

UDK 78 Ligeti: Ramifications

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"RAMIFICATIONS"

"Hercules ... dixit: Hoc autem magisterium ex una primum radice procedit, quae post modum in plures res expanditur, et iterum ad unam revertitur..."¹

The composition "Ramifications" is one of the few within the full scope of musical production of the Hungarian composer György Ligeti that seem to defy a description in terms of being of "great consequence to his further development". It comprises compositional techniques, means, sound combinations and moods that can easily be recognized as typical of the period of Ligeti's musicianship in which it took rise. In this way "Ramifications", as one of the many possible variants of what has already been carried through in his string quartet No. II or in his 10 compositions for wind quintet, represents a well-proportioned retrospection of his searching and findings in this very period, or, in a manner of speaking, a felicitous, if somewhat collateral compilation. It is true that the microtonal divergences consistently carried through the bringing in of the 11-bar melody, and the coupling of the two basic types of motion characteristic of Ligeti's music (namely the static and the dynamic), all looked upon as elements that become discharged in this musical piece, seem to speak for "Ramifications" as being consequential to Ligeti's development. Nevertheless, neither the microtonal divergences nor the surfacing of the melody functions as something more than a part of the tendencies generally observable in this period of Ligeti's creative work: although not fixed upon in the notation, the microtonal divergences deliberately conceived of have been manifesting themselves even from the time of the "Requiem", while the gleams of unfinished melodic lines can be hinted at in the rather airy texture of his chamber works. Yet again, by dint of building up the climax of the musical continuum in the dynamic point of the static motion as the result of bringing together the immovable and the extremely movable, "Ramifications" is compressed into "ein Endpunkt in der Entwicklung von 'Dicht und Statisch' zu 'Durchbrochen und Beweglich'".² In this way it places itself in some kind of ultimate position which, however, is not a legitimate one because this very same development continues rounding off the musical production in the framework of which "Ramifications" itself took rise,

¹ "De transmutatione metallorum", in *Artis auriferae* II, p. 25, from C. G. Jung, *Psihologija i alkemija*, p. 303 (footnote), Zagreb, 1984.

² Ove Nordwall, G. Ligeti, *Eine Monographie*, Mainz, 1971, p. 109.

irrespective of its "ultimate" position. What is more, this throws it out of the legitimate course of Ligeti's development, which takes away any possibility of securing it any position whatsoever within the same. Be that as it may, "Ramifications" manages to achieve its own identity in the position of such "ultimate" point which is not ultimate at all, as well as in the position of a variant of what has already been accomplished, thus nearing the verge of compilation. For if compilation were all that it was about, i.e. if the meaning of the means applied together with their inseparable formulae of association remained the same when applied within the context of "Ramifications", it would indeed be a "collateral" work, made "en passant", and nothing else. However, by reducing the previously valid identicalness of technique and means in the process of constituting the form to a pure means which only creates the illusion of giving it a form of some kind (all this by way of a new method of integration), Ligeti's "Ramifications" evades the extra-imposed appearance of a mere compilation. Thus, by reaching a form of existence of its very own within the range of what has already been achieved, while representing no special stage in Ligeti's development but being a simple, unpretentious event on the side-lines of an emerging musical production, "Ramifications" breaks itself loose into a moment of sheer play of sounds.

The composition is written for strings or 12 string soloists. The orchestra is divided into two differently tuned groups: the first group has $a' = 453$ Hz, and the other $a' = 440$ Hz. The composition itself was written in 1968/69, and was dedicated to the memory of Natalie and Serge Koussevitzky (the manuscript is the property of the Koussevitzky Foundation).

By way of exchanging the sound structures whose intonational, rhythmical and metrical parameters in gradual motion make up a micropolyphonic reticulum closely packed together (a [bb. 1–34]; a_1 [bb. 54/55–95]) (Example No. 1), with a sound surface of long-lasting pitches (b [bb. 33/34–54]) (Example No. 2) and a sound field of reticular texture torn apart in radical progressions (c [bb. 95/96–106]) (Example No. 3), "Ramifications" appears to be realized in a kaleidoscopic form so characteristic of Ligeti. Still, it is not the same type of form as found in his string quartet No. 11 or in his 10 compositions for wind quintet where separate movements are formed through the construction of individual kinds of texture as a means. Being governed by simplicity, the various textures of "Ramifications" are contrariwise brought together into a direct interplay of energy, exposing themselves to one another freely. In this way they stop being closed in just their own formal qualities, and on this account they also stop functioning on the level of technique but are turned into a mere means to the purpose of constructing a completely new form.

As regards form, "Ramifications" offers itself to an explanation in terms of number of patterns: The arrangement of various kinds of its texture seems to define it as a rondo. If, however, various degrees of unification within the closely packed micropolyphonic texture should be taken for the result of the principle of variation, "Ramifications" shows itself to be a combination of variations and rondo, with rondo and the technique of variation overlapping while other textures are being brought into play as episodes. And again, being focused on the closely packed micropolyphonic texture, the entire piece seems to fit best into a pattern of binary form with a coda:

	A		A ₁		Coda
a		b	a ₁	c	
(1-33/34)		(33/34-54)	(54/55-95)	(94/95-110)	(110-119)

Example 1

3 4

I. Group (A Quarter-tone higher)

Vn. 1

Vn. 3

Vn. 5

Vn. 7

3 5 6

IV v ten. senza vibr. *ppp*

Vc. 1

II ten. senza vibr. *ppp*

Vn. 2

Vn. 4

Vn. 6

VI. 2

Vc. 2

Cb.

40 41 42 43 44

II. Group

Accelerando

* *marcato*, but long strokes of the bow (*quasi legato alla corda*), *sempre marcato*, aber lange Bogenstriche (*quasi legato alla corda*), *sempre*

Nevertheless, the actual development of the musical flow is proven to correspond to none of the above-mentioned patterns. The reason is that the episodes, no longer treated as at least relatively independent units, do not indicate any governance over the musical flow either. Taken in the character of a prolongation of the intentions set forth in the closely packed micropolyphonic texture which, as it were, is the sole place of incubation for the whole of the musical action, they have been reduced to an additional charge in the process of straining (*b*) and unstraining the dynamic arc of the whole. Irrespective of all patterns and models, the musical action is made to progress through a transformation of the linear conception of the structure into the vertical and vice versa (Example No. 4), with its point of intersection — which, as if in the quadrature of the circle, gravitates towards a sublimation of all the coordinates in space and time (both those successive and simultaneous, progressive and revertible, static and dynamic) and, when the coda is not taken into account, falls in with the golden section of the composition — thus creating a new binary form, with one section comprising textures *a b a₁* (1-66/68) and the other *a₁ c* (66/68-110).

This transformation of linear conception into vertical and vice versa can in this sense be labelled as a formative process: a pair of layers shifted in canon form make for the vertical structure in a process of intonational, metrical and rhythmical levelling off, while on the contrary the vertical conception tends towards the independence of individual lines differentiating them gradually in a process of self-stratification as regards dynamics, ways of sound production, metre, rhythm, and intonation. The transformation itself is based on the identity of both simultaneous and successive actions regarding pitches, metrical phrases and rhythmical schemes, this identity being organized on the principle of symmetry as well as on the principle of repetition: in the former case it results in linear while in the latter in vertical structures. However, in the view of the fact that the two principles are kept being applied at the same time, the type of texture is determined by the predominance of either principle within the three above-stated parameters. Consequently the textures turn out to be in fact both vertical and horizontal, one-way progressive and revertible, static and dynamic, all at the same time; nevertheless, not for a moment, except in the point of intersection, are they identical within both successive and simultaneous actions in all three parameters but in building up and breaking down their identity. It is in this way that the linear conception proceeds to take in vertical structures and vice versa.

In this sense, the first section is realized in two lines with a canon shift between the two groups, so that the structural changes in the second line chime in with a constant delay with relation to those of the first line, thus providing for the successive-ness of the musical action. By intensifying the principle of repetition the lines themselves are fashioned in the manner of an outflow of horizontal complexes into vertical ones. On the other hand, the vertical conception is made possible by the simultaneity of the musical action in both groups while the structure itself has been devised as divarication of identicalness and the principle of repetition, and as a transition of vertical complexes into horizontal ones.

The point of interchange and intersection of the linear and vertical conception is reached by levelling off the musical interplay between the two groups and by effectuating the identity of the vertical and horizontal axes in all three parameters. This levelling off is therefore identical with the point of intersection of both horizontal and vertical conception, which is vertical by force of identity of all its parts and horizontal by force of each part having a ductus of its own regardless of the vertical identity. In this way this conception keeps pervading and uniting both the simultaneous and the

Example 4

66 67

I. Group (A Quarter-tone higher)

Vn. 1
(sempre *pp*)

Vn. 3
(sempre *pp*)

Vn. 5
(sempre *pp*)

Vn. 7
(sempre *pp*)

Vi. 1
(sempre *pp*)

Vc. 1
(sempre *pp*)

II. Group

Vn. 2
(cresc. poco a poco)

Vn. 4
(cresc. poco a poco)

Vn. 6
(cresc. poco a poco)

Vi. 2
(cresc. poco a poco)

Vc. 2
(cresc. poco a poco)

Cb.
(cresc. poco a poco)

successive, the vertical and the horizontal, and thus gradually creates a circular while at the same time static and irritating motion. Through this motion the linear development has been brought to a stop as if in a process of secluding itself in self-sufficiency; the lines have stopped functioning as such and proceed to pass into the category of a sound complex; the horizontal mode of structuring the texture changes over to the vertical. At the same time, by use of different levels of dynamics — piano in the first and crescendo to fortissimo in the second group — the focal point is differentiated into two sound complexes, starting in this way a stratification of a uniform sound and tending to impart independence to its strata as individual lines.

In a manner of implicit development, the linear structure (in itself and through itself) provides for the process, the development of the musical continuum. Contrariwise, the vertical structure remains static, being related to nothing else than to its own self after its loss of function. However, by disintegration of dynamism within the linear coordinates and statics within the vertical coordinates both the vertical and horizontal conception and the vertical and horizontal structures within become interpermeable, and what is more, they start a process of confirmed intergrowth both making possible and petrifying the development of the musical action and form: devising progression on the level of one parameter while at the same time creating regression on the level of another, Ligeti keeps building up the form in a spiral motion from micro- to macrostructure by closing up one element of form at a lower arm of the spiral and evolving, as a distortion of the former, some element farther up which in itself is never complementary yet comes to acquire the function of a complement at the next level of form. On the other hand, despite the unidirectional character of the process, the form which is governed by this same process turns out to be revertible: spreading out in concentric circles from a central point, the disposition of its segments and their function within the form proves to be complementary. — As in the hall of mirrors, the selfsame concept — the overlap of the simultaneous and the successive — is thus carried through from the smallest detail of the structure to the entirety of the form, from the centre to the outer boundaries. Coda, as the ultimate distortion of revertible proportioning, seems to confirm such notion, though on a level which transcends the structure of the composition, with reference to its merging with the silence after the fade-away, to its merging with the harmony of the spheres, with the very structure of the world from which it has arisen, thus bringing the formative notion of the entire composition back to where it has started from — to the actual unity of space and time.

Thinking of the microtonal divergences which impart "impurity" to the sound, Ligeti once wrote in his commentary on a rendition of this piece of his, "Verwesung ist in die Musik eingezeugen. 'Ramifications' ist ein Beispiel dekadenter Kunst".³ Be that as it may, this remark would perhaps not refer as much to the "impurity" of sound as to the inexhaustibility of the play with the distorting mirrors in the infinity of its own reflections: having arisen within a tradition which thinks of music as a self-contained universe and finding its finality through realization in the structure of the world, "Ramifications" proceeds to make this tradition, such as it is, final as well.

³ Ibid., p. 113.