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## **Structure and Content as Determinants for Musical Interpretation**

According to Thomas Carson Mark performing a piece of music that someone else has composed is like asserting something by means of a citation.<sup>1</sup> If the performance is to be aesthetically valid, it is necessary that the musician intends to assert something with the music, and this intention lends a specific kind of significance to the playing. But since it is impossible to assert something that one does not understand, performance in this emphatic sense requires that one understands the musical text. (If you do not understand it, or if you have no intention to assert it, you just play the music through in the same way as you can cite what someone has said or written without meaning anything with it or without understanding it.)

Performing thus presupposes interpretation, and interpretation is not, as sometimes happens, taken as an aspect that the musician imposes upon the music, but as a presentation of what the player "sees" in the music. Whether this is also what the composer intended the music to mean is uncertain, although people with normative minds are prone to demand agreement between interpretative understanding and intended meaning. But this problem need not be analysed in the present context.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mark, Thomas Carson, "Philosophy of Piano Playing. Reflections on the Concept of Performance", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 41(1980/81), 299-324.

<sup>2</sup> It is discussed in Edlund, Bengt, "Sonate, *que te fais-je?* Towards a Theory of Interpretation".

Leaving Mark's views, what kind of meaning or significance is it that musicians have to discover in the score and understand in order to perform a work of music? Avoiding here a host of complex questions, it is obvious that the current antithesis of form and content cannot be applied without qualifications to music. It turns out that the more or less associative components of the musical significance grow directly out of the formal structure; indeed, disregarding the fragmentary semantic meanings of music, the content may be said to reside within the formal substrate and its processual functions. It seems then that musicians approach musical meaning in two ways: they penetrate deeply into the structure in order to form an inner representation, a network of meaningful interrelationships, of that structure, and they attach broader, extra-musical intuitions to this representation, ideas that enrich and individuate the structure as conceived in purely musical terms.

Among other things interpretation involves, indeed requires, that the musician finds out – consciously or unconsciously – how the music proceeds, that he/she determines the modes of continuation embodied in the musical structure. And it further appears that one aspect of musical meaning of vital importance for interpretation concerns characterizations of musical continuation, characterizations that transcend technical description and relate to domains beyond music. The musician's way of rendering the continuations understood to be present in the structure is included in the information passed on to the listener – the observation and enjoyment of animated, meaningful form is generally considered to be the essence of music appreciation.

But music theory offers only a few, crudely generalizing concepts like repetition, development, variation, and contrast to capture the finely differentiated varieties of continuation met with in actual music. This lack of terms for describing the ways in which music can be continued is a serious drawback, since it means that the musician has little or no conscious access to categories that could sharpen the faculty of observation and guide the musical intuition making it more precise. A phenomenologically sensitive analysis of musical continuation requires a more developed terminology, words that bring richer connotations: ad-

dition, confirmation, answer, echo, alternation, polarity, parallelism, opposition, complement, expansion, contraction etc. Some of these terms have affinity to physical changes or events, while others rather refer to human actions or changes of mind. Indeed, some of them are related to reporting verbs, indicating that we are sometimes prone to hear music as "speaking" – a way of listening that has a long tradition. The metaphoric character of these descriptions (and many others more inventive or probing) when applied to music is both obvious and essential, for it is the transcendent aspect of these categories of continuation that stimulates the artistic imagination.

Most of these individuated kinds of continuation are likely to emerge as variants of the basic alternatives first mentioned, but the point is that access to a diversified terminology, to words having slight differences in connotation, will lead to a more discerning analytic penetration and a deeper musical involvement, and eventually to a richer, more differentiated and more compelling interpretation. When keenly analysed with regard to its specific modes of continuation, a piece of music will yield more interpretative options than when conventionally understood: there is for instance a musically vital distinction between a contrast that is also an answer, and a contrast that brings a complement, and when you have made up your mind it will sound differently.

Analytic discovery and phenomenological description of musical continuation is the core of the present study. In order to delimit the task, the work has been concentrated to shifts of continuation related to joints or demarcations between structural units such as motifs, phrases, periods etc. This limitation seems justified in as far as the attention of analysts, musicians, and listeners alike is to a great extent fixed upon what happens at such points of transition.

From a structural point of view the various modes of continuation are made up of intricate mixtures of identity and change: the musical parameters (melody, harmony, rhythm etc.) concurrently produce the continuations to be described. But the analytic study of musical continuation is complicated by certain stylistic and formal conditions that will be shortly discussed.

It appears (at least superficially) that some styles do not lend themselves to study in terms of continuation at points of demarcation. Thus some Baroque pieces have an overall continuity that seems to leave little room for demarcations, but this does not mean that an imaginative player cannot find a hold for various options of continuation.<sup>3</sup> And in pointillist music many categories of continuation may fail to apply. The individual “moments” in this kind of music can perhaps not be related to each other as are the units in tonal music (and much dodecaphonic music along with it), but on the other hand such a state of affairs also presents a challenge – maybe it is rather the ability of the musician to imagine suitable modes of continuation that fails when he/she is confronted with an unfamiliar idiom that seems to defy interpretation.

Music might in various ways be designed so as to concurrently exhibit different modes of continuation: continuations might thus be hierarchically superimposed extending over various structural formats, or they may reside in different strands of the music. And it often happens that structural units succeed each other in overlapping fashions – the formal demarcations being either suppressed or uncoordinated – a fact that implies that the continuations do not always start at a clearly defined “after”. Indeed, it seems that some complexity and ambiguity with respect to continuation is a mark of musical quality and even a constitutive property of chamber music in emphatic sense.

In order to describe the changes that underlie various modes of continuation, it is necessary to analyse the structure before as well as after the demarcation. This is trivially true, but the description of future events is necessarily influenced by the apprehension of previous events, and conversely the character of consequent units to some extent retroactively influences the meaning of antecedent units. The demarcations may further exhibit different degrees of closure. Some musical situations are dominated by patterns that according to ingrained perceptual habits or pre-ordained schemata are about to reach completion, while other passages, due to the inherent dynamics of ongoing melodic,

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<sup>3</sup> The Allemande from J. S. Bach's Suite for solo flute BWV 1013 – a *perpetuum mobile* string of sixteenth-notes – has been analysed by the present author so as to disclose its opportunities for interpretation when conceived of as a sequence of utterances.

harmonic and rhythmic progressions, rather give an impression of a more or less directed development across local demarcations towards future goals. In order to understand the nature of musical continuations a thorough study of the musical design as it gradually evolves must be supplemented by an analysis of various kinds of structurally warranted expectations.

The musical process is sometimes apprehended in an impersonating way, and it may emerge both as a monologue and a dialogue/multilogue. Apart from quite obvious mechanisms like the distribution of musical substance to different voices or instruments, the structural cues that invite listeners to hear, and interpreters to construe, music as a monologue or a dialogue are little known, and in many cases both options seem to be available. But when the musician has made up his/her mind, the playing will probably make it evident whether the music is intended to be heard as an impersonal chain of events, as a monologue, or as a dialogue. This basic choice is bound to influence the categorization, expression and perception of musical continuation alike: it makes a great difference if a shift in continuation is taken to be something that is imposed on the music from an external source, or if it is something that seems to emanate from within – and an answer that is conceived of as a reply is something quite else than an answer heard as a response issuing from the same musical “persona”.<sup>4</sup>

As a specimen of this kind of analysis aiming at discovery of interpretational options,<sup>5</sup> we will now turn to a piano piece by Robert Schumann, *Träumerei* from *Kinderszenen* op. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Personification of musical structure and performance is the subject in Edlund, Bengt, “Monologue and Conversation” and “In Quest of Dialogues in Music”.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to Schumann’s *Träumerei* six further piano pieces have been selected for study: the Prelude in F minor from The Well-Tempered Clavier II by J. S. Bach, the first movement of Mozart’s B $\flat$ -major Sonata K. 333, the theme from the first movement of Beethoven’s A $\flat$ -major Sonata op. 26, Chopin’s Prelude in C minor Op. 28 no. 20, the Intermezzo in B $\flat$  major op. 76 no. 4 by Brahms, and the tenth *Vision fugitif* from Prokofiev’s op. 22. Cf. Edlund, Bengt, “Prelude to the Art of Continuation”, “In Quest of Dialogues in Music”, “*Sonate, que te fais-je?* Towards a Theory of Interpretation”, “Afterthoughts on a Prelude”, “Analysis and Interpretation”, and “Forming Musical Continuation”.

Disregarding the repeat of the first eight bars, *Träumerei* is made up of six closely related four-bar sections each consisting of a rising/falling melodic arch. They all start in the same way, and since the (slightly) contrasting third and fourth sections follow parallel paths, and the first and fifth are exactly identical, the piece exhibits a symmetric 8+8+8 bar ABA form.

But the divergencies are more interesting than the similarities, and the sections differ significantly with respect to the chords with which they start and culminate. Thus all melodic arches but the fourth start from F major, and the B-major level of this section might (in a rendering that brings this aspect out) give rise to a sense of expansion and formal ambiguity: taking account of the chords of departure the tonal form of the piece emerges as asymmetric (12+4+8 bars). Even more important, however, are the harmonies supporting the top notes of the melodic arches, the chords that represent the focal, most expansive and most remote harmonic event in each section.

The first and fifth sections reach stable B-major subdominant chords, while the rising sixths in the second and final sections open up a wider harmonic space. Thus the poignant A-major seventh chord in m. 6 is resolved to D minor at the following primary downbeat, whereas the soft G-major ninth chord in m. 22 is never resolved to C major – it owes much of its remoteness to the fact that the listener is expecting an A-major seventh chord corresponding to the one heard in the second section. The piercing dissonances of the D-major and A-major ninth chords in the third and fourth sections push even more actively towards their accented G-minor and D-minor resolutions, respectively, since they are dominants in root position local IV-V-I cadences.

Other observations of interpretational relevance pertain to the melodic and contrapuntal domains. The third and fourth sections feature a left hand imitation of the steeply rising portion of the theme, and immediately after that there is a falling soprano/alto/tenor imitation of a four-note motif – concurrently with this imitative, ongoing descent (imperfectly indicated in the score) the other voices are engaged in iambic  $\bar{1}|\dot{1}$  rhythms, representing attempted cadences and suggesting a sense of withholding. Such a chain of imitations and such rhythms also appear in the second section, a trait that links this section to the two

central ones. In m. 10 Schumann has indicated a bifurcation of the melodic line into separate soprano and alto lines, an expansion that is counterbalanced by the contracting tenor/bass motion in the left hand.

Turning to the first/fifth and sixth sections, the descending portions of the melodic arches should be studied and compared. The melody of mm. 2—4 is divided into motifs comprising four, four, and then five notes, motifs that are closely related. (They all end with a rising interval, the third of them is a transposed replica of the second, and they form a stepwise descent.) The first two of these gestures end openly in a moving way – the rising inflections are just left at a high note, and the melody is then resumed at a much lower pitch – while the last of them is prolonged by one note and comes to rest. The tenor voice seems to support the first and third soprano motif since it moves in parallel tenths and octaves, respectively; on the other hand, since it runs in contrary motion to the second motif, the tenor may be taken to represent a gentle opposition to the melody at this point.

This account is valid also for mm. 22—24 until the fourth beat of m. 23 comes up with an exquisite harmonic deviation. Instead of the first inversion tonic chord already heard in m. 3 and then in m. 19 – and thus expected in m. 23 as well – the harmony (but not the melody!) is elevated by one step to G minor. The second motif is repeated, confirmed as it were, in a mood that is both shimmering and poignant. This transformed third motif is then expanded to seven notes to reach a primary downbeat and the tonic. But it is also a fact that the three last notes of this stretched gesture actually bring the beginning of a fourth motif: within the slur of the final motif there is a 4+3 note interior organization.

The bass voice of this essentially four-voice piece is little prominent, but in m. 8 and particularly in mm. 4 and 20, where it enters already at the comparatively weak second beat, the sudden activity of the bass gives rise to anacrusic motions that bind the sections together. In mm. 6 and 22, to mention a further detail of possible relevance for interpretation, an extra eighth-note is added in the upper line: depending on how it is played, it may be heard as either urging the descent or delaying it.

What are then the interpretational options with respect to differences in continuation?<sup>6</sup>

The rising thematic idea in *Träumerei* is not uniformly slurred, a fact that might encourage the pianist to look for various interpretations.<sup>7</sup> The tones F—E—F in m. 1 may thus be rendered as a local neighbour-note motion postponing the ascent and expressing relaxation, but on the other hand the notes E—F may also be attached to the next note A forming an active anacrusis E—F—A leading up to the higher register. The following motion C—F—F represents, if the player chooses to bring it out or wants to clarify the off-beat, quasi-syncopated metric nature of the focal B $\flat$ -major chord, a more urging replica to the initial low register C—F particle, but the rise might also (as already mentioned) soar, unimpeded by interior demarcations, from the low E to the final F. Having distinguished these three options with respect to the very beginning of the piece, two general remarks are due.

Musical interpretation is to an appreciable extent a matter of identifying and expressing aspects that coexist in the composed structure – a situation having affinity to the rabbit/duck effect in visual perception. Disregarding specific cases where ambiguity is the point, it is not sufficient in an aesthetically valid performance to present shapes that are both-rabbit-and-duck (or perhaps rather neither-rabbit-nor-duck). It is the duty of the player to make up his/her mind and to show the listener either the rabbit or the duck by underscoring their distinctive traits. In this specific case it turns out that pianists are apt to present

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<sup>6</sup> We thus leave out a number of other important interpretational considerations, for instance such that concern the choice of tempo, sonority, and general character, as well as the crucial question of how different modes of local continuation should be selected and combined to make up a convincing whole. At the seminar "Imagination in Interpretation" at Hanaholmen 6th–9th of May 1994, when this paper was read, the author demonstrated various options of continuation at the keyboard.

<sup>7</sup> In the work to follow the interpretational marks in the score will not be accorded normative validity. It can be argued that interpretational practice should be granted a certain freedom *vis-à-vis* such signs – cf. "*Sonate, que te fais-je?* Towards a Theory of Interpretation". Furthermore, considering the aim of the present investigation, it is more productive to let the musical structure itself suggest its inherent options of continuation than to let the interpretational marks circumscribe the possibilities.



the rabbit – the rise is generally played<sup>8</sup> as an anacrusis to the high F – and that analysis has not been used to outwit tradition (i.e., to find the two other animals hidden in Schumann's puzzle picture) or else that the presence of these concurrent animals has been deliberately denied.

Interpretational ideas are however not only a question of analysis, they are also deeply associated with playing motions, proprioceptive feelings and such technical matters as fingerings. Indeed, interpretational decision and technical execution are like the two sides of a coin.<sup>9</sup> Thus the current extended-anacrusis view of the rising phrase is inherent in the current continuous-legato fingerings 23124 or 21235, and to the pianist these fingerings are expressive of this musical idea. Turning to the other options, they are just as likely to be discovered as by-products of probing technical study as to be distinguished analytically, and they will not appear musically warranted to the pianist until the corresponding fingerings have been devised. The neighbour-note interpretation seems natural only if you play 45 235, whereas the quasi-imitation idea is brought out by the fingering 235 24.

Considering the different culminations in mm. 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, and 22, further options present themselves. Should the melodic and harmonic expansion in m. 6 be announced by infusing already the E—F—A motion in m. 5 with an energy that was not felt in m. 1 and that brings forth the ensuing melodic expansion, or should the A-major seventh chord be produced by the salient quality given to the point where

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Repp, Bruno, "A Constraint on the Expressive Timing of a Melodic Gesture. Evidence from Performance and Aesthetic Judgment", *Music Perception* 10(1992), 221–242. According to Repp's study the timing profile of the inter-onset durations of the gesture E—F—A—C—F—F as measured in 28 recordings was generally "parabolic" and suggestive of physical motions having this character, and this kind of timing was also preferred by a group of listeners. It seems likely, however, that if this passage is taken to embody any of the alternative modes of continuation advanced here, other varieties of timing might turn up in performance – durational inflections characterizing other meanings of the passage, timing profiles that could presumably be appreciated by listeners being in agreement with these alternative interpretations.

<sup>9</sup> For a further discussion of these issues cf. Edlund, Bengt, "An Approach to Musical Idiomatics", and "Ways of Musicmaking . Musical Ontology at Your Fingertips". While certainly not referring to such pianistic niceties, the following little poem by Tage Danielsson may nevertheless be taken to allude to the relationship between fingerings and interpretative options: "*Om fingrarna var hundra/på Käbi Laretei,/så skulle det allt dundra/om Schumanns Träumeri*".

the first sign of change actually occurs, i.e., to the stretched melodic inflection C—A? (The fingering 21235, involving a stretched hand position, will support the former interpretation, while the latter is best served by 235 25.) The character of m. 22 is altogether different: in order to distinguish this passage from what happened in m. 6, the mild G-major ninth chord should rather be approached, perhaps from the rising sixth on, in a way that suggests withdrawal and rarefaction.

And mm. 10 and 14 must distinguished from the corresponding bars of the preceding portions of the music as well as from each other. The upbeat left hand entries of the local IV-V motions lend a certain weight and stability to the applied dominant D-major and A-major ninth chords. If however the rising tenor voice is allowed to seize the initiative, instability prevails, and the soprano/tenor imitation cumulates a considerable anacrusic push towards mm. 11 and 15 – as a result the culmination points of these sections will seem to have shifted from the applied dominants to the G-minor and D-minor resolutions, respectively, resolutions that are subsequently reiterated and undermined three times in the receding sequence of iambic rhythms bringing ever more faint cadences.

Measure 10 brings an extraordinary deviant – the final interval of the rising upper line is reduced to the minor third C—E<sub>♭</sub> and yet the tension is unmistakable. This is due to the dissonant harmonization of course, but to bring the poignant quality out in a telling way it seems that the right hand soprano/alto bifurcation must be made clear. The existence of an alto voice to be deflected downwards might be clarified if the A in m. 9 is rendered as a local upbeat pointing to the C—B<sub>♭</sub>—A motion, and the fingering that seems most idiomatic for this lower strand is 231321 since it uses the thumb for the A and tends to put the soprano rise A—C—E<sub>♭</sub>—E<sub>♭</sub> somewhat out of focus.

Turning to the recession phase of the melodic arches the notation again offers different options. The first descending notes in m. 2 may thus be attached to the preceding top note, or they may be taken to introduce a new motif, clarifying the following motivic relationships. In m. 6 the G starts the descent “too early”, a fact that may either be used to give an impression of hesitation (or even a shade of transient rhythmic ambiguity) or suggest eagerness. Such a “premature” start ap-

appears also in m. 22, but this passage brings a further melodic modification of relevance for interpretation: the unexpected gap in the sequence G—F— —D can be used to express a sense of inhibition followed by resumption. On the other hand, since G—F—D may either be taken to belong to the preceding, retreating ninth chord or to bring a return to the following normal progression, these notes can be played slowly and quietly, or lightly with a sense of relief, respectively.

In mm. 2—4 and 18—20 the essential aspect is the dreaming lack of closure of the first two four-note motifs followed by the eventual arrival of the third five-note motif. An impression of forthcoming closure might emerge already from the start of the third motif if it is rendered in a slightly more firm manner, or if some emphasis is given to the left hand motion that is now reversed, supporting, as it were, the rising line of the melody. But the final right hand note might also enter without any prior announcement, a manner of playing that underscores the falling sequence and the similarity between the two last motifs, and that combines well with a prominent bass in m. 4, introducing an element of dialogue. Considering the beginning of the passage, the falling inflection E—D in m. 2 conceals the resemblance between the first and the second motif. The latter may therefore be rendered as opposing or gently rectifying the former. As already pointed out the contrary motion in the tenor voice suggests a concurrent element of simultaneous opposition.

The repeat in mm. 23—24 of the second motif, elevated to a G-minor harmonization, is a stroke of genius and an intensely charged moment. It may be rendered either so as to represent a renewed, decisive effort or as a radical withdrawal. Both these interpretations are suitable for bringing the piece to an end: the more emphatic option has the energy needed to produce a final seven-note motif, while the withdrawing gesture rather leads to a four-note motif with a loosely appended, incomplete three-note particle.

Considering the passage mm. 10—12 (and mm. 14—16 and 6—8 as far as the parallelisms go) there are several options of interpretation. The upper line is certainly in focus when the descent begins, but it gradually loses some of its interest as it engages in repeated imperfect cadences that appear to hold back the motion. The so-

prano/alto/tenor imitation chain C—B>—D—G/E>—D—G—B>/C—B>—D—G offers a good alternative, but to express it clearly its first soprano member must be played so as to intrude upon the receding motion of the upper melody line: D—C—B>. This falling three-note motion may however also make sense if it is associated with the alto voice, if it is played as a soothing imitation of the previous, agitated C—B>—A inflection. Finally, proposing a bold reading that even more transforms the notated structure, the rising left hand imitation of the thematic ascent – an imitation that is likely to be brought out in most interpretations – may be connected with the descending soprano/alto/tenor imitation chain, giving rise to a sweeping gesture (G—F#—A—D—F#—A—C—B>—D—G—E>—D— etc.) towards the following B>-major thematic entry.<sup>10</sup>

From the formal point of view, the most challenging interpretative option – an option that would slightly undermine the formal regularity of the piece – is to render the sonorous B>-major start of the fourth section as the climax of the piece, i.e., to play the preceding section as a preparation to reach this heightened point of tonal departure. Alternatively, taking account of its more transparent register, the fourth section could be rendered as a weaker complement to its forerunner.

Despite all analytic efforts, one should not expect that the various modes of continuation inherent in a piece of music can always be positively distinguished by means of analyzing the score. In practice it is up to the player's musical intuition and discernment to judge how the music changes at points of demarcation. And therefore empirical investigations turn out to be a necessary complement to the analytic work. What consensus is there among musically informed judges if they are asked to

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<sup>10</sup> There may be readers who do not consider the latter two readings legitimate since they violate the voice-leading as notated in the score. But it may be held that these options are musically meaningful, and that some variety of structural configuration might be desirable at this stage in the piece. Generally, the pianistic tradition offers many examples of voice-leading re-arrangements that heighten the interest and uncover the potential richness of the works, and there is no reason to assume that the composers were less fascinated by, and less creative in finding, such options. For a further discussion, cf. "*Sonate, que te fais-je? Towards a Theory of Interpretation*".

describe musical continuations? And what modes of continuation do various musicians actually express when playing?

We also have little knowledge about what musicians actually do in order to clarify their intentions as to how they want the music to continue, and this means that a very important part of the musical "prosody", viz. the expression in actual sound of meaningful structural change, is practically unknown. The cues for continuation are likely to be stylistically proper, but within these confines quite drastic measures, stretching the respect for the notation and its directions for execution, might sometimes seem necessary; on other occasions minute modifications may be sufficient. It is of great interest to investigate into the means that musicians use when bringing out the mode of continuation that they have chosen, and especially to find out how they differentiate between options of continuation that are quite close to each other – given that such fine distinctions can be rendered at all.

As to the listener, finally, the situation is quite complex since the apprehension of musical continuation is based upon the musical structure and the modes of continuation it potentially embodies, as well as upon how these options are selected, understood and expressed by a certain musician playing the music. But the main problem, which is both accessible and worth studying, concerns the efficacy and precision of communication. Do musicians succeed in conveying to the listeners the very mode of continuation that they have found in the score and decided to bring out?

There is thus reason to complement the analytic study exemplified above, which should be regarded as a contribution to the development of a method of interpretational choice, with further investigations dealing with the expression and apprehension of musical continuation.<sup>11</sup>

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