

COMPOSITIONAL DEVICES FOR EXPLORING & STRUCTURING PHRASE MATERIAL

NOTE: Definitions in quotes are musical definitions from the *Harvard Dictionary of Music*.

1. DEVELOPMENT/WORKING OUT/RESHAPING/TRANSFORMING

"The important technique of recent composition which consists in the 'unfolding' of the thematic material. These devices are used in a manner designed to bring about a feeling of evolution and growth, of increased intensity at higher 'temperature,' of dynamic stress and climax."

- to gradually carry the phrase to a new choreographic intention through repeating, mirroring, augmenting, diminuting, isolating; the phrase evolves to a new physical situation.

2. TRANSFORMATION

"The modification of a musical subject or motive made with a view to change its personality."

- to change the phrasing/organization of energy and time (re-phrase timing & energy)
- to change the dynamic/character (change from resiliency to strength)
- to explore nuance

3. TRANSPOSITION

"The rewriting or the *ex tempore* performance of a composition at another pitch, i.e., in another key."

- to change range or plane orientation of movement
- to put the movement of one part of the body on another part
e.g., arms to legs, legs to arms
- to change the level of the movement
e.g., put aerial or middle level phrase onto floor
- to change the state of the rotation of body parts
e.g., change from turned-out to parallel

4. ISOLATION (paring down)

- to explore one or two aspects of the phrase e.g., only do: the focus and head movements of the phrase, the port de bras, the shifts of weight, the leg gestures, the directional changes, etc.

5. SCRAMBLING/REARRANGING

- to reorganize the material within the phrase or the structure of the work (think of movement as a vocabulary list)

6. ACCUMULATION

- A sequentially based repetition: to start at a specific point in the phrase and gradually add the following counts, going back to the starting point each time and accumulating.
e.g., 1; 1,2; 1,2,3; 1,2,3,4; 4,4,4; 5,6,7; 7,8; 8

7. INVERSION

"The general meaning of the term is substitution of higher or lower tones and vice-versa."

There are two main types of inversion:

Harmonic — an interval is inverted by transferring its lower note into the higher octave or its higher note into the lower octave.

Melodic — a melody is inverted by changing each ascending interval into the corresponding descending interval, and vice-versa. The result is a mirror-like exchange of upward and downward movements, comparable to the contours of a forest and its reflection in a lake.

- to perform the spatial opposite, or counter-direction with the same body part; a configuration of 3 or more movements is needed to discover the "invertedness"

Reminder:

do not change level, invert in relation to center of body
consider center of weight

8. RETROGRADE

"the term denotes the backward reading of a melody, i.e., beginning with the last note and ending with the first one."

- to go from the end of a phrase to the beginning, as in running a film backwards

9. SPLICING/ INSERTION/ INTERRUPTING

"Highlighting what you have by bringing in high contrast."

- to "insert" or "splice in" new material

10. EMBELLISHMENT/ LAYERING

"Arose as a spontaneous act on the part of the interpreter who, in performing a written melody, enlivened it, expanded it, or varied it through his technique of improvisation."

- to add on top of, or to give a special emphasis to one aspect of the phrase
e.g., adding an elbow movement every so often; adding a prop/costume or person
- to improvise on the structure of the phrase

11. CANON

"A polyphonic composition in which all parts have the same melody throughout, although starting at different points."

e.g., to start the *port de bras* 4 counts later

12. AUGMENTATION

"the presentation of a subject in doubled value, e.g., quarter-note replaced by the half-note."

- to lengthen and significantly change time values/slow motion, stillness
- to increase range/fragment gesture

13. DIMINUTION

"the presentation of a subject in halved value, e.g., quarter-note replaced by an eighth-note."

- to reduce in size
- to condense time

14. MIRRORING

- to repeat
- to do it on the other side
- to change the facing
- to travel on a line