

Sator Arepo Tenet Opera Rotas
or else:
Symmetrical Constructions in Webern's Rows ("Reihe")

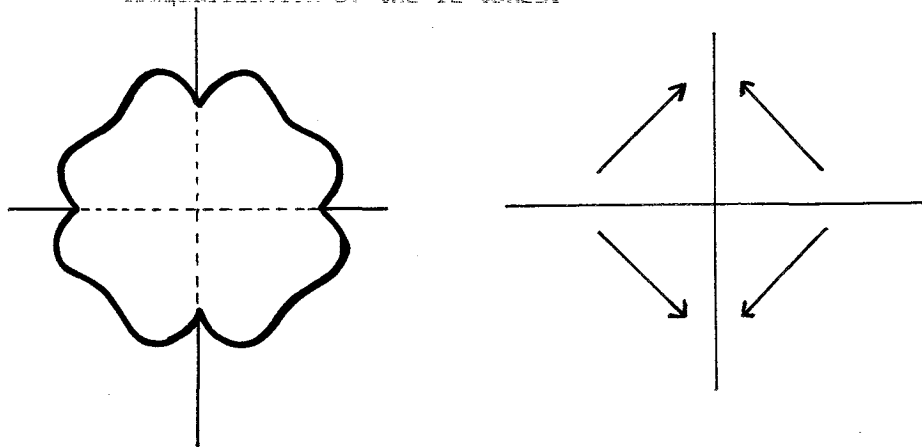
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In case of stereoscopic compositions--be the object of survey natural or artistic composition--time is available to recognize the formal structure. (Let's think it over that a building can be walked around several times and from various directions.) And conversely, the formal inquiry at so called "temporal" compositions--such as musical ones--is more difficult: the composition itself "moves forward" in time and at the first hearing--without any help--only our vanishing acoustic remembrance can give a basis.

Thus the repetition can be considered as a primary form-creative factor. This helps the most the orientation. The larger form-unit is repeated, the easier recognition of the structure is: usually the "A-B-A", "da capo" structure can be perceived at first hearing.

Extremely difficult is the identification of the temporal progression if it is turned backwards. Perhaps Machault's short composition is the first "bravos-piece" of that sort: "Ma fin est mon commencement--et mon commencement est ma fin" (My end is my beginning--and my beginning is my end). It was followed by many enigma-canons of Flamish authors and the complicated polyphonic pieces of baroque music. In certain respect Webern wants to belong to this many-centuries-lasting musical progress, this is proved by his lectures in which he asserted that the birth of the "new Vienna school" was inevitable and this development was regular by the usage of the 12 chromatic degrees and by the coequalisation of the 12 tones.



The row, namely "Reihe" is a high level of musical organization. Webern has pointed out that the constraint is useful in the interest of creating organic connections and at the same time it is exactly the constraints which can set free the thematic invention. He made clear the double-root of composing, based on the rules of the row, drawing attention to the fact that the new Vienna school was led by the same intention when used the 12 degrees of chromaticism in equal value, which sort of intentions occurred earlier in connection with the more various usage of individual scale-degrees.



This rule corresponds to the law of the great melodic styles. It's enough to think of Palestrina's art, in which the prohibition of overusing of certain notes played determinant role. The same tendency is valid in the "harmonic" styles, too, because in the classicism the three functions didn't do other than exhausted fully the potentialities of 7 note diatonic scale. The diatonic row wasn't "found out" but it was discovered; similarly, the composition with the 12 chromatic notes is the result of a "natural order".

It can be easily believed that the method with the row binds in the composer, because—according to the row—a predestination would be established and, for example in a work with text it becomes incidental that for which syllable of the text which notes is associated. This question must be cleared to a certain extent.

Webern's method to create comprehensive connections rich to find abundant the possibilities of the row. Moreover, there are plenty of examples that he willingly narrowed the possibilities in order to create rigorous relationships.



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We have to emphasize: although Webern explained the composition method of the new Vienna school, he didn't do it because of his technicist bias but he wanted to prove the justification of his new style.

On the one hand, the content played the primary role, on the other hand, he realised that the content can be transmitted only through a form which adequately for it.

This consciousness allows me to examine Webern's works from formal and structural standpoints.