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Music Analysis Through Crisis: Mahler, COVID-19, and the Music Theory Classroom

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Abstract

In March 2020, U.S. universities followed the lead of the world as COVID-19's rapid emergence caused a seismic disruption of the world's education system, and classes for the remainder of the semester shifted online. This placed an incredible burden on students and professors, bracing themselves for the uncertain future of education, daily interpersonal interactions, and the comfort brought by society's operations to which we were accustomed. This article explores positive mental health outcomes as a result of a substitutive final project from my undergraduate chromatic harmony course during the COVID crisis. The *Adagio* from Mahler's *Fifth Symphony* was chosen for its sense of peace and longing, created in part by an array of dissonances that either delay or completely deny the resolution and establishment of a given harmony, a perfect picture of the uncertainty and distracting delay created by the surge of COVID-19 cases across our planet and a connection many of my students made in their papers.

Traditional music theory and analysis classes deal with the relation of form, rhythms, harmonies, and individual pitches within a piece or broader musical corpus, often leaving extramusical connections to the fields of musicology and ethnomusicology. The history of music theory and analysis has wandered across a spectrum of techniques, often enduring heated debates, from ridged mathematical and scientific precision to more interpretive narrative constructions. This article argues for the incorporation of narrative interpretations as a therapeutic act within times of crisis. In facilitating this task, the professor's role transforms from instructor to mentor and toward what Foucault called a "spiritual guide." As a case study, this article recounts my experience along with anecdotal reflections from my students' experiences in this assignment. It frames it within the debate of theory vs. practice and analytic methodologies, arguing for a new framework of analytic practice that goes beyond applications for music-making and toward a broader use for mental health and wellbeing.

Keywords: Music Analysis, Education, COVID-19, Mentorship, Therapeutic Process

1. Introduction

In March 2020, U.S. universities followed the lead of the world as COVID-19's rapid emergence caused a seismic disruption of the world's education system, and classes for the remainder of the semester shifted online. This placed an incredible burden on students and professors, bracing themselves for the uncertain future of education, daily interpersonal interactions, and the comfort brought by the regularity of society's broader operations. The negative effects on the world's social and economic systems cannot be overstated. These negative effects and news of tragic death tolls have weighed heavily on our psychological health and wellness. Within university systems, the first full school year in the COVID-19 era began on unstable ground with different combinations of face-to-face, fully online, and hybrid course

delivery and rules that change day-to-day. Despite these negative effects and the psychological burden placed upon individuals and systems alike, this article attempts to extract positive pedagogical innovations hidden beneath the murky weight of dire circumstances. In particular, it explores a purposeful switch in my approach as an instructor and unexpected constructive mental health outcomes as a result of a substitutive final project from my undergraduate chromatic harmony course during the COVID-19 crisis. The final project for that course involved an analysis of the *Adagio* from Mahler's *Fifth Symphony*, which was chosen for its sense of peace and longing, created in part by an array of dissonances that either delay or completely deny the resolution and establishment of a given harmony. The *Adagio* has been described as 'a haven of peace, full of rapturous yearning and consolation...[through which] one is suddenly drawn into a more personal space' (Zander 2001) and, especially when performed at a slower tempo as it often is, 'as a lament, conveying feelings of melancholy, despair or even death,' an ethos partially originating in its use in Luchino Visconti's film, "Death in Venice" (Kaplan 1992). While the movement certainly evokes all of these feelings, Mahler's original intent was indeed one of love and longing, as he sent the movement to Alma Schindler as a musical love letter prior to their marriage (Kaplan 1992). As such, the movement creates a perfect picture of the uncertainty and distracting delay coupled with a longing for happier days created by the surge of COVID-19 cases across our planet and a connection many of my students made in their papers.

Music analysis has historically balanced the narrow edge between empirical observations derived from the musical score itself and narrative interpretations that draw upon extramusical associations and tie analytic observations to phenomena beyond the music. For many music students, analysis is a difficult and often tedious task, done primarily to complete the requirements for a course, often leaving little direct connection to the practice of music-making itself, much less their lives beyond music. To be clear, the connections between theory and practice are certainly there, but are often implicit rather than highlighted for direct application to the practice of music. This article argues for an analytic approach that moves beyond the standard analytic observations required in a music analysis and toward an application of those observations to the analysts' own daily life, both musical and beyond, serving as a middleground between the divide of theory and practice described by Foucault later in this article. As such, my role as instructor shifts away from the frequently maligned university lecture format and toward that of a mentor, guiding students toward their own path of self-discovery, both within the musical experience and outward into their daily lives. The connection to daily life outside of music is particularly novel. This article presents a music analytic activity as a practical application of music analysis to daily life, which, when placed within the traumatic environment created by the COVID-19 pandemic, even served as a therapeutic act. As a case study, it recounts my own experience and observations of my students' anecdotal reflections as they ascribed elements of their own trauma from COVID-19 in this final assignment to analyze Mahler's *Adagio*. It locates the assignment within the philosophical approaches to pedagogy framed by Michel Foucault in *Fearless Speech* (2001), arguing for a new framework of analytic practice that goes beyond applications for music-making and toward a broader use for mental health and wellbeing. Despite his criticism of the traditional model of a university classroom, Foucault is particularly useful for this perspective, as his suggested methodology moves toward a more personal, practically applicable interaction between student and analyzed music and student and teacher alike. This personalization of the analytic process, drawing from students' experience of the music in the context of their lives during a global pandemic, proved to have a therapeutic effect on many of my students. As such, the article also posits the potential for a therapeutic process as described in Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (1992).

2. The Trauma of COVID-19: Definition of Trauma and What COVID caused

The COVID-19 pandemic caused three important elements that disrupted the educational experience, each of which was exasperated by a strong and suddenly forced implementation of drastically different pedagogical circumstances: 1) it altered the pace of life, 2) it introduced a traumatic experience into most lives, and 3) it created a necessary alteration of instruction and pedagogy. This article argues

that, despite their shock and negative effect, these elements afforded the opportunity for positive change within my course delivery and pedagogical approach.

2.1 Change of pace

The COVID-19 pandemic forced a drastic change to the pace of life. There was an initial response of panic and fear, accelerating behaviors, such as rushing to stores to stalk up on non-perishable food, hand sanitizer, masks, and toilet paper. The rush was also internal. Our minds raced with questions about how best to protect ourselves and our families from the virus, including questions of survival itself as death tolls rose. Lives were made hectic by the introduction of new hurdles, such as the juggling of child care and work/school responsibilities or the care for others while still maintaining our own personal safety and health. Following this initial shocked rush, the pace of life also slowed significantly. We quarantined and separated ourselves, stalling our hectic pre-COVID lives. Time alone with ourselves and with our families gave way to much introspection and self-evaluation. The contents of that introspection also changed as we were separated from others and our pre-COVID routines. For many, this led to mental health issues such as loneliness and depression (Panchal, et al., 2021).

The pedagogical climate of most classrooms was not foreign to this slowed experience. Our usual routines in a given semester involve a necessary list of objectives that must be covered. Teachers and students alike are pressed with the next assignment, quiz, exam, or project. The end of the semester is particularly notorious for frantic pacing for students and faculty alike. COVID-19 disrupted this rush to the end, moving the rush forward in the semester as instructors faced the exponential growth of time spent on moving face-to-face course materials online. Likewise, students experienced new interactions with their instructors, many of which took more time than normally found in a face-to-face situation. These factors pulled on the pace of life in many ways and added significant strain to the mental health of both instructors and students.

2.2. Trauma

COVID-19 has been a traumatic experience as the world's health, social, and economic structures have grown unstable at best. The DSM-V defines trauma as 'exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence' as a result of direct, personal experience of trauma, witnessing the trauma others encounter, knowledge of such trauma to someone close to us, or even through merely experiencing repeated exposure to accounts or effects from such trauma (DSM-V: 271). In February 2020, global air travel was restricted, the U.S. government declared a public health emergency, and deaths in China exceeded those of the SARS epidemic in 2003. In March 2020, outbreaks on cruise ships forced them to dock at sea, travel bans were instated, the state of California issued a statewide stay-at-home order, and the CARES act, the largest economic aid package in U.S. history, was passed in an effort to bandage the economic crisis and help in the health crisis. The WHO also elevated COVID-19 to a pandemic in March 2020 (AJMC Staff, 2021). News of deaths across the globe certainly incited a traumatic experience for many. These events coincided with the transition to online instruction.

Noted psychiatrist Judith Herman identifies 'the core experiences of psychological trauma...[as] disempowerment and disconnection from others' (Herman, 2015: 133). In a general sense, the act of quarantining disconnected us from society and the combination of misinformation, unknown answers about vaccines, and constant news of death tolls and hospital overloading disempowered us from the emotional certainty of a path out of the pandemic. Within the specific context of education, students and professors were disconnected from one another with an additional disruption from our traditional roles within the classroom.

The loss of power over the educational situation manifested itself in a number of ways. Students lost their normal power over class attendance. Health was a major factor. The move to fully online

delivery of classes disrupted the established routine from the first half of the semester. They were now attending class while adjusting and sharing a space with those with whom they were quarantined, competing for screens and access to their virtual classes. Internet issues also played a role for many students, who were now required to have access to both a computer and internet, a burden for many students. For many, these altered environments and new time commitments also disempowered their ability to even complete assignments. Instructors were disempowered in their lesson plans for the remainder of the semester. Course content had to be quickly modified, if not fully reconstructed to accommodate the new situation. The level of disempowerment was exponential for studio teachers. In music, studio teachers were faced with a particular burden of overcoming sound issues and a loss of performance opportunities and abilities alike. Even prior to COVID-19 and further discussed below, the efficacy of online versus face-to-face instruction has been controversial with some embracing online environments and others seeing face-to-face instruction as a more viable form of instructional delivery. For many, the forced move to online instruction was highly disempowering. Again, as with our non-educational lives, the sentiment was to survive the remainder of the semester and much less to accomplish any pedagogical innovation.

2.3. Alteration of Pedagogy and Instructional Methodologies

For most instructors, the spring semester began with coursework designed for delivery in a traditional classroom, face-to-face with our students. The COVID-19 outbreak forced an abrupt change in delivery to online instruction. Online instruction is distinct enough that most universities offer their instructors training in best practices and how to design a strong online course. The sudden transition eliminated any opportunity for the detailed design required to create a well-formed online course. Rather, many instructors continued their face-to-face methodologies in an online format. With the unexpected immediacy of the COVID shut down, this was a reasonable and perfectly acceptable response to the situation. Online instruction, however, presents immediate challenges to pedagogical norms. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced instructors to (re)consider their pedagogical approaches with both positive and negative outcomes.

There are clear differences between teaching online and teaching face-to-face and much research has been performed on the efficacy of these different forms of delivery. The work of Neuhauser (2001), Ladyshewsky (2004), and Johnson, et al. (2000) provide a small sample of these studies. While some face-to-face methodologies are certainly adaptable to an online format with slight but necessary modifications, the change in format invited the opportunity for sudden experimentation in pedagogical design, many of which lie at a more philosophical than practical level. The philosophical ramifications of COVID-19's influence on the educational system is the focus of the remainder of this article, which explores my personal reaction to the new educational environment, how that created a new educational experience for my students, and the implications of that new experience for the discipline of music theory and analysis and classroom instruction at large.

3. My personal reaction in *The Polyphony*

In Judith Herman's discussion of trauma and the recovery process, she notes that 'the ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable*. Atrocities, however, refuse to be buried.... Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims' (Herman, 2015: 1). My experience as a professor reflected this difficult balance of not knowing what to say or how to act and an inherent need to express my feelings about the new educational environment. As such, I saw my role shift from instructor to that of cooperative mentor, a role highlighted in the work of Foucault below.

As my university dismissed classes for Spring Break, I was forced to reconsider my own delivery of classes for the remainder of the semester. Simultaneous with my pedagogical considerations, I wrestled with my own reaction to the world's debacle, reflected both in the COVID-19 pandemic and in the

sociological turmoil engulfing the United States, and my own psychological trauma. I turned to some of my favorite pieces for peaceful, meditative moments within the fray. One of those pieces was the *Adagietto* from Mahler's *Fifth Symphony*. During the transition to online classes, I published an essay for *The Polyphony*, a web-based journal associated with The Institute for Medical Humanities at Durham University, UK (Fleshner, 2020). Along with my own search for peace, the essay was a personal reckoning with what information I wanted my students to get from the remaining online portion of the semester. It represented a philosophical shift that I made in my teaching, even before the pandemic. Music theory courses, particularly in the undergraduate core, are centered on dispensing the basic constructs of diatonic and chromatic harmony. These constructs are critical components of my courses, but my pedagogical philosophy strives to progress the analytic process beyond the identification and use of these musical phenomena and into a more practical application.

Like the assignment described below, the essay extracts positive elements hidden within the traumatic experience. It notes that, while instruction was transferred from the classroom to an online environment, I still retained contact with my students and had the opportunity to influence them in a positive manner. Although my classes focus on music analysis, the essay posited that the main objective of my classes is to learn 'a sense of how to observe data and its relationship with other data and create well-formed, logical interpretations of that data' (Fleshner, 2020). An analysis of the opening bars of Mahler's *Adagietto* demonstrated observational analytic skills, such as combing through data and forming a well-organised logical interpretation of that data—a skill that is critical in the post-truth era of information as well as the COVID-19 era where science is unfolding in front of us, constantly transforming our knowledge as new data emerges almost daily. The skills of deciphering and interpreting information that students learn in music theory courses (and in many similar university courses) is directly applicable to their daily processing of information in the news. This pedagogical philosophy influenced the formation of the following assignment as I restructured my courses for the remainder of the spring semester.

4. The assignment and students' responses

As I grappled with my own reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, my Theory III course, the third semester of four in our core undergraduate music theory sequence, required revision for the final five weeks of the semester. As is common in the U.S., this course addresses chromatic harmony up to and overlapping the dissolution of functional tonal harmony. In past iterations of the class, I was pleased with the students' grasp of the basic principles of these harmonic structures, including their ability to compose with and identify chromatic harmonies in a musical context, but I perceived some trepidation at the task of unpacking them within the context of a larger selection of music such as an entire movement or piece of music. I also desired them to have a better ability to apply the principles of chromatic harmony in a way that would directly benefit their activities as teachers and performers on their instruments (including the human voice as an instrument), the ultimate goal of most of my students. To achieve improved analytic, pedagogical, and performance applications, I restructured the course to include a large-scale analytic activity for the last month of the class. The goal was to assign a single movement or piece that we would analyze together in great detail, gradually moving from large-scale form and structure toward the chromatic, motivic, and rhythmic details that ultimately form the musical identity of that piece. I wanted the students to go beyond these musical details into a discussion of the application of their analytic discoveries to their daily musical lives as teachers and performers of that piece.

In a case of good fortune, the semester's disruption by the global COVID-19 pandemic came just before the beginning of this unit. We had covered most of the content for the semester before moving fully online. Much as COVID-19 slowed the pace of daily life, this course restructuring was intended to slow the pace of the end of the semester. I desired a slow, methodical, and immersive experience in which the students did not jump from one analytic vignette or assignment to another, but rather focused on a meticulous and detailed analysis of one single musical object. As such, the final assignment constituted

four of the five remaining weeks of the semester. As I had just written about it in my article for *The Polyphony*, Mahler's *Adagietto*, the famous fourth movement of his *Fifth Symphony*, was assigned for this final analysis project. The movement was broken down into four fragments that students analyzed together via online discussion groups to which they could contribute as their personal circumstances allowed. I responded via asynchronous videos with confirmation of and responses to their analyses and leading questions designed to further the detail of those analyses. In doing so, my role shifted from that of lecturer to that of a peer and mentor. Rather than leading them toward musical ideas and analytic interpretations, I served rather as a sounding block for discussion of ideas that originated in their experiences of the music and in life. They were then assigned a final analytic paper that served as a substitute for their traditional final exam. These final papers were to be written individually with topical inspiration gleaned from their analytic discoveries made together over the four-week analysis project. The expected outcome was an application of their analyses to a larger musical context. Their task was not to write a detailed paper describing every chromatic nuance of the movement. Rather, they were to choose a specific passage that they found interesting or inspirational in some manner and explicate the details and reasons for that interest in their paper. In other words, they were to write about a specific topic within the piece rather than give a general overview, avoiding a chronological approach or, what I often call, a 'play-by-play' of the piece.

The slow and meticulous analysis of a single movement afforded a few important pedagogical achievements. It gave students time to know the piece on another level.¹ Rather than a superficial analytic assignment in which students merely labelled musical phenomena, they were tasked with the slow process of getting to know a piece on an intimate level and to learn the fine nuances embedded within its complexities. Likewise, it gave students time with their thoughts and gave those thoughts time to distill into stronger, better organised arguments. The slower, elongated pace reduced the possibility of a rushed, one-night paper-writing session. Even if students did indeed write the paper in one sitting, the paper had time to form in their minds, whether consciously or unconsciously. It also countered Herman's disempowerment and disconnection by building a sense of community through the discussion boards. No one was analyzing it alone. Certain students took the lead, but all participated in the discussion. Students had ownership of their own analytic process. I served more as moderator, cheerleader, and mentor to their own educational process. The final written paper allowed students to place their individual mark on the process as noted below.

The analytic task moved from big picture to small details as noted above. Students often get overwhelmed with problematic spots. This approach allowed them to bypass that difficulty, at least at the beginning of the process, and then address problematic analytic spots later in the process, after they had built some confidence. Students were then asked to focus on these problematic spots, released from any requirement to label the musical phenomena within, and instructed rather to focus on their struggle with the passage. What notes are causing confusion? What is the passage's general musical function? What music precedes the passage? What music follows the passage? How does that passage serve to transition between those two passages?

For their papers, students were encouraged to lean into these struggles with difficult passages, to embrace their uncertainty, and to write not about the music as much as about *their experience* with the music. They were encouraged to move beyond the passages that appeared rather obvious into the more interesting, murky passages and postulate general, even non-musical, descriptions of the function of those passages and the notes within. They were enticed to move beyond the music itself and explore their experience with the music and the environments of both our new educational and sociological circumstances. This was not required. They could write a purely musical analysis. I shared, however, my essay that incorporated the *Adagietto* as an analogy for the process of observational analysis and logical formulation and interpretation of data. I admitted to them that I had chosen the Mahler while searching

¹ For more on the importance of slow analysis, see Fred Maus, "Teaching Music Slowly" in *Reversing the Cult of Speed in Higher Education*, Edited by Chambers and Gearhart (New York: Routledge, 2018).

for peace myself and that I found the piece very moving in that way. I invited them to explore their own experience, to make non-musical connections to their analysis of the Mahler, and to write about any significant connections they might have also experienced between music and life.

I was pleased to find that many students in my class embraced this opportunity. Some stayed within the confines of a purely musical analysis. Other analyses branched out into the extramusical and even further into their own emotional experiences in the new confines of the COVID-19 pandemic. Students connected the music with feelings of uncertainty, longing, waiting, serenity, unresolved anticipation, ambiguity, struggle with circumstances and the overcoming of those struggles, and even a sense of boredom. Some students described their experience during the assignment as pushing them beyond their musical comfort zones and reflected on that along with the stretching of their sociological comfort zones during COVID-19. For many of my students, their own encounter with the analytic process had shared my own therapeutic thought process in determining and fortifying my approach to the remainder of the semester. The word therapy and the therapeutic process were never mentioned in the course of the assignment, but clearly many students had encountered in the assignment a therapeutic process that contributed to their processing of the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. Foucault's Notion of Teacher as Mentor and Spiritual Guide

The pedagogical shift in this assignment reflected an important role encountered in the classroom, a role that goes beyond that of mere instructor moving toward a more personal mentor-like role. Michel Foucault has described a similar shift in the role of the instructor through the pedagogical idea of 'personal interviews,' drawing the idea from a study of the ancient Greeks (Foucault, 2001: 113). In doing so, Foucault draws a distinction between theory and practice. Practice is often taken to mean the practical application of theoretical ideas, but I posit here that we might divide it again into a practical application within the discipline of music itself, but also into a broader practical application of the thought processes drawn from analytic ideas applied to daily life and sociological circumstances encountered. The difficult (im)balance between theory and practice is an ancient problem for music theory as for many disciplines. The problem is likely due to the cyclical nature of the relationship between theory and practice. Theoretical principles and their philosophical underpinnings often generate or at least influence the manifestation of practice. Likewise, the manner in which music is performed serves to form compositional practices which then serve as an empirical methodology that influences the development of theoretical principles. Both are inherently necessary; it is merely a matter of which is more emphasised at any given time. In music, students must of course understand melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic theoretical principles and the formal relationships that connect them into a complete musical composition in order to achieve fluency in the language of music. It is equally critical, however, that they understand how these theoretical principles relate to the practice of music making and teaching. The application of *what*, *how*, and *why* is important for both theory and practice along with their relationship to one another. As such, the activity of learning theory within an applied music lesson or ensemble experience can provide students with real-life connections between theory and practice that engrain and solidify the learning experience as much as practical application for how to perform or teach a musical passage can happen within a music theory class. This article argues for one step further, a broader perspective on the meaning of practice, a practical application even beyond the practice of music itself, an application to everyday life.

In his collection of speeches, *Fearless Speech*, Foucault attempts not to define but to extract the meaning and history of the activity of *parrhesia*—free speech, or truth-telling, an activity also sought within the therapeutic and teaching processes. Foucault looks primarily to the Greek philosophers for this history of truth telling, including a fragmentary text, *On Frank Speaking*, by Philodemus. Foucault notes Philodemus' emphasis on the practice of *parrhesia* over its theoretical constructs, defining *parrhesia* 'as a *techne* comparable both to the art of medicine and to the art of piloting a boat' (Foucault, 2001: 110). Foucault highlights two common principles to speaking the truth, navigating a boat, and practicing medicine: 1) the presence of practical training and 2) the presence of a leader/follower relationship

(Foucault, 2001: 110-111). In addition to their foundation in practical training, these activities require their master ‘to take into account not only the general rules and principles of the art, but also particular data which are always specific to a given institution’ (Foucault, 2001: 110). Likewise, the master of each disciplinary activity ‘must make the decisions, give orders and instructions, exercise power and authority, while others—the crew, the patient, the staff—must obey if the desired end is to be achieved’ (Foucault, 2001: 111). Foucault follows the Greeks and elevates these practical activities beyond their clear practical applications to the level of ‘spiritual guidance,’ noting that Gregory of Nazianzus called this spiritual level of practice the ‘technique of techniques—*ars atrium, techne technon*’ (Foucault, 2001: 112). Foucault highlights thirteen centuries of European practice, referencing ‘the expression ‘*techne technon*’... spiritual guidance as the most significant clinical technique’ (Foucault, 2001: 112). Therefore, the philosopher, truth-teller, politician, physician, boat captain, or for this article, music theory instructor are responsible for more than mere leadership, they serve also ‘as a kind of ‘spiritual guide’ for other people’ (Foucault, 2001: 112).

Foucault applies this practice of spiritual guidance to the classroom teacher. He parses teaching into two types: 1) lecturing and 2) ‘instruction in the form of personal interviews where a teacher would give advice and precepts to individual community members’ (Foucault, 2001: 113). In the context of his history of the Greek system and a previous discussion of Socratic methodologies, Foucault is clearly referencing a Socratic method of teaching here. He notes that, in ancient Greece,

a distinction was drawn between general teaching and personal instruction or guidance. This distinction is not a difference in content, as between theoretical and practical subject matters—especially since studies in physics, cosmology, and natural law had ethical significance for the Epicureans. Nor is it a difference in instruction contrasting ethical theory with its practical application. Rather the difference marks a distinction in the pedagogical relationship between teacher and disciple or student (Foucault, 2001: 113).

Foucault returns to the Socratic method and the necessary introspection that it affords. In such methodologies, the student and teacher alike must connect *logos* and *bios*, the meaning of the words being spoken to the meaning and daily practices of everyday life. This next level of spiritual guidance in teaching, inherent in a pedagogical methodology as much as a purposeful act of providing actual spiritual guidance, allows the student ‘to gain access to additional truths [beyond those of the lesson] (about the world, ideas, the nature of the soul, and so on)’ (Foucault, 2001: 114). Foucault concludes that ‘these two types of teaching became a permanent feature of Western culture. And in the Epicurean schools we know that it was the role of the ‘spiritual guide’ for others that was more highly valued than that of group lecturer’ (Foucault, 2001: 114). Foucault’s connection between different professional leadership relationships and the relationship of the teacher to their students as sort of spiritual guide invites the idea of a therapeutic process. Not that any of these are roles are that of a religious leader or guru, but rather they serve as an ally with whom the patient or student might find themselves within difficult experiences or difficult educational tasks. As with Foucault and the Greeks, this task of applying what we learn to our daily personal lives may indeed be the ‘most significant clinical technique.’

6. Conclusion: Analysis as Therapy and Recovery from Trauma

Foucault’s focus on spiritual guidance and on truth-telling mirrors Herman’s goal in the therapeutic process. Herman notes that ‘remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims’ (Herman, 2015: 1). My original intention had not been to introduce a therapeutic aspect into my music theory class. Instead, I sought a practical alternative to the traditional regurgitation of data in the form of a final exam, a direct application to those analytic skills to their musical lives. That direct application took a life of its own beyond music theory, incorporating the traumatic experience surrounding the social unrest that encompassed the COVID-19 pandemic along with the social unrest from a myriad of other sources.

While not a clinical therapeutic experience, the instructor takes on a relationship with some students that can mirror that of a therapist, or Foucault's spiritual guide, in some ways. It was not that I, the instructor, took on the role of a therapeutic guide, but that I opened the door for students to have an introspective experience applying the act of music analysis to their own lives. It was almost as if Mahler's *Adagio* and the analytic activity of deciphering its contents became a type of self-guided therapeutic act.

As noted above, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a traumatic experience. This assignment attempted to remove some of the additional trauma otherwise created by the end of a course and its final exam while still maintaining some evaluation of their progress in the class. Rather, it allowed students to encounter a form of therapy through the music analytic process, a combination not often connected. Among other things, therapy requires many of the tasks embedded in this assignment. Therapy requires time. It requires room for errors to be made, for misconstructions and reevaluation of analytic constructions, and for reconstruction of new, better formed analytic constructions.² It requires making connections between different circumstances and phenomena, bringing otherwise disparate things together to form interpretations that better match the causes, both conscious and unconscious, of our innermost conflicts and emotions.

Herman highlights this aspect of recovery from trauma. 'Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation. In her renewed connections with other people, the survivor re-creates the psychological faculties that were damaged or deformed by the traumatic experience. These faculties include the basic capacities for trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy' (Herman, 2015: 133). The slower, more contemplative nature along with the group dynamic of the analytic process afforded the empowerment of the students in this process. It gave them the relationships—with me, with each other, and with the music—that Herman notes are necessary for recovery. It helped them build trust in each other and more importantly trust in themselves and their analytic abilities. 'The first principle of recovery is the empowerment of the survivor. She must be the author and arbiter of her own recovery. Others may offer advice, support, assistance, affection, and care, but not cure. Many benevolent and well-intentioned attempts to assist the survivor founder because this fundamental principle of empowerment is not observed' (Herman, 2015: 133). Like a group therapy session, the discussion groups empowered the students in their own process, leading toward the final analytic paper as an individualised chance to be both 'author and arbiter' of their analytic and possibly therapeutic process.

As the activity shifted toward Foucault's personal interviews and my role shifted toward that of a mentor or spiritual guide, a therapeutic element arose as some students applied their experience with the Mahler and the analytic process itself to their lives during the trauma of COVID-19. It removed me from the usual role of arbiter of their work, transforming it into a collaborative effort in which I was coach and ally. 'The therapy relationship is unique in several respects. First, its sole purpose is to promote the recovery of the patient. In the furtherance of this goal, the therapist becomes the patient's ally, placing all the resources of her knowledge, skill, and experience at the patient's disposal. Second, the therapy relationship is unique because of the contract between patient and therapist regarding the use of power. The patient enters therapy in need of help and care. By virtue of this fact, she voluntarily submits herself to an unequal relationship in which the therapist has superior status and power....It is the therapist's responsibility to use the power that has been conferred upon her only to foster the recovery of the patient, resisting all temptations to abuse' (Herman, 2015: 134-135).

² The act of creating psychoanalytic constructions mirrors the music analytic process as a form of Foucault's search for truth discussed above. For more on the idea of psychoanalytic constructions, see Sigmund Freud, "Analytic Constructions," *Wild Analysis*, (London: Penguin Books, 2002): 209-222 and Adam Phillips, "On Not Making It Up: The Varieties of Creative Experience," *Side Effects*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006): 75-106.

One of my primary goals as a teacher is to instill in my students the ability to make independent, well-formed, and logical musical interpretations and to equip them with the necessary skills to go about the process on their own. At the start of each semester, they are somewhat reliant on me to introduce new theoretical concepts and their defining qualities. In order to dislodge this expectation and reliance, I often start class with a musical example but without disclosing the reason the example was chosen. Much like the power instilled in the therapist, I have a position of leadership and certain power over their educational process, but it is my responsibility, as Herman notes, ‘to use the power...to foster’ their own learning progress. In these exercises, I have students comment on their observations of the passage, fostering an environment where all answers are accepted and steering the conversation toward observations that lead toward the day’s lesson. With group discussion removing much of my guidance and the student’s ownership of their own analytic path, the Mahler assignment exponentially increased this role between myself and my students. The relationship of therapist to patient mirrors this activity somewhat.

In entering the treatment relationship, the therapist promises to respect the patient’s autonomy by remaining disinterested and neutral. ‘Disinterested’ means that the therapist abstains from using her power over the patient to gratify her personal needs. ‘Neutral’ means that the therapist does not take sides in the patient’s inner conflicts or try to direct the patient’s life decisions. Constantly reminding herself that the patient is in charge of her own life, the therapist refrains from advancing a personal agenda. The disinterested and neutral stance is an ideal to be striven for, never perfectly attained. (Herman, 2015: 135)

The Mahler assignment created an expanded environment of neutrality in my now-virtual classroom. It allowed students to wrestle with analytic decisions, make interpretations that were not wrong but required alterations to be even stronger, revise those interpretations, and finish with an analysis that was well-formed and truly their own. My role was merely as a guide and ally for when they were unsure or needed a boost in confidence. It gave them ownership of their analysis within the stressful, traumatic environment created by the COVID-19 pandemic. In this way, it matched the therapeutic process somewhat, following Herman’s two characteristics of trauma—disempowerment and disconnection. It moved them toward a therapeutic recovery by empowering them through a slow return to confidence and reconnecting them to a familiar activity within an otherwise chaotic world, thus reconnecting them with themselves through the music.

The length of the assignment—four weeks during which the assignment was the sole focus of the class—afforded the time to rebuild trust that had been building from the beginning of the semester but dislodged by the COVID-19 instructional interruption. By trust, I mean a trust each student needed to build with themselves. The alteration of instructional delivery and abrupt sociological changes from the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted some of that process, but the length of time remaining in the semester allowed time for it to be refortified. Herman notes this important aspect of the therapeutic relationship. ‘The alliance of therapy cannot be taken for granted; it must be painstakingly built by the effort of both patient and therapist. Therapy requires a collaborative working relationship in which both partners act on the basis of their implicit confidence in the value and efficacy of persuasion rather than coercion, ideas rather than force, mutuality rather than authoritarian control. These are precisely the beliefs that have been shattered by the traumatic experience’ (Herman, 2015: 136). The Mahler assignment afforded this exact collaborative relationship between myself and the students, the students and each other, and the students and the piece of music. The shift in roles toward Foucault’s spiritual guide and mentorship allowed a therapeutic environment in which trust, power, and connection were able to be restored.

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