If philosophy is like music (cf. *Phaedo* 61a3), and has both a theory and a practice, then it might seem that Anne Wersinger conceives of a Platonic dialogue as a performance. The performance, the writing, involves factors not reducible to theory, but essential to the philosophy as philosophy. It might have been helpful (to me), in reaching this much, at least, of an *aperçu* into a difficult book, to have read, before the rest, her conclusion (289-90), which briefly summarises the overall argument, and the appendix, ‘Introduction à la “form musicale”’ (291-6).

Wersinger does not quote sources or authorities for what this appendix summarises concerning Greek musical theory and practice in Plato’s time, but an English reader can easily confirm it from, for instance, M.L. West, *Ancient Greek Music* (Oxford, 1992) or Andrew Barker, *Greek Musical Writings* I & II (Cambridge, 1984-9). In a nutshell, the efforts of early theorists to find a common structure underlying the plurality of traditional, limited and self-enclosed scales used for different kinds of Greek songs quickly produced a revolution in composition, the New Music to which literary sources refer. The net effect, not acknowledged by contemporary theorists, was in practice to allow musical intervals from any genre to interpenetrate any other, which Wersinger understands by analogy with the modern chromatic scale, although there are differences.

Wersinger seeks to demonstrate that Plato’s dialogues do not only privilege certain theoretical structures, both musical, such as the diatonic scale used in the *Timaeus* to construct the world soul (35b-36b), and others (geometric, the theory of forms, accounts of dialectic and rhetorical theory, for instance). They also employ in practice a ‘chromaticism’ in each of these respects, as a means to incorporate whatever is disharmonious, multiple, unorganised or in motion within his representation of the whole of things.

This is a chromaticism both of content, for instance in Plato’s discussions of fluids, sensory qualities or the vagaries of the planets.
(chs.1-2), and of literary style, both in the *tours de force* of flawed rhetoric in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* (Agathon’s and Lysias’ speeches, discussed in ch.3), and also in the language used to describe the complexities of physical cosmology (ch.4). Its signs include regularly reappearing imagery of sea and mud, a spiral infinite geometry of flows, knots and braiding, vibration and scintillation.

Chromaticism is further identified in a diachronic, sequential mode of thinking, linked with the paratactic linguistic construction employed in catalogues and sub-eidetic repeated mathematical procedures, phenomena evidenced by characters such as Hippias and Theaetetus (ch.5). More surprisingly, perhaps, it is discovered in the heart of the forms (ch.6), in the braided tensions of their mutual relations of combination and co-constitution, and in the description of dialectic in the *Statesman* and elsewhere (chs.6, 8, 10).

A large part of the second half of the book concerns Plato’s treatment of the soul, arguing in ch.7 for a double psychology in the *Republic*, where the tripartite theory is superimposed imperfectly upon Bk 3’s original chromatic depiction of the soul and virtue in terms of a fluid range of tensions in the *thumos*. The overlay effectively suppresses the traditional virtue of temperance, thereafter indistinguishable from justice in the tripartite schema. Wersinger argues this has the effect of attributing desire to each part independently, allowing for Plato’s new morality of philosophical *eros*. According to ch.9, corresponding with the residual presence of the older *thumos*-based moral psychology there is also an epistemology and sociology of *charis*. Wersinger suggests that *charis* is understood essentially, from Homer on, as a recognition of another (229-30), and the basis of free and noble social interaction. Plato invokes this, for instance in the speech of Lysias in the *Phaedrus*, but thereafter and in the *Symposium* presents *eros*, rather, as responsible for *philotimia*.

The final chapter seems to aim at an overview of the relation between chromatic practice and ‘harmonic’ theory in Plato’s view of philosophical life. The focus is on value judgements, identified as one of the two kinds of measurement distinguished in *Statesman* 283d-4b. Dialectic itself is not swayed by the values of things, but its disdain for human life in the face of the whole enables us to judge value
objectively. Yet our valuing of people doesn’t arise from that disdain—rather from our sense of impotence vis-à-vis the whole. In the absence of any non-mythical fundamental cosmological theory, only the dialectician can recognise the measures of value judgement: the proportionate, the seemly, the convenient and the necessary, and their respective practical nuances.

This final thought seems to provide a sort of closure to the argument of the book, but it is not obviously its point. Except here, the conception at work seems to be the distinctly postmodern one of philosophy as written text, not as intellectual practice (as such), let alone as a way of life. As I noted initially, this identifies it, in the context of Wersinger’s inquiry, as artwork, and so (in Plato’s terms) as a representation, not as what is represented (image, not original). Wersinger could perhaps reply that she does legitimately discuss the representations of the practice of dialectic, and the figure of the dialectician in the dialogues, while after all the dialogues are artworks.

Again, methodologically, if not doctrinally, Wersinger seems to re-enact the practices of deconstruction: her technique involves locating paradox, conceptual incoherence and inconsistency in the thought-world of the dialogues, as the signs of chromaticism. I have no quarrel in principle with this: Plato indeed seems to represent the ontological degradation of our usual experience by such means. But its counterpart is the ordering of the imperfect to the perfect. Wersinger of course acknowledges in principle the harmonious, the diatonic, the systematic, the ideal, in the text, but does not focus in general terms on how this is related to the other, the disharmonious and chromatic. The former is, as far as possible, just ignored, so as to insist on the presence of the other. I think she is quite right that there is no overall metaphysical theory of the relation between the two in the dialogues, but there is an artistic relation, at the very least. What is that?

Moreover I must complain that the argumentation for Wersinger’s synthetic interpretation of the underlying conception and general characteristics of the disharmonious is in many places very loose, appealing for imaginative leaps by the reader. Most disconcerting is the application of the schema to the soul and the virtues, discussed above, which does not seem to fit: rather than two metaphysically or
stylistically opposed phenomena, here we seem to have a historical story of one account imperfectly replaced by another account of the same phenomena.

Nevertheless this book is useful for its stimulus to the study of the pervasiveness of patterns of language and thought which might otherwise go unremarked, and yet are clearly central to the understanding of the dialogues. The ubiquity of imagery of the sea, for instance, in relation to metaphysics, to dialectic, to politics, and its linkages with other images is immediately thought-provoking (cf. 'Avant-propos', 8-14). In principle, the study of the general characteristics of Plato’s representation of the everyday, the terrestrial, the bodily and the morally flawed must be illuminating, and an advance upon limiting investigation of each such phenomenon to its own relation to its local representation of the ideal.

There is also here a useful survey and criticism of the international state of scholarship on a major traditional topic, the theory of forms (ch.6.1), as well as on many other topics, and a salutary reminder at a number of places of the importance of Homer, both as incorporated into, and as opposed to, the thought and the language of the dialogues. Very few books hitherto have taken the relation between content and style in Plato as seriously as this does. Wersinger spends no time on literary factors such as dramatic action, characterisation or setting, but arguably what she does discuss, albeit not conclusively, is at least as important.

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