Aisthesis

Problems with Musical Signification: Following the Rules and Grasping Mental States

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Abstract. The reflections on music are crucial in the philosophy of language and the mind of the second Wittgenstein. These reflections go around the comparisons Wittgenstein did between meaning and understanding language, and meaning and understanding music. Musical passages show a language as independent from reality, i.e. objects, events or mental states, centered instead in intonations, conclusions, parenthesis, confirmations, questions and answers, a phenomenon enough studied in musicology.

Two interpretations on the signification of musical meaning are analyzed: Ahonen's formalist view [2005], based in the following of rules, and Scruton's expressive view [2004], based on the comparison between the intuitive recognition of a mental state "hidden" behind the facial expressions. As a conclusion we arrive to a mixed argument: Either of the alternatives whether annulling the other, are possibly telling about Wittgenstein's conception but do not elucidate the problem itself.

Keywords. Musical signification, Musical Language, Wittgenstein, Ahonen, Scruton.

And why should not the musical experience embrace feeling and evocation just as much as pure structured sound?
Scruton, Programme Music

In *Wittgenstein and the Conditions of Musical Communication* (2005), Finnish philosopher Hanne Ahonen confronts Roger Scruton in his paper on *Wittgenstein and the Understanding of Music* (2004), under the idea that Wittgenstein's later philosophy was imbued with his reflections on music and that these thoughts were inspired by the formalist «Brahmsian musical circles of Vienna» (Ahonen [2005]: 515), contrary to the expressive reading Scruton made of Wittgenstein, about understanding a piece of music «only if you imaginatively grasp the state of mind expressed by it» (Scruton [2004]: 1). Here a position which concedes the force of the evidence that Wittgenstein would defend a pragmatist, yet formalist theory

of musical meaning, according to Ahonen, combines with the search for a comprehensive description of what is involved when we appreciate music by understanding it. Understanding music could reconcile a formal perspective, in Wittgenstein's terms of «following rules», and an expressive perspective, i.e. «grasping mental states» by «bringing up the commonplace intuition of facial expressions as reflections of first-person knowledge of "what it is like"» (Ahonen [2005]: 514). The last assumption is supported by recent results brought up in neuromusicological research.

We will divide the analysis firstly in a historical account about the relationship between music and language, then we will focus onto a more analytical account, and enter into syntactist, semantist and pragmatist views on musical language. Finally, a pragmatist view, as we will interpret it, could cover both formal and expressive aspects as developed in today's philosophy of music.

1. MUSIC AND LANGUAGE

The question of signification or meaning in music requires the study of a position around the topic of music and language. It should firstly answer the questions of what the historical relationships between them were, and secondly, whether music is language in an analytical sense. Music has been dependent on language from early on; at the same time it came to be considered a "language" in its own terms. In this last context, philosophies of language provide a framework to decide a notion of music as language.

The relation of music with language can be found explicitly formulated for the first time in the Baroque, in the use of rhetorical classical forms as a framework for inventing, structuring, embellishing, and even delivering music (the *inventio-dispositio-elocutio* or *decoratio-memoria-pronunciatio* from the Greco-Roman tradition of rhetorics) (see Blake [2001]; Buelow [1966]; Borgerding [1998]). From this point onwards, other aspects are crucial for understanding the sustained exchange between music and language: linguistic contents were imitated by music in different ways – "word painting", imitation music –, the model of literary narrativity was assimilated (Tarasti [1994]: 138-180; Tarasti [2002]: 112-115), and a similar sense of abstraction was reached.

The historical process of the relations between music and language could be summarised in four steps:
1. Music emulates linguistic manners, being associated with rhetorics.
2. Music emulates language in that it can refer to contents outside itself (imitation music).
3. Music emulates the narrative of language ("programme music", but also "absolute music").
4. Music can reach abstraction, in the sense of being separated from an extrinsic reference and play with its own elements in a formal way (musical formalism).

In addition to the historical relations music had with language, the conception of music *as* language deserves an analytical treatment. Roger Scruton presents one in his *Aesthetics of Music* ([1997]: 171-210). Scruton asks if an analogy with language or the search for a grammar would cast any light on a theory of musical understanding. His answer is "no"; the arguments that lead him to such a result will be discussed in next section and serve as introductory both for understanding his expressive position, Ahonen's later criticism, and our comprehensive conclusion in defence of an enhanced formalism.

2. MUSIC AS LANGUAGE

According to Scruton's philosophy of music, whether music is a language or not will strictly depend on finding identical conditions that language needs in order to be called as such: substitution rules, transformation rules and syntax linked to a semantic goal (Scruton [1997]: 174, 177). Here, different theories of signification in the philosophy of language should be presented in order to test their results in relation to the problem of musical signification. The vision of music as language will vary depending on the notion of

language one is considering, such as the picture theory of language, semantic-oriented, or the theory of language as expressive, pragmatic-oriented.

2.1. Syntactist Approach to Musical Language

In 2005, Ahonen criticised Scruton's psychologist, expressive interpretation of the philosophy of musical signification based on Wittgenstein's late philosophy of language. However, Scruton's interpretation in 2004 was much based on the primary reflections on music and understanding from his *Aesthetics* from 1997.

According to Scruton, the wrongness of assimilating syntactic structures to music resides in the absence of any link between syntax and semantics; whereas in language syntax and semantics go hand in hand. The meaning of the music is not provided by the syntactic order but by the acoustic sensation provoked by the music.

"Syntax" informs us whether a sentence is a possible sentence of the language, which of its component sounds is a word rather than a phoneme, and how the words are linked. On the other hand, "semantics" tells us whether a sentence has meaning and what the meaning is. Scruton goes on to explain that a theory of syntax would explain how we can derive sentences of the language, by finite transformational rules, from a finite vocabulary and a repertoire of deep structures. We recognise syntactically correct sentences by grasping their derivation; deviant sentences are those that we cannot derive from the repertoire of rules and structures.

According to the Chomskian model, syntax is generative, and not merely consists of "rules of substitution" (*syntagmatic* structures). "Transformation rules" generate surface structures from underlying "deep" structures. Transformation rules explain our ways of grouping words in a sentence; they also explain how we hear the sentence. From the sentence: «That he was angry was evident from the way he frowned», we hear the first «was» less far from «angry» than the second «was». This is because we hear the first clause, a noun phrase, as grouped together.

Scruton shows consequently that our rules of grammar must take into account more than the surface position of a word to generate a natural language. The point is illustrated as well by reflecting on the intransitivity of syntax. A word may be acceptably joined to its successor and the successor to its successor, and the result may be ill formed, e.g. «Fish eat three ideas». According to Scruton, this may have a parallel in music too. In Paul Hindemith's *Gebrauchmusik*, there is an example where each bar leads smoothly to its successor, but the whole is non-sensical: for example, in the Concerto for trumpet, bassoon and string orchestra (1949) (see Scruton [1997]: 179). From this situation however, a consequence can still be derived that there are indeed intuitions of right and wrong that can equally be shown in music.

But for the analogy with functions of language, one should provide a rule-governed syntax for all dimensions of musical organisation: that is, for rhythm, for melody, and for harmony. Scruton examines a first case in which a metrical pattern is interrupted by a syntactical incorrectness. Then, a second case in which, substituting a falling fourth in a melodic syntactically correct example, we feel the pressure of redefining the other consecutive "slots" in the melody. Similarly with harmony, one could find also a kind of rule-governed order. Given a certain melody, a bass-line could be derived directly according to its tonality.

Scruton remarks that these intuitions of right and wrong in music remind us of those which the linguist tries to explain through a transformational grammar. Consequently, he concedes at this point of the analysis the following facts:

1. There are infinite utterances in music, but constructed from a finite (discontinuous) vocabulary, i.e. the twelve semitones.
2. Music implies a cognitive process in which we pay attention and every element is understood in relation to the whole.
3. There is a context-dependent affinity between tones, more than a step-by-step substitution of syntactically equivalent elements. Music is organised, but *sui generis,* through variations,

imitations, parallels, and structural and prolonging episodes.

4. There is a "chunking of information" in music; groups of tones, beats, and harmonies are perceived as forming a unit, as words forming a sentence.

5. In music, memory plays an important role, aiding the recognition of the structure as a whole.

6. And there are in fact intuitions that suggest a "generative" explanation. How music is heard leads to a hypothesis of how it is derived. His example is: in Debussy's opening bars to his *Pelléas et Mélisande* [1898], the chord in measure 5 should be derived from a whole-tone scale (D–E–F#–Ab–Bb–C).

According to Scruton, a generative theory of tonal music should offer the following "intuitions" as primary evidence. We could develop with these intuitions, as a linguist does, a theory that would explain those patterns that sound right and exclude those that sound wrong. It would be a theory of musical understanding *par excellence*; it would show how and what we should understand:

1. Horizontal grouping into phrases or melodies and vertical grouping into chords.
2. Metrical intuitions.
3. Melodic intuitions, how a melody splits into episodes which elaborate, answer, or continue.
4. Intuitions concerning tension and relaxation or the presence of unsaturated chords requiring a completion.
5. Intuitions concerning the part-whole relationship, episodes either answering each other or being independent.

In musicology, Lerdahl and Jackendoff's Chomskian inspired work *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (1983) distinguishes two kinds of grammatical rules: those that specify when a given complex is well formed («formation rules») and those that specify the preferred or favoured musical structures («preference rules»). They emphasise however the importance of the second type while they marginalise the concept of «well-formedness», which is the equivalent to syntax in formal languages.

Lerdahl and Jackendoff propose four structures in tonal music according to grouping, meter, the organisation of pitches according to their structural importance, and the order of tension and release. They constitute hierarchies, which derive perceivable musical phenomena from underlying structures, in the same manner that the word order in a sentence is derived from the deep structure of rules of transformation. The first step in a transformational grammar is the design of trees (see Chomsky [1986]). They construct similar trees to explain which musical elements are heard as subordinate to which. The analysis has the following layers:

1. The grouping structure: divides the piece into motifs, phrases, and sections hierarchically in a tree diagram.
2. The metrical structure: divides between strong and weak beats at various levels into the grouping structure.
3. The «time-span reduction»: assigns a hierarchy of structural importance to the pitches.
4. A «prolongational reduction»: derives the tension and relaxation of the harmonic and melodic elements hierarchically, from an underlying harmonic and melodic structure (equivalent to the Schenkerian *Ursatz*) (see Pankhurst [2008]).

Each structure is characterised by «preference rules», rules which, for example, tell about the preference of the event leading to the more stable metrical order, as the most important event (or «head») in a time-span. The corollary from this enterprise is that there are «musical universals» and that it is innate for humans to recognise them. However, according to Scruton, we should hesitate to call this a theory of musical syntax, for the rules do not determine any musical surface uniquely. This is because preference rules can conflict. It is impossible to think of these rules as procedures which one might obey: the listener acts in *accordance* with these rules, but not *from* them.

By the way, Lerdahl and Jackendoff admit that preference rules have no parallel in natural language because the rules are precisely obeyed in language, at least in normal discourse, but with

possible exceptions in literature. The problem of preference rules touches the nature of Lerdahl and Jackendoff's enterprise.

Moreover, the reduction acquires a tree structure familiar to generative theories of syntax. The same authors admit also that this is misleading, since linguistic syntactic trees relate to grammatical categories, which are absent in music. In music, on the contrary, it is the individual events that are hierarchically related.

The principal question for Scruton is whether a theory of tonal music conceived in cognitive science terms would really show how we understand tonal music. Scruton presents his arguments for diminishing the power of the generative theory in music. Each of the four reductions proposed by the theory offers to explain our experience of sequence: why this sounds right after that. However, he regards counterpoint as just as important. We can affirm for example that a chord heard in the second voice of a canon is right, being acknowledged that here is first a matter of musical expectation, and not of derivation.

Likewise, he considers the «prolongational reduction», where a portion of music is derived from its cadence. Scruton notes that we can treat a passage as subordinate to a cadence only because we perceive the temporal *Gestalt*. The basic experiences involved in hearing music, recognising parallels, movement, and force are not explained by the hierarchical theory of the piece's structure, but assumed by it. Scruton's example is Franz Schubert's first «Suleika» song (1821): at the beginning, three measures displaying an ambiguous G seventh chord arrive at the dominant F# of B minor in the cadence; the situation he wants to explain is that we *already* hear B minor in the first three measures. By the way, Lerdahl and Jackendoff also admitted that they could not explain parallelism. He concludes: «A prior conception of the musical *Gestalt* is therefore required before the generative theory of prolongation can get off the ground» (Scruton [1997]: 196).

Finally, the theory does not mention the key component of the grouping phenomenon: the experience of movement, i.e. of phrases beginning,

moving on, and coming to an end, and the experience of metaphorical space in which this movement spreads. Scruton appeals here to his main thesis:

> *To notice the movement in music, you must perceive the notes not merely organised into groups, but as moving; and that means perceiving the music under an irreducible metaphor [...]. A generative theory of grouping is necessarily blind to this fact: it can, perhaps, explain the grouping; but it cannot explain the metaphor – nor the fact that this is how the music is heard. (Scruton [1997]: 197)*

Concerning the status of musical rules and the way in which they shape musical practice, he arrives at the following conclusions:

1. The order that we hear in music may be likened to, but it is not, truly syntactical. It resembles the order of style in language, although it is less independent.
2. There are rules in music but they are not usually prescriptive, they are derived *post facto*; generalisations instead of rules of grammar.
3. There are no parts of speech in music, no syntactic elements playing a single specifiable role. In music, as in language, it is only in the whole context of the utterance that any element has meaning. But in music, unlike language, the contribution is not and cannot be constant.
4. In language, speaker and hearer have the same competence. In music, the composer must have the hearer's competence, but he must also have much more than this if his music is to be meaningful. A generative grammar of tonal music would not tell us how tonal music is composed.
5. Rule-governed music is, in general, vacuous and uninteresting.

We could discuss the scope of Scruton's arguments 1 and 4. The first one, about the style in language as more independent than the musical one, is doubtful. And regarding the argument 4, about speaker and listener's having the same competence, it seems that Scruton should moderate these conclusions.

2.2 The Semantist Approach to Musical Language

As a second stage, Scruton elaborates another claim, perhaps the stronger one, to criticise Lerdahl and Jackendoff's theory. It is based on the assumption that a coherent conception of deep structure in natural language is linked to a semantic interpretation of it. Even in formal languages, syntax is modelled on an implicit interpretation. And there is no way in which we could build a theory of language syntax without depending on intuitions about the meaning of words.

This means that music could be described syntactically only if we could propose a musical semantics. According to Scruton, the weakness of the semiological approach (see Monelle [1992]) resides in its inability to combine syntax and semantics into a unitary theory. Music has a quasi-syntactic structure and also a kind of meaning. But there is no reason to believe that its structure is the vehicle of meaning.

According to Scruton, we could still think of music as having a semantic value, only if we could signal the meaning of a piece from the meanings of its elements. We should search for a musical equivalent to a vocabulary: phrases, harmonies, progressions, and so on, with a repeatable significance that regularly and predictably contributes to the meaning of the musical whole (see Cooke [1959]).

For Scruton, meaning is assigned by *perception*, not by convention in the case of music; a case completely unlike language. And through an example he shows how rivalling semantic meanings could be assigned to music (e.g. Schubert's «Rückblick», *Winterreise* [1828]). Scruton's question is whether the set of phrases and gestures have the same standard meaning for those who are competent to deploy them, regardless of any accompanying text. The absence of parts of speech implies that there are no clear procedures for deriving a semantic interpretation of a whole phrase or movement from the interpretation of its parts. Instead, music simply accumulates meaning without an articulate structure. Expressive meaning is chiefly context dependent and irreduc-ible to laws. The constancy of meaning cannot be assumed, and the process of accumulation changes unpredictably the significance of each "syntactical" part. He concludes: «Who would say that the move from the minor sixth to the dominant in the minor key means the *same* in Alberich's lament (Wagner, *Rheingold*, scene I), and in Mozart's Fortieth Symphony, K. 550 (opening)?» (Scruton [1997]: 206-207). The hypothesis of semantic structure in music as literal truth is for Scruton unsustainable.

The constancy of meaning which is a fact found in tonal tradition must be explained however. The apparent musical vocabulary is the outcome of a long tradition of «making and matching», and his rules of meaning are really habits of taste (see Thompson, Quinto [2011]: 361). Following Scruton's arguments, music has neither truly syntactic nor semantic structure. He remembers Nelson Goodman and Suzanne Langer who notably presented the category of symbol systems without semantic structure, symbols that present their subject matter directly. Their intention was to formulate a concept of symbolism that would allow us to speak of music (and other art forms) as signs, while denying that they describe what they signify, as language does.

Scruton arrives at the conclusion that there are no rules that guarantee expression, even if a background of rule-guidedness may be necessary for the highest expressive effects. Rules have a different role from the grammatical rules of language; if you rewrite the rules then you can change the possibilities of expression. All this would lead to the topic of the aesthetic experience. He believes that finally the linguistic analogy in the case of music is more of a metaphor than a simile and although it is not useless, it is anyway not appropriate for founding a theory of musical understanding.

The analyses made by Scruton hide a particular conception of language, which comes from the semantist school of philosophy of language of the 20th century (see Lenci-Sandu [2008]). Before leaving this analytical inquiry on music *as* language, a different notion of language will be approached, which presumably helps.

2.3 The Pragmatist View

Jerrold Levinson claims – in his article *Musical Thinking* (2003) – for music the same association with thought that one usually attributes to language. He begins by remembering here how music served the late Wittgenstein for speaking about our deep constitution in language: «Here it is as if a conclusion were being drawn» (Wittgenstein [1953]: 182); «You can point to particular places in a tune by Schubert and say: look, that is the point of this tune, this is where the thought comes to a head» (Wittgenstein [1980]: 47e). Again in *Culture and Value*:

> If I say for instance: here it's as though a conclusion were being drawn, here as though someone were expressing agreement, or as though this were a reply to what came before, – my understanding of it presupposes my familiarity with conclusions, expressions of agreement, replies. (Wittgenstein [1980]: 52e)

Levinson provides inspiring passages from Wittgenstein's different categories for speaking about music as thoughtful activity:

> [E]mbodied thinking in music is thinking we ascribe to the music, as something it appears to be doing, and has no identifiable object, whereas implied thinking in regard to music is thinking we ascribe to the composer, and has a quite definite object, namely the evolving composition itself. [...] [Intrinsic thinking] may reside instead in the mere succession from chord to chord, motive to motive, or phrase to phrase at every point in any intelligible piece of music, whether or not there is any suggestion of recognisable extramusical action, or any implication of specific compositional deliberation. (Levinson [2003]: 2.10, 2.11)

Now, the turn from searching for the question of meaning in language in its semantics to searching for its meaning in pragmatics, means that one is passing from believing that grammar is underlied by reality (the object), to rather a belief that the meaning of language is formed by conventions and practices, such as in the following example: «Can he *speak*?», whether it is asked of the parents of a child or of the family of an ill person. According to the first period of Wittgenstein's thought, the *Tractatus*, the question would appear mysterious, intangible, abstract; according to the second period, the *Philosophical Investigations,* its significance would be given by its use in an act of communication (the person would be asking if the little child is already able to speak, or whether a patient is in condition to speak) (see Malcolm [1986]). In music, like language in this particular pragmatic-oriented sense, there is no grammar, no content that has to be deciphered, but outwardly responses and capacities (gestures, apt comparisons, hummings, and movings). In Levinson's own words:

> Both music and language are forms of thought. Understanding music should therefore be analogous to understanding language. The former, like the latter, is a matter of use, that is, of knowing how to operate with the medium in question in particular communicative games, in particular contexts. But knowing how in regard to music, as with knowing how generally, does not consist in propositional knowledge but rather in behavioral and experiential abilities and dispositions. Hence if music is thought we should naturally come to understand it as we come to understand thought in words; not by learning how to decode or decipher it, but by learning how to respond to it appropriately and how to connect it to and ground it in our lives. (Levinson [2003]: 2. 16)

3. THE PROBLEM

An overview of the history of the relations between music and language (section 1) and the analytical investigation on their strict analogy (sections 2.1, 2.2. and 2.3), produced, seemingly, independent results. The first part dealt with some general ways in which music has related to language through history: music has been seen as imitating the "procedures" of language, as attempting to "represent" in the way language or painting did, as following the narrative structure of the linguistic discourse and, finally, reaching "abstraction". These are just the philosophical reasons

which, on the other hand, support what a cognitive analysis is testing nowadays based on neuropsychological studies: language and music share, although not entirely, systems of the brain.

Music appears to mimic some of the features of language and to convey some of the same emotions that vocal communication does, but in a nonreferential, and nonspecific way. It also invokes some of the same neural regions that language does, but far more than language, music taps into primitive brain structures involved with motivation, reward, and emotion. (Levitin [2006]: 187)

From the philosophical analyses about music *and* language some results can be extracted: there must be a limit in the association of a syntax and semantics in the case of music, but music can be considered to be in the same boat with language understood in a pragmatic sense in that it supposes a meaningful act of communication: embodying, implying, and intrinsically involving thought.

Sanz González's article (2001) helps here to join music aesthetic tendencies with the different theories of the philosophy of language. In this way, historical currents in musical aesthetics could be seen in parallel with different theories of signification born from the study of natural language.

In very general terms, Sanz González juxtaposes Baroque music constructed around rhetorical principles, with an *aesthetic of imitation*, in the sense of an imitation of the natural emotions; Romanticism with an *expressive aesthetics*, expression of the individual emotions of the artist; contemporary music tends to avoid the notion of music as referential, either of conventional or private emotions or of any natural scene or description, thus it is compared to a *formalist aesthetic*, the signification of music being found in the music itself, in its own ways of organising.

These theories of musical signification (imitation, expression, and formalism) were revisited by Sanz González in relation with the "referentialist", "intentionalist", and "semantist" theories of language. A *referential* theory of language finds a basic relation between the noun and the named – an object. As it describes a relation of imitation,

its counterpart in musical aesthetics would be the aesthetics of imitation. The *intentionalist* believes that language is the mere outward manifestation of the internal consciousness consequently failing to explain intersubjective knowledge. Its counterpart in musical aesthetics would be the aesthetics of expression. A *semantist*, unlike the ancient referential theory, maintains that the minimum unity of signification is not the noun but the proposition. The proposition reflects a fact in the world (picture theory of language); this vision implies an analytical study of the parts of the proposition. According to Sanz González, formalism in music is associated with this vision for studying the relation of the parts of the composition. But yet for semantist philosophers, the reference outside the world of the sentences they analyse is crucial for the epistemic goal of language. A crucial difference is that for the musical formalist, the signification is however internal to the musical work. Note that this view, which associates semantist theories of language and formalism in musical aesthetics is in opposition with Ahonen's interpretation of Wittgenstein's late pragmatism as linked to a musical formalism as presented below.

In addition to these, Sanz González states that the philosophy of language offers the *pragmatist* theory of language. For this last one, signification is neither associated with an external object or with facts, nor to an internal consciousness, but resides in the use of the words in different situations. For this reason, signification is dynamic and open. Pragmatism would allow, in the case of music, an explanation for how symbolic qualities of sounds function. These symbolic qualities are those that add the value of "joy" or "sadness" to certain sonic combinations, are shared, and are not illusory, but are also distinct from those inherent to pitch (high/low), duration (long/short), intensity (loud/soft), and timbre. They function as certain rules which are current in a community, as rules of taste and of a practice. It is a matter of use, again, that determines their significance.

The interpretation offered by Sanz González about the goodness of a pragmatist approach to musical signification in terms of symbolism asso-

ciated to values helps in reading the problem of musical significance in depth. This last reading allows to join Ahonen's (formalist) and Scruton's (expressive) views. Ahonen's thesis about pragmatism in music alone would lead us to an explanation of how musical *communication* is possible, sharing the same rules in a game of language according to a public criteria; Scruton's thesis about pragmatism in music will lead to an intuitive understanding of how we *perceive* it, also linked, although *partially*, to intentionalist and solipsist interpretations since, undoubtedly there is certain constancy of meaning shared. However, neither Ahonen nor Scruton can give a complete account of musical signification, in that we need rules and aesthetic appreciation together. Reconciliation of both interpretations lead us in a thesis already called *enhanced formalism* (See Alperson [2004]).

After studying some key issues in the problem in general, we must read again the controversy brought at the beginning between the works by Ahonen and Scruton in terms of explaining the problem of musical signification either as a question of following rules *or* grasping mental states.

Ahonen's criticism to Scruton is based on the interpretation extracted from Wittgenstein's late philosophy that is strict and not deviated into expressive or psychological contents. When Scruton interprets Wittgenstein, he emphasised the fact that «you can be looking outwards and yet gaining first-person knowledge», «search for a meaning beyond the immediate Gestalt»; finally, this search leads the listener to experience within his «first-person perspective a state of mind that is not own» (Scruton [2004]: 7-9). A similar approach is at the base of actual research on neuromusicology: the thesis of mimicry and its empiric base in the mirror neurons (see Robinson [2016]).

In several occasions Wittgenstein feeds this idea of an internal reference about musical meaning:

The same strange illusion which we are under when we seem to seek something which a face expresses whereas, in reality, we are giving ourselves up to the

features before us – the same illusion possesses us even more strongly if repeating a tune to ourselves and letting it make its full impression on us, we say: «This tune says something» and it is as though I had to find what it says. And if, recognizing this, I resign myself to saying «It just expresses a musical thought», this would mean no more than saying «It expresses itself». (Wittgenstein [1964]: 166)

In his *Notebooks 1914-1916,* parallel to his working on the *Tractatus,* Wittgenstein also reveals a formalist understanding of music: «A tune is a kind of tautology, it is complete in itself; it satisfies itself» (Wittgenstein [1961a]: 40). Also, he shows the same conception already working in his later philosophy:

It has sometimes been said that what music conveys to us are feelings of joyfulness, melancholy, triumph, etc., etc. and what repels us in this account is that it seems to say that music is an instrument for producing in us sequence of feelings. And from this one might gather that any other means of producing such feelings would do for us instead of music. To such an account we are tempted to reply «Music conveys to us itself!» (Wittgenstein [1964]: 178)

The defence Ahonen made of her thesis is aided by a thorough analysis and counter attack of the following objections, as posited by Scruton:

1. Unlike in the case of natural language, we cannot take the ability to follow the rules of music as the criterion of understanding it, because listening is not an activity of the relevant kind (Ahonen [2005]: 520).

On the contrary, according to Ahonen, Wittgenstein brings musical examples since his idea is that the ability to make judgements in aesthetics is directly linked to learning the rules of the art in question. Of course this implies different degrees, as for example with the "counterpoint" case: to define the term, to identify a musical passage containing it, to be able to write a few bars of a contrapuntal structure, up to improvising. Wittgenstein also was thinking about what musicologists largely developed around the phenomenon experienced from the hierarchical tonal scale: implica-

tions, expectations, etc. He had the opinion that if one does not know that a dominant must be followed by a tonic degree he/she would not be able to experience the "question" in music. Familiarity with rules, as when one expresses discontent with a passage that does not harmonize, lead us presuppose there is a point in understanding associated to these rules. "Whistling" is, for example, Wittgenstein's favourite for explaining the familiarity with the rules of music.

2. Many listeners have not studied music theory, and cannot explain what they hear in theoretical terms (Ahonen [2005]: 524).

Ahonen ascribes this critique to the fact that Scruton is supporting a chomskian, universalist view on language and that is untenable to be transported to music. In section 1 we already explained why. However, according to Ahonen, one does not have to explain the rules in terms of consciously understanding the grammar; they are tacit knowledge. This does not imply however, that knowing the grammar does not allow us to understanding better the language. Ahonen moderates the argumentation and accepts that musical practice do not only implies knowing structural properties of the language but also to reproduce the fine nuances in a performance, described "metaphorically" in emotional and figurative terminology.

3. Explaining musical meaning and understanding in terms of rules does not do justice to the creative aspect of music. (Ahonen [2005]: 526)

Wittgenstein was aware that composers do not change the rules every time. This does not mean there is no creativity. In *Philosophical Investigations* (§203) he refers to language as a «labyrinth of paths» which does not prescribe which path one should take, although it makes movement possible.

4. The fact that people use mental terminology, emotional terminology in specific, when they describe music shows that the meaning of music is somehow related to mental states (Ahonen [2005]: 527).

Ahonen gives a clear example: «[I]f we are looking for criteria of understanding music, gen-

eral claims like describing Chopin's Etude op. 10 no. 12 as conveying a mental state of "wild despair", "resignation to one's fate", "passionate love", or "controlled anger" seem all equally plausible» (Ahonen [2005]: 528). The problem is that their role as criteria for understanding is less central. Another reason is that musical meanings should be suitably explained through musical means (see Robinson [1994]).

CONCLUSIONS

As it happens with questions of authority, whether Wittgenstein said one or the other thing, it all finally ends arising problems at the fundamental strata. The fundamental question asked by this paper is: Can we determine one or the other interpretation as prevalent when it comes to music understanding? The answer here is: no. Understanding music (musical signification) is possible when both following the rules and (inevitably) grasping mental states (arousal of feelings) occur in the mind of a listener. Meaning, although it is not beyond (as Idealism in music would posit), nor behind (as an expressive account would posit), is a complex but articulated phenomena of agreement in the rules (as a necessary condition) but the rules are inextricably intertwined with *forms of life*, which can be translated in Scruton's sense as mental states and consequently, in tastes. It is rather dubious that Ahonen only searched into Scruton's opinions in 2004 at the moment of writing the paper on musical understanding. In his entry to "Absolute music", Scruton had however the idea that:

The advocacy of absolute music has brought with it a view of musical understanding that is as questionable as anything written by Lizst in defence of the symphonic poem. It is of course absurd to suppose that one understands Smetana's Vltava primarily by understanding what it "means". For that seems to imply that the grasp of the melody, development, harmony and musical relations are all subordinate to a message that could have been expressed as well in words. But so too is it absurd to suppose that one has

understood a Bach fugue when one has a grasp of all the structural relations that exist among its parts. The understanding listener is not a computer. The logic of Bach's fugues must be heard: it is understood in experience and not in thought. And why should not the musical experience embrace feeling and evocation just as much as pure structured sound? (Scruton [2001a])

Wittgenstein was interpreted in linguistic domains as for example in Davidson's neopragmatism. This last philosopher speaks of meaning in terms of uses as effects or actions (Davidson [1978]). Curiously, whenever one wants to inquiry into musical meaning, uses and customs are hidden under formalist conceptions of the type Ahonen defended, although this tradition goes back to Hanslick [1854]. As a conclusion, the framework here presented should prevent us from being *puzzled* by the narrowness of language – albeit this being a very wittgensteinian opinion – while in the process of accounting for musical signification.

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