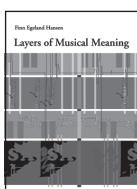


If Nila Parly – on the basis of the score – can read a feminine ending into the first two forte fortissimo staccato semiquavers of the *Trauermusik beim Tode Siegfrieds*, then you can interpret anything as feminism. On the CD interpretation I have (Georg Solti, 1965/97 Decca) I clearly hear the two sounding semiquavers as equally stressed, physically shocking enunciations of death and sorrow, physically affecting and phenomenologically arousing me (the CD listener). Whether this would also be the case for a real opera audience is a matter for the theory of the sounding, performed opera – which would by its nature take a quite different theoretical point of departure where the closure of semantics and meaning is not the main focus.

However, the most original and important achievement of the book is that Nila Parly has managed to focus on the singing women's voices and their articulation ('enunciation') in the tension between text (language) and music as decisive for the understanding of these women characters. The project is important in relation not only to Wagner himself, but also to the understanding of the historical and current reception of Wagner.

The book's title, which means *Absolute Song*, used as a concept for this 'voicing', is problematical and perhaps misleading in relation to Eduard Hanslick's concept of 'absolute music', which he developed precisely in opposition to Wagner's musical aesthetics. An alternative would have been to consult Roland Barthes' classic text, *The Grain of the Voice*, which – inspired by Kristeva and by Benveniste's linguistic enunciation theory – investigates at quite another theoretical level the intertwined voice production of music *and* language as the most profound and complicated creative source for human articulation of body and mind.

Ansa Lonstrup



Finn Egeland Hansen, *Layers of Musical Meaning*  
København: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2006  
333 pp., music exx.  
ISBN 87-635-0424-3  
DKK 300

The purpose of the book is clearly stated in the preface: there are 'two approaches to music in need of both supplementary and corrective reflection'. The truth value of hermeneutic interpretations cannot be determined, and structural analysis is not meaningful unless one pays close attention to the underlying codes. The normative character of Egeland Hansen's undertaking is evident throughout, but his attitude towards the two domains is different. Whereas analysis is supplied with a basic theory as well as with inventories of things that he considers necessary to make music inherently meaningful, various attempts to establish extramusical content are severely criticized – the reader cannot but get the impression that hermeneutics is a futile activity beyond remedy.

The reason for this condemnation is the author's strong adherence to positivistic principles – 'positivism' taken as a neutral term within the theory of science, of course, not as a trigger of irrational conditioned reflexes. He holds that theories (and by extension findings in general) should be falsifiable, and that unverified results amount to nil in scholarly work. When applied to musical hermeneutics, this guiding rule is bound to yield negative results and – so it seems to this reviewer – practitioners of musical analysis have to be careful not to get into credibility problems as well. It does not emerge as altogether clear whether Egeland Hansen's no-nonsense criterion of meaningfulness, strictly implemented, is entirely reason-

able within a field like musicology. To the extent that there are things in music that we want to learn about but that are not strictly knowable, we might consider a less rigorous methodology.

Anyway, chapter two disposes of hermeneutics. Quite a few interpretations of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony are cited (and a number of pages are wasted) just to show how much they diverge in terms of approach and extra-musical content. But Egeland Hansen also offers evaluations of four hermeneutic authorities. In as far as Kretzschmar restricts himself to middle-of-the-road characterizations of themes and motifs — a quite primitive kind of hermeneutics — he is harmless. Schering's way of reading Beethoven's compositions along with works by Shakespeare, Schiller etc. in order to extract musical narratives is exemplified and dismissed without further arguments (which seems both fair and sufficient). The interest is considerably heightened when the attacks are aimed at contemporary big game. Kramer claims that music, like the other arts, bears content, and that this content is accessible if only the analyses are valid. It is convincingly shown, however, that the hermeneutic 'window' through which Kramer observes Beethoven's Op. 111 is marred by serious errors of refraction. Tarasti's theory of music semiotics is succinctly presented — one cannot but marvel at the richness of musical signification that reveals itself when introspection is unhampered by positivistic control — and the atemporal semiotic square is then found to be too square a strait-jacket to capture the essence of Chopin's *Polonaise Fantasy*.

For every strange analysis a counter-analysis should be available. There is much work to be done here — musicology seems self-supporting in this respect — and it is praiseworthy when someone with an unbiased mind sets about to undertake it. The author also warns analysts of the pitfalls associated with establishing motivic affinities (beware of too short and stylistically commonplace items in out-of-the-way corners!). It is indeed quite awkward when one suspects that an analyst has by far out-smarted the composer. But identifying affinities does involve such risks, and turning to the reverse pitfall of triviality, of saying too little, overly circumscribed, pedantic analyses may fail to do justice both to the unregulated creativity of the composers and to the unbridled associations of the listening mind.

Egeland Hansen's theory of the structural meaning of music, music as heard when 'uncontaminated' by irrelevant associations and circumstances, assumes the existence of one 'comparator' for each element in music (rhythm, harmony, melody, etc.) that compares what actually happens in these domains (*parole*) with the codes for such events (*language*), codes that the listener must be in command of as internalized knowledge. The output of these processes serves as input for the 'integrator' having three functions: to establish the interrelationships between the elements, to recognize stylistic patterns, and to determine the relative importance of the elements. This scheme amounts to a quite plausible machinery for informed listening, but it also strikes as being a 'theory' that is too abstract to be strictly testable. Cognitive musicology might shed some light on some of these processes, but the author somewhat rashly adopts a quite negative attitude towards such research since it has a record of not taking due account of musical context and stylistic matters. Meanwhile, nothing prevents the workings of Egeland Hansen's framework from being specified, an endeavour that occupies most of the book and yields a number of pertinent observations that may be shown to agree, not primarily with how music is heard, but with how it is in fact constructed.

Some particulars of his system deserve mentioning and comment. While admitting that repeated listening often makes for more rewarding experiences, the author, wanting to take account of the temporal nature of music and its concomitant effects of expectation, opts for dealing with first-time encounters. And whereas he acknowledges the fact that the listener may in fact choose among several codes, he insists 'that in the ideal listening situation the listener must apply exactly the same set of codes as the composer did when he wrote the piece

of music' (p. 14) — otherwise the understanding will be lost. It is regrettable, however, that the best listening is left aside, and that ideal/uncontaminated listening tends to be extremely rare, perhaps unattainable.

In his discussion of Nattiez's concepts of *poiesis* ('the way a musical work is created') and *aesthesia* ('how it is perceived'), Egeland Hansen dismisses the 'neutral level', i.e. the 'level of analysis on which it is not decided *a priori* whether the results ... are pertinent from the aesthetic or poetic point of view': 'In my opinion a strict and mechanical analysis of the musical surface has no great relevance, at least not to the present work' (p. 28). However, already one page later he embarks on an investigation to find out whether the Franconian rule applies in a certain body of works. Intervals are counted and durations are sliced, and it seems that the level is neutral indeed; the statistical method as well as its results would certainly come as a surprise both to the contributors to Codex H 196 and to their listeners, which does not prevent that the findings are pertinent for both. The Franconian test is quite good, and I think that many of the best things in the book derive from such 'neutral' undertakings.

According to the theory, music may be 'represented' by means of notations or sound registrations of various sorts. It can also be 'paraphrased', and this happens as soon as we attach musico-theoretic terms like 'upbeat' or 'triad' to a represented event, thus adding intellectually reliable pieces of experiential content. Finally, music is also 'interpreted' which means, not that we play it, but that we 'attribute specific content to a musical progression', which in turn implies that we have left 'the discipline of musical analysis' which is scholarly and 'therefore objective'. It is the prerogative of any author to stipulate re-definitions of worn-out words, but as far as music analysis is concerned, it is a pity that testability commands such a high price in terms of reduced territory and interest. There are insights to gain already if the restrictions regulating what counts as a permissible description were somewhat less rigid, if the phenomenology of tonal motion were granted some space within 'paraphrasing'. Words like 'upbeat' and 'triad' cannot very well be the outermost boundary marks beyond which the quagmire of hermeneutics necessarily begins.

The larger part of Egeland Hansen's book deals with the codes that we must know in order to understand the various layers of musical meaning. Gregorian chant is used as an example to show the workings of tonality: the author simply gives a short version of his thesis from 1979 — a *tour de force* on the neutral level. Summarizing common knowledge, the chapters on harmony and form are entirely eclectic. Lots of old meat is served, but the chewing is made easier by the clarity of the presentation and the well-chosen music illustrations. As a bonus, the proponents of harmonic dualism (may they otherwise rest in peace) are found guilty of having invented theories that lack support from compositional practice.

Most of the chapter on rhythm is devoted to a discussion of the phenomenon of metric accent, being the main (or only?) material for the comparator dealing with small-scale temporal formats where it gives rise to sensations of tension and release. But what about grouping — is it matter of *parole*, rather than *language*? From the point of view of analytic objectivity, it is worrying that ambiguities turn up already when considering the relative accentual weights between pairs of bars, but Egeland Hansen handles such situations without much discussion. Perhaps the scope and power of the rhythmic comparator is severely restricted when it comes to hypermetric issues? Perhaps some assistance from the integrator is what is needed?

'Stray Reflections on Melodic Codes' is the shortest but most interesting of these chapters — questions and provisional answers provoke thinking. The author suggests that, especially when compared to the orderly and thoroughly studied system of harmony, the relationship between melodic *parole* and *language* (being hard to pin-point) may be different, and indi-

cates some problems to be pursued. What is, for instance, the relationship between interval size and melodic/tonal tension? What is the nature of the symmetry between ascending and descending melodic motions?

Bengt Edlund



Anders Meng, *Temporal Feature Integration for Music Organisation*  
Kgs. Lyngby, Danmarks Tekniske Universitet, 2006  
IMM-PhD-2006-165



Peter Ahrendt, *Music Genre Classification Systems – A Computational Approach*  
Kgs. Lyngby, Danmarks Tekniske Universitet, 2006  
IMM-PhD-2006-164

This is not a review proper but merely a brief presentation of two closely related Ph.D. theses from the Technical University of Denmark (DTU).

The subjects of these theses lie within the research area *Music Information Retrieval* (MIR) and aim at a computerized genre recognition mechanism working on the acoustical signal as it appears on a CD or other standard music medium.

The mechanisms developed may be compared with fingerprints and DNA-tests in forensic medicine. These methods may certainly be crucial in establishing 'who did it', but they do not in themselves contribute to our understanding of the crime committed, psychologically or sociologically. In the same way the concepts *Short-time Feature Extraction* and *Temporal Feature Integration* which form the central approaches in both theses may well establish that a given sequence of music belongs to a certain musical genre or that it is written by a certain composer – but they do not tell us anything about music – neither the music analysed nor music in general.

*Short-time Feature Extraction* consists in cutting the music into overlapping slices of typically 10–40 ms. The slices are then analysed with regard to frequency and intensity. It should be noted, however, that a Fourier transform performed on such narrow time windows yields a very coarse frequency resolution. Consequently the extracted spectra may not be intuitively connected with any normal musical concept such as harmony or timbre. This, however, does not prevent the analyses from yielding useful information in connection with MIR.

*Temporal Feature Integration* 'is the process of combining (integrating) all the short-time feature vectors in a time frame into a new single feature vector on a larger time scale' (Ahrendt, p. 31). Various, mainly statistical methods are discussed, none of which, however, speak directly to the musician or the musicologist.

The performance accuracy of the systems is tested on two data sets, one of which is made up of 100 songs evenly distributed among the five genres Classical, Jazz, Pop, Rock, and Techno. The other, and much larger set consists of 1,210 songs distributed among 11 genres: Alternative, Country, Easy Listening, Electronica, Jazz, Latin, Pop & Dance, Rap & HipHop, R&B Soul, Reggae, and Rock. The first set is tested on a panel of 22 persons 'without any