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“The Structures of Musical Temporality”

Synopsis

The aim of my study is (1) to uncover basic features of musical temporality, (2) to develop a conceptual apparatus for describing temporal structures in musical phenomena in terms designed to capture their specifically temporal character, and (3) to apply that apparatus in the analysis of specific examples. Although it is the last stage that comprises the greater part of the study, the first is most suited to serving as a basis for a general introduction or summary. Consequently I shall concentrate here on presenting some of the concepts that are themes in my study and come to play a regulative role in the course of the investigation.

1. The investigation is *phenomenological*: it describes how music shows itself *as* music and as such becomes accessible for a subject hearing music *as* music. It is not expressly concerned with transcendental – or for that matter psychological – conditions of musical perception, but describes solely the object as it shows up insofar as those sorts of condition are actually fulfilled. Neither does the study include any epistemology: phenomenology as I take it here demands that we take each ‘matter’ or ‘case’ for what it is (“zur Sache selbst”, to use Husserl’s phrase), and what matters here (“die Sache”), in this case is the musical phenomenon.

2. In the context of this sort of phenomenological investigation, the concept of something ‘showing itself’ is an *ontological* concept, and the phenomenology may be defined as being an ontological phenomenology. What that means can be illustrated by the following example, of a cube. To any observer the cube uncovers only two or three sides at a time. To see the cube as a cube therefore means to perceive the visible sides of the cube while taking for granted the existence of the other sides as well. This is ‘showing itself’ as an *epistemic* concept. However, my point would be that the cube shows itself as a cube, whether anybody sees it or not, and shows itself as a whole even though there is no place from which it may be seen as a whole. In this sense, it shows itself all at once with all its sides, and as such it defines its own conditions for being seen: if you stand here, you will see this or that in such and such a way, whereas if you stand there, you will see this or that in some other way. This is ‘showing itself’ as an *ontological* concept. I have elaborated this distinction more fully in my book *Apparitionens Logik* (“The Logic of Apparition”).

3. The basic form for any analytic observation in my study is that “something shows itself *as* something” or “something is, can be, or asks to be, heard *as* something”. Musical perception is interpretative, and so a phenomenology committed to this sort of reflection may then be termed as a *hermeneutical* phenomenology, the ‘as’ then having the same sort of significance as what Heidegger calls “the hermeneutical ‘as’”.¹ The use of phrases like ‘hearing/seeing as ...’ may well suggest the Wittgensteinian notion of aspect perception. There is, however, an important difference. The figure in Part Two, § xi of the *Philosophical Investigations* is likely to be seen as a duck and as a rabbit because it, at the same time, looks like a duck and looks like a rabbit. Such a symmetry is

¹ I should perhaps caution that the notion of ‘hermeneutics’ involved here is one that is rather far removed from what tends to be implied by current talk of “musical hermeneutics”.

not – at least not right away – to be found in my hermeneutical approach. To stay in the example: if the figure actually *is* a sketch/drawing/picture of a rabbit (hanging on the front-gate of the rabbit-farm, for instance), then it looks like a rabbit as a part of *being* (or simply “because” it *is*) a sketch/drawing/picture of a rabbit. And if it nevertheless also looks like a duck – and if somebody actually sees it is as a duck – then this is “interesting”, a matter of “confusion” or whatever. (If a tree is seen as a tree that offers shade – and isn’t *wrongly* seen, i.e. not really *seen* as such – then it *is* a tree that offers shade, and shows itself as such.)

4. Just as the cube lets itself be seen in different ways subject to its own conditions, the musical object lets itself be heard in different ways that are constitutively determined by the object itself. But these ways are not equally salient: the object foregrounds some structures, leaving other structures to stand behind what is foregrounded. Hearing X in *this* way makes it more likely to hear Y in *that* way. (If you hear the harmony G-B-D-F as a dominant 7th (a V⁷ in C) – which you in turn may be more or less likely to do depending on the tonal implications of the intervallic structure and of whatever else can be heard going on in that context – *then* the occurrence of a subsequent E is most likely to be heard as resolving the functional dissonance. Of course you may force yourself to hear it another way, but the fact that force is needed is itself an immediate demonstration of the fact that one way of hearing is more salient than another.²) Conversely, and even more importantly, hearing X in *this* way makes it less likely, or even impossible, to hear Y in *that* way. (If you hear the harmony G-B-D-F in a context of B-minor, for example, *then* the F is straightaway heard instead as an E# with a dissonant character whose tension demands upwards resolution by step, whereas you would now have to make a real effort to hear it as an F whose tension demands downwards resolution towards E. And it would certainly not be possible to pursue both ways of hearing at the same time.) In this way then, the access to the object is *perspectival*. I take this to be a key reason for pursuing an *ontological* phenomenology: the music itself is always *richer* than what even the best ears may perceive. And in its appeal to the ear it defines its own accessibility as a structural *order*. If you are clever you may follow all three voices in a fugue, but you cannot, for example, at the very same time both hear the soprano with alto and bass as harmonic ground *and* hear the alto with soprano and bass as harmonic ground. In my investigation, this perspectivity is itself partly discussed in principle and partly applied as a basis for many of the analyses.

5. It has traditionally been the case that phenomenology – and maybe all philosophy since the Greeks – has conceived of human access to what is there and what is occurring in the world according to a visually oriented paradigm, which for obvious reasons raises a problem for a musical phenomenology. I don’t think it is possible to start again from scratch introducing an *akoumenology*³ that would be on a par with *phainomenology*⁴. My “strategy” is therefore to pursue, in a ‘naively’ straightforward but also critically attentive way, the analogy between the temporality of the visible and the temporality of the audible, with the hope that the limitations of this approach can be elucidated from within and taken on board as the investigation unfolds. I do, however, devote a complete chapter of my work to dealing exclusively with the question of the relationship between akoumenology and phenomenology.

² These sorts of entailments, spelt out in terms of ‘if’ and ‘then’, are not meant as psychological claims, but as having a synthetic a priori status. The establishing of functional tonality as a coherent syntactic system may indeed presuppose, for example, certain gestalt psychological preconditions. But as far as I am concerned once the system is introduced as a framework for notes to be heard *in*, we are no longer properly dealing with psychology.

³ From the Greek ‘akouē’: “what is or may be heard”.

⁴ From the Greek ‘phaino’, originally “comes or brings into light, becomes visible”.

6. Among the great phenomenological theorists of time and temporality, I would say that my own approach comes closer to Heidegger (and maybe Merleau-Ponty) than to Husserl. But in the context of a short presentation I think it may be more desirable from the point of view of clarity to formulate a number of my points with reference to Husserl's thinking about this issue.

One of Husserl's principal aims in his lectures *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* ("Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des Inneren Zeitbewusstseins") is to explain how it is possible to perceive a succession of particular phenomena *as* a succession. After all, we do only perceive one thing at a time. So how may a succession of perceptions become a perception of a succession? How can there be a "before" and an "after" in one and the same moment? As is well known, Husserl resolves the question of 'the breadth of the now' by introducing the concepts of *protention* and *retention*.⁵ Husserl's own general example is that of a short melodic sequence, but he studies it as a succession of notes rather than as an instance of melody. The distinction between these is unimportant to him, whereas in my study it is treated as an essential one that demands elaboration. The point is not to formulate criteria of how to differentiate successions of sounds that are musical from ones that are not, but to explain *what* we are hearing insofar as we are hearing the succession *as* a musical one. In a special chapter of my study I attempt to demonstrate that this distinction should basically be drawn in temporal terms.

Husserl himself takes succession itself as the time-object (### "Zeitobjekt") that he is basically concerned with, whereas I am engaged in the analysis of movement, change, etc. But the movement of a thing is not the same as the succession of its position in the course of that movement, just as the changing of a thing isn't the same as the succession of its versions in the course of that change.

Furthermore, Husserl deals with what the perceiving subject contributes, insofar as the present "now" gets the breath that it has to have when the succession is actually perceived as a succession. By contrast in my study I discuss how the time-object itself – be it a succession or a movement – must show itself if it is to let itself be perceived from within a single "now" *as* a succession, *as* a movement. Corresponding to the concept of what is perceived in one "now", I then define the '*momentary*' in a technical sense, as "what shows itself all at once".⁶ (Note that I am not using the phrases 'in one now' and 'all at once' to mean the same thing here: a "now" presupposes a subject that may *say* "now" in much the same way as Kant points out that you may put an "I think" ("Ich denke") before any representation ("Vorstellung").)

7. It is not within the scope of my study to discuss the optimum or usual extent of the stretch of time or number of occurrences that you or I or people in general may capture together in one "now". The analytical observation still has the form: *if* you hear A in one "now", i.e. because it shows itself all at once, *then* you will also hear B in this or that way. And this must be the case,

⁵ The terms 'protention' and 'retention' designate the immediate consciousness of future and past. Not as some kind of expectation of what is to come and memory of what has been, but as irreducible preconditions for expectation and memory generally, and for the immediate experience of the unity of the flow of consciousness.

⁶ The definition cannot but be technical. In English there is, as far as I know, no simple way to draw the distinction in German between what in ordinary talk is called an 'Augenblick' and what may be more freely and stipulatively defined as a "Moment". For present purposes I have chosen to apply italics when using the term in the technical sense defined above, while applying a non-italic typeface when the term is used in its ordinary sense. To be sure, Husserl also applies the term 'Moment' but in yet another sense: as a part of an object that could not exist without that object – i.e. a part of an object that is dependent on that object for its own existence. An example of an independent part of a cube would be a *piece* of the cube, whereas an example of a dependent part of the cube – a 'moment' – would be a *side* of the cube.

precisely because what I call the *momentary structure* of the present object (i.e. of the actual movement, of the actual music itself) is as it is. Developing the concepts of (i) the *moment* and the *momentary*, (ii) of the relationship between different *momentary* appearances of the same object, and (iii) of *immediate* versus *synthetic* moments, then forms a large part of my investigation, and these conceptual distinctions are subsequently applied systematically in the analyses of particular pieces of music.

8. The concepts of protention and retention as introduced by Husserl are ascribed to the perceiving subject as basic temporal modes of intentionality itself. Heidegger, in *Sein und Zeit*, may be said to generalise these modes to take in ordinary practical life and even to sheer human existence per se. The phenomena of futurity, pastness and present time (“Gegenwart”) are described as the *ecstases* (in the original Greek sense of the term)⁷ of the subject, a subject which for Heidegger is human existence itself (“die Existenz”). My point is that the *ecstatic* structures may be ascribed not just to a perceiving or practical subject, but are to be found operative whenever an object is ascribed direction, potency or movement. Just as what it means for a question to be a question is that it calls for an answer, so the tension of the music, whether that of an upbeat, a leading note, or the harmonic tension of a V^7 chord, *as* tension calls for a resolution. (If a substance in Aristotelian terms (an “object”) is assigned a *telos* it is already assigned a tendency to move or change in a certain way, in a certain direction.) In much the same way, an excuse *as* an excuse invokes an action that it is the excuse *for*, and in musical terms, a resolution *as* a resolution invokes a preceding tension. I will gather together these concepts relating to the object’s own temporal directedness under the mantle of the terms *projection* and *reclamation*.⁸ Projection here, in a sense that is ascribed to an object, is not treated here as a product of somebody’s expectation. Rather, the expectation is grounded in the recognition of the projection, and I would make an equivalent point about my use of the term *reclamation* with respect to its relationship to memory.

Regardless of whether the projection is actually fulfilled or not, it is generally – and in music, always – succeeded by something that *takes over* that projection, in the sense that it relates, in some way or other (more or less specifically, positively or negatively), to the projection in the projection’s own terms. Similarly, regardless of whether the things that happened before the *reclamation* were really the things reclaimed by the present or not, they are always *recalled*, i.e. they relate to the *reclamation*, in the *reclamation*’s own terms.⁹

For example, a V^7 chord in C-major consisting of G-B-D-F may *project* its own resolution to a subsequent tonic chord. But what if the subsequent harmony turns out to be F#-B-D-F#? As such the projection of the previous harmony is *taken over* negatively, while at the same time the first harmony, through the tonal *reclamation* of the latter, is being *recalled* as an augmented (“French”) 6th chord (technically speaking, a V^{7b9} of V with flattened 5th in 2nd inversion) in B-minor.

⁷ According to which *ek-stasis* may be translated as “that which is itself insofar as it stands out from itself”. This notion thus has very little to do with mental life, such as states of arousal, and should of course not be understood in animistic terms.

⁸ The term ‘projection’ as I use it here does not refer to any sort of psychologically understood act of intentional projection or mapping. Rather, the paradigm sense is here that which allows you to say that to perform an action such as building a house means to complete – and thus *fulfil* – the *project* of building a house (i.e. the *project* of performing that action). Perhaps the clearest way to grasp this meaning would be to treat the term ‘projection’ as a direct translation of Heidegger’s use of the term “Entwurf” in *Sein und Zeit*. The term ‘reclamation’ is here intended to correspond to the Danish ‘tilbagegreb’ or the German ‘Zurückgreifen’, which would be translated more literally as ‘grasping back’ or ‘taking back’.

⁹ Once again, any “animistic” interpretation of this use of the concept of the “ecstatic” would be totally inappropriate.

All this may occur (i.e. show up) in one *moment*, and so may be called a *momentary succession* (in my technical sense of this the term 'momentary'). To see or hear a movement *as* movement – rather than merely as a series of locations within its actual trajectory – means continuously to see or hear it as projecting its own continuation and as (positively) taking over such a projection. To see or hear something as “going on” means to see or hear it projecting a *still-going-on* and as positively taking over such a projection. Elaborating the implications of these concepts, including the working out of a formalised language for describing the complex structures that we are confronted with here, makes up a large part of my study.

8. My study deals with music as an object of an aesthetic than an epistemic mode of sensuous encounter. Music as music is an aesthetic object insofar as it is dedicated to *aisthesis*. In aural aisthesis we are not concerned epistemically with hearing *that* something is, for example, a harmonic tension, but with *hearing* that tension *as* tension – so long as there *is* a tension. Similarly, the point is not to establish the fact *that* something present is a recapitulation, but to hear the recapitulation unfolding *as* a recapitulation.

9. In principle music could be said to show itself as a single whole, as present within a single moment. This corresponds to the limiting case, where we hear the whole piece “all at once”. Mozart is supposed to have said things that indicate that he occasionally heard his own music in this way, and ordinary mortals may do so too, when the piece is sufficiently short. The important point, however, is that the music also shows itself at anytime in moments in which only a part of it is present, this of course being of the utmost relevance for us as practical listeners. To hear the music as music then means to hear it “on the way” to an unfolding of itself. Music is always “coming to” what is in fact a *place in* music: to a “*now as ...*”, where it presents itself explicitly related to an already *factual* “*at the time when ...*”, and a prospectively *possible* “*at a time when ...*”. And whatever specific analytical or descriptive formulations we insert after the word “as” in the formula “*now as ...*” will be what is then properly said to be *momentarily present*. Musical analysis tends to treat a whole piece or work as the sort of entirety that may be viewed “from without” or “from above”, as from some sort of Olympic viewpoint. By contrast it should be clear by now that my analyses expressly aim to describe the music as it shows up in its momentary presences.

The fact that as listeners we usually encounter music in local terms – i.e. one part at a time – doesn't mean that we have to perceive it as a mere succession of more or less intense or beautiful instants. My study tries to describe how that which is momentarily present phenomenologically as a part of its presence may *refer* to what has occurred before and thence also beyond the present moment. Here two things are important. Firstly, we should explain how the momentary reference to something that *has* happened occurred may itself occur *without* having the consequence that that which has happened and is referred to as such then itself becomes *enclosed* in the moment. Secondly, we should demonstrate how the extra-momentary is nevertheless not just some sort of add-on to the structure of the music, but actually *modifies* sensuously the momentary. The most important phenomenon that calls out for such an analysis is surely that of *recapitulation*. Music may at any time be involved in recapitulating itself, on a range of levels, across a variety of temporal perspectives, and with respect to many different aspects of the music. But what is recapitulated (the “recapitulatum”) has already transpired in advance of and thus outside the moment in which recapitulation (the “recapitulans”) occurs. Once again, it is one thing to just point out a recapitulation and hear *that* it is taking place, but quite another to ask, as I would, how a recapitulation *sounds* – that is, what do I hear whenever I hear/perceive a recapitulation unfolding *as* a recapitulation? (In order to see that Anna standing over there looks like her sister you must know what her sister looks like (you need to have seen her sister). But what you don't need to do,

and what you in fact do not do, is imagine her sister standing next to Anna and then compare her to Anna. Similarly, you don't imagine the *recapitulatum* sounding when you hear the *recapitulans*, as a basis for hearing the latter as its recapitulation.)

10. For Aristotle movement/change is always ascribed to an object, or more precisely to a primary substance: from some place to another, from one quality to another, from one quantity to another, as coming into being or passing away. Though music can never be a primary substance in that sense, the Aristotelian forms of movements are operative in music as well. In principle, a melody moves up and down in stepwise fashion much as a person moves by step up and down a staircase. The question then, of course, is what it is that remains internally unchanged as the substratum (in Greek: *hupokeimenon*) of the movement. As with many other musical "objects" the melody is what I would call a "*Heraclitean object*": the stream is that *which* streams, and it is what it does when it streams: the streaming itself.

This is not a phenomenon exclusive to music, as is shown by the many concepts of activities, processes, developments and events that do not need to be, and maybe even can't be, ascribed to a subject of change in this sense. For example, what is the subject of a shower of rain? The particular raindrops may be falling, but the shower itself surely is not. Or what is it that develops when we talk about certain "political developments"? The political *situation*, for example, may at any time be regarded as resulting *from* those developments, but it can't be the thing that we would ascribe those developments *to* (since this would have to imply not developments in a situation but developments in features of an underlying situation that somehow remained unchanged as a situation). In fact language is very sensitive to distinctions of this sort, and we can find most of them expressed in an exemplary fashion in connection with music.

For example, we might also consider concepts and distinctions such as quick/slow, hesitating, dwelling, to begin or to end, fixity, lability/stability, tension/relaxation, tension/resolution, etc. Or take the term 'going', which is both (i) the present participle of the main verb 'to go', whether in the strict sense as in "to walk" or the more general sense of "keep going (with whatever you're doing)", and (ii) an auxiliary verb ("X is going to do something"). It may be that this word first emerged, and that we learn it or even have to learn it, as designating the way we human beings move ourselves in some basic sense, as two-legged creatures. (And this suffices for some cognitive linguists to then say that the word is being used "metaphorically" when it is put to use in other contexts.) Ontologically, however, there is no such pattern of derivation here. In these terms, the phenomenon of 'going' is a primordial aspect (a "moment" in the Husserlian sense!) of temporality itself. And once again, we may find exemplary instances of this in music.

11. At one end of the scale of theoretical abstraction, I am addressing the question of which temporal structures are necessarily operative or prevalent in music just by virtue of its intrinsic character as music. At the other end, I am engaged in making concrete analyses of pieces of music. Somewhere between these extremes, I am also seeking to clarify the sorts of temporality present in and characteristic of some of the musical phenomena we might think of as elementary, such as those to which I now finally turn.

(a) *Melody* has already been mentioned. It is at the same time both the subject of melodic movement – that which is *in* movement – and it is the movement *itself*. Moreover, it is also the places *through which* the melody moves (e.g. "the melody has is moving just now to the high-point of the melody"). And it is the melodic curve or contour unfolded and outlined *by* the melody itself – the shape that it has. Even more, it is melodic identity, such that no matter where it takes us it continues in an unbroken fashion to be *that same melody*. (And maybe it is even other things too.)

So the same holds of music as anywhere in daily life: what we are closest to and most familiar with is the most complicated to elucidate or explain.¹⁰

(b) *Functional harmony* is of course not a universal phenomenon occurring in all musical cultures, in the way that melody and perhaps metre are. But it has certainly become deeply embedded in our Western musical tradition since the late Renaissance, and so I am inclined to think that the distinctive temporality of functional harmony itself may somehow echo the temporal structures embedded in ordinary practical life from that time onwards – embedded as lived interpretations of life. If there is something like a feel for time (a “Zeitgefühl”) characterising specific historical époques, music – once again – may be the place where we will find expressed in an exemplary fashion. The social classes that first experienced the changes brought about by the emergence of capitalism were in fact the same as those that first began to hear chords in functional terms.¹¹

(c) *Metrics*. Metrical time is a primordial phenomenon in Western music. Metre gives birth to musical time as an *energetic* phenomenon characterised by a constant pulsating between tension and resolution. A *melodic-energetic* phenomenon (i.e. upward movement as intensification, downward movement as resolution) presupposes that the note in question - “*this* note heard now” - at least appears in a melodic context: perhaps as a melodic high-point, a note filling out an interval of a third, marked by a leap, or something similar. Likewise, a *harmonic-energetic* phenomenon, such as a dominant triad’s tension relative to a tonal centre, takes for granted a tonal context in which to sound. A *metrical-energetic* phenomenon, though, does not presuppose any actual sounding at all! It is constituted by the very fact that the time we are dealing with is a *musical* time. As such, it also stands above the Law of Conservation of Energy. Melody and harmony draw on this, to enable what would otherwise be quite impossible: a harmonic progression beginning with a tonic chord, for instance, can nevertheless set itself in motion ‘on its own’, thanks to the fact that the tonic itself comes on a weak beat. To take another example, an upwards-melodic leap can be an organically occurring phenomenon, in that it sets out from a weak beat. I have examined the metrical-energetic phenomenon elsewhere (in English) in my article *Metrical Energy – Outline of a Theory*, my aim there being to develop a conceptual framework for use in uncovering and describing concrete metrical structures in music. Other temporal aspects of metre (in addition to metrical tension) will of course also be discussed in this study.

(d) *The phrase*. The concept of a ‘phrase’ should be taken here in a general sense to include whatever *has* a beginning, goes on and comes to an end, and is *showing itself as* beginning, going on and coming to an end in the very exposition of these same characteristics. Understood literally, a phrase means a sentence, and just as we can hardly imagine a language without sentences it may be difficult to have music without phrases. However, this might be an issue where musical modernism is concerned.

(e) *Part/whole*. Nothing is simpler than drawing two lines in a score and just declaring that a piece falls into three sections.¹² But arrived at in this way, the parts are the result of a partition of a *de facto* whole, and so are not really given until the music has already transpired and hence is no longer actually unfolding. The plurality of the parts and the relations between them are therefore not

¹⁰ In a few cases Husserl expresses his astonishment at the complexity of what is going on in the experience of “so eine einfache Melodie”. One dares not imagine his consternation had he really dealt with melody *as* melody rather than just as succession!

¹¹ In my study, examples from functional harmony play a significant role in introducing some of the key concepts described above.

¹² Sometimes we may of course discuss where such lines should be drawn. And we may generally try to make ourselves conscious of the principles we – usually unreflectively – apply (or ought to apply) when drawing such lines. However, that’s another discussion.

really being treated as dynamic phenomena, or rather they are not, in the strict sense defined above, properly being treated as *phenomena* at all.¹³ By contrast, the kind of phenomenological analysis I am trying to practise aims to study how, in any moment of its unfolding, music both divides itself up and coheres together, where this takes place within the course of an ongoing *transition* between different states of internal division and cohesion, either by virtue of what is contained in the moment itself or as a consequence of references to what lies outside it.

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¹³ Except in the special case where the whole musical work is *momentarily* present.