



DIE GLÜCKLICHE HAND (THE HAND OF FATE) BY ARNOLD SCHÖNBERG: AN ELECTROACOUSTIC RE-COMPOSITION

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Abstract

This article is the result of a polemical experiment that questions the originality of a work: what happens when the musical materials are original of an author, in this case Arnold Schönberg, but their arrangement in time corresponds to another creator? Can we then speak of creation? The words composition, interpretation, transcription, analysis, inspiration... come close to the topic we are dealing with here, since re-composition has a bit of all of them. The value of this experience consists in focusing the urgency of redefining these concepts, traditionally well determined and compartmentalized. This is the case, for example, with the notions of author, work, score and version; the experience I propose here leads to questioning the exclusive value of the score as the result of a project, and highlights the importance of the compositional process, of which writing is a realization taken from a reservoir of infinite possible virtualities.

In the specific case of the first Scene of die glückliche Hand, these general questions are accompanied by a concern for the intelligibility of Schönberg's text, originally destined to remain incomprehensible (a poem literally "drowned" into the musical opacity of the Scene). This lack of semantic clarity is, of course, deliberate, and is being generated by unconscious motivations that we will not analyze here. Is making Schönberg's poem intelligible, in other words, bringing to light the voice of his unconscious, a service to the composition or a violation of the creator's will?

The experience of re-composition seeks to highlight the fact that a work is not necessarily an absolute, but can be understood as a continuous work in progress as it is produced in our memory, always renewed and recreated. Thus, in a process of regeneration close to the auto-poiesis of neuroscience, works can be reconstituted in new senses, acquiring new meanings through which the miracle of life is expressed.

Keywords: *Esthetics – Musicology – Musical composition*

INTRODUCTION

It is about to be twenty years since the article “Labyrinthe de Miroirs”, part of the proceedings of the conference *Le Mélange des Arts* organized at the University of Lille, France, by Joëlle Caullier was published by the Septentrion University Press under the title “C'est ainsi que l'on crée...” – À propos de *La Main heureuse* d'Arnold Schönberg. The reason that impels me to present this corrected and enlarged translation is how topical the problems that it raises are in relation to the absolute value of the musical work as a final result. The process of creation is at issue here, not the work itself. From this point of view, the final score could be considered as a concretion that emerges from an infinite number of virtualities,

transcending the very person of the composer. This happens spontaneously with the elaboration of memory and imagination in each of us after listening to a work. But here we go further: we consider that reference work as an invitation to creative action, to its re-composition, as if it were a “work in progress”.

This is how *Labyrinth of Mirrors* is a work of electroacoustic re-composition of the first scene of Schönberg's *The Hand of Fate*, op. 18, opening a debate on the nature, the meaning and the musical and musicological scope of the experience. Here, a caveat: at the time of the appearance of the article in French, I greatly regretted the absence of a score for the work of re-composition,

which did not then exist. This omission has finally been repaired in the present edition, which provides readers with a graphic score detailing the origin of each sound material with references to the original score.

May this work be a tribute to the master Arnold Schönberg, with all the admiration and respect he deserves.

The background

“But what is decisive is that a spiritual process, which undoubtedly has its source in action, is expressed not only through gesture, movement and music, but also through color and light; and it should be clear that gesture, color and light have been treated here in the same way as sound: that with them music has been made.”¹

Composed for a singer, two mimes, a small 12-voice choir and orchestra,² *The Hand of Fate* is a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art) in which Schönberg himself conceived the music, text, sets, costumes, staging and lighting. The work is divided into four scenes. It is an expressionist piece, in which several layers of reality and meaning are superimposed, introducing a deliberate ambiguity between the inner and the outer world. The vision of this multiplicity prevails over any other technical consideration, and forces us to make a plural analysis of the meanings.

The Hand of Fate was composed between 1910 and 1913. It occupies a special place in the composer's output, and several circumstances converge for the gestation of the work:

- a) Together with *Erwartung* op. 17 (*Expectation*), a one-act monodrama composed in 1909, *The Hand of Fate* is a work of psychological elaboration of the tragic events Schönberg experienced at that time.³
- b) Reading the book *Geschlecht und Charakter (Sex and Character)* by the Austrian philosopher Otto Weininger, and discovering the Swedish playwright August Strindberg (translated into German at the time of the composition of the two pieces) opened the way to a musical form totally rooted in subjectivity, achieving what today is called an “Ich-Drama”. In both *Expectation* and *The Hand of Fate*, expressionism is the result of the fantasy of the protagonist self, projected into reality.

¹ « Mais ce qui est décisif, c'est qu'un processus spirituel qui a sans aucun doute sa source dans l'action, est exprimé non seulement à travers les *gestes*, le *mouvement* et la *musique*, mais aussi à travers les *couleurs* et la *lumière* ; et il doit être clair que les *gestes*, les *couleurs* et la *lumière* ont été traités ici pareillement à des sons : qu'avec eux de la musique a été faite. »

Arnold SCHÖNBERG, conference from Breslau about *Die glückliche Hand*, French translation Edna Politi, Contrechamps editions, online at <https://books.openedition.org/contrechamps/2625>

² 1 piccolo, 3 flutes, 3 oboes, 1 English horn, 1 clarinet in D, 3 clarinets in B \flat and A, 1 bass clarinet in B \flat , 3 bassoons, 1 contrabassoon, 4 horns in F, 3 trumpets in B \flat , 4 trombones, 1 bass tuba; harp, celesta, glockenspiel, xylophone, timpani; unpitched percussion composed of cymbals, gran cassa, snare drum, tam-tam, treble bells, bass bells, triangle, metal pipes, tambourine, hammer; minimum 16 first violins, minimum 14 second violins, 10 to 12 violas, 10 to 12 cellos, 8 to 10 double basses.

³ I am referring to his wife Mathilde's admitted infidelity, followed by her departure with the Schönbergs' painting teacher, Richard Gertl, and the latter's suicide in 1908.

“This fundamental subjectivity of the central character, often a phantasmagorical double of the author, leads to a fragmented text, made of the superimposition of partial and strongly subjective “visions” of the world. With this, Strindberg expresses the ideal of expressionism, of which the mono-drama seems to him the quintessence, and Schönberg does no more than transfer to the musical realm what the writer advocates for the theater. In *Erwartung* we find the technique of the interior monologue and the single character, and in *The Hand of Fate* the silent characters (a man and a woman) are mere anonymous roles for a central character, Man.”⁴

- c) In 1911, Wassily Kandinsky had just published his work *On the Spiritual in Art*, at the same time when Schönberg's *Treatise on Harmony* was published. There exists an important epistolary correspondence between the two artists, which shows their strong coincidence of opinions. For Schönberg in particular, the work of art was, at that precise moment in his life, the means of expressing the unconscious, of abandoning the conscious search for form. The convergence between the two artists is manifested, in addition to Schönberg's collaboration as a painter in the creation of the almanac *Der blaue Reiter*, by the creation of the respective total works of art: *Der gelbe Klang (The Yellow Sound)* is the *Gesamtkunstwerk* created by Kandinsky in 1909⁵, which undoubtedly influenced the composer for the composition of *The Hand of Fate*.
- d) It was through reading Honoré de Balzac's *Seraphita* that Schönberg came into contact, indirectly, with the symbolism advocated by Emmanuel Swedenborg, whose considerable influence was felt in the literature, theater, music, philosophy and psychology of the time.⁶ *The Hand of Fate* is influenced by this symbolism through the androgynous representations that beset Man (The Woman, the Dandy). The central problematic of the work is constituted by the tormented contradictions of this main character.

After this outline of the circumstances that interact for the creation of *The Hand of Fate*, here is a brief description of its scenes:

First scene

⁴ « Cette subjectivité fondamentale du personnage central, souvent double fantasmagique de l'auteur, conduit à un texte éclaté, fait de la superposition des « visions » partielles et fortement partiales du monde et des autres hommes. En cela, Strindberg exprime l'idéal de l'expressionisme dont le monodrame lui paraît la quintessence, et Schönberg ne fait que transposer au domaine musical ce que l'écrivain prône pour le théâtre. On retrouve d'ailleurs dans *Erwartung* la technique du monologue intérieur et du personnage unique, et dans *La Main heureuse* les personnages muets (un Monsieur, une Femme) ne sont qu'anonymement des faire-valoir du personnage central, un Homme. »

Michel IMBERTY, *La musique creuse le temps : De Wagner à Boulez : Musique, psychologie, psychanalyse*, Éditions L'Harmattan, 2005, p. 116.

⁵ That same year Kandinsky produced two other works designed for the stage: *The green sound* and *Black and White*.

⁶ Goethe, Gérard de Nerval, Balzac, Wagner, Oberlin, Berlioz, Baudelaire, Paul Valéry, Eliphas Lévi, Hahnemann and Jung, among others, show the influence of the Swedish philosopher.

This first musical sequence is elaborated on the basis of Man's inner dialogue, lost between his carnal desire and his own image as creator. The voices of the chorus represent the inner voice of Man, whose problematic can be summarized in this verse:

Du der das überirdische in Dir hast, sehnst dich nach dem irdischen!

which loosely translated would mean:

"You who have the supernatural in you, still long for the earthly!"

Theatrically, Man is lying face down to earth when the play begins: a mythical animal, a representation of the psychological malaise noted above, sits on his back and bites his neck. The stage is almost completely dark. A velvet curtain with slits allows us to see the faces of the 6 women and 6 men who make up the chorus. Man remains motionless on the floor during the entire scene.

The second part of this article, entitled "Labyrinth of mirrors", will be devoted to the musical organization of the first scene.

Second scene

In the second scene, Man is still divided between the sensual and the spiritual, but unlike in the first scene, the problem is embodied in the characters that appear on stage (the woman, the dandy). They have no life of their own, they are mere projections of Man's unconscious. That is why they do not sing and only manifest themselves through mime. Man, who during this painting will praise the beauty of the woman, will not be able to look at her or touch her since she does not exist in reality. She will remain behind him all the time and will only express herself through the gestures of her face, where one can perceive the feelings that Man inspires in her: unspeakable pity, warm interest, indifference, hostility, humility, contempt. The woman thus acts as a phantom whose image, evanescent, is deprived of its own existence and of any verbal expression.

Musically, the second scene is presented in the form of four successive illustrations or commentaries to the verses sung by Man. The second and third illustrations are separated by a musical interlude. In contrast to the static first scene, the changes of character, tempo and meter are here particularly marked, giving this second scene a dynamic atmosphere rich in interruptions.

The first illustration consists of a fragmentary exposition with a proliferation of instrumental solos accompanying Man's singing, followed by a scherzo performed by the woodwinds.

The second Illustration exhibits the same fragmentary character, but here the discourse is organized in imitation of the voice. For example, in the verse *mit dir zu sprechen (to speak with you)*, the word "sprechen" is literally imitated by the strings.

The instrumental interlude is realized from two characteristic actions: a regular tremolo of strings is followed by a series of trills played *accelerando* by the winds.

The third illustration contrasts with the other two by a clear increase in dynamics and instrumental density: here the orchestra takes on a much more fluid and dramatic character.

The voice of Man first presents a vocalization on the vowel "O". Then he sings in falsetto the verse *Du Süße, du Schöne! (Oh, you sweet, you beautiful!)*.

The last illustration of the second scene is introduced by a characteristic violin solo. The trills of the winds continue and prepare the sonorous plot at the end of the scene, which arrives by

illustrating the verse *Nun besitze ich dich für immer! (Now I possess you forever!)*.

Third scene

The original problem of the work, defined as the ambivalence between spiritual and sensual life, undergoes a new metamorphosis: the action is now objectified and takes place in parallel inside two caves, very close to each other, represented on stage. In the first one, several workers are performing manual labor; in this place, Man will quickly demonstrate his superiority over them by hammering a diadem with embedded precious stones. Despite the threatening attitude of the workers, Man laughs; he has nothing to fear from them, he is a creator, his superiority protects him.

In the second cave are the woman and the dandy. Man cannot access this place; the plot takes place without his direct intervention. It is a scene where erotic suggestions abound, while Man observes, impotent.

Musically, the third scene presents motives associated with the characters, reminiscent of Wagnerian leitmotifs. The interventions of Man's voice are dispersed, separated by large solo instrumental sections. Although there is a total independence between the musical environments of the two caves, a symmetry is established between them from the point of view of form, since both present an Introduction, followed by a First sequence, a Second sequence and a Conclusion.

The dénouement of the third scene arrives quickly, with a sudden increase in the instrumental density of the orchestra. It is marked by an almost literal repetition of the "behind-the-scenes music" to which we will return later in our musical analysis of the first scene. Man has just been caught by the fall of a huge rock; the circular motif of the beginning of the piece is repeated by the bass clarinet and bassoon.

Fourth scene

The form closes. Man lies on the ground where the block of stone has just crushed him. As in the first image, the mythical animal is sitting on his shoulders; the six men and six women of the chorus are visible under a gray-blue light. The idea of eternal return is confirmed by the repositioning of the original question raised by the work.

Musically, three polyphonic sections of the chorus appear between an instrumental prelude and coda.

The prelude is generated from a characteristic rhythm of eight eighth notes and four sixteenth notes. This figure is developed by the whole orchestra.

The first polyphonic section consists of two interventions of the choir separated by a caesura. The first intervention is a *crescendo*, accompanied by sporadic oboe and bass clarinet solos. The second choral intervention first presents the text in unison and then develops it into three canonic voices. At the end of this first vocal section, the polyphonic dimension is reduced to two voices only (women and men).

The second section resumes the polyphonic density starting from four canonic voices. Here several solo instruments appear: celesta, first violin, piccolo, flutes and clarinets. The instrumental density increases, raising the psychological tension to the extreme.

The third choral section is organized in the form of rhythmic ritornellos. In a mysterious *pianissimo*, the violent irruption of the

bass strings in unison with the bassoons and contrabassoon creates a climate of great expectation. Everything is set for the final intervention of the verse *Du Armer (Poor you)*. A final increase in intensity precedes the coda.

The coda is the culmination of the work. It consists of three bars that leave the musical form open. The generating conflict of *The Hand of Fate*, the contradiction of the carnal versus the spiritual, has not been resolved. Thus, the energy for an eternal restart is produced...

A little bit of history

In May 1997, the conference *La Synthèse des arts* was organized by Joëlle Caullier and the *Centre d'Études des Arts de la Voix* of the University of Lille III. In addition to presenting the various modalities of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary correlations between the different arts, this conference had an additional interest: there was a public performance of Wassily Kandinsky's stage piece *Der Gelbe Klang (The Yellow Sonority)*, with the participation of several teaching colleagues from Lille III and students from the Department of Musical Studies (DEM). The realization of this project led us to reflect on the hypothesis of considering a work not as a finished object but as a human product, a work in progress that, since it continued in the memory and in the elaboration of each one, could be susceptible to be continued collectively in practice.

As a result of these considerations, Joëlle Caullier and the *Centre d'Études des Arts de la Voix* organized a second conference entitled *Le Mélange des arts*, this time concentrating on various contributions on Schönberg's *The Hand of Fate*, op. 18.

In addition to the multiple musicological contributions to the conference, the artistic realizations that originated there were based on the hypothesis that the re-composition of the work is possible. Adopting this idea as a starting point, we made successive arrangements of Schönberg's first scene. In May 1998 we presented three re-compositions in concert, two purely instrumental and the last one electroacoustic.

For the instrumental re-compositions, the students of the DEM degree prepared rhythmic models of the score, in order to maintain its original rhythmic structure as a skeleton, proposing harmonies and melodies different from the original. In the first two re-compositions the students participated actively as performers. The first, conceived for symphony orchestra instruments, was conducted by Jean-Luc Hervé; the second, for traditional instruments, was conducted by Alain Desjacques. The third, for electroacoustic support, was conceived by this writer with the re-recorded voices of Joëlle Caullier and François Mulard. The synthetic instruments were made at the Studio du Nord of the University of Lille.

The experience of re-composition was overwhelming for all of us who participated, because of the game of identity and difference with the original composition that it brought us at all times. Personally, I felt that between Schönberg's creation and my re-composition a real labyrinth was woven, always reflecting, as in a room of distorted mirrors, the image of Man in *The Hand of Fate* and his tremendous identity crisis.

THE LABYRINTH OF MIRRORS

Electroacoustic re-composition of the first scene from Arnold Schönberg's *Die Glückliche Hand (The Hand of Fate)* op. 18

"The true path of discovery does not consist in seeking new landscapes, but to look with new eyes. "

Marcel Proust

PRELUDIUM

The history of music is full of examples of composers who were inspired, either in their formative years or later, by the work of others. What follows is the account of an experience that is part of this tradition, while attempting to make an original contribution to this process. It is a re-composition of the first scene of Arnold Schönberg's *The Hand of Fate*, op. 18. The result is a musical configuration that I have called *The Labyrinth of Mirrors*, whose form and meaning are different from those of the original piece. This "transformation of meaning" is realized with electroacoustic means in a stereophonic space, the localization of the sound materials being an essential part of the project.

Formally, I interpreted the first scene of *The Hand of Fate* not as the beginning of the work, but as an autonomous musical project: the presentation of the original text, which, being a poem written by Schönberg himself, is heard for the first time in an intelligible form.

What follows is devoted to the description of this creative experience. First of all, I will propose an analysis of the music of the first scene by breaking it down into strata, especially taking into account the complex text/music relationship involved. I will then attempt a critical approach to some aspects of Schönberg's work as an introductory reflection to the re-composition. This will be followed by the graphic score of the re-composition, which can also be heard on Soundcloud.⁷

By way of conclusion, I will allow myself to invite readers to a discussion on the nature of this experimental project which, I believe, is likely to produce aesthetic, musicological and musical consequences.

The first scene of *The Hand of Fate*

Schönberg conceived this scene as a superposition of several layers, each with its own meaning. The music and the text (by Schönberg as already mentioned) maintain an ambiguous relationship that goes from total independence to identity, proposing a mimetic framework where similarity and otherness follow one another, until finally producing a synthesis: the instrumental doublings of the sung voices.

The four layers of the scene are: a) the chorus, b) the static musical background, c) the instrumental actions in the foreground and d) the "music behind the scene". As a sort of cadenza, the latter closes the musical form and prepares the appearance of the second scene.

⁷ The re-composition's audio is to be found in <https://soundcloud.com/eduardito1/laberrinto-de-lols-espejos>

The chorus (bars 3 to 22)

Six female voices (three sopranos and three altos) and six male voices (three tenors and three basses) whisper, recite and sing Schönberg's original text:

Frauen

Still
O schweige
Du weißt es ja, und trotzdem bist du blind?
So oft schon! Und immer wieder?
Immer wieder das gleiche Ende
Immer wieder glaubst du den Traum?
Immer wieder hängst Du deine Sehnsucht
Ans Unerfüllbare;
Immer wieder überlässt du Dich
den Lockungen deiner Sinne,
die unirdisch ist,
aber irdisches Glück ersehnen!
Du armer!
Irdisches Glück!
Du der das überirdische in dir hast
Sehnst dich nach dem irdischen!
Und kannst nicht bestehen!
Du Armer!

Männer

Du wusstest es ja
Kannst du nicht endlich Ruhe finden
Du weißt, es ist immer das Gleiche
Musst du dich immer wieder hineinstürzen?
Willst du nicht endlich glauben?
Glaub der Wirklichkeit;
Sie ist so, so ist sie
Und nicht anders.
Immer wieder hängst du deine Sehnsucht
ans Unerfüllbare;
Immer wieder überlässt du dich
den Lockungen deiner Sinne,
die das Weltall durchstreifen,
aber irdisches Glück ersehnen!
Irdisches Glück!
Du Armer!
Du das überirdische in dir hast
Sehnst dich nach dem irdischen!
Und kannst nicht bestehen!
Du Armer!

Women

Hush
Be silent
You know, and still you are blind?
So many times! And again and again?
Again and again the same old story.
Again and again you believe the dream?
Again and again you hang your longing
To the unfulfillable;
Again and again you surrender
To the lure of your senses,
Which is unearthly,
but crave earthly happiness!
Poor you!
Earthly happiness!
You who have the supernatural in you
Still long for the earthly!
And you cannot stand it!
Poor you!

Men

You knew it
Can't you finally find peace?
You know it's always the same
Do you always have to rush into it?
Don't you want to believe at last?
Believe in reality;
It's like this, like this
And not different.
Again and again you hang your desire
To the unfulfillable;
Again and again you abandon yourself
to the lure of your senses,
that roam the universe,
but long for earthly happiness!
Earthly happiness!
Poor you!
You have the supernatural in you
And still long for the earthly!
And you cannot stand it!
Poor you!

The families of voices (women and men) allow an unfolding in time of the dramatic action. Indeed, the problems of Man, central figure of the scene, are circular; they refer to his present, but also to his past, as indicated by the tenses of the verb "Wissen": *Du weißt es ja*, (you know it), sung by the women, is opposed to *Du wusstest es ja*, (you knew it), sung by the men.

The organization of the voices is polyphonic, with 6 real voices gradually emerging from two common trunks.

Example 1 – Bars 14 and 15

Once fully deployed, the six-voice polyphony folds back, giving rise to a kind of distorted mirror, where the expression ...*ans*

Unerfüllbare (...To the unfulfillable), repeated by both female and male voices, plays the central role of axis of symmetry.

The chorus presents a complex compositional logic, with remarkably subtle repetitions and echoes. The ensemble resembles a delicate clockwork mechanism that is set in motion little by little, and which is especially noticeable in the passages in which

The static musical background (bars 1 to 34)

The static musical background is produced by the violins and cellos in tremolo, to which the harp and timpani are added.

Example 2 – Bars 1 and 2

Of the 12 tones of the chromatic scale, nine (3 for the violas, 2 for the cellos, 2 for the harp and 2 for the timpani) constitute a continuous pedal. The atonality arises from the ambiguity of the overlapping tonal relationships rather than from the search for non-tonal intervals. No interval is clearly discernible. The sounds are mostly in the low register, which gives the first frame its characteristic opacity. Adding to the lack of harmonic intelligibility is the percussion, with the respective attacks of the timpani and harp, as well as the tremolo bows, which give the picture a dense spectral identity.

The static musical background is composed of fixed sounds without evolution, neither timbre nor dynamics, except for an almost imperceptible *diminuendo*, bars 23 to 25. The harmonic and rhythmic fixity does not adapt to the events of the foreground; it is not their accompaniment, but a magma from which they are detached in order to exist. It is, one could say, the undefined presence of the unconscious being brought to the fore, from which punctual actions emerge.⁸

Instrumental actions in the foreground (bars 1-25)

Four types of foreground instrumental actions can be easily identified: phrases, irruptions, mimetic actions and doublings.

Phrases have no obvious connection to the text and provide a corporal alternative to the musical flow. They carry a musical gesture that is always characteristic. They constitute a micro-form in the musical form that can be isolated from the rest. (Examples: the doubling action of the bass clarinet and bassoon, to which the contrabassoon is added, bars 1 to 3; or the intervention of the three trombones in bars 9 and 10.)

Example 3 – Bars 1 to 3

⁸ I can't help but associate the role of the static musical background I'm describing with the magmatic power attributed to the planet Solaris, in Andrei Tarkovsky's eponymous 1972 film. From it emerged real and tangible characters and situations, created by imagination and memory...

polyphony gives way to the sudden synchronization of the voices. The problem of the intelligibility of the text and the recognition of each voice arises even when considering the voices alone without instrumental accompaniment. The difficulty in recognizing the text is intentional: this can be deduced from the use of dynamics that are almost inaudible in the general sound context of the scene.

Example 4 – Bars 9 and 10

The irruptions introduce an unexpected element that momentarily attracts the listener's attention. The difference with the phrases is created by the absence of a characteristic motive (Examples: the violin pizz., bar 3, or the three synchronized trombones, bar 4).

Example 5 – Bar 3

Example 6 – Bar 4

The mimetic actions are those that have been influenced by the choral voices, but still retain their independence. With these actions a game of repetitions and echoes is established that prolongs, on a strictly musical level, the imitative work of the voices of the choir among themselves. In the syllabic decomposition of the text, the mimesis with the instruments is often perfect; at other times, one feels that there is an influence of the text, even when the resemblance is not so evident. (Examples: *Du weißt es ja* (*You know it*), female voice 1, is associated with the piccolo action, bar 5.

Example 7 – Bar 5

Willst du nicht endlich glauben? (Don't you want to believe at last?), male voice 1, bar 8, is partially imitated by the oboe, bars 8 and 9.

Example 8 – Bars 8 and 9

The doublings are remarkably subtle, and play a role of liberation, of dénouement of the dramatic action within the scene. The imitation gives way to the identity between voices and instruments in the verse *ans Unerfüllbare (...To the unfulfillable)*, bars 12 and 13. A process of simplification given by the shortening of the vocal parts (The three real female voices doubled by the bassoons, will give rise to a complex game of echoes, bars 13 and 14 in the verse *immer wieder überlässt du dich den Lockungen deiner Sinne (Again and again you surrender to the lure of your senses)*.

Example 9 – Bars 13 and 14

Bars 17-19 mark the apotheosis of the doublings, with the cello in unison with the first male voice, and the flute and oboe in unison with the first female voice. This occurs in the verse *Du, der das überirdische in dir hast sehnst dich nach dem irdischen! (You who have the supernatural in you, still long for the earthly!)*.

Example 10 – Bars 17 to 19

The music behind the scene (bars 26-33)

The Hand of Fate is, as I said, an example of an expressionist work, where meaning is produced by the opposition between superimposed levels of reality. In the first scene of the work, the dramatic action takes place on two levels. The first level presents Man with his phantasmagoric anguish, while in the second this problem is seen “from the outside”, mocking the drama represented in the first level.

Example 11 – Principal Bar 26 (4/4)

Musically, this gives way to a brief coda of rare violence with invisible instruments and voices. Here other percussion instruments appear (triangle, cymbal). The celesta, for its part, loses its interruptive character to acquire a continuous function. Another instrumental color comes from the combination of piccolo and clarinet in E_b in unison, producing a brief and characteristic *ostinato*.

The first scene culminates in a sudden, violent burst of laughter.⁹

The stereophonic electroacoustic re-composition

This analysis serves to define the context in which the electroacoustic re-composition took place. In Schönberg’s original, the complexity of the interactions of the four parallel layers (the chorus, the static musical background, the instrumental actions in the foreground, and the music behind the scenes) obscures the intelligibility of the poem, as if Schönberg did not want the problematic that emerges from his verses to come to light. This allowed me to imagine the musical form of the re-composition as a recovery of the acoustic understanding of the verses. The work is performed on the modes of whispering without phonation, whispering with phonation, spoken phonation and singing. Instead of presenting the sung voice alternating with the whispered or spoken voice, I have thought it convenient to arrange the modes in a sequence of progressive transitions where the appearance of the phonation first, and the melody later, play a preponderant role. In this way, a sort of genesis of the meaning of the text is established, evolving from semantic to musical discourse.

Here is a summary of the most important characteristics of the re-composition work:

- (a) the 6 female voices are reduced to only one (the voice of Joëlle Caullier, soprano, re-recorded). The same applies to the 6 male voices, which are also reduced to one voice (the voice of François Mulard, baritone). The bursts of laughter are produced by the voices of Vincent Tiffon, Robert Llambias and Christophe Janicki. As already mentioned, all instrumental materials have been synthetically produced at the Studio du Nord of the University of Lille.
- (b) The female voice is omnipresent, except for a single spoken intervention of the male voice in unison with her

⁹ All quoted musical examples are authorized by the publisher in the following terms: “© Reproduced by kind permission of Universal Edition A.G., Wien.”

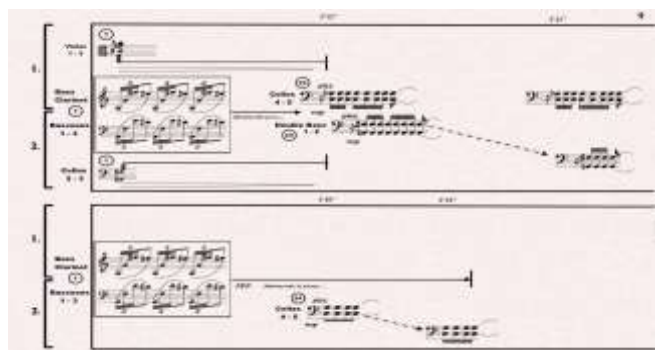
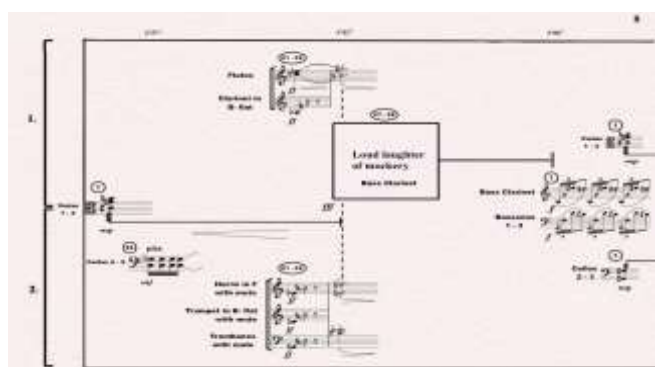
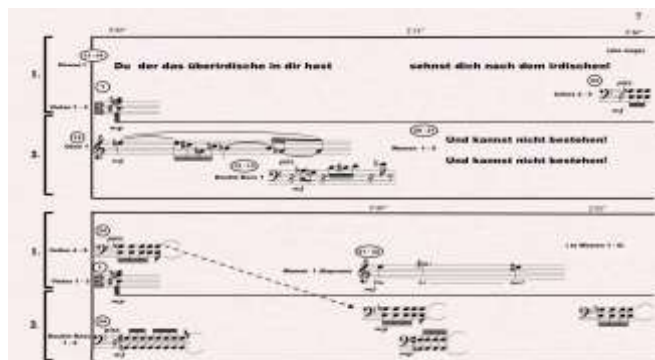
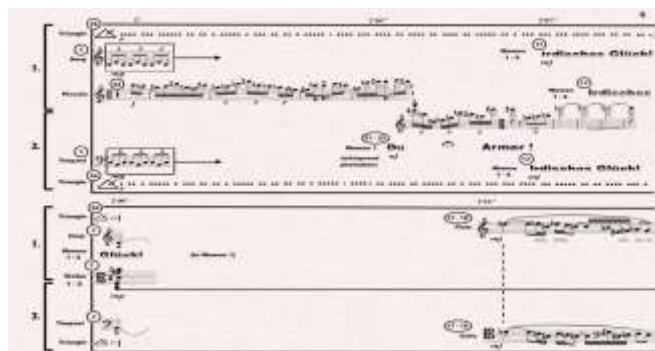
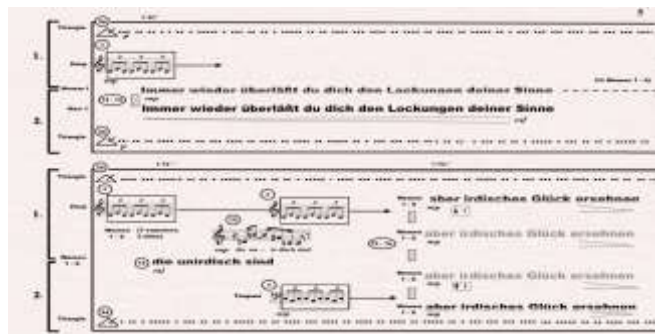
in the verse *Immer wieder überlässt du Dich den Lockungen deiner Sinne (Again and again you surrender to the lure of your senses).*

- (c) In the re-composition the *ripieno* voices of the original disappear.
- (d) The electroacoustics allows to replace the polyphonic density of the choir by its spatial localization with displacements of the voices from one channel to the other. To this is added reverberation, which adds depth to the spatialization of the signals.
- (e) The static musical background is broken down into its instruments: harp, timpani and violas (cellos are absent, with one exception). The harp is presented accompanying the whispered voice. Its original triplet rhythm is not immediately perceptible; the rhythmic continuity is replaced at first by groups separated by irregular pauses. The triplet continuity is perceived later, in a *ritardando* reminiscent of the first bars of the painting. The harp disappears for a moment, to return later with the timpani. The tremolo of the violas in the static musical background is introduced later.
- (f) The material chosen from the instrumental actions in the foreground and the “backstage music” gives priority to the less used instruments of the first scene: the tam-tam and the triangle.
- (g) The flute and cello, duplication of the female and male voices in the verse *Du, der das überirdische in dir hast (You who have the supernatural in you)* play here in unison while in the original score they are out of phase (bars 17 and 18, see example 10 above). We can appreciate here the eminently modal-tonal character of these actions, which in the original version is disguised by the musical complexity of the picture.
- (h) The instrumental duplication that follows the aforementioned, (bar 19) corresponding to the verse *Sehnst dich nach dem irdischen! (Still long for the earthly!)* is performed by the oboe, but here the female voice recites *Du, der das überirdische in dir hast*. The play of mirrors that occurs between the instrumental imitation and the voice becomes perfectly intelligible here.
- (i) The pizzicatos of the cellos and double basses are presented without the continuity of the original: they form small groups, separated by irregular pauses.
- (j) The chord that in the original serves as resonance for the last verse *Du, armer* (flutes, clarinet in B ♭, horn in F, trumpet in B ♭ and trombone) is introduced here without the female voice.
- (k) From the backstage music we hear the undubbed piccolo of the clarinet in E ♭, in dialogue with the voice, which whispers with little phonation.
- (l) The characteristic chuckle of the backstage music, superimposed on the chord of (j), constitutes the climax of the re-composition.
- (m) There follows immediately the characteristic looping motif exhibited by the bass clarinet and bassoon at the beginning of the piece. Here they perform a perpetual *diminuendo* without resolution.
- (n) A final spatial interplay between the lines *Still (Silence)* and *So oft schon? (So many times?)* concludes the re-composition, leaving the form open and in suspense.

On the score of the re-composition

It is important to note that the distribution of the symbols corresponds neither to the pitch nor to the timbre of the sound materials represented, but to their spatial situation with respect to the two stereophonic channels.

The origin of the materials with respect to Schönberg's original score is indicated by the original bar number and the voices or instruments that produce them.



The debate is opened

What is the status of this hybrid musical composition whose gestation process I have just described?

The words composition, interpretation, transcription, analysis, inspiration... come close to what we are dealing with here, given that re-composition has a bit of all of them. From a general point of view, the experience in question forces, in my opinion, to redefine certain concepts traditionally well determined and compartmentalized in music and musicology. Thus, for example, for the concepts of author, work, score and version; the experience of “loss and recovery of meaning” at issue here leads to question the exclusive value of the score as the result of a project, and highlights the importance of the compositional process, of which writing is a “crystallization” in a reservoir of possible versions.

In the specific case of *The Hand of Fate*, these general questions are accompanied by a concern for the intelligibility of Schönberg's text, which was destined to remain incomprehensible (as we have already said, Schönberg did his best to “drown” his text, always in *pp*, within the musical opacity of the score). This lack of semantic clarity is, of course, deliberate, and is being generated by unconscious motivations that we will not analyze here. But if, indeed, the text is meant to remain in the shadows, why so much precision in its notation?

Indeed, the chorus is written musically with an extraordinary thoroughness, with clefs, staves and rhythmic figures that are not justified when it comes to actions without phonation. It is clear that the text contributes decisively to the understanding of Man's inner struggle, which will continue to unfold in the following scenes. Under these conditions, is making it intelligible, that is, bringing to light the voice of Schönberg's unconscious, a service to the composition or a violation of the creator's will? The question seems particularly pertinent in relation to the composers of the Vienna School:

“But how to make oneself intelligible? By expressing yourself as precisely as possible; what you say must be clear. One must not get lost in vague considerations. There is a precise term for this: understanding (*Faßlichkeit*). The supreme principle of the expression of all thought is the law of understanding.”¹⁰

¹⁰ « Mais comment s’y prendre pour se rendre intelligible ? En s’exprimant aussi précisément que possible ; ce que l’on dit doit être clair. Il ne faut pas se perdre dans des considérations vagues. Il existe pour cela un terme bien précis : la compréhension (*Faßlichkeit*). Le principe suprême de l’expression de toute pensée est la loi de la compréhension. »

Further pressing questions arise here:

Could the re-composition be a virtuality already contained in the first scene of the work?

“It is Goethe’s Idea of the original plant; the stem is already contained in the root, the leaf in the stem, and the flower, in its turn, in the leaf: variations on the same Idea.”¹¹

Would this idea also apply to the metamorphosis of meaning in a composition?

The Labyrinth of Mirrors forces us to reconsider the actuality of our conceptual tools, incapable of defining, classifying or analyzing such an irreducible musical experience.

In principle, the work of re-composition could be considered as an interpretation of Schönberg’s music. Indeed, the appropriation of the Viennese composer’s materials is meaning-generating and constitutes the prerequisite of any interpretation: a re-actualization of the work from its current version.

However, it is difficult to accept this broadening of the notion of interpretation, given that the arrangement of sequences and elements, in short, the administration of elements in time, is not the work of Schönberg. How far can a composer’s style be molded through interpretation without breaking it?

Another concept that seems to depend on these reflections is that of transcription. It is no coincidence that it is almost non-existent in the music of our time; the absolute value attributed to timbre and materials must necessarily be responsible for this absence. We seem to have lost sight of the fact that the function of transcription is, above all, to increase the versions of the reference work so that it becomes known. Without this possibility the music of our time, lacking in versions, continues to age and remain marginalized; in my experience as a composer, contemporary pieces (with some exceptions, of course) are only performed once, on the day of their world premiere. Transcriptions could allow for a wider reception.

From the point of view of musical analysis, my approach to the first scene has had to face a fundamental ambivalence, stemming from the difference between the original compositional approach and the one it generated. My analysis of the first scene is the result of a composer’s – not a musicologist’s – reflection on the musical output of another composer. It is totally polarized in the act of creation that accompanies it, of which it is the reverse, the negative image. It presupposes the methodological ambiguity between the subject and his intellectual tools, on the one hand, and the work to be analyzed, on the other.

Regarding poiesis, I will find it difficult to accept the nature of the derived sequences as creation, given that the materials on which they are based were indeed composed by Schönberg. A hypothetical independence of the derived sequences from the

Anton Webern, conference from 7. March 1932, in *Chemin vers la nouvelle musique (the Path to the New Music)* French translation by A. Servant, D. Alluard et C. Huvé, Lattès editions, 1980 for the French translation, p. 61.

¹¹ « C’est l’Idée goethéenne de la plante originelle ; la tige est déjà contenue dans la racine, la feuille dans la tige, et la fleur, à son tour, dans la feuille : variations sur une même Idée. »

Anton WEBERN, conference from 19. February 1932, *op.cit.*, p. 134.

original seems to me illusory, given that the materials are the same. And here is the inevitable question: can there be creation when the materials are not original?

With this question, the mythical value of the material in contemporary music is called into question, as well as the notion of originality of the work on which the whole edifice of Western art is based.

Writers, philosophers and visual artists are much more advanced than musicians in this respect. They have been questioning the originality of the work for years. For example, and to cite a well-known example, take Jorge Luis Borges’ *Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote (Pierre Menard, author of the Quijote)*. The story revolves around the identity of two texts, which is not enough to determine their authorship: Cervantes or Ménard? Borges’ text has become an inescapable classic of world literature, for reasons that Arthur Danto has been able to summarize thus:

“It is not enough to point out that the two books were written at two different times by two authors who did not belong to the same nation and who each pursued different literary intentions: these are not external facts, since they allow us to characterize the two books and differentiate them, despite their graphic identity. Thus, the works are constituted in part by their specific location within the history of literature, as well as by the relationships they maintain with their respective authors. Since critics, in general, disregard these factors and tell us to focus our attention on the work itself, Borges’ contribution to the ontology of art is truly prodigious: these factors cannot be dissociated from the work, since they penetrate its very essence. Thus, despite their graphic identity, the two works are radically different...”¹²

Perhaps the time has come to recognize this discussion within our musicological specialty.

CONCLUSION

I believe that the re-composition experiment has made it clear that the meaning of musical materials can vary over time, which constitutes their historicity. Similar to the words of a language, which change their meaning according to the time, the materials are filled and emptied of content through an operation of perpetual renewal. In this overcoming lies, in my opinion, the dialectical driving force of life: the affirmation contained in the negation, the

¹² « Il ne suffit pas de faire remarquer que les deux livres ont été écrits à deux époques différentes par deux auteurs n’appartenant pas à la même nation et poursuivant chacun des intentions littéraires distinctes : il ne s’agit pas là de faits extérieurs, puisqu’ils permettent de caractériser les deux livres et de les différencier, malgré leur identité graphique. Les œuvres sont donc constituées en partie par leur localisation spécifique à l’intérieur de l’histoire de la littérature, ainsi que par les relations qu’elles entretiennent avec leurs auteurs respectifs. Comme les critiques en général ne prennent pas en considération ce genre de facteurs et nous enjoignent de concentrer notre attention sur l’œuvre elle-même, la contribution de Borges à l’ontologie de l’art est vraiment prodigieuse : on ne saurait dissocier ces facteurs de l’œuvre, puisqu’ils pénètrent son essence même. Ainsi, malgré leur identité graphique, les deux ouvrages sont radicalement différents... »

Arthur DANTO, *La Transfiguration du banal, (The Transfiguration of the Commonplace)* French translation by C. H. Schaeffer, Seuil, Paris, 1989 for the French translation, p. 78.

germ overcome by the determination of its possibilities (Here we return to the quotation about Goethe's original plant). But, in order to give free rein to this ever-actualized transformation, it is necessary to admit that the work can be something other than an absolute. Stripped of all mystification, it reveals itself to us as a crystallized process, as a perpetual search for meaning. It is precisely this constant redefinition that opens the door to a panoply of new experiences, destined to rejuvenate our concepts and behaviors with respect to musical creation.

As a consequence of our changing and perishable nature, the meaning that things carry through the ages does not remain unchanged; on the contrary, it is gradually lost, transformed, reborn from its ashes to disappear again, in an ever-renewed and ever-living cycle. *The Labyrinth of Mirrors* will have served, I hope, to demonstrate that musical materials are no exception to this circularity.

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