

Ligeti conta sobre seu sonho de infância (a teia) e comenta a influência desse sonho na criação de obras como "Apparitions" (1958-9).



States, Events, Transformations

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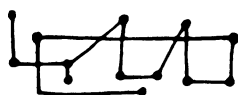
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STATES, EVENTS, TRANSFORMATIONS¹



GYÖRGY LIGETI

IN MY EARLY CHILDHOOD I once dreamt that I could not make my way to my little bed (which had bars and for me signified a haven) because the whole room was filled with a finely spun but dense and extremely tangled web, similar to the secretions with which silkworms fill their entire breeding box as they pupate. Besides myself, other living creatures and objects were caught in this immense web: moths and beetles of all sorts, which were trying to get to the weakly flickering candle in the room; and enormous damp, dirty pillows, whose rotten stuffing was bulging out through rips in the covers. Every movement of an immobilized insect caused the entire web to start shaking so that the big, heavy pillows swung back and forth; this, in turn, made everything rock even more. Sometimes the reciprocal movements became so violent that the web tore in places and a few beetles were unexpectedly liberated, only to be ensnared soon thereafter, with a choked buzz, in the rocking mesh once again. These periodic,

suddenly occurring events gradually altered the internal structure of the web, which became ever more tangled. In places impenetrable knots formed; in others, caverns opened up where shreds of the original web were floating about like gossamer. These transformations were irreversible; no earlier state could ever recur. There was something inexpressibly sad about this process: the hopelessness of elapsing time and of the irretrievable past.²

The memory of this dream from long ago had a definite influence upon the music that I wrote at the end of the 1950s. The events in that cobwebbed room were transformed into sonic fantasies, which formed the initial material for compositions. The involuntary conversion of optical and tactile into acoustic sensations is habitual with me: I almost always associate sounds with color, form, and texture; and form, color, and material quality with every acoustic sensation. Even abstract concepts, such as quantities, relationships, connections, and processes, seem tangible to me and have their place in an imaginary space. For example, the concept of "time" for me is foggy white, flowing slowly and uninterruptedly from left to right, producing as it does so a very soft, "hhhh"-like noise. "Left" in this case is a violet region with a sheet-metal quality and a similar sound; "right," by contrast, is of orange hue, skinlike in surface, and dull in tone.

If I identify the dream described above as the foundation for some of my compositions, I do not mean that it serves as their "content." Nothing could be further from my intention than to create illustrative or wholly programmatic art. The content of the dream was many times transformed, layered over with other ideas and compositional processes, and was manifested in the end only in certain formal/technical aspects as well as in the general character of the corresponding work.

In the orchestral work *Apparitions*, for example, the sonic structures recall the network of the dream, and the course of the form as a whole corresponds to the process of transformation to which the web was subjected. In this piece there are two fundamental types of musical material. One, a derivative of the "tone cluster," is somewhere between sound and noise and consists of several voices stratified and interwoven in semitones, which thereby give up their individuality and become completely dissolved into the resultant overriding complex. These delicate, resonant "textures" vary in quality according to their registral placement, the type and density of their interweaving, and the nature of their constituent, individual voices. Thus the strings produce especially thin and sensitive textures; those of the flutes and clarinets are thicker and smoother; those of the brass are still thicker and completely opaque. Various types of movement induce further differentiation of the complexes: some are completely stationary; others, while unmoving as a whole, exhibit internal fluctuations which are brought about by the continuing alteration of the webwork; still others move in

their entirety. Moreover, there are complexes that accumulate or disintegrate as they sound. Several complexes, of diverse breadth and duration, enter into various interrelations: they alternate with one another, engulf one another, or flow into one another to the point of blending completely.

The other type of musical material consists of fixed groups of sounds which, in a manner of speaking, populate the "noise-labyrinth" arising from the first type. Several of these groups are composed of an "assembly" of sounds, which remain hanging between the filaments of the smooth material; others are built from several sounds or noises or from one of several sound fragments which punctuate the sounding network. All groups of sounds and individual sounds emerge suddenly, as resonant phenomena, and disappear for the most part just as quickly. However, they leave traces behind in the smooth noise-textures; the composition of the noise-textures is thus altered after every attack of the sound assemblies and fragments, and the magnitude of these alterations corresponds approximately to the strength of attack.

To illustrate this process, I will describe the opening of the first movement of *Apparitions*. It begins with a stationary, very soft, very low, and very long sound, which consists simply of two tones played by contrabasses. This stationary sound is not entirely motionless, for the interval between the two tones is a minor second, from which arise the interference oscillations that muddy the sound a little as it extends in planar fashion. These oscillations act already as an attack (though an extremely weak one) against the static quality of the planelike sound, which accordingly after a certain amount of time suddenly undergoes a mutation: it is transformed into a high, complex, noise-filled sound for eight densely stacked 'cellos. This new sound is just as stationary as the first, but it is even softer and also shorter in duration. The reduction in duration and intensity results from the fact that the new sound consists of more tones and therefore has a greater "breadth" than the first; and because up to this point there has been no external impulse that would have signified an influx of energy, the increase in breadth and density must proceed from a loss of intensity and duration. The energy influx is first provided by the harp, soon thereafter introduced [measure 8]: its plucked sound represents an effective attack against the static structure. The change which now begins must therefore be greater. Indeed, a disturbance of the original planelike sound emerges in consequence to the impulse-giving effect of the harp sound: it is almost as if the disturbance were transformed into a vibrating mass. This new, vibrating sound is intimately related to the first two, almost unmoving sounds, because it is constructed likewise from contrabass and 'cello parts; it is merely "heavier," not only because of the vibration, but also because of an increase in breadth and density: it now consists of fourteen parts.

The further construction of the movement follows along similar lines. Accordingly, I will mention only two other typical passages, which will serve to enlarge upon and reinforce my commentary. First, the place where a very short, hard, splintering *pizzicato* enters in the strings. While up to that point, despite all the variations in dynamics, the loudest has been *mp*, now very suddenly a *ff* occurs. This unexpected appearance of an unexpected dynamic level must—following the logic of previous events—work a more profound change than all previous impulses. This in fact does happen: at this point for the first time the entire network is subjected to a shock, which overloads its resistance. A tear develops in the sonic structure: it comes by way of the first long, form-interrupting pause [measures 30–32]. From here on the network is irrevocably changed; the stationary sounds, heretofore only weakly stirred by internal vibrations, are now crumpled. Trills and tremolos animate the sounding masses, and a continuously irregular fluctuation of the dynamics hinders the retrieval of any equilibrium.

The second spot that I might mention consists of a still less expected and still harder attack that achieves, so to speak, the dynamic climax of the movement [measure 73]. It is distinguished not only by being louder than anything that has preceded it, but also through its timbre and registral placement, both contrasting most violently with what has gone before. This especially sharp, high, and powerful attack is brought about by the following instruments: three piccolos *staccatissima*, xylophone, glockenspiel, whip, a very high-pitched snare drum, celesta, harp, harpsichord, piano—these last four instruments playing very high tone clusters—and finally strings, which play a special, particularly penetrating *pizzicato* in which the string is pressed against the fingerboard with the fingernail. This, what might be called a “metallic explosion,” is the strongest attack that has occurred in the movement and thus must have (in conformance to the compositional principles in use) the furthest-reaching consequences. Actually the entire form is tipped over at this point. This is accomplished through a sudden alteration of register: up to now the deepest registers have dominated—the high registers entered only at isolated points and were lost in the general “darkness”; from now on the high registers are in command, the lower remaining only here and there as traces. This register reversal (inversion) represents the most striking development in the whole extent of the movement, whose entire architecture is illuminated by this sudden flare.

The musical form that is built from the ideas and principles mentioned here originates in a continuous reciprocal relationship between states and events. The states are broken up by suddenly emerging events and are transformed under their influence; and vice versa: the altered states also have a certain effect upon the type of events, for these must be of ever new

A handwritten musical score for a symphony orchestra, spanning four systems. The instruments listed on the left are: Echo { 3Gg., Trp.; Sch. 1: gr.Tr.; Sch. 2: Glsp.; Sch. 4: Crotales; Cel.; Hf.; Comb.; Klar.; Gg.I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, dynamics (e.g., ppp, mp), and articulation marks. There are also some handwritten annotations like "perdendosi..." and "Einführung". The bottom of the page shows the beginning of a section for strings, labeled Gg.I through XII.

- * Schwing wichtiger als vollkommen saubere Intonation / Verve more important than completely accurate intonation
 - ** = Unbestimmter, äußerst hoher Ton / † = Indefinite, extremely high tone
 - *** Echo-Geigen: So leise wie möglich. Nicht lauter, als für das Ansprechen des Tones gerade noch nötig / As soft as possible. No louder than absolutely necessary for production of the tone
- 1) ferociously
 - 2) cardboard
 - 3) (metal)
 - 4) only 4'

kinds of character, in order to be able further to transform the transformed states. In this way arises an unceasing development: the formerly existing states and events reciprocally exclude their repeated occurrences, and thus are irretrievable.

Because the degree of state alteration is approximately proportional to the attack strength of events, the impression is created of a causal relationship between event and state alteration. This causal relationship is of course only apparent: it is an element of a merely imaginary musical syntax.

—Translated by Jonathan W. Bernard

NOTES

1. Original text: “Zustände, Ereignisse, Wandlungen,” *Melos* 34 (1967): 165–69. This publication is in turn reprinted from *Bilder und Blätter* 11 (1960), where the article had the further subtitle “Bemerkungen zu meinem Orchesterstück *Apparitions*.” [TRANS.]
2. A slightly different version of this opening paragraph is translated as a supplement to Péter Várnai, “Beszélgetések Ligeti Györggyel,” trans. Gabor J. Schabert in *Ligeti in Conversation* (London: Eulenberg, 1983), 25n. [TRANS.]