

Compositional Archetypes, National Identity and Geometric Symbolisms

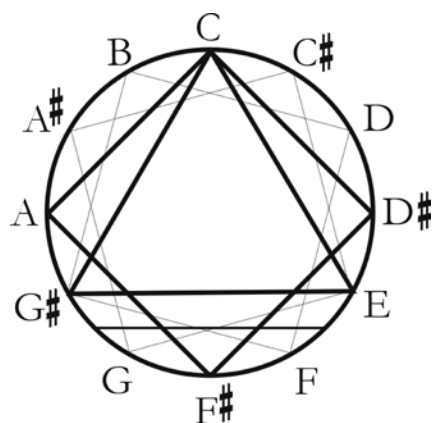
Four archetypes control the organization of the first movement of Pitombeira's *Seresta No 9 (Incelença)*: an augmented triad (048), a diminished tetrad (0369), a hexatonic pole (014589)¹, and the Brazilian northeastern major mode². The first three archetypes are intrinsically connected with geometric figures built upon numbers three, four, and six, respectively. As we will describe in the next paragraphs, these numbers seem to have a cultural symbolism associated with spirituality, materiality, and death. The last archetype makes a more explicit connection with Brazilian culture.

The *Incelença* (the title of the movement) is a type of folk vocal genre performed during funerals in the countryside of Brazil, especially in the northeast region. This genre, an heritage of the Portuguese culture, is sung with sinister and fearful intonation (MARCONDES, 1998, p. 379). Pitombeira's *Incelença* looks for a connection with this religious and spiritual universe without using literal quotations of the folk materials but emphasizing the fundamental points of the rite: the contrast between the sacred and the profane, the Heavens and the Earth, the divine and the human, being death the ultimate connection between these two contrasting universes.

The piece consists of the combination of numerological aspects with musical elements, a kind of game, in which numbers three, four, and six – representing spirituality, materiality, and death, respectively – control the organization of the harmonic, melodic, rhythmic, and formal parameters.

The augmented triad (048) seems to have a numeric relationship with the idea of trinity (three elements) – and consequently with the idea of spirituality. It divides the octave in three equal parts forming an equilateral triangle (fig. 1). The diminished seventh chord (0369) may be associated with secular elements. It divides the octave in four equal parts forming a square (fig. 1). The association of the square (and hence of the number four) with secular elements (ephemereal and unstable) is due to the fact, noticeable through experiment, that this geometric figure can be easily transformed in a losangle by moving its sides, with no length alteration (fig. 2). This flexibility of movement can be associated with mutability and instability, which are properties of the material world. The area of the this mutant figure varies from zero to L^2 . Figure 3, an engraving by Agrippa Von Nettesheim, quoted in Jung's *Symbole der Wandlung*, shows a man in format of cross, framed within a square (JUNG, 1986, p. 258).

Figure 1. Division of octave in three and four equal parts



In contrast, the equilateral triangle is a geometric figure that shows itself immutable when we try to perform the same experiment, i. e. it is impossible to move its sides laterally without changing their length (fig. 2). This immutability can be associated with ideas of eternity and spirituality.

The identification of Pitombeira's *Incelença* with the Brazilian northeastern ritual is suggested by the title of the movement and by the symbolic connection between the aforementioned musical archetypes with the contrasting spiritual and material planes. However, other archetypes, already culturally established, have a direct relationship with the ideas of death and Brazilian northeastern imagery.

The third archetype is a structure called hexatonic pole by Richard Cohn (2004, p. 285). This structure is built with six different pitch classes organized in six different chords (major and minor), which are disposed in a circle in a such manner that the difference between adjacent chords is of only one pitch class. Each opposite triad forms a hexatonic pole (fig. 4).

¹ Allen Forte's classification of sonorities will be used throughout this article.

² The Brazilian northeastern major mode consists of the Mixolydian mode with raised fourth scale degree. Example: C-D-E-F#-G-A-B# (OLSEN, 1998, p. 325).

Figure 2. Elasticity of the square and rigidity of the triangle

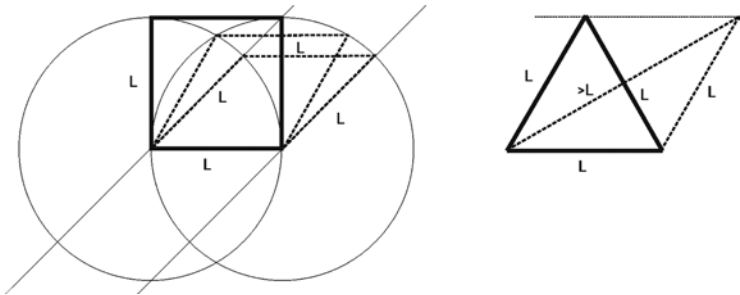


Figure 3. The secular man: a cross inside a square

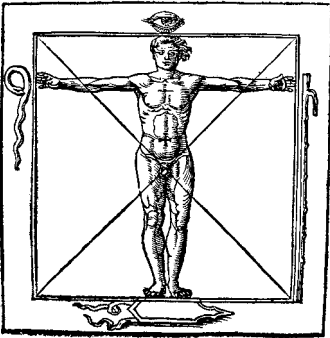


Figure 4. Hexatonic Poles

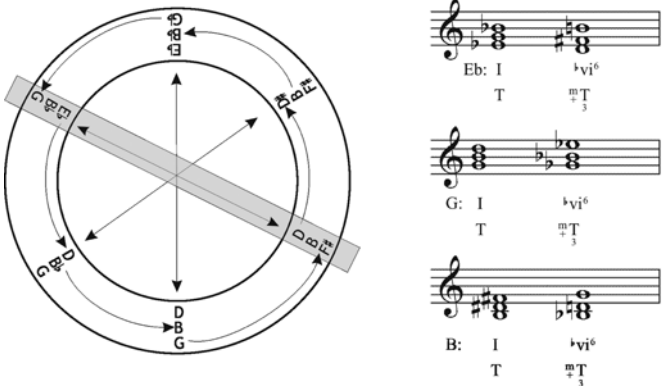
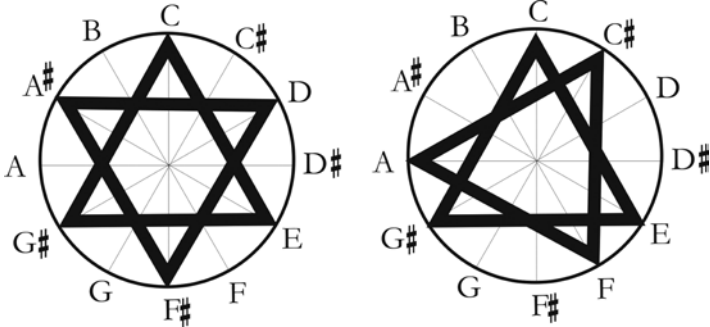


Figure 5. Whole Tone scale transformed in a Hexatonic Pole by internal rotation



Richard Cohn and several other authors³ associate the progression between these two triads with the ideas of death, paradox, supernatural, magical, etc. He gives several musical examples of composers⁴ that used this progression to represent uncanny phenomena and death.

The hexatonic pole (014589) can also be thought of as a distortion in the whole tone scale. See in figure 5 that a hexatonic pole can be produced by the rotation of 30 degrees in one of the triangles that comprises a whole tone scale. In this case, the triangle pointing down rotates 30 degrees counterclockwise. The 014589 is a mode of limited transposition level 4 (not one of the Messiaen's though), i.e. it exists in four different transpositional levels.

Each archetype (048, 0369, and 014589) is applied in the work in a specific manner, or through a series of operations, connected with its symbolism in the rite of *Incelença*. The operation for the spiritual archetype (048) consists of ascending chromatic lines, representing the rise of the human soul from the material world towards the spiritual and pure universe, through a type of metaphorical Jacob's ladder. It is the contact of a secular and inferior being with a celestial and superior world. This archetype appears sometimes combined with a bass line that progresses according to the cycle of fifths. Figure 6 shows an excerpt (with a reduction) of the piece where the first archetype is applied.

Figure 6. The first archetype, as it appears in the beginning of the piece

The figure displays a musical score for the first archetype. It is divided into three staves: Clarinete (Bb), Harpsichord, and Reduction. The Clarinete staff features a 'Chromatic Ascending Line' from measure 2 to 11, marked with a piano (p) dynamic. The Harpsichord staff shows 'Chromatic Ascending Augmented Triads' from measure 4 to 11, marked with mezzo-piano (mp). The Reduction staff illustrates the 'Cycle of Fifths' progression. The music is in 3/4 time and begins with a piano (p) dynamic for the Clarinete and mezzo-piano (mp) for the Harpsichord.

The material archetype (0369) operates only on fundamental level, punctuating important events in the piece as a Schenkerian *Baßbrechüng* and it appears only on the first section and in half of the second section of the piece. This fact has an important symbolic signification with the rite itself. The folk ritual in which the *Incelenças* are performed is divided into three parts: in the first part the soul is still connected with the moribund body, in the second part death happens and body and soul suffer separation, and in the third part the soul leaves the body and reaches its destiny. The second part is the most important moment of the ritual for that the participants (family and friends of the dead) must be in a state of maximum attention, respect, and reverence. At this point, the chants are differentiated and special. Therefore, the secular archetype, which operates only in the fundamental level, is interrupted in the middle section and does not come back again, symbolizing the death of the physical body.

Observing the reductive diagram of the *Incelença* in figure 8 (mm. 1, 10, 15 and 20), which shows the structural divisions of the piece into sections A (mm. 1–14), B (mm. 15–27), and A' (mm. 28–40), one can see that the 0369 sonority is structurally spread throughout the first section and part of the second section of the piece (B, G#, F, D) and how its completion is highlighted by the tuplet 4 : 3, symbolizing the crucial moment when the secular conscience stands before the spiritual essence: death is nearby (m. 20). Similarly to the ritual, in which death happens in the middle part, the climax of Pitombeira's *Incelença* also occurs in the middle section (B).

³ Hugo Riemann, Ernst Kurth, Carl Dahlhaus, Theodor Adorno, and Ernö Lendvai among others.

⁴ Carlo Gesualdo, Joseph Haydn, Richard Wagner, Edvard Grieg, Giacomo Puccini, Richard Strauss e Arnold Schoenberg.

The death archetype (014589), broken into two triads, is prepared throughout section B with the use of mediant in a non-functional harmonic context. The hexatonic poles happen on measures 23–24: B minor and Eb major constitute hexatonic poles. This is the central point of the piece in terms of a quasi-verbal intelligibility, since it is the very reason for the movement to be a funereal chant. It is noteworthy that, except for the B major triad, all chords of the hexatonic pole shown in figure 4, are used in section B. The G major triad appears inserted in the context of the Brazilian northeastern major mode (the fourth archetype), which occurs in a parenthetical fashion breaking the B minor triad, and is an important reference to where this particular death described in the piece takes place (northeastern Brazil). Therefore, measure 21–24 combined express clearly the essence of an *Incelença*: death rite in northeastern Brazil.

The guitar plays an important role in the build up of the climatic point of the piece (mm. 23–24). It enters only four measures before the third archetype confirms the symbolism of death. One could infer that the guitar stands for the messenger of death. Figure 7 shows that the guitar's harmonic material from measures 19 to 24 derives from the hexatonic poles described in figure 4.

Figure 7. The first entrance of the guitar

The figure shows a musical score for guitar in 2/4 time. The staff contains measures 20 through 25. Measure 20 begins with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. A dashed line above the staff spans from measure 20 to measure 23, indicating a specific melodic or harmonic phrase. Below the staff, two brackets are used for annotation: one bracket covers measures 21 and 22, labeled 'Brazilian Northeastern Major Mode'; the other bracket covers measures 23 and 24, labeled 'Hexatonic Poles'. The notation includes various chords and melodic lines with stems and beams.

The piece is scored for Voice (no text), Recorders (tenor and bass), Bb Clarinet, 2 Flutes, Guitar, Bass Viola-da-Gamba, Psaltery, and Harpsichord. The second movement, titled *Desafio*, is scored for Recorders (soprano, alto, and tenor), 2 Flutes, Guitar, Bass Viola-da-Gamba, 2 Percussionists, and Harpsichord. The piece was composed in 2004 and integrates a cycle in progress⁵, written for several instrumental formations (including sometimes voice)⁶, that uses Brazilian dances, rhythms, sonorities and genres as compositional archetypes.

The essence of the folk ritual – and also of Pitombeira's piece – as we have described, consists of bringing into focus the human and divine natures, the paradoxical relationship between Heavens and Earth, within a religious context. It connects death and eternity, keeping these ideas with their original richness and evocative power, a cultural practice that is becoming gradually more distant from urban reality⁷. Thus, one perceives in the piece, some connections with postmodernism: juxtaposition of multiple musical elements, varied repertoire of influences, and preoccupation with aesthetics and with "symbolic game". However, such connections, instead of expressing a relativistic perspective of the meaning of death, or denying the ordinary ethical values, recuperates a more profound meaning of identity and of a significant ritual practice in northeastern Brazil. This brings the dense meaning of the tradition to another context, inviting us to look closely to it, opening the possibility of reflection.

⁵ Until March 2008, the cycle comprises sixteen pieces.

⁶ *Seresta No 11* is for voice, clarinet (or cello) and piano and *Seresta No 16* is for voice, flute and piano.

⁷ As noticed by Benjamin (1994, p. 207–208) in the 30s, in the text *The Storyteller, Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov*. He says: "Death used to be a public episode in an individual's life. <...> Today, death has been gradually expelled from the living universe. In the past, there was no house and almost no rooms in which somebody had not died. Nowadays, the bourgeoisie lives in spaces cleansed from all vestiges of death and, when their time to die comes, they will be sent by their heirs to sanatoriums and hospitals. However, it is in the moment of death, that the knowledge and wisdom of a man, especially his living existence <...> achieves for the first time a transmissible form. Thus, as in the conscience of the moribund several images are displayed – vision of himself, where he had been present without perceiving – thus, the unforgettable suddenly appears on its gestures and images, conferring to everything connected with him the authority that even a poor devil has while dying, to the living persons surrounding him."

Figure 8. Reductive diagram of the *Incelença*

The diagram illustrates the reductive structure of the *Incelença* piece, divided into two main sections, A and B.

Section A: This section is divided into two parts. The first part, labeled 'Chromatic ascending line (clarinet)', spans measures 1 through 14. The second part, labeled 'A'', spans measures 28 through 40. Both parts feature a series of chords and melodic lines, with specific measures highlighted by brackets and labeled with numbers like 037, 0258, 048, 0257, 01468, and 0157. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, key signatures, and various musical symbols such as accidentals and dynamics.

Section B: This section is divided into three parts. The first part, labeled 'B', spans measures 15 through 27. It includes a 'Brazilian Northeastern Major Mode' (measures 21-22) and an 'Aeolian Mode' (measures 25-27). The second part, labeled 'A'', spans measures 31 through 40. The third part, labeled 'Hexatonic Poles', spans measures 23 through 24. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, key signatures, and various musical symbols such as accidentals and dynamics.

Measure numbers are indicated at the top of each staff, and specific measures are highlighted with brackets and labeled with numbers like 037, 0258, 048, 0257, 01468, and 0157. The diagram also includes various musical symbols such as clefs, key signatures, accidentals, and dynamics.

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Santrauka

Kompoziciniai archetipai, nacionalinis identitetas ir geometrini simbolizmas

Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas etnomuzikinių ir geometrinių archetipų naudojimas šiuolaikinės komponavimo praktikos kontekste. Keturių archetipų, iš kurių trys yra susiję su geometriniu simbolizmu, o vienas – su Brazilijos etnomuzikos elementais, pagrindu formuojama L. Pitombeiros Serenados Nr. 9 pirmoji dalis („Incelença“). Šiame kūrinyje išryškėja atokiaose Brazilijos šiaurės rytų kaimiškose vietovėse (*sertão*) liaudies apeigų metu giedamos laidotuvių giesmės „Incelença“ sąsajos su kompoziciniais archetipais.