

Musical gesture: from composition to performance

In an interview to Richard Toop, Brian Ferneyhough proposes a threefold comprehension of music listening and composing: figure, texture and gesture. In his point of view, gesture and texture are both articulated by a figural substrate. It means that gesture and texture are both resultant of a figural manipulation, which comprehends a parameterization of the sonic fluxes according to articulations, instrumental activities and notes parameters. In this sense, it is not possible to separate gesture from other musical aspects. In this paper we will present the idea of an unfolding gesture in two aspects: motor or energetic aspect (performance gestuality) and symbolic aspect (historical dimension of a specific sonic flux). If the first aspect can be related to Ferneyhough musical thought, the second one has Luciano Berio as a main reference. After that, we will present an interpretation of gesture as a non-abstract musical aspect and as a compositional and performance tool. It means that we shall include time as a main feature for musical analysis.

One of the most important issues for contemporary music is the gestural heterogeneity of its repertoire, that makes parametric dimensions differ greatly from composer to composer and piece to piece. On the one hand this kind of variety makes rich the listening within the symbolic aspect, on the other, it makes understanding more difficult in the energetic aspect to the interpreter, impeding, thus, the prägnanz of sense that the gesture carries within. This is important, therefore, to establish an analytical pattern to consider the individuality of compositional processes, enabling performance that takes into account each of those figural manipulations, thereby generating even greater wealth within the motor or kinetic aspect of gesture. We believe so that understanding musical structures after those three elements could establish a better communication between composition and performance, resulting in a actual gestural performance. To effectuate this, we will use as the main object of analysis, to illustrate those relationships, the Sonata for Solo Cello by Bernd Alois Zimmermann, making use also of writings by the composer himself as an analytical background.

William Teixeira holds a BA in Cello Performance by São Paulo State University (UNESP) and a MA in Musicology by Campinas University (UNICAMP). He was professor of cello and music history at Fukuda Institute and principal cellist for São Paulo University Chamber Orchestra beyond his work as soloist and contemporary music performer. He is currently a candidate for PhD at São Paulo University (USP) with scholarship by FAPESP.

Silvio Ferraz studied composition at São Paulo University (USP) with Gilberto Mendes and Willy Corrêa de Oliveira, completing his studies at Foundation Royaumont with Brian Ferneyhough and James Dillon and at IRCAM's "Académie d'Été", with Gerard Grisey and Jonathan Harvey, Doctor in Semiotics by the Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC/SP) with a thesis about difference and repetition in music. Currently, he is professor of musical composition at São Paulo University (USP) and researcher of FAPESP and CNPq.