

UDK 78.082.1Bergamo P.

Gregor Pompe

Filozofska fakulteta, Univerza v Ljubljani
Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana

Postmodern referentiality: playing with texts and contexts in Petar Bergamo's Second Symphony

Postmoderna referencialnost: Igra tekstov in kontekstov v Drugi simfoniji Petra Bergama

Prejeto: 3. september 2013
Sprejeto: 7. oktober 2013Received: 3rd September 2013
Accepted: 7th October 2013

Ključne besede: Petar Bergamo, modernizem, postmodernizem, tekst, kontekst, referencialnost, intertekstualnost

Keywords: Petar Bergamo, modernism, postmodernism, text, context, referentiality, intertextuality

IZVLEČEK

ABSTRACT

Drugo simfonijo (1967) hrvaškega skladatelja Petra Bergama je potrebno analizirati v kontekstu zagrebškega Bienala, torej v kontekstu prevlade modernizma, ki ga je skladatelj razumel kot slepo ulico. Simfonija je zasnovana kot niz citatov in aluzij, ki lahko sprožajo široko polje asociacije, povezanih z logiko toka glasbene zgodovine. Takšni postopki so podobni postmodernističnim tehnikam, zato je mogoče skladbo Bergama razumeti kot proto-postmoderno delo.

Petar Bergamo's *Second Symphony* (1967) must be analyzed in the context of Zagreb Biennale and therefore in the context of modernist domination which Bergamo understood as *cul-de-sac*. His *Second Symphony* is conceived as set of quotations and allusions that are able to trigger wide field of associations connected to the logic of music history. Such a procedure resemble postmodernist technique, therefore it is possible to understand Bergamo's symphony as a proto-postmodern work.

The questions of referentiality are predominantly connected with the acts of the reception and the interpretation. However it is possible to broaden this horizon – a kind of a “play” with referentiality can be found also at the level of production/composition: the composer deliberately chooses to position his work in the complicated net of different referential frames. Such procedures are typical of postmodern music but I would like to choose for my analysis a symphony of Croatian composer Petar Bergamo who is rarely brought in connection with postmodern praxis.

First of all we should contextualize and localize Bergamo's symphony both historically and geographically. Petar Bergamo finished his symphony in 1967 at the time of the second modernistic "wave". If the aim of the first "wave" was to ultimately "destroy" the last remnants of the traditional expressive gestures, and establish a new music paradigm stemming from the liberated sounds and isolated fragments of tones (punctualism) as was used in strict serialism (P. Boulez's total serialism) and radical chance operations (J. Cage's indeterminacy), the second one recognized the problem of nivellization of sound material (all the pitches, intervals, chords, dynamics and durations were of equal importance and distributed evenly, which made it hard to establish the specific character of composition in purely musical terms). Composers such as G. Ligeti, I. Xenakis and members of the so called "Polish school" (K. Penderecki, T. Baird, W. Lutosławski, K. Serocki) tried to establish a new musical "logic", which would be related to the immanent physical and acoustic characteristics of sound – it was the time of postserialism and sonorism (*Klangkomposition*¹).

But in Yugoslavia the course of stylistic changes occurred differently and there were several reasons for such a stylistic independence. First of all, the tradition of art music was not very strong, since national schools were established as late as in the late 19th Century. Without a strong tradition, there was no need to depart from it, as there was no strong opposition to the modernistic or avant-garde rejection of old norms and modernistic "negations" were not so radical. The need for fundamental changes in music syntax and material was further weakened by the new political system in Yugoslavia, established after 1945, which desired and partially demanded the "comprehensibility" and "optimism" of the socialist realism. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the most convenient style in the postwar years seemed to be the neoclassical one: with its roots in classism it made possible composing in traditional forms (symphonies, concertos, sonatas), which in view of the special historical situation were not often used until that time, and secondly, the seemingly unproblematic expression with an unstoppable metric pulse went hand in hand with the idea of socialist realism. However the most notable influence of the political situation was associated with a certain degree of cultural isolation and reservation towards contemporary modernistic trends in music. The first contacts with avant-garde music and modernism were made by Yugoslav composers attending the Warsaw Autumn Festival (established in 1956). The composers were not restrained from visiting the festival because of the geopolitical affinities with Poland. In this way Yugoslav composers "actually received contemporary musical thought second hand."²

The Zagreb Biennale, established in 1961, provided new impulses. In the sixties came the gradual thaw of political pressures and this helped re-establish connections with musical culture abroad. The cultural success of the Biennale is the context in which Bergamo conceived his symphony. At that time, he had finished his studies at the Belgrade Academy of Music and slowly began to establish himself as one of the leading Yugoslav composers. Yet he felt himself stuck in the dichotomy between the traditionalism of neoclassicism and modernist destruction. While the former offered a link to the missing tradition of the well-crafted works, the latter threatened to break the communication

¹ Hermann Danuser, *Die Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1984).

² Cvetka Bevc, "Glasba je zvoneča metafizika", *Slovenec*, June 11, 1992, 21.

chain between the composer and the broader spectrum of his audience with their uncompromising negative attitude towards the traditional musical language. He felt that both ways lead to a dead end. He saw the modernism of the Zagreb Biennale as “an organized breakthrough of the avant-garde”³, but at the same time he knew that he “must go forward, but with steps that would not pull one away from the ears of the listeners in order not to break something that has not yet started properly in this country.”⁴

Bergamo was aware of the shortcomings of the neoclassical style, but on the other hand he understood the new trends, which were presented at the Biennale as a kind of paradoxical totalitarianism: “Free thought was actually suppressed in the name of ‘freedom’.”⁵ Therefore he searched for his own musical language,⁶ his own way out of the crisis. The composition *Musica Concertante* (1962) can be regarded as his first step in that direction. The piece is written in a form of “double variations” – the material is derived from the piano composition *Variazioni sul tema interrotto* (1957) and the variation process is inverted with gradual crystallization of the theme. However, there is another ongoing variation process: the whole piece could be understood as a kind of “music about music.”⁷ Each variation could be regarded as a an exercise or study in a particular musical style, reaching back historically from Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky, Bartók, Schönberg to the sonorism of Ligeti, Lutosławski or Penderecki. Besides the purely musical play with contrasts, themes, rhythm, forms and orchestral colors Bergamo was evidently interested also in evoking stylistic allusions and stimulating reflection about musical evolution and historical development.

This idea was further developed in Bergamo’s *Second Symphony*. It is even possible to observe the symphony as a kind of calculated composer’s retreat from composition or renunciation of the power of the subject. At that level the composition could be compared with famous modernistic pieces such as Boulez’s *Structures Ia* (the logic of the composition is controlled via strict serial organization, the main material - the twelve-tone row - is “borrowed” from O. Messiaen or Cage’s *Music of Changes* (the material is distributed according to the “laws” of chance). Bergamo perceived the problem of the new musical material:

*When I was writing my Symphony no. 2, I realized that I did not have any disposable musical material, not even a brick, so to say. The destructors had taken everything that I would need to build the house which could be recognized by the human ear. The house can be built in many different ways, but it must have its own programme, doors, windows and floors. But I have lost the chance to build a house which would be used by someone. How was I to work then? How was I to establish communication? At that time I did not have any other choice so I used [...] the method of palimpsest, collage, a method with which I used parts of the beautiful temples from the past as the material for the house, which could be used by someone even today.*⁸

³ Branimir Pofuk, “Plovidba morem besmisla”, *Nedjeljna Dalmacija*, June 9, 1991, 20.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Melita Milin, “Prožimanje tradicionalnog i novog u posleratnoj srpskoj muzici” (PhD diss., University of Ljubljana, 1994), 154.

⁷ Ibid., 161.

⁸ Erika Krpan, “Radost od krhotina”, *Danas*, June 4, 1991, 55.

Bergamo's response to the crisis of material and style in the sixties was typically dichotomic: he wrote a big, traditional, cyclic form (symphony) and in that way he lined himself up with the great historical symphonic tradition, while on the other hand he refused to choose his own material and so seemingly stepped out of the composition as a subject, which could be regarded as a typical modernistic procedure. In that way, one can interpret Eva Sedak's remark that "Bergamo was among those who opposed the intolerance of the avant-garde of the sixties not with tolerance but with abstinence"⁹ not only word for word but also as a metaphor – Bergamo in fact reduced his compositional activities in the seventies but it seems more important that traces of some kind of "abstinence" can be recognized already in the use of "foreign" material in his *Second Symphony*.

* * *

The main compositional idea of the symphony is the uniformity: the whole cycle stems from the main theme, which is a typically Beethovenian concept. Bergamo takes this central theme from Stjepan Šulek's *Second Symphony*. The obvious fact that Bergamo also writes his *Second* is as important as the other reasons for borrowing this theme. Šulek's symphony is subtitled "Eroica" and thus clearly alludes to Beethoven's *Third symphony*. However, not only the symphony as a cycle, but also the theme itself is full of allusions. The analysis of the theme, which in the developmental section of the second movement of Šulek's symphony forms the basis for a fugato, and is at the same time a variation of the first theme of the movement, reveals a strange historical dichotomy: it contains the characteristic motif from Wagner's music drama *Tristan und Isolde* and at the same time introduces all twelve chromatic tones and thus the idea of the twelve-tone field. It seems as if Šulek's theme somehow demonstrates the historical development.



Example 1: Theme from the central section of the Šulek's *Second Symphony*.

This kind of historical permeation – ranging in Šulek's case between Wagner's leit-motivic work and touches of dodecaphony – precisely represents the idea of historical development that was often argued by Bergamo: "If the convention is about to change, it should be changed imperceptibly like society changes. And as a rule society does not change with revolutions."¹⁰ Bergamo is convinced that in order not to damage the fragile communicative link between the musical system (syntactic rules with their semantic potential) and the audience the historical development should not unwind in a sequence of abrupt revolutions but as a continuous evolution. Therefore "the new" should always be organically linked with "the old". This kind of evolution is represented in Šulek's symphony. Although the piece was written in 1946, in the post-war years, stretched between pre-modernistic silence (the new generation in Darmstadt was getting acquainted with

⁹ Eva Sedak, "Componere necesse est", *Danas*, June 10, 1986, 42.

¹⁰ Krpan, "Radost od ...", 55.

the pre-war tradition) and neoclassical optimism (Šulek's *Eroica* clearly commemorates the end of the Second World War), with its material and compositional procedures Šulek evokes not only allusions to Beethoven, Wagner and dodecaphony, but also some other associations. Especially the last movement abounds in stylistic quotations. The idea of the march theme that becomes louder and thicker in texture with each consecutive appearance seems to be taken from the first movement of Shostakovich's famous *Seventh Symphony*. The theme itself is modeled as in Shostakovich's work, and fanfare-like figures in brass suggest Respighi's influence (the finale of the *Pini di Roma*). Heroic figurations, heard just before the end of the symphony resemble a similar passage in the finale of Brahms' *Second Symphony* (again the number of the symphony seems to be of great importance), and the conclusion itself, with the pounding fourths in timpani, brings to mind the conclusion of Schumann's *Second* (note the number again) or even Mahler's *Third Symphony*.



a



b



c

Example 2: Allusions in Šulek's Second Symphony: a – Šulek's march theme compared to the theme from Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony, b – fanfare like figures in Šulek's symphony and Respighi's symphonic poem, c – figuration near the closure of Šulek's and Brahms' symphonies.

With the borrowed theme Bergamo inherited also all the allusions that are connected with Šulek's symphony, and made a few steps further: (1) contrary to Šulek, Bergamo does not make any motivic allusions, but he simply borrows the "old" material and (2)

he does not borrow only the thematic material but also some of Šulek's compositional procedures and "situations".¹¹ The material itself has lost the importance of the carrier of originality and aesthetic value – in the focus of Bergamo's work is a concept: his understanding of music and composition history. In that way, Bergamo achieves his central goal: his symphony communicates. Not with the aid of the traditional system of motivic work, thematic contrasts, harmonic tensions or formal shapes but via the semantic potential of allusions, reflections and the narrative "lustre" of his palimpsest folio.

The whole symphony should be analyzed according to its context (bearing in mind the time of the radical modernism of the third Biennale in Zagreb, the crisis of neoclassicism and the avant-garde's rejection of traditional musical "language"), whereas the traditional analysis of form and material represents only a starting point for deeper reflection about music history and its development. The play with texts and contexts is suggested already at the opening of the symphony. On a purely structural level, we can recognize the building-up of a twelve-tone chord, but a closer look reveals that the distribution of the tones of the chromatic chord follows the melodic logic of the beginning of Wagner's *Tristan*. This simple procedure represents the idea of the whole symphony: it namely merges Wagner's tonal material with the idea of total chromaticism. At the opening of the piece it is presented vertically and immediately afterwards follows the horizontal presentation in the form of a quotation of Šulek's theme.

Example 3: Wagner's motif, masked as a twelve-tone chord and exposition of Šulek's theme.

After another twelve-tone chord Bergamo does not only quote Šulek's theme, but also travesties Šulek's procedure of building the climax with the help of sequential fragmentation of the theme and the gradual shortening of durations. Nevertheless, Bergamo adds some of his own "spice": the entries of strings are mainly half a tone apart, so they slowly build up a kind of chromatic cluster. In that way, Šulek's theme with its allusions to Wagner and dodecaphony is brought in touch with the contemporary context. In

¹¹ Eva Sedak, "Skladatelj ne zna što se nalazi u crnoj kutiji", *Zarez*, March 30, 2000, 35.

other words: Bergamo plays with different texts (Wagner, Šulek) and contexts (traditional music, dodecaphony, modernistic sonorism). His musical narration springs from the collision between different – even disparate – texts and contexts.

The second movement, Scherzo, has a clear tripartite form ABA'. Its first part is built as a sequence of short fragments: *a* – strong pulsating rhythm (measures 1–9), *b* – Šulek's main theme distorted with the use of parallel seconds, *c* – segment with predominating steps in seconds and *d* – a circular chromatic movement, which is to play a prominent role in the third movement. It seems that Bergamo is inverting his play with texts and contexts: if in the first movement his main procedure is connected with the horizontal layering of different texts and folios this time the allusions spring from the consecutive clashes. A strong irony also pervades the middle section – “the trio” – where Bergamo quotes the theme from *Tristan*: the typical alienation arises from the fact that Bergamo uses Wagner's leit-motif idea in a strictly melodic fashion, although the motif in the primary text is essentially related to the famous harmonic formation known as the “Tristan chord”. Bergamo, in fact, musically analyzes this chord: its fragmentation in two parts (the rising sixth followed by the falling chromatics and the chromatic rising) confirms the notion that the Tristan chord actually has a polyphonic structure¹² and that it is built out of two leit-motifs: the motif of suffering (falling chromatics) and the motif of longing (rising chromatics). With these successions Bergamo gives us a new interpretation of the motifs that can be linked to the context of the sixties: modernism brought suffering (destruction of tradition) and then also longing for the reestablishment of music communication.

The third, slow movement brings another version of ironic blending or “parallel constructing”¹³ of different music worlds. Again, as in the first movement, the first part of the movement grows out of the idea of the thickening of texture, reaching the climax in a thick harmonic aggregate close to the vast cluster. The semantic potential stems from the fact that this gradation is built from the circular thematic movement, which Bergamo already presented in the scherzo (segment *d*) and is actually developed out of Šulek's motif from example 4. Another contextual clash is brought by the tam-tam, revealing strict control: the durations and number of attacks are clearly numerically controlled (12 attacks of 2 quavers, 9 attacks of 3 quavers, 6 attacks of 4 quavers etc.). After the climax come the insertion of Šulek's main theme and more “free” texture dominated by many halftone steps that can be found in all movements (the second part of the first movement, section *c* of scherzo and in the preparatory phrase of the march theme). A short reminiscence on the circular chromatic movement ends the movement, which is again without a pause glued to the next one – the finale.

The finale brings another “double variation” of Šulek's. This time the composer works with Šulek's formal model – like the middle section of Shostakovich's *Seventh Symphony* or the finale of Respighi's *Pini di Roma* (Ravel's *Bolero* also comes to mind) also the finale of Šulek's *Second Symphony* is conceived as a massive orchestral gradation of a march theme, consisting of two parts: “the preparatory” part with several ac-

¹² Heinrich Poos, “Die -Hieroglyphe”, in , ed. Hainz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn (München: Edition Text + Kritik 1987), 46–103.

¹³ Brian McHalle, (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

companying figures (chords with halftone steps, fanfare figures to which Bergamo adds the passages derived from the circular chromatic movement of the third movement) and with the main theme. Bergamo uses Šulek's model and fills it with some more of Šulek's material: Šulek's main theme. Ironically Bergamo's model comes even closer to the square periodicity (Šulek's relation between the preparatory phrase and the main theme is 17:11, whereas Bergamo with his relation 12:12 obeys the rules of strict symmetry). This kind of strictness is also preserved for the closure of the symphony – while Šulek introduces some semantic gestures by bringing back the main material of the slow movement, now modulated in a heroic major tonality, Bergamo just ends “drily”, fully respecting Šulek's formal model and his faithfulness to the economically chosen material of Šulek's theme.

* * *

Bergamo's symphony is not a simple collage, neither is it a palimpsest or sequence of quotations. He indeed uses all the procedures mentioned above, but they are not important *per se* – the narrative potential they inspire and the wide scope of the allusions evoked are far more important. Bergamo uses, travesties and plays with different texts (Wagner, Respighi, Shostakovich), which open further semantic potential in relation to the main material from Šulek's symphony (allusions to Beethoven, Brahms and Schumann). But such crossing of different texts only serves a higher level of play – play with contexts. By quoting Šulek's theme and the orchestral situations from his *Second Symphony*, Bergamo addresses the issues of Croatian music history, and raises questions about the abyss that separates the avant-garde from traditional neoclassicism. By doing that, he touches on the problems of originality and plagiarism as well.

However, such opening of reflective potential with the aid of music reveals stylistic procedures that are usually connected with postmodernism. Therefore the central question of the analysis of Bergamo's *Second Symphony* should be that of whether we are not dealing with a characteristic postmodern piece or even the first postmodern piece written even before L. Berio's famous *Sinfonia* (1969) or B. A. Zimmermann's *Requiem für einen jungen Dichter* (1969)? This dilemma becomes even more frustrating when faced with Bergamo's clear rejection of postmodernism which he values similarly to modernism: “But in the world of postmodernism, untalented people and dilettantes who believe they can compose make their way into the world of postmodernism because there seems to be no precondition for disciplined musical thinking.”¹⁴ In that way, postmodernism is not far away from modernism: its driving force is once again disorder, the incapability of creating a music system that would make communication possible. For Bergamo “postmodernism works in the gaseous state and since there is no charismatic individuality any more, gravitational forces do not develop: each particle of musical energy is independent – conditions for the rules of the game cannot be created.”¹⁵

When one first listens to Bergamo's work it is difficult to recognize different texts and contexts – the symphony is a homogenous work of art, at the level of the structural surface it does not bring a shock, and the play with different, “parallel” worlds is

¹⁴ Maja Stanetti, “Apstrakciju i avangardu režim je podržavao!”, *Večernji list*, August 16, 1998, 31.

¹⁵ Igor Brešan, “Sugestije iz zdenca prošlosti” *Slobodna Dalmacija*, August 17, 1999, 21.

difficult to recognize. Bergamo himself acknowledged this problem in describing his experiences with the reception of the symphony: “I expected focusing on the subject, opening of polemics, a social scandal, if you want, but instead of a feed-back I got only silence, a shot in the air.”¹⁶

At the same time Bergamo is painfully aware of the reasons for the silence of the reception: the absence of the awareness of the music history, especially national history. Bergamo plays with Šulek’s symphony in the context where the nation’s own music history, and therefore also Šulek’s *Second Symphony*, is practically unknown. This is why it is virtually impossible for a listener to recognize Bergamo’s travesty of Šulek’s work, his play with different levels and the rich scope of allusions. Bergamo is very precise in defining the context of Croatian music:

*A community living at a specific historical time and place must leave its own frequent imprints, if not, that social group does not exist. [...] We do not have our own music history. History is awareness of crossed path [...] But, a music history which would live in individuals and be part of the cultural heritage of the community – that we do not have. We are in that respect a nation without a history.*¹⁷

Such kind of unexpected receptive silence comes close to the problems of different referential frames: the public was not able to recognize the implicit referentiality, hidden in Bergamo’s symphony and they listened the symphony in an inadequate referential frame. Or more poetic: the public at the time of the first performance expected modernist piece, then realized that it was a kind of neoclassical symphony although, observed from our historical distance, what they really got, was a proto-postmodern work – complicated net of referentiality, a kind of rhizome.

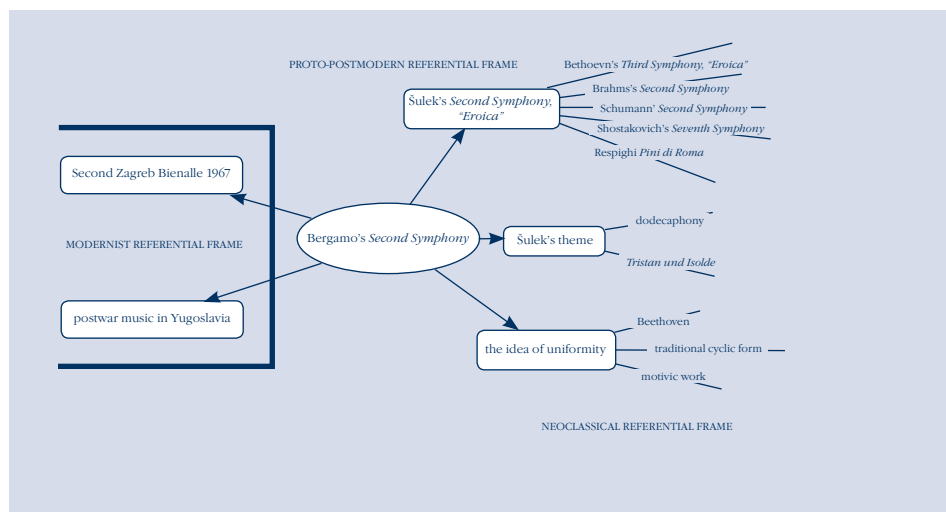


Table 1: The net of different referential frames in Bergamo’s Second Symphony.

¹⁶ Sedak, “Skladatelj ne zna ...”, 35.

¹⁷ Aleksandra Wagner, “S onu stranu povijesti”, *Oko*, June 28, 1990, 8

POVZETEK

Večinoma so vprašanja referencialnosti povezana z akti recepcije in interpretacija, toda analiza *Drugo simfonije* Petra Bergama omogoča odkrivanje »igre« med različnimi referencialnimi okvirji tudi na ravni zasnove/produkcije. Skladatelj je svojo simfonijo zasnoval leta 1967 za zagrebški Bienale, na katerem je v tistem času že prevladoval modernistični slog, ki pa ga je Bergamo že od vsega začetka občutil kot slepo ulico. S svojo *Drugo simfonijo* je skladatelj segel onkraj modernizma, vendar »preteklih« pokrajin ni »obiskal« brez jasne izkušnje sedanjosti – v svojo skladbo je jasno šifriral lastno dožemanje logike zgodovinskih preobračanj, ki po

skladateljevem mnenju ne poteka v smislu abruptnih revolucij, temveč kot evolucija predhodnega. Simfonija je zasnovana kot niz citatov in aluzij, ki pa so zelo jasno sprepleteni v semantično mrežo: Bergamo komunicira z občinstvom, toda ne zgolj na ravni znanega, preteklega glasbenega stavka, temveč predvsem prek nenavadnih referencialnih trkov med različnimi kontekstualnimi ravninami: med Šulekovo *Drugo simfonijo*, ki je že sama polna aluzij, neoklasicistično idejo glasbene poenotnosti in modernističnim okvirjem zagrebškega Bienala. Glede na zgodnjo letnico nastanka dela, bi bilo mogoče trditi, da je Bergamo s svojo *Drugo simfonijo* zasnoval zgodovinsko izstopajoče, proto-postmodernistično delo.