

ON THE POSSIBILITY OF NONCONCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE:  
THE CASE OF MUSIC EXPERIENCE

ÖZGE AR

BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY

2009

ON THE POSSIBILITY OF NONCONCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE:  
THE CASE OF MUSIC EXPERIENCE

Thesis submitted to the  
Institute for Graduate Studies in the Social Sciences  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
Philosophy

by  
Özge Ar

Boğaziçi University

2009

## Thesis Abstract

Özge Ar, “On the Possibility of Nonconceptual Experience: The Case of Music Experience”

The present thesis concerns the possibility of nonconceptual content from a representationalist framework. It briefly reviews the literature on nonconceptual content. It argues for the existence of nonconceptuality at conscious and unconscious levels. It takes conceptuality and nonconceptuality as features of experiences and mental states.

The thesis proceeds with thoughts on the nature of music experience. It distinguishes between the structural and expressive ways of attributing nonconceptuality to experiences of music. Intense and exceptional experiences of music are regarded as candidates for nonconceptual experience in seeming to defy verbal definitions. After the presentation of theories of musical expressivity, the mystery of such experience is explained via unconscious associations with representations from one’s personal and cultural history. The thesis shows that ordinary music experiences are also taken to be nonconceptual since they require the mobilization of one’s discriminatory abilities but cannot figure in one’s reasons for belief and action.

## Tez Özeti

### Özge Ar, “Kavramsal Olmayan Deneyimin Olasılığı Üzerine: Müzik Deneyimi Örneği”

Bu tez, deneyimin kavramsal olmayan bir deneyimin olup olamayacağını gösterimci bir bakış açısı çerçevesinde konu edinir. Kısaca, kavramsal olmayan içerik ile ilgili yapıtları gözden geçirir. Kavramsal olmama durumunun bilinç ve bilinç dışı düzeylerde varlığını savunur. Tez, kavramsal olma ve olmama durumlarının deneyimlerin ve zihinsel durumların özellikleri olduğunu ileri sürmektedir.

Tez, müzik deneyiminin doğasını inceleyerek ilerler. Müzik deneyimine kavramsal olmama durumunu atfetmenin yapısal ve duygusal yolları arasında bir ayrım yapar. Ender yaşanan kuvvetli müzik deneyimleri ‘kelimelerle ifade edilemez’ şeklinde algılanabilmeleri nedeniyle kavramsal olmayan deneyim olarak nitelenmeye aday sayılabilirler. Müzik deneyiminin duygusal boyutuna ilişkin teorilerin sunulmasından sonra bu tip deneyimlerin gizemi, müziğin bazı yapısal özellikleri ile kişisel ve kültürel tarihle ilgili zihinsel gösterimlerin bilinçdışında ilişkilendirilmesi şeklinde açıklanmaktadır. Bunlar dışında, sıradan müzik deneyimleri de, kişilerin ayrım yapabilme kabiliyetlerini harekete geçirmeleri, fakat onların inanç ve eylemleri için gerekçe oluşturamamaları ile kavramsal olmayan deneyimlere dâhil edilmektedir.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Stephen Voss who has always been an important figure in my life. He is a source of inspiration for me with his wisdom and with his presence. I could not have done this thesis with anyone else. I thank him for his patience and calmness which relieved me whenever I felt nervous.

I thank Berna Kılınç and Karanfil Soyhun for initiating me into philosophical thinking and for their sincere help and understanding. I am indebted to all members of our philosophy department for their significant contribution to my life. I want to thank them all on this occasion.

I owe special thanks to Uriah Kriegel for his great concern in my project, for his material and emotional support, and for his friendship.

I thank Reşit Canbeyli, Güven Güzeldere and Kemal Kuşçu for the inspiration they gave and the help they offered. I also thank Erdem Çöloğlu for his material aid in musical matters and Özcan Kanaoğlu for his continuous concern.

I owe too much to dear Berk Özen for being with me in every process; for all that he had done to prompt me to complete my thesis.

Finally, I wish to express my exceptional gratitude to my family: Şadi Ar, Nurcan Ar, Bilge Ar and Defne Ar. They have always believed in me and gave me priceless encouragement, love and support.

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER II: MENTAL REPRESENTATION .....	4
CHAPTER III: CONTENT AND ATTITUDE.....	8
CHAPTER IV: NONCONCEPTUAL CONTENT .....	12
Conceptual Content and Nonconceptual Content .....	12
Concept .....	14
Specifying Nonconceptual Content .....	17
Nonconceptual Content: Preliminaries .....	18
Representational Domains with Nonconceptual Content .....	19
CHAPTER V: MUSIC EXPERIENCE.....	28
Nonconceptual with respect to Expressive Features .....	29
Nonconceptual with respect to Structural Features .....	36
CHAPTER VI: MUSICAL UNDERSTANDING.....	49
CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION.....	52
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	55

## AUDIO CD TRACK LIST

1. Erik Satie – Gnossiennes 1- Jean-Yves Thibaudet
2. Erik Satie – Gnossiennes 2- Daniel Varsano
3. Erik Satie – Gnossiennes 3- Orchestre de Toulouse
4. Erik Satie – Gnossiennes 3- Erkan Oğur (Yazı Tura Soundtrack)
5. Erik Satie – Gnossiennes 4- Jacques Loussier Trio
6. Ennio Morricone – ‘Cinema Paradiso’ Soundtrack: Cinema Paradiso
7. Eleni Karaindrou- ‘Eternity and a Day’ Soundtrack: Depart and Eternity Theme
8. Eleni Karaindrou- ‘Eternity and a Day’ Soundtrack: Trio and Eternity Theme
9. Eleni Karaindrou- ‘Weeping Meadow’ Soundtrack: The Weeping Meadow
10. Philip Glass & Ravi Shankar – Ragas in Minor Scale
11. Stavros Xarhakos – ‘Rembetiko’ Soundtrack: To Dixty
12. Salif Keita & Cesaria Evora – Yamore
13. Procol Harum – A Whiter Shade of Pale
14. The Beatles – For No One
15. The New York Rock & Roll Ensemble – Nel Cox
16. Percy Sledge – When a Man Loves a Woman
17. Johann Sebastian Bach – Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D major, BWV 1068 (Air on the G String) – Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra
18. Johann Sebastian Bach – Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme, Cantata 4<sup>th</sup> movement BWV 140 (Sleepers Awake) – Jacques Loussier Trio

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The ideas that lie behind this thesis began to be formed during the undergraduate years in philosophy and psychology. Theories of consciousness had then started to attract my attention. The points I was particularly concerned about were the very personal, ineffable conscious experiences people claimed to have and I was curious about figuring out what sort of mental states were involved in such experiences.

Mystic and esoteric experiences, psychotic states, hallucinatory experiences due to chemically altered states of consciousness were among the examples that I could think of. Meanwhile, I had been contemplating about some of my personal experiences of music which seemed very intense and special to me. (I need to stress that I do not regard all musical experience as such.) After getting involved in the nonconceptual content literature, I began to think of these as candidates for nonconceptual experiences. Then, I considered this thesis an opportunity to dwell on these matters more closely and investigate the nature of nonconceptual experience.

Since I felt the need to narrow the scope of my inquiry and among all those that I mentioned above, I am personally involved merely in musical experiences I excluded other candidates and decided to focus on music. As for many people, music is a vital and indispensable part of my life. I am involved in it as a listener and as an amateur performer. I am aware of the fact that music experience can be discussed from various perspectives: from the perspective of the listener, the performer, the composer or the music theorist. I decided this thesis to have the listener's music experience as its subject matter because as a listener I consider myself more competent.

Regarding the nature of my topic, I cannot help but occasionally use the first person narrative throughout the thesis, as I have done in the introduction. I tried to give a brief explanation of the history of my inquiry here in order to stress that I have undergone this work motivated by personal curiosity. Hence, I share some literature review and empirical research review with the reader before the formulation of my own position. There seems to be no consensus about many matters that constitute the subject matter of this thesis. I chose the ones I would be using among the numerous and contradictory conceptions of the same phenomena. Thus, I insist that the use of a literature review is indispensable.

The purpose of this thesis is roughly to pursue the possibility of nonconceptual content. To do that, first, relevant concepts and constructs will be introduced and elaborated. What is understood by a 'concept', what is meant by 'experience' and 'content' will be explained. The distinction between the conceptual and nonconceptual will be provided. Literature on nonconceptual content will be reviewed and discussed. Contrary to many theorists who take nonconceptuality at the level of content, I will argue that nonconceptuality is a property of mental states. Hence, at the personal level, I will claim the possibility of nonconceptual experience, rather than the possibility of nonconceptual content.

Music will come to be discussed afterwards in an interdisciplinary fashion (from philosophical and psychological perspectives). Musical examples are restricted to instrumental music (and merely the instrumental sections of music with vocal accompaniment) on purpose, wishing to prevent the interference of other factors (text, programme, etc.). However, I do not think exceptional experiences with music are limited to instrumental music.

Lastly, whether any musical experience could count as a nonconceptual experience will be investigated. The nonconceptual in music experience could be argued for from two perspectives, meaning that music experience can be conceived to be nonconceptual both with respect to the formal/structural features of music and with respect to its expressive/emotional features. I will mainly argue for associationism in explaining people's experiences of musical expressiveness and their emotional attitudes toward music. Since associations take place at a subconscious level, people are usually not cognizant of the connections between their emotions (and the so called intense, ineffable experiences) and their other life experiences (personal and situational representations). I believe the structural features of the music affect our attitudes and reactions to music nonconceptually, through connections with one's personal or cultural history. However, the relations are also open to discovery. Once the listener is aware of how she is affected by the music and what feature of the music is responsible for it, the nonconceptuality can be accounted for at the personal level. Via allocation of attention mechanisms one can happen to conceptualize her experience to some extent. Experiences of music can also be nonconceptual due to their formal structures. In that case through training (the music theorist vs. the ordinary listener) one becomes more capable of conceptualization. And once certain concepts are acquired, ways of apprehending phenomena related to those concepts nonconceptually are lost to a great extent and successive listening becomes concept-laden. In that case, one, does not merely 'discriminate' the properties of the sound, but also 'recognizes' them due to concept possession.

## CHAPTER II

### MENTAL REPRESENTATION

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the notion of mental representation. We start with this notion because in philosophy and cognitive science, conceptuality and nonconceptuality are generally taken to be features of contents. And contents are mental representations. All perceptual experience is assumed to be contentful. As briefly explained in the introduction, our main focus will be the representational contents of auditory experience. So, we have to discuss it within a representationalist framework. According to the representational theories of perception, we are aware of physical objects only through being aware of mental intermediaries (representations). These representations could either be conceptual or nonconceptual. I postpone the clarification of content and nonconceptual content to the following chapters where I will argue, contrary to the widespread conception, that nonconceptuality is a feature of experience itself rather than its content.

‘Mental representation’ is a construct of contemporary cognitive science that is postulated as an attempt to naturalize the mind. Representation stands for a mental object with semantic properties, such as truth conditions, content and reference. Mental states are constituted by the occurrence and storage of such information-carrying structures.

Mental states (beliefs, desires, thoughts, inferences, images, perceptions, etc.) according to Pitt<sup>1</sup> may be evaluated in terms of consistency, accuracy, satisfaction conditions, and so on.

Most talk about mental representation concerns the existence of propositional attitudes (believing that..., thinking that...), and the determination of their contents. However it has also been debated by many that representation also concerns the existence of phenomenal states and their relation to the content of thought and perceptual experience.

Realists about mental representations assume that representational states can be of the following forms: (i) those that are composed of concepts and that have no phenomenal features, such as thoughts, (ii) those that have phenomenal features but no conceptual constituents, such as sensory experiences, and (iii) those that are composed of both conceptual and nonconceptual constituents, such as perceptual states.<sup>2</sup>

There is disagreement among philosophers over nonconceptual representation concerning the existence and nature of phenomenal properties and their role in determining the content of experience. Dennett<sup>3</sup> and Hacker<sup>4</sup> deny the existence of

---

<sup>1</sup> David Pitt, "Mental Representation," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. Available [online]: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/mental-representation> [25 January 2009].

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Dennett, Daniel C. "Quining Qualia." In *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, eds. Ned Block, Owen Flanagan, and Güven Güzeldere (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), pp. 619-642.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Michael Stephan Hacker, "Is There Anything It is Like to Be a Bat?" *Philosophy* 77 (April 2002), pp. 157-174. Available [online]: <http://info.sjc.ox.ac.uk/scr/hacker/docs/To%20be%20a%20bat.pdf> [14 April 2009].

such things as qualia. McDowell<sup>5</sup> is among those who think that qualia are unnecessary to explain the content of sensory experience. Dretske<sup>6</sup> and Tye<sup>7</sup> accept that experiences have phenomenal content but argue that such content is reducible to some intentional content. Others (Chalmers, Block, and Peacocke) argue that phenomenal content is irreducible. Those who accept that phenomenal properties are real may belong to either camp, where the former are called representationalists, and the latter are called phenomenologists. I present the views so that the reader can have an idea. My concern is not to accept two things and reduce one to another. Rather, I will be arguing for the existence of nonconceptual experience in this thesis. For, once we accept that some representation is nonconceptual we would not feel the need to introduce qualia and sensational features to account for our experiences and can perfectly retain our naturalistic stance.

According to representationalists, the qualities of which we are aware are not qualities of experiences, but rather they are qualities of things in the world or of regions of our bodies. We may also talk of qualities belonging to the intentional objects of perception. In hallucination, for instance, when one seems to see a purple sky, the representationalist would attribute the quality 'purple' to the 'intentional-object-sky' but not to the 'purple-sky-experience'. This is not to deny the existence of qualia. It just means that qualia are not qualities of experiences. They are the properties of external things represented by experiences. On this view, one comes to

---

<sup>5</sup> McDowell, John. "Nonconceptual Content." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003), pp. 75-90.

<sup>6</sup> Dretske, Fred. "Sensation and Perception." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003), pp. 25-41.

<sup>7</sup> Tye, Michael. "A Representational Theory of Pains and Their Phenomenal Character." In *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, eds. Ned Block, Owen Flanagan, and Güven Güzeldere (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), pp. 329-340.

know the phenomenal properties of his experience through introspection, by coming to know the objective features it represents.

Before we go on to discuss content, we need to make it clear that we should not identify representation with consciousness because there are also many representations that are not conscious. Subpersonal representation is going to be discussed in chapter four.

## CHAPTER III

### CONTENT AND ATTITUDE

In this chapter we proceed with our next step in the explication of experience, i. e. the clarification of content. By the phrase ‘the contents of perception’ we understand the things conveyed to the subject by his perceptual experience. When you are listening to a song, certain features of it, its lyrics, melody, rhythm etc., are conveyed to you by your auditory experience. If your experience is illusory, if you are having a musical hallucination, even then, there will be something conveyed to you by your experience. This is the content of your experience. An experience, by definition, has some phenomenal character. People normally have experiences in some or all of their sense modalities when they are awake. In some cases one is not able to determine to which sense modality one’s experience belongs as in the case of synaesthetic perception.<sup>8</sup> People’s emotions and moods also contribute to their overall experience. This thesis, as said before, will be devoted to the exploration of auditory experience, particularly music experience.

Siegel<sup>9</sup> argues that the contents of experience are determined by the conditions under which they are accurate or veridical. When they are conceived as such, they are much like the contents of thoughts and utterances in proposition-like form. Contents of experience seem to be of the predicative form and involve objects

---

<sup>8</sup> See Kenneth Peacock, “Synesthetic Perception: Alexander Scriabin's Color Hearing,” *Music Perception* 2, no.4 (Summer 1985), pp. 483-506, and Sacks, Oliver. *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain* (Kent: Pan Macmillan Ltd., 2007) for details about synaesthesia.

<sup>9</sup> Susanna Siegel, “The Contents of Perception,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2008 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta. Available [online]: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2008/entries/perception-contents> [19 February 2008].

and properties, just like the contents of thoughts. Thus, Siegel states, it is possible to conceive of accuracy conditions concerning the properties things seem to have and the accuracy conditions concerning the objects that seem to have that properties separately.

The reason that contents of experience are likened to contents of beliefs and thoughts, as given by accuracy conditions, is motivated by the idea that one can be misled by one's experiences, for instance in hallucinations. Some philosophers deny (on various grounds) that experiences have accuracy conditions, saying that this is not supported by their phenomenology. On my view, experience consists in perceiving the mental representations of physical objects. And I am sympathetic to the view that the contents of experience have accuracy or satisfaction conditions. However, I believe that the assessment of the accuracy of one's experience is frequently opaque to the experiencing subject.

We have seen that experiences are assumed to have contents. In order to claim that experiences are assessable for accuracy various positions can be taken. One of them is assuming that the contents of experience derive from the contents of beliefs. Another one is assuming that the contents of perception and the contents of belief are analogous.

To say that the contents of perception and the contents of belief are analogous means that experiences are structured by content and attitude just like beliefs<sup>10</sup>. Beliefs are considered to be relations to contents. One can be in other relations toward the belief content, beside belief. For instance, believing that one is pregnant, knowing that one is pregnant, and supposing that one is pregnant. Attitudes can thus

---

<sup>10</sup> See Siegel for details about content.

be defined as the relations in which one can stand to contents, in other words as the ways of having contents. Content and attitude are both facts about mental states, where the former can be conceived as the subject matter, and the latter as the mode of entertaining it. Siegel<sup>11</sup> thinks that experiences have contents in experiential ways, meaning that they have different experiential attitudes. There is no single recipe for explaining experiential attitudes. Some take them to be a finely grained way of having content; some conceive them as giving rise to the relevant phenomenology. Some say that it is possible for the same content to be entertained both consciously and unconsciously and some philosophers hold that the same experience can have multiple contents, namely conceptual and nonconceptual.

There are numerous specifications of content employed by various philosophers. One that allows for nonconceptual content is the Fregean kind of content. Fregean representationalism is the view that phenomenal properties are identical to certain Fregean representational properties (Fregean contents). Chalmers<sup>12</sup> is among those who endorse the use of such contents; he remarks that to have a state with Fregean content, a subject will not have to employ a concept with that content. The contents of experience, according to this view are constituted out of modes of presentation of objects and properties, but not the objects and properties themselves. On this view the same object may have multiple modes of presentations. Fregean content will be accurate if the object presented (by a mode of presentation) in the content has the property presented (by a mode of presentation) in the content.

---

<sup>11</sup> Siegel

<sup>12</sup> Chalmers, David J. "The Representational Character of Experience." In *The Future for Philosophy*, ed. B. Leiter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Available [online]: <http://consc.net/papers/representation.html> [13 February 2009].

At the subpersonal level, theorists often specify contents in terms of relational proper function, meaning that they are defined in relation to their environment. Correctness conditions are then fixed with reference to evolutionary design and past performance<sup>13</sup>.

The type of nonconceptual content supposed to occur in experiences of animals and infants is specified by some as an ability-based notion. According to that, the content should not be understood in terms of truth-conditions but rather in terms of the creature's abilities to act upon its environment. Others have proposed a richer notion that can be explained similarly with propositional attitudes (proto beliefs/desires).<sup>14</sup>

I will not go into more details about content types as they remain out of the scope of this thesis. However, I reserve some space for the specification of nonconceptual content in the following chapter where I will particularly talk about nonconceptual content.

---

<sup>13</sup> José Luis Bermudez and Arnon Cahen, "Nonconceptual Mental Content," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2009 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. Available [online]: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/content-nonconceptual> [13 February 2009].

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* and Siegel

## CHAPTER IV

### NONCONCEPTUAL CONTENT

This chapter addresses the fundamental questions of this thesis. Nonconceptual content is introduced in this chapter and it is defined, as its name implies, in a negative fashion, through showing what conceptual content is and contrasting it with that. The chapter proceeds with an explanation of what we mean by a concept. It is not possible to present a worked out view of concepts with this limited space, yet I do not have one. So here I will present my conception of a concept, which is one among others. I think what is meant by a concept significantly affects one's view of contents. Specification of nonconceptual content will be our next topic in this chapter and finally fundamentals of nonconceptual content will be presented and discussed.

#### Conceptual Content and Nonconceptual Content

It has been widely held that the way in which a creature can represent the world is determined by its conceptual capacities. The idea of nonconceptual content is a challenge to this view with its claim that some mental states can represent the world even though the bearers of those states do not possess the concepts that are necessary for the specification of their content. In order to get a better understanding of the view, we need to commence with the notion of conceptual content.

A mental state with conceptual content is usually defined as a propositional attitude, the possession of which involves standing in a certain relation to content (thought/proposition). The content is what it is that is believed, desired, etc. Though propositional attitudes are directed at certain objects, which yield their correctness conditions, only certain ways of characterizing those objects can serve to specify the content of those propositional attitudes. Since, the content of propositional attitudes is taken to consist of concepts, it is clear that specifications of the content of a propositional attitude state must not employ concepts that are not possessed by its bearer.<sup>15</sup> Bermudez and Cahen<sup>16</sup> state the motivating thoughts behind this conceptual constraint as follows:

1. In specifying what a thinker believes, what a perceiver perceives or what a speaker is saying by uttering a certain sentence in a particular context one has to be as faithful as possible to the way in which that thinker, perceiver or speaker apprehends the world.
2. The way in which a speaker, perceiver or thinker apprehends the world in speaking about it or having beliefs about it is a function of the concepts he possesses.

Theorists of nonconceptual content hold that specifications of content must respect the way in which one apprehends the world and because of this they cannot be limited to the concepts one possesses. Thus, they introduce the existence of ways of representing the world nonconceptually. Retaining the first thought (stated above) and questioning the second, the conceptual constraint is supposed to be locally lifted.

---

<sup>15</sup> Bermudez and Cahen

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

## Concept

The plausibility of all these claims depends on how a concept is defined. According to Bermudez and Cahen<sup>17</sup> (i) Concepts are generally taken to be abstract semantic entities that constitute contents. (ii) Any attitude towards them or mastery of them can be considered a psychological phenomenon but concepts themselves cannot. (iii) A given content must either be conceptual or nonconceptual, but not both. This means that the same content can never be the content both of a (nonconceptual) perceptual state and a (conceptual) belief state.

I do not totally agree with this final characterization. For, I think, the specification as conceptual or nonconceptual may depend on the attitude one takes toward the content. For me, perceptual content is the representation of the qualities of external objects. And the characterizations of conceptual and nonconceptual can plausibly be made with respect to the ways of apprehending the same content. What I am trying to put forth is that it is not the content which is conceptual or nonconceptual. It is either the mental state or the experience, which stands in a certain relation to its content, which is conceptual or nonconceptual. Bermudez & Cahen<sup>18</sup> cite Heck (2000) who distinguishes between the ways in which a perceptual state can be nonconceptual: namely, at the level of mental states or at the level of contents of those states. Heck's state view seems to be very similar to my objection. On such thinking it is possible to reject both the first and the third characterizations.

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

To account for the rational role of perceptual states in belief formation I have claimed that we should not apply the notions ‘nonconceptual’ and ‘conceptual’ to contents, rather I proposed that they should be applied to attitudes (towards contents). Kriegel states, in line with my position, that “conceptual content, (...), is content carried by a vehicle whose functional role involves the mobilization of recognitional abilities, as well as other abilities involved in concept possession. Nonconceptual content is content carried by a vehicle whose functional role does not involve the mobilization of such abilities”<sup>19</sup>, but instead involves the mobilization of discriminatory abilities. He concludes that conceptuality and nonconceptuality are primarily attributes of vehicles rather than contents and argues that the conceptual and the nonconceptual can combine to form a single conscious content. He thinks this is possible since a single vehicle can play a functional role of mobilization of certain abilities and not mobilization of others. Conceived as such, content turns out to be partly conceptual and partly nonconceptual.

The significance of nonconceptual content depends very much on the way a concept is defined. States that would count as nonconceptual for a theorist with a demanding notion of a concept can be conceptual for another theorist whose view of concept is looser. On the loosest conception, one can be said to possess a concept of Fs if he can discriminate Fs from other things. On the most demanding conception, one needs to be able to justify and defend the judgment that something is an F. We need to be clear about what it is to possess a concept before any plausible discussion of the notions of conceptual and nonconceptual content.

---

<sup>19</sup> Uriah Kriegel, “Perceptual Experience, Conscious Content, and Non-Conceptual Content,” *Essays in Philosophy: A Biannual Journal* 5, no.1 (January 2004). Available [online]: <http://www.humboldt.edu/~essays/kriegel.html> [17 June 2008].

Bermudez and Macpherson<sup>20</sup> talk of ‘the priority principle’ which states that conceptual abilities cannot be possessed by non-linguistic creatures since they are constitutively linked with linguistic abilities. For them, possessing a concept enables one to recognize that certain circumstances give one good reasons to take particular attitudes toward contents that contain that concept. And concept mastery is required to make and to take as legitimate certain inferential transitions between judgments. Since providing a justification is a linguistic activity, they conclude, non-linguistic creatures are incapable of doing that.

As I said before, I do not have a view of what a concept is. I understand and accept that there are many formulations. The one I will use is just one among others. Since I will be concerned mainly with adult human beings, I assume that some verbal or behavioral indication is necessary to reveal concept possession. I think that possessing a concept requires some linguistic ability, because recognizing things and giving justifications are more demanding than mere discrimination and require a rational ability that is only possible via language. Conceptual grasp of something, I suppose, entails recognition and necessitates an ability to figure in one’s reasoning, to take part in the belief system, to have the potential to lead to relevant action and to interact with the other representations available.

In the following section, I will go back to the content issue. But this time I will focus solely on the specification of nonconceptual content.

---

<sup>20</sup> José Luis Bermudez and Fiona Macpherson, “Nonconceptual Content and the Nature of Perceptual Experience.” *The Electronic Journal of Analytic Philosophy* 6, (1998). Available [online]: [http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/584/1/macpherson\\_ejap.pdf](http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/584/1/macpherson_ejap.pdf) [13 February 2009].

## Specifying Nonconceptual Content

Peacocke<sup>21</sup> presents the most developed view about the nonconceptual content of perceptual states. He describes a kind of content called scenario content which is the content of experiences. It is a way of filling out the space around the perceiver, relative to an origin and axes marking directions, consistent with the experience being veridical and that can adequately reflect the spatial and first personal perspectives in experience. The specification of each minimally discriminable point within the perceiver's perceptual field gives the way that perceiver represents its environment. The representation is veridical only if the space is occupied in one of those represented ways. A positioned scenario is a scenario with a specific origin and axes at a specific time. Therefore, a positioned scenario is assessable for accuracy. Scenario content, as will be discussed below, is analogue, unit free and possesses the appropriate fineness of grain. For Peacocke, although spatial concepts may be needed to specify a scenario, they do not need to be possessed by the subject to have experiences with scenario content.

Peacocke gives three examples<sup>22</sup> in which an aspect switch leads the perceiver to have experiences that differ phenomenally while the two aspects in each example represent exactly the same properties. For Peacocke, in these examples of single properties (the four-sided figure, the middle C-F sharp interval, the arrangement of dots) that are represented in different ways, there are multiple ways

---

<sup>21</sup> Peacocke, Christopher. "Scenarios, Concepts, and Representation." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003), pp. 107-132.

<sup>22</sup> The examples are found in Mark DeBellis. "The Representational Content of Musical Experience." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51, no.4 (June 1991): 308-309. Available [online]: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/2108129.pdf> [14 April 2009].

that pick out the same property. The properties represented and accordingly the scenario contents in these examples do not differ. Peacocke names the contents of these examples protopositional contents. He thinks that such content is distinct from conceptual content and supposes that protopositions contain objects together with a property or relation. He assumes that they are assessable in terms of accuracy. For Peacocke, the mastery of many observational concepts will require sensitivity to experiences with protopositional content. According to Peacocke, when a protoposition enters the representational content of an experience, the experience will represent the property as belonging to the objects that the protoposition indicates. Yet, the protoposition is not a part of the conceptual content. I will not advocate this view because I believe these protopositions cannot take part in the experience's representational content and also it is hard for me to conceive of ascribing a distinct property to an object without having the corresponding concept.

### Nonconceptual Content: Preliminaries

The notion of nonconceptual content appears in analytical philosophy first with the work of Gareth Evans. Evans thinks that the information provided by the perceptual systems is nonconceptual. He argues that this information is initially unconscious and becomes conscious if it serves as input to a concept-using, reasoning system.<sup>23</sup>

This conception seems to conceive of nonconceptual content merely at the subpersonal level. Besides, he seems to deny non-linguistic creatures conscious perceptual experiences.

---

<sup>23</sup> Evans, Gareth. "Demonstrative Identification." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003), pp. 43-74.

## Representational Domains with Nonconceptual Content

Three different representational domains are generally proposed to include nonconceptual content: (i) *perceptual states*, (ii) *representational states at the subpersonal or subdoxastic level*<sup>24</sup>, and (iii) *representational states of non-human animals and human infants*.

### Perceptual States

Theorists of nonconceptual content assume the content of perception to be *analogue* in nature, meaning that it carries additional information about an object than its having some certain property. Dretske<sup>25</sup> distinguishes between analogue and digital forms of representation. He argues that the conceptual content of propositional attitudes is represented in digital form, unlike the contents of perceptual experiences. To illustrate the difference, we can consider two cases: (i) The utterance that ‘My sister has brown eyes’, and (ii) The picture of my sister. The latter will obviously contain information other than my sister’s having brown eyes. The case is also obvious when we compare a mechanical clock with a digital watch. In the

---

<sup>24</sup> Occasionally in this thesis the personal/subpersonal level distinction will be used interchangeably with the conscious/unconscious level distinction. I think it is plausible to treat the distinctions as coextensive but I am aware that they are not exactly so. According to the original distinction, personal level states include those that are explanatory of people, their actions and sensations, and subpersonal states include those that are explanatory of brain states, neural events and the like. I am also aware that some people may think of a tacit belief (like the belief that 34.09 is bigger than 23.12) as a personal level state (as it is a state of a whole person) while at the same time taking it to be an unconscious state (as the person is not aware of it and as it does not have a phenomenal character).

<sup>25</sup> Dretske, pp. 25-41.

mechanical clock, we can see where we are temporally by means of the gaps between the hour-indicating dots. The hour and minute hands do not only stop at the dots, but also stop at the gaps. By contrast, in the digital watch we can just learn about the numbers indicating the hour and the minute and in that we cannot estimate where we are by seconds within the same minute (in case the watch does not show the seconds).

The content of perception is also assumed to be *unit-free*.<sup>26</sup> When an object is represented as being a certain distance from one, the distance is not represented in terms of a particular unit, even though the representation is a determinate distance. It is simply represented as being ‘that distance’, where the content of the experience specifies the distance. Such unit-free representation cannot be captured in propositional terms.

The content of experience is more *fine-grained* than the content of propositional attitude. Peacocke<sup>27</sup> argues that the fineness of grain of perceptual experience outruns the conceptual (recognition) capacities of the perceiver. We can see and discriminate many more colors than we have concepts for. When you look at a skirt, you do not experience it as being simply green. You experience it as being a specific shade of green, green 17 for instance. Next day, at a store, you may see two green skirts, one of them green 16 and the other green 17 (which are very similar). You would probably be unable to pick the one with the same color as the skirt that you saw yesterday. This means that you are unable to recognize the specific shade of color as being the same color, implying that you do not possess the concept of green 17. But you can tell the difference between the two shades when you are presented

---

<sup>26</sup> Peacocke, pp. 107-132.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

with them simultaneously. This implies that the difference does not outrun your discriminatory abilities. You would have phenomenally distinct experiences. Even with a strict standard of what concepts are, you can safely conclude that your conscious experience represents the skirt as being a skirt conceptually, while it also represents it as being green 17 nonconceptually.

If we consider someone who cannot recognize green 17 over time and also cannot tell apart green 16 from green 17, we can say that her experience of a green 16 skirt is phenomenally indistinguishable from her experience of a green 17 skirt. She will probably have exactly the same experience. This reveals that discriminatory abilities used in conscious experiences affect the individuation of phenomenal characters.<sup>28</sup> McDowell<sup>29</sup> argues against the thesis that perceptual experience has a nonconceptual content. He argues that the fineness of grain of experiences can be hosted at the conceptual level, suggesting that the conceptual content of perceptual experiences is given by demonstrative concepts like ‘that shade’. Peacocke defends nonconceptual content against McDowell’s criticisms<sup>30</sup>. However, Kelly criticizes Peacocke’s appeal to fineness of grain in countering McDowell’s arguments<sup>31</sup>. In order to defend nonconceptual content, he refers instead to the notion of ‘situation dependence’.<sup>32 33</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Example is a modification of Kriegel’s.

<sup>29</sup> McDowell, pp. 75-90.

<sup>30</sup> Peacocke, *Nonconceptual Content Defended*, pp. 381-388.

<sup>31</sup> Kelly, Sean D. “The Nonconceptual Content of Perceptual Experience: Situation Dependence and Fineness of Grain.” In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003), pp. 223-229.

<sup>32</sup> Peacocke defends this time his position against Kelly. See Peacocke, *Phenomenology and Nonconceptual Content*, pp. 609-615.

Defenders of nonconceptual content also assume that experiences are belief-independent. It is possible for one not to believe what one seems to hear.<sup>34</sup> It is also possible for one to undergo an illusion even when she knows that she is undergoing an illusion and things are not as they look. Crane<sup>35</sup> shows that the Müller-Lyer illusion leads to a conflict between two intentional states (*attitudes*): the state of the lines appearing to be of different lengths and the state of believing that the lines are the same length. He also argues that the waterfall illusion presents an experience with a contradictory *content*, which reveals that it cannot have conceptual content.<sup>36</sup>

Many theorists agree on these (analogue, unit-free, fine-grained, belief-independent) as the features of nonconceptual content. However, only some accept the ‘autonomy of nonconceptual content’. The issue of the autonomy of nonconceptual content arises with the question whether a thinker can be in states with nonconceptual content despite not possessing any concepts at all. Bermudez<sup>37</sup> affirms the autonomy of content, and defends it against Peacocke’s rejection<sup>38</sup> and

---

<sup>33</sup> We will refer to McDowell’s strategy briefly when we will be discussing musical experience below. I will not go into an in-depth elaboration here.

<sup>34</sup> When the notion of conceptual content is applied to perceptual experiences; for instance, the content of an auditory experience will be determined by the proposition which specifies what seems to be heard (an inclination to believe).

<sup>35</sup> Crane, Tim. “The Waterfall Illusion.” In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003), pp. 231-235.

<sup>36</sup> The waterfall illusion occurs when one turns his attention towards a fixed object such as a stone just after he was looking at a waterfall. In that case the fixed object appears as moving on the one hand and it does not appear to move on the other (when perceived relative to its context). Being aware of features as both moving and not moving is logically impossible, according to Crane, and poses a problem for the view that the contents of perception are composed of concepts (Ibid., pp. 232).

<sup>37</sup> Bermudez and Macpherson

<sup>38</sup> Bermudez, José Luis. “Peacocke’s Argument against the Autonomy of Nonconceptual Representational Content.” In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003), pp. 293-307.

Peacocke later comes to acknowledge the notion.<sup>39</sup> The significance of the discussion depends on what is understood from a concept, for sure. The elaboration of autonomy, however, is not among the aims of this thesis. Only the nonconceptual experiences of adult human beings are targeted in the thesis. The experiences of human infants and animals are excluded (though trivially and occasionally mentioned).

### Subpersonal/Subdoxastic Representational States<sup>40</sup>

Chomsky assumes that there are common rules to all languages and that these common rules are innate. Thus he thinks that people are born with some tacit knowledge of (universal) grammar. However, the specification of grammatical rules by the linguists requires concepts that are not possessed by the language user. The representational states involved in such tacit knowledge are at the subpersonal level and said to involve nonconceptual content. Evans's 'informational systems' provided by the perceptual systems have states with nonconceptual content. Since Evans<sup>41</sup> characterizes these as unconscious, they seem to exist at a subpersonal level. For Evans, states with nonconceptual content seem to be not conscious states. I believe, as I stated above, nonconceptuality can exist at both personal (conscious) and

---

<sup>39</sup> See the postscript in Peacocke, *Nonconceptual Content: Kinds, Rationales, and Relations*, pp. 309-322.

<sup>40</sup> I will mostly be treating subconscious representational states under this heading instead of subpersonal states. However, I retained the title 'subpersonal' because mostly in literature this is the operative distinction.

<sup>41</sup> Evans

subpersonal levels. Yet, I maintain that most nonconceptual representation takes place at the subpersonal level. Evans gives the example of ‘blindsight’ to support his claims, which we will discuss next. Under this heading we will also talk about the cognitive unconscious, which is the general name coined to refer to the impact of unconscious mental processes on their possessor’s actions without reasoning, and will mention subliminal perception of which blindsight is an instance.

### Blindsight

Several neuropsychological syndromes in which good function is retained in the absence of acknowledged awareness may lead us to consider the possibility of nonconceptual content. Blindsight, which is roughly visual discrimination without awareness (that happens due to visual cortex damage), is among those. In blindsight, damage to the visual cortex causes blindness in the contralateral hemisphere of vision. Yet, it is still possible for the patient to demonstrate the ability to detect, locate and discriminate visual events and objects in their blind field. In testing blindsight, Weiskrantz<sup>42</sup> first asked his subjects to report whether they are aware or unaware after they are presented with stimuli and then asked indirectly (with forced choice) to discriminate what they are shown. The results show that the subjects are able to show good discriminative performance most of the time though they reported that they were not aware. Accordingly one may conclude that discriminatory function takes place even though the subjects are phenomenally unaware. Cases like

---

<sup>42</sup> Lawrence Weiskrantz, “Consciousness and Commentaries,” *International Journal of Psychology* 33, no.3 (June 1998), pp. 227-233. Available [online]: [http://pdfserve.informaworld.com/393342\\_758064766\\_741925958.pdf](http://pdfserve.informaworld.com/393342_758064766_741925958.pdf) [23 March 2008].

these lead us to consider the possibility of nonconceptual content at a sub-personal or sub-doxastic level.

### Subliminal Perception

Subliminal perception is the general name coined to describe any situation in which unnoticed stimuli are perceived via preattentive processing<sup>43</sup>. Experimental studies are designed to test the phenomena, in which the participants were presented with visual or auditory stimuli that are too distant or too faint to be consciously perceived and then were tested indirectly through forced choices and guesses. The results of these studies revealed that considerable information capable of informing decisions and guiding actions was perceived even though the participants were not aware of perceiving that information<sup>44</sup> and were not deliberating; meaning that perception occurred in the absence of phenomenal awareness<sup>45</sup>.

Prosopagnosia is a neurological syndrome in which subliminal perception occurs. Patients are unable to recognize familiar faces. Even when this is so, when they were asked to choose which of two names goes with each similar face, they

---

<sup>43</sup> John F. Kihlstrom, "Availability, Accessibility, and Subliminal Perception," *Consciousness and Cognition* 13, no.1 (2004), pp. 92-100. Available [online]: <http://www.sciencedirect.com> [6 June 2008].

<sup>44</sup> Philip Merikle, "Subliminal Perception." *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, ed. A. E. Kazdin, Vol. 7 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 497-499.

<sup>45</sup> There were attempts to exploit the subliminal perception phenomena by the market industry after James Vicary's claim that the presentation of ads for 3/1000 of a second once every 5 seconds during a movie affects people's buying behavior. However, no strong correlation was found in the subsequent studies. (Ibid.)

were mostly able to make correct choices. Blindsight is also an example of subliminal perception.

### The Cognitive Unconscious

The impact of mental structures and processes that operate outside phenomenal awareness, on the individual's conscious experience, and action is indicated by contemporary cognitive psychology research and such structures are named the cognitive unconscious. Perceptual-cognitive and motor skills are known to be automatized through experience and thus they function unconsciously. In the case of skill learning, when one is learning to play the guitar, or to drive a car, one is initially conscious and attentive. But later, through practice and routinization she can practice these skills unconsciously and automatically. Besides this, research on subliminal perception, implicit memory<sup>46</sup>, and hypnosis reveals that events can have an effect on mental functioning though they are not consciously perceived or remembered.

---

<sup>46</sup> "Explicit memory requires the recollection of a previous episode, whereas implicit memory is revealed by a change in task performance that is attributable to information acquired during such an episode." Kihlstrom, *The Cognitive Unconscious*, pp. 1445-1452.

## Representational States of Human Infants and Non-human Animals

Representational states of infants and animals are also candidates for states with nonconceptual content. Bermudez distinguishes between two types of thinking: The type of cognition exercised by animals and infants is said to be domain-specific and modular. These bodies of knowledge are focused on particular aspects of their worlds and are not integrated with each other. The type of thought engaged in by language-users is, by contrast, domain-general and productive. Any thought constituent is able to be combined with any other.<sup>47</sup> This being so, it seems that many non-linguistic creatures are not capable of engaging in conceptual thought. And if they are to be taken as representing the world, their representations need to be at a nonconceptual level.

---

<sup>47</sup> Bermudez and Cahen

## CHAPTER V

### MUSIC EXPERIENCE

This chapter constitutes the core of this thesis together with the previous chapter that makes explicit what we mean by nonconceptual. Here we will apply the general notion ‘nonconceptual’ to auditory experience and to music experience in particular. As noted before, the discussion will be over the experiences of the listener (not the performer, composer, or any other person) because being a listener is common to all.

I will argue that vision is the least convenient of all sense modalities to argue in favor of nonconceptuality. We have many concepts to refer to visible phenomena. Even though we do not have the appropriate sortal, we can apply a demonstrative and still remain within the realm of the conceptual. We could think of someone who does not possess a concept for the color ‘turquoise’, yet can reveal his recognition by referring to turquoise via the phrase ‘that color’ or ‘that shade of blue’. However we are poorer in concepts with respect to audition, olfaction and gustation. I have chosen to work with what I am more familiar with.

It seems to me that musical sound has a distinctive character that is so fine that it can not be grasped by our conceptual capacities, at least by the conceptual capacities of ordinary, musically naive listeners. We are mostly unable to acquire distinct and precise categories, i.e. concepts, to describe our musical experiences. This is probably because we cannot retain in memory the auditory information conveyed by the music. Thus, I think much musical processing occurs either unconsciously or consciously but nonconceptually, making it inarticulable through

concepts and propositions. This inarticulability compels some to describe music as ineffable or as conveying deep and profound, inexpressible truths.

I, myself, am drawn to the investigation of the nature of music experience with a similar motive. I realized that this motive stands behind the perception of expressive features of music and that there is more to musical experience than that, namely the structural features. The two features are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they affect each other. Nevertheless, I decided to treat them separately in the two sections below. Nonconceptuality with respect to expressive features of music is more obscure. And it is impossible to present a comprehensive account of musical expressiveness within this limited space. Besides, it belongs more in the scope of the psychology of music. So I have just briefly gone through it and elaborated the structural nonconceptuality in music more exhaustively.

### Nonconceptual with Respect to Expressive Features

As we have said music can also be considered nonconceptual due to the expressive or emotional properties it has. Sometimes we find ourselves saddened by a song, other times we use music intentionally to change our mood, like my playing high tempo music in the mornings to start the day in a good mood. Most of the time, we are able to identify the emotional character of the musical work no matter whether we are affected by it or not. We use adjectives such as joyful, gloomy, charming, soothing, nervous, and thrilling to describe the music. But sometimes music seems to produce a strange feeling in us that cannot be captured by words. Erik Satie's *Gnossiennes* played a role in my thinking so.

People are generally clear about their attitudes toward musical works. They can make value judgments such as ‘I like this.’ and ‘I don’t like that.’ However, mostly they are unable to tell what they like in the music. This difficulty in explaining what makes the musical work pleasurable or not is due to a lack of conceptual sophistication, for they experience the music through a perceptual route, not through a cognitive one. Clearly I am very pleased by my hearing experience of the *Gnossiennes*. I thought a lot on the nature of my experience. It seemed very deep and special to me, as if it were mystical. I was aware that it is not sensible to describe a sequence of sounds as mystical and I focused on my experience to figure out what structural aspects of the *Gnossiennes* made me think that way. I associated especially the fourth *Gnossienne* with the images of a tale that takes place in the Orient, as if there were flying rugs around. My personal quest ended up with the discovery that the plain structure of the *Gnossiennes* contained the augmented second interval and slow changes which are common in the Oriental culture. Moreover, I found out that the *Gnossiennes* were used in a cassette recording of tales that I used to listen to when I was a child. I believe I had come to conceptualize my experience (which I consider to be nonconceptual initially) to a great extent. It was easier for me to interpret my strange feelings in listening to the soundtracks of two Angelopoulos movies- ‘*Eternity and a Day*’ and ‘*Weeping Meadow*’ by Eleni Karaindrou, and the soundtrack of ‘*Cinema Paradiso*’ by Ennio Morricone. Because in these, one can attribute the feelings to unconscious associations formed while one watches the scenes. The nonconceptuality due to expressive properties, I propose, is nonconceptual at a subpersonal level. And in order to conceptualize it one has to find associations between one’s personal and cultural history. Thinking that way, among the various theories of musical expressivity I advocate associationism. It is rather the

task of psychology of music to explore the causes of these unconscious associations. And it is only when we notice the impact of these associations that they can reach our personal level conscious experience and contribute to the phenomenology of one's experience.

### Mystical

Music sometimes may seem mysterious. Our experience of it seems to have a peculiar depth. There is something special about music and our experience of it that makes us think it is ineffable. We face a hard obstacle in trying to describe our experiences of music in literal terms. Many people are inclined to qualify at least some musical works as apparently profound.<sup>48</sup> Zangwill<sup>49</sup> likens music experience to mystic experience, arguing that both experiences defy any adequate description via language, since communication requires conceptual differentiation. Thus, he claims, we apply metaphors and similes in describing music and our musical experiences. He contrasts the problem of ineffability and indescribability in music to that in perception and concludes that only in the former is the experience ecstatic. And he adds that the musical ecstasy, which we can merely metaphorically describe, reflects an awareness of music's aesthetic value.

---

<sup>48</sup> The 'profundity' issue will be discussed below.

<sup>49</sup> Nick Zangwill, "Music and Mysticism." Forthcoming in *Research Journal of the Iranian Academy of Arts*. Available [online]: <http://www.dur.ac.uk/nick.zangwill/MusicMysticism.doc> [19 February 2008].

Gabrielsson<sup>50</sup> makes a similar claim. He states that strong experiences with music may have many properties in common with other types of intense and exceptional experiences, for instance, mystical experiences.<sup>51</sup> Maslow's investigations and subsequent studies indicate many different physical, cognitive, emotional, perceptual and transcendental phenomena in strong experiences.<sup>52</sup> Gabrielsson<sup>53</sup> reviews his former study about strong experiences of music (SEM) in which he asked the participants to describe their exceptional experiences of music. The analysis yielded the characterization of SEM as a unique and incredible experience that is too hard to describe as words would remain insufficient. The aspects of SEM were characterized under these headings: (i) physical reactions and behaviors, (ii) perception, (iii) cognition, (iv) emotion, (v) existential and transcendental aspects, and (vi) personal development. It is obvious, as Gabrielsson also notes, that emotional reactions to experiences of music depend on interactions between musical, personal, and situational variables. Most of the time personal and situational factors come to be more dominant than music itself. The piece of music is associated with some object or situation. Several respondents described their experience as something direct, something that bypasses cognitive barriers and going straight to the emotions. This suggests that there is no cognitive appraisal. However, the reports of some others revealed deliberate cognitive appraisal that mediated emotional reaction.

---

<sup>50</sup> Gabrielsson, Alf. "Emotions in Strong Experiences with Music." In *Music and Emotion: Theory and Research*, eds. Patrik N. Juslin, and John A. Sloboda. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 431-449.

<sup>51</sup> His conception of a strong experience is motivated by Abraham Maslow's 'peak experience', a notion he associates with self-actualization which is placed at the highest level in his hierarchy of needs.

<sup>52</sup> For details about those studies see Gabrielsson

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

## Profound

Kivy<sup>54</sup> introduces a puzzle of ‘profundity’ in his *Music Alone* and causes much controversy among those who are concerned with musical experience. Kivy reflects on our inclination to describe some works of absolute music as ‘profound’, and proposes that it is very unclear what might be meant by that. He objects that music could not literally say anything profound, contrasting it with the art of literature<sup>55</sup> which he characterizes as treating a profound subject matter in a profound way. Kivy<sup>56</sup> criticizes Davies for introducing another way of being profound, i.e. non-propositional profundity which he exemplifies with chess and complex mathematical proofs, and for arguing that absolute music also exhibits this non-propositional profundity. Kivy argues against Davies’s attempts, and claims that his position ends up with being forced to accept all great works of music as profound. Zangwill is another who claims the profundity of music, but he thinks profound is a metaphor that is applied to music and merely means that the work is valuable. The common use of the adjective ‘profound’ in the description of music is closely related to both the musical work’s complexity and its expressivity. It could be used as an appreciation of the great mind that produced the very complex and difficult work or as an appreciation of the great expressive power of a work that is able to arouse deep feelings in the listener even though it may have a plain structure. Kivy rejects the everyday use of the adjective profound and defines it as an objective property of only certain great works of music that deserves the label, fitting in with the criteria he

---

<sup>54</sup> Kivy, Peter, *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1990).

<sup>55</sup> Kivy, *Another Go at Musical Profundity: Stephen Davies and the Game of Chess*, pp. 401-411.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

lists. Kivy's criteria of profundity in music, however is not clear, for they contain the word 'profound' in the clarification which is itself not very clear. Thus, I think Kivy's explanation remains circular.

### Emotional

The question of why we find music valuable is among the questions that philosophers of music tackle. Music's ability to express emotions while being an abstract art is central to their thinking.<sup>57</sup> Sometimes the musical work seems obviously emotional as it is for me in listening to the Rembetiko song *To Dixty*. I interpret the song as expressing sadness caused by a loss maybe, but not giving way to it and continuing to live with dignity while resisting obstacles. My interpretation is independent of the words of the song which are in Greek and whose translation I have not looked up. Salif Keita & Cesaria Evora's *Yamore* and Ravi Shankar & Philip Glass's *Ragas in Minor Scale* are also among the musical pieces that I find emotionally expressive. These two pieces are produced by the cooperation of musicians from different cultures (different continents). Nevertheless, the emotions seem to be universal.

Many people including philosophers have been engaged in trying to answer the question of how music can express emotions. Kania<sup>58</sup> mentions the different theories proposed by various philosophers of music to account for music's

---

<sup>57</sup> Andrew Kania, "The Philosophy of Music." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. Available [online]: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/music> [25 January 2009].

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

expressiveness of emotions. The expression theory states that musical works and performances are expressions of the composer's or performer's emotions. This view is easily refutable and fails to explain music's expressivity. The arousal theory attributes the expressiveness of a musical work to its ability to arouse the relevant emotion in a qualified listener. It can be objected that many comprehending listeners do not respond to music emotionally. Ridley<sup>59</sup> defends a modified version of the theory that he calls weak arousal theory. According to Ridley, music contains many (structural) features (that he calls melisma) that contribute to the resemblance of musical sound to vocal and physical expressive behavior when interpreted by the experiencing subject. If melisma is interpreted sympathetically (rather than robotically) it may be heard as expressive. Another theory is associationism, which I have mentioned above, which explains musical expressivity with conventional associations between music's structural elements and certain emotional states. I do not think associationism is able to explain music's expressivity which should be an objective property. Because, the associations to be made will be private and personal, and so will vary between listeners. However, I believe, it is sufficient to explain the listeners' musical experiences of expressive music. The resemblance theory explains music's expressivity in the resemblance between music's structural features and the dynamic character (vocal and behavioral) of the persons who have the relevant emotions. Boghossian<sup>60</sup> is one who thinks that we respond emotionally to music as he takes it to have expressive meaning due to its structural properties. He rejects

---

<sup>59</sup> Aaron Ridley, "Musical Sympathies: The Experience of Expressive Music," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53, no.1 (Winter 1995), pp. 55-56. Available [online]: <http://proquest.umi.com> [14 April 2009].

<sup>60</sup> Paul Boghossian, "On Hearing the Music in the Sound: Scruton on Musical Expression," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60, no.1 (Winter 2002), pp. 49-55. Available [online]: <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/118908289/PDFSTART> [25 January 2009] and Boghossian, *Explaining Musical Experience*.

Scruton's argument that expressive properties are only metaphorically possessed by sounds. Boghossian defends a resemblance view of musical expressiveness. There exist other theories of expressivity but I think these are sufficient to have an idea.

Peacocke's<sup>61</sup> proposal as to how musical expression should be understood is founded on the notion of metaphor. He distinguishes between three forms of experiencing-as and asserts that music is perceived metaphorically-as something else. For him, the metaphor enters the content of perceptual experience as what is depicted. Metaphor, as he takes it, is not a linguistic phenomenon though it is something cognitive that can enter different kinds of mental states. Peacocke is able to show via his theory that a piece of musical work can have an emotional significance that its composer did not intend. According to Peacocke, a subject does not think about but exploits an isomorphism in appreciating a metaphor. The composer could have exploited a perceivable metaphor for a particular emotion and this could have been affecting his successive compositions without his noticing. Other qualified listeners may perceive in those compositions the emotional significance that the composer has not intended.

#### Nonconceptual with Respect to Structural Features

My concern here is not the representational content of music, but the representational content of the experience of listening to music. Music can be conceived to represent extra-musical phenomena such as seasons, war, sea, melancholy and death, or it may

---

<sup>61</sup> The interested readers may find Peacocke's paper and the replies to it in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, July 2009.

not be taken to represent anything at all. I will not be concerned with these matters in my elaboration of the structurally nonconceptual in music. In the case of music, our auditory experience represents many properties of sounds and various relations among them. In this section, I will argue in favor of the nonconceptual representation of music mainly through the views of DeBellis and Luntley, both of whom defend the nonconceptual way of experiencing music. I will side with DeBellis in acknowledging the difference in terms of conceptuality and nonconceptuality between the experiences of musically trained and musically untrained persons.

An intricate account of the content of musical experience is provided by DeBellis<sup>62</sup>. DeBellis defends the claim that all the features of musical experience are representational. He argues against Peacocke who had claimed in a previous publication that there were also non-representational features which he called sensational. On my interpretation of DeBellis's paper, an underlying thought is that Peacocke's argument was based on a suppressed premise that all representation must be conceptual<sup>63</sup> and an assumption that some representation could be nonconceptual. Thus, I think, DeBellis argues that Peacocke's premise needs to be rejected. He thinks that one would not need to posit sensational properties to explain the phenomenal difference in experiences once he accepts that some representation is nonconceptual.

---

<sup>62</sup> DeBellis, pp. 308-309.

<sup>63</sup>“It is a conceptual truth, Peacocke says, that one's experience cannot represent the environment as being a certain way if one 'is not capable of grasping what that way is' or does not possess the concepts out of which the relevant content is 'built up'.” (Ibid., pp. 307) It is clear from this passage that DeBellis attributes conceptualism to Peacocke. He may be right in so doing, for his interpretation of Peacocke (as claiming that all representation must be conceptual) is over Peacocke's ideas in *Sense and Content*, 1983. Apparently Peacocke's views had radically changed in time and he is well-known today as an eminent defender of nonconceptualism. I thank Uriah Kriegel for helping me to settle this point.

DeBellis<sup>64</sup> mainly talks about Peacocke's argument concerning the hearing of musical sounds.<sup>65</sup> Peacocke's most challenging argument against the adequacy of representations in explaining phenomenal experience, according to DeBellis is that of the tritone<sup>66</sup>. "The combination of tones, or dyad, produced by striking the keys C and F-sharp on the keyboard can sound different in two main ways, which can be imbedding the dyad in a G-major context or a D-flat-major context."<sup>67</sup>

Peacocke thinks that the contrasting experiences have the same content but that they differ phenomenally. DeBellis maintains that there is a difference in their representational content. In order to account for this, he applies to music theory and analysis, because he thinks their descriptions of musical works coincide with the contents of musical perception. He investigates the Schenkerian analysis in particular.<sup>68</sup> DeBellis sketches the Schenkerian analysis as follows:

A musical passage is taken to be the outcome of the application of certain operations, called prolongations, to some simpler passage. The musical passage at the surface is called the foreground, its prolongation is called the background and the intermediate structural stages are called the middle ground. Prolongation can be done in various ways, some of which are arpeggiation, the passing note and the neighbor note.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> The particular example he gives is the sounding of a tritone in two different contexts.

<sup>66</sup> Quoting from DeBellis, pp. 309: 'The term "tritone" is sometimes used to mean an augmented fourth (three whole tones) as distinguished from a diminished fifth, but here I use it to mean either. Note that the example presupposes equal temperament, in which F-sharp is the same as G-flat.'

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Schenkerian analysis takes its name from the music theorist Heinrich Schenker. It is well-known and deep seated in music theory.

<sup>69</sup> For details and explanations see DeBellis, pp. 310-311.

DeBellis proposes that the content of an auditory experience corresponds to a Schenkerian graph, meaning that one would hear the musical surface within certain (Schenkerian type) relations to higher structural levels. This implies that one hears the foreground passage as sounding, and as being related to passages that do not sound. According to DeBellis, such a conception is able to solve the puzzle Peacocke raises. For a passage might be analyzed in various ways. The contrasting experiences in Peacocke's example above, thus, correspond to different Schenkerian analyses. In one experience the tritone is heard in relation to the triad G-B-D and in the other, it is heard in relation to the triad D-flat-F-A-flat. In this puzzle case experiences are equivalent as they are satisfied by the same possible worlds. To solve the puzzle one needs to disprove that there is no difference in content in the two cases.

The Schenkerian account of content, for DeBellis, allows this by providing a fine-grained, structured conception of content and by reflecting the listener's phenomenology. DeBellis's conception of content is a structured entity formed out of perceived relations and properties in a way that a difference in constituents leads to a difference in the structure. This, I suppose, permits the content of experience to be nonconceptual. On such a conception important aspects of sensory experience could easily be distinguished at the level of content (without any recourse to sensational features). It is also possible for someone unacquainted with the Schenkerian theory to have experiences as of the relations described in the theory. One way to read DeBellis is that the Schenkerian account of content he advocates leads to some discriminatory behavior and furnishes evidence for nonconceptual representational content<sup>70</sup>. DeBellis alerts us that there are many dimensions to the content of musical

---

<sup>70</sup> See DeBellis, pp. 314-315. DeBellis does not explicitly say that the fine-grained content must be nonconceptual, nor does he specifically advocate nonconceptualism in this paper. But I believe it is

experience (such as loudness, pitch level, tempo, and timbre) other than the Schenkerian, all of which could have a place in the content of the experience consistently with the Schenkerian, contributing to the phenomenology of perception. Hence, he shows that we need not introduce sensational features to explain the phenomenology of our auditory experience.

Luntley is another theorist who argues in favor of nonconceptual representational content of music. He basically claims that experience can possess representational content that cannot function like conceptual content, meaning that such experience cannot partake in the subject's belief system. He sides with McDowell against arguments for nonconceptual content that overemphasize the fine-grainedness of experience. McDowell treats the representations of perceptual experience as short-lived recognitional capacities marked by a phrase, such as 'that color'.<sup>71</sup>

Luntley thinks nonconceptual contents characterize a subject's experience but are not expressible with concepts the subject possesses. He thinks that the nonconceptual has an independent place in phenomenology besides its role in the explanation of conceptual content.

He is mainly interested in the content of personal level experience that picks out the subject's point of view on the world. In order to show that nonconceptual content is a part of the subject's point of view, he seeks examples in which the subject's experience discriminates a property despite a lack of concepts for that

---

pretty clear that nonconceptual content is what he has in mind (especially when we take into account his later writings on music experience).

<sup>71</sup> Michael Luntley, "Non-Conceptual Content and the Sound of Music," *Mind and Language* 18, no.4 (September 2003), pp. 402. Available [online]: <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/118880017/PDFSTART> [6 June 2008].

property (since the discrimination will occur at the personal level). This discrimination would be nonconceptual only if the capacity cannot combine with other representations, take part in other propositions and contribute to the subject's rational organization of behavior<sup>72</sup>. For the possibility of nonconceptual content, he thinks, we should show the possibility of things that we notice but cannot conceptualize.

In order to seek examples of subjects who are naive regarding the concepts of perception he chooses auditory perception because in it we have a much smaller chunk of concepts available to organize our perception than that in visual perception. Hence, visual data have priority over auditory data with regard to action.<sup>73</sup>

At this point, I suggest getting back to DeBellis. On Skokowski's<sup>74</sup> and Ridley's<sup>75</sup> reviews of DeBellis's book *Mind and Conceptualization* we can find a brief summary of DeBellis's position. According to the reviews, DeBellis is concerned with what representational contents listeners have in listening to music. He argues that listener's mental representations of music could be conceptual or nonconceptual. He distinguishes between two forms of nonconceptual hearing; namely weakly nonconceptual and strongly nonconceptual.

DeBellis describes hearing as a psychological state with representational content and argues that all hearing has representational contents. These contents are

---

<sup>72</sup> Luntley seeks ways of discriminating things that cannot contribute to one's reasons for belief and action at the personal level and thus he ignores nonconceptual causes of behavior at the subpersonal level in his paper.

<sup>73</sup> This, I think, accords with Kivy's statements about the priority of vision.

<sup>74</sup> Skokowski, Paul, Book review, *Music and Conceptualization* by Mark DeBellis. *Mind* (July 1997). Available [online]: [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2346/is\\_n423\\_v106/ai\\_19635817](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2346/is_n423_v106/ai_19635817) [14 April 2009].

<sup>75</sup> Ridley, *Music and Conceptualization*, pp. 187.

nonconceptual in the case of untrained listeners. Conceptual hearing implies the possession of certain recognitional capacities via music theoretic concepts. It is the kind of hearing exercised by musically trained listeners and music theorists. For them, perceptual concepts are integrated with musical concepts. When they hear a dominant seventh chord they identify it as such and acquire the belief that it is so, bringing it under the relevant concept. In nonconceptual hearing there is no such integration. Nonconceptual hearing is typical of untrained, ordinary listeners. The weak sense of nonconceptual hearing for DeBellis involves a content which is not music-theoretic but is yet the content of some belief. It involves concepts but not those of music theory<sup>76</sup>. The content of strongly nonconceptual hearing by contrast, is not the content of any belief. It involves no concepts. According to DeBellis, untrained listeners do not have recognitional capacities for musical properties, but still they can represent those properties nonconceptually. If they can discriminate the properties, i.e. reidentify the properties in other instances, this is weak nonconceptual hearing, and if not that is strongly nonconceptual.

An ordinary listener will be aware of the harmonic function of a dominant seventh chord and represent it as directed to a resolution. However, he cannot bring it under the relevant concept and so will not have the belief that it is a dominant seventh chord. Even a moderately trained listener who is acquainted with the concept cannot have the relevant belief, if she cannot apply that concept properly to what she hears. Because untrained listeners are mostly unable to identify dominant seventh chords and distinguish them from other chords we can conclude that they lack the relevant perceptual concepts. By contrast, in the musically trained listener's musical experience perceptual and theoretic concepts are integrated. Musical understanding

---

<sup>76</sup> As such, Luntley remarks that weakly nonconceptual content can be considered conceptual by a McDowellian manoeuvre. Luntley, pp. 413.

can be improved, according to DeBellis, by ear training which enables conceptualization and belief formation.

Luntley criticizes DeBellis for disregarding the sort of contextualized practical conceptual listening (that is characteristic of many musical genres) and for contrasting listening informed by music-theoretic concepts with less informed listening, when talking about personal level experiences. Luntley talks of expectations as components of experience that have satisfaction conditions and asserts that these expectations make the experience representational. To make his point, he considers someone who lacks both music-theoretic knowledge and practical competence and suggests that his having an experience that represents some musical feature (which produces a relevant expectation) whose discrimination he cannot generalize will suffice<sup>77</sup>.

Luntley thinks McDowell's strategy is a powerful strategy since whenever a subject lacks the usual way of representing a property she can represent that property (same reference) with another sense. If she lacks the music theoretic concept for some chord, she can employ a practical recognitional concept for it. However, with the naive subject, the case is different. The inferences available to him are inadequate to provide a sense with the same reference. The 'that...' clause applied by the naive subject is too coarse to represent the property in question. Yet, he can discriminate that property, he can be moved by the music but he will not be rationally responsive to it.

I consider myself a competent listener who does not know much about music theory. I get more pleasure from a piece of music when I listen to it attentively than

---

<sup>77</sup> Hearing the dominant seventh chord produces a pull toward the tonic within the sense of tonality. For the naive listener this is a nonconceptual content. And it is representational as it has correctness conditions, satisfied when the tonic follows or not satisfied when another chord is played.

when I just happen to hear it (hear merely the surface melody), trying to analyze the role of each instrument in the piece, to figure out the techniques used, and to anticipate what will come next. While listening to a musical work I sometimes find affinities with other works that I have heard before. Thoughts such as ‘They must have been influenced by this band.’ ‘This sounds very baroque.’ ‘This is the Pink Floyd sound.’ ‘I haven’t heard this song before but it must be Jimi Hendrix.’ and ‘That tune is also present in that piece.’ sometimes come to my mind when I am listening. Usually it is hard for me to specify what that similarity is and even harder to explicate it to someone else. Occasionally the similarity is due to the fact that the songs are based on the same chord progression. I can discriminate that the chord progressions are the same in the two pieces. However, I cannot recognize which chords are being used, I cannot tell their names. I believe that my hearing experience represents some properties of the sounds that I am sensing, such as its pitch, dynamics, tempo, rhythm, and timbre. I hear additionally the notes as standing in certain (tonal) relations with one another.

I believe that my hearing is affected by enculturation, by what I have learned, heard or listened to since my birth. Voluntarily or involuntarily I have acquired many concepts related to music throughout the years. These have a crucial role in determining the content of my conscious auditory experience by determining what I will attend to. My musical experience is partly conceptual and partly nonconceptual. I am competent cognitively in certain respects but not so in others.

My ability to discriminate the similarity of (while not being able to articulate or replicate) the chord progressions in two songs that I have listened to indicates that I represent those features nonconceptually (at least on my first unreflective hearing). I hold the view that once we get to learn something we cannot escape its impact on

successive learning, meaning that observation is always theory-laden<sup>78</sup>. Granted this, I claim that if we come to learn music theory our musical experience will change considerably and become more conceptual in many structural respects.

According to Luntley a naive listener can notice the chord progressions within songs nonconceptually as producing different expectations satisfied by different outcomes. But to find similarities between songs is conceptual for him when the competent listener has either music-theoretic or practical understanding of musical form. It is conceptual because the discrimination one makes in a song has a rational bearing on identifying the same property in another song. I would place my musical understanding somewhere in the middle of the conceptual-nonconceptual spectrum. I believe that musical understanding comes in degrees and can be improved. I would say that my finding similarities is an indicator of my practical grasp of some musical properties, but contrary to Luntley I would not say comfortably that it is conceptual (at least initially). Since, by ‘conceptual’ I understand recognition. And though I do not necessarily expect linguistic articulation, I expect at least an ability to reproduce. Yet, I do not believe I can reproduce the similarity exactly either vocally or on the guitar or on the piano. On the first hearing, I suppose, my experience is mostly nonconceptual. But I am sensitive to melodic, harmonic and rhythmic progressions and can often locate the similarity upon some reflection on my hearing experience. My experience is thus initially strongly nonconceptual but as I work on it and while it starts to contribute to my belief system (though not with the relevant concepts) it becomes weakly nonconceptual, according to DeBellis’s distinction. However, I agree with Luntley in thinking that DeBellis’s notion of ‘weakly nonconceptual experience’ is unnecessary

---

<sup>78</sup> Remember the Churchland-Fodor debate.

and misleading. Because after all, the weakly nonconceptual is in fact something conceptual. Though it does not exploit the relevant concepts, it still makes use of some concepts. So, I would say that my experience is at the beginning (strongly) nonconceptual and then it becomes conceptual to some extent and it could be more conceptual (employing the relevant concepts) if I were exposed to extensive ear training. My example is an experience that takes place at the conscious personal level and it is not one of those cases where the hearing experience contains mostly strongly nonconceptual elements. For, I believe, ordinary listeners' experiences are generally of the strongly nonconceptual kind.

Below, I will present the musical analysis I formed after consulting a music theorist for the songs between which I found resemblances. Initially, I was able to find the similarities, could tell whether they are due to a parallelism in the melodic lines or the chord progressions, and was aware of their locations in the music. However, I was not able to determine the keys of the songs or the chords by name. I suppose this reveals the fundamental difference between my understanding and that of the theorist I consulted.

In this analysis of five songs of the popular genre, I intend to reveal the harmonic and structural resemblance of songs so that after the analysis it would be easier to comprehend why these songs sound similar to our ears in a subtle way although they differ in musical parameters such as rhythm, melody, pitch and key. I will try to put forth which aspects of music unite them together to allow us to speak of their similarity, when we hear all of them successively.

The first song is Procol Harum's renowned 1967 hit *A Whiter Shade of Pale*<sup>79</sup> (henceforth *AWSOP*), widely known for its baroque-styled organ solo. In the opening of *AWSOP*<sup>80</sup>, we come across a descending pattern of harmony and bass, accompanying an ornamented melodic line almost in the style of a baroque aria, and as we move toward the end of the opening, the bass and harmony begin to progress in the opposite way. This whole pattern forms the basis of the entire song. If we should define the descending bass line, it goes as follows: C-B-A-G-F-E-D-C. As the bass proceeds down, the harmony changes at every descending step to the chord whose root is the bass at that beat. Here, the essential thing to be considered for the purpose of comparison is the descending bass figure.

The second song is a Lennon-McCartney composition, called *For No One*. The bass line in the opening of this song is the same as that of *AWSOP*. By chance, they are written in the same key. The chord progression is C-B-A-G-F at the onset of the song.

The first five chords of the song *Nel Cox* of The New York Rock & Roll Ensemble also reveal a structural similarity to the first two songs. The technique underlying both pieces is there again, that is the continuous stepwise descending bass line: C-B-A-G-F-E-D and it turns to G again to introduce V of the key C major, and then back to its origin C.

---

<sup>79</sup> Before I took help from the music theorist I had been thinking of resemblances between *AWSOP* and Bach's *Air on the G String* and his *Sleepers Awake*. Its resembling sections to *Air on the G String* are obvious. I thought that *AWSOP* uses the melodic progression of *Air on the G String* as its underlying chord progression. However, its affinity to *Sleepers Awake* is less obvious and harder for me to indicate. There is only a short melodic section that is in common.

<sup>80</sup> Greenberg, Bernard S. *Does A Whiter Shade of Pale quote Bach?* Available [online]: <http://web.archive.org/web/20010616224827/www.bachfaq.org/awsopafg.html> [25 August 2009].

*When a Man Loves a Woman* of Percy Sledge is another song that might be given as an example regarding the harmonic texture and descending bass line, however, in a different key. Its first five chords could be outlined as follows: Db-C-Bb-Ab-Gb, and then back to Db in an ascending stepwise motion.

The last musical piece is Johann Sebastian Bach's Orchestral Suite in D, BWV 1068, which is commonly known as the *Air on the G String*. This piece is in the key of D major. The sequence of the chords at the beginning of the piece is as follows: D-C#-B-A-G, and then it modulates to different keys throughout the song. Considering the harmonic analysis of the song, which is not so hard to define, we might say that it consists of the five tonal chords that come one after another in the previously described descending form.

As would be noticed, although these songs differ in some aspects, regarding the instruments on which they are to be played, rhythm, melody and so on, it is not so difficult for the listener to catch similarities between them because they share the same harmonic and structural form as explained above.

## CHAPTER VI

### MUSICAL UNDERSTANDING

In this chapter I will sketch Stephen Davies's conception of a musically qualified, understanding listener and then go on to discuss with reference to conceptuality and nonconceptuality what I mean by musical understanding.

According to Davies<sup>81</sup>, by a comprehending listener we should think of someone who is able to distinguish music from the non-musical sounds and noise and who is able to discriminate between overlapping but distinct performances. The comprehending listener needs to be aware of a musical work as beginning and as coming to an end. He should be able to recognize repeats and to do so he must be able to re-identify earlier themes. He should be able to predict what will come next and how the music will continue. This capacity can be present in musically untrained listeners, but it can be refined through practice such as ear training. The listener's ability to follow and predict musical progression is developed, according to Davies<sup>82</sup>, through exposure and through familiarity. Familiarity comes by being subjected to the works produced by one's culture and this affects what one is able to discriminate and recognize in other works that he listens to. Davies thinks that the listener also develops his music appreciation through learning about the characteristics of different instruments and the difficult techniques employed in their playing. Additionally, the listener should know about music history and about different

---

<sup>81</sup> Stephen Davies, "Musical Understandings," Forthcoming in *Musikalischer Sinn: Beiträger zu einer Philosophie der Musik*, trans. Matthias Vogel, eds. A. Becker & M. Vogel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag). Available [online]: <http://philpapers.org/rec/DAVMU> [5 May 2008].

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

musical genres in order to be said to have a deep musical understanding. An understanding listener is not someone who listens unreflectively. He has to be self-conscious and attentive. He should discriminate between the properties of the work and the interpretations that belong to the performance.

When it comes to discuss the musical understandings of listeners, Davies<sup>83</sup> thinks that the musical understanding of someone who is competent in music theory is not necessarily superior to the musical understanding of an untrained listener. Like Davies, I suppose, the ordinary listener can have a high level of understanding if he can be said to make the relevant discriminations in the music. However, it is not very likely that he can articulate his understanding with the music terminology. But someone who can make the relevant discriminations is of course qualified in music in ways other than formal training, such as through a keen interest in and a continuous exposure to music. Thus he will have weakly nonconceptual experiences in DeBellis's terms. Still, I think, the theorist's conceptual grasp is superior. Things that music theorists say are often parallel to what we are aware of in our listening experience. In fact, for DeBellis<sup>84</sup> the theorists' descriptions are informative since they provide an analytic, linguistic description of what ordinary listeners grasp through a perceptual, auditory route. He argues that the perceptual grasp of certain properties does not necessitate a theory or linguistic command of those properties.

Bartel<sup>85</sup> also thinks the phenomenology of musical experience to be different in musically trained and musically untrained listeners. He elaborates the example of

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> DeBellis, pp. 321.

<sup>85</sup> Christopher, John B. "Can Musical Understanding be Grounded in the Phenomenology of Musical Experience?" Paper presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Oxford Graduate Conference, University of Oxford, November 2006. Available [online]:

perception of tonality and cites empirical evidence to support his argument. He argues that the perception of tonality requires acculturation and representation of pitch. To the extent that listeners differ on their level of training or acculturation, so would their musical experiences.

The point where I depart from Davies before reaching the same conclusion that the two listeners' musical understandings do not drastically differ is my acceptance that the music theorist may also have nonconceptual music experiences. The nonconceptual experience that I reserve for the theorist is not at the structural level (though it could be at the structural level as well, for people vary according to the level of their knowledge). Rather, it is possible that they have nonconceptual experiences regarding the expressive features of music. My conception of musical understanding as a combination of formal and emotional understanding, I believe, explains the distinction I made in this chapter between the two sorts of nonconceptual in music experience.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

The main purpose of the thesis was to seek the possibility of nonconceptuality in adult human experiences. Since conceptual and nonconceptual contents are constructs of the representationalist theory, the thesis commenced with mental representation. In the following chapters, the relevant constructs such as concept, attitude, conceptuality and nonconceptuality were defined and clarified. Being aware of the fact that in philosophical literature we may encounter many different formulations of these constructs, a brief literature review was provided and the ones we would be using were selected and formed.

In order to account for the rational role of perceptual states in belief formation I have claimed that we should not apply the notions ‘nonconceptual’ and ‘conceptual’ to contents, rather I proposed that they should be applied to attitudes. The thought that experiential attitudes depend very much on the background knowledge and the existing concepts one already has was introduced. It was claimed that contents of experience were the qualities of objects which were themselves neither conceptual nor nonconceptual.

It has been assumed that nonconceptual content, if shown to exist, can account for the phenomenology of our perceptual experiences while remaining in a naturalistic framework. Throughout the thesis it has been argued that nonconceptual content exists at both the personal and the subpersonal and the subconscious levels. Nonconceptual content was defined as a kind of mental representation that occurs with or without possible awareness. Thus, though it was assumed to take place within

phenomenal awareness, it was not thought to be dependent on conscious experience for its existence. However, nothing was said about the autonomy of nonconceptual content because the discussion was concerning merely the nonconceptual experiences of adult human beings. One needs to distinguish between self-consciousness and consciousness in talking about conceptuality and nonconceptuality. I believe we can have conscious experiences of both the conceptual and the nonconceptual type. Yet, we need to have a conception of the self to account for our nonconceptual representations and for them to take part in our beliefs.

Other researchers may wish to investigate the autonomy of nonconceptual experience, whether such experiences can be had by creatures with no concepts. Knowledge of animal consciousness would be necessary for such research. Lack of animal-consciousness-knowledge may be considered a shortcoming of the present research. Because possession of that would probably lead to a richer and more accurate understanding of what a concept is.

A secondary purpose of the thesis was to investigate the nature of music experience and to test whether a musical experience could be nonconceptual in any ways. Music experience was selected as a candidate for nonconceptual experience while it seems to defy verbal explanation, especially for the naive listener. The music theorist or analyst was considered capable, for sure, much more than an ordinary listener, of conceptualizing musical works. Music experience was investigated in a twofold fashion, namely as being nonconceptual formally and as being nonconceptual emotionally. It was argued that emotional nonconceptuality is closely tied to musical structure and is explicable by unconscious associations. Formal nonconceptuality was attributed to the experiences of ordinary, musically untrained

listeners. A gradation was made between the musical experiences and musical understandings of listeners with various capabilities. Examples were provided to illustrate the levels that are placed between total nonconceptuality and total articulability.

To conclude, we can say that nonconceptual content is marked by an ability to discriminate a certain property which cannot partake in one's reasons for belief and action, and that we have found evidence for the existence of it especially through our investigation of the music experience. As I have said elsewhere we have more concepts for visual stimuli than we have for auditory stimuli. Thus demonstrative concepts will not do in the case of audition, or music perception.

This research is one among those few in analytic philosophy that is concerned about seeking nonconceptuality in a sensory modality other than vision. It is important in this respect and I believe it will initiate others to work in audition and other neglected modalities, where I guess they will be more likely to find supporting evidence for nonconceptual experience.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bermudez, José Luis. "Peacocke's Argument against the Autonomy of Nonconceptual Representational Content." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003: 293-307.
- and Cahen, Arnon. "Nonconceptual Mental Content." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2009 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. Retrieved 13 February 2009, from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/content-nonconceptual>
- and Macpherson, Fiona. "Nonconceptual Content and the Nature of Perceptual Experience." *The Electronic Journal of Analytic Philosophy*, Issue 6, 1998. Retrieved 13 February 2009, from [http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/584/1/macpherson\\_ejap.pdf](http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/584/1/macpherson_ejap.pdf)
- Boghossian, Paul. "Explaining Musical Experience." In *Philosophers on Music: Experience, Meaning, and Work*, ed. Kathleen Stock. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. Retrieved 25 January 2009, from <http://philosophy.fas.nyu.edu/docs/IO/1153/explainingmusical.pdf>
- "On Hearing the Music in the Sound: Scruton on Musical Expression." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 60, No. 1, (Winter 2002): 49-55. Retrieved 25 January 2009, from <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/118908289/PDFSTART>
- Chalmers, David J. "The Representational Character of Experience." In *The Future for Philosophy*, ed. B. Leiter. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. Retrieved 13 February 2009, from <http://consc.net/papers/representation.html>
- Christopher, John B. "Can Musical Understanding be Grounded in the Phenomenology of Musical Experience?" Paper presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Oxford Graduate Conference, University of Oxford, November 2006. Retrieved 14 April 2009, from <http://docs.google.com/gview?a=v&q=cache:MRhVrQKtmPcJ:www.appstate.edu/~bartelcj/documents/USAcademicCV.pdf+christopher+john+bartel&hl=tr&gl=tr>
- Crane, Tim. "The Waterfall Illusion." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003: 231-235.
- Davies, Stephen. "Musical Understandings." Forthcoming in *Musikalischer Sinn: Beiträger zu einer Philosophie der Musik*, trans. Matthias Vogel, eds. A. Becker & M. Vogel. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag. Retrieved 5 May 2008, from <http://philpapers.org/rec/DAVMU>

- DeBellis, Mark. "The Representational Content of Musical Experience." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 51, No. 2, (June 1991): 303-324. Retrieved 14 April 2009, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/2108129.pdf>
- Dennett, Daniel C. "Quining Qualia." In *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, eds. Ned Block, Owen Flanagan, and Güven Güzeldere. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997: 619-642.
- Dretske, Fred. "Sensation and Perception." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003: 25-41.
- Evans, Gareth. "Demonstrative Identification." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003: 43-74.
- Gabrielsson, Alf. "Emotions in Strong Experiences with Music." In *Music and Emotion: Theory and Research*, eds. Patrik N. Juslin, and John A. Sloboda. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001: 431-449.
- Greenberg, Bernard S. "Does *A Whiter Shade of Pale* quote Bach?" Retrieved 25 August 2009, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20010616224827/www.bachfaq.org/awsopafg.html>
- Hacker, Peter Michael Stephan. "Is There Anything It is Like to Be a Bat?" *Philosophy*, Vol. 77. Cambridge University Press, Apr. 2002: 157-174. Retrieved 14 April 2009, from <http://info.sjc.ox.ac.uk/scr/hacker/docs/To%20be%20a%20bat.pdf>
- Kania, Andrew. "The Philosophy of Music." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. Retrieved 25 January 2009, from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/music>
- Kelly, Sean D. "The Nonconceptual Content of Perceptual Experience: Situation Dependence and Fineness of Grain." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003: 223-229.
- Kihlstrom, John F. "Availability, Accessibility, and Subliminal Perception." *Consciousness and Cognition*, Vol. 13, No. 1, (2004): 92-100. Retrieved 6 June 2008, from <http://www.sciencedirect.com>
- . "The Cognitive Unconscious." *Science*, Vol. 247, (18 Sep. 1987): 1445-1452. Retrieved 6 June 2008, from <http://www.lexisnexis.com>
- Kivy, Peter. "Another Go at Musical Profundity: Stephen Davies and the Game of Chess." *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 43, No. 4, (Oct. 2003): 401-411. Retrieved 23 March 2008, from <http://bjaesthetics.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/43/4/401>

- *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Kriegel, Uriah. "Perceptual Experience, Conscious Content, and Non-Conceptual Content." *Essays in Philosophy: A Biannual Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1, (Jan. 2004). Retrieved 17 June 2008, from <http://www.humboldt.edu/~essays/kriegel.html>
- Luntley, Michael. "Non-Conceptual Content and the Sound of Music." *Mind and Language*, Vol. 18, No. 4, (Sept. 2003): 402-426. Retrieved 6 June 2008, from <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/118880017/PDFSTART>
- McDowell, John. "Nonconceptual Content." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003: 75-90.
- Merikle, Philip. "Subliminal Perception." *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, ed. A. E. Kazdin, Vol. 7. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000: 497-499.
- Peacock, Kenneth. "Synesthetic Perception: Alexander Scriabin's Color Hearing." *Music Perception*, Vol. 2, No. 4, (Summer 1985): 483-506.
- Peacocke, Christopher. "Nonconceptual Content: Kinds, Rationales, and Relations." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003: 309-322.
- "Nonconceptual Content Defended." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 58, No. 2, (June 1998): 381-388. Retrieved 13 February 2009, from <http://web.ebscohost.com>
- "Phenomenology and Nonconceptual Content." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 62, No. 3, (May 2001): 609-615. Retrieved 13 February 2009, from <http://apps.isiknowledge.com>
- "Scenarios, Concepts, and Representation." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003: 107-132.
- "Sensation and the Content of Experience: A Distinction." *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, eds. Ned Block, Owen Flanagan, and Güven Güzeldere. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997: 341-354.
- "The Perception of Music: Sources of Significance." Forthcoming in *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, July 2009. Retrieved 5 May 2008, from [http://www.columbia.edu/~cp2161/Online\\_Papers/PerceptnMusicSourcesofSignif.doc](http://www.columbia.edu/~cp2161/Online_Papers/PerceptnMusicSourcesofSignif.doc)

Pitt, David. "Mental Representation." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. Retrieved 25 January 2009, from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/mental-representation>

Ridley, Aaron., Book review, *Music and Conceptualization* by Mark DeBellis. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 37, No. 2, (Apr. 1997): 187. Retrieved 14 April 2009, from <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/start.do?p=LitRC&u=bogazici>

————— "Musical Sympathies: The Experience of Expressive Music." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 53, No. 1, (Winter 1995): 49-57. Retrieved 14 April 2009, from <http://proquest.umi.com>

Sacks, Oliver. *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*. Kent: Pan Macmillan Ltd., 2007.

Siegel, Susanna. "The Contents of Perception." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2008 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. Retrieved 19 February 2008, from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2008/entries/perception-contents>

Skokowski, Paul, Book review, *Music and Conceptualization* by Mark DeBellis. *Mind*, July 1997. Retrieved 14 April 2009, from [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2346/is\\_n423\\_v106/ai\\_19635817](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2346/is_n423_v106/ai_19635817)

Weiskrantz, Lawrence. "Consciousness and Commentaries." *International Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 33, No. 3, (June 1998): 227-233. Retrieved 23 March 2008, from [http://pdfserve.informaworld.com/393342\\_758064766\\_741925958.pdf](http://pdfserve.informaworld.com/393342_758064766_741925958.pdf)

Zangwill, Nick. "Music and Mysticism." Forthcoming in *Research Journal of the Iranian Academy of Arts*. Retrieved 19 February 2008, from <http://www.dur.ac.uk/nick.zangwill/MusicMysticism.doc>

#### Further Reading:

Attali, Jacques. *Gürültüden Müziğe: Müziğin Ekonomi-Politiği Üzerine*, trans. Gülüş Gülcügil Türkmen. İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2005.

Bermudez, José Luis. "Nonconceptual Content: From Perceptual Experience to Subpersonal Computational States." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003: 183-216.

Bogue, Ronald. *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts*. New York: Routledge Inc., 2003.

Budd, Malcolm. "Response to Christopher Peacocke's "The Perception of Music: Sources of Significance." *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 49, No. 3, (July 2009): 289-292.

- Clark, Andy. "Connectionism and Cognitive Flexibility." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003: 165-181.
- Cussins, Adrian. "Content, Conceptual Content, and Nonconceptual Content." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003: 133-163.
- Davies, Martin. "Externalism and Experience." In *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, eds. Ned Block, Owen Flanagan, and Güven Güzeldere. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997: 309-327.
- Davies, Stephen. "Philosophical Perspectives on Music's Expressiveness." In *Music and Emotion: Theory and Research*, eds. Patrik N. Juslin and John A. Sloboda. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001: 23-44.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *İki Konferans: Yaratma Eylemi Nedir? Müzikal Zaman*, trans. Ulus Baker. İstanbul: Norgunk Yayıncılık, 2003.
- Dreyfus, Laurence. "Christopher Peacocke's "The Perception of Music." *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 49, No. 3, (July 2009): 293-297
- Ferrara, Lawrance. "Phenomenology as a Tool for Musical Analysis." *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 70, No. 3, (Summer 1984): 355-373. Retrieved 14 April 2009, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/742043.pdf>
- Fung, Catherine H. M. "Asperger's and Musical Creativity: The Case of Erik Satie." *Personality and Individual Differences*, Vol.46 (2009): 775-783. Retrieved 6 June 2008, from <http://www.sciencedirect.com>
- Gabrielsson, Alf, and Erik Lindström. "The Influence of Musical Structure on Emotional Expression." In *Music and Emotion: Theory and Research*, eds. Patrik N. Juslin, and John A. Sloboda. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001: 223-248.
- Graham, Gordon. *Philosophy of the Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetics*. New York: Routledge Inc., 2005.
- Gulick, Robert V. "Consciousness." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2009 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. Retrieved 13 February 2009, from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consciousness>
- Gunther, York H. "Emotion and Force." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003: 279-288.
- "General Introduction." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003: 1-19.

- Güzeldere, Güven. "Introduction-The Many Faces of Consciousness: A Field Guide." In *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, eds. Ned Block, Owen Flanagan, and Güven Güzeldere. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997: 1-67.
- Hamlyn D. W. "Perception, Sensation, and Nonconceptual Content." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003: 251-262.
- Kivy, Peter. "The Other Shoe: Some Thoughts for Christopher Peacocke." *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 49, No. 3, (July 2009): 283-287.
- Martin, Michael. "Perception, Concepts, and Memory." In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003: 237-250.
- McGinn, Colin. "Consciousness and Content." In *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, eds. Ned Block, Owen Flanagan, and Güven Güzeldere. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997: 295-307
- Peacocke, Christopher. "Experiencing Metaphorically-As in Music Perception: Clarifications and Commitments." *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 49, No. 3, (July 2009): 299-306
- Seager, William. *Theories of Consciousness: An Introduction and Assessment*. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Sloboda, John A., and Susan A. O'Neill. "Emotions in Everyday Listening to Music." In *Music and Emotion: Theory and Research*, eds. Patrik N. Juslin, and John A. Sloboda. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001: 415-429.
- Snowdon, Paul. "Peacocke on Musical Experience and Hearing Metaphorically-As." *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 49, No. 3, (July 2009): 277-281.
- Stalnaker, Robert. "What Might Nonconceptual Content Be?" In *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, ed. York H. Gunther. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003: 95-106.
- Tye, Michael. "A Representational Theory of Pains and Their Phenomenal Character." In *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, eds. Ned Block, Owen Flanagan, and Güven Güzeldere. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997: 329-340.