

5 Resonance: Co-Becoming with Sound

Abstract

This chapter provides an account of resonance as a key force bringing about musical meaningfulness. I argue that music-making in Palau is primarily a becoming, an incipience of renewal regarding musical structure, form and texture. As this incipience of renewal actualises across sense modalities, such as in music and dance, it becomes an overwhelming experience, one that accounts for the power of music and dancing experiences – and, in the case of Palau, for the meaningfulness of music and dancing.

Keywords: resonance, meaningfulness, musical structure, suggestions of motion

The preceding chapters have charted the complex relationship of meaningfulness and temporality. The latent historicity that is inherent in sound-based practices, or more accurately perhaps, that is deeply inscribed into their medium sound, unhinges linear conceptions of time. Time in music-making does not unfold from past via present to future; instead, in music they exist all at once and with them, all the paths not taken, dreams undreamt and futures unimaginable. What seems contradictory on a surface level is not necessarily so if we think it through music and dance. Musing about the relationship between memory and physical movement, Erin Manning writes:

When a dancer moves, the movement is implicit in her perception of it, which is itself part memory. When we watch a dancer move, the movement perceived is similarly already imbricated in the memory of the previous movement coursing through it (and through us). Each movement is alive with a memory that activates the becoming-body, including that of the spectator. His activation is not the recall of an actual movement [...]. The memory is always living, a force of activation ensconced in the future-presentness of discovering the feeling of movement again for the first time. (Manning 2013, 84)

Movement in sound, in this sense, is an operationalisation of Benjamin's time-of-the-now (*Jetztzeit*), which, in a Messianic moment, suspends the distinctions between the past, present and future (Benjamin [1940] 2007). But to operationalise the time-of-the-now through music and dance is more than an evocation of an alternative temporal register. Manning continues, "[l]iving in time means activating, in the moving, the déjà-felt in all of its uncanniness [...] In the context of a choreographic practice, memory [...] creates] a platform for a body to become an ecology of a multitude of durational times interwoven" (2013, 84) Manning's notion of the déjà-felt goes right to the core of the matter: It points to the feelingfulness that is the heartbeat of the human experience of this temporal register. Musical atmospheres emerge precisely here as a potent analytic. Musical atmospheres, as shared feelings energised by resonance and actualising in sound, enable a unique analytical approach to the complexity of the temporo-spatial experience. If the ideas I put forward in Chapter 3 already resonated loudly with Manning's thoughts about the becoming-body's relationship with choreographic movement, I will develop these thoughts further here. I will argue in this chapter that music-making in Palau is primarily an incipience of renewal along musical structure, form and texture. As this incipience of renewal actualises across perceptive modalities and the diverse registers of the human experience in music and dance, it becomes an overwhelming experience, one that accounts for the power of music and dancing experiences – and, in the case of Palau, for the meaningfulness of music and dance.

Resonance is the key energising force that links incipience with musical actualisations of meaningfulness. Therefore, I will now proceed by exploring the concept of resonance vis-à-vis the neo-phenomenological analytic of atmospheres. From there, meaningfulness will emerge as a presence effect, this time in the sense of Gumbrecht, of the incipience of resonant renewal. While this chapter is mostly conceptual in nature, its journey will begin in the ethnographic setting of the opening ceremony of the new government complex in Ngerulmud, Palau, in 2006.

Ngerulmud 2006: The Mother Bat

A strange sense of tacit, critical, yet light-hearted irony took hold of the ceremonial ground as many people in the audience chuckled but immediately worked to restore their composure. It was early one evening in October 2006, and a *rubák* (traditional high-chief) in Ngerulmud, Melekeok/Palau, was chanting an *chesóls*, a traditional recitation. The occasion was highly formal:

The government of the Republic of Palau was relocating to the newly-built government complex on the Eastern shore of Babeldaob, the island nation's largest island, and this was the opening ceremony of the highly prestigious new seat of government. A member of the traditional government, the rubák had been asked to endorse the politically much more powerful elected government on the occasion of the opening ceremony. A rubák (hereditary leader) does not need the blessing of the elected government, but in public opinion the elected government certainly benefits from the blessing and advice of the rubáks. This particular rubák complied, and he chose to do so by the traditional means: he offered an chesóls, the historic solo recitation appropriate to the occasion. It was the particular chesóls he had chosen and the way he was delivering it that conjured up that fleeting moment of silent understanding among the audience. In keeping with the genre's style, his voice recited the familiar and appropriate tune characteristic of chesóls, but the vocal timbre and rhythmic inflections he added gave it a tongue-in-cheek flair that was impossible to miss yet difficult to pin down. As the chesóls unfolded, the lyrics confirmed that none of this was unintended: the chesóls the rubák performed told the parable of a mother bat mocking the father bat, who she considered lazy – while the mother bat was carrying their offspring and taking care of their well-being, the father bat was only “playing pocket pool”, the lyrics complained. This analogy was the traditional government's (the mother bat) unshrouded criticism, and perhaps mockery, of an elected government (the father bat) and their useless decorum, epistomised by the not particularly modest building complex the rubák had been asked to help open. It resonated well among the audience.

Such resonances are atmospheric. With this, I am positing that lived experience emerges from what Tim Ingold calls the “meshwork” that comprises both cultural dynamics and affective-emotional responses as “interwoven trails rather than a network of intersecting routes [...] trails along which life is lived [...], knot[s] tied from multiple and interlaced strands of movement and growth” (Ingold 2007, 75). Lived experience is always already enwrought with culture and vice versa. But as tempting as the notion of resonance is, it is also complex, particularly when used metaphorically. In the following, I will offer a few thoughts on the concept's usefulness for understanding musical practices beyond the metaphorical and the descriptive. I will start by briefly sketching prominent explorations of resonance as an analytical term within (neo-)phenomenological and socio-philosophical debates centred around music. My focus will be on scholarly discussions of roughly the past two decades; I forego most of the earlier work on resonance. Grounding resonance in the recent intellectual history of the term in this way will allow me to

distil a number of conceptual implications the concept holds. These will aid me in looking to explore its usefulness for the atmospherological analysis of sonic practices and specifically music and dance. Briefly returning to the opinionated mother bat, I will then think through performing chesóls again, this time with resonance. In conclusion, I will come back to my initial question: what is the merit of resonance within neo-phenomenological explorations of sonic practices?

Resonance

In the wake of what some like to call the acoustic turn, the notion of resonance has received increasing scholarly attention in the past ten years. Early on in the debate, Lichau, Tkaczyk, and Wolf (2009) proposed exploring resonance as model, metaphor and method against the disciplinary backgrounds of acoustics, organology and composition. German sociologist Hartmut Rosa, arguably one of the most prominent contributors to the discussion in recent years, has attempted in his *Resonance – A Sociology of the Relationship to the World* (2016) to reposition resonance as a potential key category for the social sciences. In the spirit of the aged Frankfurt School with its latently normative bias particularly when it comes to the relationship between knowledge production and social transformation (see Dhawan et al. 2016), Rosa mobilises the concept of resonance here in an attempt to offer a somewhat half-hearted critique of capitalism: “the good life”, he argues, is a matter of resonance both in terms of quantity and quality, not of resources, options or instant gratification. Instead, the book’s blurb argues, “we should turn our attention to the connection to the world that informs [...] life and which, so long as that connection is intact, is an expression of stable relationships of resonance” (Rosa 2019).

Resonance, according to Rosa, is modernity’s promise; modernity’s disappointing reality, however, is a deep and encompassing sense of alienation. Meditating on the binary of resonance vs. alienation, Rosa explores the numerous ways in which he sees humanity establish a connection to the world both in the general (and openly universalist) sense and within specific contexts such as family, religion and work. “We” yearn for resonance, he implies; but, “we” find it less and less. This is due to the “accelerationary logic of modernity, which is both the cause and the effect of a broken connection to the world, individually and collectively” (Rosa 2019). Dieter Thomä (2016) muses in his review of Rosa’s analysis about the latter’s metaphorical use of resonance, pointing out that its vagueness leads to a dangerously uniform

perspective on societal complexity. Resonance à la Rosa, he argues, implies unison and hence, boredom: tuning forks only resonate with one another when they are tuned to the same pitch, after all. This runs counter to, or perhaps simply ignores, the consequential Deleuzian insight (Deleuze 1991) that the majority is always a matter of resonant intensity not of frequency. In days of right-wing populism and demagogic Big Man politics around the globe, the latent danger, disguised here as naivety, of Rosa's thinking is immediately tangible: Rosa's resonance metaphor leaves barely any room for diversity and complexity, which also accounts for his unapologetic universalism.

At the same time, Rosa casually builds on the long-standing phenomenological debate surrounding felt-bodily responsiveness, including theories of atmospheres and Schmitzian neo-phenomenology (see Rosa 2016, 94, 458) as well as Waldenfels's explorations of the felt body's capacity to resound with otherness (e.g., Waldenfels 1991). As a matter of fact, one could see similarities between Rosa's pairs of opposites and Schmitz's: Both Rosa's alienation (bad) and resonance (good) and Schmitz's contraction and expansion, for instance, describe binary modes of relating to one's surroundings and of co-becoming with them. For Schmitz, felt-bodily alienation begins where three-dimensional space starts, which makes his notion of felt-bodily attunement to atmospheric situation akin to Rosa's situational experience of resonance in some sense. Reading Rosa with Schmitz, one could think through resonance as a primarily felt-bodily experience. Rosa's resonant relationships emerge through "processes of adaptation [*Anverwandlung*] or of mutual attunement [*Einschwingen*]" (Rosa 2016, 36, translated from the original German).³⁸ Rosa's resonance is a responsive relationship between a subject and their self as well as the world they encounter; clearly a phenomenon arising between bounded subject and the outside world they face, not one dissolving the conceptual boundaries between them.

Rosa's thinking throughout *Resonance* is also indebted to Peter Sloterdijk's work on several levels. Sloterdijk, in the first volume of his spherology (2011), positions resonance as key to the human condition. To him, it is the "vocal, tactile, interfacial and emotional games of resonance" (Sloterdijk 2011, 535; also see Sutherland 2018) between mother and child, already in the womb, that instils in the latter a constant yearning to return to the prenatal co-presence of another being in the same body. Therefore, "[t]he desire for dwelling, and with it a longing to belong absolutely, as we have already seen, is thus understood [by Sloterdijk] as a ceaseless quest by

38 "Prozesse der Anverwandlung oder des wechselseitigen 'Einschwingens'."

the factual subject to regain this seemingly lost wholeness" (Sutherland 2018). Resonance, for Sloterdijk, is, thus, constitutive to human existence and foundational for human Dasein – a stance reminiscent of Deleuze's suggestion that we should think of resonance as the "intrinsic beginning" (Deleuze 1993, 239; also see 1991, 132).

Sociologist Dietmar Wetzel, building on Rosa's work, takes resonance to the field, exploring the fitness cult (Wetzel 2014a) and polyamorous relationship models (2014b), respectively, as a set of social practices responding to the yearning for resonance. Resonant relationships, for him, are libidinous relationships in that they are *expected* to be meaningful (2014b, 3). Ethnomusicologists have attended to the more material aspects of resonance (Csikszentmihalyi and Bennett 1971; Erlmann 2010; Meintjes 2003; Ramella 2019), while philosophers have explored resonance vis-à-vis affective arrangements (Mühlhoff 2015). Anthropologist and critical theorist William Mazzarella adopted Sloterdijk's "constitutive resonance" to trace the uncanny "intimate anonymity" with which mass media yield that sense of personal immediacy that seems so paradoxical given their impersonal nature (2017). To him,

constitutive resonance suggests a relationship of mutual becoming rather than causal determination. Not all people or things are capable of resonating with each other [...]. But resonance, once established, is a source of both actualization and anxiety. I become myself through you, but I also lose myself in you. By the logic of constitutive resonance, if "I" and "you" can appear as "subject" and "object" then it is only by means of a shared field of emergence in which no such boundaries can be taken for granted. (Mazzarella 2017, 5)

Resonance, here, becomes an ambivalent force in that it is simultaneously constitutive and destitutive. It heightens the experience of self in the encounter with the other, while it simultaneously dissolves the boundaries of that same self (Mazzarella 2017, 5). Resonance makes and unmakes people and the lived environments through which they move; it pushes and pulls toward the Other and the encounter. It is this ultimately quasi-erotic force that brings about the *zoon politikon*. Resonant situations, for Mazzarella, are formative to the phenomena social theory understands as identity, subjectivity or even culture (Mazzarella 2017, 9). In Mazzarella's intellectual project, resonance is key to the becoming of both the individual and world through the lived experience: it moves from an ontological to an ontogenic category, from being to becoming. This is where resonance

becomes potentially useful for neo-phenomenologically inspired analyses of atmospheres as half things as it might open vistas to the mechanics of the emergence of meaningfulness through atmospheres and, at the same time, to a more integrated understanding of social, affective and discursive being.

In a Schmitzian neo-phenomenological vein, philosopher Tonino Griffero thinks of resonance as a core responsive capacity of the felt body. Joining Schmitz in his directed move against introjectionist approaches to lived experience, Griffero posits the felt body as a “sounding board of outside atmospheric impressions” (2016, 22). The felt body’s responsiveness to atmospheric suggestions of motion, here, becomes its ability to enter into felt-bodily communication with the surrounding physical and social space. In an attempt to categorise atmospheric qualities, Griffero uses the term “correspondence” to describe the relationship between the felt body and a given atmosphere when the latter seems unintrusive in that it does not evoke sensations of unease or disagreement but instead feels pleasant. Resonances, to Griffero, are

the demand-qualities of atmospheric spaces, and at the same time an ecstatic extension in accordance with the felt-body’s own lived directions. Through this (anti-solipsistic) felt-bodily communication, the body embodies not just its tools, but also all the things we experience in the pericorporeal space and whose peculiar voluminosity we sense: the car we drive, the by-stander we miraculously avoid on the sidewalk, and so on. (Griffero 2016, 14)

Directionality is the key here: Griffero claims that for spaces to work a resonant atmospheric effect on felt bodies, their ecstasies need to align with the temporo-spatial directionality of the felt bodies they encounter. To him, such alignment implies matching atmospheric qualities, for example, “pleasant” or “harsh” (Griffero 2016, 24): the ecstasies of quasi-things and the felt body correspond to one another. In this way, resonance becomes a key to Griffero’s “pathic aesthetics”, which focuses on “the affective involvement that the perceiver feels unable to critically react to or mitigate the intrusiveness of” (Griffero 2019b: 415). Positioning the felt body firmly in the realm of the pre-reflective, Griffero, thus, uses resonance as a felt-bodily communicative tool that is categorically prior to language. My own usage of the term ‘correspondence’ throughout this book has been significantly different from Griffero’s and much more Ingoldian: I have used it to describe the responsiveness between the various strands that make up the lived experience as a continuous process of formation.

Ingold's thinking has followed the three basic intellectual shifts debate in the field has undergone in the past twenty years: (1) a move away from the analysis of things and towards material, here: sonic, flows of energy; (2) the abandonment of Aristotelian hylomorphisms in favour of a multiplicity of concurrent formative processes; and (3) thinking in terms of ontogeneses rather than ontologies (see Ingold 2016a). Ingold, writing on dwelling, introduces the taskscape. The intrinsic temporality of the taskscape, he writes, "lies in its rhythmic interrelations or patterns of resonance" (2011b, 154).

[In] the performance of their tasks, [people] *also attend to one another*. [...] By watching, listening, perhaps even touching, we continually feel each other's presence in the social environment, at every moment adjusting our movements in response to this ongoing perceptual monitoring. For the orchestral musician, playing an instrument, watching the conductor and listening to one's fellow players are all inseparable aspects of the same process of action: for this reason, the gestures of the performers may be said to *resonate* with each other. In orchestral music, the achievement of resonance [...] is an absolute precondition for successful performance. But the same is true, more generally, of social life [...] Indeed it could be argued that in the resonance of movement and feeling stemming from people's mutual attentive engagement, in shared contexts of practical activity, lies the very foundation of sociality. (Ingold 2011b, 196; italics in original)

Resonance, here, is the force that temporarily dissolves the presumed boundaries between individual and collective, conductor and musician, and musician and orchestra. It is a material force whose efficacy goes beyond the material and has an ethical quality in that attentiveness to the other lies at its core. Its foundational nature, pointed to by Ingold, arises from the fact that it is the dynamic that allows Schmitz's suggestions of motion to work across divergent registers of experience and knowledge: the affective, the discursive, the sensory and several more. Resonance accounts for the responsiveness between these registers, triggered by atmospheric suggestions of motion.

Resonance: Conceptual Implications

Consequently, resonance becomes a technical term describing a very specific aspect of atmospheric becoming, one that is missing in Schmitzian atmospherology (which is conceptual not analytical in nature and

design). To have a phenomenological body is to be involved in a definite environment (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 82) and to be involved in a definite environment is to co-become, on many levels, with one's surroundings, including people and things. The human experience, therefore, is one of continuous transformation in response to the changing dynamics of their environment – of lifelines corresponding and reverberating with one another, to put it in Ingoldian terms. Resonance, thus, allows me to focus on the transductive process taking place *between* the divergent registers of the human experience of the world: where a sonic event conjures up a memory, an emotion becomes inseparable from an idea and a historical narrative becomes the present. It leads to that part of atmospheric dynamics which seizes people felt-bodily, and it inquires into how that happens and what is involved in that process.

Regarding analysing musical atmospheres, resonance can, therefore, serve the double purpose of attending to the complexity of relationality as a process and, at the same time, grounding that analysis in the actual workings of its primary medium, i.e., the sonic. On the conceptual level, it makes atmospheres as an analytical perspective a bit less vague, yet, it retains the holistic sensibility that sets atmospheres apart from other modes of analysis. On the analytical level, it helps one to draw closer to the evasive yet powerful efficacy of music without losing sight of its ever-transformative ambivalence.

Revisiting the Mother Bat

Let us return to the mother bat for a brief moment. The efficacy of the moment at Palau's brand-new capitol building was multisensorial: the sight and aura of the rubák, the smell of the traditional food being prepared for the audience for after the ceremony, the mild temperature and earthy smell of an early February evening in the South Pacific. And then, the rubák's voice, which did something to the situation the very moment he started to chant: Tim Ingold's meshwork, that amorphous, complex and ever-moving entwining of lines, reacted. The meaningfulness that briefly came together and surfaced to make the audience chuckle was the meshwork's response to the sound and story of the chesóls. Ingold, in his *The Life of Lines* (2015), introduces the idea of mid-streaming – movements which interweave, forming knots with currents and answering one another. This process of answering, for Ingold, is correspondence, not resonance. Resonance in the sense I am using it offers something else: it grounds sonic atmospheres

in their own becoming. It accounts for responsiveness, but it is not the same as responsiveness. Both correspondence and resonance put their finger on the intensity of human becoming and sociality in that they both explore the coming about of the intense intimacy of being moved by the lines of the meshwork as they cling to one another and move on. Resonance, particularly in connection with musical atmospheres, pulls the abstract kite of correspondence down to earth: The sonic event of the *chesóls* at the new capitol building resonated materially, enveloping the audience and working the encompassing felt-bodily sensation on them that made them chuckle. Resonance points to the transductive process through which the sonic sensation of the *rubák* chanting makes divergent temporalities (e.g., the latency of the traditional past and the famous spur of the moment), experiential registers (e.g., emotional responses and discursively constructed notions about standing in the line of Palauan traditions), and social affiliations (e.g., the ones impersonated by the *rubák* and manifest in the new capitol building complex, respectively) coalesce. For a brief moment, they become inseparable. Unlike correspondence, that is to say, resonance traces the line all the way from sonic sensation to the audience chuckling and on to the chuckling fading and attentive listening taking over. Correspondence looks at processes at the heart of any sociality; resonance traces Ingold's lines into the felt body and follows the complexity of their mid-streaming: "[t]hat movement that ruffles every surface with which it comes into haptic contact" (Ingold 2015, 150). As the ruffled surfaces coalesce in the resonant moment created by the *rubák* chanting, human becoming becomes intensely tangible – atmospherically so.

Conclusion

Musical efficacy, thus, comes about when musical atmospheres modulate and accentuate the latent resonance between divergent experiential and perceptive registers. From that resonance, meaningfulness emerges. In the context of neo-phenomenologically inspired analysis, resonance refers to a very specific capacity of sound, one which allows analytical approaches attentive to the sonic materiality pertinent to lines entwining, knotting and letting go of one another. Resonance's potency beyond the analysis of specifically sonic atmospheres lies in its pragmatic methodological value: as resonance leaves felt-bodily traces, such as recognition, alienation, bewilderment and many other things, sensations of resonance are much more

accessible through participant observation and other empirical methods than atmosphere is. In this, resonance has something to respond to the arguably most common critique of atmospheric theory, which claims that the various neo-phenomenologies of atmospheres are theoretically convincing but lack analytical merit. In the words of cultural anthropologist Bernhard Tschofen:

The academic debate centred around atmospheres, building on the so-called New Aesthetics of Gernot Böhme, philosopher of culture and technology, holds quite a lot of allure for an empirically minded cultural analysis. While atmospheres are theoretically convincing, however, we have to say that it is difficult to operationalise them. What is more, they lose their meaning once one tries to explore the practical dimensions [of cultural practices] through in-depth ethnography. Put differently and in a nutshell: where a cultural analysis of everyday practices seeks to reach beyond representation, symbolic forms and rational practices, we will need to sharpen precisely those tools and methods which have the potential to productively combine phenomenological and praxeological approaches. [This is necessary] to make the often vague concepts of late modern cultural theory more concrete and methodologically more accessible.³⁹ (2017, 19)

Resonance, as an analytical concept, can do just that: combine phenomenological and praxeological approaches productively. It is capable of addressing the transductive process that links formal event and ironic subversion, historical narrative and emotional affiliation, affect and public debate, because it is the force that establishes a connection between the felt body and its surroundings.

39 Original text: "Die an die ‚neue Ästhetik‘ des Kultur- und Technikphilosoph. Gernot Böhme anschließende verstärkte Rede von ‚Atmosphären‘ hat auch für die empirisch arbeitende Kulturwissenschaften etwas Verlockendes. Es handelt sich dabei jedoch, wie wir immer häufiger feststellen müssen, um ein zwar theoretisch überzeugendes Konzept, das aber schwer operationalisierbar ist und noch dazu an Bedeutung verliert, wenn man in höher aufgelöster empirischer Arbeit nach den Praxisdimensionen zu fragen beginnt. Anders und nun ganz kurz gesagt: will sich eine Kulturanalyse des Alltags nicht auf Repräsentationen, symbolische Formen und verstandesmäßige Praktiken beschränken, wird sie nicht um eine Schärfung gerade jener Konzepte und Methoden herumkommen, die phänomenologische und praxeologische Zugangsweisen produktiv zu verbinden wissen, um so die oftmals diffus bleibenden Konzepte spätmoderner Kulturtheorie konkreter und vor allem methodisch zugänglicher zu gestalten."

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Figure 12 Bai ornament in Ngabuked as documented by Augustin Krämer during the Hamburg South Seas Expedition. (Krämer 1929b, double plate 1) Krämer's description: "[T]he Gomsaubukl magic, left Ngeaur, right Nggeiangel, under the palms the sea with the following fishes from left: 2 *gadéng* (shark), 1 *tungg*, *kemedúkl*, 1 *kilérs re komedáol*, 1 *gadéng l bial*." (KETC 2017c, 50; italics in original)