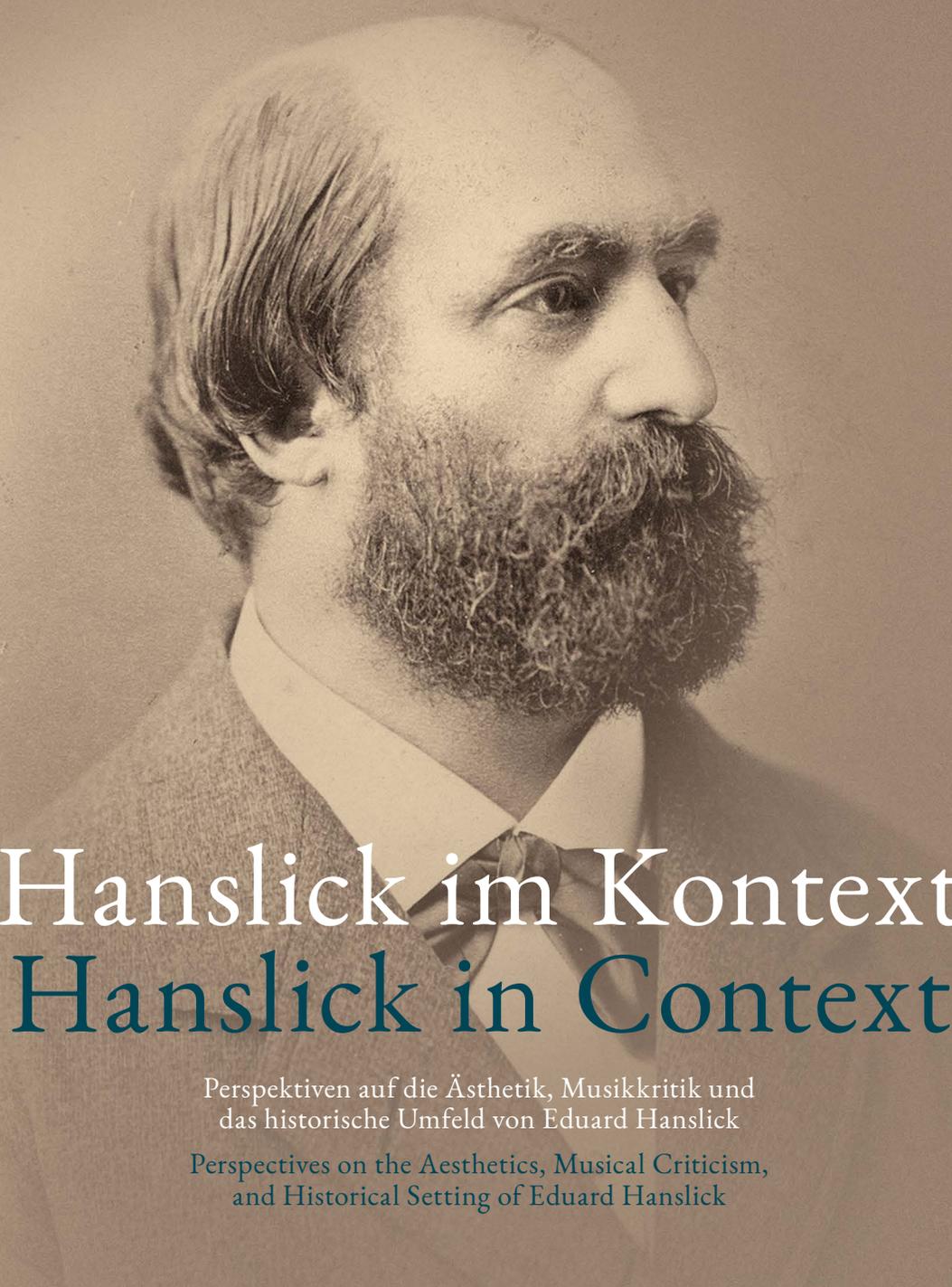


Alexander Wilfing, Christoph Landerer
und Meike Wilfing-Albrecht (Hg.)

A sepia-toned portrait of Eduard Hanslick, a man with a full, dark beard and mustache, wearing a suit and tie. The portrait is the background of the book cover.

Hanslick im Kontext Hanslick in Context

Perspektiven auf die Ästhetik, Musikkritik und
das historische Umfeld von Eduard Hanslick

Perspectives on the Aesthetics, Musical Criticism,
and Historical Setting of Eduard Hanslick

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Lively Arabesque: Between the Sublime and the Beautiful

MANOS PERRAKIS

A Revision—If Necessary?

Eduard Hanslick's essay *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* is an uncontested classic of music philosophy for many good reasons. But surely also due to its rich metaphoric language. Classic works of philosophy often operate with metaphors which clarify abstract concepts and supplement philosophical terms. Plato's cave allegory and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's (1770–1831) master-servant dialectic are probably the best-known examples. If *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* contains such a metaphor, then it is the arabesque.¹ Hanslick's metaphors include as well the kaleidoscope, the landscape (*VMS*, ²1858 onwards), the body (*VMS*, ²1858 onwards), architecture (*VMS*, ⁴1874 onwards), and the crystal—all of them are mentioned in the third chapter (*OMB*, 29, 35; *VMS*, 75–76, 85)—but none of them has intrigued generations of readers, commentators, and musicians so strongly as the arabesque. The main reason is that the other metaphors do not address the dynamic element of music. That creates an enormous distance between the arabesque and all others, in which the arabesque proves to be the most inclusive one. If Hanslick seems to favor the kaleidoscope, it is partly because he wants to limit the character of music as a *dynamic* art, warning of any preponderance of the dynamic element in music, which he links to pathological listening.²

Since Hanslick, the arabesque has been established as an adequate image for the elementary understanding of instrumental music, music without words, as an

1 Tellingly, Hanslick's arabesque is often referred to in the literature as a theoretical term (*Begriff*) and not as a metaphor. This certainly has to do with the ambiguous character of the arabesque. As Gurminder Kaur Bhogal remarks about the arabesque in general: "Depending on its context and the theoretical standpoint from which it was viewed, the arabesque could be perceived as charming or unsettling; it could mean nothing or something; it could absorb the viewer's attention and be seen; or it could remain peripheral on account of its status as mere ornament." Gurminder Kaur Bhogal, *Details of Consequence: Ornament, Music, and Art in Paris*, AMS Studies in Music (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 64.

2 At the beginning of the fifth chapter, Hanslick writes: "It is the elemental in music, i.e., sound and motion, which shackles the defenceless feelings of so many music lovers in chains which they rattle quite merrily." *OMB*, 58. Original wording: "Das *Elementarische* der Musik, der *Klang* und die *Bewegung* ist es, was die wehrlosen Gefühle so vieler Musikfreunde in Ketten schlägt, mit denen sie gar gerne klirren." *VMS*, 127.

autonomous artifact of sound and movement, a play of “tonally moving forms” (“tönend bewegte Formen,” *OMB*, 29; *VMS*, 75).³ The idea behind this metaphor is ingenious: take the most abstract form of plastic arts and imagine it alive. Hanslick tries to clarify the “musically beautiful”⁴ with a positive analogy from the plastic arts that succeeds in not being at odds with his anti-Schumann credo that every art should be understood on its own terms.⁵ An arabesque is not at all representative of the plastic arts, for it lingers between mere decoration and pure abstraction. In any case, Hanslick manages a skillful twist: he establishes enough distance from the plastic arts without having to separate totally from them. Moreover, by putting next to the arabesque the word “lively” (“lebendig,” *OMB*, 29; *VMS*, 75), he puts the finishing touch on a metaphor with a rich genealogical background.⁶ The attribute “lively” is an indirect acknowledgment of “spirit” (*Geist*). Then, a lively arabesque represents an intelligent organism, the “dynamic [*recte* active] emanation of artistic spirit” (“thätige Ausströmung eines künstlerischen Geistes,” *OMB*, 29; *VMS*, 75). Lively means intellectually active. So this goes beyond the usual understanding of arabesques as decorative figures.

However, this association did not prove to be persuasive for some critics, and even for the author himself. Later editions—from the sixth edition of 1881 onwards—of *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* contain a revision of the sentences where the positive analogy takes place:⁷

-
- 3 This standard translation of “tönend bewegte Formen” has been highly contested. For criticisms and alternatives, see Lee Rothfarb, “Nineteenth-Century Fortunes of Musical Formalism,” *Journal of Music Theory* 55, no. 2 (2011): 169; and, more recently, Alexander Wilfing, *Re-Reading Hanslick’s Aesthetics: Die Rezeption Eduard Hanslicks im englischen Sprachraum und ihre diskursiven Grundlagen*, Wiener Veröffentlichungen zur Musikwissenschaft 49 (Vienna: Hollitzer, 2019), 165–68. A new translation provided by Lee Rothfarb and Christoph Landerer—*Eduard Hanslick’s “On the Musically Beautiful:” A New Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018)—has recently decided on the rendition “sonically moved forms.”
- 4 “It is a specifically musical kind of beauty. By this we understand a beauty that is self-contained and in no need of content from outside itself, that consists simply and solely of tones and their artistic combination.” *OMB*, 28. Original wording: “*Es ist ein spezifisch Musikalisches. Darunter verstehen wir ein Schönes, das unabhängig und unbedürftig eines von Außen her kommenden Inhaltes, einzig in den Tönen und ihrer künstlerischen Verbindung liegt.*” *VMS*, 74.
- 5 “Robert Schumann has done much mischief with his statement ‘the aesthetics of one art is that of all the other; only the material is different.’” *OMB*, 2. Original wording: “R.[obert] Schumann hat viel Unheil angestiftet mit seinem Satz ...: ‘Die Aesthetik der einen Kunst ist die der andern, nur das Material ist verschieden.’” *VMS*, 23. Cf. Robert Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker*, ed. Gerd Nauhaus (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1985), 1:43.
- 6 Hanslick was not the first to use this metaphor, but he was the one who established it in the history of philosophy of music, even though he did not have such an intention. For an overview of arabesque’s reception, see Wilfing, *Re-Reading Hanslick’s Aesthetics*, 131–34.
- 7 In the following quotations, the emphasis is always mine.

First edition of 1854:

How music is able to produce beautiful forms without a specific feeling as its content is already *formidably* illustrated for us by a branch of ornamentation in the visual art, namely arabesque.⁸ (OMB, 29)

In welcher Weise uns die Musik schöne Formen ohne den Inhalt eines bestimmten Affectes bringen kann, zeigt uns *recht treffend* ein Zweig der Ornamentik in der bildenden Kunst: die Arabeske. (VMS, 75)

Sixth edition of 1881 onwards:

How music is able to produce beautiful forms without a specific feeling as its content is already *to some extent* illustrated for us by a branch of ornamentation in the visual art, namely arabesque. (OMB, 29)

In welcher Weise uns die Musik schöne Formen ohne den Inhalt eines bestimmten Affectes bringen kann, zeigt uns *bereits entfernt* ein Zweig der Ornamentik in der bildenden Kunst: die Arabeske. (VMS, 75)

First edition of 1854:

Finally, let us think of this lively arabesque as the dynamic emanation of an artistic spirit who unceasingly pours the whole abundance of his inventiveness into the arteries of this dynamism. Does this mental impression not come *very close* to that of music? (OMB, 29)

Denken wir uns vollends diese lebendige Arabeske als thätige Ausströmung eines künstlerischen Geistes, der die ganze Fülle seine Phantasie unablässig in die Adern dieser Bewegung ergießt, wird dieser Eindruck dem musikalischen nicht *sehr nahekommend* sein? (VMS, 75)

Sixth edition of 1881 onwards:

Finally, let us think of this lively arabesque as the dynamic emanation of an artistic spirit who unceasingly pours the whole abundance of his inventiveness into the arteries of this dynamism. Does this mental impression not come [fairly] *close* to that of music? (OMB, 29)

Denken wir uns vollends diese lebendige Arabeske als thätige Ausströmung eines künstlerischen Geistes, der die ganze Fülle seine Phantasie unablässig in die Adern dieser Bewegung ergießt, wird dieser Eindruck dem musikalischen nicht *einigermaßen nahekommend* sein? (VMS, 75)

⁸ I replace “close” in Payzant’s translation with “formidably,” because he translates from the eighth edition of 1891.

The reason behind these changes was probably the critique of August Wilhelm Ambros (1816–76), who criticized arabesques for lack of spirit (the old formula “decoration + abstraction = lack of spirit”) by stating that “the sounding arabesque is similarly only just a witticism which bursts like a bubble on closer examination.”⁹ Ambros, however, was not the only one who criticized the arabesque. In this context, it is important to mention a letter of the Hegelian David Friedrich Strauß (1808–74) to Hanslick from 1855: “You have successfully proven that the starting point of musical creation is not an idea, but a melody, an inner singing, not a feeling. Whether the images of the arabesque and the kaleidoscope are well chosen, I have my doubts.”¹⁰

This revision of 1881 can be read, I think, in two different ways. The first one would mean that this metaphor was not as central for Hanslick himself as it became for his readers. At this point, it is important to underline that the arabesque does not represent the *whole* of “tonally moving forms” but is meant, if one takes a careful look at the text structure, to exemplify the form component. Then, in the three paragraphs succeeding the passage about the content of music, Hanslick explicates each of the three components form, movement, and sound. The image he uses for form is the arabesque, the image for movement the kaleidoscope, and the element of sound is elucidated by Hanslick’s critical remarks on Hegelian aesthetics and its severe “undervaluation of the sensuous” (“*Unterschätzung des Sinnlichen*,” *OMB*, 29; *VMS*, 76–77). Of course, since movement and form are intertwined, arabesque and kaleidoscope could be seen here as necessarily interdependent. In other words, that the arabesque comes first should not mean that it is the best analogy, followed by the kaleidoscope as the second best, but that both of them compose the big picture of “tonally moving forms.”¹¹

9 August Wilhelm Ambros, *Die Grenzen der Musik und Poesie: Eine Studie zur Aesthetik der Tonkunst* (Prague: Heinrich Mercy, 1856), 49. Original wording: “Die tönende Arabeske ist eben auch nur ein artiger Einfall, der bei näherer Prüfung wie eine Seifenblase zerplatzt.” Cf. Christoph Landerer, *Eduard Hanslick und Bernard Bolzano: Ästhetisches Denken in Österreich in der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Beiträge zur Bolzano-Forschung 17 (St. Augustin: Academia, 2004), 95. On Ambros’s reception of Hanslick’s aesthetics and critical writings in general, compare primarily Markéta Štědrónská, *August Wilhelm Ambros im musikästhetischen Diskurs um 1850*, Münchner Veröffentlichungen zur Musikgeschichte 75 (Munich: Allitera, 2015), 142–67; or (more briefly) Barbara Boitsits, “‘Tönend bewegte Formen’ oder ‘seelischer Ausdruck’: Zu einer musikästhetischen Streitfrage im 19. Jahrhundert,” *De musica disserenda* 2, no. 2 (2006): 43–52; and Markéta Štědrónská, “August Wilhelm Ambros und Eduard Hanslick in Wien: Das Schlusskapitel einer musikästhetischen Kontroverse,” *Musicologica Brunensia* 52, no. 2 (2017): 71–83.

10 Original wording: “daß der Anfangspunkt des musikalischen Schaffens nicht eine Idee, sondern eine Melodie, ein inneres Singen, nicht ein Fühlen ist, scheint mir von Ihnen schlagend bewiesen zu sein. Ob dabei die von Ihnen gebrauchten Bilder der Arabeske und des Kaleidoskops glücklich gewählt sind, möchte ich bezweifeln.” Strauß’s letter is quoted according to Dietmar Strauß, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen: Ein Beitrag zur Revision der Ästhetik in [sic] der Tonkunst; Teil 2: Eduard Hanslicks Schrift in textkritischer Sicht* (Mainz: Schott, 1990), 103. Note that it is due to this letter that Hanslick introduces the metaphors of the human body and the landscape in the edition of 1858. Cf. *ibid.*, 102–3.

11 I owe this remark to Christoph Landerer.

Thus, Hanslick used the arabesque metaphor as a mere analogy and not as a theoretical term. So revising it did not cost him anything after all. The revision was a polite gesture towards an old friend (Ambros) or a manifestation of tact towards an influential critic (Strauß)—in accordance with the Austrian mentality of consensus. The second reading would mean that Hanslick realized that something was problematic or even had gone wrong with this metaphor. Should this be the case, why then not omit it completely? But he might have thought as well that the arabesque was important enough to keep. We cannot know.

Here, I would like to take Hanslick's revision as a point of departure to defend this metaphor from a new perspective. For this reason I engage in a close reading of the arabesque passage, asking two seemingly unorthodox questions: (a) what kind of arabesque do we encounter there, and (b) does the arabesque fit the sublime better than the beautiful?

Between the Sublime and the Beautiful

Before attempting a close reading of the arabesque passage, we will need to make a distinction concerning the typology of arabesques. To my knowledge, the discussions of Hanslick's arabesque do not ask whether his description applies to a certain type of arabesque; instead they address the arabesque in general. The reason is quite obvious: if Hanslick does not make any distinction between different types of arabesque, why should interpreters do so?

A reason why Hanslick does not discuss the typology of arabesques could be that the relevant discussions were out of date.¹² The absence of a distinction here may provide a further argument that the arabesque was not as central for Hanslick as it became for his commentators, and that it became even less across the revised editions. Here, it is crucial to recall that the positive thesis of Hanslick about the content of music as “tonally moving forms,” for which the analogy with the arabesque stands, comes second to the negative thesis, namely that “from all the customary appeals to feeling, we can derive not a single musical law” (“daß man aus all den üblichen Appellationen an das Gefühl nicht ein einziges musikalisches Gesetz ableiten kann,” *OMB*, xxii; *VMS*, 10). That also carries consequences for the centrality of the analogy. In other words, the “slightness,” as Fred Everett Maus characterizes it,¹³ of the positive thesis could also mean a “slightness” of the analogy for the positive thesis.

12 Bhogal writes: “By the time Hanslick theorized the arabesque in 1854, this ornament was no longer involved in the struggle of boundaries between centre and frame as it had been with Goethe and Kant, nor was it caught up in the complexities of its own making as it was with Schlegel.” Bhogal, *Details of Consequence*, 70–71.

13 Fred Everett Maus, “Hanslick's Animism,” *Journal of Musicology* 10, no. 3 (1992): 275.

Nevertheless, for a full appreciation of the arabesque metaphor, I think we should at least consider such a distinction. The literature on arabesques distinguishes between two types of arabesque: a *relative* and an *absolute* one.¹⁴ The first is a decorative ornament that often frames a central pictorial element. The second is a self-contained abstract ruling as the ornaments of oriental art. But there also seem to be hybrid forms undermining the strict iconoclasm of the arabesque figure, in which framing elements make contact or even fuse with the pictorial body.¹⁵

Let us now read the arabesque passage from the third chapter of *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* to see which type corresponds better to Hanslick's description.

We follow sweeping lines, here dipping gently, there boldly soaring, approaching and separating, corresponding curves large and small, seemingly incommensurable yet always well connected together, to every part a counterpart, a collection of small details but yet a whole. Now let us think of an arabesque not dead and static, but coming into being in continuous self-formation before our eyes! How the lines, some robust and some delicate, pursue one another! How they ascend from a small curve to great heights and then sink back again, how they expand and contract and forever astonish the eye with their ingenious alternation of tension and repose! There before our eyes the image becomes grander and more sublime. Finally, let us think of this lively arabesque as the dynamic emanation of an artistic spirit who unceasingly pours the whole abundance of his inventiveness into the arteries of this dynamism. Does this mental impression not come close to that of music? (*OMB*, 29)¹⁶

For the most part, this passage could apply to both types of arabesque—and the hybrid forms as well. It is all about dynamic movement, alteration, and repose

14 Wilfried Secker, "Arabeske," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, ed. Gert Ueding (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992), 1:848. The contrast between absolute and relative has been also expressed as center and frame, ergon and parergon.

15 See, for example, the work of the German early romantic painter Philipp Otto Runge (1777–1810), perhaps best exemplified in 1834 by Carl Julius Milde (1803–75) in his *Weiblicher Akt in einer Ranke* ("Female act within a tendril"). I have here in mind the paper of Maus, "Hanslick's Animism." Maus emphasizes the latent sensuality of the passage, linking it to an erotic act. In this context, arabesque as a ballet figure might be also taken into account.

16 Original wording: "Wir erblicken geschwungene Linien, hier sanft sich neigend, dort kühn emporstrebend, sich findend und loslassend, in kleinen und großen Bogen correspondirend, scheinbar incommensurabel, doch immer wohlgegliedert, überall ein Gegen- oder Seitenstück begrüßend, eine Sammlung kleiner Einzelheiten, und doch ein Ganzes. Denken wir uns nun eine Arabeske nicht todt und ruhend, sondern in fortwährender Selbstbildung vor unsern Augen entstehend. Wie die starken und feinen Linien einander verfolgen, aus kleiner Biegung zu prächtiger Höhe sich heben, dann wieder senken, sicher erweitern, zusammenziehen und in sinnigem Wechsel von Ruhe und Anpassung das Auge stets neu überraschen! Da wird das Bild schon höher und würdiger. Denken wir uns vollends diese lebendige Arabeske als thätige Ausströmung eines künstlerischen Geistes, der die ganze Fülle seiner Phantasie unablässig in die Adern dieser Bewegung ergießt, wird dieser Eindruck dem *musikalischen* nicht einigermaßen nahekommend sein?" *VMS* 8/1881, 75.

of lines that proceed forward and backward, interacting with each other. Yet a sentence here does make a difference: “a collection of small details but yet a whole.” These few words could only apply to the second type, which is an autonomous whole, and, of course, only the second type could be a model for autonomous, purely instrumental music. The first type cannot constitute a whole, even though it provides a perfect image for the symmetrical or the rhythmical element of music.

However, symmetry does not suffice for a coherent whole. Arabesques are *symmetrical*, but they are not *harmonious* in the sense of conveying a meaning which can be understood and communicated, an enlivening of cognitive powers, or reconciliation with the world, that is, in the sense of the classical triad of the true, the good, and the beautiful, in the sense of a unity. This is exactly the point where arabesques seem to fail, something that seems to have been common knowledge at the end of the eighteenth century. As Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), Karl Philipp Moritz (1756–93), and Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) pointed out, the main feature of arabesques is that *Mannigfaltigkeit* (manifoldness) predominates over *Einheit* (unity).¹⁷ This is of utmost importance, since the beautiful is constituted in the reverse way: unity predominates over manifoldness. A common leitmotif in the definitions of the beautiful is unity in manifoldness (or variety, multiplicity). The relation between unity and manifoldness is not that of an antagonism—the antonym of manifoldness is uniformity. However, in the relation between the two categories there is a primacy of unity, because it is this category that transcends manifoldness, the category towards which manifoldness is directed. Manifoldness without unity would mean chaos.¹⁸

Considering this, an arabesque as an image for the beautiful becomes fragile. But Hanslick does not feel obliged to uphold a classical notion of the beautiful. He merely wants to underline the moment of autonomy, to emphasize that the “musically beautiful” has to be understood in intrinsic terms, from an “inner-musical” and not an “extra-musical” perspective. However, that does not change the fact that the association between the arabesque and the beautiful is highly problematic because of the reverse relation between manifoldness and unity.¹⁹ If,

17 Günter Oesterle, “Arabeske,” in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: Historisches Wörterbuch*, ed. Karlheinz Barck et al. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2010), 1:273.

18 For an overview of the relation between unity and manifoldness, see Klaus Konhardt, “Mannigfaltige, Mannigfaltigkeit,” and Werner Strube, “Mannigfaltigkeit, ästhetische,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer, and Gottfried Gabriel (Basel: Schwabe, 1980), 5:731–35 and 735–40.

19 Hanslick still operates within the discourse of the beautiful, albeit differentiated, for, after all, he (a) takes his notion of the beautiful from a figure of the plastic arts and (b) always takes for granted that music is a beautiful art (*schöne Kunst*). On this point, see also Lothar Schmidt, “Arabeske: Zu einigen Voraussetzungen und Konsequenzen von Eduard Hanslicks musikalischem Formbegriff,” *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 46, no. 2 (1989): 117.

for this reason, the “musically beautiful” distances itself from a classical notion of the beautiful, what is it moving toward? In other words, is there a tendency towards the sublime?

“Seemingly Incommensurable” and “Innumerable Possibilities”

In the previous section we highlighted the predominance of manifoldness over unity as the main feature of the arabesque. This feature stands as an antipode for the beautiful, which is characterized by the reverse relation. In contrast, the sublime is an aesthetic discourse in which manifoldness may prevail over unity, in which apprehension outstrips comprehension.²⁰ In the mathematical sublime we encounter a magnitude, an amplitude, an extensiveness and incommensurability of forms impossible to grasp and therefore suggestive of infinity.²¹ If we now come back to the arabesque, can we then trace the mathematical sublime in the passage where Hanslick describes the arabesque?

Hanslick writes that the lines of the arabesque are “seemingly incommensurable.” In Hanslick’s logic the lines of the arabesque are *seemingly* incommensurable, meaning that at the end they are not; otherwise they could not form a whole. In other words, they are not and thus form a whole. However, a suspicious reader might think that what Hanslick acknowledges here is the fact that the lines of the arabesque are incommensurable, and at the very last moment he adds the adverb “seemingly” in order to be able to constitute a convincing whole. A convincing whole in terms of the beautiful would be a whole of limitation, whereas the whole in terms of the sublime would be a whole of limitedness, if we consider the Kantian distinction. In this respect, Hanslick’s expression “seemingly incommensurable” is extremely arbitrary because the whole he has in mind is a limited whole, a whole in terms of the beautiful. Here we have, I believe, a perfect manifestation of what Joseph Vogl calls *Zaudern* (“hesitation” or “prolonged hesitation”), a kind of trembling movement that exceeds the negative indecisiveness we often attest to hesitation but emerges as a dynamic ambiguity that creates an open reflective space.²²

The same reader could draw the conclusion that Hanslick relativizes the fact that both arabesque and instrumental music fit the sublime better than the beautiful. This suspicious reader could equally claim that it is not the lines that are

20 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 135.

21 Kant’s prominent example for the mathematical sublime is the overwhelming effect on a spectator entering St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome (*ibid.*, 136). The abundant arabesque in the dome of Alhambra’s Court of the Lions produces a similar effect.

22 For this term, see Joseph Vogl, *Über das Zaudern* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2007).

“seemingly incommensurable” but that it is the impression of a whole that is feeble. Our reader may also think that every movement of arabesque lines is regressive, that these lines move towards an end which is a beginning as well and there is not a clue that this direction follows an inner necessity. The directions and the combinations of lines in arabesques seem to be random. To put it more simply: in arabesques there is no beginning and no end. If the arabesque forms a whole, then it is one of manifoldness rather than one of unity, and there are indeed arabesques that give the impression of a whole ready to explode every minute.

One may ask, so far so good, we may associate the arabesque with the mathematical sublime, but where is the equivalence to music?

The lines of the arabesque unfold forward and backward like melodies; the correspondence between different lines is like the correspondence between different melodies in harmonic relations.²³ The mathematical sublime here has to do with the ontological status of musical works, expressed, among other ways, in the infinite potential of melodies: the start and ending point seem random; a melody can be turned around, transformed, varied, put in various—even contradicting—contexts and genres, played by different instruments and by instruments of various cultures.²⁴ This potential is perhaps best exposed by the late Wilhelm

23 The type of movement that connects arabesques and music is repetition. However, to consider repetition only under the denominator of the decorative as a mere manner of filling empty space, as Peter Kivy suggests in *The Fine Art of Repetition: Essays in the Philosophy of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), would do injustice to the profound meanings of repetition, which can be an abundance in terms of the sublime or the regulative modality of unity and multiplicity or a consolidation of the repeated pattern, the musical pattern, or the musical idea as remembrance and internalization (*Erinnerung* as *Verinnerlichung*), just to mention three possibilities. Not to forget as well that in the oriental world, the cultural realm of the absolute arabesque, there is no such thing such as low or high art, art with “A” or with “a.” The ennoblement of the decorative arts by the comparison with absolute music that Kivy tactically postulates (*ibid.*, 348) seems to lack validity since it starts from false premises. By taking his Persian carpet as a guideline, Kivy moves in the (opposite) direction of absolute arabesque, while he wants to defend the relative version. I thank Alexander Wilfing for making me aware of Kivy’s discussion of the arabesque in *Fine Art of Repetition*.

24 The abundance music produces is mentioned in many passages of *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, e.g.: “The material out of which the composer creates, of which the *abundance* [my emphasis] can never be exaggerated, is the entire system of tones, with their latent possibilities for melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic variety. *Unconsumed and inexhaustible* [my emphasis], melody holds sway over all, as the basic form of musical beauty. Harmony, with its transformations, inversions, and augmentations, provides always new foundations.” *OMB*, 28. Original wording: “Das *Material*, aus dem der Tondichter schafft, und dessen Reichthum nicht verschwenderisch genug gedacht werden kann, sind die gesammten *Töne*, mit der in ihnen ruhenden Möglichkeit zu verschiedener Melodie, Harmonie und Rhythmisirung. Unausgeschöpft und unerschöpflich waltet vor Allem die *Melodie*, als Grundgestalt musikalischer Schönheit; mit tausendfachem Verwandeln, Umkehren, Verstärken bietet ihr die *Harmonie* immer neue Grundlagen.” *VMS*, 74. However, this feature is not linked with the ontology of musical works or brought into connection with the mathematical sublime. It is merely a distinctive feature of the art of music, upon which Hanslick does not further elaborate.

Dilthey (1833–1911) in his unpublished fragment “Das musikalische Verstehen” (“On Understanding Music”):

And what it is that we are in fact perceiving? Parts of a whole, unfolding in time. In each of these parts, however, there is what we call a “tendency” at work. One note follows another, or accompanies it according to the laws of our musical system; but within that system there lie innumerable possibilities, and it is in the direction of one of these possibilities that music progresses, in such a way that earlier musical events are qualified by those that come later. The rising phrases of a melody appear to flow in the same direction. In such a case those phrases that appear later are conditioned by those that have gone before, but in the case of, say, one of Handel’s rising melodies, what appears latest is at the same time rooted in what came first. Similarly the falling line of a melody moves towards its conclusion, which both conditions it, and is conditioned by it. In every case all possibilities remain open. Nowhere is there a necessity in this conditioning. The situation resembles a free agreement between figures moving first towards, and then away from each other. There is never a suggestion of our knowing why the second phrase of a melody follows the first precisely as it does, with precisely this new harmonic nuance, or re-shaped into precisely this variant, ornamented with this figure rather than any other. There is no kind of necessity that determines why these things should be precisely as they are: they are thus a realization of an aesthetic value; and there is no feeling of necessity, in any particular passage, compelling one idea to follow another: what in fact follows could have been something else.²⁵

25 Wilhelm Dilthey, “On Understanding Music,” in *Music in European Thought 1851–1912*, ed. Bojan Bujčić, Cambridge Readings in the Literature of Music (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 371. Original wording: “und was gewahren wir da? Teile eines Ganzen, die in der Zeit vorwärts sich entwickeln. Aber in jedem Teil ist wirksam, was wir eine Tendenz nennen. Ton folgt auf Ton und tritt neben ihn nach den Gesetzen unseres Tonsystemes; aber innerhalb desselben liegen unendliche Möglichkeiten, und in der Richtung von einer derselben gehen die Töne so vorwärts, daß die früheren bedingt sind durch die späteren. Die aufsteigenden Glieder der Melodie seien etwa gleichlaufend. Da bedingt das frühere Glied das spätere, aber etwa in der letzten einer der aufsteigenden Melodien eines Werkes von Händel liegt zugleich die erste begründet. Und ebenso die absteigende Linie strebt dem Schlußpunkt zu, ist durch ihn bedingt und bedingt ihn doch wieder. Überall freie Möglichkeit. Nirgends in diesem Bedingen eine Notwendigkeit. Es ist wie ein freies Einverständnis sich zustrebender und wieder abwendender Gestalten. Kein Gedanke, daß wir irgend etwas davon wüßten, warum ein zweites Glied gerade so auf das erste folgt mit dieser neuen Nuance der Harmonie oder umgesetzt in diese Variation, ausgeschmückt mit dieser Figur. Das Sosein-Müssen darin ist nicht Notwendigkeit, sondern es ist Realisation eines ästhetischen Wertes; und kein Gedanke, daß an einer bestimmten Stelle, was folgt, nicht auch anders kommen könnte.” Wilhelm Dilthey, “Das musikalische Verstehen,” in *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, ed. Bernhard Groethuysen, Wilhelm Dilthey: Gesammelte Schriften 7 (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), 220–24. Another translation of the fragment is to be found in *Wilhelm Dilthey: Selected Works*, vol. 3, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof

If we return to the contrast between manifoldness and unity, the main feature of the arabesque, we may see that in this very general description of instrumental music by Dilthey the moment of manifoldness prevails. It is certainly not a coincidence that in the first sentence of the above passage Dilthey writes “parts of a whole” instead of “a whole.” However, it is not that Dilthey operates with a contrast or denies unity. It is all about the idea that the unity of the musical artwork is random; it is one of many possibilities. There is not a necessity as a condition. It is a free arrangement of forms only inside the logic of a tonal system. What Hanslick writes about the lines of an arabesque is very similar to what Dilthey writes about melodies. There is a notion of the melody as a structural relation that has no clearly contoured beginning and end and always moves away from a central position. And, more importantly, Dilthey speaks of innumerable possibilities. Perhaps we could say that for Dilthey these innumerable possibilities constitute the “musically beautiful.” This feature leads to a notion close to the mathematical sublime. And these innumerable possibilities apply similarly to the lines of an arabesque. In sum, the arabesque is an indispensable metaphor for purely instrumental music because it provides a concrete visualization of the innumerable possibilities of melodies.

Conclusion

A close reading of the arabesque passage of *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* in comparison with Dilthey’s fragment “Das musikalische Verstehen” shows that, far from being a mere positive analogy for the aesthetic autonomy and the elementary features of musical works, Hanslick’s arabesque is a metaphor aiming at the core of purely instrumental music as an art form with an incommensurable arsenal of possibilities. The typology of arabesques centered upon the contrast between unity and manifoldness, with the predominance of manifoldness over unity, takes the arabesque as an image for the “musically beautiful” far from the classical notion of the beautiful and brings it close to the mathematical sublime. The “seemingly incommensurable” lines of the arabesque are to be understood, in Dilthey’s words, in terms of the “innumerable possibilities” of the melody.

Rodi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 241–45. The dating of the fragment is estimated at between 1906 and 1910. For Dilthey’s aesthetics of music, see Frithjof Rodi, “Das Paradigma der Musik in Diltheys Verständnis des Lebens,” in *Philosophischer Gedanke und musikalischer Klang: Zum Wechselverhältnis von Musik und Philosophie*, ed. Christof Asmuth, Günter Scholz, and Franz-Bernhard Stammkötter (Frankfurt: Campus, 1999), 127–39; Michael Batz, *Der Rhythmus des Lebens: Zur Rolle der Musik im Werk Wilhelm Diltheys*, Epistemata Philosophie 497 (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011); and Hiroko Nishida, “Heinrich Schenker’s ‘Intramusical’ Hermeneutics: A Comparison of the Hermeneutics of Hermann Kretzschmar and Wilhelm Dilthey,” *Aesthetics* 16 (2012): 53–65.

The very hesitation that underlies the expression “seemingly incommensurable” might have been the first step towards the later revisions of the arabesque passage and the relativization of the arabesque metaphor. What if Hanslick had instantly realized that his description of the arabesque would fit the sublime better than the beautiful? Perhaps he was conscious of the sublime but equally aware that such an association would lead him to paths he was not willing to take or unforeseen paths that would lead to aesthetic prejudices. But Hanslick might have not thought of the sublime at all or, at least, not in opposition to the beautiful. The contrast between the sublime and the beautiful, the acknowledgment of the sublime as a distinct aesthetic discourse, is far from self-evident, since the sublime may very well be considered a sub-moment of the beautiful or inseparable from the beautiful.

Hopefully, our close reading of the arabesque has provided a good starting point for a discussion on whether Hanslick’s essay contains other implications of the sublime of and in music. That could mean a new challenge for Hanslick scholarship.²⁶

26 I would like to thank the editors for both the invitation to participate in a volume among Hanslick scholars and their careful and productive comments.