

Guidelines for Analysis of Early Music and a short bibliography

If analysis has to be validated on other than historical or systematic grounds, perhaps elementary and practical tests would suffice. A set of queries might be put to each analysis. Does it tell us something about the piece that we did not know before? Is that “something” a recognizably important component in the piece? Does the analysis explain anomalies? Does it provide intellectual justification for what we have already felt about the piece? And does it use a method that can be fruitfully applied to other pieces? These tests accord with simple reasonableness, satisfying certain proof-of-the-pudding standards, though they fail to establish analysis as a discipline in its own right or even as a quasi-independent branch of theory. Rather, they rest on the notion that analysis, which deals with works of art, must in some way be true to these works. The presence of such truth in an analysis will be as open to debate as the meaning of the analyzed work itself. Accepting this idea deflates analytical pretensions, but then to recognize where imponderables hold sway is one sign of rationality. ...

From “Introduction,” *Music Theory and the Exploration of the Past*, edited by Christopher Hatch and David W. Bernstein (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 4.

Analysis is not about theories per se or about history of theory. It’s about pieces of music. The analytical tools we use might be inspired by old treatises, but they can’t be purely historical. There is nothing wrong with a modern-day analyst using more modern tools, like a historian looking at feudal society through a Marxist lens, or a Freudian analyst writing a psychobiography of Martin Luther (see Peter Schubert, “Authentic Analysis,” *Journal of Musicology* 12 [1994]: 3-18). As Milton Babbitt is supposed to have said: “if it happens once, it’s an accident; if it happens twice it’s structural.” Analysis is to musicology as the case of Anna O. is to the Kinsey Report (Kerman: “a theorist looks at one piece, a musicologist looks at two”). An analysis is like an x-ray; it is like an autopsy (Schoenberg: “anywhere you cut, it’s the same blood”); it is like a map (General Semantics: “the map is not the territory”). Unlike analysis of nineteenth- or twentieth-century music, where a small number of widely used methods are used, early music still invites many different approaches.

Analysis begins with simple observations in different domains and plots their progression, noting occurrences of a particular type of feature. Sometimes these occurrences progress in a meaningful way (high points get higher, cadences happen more frequently, etc.). Sometimes these occurrences are congruent with features in another domain (cadences to the final and the fifth always occur on hypermetric strong beats). Such congruencies can invite a narrative explanation (meter and mode are linked). On the other hand, anomalies may be revealed (one cadence to a note foreign to the mode occurs

on a strong beat), which can also invite a narrative explanation (this cadence creates tension at the exact middle of the piece).

Analysis is an argument more than a description, it tells a story. Stories analysts like to tell include: The music is shaped to conform to a simple abstract model or scheme; it is shaped to fit the text or some other given from outside the piece (cantus firmus, polyphonic model, dimensions of a piece of architecture); unity, coherence, consistency; organicism; the large in the small; sections of the piece are in contrast (beginning – middle – end); some types of contrast include: simple/complex, stable/unstable, tension/resolution; the analysis may describe how you hear the piece; the analysis may culminate in how one should hear or perform the piece.

In addition to the questions posed by Hatch and Bernstein, here are some things to keep in mind when reading analysis: what unsupported assertions does the author make? what assumptions hide beneath the surface? Which of the author's assumptions do you share? which not? could you duplicate the author's work? would this method work on another piece from the same repertoire? from a different repertoire? what new thing did you learn about the piece? is there a single main point to the article? can you sum up the analysis in one sentence? are pictures, graphs, reductions, schemas, etc., used persuasively?

Things to bear in mind when writing an analysis: make observations in a single domain; schematize your description of a domain in an effective way (with map, graph, chart, table, etc.); after you have described phenomena in more than one domain, look for correspondences between the various domains; can you schematize the relationship between domains? Most importantly, tie your observations together in a single concise idea or narrative. Remember the one-sentence rule.

Things to avoid in writing an analysis: "blow-by-blow" description; throwing in everything you notice, whether or not it fits the "story;" not having numbered excerpts with clearly marked details that are discussed in the prose; merely attaching the score, expecting the reader to find details for him/herself (solution: put an excerpt in a numbered example and circle the notable detail); laying out parallel examples differently; saying that some variation was introduced by the composer "for the sake of variety" (solution: try to figure out why the variant occurs where and when it does); saying that some ambiguity in the music of a texted piece reflects some ambiguity in the text.

Remember the basic rule of writing: LEAD THE LAZY, IGNORANT READER BY THE HAND!

Starting Bibliography for GSW 2014

Everist, Mark, ed. *Music Before 1600*. Models of Musical Analysis. Oxford: Blackwell (1992).

Guido, Massimiliano and Peter Schubert. "Unpacking the Box in Frescobaldi's Ricercari of 1615." *Music Theory Online* 20.2 (2014).

Schubert, Peter and Marcelle Lessoil-Daelman. "What Modular Analysis Can Tell Us About Musical Modeling in the Renaissance." *Music Theory Online* 19.1 (2013).

Schubert, Peter. "Hidden Forms in Palestrina's First Book of Four-Voice Motets." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 60/3 (2007): 483-556.

----- "A Lesson from Lassus: Form in the Duos of 1577," *Music Theory Spectrum* 17/1 (Spring, 1995): 1-26.

----- "Mode and Counterpoint." *Music Theory and the Exploration of the Past*, edited by Christopher Hatch and David W. Bernstein. The University of Chicago Press (1993): 103-136.