

# The semantics of Michalis Adamis's music and the claim for abstraction

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Proceedings of the International Conference *Beyond the Centres: Musical Avant-Gardes Since 1950*  
Thessaloniki, Greece, 1-3 July 2010, <http://btc.web.auth.gr/>

**Abstract:** An element that remains consistently distinctive in the writings of the Greek composer Michalis Adamis (b. 1929) is his lifelong conviction to the dynamic interrelation between symbolism and abstraction that permeates the aesthetic orientation of his compositional outlook. Apart from, but not contrary to his belief in the inherently abstract nature of music, Adamis considers the symbolic qualification of his music's semantic content commensurate with the historical or cultural distance from the shared frame of reference that defines its symbolic dimension. In terms of compositional practice, the abstract inherence of Adamis's music is allowed to emerge not through the deployment of automated procedures upon semantically sanitized musical material but through an attempt to incorporate material and procedures from his Byzantine and Greek traditional musical inheritance. The structural means effectuating this attempt pertains primarily to the centonization of idiomatic melodic formulas into motivically saturated melodic lines, disposed synchronically in poly-melodic and poly-rhythmic settings that unfold temporally within an articulated structural narrative. By looking into one of Adamis's latest works (*O Atermon Chronos*, 2007), the present paper aims at investigating the role of the aforementioned structural procedures in attaining syntactic unity without neutralizing the music's semantic charge. Within the conceptual framework of Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) notion of dialogism and Alastair Williams's (1999) idea of a semanticized modernism, Adamis's abstraction is reinterpreted as a process of transcending tradition, leading to the opening up of a contoured absence that semanticizes his music.

Progress has been habitually considered the counterpart of tradition, in that it aspires to the new by challenging the "self-evident predominance" of the old that has been "historically condemned" (Dahlhaus 1987a, 6). It may thus seem peculiar to ascertain the centrality of the notion of tradition in both the music and the writings of the Greek composer Michalis Adamis (b. 1929) who places himself in "the avant garde of contemporary music" (Adamis 2007a, 17).<sup>1</sup> Adamis's reconciliatory interpretation of the old and the new is based on a more inclusive definition of tradition, one that ascribes to it a sense of dynamic immanence: "I refer to Tradition [*sic*] as a whole: ideas, principles and practices which constitute a system of ways of thinking and of acting. A system accepted and established in as much as it operates as a fundamental assumption. It develops an identity that incorporates change, survives in time and is transmitted from generation to generation as a functional outline of experience and action, in which durability and renovation co-exist and complement each other" (Adamis 1995, 11).<sup>2</sup> In that respect, Adamis considers tradition not to inhibit progress, but to entail it in a sense that reorients its course from the solution of problems towards their discovery (Dahlhaus 1987b, 22) given that "a work of art bears the routes it opens up, the questions it poses" (Adamis 1995, 10).

Adamis releases the multifaceted character of tradition from its customarily narrow construal in his attempt to respond critically to the emergent notion of universalism in art and, more specifically, in music. He counteracts the potential negative connotations of universalism as a vehicle of cultural imperialism that threatens to subsume the multivalence of non-western musical traditions into a culturally biased canon, by recognizing in it "a trend in the context of which elements and ideas of aesthetic and compositional value originating and realized in other civilizations come to enrich musical thinking, expanding its sources, revealing resources and opening new ways and new perspectives for its course" (Adamis 1995, 10). Adamis's take on universalism affords musical traditions the prospect of coming in contact with each other and, in doing so, the potentiality of undergoing a "definite transformation, almost a transcendence" (Adamis 1995, 10).<sup>3</sup> However, this transformation does not constitute a move towards dialectical synthesis. Adamis stresses emphatically that the intent of the "internal process" that

substantiates the contact of traditions is not to "marry" respective musical elements with each other but to "distinguish them, preserving for each the assurance of the part to enrich the whole through its own energy. To transform it from within" (Adamis 2007a, 16). It should be noted that Adamis does not restrict this "internal process" within the formalistic confines of an atomized incorporation of non-Western musical elements into a dominant Western tradition as merely decorative spells of exotica, but associates it with the innate "ethos" of the imbuing tradition: "Beyond its identifying features, structural and compositional elements, there is in every tradition that characteristic ethos which aesthetics reflect and convey. The dimension of qualitative expression of the abstract, that relates deeply to the answers given to the fundamental questions of human experience; those that lie at the beginning and still wait there at the end and landmark the mental journey in between, in short the questions about man's place in the universe" (Adamis 1995, 11). This "qualitative expression of the abstract" appears to be a consistent concern for Adamis, projected in the majority of his writings (1992; 1995; 2000; 2007a) not as a self-referential concept but inductively through its association with the symbolic.

Adamis posits the concepts of symbolism and abstraction within "a context of ideas and purposes originating and directing outside itself, referring to a world of different levels of concreteness (or of abstraction), a world to be represented through associations within a given frame of reference shared by all. As such it exists within limits; freed from these, however, by means of temporal or cultural distance, music continues to exist independently. In the absence of a code, and perhaps even missing some of its initial special charge, music retains the communicable character of a coherent product, a shape effected by practices governed by and reflecting the treatment of musical ideas, their development and fulfillment into a real, comprehensible though abstract shape" (Adamis 1995, 11). In an essentialist rendition of abstraction, Adamis suggests that "music retains deep in its essence a basic freedom from the limits of the intellectual demand for recognition and the conventions it consequently postulates" (Adamis 1995, 10). In that respect, Adamis's abstraction seems partly compatible with the notion of abstraction as entailing a "withdrawal of self," interpreted either as criticism towards "content which has sunk to the level of ideology," or as "successful irresponsibility," removed from social reality so as not to impinge on it (Dahlhaus 1987b, 17).

Adamis does not regard the notions of symbolism and abstraction as mutually exclusive. He suggests that we do not recognize and follow merely the way musical ideas are realized and developed, but also "the unfolding and the narration of a flow of inner experience" (Adamis 1995, 11). In our attempt to grasp the abstractness of this "inner experience" and make it intelligible and communicable, we feel compelled to attach music to symbolism. And we do so by attesting to the "existence of non-musical elements that enrich musical perception, the listener's musical experience and also the pure musical thinking itself, to the degree that such elements are being assimilated in it" (Adamis 1995, 11). By considering the extent to which the symbolic imbues the abstract commensurate with the historical or cultural distance that dissociates it from a shared frame of reference, Adamis acknowledges the agency of the listener in the qualitative determination of music's semantic content: the abstract is innate, while the symbolic is imposed by the listener as a qualitative expression of the "flow of inner experience" that semanticizes it. In effect, the syntactic unity of a music work remains for Adamis a valid and realistic goal that poses no threat to its semantic core or the wide spectrum of referential possibilities that qualifies it. Interestingly enough, Adamis places his works within this continuum of possibilities not in a temporal trajectory based on the assumption of a developmental progression from the explicitly "symbolic" to the overtly "abstract" ones: "In an overall regard of my work, developments in the main trend of exploration within the symbolic context and of moving beyond it are not in linear or serial succession, but like the branches on a tree, growing together, spreading in many directions, approaching and diverging, parts of a whole and yet identifiable" (Adamis 1995, 13).

## **The Byzantine tradition and the pursuit of syntactic unity: *O Atermon Chronos***

For Adamis, it has been primarily the Byzantine musical tradition as “a well of generative ideas on all levels, from the precisely symbolic to the highly abstract” (Adamis 1995, 12) that he has turned to in order to demarcate a gamut of symbolic delineations for the semantic content of his music.<sup>4</sup> Apart from dealing with “the multitude of the original traditional material within the context of its direct, recognizable symbolism” by fragmenting and re-composing “familiar poetic and musical elements” (Adamis 1995, 13), Adamis also abstracts structural procedures associated with Byzantine musical practice, yet retains their “functional quality” with the express intent to achieve syntactic unity: “Rooted in Byzantine music, fragmenting and re-organizing it, transforming and transcending it, my music aims at the development of an approach towards the absolute through the pathways of a tradition the ethos and the symbolism and the realizations of which shed a different light to the treatment of Sound [*sic*] and to our inner processes of dealing with the abstract” (Adamis 1995, 16).

Melodic construction, as one of the most idiosyncratic aspects of Adamis’s compositional practice, reflects his admiration towards the melodic refinement of the essentially monophonic Byzantine chant (Adamis 1995, 12). By centonizing primal melodic formulas and disposing them melismatically into horizontal lines with distinct melodic contour, Adamis creates melodic phrases comparable to the iconographic tessellations of Byzantine art (Adamis 1966, 154). In *O Atermon Chronos* (*Interminable Time*) for organ and soprano saxophone, one of Adamis’s latest instrumental works composed in 2007 in memoriam of his wife Panny,<sup>5</sup> the saxophone’s opening phrase (Figure 1b) may be reduced to a grid of tetrachordal melodic formulas—labeled as a pitch class set 4-7 according to Allen Forte’s widely accepted analytical model (1973)—projected onto its chromatic surface through the agency of such salient features as rhythm and metric placement (Figure 1a). The combination of the two prominent disjunct 4-7 tetrachords that define the opening of the melody’s associational macrostructure—reminiscent of the soft and hard chromatic tetrachords of Byzantine music theory (Devrelēs 1994)—resembles a system of pentachordal conjuncture in Byzantine music theory commonly known as “trochos” (wheel). This system has been employed by other modern Greek composers as well, more importantly for the purposes of the present study, by Yannis A. Papaioannou (Chardas & Alexandrou 2008), Adamis’s composition teacher in Athens.

Concurrently with the saxophone’s opening phrase, the organ part appears to draw its pitch material from a more or less abstract pitch aggregate construed as a series of disjunct tetrachordal structures, analogous to the one associated with the saxophone part, this time, though, as diatonic 4-11 sets that are conjoined by intermittent chromatic tones (Figure 1c). The members of this abstract pitch space are disposed into synchronic melodic lines that co-traverse the melodic trajectory of the component tetrachords at disparate rates and with different points of departure and arrival. The effect of such a procedure may be described in terms of an unfolding of independently moving, though relatively coherent, melodic lines, moving imminently within an increasingly dense and dissonant texture towards a common melodic goal. The musical passage at hand exemplifies the structural process that Adamis terms “poly-melodic and poly-rhythmic treatment.”

Adamis describes poly-melodic and poly-rhythmic treatment as a process in which “several melodies, each preserving its individuality, its phrasing and its rhythm, or melodic schemata in different rhythms sound simultaneously, join together in producing a compound sound impact beyond the elements that comprise it. The correspondence between the lines is worked in detail, their interlinking generates the auditory impression of a complex weaving and the vertical effect results from the horizontal treatment of the melodic combinations and their succession” (Adamis 1995, 15-16).<sup>6,7</sup> What is interesting is that Adamis makes a tacit symbolic association between poly-melodic and poly-rhythmic treatment and the Orthodox church, “its concentration on the idea of the Person and its view of the Church as a community of Persons

[sic], with a respect for everyone's uniqueness and a deeply positive attitude towards Life and the living [sic]" (Adamis 1995, 16).

Figure 1 consists of three musical staves. (a) Reductive analysis of the saxophone part, showing a 4-7 gesture that contracts into a 4-3 configuration. (b) Original score for Saxophone and Organ. (c) Reductive analysis of the organ part, showing a 4-11 gesture.

**Figure 1.** (a) Reductive analysis of the saxophone part and (c) reductive analysis of the organ part from (b) the opening phrase of Michalis Adamis's *O Atermon Chronos*, mm. 1-7.

If poly-melodic and poly-rhythmic treatment organizes the synchronic interrelation of melodic lines in Adamis's music, it is the concept of narrativity as a form-defining element that arranges the diachronic sequence of its constituent structural events: "Without a literary or visual counterpart, controlled and not coincidental, the form in my music resembles a constant flow in which the matter moves towards some height of completion; it evolves not on the basis of development of motivic elements, but rather as something continuously unfolding or rising in a spiral motion. In this I recognize a narrative aspect in my music, in reflecting a process in which consciousness organizes experience; within an ethos, however, that refutes expressionism in its conventional definition, prevalent in our century as an outgrowth of Romanticism" (Adamis 1995, 16). When talking about "a consciousness that organizes experience," Adamis appears to consent to Edward T. Cone's interpretation of narrativity in music, according to which the listeners embrace the illusion that they hear the sequence of expressive states of music as if projected from a subject or consciousness, a virtual persona that acts as the mediator of musical action (Cone 1974). However, it should be noted that by associating the "narrative aspect" of his music with form, Adamis apparently perceives it not in an expressive but in a structural sense, as if the imaginative musical persona narrates the music's structural plot. In that sense, the sequence of structural events in the opening phrase of *O Atermon Chronos* (Figure 1) may be interpreted as if unfolding along a narrative line as follows: the opening tetrachordal 4-7 gesture of the ascending melody of the saxophone part is gradually transferred up an octave and contracted into a 4-3 configuration of similar melodic contour, succumbing to the pressure of its cumulatively dense, tense, and dissonant context, "in which the matter moves . . . in spiral motion . . . towards some height of completion." The

opening phrase closes with a 4-14 chordal configuration and a rhythmic caesura that clears the space for the second phrase (Figure 2), a kind of transformed repetition in which surface motivic elements in the saxophone part of the preceding phrase are fragmented and/or rearranged. This second phrase concludes in a similar way as the opening one, i.e. with a rhythmically articulated 4-14 chord, this time transposed by interval class 8.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 2 consists of two musical systems, (a) and (b), each with a saxophone part and a piano accompaniment. System (a) covers measures 1-7. The saxophone part begins with a rest, followed by a melodic line with dynamics *mp*, *p*, and *f*. It features two triplet markings (3-1) and a 4-3 interval marking. The piano accompaniment has dynamics *pp*, *mp*, and *f*. System (b) covers measures 7-13. The saxophone part starts with a rest, then a melodic line with dynamics *mf* and *f*. The piano accompaniment has dynamics *mf* and *f*. A transposition symbol  $T_8$  is shown between the two systems, indicating that the second phrase is transposed by interval class 8 relative to the first.

**Figure 2.** Rearrangement of surface motives in the saxophone part of the opening two phrases (a) and (b) of Michalis Adamis's *O Atermon Chronos*, mm. 1-7 and 7-13 respectively.

It is not only the arrangement of micro-structural events that is conditioned by the “narrative aspect” that Adamis recognizes in his music. The clearly articulated structural units that comprise the overall form of *O Atermon Chronos* are arranged along a narrative line according to their more or less distinct functional role, prescribed by the position that their respective pitch material holds within a wide spectrum of potential chromaticism, from the evidently diatonic to the overtly chromatic. In that respect, the pervasive chromaticism of the opening two phrases, with their high tessitura and total absence of bass support, is followed by an unambiguously diatonic phrase, whose opening three-note melodic gesture reverses the overall ascending contour of the preceding section and grounds the music with a “diagonal” unfolding of its pitch content (Figure 3). The diatonic flavor of this phrase owes much to the large-scale contrapuntal structure of the outer voices, which replicate the ascending octave trajectory of the saxophone’s opening phrase in mm. 1-7 and frame the poly-melodic and poly-rhythmic disposition of the comprising melodic lines as well as the occasional pseudo-canonic excursions. Although it would be questionable to assign tonal centrality to a specific pitch in

this passage—even though G appears quite assertive in the beginning of the phrase—it is hard to overlook the presence of an overall harmonic feel that attests Adamis’s belief in “a harmonic depth, which underlies the melodies and supports their movement.” For Adamis, this “harmonic depth” stems from the functional logic of the drone in Byzantine music that “keeps the basic tone of the tetrachord of the echos-mode [*sic*] to which the melody is sung and moves accordingly as the chant moves to different echoi-modes” (Adamis 1995, 15).

**Figure 3.** Large-scale contrapuntal association of outer voices and pseudo-canon imitation between the two lowest parts in poly-melodic and poly-rhythmic context in Michalis Adamis’s *O Atermon Chronos*, mm. 13-21.

**Figure 4.** Michalis Adamis’s *O Atermon Chronos*, mm. 97-104.

The subsequent phrases proceed in more or less similarly diatonic environments with only transient oscillations to mildly chromatic areas. The narrative thread that binds them together implies a gradual move away from the original diatonic region, with its connoted initial centrality around G, towards a culmination, brought about by the establishment of a D pedal in



(197)

**Figure 6.** Conclusion of Michalis Adamis's *O Atermon Chronos*, mm. 197-123.

### Towards a semanticized abstraction

The preceding analysis confirms, amongst other things, Adamis's indifference towards the developmental logic of a motivic conception of musical structure. The melodic formulas that comprise the poly-melodically disposed horizontal lines of *O Atermon Chronos* are not subjected to the manipulation of their rhythmic and melodic content. Instead of an organically conceived, motivically coherent musical form, Adamis privileges narrative comprehensibility. In light of Adamis's inclination for narrativity, an unavoidable parallelism appears to emerge between this marked shift of emphasis from a developmental logic to one informed by rhetorical and narrative strategies and the postmodernist ideal of *fictionality* as advocated by Heinrich Klotz in his effort to salvage postmodern architecture from the inherent tendency of modernism towards abstraction (Kompridis 1993, 8).<sup>9</sup> What draws Adamis away from postmodernist aesthetics and towards modernist ideals is his consistent commitment to the structurally functional projection of music's abstract inherence, his thesis that "art is conditioned by the problematization of Form [*sic*]" (Adamis 2007a, 14): Adamis's music evinces the orientation of his structuralist tendencies towards a kind of fictional functionalism.

In reference to the demonization of the principles of construction as evidences of the "harmful consequences of modernism" and the insistence on their replacement with an eclectic pluralism, Nicholas Kompridis contends that postmodernism recapitulates the same "category error" made by modernism, namely, an attempt to solve problems stylistically when, in fact, they exceed "stylistic-aesthetic resolution." For Kompridis, the solution should be sought in "the shared everyday world and the interpretive resources and implicit background knowledge of all individuals speaking and acting within it" (Kompridis 1993, 13). This position echoes the aforementioned emphasis that Adamis puts on the listener (see p. 2 above), interpreted as an implied request for a more participatory aesthetic experience that aspires to a communicative relation between art and everyday life. It is within this conceptual framework that Adamis reconciles structure with semantic content and abstraction with cultural context.

Adamis's aversion towards the mechanistic deployment of semantically sanitized structural procedures is reflected in an early critique against the fetishization of material in electronic music composition: "I am not indifferent to the construction of original sounds, but I see it as a means, not as a goal... As soon as they are constructed, they assume the position of data. They become, I would dare say, objective. They constitute something not only before and beyond composition, but something before and beyond elemental organization... Over and beyond technique lies composition, the man, the face, the artist who seals the new work with his creative imagination and inspiration, his experience and his talent" (Adamis 1966, 155).



Adamis's stance concurs with Theodor Adorno's attack against the rationalizing tendencies of high modernism and its infatuation with material, an infatuation that results "from the fiction that the material speaks for itself, from an effectively primitive symbolism. To be sure, the material does speak but only in those constellations in which the artwork positions it." According to Adorno, high modernism obfuscates this fact and deludes the composer into "a confidence in the meaningfulness of abstract material, in which the subject fails to recognize that it, itself, releases the meaning from the material" (Adorno 2002, 189). Alastair Williams reiterates Adorno's view of modernist art as "encoded subjectivity," and thus as semantic medium, in light of which, "construction should release subjectivity, or work from a semantic core, instead of eliminating the subject in structuralist fashion" (Williams 1999, 30). In accordance with Adorno, Adamis seeks to subsume subjectivity within his objectified material by re-coupling formal innovation with historical experience so as to "win back the density of experience" (Adorno 2002, 191) and rescue the expressive and critical impulse of his music from effacement. If Adamis's "semanticized abstraction," to misquote Williams, may be viewed as criticism towards "content which has sunk to the level of ideology" (see p. 2 above) it is the ideology of the material's innate capacity to convey meaning without mediation that it appears to address.

As a move towards the semanticization of his music, Adamis reconciles structure with historical experience not by simply drawing from the Byzantine musical tradition but by staging its transcendence. However, such transcendence of tradition cannot be conceived without its antithesis, i.e. without the presence of tradition through "the evocation of its own memory trace and its decay" (Williams 1999, 40). In Adamis's music, the subtle references to the Byzantine musical tradition as prerequisites of its own transcendence constitute the contrary forces against which "the explosive power of the musically individual" is being tested (Adorno 2002, 185-186). On the other hand, in order to prevent historical experience from its emergence in "standardized form," it must undergo a process of formal abstraction as substantiation of its "aesthetic sublimation": "Formal abstraction is the filter through which aesthetically reconstructed historical experience must pass in order that the process of sublimation can take place" (Kompridis 1993, 17). The residue of such process of "aesthetic sublimation" in Adamis's music may be associated with what he terms the "ethos" of the Byzantine tradition, the "qualitative expression of the abstract" (see p. 2 above) that survives the loss of the explicitly symbolic and retains its universal relevance.

In terms of symbolism, the manifold symbolic delineations of the "flow of inner experience" as semantic content, dependent on the cultural and temporal distance of the listener from Adamis's preferred field of reference, point towards a plurality that contradicts the syntactic unity of the work. However, if one views the notion of aesthetic autonomy as less of a "reductive" conception—in respect to the self-referentiality usually associated with it—and more of a concept "guided by plastic, flexible, and dialogical principles of unification," then "the cognitive gains which follow from the formal achievements of modernism need not be sacrificed" (Kompridis 1993, 17). Such reinterpretation of aesthetic autonomy underlines the emphasis on reception as vehicle of meaning in a work of art, whether this is a piece of music or literature: "Instead of processing literature entirely for form, readers can now ask how they might have reacted to a situation depicted; comparably, listeners can inquire intersubjectively how musical events touch their lives" (Williams 1999, 44).

The request for "plastic, flexible, and dialogical principles of unification," able to inform models of analysis that allow both unity and heterogeneity, is met in Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogue in literature. According to Bakhtin, a novel comprises "several heterogeneous stylistic unities, often located on different linguistic levels and subject to different stylistic controls" (Bakhtin 1981, 261). The confluence of these relatively autonomous "discursive layers" suggests a "dialogic linguistic consciousness" that challenges the unity of monologic genres by creating "artistic images of languages" (Korsyn 1999, 61): "The novelistic hybrid is *an artistically organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another, a*

system having as its goal the illumination of one language by means of another, the carving-out of a living image of another language" (Bakhtin 1981, 361). Bakhtin suggests that different languages participate in a socially stratified linguistic universe that he terms "heteroglossia" by becoming engaged in a complex dialogue that substantiates the need of consciousness "to have to choose a language" (Bakhtin 1981, 295). However, this dialogue is not dialectic in nature: "This is not the dialectical evolution of a single consciousness overcoming otherness; it is not a monologic consciousness reducing difference to sameness" (Korsyn 1999, 62). Behind the centripetal tendencies of the syntactically unified work, the heterogeneous languages that are involved in its discourse do not collapse into a synthesis but point centrifugally towards semantic plurality. Bakhtin replaces "the monologic subject with the idea of selfhood as dialogue" (Korsyn 1999, 63) and reinterprets unity "as a dialogic concordance of unmerged twos or multiples" (Bakhtin 1984, 289). This reinterpretation of unity does not necessarily defy the sense of closure in music, it just eschews "mystifying" and "naturalizing" it. On the other hand, "if closure is achieved through conventional means, then the process of closure itself becomes an intertextual event. One can only induce a sense of closure by appealing to conventions, by enacting rituals of closure; thus, paradoxically, the very factors that close a work off, sealing its borders and creating a sense of autonomy, also refer to a plurality of events outside the text" (Korsyn 1999, 64). The relevance to Adamis's music is obvious: the dialogue between traditions that its "heteroglossia" instigates does not implode into synthesis but preserves for each "the assurance of the part to enrich the whole through its own energy" (see p. 2 above). On the other hand, the apodictic syntactic unity of his works appears not monologic but dialogic in nature, connoting more than it denotes.

Korsyn proposes dialogic analysis on the grounds that "rather than reducing difference to sameness, in an attempt to secure the boundaries of an autonomous, self-identical text, dialogic analysis would begin from this apparent unity, this *unity-effect*, but would move towards heterogeneity, activating and releasing the voices of a musical heteroglossia" (Korsyn 1999, 64-65). Korsyn offers Harold Bloom's theory of poetic misprision—known as the "anxiety of influence"—as both a paradigm of poetic history construction and a methodological prototype for a dialogic analysis. Korsyn points out that Bloom's theory reverses the semantic weight of presence and absence, as a poem becomes unique in its encounter with other poems (Korsyn 1991, 13), an encounter that involves a discontinuity between texts, an "awareness not so much of presences as of absences, of *what is missing in the poem because it had to be excluded*" (Bloom 1979, 15). For Korsyn, Bloom registers a "signifying absence... analogous to the dark matter of the universe, the invisible matter that is known only through its effects on what is seen" (Korsyn 1999, 71). Relating Korsyn's interpretation of Bloom to Adamis, the transcendence of tradition that his music aspires to not only frees creative space for his own subjectivity to fill, but also opens a contoured void, a "signifying absence" that semanticizes it.

The above inference brings to mind the works of Rachel Whiteread, a contemporary sculptor who solidifies empty spaces, whom Williams cites in order to offer an elucidation for the concept of "semanticized modernism." In *House* of 1993, Whiteread created a concrete cast of a terraced house in the East End of London marked for demolition, a kind of "inverted" house, stripped of its external structure. In Williams's opinion, "the space in which lives were conducted, the air they breathed is transformed and solidified by impenetrable facades. The interior of a rejected object has become a source for the new, a modernist abstraction: instead of semanticizing modernism, the cast has modernized, or abstracted, a community and its interpretive horizon" (Williams 1999, 37). By analogy, Adamis's claim for abstraction as transcendence is in effect a claim for the conversion of absence into presence: tradition's "functional outline of experience and action" survives the process of abstraction and stands as a semanticizing cast, a solidified space that alludes to "ethos" as meaning.

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<sup>1</sup> "My proposition moves within the borders of an area that has been termed the avant garde of contemporary music as a new outlook to things that aspires to organize them with an aesthetic consistency intrinsic to the way of formulating the material into a work" (Adamis 2007a, 17).

<sup>2</sup> All translations of Adamis's quotes originally written in Greek are mine.

<sup>3</sup> This position does not concur with the basic argument of postmodernism for an eclectic pluralism based on the assumption that the artist "has the ability to choose from the totality of traditions as if s/he were *equidistant* from them" (Kompridis 1993, 11). By assigning agency to a preferred cultural tradition over another (e.g. the Greek Byzantine musical tradition imbuing the Western musical tradition), Adamis suggests a hierarchy that affirms the cultural constraints imposed by the place he holds within a complex of traditions and grants his imagination "a privileged perspective of the totality of possibilities," usually associated with modernist aesthetics (Kompridis 1993, 11).

<sup>4</sup> Adamis's sedulous research into and profound knowledge of Byzantine music as both a practicing musician and a scholar is well documented (1972; 1978; 1995; 2000; 2007a). Furthermore, it should be noted that Adamis relies on the tradition of Greek folk music as well, though not as heavily as he does on that of Byzantine music.

<sup>5</sup> The title of the work is itself inspired by one of the concluding verses of a poem written by Adamis's wife Panny in 2001: «Κι όσο κι αν ο φόβος του μηδενός, που η Φύση όλη – εξ άλλου – αποστρέφεται, καθιστά ολόλαμπρη και ποθητή προοπτική την πέραν του Χρόνου ύπαρξη, μ' αυτήν αντέξαμε, τόσοι τόση ζωή, ω ντρέπομαι να ομολογήσω με συντριβή και με εκ βάθους καρδιάς «κύριε ελέησον»· πόσο μου φάνηκε αφόρητος ο Ατέρμων Χρόνος σαν ονειρεύτηκα το επέκεινα της έν-χρονης ζωής μου. Δεν ήταν πια ζωή, καθόλου· μα πάλι που να ξέρω, ίσως μόνο όνειρο παραχής τότε που η ελπίδα κοίταζε θαρρετά τη συμφιλίωση με το τέλος» (Adamis 2007b, 5).

<sup>6</sup> A conversation with Adamis on July 5, 2009 corroborated his belief that the complex sonic result of poly-melodic and poly-rhythmic treatment exceeds the sum of its parts, allowing for new sonic planes to emerge through the phenomenon of acoustic resonance (hence his insistence on a limited use of vibrato on behalf of performers). Although "the correspondence between the lines is worked in detail," Adamis admitted that there is not total control over the end result. This sense of partial loss of control with respect to the final outcome might be interpreted as a "weakening of the composing subject" that "simultaneously creates space for listening subjects to pursue various interpretive strategies... allow[ing] semantic resources other than authorial intention to be mobilized" (Williams 1999, 40).

<sup>7</sup> In the same conversation as the one referred to earlier, Adamis traced the origins of his poly-melodic and poly-rhythmic technique back to his early explorations with electronic music composition as well as his research with Byzantine music paleography. His most important contributions to the field of Byzantine musicology involve the reconstitution of the *Office of the Three Youths in the Furnace* and the discovery and transcription of the bi-modal two-part *Aineite* by Manuel Gazis, the oldest extant of the rare polyphonic works from the mid-Byzantine era (<http://www.adamis.gr/en/bio.html>, accessed May 12, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> In another version of the piece, brought to my attention by the composer after the completion of the present essay, there is no intermediate rhythmic and textural articulation between the two opening phrases. They are integrated into a single unit with the saxophone part repeating the opening melodic gesture, over the sustained notes of the organ part, in the high register it has reached by m. 7. Despite minor alterations in terms of pitch class content, this second version of the opening thirteen bars projects an alternative, though equally lucid, structural narrative.

<sup>9</sup> The rhetorical undertones in Adamis's poetic thinking may be confirmed by the way he describes the dynamic development of contemporary compositional trends as "a process that is better understood with a parallelism not to the discovery of a land, but to an *invention* to be made. As such, a process that eludes preconceptions and predictions, assessment and even anticipation" (Adamis 1995, 9, my emphasis).