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# Why, then, is it so bright? Towards an aesthetics of peace at a time of war

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Dieter Senghaas, *Klänge des Friedens: Ein Hörbericht* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), pp. 188.

Ekkehart Krippendorff, *Die Kunst, nicht regiert zu werden: Ethische Politik von Sokrates bis Mozart* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999), pp. 467.

## I

“Why do the nations so furiously rage together?” ask the voices of the choir in Georg Friedrich Händel’s *The Messiah* (1742). And so ask two excellent recent books by senior German international relations scholars: Dieter Senghaas’ *Klänge des Friedens: Ein Hörbericht* (*Sounds of Peace: A Listener’s Report*) and Ekkehart Krippendorff’s *Die Kunst, nicht regiert zu werden: Ethische Politik von Sokrates bis Mozart* (*The Art of Not Being Governed: Ethical Politics from Socrates to Mozart*).

These books deserve sustained engagement, and attention among Anglo-Saxon readers, not only because they employ unusual aesthetic sources to investigate the political (from music to painting, poetry and theatre), but also because the ensuing ruminations offer a formidable challenge to prevailing practices and conceptualisations of international relations. Although suffused with a strong pacifist spirit, both volumes advance more than mere programmatic oppositions to war. They offer inquiries into the dialectic of violence that can make war appear inevitable or legitimate, even when it is only a straightforward struggle for power and superiority. Such problematisations are particularly needed today, at a time when the promotion of global peace and justice is becoming increasingly couched in terms of a violent suppression of forces that threaten the existing order. To challenge this automatic resort to militaristic means as the only way of maintaining security is not to question the need for order or to forego the use of force to defend humanitarian causes. Rather, the key is to oppose a narrowing down of political debates in a

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challenging time, for precisely at such moments do we need as many insights as possible into the problem of war and peace. The two volumes in question make an important contribution to this broadening process. Senghaas' relatively slim monograph offers a take on the intersections of music, war and the search for peace. Krippendorff's book is more ambitious in its task, seeking no less than to unravel the links between aesthetics and ethics from ancient Greek philosophy to today. The book's cover jacket advertises the volume as the author's *magnum opus*. An opus it is, for it presents the accumulated wisdom of four decades of academic research and teaching. And *magnum* as well, at least some of the book's key chapters, which are among the more innovative engagements with peace and conflict in recent years.

## II

By musing over politics through a politicisation of music, Senghaas' *Sounds of Peace* opens up a theme that remains largely unexplored in international relations scholarship, at least in book-length format.<sup>1</sup> This alone makes his effort worthwhile, for the political dimensions of music are all too evident. The terrifying realities of war and the search for peace have inspired composers throughout history, Senghaas notes, and it is this dual political dimension of music that he sets out to explore. He begins by discussing musical compositions that seem to anticipate war, such as Anton Webern's *Six Pieces for Orchestra* (1913) or Béla Bartók's *Divertimento* (1939). One is immediately struck by how Senghaas politicises not just titles or sung passages, where references to the political are easy to find, as in Ralph Vaughan Williams' appropriation of Walt Whitman's poem 'Beat, beat, drums' in *Dona Nobis Pacem* (1936). Senghaas also finds traces of fear and mourning, or the desire for reconciliation, through a sensitive listening to various instrumental passages. That is, indeed, one of the distinguishing features of this book: the willingness to engage in a political listening that scholars of international relations are simply not accustomed to. Oddly enough, though, Senghaas partly undermines his own endeavour towards the end of the book, where he notes that 'all these compositions are difficult to imagine without words that convey messages of peace' (p. 156). Compositions that do not carry a clear meaning in their title or texts are seen as risky, easily doomed to fail. From a political perspective, that is. Risky they may well be, for there will never be an ultimate empirical proof to sustain or dispute a particular hearing. But sometimes risks are well worth taking, as many passages in Senghaas' book clearly demonstrate, for if lyrics were the only political aspects of music, then music itself would always be apolitical. And even the most sceptical opponent of aesthetics would hardly claim so, at least not after having read *Sounds of Peace*.

The link between marching tunes and uniformed men is perhaps the most evident manifestation of instrumental music that contains political dimensions. Krippendorff

<sup>1</sup> For a recent exception see Michael J. Shapiro, 'Sounds of Nationhood', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 30:3 (2001).

writes of 'acoustical and optical orgasms of power' (p. 362). But attempts to raise the fighting spirit of troops and the population can also be found in compositions of high musical integrity. Dmitry Shostakovich's *Leningrad Symphony No. 7* (1942), for instance, is a direct political engagement in the context of the city's siege by the German Wehrmacht. Senghaas reads this and many other compositions not only as battle cries, but also as warnings of war. He finds an oscillation between the realities of conflict and the desire to reconcile above all in Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*. Through constant and abrupt changes in speed, key and volume, Beethoven manages 'like no other moment in musical history to portray . . . the dramatic wrestling for peace against war' (p. 70). Such an interpretation is, of course, not uncontested. Many commentators, Bertold Brecht being one of the most prominent ones, have experienced Beethoven's music also as a problematic celebration of battlefield heroism. This is particularly the case, as Senghaas acknowledges, of *Wellington's Victory or the Battle at Victoria* (1813), which uses the triumph of British, Portuguese and Spanish troops over the French army as a way of artistically supporting the campaign against Napoleon.

The evident next step is to retrace musical explorations of peace *per se*. Senghaas does so by stressing that this endeavour is as old as music itself. He reviews an impressively broad range of compositions that try to 'translate the demand for peace into music' (p. 77). Some, such as Antonio Vivaldi's *Gloria* (1716) can be heard as jubilations at the end of long conflicts. Others express a more generic quest for order and stability, something that Senghaas hears particularly in Baroque composers, from Muffat to Bach and Handel. Others again, such as Mozart, are interpreted as celebrating peace through an expression of happiness and harmony.

Hearing messages of peace into (or out of) music is problematic on various levels. At least two challenges stand out. First, to have political content, music must convey more than simply a meditative state of peacefulness. It must do more than 'radiate moments of calmness', as Senghaas puts it (p. 164). But *Sounds of Peace* is not entirely clear about what this 'more' entails. Does it depend on the political circumstances of the composing process (as in Shostakovich's *Leningrad Symphony*) or on the context within which a piece becomes politicised (as in military marches)? Or is it something in the music itself? These are not easy questions, but they must be posed if one is to understand the political dimensions of music. And so must a second key dilemma: to be political, at least in the critical sense, music must be more than programmatic. There are countless occasions when composers were asked by governments or other organisations to deliver a piece for a specific event, such as Vaughan Williams' *A Song of Thanksgiving* (1945) or Sergej Prokofiev's *Ode to the End of War* (1945). Sometimes these efforts are advanced in the name of a very particular political cause, such as Kurt Weill's songs in support of the American war effort or Milczylaw Vainberg's *Freedom-banner*, commissioned for the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The artistic quality of such engagements is better left for musicologists to discuss, but it can be noted that their reduction of politics to programmatic statements invariably binds them to the particular cause they support. Both are likely to vanish together, just as Pablo Neruda's poems in support of Stalin survived neither artistically nor politically, whereas his less programmatic engagement with love, memory or inequality continues to fuel our imagination, and thus also our politics.

## III

*Sounds of Peace* is not without its limits. There are some easy targets, such as the limited focus on 'classical works of music', which the author fully acknowledges, thus explicitly foregoing potentially interesting inquiries into the politics of, say, operas, folk songs, blues, jazz, rock, hip-hop, techno or so-called world music. Foregone as well, as a result, is an exploration of the links between music, culture and politics. Virtually all examples are drawn from the Western tradition, save brief allusions to Taoism and some isolated compositions, such as Isang Yun's engagement with Chun Doo-hwan's military dictatorship in Korea, in his *Exemplum in Memoriam Kwangju* (1981). All this is understandable, given the focus of Senghaas' inquiry.

Less understandable is the absence of any discussion about the stunning masculine dimensions of music. Very few aspects of modern aesthetic life (with the possible exception of architecture) are as male-dominated as music. Senghaas' discussion makes a few brief references to the work of female composers, such as Nancy van de Vate's attempt to come to terms with the Chernobyl accident or Katherine Hoover's more generic quest for peace in her *Quintet Da Pacem for Piano and String Quartet* (1988). But as a result of his lacking engagement with gender, Senghaas misses out on what could have been highly relevant political interpretations. Some of the musical themes he discusses, such as the rhythmical interpretation of heroic battle scenes or the celebration of military victories, virtually beg for a gender-sensitive reading/listening. Or take the brief, one-paragraph, mention of Gloria Coates' *Symphony No. 7* (1990/1), which is 'dedicated to those who brought down the Wall in PEACE'. Senghaas' discussion implies surprise that this experimental composer does not offer an optimistic anticipation of peace but, rather, gives us music that 'evokes trepidation, fear, gloom and a general feeling of doom' (p. 147). He explains (or, rather, refuses to explain) this seeming paradox by speculating that her music was perhaps not a commentary on events of the time, but simply an expression of a peculiar style of composition. That may well be the case. But a gender-sensitive listening might nevertheless have come up with a more nuanced interpretation. One could at least have noted, for instance, that feminists have for long emphasised that historical events affect women and men differently. Political turning points that are usually considered liberating and progressive, from the Renaissance to the French Revolution, often had the opposite effect on women.<sup>2</sup> The fall of the Berlin Wall is no exception here. Despite their unusually active participation in the mass protests of 1989, women in the eastern part of Germany suffered a series of setbacks in the subsequent unification process, most notably in the realms of reproductive rights, access to day-care and employment opportunities. There are strong disagreements, even among feminists, about the cause and nature of these issues.<sup>3</sup> But independently of these disputes, it would have been politically

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Joan Kelly-Gadol, 'Did Women Have a Renaissance?' and Ruth Graham, 'Loaves and Liberty: Women in the French Revolution', both in R. Bridenthal and C. Koonz (eds.), *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, C. Faber and T. Meyer (eds.), *Unterm neuen Kleid der Freiheit das Korsett der Einheit* (Berlin: Rainer Bohn Verlag, 1992); B. Bütow and H. Stecker (eds.), *EigenArtige Ostfrauen: Frauenemanzipation in der DDR und den neuen Bundesländern* (Bielefeld: Kleiner Verlag, 1994); and, in English, Brigitte Young, *Triumph of the Fatherland: German Unification and the Marginalization of Women* (University of Michigan Press, 1999).

pertinent to hear Coates' unusually gloomy musical portrayal of the (then) much celebrated new world order in the context of feminist insights into the underside of progressive politics.

The lack of gender sensitivity in *Sounds of Peace* reflects a decision not to engage with the issue of representation, which is surely one of the most political aspects of art – and of life in general. Senghaas limits his effort to providing a *Hörbericht*, the musical equivalent of a literary review (p. 23). But given the enormity of this task, he is often unable to spend more than one or two paragraphs on a particular composition. Only very rarely, as in the case of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* or Karl Amadeus Hartmann's musical take on the Nazi regime, does he offer longer interpretations. Above all he describes how a great number of musical compositions describe politics, that is, how the realities of war and the struggle for peace have been 'translated into music' (p. 138). The ensuing ruminations are highly informative, but leave the reader, or at least this one, with the desire for more: for a more direct engagement with the links between aesthetics and politics, for an exploration of how music can give us a different take on the political.

How is listening different from smelling, touching, seeing, reading, rationalising? What can we hear that we cannot see? And what is the political content of this difference? Senghaas never set out to explore such questions. Taking on 'form-content-relationships', he says, is a challenge he won't meet (p. 25). But should such a challenge not precisely have been the key element of a political discussion of music? The impression that Senghaas held back where he should have charged ahead is reinforced by a few passages in which he takes on, against his own declared intentions, questions of representation and aesthetics.

Consider Joseph Haydn's *Missa in Tempore Belli*, which Senghaas presents as a key example of an anti-war statement. It was composed in 1796, at a time when Napoleon's armies were closing in, a time when war preparations were so intense that it was officially forbidden to speak of peace. But Haydn was able to use his music not just to speak of the unspeakable, but to demand it in his own way. Senghaas convincingly interprets the combination of the pleading 'miserere nobis' and the relentlessly rhythmic 'dona nobis pacem' as one continuous call for peace (p. 68). Such aesthetic efforts to rise above the *Zeitgeist*, uncomfortable and risky as they may be, can be found in many historical, geographical and aesthetic contexts. Look at how Anna Akhmatova finds light even during the darkest moments of the Stalinist purges:

Everything has been plundered, betrayed, sold out,  
The wing of black death has flashed,  
Everything has been devoured by starving anguish,  
Why, then, is it so bright?<sup>4</sup>

Senghaas recognises the importance of such politico-aesthetic quests for light. He does so by asking not only if one can actually experience glimmers of hope in the middle of an apocalyptic environment, but also if such sentiments could be aesthetic-

<sup>4</sup> Anna Akhmatova 'MCMXXI', in *The Complete Poems*, trans Judith Hemschemeyer, ed. R. Reeder (Boston: Zephyr Press, 1997), p. 279.

ally captured (p. 121). Unfortunately, though, both parts of the question remain largely unexplored. But at times Senghaas offers a sense of what would have been possible through an aesthetic engagement with the political, as in his discussion of the changing nature of warfare.

Victory compositions, by Handel, Rameau, Vivaldi and others, were part of a period when war was fought on the battlefield, with soldiers facing each other in a contest of strength. There were winners. There were losers. There was glory. But the nature of war has changed fundamentally since then. In an age where weapons of mass destruction dominate the spectre of war, where the boundaries between soldiers and civilians has become largely blurred, wars have no more winners. Only losers. And on all sides. War now increasingly appears, as Senghaas appropriately puts it, as a 'civilisational, societal and human tragedy' (p. 96). As a result, one finds few contemporary compositions that are infused with the triumphant spirit of, say, Handel's *Fireworkmusik*. Instead, an aesthetic anti-war attitude has become a central and constant element of the musical scene. Dieter Schnebel's *Lamento di Guerra* (1991) for soprano and organ, simply moves into an extended 'choking, moaning and sobbing' when it comes to representing the theme of war (p. 97). Senghaas writes of a music of darkness (*Finsternismusik*), of a long *concerti funebri* (pp. 96, 123), which he locates in works by Béla Bartók, Isang Yun, Frantz Schmidt, Paul Dessau, Steve Reich and Arnold Schönberg, to name just a few.

A further exploration of such linkages between form and content would have been highly revealing. Although Senghaas refrains from doing so, he does not necessarily question the usefulness of such an endeavour. Indeed, he seems to agree with Pierre Boulez that 'feeling without structure is nothing, and that structure without feeling is nothing either' (p. 182). Seen (or heard) from such a vantage point, the experimentalism of contemporary classical music not only reflects a generic anti-war attitude, but also offers important clues about how to deal with an increasingly globalised and insecure world. We now live in a world of grey zones, transgressions and multitudes. The standard realist response to this perceived anarchy is well known: protect sovereignty, order and civility at the domestic level by promoting policies that maximise the state's military capacity and, so it is assumed, its security. It may be more adequate – and certainly more productive – to characterise the international system in the age of globalisation and transnational dynamics not as anarchical, but as rhizomatic. And music offers us a way into it. Boulez's avant-garde compositions, for instance, can be seen as the epitome of a rhizomatic approach. Or so argue Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who plea for the advancement of the latter against a long modern tradition of thinking in the form of trees, roots, radicals. A tree is a hierarchical system in which one becomes two, in which everything can be traced back to the same origin. Roots and radicals may shatter the linear unity of knowledge, but they hold on to a contrived system of thought, to an image of the world in which the multiple always goes back to a centred and higher unity.<sup>5</sup> The brain, by contrast, is not rooted, does not strive for a central point. It functions like a subterranean rhizome. The same holds true of the increasingly complex and intertwined international system. It grows sideways, has

<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. B. Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1996), pp. 3–25.

multiple entryways and exits. It has no beginning or end, only a middle, from where it expands and overflows. The rhizomatic dimensions of contemporary classical music may help us recognise that the allegedly anarchical nature of the international system is not only a threat to human security, but also a crucial opportunity to establish a democratic ethos that transgresses national boundaries.<sup>6</sup>

#### IV

Ekkehart Krippendorff's *The Art of Not Being Governed* continues the journey where Senghaas' path came to an end. This is in part a function of the book's broader objective, which revolves around an attempt to articulate links between politics, aesthetics and ethics. Krippendorff is driven by a passionate plea to resist forms of fatalism that consider conflict inevitable. The future, he stresses, is not predetermined: it will be shaped by our own thoughts and actions. This is not to say that intellectuals should necessarily provide specific policy advice. To do so is the task of politicians. Krippendorff believes that intellectuals have the responsibility to challenge, even to provoke, and this particularly at moments when questions are uncomfortable. The rationale for such an attitude comes out of Foucault's work, which also provides the title for Krippendorff's book. 'The Art of Not Being Governed' stands for a certain scepticism towards increasingly encroaching practices of modern governance and the truth claims they uphold.

The quest for insight beyond dominant knowledge conventions leads Krippendorff to an engagement with what he considers to be the three most important wars: the Trojan, the Peloponnesian and the First World War. These wars are central not only because of their tragic nature, but also, and above all, because subsequent interpretations of them have decisively influenced the evolution of politics. Consider how Thucydides turned the Peloponnesian war into the 'war of all wars' (p. 78). His analysis of the conflict generated a long tradition of realpolitical attitudes, which themselves started to shape political conflicts. And these conflicts were in turn used to validate and legitimise the realpolitical positions that had engendered them in the first place. Krippendorff's detailed critique of Thucydides and the ensuing realpolitical cycle of violence is insightful and convincing, but not necessarily new. It comes at a time when international relations scholarship is already characterised by a burgeoning Thucydides industry, which includes various critical interpretations.

Krippendorff is at his best when he employs aesthetic sources to scrutinise the ethical dilemmas of realist theory and practice. He directly asks what political insights can be gained through art. And in his detailed answers lie the book's most significant contributions. Krippendorff locates the emergence of a critical aesthetic attitude not primarily in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as Foucault does, but in ancient Greece. Socrates and Plato offer sources of insight, but it is mostly in the Greek tragedy that he finds hope and inspiration. Key here is the fact that the theatre's dialogical nature always contained the possibility of an alternative course

<sup>6</sup> See William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

of action. And it infused the ensuing critical spirit into the public realm, for the Athenian theatre at the Acropolis could accommodate up to 17,000 people, or about a quarter of all citizens. Entries to the spectacle were subsidised, thereby creating a public sphere whose vibrancy may have surpassed the far more apathetic civil society of our days. And yet, Krippendorff believes that despite their remarkable celebration of the political theatre, the Greeks did not take their tragedies seriously enough. Otherwise they would have heeded poetic wisdom and refused to embark on the ultimately self-destructive Peloponnesian War (p. 41). With the demise of the Greek order, the significance of the theatre vanished too. Later attempts to revive its political and public significance, as through the great operas of the nineteenth century, did not last long. Politics turned into representation, theatre became professionalised, and Krippendorff goes on to look for other aesthetic sources of inspiration. He finds them in Shakespeare, which he employs to great effect to rethink the conflict in Yugoslavia, or in Goethe, whose work as minister in Weimar initiated one of the most radical political experiments, consisting of an attempt to dismantle the military and increase public spending for education and health. But above all Krippendorff draws important lessons from revisiting one of the most tragic historical episodes: World War I.

## V

The First World War transgressed a new threshold of barbarism. The battle of Verdun alone, Krippendorff reminds us, killed some 800,000 German and French soldiers. As tragic as the war itself was the political attitude that led to it in the first place. The feverish patriotism, the euphoric call for war that swept across Europe in the months leading up to the conflict, is 'one of the bleakest hours of European intellectual history' (p. 189). Very few leaders were able to resist the glorification of the battlefield and anticipate the horrors to come. Krippendorff resurrects in detail the publishing work of Karl Kraus, whose categorical oppositions to the militaristic *Zeitgeist* set a rare example of moral integrity in a difficult time. One could mention Akhmatova in the same vein. Two years before euphoria turned into gloom she writes:

Fearful times are drawing near. Soon  
Fresh graves will be everywhere.  
There will be famine, earthquakes, widespread death,  
And the eclipse of the sun and the moon.<sup>7</sup>

Not all artists had the vision and the courage to advance criticism at a time when political opinion was as heated and united as in the lead-up to World War I. Many became caught in the patriotic desire for war. Take the example of the prominent painters Max Beckmann and Otto Dix. Neither could resist the euphoria of the time entirely. Both voluntarily joined the war but soon turned against it, as did many

<sup>7</sup> Akhmatova, 'July 1914', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 199.



other artists. The portrayal of war as an utter absurdity in the Dadaist movement is as characteristic for this tendency as the widespread refusal of many artists to contribute to the construction of war memorials after 1919.

There are significant differences between 'scientific' and 'aesthetic' perceptions of conflict. Conventional analyses of war, from Thucydides to Clausewitz and Kissinger, provide insights through a process of abstraction that focuses on such factors as the struggle for power or the nature of the international system. Embracing the spirit of social science, experts in fields as diverse as sociology, politics or economics have searched for generalisations, for laws of nature that could explain the recurrence of conflict throughout history. Insightful as some of these analyses may be, they provide a view of the world in which people are all but invisible, reduced to impotent bystanders in a drama that is shaped by forces too powerful to be swayed. The dominance of such interpretations accounts for the fact that it is still possible to speak of the 'outbreak' of World War I, as if events somehow just happened, broke loose on their own, as if nobody had wanted war and played a role in orchestrating it. Krippendorff does an excellent job in showing how aesthetic approaches challenge such avoidance of responsibility. Artists realised, and managed to communicate, that World War I was above all a civilisational crisis, whose causes reached far deeper than what could be understood through conventional socio-political analyses.

Rather than abstracting war as a systemic inevitability, artists focused on the fate of individuals. Dix painted soldiers living and dying in the trenches. Beckmann too chronicled the struggle for survival far away from the grand political doctrines that justified the need for violent encounters with enemies. Painters may have been able to express a sense of terror that could hardly be captured in words, even poetic ones. But they did so without 'individualising' people, that is, without assigning them identities. The wounded and dead in Dix's paintings are neither French nor German nor English. They are simply wounded or dead. We have a different form of abstraction here, one that draws attention to the human side of war, one that gazes beyond the state-centric discourses that justify violence in the name of either domestic order, structural inevitability or international glory.

## VI

Aesthetic critiques of World War I raise an important question. Is art by its very nature critical of the *status quo*? Does it automatically advance alternatives to realpolitical justifications of war, as Krippendorff suggests, or at least implies (pp. 239–40)? Not necessarily. The cases of Ferdinand Celine, Ezra Pound and Martin Heidegger have amply demonstrated that artists and philosophers can be as corruptible as other individuals. But the question itself is still worth asking, for it allows us to engage the crucial links between form and content that Senghaas posed but declined to pursue.

The aesthetic is neither progressive nor regressive: it merely opens up a different take on the political; different in the sense that it provides insights that cannot be gained through the practices of instrumental reasons which have come to be elevated to the prime – and at times only – way of understanding the political. It is in this sense that art is always critical: it challenges the modern tendency to reduce the political to the rational. And by doing so, art can politicise practices of governance whose

problematic dimensions are no longer recognised because years of habit have turned them into common sense.

Music is one of the sensual experiences that can broaden – and at times challenge – our exclusive reliance on reason and argumentation in the exploration of the political. Music may, in this sense, generate the type of sensitivity that Nietzsche considered an essential precondition for insightful thought.<sup>8</sup> To illustrate this point, Krippendorff compares Wagner and Verdi. He does so by paying attention not to the text of the respective operas, but to their musical content. Wagner is presented as inherently monological because he refused to compose aria-like songs that can be sung or musically memorised by the general public. One can even speak of a ‘totalitarian’ music, insofar as its capturing effect is supposed to set in without listeners knowing why, or even wanting to know why they are drawn into the music’s aesthetic vortex (pp. 416–7). That such music is open to misuse is already known. Consider how Wagner turned into a major Nazi propaganda tool although the texts of his operas are highly subversive, touching on anything from incest and adultery to critiques of power and patriarchy. Other forms of music are, by contrast, presented as less corruptible. As opposed to Wagner, or Beethoven for that matter, Mozart never wrote a line that could be used to evoke, let alone justify, war. Or so believes Krippendorff.

While Krippendorff’s politico-musicological arguments are convincing, he somehow detracts from them by outlining in detail how Mozart was indeed opposed to military institutions. Interesting as such observations may be, they have no relevance to the music’s political content, which exists independently of the composer’s intentions. The death of the composer is as inevitable a phenomenon as the much discussed death of the author. Marcel Reich-Ranicki, for instance, recalls how Hölderlin’s ode ‘Death for the Fatherland’ was widely recited by German high-school students about to be drafted to the front during World War II. Like Krippendorff, Reich-Ranicki believes that the same political appropriation would never have been possible with a poem by, say, Lessing or Goethe.<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that Hölderlin or Wagner produced less sophisticated art than others. Rather, it is to recognise that art is inherently political, with all its risks and rewards. ‘Where there is danger’, Hölderlin would say, ‘the chance for salvation grows too’.

## VII

The most complex aspect of Krippendorff’s book is the challenge to combine a perpetually critical attitude towards authority with an attempt to establish the foundations for a progressive politics. He approaches this task by acknowledging that the path to ethics invariably leads through aesthetics (p. 243). But Krippendorff mostly treats aesthetics and ethics separately, which prevents him from employing his critical insights to maximum effect.

<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘Richard Wagner in Bayreuth’, in *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* (Frankfurt: Insel Taschenbuch, 1981), pp. 280–361.

<sup>9</sup> Marcel Reich-Ranicki, ‘Meine Bilder’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, 29 September 2002, p. 25. Note, though, that both Lessing and Goethe were extensively appropriated by the East German regime to justify particular political agendas.

When using aesthetic insights to challenge political domination, Krippendorff displays a particular preference for art that refuses to impose closure on its object of inquiry. The power of Shakespeare, for instance, is located in the fact that he does not denounce, but poses important questions, thus leaving the viewers/readers with the responsibility of reaching their own judgements (p. 241). Likewise, Sophocles' *Antigone* is presented as a key form of critique because it offers political alternatives without committing itself to a programmatic agenda (p. 33). Herein lies the power of art: in its refusal to be dragged into short-term political manoeuvrings, which would reduce art to merely one more set of propaganda tools. Art is thus political in the more basic sense of offering insight into the processes through which we represent (often in narrow and highly problematic ways) political facts and challenges.

Significant elements of this open aesthetic attitude become diluted when Krippendorff begins to develop the foundations for an ethical politics. We do, of course, need foundations to make politics, to defend an ethics, to distinguish right from wrong. But these foundations can only remain adequate and fair if we accept their contingent character, if we submit them to periodic public scrutiny. Such critical scrutiny is at times missing from Krippendorff's analysis, especially when he elaborates on personalities he considers to be great historical role models. Driven by his admiration for exemplary men, his aesthetic call for openness gives way to an appreciation of individuals who defend an unwavering commitment to principles in times of political crises. Karl Kraus, for instance, is viewed as a model not because he professed an open attitude in the spirit of Shakespeare or Sophocles, but because he lived up to the duties and honour of a great intellectual, which Krippendorff defines as 'to hold up principles, to insist on truth, and to serve justice' (p. 201). Likewise, Goethe is admired for adhering to maxims that allowed him to pursue a consistently anti-militaristic policy while serving as a minister in Weimar. And Gandhi turns into an ethical role model as a result of his search for Truth and his strict adherence to non-violent forms of political action.

Few would, of course, question the ethics of Kraus, Goethe or Gandhi, especially not with the benefit of hindsight. But this is besides the point, for an uncritical adherence to (and admiration of) principled behaviour can easily prevent us from recognising practices of domination. Consider, for instance, the persistent power of patriarchy. All of Krippendorff's heroes are men, from Socrates to Shakespeare, Goethe, Mozart, Verdi, Kraus, Beckmann, Dix and Gandhi. Rosa Luxemburg is mentioned as 'another great role model', but only in the last sentence of the respective chapter, just before the page turns blank and the book moves on to the topic of music (p. 403). It is not even that Krippendorff is insensitive to gendered forms of domination. He devotes an entire chapter to the issue. But his feminist engagement is channelled solely towards a plea for a progressive gender politics. And the ensuing elaborations are limited to the respective chapter, which seems well sealed-off from the rest of the book (pp. 342–56). As a result, Krippendorff is unable to embark on a broader aesthetic problematisation of patriarchal practices. His admiration for male role models and their principled ethics prevents him from developing critical perspectives on a variety of key issues, such as Gandhi's programmatic deification of a hero who embraces the vow of chastity and is willing to 'sacrifice his property and even his family' to fight for justice and a better world.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Mohandas Gandhi, *Satyagraha*, trans. V.G. Desai (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1958), p. 67.

A male-dominated world, that is. Likewise, Krippendorff's otherwise compelling critique of Thucydides and Realpolitik falls short of its potential because he leaves the masculine dimensions of the respective phenomena largely un-investigated, and thus unchallenged.

### VIII

Few authors epitomise the intersections of aesthetics and ethics better than Kant. And it is in his reading of Kant that we can best identify Krippendorff's unresolved tension between advancing critique and defending principles. Much like other classical philosophers, Kant has been used by international relations scholars in a rather self-serving way. Whereas Machiavelli, Hobbes and Rousseau were selectively appropriated to justify a set of already formed realist interpretations, Kant is held up as the prime inspiration for a cosmopolitan ethics. Krippendorff's reading is broader but still limited to the Kant of the categorical imperative and of the treatise on *Perpetual Peace*. The Kant we find in his writings is the Kant who refuses to justify the means by their ends, the one who rejects a utilitarian and instrumental approach to politics in favour of an ethics that revolves around universally accepted principles (pp. 210–11).

The Kant of the categorical imperative is, of course, not the only Kant. References to the three *Critiques*, for instance, are strikingly absent in Krippendorff's book, and, indeed, in much of international relations scholarship. And it is precisely there, in a reading of the *Critique of Judgement*, for instance, that alternatives can be located, as Gilles Deleuze has convincingly shown. Orthodox approaches, such as realism, Deleuze would stress, are based on the principle of recognition, which he defines, in Kantian terms, as 'the harmonious exercise of all the faculties upon a supposed same object'.<sup>11</sup> Such a harmonious state is possible if all faculties (such as perception, memory, reason, imagination and understanding) collaborate along the same model of recognition towards a particular object. The consequences are far-reaching because a few dominant forms of insight, usually those emerging from and associated with reason, are being given the power to coordinate and synchronise a variety of otherwise rather disparate faculties. Harmonious as the resulting notion of common sense may be, it can neither explain its emergence nor become aware (and critical) of its own values. As a result, the established mode of thought makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to locate and explore a wide range of other and potentially very valuable insights into the political.

Krippendorff would presumably be sympathetic to such a Nietzschean reading of Kant, for Nietzsche does surface periodically in his book. And it is a very Nietzschean passage in Foucault that provides the volume with its title, 'The Art of Not Being Governed'. But Foucault never appears again in the entire book. And Foucault would precisely have been able to remind Krippendorff of the need to approach his own heroes and their principles with the same critical attitude he employs to great

<sup>11</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans P. Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 133. See also *La Philosophie critique de Kant* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963).

effect when scrutinising realist objectifications of violence. 'Look how your relation to truth creates a tension/you have slackened with compromise', the poet Forrest Gander writes.<sup>12</sup> And Krippendorff could hardly object, for he knows that 'every great scientific work contains traces of violence: violence done to its object of inquiry' (p. 331). At times he heeds to such words of caution, as when he acknowledges that 'sensation possesses its own rationality' (p. 405). But instead of exploring the aesthetic on its own terms, Krippendorff pulls back. The function of the sensual becomes reduced to *supplementing* the rational intellect, rather than providing an inherently different and perhaps incommensurable form of insight. In that sense Krippendorff objectifies the orthodox image of thought that Deleuze sought to overturn in his Nietzschean reading of Kant. For by examining how the beautiful and the sublime generate an inherent tension (rather than a smooth link) between imagination and reason, Kant sought to find ways for allowing each faculty to cultivate its unique insights and passions.<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that Kant's *Critiques* should themselves be elevated to a position beyond critique. Here too, aesthetic sensitivity can unveil problematic dimensions, as in the standard Western subject that is implied in the Kantian notion of the sublime.<sup>14</sup>

## IX

Despite the problematic tensions in them – or perhaps precisely because of them – the two books by Krippendorff and Senghaas offer very important contributions. They are inherently European books, perhaps even German books. And yet, their innovative use of an impressively wide range of sources allows the authors to generate insights that reach far beyond most contributions to international relations scholarship. By doing so they offer convincing evidence for what Krippendorff claimed at the outset of his book: that politics is far too important a domain to leave to politicians, or to political scientists for that matter (p. 8).

Both Senghaas and Krippendorff are Romantics. They are attracted to high culture, to role models, perhaps even to heroes, at least in the case of Krippendorff. A certain masculinism pervades their work, even though much of their intellectual commitment is directed precisely towards opposing such forms of domination. Problematic as this tension may be, Senghaas and Krippendorff also resurrect the best elements of the Romantic heritage. They do so to oppose one of the greatest dangers of our time: the combination of narrowly informed decision-making with a widespread sense of political apathy. As did the Romantics before them, our two authors resurrect the notion of human agency. They believe that the world is open to being shaped and that the task of intellectuals is to contribute to this shaping process by providing thinking space: viable alternatives to political practices that are

<sup>12</sup> Forrest Gander, 'The Hugeness of that which is missing', in *Torn Awake* (New York: New Directions, 2001), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 136–7, 146.

<sup>14</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

so worn out that their problematic effects have come to be accepted as inevitable, even natural. And as did their Romantic predecessors, our two authors endow the aesthetic – from music to painting and poetry – with key political importance. Aesthetics thus becomes far more than merely the study of beauty. The sublime is only the starting point because aesthetics, in the Romantic sense of the word, has to do with validating the full register of human perception, feeling and intelligence, rather than merely the practices of reason and logos that triumphantly emerged out of the Enlightenment. It is in the context of this fundamental political struggle, and with reference to the looming clouds on the international horizon, that Krippendorff and Senghaas should be read, and read widely, for they show us, with Hölderlin, that ‘where there is danger, the chance for salvation grows too’.