Stylistic Development and Variation Form Dutilleux's Second Symphony, *Le Double*, in Context

by Christian Morris

Henri Dutilleux's lifelong belief in the validity of pitch hierarchies was, in the works of the 1940s and 50s, expressed in his continued use of classical forms such as the sonata and symphony. The period ends with the Second Symphony (1955–59), the work that followed, *Métaboles* (1959–64), marking the beginning of Dutilleux's mature style. In *Métaboles* and thereafter his works usually have an untraditional number of movements, their titles always avoiding direct reference to classical forms.

The structures of individual movements from *Métaboles* onwards are normally analyzed on a case-by-case basis, not with any preconceptions based upon established forms, since Dutilleux's approach in these mature works is idiosyncratic. This can make his music perplexing to study, since he was not a composer who liked to provide clues to his compositional process.[1] Despite this, Dutilleux was less reticent about musical processes involving variation. The title of *Métaboles*, though ostensibly untraditional, in fact describes a process of variation in which, in each of the movements, "la figure initiale – mélodique, rythmique, harmonique ou simplement instrumentale – subit une succession de transformations."[2] The ninth section of *Mystère de l'instant* (1985–89), similarly, is entitled *Métamorphoses (sur le nom SACHER)*, Jeremy Thurlow observing that "le terme de 'métamorphose' est presque synonyme de celui de 'métabole',"[3] the SACHER theme being elaborated in a similar way. The first movement of *Tout un monde lointain* (1967–70) contains a theme and variations, Dutilleux even marking the position of each variation (beginning at rehearsal mark 9) in the published score.

1 As is often noted by Caroline Potter; see, for example, "Messiaen and Dutilleux," in *Oliver Messiaen: Music, Art and Literature*, ed. Christopher Dingle and Nigel Simeone (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 23–37, esp. p. 33.

2 Henri Dutilleux, quoted by Pierrette Mari in *Henri Dutilleux* (Paris: Hachette, 1973), pp. 181–82.

3 Jeremy Thurlow, *Dutilleux: … la musique des songes* (Notre-Dame de Bliquetuit: Millénaire III, 2006), p. 240.

That variation form held a privileged position in Dutilleux's thinking is also suggested by changes in his approach before the Second Symphony. The Sonata for Piano (1947–48) was a significant turning point. Its first movement, in sonata form, looks back to the Sonatina for Flute (1943) and Sonata for Oboe (1947). The last movement, however, marks Dutilleux's first use of a theme and variations during this period. The next major work, the First Symphony (1950–51), takes the rejection of sonata form a stage further. Here the first movement is a passacaglia, one that Daniel Humbert calls "une grande variation libre,"[4] and the last movement is marked "Finale con variazioni."

Thurlow observes that these movements, even those that are specifically labelled as variations, have an "approche non dogmatique" that is "loin de constituer un modèle académique de variations."[5] Despite this they share an important characteristic: they can be partitioned in a way that is distinct from sonata form, especially since they reject the concepts of exposition and recapitulation. Instead they have a more regular sectionalisation that derives from the model of constant elaboration seen in a theme and variations. In the Piano Sonata this is obvious enough, the sections being clearly delineated by Dutilleux marking the positions of chorale and four variations. Thurlow also divides the first and last movements of the First Symphony along similar lines. He avoids the use of the word variation in the last movement, preferring to divide it into a theme followed by sections I–V.[6] The first movement opening, similarly, is followed by sections II–V.[7]

The variation argument was tentatively made in a recent paper by Mauricio Beltrán Miranda and the present author.[8] It was based upon sketch material for the Second Symphony held at the Paul Sacher Foundation that suggested that the harpsichord idea appearing at rehearsal mark 3 could be considered the theme, especially since the section that follows at 6 – a development of this theme – had been marked in the sketched short score "1ère Var." (see *Plate 1*). The authors concluded that the movement may have been "a hybrid of sonata and variation forms."[9] The variation argument could, however, have been taken further. Regardless of the sketch material, a more regular sectionalisation is suggested by a series of thematically related climactic points within the first movement (see *Table 1*). Even after the variation argument breaks down, there is enough consistency in mood and thematic development between subsequent climactic points to

4 Daniel Humbert, *Henri Dutilleux: L'œuvre et le style musical* (Paris: Champion / Geneva: Slatkine, 1985), p. 45.
5 Jeremy Thurlow, *Dutilleux* (see note 3), p. 53.
6 Ibid., p. 75.
7 Ibid., p. 64.
8 Mauricio Beltrán Miranda and Christian Morris, "Between the Pages: Composition Process in Dutilleux's Symphony No. 2," *Tempo*, 67, no. 266 (October 2013), pp. 54–64.
9 Ibid., p. 61.

at least justify labelling them as discrete sections. As such, the structure mirrors Dutilleux's free approach to variation form in the Piano Sonata and First Symphony.

Beginning	RM (Rehearsal Mark) 3	RM 6	RM 10 (-1)	RM 11	RM 15
Introduction	Harpsichord THEME	Variation?/ Section 1	*Climax 1*	Variation?/ Section 2	*Climax 2*

RM 16	RM 20	RM 22	RM 29	RM 32	RM 40
Section 3	*Climax 3*	Section 4	*Climax 4*	Section 5	Coda

Table 1: Proposed structure of the first movement of Dutilleux's Second Symphony, *Le Double*.

Two further factors also support the theory that this movement was conceived as a set of variations. The first is that Dutilleux's increased concentration on variation forms in the 1940s and 50s appears to have gone hand in hand with the emergence of his concept of *croissance progressive*, a procedure involving "small cells which are gradually developed."[10] Dutilleux himself dates its first use to this time, saying: "it is a central preoccupation of mine from the First Symphony."[11] *Croissance progressive*, which stresses continuous development, is alien to a traditional structure such as sonata form, which stresses recapitulation. Given this, it is not surprising that his gradual discovery of the procedure led him to adopt a form better able to express it: variation form with its emphasis also on continuous development. Having applied this to the First Symphony, it seems unlikely that he would then have reverted to sonata form in *Le Double*.

The final factor concerns Dutilleux's choice of subtitle for the symphony.[12] When asked by Claude Glayman why he chose to name it *Le Double* Dutilleux replied: "Tout simplement à cause des deux orchestres et pour toutes les raisons déjà énoncées […]. Je n'aime guère les appellations classiques: sonate, symphonie…"[13] "Les raisons déjà énoncées" did not include a further meaning of the word *Double*, of which he must surely have been aware: "A French term used during the 17th and early 18th centuries for a technique of variation."[14] While his failure to acknowledge this may be related to the composer's reticence regarding technical explanations, it

10 Henri Dutilleux, quoted by Caroline Potter in *Henri Dutilleux: His Life and Works* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 1997), p. 60.
11 Ibid.
12 I am grateful to Robert Piencikowski, who suggested this to me during my visit to the Paul Sacher Foundation in 2015.
13 Henri Dutilleux, *Mystère et mémoire des sons: Entretiens avec Claude Glayman* (Paris: Belfond, 1993), p. 101.
14 Greer Garden, "Double," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, second edition, ed. Stanley Sadie (London and New York: Macmillan, 2001), p. 519.

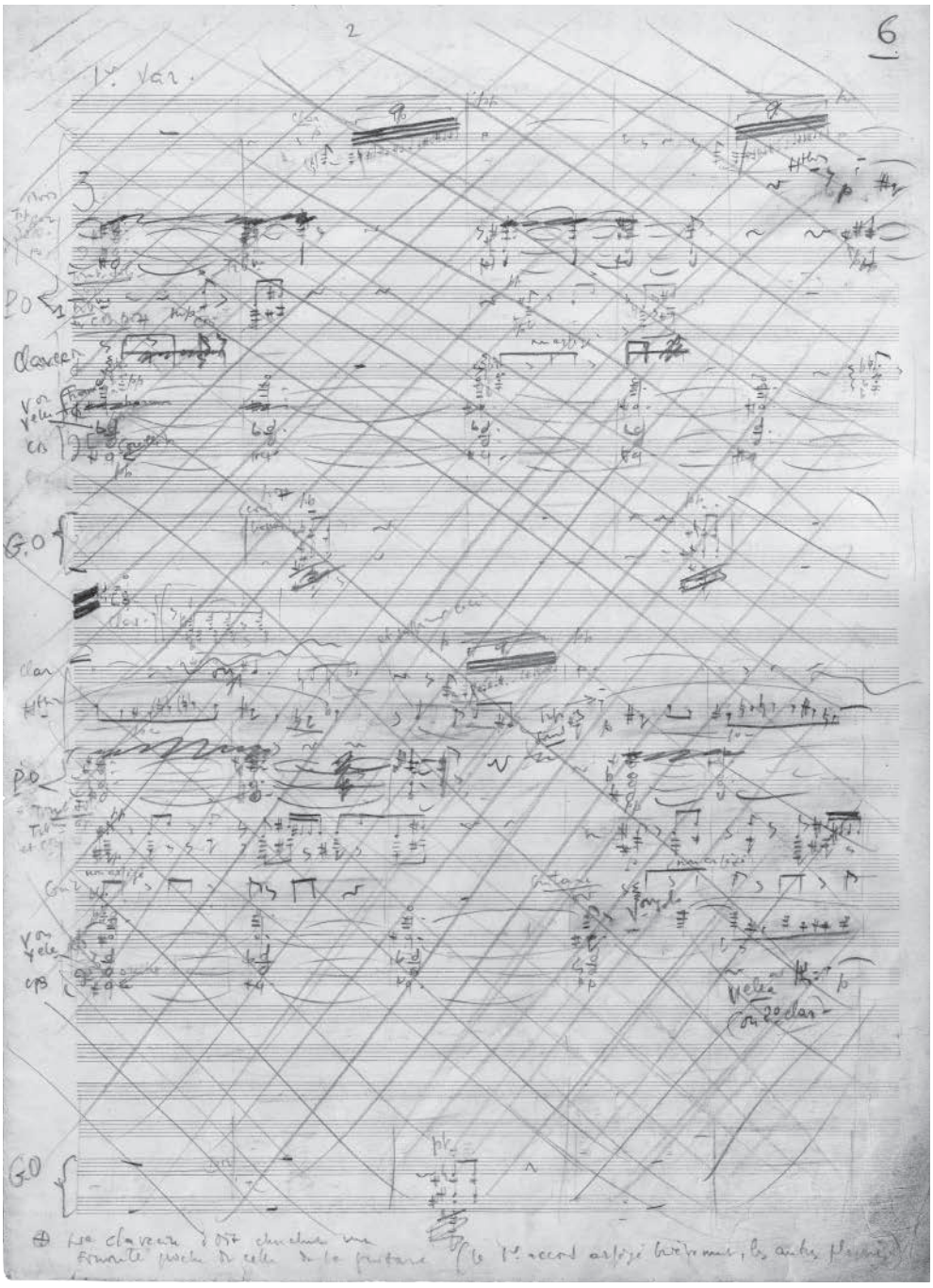

Plate 1: Henri Dutilleux, Symphony No. 2, *Le Double* (1955–59), short-score draft, p. 6 (Henri Dutilleux Collection, PSS).

could also have been because his inspiration for the title came from an unlikely source.

Boulez's *Doubles* was performed in Paris in 1958 before being incorporated into the never-completed *Figures Doubles Prismes*. The work makes significant use of variation processes,[15] Boulez's use of the term likely being a way of invoking the form while avoiding its historical connotations, especially of Schoenberg's *Variations for Orchestra* (1926–28).[16] The timing and location of the performance raises the possibility that it may have inspired Dutilleux to use the title for his own work. Certainly the short score of Dutilleux's Symphony, which was not completed until 1959, suggests that the name was not decided upon until late into the work's composition, with two different titles, *Symphonie pour Grand et Petit Orchestre* and *Symphonie pour Grand Orchestre et Orchestre de Chambre*, appearing on the first page of the sketch of the last movement.

Even if he arrived at this subtitle independently, however, his remark "Je n'aime guère les appellations classiques"[17] would certainly explain his desire to avoid any explicit reference to variation form in the work. In this context *Le Double*, just like *Métaboles* and *Métamorphoses* many years later, makes the ideal alternative.

15 See the analysis in Allen Edwards, "Boulez's 'Doubles' and 'Figures Doubles Prismes': A Preliminary Study," *Tempo*, no. 185 (June 1993), pp. 6–17.

16 See Robert Piencikowski, "Une 'musique de la cruauté'? A propos de 'Dialogue de l'ombre double' de Pierre Boulez," *Schatten / Shadows*, ed. Thomas Strässle, *Figurationen*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004), pp. 47–54, esp. p. 49.

17 Henri Dutilleux, *Mystère et mémoire des sons* (see note 13), p. 101.