

Article

Expressive Circles—Original Concept Regarding the Structural and Dramaturgical Aspects of the Musical Composition in the Piece *EXPRESSIVE CIRCLES—Three Pieces for Piano Trio*: Composer's Self-Reflection

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to present an original approach for modern composers to construct their musical work regarding its structural and dramaturgical aspects. The concept of Expressive circles originated primarily in inspirations taken from the movement in art called Surrealism and from music composed by Hanna Kulenty (which she describes as *musique surrealiste*). There are also parallels to other concepts (unism in music, surconventional deconstruction of the musical material) or to other composers (Witold Lutosławski). In the article, I present three types of Expressive circles (i.e., three form models)—closed structure, open structure and inverted structure. Each model is characterised by different approach to the musical theme and to its development in the musical piece. Considering the dramaturgical aspects of the work, the trance-like character of the music is important and there are two types of musical trances that I distinguish in Expressive circles, logarithm and drive; both are achieved differently in the musical work. The theoretical assumptions of the concept presented in the article are illustrated by chosen fragments from the score of my composition (*EXPRESSIVE CIRCLES—Three pieces for piano trio*) and by colourful schemes showing how the concept translates from theory to music.



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1. Introduction—Between the Content and the Form of the Artistic Work

“What?” and “how?”—two crucial questions that an artist asks himself when faced with the task of creating a new work. These fundamental questions relate directly to the issues concerning the content and the form of the musical piece (Mishra 2011). My work as a composer always begins with an attempt to answer those questions. I believe that answer to the first question is largely an individual matter and depends on the sensitivity of the creator, their perceptiveness and their artistic curiosity. However, issues concerning the question “how?”—so those related to the used techniques and overall form of the composition—are possible to work out, describe and systematise. That is because the concept of the form is often perceived as limiting the unlimited and/or as organising the unorganised in order to achieve internal unity (Blume 1970).

The aim of this article is to present my original concept concerning the structural and dramaturgical aspects of a musical work. This new approach, which I named Expressive circles, is derived from some traditional elements from music history, and it opens new possibilities for modern composers to organise musical material. It also expands the set of

possible composition techniques that may be used while creating new works. I will present the theoretical background of the concept and describe its most important determinants as well as point out how it corresponds to the ideas already present in the musical literature. Therefore, I will share my experiences and outcomes of my artistic research in the field of creating a specific architectonic and dramatic shape of a musical piece, and possibly encourage other composers to either follow principles presented here, or inspire them to look for inspirations in the past, while reviving some of the romantic and surrealist ideas.

2. Compositional Principles—Fundamental Ideas Behind Expressive Circles

The idea of Expressive circles was not created by me as a top-down theoretical construct, to which I later adapted music. It is the sum of my past experiences and convictions. It was from the music and intuition that the concept emerged, not the other way around. Therefore—because it is the result of my understanding of art and music—it seems to me important to first briefly present my compositional principles and the ideas that guide me in my work, as they are the fundamentals from which the concept originated.

2.1. Philosophical and Aesthetical Background

In addition to the two questions raised in the Introduction, there should be one more question stated. The one that precedes the whole act of creating a new work—the question “why” (Dissanayake 1988). I believe that the primary factor that makes one an artist is the inner need for expression. This however results from an even more profound need to seek answers to questions about philosophy and aesthetics. In my case, one of the most important questions—considering the philosophy of art—is the question about that unnamed feeling which makes me feel better or fulfilled when interacting with a work of art—the moment of understanding some universal Truth or experiencing some profound Beauty. Therefore, referring to the Platonic Triad—Truth, Beauty, and Goodness/Justice—is a foundation of my artistic work (Rocconi 2012). However, I believe that all of those terms are inherently connected and that they have at their core one specific word which is not yet known to us. That particular thought was inspired by the Polish philosopher and poet Zbigniew Herbert, who did not perceive Beauty exclusively as an aesthetical term, but also linked it with Goodness and emphasised their inseparable connection (Hryniewicz 2014; Siemaszko 2014).

In the past, guided by the abovementioned ideas, I have developed the thought that has become my artistic credo; I think about the art and its influence on us as a metaphorical “touch of a mist”—there is some etheric friction when “nothingness clashes with silence”, and together—out of nothingness—they create something that simultaneously is and is not—something more than we can comprehend. Therefore, I believe that art is able to move us and provoke us because it is paradoxical in its nature—there are tangible effects that music can bring to the listeners that are caused by an intangible matter—sounds. As the music is ephemeral, we experience it through senses and the most tangible contact with it is by interacting with its representation in the form of a sheet of music. Considering the differences in art disciplines, one can say that paintings may be accessible to us when visiting a museum; however, music is different—it only plays out in the “museum of our imagination” (Goehr 1992).

All the above considerations prove that I am close to experiencing the world of art in categories characteristic to artists from the Romantic period, who connected art to metaphysical values (Gardner 2002). I believe that the mystery is an inherent element of art, and it also emphasises the role of intuition that an artist should have. The idea of the romantic wanderer who absorbs optimism and pessimism in order to exist between them, equally aware of what is tragic and joyful in life (Pociej 2008), resonates in me. It also indirectly guides me to the movement in art called Surrealism, which is a key inspiration to Expressive circles.

To that philosophical premise, I would like to also point out that within the premise of my concept I find some parallels to Viktor Frankl's concept of self-transcendence (Frankl 1966; Konaszkiewicz 2019). This concept is about a man's ability to be open to values greater than him. I believe that the need to grasp what is inherently elusive is the main factor that stimulates me to create. What I am not able to put into words, because—perhaps—it is beyond the capacities of language, I try to express in music through emotions and through musical trances that are built into the core of the Expressive circles idea.

Concluding the philosophical considerations—and briefly considering the esthetical premise of Expressive circles—it is worth pointing out that my understanding of music is largely grounded in the belief that music as an art should somehow refer to the category of Beauty (Jarzębska 2004). I feel that it should carry some kind of story or a message and provoke emotions. In my view, it should not be just a strict theoretical construct shaped by abstract sounds, and therefore the premises of some concepts like stochastic music proposed by Iannis Xenakis—which is largely based on mathematical assumptions (Arsenault 2000)—are not aligned with the premise of my concept. Both elements—the “what” I want to say in my compositions and “how” I want to do it—are caused by my inner need to act in the service of emotions. That again brings us back to Romanticism with its categories of inexplicable feelings, mystery, duality, and uncertainty, which stand in opposition to rather strict and logical mathematical rules.

Those concepts of duality, the blurring of boundaries and the “friction when nothingness clashes with silence”, led me to an interest in Surrealism and, consequently, to the creation of Expressive circles.

2.2. Musical Background of Expressive Circles

There are four crucial musical inspirations that formed the concept of Expressive circles.

The first is music composed in the Romantic period. However, as I already mentioned above, the music from this period inspires me mainly because of its philosophical and aesthetical background—the musical language itself is of less importance.

From the 20th century, I should certainly mention minimalism (Warburton 1988; Johnson 1994; Fink 2005). Opposing the directionality of narrative (Kramer 1981)—so presenting the music without the context of past and future—minimalism introduces the category of lasting in music. This ties in with the vital concept of achieving a trance-like character in music, which is important in Expressive circles. However, I am not fully in favour of the American minimalism (Mertens 1988) as it often negates directionality, and—by excluding the context of the future—also consequently negates narrative thinking, which is an important factor in my music. Therefore, perhaps a more suitable term than minimalism, in the context of inspirations for Expressive circles, would be a reductionism that leads to repetitiveness in music, as the repetitive process of composing is of considerably more importance to me than just reducing the musical material to a minimum. As a result, I was inspired less by Philip Glass (Isac 2021) or Terry Riley and more by Zygmunt Krause and his idea of unism in music (Szwajgier 2015), as in his compositions there is still the overall feeling of striving somewhere—there is a repetitiveness and unity, but paradoxically there is also a diversity and striving to local climaxes.

However, the most important inspirations from which the whole concept of Expressive circles originated are the idea of surconventionalism in music created by Polish composers—Stanisław Krupowicz (Krupowicz 1994), Paweł Szymański, and Paweł Mykietyn—and Surrealism as a general movement in art. This prefix, sur-, meaning beyond, seems to be a common denominator for many of my reflections (beyond conventions, beyond realism, beyond the romantic boundaries of optimism and pessimism, etc.).

Surconventionalism intrigues me with the idea of playing with the known conventions and perception of the listeners (Granat-Janki 2010), and with its technical assumptions regarding the category of deconstruction of the expected musical events—particularly at the level of musical syntax (Kostka 2017). The decomposition of the expected order—interrupting the predictable development of the musical theme, by repeating some of its constituent parts—helps to create a trance-like character, and it enables the possibility of achieving a uniqueness in repetition that is an important factor in Expressive circles.

The second element inspired by surconventionalism is the presence of two layers: the actual layer heard in the piece and a deeper layer—an idiom, an archetype—that is not present in the piece in its original form. That deeper layer is just a basic musical idea for a composer to code it within the piece (Granat-Janki 2017).

Finally, the most important inspiration is the movement in art called Surrealism—particularly the musical aesthetics of Hanna Kulenty, which the composer herself describes as *musique surrealiste*. It assumes that music “is the imitation of nature or the interpretation of nature”. Surreal deformation takes place not on conventions, as it was in surconventionalism. The composer writes of herself as follows: “I am a musical surrealist precisely because I pass on to my listeners the emotional states and gestures that might accompany a given convention. I do not have to use these conventions, though. I am far more interested in the direct imitation and transformation of nature, not in the imitation of someone else’s imitation; that is I am not interested in conventions” (Kulenty 2016). One of the most characteristic features of her works is a “musical turbulence—harmonic turbulence, including bitonality, rhythmic turbulence, changes of metre, tempo” (Kulenty-Majoor 2015). These are procedures involving the juxtaposition of different ideas in order to produce tension, and “the tension generated between the different layers is the greater, the more incomprehensible the clash (...) of these layers with each other is”. This also translates into the form of the piece—the composer writes “the typical predictability of the form does not exist in my music, but predictability in sense of the pursuit to catharsis—there is indeed” (Kulenty-Majoor 2015).

Both surconventionalism and *musique surrealiste* fulfil the assumptions of Surrealism, which is defined as a movement in 20th century literature, art and film aiming to make the artist’s imagination independent of the rules of logical thinking and aesthetic and moral norms (Breton 1969; Janicka 1985). A publication by Amy Dempsey describing the history of the emergence of Surrealism and its most important features (Dempsey 2019) states that Surrealism is largely about experiencing the sensation caused when ordinary but unrelated objects were brought together in unexpected encounters. We also read there that the aim of surreal art is “to make the familiar unfamiliar” and that by “displacing things from their normal context, we would be able to see them anew”.

It is worth to mention other important musicologists and aestheticians who have written about Surrealism and its features, such as Theodor Adorno (Adorno et al. 2015) or Max Paddison (Paddison 2010). I am aware of their work; however, I was not directly inspired by their texts. The same is the case with music composed by Erik Satie (Calkins 2010) or George Antheil, who are often associated with Surrealism in music, but the aesthetics of their works are different from the aesthetics in my compositions, and therefore there was no influence on Expressive circles from them.

There is also an interesting view on the subject of bringing the ideas of Surrealism from painting to the field of music in works by the Polish musicologist Jacek Szerszenowicz, who studied the connections between these two arts (Szerszenowicz 2012). According to Szerszenowicz, Surrealism may be defined as a clash of different worlds and conventions, which give a sense of strangeness and a violation of objective rules. The surreal deformation of “reality”, in music and in painting, is not directly associated with a natural reality surrounding us, but rather with the symbols and established conventions of artistic reality.

It is about crossing boundaries and its defining characteristic lies in a climate of mystery and “suspended strangeness”; a climate resulting from “the clash of elements between which there is some vague non-understanding” that is inherently impossible to grasp.

That abovementioned elusiveness, together with the crossing of boundaries and the “clash of elements between which there is a vague non-understanding” are for me that “clash between nothingness and silence” that I mentioned earlier while describing my thoughts about the philosophy and aesthetics of art. Therefore, Surrealism corresponds with my significant artistic concepts and consequently makes it possible to bring certain ideas to the ground of music within its boundaries.

All the abovementioned inspirations contributed to the process of shaping my original idea of Expressive circles. Their chosen specific features are noticeable in the overall concept.

3. Expressive Circles

3.1. Definition

Primarily, I think of the Expressive circles as my compositional technique. While distinguishing between the terms technique and form, the former may be described as a set of means and activities necessary for the construction of a work. It itself becomes the essence of the construction, so that the technical activities overlap with the form, or it serves only to realise the elements of the construction (Chomiński and Wilkowska-Chomińska 1983; Green 1979; MacPherson 2006). This description fits with my thinking about Expressive circles, as in the same way that the variation technique and variation form occur in the musical literature, I treat Expressive circles simultaneously as my technique and as an idea for the whole structural arrangement of the piece.

However, merely talking about the form is not enough for me, because the premise of Expressive circles is also linked to a specific way of presenting the musical narrative. So, it is not only the architectonics of the piece that is important, but also its dramaturgical arrangement.

In addition, I also think about Expressive circles in a slightly broader context. They are not a directly created structural principle of mine, but they have their origins in the philosophical and aesthetic beliefs I have mentioned earlier. For this reason, it is not just a set of means and actions that help to construct a piece, since that presupposes that there are first the idea and intention—as independent of a technique—which are then only translated within the piece by the means provided by a technique. I feel that thinking about Expressive circles goes a little further, as they can still affect the musical idea and intention themselves, and therefore the precompositional phase of creating a musical work. For this reason, I would widen the scope from talking strictly about compositional technique to talking about a certain strategy of composing, noting the broader meaning of the term strategy.

Initially, I also used the term concept, as it is often defined as a general plan of action or simply an idea or a project: Expressive circles as a concept for developing the architectonics and dramaturgy of a musical piece.

Ultimately, the term most fitting for Expressive circles for me is the idea, which in the context of artistic research is defined as the guiding thought that determines the purpose and direction of scientific and artistic work—the overarching reason for doing something. I feel that this term best reflects the essence of Expressive circles in this broader approach, which includes also the aforementioned precompositional phase.

All the terms mentioned above can serve as a description of Expressive circles. For this reason, depending on the context, I use them interchangeably in my work. At the origin, it is the idea as a guiding thought, from which the concept and a certain formal and dramaturgical arrangement of the composition has emerged. Further—internally—it is also the use of certain technical procedures that serve to construct my pieces, i.e., my

compositional technique. Therefore, it is not a dogmatic system, but rather an open-ended creative strategy of composing.

3.2. Basic Principles of Expressive Circles

The core factors of Expressive circles are the specific shape of the musical theme and its development in the piece. The term escalation and the close relationship that arises in thinking about architectonics and the way the narrative is conducted are also important, as one has a strong influence on the other. The common denominator of all assumptions is the principle of returns, which is noticeable on multiple levels.

The starting point of Expressive circles is their distinctive thematic structure. However, this term needs to be clarified because I do not always see that primary melo-rhythmic structure as the same as the actual theme of the musical piece. I often use the term precompositional structure instead.

This basic idea is just a foundation—the starting point—and in its original form it usually does not appear in the piece. This approach is a result of the two layers in a musical piece inspired by surconventionalism (Mokrzewski et al. 2005). The first presentation of the theme in a composition is already its first variant. So, this simplest sound of the basic thematic structure is not given directly to the listener, but it is possible to find it and hear it after analysing and reducing the musical material. The basic motifs from this structure may subconsciously “play in the imagination” while listening to the piece, as a result of the intention to create a musical trance. Therefore, the precompositional structure is a constant point of reference for the construction of architectonics and dramaturgy.

Mentioning the musical theme, it is especially important to compose it properly for the purposes of Expressive circles. It should be fairly simple and consist of short motifs rather than long phrases. The motifs should also be melodically or rhythmically distinct by themselves and from each other. Of particular importance are the initial motif and the coda of the theme. The entire theme should also be composed in such a way that one can return directly and smoothly from its end to its initial motifs. This makes its continuous looping possible, which is a characteristic feature of circular form, and circular form is the starting point for the overall idea of Expressive circles.

The way the musical theme is developed in the piece is also relevant. This development is achieved mostly through creating numerous suspensions, loops, returns and permutations and by continuous evolution of the melodic and rhythmic structure. The aforementioned idea of looping the entire theme also carries over to looping its internal, individual motifs. This has to do with the attempt to achieve uniqueness in repetition or unpredictability in predictability (cf. Krause’s unism in music). The listener, already being familiar with the general outline of the theme and individual motifs, knows—or anticipates—what is to come, but is not sure when or how it will be presented. This development of the narrative through looping is a distinctive feature of Expressive circles.

All of the above lead to the possibility of achieving a musical trance, and therefore to associations with Surrealism. What we know and expect is presented as deformed—like in a dream. This is achieved largely by the deconstruction of musical syntax and by slowing down the musical narrative or—on the contrary—speeding it up. These two contrasting approaches are reflected in the two types of musical trances that occur within Expressive circles. Those types will be described later in the article.

That leads to another feature of the concept—escalation. It appears in the context of architectonics of the composition as a natural consequence of the evolution of the basic precompositional structure. Primarily, however, the idea of escalation refers not to architectonics, but to the dramaturgy and expression of the whole piece. The theme is not just simply looped while maintaining the same shape, but each successive repetition

builds upon the previous one narratively and expressively. Always starting from an initial point—which I call the position of balance—circles of increasing circumference emerge with ever more far-reaching developments and transformations of the theme. These eventually lead back to the same point from which the development started. From there, the entire process can start all over again and escalate (Figure 1).

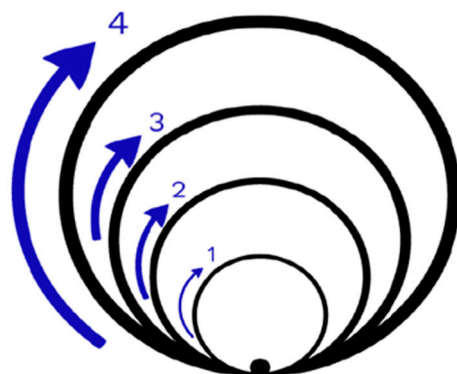


Figure 1. Graphical representation of Expressive circles. Source: own research.

Successive circles are new structural units. It is important to compose the entire piece in such a way that despite constantly using the same theme, it is possible to hear when the next circle begins. Referring to the description of expression—the ability to suggestively express feelings and experiences in art (Stecker 2001)—each successive circle brings a more complex attempt to express the essence of the overall narrative message. It is from those elements—the looping of the theme and the escalation of expression—that Expressive circles have taken their name.

The starting point of the whole concept was the circular form, which allows an endless repetition to be achieved. It is from that idea that the essential principle of returns emerged for me. It appears both as returns at the micro level—the looping of individual motifs within a theme or looping the entire theme—as well as on a macro level—looping the entire musical work. Indeed, it is often possible to mark the sign of repetition at the end of a composition, and then start the process of looping the whole piece from the beginning. This is another element stemming from Surrealism and minimalism—a state of mysterious suspension and uncertainty, when the listener may wonder if this is ultimately the end of the piece, or if the process of looping will arise again from the beginning.

While describing the architectonics, I would also point out that in addition to the circular form—which is the basic axis—there are noticeable parallels to other musical forms: the rondo or the variation form (Stein 1995)—particularly the ostinato variations—and the arch form, as the piece begins in the position of balance, the tension increases and then there is a return to the starting point. Such an approach—related to the dramaturgy of the piece—also matches one of the definitions of the form based on E. Kurth's energetic concept (Cecchi 2016). It describes the form as a mechanism whose operation consists of the fluctuation of tensions and relaxations. This definition inspires me in a special way, because as a composer I often try to evoke energy and later give time for reflections in my music. This thinking leads me to the two types of musical trances occurring in my works.

3.3. Narration and Dramaturgy in Expressive Circles

At first, I want to clarify what I mean by mentioning the narration in my music. It is for me the occurrence of cause-and-effect relationships that stand in opposition to works containing a series of isolated musical events. When listening to pieces written using a punctual technique, it is difficult to grasp the logic in the larger perspective—there is often a feeling of uncoordinated events (Jasiński 2014). In my music, I am looking for continuity

and the ability to follow the musical narrative. I want to be able to hear how themes develop and how they are coordinated in relation to each other—how expectations are built and how they are later fulfilled or unexpectedly disrupted (which is yet again a result of the inspirations taken from Surrealism).

This creates a certain paradox, because in Expressive circles there is continuity—not isolated events—but on the other hand there is also trance, i.e., looping and suspension on certain musical motifs, so there is a retention in the “musical present”. However, the overall development is perceptible when looking at the whole piece more broadly. Locally, there is a retention in the present, but globally—looking at the process of building upon the theme, as well as its development and the escalation of expression in the successive circles—the aspect of constant striving towards climaxes is also noticeable.

This dual outlook, containing both looping and directionality, fits into the surreal category of ambiguity and drowsiness, which leads to the concept of the trance. The dictionaries define trance as a state similar to incomplete sleep—which is also characterised by reduced consciousness—or as losing oneself in some activity. I distinguish two types of musical trances in my works, which relate differently to those definitions.

I call the first type of musical trance the logarithm. It is a trance that relates to the categories of drowsiness and reduced consciousness. It is characterised primarily by slowing down the musical narrative. It is the retention in the “musical present” caused both by looping motifs and by presenting fragments of a theme in a musical augmentation. It is also making already known motifs less familiar by deforming their melo-rhythmic structure to which the listener has already become accustomed. It brings relief and reflection, which usually come after a turbulent and intense section of the piece. The logarithm takes its name from the mathematical language, meaning the opposite action to exponentiation. Instead of expanding, the opposite movement takes place—in graphical representation, the vector is directed inward (Figure 2).

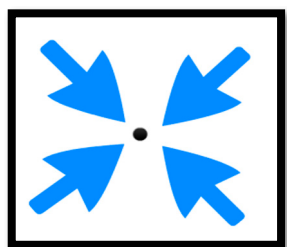


Figure 2. Graphical representation of the logarithm. Source: own research.

The second type of trance I call musical drive, as it is related to the feelings of urge, push and momentum. This type refers to the other definition of trance, which is to lose oneself in something. Drive is characterised by the constant building and intensification of tension and surrendering to the momentum of the narrative—the vector in the graphic representation is directed outwards (Figure 3). The fast pace, constant changes, permutations and loops of persistently repeated motifs do not allow the narrative to develop further, but then—immediately afterward—it suddenly unfolds and moves at double speed. Other characteristic elements are mainly irregular rhythms and polymetry which together give a sense of unsteady momentum. The overall idea of drive is based upon constant building and escalating.

Both types of trances can occur on their own in a piece or appear together—either as a direct juxtaposition or as a progressive process of slowing down the drive’s momentum to a logarithmic retention (or the other way around).

In both logarithm and drive, it is especially important to achieve uniqueness in repetition and—this is especially true for drive—unpredictability in predictability. The permutation and

repetition of structures creates a sense of constancy—since changes occur as a rule, we can say that their repetition is predictable—but on the other hand, the unpredictable moment of their occurrence keeps attention sustained, and the listener awaits that uncertain climax.

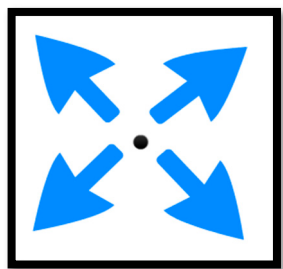


Figure 3. Graphical representation of drive. Source: own research.

Building up and releasing tension comes naturally to music (Hutcheson 1976). Composers make various references in their works to these interrelationships, for example, in the case of the two-phase form by Witold Lutosławski, in which there is a slowed-down action in the *hésitant* part and directional movement in the *direct* part (Winnicka 2014). However, while developing two types of trances in my music, I have not been directly inspired by any other composer. I worked out my principles on my own while exploring the philosophical and aesthetical background described earlier.

4. Three Types of Expressive Circles

I distinguish three types of Expressive circles in my works. Each type is characterised by a different approach to the basic precompositional structure and a unique way of presenting and developing it in the piece. The significance of certain individual motifs within the structure is also different in each type. As a result, each type is characterised by a different structural arrangement, so each type represents a different form model.

In order to present my concept of Expressive circles, I composed a special work for piano trio entitled *EXPRESSIVE CIRCLES—Three Pieces for piano trio*. Each piece in that work—*Continuum*, *FORWARD* and *drive 303*—presents a different type of circle, and I will use fragments from the scores of those pieces to show how the theory translates into music.

4.1. Closed Structure

4.1.1. Premise of the Closed Structure

The first type of Expressive circle is the closed structure. This is the basic type which originated directly from the main ideas of the concept.

A significant feature of this type is the appearance of the theme (precompositional structure) in its entirety each time it is presented in the piece. Within each segment—i.e., each circle—there are developments, repetitions, and permutations of each of the constituent elements of that theme—starting from the frontal motif, through the subsequent internal motifs, up to the coda of the theme (Figure 4).

The essential part of the theme is its coda—it should be particularly distinctive, as it is the element that allows the listener to recognise where we are in the form of the piece. Since the theme with each repetition can move further and further away from what is present in the precompositional structure—also minding the possibility of constant looping of motifs and constant permutations of the material—it is the coda that perceptually enables the listener to grasp that moment of returning to the beginning, and therefore to the position of balance. This is usually the reason that the coda itself is not subjected to as many transformations as other parts of the theme. Thanks to that, its melo-rhythmic clarity is an “anchor” to find a way back to the point of balance and the overall feel of the clarity of the form.

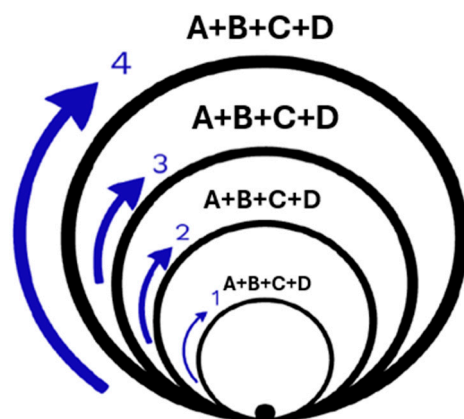


Figure 4. Expressive circles—closed structure. Source: own research.

The theme should also be constructed in such a way that a seamless transition directly from the coda to the initial motif is possible in order to enable the continuous looping. Therefore, the theme will often begin and end on the same note, which will be the tonal axis around which subsequent motifs will revolve.

4.1.2. Representation of the Closed Structure in the Piece *Continuum*

From a structural point of view, the basic precompositional structure of *Continuum* presents itself as follows (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The precompositional structure of *Continuum*. Source: own research.

This precompositional structure is mainly formed by the succession of seconds and sevenths. Structurally, there are the leading motif, its fourfold repetition in variants that preserve the succession of the seconds and the sevenths, and the coda of the theme. Those leaps by the seventh guarantee the intensification of the expression, and they mark the consequent significant notes on which the narrative development will be based. These notes will be the axis for the theme and the points of reference for the listeners in the perception of the form.

The coda of the theme marks the moment of transition between each circle. It maintains motivic coherence with the theme, and at the same time it is distinct in comparison to other motifs because of its rhythm and characteristic pause. The coda ends on the same note as the theme begins, making it possible to return smoothly to the initial motif and achieve a looping of the whole theme (Figure 6).

The colours used above mark the subsequent motifs that are structurally important. The choice of colours is not random. It highlights the arching shape of the theme—the upward direction and escalation of expression is accompanied by changes to warmer colours and vice versa. This colour distinction will also help to identify the motifs in examples from the score, and help with understanding the graphical representation of the overall structural and dramaturgical arrangement of the whole piece, where the same colours will be used.



Figure 6. The theme of *Continuum*. Source: own research.

The theme in this basic form does not appear once in the piece. From the beginning, we will hear its variants and transformations, as well as the looping in the motifs, which stem from the desire for achieving a trance-like character.

Below, there are examples from the score, showing how certain motifs are presented and developed in the piece (Figures 7–10).

Continuum Patryk Kusiak
(2021)

A ♩ = 44

freely, espressivo

Violoncello *p* *mp*

Vcl *mf* *p* *mf*

B ♩ = 66

Vln *p* *mf*

Vcl *f* *p* *mf* *mp*

Pno *p* *mp*

Figure 7. Patryk Kusiak, *Continuum*, bars 1–20, emergence of the theme at the beginning of the piece. Source: own research.

Vln *mp*

Vcl *mp*

Pno *mp*

Figure 8. Patryk Kusiak, *Continuum*, bars 55–58, escalation of the motifs and counterpoints. Source: own research.

Figure 9 shows the musical score for bars 66–75 of Patryk Kusiak's *Continuum*. The score is for Violin (Vln), Viola (Vcl), and Piano (Pno). The Vln part features yellow highlights in bars 66–67 and 68–69. The Pno part has a red arrow pointing to bar 75. Dynamics include *f* (forte) and *mp* (mezzo-piano).

Figure 9. Patryk Kusiak, *Continuum*, bars 66–75, climax in the third segment (third circle). Source: own research.

Figure 10 shows the musical score for bars 137–147 of Patryk Kusiak's *Continuum*. The score is for Violin (Vln), Viola (Vcl), and Piano (Pno). The Vln part has a *pizz.* (pizzicato) marking in bar 137. The Vcl part has a *p* (piano) marking in bar 137. The Pno part has a *p* (piano) marking in bar 137. The score ends with a double bar line in bar 147. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *pp* (pianissimo).

Figure 10. Patryk Kusiak, *Continuum*, bars 137–147, end of the piece. Source: own research.

4.1.3. Architectonics and Dramaturgy of *Continuum*—Overall Development of the Closed Structure

Below I will present the graphical representation of the piece *Continuum* (Figure 11).

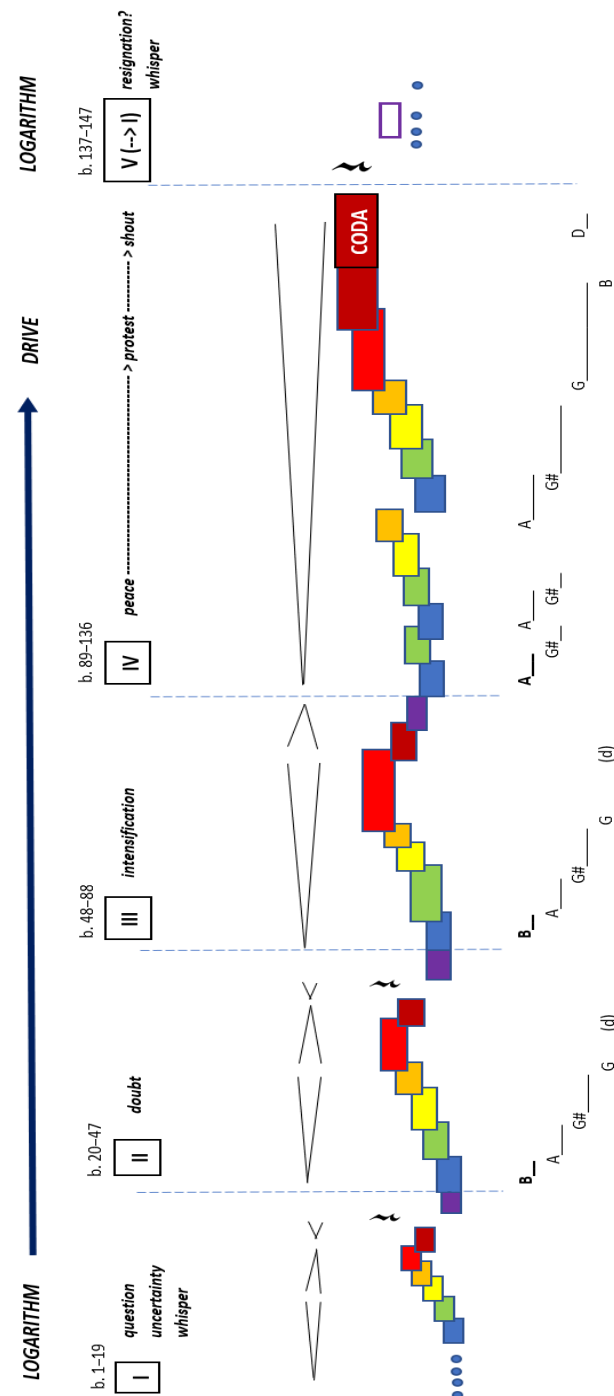


Figure 11. Graphical representation of the development of *Continuum*'s architectonics and dramaturgy; Expressive circles—closed structure. Source: own research.

In *Continuum*, there are four segments (four circles) that can be structurally distinguished. The final part of the piece is its coda, which can be interpreted as the beginning of a fifth circle, and at the same time may be seen as the first circle again. This procedure stems from the desire to achieve maximum continuity by allowing for the potential looping of the entire piece.

With successive presentations of the theme, expression escalates. Although each circle after its local culmination returns to the position of balance, the tendencies to thicken the texture and increase the role of the motoric are clearly perceptible globally. The partial culminations of each circle eventually sum up in the coda of the entire *Continuum*.

The abovementioned escalation is visually presented in a graphical representation of the piece. The individual motifs that build up the theme are depicted there by means of coloured figures, which show the significance of the motifs in each segment, and the order in which they occur in successive circles. In the lower part of the diagram there are notes that form the harmonic basis, while the upper part presents an overview of the development of expression and dramaturgy in each circle separately. At the top, there are bar numbers and the overall musical character associated with each circle. It is also shown how in successive circles the tension gradually increases—the entire *Continuum* is essentially a directional movement from looping in logarithm at the beginning, to achieving momentum in drive at the end.

We can see that each circle consists of each coloured block, i.e., each of the motifs from the theme. Therefore, in subsequent circles the theme does not grow structurally, as will be the case in the next type of Expressive circle.

4.2. Open Structure

4.2.1. Premise of the Open Structure

The second type of Expressive circle is open structure. This type is characterised by the fact that the theme does not appear immediately in its entirety, but with successive circles it forms over the course of the piece. The successive segments (successive circles) add further motifs that originally appear in the basic precompositional structure. Therefore, the theme will not sound in its entirety until later in the development of the piece.

Once again, the specific method of composing the basic precompositional structure is important. It should be composed in a way that will allow the return to the initial motif from any point of the theme. This is best achieved by starting and ending all structures on the same note, which will become the axis for the entire theme, and therefore for the entire piece (Figure 12).

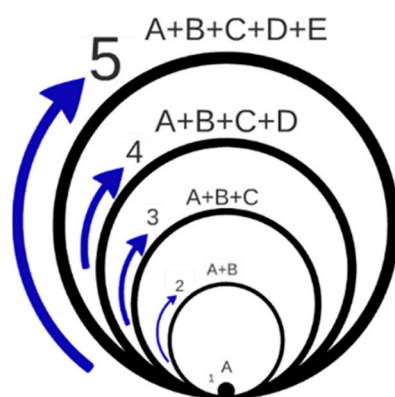


Figure 12. Expressive circles—open structure. Source: own research.

As the coda of the theme will not appear until later in the piece—when the theme in its entirety has already formed over the course of the following circles—it will not have such a significance, as it was the case in the previous type. This time it is the front of the theme that is crucial from a structural point of view, and it is the initial motif that will enable the beginnings of the subsequent circles to be picked up by listeners.

This type of circle further emphasises the importance of looping and permutating individual motifs, as at the beginning of the piece—before the theme develops—there will be only single initial structures repeated.

However, it is also not the case that further motifs have to be added in successive circles immediately after the motifs preceding them have appeared. There can be multiple repetitions of one specific circle before the next motif is introduced in a consequent circle.

This is the result of thinking in terms of achieving the trance-like character by focusing on constant looping.

4.2.2. Representation of the Open Structure in the Piece *FORWARD*

The basic theme of *FORWARD* is derived from a precompositional structure, and it develops over the course of the entire piece. Within the development of successive circles, further motifs are gradually added, which will be presented below step by step.

The theme is made up of a series of motifs, and each one has some characteristic feature that distinguishes it from the others. All of them revolve around a central note, so that the initial structure can be revisited from any point of the theme. Yet again, that allows achieving the essential seamless loops.

I will present the development of the precompositional structure, starting with the initial motif. By adding further motifs, the entire theme of *FORWARD* will eventually be formed.

Central to the theme is the initial motif marked in blue in the following analysis (Figure 13). This structure will indicate the beginnings of the consequent circles and provide a reference point in the perception of the piece's architectonics.



Figure 13. *FORWARD*, theme: initial motif (A). Source: own research.

The initial melo-rhythmic phrase of *FORWARD* begins with a central E note, around which the other motifs will revolve, or towards which the other motifs will strive. That structure of the theme—the A motif—directly connects to the B motif (green), and they usually occur together—immediately after each other—forming the head-motif of the theme (Figure 14).



The D motif (orange) introduces an octave leap and the simultaneous occurrence of an ascending and descending direction. From the central E note, there is a chromatic falling of the upper octave component and a chromatic rising of the lower one. The notes meet exactly in the middle, a tritone away from the central E note. From there, the rising occurs again. Contrary to expectations, however, this movement does not end with an E note, from which one could potentially return to the beginning of the theme, but there is an unexpected change to the D note (Figure 16).



Figure 16. *FORWARD*, theme: motifs A + B + C + D. Source: own research.

The above “harmonic turbulence” is a part of the development of the theme. The momentary departure from the tonal axis, to which the listener has already been accustomed, emphasises the unpredictable nature of the drive-trance. The D motif eventually directly merges seamlessly with the last motif (Figure 17).



Figure 17. *FORWARD*, entire theme: motifs A + B + C + D + E. Source: own research.

The characteristic feature of the E motif—the coda of the theme (red)—is the intensification of the rhythm and chromaticism. It is possible to move smoothly into the initial motif, which will become the beginning for the new presentation of the theme. Therefore, the theme has reached its climax and can begin to shape another circle. It is now fully formed.

The main features of the entire theme—and consequently of the entire piece—are the general upward direction and escalation, occurring not only in terms of expression, but also in the expansion of the thematic structure.

The construction of the theme allows for looping—from almost any point we can return seamlessly to the theme’s beginning, and the coda of the theme—by ending precisely with a melo-rhythmic structure from the initial motif—enhances that possibility of connecting both ends.

Below, there are examples from the score, showing how the abovementioned motifs are presented and developed in the piece (Figures 18–20).

Figure 18. Patryk Kusiak, *FORWARD*, bars 1–24, circles I₁ and I₂. Source: own research.

Figure 19. Patryk Kusiak, *FORWARD*, bars 214–237, circle III₂, motifs B, C and D. Source: own research.

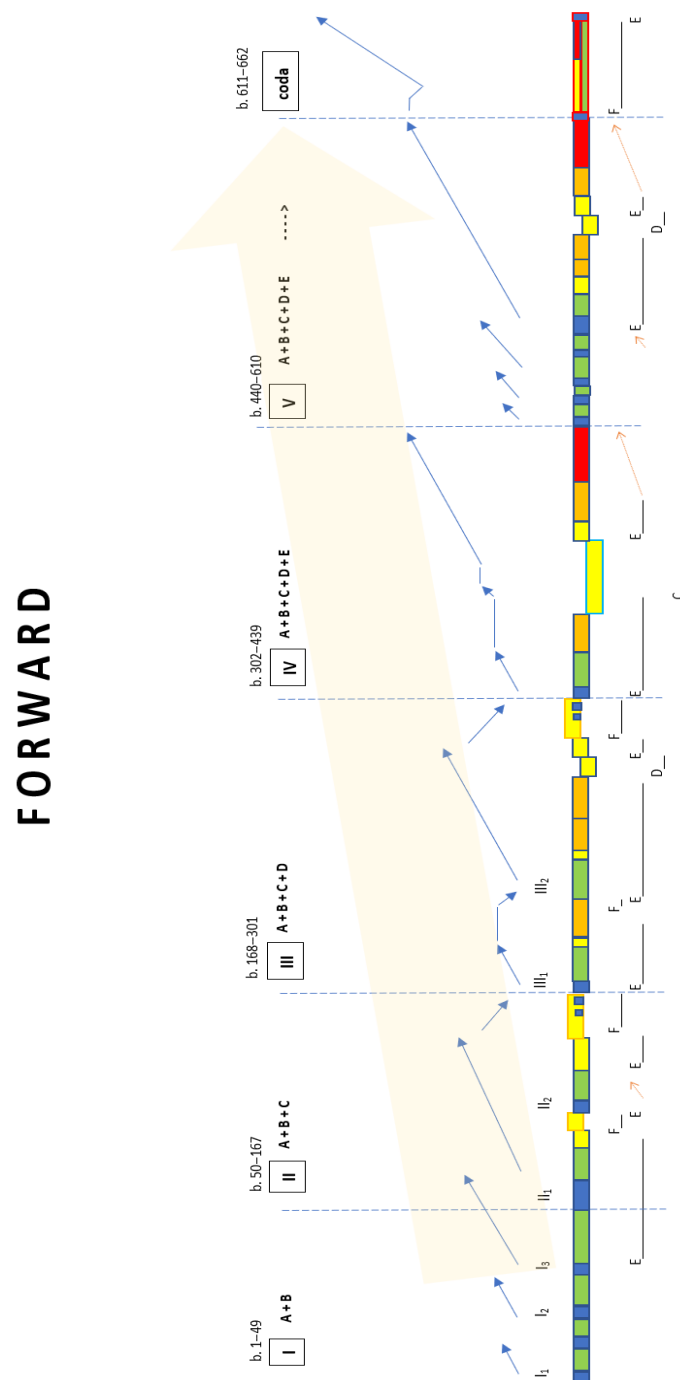


Figure 21. Graphical representation of the development of *FORWARD*'s architectonics and dramaturgy; Expressive circles—open structure. Source: own research.

4.3. Inverted Structure

4.3.1. Premise of the Inverted Structure

I call the last type of Expressive circle the inverted structure. Its basic idea is to mirror the principles presented in the second type and invert them—now the essential factor is shortening the theme from a full structure to its initial motifs (Figure 22).

The front of the theme is of primary importance again, as in this case the coda will be the first part of the theme that will disappear in subsequent circles. In addition, the theme should be constructed using the same principles as in the previous type, so in order to allow a smooth transition between successive circles, each motif should be able to link directly to the front of the theme.

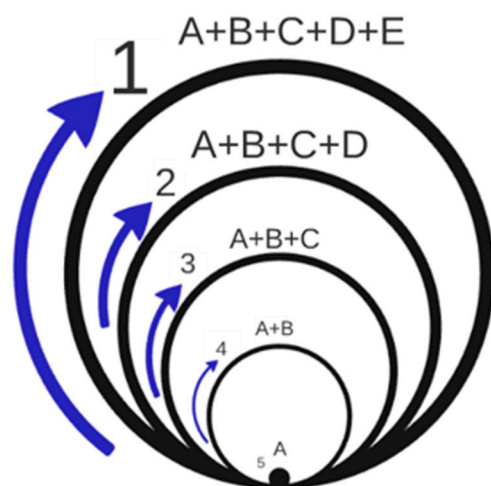


Figure 22. Expressive circles—invited structure. Source: own research.

It is worth noting that in this type, in terms of architectonics, there is structural de-escalation—the successive circles become smaller and smaller to eventually loop solely on the initial motif. However, this does not exclude the possibility of bringing escalation in terms of expression.

The third type of Expressive circle is also the best structural model for achieving a seamless transition from drive to logarithm.

4.3.2. Representation of the Inverted Structure in the Piece *Drive 303*

The precompositional structure in *drive 303* has the same basic characteristics as the precompositional structure in *FORWARD*. Therefore, referring to the premise of the inverted structure, the initial motif of the theme in *drive 303* is much more important than the coda of that theme, because the narrative eventually leads to looping almost exclusively on the initial structure.

This time—bearing in mind that the theme in its entirety is already presented in the first circle—I will show the entire precompositional structure at once, graphically separating the successive inner motifs that build it up (Figure 23).



Figure 23. The precompositional structure of *drive 303*. Source: own research.

The axis of the theme is the central D note—all motifs in *drive 303* are either derived from that note, or strive to it. The theme is also characterised by a big ambitus and by a specific dramaturgical shape—an alternating rising and falling.

The overall precompositional structure consists of seven motifs. I will briefly point out their distinctive features.

The opening motive [motif A]—dark blue colour—is the head-motif of the theme, and it consists of two elements: the first is the initial melo-rhythmic structure and the second is its variant that swings away from the central note, and then returns to it. That creates an arched, sinuous shape that enables looping.

Motif B—light blue colour—is characterised by a descending direction and leaps of thirds. The descending direction leads to a central note in the lower octave, from which the theme bounces up in the next motif.

Motif C—green colour—is characterised by a big upward leap and return to the initial register. It also brings a change in rhythmic structure by emphasising the weak beats.

Motif D—yellow colour—is characterised by changes in pulsation which were also presented in motif C. Even rhythmic divisions begin to mix with odd rhythmic divisions. In addition, this motif does not start from the axial note, but leads to it instead.

Motif E—orange colour—introduces a chromatic scale to the theme. It presents the upward movement which leads to the subsequent higher octave.

Motif F—red colour—introduces leaps by a tritone. It is also characterised by a lack of pattern in narrative development—the melody alternately rises and falls. Additionally, there is an intensification of motoric and expression, which is emphasised by tension-building leaps of augmented fourths/diminished fifths.

Motif G—brown colour—is derived directly from the built-up tension. It is characterised by an ascending direction of the melody, which increases the tension, and by the rush towards the climax and axial D note. Once the balance point of the theme is reached, a smooth return to the beginning is possible, together with the reappearance of the head-motif.

Since all motifs share a common denominator in the form of the position of balance on the D note, they can interpenetrate each other. So, despite the fact that they have their own characteristics enabling them to be identified in a piece, the characteristics of one motif can appear within the transformations of another motif. This fosters the unity in diversity and unpredictability in predictability I expect to achieve.

Below, there are a few examples from the score, showing how the abovementioned motifs are presented and developed in the piece (Figures 24 and 25).

4.3.3. Architectonics and Dramaturgy of *Drive 303*—Overall Development of the Inverted Structure

Drive 303 is a complex musical piece. It consists of a musical introduction and three big segments. The inverted structure described above is present in the first segment of the piece, right after the introduction. There is structural de-escalation—the shortening of the musical theme to its initial impulse. That process is graphically shown below in the diagram presenting the development of the architectonics and dramaturgy of the whole piece (Figure 26).

In *drive 303*, there are both escalation and de-escalation in terms of expression—first, there is a gradual build-up of tension, and then there is a process of extinguishing it, which stems from the assumption of a smooth transition from the drive's directed momentum to a slowed-down suspension of the logarithm. Therefore, the basic dramaturgical premise of *drive 303* is to present two types of musical trances, which are marked in the diagram above by two colours in the background of the main segments (orange and blue).

Figure 24. Patryk Kusiak, *drive 303*, circle I (bars 195–217), excerpt from the inner circle I₄. Source: own research.

Figure 25. Patryk Kusiak, *drive 303*, circle II (bars 316–322), excerpt—motifs E and F. Source: own research.

The overall diagram of *drive 303* presents how the theme is shortened in the piece and how the six consequent circles are internally constructed. The diagram also illustrates the evolution of expression and how the main theme is derived from the introduction. Additionally, we can see how the middle part of the piece, which brings logarithmic suspension, is internally divided into two alternating segments.

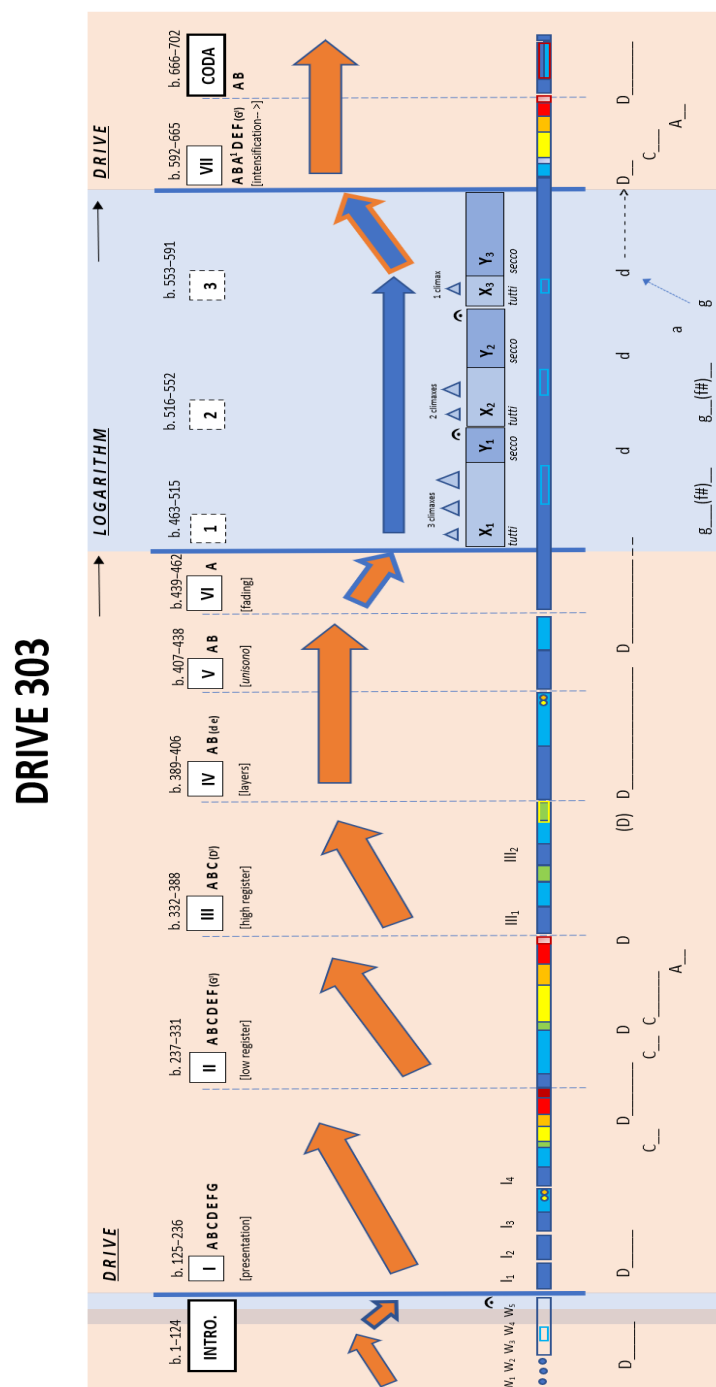


Figure 26. Graphical representation of the development of *drive 303*'s architectonics and dramaturgy; Expressive circles—inverted structure. Source: own research.

5. Summary

The concept of Expressive circles sums up all my inspirations, thoughts and preferences derived from my compositional principals. Connections to minimalistic repetitiveness and surconventional deconstruction of the expected order, as well as referring to expression, emotions and Surrealism—with its categories of mystery, inexpressibility, dreaminess and trance—are all noticeable in the Expressive circles.

The principle of returns, which is fundamental to the whole concept, stands out on various levels—internally and globally. In a way, a fractal structure is created (Mandelbrot 1989)—motifs, themes, segments and the entire composition can be looped. This arrangement also guarantees coherence, as all elements can relate to each other.

It would seem that there are many strict or mathematical relationships in Expressive circles, for example, in the planned structural arrangements of the forms or certain developments of the themes, or because of referring to terms such as permutation or logarithm. However, I would like to point out that such a statement is not very accurate. For me, Expressive circles are basically a foundation—a certain general idea. It is not a strict framework—a mathematical principle into which I later fit the music. The assumptions described above are indeed of considerable importance, but they stem from the need to organise my ideas, so that neither I nor the listeners have a sense of randomness and so that there is a perceptible directionality and some kind of internal logic within the work. Above the form, however, there always is the content that emerges from emotions, and that is guided by intuition. I do not want to become a slave to my own assumptions. When I feel the need to go beyond the framework of established rules, I do not try to hold myself back. When that happens, I consider Expressive circles as my composition technique rather than a certain form model. I did so in one of my orchestral pieces titled *R.E.M. for symphony orchestra*, where shaping the consequent circles was not a goal itself, but a means to achieve some other structural idea. That, however, needs to be presented in another article, which will discuss the more liberal usage of the rules of Expressive circles.

To conclude, I will return to the thread related to the definition of the concept. When I talk about Expressive circles I think a little bit about a form, a little bit about a narrative and a little bit about expression and technique. However, none of these approaches is the sole and ultimate determinant for me. Instead, there is a network of interactions and relationships—one relates to the other and one justifies the other. The common denominator for everything above is the overarching principle of returns. Therefore, the Expressive circles are my technique and my philosophy of current compositions—not a monolith and fixed theoretical construct to which I adapt as a creator, but an overall idea, an open-ended strategy I have developed in my music. It is a guiding thought that sets the goal and direction.

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