

Lecture 6 – Patterns / Form / Process

First of all I should like you to consider what I believe is the best definition of music, because it is all-inclusive: "the corporealization of the intelligence that is in sound," as proposed by Hoene Wronsky.

(Varèse, 1966)

Varèse and Crystals

Conceiving musical form as a resultant—the result of a process, I was struck by what seemed to me an analogy between the formation of my compositions and the phenomenon of crystallization. Let me quote the crystallographic description given me by Nathaniel Arbiter, professor of mineralogy at Columbia University: "The crystal is characterized by both a definite external form and a definite internal structure. The internal structure is based on the unit of crystal which is the smallest grouping of the atoms that has the order and composition of the substance. The extension of the unit into space forms the whole crystal. But in spite of the relatively limited variety of internal structures, the external forms of crystals are limitless." Then Mr. Arbiter added in his own words: "Crystal form itself is a resultant [the very word I have always used in reference to musical form] rather than a primary attribute. Crystal form is the consequence of the interaction of attractive and repulsive forces and the ordered packing of the atom."

(Varèse, 1966)

The analogy to crystallization, then, emphasizes growth through orderly expansion of a bare minimum of an idea, cell-like in nature. This may sound, in twentieth-century context, suspiciously traditional. One might well wonder whether "crystallization" is simply synonymous with the generative cell models of analysis propounded by George Perle and others. Other statements by Varèse, however, effectively deny this possibility:

There is an idea, the basis of an internal structure, expanded or split into different shapes or groups of sound constantly changing in shape, direction, and speed, attracted and repulsed by various forces. The form of the work is the consequence of this interaction.

(Bernard, 1981, p.4)

Stockhausen's Moment Form

Every present moment counts, as well as no moment at all; a given moment is not merely regarded as the consequence of the previous one and the prelude to the coming one, but as something individual, independent and centered in itself, capable of existing on its own. An instant does not need to be just a particle of measured duration. This concentration on the present moment – on every present moment – can make a vertical cut, as it were, across horizontal time perception, extending out to a timelessness I call eternity. This is not an eternity that begins at the end of time, but an eternity that is present in every moment. I am speaking about musical forms in which apparently no less is being undertaken than the explosion – yes – even more, the overcoming of the concept of duration.

(reproduced in Kramer, 1978, p.179)

Indeterminacy

This is a lecture on composition which is indeterminate with respect to its performance. The *Intersection 3* by Morton Feldman is an example. The *Music of Changes* is not an example. In the *Music of Changes*, structure, which is the division of the whole into parts; method, which is the note-to-note procedure; form, which is the expressive content, the morphology of the continuity; and materials, the sounds and silences of the composition, are all determined. Though no two performances of the *Music of Changes* will be identical (each act is virgin, even the repeated one, to refer to René Char's thought), two performances will resemble one another closely. Though chance operations brought about the determinations of the composition, these operations are not available in its performance. The function of the performer in the case of the *Music of Changes* is that of a contractor who, following an architect's blueprint, constructs a building.

(Cage, 1961, p.36)

Sol Lewitt – Paragraphs on Conceptual Art

To work with a plan that is preset is one way of avoiding subjectivity. It also obviates the necessity of designing each work in turn. The plan would design the work. Some plans would require millions of variations, and some a limited number, but both are finite. Other plans imply infinity. In each case, however, the artist would select the basic form and rules that would govern the solution of the problem. After that the fewer decisions made in the course of completing the work, the better. This eliminates the arbitrary, the capricious, and the subjective as much as possible. This is the reason for using this method.

(Lewitt, 1967)

Steve Reich – Early Works

In retrospect, I understand the process of gradually shifting phase relationships between two or more identical repeating patterns as an extension of the idea of infinite canon or round. Two or more identical melodies are played with one starting after the other, as in traditional rounds, but in the phase shifting process the melodies are usually much shorter repeating patterns, and the time interval between one melodic pattern and its imitation(s), instead of being fixed, is variable. Nevertheless, that this new process bears a close family resemblance to the thirteenth century musical idea of round seems to give it some depth. Good new ideas generally turn out to be old.

(Reich, 2004, p.20)

Music as a Gradual Process II

The terse, inexpressive wording of "Music as a Gradual Process" serves to reinforce four important points in the concisest of manners. First of all, Reich is concerned with clarity of structure, which he feels can only be achieved by creating compositions in which structure ("process") and musical content are identical. He has no use for hidden constructive devices that serve to obscure a musical process. Secondly, musical processes, once set into motion, have a life of their own, and need no further meddling from the composer to progress; they are impersonal and objective procedures. Thirdly, improvisation can play no part in a musical process; on the contrary, one must subvert one's own feelings and allow the inexorable forward thrust of the process to take charge. Lastly, no matter how objective the process, unexpected events will still occur: these are the resulting patterns.

(Schwarz, 1981-2, p.226)