

MUSICAL PROFUNDITY: WITTGENSTEIN'S PARADIGM SHIFT

PROFUNDIDAD MUSICAL: EL CAMBIO DE PARADIGMA DE WITTGENSTEIN

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Abstract: The current debate concerning musical profundity was instigated, and set up by Peter Kivy in his book *Music Alone* (Kivy 1990) as part of his comprehensive defense of enhanced formalism, a position he championed vigorously throughout his entire career. Kivy's view of music led him to maintain utter skepticism regarding musical profundity. The scholarly debate that ensued centers on the question whether or not (at least some) music can be profound. In this study I would like to take the opportunity to relate Wittgenstein's ideas on music to this current debate, thereby achieving a twofold goal: not only to reintroduce Wittgenstein's ideas into the current debate, but also to use the current debate as a foil to better appreciating Wittgenstein's otherness as a philosopher of music. I argue that Wittgenstein's unique philosophical response to the Romantic framing of the discourse concerning musical profundity—specifically, its threefold emphasis on the specificity, aboutness, and artistically exalted status of music—occasioned a view, which was bound to be glossed over by a philosophical tradition, whose origins had made it inimical to Wittgenstein's original philosophical insights. I conclude that, in a sense, Wittgenstein occasions a paradigm shift by his philosophical thrust to undo the gravitational forces which form the current debate: the very idea of aboutness pertaining to music, and the very idea that a clear line could ever be drawn between music and language.

Keywords: Wittgenstein, music, profundity, Kivy, Romanticism.

Resumen: El debate contemporáneo concerniente a la profundidad musical fue instigado y estructurado por Peter Kivy en su libro *Music Alone* (Kivy 1990), como parte de su exhaustiva defensa del formalismo mejorado, una posición que defendió vigorosamente a lo largo de toda su carrera. La visión de Kivy de la música le llevó a sostener un escepticismo total con respecto a la profundidad musical. El debate académico posterior se centra en la cuestión de si la música (al menos alguna) puede ser profunda o no. En este estudio me gustaría aprovechar la oportunidad para relacionar las ideas de Wittgenstein sobre la música con este debate actual, cumpliendo así un doble objetivo: no solo reintroducir las ideas de Wittgenstein en el debate actual, sino también usar el debate actual como contrapunto para mejorar la apreciación de la otredad de Wittgenstein como filósofo de la música. Sostengo que la respuesta filosófica única de Wittgenstein al encuadre romántico del discurso relativo a la profundidad musical—específicamente, su triple énfasis en la especificidad, el *aboutness* y el estado artísticamente exaltado de la música— desencadenó una comprensión que estaba destinada a pasar desapercibida por la tradición musical, cuyos orígenes la habían hecho adversa a las originales intuiciones filosóficas de Wittgenstein. Concluyo que, en cierto sentido, Wittgenstein ocasiona un cambio de paradigma por su impulso filosófico para deshacer las fuerzas gravitacionales que forman el debate actual: la idea misma del *aboutness* concerniente a la música y la idea misma de que cabría trazar una línea clara entre música y lenguaje.

Palabras clave: Wittgenstein, música, profundidad, Kivy, Romanticismo.

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Ápeiron. Estudios de filosofía, monográfico «Wittgenstein. Música y arquitectura», n.º 10, 2019, pp. 41–58,

Madrid-España (ISSN 2386 – 5326)

<http://www.apeironestudiosdefilosofia.com/>

Recibido: 19/2/2019 **Aceptado:** 11/3/2019

1. Introduction

Ludwig Wittgenstein's fascinating remarks on music are something of a hidden treasure trove. The dispersal of these remarks across Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* and other writings, their embeddedness in the shape-shifting fabric of Wittgenstein's writing, and their multiform occasions and orientations make it difficult not only to extract and present them for discussion, but also to relate Wittgenstein's ideas on music to current theories and discussions. Wittgenstein's remarks on music have often been sidelined in the stronghold of contemporary analytic philosophy of music. For instance, Roger Scruton pointed out that Wittgenstein's writings "have little to say about the problems which I believe to be central to the discipline: the relationship between sound and tone, the analysis of musical meaning, and the nature of the purely musical experience" (Scruton, 1999: viii). More recently, Stephen Davies downplayed the scope of Wittgenstein's contribution, saying that "he did not develop an account of music as such, or any systematic theory of aesthetics, but here and throughout his later lectures and writings he often uses musical examples to make points within aesthetics and other areas of philosophy" (Davies, 2011: 298). It behooves us to get to the root of this sort of undervaluation and rectify it, not only by means of proper exegesis and careful interpretation of Wittgenstein's remarks on music, but also by actively seeking ways to bring them into fruitful dialogue with ongoing concerns in the philosophy of music.

In this study I would like to take the opportunity to relate Wittgenstein's ideas on music to the current debate in analytic philosophy of music concerning musical profundity, thereby achieving a twofold goal: not only to reintroduce Wittgenstein's ideas into the current debate, but also to use the current debate as a foil to better appreciating Wittgenstein's otherness as a philosopher of music. The current debate concerning musical profundity was instigated and set up by Peter Kivy in his book *Music Alone* (Kivy, 1990) as part of his comprehensive defense of enhanced formalism, a position he championed vigorously throughout his entire career. Kivy's view of music led him to maintain utter skepticism regarding musical profundity. The scholarly debate that ensued centers on the question whether or not (at least some) music can be profound. This debate has been going on for some three decades now.

An important aspect of the current debate concerns its ties to the preceding discourse concerning musical profundity in German Romanticism, in particular the carrying over of a host of metaphors of depth, which shape and regulate the current debate. This history of ideas is common ground for both Wittgenstein and exponents of the current debate. I have argued elsewhere that Wittgenstein should be seen as a notable transitional figure in the passage from German Romantic thinking about music to present-day philosophy of music (Guter, 2017). The current debate is also emblematic of the way in which analytic philosophy of music has emerged and taken shape over the last four decades, at least since its regeneration upon the publication of Peter Kivy's book *The Chorded Shell* in 1980. Thus, even though Wittgenstein's ideas are nowhere to be seen in the orbit of the current debate, or perhaps because of that, it becomes most intriguing to explore his direct philosophical response to the shared ideas and sensitivities, which have framed the current debate.

The main point of this study, which addresses its twofold goal, is this: Wittgenstein's unique philosophical response to the Romantic framing of the discourse concerning musical profundity—specifically, its threefold emphasis on the specificity, aboutness, and artistically exalted status of music—occasioned a view that (other contingencies aside) was bound to be glossed over by a philosophical tradition, which has been developing along lines that have made it inimical to Wittgenstein's original philosophical insights. In a sense, Wittgenstein occasions a "paradigm shift". I use the term in a loosely Kuhnian sense. My discussion proceeds as follows. In section two I offer an exegesis of the common ground: the thematic structuring of the discourse concerning musical profundity, including its origins in German Romanticism. Against this background, I discuss (in sections three and four) the current debate in analytic philosophy of music, which has been gravitating around Peter Kivy's seminal work. I offer particular attention to Kivy's "aboutness criterion", which has been at the center of debate right from the outset. The very notion of aboutness is precisely the point of convergence with Wittgenstein's response to German Romanticism. In sections five and six I show not only Wittgenstein's allegiance with German Romanticism, but also his otherness as a philosopher of music, namely, his philosophical thrust to undo the gravitational forces that shape the current debate: the very idea of aboutness and the very idea that a clear line could ever be drawn between music and language.

2. Whence musical profundity?

The prevailing debate concerning musical profundity in contemporary analytic philosophy of music has been conducted with meagre attention to the relevant history of ideas and to the conceptual underpinning of such an idea. A noncommittal nod toward Arthur Schopenhauer's metaphysical glorification of music notwithstanding, the complexities that underlie the very notion of profundity as a property and its peculiar affinity to the art of music are glossed over (see Neill and Ridley, 1995: 242-243). The tendency of commentators to concede to a relatively narrow, quite predictable set of canonical examples of profound music (usually consisting of Beethoven's late string quartets and much of J. S. Bach's music) only adds to the general impression that the main issue at hand is "a fairly narrowly defined question about one of the arts" (ibid.: 244), to wit: can music be profound?

Logically speaking, this is a simple yes or no question. In itself, it merely presupposes that either music can be profound or else that music cannot be profound. Hence, we get the familiar diametrically opposed positions: denying that music can be profound versus affirming that it can. The prevailing debate concerning musical profundity in contemporary analytic philosophy of music exhibits, by and large, this rather simplistic contour. Yet underlying the simple disjunction there is a nexus of ideas, which serves as an ultimate presupposition for that question, an assumption to the effect that this general question can be raised and answered. Unearthing and understanding this ultimate presupposition requires some probing into the origins of the idea of musical profundity.

The first thing that we need to observe about the term "profundity" is its linguistic ambiguity: it is both descriptive and evaluative. It obfuscates the usual separation between subject and object: describing a musical work (or parts thereof) as profound leaves it unclear whether we are referring to a quality felt by the listener (or merely her enjoyment and admiration) or to an objective fact about the music. Moreover, it seems that the attributed quality of profundity does not admit of degrees. We do not have more or less of it. Either we have found something to be profound or we have not. As such, "profundity" may just be a euphemism for adhering to a certain cultural canon. This is where the constant recourse to a standardized stock of musical examples seems particularly counterproductive in the prevailing debate. It is more instructive to try unpacking one of the main questions posed in the debate, namely, "What kind of property *is* profundity?" (ibid.: 243), in order to see how the linguistic ambiguity of the term plays out. So here is the second thing that we need to observe: the term 'profundity' is distinctly a metaphor. This in itself immediately sets the scholarly question "What kind of property *is* profundity?" in conceptual disarray. It is as if, upon hearing Romeo saying that "Juliet is the sun" (in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, act 2, scene 2), we are prompted to ask "What kind of property *is* being the sun?" An answer in a deadpan descriptive mode would be either nonsensical or else question-begging. One is better advised to seek out how a metaphor works its wonders.

As a metaphor, profundity is related to notions of depth. It is a spatial yet nonvisual metaphor. It most often refers to something that is not visually accessible. According to Jean Gabbert Harrell, "in the literal use of *deep* we have a spatial determination, but of something that generally cannot be seen from the surface. What is deep may become visible if we dig down far enough, but then, from that new vantage point, the thing is no longer deep. *Profundity*, in the metaphoric use of depth, is of something that is hidden from view. At best, depth can be regarded as a negative visual metaphor, relating to vision only by what it (usually, at least) is *not*" (Harrell, 1992: 20). Significantly, this makes musical and literary works more susceptible to being described as profound in themselves (rather than just moving us profoundly), as compared to works of architecture, for instance.

In their seminal book *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson offer a useful analysis of the notion of depth, which underscores, for our present concerns, the peculiar complexity pertaining to the ascription of musical profundity (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 100-105). According to Lakoff and Johnson, the notion of depth involves, in various measures and combinations, what they call CONTAINER, BUILDING, and JOURNEY metaphors. All three types of metaphor define content in relation to surface, albeit in different ways. Containers are pervasive ontological metaphors. They can be viewed as defining a limited space (with a bounding surface, a center, and a periphery) and as holding a substance (which may vary in amount, and which may have a core located in the center). For the CONTAINER metaphor, the content is inside the

container, whose boundaries are defined by its surface. There is some similarity between containers and buildings: for the BUILDING metaphor the surface is the outer shell and foundation, which define an interior for the building. However, Lakoff and Johnson point out, in the BUILDING metaphor, unlike the CONTAINER metaphor, the content is not in the interior; rather, the foundation and outer shell constitute the content. Lastly, the JOURNEY metaphor highlights both direction and progress toward a goal. The surface is defined in terms of covering ground, while the content is the ground covered. The longer the path, the more ground is covered (the more content is accumulated).

Regarding the notion of depth, Lakoff and Johnson make the important point that while depth is also defined relative to a surface, the depth-defining surface for each metaphor is not always the same as the content-defining surface. In both the BUILDING and JOURNEY metaphors, the depth-defining surface is the ground level. In the CONTAINER metaphor, it is again the container surface. Yet there are two different notions of depth operating here. The metaphorical orientation of depth corresponds to basicness in the BUILDING and CONTAINER metaphors, but to lack of obviousness in the JOURNEY metaphor. In the BUILDING and CONTAINER metaphors, what is deeper is more basic: the foundation and the core, respectively. However, in the JOURNEY metaphor, points that are not on the surface are hidden from immediate view; we need to go into them in depth. This requires effort — digging — to reveal them so that we can see them. As we go more deeply into an issue, we reveal more, which allows us to see more, that is, to understand more.

In light of the analysis offered by Lakoff and Johnson, we can now make the following preliminary observations concerning the idea of musical profundity: (a) the CONTAINER metaphor must be prominent in the discourse concerning musical profundity, insofar as one tends to speak of musical *works* (qua containers), hence to look for their ultimate depth *at their core*, that is, in their *content*; (b) the distinctive notion of depth as hiddenness pertains to the JOURNEY metaphor; (c) the idea of musical profundity exhibits the dual, conflicting pull of the different metaphorical orientations of depth that these two different kinds of metaphor bring about: basicness versus lack of obviousness; and (d) this conflicting pull is even sharper in relation to the BUILDING metaphor due to its rendering of content in purely structural terms.

This generalized outlook needs to be supplemented with ideational context: the actual way in which the discourse concerning musical profundity has been handed down to the contemporary debate from German Romanticism. Most important is the appropriateness of attributing musical profundity precisely to something not fully explicable or exhaustible. One of the hallmarks of German Romanticism is the conception of profundity in terms of an inexhaustible inner domain whose contents are neither reducible, collectible, nor calculable, hence could ever be fully articulated (Taylor, 1996: 390; Berlin, 1999: 104). This accounts for the air of paradox that is endemic to musical profundity, as the conception of indeterminate, inexhaustible content implodes the CONTAINER metaphor. The musical work qua CONTAINER opens onto a bottomless abyss (Watkins, 2011: 10). Indeterminacy, inexhaustibility and unknowability also render the BUILDING metaphor unintelligible.

Metaphors of depth became an integral feature of German musical discourse. Indeed, as Bernd Sponheuer points out, depth can be regarded as an ideal type of the “German” in music, which reached full maturity and distinctiveness in the writings of philosophers, critics, music analysts and composers around the mid-nineteenth century, and can be traced back to the writings of Johann Gottfried Herder, Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, and E. T. A. Hoffmann (Sponheuer 2002). This ideal endured almost without change well into the mid-twentieth century. According to Holly Watkins, the early German Romantic fascination with depth should be seen in the context of a rebellion against the strictures of Enlightenment thinking. The vocabulary of depth and interiority circulating in German Pietism and the natural sciences was harnessed in order to articulate an anti-French, anti-rationalist aesthetics of music. German writers paid homage to instrumental music's ability to expand the listener's sense of inner space beyond the limits prescribed by rationalism or by language, to convey the sense in which music differs from linguistic and visual modes of expression, and ultimately to create and transmit a distinctly Germanic cluster of idealized values pertaining to music, among them spirituality, inwardness, and seriousness (Watkins, 2011: 22-50). E. T. A. Hoffmann can be singled out as one of the Romantic writers who began to imagine music as possessing an interiority similar in its uncanniness to the interiority of the listening subject. His celebrated Beethoven essays are regarded as the first to attempt to penetrate the “inner structure” of Beethoven's music by means of analytical language, as he envisioned a ‘vertical’

dimension to music complementing its axis of ‘horizontal’ or temporal unfolding. Hoffmann imported into the musical work tensions endemic to Romantic metaphors of depth: between the knowable and the unknowable, and between rationality and irrationality (ibid.: 25).

This complex conceptualization of musical profundity in terms of vertical probing, a being launched from the variable surface of temporally unfolding sound structures into inexhaustible, inexplicable interiority, which is both our own innermost and the world’s, reached saturation in the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer, for whom “the inexpressible depth of all music, by virtue of which it floats past us as a paradise quite familiar and yet eternally remote, and is so easy to understand and yet so inexplicable, is due to the fact that it reproduces all the emotions of our innermost being” (Schopenhauer, 1966: 264). For Schopenhauer, music has an exceptional place in the system of the arts. It is conceived to be radically different from, and superior to, all other arts in two correlated ways, metaphysical and aesthetic: it both expresses the will itself, intimating knowledge of ultimate reality in the most immediate, most vivid way, and speaks to us intensely about human reality, intimating knowledge of what Schopenhauer calls the “inner nature” of human emotion, or the “secret history” of the human will. Thus, the value of music lies inter alia in its unique kinship to the phenomenological dynamics of human emotions, feelings, and moods, to the peculiar “feel” of their intensity, surge, waxing and waning. This is a full-fledged philosophy of music in which the uncanny correspondence between the inner space of music and the inner space of the listening subject is sought out. Yet for Schopenhauer, whatever music tells us with such intimacy and immediacy eludes comprehension by reason. Thus, what music means, what it is about, cannot be translated into other, particular languages. It remains otherwise inexpressible, and understanding what music is about amounts to gaining access to this otherwise inexpressible knowledge (ibid.: 256-263).

3. The ‘aboutness criterion’

The way in which the discourse concerning musical profundity has been handed over from German Romanticism to the current debate in analytical philosophy of music secured the prominence of the CONTAINER metaphor as a regulating element in that debate. The debate emerged complete with a notion of depth as vertical progress toward a purported core, and a notion of hiddenness, suggesting the distinctive Romantic baggage and endemic tension between knowability and unknowability, concerning the purportedly indeterminate, inexhaustible nature of whatever is said to be contained within. Yet it is this notion of content —something which is contained within the container’s surface, an interior— which can be singled out as epitomizing what I would like to portray as the prevailing paradigm. For, according to the prevailing paradigm, a work of music can be said to be profound, only if it could be shown that the work is *about* something profound in itself, or that whatever the work says about its purported subject matter is in itself profound, and that somehow all this is contained within the work, awaits being unearthed, recognized, evoked, recollected or at least apprehended non-discursively. Thus, the idea of *aboutness* —in the sense of possessing the possibility of a subject matter— marks the metaphorical orientation of depth for the CONTAINER metaphor, which regulates the prevailing debate concerning musical profundity. The idea of aboutness is the ultimate presupposition for the primary question for the debate: can music be profound?

Throughout his career, Peter Kivy pitched very high what he called “the problem of absolute music”. For Kivy, absolute music is “pure instrumental music without text, title, programme, dramatic setting, or any other extraordinary music apparatus” (Kivy, 2009: 157). Since pure instrumental music is a quasi-syntactic structure, according to Kivy, without meaning, or reference, or representational features, it cannot be *about* anything, and while some of its features are expressive, music is still not *about* the emotions. The problem of absolute music concerns why and how pure instrumental music is important for us, given that it lacks just those things, namely, extra-musical content, which seem to play so prominent a role in our appreciation, and which seem so vital to the value that music holds for us. “Of the problems that currently concern [...] ‘philosophers of art’”, he wrote, “None is more difficult, more important, or less understood than the problem of absolute music” (Kivy, 2001: 156).

Kivy denied content interpretations of absolute music across the board. He was highly critical of proponents of the New Musicology (Kivy, 2001: 135-159; 2002: 155-167), arguing that their controversial content interpretations of the great symphonies, unabashedly informed by gender theory, exemplify what he sardonically called the “anything goes model”. Such extravagant tales of male dominance in Beethoven’s ninth symphony or feminine entrapment in Tchaikovsky’s fourth are not only unwarranted, he maintained, but also symptomatic of misconstruing the very concept of musical meaning. His point is that there is an obvious lack of criteria for securing any particular content narrative for a given piece of pure instrumental music. In lieu of proper demonstration, content interpretations capitalize on the powers of persuasion —appealing to some authority, to certain social sentiments, to the intellectual agenda *en vogue*— in effect falling prey to a variety of fallacies of relevance.

Kivy’s debate with New Musicology seems to have reached a certain deadlock. Indeed, the standard complaint leveled against New Musicology right from the outset was, as Nicholas Cook put it, that “in problematizing the very idea of ‘the music itself’ the ‘New’ musicologists at times came close to changing the subject, no longer talking about the music but rather through the music and about gender, cultural identity, or ideology” (Cook 1999). Since New Musicology hinges upon the idea that music is never ‘just’ music, but always serves somebody’s ends at the expense of somebody else’s, the question whether a musical work is about some particular extra-musical content is answered in the affirmative only on pain of circularity. On the other hand, Kivy’s own argument for the longevity of the problem of absolute music in the face of a plethora of content interpretations of pure instrumental music remains sheer *argumentum ad ignorantiam* if all that it amounts to is saying that since the formalist thesis has not been nullified or refuted, it nonetheless must have some grain of truth in it.

Yet Kivy not only rejected the practice of content interpretation of pure instrumental music, but also rejected across the board the very notion of content, that is, the idea that pure instrumental music possesses the possibility of a subject matter. Thus, Kivy set himself to undermine what he called the “aboutness criterion”, which he culled for his own expositional purposes from Arthur Danto’s book *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Danto, 1983). According to the “aboutness criterion”, works of art (including works of music) “are about something (or the question of what they are about may legitimately arise)” (ibid.: 82), and they not only possess a content but express something about that content (Kivy, 1997: 39-40; Danto, 1983: 147-148). In light of the preceding discussion, it is noteworthy that the “aboutness criterion” is not just a semantic criterion, but also pertains to acquisition of knowledge. When we ask regarding a musical work “What is it about?”, there is something that we wish to know. The desideratum is a unique item of knowledge, which we are supposed to justify and ground.

Kivy conceded that the legitimacy of raising the aboutness question in regard to absolute music has been handed down to us due to the association of music with the representational arts since the Enlightenment. However, he remained skeptical about the very process whereby absolute music is supposed to have been gathered into the system of the fine arts (Kivy, 1997: 40-41). In order to push against this inclusion, Kivy considered three kinds of “aboutness” which could be attributed to absolute music (ibid.: 42): (a) Absolute music may be “about the emotions”, (b) Absolute music may be “about fictional worlds” of some kind that it generates, (c) Absolute music may be “about itself”. He contended that none of these alternatives work.

According to Kivy, the first two kinds of “aboutness” are symptomatic of what he called “narrativism” (Kivy, 2009). Narrativists are actually literary interpreters of absolute music. They employ a literary analogy in order to attribute meaning to pure instrumental music, perhaps even to render absolute music as akin to literary art. Kivy argued that “emotive aboutness” rests on the mistake of thinking that ascribing perceptual qualities to the music, perhaps emergent or supervenient ones, commits one also to ascribing semantic or representational properties, i.e. “content”, to the music (Kivy, 1997: 44). Kivy was particularly critical of such narrativist accounts as the “persona theory”, which were developed and defended independently by Jerrold Levinson (Levinson, 1990: 306-335) and by Jenefer Robinson (Robinson, 2005). Such theories commonly postulate some sort of indefinite persona in the music, which is supposed to serve as a hinge for our deeply felt interest in pure instrumental music.

Such theories attempt “to give absolute music a fictional content that is supposed to account for its artistic substance and interest, at least in part” (Kivy, 2009: 101). The idea is that just as narrators in literary works

express beliefs, attitudes, intentions, emotions, by means of the words of the text, so musical personae express emotions (feelings, attitudes) by means of the sounds (or “gestures”) of the music. So listeners’ experiences, like those of readers, involve something like recognizing and responding to another person, one who experiences and expresses the emotion in question. From the formalist’s point of view, the persona theorist wishes to take an easy way out of the problem of absolute music (Kivy, 2002: 113-119; 2009: 101-117). Yet the analogy with the literary model runs out of steam when we come to realize that literary personae are interesting because they are individuals and concrete, with relatively rich personal histories and situated in relatively detailed circumstances, rather than abstract entities, or “empty suits”, as Kivy called them. In the last analysis, Kivy maintained, musical personae may have very little literary resources to hold our interest or to move us emotionally.

The second kind of “aboutness” consists in the suggestion that, just as in the case of a literary novel, absolute music may be about fictional worlds of some kind that it generates. In this regard, Kivy targeted Kendall Walton’s attempt to incorporate absolute music into his theory of representation as “make-believe” (Walton, 1990; 1994). Kivy took Walton to be arguing that since successful listening to music is imaginative, and since listening with imagination implies imparting fictions to it, then music contains fiction, at least in some minimal sense (Kivy, 1997: 47-48). Kivy contended that the second premise is patently false, since it fails to distinguish between two kinds of imagination, to wit, “fictional imagination” and “constructive imagination”. Constructive imagination enables us to hear individual tones melodically, joined together; hence without it music is impossible. There is nothing fictional about this, Kivy maintained.

The third alternative, which Kivy argued against, is the idea that music may be internally representational, that is, self-referential, and ultimately about itself. Kivy denies that musical phenomena such as quotations and repetitions can be interpreted semantically in a non-question-begging way. He makes the important point that when we say that the music “quotes”, “suggests”, “repeats”, etc., the use of such words in musical contexts actually presupposes familiarity with their ordinary use (ibid.: 49-52). His point is actually quite Wittgensteinian (as I explain below). Ultimately, the secondary use of such terms cannot sustain the claim that the music is about itself.

While Kivy admitted that he may have not exhausted all the possibilities, he remained firm in his belief that the prospects of the “aboutness criterion” are bleak. It may be instructive at this point to take stock of his position in light of my preceding discussion.

Kivy’s enhanced formalism shows a remarkable commitment to the contours of the Romantic discourse concerning musical profundity as it has been handed down by Arthur Schopenhauer. Aspects of the CONTAINER metaphor are eminently clear in Kivy’s Schopenhauerian insistence that music differs categorically from the other arts, and that this is wherein the exalted nature of music can be found. Kivy actually paid heed to Schopenhauer’s conviction that music liberates us from the world (Kivy, 1997: 179-217; 2001: 18-38). Furthermore, indeed quite strikingly, Kivy was willing to portray music even as a world unto itself, as some kind of an object. Worlds of absolute music, he wrote, “are worlds of musical sound that make no contact with—no reference to—the world in which we live and move and have our being. From that world they are apart” (ibid.: 206-207).

Yet Kivy was adamant in his attempt to remove from that CONTAINER any metaphorical orientation of depth, as epitomized by the “aboutness criterion”. For Kivy, no verticality is allowed. He rejected the very idea of content (nontrivial knowledge of something), the interior dimension of the CONTAINER. Schopenhauer’s “murky and cumbersome” metaphysics was supposed to inflate it, keep its outer shell well defined. Kivy rejected Romantic metaphysics *tout court*, and put a lot of effort into curbing any other sort of Romantic spillover, in theory or in spirit, as he detected in the effusions of proponents of New Musicology, or in the theorizing of proponents of narrativism. Thus, Kivy can be seen as a quintessentially modernist philosopher of art.

In the last analysis, the problem of absolute music, as Kivy construed it, is emblematic of the implosion of the CONTAINER metaphor, envisioning a container with no core. (Lewis Carroll’s Cheshire Cat comes to mind.) And, at the end of his book *Music Alone*, drawing on the repartee “Play it again, Sam” (when asked why Bach’s music is profound), even the antagonistic JOURNEY metaphor, with its rendering of depth in terms of lack of obviousness, drops out of sight.

4. Spiraling into skepticism

Kivy forcefully pushed the Romantic framing of the discourse concerning musical profundity to the brink of utter skepticism. “[F]or a work to be profound,” he wrote, “it must fulfill at least three conditions: it must be able to be ‘about’ (that is, it must possess the possibility of a subject matter); it must be about something profound (which is to say, something of abiding interest or importance to human beings); it must treat its profound subject matter in some exemplary way or other adequate to that subject matter (function, in other words, at some acceptably high aesthetic level)” (Kivy, 1990: 203-4). Of course, since instrumental music is a quasi-syntactic structure, according to Kivy, without meaning, or reference, or representational features, it cannot be *about* anything, and while some of its features are expressive, music is still not *about* the emotions. Furthermore, he argued that even if we grant that music satisfies the aboutness criterion by saying that music is about the very possibilities of musical sound itself, we eventually run into vicious circularity. Short of finding a way to construe musical sound itself as a profound subject matter independently of its containing profound musical works, we can only say that “there are profound musical works only if musical sound is a profound subject matter; musical sound is a profound subject matter only if there are profound musical works” (Kivy, 1990: 216-17). Ultimately, Kivy bites the bullet, as he is forced to give in to the distressing conclusion, contrary to both the weight of musical practice and his own natural inclination, that since absolute music fails to meet these criteria it cannot rightly be called profound.

Kivy’s skepticism about musical profundity has not been left unanswered. It should come as no surprise that all of Kivy’s major critics complained that his “aboutness criterion” is too restrictive, being essentially propositional, gravitating toward systematic or conventional relations of reference or denotation, or misconstruing its subject matter (Levinson, 1992; White, 1992; Ridley, 1995; Robinson, 2000; Davies, 2002; Dodd, 2014; Hulatt, 2017; Kivy responded in Kivy, 1997; 2003). Indeed, in *Music Alone* Kivy seems to have created an acute need within the circle of analytic aesthetics to rescue musical profundity from skeptical oblivion by repairing the “aboutness criterion” for music. Stephen Davies summed it up by saying that “unlike [Kivy], I would be inclined to reject the analysis of profundity, rather than to abandon the intuition that some music is profound” (Davies, 2002: 343).

Kivy’s critics targeted first and foremost his strong semantic commitment to the “aboutness criterion”, which requires that the subject matter of the profound be also generalizable and fully discursively communicable. This critical reaction is clearly aimed at Kivy’s forceful push against the limits of the prevailing paradigm: if aboutness can sensibly be asked of absolute music, then not only do we need to demonstrate how such music can possess a subject matter, but it also behooves us to provide a full disclosure of that subject matter. Or else we cannot really know the answer to the question “What is it about?” According to Kivy, “for a work of art to be profound—and literature is the obvious example here—it must (1) have a profound subject matter and (2) treat this profound subject matter in a way adequate to its profundity—which is to say, (a) say profound things about this subject matter and (b) do it at a very high level of artistic or aesthetic excellence” (Kivy, 1997: 145). In other words, Kivy’s strong semantic commitment to the “aboutness criterion” entails that the purported content or subject-matter of (profound) works of absolute music consists in general—and generally articulable—themes or propositions, with which the music propositionally interacts (Hulatt, 2017: 196). Kivy pushed against the limits of the prevailing paradigm by setting an exceptional standard for cutting through its endemic tension between knowability and unknowability: he demanded that the irrevocable specificity of the musical gesture be offset by semantic clarity.

Bounded by the prevailing paradigm, most of Kivy’s critics were facing an uphill battle, as they struggled to find non-semantic means of exhibiting or presenting some profound content in musical works, thereby loosening the strong semantic commitment to the “aboutness criterion”, which has been mandated by Kivy. Inevitably, within the paradigm, this involved recoiling into the knowability-unknowability tension while trying to find theoretical ways to accommodate the idea that the content of profound music—the answer to the question “What is it about?”—is inseparable from the specificity of the musical gesture in which it is to be found, hence not fully discursively communicable. Reaching the limit, marked by Kivy’s retort “Play it again, Sam”, was not an option.

The responses to Kivy's challenge so far exhibit three main strategies. The first argues that music is directly connected, in a rather informal sense of "aboutness", to extra-musical subject matter, of profound nature, usually via the emotions it expresses (e.g., Levinson, 1992). Yet the attempt to loosen Kivy's strong semantic commitment by adhering to an informal notion of "aboutness" does not explain what it is for music to be about something (Dodd, 2014: 314). And even if we grant that music can somehow be about the emotions, then such an account ultimately stops short of explaining how music can convey much more than dull banalities about the emotions, which it expresses (Kivy, 1997: 169; Davies, 2002: 345). This amounts to a failure to meet the second necessary condition for profundity (according to Kivy): that the profound subject matter be treated in a way adequate to its profundity.

The second strategy argues that the locus for musical profundity is the abstract features of the musical unfolding, in its treatment of the piece's contents and form, and that there are indirect ties between these autonomous musical events, processes and features, and profound notions pertaining to our life (e.g., Levinson, 1992; White, 1992). Such an approach patently underscores, indeed enhances, the knowability-unknowability tension, since it is inevitably afflicted by general vagueness about the manner in which music contributes to our understanding of the lofty ideas, which the music is supposed to intimate. Eventually, as Davies says, "we are back to the earlier complaint that, even if music can direct our focus to humanly important notions, it is not clear that it can clarify our understanding of them as such" (Davies, 2002: 348).

The third strategy argues there are ways of conveying thoughts that are not propositional at all, and that profound works of music non-propositionally exemplify or display their properties (Davies 2002; Dodd 2014). Such an approach attempts to loosen Kivy's semantic commitment as regards profundity by rendering the content of profound works of music as somewhat less generalizable in discursive terms. That is, it attempts to ease the knowability-unknowability tension by accommodating the idea that the profound content is embedded in the specificity of the musical work, and attending to it involves enacting this content in and through the specific musical work. Within the prevailing paradigm, this is as close as one could allow oneself to approach Kivy's limit, marked by the retort "Play it again, Sam", without spiraling again into skepticism. So it is imperative that profound musical works offer no statements, and there is no explicit treatment of discursive themes. According to Stephen Davies, "some music is profound as some chess play is; namely, for what it exemplifies and thereby reveals about the human mind" (Davies, 2002: 355). According to Julian Dodd,

The profundity of an artwork —literary, pictorial, or musical— does not lie in its *saying something* profound, but in its possessing a type of *response-dependent property*: specifically, a disposition to elicit a certain kind of merited response in the understanding appreciator. (Dodd, 2014: 312)

Davies's proposal suffers from the unwelcome, counterintuitive consequence that "every human accomplishment and invention requiring genius or greatness of mind is non-propositionally profound" (Kivy, 2003: 408). Moreover, it misses the mark by suggesting that a profound musical work is not itself about (what Davies presumes to be) the source of its profundity (i.e. the creative genius of the composer). Consequently, he has provided no ground for believing that the musical work is itself capable of profundity (Dodd, 2014: 305). Like Davies's proposal, Dodd's proposal —the most sophisticated response to Kivy's challenge as of yet— still shows, as it must within the prevailing paradigm, some commitment to the idea that the profound content of a musical work could still, in principle, be realized by other means; that is, there should still be a discursively free-standing answer to the question "What is it about?" Furthermore, both proposals may still be vulnerable to Kivy's well-chosen counterexamples of non-profound artworks which meet the criteria of exemplification and non-denotational expression of content (Hulatt, 2017).

And so, as Kivy himself wryly acknowledged, "apparently my 'distressing' conclusion continues to distress" (Kivy 2003: 402). In sum, Kivy's skepticism about musical profundity, and the responses that it elicited, invariably reveal that the ensuing contemporary debate swallowed the Romantic framing of the discourse hook, line and sinker, complete with all the endemic tensions (which Kivy has been fighting so hard to ameliorate) pertaining to the inexhaustibility and inexplicability of the purported ability of music to reveal things about human nature or about our place in the world. The Romantic framing has been perpetuated as a paradigm for the current debate. In a sense, Kivy's skepticism serves as a litmus test for the prevailing paradigm. A bit

like the loveable figure of Humpty Dumpty, the “aboutness criterion” for music, pushed by Kivy, had a great fall. Ever since, others have been trying to put it together again.

5. Wittgenstein's Romantic allegiance

Wittgenstein's critical emergence (in his later writings, from 1930 onwards) from the Romantic conceptions of musical depth is reflected in both his aesthetic sensibility and his concern with translatability between musical and linguistic experience. Where German Romanticism points unequivocally towards the irreducibility and ultimate inexpressibility of music, Wittgenstein occupies a middle ground that preserves the full and unique nature of such experience without cutting it off from the other patterns of life (Guter, 2017).

A historical survey of sources of metaphors of musical depth in Wittgenstein's writings easily brings out again the familiar influence of Arthur Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*. Wittgenstein's interest in Schopenhauer spanned his entire career. There is ample evidence for Wittgenstein's keen interest in Schopenhauer's ideas in his early 1914-16 notebooks and in his diaries, and by 1931, in his middle period, he famously went as far as to name Schopenhauer one of the thinkers whose line of thinking he seized on for his own work of clarification (CV 16). There is some written evidence of, and also a well-known testimony to, Wittgenstein's continued engagement and sympathy with Schopenhauer's ideas on music throughout his later years (Fann, 1967: 67-68).

Yet Wittgenstein's immediate sources were more variegated, and significantly so. Oswald Spengler utilized metaphors of depth as part of his comparative methodology for cultural epochs, and ultimately for his sweeping cultural critique. Wittgenstein read Spengler's *Decline of the West* eagerly in the spring of 1930, and acknowledged Spengler's singular contribution to his thinking alongside Schopenhauer's (CV 16). Spengler powerfully pursued the Romantic conception of artistic depth as an essential characteristic of the late hours of what he called the “phase of accomplishment” in Western culture. For Spengler, music is a reflection of the Western soul, its prime symbol, and the ideal medium for expressing the Western (essentially Faustian) ideal of a striving toward infinite space. “Be the artist painter or musician”, Spengler wrote, “his art consists in creating with a few strokes or spots or tones an image of inexhaustible content, a microcosm met for the eyes or ears of the Faustian man; that is, in laying the actuality of something objective which, so to say, forces that actuality to become phenomenal” (Spengler, 1939: 286).

Around the time he read Spengler's *Decline of the West*, Wittgenstein also became acquainted, albeit briefly, with the music theory of Heinrich Schenker (Guter, 2015). Schenker's theory represents the culmination of the Romantic notions of depth. According to Schenker, all great masterworks possess a deep structure, or background, which lends them not only their coherence but also their cultural identity and value. As Watkins points out,

For all its apparent formalization, Schenker's notion of the background is emphatically not just a musical concept. Instead, the background delineates an imaginary space with abundant figurative overtones, including those of nature, God, origin, genius, the soul and Germanness—all by this point conventional associations of depth. (Watkins, 2011: 25)

Like Spengler, Schenker harnessed this metaphoric orientation of depth to mount a scathing critique of the modern composition of his day for its lack of depth, according to his theory. “Today's generation even lacks the ability just to understand the existing technique of the masters, which would be required as the first step toward any kind of progress”, he wrote,

[...] the proudest products of Richard Strauss are inferior—in terms of true musical spirit and authentic inner complexity of texture, form, and articulation—to a string quartet by Haydn, in which external grace hides the inner complexity, just as color and fragrance of a flower render mysterious to humans the undiscovered, great miracles of creation. (Schenker, 1987: xxi)

The Romantic framing of the discourse concerning musical profundity is in full display in the following transitional passage, which Wittgenstein wrote early in the 1930s:

Music, with its few notes & rhythms, seems to some people a primitive art. But only its surface [alternative: foreground] is simple, while the body which makes possible the interpretation of this manifest content has all the infinite complexity that is suggested in the external forms of other arts & which music conceals. In a certain sense it is the most refined art of all. (CV 11; I have modified the translation)

Wittgenstein shows allegiance to the distinctively Romantic threefold emphasis on the specificity of musical expression, the aboutness of music, and the exalted status of music among the arts. Yet the philosophical context of this passage puts it in a special light, which sets Wittgenstein's discussion apart from the parameters of the prevailing debate concerning musical profundity.

Wittgenstein rendered the specificity of musical expression in terms of gesture and physiognomy. This is yet another theme, which Wittgenstein took up in this context from both Schopenhauer and Spengler. But it is also intrinsically connected with Wittgenstein's philosophical development in his middle-period (1929-1936), specifically to the emergence of his "anthropological view", which brought into prominence the idea that understanding a gesture requires looking at how the gesture relates to the form of life of which it is a part. That is, a gesture has a point only in human society. We have to look at the environment, the surroundings, where the language functions. In the context of the emergence of Wittgenstein's "anthropological view", his reference to music as "a primitive art" (in CV 11) should be understood as meaning that music is "an art of gestures". Understanding the gestures of "primitive languages" (in Wittgenstein's particular use of this term) —for example, facial expressions— does not correlate with explanation. According to Wittgenstein,

We learn to understand these gestures the way we learned as children to understand the gestures and facial expressions of grown-ups —without explanation. And in this sense learning to understand does not mean learning to explain, and so we understand the facial expression, but can't explain it by any other means. (BT 10; handwritten remark)

For Wittgenstein, musical gestures (for example, understanding a phrase as an answer to a question) are prime examples of the kind of understanding which comes before the capacity to explain according to a calculus with fixed rules of "grammar". This is a view of gesture as enmeshed with life, as a move in a language-game, whose purpose and point can be brought out only when considered as part of a form of life. The importance of Wittgenstein's view for our present discussion is this: his understanding of the specificity of musical expression undercuts the CONTAINER metaphor (in Lakoff and Johnson's analysis of depth) by doing away with the inner-outer distinction. For Wittgenstein, music is not sealed off from language. Quite on the contrary, when we realize, for instance, that a repeat is *necessary* in a musical piece, says Wittgenstein, "the theme is a *new* part of our language, it becomes incorporated in it; we learn a *new gesture*. The theme interacts with language" (CV 59-60). This is where Wittgenstein's paradigm shift transpires. I will discuss this in detail in the next section.

Careful reading of the rest of the transitional passage in CV 11 lends further support to this claim. Emulating the Romantic framing of the discourse concerning musical profundity (as handed down to him by Schopenhauer, Spengler and Schenker), Wittgenstein presents the challenge of looking further into the enmeshment of music with human life in terms of an unfathomable complexity, configuring the challenge in Hoffmannesque fashion as a horizontal plane (a surface), which calls for vertical probing. Meeting this challenge requires traversing the tension between the knowable and the unknowable, between concealment and revelation. His wording strikingly resembles not only Schopenhauer's (regarding the infinite complexity of music, which can only be suggested by the external forms of other arts), but also the metaphoric language of Spengler and Schenker (regarding the simple, graceful surface of sounds, which conceals this infinite complexity). Even more strikingly, Wittgenstein decided to replace the word "surface" (Oberfläche) with the word "foreground" (Vordergrund), which notably is used by Schenker in this very context as a technical term in his theory. Ultimately, Wittgenstein retained a sense of depth as verticality, yet against the backdrop of Wittgenstein's affinity with Schenker's view of music (Guter, 2015), such verticality is anything but semantic. Furthermore, as noted above, the CONTAINER metaphor drops out of sight.

In fact, Wittgenstein opted for the JOURNEY metaphor instead. This is clearly shown in CV 11 by the fact that for Wittgenstein the term "content" (Inhalt) and the term "surface" are on a par. The "simple surface"

is the “manifest content”. For Wittgenstein, the infinite complexity of the musical gesture is not contained inside the musical piece, but rather is *embodied* in the form of life of which it is a part —Wittgenstein even uses the word “body” (Körper). This renders the metaphoric orientation of depth very differently from that of the CONTAINER metaphor.

Wittgenstein's emphasis on the JOURNEY metaphor, in particular its metaphoric orientation of depth, are eminently clear in his letter to his friend Rudolf Koder, written at around the same time, in 1931 (KL 38-39). Wittgenstein's unique description in this letter of what it takes to get to know a piece of music brings into prominence the primacy of playing music for Wittgenstein, the aptly collaborative nature of one's attempt to draw in significance (the dialogue is there, even if one is playing for oneself). According to Wittgenstein, we phrase and rephrase a passage in order to characterize it, realizing that a certain characterization may elude us. He emphasizes the investigative nature of making such comparisons, as well as the daring choice to take on a specific phrasing as an invitation to traverse a whole field of possibilities, thereby enabling meaningful distinctions between right and wrong, in the hope of reaching one that necessitates itself, that is, to see in the score something we have not seen before.

The JOURNEY metaphor comes across powerfully in Wittgenstein's understanding of the richness of character which ensues from such traverse, rendering depth as an articulation of possibilities, which serves and instances further possibilities for characterization of what may be heard. Again, Wittgenstein shows his Romantic allegiance by relating such deepening to self-knowledge, but this does not hinge upon the inner-outer distinction, but rather upon how phrasing and characterizing changes one in return.

6. Wittgenstein's paradigm shift

Wittgenstein's allegiance to German Romanticism notwithstanding, the evocation of its threefold assumption concerning musical profundity —specificity, aboutness and knowledge— and his critical response to it in the context of his later work are calculated to flesh out the conceptual constraints on musical understanding, not to ponder musical metaphysics. For Wittgenstein, understanding a musical theme involves inquiring into specificity and necessity in the context of *musizieren*, that is, seeing music primarily as embodied activity. For example, asking why it is that loudness and tempo move along *these* lines. Yet Wittgenstein reminds us:

One would like to say: “Because I know what it's all about”. But what is it all about? I should not be able to say. In order to ‘explain’ I could only compare it with something else which has the same rhythm (I mean the same pattern). (One says “Don't you see, this is as if a conclusion were being drawn” or “This is as it were a parenthesis”, etc. How does one justify such comparisons? —There are very different kinds of justification here.) (PI §527)

To be sure, we cannot say what it's all about; but his point cannot be dogmatically Romantic, namely, that the face of musical meaning is hidden from us. For nothing is hidden. “There just *is* no paradigm there other than the theme”, Wittgenstein wrote, “And yet again there *is* a paradigm other than the theme: namely the rhythm of our language; of our thinking & feeling” (CV 59).

According to Wittgenstein, knowing what the music is about is manifested within aesthetic conversation. He expounded the characteristic of such conversation already in his lectures in Cambridge in the 1930s. It involves presenting phenomena, laid out side by side, independently of the causally determined sequence of events, in a creative, fitting order, which enables one to see things with understanding. The open-endedness of the discussion, its flow, is regulated by manifold, nuanced, patently incalculable “verifying phenomena” of the parties involved. In Juliet Floyd's words,

With success, the ‘face’ of what is characterized shines through in a comprehensible and communicable way, affording us ways to see likenesses and differences, and ways to go on discussing and drawing out from the articulation further aspects of what is characterized that are there to be seen in and by means of it. (Floyd, 2017: 366)

According to Wittgenstein, the comparisons of which aesthetic explanations consist are illuminating insofar as the expressed facts and phenomena are ordered in such a way that we can see them “within a system” (M 9: 41, 47), having gained a synoptic view of them (M 9: 33). According to Wittgenstein, this is made possible by our having an ideal before our minds. Aesthetic reasons, that is, justifications of the kind that manifests our musical understanding, “are given in the form: getting nearer to an ideal or farther from it” (M 9: 36). As I explain elsewhere (Guter, forthcoming), Wittgenstein’s notion of “ideal” (at the time) originated also from his critical reading of the notion of a “prototype” (*Urbild*) in Spengler (and also in Goethe). Ideals come into aesthetics as objects of comparison for the purpose of seeing something anew, a possibility: “you would need to describe the instances of the ideal in a sort of serial grouping” (AWL 36).

Importantly, for our present discussion, what Wittgenstein called “ideal” in his lectures in the 1930s is equivalent to the term “pattern” in PI §527. They are all facilitators of aesthetic discussion. These facilitators provide for tradition and nourish new creations and cultured judgments. They are used against a specific cultural background of measuring and judging various achievements, hence they also facilitate the development of a cultured sense of taste, artistic sensibilities and judgments that in turn manifest them. They allow us to characterize the topography of culture by yielding an overview that can be rendered in a comprehensible and communicable way, and also ways to go on discussing and drawing out—via such characterization—further aspects of what is there to be seen in and by means of it. This sort of “measuring rod” is a value-laden measure: one that will not suit cultural practices and sensitivities entirely different from ours. As Garry Hagberg points out, for Wittgenstein, understanding music occurs within our cultivated sensibilities and imagination-assisted perception, within the stream of musical life (Hagberg, 2017: 92).

As already suggested, Wittgenstein’s critical response (in his later writings) to the Romantic framing of the discourse pertaining to musical profundity involves a decisive move beyond the inner-outer picture and a modulation of the Romantic notion of “aboutness” accordingly. This means that, for Wittgenstein, the primary issue of the aboutness of music is twofold. First, the answer to the aboutness question (for music) is construed in terms of vertical interrelations between language games, that is, language games that presuppose familiarity with other language games (Hintikka and Hintikka, 1989: 272-304; 1996: 335-343; Ter Hark, 1990: 33-42; Mulhall, 1990: 45-52). That is, understanding what the music is about—whether the theme “points to anything beyond itself”, approaching a model, which “exists in reality”—logically presupposes a myriad of other language games, and ultimately, says Wittgenstein, “the whole range of our language games” (CV 59-60).

Second, the manifestation of musical understanding, and the circumstances for embracing or rejecting such manifestation, comprise the only criterion for the existence and nature of the experience involved. That is, when I address the specificity of the musical theme, “I know what it’s all about”, it is not because my understanding sends me further inwards into a determinate mental state. “What does it consist in, following a musical phrase with understanding, or, playing it with understanding?” Wittgenstein asked, “Don’t look inside yourself. Ask yourself rather, what makes you say that’s what *someone else* is doing” (CV 58). And again, this in turn ultimately presupposes “the whole range of our language games”.

Wittgenstein’s important point is that the ways in which I could lead someone else to understand music, or to get it right, admit of indeterminacy, which is constitutive of such language games in a logical sense. According to Wittgenstein, enormous variability, irregularity, and unpredictability are an essential part of human physiognomy and the concepts of the ‘inner’ for which human physiognomy serves as a basis (RPP II §§614-615, 617, 627). Two important claims are intertwined here. First, human physiognomy is fundamentally non-mechanical; that is, it cannot be recognized or described by means of rules, and it introduces an indefiniteness, a certain insufficiency of evidence, into our physiognomic recognition that is constitutional hence not indicative of any deficiency of knowledge. Second, such indeterminate “fine shades of behavior” constitute our concepts of the “inner”, which we use occasionally also in aesthetic contexts (Z § 505). These concepts are ultimately grounded in “patterns of life”, as Wittgenstein put it, which confers upon them indefiniteness in a logical sense (LW I §211).

The fact that one does not have to accept my suggestion regarding how a passage is to be played, or that there are no hard and fast ways of making one see how to play it right, does not constitute a shortcoming in the game (CV 79). And when one does get it right, this is the culmination of a kind of language game, which admits of what Wittgenstein calls ‘imponderable evidence’, whereupon, as he put it, “sufficient evidence

passes over into insufficient without a borderline" (RPP II §614). According to Wittgenstein, "expression consists for us in incalculability" (CV 83). The imponderability of this kind of evidence is significantly reflected in the way we attempt to communicate our experience, and in the measure for the success of our justifications. Thus, in the case of music, I may ask one, for instance, to hear a certain passage as a question or as a parenthesis, although I am quite incapable of describing—and not due to a lack of suitable words—what I want him to hear. That is, I react in a certain way out of conviction, and if I am successful, then the other person shows willingness to follow the rules of the game that I am playing, that is, to use concepts based on indefinite evidence (LW I §927).

The manifestation of musical understanding—for instance, the other person playing now differently out of genuine conviction—is the only criterion for the existence and nature of the experience involved, namely, hearing the passage as a question. Wittgenstein portrays this moment by saying: "For me this musical phrase is a gesture. It insinuates itself into my life. I adopt it as my own" (CV 83). What is peculiar here is the incorrigibility of gesture. I adopt the gesture as my own without "conclusive reason" and without doubt; it is the aesthetic moment of reveling in attunement, wherein there is neither opinion nor difference.

The specificity of the musical expression, embodied in gesture, marks a vertical shift in the language-game played. The melody becomes "a *new* part of our language", in Wittgenstein's words, because the moment of getting it right consists in a vertically interrelated move in a language-game, which can only be understood against the backdrop of correlate, logically prior moves in "the whole range of our language games", hence constituted indeterminately, *and* because it is internally related to the experience involved. The one who hears music with understanding "resonates in harmony", as it were, with the thing understood (PG 79).

For Wittgenstein, this sort of "resonating in harmony" is the hallmark of the aesthetic conversation, an experience of a fitting characterization, which marks the resolution of an aesthetic puzzle—nothing has been explained away, but we have drawn our attention to something that can now assist us in recovering a sense of necessity in the given situation. Nothing has been said or shown in order to inform the other person; rather "this is a reaction in which people are in touch with one another", Wittgenstein wrote (RPP I §874). The game has become incorrigible insofar as the performer "gets the expression right". Yet no deficiency of knowledge has been addressed or rectified: at the apex of musical understanding, grammar has no room for the concept of doubt, and hence it also has no room for the concept of knowledge. "Getting it right" is part of the game; that is to say, not getting it right (at first) has been part of the game as well.

In sum, Wittgenstein's paradigm shift vis-à-vis the Romantic framing of the discourse concerning musical profundity was twofold: the concomitant dissolution of the aboutness criterion, and of the distinction between music and language (insofar as it is supposed to be underpinned by a philosophical theory based on the drawing of a specific line). Both aspects of Wittgenstein's response to German Romanticism hinge upon his unique treatment of the notion of gesture—its grounding in "imponderable evidence", and its embodiment of vertical shifts in interrelated language-games. By arguing that "the theme interacts with language" (CV 60), Wittgenstein was pushing against the temptation to render the intrinsic, structured, or conversational sense of a thematic line in isolation from our language-games and the form of life within which they emerge. The problem with such a temptation to draw a clear line between music and language, as Andrew Bowie notes, is that "what is supposed to be on each side of the line cannot be said to be stable. Furthermore, the resources for drawing the line, that is, language itself, may not be sufficient to describe the musical 'side' of the line, which has to be experienced in ways language cannot circumscribe" (Bowie, 2007: 18). Indeed, Garry Hagberg points out that Wittgenstein recovers "a full-blooded sense of practice-focused embodiment against the abstractions of a disembodied idealism (of a kind that, given the inducements of certain linguistic forms, remain ever-present in aesthetics)." (Hagberg, 2017: 73)

7. Conclusion

It is instructive to view the current debate concerning musical profundity from the vantage point of Wittgenstein's paradigm shift. As Scruton noted, Wittgenstein's insight that musical meaning is an internal relation, that is, a relation that denies the separateness of the things it joins, sharply sets him apart from contemporary analytic philosophy of music, whose discussions of musical meaning, for the most part, hinge upon whether music is somehow related to extra-musical emotions and whether this could have anything to do with the value of music (Scruton, 2009: 33). In this sense, Peter Kivy's defiant position can be seen as a fully realized philosophy of music held captive by a picture of musical meaning as a relation between music and something else. Drawing the most consistent conclusions from the Romantic paradigm of musical profundity, he literally pushed it all the way to the breaking point, showing that it cannot sustain its own weight once whittled down by skepticism concerning a relation between music and human life.

To my mind, Kivy's philosophically defining moment —indeed a great moment of intellectual honesty— takes place right at the end of his book *Music Alone*, when, perplexed by the fatal circularity of the attempt to construe musical sound as the subject of profound musical works, he turns on his heels at the edge of the abyss, unable to see any further. From the vantage point of Wittgenstein's paradigm shift, the threat of vicious circularity here would be symptomatic of thinking of musical sound apart from gesture —that is, apart from what Wittgenstein considered to be the preconditions, and the lived, embodied realities, of musical intelligibility. Hence, Kivy's importance lies in showing us how skepticism marks the conceptual boundaries of musical profundity.

In the context of the current debate, Wittgenstein once again shows us that we are in the grip of a certain picture. Circularity would be fatal only if one seeks out knowledge. Surely we can let go of this picture, if the grammar of musical understanding has no room for the concept of knowledge. Letting go would amount to affirming that musical profundity is praxeological, internally related to human life and spread across its filigree-shaped pattern. This means that for Wittgenstein there has never been any genuine philosophical problem of absolute music —not as Kivy defined it, anyway— and that there is no philosophical urgency in pointing out the obvious by arguing that music is important to us. Wittgenstein is telling us that musical works are profound, not because formalism is false or because narrativism is true, but simply by virtue of inviting us to “be in touch with one another” by engaging creatively, intellectual and physically in this culturally embedded, embodied activity involving organized sound. We actually have been doing just that all along: composing music, playing music, listening to music, appreciating music, talking and writing about it. Kivy's intuition was right, but not in the sense he had in mind. “Play it again, Sam” is not a limit, but rather a steppingstone.

8. Postscript

This study is dedicated with gratitude to the memory of Peter Kivy (1934-2017). Peter joined my doctoral dissertation committee at Boston University in the late 1990s, and was there by my side when I just started thinking about Wittgenstein as a philosopher of music. His genuine interest in my project, his intellectual generosity, clear philosophical voice, sincere mode of dialogue, and above all his witty, razor-sharp criticism have remained immensely important for my efforts over the years to clearly articulate Wittgenstein's ideas on music and their overall philosophical significance.

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