

Research Academy on “Munich” Mozart Piano Sonatas – Orpheus Institute – 3-13.07.2023: Report and Questionings about the Practice of Ornamenting and Improvising on Early Keyboards as a 21st Century Pianist

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ABSTRACT – The research was carried around these three focal points: 1) Authenticity: I replaced the composer-performer as part of an aesthetic whole, instead the instrument being the focal point of the experiments. I questioned the sense of “authentic” performance and represented the historical context of the works. 2) (Re)Shaping Interpretation: I deepened the understanding of the musical works by exploring the specificities of the clavichord and the Stein fortepiano. I questioned the expressive architecture of the chosen musical pieces in the light of *Empfindsamkeit*, rhetoric and good taste. 3) Artistic exploration: focusing on Mozart’s 6 “Munich” Sonatas and C. P. E. Bach’s 6 *Varied Sonatas Wq. 50*, I studied the ties between the musical score, the sound complexes and the instrument itself. I explored the notion of improvisation and variation in the classical era and questioned my relation to it as modern performer.

Keywords: early keyboards, improvisation, authenticity, performance practice.

1 Introduction

The research academy on early instruments, organized and hosted by the Orpheus Institute (Ghent, Belgium) and directed by Tom Beghin¹, Benjamin Steens², Juliane Brandes³ and Anastasios Zafeiropoulos⁴, took the form of ten days of intense work involving coaching, seminars, readings, research and composition. In contrast to a vertical teacher-participant transmission, the emphasis was on experimentation with all the trial and error that it implies. Experimentation was approached from multiple angles: that of the composer probing the limits of good taste in his practice of variation, that of the performer exploring the possibilities and personalities of the instruments made available, that of the researcher questioning the way in which period texts and reference treatises in the art of playing the keyboard resonate with the artist of the 21st century. Despite my considerable experience as a concert pianist, I must confess that I felt like a novice in front of these two instruments, which I had never played before. In the space of less than ten days, I had to master each one’s expression, so as to be able to present it to the public at the two concerts organized at the end of the research, as well as to take up the challenge of a professional recording session, audio and video, during which my version of Mozart’s *Sonata KV 282*, including the ornaments and variations composed during the research, would be “engraved.”

The primary idea of this research was to question not only the musical text as an evolving material when subjected to the practice of variation, but also our relationship to it, as performers of the 21st century, and to the necessary re-evaluation of the modern concept of authenticity. Indeed, making changes to the musical text to serve an expressive purpose was widespread, acceptable and a mark of great artistic merit among pianists until the beginning of the 20th century. The overriding objective was to convey emotions through the use of an effect, which could be subject to the codes of rhetorical expression in order to underline a particular idea, or obey only the pure pleasure of the ear through the search for sound colour. From the first half of the twentieth century onwards, a literal, even pious, attitude towards the score gradually developed. This saw an aesthetic shift in musical thinking from the instant to the whole, from the descriptive to the analytical, following a structuralist trend that was penetrating the arts and society at the same time. Music came to be defined, in Hanslick’s words, as an autonomous, hierarchical language, and no longer merely an intermediary between listener and feeling in the highest sense of the term.

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Towards the end of the twentieth century, however, a new idea began to emerge, opposing the notion that the exact reproduction of the musical text could only transcribe the composer's wishes. The notion of interpretative creativity, which had remained undefined and even detrimental to the need for exact reproduction of the musical text, had to be put back at the centre. Leech-Wilkinson points out that a listener untrained in the science of music will not hear through the prism of a definition of formal structure by thematic material or harmonic progression, but will grasp each musical moment as carrying an emotional dimension that he or she will apprehend subjectively in the light of his or her own feelings and experience⁵. This relationship between structuralism and emotion is summed up in the following sentence: "The performer can make audible a certain form of analytic structure by giving it emotional force through expressive means; on the other hand, those moments of expressive tension that may have been arbitrarily defined by the performer tend to appear audibly as bearers of a structural signifier"⁶. Music thus exists on several levels and manifests itself in several forms: as an idea within the mind of the composer and performer, in the score, in the sound material produced by the performance, and in its reception by the listener. Communication between the two entities, composer/performer and listener, can only be achieved through the sound material that results from the performance, and not by reading the score alone.

2 The question of musical text

Clearly, ornamental variation is an important element in Mozart's initial conception of each melody, even before he understood how these melodies would fit into a final composition. This is ornamental thinking, as it is part of a natural expressive rhetoric imbued within the creative process. Ornamental language and its various formulations of affect are intimately associated with Mozart's creative syntax. In both C. P. E. Bach and Mozart, variations are often added to only half of each phrase at a time. This procedure not only preserves the intelligibility of the discourse and makes it easier to memorize, but may also help the audience to differentiate between the original material and its ornamented version. The interpreter-improviser must then choose one of two attitudes: to add density to the original material by using ornamentation as a superimposed element, acquiring a certain form of independence as a musical object – it then asserts itself as a signifier in its own right within the structure – or to support an increase in melodic density, the ornamentation then being at the service of the primary expressive formulation and subordinate to the structure established by the original melodic contour. Adding ornamentation to fast movements can prove complex, as the original melodic contour of these movements, by virtue of its inherent virtuosity, already tends to unfold around ornamental figures. The question of the acceptable degree of variation then arises, and we need to determine where to draw the line between ornamentation cantered on the original material – in this respect, it may be judicious to opt for an obliteration of substance (removing material to add theatricality) – and a disjunction of the latter leading to the creation of new melodic material, which would then risk tipping our creation into the genre of paraphrase. This issue is particularly acute in the first and third movements of *Sonata KV 282*.

2.1. Score and authenticity in the practice of variation

As Schenker states, the score does little to indicate the composer's interpretative intentions, but rather contains the effect he wishes to achieve; "this effect then justifies all the means the performer may use to achieve it"⁷. The performer's overall image of the work is built around several factors: the influences of other performers or mentors who have nurtured his or her artistic personality, as well as the physiognomy and path of the harmonic-melodic complex in relation to the emotional perception of the structure. When the performer plays the work, he evolves within his own preconceived image of it, which is also constantly evolving. The work does not exist on the score any more than it does during performance: at the moment of its creation, its different dimensions, structural and expressive, conceived as an interconnected whole, coexist simultaneously in the composer's mind; during performance, these aspects acquire a temporal dimension through their sequential aural presentation. The truth of the work, *i. e.* the instantaneous perception of its globality and profound meaning, cannot be reached more easily either by interpretation, which unties and projects it into time, or by the score, whose partial and limited notation cannot fully express all the composer's wishes. The processes of composition and interpretation need to be brought closer to those of improvisation. The composer, as much as the performer, faces multiple choices and makes decisions among a number of possibilities offered to them from moment to moment; thus, what is definitively engraved on the score is the representation of something that could have been different, and whose surface will take on different aspects at each of its sonic incarnations during performance.

⁵ Leech-Wilkinson, "The Changing Sound of Music".

⁶ Leech-Wilkinson, "The Changing Sound of Music", 11.

⁷ Schenker, *The Art of Performance*, 78.

2.2. The case of 6 Varied Sonatas by C. P. E. Bach and the transmission of affects

The music of the 6 *Varied Sonatas Wq. 50* by C. P. E. Bach that I studied as a reference point in that research on Mozart's practice of variation, shows in a modern way the means offered by the keyboard to apprehend and transcribe emotions. The search for the expression of feeling is embodied in a lilting, sometimes dreamy character, often with an inner eloquence. The *Empfindsamkeit*⁸, whose influence was to be felt well beyond the 18th century, and which was to be one of the essential ferments of Romanticism, is the underlying tenor of the musical gesture: dynamic ruptures, the specific use of silences, the detail given to phraseological sculpture and desinences, sudden bursts of energy, the choice and judicious placement of dissonances, and the recurrence of the harmonic chiaroscuro of tension/relaxation, act as a permanent revival factor, to translate in the richest and most elaborate way possible the fluctuations of a soul troubled by the ebb and flow of passions, without detracting from the coherence of the whole. Here, the modulating naturalness of spoken language determines the melodic inflections and rhythm. Herein lies the substance of the art of variation. The easy beauty of the themes, their development and variations, all revolve around the idea of balance in all things, inherent in the notion of good taste conveyed by the figure of the *gentilhomme*. Although the expression of feelings and passions is at the heart of the musical gesture pursued by C. P. E. Bach, in his *Versuch über die wahre Art, das Clavier zu spielen* (1753) he warns us against excessive sentimentalism. Intelligibility in the practice of variation and in instrumental expression serves the immediacy and naturalness of message transmission, as should be the language of the *gentilhomme*: direct but complex, rich but comprehensible, using metaphors, images, allegories and oxymorons to embellish and serve the idea, without ever obscuring it. In this respect, the case of C. P. E. Bach's 6 *Varied Sonatas* is a veritable rhetorical manual. It provides the performer with the keys to controlled, framed expressivity. These written ornaments and variations also enable a more interior approach to the aesthetic and technical world of the composer/performer. This raises not only the question of the role and function of ornaments in the sight-reading culture of the time, but also that of good taste in the transmission of affects to the audience and the way in which the artist communicates with it.

3 The question of pianistic gesture

During the research, playing this chosen corpus of works on specific instruments (Clavichord 1760, Stein Fortepiano 1786) was, as far as I was concerned, a challenge from a purely interpretative point of view. It proved necessary to re-evaluate my gestural approach, shaped by practice on the modern piano, in order to draw from the instrument the expressive trajectory I wished to convey. The dimension of pianistic gesture hinges on complex mechanisms: indeed, my interpretative personality is defined by the interaction between the instrument's sound properties, my own physical capacities and my adopted choices. The physical aspect of my instrumental playing is made up of bodily reflexes acquired during practice, whose application/realization is a function of the expressive trajectory imagined upstream in my mind. My interpretative choices derive from the combination of these physical reflexes, which respond in real time (and are therefore constantly re-evaluated) to the specific situation of instrument/room/audience, and from a creative thought that, while nourished by my experience and knowledge of the repertoire, style (inseparable from the notion of taste) and traditions, is personally defined as a succession of trajectories on a small or large scale, trajectories that have a direct influence on my means of sound production (articulation, bodily gestures) and on the parameters of production (tempo, dynamics, colour...).

⁸ Sensitive style (t. n.).

3.1. The clavichord and the role of gestures in shaping a relevant interpretative trajectory



Fig. 1. 1760's Clavichord, Joris Potvlieghe, Orpheus Institute.

In the 18th century, the clavichord was considered the ideal instrument for learning keyboard and affects. Sound production is comprised of three specific moments: impact; control of note duration; control of string tension (timbre quality). First of all, we need to be aware of the point at which the sound is created, so as to be able to develop an appropriate gesture. To familiarize myself with the instrument, I worked on each finger, falling freely on neighbouring notes, in order to feel the bodily involvement necessary to obtain a pleasant sound. The phrasing of the sound is achieved through constant attention and presence. This instrument forces us to follow harmonic expression in the most immediate and refined way to connect ideas. It's all about the right balance of weight: too much weight on the fingerboard leads to a distorted sound due to the additional pressure of the metal tangent on the string. The natural tendency inherited from modern piano playing is to push down to the bottom of the keyboard, seeking relaxation in the fall to the bottom of the key; on the clavichord, however, it is essential to practice a kind of rebound by lightening the weight just after the sound appears, to preserve the beauty of the resonance after the attack. In addition, it is necessary to maintain the connection to the hand's centre of gravity, which becomes particularly important in complex or heavily altered passages. For this reason, certain fingerings are sometimes specific to the clavichord. To obtain a strong sound, the attack should be rapid and the weights released after the sound. As there is no escapement on the clavichord, it is impossible to lose contact with the fingerboard. Vibrato should begin after the sound has been produced, but not immediately afterwards, so as not to give the impression of falseness. This technique enhances emotional expression.

Benjamin Steens' opinion: Instrument making evolved so rapidly from the end of the 18th century onwards that it is necessary to specify in advance what type of "clavichord" we are talking about. In this case, we're talking about a clavichord such as the Silbermann described by Ch. Burney: a large, five-octave instrument (like pianofortes) and unbound. Unbound clavichords appeared around the same time as Cristofori's first pianos. They became, for much of Europe, the keyboard instrument of reference for the solo repertoire due to their tonal and expressive qualities, before being gradually dethroned by the advent of the pianoforte. More specifically, it is the cantabile playing qualities offered by the clavichord that are prized, both musically and pedagogically. The bound clavichord is also appreciated by amateurs and has been used since the Middle Ages as an accompaniment instrument for singers or a working instrument for organists. The basic technique learned through clavichord playing will long remain the benchmark for starting out and learning the proper art of touching the keyboard. Indeed, until the first half of the 19th century, a large number of sources specify the pedagogical value of clavichord work. The musical gestures required to play the clavichord and its repertoire form the basis of any good "*sangbar und zusammenhängend spielen*" technique, for any keyboard from the late Middle Ages to the early 19th century. With the advent and development of the fortepiano, the creativity of composers and keyboardists progressively exploited new inventions in instrument making, developing new textures in writing and new musical gestures.

3.2. Some specific musical and pianistic gestures associated with the Stein pianoforte



Fig. 2. 1786 Stein Pianoforte, Chris Maene, Orpheus Institute.

The gesture needs to be more concentrated than on the modern piano. Everything is more intimate and immediate. Control over the connection between the phalanges and the carpus is fundamental. *Pianissimo* must be sought through complete relaxation and release of weight. Care must be taken to avoid the mannerism that can result from exaggerated contours due to an overloaded expressive will. The notion of time is malleable, and depends on the musical discourse. We create our own time, and the perception of its coherence through its variability is intimately linked to the dramaturgy. Fingering must follow phraseology, and it's a good idea to conceive of all phrase groups in terms of the natural succession of fingers. The gesture used to refocus the hand is often correlated with the breathing required before the phrase. It's more important to sculpt phraseology even if it means using a risky fingering, and only breathing in the gesture will allow this to happen. While my approach to the keyboard is shaped by the modern piano, I found it difficult to get used to seeking out the sensation of double escapement and the comfort it provides, not only in controlling fast passages but also in the muscular relaxation it brings when making contact with the bottom of the fingerboard, particularly during the arm-fall gesture. As the Stein keyboard action is extremely light and reactive, the gestural approach to the support points must be carried out with care to avoid inappropriate accents. Consequently, pianists accustomed to the inertia of a modern action must be extremely attentive to the conciseness of their gestures, to their expressive scope and to the sonic purpose they pursue. In this respect, care must be taken not to exceed the Stein's sonic capabilities. You have to listen outwards to ensure that the sound does not lose its intelligibility and theatricality. The registers are naturally balanced, and we must not apply the reflexes of the modern piano, where projection, especially melodic projection, is at the heart of the pianistic gesture. The notion of balance between the hands is fundamental. Harmonic balance comes naturally when the left hand is brought to the fore. You have to get rid of thinking the musical space in terms of bel canto concept associated with the Romantic piano, where the bass disappears to make way for the melody carried by the right hand and projected in an operatic manner. Here, everything is concentrated in a more intimate way, bringing the audience to itself. The differentiation of forte/piano contrasts should not be shown in absolute terms: in the forte, for example, the intensity of the relationship between the notes is more important than the speed of attack or weight.

In my creative process for the various repetitions of *Sonata KV 282*, I have chosen to adopt a relatively codified approach. Following the model set out by C. P. E. Bach in his volume of the *6 Sonatas*, I opted to set down on paper the entire musical text of the repeats. Prepared on a modern piano before my arrival at Orpheus, and striving to be as faithful as possible to the Galant stylistics of improvisation, I realized, in contact with the Stein fortepiano, the extent to which certain figures were nonetheless attached to a later aesthetic universe, notably in the use and characterization of registers, but above all in the formulation and development of new motivic ideas from the original material, more akin to a form of paraphrase. In agreement with the research team, we decided to keep this particularity, but I modified the figures that showed a sonic incompatibility with the Stein's expressive capacities.

Benjamin Steens' opinion: We see the clavichord, the keyboard of reference for the work of C. P. E. Bach, Haessler and Benda, gradually evolving towards the Stein and Walter pianoforte for the work of Haydn and Mozart. This shift in interest from one instrument to another is also accompanied by a change in the writing style. In my opinion, this evolution is more in the realm of texture than melodic development. An example of this is the widespread use of Alberti basses, more appropriate for the pianoforte than the clavichord, or the generalization of more harmonic continuation writing. The greatest change in the musical gesture of the pianoforte is certainly the invention of the "damper machine". Initially intended as a "Pantaleon playing register" (which already existed on certain clavichords), this mechanism, transformed on the pianoforte into a toggle and then a pedal, opened up new possibilities for modelling the world of sound.

Although the musical gesture was initially relatively similar between the Silbermann clavichord and the Stein pianoforte, it would later diverge with the rapid evolution of pianoforte types.

4 Questions to Tom Beghin, Juliane Brandes, Benjamin Steens and Anastasios Zafeiropoulos

Christophe Alvarez: *What expressive automatisms, shaped by modern practice, do we convey? Are we imitators or creators?*

Anastasios Zafeiropoulos: In a world where the piano tradition has been shaped, even dominated, by recordings, competitions and the quest for projection and homogeneity of sound on a very powerful, stable and heavy instrument, in a highly canonized repertoire, historically informed interpretation invites us to reconsider our standards. Even among early music keyboardists, informed interpreters and authentic creations are rare, for creative minds are constantly transforming, transmitting, transcending. In this sense, simply reading music with our hands on a historical instrument – reading didactic music, entertainment music, treatises and fantasies – from the sources is an activity that never ceases to enrich the open mind (*i. e.* one that neither seeks nor wants to adhere to anything), to inform the ear and sensitive fingers, and to give a sense of accomplishment, both forming good taste and forging a tradition of understanding music as practice in our highly intellectual world. This process is timeless: we are always imitating and creating, as one cannot contradict the other in an open mind. Instead of seeking novelty and originality, we should seek to express our singular identity in our quest for historical performance. This is the only path to authenticity.

C. A.: *How do we improvise in the classical style, as pianists of the 21st century, and to what extent can we qualify our creation as authentic?*

Tom Beghin: To me the crucial click we need to make is to not only worry about what we play, but also think about whom it is we are playing. When we play "repertoire", we always have an idealized and hierarchized agenda. We practice, try to refine our delivery of a piece as best we can, with the goal of walking onto a concert stage and playing for an audience. Historically, however, goals would have been different and the process was much less linear. Sight-reading, for example, was a complete musical experience in itself that happened in the moment with no sense of needing to practice to make it better still, except to practice to increase your sight-reading skills, regardless of the piece at hand. Even just having a lesson, playing for your teacher as the highpoint of the day or week, would count as the equivalent of what we today like to idealize or formalize.

So, playing scores, including taking the risk of including ornamentation and expanding, paraphrasing, or even deviating from the text, becomes a reflection of whom we decide to be as musicians. What we've learnt over the past week is that a practice of "varying repeats" allows us to demonstrate our skills and personalities as musicians in ways that are much more individualized than one would expect from what we call a "classical" repertoire. The big question now is whether these differences – always to be mitigated under the concept of "good taste" – would become smaller as we were to spend more time together and develop ever more expertise in mid-to-late eighteenth-century style and performance, or on the contrary whether these individual differences would have been more outspoken among that historical generation of post-baroque, pre-classical performers than we might have assumed. The problem is that we constantly uphold the highest standards, we study the improvisations of musicians like C. P. E. Bach or Mozart and almost want to be as good as them, but there's a whole range of possibilities that remain unexplored. How would a talented young performer-composer have sounded when discovering a Mozart sonata, or how did Mozart really sight-read and/or improvise on the score of a distinguished colleague? What if instead of trying and playing Mozart in the most "stylistically correct" manner possible, we explore what it means to adopt a persona of composer-performer ourselves?

Juliane Brandes: Do we live in an age of reproduction? This would mean that we are merely "copying" something when we improvise or compose in historical styles. The degree of adherence to a historical style could certainly materialize another question that doesn't have that much bearing on this topic. In my opinion, anything goes (I'm a radical pluralist), but we have to be honest: as in the case of art forgery, there's a difference between telling the audience "this is a real Mozart" or "this is my piece which is written in a late 18th century style" or "this is a Mozart piece, embellished as people might have done in the early 19th century". Ultimately, if we're aware of what we're doing and don't lie or pretend we're doing anything else, anything is possible and artistically interesting. It doesn't matter when this awareness begins, it can also happen afterwards: "I like my artistic product, but what's in it, what have I done to it now?" In the end, every historically informed composition/improvisation is an informed guess that can be answered as correctly as possible, or can simply be seen as a musical experiment that plays with historical idioms.

C. A.: *Are there any rhetorical figures attached to a particular instrument? How do the effects conveyed by these figures remain relevant when switching from clavichord to pianoforte or vice versa?*

Tom Beghin: The question of transferability of rhetorical figures from one instrument to another is intriguing. Let's narrow it down indeed to a Stein fortepiano and a clavichord. But first, what do we mean by rhetorical figures? With the risk of becoming technical here, one must distinguish between what rhetoricians call "figures of speech" and "figures of thought." The former depends on specific linguistic formulations – they're close to what Marpurg would call "mechanical figures", like repetition, or accumulation. The latter on the contrary thrive on meaning – say when expressing emotions, or when, for example, pretending to be in doubt. It's what in music we like call "affective". If we go down to the level of phonetics, we can say that the instruments we used – three Saxon-style clavichords and three copies of a Stein fortepiano – still operated more or less within the same aesthetic world. On the other hand, we know that C. P. E. Bach at first was skeptical about the "new" fortepiano but that over the years he too embraced them. The quick and responsive action of Stein's pianos may have been a factor here. It is interesting how in Bach's explanations of how to realize certain ornaments changed from the first edition of his *Versuch...* in 1753 to the second one in 1787, and we hypothesized that the different behaviour of a fortepiano – and its increased presence by 1787, also in Bach's life – may have been responsible.

So, although keyboardists moving between clavichord and fortepiano could still operate using more or less the same expressive vocabulary, it should also be obvious that one's increased dependence on the specific affordances of an instrument would eventually also reshape one's means of expression. Again, think Mozart, who in the early 1780s continued to rely on pianos, moving from Stein to Walter. What I'm implying here is that Mozart's language, including his use of "rhetorical figures", did indeed change from those early "*Munich*" Sonatas that we explored. I'm a strong believer in the centrality of the technologies of instruments and musicians' direct interaction with them: that's where musical expression starts and ends. Going back to rhetorical figures, then: yes, certain "mechanical" figures may be said to live across instruments, just like the principle of rhyming remains more or less the same across different languages, but the affective ones rely all the more on instrumental affordance: *Tragen der Töne*, to evoke the most obvious example, may be used on the clavichord to convey a similarly intense emotion as say, the most exquisite decay after a *sforzando* on the fortepiano but it takes a musician intimately familiar with either of these instruments to make the effect work.

Benjamin Steens: I don't think, until there's proof to the contrary, that certain figures are more attached to this or that instrument. Rhetorical figures are generally effects that reflect musical ideas or their development. They have a strategic role and place within the piece, and are therefore linked to the structure of the works. In the treatises, musical rhetoric is always developed and explained in this sense of structural implication. This does not prevent certain instruments from being more or less effective in highlighting certain musical rhetorical formulas, due to their particular sound, range and dynamics. For example, the clavichord's particular touch allows for after-touch effects such as *Bebung*. The fortepiano gains in power, percussion, clarity and diversity of timbre in the different registers of the keyboard, but loses certain aspects of the clavichord's cantabile quality. Think also of the organ, with its contrasting power effects, and the contrast between extreme lows and highs...

In conclusion

These days of intense research enabled me to approach the practice of variation in the context of the keyboard sonata from a variety of angles. We questioned the meaning of authenticity in terms of the relationship between musical text and interpretation, placing the composer-interpreter within his or her aesthetic and historical universe, and considering the instrument as the focal point of the experiments. By exploring the specific features of the clavichord and the Stein fortepiano (construction, mechanics, touch and sonic expressivity), I deepened my understanding of the chosen corpus of works, also questioning its expressive trajectory in the light of *Empfindsamkeit*, rhetoric and good taste. Finally, by studying the act of improvisation in C. P. E. Bach and Mozart, and more generally in the classical era, I was able to question our relationship to creativity as performers of the 21st century. This artistic exploration has enabled me to study the links between the musical score, sound complexes and the instrument, in the light of the transmission of affects, a primordial element in communication between performer and listener.

Indeed, expressiveness carries with it a dimension of persuading the listener to the effect it seeks to manifest. It contains characteristics of musical playing that are not directly specified by the score, and which must be convincingly realized if emotion is to be conveyed. Expressivity is in constant motion, changing at every moment; it occurs at every moment of performance. It is through expressivity that the abstract structures that remain in the score in the form of ideas can be brought to life and made sensitive. In order to convey this living quality, all human interpretation must be endowed with an expressiveness that manifests itself in a certain proportion of deviation from notation. Expressive gestures are combined, sequenced, to form a musical phrase, which in turn acquires a specific meaning within larger sections. As pianists in the 21st century, we cannot ignore the question of tradition when approaching the classical repertoire. Tradition is deeply attached to the characterization of the

musical work as a “horizontal place of instantiations”⁹, an unstable space where new transformations occur at every moment. Each interpretation tends to seek a balance between tradition and innovation, so the performer is often at the confluence of two aesthetic attitudes: adhering to established conventions or departing from them. The continuity of tradition is intrinsically linked to the notion of change. In this respect, practicing variation as performers-composers of the 21st century on the model of our predecessors of the classical era leads us to ask ourselves the following questions: to what extent can we add or subtract from the musical text, and when will it be more appropriate to literally repeat the score, who is our judge? Music must be seen as an object consisting of both abstract structures and interpretive movements, in other words, formed on the one hand by the score and on the other by its rendition of sound¹⁰. Musical meaning emerges as much during the process of reception, listening by a listener, as during the process of production, composition and interpretation. The abstract and the concrete are therefore in continual interaction. According to Rink¹¹, the performer evaluates the structural particularities of the work as s/he comes into contact with it. Such a process takes place note by note, bar by bar, phrase by phrase, and interpretative decisions are made according to the projection the performer wishes to give to the expressive physiognomy s/he has elaborated. It appears that musical structure, as conventionally modelled, is not the sole determinant of expression. In my opinion, the variation in the emphasis of certain musical aspects derives from a change of perspective on structural breathing. As performers, we are constantly moving back and forth between the different levels of localized manifestation of structure, from phrase to their periodic distribution (*carrure*), in order to serve an overall conception of the larger form that is more or less fixed and defined according to the physiognomy of the musical language. Variation thus becomes an opportunity to take a fresh look at the structural trajectory of the work, and for the performer to add a new expressive dimension, the fruit of his or her intimate perception of the message conveyed by the musical design. We will always have only a fragmented and somewhat distorted vision of history when we try to represent it to ourselves. While we certainly need in-depth knowledge to construct our rendition of the work, trust in the vital impulse born of our own intuition is paramount to bridging the spaces of uncertainty that remain between the notes.

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⁹ Clayton, Herbert and Middleton, *The Cultural Study of Music*, 206-207.

¹⁰ Dogantan-Dack, “In the Beginning Was Gesture”.

¹¹ Rink, “Translating Musical Meaning”.