

# On Form in New Music

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## I.

“Musical form” can be examined and described from several points of view.

A quite general approach leads initially to this formulation: *Form is the relationship of the parts to one another and to the whole*. This definition (which appears not only in the theory of musical form, but also in other contexts pertaining to form) is indeed valid and true, but it says all too little about the actual nature of musical form. Descriptions of schemata, e.g., “A—B—A,” “sonata,” “rondo,” belong to this approach, as well as the description of the articulation of the whole and its parts all the way down to the level of the smallest elements and fragments of elements. With the newer types of music, to which traditional form schemata no longer apply, such general descriptions concentrate on the proportions among whole and parts — registering them, but not interpreting them.

With a more detailed approach, it turns out that musical form is more than just the relationship of the parts to one another and to the whole. Syntactic aspects take on a primary role in the understanding of form: within the musical process each phase (?) and each single moment has properties that contribute to the process’s formation; value and function within the totality, coherence and incoherence

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[*Verknüpfung* bzw. *Nichtverknüpfung*], connection and contrast of individual moments — all of these result in a system of relations that brings about apparent motion or stasis, an "extension [*Ausdehnung*] in time." The term "musical form" therefore refers not only to aspects of the relationships among the parts, but also to the ways in which the parts act within the whole; consequently the notion of function is more significant than that of mere arrangement.

We may draw nearer to the concept of *musical form* from the broader concept of *form* by engaging a spatial analogy. *Form* is fundamentally an abstraction of spatial configurations, of the proportions among the spatial extensions of objects; when carried over to nonspatial realms such as poetry or music, the idea of *form* is an abstraction of an abstraction. According to the origin of that idea, "spatialness" inheres in that which unfolds in time. This is supported by the fact that space and time appear to be inextricably interconnected in our thoughts and imaginations: wherever one of the two categories is primarily present, the other immediately shows up by association. Hearing or imagining [*Vorstellung*] music (where the progression of sounds is primarily chronological) calls into existence a set of imaginary [*imaginäre*], spatial relations on many levels. The first of these associative layers is one in which the vertical dimension is constituted by changes in pitch [*Tonhöhe*] (the very word engages the spatial analogy) and the horizontal dimension by the [temporal] persistence of these same pitches, while changes in loudness and timbre (e.g., a distinction between open and muted sounds) give the appearance of near and far, or, generally, spatial depth. We visualize musical figures and events as though they have placed themselves in this fictional, imaginary space of their own creation. Imaginary spatial relations among layers of greater abstraction are the second to arise, and here more types of "space" can be conceived. Thus we can speak of "harmonic space," an abstraction of pitch space fictively created not by the pitches themselves, but by their harmonic interrelationships. The syntactic connections among individual musical moments are likewise positioned by our imagination in a virtual space in which the individual moments (elements, figures, links, parts, etc.) seem to act like locations or objects, and in which the musical event [*Geschehen*] appears present in its own cumulative unfolding [*Verlauf*], almost like architecture in space.<sup>1</sup> This applies not

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<sup>1</sup>See Th. W. Adorno, "Anweisungen zum Hören Neuer Musik," in *Der getreue*

only to “static” musical formations — in which case the spatial analogy emerges directly through the appearance of stasis in the musical event — but generally to any kind of music, even one with a developmental style of unfolding [*Verlauf*]. For as each moment enters our consciousness we involuntarily compare it with the moments already experienced, drawing conclusions from these comparisons about moments to come; it is thus that we walk through the musical building, as though that building were already present in its entirety. Generally speaking, it is only the joint efforts of association, abstraction, memory, and prediction in bringing about a network of relations that enables the conception of musical form.

In the standpoint just promulgated, a distinction is made between musical form and “music-itself.” According to this approach, “music-itself” is the purely chronological succession of events, whereas “musical form” is an abstraction from these chronological successions, an abstraction in which the relations within the successions are no longer represented chronologically, but in a virtual space; musical form materializes only as the flow of time is retrospectively surveyed as “space.”

The phrase “retrospectively surveyed” has a connotation of history. The historical aspect applies not only to the form of individual pieces of music, but additionally to the formal connections that weave webs between individual pieces. It is not at all possible to explain the function of the constituents of a piece only through the internal musical connections of the work in question: the characteristics of the individual moments, and the linkages [*Verknüpfungen*] among these moments, have meaning only in relation to the general characteristics and linkage-schemata arising out of the body of works in a particular style or tradition. Individual moments make themselves known as such only insofar as they include similarities to and differences from the historically constructed types. Accordingly, the historical factor contributes to both the syntactic and the spatial approaches to musical form. Musical syntax is transformed both by history and through history; the virtual space of the formal reference-system incorporates not only the moments of the individual work, but also those of the past — the “present” of musical form includes moments that have been directly passed through as well as all music that has been previously experienced. The real time occurring in music — a kind of time that

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*Korrepetitor* (Frankfurt, 1963): 95–96.

occurs in musical form as an imaginary space — is not the only temporal layer of a piece: in every moment there is also an imaginary time at work, a time of (so to speak) higher power, resulting from the compression of events [*Geschehens*] in the real-time unfolding [*Vorgang*] of individual works. For its part, this imaginary time is again abstracted to space — history, as accumulated time and time-made-present, is already imaginary and spatial.

Within musical form, historical function can be exhibited as types within a particular tradition.

An example:

A feature of the formal parts of a Viennese Classical sonata is that, thanks to their historically constructed characteristics, they indicate which phase of the formal process they belong to. Themes, transitions, development, retransition, coda — these are to be identified not only by their position in the larger form, but also (and above all) through their respective individual musical behaviors, which can be more accurately described by their harmonic, modulatory, rhythmic-motivic, and to some extent even dynamic characteristics. Once the classical sonata types (having become types by historical convention) appear in a Romantic musical context, their formal meaning undergoes a metamorphosis. (This can also be understood in reverse: the change in the types' meaning is what brings about an altered context.) But this metamorphosis is not complete: the new meaning results only from a change in emphasis, retaining this in itself. One of the coda types of the Classical style, for example, the closing gesture — resulting harmonically from repeated confirmation of the tonic, rhythmically from a composed-out fermata, dynamically and instrumentally from a fortissimo orchestral tutti illuminated in the brightest light, and generally placed splendidly at the end of overtures and finale movements of symphonies — is further developed and even exaggerated in Romantic overtures and symphonies. Culminating examples of this type can be found in Bruckner's climactic codas [*Coda-Apotheosen*] such as the close of the outer movements of the Seventh Symphony. The change in function relative to the classical tutti-coda is in full view here: the composed-out fermatas are not mere closing gestures, but static sound-planes [*Klangflächen*] that do in fact preserve their earlier confirmatory meaning without affirmatively asserting The End Is Near. Rather, the closing gesture is expanded in every direction, delayed and

suspended, giving the impression that the ending could go on forever. But such a coda will only have this sense [*Sinn*] if its shift in meaning [*Bedeutung*] is registered in confrontation with the meaning it accumulates from its predecessors: if it were just seen as being it-itself, as being part of an individual work, then this sense, although it would not entirely cease to exist, would largely fade away. The complete sense arises out of the fact that it encompasses the whole tradition of formal references, from the present musical configuration to the subliminal, as though history were tightening the thread connecting all aurally cognate configurations.

The example just described, which stands for countless others, has implications for two aspects of musical form.

First, it sheds light on the peculiarity of the notion of meaning as it relates to musical form, or generally as it relates to music-itself. Musical meaning (which makes musical contexts seem in some ways linguistic<sup>2</sup>), is fundamentally different from linguistic meaning: musical meaning does not directly refer to the world of ideas and consequently has only an “as-if” semantic substrate. Music simulates meanings, meanings that slip away into nothingness the moment we try to nail them down into some definite semantic footing. Musical moments have meaning only insofar as they refer to other musical moments: only the displacements and alterations of meaning are ascertainable, not the meanings themselves. The linguistic aspect of music is still more narrowly delineated by the fact that musical syntax is substantially looser and more ephemeral than that of language: although it is partially legitimate to conceive of music as a syntactic system, the system is actually shot through with holes and internal inconsistencies. Furthermore, it is in no way a closed system, it is, rather, open to all kinds of reorganization, particularly in the course of history. Thus the system of music barely satisfies the requirements of an internally consistent system, and any attempt to describe music and musical form with logical or mathematical criteria is exceedingly questionable.<sup>3</sup> To

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<sup>2</sup>See Th. W. Adorno, “Fragment über Musik und Sprache” (1956), in *Quasi una Fantasia* (Frankfurt, 1963): 9–16.

<sup>3</sup>Of course, what has been said here does not apply to schools or methods of composition that rest *per se* on a logical, arithmetical, or mathematical basis; with regard to these and only these methods is it appropriate to make an accordingly exact description, as long as it does not overstep the boundaries the composer has placed on the logic, arithmetic, or mathematics of the method.

be sure, the system of music has logical aspects, but these arise from some kind of illusory semantics: music can predicate, and it can draw conclusions from its predicates, but these conclusions cannot answer to any criteria of categorical accuracy or truth. Musical meaning and musical logic are related to factual meaning and factual logic as dreams to reality.

Secondly, the foregoing example clarifies the peculiarity of formal function — that it can be fully understood not merely within individual pieces, but principally within the chain of history. This entails that musical form is a category superseding individual musical phenomena. Each moment of a work is, on one level, an element of the referential system of the individual form, and on a higher level, an element of the all-encompassing referential system of history.

The historical aspects of musical form were primarily uncovered by Th. W. Adorno; more than anything else, a good deal of his Mahler book<sup>4</sup> represents his most important contributions to a "historical *Formenlehre*."

The historical approach to form is all the more essential in that music has no actual material — in the original sense of the word — that can be "formed" in the compositional process; notes, sounds, etc., as an acoustical substrate, cannot be understood as material for music in the sense that stone and wood are materials for sculpture. The process of "forming" music has much more to do with relationships mediated by contexts of notes and sounds: what is formed in music is already "form" itself, and not material. The system of musical form and its historical transformations can be understood metaphorically as an immense network stretching across time: individual composers tangle up this or that part of the giant network, creating new snarls and knots which later composers will in turn tie or untie or otherwise weave further into the network. Some spots will end up so tangled that they cannot be tied further, and the network is torn apart, and new threads and new models will be woven together — seemingly apart from the structure of the previous network. But from a great distance we can see a completely transparent ball of string imperceptibly weaving over the torn places: even the apparently nonreferential and nontraditional have a hidden connection to that which has been.

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<sup>4</sup>Frankfurt 1960.

## II.

Today we find ourselves at exactly such a tear in the historical process. The principal considerations of form — the relationship of the parts to the whole, the spatial analogy, historical chaining — have remained valid; however, the manner of this validity is essentially different from the manner in which the same principles are manifested within the tonal tradition, and indeed within the New Music that is no longer tonal, but is conceived by analogy with tonal syntax. This is not to say that the “secret threads” of tradition in the newest musical period (*Phase*) are null and void; in contrast, the more this period becomes amenable to overview, the more clearly can its connections with the past be revealed. But a qualification is in order: that “ahistorical” trend in composition, which to a large extent originated in Schillinger’s<sup>5</sup> theories, does not measure up to the criteria of musical form. This in no way means that the criteria of form have become invalid in and of themselves; rather that Schillinger’s compositional ideas (and the conception that Cage derived from it) can by no means lay claim to generating musical form. On the other hand, even this “aformal” music gave rise to form, through objective and prevailing formal principles that are independent of compositional intent — *malgré lui*, as it were. Moving through time and influenced by time, it *became* history and spawned its own tradition-chain. One can get to work on the question of whether the appropriation of certain aspects of Schillinger’s and Cage’s conception by the European avant-garde — involuntarily thinking in terms of coherence (*unwillkürlich in Zusammenhängen denkende*), under the guise of the nontraditional, but stamped by tra-

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<sup>5</sup>[Yes, this is Joseph Schillinger of Schillinger System fame. Ligeti presumably is responding to Schillinger’s *The Mathematical Basis of the Arts* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948), a representative passage of which follows: “If art implies selectivity, skill and organization, ascertainable principles must underlie it. Once such principles are discovered and formulated, works of art may be produced by scientific synthesis. There is a common misunderstanding about the freedom of an artist as it relates to self-expression. No artist is really free. He is subjected to the influences of his immediate surroundings in the manner of execution, and confined to the material media at his hand. If an artist were truly free, he would speak his own individual language. In reality, he speaks only the language of his immediate geographical and historical boundaries. There is no artist known who, being born in Paris, can express himself spontaneously in the medium of Chinese 4th Century A.D., nor is there any composer, born and reared in Vienna, who possesses an inborn mastery of the Javanese gamelan. The key to real freedom and emancipation from local dependence is through scientific method.” —iq.]

dition — was adequate or not: the use of particular aspects of the aformal conception in some compositional way of thinking aimed at coherence (and thus at form) retrospectively projects form onto an inherently formless conception. The asyntactic music of the Cage circle, which resembles isolated languages, avoids relationships between individual moments; as such, it has characteristics of coherence within that very dimension, and out of its intended ahistoricity it unintentionally becomes history.

From a global point of view, and thus in the context of the salient characteristics of serial, stochastic, chance, and postserial musics,<sup>6</sup> the following principal distinctions may be made between the [present] nature of musical form and the nature of form in the earlier tradition:

1. There are no longer any established formal schemata: each individual work is compelled, by the entire historical constellation, to present a one-of-a-kind form that is only appropriate for that one work. The "one-of-a-kind forms," however, acquire common characteristics through history and in retrospect; these characteristics make even the most heterogeneous individual formal realizations into members of some higher-level form-family — if perhaps not with the same strong predetermination as in the tonal period.

2. Rhythmic articulation (even the large-scale rhythm of form) has become independent of any foundations in metrical pulse. This leads, on the one hand, to possibilities of articulatory differentiation that could not have been foreseen. On the other hand (but also), this leads to a diminution in the power of articulation alone to create form, due to the fact that overweening differentiation reverts into indifference.

3. There is no longer a generally valid system for creating syntax as there had been for tonal, chromatic (*aufgelöst-tonal*), and even twelve-tone musics — no system that, despite its variants, is more or less coherent. Syntax in the sense of a direct unifying force has been dispensed with entirely; we still have syntax in the sense of there being various possible systems of coherence, though there are, as with individual forms, particular solutions. To be sure, with the "higher-level form family" arise higher-level relationships among individual syntactic systems, but these relationships are too weak and ephemeral

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<sup>6</sup>The term "postserial" [*jenseits des Seriellen*] was coined by G.M. Koenig; it seems to be more reasonable than any catchword for those types of music that are not composed serially, but which radically turn away from the whole serial legacy that preserves any recourse to obsolete traditional types.



to establish a unified, general syntax. (There is no point in complaining about this situation: there is no reason that one established musical syntax should be more reasonable than a fragmentation into particular syntactic systems. General validity is no criterion for art.) The worst-case scenario among the various possible syntactic solutions is Cage's practice: the negation of any kind of syntax.

4. A change of function goes hand in hand with the individualization of syntax. Formal function no longer exists as it did within the tonal tradition; units of form whose historically constructed behaviors mark off formal phases more or less unambiguously are unthinkable in a formal structure that no longer knows any established schemata or any unambiguous types of linkage. This does not mean, however, that the concept of function is meaningless for today's formal types; only the character of function has changed, insofar as it is no longer fixed within the formal structure, but is relaxed and relative. Various types of structure and motion, various possible ways of arranging sounds, sound objects, sound masses, sound webs, contrasting and mediating formations, the chopped-up and the melted-together, the constructive and the deconstructive and the like — all these can serve as function-bearing elements of form; only the unambiguous marker and the signpost are unavailable. Thus the position of a formal unit within the whole does not place any obligations on the function of that unit, and (to turn it around) no function is bound to any position: functional types articulate the form and endow it with coherence, but the large-scale form is without direction and without development, and in its interior the individual moments are, as a matter of principle, interchangeable as far as their function and position is concerned.

The aforementioned four features are in a closely causal relationship with one another: the disappearance of formal schemata was, in the end, brought about by the dissolution of tonality (the anachronistic restoration of the schemata through twelve-tone technique turned out, for lack of the tonal substrate, to be all too short-lived); with the decline of the schemata, and in particularly with the equalization of compositional elements brought about through the dismantling of the tonal hierarchy, the possibility of a generally valid syntax declined as well; the directional character of formal function dwindled away as much through the dissolution of directional tonal harmony and syntax as through the disappearance of formal schemata; the fundamental

metrical types of articulation were washed away by the collapse of the harmonic and formal hierarchies, and so on — the causal relationships among these metamorphoses can be turned around on each other in the manner of the chicken and the egg: each individual moment of the metamorphosis is at once the cause and the effect of the process described.

Since function is particularly important to the realization of musical form, a question arises as to the extent to which the profound transformation in character of formal function has affected form itself.

Those who approach contemporary music with traditional criteria of form are misled into the belief that this music is, in general, "formless": the lack of direction-indicating functions is an obstacle to those who expect a signpost [*Wegweiser*] indicating the formal architecture. Those who approach the same music without the expectation [*Erwartung*] that function will signify direction and orientation within the architecture will encounter a whole array of architectonic possibilities that are no less graspable than those of traditional formal constructions; the possibilities range from something like giant empty one-roomed edifices all the way to twisted subterranean labyrinths and vast, sparsely scattered settlements.

As the vectorial character of formal function was dwindling away, its coherence-providing character remained (and in the historical dimension as well). The general tendency of music toward stasis largely enfeebled its language-like aspects: quasi-linguistic meanings and slippages of meaning, hardly exist anymore, in the sense that they could have been used to describe (for example) a classical formal unit. On the other hand, as time went on an inventory of types accumulated, such as: aperiodic zig-zagging through large intervals followed by an abrupt standstill, then a resumption of the leaps; unbroken and persistent planes of sound with a largely cluster-based internal architecture; sound objects seemingly placed individually in the form's space; particular color combinations, such as a sweet and sedulous percussion display enveloped in peals of vibraphone and glockenspiel. These types have already been so widely used that they have become as familiar as an authentic cadence. With time they have taken on the appearance of a general validity, so that metamorphoses in character have become understood as aberrations or as supplements to the General: it is as though "as-if" meaning and rudimentary language-likeness have crept

through the back door into musical contexts that were conceived as inherently anti-linguistic and anti-meaningful.

At this point, however, the problem of contemporary music arises most clearly: the internal inconsistency between intended form and the form that actually arises. That is to say, as long as there are no established and generally valid formal archetypes and syntactic systems, musical types tend to consolidate, paradoxically, in a historical manner: instead of a system that provides coherence, *equal* types themselves become established through *several* such systems.<sup>7</sup> The consequence of this paradoxical situation is that it could give rise to the heresy that the contemporary musical language is as solidified as the traditional tonal language was for centuries, and that there is nothing further to be done than to enrich and develop the language that has been achieved.

In the event that there is a great variety of syntaxes and a substantially smaller variety of musical types, one of the causes is to be found in the fact that so many pieces resemble each other like so many eggs, and that a new academicism seems to be forming almost faster than the academicisms of earlier eras.

### III.

The question arises: how and why did the paradoxical situation described above arise?

In all probability the reasons are to be found in the loosening of the connection between the compositional process and the resulting sense experience.

Although the sounding music manifests internal coherence throughout, and therefore has a syntax, this syntax does not necessarily always correspond with the system of coherence that is built into the compositional process. By bifurcating the compositional process into precomposition (of elements and relationships) and composition “proper” — or even in some cases through a threefold process of precomposition, score production, and compositional-interpretive realization — a par-

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<sup>7</sup>“... this view seems to embody a growing suspicion that whatever compositional methods may be employed, the formation of really new patterns is becoming increasingly less possible. By now, even widely divergent methods of organizing musical elements seem to produce very similar musical results, and the semantic value of such similarity overshadows in its power of communication the differences among dissimilar methods of origination.” H. Brün, “Against Plausibility,” *Perspectives of New Music* 2/1 (1963): 43–44.

tition is thrown up between the act and the product of composition. The division of labor into processes of planning and manipulation brings about a situation in which it can no longer be guaranteed that the entirety of what is planned can be manipulated, and that the entirety of what is manipulated ends up in the resulting music. On the one hand, planning and manipulation have been conceived as independent activities; on the other hand, the tendency has been to set up these independent phases of the compositional process as being complete in and of themselves, to such an extent that their endpoints can no longer adequately be transferred to a later stage of work on the basis of completion. Furthermore, compositional work has been carried out in the various phases of work in such a way that the characteristics of the hoped-for music was foreseen only summarily, if at all. Fewer musical connections have been composed than connections limited to the notes in the text. The compositional process (together with the score) and the resulting music have become almost hermetically removed from one another. Adorno discerned and pointed out this problem quite early on.<sup>8</sup> Metzger justly criticized Adorno's somewhat rash overgeneralizations,<sup>9</sup> since in the works relevant to the situation at the time — mostly compositions by Stockhausen and Boulez — the aforementioned discrepancy between composing and that which is composed proves to be negligible: owing to compositional strength and concentration, and despite the bifurcation of the compositional process, there was a sufficient supply of forces to hold together meaningfully that which had been composed, allowing the sound to turn out as music at a high formal level. It cannot be denied that these works give the impression that they have a wealth of relationships; however, these relationships, as a consequence of their negative identity with the relationships built in during the compositional process, are not free from the pull of *malgré lui*. The high formal level resulted in part directly from the wealth of compositional investments hidden under the surface [*Wasserspiegel*] of the music, through which it shines through translucently. Surely it is often the case in music of the highest rank that "secret" constructions hold up the cupola of form — Machaut, Okeghem, Bach, and Webern can be held up as examples — and that any kind of paper music is licensed, as long as there is assurance that

<sup>8</sup>"Das Altern der Neuen Musik" (1954), in *Dissonanzen* (Göttingen, 1956).

<sup>9</sup>"Das Altern der Philosophie der Neuen Musik," *Die Reihe* 4 (1958).

the sounds arising out of that which is on paper will reach a certain level: The unheard yet imagined contributes more to the aura of high art than does a foregrounded compositional handicraft. The license of paper music vanishes as soon as the construction becomes shut off from the aura of the sound, and the resulting music falls out of the compositional work-process, almost as a byproduct. It seems that aside from a few major works, the internal discrepancy of the working methods for serial, stochastic, aleatoric, and postserial music are becoming ever greater: Adorno's critique was only conditionally valid in 1954, but was all the more appropriate as a prognosis for later developments — for the situation in the 1960s.

With the generalization of the serial method — that is, with the incorporation of planning techniques that had earlier been applied to a repertoire of elements, and now to global, even abstract categories such as general musical characteristics, structural constellations, types of arrangement and motion — and with the involvement of aleatoric manipulations in the practice of generalized serialism, the crux of the situation, the dissociation of the phases of compositional activity, has been in no way dealt with. Instead, there has been such a change in emphasis in the partition of the working method that leans even more toward giving pre-planning such importance that it tends to absorb “composition proper”: whatever is left over is conflated with interpretation. This means that compositional intentions, and with them the establishment of coherence, is ever more concentrated on generalized pre-planning and removed from the musical result — especially when this result is codetermined by a “second composer” (the interpreter) independent, to some degree, of the “first” composer. The division of labor that first manifested itself inside the compositional process, has subsequently devolved onto two separate people. Music, and therefore musical form, becomes highly undesigned and structurally indifferentiated in a situation where ultimate responsibility for the result lies with the performer, where ultimately the dissociation of the compositional process is spread out over a number of performers such that either the composition is passed around from hand to hand (not unlike the game in which a message is whispered from one ear to another so that the end result comes out nothing like the original), or the interpreters simultaneously acting independently of one another.

Thus serial and chance musics, despite their supposedly contradic-

tory methods, become largely identical in terms of their results, which increases the poverty of archetypes — poverty in proportion to the multiplicity of methods.<sup>10</sup>

In this connection it should be noted that the "determinate—indeterminate" opposition is not so decisive as the unintended commonality of the apparently antagonistic methods. From the outset this commonality has been based on the fact that both methods work with *directives*. The serial method deals with directives of pre-forming determinate dispositions and operations, and the chance method with directives for certain manipulations with things that are premusical or extramusical — as planning documents, Cage's dice, coins, and star maps are no less effective than the exact plans of serial composers. As far as numeric orderings or distribution models go, it is not determinacy or indeterminacy that is decisive for the fate of the prepared material, but the fact that *overall* orderings and distributions (as they are provided) are accepted as constraints on the starting point of the compositional process. *Any* kind of method that involves general pre-planning, whichever directives are adopted, produces relationships at the level of the sounding music, despite the isolation of individual moments, that are not intended by those methods, but appear in the result as though of its own accord.

Here is where we can locate "*malgré-lui* coherence" and "*malgré-lui* form." In the horizontal dimension "musical structure" means that apart from the dislocation of musical senses of totality or of larger formal divisions into unrelated moments, unintentional sense-relations arise in the succession, which the isolation of the individual moments works against. In the vertical dimension, on the other hand, it means that spans that were originally conceived as independent from one another and incongruous, but that are manipulated into simultaneity in the result, add up to an accidental constellation; this bestows a sense of "as-if" to simultaneity. The interaction of both dimensions, together with the illusionary relationships inherent in them, eventually gives rise to the ghost of a system of relationships within what is primarily devoid of relationships, and as a consequence, to musical form.

#### IV.

Tied up in the situation just described is the question of whether,

<sup>10</sup>Ligeti, "Metamorphoses of Musical Form," *Die Reihe* 7 (1960).

forms that are called “polyvalent” or “mobile” the form is truly that of a mobile, or whether mobility relates to a plane other than that in which musical form is constituted.

Polyvalence and mobility arise as a consequence of the tendency to isolate individual moments: that which is not entangled has the potential to be positionally permuted. (The independence of the formal function of individual moments and of formal units from their position, as well as the non-vectorial character of function, are part of this consideration.) We already see a permutability of moments in late Webern; but there the permutability cannot actually be brought about, being merely a latent possibility in the structure: the mobility is composed out, so to speak, insofar as the individual units appear, with their interrelationships of inversion and retrograde, to be permutable; in reality, however, they are fastened to the structure like gears. With continued isolation of individual moments — as a result of compositional methods working more generally with pre-planning — real permutability soon emerged as a consequence. But the level at which mobility operates changed as a result: precisely because in Webern the mobility was only potential, located on the level of the imaginary, did it become a characteristic of the form; with its dislocation to the level of the real (as opposed to the abstract level of form), permutability becomes a property of the process by which a musical text is realized. It thus enables multiple instantiations of a text, but musical results of the individual instances have no mobility: the process can have a meaning of “either/or,” but the musical form cannot; that is, as soon as an ambiguous process becomes an unambiguous instance through the sounding music, the mobility of the process itself is shut out of the sphere of the musical result.

The problem of polyvalence and mobility basically goes back to the essential differences between primarily spatial configurations and primarily temporal events, and, relatedly, to a common tendency to insufficiently separate these two fundamentally different domains, to apply principles that are valid for one domain to the other without having critically considered the legitimacy of this transfer.

A sculpture is a primarily spatial configuration. But a movable sculpture, such as a Calder mobile, includes the dimension of time in its primarily spatial configuration. The form of a mobile is therefore not just an abstraction of its spatial configuration, but also encom-

passes the changes of the spatial configuration in time. The situation is reversed in music: there the form is the product of an imaginary spatialization of a temporal process, whereas a mobile sculpture is the product of the "temporalization" of a spatial object. Music, as a primarily temporal activity, is already motion itself (totally static types of music represent merely represent a borderline case). Therefore in music there is no analogy to a mobile sculpture, since to set motion once more in motion means that there is no transformation: the result would be only motion again. Since music already embodies motion, as primary constituter and constituent of musical events, and since this mobility, as a spatializing entity, enters into musical form and determines it, musical form cannot be understood as mobile: mobility inheres in form, but form *itself* is not mobile. Various successive realizations of a polyvalent model stand in relation to one another as different snapshots of a Calder mobile.<sup>11</sup>

All of this goes to show that music, once realized, is indifferent to the question of whether it arises out of an ambiguous or unambiguous process, or whether it is bound to the text or arises from improvisation: the ambiguity of the process is not preserved in the music that emerges.

## V.

The broader consequences lead in two opposite directions.

On the one hand: "Do-it-yourself" composition tends, as an immediate consequence of its inherent reality, to lead to a slippage out of the scope of sound into the scope of pure action; music, as an unintentional and contingent thing, becomes the accompaniment to action and fuses with it into some kind of (absolutely anti-Wagnerian) Gesamtkunstwerk.

On the other hand: Through a dislocation of the starting point of the compositional method, the possibility arises once again that form is an intentional object. This means that relationships internal to a compositional process largely coincide with the relationships evident in the composed music; at the same time, this means abdicating any dispositions and manipulations made in accordance with directives set up in advance: the compositional process is not the main given, only the conception of the totality of the form, the imagination of the sounding music. Whichever method is adopted snuggles up to

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<sup>11</sup>Ligeti, loc. cit.



the projected musical outcome and is designed in accordance with the formal demands of this outcome. Such a compositional process is at the same time bound and free: the vision for the resulting form is free, but the particular method is bound to the requirements of the formal conception thus stipulated. With a tight interlocking of formal connections a process not unlike the serial method can work; only the point of departure lies in exactly the opposite direction. The primacy of the imagination of form entails that the callous types of the newest music can be avoided, since the unintended will no longer creep in: the conception can eliminate in advance any undesired models. In this way the lack of justification in today's compositional situation could be solved, for through the abolition of any kind of preconception we can freely indulge our musical fantasies of being unhitched and uncovered. It is only possible to avoid and fight the solidification and calcification of the new academicism by constantly devising new things: we can neither waffle nor stay at the place at which we have arrived without slipping into a self-delusion about the solid ground that does not at present exist.