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Composition in Bahia, Brazil: Ernst Widmer and His Octatonic Strategies

Ernst Widmer and Music Compo- sition in Bahia, Brazil

The distinctive role of Ernst Widmer (1927–90) in the realm of Brazilian musical creation during the second half of the twentieth century is supported by the broad perspectives of a project that encompasses both teaching composition and creating music. In fact, according to Widmer (1988, 5), teaching composition and composing are similar processes, rooted in a set of common principles. These perspectives include the projection of a discourse about composition and teaching, the concrete development of pedagogical practices, the creation of musical works, and the elaboration of a compositional theory underlying these pieces, as well as the construction of cultural and institutional leadership both locally and nationally. All these components are closely connected to the process of cultural interaction that characterizes Widmer's lengthy permanence in Brazil, whether through direct pedagogical experience and the inevitable interchange with students, or through conscious experimentation involving local materials and thematic horizons.

Widmer's experience differs from many other instances in which a foreign composer establishes himself in Brazil, proclaiming a specific compositional practice or aiming at the creation of a "school of composition," something that usually requires an affiliation to a model. Quite the contrary, for Widmer it represented an investment in the singular development of student-composers, leading to a movement that described itself as anti-school, and that tried to become relevant through questioning accepted principles, both traditional and modern ones. Widmer's teachings entailed a necessary interaction and friction between European creative practices and the perspectives of the tropics, developing a very peculiar parity

between students and professor, something that evolved quite naturally into the creation of the Group of Composers of Bahia (GCB) in 1966.

The initiative to train composers in Bahia possessed all the ingredients to be considered far-fetched and implausible, viewed from the perspective of 1963, when the group was officially formed. It could seem so even from the standpoint of *Seminários de Música*, the school of music modeled after a German conservatory and established in 1954 with the aim of catching up with the contemporary artistic milieu in Europe. What credibility could be associated with the idea of converting these young people recently admitted to the *Seminários* into active leaders of the compositional movement in Brazil? Nevertheless, this was precisely what happened in 1969, just six years after the beginning of the course, when some of these students won national recognition at the Festival da Guanabara, an event that has become a paradigm for developments in the area of composition in Brazil. Bahia showed no precedent in recent history to compare to this dynamic of educating and articulating student-composers.

Between 1963 and 1987 Widmer became deeply involved in the instruction of sixty-seven students, thirty of whom have since become recognized composers. Despite this prolific activity, there are no comments in the musicological literature concerning a common style practiced in Bahia. The proposals of Lindembergue Cardoso, Fernando Cerqueira, Jamily Oliveira, Agnaldo Ribeiro, and others are always presented as quite autonomous enterprises, reverberating distinctive identities, even though they share a common background.

This is an issue that brings about immediately the problem of compositional identity and its construction in Bahia, and it represents a challenge for the analytic efforts directed to the production of composers related to the GCB: What compositional principles underlie this important movement? How can these principles be understood as reflecting a process of identity construction? How do they relate to the overt discourse of the Group?

It seems reasonable to believe that the analytical elaboration of Widmer's music will present significant elements in the process of addressing these questions. Indeed, this constitutes one of the best justifications for analyzing Widmer's output. Thus, the present undertaking transcends the immediate meaning of the individual work of the composer, or even its insertion in the broader scene of European avant-garde, and points to a better understanding of the compositional path of a Brazilian group. It departs from the interaction with this Swiss-born professor, dedicated to cultural dialogues, organic developments, and inclusive solutions. Two basic ideas, organicism and relativism (inclusive thinking), were elevated by Widmer himself (1988) to the status of all-embracing synthesis of the compositional processes engendered by the activities of both composing and teaching composition:

The first law, “organicism,” has to do with the act of creation, and it is constituted by several phases, such as conceiving, germinating, growing, blooming and ripening. Thus it is a rigorously organic process from which the form results, but that also involves pruning and a permanent critical attitude. The second law, “relativism,” is based on the relational nature of things in themselves and of the distinct perspectives. . . . We have to admit that it is no longer a question of dualisms such as “this or that” . . . but instead, of the paradoxical reality of “this and that.” Inclusiveness instead of exclusivity. (Widmer 1988, 2)

Taking Widmer’s trajectory as an object of investigation and recognizing both the autonomy and interdependence of three distinct fields of information that mark this path, through the discourse he elaborated, the representations produced by former students concerning the pedagogical process, and the compositions themselves, we can demonstrate how these all-encompassing syntheses were in operation in the three fields, and how much credibility they deserve (Lima 1999).

Precisely what should be considered as organicism in Widmer’s works? It is not difficult to identify several lines of development that run through four decades of production. Of these, the most evident is the affinity for environments that favor motivic derivations and elaborations. These are usually embedded in a serial frame, giving priority to operations with small sets, something that may be described either as “serial thematism” or as “motivic serialism.”

Considering analysis as a dialogue between the categories of what is being observed and those of the observer, we can use some analytical tools borrowed from post-tonal theory as valuable markers of Widmer’s organizational work of pitch. The processes of motivic and melodic elaboration are supported by the constant use of trichords (014) and (025) as structural units. It is through these units, and also through some tetrachords derived from them, such as (0125), (0134), (0347), (0145), (0235), (0136), (0257), (0136), and (0358), among others, that the thematic ideas are usually developed (see Example 1). Prevalent since the beginning of Widmer’s output, in the 1950s, this procedure has generated many distinct formats over the course of four decades, corroborating the interest in inclusiveness, and also the quest for a synergy between organic development and constant relativism of the musical logic produced.

In pieces such as *Suite op. 6* for piano (1952), *Gráfico de la Peteñera op. 21* for voice and guitar (1955–60), and *Concerto op. 33* for violin and orchestra (1965), one can identify a free serial environment in which the motives intertwine to build more complex sets, without a clearly discernible concern in relation to the aggregate. On the other hand, in pieces such as *Ceremony After a Fire Raid op. 28* for choir (1962), *Partita II op. 23* for flute and cembalo (1962), *Bloco I op. 27* for chamber orchestra (1962), *Prismas op. 70* for piano and orchestra (1971), and *Quinteto II op. 63* (1969/75), the

Example 1

op. 6 - Suite for piano (1951) op. 12 - 'Argovia' Quintet (1955) op. 17 - Bahia Concerto, piano and orch. (1959)

c. 1 c. 2 c. 6 (0134) (0125) (0125) (0125)

(014) (0145) (0135) (0235)

op. 19 - Partita I (1959) op. 21 - Grafico de la Petateira (1955-1960)

(025) (014) (014) (014) ...

op. 22 - Côco (1961) op. 23 - Partita II - Louré (1962) op. 28 - Ceremony after a fire raid (1962)

(025) + (025) ... (0123) (0145) (0347) (0123) (0347) (0145)

op. 34 - Ave Maria (1962) op. 33 - Concerto (1965) op. 37 - Ludus (1966)

(025) (025 + 014) (0134) (014) (01234) (01234) (02357 = 025 ...)

op. 70 - Prismas (1971) op. 63 - Quinteto II (1969-195) op. 80 - Trilemma (1973)

(0123) (0347) (0145) (0145) (0167) (0145) (014+025)

op. 64 - Sinopse (1970) op. 93 - Trégua (1976)

(013+013) (014) (014) (013) (0123) (0145) (0134))235) (025 ...)

op. 102 - Ignis (1978) op. 124 - Gira Estrela (1980)

(025 + 025...) (025 + 025...)

motivic work is delimited by a twelve-tone series without any emphasis on the use of systematic twelve-tone operations.

Ave Maria op. 34 for choir (1962) illustrates a quite interesting technique of harmonic immobility through the valorization of small gestures that are simply repeated throughout the piece. *Divertimento III - Côco*, op. 22 (1961) marks the beginning of the introduction of native materials with its consequent emphasis on (025), an important element in the scales used in several different cultural traditions in Brazil. *Trégua* op. 93 for flute (1976) presents a cycle of transformations of the segments of a series. *Sinopse* op. 64 for orchestra (1970) takes the aggregate as its starting point, and from there delineates a number of specific contours. In *Vértice* op. 112 for piano solo (1978), the aggregate is built as a consequence of piling up thirds.

Cosmofonia II, op. 162 for cello solo (1987) presents the aggregate melodically in two halves.

Widmer makes constant use of serial strategies, but this tendency is rarely acknowledged. Attention is many times driven to other aspects of his music related to the interactions between distinct references, a feature that is usually described as eclectic, combining timbre, textural and dynamics games, local idioms, and melodic and harmonic references. Notwithstanding this considerable diversity of profiles, Widmer's compositional thinking is always oriented in terms of motives and sets.

The idea of organicism in Widmer involves a superficial level related specifically to the motivic work and other more remote elements that include a number of distinct entities abstracted from the surface, such as complex sets originated by the motivic elaboration, scale collections, systems derived from these scales, twelve-tone series, and cycles of serial transformation. The connection between these superimposed levels of compositional planning comprise many distinct strategies that undoubtedly have played an important role in Widmer's compositional thinking.

Identifying a period of his compositional activity in which octatonic strategies are given high priority, from the beginning of the 1980s onwards, represents a significant opportunity to deepen the understanding of this compositional dynamic involving surface and reference structures, enabling a reconceptualization of the dialectic pair organicism/relativism. The inspection of some twenty pieces with octatonic orientation (see Table 1) offers the researcher a large field of data and represents a synthesis of Widmer's previous phases.

Widmer created this body of work during his last period of activity as a composer, while the serial and motivic-oriented experiences are present since the beginning of his output. Nevertheless, there is no contradiction between the two directions. Widmer discovered that octatonic strategies could absorb a great deal of the previously developed procedures, providing a wealth of interfaces with several distinct contexts (modal, tonal, atonal, pentatonic, and hexatonic) while also permitting a fertile dialogue with elements originating in local cultures. Additionally, the elaboration of the "octatonic world" did not preclude, but stimulated, the interest in coloristic gestures and indeterminacy.

The creation of these multiple interfaces produces an amazing contradiction. Since the beginning of his production Widmer flirted with and felt reinforced by the GCB's heterodox (1967) maxim "in principle, we are against all and every asserted principle" (*Compositores da Bahia & Música Experimental* 1966), thus opening the possibility of making things relative, including reference systems, and demonstrating an example of the hybridization of procedures. With the octatonic solution, the hybridization itself becomes embedded in the system, providing for unquestionable coherence and unity without giving up ambiguity and subtleties.

Table 1. Pieces with Octatonic Orientation

Concerto for clarinet and piano op. 116	1979
Sonata “Monte Pascoal” op. 122, piano solo	1980
Duo op. 127 for violin and piano	
Quatro Estações do Sonho op. 129, 2 fl / strings	1981
Quarteto VI op. 130	
Interface op. 135, for string quartet	1982
Sertania op. 138 (Sinfonia do sertão)	1983
Sinfonia II op. 139 (Médio São Francisco)	
Utopia op. 142 for mixed group	
Trio op. 144 for clarinet, cello and piano	1984
Concerto op. 147 for double-bass and orch.	1985
Concerto op. 148 for bassoon and orch.	
Paisagem baiana IV op. 149, fl, vn, vla e vc	
Quarteto VII (Amabile) op. 157	1986
Cosmofonia II op. 162 for cello solo	1987
Brasiliiana, Trio for fl. vc. and harpsich. op. 166	1988
Toadas dos remeiros do S. Francisco op. 168	
Neues Klavierheft, op. 170	
Ich liege, Herr, in deiner Hut op. 173, for organ	1989

The Octatonic Constructions: Three Examples

Conceived as a means to increase flexibility, the octatonic strategies developed by Widmer operate a dynamic interaction between the more explicit level of compositional choices already made—that is, the surface and the level of principles and anticipations—and elaborated as a support for these choices, namely, the structure. In the three examples to be discussed, it is possible to illustrate distinct ways to treat this compositional challenge: (1) sometimes using a specific octatonic collection as a way of demarcating particular sections, as in *Sonata op. 122*; (2) experimenting with intertwined scalar segments originating from the three possible octatonic formats (see Ex. 2) in *Concerto op. 116*; (3) or, taking a short two-part model that he calls *bifonia* (a type of bicinium) as a starting point, as in the *Quatro Estações do Sonho op. 129*, making it function as both an element of the surface and a structural reference.

Example 2



Sonata op. 122, Monte Pascoal

This composition adopts a classic formal model, permitting a comparative approach of the octatonic universe in relation to the traditional solutions. It is quite possible to segment the exposition in four sections—mm. 1–11 (first thematic area), mm. 12–23 (thematic expansion and transition), mm. 24–32 (second thematic area), and mm. 33–43 (codetta)—all integrated by a dramatic design and a consistency of sonority. What is the logic engendered as a framework for this formal scheme and for the integration of the parts into a single whole?

At a first level, the motivic work functions as a kind of tissue generating sonic consistency and involving generally direct derivations, such as the one connecting the gestures of the beginning. More remote relationships are introduced at the beginning of the second thematic area. What is the scope of this coherence presented by this craftsmanship? Would it be possible to discover a logic connecting the “cascade of thirds,” presented by the gesture at mm. 27–29, to the motivic game at the beginning of the exposition? In order to answer this question properly, it is necessary to return to the initial motivic environment. A mapping of motivic formats as prime forms reveals that from the initial trichord (b, d, c#, 013), a number of distinct melodic ideas are developed, projecting two basic tetrachords, (0235, d, c#, b, e) and (0136, d, c#, b, g#).

The elements presented may be gathered in a single octatonic collection—f, e, d, c#, b, b-flat, g#, g, f, e, d, (t2)—upon which structure the motives seem to slide over. Additionally, there is a careful planning of the spatial dimension of the motive formats, emphasizing symmetry as an organizational procedure. Motivic work and spatial planning develop an important synergy along the way.

These insights are extremely important to understand what happens in the second area, especially mm. 25–26. What is presented in these measures is a structural formation, composed of two octatonic collections, (t2) and (t0), standing symmetrically in relation to a central axis, represented

Example 3

1. Presto $\text{♩} = 144$

Handwritten musical score for Example 3, marked Presto. The score is in 2/4 time and consists of six systems of piano and bass staves. It features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs. Dynamics range from fortissimo (ff) to pianissimo (pp). Performance instructions include "poco cresc." and "dim.". The score includes measure numbers 2, 5, 10, 15, 20, and 25.

Example 3 (continued)

Handwritten musical score for Example 3 (continued), measures 25-45. The score is written on two staves (treble and bass clef) and includes dynamic markings, articulation, and fingering.

Measures 25-30: **25** *p* *ff* (5-fingered runs)

Measures 30-35: **30** *fff* *dim* *pp* *pp* (trills and triplets)

Measures 35-40: **35** *mf* *pp* *mf cresc* (trills and triplets)

Measures 40-45: **40** *ff* *p* *pp* *pp* (trills and triplets)

45

Example 4

Example 4 consists of three staves of musical notation in treble clef. The first staff contains measures 1 through 12, with chord symbols (013), (0235), (0136), (0235), (0136), (0136), (0235), and (0257) placed below. The second staff contains measures 13 through 30, with chord symbols (0236), (0135), (01347), (0146), (01358), (02358), and (0135 + 0135) placed below. The third staff contains measures 31 through 42, with chord symbols (01357) and (0268) placed below.

Example 5

Example 5 consists of two parts, a) and b), shown on a single staff. Part a) is the first measure, and part b) is the second measure. Both parts have the chord symbol (0136) written below them.

by the note f-3. Essentially, the compositional solution supporting the entire second thematic area, providing both continuity and contrast, rests upon the activation of a renewed structural formation, increasing the possibilities envisioned at the beginning of the piece through the activation of structural dynamics. In Widmer's "octatonic world" the level of motivic work depends on these more remote structural constructions, involving scalar collections and renewed structural formations. In other words, the structural dimension behaves in a motivic manner, transforming itself all along the pieces.

We shall soon turn attention to the transformation of the operative musical logic once the structural reference is duplicated by this symmetrical construction. Before that, however, it is worthwhile to observe that from the standpoint of pitch organization, continuity is guaranteed by the permanence of at least two basic principles: octatonic logic and spatial symmetry. Contrast, on the other hand, depends on the diversification of elements, harmonic complexity, and dramatic intensification. With this in mind, the music presented by mm. 27–29 may be understood as a consequence of this new structural space opened up by the symmetrical formation of two octatonic collections around f-3. The superimposition of thirds strictly follows the possibilities offered by this amplified structural reference. The formation of the arpeggiated chords played by both hands is intimately connected to the new possibilities established by this continuum

of two octatonic scales. The predominance of scale segments that characterized the initial section is now replaced by this new procedure. This signifies that two quite distinct methods of articulating elements at the surface level may be connected to the same structural universe; and although there is structural reference, the method still serves as a function of octatonic scales and their logic.

Example 6

The image shows three staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'a) right hand' and features a melodic line starting at 't0' and ending at 't2'. It includes several intervals marked with 'V' and a final tritone interval marked with a flat sign. The middle staff is labeled 'left hand' and mirrors the right hand's structure, also starting at 't0' and ending at 't2'. The bottom staff is divided into two sections, 'b)' and 'c)'. Section 'b)' contains two tetrachords with intervallic numbers (01358) and (02358) below them. Section 'c)' contains a pentachord with intervallic numbers (-10), (-7), (-3), (+3), (+7), and (+10) below it, and a 'V' above it. The notation uses a treble clef and a key signature with one flat.

The octatonic universe reconceptualizes the idea of tonal distance, a cornerstone of the compositional work in the classic sonata. The distance is achieved through the diversification of structural references, as well as through the motivic work that accompanies this process. Soon after the closure of the first thematic area, new motivic formats appear in the transition as alternatives to the initial tetrachords (0235 and 0136), (0257, m. 21) and (0236, m.23), and pentachords (01358, m. 27) and (02358, m. 27).

These new formats do not directly reproduce the logic of the octatonic scalar segments; instead they display greater freedom and point to the new structural reference and its fresh logic possibilities of articulating the available elements. As a result, some motivic formats unavailable in a single octatonic collection become quite natural, such as the tetrachord (0135, m. 24 and mm. 30–31), which is typically diatonic and has been used extensively by Widmer as a basic idea for several pieces from prior periods. The accumulation of these strategies engenders the curious compositional paradox referred to previously as an eclecticism based on organicism, produced from the inside out and not through the collage of divergent materials.

It appears significant that the *Sonata* adopts as a subtext the question of the “discovery” of Brazil, and more specifically, the epic narrative of an oceanic crossing, departing from Lisbon and leading to the Monte Pascoal site in Bahia, an event which is the central concern of the second movement of the *Sonata*. The structural and organicist work previously described establishes a dialogue with this narrative dimension associated with the

piece. The motoric character that dominates the exposition, the sweet irregularity of rhythms (3 against 2), and the arched spatial disposition of the motives, reminding the listener of waves, impart this narrative quality. The exposition of the *Sonata* projects the drama of the crossing itself and the adventurous spirit of the enterprise.

From this perspective, the tiny little wave at the beginning, m. 1, and the explosion of thirds in the second thematic section, mm. 27–29, represent distinct aspects of the same compositional gesture, both belonging to a narrative that replicates the Portuguese adventures during the oceanic crossing. The formal design of the exposition nurtures a process of intensification that finds its climax in the cascade of thirds, mm. 27–29. The drastic suspension of the motoric accompaniment from m. 32 onwards signals the beginning of the codetta and provides this closing section with a special character, somewhat ethereal and suspended.

The codetta presents a synthesis of the material introduced earlier in the piece. The first four measures juxtapose ideas of the first and second thematic area: (b, d) (c#, e), 0235, m. 32; (f, b-flat, g), 025, m. 33; (b, d) (c#, e), m. 34; and (b-flat, g, a), 013, m. 35. This may be described as an interaction between the tetrachord (0235), representative of the initial motive, and the tetrachord (0135), produced by the association of the two octatonic collections at the beginning of the second thematic area.

Example 7

Example 7 shows four measures of a melody on a treble clef staff. The notes are: m. 32: B, D, C#, E; m. 33: F, B-flat, G; m. 34: B, D, C#, E; m. 35: B-flat, G, A. Below each measure is a circled measure number: c. 32, c. 33, c. 34, c. 35. Below the staff are the chord symbols: (0235), (025), (0235), (013).

The arpeggiated chords of the codetta reinforce the idea of a structural formation produced by the association of two octatonic constructions—(t0 + t2). The chords reproduce the logic of piled thirds, while the melody evokes the work with scale segments. At m. 36 the b is reached through a and a-flat, indicating that one is progressing over (t0); but, the b is followed by c#, a characteristic element of (t2), associated with the initial context. From this point on, three distinct expectations are offered: the first one deals with a possible return to the initial scenery (b, c# . . . d); the second reproduces a scalar segment of (t0), (a-flat, a, b, c, d, e-flat, f), and assumes a dominant position; and the third possibility is quite subtle, and combines aspects of the first two, establishing a melodic hexatonic progression (a, b, c#, e-flat, f). This last format is heard primarily through the progression presented at m. 42, a curious motivic formation that appears for the first time at this point, (0268). Further in the piece, in the third movement, this detail will be transformed into the basic idea of the movement.

The motivic elaboration associated with the two symmetrical octatonic collections propitiates a number of interesting situations of melodic conflict between neighbor degrees. The ambiguity of the progression from b to either c# or c, in the codetta, and also the previous conflict between b and b-flat, mm. 38–39, can be understood as a result of the synthesis portrayed by the section. Indeed, these melodic frictions are already present in the transition, when the interaction between (t0) and (t2) is activated. The introduction of the note c, m. 21, in a section dominated by (t2)—a format that does not include this element—deserves special attention because it predicts the transformations that will take place later in the second thematic area. Details and structure are articulated from a single compositional plan.

Two main directions of motivic elaboration dominate the exposition, and indeed the whole movement, representing transformations of the two initial basic tetrachords, (0235) and (0136). These sets reflect a polarity already present in the octatonic scale itself, easily identified through the observation of adjacent trichords, tetrachords, and pentachords in the scale: (013, d, c#, b); (023, c#, b, b-flat); (0134, d, c#, b, b-flat), (0235, c#, b, b-flat, g#); (01346, d, c#, b, b-flat, g#) and (02356, c#, b, b-flat, g#, g). As we noted previously, the tetrachords (0135) and (0236) present in the second thematic area can be understood as interactions between these two poles.

This polarity between the basic tetrachords prompts analysis in the direction of a proficient mapping of motivic forms present in the octatonic universe (Lima 2000). Such a mapping reveals that motivic elaboration is indeed a fundamental dimension in this music, and that it is possible to follow a process of differentiation of the basic formats, establishing degrees of proximity in relation to the initial context. An appropriate example of this “motivic distance,” the horizontal parallel to tonal distance, can be seen in the tetrachord (0268), a remote format presented for the first time in the codetta of the exposition, which then becomes the central issue in the last movement. The transformation of formats initially introduced as remote into objects of privileged attention also points to the dynamics between surface and structure in Ernst Widmer’s music.

Concerto op. 116

In contrast to the *Sonata*, which begins with the presentation of thematic material derived from one of the octatonic collections, the main interest of this piece seems to be the interconnection of octatonic scalar segments worked out as motive forms and functioning as agents of the interaction between surface and structure.

The eight-measure theme introduced by the piano, mm. 1–5, conveys a flavor typical of the Brazilian Northeast, presenting from the outset a

Example 8

Con brio

The musical score for Example 8 is written for Clarinet and Piano. It begins with the tempo marking "Con brio". The Clarinet part (top staff) features a melodic line that starts on a low note, moves up through several intervals, and ends on a high note, creating a beautiful arch. The Piano part (middle and bottom staves) provides harmonic support with chords and moving lines. Dynamics include *f*, *sf*, and *ff*.

captivating logic, based on clarity, economy of means, and at the same time subtleties. The clarinet presents a beautiful melodic arch spanning almost three octaves. The whole piece sounds quite simple and articulate, but there are eleven pitch-classes involved in these first eight measures. What is the real upper neighbor of the note *c* at m. 3: *d-flat* or *d*? And at m. 5, does the *f* have as its lower neighbor *e-flat* or *e*? The frictions between *e/e-flat*, *d/d-flat*, *b/b-flat*, and *a/a-flat* are handled carefully enough to produce concomitant coherence and paradox. What is involved in this compositional game? The problem posed by this theme is precisely this harmonic integration of distinct elements.

A careful inspection of the material presented by the piano, mm. 1–8, reveals two transpositional levels of the initial motive (*e-flat*, *d*, *c*, *f*):

m(0)	[<i>e-flat</i> , <i>d</i> , <i>c</i> , <i>f</i>]	<i>a</i> , <i>b</i> , <i>c</i>	m. 1–5	(t0)
m(10)	[<i>d-flat</i> , <i>c</i> , <i>b-flat</i> , <i>e-flat</i>]	<i>g</i> , <i>a</i> , <i>b-flat</i>	m. 6	(t1)
m(5)	[<i>a-flat</i> , <i>g</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>b-flat</i>]	<i>d</i> , <i>e</i> , <i>f</i>	m. 6–7	(t2)

The point deserves further attention. The three octatonic formats are involved in the presentation of this theme, and they intertwine to form a single whole. The motivic work presented through the clarinet part confirms this assessment: m. 1 is related to the original motive, *m*(0), and therefore to (t0); mm. 2–3 projects *m*(5) and (t2); and mm. 3–4 evokes *m*(10) and (t1). The model and the two transpositional levels—*m*(0), *m*(5), and *m*(10)—are scalar segments that project their structural references, as shown below:

compositional game occurs around the role of pitch-class *c*, which belongs to two distinct formats— $m(0)$ and $m(10)$. In the context of the first motive, the *c* may be associated with the *d*; in the second it relates to *d-flat*. The octave reached at *m. 3* exposes this ambiguity, linking elements apparently identical, but motivically differentiated.

The same kind of friction that takes place between *d* and *d-flat* is projected in the alternation of *e* and *e-flat*. Between the end of *m. 4* and the beginning of *m. 5*, the friction among the possible neighbors of *c* and *f* is intensified: *d-flat/c* or *d-natural/c*, *e/f* or *f/e-flat*? These two or three beats project a complex set (0123458), which although appearing to be a cluster is nevertheless capable of preserving the clarity of melodic ambiguity caused by its distinct neighbors. The point here is the role played by this strategy of friction in the formation of complex chords. The purity of sound characteristic of the small motives is somehow preserved in the construction of these complex sets.

All this paves the way for the *b* of *m. 5*, which is reinforced by the *d* played by the clarinet, corrects the memory of *d-flat* and *b-flat* presented earlier. Simply to evoke the conflict is insufficient; therefore, *m. 7* exposes the friction between *b* and *b-flat*, and does this in a very interesting way. The *b-flat* of *m. 7* is related to $m(5)$, while the *b-natural* evokes $m(0)$. The subtlety involved is that in the (t2), the octatonic collection that originates $m(5)$, the *b* is a natural neighbor of *b-flat*, thereby demonstrating that the conflict between the two motivic segments is absorbed in a single collection.

At this point in the miniature drama portrayed by this theme, the motive is amplified in the direction offered by the scalar collection, exposing it a little bit more. The *sforzato* indication makes it clear that this is the desired articulation. Over the course of this piece, several other situations will confirm this negotiation between motivic formats and octatonic collections, making the latter ever more exposed.

Example 12



We must also note the internal symmetry of the motive $m(0)$, a direct consequence of its relationship with the octatonic scale that has symmetry systematically distributed all along. The arrival of the *b* exposes how the expectations created by motives and scale coincide. The use of symmetry in the process of melodic construction is manifested several other times in this movement.

Example 13

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The first staff contains a sequence of notes with annotations: +3, +2, m(10), t0, m(0), m(9), m(6), m(3), -3, -2. The second staff contains notes with annotations: c. 15, t0/m9, t1/m4, t2/m2, t1/m7. Brackets and lines connect these annotations to specific notes or groups of notes on the staves.

During the first movement of the *Concerto*, the initial motive is gradually amplified through the inclusion of new elements, always in accordance with the reference scales. This process of developing horizontal complexity is articulated by careful planning of transpositional levels, culminating in the presentation of the aggregate, motivically expressed. This first movement is not merely a twelve-tone series, but a motivic transformation that involves scale collection (t1) and (t2).

Example 14

The image shows a single staff of musical notation. It contains a sequence of notes with annotations: t1 and t2. Brackets and lines connect these annotations to specific notes or groups of notes on the staff.

As Quatro Estações do Sonho op. 129

Composed in 1981, this work is, in fact, a double concerto for two flutes and string orchestra that involves four movements which may be performed individually, in pairs, or integrally in several orderings, as a reference to the distinct nature of the experience of seasons in the two hemispheres. In the front page of the score, Widmer reproduces a two-part fragment he calls *bifonia*, serving as an important compositional reference for the piece. It is a two-voice motivic model involving two tetrachords—(0136)—and progresses from octave to unison. This compositional tool becomes quite important in several pieces composed during the 1980s, including the *Duo op. 127* for violin and piano, *Sertania op. 138*, *Sinfonia III op. 145*, and *Quarteto Amabile op. 157*. As a compositional entity, it finds a place between surface and structure, presenting material that is explicitly used in the pieces, while at the same time pointing to octatonic references. The basic motive present in this formation presents a strong modal orientation and appears frequently in Brazilian Northeastern contexts. Furthermore, it displays an incredible flexibility, leading smoothly to more complex formations.

d-natural, generating a friction between octatonic and diatonic orientation. This suggests, once again, that the octatonic conception adopted permits references to other contexts, apparently remote. Subtle changes in the motivic design initiate the process. This does not mean that two independent universes such as octatonism and diatonicism are confronted as individual references. Quite the opposite, an “organic” elaboration internal to the octatonic universe generates this polarity. The difference between these two ways of interpreting Widmer’s music is fundamental to the understanding of his work.

The octatonic system here described in relation to Widmer’s music is not merely a harmonic system of reference, displaying autonomy from the melodic and motivic work, or from the spatial configurations. Analytic interpretations that overlook integrating these parameters miss one of the most valuable aspects of Widmer’s contribution. What is at stake is precisely the possibility of developing an all-embracing compositional tool, capable of multiple references, including materials from quite distinct cultural origins. The construction of coherence through flexibility indicates an interesting proximity between these compositional strategies and the concept of *Grundgestalt*, such as described by Epstein (1979) and Neff (1995).

The five initial measures of the piece display quite clearly the interest in symmetry and the motivic elaboration, indicating an octatonic horizon:

Example 18

Example 18 consists of two musical staves, labeled a) and b). Staff a) shows a melodic line in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The notes are numbered 1 through 20. Brackets below the staff group notes into intervals: 1-2, 2-3, 6-5, 5-4, 7-8, 8-9, 12-11, 11-10, 15-13, 13-14, 19-20. A double bar line is placed after measure 11, with a fermata over the final note (a natural A). Staff b) shows a similar melodic line in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The notes are numbered 1 through 12. Brackets below the staff group notes into intervals: 1-2, 2-3, 6-5, 5, 10-11, 11-12, and 9.

A Synthesis of the Analytical Observations

1. The identification of octatonic strategies reveals compositional logics and subtleties in operation, leading to an interpretive perspective that can be described as a web connecting surface and structure.
2. The structural level is not fixed, but dynamic. There is no space for the traditional opposition between surface and structure in terms of mobility versus permanence. Identical to the surface, the structure is also involved in transformations. The choice of elements

belonging to the surface point to a number of structural configurations as well as certain ways of approaching them, for example, emphasizing scalar segments or superimposed thirds.

3. Both structure and surface generate spatial configurations, consisting of the elements involved and the intervals between them. The motivic formations inhabit both structure and surface, and the notion of spatial symmetry can be found in either.
4. The diversification of structural formations and the process of motivic elaboration and transformation create distinctive identities for specific sections of the pieces considered, acting as markers of tonal distance or a motivic distance. Both concepts are involved in the generation of form.
5. The transformations undergone by structure and surface lead at times to diatonic, hexatonic, and twelve-tone environments. These transformations take place as “internal” processes of the octatonic horizon. Organicism and unity prevail over juxtaposition, eclecticism, or non-sequitur. This system’s flexibility facilitates a connection between the supposedly “autonomous” space of formal music construction and the reverberations of Brazilian cultural contexts.
6. The differentiation of motivic formats represents a fundamental aspect of this process of system diversification. The formation of complex sets is parallel to the process of motivic elaboration and transformation.
7. The processes of chord formation are intimately connected to the motivic universe. The spatial disposition of chords, often projecting motivic formats, serves an important compositional strategy. The same applies to voice leading, or *bifonia*; chord progression between fundamentals one tritone apart plays an important role in the octatonic universe.
8. The friction between neighbors is one of the most important melodic processes, with undeniable harmonic consequences testifying to the interconnection of scalar segments in the structural level. Other frequent strategies include chromatic filling of melodic space, symmetry around an axis, and melodic disruption, that is, when a specific note interrupts the logic established by the beginning of a motive as in the formations [(01234, -1, -2, -1, +2) and (01346, -1, -2, -3, +2)].
9. Anomalous elements are seldom gratuitous, playing an important role in the renewal of the established logic, as interstices to new configurations.

Coda

The negotiation between surface and structure belongs to the domain of Widmer's compositional theory, which can be comprehended in a broader sense, not only as the universe of organicism or structural strategies, but also as a fertile ground to address questions related to cultural identity and context. Widmer established the octatonic strategies because they offer a great margin of flexibility, leading to interactions with serial procedures, tonal and modal environments, and the like. Through this manner they were capable of evoking many distinct contexts—Brazilian Northeastern tradition, romanticism and post-romanticism, nationalism, free atonality, strict serialism, indeterminacy, and clusters—without losing a sense of internal coherence, and even propitiating interesting dialogues among these domains. They appear as a phenomenon of maturity in Widmer's output and promote a reconceptualization of several characteristics introduced in earlier periods, such as the preference for trichords (014) and (025)—now embedded in the octatonic scales—and the motivic work based on scalar fragments, among others.

The elaboration and mastery of the compositional framework through octatonic strategies create an idiosyncratic solution developed by Widmer, leading to a compositional identity. Such a framework distinguishes itself from the use of the same scales made by Bartók and Stravinsky, and it crystallizes principles and attitudes expressed since the beginning of the 1950s in Switzerland, together with perceptions and discoveries made through his contact with Brazil's multi-cultural scenario. There is an important connection between this construction and Widmer's attitude towards musical tradition, probably inherited from Willy Burkhard, who displays mistrust in relation to radical futurisms and the attention dedicated to phenomena that comprise long periods of time, an aspect that finds a continuation in Widmer's analytic efforts focusing on cadences, drones, and false relations (Widmer 1971a, 1984b, 1988).

The creation of new compositional systems was a breakthrough for twentieth-century composers, an oasis permitting the recovery of informational autonomy, considered lost among the decay of information attributed to the tonal system. As incredible as it may seem, this situation led to an interesting paradox: each composition tended to be transformed into a manifesto for a new system; while on the other hand, the bond with tradition and tonality was reinforced as a model of reference to be followed or avoided, reformed, or abolished.

Widmer always expressed these concerns in his compositional work. It is quite easy to identify an impulse towards the creation or adoption of

new systems, and it is possible to demonstrate how these constructions also were engaged in the reconceptualization of important aspects of Western tradition and Brazilian cultural traditions, beginning with the *Divertimento III, Côco, op. 22* (1961), be it for the sake of making relative the absolutist tendency inherent in the new systems, or for the sake of a deep involvement with the musical traditions of the past.

There is a curious reverberation between this orientation and the cultural significance that Bahia represents, always expressing through its cultural output a permanent tension between tradition and innovation. This friction is likely associated with the ancient inclination towards anarchic and iconoclastic humor, a feature that encompasses a huge rainbow of gradations of cultural phenomena as diverse as the seventeenth-century poetry of Gregório de Mattos, the music of tropicalism, Dorival Caymmi, and Carlinhos Brown, among others.

Do Widmer's strategies represent a reference for the production generated by other members of the Group of Composers of Bahia? Attempts to expose direct influences do not seem successful, considering how the idea of anti-school and anti-epitome was central to the Group. Nevertheless, there are some indications that the identification of shared compositional principles is a productive approach as in the use of multiple references, for instance. Works such as Lindembergue Cardoso's *Ritual op. 102* for orchestra, Jamarly Oliveira's *mesmamusica* for piano solo, and Fernando Cerqueira's *Memórias Espirais* for mixed group, cultivate references to the rhythmic universe of Afro-Bahian candomblé music, to minimalism in a dialogue with this same universe, and to children's melodies from the Bahian Recôncavo, respectively. The use of symmetry as an organizing compositional principle offers many examples. The initial gesture of *Ritual op. 102*, a piece developed through the elaboration and transformation of a single symmetrical set, illustrates this point.

Example 19

Example 19 consists of two musical staves, (a) and (b), illustrating pitch classes and intervallic transformations.

Staff (a) shows a sequence of pitch classes: $-1, +6, 10, +6, 1, -1, -6, +10, -6, +1$. A vertical line labeled 'V' is positioned above the pitch class '1'. The sequence is symmetric around the central '1'.

Staff (b) shows two sequences of pitch classes: $6-Z41$ and $7-Z12$. A vertical line labeled 'V' is positioned above the pitch class '7'. A bracket below the staff indicates a span of 10 units.

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A List of Ernst Widmer’s Students

1950s in Switzerland

01. Heiny Schuhmacher

1960s in Brazil

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 02. Milton Gomes | 17. Ilza Costa Nogueira |
| 03. Jamarly Oliveira | 18. Lucemar de Alcântara |
| 04. Fernando Cerqueira | 19. Henry Bong Foo Chu |
| 05. Lindemberg Cardoso | 20. Horst Schwebel |
| 06. Rinaldo Rossi | 21. Ralph Waddey |
| 07. Nikolau Kokron | 22. Luis Eduardo |
| 08. Antônio José Santana
Martins (Tomzé) | 23. Maria do Carmo Correa |
| 09. Carmen Mettig Rocha | 24. Tuzé de Abreu |
| 10. Camel Abras | 25. Moacyr Albuquerque |
| 11. Miguel Huertas | 26. Antônio Renato Froes - “Perna” |
| 12. Eduardo Vieira de Mello | 27. Maria da Graça Santos |
| 13. Djalma Novais | 28. Roberto Solano de Freitas |
| 14. Rafael de Menezes Bastos | 29. Carlos Alberto Purificação |
| 15. Myrian Kobles Brasil | 30. Marco Antônio Guimarães |
| 16. Carlos Rodrigues de Carvalho | |

1970s in Brazil

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 31. Agnaldo Ribeiro | 36. Monclar Valverde |
| 32. Juracy Cardoso | 37. José Maria Freitas (Zeca Freitas) |
| 33. Franklin Oliveira | 38. Ruy Brasileiro Borges |
| 34. Daniel Damasceno | 39. Eunice Moura |
| 35. Luiz Oliveira Maia | 40. Sérgio Souto |

41. Lindbergh Pires
42. Aderbal Duarte
43. Thomas Gruetzmacher
44. André Pelágio Bessa
45. Thomaz Oswald

46. Hans Jurgen Ludwig
47. Dilson Araújo Alves Peixoto
48. Élcio Rodrigues Sá
49. Roberto Luís de Castro
50. Paulo Costa Lima

1980s in Brazil

51. José Roberto Alves Marfuz
52. Moisés Silva Gabrielli Filho
53. Wellington Gomes da Silva
54. José Coelho Barreto
55. Helder Rocha Leite
56. Dulce Barbosa dos Santos
57. Paulo Chagas Ferreira
58. Renato César de Aguiar
59. Frederico Meireles Dantas
60. Ângelo Tavares Castro

61. Celso Mendonça de Aguiar
62. Hélio Bacelar Viana
63. José Carlos Carvalho de
Mendonça
64. Pedro Antônio de Oliveira
Carneiro
65. Almiro Mascarenhas Moura
66. Antônio Fernando Burgos Lima
67. Cícero Alves de Almeida Filho