

MUSIC AS SOCIO-AFFECTIVE CONFLUENTIAL COMMUNICATION? RESPONSE TO GRAHAM

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IN THIS RESPONSE I LARGELY CONCUR WITH THE commentary offered by Graham and argue that a label such as that proposed by Graham could additionally be useful in drawing primary attention to crucial social and affective features of music-making that have at times been undervalued in interdisciplinary investigations into music. I suggest two changes to the label proposed by Graham arguing that “affective”—rather than emotional—and “communication”—rather than signal—more broadly and precisely describe the boundaries of relevance that should be applied to music.

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THE PRIMARY FOCUS OF THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE (Bispham, 2006) was to discuss musical rhythm in the broader context of human and animal communicative behaviors and to attempt to identify features of “rhythm”—both psychological and behavioral—that are specific to human musical engagement. As Graham notes, the proposed label—socio-emotional confluence signal—goes beyond the boundaries of this paper in that it seeks to encapsulate “music” and not just musical rhythm. I agree entirely that many of the points made in the article and by Graham in his commentary should be extended to “music.” In fact, since publishing the article discussed here, I have been attempting to broaden the comparative approach to include other aspects of music including pitch and motivation (Bispham, *in press*). I have argued that, although hugely diverse and dependent upon cultural knowledge and immersion for “appropriate” engagement, music is universally identifiable by the presence of at least one—most commonly both—of the following quasi-organizational foundations: A more or less steady and sustained attentional temporal pulse and/or a system

for maintaining certain relationships between pitches. Clearly, a full discussion on the question of universals in music and the complex interplay between culture and biology is beyond the current response (see Bispham, *in press*; Cross, 2003). However, the crucial point I would like to make here is that music appears to me to be generically distinct from other human and animal communicative behaviors in that it provides a temporal and/or pitch-based framework that potentiates simultaneous action and group affective social interaction. As such, and despite some small reservations about the terms “signal” and “emotional” in this context (see below), the label of “socio-emotional confluence signal,” proposed by Graham, seems to me very apt.

Graham rightly points out that giving a complex phenomenon such as music a label has the potential to arbitrarily limit research agendas and ideas. However, in this case the term proposed is very broad in its applicability and I concur that the potential positives described by Graham substantially outweigh the possible pitfalls. Especially so if, as Graham clearly intends, we remain watchful and open-minded as research progresses. In addition to circumventing the possibly intangible question of music’s adaptive or exaptive evolutionary status and providing the basis for an integrative model for future research, I believe that adopting a label such as is proposed could also be useful in guiding interdisciplinary researchers towards a productive vision of what music is. A growing body of interdisciplinary research into music has, in recent years, greatly increased our understanding. However, a restricting factor in some research has been an overly narrow conception of music that fails to encapsulate fully the social and affective dynamics that have created, characterized, and functionalized music across time and cultures. A strength of Graham’s proposed label is that it immediately draws attention to these crucial factors. I would, however, like to suggest the term “socio-affective” in place of “socio-emotional.” “Affect” is a broader term encapsulating, motivation, emotion, and mood, all of which are influenced and regulated in musical engagement. This may seem somewhat pedantic especially considering that research into “music and emotion”

(e.g., Juslin & Sloboda, 2003) has incorporated discussions on mood and to some extent motivation. However, I suggest this change in the interest of interdisciplinary confluence and clarity as well as ensuring that the proposed label imbues a suitable breadth of relevance.

Confluence is a concept that has, in my opinion, received too little attention within the field of music psychology and I think that Graham is absolutely right in proposing its importance to future research. Affective and social confluence are generically key experiential components of musical engagement and the assumption that engagement with music engenders convergent affective states is widespread. Researchers in the affective sciences, for example, regularly employ musical stimuli as a means of consistent mood induction in a range of experimental paradigms. Nevertheless, as music psychologists we lack a clear framework for understanding how this occurs and how confluence of this nature may have been evolutionarily functional. Addressing these crucial gaps in the literature will require the development of and/or focus on experimental paradigms that target social, interactive, and affect-regulatory aspects of musical engagement. Clearly this is a very considerable challenge. However, I strongly concur with Graham that it is a very promising and necessary avenue for exploration.

The final point I would like to make is that I would prefer the word “communication” to “signal.” Again,

this largely concerns the breadth of relevance of the term but would also ally the label more closely with recent research that attempts to position music within broad frameworks of animal and human communication (Cross, in press). Essentially, my concern is that “signal” will connote to readers a one-way informational process between a “signaler” and a “receiver.” On the other hand “communication” comfortably encapsulates (without discounting the “passive” listening experience) the ethnographically predominant bi/multidirectional, interactive, and affective nature of musical engagement.

In conclusion, I support the proposals made by Graham and agree that a focus on social and affective confluence could offer an integrative and productive way forward for biomusicological research. I only suggest a slight modification of the label proposed by Graham for music to “socio-affective confluential communication,” which I feel would more precisely describe the full scope of music’s relevance to broader interdisciplinary investigations.

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