

# RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ANALYTICAL AND COMPOSITIONAL WORK:

## A PROCESS OF DESCENDING FROM A MUSICAL IDEA TO THE SENSE OF WRITING

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### 1. COMPOSING AND ANALYZING: A FRUITFUL SYMBIOSIS

A still deep-rooted opinion claims that writing (serious) music simply coincides with the logic of the treatment of aseptic sound materials. The more our musical thinking is logically plausible, explicable and coherent, the more our music will be endowed with recognizable value. So, particularly during the second part of the twentieth century, quite a few speciously scientific ways of composing music stressed the processes of manipulation to the detriment of the interest in what those processes generated in sound outcome terms.

However, if writing operations blindly proceed without taking account of their significance in relation to the musical material on which they work, it is supposable that music will be reduced to not much more than sound information. So, when we do not think of composition as a sound trivial pursuit, none of the techniques of composing we adopt or invent can per se have a title to affirm its adequacy. Therefore, what is unavoidably important in composing music is not so much the method we use, as the evaluation of the effects it step by step provokes on the musical idea to which it applies.

At this point, it is well to note that the concept of sound materials as a working tool or rather as a mere object of our operations fades, and what is seen coming into sight is the (semantic) relevance of a musical idea, which must be regarded as a subject already fitted with a minimum of sense.

The moment that we formulate our musical idea (in terms of pitch relationships, timbre, dynamic, rhythm, and harmony) we are required to comprehend its intrinsic nature. Our *propositum* – that which is laid down – can certainly represent a sort of degree zero of writing (even though, by the way, this is not true on all occasions), but we know that the degree zero is a significant kernel in some way, even if containing few essential sememes, and not merely an amorphous basic matter. Consequently, every single process of manipulation, which a musical idea is subjected to, will give rise to a specific alteration and enrichment of the primitive signification carried by that idea. Thus, it is to be hoped that every act of composing will involve our awareness and choice of the direction which music goes in, so that it does not become senseless.

The preceding considerations call attention to the fact that it is of paramount interest to understand why our compositional work makes use of a specific process of manipulation rather than another one with regard to a certain musical *propositum* (theme, in an obsolete language). On balance, in a sense, every different *propositum* seems to suggest peculiar ways of evolving. It is desirable, then, that the compositional work is flanked by the analytical one.

Firstly, when we consider our musical idea as a real significant subject, the recognition of its structural characteristics will positively influence the selection of the processes of manipulation we grasp to be pertinent to the musical *propositum*. Therefore, if the analytical work does not restrict itself to jumbling up data, it will have the essential task of highlighting the potentialities of the subject. It can and must play a hermeneutical role towards the subject, which means it can and must tend to interpret what the subject connotes (and here this verb has to be read in strictly linguistic terms).

Secondly, when we have chosen to develop our idea by means of a certain process of manipulation, the analytical work on the musical outcome of our choice throws light not only on the relationships between the *propositum* and the changes that it undergoes, but also – and above all – on the progressive formation of the global sense of the piece we are composing. Evidently, all the gradual developments and sudden changes we bring into action contribute to the morphogenesis of that piece, but each of them carries weight in a different way. It is a task of the analytical work to recognize and evaluate their semantic relevance within the evolutionary process peculiar to the budding piece.

Now, it would be a nice simplification to reduce analysis to a kind of feedback working on composition, even if in part this is true. Nevertheless, analysis does not set the aim of modifying or governing our processes of manipulation. It mainly clarifies the sense of what we are writing in relation to our musical idea. In addition, in drawing our attention to the meaning of our own *componere*, by implication it reaffirms the significance and subjectivity of the original *propositum*. From this viewpoint, the *morphogenesis* of the piece in process tends to coincide with the formation of its specific sense. Therefore, it is to be hoped that through the analytical work we will be aware that all our writing operations are not self-regulating mechanisms totally unconcerned with the (semantic) consequences to which they give rise.

Finally, our processes of manipulation are able to produce a musical sense on condition that they get the sense of the musical subject on which we are working.

## 2. WRITING OF CANONS WITHOUT CANONS OF WRITING

The subject of the 'Canone 'Adieu mes amours'' and that one of the 'Canone II' are very different from a semantic point of view; as a matter of fact the first seems to be an actual degree zero in the most restrictive sense of the term, whereas the second shows itself to be an already elaborate musical *propositum*. Such a difference implies some analytical consideration helpful to lead us to ready suitable processes of manipulation.

On the whole, a minimal subject – so to speak – is required to unfold and define its significance by means of the elaborations which it undergoes. At first, it is open to a plurality of equally pertinent ways of developing, and this opportunity means that it carries not much sense per se. Therefore, the processes of manipulation we apply to such a subject are highly responsible for the opening connotation that it takes on. Initially, those processes do not increase and alter a strong semantic kernel; they establish it, lessening the evasiveness of the *propositum*. In the light of a thorough analytical work, on the contrary, an already elaborate subject displays some semantic specificity we ought to take into account, unless we are

composing a senseless pot-pourri, or playing an unexciting combinatorial game. The moment that such specificities are picked out, and hermeneutically endowed with a peculiar significance, it will be well to distinguish between the processes of manipulation which develop the semantic kernel, without altering it radically, and the processes which undermine its original properties. In order to construct the global sense of our piece, in fact, it is greatly important for us to decide to use the former or the latter.

At this point, the symbiosis between analysis and composition proves to be evident, and the interdependence that must exist between a musical *propositum* and writing operations needs to be organized on a sturdy analytical and hermeneutical basis.

I am going to try to reconstruct the compositional and analytical work which jointly proceeded in writing my two canons. Of necessity, this reconstruction will be quite incomplete; it will just attend to the beginning of the symbiosis between composing and analyzing, because the complete course of the musical events within the two pieces would be too long (and boring, I fear) to relate. Nevertheless, I hope that something of the process of descending from my original musical ideas to the budding global sense of each of the two canons can come to light. In particular, with regard to the 'Canone 'Adieu mes amours'' it should be clear that from the very beginning the process of manipulation marks the signification of the musical idea, while as far as the 'Canone II' is concerned, the musical influences the initial choice of the process of manipulation.

The image shows the first page of a musical score for 'Canone 'Adieu mes amours''. The title is centered at the top. The tempo is marked as '♩ = 46 ca.'. The score is written for a string quartet, with staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The first system includes dynamics like *mp* and *f*, and a performance instruction 'Poco accelerando'. The second system includes 'Una corda sempre' and 'per pianoforte -'. The third system is marked 'A tempo' and 'Poco accelerando'.

Example 1: Canone 'Adieu mes amours', page 1.

E (double whole note), E (whole note), E (half note), D sharp (quarter note) and F sharp (quarter note): this is the opening of the *dux* of the 'Canone 'Adieu mes amours''. Clearly, the durational relationships are more pregnant than the pitch ones, for the melodic contour is rudimentary. They show a process of regular diminution that stops after the D sharp, while the pitch relationships show two intervals only. Such a small rhythmic-melodic structure is semantically poor and does not suggest any implicitly plausible

development. A compositional decision has to be made in order to endow this outset with a more accomplished sense. So, the melodic contour is extended by a G (whole note), a C sharp (dotted half note), a C (half note), and an A (quarter note). Now our outset has become a real subject containing peculiar rhythmic and melodic characteristics. The initial E, from a melodic viewpoint, has openly become a starting point from which two short series of intervals departs: an ascending major second + minor second + major second, and a descending minor second + major second + minor second. From a rhythmic viewpoint, the notes G, C sharp, C, and A show another process of diminution: now their value decreases by one quarter each time. Next, extending the short series to the common note B flat, the melodic contour takes on its first complete shape, but that B flat is repeated three times, and rhythmically the three notes show another regular diminution which would incline us to presume that they are a new opening and, at the same time, the regular diminution of the three initial E. The process of manipulation of the melody begins to turn complex, and it is not plausible that it can be traced back to some abstract method of composition taken out of the given context. Moreover, the total durations of the outset, of the later four notes, and of the three B flat are sixteen, ten, and seven quarters respectively. All this shows a process of diminution among the three fragments regulated by the ratio three.

Meanwhile, the first *comes* has started at the lower octave. However, the second *comes* starts wrongly, replacing E with E flat. Here a crucial event happens. If the second *comes* has rightly started from E, the context would have made it sound wrong, or rather, in other words, alien to the semantic field which is forming. So, the abstract correctness of the imitation is coerced into submitting to the global musical outcome. Now the writing of this specific canon is heading for a flexibility of the process of manipulation that asks for a painstaking analysis.

It is surely true that the E of the *dux* constitutes the starting point both for the ascending fragment E-F sharp-G-A-B flat and for the descending one E-D sharp-C-B flat. It is likewise true that the B flat is the common final note (the point of arrival) of those fragments and, at the same time, seems to be a new outset. Moreover, the unfolding of the two fragments creates other pitch relationships, and further relationships are created by the entrance of the first *comes*. And when the B flat of the *dux* is heard, and the first *comes* reaches its F sharp, all the intervals between the minor second and the major sixth have been heard melodically or harmonically; an early semantic field sounds full, and something has ended. The process of diminution within the *dux* better still substantiates this remark, so that a turning point seems to become necessary. The process of manipulation is compelled to take account of such an intrinsic state of play, and must change consequently.

Nevertheless, we are writing a canon, and some solution has to be found in concordance with such purpose. The wrong entrance of the second *comes* attends to effect the desirable shift, and gives the canon new sap. Besides, it is symptomatic that the third voice is strategically placed on the lower octave than the awaited one, because this timbre mark contributes to emphasize its atypical role. Henceforth, so to speak, the piece starts out to take on and disclose its true sense.

At the end of the first five notes of the second *comes*, in its turn the *dux* imitates the last entrance as if this one were a new outset – a half-tone below – and starts playing the false role of first *comes*. The strategy of writing will interweave the melodic development of the three voices, minding the semantic transformations which they undergo by means of the analytical and hermeneutical work. Every process of manipulation will work changes in the piece with the awareness of its own action on the budding global sense.

**Canone II dal „Waldes-Büchlein der neuen Musiken“** - per pianoforte -

♩ = 126 ca. **Furioso**

Example 2: *Canone II*, page 1.

The musical idea on which the 'Canone II' is based is totally different. Here the *dux* is a highly significant complex subject; it would be a mistake to consider it an actual degree zero, for its turbulent appearance is so rich in inside relationships as to suggest some simpler deep structure. Therefore, from the very beginning an analytical work becomes necessary so that the basic sememes come to light and influence the choice of adequate processes of manipulation.

Within the fast flow of sixteenth notes descending by conjunct motion, two events sound differently: 1) a set of disjunct intervals expanding from the minor third D-F to the octave A-A; 2) the presence of two quarter notes and two eighth notes. Melodically, the disjunct intervals break up the flow and point some note out: D-F, B-E, G-D, E-C, C-B, and A-A. Rhythmically, all the first pitches of the intervals are sixteenth notes, while the second ones respectively have the value of a quarter, an eighth, a sixteenth, a sixteenth, an eighth, and a quarter note.

Now then, we can simply and plausibly interpret the whole subject as a melody with a gap-fill structure, but something else lies hidden within it. The quarter and eighth notes, in fact, unveil a rhythmic palindrome (F quarter note + E eighth note + D sixteenth note; C sixteenth note + B eighth note + A quarter note) that allows us to separate the descending sixth F-A from the context. Consequently, also the series of thirds D-B-G-E-C-A can be separated, and regarded as a manipulation of the hexachord E-G. Two banal melodic fragments seem thus to constitute the basic material of the musical *propositum*, or, if we like, the real degree zero of writing.

The ascending intervals of third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and octave – resulting from the note-by-note relationship between the two fragments – try to oppose a more and more vigorous resistance to the mainstream of the whole subject, which is sinking quickly. Hence, two conflicting behaviors operate simultaneously, even though the bent for sinking would look set to be predominant.

From a hermeneutical point of view, such a complex musical idea is reluctant to accept manipulations without estranging itself completely. It seems to request nothing more than repetitions, perhaps at different pitches. However, if any continuation is incapable of deflecting its course, no further

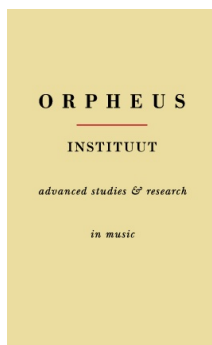
signification will emerge.

The strategy of writing reaches the decision to compose a canon at the fifth. In this way, all the B of the *dux* turn into F sharps within the *comes*. The F sharp does not exist within the subject, and provokes a modest mechanical alteration of the pre-existent sound context. Probably, such an alteration would remain unremarked if the *dux* were unaware of it, and kept using the original F natural. But here the most important strategic decision occurs: the continuation of the *dux* takes on the new note modifying its sound context, i.e. its semantic field. Subsequently, since F sharp within the *dux* is C sharp within the continuation of the *comes*, C sharp will replace C natural within the *dux*, and so on. This process of gradual displacement – in combination with a more and more high-pitched timbre – achieves the effect of frustrating the mainstream of the musical *propositum*, and slowly forms a diametrically opposed sense. So, the piece tends to brighten up and annihilate the initial sinking.

Finally, on this occasion, it seems evident that the formation of the global sense does not come from the development of not very significant sememes, which need to be developed, but is the result of a compositional work deconstructing the early signification and creating a brand-new one. Therefore, any process of manipulation cannot help being founded on a previous analytical and hermeneutical work.

The sense of writing is out of our methods of composition, I hope.

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