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Calls and Responses

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Calls and Responses

The animating claim of Christopher Hasty's *Meter as Rhythm* is that meter is a phenomenon which is produced as it goes along. Hasty's theory is rooted in embodied-cognitive acts of experiencing music and marks an important intervention into how we understand the structure of that experience. It does so by working from within the contours of experience and how the interrelations of (passive) past, (active) present and (projections towards) future events give shape to those contours and how we come to understand them. Equally important, it offers an expansive process-oriented conception of what metre is in the first place, eschewing metaphors such as 'container' or 'grid' that assume metre to be an abstract and consistent structuring phenomenon which organises a musical surface in some way, which we can characterise straightforwardly by noting how many beats there are in a bar, how those beats are subdivided, and the like. As Justin London suggests in his 'many metres hypothesis',

> We do not encounter "generic 4/4" […] but a pattern of timing and dynamics that is particular to the piece, the performer, and the musical style. Therefore, to give an ecologically valid account of meter, we must move beyond a theory of tempo-metrical types to a metrical representation that involves particular timing relationships […]. (London 2004, p. 159)

Similarly, as Hasty illustrates in his analyses of two nominally similar Courantes by Johann Sebastian Bach (Hasty 2020, pp. 201–14), the way a measured span of music projects or 'throws forth' (p. 113) the sense of continuation which we can call metric goes far beyond instilling a sense of expectation that, for example, another sequence of three beats will follow a first sequence.[1] Rather, it is the particular temporal profiles of combinations of actual sounds and silences – which articulate what we come to understand as the music's metric structure, therefore enabling us to attend to the latter *as* metre (Gjerdingen 1989) – that project forwards a protensive field of possibilities which may then be affirmed or denied. This is crucial: any given stretch of music is made up of a simple or complex array of co-occurring, nested or concatenated temporal gestures, and those gestures are able to be constitutive of metre because of the ways they project the conditions of possibility for next gestures and how those next gestures relate to what preceded them (confirming or denying the projective implications of the former). Furthermore – and this is where Hasty's theory becomes deeply phenomenological even if not explicitly framed as such – it is musical sounds *as they are experienced* that project particular modes of metric continuation (or

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fail to do so), which means the perceiver is central to the projective apparatus through which metre is constituted.[2] Prior experience and cultural conditioning matter, as we will see below.

The specific kinds of projections Hasty is concerned with are durational potentials. We reach the end of a 'mensurally determinate' sound (Hasty 2020, p. 107), the now-past totality of which projects the potential duration of a next event. We do not yet know what that next event will be, nor the nature of its relationship to the first event, if any. According to Hasty, 'the potential of a past and completed durational quantity [is] being taken as especially relevant for the becoming of a present event' (p. 113); in other words, to attend projectively to music is to consider any now-past-event as 'a condition for the particularity of what is presently becoming' (p. 102). But that's nowhere near the whole durational story: it's not so much that a particular interonset interval occurs and then either is or is not reproduced. Rhythm (and by extent, under Hasty's definition, metre), is an active, eventful *force*. This is a crucial point which models how we hear a duration during the event of its unfolding. A duration commences; we then follow along its contour (including subevents or other discernible phenomena which help us determinately measure it) until it gives way to a next event, at which time we can understand the first duration to have ended. At that moment, we can assess what has transpired thus far and turn our attention to the next event already underway.[3] That next event might be a new beginning or a continuation, redirection or deferral of the energetic impetus set in motion by the first event. In a periodic series of realised projective potentials, a next event might encroach upon an ongoing flow as an anacrusis or elision, transforming the directed energy of the larger projective arc in expected or surprising ways. In all cases, what constitutes an event is an important question which Hasty leaves open to some extent.

There are several implications of Hasty's theory which I have taken up in my own work, three of which I will now describe in turn. Importantly, all these take Hasty's theory out of the somewhat rarified world of score-based Western 'art' music and into the active participatory musicking processes of collective vernacular expressions. This follows a trend set in motion by Robin Attas (2011 and 2015), Matthew Butterfield (2006) and myself (Stover 2009) and continued by, among others, Garrett Michaelsen and John Roeder, as seen in their contributions to this forum, which is to enlist Hasty's theory of metric projection to help account for temporal processes which can be heard to occur in different global and popular music contexts.[4]

First is the role an embodied-cognition-based theory of projection might play in the dialogic unfolding of improvised drum-dance music from West Africa and the African diaspora. Aspects of how different interlocking parts interact in these musics can be characterised in terms of 'call and response', a signal discursive and rhetorical technique found across a wide range of African and Afro-diasporic music practices (Stone 2008, pp. 10–11), which Garrett Michaelsen also touches on in his contribution to this forum. Call-and-response interplay takes many

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Fig. 1 Basic rumba guaguancó matancero strata. Diamond note heads indicate soft 'timekeeping' strokes; triangle note heads indicate muted bass tones; encircled note heads indicate the chékere's diffuse onset

forms: the relationship between the sonero's continuously varied call and the coro's relatively fixed response in salsa,[5] the jazz rhythm section's improvised response to a soloist's call (Monson 1996; or conversely, a melodic soloist's response to the call of a pianist's chord reharmonisation or drummer's rhythmic interjection), the 'answer' phrase crafted in real time to a first singer's 'question' in Brazilian embolada (Souza Santos and Lamara dos Santos Barbosa 2014).[6] What happens if we frame the improvisatory interplay of these kinds of examples in Hasty's projective terms?

In the call-and-response dialogue which drives Cuban rumba guaguancó matancero, two kinds of projective forces are at work.[7] The dialogue I'm concerned with here occurs between two 'support drums' – the salidor and segundo – whose exchange functions in tandem with no fewer than six additional musical layers: clave, catá, chekere, the quinto or lead drum, a solo voice and the coro, a small chorus of accompanimental singers. The basic parts for clave, catá, chekere, segundo and salidor are shown in Fig. 1. The quinto and voice parts are not derived from basic structures in the same way, so are not shown in the figure.

Fig. 1 shows two iterations of the basic cyclic structure. Clave, catá and chekere tend to repeat their basic parts with little variation except at the microtiming level (see below). Alongside this steady substrate, the salidor and segundo continuously vary their basic parts shown in Fig. 1 in a tightly interwoven extemporaneous dialogue, an example of which is shown in Fig. 2. Because of their relative positions in the cycle, the salidor is often said to 'call' the 'response' of the segundo. We can see this relationship in the figure. For visual clarity, I have combined clave and catá in the top stave and omitted the chékere (which simply articulates cycle beginnings), and I have reproduced the

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Fig. 2 A series of call-and-response exchanges between salidor and segundo in rumba guaguancó matancero

'basic' parts for segundo and salidor in the second and third staves with small noteheads. The fourth and fifth staves show four cycles (eight notated bars) of a hypothetical dialogic exchange between salidor and segundo, illustrating how each in turn embellishes their contribution to the hocketed guaguancó melody.[8] In each iteration, the salidor 'calls' with an embellished version of their basic melody: this occurs in bars 1, 3, 5 and 7 of the figure. The segundo 'responds' in turn, as seen in bars 2, 4, 6 and 8. In each case, the salidor completes the melodic gesture with the fourth-beat open tone from the basic melody.

In this relatively straightforward example, the call and response roles are clear: salidor calls, segundo responds, and the cycle wraps up cleanly before moving on to the next dialogic exchange. In practice, the projective range is much more complex, as I examine elsewhere (Stover 2009 and 2018): responses are recast as new calls, and different performance strata call and respond to one another in a lively multivalent heterophony.

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Putting this in projective terms, it is not so much durational potential which is being projected in this simplified illustration as it is the nature of what might possibly unfold within each second half-cycle span, the conditions for the particularity of which were set up in the first half-cycle span. In other words, each of the salidor's improvised gestures – and the particular way it embellishes its basic melodic part – opens a range of possible next gestures that an experienced listener would expect to happen in response. This is important: in rumba guaguancó matancero, the relationship between call and response gestures is determined partially in that performers internalise a range of possible appropriate responses to a given call, from which they will select in the heat of the improvisational moment. There are durations, of course, but it seems to be more a question of the gestural profile of each main duration than an accounting-for of each little durational detail.

The second implication follows from this point, turning away from durations per se, towards the projective implications of a broader range of musical parameters. The interlocking salidor–segundo dialogue is often referred to as a melody. Each drum has a clear tone (the two are often tuned approximately a perfect fourth apart) and different physical techniques are used to produce many kinds of sounds. The most frequently played of these are 'open' tones, muted 'muff' tones, sharp 'slaps', expansive 'bass' tones and barely audible 'time-keeping' strokes which are mostly perceivable through the effect they have on expressive timing or groove. Sometimes different techniques are combined, such as 'open slaps' or 'muted bass' tones, or even more subtle variations produced by striking the head of the drum harder or softer or from a different angle. This array of sounds comprises the sonic resources performers draw on as they create improvisatory timbral melodies in hocketed call-response dialogue. The Hastian question, then, is how might a given gesture 'throw forth' the projective potential of its timbral profile? An interjective slap or bass tone might beget a mimetic response, or it might clear space for an altogether different gestural content to follow, and players may have strategic reasons for tending towards one or the other of these response-orientations. For a listener, part of the joy of following along with rumba's improvisatory unfolding is precisely hearing the projective intimations bound up in a call gesture and how they are realised in what follows, as a continuous dynamic process.

This leads to the third and – for rumba guaguancó and many related African and Afro-diasporic musical expressions – most important implication of Hasty's theory. Beyond the durational and timbral content of a given played gesture, the particular way in which the latter articulates its temporally elastic substrate has profound ramifications for how the whole performance takes shape. That is to say, expressive microtiming is an essential component of musical structure and process in these musics. The played events in rumba guaguancó take place within an elastic temporality which is staked out in part by the interplay of two gravitational fields, which I describe elsewhere (Stover 2009) as originating within co-occurring 12-count and 16-count traversals of the metric cycle. These

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are continually working to pull one another out of alignment, creating what I call 'beat span', a small temporally extended 'now' within which given played events are located. But that is only half the story, because those played events – as the actual phenomena which articulate and define the metric structure at any given moment – are what are doing the pulling. Similar, then, to Hasty's conception of the mensural determination of a given duration, a continuous process of inaugurating and completing microdurations is taking place, and each such microduration functions as an agent which contributes to defining the temporal profile of the performance. This is largely what makes each performance unique and coherent.

To put this in Hasty's terms, the expressive timing with which a given performer imbues their played gesture (for example, pushing ahead or laying back in relation to an imagined isochronous grid), an essential aspect of the projective apparatus, projects an array of possible conditions within which a next player might respond. The response can take many forms, but it is important to think of it *as* a response, as an action which derives its own directional impulse in part from what transpired immediately before it. The immediacy is key; as Hasty insists time and time again, the role of just-past experience is intensely constitutive of the projective field: 'After ten seconds, when the sound has ended, the entire sound will be past, but the immediate past of the sound will be more vividly felt than its more distant past' (Hasty 2020, p. 107). So, the perceptual (and therefore phenomenologically constitutive) process is one of 'immediately successive events' (or, better, many coextensive strata of successive events) in an ongoing chain, each conditioning the possibilities within which the next will transpire.

As we look back 25 years to when *Meter as Rhythm* made its initial splash, winning the Society for Music Theory's prestigious Wallace Berry award, stimulating rich discussion and debate (most notably between Justin London and Hasty himself; see London 1999 and Hasty 1999) and influencing a generation of music theorists, it is clear that its legacy is alive and well even if its full potential has yet to be realised. As Roger Mathew Grant writes in his jacket blurb for the revised twentieth anniversary edition, *Meter as Rhythm* is 'a document to which all subsequent theories of musical temporality must respond'. It's a sad fact of history that not all recent theories of music temporality have done so, or have done so inadequately, often for methodological or, dare I say, ideological reasons. And so, I'll conclude this forum by echoing Grant's forceful words and calling to theorists and analysts to continue to pursue the nuanced implications of Hasty's theory, to direct and deploy them in whatever ways seem fruitful and to lean in to the specifically processual nature of an orientation towards musical experience which foregrounds motion, change and the production of identity over time.

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NOTES

1. All citations of *Meter as Rhythm* in this essay refer to the 2020 revised second edition.
2. I'm referring to Edmund Husserl's (1970) important distinction between an object of experience and an object *as* experienced.
3. The question of how that assessment (especially along a spectrum of active–passive attention) transpires remains open.
4. Numerous theorists have projected Hasty's ideas in compelling ways within the context of Western Euroclassical music; see especially Mirka (2009) and the contributors to Clarke and Rehding (2016).
5. For a compelling analysis of vocal improvisation in salsa that underscores the role of rhythm and microtiming (as opposed to lyrical meaning, which most studies focus on), see Quintero Rivera (2008).
6. All three of these examples are greatly simplified.
7. Rumba refers to a range of folkloric music-dance practices in Cuba, with many regional, historical and stylistic variants. Guaguancó is far and away the most pervasive form of rumba. The regional variant I'm considering here hails from the rumba community in Matanzas, a working-class city in the northwest of Cuba, hence 'matancero'.
8. Transcriptions and analyses of several actual performances can be found in Stover (2009) and Stover (2018).

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