

# Modernism with Spirit: Wittgenstein and the Sense of the Whole

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## 1 Wittgenstein's double orientation in music

That Wittgenstein was a lover of romantic music, familiarized with tonal music, is not in contradiction with what he had to say in the field of music if viewed from a 'modern' perspective. He himself declared in 1929 that his *Kulturideal* derived from Schumann's, although his continuation (*Fortsetzung*) of this ideal differed from the way it had actually been continued in the second half of the nineteenth century (after Schumann's death). This remark shows that he was aware of the new trends in music in his time, the so-called 'Vienna School'. He used to play the clarinet and take part in concerts on private occasions. In the 1920s, he was a close friend of Rudolf Koder who, in the early part of the decade, introduced him to the blind pianist and organist Josef Labor. Labor had in the past followed Eduard Hanslick's lectures in Vienna on the history of music.<sup>1</sup> It is possible to show that, in spite of the musical milieu Wittgenstein belonged to through his family and his personal contacts with professional musicians, his conception of music extended beyond the classical repertoire, at least on a methodological level.

There is, therefore, an intriguing double orientation: on the one hand, a strong awareness of his belonging to older cultural models in music, and on the other hand, on a methodological level, far-reaching views that place him ahead of his time. This double aspect helps to understand how Wittgenstein could be critical of modernism in the 1930s, and at the same time promote a certain 'spirit' of

<sup>1</sup> For the correspondence of Wittgenstein and R. Koder, see *Wittgenstein und die Musik*, with essays by Martin Alber (Innsbruck: Haymon, 2000). See also *Wittgenstein, Ludwig: Denkbewegungen, Tagebücher 1930-32, 1936-1937*, ed. Ilse Somavilla (Innsbruck: Haymon, 1997).

modernity as regards his conception of philosophy based on the model of the arts, in reaction to the analytical philosophy his *Tractatus* had been first thought to represent.

Wittgenstein's view of music, indeed, shows this double aspect as regards modernity and confirms that 'modernity' runs along the centuries as a mobile entity, displacing itself along several lines. I will set forth the idea of the 'Modern with spirit' through his critique of the loss of the 'sense of whole,' which takes some of his contemporary artists as a target. Yet, keeping in mind the crucial schema of the 'Musical Idea' mentioned in his earlier *Tractatus*, I will show that, although after the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein had done with all spiritual entities of any sort – mind, interior processes, mentalism, intention as prior to action – language as invested with a kind of inspiration still lies at the heart of his idea of modernism with a spiritual dimension. My interpretation is that, like Schoenberg who expressed the same feeling, Wittgenstein's complaint about the loss of this 'sense of the whole' in the 1930s was still pervading his conception of philosophical activity in comparison to the arts. Readers usually agree that later on, philosophy breaks into fragmentary remarks that Wittgenstein himself confesses he is unable to gather in one unitary thought.<sup>2</sup> To the question of whether this view is contradictory with the need for the missing sense of the whole advocated in the early 1930s, which presupposes a *sub specie aeternitatis* viewpoint, my answer is resolutely no!

## 2 'What is modern?' – An architectural question in Vienna between the two wars

'What is Modern?'<sup>3</sup> (1930) is a famous article written by the architect Josef Frank, the brother of Philipp Frank who was a member of the Vienna Circle. Josef Frank, the future author of *Architecture als Symbol* (Vienna, 1931), was present at the first Congress of Modern Architecture in La Sarraz in 1928 (the CIAM). 'Modern' is an expression commonly used by Viennese architects having in common the practical aim of privileging human needs according to a conception of housing that was critical of the German *Neue Sachlichkeit* or

<sup>2</sup> Foreword to PI.

<sup>3</sup> In *Die Form*, n. 15. The expression 'Modern architecture' is also the title of Otto Wagner's famous book, first published in 1896 by Verlag von Anton Schroll and Co., then with amendments in a 3rd ed. 1902, ed. Harry F. Malgrave, trans. W. Herrmann, 4th ed. 1914; last publication: 1988 by The Getty Centre.

‘New Objectivity’. The controversies among architects and urbanists were of first importance in Austria between the two wars. It was the time for the ‘social reconstruction’ of the city and competing styles of housing (*Siedlungen* or *Höfe*) were at stake in the social-democratic municipality of ‘Red Vienna’. Josef Frank’s modernism shows affinities with the use of the ‘modern’ in the ‘Scientific Conception of the World’ advocated by the founders of logical empiricism. In their Manifesto,<sup>4</sup> Otto Neurath is the leading voice in favour of ‘*Sachlichkeit*’ (Objectivity) in an Austrian sense, which is to be distinguished from the German movement of ‘New Objectivity’, because the latter’s conception of ‘rationality without life’,<sup>5</sup> which favoured industrial production and the domination of the machine, ignored human aspirations.

In the architectural programme as well as in philosophy, one could read a futurist programme of happiness, the rejection of superfluous entities through the application of Occam’s razor (in architecture, decoration and luxury; in philosophy, metaphysical abstractions), the sense of the real without the cult of functionalism, combined with the claim of clarity linked to use in life, and – against the German universalization of function – the importance of symbols in communication at the level of real life.<sup>6</sup> All of these ‘modern’ requirements find their expression in the methodological claim of formalism looking for exactness and clarity. Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* itself incarnates this strong affiliation of a logical work with an architectural building. Some interpreters suggested that this scaffolding looked like a ‘syntax of silence’ (G. Gebauer) interpreted into forms and stone. The house designed by Adolf Loos’s pupil Paul Engelmann along with Wittgenstein for the latter’s sister Margarethe Stonborough, in 1926, materializes this project. Externally ‘modern’, the house’s interior was obsessively adjusted to Margarethe’s needs in order to make it a ‘house embodied logic’.<sup>7</sup>

As regards architecture, Paul Engelmann certainly deserves more attention. He was the most attentive observer of Wittgenstein’s life and his artistic inclinations towards architecture, especially in connection with music.<sup>8</sup> One interesting aspect that would be difficult to grasp without referring to Engelmann is Wittgenstein’s

<sup>4</sup> ‘The Scientific Conception of the World’, in *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung: Der Wiener Kreis*, eds. F. Stadler and T. Uebel (Vienna: Springer, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> See the appeal to life in the last sentence of The Scientific Conception of the World, 90: ‘The scientific world-conception serves life, and life embraces it’.

<sup>6</sup> See Alena Kubova, ‘Josef Frank: proposition d’une modernité’ in *L’architecte et le Philosophe*, ed. Antonia Soulez (Liège: Mardaga, 1993), 37.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Bernhard Leitner, ‘La maison de Wittgenstein’, in *Vienne, l’Apocalypse, joyeuse*, ed. Jean Clair (Paris: éditions du centre Pompidou, 1986), 536.

<sup>8</sup> *Ludwig Wittgenstein, Paul Engelmann, Briefe, Begegnungen, Erinnerungen*, Ilse Somavilla in collaboration with Brian McGuinness (Innsbruck-Wien: Haymon, 2006).

special approach to the connection between formalism, art and seeing the world *sub specie aeterni*. This triangular nexus furnishes Wittgenstein's representation with a method for clarity. Such are the requirements for its 'modernity', especially modelled on the constructive arts as they were taught at the School of Applied Arts in the same years. It is not modernism in itself, nor achieved modernism in a historical sense, but modernism with a 'spirit', which, as I maintain, could only be compared with Schoenberg's *Musical Idea*.

### 3 Formalism and Modernism: Eduard Hanslick's 'sound-forms in movement'

Wittgenstein's 'modernity', indeed, conveys a view '*sub specie aeternitatis*' of the 'centrality of language', firstly based on the *Abbildungs*-model of music in the *Tractatus*, and then, in his later philosophy, on a model of understanding-playing music. A 'modernist' aspect of formalism in music is to be traced back to the historian of music Eduard Hanslick. Of course, in the mid-nineteenth century, 'formalism' could not have the same meaning as the analytical method of 'New Logic' that was imposing itself in 1920s Vienna. Yet, it is worth noting that Hanslick's contribution to the history of music made room for a new claim in favour of formal aspects *within* the field of tonal music, in contrast with theories endorsing a sentimental conception of musical content as *Affekt*. For sure, such 'modernity' is to be understood as different from the Vienna School's 'modern music' that was to come half a century later.

One can understand the connection between forms and life only through movement, yet not in the sentimental sense of *muovere*, which was considered as a clue for grasping content in the earlier *Affekttheorie* of musical content. Wittgenstein's apparent anti-sentimentalism is an aspect of this Hanslickian 'modernist' heritage. The question of musical 'content' in the mid-nineteenth century was a matter of violent controversy among the representatives of the so-called 'Absolute Music', opposing Wagner and Hanslick. Yet Hanslick's formalist conception imposed itself only later. Music as language also calls for a study of the signified, as Hanslick pointed out: 'The sound is a sign ... a means to express a thing totally alien to the sign.' The semiological potentiality of Hanslick's conception of the autonomy of the musical as based on sound-forms introduced musical meaning through the idea of a compositional whole according to which a language signifies itself.

Hanslick's formalism was motivated by a new conception of absolute music, turned against the opera and deeply anti-Wagnerian in spirit.<sup>9</sup> The discarding of voice and libretto was part of the formalist strategy's quest for meaning in music. His objection to the sentimental content of music foreshadows the later current of anti-psychologism that strongly inspired both Frege and Husserl's respective conceptions of logic and objectivity of thought. In these respects, it is striking to realize how much of a pioneer Hanslick was. Preparing the field for musical meaning by distinguishing the expressivity of articulated musical expression from the expressivity of emotion, he paved the way towards 'modernism' methodologically conceived.

The aesthetical source of Hanslick's 'forms in movement' is a key to understanding the conception of 'form as content' and 'content as form,' which first appeared in his argument against Wagner's conception of 'Absolute Music'. The interchange between content and form tends to blur the traditional opposition between the two. The fact that this opposition disappears makes us understand that expressing is not expressing something, transitively speaking. According to Hanslick, 'moving sound-forms'<sup>10</sup> – or, so to speak, formal content in music – are not reducible just to the 'Form' of empty sound-elements (*Tönen*), devoid of expression. This reduction would, rather, be the way his opponents presented his formalism. Form according to him means, on the contrary, an already full and active one, a kind of (music-) 'specific' force-form, exactly the opposite of an empty entity or a mould to be filled with content. Its expressiveness is that of the 'Idea' or 'Musical Idea' freed from sentimentality, closer to von Humboldt's conception of *Geist*, which he knew and to a certain extent integrated.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4 From sentimental feeling towards expressivity of meaning: A modern step

Wittgenstein invented a special non-eliminativist strategy to deconstruct the expressivity of sentiment in order to reshape it to mean expressivity with the

<sup>9</sup> In a text mentioned further below, written in 1946, titled 'New music ...,' Schoenberg is not so favourable vis-à-vis Hanslick, in whom he perhaps saw a strongly engaged anti-Wagnerian partisan. Hanslick's attacks on Wagner's conception of absolute music contributed to dividing musicians in the 1850s.

<sup>10</sup> 'Tönend bewegte Formen'. Cf. *Vom musikalisch-Schönen* (1854). This is in opposition to Daniel Schubart or Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, who at that time represented the current of aesthetics taking emotion as the true content of a musical idea.

<sup>11</sup> As recalled by Carl Dahlhaus in his *Aesthetics of Music*, trans. William Austin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 52.

means of grammatical analysis. It is the way Wittgenstein ‘depsychologizes psychology’.<sup>12</sup> He thereby provides a condition of access to musical meaning by opening a way from the inducible *Gefühl* to expression proper. I take it as a ‘modernist’ turn to which grammar has contributed. Grammar provides a better reformulation of expressivity that is neither vitiated by an illusory picture of content nor entirely rejected on a logical basis. By dissolving the prejudice that music expresses a sentimental content, it shows that expressing is not a transitive operation. Only on the basis of this model could meaning in language be conceived without falling into the trap of the cliché of ineffability. As Moritz Schlick<sup>13</sup> once wrote, if music dealt with the content of expression, no one could hear it. Yet, this does not amount to saying that music leaves the performer or the hearer emotionally indifferent, or that feeling is unimportant. It only confirms Hanslick’s point that emotion is not ‘specific’ to music.<sup>14</sup>

A good example of this grammatical strategy is offered by Tolstoy and the discussion of what Wittgenstein calls his ‘false theory’ of sentimental content,<sup>15</sup> from which ‘there is a lot to learn’. Against Tolstoy’s conception that ‘the activity of art is based on man’s capacity of receiving through his senses of hearing or sight a feeling’, that is, ‘experiencing emotion’,<sup>16</sup> Wittgenstein stresses the distinction between expression and feeling in a way that draws on an aspect of Hanslick’s formalist conception of the autonomy of the musical that has been recently emphasized in writings on the ‘inexpressivity’ of music.<sup>17</sup> My first point is that the subtle interchange that Wittgenstein operates in the text between feeling and expression does not rule out feeling. In these lines, by writing ‘You

<sup>12</sup> Stanley Cavell’s expression in *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> M. Schlick (1938), ‘Form and Content, an Introduction to Philosophical Thinking’, French trans. D. Chapuis, J.-J. Rosat, in *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Marseille: Agone, 2003), 151–249.

<sup>14</sup> In contrast with Wagner’s ‘absoluteness’ of music, ‘specificity’ is, in fact, an important, rather polemical, expression in Hanslick’s writings on music and designates all the features that are important in music so that, as Schopenhauer himself thought, music steps out of all hierarchy between arts and, thereby, all classification in terms of degree. One could even consider Kant’s gradual scale of arts: having music at the top, instead of poetry, would be inadequate as a ranking.

<sup>15</sup> CV, 58 (1947): ‘There is a lot to be learnt from Tolstoy’s bad theorizing about how a work of art conveys a “feeling”. – You really could call it, not exactly the expression of a feeling, but at least an expression of feeling, or a felt expression.’ See also Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?* (1897–8), trans. Aylmer Maude (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962). In his *Tolstoy’s Life*, Romain Rolland stresses the Russian writer’s anti-modernism. The effect of music on Tolstoy was strange: he feared music as much as he liked it. For Tolstoy, music is a deregulated intense enjoyment that might lead to depravation. An exception for him was Beethoven, whom (as noted by Romain Rolland) he violently admired: ‘The art of the old deaf composer’ generated in him anger as well as worship.

<sup>16</sup> From Tolstoy, ‘What is Art?’, quoted by Alan Tormey, *The Concept of Expression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 149.

<sup>17</sup> For instance, by Santiago Espinoza and Clément Rosset, *L’inexpressif musical* (Encre marine, 2013). The expression is Stravinsky’s. Wittgenstein’s conception has been treated as marginal.

really could call it not exactly the expression of a feeling (*Ausdruck eines Gefühls*) but at least an expression of feeling (*Gefühlsausdruck*), or a felt expression' (*Gefühltenausdruck*), he shows that he is looking for a still better expression, more adjusted to what he means. The argument finally settles on a structural analogy with a ritual in which one responds to an invitation 'in resonance' ('when I pay someone a visit'). Never does Wittgenstein explicitly criticize sentimental content as such. He only denies that it is describable in an intelligibly sharable manner, which is why he says, 'Don't look inside yourself' (CV, 1946), in the sense that 'depths are not interesting'.<sup>18</sup> This warning only means that one should not draw cognitive conclusions from consulting one's interior forum. Instead of an essential definition in response to a question about 'what content' is expressed, he chooses a grammatical comparative study 'sign to sign' or a 'structural description' (*Strukturbeschreibung*). The method consists of looking for analogies (here 'resonance': *zu ihm schwingen*) between parallel cases in heterogeneous domains (here music and a ritual), and constructing other possible cases of comparison. It is only after such a process of depsychologization that the expression of feelings finds itself re-evaluated in comparative anthropological terms without being eliminated. From the semantic test of Tolstoy's 'false theory', the reader draws an anti-sentimentalist lesson connected with the 'centrality of language', showing what musical meaning looks like in comparison with reactions in a ceremony. The grammatical analysis of Tolstoy's 'false theory' shows that the problem is less the sentiment in itself, which is fully legitimate, than its privileging over intellectuality. Feeling is not to be discarded under the pretext that it cannot be a cognitive musical content. I just cannot show my feeling, only its signs: *der Ausdruck*.<sup>19</sup> Paul Engelmann had a beautiful way of stressing the paradoxical importance of sentiment in a modernist conception of forms: one should save the need for a sentiment that makes understanding (intellect) possible.<sup>20</sup>

My second point is that the grammatical re-evaluation of the language of expression reinforces the formalist stance without corroborating the earlier analytical conception of understanding. The example of depsychologization we have just mentioned has shown the way towards a modernist view of expressivity

<sup>18</sup> 'What it is to follow a musical phrase with understanding, or to play it with understanding? Don't look inside yourself. Consider rather what makes you say of someone else that this is what he is doing' (CV, 51). Here, as indicated further below, Wittgenstein suggests taking into account how understanding is manifested, rather than what happens while one is experiencing a musical theme.

<sup>19</sup> CV, 1946 à propos the statement, recalling J. Labor's playing (according to J. Koder): 'He is experiencing the theme intensely.'

<sup>20</sup> See Engelmann's Letters quoted above. We will see below this opposition between heart and intellect, with Schoenberg and his own reply to the criticism of abstract intellectuality.

in connection with grammar that proceeds like a comparative methodology of enquiry into meaning. It leaves far behind the *Tractatus*'s analytical conception of understanding based on the 'paraphraseability principle' that allows a replacement of equivalent phrases that have the same meaning, as well as the corresponding compositional conception of meaning according to which the meaning of an expression depends upon its components. It also displaces, rather than suppresses, the need for a kind of totality, as I will soon show. The anthropological shift of understanding has definitely put an end to analyticity in the modern sense. The musical model of understanding in Wittgenstein's later philosophy confirms this renouncement. Does it, thereby, leave modernism behind?

## 5 Wittgenstein's 'anti-modernist' tone in 1930: The lack of 'the sense of the whole'

There are some obstacles regarding Wittgenstein's attitude towards modernism. In the crucial period of 'transition', when modernism was at its peak, Wittgenstein declared that he was not in agreement with the new movement in music, architecture and arts. As we know from his correspondence with Paul Engelmann, he was even reserved about the project of a *Kunstamt* that Loos, Kraus and Schoenberg wanted to build in 1919.<sup>21</sup> He mocked it and its '*Grossesprecherei*'. These lines from an early draft of the foreword to *Philosophical Remarks* – now a remark in *Culture and Value*<sup>22</sup> – show how to his ears 'modernism' sounded as something infected with the American influence, putting private interests above the common goal of men. His appraisal is strange, as it mingles anti-democratic tones in the style of Nietzsche with a quasi-Marxist view of what should be looked for by workers working together in the same factory: working in view of a common goal requires an equal participation of workers, motivated by the 'sense of the whole' (*im Sinne des Ganzen*) that is to link them together. What he deplores is precisely the loss of that 'sense'. Because this spirit is lacking, culture is, in fact, *Unkultur*. Its disintegration by the effects of individualistic work, when each one works for himself, amounts to wasting one's own forces because of too many counteracting resistances. This process of fragmentation generates decay. The image of the forces spent in vain is inspired by the industrial machinery of production in a capitalistic world. The lacking 'sense of the whole' is due not

<sup>21</sup> To Paul Engelmann, on 25 September 1919 (vol. 8, *Briefe*, Suhrkamp, 1980).

<sup>22</sup> CV, 6f. (and footnote 1).



so much to the eradication of any belief in a soul or a *Geist* making language a living symbolic activity, as to the absence of a collective impetus towards a common goal.

The discontentment with the loss of this 'sense of the totality' echoes Schoenberg's declarations in the same period, holding musical form as an organic whole. Wittgenstein also clearly has in mind the totality of form that makes a piece a real work of art. One could argue that, in reference to the emblematic Brahmsian (quartet, opus 60) conception of the dynamic structure of a composed piece, such an insight does not sound very 'modern'. Yet, it was the model Schoenberg had in mind of the 'Idea' governing the relations between parts and whole, which is irreducible to a totality composed of parts.<sup>23</sup> For Wittgenstein as well, Brahms was an important model because of his musical 'thought', whose unity constitutes its strength.<sup>24</sup>

Interestingly enough, a classical example such as Brahms could illustrate the 'modern' methodological requirement of Form as a coherent whole. That means that modernism does not lie in modernist music, but in the way the unity of thought is rendered even in a classical piece. The modernist aspect lies in understanding the Form as based on the same laws of comprehensibility (*Fasslichkeit*) and coherence (*Zusammenhang*) that, for Schoenberg, hold true for a language. The centrality of language to music as Schoenberg conceives it, as well as the above-mentioned requirements founded on constructed relations, are 'modern' in the good sense, which saves and serves the spirit of the whole.

## 6 Spirit in what sense? Life and language

Of course, Wittgenstein was not a spiritualist and clearly refuted the thesis of a spirit animating language. There is neither soul nor intentions in words. His critique of mentalism, joined with the discussion about the 'mythology of interiority' (J. Bouveresse) that induces the philosopher to forge an internal space called 'mind' in which mental processes would take place, is well known. Neither does the 'life' of a symbolism come from an external incorporeal entity that would be added to it, for instance Frege's *Gedanke*.<sup>25</sup> We could then assert that,

<sup>23</sup> See his *Gedanke* Fragments, analysed by P. Carpenter and S. Neff, *Schoenberg, The Musical Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> 'The strength of the thoughts in Brahms' music', in CV, 32 (1932–4).

<sup>25</sup> See Wittgenstein's critique of Frege's conception of Thought as a condition for making a living use of signs in BB, 4.

without being a philosopher of mind in the contemporary sense, Wittgenstein defended a conception of ‘intentionality *without any content of representation*, penetrated with spirit (or life) without *reference* to it.’<sup>26</sup>

Use makes signs ‘living’, like the walls of the house supporting the foundations. This view on the life of signs, of propositions, the growing importance of the life of forms in language as in the arts, show that Wittgenstein has indeed shifted from a logical conception of the ‘sense of the whole’ to a more cultural one – hence the recurring claim for ‘life’ in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy, the life of propositions, then of symbolism against various mechanistic conceptions in mathematics, for example, in order to claim that philosophy is not ‘programme music’. Correspondingly, the meaning of the ‘whole’ has changed. It is no longer the whole world, nor the wholeness of an objective sort of totality. The unity of such a ‘world’ is a prejudice, as is the ‘modernist’ idea that philosophy deals with ‘objects’ that are objects of knowledge.<sup>27</sup> Akin to culture, its integrity is that of a ‘system’ of forms of life in a liveable world.

So, for Wittgenstein, the sense of the whole is connected now with life-activity, which means displaying human potentialities. In these respects, music, as an activity that achieves its full potential when expressively incarnated into a work, shows the way. An expressively complete (as opposed to logical-symbolically complete) work is one whose forms ‘witness their own life in movement’, as Henri Focillon<sup>28</sup> puts it in relation to painting.

When Wittgenstein says that language is to be a life-activity, the best example he gives is music, because playing or hearing music are living experiences of meaningfulness rather than experiences of life.<sup>29</sup> The musicologist and writer Boris de Schloezer<sup>30</sup> adopts a similar notion, through his devotion to music, though with no reference to Wittgenstein and in different terms. He writes that it is one thing to experience a ‘vécu’, another to live in the sense of expressing signs. It is clear that Husserl<sup>31</sup> understands the experience of living a melody in the

<sup>26</sup> This is the title of my paper read in Tunis University, mid-April 2015, to be published in the Proceedings of the Colloquium, ed. Melika Ouelbani.

<sup>27</sup> See Philippe Descola, *La composition des mondes: Entretiens avec Pierre Charbonnier* (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> See his *Vie des formes* (Paris: Vrin, 1943). Note that Focillon also forged the expression ‘contenu formel’, which I myself use to express the identity of form and content (see above à propos of Hanslick’s view).

<sup>29</sup> Note that this reversal casts light on the now-accepted, if not current, expression ‘musical significance’, expressed in the arts. This way of seeing can be applied to other arts if considered in the same way.

<sup>30</sup> In *Comprendre la musique, articles 1921-1956* (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> For a Husserlian reader, the ‘symbol’ looks like something external, an empty linguistic and conventional sort of expression that should disappear for the benefit of the meaning-relation.

first sense, whereas Wittgenstein rather asks us to *live* the activity of hearing and playing a musical piece, which is, in short, that of expressing signs. This is how I understand his aspiration to be ‘living a melody intensely’: as an interpreter, interiorizing the compositional process as is ‘manifested’ in the performance.

Taking for granted that the so-called ‘later Wittgenstein’ is the philosopher of context par excellence, let me specify two crucial aspects that correct the common view. 1) Basing his conception of philosophical understanding on the model of music, Wittgenstein makes a certain case for dynamical aspects from the point of view of a grammatically orientated comparative analysis of expressivity. 2) By resisting its total reducibility to a mere contextual approach, it allows a view ‘*sub specie aeterni*’ in present time, despite the historical roots of what could count as new or obsolete. I take the ‘Musical Idea’ to contribute to stressing that kind of eternity.<sup>32</sup> So far, as I said, Wittgenstein’s well-known remark against the ‘modern’ in 1930 does not make him a genuine ‘anti-modernist’ of the pessimistic sort. At that stage, Wittgenstein was no less modern than Schoenberg meant to be, in contrast with their contemporaries. That is also why one now needs to give more consistency to the ‘modern’ vocation of their conceptions of forms as regards language, independently of what was received as ‘Modern’. The ‘Modern’ as broadly admitted could, indeed, generate a decline of the modern or at least reveal a ‘malaise of modernity’ (Charles Taylor). In these respects, Schoenberg’s first dodecaphonist opera composed about the ‘modern’ throws light on what I would like to call the spiritual spell of the modern, without which the modern would fail to be interestingly modern.

## 7 ‘Musikalische Gedanke’<sup>33</sup>: Wittgenstein and Schoenberg, a methodological affinity

Already in the *Tractatus*, one is struck by the role attributed to the Musical Idea. Whereas the reader could expect the Idea to be applied so as to be reified in the world, Wittgenstein mentions it as resulting from projection and, thereby,

<sup>32</sup> Already mentioned in 1915 in lines reminiscent of Tolstoy’s ‘mysticism’. See B. McGuinness’ reference to *Notebooks 1914-1916*, 25-5-1915 foreshadowing the *Tractatus* 6.52, in *Approaches to Wittgenstein, Collected papers* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 140.

<sup>33</sup> TLP 4.014. I prefer to use here Wittgenstein’s German expression rather than ‘Musical Idea’ as it was translated to English, since it meets Schoenberg’s own expression. See Schoenberg, *The Musical Idea*, especially 15: ‘Composing is thinking in tones and rhythms’; ‘all thinking consists essentially in bringing things (concepts, etc.) into relation’. Hence the importance of searching out ‘coherences’; here, an ‘Idea is a musical relation’... (Fragments on the Musical Idea).

as being on the same footing as the score, the orchestral performance, the gramophone record or any other projected thing. This unexpectedly makes the Idea a constructed system of relations (as Schoenberg took it), obtained by top-down projection, rather than some superior essence of a Platonic sort, pre-existing before its projection. Thus, even though Wittgenstein's musical paradigm might well be classic or romantic, or non-modern, the *Abbildungscharakter* of music, so close to architecture, reveals a methodologically 'modern' conception that has affinities with Schoenberg's theory of forms according to which 'in music there is no form without logic, no logic without unity'.<sup>34</sup> What is 'unity'? It is a single thought emerging from the work as an organic whole. In spite of his personal allergy to modernism in the arts, Wittgenstein could be viewed, relatively speaking, as sympathetic to Schoenberg's methodological conception of constructing musical phrases, shaping sense in quasi-architectural terms to build up the clear great Form. For both, 'clarity' meant the intelligibility of the great form at the end of the *Klarwerden* process. As J. K. Wright writes, the 'centrality of language' made Schoenberg a 'modernist' close to Wittgenstein and Kraus.<sup>35</sup>

As I see it, Aldo G. Gargani's investigations into methodological affinities between Wittgenstein and Schoenberg<sup>36</sup> have definitely invalidated all attempts, founded on Wittgenstein's critical remark in 1930, to radically oppose the classical spirit of Wittgenstein's conception of music to Schoenberg's constructivist views. The key of Gargani's comparative study is that in mathematics, a new vision of the logical forms emerges in contrast not only with the traditional deductive view, but also with a reductionist method. This vision is more suitable to inventing/composing related sequences of forms on the basis of their formal structures, as they let themselves be constructed according to a technique that invention itself produces. In the *Tractatus*, we find the statement that 'one can anticipate only what lets itself be constructed'. This echoes Schoenberg's refusal to build musical phrases out of a tonal given, anchored in the nature of the sounds. Construction of an atonal grammar as an extension of tonal music shows that tonality itself is

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<sup>34</sup> A. Schoenberg, 'Composition with Twelve Tones' (1941), in *Style and Idea* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1975).

<sup>35</sup> J. K. Wright, *Schoenberg, Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 67 and 185.

<sup>36</sup> See Aldo G. Gargani, 'Techniques descriptives et procédures constructives, Schoenberg-Wittgenstein', *Revue Sud*, special issue on Wittgenstein, Marseille, 1986, 74. This comparative study relies on the role of the 'mathematical action' and 'constructive procedures in mathematics', stated by Herman Weyl, and also by Brouwer, as the source of the 'formal technique of construction of a field of operational possibilities and variations'.

the product of art, not of a natural system of sounds. An aspect of modernism is a distance from the centre of organization of chords as given-in-nature.<sup>37</sup> In Wittgenstein's approach, the same could apply to language. Atonality is achieved by constructing logical series of dissonant chords as far and as remotely as the composer is able to extend the harmonics beyond the conventional limits of the tonal system. Similarly, drawing new analogies by creating – rather than digging them out as already available in nature – family resemblance predicates extends the possibilities of meaning far from a Fregean sort of referential nucleus of a conceptual content. Putting into question the existence of a nuclear content leads to blurring the limits of the area of a concept.<sup>38</sup> The two are concomitant.

From a reference quoted by Baker and Hacker in their commentary on PI, §§65–71,<sup>39</sup> we learn that emerging aspects in Wittgenstein's later philosophy suggest visualizing, in the absence of a Fregean conceptual content, interrelations or intermediate modal cases for which no class of abstraction could be constructed. It is like a composer constructing his logic of dissonances in the absence of a tonal centre, by using a procedure of extension of chords from heard and familiar harmonics to unheard and remote ones. In PI §6, Wittgenstein says that 'uttering a word is like striking a note on the keyboard of the imagination'. If we can compare the life of signs to the life of sound, it is not absurd to argue in favour of a thematic continuity from the life of propositions in the *Blue Book* to aspects as emerging *qualia* in the later philosophy.

## 8 A musical case of tension between outmoded style and modernism: Schoenberg's *Von Heute zu Morgen*

I take Schoenberg's dodecaphonist opera in one act, opus 32, *Von Heute zu Morgen* (1928) as an illustration of Wittgenstein's remark in *Zettel*: 'I think of a quite short phrase, consisting of only two bars. You say "what a lot that's got in it!" But it is only, so to speak, an optical illusion if you think that what is there goes on as we hear it. ("It all depends *who* says it.") (Only in the stream of thought and life do words have meaning.) (Z, §173)'. What is denounced

<sup>37</sup> See our *Du son à la musique*, Helmholtz, Mach, Dahlhaus, with the collaboration of P. Bailhache and Céline Vautrin (Paris: Vrin, 2011).

<sup>38</sup> See PI, §69ff. where Wittgenstein, against Frege's conception of concept (§71), builds up his conception of language-games.

<sup>39</sup> In G. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 325.

here in terms of 'illusion' is the idea that a cultural motif is contained in a small musical phrase, that refers to it as if people shared something they express in common. Rather, culture is the effect of human manifestations of understanding forms within it. The relation is not of a transitive expression of the same content, but of an aspectual interaction allowing describable features of understanding. Yet, in such an aspectual interaction, there is a tension between life and spirit, as the essential expression of a double striving towards a modernism still to come.

Schoenberg's opera is an illustration of this tension between modern style and the Musical Idea. Modern style is what people say, which echoes a given culture. The Musical Idea is what, despite the context, the musician constructs in order to animate his piece with a sense of the whole without which the work would lack expressive completeness; it is its value.

The year 1928 is the year in which, in his lecture in Breslau on *Die Glückliche Hand*, a *Zeitoper*, Schoenberg declares that he intends to make music using the means of the theatre stage. So conceived, the goal of this musical drama is to exemplify the 'modern' by displaying its banal forms, which every ordinary man in Vienna of the time could hear at home. This example, which deals with the banal, namely the 'modern' as it was admitted and lived in ordinary life, is also intended to demonstrate the validity of the dodecaphonist series,<sup>40</sup> and hence of the Musical Idea. As it seems, Arnold Schoenberg's text would, indeed, contribute to validating the dodecaphonist series, but in an easy-to-understand and, therefore, light form. Yet, against this apparent pretension, doubt arises regarding such a strategy in favour of easy understanding. One can indeed see, underlying the real 'social engagement', a political background that orientates the composer towards the opposite side, already making more understandable the criticisms the composer will later (1946) aim at himself regarding his preference for an easiness of understanding. Even though it is a music of 'context' entirely permeated with, so to speak, the motive of banality, there is a tension between the context of the Modern as it is restored in the *libretto*, rendered by the sound material illustrating the series, and the Musical Idea of the Modern inspiring the written score. The point is that it is, in the end, up to music to take charge of the mission of letting the distanced observation on modern culture be fully

<sup>40</sup> Or serialism (emerging in opus 23, the 5th piece, 1921, and also opus 24 and 25). At this period, the motive of twelve tones covers the whole chromatic scale. Such is the 'series' that designates the order of notes within the motif, 'notes having only relations between them'. Thereby the motif turns its back to the melody.

heard. The dilemma between the requirements of the Musical Idea and the mere context of banalization as the musical strategy of the composer can be discussed, but how could music express it in sounds?

My question returns to my earlier remark about the feeling of the loss of spirit in terms of the sense of the whole. How can one make clearly audible the loss of what Wittgenstein calls the 'sense of the whole', a whole that is lacking in a fragmented society that has lost its soul, without relying on the force of the Musical Idea itself, for its capacity to restore that sense? At this point, Schoenberg refers to the composer's will that makes the mastering role of the Musical Idea clear through its incorporation into the orientated sound material. This conflict between what it means presently to be 'modern' and what it must sound like, between the 'is' and the 'ought' of the Musical Idea, receives its solution in a section of *Style and Idea* (1946). Besides a mitigated appreciation of the so-called 'new music' at a given period of the history of music, or outmoded music, Schoenberg calls for the 'Idea' in the name of a totality, the totality of a musical piece. The 'Idea', he writes, never dies, whereas a style is bound to become outmoded. Hence, the Musical Idea survives by virtue of the tension between the style and the Idea. If the tension disappears, it means that the Idea has disappeared. It is interesting to see what Schoenberg gives as a definition of the 'Idea': each time you add a note to another note, you instil doubt as to what the first note meant. Several possibilities could appear after a first note like an 'A', depending on where you go on the harmonic scale, the direction of the sequence, which the composer's will has determined.

Note in passing that Schoenberg's conception of orientated action on the sound material by virtue of the Musical Idea is exactly what Cage, the rebel pupil of the Austrian master, will object to in Schoenberg: the control of the will over the sound. Yet, for Schoenberg, this will (or desire, independent of a 'natural order') coincides with the Idea; it gives it its firmness in time, maintaining it as self-consistent through various sound-configurations that follow the first note, as he says. This example is very striking. That is in a way the 'eternity' of the Idea, the condition for the 'internal tension' that must remain such, yet not a Platonic Idea but a constructive system of chords. There were similar considerations already in the *Treatise of Harmony* (1911). In these respects, the 'modern' can be used and abused, but the Idea remains, not the Idea before the composer composes, but the Idea that the composer brings into existence in the form of a work that is, as he writes, the Idea out of which the musical tools have been forged.

## 9 Life versus *Geist*

To my argument of a life-orientated ‘function’ of forms, the reader could object that ‘Life’ and ‘Form’ are not made for each other. A logical matter might be quite opposed to a life-affair. That is Russell’s point of view. In Waismann’s notes, transcribing one of Wittgenstein’s dictations around 1931, the latter is said to vindicate the priority of ‘questions of life’ over ‘questions of logic.’<sup>41</sup> The priority of questions of life for Wittgenstein would rather oppose him to Schoenberg, who was sometimes criticized as a rather intellectual composer, more concerned with an abstract notational formalism than with so-called emotional life. It seems as though, on the contrary, Wittgenstein would rather strive towards ‘questions of life’ even in much harder matters such as mathematics. As I said, Wittgenstein kept reproaching himself later for having missed the ‘living’ aspect of forms in his earlier writings.<sup>42</sup>

But what should we understand by ‘life’? Are ‘life of forms’ and ‘forms of life’ the same? Wittgenstein’s philosophical aspiration echoes the notion of ‘living a melody intensely’, a phrase that, applied to himself, is a confession, but is also a quotation of Jakob in the *Die Arme Spielman* (1848) that was written by the novelist Franz Grillparzer, so dear to Hanslick. Wittgenstein, too, liked Grillparzer. Paradoxically, it is the kind of phrase that is exposed to Wittgenstein’s critique of sentimental content. I take Wittgenstein to sometimes attack views he is himself tempted to advocate, exhibiting conflicting voices in himself when submitting his own passionate convictions to a cold grammatical critique.

The demand for a colder approach (of a grammatical sort) is to him what he expected philosophy to be: an activity of interpretation comparable to the instrumentalist’s practice of performing a musical piece, let us say an art of understanding in this pragmatic sense. Music shows the way since, especially in music, there is a strong interdependence between performing (instrumental interpretation) and understanding the musical piece played.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Notebook 1, about ‘Zusammengesetztheit’, F 71, F 38. I refer here to our *Wittgenstein’s Dictations to Waismann and for Schlick* in a French translation (Paris: Vrin, 2015). The English version is Gordon Baker (ed.), *The Voices of Wittgenstein: The Vienna Circle* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>42</sup> Namely TLP, §4.0311, in which the French expression ‘tableau vivant’ occurs. Note that ‘tableau vivant’ is an expression that originally designates a group of characters participating in a musical event such as singing together.

<sup>43</sup> Wittgenstein often says that understanding a musical piece shows itself in the fact that you are able to sing the musical air you are listening to. They are one and the same gesture. Ryle’s ‘knowing how’ amounts to the same, and Paul Valéry holds a similar view.



How can forms be said to be living? Are there really two meanings of 'life', everyday life and the autonomous life of higher forms, in music or in ethical forms of activity, dealing with 'Thought' (*Gedanke*) 'flying above the world and leaving it as it is' (CV, 1930)? Note that in the phrase just quoted, thought looks for eternity while leaving the world as it is, in its ordinary order. Both lives, the ordinary (the contingent world as it is) and the so-called eternal course of thought, find themselves in the same sentence. There is an aspect of how things appear to us as eternal from our lower point of view of earthly human beings, along our ordinary course of life. The eternal course of thought does not posit eternal things as if, seen from above us, they were installed in upper spheres. Here, there is nothing like Plato's time, defined as 'a moving image of eternity'. What is offered to us is a perspective from down here. That is important for solving our problem about the work of art *sub specie aeternitatis* and contingency. Contingency does not contradict eternity and can be looked at as being compatible with eternity as an aspect under which, down here, we see things-*as*. Thereby, the difficulty to articulate ethics and everyday life also dissolves.

Under the guiding 'Musical Idea' (or *Gedanke*), only music is able to ascertain the survival of such a principle after the *Tractatus*, in the midst of contingency. In Wittgenstein's vocabulary, the Musical Idea is the projected thought that is offered to our understanding. Understanding means interiorizing the forms of the work of art, which display themselves through gestures that we make our own (CV, 1948). The gestural factor shows how important is the 'indwelling' function of Life (*des Lebens*) which, in its infinite varieties, as Wittgenstein writes, penetrates 'our life', that is, our everyday life. Wittgenstein interweaves the two aspects of 'life'. The transference of musical phrases or gestures into forms of life is mediated by my interiorizing attitude: 'Ich mache sie mir zu eigen.' Hence the emergence of 'expressive movements' that are signs of understanding (*Ausdrucksbewegungen des Verstehenden*) exhibited in response. 'Appreciating music is a manifestation of the life of mankind' only in this sense (CV, 151, 1948). Again, here a process of 'intensified resonance' is called for, which witnesses the life of language, as what Wittgenstein said when he was prisoner in Montecassino: 'Die Sprache ist alles.'<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> About Wittgenstein and the war, see Brian McGuinness, *Wittgenstein, A Life* (London: Duckworth, 1988), as well as 'It will be terrible afterwards, whoever wins', Chapter 5 of his *Approaches to Wittgenstein*.