

**«VORDERGRUND» AND «HINTERGRUND» –
A FUNDAMENTAL CONTRAST
IN THE CORPUS OF THE MUSICAL WORK.
*An Attempt to Understand the Peculiar Character of
Form-Bestowal and Stratification in Musical
Composition and Performance***

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ABSTRACT

In order to understand the specific nature of the musical act both in its ontological reality and as a hermeneutical projection, we have organized our paper into 11 successive sections, as follows:

1. It is a matter of course that although natural language and music have their distinct characteristics, they are based essentially on the same fundamental premises that ensure their presence as an act. To clarify the relationship between the *linguistic act* and the *musical act*, we will start from the basic considerations introduced by Humboldt. Essentially, they tend to consider language as an essential form that lives through unity and vitality.

2. To understand the musical act as a *language*, the considerations on language are paramount. Thus, the musical phenomenon is a language put into action, which presents both a sensibly real interface and a deeper projection that lies in the essential unity of compositional thinking based on invention.

3. Given that “the artistic miracle of a musical work” implies more than we can physically hear, it is necessary to investigate the “relationship of appearance” that characterizes the mode of being of the musical act. Thus, the musical art does not transpose the idea to reality, but only represents it on a higher plane.

4. While further investigating the composer and the realization of the musical composition, the same “relationship of appearance” is immediately brought to the fore. Thus, two strata are identified in the presence and effect of the musical act – the foreground (*Vordergrund*) and, necessarily, the background (*Hintergrund*), which the act of composition brings in a sensible and also significantly hermeneutical synthesis.

5. The essential thing is therefore this different thing, which is no longer sensible. Given that in music, the foreground and the background are much closer than in other arts, their duality has long been misunderstood. This tense dynamic contrast between strata is the very essence of a musical work.

6. This unity and opposition between strata is even more necessary in music than in other arts. Music needs to be transposed to reality through the art of execution, in order for the musical work to be brought into effect and presence. The composer and the performing musician constitute what in philosophy we would call the “condition of possibility” of the musical work, which, beyond being a creation, has to be brought into presence, into effect, through the audible performance.

7. The background is often mysterious and difficult for the aesthetic understanding. We will resort here to N. Hartmann's analyses, particularly to those addressing the “the phenomenon of the background in music”, which are both aesthetically and philosophically exemplary.

8. The paradox of music lies in that it is capable of bringing to the senses something that is entirely different and distanced from what can be sensibly heard. To solve this essential duality is an ontological undertaking. The aesthetic object enters into a larger set of cultural phenomena, but at the same time falls entirely under the law of objectivation.

9. What is mysterious in the nature of objectivation is and always remains this: how can the modelling of a sensible thing in the foreground be the carrier of a content that has an entirely different mode of being and that is there only for a consciousness? Here, a parallel must be drawn with the mode of understanding of the concept that appeals both to the sensible intuition and to the higher forms of intuition that lead to understanding.

10. The parallel between the concept and the work of art highlights the necessity of the permanent and higher synthesis of the musical act. The status of this unique unity may be understood by appealing to what Leibniz called the principle of the “identity of

indiscernibles”, which in fact interferes with the principles of order and continuity, thus allowing the quasi-identity of musical strata, as well as the essential ontological difference between them to be viewed in a fair light.

11. The problem, therefore, is finding the “internal difference” between the two strata, which in the musical work lies both in itself and in its actual performance. At the same time, this subtle difference between the strata appears and varies constantly with every performance, which leaves the musical act perpetually available for possible new consummations.

Keywords: linguistic act, musical act, *ergon*, *energeia*, foreground (*Vordergrund*), background (*Hintergrund*), appearance, composition, performance, identity of indiscernibles.

1. Nowadays, the idea that (natural) *language* is *music*¹ is almost unanimously accepted, which also justifies the question: isn't music itself (as presence, the musical act) (apart from being a form of art or precisely for that reason) a language? For both *language and music* pertain to what is essential in man's mode of being, in his (phenomenological) relation to the world (*Weltbezug*).

In a certain sense, with both grammar and music being rooted in man's innate tendency towards a spontaneous grammatical and musical behaviour, one cannot but notice that before learning the grammar of his mother tongue, the human individual begins to communicate verbally in a grammatical manner, just as, without having musical training, he is able to sing as well.²

¹ The idea of the musicality of the spoken language is no longer a novelty today; people speak about the «melody of speech» as an important factor of intonation depending on the «communication situation», which requires the speaker to choose the phonetic means (the tempo of the verbal flow, dynamics, rhythm, intonation, etc., with the last being used even as a grammatical means), which strengthens the belief that a proper understanding of the grammar of (natural) languages is a path towards a better understanding of musical language. Of special significance in this regard is Schopenhauer's conception: “[...] *music*, if regarded as an expression of the world, is in the highest degree a *universal language* [our emphasis], which is related indeed to the universality of concepts, much as these are related to the particular things. Its universality, however, is by no means that empty universality of abstraction, but quite of a different kind, and is united with thorough and distinct definiteness; in this respect it resembles geometrical figures and numbers, which are the universal forms of all possible objects of experience and applicable to them all *a priori*, and yet are not abstract but perceptible and thoroughly determined” (A. Schopenhauer, *Lumea ca Voință și Reprezentare* [*The World as Will and Representation*], selection, translation into Romanian, notes, afterword and bibliography by Alexandru Boboc, Cluj-Napoca, Grinta Publishing House, 2008, p. 49).

² Perhaps it was not coincidentally that to J.-J. Rousseau (*Eseu despre originea limbilor, unde se vorbește despre melodie și despre imitația muzicală* [*Essay on the Origin of Languages, which Treats of Melody and Musical Imitation*], Iași, Polirom, 1999) regarded *music* and *speech* as complementary expressions of human affirmation: “[...] *cadence* and *sounds* are born together with syllables, passion makes all the organs speak and endows voices with all their lustre; thus, *verse*, *song* and *speech* have a common

In fact, the grammatical structure is inherent to any language and works not only within the morphological and lexical unit, but also against a phonetic background that ensures their presence as an *act*: the *linguistic act* and the *musical act*.

The explanation regarding the linguistic act is equally valid for the musical act: “in its concrete form, there is no *language*, but only *linguistic acts* of expression and communication, different from one individual to another and also different in the same individual, depending on circumstances. No *linguistic sign* has exactly the same form and the same value (signified) for all the individuals who use it and at all times when it is used”¹.

The treatment of the *linguistic act* as a fundamental aspect of language is indebted to W. von Humboldt, who “[...] was the first to distinguish between two fundamental aspects of language: on the one hand, language as *enérgeia*, that is, as a continual creation of individual linguistic acts, as something dynamic, that is not made once and for all, but is produced continually, and, on the other hand, language as *érgon*, that is, as a «product» or a «produced object», or as a system that developed over the course of time («language»)”².

Humboldt himself wrote: “Language is, in other words, the perpetual effort of the spirit to make the *articulated sound* capable of expressing *thought*. In a direct and strict sense, this is the definition of *speech* on any occasion; in its true and essential meaning, however, we can also regard only the *totality of this speaking* as the *language*. For in the scattered chaos of words and rules that we are accustomed to call a language, *what is present is only the particular element brought forth by this speaking* [our emphasis], and this never completely, and also requiring new work, so as to detect from it the nature of the living speech and to provide a true image of the living language. It is precisely the highest and most refined aspect that cannot be discerned from these disparate elements, and can only be perceived or assumed in connected *discourse*, which is all the more proof that language proper lies in the act of its real production. It alone must always be thought of as the true and primary, in all investigations which are to penetrate into the living essentiality of

origin”; “the Greeks could sing while speaking, but among us it is necessary either to speak or to sing – both cannot be done at the same time” (pp. 65, 73).

¹ Emiliu Coșeriu, *Introducere în lingvistică*, Cluj-Napoca, Echinox Publishing House, 1995, p. 26. *Mutatis mutandis*, we retain: “It is not the «musical work» that the phenomenology of music investigates, but rather the act in its realized form, through the mandatory participation of those who play the music, for in no other way can music be an act of personal experience” (C. Bugeanu, *Fenomenologia muzicii* in: *Dicționar de termeni muzicali*, Bucharest, Editura științifică și enciclopedică, 1984, p. 180.)

² Emiliu Coșeriu, *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

language. The break-up into words and rules is only a lifeless makeshift of scientific analysis"¹.

Especially important is the concept of the *form of language*: not the form "as a mere non-existing thought", for "form is the quite individual urge whereby a nation gives validity to thought and feeling in language. But as we are never allowed to view this urge in the undivided totality of its striving, but merely in its particular effects on each occasion, we can only summarize the uniformity of its action in an inert general concept. In itself, this urge is single and alive"².

Thus, "by the *form of language* we are by no means alluding merely to the so-called grammatical form [...]. The concept of the form of languages extends far beyond the rules of word-order and even beyond those of word-formation, insofar as we mean by these the application of certain general logical categories, of active and passive, substance, attribute, etc. to the roots and basic words [...]. The form is contrasted, indeed, to a matter; but to find the matter of linguistic form, we must go beyond the bounds of language. Within the latter, it is only relatively speaking that one thing can be regarded as the matter of another, e.g. the basic words in contrast to declension. But the matter here is again perceived in other connections as form [...]. In an absolute sense, there can be no formless matter within language, since everything in it is directed to a specific goal – the expression of thought –, and this work already begins with its first element, the articulated sound, which becomes articulate precisely through being formed."³.

¹ Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Despre diversitatea structurală a limbilor și influența ei asupra dezvoltării spirituale a umanității* [On the Difference in the Structure of Human Languages and Its Influence on the Spiritual Development of Humanity], (translation into Romanian by E. Munteanu), Bucharest, Humanitas, 2008, p. 83.

² *Ibidem*, p. 84. "To describe languages as a work of the spirit is a perfectly correct and adequate terminology, if only because the existence of spirit as such can be thought of only in and as activity [...]. This labour operates in a constant and uniform way. For the mental power which exerts it is the same, differing only within certain modest limits. Its purpose is understanding. Thus nobody may speak differently to another from the way in which the latter, under similar circumstances, would have spoken to him. In the end the material transmitted is not only of this kind, but also closely allied throughout with the train of thought, having itself a similar origin. The *constant* and *uniform* element [our emphasis] in this mental labour of elevating articulated sound to an expression of thought, when viewed in its fullest possible comprehension and systematically presented – constitutes the form of language" (*Ibidem*, pp. 83-84).

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 85-86. "Both the identity and the affinity of languages must rest on the identity and affinity of their forms, since the effect can only be equal to the cause. So the form alone decides what other tongues a language is affiliated to by family ties [...]. The forms of several languages may unite into a yet more general form"; however, "in language the individualization within a general conformity is so wonderful, that we may say with equal correctness that the whole human species has but one language, and that every man has one of his own." (*Ibidem*, p. 87).

Observing the “practice of language” in its widest extent, namely “in its connection with the capacity for thought and feeling”, Humboldt states: “*Language is the formative organ of thought. Intellectual activity, entirely mental, entirely internal, and to some extent passing without trace, becomes, through sound, externalized in speech and perceptible to the senses. Thought and language are therefore one and inseparable from each other [...]. The inseparable bonding of thought, vocal apparatus and hearing to language is unalterably rooted in the original constitution of human nature, which cannot be further explained*”¹.

After a preliminary view of the “aptitude of sound to the operations of the mind”, Humboldt goes more accurately into the connection between *language and thought*, emphasizing the “formative” role of language: “Subjective activity fashions an object in thought. For no class of ideas can be regarded as a purely passive contemplation of a thing already present. The activity of the senses must combine synthetically with the inner action of the mind, and from this combination the idea is ejected, becomes an object in relation to the subjective power, and, perceived anew as such, returns back into the latter. But language is indispensable for this purpose. For insofar as the mental striving breaks out through the lips in language, the product of that striving returns back to the speaker’s ear. Thus the idea becomes transformed into real objectivity, without being deprived of subjectivity on that account. Only language can do this; and without this transformation, occurring constantly with the help of language even in silence, into an objectivity that returns to the subject, the act of concept-formation, and with it all true thinking, is impossible”².

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 89. Particularly significant here is the idea of concordance between sound and idea: “Just as thought, like a lightning-flash or concussion, collects the whole power of representation into a single point, and shuts out everything else, so does sound ring out with abrupt sharpness and unity. Just as thought seizes the whole mind, so does sound have predominantly a *penetrating power* [our emphasis] that sets every nerve atingle. This power that distinguishes the sound from all other sense-impressions is evidently due to the fact (which is not always so with the other senses, or is so in a different way) that the ear receives the impression of a movement, and in the echoing sound of the voice the impression of a veritable action; and this action proceeds here from within a living creature, a thinking creature if the sound is articulated.”

² *Ibidem*, p. 91. In this regard, Hegel’s remark is clarifying: “With sound, music relinquishes the element of an external form and a perceptible *visibility*, and therefore needs for the treatment of its productions another subjective organ, namely *hearing* which, like sight, is one of the *theoretical* and not practical senses, and is still more ideal than sight [...]; the ear, without itself turning to a practical relation to objects, listens to the result of the inner vibration of the body through which what comes before us is no longer the peaceful and material shape but the first and more ideal breath of the soul.” (G. W. F. Hegel, *Prelegeri de estetică*, vol. II, Bucharest, Editura Academiei, 1966, p. 286).

2. These would be the most important considerations on the idea that *music* could be understood as *a language*, with all that this implies for the analogy with the structural and functional features of language and for the relationship between language and thought. All that has been said in this context applies *mutatis mutandis* for the understanding of music, of musical language in particular, and not least of musical thinking.

Basically, what should be considered is the complex process of interaction between the language through which a «product» or «produced object» (language as *ergon*) comes into being (in the unity of the spirit) and the language in “connected discourse” (W. v. Humboldt).

In other words, we may be dealing with the relationship between the “form of language” and the “matter of linguistic form”, which requires going “beyond the bounds of language”, or, more exactly, language as a “formative organ” (*bildend*) in the unity of the spirit and the language of the discourse; *discourse* as a “language event”, or «language put into action» in a historical process that turns enunciation into an event”¹.

By analogy with all this, let us follow *the musical phenomenon*, according to the rule: «discourse» as a «language put into action» in a process whereby enunciation becomes «an event», in which “only through the audible performance is there a sensible foreground that is not dependent upon thought”, but a «reality» that is “exclusively the acoustical reality, the realm of the sensibly audible”; “what can be sensibly «heard» “together in a unity” (*Zusammenhören*) is a limited construction of tones. A sonata, a «movement», or even a prelude is far from appearing in such structure. Of course we hear (purely acoustically) as a sensibly real unity a limited series of tones, similarly we hear a series of harmonies, but only so far as our capacity extends for acoustically retaining (the lingering after-echo) what has just been heard”².

Behind the sounds there is something that “must be sought where it can be found, – not far beyond the domain of sounds, but rather close to that domain and still within its realm”³.

In other words, it is, based upon invention, the composition unity “which is not present in any of the stages of its acoustical performance, but is nonetheless what the composition is really about”⁴.

¹ Émile. Benveniste, *Problèmes de la linguistique générale*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, p. 242: “le discours est «le langage mis en action» dans un processus historique qui fait du l’énoncé un événement”.

² Nicolai Hartmann, *Estetica*, Bucharest, Editura Univers, 1974, pp. 137, 131.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 131.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 133.

Actually, “the only” middle stratum of what is «sensibly audible» is realized in the here and now of the unique performance. And that means that in the performance what is genuinely *musical in music* remains appearance”¹.

3. We are facing a miracle – “the artistic miracle of a musical work, emerging from its presence in an acoustical performance”, in which “we experience the music’s lofty climb, its growth, its towering up and out of itself; and this entire construction, rising ever higher, is then completed and unified only when the audible succession of sounds has come to a close, i.e. has died away. The final bars of a logically constructed work of music will then be apprehended as the conclusion of the structure and its crowning moment”².

In fact “one hears more than what is sensibly heard [our emphasis]; one hears a construction of tones of another magnitude that is impossible to hold together acoustically in one’s ears. This other construct is the music-work proper, the «movement», the fugue, the sonata. And this other construct constitutes the «musical background». Of course, we mean only the musical background; for much more belongs to the complete background of the music”³.

Listening to music “transcends sensible hearing. *The entirety of the music* that appears in a movement is not sensibly given as such; *acoustically it is unreal*, that is, not even realized in the playing of the music, for it cannot be realized all at once. One hears it “throughout”, for the sensibly given series of sounds lets it appear, although its phases cannot be held together; those sounds have the particular transparency that lets something else, the structure that cannot be reduced to it, appear to an attentive listener”⁴.

And here comes the explanation of the “relationship of appearance”: “what in fact is hidden in the principle of «expression» ought rather to be *a relationship of appearance* [our emphasis], and indeed one of a particular kind. But it requires the appearance neither of an «idea», nor of life, nor of a meaning. Rather, what is specific to an object we think beautiful will have to be sought in the type of appearance itself. Then, however, we will have free latitude for a different

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 219.

² *Ibidem*, p. 134.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 134-135.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 135. In fact, “a musical work requires the listener to anticipate and to recall, and, in every stage of his hearing of it, to have an expectation of what is coming, to anticipate the specific development that the music requires. That is true even when the actual development of the piece reveals itself as a different one than expected. For the *resolution of the tension* [our emphasis] aroused by the music can be different than the one expected, and the exploitation of unexpected (innovative) musical possibilities is an essential element of surprise and enrichment” (*Ibidem*, pp. 133-134).

type of concept of form, one specific to aesthetical phenomena. For the question here must touch in some way the form of appearance as such"¹.

Here is how the "mode of being of any beautiful object" may be understood: "The beautiful thing is a double-faceted object, but united as one, as one single object. It is a *real object*, and is given to the senses that way, but it is not reduced to that; rather it is equally a quite different, *unreal* kind of object that appears in the real one, or that arises from behind it. What is beautiful is neither the first object nor the second alone; they exist only both in each other and with each other. More correctly expressed, it is the appearance of one in the other"².

Indeed, "the mode of being of the whole must be a divided one, while in terms of structure the object is unified and completely undivided in its effect. The unity lies in *appearance*. What allows something to appear must be real, and what appears must be unreal, for the latter consists only in this appearance of itself. That is the ambivalence in the mode of being of beauty: it is there and it is not there. Its existence hovers about it"³.

Therefore: "the mode of being of the whole, the *corpus*, is the unity of the *two* strata, although the "object" acts in the sphere of "appearance". What makes it (the foreground) appear is real, and what appears consists in its appearance alone; it is not the *unreal* as such (this *is*, though not in a structured form), it comes as a validity, not as a value (it is always transcendent).

In other words, what appears incorporates what the composer managed to grasp as an idea, not the Idea itself. This remains the absolute model, to which those who create, i.e. composers, relate *to the best of their ability* (depending on their talent and technique). However, the mode of *being* (not of existence) of the unreal remains the mystery of what always lies "beyond", transcendent.

¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 32-33.

² *Ibidem*, p. 39. And now the explanation: given such a structure, "the mode of being of the aesthetic object cannot be a simple one. As it contains a twofold object, so it is also a twofold being, a real being, an unreal, merely apparent, being. And what is peculiar is that this duality of being, despite its complete heterogeneity, allows the object to appear undivided and unified. The relation between the two parts that constitute it must accordingly be quite intimate; one may say it is a *functional relation* [our emphasis]. What the being-beautiful of the object most essentially depends upon is the specific role of the reality in it (that which is given through the senses) in allowing the quite alien unreal element to appear" (*Ibidem*).

³ *Ibidem*. "In beholding and in enjoying, we feel this floating as the magic of beauty. If we understood the object itself as divided, the magic would vanish. Only provided that we encounter it as an undisturbed unity, and sense in it the opposition of existence and non-existence, are we able to experience the magic of the aesthetical relation of appearance" (*Ibidem*). But the concept of appearance should not be confused with what appears, for "to illusion belongs the falsification of reality [...] what is essential is precisely the opposition to being real" (*Ibidem*, p. 41).

At a first glance, it appears as if “the activity of the artist was a realization, perhaps a realization of an idea, or of an ideal that hovers before his mind. But if one looks more closely, one finds quite the opposite. His creation is precisely not realization, and therefore not a making-possible. What hovers before his mind is not translated into reality, but only *represented* (*dargestellt*). And that means that it is made to appear (*zur Erscheinung gebracht*)”¹.

In more concise terms: “The procedure of the creative artist is a distancing from the actual; it is de-actualization (*Entwirklichung*). He does not need to procure the conditions of possibility that are lacking, he does not need to put in motion the inert weight of the sphere of real things, but only to offer what is *unreal* as such to the beholding eye. He needs a real object only as a mediating element in which the *unreal* can appear; and only in the production of such real things can he be said to realize something. But what comes therein to appearance remains entirely unreal, “and, indeed, so decisively and unmistakably unreal that even the appearing object in its sensible tangibility does not deceitfully lead us to think it real”².

4. Returning to the composer and the musical composition, emphasis should be placed on the fact that even here there exists a “relationship of appearance”, although one should not consider the “physical moods (pain, joy, wantonness, longing) as background elements, which are undeniably expressed in music. That cannot be permitted precisely because moods constitute a further stratum of the whole [...]. In the meantime, we can demonstrate that even in pure music – and, in fact, this side of all psychic content – a stratification and a relation of appearance is found. Obviously, it is also found in any and all other music, even in the composition and arrangement of works of poetry. But there it does not come into question, as it does in pure music”³.

And here is a possible explanation: “We must assume that the audible tone constitutes here the «material» that is given form by the composer. Thus, the sequence and interrelation of tones must count as real stratum and *foreground* of music (*in the footnote*: “sounds are not real in the strict sense, because they exist as such only for the hearer [...] what is essential about the «real stratum» of a musical work is always the sensibly given, that which exists for perception”). So the following question arises: is there in music something that lifts itself beyond the sensibly audible sounds, something that hovers above it and can that something be grasped by a person capable of understanding music? Or, to state this in the image

¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 42-43.

² *Ibidem*, p. 43.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 130.

we used earlier: is there here a *background* (*Hintergrund*) that appears through the sounds in such a way as to remain the genuine and true musical content?"¹

The answer is: yes, there is, but "we need to seek it where it can be found, – not far beyond the domain of sounds, but rather close to that domain and still within its realm"².

That would be the secret of the presence and effect of the two strata – the foreground (*Vordergrund*) and the background (*Hintergrund*) brought by a musical composition in the unity between "what is sensibly audible" and "what is beyond it, «something that is musically audible», which requires a different synthesis by the consciousness that receives it than what can be produced in a purely acoustical perception"³.

5. The essential thing is therefore this "different thing" which is "a greater whole, and creates the background (*Hintergrund*), which is no longer sensible"⁴.

Everything becomes clear in the following explanation: "The musical unity of the work itself has indeed the character of a synthesis. That is, it is a «composition» (*compositio* is the simple translation of the word *synthesis*). Such a unit is not heard by the senses. Therefore it is a genuine appearance and specifically one that appears through the sense of hearing. It therefore belongs to the background of the piece. Taken objectively, however, it is the synthetic unity in which the sound that has at one point died away and is no longer sensibly heard, is yet retained, and thus forms, as something still present, an essential component of the whole that is successively built up in the process of musical hearing"⁵.

It is true, however, that "the phenomenon of the background in music" is extremely complex: "The entirety of the music that appears in a movement is not sensibly given as such, but is *something acoustically unreal*, that is not even realized in the playing of the music [...]. One hears it «through the medium» of other elements, for the sensibly given series of sounds lets it appear, although its phases cannot be held together"; moreover, "the special kind of tie between the strata is

¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 130-131.

² *Ibidem*, p. 131.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 133. "Genuine musical hearing", despite its separation into its temporal stages, "is apprehended as a coexistence of its parts – not as parts that are temporally simultaneous, but as belonging to each other, as a unity" (*Ibidem*, p. 132). Music creates "precisely a unity and closed wholeness in what, in the temporal series, was drawn asunder. This synthesis is produced in the process itself of musical hearing, which passes far beyond the narrow limits of hearing tones in unison. But it is not produced all at once, but rather successively in the process of sensible listening-to, and on the basis of a very definite inward unity and completeness of the musical work" (*Ibidem*, p. 133).

quite different in these [representational - our note] arts, perhaps just because in music the foreground and the first background are more similar, and are more like each other in kind. For that reason, in music too, their dual nature has always been misunderstood, more than anywhere else”¹.

The unity of the strata is essential to the structure of the composition: “We, therefore, have in music the same two strata of the object as in the representational arts; the same *duality and opposition* [our emphasis] in their modes of being, the same phenomenon of appearing in sensible material, the same transparency of the constructed foreground. In the same way too, an identical role is given to the apprehending subject, for only to an observer who meets the conditions of musical discernment can the unity of the work appear”².

The duality and opposition between their “modes of being” creates a *dynamic and tense contrast* between strata: “However, it is clear how in the composer’s work the foreground is determined by the background, how the unity of the internal form determines the organization of what can be sensibly heard down to the smallest details. Here again the musical work is comparable to the works of poetry and painting”³.

6. The unity and opposition of the strata (in fact, their implication) is also found in the “art of a second order”, which alone “allows the composed and written music to be audibly heard”: “The written composition needs such an art even more than a theatrical performance: after all, anyone can “read” a play, and, if a person has a little imagination, he can “see” the piece inwardly; to read a piece of music is quite different, it requires a specialist’s professional training and a great deal of practice. Ordinarily, an amateur musician can «play» the music himself before he can «read» it without playing it [...]. However that may be, the musical public requires the audible reproduction, the presentation [...] in order to understand the music at all”⁴.

In this way, “the art of the performing musician becomes an aesthetical necessity. Here, as with drama, it is an art of «execution», and many of the

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 135.

² *Ibidem*.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 135. There is, however, “a kind of composition in which the details do not seem to the listener to come together, but instead fall asunder. The details may have a pleasant effect, they can fascinate one, excite one, arouse anticipation; they may even point ahead to some whole. But when the whole is lacking, when this whole does not develop out of the music, we experience it as lacking unity, as insipid and without character. No inward interconnectivity is felt, and the piece lacks the unity of an internal form” (*Ibidem*).

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 136.

characteristics of the art of dramatic performance apply, of course, only *mutatis mutandis*, for the kind of execution is different”¹.

In music, “a stratum of the work of art, which remains unreal in the written composition, that is, it is not given to the senses, but is left to the imagination, is transposed to reality by the secondary art of «execution» – and in that way it is driven into sense-perceptibility and into the foreground of the entire work [...]. The «reality» in question here is exclusively the acoustical reality, the realm of the sensibly audible. This is true even where the “visible” energies of the musician who executes the piece, or even those of the conductor, make an essential contribution to our understanding of the music”².

In fact, “the «realization» of the music by the performing musician – including the amateur who plays it – is so obvious that in fact everyone calls the realization alone music, whereas the printed score in black and white is thought to be a mere expedient. We may not claim, therefore, that the reader becomes a listener (as in drama a reader becomes a member of the audience); for in music, the reader is the exception”³.

Consequently, “music proper” arises objectively “only with the secondary art of the musician”; “no question of strengthening the effects of the frame arises here. Music as played and heard does not need to be set off from its ties to the reality; it is set off more than enough by its acoustic material, because this material, as a tonic series, appears nowhere other than in music”⁴.

In the process of execution, music becomes dependent upon “the performance by the musician”: “and here, too, there is an intermediate stratum where the performance is realized. The realization is no longer the work of the composer, but that of the musician who executes it. The musician has a free hand in the shaping of the endless details of the most imponderable sort, which cannot be written in the score, but upon which the shape of the whole depends. He is promoted a fellow-composer, and is in this sense not just a «reproducing artist», but rather quite creatively productive”⁵.

¹ *Ibidem*.

² *Ibidem*, p. 137.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*. Worth noting is that “a strict analogy to the fine arts appears only by means of an actual performance; only through the audible performance is there a *sensible foreground* that is not dependent upon representation; only thus does the musical work first address the ears, and not the creative imagination of «readers» (who are rare). What is merely an object of thought is replaced by what can be perceived” (*Ibidem*, pp. 137-138).

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 138. “The composer requires a congenial performance. The musician receives from him a work that is shaped only in part (still in a relatively general way), and he completes the process. He fills it with life and soul, according to how he thinks the composer intended it to be. But he does

The situation is complex, involving dependence and independence, unity-identity and difference, opposition and correspondence and, especially, the *co-presence* of the two strata in different languages: the language of composition and the language (in fact, the metalanguage) of interpretation.

Through interpretation-execution, the musical work is different with every reproduction (which is not a mere reproduction): “The musician’s interpretation is always added to the composition, and that interpretation can be very personal and unique. Within certain limits, the identity of the musical work may be lost in this way; it is broken asunder by the qualitative variety of the interpretations”¹.

The composer and the performing musician (who can also be the composer himself) constitute what in philosophy we would call the “condition of possibility” of the musical work, which, beyond being a creation, has to be brought into presence, into effect, through the audible performance, in which the art of the performing musician – albeit “an art of a moment” – becomes a necessity.

In other words, along with its realization (through interpretation-execution), “the written composition in its half-concretion stands immovable and at each instant available for possible new consummations”².

not proceed through the medium of his own person, but through the instrument. For he is not, like the actor, representing characters, but is the interpreter of music” (*Ibidem*).

¹ *Ibidem*. It is in the type of objectivation (for there is objectivation in both dimensions: in *composition* and in *interpretation*) that lies “the greatest disparity between written and performed music [as if there were two musics! – our emphasis]. The former owes its permanence to the durability of the writing material – *aere perennius* –; it is given concretely only by a half, it is true, but at the same time it is given a structure for all time, offering itself ever again to new interpreters; the musician, in contrast, gives the music a realized concreteness and clarity, but only in the most transient material; he completes it, but only for a moment. The higher objectivation cannot be maintained; it fades away in time along with its unique performance. Of course, within certain limits, the music can be recorded by means of modern technology (recordings), but that technology does not reach to the finer details of the music, and it changes nothing regarding the multiplicity and diversity of the renditions. Each individual performance, despite all recording, will always be replaced by ever-new interpretations” (*Ibidem*, p. 138).

² *Ibidem*, p. 138-139. One might say that the performing musician does not draw “the entire background of the music” into reality: “In no sense is the whole work of music made real but rather only the first and nearest stratum of the background, that which is sensibly audible, the tones and harmonies. Just these play the role of the intermediate stratum. They alone are acoustically realizable. That is no small matter, but it is not the whole of the music. All the rest remains *unreal*, as before, and is produced only in the mind of the hearer. This is true for the entire psychic content of the music, whatever else it may consist in [...] it is easy to anticipate that it must consist in a new series of strata, which alone constitutes the depth of the background. As in the art of drama, the plot proper, with its loves and hates, remains *unreal*, so too do the moods and feelings in a musical performance” (*Ibidem*, p. 139).

7. A horizon of intangibility is always active here (hence the expectations for the presence of an eve-new “audible sound” in performance-interpretation): “Even the *entirety* of the composition remains *unreal* in the performance of the musician. Not even the most consummate performer can create for the listener the synthesis of hearing together in a unity; he can bring him close to it, or lead him towards it, but no power in the world can spare him the successive construction of the whole in the music listening process. One man cannot «hear» for another, any more than he can think, conceive or comprehend. But [...] the unity and the wholeness of the musical object exist nowhere else but in the hearing of music. It is therefore clear that everything that was said above about the «appearance» of a compositional unity refers precisely to the audible performance of the musician, and not at all simply to the written music”¹.

The “background” (*Hintergrund*) therefore presents great difficulties of understanding. That may be the reason why N. Hartmann studied it as “the phenomenon of the background in music”. For only the “middle stratum of what is «sensibly audible» is realized in the here and now of the unique performance”, which means that “in the performance what is genuinely musical in the music remains *appearance*. Of course one may not underestimate this being-as-appearance; appearance can be itself genuinely objective, it can be compelling, cogent, and shock us deeply; it can, to our amazement, pull along violently an audience of listeners in the unity of one «unique» artistic experience. However, it still remains appearance and does not become reality. It is precisely and only in this way that the fundamental condition of the «aesthetic object» and of what is beautiful about it is fulfilled”².

In a somewhat summarized form, one may also say “no element of illusion is found in performed music [...]. The performance remains performance, and the earnestness of what appears in it with irresistible force remains appearance. The relation among the strata with its contraries of *real* and *unreal* is maintained. The relation works here through other means than in the fine arts. Its apparent removal rests simply in the fact that pure music has no themes external to itself, which means that it is not a representational art. But what it really transmits to the listener through the foreground cannot be expressed at all in words and concepts”³.

8. Yet there remains an enigma: how can what is entirely other appear to the senses? And that even in different ways in the different arts. It all depends on

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 139.

² *Ibidem*, pp. 139-140.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 140.

the understanding of the “law of objectivation”, resting upon the “objectified spirit”, or more correctly upon the “being of the aesthetic object”.

The basic theme would be the following: the “aesthetic object” has no “independent being to it, one not dependent upon a subject (a being in itself); on the other hand, “a part of it indeed exists independent of a subject. With this we are faced with the problem of its mode of being. To solve this problem is an ontological undertaking”¹.

The task belongs within the “general problem of spiritual being” (*Probleme des geistigen Seins*). For just as the aesthetic object exists only «for» an intellectual being, there is also contained in it some kind of intellectual content, at least a definite way of looking or understanding. That is not immediately apparent in a natural object, but it is in the product of the art, of the *artwork*, which “is an intellectual product that possesses within itself something of the productive mind that created it”².

Thus, “the aesthetic object enters into, so far as human beings create it, a large set of phenomena; it forms a special class of objectified spirit. Thereby it falls entirely under the law of objectivation”³.

In its complex mode of existence, *objectivation* “is only in part *real*, that is, only the matter in its formation is real; the genuine spiritual content remains *unreal*, it is not realized by the living spirit, but rather comes to be for the living spirit only as *appearance* [...]; in the relation of appearance we are dealing with something far more general and not with the work of art alone. It is not a question of the special mode of being of the aesthetic object, but of the mode of being of the objectified spirit”⁴.

According to the *law of objectivation*, “all appearances of spiritual content depend on the reciprocal performance of acts of the living spirit, so far as the latter

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 93.

² *Ibidem*, pp. 93-94. More exactly, the work of art “belongs to a specific form of spiritual being, «the objectified spirit». It is objectivation, i.e. the realization of an ideal content in objective existence”; objectivation is “the third fundamental form of the spirit. It is, indeed, not living spirit in itself, but simply spiritual content, a product of the spirit, a spiritual creation. In this capacity it stands in a certain sense detached from «spiritual life» [...] but at the same time it is lifted out of the spiritual life and thus exempt from the process of change to which that life is subject, and the objectivation can therefore have an existence of its own alongside of it” (*Ibidem*, p. 94).

³ *Ibidem*, p. 95. “The law of objectivation has a twofold form. It asserts first: spiritual content can only endure if it is banished to real sensible matter, i.e. if it is tied to matter by its unique form, and is thus carried by it. And secondly it asserts that the spiritual content carried by informed matter always requires the responsiveness of a living spirit, a personal one as well as an objective one; for it depends upon a consciousness that beholds it [...] that comprehends and recognizes it, and to which, through the real medium it informs, it can appear” (*Ibidem*, p. 95).

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 96.

brings to them the conditions of understanding"; according to this law, our entire model of it consists of two heterogeneous strata, "with respect to both their structure and mode of being. For only *the foreground*, the material sensible form is *real*; the background that appears in it, the spiritual content, is *unreal*. The former exists in itself, along with its form; the latter, in contrast, exists only «for» a living spirit ready to receive it, who contributes to it his own nature, and reproduces its content as he grasps it"¹.

9. "What is mysterious in the nature of objectivation is and always remains this: «how» can, then, a sensible thing that constitutes the foreground become the carrier of a content that possesses an entirely different mode of being and that is there only «for» a consciousness. For the relation between the two is so ordered that this content can be glimpsed in the sensible construct of the matter and can be at any time won back from it. In some way, therefore, it must be contained in it"².

So where can one find the solution to the mystery? It may be found in the consideration that "in fact, the spiritual content cannot be found in the configured material without the agency of a living spirit. For the content is not the material «in itself», but is there only «for us» who comprehend it. And it is only placed in the material by its creator for the spirit who comprehends it, but not stamped upon it independently of the nature of the material. Rather, the form really stamped upon it is itself only the material form, that is, the material of the sensible foreground"³.

Much can be understood by analogy with "the amazing mutability of the concept [...], its unique capacity to follow the restless growth of knowledge. But this capacity is at the same time an eloquent testimony to the looseness of the tie that binds the term to the spiritual content in the concept"⁴.

¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 100-101.

² *Ibidem*, pp. 101-102. The expression «spiritual content» should be taken with caution: "The background need not be something ideal, neither as a thought nor as the ideal object of intuition. Its content also need not be taken from a higher stratum of being (psychic or spiritual being), nor be an imitation; it is sufficient that it be *spiritually intuited originally*, and that the way of beholding it is maintained in the manner of its appearing [...]. For the ontological nature of the background, it is sufficient that it be called forth in the consciousness of the comprehending hearer or reader as a represented content" (*Ibidem*, p. 101).

³ *Ibidem*, p. 102. Somehow, the circle closes: "in all cases of objectivation of whatever kind, the appearing background stratum exists solely «for» a living spirit; this stratum exists only by force of the reciprocal relation to it. This is the meaning of «being for us». This is quite a relative way of being that divides the foreground from the background, although the original creative spirit who formed the whole is a real being who can appear in the spiritual content of his creation; he appears along with it, but not as an existing presence" (*Ibidem*).

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 104.

The example of the concept is eloquent, for “only in the contrast we see here does the nature of the objectivation in the work of art appear in the correct light. The work of art has, indeed, a different kind of stability, an incomparably higher capacity to endure through time. The reason for this lies in the strong and independent tie in it *between the foreground and the background*. For this tie is neither conventional nor conditioned from the outside (by some systematic relationships), but is rather *a purely internal tie* [our emphasis] created by itself alone. Therefore it addresses not our comprehension, but our intuition, and, within intuition, it has the form of the tightest relationship between sensible intuition (perception) and the higher forms of intuition”¹.

Compared with the *concept*, “it is precisely the foreground, the material and the sensibly real elements with which the *work of art* is adorned; such adornment is not found in concepts, and for that reason nothing in them can appear out of the concept itself, but is instead dependent upon the relationships that lie above and beyond it. The work of art is dependent upon nothing of this kind: the fullness of the construction of the real object is sufficient to allow a spiritual content to appear to the beholder. That means that in the work of art the connection between the *foreground* and the *background* is a «close», tight and independent one. The spiritual content does not open to the knowledge that one brings to the work, but to intuition”².

10. A special place in the understanding of these strata is held by the “free play with the form”: “This is a truly constructive activity, one that intervenes here as a representation; it is a pure play done for its own sake [...]. It is based upon no previously given form. The endowing of an object with form is an entirely autonomous activity; it is a different and higher freedom than we encounter in the representational arts. It is *pure production*, without an element of mimesis or reproduction, pure «creation out of nothing»³.

Only music – writes Hartmann – is truly free, and then only pure music. For it too, can, in a sense, serve ends. In pure music the principle of “play” becomes completely independent. Music as a play with tones, melodies, harmonies and timbres – exists in a kind of matter that divests itself, to a high degree, of all aims external to aesthetics. For that reason it is the most free of all the arts.

¹ *Ibidem*. The idea of the internal relationship between the strata is essential and makes the opposition (the contrast) between the strata and their unity intelligible, as complementary and, in fact, interdependent modes of being.

² *Ibidem*, p. 104.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 128.

Moreover, it is free in two directions: it is just as free of themes or subjects external to aesthetics, as it is free of aims external to it¹.

And [...] a significant conclusion for a distinction between the arts: at the moment of creation “a level of productivity, unknown in other arts, is reached. Composition is based upon invention – on an inward surprise and discovery –, to the extent that even a musical «theme» is freely created; it is purely a product of musical fantasy”².

This development of the role of form reveals more and more the possibility of understanding the musical creation in which freedom plays an important part, which also requires a clarification of the interaction, opposition and unity (and perhaps complementarity) of the strata: *Vordergrund* V (non-exclusive disjunction) and U (reunion) with *Hintergrund*.

The comparison between concept and artwork highlights the «tight» relationship between «foreground» and «background» and implicitly, in Kantian words, the «conditions of possibility» of the musical act, in which any language, including musical language, occurs as in an “event” of language (discourse): with multiple strata, though predominantly with two: of composition and performance-execution, covering the duality and opposition that are specific to the mode of being of the work of (musical) art, and, on the other hand, of the two strata: *Vordergrund* and *Hintergrund*, which (according to N. Hartmann) “in music are more similar, and are more like each other in kind”.

How should one understand this duality in which “the entirety of the music that appears in a movement” is “something that acoustically is *unreal*, that is, not even realized in the playing of the music?” Indeed, in music too, the “unreality” of these strata “was always understood, more than anywhere.” For their mode of being is different: they are not identical, but neither are they opposed to an identity (perhaps a higher one).

So how is “the musical unity of a work”, the synthesis, the composition, possible if this unity “is not heard by the senses”?

Let us try to understand the status of this unity by appealing to the *principle of the “identity of indiscernibles”* (formulated and used by Leibniz in logic and metaphysics, in interaction with other principles: *order* and *continuity*, in particular), designed “to correct”, to a certain extent, the principle of continuity, according to which: “[...] everything is interconnected in the universe by virtue of metaphysical reasons, so that *the present is always pregnant with the future*. If this be denied, the world would have hiatuses which would upset the Great Principle of

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 129.

² *Ibidem*.

Sufficient Reason and compel recourse to miracles or to pure chance in the explanation of phenomena”¹.

Like all the principles (formulated by Leibniz), the principle of continuity leads to the “principle of general order”, which is a principle of *uniformity*, but “there must always be, besides the difference of time and place, an internal principle of distinction, and even if there are many things of the same species, it is nevertheless true that none of them are ever perfectly similar”; “the *principle of individuation* reduces, in the case of individuals, to the principle of distinction [...]. If two *individuals* were perfectly similar and equal and, in short, indistinguishable in themselves, there would be no principle of individuation”².

The principle of the “identity of indiscernibles” («identitatis indiscernibilium») allows us to categorize differences by *order* and *size*, where order is both a term of enumeration and an organizing principle of enumeration. *Indiscernibility* is a relationship of complete similarity (in terms of content, identity), though not a numerical identity, but a diversity (in terms of content of the indiscernibles)³.

Essentially, the principle of the “identity of indiscernibles” allows a consideration of the identity of two objects by dissociation based on their properties, whereby they do not constitute a single object, but that does not exclude the fact that the same object may be designated by different names. If the

¹ Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, *Despre principiul continuității*, in: *Characteristica universalis and other writings* (translation into Romanian, notes and afterword by Alexandru Boboc), Grinta Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2008, p. 52. “Even in things that exist simultaneously, where sensible intuition distinguishes only leaps, there may exist continuity” (*Ibidem*, p. 53).

² Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, *Noi Eseuri asupra intelectului uman*, Grinta Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, pp. 166-167.

³ The term “indiscernibilia”, used by Leibniz as the “principle of indiscernibles” in the calculus of predicates “as part of the definition of the concept of identity, or as a theorem that characterizes it.” In this modern formulation, it asserts that if x and y have all the same properties (and are therefore indiscernible), then x is identical to y. The use of variables that can be substituted by names or descriptions of things allows us to avoid paradoxical formulations like «if two objects have all the same properties, then the objects must be identical (they are one single object)», which does not necessarily make it impossible for the same object to be designated by different names [...]. Formulated in the language of predicate logic, the principle expresses a purely logical truth, whose negation is a contradiction. In Leibniz’s case, however, this appears at a first glance as a metaphysical principle under which two given objects can actually be always dissociated, *in linea di principio*, by virtue of their very nature. As such, the principle does not express a purely logical truth, and is subject to possible confusion. However, Leibniz’s theory clearly entails that all of the properties of a given individual (the ones we would ordinarily classify as «accidental») are essential to him. Given these premises, the distinction between the extrinsic relations and the intrinsic properties of an individual depends on our knowledge of that individual” (*Enciclopedia Garzanti di Filosofia*, La nuova edizione 1993, Garzanti Editore s.p.a., Milano, p. 536).

two were perfectly similar and equal and therefore indiscernible, individual distinction or differences would be no longer justified.

In the spirit of Leibniz's monadology: "it is necessary that each monad be different from each other. For there are never two things in nature that are perfectly alike, two beings in which it is not possible to discover an internal difference, that is, one founded on an intrinsic denomination"¹.

11. The problem, therefore, is finding that "*internal difference*" founded on an intrinsic denomination. For while each stratum displays an "*internal difference*" founded on an intrinsic denomination, they exist in a constant dynamic and tense contrast, insofar as the "background" appears through and by means of the "foreground", whether it is the organization of the material (the "real stratum" of a musical work) in a composition, or the extent to which the musical work (with its levels) is reconfigured by the performing musician's understanding of it.

In other words, just as "there is something here behind the sounds, that stands out against them", but that constitutes in this way a background that appears through the foreground, in the performance it must remain "genuine and true musical content".

It is therefore said that the performer has a great responsibility, the more so as he becomes a "fellow composer", and, in this sense, not just a reproducing artist, but rather quite "creatively productive".

Through this "splitting" into a variety of interpretations, the identity of the musical work may be to a certain extent lost. For the performing musician does not draw into reality "the entire background of the music", "the whole work of music", but rather "only the first and nearest stratum of the background, that which is sensibly audible, the tones and harmonies"; "all the rest remains *unreal*" and "is produced only in the mind of the hearer";

The difference between the strata in a composition appears to be moving with every performance, though not structurally, as in the composition, but only functionally, along with the diversity of performances, remaining available for possible new consummations.

Perhaps that is the reason why Hartmann asserted that "the *entirety* (the unity) of the composition remains, in the performance of the musician as well, *unreal*" and that "not even the most consummate performer can create for the listener the synthesis of hearing together in a unity; he can bring him close to it, or lead him towards it, but no power in the world can spare him the successive construction of the whole in the music listening process".

¹ Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, *Vernunftprinzipien der Natur und der Gnade. Monadologie*, F. Meiner, Hamburg, 1982, p. 28.

It is in this context, in fact, that lies the charm of the “worlds of sounds”, imbued with an ever renewed feeling of expectations. This is somewhat akin to the Romantic feeling of expectation in Hölderlin’s *Hymns*, all replete with metaphors that reveal the poet’s sense for the musicality of language.

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