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Emotion without affect: towards a grammar of understanding-music concepts

Today, to speak about musical emotion in the usual sense of emotion in contemporary musics, such as acoustic-electrical, numerical, technologically advanced compositions, is almost attempting the impossible. The non-informed auditory will prefer to attend to classical music concerts, arguing that, in listening to these pieces, it is still possible to feel a strong emotion. It is as though tonal projection with its anticipation-tension-release phases mirrored something, a “logic” expressed in symbols, as Susanne Langer said¹⁵¹. Even some professional musicians might say so. Emotion, that’s good for tonal music, with melodies, or pop music, songs everybody can understand and repeat, as long as there is some main attraction center exerting its influence on a musical sequence.

1. «Getting out of oneself towards the external world» (S. Reich)

An example – though of a certain hesitation – between two kinds of music, «musique savante» as we say, and «musiques actuelles»¹⁵² is Steve Reich, who situates himself half way between the two¹⁵³. Here is what he answered to a question raised by Paul Hillier about his position *vis à vis* «musique savante»: in reply, he says: «My ears, no mathematical system». Of course, this answer is clearly intended against a conceptual or at least intellectualist approach to music. The target might be all sorts of scientifically-orientation methods of composition. In his writings¹⁵⁴, he indeed claims the importance of emotion, arguing that, in music, an individual sort of emotion is not what the musician should look for. But rather an experience that a hearing person or participant makes for the benefit of a total resorption, as in a quasi-ritual situation. Which implies one’s renouncement to feeling a personal experience. The latter must be on the contrary neutralized and becomes so-to-speak devoid of personal affect. That’s the condition upon which a collective emotion is possible in which each musician melts himself into the collective, « by getting out of himself towards the external world »¹⁵⁵. This experience means a shared hearing, like a common *Denkstil* through participation to a collective game¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵¹ After her reading of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* in a first book, *Philosophy in a new key* (1942), a book that appeared when Leonard Meyer was finishing his thesis. See p. 97, the common logic form between a musical piece and a feeling.

¹⁵² An official expression used by the ministry of culture and by the SFAM (Société Française d’Analyse Musicale) in December 2014 in order to obtain financial aid!

¹⁵³ On the 16th of December 2014, I presented a paper on: *Une écoute « savante » de compositeur pour une écoute «non-savante» de la musique: Steve Reich*. Steve Reich is an avant-garde experimental composer very difficult to classify who mixes «musiques savantes» and popular or «vernacular» (Paul Hillier) musics as many other composers in the US in the same years 1960-70.

¹⁵⁴ S. Reich, *Writings on music 1965-2000*, Oxford Univeristy Press, Oxford 2002, ed. with introd. by Paul Hillier.

¹⁵⁵ Reich mentions his *Music for 18 musicians* (1976) as the most achieved from this point of view, so that it has a «life», a «collective life». This condition makes music an art concerned with the soul of the collective, though not directly a social art.

¹⁵⁶A kind of «harmony of illusions» as the sociologist G. Le Bon used to say and L. Fleck after him. An anthropological aspect of music.

It is more than 100 years that music has totally changed, as regards such criteria as emotion. «Sentimentalism» has become the pet hate of musicians, especially among composers using a highly sophisticated technology of sound-composition. But emotion might also be understood differently from sentimentalism. And that's my point. When contemporary composers mention «emotion», the spirit of what they mean is turned towards the exploration of unheard structures, and this is what provokes a kind of very specific emotion, under the effect of unexpected sound-effects. Then the French word *toucher* used by Couperin gets a real meaning, but in relation to the state of being surprised by new sounds, and not to the state of anticipating it as a familiar one in a familiar frame.

Recently I heard Jose Manuel Lopez's *Matiera oscura*, and this is how he presented his piece, mentioning a special emotion when getting acquainted with astrophysicians' writings and discoveries. He meant an emotion half way between the scientific sort accompanied with discoveries, and music. And one can say this kind of «emotion» has been prevailing since Varese's idea of laboratories for composers searching in collaboration with physicists. The unexpected sound has a scientific flavour in accord with the scientific style of sounds-investigations of so-to-speak researchers¹⁵⁷.

My contention here is to show the growing independency of emotion and expression, as being two separate things. But, as is clear, given the plurality of meanings of emotion, one has to specify which sort of emotion is obsolete, and which sort of emotion is compatible with contemporary creation is at stake. Two questions arise: Is it a specific emotion like the kind of emotion Hanslick referred to? Is it the same kind of emotion as in tonal music?

2. *Hanslick's contribution to the distinction between emotion and expression: two benefits*

1) The separation between emotion and expression

The so-called formalist conception contributes to cast light on this separation emotion/expression at its root. To Eduard Hanslick, now wellknown and certainly more appreciated now than in his own times (1854), we owe much, especially his important stance in the controversy against Wagner. Anticipating the present-time debate, he helps us to understand what is at stake when we call for «emotion» today. In his times, expressing could still mean «expressing an emotion». After him, the grammatical import especially seen through the prism of Wittgenstein's grammar, changes in a meaningful manner as I will soon show. To one who would be tempted still now to say, in such contexts, that we «express emotions etc.», Hanslick seems to bring serious arguments against his view. The goal is rather to change our linguistic habits in a way that Wittgenstein, half a century later, has made perhaps more explicit by applying grammatical comparisons, in order to show us the way to using the verb «expressing» differently, freed from grammatical prejudices modelled on ready-made analogies. Namely, one cannot say any longer, after him, that a symphony or a sonata simply expresses a passion, joy or sadness. A different use of this verb excluding a transitive grammatical use of «feeling» or «emotion» opens a new conception of musical expression that stands out against a whole traditional conception of expression. It is as though we are still under the effect of Hanslick's formalist turn as Nattiez himself confesses (see further down)¹⁵⁸ when he speaks about a «negative theology in music».

¹⁵⁷See for example Hugues Dufourt's (interview) on *Musique avancée, musique pour tous* and other contributions in *Chercheurs ou artistes*, «Autrement», 158, oct. 1995, textes réunis par Monique Sicard.

¹⁵⁸ First music strikes us because or in virtue of its semiological (study of the signified) dimension: the sound is a sign, a means to express a thing totally alien to the sign (Hanslick).

2) *Crisis of emotion and access to meaning*

An interesting fact is that the formalist turn in music has generated an avowed interest into musical significance, or the other way round. One thing is sure, the emergence of meaning of music could but benefit from the Linguistic Turn, even if music made things more difficult in comparison with an articulated language proper to formalization. Between the crisis of emotion and access to meaning, one can see at least an interesting concomitance. Yet, I am not pretending that meaning in music has definitely excluded emotion, as I have hinted above. Let's first admit that it has put an end to what Adorno has labeled the «emotional type of man», *driving man away from hearing*.

Emotion at its easy level is a dubious contagion. It is as though, through emotion similar to a fluid, an effect could be communicated from a person to another. That's the «sympathy» we also find in the domain of social psychology, explained by such people as G. Tarde, etc. Adorno's severe appraisal of the «emotional type of man», when hearing music, is well-known (see his *Beaux passages*¹⁵⁹). This type of man exploited by the industry of art or musical production, lets himself overwhelmed with a first degree emotion that invades him, making him an easy prey of those who merchandize the work of art. The sociological remark is not only sociological. It has also a deep truth if one takes into account the status of the work of art in the process of hearing, a subject-matter Adorno has scrutinized. What the work of art becomes then is an object of alienated hearing, that ruins the work of art itself. In fact, the emotional type of man who bursts into tears, misses the very process of hearing it. So far, emotionality is more a pathological contagion than a real sensitiveness to music. It drives music away from its meaning which, as an enigma, is to be understood, and is not just reducible to irrational feelings¹⁶⁰. Exploiting pathos is an abuse leading to corrupting the very task of understanding the meaning of music. Under the guise of direct access to the content of music, emotion so conceived bars the way to it.

Adorno's point here does not fundamentally disagree with Hanslick's one as regards the «emotional content» of music Hanslick held irrelevant. Like for his predecessor, such an emotion closer to a pulsion, is to be controlled, and has no specifically musical dimension. The overflow of pulsional emotion rather reinforces the non-specificity of affects in music. In short, its anti-intellectualist character is no service rendered to expression in arts.

3. *Wittgenstein/ Tolstoy: a bad conception*

In the same vein, Wittgenstein who is so different from Adorno in these matters, also criticizes what he calls «Tolstoy's bad theorization» as regards the way art conveys a feeling¹⁶¹. It is not to say that Tolstoy emotional man embodies a «type» such as the one

The semiological here is the idea of a compositional whole (a language that signifies itself, Jakobson). This justifies Nattiez's interest in Hanslick.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Extracted from *Gesammelte Schriften* (Suhrkamp1973). In a French translation by Jean Lauxerois, publ. Payot, 2013.

¹⁶⁰ Th.W. Adorno, *Schöne Stellen*, radio talk, 1965, in Id., *Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 18., Musikalische Schriften V*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1997, pp. 695-718 (trad. Fr. *Beaux passages*, Payot, Paris 2013, p. 120). Lining the subjective experience with the «primacy of object» (a-conceptual), see Sh. Weber-Nicholsen, *Exact Imagination, Late work*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1997.

¹⁶¹ S. Zweig, *Tolstoi* in Id., *Drei Dichter ihres Lebens: Casanova, Stendhal, Tolstoi*, Insel, Leipzig 1928 (trad. Fr. in Id., *Trois poètes de leur vie, Stendhal, Casanova, Tolstoï*, Belfond, Paris 1983, p. 240). See also A. Soulez, *Au fil du motif: autour de Wittgenstein*, Delatour, Paris 2012, p. 39.

Adorno stigmatizes. But in some ways, Tolstoy's conception is not so different from what Adorno criticizes. True, Adorno's diagnosis is mainly directed against occidental music of the Romantic tradition. Yet the reader will note his critical remarks concerning the «slavic» mood and attitude to expressive sentimental music. That could apply to Tolstoy's view on music, especially in Russia in his time.

The lines I mention can be found in one of the Wittgenstein's *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (*Culture and Value*, 1947). Tolstoy's *What is Art?* and *Essays on Art*, first appeared in 1898. His vocabulary is evidently marked with expression of feelings, suffering, exaltation, and even rage¹⁶². The transmission of these feelings is similar to a sort of contagion of an infection (Tolstoy's own words). The «contagion» can be that of sincerity for the novelist. The words here are not critical and allow a good infection with depths of sincerity. The word *soul* is recurrent. Strangely enough, Alan Tormey who mentions Tolstoy's theory, but also some of Wittgenstein's views (not the Remarks of *Culture and Value* though), does not distantiate from the Russian's view in which he finds a good emotional attitude. In Tormey's book, introduced by Arthur Danto, what has to be dismissed is a «decorative» emotional conception of art, «not sincere», shallow. Not emotion in itself.

Wittgenstein is more distantiated and critical. His reading is not judgemental. It introduces an interesting critical attitude devoid of judgement in terms of truth and falsity. He indeed writes that there is «much to learn» from Tolstoy's bad conception. To have to learn much from a bad theory is very peculiar. Errors thus are fruitful. Study of the use of concepts in this domain will catch more light than an inquiry into the truth of Tolstoy's sayings. As regards understanding, confirms that this truth is not available. More relevant is the very use of concepts, what it reveals of a style of life. Tolstoy does not exhibit what is wrong in thinking about expressing feelings in music, but forms of life in his times. So, Wittgenstein's words are a real piece of grammatical insight at the cross between anthropology and aesthetics. Note that far from expressing a disappointment, it offers insights on grammatical features that are suggested by the bad theory, and shows the way to see things differently. The error of Tolstoy is not to be eradicated in favor of a truth, but to be identified as a source of prejudices. That's Wittgenstein's conception of therapy.

What happens then when this transmission of an emotion seems to occur, is an experience of «*gleichermassen.... schwingen*», that puts men in a relation of «answering in resonance» to each other. That's how understanding music looks like. Let me quote a part of this passage in the English version (*Culture and Value*, p. 58) : « You really could call it, not exactly the expression of a feeling (*Ausdruck eines Gefühls*), but at least an expression of feeling (*einen Gefühlsausdruck*), or a felt expression (*einen gefühlten Ausdruck*)». The latter is difficult to understand. Then the analogy comes: «And you could say too that insofar as people understand it, they “resonate” in harmony (*gleichermassen*) with it, respond to it ». Then the following lines propose an unexpected analogy with a ceremony of paying a visit and responding to it. At this point, as regards understanding music, anthropology meets aesthetics, a direction I would like to develop in my own way.

¹⁶² See Romain Rolland's famous book on Tolstoy, that was widely read in Russia. Strangely enough, to my knowledge, A. Tormey has not taken it into account. See also Arthur Danto's mitigated introduction to A. Tormey's book on *The Concept of Expression*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1971. Tormey read A. Danto's *The Artworld* (1964). The page 116 (and footnote 28) is interesting as it presents as soon as in the 1960's a critique of the aspect-theory in aesthetic perception in reference to B.R. Tighman's writings, but also to P. Kivy's ones. The critique of aspects in the aesthetic domain is articulated with putting into question the idea of an «aesthetic object» (Tighman). So far, aspect-theory is intended against the metaphysics of objects, typical of the 20th century.

It took Wittgenstein three steps, to modify the sequence «expression of a feeling» that now is discarded. The search for the right expression is interesting and also in accordance with Hanslick's principle of music-autonomy that the «work of art does not aim at conveying anything else than itself». Thereby, the semantical-grammatical adjustment looking for the right expression strengthens the formalist assertion. However, Wittgenstein offers an anthropological kind of comparison in order to grasp that «resonance in harmony» between an invitation and the response to it in an ordinary social context. At first sight, though, the comparison might appear shocking as what is common between hearing a musical piece and paying a visit to someone?

That's why it is not just an incidental philological remark on the English translation by «harmony», to stress the fact that the ceremony of responding to a visit conveys a dimension of *intensification of the response*, in proportion with the host's offer. It reminds us of a process of intensification in Marcel Mauss' case of giving a present. In the example mentioned twice by Alessandro Arbo in the volume on *Musique, emotion and signification* to which we both contributed¹⁶³, he quotes Wittgenstein's example of a smile you are looking at in a painting that in turn prompts you to respond with a smile. So «harmony» rather means equality of intensity between offering and responding, a case of reciprocity in transmission whereas I suggest here to see an increasing process of an anthropological kind. As Aaron Ridley says in his *Philosophy of music*¹⁶⁴, there is no equality between response and expectation here, no «fitness», but rather the situation that prompts someone to get the other better, an aspect that introduces a zest of inequality, good for intensification. Ridley stresses the fact that, in the visit case, no «paraphraseability principle» that normally allows a replacement of equivalent phrases that have the same meaning, is available. The same holds for musical or poetical cases of understanding in which «fitness is just out of place»¹⁶⁵.

4. *When life passes from the indincible Gefühl to expression*

One has therefore to count on a situation of «*schwingen*» (oscillate, vibrate) that allows a «life», a «life for me», that escapes protocols and behavioural codes, A. Ridley adds. That's how, thanks to practice, life passes from the indincible *Gefühl* to expression, from a private feeling to a shared expression. The visit, in the anthropological Wittgenstein mentioned, has given a publicly identifiable sense to a form of expression without a content that would have otherwise remained privately self-contained and incommunicable. I take it a fascinating point to stress, as Wittgenstein does, the shared aspect of feeling in anthropological contexts while the point is to serve, not so much sociological aspects, as the highest cause of music in the deepest manner. Remember Wittgenstein's own words : I live music, a thema, intensely, I have myself quoted in my book *Au fil du motif*. «Live» points to form of life when «living forms» lead to «forms of life».

If it is up to grammar, as Wittgenstein puts it, to describe such observable features displayed by two kinds of understanding, in music compared to a ceremony of visit, where

¹⁶³ M. Ayari et H. Makhlouf (ed.), *Musique, Signification et Émotion*, Delatour, Paris 2010.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. A. Ridley, *The Philosophy of music*, Edimburgh University Press, Edimburgh 2004, p. 31, when mentioning the face of shyness under the effect of frightness. Nothing to say as regards an event or an object with which that expression would be related. What happens here is «life in the features of the face», which, if they somehow change a little enable one, by comparison, to say something. One thus needs graduated correlations between two realms to make grammar have, by way of description, a hold on something that happens, that one could not determine at all in itself.

¹⁶⁵ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1953, I, §537.

understanding shows itself in situations of intensified reciprocity, through a so-to-speak «proportioned gestuality» between two or more agents, then we realize how much grammar might be a great thing when showing the power of an anthropological description in the aesthetical field of understanding. Note, that only at that point, one has stepped out of the ineffable sphere of inner experiences.

5. Back to Hanslick: What kind of movement is involved in music ? Dynamism of sound-forms in music vs emotional movement.

As J.-J. Nattiez points out, nous vivons encore dans l'ère hanslickienne¹⁶⁶. It is «l'essentiel credo esthétique occidental en matière de musique» still today. In a way, the correspondence, for example, between Eduard Saïd and Daniel Barenboim witnesses this credo. From a theoretical point of view, it is striking to observe among the musicologists a return to Hanslick whereas he has been so long considered as the most inactual philosopher of music in his own times. The «*tönend bewegte Formen*»: moving sound-forms indeed result from a «move» that is an effect produced by the dynamics of sound-forms¹⁶⁷. Such a «move» has nothing to see any longer, according to Hanslick, with the «muovere» or «commuovere» principle of the *Affektentheorie* of emotion-thoughts to which the «Musical Idea» used to refer. By saying so, Hanslick marks his opposition to the sentimental content of music, for instance in Daniel Schubart's theory, Hanslick's favourite target, author of *Ideen zu einer Aesthetik der Tonkunst*, (Wien, 1806), but also Carl-Philipp Emmanuel Bach (one of Bach's sons).

For Hanslick, what is important is the interior singing, that presupposes a kind of modeling activity (*ein Bilden*) shaping sounds into forms of relations. That's what composition is, according to a Humboldtian conception of activity of language, with a special stress on the role of «fantasy», beyond the opposition between intellect and sentiment¹⁶⁸.

The conception of effects caused by sounds indeed contributes to make music a «language» in which displaying of forms does not directly aim at «expressing feelings», at least understood as a pathological dimension of understanding music¹⁶⁹. Hanslick translates von Humboldt in the sphere of sounds that constitutes its acoustic substratum (Carl Dahlhaus).¹⁷⁰ In order to justify the production of an objective system of meaning or sense by the work of the «*Geist*» when applied to language as a material, Humboldt writes in his *Comparative Study of languages*, that «the essence of language consists in pouring material into the phenomenal world in the form of thought», a sentence Husserl has favourably commented in his *4th Logical Research*.

The same in music. The process of working on shaping interior Form or «*Geist*», consists in exerting itself on sounds as material in which the sound-forms are produced in an active manner «as stemming from the interior». Such a conception that brings to the foreground the

¹⁶⁶ Cf J.-J. Nattiez, *Comment raconter le XXe siècle*, in Id. (ss dir. de), *Musiques: une histoire pour le XXIe siècle*, Actes Sud/Cité de la musique, Paris 2003, pp. 39-61.

¹⁶⁷ That Suzanne Langer assimilates to the movement the physical process of emotions.

¹⁶⁸ Enrico Fubini, *Gli enciclopedisti e la musica*, Einaudi, Torino 1971 (trad. Fr. *Les philosophes et la musique*, Honoré Champion, Paris 1983).

¹⁶⁹ See further down, the reference to the «arousing theory» stemming from a certain cognitive reading of Kant.

¹⁷⁰ C. Dahlhaus, *Die Idee der absoluten Musik*, Bärenreiter, Kassel 1994 (trad. Fr. *L'Idée de musique absolue*, Contrechamps, Genève 1997, p. 101).

idea of a material penetrated with « *Geist* », makes Hanslick not only a formalist or the first positivistic musicologist, as is often said, but also, more paradoxically, a precursor of a well-known anti-formalist thinker as resolute as Adorno. In his *Adorno's musical aesthetics* (Cambridge UP 1993, p. 66), Max Paddison quotes these lines of Hanslick extracted from *The Beautiful in Music*, in order to show what Adorno owes in fact to his predecessor: « Composing is the work of *Geist*, able to be spiritualized, (*ein Arbeiten des Geistes in geistfähigem Material*) as the creation of a thinking and feeling mind, it follows that a musical composition possesses at a highest degree, the very ability to be *geistvoll* and *gefühlvoll* »¹⁷¹.

What about emotion then, in what sense, emotion is not the «right motion» to take in consideration in the case of music ?

6. Hanslick's «denegation» of what ? (Peter Kivy)¹⁷². The Aria's case in the *l'Orfeo ed Euridice*, by Gluck

Peter Kivy has attempted to scrutinize what Hanslick was really «denegating» when combatting emotion as a musical content. Denegating is stronger than negating. It involves a refusal of something that could be too important. You denegate something that could be tempting. This denegative stance about emotional expressivity of music might well put, by contrast, something else in evidence. To get out of the negative thesis (inexpressivity of music) Peter Kivy will soon introduce his argument in favour of the «arousal theory» in music, stemming from a certain reading of key-passages of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, (namely §§ 53-54) using these lines as a detour against the *Affekten-Lehre* that Kant inherited, that could offer Hanslick a positive issue out of a mere negative strategy.

The well-known example of Gluck's *Orfeo* reveals a contradiction that Hanslick has mentioned. Peter Kivy rereads Hanslick's developments on Gluck's *Orfeo* in a new translation by Payzant presented in 1987 (see P. Kivy, *The fine art of repetition*, ch. XV, p. 265 and footnote). It is the famous Orfeo's *Lamento* to which the libretto «Che farò senza Euridice?» is supposed to correspond, bringing tears to the hearer's eyes, whereas the music seems to express nothing sad. Yet, in passing, Peter Kivy adds that the anti-emotionalist writer (Hanslick) could say so while as a musical criticist, he could refer to affects! Not a least paradox.

The *Orfeo*'s case illustrates the absence of objectivity that is typical of feeling as a pathos that prevents from making it a «content» of music. As we know Hanslick on the contrary vindicates objectivity in music. When Orfeo sings «Che farò senza Euridice?», he expresses his misfortune for the second time turning again his eyes towards his beloved, now a lost object, whereas it is forbidden. The phrase is distressing while on the contrary the music does not express sorrow so much, and could well correspond to why not joy ? Therefore, there is a real disagreement between the movement of sound-forms, and the movement of emotion. We are here facing a case of discordance between two meanings, textual and musical, of so-to-speak «ill-attuned dynamisms». Leonard Meyer devotes a good discussion to Hanslick's non-emotionalist *Orfeo* case in *Emotion and meaning in music*¹⁷³.

¹⁷¹ Of course, no question here to say that Adorno prolongates Hanslick. The reader is aware of Adorno's critique of the famous «formalist» Hanslick who missed the critical conception of *Vermittlung* at a social level but also the historical dimension of the material.

¹⁷² Ch. XVI, see title p. 276, in P. Kivy, *The Fine art of repetition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1993.

¹⁷³ L.B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, Chicago University Press, Chicago 1956 (trad. Fr. *Emotion et signification en musique*, préface de J.-J. Nattiez, Actes Sud, Arles 2010). Hanslick's thesis, he writes, is anti-referentialist or non-representationalist (no

7. *Leonard Meyer and Hanslick's emotionalism: Towards a depsychologized emotion (more about Gluck's Orfeo)*

In favour of a «absolutist expressionist» view that L. Meyer makes his own one, the reader finds a good discussion of Hanslick's example in which the American author on the contrary emphasizes the strong presence of an expectation affect that was already there, but is to be contradicted : see p. 177 Gluck's Aria, ex. 43. Hanslick's denegation of emotion is only intended as a negative strategy against a certain theory of expression.¹⁷⁴ As a strategy, it does not tell all it means. Music has nothing to express outside itself. Nattiez suggests a kind of «negative theology» about the musical beautiful for Hanslick. Such is the «auto-telic conception of musical *renvoi*» (Jean Molino),

So far, «formalism» as such appears as a restrictive frustrating theory. Alone it does not hold true, Meyer says. It must be completed, enriched. On the other hand, we perfectly know that Hanslick did not exclude emotion at all. He only denied that emotion was a definitory character of music at the level of its content, philosophically speaking. He himself allows a role to a kind of emotion he considers as «specific» to music, and intrinsically different from emotion as a general pathos occurring in life. He writes *à propos* this fragment that «a strong affectivity emanates from it, in spite of the ironical commentary it suggests to Hanslick». What makes these passages especially poignant, are «the tensions, the inhibited tendencies it contains in so far as the expectation arises before the structural voids created by the overture mottoes are filled up. It is only once the omitted notes have been introduced that the tensions get released and that the melody concludes».

He adds that for Gluck, who knew, he could rely on the written text of the libretto in order to characterize the affect¹⁷⁵, the assumption that music had to do the same job, was superfluous. However such a remark rather enhances the value of the text, and this would not please somebody like Hanslick. It also confirms the disagreement between the story of Orfeo and music, rather than it puts this disagreement into question.

The affect is contingent and its movement perturbrates the movement of the sound-forms rather than is aroused by it¹⁷⁶. It is parasitic to it. Clearly opposed to Hanslick's anti-

reference to an object external to music) as well as non-causalist.

¹⁷⁴ See ch. 9 of Dahlhaus' *Musikaesthetik* Labia's group have translated for Vrin publ., now published under the title *L'esthétique musicale*. See also in a translation in French by J. Labia, *Sur l'impression subjective de la musique et sa place dans l'esthétique* (1853), in Carole Maigné (ed), *Formalisme esthétique, Prague et Vienne*, Vrin, Paris 2012. It is to be the 5th chapter of *The Beautiful in music*, Hanslick's great opus.

¹⁷⁵ See P. Kivy, *The Fine art of Repetition*, cit., ch. XV. Peter Kivy is severely treated by A. Ridley Ridley who qualifies him as an «automania». The reason is his Kantianism underlying his *Music Alone*, which is his manifesto in favour of the autonomy of music. Kivy is devotes interesting thoughts about the arousing phenomenon stemming from a sharp reading of Kant's *Critique du Jugement*, § 49 in which he reads a cognitivist interest in connection with the aesthetical ideas to which Kant refers. See also P. Kerszberg, *The sound of the life-world*, «[Continental Philosophy Review](#)», Volume 32, [Issue 2](#), April 1999, pp 169-194; A. Soulez, *Place pur une émotion spécifiquement musicale*, in M. Ayari et H. Makhoulf (ed.), *Musique, Signification et Émotion*, Delatour, Paris 2010, p. 53.

¹⁷⁶ A distinction I hold as purely methodological : Affect is contingent and its movement perturbrates, as we have said, the movement of sound-forms rather than it arouses them. *Bewegung* is a key-notion that indicates the dynamic properties of music. The musical beautiful is «moving forms». «There is no form that could be opposed to content, and vice versa». The form is already filled up. That's is Herbat's view the first labelled «formalist» in

referentialism, Meyer represents an amended view of formalism, that makes it compatible with sentimental expressionism. The two, according to him, could be seen as complementary. His conception gets closer to S. Langer's notion of musical significance (in Ogden and Richards' sense) according to which music is able to convey a «lived» aspect of man, or «*vécu*», a felt experience, although one cannot say what music really means by that.

It is true that once the specificity of musical emotion is recognized, once it is clear that the movement of sound-forms is not the movement of emotion, Hanslick leaves us free to deal with our emotions, without offering a positive conception.

Yet, in contrast with Meyer's amended view, my suggestion rather is: in order to grasp Hanslick's point in which I find an unavoidable methodological point, it is clear that one has to understand musical emotion less as such a neatly demarcated kind of emotion, apart from a pathos, than as a kind of «depsychologized emotion». My view closer to Wittgenstein's conception introduces a process of «depsychologization» that follows what I have called Wittgenstein's grammatical progress (in three steps) I have described above (his remark on Tolstoy). The benefit of a grammatical progress is that it needs not distinguish (and thereby essentialize) two kinds of movement or «motions», here emotional, there musical. That's too doctrinal, and does not tell us why there is nonetheless emotion as pathos in music.

8. *Towards an depsychologized emotion (Hanslick's way to a positive view ?). The doctrinal) problem of the neat distinction between two «movements», emotional and musical. Betsy Jolas' view.*

Indeed, following Hanslick's negative view, one comes to distinguishing two species of expressions of emotion, as if there were two essences of motion. That's in a way Stephen Davies' view: expression of emotion «in music», is to be distinguished from expression of emotion «through» music¹⁷⁷. Hanslick would rather endorse the first species. The musical «motion» is at its maximum in the first kind of emotion. Emotion «in music» is closely tied to this movement from which musical meaning proceeds. The other species is external to this movement. The distinction justifies Hanslick's «denegation» of the «sentience» aspect of emotion – or the ability to feel in life-situations – to which music is indifferent, according to Hanslick. Better then focus on the first species or «emotion in appearances» as Stephan Davies says, meaning that «emotions» coming from «hearing in sounds» calls for a secondary use of the word «emotion». Yet, if we accept to do so, there is a risk: separating music from life under the pretext of de-psychologizing emotion.

Rather than losing ourselves in speculations, let us come back to the hearer's point of view, The «hearer» here being the one who listens to music and tries to understand what it «expresses». I will then end with Betsy Jolas's view that after all is not alien to Wittgenstein and Adorno,

Is there such a separation between the two «motions»? Methodologically, there must be one for sure, but from the point of view of the hearer, as the composer Betsy Jolas¹⁷⁸ puts it, the two movements are correlated and one can consider that the emotional movement is transformed into a musical movement that is experienced by the hearer – if the hearing is

aesthetics, as Enrico Fubini says in his *Les philosophes et la musique* (1983), I have referred (see footnote). What could be said perhaps is that the movement of musical forms has kept something from the emotional movement, but separately or in abstraction from all sort of external causality.

¹⁷⁷ S. Davies, *Themes in philosophy of music*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003, p. 134.

¹⁷⁸ B. Jola, *Molto espressivo*, recueil de différents textes réunis par A. Ramaut, L'Harmattan, Paris 1999; ici le texte est celui qu'elle a prononcé à Berkeley, 1981, p. 181.

«active» – and in the case of contemporary music, with the help of the education of the ear. What is this «transformation»? From which more specific point of view?

There is something that here needs clarification: it is not the same to point out to an emotional movement first, and a specifically musical movement at a second stage, except perhaps genetically speaking (see further down, the Hungarian composer G. Ligeti's example), as to reversely say that there is a specifically musical emotion that comes from the purely specific musical movement (Hanslick's internal point). Betsy Jolas' point in fact rather suggests a process of re-creation using sound-movements, emanating from an emotional experience, so that the latter finds itself integrated in sound-structures in virtue of a «*metamorphosis*».

She nonetheless mentions emotional affects provoked by hearing sound-structures, she says in contemporary music as in tonal music. Denying a neat distinction between the two kinds of movement, that is between two sorts of emotion, sentimental and musical, emotion she says occurs before and after at different stages, under different movemental aspects, perhaps half felt half musically experienced, so that the two in fact mingle rather than they succeed to each other. An aspectual approach here would be therefore more appropriate.

If Stravinsky dared to declare in a provocative way that «music is by essence totally unable to express whatsoever», a famous phrase he writes in *Chroniques de ma vie*, that takes «express» in a sentimental sense, one should argue, Jolas adds, that this stance is very problematic for the very defense of contemporary music he advocated, as it could rather be used by his own enemies.

I think that there is a misunderstanding here or rather a distortion.

Two senses of expression :

- 1- «Inexpressive», yes, music is *in Hanslick's sense*, that is totally favourable to music, contemporary or not. It does not mean a (transitive) content. I have insisted on that. And that's clear.
- 2- Now, if by «inexpressive», one also means «*without expression*», this is wrong.

9. Betsy Jolas's point

Expressivity is that of musical sound-signs; they express themselves, not something else outside. But, Betsy who, as she confesses, first thought they could be separate and clear-cut, came to realize that there is a moving reciprocal transition from the semantic aspect to the musical, as they appeal to each other. She mentions *Like a sick eagle* by the American composer Charles Ives, Webern's opus 16, 5 canons, or Alban Berg's *Wozzek*. Such are living examples of what she calls a «metamorphosis in sounds». When Stravinsky himself says that, from his point of view of a hearer, there are indeed sensations generated by music, as by the displaying of architectural forms, he acknowledges the integration of the emotional ingredient into the complex structure of his composition. He speaks as a composer who is also by the same way an active hearer (“*écoute active du compositeur*”). The acousmatic composer will not say the contrary who exploits aspects of «hearing as» as a compositional material.

Yet, to allege with Betsy Jolas the transformation or metamorphosis from a kind of movement (emotional) to and into the other kind of sound-movements, is not a concession to a cognitivist conception of emotional feelings as one would find in the *Arousal theory* proposed by Peter Kivy.

My point of view here on what is discursively attainable in music chooses the hearer in the position of understanding what he hears *actively*. Understanding music therefore is what we can talk about. It requires a method, not an aesthetic method like Hanslick's one. The active

hearing covers and combines if not requires both in the same person, the understanding hearing man, one of us, and the active hearing of the composer.

10. An example of depsychologization: Ligeti's *Apparitions* (1958-9), a genetic approach compatible with Wittgenstein grammatical progress

As a musical illustration of this approach, let us mention Ligeti's motto of the spider. There is a terrifying aspect of the spider he used to see in his grand-mother's house when he was a child. That's the pulsional aspect of the motto. From that pulsion of terror, artistically sterile, to the musical motto of *Apparitions* (1958-9, Köln, 1960), there is a big gap, a real discontinuity. Ligeti could not have put in sounds his primeal terror, yet, his musical timbre-work is not any longer a causal product of fear and strong emotions. The spider has become a sound-figure. A kind of metamorphosis that accompanies domestication of a terrifying motive. Using devices of fusion, Ligeti writes interweaving forms implying the suppression of intervals by reaction to serial music, in favour of a ramified entanglement of sound-textures. Is there a choice here? No. Ligeti rather acknowledges that music is the transformed (my expression is: *la transformée sonore*) process of his earlier pulsions, as though the latter had been tamed through associations between forms, colours, materiality¹⁷⁹. Some Freudian considerations here would not be out of place, although Freud, as he himself conceded, had nothing to say about music.

11. Conclusion

My plea for a theory of musical understanding yields an interdisciplinary combination of philosophy of language, grammar (description of understanding through the use of words and sentences), and semiology (a notation for signs for sounds) or a symbolism for sounds.

- Comparative grammar of expressions only can save us from the unexpressible obstacle to clear expression of understanding combining;
- semiology because of the status of musical signs whose signified entities are unspeakable;
- philosophy of language because of the «language» of music, were it a language devoid of emotion, having no vocabulary (no semantical, or conceptually void) expressed in sounds only, without reference to things. As long as the status of music as language is in question, philosophy of language is a necessary approach for us. But it does not compell us to assume that art or music is a language (Collingwood, Ducasseink so). It only gives sense to the inquiry. I rather rejoin G. Hagberg's view that «music takes up where language leaves off»¹⁸⁰. But to say so presupposes philosophy of language.

Grammar here implies a comparatist confrontation of expressions of musical understanding as they are used in different situations upon the condition that one works with different registers at a public level: «I'll take the movements done as the signs that the work is understood» (Wittgenstein). Gestuality in a public space, not emotion in the private forum of an individual. See what Wittgenstein writes in 1948: «Musical understanding is a gesture that insinuates itself in my life, that I make mine, in an uncalculable, unpredictable way»¹⁸¹.

¹⁷⁹ See G. Lygeti, *L'atelier du compositeur*, Contrechamps, Genève 2013, pp. 169-170 sur *Apparitions*, 1958-1959, where Ligeti left serialism and broke with harmonie, to take care of textures and complex sounds on the way of micropoliphony, towards *Klangkomposition* (pp. 171-172).

¹⁸⁰ G.L. Hagberg, *Art as language*, Cornell University Press, Itacha (N.Y.) 1995, p 16.

¹⁸¹ One says: «A whole world is contained in a small phrase» (L. Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1982). This is to be understood *cum grano salis*, as one could wrongly

Two methodological features meet here, as necessary moments as well as concomitant: Grammar and «depsychologization» as a condition for grammar. So far, the status of the emotional is very different when felt individually, or shared. The shared character of emotion (see our remarks on Steve Reich, see here-above) is a condition for transmission of expressive movement at a meaning level, in the context of a work of art. This articulation can be grasped only through grammatical description proper to drive us away from the «cliché of the ineffable» (A. Ridley). Understanding provides the access to musical expression not only internally but also externally (in context).

Again the work of depsychologization, or desaffectivization, is a condition for the communication of an articulable kind of emotion in a public space. If emotion is not an articulable language, it is only in an articulated garb that emotion can become expressive because shared. Without articulation, there is no expression in artistic context. Yet expression is nothing expressed. It reveals itself in forms of language that are used when showing the *how* of the arrangement of signs through which our understanding exhibits itself.

It would be a mistake to infer from the impossibility to say «what» is said, the possibility of *something* expressed. The impossibility to say what is expressed is not an issue nor a compensation. In the *Tractatus*, it is true that what cannot be said, can be shown. But this does not mean that the *what* is somehow saved in the passage from saying to showing. There is no more «thing expressed» than there is «said content». The problem is the same one in the two alternative realms.

The belief in something expressed is conventional. In fact, what is observed is rather the multifarious use of adjectival words and forms by which one attributes qualities to what he hears or sees, because he has no substantive expression available to define a «something» understood as such, as Nattiez himself says in his introduction to Hanslick's *The beautiful in music*¹⁸². Even the professional musician or composer can be extremely vague when speaking about his music. He will appear as vague and literary as an hearer of his piece. Today contemporary composers get their inspiration from great paintings. Turner's Snowstorm for instance inspires the young Arturo Fuentes, but Hugues Dufourt who mostly loves Italian paintings likes to project some favourite paintings before we hear his piece. This literary facet does not prevent the composer to be technical when explaining for instance how he used such and such device, or obtained such effect. But neither the technical nor the literary approach will say anything of the musical *content*. Just the music.

For this reason, I find the obsession of the «inexpressivity of music» a bad thing. It has recently become a slogan. Who is not a formalist these days ? Santiago Espinosa for instance uses to stress it too much (after Clément Rosset). In a way, music is very very expressive, not because there is *something* expressed, with or without emotions, but precisely because there is *nothing* expressed. *Because of « nothing expressed», I would paradoxically maintain that there is expressiveness in a way that excludes emotion not «in re» but «in dicto».*

The relation between *nothing* expressed and non emotional expressivism is inversally

infer from it the belief that there is some transmissible content communicated, because of the illusion that something is said, whereas there is no such thing, nothing «said». What shows off is but gestures, a *how*, not a *what*, that exhibit the way something heard has been understood in a given cultural context. What is revealed is the cultural dimension of understanding music, not a «musical content» as such. But one is tempted to take the cultural dimension for the content. As to the musical significance, it is revealed through understanding-behaviours with which grammar deals.

¹⁸² J.J. Nattiez, Introduction to E. Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, R. Weigel, Leipzig 1854 (trad. Fr. *Du Beau dans la musique*, Christian Bourgois, Paris 1986, p. 33).

proportional. Density of expression increases in proportion to decreasing content expressed. The less content is expressed, the more there is expression, which happens when expressiveness of sound-figures has succeeded to master a first degree kind pulsional emotional expressivity (Ligeti). In order to understand Ligeti's point, one needs not exclude the emotional ingredients of his earlier affects when he was a child afraid by spiders.

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