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EXAMINING THE SUBTEXT OF MAXIMO DIEGO PUJOL’S TRES ENSAYOS SOBRE UN BOCETO DE KANDINSKY

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Abstract

Tres Ensayos Sobre Un Boceto De Kandinsky is a striking classical guitar piece, based on a *Sketch for Composition II* by Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944). It was composed by an Argentinian classical guitar player and composer Maximo Diego Pujol (b.1957) in 2006. It has three movements and each of them represents a different stage of the piece’s main idea which emerges from the composer’s very first impression of the sketch. This study examines the subtext of *Tres Ensayos Sobre Un Boceto De Kandinsky* by the composer’s own descriptions and portrayals. In this context, the subject of composing is discussed from a different point of views. Kandinsky’s relation with sound and music was emphasized. Detections of the subtextual references between *Sketch for Composition II* and *Tres Ensayos Sobre Un Boceto De Kandinsky* are examined and shown through the score.

Keywords: Tres Ensayos Sobre Un Boceto De Kandinsky, Sketch for Composition II, Maximo Diego Pujol, Wassily Kandinsky, Classical Guitar.

Introduction

One of the fundamental sources of art is to follow the traces of metaphysical phenomena. These are natural necessities and they are inevitable. Artist continues this mental pursuit both consciously and unconsciously until revealing the expressions. They are mentally embodied in the artist’s mind. This process is not a type of creation that develops and reaches a conclusion by planned and being aware. Creation process is directly related to the resource. The process means taking action of the artist. It doesn’t always happen concretely. Constructing ideas and activating the mindset are also a part of creation. This is the main effect of the source that influences the artist.

A musical work or a composition can also be based on an idea or ideas. Composer evaluates an idea as a movement phenomenon which triggers the creation process. He constructs the musical extensions

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to be included in the work based on this idea. These are also the musical elements that the composition have. These elements can be derived from the ideas, which are extensions of sound and rhythm. This is a creative process that takes place by activating a musical idea. In this context, as Kaygısız indicates "music is the arrangement of the sounds that man creates by correcting through his consciousness of nature" (2017, 35). The ideas within this definition of nature can originate from any discipline. In other words, these ideational grounds, which the composer uses as a source of starting movement of the creation process, may emerge from different disciplines as well. Related to that, it is important and eligible to emphasize the meaning of the word of "composition".

The subject of composing music has been included in many studies and researches. Komulainen stated (2013, 3), "The word composer originates from Latin and translates to one who puts together. The meaning questions the notion of composers pulling something out of thin air. A composer is someone who takes a number of things and arranges them into a novel configuration". In the scope of contextual meaning, Komulainen's description of composer has some similarities with Kaygısız's music explanation. It is also important to determine that composing a work ontologically is not to reveal something that doesn't exist but to discover what actually is and to make it visible. In other words, composing is to make it noticeable the existed. Composer discovers, combines and reunites the sounds that already existed. "Hannu Pohjannoro thinks (2009, 11), the act of composition is largely about making choices, which must be made with reliance to intuition as much as to rational deduction." (as cited in Komulainen, 2013: 5). Intuition is the basic medium of the composer. The composer takes a journey to his own mind through the sounds. This is a journey to his mind through the ideas. "The process of inventing and organizing musical material is intrinsically linked to conceptualizing music in one's mind or thinking in sound, as described by Aaron Copland (1952, 22), you cannot produce a beautiful sonority or any combination of sonorities without first hearing the imagined sound in the inner ear" (As cited in Wiggins, 2007: 454). During the process of combining sonorities, the composer can be influenced by different disciplines through the approach of his own intuition. These are the different paths and environments from the sonorities. It is having the particular approaches to the perception. In this respect, every discipline is an extension that reaches the same point. In the context of artistic intuition, they are basically parts of a whole. It is inevitable that they interact with each other in this unity. An artist constantly gets involved in this interaction. As a part of that, the composer interacts with different art disciplines. In this regard, it is noticeable that several artworks in which two different disciplines such as fine arts and music interact from each other. M. D. Rucsanda's (2020, 191), emphasis on triggering impressionists' relationship with sonorities is significant and also instructive. According to Ruscanda "the symbiosis between music and plastic arts is by no means a discovery of the contemporary arts; until the end of the 20th century, the various arts were in positions of subordination, and the apparition of the Impressionism also brought the winds of change, on a perceptive level, in the visual arts. The urge to render states of mind or emotions by breaking the limits between sounds - colour - form - movement, or even by a combination of these in synesthetic works of art became more and more acute" (2020, 91). In connection with this symbiosis, Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) is one of the leading figures of the 20th Century, whom theoretically examined and analyzed the relationships and the connections between the sound and image.

1. Kandinsky and Music

Realizing the problems posed by the industrial and technological revolution, modern artists chose to turn every *element* that they encountered during the process into a *subject*. This orientation of the era insists that it has produced one of the inevitable consequences. This is an evolution in itself that artists have succeeded in transforming impurity into a movement. That is abstraction. To Kandinsky, music is the climax of presenting an idea in abstract form. Music is simply an abstract art form that contains no physical or visual presumptions. It is establishes an indefinable bond with the addressee or transmitter as the art of sounds. Sounds can shape, recreate, or elicit emotions. Therefore, they have a direct impact on the individual. During this interaction, they apply a suppressive communication. As Kandinsky indicates (1911, 54), "With few exceptions music has been for some centuries the art which has devoted itself not to the reproduction of natural phenomena, but rather to the expression of the artist's soul, in musical sound". The concept of abstraction is a phenomenon that Kandinsky theoretically examines and tries to reach from an artistic perspective. He aims his works to be reached and perceive intuitively. He was interested in the depths of human. The art of sounds aims this entirely. Music as an art form is in the common sense and directly related to imagination. According to Kandinsky, the conception of abstraction is one of the



symbioses between painting and music. As Dabrowski mentions (1995, 19), "Kandinsky was fascinated by music's emotional power. Because music expresses itself through sound and time, it allows the listener a freedom of imagination, interpretation, and emotional response that is not based on the literal or the descriptive, but rather on the abstract - a quality that painting, still dependent on representing the visible world, could not provide".

There are two influential events on Kandinsky's inclination to the field of art. The first one was an exhibition of the collection of French Impressionist artists. The other one was Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin*. During this performance, Kandinsky had the impression that music can be quite effective about triggering visual creativity and imagination on the listener. He came to this idea primarily based on the effect that music has on himself. As Dabrowski pointed out (1995, 13), "This experience that united painting and music, combined with Wagner's notion of Leitmotif, became exceptionally relevant to the creative process of the Compositions". "Leitmotif, (the leading motive), a recurring musical theme appearing usually in operas but also in symphonic poems. It is used to reinforce the dramatic action, to provide psychological insight into the characters, and to recall or suggest to the listener extramusical ideas relevant to the dramatic event. In a purely musical sense the repetition or transformation of the theme also gives cohesion to large-scale works"¹.

Kandinsky emphasized the connection between colors and instruments and made various definitions. In particular, he stated these emphasis in his work *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. He compared colors to musical instruments and put emphasis on their reflections of each other in a certain way. He stated (2014: 868), "in music a light blue is like a flute, a darker blue a cello; a still darker a thunderous double bass; and the darkest blue of all-an organ.....Light warm red has a certain similarity to medium yellow, alike in texture and appeal, and gives a feeling of strength, vigour, determination, triumph. In music, it is a sound of trumpets, strong, harsh and ringing" (As cited in Madalina, 2020, 95).

A. Schönberg (1874-1951) who pushed the limits of chromatic harmony, used a similar approach in his twelve ton system to achieve atonality. Similarly and relatedly, Kandinsky examined and searched to find the independent paths of sound sequencing and phrasing in the art of painting. His approach was to establish the dissonance structure based on geometric elements. Through these theories and works, he explored the commonalities between musical forms, elements and the visual expression. As Önal stated (2018: 103), "Kandinsky referred the simple compositions dominated by geometric forms *the melodic*, polyphonic compositions consisting of quoting and combining different forms depending on a single form *the symphony*. The works of named as Impression, Improvisation and Composition are given as an example to the symphonic structure (Kandinsky, 1993, 95-104)".

1.1. Composition II

Ideas and effects of the vibration of music on the human mind can be observed almost all of Kandinsk' works. As mentioned before, this interaction is also noticed through the names given to some of his paintings. In this regard, *Compositions*, one of his masterpieces, are among the major works of his oeuvre. As Dabrowski stated (1995, 23), "the *Compositions* occupy a singular position. They represent his strivings for pure painting, an idiom that would speak directly to the soul of the viewer and incite his response to it, unencumbered by a narrative quality".

During the World War II. (1939-1945), many works of art were lost or intentionally destroyed. Numerous works of art were destroyed and eliminated. In the field of art, rare works of modern art have been the main victim. Unfortunately, within the limited and scarce possibilities of times of WWII, exact copies or catalogs of these artworks could not be produced. (Mukaddes, 2020, 5). *Compositions* were created between 1907 and 1939. First three of them were destroyed during the war. "Composition II, is one of destroyed artworks of World War II, was probably first conceived in 1909. It was finished in 1910. Composition II was in the Botho von Gamp collection in Berlin and was listed in Kandinsky's Handlist II under no. 98 and dated 1909-10. Miinter gave it the subtitle Cliffs (Felsen) in her Handlist II and dated it winter 1909-10. Roethel and Benjamin suggest the winter of 1909-10 as the date of its execution" (Dabrowski, 1995, 55). However, there are some works were created by the artist himself during the designing process of *Composition II*. These works let us have an idea about conception of the original canvas. Sketches, studies, pencil drawings, a woodcut in the artist's poetry book called *Klange* are some of the works related to *Composition II*. (Dabrowski, 1995, 26).

¹ Retrived from <https://www.britannica.com/art/leitmotif>

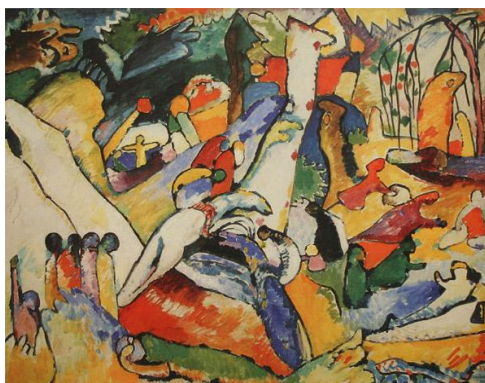


Figure No: 1² Sketch for Composition II

Kandinsky's perspective on art and creativity has inspired many different disciplines. This relationship is part of the interaction between ideas. Visual arts, literature, performing arts and music are among these disciplines. Kandinsky's depth of expression can be described as a rich resource both in theory and in the context of deep subtext of abstraction. A play titled "Six Degrees of Separation" and the movie "Double Jeopardy" are some of the works that include works of Kandinsky.

"Tres Ensayos Sobre Un Boceto De Kandinsky" composed by Maximo Diego Pujol (b.1957), is a classical guitar piece that based on a *Sketch for Composition II* by Kandinsky. As one of the most striking works of the classical guitar repertoire, in this piece, Pujol took a sketch for Composition II as his starting point and expressed that abstract idea through the music, which is described as an abstract phenomenon by Kandinsky as well. In this context, Pujol's *Tres Ensayos Sobre Un Boceto De Kandinsky* which means in English "Three Essays on a Sketch by Kandinsky" has an exclusive and unique place in the classical guitar repertoire.

2. Tres Ensayos Sobre un Boceto de Kandinsky³

In December 2020, I made an interview with Maximo Diego Pujol about his composition titled "Tres Ensayos Sobre Un Boceto De Kandinsky" (T.E.S.B.K)⁴. It is based on a *Sketch for Composition II* by Kandinsky. In other words, that sketch is fundamentally the identical structure of the piece. Related to that, in order to comprehend the T.E.S.B.K, it is essential to try to sense the composer's mindset.

What does it depend on when a musician composes a piece by influencing from another work? What is the trigger factor? Undoubtedly, the answers to these questions are relative. In this case, the origin of this piece is related to the moment the composer sees the Kandinsky's sketch for the first time. On October of 2006, Pujol was in London to teach and give a classical guitar concert in West Dean International Classical Guitar Festival. As someone who is influenced and highly interested in fine arts, he had the opportunity to visit the Tate Gallery where several works of Kandinsky, including *Sketch for Composition II*, were exhibited. The first thing that impressed the composer was the content of the painting. Because, it consisted of three parts. (M. D. Pujol, Personal Communication, December 22, 2020).

According to Pujol, the part on the left side is the first section of the painting. As it can be seen that some people stand up and look like depressed and sad. This part is almost reminiscent of a dark place. Almost like *inferno*. In the middle, there is a human figure jumping with his or her horse to the right part of the painting. That part presents the second section. Finally, on the right part, one can see that some people figures who enjoy the life, like a *Paradise* (M. D. Pujol, Personal Communication, December 22, 2020).

After standing approximately forty minutes in front of the canvas, the fundamental idea that appeared in the composer's mind was that in the *sketch for Composition II*. Kandinsky was able to create the reflection of how an important decision can be made in a life time. Pujol stated "Millions of people live on earth and they all have had moments in their lives when they had to make a very important decision. Because everybody has some darkness and lightness in their soul. Sometimes, many people feel comfortable in the darkness." (M. D. Pujol, Personal Communication, 2020). The comfort that the composer mentioned is

²1909-1910, Oil on canvas, 38.4 × 51.4" (97.5 × 130.5 cm), New York, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, retrieved from <https://www.wassilykandinsky.net/work-16.php>

³ Tres Ensayos Sobre un Boceto de Kandinsky was dedicated to The Chilean classical guitarist Carlos Perez. It was also recorded by him. The album titled "Musica Nueva", P & P Producciones, 2011.

⁴ Tres Ensayos Sobre un Boceto de Kandinsky, (Three Essays On A Sketch By Kandinsky).



associated with passivity. Not being able to find the energy and even the courage to move. Related to that, getting the impression that the darkness in the human soul is the real life itself. It is almost being unable to get out of this process. The comfort that the composer mentioned is actually the mental acceptance of this situation. Therefore he stated, "it is very important to make the decision, which is jumping to the other part of the life" (M. D. Pujol, Personal Communication, 2020).

Horse is one of the important figures of Kandinsky's art. Herewith the *Sketch for Composition II*, as it mentioned before, in the middle part of the painting, there is a human figure with a horse. The composer associates this horse and human figure with being strong and resistant in life. It can be described as a symbol of holding the power or being strong. To tackle difficulties and reach a brighter path by deciding to deal with them. Pujol stated, "it takes courage to decide to the jump to the best part of the life." (M. D. Pujol, Personal Communication, 2020). This is the main reason why *T.E.S.B.K* consists of three movements. These are reflections of the parts of the Painting.

All three movements of the piece do not have any titles. There is a reason why this is specially preferred by the composer. If they were defined and titled, it could possibly neutralize the emotions and phenomenon which are the subtexts of the movements. Because, the imaginary depictions in these three movements are relative. The emotions and moods mentioned are relative and their explanation by using the words could frame their meanings. Moreover, the main purpose of the composer is not to describe the sketch through the classical guitar music. That piece is the expression of how the painting made the composer feel. It is the expression of the effect of the painting on the composer.

As in almost every discipline of art, within the history of music, it is possible to encounter with the compositions that are directly or indirectly related to other art forms. Such as *Modest Mussorsky's Pictures of an Exhibitons* (1874). It is a composition directly influenced by the art of painting. That modern suite is a unique piece that depicts the paintings musically. In this context, this work is different. It has a different point of view to the art of painting. In *T.E.S.B.K*, the composer described the effect the painting has on himself and its reflections on his inner universe.

According to composer, first movement represents chaos (M. D. Pujol, Personal Communication, 2020). As Pujol indicated, "the first movement of the piece is the most challenging one to compose" (Personal Communication, 2020). Although it seems to describe a negative phenomenon, the concept of chaosity is ironically catching the attention of most people. This situation is one of the contradictions in the mind of the person. Because, the mind is full of conflicts. The events or problems we encounter in life lead us to have an idea about these developments. This conflict is one of the mental dimensions of the process that we go through while perceiving them.



Figure No: 2⁵ First part of the 1st movement

The first movement of the piece is divided in two parts. It is important to notice that this division is not made according to the musical form of the work. These parts are determined according to the subtext of the work. As it can be seen in figure no: 2, the *T.E.S.B.K* begins with a *presto*⁶. That means is at a very fast

⁵All notation figures cited from the same score. *Tres Ensayos Sobre un Boceto De Kandinsky* (2010) Editions Henry Lemoine, France, (LM.28651), ISBN 9790230986519.

⁶Retrieved from <https://www.freemusicdictionary.com/definition/presto/>



and rapid tempo. First part of the first movement has a irregular rythmic structure (figure no: 2). It is 5/8. This formation assists the effective expression of the presentation of attacks and accents. The change in the time signature of the measures actually contributes to emerge and convey the chaotic expression as a whole by representing a regular rhythmic distribution between the irregular structure. That movement describes the combination the darkness with aggression. its melodic approach is based on repetition. This melodic expression also assists the impression of fluttering. These melodic and rhythmic structures are the silent fluttering of congestion in stillness. The first part of the first movement is connected to the second section with a two measured bridge. *Molto*⁷ *Rallentando*⁸ applied during the presentation of this connection also prepares the general character of the second part of the first movement.



Figure No: 3 Second part of the first movement

It is observed that the tempo has changed in this part. This difference which is from *presto* to *Allegretto*⁹ supports and assists the description of the change in feelings that have deep distress, such as pressure and hopelessness, which are included in the emotional integrity. In addition, this constant and stable mood is tried to be conveyed to the listener with the three-voiced chords and the stable rhythmic expression. Another expressive feature of this part as a subtext is that realizing the way out of hopelessness and being stuck. In other words, the idea musically expressed in this part can be interpreted as there is always hope against pessimism. A slowly developing expression is observed in the later part of the first movement. This narrative of development is musically expressed in a minimalist point of view.

There is a long *Coda*¹⁰ in the first movement. As stated before, this piece is about a decision. It reflects the stages of the decision, the moment of decision, and the moods within the stages of implementation. It is a decision to aim to change the situation and struggle to cope with the challenge, rather than maintaining this mood by accepting the challenges. Pujol stated, "It is fantastic that Kandinsky represents the moment that millions of people making this decision in their life" (M. D. Pujol, Personal Communication, 2020). Conflicts of the feelings and consciousness experienced by the people during the stages of this decision are included in the main idea of chaos which is described in the first movement. In the context of this approach, main idea and fundemantel formation of *Coda* is significant. It doesn't represent the idea of ending of a movement. It is the presentation of the internal conflict. The stages and differences of this decision are depicted in *Coda* through the modern performing techniques and irregularity of the rythmic structure.



Figure No: 4 Tambour and Bartok Pizzicato effects

⁷ Molto means "much or very". Retrieved from <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/molto>

⁸ Rallentando is a term using to reduce tempo in music. Retrieved from <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000022829>

⁹ "Allegretto a musical composition or musical passage to be performed at a somewhat quicker tempo than Andante but not as fast as Allegro". Retrieved from <https://musicaldictionary.com/allegretto/>

¹⁰ "Coda is the closing section of a musical composition". <https://musicaldictionary.com/?s=coda>



Tambour effect creates a percussive sound on guitar. Performer hits the strings or the some body parts of the guitar with his fingers. Similar with the slap technique used on electric bass guitar, primarily it has the rhythmic expression. The version shown in figure no: 4 is produced by hitting the open E and A strings firmly and rigorously with the edge of the thumb of the right hand of the guitarist. *Bartok Pizzicato* is used for both rhythmic and melodic. It is produced by pulling a single string forward and hitting the body of the guitar, mostly with the thumb in the right hand. In passage in figure no: 4 on a single string as well. Additionally, at the same time, the other fingers of the right hand produce the other voices of the chord. The first movement ends with *coda*. Ending is still and dull. Additionally, end of the first movement is also a preparation of the following movement.

The second movement's tempo is *Andante*¹¹. The reason of that, contrary to the first, second movement describes the calm and peaceful decision-making phase in which the person lives in his inner world. This harmony of the mind was prepared with the rhythmic similarity of the two notes in the last measure of the first movement and the two introduction notes of the second movement.

Similar to the first, the second movement of the *T.E.S.B.K* is also divided into two parts. However, this time it is observed that the two parts are in a structure that musically supports each other. There is a development of the presented theme. It is a description of the progress of the idea that is escaping and disposing from the chaotic situation that described in the previous movement. To emphasize this idea, the first part of this movement is presented by supporting the monophonic melody line with the dramatic chords at the beginning of the measures. Thus, the combination of melody and the chords creates the lyric harmony. This development is shown in figure no: 5.



Figure No: 5 Beginning of the 2nd movement

Second part of the second movement depicted the continuity of the idea of salvation, its formation, assimilation and eventually one's taking action for the situation of enlightenment. The musical reflection of the idea of taking action is presented in this part. Taking action is related to change within this perspective. This change is the presentation of the theme that reflects the enduring idea with a naive accompaniment one more time. The melody is never in the background. However, during the presentation of the melody, there is an emphasis on completion of the idea while reaching the end of the second movement. As mentioned before, this idea is the last stage and the completion of the decision in the mind.

According to Pujol, as the opposite of the first, last movement of the piece was the easiest to compose (M. D. Pujol, Personal Communication, 2020). The last movement expresses the state of mind of the decision phenomenon. Being mentally comfort is the the idea which is described in the last movement. A sense of being without conflict and relaxation. In other words, the realization of the decision making phase. Unlike the the first and the second, in the third movement, the composer applies a dance form, *Milonga*. It is a musical form which roots goes back to Argentina. *Milonga* has the syncopated rhythmic structure with mostly sets to 4/4 time signature.

In third movement, the rhythmic structure in the bass part is also the reflection of the melody. In other words, they are a whole in this movement. This is one of the main characteristics of *Milonga*. The musical ideas which are two measures long, expressed through repetitions, constitute the beginning to the last movement of the piece. These musical half sentences are mutual questions and answers. After the beginning, the development part of the movement is presented through the sequences. The expression that dominates all of these parts can be described through adjectives such as energetic, happy, and positive. The following part is the presentation of the first two parts in accordance with the same idea and the characteristic point of view. The introduction of the third movement is shown in figure no: 6.

¹¹ "Andante is a musical composition or musical passage to be performed moderately slow"
<https://musicaldictionary.com/?s=andante>

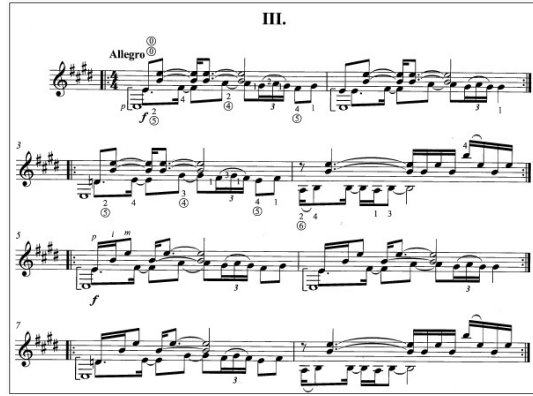


Figure No: 6 Introduction of the 3rd movement

After a four measures long bridge arrives to a new section that has the quite similar rhythmic structure of the sequences in the previous part. In addition, *Bartok Pizzicato* and *Tamburas* are also applied during the presentation of this part. Both of these effects prepare the end of the piece and contribute to increase the expression of joy and energy. The last movement returns to Milonga character presented at the beginning. *Tres Ensayos Sobre Un Boceto De Kandinsky* ends with a presenting of a strong chords with *Rasquedos*. Commonly used on the guitar, it is playing all or some of the strings with the right hand from top to bottom or the opposite (Uluocak, 2011, 57). Through this effect, third movement ends with a high degree of emphasizing the full E major chord.

Conclusion

Tres Ensayos Sobre Un Boceto De Kandinsky consists of three movements which are *Presto*, *Andante* and *Allegro*. In addition to that, each movement has its own parts. The general character of these parts is determined as fast-slow-fast, which is frequently observed in three-part structures in music. Pujol describes these movements as *Tres Ensayos* (Three Essays). These are the impression of W. Kandinsky's sketch on the composer. They do not accurately describe the sketch. In other words, the effect of the sketch on the composer is the subtext of the piece. The determination of this is especially important for the performers. Although the interpretation of a musical composition could be perceived as a personal phenomenon, it is actually inevitable to go through the idea or the ideas of the composer. Performer should aim to perceive and comprehend the idea or the ideas which presents by the composer. That is one of the fundamental steps of the personal and original interpretation. Having knowledge about a musical piece from the different angles and perceiving the composer's point of view gets the performer closer to the piece. These approaches can be sociological, historical, psychological or political and they are extremely important. Therefore during the examination of these informations, many data regarding the mind of the composition are encountered and discovered. Many sources can be effective during the formation phase of the musical composition. In *Tres Ensayos Sobre Un Boceto De Kandinsky*, this source happens to be Kandinsky's *Sketch for Composition II*. The information to be obtained from these determinations enables the performer to comprehend the piece musically. It is the path of creating to personal interpretation.

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