Music, Essence and Context:

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I defend the idea that music has an essence, along the lines of Eduard Hanslick's appeal to the musically-beautiful. In so doing, I respond to some points in Richard Taruskin's essay "Essence *or* Context", in this volume.

1.Essence and Context

In the *Meno,* Plato seems to say that if we are to know whether virtue is teachable, we must know what virtue is (Plato 1997a). The idea seems to be that we must know what a thing is—what its essence is—if we are to understand its relations. Perhaps such a general principle would be an exaggeration: one can know that a dog bit a cat without knowing the essences of dogs and cats. But perhaps if we want to understand why a relation holds, or explain it, then we need to know the essences of the things that are related. We cannot explain or understand a thing's relations without knowing what the things related are.

This is a plausible view of the relationship between music's essence and its context. Many musicologists love the context of music and dislike the idea that it has an essence. This is a mistake, in my view. There are contextual relations in which music stands, but it stands in those relations *because* of its essences. Or, to weaken the claim, because quite a lot enters into relations apart from essence: the fact that music stands in the relations it does depends on music having its essence—whatever it is. So, it could not stand in all the relations to context that musicologists explore unless it had an essence that is separate from its context. There is music; there is its context; and the essence of music is necessary (but not sufficient) for explaining its relation to its context. Compare tigers: that something is a tiger not only explains its stripes but also how it behaviorally interacts with its environment (Devitt 2010).

The idea of essence often goes along with the ideas of *objects*, as opposed to events or processes or facts. And the idea of the essence of objects seems to invoke the Aristotelian idea of substance. Is this not the common-sense metaphysics of the Neolithic era, which may have served us well in a pre-historic phase of human cultural evolution, but which has no place in a modern scientific world-view?

My physicist friends tell me that there are no objects, or at least no persisting objects of the sort found in Neolithic or Aristotelian metaphysics. There *seem* to be persisting objects, such as rocks, tables, atoms and planets; but, in fact, the world is subject to perpetual change. There are events, not objects. Or rather, an object is a really really boring event. In one sense, a party or a battle is a *object*. But really it is a kind of stable event. At the sub-atomic level, the world is more like a party or battle rather than Democritus' "atoms and the void". There are more or less stable conjunction of events in which the appearance of *objects* emerges (often due to dynamic attractors). Really, 'all is flux', as the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus said: the world is unremittingly dynamic, and we humans call the relatively stable parts of that dynamic world 'objects' and 'substances'. But there is some falsification of the world in speaking in that way (see Nietzsche 1965).

Should we banish essences and substances as Neolithic thinking? Perhaps, if essences go with objects. But there are also events. There is no denying that things happen. There are parties, battles, star explosions and firework displays. And there are musical performances. Why cannot events have essences? Events may not have sharp boundaries. When exactly did the party end? When exactly did the battle start? The answers may be somewhat indeterminate. But events continue; they persist. Like a cloud or city, a party or battle, may have indeterminate boundaries. Nevertheless, they are real. And I do not see why they cannot have essences—perhaps the rough places and times at which they occur, for example.

2.Artifacts and Functions

It is the category of events, rather than objects, that is most appropriate to the kind of temporal art that music is. (So, I am not unsympathetic to musicologists who follow Christopher Small in talking of 'musicking'; see Small 1998.) And if events can have essences, suspicion of substances and objects should not lead us to doubt that musical events have essences.

If musical events have essences, they must be essences of a particular kind—since music is a human creation, an artifact. Because of this, musical essences must be functional essences. Functions divide, roughly, into biological functions and artifactual functions: eyes and eye-glasses are examples of each of these. (We could speak of "purposes" rather than "functions", but it would make no difference.)

What about events with functions? The beating of the human heart is one example of an event with a biological function. Hearts have the function of pumping blood around the body. The heart may also make certain regular sounds, perhaps 'musical' sounds, in a sense; but that is not why it exists, and it is not what its beating is *for*. The sounds are a by-product of its function of pumping blood, which is why the heart exists and also what it is. The heart is essentially something with that function. Note that it can have that function even if it is congenitally defective and cannot pump blood; functions are not dispositions (Millikan 1993).

Some deliberate human actions, such as handshakes, are also events with functions. As with hearts, human events with functions may do other things apart from fulfilling their functions. But that is not why they exist, and it is not what they are for and it is not what they are. This is how we should think of musical events—as human actions that have distinctive artifactual functions.

I have just appealed to musical events with artifactual functions; but in some musical traditions, there are musical works, which look more like objects than events. But I would argue that these objects should be seen as depending, in some way, on events with musical functions. The point of the work-object lies in its realization in a performance-event. Their being and point is derivative. (Hanslick sees this; he is decidedly not score-centric, as is sometimes said. Other so-called 'formalists' may fetishize the score; not Hanslick.)

Our interest, then, is in a certain kind of human kind, not natural kinds—handshakes, coronations and firework displays rather than star explosions, particle spin and melting ice. Music is an artifact—a deliberate human creation, and this affects the kind of essence it has.

This is a suitable point, I believe, to begin to respond to some points that Richard Taruskin makes in his paper "Essence *or* Context" in this volume (and let me say that I am very grateful, even honoured, that my writings on music have been the object of critical attention from someone who's writing on music I respect so highly). Firstly, and most importantly, we can see that there is no route to anti-essentialism about music from the fact that we are in the realm of human culture rather than nature. (Taruskin writes: "…I reject essentialism in [music] as in all humanistic domains" (Taruskin 2018, conclusion).) Coffee-makers are human cultural products with functional essences: having been made in order to make coffee. A coffee-maker may not work, it may be broken, but that is still its function, and that function is its essence, whether or not it can perform its function. The same goes for artifactual events

such as handshakes. The handshake is a cultural artifact that has culturally evolved (no one decided what a handshake will mean) and it is a joint action, an event with a certain commonly understood meaning; and that is its essential function, rather in the way that animal mating dances have essential biological functions. It is essential to handshakes to have their meaning-function (Millikan 2005). It goes without saying, or perhaps it should go without saying, that *all* functional essences are historically given. The essence of biological things and events is given by their evolutionary history, while the essence of human artifacts is given by the intentional history of the production of those artifacts. There is no sense in which having a history somehow excludes having an essence, whether we are dealing with biological nature or human artifacts. So, I would suggest to Taruskin that to say that music has an essence is not to deny history but to embrace it, even though it is to embrace a certain kind of history, one that includes the purposes and intentions with which it was made. History is part of the essence of all artifactual things and events—including music. (See also Searle 1995.)

Secondly, mind-independence. Taruskin thinks that it is paradoxical to say that products of the human mind have mind-independent properties. (Taruskin writes: "Is it not paradoxical … to describe a product of our minds (in this case music) as having mind-independent properties?" Taruskin 2018, section IV).) Well, let us distinguish. There is *a* sense of "mind-independence" in which artifacts are mind-independent. Consider economic booms and busts. We create them. Even so, they make us "playthings of alien forces", in Karl Marx's memorable phrase. Such economic facts may be studied by economists, using quantitative methods, even though *what* they study is a matter of fact about human creations. These creations are for the most part independent, not of human beings, but of the people who study them. So, in *that* sense, they are mind-independent. (It is in this sense that I think that Hanslick tells us about music, just as the disciplines of evolutionary biology and cosmology tell us about their subject matter.) The social sciences are disciplines that study facts that are made by human beings; but the social scientists themselves do not create the facts that they wish to understand and explain. (Only theorists with postmodern megalomania think that the facts they study are a product of the minds of *theorists* like themselves; but then for such pathologies, all interest in facts has disappeared). Another point about mind-independence is this. In general, that some artifact has the function of doing something does not mean that doing that thing is somehow a product of the mind. For example, a filter on a car exhaust has the function of reducing pollution. That a thing has the function of reducing pollution is

mind-dependent, because of its essential historical origin in certain intentions: someone made it with the intention that it will reduce pollution. But the reduction of pollution is not mind-dependent; it is a physical fact. That something is a functional thing is mind-dependent, but in many cases what it does when it executes that function is not. This is not paradoxical; it is a commonplace. What about music? Now, in *some* cases, a thing's function might concern human beings. For example, eye-glasses have the function of having an effect on eyesight. Unlike exhaust filters, they are designed to affect the minds of human beings. There is considerable plausibility in the idea that music is similar: it has a purpose that concerns its consumption by human beings. As we will see, this is what Hanslick thinks. If so, musical beauty is like eye-glasses, and unlike car exhaust filters. All are human creations, but musical-beauty is meant to be appreciated by human beings as a human creation. I guess that Taruskin would agree with this. At any rate, in some senses musical-beauty is mind-dependent and in some it is not. (We analytic philosophers are the ones who like to make distinctions, you see.)

A third point concerns Taruskin's claim that because music is a temporal art (essentially so?), we cannot literally speak of the "structure" of music. (Taruskin 2018, section IV.) Structure in music is temporal structure, not unlike that in literature. Homer's works, for example, contain many passages that have a ring structure, such as ABCDCBA. Is that metaphor? I don't know. What matters is that what we need for such structure is elements and their recurrence in a temporal sequence. I cannot see that structure, in this sense, needs to be restricted to spatial arrangements. (For an exploration of temporal parts see Sider 2001.) There is of course more to literary quality or musical beauty than such structure, but it is often part of it. Such a notion of structure coincides with one notion of 'form', one that is central in the theory of logic (McFarlane 2002; Susan Langer notes the parallels between 'form' in logic and 'form' in music, where 'form' has the sense of recurring elements, in Langer 1937). I take it that machines, such as coffee makers, have a structure. But it is both a spatial and a temporal structure. That is what a mechanism is. It has physical parts, of course, but also, it executes operations in a certain order: first this should happen, and then that.

3.Musical Beauty?

Now, once we allow musical functional essences, the next question is: what exactly are the distinctive functional essences of musical events? Which functions are musical functions? It

is not too controversial, surely, to appeal to sounds, since music is primarily something to which we listen, although there is more to be said about these sounds and what it is about them that we are interested in when we listen to music. I do not deny relevance to other senses. I remember feeling the road vibrate to the base of the dub reggae at the Notting Hill Carnival. Nevertheless, what we hear has primacy in our experience of music, just as what we see has primacy in architectural experience (Mitrovic 2013).

In *a* sense, there may be music in nature. That is, there are sounds in nature that exhibit something like rhythm, melody and harmony. Perhaps the dripping of water in a cave could exhibit these qualities, and we could listen with pleasure to their apparent musical qualities. And the rotating crystal spheres that some philosophers think constitute the world may make a pleasing sound as they move in *harmonia* (see Plato's *Timeas (*Plato 1997b). But then much depends on whether there is a World Soul causing them to rotate in order to make sounds with audible qualities. If so, that would make them 'music' in the human sense—in the sense of an artifact with a certain sonic purpose.

Now, what is it about these sounds that interests us? Hanslick's view was that generating audible musical-beauty is the essential function of music of a wide variety of kinds (Hanslick 1986, chapters 1 and 3). On this conception, it is essential to music, or at least most music (and who cares about a few avant-garde outliers?), to have the function of sustaining beauty either as its sole function, or as a significant function. (Hanslick appeals to "the essence and character of music" at 1986: 23, footnote.)

Hanslick says, to the surprise of some of his readers, that what is musically-beautiful today may not be so in 50 years (Hanslick 1986: 35). He thinks that that musical-beauty is not eternal. But this is precisely because music is an artifact, not something found in nature—it is something produced by us. The beauty of music is the beauty of an artifact, considered as such. That is why it is not timeless. It is a sonic artifact, and it must be appreciated as a human achievement. It is not merely sonic beauty but musical-beauty, with the important hyphen, which tends to get lost in English translations. Hanslick distances himself from the idea of timeless musical beauty, something that was embraced by his mentor Robert Zimmerman (see further Landerer and Zangwill 2016). (I confess that I am not sure who I side with here.)

Perhaps it is worth mentioning at this point why it is that when citing Hanslick, I prefer to cite his phrase "tones and their artistic combination" (Hanslick 1986: 28) rather than the

musicologist's favourite "tonally moving forms" (Hanslick 1986: 29). This is because the latter includes a crucial metaphor, of motion, and in the interpretation of that metaphor lie all the controversial issues (Zuckerkandl 1956, Scruton 1997). By contrast, the former passage is relatively pristine and clean. Note also that the former concerns the *constitution* of musical-beauty while the latter concerns its *content*, which is a difficult idea.

If we are foregrounding beauty, or musical-beauty, we may say that the function of much music consists in sustaining musical-beauty, or we may say that its function extends to our experiences and pleasures in musical-beauty. There are a variety of possible views here.

But why appeal to beauty at all? What might usefully be meant by "beauty" or "musical-beauty" at this point? Taruskin objects: musical-beauty is not the purpose of much music, indeed of much great music. For example, he thinks that we feel a mixture of pleasure as well as pain when listening to the more intense of Bach's Sacred Cantatas or the rougher passages of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (Taruskin 1995: essays 9 and 14). Hence these works are sublime, not beautiful. (Taruskin 2018, section II.)

Of course, there is a temptation of introspect, and to generalize from one's own case. *I* do not feel Taruskin's pain, in these cases. Be that as it may, the main difficulty I have in accepting Taruskin's self-reports, and their generalization to the average audiences of these works, is a psychological difficulty. It is a platitude of common-sense folk psychology that pleasure is something we desire, and pain is something we detest. If so, then what are all these people doing in churches and concert halls electing to sit and listen to the heavier of Bach's cantatas or Beethoven symphonies? Why are they sitting there attentively listening to the heavy music if it causes them pain? They should be heading for the exits in droves. What is wrong with them? Instead, I believe a much simpler psychological explanation, which is that they are enjoying listening to the music; they get a certain kind of pleasure, a particularly intense and profound pleasure, which contains no admixture of pain, unless their chairs are uncomfortable. I do not deny the role of pain in the appreciation of some sublimity; but I am skeptical about its presence in music. Deploying the notion of the sublime is just a bad way to describe musical intensity or weight (and I do not care if a number of famous dead people have said the opposite). Pleasure attracts: pain repels. People are not repelled by heavy music, but attracted to it. Therefore, they take pleasure in it, not pain. Pleasure and pain come in different sorts, of course; but except in the complicated and unusual case of sadomasochism, pain repels. I do not believe that the many enthusiastic audiences of performances of the

heavier compositions of Bach, Beethoven and others are savoring perverse sadomasochistic pleasures. I think that they are pleasure-lovers, without pain being perversely mixed with their pleasure.

There is more to say here about cases where music and text fit together, where there is literal pain that is referred to in the content of the text. But I believe that these combinations can also be understood without invoking musical sadomasochism.

4.Non-Absolute Music

In order to appreciate the power of Hanslick's view, we need to see that Hanslick can take on board contextual matters. Let us recall a trope in musicology: there used to be, at least in the musicologist's imagination, a Homeric a battle between those who believe in 'pure' or 'absolute' music (Hanslick is supposed to sit on that uncomfortable chair) and the contextualism of 1990s 'new-musicology'. (For a representative of this kind of tiresome approach, see Williams 2001.) It is surely now clear that this opposition was over-simplistic, and it is somewhat of a convenient fairytale for those on the contextualist side. The fact that music has the function Hanslick identifies, of sustaining musical-beauty, is quite compatible with allowing that music has many *other* effects and functions. Music can have religious, political, military, sporting or whatever functions. Hanslick may even allow that the musical function is not the dominant function, so long as it is nevertheless *an* important function. (See further Zangwill 2015.)

Appealing to the essence of music is compatible with great diversity in music. Indeed, that is the very point! Essences explain, and what they explain is diverse (Kripke 1980, Gelman 2003). Water is one thing: H_2O. But water takes many forms: ice, steam, liquid, depending on its temperature and context. The essence explains the variety of forms that the water can take. In a similar way, the Hanslickean essence of music is needed precisely to explain the variety of other things that music does, because if it did not do the Hanslickean thing, then it would not do the other things. A rousing national anthem had better also work as Hanslickean music-beauty.

Not only does the idea that *a* function of music is to generate musical-beauty, as embodied in certain sounds, allow for other functions of music, it also allows that the musically-beautiful

can combine with other functions of music to yield values that are a non-decomposable synthesis.

A *mea culpa*: like others I have in the past used the phrase "The music itself". I plead guilty to this sin, and meekly accept Taruskin's stern reprimand: it does not help and begs questions about what is included in music. I hereby repent. Nevertheless, we can separate the musical-beauty function of music from its other functions. The word "music" is ambiguous in English between the sense in which song is one kind of music and the sense in which in a song we distinguish between the words and the music. This is a harmless ambiguity. We could refer to the latter as "the music itself" without begging questions by so doing. But it is true that the phrase is probably best avoided.

We might define 'absolute' music to be music that *only* has the musical-beauty function. Some music is like that; but much is not. Such a notion of 'absolute music' would be evaluatively neutral, which is what we need the notion to be if there is to be a useful debate about its value. Hanslick can say that much non-absolute music is better than much absolute music. No one is saying that all music is absolute or that all absolute music is superior. Hanslick does not say either of these things. (Interpreting Hanslick as making such claims sets up an unfair stereotype, or straw-man, dishonestly peddled by some contextualists, who at some level of consciousness probably know how implausible their view is.)

A case study of Hanslick allowing for non-absolute music is his excellent review of Wagner's *Parsifal* (see Hanslick 1950). With painful precision, Hanslick takes the music and text apart (as Wagner said you cannot) and then puts them back together, in the face of Wagner's attempt to drown the musically-beautiful in the literary ambitions of the work (Wagner 2014). *Parsifal* fails to be a 'total work of art', if that means that dissection is not possible. As Hanslick grants, *Parsifal* has some virtues; but as Hanslick details, with somewhat cruel but perfect accuracy, it has flaws as text, and also as music, that are not redeemed in a music/text synthetic combination.

Thus: a Hanslickean can and should recognize of the variety of things that music does apart from aiming at musical-beauty, even though Hanslick did think that musical-beauty was in some sense its central goal. Hanslick did not deny music's other goals. Moreover, there is more than one way to think of the non-musical purposes of music. Different musical works or phenomena need to be interpreted in different ways. These differing ways should be carefully

described without disregarding the central or basic function of music—its musical-beauty function.

5.Formalism and Politics

Is Hanslick's view 'formalist'? Music is a human artifact that (typically) has among its functions, the function of generating musical-beauty—a beauty that in part depends on, or arises from, structures of sounds, and that consists "simply and solely of tones and their artistic combination" (Hanslick 1986: 28). That excludes most of the socio-political contextual factors that many musicologists are interested in, which suffices to make Hanslick 'formalist' on most understandings of that term, since such contextual matters are something over and above sounds or tones artistically combined. On the other hand, since music is an artifact, and its musical-beauty is the beauty of sonic events considered as artifacts, it is not formally beautiful in the sense of beauty that is dependent solely on sounds or tones. That is why it has musical-beauty. Music and musical-beauty are human creations.

Formalism in the arts—in the visual arts, as well as in musicology—often faces political criticism. There is said to be something exclusionary about formalism, privileging a certain kind of listener or culture. Is it somehow parochial? What about so-called 'non-Western' music? However, it is in fact a major advantage of formalism, if we conceive it as the idea that musical-beauty has explanatory priority over other functions of music, that the analysis is not restricted to Western classical music or the music of any other period. (I do not understand musicologists who assert the opposite; for instance, Chua 1991.) Lots and lots of non-western instrumental music has pure musical-beauty as its primary function, or at least, as a significant function. A great deal of music is just for listening or primarily for listening. Note that Musical formalism was alive and well as a theoretical option in 3rd Century China. Ji Kang has an interesting and robust defence of something close to what we might call musical formalism (Kang 1983). This should be required reading for historicizing contextualists.

The tables should be turned on those who attack formalism on political grounds. In the visual arts Sally Price rightly complained about the tendency to over-emphasize the differences between African art and Western visual art (Price 2001). Many claimed that, unlike Western art, African artworks are not separable from religious and social rituals, and that they are viewed as collective products without anything like our (allegedly Western) idea of individual

talent or genius. But, as Price shows, this is a common Western myth about African art, and may even have racist underpinnings, despite the avowed 'progressive' intentions of those who claim this. Similarly, there is something dubious about the idea that pure listening is something we in the West do while those in other cultures (savages?) only listen as part of rituals or in religious contexts, in a non-individualistic fashion. The idea of instrumental music as a distinctively local Western phenomenon is politically disturbing. (Recall that Hanslick claims that his thesis is general not parochial; see Hanslick 1986: 38.)

6.Nature/Culture?

Lastly, I want to comment on some large claims about the humanities that Taruskin touches on several times in his paper. He claims that there is a significant distinction between 'nature' and 'culture' that I fail to make. (For example, Taruskin writes: "…[the] categorical distinction between nature and culture is blithely disregarded", Taruskin 2018, section IV).) He also claims that many in so-called 'analytic philosophy' fail to make this distinction, which is wildly inaccurate, like quite a few of Taruskin's generalizations about academic philosophy; but this is of little importance.

What does Taruskin mean by the distinction between "nature" and "culture"? It seems to have to do with a distinction between human psychology and the rest of non-human nature. Taken in one way, this threatens to catapult human beings altogether out of the realm of nature. But that would seem unwelcome. The relation between mind and body has been a vexed issue at least from Descartes to the present day. Many, but not all, philosophers in the English-speaking world want to insist on stronger or weaker metaphysical links between mind and body (for very different views, see Smart 1959, Davidson 1980, essays 9-11). They deny an absolute mind-body divorce. At the same time, many of these same thinkers also say that the *methodologies* or *epistemologies* of the two are very different. In order to obtain knowledge of other minds, including the acts and objects that constitute culture, we require interpretation—sometimes also called "hermeneutic understanding", or "*verstehen"*—and this is unlike anything in the 'hard' or non-human sciences. Why? Because in the human sciences we deal with what Brentano called "intentionality": our mental states have 'content' or 'aboutness'. This means that we need to make sense of what people think and the things that they strive for; we must understand how they seem worthwhile or reasonable from their point of view. This, roughly, is why the quantitative methodology of the hard sciences is not

appropriate for knowing contentful states of mind. Interpretation is a different way of knowing (although I have only hinted at the difference). Now this looks like a 'nature/culture' distinction of a sort. It is an epistemological not a metaphysical difference. My best guess is that Taruskin means something like this by his 'nature/culture' distinction. Understanding nature (non-human nature), and understanding human thought and culture are radically different in this way. This is probably the majority position in English-speaking philosophy, and my philosophy of music is predicated on this distinction, since I prioritize making sense of musical activities.

Before we see how this works, note that this kind of interpretive (hermeneutic) understanding has nothing to do with eschewing essence. Indeed, the very opposite: it requires essence. This is because of what an action is. An action essentially has the motives it does; its essence lies in the motives from which it was done. An action done from other motives would not be that very action, even if the bodily movements were the same. That is why the rational explanation of intentional action is one that deploys essence. If so, Taruskin could not be more wrong to take out essences from our understanding of human beings; if you do that, there is no culture left, since culture consists of deliberate human actions. (I am impressed by Harold Bloom's description of the way writers relate to their predecessors, not by being subject to a passive influence, but by active appropriation and even antagonism to their forebears; see Bloom 1973.) Human actions are defined by their essential motives. Furthermore, these motives are historical causes (so we have an instance of Kripkean essential origins; Kripke 1980). There is nothing ahistorical about such an essentialist understanding. Understanding actions, and our contentful mental life, including our cultural activities, means seeing how our actions make sense, or seem reasonable, to the participants—the ones performing the actions. That also goes for our cultural actions.

Of course, we also have our irrational and non-rational sides. There is well documented research in psychology on this matter (Kahneman, Slovic and Twersky 1974, Nisbett and Ross 1980). And there are more speculative Freudian, Marxist, feminist attempts to explain actions non-rationally. Nevertheless, the bulk of our mental life is such that the point of what we do is transparent to us—it seems to make sense to us. If a theorist of culture cannot capture that appearance, they have gone wrong. (Perhaps some of our dreams seem to make sense when they do not, but our waking life cannot be like this, in large measure.)

This is where I believe Hanslick's approach is especially strong—precisely on the side of culture, not nature. The appeal to musical-beauty allows us to vindicate the activities of musical creation and listening, unlike so many of the context-first attempts to explain musical culture, which alienate us from our first-person perspective as we engage in music making or experience. Suppose it turns out that people like certain music primarily because of social class, because of feelings about their mothers, because of gender codes, etc. etc. These accounts do not capture what it is like to enjoy listening to music, that is, how it seems from the participant's perspective. Instead that perspective is denigrated as an illusion. By contrast, a Hanslickean account may appeal to pleasure; and the pursuit of pleasure is widely acknowledged to make sense. Furthermore, it is pleasure *in* a value—at least that is how the aesthetic experience of music (some music) presents itself to us. So, it is pleasure of a particularly valuable sort, a pleasure in a value—not just pushpin, but musical poetry. That makes sense of our concern with music—something that contextualists have difficulty doing. Music, or at least most music, is an artifact designed at least partly in order to embody the value of musical-beauty in a temporal unfolding sequence of tones, onto which our listening attention is directed. This attention rewards us with pleasure in that value. You need that essential function to begin to explain the wider cultural role of music in our lives.

Taruskin chooses the title "Essence *or* Context". But why the disjunction? Why not both? Essence, thinks Taruskin, belongs to science, while context belongs to the humanities. Both claims are questionable. Geology and evolutionary biology give history a preeminent role. And I have tried to sketch the way that the humanities rely on essence. Understanding culture means understanding human actions; but human actions have historical essences. So without essence, no context and no culture.

Coda

I finish by pulling some themes together. Sonic beauty may be there in nature, but *musical-beauty* depends on human purposes. We may say that absolute music is music the only, or main, function of which is to have musical-beauty. Formalism need not be the implausible view that all music is absolute, but can be the view that makes musical-beauty central, and aims to explain other values and functions of music, not completely in terms of musical-beauty, but where the goal of musical-beauty is an essential and ineliminable part. That essence is necessary for explaining whatever else music does. A Hanslikean will say that the

musical-beauty function is sometimes the only function of music, but also that many musical events have both musical-beauty functions as well as other functions. These other functions may even be more important than the musical-beauty function. Many are the ways that musical-beauty can combine with other functions of music. But in most cases, it does so partly in virtue of sustaining musical-beauty. If you throw out Hanslick, little is left.*

*Many thanks for helpful comments to Mike Gallope and Gintare Stankeviciute.

Appendix:

In footnotes 5, 8, 11, 14, and 16 of his paper in this volume, Taruskin added some responses after seeing this paper. He kindly invited me to respond to his responses, so I add an appendix here for those who enjoy the pleasures of iteration.

Footnote 5 is about the sublime. My response: (a) There are lots of dead people in the history of thought, and they speak with diverse and discordant voices. There is no cozy historical consensus over the sublime, and certainly not over the sublime in music, nor should we yearn for historical consensus. If we want to know what to think about the sublime, we will have to make up our own minds. (b) I very sympathetic to the proposal that Taruskin makes in this footnote, which is to identify the musical sublime by paradigm cases. This is an excellent helpful suggestion. Unfortunately, it provides precisely zero in the way of support for the pain/masochistic theory of the sublime that Taruskin favors. (c) I note that Taruskin completely ignores my argument against the pain/masochism theory. Partly because there is no intellectual security in appeals to appeal to intellectual authorities, I try to give a self-standing argument, which was my appeal to the psychological implausibility of the pain/masochism theory. I gave an argument; Taruskin ignores that argument; he does not venture an alternative argument; and he relies on the authority of (some of) the dead. (I leave it to others to apportion the epithets “blythe”, “nonchalant” and “bravado”.) (d) In my book, I wrote “AC/DC” rather than “Motorhead”, which I am embarrassed about; and the press would not allow me to correct the mistake in the 2017 paperback edition.)

In footnote 8, Taruskin criticizes a throwaway dismissive bracketed comment that I made about the Avant Garde. I note that I have a book-length criticism of the tendency in

Twentieth Century aesthetics to make the Avant Garde pivotal in general theorizing about art (Zangwill 2007).

Footnote 11 concerns Hanslick interpretation. All I will say is that neither musicologists nor philosophers have sufficient probed this text. Hanslick's book (which I like to refer to as 'The Bible') is quite fluid and is actually a patchwork containing some previously published essays, with multiple and changing influences. The proper analytic close-reading of the text is just beginning. See for example Christoph Landerer's contribution (part II, "On Hanslick and Essence") to Landerer and Zangwill 2016).

Footnotes 14 and 16 are about Nature and Culture. In footnote 14, Taruskin makes a concession: he should have said "categorial" rather than "categorical". He magnanimously agrees to change a word. But this does not address the simple but (I think) powerful argument that I put, which is this: culture is constituted by cultural actions; actions have essential origins in intentions; therefore, culture and essence cannot be divorced. I would respectfully suggest that separating culture and essence is an error in Taruskin's thinking. On this matter, we differ. What is clear, however, is that my argument cannot be met so lightly.

In footnote 16, Taruskin writes: "…the artistic combination of tones did not exist before we knew about it, for there was no music until we humans invented it. Hence no mind-independence, and no essence". But this argument forgets the ubiquitousness of mind-dependent essences of human artifacts, such as coffee-makers and handshakes. So, although music is not mind-independent (in one sense), that does not mean that it has no essence. Taruskin's inference is what philosophers call a 'non-sequitur'.

Taruskin also complains that talk of essences illegitimately smuggles in normative judgements. Maybe so. Perhaps I may be allowed an ad hominem point here, which is I find this complaint surprising given what I have read of Taruskin's oeuvre (for instance the essays in Taruskin 1995): Taruskin is not shy of the normative—and that is no bad thing. In the humanities, normativity is all around us, and it is best to acknowledge that honestly rather than pretend to be value-free. This is a common scenario across the humanities. I would have thought Taruskin would agree with this. So why object to invoking essences on the grounds of normativity?

Taruskin's strongest point is this. He concedes biological functional essences but not musical essences. Since essences are supposed to be explanatory, whether in the physical natural world, in human psychology or in cultural activity, Taruskin's challenge is a fair one.

Essences must earn their keep. But do they? Taruskin is skeptical. Perhaps the word “essence” is a redundant ‘placeholder’, adding emphasis, but no content. Now, where there are essences, there is an explanatory difference between the essential and the non-essential properties of a thing. We can use a coffee-maker as a paper-weight, but if we do, it is not doing what it was supposed to do. By contrast, when we use a coffee-maker to make coffee, what it does is explained by its essence. It makes coffee because it is a coffee-maker. It is true to itself, as it were. Music is similar. There is a difference between the effects of music that it was designed for and effects that are incidental. Music may also wake the neighbours, which it was not designed for. But sometimes music does what it was designed for, and if so, it has its effects in virtue of its essence—what it was designed to do. Some of what music does is due to its design essence, and some is not. Now add that being designed for musical-beauty is at least part of the essence of much music. In many cases, that musical essence will be part of a rational explanation of our musical activities—experiencing music, creating it, preserving it, and so on. The essential aspect of music is often in play in its uptake by human beings as well as their creating and preserving it, and it is that essence that (in part) makes them reasonable, sensible and rational to engage in these activities. The Hanslickean essence of music, therefore, does work in rendering human beings intelligible.

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