An improvisatory approach to nineteenth-century music

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Citation

Mooiman, A. (2021, December 14). *An improvisatory approach to nineteenth-century music*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3247235

Version:	Publisher's Version
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Downloaded from:	https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3247235

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Chapter 6. *Andante*: the tempo of a walker

6.1 Introduction

The previous three chapters centred around the connection between music and spoken language, an analogy that was felt strongly in the nineteenth century. I argued that not only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but also in the nineteenth, music had features that can be understood as musical manifestations of rhetoric. A pronounced need for variety in performance is an important example; such variety is typically based on non-predetermined decisions, which makes it a vehicle of an improvisatory approach. I have shown that ornamentation in bel canto and in the brilliant style can be explained through this concept, not only with respect to how and where it was applied, but also to its function.

The analogy between music and language is more than a mere metaphor: the activities of making music and speaking are interwoven on a level that is almost synesthetic. This chapter focuses on the analogy with yet another human activity that is as fundamental as speaking, namely walking. It is music's acting-in-time that makes us feel that it 'moves', and in this way connects with our own 'temporality'.[448] The anthropologist Tim Ingold sees a deep parallel between storytelling and walking (→ section 6.2). Given the similarity between a musician and an orator, the same could be said about making music. As I mentioned, aspects of nineteenth-century speech (such as a tendency towards rhetorical variety) had their parallels in music; similarly, features of musical performance may be clarified by the predominant way of moving forward at that time: walking.

As I will show, this is especially relevant for the issue of musical tempo. I will argue that the almost mathematical tempo regularity performers often strive for is a recent phenomenon, and that the nineteenth-century experience of tempo might better be seen as a musical translation of the continuous ('legato') movement that is characteristic of walking. The result is a flexible conception of tempo that as such is another manifestation of musical *varietas* and of an improvisatory approach to scores. By means of this analogy between music-making and walking, I will propose that we rethink tempo in this repertoire as immanent in the music, as opposed to the now more usual 'transcendental' conception that sees tempo as something that is imposed on the music.

6.2 Music moves

For many centuries, it has been common to speak about music in terms of bodily movement. Already in one of the earliest notated versions of Gregorian chant, the eleventh-century codex no. 339 from the *Stiftsbibliothek* in St. Gallen, Switzerland, we find abbreviations such as 'c' for *celeriter* (fast /

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[448] Cf. Schoot, A. van der: 'Klinkt muziek zoals emoties voelen?' In: Heijerman, E. & Schoot, A. van der (eds.): *Welke taal spreekt de muziek?* Budel, 2005; 63.

faster) and 'x' for *exspectare* (wait).[449] One of the most well-known tempo indications in the Italian language from the Baroque period on was *Andante*, usually translated as 'at a walking pace' (*andare* = to go).

Apparently, there has always been a strong connection between music and movement. Dance hardly exists without music, and real dance music has the capacity to stir the listener; but even music that is more lyrical in character seems to 'move' as well. Not only is the similarity between motion and music-making reflected in countless verbal expressions about music – such as when we speak of the 'direction' a passage can have, of a transition that 'leads' towards a new key or theme, or, most obviously, of the 'speed' of a musical performance – motion and music also really share the parameter of time. The fact that music as an art form is unable to express itself in static artefacts such as sculptures or paintings makes it deeply connected with one of the key qualities of a human being, namely its capacity to move – and most fundamentally, to walk. Like music-making, walking has a performative side. As historian Joseph Amato writes in his study *On Foot*: 'A primary body language, walking always communicates something. Like waving, smiling, and greeting, walking belongs to the history of gesture'.[450] Walking, one could say, has for most of the history of mankind been an important part of the way life is experienced, the *Lebensgefühl*. In a society in which walking is normal, man has a specific relation with his environment.[451]

It is especially in this direct contact with the environment while we move that the analogy of walking and music-making applies. In his book *The Art of Wandering*, Merlin Coverley quotes Ingold, who argues that 'such fundamental activities as walking, writing, reading and drawing all display characteristics or gestures common to each of them.'[452] What unites these activities, argues Ingold, is the way in which they reflect a particular form of movement, 'breaking a path through a terrain and leaving a trace, at once in the imagination and on the ground.' Ingold calls this movement 'wayfaring', a practice which he claims is 'the fundamental mode by which living beings inhabit the earth.' As a consequence, Ingold sees human life as defined by 'the line of its own movement', a process which inscribes a trace across the landscape which can be 'read' by subsequent generations.

> To tell a story, then, is to relate, in narrative, the occurrences of the past, retracing a path through a world that others, recursively picking up the threads of past lives, can follow in the process of spinning out their own. (...) In the story as in life there is always somewhere further one can go. And in

[449] Agustoni, L.: 'Gregorianischer Choral.' In: Musch, H. (ed.): *Musik im Gottesdienst*, Band 1. Regensburg, 1983; 258.

[450] Amato, J.: *On Foot: A History of Walking* . New York, 2004; 4.

[451] 'Environment' is understood here in the strict sense of everything that surrounds our bodies: the ground under our feet, the air through which we move.

[452] Coverley, M.: *The Art of Wandering.* Kindle Edition; location 66.

> storytelling as in wayfaring, it is in the movement from place to place – or from topic to topic – that knowledge is integrated.[453]

Translated to music, this resonates with the process of transformation that for Bruce Ellis Benson is an essential quality of improvisation (→ chapter 1.5). A new musical 'story' also retraces older ones, and even in music 'there is always somewhere further one can go'.

It might be worth pondering over this analogy a bit, especially since modern society famously has become a sedentary one. As for the way how people actually move, there seems to be a gap between our times and previous centuries, a difference that might be of a deeper influence on the way we experience the world – or in this case, music – than we are aware of.

6.3 The predominance of going on foot

One of the many important technical innovations of the nineteenth century was the invention of photography. After 1850 the photosensitive material had been developed to a degree that allowed for exposure times that were much shorter than the many minutes which were still needed for the daguerreotype of the 1840's. As a result, it became possible to photograph street life. When we study such fascinating glimpses of everyday life from the second half of the nineteenth century, be it in the city or in the rural area, we can be struck by a very crucial difference with today: the large share of pedestrians – for instance on this picture of the bridge across the *Singel* canal near the *Paleisstraat* in Amsterdam, taken by the painter George Breitner in the early 1890's.

Example 6.3.1: G.H. Breitner: Singelbrug bij de Paleisstraat. Amsterdam, before 1894.[454]

[453] Ibidem. Ingoll's words recall Bruce Chatwin's description of Australian aborigines, who ritualistically 'sing the world into existence' by walking and singing on long treks across the Australian Outback (Chatwin, B.: *The Songlines*. London, 1987). Thanks to Roger Graybill for pointing out this connection to me.

[454] Veen, A. van (ed.): *G.H. Breitner, fotograaf van het Amsterdamse stadsgezicht.* Bussum, 1997; 13.

The nineteenth century was the last century in Western Europe in which walking was still normative. Of course, man has always used means of transport that would be less tiring than walking, or that would facilitate carrying heavy loads. The Netherlands, blessed with a multitude of waterways, were famous for the 'tug-boats' (*trekschuiten*), an extended and accurate system of connections by boat, that functioned from the seventeenth until the nineteenth century. In the nineteenth century, large cities, including Amsterdam, had a well-developed system of omnibuses, and for the long distances the mail-coach was an early form of public transport. However, 'almost everywhere in the European countryside, the foot remained the most reliable mode of transport, especially in low-lying, rocky, sandy, and steep surfaces, or when rain, snow, or powerful winds swept the landscape. Even in mid-eighteenth century France, which at the time had the best roads in Europe, travel by carriage (...) averaged only two or three miles an hour.'[455] In his 1899 novel *Resurrection*, Lev Tolstoy still describes how Nekhlyudov, sitting in his coach, has trouble keeping up with the procession of walking prisoners, because 'his horse was a bit lazy'.[456]

In the course of the nineteenth century, steam engines gradually replaced horse-power, inter alia contributing to the development – simultaneously with photography – of railway travel. The first bicycles that could be used as a real means of transport date from the late nineteenth century, and roughly the same can be said about the car. Both bicycles and proto-cars facilitated a marked increase in speed – see the ornament on the ball-head of this 1876 high-wheel velocipede (red circle):

Example 6.3.2: Velocipede in the Velorama Museum, Nijmegen. (Picture by the author.)

[455] Amato, J.: *On Foot: A History of Walking*. New York, 2004; 79.

[456] Tolstoy, L.N.: *Opstanding* (Transl. H. Leerink). Amsterdam, 1972; 358.

Incidentally, it should not be forgotten that the success of such machines also depended on the condition of the roads: until well into the nineteenth century, many roads were unsurfaced.

It cannot be denied that during the nineteenth century a revolution took place in transport, and consequently in the experience of distance. For the less wealthy, the results of this revolution most likely became noticeable only well into the twentieth century: the range of action of an average nineteenth-century villager might still have been limited to the place where he was living, only occasionally extended by a trip to a nearby town (a situation that still existed in the early twentieth century). On the other hand, the career of a travelling virtuoso, which Clara Schumann took up again after the illness and death of her husband, or the travels between Weimar and Rome that Franz Liszt undertook later in his life, might not have been possible without the new fast railway connections between the major European cities.

Notwithstanding the nineteenth-century developments in transporting technology the primary way to move around was still on foot. 'Western society remained essentially a walking society until the middle of the nineteenth century and the great majority did not take to riding mass transit until the opening decades of the twentieth century.'[457] When two young and wealthy Dutchmen, the later author and politician Jacob van Lennep and his friend, the lawyer Dirk van Hogendorp, made an investigating journey through the northern part of the Netherlands in 1823 (at that time a young nation), they walked most of the distance. Only sometimes, when they were very tired or when the weather was extremely bad, did they take the tug-boat – which, as a matter of fact, did not help them travel any faster. The two young men normally covered the impressive distance of 40 or 45 kilometres per day. Interestingly, walking as a way of travelling did not prevent them from enjoying a walk as a pastime: more than once, they arrived at an inn after a day's walk, had a good meal, chatted with the beautiful landlady, refreshed themselves, and spent the early evening with a stroll around the town.[458]

6.4 Walking for pleasure and as a source of inspiration

The stroll as a pastime is generally seen as a nineteenth-century development. Promenading and strolling had become a leisure activity of the aristocracy in the eighteenth century.[459] As Amato notes, 'Romanticism changed walking. It took it from being a lower-class necessity and an upper-class select activity, and transformed it for those with means and a certain subjectivity into an elevated vehicle for experiencing nature, the world, and the self. (...) Romanticism (...) had to validate the countryside and nature as fresh sources of human feeling, knowledge, and experience. (...) It had to entice the

[457] Amato, J.: op. cit., 149.

[458] Lennep, J. van: *De zomer van 1823* (ed. M. Mathijsen & G. Mak). Zwolle, 2010; passim.

[459] Amato, J.: op. cit., 83.

walker with the promise of elemental, sublime, and even religious experiences.'[460] Anticipated by Rousseau and Wordsworth, it was the type of the romantic *Wanderer* that developed from this ideology. Not only writers, but also many nineteenth-century composers of the 'Romantic generation' are known to have been inspired musically by their frequent walks through nature: Beethoven, Schubert (who immortalized the *Wanderer* in his songs on texts by Wilhelm Müller), or Weber.[461] Towards the end of the century, faster railway connections gave rise to tourism, including the possibility of escaping the busy city and enjoying long walks in beautiful scenery. Such walking for pleasure was associated mainly with the intellectual classes,[462] including writers, philosophers (Nietzsche!), but also composers: Brahms, Wagner, Grieg, and Mahler, to name but a few.

Another archetype of a nineteenth-century stroller, but in an urban context, is the *flâneur* (coined by Charles Baudelaire, made famous by Walter Benjamin). Erik Satie might count as a musical representative of this type. Debussy also seems to have enjoyed unplanned strolls through Paris. Interestingly, around the time when strolling as a pastime became widely popular, the meaning of the musical term *andante* started to change. Though initially designating a moderately 'moving' tempo, the term seems to have developed to indicate a relatively slow tempo in the later nineteenth century; *più andante* in a Baroque context is supposed to mean 'faster', whereas it could very well mean 'slower' in Brahms or Mahler.

6.5 Increased discipline

One thing easily forgotten today is the (to modern eyes) chaotic impression that street life must have made until well into the nineteenth century. The Paris Frédéric Chopin lived in still had many streets without sidewalks.[463] There were no traffic signals, no shared sense of etiquette in traffic; 'walkers, as individuals and groups, were undisciplined and even unruly.'[464] Original footage of film pioneers Auguste and Louis Lumière shows how pedestrians crossed the Avenue des Champs-Élysées (1'39") or the Place de la Concorde (2'40") in Paris in the late 1890's – pictures that are still breathtaking. César Franck, who found himself injured in a collision between his cab and a (horse drawn) omnibus, was just one of the many daily victims of traffic accidents.

[6.5 #1 Lumière, A. and L.: Paris (1896-1900); speed corrected.[465]]

[460] Amato, J.: op. cit., 84-86.

[461] Graf, M.: *From Beethoven to Shostakovich.* New York, 1947; 303.

[462] Amato, J.: op. cit.; 103.

[463] Amato, J.: op. cit., 173.

[464] Amato, J.: op. cit., 144.

[465] https://youtu.be/NjDclfAFRB4 (uploaded 2018 by 'Guy Jones').

The early nineteenth-century city must have been not only a chaotic, but also a dirty, noisy and bad-smelling place. During the second half of the century, technical developments improved the organization of urban life: sewage systems made the streets less dirty, gas lighting made them safer at night, sidewalks regulated the traffic, and in the beginning of the twentieth century traffic laws were implemented. The result of such developments was that walkers themselves had to be disciplined as well. They were taught not to throw rubbish (and worse) on the street, not to fight or block the sidewalks, to stay at the correct side and to cross streets in the right way. Control started to make street life safer, but also took away some of its vitality and spontaneity.[466] During the twentieth century, the (voluntary) discipline of bodily movement increased further under the influence of film[467] and, later on, television and internet. As Amato argues, 'Movies taught their viewers stereotypes – even created archetypes – of how the rich and poor, the snobbish and humble, the stylish and gauche moved'.[468] Not only in the streets but also in the concert hall, movements and behaviour of both audience and musicians in post-World War II classical music life show a level of discipline that is probably unprecedented in history.[469]

6.6. Speed

It is clear that today, fast and affordable public transport and cars have taken the place of walking as a primary way of getting somewhere. This implies that a 'primary body language' (Amato) has become obsolete, and that an important aspect of the *Lebensgefühl* must have changed. How does this affect music-making? It is reasonable to assume that our experience of distance and speed must be completely different from that of, say, Robert Schumann. Why wouldn't this include, for instance, our experience of *musical* speed?

It is tempting to think that musicians of the nineteenth century performed their music at slower tempi that we do. This, I think, would be a mistake. In many early recordings, the tempo is by no means slower than nowadays. If there is a general tendency, it is rather the other way around: especially slow compositions tended to be played slower and slower in the course of the twentieth century. There is an apparent contradiction between this phenomenon and the fact that we are able to move much more quickly today because of our modern modes of transportation. Seen from outside, indeed, modern man can move faster. But in doing so, he is usually physically much less active than his nineteenth-century counterpart. A walker moves slowly in absolute terms, but in his

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[466] Amato, J.: op. cit., 165.

[467] Amato, J.: op. cit., 193.

[468] Amato, J.: op. cit., 192.

[469] Cf. e.g. Müller, S.O.: *Das Publikum macht die Musik.* Göttingen, 2014; Cressman, D.: *Building Musical Culture in Nineteenth-Century Amsterdam.* Amsterdam, 2016.

experience he can be in an extreme rush, while a traveller in a fast train or airplane can be in perfect rest, moving at a speed beyond the imagination of nineteenth-century man. The assumption that fast cars lead to quick music is untenable.

It seems therefore necessary to explore more thoroughly what is characteristic about going on foot, compared to other means of transport. With respect to speed, the difference between then and now that matters here is not the absolute speed, but the way speed is experienced by the traveller. Characteristic of much modern travelling, it would seem, is the fact that a machine, more specifically a motor, moves us: we ourselves either relax, or handle the machine, which can be a complicated task by itself, but still disconnects us from the act of moving as such. How, then, do we experience speed? When we are being moved, we probably experience it mainly visually by relating to the world around us: when we drive a sports car that is low to the ground, we feel the speed more clearly because the road surface, rushing past, is so close to our eyes. When we are in a plane moving 900 km/h through open space, we don't even feel like we are moving at all. When we walk, it is different: apart from judging our speed by looking around, we feel it in the movements of our body. There is a direct connection between what we do and what we see. It is the way of moving in which 'our senses are by evolution ideally attuned to the environment'.[470] What has changed since the nineteenth century is that the majority of our movements happen through the agency of technique; it is not that we are incapable of acknowledging the sense of being in direct contact with our environment while moving, but it has been pushed into the background of our awareness.

Even on a bicycle, there is still this 'machine' in between us and the environment, which diminishes this sense of direct contact. A comfortable bike ride very much depends on an even road surface. The contact with the environment is partial: one still feels the wind, experiences the temperature, hears and smells everything around; only the act of moving forward has been taken over by a machine, even though it is, in this case, human powered. It is interesting that the first automobiles were generally open cars, making the experience of (usually) being driven probably not very different from a ride in a horse-drawn open coach: enjoying the fresh air, the surrounding view – and being admired... When cars became closed vehicles, much of this environmental experience was lost, as lovers of convertibles and motorcycles can testify today. Driving a modern car feels like being inside, protected from (and our senses to a high degree disconnected from) the outside world. The same goes for trains and airplanes. A telling development, in this respect, is the recent innovative idea of taking out plane windows and replacing them with screens showing a camera image, in order to make a lighter construction of the aircraft possible.[471]

[470] Brinckmann, E.: *Filosofische wandelingen*. Zeist, 2015; 7 (my translation).

[471] https://www.bbc.com/news/business-44383220

It is interesting that even for a walker, a very wide and even road actually diminishes the feeling of being in contact with the landscape. It can make a walk boring, and tiring too. The ideal footpath (from the point of view of a modern *Wanderer*, that is) is narrow and unsurfaced, and makes the walker feel as though he is a part of the landscape – which he is, in a way.

6.7. Improvising on foot

The absence of a machine (motor)[472] makes the activity of walking essentially different from, for instance, driving a motorcar. A prominent feature of a machine is the regularity and predictability with which it works. Not so for a walker: even though he might strive for smoothness in his movements, there will always be small irregularities that result from adaptations to the terrain. A stone on the path, a muddy spot: without thinking a walker will adjust the size, the direction, or even the speed of his steps. Even when the walker follows a prescribed route, there will be countless minor decisions taken on the spot: at which side of the road to walk, where to pause, where to make a small shortcut. To the extent that such decisions are not determined in advance, they may be called improvisatory. Surely it is theoretically possible to plan all movements on a detailed level, but that would change the focus of the walker, and thereby the character of the walk; instead of the moving-in-the-landscape, the movements themselves would become the central point of attention, as is probably what happens in sports. And, as philosopher Frédéric Gros writes, 'walking is not a sport'.[473]

A walker resembles a musician in many respects. The route is like the composition he performs, and the map is his score. Even if closely following a prescribed route, he will still improvise on a detailed level, as mentioned above. Even a freely improvised 'piece' is possible to him: he can have a general idea about where he intends to go, but decide on the spot how to get there. Maybe he will choose to take an unexpected direction at some point and compensate for it later, or in the end adapt the goal to the interesting direction his walk has taken. Even the counterpart of a free fantasy à la C.Ph.E. Bach is possible in this sense: philosopher Eric Brinckmann describes a deliberately un-predefined walk through the sand dunes of Kootwijk in The Netherlands. This historical landscape forms the largest area of wandering dunes in Europe, a terrain that is in its turn 'improvised' by the sand and the wind. Brinckmann tries to get into direct contact with the landscape, to 'repair forgotten connections', to be accessible to the unforeseen, an attitude that he, referring to the author Ernst Jünger, characterizes as *désinvolture* (casualness, laisser-aller).[474]

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[472] The specification is relevant because a musical instrument might also be understood as a 'machine' in the sense that it 'transmits force or directs its application' (Oxford English Dictionary); especially the organ has 'machine-like' qualities, which obviously does not impede the player from improvising. Here, the focus is on a machine that specifically facilitates moving around.

[473] Gros, F.: *A Philosophy of Walking* (J. Howe, trans.). London, 2014; 1.

[474] Brinckmann, E.: *Filosofische wandelingen*. Zeist, 2015; 278.

Most strikingly however, the analogy of walking and performing music becomes noticeable in musical speed, usually termed 'tempo'. As I described above, the movements of a walker in his environment are to a certain extent 'improvisatory'. As a result of a long development of mechanisation, this fundamental aspect of our relation with the landscape has become weaker. In the next section I will argue that our experience of musical tempo has simultaneously become mechanised in a similar sense.

6.8. The tempo of a machine

With respect to tempo, post-World War II music shows two developments that seem to be the opposite of each other – but both form, in their own ways, a rupture with the tempo-experience of the previous centuries. One is the development of serial music in the 1950's; Pierre Boulez's composition *Structures* for two pianos may serve as an example. When the serial principle is applied to rhythm, the sounding result is a 'rhythmical atonality': any regularity of pulse is avoided in the music-as-it-sounds, resulting in the disappearance of a feeling of tempo by the listener, simply because there is nothing that feels like a 'beat'. The other development is the spectacular rise of pop music, which not only features, by contrast, a very clear beat, but increasingly so, a beat that has a machine-like regularity (and indeed, it often *is* produced by a machine). A third main stream in music, the 'minimal music' that emerged in America in the 1960's, also exists by virtue of a machine-like regularity in tempo, perhaps influenced by pop music. Completely different though these musical styles may be, they share one important characteristic: from the point of view of a performer, they all depend on a tempo experience that is based upon regularity. Serialism might seem to deny this regularity; however, in order to perform this music well, it is a mathematical regularity of inner pulse that is demanded from the musicians. It is striking that all three developments coincided with the popularisation of the car, and hence the decisive turn to sedentary life.

When classical musical culture is understood as a *modern* culture that makes use of scores from a more or less remote past, it would be highly unlikely for classical music-making *not* to show (at least partly) the same qualities of tempo as the new styles that developed from the 1950's on. On the contrary, chances are that even classical music-making moved imperceptibly in a direction that matched the new rigid standards of tempo. Indeed, a regular and unchanging tempo has become a quality of many recorded 'classical' performances since the 1960's, no matter whether they reflect a 'traditional' or 'historically informed' orientation.[475]

How is this connected with walking? Superficially, there is a similarity between the steps of a walker and musical pulse. The question is, however, what exactly this pulse might be? We are probably used to seeing it in metronomic terms, as a punctuation of time. For that is what a

[475] Cf. Philip, R.: Performing Music in the Age of Recording. New Haven, 2004.

metronome does: its pulses have no length, they are like mathematical points that have no dimensions. Since we are nowadays surrounded by machines of all sorts, absolute regularity has become immanent to our understanding of this punctuated tempo feeling. However, this understanding does not correspond to walking: it corresponds to marching! It is a marching army that indeed sounds like a metronome. Now, marching is an unnatural movement in the sense that it takes (a lot of) effort to walk in this way. Normal walking is very different. If one would watch a walker and try to determine exactly the speed of his steps with a metronome, this might turn out to be quite difficult. First of all, his steps might be not completely regular; but more importantly, which moment in his movement would count as the 'pulse'? Is it where his heel touches the ground, or where the toe pushes off? Walking, when it is done well – and we must suppose that people who could walk 40 kilometres on a daily basis did walk well – is not dragging the body from one step to another; rather, it is a continuous play with the balance of the body. Once a step has been made, the body is already in the process of moving to the next one. Walking, as opposed to marching, is – as ballet dancers say – a *legato* movement. It is probably this aspect that makes such a strong connection between walking and music-making before the twentieth century, since music also 'moves' in this way: it is a continuous process in time, often carried by a pulse, but not punctuated by it. Just as marching is a special and derived instance of walking, the modern punctuated tempo experience can be seen, from a nineteenth-century point of view, as an 'unnatural' development that managed to take the place of a more *legato* and improvisatory tempo. For a modern musician, walking is no longer the primary point of reference for moving-in-the-landscape, which, I argue, affects his intuitive conception of tempo.

6.9. Rethinking musical tempo

Not only is transportation governed by machines nowadays; in almost every aspect of daily life, technique (i.e. the use of machines) has moved in as an intermediary between us and our environment. As I argue in this chapter, the modern conception of musical tempo was deeply influenced by the machines that started to surround us, especially where our movements are concerned. We are used to a degree of regularity and discipline that must have been unknown in the nineteenth century. The fundamental connection between walking and music-making became an abstraction under late-twentieth-century circumstances. However, since walking as an activity never really disappeared, the walking tempo did not become inaccessible to us, and therefore it could be a valuable way to get closer to nineteenth-century music-making – that is, to increase our understanding of the horizons of nineteenth-century scores. The movements of a walker are '*legato*', his pulse is not a punctuation of time but a part of a continuous process, rather like a heart-beat. When we rethink musical tempo in this way, we get at a tempo that doesn't adjust to a punctuated, machine-like external standard, but that is continuous and essentially organic, to use a metaphor that

was popular in the nineteenth century. Tempo is not a motoric *imposition on* musical movement, but rather a *result of* organic and flexible musical movement.

As with the pulse of a walker, it is not always possible to tell exactly where the musical pulse starts. To a modern understanding, there can hardly be any question about that: the pulse starts when a note, written on the beat, starts. However, there are good reasons to assume that in nineteenth-century music-making the beat was often not clear, but rather blurred. One example, taken from piano playing, is the tendency to ambiguate the exact beat by arpeggios and dislocations between the hands of the pianist.[476] Another instance is the old *tempo rubato* from bel canto, in which a melody sometimes moves away from a steady accompaniment. This also existed in instrumental music; witness descriptions of contemporaries of Mozart, Chopin, and still later, the violinist Eugène Ysaÿe. Both examples will be elaborated in chapter 7.

This is not a plea for arbitrariness. A walker whose steps seem to lack direction and are completely unpredictable in speed and size looks like a drunkard. Normal walking is different: the movements of the walker are attuned to each other, the steps are organically part of the walking process, and there is always a clear direction (which, of course, doesn't exclude digressions). The same thing is true for music. Moreover, music can have, as musicians say, a direction. Rhythmically, a clear musical direction needs a flexible, yet organic tempo. An important feature of the suggested tempo conception is that the organic pulse cannot be separated from the music, but is rather an immanent feature *of* music. The contrasting 'modern' tempo conception could – with a term borrowed from theology – be called 'transcendental', because it depends on a standard that is external to the music as it sounds. The conception of immanent tempo that is advocated here was pushed into the background in the course of the twentieth century, but it might be worth reviving when nineteenth-century scores are used as a basis for music-making. The next chapter will explore this idea further.

Concretely this means more flexibility in music-making, and allowing more space for musical gestures. Fortunately, the conception of immanent tempo has never completely disappeared. Musical flow is still an important issue, and especially in recent years there has been a lot of attention to *rubato* in Romantic music, and even to dislocation in piano playing (a habit that was loathed by most musicians a generation ago). It is to be hoped that present-day performers will explore the possibilities much further, focusing on a more 'digressive' performing style – which is nothing else but 'playing with' the appropriate loci communes. The 'transcendental' tempo conception deserves its due place in music-making, but should not be generalized. After all, one doesn't march all the time!

To conclude, and as a prelude to chapter 7, I would like to mention that in my experience, it can be a true eye-opener to consciously use the walking analogy during performance. Imagining a walk while playing, as if the music forms the sound track to one's own movements through the landscape,

[476] Cf. Perez da Costa, N.: *Off the Record*. New York, 2012.

effectively may open up a synesthetic reservoir of tempo inflections. In the next chapter, such timing options will be examined from a historical perspective.