

The raised fourth in Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story*

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This article traces the functions and applications of the raised fourth-scale degree in Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story* against the background of the work's precarious positioning between a Broadway musical and a modern opera. It attempts to demonstrate how the raised fourth operates in a variety of ways as a coherent tonal motive with distinctive tragic undertones. While it relates the main songs and musical sequences to one another, it also effects a poignant relationship between the lyrics, music and dramatic action. In this regard it represents a powerful instance of musical symbolism, its tragic quality being closely intertwined with the story's disturbing theme of gangsterism.

Die verhoogde vierde in Leonard Bernstein se *West Side Story*

Hierdie artikel ondersoek die funksies en toepassings van die verhoogde vierde toontrap in Leonard Bernstein se *West Side Story* teen die agtergrond van die werk se dubbelslagtige posisionering tussen 'n Broadway musiekblyspel en 'n moderne opera. Dit trag om aan te toon hoe die verhoogde vierde op verskeie wyses as 'n koherente tonale motief met kenmerkende tragiese ondertone optree. Terwyl dit die belangrikste liedjies en musikale sekwense met mekaar verbind, bewerkstellig dit terselfdertyd 'n kragtige aanwending van musikale simboliek, waarvan die tragiese kwaliteit ten nouste met die storie se ontstellende tema van gangsterisme verweef is.

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New York, 6 January 1949:

N Jerry R. called today with a noble idea: a modern version of *Romeo and Juliet* set in slums at the coincidence of Easter-Passover celebrations. Feelings run high between Jews and Catholics. Former: Capulets; latter: Montagues. Juliet is Jewish. Friar Lawrence is a neighbourhood druggist. Street brawls, double death – it all fits. But it's all much less important than the bigger idea of making a musical that tells a tragic story in musical-comedy terms, using only musical-comedy techniques, never falling into the 'operatic' trap. Can it succeed? It hasn't yet in our country. I'm excited. If it can work – it's the first. Jerry suggests Arthur Laurents for the book. I don't know him, but I do know *Home of the Brave*, at which I cried like a baby. He sounds just right (Bernstein 1985: 9).

As one of the most influential contributions in the history of musical theatre, Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story* celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2007. In commemoration of this event, the work was performed at a number of prestigious American venues, including The North Carolina School of the Arts, the Filene Center at the Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts in Vienna, Virginia, and the Fifth Avenue Theatre in Seattle. The performance at The North Carolina School of the Arts was directed by Gerald Freedman, who was assistant director of the original 1957 Broadway production (cf Gans 2007).

The musical initially debuted on Broadway, New York, at the Winter Garden Theatre on 26 September 1957, and received 732 performances before closing on 27 June 1959. In London, a total of 1 039 performances were presented (Larkin 1998: 5772). Arthur Laurents wrote the book, creating characters that were edgy and street-wise, while Stephen Sondheim's lyrics were equally typical of the tough, often cruel slang of street gangs. Jerome Robbins, who had also conceived the idea of the musical, designed the dynamic Tony Award-winning choreography. As a transposition of Shakespeare's timeless story of Romeo and Juliet to contemporary New York, the stage musical unsettled audiences with its powerful, at times aggressive score, dancing and storyline.

It can already be remarked at this point that the subcultural context in which the music and lyrics of *West Side Story* are embedded could be called gang culture. From the perspective of ideology theory, it is

important to reflect on the grounding structure of gangster subculture. It is our contention that this phenomenon is not too trivial to be of interest to so-called critical theory – or, as we would prefer to call it – ideology theory.

A few introductory remarks are necessary at this point about the highly formal matrix theory that is at issue in this instance, continuously but inconspicuously in the background: the so-called *Ideological Topography of Modernity* (ITM) (cf Visagie 1996). At this initial stage, the theory as such will be characterised broadly and in sketchy outlines – apart from its numerous applications, the latest one evidenced in this article. Therefore, the following general remarks are deliberately brief and to the point. For the purpose of this article the focus is on the unique structure of a musical narrative – not to engage in sophisticated theoretical polemics. Perhaps the most prominent feature of ITM, is the synthesis it constructs between two distinctly different approaches to those cultural and social pathologies investigated by many theories, which have relatively recently been lumped together as so-called “Critical Theory”. Accepting for the moment this rather dubious term and its wildly incoherent mix of subject matter, perhaps the best known approach, in terms of overarching perspectives, is that which investigates relations of domination between various kinds of social groups. There are numerous denominators of this kind of domination: varying from class (the classic Marxian theme), to race, to culture, to gender, to age, and so on. ITM considers this to be one sphere of ideology, and distinguishes macro and micro levels pertaining to this sphere. What is meant by macro levels is of course obvious: intra- and inter-state relations, is what comes immediately to mind. As for the micro levels, one can think of Foucault’s interest (during his middle period) in institutions such as prisons, hospitals, psychiatric institutions, and so on.

However, according to ITM, these relations of domination are often linked to what is termed hypernormative domination. To put it in a nutshell: this latter phenomenon occurs when some (legitimate) goal or value or norm is extracted from its normal sphere of “essentiality” and elevated or promoted (hypostatized, idolised) to a position of hypernormative power. From this position it then dominates, even

penetrates the “inner logics”, the norm-al, indeed the intuitively natural functions (as perceived by most “players” in the sociocultural institutional field) of systems and spheres and fields of various differentiated and specialised forms of human endeavour. These socio-cultural encoded institutional “essences” are traditionally, and also intuitively, perceived as such by the larger part of society – before the hypernormative dynamics begin to take shape, and to take charge. A very familiar example that has been one of the classic targets of ideology critique in this sense is scientism. In ITM terms, scientific rules and methods and values and norms have in this case been promoted to hypernormative criteria for fundamentally other and fundamentally different enterprises, such as for example, politics, or general education, or justice, or ethics, and so on. The point is that such massively (conceptually) internalised hypernormative configurations do metaphorical violence to these “targeted” spheres, institutions, and activities which they begin to “colonise” (Habermas) and to rule. Beyond this, they cause even literal violence and bloodshed when the link to the other sphere of ideology (defined above) becomes actualised and, for instance, a hypernormative ethno-nationalism, or statism (to name only two examples) is transformed, within the social sphere of ideology, from socio-cultural discourses of distortion into groups of people initially distancing themselves from Others, with tension and conflict rising, and often turning into limited or full-scale violence, ultimately war. But it is important to note that the initiator of all this can be the conceptual dominance accorded to the deemed superiority or perceived “survival” of a given culture, or the assumed prestige and power of an individual state, which then acts as a norm, indeed a hypernorm. In other words, this norm itself, in the popular mind of those bewitched by it, can never itself be questioned, or critically interrogated, by another norm such as international law for example.

ITM has identified a “topography” of levels, realms and sections, a veritable landscape, that is inhabited by a whole complex of existing and intricately interrelated hypernormative constructs. Into the analytical construction of this complex have gone elements of the work of Habermas (his theory of systemic colonisation); Foucault

(his thoughts on pastoral power); Charles Taylor and Christopher Lasch (on the culture of narcissism) – to name a few contributing theorists. However, their contributions had to be significantly adapted to fit into the initial architecture envisioned for ITM.

We will on occasion have cause to return (often only implicitly, or in very generalised references) to this sketchy introduction – but then only in terms of what is deemed minimally necessary to carry through the analysis. Even on such occasions the ITM will form part of the analysis as self-explanatory, concrete and intuitively sensible as possible.

In principle, the phenomenon of gangsterism is at the same level of group domination on which sociologists and culture-critical theorists focus when they analyse the more familiar relations of domination based on class, race, gender, age, and so on. While the foregoing (including the relations between a government and its subjects, and those between states) can be said to act as denominators of domination on the macro level of group domination, many analysts do not realise that a micro level must also be taken into account. Foucault, for example, wanted to investigate power as it manifests itself in institutions such as hospitals, prisons, and so on.¹ On this micro level, gangsterism is regarded as appropriate for the study of domination that becomes manifest in the power struggle between rival gangs (for example in the name of contested territory). Note also that the principal norm disregarded by macro domination, namely recognition, is presupposed to be overt or covert in gang conflict.

As will become evident in the discussion below, this intergroup power struggle is centrally related to the music of *West Side Story*. But, as the story unfolds, this “asymmetry” becomes more complex as the struggle referred to is also internally linked to what may be called “pastoral havens”. These ordinary values, norms and goals of our life world become ideological (distorted) when they dominate other values, norms, and so on which, in turn, become detrimental to the individuals and groups who absolutise them. It is important

1 For a comprehensive discussion, cf Caputo & Yount (1993).

to realise that ideological domination applies to relations between values and to relations between social groups.

Since the phenomenon of gangsterism will feature again later in this discussion, Bernstein's unique compositional conceptualisation of *West Side Story* will first be considered. The musical was characterised by numerous commentators (as well as the composer himself) as something "(b)etween Broadway and the Opera House" (Stearns 1985: 11) since it represents a unique fusion of genres, resulting in a work in which the ideal of total theatre is fully realised, and the composer's so-called popular style is merged with symphonic techniques. Bernstein's brilliant score set a new standard for musicals, requiring performers to be exceptionally versatile (Freedman 2007). In the words of Colin Larkin (1998: 5772), *West Side Story* "blasted many preconceptions about form and content of American musical comedy".

When tracing the historical roots of the American musical it is important to note that it evolved out of the intermingling of a number of late nineteenth-century European musical-theatrical traditions. The light- and comic-opera traditions of Paris, London, and the Viennese operetta were particularly important. As Knapp (2005: 20) observes, these types, while obviously being at odds with "Americanism",

... offered visions of European life that eventually became important touchstones for American representation. In other words, they served not only as models but also as a source of topics, that is, as a source of musical and dramatic conventions and archetypes that could be used to evoke referentially some dimension or attribute from the source from which they were derived.

These topics were soon appropriated to convey nationalist content. Snelson (2001: 453) notes that, historically, American musicals were always concerned with particular constructions of Americanism and, to this day, have taken on a defining role in the construction of a collective sense of American identity. As the genre expanded and its repertoire was established, its character shifted from a light diversion to a more serious form of entertainment which, in some instances, included overt social comment and analysis (Snelson 2001: 453).

In *West Side Story* social analysis is explicit. In the context of the present article it will be emphasised that this aspect of the musical

does not only pervade its plot and dramatic action, but also extends to the realm of Bernstein's musical language and, more specifically, to his construction of social symbolism through the deployment of the figurative device of the raised fourth. This article therefore focuses mainly on investigating this expressive motif. However, before attempting a discursive analysis of Bernstein's music, the social context of *West Side Story*, focusing again on the phenomenon of gangsterism, must first be considered.

1. The social setting of *West Side Story*

The recently published work of Raymond Knapp (2005) offers important historico-political perspectives on the American musical which are also relevant to understanding *West Side Story* as a symbolic form produced and received within a specific spatio-temporal setting. Knapp (2005: 121) observes that American musicals have long been involved in "creating, developing, or in some cases merely exploiting a variety of American mythologies" – an involvement which became more evident as the USA turned into an increasingly major player on the world stage during World War II and its aftermath. Knapp (2005: 122) argues that at this stage the idealistic tone of nationalism proved irresistible to Americans, who tended to see nationalism "as a kind of super-charged patriotism". However, he (Knapp 2005: 122) points out the irony of the fact that this process was represented in earnest on the American musical stage "at precisely the historical moment when European nationalism reached its frenzied peak of violent confrontation".

In terms of an ideology-critical perspective it should be noted that Knapp's observation with regard to American patriotism corresponds to the above-mentioned differentiation between ethno-nationalism and (state-) political nationalism. In the literature of political philosophy, "patriotism" usually refers to the relation between "the people" (citizens) and the state. In addition, the ideological phenomenon of "statism" functions first of all on the level of value domination (where the "idea" of the state can overrule considerations of law, morality, and even art) and then causes, on the level of macro

group domination, conflict and power struggles between “sovereign” states. The mirror image of this type of ideological relation will be noted in the discussion on the links between pastoral values and group conflict in *West Side Story*.

In Knapp’s (2005: 122) interpretation the American mythologies of the musical stage inverted the structure of European mythologies, advancing the “melting-pot” model rather than the “pure strain” ideal. Thus American nationalist mythologies often exhibited a specifically American strain of inclusiveness and reconciliation. While the “melting-pot” model was a rather natural model (given the kind of nationalism that is operative in “Americanism”), the “pure strain” model would be a natural option in the case of ethno-nationalism (as was the case, for example, with Afrikaner nationalism during apartheid).

Knapp (2005: 103-4) classifies *West Side Story* as being part of a number of musicals that “pursue fairly aggressive agendas of defining America”. With regard to the story’s main protagonists, he maintains that the switch from Catholics and Jews to Puerto Rican immigrants against a rival gang of “melting-pot” Americans – Jerome Robbins’s 1949 conception was originally to be called *East Side Story* – made the basis of the conflict “more generic and thus able to stand for ethnic hatred more generally” (Knapp 2005: 205).

Note that whereas the earlier analysis of gangsterism was abstracted from the ethnic aspect of relations of domination (though it was mentioned as one of a series of denominators), in order to highlight other, often neglected aspects, the article now arrives at a stage where this aspect has to be acknowledged as crucial in the *West Side Story* plot. Knapp (2005: 205), however, views this choice in a critical light:

In using as their basis the conflict between Puerto Rican immigrants and longer-established constituencies, as compounded by big-city, gang-related violence, Robbins and Bernstein, along with Laurents (and eventually Sondheim) were paradoxically *not* particularly interested in the life circumstances (or music) of actual Puerto Rican immigrants, but only in their current relevance and comparative facelessness, as the “other” to the mainstream Jets,

who (like the Montague family in *Romeo and Juliet* and the whites in *Show Boat*) occupy the dramatically central position in the story.²

Therefore, it might be said that the production context of *West Side Story* was itself to some degree insensitive to the ideologically projected norm of authentic recognition. Thus Bernstein used a rhythmically charged but generalised “Latin” style for the immigrant Sharks, the latter being truer to what Americans would recognise as a more general “Caribbean” idiom than music specifically native to Puerto Rico. Again, Knapp (2005: 206) critically remarks that this strategy was in line with Broadway musical conventions of setting ethnicity according to what a projected audience would recognise and accept, without much concern for authenticity. Finson (1999: 284-314) finds an even more derogatory generalisation within the lyrics of the musical, in particular the song “America”. As he observes, its words project assimilating attitudes among immigrants to America which was a recurring feature in American popular song dating from the nineteenth century:

Puerto Rico ...
You ugly island ...
Island of tropic diseases.
Always the hurricanes blowing,
Always the population growing ...
And the money owing,
And the babies crying,
And the bullets flying.³

Similarly, Knapp (2005: 206) critically remarks that Jerome Robbins's choreography featured vigorous hand and body gestures to define the Puerto Rican immigrants. This strategy, he argues, was derived mainly from a general tendency in America to perceive Latin-

2 Nash (2009: 88) points out that the original “working” title for *West Side Story* was *Gangway*, later changed to *East Side Story*. Initially conceived as a contemporary *Romeo and Juliet* set in the slums against a Jewish-Catholic background, the “Jews” eventually made way for the “Jets” which necessitated the move from East Side to West Side, where the Jets (“self-styled Americans”) were placed against the Sharks (newly arrived Puerto Rican immigrants).

3 Laurents & Sondheim 1989: 52.

American immigrants as gesturally more exuberant – which might, at least in part, be explained in terms of a need to compensate for inadequate English.

If considered within the context of the musical, these criticisms are perhaps not entirely justified. It should be noted that Bernstein's hard-edged jazz-blues idiom for the Jets (the composite "white" Americans) was essentially the music of black America, and could therefore hardly be interpreted as any musical stereotyping. Rather, it appears that the composer's decision was based on musical considerations, and that what he had in mind was to symbolise the group's cool detachment, characteristic also of their style of movement – which, in Robbins's choreography, was no less aggressive than that of the Puerto Ricans.⁴ Similarly, Anita's depiction of Puerto Rico, cited above, is a humorous rather than belittling reaction to Maria's nostalgia for the country:

Puerto Rico ...
You lovely island ...
Island of tropical breezes.
Always the pineapples growing,
Always the coffee blossoms blowing ...⁵

Within the context of the plot's thematic focus, it is hardly likely that Bernstein, or any of his collaborators on the project, were masking racially derogatory views in *West Side Story*. And yet, as remarked above, the production context of the musical, albeit in a very subtle manner, did not focus on authentic representation, but rather on the construction of an ethnic 'Other'. As such, however, the musical was not conceived as a simplistic plea for the promotion of ethnic tolerance. As will become evident in the analysis below, Bernstein's score, in particular, suggests the unfolding of a complex reality – a "story" figured musically by way of an ubiquitous thematic and tonal

4 Massey's (2009: 67) study of archival materials reveals that Bernstein's entanglement with the Harvard Student Union, a major leftist political force on the Harvard University campus during the 1930s and 1940s, was significant to him "only insofar as it was an organization amenable to supporting his musical activities".

5 Laurents & Sondheim 2005: 52

device, the raised fourth degree, powerfully symbolising the tragic elements of the plot. This device is also a manifestation of what may be regarded musically as a universal element of design intended to reveal structural coherence and to evoke symbolic expression in its application, which are essential prerequisites for the music's symbolic construction of the tragic storyline.⁶

As suggested above, the phenomenon of gangsterism is central to the dramatic unfolding of *West Side Story*, and therefore warrants further consideration prior to an analysis of the music, on which the phenomenon also has a bearing.

From the perspective of ideology critique it is relevant to note in this instance that “Americanism” as “nationalism” is not some kind of ethno-nationalism (cf also Schoeman 1997). Even the concept of “the American People” should be understood in the sense of a political unity. This distinction is important, because, in terms of the relation between music and “politics”, both kinds of identity are at stake. Moreover, both kinds of identity can enter into musical contextualisation in either a relatively “normalised” mode, or a more ideological mode where the identity at stake (whichever one it is) dominates all other relations in which the identity of individuals is formed. In the latter case, the music obviously serves some form of ideological function.

In this regard, it should be noted that both “normalised” and “ideologised” ideas of Americanism will usually be trumped by the pastoral bonds of gangsterism. Over and above the pastoral bonds of gangsterism the latter, of course, also has its own – often minority – cultural background. Currently it is well-known that a constitutive element of this subculture consists of the bonds of loyalty, trust, and friendship that are formed amidst the power struggle. This implies that this particular “haven” of love, care and loyalty is inhabited by the individual members of the gang in relation to each other. The gang is often the only social structure where members find intimate bonds of this nature.

6 Giger (2009: 312) argues that “[c]ompositional logic – building rather than chaining – is manifest on every level of Bernstein's best compositions, whether in a large-scale symphony or a small-scale song ...”.

Evidently, in *West Side Story*, this factor has to be taken into account within the depicted socio-cultural context. In terms of the unfolding of the plot, as well as Bernstein's musical "reading" of the story, it might be posited that it is a "love-power" complex to which the music relates as a central sociocultural point of reference.

It will become clear in the ensuing analysis, and as demonstrated in Bernstein's music, the "love" component itself is further complicated, given the romantic aspect of the haven (as realised in the love story) intertwined with its non-romantic aspects (such as brotherly love, or intense comradeship). This complex of "relations of domination" is the "structural-ideological" frame within which the tragic tensions develop further between different kinds of love and loyalty.⁷

As will be argued below, the stylistic and idiomatic features of the score, in addition to being part of Bernstein's eclectic musical language, are specifically employed to serve a multiplicity of characteristic, expressive, colouristic, atmospheric, functional and aesthetic goals in accordance with the complexity of requirements presented by both the storyline and the simultaneous contexts of musical theatre and comedy in the musical. In their relation to the figurative motivic and tonal device, these features, in turn, serve to enhance, reinterpret and even transform the affective scope within the changes and developments of the storyline.

As for the authenticity or a lack thereof with regard to the Puerto Rican style of music in *West Side Story*, it is to be expected that considerations pertaining to the requirements of the musical and its actions, as well as to Bernstein's own particular compositional language or "voice", will inevitably lessen the notion of authenticity in favour of either musical functionality or varying degrees of musical standardisation. However, in terms of ideology critique, it should be noted that aesthetic considerations regarding a production may result in the projection of ideological imbalances (as is arguably the case in *West Side Story*) – whether the producers are aware of this or not.

7 Nash (2009: 88) observes that, in traditional musical comedy, one of the principal plot elements was the marriage trope with its "correct" partnering of couples. In *West Side Story*, both leading couples lose a partner in onstage deaths so that the marriage trope is "reversed".

3. A symbolic articulation of musical structure

In his liner notes to the now famous 1985 Bernstein recording of *West Side Story*, David Stearns (1985: 13) refers to the most important aspect in separating opera from lighter musical entertainment, namely the function of music in unfolding the drama and portraying its characters. He continues:

Considered thus, the score of *West Side Story* possesses strong thematic unity; it is fired by enormous rhythmic subtlety and variety, fleshed out with chords built on harmonically unstable augmented fourths, most apparent in the confrontations of the gangs [...] but also strongly present in the music's most lyrical passages.

He then briefly touches on the songs, "Something's coming" and "Maria", in which "a more specific kind of musical symbolism is found", referring to the application and function of the raised fourth scale degree. The musical elements mentioned in his discussion thus again appear to partially symbolise the interesting ideological unity of strong emotional bonding, which is split between its romantic manifestation and the aspect of brotherly bonding, and forces of an opposite and antagonistic bonding that threaten the very existence of the former bonding. The thematic unity he refers to may be said to be grounded in this "pastoral" ideological complex, which is indeed of prime importance in ordinary human existence (namely, the formation and maintenance of strong emotional bonds which serve as a defence against an "outside" world).

Further investigation of the music, however, reveals many more instances of the raised fourth operating in a variety of ways as a coherent tonal motive with distinctive tragic undertones. The scope of this article does not permit a detailed account of every occurrence of the raised fourth in *West Side Story*. Therefore only the most striking applications of this phenomenon will be highlighted, beginning with a general classification of its function throughout the work.

Bernstein masterfully succeeded in manipulating the unique tonal character of the raised fourth, thereby producing a concentrated network of highly expressive tonal effects that poignantly complement and enhance the emotional content of text and music. The essential tonal functions of the raised fourth in *West Side Story* are an

augmented fourth or tri-tone as a result of being set against the tonic or the root scale degree of a particular harmony or key area, and a chromatic lower neighbour figure resolving to the dominant or fifth scale degree. These two functions are either separated from or integrated with each other. Symbolically the raised fourth, especially in its tri-tone setting, is associated with tragedy, either in the setting of text portions directly or subtly referring to the underlying tragic storyline, or during instrumental sequences, interludes and accompaniments which reflect the tragic undertones of the musical.

At this point it may be observed from an ideology-critical point of view that “tragedy”, as an aesthetic term, can be viewed as a “transformation” of the concept of suffering, which is the equivalent of this term in the contexts of social injustice as thematised in critical theory or ideology theory. In the context of the present reading of *West Side Story*, it may be argued that this “transformative” view of tragedy forges the necessary connection between the raised fourth and ideology.

Bernstein’s deployment of this compositional device will now be considered. There are four main applications of the raised fourth: in a melodic or harmonic statement of the tri-tone interval with or without resolution; as part of a melodic circling motion around the dominant or fifth scale degree; a modulatory or tonicising device and, as indicated earlier, forming part of harmonically unstable sonorities. From a hierarchical structural point of view, the tri-tone interval is either subtly concealed in the melodic motions, or operates on a larger structural level, that is, its elements are indirectly connected to one another over a larger distance in the music.

The first two applications of the raised fourth can be traced to the following main thematic/motivic ideas: a thematic motive first occurring in the introductory sequence and in the “Jet song”, an “identikit” of the Jet gang (in terms of an ideology-critical interpretation, the “pastoral brotherhood” motive), conveniently referred to in this instance as the Jet motive (example 1); a three-note transformation figure, consisting of scale degrees 1, sharp 4 and 5, and appearing in different arrangements, first, as in example 2, during the gang sequences (gang motive), second (example 3), as the main idea in the

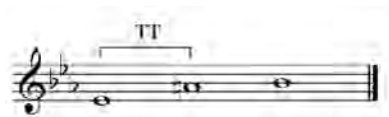
song “Maria” (Maria motive), and third (example 4), a derivative of the Maria motive in the song “Cool” (Cool motive – in the idiom of ideology theory, the “pastoral romantic bonding” motive), and the circling motive (example 5) as in “Something’s coming” and in “Maria”.



Example 1: The Jet motive



Example 2: The gang motive



Example 3: The Maria motive



Example 4: The cool motive



Example 5: The circling motive

Derivatives of the circling motive, but without the raised fourth, can be found in the songs “One hand, one heart” and “I have a love”. A separate motivic idea involving the raised fourth purely as a textural colouring device is only presented twice in the music, the first in the song “Gee Officer Krupke” (Krupke motive – the ideological/symbolical “counter-motive” to the haven of bonding), consisting merely of a single sustained raised fourth set above the tonic scale degree in each of the first four key areas of the song. The second instance of such a sustained raised fourth is at the very end of the musical where a low F-sharp in the bass is set against a high-sounding C major sonority.

The third application of the raised fourth has no melodic/motivic connections, but operates purely as a tonal structural device with tonal symbolic significance. This application can be traced particularly in the songs “Tonight” and “Gee Officer Krupke”. Examples 6 and 7, respectively, are middle-ground presentations of the two songs, which demonstrate how the modulatory processes in each derive from tri-tone motions involving the raised fourth. In the case of “Tonight”, the motion is descending, signifying the already preconceived tragic outcome of the newly formed love relationship between Tony and Maria. With “Krupke” the Jet gang’s satirical yet fatalistic display of their juvenile delinquency problems is portrayed by three ascending semi-tone modulations in which a parallel chain of augmented fourths resolving to perfect fifths are formed.

In terms of an ideology analysis, there are in this instance relations of domination between “pastoral bonding” and its “counter-balance” (state-enforced power).



Example 6: Middleground bass-line: "Tonight"



Example 7: Middleground presentation: "Gee Officer Krupke"

A startling similarity in tonal design – albeit not an exact one in terms of harmonic and voice-leading detail – can be traced between the modulating motions of "Tonight" and the wonderful transition passage from A minor to D minor between the "Confutatis maledictis" and the "Lacrimosa" of Mozart's Requiem Mass in D Minor (KV 626), a work which Bernstein was intimately familiar with as a conductor. Although a similarity between the two compositions is not proposed, it is nevertheless revealing how the text portions surrounding the transition passage in the Mozart requiem reflect tendencies such as "lost condition" (the closing words of the "Confutatis") and "tears and mourning" (in the opening line of the "Lacrimosa"). Example 8 is a reduction of the Mozart passage.⁸

8 Nash (2009: 90ff) argues that a combination of Jewish and Catholic themes in *West Side Story* is evident in the *shofar* calls employed in the whistles of the gangs, in the use of the name Maria (associated in the song 'Maria' specifically with 'praying'), in cantor-like, quasi-liturgical recitation, and in the use of plagal cadences. He points out that the musical "inhabits a space located between the domain of entertainment and the realm of ritual" (Nash 2009: 99). He also notes that Bernstein had always been intrigued and awed by the Roman Catholic Mass in Latin, finding it "moving, mysterious, and eminently theatrical" (Nash 2009: 100).



Example 8: Reduction, transition between “Confutatis maledictis” and the “Lacrimosa” from Mozart’s Requiem

The only other instance in the work where the raised fourth effects a modulation is at the end of the instrumental Scherzo just before the start of the song “Somewhere”, where the tri-tone C-F-sharp in C major is resolved to B-F-sharp, forming part of a dominant harmony of E major and the beginning of “Somewhere”.

As for the fourth application of the raised fourth, there are numerous chord constructions in which it can be traced. The most important of these are: the F-sharp/C poly-chord immediately following the police whistle interrupting the introductory dance sequence; the altered dominant harmony during the I-V-I harmonic motions of the instrumental Promenade forming part of the dance sequences at the Gym; the chord successions in the opening part of the Mambo in the same dance sequence; the contrapuntal sharp-4/2 sonority in the opening line and related places of “Tonight” (the same sonority also occurs during the instrumental and dance interlude of “America” at the conclusion of “Somewhere” and in the first line and related places of “I have a love”); altered dominants (similar to those in the Promenade) within the modulations of “Tonight”; several contrapuntal sonorities in the dance interlude of “Cool” reminiscent of the introductory sequence and the Mambo; the chordal climax in the Rumble (the “Rumble chord”) at the killings and the simultaneous arrival of the police - the same chord being used again at the end of the Nightmare sequence; and finally the beautiful poly-chords based on a tri-tone relationship in “I have a love”.⁹

9 Note that the references to a police whistle and “Tonight”, as symbolised by way of raised fourth chord constructions, may also be regarded as representative of the ideological ‘conflict’ underlying the plot of *West Side Story*.

Concealed appearances of the tri-tone can also be traced in the melodic structures of *West Side Story*. A notable instance is the sequential melodic motions during the middle part of “Tonight”. The same melodic figure is also used by Bernstein in conjunction with the tri-tone bass motion at the end of each stanza of “Tonight” for the already mentioned descending modulations. A related instance in which a filled-in tri-tone occurs is at the beginning of the “Tonight” ensemble version at the words “the Jets are gonna have their day tonight” and the counter call by the Sharks. In this instance, the tri-tones B to F and D to A-flat, respectively, are filled in by ascending sequence figures involving minor third motions in the melodic line. The most dramatic large-scale application of the tri-tone can be found in “Gee Officer Krupke”, where it spans the entire song’s tonal structure. Starting in B major, it eventually ends in F major, producing the notes B and F as the opening and closing tonics of the song – certainly not an accidental tonal relationship, especially since the first appearance of the Krupke motive in B major significantly involves the raised fourth E-sharp, the enharmonic equivalent of F. When the song’s tonal structure is considered retrospectively, B becomes the raised fourth of F, its closing tonic.

It should already be clear that the tri-tone function of the raised fourth is undoubtedly the most frequent and important one in *West Side Story*. Its occurrence throughout the work is so ubiquitous and striking that it definitely suggests special symbolic significance. In this regard the tri-tone is intimately associated with the underlying tragic storyline. As a kind of fixed idea that is presented in a variety of rhythmic, melodic and harmonic transformations familiar to symphonic and operatic writing, it symbolises violence or pending violence (Jet, Gang and Cool motives), as well as doomed love and inevitable tragedy (Maria motive). The two most dramatic realisations of the tri-tone as tragic symbol occur in the Rumble chord – incidentally also embodying the notes B-flat; E-flat; A (the pitches of the Gang and Maria motives) – and at the very end of the musical, as mentioned earlier, where the closing bars of “Somewhere” are delicately presented in a high register in C major, but then starkly set against a low F-sharp in the bass. The second most important

manifestation of the raised fourth, as a chromatic lower neighbour retardation figure mostly involved in the circling figure, symbolises emotional excitement, expectancy and tenderness, but is fused with inevitable tragedy as in “Something’s coming” and “Maria”.

It might be noted from an ideology-critical point of view that the concept of tragedy as symbolised in the musical is suggestive of both suffering and meaninglessness, that is to say, the meaninglessness (often) experienced as inherent in suffering as a consequence of doomed love. But gangsterism is also connected with meaninglessness as an “existential condition” of modernity itself. Members of the gang find the pursuit of “normal” social values and ideals (work, careerism, raising a family) to be without meaning. Against this background the value of pastoral romanticism correspondingly increases, and its loss becomes even more devastating.

In terms of Bernstein’s deployment of the tri-tone, connections are made between doomed love and inevitable tragedy, while, as explained earlier, the Rumble chord also embodies pitches from the Gang and Maria motives. This suggests that suffering is connected with both the pastoral haven of romantic love and the gang struggle for domination.

Two important additional aspects lend further credence to the role of the raised fourth in its various settings as tragic element in *West Side Story*, namely unification and text relationship. Several instances of thematic and harmonic unification relating to the use of the raised fourth can be deduced from the observations so far. In fact, the unifying material, either of a thematic or tonal nature; or in and between songs, interludes or dance sequences; is of such a concentrated nature that it requires a separate investigation. However, limiting the idea of unification to the tragic storyline alone produces a few noteworthy instances.

The tri-tone, as embodied in the Gang, Maria and Cool motives, links the various dance sequences to one another, in particular the introduction and Rumble, thereby emphasising their contextual similarities. At the same time cross-references of motives occur in many instances, for example, hints of the Maria motive in the Mambo, the circling motive in both “Something’s coming” and “Maria” as mentioned

earlier, a transformed Maria motive in “Cool”, and the three occurrences of the Maria motive in the bassoon, clarinet and flute at the end of “One hand, one heart”. At the end of “Somewhere”, there is a subtle thematic reference in the flute to the opening of “I have a love”, but with the circling motive around the fifth scale degree instead of the tonic. The most powerful unifying element, however, is the idea of transformation involving scale degrees 1, sharp-4 and 5, generating the main melodic/motivic content of the musical. Apart from the three principal transformations of the pitch collection in the Gang, Maria and Cool motives, significant tonal effects are also produced through this device, such as the Rumble chord and the closing bars.

Within the context of the present reading, the Cool motive warrants special consideration. One way of understanding “being cool” (as in its “original” slang meaning) is that it points to a kind of detachment, involving even a personal “transformation” through which the troubles of everyday life may be transcended. In *West Side Story*, the Cool motive may function as a pastoral haven of its own (the haven of a “transformed consciousness”), but which functions within the broader conflicting context of the brotherhood/romantic love “haven” – after all, “being above it all” and passionate love are conflicting goals. While further complicating this ideological context, the Cool motive simultaneously contextualises the gangster motive.

Finally, the following observations on the use of the tri-tone and circling motions, as well as chordal accompaniment figures in portraying tragic or seemingly tragic text portions, are pertinent. In this instance, the discussion is limited to the songs “Something’s coming”, “Maria”, “Cool” and “I have a love”.

In “Something’s coming”, the circling motive occurs for example at the words “there’s something due any day; I will know right away”. The fulfilment of these anticipations in “Maria” at the words “I’ve just met a girl named Maria” and “I’ve just kissed a girl named Maria”, is beautifully complemented by the same circling melodic motion around the fifth scale degree. In addition, at the words “say it loud”, the circling motive is again present with strong emphasis on the raised fourth D on “loud”. However, the most poignant feature of this song is of course the Maria motive itself with the raised fourth giving it its

special piquancy and eloquence – in the words of Steams, “a yearning appoggiatura that urgently demands resolution as Tony is drawn irresistibly toward Maria”. At the final occurrence of “Maria” in the song’s text, Bernstein reverses the order of the last two notes in the “Maria” motive, while at the same time placing it in a different tonal context, that is, the pitches D-flat, G and A-flat involved in this instance, are presented in the order D-flat A-flat G within the key of E-flat major. As a result, the functions of all the pitches in the motive are changed, most notably the G, where it loses its dissonant sharp-4 function within the original motive, and becomes the third of E-flat major to which the second last note of the rearranged motive, A-flat, resolves. This extraordinary artistic manipulation of the motive gives an ecstatic image to this yearning musical gesture.

The transformed Maria motive in “Cool” is used at the words “boy, boy, crazy boy” together with a tri-tone motion C/F-sharp in the bass. Likewise, at “turn off the juice, boy” and “school boy”, there is an F-B bass motion. Finally, in the moving “I have a love”, the opening lines “I have a love, and its all that I have. Right or wrong”, are beautifully supported in the accompaniment by the sharp-4/2 chord of “Tonight” and at the end of “Somewhere” on “love”, and the gripping A/E-flat poly-chord on “wrong”.¹⁰ A similar poly-chord appears at “all” in the line “Be with him now, tomorrow and all of my life!” Then, as in “Cool” and elsewhere, tri-tone bass motions accompany the words “too” and “do” in “Everything he is I am, too” and “There’s nothing to be done, not a thing I can do”. At the ecstatic close of the song, the sharp-4/2 and poly-chords reappear, echoing the fateful character of both its opening and closing lines. The notion that, together with “Somewhere”, “I have a love” represents perhaps the deepest expression of the tragic love relationship in *West Side Story*, is attested to by the end of the musical where appropriate fragments of both songs are presented together, resulting in a final simultaneous melodic and harmonic utilisation of the raised fourth.

10 The conceptualisation of love as something that one “has”, that it can be all that one has, whether right or wrong, is a lyrical description of love in its function of a pastoral haven. In this case, persons become possessions and “normal” norms are overruled.

A final remark on the nature of ideology critique itself is appropriate. It may be that, at times, the much distorted appearance of an ideological phenomenon makes one realise that, however broken this piece of reality, it points one dialectically to its potential of transcending its ideological immanence. Viewed in this light, the narrative and music of pastoral love in the *West Side*, experienced amidst gang wars, anticipate in themselves the kernel of love and brotherhood that is, or will be, redeemed. This element of hope in *West Side Story* is small and nebulous, but it is present nevertheless.

It may be argued that in the end, the universal human posture of suffering receives its final specification not so much in the modality of tragedy, but in a posture which stands opposed to suffering, namely the posture of hope. In this case, an existential structure of postural subordination can be identified, and hope becomes qualified (interpreted) by suffering. At the same time, the “state of hope” specifies the suffering at hand.

This complex construct has been uniquely orchestrated by Bernstein through the coherent reapplications and transformations of the raised fourth. Thus the final experience of characters and viewers is loss of hope. This cannot be symbolised more powerfully and poignantly in the musical than at its very end. Three appearances of a high register C major triad, each succeeded by a low register F-sharp in the bass. In this extraordinary tonal placement (below the triad), the final appearance of the raised fourth does not offer any tonal ground for hope to the ecstatic C major triad, but, in its utterly desolate and dissonant setting, casts a shadow over the final radiant C major tonality of the musical, placing it in a state of tonal loss.

4. Conclusion

This article demonstrated the intimate, intrinsic connections between ideological aspects of a narrative (those depicted and those dormant in the production itself) and – on a reasonably technical level – the music accompanying it. It was contended that this particular type of analysis (in an attempt to construct an example) is a useful tool for understanding “symbolic forms” (cf Thompson 1984) that

is both hermeneutically sensitive and ideologically critical. However, it would appear that such projects more often than not require interdisciplinary cooperation. Although it has not been attempted in this instance, it must be pointed out that in terms of the ideological component, this kind of study can also profit from empirical research – for example an analysis of the reception of *West Side Story* in selected social and cultural contexts (cf Thompson 1990).

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