Varieties of Tone Presence: Process, Gesture, and the Excessive Polyvalence of Pitch in Post-Tonal Music

Aaron Harcus
The Graduate Center, CUNY
aaronharcus@gmail.com

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Outline of Talk
I. Introduction: Perceptual Presence
II. Traditional Approaches to Tone Presence (“Chunk and Match”)
III. Phenomenology of “Now” and the Embedded Character of Temporal Experience
IV. A Comparison of the “same” chord in Bartók and Schoenberg

I. Perceptual Presence

Phenomenon of Presence: “How the world shows up”; online (as opposed to offline) processing in the various sensory modalities.

Main Thesis: The question of how tones show up for experience (their presence) is dependent on getting an accurate description of the structure of temporal experience.

Secondary Thesis: The focus on principles of segmentation in music analysis, theory, and cognition has virtually ruled out the possibility of a theory of tone presence because it begins with a faulty conception of temporal experience.

Minimal requirement for an adequate description of tone presence:

Perceptual experience is (Noë 2012) transactional in nature: Our perceptual experience registers both how things are and our relation to how things are.

- Included in my conception of “relation to how things are” is understanding.
- Take either one of these aspects of perceptual experience away and you no longer have perceptual experience.
Example 1. Bartók, String Quartet no. 5, second movement, mm. 1-14.
b. Interpretation 1 of mm. 11-12

- Assuming absolute pitch, you hear two layers with distinct tonal relations/functions in D♭ and C Major.
- Root, third, and Fifth of CM triad are all equally present.
- The relation of minor ninth between the two layers is equally present.
- Visual Analogy: An abundance of pitch relationships all in sharp focus from the center out to the periphery.

Content of Experience:

c. Interpretation 2

- Two distinct tonal layers in an ambiguous relation to one another (thus the arrow labeled $cseg <01>$).
- Root of tonic triad and scale degree 1 more prominent than other pitches within their respective layers.
- The tonal relations, particularly scale degree 1, in Violin 1 is much more focally prominent than the pitch relations in other layers.

Content of Experience:

Example 1. Continued.
d. Interpretation 3

The motion from m9 between layers to the octave is focally prominent.
Slightly less prominent is the experience of two distinct layers converging into one layer, the Major tonic triad.
The m9 above the tonic root is elaborated in Violin 1 by a stepwise ascending figure without any tonal or set-class implications.

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f. Interpretation 5, mm. 11-14.

- Two chords lack tonal focus and the roots of the chords are still focally prominent.
- The motion up a perfect between the two chords is focally prominent.
- Greater isolation between layers, as the second instance of the prominent descending m2 in Violin 1 (E-D♯) does not resolve into the chordal layer.

Example 1. Continued.
II. Traditional Approaches to Tone Presence (“Chunk and Match”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3) Tone Presence:</th>
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<td>A match is found, a structural description assigned (the propositional light bulb is turned on), and the object is experienced “now.”</td>
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Formal Models

- **Representational Models:**
  - Schemata (Prototype or Exemplar-based)
  - Location (or relative distance between two chords) in some quality space
  - Grammar (primitives + rules of combination)

- **Open-Ended/Subjectively Autonomous models:**
  - Associative Set
  - GIS/Transformational Network

2) “Match”: Identity or Best fit between musical object and formal model.

Principles of Segmentation

- Sonic ($S_1$ and $S_2$) or Contextual Criteria (given two+ segments)
- Well-Formedness (WFR) and Preference Rules (PRs)

1) “Chunk”: Break stream up into objects

Example 2. *Schematic Outline of Traditional Approach to Tone Presence (“Chunk and Match”).*

III. Phenomenology of “Now” and the Embedded Character of Temporal Experience

How should we characterize Now?

*Quote 1* (Noë 2012, 77-78): “What you hear when you experience the temporal extent of the note are not the sounds that have already passed out of existence…What you experience, rather, is…the rising of the current sounds *out of the past*; you hear the current sounds as *surging forth* from the past. You hear them as a continuation. This is to say, moving on to a better approximation, you hear them as having a certain *trajectory or arc*, as unfolding in accordance with a definite law or pattern. **It is not the past that is present in the current experience; rather, it is the trajectory or arc that is present now, and of course the arc describes the relation of what is now to what has already happened (and to what may still happen).** (italics in original, bold my own).
**Quote 2** (Hasty 1997, 76): “I suggest that now might be regarded as a continually changing perspective on becoming. Now is continually changing and ever new, because becoming is ever new and never fixed or arrested. What has become is fixed and past, but what is past becomes past only with a new becoming and is past only for what is becoming or will become. By calling now a perspective I mean that it is a ‘view’ taken on present becoming from the standpoint of the particular opportunities offered by what has become and what might become. In this way, ‘now’ might be considered most generally as a condition for freedom of action and more specifically as a condition for feeling rhythm” (emphasis my own).

Example 3. **Schematic Representation of the Embedded Character of Temporal Experience.**

Two main points regarding Example 3 with respect to tone presence:

1) The past aspect corresponds to what is traditionally identified as the segment; **HOWEVER**, it is not the segment (or past aspect) itself that is present to experience; instead what we hear is the trajectory of the tone object arising out of this segment (‘past aspect’).
2) It is this process of the segment coming into being by virtue of being made past and relevant for present becoming that helps determine the relevant immediate scope of the tone object.
A. Measures 1-6.

Example 4. *String Quartet no. 4*, third movement.

B. Analytical Reduction of measures 1-6.

Example 5. *Schoenberg, Chamber Symphony no. 1*, op. 9, Figure 77.
Select Bibliography


