

THE INTERSUBJECTIVE DURÉE OF MUSIC

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In all forms of music, as meaningful communication, we find not only two persons but also many in various capacities tuning-in simultaneously to the internal time flow of the composer. This comes about through what I call an *intersubjective durée* through which meanings are built up and shared simultaneously. With communication offered by music, the listener participates in the process of making meaning through sharing. For Alfred Schultz:

Communicating with one another presupposes, therefore, the simultaneous partaking of the partners in various dimensions of outer and inner time... This seems to be valid for all kinds of communication, the *essentially* polythetic ones as well as those conveying meaning in conceptual terms—that is, those in which the result of the communicative process can be grasped monothetically.¹

Schultz defines how monothetic and polythetic meanings are synthesized into a unified meaning whole:

Monothetic-polythetic-synthetic. Modes of apperception, apprehension, comprehension, etc. Any object of experience may be seen “in one single ray” or *monothetically*. This may be so even though the object itself can only be grasped *polythetically*, that is, in a sequence of steps following each other in time, like the presentation of an idea in the unfolding speech of a person. The communicative action of the speaker, on its part, constitutes a *polythetic* act. The successive statements of his speech become *synthetic* because its polythetic elements are posited together and, eventually, form a complex unit. In retrospect, the synthetic unit of polythetic elements may blend into a single idea, and become a *monothetic object*.²

We can see that music, considered as a process of communication, is a structured series of events built up polythetically in outer time which is bound to an occurrence in the outer world. For Schultz:

Its very polythetic character warrants the simultaneity of the ongoing flux of the communicator’s experiences in inner time with the occurrences in the outer world, as well as the simultaneity of these polythetic occurrences in the outer world with the addressee’s interpreting experiences in inner time.³

In music, the ongoing flux *Inbetween* the composer and listeners arises from the *intersubjective durée*, meaning is communicated through living through the flow of inner time synthesized in the musical creation. Schultz points out that there is an immediate grasping of expressivity in the activity of co-performers. A relationship is built upon sharing simultaneously different dimensions of time. For instance, there is an unfolding of the flux of the music in an inner time, in which each performer “re-creates in polythetic steps the musical thought of the (possibly anonymous) composer and by which he is also connected with the listener.”⁴ The synthesization of the polythetic building up of meaning is likened to the intuitive process described by Henri Bergson:

...let us confine ourselves to showing how the intuition we speak of is not a single act, but an indefinite series of acts, all doubtless of the same kind, but each of a very particular species, and how this diversity of acts corresponds to all the degrees of being.⁵

Schultz utilizes Bergson’s idea of the “inner durée,” emphasizing the nature of its importance in the communicative process of music. In the co-performer situation, Schultz is talking about the formation of a community of space, a face-to-face relationship that arises in outer time, the dimension that unifies the fluxes of inner time of the participants and warrants their synchronization into a vivid experience of the present. *Inbetween* participants of a mutual tuning-in process is necessary for the possibility of intersubjective understanding. For communication, a relationship is established by reciprocal sharing of the other’s flux of experience in inner time by living through a vivid present together. This togetherness being experienced as Schultz says:

Only within this experience does the Other’s conduct become meaningful to the partner tuned in on him—that is, the Other’s body and its movements can be and are interpreted as a field of expression of events within his inner life.⁶

The meaning of a musical work consists in the articulated step-by-step occurrence in inner time. A sentence or a paragraph of a book, for example, may be understood monothetically, that is, it can be grasped, in a single glance, independently of the polythetic steps in which and by which this meaning has been constituted. Music, then, as a meaningful communication, through a synthesization, of the articulated step-by-step process presupposes a tuning-in with the original composer’s inner time, living through the present together. A Gestaltist perception would show that a melody will be perceived in its wholeness whether its elements are in the key of C or the key of G, two different sets of tones. As such, the intersubjective durée that allows musical experience to be shared and handed down through time

unifies the culture of its composer, even through time after that composer's death, the melody remains. Bergson critiques any attempt of the theories of determinism where consciousness is compared to any invisible musician:

Or yet again we are to think of an invisible musician playing behind the scenes while the actor strikes a keyboard the notes of which yield no sound: consciousness must be supposed to come from an unknown region and to be superimposed on the molecular vibrations, just as melody is on the rhythmical movements of the actor.⁷

As Bergson says, this would be a “philosopher who is studying my mind, rather than of my mind itself.”⁸ Meaning is not a collection or a number of conscious states that would do away with the qualitative, rather meaning in the whole personality is, says Bergson, in a single one. Each of us has a way of self-expression that reflects the whole personality. It is not an aggregate of conscious states such as sensations, feelings and ideas. Rather it is the particular coloring which each state assumes and which comes to each of them by reflection from all the others:

In short, we are free when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artists and his work.⁹

Through the intersubjective nature of the inner *durée* relived, then, by a composer, a performer and listener alike, the melody represents the composer's presence experienced much like the absence of the musician of the old player pianos which *appear* to produce the melody played by another invisible musician.

Experiences found in the intersubjective *durée* become meaningful through synthesization of polythetically built up experiences. Using music as an example we see that in the sharing is displayed the intersubjective *durée*. Music externalizes prephenomenal experience and shows us the timelessness of the “inner *durée*” and removes the boundaries of the outer world time. Through sharing time together meaning is communicated.

Notes:

- 1) Alfred Schultz, *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, ed. Arvid Brodersen (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), p. 178.
- 2) Alfred Schultz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, ed. Helmut Wagner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 320.

- 3) Schultz, *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 178.
- 4) *Ibid.*, p. 177.
- 5) Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. T.E. Hulme, intro. Thomas A. Goudge (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1955), p. 46. (Originally published 1903)
- 6) Schultz, *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, *op. cit.*, pp. 177-178.
- 7) Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, fourth edition, trans. F.L. Pogson (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1921), p. 147. (Originally published 1910)
- 8) *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- 9) *Ibid.* p. 172.