

CADENTIAL CLOSURE VS. TONAL CONTENT AS INPUT FOR REDUCTION

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Background

In language, clauses and sentences are held together and combined by means of syntactic rules, whereas paragraphs and larger textual sections emerge as coherent due the shared content of their constituents. Tonal music has units at seemingly corresponding levels, but at least according to current ideas of tonal reduction, they are syntactically defined by means of tonal closure: music is conceived of as a hierarchical structure of ever more encompassing cadences. Given the analogy between language and music, it appears that reductional analysis does not respect demarcations corresponding to full stops in language.

Aims

Applying the notion of ‘full stop’ to music implies that the coherence of large units should depend on conspicuous events and their relationships (the “tonal content”) rather than on the cadential framework. It also means that tonal reduction, whether it proceeds bottom-up in the way we actually listen or is undertaken in a top-down fashion, has to make a halt and change its approach at the level of full stops. Furthermore, admitting the

importance of syntactics for understanding low-level linguistic units and their musical equivalents, it must be acknowledged that meaning is predicated on content rather than on framework — there might thus be a scope for bottom-up reduction relying on tonal content as its input.

Main Contribution

These ideas will be demonstrated and preliminarily tested on a short piece of music.

Implications

If reduction in terms of tonal content proves to be feasible and rewarding, it will obviously emerge as an important complement to tonal reduction as currently practised.