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Multi-Movement Work as Complete Gesture in Liszt and other 19th-Century Composers: Towards the Concept of Two-Dimensional Cycle

ABSTRACT

Background

One of the achievements of the New German school was a decisive rethinking of musical form and departing from conventional *Formenlehre* models. The new thinking manifests itself in at least two ways: in one-movement forms in which the sonata form was combined with the elements of sonata cycle, and in multi-movement structures in which the separate movements were brought closer to each other by using similar thematic material and musical rhetoric.

Aims and Repertoire Studied

The one-movement sonatas displaying the features of a sonata cycle are referred to as two-dimensional or double-functional sonata forms in the analytical literature. The paper aims to demonstrate that the opposite — i.e. the multi-movement structures which show a dimension of a movement form — is also a possibility. The paper especially focuses on the three-movement instrumental works of Liszt (Faust symphony) and other 19th century composers (Scriabin's Third Symphony) displaying fast-slow-fast pattern.

Methods

First, the concepts of dimensions of a single-movement form and that of a cycle are discussed. In a broader perspective, the dimension of form can be understood as a principle which binds together seemingly contradictory aspects of a musical narrative and ensures the completeness and wholeness of otherwise diverse musical discourse.

One way to see form as a unifying principle in action is to understand it as a kind of expansion-contraction process where urge to conquer new musical territories is periodically replaced by opposite process, withdrawal. The expansion is referred to as trochaic phase and contraction as iambic phase in this paper. Trochaic phase followed by iambic phase makes up a complete unit.

The dimension of cycle, on the contrary, can be understood as a principle that separates. It is the dimension of diversity acting through different topic styles. As such, it can be also understood as a trochaic principle — of form — that manifest itself in a higher level of formal structure.

In addition, a concept of a dividing caesura is introduced. Dividing caesura divides trochaic and iambic phase on a given level of formal structure. In a lower level, it manifests itself as a half-cadence, whereas in a higher level it is mostly a rhetorical gesture.

Finally, two-dimensional form is defined as a formal design in which the possibility of a cycle is suggested — through

introduction of topic styles referring to sonata movements — but not realised as such. Consequently, two-dimensional cycle is defined as a formal design in which the possibility of a one-movement form is suggested — through direct thematic and topical links between the movements — but not realised as such.

In his book on sonata form, Hepokoski discusses multi-movement structures as complete gestures — i.e. as 'one-movement works' — from the point of view of their rotational design. The approach works even better in the multi-movement compositions showing remarkable thematic resemblance between the movements. A rotation in such a work tend to display a pre-ordered set of certain contrasting thematic groups. Due to the contrast between the thematic groups, the boundaries between the rotations are clearly articulated.

Implications

The number of rotations making up the 'secondary' formal dimension of a multi-movement work is usually larger than two — i.e. the number proposed by Hepokoski. The boundaries between the movements and those of rotations do not always overlap. The divergence between the two dimensions seems to occur between the first and second movements, but not between the second and last movements of the works discussed in this paper.

The approach proposed here may shed new light on the issues of unresolved recapitulation and sonata deformation in general.

Keywords

Two-Dimensional Form, Rotational Form, Form as Binary Process, New German School and Instrumental Music, Musical Rhetoric.

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