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On Analytical Listening in the Context of Metaphoric Imagination

'Today, one can hear almost any style of music in any surrounding and in any situation. The sound of big opera ensembles can be fitted onto a windsurfing board, and the sound of a nylon-stringed guitar can fill a football stadium; one can listen to march music in the bathtub and salon music in the mountains',¹ writes Ola Stockfelt.

Advances in technology have made possible not only the omnipresence of music in our environment, but also the emergence of new musical genres, making increasing use of electroacoustic media. According to Denis Smalley, this 'revolution in the sounding content of musical works' has also brought about a considerable expansion of the variety of listening responses.² The fact that music reaches us in contemporary culture in so many different circumstances and in such different varieties is conducive to profound and wide-ranging reflection on the subject of listening. This encompasses such problems as the listener's activeness and attitude, which, as Smalley states, oscillates, in most general terms, between passive and uncontrolled 'hearing' and the conscious, intentional 'act of listening'.³ Each of these attitudes may be adopted in a range of circumstances, in respect to both the musical work and the sounds that surround us. If we tend to associate listening rather more with music than with the sonic environment, then this is because we are influenced by

¹ Ola Stockfelt, 'Adequate Modes of Listening', in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York and London, 2006), 90.

² See Denis Smalley, 'The Listening Imagination: Listening in the Electroacoustic Era', in *Companion to Contemporary Musical Thought*, ed. John Paynter, Tim Howell, Richard Orton and Peter Seymour, vol. 1 (London and New York, 1992), 514. Changes in the way we listen that are brought about by new technologies are also discussed by Eric F. Clarke, 'The Impact of Recording on Listening', *Twentieth-Century Music* 4/1 (2007), 47–70.

³ Denis Smalley, 'The Listening Imagination', 515.

specific conventions. From the sociological-historical point of view, claims Stockfelt, we can speak of numerous, equally valid, 'adequate modes of listening', since a range of receptive situations that are typical of a given musical genre shape the ideal of the listener's attitude and the optimal relationship between listener and music.⁴ Over recent years, the intense development of psychoacoustic research has given rise to another research perspective, one that allows us to verify many convictions regarding the boundaries and specific nature of auditory perception.

In the context of the changes occurring in the way we listen, questions are increasingly being asked about the contribution of music theory to auditory experience and the value of so-called analytical listening. In his book *Music, Imagination and Culture*, Nicholas Cook aims to show the divergence between the analytical listening postulated by music theorists and listening for pleasure, without engaging one's knowledge of musical structure. The former, active way of listening, which Cook calls 'musicological',⁵ has been recommended by Eduard Hanslick, Theodor W. Adorno and Carl Dahlhaus, among others. A number of psychoacoustic studies have shown that in practice this proves to be an ideal that is hard to realise. Even musically trained persons are unable to grasp the hierarchic structures of classical musical forms while listening, do not notice slight changes to the tonal scheme of a sonata, and cannot follow all the passages of the theme of a fugue.⁶ Thus the limits of perception turn out to be considerably narrower than some theorists might have thought. Writing about 'musicological listening', Cook does not refer to any specific theory of analysis, mentioning only typical skills acquired during a musical education. The procedures performed during experiments concern such things as key recognition and ordering the elements of forms.

Besides the model of 'musicological' listening and its opposite, the complete ignoring of music, degrading it to the level of noise, Cook, referring to such authorities as John Blacking and Virgil Thomson, also distinguishes 'musical listening',⁷ typical not only of the amateur, but also of professional musicians who, albeit for just a moment, have forgotten about their profession in favour of unconstrained, spontaneous experiences. 'Musical listening' requires neither effort, close attention nor intellectual input. In this sense it remains passive, as 'just listening',⁸ involving solely our physiological and emotional responses, in moments of

⁴ Ola Stockfelt, 'Adequate Modes', 91.

⁵ See Nicholas Cook, *Music, Imagination and Culture* (Oxford, 1992), 152.

⁶ Nicholas Cook refers, among others, to the research of Vladimír Konečni, Robert West, Peter Howell, Ian Cross and his own; see *ibid.*, 43–70.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

forgetting. The immediacy of this way of experiencing music is contrasted with the aesthetic distance of 'musicological listening'.

In closing his considerations, Cook stresses that the divergence between 'musical listening' and 'musicological listening' should not arouse disquiet or force the rejection of one in favour of the other. Both types of reception are important elements of Western European musical culture and show to what extent perceptual facts may depart from aesthetic ideals.

'A formal model of music', Cook concludes, 'should be valued in the same way as any other metaphorical construction: for its usefulness, for its heuristic value, and perhaps for the intellectual satisfaction that it affords, but not for its truth'.⁹

'If what he says is true, music theory is in deep trouble'.¹⁰ Thus wrote David Huron in his review of Cook. In fact, despite his preference for empirical research, Huron posits that what Cook writes is not true. Huron has a somewhat different idea of the significance of music theory and music analysis, far from deeming them merely cultural fictions or metaphors. Questioning the simplistic division into 'scientific' and 'culture-orientated', he defends the possible contribution of both disciplines to musical culture, through their influence on composers, listeners and performers, and also to the scientific study of music, even if this were to prove to be the study of human imagination. Günter Kreutz states, meanwhile, that the experiments relating to the perception of musical form carried out thus far provide insufficient grounds for drawing unequivocal conclusions.¹¹ At the same time, he postulates a greater interaction between psychoacoustic research and music theory, asserting that this will make it easier to avoid the 'speculative symbolism' of musical analysis.

The idea of the metaphoric character of the theories underpinning analytical listening is shared by other scholars, although not always in such radically-formulated terms. Cook bases his conviction that the formal models of music are metaphoric constructs on the views of Roger Scruton, who has stated that 'there lies, in our most basic apprehension of music, a complex system of metaphor, which is the true description of no material fact'.¹² The key to understanding this and other utterances of Scruton's is the phenomenon of 'aspect perception', described by Ludwig

⁹ *Ibid.*, 235–236.

¹⁰ David Huron, 'Music, Imagination, and Culture', by Nicholas Cook', *Music Perception* 12/4 (1995), 481.

¹¹ Günter Kreutz, 'Musiktheorie in neuer Tonart. Tendenzen und Perspektiven empirischer Musikforschung', in *Klang-Struktur-Metapher*, ed. Michael Polth, Olivier Schwab-Felisch and Christian Thorau (Stuttgart and Weimar, 2000), 55.

¹² Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford, 1999), 92.

Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations*.¹³ 'Seeing' as such is beyond our control, yet we can decide what we wish to capture in a given look. As a result, we may experience 'double intentionality', relating to two different objects at the same time. As we read in *Philosophical Investigations*, 'I contemplate a face, and then suddenly notice its likeness to another. I see that it has not changed; and yet I see it differently. I call this experience "noticing an aspect"'.¹⁴ Wittgenstein also writes that, 'The flashing of an aspect on us seems half visual experience, half thought'.¹⁵ 'Seeing as' is half act (choice), half experience, linked to the appearance of a picture in one's imagination.

The skill of aspect perception does not concern seeing alone, but relates to the apprehension of reality on various planes. Marcus B. Hester applied this notion to poetry, stating that the figurativeness typical of metaphor is guided by the experience of 'aspect seeing'.¹⁶ Metaphor, as Paul Ricoeur later wrote, 'joins the light of sense with the fullness of the image'.¹⁷ In Scruton's aesthetic, seeing is replaced by hearing, as the main question that he sets himself is how it comes about that we hear sounds as music. Scruton suggests that the listener has no choice but to hear sounds as music and that the experience of its reception is conditioned by the most basic metaphors, such as musical space and motion. These play a similar role to that of the pure forms of sensible intuition (time and space) in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. 'If the metaphors are dispensable, it is only for the trivial reason that our world might not have contained the experience of music. But this too could be doubted: for perhaps it is the nature of reason, to hear sounds in just this way?'¹⁸

Although Scruton himself does not relate his ideas to music analysis, critics and continuators of his theory do. 'Given that its aim is to persuade the reader to perceive in a certain way, not simply to think about the music in abstraction', writes Naomi Cumming, 'the analytic notation does represent a "perceptually embodied thought" and not simply a conceptualisation. "Imaginative perception" and "belief" are compatible with one another in music analysis, since both are involved in constructing a representation of music as an intentional object.'¹⁹ Stockfelt, too, opines

¹³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. Gertrude E. M. Anscombe (Oxford, 1958), 193–214.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁶ Marcus B. Hester, *The Meaning of Poetic Metaphor* (Hague, 1967).

¹⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello (London and New York, 2003), 253.

¹⁸ Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 93.

¹⁹ Naomi Cumming, 'Metaphor in Roger Scruton's "Aesthetics of Music"', in *Theory, Analysis and Meaning in Music*, ed. Anthony Pople (Cambridge, 1994), 24.

that all disputes between theorists can be treated as argumentation in favour of various modes of listening. Thus there is no single ideal of autonomous listening, only numerous varieties thereof.²⁰ The advantage of this approach is that the multiplicity and rivalry of the perspectives proposed by the various analytical theories conveys that voluntary character of imagination-dependent experiences to a much greater extent than indispensable metaphors of motion and space. Imagination enables the free flow of unasserted thoughts.²¹ Mark DeBellis refers to this very capacity when he writes that the verification of theories does not play a decisive role in auditory experience. From the receiver's point of view, the elasticity of this experience proves more crucial: 'A concern with confirmation and disconfirmation – arguably central to science – does not play a comparably important role vis-a-vis the listening situation [...] The falsity of a theoretical assumption that plays a causal role in someone's arriving at a certain aesthetic situation will not undermine the situation. For the listener, such assumptions are a ladder one might kick away'.²² The 'ladder' of analytical premises enables a kind of experience which in another case would be unattainable, and in the opinion of some scholars it is the aesthetic situation that may serve as the ultimate validation of analysis. 'An assertion is justified by its enriching effect on hearing – on its codifying or changing it',²³ writes Marion Guck. This applies in particular to 'incorrigible personal statements', present even in the most formalised theories of analysis. While they are not subject to verification, they do induce us to imagine a situation in which the listener senses the same thing as the person expressing his personal relationship with music.²⁴

Attempts by musicologists to investigate analytical imagination are increasingly frequent, especially in connection with the reception of the cognitive theory of metaphor. In many cases, they concern those theories of analysis which have gained considerable popularity and become an undisputed source of musicological terms. It might be said that the

²⁰ Ola Stockfelt, 'Adequate Modes', 92.

²¹ 'Propositions may be affirmed but they may also be entertained without affirming them. The capacity to do this – and to do it constructively – is part of what I mean by imagination.' Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 88.

²² Marc DeBellis, *Music and Conceptualization* (Cambridge, 1995), 131.

²³ Marion Guck, 'Rehabilitating the Incorrigible', in *Theory, Analysis and Meaning in Music*, 63.

²⁴ 'This description invites you to match your hearing with mine or to imagine a new hearing that could be described by you in the same terms [...] it requires your active participation to (re)construct the hearing: you must make the imaginative leap necessary to discover the correlations between the musical events and their figurative description – if you can and will.' *Ibid.*, 63–64.

greater the freedom of imagination they are able to display, and thus the greater the contrast that emerges between the different modes of listening, and the more similar the material under analysis, the greater is the appeal of the cited examples.

Michael Spitzer has tried to juxtapose listening according to the theories of Heinrich Schenker and Leonard B. Meyer,²⁵ taking as his example Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Piano Sonata in G major, KV 283. The first analysis²⁶ focuses on the continuity of the work and the voice leading, the second on segmentation. Music as motion or as a living organism are metaphors typical of Schenker. Meyer, meanwhile, prefers the metaphor of music as language, with a corresponding vocabulary and grammar. In both cases, an important role is also played by the philosophical background: Hegelian for Schenker, whilst Meyer betrays the influence of the pragmatists (John Dewey, Herbert Mead) and of Gestalt psychology.

In comparing the 'analytical fictions'²⁷ of three prominent theorists – Edward T. Cone, Allen Forte and Carl Schachter – Guck juxtaposed the analyses of works from a similar period and from the same aesthetic circle. Cone's analysis of Franz Schubert's *Moment musical* in A flat major resembles the description of an inner psychological drama, as is attested by such terms as 'anxiety' or 'promise'. Analysing Johannes Brahms's Second Symphony, Schachter, making use of vocabulary typical of Schenkerian analysis, emphasises the role of tension, motion and change. Both authors make greater use of verbs than nouns, which reflects the dynamic character of the music. In contrast to them, Forte reifies the musical construct (Brahms's *Alto Rhapsody*). He analyses it from the position of an observer, who does not enter into contact with the work but describes its construction and enumerates its physical attributes. Emotional involvement is contrasted with attempts at objectivisation.

In all the cited analyses, metaphor highlights and integrates various areas of experience – emotions, corporeal experience, abstract thinking. 'If perceived musical structure is indivisible from physical and emotional response, then metaphors may offer an embryonic structural interpretation reinforced by – explained through – physical-emotional responses',²⁸ writes Guck. The instructive, multi-dimensional character of this figure proves particularly valuable when the listener himself seeks adequate ways of speaking about music. Hence the important role played by meta-

²⁵ See Michael Spitzer, *Metaphor and Musical Thought* (Chicago, 2004), 28–44.

²⁶ The author uses to this end a graph produced by Felix Salzer, a populariser of Schenker's theories. See Michael Spitzer, *Metaphor and Musical Thought*, 28.

²⁷ Marion Guck, 'Analytical Fictions', *Music Theory Spectrum* 16/2 (1994).

²⁸ Marion Guck, 'Musical Images as Musical Thoughts: The Contribution of Metaphor to Analysis', *In Theory Only* 5/5 (1981), 42.

phoric imagination in music teaching, as well. The thesis formulated by Guck is illustrated by the metaphor of a musical 'arch', which is the effect of research carried out on students and alumni of music departments. The participants' task was to listen to Fryderyk Chopin's Prelude in B minor without the music, to describe it intuitively, and then to compare their descriptions with the score. The multi-dimensional metaphor of the 'arch' is not confined to the outward profile of the course of the melody in a rising and falling direction, but even concerns individual motoric associations, the inner recollection of motion, the sequence of emotions and the flow of the narrative. As a result, it extends its scope to cover other parameters of the work – dynamics, rhythm, overall scheme – each of which may gain or lose in intensity.²⁹

The mutual connection between music and motion reveals its significance also in the case of performers, who through specific motoric exercises, aiding the dynamic representation of tonal space, stimulate their sensitivity to music. In this way they learn to understand it more fully, as well as improving their performance skills. An original solution in this domain was put forward by Alexandra Pierce, who sought equivalents to Schenker's structural theories in the differentiated level of motoric activity in different areas of the performer's body.³⁰

Metaphorical descriptions of musical structures fulfil numerous communicational functions. They can enrich the auditory experiences of those who come into contact with them, and they enable their authors to express the multi-dimensionality of this experience. The role of metaphor is not restricted to the verbal level. According to a thesis so often stressed in contemporary theories of metaphor, this figure not only allows abstract things to be described by means of concrete expressions acting on our imagination, but it also helps us to think about them in such terms. It mediates between various spheres, and thereby facilitates the complete reception of music, connecting notions with specific images and emotions. Consequently, as Hannah Arendt writes, metaphor 'may be seen as a kind of "proof" that mind and body, thinking and sense experience, the invisible and the visible, belong to one another, are "made" for each other, as it were'.³¹

Translated by John Comber

²⁹ See Marion Guck, 'Two Types of Metaphoric Transference', in *Music and Meaning*, ed. Jenefer Robinson (Ithaca and London, 1997).

³⁰ See Alexandra Pierce, 'Developing Schenkerian Hearing and Performing', *Intégral* 8 (1994).

³¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York, 1981), 109.

