

DISCOURSE ON THE COMPARATIVE METHOD

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Abstract

Established as an authoritative discipline in humanist sciences, particularly in anthropology, the comparativism will generate surprising evolutions and will define itself as an efficient investigation method, reaching a certain level of research depth. The essay is structured in two sections. The first one circumscribes some general coordinates of the comparativism viewed as a method, trying to clarify, as much as possible, its qualities and its limits. In the second section I accomplished a translation of these principles in the interpretative activity, applying the comparative method in the main territories of the musical morphology, particularly focusing on their rendering in piano interpretation. I also tried in this essay a diachronic approach towards the comparative method, as it is conditioned by multiple socio-cultural and historical parameters. Verified, validated



and honored with obvious results, the comparative method continues to keep its efficiency in musical interpretation by the intimation of details, the creation of interpretative models and the marks it can offer in stylistic and historical approaches. We believe that the essay can offer certain conceptual and attitudinal articulations for this research area.

Keywords: interpretive analysis, comparative method, model, structuralism, tradition

One of the most memorable meetings of my life was with Professor Ferdinand Weiss and his illustrative comparative auditions. I was the direct and privileged beneficiary of these interrogative undertakings, in which the basic method of approaching the truth was *comparison*. The theoretical framework and practical illustration of this working method in music performance eventually became the theme of his doctoral dissertation that he defended at the Cluj-Napoca Music Academy.

Over the years, I have often asked myself why he would choose this particular method and not some other, why it has had such positive outcomes and such a long-lasting echo in my heart, and what are the deep grounds for the discovery of truth through comparison... I have thus come to appreciate more and more comparison as a working method and to expand its mysteries through my own interrogations. I will therefore entitle this material *Discourse on the Comparative Method*, after the brilliant expression of many of our ancestors. This text is meant as an essay on the intimate spheres of this type of investigation, which has become one of the working techniques in performance practice and musicology. Through these pages I wish to offer my homage to the blessed memory of Professor Ferdinand Weiss.

1. Semantic coverage

After presenting the motivation of the interrogation in the prolegomenon, we take the first step in the proposed theme by investigating the etymology of the term *comparison* in the Hebrew, Greek, Latin and Romanian languages.

The Hebrew term for *to compare* is *lirot*. Its semantic field is wide and it actually exhausts all the comparison-related problems *in nuce*. Thus, it first covers the meaning of attentive, compulsory observation, as a first step toward a real, subsequent comparison: to see, to watch, to look; then the meaning refers to an active observation, attentive to details: to observe, to pay attention. The third meaning concerns the level of cognition, of deciphering meanings: to understand. Finally, as a goal of the entire comparative endeavor, the choice: to prefer. Through all its four meanings, the verb *lirot* covers the whole semantic spectrum and marks out the entire inner route, from observation to choice. To synthesize, the Hebrew word *lirot* means to watch – in our case, to hear – to pay attention, to understand and to choose.

For the Greek language, we will refer to the irregular verb *eiko*= to resemble, to seem, which will give rise to the Romanian noun *icoană* (icon).

In Latin, the meanings of the word are: *comparare* – putting together two similar people or things, *compar* – identical, exactly alike, *comparea* – to appear, to become visible, to come into view, to become apparent and *comparo* – to join people or things together, to combine into a whole, to show how (people or things) are alike or different, to oppose as an adversary and to reckon, to consider while comparing.

In Romanian, DEX (The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language) gives the following meanings for the verb *a compara*: to be like, to confront (bringing together people or things); about scientific disciplines: which examine by comparison, which use the comparison method (example: comparative grammar, comparative literature). The *comparative method* is explained as: a research method in historical linguistics, concerned with the reconstruction of the past unwritten facts of language based on the methodical comparison of some subsequent related facts from different existing languages.

Since the three aforementioned ancient languages have a privileged connection with the sacred texts, we shall hereafter attempt to synthesize some adverbials of the first meaning, *to look*, encountered in these writings. Firstly, *how* should we look (in our case, listen)? The encountered adverbials are: cautiously, carefully, well, closely, around, straight at etc. They obviously refer to the second Hebrew meaning, i.e. that of attention in observation. The adverb *where* comes in the following formulations: backward, inside, around, at the appearance, at the place where it was located, upward, at what is going on, in the book etc.

Many of them will become landmarks for subsequent structuralist research. Finally, the conditional *when* is answered by: incessantly. This adverbial turns attentive observation into an essential concern of the human being which, although necessary, is not enough to lead to the knowledge of truth, as we shall see.

2. The strong thought and the weak thought; the sciences of the spirit

The comparative method has come a long way in human thinking, managing even to designate an anthropological trend – *comparativism*, represented by L. Morgan and E. B. Tylor in the 19th century, and by A. Radcliffe-Brown, G. P. Murdock, C. Lévi-Strauss and E. R. Leach in the 20th century. Their goal was to study the general laws of development of the human cultures, by careful observation and comparison, in order to identify universals, constants and common laws.

Contemporary science uses direct and indirect methods of investigation; comparison therefore falls within the category of the investigation methods. Its correct use involves steps towards the truth. In Greek, *methodos* means “a pursuit, a following after”. The path to the truth can be reconstructed and this assumes an absolute realization of the ways to knowledge. We approach a (musical) discourse methodically when we can recreate the creator's journey and then step out of it, being at the same time able to narrate our route, to describe, after we *understand*, the process of its making, to a certain extent the structure and the forces that make it coherent and alive, the *entelechia* of the unity; we can thus engage in another genuine discourse reflecting the morphology and physiology of this first entity represented by the work of art. It is, however, known that the musicological enterprise does not cover the vividness of the work, and that the genuine text of the work will forever leave place, through the open nature of the discourse, for something new and unsaid until then, all the more so in the realm of musical expression, where the text matter is altogether special.

Any research aims at getting closer to the truth. That said, multiple questions arise, such as: which truth and what is the meaning of truth, where can it be found and what is its relationship with the scientific research, knowing that science, in its contemporary meaning, has established privileged relations with the truth. All these questions will generate in our case various epistemological positions on the field of investigation represented by the artistic work. Different relationships emerge between composers and the written musical text, between the performer and the text, between the composer and the performer, or between different

performers regarded diachronically; next, the question arises whether musicology as science allows the insertion of a discourse accepted as true about a territory that uses a different material to articulate its expression, based on its own grammars. In point of fact, the research undertakes to identify a *mathesis* of the work as a general science of order, as a dispute between organization and non-organization, structuring and destructuring, construction and deconstruction, order and chaos. The observation of these complex systems is then given a historic perspective. The synchronic scrutiny is doubled by the diachronic one, whereby things become more and more difficult to encompass.

Therefore we wonder from the start: could science – in our case musicology – be as it claims, the ultimate instance and sole defender of the truth? What is the place and role of the unsayable and the ungraspable of the work of art, mentioned earlier? Heraclitus of Ephesus famously said that "nature loves to hide" and thus the truth in it can only be attained by an act of "robbery". The attempt to explain appears therefore beneficial at times, though not always ethical; sometimes the demonstration appears as indecent. Hiding the existence of the truth raises serious problems for knowledge, for understanding, for what they stand for and how they are attained. The logical definition of truth as *adequatio intellectus ad rem* had long covered – and in a way concealed – the threshold between *les mots et les choses*, as Michel Foucault so brilliantly put it. The task of musicology is to clarify as much as possible the things that are related to the work of art, but "... the vivid content and clarity are antipodes, in that one clears the field for the other" (Cramer, p.115).¹

From a rudimentarily positivist perspective, *esse est percipi* (to be is to be perceived, or the existence of an idea cannot be separated from its being perceived); the scientific approach is itself based on this concept, while validating silence as a learning tool "... and to quietly revere the unfathomable" (Goethe).

All is simple when we look upon things as if they were mechanisms. For a long time, human thinking proposed the instrumentalization of knowledge, i.e. a "technical" knowledge and an absolutization of the claim that all things can be known only in the form of writing. Plato distinguishes between *hypomnesis*, i.e. knowledge through writing, and *anamnesis* as an internal process that can be transmitted only orally, or truths that can only be known through silence. In his Seventh Letter, he says: "There neither is nor ever will be a treatise of mine on the subject. For it does not admit of exposition like other branches of knowledge."

¹ This is where Blaga places his philosophical theory by raising the mystery of aliveness to the category of those that must be left in their unsayable ("I do not crush the world's corolla of wonders").

The claim of modern science that knowledge can be known by following paths and then reiterating them according to a topographic description, narrows the idea of *truth* and replaces it with *certainty*. All that can be reverified finds its fulfillment only in *limitation*. This type of investigation raises serious problems in terms of concrete applicability, for the practical procedure of research leads to a universe of planning and technique, where science itself becomes a technique. They all derive exclusively from the ideal of modern science, i.e. that of *verification*, more exactly of the logical possibility of such verification, by way of demonstration.² We have, though, to admit that the greatest and most outstanding achievements in the sciences of the spirit exceed by far the ideal of verifiability.

“... Any researcher struggling to reach this ideal (the verifiability of all knowledge), will seldom, if ever, have anything really important to say. Thus the situation arises that there is something in the human sciences that is not thinkable in the same way in the natural sciences, namely that the researcher sometimes can learn more from the book of a dilettante (as a scientist) than from the books of other researchers” (Gadamer, p.404).

3. Comparativism in music. Musicology alliances

Located within the triangle between natural sciences, mathematics and philosophy, the human sciences willingly or not resort to contaminating proximities and neighborhoods, thus coining certain impure scientific binomials that are represented by more or less overt associations between musicology and biology, musicology and mathematics, musicology and philosophy, or other more complex ones. Except for the association with mathematics (whose certainties have represented, ever since the ancient times, the paragon of knowledge³), all the others continue to resort to the explanation through words, and therefore difficulties persist. Silence and mathematics would thus represent extreme gesticulations.

This problem of the boundary of the possibility of objectivation is the most difficult barrier for musicological research to overcome. The metaphoric profusion of musical expression, the polyphony of senses, the evanescent diffusion of texts decisively deny – in this territory – science's claim to overcome the fortuitous nature of subjective experiences through objective knowledge. The problem of presentation through speech of another type of speech raises serious questions about the relation between true knowledge and expressibility. And

² A particular case is that of the still unproven truths, called conjectures.

³ From the science about *λογος* (*logos*), the Greeks (Aristotle) reached the conclusion that the true science is not the natural science, but mathematics, as a paragon of knowledge.

yet, Claude Lévi-Strauss sees in music "... the supreme mystery of the science of man, a mystery that all the various disciplines come up against and which holds the key to their progress" (Strauss, p.79).

For such objectivation⁴, some comparatists strictly confine themselves within the limits of the written text, for any interpretative excesses must eventually pass the test of the rational confrontation with the text. It was believed that the disciplined and methodical use of reason, along with the perpetual confrontation with the text, eliminate errors. But the problems of the written text are much more complex than they appear, as they emerge from the relationship of the creator and interpreter with the graphical model. The text has to be placed in a "context", a process which – by virtue of its temporal, cultural and social determination (therefore of history) - is in a state of perpetual becoming: the word or sign which humans use are the humans themselves" (Sebeok, p.57). The text can be viewed either as a definite and absolute structure, or as a living, open and historically interpretable being. This binomial represented by a structuralist approach (*pattern* – design, mechanism, structure) and an organic one (*Gestalt* – form) is the Gordian knot of the new approaches: "In the end, the genetism-structuralism blockage was overcome in the most natural way, namely not by inventing in the abstract a structuralist genetism or a developmental structuralism, but by radically generalizing, owing to the facts themselves, the two notions of structure or organization and of genesis or development, up to the understanding that any development is organization and any organization is development" (Piaget, p.143).

4. Historical conditionings of comparativism

Engaged in historicism, i.e. in the diachronic perspective on events and in the comparative enterprise, the researcher is confined by a series of conditionings, such as: **fashion, prejudices, the authority of a model, tradition, relation to the model and to novelty** etc. Let us consider them in turn.

Of all the historical conditionings, **fashion** is the most apparent one. Certain socio-human tendencies or certain historical situations generate fashions, even in science. We thus

⁴ The thirst for certainties related to the difficulty of objectifying certain materials (the sounds) will burst forth into the foundation of a structuralist approach where the object is not only defined, but also absolutized. "Thinking is not content with the becoming of things, with their value, or cause, or origin, but wants something certain and palpable, something that would not fade away like the shades of night. Moreover, it is not content with anything that would surround the object, with anything that is a mere attribute, but wants the very things themselves. Not what things have, but what they are" (Nemoianu, p. 76-77).

periodically witness a bureaucratization of research, when certain coordinates, often generated by hard-to-explain factors, impose themselves and lapse into generalizations.

Closely related to the problem of fashion is that of the **prejudices**, as conditionings for understanding. "... we cannot know certain things that are true, for, without knowing it, we are limited by our prejudices" (Gadamer, p.405). Freedom from prejudice is difficult, if not impossible to achieve, for the very reason that – as pointed out by Gadamer in his book *Truth and Method* – they operate without us knowing. The close relationship between prejudices and judgments often leads to errors, for inside us they are difficult to separate. Prejudices are of two kinds: prejudices of authority and prejudices by precipitation (through slow deposition, through sedimentation). The prejudices by precipitation, as illegitimate prejudices, introduce an unfortunate concept for the comparative enterprise, namely that of biasing. The positive, productive prejudices bring into discussion another aspect of comparativism, i.e. authority.

Authority in the musical-interpretive field is the educator, the superior or the specialist. The prejudices they inculcate into their disciples' minds are validated by their personality. "The authority of persons is ultimately based not on the subjection and abdication of reason but on an act of acknowledgement and knowledge – the knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgement and insight and that for this reason his judgement takes precedence – i.e. it has priority over one's own. This is connected with the fact that authority cannot actually be bestowed but is earned, and must be earned if someone is to lay claim to it. It rests on acknowledgment and hence on an act of reason itself which, aware of its own limitations, trusts to the better insight of others" (Gadamer, p.214). Thus, this construction of one's own interpretative visions comes from a willful submission that was accepted and chosen under the vision of a predecessor, namely the historical alignment of the effort to reach the truth of the work. This selective effort – followed by the integration of the person in a "school", "trend", or group" that would legitimate them – strengthens our conviction that the work of art in itself and through its interpretation is not an *ergon*, i.e. a finished work, but an *energeia*, i.e. something that is the outcome of a continuous expenditure of effort (Humboldt). Paradoxically, the work of art is born and yet to be born, accomplished and still open, still and yet alive. This is so much truer in the small realm of the instrumental concert, which is the cadence of virtuosity, where the composer-performer cooperation is even more explicit; this is the genre that allows insertion of this type of discourse (its presence in other genres would be inconceivable). Returning to the issue of authority, all the things consecrated by custom and tradition become authorities and our historically finite nature is

determined by this **authority** of the things received which strongly influence our actions and conduct through things that are justified by more than reason. Our finitude deprives us of the knowledge of the truth of an infinite work, of a musical work; none of us can grasp the entire truth in our thought, but the Truth can encompass us all in our isolated thoughts.

A fourth aspect of comparativism is **tradition**. Any comparison involves questions raised at different times, collecting and spacing them in time, placing them in context, eliminating perishabilities and maintaining the perennials. Generally, the time of history works like a sieve and unfair oblivions are exceptions rather than rules.⁵ Tradition frees the reason from fashion's immediate imperatives, and offers perspective and time for the separation of truth from imposture and opportunism. In the past, the placement in a tradition was a matter of behavioural discipline, which was more and more vehemently criticized by the contemporaneity⁶.

History records "revolutions", whose contestatory character over earlier ideas or attitudes increases with their evolution in time. According to the old integration of creators or performers in the context of time, traditions were alive, while the past was present or very close. In reality, tradition has always been a factor of freedom and of history itself. Not even the most authentic and solid tradition can find its natural fulfilment by sheer pre-existence of what already exists, requiring instead affirmation, embracement and cultivation. Only thus will it become preservation, concomitantly contributing to the entire historical dynamics. This multiple conditioning that tradition exerts upon us is in no way a limitation of freedom. Rather, it is an azimuth that guides humanity: the better we know where we come from, the better we will know where we are heading.

Historical knowledge is not a mere updating of the past. It assumes concomitance. Understanding the past (works, interpretations) means hearing it in terms of its validity. Understanding by comparison cannot be fulfilled by eluding tradition. The correlation between *situation* and *truth* in terms of labelling situations by neglecting the context and details renders the historic approach meaningless and, instead of favouring the advancement of knowledge, blocks it.

"Whereas romantic hermeneutics had taken homogeneous human nature as the unhistorical substratum of its theory of whole – thus isolating the individual who congenitally

⁵ Unfortunately, Bach is one of these exceptions.

⁶ The disparity between modernity and tradition has been a historical permanence, but its escalation into an intellectual clash has only pertained to the last decades; any traditional gesture is also a sign of incongruity with contemporaneity; music has repeatedly and overtly carried the flag of unconventionality.

performs the understanding, from any historical conditioning -, the self-criticism of the historical consciousness eventually leads to the reconstruction of a historical affectation not just in the event, but in the understanding, too. Comprehension must not be conceived primarily as an act of subjectivity, but as an insertion within an event of tradition, where a permanent mediation between past and present takes place. This is what we need to reaffirm in a hermeneutical theory excessively dominated by the idea of a procedure, of a method” (Gadamer, p.222).

The comparative method not only does not invalidate historicism, but assumes it and makes it a mandatory presence in the research process. That may be the reason why comparison as a method spares us from synchronic absolutizations and opens the generous perspective of the becoming in time, of placing interrogation within a row of prior interrogations that have become answers.

The fifth aspect of comparativist historicism is the one that regards the **reference to the model**. Subject to historical validation, certain models represent a culmination of a stylistic stage and become what we call "classical models". There are performances or works that convey long-lasting values, meanings that withstand the test of time, seemingly devoid of any temporal connotation. They become a kind of atemporal present. To the analyst they are reference landmarks over time, enabling the simultaneity of any present. By virtue of their absolute exemplarity, certain performances acquire almost canonical status, leaving deep traces in the art of interpretation through their exquisite expressions of the humane. The balanced reference to these models creates a transitory harmony between moderation and abundance, a freely accepted homologation of a normative content. References to models are definitely multifarious, subject to temperament, learnedness, consciousness etc.

5. Comparativism finalities

In connection with this reference to the model, the problem of finality of comparativism arises. Thus, it can be conducted in order to identify similarities or differences. The main tool in the comparative method is the *similarity* or *analogy*, an often unfaithful and slippery guide - and yet the only one. “To understand, one must have the organ of similarities between things, rather than that of the differences between them. More than the analytical spirit, one needs the analogical one. More than discernment, one needs imagination” (Pleșu, p.46). The problem of common things and of differences is what divides comparativists into

two categories. Are there indeed super-ordered categories in which the common things come together, or are there only brands, or unique and particular structures? Does the general truly exist, or is it just a creation of our mind? Similarity, as a constructive element of the general, is a highly subjective construction material - and the more subjective it gets, the more questionable the durability of the general construction is. Analogy, as a tool, allows us to identify without mistaking, but also to recompose the unity of reality without uniformizing it; this is a real methodological paradox. Understanding always moves from the whole to the part and backwards to the whole. "... A theorist's task is precisely to dissect, to highlight the parts of the hierarchized whole, to transform the work into a program or algorithm; in fact, to destroy it in order to know it, to sliced it apart in removable sections, although their subsequent, mathematized juxtaposition does not mean knowing it" (Nemoianu, p.82-83).

6. The applicability of the comparative method in interpretive analysis. Discourse components under observation

In what follows, we will try to identify some possible general coordinates of the application of the comparative method in interpretive analysis. Observing the same work in different interpretive instances is an extremely complex undertaking that assumes an inner journey that puts one's personality in the position of the disciple willing to assume the interpretive shortcomings and clumsiness.

The purpose of such an enterprise is not establishing a hierarchy of the interpretations studied, but shaping an internal interpretative model whose complex structure will include either compatible components of the auditioned variants, or new entities arising from the awareness of their absence from the conceptions studied. The presence of this model, itself in constant becoming, enables the proper positioning of the self in relation to the greatness of the work of art, as the fecund result of the close observation of some landmark performances. The complexity of the information involved in the comparison of different interpretive approaches leads to a tendency to simplify the method, to isolate the various components under observation. Their identification, coupled with the ability to discern the specific means of use, are prerequisites for significant accumulations arising from the analysis.

Tempo is a major factor in shaping the musical discourse. By its very diachronic nature, musical art engages memory in its interpretation and perception, which entails an endless comparative process meant to determine both the correct positioning of the present in relation to the past events, and the anticipation of the possible future perspectives.

Developing the reflections of the Russian philosopher Pierre Souvchinsky, Igor Stravinsky identified two basic dimensions in the musical projection of time: one is the ontological or real time, whose linear course provides stability and unity to the discourse, raising it to a high level of impersonality, which resonates with the most general constructions of the human mind; the other one is the psychological time, that of the individual, characterized by extreme adaptability to emotional changes, responding to these signals by altering the pulsating speed. “Music that is based on ontological time is generally dominated by the principle of similarity. The music that adheres to psychological time likes to proceed by contrast. To these two principles which dominate the creative process correspond the fundamental concepts of variety and unity.” (Stravinsky, p. 33-34).

By its ability to establish the general expressive framework and the character of the discourse, as well as to cover wide areas with constant values and give unity to the intonational, dynamic or timbral diversities, tempo can generate expressive correspondences between articulations separated by wide spaces. Another quality that recommends tempo as a priority element in the comparative process is its quantifiable nature, which places the research in a well-defined epistemological field.

In the concerto genre, the specific elements that stand out are the tempo relationships between different movements, the nuance differences between the tempos of the thematic blocks, the agogic liberties of the cadence and the ratio of the basic tempo of the final movement to that of the coda. All of these elements may be the subject of wide range studies in the field of comparative interpretive analysis.

Dynamics is another critical component of the interpretive act. The problem of dynamic articulation is extremely complex due to several factors, of which we shall mention a few.

a) The relativity of the dynamic indications, which by their unquantifiable nature leaves wide spaces of manoeuvre for the performer’s subjectivity;

b) The extreme mobility enjoyed by the performer in areas deprived of explicit dynamic indications. The extremely rich variety of the possible forms of the dynamic evolution, able to cover the most diverse expressive intentions, gives rise to one of the performer’s fundamental responsibilities, i.e. that of organizing, in terms of dynamics, the diachronic and synchronic elements of the discourse. Piano interpretation involves, almost without exception, sound simultaneities spatialized by placing the constituent elements in different dynamic contexts. The intensity contours can thus differentiate between polyphonic levels, emancipate monody from its accompaniment, give nuances to the harmonic evolutions,

and thereby become elements of primary importance in the vertical hierarchy of sound levels.

c) The ability of dynamics to structure the interpretive gesture on multiple levels. The dynamic variations can confer vectoriality to a cell or motif, are able to direct the evolution of a phrase, to bring thematic blocks into contrast, to delimitate large articulations of form or provide a pulsating character to the entire discourse, enhancing its nodes and loops of potential.

Timbrality is another major factor in achieving the interpretive act. Although the composer is the one who organizes the timbral deployment by choosing the instrumental apparatus, the performer can act upon this component in two general directions.

On the one hand, the changes generated by the evolution of instruments give him the opportunity to choose between historical or modern instruments, which significantly influences the overall timbre. On the other hand, the performer can change the spectral composition of sounds through specific manners of attack, an ability that demonstrates the highest level of interpretive virtuosity.

Agogics, regarded as a perpetual creator of tempo nuances, covers its cumulative area, assuming periods of continuous instability of the speed of development. By agogic nuancing, the becoming in time of the performance gains fluidity and a new dimension, i.e. that of flexibility of the rhythmic pulsation, which from objective beat becomes internal pulse, adaptable to the changes imposed by various expressive requirements.

Present in any interpretive act, agogic oscillations can take on the most varied of forms, from quasi-imperceptible developments that animate a discourse lacking in vitality in the case of a strictly quantified approach to the rhythmic values, to variations contributing to the drawing of the general time coordinates of the interpretation.

Perhaps more than with other discursive components, a convincing outline of the agogic dimension involves finding the just measure, for any excess threatens to take interpretation into mechanic inflexibility or to break it into non-convergent elements.

Perhaps the component the most tributary to the concept of *interpretive fashion*, agogics appears as the most unstable dimension in the history of the musical act. Therefore it has the quality to load the audition with the socio-musical context of the period when the recording was made.

Articulation is another key concern of the performer, which defines the micro-structural contours of the discourse structure. Covering a wide range of issues and vast areas of research, like finding the infinitely varied separation of attacks, piano pedalling and specific manners of attack, and having significant implications in the area of the dynamic,

timbral and agogic components, articulation is a fundamental issue in musical interpretation. In the comparative analysis, articulation is a matter of the highest interest, which is also due to the high technology, able to focus intensely on details by changing the speed and registers of the discourse.

These components of interpretation can mark out the course of the comparative audition, which will oscillate between the nuanced details of the elements exposed and the synthetic perception of the discourse as a whole. This type of closeness confers the comparative interpretive audition the certainties of the method, while at the same time leaving place for the sensitive perception of the interpretive discourse.

Each new interpretation raises a new question, rather than providing a new answer. The logical form of a proposition is the question; any question is itself an answer; every proposition has its horizon of meaning in that it originates in a question situation. "We accept that the matter at hand presents itself historically in different ways at different times or when approached from a different standpoint. We accept that those ways are not simply cancelled in the continuity of progressive research, but are like mutually exclusive conditions that persist by themselves *and are only united in us* (author's underlining). Our historical consciousness is always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is heard. Only in the multifariousness of such voices does it exist" (Gadamer, p. 217). In the course of investigations and questions a new voice always emerges, in which the past is heard in different ways. The investigating interest does nothing but create a new interrogation, and so the question: "What is truth?" remains unanswered. We are therefore left with the prospect of fulfilling the goals of comparative investigation, i.e. formulating good questions and making the right choices.

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