

## Tunes of Today from the Island of the Day Before

**Abstract.** Audiation, the ability to internally represent sound that is not physically present is a human capacity indispensable for any meaningful engagement with music, including composing, performing, music pedagogy, and so on. It is related to certain music-theoretical concepts, notably prolongation, in the sense that the prolonged sound is active and somehow deemed present even when not actually sounding. This, in turn, can be connected with certain concepts of psychoanalysis. Drawing on our previous research in which we demonstrated isomorphism between musical structures and processes, and a process unfolding in the unconscious mind, in the present paper we emphasize anticipation as a crucial part of the listening experience. It is necessary for the object (in this case a musical event, typically a theme or motive) not only to be repeated, but to temporarily “disappear”, thereby creating expectation of its reappearance, and the tension thus produced is released by regaining the object. This psychic movement toward searching for the lost object and the resulting release of tension is only possible if the lost object exists in the listener’s unconscious mind. This is enabled by the fragmentation of the object (according to psychoanalytic terminology) into *partial objects*. The given object (musical event) is transformed so that it contains partial objects, which prevent the object from being irretrievably destroyed. While such transformations may appear to the conscious Ego as discontinuity, according to the logic of primary processes, the Id experiences them as identity. The constant presence of the object even when not physically sounding may be considered as a kind of unconscious audiation.

**Keywords:** primary process, audiation, prolongation.

Psychoanalytic explorations of music have a long history, and for a number of psychoanalysts music was an important means for their understanding of the unconscious processes. Julie Jaffe Nagel, for instance, formulated this very clearly: “If the verbal analysis of dreams paves a royal road to the unconscious, music provides an aural road to the same destination” (Nagel 2008: 526). There are momentous ramifications of the psychoanalytic approach to music. Many aspects of music can be better understood through the study of the unconscious mind, and conversely, the study of music can advance in many ways our understanding of psychic processes. The initial impulse for the ideas presented in this paper comes from the observation of the ability of the human mind to form an internal representation of sound which is not physically present; to put it simply: to hear something that is not actually sounding. This is largely derived from Edwin Gordon’s concept of audiation, and it is an indispensable tool for any meaningful engagement with music, including composing, performing, and music pedagogy. It can also be related to certain theoretical concepts, notably prolongation, which also talks about music events being active and controlling certain portions of music even when not actually present. Such theoretical concepts, in their turn, can be connected with processes unfolding in the unconscious mind, and the principal aim of this article is to shed more light on these connections.

We will begin with some fundamental principles of psychoanalysis. One of the milestones in the development of psychoanalytic thinking is the understanding that the obtaining of pleasure, while avoiding displeasure, is a powerful principle (*Lustprinzip*) and the basic motive of any psychic functioning. During the earliest part of our life, the Id as the representative of this principle is the predominant element of psychic structure. This idea, which lies at the core of Sigmund Freud’s theories, was elaborated later by his close collaborators such as Paul Federn (Federn 1915), and stands firmly even today. The Id seeks the fulfillment of wishes regardless of the constraints of reality. Although a rudimentary Ego is also present, it is too weak to engage in the significant interplay with its mighty counterpart, the Id. The pleasure, at this initial developmental phase, will be obtained by the discharge of tension, achieved, if possible, without any delay or, in other words, without prolonging the state of tension. However, according to Freud’s structural model of the mind, in the course of further development two psychic instances, namely the Ego and Superego, enter inevitably into the play.

It is important to investigate the destiny of the impulse to discharge (and the pleasure that follows it), leaving aside for the time being, the representation of the object that promises satisfaction. If satisfaction is not immediately achieved, the tension that seeks discharge may have a threefold destiny:

- a) The impulse is renounced or inhibited, and the further rise of the amount of tension is suppressed and blocked.
- b) The impulse is turned back to its original source, that is, to the subject.
- c) The discharge is postponed or withheld until the circumstances permit its discharge, and pleasure will be gained.

A brief explanation is due of how the powerful Id impulse can traverse the paths we have just described. In the option a), it is the task of the Superego to inhibit, in certain situations, the direct gratification or

pleasurable discharge. This inhibition can occur for various reasons. The most common one is that the instant gratification of the impulse – particularly when such an impulse is aggressive – may be dangerous for the person. Dangerous not only because of the possible retaliation on the part of the attacked object, but also because of the feeling of guilt that may arise, the feeling that arises as a product of early development and education. The task of the Ego in this case is to alarm that this instant satisfaction may lead not to pleasure, but yet to greater displeasure. One of the outcomes of such inhibition is the aggression that is now turned back towards the subject, which brings us to the outcome b). We do not consider either the outcome a) or b) as particularly relevant for music: we do not see (at least for now) how we could even recognize such situations in a piece of music.

Of pivotal interest is, therefore, the option c): the delay of the impulse to discharge. In order to elucidate this, we will briefly summarize certain points we have made in our previous collaborative research (Zatkalik & Kontić 2013, 2015, 2017). We have repeatedly emphasized isomorphism between musical structures and processes on the one hand, and the mental states pertaining to the earliest phases of individual development on the other. Having its roots in the archaic, unconscious mind, music incorporates the rules of unconscious, preverbal primary processes, no matter how sophisticated the given piece may be owing to the working of secondary processes. Thus, if condensation, as the representation of several chains of mental associations by a single idea, is one of the paramount primary mechanisms, we can also argue that it is of paramount importance in virtually any aspect of music. We find it in the polyphonic blending of many individual lines (think of György Ligeti’s micropolyphony!), or in seamlessly welding together musical motives or themes. Modulations involving a common chord momentarily condense different keys. In the analysis of form we come across situations when certain normative formal sections are fused (reprise and coda, for instance), and we have even identified situations in which several organizational principles, “musical languages” as they are sometimes called, are conflated in a single passage of music (Zatkalik and Kontić 2013, 2015; Zatkalik 2017).

At the same time, we have shown music’s extraordinary predilection for fragmentation, fragmentation also being one of the mechanisms used by the unconscious mind. Musical themes are fragmented (and usually reassembled at some point) almost as a matter of course; the integrity of harmonic progressions disrupted, and in extreme cases of pointillistic texture, such as associated with Anton Webern for instance, the very tissue of music disintegrates. One especially important feature of fragmentation is *pars pro toto* representation: a fragment – any fragment – of an object can stand for the object itself. The musical significance of it will be indicated later, but for the time being, we can think of an expression often encountered in music-analytical parlance, that, for instance, in the development section, the composer is working with the first theme, whereas in fact he or she uses fragments (motifs), often a single fragment from the theme. How unique music is in its capacities for fragmentation and condensation is best seen if we compare it to verbal discourse, in which secondary processes dominate by definition. We can break down sentences into syntagms and individual words, and individual words, in their turn, into syllables and phonemes, but it results in language ceasing to be a vehicle of meaningful communication and becoming something in the nature of acoustic material, hence closer to music. Likewise, to emulate polyphonic procedures in language would probably mean a reading of two or more texts simultaneously, the result being again a semantic breakdown. In addition, if we have mentioned the conflation of different “musical languages”, writing a novel or story in several (“natural”) languages at the same time is probably only possible if you are a James Joyce.<sup>1</sup>

Yet another item that we wish to include in this survey of primary-process mechanisms is turning into the opposite. It is very aptly illustrated by enharmonic modulation, in which, typically, the leading tone of the chord is often subverted, and turned into the opposite direction. We can also view this as two contradictory tendencies contained within a single event, amounting to simultaneous opposites, in defiance of formal logic (which is again the realm of secondary processes). To reiterate, all these: fragmentation, condensation, turning into the opposite, and more, are characteristic of the earliest mental structures, ruled by primary processes.

Further, along these lines of thinking, we can account for certain typical procedures, associated especially with classical form, including its outgrowths in the twentieth century and up to now. Consider the following situation. A theme – or if a “theme” is too suggestive of the traditional formal types, we may use the broader term “musical event” – is stated, and at a certain point developed (accompanied by a rising of the feeling of

<sup>1</sup> Meaning, of course, *Finnegans’ Wake*. It is no accident that Joyce is universally acclaimed for the unique musicality of his prose, and arguably, it is not so much because of its acoustic qualities as because it pushes the limits of the application of primary-process mechanisms (Zatkalik 2002, 2014). For the discussion of the poor condensing capabilities of language, see Langer (1951) and Balkányi (1964).

tension). As discussed above, development will probably involve fragmentation and subsequent reintegration. The last thing we would expect is that this process will be abruptly inhibited, and the theme definitely abandoned, never to reappear: the situation corresponding to the item a) on our list. By no means do we intend to be prescriptive, or to use this as a value criterion: our claim is founded on the vast quantities of analytical data.<sup>2</sup> This can be subsumed under a general rule postulated by Boris Asaf'ev, whereby "the natural law governing musical motion [is that] each elision is filled up or balanced after a while..." (Asaf'ev 1962: 124), recognizing the pattern of "leap – filling in" (*скачок* and *заполнение*) as ubiquitous in music (Asaf'ev 1962: 63). "Leaps" and "elisions" can be taken in the broadest sense, to include, for instance, situation in which the music flow "jumps" from one fragment of the theme to another, eliding what was originally lying in-between. The tension thus created, however, will be released eventually. For this paper, of the utmost importance is to understand that "after a while" can mean quite a long while. A coda may tie loose ends left from the introduction; implications from the first movement are sometimes realized in the finale etc.

Assuming the aforementioned isomorphism between music and the earliest infantile mental organization, it would follow that in the medium of music no impulses are aroused that entail a conflict with the Superego. This does not preclude the possibility that certain occurrences in music can be taken to evoke interplay between the Id, Ego and Superego (see, for instance, Feder 1993). However, considered from the vantage of the listener's (or performer's) experience, we could hardly say that a given motif is *immoral*, or that a certain passage of music ought to be played *with shame*. These two notions, immorality and shame are basic contents of the Superego. We can indicate, therefore, a specific benefit from music, arising from one largely neglected source: it is free from conflicts between the Id and Superego. We say benefit, although we can with the freemason Settembrini from Thomas Mann's *Zauberberg*, accuse music of being politically suspect and morally dubious, or even insinuate that music can play a part in a murder, as in Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata*.

The unfolding of a musical event entails a certain amount of tension that from the very beginning seeks discharge. Concerning the outcome of this process of discharge, the destiny of the tension, we have already indicated that the situations a) and b) from our list above are virtually irrelevant for music, and that our focus will be on the situation c), in which a path to the Id impulses is open. We have also described how the theme/object is transformed in the same way in which the psychoanalytic primary processes are described. However, if this is so, the question arises why music does not present the simplest imprint of the most archaic path: the model of immediate discharge, which would secure the shortest way of obtaining pleasure?

The answer is provided by a number of psychoanalytic authors (e.g. Jacobson 1953; Menninger 1954), who have long since emphasized *stimulation*, without discharge; seeking for excitation as a fundamental psychic force. Or, as William Needles says: "I would submit that there are innumerable situations in life in which a striving for stimulation, without concomitant discharge, is discernible and that the *seeking for excitation* is a fundamental property of the psychic apparatus, alongside the tendency, in different circumstances, to minimize excitation" (Needles 1969: 809) [author's italics]. This implies – and for our purpose, it is crucial – that the striving for the object that promises satisfaction is as important as actually gaining it. The following quotation from Umberto Eco's famous novel *L'isola del giorno prima* (The Island of the Day Before) presents this very vividly.

"So you love, and therefore you desire and do not desire. ... You fear that attaining your end will disappoint you. You have pleasure in limine, as the theologians put it, you enjoy delay."

"That's not so. I ... I want her at once!"

"If that were the case, you would be still only a rustic. But you have wit. If you wanted her, you would already have taken her—and you would be a beast. No, you want your desire to be set aflame, and you want hers to be stirred as well. If her desire were to blaze to such a degree that she was impelled to **surrender herself to you at once, probably you would no longer want her. Love flourishes in expectation. Expectation strolls through the spacious fields of Time towards Opportunity** [emphasis ours]."

How does this translate into music? Let us assume that the object in music is a theme, or any musical event that fulfills a similar function. This event, once stated (and possibly repeated) is subsequently very likely

<sup>2</sup> This "rule" obviously does not apply if music dispenses with such entities as themes or subjects. Gilbert Rose, a musically competent psychotherapist, suggests that much modern art highlights irreconcilability inherent in reality, and forces one to live with logical opposites and existential conflicts (Rose 2004: 160). This can be traced to Heinz Kohut's distinction between the Guilty and Tragic Man (Kohut 1977), its implications in music discussed in Zatkalik & Kontić (2017).

to be fragmented, disintegrated and/or replaced by a contrasting one. Ostensibly, the object is lost, temporarily at least. Psychoanalysis teaches that from the vantage of archaic mental functioning, the loss of the object or its permanent and irreparable destruction is intolerable. Freud famously described such a situation in his study *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. A three-year old boy was dealing with the trauma of separation from his mother by deliberately hiding his toys, so that he could find them: the *fort-da* game as is known in psychoanalytic literature. It led Freud to his equally famous statement that “the finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it” (Freud 1905: 222). In a previous paper (Zatkalik & Kontić 2015) we pointed out the importance of this mechanism for the creation of formal types (rondo, sonata, variations...). Now, we argue that refinding, or finding again, implies the prolongation of striving for the object, meaning also the prolongation of tension.

Our psychoanalytical understanding offers a possibly surprising explanation: in music – especially in music, to be more accurate – the loss of the object, in other words the disappearance of the event that has once been stated, is illusory. By prolongation, the identity and presence of the object is constantly maintained. We owe this precisely to the ability of musical events to transform according to the laws of primary processes, which sometimes implies huge distortions. There are other instances in which these primary transformations are observable, namely, dreams. Think, on the one hand, of all weird shapes that familiar objects assume in dreams, including a recombination of fragments from various percepts or blending of several persons into one. On the other, let us recall the above indicated similarity between these transformations and musical structures and processes. In Zatkalik and Kontić (2013) we strived to demonstrate these dream/music parallels, drawing on the case study of Freud’s probably most famous patient known as Wolf Man (Freud 1918). In the briefest possible terms: the object – musical objects included – may be fragmented, but for the Id, *the part of the object is the object itself*, in accordance with the above-mentioned *pars pro toto* representation. Alternatively, it can undergo a striking level of condensation, blend with numerous other events, and still, the constancy is maintained at deeper mental strata.

The sound object is, therefore, not always literally present: “objectively” speaking, it may not be sounding at all. Yet, at a certain mental level, we can hear it vicariously, through primary-process transformations. We believe that this psychoanalytic explanation taps into the music-theoretical concept of prolongation both in its everyday usage (extend, lengthen, protract...), and in its more technical, chiefly Schenkerian sense, whereby the prolonged event is somehow deemed present and active even when not physically sounding. We will illustrate the parallel between music and the psyche with a concrete example: in Wolf Man’s dream, the image of the father is not literally present in his dream, nor is the wolf from his picture book that served to screen the former. Yet, these images are central to the dream, and in a very important sense, they are constantly present. Likewise, the deeper structural layers are not directly perceived, yet they govern the entire course of music.

We may add that the prolongation of Id impulses is the *conditio sine qua non* for the education of the immature psyche, and as the early psychic development progresses, the passage of time between the temporary object loss and the action to find it is increasingly *prolonged*. Moreover, it was also the cornerstone of human civilization, as our Eco quotation suggests.

The conclusion may be that prolongation is not only possible, it is necessary. It is a condition for obtaining pleasure from music. We will return to this losing/regaining game we mentioned earlier, the *fort-da* game, with its ingrained and induced tensions that are to be mastered. It demands that the resolution of these tensions should be prolonged. We can formulate it in the following way. It has been repeatedly argued that anticipation is a crucial part of the listening experience (Meyer 1956; Kramer 1988; Huron 2006 to name but a few authors). It is, accordingly, necessary for the object (in this case a musical event, typically a theme or motive) not only to be repeated, but to temporarily “disappear”, thereby creating expectation of its reappearance, and the tension thus produced is released by regaining the object. Yet, the quality of experience that something is prolonged is grounded in the fact that this “something” is omnipresent. This sounds contradictory, but we need to emphasize that we are not dealing with one, but with two areas of experience: one belonging to the unconscious Ego that something desired has disappeared, and is about to reappear. At the same time, from the point of view of the Id, the object is omnipresent for the primary process transformations of the object are equal to the object itself. This psychic movement toward searching for the lost object and the resulting release of tension is only possible if the lost object persists in the listener’s unconscious mind. We regard this situation as interplay between the Id and Ego. Transformations (motivic work, for instance) appear as such for the Ego. Insofar as the logic of primary processes applies, the Id experiences them as the same, as identity. Thus, while audiation – the internal realization of music, hearing or feeling sound that is not actually present – is a necessary practical tool for composing, and it exists on the conscious level, it also transpires that it is rooted

in the mental structures of both the creator and the listener, down to the deepest strata. Perhaps we need to introduce the concept of unconscious audiation.

There are several points that merit further discussion. The occurrence of a wish implies the anticipation of the wish-fulfilling object. The existence of the wish-fulfilling object is the outcome of experience, when the mental representation of the object is established. This requires the existence of the mental creation of the object, which is tantamount to hallucination, the state we usually associate with pathology. Yet, we integrate such an experience into not only the creation and reception of music, but even into theoretical models of music, however rational and subject to logic they are required to be. Furthermore, such a mental creation in itself does not produce the fulfillment and the discharge of tension. In order for that to happen, the Ego must be activated to search for the object in reality. In real life, therefore, the act of thinking is interpolated between the Id and the immediate satisfaction: this is what we meant by emphasizing the civilizational aspect. It is true that thinking, a rational attitude, can be part of any human experience, music included. Music, however, is also capable of prolonging the path to the object precisely in a “non-thinking mode.” Such immediacy of experience reveals its mentally archaic origin, and consequently its involvement with unconscious processes. It is obvious that within the present framework we can merely scratch the surface of these questions.

In the already quoted work by Umberto Eco, the protagonist is stranded on the Date Line, between the past and present, as it were; in addition, the future, since his love is attainable only in the future (if at all). The past is in a way solidified, materialized in the island he observes, but its “pastness” remains illusory, since it can be experienced only in the present. The categories of today and tomorrow, the past and present (and future) almost palpably dissolve. So do the boundaries between the real and imaginary, mental and material. The composer – and along with him the performer and the listener – is stranded in a similar way, prolonging the present in order to defer the future. However, the present is also a re-materialization of the past, whether the past phases of the composition itself or the past compositions, and that past is somehow always present in our minds.

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## Šiandienos melodijos, ataidinčios iš vakar

### Santrauka

Šenkerio teorijos terminas *prolongacija*, nors iš dalies gali būti paaiškinamas remiantis kasdiene jo reikšme (išstęsti, pratęsti), visų pirma yra sietinas su faktu, kad muzikinis įvykis, net ir nustojęs skambėti, išlieka aktyvus. Vadinasi, kad patirtume *prolongaciją*, turime išgirsti kažką, kas realiai neskamba. Objektų (akustinių ar kitokių) be išorinio stimulo patyrimas gali būti prilyginamas haliucinacijai – būsenai, kuri paprastai siejama su patologija. Vis dėlto mes integruojame tokią patirtį ne tik į muzikos kūrybą ar jos recepciją, bet ir į teorinius modelius. Straipsnio siekis yra nušviesti šį fenomeną iš psichoanalitinės perspektyvos.

Atsispiriami nuo prielaidos, kad *id* visada siekia troškimų išpildymo nepaisant realybės. Troškimo atsiradimas implikuoja jį išpildančio objekto numatymą. Vadinasi, būtinas mentalinio objekto sukūrimo aktas, kuris ir prilyginamas haliucinacijai. Tai savaime nepanaikina įtampos, neįgyvendina išpildymo. Kad tai įvyktų, *ego* turi aktyviai ieškoti objekto realybėje.

Dažnai kartojama, kad nuojauda, numatymas yra kartinė klausymo patirties dalis. Iš tiesų, objektas (šiuo atveju – muzikinis įvykis, paprastai tema ar motyvas) turi būti ne tik kartojamas, bet ir laikinai „išnykti“, – taip sukuriamas jo pasikartojimo lūkestis, o atsiradusi įtampa nulsūgsta vėl pasirodžius lauktam įvykiui. Tai sietina su žymia Freudo studija apie objekto praradimą / atgavimą, dar žinomą kaip *fort-da game*. Šis psichikos polinkis ieškoti pamesto objekto ir vėliau realizuojamas įtampos atpalaidavimas yra įmanomas tik tuo atveju, jei pamestas objektas iš tiesų egzistuoja klausytojo sąmonėje, kitaip tariant, jei sukuriamas tokia „haliucinacija“.

Akivaizdu, kad objekto praradimas yra negalutinis, o jo suradimas užtęstas. Tai galima realizuoti per objekto fragmentaciją (remiantis psichoanalitine terminologija) į dalinius objektus. Tam tikras objektas (muzikinis įvykis) yra transformuojamas skaidant į dalinius objektus, kad objektas nebūtų negrįžtamai sunaikintas.

Savo paskutiniuoju tyrimu atskleidėme glaudų ryšį tarp šių transformacijų ir mentalinio funkcionavimo pirminių procesų. Dabar šią situaciją traktuojame kaip žaismą tarp *id* ir *ego*. Transformacijos (pvz., motyvų vystymas) pasireiškia kaip klausytojo *ego*. Kol tai atitinka pirminių procesų logiką, *id* tai patiria kaip tą patį – vyksta atpažinimas (*identity*). Taigi, nors gebėjimas audijuoti yra suprantamas kaip būtina praktinė komponavimo priemonė, akivaizdu, kad tiek klausytojo, tiek kūrėjo atveju jo šaknys glūdi giliausių sluoksnių mentalinėse struktūrose.