8 *Musique automatique*? Adèsian Automata and the Logic of Disjuncture

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Twenty years after Richard Taruskin fashioned Thomas Adès as a modernist saviour in surrealist garb, to call Adès's music surreal is now a cliché.¹ And while the stereotype's communicative utility remains undeniably evocative, its entrenched position in our discourse easily obscures both surrealism's wonderful elusiveness and the fascinating tangle of associations linking the movement to Adès.² In the dialogue that has sprung from Taruskin's influential review, critics have seized primarily on those Adèsian musical effects whose jarring quality emerges from common sounds 'made newly strange'.³ This observational stance has the benefit of linking Adès to the most recognisable surrealists - and to Salvador Dalí in particular, whose melting clocks and lobster telephones are easily translated into droopy harmonies and disfigured cadences. Taruskin's rendering of the connection frames Adès's surrealism in just this way - suggesting that he transfigures the medium of music into something "painterly" rather than "narrative", 'improbable sonic collages and mobiles: outlandish juxtapositions of evocative sound-objects'.⁴ By suggesting a visual origin for Adès's incongruous sounds, Taruskin effortlessly situates Adès within the Dalí-dominated strand of object-oriented surrealism.⁵ Like Dalí's Persistence of Memory and Lobster Telephone, Adès's music is in this light brimming with incongruous juxtapositions, recontextualisations, decontextualisations, distortions and disjunctures.

And yes, these are central features of Adès's music that resonate with a particularly rich paradigm of modernist art – both surreal and not surreal.⁶

My greatest thanks to my father Will Moseley, for introducing me to Dalí, Ernst, and other surreal artists at a young, impressionable age. This essay would not be possible without him.

¹ Richard Taruskin, 'A Surrealist Composer Comes to the Rescue of Modernism', New York Times, 5 December 1999; reprinted with a postscript in *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-utopian Essays* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), pp. 144–52.

² See Edward Venn, *Thomas Adès*: Asyla (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017); and Drew Massey, 'Thomas Adès and the Dilemmas of Musical Surrealism', *Gli spazi della musica*, 7 (2018), 86–146.

³ Taruskin, 'A Surrealist Composer', p. 147. ⁴ Ibid.

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⁵ See Salvador Dalí, 'Objets surréalistes', *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution*, 3 (1931), 15–16.

⁶ Adès has many familial connections to surrealism as well. His mother, Dawn Adès, is a prominent art historian who specialises in Dada and Surrealism, and, as Drew Massey ('Thomas Adès and the Dilemmas of Musical Surrealism', pp. 93–4) has detailed, his father and brother are also connected to the movement.

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But I believe that something central is missing in Taruskin's description of Adès's 'painterly' disjunctions: these purported disjunctions frequently have their basis in a compositional logic that does in fact structure a musical process, or even a narrative. Christopher Fox captured this feature of Adès's works in an article written not long after Taruskin's. Much as surrealist painting derives its 'fantastic nonsense' from 'a logic within the depiction itself', Fox finds in Adès's music a 'wealth of melodic and harmonic detail' that 'can be related to a few intervallic relationships'.⁷ Logic of this sort does not make Adès's music any *less* surreal; rather, I will argue below that it makes it *more* so. Locating surrealism *in the music*, Adès engages an aesthetic predating Dalí – one represented in the works of André Breton, André Masson and Max Ernst, who operated under the spell of 'automatism'.

Breton, the chief instigator of early surrealism, viewed automatism and surrealism as synonymous. Automatic thought was a great interest of Sigmund Freud, for whom it represented the spontaneous and non-purposeful behaviours of the unconscious. Dreams are automatic thought par excellence because they are not rationally conceived. Breton, a great admirer of Freud, felt that dreams were grossly neglected, and in his *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924) he argues that we awaken understanding by elevating a dream's marvellous events to a status typically reserved for conscious reality.⁸ Automatism as a principle accomplishes this reorientation and becomes the basis of Breton's notion of surrealism:

SURREALISM, n. Pure psychic automatism, by which one proposes to express verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic concern.⁹

Surrealism, then, exceeds realism by ignoring the active, reasoned coherence of the conscious mind, freeing the seeming incoherence of the passive and unconscious mind and rounding out our understanding of thought itself. In Daniel Albright's telling, this negotiation between the tyranny of consciousness and unconscious freedom occurs most clearly when our senses become disconnected: a 'twittering cow' is 'the primary surrealist act', emerging when 'I ... walk through a field and watch a distant cow

⁷ See Christopher Fox, 'Tempestuous Times: The Recent Music of Thomas Adès', *Musical Times*, 145/1888 (2004), 41–56 (p. 45).

⁸ André Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)', in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), pp. 3–47.

⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

open its mouth, and hear, at that very instant, the tweet of a bird'.¹⁰ The humour of this image, if we allow it to emerge, comes from a sensory mismatch of eye and ear that refuses to allow our conscious mind to connect our senses. Surrealist automatism encourages us to free these 'suppressed dissonances', which are as much a part of our 'everyday sensory existence' as coherent thought.¹¹

Interpreted this way, surrealism's relished incongruities are not fully disjunct but are legitimate, logical manifestations of our unconscious. Surreal automatism therefore asks us to imagine Adès's 'outlandish juxtapositions' as surreal revelations of supressed associations. This chapter's goal is to explore this reorientation by positioning Adès's music in the context of automatism. I believe that this focus enriches our engagement with the music far beyond simply giving us new pictures to imagine as we listen. First, the framework of automatism allows us to incorporate works that have not often been understood as surreal. Much of the literature discussing Adès and surrealism has concentrated on the operas and programmatic pieces.¹² My focus in this chapter is on his four Mazurkas: genre pieces that lack dramatic, textual, pictorial or programmatic content around which we are able to position a surreal reading. Second, the automatic techniques found in literary and visual art link Adèsian surrealism to the compositional logic that theorists such as John Roeder and Philip Stoecker have uncovered in the past twenty years.¹³ Finally, Adès's automatism suggests a way of composing genuinely surreal music. Breton found music 'confusing', and he does not include it among the modes of surreal artistic creation.¹⁴ By emphasising the 'painterly' nature of Adès's compositions, Taruskin would seem to respond to Breton's critique by suggesting that this music's surreal qualities are found in its visual attributes. I, on the other hand, suggest that by attending to the surrealist qualities that are fundamentally musical, we are able to account for those

¹⁰ Though he does not discuss Adès, Daniel Albright's formulation of musical surrealism has been, apart from Taruskin's review, perhaps the most influential precursor to our present

understanding of Adès and surrealism. See Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 291–311.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 248.

¹² Venn's subject (in *Thomas Adès*: Asyla) is the orchestral *Asyla*. Massey ('Thomas Adès and the Dilemmas of Musical Surrealism') discusses *Powder Her Face*, *Life Story*, *Brahms* and *In Seven Days*.

¹³ See, for instance, John Roeder, 'Co-operating Continuities in the Music of Thomas Adès', Music Analysis, 25/i-ii (2006), 121–54; and Philip Stoecker, 'Aligned Cycles in Thomas Adès's Piano Quintet', Music Analysis, 33/i (2014), 32–64.

¹⁴ See André Breton, *Le surréalisme et la peinture*, rev. ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 1.

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marvellous sounds that emerge from logical processes of structured time, thereby adding strength to the notion that music can indeed be surreal.

I return to these themes explicitly in the final part of this chapter, where I examine the three Mazurkas Op. 27 and *Thrift (a Cliff-Flower): Mazurka-Cortège*. But in the meantime, I hope that the specific surrealist connections to Adès's music can remain just at the edge of consciousness as I discuss automatism as a principle and explore automatic techniques found in early surrealist literary and visual art. As I navigate the historical and artistic gaps separating Breton and Adès, Max Ernst, his collage process and the frottage technique in particular will provide a helpful bridge.

Willed Passivity, Conscious Receptivity and the Logic of Surreal Automata

'Automatic' techniques of artistic creation proliferated through literary and visual art in the 1920s. Breton prefigures the definition of surrealism given above by describing his gravitation towards a way of 'automatic writing': in the half-consciousness before sleep one evening, a phrase appeared in Breton's mind – 'There is a man cut in two by a window' – without 'any apparent relationship to the events' of his reality. Excited by its organic, unexpected imagery, he sought out these supressed thoughts by putting himself 'in as passive, or receptive state of mind' as possible ... writing 'quickly, without any preconceived subject'. Automatic writing thus aimed to outrun consciousness and capture an inner 'monologue ... unencumbered by the slightest inhibition'.¹⁵

Breton's *Les champs magnétiques (The Magnetic Fields)*, written in 1919 with Philippe Soupalt, was the signal event in the development of early surrealism. Produced with the automatic writing technique, the book puts forth passage after passage of odd images piled on top one another. In its post-war landscape, we are imagined as 'prisoners', not of other humans but 'of drops of water'. The landscape of post-war Europe is anthropomorphised only to reveal that its towns 'are dead' and its walls 'quiet'.¹⁶ It is essential to recognise that while such images present us with an '*extreme degree of immediate absurdity*', surrealists understood them as entirely

¹⁵ Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)', pp. 21-4.

¹⁶ André Breton and Philippe Soupault, *The Magnetic Fields*, trans. by David Gascoyne, 3rd ed. (London: Atlas Press, 1985), pp. 25–6.

logical products of thought that '[disclose] a certain number of properties and ... facts no less objective, in the final analysis, than the others'.¹⁷

Given the imagistic quality of The Magnetic Fields, it is unsurprising that Breton positioned visual expression alongside literary expression as one of only two ways to produce surreal art. And visual artists in the 1920s quickly replicated the axioms of automatic writing to produce surreal images. Among the most important are the 'automatic drawings' of Masson and Joan Miró. Each artist's imitations of automatic writing began by their copying Breton's instructions for automatic writing literally. Masson, in drawings such as Automatic Drawing (1924), Furious Suns (1925) and Birth of Birds (1925), began by attempting to free his mind, letting the pen flow freely and spontaneously across the page in hopes of capturing the same unconscious images sought by Breton. Subsequently, these lines were interpreted by Masson into finished drawings.

This added layer of after-the-fact interpretation highlights a significant characteristic of automatic drawing that will be important when we return to Adès. This quality, which I will refer to as 'willed passivity' and 'conscious receptivity', describes how automatic drawing lives in the tension between the passive state sought at a drawing's beginning and a conscious mind's later reflection. Miró vividly captures these qualities by describing two separate stages of creation: 'I start a canvas without a thought of what it may eventually become. I put it aside after the first fire has abated. I may not look at it again for months. Then I take it out and work at it coldly like an artisan, guided strictly by rules of composition after the first shock of suggestion has cooled.¹⁸

As an example of these qualities, consider Masson's Birth of Birds.¹⁹ The speed and airiness of the abstract pen strokes produced in the drawing's passive beginning come together into smoothed-over convex angles that point the drawing upwards to the right. The drawing's lines have a purposeful, airy and earthy quality. At its centre, Masson later formed those lines into the vague outlines of a nude female, with breasts made of comets and stars, and two bird-like images with triangular beaks emerging from her lap. Masson's interpretation of the pen strokes seizes on a classic surrealist coupling of humans and beasts, natural and unnatural: the female form merges with the soaring birds, and the natural process of birth

Thomas Adès Studies, edited by Edward Venn, and Philip Stoecker, Cambridge University Press, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/buffalo/detail.action?docID=6809131.

¹⁷ Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)', p. 24, original emphasis.

¹⁸ See James Johnson Sweeney, 'Joan Miró: Comment and Interview', Partisan Review, 15/ii (1948), 206-12 (pp. 210-11).

¹⁹ At the time of writing, a high-quality reproduction of this drawing is available online at the website of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, www.moma.org.

becomes an analogue for avian flight.²⁰ *Birth of Birds* foregrounds the *revelatory* aspect of automatic art, linking surrealism to Freud's 'uncanny'. Seeming disjuncture and disorientation are symptoms of both, 'produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced'.²¹

Max Ernst's 1921 exhibition of collage works was, after the publication of *The Magnetic Fields*, the other central event in surrealism's early development. Ernst's collages, as assemblages of pre-existing materials, seem at first to contrast rather sharply with the fluidity and passiveness of automatic writing and drawing. Both Ernst and Breton, however, attempted to ground collage within the overarching principle of automatism.²² In his *Surrealism and Painting* of 1928, Breton sees the chance encounters in collage elements as the result of an automatic process. By allowing defunct, often discarded items to come into chance association, collage begins from a position of passiveness that is followed, like automatic drawing, by conscious interpretation.

Ernst's related technique of 'frottage' even more clearly highlights the automatic principles of willed passivity and conscious receptivity. In frottage, Ernst places objects below a sheet of paper and then exposes the object's contours by rubbing the paper with a pencil. When a frottage work such as *The Fugitive* (*L'évadé*) is viewed, the breakages in material heterogeneity that are recognisable on the surface foreground the processual quality of collage noted by Elza Adamowicz.²³ The strange creature in the centre of the work is formed from a disparate group of these patterns.²⁴ The image's unnatural character – is this a creature or a machine? – is brought into relief against the natural materials used to produce it. The leaves that create its trailing fins, the canvas-like material forming its body and the wire-mesh sea below cause one to wonder whether this is a fish floating in mid-air, escaping the water by sprouting wings, or a strange zeppelin whose fish-like form is an adaptation to its marine environment.

- ²¹ Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny", in An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works (1917–1919), vol. 17 of The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1955), pp. 217–52 (p. 244). Both Massey ('Thomas Adès and the Dilemmas of Musical Surrealism', pp. 122–30) and Edward Venn, in 'Thomas Adès and the Spectres of Brahms', Journal of the Royal Musical Association, 140/i (2015), 163–212, discuss Adès in relation to the uncanny.
- ²² Breton, Le surréalisme et la peinture, p. 27.
- ²³ Elza Adamowicz, Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 15. My understanding of collage as 'automatic' is influenced by Adamowicz's work.
- ²⁴ Ernst's *The Fugitive* is, at the time of writing, available for viewing online at the website of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, www.moma.org.

²⁰ Julia Kelly draws out many of these observations in *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, ed. by Jennifer Mundy (London: Tate Publishing, 2001), p. 105.

To retrieve Adès's music from the periphery of this discussion, frottage represents a critical link between purely automatic writing and drawing and the surreal character of his music. In the work of both Ernst and Adès, seeming disjunctions emerge from the tension of passivity and activity that is inherent in engaging with pre-existing, underlying patterns and processes. Ernst himself felt that the potential for musical automatism could be found in frottage. Musical automatism, he stated, might replace the technique's patterned objects with 'dictations of actual raw resonances, which would place our unconscious in possession of this latent music'.²⁵ Notably, Ernst's suggestion that 'raw resonances' replace the physical patterns of frottage is centred on a conception of sound as devoid of 'independent aesthetic value'.²⁶ Patterned floorboards, leaves and breadcrumbs, like common chord successions, scales and generic rhythmic ideas, have no specific meaning.

What, then, are the 'raw resonances' of Adès's automatic musical language? I contend that they are patterns of pitches, intervals and rhythms, occasionally derived from specific pieces by other composers, but also 'natural' or, as Adès might say, 'geometrical', patterns based on numerical sequences and musical properties that are latent in familiar musical objects. These are the patterns, I believe, that Christopher Fox notices when writing of the 'logic' that inheres in the 'fantastic nonsense' of Adès's music, and they include Adès's characteristic interval cycles and rhythmic gestures.²⁷ That Adès engages them through both the willed passivity and the conscious receptivity common to surrealist automatism is evident not only in his compositional logic but in a great many of Adès's discussions of his music. Adès has described his use of pre-existing materials with recourse to natural imagery whose vividness is reminiscent of the Miró quotation above. Calling them 'live cultures', 'roots' or 'seeds', Adès indicates that he is entranced by old ideas that are 'still not quite set' and that invite 'further experimentation, further unfolding'.28 Again channelling Miró, he says:

²⁵ See François-Bernard Mâche, 'Surreálisme et musique, remarques et gloses', La nouvelle revue française, 264 (1974), 34–49.

²⁶ Quoted by Anne LeBaron, 'Reflections of Surrealism in Postmodern Musics', in *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*, ed. by Judy Lochhead and Joseph Auner (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 27–74 (pp. 37–8).

²⁷ Fox, 'Tempestuous Times', p. 45.

²⁸ Kirill Gerstein, 'Thomas Adès: "Roots, Seeds & Live Cultures" – "Kirill Gerstein Invites" @ HfM Eisler Berlin', online video interview, 18 June 2020, YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v= I0kHP_npxJA.



Ex. 8.1 Piano Quintet (2000). (a) Bars 1–4; (b) aligned cycle of intervals for the first three chords; (c) a different interval pattern structure

You can have quite a lot of material that is sort of, if you like, applying for entry to a piece. And in my case, I will scribble something down if it looks promising, tear it off, and stick the piece of paper to the wall physically. And they can sit there, sometimes for years and never make it into anything. And sometimes they suddenly have their moment. And I say 'oh, you'll do' . . . I need time for most things . . . What can happen is I'll do something very quickly and leave it for however long, and then you start to see the things that will never do and then you work on those.²⁹

Consider, for example, the opening of Adès's Piano Quintet, shown in Ex. 8.1a. The common chord succession that forms the piece's upbeat – a second-inversion C major chord followed by a first-inversion G major chord – is an ideal musical representation of the conventional object, or 'raw resonance', suggested by Ernst. Adès has described this chord succession in terms redolent of the surprising images that materialise out of frottage:

There was a period where I was fascinated by ... perfect cadences. And I thought, what happens if I treat it [the first two chords of Ex. 8.1a] not as an inevitable, natural process ... but I look at those things as a structure ... If you abstract it a little bit, you see that you have three voices, one moves major second, one moves minor third, one moves major third. And then logically, geometrically the next chord is actually that [the D#-A#-E chord in bar 1].³⁰

Our sense of surprise at the composite gesture's end is certainly a result of hearing D#-A#-E rather than a root-position C major; in Taruskin's terms, it is 'an ordinary event ... made newly strange'.³¹ But imagined within the context of surreal automatism, the patterns of Ex. 8.1b reveal that the

²⁹ Ibid., 00:24:15–00:28:30. ³⁰ Ibid., 00:29:30.

³¹ Taruskin, 'A Surrealist Composer', p. 147.

distortion has a richer meaning. Those intervallic patterns, like Ernst's frottage patterns, are *pre-existing* and inherent in the succession, present for as long as the well-worn chord succession has existed; thus as Breton might say, what we hear at the opening of the Piano Quintet is 'no less objective', no less legitimate than the tonal pattern that would have produced a C major chord.³² By mining this relic of the musical past for something long ignored, Adès enacts a willed passivity towards it that aligns him with the automatism of Breton, Masson and Ernst. Distortions and disjunctions are revealed in this way to have been present all along and made invisible only by the inherited habits of our conscious mind.

Surrealism on the Inside: Adès's Mazurkas

In a wonderful coincidence, one of the first self-professed pieces of surreal music was itself a mazurka. Written by André Souris and Paul Hooreman in 1925 – a year after Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto – Tombeau de Socrate* has generally been read as an attempt to 'out-parody' Erik Satie, who had written his own 'Death of Socrates' and died just weeks earlier.³³ Simple in the extreme, the mazurka is one minute in length and contains a single stave and no bar lines, and its mazurka-like attributes are evident primarily in unadorned metric and rhythmic attributes.³⁴ Adès – like Souris and Hooreman – had available to him many of the specific qualities that we hear in Chopin's mazurkas along with a set of meaningful, conventional patterns: the mazurka's triple metre, with characteristic accents on the second and third beats; conventional rhythmic patterns, particularly dotted rhythms on the first beat; repeated short, symmetrical phrase structures; bass pedals; an invocation of the Lydian fourth scale degree; and formal plans oriented around thematic and tonal contrast.³⁵ These mazurka

³² Venn (*Thomas Adès*: Asyla, p. 149) suggests that Adès's compositional logic often 'trigger[s] associations with functional tonality, but which is nevertheless divorced from it', thereby making him 'less a surrealist in the mould of Poulenc *et al.*, and more a *second-order* surrealist, whose semantic innovations arise not from a tilting of the musical logic [of] functional tonality, but rather from a tilting of the musical logic of the surrealists themselves'. I argue, however, that the *logic* of Adès's compositional language, proceeding as it so often does in relationship to the past, is fundamental to the axioms of first-generation surreal thought.

³⁵ Jennifer Maxwell has analysed these Mazurkas alongside those of Chopin and composer Karol Szymanowski. Maxwell's sense of connection is confirmed in Adès's interview with Gerstein,

³³ Caroline Potter, *Erik Satie: A Parisian Composer and His World* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2016), p. 236.

³⁴ Jean-Jacques Nattiez, The Battle of Chronos and Orpheus: Essays in Applied Musical Semiology, trans. by Jonathan Dunsby (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 24.

patterns are, to paraphrase Adès, like 'a sort of invisible object', 'chronically volatile', 'like lava'.³⁶ They are hidden but still living natural materials waiting to exhibit new sides of themselves.

Through his titling of the movements of Op. 27 as First Mazurka, Second Mazurka and Third Mazurka, Adès explicitly indicates a performance order that corresponds, as we will see, to a slow deterioration of those traits that are most topically characteristic of the mazurka. In the First Mazurka the patterns are revealed to the listener in their most characteristic state. Figure 8.1 offers a diagram of its arch form listing a set of mazurka patterns beneath, while Ex. 8.2 shows excerpts from the movement. On its downbeat, Adès immediately invokes the mazurka's characteristic dotted rhythm (here realised in a short-long triplet form), along with a conventional tonic pedal in the bass and emphasis on the Lydian fourth scale degree (D#, here notated as Eb).³⁷ As shown in Ex. 8.2a, bars 1–2, that Eb initiates a series of 'expanding intervals' that generates the melody and, in fuzzy canonic presentation, the piano's middle register. Like the leaves and wire mesh concealed throughout Ernst's Histoire naturelle, this expanding interval series (EIS), diagrammed abstractly in Fig. 8.1b, is a staple of Adès's music.³⁸ Notably, the EIS is a pattern that is automatically selfgenerating: each interval between successive pitches is one semitone larger than the previous one. The resulting pitch construction produces one of Adès's famously 'irrational' tonal relationships - tritone-related harmonies. This tritone relationship is foregrounded in Ex. 8.2a, in which the D minor seventh above the tonic pedal in bar 1 is followed by a striking G sharp minor seventh in bar 2. (Note that Adès alters the EIS in the second bar, which avoids the A^{\U03} that would have ended it but which has been present in the bass all along.)

where he reveals some specific Chopin mazurkas used as models for the three published as Op. 27. See Jennifer A. Maxwell, 'Tracing a Lineage of the Mazurka Genre: Influences of Chopin and Szymanowski on Thomas Adès's Mazurkas for Piano, Op. 27' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Boston University, 2014); see also Gerstein, 'Thomas Adès: "Roots, Seeds & Live Cultures'', 00:38:30–00:48:00.

³⁶ Thomas Adès and Tom Service, *Thomas Adès: Full of Noises – Conversations with Tom Service*, paperback ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 2018), p. 4.

³⁷ Each of these characteristics are found in Chopin's Mazurka in B flat major, which Adès played in his conversation with Gerstein. See Gerstein, 'Thomas Adès: "Roots, Seeds & Live Cultures", 00:41:00–00:41:15.

³⁸ The analogy between Adès's EIS and Ernst's various frottage objects is strengthened by the numerous contexts in which Adès uses it. Roeder described the pattern in 'Co-operating Continuities' in connection with the string quartet *Arcadiana*, where it occurs in conjunction with a similar projection in duration (p. 26) and a tango-like passage from *Powder Her Face* (p. 36).



Fig. 8.1 First Mazurka. (a) Formal diagram and notes; (b) 'expanding interval series'

The Mazurka's first section contains sixteen bars, divided into two-bar variations of this pattern. Not only is this symmetrical division and variation redolent of the mazurka, but so is the patterned 'tonal plan' that Adès binds to the mechanical interval patterns. Example 8.2a interprets the main actions of this plan in three stages. After the initial presentation of the pattern (stage 1), repeated over the course of bars

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Ex. 8.2 First Mazurka. (a) Bars 1-15, excerpts; (b) bar 53-end

3–8, the right and left hands become unglued in bar 9 (stage 2): the E–Eb that began each prior iteration of the EIS is reinterpreted, allowing the middle register to play a new version transposed one semitone higher, labelled on the example as ' T_1 (EIS)'. Only in the third and final stage do the patterns come back together. In bar 13 the upper melody of this new transposition of the EIS leads to a climactic G₆ on the downbeat of bar 15.

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Unfolding in the bass throughout all three stages – and indicated below each stage with a circled pitch name – are characteristic mazurka pedals arranged in an interval pattern of ascending fourths/descending fifths. Perhaps the most conventional of all interval patterns (and replicated in the bass of the Mazurka's central 'C section'), this bass cycle reaches a nadir on the low G_1 of bar 13 just as the upper-voice patterns come together around the transposed EIS. The convergence of these unique patterns gives rise to a melodic inversion of the EIS that joins the bass in a 'perfect cadence' on C in bar 15. C, the mediant of the tonic, A, is a typical destination in the mazurka's tonal form; but here, coupled to the mechanical patterns of melody and bass, the cadence's conventionality is revealed in a new, strange light.

At the passage's recapitulation in bar 53, shown in Ex. 8.2b, varied statements of the EIS enact an opposite procedure to secure a conventional 'tonal adjustment' that ends the piece on the tonic. From bar 54 onwards, simultaneous presentations of the EIS once again become unglued, the piano's middle register melody playing T_8 and then T_7 transpositions while the melody above is fixed on the original. But where in the first A section (Ex. 8.2a, bar 13) those melodies came back together around a transposition leading to the C cadence, here they coalesce in the final bars on the original EIS itself. The pattern here has been reimagined a final time. Three bars from the end, final statements of the EIS begin on F[#], and each unfurls in contrary motion, the statements together sounding all eleven ordered interval classes. Unfolding at different speeds and heading towards the piano's extremes, these final EISs manage to arrive together on the downbeat of the final bar, sounding the tonic A six octaves apart.

In my experience of listening to this passage and playing it for others, the final cadence of the First Mazurka is delightfully funny, and I think its humour is evidence of the surreal possibility of musical process. Most obviously, the final cadence projects a feeling of a 'ludicrous' incongruity of concept and object, to frame it in Schopenhauer's terms.³⁹ 'Closure', which is referenced so strongly by the final cadence's sudden *pianississimo* and simple octaves, seems incongruous in the context of the mechanistic, patterned music that precedes it. That incongruity is foregrounded by the pattern's musical 'activity', which strongly highlights

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³⁹ See John Morreall's discussion of Schopenhauer in *Taking Laughter Seriously* (Albany: State University of New York, 1983), pp. 15–19.

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Ex. 8.3 Second Mazurka. (a) Bars 1–2; (b) an intervallic pattern, x; (c) a rhythmic pattern; (d) an articulation pattern

our sense of 'passivity' at that moment. Upon its arrival at the simple octave on A, one seems to realise, in retrospect, that the Mazurka's patterns themselves have found a previously concealed association with the conventions of tonal form.

The Second Mazurka more greatly conceals the topical attributes of the mazurka that were explicit in the First. Nonetheless, as the connections between Exs. 8.3 and 8.4 and Fig. 8.2 detail, this Mazurka's extraordinary assemblage of patterned logic comes closest to representing the material heterogeneity of Ernst's frottage works.⁴⁰ In Ex. 8.3, I show the three simple patterns that generate the majority of the movement: a pitch pattern labelled x in Ex. 8.3b descends a diatonic second and then a third; a rhythmic pattern shown in Ex. 8.3c contrasts two triplet quavers with two straight quavers; and an articulation pattern in Ex. 8.3d alternates two slurred notes with two separated ones.⁴¹ All of these patterns combine to produce the two-voice counterpoint of the Mazurka's opening, which is

⁴⁰ Adès points to Chopin's Mazurka in C major Op. 24 No. 2 as one model in his interview with Gerstein. Gerstein, 'Thomas Adès: "Roots, Seeds & Live Cultures", 00:43:15.

⁴¹ The genesis of each pattern is easy to see in Chopin's Op. 24 No. 2, bars 5–6. Adès's explanation of the origins of the rhythmic pattern at Ex. 8.3b is particularly fascinating and relevant in the context of this chapter. Playing bar 5 of Chopin's Op. 24 No. 2, he alters the rhythm of the first two quavers, making them triplet quavers instead. This places the third note, a B[↓] which had been located squarely on beat 2, instead just before it, creating the rhythm of his Second Mazurka out of the opening of the Chopin. In his description of this transformation, he describes it botanically as a 'cutting', splitting the Chopin at a particular place from which his piece 'begins to grow'. Gerstein, 'Thomas Adès: "Roots, Seeds & Live Cultures'", 00:44:30–00:45:00.

(a)







Ex. 8.4 Second Mazurka. (a) Bars 1-7; (b) bars 17-20, 'modulation' to F sharp; (c) bars 29-33, recapitulation on F



Fig. 8.2 Second Mazurka, formal overview of the first large section

labelled **S** in Ex. 8.3d. While each pattern is applied to the three boxes characterising the right hand, the intervallic pattern in Ex. 8.3a is present in the more slowly unfolded left hand. Those boxes on the top stave of Ex. 8.3d also highlight an overarching pattern: while the rhythm and articulation patterns remain constant, the pitch pattern *x* is sequenced by descending diatonic thirds: F-E-C is followed by D-C-A, Bb-A-F and G-F, ... (A-G-E), ... D.⁴² Most striking, both structurally and perceptually, the patterned right hand – further decorated with mordents – implies a 5/12 metre whose attempts to coexist with the simple 3/4 of the left hand have a strong whiff of Breton's absurd. In Ex. 8.3d, the large **S** pattern begins on pitch-class F, and thus I have appended a subscript 'F' to track its presence throughout the Mazurka. Above the stave in the score

⁴² In Chopin's Op. 24 No. 2, this pattern of descending thirds links bars 5–6 to bars 7–8.

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excerpts of Ex. 8.4, I show that the right hand proceeds, for example, through S_F , S_D , $S_{B\flat}$ and S_G ; against this, the left hand (diagrammed below the lower stave) plays S_F , then $S_{E\flat}$ and $S_{D\flat}$.

An overview of the Mazurka's large opening passage is shown in Fig. 8.2 with the right and left hands separated to reveal the unique paths that **S** follows within each. (A comparison of Ex. 8.4 and Fig. 8.2 may aid an understanding of the diagram's layout.) Layered on top of the patterned patterns of **S**, the right hand moves downwards in a further patterned alternation of three and four semitones while the left hand descends by whole tones. A final pattern is placed on top of it all, as every statement of **S** is heard within a diatonic context that is subject to its own logic: most clearly, the darkened boxes expose how the diatonic contexts of **S** generally change chromatically by one accidental in the sharp or flat direction, with some significant exceptions. Thus, while **S**_B in bars 5–6 occur in the context of the one-flat, F major collection of the opening, **S**_G in bar 7 introduces E^b, thereby creating a two-flat collection.

It is worth pausing to reflect upon the sheer patterned complexity of these examples, particularly in relation to the patterns themselves. In automatic works, we have seen that surrealists felt that a passive mind could reveal new phrases or images hitherto unheard. But these new-found objects were commonly made from old ones. Dismantling Breton's phrase 'There is a man cut in two by a window' into its parts does not reveal anything of interest, nor does separating Ernst's *The Fugitive* into its various patterns. But when subjected to the fantastic logic of automatic thought, these old phrases and materials are given new life. Thus, consider the banal structure of the three patterns in Ex. 8.3, the simple sequences governing **S** and the bland pattern that organises each diatonic collection. While these are mundane by themselves, Adès illuminates something wonderfully new and complex by allowing them to interact as he does.

Of most consequence are the resulting form and startling tonal structure of the opening passage, some highlights of which are shown in Ex. 8.4. For instance, when S_F returns at bar 13 it is heard just as the left hand's wholetone pattern has reached $S_{D\flat}$, recasting the opening bars of S_F in a new five-flat diatonic context. An even more striking chromatic motion occurs at the approach to the contrasting B section that begins in bar 19. In the preceding bars (see Ex. 8.4b), the right hand works through $S_{B\flat}$ as the left marks out $S_{D\flat}$. At the end of bar 18, the right and left hand align to produce a quasi-'V–I' cadence in F sharp – 'modulating' up a semitone from the F major opening and inducing a disjointing change in diatonic collection. A similar alignment leads to the A section's recapitulation at bar

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33, which is shown in Ex. 8.4c. By bar 29 the independently operating patterns that sequence S have come together on S_C , suggesting the 'dominant' of the F major tonic. As the patterns continue to spin out in bars 29–32, they come together in another 'V–I' cadence, marking the end of the 'B section' and leading to a formal recapitulation. This entire opening sounds to me more like a strange music box with gears whirring around at different speeds than like a mazurka. That surreal image, reminiscent of the natural-cum-unnatural aspects of *The Fugitive*, is nonetheless produced by a *musical process* that structures time.

The progressive deterioration of the mazurka's topical character that began most clearly in the Second Mazurka continues in the Third, which deals with an even more abstract musical pattern, the circle of fifths. Of the many 'raw resonances' suggested by Ernst's analogy, the circle of fifths is one of the most likely. Not only does this famous circle belong to the kind of everlasting 'musical realm' that Adès mentions frequently, but fifths are foundational intervals at many levels of the tonal system and present early in the natural overtone series, and when arranged in a pattern, they produce all twelve pitch-classes. And in both the Third Mazurka and *Thrift*, the circle of fifths plays a foundational role in which Adès situates its raw, resonant power in a new form.

The ostinato that we hear at the opening of the Third Mazurka is shown in Ex. 8.5. Once again, one of the mazurka's most characteristic traits has been obscured. Though in triple metre, this passage occurs at a rather unmazurka-like tempo of crotchet = MM 44, and while the ostinato's melody preserves the long-short rhythmic characteristic, it is drastically slowed down.⁴³ The ostinato takes twelve bars to complete and then repeats, and in bar 8 it is accompanied by an odd triad-infused melody. On each downbeat the ostinato's two parts together produce the stark perfect fifths that are boxed in bars 1–3. While the left hand sustains, the right hand plays a single melodic interval that alternates perfect fourths and fifths. The proliferation of these intervals at such a slow tempo produces a strong sense of local diatonicism that is confirmed in the surrounding music: bars 1–2 occur in a diatonic context of seven sharps, suggestive of C sharp

⁴³ When explaining to Gerstein the Mazurka's derivation from Chopin, Adès played Chopin's Waltz in B minor Op. 69 No. 2 and Mazurka in C major Op. 68 No. 2 as models. It is interesting that neither of these pieces are in C sharp, even though Adès says that they demonstrate 'this sort of C sharp minor sound that he [Chopin] has'. And when playing them for Gerstein, he transposes each to C sharp. The referenced Mazurka in C major has a melodic and rhythmic contour that is extremely similar to the melody that begins in bar 8 of the Third Mazurka. Gerstein, 'Thomas Adès: "Roots, Seeds & Live Cultures", 00:45:00–00:47:00.



Ex. 8.5 Third Mazurka, bars 1-13

major, and the bass's dip down to G[#] in bar 2 evokes the tonic-dominant progression that begins many ground bass patterns.

Figure 8.3a reproduces the ostinato melody with transpositional arrows added to highlight the relationships described above.⁴⁴ The alternating fifths and fourths are shown with arrows along the bottom, while the arrows on the top show a different pattern among the melody's downbeats. This new pattern is a non-retrogradable symmetry, <7,3,11,11,3,7>, that occurs twice in course of the ostinato. Most significantly and surrealistically, we can see through this representation that the 'local diatonicism' noted above occurs in the context of that most chromatic of musical objects, a twelve-note row. Further reinforcing this sense of a diatonicism fantastically reimagined, Adès's twelve-note series is arranged in a complex manner not unlike that which we would find in the music of Alban Berg or George Perle.⁴⁵ While the downbeats produce a complete twelve-note series that I have called S on the example, the twelve upbeats also create a twelve-note series - this one the retrograde of S. Moreover, the downbeats and upbeats are imbricated within S in such a way as to create an altogether different twelve-note series that I call T; and like S, T is presented both in prograde and in retrograde.

⁴⁴ To derive the bass from this example, transpose the bolded circles down a perfect fifth.

⁴⁵ This relationship is not far-fetched, as Philip Stoecker implies in 'Aligned-Cycle Spaces', *Journal of Music Theory*, 60/ii (2016), 181–212.



(b)

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Fig. 8.3 Third Mazurka. (a) Piano ostinato; (b) the circle of fifths compared with Adès's note rows

To foreground how the patterned 'raw resonances' of the circle of fifths structure these twelve-note rows, Fig. 8.3b shows them alongside one another. This figure reveals that some basic components of the circle of fifths are preserved in **S** and **T** while others are altered. For instance, **S** and **T** are patterned productions of all twelve notes, though **S**'s and **T**'s intervallic patterns are complex distortions of the circle of fifth's simple pattern.⁴⁶ But their most surreal and perceptually salient commonality is that

⁴⁶ S is a pattern of intervals in non-retrogradable symmetry, while T is a pattern of intervals in a different way. T contains two interval sequences separated by tritones that are related by retrograde inversion: <5,+2,+7,+8,+5> is the retrograde inversion of <+7,+4,+5,+10,+7>. John Roeder has pointed out to me that S embeds two whole-tone collections in alternating order positions. That relationship plays a significant role in the creation of the Mazurka's second section, which begins from the same G# that began the first but works through a series of whole-tone canons.

all three project locally diatonic collections whose relationship is maximally chromatic: the 0-sharp and 7-sharp diatonic collections, bracketed on each circle, organise the chromaticism of all three circles in the same way. As a result, when we hear the ostinato at the opening of the Third Mazurka, its local diatonicism occurs within a context of global chromaticism. This diatonic/chromatic arrangement is similarly endemic to the melody we hear at bar 8. Each melodic gesture (the characteristically dotted ideas shown on Ex. 8.5) joins a minor triad and tritone: F minor + B, E minor + B and so on. Those tritones interact with the ostinato in such a way that each downbeat colours the ostinato's diatonic perfect fifth with a chromatic tritone, producing a series of accented dissonances that are startling after the pure fifths and fourths of the opening.

Not only is Adès's alteration of the circle of fifths an exploration of Ernst's 'raw resonances', but its diatonicism is also reminiscent of Breton's 'automatic purity'. The plainness of the ostinato's diatonicism – a musical characteristic that nearly everyone has experienced – conceals an underlying chromaticism; that is, Adès's ostinato surrealistically discovers the fundamentally chromatic nature of diatonicism's central structure, the circle of fifths.

Two years after completing the Mazurkas of Op. 27, Adès composed a final mazurka entitled Thrift (a Cliff-Flower): Mazurka-Cortège, a portion of which is given in Ex. 8.6. While the three Mazurkas in Op. 27 have a specified order and enact a progressive process of deterioration, Thrift exists outside these pieces, and it seems to have been composed in reaction to them. This title uses surrealism's most characteristic language (French) to qualify 'mazurka' with an indication (cortège) suggestive of a funeral procession, thereby echoing the mazurka that Souris and Hooreman composed upon the death of Satie. Like the three Mazurkas in Op. 27, Thrift uses but obfuscates the patterns typical of the mazurka, though here the obfuscation is so thorough as to seem but a ghost in comparison. (Combined with the funereal implications of cortège, the indication 'Liberamente' at the movement's beginning could be interpreted as a double entendre referencing a rhythmic and metaphorical freedom.) Slower than the Third Mazurka, Thrift is notated in 3/4 throughout, but this metric structure is primarily a residue of the mazurka's metre. From the very first bar, the right hand plays a patterned alternation of triplet quavers and straight quavers that refuses to confirm the metre's notated bar lines.

The juxtaposition of diatonicism and chromaticism in the Third Mazurka was subtle, but here it is quite stark. While each hand is



Ex. 8.6 Thrift (a Cliff Flower): Mazurka-Cortège, bars 1-11

individually diatonic, together the hands are chromatic. Over the first seven bars, the flat-leaning five notes of the left hand, $F-D-B\flat-G-E\flat$, are the twelve-note complements of the sharp-leaning notes of the right hand, C#– A–B–F#–E–G#–B#. The structural underpinnings of this fully chromatic collection are, like those in the Third Mazurka, produced by interval patterns that surreally distort the circle of fifths. To demonstrate, Fig. 8.4 shows the individual interval cycles in, respectively, (a) the right hand and (b) the left. The first five bars of the right hand are organised in register around an ascending $\langle 3,2,2 \rangle$ cycle, creating the pitch arrangement F#₄–A₄– B₄–C#₅–E₅–F#₅–G#₅–B₅. In Fig. 8.4a, that arrangement is in the south-east corner of the circle. At thirty-six notes long, this pitch cycle is three times larger than the circle of fifths, but the two are otherwise somewhat alike: the $\langle 3,2,2 \rangle$ cycle embeds all twelve diatonic and pentatonic collections and mirrors the order of its accidentals.⁴⁷ The left hand moves through a different pattern, shown in Fig. 8.4b, that is twice the size of the circle of

⁴⁷ To see this most easily, first find at the top of the circle the collection {C, D, E, G, A, B, D} – a collection with no sharps and no flats. Then slide that collection three places to the right, beginning on G, where the collection {G, A, B, D, E, F#} contains only one sharp. Continuing to slide each new collection three places to the right will produce all twelve diatonic collections in the order in which they occur on the circle of fifths.



Fig. 8.4 Diatonic characteristics of two large interval cycles used throughout Thrift. (a) Piano right hand's (3,2,2) cycle; (b) piano left hand's (3,4) cycle

fifths. Though Fig. 8.4a and Fig. 8.4b are distinct, both are permeated with diatonic collections that mirror the structure of the circle of fifths.⁴⁸

Thrift's opening nine bars combine the metrically disjointed patterns of each hand with similar disjunctions in pitch content. Over the first five bars, the sharp notes from the right hand's (3,2,2) cycle sound as if in a different world from the flat-leaning notes of the left hand's (3,4) cycle. From around bar 6 (see Ex. 8.6), Adès slowly winds the right hand sharpwards, eventually linking the opening three-sharp collection with a seven-sharp collection through the shared fifth shown at the bottom of Fig. 8.4a. At the same time the left hand is moving more slowly and flatwards around the cycle, as shown in Fig. 8.4b. When C₅ is heard in the right hand of bar 10 it is the sharpward continuation of bar 9's interval pattern {C#, D#, E#, G#, A#, C}, which Adès links to the C major diatonic at the top of Fig. 8.4a; at just this moment, the left hand also arrives on C, though it has been reached through opposite, flatward motion through the cycle at Fig. 8.4b. Serendipitous as it sounds when we listen, the two pitch

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⁴⁸ Though these two cycles and the circle of fifths have different lengths and present the twelve pitch-classes in different ways, they nonetheless project many similarities. For example, the circle of fifths is embedded in the (3,4) cycle and the (3,2,2) cycle, and the (3,4) cycle is embedded in the (3,2,2) cycle.

patterns have been inching closer to one another since the first bar, and though their coalescence on the luminous C major of bar 10 seems accidental in real time, its arrival has been suggested in the patterned logic all along.

* * *

When I hear this passage at the opening of *Thrift*, the arrival of C major on the downbeat of bar 10 sounds uncommonly beautiful. Accounting for that beauty requires me to appeal to its sense of natural and unnatural, real and imagined - paradoxes that surrealists constantly explored and that we see in works by Breton, Masson and Ernst. To describe the beauty of that stunning C major is as difficult as accounting for the music-box character of the Second Mazurka, the chromatic diatonicism of the Third or the humorous tonal close of the First. In one respect, all of these features are distortions of old objects. But as I have explored throughout this chapter, describing them in only that way misses something crucial: that these distortions realise properties that have always existed in these patterns, but have simply never been heard. The 'raw resonances' of the Third Mazurka and Thrift highlight a relationship between chromaticism and diatonicism that has been present all along. Thus in each of these mazurkas, we hear and see some residue of the mazurka as we might find it in Chopin, but these are mazurkas clearly liberated (and often deliriously so) from the mazurka itself. To consider this in an even more radical way, imagine a world in which past and present were swapped, in which Chopin came after Adès. In such a world, we might use the logic underlying those most wild of Adèsian distortions to instead describe their normalcy; and in such a world Chopin becomes the surrealist, his mazurkas showcasing the untapped potential latent in those by Adès.

Breton believed that a proper surrealist should continue to create the universe. 'The God that dwells within us is nowhere near ready to rest on the seventh day. We have yet to read the first pages of Genesis', he says.⁴⁹ This quotation says something of how we might understand musical automatism, notwithstanding Breton's disinclinations towards the musical form. By dealing in a musical past whose remnants are not so different from the seemingly fixed contours of Ernst's frottage items, Adès's music reminds us of a musical realm that is never fixed, whose 'first pages' we will never read. Therefore Adès's stated disinclination to respect a 'pre-compositional' phase

⁴⁹ Albright, Untwisting the Serpent, p. 268.

and a 'during-compositional' phase may not be simple composerly posturing.⁵⁰ Rather, it suggests precisely the sort of dreamscape that Breton imagined as the goal of surreal art: a dreamscape where new-found associations are understood not as distorted versions of something normal, but as marvellous possibilities whose legitimacy is born of their logic.

⁵⁰ Adès and Service, *Full of Noises*, p. 4.