

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Susanne Langer on Music and Time

Eran Guter¹ and Inbal Guter²

¹ Max Stern Yezreel Valley College, IL

² University of Haifa and the Buchmann-Mehta School of Music, Tel Aviv University, IL

Corresponding author: Eran Guter (erang@yvc.ac.il)

Susanne Langer's idea of the primary apparition of music involves a dichotomy between two kinds of temporality: 'felt time' and 'clock time'. For Langer, musical time is exclusively felt time, and in this sense, music is 'time made audible'. However, Langer also postulates a 'strong suspension thesis': the swallowing up of clock time in the illusion of felt time. In this essay, we take issue with the 'strong suspension thesis', its philosophic foundation and its implications. We argue that this thesis is overstated and misdirecting insofar as it purports to describe what we experience when we hear music with understanding, and that it rests on a contested presupposition concerning the conceptual primacy of memory-time.

Keywords: Langer; time; music; memory; tonality; Wittgenstein

Susanne Langer's philosophy of art retains an enduring appeal as a thoroughly systematic, beautifully laid out, overarching theory of the arts. In particular with regard to music, her theorizing still stands out in its bold, quintessentially Romantic yet clear-headed insistence on relating what is meaningful in music to organic vitality. In this essay, we would like to show our indebtedness to Langer's ideas by critically addressing her view of musical temporality, a profound topic that has attracted surprisingly little scholarly attention over the last sixty-five years.

The modest output, predominantly written by musicologists,¹ that has been dedicated to aspects of Langer's view of musical temporality concerns her definition of virtuality or illusion pertaining to music, but without any attempt to offer a critique of the dichotomy between virtual and real time as it functions in her theory.² Others have focused on her treatment of rhythm, without acknowledging that Langer's overemphasis on vital rhythm in this context is at odds with the temporally variegated structure of actual rhythms in different musical

¹ A rare exception is Philip Alperson, "Musical Time" and Music as "The Art of Time", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 38 (1980): 407–18. We discuss Alperson's view below. Robert Innis's more recent comprehensive study of the development of Langer's philosophy also contains some discussion of her view concerning musical time. See Robert E. Innis, *Susanne Langer in Focus: The Symbolic Mind* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

² See Richard Norton, 'What Is Virtuality?', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 30 (1972): 499–505; Mary J. Reichlin, 'Susanne Langer's Concept of Secondary Illusion in Music and Art', *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 29 (1995): 39–51.

contexts and practices.³ Some scholars seem to have adopted Langer's 'strong suspension thesis' of clock time uncritically in order to derive from it far-reaching cultural conclusions.⁴

In this essay, we carefully examine Langer's philosophical and musicological presuppositions concerning musical temporality and their implications. In particular, we take issue with Langer's 'strong suspension thesis' as it pertains to musical temporality, that is, the idea that clock time is categorically suppressed in the artistic production of music. We find the idea overstated and misdirecting insofar as it purports to describe what we experience when we hear music with understanding. According to Langer's theory of musical hearing, 'what the auditor ought to hear [is] virtual movement, motion that exists only for the ear'.⁵ Thus, her 'strong suspension thesis' implies a significant restriction on musical understanding and musical meaning. Insofar as we can construe the meaning of music as whatever we understand when we understand the music, musical meaning is, in Langer's view, patently ascribed to a primarily subject-centered mode of temporal reference – namely, what she dubs 'felt time'. We beg to differ. Profound ideas may show their mettle by giving rise to deep problems, which in turn may become conducive to new and fruitful lines of investigation.

We are encouraged by Langer's own invitation to pick up the discussion of ideas contained in her work. In her introduction to *Feeling and Form*, she writes: 'Nothing in this essay [...] is finished, nor could art theory ever be finished. There may be new arts in the future; there may surely be new modes of any art; [...] this book, I fondly hope, is a beginning of something capable of indefinite continuation.'⁶ The interest in engaging in a critical dialogue with Langer's ideas is further reinforced by the fact that at the time of the original publication of *Feeling and Form* in 1953, significant innovations in compositional approaches, theories and performance practices had already taken center stage in the European avant-garde scene, as well as in American experimental music. The international seminars at Darmstadt began in 1946, and by 1953, some of the most notable, iconic music of the Darmstadt School had been presented. Even more strikingly, the radical music of well-known, pioneering American composers, such as Charles Ives, Edgard Varèse, Henry Cowell, and the young John Cage, date back to the first four decades of the twentieth century. Cage's groundbreaking work *First Construction in Metal* dates back to 1939, and he presented his notorious piece '4'33"' in 1952, one year before the publication of Langer's *Feeling and Form*. These new modes of music seriously challenged Langer's theory already during her lifetime.

Our critical discussion proceeds along three expanding tiers. First, we unpack Langer's distinction between musical materials and musical elements, which supports her 'strong suspension thesis'. The general distinction between materials and elements in the arts runs throughout Langer's philosophy, but when specifically applied to tonal music it exhibits some deeply seated misapprehension on Langer's part with respect to the very idea of tonality. In Section I, we explain this difficulty in detail and argue that the strenuous setting apart of materials and elements in tonal music, which underlies Langer's strong suspension thesis, becomes even more pronounced with respect to her discussion of musical time. In Section II, we offer concrete musical counterexamples, which palpably show that the restriction on musical understanding, which is implied by Langer's strong suspension thesis regarding clock time, is unwarranted in both tonal and nontonal music.

³ See Felicia E. Kruse, 'Vital Rhythm and Temporal Form in Langer and Dewey', *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 21 (2007): 16–26.

⁴ See Susan McClary, 'Rap, Minimalism, and Structures of Time in Late Twentieth-Century Culture', in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Bloomsbury, 2004), 289–98. Yet Langer's 'strong suspension thesis' of clock time also drew criticism from within musicological circles. See Jonathan D. Kramer, *The Time of Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1988). We refer to Kramer's view below.

⁵ Susanne K. Langer, *Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures* (New York: Scribner, 1957), 38. Hereafter: *PA*.

⁶ Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form* (London: Routledge, 1953), xi–xii. Hereafter: *FF*.

Section III consists of the second tier of our critique, where we turn to Langer's counterpart theories of musical composition and musical performance. We argue that these theories exhibit conceptual biases, which are due to the strong suspension thesis. These theoretical biases are shown to be at odds with various musicological evidence and actual musical practices. In particular, we argue that the restriction on composing on the level of materials, which is imposed by Langer's theory of musical composition, fails to account for new modes of music, which employ extended playing techniques.

In the third tier of our critique (Sections IV and V), we offer a broad philosophical outlook on, and a critique of, the conceptual primacy of memory-time in Langer's philosophy of music, which underlies her strong suspension thesis. Langer's reliance on the primacy of memory-time is typical of a venerable philosophical tradition, which harks back to Augustine's celebrated account of time in his *Confessions*. This memory-based conception of time underlies Augustine's celebrated struggle with the major aporia of time – namely, its measurement, which is encompassed by the even more fundamental aporia of the being and nonbeing of time. We turn to Ludwig Wittgenstein's sustained criticism of Augustine's conception of time as a substance, or a space, or motion, all of which are internally experienced and identified. The reason for setting Wittgenstein contra Langer in the present context is quite solid: Wittgenstein's criticism undercuts conceptions of music (such as Langer's), which exclusively rely on the framework of memory-time. In Section VI we conclude with some positive suggestions.

I. Langer's Strong Suspension Thesis

In her books *Feeling and Form* and *Problems of Art*, Langer put forward the idea that the realm of music is characterized by the appearance of movement. It is what Langer calls the 'primary apparition' of music, which is created whenever tonal materials beget a musical impression. Such motion – which, Langer maintains, is best captured in Eduard Hanslick's phrase 'sounding forms in motion' – is the essence of music. It is the answer to the philosophical question 'What is music?' This answer hinges upon a distinction, which Langer makes, between the *ingredients* or *materials* of music and the *elements* of music. In music, materials are 'actual': 'sounds of a certain pitch, loudness, overtone mixture, and metronomic length'. Elements are always 'virtual': 'figures, motions, and what we call "colors", "spaces", tensions and resolutions, resting tones, emptiness, beginnings and ends' (*PA*, p. 39). The crux of Langer's argument is what we propose to call 'a strong suspension thesis': 'In artistic production, the composer's materials must be *completely swallowed up* in the illusion they create, in which henceforth we find only illusory elements, but not – except through technical interest and workmanlike attention – the arrangement of materials' (*ibid.*, our emphasis). Let us look very carefully at Langer's distinction in order to better appreciate the import of the ensuing thesis. Langer wants the distinction between materials and elements to be sharp; otherwise, the ensuing suspension thesis will not be strong enough to support the desideratum that 'it is [virtual] elements that an artist composes into an apparition, an expressive form', not materials (*PA*, p. 42). She reprimands those who confuse between materials and elements. Such confusion, she maintains,

is the crux of most difficulties in art theory, and even the cause of some practical errors that arise from superficial theory. As long as you think of music in terms of arranged tonal material, you are ridden with all the traditional problems of what to allow or not to allow, of pure and impure music, hybrid arts, classical patterns and free combinations, and so on. But as soon as you think of it as moving tonal forms creating an organic, purely virtual image of subjective time in its passage, these problems evaporate. (*PA*, p. 39)

Be that as it may, Langer's attempt to set materials and elements sharply apart from one another in tonal music is marred by what appears to be an innocuous equivocation in the text we just quoted, as she sets 'arranged *tonal* material' against 'moving *tonal* forms', but is actually indicative of a much deeper problem.

The elements of music (for example, tensions and resolutions) are supposed to be phenomenological objects, objects that have the status of emergent qualities, rooted in the material world, but clearly distinct from it. Yet within the realm of tonal music, the same set of presuppositions concerning the gravitational forces that underlie tonality in the first place – the principles of tonal organization, which enable the development of musical ideas in tonal compositions – equally underlies both categories, elements as well as materials. Throughout the 'common practice era' (1600–1900), Western music employed two basic systems of pitch collection: the major mode and the minor mode, consisting of seven consecutive pitches arranged in a step-wise order. Utilizing these pitch collections in composition is clearly not restricted by the order of pitches in the given mode, but rather by the organization of the pitches around a central tone, the first pitch of each mode. Thus, possible arrangements of such material necessarily presuppose tonal hierarchy. In tonal music, musical elements (such as tensions and resolutions, according to Langer) patently presuppose this very tonal hierarchy. That is to say, the emergent qualities, which Langer attributes solely to elements, manifest themselves already at the level of the very tendency to opt for this or that particular arrangement of materials. As such, materials are not merely 'actual', as Langer would have it, but pregnant with possibilities and meaning. Although materials may well be 'sounds of a certain pitch', one could derive both tonal and nontonal organization from the same pitch class. The difference lies in the tonal hierarchy, which is presupposed in the former case, but not in the latter.⁷ Langer glosses over this crucial step.

One can palpably see this omission on various levels in Langer's incidental discussions of some of her own examples. On one occasion, Langer discusses (following Ernst Toch) the opening bass figure in the first movement of the second symphony by Johannes Brahms, and its transformations.⁸ Again, there is an innocuous equivocation: she designates a figure (a musical element, by her own standard) as 'material'. This material, she maintains, 'serves to create one element after another – motion, suspension of motion, recall, expectation, opening, sustainment, closure – what you will'.⁹ Yet one cannot consider transformations, or other means of developing figures, without conceptually relying on the primacy of tonal organization (at the level of the materials). For instance, the element of closure can be created only if one uses certain pitch material in a suitable arrangement, whose relation to the tonic of the piece can be clearly recognized.¹⁰

Langer's discussion of the form of an ordinary musical scale is even more revealing.¹¹ Langer does not make a clear distinction between the notion of a 'scale' and the notion of a 'mode'. A scale is a succession of step-wise pitches. Yet referring to the pitch collection of the scale as a major or minor mode means that we have already assigned to the modes the capacity of a key.¹² Langer argues that any melody, whose pitch sequence is not the same as that of the scale itself, does not share the form of the scale. Yet the comparison of a collection of

⁷ This point is made powerfully by Arnold Schoenberg in his discussion of the functional difference between a chord succession, which is aimless, and a chord progression, which is goal-oriented. See Arnold Schoenberg, *Structural Functions of Harmony* (New York: Norton, 1954), 1.

⁸ Susanne K. Langer, *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), 201.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ See Arnold Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 27.

¹¹ Susanne K. Langer, *An Introduction to Symbolic Logic*, 3rd ed. (New York: Dover, 1967), 25–26.

¹² See Walter Piston, *Harmony*, 5th ed. (New York: Norton, 1987), 53.

individual sounds qua melody and a collection of individual sounds qua mode is erroneous. A mode is a pitch reference. Tonality, as a hierarchic system, enables endless combinations that can accommodate the modes.¹³ A mode cannot be considered as some sort of singular melody. Langer actually commits a category mistake here. A melody and a musical scale can be said to be different forms made of the same materials only on pain of failing to acknowledge that the mode already has the significance of a key.

Langer's conflicting claims about the nature of the materials of music bear significantly on her distinction between materials and elements in tonal music. If musical elements are 'made of harmonic or melodic material' (*FF*, p. 107), then the distinction between materials and elements becomes blurry at best, and the ensuing suspension thesis becomes too weak to uphold Langer's own decree that 'it is [virtual] elements that an artist composes into an apparition, an expressive form', not materials (*PA*, p. 42). On the other hand, if the materials indeed are nothing more than 'tones of such and such pitch' (*FF*, p. 107), that is, considered in themselves inert with respect to the gravitational forces of tonal hierarchy, then the ensuing suspension thesis is rendered too strong to make the upwelling of 'the illusion begotten by sound' (*ibid.*), as Langer defines music, reasonably explicable from the vantage point of solid music theory. Because, to borrow from Nelson Goodman's catchy retort concerning the myth of the innocent eye, the innocent ear is tonally deaf. Ultimately, Langer cannot have it both ways. In the last analysis, Langer would be hard pressed to modify her theoretical desideratum – in effect, loosening the restriction that music is purely virtual, which is the purported upshot of her strong suspension thesis.

The strenuous setting apart of materials and elements, which underlies Langer's strong suspension thesis, becomes even more pronounced with respect to her discussion of musical time. According to Langer, the essence of music inheres solely in the experiential realm of elements. She asserts that 'all music creates an order of virtual time, in which its sonorous forms move in relation to each other – always and only to each other, for nothing else exists there [...] *Music makes time audible, and its form and continuity sensible*' (*FF*, pp. 109–10; see also *PA*, pp. 38, 41). For Langer, musical time is 'felt time' (*PA*, p. 37). It is lived time or experiential time, subject-centered, memory-based, thoroughly perspectival and organic: a realm of transitoriness itself, of the specious present. It is entirely perceptible through the agency of a single sense – hearing – hence it inheres in a unified virtual space. It has a sort of voluminousness and complexity akin to the passage of vital functions and lived events:

[T]he passage of life that we feel as expectations become 'now', and 'now' turns into unalterable fact. Such passage is measurable only in terms of sensibilities, tensions, and emotions; and it has not merely a different measure, but an altogether different structure from practical or scientific time. (*FF*, p. 109)

According to Langer, practical or scientific time is dominated by 'clock time', a 'time concept' of a one-dimensional infinite succession of homogenous moments, which we have abstracted, she maintains, from direct experiences of time ('Time exists for us because we undergo tensions and their resolutions,' she writes). It is devoid of the experientially prime aspect of passage and also of feeling. Clock time is public and ordinary in the sense that 'it is the only adequate scheme we know of for synchronizing practical affairs, dating past events, and constructing some perspective of future ones'. For Langer, clock time is a discursive symbol: 'the way of the clock' is our way of thinking discursively about time at all (*FF*, pp. 111–12).

¹³ See Leonard B. Meyer, *Explaining Music: Essays and Explorations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 80.

Philip Alperson argued that Langer's consideration of music as the art of time, in which the composer exploits time as a formal element, has led her to speak erroneously of musical time as being ontologically distinct from ordinary time.¹⁴ According to Alperson, the importance of the temporal ordering of tones in musical perception prompts Langer to postulate an intrinsic, ideal realm of time peculiar to musical perception. He argues that Langer's contention that musical time is the image of 'lived' or 'experienced' time ultimately fails to designate a special kind of time created in music and somehow ontologically different from any other sort of perceived temporal relation. He argues that although musical experience does in fact give rise to a specific class of tensions, this in itself is not enough to distinguish musical time as ontologically different from what Langer calls 'subjective time'. Similarly, Langer's branding of musical time as a 'semblance' does not help. Because both musical time and subjective time are (Alperson argues) emergent qualities that arise in the perception of tensions and resolutions, hence both 'times' are equally 'virtual'. Finally, the fact that a sequence of musical events is composable and repeatable as opposed to sequences of events in the natural world, is a distinction that pertains primarily to the manner of production of musical events and to a difference in the degree of subtlety of discrimination typically elicited by those events, rather than to a difference in the kind of temporal experience.

Alperson's general conclusion that the temporal dimension of musical experience is not fundamentally different from that of any other sort of temporal experience, may well be true. However, he seems to have misdiagnosed the problems with Langer's theorizing about musical time. He insists on reading Langer's contention that 'all music creates an order of virtual time' as if it designates a special *kind* of time created in music, ontologically different from any other sort of perceived temporal relation. Hence, his argument hinges upon Langer's alleged failure to set the ontological status of musical time apart from that of subjective time. Although Langer's language strongly tends to reify musical time as she follows through her distinction between the materials and the elements of music (for example, she says that musical time is the 'very stuff' of the primary illusion of music; *PA*, p. 41), she does not seem to be making any metaphysical claims about a special *kind* of time created in the elemental apparition of music. The order of virtual time is not a different *kind* of time, but rather the conceptual framework for the ordering of musical events in the artistic production of music.

Alperson acknowledges that the difference between musical time and subjective time lies not only in the different class of tensions and resolutions, which give rise to musical temporality, but also in what he calls the 'negotiability' of musical forms, that is, in the manner of production of musical events and in the degree of subtlety of discrimination typically elicited by those events. Indeed, all this does not amount to a difference in the kind of temporal experience. But that, we maintain, is not the point. Alperson glosses over the fact that Langer's strong suspension thesis (according to which the order of virtual time is created as the composer's materials are completely swallowed up in the illusion they create) specifically addresses the artistic production of music, not merely the perception of musical events.

On her part, Langer rightly observes that musical time is conditioned upon the appearance of motion. Yet, with respect to the manner of production of musical events in tonal music, musical motion is enabled by a multilevel structuring of three facets: a hierarchy of tonal materials, rhythmic grouping and patterning, and a sense of closure. Although the tonal materials provide pitch hierarchy, the rhythmic grouping and patterning of these tonal materials both organize and regulate their flow into musical events, thereby creating additional hierarchic layers. The coordination of pitch and rhythm enables punctuation, which gives rise

¹⁴ Alperson, "Musical Time" and Music'.

to a sense of closure. Thus, not surprisingly, Langer's explication of musical time in terms of moving sonorous forms exhibits the same general problem as her distinction between materials and elements in tonal music, which we expounded above. The distinction she makes is either too-sharp or else not-sharp-enough to render musical time, the primary illusion of music, reasonably explicable as a *purely* elemental apparition from the vantage point of solid music theory.

Alperson also glosses over the fact that, upon introducing the notion of the order of virtual time, Langer specifically sets virtual time apart not from subjective time, but from 'the sequence of actual happenings' (*FF*, p. 109), that is, from the order of clock time. This is actually the most significant contrast in Langer's theory, and the most troublesome, in our view. According to Langer, although clock time pertains to the 'sequence of actual happenings', musical time pertains to sonorous forms, which move in relation to each other. She writes: 'This virtual time, which is an image not of clock-time, but of lived time, is the primary illusion of music' (*PA*, p. 41). Moreover, she maintains, musical time is 'something radically different from the time in which our public and practical life proceeds. It is incommensurable with the progress of common affairs' (*FF*, p. 109). Most significant to our discussion in the following sections, she also contends that clock time has been abstracted from felt time, hence felt time is conceptually prior to clock time.

Langer's upshot concerning the difference between musical time and clock time is captured in a quotation from Basil de Selincourt's article 'Music and Duration', which she emphatically introduces into her discussion: 'Music is one of the forms of duration; it suspends ordinary time, and offers itself as an ideal substitute and equivalent' (quoted in *FF*, p. 110). Let us carefully rephrase Langer's strong suspension thesis concerning musical temporality in her own words. Langer's contrast between virtual time and clock time is captured in her own distinction between materials and elements as pertaining to musical time. Among materials, she names 'metronomic length', which clearly bespeaks 'the way of the clock', while 'the elements of music are moving forms of sound; but in the motion nothing is removed'. According to Langer, then, in the artistic production of music, which covers the work of the performer with its underlying primary activity of musical hearing (*FF*, pp. 135, 148), clock time is completely swallowed up in the illusion of virtual or felt time, which it creates. Hence, we find in the music only illusory elements of virtual time (that is, sonorous forms that move always and only in relation to each other, for nothing else exists there), but not the arrangement of metronomic lengths (except through technical interest and workmanlike attention).

As it stands, Langer's idea that clock time is suspended is an exaggeration. As Jonathan Kramer points out, 'Langer is less than specific about the actual mechanisms by which music creates virtual time and about the real nature of a musical continuity fundamentally different from that of absolute time.'¹⁵ This is largely due to Langer's insistence on a sharp distinction between materials and elements within the realm of tonal music, which, we have argued, is untenable in the light of her theoretical desiderata. We surely do not suspend clock time as we listen to a musical work in the sense that we remain aware of approximately how much time has elapsed in various sections of the work. Otherwise, says Kramer, 'we could not perceive or understand a work's proportions'.¹⁶ Also, we surely do not suspend clock time as we perform music, in particular when executing nonlinear tempi, such as tempo rubato. According to David Epstein, in a rubato performance we have a dramatic display of two different systems of time control operating simultaneously, as they rapidly become dis-synchronous and thus

¹⁵ Kramer, *Time of Music*, 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

in conflict only to realign at the end of the phrase.¹⁷ On the one hand, we have the metric control of the beat, which is precise and chronometrical, and on the other, we have the contorted pulse that leads us away from the regular beat and back. Tempo rubato makes sense inasmuch as the musical contour is pitched against the framework of clock time.

Finally, Langer's strong suspension thesis implies a significant restriction on musical understanding and musical meaning. According to Langer, 'what the auditor ought to hear [is] virtual movement, motion that exists only for the ear' (*PA*, p. 38), hence, allegedly, clock time in itself may not form a part of what we understand in the music. Yet, as a matter of fact, clock time retains its identity both within and outside the realm of tonality. This is precisely where the ear can still be innocent while tonally aware. In Section II, we turn to a set of musical examples that reveal a glaring lacuna in Langer's view, as clock time becomes invaluable to our musical understanding.

II. Musical Repetition as Counterexample

Langer's distinction between materials and elements relegates musical meaning strictly to the realm of elemental apparition. She maintained that this is what we understand when we understand music. The 'strong suspension thesis' asserts that in artistic production the composer's materials must be completely swallowed up in the illusion they create. This restriction amplifies all that is inherently problematic about Langer's distinction between materials and elements. We now turn to a striking counterexample to the alleged suppression of materials in musical hearing, which is, in Langer's view, the primary musical activity to which both composition and performance must correspond (*FF*, pp. 147–48).

Some examples of musical repetition eminently show the limitations of Langer's 'strong suspension thesis', specifically with regard to musical temporality. The examples are concrete, yet they expose a lacuna in the way Langer describes the primary musical experience, and they impinge on what Langer takes to be the 'primary apparition of music', its very essence. Since early stages in the evolution of music, repetition has served as a device for extending a musical idea. Repetition may be exact or varied; however, its function varies in different contexts along the history of music.

Mediaeval chant provides a most striking counterexample to Langer's view of musical temporality by showing that her view cannot accommodate nonhierarchical musical environments. In mediaeval chant, appearing in pretonal contexts, a repetitive reciting tone was used as a rhetorical device for elucidating the text. In the nonhierarchical environment of such modal music, the listener will not be able to perceive the differentiation of musical events necessary for experiencing integral (musical) time, but rather will experience the persistent pulse of clock time. There is no elemental apparition to behold there.

Repetition in the common-practice era is facilitated by a wide range of devices available to the composer, who is relying on the solid force enabled by tonal organization. The 'codification' of the tonal organization supports varied devices that contribute to the extension of the germinal musical ideas. However, in cases where excessive repetitions appear, an interruption in the functional four-stage tonal cycle occurs. We can find examples of this in several of the keyboard sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti (for example, Sonata in B Minor L449 and Sonata in D Minor L420). As a result, the listener experiences a certain 'freeze' in the flow of musical events, leading to a deficiency in the prediction of events and a corresponding experience of disproportion in the musical organization. In such cases, the listener will not be able to perceive a coherent organization. As excessive repeats dominate the sound stream, the metronomic pulse shines through the texture.

¹⁷ See David Epstein, *Shaping Time: Music, the Brain, and Performance* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1995), chap. 11.

In twentieth-century music we find many ostinato patterns, repetitive cells and repetitive 'sound blocks'. Ostinato patterns are typical in neoclassical music or nationalistic music. An example is the 'augurs' chord in Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* or some of the pieces in Bela Bartok's *Mikrokosmos*. In such cases, the repetitive ostinato forms result in long moments of persistent 'blocks' on the same bass note. Often, these blocks are combined with an active rhythm that creates a strong sense of motion. Although motion is necessary for the differentiation of events, the lack of change in the bass line is regarded as 'pseudo motion'. In such cases, the listener will experience difficulties perceiving any differentiation between events. Moreover, in many cases, the repeated blocks actually appear without any breaks at all. Their lively rhythm encourages the listener to become aware of the persistent pulse, not of any illusory movement. Again, elemental apparition cancels out.

Other relevant examples appear in contemporary minimalist music, which is characterized by reduced musical content and the consistent use of repetitive patterns. *In C* by Terry Riley introduces fifty-three short musical phrases; each phrase may be repeated an arbitrary number of times. Each musician may choose which phrase to play, but the players are encouraged to start the phrases at different times. Although the melodic phrases are given, the performance instructions call for significant freedom for the performers. However, it is expected that one of the musicians will play the note C persistently with consistent eighth notes. This functions as the pulse. Due to the persistence of patterns, unsynchronized transitions from one event to the other, and the lack of harmonic motion, the listener will inevitably fall back on the persisting pulse.

With regard to Langer's insistence on the suspension of clock time, the upshot for all these various cases of repetition is that in the artistic production of music, time involving the specification of time-references by means of publicly observable chronology may become invaluable to musical understanding in a way that Langer's theory cannot accommodate: elemental apparition gives way to material manifestation as we listen to the music with understanding.

III. Aspects of Creation and Performance

Langer's strong suspension thesis comes with what she calls 'counterpart' theories: a theory of musical creation, a theory of musical performance, and a theory of musical (as against actual) hearing (*PA*, p. 38).¹⁸ Langer's rationale here is quite clear: to present a unified theory. According to Langer, this requires aligning all aspects of musical production with what she takes to be the primary musical activity: musical hearing. 'If music is indeed time made audible,' says Langer, 'then that is what the auditor ought to hear: virtual movement, motion that exists only for the ear' (*ibid.*). We have already challenged Langer's underlying assumptions for this theory of musical hearing in Sections I and II. According to Langer, the first principle in musical hearing is the ability 'to experience the primary illusion, to feel the consistent movement and recognize at once the commanding form which makes this piece an inviolable work' (*FF*, p. 147). Also, 'The musician listens to his own idea before he plays, before he writes' (*FF*, p. 148). Langer requires that all aspects of musical production should proceed from inner (felt) experience to outer manifestation. Yet, precisely due to Langer's need to unify her philosophical theory of music in such a way, her counterpart theories of musical creation and musical performance feature odd biases when viewed against the backdrop of actual musical practices as well as musicological insights. An understanding of these biases gives a fuller picture of what we have argued so far is inherently problematic in Langer's strong suspension

¹⁸ It is noteworthy that Langer opts for the word 'counterpart' in this context, which denotes the functional sameness of her theories of musical hearing, musical performance and musical creation, as they partake in a theoretical unity, rather than being presented as merely analogous.

thesis. We shall critically examine her theory of musical creation first, and then proceed to her theory of musical performance.

According to Langer's theory of musical creation, 'the first stage is the process of conception, that takes place within the composer's mind [...], and issues in a more or less sudden recognition of the total form to be achieved'. Langer calls this original conception 'the commanding form of the work' (*FF*, pp. 121–22). Once this essential musical form is found, a piece of music exists in an embryonic state: implicit, because its completely articulate character is not yet determined. Still, this general Gestalt serves as a measure of right or wrong, too much or too little, strong or weak, in the subsequent invention and elaboration of the work.

Langer's position is actually old wine in a new bottle. It is a pretty straightforward recasting of eighteenth-century theory of composition, as exemplified in the theoretical writings of Johann Georg Sulzer and Heinrich Koch. Langer's 'commanding form' is what these theorists called *Anlage*, the sketch or plan, which is the first of a threefold process of artistic creation, which also includes 'realization' and 'elaboration'. The *Anlage* is the most crucial of these three stages. It is the first burst of inspiration, consisting of the essence of the work. It is a product of genius, which contains all the essential ideas and defines the affection to be expressed. Through it the work becomes a coherent artistic expression. According to Sulzer,

when the plan is completed, then nothing more that is essential can come into the work. It already contains all the important ideas, and for that reason requires the most genius. Therefore a work acquires its greatest value from the plan. That constitutes the soul of a work and establishes everything that pertains to its inner character and to the effect which it should have.¹⁹

According to Koch, in the *Anlage*, 'the main ideas of the composition already connected with one another, which present themselves together to the composer as a complete whole, along with its main harmonic features'.²⁰

However, it is important to observe that this venerable theory of composition is at odds with the facts concerning actual processes of composition. The most striking counterexample is none other than Ludwig van Beethoven. Beethoven's composing strategies involved detailed sketches, many of which have survived. Beethoven dedicated considerable time to developing elaborate methods of sketching music in great detail. After the long stage of sketching, he did not rely heavily on the keyboard for composing, but instead preferred to complete his compositions by working out most of the details on paper in his sketches. He kept those sketches bound in several volumes.²¹

Beethoven scholars generally agree that Beethoven's process of composing involved several distinct stages: commonly 'a concept sketch' and 'a continuity draft', and occasionally also 'sketches of intermediate length' and 'movement plans'. His sketches for the *Eroica* provide crucial evidence that sheds some unexpected light on the evolution of this work:

1. Early sketches of the piece introduce a different opening as compared to the final score. The sketch suggests an opening on a dominant harmonic rather than the familiar opening of the piece that appears on the tonic.²²

¹⁹ Quoted in Nancy Kovaleff Baker, 'The Aesthetic Theories of Heinrich Christoph Koch', *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 8 (1977): 193.

²⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*

²¹ Douglas Porter Johnson, Alan Tyson, and Robert Winter, *The Beethoven Sketchbooks: History, Reconstruction, Inventory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 3.

²² Gustav Nottebohm, *Ein Skizzenbuch von Beethoven aus dem Jahr 1803* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1880), 6.

2. The order of the musical ideas in the sketch does not correspond to the order in the final score; in some cases, ideas are distributed between movements, and in others, Beethoven insinuates ideas of a subsequent movement and then shifts back to the movement in progress.
3. Several musical ideas are shaped differently in the sketches compared to the final version. In some cases, the sketch version is more concise, while in others, it is (against our expectations) more elaborated.
4. The finale of the *Eroica* relies on former materials that appeared in earlier compositions. The main theme of this movement, known as the famous *Basso del Thema*, previously appeared in *Creatures of Prometheus* (1801), *Ländler* no. 7 (1802), and *Variations* op. 35 (1803).

With regard to Langer's position, the upshot is very simple: in Beethoven's actual composition process for the *Eroica*, one cannot speak of a 'commanding form' in Langer's sense without begging the question. The organic final form of the symphony is a result of completely different compositional strategies than the one presupposed by Langer uncritically, following classic models such as the ones introduced by Sulzer and Koch.

As we have seen in the previous sections, Langer's strong suspension thesis does not fare well with respect to nontonal environments, and this is primarily due to her manner of making a distinction between the materials and elements of music. To this we can now add Langer's insistence that the notion of 'commanding form' also serves to sharply demarcate the art of music: 'music is more universal than any one artistic tradition, and the difference between music and noise is not the absence of this or that constructive principle, but of any commanding form whatever' (*FF*, pp. 125–26). This contention serves as Langer's basis for criticizing the compositional practice of modern composers who feel some obligation to explore all the new sonorous possibilities that science puts at their disposal. According to Langer, the modern composer has the right to use any materials they like, but their purpose remains to create new elements. 'How he will do it is a problem for his tonal imagination and his conception of feeling,' she avers (*PA*, p. 40).

Interestingly, Langer believed that her notion of the commanding form can be extended also to what she unqualifiedly calls 'atonal' composition. She maintains that the essence of all composition, tonal or atonal, is 'the semblance of *organic* movement, the illusion of an indivisible whole' (*FF*, p. 126). Some comments are in order in this regard. First, any binary distinction between tonal and atonal is bound to go astray at some point. For one, nontonal organization need not be atonal. As a name for a particular 'musical language', atonal composition has been associated first and foremost with a highly specific pitch organization (for example, cell-based compositions, as such Schoenberg's piano piece Op. 11, no. 1) and also a specific sound. It is not clear whether Langer has such narrow characterization in mind here. Either way, in such narrowly defined atonal composition (as well as other kinds of nontonal composition), the semblance of movement is created by punctuation substitutes, which are carried out by means of rhetorical gestures. A typical example would be achieving closure solely by means of a set of rapid tempo changes. However, such devices are external to the musical syntax – namely, they are alien to Langer's notion of 'commanding form', and hence they are patently not 'organic' in Langer's sense. Whatever illusion they serve to create, it is not one of an 'indivisible whole'.

Second, precisely on the fuzzy border between the tonal and the atonal, as a quintessential manifestation of early modernist aesthetics, we find striking explorations of textural consistencies so great that they can suspend a composition's forward motion through time. As Jonathan Kramer points out, 'with composers such as Debussy and Stravinsky, we first encounter true harmonic stasis: no longer the tension-laden pedal points of Bach but rather

segments of musical time that are stationary and have no implication to move ahead; no longer textural constancy as an overlay to harmonic motion but now the freezing of several parameters into miniature eternities.²³ Even in the last song in Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* 'there are vast stretches of harmonic stasis, and, at the end, functional tonality gradually evaporates in favor of an all-inclusive pentatonic verticality: C, E, G, and A are literally present, while D remains in the memory, unresolved in its register.'²⁴ In Charles Ives's pioneering experimental music, the juxtaposition of materials and the multilayered division of musical space, characteristic of his style, give rise to an experience of nonlinear, directionless, seemingly arbitrary construction. Oddly, such stalwart musical examples may have been quite familiar to Langer.

Yet Langer's much more ambitious claim here entails a restriction on the ontology of musical composition: allegedly, there can be no composition at the level of materials. Again, our point is that Langer cannot impose such a restriction without begging the question. We offer two cases in point: Henry Cowell's *The Banshee* for solo piano, which was composed in 1925, almost thirty years before the publication of Langer's *Feeling and Form*, and Helmut Lachenmann's *Pression* for solo cello from 1969. Different as they may be, these two examples yield similar conclusions with respect to Langer's theory.

Cowell's groundbreaking composition *The Banshee* employs extended techniques for piano playing. The performer is instructed to produce both fixed and sliding pitches by strumming and plucking the strings as well as sliding along their length with his fingertips or fingernails. The piano keyboard is not used at all in executing this music, as the performer taps directly into the physical properties of the instrument. *The Banshee* expands the realm of musical sound up to the point that the listener cannot even trace the source or the cause of the sounds that make up the piece back to a specific notation or even to specific instruments. Cowell's notation for *The Banshee* consists of technical instructions for producing sounds, which does not afford the performer any particular sound image ahead of time. Furthermore, the temporal aspect of the piece derives solely from the physicality of the sounds as produced. Thus, different performances of *The Banshee* may vary significantly from one another. What Cowell has composed into an expressive form in *The Banshee* are raw sound materials, not virtual elements, and in the execution of the score the sounds ring free of what Langer calls 'primary illusion', first and foremost due to the indeterminacy of the score.

Lachenmann's *Pression* for cello is another striking example of composing on the level of materials only. Lachenmann's music is an exploration of new sounds – new materials in Langer's terms – not merely as outcomes of extended techniques, but also in the sense of rediscovering physical primary materials and disclosing their beauty. This exploration of beauty is carried out, according to Lachenmann, 'not only through refusing the customary but also through unmasking the conditions of what counts for beauty, such as the suppression of the fundamental physical pre-requisites and energies, of the fundamental efforts – if you will, of the concealed labour'.²⁵ Lachenmann's aesthetics relates to the ideal of 'Musique concrète', according to which sounds are experienced as the immediate results of their production rather than mediated by conventions of listening and metaphorical meaning. A prominent example of this sort of aesthetics is his work *Pression* for solo cello (1969). In this work, the familiar sound of the instrument is replaced by concentration

²³ Kramer, *Time of Music*, 44.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Quoted in Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music and After*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 216.

on unconventional techniques, which explore the physical mechanisms underlying sound production.

Lachenmann argues that in this kind of music, listening becomes 'concrete' in the sense that 'one hears under what conditions, with what materials, with what energies, and against what (mechanical) resistances each sound or noise is produced'.²⁶ The listener experiences the primary materials without being able to reach the stage of organized sound events. The very idea of concrete musical hearing is conceptually incompatible with the philosophical foundation of Langer's view.

In the remainder of this section, we briefly turn to Langer's counterpart theory of musical performance. This theory oddly relies on the notion of inward (mental) hearing and its purported relation to actual (physical) hearing. According to Langer, 'inward hearing is a work of the mind, that begins with conceptions of form and ends with their complete presentation in imagined sound experience. [...] inward hearing usually stops short of just that determinateness of quality and duration which characterizes actual sensation' (*FF*, p. 137). Performance, whereupon actual hearing is constituted, follows logically and causally from the musical thought (the composition) through inward hearing:

Performance is the completion of a musical work, a logical continuation of the composition, carrying the creation through from thought to physical expression. Obviously, then, the thought must be entirely grasped, if it is to be carried on. Composition and performance are not neatly separable at the stage marked by the finishing of the score; for both spring from the commanding form and are governed throughout by its demands and enticements. (*FF*, p. 138)

Ultimately, Langer contended, real performance is as creative an act as composition, just as the composer's own working out of the idea, after he has conceived the greatest movement and therewith the whole commanding form, is still creative work. The performer simply carries it on. (*FF*, p. 139)

Langer's take on inward hearing is a far cry from what musicians actually do with this essential skill. Inward hearing is a pre-performance practice. It may indeed serve to highlight and explicate hierarchies of the different levels of structure within the piece. Thus, inward hearing may enhance the performer's ability to deliver a clearer articulation of both the formal and tonal plans of the work. Still, inward hearing cannot be used to similarly enhance the sense of musical time in the piece. On the contrary, the challenge in inward hearing is precisely to preserve a higher level of organization in order to avoid an uncontrollable flow of pitches and rhythmic patterns, which could result in a meaningless series of tones. Furthermore, in inward hearing, it is always easier to keep in mind a constant pulsation (akin to clock time). The quality of musical time will be absent in inward hearing because it requires physical and acoustic cues – for example, the attack and decay of the instrument, which not only varies from one instrument to another, but also may vary from one concert hall to another. Such material cues cannot be predicted ahead of the actual playing. The absence of a sense of musical time is a glaring lacuna in Langer's postulation of a progression from the composer's commanding form to its actual execution in performance by means of the performer's ability to hear the form inwardly.

We might also add that in cases such as Cowell's *The Banshee* and Lachenmann's *Pression*, inward hearing cancels out altogether. As we have noted, the employment of unconventional

²⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, 117.

and extended techniques requires a corresponding method of notation. In both pieces, the score can be said to be prescriptive with regard to the actions of the performer, rather than descriptive with regard to the intended sound result (as is the case with common-practice musical scores). One reads such scores more like a blueprint than a (standard) musical score. The execution of such prescriptive scores exemplifies a completely different relation between the composer and the performer. One could use Langer's words to say that in such new modes of music 'real performance is as creative an act as composition, just as the composer's own working out of the idea', but this would be true in a sense hugely different from Langer's.

IV. The Conceptual Primacy of Memory-Time

The suspension of clock time in music is a manifestation of the conceptual primacy of memory-time in Langer's philosophy of music. Her notion of the primary apparition of music is patently subject-centred. Langer's view belongs to a venerable tradition of thinking about music as an embodiment of time, which began with Augustine's discussion of time in terms of chanting in Chapter XI of his *Confessions*. Augustine's initial premise is that time flows: 'I know that if nothing passed away, there would not be past time; and if nothing were coming, there would not be future time; and if nothing were, there would not be present time.'²⁷ From this it follows, according to Augustine, that only the present appears to exist in reality, because 'the past now is not, and the future is not as yet'.²⁸ Yet, if the present moment bears the mark of time, that is, directional flow, then it must become past. That is, the present continuously flows out of existence. Under the assumption of the flow of time, Augustine tries to close in on a 'temporal atom', which cannot be divided further into future and past. Ultimately, he whittles down the time that is said to be present to a dimensionless point, which has no measurable extension. Thus, Augustine portrays time as passing 'from that [...] which as yet is not, through that which has no space, into that which now is not'.²⁹ Time is nothing else than extension, and we measure tracks of time only in performance. Sound can be measured only while it is sounding, for 'while passing, it was being extended into some space of time, in which it might be measured, since the present has no space'.³⁰ Augustine's account of time gives priority to memory-time: 'do I not measure [syllables] themselves, which now are not, but something in my memory, which remains fixed. In thee, O my mind, I measure time.'³¹ Since each syllable uttered, each sound voiced, is immediately past, to measure a tract of time by comparing it in the following act of annunciation to a subsequent one is made possible only through memory. Our attention – through acts of remembering, attending and expecting – is a lasting thing that produces continuity in present experience. As we sing or recite, time flows from future to past through this extended present experience. As expectation wanes, memory lengthens.

The philosophical picture of music as an embodiment of memory-time, utilizing versions of the idea of the specious present, has become well-entrenched in the philosophy of music. Such philosophies of music, which are shaped and informed by Augustine's view of time, share common core features. It would be instructive to place Langer's position side by side with the views of two other distinctive, albeit very different representatives of this venerable tradition: Edmund Husserl in *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* and Jerrold Levinson in *Music in the Moment*.³²

²⁷ Augustine, *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, vol. 1, ed. Whitney J. Oates (New York: Random House, 1948), 191.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 199.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

³² Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, trans. James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964); Jerrold Levinson, *Music in the Moment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

First and foremost, they all exhibit the primacy of the conceptual framework of memory-time. Memory-time is a now-centred system of time-references. In such a system, there is only 'before' and 'after', 'earlier' and 'later', but no 'past' and 'future'. When taken in isolation, such a framework cannot rely on any external criteria for time-reference or time-measurement. Memory-time can rely only on one's present memories and expectations. Such references do not seem to give us any direct way of measuring timespans, which explains Augustine's resorting to measuring timespans by means of comparing the relative length of syllables in the mind. In the framework of memory-time, chronometric temporal concepts are secondary.

Langer's view of musical temporality exemplifies these characteristics very clearly. As we noted in section I, she postulated that felt time is conceptually prior to clock time. According to Langer, 'Musical duration is an image of what might be termed "lived" or "experienced" time – the passage of life that we feel as expectations become "now", and "now" turns into unalterable fact. Such passage is measurable only in terms of sensibilities, tensions, and emotions [...]' (FF, p. 109). The last sentence clearly echoes Augustine's creed: 'In thee, O my mind, I measure time.' At the most basic level, Langer maintains, short-term memory is needed to maintain the unity of an evolving act. In the case of hearing and understanding music, 'it is essential that each subact be remembered at least to the extent of physically retaining its contribution to the advancing conception of the whole'.³³ Ultimately, cumulative retention generates time-consciousness as a permanent background to human existence.³⁴

In his discussion of musical experience, Husserl was specifically concerned by the problem of identity as it pertains to the perception of temporal objects. As the given now-point is in flux, constantly sinking back into the past, memory – 'primary memory' or 'retention' in Husserl's terminology – plays a crucial role in retaining the identity of the musical object. Husserl distinguishes retention from a secondary sort of memory, which is cut off from the felt present. Retention clings to events happening now, qualifying the real now with a wider, phenomenal now. Although retained objects may lose their clarity as they recede into consciousness, they do not lose their identity. We know that we are still hearing the same melody from moment to moment, even though we may not be able to recall exactly the flow of former events. Recollection of former events falls in the domain of secondary memory, or 're-presentation', which, in turn, depends on retention; recollecting a past gone by (*ist vergangen*) presupposes a past that has been (*ist gewesen*). The relation of protention – Husserl's technical term for vivid expectation – to the present is similar to that of retention; the meaning of both determines their respective object-phases with regard to both their temporal location and their extra-temporal qualities.

There is a similarity to Levinson's concatenationism in the latter's clear reliance on concepts such as 'vivid memory' and 'vivid anticipation' in order to account for the temporal nature of our quasi-hearing of the musical present: 'The width of the window of quasi-hearing, as conceived, is thus at any point a direct function of the reach of vivid memory and vivid anticipation at the point, which is a matter of the extent of virtual imaging backwards and forwards that the musical material and one's familiarity with it allow'.³⁵ It is noteworthy that Levinson believes that we can unproblematically map the musical specious present, thus defined, onto the conceptual framework of physical time. He contends that the musical present rarely exceeds a minute or so in length, depending on the nature of the musical material involved and the quality of its internal connectedness.

³³ Susanne K. Langer, *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, vol. 2 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 335–36.

³⁴ See Innis, *Susanne Langer in Focus*, 222.

³⁵ Levinson, *Music in the Moment*, 16.

The second characteristic of these theories is the foundational Augustinian idea that musical flow embodies the flow of time and that the musical present contains time in some sense. This entails conceptualizing time as a substance and also as a space. According to Augustine, the present moment leaves a kind of temporal space behind after its own disappearance. This is the reason, he thought, why it can be measured presently as having occurred in the past. Langer's concept of 'passage', the sense of transience, precisely captures not only the idea of musical flow but also the spatial idea of 'volume'. According to Langer, '[Music] creates an image of time measured by the motion of forms that seem to give it substance, yet a substance that consists entirely of sound, so it is transitoriness itself' (*FF*, p. 110).

This characteristic is of course in full display in Husserl's phenomenological discourse:

The sound is given; that is, I am conscious of it as now, and I am so conscious of it 'as long as' I am conscious of any of its phases as now. But if any temporal phase (corresponding to a temporal point of the duration of the sound) is an actual now (with the exception of the beginning point), then I am conscious of a continuity of phases as 'before,' and I am conscious of the whole interval of the temporal duration from the beginning-point to the now-point as an expired duration. [...] At the end-point, I am conscious of this point itself as a now-point and of the whole duration as expired. [...] 'During' this whole flux of consciousness, I am conscious of one and the same sound as enduring, as enduring now.³⁶

Levinson offers a similar outlook: 'Hearing musical movement is necessarily hearing a sonic entity not all of which is sounding at any instant, while at any instant, one hears the sounding notes as belonging to a musical flow, or as contained within a musical process, of which they form a part.'³⁷

The third characteristic is the understanding of the particularity of expression as inhering patently in musical motion, which is conceived as internal to the musical specious present. This characteristic is undoubtedly the hallmark of Langer's philosophy of music. According to Langer, we hear the passage of time in music as lived events, felt inwardly as 'they grow from a beginning to a point of highest intensity, mounting either steadily or with varying acceleration to a climax, then dissolving, or letting go abruptly in sudden deflation, or merging with the rise or fall of some other, encroaching tension' (*PA*, pp. 37–38). Levinson suggests that 'basic [musical] expressiveness, and so the basis for any further expressiveness it may possess, comes available to the listener' by means of what he dubs 'quasi-hearing'.³⁸ Levinson defines quasi-hearing as 'a process in which conscious attention is carried to a small stretch of music surrounding the present moment, and which involves synthesizing the events of such a stretch into a coherent flow, insofar as possible'.³⁹ Husserl is relatively sketchy with regard to musical expression, although it is clear in his theory that in the case of a musical tone, our retentions and protentions frame the tone-phases not only as 'past tone-phase' and 'future tone-phase', respectively, but also as tones of certain qualities.

V. Wittgenstein Contra Langer

We now approach the final tier of our critique of Langer's view of musical temporality, where Langer's view is shown to be in the grip of a picture, to avail ourselves of Wittgenstein's famous locution. As we have seen in Section IV, the picture is the Augustinian tradition of

³⁶ Husserl, *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, 44–45.

³⁷ Levinson, *Music in the Moment*, 15.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

rendering music as an embodiment of memory-time. Augustine's conception of time was targeted by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his writings and lectures in the 1930s. Wittgenstein aimed to show that what generates the Augustinian tendency to reify memory-time, to render it as a substance or in spatial terms, including the very idea of measurement, is a set of false analogies, which only generate philosophical confusion. Augustine himself seems to have commingled the very different ways in which we measure time and space, as he concluded that we measure the specious present in our mind, as if the present is some object in front of him. Ultimately, Wittgenstein's criticism undercuts conceptions of music, which exclusively rely on the framework of memory-time.⁴⁰ In this sense, we propose to set Wittgenstein contra Langer.

Wittgenstein cuts to the core of the aforementioned philosophies of music in his debunking of Augustine's contention that the word 'now' is a specification of time, a name of an instance of time, a real punctiform present, an 'unalterable fact' in Langer's words (*FF*, p. 109). This idea is the source of the necessity for the primacy of the conceptual framework of memory-time. According to Wittgenstein, the error is already contained in Augustine's initial question 'What is time?', which presupposes that in some sense time is made of some material.⁴¹ For Wittgenstein, Augustine's original puzzlement concerning the nature of time is a prime example of language being seduced by substantives as it runs against its own limits. Wittgenstein uses the film-strip analogy in order to tease out this sense of limit for our language of time.⁴² Wittgenstein suggested thinking about the present experience as a picture on a film-strip. There are two alternatives here: either to talk about the projected image, or else to talk about the picture on the film-strip itself. In the latter case, there are other clearly identifiable pictures preceding and succeeding it on the strip. Wittgenstein's point in this analogy is that the philosophical idea that 'present experience only is real' arises from imagining events to pass before us like film in a projector, or lantern. When the image is there and seen, no other image is there and seen. According to Wittgenstein, there are modes of talking about present experience in which we can, and sometimes ought to, dispense with the word 'present', just like we can sometimes do without the word 'I'. In such contexts (for example, when we cannot speak of the present as opposed to past and future), the word 'present' seems to cancel out simply because there is no other word, which could replace it. In such context, the word 'present' does mean something bordering on something else, from which it can be limited off. The upshot of the film-strip analogy is this:

The present we are talking about here is not the frame in the film reel that is in front of the projector's lens at precisely this moment, as opposed to the frames before and after it, which have already been there or are yet to come; but the picture on the screen which would illegitimately be called present, since 'present' would not be used here to distinguish it from past and future. And so it is a meaningless epithet.⁴³

Thus, the extravagant idea of the primacy of memory-time as 'the source of our cognition' overshadows our more mundane notion of memory-time as a mere ordering of events. But

⁴⁰ For a thorough discussion of Wittgenstein's position and its import see Eran Guter, 'Measure for Measure: Wittgenstein's Critique of the Augustinian Picture of Music', in *Wittgenstein and the Limits of Language*, ed. Hanne Appelqvist (London: Routledge, 2019), 245–69.

⁴¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Big Typescript: TS 213*, ed. and trans. C. Grant Luckhardt and Maximilian A. E. Aue (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 522. References are to the original German pagination.

⁴² See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks*, ed. Rush Rhees, trans. Raymond Hargreaves and Roger White (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1975), 49–54; *Wittgenstein: Lectures, Cambridge 1930–1933; From the Notes of G. E. Moore*, ed. David Stern, Brian Rogers, and Gabriel Citron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 8:49–50; *Big Typescript*, 494–98, 518.

⁴³ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks*, 54.

the former draws its attraction from a mere simile. 'It's just we've used a simile,' Wittgenstein wrote, 'and now the simile is tyrannizing us. In the language of the simile, I cannot move outside of the simile. Wanting to use the language of this simile to speak of memory as the source of our cognition, as the verification of our propositions, has to lead to nonsense.'⁴⁴ Wittgenstein's point is that we need to observe a limit: we cannot apply the concept of time, that is, the syntactical rules as they apply to physical nouns, to the world of mental imagery, where one uses a radically different way of speaking. Of course the word 'measurement' itself and its related standards of exactness and precision belong to the vocabulary of the physical world. Other anomalies ensue from saying that we have perception into the past (as we do in the framework of memory-time), thereby contradicting every concept of physical time.⁴⁵ Also, the idea of the specious present invites us to regard the future as preformed in some sense. This is also characteristic of Langer's theory of musical creation, which capitalizes on the notion of 'commanding form', as we pointed out earlier. Wittgenstein points out that 'there is a point in saying future events are pre-formed if it belongs to the *essence* of time that it does not break off'.⁴⁶ Yet not breaking off is characteristic of the framework of physical time. The present in memory-time is patently slipping away from us.

Furthermore, the very idea of the flow of time is also a product of an unchecked analogy. Wittgenstein wrote:

It is clear that this question ['Where does the present go when it becomes past?'] most easily arises if we are preoccupied with cases in which there are things flowing by us – as logs of wood float down a river. In such a case we can say the logs which *have passed* us are all down towards the left and the logs which *will pass* us are all up towards the right. We then use this situation as a simile for all happenings in time and even embody the simile in our language, as we say that 'the present event passed by' (a log passed by), 'the future event is to come' (a log is to come). We talk about the flow of events; but also about the flow of time – the river on which the logs travel.⁴⁷

The analogy seems to allure us into thinking of temporal events as fixed points or entities coming towards us as we expect them, passing us by as we experience them, and then flowing away from us as we remember them. We are then tempted to think not only that we can measure, as it were, the distance between these events, but also – as strongly suggested by the picture of the floating logs of wood – that we can measure the length of each event.

The applicability of Wittgenstein's critique to views of musical temporality such as Langer's is given striking expression in the context of his consideration of C. D. Broad's theory of our awareness of the temporal extensity of the immediate objects of our experience.⁴⁸ Broad argued that at a given instant we are directly acquainted with a temporally extended sense datum, which occupies a short interval of time 'stretching' into the past from that instant. He also argued that the sensing involved in our experience of a long musical tone and the aural sense datum with which we are acquainted are both *continuous*. Thus, our mode of identification of the musical object is, in the last analysis, of the 'searchlight' kind.⁴⁹ The constant span of illumination of the searchlight (representing the span of the specious present) moves

⁴⁴ Wittgenstein, *Big Typescript*, 518; comp. *Philosophical Remarks*, 49.

⁴⁵ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks*, 50.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the 'Philosophical Investigations'* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 107–8.

⁴⁸ C. D. Broad, *Scientific Thought* (London: Kegan Paul, 1923).

⁴⁹ See J. D. Mabbott, 'Our Direct Experience of Time', *Mind* 60 (1951): 153–67.

continuously parallel to, and along, its postulated 'target' – the sense datum, in Broad's case – as it 'illuminates' it.

Again, Wittgenstein makes his characteristic move (in his middle period), distinguishing between different kinds of logical or grammatical 'spaces', pointing out analogies and dis-analogies between them, and stressing that what could be said of the concepts that belong to one such space could not meaningfully be said of concepts belonging to another space. Wittgenstein's point here is that the word 'continuity' belongs strictly to the vocabulary of the physical world. When we apply the physical notion of continuity to our immediate experience of a musical tone, we end up precisely with a 'searchlight' model of music. According to Wittgenstein, this presupposes the nonsensical idea that there is an intermediate stage in our experience in which we both hear and remember.

The confusion lies in thinking that physical sound and the sense-datum are both continuous. The physical sound is continuous, but the sense-datum is not. The two experiences, hearing and remembering, are quite distinct. You can narrow down the point between where you finish hearing and where you begin remembering, but there will be no point at which you can say that you both hear and remember.⁵⁰ Wittgenstein makes it very clear that a notion of continuity based on memory-time is nonsensical, and his response – apparently a direct rebuttal of C. D. Broad's position – undercuts the very foundation of Langer's view of musical temporality: 'Music makes time audible, and its form and continuity sensible' (*FF*, p. 110).

VI. Back to 'Our Common Sense Version of Time'

In conclusion, we would like to offer, albeit briefly, a positive outlook for further study. It falls beyond the scope of this essay to consider the many aspects of Wittgenstein's remedy for the philosophical puzzles generated by insisting on the conceptual primacy of memory-time.⁵¹ It suffices to say that he suggested reversing the Augustinian priorities. According to Wittgenstein, what is conceptually prior is a temporal order involving the specification of time-references by means of public, observable chronology, which is implemented by means of not only chronometers and calendars, but also documents, diaries, manuscripts, and other modes of making records or consulting them. Wittgenstein calls this framework 'information-time'. According to Wittgenstein, information-time is 'the order in which information is got by asking different people'.⁵² It is observation time,⁵³ written time,⁵⁴ narrative time,⁵⁵ time of documents,⁵⁶ and historical time.⁵⁷ More narrowly it is also physical time,⁵⁸ that is, the time of the chronometer, or clock-time, as Langer called it – the realm in which musical repetition makes *musical* sense in some contexts, as we have shown. It is the order of the film-strip, in which 'before' and 'after' also spell 'past' and 'future'. 'With our language,' Wittgenstein wrote, 'we find ourselves, so to speak, in the domain of the film, not of the projected picture.'⁵⁹ Wittgenstein's emphasis on information-time is an attempt to resolve philosophical conundrums pertaining to an exclusive reliance on the order of memory-time

⁵⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1930–1932: From the Notes of John King and Desmond Lee*, ed. Desmond Lee (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 71–72.

⁵¹ See the full discussion in Guter, 'Measure for Measure'.

⁵² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1932–1935: From the Notes of Alice Ambrose and Margaret Macdonald*, ed. Alice Ambrose (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 15.

⁵³ Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1930–1933*, 7:106.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 8:64.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 8:45.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 8:49.

⁵⁷ Wittgenstein, *Big Typescript*, 495.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 495.

⁵⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks*, 70.

(for instance, temporal solipsism) by observing the variegated activity of asking and receiving information.⁶⁰

This kind of ‘information-time’ framework entails what Langer called ‘our common sense version of time’, which, she maintains, is even more composite, heterogeneous, and fragmentary than our similar sense of space, and certainly not organized by, or unified in terms of, a single sense (to wit, the sense of hearing): ‘Inward tensions and outward changes, heartbeats and clocks, daylight and routines and weariness furnish various incoherent temporal data [...]’ (FF, p. 109). Whether Langer’s philosophy of music could accommodate ‘our common sense version of time’ as foundational to the description of musical experience is a question for another study. In the light of the final tier of our critique of Langer’s view, we conclude that a reversal of Augustinian priorities in Langer’s philosophy of music – that is, the deployment of a perspectival mode of temporal identification from within the public framework of our ordinary language – would require jettisoning her ‘strong suspension thesis’ at the very least. As we have shown in Sections I–III of this essay, this thesis should independently be rejected for other reasons as well.

Yet what Langer aptly called ‘our common sense version of time’ is nonetheless the framework for all the many subtleties of human gesture in actual music making, the time in which music is played together, rather than experienced in the solitude of one’s mind. According to Wittgenstein, this framework affords the kind of ‘protocol’, so to speak, which gives rise to the aptly collaborative quest of music making – always a robustly embodied and situated practice, for drawing in significance by means of the phrasing and rephrasing of a passage in order to characterize it, enabling by means of such comparative investigation meaningful distinctions between right and wrong.⁶¹ This notion of ‘protocol’ would particularly challenge the kind of separation between doing and experiencing, which is the hallmark of Langer’s theory of musical performance as it stands. The theory would need to reorient itself towards the enactment of musical experience. As Wittgenstein fondly quoted from Goethe’s *Faust*, Part I: ‘In the beginning was the deed.’⁶²

Acknowledgements

Earlier versions of this essay were presented at the Tenth Annual Conference of the European Society for Aesthetics, which was held at Alma Mater Europaea, Maribor (Slovenia) in 2018, and at the Seventh Conference of the Royal Musical Association Music and Philosophy Study Group, which was held at King’s College London in 2019.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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⁶⁰ It is noteworthy that Paul Ricoeur attempted to address Augustine’s aporias with regard to time by way of supplementing Augustine’s concept of time with the external, less time-bound, yet more structure-focused notions of plot and mimesis as found in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Yet, by arguing for the primacy of the activity of plot-making, Ricoeur actually concurs with Wittgenstein: the temporal order of the film-strip, or narrative time, comes first. See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984–85).

⁶¹ See Guter, ‘Measure for Measure’, 259–68.

⁶² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. Georg Henrik von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), § 402; *Culture and Value*, 2nd ed., ed. Georg Henrik von Wright and Alois Pichler, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 36.

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How to cite this article: Guter, Eran and Inbal Guter. 'Susanne Langer on Music and Time.' *Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics* LVIII/XIV, no. 1 (2021): pp. 35–56. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/eeja.195>

Submitted: 30 October 2018

Accepted: 19 December 2019

Published: 17 March 2021

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