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ISSUES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANTON REICHA'S THEORY OF *GRANDE COUPE BINAIRE*

Peter M. LANDEY

REICHA developed his theory of *grande coupe binaire* during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, first in the *Traité de mélodie* of 1814, and subsequently in the second part of the *Traité de haute composition musicale*, published in 1826. Reicha's theories reflect a wide variety of influences, ranging from the rhetorically based theories of the *Affektenlehre* theorists to the increasingly abstract notions of musical structure exemplified by the proto-structuralist work of Chabanon,¹ and post-Kantian idealists such as Michaelis² in Germany and Mme de Staël³ in France. In addition, the empirical emphasis of Reicha's investigations was almost certainly inspired by Destutt de Tracy's⁴ concept of *idéologie* which dealt with the «science of ideas,» an essentially neo-Lockean notion of the decomposition of complex ideas into their constituent elements founded in sense-experience. Although Reicha was notoriously

¹ Chabanon, Michel-Paul Guy de (1730-1792), *De la musique considérée en elle-même et dans ses rapports avec la parole, les langues, la poésie, et le théâtre*, Paris, 1785.

² Michaelis, Christian Friedrich (1770-1834). He was one of the first to apply Kant's aesthetic theories to music, primarily in articles appearing in the Leipzig *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* and the *Berlinische musikalische Zeitung* during the first decade of the nineteenth century.

³ Anne-Louise-Germaine Necker, Madame de Staël (1766-1817). Her most influential work, *De l'Allemagne* (1810), was at first censored by the French regime. The first French edition was published in 1814.

⁴ Destutt de Tracy, Antoine-Louis-Claude (1754-1836). His major work, *Éléments d'idéologie*, was written and published between 1801 and 1815.

inefficient at crediting the sources for his ideas, he was undoubtedly fully aware of the intellectual and musico-theoretic issues of his time. Before considering Reicha's concept of *grande coupe binaire*, I will therefore briefly outline some of the principal issues that confronted music theory around the turn of the century, issues that were crucial in shaping Reicha's theories of musical form.

THEORETICAL ISSUES

One of the most significant achievements of eighteenth-century music theory was the development of a theory of melodic phraseology which in its broadest sense was understood as the study of rhythm. This theory evolved naturally out of the rhetorical tradition in which melodic units of various sizes and function were equated with the rhetorical elements of discourse. In addition to the rhetorical arrangement of parts of the composition, the theory of *rhythmopoeia*, which was based on a more or less literal correspondence between poetic and musical feet, continued to provide a ready inventory of musical material to be used either in conjunction with or independently of a given text. However, toward the end of the eighteenth century, the association of musical and rhetorical techniques evolved in the direction of a broader analogy between music and language in which music eventually came to be considered as an autonomous language, understood in terms of its own internal processes. At the same time, the simple correspondence between poetic and melodic feet proved inadequate to account for larger concerns of phrase rhythm and the appropriate placement of ideas within a composition. After theorists such as Sulzer, Mattheson, Riepel, and Koch had laid the foundations, a new generation of theorists which included Choron, Momigny, and Reicha continued to develop the theory of rhythm and melodic phraseology. While there are considerable differences as to the precise meaning of the term rhythm in the work of these theorists, there is a common thread, namely: the subject of rhythm is not simply meter or motivic patterning, but the larger context of proportional relationships between phrases and periods which in turn shape the form of a composition. An important aspect of this concept of rhythm is the measurement of durations and their hierarchical replication over longer time spans. The term rhythm signified and was in fact synonymous with the more or less regular recurrence of cadences at the level of the motive, phrase, or period. Reicha very clearly follows in this tradition. At the beginning of the *Traité de mélodie* he states his position:

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A melody must be striking, moving, or charming. For a melody to have one of these three qualities, it must be constructed according to certain principles: these are somewhat comparable to the principles by which an oration or a poetic narrative are made. Therefore, melody requires *a theory of rhythm; a theory of points of repose, or cadences; the art of connecting and developing ideas* so as to create a whole; and *a knowledge of periods and their inter-relationships*.⁵

Following in the path of Riepel and Koch, Reicha deals with melodic units in a systematic hierarchical order. In Reicha's terminology, the various structural units of the *dessin*, phrase, and period, are articulated by melodic cadences called quarter, half, three-quarter, and perfect cadences, which interact with harmonic cadences to create varying degrees of closure. A crucial element of Reicha's theory, which looks back to the eighteenth century, is the view that a composition consists of an amalgamation of phrases of varying lengths, called «rhythms.» These rhythms are prolonged through melodic and/or harmonic interruption. For Reicha, a piece is considered to be incomplete if the melody concludes on scale degrees 3 or 5 of the tonic chord. While other theorists such as Koch and Momigny also pointed this out, the principle of interrupted melody was for Reicha a prime source of musical continuity. There is nothing motivic about this aspect of Reicha's theory. On the contrary, the inter-relationship of phrase rhythms was considered quite apart from what Momigny referred to as the «substance» of the composition,⁶ that is to say, without consideration for the motivic content of the phrases themselves.

Reicha was not only concerned with the inter-relationship of phrases. A considerable part of his theories deal with the concept of an opening theme and its subsequent manipulation and development during the course of a composition. The notion of a «musical idea,» referred to by various early nineteenth-century theorists as the subject, *dessin*, proposition, motif, or theme, was not new to the early nineteenth century. The increasing emphasis on a thematic idea, however, represented an important shift toward the concept of an autonomous musical idea. Hitherto, arguments concerning the role of melody, of «idea» in music,

⁵ «Une mélodie doit... frapper, émouvoir, ou flatter. Pour que la Mélodie ait une de ces trois qualités, il faut qu'elle soit faite d'après certains principes: ces principes sont à peu près comparables aux principes d'après lesquels on ferait un discours ou une narration poétique. Delà, la Mélodie exige *la théorie du rythme; celle des points de repos ou cadences; l'art d'enchaîner et de développer des idées* pour en faire un tout; *la science des périodes et de leurs réunions entr'elles.*» *Traité de mélodie*, p. 9.

⁶ See Momigny's article «Melody» in the *Encyclopédie Méthodique*, Paris, Panckouke, 1791 and 1818. R. Da Capo Press, New York, 1971. p. 117.

had focused upon the conflict between melody as the horizontalized expression of harmony as opposed to harmony as the convergence of individual melodic lines. Rameau had argued that melody was subordinate to harmony because the vertical constraints of harmony controlled the choice of pitches, and therefore pre-empted any notion of an independent melodic idea. Rousseau, on the other hand, argued that melody was analogous to line in painting, while harmony was analogous to colour. For Rousseau, line depicted the subject of the painting, while colour was considered unessential to the recognition of that subject. In music, melody therefore represented the «substance,» the thought content, while harmony assumed a merely additive, or modifying role. The notion that melody was the embodiment of the musical idea prepared the way for theorists such as Reicha, who set forth the concept of a musical idea both as an initial motif *and* as its subsequent development. «Melody» was now conceived as a self-sustaining motivic pattern. That such a pattern was embedded in the harmonic substructure did not impede its potential to articulate a motivic superstructure independently of its harmonic underpinnings. Motivic patterning thus attained a level of functional autonomy in the articulation of large-scale form, and the circular arguments surrounding the relative primacy of melody and harmony were thereby defused.

Reicha was one of the first theorists to discuss thematic development in music. Reicha conceives of the «motif» or «theme» as a unit of two to twenty-four measures in length, functioning at the level of a relatively complete musical thought. He further asserts that the motif be memorable, and that it be intrinsically interesting. In other words, the motif is not dependent upon its development to sustain interest—it is a substantive, concrete entity. The motif is extended through two principal techniques: varied repetition and sequential repetition. Reicha asserts that the technique of varied repetition must never distort the motif such that it becomes unrecognisable; subsequent motive forms must always retain their original identity. Thus, the motivic-thematic fabric does not actually transform itself in a manner that would generate the outer form of the piece. Reicha is more concerned with appropriate thematic «placement» than he is with thematic «evolution.» The second technique, that of sequential repetition, involves the dissection of a previously extended theme into its constituent elements, which are then reassembled into modulatory sequences. The emphasis here is upon fragmentation and recombination, coupled with rapid modulation.

Broadly speaking, Reicha's theories of musical structure reflect two contrasting views of musical development. One is the notion of a continuous melody, or theme, which is tonally closed, but prolonged

through a series of melodic and/or harmonic interruptions, and understood in terms of the inter-relationship of phrase rhythms. The second view consists of the presentation and development of thematic material in which the principal development takes place in the development section. The development is characterized by fragmentation, is tonally open-ended, and is concerned with recombination of material. These procedures lie at the heart of Reicha's concept of *grande coupe binaire*.

REICHA'S CONCEPT OF *GRANDE COUPE BINAIRE*

Although Reicha does not actually coin the term, his discussion of *grande coupe binaire* amounts to one of the first descriptions of sonata form. In the *Traité de mélodie*, he presents two fundamental «principles» of *grande coupe binaire*. First, he asserts that «the second part of this division may never be shorter than the first, but it may be longer by a third or even a half, for the first part is only the exposition while the second part is the development.»⁷ The form is thus characterized as a two-part structure in which the second part is clearly the development of the first, and a concomitant concept of large-scale proportion in which the second part is also longer than the first.

Reicha's second principle of *grande coupe binaire* concerns harmonic structure. He advises that the «exposition» of the piece be tonally stable so that it may always be «direct and clear.» Without this tonal stability at the opening, the «second part» of the piece «loses its interest.» It is curious that despite his opinion elsewhere (typical of the late eighteenth century) that harmony is incapable of conveying the thought content of music, Reicha now considers harmony to be a principal agent in the generation of large-scale form. The answer to this apparent contradiction lies in the fact that harmony does contribute to the definition of phrases and periods, and since Reicha's concept of form relies heavily upon the complex interaction of periods, harmony inevitably assumes a form-defining role. Reicha cautions, however, that «modulations are not the goal of music; they are only the means of varying keys, and of thus preventing a monotony of tones and of cadences, which would necessarily be felt in a long melody.»⁸ He

⁷ «La seconde partie de cette coupe ne peut jamais être plus courte que la première; mais elle peut être d'un tiers et même de moitié plus longue, car la première partie n'est que l'exposition, tandis que la seconde en est le développement.» *Traité de mélodie*, p. 46.

⁸ «Les modulations ne sont point le but de la Musique; elles ne sont que le moyen de varier les gammes, et d'empêcher par-là la monotonie des sons et des cadences, qui se ferait sentir nécessairement dans une longue Mélodie.» *Traité de mélodie*, p. 47.

further defends his recommendation that extraneous keys be avoided, remarking that «the value of the ideas is not thereby influenced, although bad composers believe that heterogeneous modulations may make up for what is lacking in ideas.»⁹ These remarks notwithstanding, it is clear that harmony does play a formative role in Reicha's concept of *grande coupe binaire*, as his following summary of the form indicates:

(A) The theme which establishes the original key. (B) Small passing modulations to relative keys in order to perfectly establish the dominant, in which the theme remains (broken up from time to time by other small passing modulations if desired, especially if this first part lengthy). (C) The second part (according to its length) may first modulate from one key to another and may sometimes remain in one of the relative keys which it has established. After this, it returns to the original key (where the theme is repeated, usually in its entirety), and a considerable portion of the ideas which occur in the first part in the dominant are here transposed to the tonic. This transposition is sometimes more or less modified, the ideas being slightly altered (although never in such a manner that they cannot be remembered or recognized). A coda may end this second part in order to give more interest and brilliance to the end of the piece, which is commonly called the *Coup de fouet*. In general, the second part is composed out of, and develops the first part, especially in instrumental music where the pieces are more extended than in vocal music. In the latter one is often obliged to create other ideas in addition to the theme which one wishes to recall in the second part, for the voice cannot always transpose on account of its limited range, and because the words very often do not permit it.¹⁰

⁹ «...la valeur des idées n'y influe rien, et que les mauvais compositeurs croient y suppléer par des modulations hétérogènes.» *Traité de la mélodie*, p. 47.

¹⁰ «A. Le thème avec lequel on établit le ton primitif. B. De petites modulations passagères dans des tons relatifs, pour établir parfaitement bien la dominante, dans laquelle on reste, (coupée de tems en tems par d'autres petites modulations passagères, si l'on veut, particulièrement si cette première partie est d'une certaine longueur). C. La seconde partie (selon son étendue) peut moduler d'abord d'un ton à l'autre, et s'arrêter quelquefois dans un des tons relatifs qu'on a établis. Après cela, on retourne dans le ton primitif (dans lequel on répète assez généralement le thème en entier), et on transpose une grande partie des idées de la première partie de la dominante dans la tonique. Cette transposition se fait quelquefois avec plus ou moins de modifications, en altérant un peu les idées (mais jamais de manière à ne pouvoir s'en rappeler et à ne pas les reconnaître), en les répétant parfois, ou bien en les variant légèrement. Une coda peut terminer cette seconde partie pour donner plus d'intérêt et d'éclat à la fin du morceau; ce qu'on appelle vulgairement le *Coup de fouet*. En général, la seconde partie se compose et se développe avec les idées de la première, principalement dans la Musique instrumentale, où les morceaux sont plus étendus que dans la Musique vocale. Dans cette dernière, on est souvent obligé de créer d'autres idées hors du thème qu'on cherche à répéter et à retrouver dans la seconde partie, parce que la voix ne peut pas toujours transposer, par rapport à son peu d'étendue, est parce que les paroles fort souvent aussi ne le permettent pas.» *Traité de la mélodie*, p. 48.

In the above description of *grande coupe binaire* Reicha considers both harmonic and thematic processes. His view of the form appears at this stage to be monothematic, as there is no mention of a second theme after the modulation to the dominant. Reicha's remark that the theme be «broken up from time to time by other small passing modulations» indicates that the second group (if one may call it that) is not as stable as might have been expected. Whereas the modulation of the first group to the dominant creates a tension which is normally resolved upon arrival at the second group, Reicha's remark indicates that the tension must be maintained through further «passing modulations.»

It is important to observe that in the *Traité de mélodie* Reicha has relatively little to say about the second part of *grande coupe binaire*, except that it is characterized by modulation (in the first section, i.e. the development section), and by the transposition and varied repetition of the opening ideas (in the second, section, i.e. the recapitulation). However, by the time of the *Traité de haute composition musicale* Reicha formulated his concept of *grande coupe binaire* primarily according to thematic procedures. Although still a two-part form, he clearly identifies an exposition as consisting of various types of musical ideas, a development section characterized by thematic fragmentation, recombination, and modulation, and a recapitulation which is normally modified thematically and tonally. Most importantly, Reicha now describes *grande coupe binaire* in quasi-dramatic terms, breaking it up into three distinct sections: the exposition of the ideas—the plot, or knot—and the *dénoûment*.

CONFLICTING PROCESSES OF EXTENSION AND FRAGMENTATION

In Reicha's theories of melodic extension and the development of melodic ideas there are two fundamentally different compositional processes. The first process is essentially additive and concerns the extension of motives, phrases, and periods, principally through techniques of melodic interruption, elision, varied repetition, and high-level harmonic plans. The second process concerns the fragmentation and sequential treatment of pre-established material and is accompanied by frequent modulation. It is interesting to consider how the coexistence of these procedures came to be formulated in Reicha's thought.

It may at first seem odd that Reicha draws upon repertoires from composers as divergent as Piccinni and Haydn, repertoires that are ostensibly technically and aesthetically irreconcilable. It could be argued, however, that Reicha gradually formulated his theory of *grande coupe*

binair through a synthesis of an Italianate concept of melody as exemplified in the aesthetic of Piccinni, and the perceived Germanic preoccupation with harmony, modulation, and motivic development, as exemplified in the work of Haydn, to which Reicha constantly refers. This is not to suggest that Piccinni's music is entirely lacking in motivic development or harmonic interest, or that Haydn's music lacks «tunefulness», it is a matter of emphasis. Reicha's description of *grande coupe binair* incorporates both of these stylistic propensities. The first part (exposition) is discussed primarily in terms of melodic interruption and elision, procedures which reflect the perceived notion of Italianate melody. However, the development section is characterized by an absorption of Baroque-like procedures of sequential repetition and canonic imitation, to which is added the drama of thematic juxtaposition and harmonic dislocation. The notion that the development section represents the abrupt and rapid flow of ideas is in part a reflection of the prevailing attitude toward the German treatment of harmony and modulation.

Reicha was certainly conscious of these national distinctions. It was, in fact, common practice to categorize music in terms of the given tendencies of one nation or another toward melody and harmony. As Reicha remarks:

Of the three European nations that are the most ambitious musically, one has first excelled in harmony and not in melody, then excelled in melody at harmony's expense, and now operates in a very limited context. The second excels mainly in harmony, but very often at melody's expense. The third is still on the way to excelling in both true melody and true harmony.¹¹

It may be inferred from an earlier comment in the treatise that Reicha is referring to Italian, German, and French music respectively:

These aptitudes manifest themselves solely for harmony while not for melody, and *vice versa*, which clearly proves that harmony is a quite different thing from melody. Thus it can be explained why one nation, such as Germany, generally shows a greater disposition and genius for harmony, while another, such as Italy, aspires towards melody.¹²

¹¹ «Que des trois nations européennes qui ont le plus de prétensions en musique, il y a une qui a d'abord excellé dans l'Harmonie sans exceller dans la Mélodie, a ensuite brillé dans la Mélodie mais aux dépens de l'Harmonie, et tourne maintenant dans un cercle fort étroit. La seconde excelle principalement dans l'harmonie, mais trop souvent aux dépens de la Mélodie. La troisième est encore au chemin pour briller dans la véritable Mélodie.» *Traité de mélodie*, p. 94.

¹² «Ces dispositions souvent se manifestent seulement pour l'Harmonie, et pas en même tems pour la Mélodie. Par-là on peut s'expliquer comment une nation, comme l'Allemagne,

A further example of the attitude toward Italian and German music is found in Ginguené's article «Fantasie,» in the *Encyclopédie Méthodique*:

Here again, as in nearly all other functions of musical art, there is felt a difference between the German and Italian schools. In general, a German who improvises, who gives full reign to his *fantasies*, appears not to find enough notes to play. He continually fills all the harmony with the most extraordinary and dissonant chords; he combines suspensions, suppositions, modulates boldly and forcefully; he strikes and thumps the keyboard; he exhausts all the effects, all the means of surprise with which the instrument can provide him. It is a torrent, an overflowing of harmony. He does not let you breathe, and does not breathe himself. An Italian, by contrast, after having run over, and so to speak, caressed the keys, creates a fluent melodic phrase; from this he makes a second phrase, and from this a third; he returns to the first, then the others in turn; he moves among them with ease, he connects them with simple and natural modulations.¹³

To the extent that Reicha was influenced by the controversy surrounding the treatment of melody and harmony in Italian and German music, his description of *grande coupe binaire* may be understood as a synthesis of procedures of periodic extension on the one hand, and motivic manipulation accompanied by harmonic dislocation on the other. Reicha associates periodic melody primarily with the first part of *grande coupe binaire*, or the exposition; the motivic manipulation of ideas, however, appears to be primarily reserved for the first section of the second part, that is, the development section. Reicha clearly recognised that there existed tonally stable and thematically closed sections of a composition, as well as sections which were tonally unstable and thematically open-ended. Reicha's concept of *grande coupe binaire*

montre généralement plus de dispositions et de génie pour l'Harmonie, tandis qu'une autre, comme l'Italie, n'aspire qu'à la Mélodie.» *Traité de mélodie*, p. 1, fn. 3.

¹³ «Ici encore, comme dans presque toutes les autres opérations de l'art musicale, se fait sentir différence entre l'école Allemande & Italienne. En général, un Allemand qui improvise, qui se livre à ses *fantasies*, semble ne pas trouver assez de touches à faire parler à la fois. Il remplit continuellement toute l'harmonie des accords les plus recherchés & le plus dissonans; il combine les suspensions, les suppositions; il module avec hardiesse, avec force; il frappe, il assaisse le clavier; il épuise tous les jeux, tous les moyens de surprise que l'instrument lui peut fournir. C'est un torrent, c'est un débordement d'harmonie. Il ne vous laisse respirer, & ne respire pas lui-même. Un Italienne au contraire, après avoir parcouru, & pour ainsi dire caressé les touches, en fait jaillir une phrase de chant; il en tire une seconde, de celle-ci une troisième; il reprend la première, puis les autres tour-à-tour, il les parcourt avec aisance, il les enchaîne dans les modulations faciles, & naturelles.» See the article «Fantasie,» by Ginguené, in the *Encyclopédie Méthodique*, p. 547.

formally reconciles these compositional procedures whose origins clearly derive from the prevailing attitudes toward Italian and German music in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. That Reicha did not formulate this compositional dualism as an issue requiring a particular resolution suggests that it was precisely the coexistence of these conflicting concepts of musical structure that constituted the dramatic essence of his concept of *grande coupe binaire*.

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