

# Formal Functions and Meaning in the Atonal Language of Villa-Lobos' *Rudepoema*

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We tend to consider modernistic composers as iconoclasts that lack all concern for classical principles, inventors of new musical languages that are built from *tabula rasa*. Villa-Lobos, the leading musician of the momentous Brazilian Week of Modern Art of 1922, developed a persona that follows closely this model. His achievement of an international recognition has been considered, to use Gerard Béhague's expression (Béhague 1994), a consequence of his "search for a Brazilian musical soul," supposedly something so quintessential that might define the identity of his music beyond the relation that it bears to the Western musical tradition.

This standpoint fails to acknowledge Villa-Lobos' significant contribution, amongst a small number of pioneer composers, to the development of a **universally shared atonal language based in standard symmetrical collections and the transformation of modal scales collected from folk sources into symmetrical sets.** Born in 1887, Villa-Lobos died in 1959. Therefore he belongs to the generation of Stravinsky (1882-1971) and Bartók (1881-1945). His career presents some parallels with Bartók's, although he probably knew very little of his output. On the other hand, he immediately absorbed the influence of Stravinsky's music, particularly from *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*, as soon as he acknowledged them around 1918, through contacts with Arthur Rubinstein and Darius Milhaud, or attending the Diaghilev ballets that toured Rio de Janeiro at that time, or else during his first trip to Paris in 1923.

In his book on *Twentieth Century Music*, Elliott Antokoletz (1992, p.228-237) dedicates a chapter to Villa-Lobos where he presents an insightful analysis of Villa-Lobos' atonal procedures. He demonstrates, using *Chôros No.10* as example, that Villa-Lobos' music of the 1920s, inspired by the study of Debussy and Stravinsky scores, had achieved a personal style that fuses abstract atonal materials with elements drawn from folk songs of his native country.

Departing from this well established foundation, we studied how the formal organization of Villa-Lobos' lengthy one-movement piece *Rudepoema* faced two complex challenges. First the problem that the atonal language he had recently embraced did not offer him, as a given, pre-set solutions for the basic syntactical devices required to the development of large forms, i.e., some "engine" like the cycle of fifths of the tonal system that might grant a sense of directionality for the discourse, both in the short and the long run, and a repertoire of standard cadential "breaks" to shape it. **Therefore we must consider as a remarkable achievement of Villa-Lobos that he was able to keep the cohesion of such large scale work on the grounds of the new atonal language, at a time when Schoenberg feared it might lend support only to short pieces.**

The second challenge originates from what has been considered the source of his originality, namely a poetic based on nationalistic references. Quotations can, at best, create a tapestry of cross-meanings, but do not help at the formal level. On the contrary, assemblages of borrowings tend to divert the discourse, loosening its coherence, being therefore a counterproductive approach to unify large forms.

**Our hypothesis is that, somewhat paradoxically for a modernistic composer, Villa-Lobos faced both challenges adapting to his style models of the common practice period. He solved the large form problem relying in the classical formal functions, up to the point that, as rhetorical devices, they can work independently of the tonal syntax. We found in *Rudepoema* principles of motivic development, phrase structure and formal organization similar to those employed in classical large forms. They**

compensate for the disruption of an organic growth process caused by the prevailing block structure. More unexpectedly yet, Villa-Lobos faced the nationalistic referential problem also importing another feature of the classical style, namely the constant alternation and mixture of topics related to meanings of two opposite topical fields.

*Rudepoema* was written between 1921 and 1926. It took Villa-Lobos six years to finish the composition. This was an unusual length of time for his standards. No other work of his output required him so many years to write. As many of his acquaintances reported, Villa-Lobos used to compose astonishingly fast and once a piece was laid on paper he seldom went back to revise it. This may have originated the often repeated remarks that Villa-Lobos was careless about the formal unity of his works, frequently allowing the intrusion of unrelated materials. If this may hold true for some other works, I argue that *Rudepoema* does not fit in this critique. The piece conceals a great deal of formal planning and careful working out of details. Many performers and musicologists, for intuitive or analytical reasons, have rated it one of the most outstanding modernistic pieces written for the piano<sup>1</sup>.

Despite its overwhelming technical difficulties, *Rudepoema* has been recorded by many pianists of international reputation, among them Nelson Freire, Roberto Szidon, Anna-Stella Schic, Gregory Allen, Sonia Rubinsky and Marc-Andre Hamelin, not mentioning that the piece was dedicated to the legendary Arthur Rubinstein that premiered it in Paris in 1927. Villa-Lobos must have had *Rudepoema* in high esteem since he chose it to be performed in both his European and North-American debuts (the original piano version and the orchestrated version, respectively).

### **Developing variation as block unifier**

*Rudepoema's* extensive use of texturally accompanied melodic lines disguises the feature that even the most memorable large passages depend on short motives. Indeed, all thematic materials of *Rudepoema* seem to derive from some ideas presented at the onset. However, along the piece, no theme is repeated altogether as heard before, instead rebuilt with motives derived from the initial statements. Not even the recapitulation displays evident straightforward thematic repetition, although themes are indeed recapitulated.

Unexpectedly we find that *Rudepoema* uses text-book developing variation techniques, a principle favoured by composers of the German sphere of influence, from Beethoven through Brahms and Schoenberg, what could not be foreseen in the work of a Brazilian composer whose modernistic language is considered to grow out of the Franco-Russian school<sup>2</sup>.

All scholars that examined the piece agree that thematic and motivic consistencies are in large part responsible for the sense of unity of the piece. Béhague (1994, p.102) envisions that “despite its heterogeneity of moods, *Rudepoema* relies on thematic and rhythmic relationships to unification. Several themes appear throughout the seven sections of the work, each theme serving as a unifying element”. Unfortunately Béhague does not show us what these themes and sections are. Tarasti (1995, p.259) asserts similarly that “all its motifs, the thematic material, has been derived from a few germ motifs”. Rubinsky’s motivic analysis (Rubinsky 1986) is presented more carefully. She proposes four basic “motives” (or “themes” in our terminology) as the unifying material of the piece and thoughtfully studies their internal formation. We consider that three of her motives are indeed the main themes of the piece. The fourth is derivative, as it can be traced back to a pentatonic segment of theme 1A. Also because they are integrated parts of Theme 1, Rubinsky’s first two motives have been grouped together. There exists also a short analysis of the piece that the composer himself has written (Villa-Lobos 1965, p.235). History teaches us not to blindly trust composer self-analyses. However concerning theme identification, there is perfect agreement between our conclusions and Villa-Lobos notes.

Example 1 elaborates the process of developing variation that, departing from the core idea “X,” generates the three main themes.

## Ex. 1: Structure of Themes 1A, 1B and 2

**THEME 1A**

**THEME 1B**

**THEME 2**

We should look yet deeper into the structure of motives X-Y-W to verify their close relation. Example 2 clarifies that their inner structure is based on two elementary melodic cadential gestures, “a” – a double neighbour note ornament, and “b” – a linear melodic descent of a third. Observe also that, in Themes 1A and 1B, motive-a and motive-b are interlocked, but, in Theme 2, juxtaposed. I will save for later my comments about the function of motive-c embedded in Theme 1B. As pitch B is approached twice in Theme 2, this melodic gesture implies a stronger cadential sense than the other two. This may have been a reason why Villa-Lobos explored it more than the others, as in atonal music voice-leading can play an important role for phrase closure.

## Ex. 2: Structural relations of motives between Themes 1A, 1B and 2

**THEME 1A**      **THEME 1B**      **THEME 2**

Besides those, there are some other materials further developed. However in a closer analysis they prove to be segmentations of the main themes. The most important are the pentatonic ascending segment on Theme 1 (marked “PENT” in example 1)<sup>3</sup> and the diatonic set introduced as an ornament to theme 2 (marked “diatonic symmetrical intrusion” on example 1). PENT is an index pointing to the world of pentatonicism which plays a fundamental role in the piece, both as abstract structure and as signifier for meaning correlations.

All other thematic occurrences along the piece are developing variation of themes 1A, 1B and 2. Example 3 presents some of the more prominent. It would be impossible to show every thematic transformation because ultimately we might link to the core motives all materials that appear seemingly anew. I hope that a simple comparison between the chosen examples and the profiles of Themes 1-2 suffices to make self evident the thematic coherence claimed by the musicologists, at the same time that allows us to realize the ingenuity of the composer.

Ex. 3: Some transformations of Themes 1 and 2 as developing variation

The musical score for Example 3 consists of five systems of notation. Each system begins with a boxed measure number and a tempo marking (♩ = [value]).  
 System 1: Measure 58, tempo 112, dynamics *f*, 4/4 time signature.  
 System 2: Measure 85, tempo 138, dynamics *p*, 2/4 time signature; Measure 104, tempo 152, dynamics *mf*, 4/4 time signature.  
 System 3: Measure 143, tempo 160, dynamics *mf*, 4/4 time signature; Measure 198, tempo 126, dynamics *ff*, 3/4 time signature.  
 System 4: Measure 220, tempo 108, dynamics *mf*, 4/4 time signature; Measure 286, tempo 152, dynamics *mf*, 2/4 time signature.  
 System 5: Measure 359, tempo 132, dynamics *sfz*, 4/4 time signature; Measure 591, tempo 57, dynamics *mf*, 8/8 time signature.

Almost as linear as a *cantus firmus* in Palestrina’s style (not considering the repetitions), Theme 1A (Example 4) emphasizes F# as tonal centre. The lowered second degree G natural provides a Phrygian character. The circular motion around F# demands rhythmic acceleration at the final of the phrase to achieve cadential closure. A revealing aspect of this phrase is that it follows properly the *sentence* model, according to Schoenberg’s definition. This finding adds evidence to our hypothesis about the influence of classical paradigms in *Rudepoema*.

## Ex. 4: Sentence structure of Theme 1A

The choice of a theme with the structure of a classical sonata first theme lends important consequences to the development of the piece. In fact, quite unexpectedly for a piece in the modernistic realm, around half of the phrases in *Rudepoema* fit the sentence paradigm. Bending yet more to the classical aspect, among the other half we count many periodic and small ternary phrase structures. However, approaching the end of the piece, the phraseology tends to become somewhat looser. The phrase models found in *Rudepoema* are summarized in table 02.

The principle of an “equal-division system to which belongs the concept of non-functional diatonicism” (Antokoletz 2004, p.17) has been used extensively to analyze the music of Debussy and Bartók. The symmetry around the B $\flat$ -E axis of the collection used for of Theme 1A (Example 5) points to this principle. In a similar approach, the melodic range of Theme 1B is symmetrical around the D $\sharp$ /A axis of the rotated G-Lydian-Mixolydian collection employed. Considering the historical period, the novelty of the atonal symmetrical reinterpretations of the modal Themes 1A-1B can be seen as a *trope* at the syntactical level. They are equivalent to the multiple meaning of a metaphor insofar as these structures point simultaneously to three different stylistic domains, namely the tonal, the modal and the atonal.

## Ex. 5: Symmetry in the collections used for Themes 1A and 1B

The repetition of the chromatic neighbour note passage F $\sharp$ E $\sharp$ F $\sharp$  in the tenor voice of Theme 1 strongly emphasizes F $\sharp$ , making prevail, but only during the beginning of the exposition, a tonal interpretation of this section as being in F $\sharp$  minor. However, as the piece unfolds, the non-directional static character of the symmetrical sets overrides most of the sense of traditional tonality. In measure 9 the F $\sharp$  minor tonality changes to D Major by the addition of parallel thirds to the bass line and on measure 13 starts a cadential gesture that culminates on measure 16, implying a dramatic jump into the atonal world as the result of a polytonal confrontation between D major and D $\flat$  major. Measure 16 ends with a sense of “atonal half-cadence” that prepares for the dramatic entrance of the octatonic chords on measure 17. This is the only clear cut polytonal passage in *Rudepoema*, maybe in homage to his friend Darius Milhaud.

## Ex. 6: Polytonal “half-cadence” of Theme 1

*Rudepoema* offers a variety of atonal cadential models based in different rhetorical strategies that can produce phrase closure. Reversing liquidation by intensification or sudden contrast can produce half-cadence effects, as in example 6. Energy reduction, in dynamics (*diminuendo*, fade out) or tempi (*rallentando*, *allargando*), a shift towards high or low registers, cross-fading, texture change from turbulent state to rarefaction or stasis, are some of the principles used to provide the sense of ending.

The equivalent to an “authentic atonal cadence” happens for the first time in measures 28 to 30. This cadence relies in the stability of a symmetrical Z cell<sup>4</sup> as the goal of a sentence ending that slows down (marked *poco allargando*), producing an effect similar to a fade out. Notice in Example 7 the repeated alternation of symmetrical Z cells against another pitch set, recalling the alternation of tonic-dominant chords used to close sections in the classical style.

## Ex. 7: Cadence based in Z cell stability

This cadence portrays the paradigmatic iconic gesture of falling down from high to low register, a depiction of the literal meaning of “cadence” (to fall). Villa-Lobos writes in the piece more than ten different solutions for this type of cadential gesture. The more impressive of them is the final cadence of the work that Tarasti (1995, p.267) describes as a descent “to the bottomless depths of the underworld” (Example 22). However there are other passages with similar design that are mere links without cadential function. This relates to a fundamental iconic property of the musical sign: iconic meaning

(such as “to be similar to a movement of falling”) can be reinterpreted according to the context to serve different formal functions as cadence, bridge or thematic material.

The type of cadence dependent of subtle symmetry, like the cadence directed to a Z cell of example 7, is not as conclusive as another type (that we may call the “shut up model”) based in sudden strong contrast<sup>5</sup>. Hatten (1994, p.49) reminds us that in early cadences like Machaut’s and Landini’s, therefore before tonality, “specificity of syntactic function is earned without benefit of a comparable underlying harmonic system, but rather *by means of locally maximized differentiation*”. Villa-Lobos uses this principle to articulate sections that require a stronger sense of closure, like the ending of the exposition’s closing section before starting the development (Example 8).

Ex. 8: Cadence based in strong contrast

The musical score for Example 8 is presented in two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The time signature is 4/4. The piece is marked 'Vif' with a tempo of 152. The score begins at measure 233. The treble staff features a melodic line with a glissando (gliss.) and a forte (sf) dynamic. The bass staff features a triplet of eighth notes and a fortissimo (fff) dynamic. A circled area highlights a specific chordal structure in the bass staff, consisting of a cluster of notes including a flat second scale degree and a flat third scale degree.

Because the atonal syntax is not directional, frequently cadences must not only earn the ending of a phrase but also suggest some link to the next phrase. It is idiomatic of the style clear block definition due to changes of harmonic material – for instance octatonic against diatonic – many times reinforced by changes of rhythm, metre, texture, register and timbre enhancing block contrast. On the other hand, composers must also take care of the discourse continuity what is not assured by the syntactical means of the system (for instance, in Example 9, the harmonic support provided by layer 1 is neutral in this respect). This explains why so many phrase transitions in *Rudepoema* employ some kind of linkage techniques, as voice-leading focusing some important pitch in the next section, or either common-note (or set-segment) continuation and cross-fading – a collage technique similar to that used in sound and image editing in cinema. Example 9 shows an instance of cross-fading, an innovative technique for that moment. Contrast between sections is provided by the change in tempo, metre, thematic material, character and texture, as the number of layers increases to five, while Layer 2 of rhythmically repeated D#s fades away and layers 3, 4 and 5 emerge from the thick texture.

## Ex.9: Phrase ending and cross-fading link between two sections

The musical score for Ex. 9 is written for piano in 6/4 time, marked 'Animé' with a tempo of quarter note = 138. It consists of five layers of polyphonic texture. Layer 1 is the bass line, Layer 2 is the upper melodic line, Layer 3 is a middle melodic line, Layer 4 is a chordal texture, and Layer 5 is a lower melodic line. Dynamics range from *ff* to *p*. The score shows a transition from 6/4 to 2/4 time. A box labeled '83' is placed above the first measure. The score is annotated with 'layer 1' through 'layer 5' and various dynamics and articulation marks.

## A set link between paradigmatic sets

The harmonic material of *Rudepoema* is consistently derived from standard symmetrical collections: whole-tone, octatonic, pentatonic and diatonic. The interaction and transformation of these sets has become almost an *a priori* assumption. However, in those days, it was an exciting novelty. A distinctive feature of Villa-Lobos' style is the use of dense colourful contrapuntal textures created by the assignment of different collections to different layers. In transitional or developmental sections the collections tend to be used vertically, in juxtaposition or alternation, implying a faster harmonic rhythm that agrees with the instability required by the formal function of these sections. The section of transition that starts after the cadence of example 7 shows the typical treatment of harmonic materials (Example 10). Theme 1 reappears in the bass line (layer 1) still implying F# Phrygian however disturbed by grace notes in lower octaves that introduce four notes of a whole-tone scale (WT2, layer 3). The melodic line (layer 2) is a pentatonic segment, difficult to be aurally recognized as such due to the dense modal mixture. The chords on layer 4 alternate three collections: a whole-tone (WT2), a diatonic "white keys" and the other whole-tone (WT1). The completion of the whole-tone set is achieved by the combination of Layers 2 and 4. Layer 1 matches alternately or simultaneously layers 2, 3 or 4. A G# that appears on measure 23 completes a dodecaphonic super-set, just when a sentence liquidation process begins and we find chords that apparently include some "wrong" notes in respect to the coherence of symmetrical collections.

## Ex. 10: Polymodal collections in measures 17 through 24



In his analysis of *Chorus No.10*, Antokoletz (1992, p.232) finds that “the harmony and melody polarity is enhanced by the differentiation of pitch content, the opening chord revealing the “octatonic-I” source (Eb-E-G-A-Bb, plus one “odd” note, D);” and following: “the flute theme also unfolds an octatonic segment, this time from octatonic-0 (D-Eb-E#-F#-G#-B, plus the “odd” cadential note, Bb).” This “odd note” concept that appears also here at the last measure of Example 10 might be understood as a flaw of a careless composer, but certainly Antokoletz meant something else. As the “odd note” procedure happens consistently in *Rudepoema* we must assume it as a stylistic feature. The “wrong” note becomes marked, working as a trope at the syntactical level. It stands as an index to two different functions: to lock multi-symmetrical sets to a fixed symmetry and to improve modulating alternatives by maximizing common-tone links between less similar collections. For sure this is what Antokoletz meant.

The addition of one “odd note” to whole-tone and octatonic collections establishes other sets that are also symmetrical. Therefore it does not spoil the ideal of atonal balanced symmetry. On the contrary, it adds to the repertoire two others closely related symmetrical sets. If we add a seventh pitch to the whole-tone collection (WT), the symmetry that was floating over twelve possible chromatic notes suddenly gets pinned down to a fixed axis. Because any axis of symmetry also implies the note a tritone apart, this collection can be considered a different type of standard octatonic set and named locked-whole-tone collection (LWT). It allows six different transpositions, while the whole-tone has only two and the octatonic three. The same way, if we add a pitch to the octatonic set (OCT), the symmetry also freezes to a fixed axis, and we may consider this as another new standard collection (LOC), even though a set with ten pitches may seem almost irrelevant.

#### Ex.11: Symmetry in LWT and LOC collections

The LWT collection presents some interesting properties for common tone modulation. Any OCT collection has 6 pitches in common with four of the LWT transpositions, besides, obviously, 6 pitches in common with the original WT, while a WT can have at best have 4 pitches in common with an OCT. Therefore LWTs can be used as a smooth link to maximize common tones for transitions between WTs and OCTs. The same principle applies to diatonic collections (DIA). A LWT can have 5 common pitches with the seven of a DIA. In fact there are other collections that present similar

properties, like the diatonic octad employed by Stravinsky (Johnson 1987, p.55-59) but Villa-Lobos did not use them in this piece.

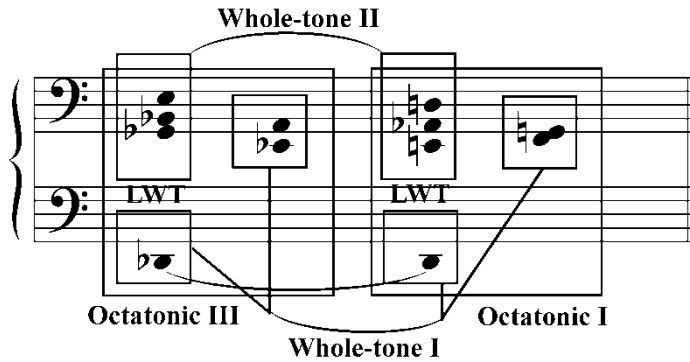
The LWT collection may be recognized as a useful analytical paradigm, also for other composers, like Bartók and Stravinsky. There are only two other eight-notes collections that are generated by four tritones: the octatonic (in three transpositions) and the collection built with a four notes chromatic segment<sup>6</sup> repeated a tritone apart (in six transpositions), both already largely recognized in the literature. A LWT also offers, as unique melodic material, segments of three chromatic pitches not shared by whole-tone or octatonic sets.

Notice that in measure 24 of Example 10 the last low-bass grace note changes from B to B $\flat$  in the repetition. The purpose of this subtle but meaningful change is to transform the otherwise whole-tone segment into a pentatonic link. It connects with the figuration of measures 25-26 that is the combination result of five different pentatonic collections (Example 12). Considering Pent-1 as the reference, Pent-2 is a parallel T6 transposition, and Pent-3 is a T5 transposition interlocked with Pent-2. On the other hand, the interval strings of Pent-4 and 5 are not the same as Pent-1, although Pent-4 is just a rotation of Pent-2, while Pent-5 is a rotated T7 transposition of Pent-1, so that four of its notes match a displaced Pent-1. The motivation behind this skilful rearrangement is that the combination of Pent-4 and Pent-5 produces a five notes alternation of collections whole-Tone 2 and 1. Also the grouping of Pent-1-2-3 alternates a 6 notes segment of octatonic-III with another 6 notes segment of LOC-II (OCT-II plus a G “odd note”). Therefore this seemingly naïve descending pentatonic figuration conceals the sonorities of many different symmetrical collections. This module assemblage technique was a hallmark of Villa-Lobos pianistic experimentalism. We find in *Rudepoema* a dozen of other passages with different solutions for this problem of generating atonal figuration using pentatonic and other sets as building blocks.

Ex.12: Figuration built with five pentatonic sets

This passage ends with the cadence already discussed on Example 7, but the harmonic structure of measures 29-30 deserves a more detailed analysis. The passage that had started as a descending figuration built with pentatonic collections, settles in the alternation of octatonic III and I (Example 13). Notice also that right hand chords imply whole-tone II on strong beats and whole-tone I on weak beats. Therefore there is also a secondary alternation of whole-tone collections. Taking into account both hands we find a demonstration of how a symmetrical LWT set enhances the link between octatonic and whole-tone collections, as theorized in Example 11.

Ex.13: Alternation of Octatonic – LWT– Whole-tone sets



We examined on Example 8 how Villa-Lobos obtained strong cadential effect using maximum contrast between pitch sets. However when the problem is harmonic progression during phrase development, he favours the opposite strategy, i.e. large common-tone relation between two successive collections. The progression of measures 42 through 49 gives us a good idea of this procedure (Example 14). It portrays OCT-III > B-LydMix > E-LydMix > LOC-III > (PENT)+LDIA, with sequential links using 4 common-tones in each step. Notice that the B-LydMix holds pitch B to be used at the last moment as a link to E-LydMix (see pitch B marked \* in Example 13). On the other hand, measure 48 shows a G# (marked \*\* in Example 13) that conflicts with the G natural in both OCT-III and DIA collections, what means that this step may be interpreted as a LOCT > LDIA type of link.

Ex.14: Symmetrical collections in meas. 42-49

Table 1 gives additional details of the common-tone progression. The pitches between brackets belong to the collection, but were not used in the passage. As we see, each step uses 4 common-tones among 6 or 7 pitches present. In the last link neither collection uses a C natural that might be a common-tone, but a G# “odd note” was added to both sets and therefore both collections should be considered as types LOC and LDIA.

Table 1: Common-tones progression in measures 42-49

Collection	Pitches
Octatonic-3	[C] – C# – D# – E – F# – G – A – A#
4 common-tones	<b>C# – D# – F# – A</b>
B–Lydian-Mixolydian	B – C# – D# – [F] – F# – G# – A
4 common-tones	<b>B – C# – F# – G#</b>
E–Lydian-Mixolydian	E – F# – G# – A# – B – C# – D
4 common-tones	<b>C# – E – F# – A#</b>
(L) Octatonic-3	[C] – C# – D# – E – F# – G – A – A# – (G#**)
4 common-tones	[C] – <b>E – G – A – (G#**)</b>
(L) E–Diatonic	E – F – G – A – B – [C] – D – (G#**)

### Sonata-Variations Form as a Trope

Tarasti (1995, p.259) assumes that in *Rudepoema* “the thematic material has been derived from a few germ motifs” and reaches the conclusion that “this process is so obvious that the work might almost be considered a variation form”. Certainly the “variation form” he proposes is not some kind of Baroque continuous variation, like the passacaglia, despite the unfolding of a bass line repetition at the beginning of *Rudepoema* that might lead us in this direction. In fact, very soon, all traces of a ground structure have disappeared. On the other hand, if we make the case for sectional variations, some parts of the piece seem to fit this model but others not at all. Tarasti’s proposition can be considered an insightful abduction however did not grasp all aspects of the formal design.

Rubinsky (1986, p.20), on the other hand, uses the terminology of sonata form to describe “a developmental section arriving at one of the major climaxes, just before the ‘recapitulation,’ m.415-416.” But, in a foot-note, she emends herself: “I have refrained from using sonata-form terminology because in my view this is a unique form and does not relate itself to sonata-form. Nevertheless I use the term ‘recapitulation’ for its convenience.” In his self-analysis, Villa-Lobos (1965, p.235) also claims that despite its “unquestionable structural unity, *Rudepoema* has a free form in relation to the traditional aesthetic construction.” Although Rubinsky had presented some convincing evidence towards an interpretation of sonata form functionality, she must have felt intimidated by the composer’s statement and did not follow up her insight.

We must understand that there was no point for Villa-Lobos to claim that *Rudepoema* was a Sonata or a set of Variations, even if that was true. The modern status he pursued for his music meant to distance himself as much as possible from the tradition that classical formal labels stand for. The style of Stravinsky’s ballets represented to him an ideal to be emulated and the rhetoric of block juxtaposition stood as the most obviously available formal feature to adopt. As Pieter van den Toorn has pointed out (1983, p.137) “the developmental ‘style’ of the Classical sonata form seems to run fundamentally counter to Stravinsky’s musical thought processes.” Therefore, we should expect that the same held true for Villa-Lobos’ music.

Commenting the few instances of sonata form in Stravinsky’s music, Joseph Straus (1987, p.141) reminds us that “no piece of music exists in isolation or can be fully understood apart from its predecessors. But, while no work can entirely avoid referring to the past, some works do so in a more explicit manner than others.” As we have seen, Villa-Lobos’ *Rudepoema* mixes an innovative atonal harmony, strongly leaning towards Stravinsky’s block juxtaposition syntax, but also uses extensively the development variation technique (which, by the way, is completely foreign to Stravinsky’s idiom because it had been a fundamental tool for the romantic formalists, against whom Stravinsky’s music reacted).

Our conclusion, as presented in Table 2, is that the formal design of *Rudepoema* is a hybrid of sonata form and variations set. A suitable name for this hybrid might be *Sonata-Variations* form. Why not to call it just a sonata-form, as we do with Brahms sonatas that resort to developing variation? The answer to this question requires a more detailed examination of *Rudepoema*'s formal design.

Table 2: Formal Design of *Rudepoema*

<i>formal function</i>	<i>measures</i>	<i>key</i>	<i>phrase paradigm</i>
<b>EXPOSITION</b>			
Main Theme [1]	1-16	F#	period of two sentences
Transition	17-30	F# → C#	sentence
Subordinate Theme [2]	31-38	C#	sentence
<b>VARIATIONS on Theme 2</b>			
Transition - Introduction	39-54	D#	loose sentence
Variation 2-1	55-83	D#	small ternary
Variation 2-2	84-103	D#	sentence
Variation 2-3	104-138	E	parallel period
Variation 2-4	139-177	A#	small ternary
Variation 2-5	178-211	Bb	sentence
Closing Section	212-234	Bb	sentence
<b>DEVELOPMENT</b>			
Develop. Section 1	235-264	Bb / Ab	small ternary
Develop. Section 2	265-320	G#	period
Develop. Section 3	321-336	A# → unstable	sentence
Develop. Section 4	337-357	Eb	period + bridge
Develop. Section 5	358-392	Bb	sentence
Retransition	393-416	Db = C#	loose sentence
<b>RECAPITULATION</b>			
Main Theme [1-1]:	417-438	F#	small ternary
[1-2]:	439-445	F#	sentence
Transition	446-480	E	loose
Subordinate Theme [2-1]:	481-518	A	loose
[2-2]:	519-533	A	loose
Closing Section	534-552	A	sentence
<b>CODA</b>			
Bridge	553-560	unstable	loose
Section 1 (on Theme 1)	561-583	F#	sentence
Section 2 (on Theme 2)	584-601	F# → unstable	loose

Closing section	602-636	unstable	loose
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The distinctive aspect of this design is the “intrusion” of a lengthy set of variations. But wouldn’t be better to group the variations and the development in one huge section? I think this would be an incorrect assessment of the rhetorical character of these sections. In the variations set, all sections share the character of etudes regarding some technical aspect of note repetition. Variations 2-1 and 2-2 articulate throughout fast repetitions of pitch class D#, in a disguised carnival march rhythm. Variation 2-3 sustains rhythmic repetitions of a chord, supposedly recalling native Indian music. Variation 2-4 features repeated alternation of pitches B and A#. In Variation 2-5 this alternation becomes tremolo and subsequently repeated arpeggiation. More important, each variation, in unmistakable sectional separation, holds only one idea throughout, and all variations together form a block unity, preceded by an introduction and closed by another section that also portrays note repetition, this time on Eb over a pedal Bb. On the other hand, the development section is intrinsically fragmentary and unstable. The idea of note repetition sometimes resurfaces, but briefly and always varying pitches. The development is so markedly more unstable than the variations that the sections of the development proposed on table 2 might be considered arbitrary, had not the composer structured the discourse with clear block patterns.

The synthesis of sonata form and variations certainly is not an original idea of Villa-Lobos. He certainly knew that Beethoven and Liszt, among others, had dealt with it. But Villa-Lobos’ approach is completely different, not mentioning that the atonal language created new restraints. This observation reminds us of another major problem. The classical sonata form is intrinsically dependant on the tonal syntax. How Villa-Lobos dealt with the relation between harmony and form in the atonal field? What are the keys assigned for each section in table 2?

Villa-Lobos language duels in the threshold between tonality and atonality. Music that uses symmetrical collections ultimately will demand a new logic of construction based in axial symmetry conceptions that exclude the old figured bass principle: music that has the bottom in the middle, like Webern’s or Bartók’s. But Villa-Lobos’s *Rudepoema* is not quite there yet. His principles of harmonic construction, as much as his pianistic technique, are borrowed from Debussy’s late works. The symmetrical collections cohabit with bass pedal points. There is no necessary relation between the sustained bass and the symmetrical sets other than occasional congruence of the bass pitch with the upper collection. Notes generally are not posed symmetrically around axial centres. They are also unable to point to any direction and do not imply harmonic progressions. In such music “the bass is still struggling at the bottom, alienated and bearing an enormous tension of dislocated dissonance, trying to be a root under somewhat unfavourable and stressed conditions” (Harvey 1984, p.84)<sup>7</sup>.

The keys assigned on table 2 mean “pitches”, not “functional chords”: most are pitches of sustained pedal notes, except for the exposition and recapitulation of Theme 1 that feature traditional tonality. Strikingly all the pitch relations seem to fit a conventional framework of Tonic-Dominant functions, even though the syntax is not functional anymore. Therefore the struggle is projected into the large scale as a discrepancy between the formal functions and the harmony that was supposed to support it: the bass mimics the “right” pitches but there are not proper harmonic functions assigned to them. Not only the harmony is dissonant, the functional relation between syntax and form is also “dissonant”.

Music can create “tropological” (metaphorical and metonymical) meanings by its own means. Abstract relations between parts of the music are able to signify without recurring to external associations. That is the case of the “tropological” Sonata-Variations form created by Villa-Lobos in *Rudepoema*. A distinctive feature of the Sonata form is the Development section. The development technique can be compared, in verbal language, to the Metonymy trope, because it is also based in a fragmentation process of the original material (the part for the whole paradigm). Assemblage of parts creates new meanings, as much as the description of details depicts a character in a novel. In that respect, Sonata form can be compared to Prose in literature. On the other hand, Metaphor, the typical

trope of Poetry, can be compared to Variation techniques insofar both depend on the cognitive operations of similarity. The material that has been subject to variation holds a double meaning, one that points to the original theme, and a second that points to a new meaning assigned by the variation re-clothing, as much as a metaphor is based in a double meaning interpretation of the words.

Therefore a Sonata-Variations form can be considered a Formal Trope as it synthesizes two opposed composition techniques. Villa-Lobos achieved this goal using the idea of pervasive developing variation but, contrary to the Brahmsian tradition, in a sectional, block juxtaposed structure, which more likely relates to variation sets than to sonatas and, at the same time, he stretches the concept of sonata type formal functions to fit a sectional block form with atonal syntax. This is how Villa-Lobos' Sonata-Variations goes beyond the Brahms paradigm of developing variation Sonata form.

### **Blending exoticism and innovation**

To understand the background concepts that lead Villa-Lobos to compose *Rudepoema* it is necessary to take into account some details of his career. He went to Europe, for the first time, relatively late in his life, with the intention of promoting his music. Soon he realized that “in Paris of the 20's a South American composer could make his name only by supplying characteristically South American music: therefore, instead of writing in a traditional style, he composed (...) pseudo-folkloristic music” (Peppercorn 1992, p.92).

Villa-Lobos was an expert in promoting his image, sometimes resorting to outrageous strategies, like the interview he gave to René Dumesnil, published in *La musique contemporaine en France* in 1930, in which he told the story that he had been held prisoner of a Brazilian cannibal Indian tribe, participated in three days of ceremonial dances and escaped just before being eaten (Peppercorn 1992, p.213). In a certain sense this was not an invented story as far as it reproduces the book of Hans Staden, a sailor of the XVIth century, victim of a shipwreck at the Brazilian coast. But more importantly, it tells us that Villa-Lobos was reaching for the image that most Europeans had (and maybe still have) about Brazil.

This is an important key for the understanding of *Rudepoema*'s meaning. It is music that deals with an imaginary opposition between the “civilized” and the “savage”, aiming to reach the European audience. At that time, this was a key issue for both French and Brazilian cultures. Not by chance, Claude Lévi-Strauss, the famous French anthropologist, a few years later taught in Brazil at the University of São Paulo and developed there the field research used to write *The Raw and the Cooked*, a book that deals with the same dichotomy. Villa-Lobos' fictional story also reflects the theoretical concept of “cultural anthropophagy” developed by the Brazilian modern art movement to deal with the problem of foreign influences in the Arts, a particularly important issue for the culture of European ex-colonies in Latin America.

This leads to the conclusion that the nature of Villa-Lobos's resource to folk materials is quite different from Bartok's. Villa-Lobos cultivated legends about his excursions to remote areas of the country but confrontation of materials have demonstrated that most of his quotations derive from urban popular music, not from old peasant folk tunes as Bartok's. In this respect Bartók may have had good reasons for his dispraise of Hungarian urban popular music as they displayed exotic influences that impaired the purity of the modal configurations whose transformation into symmetrical scales was at the heart of his creative process. On the other hand, Villa-Lobos had exceeding familiarity with Rio de Janeiro's popular urban music to despise or avoid its influence. Despite some occasional efforts to locate exotic musical materials, even recurring to some rudimentary recordings of native Indian songs, from

places he never went, that he found stored in an ethnological archive in Rio de Janeiro's Museum, Villa-Lobos methods of collecting and transforming Brazilian folk musical materials are far from systematic, moreover when compared to Bartók's.

Villa-Lobos did not think he needed real folk music. "I am the folklore", claimed him. He was not aiming the Brazilian public that might acknowledge his sources. His public was the Parisian audience that had responded to the advertisement of a concert featuring works of a Brazilian composer, seeking for adventurous exotic music. Villa-Lobos' music should therefore meet their expectation in everything they imagined about the Brazilian life and culture: jungles, birds, paradisiacal beaches, savage Indians and Black slaves. In what concerns authenticity, Milhaud's music quotes more faithfully dozens of Brazilian songs than Villa-Lobos' *Rudepoema*. He may occasionally use as theme a distorted quotation of a Brazilian children's tune, like the *Terezinha de Jesus* recognized by Rubinsky (1984, p.13), but ultimately *Rudepoema*'s ideological background is Rousseau's myth of the "good savage", a theme primarily concerned with ethical and identity issues ("the self" versus "the other") in multiple echoes of the images of European and Brazilian cultures.

Therefore *Rudepoema*'s meaning is not dependable on the recognition of folk quotations, but surely on the interpretation of stylistic Topics. According to Hatten's definition (1994, p.294), topics are cultural unities of the Classical repertoire used for expressive correlation. Villa-Lobos' art was to reclothe, as many times as his imagination permitted, the *Grundgestalt* material of *Rudepoema* with new meanings that polarize two topical fields that contrast the senses of exoticism and familiarity.

Indeed, topical meanings of *Rudepoema* belong to two opposed fields, the "savage" and the "civilized", however, between them, there is a middle ground set by the "childish". Education transforms children, born little savages, into civilized adults. Nevertheless childish behaviour of adults can reveal the savage side of civilized men. Therefore there is a dynamical relation implied in these topical fields:

SAVAGE ← → CHILDISH ← → CIVILIZED

"Savage" meanings can be recognized in sections of the music that have very simple or primitive (as opposed to complex) rhythms and melodies, very dissonant harmony and brutal dynamic contrasts. Therefore polymodal dissonant textures and symmetrical collections are important indexes to the topical field of "primitive", as long as the symbolic association between "barbaric" and "dissonant" had already been well established in the audience's interpretant by many previous works, like Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and Bartók's *Allegro Barbaro*. Paradoxically this topical field comprehends also a "gentler" mood, opposed to the "brutal". This mood relates to the representation of nature, depiction of paradisiacal scenes, forests and bird calls, allowing the "flowing style", elsewhere distinctively "civilized", unexpectedly to be associated with the "savage" field. This aspect is emphasized wherever the flowing style joins syncopated African descendent rhythms, like the Samba, associated for Western audiences with sensuality and instinctive feelings.

On the other hand the "civilized" field is represented by a plethora of stylistic possibilities. Counterpoint complexity, virtuoso (and brilliant) style, diatonic scales and harmonic consonance, marching and singing style, operatic pathos and *Sturm und Drang* tension, *piano* chromaticism transformed into sighs (Monelle 2000, p.17), are a few among many indexes that correlate passages of *Rudepoema* with the civilized field.

Linking the two fields there is the "childish" realm that is brought to scene by the pentatonic scale, the prototype of simplicity that points to the "exotic" (a given correlation since Debussy) and the "savage" (native Indian music, for example) but also to the civilized as much as it can be developed in pastoral interpretations, *scherzando* style, cradle and round songs (that adults sing and teach to children, therefore an index of civilization).



The exposition of Theme 1 is somehow deceitful. It displays a texture that recalls the *style brisé* (harpsichord technique of non-simultaneous attacks that here seems closer to the guitar legacy) but the syncopation points to African folk rhythms like the *lundu*, as if played by a *kalimba*. Therefore there is a mixture of middle and low styles that suggests that a conflict will unfold. There are also other signs of conflict in the initial material. The running bass line that introduces the actual Theme 1A has a Baroque steady pulse that contrasts with the delayed off-beat presentation of Theme 1B. We mentioned that the F# minor tonality is tinged with the Phrygian mode. Theme 1B displaced superimposition to Theme 1A also features a different modality that might be conciliated interpreting the Lydian-Mixolydian as a rotation of F# melodic minor, but the persistent F naturals contradict this possibility, adding a subdued tension to the exposition. Furthermore, if this is not farfetched, we may figure some axial tension between the different symmetrical interpretations given to Themes 1A and 1B (Example 5). Although this does not work as a large-scale principle for Villa-Lobos' music, nevertheless it occurs locally and fits his transformational approach of pitch collections used to link structural blocks.

Theme 1 (Example 15) belongs mostly to the “civilized” world, if not by other reasons, definitely because it is one of the few tonal sections in the piece. The singing style of Theme 1B recalls a stylized folk song, maybe a cradle song. It fosters the seeds of the opposition that will unfold. The ‘troping’ of many conflicting stylistic elements (*style brisé*, *lundu*, Baroque running bass, singing style, cradle song, classical sentence form, etc) might pass unnoticed had not Villa-Lobos reinterpreted them later in the piece.

Ex. 15: Exposition of Theme 1

After the presentation of Theme 1 the piece plunges into the atonal world. We already commented the complex transition (Example 10) that features a pentatonic melody accompanied by octatonic and whole-tone harmonies, with a Phrygian bass and diatonic ornaments. The pentatonic melodic line is an important emergent idea, even though obscured by the complex harmonic set up that defines the atonal language of the piece.

Theme 2 (Example 16) presents the material that appears more prominently, in many variations, on the façade of the piece.

## Ex. 16: Exposition of Theme 2

Très peu moderé  $\text{♩} = 76$  *m.g.* *en dehors* *m.g.*

31

*ff et rythmé*

The harmony that supports Theme 2 is static. It displays a stack of nine notes that only gets a meaningful interpretation from its arrangement in thirds. Pitch D in the melody is the common link between two superimposed harmonies: a five pitches whole-Tone I set (F#-A#-C-E-**D**) topped by a six pitches “white-keys” diatonic set (C-E-A-B-G-**D**). The bass pedal point C# does not fit in either collection. It implies some ambiguous modality or even tonality that, in any case, represents a conflict with the other sets.

The melodic motive of Theme 2, extensively varied throughout the work, hints a fundamental intertextual interpretation for the meaning of the piece. It shows the same contour of the initial bassoon phrase of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*, with (almost) the “same notes” reinterpreted by different clefs.

## Ex. 17: Comparison between Stravinsky’s and Villa-Lobos’ Themes

Lento  $\text{♩} = 50$  tempo rubato.

Solo ad libitum

Bassoon

contour of Stravinsky's theme

contour of Villa-Lobos' theme

Villa-Lobos (1965, p.235) described this theme as a Brazilian native Indian tune. Although the direct relation with the *Rite of Spring* has been demonstrated, we should not take Villa-Lobos’ words by face value. In the Stravinsky’s ballet this musical idea was associated with the primitive and the barbaric. Villa-Lobos takes possession of this idea, transforming it into what *he* sees as an Indian tune. It does not matter that we cannot prove it to be true, what matters is that the meaning of something “primitive and barbaric” has been carried on. But this “something” has also both an operatic *pathos* (in

the first statement) and a *scherzando* dismissal tone (in the repetition), projecting other interpretations for later in the piece.

What differentiates the first thematic area from the second is not the motivic material. As our analysis has demonstrated, they share the same *Grundgestalt*. The essential difference comes from the harmonic context in which the material is presented, opposing tonality (1<sup>st</sup> theme) against atonality (2<sup>nd</sup> theme) to represent two different cultural perspectives of the world, the civilized and the savage. Similarities below the surface, recognizable as a sense of unity and coherence projected for the whole piece, tell us about unsuspected connections between these two worlds.

The second thematic area is largely expanded by the interpolation of a variations set. The first section (measures 39 to 54) of this set has a double function. It works as an introduction in as much as it features a prelude style based in chord arpeggios. On the other hand it also features dissonant harmony and thematic build up by progressive addition of pitches until the poignant phrase is complete. This adds to the passage a function of transition (between the exposition and variations set) that eventually leads to a sense of closure by retrieving the idea of pitch repetition on C#, a material introduced earlier at measure 7 of Theme 1. Pitch repetition turns to be the key element to hold together the set of variations.

Ex. 18: Ending of the Variations Set Prelude-Transition

This passage ends with a summation of the main harmonic materials used in the piece (whole-tone, pentatonic, octatonic) and introduces a new figuration whose full meaning will be clarified only in the recapitulation. This figuration is a distinctive five notes group that has a strong “sigh” connotation, given by the chromatic descent between the first and last notes in the lower register, implying emotional fatigue. It can also suggest some exotic bird call, four times repeated in arch design. Measure 52 features the last instance of the characteristic arpeggio of the prelude-transition section which, as we can see in example 18, generates the design of the sigh figuration.

Each of the five variations of the following set suggests a combination of different topical meanings. The first one asks for a *movement calme de marche*. The metre alternates 4 and 3 beats, contradicting the specified march rhythm. Besides that, the irregular rhythm of the note repetition implies a samba Carnival march. The melody is a pathetic operatic outcry based in the octatonic I scale (actually a thematic developing variation, as shown in Example 3, measure 58). The pianistic difficulty

of the note repetition figuration implies virtuoso style. Therefore this is a troping of styles that correlates with the emotional conflict of Carnival, a religious festivity that allows the last cry of acceptable savage behaviour before civilization imposes Lent penitence.

The following variations display childish scherzo topics (see, for instance, Example 3, measure 85), Indian music (see, for instance, Example 3, measure 104, which, by the way, is from the point of view of ethnic signifier, almost as conventional Indian music as Hollywood film music delivers), learned compound melody (see, for instance, Example 3, measure 143). The last variation brings a new version of the birdsong-sigh figuration (see Example 3, measure 198). Tarasti (1995, p.262) considers that this “melodious use of the piano’s upper register may have inspired Olivier Messiaen.”

Throughout the Variations Section and the Development Section, new topical meanings are constantly renewed, transformed, mixed and even “tropologically” combined. If we cannot assume a direct correlation between the formal functions of the sections and their implied topical meaning, undoubtedly the *Ars Combinatoria* of topical variety is essential to sustain the musical interest of such lengthy developmental part of the work. Besides that, it enhances the opposition between different topics belonging to the “savage”, “childish” and “civilized” fields.

In classical sonata form the conflict proposed by the exposition, perhaps expanded by the development, is supposed to be settled by the Recapitulation. The focus of the classical style is the opposition of tonal centres, but the language of this piece displaces it to two different problems: the harmonic conflict between tonal versus atonal and the meaning opposition between the savage and the civilized, two problems certainly interrelated, but demanding separate resolution. This explains the unusual length of the Recapitulation, three times longer than the Exposition.

Solving simultaneously many conflicts requires splitting the problem in parts. Villa-Lobos starts taking care of tonality and texture. His solution not only retrieves but completely modifies the original proposition of Theme 1. The F# minor tonality is unquestionably resettled, even though *too much* settled. Grounded on an F# pedal point throughout eight measures, the recapitulation maximizes the stasis effect implied on the exposition. The warm cradle song is substituted by a hymn-like variation of the melody that dialogues with the birdsong-sigh figuration retrieved from measure 198 of the transition-prelude which finally finds here its full meaning.

Tarasti (1995, p.263) observes that on measure 417 the melody hints a detail of syncopation that indexes nationalistic meanings but he did not realize that this is the only remaining clue for the exposition first theme’s *lundu* style. Tonality has been recovered at the expense of repressing sensuality, i.e., tonality has been frozen to a state of immobility. Prompted by a remarkable twist of the pastoral topic, the Parisian public imagined that the composer’s exotic palette was depicting a desolated jungle landscape over which planes a weeping bird.

#### Ex. 19: Recapitulation of Theme 1

- a) First Part – measures 417 to 420

Moins, mais très rythmé ♩ = 112

417 *Très en dehors le chant*

b) Second Part – mesure 439

Un peu modéré et grandeose

439

Unfolding the first part of the Recapitulation in a small ternary form, Villa-Lobos retrieves the tonality of F# minor and prepares for the second part of the Recapitulation of the Theme 1 (see example 19b) that focus on thematic materials. This section settles the conflict between Themes 1A and 1B, in a romantically verbose operatic style that Villa-Lobos was fond of. The F# minor tonality reigns sovereign and briefly recovers movement and functionality. Themes 1A and 1B are “normalized” and march together orderly.

The solution for the conflict between Themes 1A and 1B is achieved by a perfect alignment of the two themes in a rewritten version that reveals the actual contrapuntal relation hidden in the exposition. If we set the outer lines of both passages in contrapuntal old style, we get clearer picture of how the new design of the recapitulation fixes the awkward disjunction of the themes in the exposition.

Ex. 20: Relation of Themes 1A-B in the Exposition and Recapitulation

Theme 1 - Exposition

Theme 1 - Recapitulation

However this resolution causes a new problem to sneak in. Head notes of Themes 1A and 1B relate in the exposition by a perfect fifth (F#–C#) but in the recapitulation they stand a tritone apart (F#–C natural). This hints that the atonal field is lingering unsettled at the background.

The transition of the recapitulation is entirely recast (see Example 21a). The dramatic shift towards the atonal world that occurred in the transition of the exposition is dramatically subdued in the recapitulation employing a much less dissonant atonal technique, the parallel triadic diatonicism obviously borrowed from Stravinsky's *Petrushka*. This transition introduces, as a new idea, the three notes motive F#–A–E. This apparently unheard motive actually is part of the original material of Theme 1B, the embedded “motive-c” shown in Example 2. A variation of this motive works as a cadence to mark the end of the transition (see Example 21c, measure 474) and reappears as a motto in the following section.

The next section fulfils the role of Recapitulation of Theme 2 (see Example 21b) even though we can barely realize a thematic relation between the original theme and its recapitulation. Tarasti (1995, p.265) considers it as “the most lyrical section in the piece” and Rubinsky (1986, p.27) that it “suggests a forest with bird cries, maybe the *araponga*, a Brazilian bird that has a most strident sound that surpasses all other birds”. It is possibly the most magical moment of the piece, the one that sparks the sense of fulfilment. As much as the recapitulation of Theme 1, it relies on the effect of a slow harmonic rhythm and undulating harmonic accompaniment. The bird-call motive-c leads the narrative towards the closing section (see Example 21c). This is indeed a remarkable bird specimen as it never sings twice the same tune but rather variations of the motive-c, exploring different pitches, intervals and rhythms.

The enticing quality of this musical protagonist might be also related to the *Uiara*, a mythical river mermaid of the Brazilian folklore that attracts, kills and eats her victims. This extrinsic interpretation suggests an explanation for the sense of synthesis caused by this section. At one level, there is the A major tonality and the linear melody both pointing to the return to the civilized topical

field. At other level, the alluring melody and the subdued impressionistic atmosphere touch deeper psychological contents indexed to some kind of anthropophagic mythical danger portrayed by the savage topical field. This is a notch higher yet in the troping twist of the pastoral topic.

Ex. 21: Transition and Recapitulation of Theme 2

a) Transition – measures 447 to 449

447

*p* *rf* *p* *rf* *p* *f* *p* *rf* *p* *f* *p* *rf*

*rf* *p*

b) Recapitulation of Theme 2, First part – measures 481 to 488

481

Moderé presque lent (♩ = 56)

*Très lié et murmuré*

*ppp*

*toujours très ppp*

*ff* *Très en dehors*

*mf*

c) Development of “motive-c”

448 (Très animé) 474 (Lento)

484 (Modéré presque lent) 535 (Andante)

The recapitulation of Theme 2 is acknowledged by Rubinsky (1986, p.11) as the revelation of a children's tune that would be the source of all materials used in the piece. One might dispute this passage as a quotation because it only hints fragments of the children's tune spread all over the unfolding melody and counterpoint. However the clues are there and the association is certainly meaningful. It is no ordinary tune one that carries the lyrics of this telling history: *Therezinha de Jesus* is a girl that fell to the ground and was helped by three gentlemen, her father, her brother and a third one, unknown. She refuses the help of the relatives and gives her hand to the third party. This is, of course, a tale about the incest taboo. It points to the savage field, the unknown territory of the unconscious, the Edipo complex, relating directly to dangerous instincts and desires, of which the forest and the enchanting bird-call might be a metaphor. Unfortunately, because this meaning is only recognizable by Brazilian listeners that know the original tune, it does not universally correlate to a specific topic.

The second part of the recapitulation of Theme 2 links the closing theme to an overall function of final prolongation. The piece might perfectly end at measure 552, where motivic liquidation plus dynamic and rhythmic fade out provide substantial closure. However there is an important unresolved issue. Where is the recapitulation of the atonal-savage field? This problem is addressed by the impressive Coda. Themes 1 and 2 are synthesized in a stepwise rhythm, juxtaposed to seventh chords and triads in fast alternation. We do not expect Codas associated to *Sturm und Drang* but this was the topic chosen to bring back the savage field, and also with increased intensity. A variation of Theme 2 which, since the exposition, has been associated with the savage field, emerges and dominates the discourse (see Example 3, measure 591). The ending is a gradual diving process towards the lowest register of the piano. When it reaches the physical boundary of the lowest note, the composer asks for four clusters in quadruple-fortissimo performed with fist strokes, a coherent conclusion for the savage field intense emotional energy.

Ex. 22: Structure of the Coda ending.



The image displays a musical score for 'Rudepoema' with three main layers and two pentatonic scales. The top layer, 'All Diatonic Layer', consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) showing chords and intervals. Above this layer are labels: OCT II, WT II, OCT III, WT I, OCT I, OCT II, and WT II. Arrows labeled 'LOC' and 'LWT' point to specific notes in the diatonic layer. The middle layer, 'All Pentatonic Layer', shows two staves with pentatonic scales. Brackets below these staves indicate segments with interval patterns (0257). The bottom layer shows two pentatonic scales: Pentatonic G# [2-3-2-3] = (02479) and Pentatonic C# [2-3-2-3] = (02479). Fingerings (2, 3, 2, 3, 2) are indicated for the G# scale.

Notice that at this point Theme 2 has also vanished. All that rests is a bass line structured with two alternating pentatonic sets. This line features successive four notes symmetrical segments of the pentatonic set. Joined they complete the pentatonic content. Contrasting with this pentatonic material, the upper layer displays only diatonic materials, and the middle register displays augmented, seventh and major/minor chords. Combined these layers create an alternation of octatonic and whole-tone sonorities, linked by the LOC and LWT odd note techniques. Therefore this final statement represents an all-encompassing summary of the atonal harmonic content of the piece. This way closure is also granted to the savage topical field.

## Notes

1. Tarasti (1995, p.259) considers *Rudepoema* “the apex of Villa-Lobos’ piano production” and compares it to Charles Ives’ *Concord Sonata* and to “the most monumental works by Prokofiev, Stravinsky, Szymanowski, Scriabin and Bartók”, asserting that “it is as revolutionary as Stravinsky’s piano arrangements of his *Petrushka*.” Béhague (1994, p.100) places *Rudepoema* along *Prole do Bebê No.2* as the “composer’s main contributions to piano literature of the period.” Rubinsky (1986, p.3) also claims that *Rudepoema* “should take its rightful place as a major composition in the piano literature of the XXth century.”
2. Even though it should be recognized that the principle of developing variation is also important to Debussy’s music, as it runs, for instance, throughout *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Anyway, this finding is consistent with Rio de Janeiro’s cultural environment at the time Villa-Lobos studied there. Dudeque (2004) has demonstrated that the preceding generation of Brazilian composers absorbed significant influences of the German formalists. The works of Alberto Nepomuceno (1864-1920), who studied in Berlin at the Stern Conservatory and represents a fundamental influence for Villa-Lobos’ early music, reveal a skilful use of the developing variation technique. But not to the point of combining it with a principle of non-repetition (applied to themes, but not at the phrase level) that makes *Rudepoema* a demanding piece for the listener, in contrast with the easier reception of his later neo-classical style.
3. With a defensible reasoning due to the importance of pentatonic materials later in the piece, Rubinsky (1986) considers this material as an independent fourth theme.

4. This term was proposed by Leo Treitler (in “Harmonic Procedures in the Fourth Quartet of Béla Bartók,” *Journal of Music Theory* 3/2, November 1959) and later was adopted and elaborated by Antokoletz (1984, 1992, 2004).
5. Tarasti (1995, p.263) calls attention to the retransition cadence on measure 401 that reintroduces the F# key and leads to the recapitulation. That is also a typical cadence by strong contrast. The dissonant chord that substitutes for the dominant function has all the pitches except F# and C#. The cadential meaning results from the contrast between the chord stroke and the isolate unmarked missing pitches F# and C# that follow. These pitches, in turn, become worthy of attention, recalling tonal harmonic function of tonic and dominant in the recapitulation.
6. This is the so called “X-cell”, as named by Perle (1955) and further used by Antokoletz (1984) to analyse Bartók’s music.
7. Actually Harvey’s phrase had in mind Schoenberg’s serial music but the comment fits perfectly Villa-Lobos’ *Rudepoema*.

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### **Abstract**

The analysis of *Rudepoema*, a landmark piece in Villa-Lobos production, demonstrates his technique of using symmetrical collections in the atonal context, following the path of Stravinsky and Debussy. His achievements can be compared to Bartók’s in Hungary regarding the exploration of the Brazilian folklore in the atonal language. Nonetheless the dissection of materials reveals an unexpected intensive use of developing variation in order to grant unification to the predominant block structure. From this block integration process results a hybrid large form that synthesizes Sonata formal functions with the sectional character of Variations sets. This trope of forms may be called Sonata-Variations. Villa-Lobos also retrieves the alternation of topical styles, characteristic of the Classical period, to achieve a growth process of the form and, at the same time, to favour interpretations of exoticism by his aimed Parisian audience. Colouring the discourse with topical contrasts, Villa-Lobos allows us to correlate materials to the “civilized” and the “savage”, an opposition between two topical fields that represent a key subject for Brazilian and French cultures at that time.

### **Biographical Note**

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