Music and Language-Games

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Questions of how language and music can be seen as connected are discussed in various manuscripts Wittgenstein wrote at different times. Probably, his most sustained discussions of this sort of topic can be found in his fairly late writings from the period between the dictation of the last version of the *Investigations* and his last visit to America – that is, in manuscripts written between 1946 and 1949.

One set of relevant questions centers on certain words that we tend to use when talking about music: it is striking that in our attempts to indicate what we find interesting in a work of music or a particular performance of such a work we are inclined to use terms with an as it were "linguistic" slant. Thus, a number of Wittgenstein's remarks concern words like «express», «expression», «expressive». And another example he mentions is our use of *sagen* (that is, "say" or "speak" or "tell") and its cognates.

In a manuscript whose first pages contain very late stages of his work on the *Investigations* we find a rough note which, in a fairly literal translation, runs as follows: «This variation /modification/ says infinitely much. But what it says is indescribable [*Diese Variatio /Veränderung/ sagt unendlich viel. Aber was sie sagt, ist unbeschreiblich*]» (MS 130: 56; transcriptions from manuscript material are simplified and normalized; unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own). A bit further down, but still on the same page, Wittgenstein begins to turn this into a full remark. He writes (and now I shall give a freer rendering):

This variation is tremendously significant [it says a lot]. If I wish to say what its significance is [if I wish to say *what* it says], I will make a certain gesture, roughly expressing «The moral of this is …». I think there must be words that I would accept as corresponding to this musical phrase. Obviously, what I really say about it, or the gesture I make, are completely inadequate. When accompanied by this music, they may appear suitable, but to a person unfamil-

iar with it they would not give an inkling of its character[1].

A lot could be said about this remark. I will confine myself to a few observations. (1) The first sentence should be read as printed within quotations marks. We are dealing with an exclamation one is strongly inclined to utter or, perhaps, cannot help uttering. (2) A slightly later remark (ivi, p. 60) suggests that the particular variation Wittgenstein has in mind is the last variation on the main theme of the Allegretto of Beethoven's 7th symphony[2]. (3) The German wording, with its three repetitions of "say", drives the point home that what appears to be saying a lot does not really say anything specific, and hence nothing at all – if you are prepared to apply certain standards. (4) Wittgenstein's phrase *eine gewisse Geste* («a certain gesture») is a characteristic move emphasizing that we use the same word («certain») to indicate specificity as well as complete vagueness: to say that one makes «a certain gesture» appears to imply that we know exactly which kind of gesture we tend to make, but at the same time it suggests that the nature of this gesture is ill-defined. A few lines further down this move is repeated by insisting on its being a *certain* expression (*ein bestimmter Ausdruck*) with which a given sentence is uttered by an American speaker[3].

Underlining the ambiguity of the word «certain» between definiteness and its opposite is another way of bringing out what the rough note I quoted expresses by contrasting the tremendous apparent significance of a given musical phrase with the indescribability of what it signifies. This idea is taken up in a slightly later remark where the

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[1] «*Diese Variation ist unendlich vielsagend. Will ich sagen,* was *sie sagt, so mache ich eine gewisse Geste, die etwa ausdrückt, es werde hier eine Moral ausgesprochen. Ich* glaube*, es müßte Worte geben, die ich als die der musikalischen Phrase entsprechenden anerkennen würde. Das, was ich wirklich von ihr sage, oder meine Gebärde, sind offenbar ganz ungenügend. Sie mögen, wenn sie von der Musik begleitet sind, passend erscheinen, würden aber niemand, der die Musik nicht kennt, eine Ahnung von ihrem Charakter geben*» (MS 130: 56-57). Variant translations are given in [square brackets].

[2] If we look back at the first rough note that I cited, it is not clear that at this point he was thinking of a specifically *musical* example, let alone this specific work by Beethoven. – The gesture mentioned in the later passage (ivi, p. 60) is «a concluding nod», i.e. a gesture that can be seen as similar to «the moral is …».

[3] «Suppose a person utters a certain phrase in a tone of voice and with a demeanour possible only for an American. Could I in *this* case reproduce the expression in a different way? [*Wenn etwa jemand eine gewisse Phrase in einem Ton und mit einer Miene ausspricht, wie sie nur ein Amerikaner aussprechen kann. Könnte ich hier den Ausdruck auf andere Weise wiedergeben?*]». Wittgenstein's mentioning both *Ton* and *Miene* emphasizes that what he has in mind is not merely a matter of *accent*. But the fact that the extra is not well-defined is obvious: the answer to the question whether there are alternative ways of reproducing the expression is clearly negative.

«indescribability» of what is suggested by the variation is spelled out by saying that «accordingly, I am tempted to give a description but fail to be able to do so. Eventually, my explanation will consist in *accompanying* the sounds with a gesture and a facial expression». Wittgenstein's next words are the important ones. He says: «And this explanation satisfies me"[4]. Virtually the same point is made in a remark noting the fact that certain sounds may stimulate a hearer to try to find a description of these sounds and then to come up with a passage from a poem which he regards as parallel to the musical phrase. Wittgenstein himself speaks of discovering a turn of phrase corresponding to this expression of our musical language: such a discovery, he says, «would doubtless give me great satisfaction» (MS 130: 62).

But what exactly is the point that Wittgenstein wishes to make by emphasizing the satisfaction given by such gestures and parallels? After all, he at the same time stresses that we are unsuccessful in our attempts at describing what the musical phrase appears to express. – I think there is no truly uncomplicated answer to this question. On the one hand, we are reminded of the fact that certain musical phrases give us the impression of signifying a lot and thereby encourage us to look for a description of what they signify. On the other hand, it is pointed out to us that gestures and parallels may give us, who have vainly been looking for a proper description, a good deal of satisfaction. What is not clear is whether these gestures and parallels are supposed to function as a surrogate kind of description or whether they are meant as a sort of consolation prize in the absence of the real thing.

Some part at least of these questions can be clarified by drawing on further remarks from Wittgenstein's manuscripts and arranging them in such a way that they can be understood to bear on each other. But before proceeding to look at additional material from the relevant period I will mention three points that can be gathered from the pages I have been looking at so far.

The first point is this: that Wittgenstein is not in the least reluctant to speak of music as a language. As we have seen, he does use expressions like *Tonsprache* and *musikalische Sprache*, but the mere fact of his being prepared to use these words does not say much about the degree of literalness intended by this way of talking. One may use expressions like "language of music" or "musical phrase" without wishing to suggest more than a vague analogy between word language and music. On the other hand, one

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[4] «*Ich bin also in der Versuchung, eine Beschreibung zu geben, kann es aber nicht. Meine Erklärung wird am Schluß darin bestehen, daß ich die Töne mit einer Gebärde und Miene begleite. Und diese Erklärung befriedigt mich*» (MS 130: 61).

may use these expressions in a very ambitious sense and thereby wish to claim that music forms a system structurally similar to our word languages and of roughly comparable power. Or one may want to argue that in some sense music is part of our language and hence part of the same system as our word language. It is clear that here there is a wide range of choices between positions of very different strengths, and it would surely contribute to getting a clearer picture of Wittgenstein's views if we succeeded in taking a few steps towards locating Wittgenstein on the map of possible positions.

My second point is the importance of context. In a way, this point is bound to remain pretty vague, but there are certain distinctions that need to be drawn if one wishes to see what Wittgenstein is driving at. On the one hand, he stresses that a musical phrase is significant or expressive only in its specific musical context or, as he puts it: «The expressiveness of a musical turn of phrase rests only on its context within the entire musical language to which it belongs»[5]. This idea is reminiscent of the famous statement that «a smiling mouth smiles only in a human face» (Wittgenstein [1953]: §583) and might accordingly be called *physiognomic* contextualism. On the other hand, he underlines the fact that a proper understanding of a musical phrase presupposes a great deal of practical and theoretical knowledge. Thus, hearing the aforementioned phrase from the Beethoven Allegretto in the way described is, as Wittgenstein writes, «only possible in the context of the entire variation, and then of the entire movement, and in its turn only for someone who understands our musical language. And now consider what *this* consists in»[6]. This idea is reminiscent of another famous statement, viz. «To understand a sentence means to understand a language» (Wittgenstein [1953]: §199) and might accordingly be called *holistic* contextualism. This admittedly rough distinction may help us to arrive at a better grasp of certain allusions Wittgenstein makes to the contexts which ought to be seen as a frame of reference for the remarks or phrases in question.

The third point will have to remain fairly allusive. Wittgenstein implies that a distinction should be drawn between different ways of explaining our hearing certain se-

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[5] «… *daß eine musikalische Wendung ausdrucksvoll ist, beruht nur auf ihrer Umgebung in der ganzen musikalischen Sprache, zu der sie gehört*» (MS 130: 60).

[6] «*Aber doch natürlich nur im Zusammenhang: einmal dieser ganzen Variation; dann aber des ganzen Satzes; und das doch auch nur für den, der unsere musikalische Sprache versteht. Und worin* dies *besteht, das überlege dir*» (MS 130: 60). Cfr. the following remark: «*Und eine Gebärde wird auch nur der verstehen, der z. B. weiß, daß dies die letzte Variation eines viel hin und her gewendeten Themas ist. Und auch nur der, der den eigentümlichen Ton des Ernstes dieser Musik sieht. Und über diesen Ton ließe sich wieder viel sagen; er läßt sich auch wieder nur in einer weiten Umgebung verstehen*» (MS 130: 61-62).

quences of sounds as expressive of gestures or states of mind or various kinds of characteristics. He says that the effect of such a sequence of sounds could be explained in technical, musicological terms whereas the seriousness and significance of the music cannot be explained in this way[7]. In another remark he refers to programme-musical descriptions and says that this type of interpretation could be explained in terms of purely musical relations. Then he goes on to observe that we, however, do not wish to *explain* things; we want to *describe* them[8]. This, of course, alludes to an often appealed-to but perhaps never satisfactorily clarified distinction which, in our context, may perhaps be helpfully re-interpreted as a distinction between different *levels* of elucidation. As already mentioned, the frustration of our drive to describe the true content of the impression certain musical phrases tend to make on us was summarized under the heading of «indescribability». But if we bear in mind what Wittgenstein aims at by speaking of a distinction between explanation and description, it may prove more useful to hold that the alleged «indescribability» is due to a failure to separate descriptive from explanatory factors.

The questions raised by my first two points are variously connected. Most of these connections can be seen from a point of view which, while it need not take its start from a distinction between physiognomic and holistic approaches, will soon prove to require a distinction along these lines. At any rate, the central notion that will allow us to see some of the relevant connections is the notion of understanding. In our context, we will have to ask, as Wittgenstein does: what is involved in saying that one understands a work of music, or part of such a work? One way of trying to answer this question starts from wondering whether it needs to be distinguished from asking, as Wittgenstein also does, what following a musical phrase with understanding consists in (MS 132: 51-52; Wittgenstein [1998]: 58). Perhaps one might want to argue that, strictly speaking, to follow a musical phrase does not imply that one does understand it in one way or another: one could, after all, pay attention to what is going on in the music without having the faintest idea of what it means – if it can be said to mean anything at all. On the other hand, it sounds incoherent to say that a person is following a musical phrase without understanding it. Evidently, both in German and in English "to follow" appears to imply a certain degree of understanding. But does this mean that Wittgenstein's phrase «to fol-

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[7] MS 130: 61: «*Die Wirkung dieser Takte … läßt sich natürlich harmonisch erklären, aber nicht der Ernst, die Bedeutsamkeit dieser Gebärde*».

[8] MS 130: 103-104: «*… Und die Deutung kann aus gewissen rein musikalischen Beziehungen erklärt werden. – Wohl, aber wir wollen ja nicht erklären, sondern beschreiben*».

low a musical phrase with understanding» is tautological, if the meaning of "to understand" is partly, or fully, contained in the meaning of "to follow"? No, I think it is not tautological inasmuch as Wittgenstein's use of the phrase serves to bring out that the expression «with understanding» is typically used to indicate that this sort of understanding is something that can be perceived from the outside: one could follow (in the sense of "understand") what is going on in the music without revealing any cognitive attitude towards it. But the statement that someone follows the music with understanding may be regarded as implying that his way of understanding it can be perceived by an observer.

To be sure, one might mention further niceties of idiom that could be regarded as playing a role here, but I think that for the time being these idiomatic nuances may safely be ignored. What will interest us, and what Wittgenstein finds interesting, are the possibility of simply perceiving that another person understands a work of music and the naturalness of observing this kind of thing. The fact that this kind of perception is possible is importantly connected with a principle of Wittgenstein's general strategy – a principle which might be summarized as follows: «Don't look at your own case – in particular, don't look at what's going on in your own head or heart –, look at other people's behaviour to see what you can make of it». It is in accordance with this principle that Wittgenstein writes: «… 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).

But even if we accept Wittgenstein's advice, applying his strategic principle is not plain sailing. On the one hand, I may observe another person's behaviour to find out what is going on in him in the sense of discovering what sorts of experiences he registers. On the other, I may observe his behaviour to determine in which way he responds to the music in the sense of finding out what he hears the music as telling, or conveying to, him. Quite apart from the fact that construing the notion of understanding as signifying a felt experience may mislead us into thinking of the wrong sort of criteria for our application of the word "understand", the difference I have just alluded to has to be respected if one wishes to avoid additional misconceptions. It seems that German idiom diverges from ordinary English to such an extent that Peter Winch, the translator of the relevant passage, confesses himself stumped[9]. So, I will try to summarize what I take to be the drift of Wittgenstein's reflections.

[9] See footnote ii in Wittgenstein [1998]: 58. The relevant passage seems admittedly difficult to elucidate in a plausible way («*Noch einmal: Worin besteht es, einer musikalischen Phrase mit*

The point of observing the listener's behavior may consist in finding out how he reacts to the music in terms of episodes of feeling, sensation, emotion. His reports on these episodes need not mention the music at all, nor do they have to reflect the listener's grasp of the music (or his failure to grasp it) in any way. Such reports can in their turn play a role in our attempts at constructing a theory that might help us to find a possibly causal account of parts of our mental life – an account that does not have to have specific connections with music in general or certain works of music in particular.

However, observing the listener's behavior may also assist us in discovering what he takes a work of music or a musical phrase to mean. In what one may want to call the "ideal" case he will be able to supplement the evidence yielded by gestures or facial expressions by verbal accounts. But he – and also we as observers – may feel that words fail him where his non-verbal responses can tell us a lot. It is typical, though, that where our listener cannot find the right words to express what his gestures make visible to us we ourselves are quite capable of giving a verbal account of the sense he has made of the music he listened to. The obvious explanation for this state of affairs is that we, in

Verständnis folgen, oder, sie mit Verständnis spielen? Sieh nicht in dich selbst. Frag dich lieber, was dich sagen macht, der Andre *tue dies. Und* was *veranlaßt dich, zu sagen*, er *habe ein bestimmtes Erlebnis? Ja, sagt man das überhaupt? Würde ich nicht eher vom Andern sagen, er habe eine Menge Erlebnisse? / Ich würde wohl sagen "Er erlebt das Thema intensiv"; aber bedenke, was hiervon der Ausdruck ist*». – «Once again: 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. And *what* prompts you to say *he* has a particular experience? Indeed, do we ever actually say that? Wouldn't I be more likely to say of someone else that he's having a whole host of experiences? / I would perhaps say: "He is experiencing the theme intensely"; but ask yourself, what the expression of this is»). I am not sure, however, that the difficulty is of the kind suggested by Winch. Another possible reading might be the following: Looking into myself when understanding a musical phrase could lead me to think that there is *one* type of experience constitutive of such understanding. For general strategic reasons, however, I decide to ignore the first-person case. But what about the other person? Would I be as prepared as I am in my own case to speak of one type of experience corresponding to, or constitutive of, his understanding? Probably not: I would be more likely to speak of a whole host of experiences on account of the fact that attribution of understanding to another person would be based on a whole conglomerate of instantiations of outer criteria which in their turn might be seen as indicating the presence of a number of inner episodes (= a whole host of experiences). Similarly, a statement to the effect that «He is experiencing the theme intensely» would probably rest on seeing that his expression is a complex one; and its complexity would not easily make me think that his experiencing the theme intensely is likely to consist in *one* experience. – This reading would simply reproduce the essential features of the probable reasoning of a person initially tempted by the idea that understanding a musical phrase consists in one particular type of experience.

giving our verbal account, have moved to a different level of description. It is one thing to respond to a musical phrase by making a certain gesture – a quick motion of the hand or a peculiar look or an outlined dance step –, and quite a different thing to point out in so many words that a specific musical phrase is an answer to a question raised by an earlier phrase or that it is an ironical comment on what went on before etc.

Thus described, these levels can be seen as clearly separate. Wittgenstein, however, proceeds to muddy the waters by bringing in verbal responses such as quoted lines of poetry, for example, which in spite of their linguistic character function like gestures rather than like full-fledged verbal comments. But while Wittgenstein is curious about these intermediate cases, we will largely ignore this part of his enterprise. We should hasten to add, though, that this move to a different level of description is not a privilege enjoyed by us as observers. In reality, the listener himself is quite free to take similar steps and to move from his own immediate responses to verbalized reflections on their possible significance.

A great deal remains to be said about Wittgenstein's remarks on the ways in which language and music can be seen as connected. Perhaps it will be useful to have a look at some of the things he says about the importance of context. This was the second point mentioned above, and I claimed that it is a point which can be seen as hanging together with the idea of music as language.

In a passage following the remarks on which I based the bulk of my last observations Wittgenstein raises the question whether a certain musical theme points to nothing beyond, or outside, itself. His answer is that «oh yes, it does»:

But that means: – The impression it makes on me is connected with things in its surroundings [its context] – e.g. with the existence of the German language and 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 were 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; MS 132: 59-60)[10]

It is, Wittgenstein claims, the context formed by «the whole field of our language games» which is connected with the impression a certain musical theme makes on me. And he continues to say that my ability to respond in certain more or less immediate

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[10] «*Weist das Thema auf nichts außer sich? Oh ja! Das heißt aber: – Der Eindruck, den es mir macht, hängt mit Dingen in seiner Umgebung zusammen – z. B. mit der Existenz der deutschen Sprache und ihrer Intonation, das heißt aber mit dem ganzen Feld unserer Sprachspiele. / Wenn ich aber z. B. sage: Es ist, als ob dies eine Antwort auf das Frühere wäre, – so setzt mein Verständnis eben die Vertrautheit mit Schlüssen, Bekräftigungen, Antworten, voraus*».

ways to such a theme depends on, or presupposes, my familiarity with all kinds of extra-musical usages and institutions. Perhaps one could summarize this remark by saying that it is a fairly sweeping instance of the holistic contextualism mentioned earlier[11]. In a way, this is unexceptionable, but at the same time it may seem a bit banal to mention all these general presuppositions and dependencies. However, what exactly is the point of alluding to «the whole field of our language-games»? Is this, too, a kind of triviality? I think it is not. And it seems that Peter Winch, in a footnote to his translation of this passage, finds Wittgenstein's wording remarkable. He says that, in his opinion, «"field" here should be understood in the sense of a "field of force", as in physics» (Wittgenstein [1998]: 59, note i.). Well, I for my part do not find this note self-explanatory, but I suppose that Winch wishes to suggest that our language-games should be seen as embedded in a highly structured network, where the phrase «highly structured» (or similar expressions) would indicate that the slightest change within the network would have consequences in many or all parts of the network, thus changing the position and perhaps the function of our language-games.

Now, I do not want to argue that this suggestion about an analogy with a field of force cannot be made perfectly good use of. Probably it can. But on the whole I think that it would be more helpful to read Wittgenstein as talking about «the whole domain covered by our language-games». Briefly, the difference between these two readings amounts to this: that Winch's suggestion aims to clarify the notion of a language-game by specifying the contextual embedding of such games, whereas the other reading underlines that the domain in question is characterized by the fact that language-games can be applied to it: the playing of language-games is an important characteristic of this domain, and we need a good grasp of the notion of a *language-game* to arrive at a clearer idea of the domain in question. Winch's suggestion, on the other hand, is an attempt to clarify the idea of a language-game by way of narrowing down our understanding of the embedding context of such games.

Of course, this is not the occasion for extended explanations of Wittgenstein's notion of a language-game. I will content myself with summarizing one or two aspects of this notion that may be found useful in dealing with some of the questions raised in this pa-

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[11] And here it may be worth observing that it is followed by a straightforward example of his physiognomic contextualism: «A theme, no less than a face, wears a [facial] expression [*Ein Thema hat nicht weniger einen Gesichtsausdruck als ein Gesicht*]».

per[12]. To begin with, it needs to be pointed out that Wittgenstein uses the word *Sprachspiel* («language-game») in a number of quite different senses. So, in a way there is not *one* notion of a language-game that we might want to identify but several such notions that stand in need of elucidation and distinction. Here, I just wish to outline one of these notions which in my view, however, plays a central role in Wittgenstein's thought. What I mean is the idea of a language-game as a kind of model: a kind of simple or «primitive» (as Wittgenstein says) stereotype, perhaps an archetype, which can be characterized fully by giving a list of explicit rules, rough descriptions of standard situations of play and a few typical examples. The great advantage of these games is that, on the one hand, they can be mapped onto situations of real language-use if they have been constructed properly, while, on the other hand, they – in contrast to our real language – are managable, perspicuous entities. Their pre-eminent function consists in serving as *objects of comparison*, as Wittgenstein calls them in a prominent passage of his *Investigations*[13]. And as mappable objects of comparison they can contribute to arriving at a better understanding of certain features of our language.

Looked at from this perspective, language-games are chiefly seen as constructions largely independent of our everyday language. At the same time, however, they can also be regarded as possible extensions of this language – as phenomena which can be imagined to be parts of our language. As Wittgenstein's examples show, the fact that we can imagine this depends on our natural inclinations: this is why we often know how to go on even though we have never travelled this particular path.

Now, understanding music – like understanding language – is what Wittgenstein calls a *Lebensäußerung der Menschen* (MS 137: 22a): it involves practices and techniques which manifest characteristic features of human life. And one particularly important technique of understanding, and of explaining our understanding of, music consists in finding and pointing out parallels taken from different areas or to be discovered in other regions of our arts, e.g. in painting or poetry[14]. In other words, discovering helpful ways

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[12] For a more comprehensive account of my reading of Wittgenstein's remarks on language-games, see Schulte (2004).

[13] Wittgenstein [1953]: §130: «Our clear and simple language-games are not preliminary studies for a future regimentation of language – as it were, first approximations, ignoring friction and air resistance. Rather, the language-games stand there as *objects of comparison* which, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language».

[14] «*Ja, auch ihm Verständnis für Gedichte oder Malerei beibringen kann zur Erklärung dessen gehören, was Verständnis für Musik sei*» – «Even teaching him how to make sense of poems or paintings may form part of an explanation of what understanding music is» (MS 137: 22a).

of filling in the gaps in the sentence «This … is like that …», for instance «This musical phrase is like that gesture or that line from a poem», is an essential part of playing the, or a, language-game of understanding and explaining music.

Here, of course, I am using the expression "playing the language-game" as referring to what we do in real life when we understand and explain music. But it is easy to see how we get from here to primitive language-games. Situations of teaching and learning how to talk about music would form an important stage of this process. And it is equally easy to see how to get from primitive language-games to our everyday language. This insight will help us to answer one of the questions raised before, viz. the question whether gestures and parallels are mere ersatz descriptions in the absence of the real thing or the best we can get – *if* we can get it. The answer is: in many cases well-chosen gestures and parallels *are* the best we can get. To be sure, they are not verbal descriptions but their expressiveness contains a descriptive element which we can grasp once we have learned to play this sort of language-game.

In certain respects speech, music, poetry and other fields of human activity are so closely interrelated that we find it difficult to decide which side should be seen as primary, which side is to be regarded as explanatory and which as the object to be explained. The following is a marvellous example invented by Wittgenstein:

Might one not imagine someone who had never known music, and who came to us and heard someone playing a reflective piece of Chopin, being convinced that this was a language and people were merely keeping the sense secret from him? / Verbal language contains a strong musical element (A sigh, the modulation of tone for a question, for an announcement, for longing; all the countless *gestures* in the vocal cadences). (MS 134: 39 v.; cfr. Wittgenstein [1946-49]: § 888)[15]

One of the splendid features of this example is the fact that the word «reflective» itself characterizes a gesture. While on the one hand it suggests that the "speaker" – that is, the piano player – reflects on the sense of what he is getting across by way of playing this music, it on the other hand functions like a stage direction specifying, not the player's facial expression or his bearing, but rather the way he is to play the music. If one had to explain this way, one might try to do so by making certain bodily gestures or

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[15] «*Könnte man sich nicht denken, daß Einer, der Musik nie gekannt hat und zu uns kommt und jemand einen nachdenklichen Chopin spielen hört, daß der überzeugt wäre, dies sei eine Sprache und man wolle ihm nur den Sinn geheimhalten? / In der Wortsprache ist ein starkes musikalisches Element. (Ein Seufzer, der Tonfall der Frage, der Verkündigung, der Sehnsucht, alle die unzähligen Gesten des Tonfalls)*». – Cfr. my observations on this remark in Schulte (2004 b): 146-164, in particular 154-55.

quoting lines of poetry or by pointing to a painted or a real landscape. The man from the remote culture perceives the reflectiveness and is thus prompted to think that he needs a key to grasp the sense of what is being "said" by the music. But in reality he would have to learn *music* to make any sense of the sounds he is hearing. And then he would understand that a verbal translation is not to be had. This, however, does not mean that it would be impossible to describe, or explain, the music. No, as we have seen, a lot can be said or done to make the character of the music more intelligible or to elucidate one's personal understanding of it. But what can be said or done is not in the nature of a verbal translation of what is going on in the music.

Examples of the kind alluded to, where music is described and explained by pointing out parallels from other areas and demonstrating gestures, can, in a certain sense, be seen as prototypical or primitive language-games. They show how far we can get by verbal means and where we will have to avail ourselves of non-verbal tools. And yet, even though these tools are not verbal ones, they do belong to the language-game. The case is similar but far more complicated than that of the colour samples mentioned in Wittgenstein (1953): §16[16]. And precisely because of its being more complicated it may prove especially helpful to construct language-games of a primitive kind and to show how they can be developed, as it were, from our real ways of talking in such a way that the resulting image or model can be seen to reflect essential features of our everyday use of language without blurring their outlines and mixing up the (explanatory) sequence of events.

I suspect that telling instructive stories about imaginary primitive language-games is an important part of what Wittgenstein means by «description» in those cases where he makes invidious comparisons between description and explanation and says things like: «All *explanation* must disappear, and description alone must take its place» (Wittgenstein [1953]: §109). This type of description is surely quite remote from the sort of de-

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[16] «*Wie ist es mit den Farbmustern, die A dem B zeigt, – gehören sie zur* Sprache*? Zur Wortsprache gehören sie nicht; aber wenn ich jemandem sage:* "*"Sprich das Wort 'das' aus", so wirst du doch dieses zweite "das" auch noch zum Satz rechnen. Und doch spielt es eine ganz ähnliche Rolle, wie ein Farbmuster im Sprachspiel (8); es ist nämlich ein Muster dessen, was der Andre sagen soll. / Es ist das Natürlichste, und richtet am wenigsten Verwirrung an, wenn wir die Muster zu den Werkzeugen der Sprache [= des Sprachspiels] rechnen*». – «What about the colour samples that A shows to B; are they part of the *language*? Well, it is as you please. They do not belong to spoken language; yet when I say to someone, ""Pronounce the word 'the'", you will also count the second "the" as part of the sentence. Yet it has a role just like that of a colour sample in language-game (8); that is, it is a sample of what the other is meant to say. / It is most natural, and causes least confusion, if we count the samples as tools of the language[-game]».

scription appealed to in those above-mentioned remarks where Wittgenstein laments the «indescribability» of the impression made by a musical phrase and alludes to its possible origin in a failure to separate descriptive and explanatory elements. The type of description now invoked by him characteristically involves constructed or re-constructed primitive language-games. And as we have seen, it leans heavily, and often successfully, on our knowledge of natural human inclinations and our powers to imagine how people endowed with these inclinations will respond to certain sounds produced by other people.

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