an explanation of how the referencing for the study is organized.

1.2 Introduction and research question

How do orchestras do what they do? This question, and variations of it, have intrigued me since rehearsals for my first concert as a professional orchestral player, given as a teenager in early 1978. The conductor for the performance was the distinguished composer Aaron Copland, and the music at hand was Copland's own *Rodeo* suite, a rambunctiously rhythmic musical depiction of life in the rural USA.

At one point in rehearsals, Copland exhorted the orchestra to "stop Debussyizing," in a brusque reference to the French Impressionist composer Claude Debussy, as he sought more grit and less polish in the playing. What, I remember asking myself, does he mean? But then I thought of what little I then knew of Debussy's music – which, at that stage in my career, was only the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, written in 1894 in response to Mallarmé's poem of the same name (Wiskus, 2012). The *Prélude* is an almost perfumed piece of music, with soft articulations and lush harmonies that discourage definition and conjure images, suggest shapes and allow nothing abrasive to intrude. In short, whatever the piece *is* about, harsh reality under the bright light of day is not it.

Copland's *Rodeo* suite, in stark contrast, covers exactly this territory, so along with the rest of the orchestra I 'got the message' being sent from the podium, and responded to his instruction by making an abrupt change in my sound. 'Pastels' were out, and the rustic vibrance of primary musical colours was in, producing music-making that was much rougher and, if the conductor-composer's reaction was any guide, much more to his liking.

At the time, I found the chameleon-like immediacy of this change immensely impressive (I still do!), and part of what made this performance one of those experiences that charted my career's future course. But it also sparked a question: how could the entire orchestra switch from the smoothness that so irked Copland to the rusticity that he was seeking in the space of a couple of beats without falling apart or even losing any rhythmic impetus? Forty-plus years later, I still find this aspect of orchestral work remarkable – how a group of 80+ people can come together with the precision, unanimity and empathy required to respond as a cohort to this sort of request when, offstage, those same people, as individuals, struggle to agree on anything. This is more than a question of technique and the socialized 'ensemble skills' that players acquire as they adapt to working in a particular group; there is a deeper and more specialized form of relationality at work here which invites further scrutiny.

Another, equally personal, dimension entered my inquiry as the earthquakes of 2011 in Christchurch, New Zealand and, more recently, the impact of COVID-19 brought inanimate but important artifacts into consideration. One example, discussed in Chapter 6 below, is the concert auditorium. The damage sustained in the 2011 earthquakes by the Christchurch Town Hall – the venue where the 1978 concert discussed above took place – and, more recently, the pandemic-related restrictions placed on the use of the venue where the author's orchestra, the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra (NZSO) is based, have had a

major impact on the NZSO's concert activity. From a research perspective, these ruptures also reinforced the importance of place and public to the performing experience and to my own professional identity. Weick, although writing in the context of firefighting, points out that "given the central role of tools in defining the essence of a firefighter, it is not surprising that dropping one's tools creates an existential crisis. Without my tools, who am I? A coward? A fool?" (1996, p. 308). While the significance of an instrument to the musician is a given, venues and audiences are no less important to performers than their tools are to Weick's firefighters, so for an orchestral player the question then becomes, "if I have nowhere to perform and no one to play to, who am I?" This realization motivated an extension of my inquiry beyond the concert platform to include the spaces where performance happens and who the orchestra performs for, alongside the musicians themselves.

The significance of the venue to orchestral work is hard to overstate, as it provides the acoustic space which defines the sonic parameters of the music-making. As a result a venue takes on a persona which, to the musician, becomes almost human, akin to that of a musical instrument; acoustics are referred to colloquially as 'live' or 'dead' depending on the degree of reverberation, warmth and generosity they are perceived to confer on the playing. These qualities, as I discuss in Chapter 6 below, are also shaped by the audience simply by their corporeal presence or absence. Service's reference to the importance of "the acoustic damping of 2,300 Dutch bums on seats" (2012, p. 60) to players adjusting to the acoustic of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw is blunt but accurate, although it is the *derrière*, rather than the nationality of its owner, that provides the key acoustic variable.

From this account, orchestral performance begins to look less like a singular event at which individuals encounter music according to their personal predisposition, and more like an interwoven relational fabric, or meshwork (Ingold, 2011), where individual contributions intertwine along both spatial and temporal dimensions to weave something that is much more than the sum of its parts. That something, I argue below, is the lifeworld of an orchestral performance or, as Mauceri (2017, p. 133, original emphasis) puts it, “the titanic power of *orchestra*.”

Scrutiny at the level of conscious observation raises as many questions about these considerations as it answers, especially when extended to include inanimate artifacts alongside human protagonists; even expert practitioners and astute commentators struggle to go beyond quasi-mystical notions of alchemy and magic once the discussion moves past the technique and ‘hardware’ of performance towards the relational connections that underpin music-making (Feeney-Hart, 2013; Mauceri 2017; Service, 2012). Nonetheless, as the Copland anecdote described earlier suggests, there remains more to orchestral performance than notes per second or decibels of sonic volume. Somehow or other, the musicians on stage bring the various notes of a piece of music together in a vehicle for the composer’s ideas that is evanescent and fleeting yet transcends its constituents, speaking across time and physical space while remaining powerful and durable enough to live on in the memories of those who are there to experience it (Mauceri, 2017; Service, 2012).

This suggests the presence of relational structures that subtend observable performance and provide an invisible framework that supports the music-making and the lifeworld that forms around it. To return to the beginning of this thesis and start to answer the question “how do orchestras do what they do?,” a deeper understanding of these preconscious

connections is required, and it is the link between orchestral relationality, understood at this primordial, pre-reflective level, and the lifeworld of the performance experienced by the participants that I interrogate here.

To that end, in this thesis I aim to answer the questions:

What do the relational substructures of orchestral performance look like? How might they be understood?

I now discuss the literary foundations of my journey towards an answer.

1.3 Literature

As stated in Section 1.1 above, Chapters 2 through 6 each cover a different aspect of relationality in orchestral work; the literature specific to that facet of the argument is therefore discussed in relevant chapter. The present section is concerned with the broader literary terrain in which the study is embedded, and so focuses on the two different strands of literature which inform my analysis:

- The literature on the organizing of orchestral and other related avenues of musical performance.
- The literature concerned with the work of Merleau-Ponty. This is the commentary on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy which helped contextualize it for an organization-based analysis of orchestral relationality. The work of Merleau-Ponty himself is discussed in the methods section 1.4 below.

Relationality elsewhere in organization studies, particularly in the work of Cooper (2005) and in the field of relational leadership, is also touched on briefly. Despite being oriented

towards relational processes rather than the structures such as *écart* and *flesh* that concern this study, this work alerted me to the rich vein of possibility that lay in the 'space between' to which Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) refer. Stephens (2021) makes a valuable contribution in this area through his analysis of coordination in choral performance; although this work came too late for inclusion beyond an 'honourable mention' here, the intersection between his exploration of the nexus between the pre-reflective and the conscious and the discussion of primordial relationality in the present study suggests a direction of considerable promise for future research.

1.3.1 The orchestra

The study of the orchestra as a site of organizational interest emerges with Arian (1971) and Hart (1973). Arian (1971) has had a formative influence on the present study, as his work remains one of the few studies by a *player* where the organizational implications of onstage activity have been interrogated. Edward Arian was an excellent double bass player, rising through the ranks of the Denver and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras to become Assistant Principal Double Bass in the Philadelphia Orchestra, where he remained for 20 years (Rosenberg, 2010). Thus, when he writes at length about labour relations in the Philadelphia Orchestra, he is drawing on personal experience of rehearsal and recording conditions alongside working within the wider structure of the Philadelphia Orchestra Association. This experience formed the basis of the classic *Bach, Beethoven and bureaucracy* (Arian, 1971), the published version of his PhD dissertation (Rosenberg, 2010). Arian's example and its resonance with my own situation as the former Sub Principal Second Violin in the NZSO has, on several occasions since I stepped down in order to pursue the present research, provided both guidance and reassurance.

Arian's use of onstage activity as raw material mined in support of a focus on offstage issues remains the template for most organizational literature with an orchestral theme, and his playing expertise allowed him to write with some authority about onstage work. Though lacking that authority, Hart (1973) is still an important resource regarding the development of the organization around the North American symphony orchestra and so provides important general background for orchestral research.

More recently, scholarly focus has been drawn toward the study of conducting and leadership as a subject which is more accessible to the external observer. This turn is led by Mintzberg (1998), who gives a brief but astute account of how the contemporary conductor, without recourse to the tools of the dictator described by Canetti (1962) and Lebrecht (1991), plies their trade. As this terrain is covered extensively in Chapters 3 through 5, I revisit here only those studies that have had a wider impact on the present research. Of these, Service (2012), Mauceri (2017) and Wigglesworth (2018) have informed this study throughout, providing both practical perspective and analytical insight.

Service (2012), a reviewer for both *The Guardian* and the BBC, follows several examples of a conductor and an orchestra on their journey towards a particular performance. He provides 'expert witness' testimony from his own perspective as critic and audience member, and the interviews he undertakes with conductors and players generate a range of important insights. It was, for instance, his discussion with a player in the Concertgebouw Orchestra about the importance of the concert hall to an orchestra's sound, and thus its identity, that prompted me to include the venue in the discussion of Flesh and the relational fabric of performance in Chapter 6. As the audience experience is seldom captured outside the Likert

scales of orchestral marketing surveys, Service also gives a rare but welcome concertgoer's perspective.

Mauceri (2017) and Wigglesworth (2018), distinguished practitioners in their own right, discuss conducting as craft and profession in some detail. While there is a personal aspect to each account, these are not the ghost-written autobiographies that sometimes appear, and although the emphasis is on technical advice, there is also a relational thread running through both works. In emphasizing the need for a conductor-orchestra rapport at an individual and a collective level, Mauceri and Wigglesworth remind us how easily fractured these connections are, and further – anticipating Crossley's suggestion that "music only exists in the experience of listeners and therefore always involves interaction" (2020, p. 25) – how important the bond between orchestra and audience is to the orchestral enterprise.

Alan Gilbert's (2015) speech to the Royal Philharmonic Society, given while he was still the New York Philharmonic's Music Director, offers a general account of what he sees as the future direction of the orchestra that resonates with those of Mauceri (2017) and Wigglesworth (2018). The audience presence running through his narrative and his almost Merleau-Pontian turn of phrase directly influenced my framing of the orchestral lifeworld as Flesh in Chapter 6 below. Feeney-Hart (2013) is also valuable in that her interviewee, the eminent conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen, answers her questions with a rare directness, especially with regard to his more collegial view of the relationship between the conductor and the players of the orchestra.

The most valuable material on the work of the notoriously reclusive conductor Carlos Kleiber, which is central to Chapters 4 and 5, comes from three practitioners: Charles Barber, Carolyn Watson, and Itay Talgam. Barber's (2011) correspondence with Carlos

Kleiber offers insight into Kleiber's work that, because of Kleiber's responses to Barber's astute line of questioning, reveals more about the former's approach to orchestral performance and his own methods than perhaps he intended. A flat denial by Kleiber that he knows what he's doing is often contradicted soon after by an incisive explanation, when asked to comment on a film of another conductor, of exactly the technique in question. On the other hand, when complimented on the performance analysed below, Kleiber deflects, preferring instead to discuss the importance of hairspray (!) for conductors (Barber, 2011, p. 116). Watson's (2012) study, while more technically oriented, provided invaluable assistance to my understanding of Kleiber's unique gestural vocabulary, while Talgam's (2015) analysis gives an organizational perspective which again offers valuable insight into the conductor's role. The section devoted to the work of Carlos Kleiber makes the especially important connection between Kleiber's close attention to the transition passages in the music as the point where the relational space between conductor and player is shaped, and his then being able to trust the player to make their contribution.

Koivunen (2003, 2008), Koivunen and Wennes (2011), Köping (2007) and Ropo and Sauer (2007) are concerned with issues of leadership embedded in conductor-player relations. An important by-product of this focus has been the associated work on relationality in orchestras, especially as these authors stay onstage for their raw material while stressing the increasingly collegial turn in how contemporary orchestras and conductors work together. Further, Koivunen (2003) was, as far as I can ascertain, the first to make the link between Merleau-Ponty and the orchestra that I have extended elsewhere (Gilling, 2010, 2014a). Bathurst and Ladkin (2012) cover similar territory with an important exception; they introduce the idea that leadership in musical ensembles is a quality of the relational space

between individual musicians. The idea of the between space – further elaborated by Ladkin (2013) in the context of the leadership-followership dyad – as the space between colleagues where organizing and, in the orchestra, music-making, happens is one of the central themes of the present study.

Despite her primary focus on questions of orchestral governance, the late Erin Lehman (1997; Lehman & Galinsky, 2000) makes a significant contribution to understanding orchestral relations as her research sites are both self-governing orchestras; the Berlin Philharmonic and the London Symphony. In these orchestras, players who take on governance responsibilities must both play with and manage their peers. Lehman's research also made a major contribution to the survey *Life and Work in Symphony Orchestras* (Allmendinger, Hackman & Lehman, 1996) which remains a benchmark in the literature. Of the multiple questions Allmendinger et al. ask, "what helps make an orchestra into a great musical ensemble?" (1996, p. 195) is the most relevant to this study, as is the conclusion that arises:

We found particularly interesting those orchestras whose members were not considered to be among the greatest instrumentalists in the world but who nonetheless played together superbly. Also of interest were orchestras that *did* have the very finest players but that did not quite come together as ensembles. (Allmendinger et al., 1996, p. 212)

This point is crucial. It is the playing *together* that these authors found to be the key quality of a great orchestra, with technical skill beyond a certain level being of lesser importance. In other words, it is the 'ensemble skills,' both individual and collective, that are embedded in pre-reflective relational structures that concern the present research. Glynn's (2000), concern with professional identity and Maitlis (1997, 2005), with her focus on decision-making and sensemaking cover very similar territory, again turning to the offstage implications of onstage relations. Maitlis' (2005) turn to Weick's (1995) sensemaking

framework suggests a closely related theoretical possibility which I have explored previously (Gilling, 2010), but Merleau-Ponty's late ontology has, with its focus on the primordial substructures of relationality, provided the present study with an approach that is more consistent with my concern with the pre-reflective in orchestral work. Flanagan (2012) and Nathan (2015) touch on relational issues within orchestras, but only in terms of their economic impact on the wider orchestral organization and external social environment. Economics and employment are also front and centre for Carpos (2017), who gives an account of the life of a freelance musician in the UK from a player's perspective. Having relied on the 'gig economy' for work before winning my first orchestral job, I can empathize with much in what she writes; it also remains to be seen how, or even if, this sort of work will recover in the post-pandemic era. Johnson (2018) provides further environmental context in his account of the governance arrangements of a New Zealand-based orchestra very similar to the one that features in this chapter's introduction.

Some of the most useful ideas for this project have come from the world of the small ensemble. Hackman's (2002) work on teams, located in the example of the chamber orchestra and the string quartet, shows the importance of the inter-collegial 'between space,' and the understanding of how to work with it, as a key ingredient in an ensemble's success. Murnighan and Conlon's (1991) account of British string quartets discusses the second violin 'paradox', where musical initiative is expected alongside subservience to the first violin. This is mirrored in the orchestra, and is not only relevant to the second violin-first violin relationship; it also, in many ways, reflects the dynamic of the conductor-player relationship. Steinhardt (1998) captures the relational flow of a string quartet's music-making in ways that suggest Merleau-Ponty's ideas would be equally fruitful in that context.

Cumming (1997, 2000), in her exploration of music and gesture, touches on the physical nature of performing. Despite setting aside the organizational implications of her analysis to pursue individual agency in the context of textual matters, her discussion of the links between the music in the score and the interpretive result embodied in the gestural vocabulary of the musician influenced my entire project. Chapters 2 and 6 in particular would have been much poorer without her work.

Finally, in Dale Cyphert's (2000) *Learning to 'Yo!'*, we encounter a task-oriented relational fabric with a coordinating synchronicity of sound, rhythm and physical gesture that is of fundamental importance to the organizing of the work involved. While Cyphert's (2000) example might be concrete pouring on a construction site, when considered at a primordial level this brief but powerful vignette provided an early example of the Merleau-Pontian constructs of reversibility, écart and Flesh in a team setting that in turn suggested what an orchestral version of these ideas might look like.

I now turn to the commentary on the late work of Merleau-Ponty that has guided me through this rich, rewarding, but undeniably difficult philosophical terrain.

1.3.2 Merleau-Ponty: Commentary

The Merleau-Ponty-related literature that has informed each section is discussed in the relevant chapters. There are, however, some works whose influence pervades this study. The survey *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts* (Diprose & Reynolds, 2014) was a constant companion, providing succinct summaries of frequently difficult concepts and introducing me to the work of a number of important scholars, some of whose individual contributions I now discuss in more detail. In particular, and given the centrality of the reversibility

construct to my argument and grounding that argument in the late ontology of Merleau-Ponty, the debt I owe to the following Merleau-Ponty scholars needs to be repaid: Dillon (1997), Morris (2010) and Hass (2008), on reversibility, Flesh and how Merleau-Ponty treats their implications; and Wiskus (2012, 2013, 2018) on the links between Merleau-Ponty and music. The settling of this debt, though all too brief, now follows.

Early on in my acquaintance with the later work of Merleau-Ponty, it became clear that the notion of reversibility is at the heart of his later philosophical project. Reading Merleau-Ponty himself, it remains difficult to find anything like a meaning, or less still a definition, that remains consistent across the various texts in which the reversibility construct appears; however, without some sort of framing of the idea, Merleau-Ponty's late work becomes not just difficult for the reader, but almost impenetrable. This is why the chapters of this thesis are ordered the way they are, from the beginnings of reversibility in the phenomenon of touch in Chapter 2 through to the notion of Flesh in Chapter 6, and why the 'tentpole' constructs of reversibility, *écart* and Flesh were chosen – to give my account structural integrity and provide the reader with a textual handrail to help guide them through my argument. This is the same trajectory as that of the idea itself in what remains the essential text on the subject: Martin Dillon's (1997) 'The Reversibility Thesis' in his *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*.

In this chapter, Dillon contends that "the reversibility thesis set forth in *The Visible and the Invisible* is crucial to understanding both [Merleau-Ponty's] novel terminology and his strategy for resolving the problems of dualistic ontology." Reversibility assumes even greater significance in the process because "pre-eminently at stake here are Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of the lived body, his thesis of the ontological primacy of phenomena, and

its correlate, the thesis of the epistemological primacy of perception” (1997, p. 154). Setting aside the political writing, this includes just about all Merleau-Ponty’s published output, from the early *The Structure of Behaviour* (Merleau-Ponty, 1965) through to the posthumously published *The Visible and the Invisible* (Merleau-Ponty, 1968).

How, then, does Dillon resolve the inconsistencies that seem to undermine reversibility when encountered in the context of *The Visible and the Invisible* or elsewhere? He begins by reminding us that the text, as edited by Merleau-Ponty’s friend and pupil Claude Lefort, begins with a final draft that represents the almost publishable opening chapters of what was intended by its author to be a much larger work. The working notes that follow these chapters are, however, just that; though they show Merleau-Ponty working through his ideas and their implications, these notes cannot be treated as definitive as, for the most part, there is no sure way of knowing just where in his argument Merleau-Ponty had arrived.

Dillon (1997) then pinpoints a number of key domains traversed by the construct, such as the phenomenon of touch; these are discussed further in Chapter 2. Arguably the most notable, for the wider discussion presented here, is reversibility’s location in the primordial and pre-reflective arena where Merleau-Ponty situates his late ontology. If, like him, we view the ‘object’ of perception as the perceived world and its structure, then, as Dillon (1997, p. 160) points out, “the ‘subject’ of perception ... is the anonymous body, the body prior to the reflective differentiation which identifies it as mine,” and it is toward the body grounded in primordial existence prior to second-order, conscious reflection that Merleau-Ponty is directing us when he writes that “if the other person is to exist for me, he must do so to begin with in an order *beneath the order of thought*” (1964b, p. 170, emphasis added).

This brings us to the work of Morris (2010) and his location of the roots of reversibility at the primordial nexus between activity and passivity. Merleau-Ponty himself makes this point when he writes that “as many painters have said, I feel myself looked at by the things, my activity is equally passivity” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 139). At first glance this seems counterintuitive, but when considered at the pre-reflective level where Merleau-Ponty is working, the example begins to make sense because, as Morris (2010, p. 151, emphasis added) points out, in seeing and painting the painter “must be passive as a body in its engagement with things, yet be active with *his* body” in order to make the physical movements necessary to paint. The idea holds for the musician and their instrument; as explored in Chapter 2 below, while I actively play I am also passively receiving the music, complete with traces of my original actions, as ‘played back’ to me by my violin and bow, and this in turn guides how I continue.

But reversibility is not the only construct in later Merleau-Ponty that acquires multiple meanings. The construct of Flesh, as it stands, has a similar character. This may be a flaw, or it may simply reflect Merleau-Ponty not having been able to settle on any one answer before he died. It may also, of course, have been what he intended for the concept. Whatever the answer, Hass (2008, pp. 139–140) has tallied up the mentions of Flesh across several different texts, and discerns three primary meanings as a result: Flesh as carnality, or “the physicality of ourselves and our relations with the world;” Flesh as reversibility, with Merleau-Ponty gesturing toward the “intertwining (reversibility) of things that are different but not opposite;” and Flesh as “a basic element of being,” regarded by Merleau-Ponty as a “*general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea” (1968, p. 139; italics in the original). There is undoubtedly a significant degree of overlap across these

meanings, and certainly no hard and fast boundaries between them; indeed, the more one reads 'The Chiasm' the more the idea of Flesh looks like the conceptual multiplicity that Hass (2008) thinks Merleau-Ponty means it to be. I have attempted in this study to keep an open mind, focusing on the idea of a conceptual multiplicity with (at least) three dimensions as the one most consistent with the view of Flesh as a primordially interwoven relational fabric, reversible yet dehiscent, while accepting that among the connections that intertwine to constitute that fabric there is identity, but there is also difference. "To touch something is not to coincide with it" (Dillon, 1997, p. 164); between the touching and the touched "it is a reversibility always imminent and never realized in fact ... the coincidence [between sensible and sentient] eclipses at the moment of realization" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 147).

Dillon, Morris and Hass have helped me navigate the philosophical aspect of Merleau-Ponty's work, but Wiskus (2012, 2013, 2018) has served as a constant reminder that there is a musical side as well. The Merleau-Pontian analysis she gives of Debussy's *l'Après-midi d'un faune* (Wiskus, 2013) is on a par with Cumming's (1997) study of Bach's *Erbarne dich* as a source of inspiration for my research, and the links more generally with art and literature throughout her work continue to provide food for thought. Her three chapters (Wiskus, 2013) discussing Proust as analysed by Merleau-Ponty (1968) in 'The Chiasm – the Intertwining,' have illuminated an at times scarcely visible path. Wiskus (2018) also makes the crucial point that turning from painting to music allows Merleau-Ponty to introduce a hitherto nearly absent *temporal* dimension into his project, as a painting takes an instant to view, but a piece of music will always unfold over time.

1.3.3 Relationality in Organization Studies: Two key contributions

Work on relationality from elsewhere in organization studies has made two key contributions to this study. The first comes from Cooper (Burrell & Parker, 2016; Chia, 1998; Cooper, 2005) in the form of the connection between relationality in organizations and the work of Merleau-Ponty, particularly with regard to the idea, taken from *The Visible and the Invisible*, of *écart* as hinge between self and other (Chia, 1998). However, while Cooper (2005) and Merleau-Ponty often appear to be heading in similar directions, the differences between them increase as Merleau-Ponty turns towards the preconscious *structures* of relationality such as *écart* and *Flesh*, while Cooper moves towards relationality as a *process* of relating and an understanding of organizations “as loose and active *assemblages of organizings* – not static structures but dynamic acts that are always on the move” (Cooper, quoted in Burrell & Parker, p. 319, original emphasis).

Process, rather than structure, is also closer to the view of relationality taken in the field of relational leadership (Cunliffe & Ericksen, 2011; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Uhl-Bien, 2006). “A relational view recognizes leadership not as a trait or behavior of an individual leader, but as a phenomenon generated in the interactions among people acting in context” (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012, p. 1043); this, in the idea of the ‘between space’ (Bathurst & Ladkin, 2012; Ladkin, 2013) at the nexus between leadership and followership, is where the second contribution from relationality in OS to the present research is located. Extended beyond the leadership-followership dyad to include colleagues more generally, the idea of the ‘between space’ or ‘space between’ subtended by a relational connection is understood here through the construct of *écart*. As a core concept in the present study, this notion is,

alongside reversibility, a focal point of Chapters 4 and 5 where the work of Carlos Kleiber and the Concertgebouw Orchestra is analysed.

Bradbury and Lichtenstein take a method-related turn with this idea, exhorting scholars to interrogate relationality in “the space between subject and object, subject and research, researcher and subject, and the reflexivity of the research process itself” (2000, p. 551). This in itself has had a significant impact on this thesis, encouraging me to look beyond the orchestra and offer these Merleau-Pontian constructs as a way of conceptualizing organizations and organizing in a pandemic-threatened world where working from home and home-office hybrid arrangements are redefining expectations, connections, and the relational structure of the workplace (Cole, 2021; Warzel & Petersen, 2021).

The research process is also where we meet Küpers (2014, 2020) who, within a wider body of work applying Merleau-Ponty’s ideas to the study of organizations, provides valuable guidance on phenomenology in practice-based organizational research. This includes a timely rationale for approaches grounded in late Merleau-Ponty; “the concept of a flesh-mediated embodied inter-practice helps to reveal and interpret the relationships among being, feeling, knowing, doing, structuring and effectuating in and through action, both individually and collectively as they are implicated in organizational everyday life and its changes” (Küpers, 2020, p. 1455).

A ‘flesh-mediated embodied inter-practice’ can only ‘reveal and interpret’ when resting on a firm methodological foundation, so I now turn to the method underpinning this study and its roots in autoethnography, Merleau-Ponty’s (1968) *The Visible and the Invisible*, and the descriptive phenomenological method of Amedeo Giorgi (1997, 2012).

1.4 Method

1.4.1 Introduction

In this section, I outline the method that guides this study. I begin with its origins in previous research and then discuss the contribution to the study's shape and methodological structure made by three key bodies of work.

These are:

- *Autoethnography* for gathering the raw material for later analysis. Given the contested nature of the field (Atkinson, 2020), I have taken Anderson's (2006) analytic autoethnography, and Adams' (2017, p. 65) reminder that "what autoethnography can do that other research perspectives and practices cannot accomplish" needs to be demonstrated, as my starting point.
- *Merleau-Ponty* (1968), which forms the theoretical backbone of the study through the constructs of reversibility, écart and Flesh.
- *Giorgi* (1997; 2012). Giorgi's ideas provide analytical structure via the descriptive phenomenological method, adapted to the study of work teams by Stablein (2002).

The method itself emerged primarily from the concern that my experience as an orchestral player would have remained a distorting influence no matter what research path was chosen. Ultimately, this issue proved insurmountable, so the decision was made to 'flip the script,' and instead draw on this background as data to be examined rather than as an intractable source of bias to be avoided. Another problem was that the work practices in which this relationality is embedded were often observable only in trace form – for example, in the reaction of a colleague to the lack of an audience and understanding both

lack *and* reaction through my own feelings. Or perhaps in reverse, starting with a vague sensation of being unsettled and then realizing, after putting the diary entry through the steps of Giorgi's (2012) approach as outlined below, that the feeling was due to the social distancing on stage. So early indications suggested that any evidence of the relational substructures I was looking for would be tacit, taken for granted and lie buried under layers of experiential sediment.

As autoethnography, following a broadly phenomenological method grounded in the work of Merleau-Ponty (2012), had worked well in past research covering similar terrain (Gilling, 2010, 2014a, 2014b), I decided to find out if the same approach might work in the present study. To that end, I revisited the descriptive phenomenology of Giorgi (1997, 2012), Merleau-Ponty's (2012) *Phenomenology of Perception*, and the literature concerned with developments in autoethnography, with the intention of adapting and updating the method to the requirements of later research. The present study builds on my earlier approach in several ways, so I now outline developments and extensions that have occurred in each area since I first turned to this methodological mix.

1.4.2 Autoethnography

The term *autoethnography* was first used to characterise ethnographic work conducted amongst 'one's own.' It was not primarily, let alone exclusively, writing about the ethnographer's self. Rather, the writer uses his or her own life experiences to reflect on and to document a domain of work or leisure (Atkinson, 2020, p. 138)

Autoethnography offers an avenue into connecting with the vulnerability and suffering uncertainty brings into our lives, because autoethnography itself is a genre of doubt, a vehicle for exercising, embodying, and enacting ambiguity. The shape of autoethnography is not the exclamation point (!) but the question mark (?) (Bochner & Ellis, 2021, p. 253)

These words, from a leading sceptic (Atkinson) and two ardent advocates (Ellis and

Bochner), provide the parameters for the autoethnographic arena ventured into here. This

study has indeed focused on the orchestra as my professional ‘own,’ and while my life experiences underpin what might loosely be called ‘the data,’ the degree varies across the study from Chapter 3, which is primarily historical analysis grounded in ‘expert opinion,’ to Chapter 6, which is an account of a vulnerable performer coming to terms with life under the shadow of COVID-19 who, at the time, felt like anything *but* an expert. In between, my admiration for the Kleiber/Concertgebouw orchestra performance analysed in Chapters 4 and 5 is impossible to set aside completely, while the uncertainty I felt during the performance analysed in Chapter 6 is, as an account of my perceptual experience, a crucial part of the narrative.

Anderson (2006) posits these extremes as the two poles of the autoethnographic enterprise. One he dubs ‘analytic’ autoethnography, of which, in his view, the five main characteristics are “(1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis” (2006, p. 378), and the other ‘evocative’ autoethnography, in which exponents “bypass the representational problem by invoking an epistemology of emotion, moving the reader to feel the feelings of the other” (Denzin, cited in Anderson, 2006, p. 377). This approach drew applause from Atkinson (2006) and disdain from Ellis and Bochner (2006). Delamont (2009, p. 60) goes even further than Atkinson (2020), writing that “autoethnography is antithetical to the progress of social science, because it violates the two basic tasks of the social sciences, which are: to study the social world and to move their discipline forward.”

More recent work pleads for greater latitude, acknowledging that while it may be an “ineluctable fact that the ethnographer is thoroughly implicated in the phenomena that he

or she documents” (Atkinson, 2006, p. 402), phenomena themselves differ and so need appropriate flexibility in the choice of approach: “for many of us ... this distinction [between analytic and evocative] operates as a continuum rather than a binary categorization, with specific autoethnographic works falling somewhere along this continuum” (Allen-Collinson, 2016, p. 287).

Given the diversity that Allen-Collinson identifies and the breadth of subject matter revealed by Holman Jones and her colleagues in their survey of the field (Holman Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2016), Adams (2017, p. 65) offers timely advice in the form of what he calls ‘autoethnographic responsibilities.’ For the present study, the key responsibility that Adams proposes is that an autoethnography needs to show what it can do “that other research perspectives and practices cannot accomplish.” Here, the task is to interrogate the 40 years’ worth of experiential sediment that informs Chapters 2 and 6. Such a time frame unavoidably brings the high, the low and the mundane into the picture so, like Allen-Collinson (2016), my account draws on a combination of the analytic and the evocative, if only because my experience remains personal to me and so too messy to easily pigeonhole.

From Wood (1938) to Wigglesworth (2018) autobiography has been the usual vehicle for the analysis of performance by practitioners. This does not make that analysis better or worse – much of what I was able to learn about the conducting of Arthur Nikisch (Chapter 3), for example, came from the keen eye of conductor Sir Henry Wood (1938), ‘the English Nikisch’ himself – but it does limit the attempt to draw any wider implications. Again, Arian (1971) leads the way, with his practice-based account introducing an ethnographic turn to analysis of the orchestral organization. Cumming (1997, 2000), and Carpos (2017) also offer broadly ethnographic, practice-oriented accounts. My own previous work (Gilling, 2010,

2014a) takes a more directly autoethnographic turn for the same reasons as the present research; the part orchestral work has played in my life needed, for research purposes at least, to be accounted for.

Ellis and Bartleet (2010) offer a selection of autoethnographically-oriented accounts across a range of experiences that explore both creation and output. In the overview that begins their survey, they make an important link between autoethnography and music; “just as the work of a musician is inherently corporeal, an autoethnographer also draws on and works from embodied knowledge and experiences” so that “within an autoethnographic paradigm, the corporeal knowledge of a musician’s body and the physical act of music-making can be at the centre of the autoethnographic enquiry” (Ellis & Bartleet, 2010, p. 10). This resonates with the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, as the embodied nature of autoethnographic inquiry and the corporeality of the knowledge I have sought to interrogate in this study highlight a key source of the affinity between autoethnography and Merleau-Ponty’s work; “it was his mission to embody the problem of embodiment. On this question, we can all find a meeting place in his work” (Sartre, 2021, p. 117).

The affinity became even more apparent as I worked on Chapter 6, in which I address the return to performing under the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since early 2020 the pandemic has presented a threat to organizations across a wide spectrum of activity and without regard for national borders. It also arrived in New Zealand at a point in my research where I was beginning to move beyond my immediate surroundings towards an account that embraced – in the form of audience and venue – the offstage elements of performance. Ross’s (2020) vivid narrative of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra’s first performance as it emerged from a strict lockdown brought the situation to life; his

illustration not only resonated strongly with my own experience, but also showed how pandemic-related constraints – in the LA Philharmonic’s case, the Perspex screens between players and the extra distancing in force – affected how people felt about what they were doing. As one violinist commented, “I felt this isolation onstage, and that’s what we’re all going through – the isolation of this time” (Ross, 2020, p. 73).

Reading those words, I felt that I had to adjust and tackle my own experience of very similar circumstances head on. The embodiment of COVID-19 in signage, sanitising stations, stage plans (Figure 6.1) and distancing led straight to autoethnography, which, because of its placement of corporeal knowledge at the centre of the enquiry (Ellis & Bartleet, 2010), allowed me to capture not just the uncertainty but also the vulnerability that arose as my preconscious belief in the most familiar of surroundings and work practices – what Merleau-Ponty (1968) calls perceptual faith – was called into question.

It is, however, these very qualities of autoethnography that raise the ethical concern which is of particular relevance to the field, as in turning to personal experience autoethnographers may, subject to the nature of their raw material, “not only implicate themselves with their work, but also ... others” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 281). Relational ethics are thus considered central to autoethnographic inquiry (Ellis et al., 2011), as subjects are usually more than mere data sources, and issues around informed consent and guarding against harm can be problematic (Delamont, 2009) – not least because the mitigating protection given by moves such as the alteration of identifying characteristics is often insufficient (Delamont, 2009) and so impugns the integrity of the research itself (Dauphinee, 2010; Ellis et al., 2011). Plus, as in my own case as a player in an orchestra, the

researcher “[has] to be able to continue to live in the world of relationships in which their research is embedded after the research is completed” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 282).

This is why, in Chapter 5, I interrogate the conductor-player relationship through a publicly available filmed performance. As disguising a conductor’s identity is almost impossible, an account of this connection based on my own experience would have had the potential to damage a vital working relationship. Further to this, conductor-player relations can be both highly charged and personal, so turning to the Kleiber-Concertgebouw Orchestra performance afforded me the degree of detachment needed to analyse the relationality of the music-making involved, while keeping the focus on stage and avoiding the descent into negativity and score-settling that often goes with such accounts (see, for example, Yffer, 1995).

These issues are further addressed in this study through its grounding in the ideas of Merleau-Ponty (1968), whereby physical and ideal form – whether my own or another’s, human or inanimate – is interrogated at a first order, preconscious level (Dillon, 1997). It is their very location here, in the primordial substructures of relationality, which admits the constructs of reversibility, *écart* and *Flesh* into an analysis of the lifeworld of orchestral performance in the first place, so in Chapter 2, for example, I do not interrogate the performances of colleagues; rather I interrogate the trace of *my* activity that is discernible in what I see and hear. This view also locates human colleagues in the same primordial arena as the inanimate concert venue from Chapter 6, where, in an analogy to trees ‘seeing’ their painters (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p.167), it is again the *trace* of my contribution in the sound reflected back from the hall and the other physical presences located within it that is analysed.

Thus, if there is the potential for harm in this research, it is directed towards me through the traces of my own activity. For this reason, consent was sought in the form of general permission to proceed with the research, given by the NZSO's Chief Executive on behalf of the organization. This came as it was becoming apparent that the moves usually required by autoethnographers to protect others that they may be implicating, such as intentional anonymising and deliberate alteration of identifying characteristics (Ellis et al., 2011), would be rendered unnecessary by the primordial setting of Merleau-Ponty's, and subsequently my, analysis.

Anonymity, on a Merleau-Pontian account, thus becomes far more than just the post production protective device posited by Ellis et al. (2011). As discussed in section 1.4.3, it is extended here to take the form of considering the other *before* the "reflective differentiation" (Dillon, 1997) which identifies my body as mine, or my colleague's as theirs, focusing attention on interrogation of *my* experience while mitigating the exposure of others to the risk of harm that might arise from the research. Consideration of the Other as anonymous is thus intrinsic to a Merleau-Pontian account from the start (Dillon, 1997; Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, 1968), and its location in the pre-reflective and preconscious axiomatic to the understanding and application of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical constructs.

To discuss these ideas further, I now turn from the autoethnographic origins of this study to the part of Merleau-Ponty's late work that, from structure to analysis, has informed my research.

1.4.3 Merleau-Ponty: His later work

“Human actors are mindfully embodied and musical interactions engage both aspects simultaneously” (Crossley, 2020, p. 11).

My encounter with the posthumous *The Visible and the Invisible* and its central chapter ‘The Chiasm – the Intertwining’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) had a transformative effect on my approach to this project; this has, incidentally, been given poignant closure by the recent publication of the draft of a new chapter for *The Visible and the Invisible* alongside the lecture notes from the period immediately before Merleau-Ponty’s death (Merleau-Ponty, 2022). What struck me most when first reading ‘The Chiasm’ was the move from painting to music that Merleau-Ponty makes about two-thirds of the way through the chapter. Given that as recently as the essay *Eye and Mind* (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a), the last of his work that he lived to see in print, he had dismissed music as too vague an art form to be of much value to his philosophical project, the following passage in ‘The Chiasm’ – cited earlier but worth repeating – came as a revelation:

We do not possess the musical or sensible ideas ... they possess us. The performer is no longer producing or reproducing the sonata: he feels himself, and the others feel him to be at the service of the sonata; the sonata sings through him or cries out so suddenly that he must ‘dash on his bow’ to follow it (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 151).

For me as a reader, there is a passion in this writing which engaged my attention beyond anything else in the chapter thus far, while for the researcher, it tackles head-on the relational nexus of mind, body, music, and time at the heart of music-related performing (Crossley, 2020). To me as a player, this passage is also a near-perfect thumbnail sketch of what it feels like in performance when everyone is ‘in the zone,’ that area of “palpable shared concentration” (Gilbert, 2015, p. 5) where everyone in the hall feels the full “power of orchestra” (Mauceri, 2017, p. 133, original emphasis). In Merleau-Pontian terms, the

difference – for this study at least – between *The Visible and the Invisible* and his earlier work in *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012) is that he has not only found the words for the performing experience, but also, in the form of concepts like reversibility, écart and Flesh, the analytical tools to interrogate it. The resonance between this newly discovered turn in Merleau-Ponty's work and my intended study of the relational structure of orchestral performance thus seemed, at this early stage of the project, almost too good to be true.

Closer reading of this text and other material such as the unpublished prospectus of his work (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a) and the essay *The Philosopher and his Shadow* (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b) showed that, for Merleau-Ponty, the location of relationality begins in the primordial and pre-reflective; "if the other person is to exist for me, he must do so to begin with in an order beneath the order of thought" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, p. 170). Equally importantly, he gives a brief insight into his own method, stating that "we must rediscover the structures of the perceived world through a process similar to that of an archaeologist. For the structure of the perceived world is buried under the sedimentations of later knowledge" (1964a, p. 5). That meant that if I were to learn anything about the preconscious relational substructures of orchestral work, then, on a Merleau-Pontian account, I was going to have to dig.

Jean-Paul Sartre, erstwhile friend, colleague, editor of and co-editor with Merleau-Ponty, had misgivings about this approach. In a special edition of *Le Temps Moderne*, the journal co-founded by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, that was published in Merleau-Ponty's memory shortly after his death, Sartre wrote that it seemed as though "Merleau-Ponty [had] acquired the habit of pursuing every 'No' until it turned into a 'Yes' and every 'Yes' until it

changed into a 'No,'" developing a method that became what Sartre called a "decapitated dialectic" (Sartre, 2021, p. 96).

A few pages later, however, Sartre admitted that Merleau-Ponty was, in fact, on to something. "This is the considerable gift Merleau bestows on us by his relentless determination to keep on digging in the same spot: starting out from the well-known universality of the singular, he arrives at the singularity of the universal" (Sartre, 2021, p. 115). Arguably the most significant outcome of this approach is found in the construct of reversibility, the conceptual thread that 'does the digging' as it runs through Merleau-Ponty's late ontology, from the phenomenon of touch through to *Flesh of the World*, providing Merleau-Ponty's ideas with a coherence and direction that would otherwise be lacking (Dillon, 1997).

The archaeological dimension, or 'digging in the same spot,' that excites Sartre's ambivalence is, for this study, a key feature of Merleau-Ponty's method, as it underpins the excavation of 40 years' worth of accumulated knowledge being undertaken to reach the relational substructures of performance that lie buried beneath. This is apparent in the very structure of the thesis; the chapters – and the digging – begin with reversibility, move through *écart* and, finally, arrive at *Flesh*, with constructs building on one another to enable the gradual extension of the relational connections under scrutiny from the intimacy of the player's connection with their instrument, through to the uncertainty and vulnerability of that same player and his colleagues performing to an empty venue.

The other key advantage of working with the Merleau-Ponty of 'The Chiasm – the Intertwining' lies in the turn during the chapter from painting to musical performance for exemplary inspiration. As Wiskus (2018) points out, this adds a temporal dimension to

Merleau-Ponty's ideas; the viewing of a painting takes an instant, but the performance of any piece of music needs time. Further, by interweaving temporal and social relationality together in the primordial arena where his philosophical project is located (Dillon, 1997), Merleau-Ponty gives his ideas an ethical foundation which is one of the most striking features of his work (Dale & Latham, 2015; Daly, 2016). At a preconscious level, once I perceive the other, "the other's body and my own are a single whole, two sides of the same phenomenon, and the anonymous existence, of which my body is continuously the trace, henceforth inhabits these two bodies simultaneously" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 370); this, as Daly (2016, p. 20) explains, means that "as soon as I perceive the living body of an-Other, my environment attains significance not just as the context and means of my possible agency but also that of the other. Through the potentialities and actualities of interaction, our bodies form a system."

This has significant implications for research. In the present study, my own experience is inextricably intertwined with traces of the Other – the composers, colleagues, audience members and venues that together shape performance as a musical lifeworld – so any account I present of that experience carries with it an ethical obligation to those Others. A Merleau-Pontian approach comes intrinsically equipped to fulfil this obligation (Daly, 2016), being necessarily situated in the primordial, pre-reflective and anonymous arena before my body is identified as mine, or the other is identified as the other. As suggested earlier, "if the other person is to exist for me, he must do so to begin with in an order *beneath the order of thought*" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, p. 170, emphasis added), so by extension, this means that reversibility, écart, Flesh, and the whole ontological structure Merleau-Ponty builds on

these ideas depend on their location in the preconscious if they are to do what he asks of them (Dillon, 1997; Morris, 2010).

In summary, the ideas of Merleau-Ponty that have informed this study offer a holistic, practical and ethically grounded foundation for researching the specialized yet collegial form of organizational praxis that is the lot of the player in the symphony orchestra.

1.4.4 Giorgi and the descriptive phenomenological method

Having positioned the project in Merleau-Ponty's late work alongside autoethnography somewhere between the analytic (Anderson, 2006) and the evocative (Ellis & Bochner, 2006), the question then arose of how to shape the raw material for research relevance. As noted above, in previous work I had turned to Giorgi's (1997, 2012) descriptive phenomenological method as adapted for the study of teams by Stablein (2002), in order to parse the raw field material and move towards analysis.

Recently, however, the Danish philosopher Dan Zahavi has published a series of papers (2019a, 2019b, 2020; Zahavi & Martiny, 2019) and a handbook (2019c) in which he critiques what he labels applied, versus purely philosophical, approaches to phenomenological method. Giorgi's method was, and remains, a leading example of the applied approach, and, further, my whole method is grounded in the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. The ensuing debate (Giorgi, 2020, 2021; Halling, 2021; Morley, 2019; Zahavi, 2019b) – especially when read alongside Merleau-Ponty's (2012) 'Preface' to *Phenomenology of Perception*, arguably *the* key text on phenomenological method (Zahavi, 2019c) – has brought welcome clarity to my understanding of phenomenology in the context of scientific inquiry. Most notably I have revisited the idea of the *epoché* (Husserl, cited in Giorgi, 2021; Husserl, cited

in Zahavi, 2019b), the phenomenological reduction (Merleau-Ponty, 2012) or, as Giorgi (2012) calls it, the phenomenological attitude, in light of the distinction between ‘pure’ or philosophical reduction, and ‘applied’ or practice-based reduction that Zahavi (2019b) makes.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the discussion – and Halling (2021) and Morley (2019) both contend that Zahavi and Giorgi are, for the most part, in agreement, with Giorgi’s (2020) ‘scientific’ phenomenology in fact amounting to a prime example of what Zahavi (2019b) considers ‘applied’ phenomenology to be – this debate illustrates why the researcher must understand whose phenomenology they are working with. Given that each is concerned with a different aspect of human experience, alignment with Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, or Gadamer (to name but a few) will influence the whole direction of any scholar’s inquiry. Cumming (2000), for instance, turns to the hermeneutic orientation of Gadamer because her concern is with treating the musical score/physical gesture nexus as text, while my focus is on the performing gesture as an embodiment of a musical idea, which leads me to Merleau-Ponty (2012, 1968). Giorgi (2021) makes clear that *his* main phenomenological inspiration is drawn from Husserl, especially when it comes to the *epoché*/ reduction/phenomenological attitude, so for him this step is crucial. My work is grounded in Merleau-Ponty so, following the preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception* and Merleau-Ponty’s insistence therein that “the most important lesson of the reduction is the impossibility of a complete reduction” (2012, p. lxxvii), my bodily presence in the world alone is enough to preclude a complete, ‘pure’ reduction. That does not mean, however, that the process of bracketing should be dispensed with altogether, as it was this step that ensured that both the field material in Chapters 2 and 6, and the descriptive survey that is

the raw material for Chapter 5, could later be given the coherence needed for further interrogation.

This study has adapted Giorgi's approach in two major ways: to orient the autoethnographic account of my own performing experience in Chapters 2 and 6, and, later, to interrogate the filmed illustration of the player-conductor relationship on which Chapter 5 is based.

Chapter 2, section 2.5 covers the confluence of autoethnography with Giorgi's approach in detail, but some introduction is still necessary, so the following illustrates the steps of Giorgi's (1997, 2012) method as interpreted for work teams by Stablein (2002) and adapted for the events analysed in Chapter 2.

1. *Diary entry* Opening strings not together with the bassoon.
2. *Journal entry* Composite accuracy is crucial.
3. *Meaning Units* Opening not together; composite; accuracy; crucial.
4. *Central Theme* This is a whole ensemble, not an individual, problem.
5. *Analysis: Central Theme and Research Problem* Accuracy here requires awareness across the orchestra. From a technical perspective, the combined string entries must mirror the bassoon line.
6. *Analysis: Introduction of the theoretical resource [reversibility]* For this opening to succeed, each player needs to adjust to the other while giving precedence to the bassoon line.
7. *Situated Description:* In a rehearsal of *Eine Alpensinfonie*, the string sections did not play together with the bassoon as required. Each string player plays and then holds one note; this needs to line up with the corresponding note in the bassoon line. Everybody needs to listen to everybody else so that we can collectively play together while giving the bassoon line the prominence it needs to have.

The diary and journal entries (steps 1 and 2) represent the raw material, the autoethnographic part of the method in which an event is presented without analysis or scrutiny. The research problem was reintroduced as step 4 moved into step 5, while the relevant Merleau-Ponty construct – in this case, reversibility – was introduced as step 5 moved to step 6 and analysis began. Even at an early stage, the reversibility apparent in the

ensemble issues described in the diary entry, and the importance of understanding the problem as one concerning the whole ensemble as a relational fabric – a Flesh – both pointed in the direction of Merleau-Pontian possibilities.

These hidden work practices were often only to be observed in trace form – for example, seeing a colleague’s reaction to something and understanding, post Giorgi, that I empathized. Or in reverse, experiencing a vague sensation of being unsettled and then realizing, after putting the diary entry through the various analytical steps of Giorgi’s approach, that the feeling was due to the constant intrusion of COVID-19 related paraphernalia and practices on my attempts to work rather than a specific incident. Using Giorgi’s (2012) method to interrogate my autoethnographic account has, therefore, helped to reveal tacit ways of relating and, in concert with Merleau-Ponty’s constructs, framed these practices for research relevance.

Chapter 5 presents a slightly different iteration of Giorgi’s approach. While this version of the method is discussed in detail in section 5.5 below; here I briefly outline how it is adapted for application to the differing raw material. The main distinction to be noted is that in this case, rather than my own performing experience, I interrogate the performance by the Concertgebouw Orchestra and Carlos Kleiber through the ‘eye’ of the film director as much as the music-making itself – in other words, my view of Humphrey Burton’s perspective of the Kleiber/Concertgebouw performance as an illustration of the player-conductor relationship that I am exploring. Nonetheless, as accounts of conductor-player relations from those involved too often degenerate into little more than *ad hominem* attacks (Yffer, 1995), interrogating the Concertgebouw/Kleiber performance offered a measure of distance that mitigated that particular risk. Even after this initial step, some sort

of epoché/bracketing remained necessary, so I could approach the film ‘naïvely’ (Giorgi, 2012) as a documentary artifact structured around shot selection and set aside as much as possible the bias from my own long-held admiration, as an orchestral player, for what this orchestra and conductor achieve together.

Instead of the Diary and Field Journal used in Chapter 2, data, or raw material, was collected in a descriptive survey which required several different encounters with the performance. An overview showed that much of this material was, for whatever reason, ill-suited to the purposes of the present research and what raw material could be interrogated seemed to be coalescing around transition passages in the music itself. This flowed in part from the film crew’s camerawork – it is, for instance, director Burton’s decision to focus on Kleiber rather than the flute and oboe at the beginning of the main body of the symphony’s 1st movement (as shown in Figure 4.1) that helps us understand what is going on – but arose primarily because of the natural increase in the frequency and intensity of direct conductor/player interaction that occurs at these, the key inflection points in the symphony’s musical structure.

Closer scrutiny of these transition passages in the end produced enough material for further interrogation, so the method returned to that employed in Chapter 2. A form of reduction ensued, with the survey material being distilled into units of meaning that in turn suggested the central themes which directed attention toward reversibility and écart as the most relevant Merleau-Pontian constructs. Flesh was ruled out, as neither the audience nor the venue are very much in evidence in this film; the focus is very much on conductor-player interaction.

To elaborate: consider, again, the opening of the main body of the 1st movement up to the statement of the main theme by the flute, also shown in Figure 4.1. The relevant survey entry is “CK [Carlos Kleiber] bends down while maintaining eye contact with the flute and oboe” and “his beat is very small and precise.” As the flute plays the melody, the next entry notes that the “orchestra stays quiet, supporting the flute.” The meaning units – ‘CK bends down,’ ‘maintaining eye contact,’ the ‘orchestra stays quiet,’ and ‘supporting the flute’ – suggest that Kleiber is intent on preparing the ground for the flute to play the main theme. The implication is that Kleiber’s gestural vocabulary is aimed at making the transition over the opening four bars in a way that prepares the other players to focus on the flute *and the theme the flautist is playing*; Kleiber is shown shaping the gap, *l’écart*, for the main theme in advance in such a way that each player is engaged, leaving the flute free to play while his colleagues are reminded of the theme’s importance to the musical structure of the symphony.

This, and the earlier example from Chapter 2, show the importance of Giorgi’s (2012) descriptive phenomenological method in accessing the pre-reflective, raw dimension of the field material of Chapters 2 and 6, and the descriptive survey of Chapter 5, and then helping shape that material for interrogation through the lens of Merleau-Ponty’s constructs.

Having discussed the three main components of the study’s method, I now turn to a more general outline of the structure of the thesis.

1.5 The structure of the thesis

1.5.1 An outline

Chapters 1 and 7 set out the introductory and concluding matter of this thesis, from literary background, research question and methods used to conclusions reached and possibilities for future research. This is the ‘what, how and why’ of the project. Chapters 2 through 6 present its core argument. While each of these central chapters can be considered separately – or, in the case of chapters 3 and 4, in their originally published form as a pair – they are intended to be considered together and in sequence. With the exception of chapter 3, which gives important historical perspective on how the one musician on stage who makes no sound came to occupy such an important role in the organizing of orchestral performance, each interrogates orchestral relationality through the lens of one or more elements of Merleau-Ponty’s late ontology, drawn primarily from *The Visible and the Invisible* (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). The sequence starts in chapter 2, with the primordial inherence of reversibility exemplified in the player-instrument relationship. The ideas of reversibility and écart are interrogated further in chapter 5 through conductor-player relations. The sequence concludes in chapter 6 with perceptual faith and the Flesh of the World, as the analysis of relationality is extended beyond the stage to include audience and auditorium, in a discussion of the relational fabric that is the ‘Flesh’ of the full lifeworld of orchestral performance.

1.5.2 Connections

The structure of this thesis is derived from the path, charted by Dillon (1997), that Merleau-Ponty’s reversibility construct takes as it traverses domains from humble beginnings in the

phenomenon of touch through to the overarching *Flesh of the World*, threading its way through its creator's late ontology and thus serving as the unifying idea that ties this extraordinary but incomplete body of work together (Daly, 2016; Dillon, 1997). Each chapter in the body of the thesis interrogates orchestral relationality through the lens of one or more elements of this ontology, beginning with the bond between player and instrument and the reversibility between activity and passivity that underpins the notion of touch (Morris, 2010), then pivoting, through the idea of *écart* and via the Concertgebouw Orchestra and Carlos Kleiber, from the intrapersonal self-self to the intercorporeal self-other, before arriving at *Flesh*, the primordially interwoven relational fabric that is the lifeworld of the orchestra in performance, set in the context of a return to performing activity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given the central role reversibility plays in the present research, three features of the idea as applied throughout this study need to be stressed before proceeding further. First, it is important that "reversibility be understood adverbially (how) and not substantively (what)" (Daly, 2016). It is also necessary to recognize that reversibility, as posited in this account, involves "the anonymous body, the body prior to the reflective differentiation which identifies it as mine," (Dillon, 1997, p. 160). Third, reversibility here "is a reversibility always immanent and never realized in fact. My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 147). Reversibility, on this account, operates at a preconscious level in a state of constant flux, achieving some identity but never completely coinciding (Dillon, 1997), and it is this understanding of the concept that is followed here.

Chapter 2 positions reversibility at the centre of the orchestral musician's lifeworld through the relationship between player and instrument, and shows how that relationship is in constant primordial dialogue with the music and its performance. The three middle chapters form a sub unit that addresses the conductor-player connection in some detail, as this is where most people begin when they think of orchestral relationality. The first of these chapters gives an account of the development of the conductor's role through the contributions of four key figures in the profession. These four were not just great musicians. Each one made an important *organizational* contribution as well, with Mendelssohn transforming orchestral coordination through his use of the baton; Wagner, through his redesign of the orchestra pit, centralizing interpretive power in the role of the conductor; Hans von Bülow, as one of the era's great instrumentalists, bringing his professional discipline to bear on the orchestra; and Nikisch providing the career template and rehearsal techniques that conductors still, with only minor variations, follow to this day.

I then introduce a Merleau-Pontian angle through two chapters that interrogate the example of Carlos Kleiber and the Concertgebouw Orchestra. The first of these two chapters has a more general discussion of Kleiber's work, making the case for a Merleau-Pontian perspective without becoming overly specific, while showing the importance of mutual trust and respect in Kleiber's relations with the orchestras he conducted. The second digs deeper, drawing on the constructs of reversibility and *écart* from Merleau-Ponty's late ontology, and applying them in detail in order to understand how Kleiber and the players of the Concertgebouw Orchestra organized their music-making to achieve the heights they reached in this performance.

The focus of both these chapters is quite deliberately *not* on the notion of the maestro as dictator, but more on the reversibility inherent in the player-conductor relationship, as Kleiber draws as much inspiration from the players as they do from him – something Kleiber himself, it should be noted, recognized and deliberately nurtured (Barber, 2011). Instead of a discussion of the hierarchically driven idea of leadership that usually characterizes the player-conductor narrative (Canetti, 1962; Lebrecht, 1991; Matheopoulos, 1982), the emphasis here is the care and attention that goes into shaping the “space between” (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000, p. 551) conductor and orchestral musician where individual intention is transformed into collective action and the music-making happens, and how the conductor is in turn inspired by what the players contribute in response. This is viewed through the lens of *écart* – whereby Merleau-Ponty conceives the space between self and other as a gap subtended by a relational connection – as an important way of understanding this, the organizational nexus of orchestral performance.

The final part of the argument is presented in Chapter 6, through an account of performance following the national lockdown that occurred in New Zealand during March and April, 2020. In a return to the methods employed in Chapter 2, it is an autoethnographically inspired response, influenced structurally by Giorgi’s (2012) approach, to a player’s experience of a return to the concert platform with a socially distanced orchestra on stage and no audience in the hall. Other than the abrupt change in the nature of the *écart* between conductor and player, and player and colleague, that I was used to, it was precisely the *absence* of fellow musicians, the *lack* of an audience, and the disconcerting unfamiliarity that all this brought to an otherwise familiar venue, that directed my attention towards the Merleau-Pontian constructs of perceptual faith (Dastur, 1994;

Merleau-Ponty, 1968) and Flesh (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Using these ideas as the theoretical lens for my analysis, the value of regarding the lifeworld of the orchestra in performance as a fabric of primordially reversible relational connections, interwoven yet with each element of every thread retaining its individuality, has become increasingly apparent as the research has progressed.

1.5.3 A note on references

The main body of the study's argument is presented in Chapters 2 through 6. Chapters 2, 5 and 6 are, post each chapter's Overview section x.1, journal articles as submitted for publication, with Chapter 5 being referenced in the Chicago style required by the journal concerned. Chapters 3 and 4 are the author's contributions to a recently published book. References for Chapters 2 through 6 are therefore appended to the relevant chapter, while the references for the introductory and concluding material in the Front Matter, Chapter 1 and Chapter 7 are to be found following the final chapter, Chapter 7.

Chapter 2: Beyond 'alchemy' and 'magic:' Relationality in orchestral performance reconsidered

2.1 Overview

In this chapter I begin my engagement with orchestral relationality by interrogating its foundation in the connection between player, instrument and score. Turning to Merleau-Ponty's (1968) construct of reversibility and its grounding in the phenomenon of touch, the aim here is to begin to unlock the ingrained and taken for granted in orchestral music-making. I turn first to the most intimate and enduring relationship a musician has: the bond with their instrument, formed over years of practising and performing. I argue here that this connection is primordially reversible, with the instrument acting on the player just as the player acts on their instrument. During a performance, this connection is such that the musician and their instrument come to embody the music – and thus, on a Merleau-Pontian account, the ideas of the composer – for colleague and audience alike.

Here and throughout the study, working alongside Merleau-Ponty in the pre-reflective space where he situates his analysis allows me to dig beneath the sediment of habit, training, and professional indoctrination down to what is second nature, tacit and reflexive in my experience. Further, a focus on the preconscious level where the body is anonymous and before I identify my body as mine (Dillon, 1997), opens my account to the voices of instruments, music scores and – later – concert halls as these commonplace musical artifacts assume, under a Merleau-Pontian gaze, corporeal significance and take their place alongside human others as actors in their own right.

This perspective supports in turn the two main objectives of the chapter. Firstly, by drawing on my own orchestral experience as interrogated through key features of Merleau-Ponty's late ontology, I propose an agenda that views orchestral performance as a fundamentally temporal phenomenon. This moves the scope of the analysis beyond the individual to include colleagues and audience past, present and, by implication, future. Secondly, the wider purpose of this discussion is to offer a way of valuing lived experience so that individual contributions made in highly specialized organizational settings can be explored, while at the same time shedding light on work processes which would otherwise remain hidden.

The chapter is structured as follows. After outlining the territory to be covered, literary foundations and the method used in the present research are discussed. This analysis is then pursued through the example of the opening of *Eine Alpensinfonie* by Richard Strauss (1915) through my relations with the music itself and then with my own instrument, the violin. I conclude with a brief discussion of the implications of this analysis both for the orchestra and other organizational contexts.

2.1.1 Publication status

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2.2 Introduction

The orchestra in performance presents a relational puzzle that resists easy characterization. As a full-time orchestral musician and, more recently, a part-time organizational theorist, I have become increasingly dissatisfied with accounts of the orchestra that cast the

conductor as hero or villain and persist in grouping the players together as a quasi-robotic mass incapable of critical thought, or at the very least unwilling to exercise it at an individual level.

Nonetheless, there is a grain of truth running through the arguments of those who suggest that the seamless collaboration among the musicians onstage that is visible to the outsider depends on a substructure of power imbalance, rigid hierarchy, and strict standardization (Canetti, 1962; Lebrecht, 1991; Mintzberg, 1998); the vague notions of ‘alchemy’ and ‘magic’ preferred by others to explain how an orchestra does what it does in performance (Feeney-Hart, 2013; Mauceri, 2017; Service, 2012) are, for me as a career-long player, more congenial, even if they fail to give much clarity to our understanding of how orchestras work.

But adding the creativity and ego that individual musicians bring to this relationally combustible mix (Arian, 1971; Ropo & Sauer, 2007) doesn’t really help either, except by providing some insight into the frustration that is a frequent feature of player-podium relations. After all this, even the seasoned observer of orchestras is left asking: how *do* the musicians of a symphony orchestra manage to perform at all? In view of the highly technical nature of orchestral music making, how does the interested analyst without specialist expertise explore the relationality at work? And, even if that know-how is available, what theoretical frameworks can support such a line of inquiry?

These questions present significant challenges of content, theory, and method which the existing patchwork of literature on the orchestral organization does little to address.

Inasmuch as performance appears in the extant literature at all, there is a focus on conductor-centred leadership that, when in the hands of a few astute practitioners

(Mauceri, 2017; Wigglesworth, 2018) and thoughtful commentators (Bathurst & Ladkin, 2012; Koivunen, 2003; Köping, 2007) yields perceptive insights, but still only tells part of the symphony orchestra's story. Indeed, most writing about the orchestral organization sets onstage performing aside altogether in favour of the offstage implications of orchestral activity. While this has proven to be instructive across such diverse areas as teams (Hackman, 2002) and organizational sense making processes (Maitlis, 1995), many of the ways of working that make the orchestra what it is – such as the 'in the moment' communication and coordination that happens onstage – pass by untouched, leaving important lessons for organizing misunderstood or overlooked altogether.

This paper moves to redress the imbalance. In a return to onstage performance, this study seeks to further our understanding of the relational basis of orchestral work through a practice-based study of Richard Strauss's (1915) *Eine Alpensinfonie*. But the taken-for-granted, give-and-take nature of relationality in orchestral performance presents a number of challenges which, if that relationality is to be interrogated, needs conceptual support grounded in the tacit, pre-reflective arena that precedes conscious decision-making and action. This is where we find the later work of the phenomenologically oriented French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and, in particular, the construct of reversibility – the idea that if I sense something I can, from the vantage of that thing, be sensed (Dillon, 1997).

The paper is organized as follows. I begin by introducing in more detail that part of Merleau-Ponty's thought which has informed my analysis, with a particular focus on the antecedents of the reversibility construct. I then discuss relevant literary sources and outline the study's methodological orientation. Together, these ingredients underpin the analysis of orchestral

relationality, conclusions for orchestral work and organizing, and implications for future research that form the second part of the paper.

2.3 Merleau-Ponty and reversibility

Merleau-Ponty's focus on the embodied and experiential, his view of the ways in which a technology's use can "[become] naturalised, habitualised, and automatic for the user" (Wilson, 2013, p. 429), and his late turn to reversibility (Dillon, 1997; Morris, 2010), combine to offer an intriguing vantage point from which to examine organizational environments where non-human technology and its human users are closely intertwined. These ideas speak directly to the orchestral context, as they address not only relationships among performers themselves, but also those between musicians and their 'technology' as in Figure 2.1 – their scores and music stands, the instruments they play, and the spaces in which they rehearse and perform.



Figure 2.1 A musician, violin, music score and stand

Linking the artifact to the lived body (Merleau-Ponty, 2012) and, later, the reversible relationship between artist and creation (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) forms an important

conceptual trajectory in Merleau-Ponty's work. Consider, for instance, the position he takes regarding the visual arts in the essay *Eye and Mind*; "it is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings. To understand these transubstantiations, we must go back to the working, actual body – not the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 162). A Merleau-Pontian account begins with the body *as we live it*, perceiving, perceptible, and moving through space and time (Merleau-Ponty, 2012; Johnson, 2007; Siu, 2016; Wiskus, 2018). Further, the mediating influence of technology and artifact – whether the typist's keyboard, the organist's instrument (Merleau-Ponty, 2012), the violinist's bow (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) or the painter's brush and paint (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a) – is central to these relations. Although in this paper I explore the lifeworld of a musician and not a Cézanne painting (Merleau-Ponty, 1993), my inquiry is nonetheless grounded in an orchestral version of the same underlying question: how do we, as members of the orchestra, 'change the world' by lending our bodies and minds to the lifeworld of orchestral music-making and how, in return, are we changed by that world? And, given its centrality, how are we to understand the role of the musician-instrument connection in all this?

Merleau-Ponty grounds his interrogation of the reversibility thesis and its implications in the most mundane of examples – the moment "when my right hand touches my left" and "my left hand [is] starting to perceive my right" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, p. 166). This, the phenomenon of touch, is the archetype for the construct. Despite its utterly routine appearance, this example still manages to intertwine the everyday with the extraordinary (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b); "my two hands touch the same things because they are the hands

of one same body. And yet each of them has its own tactile experience” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 141). However there remains the temporal “slippage” highlighted by Wiskus (2018, p. 133); we do not perceive the touching and the touched with absolute simultaneity. Or, as Dillon (1997) puts it, there is identity, but there is also difference.

This underlying ambiguity undoubtedly positions reversibility as an intriguing new path for orchestral analysis. But it also leads to apparent ‘asymmetries’ (Dillon, 1997) and ‘incongruities’ (Morris, 2010) in the idea that demand resolution if Merleau-Ponty’s view of the notion, leading from this humble beginning in the touching touched all the way to the sensing sensed, is to hold water.

The key here is the primordial setting of Merleau-Ponty’s analysis – where “the ‘subject’ of perception ... is the anonymous body, the body prior to the reflective differentiation which identifies it as mine” (Dillon, 1997, p. 160) – as this helps us to follow Merleau-Ponty’s argument as he follows the thread of reversibility through different sensory and relational domains, and introduces such counterintuitive connections as trees ‘seeing’ their painters (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p.167). The premise espoused by Merleau-Ponty is that “as one sees, one inhabits a body – a body that is seen by others. One’s body is simultaneously seeing and seen, and when it sees itself, it sees itself seeing, just as it can touch itself touching” (Gilmore, 2005, p. 301).

This becomes somewhat clearer in a performing context. The musical project “etches itself in the very texture of the movement and is read in it, like the breath of someone playing an instrument [is read] in the sound” suggests Merleau-Ponty (2020, p. 79, translator’s insertion): on this account, when I play a phrase which is followed by a colleague’s response, what they play contains a trace of my original contribution – both what they hear *and* what

they see, sound *and* gestural activity. ‘Hearing’ and ‘seeing’ myself in this way then motivates me to recalibrate and adjust. When I continue with my own response, I am responding to a mix of my colleague’s interpretation of my original input *and* a trace of that input itself – in other words, the identity within difference that Dillon (1997) posits as the marker of Merleau-Pontian reversibility. Worth stressing here too is the point that this interaction happens reflexively and ‘in the moment,’ with little or no conscious awareness from either party of what has gone on, suggesting that if reversibility among colleagues isn’t functioning smoothly, performing relations risk being compromised at a preconscious, fundamental level.

In summary, joining Merleau-Ponty in this pre-reflective space bolsters my interrogation of orchestral relationality in two important ways. Firstly, it allows me to dig down beneath the sediment of habit, training, and professional indoctrination to what is second nature, tacit and reflexive in my experience. Most importantly, however, this move opens my account to the inclusion of instruments, scores, and concert halls as these commonplace musical artifacts assume, through the reversibility thesis, corporeal significance and take their place alongside human others as actors in their own right.

Having introduced the Merleau-Pontian underpinnings of this study, I now turn to the literature that has furnished the wider organizational backdrop for my account.

2.4 Literature

The bicameral, onstage-offstage character of the wider orchestral organization has long attracted scholarly interest. Studies of form (Arian, 1971; Hart, 1973), power (Canetti, 1962) and sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005) have all yielded thought-provoking answers to important

questions about how organizations work, but despite this, the narrative around communication and coordination in the orchestra has struggled to go beyond podium-based, conductor-centric leadership (Hunt, Stelluto & Hooijberg, 2004; Marotto, Roos & Victor, 2007; Mintzberg, 1998). The ongoing disinterest in the lifeworld of musicians in performance beyond the player-conductor relationship suggests that the highly specialized nature of performing activity, combined with the lack of an obvious conceptual framework or a straightforward path toward further generalizability, is having a chilling effect on scholarly attention.

Analyses from musically oriented commentators such as Sachs (1993), Service (2013) and Mauceri (2017) delve more deeply into onstage orchestral work practices, but again, their focus remains grounded in the player-podium relationship. In this regard, greater nuance is to be found in the world of smaller ensembles, such as the chamber orchestra (Hackman, 2002), the string quartet (Murnighan & Conlon, 1991; Steinhardt, 1998) and the piano trio (Bathurst & Williams, 2014). The relational dynamics that underpin the teamwork described by these authors, despite being largely unremarked in conductor-centric narratives, are also essential in the symphony orchestra, while Murnighan and Conlon's (1991) perceptive consideration of the string quartet resonates with my own experience and observation of parallel situations in orchestral work (Gilling, 2014).

But other than the exceptions noted earlier (Bathurst et al., 2019; Bathurst & Ladkin, 2012; Koivunen, 2003, 2008; Koivunen & Wennes, 2011; Köping, 2007), onstage relationality in the orchestra beyond the conductor-orchestra dyad (Hunt et al., 2004; Marotto et al., 2007) remains underexplored. Player to instrument and musician to score are just two examples of relationships that, despite their existential importance for the performing musician,

attract little attention beyond instruction (e.g., Galamian, 1985), and biography (e.g., Milstein, 1990; Thielemann, 2015).

In this context, Johnson's (2007) turn to an aesthetic, embodied view of human understanding allows him to remind us that "our bodies cannot be understood merely as objects interacting with other objects" but rather that "my body is a *lived* body" and "the situation from which our world and experience flows" (2007, p. 275, original emphasis). Consequently, for Johnson (2007) the meaning of music is an embodied meaning; it is *felt* by the listener and, further, "music's function is ... *presentation* and *enactment* of felt experience" (Johnson, 2007, p. 238, original emphases). This stance resonates with the broadly semiotic approach of, for example, Cumming, (1997, 2000) and Gritten, (2006) as they interrogate the links between musical text and bodily gesture in performers. Gritten (2006, p. 111) explores the interconnection between music and gesture to remind us that "music's physicality affects all our senses simultaneously and confuses (named) distinctions between space and time, subject and object, perception and conception, and so on," although he also finds that this renders a closer focus on a single sense "futile." It is, however, in the very attempt to unpack this simultaneity and confusion that the various senses offer physical clues to the underlying nature of communication in music making; this suggests that sensory interrogation has much to offer the line of inquiry pursued in the present study.

If Gritten (2006) is correct, limiting ourselves to information from one or other among visual, auditory or tangible sources, should preclude a wider understanding of relationality in ensemble settings, such as orchestral performance. But when viewed through the lens of Merleau-Ponty's late ontology and the embodied nature of musical activity and meaning

suggested by Johnson (2007), I contend that it does not. On the contrary, the information from one sense synesthetically carries within it traces of what is going on in the others – for example, as Merleau-Ponty (1968, p. 132) points out, when we see color, we also register tangible texture – and this instead invites us “to attend to the phenomenon as it appears in its richness and multi-determinability ... and to placement within a plurality of practical horizons and theoretical contexts” (Dillon, 1997, p. 53). Exploring a physical and sensory experience – especially one as closely intertwined with others as hearing a piece of music, watching a colleague play, or playing a musical instrument ourselves – is far from being futile. Instead, it has the potential to open up a new and fertile field of inquiry.

One author who takes up this challenge in a musical setting is Naomi Cumming (1997, 2000). Combining the semiotics of Peirce (cited in Cumming, 2000) and the hermeneutic phenomenology of Gadamer (1960, cited in Cumming, 2000) with her own performing experience as she interrogates a range of masterworks from the solo violin repertoire, Cumming develops a theoretical framework that allows her to approach music as an intrinsically practical “action in sound,” taking place “within a social and stylistic context” where “whether performing or not, engagement with music involves an active response, even when bodily movements are suppressed” (2000, p. 14). The picture that emerges from this analysis is one of music, performer, instrument and listener uniting in a fully reversible relation to the point where “I do not play the music ... The music plays me” (Cumming, 2000, p. 305).

Merleau-Ponty makes the same argument. If anything, his intense and visceral imagery, shown in the following passage from *The Visible and the Invisible*, evokes an even greater

range of possibilities for engaging with the primordial, pre-reflective connections that underpin performance:

We do not possess the musical or sensible ideas ... They possess us. The performer is no longer producing or reproducing the sonata: he feels himself, and the others feel him to be at the service of the sonata; the sonata sings through him or cries out so suddenly that he must 'dash on his bow' to follow it. And these open vortexes in the sonorous world finally form one sole vortex in which the ideas fit in with one another (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 151).

The performing lifeworld depicted here by Merleau-Ponty goes beyond one player and their violin to enfold music and musician, concertgoer and concert hall, and idea and instrument in a relational meshwork (Ingold, 2011) that is unique, evanescent, and inherently reversible. Cumming's (2000, p. 14) active response and Gritten's (2006, p. 111) sensory simultaneity also suggest the intrinsic reversibility of the physical and psychological associations embedded in performance activity.

Both these authors are, however, concerned with the relationship between textual considerations and individual agency, and while the present study is grounded in personal experience, orchestral music-making remains a relationally collective endeavour. Having drawn theoretical inspiration from Merleau-Ponty, at this point in the research I now needed to address the methodological problem of how to account for a personal perspective that was taking shape as either a rich source of material, or an unacknowledged barrier of accumulated bias.

This question dominated the early stages of the study, as it became more and more apparent that interrogation of my own experience was going to be a pre-condition of further progress. After decades earning my living as an orchestral violinist playing in positions ranging from orchestra leader to the last stand of the second violin section, I have acquired a large amount of potentially valuable 'inside' knowledge. Once that experience

became the subject of my account, however, challenges of both theory and method arose, even as experiential knowledge continued to underpin how I do my 'day job.' In short, the long-standing habits, tacit assumptions and taken-for-granted understandings that are part and parcel of my orchestral voice needed to be unpacked and scrutinized if a coherent research narrative was to be developed. I now turn to how this issue was addressed.

2.5 Background and method

The personal turn found in approaches such as autoethnography (Holman Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2016) suggested a way forward. Further, Stablein (2002) outlines a method for researching work teams that combines the ideas of Merleau-Ponty (2012) with Giorgi's (2012) descriptive phenomenology. This is the approach followed here, with the influence of Giorgi (2012) giving narrative shape to the experience captured in the field material, and the theoretical inspiration for the paper coming from Merleau-Ponty (2012, 1968).

I began this study by attempting to describe my experience as a player as naively as possible through an audit of my personal biases as they related to research-based imperatives. This is the *epoché*, assumption of the phenomenological attitude, reduction, or bracketing with which a phenomenological method begins (Giorgi, 2012), because, as Merleau-Ponty (2012, p. lxxi) points out, "phenomenology involves describing, and not explaining or analyzing." However, as Merleau-Ponty (2012) also emphasizes, a complete reduction is neither possible nor, in an applied setting, practical (Zahavi, 2019) – simply because, as researchers, we are primordially embodied and so ineluctably a part of the world we are researching. The idea of a complete reduction also risks the very dualism between mind as disembodied consciousness and body as biomechanical object that Merleau-Ponty is aiming to overcome (Dillon, 1997).

The bracketing exercise is, however, useful, as it raises the researcher's awareness of possible bias and prejudice at a stage when this may not be all that obvious. For that reason alone, the exercise was worth undertaking; after a lengthy orchestral career, there is simply too much in my own situation that is quasi-instinctive, preconscious, and habitual for a pure reduction to be possible. For this reason, I adopted a method that, while loosely based on Giorgi (2012) and Stablein (2002), allowed the event to unfold for later analysis with as little intervention as possible. The example shown in Figure 2.2 comes from an early rehearsal of *Eine Alpensinfonie* and shows the progression from the unadorned diary entry, which baldly states what happened during a rehearsal of the passage shown in Figure 2.3, through to the situated description of the event that fed into subsequent analysis.

1. *Diary entry* Opening strings not together with the bassoon.
2. *Journal entry* Composite accuracy is crucial.
3. *Meaning Units* Opening not together; composite; accuracy; crucial.
4. *Central Theme* This is a whole ensemble, not an individual, problem.
5. *Analysis: Central Theme and Research Problem* Accuracy here requires awareness across the orchestra. From a technical perspective, the combined string entries must mirror the bassoon line.
6. *Analysis: Introduction of the theoretical resource (reversibility)* For this opening to succeed, each player needs to adjust to the other while giving precedence to the bassoon line.
7. *Situated Description*: In a rehearsal of *Eine Alpensinfonie*, the string sections did not play together with the bassoon as required.
Each string player plays and then holds one note; this needs to line up with the corresponding note in the bassoon line.
Everybody needs to listen to everybody else so that we can collectively play together while giving the bassoon line the prominence it needs to have.

Figure 2.2 From diary entry to situated description (Giorgi, 2012)

After acknowledging sources of bias as per Giorgi (2012), I began the field phase of the project with daily diary entries. In these, I described, with as little adornment as possible, a range of events that occurred in rehearsal and performance over the course of a concert

season. An extra layer of pre-analysis was added as this material was organized chronologically in a field journal. The sole editorial intervention at this point was a brief comment attached to each entry as a tag to remind me as to why these things had attracted my attention in the first place. Following Giorgi (2012) and Stablein (2002), meaning units from individual entries were then extracted which began, over a number of entries, to coalesce into broader themes. This is where the reversibility between activity and passivity in orchestral performance came together with the notion of reversibility in Merleau-Ponty's late ontology to form the basis for analyzing relationality in the orchestra.

This is complex territory that needs an example to delineate the issues at stake, so I now turn to a practical application of reversibility, located in my relationship as a violinist with the instrument that I play and drawn from my own experience performing the opening of Richard Strauss's (1915) *Eine Alpensinfonie*.

2.6 Reversibility in action

This exploration of reversibility in action comes in two parts. I begin with a summary of the field material describing my experience as a player in the orchestra. This then provides the backdrop for a more fine-grained, practice-based account of reversibility that is situated in a key connection located at the heart of orchestral work: the relationship between player and instrument.

Following this discussion, I conclude by asking how this analysis can contribute to a more wide-ranging discussion of relationality within the orchestra and, further afield, in other forms of organization.

Dedicated with gratitude to Count Nicolaus Seebach
and the Royal Kapelle in Dresden

Eine Alpensinfonie

RICHARD STRAUSS, OP. 64

Nacht.
Lento.

2 Clarinets 2 B-Clarinetten.
Bass Clarinet Baßclarinette. (B)
Bassoon I I.
Bassoons 2-3 II. III.
2 Horns (3-4) 2 Hörner. III. IV.
4 Trombones 4 Posaunen.
1 Tuba I. Baßtuba.
Violin I I. Violinen. (vierfach)
(4 parts) (mit Dämpfer)
Violin 2 II. Violinen. (vierfach)
(4 parts) (mit Dämpfer)
Viola (4 Parts) Bratschen. (vierfach)
Cello (4 parts) Violoncelle. (vierfach)
Double Bass Contrabässe. (vierfach)

1

The musical score is written for a large orchestra. The woodwind section includes 2 Clarinets, 2 Bass Clarinets, 1 Bassoon, and 3 Fagottes. The brass section includes 2 Horns, 4 Trombones, and 1 Tuba. The string section includes Violins I and II (4 parts each), Viola (4 parts), Cello (4 parts), and Double Bass (4 parts). The score is marked with 'pp' (pianissimo) and 'marcato'. The tempo is 'Lento' and the mood is 'Nacht.' The score is marked with a circled '1'.

1

Figure 2.3 Nacht (Night)

In an evocative passage from *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty neatly captures the relational tension between the psychological dimension of a concert performance and the physical space in which that musical experience takes place. “In the concert hall, when I reopen my eyes,” he writes, “visible space seems narrow in relation to that other space

where the music was unfolding just a moment ago, and even if I keep my eyes open during the performance of the piece, it seems to me that the music is not truly contained in this precise and shabby space.” He continues, adding that “the music insinuates a new dimension across visible space where it unfurls just as, for persons suffering hallucinations, the clear space of perceived things is mysteriously doubled with a ‘dark space’ where other presences are possible” (2012, p. 230).

The intertwining of the psychological with the physical is a particular feature of the music of Richard Strauss (Walton, 2016). Even for Strauss, however, the eight-bar passage that opens *Nacht* (Night), the movement that begins his *Eine Alpensinfonie* (Figure 2.3), offers an unusually dramatic illustration – not least for the physical and psychological tension this music exerts on the performers as they attempt to play as quietly as possible while maintaining absolute precision.

Strauss begins the piece by using the line played by the first bassoon to thread a descending scale through each instrumental group like a climber’s rope, gently letting musicians and audience alike down into a kind of musical abyss in which, grounded in the rich, dark harmonic soil of the key of B flat minor, lie the foundations of the musical odyssey that is about to begin.

But this is not a journey for one ‘climber’ alone. By giving each instrumental voice – even to the extent of dividing each string section into four different parts – a fragment of the bassoon’s scale, having them hold the note on which they end that fragment and then gradually involving almost the entire orchestra in the weaving of his complex musical fabric, Strauss gives the orchestral sound breadth, depth and substance for which each musician bears some individual responsibility. In refraining from giving any one voice overt

prominence and using all the notes in the scale played at an extremely soft dynamic level which is made even quieter by having the entire string section use mutes (shown by the instruction *mit Dämpfer* in the score), Strauss creates a sound world that seems almost entirely devoid of expression and to display only the merest flicker of rhythmic pulse. Even the harmony of the home key is barely defined; G flat major, a key which would alter the whole tonal orientation of the opening, shares the notes and key signature of the descending scale, and conclusive resolution in favour of B flat minor only happens at the end of the main theme that begins in the trombones and tuba.

In doing this Strauss ensures that the grandeur of his musical mountain remains hidden, a 'possible presence' shrouded in the mystery of the 'dark space' evoked by his musical score as it begins to unfold. He also, whether intentionally or not, manages to contrive (in this performer at least) a state of mind that echoes the hallucinogenic quality referred to by Merleau-Ponty (2012, p. 230); diary entries from these performances suggest that my mind became something of a 'blank slate' over the course of these opening measures, although from a sensory viewpoint I was more alert than ever in anticipation of what was to come.

The psychophysical duality of the experience is perhaps why, as a performer, I have always found that this passage presents unexpected challenges. As I play my fragment at the very opening of the piece and then hold my note over the next few bars and beyond, I become increasingly aware of my surroundings, as sensory phenomena which I normally take for granted emerge and intensify as this note continues. My hearing seems to become more acute as I listen for any movement that might signal the arrival of other presences in the music, while visually I focus more intently on the conductor and my colleagues as I look for any associated signs in the form of physical cues like a quick glance or the flick of a finger.

My sense of touch also intensifies as I become increasingly aware of the balance and movement of my bow in my right hand and the texture of the strings, neck and body of my violin in my left.

But this sensory intensification is often disrupted by more prosaic thoughts that start to interfere with my concentration, competing with each other and the music for attention.

“Don’t cough,” “is my phone off?” and the dreaded “how many bars (measures) have I actually been holding this note for?” are among the rogue elements that threaten to intrude in a way that, if left unchecked, usually leads to the very errors, both minor and egregious, that I am trying so hard to avoid.

To overcome these distractions, I home in on that descending scale, mentally following its lead to the ‘bottom of the abyss’ located in the score at **1** (Figure 2.3) where the opening theme played by the trombones and tuba is heard for the first time. It is as if I am being drawn ever deeper into a sound world full of foreboding where nothing is clear; the feeling is increased by this important melodic theme moving towards G flat major (see the third measure of **1**) in apparent defiance of the B flat minor orientation of the harmonic texture that surrounds it, but finally sinking, in this iteration at least, back into the minor key from which it emerged.

The tension produced by this harmonic, rhythmic and physical stasis is why, despite the gradual building of intensity over the next few pages, the *Sonnenaufgang* (Sunrise) depicted in the next section of the piece arrives with an explosive force that is, for me at least, as much a physical and mental release as it is purely musical.

Above all, I emerge from the experience of performing this work with an awareness of having shared with my colleagues and the audience the opportunity to engage with a piece of music written by one of the great masters of orchestration that will always, due to the fundamental reversibility on which the act of live performance rests, depend on performers and their audiences to bring what lies dormant in the score to life in the concert hall. But, as a researcher, I still walk off stage with an unresolved question; “how did all that actually happen?”

2.7 Reversibility and the phenomenon of touch

Part of the answer lies in that most basic of relationships in music-making, the bond between player and instrument (Figure 2.1). For me as a violinist, I am, of course, aware of my violin and bow as physical things; I support the violin between my chin, left shoulder and my left hand while holding my violin bow in my right. But if we go deeper, the bow and violin become more than just pieces of technical equipment and begin to act as extensions of my own body. The bow, for instance, becomes a part of my right arm, interacting with the fingers of my right hand to form, anatomically speaking, an extension of my arm. My hand thus becomes, on this account, a joint analogous to my elbow or shoulder.

As soon as I pick up my violin and bow and begin to play, however, “the spark is lit” and these two inanimate artifacts become “woven into the same intentional fabric as my body,” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 163) as I focus on making music and cease to be as aware of their separate existence. In this way, the violin and bow come to mediate the relationship between the player’s hands – or, depending on the instrument, a variety of other parts of the body – and act, from both a musical and a Merleau-Pontian perspective, as an extension

of the player's body as the musician-instrument dyad opens on to the lifeworld of performance.

In all this, Menuhin and Primrose (1976) suggest, the violin and bow join the player in a sensory and musical partnership that is both personal and public. There is, however, another dimension to the relationship. At a primordial level, the material of the violin and bow are entwined with the bodily tissue of the player's hands and arms as the 'same stuff' (Morris, 2010), thus demonstrating the inherently reversible intercorporeality that Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 168; 1968, p. 143) describes; when I play, my violin and bow are no longer discrete combinations of high-quality timber, but rather have become parts of my body that give me the musical voice that I contribute to the orchestra's music-making.

So how, in this instance, is a Merleau-Pontian view of reversibility at work? Here the notion of *écart* adds nuance crucial to moving reversibility from theory to practice. This concept, which is used extensively by Merleau-Ponty but has no exact English translation, means a gap or a separation carrying an implied connection, such as two hands connected to the same body. Following Merleau-Ponty's own usage, Lingis, the translator of *The Visible and The Invisible*, translates *écart* variously as 'deviation,' 'spread' and 'divergence,' and uses the term almost interchangeably with its close relatives 'dehiscence' and 'fission' to interrogate the hinge between active and passive, sensing and sensed. So, between my identity with the instrument as the vehicle for my musical voice on the one hand and the difference of separation between player and inanimate violin on the other, there exists precisely the identity-within-difference (Dillon, 1997) suggested by *écart*; for the violinist, violins and bows begin as Others, pieces of 'kit' to be accommodated until, as the performer strives to achieve unity with the instrument, mastery is attained.

This happens as the player, in a clear illustration of reversibility and *écart* at work, enables the intertwining of difference and identity by acting through hands and bow on the instrument to produce sound; this sound is in turn the primary means through which the violin acts on the violinist, also contributing, through the vibrations registered in hands, jaw and shoulder, to ongoing activity in what I describe elsewhere as a kinaesthetic loop (Gilling, 2014). Digging a little deeper, consider again the example of violinist and violin bow. As outlined earlier, the bow is artifactually separate from the player but still needs to be considered organically, akin to an extension of his or her right arm, with – if we follow Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 168) – the hair of the bow touching the strings of the violin as a substitute for what would, in other contexts such as a handshake, be the fingers of the right hand. Further unpacking the extreme softness of dynamic volume Strauss requires of the second violins during the opening bars of *Eine Alpensinfonie* (Figure 2.3), it becomes clear that what I feel and respond to in my right hand through the bow, is in fact generated at the point of contact between bow hair and violin string. Bow and player are indeed functioning at the service of musical imperatives as the ‘same stuff,’ but within the right arm and bow movement there is, simultaneously, the act of holding and moving the bow while passively receiving sonic and visual information, in a “coiling over” of the “tangible” violin, through the bow, “upon the touching body” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 146).

There is also a blurring of the boundary between the pre-reflective and the conscious here which is one of the phenomena that makes orchestral work so intriguing and the concept of reversibility so relevant. Consider, for instance, what Merleau-Ponty (2012, p. 146) has to say in *Phenomenology of Perception* about an organist and their instrument: “during the rehearsal – just as during the performance – the stops, the pedals, and the keyboards are

only presented to [the organist] as powers of such and such an emotional or musical value, and their position as those places through which this value appears in the world.” In short, a proficient player perceives the various parts of their instrument not as wood and metal but rather as “an emotional or musical value” that the musician uses as they “create an expressive space” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 147) which is as much about the colour, emotion and texture of music-making as it is about raw sound production.

We see this in the very first note of *Eine Alpensinfonie*, as the player decides between a range of options before starting to play, while also considering the properties of their own instrument and variables such as the acoustics of the venue. In the case of the second violin part, a violinist can choose to play the first note of the piece with their left hand in a ‘lower’ position on the A string, close to the head, or scroll, of the violin. This maximizes the length of the string available to vibrate and so produces a relatively clear, bright, and open sound. They can also choose to play it on the lower-pitched, thicker D string in a ‘higher’ position, with the left hand closer to the body of the instrument; by playing on a thicker string and ‘stopping’ the string by pressing it down part way along its length with one of the fingers of the left hand, a more covered, darker tone will result. The effect can also be maximized by using the tip (to produce a clearer sound) or pad (to minimize resonance) of whichever left hand finger is being used to stop the note on the string. Note how this technical discussion quickly moves to a consideration of musical attributes; a bright, clear sound might be selected for its icy quality while a darker sound could be chosen as being less transparent and more ‘nocturnal;’ both are appropriate alternatives for this passage, and one or other may be requested by the conductor depending on the musical atmosphere and blend of sound across the orchestra that he or she is seeking to achieve. More often than not,

however, a conductor will simply describe their musical goal and leave technical realization to the individual player (Mauceri, 2017).

This presupposes a familiarity with the instrument on the part of the player that has reached the point where technique has become embedded in a subconscious layer which is not repressed but acts as a 'lining' of the consciousness (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) – the invisible behind, not apart from, the visible musician and violin. So, regardless of the instrument, at higher levels of capability (in his example, Merleau-Ponty (2012, p. 146) refers specifically to an 'experienced' organist) such as those expected of a professional musician, mechanical issues will be deemed to have been addressed by individual players to the point where any mention by conductor or superior is rare, directing the focus of all concerned as much as possible toward music making.

Closer inspection also reveals a primordial reversibility between the audible and the tangible in musician-instrument relations that underpins each musician's musical contribution. This is not just about the tangible sensations that I receive through the bow being understood as auditory imperatives, or what I hear from my violin leading to tactile adjustments in both hands, although diary entries from a number of performances suggest that this does indeed happen. Rather, how I physically regulate my sound – through such technical manoeuvres as use of right arm weight and the speed with which the bow is drawn across the violin string – is, in every case, serving musical ends, such as ensuring that my contribution supports the main line in the bassoon part, or that I create a brittle, icy sound as befits Strauss's depiction of a mountain glacier hidden in the predawn darkness.

The reversibility between audible and tangible, mechanical and musical is again shown when we consider in greater detail what happens with the violin bow as the violinist plays.

Without the use of the bow, the player is limited to pizzicato, the technique of plucking the strings. With the bow in hand, to revisit Merleau-Ponty (1964a, p. 163), “the spark is lit” and the full range of the violin’s sound becomes available. The musician’s ‘voice’ is released in another demonstration of reversibility at work, this time manifest in the audible music that flows from the connection between the violinist’s right and left hands as mediated by instrument and bow.

This paper therefore extends Merleau-Ponty’s suggestion that “the example of instrumentalists demonstrates ... how habit resides neither in thought nor in the objective body, but rather in the body as the mediator of a world” (2012, p. 146), by arguing that the body-as-mediator, for the player, includes body *and* instrument and, further, that in orchestral performance this mediation extends beyond the player concerned; it underpins the connection between a musician with their colleagues as, together, they bring the ‘world’ of the music to life.

In discussing the organist in performance, Merleau-Ponty encapsulates the relations between player, instrument and music at an individual level thus:

Between the musical essence of the piece such as it is indicated in the score and the music that actually resonates around the organ, such a direct relationship is established that the body of the organist and the instrument are nothing other than the place of passage of this relation (2012, p. 147).

While performing, the body of the player is intertwined with their instrument in a relationship of reversibility which opens the window onto the lifeworld of orchestral performance – and the music that is its *raison d’être*.

2.8 Conclusion

This paper argues that our understanding of relationality in orchestral performance needs to move beyond the notions of alchemy, magic, hierarchy, and standardization that currently define the territory. Another direction is suggested here, based on an interrogation of the author's own experience during a recent episode rehearsing and performing as an orchestral violinist. By situating this account in the pre-reflective relational space where the tacit meets the primordial, the study has been able to engage with Merleau-Ponty's (1968) thesis of reversibility, whereby that which is sensing can, from the vantage of what it is sensing, be sensed. This has generated implications for theory, method, and practice in regard to the pre-reflective relational substructures on which orchestral work rests.

Extended within broadly autoethnographic contours alongside the descriptive phenomenology of Giorgi (2012), this area of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy underpins the approach to researching lived experience in a highly specialized organizational setting pursued here. By directing attention toward taken for granted ways of working that would otherwise remain hidden, traces of the preconscious relationality of orchestral music-making emerged from the field account, thus allowing key relationships that usually escape attention to be examined in more detail.

Scrutiny of the field material revealed a range of these traces across numerous relationships, not least in the crucial but often overlooked bond between musician and instrument. Analysis of this relationship yielded a number of important and interrelated conclusions. Of these, three stood out. First, the musician-instrument connection is, in a Merleau-Pontian sense, reversible, as the instrument acts on the player as much as the other way around; second, when considered at a preconscious level, this relationship

elevates the artifactual instrument to the status of co-equal actor; and so third, when regarded from another vantage in the music-making context – such as that of a colleague – the instrument and musician assume a unitary quality: they become one ‘body.’ This is perhaps the most important insight that reversibility in the player-instrument connection has to offer a wider discussion of orchestral relationality, as from this it follows that, when making music, I interact with a colleague and their instrument *together*, only separating the two once the performance finishes. This means that the musicians’ *contributions* intertwine in a way which adds up to more than the sum of their discrete parts. The opening of *Eine Alpensinfonie* (Figure 2.3) offers as explicit an example of this as any in the symphony orchestra canon; we can *see* the individual parts coalescing around the bassoon’s descending line in the score as well as *hear* it happening in performance.

Drawing on these conclusions, this paper furthers our understanding of orchestral work by presenting an alternative view of player-instrument relations, reminding us of both their inherent reversibility and their foundational role in orchestral communication and coordination. This, in turn, points to the theoretical and methodological contribution that a combination of Merleau-Ponty (1968), Giorgi (2012) and autoethnography makes toward a holistic understanding of the relational substructures of orchestral music-making. Further possibilities for research then emerge which have the potential to take us beyond the individual musician and their instrument, into relations among colleagues on stage, and out into the wider lifeworld of orchestral performance to include the audience and artifacts such as venues.

2.9 Beyond the orchestra

These ideas also have significance for organizing outside the orchestra. The inherently reversible nature of the relations between the musician and artifacts allows otherwise inanimate entities to be considered as important actors in their own right. At an individual level, this resonates strongly with Weick's (1996) contention that the tools of a particular trade often symbolize wider questions of individual identity and organizational function – transposing Weick (1996) to the orchestral setting, a musician can ask “without my instrument, who am I?” Add in the role of these specialized artifacts in shaping personal contributions and it becomes clear that change in the relationship between worker and the technology they use can have an outsize impact on the mental and physical ‘software’ of organizing – the individual and collective wellbeing of the members of an organization's workforce, and the health of the interwoven relational connectivity that holds an organization together.

Recent events have demonstrated the currency of this position, as the COVID-19 pandemic forces organizations of all kinds to adapt in order to survive (Christakis, 2020). To take one increasingly common example, the success of working from home arrangements depends on an uneasy truce between the productivity of getting more work done and the uncertainty of keeping a job at all; as Hennessey (2021) points out, “if a job can be done remotely, it can also be outsourced.”

How these and other issues are tackled by scholars will be a major challenge as the pandemic runs its course. The later philosophy of Merleau-Ponty is presented by this study as a way forward. Although the focus here has been only one – albeit important – facet of Merleau-Ponty's later inquiry, his work nonetheless emerges from this study as a rich vein

of conceptual possibility, capable of a holistic, spatio-temporal framing of organizational relationality through its accommodation of interconnectivity across the full gamut of individual, group, human, inanimate, past and future. For the orchestra this means extending our gaze out towards colleagues, non-playing actors such as audiences, and artifacts from violins to venues. Beyond the orchestra, it suggests a way of regarding organizations as fabrics of relational connection that evolve from the past, through the present and into the future. As the world adjusts to the ramifications of COVID-19, the need for such inclusive approaches will only become more pressing.

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Chapter 3: Conductors: Silent leadership

3.1 Overview

The previous chapter explored the relationships of player with music score and instrument through the conceptual lens of Merleau-Ponty's (1968) reversibility thesis. This analysis revealed that not only are these relationships continually reversible and foundational to music-making – after all, to leave the page the music needs the players, and orchestral players need the written music to have something to play – it also demonstrated the extent to which, when performing, musician and instrument are considered as a single entity by their colleagues.

The merging of artifact and artist in the minds of fellow performers is central to the subject of the present chapter as, on a Merleau-Pontian account, musician and instrument unite to embody the music and the ideas of the composer that it carries (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 151). A conductor depends on this notion of embodiment to establish their bond with the players with whom they work, as, despite making no sound, they must somehow connect with each individual player while maintaining enough control of the collective cohort to establish the direction of the music-making. And that is only the level of coordination required.

We will encounter this in more detail over the course of Chapters 4 and 5 with Carlos Kleiber and the Concertgebouw Orchestra. This chapter sets the scene for subsequent analysis by tracing the development of the conductor's role through four key figures and their contributions to the *organizing* of orchestral performance: Felix Mendelssohn with his pioneering adoption of the conductor's baton and emphasis on the conductor's role as re-

creator on the composer's behalf; Richard Wagner, through his revolutionary redesign of the orchestra pit and the elevation of the conductor to the status of co-creator alongside the composer; Hans von Bülow for bringing Mendelssohnian rigour and Wagnerian revolution together to fashion the first real virtuoso touring orchestra; and Arthur Nikisch for shaping all this and more into what has been the template, both on and off stage, for professional symphony orchestra conductors ever since. Mendelssohn's deep 'product knowledge,' Wagner's vision, Bülow's uncompromising pursuit of excellence, and the people skills of Nikisch remain benchmarks that speak beyond the orchestra to all organizations.

3.1.1 Publication status

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3.2 Conductors: Silent leadership

The conductor of a symphony orchestra cuts a paradoxical figure. On the one hand, he or she has overall responsibility for coordinating, shaping and inspiring the orchestra's performance, but on the other, the conductor is the one musician on stage who makes no sound, relying entirely on non-verbal communication to direct proceedings. Even in rehearsal, verbal input and instruction is kept to a minimum, focused on the musical point being made. Proficiency as a player, while undoubtedly helpful, is no guarantee of success either. As conductor Leonard Bernstein (1963) notes, myopic focus in the direction of one instrument, because the conductor is skilled in playing it, usually inhibits the inclusive

musical vision a conductor needs, as they work with the entire corpus of musicians in front of them, each with their unique specializations and talents, into a coherent whole.

So where did this most contradictory of performing roles, where the most prominent performer leads the performance yet makes no sound, come from? How does a practitioner of this enigmatic art do what they do? How did the conductor come to occupy – literally – centre stage, with a select few transcending the concert hall to become genuine superstars, enjoying remuneration well beyond the players in front of them and attracting admiration from proletariat to presidents? And, taking a darker turn, and as Norman Lebrecht (1991) analyzes, what was the confluence of circumstances that produced the dictator of the podium whose mixture of tyranny and genius continues, for some, to cast a pall over the orchestra today?

This chapter seeks answers to these questions in the work of four major figures in the evolution of the conductor from time-beater on the fringe to the star at the heart of the symphonic action. Rather than offering a comprehensive survey we opt instead for a selection of conductors whose work continues to inform contemporary approaches. As David has looked back on his forty years as an orchestra player, he has been struck by the profound impact these ‘founding fathers’ have had on the conducting profession, beginning with Mendelssohn and Wagner, and still sees their influence in the music-making of those who work with his orchestra today.

3.3 The beginnings of a conducting profession

Mendelssohn is the beginning because of his declared fidelity to the music, his early championing of the work of other composers, and his pioneering adoption of the baton.

Wagner follows because of his elevation of the conductor to that of a co-creator, charged – in his mind, at least – with channelling the composer’s spirit through musical interpretation. These two composers are also widely regarded as the first modern conductors, and the divergence in their approaches still exemplifies the tension between re-creation and co-creation embedded in the sound world that awaits discovery in the composer’s score (Bernstein, 1963). In the second strand of the discussion we turn to the implications of this debate, and explore three contributions that underpin how the role developed around this central issue to emerge as what we know today.

The power given to the conductor in Wagner’s revolutionary orchestra pit design at Bayreuth; the discipline, astute rehearsal technique and sheer hard work behind Bülow’s transformation of the Meiningen court orchestra; and, finally, the work of Arthur Nikisch – who, more than any other, finally established orchestral conducting as a *bona fide* musical ‘day job’ – all advanced the cause of a position that has come to embody the orchestral enterprise. In an era that saw vast changes in society as well as symphony orchestras, that role also came for many to represent power, its exercise, and its abuse (Canetti, 1962; Lebrecht, 1991; Mauceri, 2017).

As the nineteenth century unfolded, it was becoming clear that the orchestra that had served Haydn and Mozart so well was struggling to deal with the implications of Beethoven’s legacy. While Schumann, Brahms and Mendelssohn chose for the most part to stay within the formal confines of the orchestral and musical structures of the late eighteenth century, Berlioz, Verdi and Wagner led those who instead saw such constraints as limitations to be overcome through new sounds, new expressive possibilities, and larger forces (Grout, 1980). Virtuosi such as Paganini and Liszt were also giving composers much to

think about as they took their instruments into previously uncharted territory, and together these developments focused orchestral coordination on a single, centrally located authority – the conductor – who could both prepare the orchestra and, increasingly, interpret the musical score.

Seen in this light, early innovations such as Carl Maria von Weber's (1786–1826) revision of orchestral seating which situated the stringed instruments at the front of the stage and the brass at the back, and Felix Mendelssohn's decision to permanently adopt the baton while conducting, assume both musical and organizational dimensions; Weber's plan is still employed as the most efficient arrangement for achieving tonal balance between the various sections of the orchestra, while the baton is the most effective visual and gestural aid for the precise coordination of larger orchestral forces remaining in common use.

3.4 Mendelssohn (1809 – 1847)

Mendelssohn starts our narrative because, driven by a strong interest in presenting the music of others and insisting on a high level of precision in rehearsal, in his hands the conductor's role moved from beating time on the side-lines to playing a central part in shaping orchestral performance (Bernstein, 1963). Today Mendelssohn is remembered mainly as a composer and pianist who, after a prodigious start, later became a bastion of musical conservatism; this has, in turn, often led to him being cast as something of a historical footnote who never achieved real greatness. Consequently, his work on the podium is often overlooked in favour of more extrovert practitioners such as Berlioz and Wagner, whose ideas on conducting have also survived because they – unlike Mendelssohn – committed their thoughts on the subject to print.

Neglect of Mendelssohn the conductor lacks justification. Closer scrutiny reveals him to have been pivotal in the evolution of the profession; right from the employment contract that he signed when taking over at the helm of Leipzig's city orchestra, he broke with tradition and began to stake out a space in creative and civic leadership for the conductors of the future. Until then, artistic directors had, for the most part (with perhaps the most well-known example being Haydn at the Esterházy court), depended on royal patronage with regular composing for employment. Mendelssohn forged a new direction by negotiating his working conditions – which do not seem to have included much composing – through a lawyer directly with the Leipzig Town Council (Tovey, 2003). These apparently prosaic contractual arrangements were to have profound organizational and artistic consequences, as this employment model established a precedent that conductors still follow, although today agents rather than lawyers do the negotiating unless circumstances surrounding the deal turn from tuneful to toxic.

Artistically, the greatest significance of his contractual setup lay in the freedom it gave Mendelssohn to program the work of other composers, instead of having to write most of the music performed by the orchestra himself à la Bach or Haydn. Among other achievements, he resurrected Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and edited works by Handel, while in his time with the Gewandhaus orchestra as their Music Director he introduced works by Schumann and Berlioz, led benchmark performances of Beethoven's symphonies and premiered Schubert's 9th symphony. It is here, in his textually driven engagement with the work of other composers, that we see an approach to orchestral performance which resonates to this day. Almost 200 years later, in his obituary in the *New York Times* for the late conductor Carlos Kleiber, Harvey Sachs (2004) suggested that "if one were to reduce

[Kleiber's] quest to a question, it would be: 'What is this work?,' not 'What can I do with this work?'" The same could be said of Mendelssohn, as without his insistence on fidelity to the musical text and greater precision in rehearsal, combined with his efforts to improve playing standards through education and attention to player welfare, the technical and musical challenges presented later in the nineteenth century by Wagner, Richard Strauss and Mahler would, for most orchestras, have remained out of reach.

3.5 Wagner (1813 – 1883)

But for some, this single-minded devotion to markings in the score represented both an unwelcome restriction and a fundamental misconception of what performance should be about. The charismatic Richard Wagner (1813–1883), who remains to this day a figure both revered and reviled (Callow, 2017), instead saw those same instructions as an interpretive starting point for the expression of the conductor's creative will and Mendelssohn's approach, on the contrary, as an artistic straightjacket, although in many ways this simply reflects the chalk-and-cheese contrast between their respective personalities.

The divergence between the two is clear in their respective composing styles. Compare, for instance, the opening of Mendelssohn's *Italian Symphony* Op. 90 and its almost Mozartian elegance and lightness of touch with the volcanic intensity achieved by Wagner in the prelude to his opera *Tristan und Isolde*. After that, it comes as no surprise to learn that Wagner disagreed with nearly everything that Mendelssohn stood for. It is also worth remembering that their differing views on conducting gave voice to the constantly simmering tension between textual fidelity and interpretation that confronts a conductor at each performance they lead. Bernstein (1963) characterizes these two musical poles as the elegant, or Apollonian, and the passionate, or Dionysian, and he also rightly points out that

every performance needs elements of both if the extremes of “dry as dust” precision and the “simple distortion” of over-the-top passion are to be avoided (p. 122).

The debate between creation and recreation crystallized in the area of tempo – not just the speed indicated by the composer, but also in the way the conductor uses tempo to reveal the shape and structure that holds the music together. For Wagner, “true tempo is based upon a stylistic understanding and a certain intuitive feel for the essence of the melody which [he] called *melos*” and, as a result, “if you understand the spirit of the piece you will instinctively pick the correct tempo.” So far so good, but Wagner then takes the idea one step further, maintaining that “the character [of the melody] changes through the course of a movement” and, whether it is shown in the score, “the tempo should respond to these changes” (Bowen, 1993, pp. 86–87). This was the genesis of his principle of tempo modulation, an idea which gives the performer space to alter speeds in search of what he or she holds to be the essential spirit and fundamental structure of the music, even though the composer may not have indicated any such thing.

Bowen suggests that while Wagner himself produced patchy results with this newfound interpretive license, some of his acolytes (including Bülow, Nikisch and Furtwängler, all of whom we meet shortly) had considerable success with it. The controversy surrounding the idea remains alive today, as many of these Wagnerian tempo modifications, ossified in orchestral tradition and often based on error-ridden scores, are challenged by contemporary performers equipped with up to date editions and trained in historically aware performance practice.

The differing approaches of Wagner and Mendelssohn remain symptomatic of the deeper tension between interpretive creation and textual re-creation – and the antipathy that

tension can generate – that threads its way through the history of conducting. Perhaps the most celebrated example of this comes in the diametrically opposed approaches to the opening of Beethoven's 9th Symphony Op. 125 pursued by arguably the two greatest conductors of the mid-twentieth century – Wilhelm Furtwängler and Arturo Toscanini.

According to orchestral legend, Furtwängler once walked out of a performance of the 9th led by Toscanini in response to the rhythmic accuracy and clarity of the sextuplets played by the second violin and cello sections at the beginning of the piece. In Furtwängler's view these notes should instead have been veiled in something akin to a musical mist from which the thematic fragment in the first violins and double basses would only haltingly appear, so for him, Toscanini's strict interpretation constituted a fundamental violation of the spirit of the music. Although Toscanini structured his approach around the inherent power of inexorable rhythmic drive while Furtwängler drew on his unparalleled mastery of tempo modulation and Wagnerian *melos*, it should be noted that both men, in their own unique ways, produced extraordinary performances of this symphony. Nonetheless, the controversy – though much-diminished – remains, so knowing this, when recently leading the second violin section of his orchestra, David made a point of asking the conductor whether he wanted these sextuplets played à la Toscanini or in the style of Furtwängler. And the conductor knew exactly what the issues were that lay behind the question.

3.6 Seating plans

Another great leap in the 'software' of orchestral conducting came out of practical improvements to performing 'hardware' and, in particular, "the nineteenth century solution to the annoyance of having an orchestra ... intruding on a clear view of the stage" (Mauceri, 2017, p. 28).

Opera had long been an important form of entertainment for European audiences, and opera companies staging operas needed orchestras. But as Mauceri points out, until the mid-nineteenth century these orchestras, seated in front of the stage, tended to get in the way, obscuring the view and interrupting the action. Various alterations of the floor in front of the stage, intended to accommodate the orchestra while improving lines of sight for the audience, had partly addressed the issue, but it was the revolutionary design of the orchestra pit built in the 1870s for Wagner’s new opera house at Bayreuth (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2) that finally solved the problem while, at the same time, “all but ensur[ing] the necessity of having a conductor” (Mauceri, 2017, p. 28). In this arrangement, the conductor is centrally located and, though unseen by the audience, is also the only performer visible to both the singers on stage and the players in the pit (Thielemann, 2015). As a result, “the only person who could manage the process of performing the music was a single man, seated at a large desk” (Mauceri, 2017, p. 29).

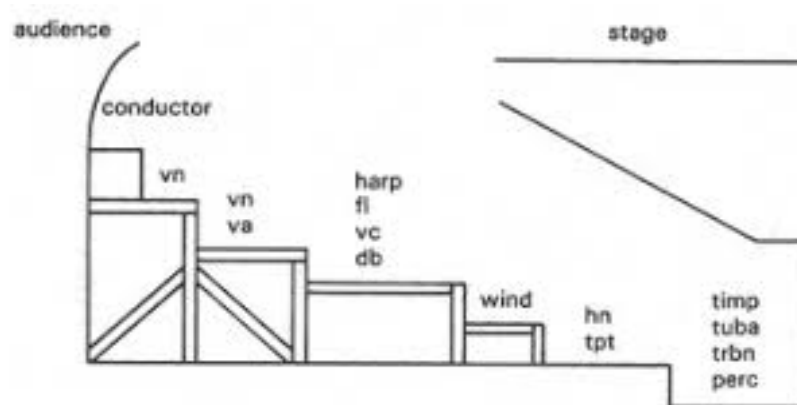


Figure 3.1 Bayreuth Festspielhaus orchestra pit, cross-section I (Shelton, 2019)

On top of any viewing considerations, this had the obvious effect of concentrating an unprecedented level of power in one individual, as this combination of clout and control gave the conductor a degree of influence over the performers, and the performance, well

beyond anything that had previously been possible. The Information Booklet that accompanied the 2017 Bayreuth Festival notes:

The *Festspielhaus* features a double proscenium, which gives the audience the illusion that the stage is further away than it actually is. The double proscenium and the recessed orchestra pit create – in Wagner’s term – a ‘mystic gulf’ between the audience and the stage (Richard Wagner Society, 2016, p. 18).

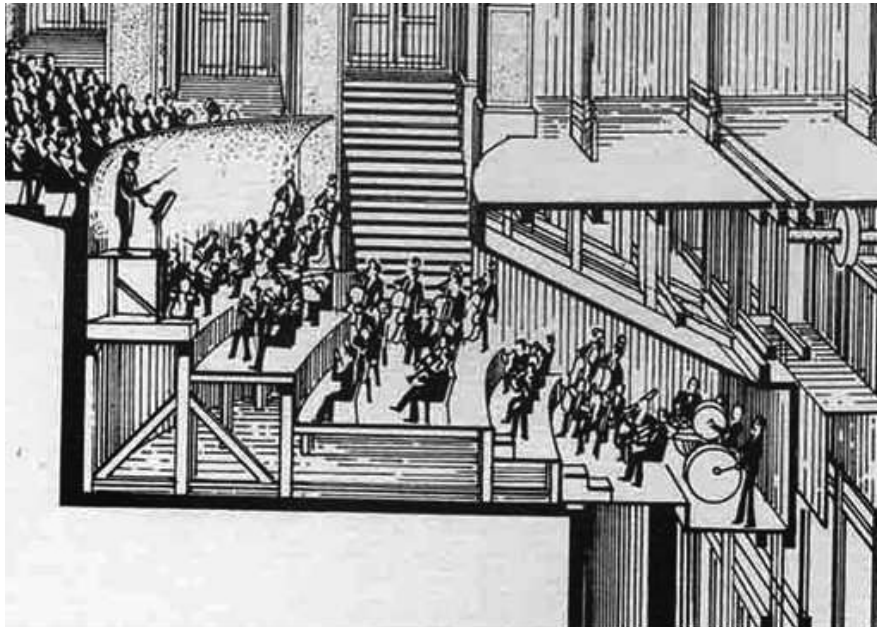


Figure 3.2 Bayreuth Festspielhaus orchestra pit, cross-section II (de Moor, 2015)

So, on August 13, 1876, when Hans Richter ascended the rostrum at the newly opened Bayreuth Festspielhaus to begin the much-anticipated première performance of Wagner’s Ring cycle, he not only introduced the musical world to an operatic game changer, but he also embodied – for perhaps the first time – the status and authority acquired by the conductor in the modern orchestral era. Conducting as a profession had finally arrived, with the maestro firmly established as the preeminent figure in orchestral performance and, for audience and performer alike, offering a direct link to the composer.

Yet despite the relative extremes espoused by Mendelssohn, Wagner and their adherents, a number of leading musicians of the time recognized the merits of both standpoints and

actively championed music from both camps. A few conductors also sought to bring the power of Wagner's opera pit to the concert stage and so developed their own styles accordingly. With the august figure of Franz Liszt acting in the background as both mentor and referee, this group was led by Hans von Bülow (1830–1894), arguably “the first professional conductor” (Lebrecht, 1991, p. 16), and unquestionably one of the great all-round performers of the era.

3.7 Bülow (1830 – 1894)

As a conductor, Bülow managed to bridge the gulf between *melos* and metronome, premièring both Wagner's *Tristan* and Brahms' 4th Symphony while also, as one of the foremost pianists of his day, rescuing Tchaikovsky's 1st Piano Concerto (Lebrecht, 1991), championing the solo piano works of Liszt and giving the first complete cycle of Beethoven's piano sonatas. Furthermore,

Bülow was at that time considered the foremost conductor of Germany. He had taken a little mediocre orchestra of fifty, belonging to the Grand Duke of Meiningen, and through his supreme genius had galvanized it into a marvellous instrument. Under his guidance this little orchestra had created a sensation all over Germany and Austria and a special *tour de force* was their playing of certain symphonies entirely by heart, without any music before them (Damrosch, 1927, p. 281).

This remains quite an achievement, especially given the modest level of the orchestra at the time of Bülow's arrival in Meiningen in 1880. Once there, Bülow immediately set to work. As the Meiningen Opera had been closed some years earlier, the orchestra had sufficient resources at its disposal to focus exclusively on instrumental music. This was in itself a rarity and had the added benefit of ensuring that the players were not overworked from the start. Bülow increased the size of the orchestra from thirty-six to forty-eight – taking care to raise standards by including several 1876 *Ring* cycle alumni as well as a number of musicians who,

like him, were graduates of Mendelssohn's Leipzig Conservatoire – and he did not hesitate to use such recent innovations as the five string double bass and the pedal timpani where these could be used to improve intonation and enrich the sound. He also engaged in the judicious use of re-orchestration, such as having half a string section play *legato* and sustained while the other half played the same material with a detached bow stroke, or having the timpani play the double bass line in order to support that line and intensify the orchestral effect being sought. In Bülow's eyes this tactic, based on Wagner's example, was simply a case of doing what Beethoven (for instance) would have done had the players and technology been available to him (Damrosch, 1927).

With all the resources in place, Bülow then drilled each section alone in the course of numerous sectional rehearsals (for example, violins alone, violas alone and so on, then recombined as strings alone and rehearsing before adding the rest of the orchestra) until the players were able to react seamlessly both individually *and collectively* to his direction. It should also be remembered that the level of virtuosity he demanded from the orchestra was no less than what he demanded of himself and that there was no secret to the 'Meiningen Principles' as he himself called them (Walker, 2010).

Artistic excellence, for Bülow, was not something miraculous but rather was attained through the single-minded, unrelenting pursuit of perfection and hard work in the course of extensive rehearsals. That said, it was the process, as much as the result, of turning this mediocre band into an orchestra capable of delivering Beethoven symphonies from memory that was responsible for turning heads, and Bülow was determined that this recognition be as wide as possible.

Supported by the Bülow name and having the newly transnational European rail network available, the Meiningen Orchestra became the first orchestra to tour across Europe, and throughout the early 1880s, they advanced Bülow's methods and message while spreading the experience of what an orchestra *could* be from Hungary to the Netherlands. After Meiningen, Bülow was lured to Berlin where he achieved similar results, putting the Berlin Philharmonic in the prime position on the musical map that it has held ever since (Lebrecht, 1991; Mauceri, 2017; Walker, 2010), but it is in his earlier work in Meiningen, creating a virtuoso orchestra from almost nothing, that he showed what one person with the requisite ability and perseverance could do.

But conducting was not yet considered a viable stand-alone profession. Leading exponents were either composers or – as in Bülow's case – instrumentalists, and almost without exception, also depended on some form of patronage to survive. This was about to change. Orchestral music was catching up with the performance-related developments coming out of Leipzig, Bayreuth and Meiningen as the symphonic writing of Berlioz and the operas of Wagner and Verdi paved the way for the even more orchestrally complex music of Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler. This in turn placed ever increasing demands on orchestral coordination and playing technique, and orchestras were expanding in size and improving in skill in order to cope with these extra demands. The pressure to combine textual fidelity and interpretive flexibility in a single, centrally situated musician with the authority and ability to 'run the ship' (Bernstein, 1963; Mauceri, 2017) had now become acute, and two more alumni of Wagner's 1876 *Ring* cycle stepped up to fill the gap.

3.8 Nikisch (1855 – 1922)

Arthur Nikisch (1855–1922) and his rival Hans Richter (1843–1916) are usually considered together as the first of a new breed of “career conductors ... who, for the first time in musical history, could make a living simply by working with orchestras” (Service, 2012, p. 6).

Artistic director in Leipzig and Bülow’s successor in Berlin, Nikisch is generally regarded as the first truly international maestro who, no longer being dependent on composing or playing to supplement his income, was able from the podium alone to dazzle orchestras and audiences from Boston to Budapest (Botstein, 2003, p. 286). Also, in contrast to Richter, he inspired successors from Boult to Toscanini, either directly through teaching in class or, less formally, by encouraging students to attend rehearsals and generously giving advice whenever it was sought (Bowen & Holden, 2003; Wood, 1938).

In Berlin, Nikisch beat Richard Strauss in the race to succeed Bülow, while in Leipzig he kept the ambitious Gustav Mahler firmly in his position as deputy (Lebrecht, 1991), thereby establishing the supremacy of the specialist *maestro* over the composer-conductor in the push to dominate the podium. Richter, meanwhile, after leading the première of the *Ring* cycle in 1876, had bailed out the ailing Wagner by taking over direction of the latter’s 1877 London concerts. This led to Richter’s becoming a fixture in English musical life for the next thirty years (Lebrecht, 1991). Both played orchestral instruments to a very high level; Richter, competent on everything from trumpet to timpani, excelled on the French horn, while Nikisch was an excellent violinist, finagling his way into the first violin section of the 1872 performance of Beethoven’s 9th Symphony (led by Wagner himself) that marked the laying of the foundation stone of the Bayreuth *Festspielhaus* and, four years later, repeating

the feat for the inaugural *Ring* cycle (conducted by none other than his future rival, Richter) performed to mark the theatre's completion.

But Nikisch was to make a contribution and establish a legacy beyond that of Richter, bringing together the technical, musical and managerial components of modern conducting in a way that has continued to provide a compelling template for those who have followed. It is this occupational synthesis, combined with his encouragement of younger talent and fearless tackling of new music that has had such a lasting influence. How did he do it? What are some of the key characteristics and techniques that made him a cult figure to students, players, and audience alike?

A brief film from 1913, available on YouTube, gives us some important clues (YouTube, 2015). While this film is silent, we see Nikisch scrupulously keeping his baton moving through the zone around eye level, thereby ensuring that in order to get information from his stick and hands, players must also look directly at his eyes. Doing this greatly increases the chances of direct two-way communication between podium and player, personalizing and intensifying the interaction in a way that bodily gestures alone cannot (Gilling, 2014). Here he also uses the baton to provide a link between his eyes and other gestures; “the top of his baton became an extension of those remarkable eyes, hypnotizing the players with its slightest tremor as he stood almost motionless on the rostrum” (Lebrecht, 1991, p. 32). Nikisch constantly exhorted his students to “use their eyes” (Mauceri, 2017, p. 70) and he made a point of capturing the attention of his musicians through visual contact. As one player in the London Symphony Orchestra said, “he simply *looked* at us, often scarcely moving his baton, and we played as those possessed” (Jacobson, 1979, p. 12). ‘Mesmerizing’

and 'hypnotic' are two descriptors that keep recurring whenever Nikisch is referred to, and the way he is using his eyes in the film certainly reinforces this.

But Nikisch also seems to have had in abundance something that is far harder to demonstrate; leadership ability and what might now be called 'people skills.' This is not just about the kind of authoritarian leadership wielded by Bülow, where a virtuoso's ability, a sharp wit, and an acid tongue ('keep the score in your head, not your head in the score' being one of his many acidulous aphorisms) were combined with a prodigious appetite for rehearsal to frighten his musicians into playing out of their skins. Nikisch's approach was altogether different, being much gentler, and dependent on his ability to size up the group in front of him and then use indirect persuasion as much as explicit dictation to direct and enthuse his players. Observers – his fellow conductors among them – tried and failed to pin down his secret; "our orchestra suddenly seemed transformed ... We could none of us understand how Nikisch, with a single rehearsal, could draw from them such beauty of sound and such ecstatic depth of feeling" (Erich Kleiber, quoted in Barber, 2011, p. 10).

In Cologne, Nikisch once declared before starting work that it was his life's dream to conduct "this famous orchestra", while if late for rehearsal in Leipzig, he would make a gold coin donation to the musicians' pension fund (Lebrecht, 1991, p. 33). Tricks such as these – memorizing players' names and quirks, judiciously using praise and flattery, and showing appreciation through small but meaningful gestures – could easily have been dismissed by wary orchestral players as little more than sycophantic bribery. But when used this shrewdly, they can actually do one of the hardest parts of the conductor's job for him or her and establish a working rapport with the orchestra before a note is played. Nikisch's well-calibrated approach carried over into active rehearsal, although his instruction to players

after rehearsing a particular passage to “now play as *you* feel it” could, once again, have easily backfired and induced chaos. Instead, when played for a second time, “*there was something of Nikisch in every note of it*” (Wood, 1938, p. 211, emphases in the original).

Appearing to cede artistic authority to an orchestral musician in this way is risky for any conductor and especially one who is even slightly unsure of their ground. That Nikisch was able to successfully incorporate such a move into his routine working methods and empower players by entrusting them with at least some artistic freedom, speaks volumes for both his technical skills and his ability to instil confidence in others. All of this was doubly important, as his short physical stature could easily have made him a target of derision rather than adulation and turned his famous charisma into mere pomposity; instead, as one player put it, “when he stood on the podium he would grow before our eyes into an enormous, titanic figure” (Lebrecht, 1991, p. 32).

This focus on the informal and the tacit in orchestral conducting was a feature of Nikisch’s work that became widely emulated as orchestras proliferated and commercial imperatives intensified. So too was the balance between efficiency and effectiveness he achieved in rehearsal; Bülow’s approach may have yielded stunning results, but the number of rehearsals required to achieve his vision placed unsustainable pressures on activity and programming. Rehearsing is also a notoriously fickle activity, as there is always a point at which returns diminish and things begin to deteriorate rather than improve, and that point can be reached for any number of reasons.

Nikisch’s standard rehearsal practice on first meeting an orchestra – “straight through a movement, and then come back on three or four points” (Boult, cited in Jacobson, 1979, p. 191) – gave him the opportunity to assess the level of the orchestra, decide how much

rehearsal was needed and how detailed it had to be, and so minimize time wastage. “He had a positive genius for immediately centring on the salient points of a work and clarifying them; and doing it with a minimum of effort” (Schonberg, 1988, p. 153). This ‘genius’ was undoubtedly due at least in part to the kind of textual knowledge that can only come from a detailed study of the music beforehand. While Nikisch’s interpretive style may have been steeped in Wagnerian *melos*, his understanding of the score suggests the depth of a Mendelssohn in his appreciation of the musical text.

Nikisch’s international fame thus emerges not as a fluke, but rather as the result of talent being parlayed into a successful career through a clear understanding and astute application of what was needed to excel in the profession. Equally importantly, he had the fortitude and perseverance necessary to back it all up. His recorded legacy, which includes the first complete recording of Beethoven’s 5th Symphony, was produced under primitive conditions that make it an unreliable guide to his ability; the true proof of his stature lies, rather, in the universal recognition among players, audience and – almost uniquely – his fellow practitioners, of his special status which, in turn, made him the conducting profession’s first real star. “Nikisch lifted the conductor out of the podium and set him on a pedestal in the centre of society. He liberated the music director from local servitude” (Lebrecht, 1991, p. 41), forging a truly international career which spanned, at various times, directorships with the Berlin Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Boston Symphony and London Symphony orchestras, and heightened the standards and prestige of each institution. Perhaps less auspiciously, his fees also eclipsed those of his rivals by a considerable margin, but his contemporaries do not seem to have considered him overpaid. “Nikisch was not necessarily greedy, but he knew his worth and never undersold himself ... with Nikisch real money

entered the maestro mystique” (Lebrecht, 1991, p. 42). This, too, would make its mark on his successors.

3.9 Implications for contemporary leaders

In this brief survey of modern conducting, we have traced its development from genesis to fruition through the pivotal contributions of four key individuals. Mendelssohn’s fidelity to the text and his outward turn toward the music of other composers in his programs; Wagner’s move to interpretive co-creation and the power relations derived from his revolutionary orchestra pit design; Bülow’s intellectual and musical rigor in rehearsal and performance; and Nikisch’s embodiment of all this as the first career maestro remain central to orchestral work. These four continue to influence how symphonic music is made and why it survives; historically informed performance practice is now a mainstream concern, and productive rehearsals are universally accepted as an essential ingredient of successful performances. And just as Bülow and Nikisch confronted the performing challenges of their era by striking a balance between Mendelssohnian re-creation and Wagnerian co-creation, so too the future of the symphony orchestra depends on the continuing recognition that, for conductor and player alike, it all starts with the composer’s score and how the performers tell its story.

Our brief look back at the rise of the conductor as focal to the orchestra, and of four pivotal figures, now brings us to the present. For, if we take seriously Peter Drucker’s (1993) exhortation that managers of the future will take on the guise of a conductor, then our discussion of these historical figures offers insights into how Drucker’s vision might be realized. As we have summarized here, the relationship between conductor and musicians is fundamentally important to excellent performance. Thus, the conductor must have the

technique to offer precise gestural instruction to the musicians while at the same time inspiring the players to render the music artfully.

In the orchestra the three elements of composer, musicians and conductor come together to produce the whole. Our discussion of Mendelssohn and Wagner is instructive because they point to the leader's task of being faithful to the purpose of the enterprise (by analogy, realizing the composer's sound world as captured in the written score) and of helping the musicians bring their best efforts to their playing (by analogy, motivating staff to achieve extraordinary work), as did Nikisch who consistently engaged with musicians with his gestures on and off the podium.

The learnings, therefore, for organizations and leaders are immense, and here we pick out several salient ideas that inform contemporary leadership practice. Firstly, the score is a symbolic encapsulation of the work of a living, breathing person, and all successful conductors immerse themselves fully in the lifeworld of the composer and the written text before they lift the baton. By analogy, it is the vision and purpose of the organization that is preeminent, rather than any one person's charisma or charm.

Secondly, and perhaps obviously, our four historical figures each had the same objective: to thoroughly understand the score and then to enable the musicians themselves to perform it excellently. While several of our contemporary leadership theories, such as transformational (Judge & Bono, 2000) and authentic (George, Sims, McLean, & Mayer, 2007), for example, focus on the person the leader, the conductor's role is of a completely different order. The conductor is totally dependent on the orchestra to bring music to life, and their role is to enable performance. Conductors necessarily must be absorbed in the 'other'; the players performing the score and, above all, the music and its composer.

Thirdly, the four historical figures demonstrate that there are multiple ways of enabling orchestras to excel. Yet within these differences, the physical body is forever the common factor. Musicians respond with their bodies to gestures made by the conductor's body. Leaders can learn, therefore, that the closer they are physically to the action of the organization, the more effective will be their leading. Leadership scholar Keith Grint (2012) notes that today's leaders are often physically divorced from the people they are leading, sometimes holed up in an office suite – colloquialized as the C-Suite – and removed from the warp and weft of their enterprise. Conductors show otherwise and display the importance of being physically with staff.

Fourthly, because leaders are often 'out of touch', they are consequently unaware of what is happening on the ground in their organizations. The conductor–musician relationship forged by the historical figures, and Nikisch in particular, demonstrates the importance of the 'interval' or the 'space between' the musicians and their conductor. The interval is the fundamental element of musical harmony and melody, as important as the interval between the wheel and axle. For, as McLuhan and McLuhan (1988) suggest, in drawing on the wheel–axle analogy, "figure and ground are in dynamic equilibrium, each exerting pressure on the other across the interval separating them. Intervals, therefore, are resonant and not static" (p. 6).

Thus, the conductor and musicians are in continuous dialogue, in the quest for the essence of the music. To this end, Bathurst and Chrystall (2019) note:

Dialogue, as with touch, is constituted by the gap or interval and the interplay between two, rather than connection and a collapse into a relationship of identity. McLuhan illustrated the principle via his reflections on the wheel and the axle. Without the gap and play, there would be seizure and dysfunction. When the gap or interval between participants in dialogue either becomes too close or too distant,

the dialogue breaks down and/or becomes something else (e.g., a debate or merely an exchange). But when the interval is just right, the 'magic' can happen (p. 2).

In sum, the traditions established by Mendelssohn and Wagner, then realized through Bülow and Nikisch are of profound importance to contemporary leaders, in their quest to behave more like the conductor-manager of Drucker's vision. Being present to the moment, having a deep understanding of the business they are in is analogous to a conductor's absorption of the score, and drawing the best out of staff dialogically, are all elements that bring an enterprise to life.

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Chapter 4: Kleiber and the Concertgebouw (Part 1)

4.1 Overview

In the previous chapter, the development of symphony orchestra conducting was charted through four pivotal contributors. This chapter takes the relational connection suggested by Mendelssohn's baton, the centralizing of control derived from Wagner's pit design, Bülow's work ethic and Nikisch's way of working with his players and brings these ideas together in the example of Carlos Kleiber, voted by his peers as the greatest conductor of all time (Wray, 2011), and his performance of Beethoven's 7th Symphony with the Concertgebouw Orchestra (YouTube, 2012). Kleiber himself would have excoriated the very idea of such a vote (Barber, 2011), but, even though it is classic 'clickbait,' the poll nonetheless gives an indication of the regard in which he was held by his peers.

Closer analysis of the Concertgebouw film reveals Kleiber constantly seeking to refresh and reshape the relational space between himself and the players, treating the performance as voyage of discovery as much as a product of the many hours of rehearsal for which, à la Bülow, he was notorious (Barber, 2011). He does this by employing a gestural vocabulary which remains unique, using an array of movements that from anyone else would have sparked chaos and confusion. In Kleiber and his working methods, we see traces of the legacy of Nikisch, as he forges a bond with the musicians of the Concertgebouw that redirects the power that began with Wagner's orchestra pit (it is also worth noting that Kleiber was also a great opera conductor) into the space between conductor and players. This leads to what is possibly the most Nikisch-like feature of all, as Kleiber recalibrates the conductor-player relationship by sharing that power with the orchestra; by ceasing to beat, as he often does, he is daring the players to look past the podium and trust each other.

This chapter is firstly an introduction to the work of this extraordinary but elusive musician, interpreted through Merleau-Ponty's approach to time, space and body. Secondly, it is intended as preparation for the more detailed analysis offered in Chapter 5, in which the reversibility construct and the uniquely Merleau-Pontian idea of *écart*, or gap subtended by connection, are introduced. These ideas offer a way of understanding how Kleiber's way of working and his uniquely personal use of gesture encourages the orchestra to join him in achieving the results we observe in the Concertgebouw performance.

4.1.1 Publication status

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4.2 Kleiber and the Concertgebouw

In this chapter we take a closer look at conducting by exploring Carlos Kleiber (1930–2004), a reclusive figure who was universally respected by musicians and his conductor peers for his ability to draw exceptional performances from the orchestras he worked with. In particular, the 1983 performance of Beethoven's 7th Symphony by Carlos Kleiber and the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam (YouTube, 2012) is a stunning achievement on many levels. The orchestra's playing is superb, Kleiber is clearly at the height of his considerable powers, and the rapport between conductor and players is obvious. Before reading further, we advise readers to pause and watch the performance of the 7th Symphony.

Part way into the fourth and last movement of the symphony (timecode 1:07.05) Kleiber does something which seems completely counterintuitive: he stops beating altogether. In a clear example of non-action inspiring action, instead of grinding to an unceremonious halt, the intensity of the music-making continues to build throughout the passage and a few bars later reaches even greater heights when Kleiber re-enters the fray.

So why don't the musicians stop playing when Kleiber stops conducting? We orchestra players are, after all, expected to follow the conductor at all times. Also, since the musicians continue to play, why doesn't the performance just fall apart when the beat stops? And, even if neither of these two alternatives eventuates, why at the very least doesn't the drive and intensity – two signal features of this performance – begin to flag when the person in charge seems to slip into what looks like musical cruise control?

The answers to these questions lie not just in the obvious abilities of the individuals giving this performance, but also in the bond between them – “the titanic power of *orchestra*” (Mauceri, 2017, p. 133, emphasis in the original) – that comes from the mutual trust, respect and empathy developed between conductor and orchestra during their shared journey through Beethoven's epic composition. There is also a striking reversibility in the interaction, as when Kleiber stops conducting he begins, like a human dynamo, to absorb the energy generated by the orchestra in order to release it at the climax a few bars later. This compelling rhythmic drive is in turn grounded in Beethoven's work and the shared vision of the music, led by Kleiber but with contributions from everyone on stage, that began with the first rehearsal and clearly continues to grow during the concert itself. “[Kleiber] is leading the players to a conception, rather than simply giving a beat to follow,” as one colleague put it (Jonas, quoted in Walsh & Spelman, 1983, p. 12), while at the same

time he is trusting those players to engage with him in that endeavour. This emancipating reciprocity is a key source of the energy that drives this performance and nurtures the collective relational tissue that holds it together.

While performing, players and conductors are often so absorbed in the musical moment that they are no longer aware of how they are acting on each other, but Kleiber added an extra dimension of artistic liberation to that involvement. The internationally renowned New York cellist James Kreger in his reflections on playing at the Metropolitan Opera under Kleiber's baton wrote: "when Carlos Kleiber is conducting and we are playing in his orchestra, we don't feel as if a conductor is inflicting his will upon us, which is usually the case. Rather it is as if we feel exactly the way *he* does about the music" (Kreger, 2014, emphasis added). Kleiber was adamant that he did not know how he did this, once writing that any orchestra he conducted had to be "a group that will play nicely any old how – I mean, sort of in spite of me, kinda. If anything, I'm good at not getting in the way, mostly" (Kleiber, quoted in Barber, 2011, p. 183).

So, unpacking and interrogating a connection of this complexity is a tricky exercise even though musicians on both sides of the podium can feel its presence and its absence.

Unfortunately, putting this bond into words is something altogether different, as Kleiber himself makes clear; "no one on earth can tell you anything accurate or intelligent about conductors or conducting, least of all musicians, critics, and ... CONDUCTORS, including yours sincerely" (Kleiber, quoted in Barber, 2011, p. 232). Nor can such a relationship be taken for granted, as the conductor who 'clicks' with one orchestra may lose the battle by the time he or she says 'good morning' to the next one. But if description is difficult, then analysis is even more so, as small movements that nonetheless carry great importance are

often invisible to external observers, although thanks to the number of his performances captured on film, including the all-Beethoven concert discussed here, Kleiber has left us with a wealth of material to scrutinize.

Kleiber's work on the podium has been used by observers to interrogate various aspects of orchestral performance. Barber, in the course of his 2011 compilation of his voluminous correspondence with Kleiber, and Carolyn Watson (2012), in her study of Kleiber's interpretation of Johann Strauss's overture to *Die Fledermaus*, offer a conductor's perspective on how Kleiber's unique gestural language worked its magic on orchestras on both sides of the Atlantic, while Kreger's (2014) blog post gives an orchestral musician's viewpoint which complements both Barber and Watson. Talgam (2015) discusses Kleiber's work as a contribution to the study of organizational leadership and Moshhammer (2016) heads down the empirical route, analyzing Kleiber's vocalizations in rehearsal to examine the acoustical properties of musical motion and expressivity. In what follows we take a different path and draw on the later work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), to go beyond the transactional dualism that frames most attempts at unpacking a conductor-player narrative and instead give a more holistic 'musician's-eye' account of the intertwined, interdependent and, to use a Merleau-Pontian phrase, intercorporeal relationship between maestro and musician.

This standpoint not only offers a path through some difficult conceptual terrain; it also helps us to comprehend Kleiber's *sui generis* gifts, and why he is still revered by those who worked with him (Barber, 2011; Kreger, 2014). Take, for example, the age-old problem of balancing responsibility and authority. Kleiber's solution was to give his musicians a "sphere of autonomous control", so that he could then take full control "not over his players but

over the space into which they fed their individual contributions” by using his body “to portray the qualities of that space” (Talgam, 2015, p. 165). The importance of what Kleiber did here begins to become apparent when considered through a Merleau-Pontian lens:

Our body, far from being a source of limitation, figures the very opening to the world. We are *of* the world, [Merleau-Ponty] insists. ‘The thickness of the body, far from rivalling that of the world, is on the contrary the sole means I have to go unto the heart of the things’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 135). Our hands that reach out to grasp what seems outside of us are themselves touched; our seeing of what is *there*, before us, is itself seen – is itself immersed in the visible. There is an intertwining between our senses and the world that they display (Wiskus, 2018, p. 130, emphases in the original).

This goes beyond the touching hand being tangible and me being visible to the colleague that I see; in orchestral performance for each player there is also a synesthetic intertwining between visible score and audible music (Wigglesworth, 2018). This quality pervades Kleiber’s music making, but again with an extra dimension; the ‘world’ is the sound world emerging from the composer’s written score, and Kleiber is ‘hearing’ not just a single line but the entire score in his head before conducting it (Barber, 2011). The bodily gestures Kleiber employs are therefore a physical manifestation of what Merleau-Ponty is writing about – using his body like this is, for Kleiber, the way into ‘the heart of things’. He famously expected the same focus from his players and made it clear that he would know if it wasn’t there; “if there is one thing I can hear, it’s whether the people playing are listening to each other” (Kleiber, quoted in Talgam, 2015, p. 162), again ensuring that all the players understood that everyone’s contribution was to be valued. Given the intensity of Kleiber’s approach, it is no surprise that his rehearsals and concerts made extreme musical and physical demands on all the participants; “with Kleiber, the orchestra seemed to have an extrasensory awareness, and this created more tension and excitement as the level reached higher and higher” (Kreger, 2014). No one remained indifferent to a Kleiber performance.

How did Kleiber invest his gestural language with the structures needed to transmit his conception and emotional commitment while inviting the same in return? Manfred Honeck, himself a conductor of considerable distinction, explains the technique behind the communication – giving neither beats nor bars but instead moulding the process and shaping the melody while somehow providing the right rhythmic inflection, as observed in the documentary video *Traces to Nowhere*, (YouTube, 2016, timecode 00:43.00). In the Beethoven 7th Symphony performance which we introduce at the beginning of this chapter, the repeated quarter notes that recur continually throughout the third movement come in groups of four measures each, with the norm being to beat each measure. Kleiber, however, often uses one long sweep of his right arm over the entire four measures while lightly giving each note, thereby indicating phrase length, direction and dynamic all in one gesture.

Further, as James Kreger (2014) points out, when conducting opera, Kleiber would,

conduct as many different characters onstage and instruments in the orchestra as he had fingers on both hands, all at the same time, flawlessly and effortlessly, throwing out cues with different fingers for each character. But that in itself was not enough, until he could inhabit each one of those characters in addition to everything that was going on in the orchestra.

However, technical facility, even of this magnitude, is on its own never enough, and orchestral players are ruthlessly efficient at exposing ‘mere technicians’ who do not support their interpretations with genuine artistic content. In Kleiber’s case, technical fluency, as Kreger’s point suggests, was always subservient to the greater artistic end of what Peter Jonas referred to as “leading players to a conception” (Walsh & Spelman, 1983). Beating time – something that Kleiber was extraordinarily adept at but which he disparaged as demonstrating poor rehearsal technique (Barber, 2011) – may have helped to frame the space, but it is the other gestures referred to by Honeck which Kleiber used to shape the musicians’ contributions and, ultimately, guide the shared interpretive conception. It is this

balance between framing and guiding that Kleiber was able to judge so astutely and which allowed him to then entrust the players with a rare degree of artistic autonomy.

Figure 4.1 Beethoven Symphony No. 7, 1st movement

While this discussion may seem somewhat esoteric and of interest only to aspiring conductors, Kleiber's approach achieved stunning results in practice. Consider, in the performance of the 7th Symphony, reproduced in Figure 4.1, the passage that begins the *Vivace* section of the first movement (YouTube, 2012, timecode 00:39.23). Here, having first prepared the ground so that the transition from the *Poco Sostenuto* opening to the *Vivace* is seamless, Kleiber assiduously 'builds the frame' by using an unmistakably clear beat – with the tip of his baton directly in line with his eyes which are in turn fixed on the principal oboe and flute – to gently but decisively accelerate through the first four measures and so arrive at the exact tempo that he is after for the main theme, thereby also making sure that he and the flute player are in sync with each other. He then hands the artistic reins to the flute by observing Beethoven's instruction to sharply reduce the dynamic, and then he remains content to indicate only the accompanying interjections to the strings; when he re-enters, it

is to drive “a wind-up of astonishing power” (Barber, 2011, p. 114) into the statement of the main theme from the full orchestra. Perhaps the key observation here is that much of the power to which Barber refers actually comes from a few measures earlier, with Kleiber forcing the entire orchestra to focus on the flute line by – paradoxically – hardly conducting the flute at all, developing a shared concentration that finds a cathartic release only once the full orchestra can ‘let rip’ together in the main theme.

In over forty years in the profession David has encountered conductors who have managed this level of finesse on occasion, but none who has so thoroughly and consistently understood that ‘the space into which the contribution of each musician is fed’ is where the work of rehearsal occurs and where the interpretation must be shaped (Barber, 2011; Kreger, 2014; Matheopoulos, 1982; Talgam, 2015).

In Talgam’s (2015) view,

when you look at the dancing Kleiber, his engaged musicians, and the delighted audience – and I bet we can add the dead composer’s spirit to the happy lot – you realize that the true achievement of any collaborative effort lies in allowing a multitude of voices and interests to sound together, satisfying their individual needs, while practically – even if not always intentionally – supporting and enabling each other (p. 177),

and that is certainly the case in this performance. Now consider the following passage from

Merleau-Ponty’s (1968) posthumously published work *The Visible and the Invisible*:

We do not possess the musical or sensible ideas...they possess us. The performer is no longer producing or reproducing the sonata: he feels himself, and the others feel him to be at the service of the sonata; the sonata sings through him or cries out so suddenly that he must ‘dash on his bow’ to follow it. And these open vortexes in the sonorous world finally form one sole vortex in which the ideas fit in with one another (p. 151).

While Merleau-Ponty was analyzing an imaginary performance of an imaginary work, his illustration could, following Talgam’s description, almost be a portrayal of a Kleiber

performance. Conductor Riccardo Muti, speaking in the documentary *I am Lost to the World* (YouTube, 2014, timecode 00:01.17), suggested that for Kleiber, performing was a personal journey akin to a religious act, well beyond production or reproduction, and Merleau-Ponty's image of 'vortexes in the sonorous world' that unite to form 'one sole vortex' certainly seems to capture the commitment and irresistible momentum which we experience in Kleiber's Concertgebouw rendition of Beethoven's 7th Symphony. Talgam (2015) also makes the point that Kleiber derived his approach "from his concept of music as flow and his perception of his collaborators as human beings in flow" and that he "aimed at keeping the musical process in full flow, without losing any of its potential energy, and still under control" (p. 164). This, too, resonates strongly with a Merleau-Pontian account; Wiskus (2018), citing Merleau-Ponty, suggests that "it is [music's] movement – its transcendence – that constitutes its power of intersubjective expression, for it is 'communicable to all who hear it'" (p. 138).

Digging deeper, what we see in Kleiber's work, Talgam's description of it and Merleau-Ponty's text, is once again the intertwined and reversible nature of the connections at work in performance – not just between player and conductor, but also between players and their instruments, among players, between the musicians onstage and the audience in the hall, and between the composer, through his or her musical voice brought to life by the performance, and everyone else in the room. As our first example shows, Kleiber's approach took full advantage of this, using the primordial tension between activity and passivity inherent in these relations to establish the dialogue between podium and player on which the momentum of a performance depends; "he projected passion and total involvement, and the orchestra wanted to reciprocate" (Kreger, 2014). Thanks to Humphrey Burton's

astute direction of the Beethoven film (YouTube, 2012), we see a textbook demonstration of this quality in action at the beginning of the *Vivace* section (Figure 4.1) as the dialogue between flute and conductor unfolds (timecode 00:39.23–00:39.38). Once the flute starts the theme, Kleiber lets the player lead and is content to follow him; all too often, every beat of this passage is dictated to the flutist, who then follows the conductor and so is often accused of dragging the tempo. Dictation of each beat, even at its well-intentioned best, in this situation controls rather than empowers, and at its worst can actively undermine the confidence of the musician on the receiving end, to the detriment of the entire performance. Kleiber, on the other hand, encourages his player to take responsibility and lead the group; not only is the tempo maintained, but Beethoven's theme is allowed to shine as a result. Of all the qualities attributed to Kleiber, none resonates more with an orchestral player than his willingness to trust the musicians in front of him and his ability to create the space for them to contribute, and there is perhaps nothing more relevant to contemporary organizations than this.

Carlos Kleiber was an enigma. As famous for what he didn't conduct as much as what he did, he was something of a recluse who, when thrust into the limelight as a result of his phenomenal gifts, actively shunned it. At the height of his fame he steadily began to withdraw from the public gaze, restricting his repertoire to an ever-shrinking core and performing with an ever-decreasing handful of orchestras. He died in 2004 after a number of years of inactivity; whatever the reason for his death, the loss to the audiences and orchestras of the world had been sustained several years earlier.

This belies the fact that, once on the podium, he clearly revelled in the experience of orchestral music making and took it to heights rarely achieved before or since – and, equally

importantly, he understood the importance of taking the musicians he worked with along for the experience. A musician of this calibre cannot be understood in terms of one conceptual framework, nor can a full picture of such a unique way of working be painted simply by analyzing one facet of his performances, however instructive that may be.

To get close to a genius of the order of Carlos Kleiber we need a philosophy which goes beyond convenient dualisms and that tackles the *Gestalt* contexture of orchestral music making head-on, asking how, at a primordial level, we *are* in the world – how we perceive and act on the world and that world acts on us – before we become consciously aware of our body and its functions as a biomechanical entity. This, as we have briefly suggested, is the conceptual space where we meet the work of Merleau-Ponty, and with Merleau-Ponty at our side we can accept Kleiber's invitation:

To join him in an experience that lifts us up and transports us to another time and place: a cosmos of emotion and color. A wall, which normally has two dimensions, becomes a door opening onto infinite dimensions and layers – a universe of worlds, a world of universes (Kreger, 2014).

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Chapter 5: Kleiber and the Concertgebouw (Part 2): Organizing the orchestra

5.1 Overview

The analysis presented below builds on the earlier discussion of player-instrument relations (Chapter 2), the development of the role of the conductor (Chapter 3), and the relationality at work in a filmed example of live orchestral performance (Chapter 4). In this chapter these elements are brought together to interrogate the relational space between conductor and players where the performance is organized, and music is made. The exemplary material is, once again, provided by the work of Carlos Kleiber and the Concertgebouw Orchestra (YouTube 2017).

The choice of a filmed performance licenced to, and freely available on, YouTube has been made for several reasons. First, the focus of this study is on performance and the *onstage* relational connections of orchestral music-making. Second, the relationship between conductor and player often comes with a highly personal dimension, so discussing relations between me and the conductors I work with daily could undermine the integrity of my research. I have no such connection with any of the musicians in this performance. Third, identification of the individuals involved is a straightforward proposition when the orchestra can be identified, so the potential for harm and damaging working relationships had I turned to an example from my own orchestra would have been considerable. Fourth, access to conductors, unless arranged in person, is for the most part strictly controlled by a gatekeeper of some sort; getting informed consent in a timely manner, for instance, thus becomes drawn out and difficult. Fifth, as a recording of a concert performance, this film is the result of one ‘take’ and so has been subjected to a minimum of later intervention; split notes and moments of scrappy ensemble remain in the mix. Finally, the range of conductor-

player connection captured by the camera illustrates relationality in the orchestra in a way that would simply not have been available to me writing from the perspective of a single seat.

In this chapter, I interrogate the relational substructures of this performance guided by two key Merleau-Pontian constructs: reversibility and *écart* (Merleau-Ponty 1968). As just suggested, because of the way it has been filmed, this performance gives a sense of the physical aspects of the relationship between player and conductor in ways that are often missed. Equally unusually, whether because of a directorial decision or the physical constraints presented by the stage, we also see gesture and response together. This is especially so in the transitional phases in the music where, because these passages define the structure of an interpretation, a conductor's influence is at its most important. It is this area of the performance which forms the chapter's main focus. Again, reversibility is crucial, with Kleiber drawing much of his inspiration from the contributions of those in front of him. Further, the relational 'between space' (Ladkin 2013) that is a defining feature of this performance now gets its Merleau-Pontian name – *écart*.

Écart is translated here as a gap subtended by connection, as, for example, in one's two hands being individually separate but connected through the same body. The idea of *écart* is central to an issue which looms large over an orchestral understanding of reversibility: how does the conductor, as the one silent musician onstage, communicate and coordinate – in other words, make music – with the players in front of him or her? If we extend reversibility as per the original example of touching/touched, this would be to the hearing/heard. There is however, a synesthetic dimension to be accounted for, as the conductor communicates only through *visible* gesture while the player responds with *audible* sound and a necessarily

limited range of movement, again adjusted according to the conductor's indications and what the player hears from other colleagues.

This apparent synesthetic dissonance, alongside the implications of the conductor seeming to draw as much inspiration from the players as they do from him, is the focus here, as while there is undoubtedly reversibility in the relations at work, it is in the space *between* conductor and player that these connections become music. This is where *écart*, as the inherently reversible hinge between conductor's gesture and player's sound, provides the conceptual means for the chapter to address the space in which Kleiber and the orchestra organize their music-making.

The chapter follows Dillon (1997) in continuing to understand reversibility as the conceptual thread that runs through Merleau-Ponty's late ontology. Beginning with touch in Chapter 2 and traversing a range of domains, the journey concludes in Chapter 6 with the conceptual keystone of *Flesh of the World*.

To begin the present chapter, I first introduce the performance, and then offer a brief explanation of why it is not just an example of great music-making, but also offers fertile ground for Merleau-Ponty-inspired analysis. The study's literary and methodological foundations are then presented, followed by an extended discussion of reversibility and *écart*. The chapter concludes with possibilities for further research, especially regarding Merleau-Ponty's notion of *Flesh* in the context of the lifeworld of orchestral performance. To do this, the artifacts of performance from music score to concert hall need to be included, as does the audience as an active but non-playing participant; this will be the subject of Chapter 6.

5.1.1 Publication status

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5.2 Introduction

In October 1983, the conductor Carlos Kleiber joined the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra for three concerts, each featuring Beethoven's 4th and 7th symphonies (YouTube 2017). The film made at the time has established these performances as the stuff of musical legend and cemented Kleiber's place as one of the great exponents of the orchestra conductor's art. As a long-time orchestral violinist, I find the music-making exemplary and the interpretation compelling. As a theorist of organizations, I find the collaboration to be a masterclass in coordination and communication that also provides a welcome antidote to the popular view of the conductor as either idolized star or power-crazed rogue, and the orchestra as a monolith of standardization, scarcely capable of individual thought or reflection.

Taking the Concertgebouw-Kleiber film of the 7th Symphony as my example, in what follows I argue that there is much more to orchestral work at this level than simply coordinating individual talent and technique. Consider, for instance, the obvious ebb and flow of relations between the musicians in this performance. This clearly indicates an extra dimension that is more than its individual components, a pre-reflective domain where extensive training meets in-the-moment connection. The questions then arise: what does this dimension look like? How can we study it? Does this analysis add anything to what we already know about the relational organization of orchestral work? Having addressed these

points, what can this information tell us about future directions for organizing at a time when a global pandemic is rewriting the rules of engagement at work (Christakis 2020; Ferguson 2020; Koreman-Smith and Anderson 2021)?

Before attempting to respond to these questions, the reader is encouraged to watch the performance of the 7th Symphony (YouTube 2017) and, while enjoying the music-making, to consider the importance of the tacit and preconscious to how Kleiber and the orchestra are communicating. This, the space between conductor and players where communication and coordination happen and music is made, is the primary focus of the paper, as Carlos Kleiber's unique way of shaping of that space is perhaps the key contribution that he makes to our understanding of how orchestral performance is organized (Barber 2011; Talgam 2015), and because this performance is a testament to the potency of the relational connections that flow from his highly personal gestural vocabulary.

To the orchestral musician, the relational space where the music-making happens is something of a black hole, at once both obvious and opaque but with a voracious appetite for attention. Performers know when it's working and when it's not, but can't tell you either what it looks like or what happens in it (Feeney-Hart 2013). Yet the physical gap between individual musicians in orchestral work is bridged by a palpable relational connectivity that, while it may vary in strength, has to be present in one form or another if intra-orchestral coordination is to function. For this reason, the present study draws on the constructs of reversibility – whereby the sentient can, from the vantage of that which it is sensing, be sensed – and *écart*, the idea of a gap or space underpinned by a connection. These ideas feature in the later work of the phenomenologically oriented philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty and, especially, the posthumously published *The Visible and the Invisible* (Merleau-

Ponty 1968), the work on which most of our understanding of his late ontological trajectory rests (Dillon 1997).

Despite being an incomplete combination of finished text and working notes compiled by an editor after Merleau-Ponty's early and unexpected death, this work offers a rich, complex and thought-provoking resource for the study of primordial relationality. For this paper, the key chapter is *The Chiasm – the Intertwining*, the section of completed text where reversibility and écart are explored in the most detail. He begins with the archetype of two hands, connected through the same body but touching one another. Over the course of the chapter, he develops both these notions through multiple sensory and relational domains, ultimately arriving at a primordially situated theory of language. The present study's concern is located partway along this conceptual arc, in the relational domain of self and other as manifested in the connection among the performers as they navigate the intercorporeal space where, together, they make music. Also, by retaining a focus on reversibility and écart, the aim is to support an analysis that, while drawing on the author's personal experience, is not an interrogation of that experience, but rather of an observed performance.

However, before putting Merleau-Ponty's ideas to work in the orchestral context, the choice of the Kleiber-Concertgebouw performance needs further explanation, especially as other examples of Kleiber performing this work exist elsewhere (YouTube 2019).

5.3 The performance

The film itself is a fascinating document. Quite apart from capturing a superb reading of Beethoven's masterwork, director Sir Humphrey Burton's astute cinematic choices allow us

to see Kleiber's unique gestural repertoire and his command of musical structure in full flow. Here Burton does the organizational theorist a real service as, especially in the musical transition passages, Kleiber's gestures serve the crucial purpose of giving the players the architectural outline of the performance – in other words, the organizational basis on which their contributions build. As most films of orchestral performance understandably concentrate attention on thematic material and whoever is playing it, this sort of structure-related activity usually ends up on the cutting room floor; we rarely get to see the full range of the conductor's gestures, the amount of interplay between performers that results, or the impact of that interaction on how an interpretation is shaped. Close up shots also tend to zero in on facial expression, which leaves the hands and arms out of frame, thus giving little indication of who or what the conductor (in particular) is responding to. Burton avoids these pitfalls, instead going to considerable lengths to show this interpretation emerging as a *shared* conception grounded in a mutually understood gestural vocabulary.

Thanks to these directorial decisions, what we see in this film is Kleiber getting as much from the players of the orchestra as they receive from him – and adapting his interpretive direction as a consequence. It is the lessons for organizations embedded in the relational connectivity that *underpin* this mutual inspiration that are addressed by this study, and many of the essential constituents of such creative reciprocity can be observed in this performance. Three that have particular relevance to organizations beyond the orchestra are explored in this paper. The give-and-take between conductor and players; the palpable connection among *all* the performers on stage despite their physical separation; and – flowing from the first two – the sense that each individual musician's input is a valued contribution to the shared musical lifeworld, are all structural requirements for any

successful and coherent performance. The obvious presence of these attributes in a visual record such as this gives us a chance to scrutinize them in greater depth for both organizational and musical purposes.

This is not, however, an endeavour to be undertaken lightly. Having spent my working life as an orchestral player, I can appreciate the music-making on display from a professional perspective, but unpacking this film or any other orchestral performance in order to study its organizational relevance is, even with the right analytical tools, another matter. Carlos Kleiber himself was adamant about this, writing to one correspondent that ‘no one on earth can tell you anything accurate or intelligent about conductors or conducting, least of all musicians, critics, and ... CONDUCTORS, including yours sincerely’ (Kleiber, quoted in Barber 2011, 232, emphasis in the original).

Kleiber has a point. Trying to distil any organizing features from the musical context in which they are embedded is bound to be somewhat artificial (Gilling 2014a), so analysis usually turns to a conceptual agenda that values the magical, mysterious, and elusive qualities often ascribed to orchestral performance (Feeney-Hart 2013; Mauceri 2017; Service 2012) while trying not to resort to vacuous platitude. That framework also needs to avoid a dualistic regard for orchestral work as the outcome of a charismatic conductor imposing his or her will on a well-drilled and obedient workforce (Canetti 1978; Lebrecht 1991). Perhaps more than anything, though, Kleiber’s words suggest the existence of a preconscious relational interaction between conductor and players that needs exploring if we are to understand the organizational side of orchestral music-making; this is the challenge taken up by the present study.

The usual place to begin such analysis is by countering the conductor-as-hero of popular imagination (Ropo and Sauer 2007) with the point that orchestral performance is, first and foremost, a collective endeavour, fashioned in rehearsal but finished in the moment by all on stage. The performance considered here epitomizes this; Kleiber is not simply showing off an assortment of pre-rehearsed moves selected on demand, nor is the orchestra engaging in an over-standardized exercise in robotics. Instead we encounter a range of deeply felt individual contributions coalescing around a *shared* conception of Beethoven's score.

But this view, while a good place to start, is inadequate. It fails to explain the reversible nature of the relations between player and podium on display, communication and coordination across physical space are implied but not interrogated, and the emotional intensity evident in gestural activity is only suggested. When the distinguished conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen quips 'I get all my conducting sticks in [Harry Potter's] Diagon Alley' (quoted in Feeney-Hart 2013, 2), it's a great line, but our understanding of the performance experience doesn't advance by much.

The use of these vague notions, especially from conductors as accomplished as Mauceri and Salonen, seems to support Kleiber's assertion. But within the implied wonder and mystery of this magic-related imagery lie important clues as to the significance of the pre-reflective relational platform that underpins orchestral music making, and so – *pace* Kleiber – there are literary and methodological resources available that *do* support inquiry in this area. I now address each of these categories in turn.

5.4 Literature

The literature interrogating the orchestral organization can be separated into three broad groupings. There is, of course, frequent crossover between organizing and music making in many of these pieces; my arrangement refers to the main thrust of the argument and the line of inquiry their authors choose to take. First, offstage concerns such as job satisfaction, (Allmendinger, Hackman and Lehman 1996; Mogelof and Rohrer 2005), management-player tension (Arian 1971; Glynn 2000), organizational sensemaking (Maitlis 2005) and teamwork (Hackman 2002) are among the topics explored, with the roles and activity of both musicians and managers coming under scrutiny. Behaviours more specific to orchestral performance are arguably given more prominence in case studies, where historical narrative often meets a mix of onstage and offstage activity in analyses of performance and work practice (Lehman 1999; Lehman and Galinsky 2000; Service 2012; Trümpi 2016).

Carlos Kleiber features in Barber (2011), Watson (2012) and Talgam (2015). Barber offers a biography of Kleiber and collection of their correspondence, while Watson, as a conductor herself, analyzes various technical aspects of Kleiber's art. Talgam interrogates Kleiber's techniques in a more general discussion of conductors as leaders. Elsewhere, Moshhammer (2016) takes an empirical approach, analyzing expressivity and musical motion through Kleiber's vocalizations in rehearsal. Kreger's (2014) blog post provides balance, giving a player's viewpoint of Kleiber's work with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra in New York. All are useful but Barber, as Kleiber's 'pen pal' for over 15 years, offers a perspective that is otherwise unavailable – that of the notoriously reclusive Kleiber himself, captured through the correspondence between the two.

The organizational side of orchestral performing is most apparent in the managerial turn taken in the final strand. This analysis is usually embedded in the context of conductor-led leadership (Mintzberg 1998; Talgam 2015), and rarely seeks the views of players except to support particular features that the author wishes to stress. In a similar vein, Norman Lebrecht (1991), although often controversial, offers an invaluable history of the development of the conducting profession and the symphony orchestra, while a range of practitioners (Bernstein 1963; Mauceri 2017; Wigglesworth 2018; Wood 1938) provide nuance with thoughtful contributions on the nature of orchestral performance and the roles of conductors and players therein.

These add important context to a growing body of work that, dissatisfied with the simple player-podium dyad proposed in Canetti (1978) and elsewhere (Matheopoulos 1982), seeks to move the discussion of leadership away from one individual to a more fine-grained consideration of leading and managing as necessary qualities of the collective relationality on which orchestral work depends (Bathurst et al. 2019; Bathurst and Ladkin 2012; Gilling 2014a, 2014b; Koivunen 2003; Koivunen and Wennes 2011; Köping 2007; Ladkin 2013; Marotto, Roos and Victor 2007; Ropo and Sauer 2007). Ladkin (2013) in particular explores leader-follower relations through ideas from Merleau-Ponty's late ontology and so is especially relevant here. The turn toward Merleau-Ponty and the repositioning of the leader-follower dyad as a quality of the space between colleagues, rather than of individual agency (Bathurst and Ladkin 2012; Ladkin 2013), marks an important shift; these moves open up an inclusive view of organizational coordination, located in a pre-reflective relational space where collegial imperatives take precedence over formal hierarchy, that resonates with what we observe in the Kleiber-Concertgebouw performance.

In this paper these ideas from the literature are extended, through a particular focus on the notion of relational space, and key elements of Merleau-Ponty's later thought discussed in the context of our example. However, given the author's background as a career-long orchestral musician, ingrained work practices and possible bias also need to be accounted for, so before turning to analysis, the methodological framework of the study is outlined.

5.5 Method and research design

The relationality of orchestral work is, fundamentally, an experiential phenomenon. Phenomenology – as the study of human experience – thus points the researcher in the right direction, asking for 'a methodological commitment to rigorous description and interpretation of the lifeworld as the basis for knowledge' (Stablein 2002, 5). Within the wider tradition of phenomenological thought, Merleau-Ponty's perspective is particularly well-suited to the study of orchestras, as on this account 'human consciousness is embodied' but the body also 'perceives in pre-conscious awareness, already actively organizing and forming the lifeworld prior to conscious attention' (Stablein 2002, 5). A focus on embodied, pre-reflective perception allows the reciprocity in the cause and effect evident between the players' sound and conductor's gestures to be seen as reversible relations within an ongoing process (Talgam 2015); in short, in the performance of the Concertgebouw Orchestra and Carlos Kleiber we are watching 'in the moment' music making, rather than a string of discrete moments driven by one individual working alone in pursuit of a pre-determined agenda.

Interrogating these relations requires a methodological approach that acknowledges both what we *can* see and hear (the visible gestures and audible sounds of performance), and what we *can't* (the invisible, preconscious practices in which these gestures and sounds are

embedded). For this, I draw on the descriptive phenomenological method developed by Giorgi and colleagues (Giorgi 2012), further grounded in the embodied consciousness and pre-reflective perception of Merleau-Ponty (Groenewald 2004; Stablein 2002; Sadala and Adorno 2002). I begin by adopting what Giorgi (2012) calls the phenomenological attitude, reduction, or *epoché*, in which the researcher's judgement is suspended as prejudices and biases are 'bracketed,' or set aside.

Complete objectivity was not the aim here. Firstly, a *total* reduction is not feasible (Merleau-Ponty 2012) or, in an applied (versus a purely philosophical) setting such as orchestra work, even desirable (Zahavi 2019). Secondly, much of the value of my research lies in the specialist's perspective that I bring to it. So, in my case, the *epoché* part of the method meant donning my researcher's hat and revisiting the film as an artifact to be interrogated for research purposes while putting aside (for example) my professional appreciation of the technical level Kleiber and the players are achieving in order to describe as 'naïvely' (Giorgi 2012, 6) as possible what I saw and heard on the film. This description nonetheless remains informed by the deeply ingrained nature of the knowledge I have accumulated over my career as an orchestral player, so I again remind the reader of that feature of my background so they can better understand and interpret my analysis.

This requires that a balance between expert knowledge and ingrained preconception be found. Again, Merleau-Ponty offers guidance: 'we must rediscover the structure of the perceived world through a process similar to that of an archaeologist. For the structure of the perceived world is buried under the sedimentations of later knowledge' (1964a, 5). Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's ideas thus enabled the conceptual 'drilling down' through

sedimented layers of experience that was needed, while keeping the focus on the performance at hand.

Having established this stance, I began with a descriptive survey of the whole performance. From this rough sketch, it became clear that, for whatever reason (such as camera shot), only some of the film was suitable for this research. The wide shots of the full orchestra, for example, rarely offered the fine-grained detail required and, at the other extreme, shots of Kleiber's face that were too close to include his hands and arms were also excluded. As this 'weeding out' process progressed, it transpired that the areas of most research interest – those points where Kleiber was most explicitly directing or responding and the players engaging accordingly – emerged from the sequences showing transitional passages in Beethoven's symphonic structure and this, too, is where the film director most often captured the detail of the dialogue between conductor and players. This selection began the process of reducing the initial description first to meaning units and then to central themes that could then be interpreted in light of Merleau-Ponty's constructs.

Reduction continued with the extraction of meaning units (Giorgi 2012) from these events, still described as simply as possible and without any theoretical weight. These units – which, as observed in my notes, were as simple as 'CK [Carlos Kleiber] bends down while looking at the flute and oboe' and 'his beat is very small and precise' – tended to coalesce around particular gestures or responses, and so presented the central themes that formed the basis of later analysis. This stage is the nexus between description and interpretation and where the observations of the performers' interactions began to reveal the drivers underpinning their activity. This, for Giorgi (2012, 6), 'is the heart of the method.'

Two key themes emerged from this process as theory came into play. These themes, which suggested the Merleau-Pontian constructs that frame my interpretation, were:

- The reversible, inherently generative nature of the interactions – action generated response which in turn generated new action.
- Despite obvious relational interconnection, each individual retained their ‘otherness.’ There was identity between the musicians, but also difference and individuality.

Description and reduction then moved to the first phase of interpretation, in which these themes were analysed through ‘the adoption of a non-given factor to help account for what is given in experience’ (Giorgi 2012, 6). In this case, the ‘non-given factor’ was the Merleau-Ponty-influenced approach I took toward the ‘given in experience’ performance itself.

Having outlined the paper’s methodological orientation, I now turn to discussion of our example, framed by the constructs of reversibility and *écart*, and conclude with consideration of the implications of this analysis for organizing in the orchestra and beyond.

5.6 Reversibility

Merleau-Ponty regarded the concept of reversibility as central to his later thought, even going so far as to call it the ‘ultimate truth’ (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 155). While the genesis of the construct can be found in *Phenomenology of Perception* as the ‘ambiguous organization’ of two hands ‘touching’ and ‘touched’ (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 95), it only takes explicit shape as a form of preconscious relational exchange in his later work. There he extends the idea from the exemplary archetype of two hands touching, through engagement with the other

via synesthesia and alterity, toward a theory of language and an account of the body as ‘the sensible sentient’ (1968, 136). As for definitions, this passage from the late essay *The Philosopher and His Shadow* is about as close as he ever gets:

When my right hand touches my left, I am aware of it as a ‘physical thing.’ But at the same moment, if I wish, an extraordinary event takes place: here is my left hand as well starting to perceive my right ... The physical thing becomes animate. Or, more precisely, it remains what it was ... but an exploratory power comes to rest upon or dwell in it. Thus I touch myself touching; my body accomplishes ‘a sort of reflection’. In it, through it, there is not just the unidirectional relationship of the one who perceives to what he perceives. The relationship is reversed, the touched hand becomes the touching hand, and I am obliged to say that the sense of touch here is diffused into the body – that the body is a ‘perceiving thing,’ a ‘subject-object’ (1964b, 166).

This, for Merleau-Ponty, is where reversibility begins. From here, ‘every reflection is after the model of the reflection of the hand touching by the hand touched’ (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 204), extending across sensory domains to the point where to perceive someone or something is to be perceptible from the vantage point of who or whatever it is that is being perceived (Dillon 1997; Morris 2010). While undoubtedly building on the ‘ambiguous organization’ encountered in *Phenomenology of Perception*, this goes considerably further, and suggests – at least when considered in a relational context such as orchestral performance – a form of pre-reflective agential exchange in which perceiver and perceived shape each other’s perception. Along with the osmotic permeability that characterizes the ‘nexus between perception, activity and passivity’ (Morris 2010, 147), this interchange is what renders the subject-object distinction in reversibility if not moot, then certainly fluid.

This exchange lies at the heart of the ‘extraordinary event’ that Merleau-Ponty (1964b) refers to in the excerpt above and opens self-other reversibility up to consideration as a preconscious form of relational ebb and flow. Turning to the orchestra, consider this assessment from Talgam (2015, 164–165) of relations between Carlos Kleiber and the

players in front of him: 'Kleiber saw his players not as objects but as processes: when they play they are in constant flow' and 'the space into which they fed their contributions ... designed and created by the conductor, interacted with the sound produced by the players in continuous flow, to create music.'

Talgam is definitely on to something with his reference to orchestral performance as a form of relational flow. However, he also misses a key point: the sound made by the players informs not just the space shaped by Kleiber's gestural contributions, but also the very gestures themselves. The flow is not exclusively unidirectional from conductor to players; Kleiber's gestures and the players' sound stand in a reversible, preconscious relationship to each other that underpins how they make music together. Take, for instance, the passage from the second movement at timecode 15:05. Kleiber is visibly moved by what he hears from the wind section of the orchestra, and his subsequent gestural activity shows it. The pre-reflective reversibility between gesture and sound is captured in action, as it generates the collective relational tissue which knits this musical lifeworld together.

This does not happen on its own. If the connection is not nurtured by the performers, then engagement in the music-making process diminishes and the performance loses its 'edge.' Whether consciously or not, Carlos Kleiber understood this, and a feature of his conducting is the way his gestural activity stress-tests the connective fibres of that tissue. He is constantly, in the moment, throwing what appear to be counterintuitive gestural 'curve balls' at the orchestra, ostensibly to keep the players on their toes and the music-making fresh (Talgam 2015); this last is especially important when the musical territory is as frequently traversed as Beethoven's 7th Symphony.

But these episodes are about more than just motivation. As the players rise to the challenge that Kleiber's gestural indications present, we also see, signposted in some of his most counterintuitive gestural language, several striking examples of reversibility. Consider the passage in the last movement that begins at timecode 32:05. Here Kleiber stops beating, breaks eye contact, and leaves his baton pointing down at the stage. Such a gesture would normally bring proceedings to an abrupt halt, but instead the players assume responsibility for the rhythmic direction of the music with a relentless energy which Kleiber absorbs like a human dynamo. Toward the end of the passage, he resumes beating, re-establishes eye contact (this time with the violin sections), and – releasing the pent-up energy – drives this section to its climax.

In rehearsal, Kleiber was much admired for his ability to find the right verbal metaphor for the musical nuance he wanted the players to realize (Barber 2011; Kreger 2014; Moshhammer 2016; Talgam 2015). In performance he achieves the same thing, communicating with gestures rather than words to establish a dialogic connection with members of the orchestra. This usually begins – especially in the transition passages – with him suggesting 'this is what I think' but often finishes with what looks like a query: 'what's your view?' His response after they play is along the lines of 'let's put it all together.' In the passage just cited, the direction during the build-up is quite clear, with a beat per bar and each instrumental voice duly acknowledged. But when Kleiber drops his arms, the question of rhythmic character is posed directly to the players, who respond with considerable vigour, which Kleiber then incorporates into his gestural response. This demonstrates an instinctive awareness of the collegial nature of the endeavour; clearly, no one individual can perform this symphony on their own. What is remarkable here is the way Kleiber, in the

moment, harnesses the reversibility inherent in his relations with each player to strengthen the *collective* conception that the cohort is arriving at.

We need to remember that what we are seeing here is not standard orchestral procedure, as when a conductor stops beating, the band will usually stop playing. Abruptly pointing the baton straight down with no specifically directed eye contact would normally finish the symphony or end a movement, so in a passage with this kind of rhythmic drive, Kleiber's move is about the last thing an orchestra member would expect to see.

But rather than being interpreted by the players as a signal to stop, this gesture has the opposite effect, as the entire cohort attacks the rhythmic figure with renewed enthusiasm. Given the number of individual players in the orchestra, each with their own perspective, Kleiber's no-action tactic could easily have led to disaster, but instead of chaos we have cohesion, paradoxically *because* there is no clear 'beat' from the conductor. This suggests that the players are not only relishing the autonomy and artistic freedom that Kleiber has just given them, but are also eager to repay the trust that it implies in an empathetic give-and-take among the performers which subtends the relationship between the musicians and the music itself. The reversibility inherent in the 'bond between the flesh and the idea' (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 149) is revealed, finding expression through the bodies of the musicians bringing Beethoven's simple but powerful rhythmic motif to life – and being inspired by it in return.

It is worth stressing that such an apparently mercurial approach only works when making music 'in the moment' rather than according to a pre-conceived formula; with a conductor more reliant on regimented gestural control than Kleiber, the orchestra would have come to a stop. This, of course, is why most conductors are wary of using Kleiber's approach to

conducting technique. And a dramatic move of any kind, such as stopping to beat, must be used sparingly or it becomes predictable, losing impact and defeating its purpose.

So why take the risk? The distinguished pianist Maurizio Pollini makes a telling point when discussing Carlos Kleiber's unique gifts: 'this man had the capacity to understand instantaneously a work or a score. He immediately had an expressive or interpretive idea in his head, and all this resolved itself immediately, instantly, into a gesture appropriate for orchestra directing' (Pollini, quoted in Barber 2011, 137). Two key words here are 'instantly' and 'appropriate'; the right gesture at exactly the right time, directed towards generating a particular response that was as spontaneous as his conception.

Further, by stopping conducting at this point, Kleiber is not setting out to shock or embarrass, but he *is* exhorting players to remain aware of their colleagues. 'If there is one thing I can hear, it's whether the people playing are listening to each other' (Kleiber, quoted in Talgam 2015, 162). As Talgam also points out, 'Kleiber is not just listening to what has been played – he is also listening, in anticipation, to what is about to be played' (2015, 162). From the extensive rehearsing Kleiber was (in)famous for (Barber 2011; Sachs 2004), the players knew what he would expect of them, but they did not know for sure how he would direct that in the concert. He didn't necessarily know either, and once wrote to his sister Veronica, after Maurizio Pollini had sought his technical advice, that 'I don't have the foggiest idea what I do, I must first think ... what is it that I do?' (Kleiber, quoted in Barber 2011, 137).

This is not just a technical question; it is also an unrehearsed – and genuine – expression of Kleiber's musical impulse. That authenticity, and his bodily communication of it, was an important reason why orchestral players responded so enthusiastically to his direction

(Jonas, cited in Walsh and Spelman 1983; Kreger 2014). For the present analysis, this example also shows something else; Kleiber is actively encouraging reversibility in real time without seeming to be aware that was what he was doing. He is clearly conscious of the powerful rhythmic drive inherent in the music of this example, and, equally, he also wants high intensity playing. But when encountered earlier in the movement (timecode 29:04) this passage elicits a quite different set of gestures; the gestural vocabulary Kleiber turns to in each instance may be grounded in his conception of the music, but it is also embedded in a reversible relation that sees it driven by, as much as it is driving, the playing of those in front of him.

Kleiber's direction is inspirational, and the artistic autonomy he allows the players encourages a freedom of personal expression that they, in return, value and reinvest in the collective music-making. But this also holds in reverse; the individual expertise of these players and their ability to bind together as an ensemble combine to have a liberating effect on Kleiber himself, freeing him to use a gestural vocabulary which would be unintelligible to a lesser orchestra but here can be directed entirely towards a musical result. Beethoven's score may be the starting point for this, but the conceptual unity of the interpretation is a quality that is generated by the pre-reflective and reversible relational bond between conductor and players, and far exceeds what would have come from simply adding together individual contributions.

There is, however, a sensory divergence that takes place as visible gesture is translated into audible sound and vice versa, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the fact that of all the musicians onstage, the only one who makes no sound is the conductor – even when that conductor is Carlos Kleiber. The unity in the preconscious relational connections at work

may follow directly from their inherent reversibility, but it comes with a synesthetic accommodation which needs to be accounted for. This is where *écart*, the Merleau-Pontian construct that enables reversible relations to traverse the gap between one sensory domain and another, comes in.

5.7 *Écart*

In Merleau-Ponty's late ontology, 'the perceiver and perceived are not two different *appearances* of one being, but two divergent ways in which being *is*' (Morris 2010, 145, emphases in the original). This has implications for the reversibility thesis, especially when considered in the context of the inter-sensory translation that defines orchestral work.

Kleiber and the players may each be concerned with developing a unified approach to the same Beethoven symphony, but the conductor's conception is realized in gesture while that of the players is realized in sound; each individual perceives in one sense and responds through another, all without knowing *exactly* what lies behind what they are perceiving.

Further, each player has their own personal experience of the conductor's direction – what the flute draws from Kleiber's body language at the opening of the first movement's *Vivace* section (timecode 04:23) is not what a member of the 1st Violins will understand. This is, of course, precisely the outcome Kleiber is looking for, given that the flute has the theme and the 1st Violins an accompanying figure.

Despite this divergence there remains a conceptual and relational intertwining at work; a literal reading of a colleague's experience may be inaccessible to the individual musician, but a vestige of their own performance nonetheless remains embedded in the activity of their fellow performers. Players pre-reflectively incorporate this trace of their contribution into their own sensory translation and thus bridge the gap between self and colleague,

enabling the reversibility of the connection and allowing individual ideas to be woven into a collective interpretation. In a working note for *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty suggests just such a possibility – and situates it within the primordially reflexive aspect of reversibility – when he writes ‘me-world Chiasm: the things gaze upon me. I gaze upon myself (through the eyes of the things)’ (Toadvine and Lawlor 2007, 443).

Considered in the orchestral context, this implies a layer of preconscious perceptual knowledge subtending orchestral relations that not only allows the intertwining of the player’s personal view of the music with an understanding of another’s experience of it, but also gives that player an appreciation of how their own contribution is being perceived by colleagues. As Dillon suggests, ‘the Other functions as my mirror: he de-centres me, lets me see myself from another vantage’ (1997, 166). Further, the perceptual activity cuts both ways; just as I perceive a trace of myself in a colleague’s playing, so they perceive a trace of themselves in mine. In performance, this layer of relationality, enabled by a pre-reflective sensory equivalence between visible and audible, underpins real-time coordination within the cohort and allows the players to interpret the conductor’s gestures as music-making. This in turn takes us toward the intangibles, such as emotional nuance and dramatic character, that inform the empathetic understanding captured colloquially in the term ‘ensemble skills’ – that elusive capacity to find different ‘colours’ and ‘shapes’ in the music while remaining sensitized to the collective context. Orchestral players are expected to be able to access this skill set on demand; without it, the music itself would remain locked in the notes on the page like a recipe missing key ingredients, and orchestral performance would be reduced to little more than an exercise in robotics.

Sensory equivalence plays an essential role in the 'synesthetic reflexivity' (Dillon 1997, 174) that is intrinsic to Merleau-Ponty's conception of the reversibility construct. Synesthesia is usually understood as a sensory response to a stimulus received in another sensory domain, but Merleau-Ponty adds a relational dimension that suggests both emotion and empathy. Consider, for instance, his discussion of the colour red and, later, musical performance in the chapter *The Chiasm – the Intertwining*. The examples he employs – the red of a tiled rooftop, the fabric of a red flag and the red of 'certain terrains near Aix or in Madagascar' (1968, 132) – all evoke *emotional* responses ranging from nostalgia to revolutionary ardour, even as he draws out the sensory correspondence between, say, the colour of the flag and the texture of its fabric.

Merleau-Ponty takes this even further when, towards the end of *The Chiasm*, he ventures into the realm of musical performance, infusing the emotional aspect of music-making with an empathetic quality that reinforces the pre-reflective relational bonds at work in the events he is analyzing. The description he presents of a performer 'who feels himself, and the others feel him to be at the service of the sonata' and so is moved to 'dash on his bow' in the creation of swirling 'vortexes in the sonorous world' (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 151) offers a vivid combination of visual, audible and emotional features that resonates strongly with the conductor-player interaction discussed here. Extending the reflexive aspect of reversibility through these relational and inter-sensory bonds underpins the de-centring referred to by Dillon (1997) and allows for the connection with the Other, whether human or non-human, which Merleau-Ponty has captured in the concept of *écart*.

Écart translates directly as 'gap,' but the idea always carries within it an implied connection, such as the gap between two hands attached to the same body, the two leaves of a hinge,

and the separate flower petals that remain connected to the same stem. In *The Chiasm*, Merleau-Ponty broadens the concept of *écart* by incorporating the emotional with the synesthetic, and so gives a name to this connection *and* the relational space it spans.

In the orchestra, *écart* offers a way to understand how the gap between conductor, players and musical idea is bridged by a connection which, rooted in the synesthetic equivalence of sight and sound, traverses the physical and conceptual separation between the individual musicians. It is also revealed as the pre-reflective space between conductor and players in which the link between the performers and Beethoven's ideas is created. Kleiber's gestural management of this relational space not only portrays the interpretive qualities he is looking for from the players; through his highly personal but very effective bodily portrayal of the qualities of that space, he also encourages each musician to embrace the inherent otherness of their fellow performers as an external source of rejuvenation, rather than resist it as a personal threat. As a consequence we, as observers, experience the identity between Kleiber and the players in front of him, not the physical separation between them or the corporeal incongruity between the gesture of a noiseless baton and the sound of a musical instrument.

The first statement of the main theme from the 7th Symphony's first movement (timecode 04:28) illustrates the point. Kleiber starts preparing this moment from the beginning of the *Vivace* section; at first half crouching and then slowly standing as the music gradually accelerates through the first four bars until, halfway through the fourth bar, he stands up fully and drops his hands in a gesture that from anyone else would be seen as a signal to the orchestra to stop playing. Instead, the gesture gives structure to the music-making.

Musically, it gets the string section to enter softly so that the flute's theme stands out from

the very first note. Organizationally, Kleiber's gesture is a signal that leadership responsibility is moving elsewhere, or more correctly, that responsibility for looking after Beethoven's theme is being vested in the musician best placed to take it – in this case, the principal flute. But thanks to Kleiber's unique way of showing this transfer, the observer also gets a clear demonstration of *écart* as the relational 'hinge' coordinating conductor, players, and the move toward Beethoven's theme.

Kleiber's main goal, though, is arguably even deeper; to have the theme itself guide the contributions of all the musicians on stage. We see this precisely in the *lack* of control he seeks to exert over the flute player, as not only does he not beat while the theme is played, but he also quite deliberately doesn't even look at the flautist. This is in stark contrast to the preceding bars, where, in a textbook example of the visual control that conductors are taught to exert and depend on (Wakin 2012), Kleiber 'eyeballs' the flute and oboe over the tip of his baton in order to establish a solid relational connection – which he then quite deliberately severs when the flute begins the theme.

From a musical perspective, this theme is the focal point of the symphony thus far, making the way Kleiber hands over to the flute even more telling. Where most conductors seek control by beating in a 'down-up, one-two' pattern and keeping eye contact with the 1st Flute, Kleiber's deliberate decision *not* to exert control by either beating time or looking at the flautist shows, in ceding this measure of autonomy to the player, his instinctive awareness of the latent power of the relational bonds at work. Kleiber's gestures directed toward the flute are not intended to dictate how this musician plays, but rather are aimed at shaping space for Beethoven's thematic argument to flourish and so become firmly established at the centre of the cohort's collective attention.

Here, in a term much favoured by Merleau-Ponty, we encounter an example of *écart* as dehiscence. As with the bud-burst that is the origin of the term, Beethoven's theme is allowed to bloom from a musical stem that has been nurtured with the utmost care during the material that precedes it. This is why, by apparently breaking contact and pushing attention away from the podium the way that Kleiber does, so much latent energy is then released; he is, in effect, splitting the musical atom by simultaneously giving the flute artistic freedom *and* releasing the rhythmicity inherent in the music. This energy and rhythmic drive not only puts the theme front and centre for all concerned, but also – in a manner reminiscent of the explosive forces released through nuclear fission – underpins the 'wind-up of astonishing power' (Barber 2011, 114) a few bars later that culminates in the restatement of the theme by the full orchestra as it 'lets rip' *fortissimo* (timecode 04:56).

Écart thus assumes a very practical aspect in this performance as the 'between space' of relationality (Ladkin 2013, 330) that becomes embodied in Kleiber's gestures. This between space is what Talgam (2015, 165) is referring to when he writes that Kleiber sought control 'not over his players but over the space into which they fed their individual contributions.' That space, as Talgam (2015) continues, is where the conductor's gesture and the players' sound come together to generate music. But this performance also shows something that a focus limited to the conductor understates; the impact that the contributions of the players have on Kleiber in return – 'their playing visibly energized [Kleiber], and this energy was transformed into his dance' (Talgam 2015, 161), dancing being an adjective often applied to Kleiber's movement on the podium (Barber 2011; Talgam 2015; Watson 2012). This, again, is where the idea of *écart* comes in, allowing us to understand the pre-reflective space

between the various actors as a hinge that is relational and, through an empathetic connection of considerable strength between the bodies of those actors, intercorporeal.

Finally, it is worth stressing again the *organizational* nuance that *écart* brings to our understanding of orchestral coordination. The apparent tension created within reversibility as it traverses sensory domains can be resolved through a reflexive sensory equivalence which, when conceived as *écart*, functions as the hinge between players' sound and conductor's gesture. When considered in this way and extended by the emotional infusion that Merleau-Ponty gives it, *écart* opens up the primordial bonds that lie in the relational space where the musicians' individual contributions meet – and where the latent power within those bonds resides. The players have come to 'see' Beethoven's music in Kleiber's gestures and he, in turn, experiences Beethoven incarnate in their sound. Each sees a trace of their own view of the music extended in the contribution of the other; as the cellist James Kreger has put it, 'when Carlos Kleiber is conducting and we are playing in his orchestra, we don't feel as if a conductor is inflicting his will upon us, which is usually the case. Rather it is as if we feel exactly the way *he* does about the music' (Kreger 2014, emphasis added).

5.8 Conclusion

In the final section of this study, I summarize its contributions and also the ways in which its argument extends our understanding of relationality in orchestral performance. I then conclude the paper by suggesting future directions for researching the orchestra and other forms of organization.

The analysis presented here draws on a classic example of orchestral music-making: the film of the 1983 performance of Beethoven's 7th Symphony by the Concertgebouw Orchestra

with conductor Carlos Kleiber. Due to the way in which the film's director has captured both Kleiber's unique gestural vocabulary and a wide range of player-conductor interaction, this performance offers a rare opportunity to observe traces of the pre-reflective relational underpinnings of orchestral work in the musicians' interactions. This allows analysis of these relations to move beyond a narrow focus on conductor-driven leadership toward a more collegial orientation.

The first contribution this paper makes lies in the methodological combination of practice and scholarship. In order to draw on the author's professional expertise as an orchestral musician while acknowledging the tacit preconceptions and biases that this might entail, the study draws on Giorgi's descriptive phenomenology and its grounding in raw description. This, in turn, instigated a move toward the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty and, in particular, the constructs of reversibility and *écart*. The introduction of this area of Merleau-Ponty's later work enabled interrogation of individual interactions in the context of the relational space between the conductor and the players, thus revealing the work practices which support the pre-reflective node where individual skill and shared experience intertwine. The observer encounters this as the space where the conductor's gesture is refashioned by the members of the orchestra to become sound, but because the relation is reversible, the orchestra's sound then becomes a platform for the conductor's next gesture. Throughout the Kleiber-Concertgebouw performance, we can observe traces of this cycle across a range of activity, most clearly during the transition passages where the symphonic structure and architecture of the musical interpretation are defined. These traces are thus manifestations of the relational structures that subtend the collective music-making, while also giving sensible outline to the space which those structures span.

The paper's second contribution flows from its first, as relational 'between spaces' such as those apparent in this performance are difficult to pin down (Feeney-Hart 2013) and defy easy quantitative definition (Ladkin 2013). By taking a Merleau-Pontian view, grounded in perception as an activity that is both primordial and embodied (Dillon 1997; Ladkin 2013), the analytical approach pursued here gives conceptual shape to evanescent relational entities – such as the space between Kleiber and the players – which can then be explored further. In this performance, for instance, we are seeing *écart* in action, the nexus where individual interpretations, embodied in the conductor's gesture and the player's sound, interweave with the composer's ideas to achieve musical performance. In short, it is where the bond between the flesh and the idea (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 149) accomplishes musical realization and where the Concertgebouw Orchestra and Carlos Kleiber, in uniting behind a collective approach to this space, succeed in releasing the creative energy that, even after almost forty years, makes this performance so compelling.

That said, the relations among orchestral musicians and between players and conductor appear, at first glance, to be very specialized, skill-dependent, and to have few – if any – parallels outside the orchestra. But once we enter the primordial arena at which his work is directed, Merleau-Ponty's ideas give us a fresh perspective. This is where the study's third contribution to our understanding of orchestral relationality emerges, in positing a collegial view of the conductor as 'head waiter,' coordinating a team serving the composer-as-chef's musical 'dish' (Feeney-Hart, 2013), in contrast to the all-powerful occupant of the podium/panopticon (Foucault 2020) of popular imagination. The notions of reversibility and *écart* inject a dose of realism into the latter view, and remind us that, in a symphony orchestra making music, conductor and players are mutually interdependent. In its title *The*

Visible and the Invisible, Merleau-Ponty's (1968) late work carries within it the implication that visible and invisible are two faces of the same thing, and that what we sense always has an inverse that is not directly sensible. Taking Merleau-Ponty at his word, what we see from the conductor and hear from the orchestra are two manifestations of one ideal phenomenon that we cannot see or hear – the idea behind what the composer has written – which rests in the nexus of dehiscence, or *l'écart*, between them. Equally, Carlos Kleiber and the Concertgebouw Orchestra show us what can be achieved when a conductor is able to provide the players of the orchestra with the right space in which to realize their individual, and collective, potential (Talgam 2015); the composer's idea comes to life in a way which reminds us of our common humanity.

5.9 Future directions

This study has a number of implications for future research. Firstly, it contributes to qualitative research methodology by offering a way to account for previous experience prior expertise so that, when harnessed appropriately, that expertise is a resource rather than a source of bias. Here, for instance, the author's background has been crucial to the understanding and interpretation of Carlos Kleiber's often counterintuitive gestural activity and its impact on the performance.

The focus here on the onstage activity of the performers is only an *entrée* to the possibilities for scholarship suggested by a close study of orchestral relationality. There is, for instance, an obvious lacuna that needs to be filled by research into the relationship between player and instrument at one end of the spectrum, and at the other, the connections in performance between musicians onstage and the audience and artifacts, such as the venue,

that lie off it. Service (2012), for instance, analyses the importance of venue and audience presence to the sound of the Concertgebouw Orchestra.

Merleau-Ponty has more to offer the study of orchestral relationality at this point in the form of *Flesh*, the culminating idea of his late ontology (Dillon 1997), that “posits the complete inter-connectivity between perceiver, perceived and world” (Ladkin 2013, 328); this possible direction is an important and necessary extension of the present study because audience and venue are key elements of orchestral performance (Mauceri 2017) that the Kleiber-Concertgebouw example, as a filmed concert, can barely acknowledge.

While these ideas open a new window on orchestral work practices, there are also lessons here for other forms of organization. The possibilities of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of *Flesh* were already being explored in organizational contexts outside the orchestra (Biehl and Volkmann 2019; McConn-Palfreyman, McInnes and Mangan 2019) prior to COVID-19, but the pandemic continues to force a reassessment of intra-organizational relations in its wake that lends even more weight and urgency to the consideration of Merleau-Ponty’s ideas.

Reversibility and *écart*, in particular, take on a new light when we consider the relational implications of Zoom meetings and working from home arrangements that have become part of everyday working experience (Hennessey 2021; Koreman-Smith and Anderson 2021; Warzel 2021), as relational ‘between spaces’ and the collegial bonds that are forged within them are stretched to breaking point and physical distancing takes an inexorable emotional toll (Galea, Merchant and Lurie 2020) on organizations and communities alike. Attention to these spaces and connections across the full gamut of organizational issues from individual identity, both personal and professional, to structure, where the very relational fabric of an organization can come into question, has rarely, if ever, been more urgent. The message of

Merleau-Ponty and the example of Beethoven performed by Carlos Kleiber and the Concertgebouw Orchestra is, therefore, both timely and relevant.

5.10 References

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Chapter 6: Orchestral performance and COVID-19: From perceptual faith to Flesh of the World

6.1 Overview

This chapter is the final stage of the journey with reversibility in orchestral relationality that began with the phenomenon of touch in Chapter 2. Since then, the idea has traversed a range of domains, including, in Chapters 4 and 5, the relational space between conductor and player. A new dimension is added here in the form of Flesh, the concept that rests at the apex of Merleau-Ponty's late ontology (Dillon, 1997). The turn to Flesh brings with it the opportunity to argue the case for considering orchestral performance as a relational fabric that includes often-overlooked offstage actors such as audience and venue, alongside performer and composer. This also illustrates the "starting out from the well-known universality of the singular," exemplified in one hand touching the other, and arriving at "the singularity of the universal," captured in the idea of Flesh, that Sartre (2021, p. 115) views as the "considerable gift" of Merleau-Ponty's late work.

The aim of this chapter is to better understand the substructures of orchestral performance, and the interweaving of the connections that form them, through the interrogation of a key relationship in the performing lifeworld; the connection between musician and venue. This, bond, though central to music-making, is often left unremarked, despite undergirding all the musician's activity. Any disturbance to the relationship thus has the potential to create significant doubt and uncertainty.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created just such a disruption. Although the concert hall where I play most often has remained intact, the precautionary signage and measures such as

hand sanitising stations and segregated spaces have combined with onstage distancing and an associated reduction in player numbers to symbolise the viral intruder's menace. To a player moving through the venue these seemed akin to physical scarring, with the distancing on stage suggesting that we'd lost much of the orchestra to the pandemic even though I knew this not to be the case. So doubt and uncertainty were creating ambiguity and a sense of vulnerability as I began, with increasing urgency, to question taken for granted ways of working that ranged from how to turn pages to pinpointing the location of what I was hearing.

For the researcher, this gave an unusual avenue and level of access to the very tacit and well-hidden work practices which were to be the material for this part of the study, as I had again decided on autoethnography as the most appropriate approach. As two of the genre's leading exponents have recently summarised:

Autoethnography offers an avenue into connecting with the vulnerability and suffering uncertainty brings into our lives, because autoethnography itself is a genre of doubt, a vehicle for exercising, embodying, and enacting ambiguity. The shape of autoethnography is not the exclamation point (!) but the question mark (?) (Bochner & Ellis, 2021, p. 253)

Again, Giorgi's (2012) phenomenologically based method was employed to facilitate analysis, while the Merleau-Pontian constructs of perceptual faith and Flesh helped me first to come to terms with what I was experiencing and then to situate that experience within the wider context of orchestral relationality.

The chapter opens by connecting the COVID-19 affected circumstances of the performance with the ideas of Merleau-Ponty, followed by a discussion of methodological considerations. The analysis interrogates the material generated by the field diary in light of Perceptual Faith and Flesh, while the concluding remarks note the importance of offstage actors to

orchestral performance and elaborate on the resonance between the ambiguity of my experience and COVID-19 related disruption in other forms of organization.

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6.2 Introduction

How do the members of a symphony orchestra connect with each other during a performance? How does an orchestra connect with its audience? Why do some concerts seem to have a ‘buzz’ in the hall, while others can’t end soon enough? Despite a career spent as an orchestral player, I still find that questions such as these don’t come with ready-made answers. If anything, the territory of relationality in orchestral work has become increasingly opaque, refusing to yield to easy characterization and remaining buried beneath the intangibles of collegial trust and tacit work practices (Feeney-Hart, 2013). To complicate matters, the artifacts of music-making – the scores, stands, instruments and venues – carry both physical and symbolic significance, reminding musician and audience alike of past performances even while setting the parameters of upcoming activity.

Since early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to fight it have combined to severely curtail that activity (Christakis, 2020). Routine work practices have been upended, putting orchestras and other organizations under significant stress as they attempt to mitigate the impact of the virus. This very struggle has, however, brought many otherwise taken for granted relationships into sharper focus, as ways of working are revisited and the relational connections within them reassessed (Hennessey, 2021; Warzel,

2021). In the case of the orchestra, this has had the paradoxical effect of opening a window onto embedded ways of relating in performance situations that was not previously available.

In this paper, I take up the challenge presented by this unexpected access and tackle the multi-faceted mix of visible and invisible, tangible and intangible, individual and collective relations that constitutes orchestral work. As communication and coordination in orchestral performance are non-verbal, the first thing to note is something that is often overlooked; the importance of the body to the relationality of music-making. This is not just about the visible and audible biomechanics of an instrument being played; it is also about conveying and perceiving the intangibles of making music – the ideas, emotions and colours that lie *behind* what is heard and seen – and how those influence the relational connections at work. Any conceptual framework directed toward the interrogation of orchestral music-making must therefore account for, or at least acknowledge, the key role played by bodily perception in orchestral relations.

As a key thinker in the field of embodiment and perception, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenologically oriented ideas resonate strongly with such an approach (Dillon, 1997; Diprose & Reynolds, 2014). For Merleau-Ponty, the body is how we know the world and the world 'knows' us; "the perceiving mind is an incarnated mind" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 3) and "[the body] is ... *our point of view on the world*" (1964a, p. 5, original emphases).

Though more widely known for his earlier work on the embodied nature of perception and consciousness in *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012), he later moved to extend his earlier efforts in order "to show how communication with others, and thought, take up and go beyond the realm of perception" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 3). As he did so

the body, perceiving and perceptible, remained at the centre of Merleau-Ponty's attention as being "much more than an instrument or a means: it is our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions" (1964a, p. 5).

This concern is reflected in the two Merleau-Pontian ideas drawn from *The Visible and the Invisible* (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), his posthumously published final work, that are of particular importance to this paper: perceptual faith, and Flesh of the World. Because "we grasp external space through our bodily situation" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 5), the first helps address the dysfunction that arose in my own corporeal condition as COVID-related constraints took their toll on my belief in my own perception. This confidence in what and how we perceive not only underpins daily living but also, for musicians, our own performance. The second, Flesh, is the idea that brings together the various strands of Merleau-Ponty's late ontology (Dillon, 1997), accounting for the relational structure of the world in which we live as an ever-evolving, interwoven relational fabric connecting perceiver, perceived and world. While I explore this concept, and its relevance to the orchestra, in more detail below, the point to be stressed initially is that Flesh, on a Merleau-Pontian account, embraces inanimate artifacts such as venues and music stands alongside musicians and audience members as actors in the orchestral lifeworld.

The case for turning to late Merleau-Ponty as a platform for analyzing orchestral work is also reinforced by his decisive shift, late in *The Visible and the Invisible*, from painting to musical performance for exemplary inspiration. This is crucial because, as Wiskus (2018) points out, it adds a temporal aspect to Merleau-Ponty's argument – the viewing of a painting can take place in an instant, but a performance of any piece of music will, for performer and listener alike, always require time to unfold. Of added significance to this

study is the point that the impact of COVID-19 mitigation was cumulative – it developed *over time*. Rather than any one measure standing out, it was the overall effect of distancing plus signage plus sanitizing stations and so on that, when combined with disruption to daily routines over a number of days, had an increasingly negative impact on my morale as the events captured in the field material unfolded.

Bringing the temporal and social together in this way also moves Merleau-Ponty's ideas into a profoundly ethical space (Dale & Latham, 2015; Daly, 2016). At a preconscious level, once I perceive the other, "the other's body and my own are a single whole, two sides of the same phenomenon, and the anonymous existence, of which my body is continuously the trace, henceforth inhabits these two bodies simultaneously" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 370); this, as Daly (2016, p. 20) explains, means that "as soon as I perceive the living body of an-Other, my environment attains significance not just as the context and means of my possible agency but also that of the other. Through the potentialities and actualities of interaction, our bodies form a system." As my own experience is inextricably intertwined with traces of the Other – the composers, colleagues, audience members and venues that together shape performance as a musical lifeworld – any account I present of that experience carries with it an ethical obligation to those Others. A Merleau-Pontian approach thus helps ensure that this obligation is fulfilled.

In summary, the ideas of Merleau-Ponty that have informed this study offer a holistic, practical and ethically grounded position from which to research the individually specialized but collectively collegial form of organizational praxis that is the symphony orchestra. Through the constructs of perceptual faith and Flesh, and the arguments he marshals in support, Merleau-Ponty provides a conceptual platform that opens relationality in

orchestral music-making to analysis while establishing a solid theoretical foundation from which to direct this inquiry toward wider implications for organizing.

This is complex territory that needs an example to help elucidate the issues at stake. For this, I turn to the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra's (NZSO) response to the Government-mandated preventative measures enacted in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the NZSO's regular concert venue was reconfigured to accommodate the required changes, significant disruption to onstage activity became the new normal. At the same time, however, a fuller picture of orchestral work emerged, and this gave new and unanticipated insights into the relational side of what orchestras 'do' in performance. Drawing on an autoethnographic account of this experience, this paper follows other analyses where extraordinary events have helped scholars shed light on the importance of the preconscious and tacit in the everyday (Glynn, 2000; Weick, 1990), and unpacks the relational foundations of orchestral music-making by interrogating the disruption to performance activity caused by the impact of COVID-19 on performer/venue relations. The aim is to explore this unique situation in order to enhance our knowledge of an area of organizational endeavour that has struggled to move beyond opaque notions of alchemy and magic (Feeney-Hart, 2013; Mauceri, 2017; Service, 2012) and a preoccupation with the role of the conductor (Lebrecht, 1991; Matheopoulos, 1982).

Elsewhere I interrogate orchestral relationality by focusing on communication and coordination within the orchestra itself (Bathurst, Gilling & Rasmussen, 2019; Gilling, 2010, 2014a, 2014b). In this paper I had intended to extend the discussion by including the audience and auditorium as essential but oft-forgotten partners in the performing lifeworld. By early 2020, however, the research remained stuck at the planning stage; the concerts

being given by the NZSO were continuing along their usual trajectory, and few non-routine features that might offer alternative avenues for analysis were presenting themselves.

Then came COVID-19. The measures employed to fight the pandemic began to bite almost immediately, and the sudden, drastic disruption that resulted cut deep into the foundational layers of orchestral relationality. As a result, observable traces of pre-reflective practice and connection began to emerge which gave the research an impetus that had hitherto been lacking. This was most obvious in one particular batch of field material covering a performance season of Beethoven's 5th Symphony. The event took place in the NZSO's usual concert venue, but under a regime of the most stringent anti-virus restrictions that still permitted concertizing; the orchestra was distanced, no audience was physically present, and the concert hall itself bore a range of reminders of the virus's threat. Field notes showed basic procedures such as page turning coming under conscious scrutiny as changes in ways of working undermined my confidence in my ability to execute these quasi-instinctive movements. This in turn suggested a deeper erosion of trust in the pre-reflective norms that underpin orchestral music-making.

Drawing on these observations, I argue in this paper that my growing doubt in what I was perceiving undermined my contribution to the wider relational substructure of the performance. I also contend that this shift in my perceptual trust brought to light rare clues as to the nature and form of the primordially interconnected relational 'tissue' – the Flesh (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), or relational 'meshwork' (Ingold, 2011) – on which orchestral music-making is predicated. Further, I broaden the scope of my inquiry by casting the net beyond the stage itself to include audience and artifact; this move also adds nuance to existing accounts of the orchestra, as these tend to focus on specific aspects such as conductor-

based leadership (Atik, 1994; Mintzberg, 1998; Talgam, 2015), or the work of individual musicians (Mauceri, 2017; Service, 2012; Wigglesworth, 2018).

As in earlier work (Gilling, 2014b), methodological inspiration is drawn from a combination of autoethnography and the descriptive phenomenology of Giorgi (2012). This approach began with a diarised account being reread and parsed for meaning units, which in turn generated the move toward Merleau-Ponty's ideas for theoretical support. While the paper is based on an account of one short period centred on one performance, it is set against the backdrop of my long-standing career as an orchestral player; the *epoché* or complete bracketing of personal bias that is usually associated with a phenomenologically inspired method (Giorgi, 2012, 2020; Groenewald, 2004; Sadala & Adorno, 2002; Stablein, 2002) has, as a result, proven to be neither practical nor entirely desirable (Zahavi, 2019). Nonetheless, this approach yielded important results, as in the very process of trying to set my preconceptions and prejudices to one side, the impact of the COVID-19-related constraints on preconscious performance practice became apparent. This primordial arena is where Merleau-Ponty situates his philosophy (Dastur, 1994; Dillon, 1997), so the resonance of the field material with the changing character of the relationality at work also motivates the paper's analytical turn to Merleau-Ponty's (1968) late ontology and the key constructs of perceptual faith and Flesh. In this way "the belief in the veracity of our own perception" (Dillon, 1997, p. 156) and the interwoven strands of sensible and sentient were brought together to ensure research relevance, allow the flavour of unease and uncertainty that has surrounded these unprecedented circumstances to emerge, and to shed light on the relational connections that form what Ingold (2011, p. 71) calls the "tangle [that] is the texture of the world."

To summarize, this study explores the pre-reflective relationality of orchestral work through an autoethnographic account of performing under the shadow of COVID-19. As the pandemic is ongoing, definitive conclusions about its effects cannot yet be drawn; its effects can, however, still serve as an exemplary stimulus. So to that end, the following discussion begins by situating COVID-19 and its impact on orchestras in a Merleau-Pontian context, followed by a summarized presentation of the relevant field material. From this, Merleau-Ponty's ideas of perceptual faith and Flesh are applied in an exploration of preconscious relationality located in the connection between player, audience and concert venue. The analysis presented here is in two parts. Firstly, I interrogate uncertainty in my own tacit work practices and locate the associated doubt within my trust in my own perception. Secondly, I discuss the implications of this for my understanding, as a participant, of the preconscious structures that connect the orchestra to audience and venue – the relational tissue of the orchestral lifeworld. This line of inquiry is predicated on a real world application of Merleau-Ponty's ontology. Given the music-making of an orchestra is bound to the venue in which it takes place, the aim here is to open a window onto a lifeworld where the non-human artifact is inextricably intertwined with the human actor. I conclude with a brief discussion of the wider implications for orchestras and other forms of organization.

6.3 Merleau-Ponty, the virus and the orchestra

The COVID-19 experience highlights the global and individual currency of Merleau-Ponty's ideas. On the one hand, the pandemic has had an international impact, repeatedly overwhelming the best that medical science has to offer (Christakis, 2020; Ferguson, 2020) and stretching social fabrics to breaking point (Galea, Merchant & Lurie, 2020). On the other

hand, antiviral countermeasures at an individual level – sanitizing one’s hands, scanning a tracing code, maintaining social distance, wearing a face mask, or getting vaccinated – involve intensely personal decisions and actions that affect our own bodies and, in most cases, alteration to familiar environments. In the face of relational turbulence of this scope and scale, Merleau-Ponty’s notion of Flesh offers a way to find and maintain our bearings. Countering the virus means acquiring individual protection while bolstering collective efforts through measures such as vaccination, mask-wearing, distancing and quarantining. From a Merleau-Pontian standpoint, these represent the ambiguity in the boundary between body and world that characterizes the ongoing pursuit of immunity from all such invasive diseases (Morris, 2018).

For orchestras, these efforts initially included additional physical barriers in order to achieve the separation mandated for ensemble work. This brought with it extra layers of complication, from no ‘live’ audience, a reduction to skeletal numbers of socially distanced musicians and playing behind Perspex screens (Ross, 2020), to recording undertaken remotely or, at best, “in much smaller groups, distanced very far apart” (Favreau, quoted in Hibberd, 2020, p. 4). But screens and distancing inhibit musical communication as well as viral transmission, so any gains in physical security were offset by a corresponding degradation in artistic connection. Despite the sense of relief whenever a return to the concert stage was possible, all this disruption gave familiar activity an air of unwelcome uncertainty as each restriction added a new hurdle to what would otherwise have been routine practice (Ross, 2020).

The NZSO’s initial return to work was marked by similarly unsettling circumstances, compounded by the orchestra’s status as one of the first in the world to be able to return to

the concert platform. This left the NZSO without any guiding precedent and working, as daily news bulletins reminded us, under the shadow of the virus. With gatherings under strict, government-mandated numerical limits and social distancing restrictions still firmly in place, no physical audience was allowed and distancing within the player cohort was rigorously enforced. The ensuing change in my relations with the venue was striking and disturbing in equal measure; the obligatory *absence* of certain colleagues and audience changed the space even while the *presence* of other colleagues and the act of performing gave acoustic shape to it.

The aberrant juxtaposition of doubt and affirmation, occurring in what is my ‘home’ environment as a musician, unnerved the player in me even as it offered the rarest of opportunities to observe tacit relational practices in action; with this in mind, I now present an overview of the field account. The concert that I discuss was given during the early stages of the NZSO’s return to rehearsal and performance activity; the ‘field summary’ that follows is intended both as a grounding for later analysis and as an aid to help the reader get a feel for what the plunge into these uncharted waters felt like at the time.

6.4 The virus and the venue

The Michael Fowler Centre (MFC) in Wellington, New Zealand, has been the main performing venue for the NZSO and its players since it was opened in 1983. To see it bearing the scars of COVID-19 in the form of distancing tape, sanitizing stations and QR tracing codes was, and remains, confronting and unnerving. As became obvious within the first few days after full lockdown conditions were lifted and the NZSO had its first opportunity to reunite on stage, the experience also reinforced the central position of this venue in the orchestra’s performing lifeworld. Distancing was required both onstage and off, putting

collegial connection to the test, while as rehearsals progressed it became apparent that relations between humans and their non-human surroundings were also coming under pressure. Starting at the stage door with a QR tracing code and hand sanitizer station sitting alongside the old sign welcoming visitors, reminders of COVID-19 were everywhere. The warning was a blunt one: rehearsals might be back on, but this was not a resumption of anything close to 'normal service.' As per government regulations, the staircase up to the stage level was marked with tape down the middle to keep users a metre apart and a notice was emailed to all players alerting them to backstage distancing restrictions. Unpacked instrument cases were placed well apart on tables, chairs were removed to maintain spacing and tape had been placed in the middle of corridor floors. A hint of a cough or a sneeze brought glances of apprehension, and even the quips about quarantining and the like carried an edge; "what's the worst thing about a three day lockdown? The first three weeks ..." remains a personal favourite. This all added to the steady – and rising – drumbeat of changes in routine that had become necessary in the staging of a socially distanced performance. And, of course, the ubiquitous bottles of hand sanitizer, constantly refilled and situated strategically throughout the backstage area, served as an ever-present symbol of the need for vigilance and a reminder of the consequences of a viral outbreak.

So when walking backstage along one side of a wide, distance-inducing strip of tape to the stage entrance itself, I had already begun to regard the venue as a battleground as much as a concert hall where, somehow, music was to be made. Arriving on stage brought another arresting image; a large number of seats had been removed from the various string sections, and the orchestra's Stage Manager, armed with a pair of callipers, was measuring the distance between each chair. This ensured maintenance of the orchestra's overall seating

footprint despite a metre's separation between players being required regardless of instrument (see Figure 6.1). But the sight was unnerving for another reason; the stage now looked as though we had already lost a number of our people to the virus. This disconcerting thought immediately had me consciously questioning basic, and usually instinctive, technical considerations – how to keep contact with my colleagues, what a single string player per stand would mean for page turning, and how acoustic balance would be maintained with the Wind and Brass sections that, while distanced, were not numerically reduced.

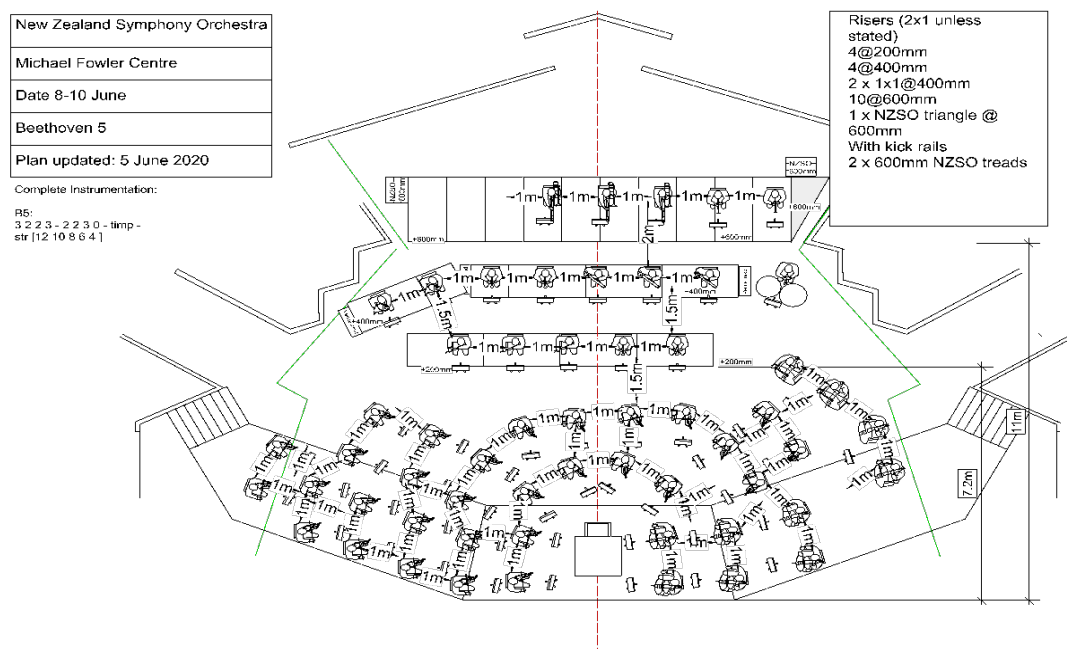


Figure 6.1 Seating plan, Beethoven's 5th Symphony (courtesy NZ Symphony Orchestra)

Once the orchestra began to play, the disorientation, compounded by the absence of an audience, was immediate and disconcerting. The repertoire – Beethoven's 5th Symphony – could hardly have been more familiar, but sound was not coming from the direction I was expecting and, thanks to the one metre space between me and my colleagues, it was nowhere near as immediate as usual. Also, sight lines had to be adjusted as other section members' heads were now in what would normally have been the gaps used to see the

conductor. None of this – either the measures taken around distancing or the acoustic variation that seemed to be happening as a result of the revised seating arrangements – would have been considered overly problematic in a pre-COVID-19 setting, as they can often occur depending on what repertoire has been programmed. Now, though, having been ‘softened up’ backstage by symbols of the viral scourge, the effect as the performance progressed was instead to have me questioning both my own playing and the quality of the overall result. From a Merleau-Pontian standpoint, the “intentional threads” of self-belief and inner certainty “that connect [me] to the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. lxxvii) of orchestral performance were starting to fray.

But it was what happened at the end of the piece that showed a real rip in the relational fabric. Beethoven spends the last few pages of the 5th Symphony’s score deliberately ratcheting up the emotional heat through trusted tricks of the composer’s trade; insistently repetitive rhythm and harmony join increasing speed and dynamic volume to propel the music headlong toward the final chords, thereby invariably generating thunderous, if engineered, applause. In this performance, the triumphant conclusion of this remarkable work was instead greeted by a silence that was, as the saying goes, deafening. For me, and judging by other conversations among many of my colleagues at the time, the absence of any response from a living, breathing and – above all – in-house audience sharing in the concert experience was both palpable and jarring. But the impact of this lacuna also summed up a paradox at the heart of this particular performance; intense relief at being able to perform as an orchestra on the one hand, and a feeling of violation at the incursion of COVID-19 into our revered concert space on the other.

To the outside observer, this intrusion and its symbols may appear trivial, amounting to little more than cosmetic interference. A small price to pay for a return to concertizing, then, especially when the inconveniences were minor and suffered by everyone. So why did a few strips of tape and bottles of hand sanitizer take on such outsize significance and come to symbolize an orchestra's part in a nation's fight with this invisible but deadly adversary? Why did distancing, which actually gave me the physical space to play that can often be lacking on a crowded stage, have the opposite effect and instead feel both oppressive and inhibiting? And why did performing without an audience feel so disconcerting, when that is how the orchestra plays in rehearsal anyway?

An overview suggests that, taken together, these reminders of the pandemic became a cypher for a deep-seated relational shift that injected a new layer of uncertainty into the primordial connection between artists, artifacts and audience. Signs of this ambiguity recurred throughout the diarised account, especially in situations of physical and relational uncertainty. The doubt that arose was cumulative, coalescing around small alterations in various routines that, in the end, added up to major change. Also, no aspect of performing escaped unscathed; everything from walking through the stage door and unpacking my instrument to orchestral seating and lack of audience presence in the auditorium bore witness to the pandemic's pervasive impact.

This explicitation of usually tacit relational practices served to underscore the point that adapting to COVID-19-related constraints brought with it uncertainty and that this, in turn, compromised the relational bedrock of musical performance – the individual musician's preconscious confidence in their own perception. For the researcher interrogating the field

material however, it was exactly this subversion of trust that pulled back the curtain on the pre-reflective relational structure – the Flesh – of the orchestral lifeworld.

6.5 Flesh, ambiguity and perceptual faith

The idea of Flesh, as left to us by Merleau-Ponty, remains an unfinished “conceptual multiplicity” (Hass, 2008, p. 138) that refuses to be shoehorned into one simple definition (Dillon, 1997; Evans, 2014; Hass, 2008). As his erstwhile colleague and friend Jean-Paul Sartre points out, this is both deliberate on Merleau-Ponty’s part – “Merleau didn’t think he was providing solutions” – and because “he did not reach the end of his thinking or, at least, he did not have time to express it in its entirety” (Sartre, 2021, p. 116). While many scholars see this as a source of inspiration (Weiss, 2014), clarification of the idea’s conceptual origins in questions of ambiguity and the idea of perceptual faith remains necessary. From there, the position on these ideas taken in this paper can be presented.

A move beyond the dichotomy of mind as disembodied consciousness and body as bio-mechanical object is perhaps the defining feature of Merleau-Ponty’s late inquiry (Dastur, 2008; Dillon, 1997). Indeed, for him, this move is vital if post-Cartesian Western philosophy is to account for the ambiguity intrinsic in “the constant, mutual interaction between the flesh that is my body and the flesh that is the world” (Weiss, 2010, p. 75). In contrast to the dualism that he targets, Merleau-Ponty embraces this ambiguity; an undercurrent of activity versus passivity runs through his later work (Morris, 2010; Weiss, 2014), and belief and doubt are, as we shall see, central to the whole notion of perceptual faith. But the culmination of his treatment of ambiguity comes in the form of a chiasmically intertwined and inherently reversible Flesh of the World – the “ultimate notion” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968,

p. 140) – within which sensible and sentient retain identity amid collective relational connection:

Merleau-Ponty's view of the 'ambiguity' of living perception is not for him to say it is meaningless or vague ... On the contrary, he uses the word literally to denote that our experience of the world is pregnant with multiple meaning-directions for our living bodies, with multiple things calling for our attention" (Hass, 2008, p. 62)

To return to our example of orchestral performance, players and conductor making music are immersed in precisely this kind of ambiguity, developing and refining individual contributions by parsing a multitude of 'meaning-directions' and 'things' from colleagues and surroundings.

6.6 Perceptual faith

In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty (1968) opens his account of the primordial ambiguity of relationality through the thesis of perceptual faith – "our belief in the veracity of perception" (Dillon, 1997, p. 156). This belief is preconscious; it is "not faith in the sense of decision but in the sense of what is *before* any position" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 3n; emphasis added), and so underpins the trust among orchestral performers that shapes the visceral substructure on which the collective interpretation rests. This already suggests a chiasmatic and reversible connectivity at work, beginning with each player and their individual response to what they perceive, then among performers, and finally unfolding among musicians, composition, audience, and concert hall as the collaboration evolves into a lifeworld where "the doors of the auditorium are closed and sealed by a tribal consciousness" (Mauceri, 2017, p. 133) and the performance assumes its final form as an all-inclusive relational 'meshwork' (Ingold, 2011).

This is why the doubt and uncertainty running through much of the COVID-19 performing experience had such a corrosive effect on my performing relationships, attacking the foundations of my own self-belief while eroding my trust in others, whether human or non-human. Thus shaken, my confidence in key connections, from close-quarters relations with immediate colleagues to spatio-acoustic bonds with the concert hall itself, was compromised, making a destabilisation of my belief in the relational and sensory connectivity of music-making all but inescapable. There are implications here for organizing beyond the orchestra, so this crucial area of Merleau-Ponty's work is worth a closer look.

The notion of perceptual faith is fundamental to Merleau-Ponty's late ontology, as it captures the ongoing, primordial commitment (Hass, 2008, p. 126) that we all make in the course of daily existence in the form of the belief "that our vision goes to the things themselves" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 28). As Morris (2018, p. 203) reminds us, it is a spontaneous quality of the moment; "perceptual faith cannot be guaranteed in advance. It happens." And, for Merleau-Ponty, perceptual faith is also primordially ambiguous; "it is a faith *because* it is the possibility of doubt" (1968, p. 103, original emphasis). This doubt, in a performance context, is what led to my diminished confidence in my own ability and trust in others although, in something of an irony, the appeal of doubt to the possibility of conscious scrutiny is exactly what brought these tacit practices to light in the first place.

Perceptual faith is a fragile thing that, in the orchestral context, becomes even more so through the highly specialized, multi-sensory manner in which it is operationalized. From where I sit in the 2nd Violin section, I cannot see the wind, brass and percussion players behind me without physically turning around, so I have to *believe* that they will adjust to acoustic conditions and *trust* that their contribution will arrive simultaneously with mine for

the audience beyond the stage. Given that a) I can't see those behind me, b) the distances involved between players vary considerably, and c) that what I hear is as much feedback from the venue as it is a sound direct from any player, there is no way I can *know* that our contributions will coincide. Even with a conductor *in situ*, my playing is based on perceptual faith grounded in sensory triangulation between what I see from conductor and colleagues, what I hear from those closest to me, and what I hear from those furthest away, all as varying combinations of direct and venue-mediated sound. In summary, an orchestral musician's perceptual faith is belief interwoven with knowledge of what others onstage are doing. But as "living perception is this paradoxical experience of encountering the other-than-me *only through me*" (Hass, 2008, p. 127, original emphases), the seed of doubt in my perception of others planted by the COVID-19 experience turned increasingly inward, morphing into a personal insecurity and a skepticism bordering on mistrust in my own abilities. The latent capacity for doubt that lies embedded in performing relationships thus threatened to unravel the very intertwining which, on a Merleau-Pontian account, is the structural nexus of Flesh, his relational alternative to the subject-object dichotomy.

6.7 Flesh

So what, on this reading, is Flesh? "The flesh we are speaking of is not matter. It is the coiling over of the visible on the seeing body, of the tangible on the touching body" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 146), the inherently reversible intertwining of things that are asymmetrical – different, but not directly opposite (Dillon, 1997; Hass, 2008). This occurs through *l'écart* (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), the gap with implied connection, the dehiscence between activity and passivity, and the hinge between sensible and sentient on which the chiasmic structure of Flesh rests. In this way, writes Merleau-Ponty, "there is no coinciding of

the seer with the visible. But each borrows from the other, takes from or encroaches upon the other, intersects with the other, is in chiasm with the other” (1968, p. 261), while in another working note from a year earlier he suggests that this “mediation through reversal, this chiasm ... is not only a me-other rivalry, but a co-functioning” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 215). Sensing and sensed are thus able to retain their individual identity, interwoven in a reversible relation in which complete coincidence “is always imminent but never realized in fact” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 147).

Presented like this, simple subject-object dualisms are dissolved by an infusion of agentic energy that, in a performance context, resonates with the “palpable shared concentration” (Gilbert, 2015, p. 5) and “tribal consciousness” (Mauceri, 2017, p. 133) posited by orchestral practitioners. Here the physical intertwines with the ideal, and is foreshadowed by Merleau-Ponty at his most evocative:

the performer is no longer producing or reproducing the sonata: he feels himself, and the others feel him to be at the service of the sonata; the sonata sings through him or cries out so suddenly that he must ‘dash on his bow’ to follow it. And these open vortexes in the sonorous world finally form one sole vortex in which the ideas fit in with one another (1968, p. 151).

This is a pivotal passage for a number of reasons. For one thing, the image of ‘open vortexes’ forming ‘one sole vortex,’ when taken alongside Gilbert (2015) and Mauceri (2017), suggests a strong affinity between *Flesh* as posited by Merleau-Ponty and orchestral performance. For this paper, however, the thread that opens up an important new direction is that of the player ‘dashing on his bow,’ as it introduces the *artifacts* of music-making – the instruments, music scores, music stands and venues – into the relational mix. These are the inanimate but still centre-stage actors that, when taken alongside musicians and audience, direct us towards recognizing the role of non-human Others in shaping the corporeal-ideal ‘sonorous world’ of the concert experience.

Under normal circumstances, such ties are deeply buried and rarely acknowledged even though, by virtue of their communal interweaving with shared objects and spaces, they also carry traces of the inter-human associations that lie embedded within them. I have played the same violin for 36 years; just as it has shaped my artistic voice, so too, signs of wear that attest to the journey we have been on together are evident on the instrument. On a larger scale, concert halls lie mute without musicians and their audiences, while musicians need their instruments, music scores, somewhere to play, and someone to play to. This is why the anthropologist Tim Ingold (2011, p. 70) opines that organisms and people “are not so much nodes in a network as knots in a tissue of knots,” their environment is a “domain of entanglement” and, ultimately, that this tangle, this ‘meshwork’ is “the texture of the world.” On this account, Ingold continues, “beings do not simply occupy the world, they *inhabit* it, and in so doing – in threading their own paths through the meshwork – they contribute to its ever-evolving weave” (2011, p. 71).

Here the bond between “the Flesh and the idea” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 149), joins Ingold’s meshwork as the full ‘tangle’ of the performing lifeworld – human with non-human, tangible lifeform and artifact with intangible idea and emotion – begins to unfold as Flesh in the full sense of Merleau-Ponty’s term. To put this in context, I now turn to the ‘thread in the tangle’ that featured more than any other in the field material: the bond between the musician, audience and the concert hall.

6.8 From perceptual faith to concert hall

Concert halls may not be sentient beings, but from a Merleau-Pontian perspective they nonetheless ‘inhabit’ the world, mixing form with function as they serve their nominal purpose while remaining enmeshed in the social, physical and temporal fabric of their

environment (Ingold, 2000, 2011). The Gewandhaus in Leipzig is not only the home of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra; in 1989 the building itself played a critical role in the fall of the East German regime, precisely because it was recognized on both sides of the political divide as a symbol of a common cultural history stretching back to Mozart, Beethoven and Mendelssohn, and so offered a neutral space where politically charged dialogue could be held in safety (Schicker, 2015).

To orchestral players and their communities, concert halls embody a past, present and future in which everyone has a stake. The Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and the Philharmonie Berlin, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and the Vienna Musikverein stand alongside The Gewandhaus and its orchestra as revered examples of orchestra/concert hall relationships. But these orchestras are renowned not only for high technical standards; they are also noted for a distinctive sound and way of playing which, remarkably, is apparent even in venues other than their own (Service, 2012). Their style of music-making carries with it traces of the unique characteristics and performance history of the hall the orchestra calls home, suggesting a 'Flesh' which, though created anew at each performance, is imbued with relational connections to the past as well as to the present.

This becomes clear with a closer look at the acoustic properties, or 'sound' of an auditorium. No two halls have the same profile, so it follows, as one Concertgebouw player points out, that "the sound of the hall an orchestra plays in is very important for the identity of any orchestra" (Kouwenhoven, quoted in Service, 2012, p. 71). In the case of the Concertgebouw Orchestra this identity, as Service (2012) analyses, is as much a function of the Concertgebouw concert hall and its unique acoustic properties as it is due to the playing

of any one individual. But neither does a hall have a 'sound' *per se*; whatever the attributes of a venue, they are no more than latent potential until unlocked through music-making by performers for their audience. The relationship is both deep and primordially reversible but, given its roots in performed sound, also evanescent and transitory, requiring renewal at each performance. Music, musician, audience member and concert venue are thus intertwined in a meshwork of active relationality that gives expression to Merleau-Ponty's working note quoted earlier: "each borrows from the other, takes from or encroaches upon the other, intersects with the other, is in chiasm with the other" (1968, p. 261). Each actor shapes, and is shaped by, the others as the performing lifeworld opens up before them.

This is evident, from a physical perspective, in every note played during a performance. Whatever is heard by a colleague comes from both the source itself and as reflected off various surfaces in the venue, while whatever the musician hears – whether their own contribution or someone else's playing – is coming via the hall as well as straight from its original source. Further, given that how I play is influenced by what I hear from those around me, the sound heard by musician and colleague alike is carrying a trace of the contributions of *all* those in the auditorium, playing or listening, as even someone sitting in silence influences the acoustic through their very corporeality.

Again considered from a purely physical point of view, this is also where an audience has a significant impact. If I look out into the auditorium and see a 'full house' of concertgoers, I know to expect an acoustic that is less resonant or 'drier' than if no audience is present, simply because bodies absorb sound. In a nod to the traces of past performances that run through this relationship, previous experience also tells me that a full hall will have a direct impact on technical decisions around articulation and sonic timbre, which in turn has

implications for collective activity through the overall tempo decided on by the conductor. Dry acoustics generally ask for less articulatory edge – or ‘more vowel, less consonant’ as a former teacher succinctly put it – while more reverberant acoustics may require the opposite, along with slower tempi so that the music can be heard clearly.

Service (2012, p. 60) illustrates, describing a post-concert recording, undertaken to cover, or ‘patch,’ various issues in a Concertgebouw Orchestra performance due for later CD release. During the retakes, “a gigantic red velvet cloth [was] suspended from the ceiling [of the Concertgebouw hall], a few rows back in the stalls, about ten metres behind [the] podium, to simulate the acoustic dampening of 2,300 Dutch bums on seats, creating as much sonic continuity for the record producers as possible.” The challenge for the musicians then becomes one of rediscovering the intensity of performance and fixing the problem at hand, all while playing to a curtain rather than an audience. This demonstrates the extent to which audience members themselves function as an extension of a concert hall, changing its acoustic profile just by their physical presence or absence. However, as we move from the purely physical to the ideal, we also encounter a visible and audible reminder of the relational tissue, the Merleau-Pontian Flesh, that is the texture of the lifeworld which interconnects all those present – including, inescapably, the space in which the music-making takes place.

In performance, the traces of this interwoven texture are usually so fleeting as to be next to invisible, even to a trained eye actively seeking them out. Not surprisingly, these signs become easier to understand when thrown into relief – in other words, when the relational fabric itself is torn, incomplete, or otherwise *not* functioning. This can happen for any number of reasons; a key player could be missing or, as in the present case, the entire

audience may be absent. The jarring impact of the conclusion to Beethoven's 5th Symphony that featured in the field notes provides a graphic illustration. This was, for me, the most striking moment of the entire project, as without an audience, the last notes of the piece reverberated to an extent that took many by surprise, signalling both a vacant auditorium and a rupture in the relational substructure – the 'palpable shared concentration' referred to by Gilbert (2015). This connection built among the players during the performance, but such is the compelling inexorability of Beethoven's music that the full impact of the audience-sized lacuna didn't really hit until the final chords were met with the deafening silence of an empty hall. I left the stage certain that, whatever I might be feeling, Beethoven had indeed written this symphony for an audience. A relentless rhythmic and harmonic drive give the concluding pages of this score an inevitability that, rooted in "[Beethoven's] *inexplicable ability to know what the next note has to be,*" (Bernstein, 1963, p. 29, original emphases) gives the "open vortexes in the sonorous world" the impetus to "finally form one sole vortex in which the ideas fit in with one another" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 151).

This concert, simply by having no public present, brought that point into stark relief, but it also reinforced the relevance of Beethoven in a pandemic-stricken 21st Century. A big claim perhaps, but by cementing the bond between the Flesh of live performance and the composer's musical idea, Beethoven's writing carries within it the genesis of the interwoven relational meshwork – the very source of "the titanic power of *orchestra*" (Mauceri, 2017, p. 133, original emphasis) – that emerges renewed and revitalized each time this music is played. My perceptual faith in my own contribution may have been shaken by the COVID 19-related symbols and the lack of an audience, but my relational balance found its equilibrium restored by the fundamental integrity of Beethoven's music or, as the

conductor, composer and educator Leonard Bernstein puts it, the feeling that “our boy has the real goods ... the power to make you feel at the finish: *Something is right with the world*” (1963, p. 29, original emphases).

The musician’s note is, then, far more than just a sonic pitch measured in so many hertz. Intertwining the corporeal with the ideal, it also opens onto a temporal dimension grounded in the sonic texture of the music itself. Merleau-Ponty provides a parallel in ‘The Chiasm’ when he refers to the colour red as “un certain noeud dans la trame du simultané et du successif” – “a certain knot in the weft of the simultaneous and the successive” (1964b, p. 174, my translation) – or “a punctuation in the field of red things, which includes the tiles of roof tops, the flags of gatekeepers and of the Revolution” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 132). The sound a musician hears or plays is, by analogy, a musical knot in the weft of the simultaneous ‘now’ of a note and the ‘before and after’ notes that precede and follow it, a ‘punctuation’ in the musical fabric of the composition. Wiskus makes a similar point, stressing the rhythmicity and melodic flow that inheres in the temporality suggested by Merleau-Ponty: “the chiastic structure at the heart of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of the flesh expresses not only the immersion of a body in the world that *sees*; it expresses also, as *that which is no longer* and *that which is to come*, a creative, melodic movement of time” (Wiskus, 2018, p. 129, original emphases). From a relational standpoint, the sound carries within it traces of human and non-human actors from past performances, becoming nothing less than an audible manifestation of the composer’s conceptual direction. Sound, whether as a single note, a Proustian “little phrase” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 149), or a meshwork of threads woven into the complexity of a Beethoven symphony, knits musicians, music, venue

and audience ‘borrowing,’ ‘encroaching’ and ‘intersecting’ together to form the performance – the Flesh of the orchestral lifeworld.

6.9 Conclusion

This paper explores pre-reflective relationality in orchestral work through the lens of a player’s experience performing in a symphony orchestra under the shadow of COVID-19.

Because of the unique circumstances arising from the measures taken to mitigate the threat of the pandemic, the opportunity arose to observe these relations as they were ‘stress-tested’ by the orchestra’s musicians in the process of adapting to the new performing environment.

The study’s method was inspired by autoethnography and underpinned by Merleau-Ponty’s notions of perceptual faith and Flesh. These constructs, drawn from Merleau-Ponty’s later philosophy, developed a compelling explanatory force over the course of the study, offering insight into why quasi-instinctive activity suddenly became conscious and how relations with artifacts as well as human others were caught up in one individual’s uncertainty. A Merleau-Pontian view also revealed that such relations are not of the discrete “between the organism ‘here’ and the environment ‘there’” (Ingold, 2011, p. 69) variety, but rather are primordially interwoven to form the evolving relational fabric of musician, audience and venue – the Flesh – of the performing lifeworld.

In this paper I have followed my own relationship with the concert hall through the personal uncertainty and doubt generated by various forms of COVID-related symbolism and mitigation. As Ingold (2011), Wiskus (2018), and Merleau-Ponty (1968) himself suggest, relational threads such as this are fundamentally temporal and ever-evolving. In short, they

are “a trail *along* which life is lived” (Ingold, 2011, p. 69, original emphasis) and orchestral music is performed.

6.10 Future Directions

Some weeks after the events analysed here, I encountered an acquaintance who, but for the restrictions in place at the time, would have been present at the performance as an audience member. Instead, he and his partner watched the event together a week later, online and at home. They found it one of the most powerful performances of this symphony that they had experienced and, thanks no doubt to the director’s liberal use of a variety of close up shots, they felt involved with the musicians onstage in a way that is not possible when sitting in a concert hall. For those listeners, the lifeworld of the performance was extended through time and space, beyond the immediate confines of stage and hall, out over the internet and into their living room – seven days later. This suggests that Merleau-Ponty’s idea of *Flesh* has relevance beyond the immediate environment of the concert itself and extends the relational boundary of the orchestral lifeworld to include media such as broadcasts, recordings, and streamed events.

Nostalgia for past performances aside, the parallels between the virtual encounter these listeners had with the orchestra and wider experience of now-ubiquitous communication tools such as Zoom and Google Meets are worth closer inspection. Maintaining relational connections has been an issue across organizational forms throughout the struggle to cope with the pandemic and its impact on workforces and customers (Christakis, 2020; Ferguson, 2020). Quite apart from an undercurrent of ongoing logistical disruption, there is always the nagging fear that “if a job can be done remotely, it can also be outsourced” (Hennessy, 2021, p. 5), while the line between ‘virtual’ and ‘reality’ in the workplace has become

blurred as possibilities are explored, boundaries extended, and other ways of working are discovered (Warzel, 2021). A turn to Merleau-Ponty's late ontology and, through the construct of Flesh, an understanding of organizations as relational fabrics in which the threads connecting human and inanimate are considered alongside relations with human others, has implications for organizational form and function well beyond the symphony orchestra. Rather than be seduced by the novelty of the latest technology or management fad (Warzel, 2021), a Merleau-Pontian view encourages us to consider the functional workplace in light of deeper questions of personal and professional identity, and relations with others – whether colleagues, clients or artifacts. Whatever the shape of the post-pandemic organization, these connections will remain essential.

6.11 References

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Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Summary of the thesis and its findings

This thesis explores music-making in the symphony orchestra from a player's perspective. It does so with two aims in mind: to enhance our understanding of the pre-reflective relational substructures that underpin the organizing of orchestral performance, and to explore the implications of this research for the study and practice of organizational management beyond the orchestra.

In this chapter, I begin by summarizing the main argument and findings. This summary is followed by a double response to the research questions, first through a direct answer and then by outlining the contributions to knowledge that this study makes. I conclude by discussing possibilities for future work that arise from the research presented here.

The search for an answer began in Chapter 2 with the relationship between player, instrument and score, viewed through the theoretical lens of Merleau-Ponty's (1968) reversibility construct. This was undertaken through an autoethnographic account of performing the opening stanza of Richard Strauss's (1915) *Eine Alpensinfonie*, and an interrogation of the impact of performing that remarkable piece of orchestration on my perception of what is the most intimate of performing relationships – the connection between player and instrument.

The key point to emerge from this account is that even the most mundane of performing relations is, indeed, *reversible*. When considered at a primordial level through Merleau-Ponty's idea, the experience in Chapter 2 reveals this reversibility in my instrument acting on me even as I act on it, and in the printed score and audible music shaping my

contribution even as I play the notes on the page – to the point where, as Cumming puts it, “I do not play the music ... The music plays me” (2000, p. 305).

Chapter 2 thus begins this study’s interrogation of pre-reflective coordination in orchestral music-making – the relationality at work prior to any conscious identification – by introducing Merleau-Ponty’s reversibility thesis as both a *way of understanding* relationality in performance and as giving a name to a foundational *quality* of how orchestral performance is organized. Worth noting, too, are the implications for organizing beyond the orchestra already emerging; the reversibility in relations between players and their instruments, for instance, finds analogies in other situations where tools are an integral part of the work being performed (Weick, 1996).

This, of course, begs the question: how far does this reversibility extend? Does it go past relations with close-proximity inanimate others such as violins and music scores to fellow musicians and beyond? The next three chapters answer the collegial part of that question by focusing on the relational connection that, aside from the player-instrument bond explored in Chapter 2, is the most prominent in orchestral work: the relationship between the player and the conductor. My experience, along with accounts such as Mauceri (2017), Service (2012) and Wigglesworth (2018), suggests that reversibility is an essential characteristic of conductor-player relations. However, addressing this hunch created a methodological hurdle, in that a return to autoethnography with myself again as the primary source, could easily have led to an account of this relationship that, although unlikely to be as vituperatively acidulous as that of Yffer (1995), would at best be biased and at worst counterproductive.

The next section therefore explores the conductor-player relationship from two differing perspectives. The first unpacks four key contributions to the development of the conductor's role as an organizing force in orchestral work, while the second interrogates a performance that illustrates reversibility and *écart* functioning as important features in the organizational, as well as the musical, side of orchestral performance.

The primary responsibility of the conductor, the only silent musician onstage, is to coordinate the disparate playing contributions that make up orchestral performance. To this end, he or she is centrally placed on stage and works from a musical score (e.g., Figure 2.3) that contains the notation for each player's part. But this position has also come to embody dictatorial power and sole interpretive responsibility in a move that goes well beyond the time-beating function that was the role's original purpose. Once the performance starts, however, conductor-player relations achieve an equilibrium that is grounded in the collaborative ebb and flow of collegial music-making, and so in this study, the conductor is regarded as a *primus inter pares* figure along the lines of the headwaiter described by the conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen (quoted in Feeney-Hart, 2013) – a team leader charged with ensuring that the composer/chef's musical cuisine is served to the audience member/diner in the best possible condition. The omnipotent dictator of Canetti (1962) and Lebrecht (1991) is left to orchestral mythology, a relic of a bygone era.

The relationship between conductors and the players in front of them is a complex subject with a storied history, so by way of background, Chapter 3 focuses on the important organizational contributions to the conductor's role in the symphony orchestra made by four individuals. These are: Felix Mendelssohn, whose adoption of the baton brought improved coordination and technical accuracy to orchestral performance; Richard Wagner,

whose redesign of the orchestra pit centralized control in the conductor's hands and so at a stroke redefined the internal power relations of the symphony orchestra; Hans von Bülow, who created the first virtuoso touring orchestra through sheer willpower, hard work, and an eye for external opportunity; and Arthur Nikisch, who combined the achievements of the other three with his own innate musical ability and leadership instincts to produce what remains the template for the symphony orchestra conductor both on and off the concert platform.

It is worth noting that these contributions all had a profound impact on how orchestral performance is organized by changing the way boundaries *within* the orchestra are experienced as much as how those between the orchestra and its environment are affected; Wagner's revolutionary orchestra pit gave the conductor real power and control over internal performing relationships – something which Bülow, as shown in his work with the Meiningen Court Orchestra, was quick to exploit – even as it transformed the way the audience experienced his operas, while without Mendelssohn adopting the baton in order to bring discipline to onstage communication, Nikisch would have found the much larger forces of the late 19th Century orchestra next to impossible to coordinate.

Note, too, the importance of connections between artist and artifact to this discussion; the baton, for instance, is central to Mendelssohn's contribution, as is the orchestra pit of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus to that of Wagner. So, if we are to understand the *organization* of orchestral performance, this study contends that the artifacts of music-making, from the instruments of individual players (Chapter 2) to collective performance spaces such as orchestra pits (Chapter 3) and concert venues (Chapter 6), need to be considered alongside the human actors at work.

Following the organizational background provided in Chapter 3, a more detailed analysis of the conductor-player relationship is given in Chapters 4 and 5 as the connection is explored through a performance that has assumed quasi legendary status in the almost 40 years since it took place. This is the 1983 performance of Beethoven's 7th Symphony by the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam conducted by Carlos Kleiber. As both chapters show, the illustration is compelling because, despite it representing one film-maker's view, that director has avoided the hagiographic approach to the musicians which often mars such films and so captured the *interaction* between Kleiber and the orchestra in a way which affords the viewer access to the space where Kleiber and the orchestra make their music. While there are many points of interest in this film, two resonate with the study of organizations. First, and putting aside questions of musical talent, Carlos Kleiber was able to conduct the way he did in this performance in large part because of the individual and collective quality of the players in front of him. Second, and more important, this performance is what it is not just because of the mutual respect for musical ability held on both sides, but also – again, on the evidence provided by Humphrey Burton's film – due to the trust conductor and orchestra have in the *relational connection* between them.

The reversible nature of orchestral relations suggested in Chapter 2 is therefore reinforced but on a wider scale, as throughout Chapters 4 and 5 we encounter Kleiber drawing on this trust to find inspiration from the orchestra as much as he is motivating them in return. This underpins the main contribution made by Chapter 5: its discussion of Merleau-Ponty's construct of *écart*, the gap subtended by a connection. Several instances, analysed in detail, show Kleiber's mastery of this, the 'space between' (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000) himself and the musicians. But what is equally striking is how that mastery depends on his

scrupulous definition of that musical space *before* it arrives, so that the player is left free to play but within the parameters already set by the conductor. To return briefly to an example which succinctly captures this phenomenon: in the transition from the introduction to the main theme in the symphony's first movement, it is almost as if Kleiber is unwrapping the theme as a gift for the principal flute, and he wants that player to know it. But equally crucial is what happens next. Having given the player a solid musical base, Kleiber then entrusts him with the key structural element in the form of the theme itself, but he does it in such a way that the rest of the orchestra is compelled to focus *on that theme*, not on any podium-based choreography. It is Beethoven's music, not any individual expertise, that comes to the fore as a result.

The *écart*, the space between colleagues, is not, for Carlos Kleiber, just a 'nice to have;' it is the unrelenting focus of his attention, while the shaping of it is the key *organizational* feature of his whole approach. Thus, it is equally important to note what he is *not* doing; while he is all control when shaping the parameters of this space through the music's transition passages, once that is done, he surrenders that control, instead trusting the players to make their best contributions through gestural activity that supports and comments rather than asserts. Based on the evidence of this performance and given the way the players of the orchestra are individually and collectively responding, by the time Kleiber and the orchestra finished pre-concert rehearsals, it is likely that he and the players had come to the understanding that if they worked together, a fundamentally collaborative approach, grounded in mutual trust rather than individual domination, could be achieved.

To have all those on stage 'pulling in the same direction' like this is, of course, a primary aim of the rehearsal process, and one which resonates well beyond the orchestra.

Contemporary circumstances suggest that as the world emerges from under the cloud of COVID-19 and the boundaries between home and work are reassessed, realigned, and reconfigured, the key lesson for managers from the onstage combination of the Concertgebouw Orchestra, Carlos Kleiber and Beethoven's 7th Symphony lies in the importance of finding the right balance between trust and control, as the imperatives of supervision collide with individual aspirations for personal freedom and flexibility. In *écart* and reversibility Merleau-Ponty offers us the concepts and the vocabulary through which to understand and interpret these organizational imperatives at work, something beyond the short-sightedness embodied in simplistic attempts to exert control by monitoring keyboard strokes, mouse clicks and laptop cameras (Cole, 2021).

While neither the audience nor the venue are much in evidence, the enthusiastic applause following the performance suggests that the audience, too, was in this space, immersed along with the musicians in the "palpable shared concentration" that is the 'Holy Grail' of orchestral performance (Gilbert, 2015, p. 5). This is the subject of Chapter 6.

If the Kleiber-Concertgebouw-Beethoven performance analysed in Chapters 4 and 5 shows what happens when the connections that subtend *écart* are so strong that the gap they span seems to disappear, then Chapter 6 illustrates the opposite by showing what happens when the relational bonds are compromised so that the gap becomes an obstacle or, at worst, an insurmountable barrier. This was how I felt returning to the orchestra and my encountering hand sanitiser, distancing restrictions and revised seating arrangements instead of the music I had anticipated. Unfortunately, these were just the start. Playing Beethoven's 5th Symphony in a socially distanced orchestra to an empty hall illustrated the importance of the audience and the concert venue – both as a symbol of past and future

performances, and as the 'other instrument' that shapes an orchestra's sound – to my understanding and experience of the performing lifeworld. The concentration referred to by Gilbert (2015) was, in this instance, neither shared nor palpable. Instead, it was absent, replaced by uncertainty and, as basic techniques such as page turning were repeatedly fumbled, a period of vulnerability during which I came to question aspects of my playing and general technique that I normally take for granted.

Turning again to Merleau-Ponty, the concert stage, for a musician, is like the football field for the footballer; to

the player in action the football field is not ... given ..., but present as the immanent term of his practical intentions; the player becomes one with it and feels the direction of the "goal," for example, just as immediately as the vertical and the horizontal planes of his own body (Merleau-Ponty, 1965, p.165).

Analogizing to the orchestra, changes to staging arrangements, set alongside other symbols of the pandemic, gave rise to a feeling that someone had, in effect, shifted the goalposts and vandalized the pitch. 'Playing for the draw' began to look like a good result, as hitherto solid relational terrain slid into ambiguity and even basic technical manoeuvres became mired in doubt.

This is where autoethnography, as "an avenue into connecting with the vulnerability and suffering uncertainty brings into our lives" (Bochner & Ellis, 2021, p. 253) and again given structural shape by Giorgi's (2012) descriptive phenomenological method, proved to be a powerful tool. Parsing my diary and journal entries through this approach led to my realization that the socially distanced orchestra and the venue emblazoned with COVID-19 signage were combining to suggest the deaths of colleagues from the disease while disfiguring a much-loved symbol of past music-making. This is why this particular

performance experience is offered here as an illustration of Flesh as conceived by Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible*; the implied corporeality of bodies absent yet suggested by distancing tore at the relational fabric of performing even as the trace of those who were indeed absent evoked the full playing cohort. As Merleau-Ponty (1968) writes in a working note,

the visible itself has an invisible inner framework (*membrure*), and the in-visible is the secret counterpart of the visible, it appears only within it, it is the *Nichturpräsentierbar* [unpresentable, not-primally-presentable (Allefeld, 2008)] which is present to me as such with the world – one cannot *see it there* and every effort to see it there makes it disappear, but it is *in the line* of the visible, it is its virtual focus, it is inscribed within it (in filigree) (1968, p. 215).

In short, “Merleau-Ponty’s invisible ... is not behind or under; it is *between*” (Phillips, 2017, p. 88, original emphasis). This example presents the invisible as an *idea* of the connection with absent colleagues which was almost palpable and bounded by physical spaces that, in a non-distanced world, would not have been there, and in an acoustic that just didn’t sound, for want of a better word, *right*. Again, the importance of Ladkin’s (2013) ‘between space’ among colleagues is demonstrated; this time, though, it is through absence and lack. The setting interrogated in the present research may be orchestral performance, but the phenomenon brought to light is being felt well beyond the orchestra as organizations from hospitals to hospitality struggle to cope with the gaps left by missing colleagues.

It comes as no surprise, then, that the other two Merleau-Pontian constructs featured in this study were no less affected. The reversibility between auditorium and player, player and audience, and among colleagues that is usually manifest in the relational mix of a concert was upended here by a distanced orchestra – numerically reduced and with greater physical separation – and the lack of an audience. And while there was connection among the musicians on stage, the extra distancing required by regulation destabilized those both

bonds physically and musically. I simply couldn't see or hear colleagues anywhere near as well as usual, which weakened the connections undergirding *écart* and exacerbated the idea of gap or separation in my music-making. After more than 40 years as an orchestral musician I have encountered a comprehensive range of performing arrangements from the ideal to the downright awful, but the combination of circumstances onstage alongside the physical evidence disfiguring the venue made this experience, for me, unique and searching for a new way of thinking and describing if I was to come to terms with the issues at stake and make some sort of personal peace with their implications. Fortunately, this is precisely what Merleau-Ponty's late ontology and the constructs of reversibility, *écart* and *Flesh* proposed therein, have provided.

7.2 The research question revisited

At the beginning of this thesis, I asked the questions:

What do the relational substructures of orchestral performance look like? How might they be understood?

In response, this research offers three main findings:

First: the relational substructures of orchestral performance are inherently reversible, whether between a player and their instrument, among colleagues, or between those onstage and the audience member or artifact off it. I act on my instrument by playing, and my body is shaped by the instrument as I play it; there is a trace of what I have just played in what I hear from my colleague; my sound changes if an audience is present; and the venue is little more than an empty space unless someone is there to make music in it.

Second: using the pre-reflective corporeal knowledge that lies embedded in the gesture/instrument/sound relationship, musicians are able to bridge the physical space that separates them in order to shape *l'écart*, or the 'between space' where the organizing of the performance happens. This space is the focal point of the collective effort as it is where communication, coordination and contribution converge to form the combined interpretation – in other words, where the music is made. Chapter 5 illustrates what happens when the performers' attention is concentrated on that space, while Chapter 6 analyses what happens when that focus is compromised.

Third: the organizational foundation of orchestral performance presents as a relational fabric woven from primordially dehiscent yet intertwined threads of preconscious

connection between all those involved, from composer to performers and audience to artifact, whether past or present. Between each of the actors in this lifeworld there is a bond through which each acts on the other, generating identity but also allowing them to maintain difference rooted in their own individuality. In Chapter 2, the foundation of reversibility prepares the way for Chapter 6, where the damage to the relational fabric of orchestral performance caused by externalities arising from the COVID-19 pandemic could be felt in the compromising of those same reversible connections.

7.3 Summary of contributions

This research contributes to organizational knowledge on three dimensions: theory, method, and practice. A summary of these contributions now follows.

7.3.1 Theory

The theoretical contribution of this study is made through the application of Merleau-Ponty's late ontology to the interrogation of relationality in a practice-based context. With its grounding in a philosophy concerned with relational substructures, this approach has enriched our understanding of how preconscious connections are made, while revealing how these relations shape the structure of the space where organizing happens.

Onstage relationality in orchestral work has received attention elsewhere (Bathurst & Ladkin, 2012; Koivunen, 2008; Köping, 2007), including analysis through the ideas of Merleau-Ponty (2012) (e.g., Bathurst, Gilling & Rasmussen, 2019; Gilling, 2010, 2014; Koivunen, 2003). Others – Cooper (Chia, 1998), Ladkin (2013), McConn-Palfreyman, McInnes and Mangan (2019) and Shotter (2006) – have also turned to Merleau-Ponty's later philosophy for inspiration. That work is extended here by framing the analysis of relational

structure through the constructs of reversibility, *écart* and Flesh considered at a pre-reflective level. Each of these is applied to a different facet of orchestral work that would, in the absence of this primordial focus, be difficult to access. The main theoretical contribution of the study lies first in the interrogation of each construct *in situ*, and then in the exploration of the *links* between these concepts, something which only Ladkin (2013) attempts and then only within the confines of the leadership-followership dynamic.

In the present account, reversibility, for instance, follows a Merleau-Pontian trajectory in extending the touching touched in Chapter 2 toward the sensible sentient encountered in Chapter 6. There, it often seemed as if the venue was ‘playing my sound back to me,’ acting on me through reverberation and the trace of my sound carried in that echo even as the sound of my playing was acting on it, interweaving with the contributions of my colleagues to form the Flesh of the performing lifeworld. And Flesh emerged in Chapter 6 as a conceptual multiplicity (Hass, 2008), replete with possibility while being open to interpretation. Within that multiplicity, this study adopts what seems to be Merleau-Ponty’s preferred direction (Dillon, 1997): Flesh is envisaged here as a pre-reflective relational fabric, carnal and elemental but above all reversible, intertwined yet intrinsically dehiscent.

Relations between musicians and the artifacts of orchestral work; the space between the conductor and players where silent but visible gesture is transformed into audible but invisible sound; and the intangible yet somehow palpable importance of the audience to the relational fabric of the orchestral lifeworld are all easy to list, but much harder to interrogate. As posited in this research, Merleau-Ponty’s constructs, and the links between them, combine to offer a conceptual framework that makes this kind of relational connectivity much easier to understand and explore. Equally, reversibility, *écart* and Flesh,

because of their genesis in the nexus between activity and passivity (Morris, 2010), take on a wider relevance by directing us toward the roots of organizational structure in primordial relationality. This also supports and extends the turn made by scholars of organizing such as Weick and his followers (e.g., Maitlis, 2005; Stephens, 2021; Weick, 1995, 1996) in their move up a stratum from the purely preconscious to the intersection between the pre-reflective and the conscious.

7.3.2 Method

The contribution to method is made through the development of an integrated approach to the study of specialized, embedded knowledge alongside the explicit incorporation of Merleau-Ponty's ideas into method as well as analysis. The study also shows the methodological importance of aligning conceptual resources from data collection through to analysis. Understanding later Merleau-Ponty (in other words, the approach to phenomenology that informs this study) facilitated the adaptation of the *epoché* phase of Giorgi's (2012) method, which in turn helped align the corporeal knowledge of music-making with the embodied knowledge of autoethnography. In turn, my autoethnographically inspired approach captured traces of hidden and tacit ways of relating, which were revealed and then interrogated through Giorgi's (2012) framework and Merleau-Ponty's (1968) constructs.

To recap, the three steps of the method are: *autoethnography*, beginning with the raw material captured in the field diary and journal; *Giorgi's* (2012) descriptive phenomenological method, which enabled the parsing of the raw material for research purposes; and analysis through *Merleau-Ponty's* constructs of reversibility, *écart*, and *Flesh*.

The importance of the *autoethnographic* aspect of the research method is shown first in the portrayal of the vulnerability and uncertainty that undermined my belief in my orchestral work (Chapter 6), allowing my voice as both author and research subject into the narrative in a way that few other methods permit. This was essential, as after 40 years, an “erasure of self” (Dauphinee, 2010) in search of the chimera of ‘objective’ knowledge would a) not have been credible and b) have violated the deeply personal bonds that connect me with orchestral playing.

The alignment of an autoethnographic approach with what is, even in rehearsal, a primarily non-verbal work site, was also crucial, as this allowed the corporeal knowledge of the musician to connect with the embodied understanding of the autoethnographer (Ellis & Bartleet, 2010).

A further contribution that follows from this connection between corporeal and embodied knowledge is the access gained to the traces of preconscious relationality revealed in Chapter 2. These would have remained present as the lining and depth of the visible (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) but otherwise hidden from view – in short, something entrenched, taken-for-granted, and not easily interrogable for research purposes. As these are the very relations that are the subject of this research, and the primordial is the domain in which Merleau-Ponty’s work is located, autoethnography thus provided the vital link between method and theory.

Adapting *Giorgi’s* (2012) framework to give structure to my autoethnographic account has helped here, as often the only way tacit practices *behind* visible gestures could be sensed was in the traces they left behind – seen, for instance, in the reaction of a colleague to the lack of an audience and my understanding, post Giorgi, that this response mirrored my own

feelings. Or, indeed, the reverse; a vague sensation of being unsettled and then realizing, after putting the diary entry through the various analytical steps of Giorgi's approach, that the feeling was due to the 'social' distancing among the performers on stage. The inherent reversibility between visible distancing and invisible disorientation in the relationality at work thus began to emerge.

Giorgi's method also helped parse the journal on which my interrogation of the Concertgebouw Orchestra/Carlos Kleiber film in Chapter 5 is based, as even with my own specialist knowledge it took several viewings of the film to move beyond the manipulation of directorial shot selection and understand, for instance, just how important the mutual understanding among the musicians of the 'between space' of *écart* is to the success of the performance. Without Giorgi's adaptation of the *epoché* and understanding the extent to which I could, as an orchestral musician, assume the 'phenomenological attitude,' the analysis presented in Chapter 5 would have been a very tall order.

This study makes a further contribution to organizational research through its incorporation of *Merleau-Ponty's* approach into method as well as analysis. The work of scholars who have turned to Merleau-Ponty's later philosophy (Biehl & Volkmann, 2019; Cooper, in Chia, 1998; Ladkin, 2013; McConn-Palfreyman et al., 2019; Shotter, 2006) is extended by the integration of key constructs into the analysis and a focus on relational connection at a primordial, pre-conscious level. This path has not just ensured consistency across method and analysis; the thesis of reversibility now frames the study itself. The construct may not have assumed a burden on a par with what its creator asks of it as "the ultimate truth," (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 155), but its trajectory from touch to Flesh – identified by Dillon

(1997) – has nonetheless driven the structure of the thesis while underpinning the theoretical framework of the analysis presented therein.

A further contribution emerges from this primordial analytic location, as once the scholar is engaged at this level, Merleau-Ponty's constructs come to life; this standpoint allows the inanimate to be acknowledged alongside the human, and orchestral music-making to be viewed as a fabric of relational connectivity with parallels beyond the concert platform in other forms of organization.

7.3.3 Practice

The key practical contribution of this project lies in its application of a late Merleau-Pontian vocabulary and perspective to the interrogation of the relational space between colleagues where organizing happens and, in the orchestra, music is made. Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) call this the 'space between,' while to Ladkin (2013) it is the 'between space,' the fulcrum of the leader-follower relationship. Here, this 'between space' is extended beyond the leader/follower dyad to include inter-collegial and musician-artifact relations. It is addressed primarily through Merleau-Ponty's (1968) idea of *écart*, the notion of a gap subtended by a connection, and the associated constructs of reversibility and *Flesh*, thus encouraging us to reconsider this space as a nexus between active and passive, and the connections that shape it as primordially and continuously reversible. Throughout this study, I argue that such a perspective allows us to go beyond the constraints imposed by labels of title and hierarchy and so unpack the potential energy that lies within these relational bonds.

Carlos Kleiber and the Concertgebouw Orchestra (Chapter 5) illustrate the point. This example situates *écart* and reversibility in the context of a conductor-orchestra relationship which, on the evidence of Humphrey Burton's film of the performance discussed here, appears to have been a highly successful one, demonstrating not only that 'leadership' and 'followership' are qualities inherent in relational connections rather than in formal titles but also, following Merleau-Ponty (1968), that these bonds – along with collegial connections more generally – are reversible, with their genesis in *l'écart*, the nexus or hinge between the sensible and the sentient. The rigid formality and stultifying standardization often associated with the orchestral hierarchy by outside observers (Mintzberg, 1998) thus undergoes an injection of flexibility and 'flattening' as the nominal leader cedes or accepts authority according to the *musical* imperatives of the moment, infusing individual creativity into the performance in ways that form something which is much more than just the sum of its parts. For organizations, Kleiber and the Concertgebouw show what orchestras can achieve through a collective focus rather than dissipating this strength among myriad personal objectives.

Chapter 6 is equally informative in this regard, but for opposite reasons. Here, in a scenario which has now become commonplace as organizations struggle to return to anything like pre-COVID normality, the circumstances around a return to work with my own orchestra after a pandemic-related lockdown had me questioning even the most basic and mundane of work practices, as my faith in abilities acquired over decades was undermined. By allowing inanimate artifacts into the mix, a Merleau-Pontian view of the 'space between' gave a more nuanced understanding of the impact of these issues on relational structures

and boundaries at all levels of organization; my relationship with my instrument, with colleagues across the stage, and with the concert hall itself were all drawn into the analysis.

The illustrations provided by Chapters 5 and 6 thus revealed much about how these structures and connections are constructed and then sustained. Kleiber's focus on transition passages in the music – akin to periods of change in organizations – allows him to frame the between space so that when the key moment arrives, he can trust the player concerned to make their contribution, be it playing a theme or announcing an important rhythm. Why? Because although Kleiber leaves the player in no doubt as to what he wants, he then entrusts them with the freedom to build on his directive indication. In stark contrast, it was the very *lack* of such a connection in the events described in Chapter 6 which led to an erosion in my pre-conscious belief – my 'perceptual faith' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) – in what I was seeing and hearing that in turn compromised my ability to perform as required.

The idea of *écart*, and the synesthetic aspect of the idea exemplified in the orchestra, opens 'the space between' to consideration as a physical *and conceptual* gap subtended by relational connections, and, further, as the key nexus between warp and weft in the wider relational fabric, or *Flesh*, of orchestral performance. In the Kleiber example, these connections are strong, embedded in a working relationship between conductor and players that is cohesive from the start and which strengthens throughout the performance. But in the events described in Chapter 6, I could feel these bonds weaken on several fronts, from my normally quasi-instinctive relationship with the music stand and score through to my not quite believing what I was hearing when familiar passages of music were being played; this in turn brought usually tacit and taken for granted practices and habits to the surface as I looked for answers and sought reassurance.

There are three key aspects to the lesson here for other organizations. First, to repeat, the *écart* between colleagues exists across physical and conceptual space and is subtended by relational connections that are, at a primordial level, reversible. Second, these connections need attention *and* nurturing if the relational fabric that they support – in this case, the Flesh of the performing lifeworld – is to maintain its structural, and thus organizational, integrity. Chapter 5 illustrates what happens when, driven by musical imperatives and underpinned by mutual understanding and trust successfully developed in rehearsal, the hierarchical structure of the orchestra flattens amid the ebb and flow of responsibility and authority in the music-making that such trust allows. Chapter 6, by contrast, shows what happens when performing relations start to deteriorate. The distancing on stage meant that the collegial connections with other players which might otherwise have sustained me through the effects of COVID-related restrictions and associated paraphernalia were either weakened, or worse, not there at all. Without this sustenance, relational bonds simply withered or died altogether, awaiting resuscitation in some future less pandemic-affected performance environment.

Amid calls to reimagine the future of work as a COVID-stricken world retreats behind a defensive wall of virtual offices and Zoom meetings (Dent, 2021; Warzel & Petersen, 2021), an understanding of *les écarts* and their relational substructures offers organizations a practical way of bridging that wall whatever the physical constraints, and so has never been more important.

7.4 Future directions

All this suggests a promising pathway for future research, but with a caveat. The “power of *orchestra*” so prized by Mauceri (2017, p. 133, original emphasis) comes from a collective

concentration (Gilbert, 2015) that needs physical proximity, while the lesson from Chapter 6 is that orchestral performance needs performers and audience *together* in the concert hall to form the relational Flesh of the performing lifeworld. As Crossley (2020, p. 23) points out, “listeners are necessary to music because there is no sound, and therefore no music, in the absence of someone who hears it” – the musician making the music included.

Yet in the world beyond the orchestra, these are exactly the kinds of connection we stand to lose as our workplaces become social silos, reconfigured by the legacy of COVID-19 alongside technological change from software for virtual meetings to sentient Artificial Intelligence (Warzel, 2022). The mental health issues associated with social distancing alone (Galea, Merchant & Lurie, 2020) become a much greater risk in an environment where the ties of location, identity and collegiality are loosened as physical isolation increases and job security is threatened because, as Hennessey (2021, p. 5) points out, “if a job can be done remotely, it can be outsourced.”

The call to reconsider working relations is nonetheless growing (Warzel & Petersen, 2021). Less clear, though, is if this is to happen, how should it be done? A ‘one size fits all’ solution looks overly optimistic. How, for example, will work be measured? Number of hours worked? Outputs? Outcomes? What does an acceptable result look like? Who sets the goals? And is it ‘working from home’ or, for busy parents, ‘being at home and trying to work’? When business leaders like Elon Musk of Tesla or Tim Cook of Apple call for more, not less, time to be spent working on site, they overlook the fact that most of their employees have a very different experience of work from them (Dent, 2021), and that definitions of success and achievement can look very different depending on where in the organization one sits (Bathurst et al., 2019). Simply tallying the number of hours worked,

whether in person or monitored through keystrokes and mouse clicks to ensure that employees really are *working* at home (Cole, 2021; Rylah, 2021), does not engender the kind of trust that we see between Carlos Kleiber and the musicians in front of him. Nor does employer-installed spyware on company-issue computers look to be having a positive impact on productivity (Cole, 2021; Rylah, 2021). The debate between hours on site and results from home, with ‘hybrid’ work policies promoted as a middle ground (Christian, 2022; Dent, 2021), thus begins to look analogous to the parable of the blind men touching the elephant, with each man having a mind’s eye view of the animal based on which part of it they’re touching (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand & Lampel, 1998). It is just as likely that every chief executive, manager, or line employee has their own idea of what the ‘best’ workplace looks like.

The Babelian discourse that emerges from this line of argument gives even more weight to the point that this study seeks to make: the ‘between space’ where colleagues come together to organize needs to be understood and nurtured, not only in isolation but also in the context of the relational fabric of the whole organization – including artifacts such as the buildings people work in and the technology with which they do that work.

The example of working from home and its hybrid counterpart points toward the key implication of this study for organizing beyond the orchestra. These new ways of working, alongside the ongoing impact of new technologies on how we work, require a way of analysing that can address changes of this magnitude by going beyond mere description toward a multi-dimensional, holistic understanding of the issues at stake. In reversibility and *écart*, Merleau-Ponty has given us two dialogically centred constructs that offer researchers and managers alike the engagement and responsiveness that is needed if we are to make

sense of the organizing processes and structures in which we live our daily lives. This thesis represents a beginning on this journey of discovery; reversibility and *écart* establish the importance of the pre-reflective bond between self and organization, while *Flesh* locates that connection within a wider world of organizing and managing.

In short, to understand our organizations, we also need to understand ourselves. To this end, a perspective grounded in the later work of Merleau-Ponty, having demonstrated its utility in the orchestral setting, has never been more timely or more necessary.

7.5 Limitations

There are many ways in which the organization of orchestral performance could be analysed. As an archaic, hierarchy-dependent form of organization, the orchestra is anathema to the flexibility and horizontality of organization structures emerging in the 21st century (Hennessey, 2021, Warzel & Petersen, 2021). By way of counterargument, however, it is worth considering 7.4 above as a response, and it is also worth remembering that as a vehicle for delivering symphonic music – in other words, what it was designed for – the symphony orchestra remains unsurpassed.

Questions of power imbalance nonetheless remain. The podium, for instance, is a real world example of a Foucauldian panopticon (Foucault, 2020). Politicisation is also a problem, as orchestras and other arts organizations compete for funding and patronage, whether public or private (Schicker, 2015; Trümpi, 2020). Gender imbalance, especially on the podium (Feeney-Hart, 2013), remains. These are all important issues which this study does not attempt to address.

While an autoethnographic turn has helped me to access the tacit and taken for granted side of my working life, it has limited the scope of the study in other areas. In terms of the work of Merleau-Ponty, my not being able to address the problem of the Other in greater depth through not having raw material from surveys, interviews and the like, was something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, I was able to interrogate the idea of the trace in ways I would probably otherwise have missed, but on the other, the chirality/handedness/mirroring of touch, and thus reversibility (Morris, 2011), and the alterity/otherness relation (Johnson & Smith, 1990) could not be addressed in any great depth. This in turn constrained where I could go with Merleau-Ponty's work, and so to some extent this study represents an attempt to work around the problem.

Finally, this research interrogates relationality in the *organization* of orchestral performance; *artistic* impacts are only addressed as secondary consequences, although Chapters 5 and 6 in particular operate under the assumption that organizational and artistic aspects of orchestral work are themselves intertwined in a relationship that is both reversible and embedded in the relational fabric of the wider orchestral organization. That story will have to wait.

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