Wittgenstein and Modern Philosophy's Musical Turn
Music, Meaning, and Understanding

Wittgenstein y el giro musical de la filosofía moderna
Música, significado y entendimiento

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to show that Wittgenstein's views on music arise from the historical and philosophical context that determined a 'musical turn' in modern philosophy. Firstly, it provides an account of the debate about the essence or nature of music that started long before Wittgenstein was born and whose legacy was still alive in his times. Secondly, it shows that this debate brings about the principal questions that concerned Wittgenstein in his post-*Tractatus* remarks on music, namely, meaning, language, and subjectivity.
Keywords: music, philosophy, meaning, language, subjectivity.

Resumen: El artículo muestra que las ideas de Wittgenstein sobre la música tienen su origen en el contexto histórico y filosófico que determinó el 'giro musical' en la filosofía moderna. En primer lugar, se da cuenta del debate sobre la esencia o naturaleza de la música, originado mucho antes de que Wittgenstein naciera y cuyo legado todavía marcó la discusión en su época. En segundo lugar, se señala que en este debate ya se encontraban las cuestiones principales que interesaron a Wittgenstein en las notas que escribió después del *Tractatus*, es decir, las preguntas sobre el significado, el lenguaje y la subjectividad.
Palabras clave: música, filosofía, sentido, lenguaje, subjetividad.

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It is impossible to say in my book one word about
all that music has meant in my life. How can I then hope to be understood?
Ludwig Wittgenstein[1]

1

Ludwig Wittgenstein's interest in music is well-known. The accuracy of the remarks he wrote on this art attests Wittgenstein's profound relation with it and justifies his inclusion in what could be called an involuntary fellowship of modern philosophers such as Arthur Schopenhauer, Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche or Theodor Adorno, who were unanimous in their praise of the philosophical value of music in spite of the differences of their philosophical views.

As in the case of each of these authors, Wittgenstein's acquaintance with music was by no means merely theoretical. On the one hand, as is widely documented (e.g., Monk, 1991; McGuinness, 1982), music seemed to run in the Wittgenstein family: Wittgenstein's mother played the piano, his father the violin, his brothers and sisters all learned or practiced music and his elder brother allegedly committed suicide when confronted with his father's opposition to his aspirations to become a pianist. As a child, Ludwig himself took piano lessons, that he eventually abandoned, and later on in his life he learned to play the clarinet all by himself. On the other hand, the importance of music in Wittgenstein's life and thought was an obvious consequence of the cultural Viennese milieu where he grew up and with which his family had excellent relations. Important Viennese composers, musicians and musicologists were regular guests at the evening concerts organised by the Wittgensteins. Johannes Brahms gave piano lessons to Ludwig's sisters and Brahms famous Clarinet Quintet was first performed at the Wittgensteins; Maurice Ravel composed a piano concert for the left hand especially for Ludwig's brother, Paul, who became a concert pianist before he lost his arm in World War I; Josef Labor and Gustav Mahler were also frequent guests at Wittgenstein's house. No wonder, then, if Wittgenstein was a deep connoisseur of the classical repertoire. He regularly attended to concerts and gladly discussed musical issues and interpretations, willingly expressing and defending his musical preferences (Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Schubert and Brahms) and frequently stating his strong aversion to "modern music" and his rather conservative musical taste (Niro, 2008; Hagberg, 2011; Szabados, 2014). In his own words, he approached "what is called modern music with the greatest mistrust (without understanding its language)" (Wittgenstein, 1998: 8), a declaration that is very much in line with his views on Western modern culture.

But besides his personal and life lasting intimacy with music, Wittgenstein also attributed a profound philosophic importance to the art of sounds and his considerations about music's particularities abound throughout his writings providing examples and insights for the development of his philosophical perspectives. The many remarks that Wittgenstein wrote on music thus fully justify both the increasing interest of Wittgensteinian scholars (e.g., Hanfling, 1991; Hagberg, 2010, 2011; Schulte, 2013; Szabados, 2014), as well as of distinguished contributors to current aesthetic debates (Levinson, 2003; Bowie, 2007; Scruton, 2004, 2009) and of prominent musicologists (Niro, 2008; Kramer, 2012; Arbo, 2013). Indeed, Wittgenstein's writings on music bring about important insights on aesthetic questions and also put forth more general philosophical problems such as the limits of verbal language, the possibilities of human communication and expression and the problem of the search for meaning in our relation with the world. Additionally, Wittgenstein's remarks on specific composers, his understanding of musical experience and of the affinities between music, language and thought continue to raise fruitful controversies regarding what is perhaps the most intriguing of the arts and the way it affects us.

The aim of this paper is to show that, however original and profoundly entangled with Wittgenstein's philosophic ideas, his views on music belong or arise from a determinate historical and philosophical context with which Wittgenstein was strongly familiar. In its broadest sense and significance, it is the context of the modern crisis of Western culture and tradition that his philosophy never ceases to address and that implied a

[1] Rhees, 1981: 94.

profound questioning about, among many other things, what would be the future of music as well as of philosophy itself. Hence, in order to clarify Wittgenstein's views on music and the place of Wittgenstein's understanding of this art within his own philosophical project, it is useful to recall the major lines of this context. In particular, an account of the debate about the essence or nature of music that started long before Wittgenstein was born and whose legacy was still alive at his times seems especially relevant, as well as an account of the specific philosophical and aesthetic modern concerns that entailed what can be called the 'musical turn' in modern philosophy, which has been object of recent and important research (Steinberg, 2004; Bowie, 2009; Johnson, 2015).

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I shall start with a brief account of the history of the modern debate on the essence or nature of music, a debate whose origins can probably be traced back to Rousseau's philosophy (Steinberg, 2004: 7; Berger, 2007: 131-182) and to Mozart's or even Monteverdi's musical compositions (Steinberg, 2004; Berger, 2007; Johnson, 2015). The development of this debate eventually achieved the form of the dispute for and against what received the name of "absolute music", a concept created by one of its most notorious opponents, the composer Richard Wagner (Dahlhaus, 2006; Bonds, 2014). "Absolute music" was the name given by Wagner to purely instrumental music whose golden age preceded Wagner's epoch. Contrarily to opera or church music, for example, that is to say, contrarily to music composed to be played and sung, composers like Haydn, Mozart or Beethoven started to write music exclusively for instruments, i.e., music without words, texts or songs, as in the case of symphonies or instrumental chamber music. As these instrumental works became more and more important, they start to legitimate the conception of music as an autonomous art, an art absolutely independent from extra-musical contents, with a meaning or a truth of its own solely expressed by means of music's constitutive musical elements.

This conception of music as an autonomous art with an independent existence and meaning was, of course, in line with the wider philosophical understanding of art and the arts in modernity that gave rise to the newborn realm of Aesthetics. The novelty about conceiving art's aesthetic autonomy or freedom from non-aesthetic meanings and contents —religious, political, social, or others— consisted in ascribing to artists and artistic works a whole new dignity, indeed, an emancipation from other forms of human activity and expression. Music was not an exception within this new conception of art and both for modern philosophers and for modern composers instrumental or "absolute" music came to be considered precisely as a manifestation of music's freedom from extra-musical meanings, concepts, ideas or projects, and hence as an expression of music's true essence. That music was "absolute" meant, thus, that its creation and its existence were autonomous from extra-musical purposes or functions, that music no longer served as a means to extra-musical ends, that music had a value of its own, that it was worth in and by itself, independently from any relation to other realities.

Philosophically, this conception of music received its utmost essentialist formulation in Schopenhauer's "metaphysics of music". According to Schopenhauer, music was a direct expression of the Will, that is to say, an immediate expression of a metaphysical reality that no empirical representation could fully convey. As such, Schopenhauer argued, music "bypasses ideas, is quite independent of the phenomenal world, positively ignores it and […] could still exist even if there were no world at all, which cannot be said of the other arts…" (Schopenhauer, 1958: 262). However, and to a certain extent paradoxically, music's emancipation from the world of representation, it's liberation from extra-musical realms and meanings also arouse a non-metaphysical conception of this art. This latter was formulated by the musicologist Eduard Hanslick who famously argued in his essay *On the Musically Beautiful* that the content in music is nothing but "tonally animated forms" (*tönend bewegte Formen*) based on elements of melody, harmony, rhythm, and timbre (Bonds, 2014: 141-209). Hanslick hence opposed a formalist view of music to the essentialist understanding of Schopenhauer. Although acknowledging the existence of a "content" in music, and especially in instrumental music, he rejects the idea that this content is metaphysical arguing that it is a purely musical one. Therefore, for Hanslick, musical forms are music's content and the ideas that a composer expresses in music are purely musical ideas.

However, although opposed, the essentialist and the formalist views on music address, nevertheless, the same problem, namely, the problem of knowing whether music expresses or means something other than itself, that is to say, the problem of clarifying whether it makes sense to say that music expresses more than what is contained in the sounding forms that constitute a musical piece. It was this problem that set the grounds for the appearance of the concept of "absolute music", a problem that confronted composers, musicologists and philosophers with the questions about the meaning of musical forms, about what is musical meaning or about what does music mean, if it means anything at all. These questions are still present in Wittgenstein's remarks on music, in particular in the notes written after the *Tractatus*. Moreover, as I shall try to clarify bellow, while dealing in the same notes with the question of the meaning of music, Wittgenstein inherits the typically modern articulation of the problem of meaning with two privileged topics of modern philosophical reflection, namely, language and subjectivity. This articulation was already present in the debate between Schopenhauer's musical essentialism and Hanslick's musical formalism, as I will try to make clear before proceeding to clarify the terms in which it appears in Wittgenstein's later texts.

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I shall start with language. One of the conclusions of Schopenhauer's metaphysics of music is that, among the arts, music is the only one that says or speaks immediately the essence of the world. For Schopenhauer, this means that music is not an empirically conditioned representation of the Will, but a direct expression of the Will that dispenses with representative mediations, namely, with linguistic mediations. More precisely, music says what words and concepts cannot say and hence expresses the essence of the world, which no linguistic mediation can convey, by means of purely musical, i.e. non-linguistic elements: "if music tries to stick too closely to the words, and to mould itself to the events, it is endeavouring to speak a language not of its own. […] [Rossini's music] speaks its own language so distinctively and purely that it requires no words at all, and therefore produces its full effect even when rendered by instruments alone" (Schopenhauer, 1958: 262).

Hence, because music is not linguistic, it expresses or says the Will; but precisely because music says the Will, it is conceived as being a language, and a language that speaks "its own language", that is to say, a purely expressive language capable of conveying what "words" cannot. The problem of the meaning of music implies, thus, in Schopenhauer, the growing modern philosophic suspicion about language's ability to convey meaning. By considering that words and concepts belong to the phenomenal world of representation and not to the noumenal or essential world of the Will, Schopenhauer is in line with modern philosophy's idea that language is a human creation and consists of a plurality of arbitrary conventions subject to historical and circumstantial changes (Bowie, 2007: 46-78). The adequacy of words to express supra or extra-historical, national, geographical truths and meanings becomes less and less evident, as well as language's alleged reliability to provide knowledge about how and what things are. Consequently, several modern philosophers came to consider linguistic or conceptual discourse as a medium that rather prevented than enabled an immediate or direct access to essentially meaningful realities, to essential, non-arbitrary or conventional meaning.

It is in this context that philosophers like Schopenhauer turned to music and to the possibility that this art could provide a solution for the problem of conveying meanings that are not linguistically reachable or translatable. Music gains, therefore, an unpreceded expressive and even cognitive value, a value that is grounded on music's a-linguist nature, especially in the case of instrumental music. At the same time, and quite surprisingly, as pointed out above, it is precisely because music is not a language or because music lacks language that it seems to articulate a meaning that verbal or conceptual language cannot reach. In addition, and perhaps even more surprisingly or paradoxically, music's non-linguistic nature brings about the idea that music is a "universal" language (Schopenhauer, 1958: 261-262) that can be understood by every human community and that is meaningful for any human individual. For Schopenhauer, this universality is in part a consequence of music's irreducibility to any other language: music is an immediate expression of the Will or of the essence of the world and for this reason it cannot be mediated, it cannot be translated. The case of instrumental music is again exemplary of this understanding: lacking spoken or written words, instrumental music not only express-

es what words cannot say, but it also manifests or shows, as Wittgenstein will put it later on, a meaning that cannot be translated or substituted by any linguistic formulation.

Music's non-translatability was, hence, within Schopenhauer's essentialist views on music, a consequence of the idea that music "is quite independent of the phenomenal world", that music "positively ignores" the phenomenal world, indeed, that music "could still exist even if there were no world at all". However, the same impossibility of translation is acknowledged by Hanslick's formalist views on music, although with a different consequence as regards the universality claimed by Schopenhauer. The problem of meaning also remains crucial for Hanslick for whom music's realm was "truly not of this world": "We cannot say what music means; in music there is both meaning and logical sequence, but in a musical sense; it is language we speak and understand, but which we are unable to translate." (Hanslick, 1986: 30) While insisting, almost in Schopenhauerian terms, that music is not of this world, Hanslick nevertheless rejected a metaphysical understanding of music as well as the universality that Schopenhauer argued for.

As already said above, for Schopenhauer music is a universal language because of its expressive immediacy. This means that for Schopenhauer music immediately expresses meaning and that, in music, meaning is immediately understood because it is, as it were, felt. Even more precisely, contrarily to words and concepts, music makes us feel the meaning (of the world, of the Will, of our lives, of ourselves) and it is universal because it is a language of feelings that everybody understands and that cannot be translated into words. Schopenhauer grounds, thus, the universality of music in music's ability of directly or immediately expressing feelings or emotions, and expressing them, not in their particularity, but, as he writes, in their "quintessence" (Schopenhauer, 1958: 261).

This point is, of course, rejected by Hanslick, because for Hanslick music's meaning or content was completely independent of the emotional effects it has in us. As already seen, his musical formalism totally opposes to the idea that the meaning or the content of musical compositions is extra-musical. Faithful to the project of defending the aesthetic autonomy of music, Hanslick hence contests the idea that music communicates feelings, that it expresses emotions, rather insisting in music's purely formal, objective properties. Hanslick formalism is, thus, an objectivism. And in valuing music's objectivity rather than our subjective responses to this art, he goes to the point of arguing that, as well as the other arts, music "demands to be understood only by itself, through knowledge of its unique technical characteristics" (Hanslick, 1986: 1-2). The formalist rejection of the essentialist views on music amounts, therefore, to a technical or scientific view of this art. Furthermore, this view privileges knowledge of music's objective musical elements or forms and totally dispenses with any consideration of music's emotional, subjective impact on its listeners.

4

Hanslick's claim about the objectivity of music brings us to the core of the aforementioned second privileged topic of modern philosophic reflection that is entangled with the problem of meaning and with which Wittgenstein also tries to come to terms, namely, subjectivity. As is well-known, modernity inaugurated a new conception of individual subjectivity that corresponded to the subject's self-awareness of his separation from a cosmic whole as well as from the facts or objects of the external world. In other words, in modern times and for modern philosophy —starting with Descartes—, subjectivity is the sphere or the realm that comes about from the contrast felt between the subject's inner world and external reality. Descartes was famously the introducer of a conception of subjectivity as a metaphysical domain where the subject becomes completely transparent to himself and detached from the world in which he lives. While knowledge of phenomena belonging to the outer world is dependent on the mediation of the senses and thus remains always uncertain, the Cartesian ego could perceive himself immediately, that is, by introspective insight or intuition, being, therefore, beyond doubt. So, according to Descartes, introspection guarantees epistemological certainty and it presupposes that the subject is capable of somehow withdrawing from the external world in order to achieve a state of self-consciousness independent from his physical or bodily existence. The Cartesian *ego cogito* is, hence, an un-extensive, metaphysical reality distinguished from *res extensa*, self-sufficient and immediately self-conscious, fundamentally characterized by the capacity to think.

However philosophically powerful and influential, Descartes's views on subjectivity were not completely adequate to modern subjective experience. Indeed, if it is true that the experience of modern subjects is one of their individual separation from the totality of the external world and facts, at the same time it is also the experience of the discovery of a realm that is by no means clearly defined, transparent and known. In other words, the modern experience of subjectivity is also the experience of a not totally explored domain, composed by indistinct or unconscious aspects and subject to change and to external influences. For this reason, to modern self-awareness also belongs the conscience that the borders of the inside and the outside worlds are never completely clear or defined. As a consequence, more than introspective knowledge of a substantial identity, subjectivity comes to be understood as "the life of the subject" (Steinberg, 2004: 5), that is to say, as the experience that the subject has of himself as an instable entity, subject to change and difficult to grasp, which is certainly irreducible to a description of facts, to its representation or conceptualization, but at the same time irreducible to clear determinations or definitions, irreducible to a clear object of knowledge that can be known by introspection. It is in this situation that modern subjects sought to find autonomy, i.e. individual freedom and emancipation from external powers and realms, while at the same time they feel themselves isolated or enclosed within an individual uniqueness that is difficult to express and to share with others.

Much has been written about the connection of modern philosophy's turn to music and its relationship with the modern philosophical conception of subjectivity (Steinberg, 2004; Bowie, 2009; Johnson, 2015). One of the motives for the unprecedented attention that philosophers paid to music in modernity was the growing conviction that, contrary to the other arts, music expressed the invisible and dynamic reality of subjective experiences and processes. Music appears thus as the only art that gives access to the subject's inner world or inner truth, to the same truth that he seems to be at pains to find in the different domains of modern existence but that modernity somehow seems to have widened or expanded, enhancing its resistance to be identified, objectified, represented, communicated. In this context, and Hanslick's objective views notwithstanding, the defence of music's aesthetic autonomy contributed to establish the idea that music was the only adequate expression of subjective life, that is to say, of subjective and invisible experiences such as feeling, thinking or willing. Listening to and composing music, especially purely instrumental music, came, hence, to be conceived of as the experience of the encounter of the listener or the composer with an otherwise concealed or inapparent reality or with an intimate truth, an encounter that somehow seemed to fulfil the modern quest for meaning and to present the complex relation between the 'I' and the world.

This truth or meaning, however, was not an identity, a determinate content, a solution or a theory that corresponded to the subject's essence or ultimate reality; the meaning at stake was rather conceived of as an endless discovery, or self-discovery, composed by dynamic movements such as desire, reflection, doubt, expectation and the like. Such dynamics properly defined the subject's experience and relation to and with himself, an experience and a relation of which instrumental music became an exemplary expression (as in Beethoven's symphonies, Mozart's sonatas, and so on). Put differently, in modernity music becomes the language as much as the experience of subjectivity, and this means that music not only speaks (to and of the subject), but that it also, as it were, thinks, expects, recalls and even listens. In a word, music's privileged intimacy with or music's adequacy to subjective life somehow embodied, in modernity, the quest for a meaning that is no longer given, but on which the modern subject cannot simply give up.

5

As said at the beginning, it is within the philosophical and historical context briefly sketched above that Wittgenstein's remarks on music achieve their full philosophic significance, as I hope it will now become clear. This is neither to say that the intertwinement of modern philosophy with music was primarily a philosophical problem for Wittgenstein, nor that, as Andrew Bowie has underlined, Wittgenstein considered music to be some kind of major philosophical solution to the philosophical questions raised by modernity (Bowie, 2009: 261). My claim is rather that considering Wittgenstein's views on music within the context of the modern philosophical interest in this art sheds light on the way Wittgenstein deals with the problems of meaning and intelligibility and clarifies his treatment of the relations between language and subjectivity.

As is well-known, this treatment changes from Wittgenstein's earlier to his later philosophical works. As Wittgenstein gives up the ideas put forth in the *Tractatus*, namely that "our sentences are meant to mirror the logical structure of the world" and that "language serves a single function, that of depicting reality" (Sluga & Stern, 1997: 331), he becomes convinced that the logical structure of the world would not clarify how language works in everyday life, that is to say, that it would not explain how do we make sense or understand linguistic propositions or articulations of our experience of the world. On the other hand, as Wittgenstein writes in 1930, he becomes aware that "One cannot describe the essence of language in language" (Wittgenstein, 1999: 3, 30). In other words, the "essence" of language is not, as it were, essential or substantial, in the sense that it is not contained in language itself, or in the sense that it is not autonomic, independent or isolated from non-linguistic realities. For understanding language's essence, or meaning, one has thus to dispense with an essentialist view of language, with the idea that language exists in and by itself, and to consider language's dependence of other realms of meaning. Another way to put this can be found in Wittgenstein's claim that "A language I do not understand is not a language" (Wittgenstein, 1999: 106). Indeed, linguistic meaning implies or depends on linguistic understanding, such that its boundaries or limits are not previously, rigidly and essentially defined.

This idea seems to be confirmed by the fact that Wittgenstein often speaks of music as a language (Schulte, 2013). However, musical language is neither conceived by Wittgenstein, especially in the post-*Tractatus* remarks on music, as the expression of a meaning that lies out of this world, nor as the expression of a subjective meaning that lies enclosed within a Cartesian interior. Indeed, Wittgenstein's writings on music frequently point to the discussion of the undefinition of the limits of language that makes meaning possible. The later Wittgenstein does not take such undefinition as an insufficiency, but as a positive resource, that is to say, as what allows for the use of a diversity of means to express meaning and whose elements rely on their relationships to other elements within particular practices.

The case of music seems to be exemplar of what is at stake in this idea. The fact that we feel that music "says" things to us shows that, contrary to Hanslick's conviction, musical meaning is not self-contained meaning, but something that "points beyond itself" as Wittgenstein writes:

> Does the theme point to nothing beyond itself? Oh yes! But that means: —The impression it makes on me is connected with things in its surroundings —e.g. with the existence of the German language & of its intonation, but that means with the whole field of our language games. If I say e.g.: it's as if here a conclusion was being drawn, or, as if here something were being confirmed, or, as if this were a reply to what came earlier, —then the way I understand it clearly presupposes familiarity with conclusions, confirmations, replies, etc. (Wittgenstein, 1998: 59)

According to the text, the impression that a certain musical theme makes on listeners is neither an objective, purely formal acknowledgement of the musical structure of that same theme, nor an introspective insight that grasps any kind of metaphysical essence or meaning. The impression, Wittgenstein suggests, is connected to the context formed by "the whole field of our language games", namely, it is connected with extra-musical meanings and extra-musical practices of which music is not wholly independent. This being so, it is also possible to draw another implication from Wittgenstein's words that concerns the topic of subjectivity as it was described above. Indeed, the "impression" about which Wittgenstein speaks here is a subjective impression, the impression that music "makes on me". This, Wittgenstein writes, "is connected with things in its surroundings", which means that not only the music or music's meaning is not self-contained or purely, "absolutely" musical, but also that the subject that listens does not experience himself as an entirely self-contained and self-sufficient entity or an identity. Indeed, the subject's (musical) experience is the experience of a connection with external realities and practices, with the "surroundings" from which he is not fully isolated and that are providers of meaning both to the musical theme and to himself.

In other words, this subject, which is capable of being impressed by music and capable of understanding the meaning of a musical theme, is not an isolated reality or content, but a subjective life exposed to music as a "beyond" himself with which he finds connections. At the same time, however, Wittgenstein describes this "beyond", or the alterity of the musical theme, as composed by features which are not alien to the movements that are used to consider something as typical of subjective life, such as concluding, confirming or replying. Better said, the "beyond" or the outside of the subject seems, hence, to be understood only in terms of what

its already familiar and internal to the subject. Nevertheless, at a closer look this appearance reveals its inexactitude. In fact, Wittgenstein's example and Wittgenstein's point is rather that, more than inner or strictly subjective movements, concluding, confirming and replying are, in truth, intersubjective practices that do not presuppose an isolated human being, but rather subjects dealing with other subjects (or with themselves as another subject).

This example shows how Wittgenstein rejects one of the problems addressed by the relation between music and subjectivity in modern philosophical thinking, namely, the idea that music is an expression of the incommunicable or a-linguistic privacy of a feeling subject. Quite on the contrary, as Wittgenstein seems to suggest, the impression that music makes on the subject makes him aware of the whole field of language games to which he belongs and not of his isolation within a purely inner sphere or a realm "out of this world". Wittgenstein's anti-Cartesian conception of subjectivity is well illustrated by another remark of *Culture and Value* about music:

> What does it consist in, following a musical phrase with understanding, or, playing it with understanding? Don't look inside yourself. Ask yourself rather, what makes you say that's what *someone else* is doing. (Wittgenstein, 1998: 58)

Understanding the meaning of a musical phrase, this text suggests, does not correspond to a private, introspective and purely inner experience that is accessible only to the one who is listening. Even more precisely, Wittgenstein suggests that understanding, and particularly, understanding music, is not a purely mental operation that goes on in the subject's mind, "inside himself", as if this "inside" was a wholly separated field, detached from its "surroundings" and invisible to others. Hence, as much as the experience of pain that is famously discussed in the *Philosophical Investigations*, the experience of understanding is not an inexpressive one and can therefore be noticed from the outside of the listener.

Throughout his works, Wittgenstein considers a variety of ways through which hearing with understanding is expressed —he speaks about singing and whistling, for example (e.g., Wittgenstein, 1964: 166; 1998: 59)— but he also explicitly stresses the possibility of "finding a form of verbal expression which I conceive as the verbal counterpoint of the [musical] theme." (Wittgenstein, 1964: 167) This claim, however, does by no means imply that verbal propositions about the meaning of musical themes can translate or substitute the experience of hearing those pieces of music with understanding. It implies, rather, that Wittgenstein sees similarities between understanding music and understanding verbal sentences and that he uses the example of understanding music for clarifying the usual, but wrong picture of what understanding a sentence is. Thus, he writes:

> What we call "understanding a sentence" has, in many cases, a much greater similarity to understanding a musical theme than we might be inclined to think. But I don't mean that understanding a musical theme is more like the picture which one tends to make oneself of understanding a sentence; but rather that this picture is wrong, and that understanding a sentence is much more like what really happens when we understand a tune than at first sight appears. For understanding a sentence, we say, points to a reality outside the sentence. Whereas one might say "Understanding a sentence means getting hold of its content; and the content of the sentence is *in* the sentence". (Wittgenstein, 1964: 167)

What Wittgenstein highlights here is that meaning cannot be separated from its formulation or expression, be it the meaning of verbal propositions or the meaning of musical works (and so he writes "the content of the sentence is *in* the sentence"). The same line of thought seems to lead him to compare understanding music and understanding a facial expression and even to declare that "A theme, no less than a face, wears an expression" (Wittgenstein, 1998: 59). That musical meaning has a physiognomy or wears facial expressions implies that it has a distinct way of appearing or sounding that is integral to his "content", as our bodies and faces are integral parts, expressions of our lives. Moreover, it implies that it can be recognized, as we recognize the signs of the inner life or disposition of someone with whom we come across.

Hence, to understand the meaning of music, attention must be paid to the way it sounds in someone, to music's "face", to its gestures. As already seen, Wittgenstein often alludes to them when he speaks of hearing as a conclusion, a confirmation, a reply, etc. This understanding as a *hearing-as* is, however, not an exact equivalent of *seeing-as* because of their different temporality: the first is based in following a succession of

sounds, while the second is grounded on the instantaneity of visual experiences, in which the elements that compose what is seen appear simultaneously and do not form a sequence or a succession. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein's insistence on *hearing-as* clarifies that music is not a mere organization of sounds and it helps to do away with the idea of music as a mere psycho-acoustic, formal, reality by stressing that it rather appeals to language-games such as hearing conclusions.

The notion of *hearing-as* raises some questions. Namely, as has been pointed out (Arbo, 2012), it raises the question of its convenience to give an account of first-person experiences with music. Indeed, Wittgenstein uses *hearing-as* only in third-person propositions and thus directs our attention to public or intersubjective situations, such as inviting someone to hear a musical theme as this or that. The question is, hence, how can it be useful to account for first-person experiences, in which we simply don't feel the need to recur to that expression. In other words, if Wittgenstein's examples of musical understanding are very fruitful to clarify inadequate (Cartesian) models of subjectivity, to a certain extent they seem to imply that the experience of musical understanding is throughoutly public. This point was made by Roger Scruton, who agrees with Wittgenstein in that we cannot find an answer to the question of what musical understanding is by looking inwards, while doubting that Wittgenstein has given an alternative answer to that question (Scruton, 2009). Furthermore, Scruton argues that if we adopt the third-person perspective, the differences between understanding music and understanding language become more obvious than the similarities because if it is true that a person demonstrates his understanding of a word by using it and that similarly someone might show his understanding of a piece of music by performing it, the problem is that most of us are not performers, and that our culture is a listening culture.

This questioning of Wittgenstein's notion of *hearing-as* stresses the quite trivial evidence that it is in listening, not in playing, that the average musical person exhibits an understanding of musical pieces. But Wittgenstein did not ignore that evidence and deals with it in his conception of what can be called an expressive listening whereby the listener necessarily expresses his understanding of music. Thus, in spite of what Scruton calls Wittgenstein's "severe attitude to the first-person case", it cannot be said that he completely dispenses with it, as it cannot be said that Wittgenstein's philosophy totally dispenses with the experience of subjectivity, with the life of the subject. To clarify this claim, and to conclude, I shall go back to the question of music's ineffability, that Wittgenstein's remarks also seem, as we have seen before, to completely reject.

It is true that Wittgenstein's notion of understanding the meaning of music as *hearing-as* connects music with this world, and the listeners with their worldly surroundings and practices, that is to say, with a diversity of language-games that allow us to speak of conclusions, replies, etc. At the same time, however, this connection also suggests that the language-games that are at our disposal sometimes fail us. This point was made by the musicologist Lawrence Kramer in the book he devoted to Wittgenstein's understanding of music (Kramer, 2012). Kramer's view is interesting in many ways, but perhaps most importantly because it underlines an aspect that is more frequently left out of consideration by the usual focus on Wittgenstein's dismissal of metaphysical views on music. The aspect I would like to account here for has to do with the failure or inadequacy of language-games to fully convey music's meaning. More precisely, it has to do with the inadequacy of a specific language-game for music that depends on its own inadequacy, namely, the game where words *undo* their work, and to which Wittgenstein refers in *Philosophical Investigations* §610:

> I should like to say: "These notes say something glorious, but I do not know what." (Wittgenstein, 2001: 159)

With this example, Wittgenstein points out the case of a musical theme that "speaks" but whose (glorious, i.e. understandable) meaning cannot be clarified or translated into words. The hearer certainly understands the meaning of the piece of music but it is as if this meaning consisted precisely in the impossibility of being put into words. Better said, the experience of the meaning of that musical theme is —at the same time— the experience of something that cannot be said or translated *and* of the feeling that it should be said or translated. The example is thus of a musical meaning that resists a translation that it not only invites but also seems to demand. The experience of hearing music as something that cannot be said can, thus, reveal a response to ineffability that is the contrary of silence. Indeed, when faced with music's resistance to be said, to be known, we move, as the musical theme does, toward verbal counterparts such as an analogy, a summarizing word, or

a gestural surrogate. Caught in this movement, understanding is produced not so much by the act of finding a verbal translation for the meaning of a piece of music, but by the sense of failing. That words fail, or can fail, shows, thus, that they can free us instead of confining or limit us to silence. And in this case it may happen that, instead of laconic or concise, music makes of us fluent and talkative subjects.

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