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The Performer as Interpretative Player.

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THE PERFORMER AS INTERPRETATIVE PLAYER.

A Study about the performer's interpretative co-operation in the musical work.

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Abstract

This paper proposes a reconsideration of the interpretative role of the performer. Such a role involve the articulation of i) the composer's intentions, ii) the meaningful content of the musical structure by itself regardless composer's intentions, and iii) the performer's originality and creativity. Two eminent performances of the Prelude in B minor Op. 28 N. 6 by Chopin were analysed in terms of dynamics and timing as the most relevant attributes of the pianistic expression. The results of this analysis were related to two analytical interpretations aroused from two approaches in the exam of the its musical structure. It was intended to show that: i) different elements of the musical structure can become relevant according to each particular *reading* of the musical piece; ii) these elements - properly arranged justify a coherent and organic interpretation of the work; iii) This interpretation consists on a given organisation of expressive (microstructural) attributes in order to *re-shape* structural characteristics such as the articulation of formal units; iv) performers use those expressive resources according to functions that emerge and can be understood within their proper referential context, instead of according to fixed rules.

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If there is something to interpret, the interpretation have to talk about something that must be found in some place and in some way it must be respected.
(Umberto Eco, [1992] - 1995)

Introduction

One of the core issues of the theoretical discussion about music performance is the topic of *authenticity* of interpretation. This debate is focused on the consideration of performance as realisation of: i) stylistic norms that draw the common practice of a give epoch, and / or ii) musical structure as it emerges from the systematic analysis of the piece. The first approach is the support of the *musicological versions*, which show an performer as an erudite specialised in the history of performance, who aims to recreate the experience of the music performance proper to this given period of time. Each distinctive peculiarity of this compositional common practice may be "interpret" according to a relatively structured set of principles which prescribes adequate actions of performance as stated by the style. Authenticity emerges, for the second perspective, as an intrinsic quality of the piece, from a coherent *realisation* of its musical structure. Therefore, authenticity is a quality not necessarily related to an epoch and then it is not temporal. In agreement with this approach, historical data about performance are not relevant to interpretative decisions, and historical data related to the composition itself only contribute to shape a perspective of the piece as a coherent whole. Musical analysis provides "objective data" in order to take interpretative decisions. Performers know the musical structure and they communicate it to the listeners. In that communication, each structural element is projected on the performance, by minimal (expressive) variations in dynamics, timing, timbre, articulation, etc. The set of these minimal variations (named *microestucture*) makes up a ruled organisation. In that way, musical structure generates specific rules of performance (see Clarke, 1988; Todd, 1985). This *generative* approach states that although those rules are applying in a conscious way, they are the basis on which common codes between listeners and performers are built. Those common codes allow to listeners to understand the musical structure recognised by performers.

However, all the judgements about authenticity in performance derived from both approaches, take the risk of being insensitive to the performer's creative act. History of music performance (at least of the western academic music, but probably of all music) reveals that this act has always operated as a *force* acting in tension with the *forces* which define both the stylistic frame and the piece's unity. Accordingly, tensions in the field of music performance can be understand "as a trichotomy among interpretation as searching of the *intentio auctoris*, interpretation as searching of the *intentio operis*, and interpretation as imposition of the *intentio lectoris*" (Eco, 1990; 29).

In these terms, the egocentric conception of music performance, rooted in romantic tradition, in which performance is viewed as performer's self expression materialises the vigorous imposition of the *intentio lectoris*: performance is authentic if it is faithful to the performer.

On the other hand, when music analysis, as it is in search of the *intentio operis*, understood its findings like the *intentio auctoris* perpetrated a sort of analytical fundamentalism, as it was named by Cook (1999). This trend has had a direct incidence on the practice of music performance: if knowing the *intentio operis* is to know the *intentio auctoris*, then a true performance is that which, by being faithful to the musical piece, is loyal to its composer. Music performance is, in that way, understood as a mean to elucidate musical structure. (Stein, 1954; Cone, 1968). On the extreme of this perspective, the main goal of music performance is to communicate and enlighten to listeners about such structural aspects (Berry, 1989).

However, even from this point of view, this authors admit that: 1) musical structure show such a complexity that it may accept different analysis; and 2) in spite of the fact that the performer, as an analyst, can decode musical structure, the communication of this structure to the listener have to traverse another interpretative circuit. "Because there may be diverse reasonable analyses of any piece, and because any structural element may be interpreted in different ways, the path from analysis to performance is one of great complexity." (Berry, 1989; p. 10.) The question about what features of musical structure are relevant to the musical interpretation do not find a satisfactory answer observing grammars highly ruled.

For this reason, the problem of authenticity in interpretation, go further than the principle of implementation of a series of stylistic norms or interpretative grammars. It comprehend another factors:

"Even though there are good reasons to think that some interpretation is more pertinent or convincing than another, undoubtedly it is useless to talk about a faithful or authentic version: each interpretation is influenced by contingent, social and cultural meanings, which are more or less codified at the expressive structure level of the piece. The performer assimilates or rejects them according to both his own way of representing music in general, and all that he knows about the piece, its author, or its epoch. Music analysis as a part of a coherent theory must be charged of this process of reconstruction." (Imberty, 1992)

Music performance can be see as a text, which is at the same time an interpretation of another text. This sort of musical *metatext* may give a good opportunity of studying those tensions among the before mentioned *Intentio*. The interpreted text, the score, is manifested through another text, the performance (which can be analysed in term of microstructure). The present study introduces a sort of epistemological exercise which aims to assign meaning to attributes of music performance in the context of specific interpretations according to representations derived from different music analyses. In doing this, it is intended to demonstrate that relevant aspects of performance are strongly related to structural characteristics of music work, but, however, such a relation is not univocal. On the contrary, this correspondence is a complex result derived of the interaction of musical structure with other factors. Although *circumstantial* factors - namely, factors related to the performance circumstances (which include place and date of performance, record conditions, stylistic customary practice, cultural and personal influences on analysis, etc.) - (Eco, 1976) this article is focused on *contextual* factor - that is, verifiable factors emerging from the set of the structural features of the piece and the set of the *microstructural* attributes of the performance itself -, which is assumed that are contributing to exhibit the performance as a coherent and meaningful whole.

In order to achieve this propose, two analyses of one piece - Piano Prelude in B minor Op. 28 No. 6 by Chopin - are introduced. They are the result of emphasising different aspects of musical structure as it is viewed from diverse perspectives. After that, two expert performances of the piece are analysed and discussed according the contextual interaction of microstructural features. In this way, this paper is deeply related to theoretical (Schmalfeldt, 1985) and empirical (Shaffer, 1992, 1995; Clarke, 1995) approaches to music interpretation, which underline the original contribution of expert performers.

Method

The piece

The complete score (Urtext) of the Prelude in B minor Op. 28 No. 6 by Chopin is showed in figure 1. In figure 2, a graphic analysis of its underlying voice leading can be seen. This graphic reveals a standard interruption-form (Schenker, 1935). Namely, the initial D is prolonged through the first eight measures, crossing a register transference, to achieve the progression to the C in measure 8. This linear descendant is supported by the progression I - V_{6/4} 5/3. This prolongation is organised around the neighbour note as structural framework. The neighbour note is firstly seen as an incomplete one (the D) at late of measure 1. Therefore, neighbour note is exhibited from the beginnings as an important thematic feature. A completed neighbour note (the E) appears in measure 7 with that thematic reminiscence. This E is prolonging the previous D after the register change. This E is simultaneously sounding above a C. This C comes form a *voice exchange* between measures 6 and 7 (this voice exchange enables the register transference). The C, as a note belonging to the intermediate voice, progresses toward a B paralleling the upper voice movement (E - D). Meanwhile, the bass progresses from the extended prolongation of the B (a the root note of the I) toward the D, at the end of measure 7. The goal of this movement of the bass is the F of measure 8 (as the root note of the V, completing the arpeggiation of the tonic triad). Briefly, the initial D/ I prolongation is achieved through a neighbour note D - E - D, which is supported partially by a progression of the tonic triad (B - D) by the bass, and partially by a parallel progression (from the C - below the E - toward the B) of an inner voice.

As a outstanding characteristic of this particular voice leading, the structural neighbour note is presented much more highlighted after the interruption, at the second section of the piece.

This emphasis is based on:

- i) The neighbour note E is now supported by a passing note (C natural) no belonging to the diatonic B minor frame. This C natural becomes into a C # at the measure 15;
- ii) The *voice exchange* is this time realised between outer (principal) voices¹, instead of between the upper voice and an inner one, as at the mm. 6 and 7. In this way, the neighbour note E is now developed at the bass register, increasing its thematic and harmonic relevance (it becomes into the subdominant step of the progression)

Notably, at the end of the second section of the interrupted form occurs a *quasi* interruption: The harmonic progression i6 - V_{6/4} supporting the linear progression D - C is materialised at the m.21. At this point we expect a B supported by a I degree in root position. However, above the I degree a D reappears, producing the misapprehension that a new term of an interrupted form is beginning once again. In fact, it is not a new interruption, but a delayed fall on the B, which finally occurs according to the original register at the m.24. The main motif acts ambiguously creating alternatively a awareness of exposition and closure. From this point of view it is clear that the Prélude may be segmented into two sections articulated at

¹ Note that the main melodic voice is located in this Prélude in an inner register of the texture throughout the complete piece.

the point of interruption (m.8). A pianist, who is sensitive to this reading of the piece, will intend to play this articulation clearly performed and distinguished from other less hierarchically important points of segmentation. At the same time he will intend a similar action at the fall of m. 22, but this time he has to play it in such a way that this fall does not sound conclusive giving to the listener the opportunity to realise that the next measures are not a new section, but the end of the main progression (D - C - B).

The image displays six systems of musical notation for Chopin's Prelude Op. 28 No. 6 in B minor. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The music is in 3/4 time and features a characteristic descending eighth-note pattern in the right hand. The first system includes the dynamic marking 'sotto voce' and has three accents (>) above the first three notes of the right-hand line. The second system shows a melodic line in the bass clef that descends across the system. The third system continues the descending eighth-note pattern. The fourth system includes the dynamic marking 'sostenuto' and features a more complex rhythmic pattern in the bass clef. The fifth system shows a steady descending eighth-note line in the bass clef. The sixth system concludes with the dynamic marking 'pp' and ends with a double bar line.

Figure 1. Prelude Op. 28 No. 6 in B minor by Chopin

Nevertheless, the particular elaboration of the prolongation of the fundamental line in this piece would give rise to a paradoxical reading. The prolongational configuration at the later levels (Schenker 1935) such as the neighbour note D - E - D, arise associated to *surface* phenomena, which are strongly emphasised. Accordingly, for example, the Neapolitan Chord at mm 12 and *ff.* are associated to an important register expansion. At the same time, an acceleration of the *event rhythm* occurs: the rising arpeggio is repeated within a shorter time span (note that previously, the rising arpeggio appeared every other measure, and, at measure 13 it appears every other beat) giving rise to an hemiole. As a metric irregularity, an isolated hemiole is often used to articulate musical form, indicating a phrase ending. Probably, this double expansion (metrical and registral) focused on measures 13 and 14 had justified the fact that many editors included the dynamic direction *f* (the original text - *urtext* - shows only one dynamic direction, namely, a *pp* at the last measure). If these surface phenomena govern the formal organisation of the piece, then the main joint will be at the arriving of the measure 13 to the 14 (note that this is the exact middle point of the piece). The concept of a new section beginning from this point is also based on the introduction of the thematic material B on a lower *tessitura* and its subsequent repetition and elaboration, which appears as a different content. A pianist who is sensitive to this interpretation will intend to indicate clearly the articulation of the measures 13 and 14 distinguishing this point from the joint of the measure 8, as a point hierarchically more important.

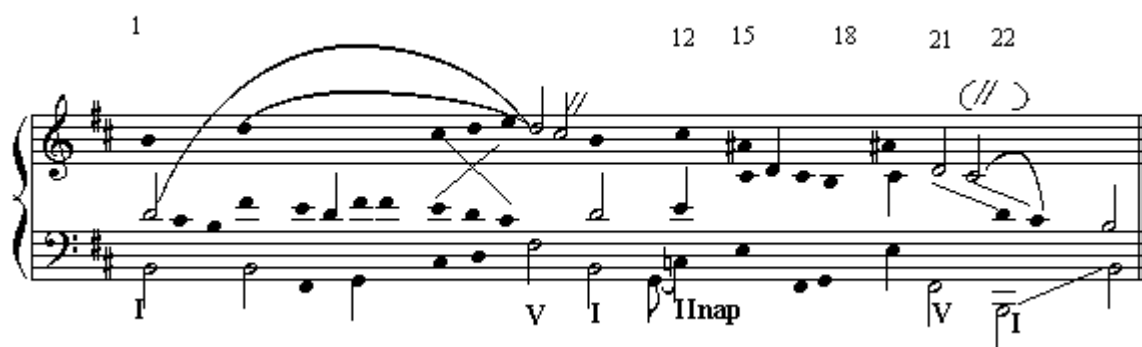


Figure 2. Rudimentary graphic of underlying voice leading of the *Prélude in B minor* by Chopin.

From a *surface* perspective is also possible to understand measures 22 and *ff.* as a coda which remind the thematic material of the work. This passage give rise to another performance puzzle because of the structural importance of the progression toward a delayed tonic after a long prolongation of the D and the simultaneous advent of the thematic material which are creating functional ambiguity at the end of m. 22. Expression may contribute to broke this ambiguity, either the performer interprets it as a coda making expressive deviations which give account of the structural importance of the B (m. 22) or he understand it as a suspension of the final tonic in the fundamental line D - C - B.

The Performances

Two performances - Alfred Cortot (1934) and Martha Argerich (1977) - of the *Prélude Op. 28 No. 6* by Chopin were analysed.

The computational analysis was run with the assistance of a software (Soundforge) which allows to see the sound envelope. Thus, it is possible to identify the location of the each note onset, in milliseconds with a minimal error margin. However, pedalling, chords, harmonic intervals, a level of dynamic *piano*, and the record conditions of the original samples, give rise to generate doubts if the exam is made only visually. Therefore, in order to determine more precisely the onset of each note, a audio - visual combined method was used. Since the complete work shows a permanent pulse of eighth notes, this value was taken as unit (onset of weaker position sixteenth notes were not taken assessed). This procedure prevent us from determining chord asynchrony. Therefore, where more than one note are sounding simultaneously, a *global onset* - completed chord - was considered. When such asynchrony was very evident, the upper note was taken as reference. Measurement of onsets give rise to calculation of inter onset intervals (IOI). They were showed as graphics exhibiting normalised IOI values. In such a graphic, a inexpressive version, in which every eighth note lasted the same amount of milliseconds, would be represented by an horizontal line at level 0. Therefore, values under 0 represent eighth notes which are shorter than the media.

Similarly, data risen form dynamic analysis were presented as graphics. In this case, the software allows to estimate the amplitude peak of each IOI. For the particular case of Piano, this peak is considered adequate to give a faithful account of the sonority levels of each note. Nevertheless, it is important to remind that this procedure is unable to discriminate the relative intensity of each note belonging to a given chord. On the contrary, this method only enables to consider the completed block's sonority. However, Repp (1999, appendix) found that, concerning some textures like accompanied melody, the block's sonority is highly representative of the sonority of the main melodic line.

Results

Results are shown in its graphic format, in which both rhythmic and dynamic values are normalised. The graphic on figure 3 exhibits values corresponding to each quarter note beat. It is possible to notice some similarities between both versions. For example, at the concluding measures both of them show a progressive tendency to decrease dynamic values while lengthening the time. This dramatic fall in tempo and dynamic is a part of a very extended

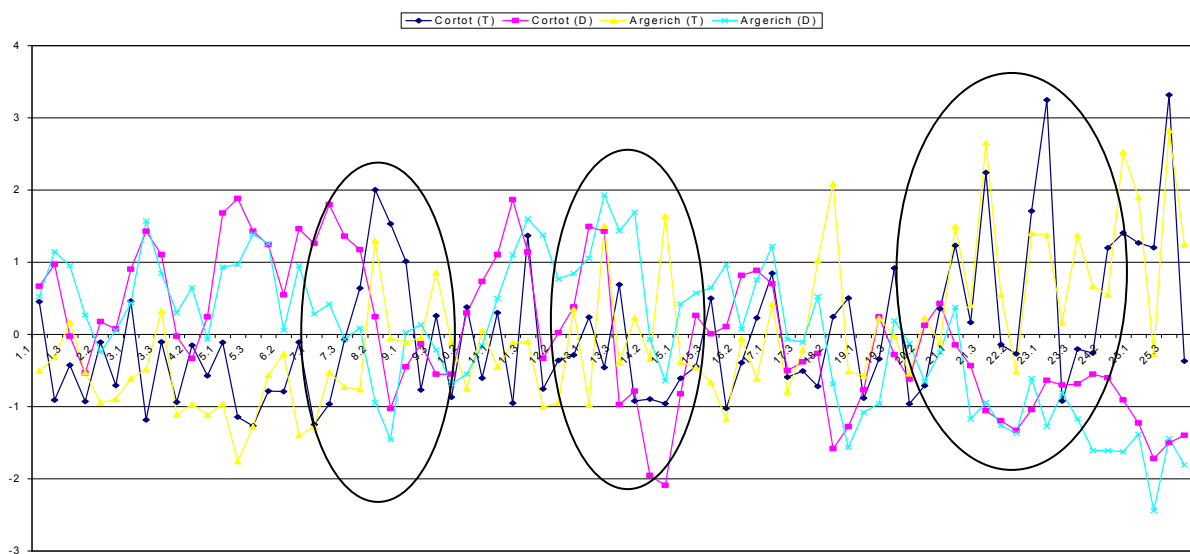


Figure 3. Timing and dynamic profile for versions of Alfred Cortot (blue and magenta lines respectively) and Martha Argerinch (yellow and light blue lines)

process coming from measure 18 - when the reiteration of the thematic material B begins - which clearly indicates that the microform as a whole is ending.

However, differences are more interesting and relevant to this analysis than similarities. Those are indicated in the graphic of figure 3 and are extended by the subsequent graphics.

The most noticeable *ritenuto* by Cortot occurs at measure 8². This *rit.* is indicating, undoubtedly, the interruption form mentioned in the previous section (Figure 4). Although Argerich, as a logical interpretation, also is *rallentando* in this place, such a *rallentando* is less pronounced than the Cortot one. Moreover, in the context of the complete performance of Argerich as a whole, this *rallentando* is not the most prominent (cf. Figure 3) contrarily to the Cortot's performance. The complete set of actions of this articulation point also involves, in both performances, a dynamic *diminuendo* tendency followed by a noticeable repetition of initial gesture at the beginning of measure 9 (compare measures 1 and 9).

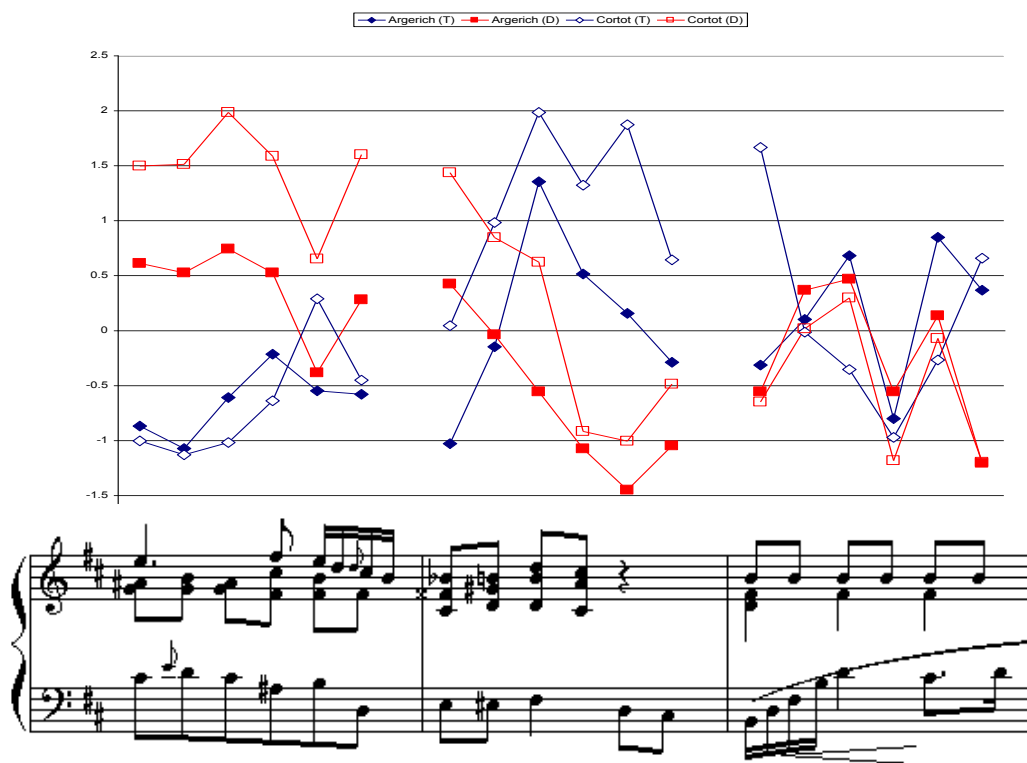


Figure 4. Detail of measures 7-9 (values of eighth notes). Blue lines represent timing deviations, red lines represent dynamic variation. Full markers correspond to M. Argerich's version and empty markers correspond to A. Cortot's version.

The second place deserving a special comment happens from measure 13 to 15, coinciding with the middle point of the piece. Some surface phenomena take place around this point separating both half (Figure 5). Note the absolutely contradictory tendency between both

² It is convenient to note that this assertion does not contradict the previous one which alluded to an extended *rallentando* at the concluding measures. The *rallentando* as a formal articulator - not only mentioned by the interpretative tradition (Keller, 1923) but also highlighted by generative theories (Todd, 1985), is the time deviation which is followed by a restoration of the original tempo. In the case of the closing fragment of the Prélude, the performed *rallentando* is introduced, as mentioned above, as a macro process of closure of the piece as a whole, from the change of tempo happening at measure 18 in both versions.

performers' timing at measure 13 with its *fall* to measure 14. The hemiole is compound by three *big beats* (half note values - mm: 13.1; 13.3 y 14.2).

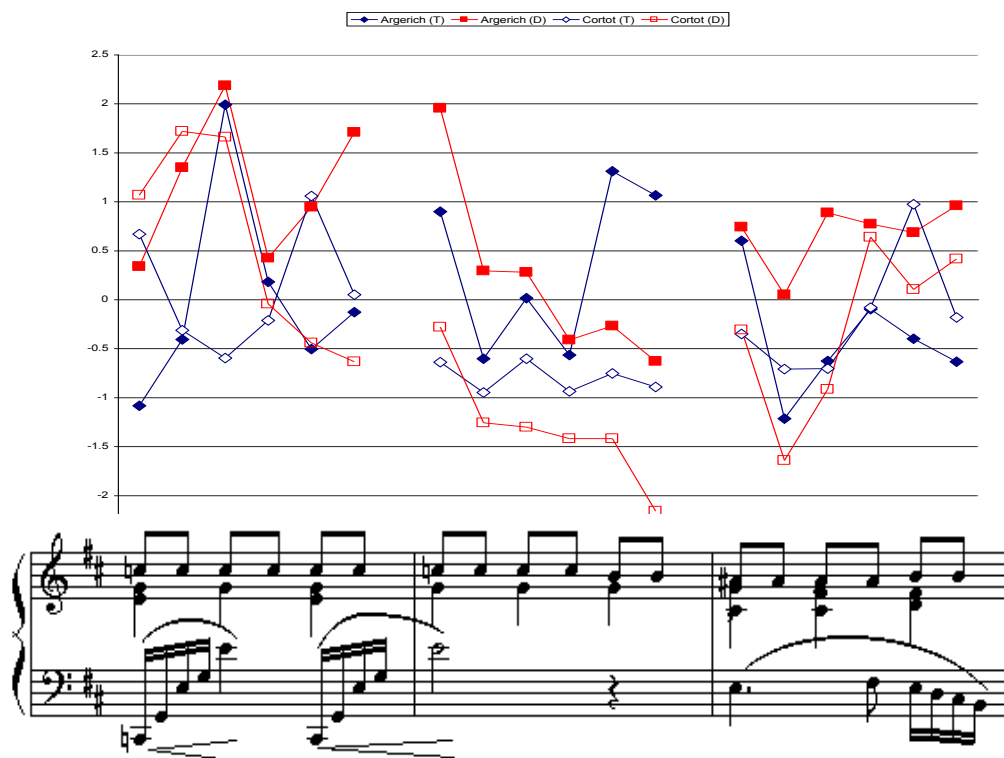


Figure 5. Detail of measures 13-15

Clearly, Argerich emphasises the E (third eighth note of each *half note beat*). In doing so, she is bringing into prominence the hemiole. On the other side, although Alfred Cortot indicates the first half note of the hemiole, on the end of the second one (m. 14) he changes the gesture performing the rest of the eighth notes of the measure 14 rapidly and equally. Contrarily, Argerich "makes time" for each half note of the hemiole. The beginning of the motif B on the lower voice at the first beat of measure 15 is also hasty in the Cortot's version while in the Argerich's the new motif is manifestly introduced by retaining the first eighth note (m. 15.1). Dynamic gestures of both versions are accompanying this differences of approaches. Argerich plays both arpeggios using the same dynamics (*f* and *cresc.*), conversely to Cortot, who plays much more *p* the second arpeggio, and reinforces his idea of subtracting importance to the last eighth notes of measure 14 by diminishing its dynamic level. Moreover, the beginning of measure 15 is, in Cortot's version, more *piano* and shorter than in the Argerich's. Therefore, measure 14 seems less emphasised as a formal articulation point by Cortot than by Argerich.

Finally, let's exam concluding measures of the piece, where the articulation of the Coda occurs (see *The Piece*). Both artists perform a noticeable *ritenuto* at the beginning of measure 23 (figure 6). Nevertheless, this *rit.* is markedly more plentiful in the Cortot's version. Note that he is making the usual gesture to perform the raising up arpeggi, but, this time, it is much more exaggerated. Argerich's gesture is new instead. Moreover, the lowest B (measure 21) is dynamically and temporally emphasised by both artists. All of these reasons lead to think in a performance based on the idea of this position as a formal articulator point, which is

substantially different than a performance based on the expectation derived only from the underlying voice leading.

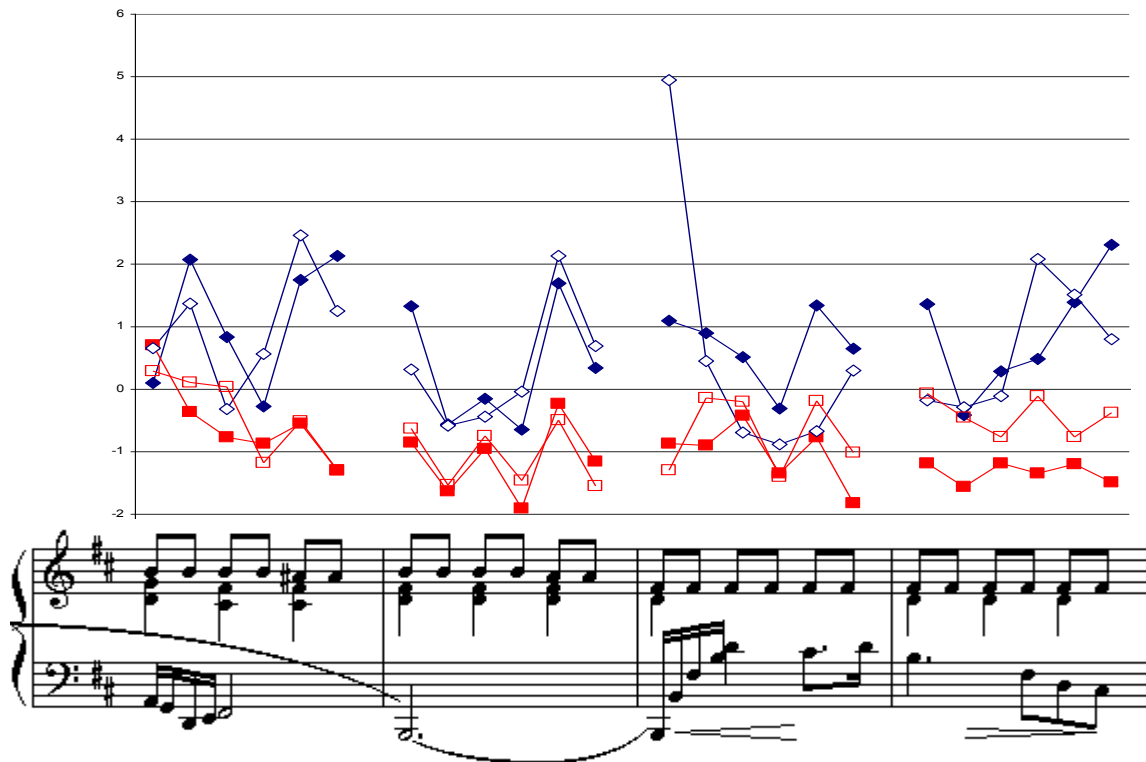


Figure 6. Detail of measures 21-24.

However, it is necessary to consider two factors of analysis:

- 1) measure 22 is showing a noticeable similarity of performance between both pianists. Both of them are emphasising both dynamically and temporally the F of the penultimate eighth note of this measure. Therefore, they are organising the continuity of the descending arpeggio A (22.3) F (23.1) D (23.2) indicating a movement toward the main voice (the D of measure 23; see reduction in figure 2)
- 2) the mentioned separation between measures 22 and 23 take place in a unified and sustained process which, having begun at measure 19, involves an important decreasing of both tempo and dynamics (see figure 3). In that way, both artists are exhibiting a unified line that contributes to make both the fall to measure 23 and the articulation of the 4 concluding measures more ambiguous.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to exercise an interpretation of performance actions which does not emerge from a juxtaposition of applied performative rules but from putting each action in context within a set of operations as a whole. In doing so, we intended to present an alternative interpretation of performance actions out of the generative explanation. As it was essayed by Clarke (1995), from this point of view, each expressive deviation acquires a contextual meaning. Accordingly, data raised from the analysis of expert performances seem to vindicate that musical interpretation is not the mere result of corresponding a grammatical

rule to a given structural characteristic. On the contrary, this structure would be *interpreted* by the performer as an unity. This interpretation would create a particular higher order mental representation of the piece. From this representation, the performer activates a collection of expressive variations which conceptually agree with the musical structure of the piece viewed from his own perspective. This particular perspective might be considered as "a personal contribution" to the original musical text.

Performances of measures 22/23 bring out the importance of analysing expressive variations in context. According to the generative approach, this site should be considered as the articulation point corresponding to the structural highest level, because the most pronounced *ritard* could be observed here (specially concerning to the Cortot's version). However, if this *ritard* is analysed as a part of a more global - future oriented - process which enhances form measure 19 to the end and involves a particular behaviour of the inner voices (the arpeggio A-F - D at measures 22/23), it will be possible to evaluate that the pianists are intending to capture the ambiguity of this passage concerning the structural functions of segmentation and continuation. Thus, this *ritard* acquires a different meaning whether it is assessed from the point of view of a gradual and sustained process of retention of tempo, or if it is examined from a grammatical perspective. In this case, this process may be observed as pertaining to a narrative (dramatic) structure which achieves to capture the formal ambiguity of the passage.

From this perspective, musical structure does not give rise to a set of prescriptive rules of performance, but it is presented as a substrate on which the performer configures his own narrative content. (Shaffer, 1992; 1995; Schmalfeldt, 1985.)

A peculiarity of this interpretative approach, since it involves music performance, is the fact that contextual relations are *bimodal*. On one hand, we have **structural contextual relations**, namely, those relations that give meaning to an attribute of expressive microstructure (an expressive deviation), for example a *rubato*, by attending to the particular attribute of musical structure to which it is correlated (Eco, 1975). For example, the *ritard* which has been just commented.

On the other hand, we can talk about **microstructural contextual relations**, namely, those relations that allow to assign meaning to an attribute of expressive microstructure by attending to a particular attribute of musical microstructure to which it is correlated. In order to give an example of this let's exam the Cortot's performance of measures 13 and 14. We saw that the second half note of the hemiole is played with a dramatic dynamic contrast. Viewed in other context, this contrast could be simply justified by the motivic iteration. However, in this context, this feature appears followed by a speed increment of the eighth notes belonging to the third half note of the hemiole. Since this acceleration give a sense of continuity, the dynamic change is "re-meant" as a part of this intent of maintaining the continuity of the passage.

We have seen that a musical text can give rise to multiple readings. In the particular case which we have presented, one reading outlined a narrative departing from a series of surface phenomena (registral expansion, metrical irregularity, motivic iteration, etc.). The other reading rescued attributes of the deeper musical structure (particularly, underlying voice leading). However, both versions are avoiding an explicit *explanation*. Apparently, they do not intent to show overtly these components by projecting them directly on the microstructural surface. Contrarily, each version is presenting its attributes (particularly timing and dynamics) as a coherent whole, which is manifested in a particular projection of

the general organisation of the piece. Consequently, the manifestation of the underlying voice leading by Cortot does not consist on bringing out - *singing* (in the pianistic jargon), making obvious - notes of that voice leading, but on reorganising groupings in order to define a clear formal articulation at measure 8. In such a reorganisation we can clearly appreciate the performer's interpretative co-operation.

In other words, the performer is not a mere transmitter of structural phenomena, but he interprets them and makes with them a new representation of the piece. This new representation is the one which is projected while performing. Natures of these "new representations" have not been elucidated yet. We have seen an example in which each "interpretation" give rise to a particular formal articulation. In that way, each artist outlined his/her own narrative. Nevertheless, we do not know the content of such narratives. Moreover, we should suppose that the performer can *originally* operate on the musical structure not only in terms of narrative (as drama). Character, emotional content, musical gesture, movement, etc. can be conceived in different way through the co-operation of the performer as an interpretative player.

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