

Chapter 8

THE ART OF HAPPINESS: PERSPECTIVES ON MUSIC AS A LIFELONG RESOURCE

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ABSTRACT

What do a Galuppi Sonata played by Benedetti Michelangeli, a Prelude of Rachmaninoff, and a scene from *The Knight of the Rose* by Strauss have in common? Happiness. Each of them shows a different form of this feeling. The first part of the chapter emphasizes the relationship between time, music and happiness as a key element of the emotional outline of music. Poetry can help us to seize such subtle but precisely defined feelings, namely the “fleeting happiness” that we find in Racmaninoff’s music, perfectly expressed in words by a poem of Montale.

The Intermezzo considers another important expressive characteristic of music, also related to time and happiness: *the emotion of occurrence*, a feeling typical of Bach’s pieces. The last part of the chapter focuses on some other features of happiness. Bizet, Schubert, and Caetano Veloso shed further light on the most sought after, yet elusive, feeling of human experience.

INTRODUCTION: MUSIC AS A LIFELONG RESOURCE

The contribution that music can give to our lives is potentially tremendous. In a time when life spans get longer and longer, the need for tools that allow us to build ourselves in a rich and harmonious way is getting stronger. [Demetrio 2005]. Music can be such an opportunity, but not one immediately available. The language of music is in fact subtle and complex, and requires a suitable approach to enfold its immense richness. We are going to show some unusual vantage points, some angles from which music can be seen, conceived, and understood, with special reference to its expressive powers and its relevance for lifelong

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education. It is a sort of musical journey, stopping near some of the richest products of the human spirit, in order to ask ourselves how they can expand our experience and better our understanding of the world. The result is a sort of geographical map of music, as it appears if observed as a lifelong educational opportunity. Happiness, in its manifold nature, is at the centre of this map.

TIME AND HAPPINESS IN MUSIC

The Spell of Perfection: Michelangeli Plays Galuppi

One of the most famous videos of Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli shows the great pianist playing Galuppi's Sonata in C Dur.¹ As in Bach's Ciaccona (see below) the listener is seized by a deep emotion which is connected with his being witnessing something entirely unusual, but in this case it is not about the breath of the universe: it is about *the spell of perfection*.

Galuppi was an Eighteenth century Italian composer, of a certain importance but not of great reknown. He wrote many Sonatas for the harpsichord, some of which are of historical value for scholars investigating the classical style and the history of the Sonata-forms [Pestelli 1979]. It's fair to say that, though decidedly respectable, it is not the kind of music that tends to stir the blood of modern listeners. Just listen to the first movement played on the harpsichord, as intended by the composer: it's smooth and pleasant, of course, but it's likely not to be fully satisfying. The first problem, for the modern listener, is a contradiction between the nature of the instrument and the structure of the piece. Galuppi writes a beautiful *Cantabile*, which is an accompanied melody, something that for us, the children of another era, inevitably evokes the relationship between figure and foreground. But this is not the case for the cembalo, which is unable to differentiate the two levels, at least using a single keyboard. The result is a slightly unpleasant sense of saturation of the sound space, over-filled by the regular pattern of the left hand, the so-called *basso albertino*, at the expense of the melody, which cannot stand out properly. It's a typical phenomenon of transition periods, when aesthetic needs and new tendencies are not always in phase with the material conditions of their realization.

Now, let's listen to Michelangeli: every lack of balance, as if by magic, disappears, and everything is in its place. What's more, the piece radiates such enchanting beauty that it would be difficult to detect listening to the cembalo, a beauty under the spell of perfection. The first, obvious consideration is that the two layers of sound – melody and accompaniment – are neatly separated, but this is hardly meaningful, given that any pianist would do the same. The specific feature, here, is not *what* but *how* Michelangeli does it. From the very beginning of the piece, the regular series of notes in the left hand acquires a sound quality that transforms the shallow formula of the *basso albertino* into something entirely different: the source of a spell constantly renewing, a sort of *environmental magic*, so to speak, i.e. a sound that creates the illusion of shaping the environment in which the music itself resounds. The sound of Michelangeli's left hand has something of an underwater quality, but without any trace of impressionistic vagueness, thus resulting perfectly suitable to Galuppi's terseness. On this basis, the right hand can display the legendary brightness of Michelangeli's *cantabile*, a

¹ RAI 1962 Turin Recording. DVD Opus arte 2005. The video is also easily available on-line.

mannerist stylization of the Italian Melodrama, as Rattalino sees it. [Rattalino 2006, p. 19]. Thus, the sound is the key of the enchantment that emanates from this execution: a sound that comes across as “natural” but is elegant and sophisticated at most [Gabon 2004, p. 70]; a sound which is at the same time essential and rich, simple and eloquent, physical and intangible.

The visual aspect of the video is part and parcel of all this, for Michelangeli’s attitude confirms and reinforces the frame. Rattalino has pointed out the abstract character of the relationship between Michelangeli’s body movements and the resulting sound: the relationship of cause and effect, obvious in the performances of other pianists, in Michelangeli’s case, and especially in this video, is almost concealed. [Rattalino 1984, p. 338]. The body is still, the face almost impassible, and the full decontraction of the hands creates an illusion of immobility. The sound seems to originate not from him, but *behind him*, from some point out of sight. Even the ivory quality of the skin, enhanced by the black and white film of the sixties, contributes to the effect [Kozubek 2003, p. 45]: the video gives the pianist a statuesque demeanor, befitting of a neoclassical sculpture. The whole casts a spell of perfection, carrying music out of time and immersing it in a light of mythical exemplarity.

Played this way, this first movement becomes a glass house where, as in the title of the J.S. Foer novel, *everything is illuminated*. Illuminated, but from inside; therefore, bright and luminous. It’s a world of sounds where the meaning of things is ubiquitous and clear, with no shadows. So, what we are witnessing here is the utopia of a world from which the opacity of things, and their impenetrable thickness, have been removed. This utopia gives us a *yearning happiness*: yearning because it is artificial, untouchable, and inaccessible. It’s a world where we all would like to live, but no one can dwell: no such thing exists in nature. Watching Michelangeli’s execution we experience the proximity of beauty, and at the same time its elusiveness; music seems to be *in* this world, without being *of* this world. It is a paradoxical happiness which combines revelation and bereavement, joy for perfection and a sense of irrecoverable loss.

Happiness as a Fleeting Vision: Rachmaninoff, Prelude Op. 32 n.5

Things can be untouchable in two ways, either because they are not physically tangible, or because they are *too fragile* to be touched, hence always at risk of being marred and vanish. The happiness that comes from the video of Michelangeli, with its inaccessible beauty, belongs to the former type; but in music we also find wonderful examples of the latter.

Rachmaninoff’s Prelude Op. 32 No. 5 for piano begins with a pattern of accompaniment for the left hand, placed in the middle register of the keyboard. The sound of the piano is evocative of the harp and bells. This pattern oscillates around two notes with a swinging gait, like a cradle or a Gondola, which creates the mood of a sort of melancholic Barcarole. The mood, but not the rhythm. While a real Barcarole tends to be steady, here the arpeggio which serves as the pattern consists of five notes. It is an irregular pattern, whose function is to provide a slight sense of dissymmetry, a movement with no strong rhythmical point of support.

The mood is enchanting, as in Galuppi/Michelangeli, but this time there is no sense of eternity. On the contrary, from the first note we are confronted with a piece that presents itself

as a *fleeting vision*. Time, in the video of Michelangeli was, according to Plato's philosophy, a moving image of eternity: music retains, preserves and shepherds time. Here, however, it is as in the Latin motto, *tempus fugit* (time flees). Of course, the Prelude is a contemplative image of lyrical beauty, but everything in the piece suggests that this image is *bound to vanish*. Even the enchanting melody, with its most pure line and its sound of crystals and ice, owes its moving eloquence to a sense of extreme fragileness, as if it could go to pieces at the slightest attempt to touch it. Galuppi's beauty was out of reach, Rachmaninoff's is *too frail to withstand any contact*.

This reminds us of a verse by the Italian poet Eugenio Montale who, talking about the extreme fragility of happiness, warns the reader:

E dunque non ti tocchi chi più t'ama
 ("and so may no one touch you who loves you").
 [Montale, 1920-1927: "Felicità raggiunta"]

If Galuppi's Sonata was a house of glass, this Prelude is a house crossed by wind, the wind of time. The yearning happiness of Galuppi originated from its *lack of extension* (in space), which made it unreachable; the fleeting happiness of Rachmaninoff arises from its *lack of permanence* (in time). This brings us to a most ancient theme: the contingent nature of happiness, its being *the unguaranteed condition par excellence*, that flashes and disappears [Natoli 2009, p. 12]. This sense of happiness as a fleeting vision, ready to vanish at the first attempt to contact, is expressed in another poem by Montale.

Cigola la carrucola nel pozzo
 l'acqua sale alla luce e vi si fonde.
 Trema un ricordo nel ricolmo secchio,
 nel puro cerchio un'immagine ride.
 Accosto un volto a evanescenti labbri:
 si deforma il passato, si fa vecchio,
 appartiene ad un altro...
 Ah che già stride
 La ruota, ti ridona all'atro fondo,
 visione, una distanza ci divide.

(The pulley of the well squeaks,
 the water rises up to the light and merges with it.
 A memory trembles in the brimming pail,
 in the pure circle an image is laughing.
 I approach my face to vanishing lips:
 the past grows deformed, it becomes old,
 it belongs to someone else...
 Oh how already the wheel
 is creaking, taking you to the black bottom;
 vision, by a distance we are kept apart.)

[Montale 1920-1927]. English Translation by A. Mazza, 1983.

The Eternal Blink: Strauss, *The Knight of the Rose*

Between Michelangelo's beauty out of time, and Rachmaninoff's fleeting time, lies a third possible relationship between music and time, along with a third kind of musical happiness: the bliss of the suspended instant. This case differs from the preceding ones, because music neither creates the neoclassical illusion to be out of time altogether, nor exploits the unavoidable passing of time as a poetic resource. Instead, music does not escape the law of time and becoming, but manages to deceive it *from inside*, temporarily suspending its flow.

This happens in a scene of *The Knight of the Rose* by Richard Strauss, where the young and attractive Count Octavio Rofrano, dressed in silver, arrives in great pomp to present a silver rose, as a token of love by her betrothed Baron Lerchenau, to the equally young and attractive Sophie. It goes without saying that the betrothed Baron Lerchenau is annoying and beyond all bearing, therefore the audience is bound to expect something to happen.

Stopping time is no joke, hence the scene is carefully prepared, and gets its efficacy only in contrast to what precedes. Act II starts with a busy and chaotic situation of expectation in Sophie's house: everything is upside down while waiting for the great moment. Strauss expresses this in music by structuring the scene as *a chain of interruptions*: the voices of Sophie's father, of Marianna, of the Butler, Sophie and the approaching heralds, run after each other and overlap, supported by a frantic orchestra that adds to the confusion.

Then, everything changes: as Rofrano finally enters, the voices around him hush and the orchestra stabilizes. Time slows down, and the atmosphere becomes something between pastoral and fairy tale-like. The high register of the orchestra prevails, adding to the neatness of Rofrano's voice (actually a mezzo-soprano) a mood of noble and bemused elegance. After Rofrano's declaration and Sophie's polite answer, Rofrano gives Sophie the silver rose, in a climate of suspension and waits in wonder, still provided by the orchestra. Then, a new phase starts: smelling the heavenly scent of the rose Sophie's voice is transfigured, as she sings in the highest register heard since the beginning of Act Two. Getting here, Strauss has displayed a terrific *art of transition*, building an increasing sense of calm, heavenly peace and enchanted quiet from the early chaos.

Now, the prodigy can unfold: Sophie's high register is no less celestial than the scent of the rose, every trace of the previous turmoil vanishes, and the orchestra performs the miracle of stopping time while the two youths intertwine their voices in bliss. The scent of the rose is, at a symbolic level, the key element of this scene: it's a silver flower, but, as Rofrano explains to a marveled Sophie, a drop of Persian attar has been put inside it. In this way, the token of love can retain the most precious gift of a flower, the scent, without paying the high price of caducity, thus becoming a poetic symbol of the eternity of love. Even more important, the scent surprisingly coming from the silver rose represents *the unpredictability of love*: it casts an instantaneous spell that suspends time in an illusion of eternity, as if it were a single moment expanded indefinitely. The bliss that irradiates from this remarkable duet is blessed by this sense of eternity, by the sense of something wondrous and unexpected, unfolding in that very moment. Saying that the orchestra accompanies the characters would be simplistic; rather, *it shapes time around them*, attentively building, in the river of time, a bend provisionally removed from the hateful curse of becoming [Brelet 1949; Ferrari 2000].

As an afterthought, I will add that, after a period of frantic and enthusiastic work, in summer 1909 Strauss met the author of the libretto of *The Knight of the Rose*, Hugo von

Hofmannsthal, and played for him some parts of the opera on the piano. Some days after, Hofmannsthal wrote to him that his music had given to him *a lasting joy* [Principe 1989, p. 757].

INTERMEZZO

The Cosmic Vertigo: Bach

Placed at the end of the Partita in D minor for solo violin (BWV 1004), the Ciaccona has the fullness and the completeness of a piece in its own right. Not by chance, has it been transcribed as a separate composition by Mendelssohn, Brahms and Busoni, as if it were a microcosm in itself.

No room, here, for every day feelings, customary emotions, in short the range of passions that sail on the human horizon with their zeniths and nadirs. [Stravinsky 1935]. On the contrary, from the very beginning everything is set on another level. There is pathos, of course, and one of the most intense kind, but it has little to do with the emotional coloring that accompanies our actions, relationships, aspirations and desires. Rather, from the theme that opens the piece (“Ciaccona” means a series of variations on a theme²) we are confronted with a sort of self-enhancing force which knows no rest, but also no sudden changes, as an organism in constant growth [Basso 1983, p. 616]. There is no trace, here, of the ups and downs that shape the line of our emotions: Bach’s pathos has the majestic steadiness and the constancy in time of a statue.

This character, however, is not the only one of the piece; from the third variation (bar 25), the music takes on another expressive countenance, leaves a monumental character and starts to work *as an intense mental activity*. Of course, that’s what music does by and large, but here this is true in a much more specific way. Other musical pieces can evoke the movement of a dance (as often happens in the music of Bach himself), or a theatrical scene translated into sounds (Mozart), or the rational articulation of a speech (Beethoven) [Ferrari 2003]. For a long stretch, however (bars 25-85) the Ciaccona conveys the feeling that music is nothing but thought expressed in sound, or, even better, *thought that thinks through sounds*. The emphasis, therefore, is more on the process than on the contents; the compelling force of this music transports us to *the workshop of thought*. This process begins quietly, as a monologue to himself (bars 25-48); then, progressively, it is as if the thought becomes voiced, obtaining a more sounded and sonorous quality (bars 49-55). With a purely self-directed process, the sound is added to the movement and energy, giving the listener the impression that the thought-machine is set in full motion.

Then a transition begins (bars 85-88), leading to a new section that features a long series of arpeggios (bars 89-120). This transition starts with a *perpetuum mobile* of swift rising notes, that marks a change in the direction of thought, suddenly attracted by a new polarity

² For a more precise definition see [Basso 1983, p. 616].

and almost undergoing a change of dimension. The “new age” resonance of the latter expressions is actually misleading, as there is nothing psychedelic or vague here. What I do suggest is that in this passage there is a change of state where the music continues to be a sort of sounded chain of thoughts, but both the quality and the scope of these thoughts change: the *working of thought* becomes *the journey of thought*. It is no coincidence that the transition has something dreamlike and visionary: what appears here is a new sense of vertigo. This sense is enhanced and brought to a magnificent climax through the following variations (bars 89-121), where it becomes clear that it is *the vertigo of infinity*, a typically baroque feeling (the Gallery of Mirrors in Versailles is a good example) that reaches one of its highest points here. [Zellini 1989]. It is not a psychic or subjective sense of infinity, however, as in Romantic music and poetry, but a cosmological and mystical one. It is not an expansion of “one’s soul”, rather the outcome of a process of thought.

There are plenty of fast notes, and yet the listener gets the unmistakable impression of something calm and steady in the bottom, as if the moving appearance of the music concealed a still core. The philosopher Pierre Souvtchinsky called this specific relationship, between music and time, *dynamic calm* [Souvtchinsky 1939]. The trajectory of music in this section is circular, or better spiral, given a strong sense of ascent. The cosmic sense of vertigo is one with the impression of following an established route and the perception of a path traced since the beginning of time: it is as if Bach made us feeling in his music the very fate of the cosmos. It is not the destiny as a force affecting our individual lives – Beethoven’s struggle against “the adverse fate” – but the general and immutable laws which rule the universe. The musical experience of this feeling is therefore undramatic. We do not fight against what threatens to destroy our single lives; rather, we get the opportunity to feel and understand, at an emotional level, the deep underlying order of the universe.

What about feelings, then? There is pain, but it is integrated into the general framework: it is the painful awareness of inevitability of things, of the unchangeable course of the universe. Given that the framework is serene, the result is a paradoxical but clear sense of... *painful serenity*. Bach’s music never forgets the pain of the world, but integrates it in the much wider experience of cosmic awareness and order. On the listener’s side, all this leads to an emotion of a very particular kind. Facing the greatness of the “cosmic scene” that we are offered by Bach, facing the wide scope of what is nearly a vision, lucid and visionary and at the same time (like the state of “*excessus mentis*” of the Medieval mystics), and realizing the huge breath of this music, we are seized by an emotion that I would call *the emotion of occurrence*. It is the emotion that springs from the rare opportunity to witness the way things are and how they came to be.

On a small scale, we have examples such as walking in the countryside, a leaf falls from a tree just before us: should we be neither pressed for time as we usually are, nor spiritually loaded by everyday worries, maybe we could get involved with such a minor event. We could follow the slow fall of the leaf to the ground, look up to the branch that housed it, and feel the deep wonder of being there at the right time to see that silent scene. On a small scale, this would be an emotion of the kind I’m trying to describe. The cosmic climax of the Ciaccona engenders in the listener a deep emotion which is far beyond the perimeter of our everyday lives, thus enlarging our emotional experience: it is an emotion where peace, pain, wonder, and a new awareness are strictly interconnected.

KINDS OF HAPPINESS IN MUSIC

Happiness as a Conscious Illusion

If Bach's Ciaccona expands our emotional awareness to a cosmic dimension, the same awareness can work as a key to happiness in the opposite way, that is as the consciousness of limitations. When this consciousness results from disappointment, of course, there is no room for happiness, but only for bitterness. However, in some cases we can experience a delicate balance between the ability to daydream, and an awareness that does not mar the illusion. We find this emotional state in Bizet's *Carmen*, Act I, scene IV.

Young Men

There's the factory bell, so we take our places,
Lying here in wait till the girls arrive;
Then we follow you, dusky little beauties,
Murmuring in your ear tender words of love!³

From a purely rational point of view, the ringing of the factory bell is the signal of a routine event, which happens every day and, as such, is predictable. But this is not the way music goes. The waiting is expressed in its emotional coloring, under the sign of the imminence of something mellow and gently exciting. The effect of the male voice choir, with its dark and severe sound, expressing this kind of languorous waiting, is remarkable. Even the short introductory passage of woodwinds seems to encourage a mild attitude. Once again, the main expressive feature of music is time, but here it is not filled with facts, but savored in its passing by.

The cigarette girls appear, cigarettes between their lips. They come under the bridge and slowly onto the stage.

Soldiers

There they are! With gaze unashamed,
Looks so provoking!
Cigarettes between their red lips,
Lazily smoking!

It is interesting to note that when the girls appear the musical mood does not change. Instead of the satisfaction of desire, the apparition of its object causes it to persist. The girls are there, but the chain of desires does not come to an end, and the men sing in an even more languorous way, driven by an orchestra whose pathos is at the same time gentle and intense.

Cigarette Girls

Smoke rings make their lazy way,

³ English Libretto from <http://www.dennisalbert.com/Opera/Carmen.htm>.

Softly curling,
Softly curling,
Skyward they stray,
In a fragrant cloud unfurling.
Their perfume pervades the air,
Gently stealing,
Gently stealing,
Soothing our mind
To a mellow pleasant feeling.
Those tender words you lovers say
every day
Fade away!
Your promises, too, like the smoke
in the blue,
Fade away.
Smoke rings rise and float away
In the blue of the sky.
See them curling and rising
And vanish at last in the blue of the sky.
See them rise,
To the skies!

When finally the girls sing, they do not seem to answer the men, as we would expect, but rather to continue in the same mood, *prolonging the chain of desires*. Words are most important here: the text is almost a pagan hymn to smoke, which pervades the air “soothing our mind to a mellow pleasant feeling”.

The girls say this not as an abstract statement, but while smoking themselves: they are not *thinking* of smoke, but actually *looking at it*. Thus, what I have called the chain of desires is also a *visual chain*: we look at the men, who are looking at the girls, who are in turn watching the rings of smoke, that “make their lazy way”, while singing about them. Traditionally smoke, steam and fog are associated with fallacy as images of lack of substance and deceptiveness. They also represent transience, namely the transience of human commitments, promises and passions, all of which are destined to vanish as time goes by. Love, of course, is no exception.

Surprisingly, here this meaning is reversed. The comparison between words and sentiments of lovers on the one hand, and the rings of smoke on the other, has no devaluing meaning; this is clear from both words and music, that show no trace of bitterness. Here the transience of things is part of their charm, exactly in the same way as this is true for Carmen, who is irresistible and uncatchable at the same time. In the enchanting scene of the cigarette girls, time, illusion and desire are interconnected into a single image: all of them are bound to disappear, but the spectacle of them vanishing is delightful. So, the rings of smoke that girls and men contemplate represent the glittering appeal of human illusions; the awareness of their impending vanishment does not mar the languorous pleasure they give us.

Smoke, here, expresses the elusiveness of desire, which never brings to an end point *the chain of sighs*: we sigh, listening to the voices of men, sighing in turn while they are waiting for women, sighing themselves while watching the smoke that rises in the air... The smoke floating to the sky tells us that illusions are inseparable from hopes. Music wonderfully expresses this *languid wisdom*, which neither deceives itself, nor gives up the sweetness of

what never stops seducing us. The happiness of this scene is not an unmixed feeling: it is a “compounded happiness” made of pleasure, desire, melancholy, and sweetness.

Happiness as a Boundless Expansion: Schubert, “Trout” Piano Quintet, Fourth Movement

In the fourth movement of Schubert’s “Trout” piano quintet, the piano is at first used sparingly: absent in the theme, it plays the melody of the theme in the first variation, and confines itself to sober interventions during the second variation. Then, the third variation comes.

A doubled trill, played with both hands, inaugurates an entirely new situation, dominated by an outstanding *perpetuum mobile* performed by the piano. In fact, the trill is a resolute gesture by which the keyboard instrument jumps to the centre of the stage, where it stays for the entire variation. A *perpetuum mobile* is nothing new, of course: it’s a regular series of swift notes that seem to run endlessly. What is new, here, is the expressive character of this musical device. In the set of five instruments, the piano becomes a sort of “energy band” around which everything else revolves. It’s a new kind of energy, unthinkable before Beethoven, that I would call “a well-adjusted spread”. The melodic flux, doubled in octave, knows no bounds, as it seems to encounter no obstacles. It conveys the sense of an unlimited flow of vital energy, at the same time both engaging and irresistible. Whilst in Bach’s *Ciaccona* we can find a spiritual kind of energy (almost a cosmic flux), here the energy has a physical quality. This is enhanced by the unusual presence of the double bass, the deep sound of which creates an illusion of almost three-dimensional spatial depth.

The fact that music can convey physical and bodily schemes is hardly new (Mozart’s often does), but here there is no mime or actor on stage; instead, music makes us feel *the embodied presence of a subject*, whose vital energy is continuously expanding. In Mozart we often have bodies on stage, even in instrumental music: his piano Sonatas and Variations often evoke theatrical scenes of marionettes and lively characters [Knepler 1995; Ferrari 2003]. However, here the situation is different: there is no theatre of sounds, and we don’t *see* anything, but *feel* something. Schubert makes us feel a new kind of presence in music, which undoubtedly has a physical side, but is also related to the modern, philosophical idea of “subject”: a conscious centre of will, decision, and – here – energy and desire. Therefore, whereas Kant’s subject was a non-physical entity, this music is closer to Schopenhauer’s subject and his “will to live”.

It’s worth noting that this joyful and unrestricted expansion goes along with other features that are even more remarkable. First of all, this expansion is without bounds, *but not shapeless*: freedom does not lead to anarchy. The unbounded flux seems to find its own rule *within itself*, thus overcoming the idea of limit as an imposed restriction; instead, the principle of order manifests as a clearly defined direction. Besides, the full expansion of the piano is not a solipsistic experience, as it would be, for example, in a solo cadence. Instead, the piano “energy band” is wonderfully integrated into the group of four strings as a whole. Moreover, this is a *playful integration*: the violin and the viola play a delightful, syncopated accompaniment that gives the music an amused and exhilarated gait, which of course turns out to be amusing and exhilarating to the listener, who gets sucked into a safe and friendly vortex. The double bass gets its moment of glory playing the theme below the others; but its

affable and debonair, low-register sound makes it seem at times like a brass instrument (today we would say a bass tuba, though at Schubert's time it had not yet been invented) thus adding fun to fun, by giving the whole a tinge of circus euphoria. Last but not least, the piano flux, though unstoppable, manages to keep good manners, and everything is glamorous and full of what the French call "*bon ton*".

The emotional outcome of all this can only be one: once again, happiness. Salvatore Natoli, in his book about happiness, lists some features of happiness, including: *an expansion that knows no interruptions*, as we have seen in the *perpetuum mobile*; *the experience of time as a flee flux*, the same as in Schubert's piece; *feeling limits not as obstacles*, exactly as in this music; last but not least, *the feeling of a perfect accordance and harmony between himself and the surrounding environment*, between himself and the others [Natoli 2009, pp. 33-39]. It's the very relationship that we have found in music between the glittering extravaganza of the piano, the winking accompaniment of violin and viola, and the affable theme sounded by cello and double bass.

Happiness as a Body Experience of the World: Caetano Veloso and Djavan, *Sina (Fate)*

The last stage of our journey across music and happiness is about lightness, an idea which is the subject of the first of *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* by Italo Calvino. The Italian writer sketches a sort of literary phenomenology of lightness in Western culture and civilization, ranging from Antiquity to the Twentieth Century. This discussion, however rich it may be, turns out to be even more interesting if we consider *what is missing*, as this can teach us something about the cultural environment we live in. The first kind of lightness I would like to consider in Calvino is the intellectual one, the lightness of thought. All of the following quotations comes from Chapter 1 [Calvino 1993].

Were I to choose an auspicious image for the new millennium, I would choose that one: the sudden agile leap of the poet-philosopher who raises himself above the weight of the world, showing that with all his gravity he has the secret of lightness, and that what many consider to be the vitality of the times—noisy, aggressive, revving and roaring—belongs to the realm of death, like a cemetery for rusty old cars.

Of course Calvino not only appreciates the intellectual side of things, but, as a writer, he also takes into account the lightness of imagination, that he finds in the literature of the Eighteenth Century, full of flying figures; a trend that culminates in the adventures of Baron Münchhausen. There are many other form of lightness that Calvino believes to be worthy of consideration, for instance the surprising lightness of Perseus, the only hero able to cut off Medusa's head:

Perseus succeeds in mastering that horrendous face by keeping it hidden, just as in the first place he vanquished it by viewing it in a mirror. Perseus's strength always lies in a refusal to look directly, but not in a refusal of the reality in which he is fated to live; he carries the reality with him and accepts it as his particular burden.

Lightness in philosophy, lightness in thought, imagination, myth, and again in poetry and sentiments: what is missing in this broad survey? Only one thing, I would say, that is *the lightness of the body*. Not by chance, I would add, as the underestimation of the body as a central issue dates back to the origins of Western culture, at least from Plato on. The absence of this theme from Calvino's writing, therefore, reflects a more general tendency. At the end of the day, Calvino finds his bearings in the lightness of intelligence, as is clear from the following passage commenting on Kundera's *The unbearable lightness of being*:

His novel shows us how everything we choose and value in life for its lightness soon reveals its true, unbearable weight. Perhaps only the liveliness and mobility of the intelligence escape this sentence—the very qualities with which this novel is written, and which belong to a world quite different from the one we live in.

It's fair to say, though, that Calvino speaks as a writer, reading other writers, so the focus is on literature; music does not enter the scene. The music itself, however, can enrich the framework thanks to its outrageous, structural connection with the body.

There is a recording made by Caetano Veloso and Djavan, in which the two musicians sing the song *Sina*, composed by the latter.⁴ *Sina* in Portuguese means “fate”, a traditionally *heavy theme* that could easily lead other artists to refer to necessity and tragedy, loading the song with a heavy burden. It is not so, however, in this case: the emotional resources of Brazilian culture allow people to deal with tough issues without sacrificing lightness. Thus, we find in this music the very refreshing lightness that Calvino admires in the fruits of intelligence, but this time we are definitely on the side of a body experience.

Pai e mãe, ouro de mina
Coração, desejo e sina

The song starts with a list of good and precious things: “father and mother, gold of mine, heart, desire and fate”.

Tudo mais, pura rotina, jazz

“Everything else is but routine”. However, the author adds jazz music to the list, singing the word “jazz” with vocals expressing the deep pleasure that comes from this genre of music. A dedication to the beloved one follows:

Tocarei seu nome, pra poder falar de amor
Minha princesa, Art-nouveau
Da natureza, tudo o mais
Pura beleza, jazz

“I will play your name to talk about love. My princess, art nouveau of nature... and the rest is sheer beauty, jazz”. You'll note that what before was *merely routine*, here becomes *sheer beauty*: a playful substitution that shows how, within the utopian horizon of this song, nothing is indeed to be discarded.

⁴ CD *Caetano Veloso*, Novo Millennium 60249822824, BR. First version of the song in “Luz” by Djavan, 1982.

A luz de um grande prazer é irremediável néon
Quando o grito do prazer açoitar o ar, reveillon

“The light coming from a great pleasure is an irremediable neon. When the cry of pleasure lashes the air, it is New Year’s Eve party”.

O luar, estrela do mar,
O sol e o dom
Quiçá, um dia, a fúria
Desse front virá lapidar
O sonho até gerar o som

“Moonlight, sea star, the sound and the gift: maybe one day the fury of that brow will stone the dream until it gives birth to the sound”. It’s a sophisticated metaphor of composing music, seen as an activity that forges utopias.

Como querer caetanear o que à de bom

“Like wanting to ‘Caetanar’ what is already good”. That is, like wanting to better the best. This is the most tricky passage of the text: it plays down the daring poetic metaphor that precedes, and it pays homage to Caetano Veloso, who in this record is singing with Djavan. The latter coins a verb based on his friend’s name, to express the drive toward perfection typical of true art. This way, the name of the colleague becomes nothing less than *the criterion for excellence*. For his part, Caetano returns the compliment making the same joke with the verb “to Djavaneer”.

The reader could be baffled by the complexity and the subtlety of the lyrics, but this is a remarkably typical feature of the so-called MPB, or Brazilian Popular Music. By contrast, the music itself is simple and carefree, and winks to the listener urging his body to move.

Of course, this music has a strong dancing rhythm, but there is also a whole set of converging musical elements, that create a specific *corporeal mood* – so to speak. The syncopated *ostinato* in the base, comforting and dynamical at the same time; the carefree, female chorus; the instrumental riffs, elegant and gracefully catchy; all of these elements integrate to create a musical and expressive environment, an almost ephemeral world, which only lasts for the duration of the song. It’s a world felt and perceived *through the flesh of our body*. The two singing voices (very similar indeed) are spontaneous, weightless, and wonderfully undramatic: to the listener, they are but one. One voice overflowing with pleasure, as we have already noticed about the word “jazz”, that the Brazilian pronunciation transforms into seductive vocals. One voice for which, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, words and vowels are *ways of singing the world* [Merleau-Ponty 2003, p. 259].

Listening to this song, for a brief moment it’s the world itself that seems to move, following the rhythm of our body: it is a feeling that in real life we only have in the rare moments when lightness raises our lives, and our body seems to float and expand into a friendly world. Music gives a steady shape to this transient experience: it has a physical reality but it is also unseizable: a coupling that makes music close, and yet eternally elusive, for all those who love it.

Conclusion

In the field of music studies the idea of rigor is often associated with history, philology and structural analysis. Curiously enough, what comes first in the musical experience, i.e. the expressive quality of a piece, is given a rather residual space. There are many reasons for this, but they are not to be considered here. What I would like to suggest, though, (and what I hope to have shown at least minimally in this and other writings) is that the analysis of the expressive features of music can be no less subtle and strict than that of the structural one. Of course, assumptions, methods and results are different, but they are always strictly related to structure, history and context, which work as a “control framework”. Moreover, the expressive powers of music are an interdisciplinary field of research *par excellence*: they require both a specific knowledge of musical language, and the capability to make connections between its subtle mechanisms and a broader horizon. This is hard to achieve, but can widen our view of music, and not only: after all, thinking about what deeply moves us, asking ourselves how, where, and in which ways it does it, is an opportunity to better understand ourselves and the world we live in.

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