Christopher Hasty[*1]
[*]*Harvard University, United States of America*
[1]hasty@fas.harvard.edu

# Music Analysis as Process

## ABSTRACT

The utility of analysis and indeed its connection to musical experience is often questioned. Theory-based analyses are typically understood as out-of-time, synoptic representations of the underlying structure of the piece. Such structure, although it may be unfolded in time, is itself complete as a set of objects and relations that precedes its temporal unfolding in the already completed work of music. The structure is in itself singular (universal), objective, and unchanging; in contrast, the performance/hearing/experience of the piece is inescapably temporal, evanescent, and subjective (particular), differing from time to time and person to person. I will argue against this as an essential dichotomy by denying the reality of a fixed structure. From the perspective of process philosophy, nothing can escape time and passage. To take music's passage seriously would be to reconsider and redefine customary categories of music theory such as form, rhythm, harmony, and indeed structure. It would also be to see the importance and necessity of music analysis as a vehicle for experimenting with musical experience and testing theoretical and analytic categories. To vivify analysis and use it in the service of discovery, I will suggest a sort of temporalized hermeneutic circle. Using some ideas of Deleuze and Polanyi, I recognize a destructive moment in analysis as a taking apart or loosening of connection to be followed by a return to vivid, engaged hearing. If successful, this excursion into the analytic can deepen musical experience and lead to new understanding by raising productive questions or problems.

***

I have long been interested in the connection of music analysis and musical experience. It has seemed to me that only through some sort of sensible connection can one have confidence that a selected analytic object is real and not merely imaginary. After all, there are a virtually limitless number of objects that can be extracted from a score. It must be said too, that from an ostensibly singular musical work there must arise a countless number of sensible experiences, that is to say, performances or hearings. Although they are all different from one another, such experiences are not necessarily anarchic. Indeed, they must be quite circumscribed if we are to accept the fact of musical communication. Certainly, we cannot in fact hear the same thing, but for a musical culture to work, experiences must be close enough to allow for productive exchange. Indeed, in view of musical communication — and without communication, no music —, highly sensitive or expert performances should, I think, be intensely shaped by fairly definite potentials for experience, potentials held in the composition and the culture that sustain music as a cultural product, that is to say potentials held in common. With less sensitivity, less commonality and less communication.

Connecting analysis with actual musical experience can, however, and indeed for good reason, be seen as a fairly unpromising enterprise. Two very different realms seem to be involved — one intellectual or discursive (involving separating, making distinctions, naming or labeling) and the other sensible or aesthetic, taking everything together as it comes in hearing, feeling, and imagining. I'd like to say that both modes are performative; that is, both are modes of action. Thus, we *perform* an analysis. A written analysis is much like a score. The intellectual and sensible are in fact always thoroughly intertwined. Habits of naming or labeling — even as primitive as calling something music — come into play in any sensible musical experience. 'The highest wisdom', Goethe wrote, 'would be to understand that every fact is already a theory' (*Maxims and Reflections*, No. 575). The difference between the two realms is that the intellectual-analytic-discursive is outside or about, and its temptation is to imagine itself outside time and process as a naming of the things that simply and truly are. It would be a naming of the whole of things understood as their order or arrangement — what we call structure, or pattern, or law. Poor sensibility from this perspective is will-o'-the–wisp, ephemeral, ineffable, 'merely' subjective. From such a hegemonically intellectualistic perspective, structure is not outside but rather inside experience as its invisible (inaudible) cause and law. From an intellectualistic perspective, variation in actual experience could be understood as noise — that is, as imperfections in empirical hearings that miss the ideal (the underlying and changeless structure or the composer's changeless intent). Or variation in experience could be seen, not as irrational but rather as pointing to the operation of more refined, more exact laws that could in principle be stated — say, if we knew more about the human brain. But in this case, how would we evaluate the great variety of experience without introducing norms and deviation from norms? Thus, it might be argued that *the* structure analysis reveals and represents is ideal, and that this singular ideal can be approached only imperfectly in actual hearing and playing. And yet, if the variety of musical experience is such an unreliable guide, on what grounds should a purely structural representation be granted the status of a true or at least adequate representation? And how can the multitude of disparate analytic representations be evaluated in their claims for the way music is or ought to be constructed?

What I'd like to do, in the short time we have here, is to sketch an alternative to the intellectualistic, or rationalistic, or mechanistic perspective (whatever name we choose to call it) — an alternative that is less one-sided. That is to say, a perspective that would honor both sides or modes of experience by seeing them in temporal, dare I say rhythmic, interaction. Again, these two modes are the discursive and the sensible. The alternative I have in mind is not new, nor is it limited to European traditions. The current and most general name is 'process thought' — 'ecological' might be another name, and Goethe might be its Modern European progenitor (Goethe who became a philosopher here in Strasbourg). In terms of music analysis, this perspective might be a way of staying connected

to musical experience and be at the same time a way of expanding our thinking about music. Or as William James (1996) puts it (in appreciation of Bergson): 'a way of trusting our senses again with a good philosophical conscience!'

The idea is really quite simple — that analysis not be an end in itself, but that it continually feed back into 'online' sensible experience. Analysis is necessarily offline to its object. The word 'analysis' comes from the Greek *analuein* — to loosen or undo. Analysis is a taking apart — taking a part, or a particular, or a detail *out* of its complicated context or interaction with other possible details. It is an undoing of connection and is thus destructive. Moreover, it is destructive of meaning if meaning is the making of connection and the growth of context or complexity. And yet, this undoing, this temporary exile into the isolated details or the particulate can be creative if later rejoined to a new context. In a sense, this is a double destruction — the isolated detail (or structure or pattern) we had focused on is itself now destroyed as something separate and disconnected. Deleuze calls this return to the whole 'forgetting', a necessary phase in the growth of sense and understanding. If the analytic exercise was effective, a new encounter with the musical work will have been changed by that exercise; learning will have taken place. Of course, this is the traditional work of learning and of music theory and analysis.

Think of ear-training, say of practicing individual intervals as a way of gaining facility in sight-singing. Such practices are forms of scaffolding. But the scaffold can be removed once the work is done. As we grow as singers we will longer need to sing interval-by-interval; but if we are curious — say, as theorists —, we might return to the question of interval and try to understand this category in increasing complicated and various contexts. Take as another example, poetic scansion. Parsing lines of iambic pentameter according to the formula: short-long, short-long, short-long, short-long, short-long is a useful introduction to reading Milton, but will have to give way to much more subtlety if we are to read fluently and with sensitively to Milton's poetry. Again, if we are curious, discovering the complexities of poetic rhythm can lead us to develop more adequate theories of prosody across a wide range of linguistic and perhaps even musical situations. This back and forth movement would be endless: trying out — asking about — trying out again (rather like scientific research). And it could be as far-ranging as our curiosity extends and our questions lead us.

The scientist-philosopher Michael Polanyi (1969) has described something of this movement in his semiotic theory and in his thought of analysis as 'alienation' (or 'exteriorization') where such alienation is understood as loss of meaning. As I promised in my abstract, I'd like to turn briefly to Polanyi's theory in the hope of interesting some of you in a rather neglected figure who is making something of a comeback now and whose work attempts to integrate practice and theory, analysis and synthesis. I think this work could be helpful in moving toward a thought in which musical analysis and musical experience (broadly defined) need not be categorially opposed.

In his account of whole and part, Polanyi distinguishes two kinds of awareness in order to point to a circulation of these two kinds — neither could exist without the other, and both must work together in order to continue to exist. The terms are 'focal awareness' and 'subsidiary awareness'. The difference is one of kind, not degree — 'subsidiary' is not a lesser degree of awareness than 'focal'. The relation is rather vectoral: we attend *from* subsidiary *to* focal. Focal and subsidiary name whole and part in new ways, ways that speak of process and that preclude separation. Here whole and part are always active and interactive; they are also simultaneous and not intermittent, that is, not off or on, but moving between. Part, or 'particular', or detail works to create meaning when integrated (or synthesized) in a focal awareness. Again, focal and subsidiary generally work together seamlessly. However, for developing skills, changing habits, and making discoveries we need to change focus, to temporarily make focal what had been subsidiary even though this is immediately destructive of a whole. In this destructive analytic act, the subsidiary is isolated and no longer participates in the meaning of the 'comprehensive entity' it has now been alienated from. Thus, rather as a violinist might try to develop better bowing technique by at first awkwardly isolating arm and wrist and losing a former fluency, an analyst might focus on some feature or detail while temporarily losing the meaning of that detail in the context of the whole, but then let go of that focus to discover a new and more intricate hearing and indeed a more complex set of questions. Of course, the violinist's regimen of re-training came from her teacher's training and experience, transmitted because it proved effective. And its effectiveness was to allow her playing to develop in many unforeseeable and presumably freer, more creative ways. On this analogy, the work of the theorist would be to develop questions or problems that would be focused and comprehensive enough to provide a path for concrete discovery. And like scientific theory, the path would be provisional and subject to change. That is to say, theory and analysis would be seen as fully temporal and processive.

If music analysis were to aim for such a process of learning, we would have to ask what parts, what sorts of detail could actually function for learning, how we could focus on detail, and what difference might be made when a creative forgetting leads to new experience. Clearly, this would be an experimental method in which analytic procedures and objects might be tested. This would certainly be a challenging program but one that could address question of truth or adequacy in pragmatic ways and allow for cooperative, intersubjective research.

In closing, I would mention a current project arising from a graduate seminar I conducted last semester. With the technical support of the Bok Center at Harvard, we are producing a modestly interactive video of the Parker String Quartet working with the Cavatina from Beethoven's Op. 130. The players were miked more or less separately so that the viewer/listener can adjust the gain for each instrument to learn to hear into the ensemble — that is, the viewer/listener might focus just on the viola or on the viola and second violin. In the, as yet unedited, four-hour session the quartet plays and discusses many possibilities — for example, various compositional alternatives (recompositions), different tempi, different ways of phrasing, tuning, bowing. Five cameras quite artfully operated create beautiful, moving, and richly detailed images. The piece is played through at the beginning and again at the end of the session. There is an incredible difference between the two performances. From all this material, we hope to create a product that analytically and synthetically can lead the viewer on a journey of discovery.

This journey, however one or another viewer might wish to take it, is not aimed at an increased 'appreciation' of music as an art to be admired. It is rather a journey of intense participation and one that could lead anywhere. It could, for instance, lead to high theoretical questions of repetition in connection with the discursive/sensible distinction with which I began this inquiry. For illustration, allow me to expand on this fundamental question. Analytically, we can take an extensive musical repetition as something simple and self-evident. It's just an obvious repeat (A–A, or A–B–A, or A–B–A–C–A).

Presumably, all we have to do as responsibly educated musicians is to notice and to label the repetition. But what if we fail to make our noticing a labeling, a more or less discursive act? Would this be a failing of our *Bildung*? Or is noticing/labeling rather shallow, something that can take us outside a deeply musical experience. What if, instead, a focal awareness of the repetition as a 'comprehensive entity' involved sensing in exquisite detail all sorts of differences that make the repetition especially fresh and intense?

I'm not suggesting that noting the 'large scale' repetition is something to be avoided. Indeed, it can be a way of more intensely feeling those differences, every time anew. But I am suggesting that merely noting the repetition without a depth of feeling that far exceeds the noting or labeling is not to be into music. Moreover, to then take this question of repetition as depth seriously, *theoretically*, generally and in all its many forms — large and small — could lead us to take music as a way of thinking about repetition and depth in general, and that would be a great gain for music.

How many aspects of music might we question if we were to open music theory and analysis to musical experience? Such opening is important because experience is never without theory, and we have the choice to make that connection as stale or as exciting as we like, as old or new.

I'd like to close with another sympathetic quote from Goethe, this time from the preface to the *Theory of Color*: 'Merely looking at a thing can tell us nothing. Each look leads to an inspection, each inspection to a reflection, each reflection to a synthesis; and hence we can say that with each attentive glance at the world we are already theorizing'.

## KEYWORDS

Music Analysis, Musical Experience, Performance, Michael Polanyi.

## REFERENCES

James, William, 1996. *A Pluralistic Universe*. Lincoln (NE): University of Nebraska Press.

Polanyi, Michael, 1969. 'Knowing and Being', in *Knowing and Being: Essays by Michael Polanyi*, ed. Marjorie Grene. Chicago (IL): University of Chicago Press, 123–37.