Metaphors, fad-words and travelling concepts in musicological terminology

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It is a well-known truth that certain intellectual trends and fad-words prevail in different times – impacting thinkers and scholars who – most willingly, or perhaps quite unconsciously – incorporate fashionable phraseology into their own vocabulary. The American sociologist Robert Nisbet has claimed that transfer of terminology simply attests to similarities in perceiving the world, serving as the ultimate proof for the human inclination to observe the reality according to certain patterns (2002, 43). Consequently, these specific concepts actively shape the history of ideas being vital components of particular cultural periods. Furthermore, these notions often transgress the borders of epochs and elude the limits of the disciplines in which they originated. While appearing in completely novel areas and in quite unexpected contexts, they seem to prove their intellectual capacity by acquiring (slightly or completely) altered meanings and connotations which consequently may result in far-fetching implications. This ability of some concepts to be applied metaphorically – across times and disciplines – was noted by the Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal. She suggested to tag them as travelling /nomadic concepts since, as she states, "concepts are not fixed. They travel – between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities" (2002, 24). Some disciplines even laid their foundations with the use of such borrowed and adapted vocabulary, including musicology, where "to think, talk, or write about music is to engage with it in terms of something else, metaphorically" (Spitzer 2004, 1).

This predilection of using similar, or even the same words, to describe phenomena observed within the realm of various disciplines seems to be acknowledged and positively welcomed (if not justified) by some scholars, who perceive metaphors as extremely useful cognitive instruments (MacCormac 1985). It seems that an extraordinary adaptability of certain words across disciplines is connected with certain traits such as plasticity, defined as the flexibility to become easily assimilated in scholarly environments alien to the primary context, and functionality, understood as simplification of the jargon leading to the facilitation of the communicative processes taking place between scholars and their addressees. In that sense, not only flexible and mobile metaphors, but also travelling concepts, as well as fad or buzzwords are "more than a mere substitution of one term with another: they reflect

broader processes of substitution that often associate extended networks of images and functions beyond the individual terms in question" (Bonds 1991, 6). They are efficient carriers of values, for example those attributed to music. Accordingly, this paper is an attempt to demonstrate the relevance of metaphors in the conceptualization of the object of musicology by illustrating the impact of metaphorical thinking on music analysis.

MUSICOLOGY AS A SCIENTIFIC DISCIPLINE

Musikwissenschaft (musicology) was established as an academic discipline in the 19th century and immediately welcomed the application of scientific procedures from a variety of areas, including natural sciences. The newly born musicology strived for so-called objective methods, i. e. the ones remaining in accordance with postulates of systematic organization of knowledge and unbiased evaluation of collected data.[1] This line of thinking was paved, among others, by Guido Adler (1855–1941) – an early trail blazer of *Musikwissenschaft* (Mugglestone – Adler 1981, 3). Adler openly wrote that in order to "attain […] research of the laws of art of diverse periods and their organic combination and development, the historian of art utilises the same methodology as that of the investigator of nature; that is, by preference, the inductive method" adding that "the emphasis here lies in the analogy between the methodology of the science of art and that of the natural sciences" (3). This eagerness to appropriate scientifically proven methods of analysis entailed an emphasis on the verifiability of hypotheses and, in fact, mirrored this highly positivistic outlook adopted by 19th century musicologists. Their approach was "a reaction against metaphysical, speculative or inferential thinking" (Graziano – Johnson 2006, 18). At the same time, as an academic discipline taught at universities, musicology found itself in the need of re-inventing the language(s) to describe music: its history, paleography, instruments as well as theory, psychology, aesthetics, etc. Yet in the 19th century, various types of rhetoric inherited from previous epochs had already been in general use, abounding with an enormous multitude of elaborated comparisons, finesse analogies and metaphors that even those positivist-oriented musicologists found quite useful and willingly resorted to (Zon 2000) while trying to answer the question whether music is able to refer to anything else beyond actual sounds.

VARIETY OF CONCEPTS AND METAPHORS USED FOR DESCRIBING MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS

As mentioned above, in order to explain sonic phenomena the newly-born field of musicology had various concepts borrowed from other walks of life at its disposal. Talking about music has always been highly metaphorical, and, as a consequence, perhaps rather inadequate. This widespread (till today) suspicion that words cannot precisely capture the phenomenon of music is reflected in various proverbial sayings, such as the one that "writing about music is like dancing about architecture".[2] Hence the musicological apparatus needed to be situated at the intersection of verbal and non-verbal elements: precisely this feature makes the discipline open towards the infiltration of various metaphors (Schreiber 2012) which in their essence combine

a "logical moment and a sensible moment" where "a verbal moment and a non-verbal moment co-operate in the unique manner" (Ricoeur 2003, 246).

While describing music involves special terminology, in order to grasp the meaning of certain notions as applied in musicology, it is also necessary to fathom their historical transformations. Indeed, even a short overview of the most popular tropes encountered in the musicological jargon will help us realize the diversity of sources, ways of transforming certain concepts to suit current musicological needs, and means of assimilating appropriate linguistic tools deemed as adequate metaphors (Adlington 2003). While discussing the arcana of music most authors have felt the need to resort to a number of various ideas, as if substantiating their deliberations about ephemeral sonic experiences.

From emotions to language and correspondence of arts

One of the most popular way of describing music – by the means of affects – was developed in the realm of theory known as *dramma per musica* in the 17th century. By then theorists of music (e. g. Giovanni Doni) as well as philosophers (e. g. Marin Mersenne) claimed that music was not only able to evoke but also to transmit emotions. The doctrine prompted the perception of music as an outlet of human passions.

Another widespread mode of talking about music was to compare it to a linguistic system. Accordingly, especially in the 18th century, such grammatical notions as *Satz* or *Periode* and *Einschnitt* were used while analyzing musical compositions. This tradition thrived again in the early 20th century (e. g. in the writings by Heinrich Schenker) as many musicologists were heavily influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between "langue" and "parole". In the meantime – predominantly in the romantic era (celebrating the idea of *correspondence of arts*) literary programmes were also considered as useful tools for decoding (hidden) connotations of certain compositions. Contemporary musicologists discuss the semiotics of music considering such concepts as symbol, gesture, or sign (e. g. Eero Tarasti, Peter Faltin, Vladimír Godár, Leszek Polony).

The impact of hard sciences and architecture

The tradition of linking mathematics and music stems from ancient times (e. g. the circle of Pythagoras[3]) and was cultivated in medieval times (e. g. Boethius). Mathematical discoveries and developments of the late 16th and early 17th century (such as the innovation of decimal fractions or logarithms) heavily influenced the debate on the nature of music (e. g. Mersenne's *L'harmonie universelle*, 1627). The appliance of mathematical tools to describe musical phenomena was revived in the second half of the 20th century (e. g. by Allen Forte). In addition, 20th-century composers willingly formulated their thoughts on the issue of order in music or the role of mathematics in their compositional processes. For example, Igor Stravinsky claimed the existence of irreversible links between musical masterpieces and mathematics (1962, 101).

In the 17th century, many thinkers favoured the idea of music's immediate connections with cosmic laws. Also Newton's mechanics, or the concept of force and energy, etc. impacted 19th-century writers such as Edmund Gurney (*The Power of*

Sound, 1880), Friedrich von Hausegger and Ernst Kurth. The notion of music as an entity made up of smaller units resembling an architectonical structure was reverberated by, among others, philosopher Karl Philipp Moritz and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.[4] The metaphor of music as a frozen edifice was further popularized by such prominent writers as August Wilhelm Schlegel, Adolf B. Marx, Hugo Riemann, Hugo Leichtentritt, etc. The legacy of this type of thinking is visible in today's theory of popular music: e. g. the most common form of pop songs is described as AABA where B stands for […] "bridge".

In the realm of psychological associations

The physiological approach towards researching music was heralded in the 1860s by Hermann von Helmholtz, who was interested in the physiology of the auditory system. This research was continued in the late 19th century by Carl Stumpf or Theodor Lipps. Also Gestalt psychology influenced early 20th century music theoreticians (e. g. Herman Reichenbach).

The development of orchestral music in the 19th century advanced the idea of perceiving and describing music with the help of colours.[5] One of the most renowned French composers, Hector Berlioz, wrote in his *Grand traité d'instrumentation et d'orchestration modernes* (1844) about various instruments whose sounds could be compared with the impression of different colours. Helmholtz – upon discovering that different timbres of vibrating instruments are connected with various visual spectra – also associated them with colours (Hatfield 1993, 523). Hermann Erpf proclaimed *Klangfarbe* to be an integral element of a musical form while Kurth, Felix Auerbach, or Arnold Schoenberg often used such terms as *Klangfarbe* (sound-colour), or *Klangfarbenmelodie* to describe music composed at the turn of the 20th century.

Biological concepts

Erica Mugglestone suggests that "the dynamics of evolution permeated the 19th century world-view" and even Adler's writings were "rich in images of organic growth and decay, and that his concept of music history is evolutionist" (1981, 4). But it was already by the 17th century when the growing interest in researching the surrounding world resulted in coining new words such as *organization* predominantly in use in reference to biological findings.[6] Another influential concept soon accepted in the realm of music analysis was the differentiation of organisms into species. Consequently the word *Gattung* (genre) became most commonly used also in musicological writings.[7]

In 1737 the German composer, writer, and music theorist Johann Mattheson (1681–1764) compared musical analysis with the dissection of a living body (in his *Kern Melodischer Wissenschaft*, 1737). According to Mattheson musical compositions, just like living organisms, could be subject to *Zergliederung* (dissection) for the sake of empirical research. But in the 18th century mechanistic conceptions, representing the vein of hard science in the modern age (*Neuzeit*), predominantly favoured analogies of musical compositions with clockworks and other mechanisms (Shapin 1996,

33–37). Hence the mechanical rules of grammar as applied to music were preferred, although musical compositions were already perceived as "sonorous" bodies.[8] In the romantic era, when "the model of organism was successfully to supersede previous eighteenth century models" (Bent 1994, 12) the tendency toward holistic thinking clearly marked an objection to the scientism of the enlightenment period.

The tradition of perceiving musical composition as a whole (perfect or imperfect) was inherited by the next generations of music theorists. In this organic vision, the relations between various elements of musical composition and their possible alterations were governed by the holistic totality, subordinated to the idea of *unit*y as expressed by the German writer E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776–1822) praising Beethoven's work or by another German scholar, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) in his *Hermeneutik und Kritik mit besonderer Beziehung auf das Neue Testament* (1838) where he spoke of "organic unity" (7) advocating the reduction of multiplicity to a noble unity.

Alongside discussing the *shape* of musical compositions (perfect unity), the organic-generative conceptions of the form also entailed deliberations on the processes of their internal development, involving references to the notion of *growth*, e. g. in the writings of the renowned German theorist Adolf B. Marx (1795–1866), who in his *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition* (1837) resorted to such terms as *Keim* (grain-motif), *Entwicklungsmotiv* (evolutionary motif) and *Entwicklung* (development) (400). Various composers and theorists were influenced by these propositions, among others those working in French circles: for example, Vincent d'Indy (1851–1931), in his *Cours de composition musicale* (1903) discussed the notion of *cellule-motif* (cell-motif).

Early 20th century musicologists like Hugo Leichtentritt (1874–1951) referred to analogies with *Bau* and *Aufbau* while speaking about musical forms. This approach of viewing the musical work as an evolutionary entity consisting of motifs stemming from a melodic kernel was continued in the mid-20th century by the Serbian born composer, pianist and musicologist Rudolph Reti (1885–1957).

Music between mind and body

Is music, perhaps, a metaphor for life itself? When we read about music, we often learn that "music 'moves', 'speaks', paints an 'image', or fights a 'battle'" (Spitzer 2004, 1). It is speculated that we cannot escape such comparisons and associations embedded into our imagination because music is predominantly about "an interaction between sound and listener" (Cook 1992, 10). The perception of music is, after all, a very complex phenomenon grounded in both concrete (e. g. bodily experience) and more abstract elements (e. g. verbal description), hence theorists and listeners oftentimes conceptualize musical structures by their metaphorical mappings rooted in physical experience (Spitzer 2004, 4). Since the 1980s, some musicologists, especially those interested in relations between music and language, have adapted an interactionist approach focusing on categories applied to the reality and reciprocity between mind and body. Since conceptual metaphors correlate source and target domains by preexistent – apparently objective – similarity (Lakoff – Johnson 1980,

5),[9] orientational metaphors became commonly discussed in the realm of music, especially those of "movement" and "space".[10] But does music really move? Roger Scruton replies "sounds do not move as music does […]. Nor are they organized in a spatial way, nor do they rise or fall" (1997, 93). For the philosopher the notions of musical movement and space are simply products of imagination: intentional, yet lacking empirical elements[11] because "music is the intentional object of an experience that only rational beings can have, and only through the exercise of imagination. To describe it, we must have recourse to metaphor, not because music resides in an analogy with other things, but because the metaphor describes exactly what we hear when we hear sounds as music" (9).

But for several researchers (like Candace Brower, Steve Larson, Janna Saslaw) the metaphor of space and movement need not be detached from bodily experience. While questioning the functionality of such metaphors in the realm of music, some would rather prefer to call them abstract terms (Cumming 1994; 2000, 49–52) or see them as elements of perception (Clarke 2001). Lawrence M. Zbikowski argues that music, as a manifestation of human cognitive capacities, is invariably linked with human experience (e. g. bodily sensations) and needs to rely on image/schematic structures for the expression of meaning and emotions (Zangwill 2007). As a basically nonlinguistic medium, music – and more precisely its perception – is based on metaphorical thinking processes with language as one of the means of manifestation. While distinguishing between conceptual and linguistic metaphors, Zbikowski privileges the role of mental concepts and processes rather than mutual relations of music and language trying to prove that the construction of mental space is not necessarily language-related, but may occur as a reaction to music (1997; 1998; 2002; 2008).

FINAL (?) REMARKS

Let us stress once again that music, as an intentional phenomenon whose meaning is negotiated by listeners, among others vis-a vis noise (Attali 1985), is oftentimes described by words borrowed from other disciplines. Metaphors, among the most commonly encountered figures of thought and speech, as applied in the musical context not only reflect certain ideas, but also pave the way for new interpretive codes. As Roger Scruton observed "the metaphor cannot be eliminated from the description of music, because it defines the intentional object of the musical experience. Take the metaphor away, and you cease to describe the experience of music" (1997, 92). Lawrence Kramer claims that the linguistic description of music is obsessed with grasping the *essence* or the *nature* of music, and proposes what he calls "the aesthetic metaphor thesis" (i. e. accommodating certain aesthetic properties that music is supposed to sustain) to be applied in metaphorical descriptions of emotions enticed by music (2004). But there are also voices that point to possible problems caused by metaphors in the realm of musicology. For example, Karol Berger admits that metaphors lie at the very heart of interpreting music, but he also observes the paradox of metaphorical interpretation: on the one hand it seems irredundant, if not necessary, but on the other hand it also seems to be rejected (2004). It seems that in musicology

"a metaphor is an affair between a predicate with a past and an object that yields while protesting" (Goodman 1976, 69).

Despite possible problems, the creative potential of metaphors, buzz-words or travelling concepts as applied in the realm of musicology can be easily observed (Walton 2015). As demonstrated, musicological terminology refers to vocabulary dealing with emotions, colours, but also resorts to poetic explanations, while remaining open towards more rigid, e. g. mathematical or physical formulas. While organic and rhetorical metaphors dominate, the discipline's terminology teems with borrowed words and concepts, proving their adaptability by far-reaching inter-connections and influences.[12] In other words, metaphors have become common coin in musicology (Watkins 2011, 14).

It can be stated that the language used for describing music serves as a tool facilitating communication between musicologists, music lovers and music critics etc. (Dörries 2002*)*. Furthermore, it is also clear to see that the discipline has managed to create its own unique jargon. Its existence is neither unique or typical for musicology, but what becomes its characteristic feature is the (over)use of deliberate and non-deliberate metaphors (Steen 2008) that serve as external points of reference attesting their functional role. Their presence within the discipline must be welcomed as they enable to understand what is still unknown and guide through less researched terrains; at the same time they may also exclude those unfamiliar with the discipline-specific metaphors, thus differentiating between "users" and "non-users". Yet I will claim that the popularity and persistence of metaphors as well as travelling concepts in musicological writings has proved, beyond much doubt, their immediate usefulness: while transgressing the borders of disciplines, they are helping to establish and crystalize specifically musicological methodology and tools of analysis. It can be even speculated that metaphors, fad-words and travelling concepts in fact facilitated the process of crystallization of the musicological principles, rules and ideals.

NOTES

[1] Musicological research in the form suggested in 19th-century Vienna proved to be inspirational for young academics stemming from various parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Thus not only similar ideas but also linguistic terms were disseminated in Eastern and Central Europe, for example in Polish musicological departments: in Krakow (est. 1911) and Lvov (est. 1912).

[2] The statement is variously attributed: from Igor Stravinsky to Miles Davis, Elvis Costello and Frank Zappa.

[3] As the best known examples of these associations even today, the so-called Pythagorean tuning system or the concept of the tetractys (tetrad) can be mentioned.

[4] Goethe wrote on 23rd March 1829: "Ich habe unter meinen Papieren ein Blatt gefunden, wo ich die Baukunst eine erstarrte Musik nenne" ("I have found, among my papers, a leaf, in which I call architecture frozen music"). Similarly the German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling stated in 1859 that "Architektur ist erstarrte Musik" ("architecture is solidified music"), and his words were echoed by Arthur Schopenhauer claiming that "Architektur ist gefrorene Musik" ("architecture is frozen music").

[5] This is not to be confused with the concept of synesthesia, which involves perceiving music with

colours as an effect of a neurological condition in which one cognitive recognition is almost automatically connected with another sensory experience.

[6] To be found, among others, in the writings by the English scientist Robert Hooke (1635–1703) or the Italian doctor Marcello Malpighi (1628–1694) as well as philosophical works by John Locke (1632–1704) or Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716).

[7] See for example: Arlt – Lichtenhahn – Oesch 1973.

[8] In the late 17th century, the German chemist and physician Georg Ernst Stahl (1659–1734) explained the difference between the mechanistic and organic concepts in the biological context. Following that, in the 18th century the word *organismus* (as the synonym for "organization") became increasingly popular. For more, see Toepfer 2009, 83–106.

[9] Lakoff and Johnson argue that "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (5).

[10] For example: Johnson – Larson 2003, 63–84.

[11] Roger Scruton outlined his theory of metaphorical transfer in *The Aesthetics of Music* (1997). For Scruton music is realized through the experience of listening, so in order to describe and define our sensations associated with it we use metaphors of time and space.

[12] While musicology predominantly makes use of borrowed concepts and adapted terminology, the career of musicological terms transferred to other disciplines should be also acknowledged. One such concept is, for example, "polyphony".

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Musicology. Metaphor. Travelling concept.

This paper deals with metaphors (fad-words and travelling concepts) as encountered in the field of musicology, highlighting how and when certain concepts and ideas were borrowed and/or appropriated from other disciplines. It is claimed that by creating its unique jargon (abounding with discipline-specific metaphors) musicology has proved the facilitating role of metaphors in the communication between musicologists, music lovers, music critics etc. It is also argued that while transgressing the borders of disciplines, metaphors have helped to establish and ossify typically musicological methodology and tools of analysis.

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