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Conceptual Blending and Musical Emotion

ABSTRACT

Background

The scholarly literature on conceptual blending and emotion is very scant. A short explanation for this would be that Fauconnier's seminal text, *Mental Spaces*, came out in 1994 (Fauconnier 1994), at the height of the cognitive turn in the human sciences, and was overtaken by the affective turn in the next decade. One exception is a short section in Fauconnier and Turner (2002) focused on the emotion of anger. Fauconnier and Turner refer to the cross-cultural research of Lakoff and Kövecses (1987) on the anger script. My paper takes this dialogue on anger as a starting-point to develop two separate yet interlinked matters. First, to open up a perspective on emotion from the standpoint of conceptual blending; second, to apply this perspective to the analysis of music's structural features.

Aims and Repertoire Studied

I begin by reviewing Juslin and Timmers' (2010) model of the expressive character of acoustic features and proceeds to assess Lakoff and Kövecses's theory of emotion as cognitive metaphor. Reconciling the cognitive metaphor of anger with the theory of conceptual blending allows us to analyze anger in two pieces, respectively by Vivaldi and Haydn: the aria, 'Se il cor guerriero', from Vivaldi's opera, *Tito Manlio*; and the first movement of Haydn's Symphony No. 45 in F-sharp minor.

Methods

After analysing the music's acoustic affordances of emotion, I filter this through a consideration of their conceptual blends. The analysis throws into relief issues which arise when we apply conceptual blending to aesthetic objects in general, and musical works in particular. One key concept here is Fauconnier and Turner's notion of time compression. Examining Brandt's (2006) useful ideas on blending in art as a way of further clarifying the special status of emotion in music, as distinct from utilitarian emotion in everyday life. Expanding on his earlier work with Lakoff, Kövecses (2000) researched the conceptualization of anger across four languages and cultures: American English, Hungarian, Japanese and Chinese. He discovered that anger actually comprises a *five-stage* scenario (Kövecses 2000, 143). These stages are:

1. Offending event (?);
2. Anger (signs of anger);
3. Attempt to control anger (containment);
4. Loss of control (explosion);
5. Retribution (violent actions).

As far as Lakoff and Kövecses can determine, this scenario constitutes a prototypical cross-cultural model. Additionally, the authors claim that all cultures share the CONTAINER metaphor for anger, conceptualizing this emotion as a fluid or

gas inside the 'container' of the human body. According to them, the CONTAINER metaphor is powerful because it allows cultures to conceptualize and coordinate all these separate items: intensity, control, loss of control, danger, expression, and action.

Compared to Fauconnier and Turner's version, and the Vivaldi example, Lakoff and Kövecses's prototype warrants two observations. First, stages 2–5 of the script are present within their model, but not stage 1 (which I label with a question mark). Theorists of emotion widely hold that anger is motivated by a perceived provocation, such as an insult to a person's honour or dignity, or a blockage of a person's goal or intention (Oatley 2004). It is strange that 'offending event' does not feature in Fauconnier and Turner's model. At first glance, nor does it appear in Vivaldi's score. The aria seems to begin with Stage 2 (signs of anger being the *stile concitato* rhythmic figure at b. 1), proceeding to Stage 3 (loss of control being the increasing dissonance in bb. 2–3) and then through Stage 4 (the explosive resolution at b. 4), climaxing with the 'action' of the sequence from b. 5, Stage 5. So does it matter that we don't see a musical provocation for this anger within the aria? The question is somewhat moot, because the cause of Emperor Tito's anger is well described in the dialogue of Scene 1, albeit in recitative rather than a closed musical number.

The analysis of the Haydn movement also yields interesting results. The music bears all the hallmarks of musical anger, including the three-in-a-bar crotchet arpeggios familiar from Tito's aria. At a more abstract level, a feeling of violence is created by Haydn's systematic destabilization of key junctures of the form, as Webster (2008) shows in compelling analytical detail. The main theme isn't properly grounded with root-position dominant chords; lacks descending voiceleading; and is riven by parametric non-congruences. The transition's path to a normative secondary key of the relative major (A major) is blocked and re-routed to a tragic dominant minor (C-sharp minor). The central D major lyrical episode in the development — a promise of 'hope' — is brutally snuffed out by the reprise of the main theme. This reprise is itself twisted out of shape through an eruption of violent secondary development from b. 146 (which displaces the theme's original answering phrase, bb. 5–8). The cumulative waves of this violence — main theme, transition-development-reprise — is striking. That said, when we consider the symphony as a work of abstract ('absolute') instrumental music, its rage is anomalous. The symphony *begins* with an angry explosion, Stage 5 of the anger scenario, without needing to go through Stages 1–4. I explain this apparent anomaly according to Fauconnier and Turner's notions of compression and syncopation.

Implications

I conclude that a synthesis of conceptual blending and cognitive metaphor provides a useful tool for analyzing musical

emotion. Crucially, this conclusion disposes of the criticisms lodged against Juslin's categorical theory of musical emotion by the Geneva School of Scherer and his co-workers. They claim that the 'utilitarian' emotion of everyday life isn't the same as music's 'aesthetic' emotion (Zentner, Grandjean and Scherer 2008, 515). Hence they contend that, unlike a tiger's roar, music can't really sound angry or dangerous because it is abstracted from the real world of adaptive action tendencies (where sounds prompt us to act to adaptive ends). But this 'either-or' binary misses the point, a point captured by mapping musical emotion more systematically within the four spaces of the blend. To understand the paradoxical, *as-if*, quality of musical emotion, we need to keep all four spaces of the blend in play.

Keywords

Emotion, Conceptual Blending, Metaphor, Time Compression, Haydn, Vivaldi.

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