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Symphony No. 7 by Krzysztof Meyer – strategy of building the form, expressivity of the work

ABSTRACT: The article brings closer the formal and expressive properties of the 7th *Symphony* by Krzysztof Meyer, composed in the years 2002/2003. Meyer distinguishes several specific features that should be taken into consideration during the process of composing.¹ These include: the capacity to adapt, the limitation of sound-information transferred onto the listener, and a division of the form into integrant phases. The capacity to 'adapt' occurs through opposing emotional states connected with the reception of music: remembering, familiarising, and becoming used to a certain property of the musical progress – surprise that emerges with the appearance of a change. The surprise effect is a strong reaction, and one that is sought after for the purpose of maintaining a high level of the listener's engagement in the reception process of music. The need to 'limit the sound-information' that the composer transfers onto the listener allows the latter to take note of it and remember it. An information overload leads to a sense of disorientation, being lost, and consequently discouragement from active listening. Finally, 'the significance of the structural elements of the form' is considered. In his conclusion, Meyer presents a model of musical form as a progress based on phases unfolding in time. The composer outlines the following phases: the initial phase, the essential phase, the transitional phase, the phase of particular importance, and the final phase. However, he warns against literal and orthodox understanding of his concept. 'Meyer's fundamental aim is 'to lead' the listener and not to overstretch their perceptive capabilities. A 'planned spontaneity' is the purpose'.² 'All the symphonies by Meyer, both early and recent, were shaped in the same manner. The process is at the forefront: build-up, development, clashing collisions, conflict of contrasting elements'.³ The 7th *Symphony* is also built according to similar constructional principles. What distinguishes it from the earlier works in this genre is connected with the expressivity of the work. The composer notes: 'The sym-

¹ Krzysztof Meyer, 'Forma muzyczna w aspekcie psychologicznym' [Psychological Aspect of Musical Form], *Muzyka* 1 (1992), 3-20.

² Lutz Lesle, 'O twórczości Krzysztofa Meyera' [The work of Krzysztof Meyer], in *Krzysztof Meyer. Do i od kompozytora* [Krzysztof Meyer. To and from the composer], ed. Maciej Jabłoński (Poznań, 1994), 95-108.

³ Irina Nikolska, 'Symfonie Krzysztofa Meyera' [Symphonies by Krzysztof Meyer], in *Krzysztof Meyer. Do i od kompozytora* [Krzysztof Meyer. To and from the composer], ed. Maciej Jabłoński (Poznań, 1994), 109-120.

phony evolves according to musical laws par excellence, but not without admitting some thoughts about myself in metaphorical categories, because, after all, the subtitle 'Sinfonia del tempo che passa' – Symphony of the Passing Time – was not chosen accidentally'.⁴ Thus it is a tale about one of the most fundamental existential experiences of every human being: the passing. This is suggested by the emotional aura of the music, the subtitle that the work was given, and references to emphatic rhetorical-musical figures known from the Baroque period. As Thomas Wesselmann wrote: 'The subtitle Symphony of the Passing Time clearly invites the assigning of a retrospective character to this opus no. 97'.⁵ 'It is true that the composer has never commented on the subject, but the justification of the suspicion seems to be confirmed by the expressivity of the final movement (*molto lento*), which, in a way, is a statement filled with peace and tranquillity made by a human being with years of experience behind him. In any case, it suffices to compare this symphony with its two predecessors, i.e. the 5th, full of energy and scored for strings, and the dramatic 6th written as a reaction to the introduction of the martial law in Poland; one has a sensation that a moment of reflection (pondering over life's end?) plays a special role in the 7th'.⁶

KEYWORDS: 20th century, Polish composers, Krzysztof Meyer, Symphony no. 7, form and expressivity of the work

Introduction

When reading various texts about my music, it happened numerous times that I came across conclusions drawn from research conducted by various musicologists, which were extremely varied, and even contradictory. (...) Naturally, I treat most musicological texts with reluctance, as they present interpretations of my music, which I find difficult to accept. However (...) the feeling of respect for someone's work is awakened in me, as well as gratefulness for the researchers' interest that my music has stimulated...⁷

I feel very close to the music of Krzysztof Meyer, especially his orchestral works. I wrote two articles about it no less than 30 years ago.⁸ The inspiration to write the papers came from my admiration for the compositional mastery of this music, woven harmoniously into the formal-expressive

⁴ Meyer, 'Forma muzyczna', 3.

⁵ Thomas Wesselmann, fragment from the booklet of the CD DUX 0695.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Maciej Jabłoński and Krzysztof Meyer, 'Rozmowy Macieja Jabłońskiego z Krzysztofem Meyerem. Musica libera...?' [Maciej Jabłoński's Interviews with Krzysztof Meyer. Musica libera...?], in *Krzysztof Meyer. Do i od kompozytora* [Krzysztof Meyer. To and from the composer], ed. Maciej Jabłoński (Poznań, 1994), 62.

⁸ Marek Podhajski, 'II Symfonia Krzysztofa Meyera' [Symphony No. 2 by Krzysztof Meyer], *Zeszyty Naukowe PWSM XV* (Gdańsk, 1976); Marek Podhajski, 'Symfonie Krzysztofa Meyera – problemy formy i ekspresji' [Symphonies by Krzysztof Meyer – the problems of form and expression], *Zeszyty Naukowe PWSM XV* (Gdańsk, 1976).

concept. These are qualities that I personally consider to be of great value, and which I perceive as characteristic traits in Meyer's music. I gave up on continuing my own retrospective of the composer's symphonic works, as there have been numerous wonderful essays written on the subject, for instance by Lidia Rappoport, Leszek Polony, Grzegorz Michalski, Tadeusz A. Zieliński, Iriny Nikolska, and Małgorzata Radziejewska,⁹ to name a few. Nevertheless, the temptation to return to the subject has remained, and I finally succumbed to it, because an opportunity to consider a new masterpiece has emerged, and it is a score that only begins to carve out its path towards wide popularity. I am thinking of the 7th *Symphony*. However, I would not like my reflections to become the cause of the composer's frustration. My intention was driven by a desire to come closer to the composer's visions that guided him during the composing of the work, and by the intention to unveil these visions, if only partially. The realisation of such ambitious goals was naturally possible only through a close collaboration with the composer. I feel honoured by his participation, and I am deeply grateful to him. Thanks to the composer, I received the recording and score of the 7th *Symphony*, and he also presented me with general commentaries regarding the work, some of which are included below. In order for my analysis to correspond as closely as possible to the composer's own perception of his work, I based my research on the strategy that the composer himself formulated in his article *Forma muzyczna w aspekcie psychologicznym* [Psychological Aspect of Musical Form].¹⁰

Psychological aspect of musical form

The composer devoted his article published in 'Muzyka'¹¹ to the above-mentioned issue. At the outset, the author considers perception of a musical work by pointing out several specific features connected with changes in the listener's concentration: the capacity to adapt, the limitation of sound-information that the listener is able to absorb, and significance of structural elements that make up the form.

⁹ Grzegorz Michalski, 'Symfonie Krzysztofa Meyera' [Symphonies by Krzysztof Meyer], *Ruch Muzyczny* 18 (1971); Lidia Rappoport, 'Symfonie Krzysztofa Meyera' [Symphonies by Krzysztof Meyer], *Muzyka* 1 (1975); Leszek Polony, 'Krzysztof Meyer. Symfonia polska' [Krzysztof Meyer. Polish Symphony], *Ruch Muzyczny* 13 (1983); Tadeusz A. Zieliński, 'Krzysztof Meyer: V Symfonia' [Krzysztof Meyer: Symphony No. 5], *Ruch Muzyczny* 18 (1983); Grzegorz Michalski, 'Symfonia polska Krzysztofa Meyera' [Polish Symphony by Krzysztof Meyer], *Ruch Muzyczny* 5 (1984); Nikolska, 'Symfonie Krzysztofa Meyera', 109-120. Małgorzata Radziejewska, 'Aspekt dramaturgiczny symfonii Krzysztofa Meyera' [Dramatic aspect of the symphonies by Krzysztof Meyer], *Zeszyty Naukowe AM* 12 (Bydgoszcz, 1999).

¹⁰ Meyer, 'Forma muzyczna', 3-20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

There are two opposing emotional states connected with perception of music that determine the capacity to 'adapt'. On one hand: remembering, familiarising oneself with and getting used to a certain property of musical progress; on the other hand: surprise arising from change, which, to an extent, undermines everything that the listener has just managed to get used to. Surprise is a strong reaction, and one that is essential for maintaining a high level of the listener's engagement during the process of musical reception. Change can happen on many levels: contrast in tonality or timbre, the extent of alteration of intervallic structure, metrical shift, contrast in rhythm, and also the extent of change in dynamics, textural pace, or combining several contrasts at once.

The need 'to limit the quantity of sound-information' passed on from the composer to the listener constitutes the specificity of reception, as the listener should not only perceive everything, but also remember it. Information overload causes the effects of disorientation and confusion, and consequently discouragement from active listening. Composers are well aware of this state of affairs. Thus, typical compositional devices include: limiting the quantity of sound-information, repetition, recapitulation (after a period of time) of previously used formulations, a range of variation devices, or a combination of these techniques.

Finally: 'the significance of structural elements that make up the form'. Meyer points out that the significant elements include not just the theme, which, in the musical tradition, played the crucial and overtly exposed role in establishing the form, but also other factors within the form, such as bridge passages, various types of motivic/thematic transformation, episodes, or coda.

The conclusion of the composer's reflections is the presentation of musical form as a progress in time, unfolding in phases, which are additionally defined not only through their content – in the sense of the musical material containing elements of the overall form – but also their significance in contributing to the building of the expressive concept of the whole work. The composer wrote:

A musical work appears as a certain continuum of sound-events, with some of them being more important and some of lesser significance. [...] A change in attention span is a phenomenon inseparable from the issue of perception of a musical work, and this fact influences fundamentally the task of designing the musical form by the composer. Therefore, when undertaking a formal analysis, one should take into account the psychological factors determining the listener's perception. Besides notions such as theme, bridge passage, stretto, transformation, etc. it is also worthwhile to speak of various other phases of musical form, which can be gathered into five essential categories.¹²

¹² *Ibid.*, 10.

The composer outlines the following phases:

- initial phase,
- essential phase,
- transitional phase,
- phase of particular importance,
- final phase.

According to the composer, the 'initial phase' 'determines the character of the entire work, or a substantial part of it. The listener is being taken into [...] a sound-climate that is specific to the work. [...] the phase determines the type of material that comes after it. Thus the initial phase is always placed at the start of a work, or as the next section. When it comes to its dimensions, they can be practically of any scale; it can be both elaborate and condensed'.¹³

'The essential phase'. 'In principle, a fundamental musical idea constitutes this phase, as it is the essential material for further development of the work. [...] To a large extent, the shape of the essential phase plays a role in the reception of the work. The more characteristic and easy to remember it is, the greater the possibilities of directing the listener's attention can become. [...] The most typical element of the essential phase is the theme. Less often, it can be also a motivic group, a characteristic harmonic structure, a type of texture, or just a specific timbral quality'.¹⁴

'The transitional phase'. 'The nature of this phase can be described as being of "lighter weight", which means that it plays a secondary role during listening. However, the lower significance of the phase is ostensible: although it can bring a kind of relief for the listener, it simultaneously reinforces the importance of the neighbouring sections through contrast. [...] Any fragments within a work that invoke the sensations of tension and expectation can be considered as transitional phases. [...] In addition, sections that come immediately after culminations also belong to this category'.¹⁵

'The phase of particular importance'. 'The section can be built from various formal elements [...] musical fragments, which are perceived during listening as most crucial. [...] the phase itself should appear unambiguous, in contrast to the previous one, which is unclear and contains multiple implications. All types of climactic points constitute phases of particular importance [...]'.¹⁶

'The final phase'. '[...] when listening to final phases, most often they bring the feelings of fulfilment of the form, harmonious passing of time, purposefulness of the work's approach towards the end, a summary of experi-

¹³ Ibid., 10, 11.

¹⁴ Ibid., 11, 12.

¹⁵ Ibid., 12, 13.

¹⁶ Ibid., 13, 14.

ences, etc. [...] At all times [...] the shapes of the final phases are conditioned by the material that precedes them. [...] The phase also constitutes the moment, in which the listener – often even against their will – goes through their first meaningful listening experience. To a large extent, this first value-judgement influences any further consideration of the work and the forming of individual opinion [at a later stage]. This is why the final phase, similarly to the initial one, plays a special role within the form. [...] The final phase is [or should be] the result of all the preceding compositional procedures, and therefore it is dependent on them'.¹⁷

The composer continues his reflections by pointing out that it is not just the phases, but also the relations between them and their proportions that are subject to certain laws. Among these, the most common are e.g. the ABA symmetry, and the Golden Section.

The above-outlined structure of the musical development based on phases forms a specific MODEL.¹⁸ It is an original concept of perceiving the process of formal development, and it differs from conventional notions concerning this issue. The concept is focused not only on properties of formal structures, but also on their organisation, which is designed to allow the composer to manipulate the reception of music. The result should be the relaying to the listener, as precise as possible, of the expressive concept that was intended by the composer. A researcher guided by the postulates of the above-described model has to remember that their interpretation cannot be literal, or rigid – instead, the analysis process should lead to uncovering unique and unrepeatable features of the work analysed.

One often finds in analytical papers, however, that the model is interpreted as a universal tool for researching the properties of any musical work belonging to the category that the model helps to define. In such cases, the analysis is fundamentally based on approaching the structure of the analysed work via the model. Therefore, in advance there is an assumption that the model's features reflect an ideal and perfect type of organisation. Thus, when the form of the work, into which research is being undertaken, does not match precisely the properties of the model describing it, then the formal characteristics are defined pejoratively as departing from the ideal model.

The formal template, however, cannot be treated as the only and universal analytical tool. Indubitably, it can be used as a point of departure in research – but the use of the model requires flexibility. The process of analysis should have two stages. First, using the model, the initial attempts to approach the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15, 16.

¹⁸ Interesting distinctions between model and pattern, scheme and artefact, can be found in article: Jarosław Mianowski, 'O istocie formy sonatowej' [The nature of sonata form], in *Homines, Ars et Scientia*, eds. Jan Astriab, Andrzej M. Kempniński and Hanna Kostrzewska (Poznań, 2000), 81-86.

reality investigated are made. If the conclusion is that the model goes hand in hand with the reality, the next steps of the research are determined by the properties of the model. Conversely, if it turns out that the reality does not fit within the 'matrix' that the model dictates, no heroic attempts at forcing this reality into the 'matrix' should be undertaken. Instead, one should try to introduce such modifications in interpreting the model – without altering its essence – that would make it applicable to the reality examined, with all its complexity; in other words, modifications that would make it possible to 'wrap one's head' around the reality – if I may put it colloquially – in order to bring out its unique and unrepeatable features.¹⁹

Krzysztof Meyer is aware that his own view on formal development within the psychological aspect offers a generalisation of the main ideas that the process is based on. He warns against literal and orthodox understanding of his concept. At the end of his essay, he wrote:

Not every work based on elaborate formal structure must include all the phases. [...] phases do not always lend themselves to being clearly defined [...]. Sometimes a phase functions in an equivocal way. [...] an example of such a situation is a phase that can be understood both as the initial and essential one [...]. The initial phase can also become transitional [...]. In other cases, when the climax is allocated to the end of the work, the phase of particular importance is at the same time the final one.²⁰

Bearing in mind also my own views on the model's role in analysis, besides the composer's statements on the subject, I am presenting formal properties of the 7th *Symphony* resulting from the phase-based model of the composer's formal framework. First, however, some remarks about Krzysztof Meyer's symphonic writing.

Meyer's symphonies

Krzysztof Meyer is the author of eight symphonies: no. 1 (1964), PWM 6987; no. 2 *Epitaphium in memoriam Stanisław Wiechowicz* (1967), PWM 7134; no. 3 *Symphonie d'Orphee* (1968), PWM 7367; no. 4 (1973), Peters 8396 – PWM 7847; no. 5 (1979), PWM 8581; no. 6 *Polska (Polish Symphony)* (1982), PWM 8710, MUZA ISPV 179 CD; *Symfonia D-dur w stylu Mozarta (Symphony in D major in Mazartean style)* (1977), PWM. The sym-

¹⁹ This issue is elaborated on in my article: Marek Podhajski, 'Kilka uwag o potrzebie doskonalenia konwencjonalnych metod analizy formalnej utworu muzycznego' [Some remarks about the need to improve the conventional methods of the formal analysis of the musical piece], in *Analiza dzieła muzycznego. Historia - teoria - praktyka*, ed. Anna Granat-Janki (Wrocław, 2010).

²⁰ Meyer, 'Forma muzyczna', 18.

phony that is the subject of my consideration – the 7th – was completed in 2003.²¹ The première took place on 17 October 2003 in Poznań, with the Poznań Philharmonic conducted by Jose Maria Florencio. Regarding his last work in the genre, i.e. *Symphony no. 8*, the composer has written the following comments in an e-mail message to me: ‘I was working on the symphony in the years 2008/09, and it is scored for mixed choir and orchestra. The poems that I used are by Adam Zagajewski. The work is entitled *Sinfonia da requiem*’.²² He also added that its premiere was planned for 14 January 2011 in Katowice on the occasion of the NOSPR [Polish Radio National Symphony Orchestra] jubilee.

I am limiting my reflections on the composer’s symphonies to quoting several fragments of texts by various authors. I think that there is no need to re-open doors that had been opened a long time ago and present results of research outlined with insight in extensive literature that already exists. I am using quotations here, which succinctly express certain features in his symphonic writing, and which apply directly to the subject at hand, namely the 7th *Symphony*.

Whoever listens deeply to Meyer’s music from the last 10-15 years will notice that several phases can be discerned in the planning of the works, or in parts of them. [...] Using the notions that the composer himself applies in his analyses, it can be said that these are: the initial phase, the main phase, transitional phase, the phase of particular importance, and the final phase.²³

The characteristics that constantly draw Meyer towards great works of old masters [...] are: formal concepts maintained in balance through relations and proportions, as well as analogies and evenness; ‘hierarchy of sounds’ [...]; experience-derived knowledge about the psychology of listening (‘it is not possible to comprehend more than three layers’) [...] Meyer’s fundamental aim is ‘to lead’ the listener and not to overstretch their perceptive capabilities. A ‘planned spontaneity’ is the

²¹ There is a discrepancy concerning the completion date of the 7th *Symphony*. The composer has informed me that he worked on it from 6.01.2002 to 22.04.2003. In article: Marcin Gmys, ‘Czas przemijający, czas syntezy. Po prawykonaniu VII Symfonii Krzysztofa Meyera’ [The passing time, the time of synthesis. After the premiere of Krzysztof Meyer’s Symphony No. 7], *Ruch Muzyczny* 24 (2003), the following information is given: *The 7th Symphony was created after a 20 year-long break, more or less, in writing within the symphonic genre, and perhaps also as a result of the composer’s renewed faith in his capabilities. Meyer worked on it from January 2001 until June 2002, but with a few months’ break, during which he composed a new chamber work.*

²² Personal communication from Krzysztof Meyer, XX Mont XXXX.

²³ Leslie, ‘O twórczości Krzysztofa Meyera’, 96.

purpose. In this regard, all irregular rhythms, changes of metre, or metrical changes of 'layers', are precisely designed and notated.²⁴

In addition, all the symphonies by Meyer, both early and recent, were shaped in the same manner. The process is at the forefront: build-up, development, clashing collisions, conflict of contrasting elements.²⁵

For Krzysztof Meyer, an opus is not only a number in a sequence [...] but also a certain ideological declaration. It comes from the classical European concept of artwork as a manifestation of order, which is the fruit of inspiration, and also a testimony to technical control and intellectual discipline. He had shown this type of artistic stance already in his early works, and it grew stronger through the years. The composer was limiting the material more and more rigorously in his subsequent works, at the same time enriching the methods of transformation of the material. There is nothing accidental in Meyer's music. The temporal proportions, as well as all the tones that make up the sonorities, come from specific principles. The details of the order, or the plans, are actually inessential for the listener – in the end, what is significant is whether a work can move, invoke interest, and capture the attention until the last sound-structure; however, the awareness of the principles can be an indicator suggesting that we are not dealing with music that is a record of spontaneous auto-expression, but rather that we ourselves become the object of the composer's 'aesthetic-emotional manipulation'.²⁶

The symphonies of Krzysztof Meyer are characterised by a general dramatic principle that encompasses the whole cycle, manifesting itself in his striving for integrity of the material. At the same time, every symphonic movement has its own dramaturgy, which is essential for the perception of the entire work. It can be said that combination of drama-ideas of individual movements determines the energy plan across the whole.²⁷

The 7th Symphony – the strategy of building the form

In an e-mail message to me the composer wrote about his masterpiece:

I worked on this piece in the years 2002/2003. A direct impulse came from a meeting with the German-based sculptor Woytek (this is both his name and sur-

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

²⁵ Nikolska, 'Symfonie Krzysztofa Meyera', 120.

²⁶ Weselmann, *Op. cit.*

²⁷ Radziejewska, 'Aspekt dramaturgiczny', 94.

name), who ignited in me an idea about an unusual dialogue: monumental sculptures and sound-forms passing in time. Woytek works on 5 sculptures for New Zealand's Pitt Island (the first place on the globe where each new day begins, according to geographers): Tourbillon – a metaphor of passing time, and the four seasons – symbols of changes that govern the passing of time.

However, to compose another musical 'seasons' did not seem attractive to me. But it can be a fascinating project for a composer to 'musicalise' the metaphors of changes and passing, which are fundamental in relation to the seasons themselves; after all, no other artform is as suitable for contemplating the passing of time as music [...].

The symphony consists of three movements (Con moto-Presto, Allegretto capriccioso, Molto lento). Each movement has four distinct segments (in a way, four 'seasons'). The ending of each movement refers to its beginning (a 'cyclic' form that can be viewed as a metaphor of the full circle of 'the four seasons' after a year's time). The movements are of various lengths (after all, the time passes differently each 'year'). However, I would not like the listeners to be strongly attentive towards finding the borders between the 'seasons', and God forbid that they should search for some kind of illustrativeness.²⁸

The symphony is scored for large orchestra with substantial percussion section (5 performers). The duration is approximately 42 minutes (the DUX 0695 recording).

The 1st movement is perceived as being built from five links.

Link (a), up to fig. 11 in the score, *Con moto*, tempo marking 76 to a crotchet.

The movement is characterised by a constant building up of the sonority, and textural complexities leading to a culmination. It prepares the entrance of the next link. The culmination without resolution makes a *subito* shift into a phase of new build-up (link b), which is more intense due to an increase of the tempo and pacing of the musical action.

Link (b), fig. 11 to fig. 15 in the score, *Presto*.

Here, the textural density is lower and less massive, and consequently the volume of the sound is lower than in link (a). However, the dynamism of action does not decrease, because it is supported by a clear, aggressive, and motor-like pulse of the musical flow.

²⁸ Personal communication from Krzysztof Meyer, 1 April 2009.

Link (c), fig. 15 to fig. 30 in the score, the same tempo.

Tension in wave-like motion. Periods of build-ups and respite.

Link (d), fig. 30 to fig. 35 in the score.

There is a clearly noticeable dying out of the musical action, as well as simplifications of texture and sonority (less rich), the use of previously-presented motivic ideas, and a decay of motion and sound. The whole section creates a sensation of the ultimate closing of the action, and has qualities similar to a dying-out coda. The closing, however, is misleading.

Link (e), fig. 35 to the end of the movement.

The *presto* tempo returns, and brings with it transformed main thematic idea placed within imitation-based texture and in a free augmentation. A process of systematic building-up begins. It encompasses an increase in textural complexity, and, consequently, greater richness of the sonority; also, there is a building-up in the dynamism of the musical pacing connected with using shorter rhythmic values and semiquaver runs of pitch-structures based on small intervallic relations in the background. The process of building-up continues until the end of the movement, finishing with a culmination.

In the overall structure of the movement, four stages of formal development emerge, with the outer links being especially distinct due to their plasticity, also being related in terms of the material and expressiveness, and they are both varied in tempo. If the structure were to be set against the psychological model that the composer proposes, the following stages can be distinguished:

- stage 1, until fig. 11 in the score, including link (a), which, according to the composer's model, should be defined as the initial phase (until fig. 11 in the score). This stage is especially significant, as it determines not only the type of material for the movement, but also for the entire symphony, together with expressivity that permeates the whole masterpiece,

- stage 2, the essential phase (fig. 11 to fig. 15 in the score). The aggressive and motor-like pulse creates a kind of opposition in relation to the reflective melodiousness of the initial phase. However, through the principle of unity based on dialectical opposition, both stages belong to the same type of expressive realm: an utterance saturated with the aura of solemnity and melancholy,

- stage 3 – two fragments of the transitional phase. The first [link (c), fig. 15 to fig. 30 in the score] initialises an action, which already contains characteristics of resolving the expressive tensions of the previous phase. This type of process is signalled by a wave-like motion of tension and release, in opposition to their constant dynamism. The second fragment (fig. 30 to fig. 35) is a dying-out coda. As it will turn out, the closing is ostensible, and in reality it is a preparation for the final stage,

– stage 4 – the final phase, in terms of expressivity, it constitutes the culmination of the whole movement. The main thematic idea returns, the texture becomes more complex, the dynamism of the musical pace and sonorous richness increase. As Marcin Gmys wrote: ‘With the rapidity of a lightning, a phenomenal fulfilment of the movement takes place: a carefully designed cataclysm that interrupts the progress of the whole work. There is no other moment in music comparable to this intricately built culmination occurring literally in the final bars’.²⁹

The 2nd movement encompasses several phases of development, among which I can point out the following:

- the introductory, initial phase (fig. 39 till fig. 48 in the score) with a short, few-bars-long preparation for the next phase,
- the essential phase [fig. 48 through 52 (local culmination) to fig. 53],
- transitional phase (fig. 53 to fig. 60 in the score),
- the phase of particular importance (fig. 60 to fig. 66),
- the final phase (fig. 67 until the end).

Within the formal aspect, the overriding significance is allocated to expositions, transformations, and mutual interactions of two main structural ideas. The first of them, which can be called *perpetuum motive*, is built from short rhythmic values in fast tempo, often connected with small-interval-based linear writing. The idea serves the purpose of achieving culmination through insistent and dynamic repetition. Along the process of striving towards culmination, the projection of the idea is often suddenly interrupted or closed off with a more sustained sound. In terms of expressivity, it is a carrier of unease and tension, which become amplified until the moment of achieving the full dramatic apogee. The second idea, in opposition to the first, clearly presents melodic elements. It can be called a *reflective motive*. It builds lines of clarity and motivic integrity, continuity, wave-like motion, and a gradation of tension. It only appears that the two motives are distinct formal structures. The distinctiveness emerges only in their structural layer – however, they complement each other in terms of expressivity. The *perpetuum* motive prepares the melodic culmination, and this in turn displays the qualities of concentration, condensation of expression, and reflective clarity. It is precisely this reflection that binds the two ideas; the aura of increasing unease and tension culminates in utterance permeated with melancholic sadness with dramatic shades.

²⁹ Marcin Gmys, ‘Czas odnaleziony. «VII Symfonia» Krzysztofa Meyera’ [Time found. Symphony No. 8 by Krzysztof Meyer], *Zeszyty Literackie* 86 (2004), 179.

The introductory, initial phase is a constantly dynamic projection of the *perpetuum* motive. The short few-bars-long ending prepares the next phase.

The special significance of the essential phase is certainly not based on accumulation of resources, increasing the sonic richness, or high dynamic level at the point of culmination. Its essence is in the return to the theme known from the first movement of the symphony, i.e. the melodic writing emanating with melancholy, tragedy, and sadness. It is through this very connection with the theme, which, in a way, contains the fundamental message of the entire masterpiece, that the whole meaning of the phase is established, and it is a justification for defining it as the essential phase.

The transitional phase again refers to the *perpetuum* motivic idea. The motive penetrates the entire sound-field and is subjected to refined imitative techniques. The projections of the motive begin to be accompanied by certain melodic formulations that create the effect of halting of the material's progress, in order to present motives relating to the main theme of the work (i.e. from the first movement). The progress goes through another phase of formal development: the phase of particular importance. This new phase is intimately linked with the preceding one and becomes its continuation. It is characterised by a constant striving towards culmination, and in this process, elements of the theme known from the main phase become progressively clearer. The whole achieves its climax in terms of texture, harmony, and dynamism.

In the final phase, there is a gradual decay of the musical action, and a dying-out of the flow, as conveyed through simplifications applied to the pacing, texture, and dynamism. Reminiscences of the *perpetuum* idea return, in fragmented and interrupted forms, accompanied by partial reflexes of the main theme.

In the construction of the symphony's finale, I distinguish the following:

- the initial phase (fig. 71 to fig. 74 in the score),
- the transitional phase (fig. 74 to 79 with a local culmination at fig. 76)
- the phase of particular importance (fig. 79 to fig. 86 with a culmination at fig. 81, its strengthening at fig. 82, and the decay of the musical action until fig. 83),
- the transitional phase (fig. 83 to fig. 86),
- the final phase (fig. 86 till the end).

During the initial phase, motives of melodic and reflective nature are exposed and presented at low dynamic levels, which clearly relates them to formulations known from the first movement. A line in the first violins unquestionably assumes the foreground. Although it is interwoven within an imitative context built from structures derived from it, the context is of a secondary, background nature. Above the texture, the line takes its shape as the main plane that conveys the expressive qualities of the music.

The transitional phase is introduced in a *subito* manner based on sudden dynamic contrast. The musical action exposing the *perpetuum* motivic idea enters, but this time it is filled also with melodic elements. It is a refined synthesis of the motivic ideas of motion and melody. In relation to the preceding phase, the imitative context undergoes simplification. The striving for a local culmination involves increasingly rich sonority and progressively denser texture. However, the culmination lasts only a moment and moves on to the stage of decaying tension. From fig. 77, the calm dynamic level re-enters, together with linear clarity, the continuity of which is at times interspersed with motivic imitations of subtle sonorous and timbral qualities.

The start of the phase of particular importance connects smoothly with the previous phase, and the transition seems not to project any major significance for the phase. Nevertheless, the mood changes very quickly, and dynamism of the musical action builds up. Again, the leading role is played by a line based on motivic ideas known from the previous movement of the symphony, characterised by short melodic turns, which are halted at their endings, or their successive continuity is interrupted. In spite of this, the whole is coherent and dynamic, because the elements that interrupt the narration are short lived. Similarly to the preceding phase, we are dealing here with synthesis of the *perpetuum* and the *reflective* motivic ideas. The gradation of the tension presents itself through increasing textural density, progressively greater richness of the sonority, gradually higher register of the lines, faster tempo, subdivision of motion into smaller values, and higher dynamics. At the point of culmination (fig. 81), a monumental sound (*fff*) is emitted by all the orchestral sections, brought together in a uniform rhythmic pulse. The process of resolving the culmination is undertaken with true craftsmanship. It is based on eliminating various forms of action of the orchestral sections. First, the woodwind section is withdrawn. The directness of the rhythmic-harmonic pulsation is replaced with a murmuring background. It is created through a sequence of sound-figures that are made of tiny rhythmic values (hemidemisemiquavers) using strongly chromatic and small-interval-based linear writing limited to a narrow pitch-range. Gradually, the activity of the orchestral formation decreases again, as the sonority of the brass section is weakening. The last stage of resolving the culmination is undertaken by strings, flute, and clarinet.

The next transitional phase plays a double role: it is the ending of the phase of particular importance, and a preparation for the final phase. From the perspective of the entire symphony, it constitutes a kind of fulfilment, or synthesis. Indeed, there is a return of melodic formulations that were characteristic of the preceding movements, and which have been described as *reflective motives*. During the ending of this phase, there are sound-figures that are derived both from the motion motive (*perpetuum*) and melodic reflection,

presented in an imitative aura. The composer's technical mastery and structural-expressive refinement is shown here with explicit clarity.

The beginning of the final phase is very clear, as it is separated from the previous phase with a general pause. The whole of the movement has the character of a non-dynamic coda. Its structure is fundamentally based on a line presented by the strings. It is constructed from motivic formulations known from the previous movements, with interruptions in their continuity that suspend some of the resonating tones. The dynamics are calm and maintained at the lowest level (from *pp* to *pppp*). The texture, at first of imitative nature, is subjected to gradual simplification, all the way to the projection of motivic ideas by the violins, with imitatively "complementing" flutes and bass clarinet, regulated in their progress by the sounds of gongs and glockenspiel. All the elements of the musical structure are subjected to a continuous process of decay and weakening of their actions. The music dies out, fades away.

The expressivity and the message of the masterpiece

I have always strived towards expressing something more than purely sonic content through music. [...] music is a means of interpersonal communication; its calling is to reflect the complexity and conflicts of our times; musical thinking runs parallel to thinking about the surrounding world, and it expresses the artist's worldview, consciously or subconsciously.³⁰

I have two photographs of the composer in my mind. The first one from the cover of the 'Klasyka' journal (September 1998), taken in the same year, and the second from the period of 2005-2006, included in the booklet of the CD with the recording of the 7th *Symphony*. How different they are! On the cover of the 'Klasyka' journal, there is a man holding a score and looking at the viewer, appearing full of life, aware of his abilities and creative possibilities. His eyes are full of light and showing a deep insight. At the same time, there is a certain distance in his look, emphasised through a restrained smile with a light shade of irony that results from the awareness of one's worth, and understanding of one's place and role in the whole complexity of the contemporary world's structures and impulses.

The second photograph is completely different, unlike the first one. It uncovers a world of personal life-experiences, which usually one is reluctant to share. This does not go well with the nowadays preferred model of 'man of success': a success at all costs, understood in very down-to-earth terms and completely materialistically, as the greatest value and the ultimate purpose of

³⁰ Nikolska, 'Symfonie Krzysztofa Meyera', 111.

all forms of activity. The choice of this photograph for the CD booklet is definitely not accidental. In my opinion, it corresponds ideally to the message of the masterpiece, as expressed through its subtitle: *Symphony of the Passing Time*.

On the photograph, it seems that there is a man looking at the viewer, who is indifferent to the above-mentioned strategy of 'success'. He perceives its elusiveness, which becomes clear when viewed within the context of existential experience of passing. He is aware of the flow of time, he has noticed this process in full sharpness and with all its unscrupulous clarity. He has realised its horror and gone through a phase marked by attempts to understand, with the questions 'why?' and 'does it make any sense?'; then, the phases of rebellion, dramatic hopelessness, and, at last, accepting the fate.

At the end of his e-mail message, which I quoted at the outset of subsection 4, the composer wrote:

The symphony evolves according to musical laws *par excellence*, but not without admitting some thoughts about myself in metaphorical categories, because, after all, the subtitle *Symphony of the Passing Time* was not chosen accidentally.³¹

In the composer's statement, the emphasis is placed on musical laws and the resultant concept of building the work's structure. If it were a longer statement, we would surely read a lot on the subject of various technical procedures, together with the consequences of their use and their transformations, as well as their relation to the building of tension and release that shapes the expressive image of the masterpiece. Characteristically for the composer, he does not reveal the specificity of his vision. As in the case of the e-mail message, he mentions the laws that are musical *par excellence*, he admits thinking about his work *in metaphorical categories*, he admits that the subtitle of the work *Symphony of the Passing Time* was not chosen accidentally, which is a crucial observation in light of the expressive interpretation of the symphony. He has always been faithful to the principle that he had once formulated:

I am also interested in enclosed structural frameworks, i.e. 20-40-minute "stories in sound". I would like my pieces to be for the listener important tales that they care about, communicated with sounds – not streams of acoustic impulses flowing beside their ears.³²

³¹ Personal communication from Krzysztof Meyer, XX Month XXX.

³² Markus Riesendorf, 'Piękno dźwięku jest moim drogowskazem. Wywiad z Krzysztofem Meyerem' [Beauty of sound is my beacon. Interview with Krzysztof Meyer], *Klasyka* 8 (1998), 13.

Thus the composer creates 'stories in sound'. Simultaneously, he knows perfectly well that every listener has the right to personal and subjective interpretation of the sense and message of what the composer wanted to convey. He does not want to impose his own vision and explain the narration, because this would imply an illustrative character of the music, as a result of which the music would lose its most valuable aspect: autonomy.

For a moment, I will now direct the focus on the message of the 7th *Symphony*. What is this 'story in sound' about? Does it tell a tale of importance for the listener, and one that 'they care about'?

The answer is evident: yes, every listener cares about this tale. To put it in the shortest way possible, it is a story about one of the most fundamental existential experiences of every human being: the passing. There are many indications suggesting that this indeed is the case. First of all, the emotional dimension of the music itself, its inspiration, and the subtitle, which the masterpiece was named with. Concerning the music's emotionality, the composer clearly resorts to rhetorical-musical figures that allow for associating the work's musical structures with their extra-musical meaning. It certainly does not involve the use of figures such as the ones known especially from the baroque tradition— instead, there are symbolic references to their existence, which is deeply rooted within the listener's musical experience. A multitude of sound-formulations that display such analogies could be pointed out. Among them, however, formulations showing connection with emphatic figures predominate, namely:

- conveying feelings of great intensity belonging to the category that includes those that are tragic, reflecting pain, suffering, desperation (*patopoja*),
- expressions of begging or pleading, explosion of anger, feeling troubled, hysteria (*exclamatio*),
- questioning (*interrogatio*),
- disturbing the natural way of placing things on a scale, using formulations in order to express sadness, grief, regret, and also falseness, lie (*saltus duriusculus* and *passus duriusculus*),
- speechlessness, break in the making of a statement, understatement, representations of emptiness, and even death (*aposiopesis*),
- sudden breaks in the musical motives, symbolising horror, fear, impossibility to continue a statement as a result of being immensely moved or angered (*abruptio*),
- finally, pauses that frequently interrupt melodic continuity, connected with moods of painfulness, sighing, crying, and lamenting (*suspiratio*).

As I have already mentioned, the relations are multiple. Moreover, the categories of emphatic figures also include contrasting combinations of the above-listed types, encompassing a wide palette of changes. For instance:

contrasts of motion (*mutatio per motus*), scale (*mutatio per genus*), register (*mutatio per systema*), intervallic structures of the melodies (*mutatio per melopoetiam*), and texture (*noema*). All these resources are widely explored by the composer.

In addition, the composer's subtly put suggestions regarding the music's emotional content (*after all, the subtitle Symphony of the Passing Time was not chosen accidentally*) correspond closely with the message of the work, together with elements of the graphic design of the CD (the photo), as well as the commentaries in the booklet, and, finally, the critical acclaim.

I know of five texts on the subject of the 7th *Symphony*. They were written by Marcin Gmys (two texts)³³, Kacper Miklaszewski,³⁴ Tomasz Cyz,³⁵ and Thomas Weselmann.³⁶

The subtitle *Symphony of the Passing Time* clearly invites the assigning of a retrospective character to this opus no. 97. It is true that the composer has never commented on the subject, but the justification of the suspicion seems to be confirmed by the expressivity of the final movement (*molto lento*), which, in a way, is a statement filled with peace and tranquillity made by a human being with years of experience behind him. In any case, it suffices to compare this symphony with its two predecessors, i.e. the 5th, full of energy and scored for strings, and the dramatic 6th written as a reaction to the introduction of the martial law in Poland; one has a sensation that a moment of reflection (pondering over life's end?) plays a special role in the 7th.³⁷

Meyer uses contrapuntal compositional techniques in exquisite ways [...] The *Symphony* neither pretends to be avant-garde, nor does it incline towards post-modernist fashion; maintained within predictably modernist idiom, the symphony indubitably acquires new values, not just by drawing on familiar figures and symbols, but by developing them further and cultivating them [...] A quotation from the Mariacka cathedral tower clock invites – when the music ceases – to contemplation of the passing of time.³⁸

In the contexts of the 7th *Symphony's* subtitle, its generally gloomy expressiveness, and the tradition of 'vanitas' musical iconography, it is difficult to avoid the sensation that the roots of the whole composition lie in an extra-musical and unspeci-

³³ Gmys, 'Czas przemijający'; Gmys, 'Czas odnaleziony'.

³⁴ Kacper Miklaszewski, 'Niech żyje kontrapunkt' [Long live the counterpoint], *Ruch Muzyczny* 26 (2008).

³⁵ Tomasz Cyz, 'Muzyka między dźwiękami' [Music between sounds], *Tygodnik Powszechny* 33 (2003).

³⁶ Weselmann, Op. cit.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Miklaszewski, 'Niech żyje kontrapunkt'.

fied impulse, which quite clearly belongs to a certain sphere (modus «funèbre»? Thanatos? «mundus melancholicus»?). I am aware that by making the above interpretative suggestion I am doing a disfavoured in relation to the artistic intention declared by the composer; however, *intentio operis*, supported by numerous universal symbols, which, by the way, Krzysztof Meyer is fully familiar with (himself being an outstanding musicologist *en passant*), it seems to me that I should situate the work precisely in this area of spherical experience.³⁹

I perceive the emotional aura and the sense of the message, which the composer conveys in the symphony, in a similar way. I understand that the composer could not 'dot the i' through a verbal commentary, explanation, or elaboration, because this would flatten the music's emotional meaning. Indeed, the experience of passing is something that escapes description, verbalisation; it is an experience that cannot be connected with specific events, situations, and personalities. It is hued with a mist of understatement, a secret; intuitive feeling and understanding of passing belong to the most personal and intimate experiences. To end with, however, I will permit myself to formulate some fundamental intuitive feelings that this music evokes within myself. First and foremost, what is most striking is the great emotional unity of the whole work. The symphony's three movements are like three states of the experience that the awareness of passing can invoke. Not a theoretical knowledge, but awareness coming from experience, seen in fullness, understood deeply, and possessed by people who have already crossed the 'shadow's blurry line'. In this music, I perceive the horror of the experience and the grief, fear, and suffering that flow from it, but also a rebellion, nervous search for answers to the questions connected with the meaning of the experience, an attempt to understand it all. What seems to be symptomatic in this experiential structure is a process that leads from the state of a fight, rebellion, and suffering, to *catharsis*: freeing oneself from fear and coming to terms with fate. It is a fate, nevertheless, on which resignation, suffering, and a sense of helplessness have left their marks.

It is the 'new Meyer', mature through greatness that comes from the awareness of the passing time.

Translated by Dominik Karski

³⁹ Gmys, 'Czas przemijający'.

