

Vitor Guerreiro

ARE MUSICAL WORKS SOUND STRUCTURES?

ABSTRACT

This paper is about the dilemma raised against musical ontology by Roger Scruton, in his *The Aesthetics of Music*: either musical ontology is about certain mind-independent “things” (sound structures) and so *music* is left out of the picture, or it is about an “intentional object” and so its puzzles are susceptible of an arbitrary answer. I argue the dilemma is merely apparent and deny that musical works can be identified with sound structures, whether or not conceived as abstract entities. The general idea is this: both Platonism and nominalism about musical works are a kind of fetishism: musical works are not “things”, in Danto’s sense of “mere real things”; they rather involve complex relationships between objects, events, and different kinds of functional properties. For this, I draw on Levinson and Howell’s notion of *indication*, combined with Searle’s approach to institutional reality... with a little twist of my own.

KEYWORDS

musical ontology,
Platonism, nominalism,
artworks, types.

Introduction

A spectre haunts the ontology of music – the spectre of abstract sound structures, conceived of roughly as a sort of Platonic universal: entities tokened by material objects while lacking spatial existence themselves, existing eternally (for they enter not causal relations nor have spatial parts), as well as temporally and modally inflexible. Such entities are appealed to in order to explain the phenomenon of musical works’ repeatability: spatiotemporally distinct sound events counting as occurrences of the same work *W*, in virtue of a connection with an abstract entity, connection which is not causal, but rather described in terms of *instantiation* – the same relation that would hold between all physical inscriptions of the word “vociferant” and the word itself, considered as a Platonic type (so that five inscriptions of the word “vociferant” count as five token-words, but there is only one type-word involved). The main difference between types, under this notion, and properties in a realist ontology about universals is that the former are subjects of predication, individuals, not being themselves predicated of other things, unlike properties (we apply to musical works the property referred to by the predicates “strident” or “delicate”, but we don’t predicate, in turn, the musical work of something else).

A good deal of musical ontology consists of a clash of intuitions for and against the identification of musical works with entities similar to Platonic universals (the

most popular among them being the theory of musical works as *norm types*, proposed by Julian Dodd (Dodd 2007: 32), following other contemporary musical Platonists such as Peter Kivy and Nicholas Wolterstorff); or with some sort of concrete entity: from classes and mereological fusions to “homeostatic property clusters” (Magnus 2013: 109) – a particular version of the theory of “historical individuals” (Rohrbaugh 2003) – among several other theories. Other proposals in theoretical space consist in identifying musical works with *action kinds* (Currie 1989), which are *abstracta* but contrast with musical Platonism’s *types*, which are types of sound event; and also with token actions (Davies 2004). There are also theories identifying musical works with abstract entities but defending that these are *sui generis*, capable of being created and destroyed (Thomasson 1999), unlike more traditional views on abstract entities. The situation in musical ontology has been described by some writers, such as Thomasson or Kania, as “an embarrassment of riches” (Kania 2008: 20) of theoretical proposals.

I don’t wish (nor would that be feasible) to make an exhaustive inventory of extant theories and their several versions, together with arguments against those theories, followed by the defence of an additional proposal. The difficulties raised by each theory have been widely explored in the literature. What I shall do is more akin to arguing for a framework, desirably plausible and productive, to conceive the ontological status of musical works in what they have peculiarly, as products of intentional human activity, that is, to conceive their status qua *musical* works and qua musical *works*. For what concerns us, I shall consider three kinds of ontological theory about musical works, without focusing on the specificities of any example of this or that kind in particular: 1) theories which identify musical works with sound structures, conceived of as Platonic entities, 2) theories which identify musical works with sound structures, conceived of nominalistically, and 3) theories like Jerrold Levinson’s, which identify musical works with indicated types, or *sound-structures-S-indicated-by-composer-C-in-historico-musical-context-M* (Levinson 1980; 2011; 2013). Although Levinson himself views a sound structure *S*, partly constitutive of a musical work, as an abstract entity, we can easily imagine a version of that theory in which all statements about *S* are given nominalist paraphrases, while the rest of the theory remains the same. The idea is to suggest that to identify musical works with previously given “things” in the world, independent of intentional states, coordinated beliefs and systems of representations, whether those “things” are concrete or abstract, is a form of fetishism¹ that has skewed the ontological debate on musical works (and other “culturally emergent” or “socially constructed” items [Margolis 1974]), specifying a necessary though not sufficient element for the world to include such entities.

I dislike the idea of abstract entities. To say of two concrete things that they “instantiate” the same universal seems to me the same as a prolonged noise which, in the end, merely expresses the following: “There is this ubiquitous phenomenon we refer to as the ‘sharing of properties’: the world seems to contain repeatable things, the language we use to describe it seems to denote repeatable entities, and

1 I use the term “fetishism” as a deferential allusion to John Dilworth’s paper “How to Reform Danto’s Vehicle Fetishism”, although I give it a slightly different purpose and don’t follow Dilworth in viewing all artworks as abstract (in his own peculiar manner).

we don't know how that works nor how to describe it without raising a host of difficulties." Two things, x and y , share clusters of properties, and in virtue of that they count as two things of the same type. There is a sense in which those properties that x and y possess are unique things, distinct from one another, as everything in space and time, and a sense in which they are the same thing, despite their being spatiotemporally discontinuous. We can hardly make sense of the world without appealing to this repeatability in our discourse. But to describe that phenomenon in terms of a non-causal relation of "instantiation" of abstract entities by concrete ones seems to add absolutely nothing of true explanatory value, besides giving sophisticated names to what we ignore.

However, my aim here is not to argue against any realist or Platonic ontology, nor to argue for a nominalist one. In fact, I think it is not at that "fundamental" level of our ontology that our characterization of things like musical works is played out. Conceiving ontology as a "layer cake", in which at the most fundamental layer we deal with the "brute facts" about the world, for instance, the option of dividing the world between concrete particulars and universals, and at the upper layers deal with more complex entities, we also see that entities such as artworks or musical works will not figure in that more fundamental layer, independently from complex connections with intentional states, functional properties imposed on objects and events, contextual settings, systems of representations allowing this whole apparatus to work, and so on. At the end of the journey, I hope at least to have given a clear image, if not of the way to characterize musical works ontologically, then of how they shouldn't be so characterized.

A Scruton Dilemma for Musical Ontology

In *The Aesthetics of Music*, Roger Scruton asserts, about the ontological puzzles raised by musical works, that these concern either the metaphysical status of an "intentional object", in which case they are susceptible of an arbitrary solution, or they concern the sounds in which the musical work is heard and are nothing but a special case of problems about the nature and identity of events (Scruton 1997: 108). (That is, nothing special would be added by the fact that these are musical entities, as well as artworks.)

My proposal may be understood as a way of accepting the first horn of this apparent dilemma – questions of musical ontology are not about an object existing independently of the intentional states of beings like us – rejecting the consequence that any ontological description we may adopt of such entities is arbitrary or that they are all equivalent.² What happens is that most ontological descriptions of musical works (those that fall under 1 and 2 above) share the problem I characterized as a form of fetishism inhering in the expectation of identifying musical works with "things" we can place in a description of reality as it is, independently of us; "things" that one or other philosopher, according to his/her sensibility, tends to identify with either concrete or abstract objects.

² The idea that ontological theories of music are equivalent, because equally adjusted to the empirical facts, and we may adopt any one of them without affecting what really matters to us in music was defended by James O. Young (Young 2011; 2014).

Platonic shadows and their material doubles

That great ideas always start with basic everyday matters may be illustrated (somewhat imaginatively) by the fact that Socrates' father, Sophroniscus, was a sculptor. How tempting to imagine little Socrates in his father's workshop, observing a figure slowly gaining shape in the stone, at each strike of the chisel. Suddenly, one blow doesn't come out as intended and, with subsequent touches, the final shape will have to be adjusted, adapted, so as the intervention of the unexpected doesn't result in an obvious imperfection. Hence, an idea (not an Idea) begins to dawn on little Socrates' mind: the material world forever aspiring to reach the condition of the ideal Form, while always falling short of it; things we can see and hear as shadows of the genuinely real objects, impassive dwellers of a world where no skewed blow of a chisel can affect them, forever indifferent to the transformative intrusion of causation. There they lie (whatever sense one can make of "there" in this context), awaiting discovery by inquisitive minds, sufficiently discerning to catch a glimpse of them.

Still under the analogy with sculpture, we find an echo of such idea in a remark by Samuel Alexander about a famous set of unfinished statues by Michelangelo:

In Michelangelo's unfinished statues of slaves in the Academy at Florence we can feel the artist not so much making the figure as chipping off flakes of the marble from the figure which is concealed in it, and which he is laying bare (*vivos ducunt de marmore voltus*). (Alexander 1988: 73)

This idea is all the more intriguing in virtue of being about that which is, together with painting, one of the paradigmatic singular artforms (those in which works have only one token: the *original*). In this sense, hewn sculpture and painting are traditionally contrasted with music and other multiple artforms (those in which works can have an endless multiplicity of tokens), to the extent that in them the artwork is intuitively identified with a physical object. However, observations such as the preceding suggest that, with an effort of the imagination, all artforms can be conceived as multiple. If the artist discovers the figure hidden in the stone, and we identify the sculptural work with such a figure, then we must conclude that the work precedes the creative action of the artist, who, strictly speaking, doesn't create something that wasn't already there. Besides, nothing ties the figure hidden in the stone essentially to that stone in particular – it can be equally "hidden" in another stone. Only our conventions make it the case that hewn sculpture and painting are singular artforms, that is, our practice of privileging the first token of the figure as the original. We don't do this with music, though we could imagine alternative scenarios where we would.

The idea that artists discover forms in the physical material rather than create something new finds vigorous expression in the musical Platonism defended by philosophers such as Kivy and Dodd. Like in Alexander's imaginative exercise about Michelangelo's unfinished statues, musical Platonists hold that composers discover "sound structures" in the logical space of tonal combinations. They see musical composition as a process of eliminating candidates, analogously to the idea of the sculptor removing fragments of stone with his chisel, to reveal the figure hidden in the stone. Hence, the "sculpture" was not introduced in the world, but was already

there, merely concealed by the material that prevented the apprehension, through the senses, of the true object of appreciation and aesthetic enjoyment.

However interesting this imaginative exercise, it flies in the face of one of our most deeply rooted intuitions about artworks, not just in sculpture and painting, but also, and especially, in the case of musical works: that these are essentially creations of their artists. Something new is introduced in the world, over and above the concrete instantiation of a possible structure or pattern. In particular, philosophers hostile to Platonism insist that the same structure, realized in different circumstances or contexts, acquires different aesthetic and artistically relevant properties, and that such difference determines a difference in identity, which would prevent a work from being identical with any structure whose instantiation may be involved in its production. When we appreciate a work, we don't appreciate it merely as a realization of a possible structure, thought we certainly could, somewhat like we appreciate the beauty of stalactites and other geological formations. The fact that we don't is one of the persistent facts about our relationship with art. In particular, we appreciate works for what they reveal about its production, the achievement it represents. This idea was expressed with remarkable clarity and power of synthesis by Gregory Currie:

An interest in the aesthetics of artifacts is, for those cases where the distinction is a real one, an interest in something that unites both factors [activity and product]: an interest in the product-as-outcome-of-activity. That is why the aesthetic appreciation of nature as genuinely natural is so different from the aesthetic appreciation of art. (Currie 2009: 18)

Here is one of the marked differences between appreciating natural forms and appreciating art: artefacts, but not natural structures, have *styles*, something they can only have through their connection with human minds and specific historical circumstances. The same object, against the background of different styles, exhibits different properties. An example of this, used by Robert Howell, is that of a musical work composed by Erik Satie, exhibiting the same "sound structure" of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony: such a work would be

an uncharacteristic, parodic freak, not the Fifth Symphony once over again, a work displaying the dramatic progression of *Sturm, Drang*, and ultimate resolution that is present in that symphony. (Howell 2002: 106)

Though this example appeals to something incredibly unlikely, there is nothing metaphysically impossible about it, not to mention there are in the actual world examples of things sufficiently suggestive of the same (e.g. when a composer adopts a "conservative" neoclassical style after a sequence of bold and revolutionary works).

To be traced back to artistic intentions, susceptible of being recognized in the object, rooted in different and varying contexts of production, alters the essential properties of the object which is the artwork, even if it doesn't alter a mere possible structure embodied in it, so that the same structure can be embodied in objects that differ essentially, to the extent that there are essential properties those objects have, properties that depend on something beyond mere structure.

Consider the following verbal sequence in James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*:

Vociferagitant. Viceversounding. Namely, Abdul Abulbul Amir or Ivan Slavansky Slavar. In allldconfusaleem. As to whom the major guiltfeather pertained it was Hercushiccup's care to educe. (Joyce 2012: 355)

In a possible world where there wasn't an individual named Percy French (1854-1920), who, in 1877, wrote a parodic song about the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878, titled "Abdul Abulbul Amir", this verbal sequence imagined by Joyce could not contain an *allusion* to the song, mentioning the names of the two characters who, in the story there narrated, fight each other in mortal combat, ending in mutual destruction. Reading the first two words of the sequence, the line "the din it was heard from afar" in French's song would not resound in the reader's mind. But allusions in a work are an essential property of it, as essential as the very word sequence. So, a work must always be more than any structure it exemplifies.

Now, if any property is essential to an artwork, it is a fair supposition that artistically relevant properties are. These include semantic or representational properties, which may bear on a work's aesthetic character, which shouldn't happen were we to consider it as but the instantiation of a pattern. Structurally similar or even qualitatively identical stylistic features, in different artistic traditions, can have profoundly different functions and meanings, as is the case with golden backgrounds in a Byzantine mosaic and in a Japanese *rinpa* painting. A "structure" formed by the sum of features such as these will always vary in artistic properties, depending on the context and artistic categories (Walton 1970) to which the work belongs.

The notion that different works can share the same structure was notoriously explored by Borges in his short story "Pierre Menard, author of the Quixote" (Borges 1999: 88-95) and applied to the philosophy of art by Arthur Danto, who converted the thought experiment in a peculiar method of analysis by indiscernible replicas, with a view to demonstrate precisely this idea. And the idea is nicely captured in Currie's words: the artist's activity brings something new to the world, not reduceable to the structure that the material object, the work's vehicle (that is, the bearer of aesthetic, semantic, and other properties) instantiates, whether this object is a marble sculpture, the inscription of a literary text or the performance of a musical work.

The idea I am reaching for, and that I shall defend in the following sections, is that artworks (and musical works *qua* artworks) are complex functional entities, whose ontology is neither adequately captured by straightforward Platonism nor nominalism. Structures or patterns, whether conceived as Platonic entities or through the most ingenious nominalist paraphrases, perform but a limited role in the fact that the world contains artworks. While being a part of what is indispensable for the presence of artworks in the world, they are not the whole story, and surely not identical with the works themselves. The works are more than the sum of all the things indispensable to their presence in the world. Using here for my own purposes the words of Chris Small,

Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do. The apparent thing "music" is a figment, an abstraction of the action, whose reality vanishes as soon as we examine it at all closely. This habit of thinking in abstractions, of taking from an action what appears to be its essence and of giving that essence a name, is

probably as old as language; it is useful in the conceptualizing of our world but it has its dangers. It is very easy to come to think of the abstraction as more real than the reality it represents. (Small 1998: 2)

“Music is not a thing at all”, in the specific sense that it is neither identifiable with a material object nor with an “abstract object”, such as a sound structure or pattern. In “fundamental” ontology we look for “things” – either concrete or abstract – and we try to place in that “conceptual map” those entities we wish to identify, e.g. events, actions, persons, properties, and whatever else to which we systematically refer in our discourse about the world. We want to “carve the world at its joints”, to know its structure, as it is independently of what we think, but there are things in our discourse and our experience of reality that don’t fit this image, because, in part, they depend on relations between a diversity of elements and also our coordinated beliefs. The relation between all those things produces something that is more than the sum of the related parts, so that we cannot place them adequately in a conceptual map that merely describes the world in terms of “things” and brute facts. What we need is an understanding of the continuity between the level of things and brute facts and those more complex emergent entities, such as artworks are.

Properties, Patterns and Types

One of the distinctions that seem to me most important in musical (and art) ontology was introduced by Robert Howell (2002). It is the distinction between properties, patterns and types. In his paper, Howell undertakes a defence of the Levinsonian idea of “indicated types”: temporally initiated entities (by contrast with Platonic types), that result from an act of indication, by a composer, in a specific musico-historical context, of a sound structure that, in virtue of that contextualized act of indication, acquires properties that no Platonic type can possess. The view against he is arguing is that of Julian Dodd, who identifies musical works with norm types, conceived as Platonic entities, corresponding to what for Jerrold Levinson is but an ingredient of musical works – the so-called sound structures (which Levinson also conceives as abstract entities). There is a technical difference between Dodd’s types and sound structures, in the sense that, for Dodd, types have no structure, given that they have no spatial parts, but this detail can be ignored: Dodd can accept to describe his norm types as “sound structures”, as long as we tacitly apply the idea of “analogical predication” he takes from Wolterstorff: when we say that the sound structure contains a B flat in the fourth measure, we are not saying that the type contains measures or notes sequentially, in the same sense that its tokens have them, but something like the type being such that all its well-formed tokens contain those things in the prescribed order.

Howell’s attack on Dodd proceeds in two fronts. On the one hand, he argues that not all properties are eternal. He does this by appealing to the notion of impure properties, that is, properties that “essentially involve” contingent entities, such as the property *being a son of Lincoln* or *being an Elizabethan playwright*. The idea is that those properties only start to exist when the entities they essentially involve themselves start to exist. So, if a type essentially involves an impure property, this type cannot exist eternally. On the other hand, Howell invokes a distinction

between patterns and types, aimed at blocking Dodd's argument, even if we conceive all properties as eternally existing. The idea is that the mere possibility of a pattern specified by certain properties doesn't suffice for us to conclude that a given type exists. For natural kinds, it is required that the patterns have a place in "actual causal chains" (Howell 2002: 117), and for cultural kinds, such as works of music, it is required that the patterns are actually used by a community, in a certain way (Idem: 110). Only as part of an actual practice of a community of agents with coordinated beliefs about the use of patterns can the latter underlie the existence of types which are actually present in the world.

In this conception, cultural types such as *Finnegans Wake* and the words of which it is made, the musical work *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* by Vaughan Williams, the sea shanty *Haul on the Bowline*, the Game of *Tabla* (*tavla* or backgammon³), the painting *Mud Bath* by David Bomberg, among countless other examples of such things, are not Platonic entities, whether or not our basic ontology includes *abstracta* of some sort, such as properties and patterns.

To clarify this idea, we can make use of an example Howell himself doesn't employ. This is an example reminiscent of Danto's method of "indiscernible replicas" to show that artworks are not to be confused with the "mere real things" that serve them as vehicles, as in the thought experiment opening *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, where eight perceptually indiscernible red canvases are placed side by side, which canvases not only include distinct works of art but also objects that are not artworks (Danto 1980: 1–2). The purpose is to show that specifying a pattern is not sufficient to determine certain types, even if it is for some of these (e.g. having four right angles is sufficient to determine Square Thing).

Consider the word sequence CANE NERO MAGNA BELLA PERSICA. Read in Latin, that sequence means "Sing, Oh Nero, the great Persian wars"; read in Romanesco dialect it means "The black dog eats a fine peach"⁴ Now, here we have two sentences and only one underlying perceivable "pattern", and the difference between both – what individuates them as sentences – resides not in the underlying pattern but in the connection between the pattern and the coordinated beliefs of humans using the pattern. The pattern itself is insufficient to determine any of the sentences. In fact, the very same pattern, if produced in a way that is wholly non-intentional, by natural erosion on a rocky surface, or by a row of ants, would not constitute a sentence at all. Only against a background of systems of representations, sustained by coordinated beliefs, could any pattern determine a sentence. Besides words, Howell gives the example of the graphic pattern of the swastika, common to a pre-Colombian symbol for, among other things, fire, and the Nazi party symbol. And from here we can extrapolate to countless other examples.

To mention just another example, given by Joseph Margolis, in a paper defending precisely that the relation between a work and its "occurrences" or "tokens" is not the relation of instantiation but the relation of "embodiment":

3 Tavla is the Turkish name for the same game denoted by the Slavic word "tabla" and the English "backgammon".

4 Another known example of such an ambiguous word-sequence is "I VITELI DEI ROMANI SONO BELLI" – Latin: "Go, Vitellius, the gods of Rome call to arms"; Italian dialect: "The calves of the Romans are beautiful".

Looking at an array of great stones I can speak of and attribute properties to the Japanese stone garden embodied in it only by reference to a suitable cultural tradition; but the garden will be identified by identifying the set of stones in which it is embodied. The reason, once again, we don't confuse the two is because (since they are different) not all the properties attributed to the one can be truly attributed to the other and because (since art is culturally emergent) not all the kinds of properties attributed to the one can be coherently attributed to the other. (Margolis 1974: 191)

The type Japanese Stone Garden is not an abstract structure instantiated by spatial configurations of rocks, but a more complex entity, which finds a place in the world only when configurations of this sort find a place in relations between humans in an appropriate context, that is, when socially coordinated agents attribute to a configuration *X* certain functions *Y* in an appropriate context *C*.⁵ What results from this connection between the elements *X*, *Y* and *C* is more than each of those things taken by themselves, or conceived in abstraction from actual social practice. It is that relation between the different elements (not the relation of instantiation between a Platonic universal and its tokens) that operates the transition from the mere pattern (element *X*) to the type.

The connection between the pattern and the type, that is, the relation in virtue of which coordinated agents can use patterns to generate types, would be the same to which Levinson refers with the term "indication", in a wider sense than the mere "pointing towards": in specifying a sound pattern on a score, or presenting a paradigm performance of it, a composer indicates a musical work, thus creating a new type. "Indication" refers an intentional action, which in turn presupposes a background of coordinated beliefs, making it intelligible. That is, in indicating a sound pattern, the composer is not merely selecting acoustic properties in isolation, but also applying the conventions in use within the artworld. The previous paragraph seeks, so to speak, to provide a glimpse into the structure of that relation of indication, which, in Levinson, is perhaps still excessively linked to the individual intentions of an agent.

There is a structural resemblance between these cases and other cases of institutional entities, e.g., the fact that this metal disc in my pocket, with a certain graphic pattern stamped on its surface, is a coin or currency. It is an objective fact that this disc of metal in my pocket is a coin, but what makes it so doesn't reside simply on the metal or the stamped pattern. It is required a system of coordinated beliefs so that any object in the world, including stamped discs of metal, count as money or can perform the function of being a means of exchange. The fact that I have a stamped disc of metal in my pocket is a brute fact; the fact that I have currency in my pocket is not only a social fact but also an institutional one. Coins are more complex objects than stamped discs of metal. We can employ here the idea of "levels of description", corresponding to layers in our ontological "layer cake", such that there is a layer where we can have stamped discs of metal but not coins, these being possible only when we introduce agents and coordinated beliefs, as it happens with Danto's indiscernible replicas: the "mere real thing" that constitutes

5 "X counts as Y in C" is the formula used by John Searle (Searle 1995; 2010) to represent the structure of institutional facts. In the final section I explore the application of his ideas to the subject of art a bit further.

the “vehicle” of the artwork is not sufficient to determine the fact that there is an artwork. It is also required that which Danto calls an “interpretation” and an “atmosphere of theory” (Danto 1964: 580), in the absence of which nothing can be conceived as art and, therefore, nothing can function as art, for the functional properties of something depend on the connection to intentional states of humans and a specific context of cooperation between them.

Dodd’s Argument in Favour of Platonic Types and a Howellian Answer

To conclude this limited exploration of one aspect of the recent literature in musical ontology, I reproduce Dodd’s argument, in a brief rendition of it by Andrew Kania (Kania 2008: 23), for the idea that all types are eternally existing Platonic entities:

- (1) The identity of any type K is determined by the condition a token meets, or would have to meet, in order to be a token of that type.
- (2) The condition a token meets, or would have to meet, in order to be a token of K is K ’s property-associate: *being a k*
- So (3) The identity of K is determined by the identity of *being a k*.
- So (4) K exists if and only if *being a k* exists.
- (5) *Being a k* is an eternal existent.
- So (6) K is an eternal existent too.⁶

As is evident from what has been said above, Howell counters Dodd’s argument by attacking premises 4 and 5. What he says about “impure properties” is aimed at refuting 5, and his distinction between properties, patterns and types is intended to undermine 4.

An “impure” property is a property that “essentially involves” (in Howell’s phrase) one or more contingent particulars, such as *being a son of Lincoln* or *being an Elizabethan playwright*. The idea is that such properties cannot exist while the contingent items they essentially involve do not themselves exist.

Dodd’s answer to this kind of argument is that properties such as *being a son of Lincoln* must exist before the entities they supposedly “involve” do (Dodd accuses Howell of obscurity as to the notion of a property “involving” contingent particulars) for instance, in 1066 it was true that no one alive was a son of Lincoln, although that truth was not epistemically available to anyone at that time. Now, that truth, according to Dodd, presupposes the existence of the property. Thus, for Dodd, even “impure” properties are eternally existing and the presence of any such properties in the world determines the existence of any types of which they are the “associated properties”, regardless of what beings such as us think or do. Consequently, even if a musical work is an “indicated type”, involving a reference to contingent particulars, Dodd believes that it raises no obstacle to the existence of the type, previously to the existence of the particulars it involves.

Premise 4 is a biconditional asserting that if a type exists, then the associated property also exists, and if the associated property exists, then the type also exists. Howell’s distinction is intended to neutralize the biconditional by falsifying the

6 See Dodd 2007, especially sections 3.3 and 3.4, where Howell’s paper is discussed.

second conditional comprised by it. The idea is that although the existence of the type entails the existence of the properties by which we identify it (the associated property, which can be a complex property or conjunction of simpler properties), the reverse is not true: the mere fact that certain properties occur in the world doesn't determine, by itself, the existence of types. What Howell does is to interpose, between properties and types, a third item: patterns. Any combination of properties determines a pattern (e.g. the property of having alternate bright and clear squares determines the pattern of the checkered board – common) but this is insufficient, according to Howell, to determine a type (e.g. Chessboard), or at least to determine cultural types, “indicated and initiated”, that is, essentially tied to coordinated intentional states of humans (though not all initiated types are indicated types).

Thus, a cultural type such as the game of *tabla* involves patterns: the graphic display of the board, the patterns formed by all possible moves, etc. But the mere presence of those patterns in the logical space of possibilities doesn't determine the actual existence of a type (namely, *Tabla*), even one lacking instantiations. This type only figures as an item in the world when all those patterns I mentioned stand in a certain relation with coordinated beliefs of humans. In other words, the existence of the type presupposes some “thing” (the patterns) and a relation of indication, that consists of its actual use by a community, in a certain way. This example allows me to bring into evidence an aspect of indication which is not usually addressed: when Levinson first proposed his theory of indicated types (Levinson 1980), he made explicit his intention to account for musical works in a certain period of music's history, leaving open the possibility of the theory not being applicable across the board. This was related especially with the essential connection, proposed by Levinson, between musical works and their composers. But maybe not all musical entities, for any time or musico-historical context, are essentially connected to an individual composer, assuming any are. Now, some cultural types such as the Game of *Tabla* are not at all bound to an individual “creator”. Even if the origin of the game was attributable to a specific individual, that would not be part of the identity of the game, and, nonetheless, the type *Tabla*, like all games, is an indicated type. This raises questions about indication being variable for different kinds of indicated types – what is the criterion? The answer to this implies a more thorough approach to the notion of *indication* than the terms in which Levinson has expounded the concept, namely, in terms of an individual *making his (or her) own* a certain pattern.

Elsewhere I defended that a fruitful path to explore would involve combining the notion of indication, such as we find it in Levinson-Howell, with John Searle's approach to the structure of institutional facts. If we observe carefully, each of the elements entering the game of *tabla* has an institutional status. A *tabla* piece is not simply a slice of wood. It is not enough to have a certain shape to be a *tabla* piece. What is required here is something similar to what makes the event of a ball hitting a net *count* as a goal in soccer. The purely physical event of a ball hitting a net is insufficient to make it the case that the world contains things such as goals, though there is no *separate* physical event here. We need a shared system of representations for the world to include something as palpable and objective as a goal in a soccer match. The same is true of what counts as a piece, a point, a

board or a legal move in *tabla*. Each of these, and many more, is an *institutional* fact: perfectly objective *and* dependent on human belief. In the absence of such connection, none of the patterns associated with any game determines the game itself, just as no graphic or acoustic pattern is sufficient for something to count as a sentence in a language.

Dodd's reply to the distinction drawn by Howell resembles his answer to contextualist arguments based on thought experiments of distinct works that are also musical *doppelgänger*, that is, works that share the same sound structure though differing in aesthetic and artistic properties. Dodd argues that such properties, supposedly of the work (like *virtuosity*, *originality*, etc.), are in fact properties of *the composer's action*, not of the work. (Though plausible for some situations, this kind of answer is unsatisfactory, as is clear in the case of allusions, for instance.) In answering the idea that types only exist when patterns acquire the essential property of *actually* being used, Dodd asserts that it is not the type itself that must have that property, but rather its *tokens*, so as being able to count as tokens of the type. So, the reply is that Howell incurs in a type-token confusion, just as contextualists in general would be confusing properties of the work with properties of the compositional action. For instance, to the argument that the graphic/phonetic pattern "glank" doesn't correspond now to a (type)word actually existing in English, though contingently non-instantiated, that it rather doesn't exist at all as a type, Dodd answers that not being a word in English doesn't entail that the (Platonic) type is non-existent, but only that no token satisfies the conditions set by the type (to be used as a noun, in order to refer such and such, being spelled and uttered in this or that way, etc.), so one could say that the (type)word has entered a language (e.g. English). Dodd appeals to the idea that one and the same word may enter more than one language (as is the case with *Schadenfreude* or *chic*, for instance, which are used in English, though originating elsewhere) and that the implausibility of attributing (type) words to particular languages illustrates what is wrong in Howell's argument. In producing tokens of the type, the speakers of one or several languages make it the case that the (type) word enters that language, but they don't cause the type to exist, which type, as a Platonic entity, exists eternally. For Dodd, examples such as that of the word sequences ambiguous between different sentences (in Latin and Romanesco dialect), or the geometric patterns shared by distinct symbols (the pre-Colombian symbol and the Nazi swastika), are correctly described in the following manner: the (eternal) property *being-a-graphic/phonetic-sequence- ϕ -used-to-signify- P* is the associated property of a (Platonic) type, which it determines, and the (eternal) property *being-a-graphic/phonetic-sequence- ϕ -used-to-signify- Q* is the associated property of another (Platonic) type, which it determines.

How plausible is this answer? To me it is as plausible as asserting that "glank" has a place in a private language *before* it is part of any known natural language. To say that a word exists, with "incorporated" meanings, in the form of conditions that any token must satisfy to be an occurrence of *that* word is to lose sight of the fact that actual use by a community is *constitutive* of what a word is. It is a sort of regression to an Augustinianism about how words mean – the idea that words already have meaning, that is, that they *are* words, *outside* of "language games" in

7 Substitute *inscription- ϕ* for *graphic/phonetic-sequence- ϕ* wherever necessary.

which they take place, as if previously given “things” then inserted into the game, rather than “equilibrium points in coordinated action” (Zangwill 2014: 144) – except that in the type-token view we are placing them in a sort of Platonic purgatory, rather than in the private mental world of a speaker.⁸

The Platonist may be suspicious of such an answer. And the reason why he will be suspicious of it, I suspect, lies in conceiving the *possibility* of “glank” being a word in one or more natural languages in terms of the eternal existence of the “associated property” of the type GLANK (*qua* word), in the same way that he conceives the truth, in 1066, that no human being alive is a son of Lincoln, in terms of the truthmaker of that thought entailing the existence of the property *being a son of Lincoln*. But this seems to ignore that the truthmaker for any proposition *denying* the existence of instances of types whose “associated property” is an incoherent cluster of properties (that is, a type that has no possible instantiations) cannot plausibly depend on that associated property actually existing, for the property is incoherent. However, the negative existential is true.

Likewise, the proposition “No human being is a son of Lincoln” is true, though epistemically inaccessible, in 1066, because no human being alive at that time was in a (causal) relation of descendancy with the individual born in 1809 in Hodgenville, Kentucky, USA, assassinated in 1865 in Washington D.C., who was the 16th president of that country, and not because the “Platonic purgatory” contains the eternal property *being a son of Lincoln*, which no human being instantiates in 1066. Here the Platonist will doubtlessly feel tempted to reply: “Yeah... Relation... Universals!”, although the point, as Howell has remarked, is whether the impure property *being a son of Lincoln* is a Platonic type, and not whether the filial relationship is conceived as a universal. Dodd (Dodd 2007: 74) protests that to conceive the first as a non-Platonic impure property amounts to “ontologize” the complexity of the relation involved (which includes a contingent particular), but this doesn’t seem, at the outset, a sin greater than the ontologization he himself incurs, when he thinks of truth conditions for propositions: Dodd infers that the property has to exist, because there is in 1066 a condition something must satisfy in order to be a son of Lincoln, but here he incurs in an implausible “ontologization” of what the truth conditions a proposition must satisfy for it to be true are, turning those conditions into properties in a “Platonic purgatory” (hovering over the material world, but always under the promise of not remaining forever there, uninstantiated).

The Twofold Functional Character of Musical Works (*qua* Artworks)

In the beginning of this paper I said I was not going to argue for a particular ontological theory, but for a possible framework, desirably both plausible and fruitful, to conceive the ontological status of musical works *qua* musical works and *qua* musical works. The shifting emphasis allowed us to catch a glimpse of how to eliminate the seeming redundancy, but now I would like to finish with a few words on this distinction between a work *qua* musical entity and a musical entity *qua* work. To

8 See the comments by Jim Stone (Stone 1994: 439– 440), in a paper that addresses the nature of games.

do it will allow me to throw a little more light on what I have characterized as the complexity of acts of indication, without which no type genuinely emerges from a pattern or combination of patterns available in “logical space”. What I shall do here is to sum up a few conclusions I have reached elsewhere, thinking about the nature of music and the contrast between functionalist and proceduralist theories about the nature of art. Such an exploration is out of the scope of the present paper, in virtue of which this will assume a somewhat dogmatic character. Its function here is merely to give the reader a notion of how vast the territory that the ontological contextualist about musical works sets out to map, equipped with the concept of “indication”, is.

The musical Platonist, as we have seen, treats the concept of “work” as if the “metaphysical baggage” that concept carries were minimal: repeatability and audibility. This approach to the concept of work pushes the Platonist towards sonicism about the individuation of works (the thesis that musical works are individuated by acoustic properties only), and occupying that position concerning the individuation question makes either Platonism or its nominalist “double” inescapable: once established the equivalence between “work” and any *sonic repeatable*, we are left with the task of isolating the “thing” in the world, with which we will identify it – the “sound structure” – the genuine target of our propositions about works.

In the view I adopt, however, the concept of “work” carries a somewhat heavier metaphysical baggage. And the distance between it and a mere sonic repeatable is the Howellian distance between a mere pattern and a genuine type. Nonetheless, that distance too is sensitive to contextual variations, in a way that no specific individuation theory can guarantee its application across the board, to all musical works in art history. What does this mean?

The distance between a pure sound pattern and a genuinely musical entity lies in the *functional* character of what it is for something to be music. Nothing is music *only* in virtue of mind-independent acoustic properties. Birdsong seems like *singing* to us because it reminds us of *our* singing, though in itself it is as musical as a bark or meow. And if a bizarre atmospheric phenomenon was to produce a sequence of pitched sounds, indiscernible to our ears from a Balkan melody, say, as played by a shepherd with the *frula* (a kind of flute, traditional of Serbia), it would not actually be music in virtue of it, just as if, by a miraculous chance event, erosion on a rocky surface were to produce a pattern indiscernible, to our eyes, from a series of decorative motifs, that reason alone would not suffice to make it the case that the pattern was indeed a certain example of decorative art. Only things that would bear the same *functions* as that specific decorative pattern, or maintain the same appropriate causal-historical links with those patterns, could *count* as such. Nature has no *styles*. The difference between two indiscernible instantiations of a pattern, such that one embodies a style and the other doesn't, is a difference in *functional properties*. The decorative pattern, to start with, has the function of exhibiting its continuity with other patterns that *count* as tokens of the type, and of generating a certain kind of experience, intelligible only when one has the type as a background, as well as other stylistic properties of which it is distinct. We don't appreciate it merely as a bearer of certain aesthetic qualities, in the way we appreciate natural formations. We appreciate it as a convergence point of “historical-artistic” intentions, or as

something that is deliberately envisaged for a mode of attention entirely distinct from that which is appropriate to rocky formations produced by erosion.

There are two elements here we should distinguish: appreciation of the pattern as an intentional vehicle of aesthetic qualities, and appreciation of the pattern as representative of the particular style at issue. There is a core of formal properties (dynamics, balance, elegance, etc.) whose presence doesn't crucially depend on conventions *about* such properties. Someone who completely ignored the style could experience the congruence, dynamism, balance, elegance, etc., of the pattern. But nothing *counts* as a representative, say, of a decorative *Iznik* pattern independently of conventions about the style itself, in the same way that nothing counts as a representative of the Persian musical style *radif* or, while we're at it, as a representative of a symphonic movement in sonata-form, independently of there being conventions about how to *count* such things. The distinction I am drawing is, thus, the distinction between things that count as representatives of a type *T* in virtue of conventions, and things that count as representatives of a type *S* in virtue of something they *do*, independently of conventions. Searle has signalled this distinction between types of functional properties with the terms "causal-agentive function" and "status-function". Our ability to impose functions of the second kind on objects is what makes institutional facts and entities possible. We have seen above, concerning the example of the Japanese stone garden, the basic structure that coordinated beliefs must have for there to be functions of the second kind: "*X* counts as *Y* in *C*", in which *X* stands for "things", events or even persons, *Y* stands for a function or functions the thing will perform in virtue of collective recognition, and *C* stands for the appropriate context in which all of this can really work. Two relevant properties of this structure are *indefinite vertical iteration* and *indefinite horizontal interlocking*. What are these properties? The former means that any *Y* element in such a structure can become the *X* element of a further structure (that is, to be a thing with a certain status-function can be a part of the conditions something must satisfy to be a candidate for attribution of a further *Y* function); the latter tells us there is an "horizontal" combination of an indefinite number of these structures, such that anything with a certain status-function makes part of the context *C* of another structure, or other applications of the same structure, so as to generate further status-functions. For instance, a certain wooden object, with a certain shape, counts as a *tabla* piece in an appropriate context, and a certain configuration of pieces counts as the *closing of a point* in *tabla* (a point cannot be closed by using anything that is not a *tabla* piece). Part of the context in this example of vertical iteration is the *point* itself, which only counts as such in the appropriate context (the graphic pattern on the board is not sufficient, since a board with more or less than six points per quadrant would not *count* as a *tabla* board).

The structure for the attribution of causal-agentive functions differs from this one: an agent or agents have an intuition that certain functional properties *F* will be sustained by certain physical properties *P* (e.g. a certain acoustic configuration will be listened to as a sequence of *tones*, with a certain set of aesthetic qualities) and the agent or agents produce objects or events bearing in mind the realization of these functions. The fact that the object or event performs such functions will not depend on a convention about what such function itself is.

Returning to the idea of the distinction between a work *qua* musical entity and a musical entity *qua* work, this involves the distinction between two types: Musical Entity and Musical Work. The distinction is then explained in terms of *functions*: to be music *simpliciter*, a sound event must have certain causal-agentive functions; to be a musical work, that sound event must also be a bearer of status-functions. Something can be music in the absence of conventions for musical works – in an alternative scenario where all musical *performances* are spontaneous improvisations, never to be repeated, there are no “works” in the sense in which we use that concept – but nothing *counts* as a musical work in the absence of conventions for musical works. As in the case of *tabla*, the presence of a mere repeatable pattern is not sufficient: it is required that such pattern figures as an element in a structure of coordinated beliefs.

To conclude this digression in dogmatic register, the functions one attributes to a musical entity *qua* work can *vary in thickness*, that is, according to the context, functions performed by musical works may include or exclude essential reference to a specific composer or a set of specific performance means. As such, no individuation theory, such as sonicism or instrumentalism, will apply across the board to the whole of music history, but will depend on conventions which vary according to context. In some cases, musical works may be more like the type *Tabla*, and in other cases they can be more like the paradigmatic works of *Sturm und Drang* romanticism. Thus, how *fine-grained* the individuation of a musical work must be will depend on conventions (which is different from them being simply arbitrary) and not on inherent properties of “sound structures”, independent of the way we conceptualize works.

The difficulty faced by most theories in the literature, giving them the air of arbitrariness pointed out by Scruton, lies in the attempt to treat musical works somewhat like we treat natural kinds, ignoring the metaphysical baggage of the concept “work” and reducing it to the notion of a mere sonic repeatable. Sonic repeatables are, in fact, independent of us and our beliefs, but the ontological level (or level of description) at which they exist, whether as *concreta* or *abstracta*, is not the level at which we can find artworks or musical works *qua* art.

Conclusion

The seeming dilemma Scruton raises against musical ontology is but an appearance of such. If we accept that metaphysical questions about music concern not its mere “acoustic vehicle” (the sonic repeatables in which musical works are “embodied”) we are not, in virtue of that fact, confined to a range of merely arbitrary solutions for metaphysical puzzles. Some answers are more illuminating or explanatorily powerful than others, even though we cannot guarantee their truth in every detail – they *point* us toward paths that are more or less fruitful. Specifically, theories that avoid the “fetishism” of the sound structure, conceiving works as complex functional entities, as emergent wholes that are more than the sum of parts standing in the relations that sustain them (a pattern of tones, the agents who “indicate” it, the shared beliefs that make it possible to speak of musical styles, forms and traditions, etc.) in a way that much resembles how certain institutional entities

“emerge” from a configuration of elements which are not susceptible, taken each in itself, of being identified with *the* entity at issue.

The reader can now imagine a club of *tabla aficionados* (who are also perhaps addicted to philosophical puzzles) this entity, “the club”, is not to be identified with any particular building that may host its head office, with a specific set of members and officials, nor with official documents establishing its “legal personality”, though each of those things “embodies” the entity at issue, in the way a score, a performance, ideas in the minds of agents, etc., embody a musical work. Nor is the club a Platonic type, that would *actually* exist previously to the coordinated, causally interconnected actions and beliefs that constitute the “life path” of the club in the concrete world. The club exists when those actions and beliefs exist, and not simply because the existence of such entity or of those actions and beliefs is an open possibility in the world. Something new *is* introduced in the world when humans *create* things such as clubs of *tabla aficionados* addicted to philosophical puzzles, just as something new is introduced in the world when there is coordination of beliefs about what *counts* as a piece, point, quadrant, board and legal moves in *tabla*. Neither *tabla*, nor Vaughan William’s *Fantasia*, nor Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, nor Bomberg’s *Mud Bath* existed before the actions that caused those entities to emerge from merely possible patterns took place.

References

- Alexander, Samuel (1988), *Collected Works of Samuel Alexander, British Idealism Series*, John Slater (ed.), London: A&C Black.
- Borges, Jorge Luis (1999), *Collected Fictions*, Andrew Hurley (trans.), London: Penguin Books.
- Currie, Gregory (1989), *An Ontology of Art*, Glasgow: Scots Philosophical Club.
- Currie, Gregory (2009) “Art for Art’s Sake in the Old Stone Age”, *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics* 6(1).
- Danto, Arthur (1964) “The Artworld”, *The Journal of Philosophy* 61(19): 571–584.
- Danto, Arthur (1981), *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Davies, David (2004), *Art as Performance*, Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Dilworth, John, “How to Reform Danto’s Vehicle Fetishism”, (internet) available at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ce53/a21519888d4475a75dc71bbc04a2b30ad611.pdf>
- Dodd, Julian (2007), *Works of Music: An Essay in Ontology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Howell, Robert (2002) “Types, Indicated and Initiated”, *British Journal of Aesthetics* 42(2): 105–127.
- Joyce, James (2012), *Finnegans Wake*, Oxford: Oxford World Classics.
- Kania, Andrew (2008), “New Waves in Musical Ontology”, in Kathleen Stock and Katherine Thomson-Jones (eds.), *New Waves in Aesthetics*, New York: Springer, pp. 20–40.
- Levinson, Jerrold (1980) “What a Musical Work Is”, *Journal of Philosophy* 77(1) 5–28.
- Levinson, Jerrold (2011), “What a Musical Work Is, Again”, in Jerrold Levinson (ed.) *Music, Art and Metaphysics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 215–263.
- Levinson, Jerrold (2013), “Indication, Abstraction and Individuation”, in Mag Uidhir (ed.), *Art and Abstract Objects*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 49–61.
- Magnus, P. D. (2013), “Historical Individuals like *Anas platyrhynchos* and ‘Classical Gas’”, in Mag Uidhir (ed.), *Art and Abstract Objects*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 108–124.

- Margolis, Joseph (1974), "Works of Art as Physically Embodied and Culturally Emergent Entities", *British Journal of Aesthetics* 14 (3) 187–196.
- Rohrbaugh, Guy (2003), "Artworks as Historical Individuals", *European Journal of Philosophy*, 11(2): 177–205.
- Scruton, Roger (1997), *The Aesthetics of Music*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Searle, John (1995), *The Construction of Social Reality*, New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Searle, John (2010), *Making the Social World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Small, Christopher (1998), *Musicking, The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Middletown; Wesleyan University Press.
- Stone, Jim (1994) "Games and Family Resemblances", *Philosophical Investigations* 17(2): 435– 443.
- Thomasson, Amie (1999), *Fiction and Metaphysics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Walton, Kendall (1970), "Categories of Art", *Philosophical Review* 79(3): 334–367.
- Young, James O. (2011), "The Ontology of Musical Works: A Philosophical Pseudo-Problem", *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 6(2): 284–297.
- Young, James O (2014), "The Poverty of Musical Ontology", *Journal of Music and Meaning* 13: 1–19.
- Zangwill, Nick (2014), "Metaphor as Appropriation", *Philosophy and Literature* 38(1): 142–152.

Vitor Gererju

Da li su muzička dela zvučne strukture?

Apstrakt

Ovaj rad posvećen je dilemi u vezi sa ontologijom muzike, koju je u svom delu *The Aesthetics of Music* izneo Rodžer Skruton: ili se ontologija muzike bavi određenim „stvarima” nezavisnim od uma (zvučne strukture), u kom slučaju je sama *muzika* isključena, ili se ona bavi „intencionalnim objektom”, te su stoga njeni problemi podložni arbitrarnim rešenjima. Naš je stav da je u pitanju prividna dilema, te da se muzička dela ne mogu izjednačiti sa zvučnim strukturama, bilo da ih razumemo kao apstraktne entitete ili ne. Načelno, ideja je sledeća: i platonizam i nominalizam u pogledu muzičkih dela su vrste fetišizma – muzička dela nisu „stvari” u Dantooovom smislu „pukih realnih stvari”. Naprotiv, ona podrazumevaju kompleksne veze između objekata, događaja i različitih vrsta funkcionalnih svojstava. U tom pogledu, oslanjam se na Levinsonov i Hauvelov pojam *indikacije*, kao i na Serlov pristup institucionalnoj realnosti... uz mali zaokret sa moje strane.

Ključne reči: ontologija muzike, platonizam, nominalizam, umetnička dela, tipovi.