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### Five Pitches in Search of a Theme: Robert Ashley's "Van Cao's Meditation"

Since the 1960s, Robert Ashley has been one of America's leading avant-garde composers. Despite his influence on a number of younger artists—including filmmaker Peter Greenaway and performance artist Laurie Anderson—his work has not been widely studied, in part because his music resists easy categorization or even easy notation. Most of Ashley's works are multimedia performance pieces in which visual and musical elements are structurally inseparable. He is best known for his "opera for television" *Perfect Lives* (1980); subsequent works such as *Now Eleanor's Idea* (1989-1993) and *Dust* (1996) have developed similar themes—and used some of the same characters—as *Perfect Lives*. Since the early 1980s he has rarely composed for traditional instrumental forces; *Van Cao's Meditation*, a 38-minute solo piano work, is therefore notable among Ashley's output.

*Van Cao's Meditation* was inspired by a *National Geographic* photograph depicting Van Cao, composer of Vietnam's national anthem, seated at one of the country's two grand pianos. Ashley's piece rather fancifully depicts the sound of Van Cao at the piano in the act of musical creation. Composition is presented here not as a flash of inspiration but rather as an arduous process involving contemplation and refinement, gradually bringing a "theme" into focus. Ashley derived the compositional constraints for this piece (five pitch classes, one- to five-note groupings, and so on) from a 1962 composition entitled "Fives." Ashley describes that piece as an "archive" of materials, "from which later I could make any kind of piece by deciding how to 'interpret' the lists of quantities." The lists were used to create "discrete, 'contrapuntal' lines"; one result was that "sometimes one line or another would rest for a few measures." One manifestation of this compositional procedure in *Van Cao* involves Ashley's use of rehearsal letters—entire sections (for example, letters C through G) are represented by a rest.

*Van Cao's Meditation* was met with divided critical response. One reviewer praised its "elusive melodic line," noting that "I've heard it numerous times now but still can't quite recall (or predict) the intricacies of its undulating progression." Another reviewer apparently failed to notice the absence of literal repetition, instead remarking that "the piece lasts close to 38 minutes and uses just five pitches ... the overall result is that of unvarying boredom." How does such a work provoke rapt attention in one listener and irritated boredom in another?

One answer can be found in classic information theory. Conventional modernist musical aesthetic has prized complexity for its abundance of "information"; any repetition—whether of a tonal center, a periodic rhythm, or even a contour (as in a melodic sequence) is seen as an undesirable redundancy. As Harold Fiske notes, "a totally original tonal-rhythmic 'message' is a piece in which no tones are ever repeated; an example of a totally redundant musical 'message' is a piece consisting of the constant repetition of only two tones. The first is obviously a very complex pattern, while the second is a very simple pattern. So the extent of originality of a message is the extent of its unpredictability or improbability."

The dilemma posed by *Van Cao's Meditation* is defining "redundancy." The unchanging pitch collection is highly redundant. On the level of note-to-note progressions, however, the lack of direct repetition in a work of this length is remarkable. Therefore, to analyze pitch permutations in *Van Cao's Meditation* I shall use Eugene Narmour's "implication-realization model" of melodic structure analyzing the work at both surface and background levels and classifying phrases by degrees of contour similarity. I also propose a hypothetical "structural series" that is seldom heard but continually implied, functioning almost as a Platonic ideal throughout the composition. *Van Cao's Meditation* effectively depicts the compositional process through constant permutation of its materials.

Drawing upon the work of Leonard Meyer, Eugene Narmour uses Gestalt principles of "similarity, proximity, and common direction" to generate a model of melodic perception that is of "considerable simplicity yet sufficient generality." This model is distinguished from Meyer's by drawing from bottom-up and top-down schemata simultaneously, distinguishing parametric "style shapes" ("primitive, simplex elements processed as input from the bottom up") from "style structures" ("schematic complexes processed from the top down"). The two types of cognitive processing work together: "The bottom-up perceptual path tends to prevent and correct cognitive 'mistakes' generated from the top down, whereas the top-down path

allows for an economy of means in the recognition, apprehension, and understanding of previously learned, hierarchically structured syntactic events.”

For Narmour, attending to the “changing dialectic between top-down and bottom-up syntax” serves to explain the “aesthetic power of intra- and extraopus style” in music: “By insisting on the simultaneous operation of bottom-up and top-down processing systems, the implication-realization model thus suggests how to enrich the study of musical style.” However, extraopus style in Ashley’s music is an elusive parameter; his work is unusually diverse, although some of his pieces involve similar operations on limited pitch collections for limited periods of time. The wider domain of the American “experimental” avant-garde offers better parallels; *Van Cao’s Meditation* may be compared to Morton Feldman’s late works, as well as some of John Cage’s piano music of the 1940s.

Therefore we can turn to intraopus style in *Van Cao’s Meditation*—the consistent factors within the piece itself. The work is monophonic, although sparing use of the damper pedal and sympathetic string vibrations provide occasional harmonic “clouds” lingering at the threshold of audibility. Individual pitch classes always appear as groups of 1 to 5 notes in ascending octave patterns; the only true simultaneity is the appearance of a sixth pitch class—a pair of A-flat octaves—functioning as a cadential gesture. (Example 1 shows the beginning of the piece.) Because of these melodic, textural, and dynamic limitations, *Van Cao’s Meditation* proves to be a uniquely “sterile” piece for testing Narmour’s theory.

Example 1. Robert Ashley. *Van Cao’s meditation* (opening). Used by permission of the composer.

Narmour’s theory is built upon three “simple archetypal structures”: process [P], reversal [R], and duplication or repetition [D]. *Process*, or iteration, is described as the concatenation of two identical elements, such as A+A. It is thus non-closural; the implication of A+A+..., in the absence of further information, is that the next element will also be A.

*Reversal* is a melodic structure represented by the concatenation of two dissimilar elements, or A+B. In the absence of further information, it is a closural gesture. Melodic intervals equal to or larger than a minor sixth—except the octave—imply reversal; reversal often implies both a change of registral direction and a change of interval. For example, Wagner’s *Tristan* Prelude opens with an ascending minor sixth followed by a descending minor second. Narmour’s taxonomy also allows for a registral reversal in which there is no intervallic differentiation (*registral return*), as well as for the dyad and monad (which are implication-free).


Three different units of measurement are specified for melodic motion: Registral direction, intervallic motion, and pitch specificity. Pitch specificity is contextual, dependent on the prior stylistic perception of mode. For example, a performer is often required to determine a musical passage’s tonal context by inventorying the sharps or flats that may add to or take away from the given key signature.

Realization or denial of any single element or combination of these elements is possible. For example, “in the up/down pattern of C-D-C, the second C is a realization of intervallic motion (M2 plus M2), but not registral direction (up is followed by down) or pitch (C follows C-D instead of E).” Pitch specificity is also subject to reversal. In the context of the C major melodic fragment Narmour describes above, the use of, say, an E-flat would deny the previously established modal context. In *Van Cao’s Meditation*, the limited pitch grammar allows for no denial of pitch specificity—unless one counts the cadential A-flats that occasionally disconfirm the five-pitch-class system.

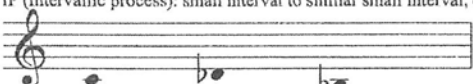
Figure 1 summarizes Narmour’s categories, using melodic formulae common to *Van Cao’s Meditation*.

**Figure 1.** Narmour’s taxonomy of the melodic structure, applied to trichords in *Van Cao’s Meditation*

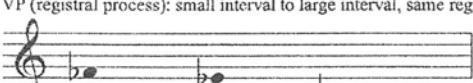
P (process): small interval to similar small interval, same registral direction



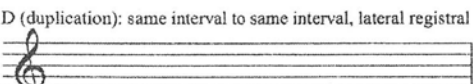
IP (intervallic process): small interval to similar small interval, different registral direction:



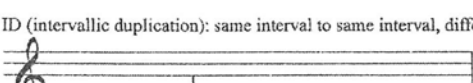
VP (registral process): small interval to large interval, same registral direction



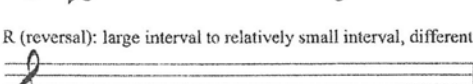
D (duplication): same interval to same interval, lateral registral direction



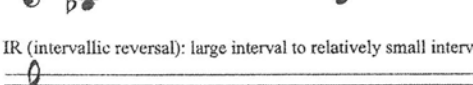
ID (intervallic duplication): same interval to same interval, different registral directions



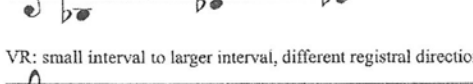
R (reversal): large interval to relatively small interval, different registral directions



IR (intervallic reversal): large interval to relatively small interval, same registral direction



VR: small interval to larger interval, different registral directions



In applying Narmour's taxonomy, one must establish criteria for distinguishing between "large" and "small" intervals (and for distinctions within those categories—i.e., what constitutes a "relatively small" interval). Narmour describes perfect fourths, tritones and perfect fifths as "threshold intervals," so named because they lie "between the clear continuational implication of small intervals (u, m2, M2, m3, M3) and the clear reversal implication of larger intervals (m6, M6, m7, M7, etc.)." Threshold intervals "have the potential to imply either continuation or reversal, though not in equal proportion. . . . these intervals are more sensitive to contextual interference." However, the widest intervallic leap in *Van Cao's Meditation*, disregarding approaches to the cadential A-flats and the omnipresent ascending octaves, is a tritone. Therefore, "large" intervals are here defined as anything wider than a minor third; since the minor third bisects the tritone, it has the same threshold context in this piece as the perfect fourth, tritone or perfect fifth would in conventional 12-tone equal temperament pitch class space.

Certain intraopus stylistic features also need to be set aside when considering the melodic structure of *Van Cao's Meditation*. There is no notated meter; Ashley's notes lack stems, and there is only an instruction that the music needs to be played "as fast as possible." While each pitch class occurs either as a monad or in ascending-octave patterns of two to five notes, there is no pattern to the sequence of durations; therefore meter cannot be used to determine larger pattern groupings. As meter is crucial for grouping larger levels of melodic structure in Narmour's theory, we must turn to Nicolas Ruwet's methodology of paradigmatic analysis for issues of segmentation and contour similarity.

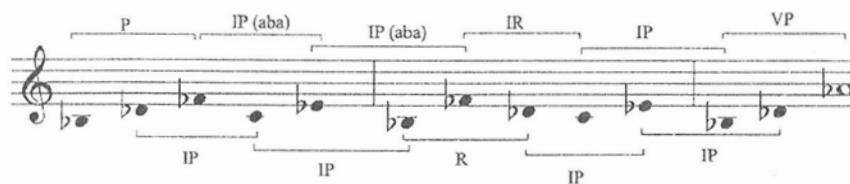
Ruwet asserts that musical syntax is most strikingly defined by repetition and by variations of repetition, or "transformation." His theory distinguishes between "parametric" and "non-parametric" musical elements. Parametric elements consist of two forms: first, features that are constant for the duration of the piece, such as meter or tempo (thus not contributing features for determining segmentation); and second, elements that offer simple binary oppositions as terms of contrast. Examples of the latter would include soloist/chorus, piano/forte, major/minor, high/low register. Ruwet's method focuses instead on non-parametric elements, using repetition and degree of similarity (transformation) as the primary criteria. Finally, it should be noted Ruwet applied his theory only to monodic repertoire, with pitch and duration his only elements for determining repetition. Nevertheless, he readily acknowledges that "segments, variable as to pitch and duration, can be considered as repetitions as long as they are identical in other respects." By focusing on elements that are not constants, nor can be separated into simple binary oppositions, and by limiting his analysis to the melodic domain, Ruwet's theory offers a complementary perspective to that of Narmour.

In *Van Cao's Meditation*, the relatively uniform dynamic level and unchanging texture are parametric elements; tempo, while subject to some rubato in Lois Svard's recording of the piece, is also a relatively static element. Pitch has both parametric and non-parametric functions. The limited gamut of tones and lack of chromatic inflection of any tone certainly contribute to the piece's "sameness," while the continually changing order of the five pitch classes in the melodic stream makes pitch non-parametric as well.

Segmentation of the musical stream is first achieved by ascribing a contour-accent function to the Bb1 that is the lowest pitch of the gamut; the segments consequently usually begin with Bb1. Sequences that do not begin on Bb1 occur immediately following a rest (the other criterion I have used to determine segmentation); the effect is that these segments are fragments of some larger pattern, joined in "mid-stream." Finally, larger sections of the piece are concluded with the double-octave A-flat simultaneity (Ab2-5); this higher-level segmentation is confirmed by Ashley's use of rehearsal letters at strategic points in the score, always following the A-flat element or following a rest that is given its own rehearsal letter.

Based on the criteria just discussed, Example 2 is a melodic reduction of Example 1. Note-to-note movements are labeled using Narmour's taxonomy of intervallic and registral derivatives; any three-tone sequence may be regarded as a derivative (unqualified by metric considerations or by the presence of rests). For example, given the ordered set of pitch classes  $\langle p, r, s, t, u, v \rangle$ , the ordered subsets  $\langle prs \rangle$ ,  $\langle rst \rangle$ ,  $\langle stu \rangle$ , and  $\langle tuv \rangle$  are each classified according to one of Narmour's derivative categories, in the absence of metric or other information that would contribute to their segmentation from one another. The derivatives consequently overlap, allowing us to categorize movement from one derivative to the next. In the ordered set of pitch classes  $\langle p, r, s, t, u, v \rangle$ , subsets  $\langle prst \rangle$ ,  $\langle rstu \rangle$ , and  $\langle stuv \rangle$  could each be classified as movement of one derivative to another; I refer to these combinations as melodic concatenations (MCs).

Example 2. Opening of *Van Cao's Meditation*, textural reduction.



As it has been shown above that derivatives overlap, there are eleven MCs in Example 2; these may be read left to right as PàIP, IPàIP(aba), IP(aba)àIP, and so on. Table 1 itemizes the probabilities of MCs shown in Example 2, using one of Narmour's seven non-duplicative melodic structures as a point of departure. Reading the first row, for example, there is only one MC in the category Pàn, which moves PàIP (the first four pitch classes in the melodic stream); probability is thus 1.00. The second row itemizes seven MCs in the category IPàn; five of these are of the variety IPàIP, which has a probability of 5/7, or approximately 0.71. Because each section of the piece is of a different length, probabilities are not determined in relation to the overall number of notes; instead each movement is calculated "from the bottom up," as it were.

Table 1. Outcome probabilities for melodic concatenations within section A of *Van Cao's Meditation* (music shown in example 1)

	P	IP	VP	ID	R	VR	IR
P		1 (1.00)					
IP		5 (.71)	1 (.145)		1 (.145)		
VP							
ID							
R							1 (1.00)
VR							
IR		1 (1.00)					

Table 2 is a two-page chart that itemizes all of the MCs for *Van Cao's Meditation*. The letters at the top of each column refer to rehearsal letters in the piece; possible MCs are listed at the beginning of each row. Thus, the calculations shown in Table 1, for section A, constitute the first column of Table 2.

Table 2. Total outcome probabilities for each melodic concatenation in *Van Cao's Meditation*, by reheasal letter

	A	B	H	J	K	M	N	O	Q	R	T	U	W	X	Y	% a†
R→P	0	0.6	0.25	0.18	0	0.165	0.571	0.467	0.454	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.143	0	0.167	23.3
R→IP	0	0.2	0.375	0.37	0.33	0.33	0.143	0.267	0.273	0.33	0.417	0.2	0	0.66	0.417	<b>28.7</b>
R→VP	0	0	0.25	0.45	0.66	0	0.143	0.2	0.273	0.33	0.167	0.5	0.43	0	0.167	23.8
R→ID	0	0	0.125	0	0	0.33	0	0.067	0	0.083	0.167	0	0.286	0.22	0.25	10.2
R→R	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
R→VR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.143	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	01.0
R→IR	1.00	0.2	0	0	0	0.165	0	0	0	0	0	0.05	0.143	0.11	0	11.1
VR→P	0	0	0	0.11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.06	0	0	0	0	01.1
VR→IP	0	0	0.21	0	0	0.063	0	0.286	0.385	0.45	0.188	0.22	0.33	0.182	0.533	19.0
VR→VP	0	0	0	0	0	0.125	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	00.8
VR→ID	0	0.5	0.07	0	0	0	0.167	0	0.076	0.09	0.125	0.22	0	0.273	0.2	11.5
VR→R	0	0.25	0.43	0.78	0.5	0.188	0.5	0.5	0.462	0.182	0.5	0.44	0.5	0.454	0.133	<b>38.8</b>
VR→VR	0	0	0	0	0	0.375	0.167	0	0	0.09	0	0	0	0	0.066	04.7
VR→IR	0	0.25	0.29	0.11	0.5	0.25	0.167	0.214	0.076	0.182	0.125	0.11	0.17	0.09	0.066	17.3
IR→P	0	0	0	0.17	0.165	0.1	0	0.125	0	0	0.125	0.067	0.25	0.09	0	07.3
IR→IP	1.00	1.00	0	0.33	0.165	0.3	0.33	0.375	0	0.4	0	0.13	0.25	0.273	0.33	32.6
IR→VP	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.09	0	00.6
IR→ID	0	0	0.22	0	0	0.2	0	0	0.143	0.2	0	0.067	0.25	0.182	0.33	10.6
IR→R	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
IR→VR	0	0	0.78	0.5	0.66	0.4	0.67	0.5	0.857	0.4	0.875	0.73	0.25	0.364	0.33	<b>48.8</b>
IR→IR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

	A	B	H	J	K	M	N	O	Q	R	T	U	W	X	Y	% avg
P→P	0	0	0.33	0.375	0	0	0.33	0.211	0	0.2	0	0	0.143	0	0.23	12.1
P→IP	1.00	0.33	0.17	0	0	0.30	0.33	0.368	0.167	0.1	0.6	0.22	0.143	0.25	0.23	28.1
P→VP	0	0	0.17	0	0	0.1	0	0	0	0.1	0.2	0.22	0	0	0	05.3
P→ID	0	0	0	0	0	0.20	0.11	0.105	0.167	0.1	0	0.11	0.143	0.5	0.077	10.1
P→R	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
P→VR	0	0.67	0.33	0.625	1.00	0.40	0.22	0.316	0.66	0.5	0.2	0.44	0.57	0.25	0.46	44.3
P→IR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
IP→P	0	0.25	0	0.059	0	0.138	0.105	0.139	0.053	0.12	0.048	0.27	0	0.138	0.136	09.7
IP→IP	0.71	0.375	0.35	0.41	0	0.48	0.579	0.25	0.158	0.24	0.143	0.351	0.22	0.38	0.432	33.9
IP→VP	0.145	0	0	0.059	0	0	0.053	0.139	0	0.04	0.095	0.27	0.11	0.03	0.045	06.6
IP→ID	0	0	0.18	0.118	0	0.172	0.053	0.139	0.263	0.2	0.095	0.189	0	0.03	0.045	09.9
IP→R	0.145	0.25	0.06	0.176	0	0.034	0.105	0.167	0.158	0.2	0.143	0.243	0.44	0.103	0.136	15.7
IP→VR	0	0	0.18	0	0	0.034	0	0.056	0.105	0.08	0.19	0	0.11	0.138	0.045	06.3
IP→IR	0	0.125	0.24	0.176	1.00	0.138	0.105	0.11	0.263	0.12	0.286	0.162	0.11	0.172	0.159	21.1
VP→P	0	0	0	0	0.33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	02.2
VP→IP	0	0	0.6	0.57	0	0.5	0.5	0.67	0.8	0.75	0.5	0.462	0.75	0.66	0.4	47.7
VP→VP	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.077	0	0	0	00.5
VP→ID	0	0	0.2	0.143	0	0.5	0	0	0	0.125	0	0.23	0	0	0.2	09.3
VP→R	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.5	0	0.2	0.125	0	0	0	0	0	05.5
VP→VR	0	0	0.2	0.143	0.33	0	0	0.165	0	0	0.5	0.23	0.25	0	0.2	13.4
VP→IR	0	0	0	0.143	0.33	0	0	0.165	0	0	0	0	0	0.33	0.2	07.8
ID→P	0	0	0.18	0.25	0	0.33	0	0.182	0	0.2	0	0.09	0.57	0.23	0.143	14.5
ID→IP	0	0.33	0.09	0	0	0.4	0.67	0.364	0.214	0.067	0.428	0.23	0	0.23	-0.214	21.6
ID→VP	0	0	0.18	0.25	0	0	0	0	0.071	0.133	0.143	0	0	0.154	0.071	10.8
ID→ID	0	0.33	0.18	0	0	0.066	0	0.273	0.429	0.33	0.143	0.27	0.43	0.077	0.071	17.3
ID→R	0	0.33	0.09	0.25	0	0.066	0	0.09	0.071	0.2	0.143	0.136	0	0.077	0.286	10.1
ID→VR	0	0	0.18	0	0	0.066	0.33	0.09	0.143	0.067	0.143	0	0	0.077	0.214	08.7
ID→IR	0	0	0.09	0.25	0	0.066	0	0	0.071	0	0	0.273	0	0.154	0	06.0

The final column of Table 2 provides a mean average (expressed as a percentage) for each MC over the course of the entire composition. The outcome for each MC with the greatest probability is shown in boldface. In nearly every scenario, one concatenation emerges with a significantly higher percentage than the other options. Thus, by concatenating the MCs of greatest probability, we might create a hypothetical melodic pattern to which existing patterns in the melodic stream may be compared. A flow chart of sorts may be diagrammed: IR and P are each most likely to be concatenated with VR ( $IR\hat{a}VR = 48.8\%$ ,  $P\hat{a}VR = 44.3\%$ ); VR is in turn most likely to be concatenated with R ( $VR\hat{a}R = 38.8\%$ ). R, ID, and VP are all most likely to be concatenated with IP ( $R\hat{a}IP = 28.7\%$ ,  $ID\hat{a}IP = 21.6\%$ ,  $VP\hat{a}IP = 47.7\%$ ), and IP is most likely to loop back onto itself, creating a steady state ( $IP\hat{a}IP = 33.9\%$ ).

It is also instructive to look at the second-highest-ranking probabilities, those most likely to function as an alternate path. IR and P are also likely to concatenate with IP ( $IR\hat{a}IP = 32.6\%$ ,  $P\hat{a}IP = 28.1\%$ ); VR's alternative concatenation is also most likely to be IP ( $VR\hat{a}IP = 19\%$ ); R is about equally likely to concatenate with VP (23.8%) or P (23.3%). ID may loop back upon itself ( $ID\hat{a}ID = 17.3\%$ ) or concatenate with P ( $ID\hat{a}P = 14.5\%$ ). VP may alternatively concatenate with VR ( $VP\hat{a}VR = 13.4\%$ ), while IP may concatenate with IR ( $IP\hat{a}IR = 21.1\%$ ).

Tables 1 and 2 are similar to Xenakis's "Matrices of Transitional Probabilities" which he uses to organize Markov chains of probability data. In this regard it is perhaps not surprising that the statistically abstract "idealized path" of MCs should lead toward a steady-state loop; such a decrease of entropy over time has also noted by Xenakis to be the eventual result of successive Markov applications.

Of course, such an unmediated result would not be musically desirable. Therefore, the top line of Example 3 presents a hypothetical "structural series" ( $\langle Bb, Eb, Fb, C, Db \rangle$ ) for the piece, which does not exactly correspond to the raw probability data of Table 2; the bottom line shows one transformation of this series, as it appears on page 9 on Ashley's score. The pitch series begins quite strongly, with  $IR\hat{a}VR$  and  $VR\hat{a}R$  the most likely MCs for their categories  $IR\hat{a}n$  and  $VR\hat{a}n$  respectively.  $R\hat{a}P$  is similarly strong as the second most likely MC for its category  $R\hat{a}n$ .  $P\hat{a}P$  is somewhat weaker, as the third most likely in its category  $P\hat{a}n$ . A loop follows, as the pitch class series  $\langle Fb, C, Db, Eb \rangle$  is repeated. Following the loop, the series takes on a hesitant quality, as the Fb is seemingly embellished by Db and Eb. Indeed, the last three MCs of the structural melody ( $IP\hat{a}ID$ ,  $ID\hat{a}R$ , and  $R\hat{a}ID$ ) are respectively fourth, fifth, and fourth strongest in probability, with percentages far lower than the MCs that began the passage.

The fact that the structural series does not exactly match Table 2's probability outcomes offers another compositional allegory. As James Pritchett points out, even that avatar of aleatory, John Cage, was known to alter his raw data in order to allow his chance procedures to produce musically interesting results. Thus one may interpret the continual hidden presence of this structural melody, and its diminishing MC probabilities as the sequence is completed, as evidence of an act of increasing compositional will working against the raw data.

**Example 3.** "Background" melodic line for *Van Cao's Meditation*

The image displays two staves of musical notation. The top staff shows a sequence of notes: Bb, Eb, Fb, C, Db, Eb, Fb, C, Db, Eb. Brackets above the staff indicate transitions: IR (Bb to Eb), R (Eb to Fb), P (Fb to C), R (C to Db), P (Db to Eb), ID (Eb to Fb), and ID (Fb to C). The bottom staff shows a similar sequence of notes: Bb, Eb, Fb, C, Db, Eb, Fb, C, Db, Eb. Brackets below the staff indicate transitions: VR (Bb to Eb), P (Eb to Fb), VR (Fb to C), P (C to Db), IP (Db to Eb), and R (Eb to Fb).



In determining the relationship of the bottom line of Example 3 with the structural series of the top line, we may here return to Ruwet. Because note-to-note movement is foregrounded even as meter is de-emphasized, I focus on Ruwet's second type of transformational process, involving "more complicated operations or permutations, additions or subtractions of certain elements." Figure 2 shows examples of these operations from *Van Cao's Meditation*:

- fragmentation (partial statement of the series),
- permutations (by moving one or more notes out of order or by more complicated nesting arrangements),
- looping (immediate repetition of part of the series),
- incursion (addition of another note from the pitch collection),
- omission (omitting certain notes but without retaining identifiable contours, as is the case in fragmentation),
- retrograde (of two or more notes in the series), and
- transposition (shifting two or more notes up or down in pitch to the next pitch in the collection).

**Figure 2.** Transformations of "Background" melodic line in *Van Cao's Meditation*, labeled by type and including section and cell number (location in score)

Background melodic line from Example 3 (O2), demonstrating looping and omission

Fragmentation (H10, H15, K2)--Db missing

Permutation--single note (H21)--Db moved from last note to third in sequence

Permutation--multiple notes (O7)--Eb and Db switch places

Nesting Permutations--several examples: 1,4,2,5,3 (R5)      1,3,4,2,5 (R8)      1,2,5,3,4 (R13)

Looping (Eb - C repeated) (R12)

Incursion (Db added as extra note between Eb and Fb) (O6)      Omission (Eb and C omitted) (Q2)

Retrograde of Fb - C - Db; looping of retrograded subset (Q7)

Transposition: C - Db transposed to Db - Eb (X2)

### Conclusion

It is perhaps an indictment of the way that Western music has historically privileged issues of pitch and form, at the expense of subtleties in timbre or melodic structure, that Ashley's piece has been classified as "minimalist" even by its admirers. Chris Blackford's review, for example, compares it to Erik Satie's *Vexations* (circa 1893) and Brian Eno's ambient work "1/1" (from the album *Ambient 1: Music for Airports*, 1978). However, Satie's work consists of musical material that is literally repeated 840 times; Eno's piece—while not as literally repetitive—is still based on repetitions of loops of various lengths. Moreover, in both of these works, pitch is arguably subservient to ambience. The compositional procedures underlying Ashley's piece are at once more layered and more inscrutable. What is striking to the attentive listener is the continual change—not only of pitch order, but of harmonic "color" provided by the damper pedal and Lois Svard's occasional humming on the recording. The listener who focuses more on the duration of each pitch class, as expressed in the number of ascending octaves, will notice an endless play of variation in that parameter. To focus exclusively on the absence of "development"—as manifested by changes of dynamic, texture, key, or pitch collection—in *Van Cao's Meditation* is to miss the point of the piece.

In this analysis of *Van Cao's Meditation*, I have sought to explore the ways in which this piece is a sonic representation of the compositional process. In searching for a "structural series" I do not mean to reify the work's "unity," as one might do by extracting a Schenkerian *Ursatz* from the surface texture. Instead, I have aimed to examine how the surface repeatedly *hints* at a melody by providing numerous partial and elliptical statements of related material. Although the underlying principles governing these utterances have enabled me to create a structural melody that may not have been what Ashley intended, I have sought not to recreate Ashley's process of composition, but to recreate Ashley's imagined conception of *Van Cao's* process of composition.

The question of how we imagine that composition occurs is one for which Western classical music offers two paradigms—Mozart and Beethoven. Ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl asserts that Beethoven and Mozart are symbols for the "conflict between inspiration and labor, and between consistency and innovation." Nettl uses the cultural symbols of Mozart and Beethoven as types for other dualities that permeate Western musical thought. With that idea in mind, Ashley's piece becomes a meditation on the compositional process, one in which the Beethoven paradigm is emphasized.

Listening to *Van Cao's Meditation* is like eavesdropping upon a private improvisation. Improvisations, however, tend to meander if they are not rooted in some sort of structure; John Coltrane's improvisations, for example, are held in high regard because of their strict motivic structure. A thirty-eight minute improvisation on five pitches, without the elaborate structure that underlies the melodic movement in *Van Cao's Meditation*, may turn out to have a structure all its own, but it is doubtful that such structure will be of the same consistency or complexity. It may be fruitful to apply Narmour's and Ruwet's analytical approaches to more obviously "improvisational" repertoire. As theorists and psychologists continue to examine the cognitive processes involved in musical composition, these methodologies—as yet not mainstays of the muso-theoretical analytical arsenal—may prove effective for testing their hypotheses and verifying their findings.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I have elsewhere offered an extensive analysis of *Perfect Lives* in my D.M.A thesis, "Music, Text and Image in Robert Ashley's Video Opera *Perfect Lives*" (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Ashley, personal e-mail communication, February 15, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The piece can be found on Lois Svard's CD *With and Without Memory* (Lovely Music LCD 3051, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Chris Blackford, "Recent and Reissued Works by Robert Ashley." Downloaded January 5, 2001 from the World Wide Web at <<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~rneckmag/ashley.html>>.

<sup>6</sup> No author given, "Edmonton Concert Composers Society: The Albertan Composer" Downloaded January 5, 2001 from the World Wide Web at <<http://www.connect.ab.ca/~piotr/eccs/Pages/nf-albertan.htm#CD>>.

<sup>7</sup> Harold E. Fiske, *Selected Theories of Music Perception* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 21.

<sup>8</sup> Eugene Narmour, *The Analysis and Cognition of Melodic Structures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 63.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>10</sup> Eugene Narmour, *The Analysis and Cognition of Melodic Complexity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 11.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

<sup>12</sup> An example is his 1988 composition *Superior Seven* for flute and orchestra (New World Records 80460, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> In its length, generally quiet dynamic, and limited pitch grammar, *Van Cao's Meditation* is especially reminiscent of Feldman's "Triadic Memories" (1981) and "Crippled Symmetry" (1983). Cage's pieces with which *Van Cao* shares stylistic affinities include "Dream" and especially "In a Landscape," both composed in 1948.

<sup>14</sup> Narmour, *Melodic Complexity*, ix. Here I use square brackets to prevent confusion with Narmour's use of parentheses to describe "retrospective" intervallic/registral derivatives; see note 21.

<sup>15</sup> The elements represented by these variables may be best thought of as intervals, or distances between pitches, rather than as individual tones. A melodic structure, then, must consist of at least three tones.

<sup>16</sup> Narmour distinguishes his use of the term "process" from the usage of Leonard Meyer—instead of Meyer's "large-scale...interaction of numerous parameters," Narmour describes process in melody as "a very narrowly defined term, referring to registral (V) and intervallic (I) aspects" (*Melodic Structures*, 89n).

<sup>17</sup> Narmour, *Melodic Structures*, 77-78.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-76.

<sup>21</sup> Narmour's definitions of the melodic derivatives is found in *Melodic Complexity*, 31. Narmour also allows for so-called "retrospective" intervallic or registral derivatives, where reversal is not anticipated. These are distinguished by the use of parentheses, i.e., (P) denotes a retrospective process. See Narmour, *Melodic Complexity*, 370-371.

<sup>22</sup> Narmour, *Melodic Structures*, 78.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> For a thorough survey of the role that musical parameters play in segmentation of musical content, see Christopher Hasty, "Segmentation and Process in Post-Tonal Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 3 (1981): 54-73. For a similar survey of musical elements in Ruwet's methodology—posed as a series of rhetorical questions—see Nicolas Ruwet, "Methods of Analysis in Musicology," *Music Analysis* 6:1/2 (March/July 1987), 14.

<sup>25</sup> Ruwet's reference to "transformation" in a melodic context is different from David Lewin's use of the term (which more accurately refers to voice leading); see Lewin 1987. For a discussion of Ruwet's concept of transformation in melody, and an application of paradigmatic analysis to a repertory not considered by Ruwet, see Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Birmingham: Open University Press, 1990), 183.

<sup>26</sup> Ruwet, "Methods of Analysis in Musicology," 16.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Pitch notation in this article follows notational conventions of the Acoustical Society of America, in which middle C = C4 and all numbered octave registers begin on C (the B below middle C, for example, is B3). Bb1 is thus the second lowest Bb on the keyboard.

<sup>31</sup> Certain rehearsal letters—C-G, I, L, P, S, and V—are represented only by rests. According to Ashley, these silences were “rests (of some number of measures)” that resulted from the application of his “Fives” compositional procedures. (Personal e-mail communication, February 15, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> For example, a rest between <prs> and <tuv>, or an ordered set of durations corresponding to <prs> repeated for <tuv>.

<sup>33</sup> It is of course possible to group the transformations that result into successively higher hierarchic structures; this idea is pursued in the second book of Narmour’s series, *The Analysis and Cognition of Melodic Complexity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). The term “melodic concatenation,” however, is my own.

<sup>34</sup> “(aba)” is Narmour’s symbol for a “near registral return,” in which the intervallic differentiation is by no more than a half step.

<sup>35</sup> D (duplication or reiteration) is omitted because, in the melodic reduction shown in Example 2, such a reiteration would be reduced to a single note.

<sup>36</sup> Iannis Xenakis, *Formalized Music* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1971), 69-78.

<sup>37</sup> My reference to a five-note series (as opposed to one shorter or longer) is in deference to Ashley’s compositional procedures for this piece, which invoked a fivefold division of parameters. It therefore would not be illogical to assume a “motive” consisting of the ordering of five pitches.

The fact that for each type of melodic structure one MC emerges as the most probable raises an interesting speculative issue. Does this set of probabilities result from compositional choices made by Ashley, or is it inherent in the “raw materials”—the 5 pcs—of the composition? Ashley’s remark that the source materials of Van Cao was “a kind of catalog from which later I could make any kind of piece by deciding how to ‘interpret’ the lists of quantities” (Ashley 2002, emphasis added) suggests that interpretation can be used “after the fact” to shape the raw data.

<sup>38</sup> James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), v-viii.

<sup>39</sup> Ruwet, “Methods of Analysis in Musicology,” 18.

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of Eno’s “generative music” and his work with tape loops, see Eric Tamm’s *Brian Eno: His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 133-141. An account from Eno himself regarding the making of “1/1” can be found in Brian Eno, “Pro Session: The Studio as Compositional Tool—Part II,” *Down Beat* 50 (August 1983), 52.

<sup>41</sup> I assert that Satie’s piece is more concerned with the perception of time and one’s environment than with the pitches themselves—these are certainly the aspects of the piece that John Cage found attractive when he arranged for the work’s premiere in 1963. Similarly, Eno’s stated intent for ambient music is as a sonic environment that should be “as ignorable as it is interesting.” See Brian Eno, *A Year with Swollen Appendages* (London: Faber and Faber 1996), 296.

<sup>42</sup> The humming is not notated in the score. This was the result of verbal instructions Ashley had conveyed to Svard: “What I wanted was that kind of involuntary vocal sound that pianists (and other activists) make when the activity is very physical, and I wanted the playing to be very physical. Bud Powell, Glenn Gould, Arthur Schnabel and many other pianists, classical and popular, make that sound. I think it must help “release” some of the inhibitions and allow the playing to be more physical. So, it doesn’t matter what pitch she sings. There is no pitch intended. It is a matter of ‘reinforcing’ or ‘urging on’ vocally what you are trying to do at the keyboard.” (personal e-mail communication, February 15, 2002)

<sup>43</sup> Bruno Nettl, “Mozart and the Ethnomusicological Study of Western Culture (an essay in four movements),” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 21 (1989), 8.

<sup>44</sup> “The major-minor diad [sic] and the division of vocal and instrumental, sacred and secular, traditional and new, art music and everything else are major taxonomic modes. The sonata form, most central to the art music tradition, is an exercise in dualism. Mozart and Beethoven as opposites have a strong hold, and the thought of musicians and even of scholars seems to be oriented towards pairing: Leonin-Perotin, Ockeghem-Obrecht, Peri-Caccini, Cesti-Cavalli, Handel-Bach, Schubert-Schumann (but also Schumann-Mendelsohn), Liszt-Chopin, Verdi-Wagner (but also Wagner-Brahms), Smetana-Dvorak, Bartók-Kodály, Schoenberg-Stravinsky, all of them partaking of some of the kinds of contrasts that the Mozart-Beethoven paradigm presents.” (Ibid., 9.)

For a look at how these dichotomies of Western thought are approached in some of Robert Ashley’s previous work, see Kevin Holm-Hudson, “Music, Text and Image in Robert Ashley’s Video Opera *Perfect Lives*” (D.M.A. thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1992), especially pp. 145-150. Conceptual dichotomies underlie much of the opera, especially Episode Four, “The Bar,” and Episode Five, “The Living Room.”

<sup>45</sup> The union of these complementary cultural paradigms—in which a rigidly deterministic structuralism is fused with the heedlessness of inspiration or improvisation—has long been a recurring theme in Ashley’s work, both before and after *Van Cao’s Meditation*. Examples include the role of Buddy (The World’s Greatest Piano Player) in *Perfect Lives* (1983), the “procedures

that invoke spontaneity” in *Atalanta (Acts of God)* (1985), and the elaborate stretto of textual layers within the morphine-induced dream scenario of “No Legs” in *Dust* (1998).

<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, a structure with more contingencies offers richer options for interpretation; the structures of Coltrane’s later solos (such as on *Interstellar Space*) are much more complex, and therefore harder to defend from judgments that the pieces are “random noise.”

<sup>47</sup> Elsewhere I have applied Ruwet’s methodology of melodic analysis to the ensemble improvisation in the middle of jazz pianist Patricia Barber’s “Postmodern Blues.” (“Patricia Barber’s Postmodern Blues.” Unpublished paper, presented at the annual conference of Music Theory Midwest, Minneapolis, MN, May 17, 2002.)

Kevinas J. Holmas-Hudsonas

Penki tonai beieškant temos:  
Roberto Ashley'io „Van Cao's Meditation“

Robertas Ashley's yra vienas žymiausių Amerikos kompozitorių eksperimentatorių nuo XX a. septintojo dešimtmečio, kai drauge su Gordonu Mumma, Rogeriu Reynoldsu ir kitais pradėjo organizuoti festivalį ONCE An Arbore, Mičigano valstijoje. Nepaisant jo įtakos daugeliui jaunų kompozitorių ir popmuzikos atlikėjų (pavyzdžiui, Laurie Anderson), jo kūrybai nebuvo skirta tiek dėmesio, kiek teko kitiems garsiems avangardo veikėjams, pavyzdžiui, Johnui Cage'ui ar Pauline'ai Oliveros. Iš dalies taip atsitiko ir dėl to, kad Ashley'io muzika, sutelkta į konceptualizmą, sunkiai kategorizuojama ar net paprastai užrašoma – dauguma kūrinių sukurti daugialypėi terpei atlikti, kur vaizdiniai elementai yra lygiai taip pat svarbūs kaip ir muzikiniai. Tačiau net ir šie kūriniai yra labai nutolę nuo kartais anarchistiškų septintojo dešimtmečio hepeningų, kuriuos imta sieti su performanso menu; Ashley'io muzikos esmė – griežta struktūrinė logika.

Ashley'is geriausiai šiuolaikinės muzikos sluoksniuose žinomas kaip epinių daugialypės terpės „operų televizijai“, pavyzdžiui, *Perfect Lives* („Tobuli gyvenimai“, 1980) kūrėjas. Tolimesni kūriniai, pavyzdžiui, tetralogija *Now Eleanor's Idea* („Dabartinė Eleanoros idėja“, 1989–1993) ir *Dust* („Dulkės“, 1996) plėtojo panašią tematiką – netgi naudojo kai kuriuos tuos pačius veikėjus kaip ir *Perfect Lives* – visa tai tik sustiprino nuostatą, kad Ashley'is pirmiausia yra daugialypės terpės kūrinių kompozitorius, mažai dėmesio skiriant koncertinei muzikai. Iš tikrųjų, nuo devintojo dešimtmečio pradžios jis tik kartkartėmis ką nors sukurdavo tradicinėms „instrumentinėms pajėgoms“. Todėl *Van Cao's Meditation* yra ne tik retas Ashley'io kūrinyse fortepijonui solo, bet, kaip pjesė, lygiai taip pat konceptualiai tikslus, kaip ir jo operos veikalai.

Pjesė *Van Cao's Meditation* Ashley'į įkvėpė sukurti viena jo dėmesį patraukusi nuotrauka, išspausdinta *National Geographic* žurnale. Nuotraukoje buvo pavaizduotas Vietnamo nacionalinio himno autorius Van Cao, sėdintis prie vieno iš dviejų Vietname esančių koncertinių fortepijonų. Ashley'is pjesėje gana vaizdingai „atkuria“ Van Cao arba bet kurio kito prie fortepijono sėdinčio ir kuriančio kompozitoriaus išgaunamą garsą. Kūrinyje yra vienbalsis, nors ribotai naudojant dešinią pedalaž bei malonius stygų rezonansus kartkartėmis sukuria harmoninius „debesis“, balansuojančius ties girdimumo riba. Individualios tonų rūšys visada išnyra kaip nuo 1 iki 5 natų grupės aukštyje kylančiomis oktavomis; vienintelis tikras vienlaikiškumas yra la-bemolinių oktavų pora, atliekanti kadencinę funkciją. Asketiška muzikinė medžiaga suponuoja įvaizdį kompozicijos – ne kaip įkvėpimo pliūpsnio (koks dažniausiai būna Mozarto stereotipas), bet veikiau kaip įtempto kontempliacijos, atradimo ir tobulinimo proceso.

Kaip ir dauguma Ashley'io kūrinių, ši pjesė sulaukė labai prieštaringų kritikų įvertinimų. Pavyzdžiui, vienas iš Loiso Svardo kompaktinės plokštelės *With and Without Memory* (Lovely Music LCD 3051), kurioje įrašytas ir Ashley'io kūrinyje, recenzentų rašė: „Sunkiai užčiuopiama melodinė linija pasipuošusi introspekcinės paslapties, netgi nesuprantamumo aura. Aš ją jau girdėjau daugybę kartų, tačiau vis dar negaliu atgaminti (ar numatyti) jos vilnijančios sekos pynių“.

Pasak kito recenzento, „pjesė tęsiasi 38 minutes ir naudoja tik 5 garsus... Bendras rezultatas – nesikeičianti nuobodybė“. Abiejų vertinimų priešingumas yra tiesiog nuostabus, nes abu recenzentai skirtingais būdais reaguoja į nepaprastai siaurą kūrinių tonų gramatiką. Kaip gali 38 minučių trukmės kūrinyje, sudarytas daugiausia iš penkių tonų, išdėliotų kylančiomis oktavomis, su šeštuosiu tonu, skirtu kadencijoms, sukelti susižavėjimo kupiną dėmesį vienam klausytojui ir erzinantį nuobodulį kitam?

Konvencinė modernistinė šiuolaikinės muzikos estetika laikosi tos nuomonės, kad bet koks kartojimas – ar tonacinio centro, periodinio ritmo ar net melodinio kontūro (kaip kad atsitinka melodinėje sekvencijoje) – yra nepageidautinas kartojimasis/dubliavimasis. Kita vertus, vertinamas sudėtingumas dėl klausytojui perteikiamos „informacijos“ gausos. Toks požiūris visiškai atitinka klasikinę informacijos teoriją. Visas keblumas, bent jau *Van Cao's Meditation* atveju, yra apibrėžti, kas yra tas „dubliavimasis“. Galų gale tonų gramatika visame kūrinyje lieka tokia pati, tai kompozicijos lygmeniu rodytų esant aukštą bendro dubliavimosi laipsnį. Tačiau paviršiniame natų sekų lygmenyje iškyla visiškai kitoks vaizdas – čia įvairių dvinarių kombinacijų ir atomazgų galimybės be paliovos kaitaliojasi. Nepaisant didžiulės trukmės ir išraiškos priemonių skurdumo *Van Cao's Meditation* nėra „minimalistinis“ įprastine šio žodžio prasme. Veikiau pjesė pasirodo esanti kaip ištisinė variacija ir išties nuostabu tai, kad tiesioginio kartojimo visame kūrinyje kaip tik ir nėra.

Todėl analizuodamas šią fortepijoninę pjesę – neiįprastą net ir Ashley'io kūrybai – aš remsiuosi Eugene'o Narmouro (1990, 1992) melodinės struktūros teorija, siekdamas sutelkti dėmesį į *Van Cao's Meditation* tonų permutacijas. Narmouro teorijos tikslas yra pasitelkti „atvirkščius“ (nuo smulkmenų prie bendrųjų principų einančius) panašumo, artimumo ir bendros krypties dėsnius [pasiskolintus iš *Gestalt* psichologijos] ir panaudoti juos kuriant gana paprastą ir drauge pakankamai visuotiną melodinio suvokimo teoriją. Iš dalies tai padaroma atskiriant parametrinius „stiliaus pavidalus“ (primityvūs, paprasti elementai, plėtojami kaip duomenys [stambinant] iš apačios aukštyje) nuo „stiliaus struktūrų“ (schematiniai kompleksai plėtojami [smulkinant] iš viršaus žemyn). Tuo pačiu metu Narmouras naudoja *Gestalt* psichologijos principus, nepaisydamas jokios „pirmesnės, apribojančios, uždaros visumos“, kylančios vien tik iš viršūnės-apačios plėtotės. Narmouro teorijos grožis, pasak Naomi Cumming, yra tas, kad ji siūlo „priemonės tyrinėti įvairovę faktorių, kurie prisideda prie melodinės struktūros

formavimosi, be privalomų nuorodų į lemiančiuosius tonalumo ar stiliaus veiksnius“.

*Van Cao's Meditation* atveju užopusinis stilius pasirodo besas nesusekamai permainingas. Ashley'io kūryba yra neįprastai įvairialypė, nors kai kuriuose kūriniuose, pavyzdžiui, *Superio Seven* fleitai ir orkestrui (1988), linkstama įtraukti tik ribotus tonų rinkinius ribotoms laiko atkarpoms. Vaisingesnis kontekstualizavimas įmanomas žvelgiant į bendresnę dvidešimtojo amžiaus amerikiečių muzikos „eksperimentinio“ sferą. Ši pjesė primena kai kuriuos vėlyvuosius Feldmano kūrinius, pavyzdžiui, *Triadic Memories* (1981) ar *Crippled Symmetry* (1983), nors Ashley's ir vengia tiesioginių pakartojimų, esančių šiuose kūriniuose. Lygiai kaip ir bendras dramatinės kreivės nebuvimas bei griežtai ribota tonų gramatika turi savo precedentą kai kuriuose penktojo dešimtmečio Johno Cage'o fortbijoniniuose kūriniuose, ypač *Dream* ir *In a Landscape* (abu parašyti 1948 m.).

Todėl intraopusinis stilius – pastovus veiksnys pjesėje – tampa pagrindiniu kintamuoju, siekiant suprasti *Van Cao's Meditation*. Dėl melodinių, tekstinių ir dinaminių apribojimų, kuriuos Ashley's įtraukė savo muzikinei medžiagai, *Van Cao's Meditation* įrodo esanti efektyviai „sterili“ pjesė, iš esmės neturinti užopusinių kintamųjų. Todėl pjesei tiesiog idealiai tinka taikyti Narmouro melodinės struktūros teoriją, siekiant atskleisti gramatinę Ashley'io melodinės plėtotės struktūrą.

Remdamasis generatyvine Nicholaso Ruweto analize (1966/1987), aš išnagrinėsiu kūrinių tiek paviršiniu lygmeniu (suklasifikuodamas frazes pagal jų kontūro panašumo laipsnius), tiek ir giluminiu (analizuodamas „motyvą“, kuris yra retai girdimas, tačiau nuolat naudojamas ir visame kūrinyje funkcionuoja beveik kaip platoniškasis idealas). Ruweto teorija, kurią jis naudojo analizuodamas choralo melodiją, yra veiksminga priemonė siekiant nustatyti panašumo laipsnių kiekį, panašumo, kuriuo remiantis – Ashley'io pjesės atveju – bus pademonstruota kaip laipsniškai sufokusuojama „tema“. Patvirtinant Naomi Cummung teiginį, kad „sukurto objekto struktūra tam tikru lygiu turi atspindėti pažintines mąstymo struktūras“, bus parodyta, kad *Van Cao's Meditation* puikiai tinka pavaizduoti kompozicinį procesą nuolatos peržiūrint ir atnaujinant.