

A View on the Philosophy of Music

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Philosophy of music is a second-level reflection on the nature of music and our experience of it. Music is a practice fraught with meaning and value in the lives of many people and occupies an important place in our artistic culture. However, it raises philosophical questions perhaps more difficult than other artistic practices. Many philosophers, from Pythagoreans and Plato to Wittgenstein and Adorno, have been attracted by these issues, and their doctrines are part of the *history* of the philosophy of music.

If we limit ourselves to the major topics that have been the focus of discussion in recent decades, we can group such topics into at least six main areas:

- (a) *methodological* issues concerning research on the philosophy of music (the debate on the definition of music; the choice of a theoretical framework to deal with the analysis of musicality; the difference between noises, sounds and tones; the debate between objectivism and subjectivism about musical phenomena; the opposition between 'pure' and 'impure' music, etc.);
- (b) issues relating to the *ontology of music* (the clash between nominalism and idealism regarding the relationship between a musical 'work' and its tokens or 'performances'; the controversy between fictionalism and realism, etc.);
- (c) topics concerning the *aesthetics of music* (the basic properties of music; functionalist vs. culturalist theories; the distinction between 'pure' and 'impure' music);
- (d) issues regarding the *semantics of music* (the semiotics of musical meaning; the link between music and text; the distinction between structure and content; the controversy between representationalism, expressivism and formalism, etc.);

- (e) topics regarding the *nature of musical experience* (psychological, cognitive and moral aspects of musical experience; musical expressiveness; skills and behavioural responses involved in musical understanding, etc.);
- (f) issues concerning the *value of music* (what makes musical experience valuable; what connections can be established between music and mysticism, between music and ineffability, between music and noise; between music and silence, etc.).

This special issue of **teorema** consists of an open collection of contributions to be regarded as a good sample of the kind of questions that are researched and discussed in the philosophy of music at present.

The papers by VITOR GUERREIRO, JOHN W. LANGO and ANDREA SCHIAVIO belong to an area of research concerning the nature of music (a). All three articles raise the question whether it is useful to have a precise definition of music, and introduce different arguments to reach conclusions that are varied and, in certain respects, incompatible with one another.

In his article "Thinking Clearly about Music", Vitor Guerreiro deals with the question 'what is music?' from a methodological rather than an ontological standpoint, since his purpose is not to provide a new definition of music, but to investigate what kind of philosophical theory would be suitable for doing so. Even though Guerreiro considers the definition of music to be an independent matter from the definition of art, he uses Dickie's distinction between *natural-kind theories of art* (according to which art arises from natural activities) whose creation is the result of the natural behavior, and *cultural-kind theories of art* (according to which institutional structures are the necessary and sufficient conditions for artworks), in order to provide a natural-kind theory of art which is nevertheless enriched with elements from the institutional theory. The purpose of such a theory, which would include functions based both on physical structures and on collective representations, would be to provide a definition of 'sonorous art' for both possible and actual sonorous activities with social, but not necessarily aesthetic functions. One such definition would cover: a) core instances of musical works arising from the intentional instantiation of basic musical properties such as harmony, rhythm or melody, by means of sounds; b) derived instances of music (i.e., events lacking any of these basic musical properties, but having a certain musical status because of their rapport with those properties); c) non-musical sonorous artworks, such as sonorous poetry; d) instances of non-artistic music, such as sonorous activities with social, but not necessarily aesthetic, functions.

In his article "Why can Sounds be Structured as Music?", John W. Lango considers the nature of music at a basic level, since his intention is not merely to define the nature of music in terms of structured sounds, but rather

to ask about the basis of the fact that sounds can be structured as music. The main thesis of the article is that in order for sounds to be structured as music, initially by the composer and then by the performers, they must be intrinsically structured. Adopting a standpoint both phenomenological and ontological, according to which sounds are not mere physical or physiological entities but rather phenomena, not pure events but rather time-framed processes, Lango defines sound as a mere bundle of acoustic properties, and musical sound as bundle of properties such as pitch and timbre. Or, more precisely, a sound is a bundle of tropes of acoustic properties, where a trope is an instantiation of certain properties and relations. Such acoustic tropes are the primary constituents of musical sounds or tones. Lango argues that this notion of a sound – and a tone – is compatible with both realist and nominalist ontological theories. But the main question addressed by Lango is not what sounds are, but how it is that they can be structured as music. Working under the assumption that what we actually hear is not a chaotic multiplicity of sonorous impressions, the answer given by the article is that sounds can be heard as music because they are instantiations of relations between intrinsically structured acoustic properties. This phenomenological thesis stands opposed to two different kinds of reductionism: one according to which acoustic relations are reducible to acoustic qualities, and another according to which acoustic qualities are reducible to magnitudes.

Andrea Schiavio's article "Constituting the Musical Object: a Neurophenomenological Perspective on Musical Research" suggests an alternative to two current research strategies to distinguish between the objective and subjective aspects of musicality. Against both the analysis of standard musicology, whose field of study are the objective features of musical materials, and certain trends in the psychology of music, interested only in the neural correlates of specific musical skills, Schiavio claims that the relation between music and audience/performer is an inseparable feature in every musical experience, and argues that only a genuine collaboration between phenomenology and neuroscience can produce adequate knowledge of music as an intentional object. The article applies Husserl's analysis of the ability to make sense to the constitution of musical objects, and argues that this ability manifests itself in the active capacity of the body, re-defined on the basis of neurophysiological evidence in terms of the human motor system. The article establishes that, within this approach to the intentionality of musical experience, no definition of music is needed, regardless of the nature of the definition: either strict and explicit, or implicit and unproblematic.

The following three papers deal with different topics in the ontology of music (b). A problem for the consideration of music as an art, although not the only one, is the ambiguity inherent to the notion of 'work', when applied to music. On the one hand, we take a musical work to be something the author composes and registers in the score sheet but, on the other hand, it is ob-

vious as well that music is not the notes written down on the score sheet, but the sonorous performance of the notes, usually by performers other than the composer himself. Emphasizing the composition aspect of the musical work implies considering music as a text, while highlighting its performance involves considering music primarily as a practice. This duality brings up such philosophical questions as: what is the ontological nature of the written and the performed musical work? How can the relation between them be categorized? What is the role of interpretation as an intermediary between the score and its performance? STEPHEN DAVIES, JONATHAN NEUFELD and ALESSANDRO BERTINETTO deal in their articles with different aspects of musical performance, including both the kind of interpretation carried out by the performer, and the performances called "improvisations", which are fairly independent of the score.

Jonathan Neufeld, in his article "Critical Performances", begins with a very common distinction in the literature between critical and performative interpretations. According to Wollheim, who established the distinction, a performative interpretation is an expression of a critical interpretation of the musical work by its performer, so there is a correspondence between them. Levinson, in his article "Performative versus Critical Interpretation in Music" [1996], concedes in turn that performers interpret, but argues that their interpretations are essentially different from, and logically independent of, critical interpretations, and upholds the thesis of the indiscernibility of performative interpretations with regard to those performances with indiscernible sonorous structures. A main goal of Neufeld's article is to discuss this thesis, arguing that performances indiscernible from a sonorous point of view may express different performative interpretations. Neufeld appeals to different examples of public criticism taken from the modern tradition, to show that to the extent to which a musical performance is an intentional act based on reflective choices expressed in sonorous structures, musical performance contains a critical aspect which reveals itself in the authority exerted on the audience when the performance establishes a particular direction to listen to the musical work. The conclusion of the article is that accounting for performative interpretation in terms of authority and participation, paves the way for an explanation of critical performances that contributes to an understanding not only of individual musical works, but of musical practice as a whole.

The leitmotiv of Stephen Davies' article "Authentic Performances of Musical Works" is the analysis of the notion and value of an authentic performance of a musical work. Davies focuses his analysis on the performance of musical works written down on scores, containing the composer's prescriptions for potential performers of the piece. In this sense, the notion of authenticity refers to the relation between performance and prescriptions, not to the attempt to recreate in the performance particular aesthetic effects sought by the composer. Davies dubs "ideally authentic" a performance that accurately accomplishes all the instructions specified by the author, and

maintains that to the extent that we are interested in performances because of the musical works they implement – not only because of their virtuosity or interpretative interest –, the search for authenticity is a requisite, and not an interpretative choice. Davies examines some possible objections to his ‘literalist’ position, particularly Peter Kivy’s thesis according to which an authentic performance is one that reflects, not what the composer wrote originally, but what he would wish if his musical work was to be performed at present. The article concludes with some brief remarks on the limited value of interpretative authenticity, under the assumption that authenticity is not the only or even a decisive virtue of musical performance.

The aim of Alessandro Bertinetto’s article “Paganini does not Repeat. Musical Improvisation and the Type/Token Ontology” is to explore the ontology of a particular kind of musical performance: improvisations. The most simple notion of improvisation highlights the coincidence of the composing and performing processes – in so far as the creation of sounds and silences is simultaneously composition and performance –, as well as its ephemeral and unrepeatable nature. Nonetheless, the first section of the article examines a more complex notion, one that distinguishes between improvisation as a process and improvisation as a result. As a process, an improvisation is unique, but the performer can use the inventions of an improvisation as a collection of prescriptions for subsequent improvisations. In this case, the result of the process can be memorized, transcribed, repeated or corrected. This is why an improvisation can be defined as a performance led by the decisions of the performer prior to the event (Kania). The distinction between process and result may suggest that the ontological type/token duality, widely used in the ontology of music to explain the usual case of musical works composed with multiple performances in view (it is a common thesis that a musical work is a type, whereas performances are tokens) might be a suitable tool to explain the ontology of improvisation. Thus the improvisation-qua-event would be the type – as it were, the composition –, and subsequent performances based on the event – i.e., the result – could be considered as tokens. Bertinetto examines this account in the central sections of his article, and argues that the type/token distinction cannot be applied to improvisations because of their singularity. In so far as an improvisation is created while performed, it is an unrepeatable process and its spatio-temporal coordinates are part of its identity. In other words, in an improvisation the process is the product: it is not only the music produced that interest us, but also the decisions and actions of the performers as they play the music. However, Bertinetto does not altogether reject the type/token distinction in the ontology of improvisation. Thus, on the basis of the type/token distinction, the last sections of the article trace interesting connections between improvisation and certain musical practices (cover songs, recordings, playbacks, and so on.).

The articles presented so far deal with different topics, but they all focus on aspects inherent to music, considered as an object with a specific identity, regardless of the effects music has on the audience. This connection between performing and listening can be found, one way or another, in the remaining articles, covering a variety of themes from various perspectives.

JERROLD LEVINSON'S article "Musical Beauty" is a good example of philosophical analysis in the aesthetics of music (c). His aim is to examine an aesthetic property of music, musical beauty, in order to offer a specific or strict characterization. To that effect, he uses a multi-faceted strategy including: a) a distinction, allowing for vague boundaries, between the concept of musical beauty and other concepts with which it may have some kind of logical or semantic connection (inclusion, exclusion, opposition, similarity, and so on); b) the use of examples to illustrate the concept of 'beautiful music', in opposition to examples of music lacking this quality; and c) a comparison between examples of beautiful music and examples of beautiful paintings. In this way, Levinson expects to achieve the following two goals: first, to distinguish between beautiful musical works (in his strict sense) and those with other qualities different from beauty, either qualities with some sort of excellence (sublime music, powerful music, disturbing music, and so on) or without it (nice music, enjoyable music, pleasant music, and so on); second, to characterize the hallmark of beautiful music as its capacity to move us, providing us with the gratifying pleasure of feeling, in some way, disarmed, to which the existence of certain structured features and some degree of unexpected novelty contribute. Levinson turns to Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* to introduce, within the category of beautiful music, a distinction between intellectual and sensual beauty. Whereas an intellectually beautiful work, such as Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, manages to captivate us by means of its melodic and harmonic shape alone, a sensually beautiful work such as Debussy's *Prelude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, uses tonal and emotional colour. The article concludes with some thoughts emphasizing the special value of beautiful music as compensation and momentary comfort for the imperfection and contingency of the world.

SARA ELLEN ECKERSON'S and ELISA NEGRETTO'S essays deal with questions in musical semantics (d), identifying some of the elements that contribute to give a musical work the meaning it has for its audience while performed.

The aim of the article "Contrarianism in the Philosophy of Music and the Role of the Idea in Musical Hermeneutics and Performance Interpretation" is to examine the role of the interpretation of a musical work in determining its meaning. Sara E. Eckerson starts from the distinction between two different types of interpretation: critical interpretation of a musical work within a specific hermeneutic tradition, and interpretation as a musical performance. A crucial point of the article is to argue that, regardless of the radical differences between them, these two types of interpretation are not

necessarily irreconcilable, and both are offered to the audience to counteract the influence of uneducated or ill-informed opinions and attitudes concerning the understanding of musical works. Eckerson's argument rests mainly on the analysis of two specific examples. The first refers to the way in which Wagner suggests Beethoven's 9th symphony should be listened to. This proposal appeared both in the programme of a concert Wagner conducted in Dresden in 1846, and in the actual performance he conducted. In the text of the programme, Wagner gives an interpretation of the movements of the symphony in terms of images and moods inspired in some of Goethe's texts. Eckerson points out that this kind of connection between music and poetry shows the influence on Wagner of Hegel's thesis about the vagueness of the meaning of instrumental music, and consequently the usefulness of a text in order to explain to the audience the idea or poetic content that the musical work encloses. Nevertheless, the importance of the text, according to Wagner, is to lead the audience to capture the idea or poetic content of the musical work during its performance. In other words, a critical interpretation is aimed at the musical interpretation as performance and subordinated to it. In the second part of her article, Eckerson contrasts Wagner's critical interpretation with Kierkegaard's analysis of Mozart's operas. Her intention is to show that, despite the different conceptions Wagner and Kierkegaard have of the nature of the content or idea expressed by a musical work, they coincide on the thesis that an explanation through hermeneutical analysis is not sufficient, and highlight the essential importance of the musical performance in order to *hear*, unfolded in the music, the idea expressed with words in the text.

In her article "Expectation and Anticipation as Key Elements for the Constitution of Meaning in Music", Elisa Negretto wonders what elements of the perceptive experience of music become more relevant from the listener's point of view in order to assign meaning to it. The article examines the determination of meaning from a standpoint that combines phenomenology with the cognitive psychology of music, through an analysis of the concepts of "expectation" and "anticipation". Both concepts refer to mental processes with different degrees of certainty: expectation refers to the cognitive ability of "pre-presenting" a future event which is not well defined, whereas anticipation refers to a "quasi-perception" of an event for which there is a high expectation. The authoress applies these concepts to the experience of musical perception and argues that both processes, which aim at future events in order to prepare the organism adequately to respond or act before the events take place, contribute to the creation of structural and meaning relations amongst the sounds. Likewise, she maintains that the differences between both processes have consequences in the way an audience perceives music it is not familiar with. In this sense, the article concludes that expectation contributes to the constitution of subjective meaningful experiences and to the understanding of the intentional movement that helps the audience to be conscious of a

sequence of sounds as full of musical meaning; whereas anticipation – which can be considered as a particular moment in the process of expectation – is the ability to have a mental representation of a future event that influences how an audience understands music, and ultimately defines the difference between understanding and failing to understand unfamiliar music.

The essays by DANIEL QUESADA and MARÍA JOSÉ ALCARAZ deal with questions concerning the nature of musical experience (e). In his article “Musical Experience”, Daniel Quesada raises the question whether there exists a specific type of experience that can be called musical experience. Starting with the assumption that there are many types of musical experiences depending on multiple elements, Quesada focuses his analysis on an idealized notion of a ‘*purely* musical experience’, an experience that only music can provide. Quesada enlightens this notion with several examples taken from modern tonal music, and then examines the conditions for musical experience in ‘pure’ or ‘absolute’ musical works, on the one hand, and in works with representational content or programme music, on the other. With regard to the former, he challenges the position of certain critics who describe the content of a musical work in terms of archetypes (e.g., work X entails suffering, work Y involves inner struggle, and so on), and argues that the emotional properties or the events involved in music are non-specific and undetermined. This is why, properly speaking, musical experiences cannot be *described* with language, but rather only alluded to. In this sense, he maintains that possession of information about a composer or a musical work, or lack of it, is not decisive so as to determine the basic character of a musical experience. This argument can also be applied to the experience of musical works with representational content. So, what can knowledge of the implicit content of a musical work contribute to musical experience? Quesada’s response is that, when we listen to a musical work, that knowledge can cause in us an auditive or imaginative experience *as if* we were hearing or imagining something determinate, although music cannot provide us with enough elements to determine it. The overall conclusion of the article is that *purely* musical experiences can be of different types, but the decisive point is that they all alike introduce characteristic types of indeterminacy.

If the aim of Quesada’s article was to determine the conditions of a purely musical experience, María José Alcaraz’s essay “Music’s Moral Character” raises an issue relating to the content of musical experience: is it possible to characterize musical works – particularly, pure or absolute music – in moral terms? The aim of the article is to argue that there are grounds in musical experience that not only allow, but also require, that characterization, and then to show that the understanding of this kind of content informs musical experience and strongly determines the aesthetic judgement of a musical work. Alcaraz analyzes possible objections to the latter claim, based on the lack of representational content of pure music, and suggests that the moral

judgement of absolute music rests on the quality of its expressive content, specifically in the possibility to express something similar to a psychological attitude or a character. An argument in favour of this is that, just like someone can express herself through gestures, movements and behaviour without an intentional object, and these features can provide information about her psychological profile, so this kind of non-intentional expression can serve as a model to take certain features that we perceive in a piece of absolute music as expressions of a character, and hence to judge or appreciate the expression as adequate or inadequate, not only in a psychological, but also in a moral sense (e.g., in terms of sincerity, distortion, arrogance, and so on). In the last part of her article, Alcaraz argues for the claim that it is constitutive of moral judgement about a particular musical work to recognize some kind of emotional response demanded by the expressive character of the musical work, and states that moral descriptions of musical works have an impact on their aesthetic value.

Despite the variety of questions the last two articles of the volume deal with, they coincide in demanding wide perspectives in the philosophy of music in order to tackle musical events that are beyond the borders of modern musical tradition.

In his article "Los oídos prestados y el *apeiron* sonoro. Notas para una Filosofía de la Música", CÉSAR MORENO stands for the necessity of a philosophy of music able to take care, in a conceptual way, of what he calls 'the sonorous adventure of the 20th century', marked by a number of creations and proposals that challenge the inherited cultural framework, which used to establish how *music* should be understood. The article analyzes different examples in that adventure, from the futurist vindication of noise – "the limited circle of pure sounds must be broken and the infinite variety of the 'noise-sound' conquered" (Russolo) – to John Cage's proposal in his 4'33 work for listening to silence as a plethora of possible sounds – listening with our thoughts, beyond our ears –, and including Schaeffer/Henry's concrete music as well as a variety of proposals where the old walls separating tonality from atonality, sounds and noises, artificial and natural sounds are tore down (Stockhausen, Berio, Messiaen). César Moreno suggests that the sonorous adventure of the 20th century paves the way for the "jump to *Big Music*", a non-institutionalized kind of music that emerges from what is unlimited (*apeiron*), unpredictable and undetermined. Through the article, and especially at the end of it, the author explores the adequacy of certain philosophical concepts taken from Heidegger and Derrida –and from Husserl's phenomenology, too – in order to conceptualize that 'sonorous *apeiron*'.

A common feature of all the articles presented so far is that they illustrate their respective analysis with examples taken from the musical tradition of the West. The last essay included in this special issue of **teorema** enriches it with a look outside that tradition – namely, the philosophy of music of

classical Confucianism. The overall aim of JAMES GARRISON'S article "The Social Value of Ritual and Music in Classical Chinese Thought" is to show the close connection that the philosophy of classical Confucianism establishes between the social and ritual nature of music, with its rhythms and repetitions. This connection reinforces the central role of the body in Chinese music and proves that its social value does not rest simply in its being a social product, but in that it socializes those people that take part in it. A remarkable aspect of the article is its attempt to draw similarities between Confucianism and certain Western perspectives on the philosophy of music (especially Adorno's and DeNora's), who have tried to articulate a more comprehensive vision of the social nature of music, including the possibility of body-oriented self-cultivation through music and rite.

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