

4 Idea as Neapolitan Complex

The first chord of Igor Stravinsky's *Canticum Sacrum* (1955), that fertile emblem of parched modernism, is 'the same as' the iconoclastic chord at bar 73 of Britten's *Night-Piece*: only here interlocked B \flat major/B minor triads release the energy of the text: 'Euntes in mundum universum praedicate evangelium omni creaturae' ('Go ye into the world and preach the gospel to every creature').⁴² Britten's chord, by contrast, is both energetic (it seems to leave the matter open) and passive (it is check-mate in the endgame). That the *Night-piece* has no text, on the other hand, by no means signifies the lack of an intra-musical affective drama. Relations of triads or keys a semitone apart, whether sounding simultaneously or consecutively, cannot but evoke a response: Donald Francis Tovey used to argue that key relations are 'aesthetic facts' whereas key associations aren't.⁴³ The listener's response, moreover, is unmediated. Whether the relation of B \flat major to B minor is one of tonic to raised tonic, or of tonic to flattened supertonic (the 'Neapolitan' C \flat), is neither here nor there: the local effect is the same. The affective basis of the tonal drama lies in the sound of the chords.

In the tonic-major/minor system, four triads create a field of Neapolitan relations. So much is obvious:

I – Np
i – np

Each of the four relations can be tested for their aesthetic impact (viz. I–Np and I–np, i–Np and i–np). When the order of the two columns is exchanged and a Neapolitan falls to a tonic, then in Tovey's terms a set of four 'indirect' Neapolitan relations emerge. The play of direct and indirect Neapolitans obviously doubles the field of affect: whereas I–Np prototypically conveys aspiration, Np–I prototypically conveys release, and so forth.

When these relations are absorbed into larger strategies, they define whole areas of affect within or between movements. Sometimes affect is achieved through juxtaposition, as with the well known shock of the E ma / E \flat major 'indirect' relation between the second and third movements of Haydn's great Piano Sonata in E \flat (published in 1798); sometimes it is generalized, as with the play of B \flat major and B major throughout Beethoven's 'Hammerklavier' (1818); and sometimes it arises from a tonal strategy within songs (or songs without words) where the connection of one affect to another is of the essence and where extra-musical 'meaning' is attributed to the affects (as we shall see shortly). The combination of the four relations and their

connections is what constitutes the 'Neapolitan Complex', an Idea explored in the second part of the Appendix.

Example 11. 'Gefror'ne Thränen', the third song from Schubert's *Winterreise*, bars 43-9, showing the dual function of dominant seventh of G \flat major and German sixth leading back to F minor.

In Schubert's *Winterreise*, for instance, there are several 'Neapolitan movements'. A main tool in their connections is self-evidently the bi-functional 'German sixth / dominant seventh' harmony: in 'Gefror'ne Thränen' the German sixth on \flat VI of the tonic F minor is also the dominant seventh of the Neapolitan G \flat major (Example 11). This dual function juxtaposes freezing tonic with a Neapolitan so gushing that it threatens 'to melt the entire winter ice' (the texts, of course, are by Wilhelm Müller). That is to say, this song mediates between i and Np, and finds a correlative for the affects described in the poem.

Likewise, 'Der Lindenbaum' juxtaposes the I of an idyllic past (E major) with the i of a nervous present (E minor) and the np of the lashing (and even portentous) wind (F minor) (Example 12); it makes its connections out of the contrast between the dyads C–B and C \sharp –B, and in the introduction gathers both dyads into the bass figure C \sharp –B–B \sharp –C \sharp (where B \sharp foreshadows C).

Mässig.

(i)

25

(ii)

47

(iii)

51

(iv)

blie - sen mir grad' in's An - ge - sicht, der Hut flog mir vom

Kop - fe, ich wen - de - te mich nicht.

Example 12. 'Der Lindenbaum', the fifth song from Schubert's *Winterreise*, showing (i) bars 1-2 in E major, (ii) bars 25-26 in E minor, and (iii) bars 47-54 in E minor reaching out to F minor but ending back in E major. The common motif is C#-B or C-B; in (iv) bars 4-5 C#, B and B# (alias C) all appear in the bass.