

Irreality of a Work of Music in Phenomenological Aesthetics

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In the thoughts on the character of music the idea of musical immateriality has gained some tradition, when sound for us is something which is not ascribed to an object because sounds used by music are independent of the material source. Thus the meaning carried by music, although it cannot be named, does not consist in the “property of this violin”. That would bring us to the violin, which, however, was made in order to produce that sound. The sound thus breaks the umbilical cord with its originator and travels to my organ of hearing. Naturally, I cannot touch and see the sound because it is an object accessible to the hearing only. But how is determined what I can hear? What kind of thing it is when I even do not know where it is? A music sound cannot be seized although it is linked with matter. Its way to a sensual impression is now relatively well proved in physiology. But that is not the whole problem. European culture arrived at a specific music form, a work of music, in which, independently of it, its “performance” is common. What is heard at a concert is not identical with the work, which means that the work requires from the listener a certain finishing of the sounds, a sort of abstraction of the work which is constantly valid, in spite of the plurality of its performances. Already in the beginnings of phenomenology, which developed after the publication of Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*, interest in the conception of the work of music can be registered.

It first appeared in a fairly widely and generally conceived study, *Der ästhetische Gegenstand*,¹ written in 1908 by Husserl’s pupil **Waldemar Conrad** (1878–1915), who formulated there the principles of the phenomenological approach to an aesthetic object and who dealt with each art form. He takes music for an ideal object which we as “das ‘gemeinte’ Kunstwerk”² want to define in its substantial properties, “wenn wir also diesen idealen Gegenstand, ‘die Symphonie’, uns ‘näher’ bringen und auf Grund von adäquater

¹ Waldemar Conrad, “Der ästhetische Gegenstand”, *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 3 (1908), p. 71–118.

² *Ibid.*, p. 78.

Anschauung Wesenseigenschaften von ihm mit Evidenz aussagen”.³ Conrad thus contrasts an individual, concrete thing with a real existence and an ideal object. Since, however, he speaks of the proximity toward the work, of the aesthetic experience – acts which for instance a symphony “deutlicher und deutlicher vor Augen führten”⁴ and thus become a basis for aesthetic evaluation, it is obvious that Conrad counts with the presence of the work in the form of its performance as it is perceived in a particular moment. Only in the perception of an aesthetic object it is possible to speak of focusing on the essential features of the work. Not all features of an aesthetic object of course form a work of art. Some are irrelevant and can vary in different performances. Conrad includes them in the “sphere of irrelevance”. The movement on their boundary is then seen in terms of a greater or smaller perfection of the performance, even though he does not specify the consequences for the work or its aesthetic seizing. Next he thinks about there being various typical extents for a work of non-relevant deviations, depending on the type of music, so that it is possible to think of such borders of irrelevance that would characterize for instance a music genre whereas within it greater generality and thus also a wider range of irrelevance is involved. In this Conrad literally “prescribes” the desirable perception, which also “weist sich doch wieder auf jene fundamentale Eigenart des ästhetischen Gegenstandes hin, ‘Aufgabe’ zu sein, einen vorgeschriebenen ‘Standpunkt’, vorgeschriebene ‘Auffassungen’ zu besitzen”.⁵ Perhaps the orientation toward the natural thing is of the same quality because the thing enables the changeability of the positions, whereas in an aesthetic subject one position must be “fixed”. Here Conrad probably has not in mind the phenomenon of adumbration, i.e. gradual appearing of the object of exterior spatial perception, but he means within this frame an already valid limited frame in the system of perceived references required by the thing. Consequently, the phenomenon itself of course disappears, which also follows from the immaterial, ideal character of the work of music.

The ideal character of a work of music was also presumed by the founder of phenomenology himself, **Edmund Husserl** (1859–1938), whose later writings contains a few remarks on works of art and on cultural and spiritual products. He regards each of them as unreal objects because they have no identity based on their spatiotemporal dating. Then for real being one could regard “*all that which, in real things in the broader sense, is, according to its sense, essentially individualized by its spatiotemporal position; but we call unreal every determination which, indeed, is founded with regard to its spatiotemporal appearance in a specifically real thing, but which can appear in different realities as identical – not merely as similar*”.⁶ Husserl’s definition is thus fundamentally based on the polarity of performance and the work itself, because there exists the possibility (and necessity) of passing with the intended significance, here and now, to the identity, which does not consist merely of the properties of the music as it sounds and which simultaneously cannot be perceived

³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgement* (Evanston, 1973), p. 265–266.

with such a degree of abstraction from the fundamental features, which would enable a replacement by another object (as for instance using any cup when I want to drink). Thus in physical things we look for similarities which usually show their identical, more general properties. But what appears as an individual performance must be absolutely identical. Thus against what “in things is embodied as such”,⁷ is put the spiritual form of ideal objectivities in the world, which of course also “in its way has an objective existence but only by means of these two-layer repetitions, finally those that embody sensually”.⁸ The ideal objectivity is thus objectivized in a thing that can be seized by senses, “is certainly ‘embodied’ in the real world, but it is not individualized by this embodiment”.⁹ Husserl, however, distinguishes free and bound idealities. Free idealities are “omnipatial and omnitemporal”.¹⁰ Bound idealities are bound to the real world, are linked with history or place, etc. Husserl believes that in the end every ideality must have a certain anchoring in the real world if for no other reason than that it was revealed, discovered somewhere at some time. Husserl’s description has an enormous disadvantage because it relates to a great many realities which are mostly called the cultural and spiritual world, where language, science, and art are found, each being much different. But it is possible to appreciate that Husserl expressed his standpoint to music in a clear way, so that it can be deduced that his thoughts involve music when he directly speaks of it: “this etching, the etched picture itself, is seen in each print and in each it is given in the same way as an identical ideality. On the other hand an etching exists in the real world only in the form of a print. Similarly we will speak of Kreutzer’s sonata in contrast to its random reproductions. Although it consists of tones, it is an ideal unity and its tones are no less this unity... So like the whole, its part is also something ideal, which becomes the real *hic et nunc* only through the real singularization.”¹¹ In his relation to music, Husserl keeps a heavy polarity of the ideal and the real.

The aspect of aesthetic perception with many of its consequences for an analysis of a work of music was introduced by **Roman Ingarden** (1893–1970).¹² Ingarden’s views of a work of music can be used as a symbol of his departure from Husserl’s philosophy due to the increasing role of the transcendental subjectivity in his work. In a discussion with Conrad Ingarden refuses to accept a work of music as an ideal object. The reason is that a work of music has a historical point of origin that can be established in the mind (in intentional acts) and so it does not exist outside the space and time of the real world although at the moment of its origin it will cross its historical dating and will be

⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Krise evropských věd a transcendentální fenomenologie* [Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology] (Prague, 1996), p. 387.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 387–388.

⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgement* (Evanston, 1973), p. 266.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

¹¹ Edmund Husserl, *Formální a transcendentální logika* [Formal and Transcendental Logics] (Prague, 2007), p. 39.

¹² Roman Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of its Identity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986).

manifested merely as an object intended through its performance but different from the performance. Thus it stands behind the multitude of its performances and Ingarden defines in what way it happens. The work is an invariant, of course not a completely defined structure, with a quasi-temporal character. It is thus a system of temporal relations, which, however, does not enter the real time, unlike the performances which make the work concrete. While Conrad in connection with the identity of the work spoke of the sphere of irrelevance, Ingarden spoke of places of indeterminacy. It belongs to the work which is defined by its schematic ontic base, the score, though of course not defined completely. The advance over Conrad is in particular the historically variable identity of the work, which is due not merely to the lack of options provided by the musical recording but is also a factor in adapting the work to variable historical norms, giving it a chance of life. Each performance makes possible a reconstruction of the work and the experiencing of this concretized work proceeds as experiencing the constituted aesthetic object, which has a particular form. Historically variable norms determine the similarly variable form of the ideal aesthetic object, which represents the aesthetically most valuable filling of places of indeterminacy. So while Conrad thinks of the maximum approximation of a particular aesthetic object to the substance of the work, Ingarden puts above this goal the historical variability of the ideal, which of course on principle he acknowledges. Ingarden insists on the non-ideality of a work of music but it is obvious that the work of music in his conception is unreal. He says that it is “purely intentional”, that is there is no intentional seizing of the real object but the constituting of the object through a real object. Further it is clear that the performance of a work of music is also an intentional object, or in the words of Husserl, “the real song itself is ... the intentional object of the hearing”.¹³ The consequences of the manner of the existence of the work in relation to its performance, conceived by Ingarden, and in contrast to it by Husserl or Conrad, are thus almost identical, although the terminology of the aesthetic object is naturally more suitable for the description of the work as it is given in experience, which is a standpoint showing greater sensitivity toward the artistic sphere, rich in experience. Moreover, many passages devoted by Ingarden to the description of the performance of a work of music can be regarded as a description of the work itself, as it was demonstrated by Ellen Jacobs¹⁴ who claims that Ingarden’s interesting analysis can be better applied to the performance. Both are intentional objects (works, aesthetic objects).

A distinct division between the performance as a real object and the work as an ideal object was done by **Alfred Schütz** (1899–1959). The relation between the score (but also the performance of the work) and the work of music is for instance similar to a lecture and a scientific theory, the real objects of which represent “indispensable means for com-

¹³ Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis, Lectures on Transcendental Logic* (Dordrecht, 2001), p. 453.

¹⁴ Ellen Jacobs, *Toward an Ontology of Musical Works of Art* (Saint Louis, 1977), p. 159.

municating the musical or scientific thought”.¹⁵ The work itself, however, does not exist independently from these means of communication, and like Ingarden, Schütz points out the possibility of seizing the work in an inner hearing, independently from its performance or from the score (when for instance the composer keeps a work in his mind already before it was written). The further account by Schütz of course can face a similar objection as Ingarden’s interpretation because in it we fail to see any distinguishing between the validity of the work and its performance, implicitly he works with the aesthetic object bound to a particular work. In addition to the determination of the status of a work of music, Schütz thinks about its specific constitution: “the specific existence of the ideal object, ‘work of music’, is its extension in time; the specific constitution is a polythetic one”,¹⁶ which is a different formulation of what Ingarden calls an object lasting in time (the Husserlian temporal object). His thoughts of course can be of interest for the phenomenological perception of music (rather than of the work of music).

Great consequences for the experiencing of a work of music, as of an invariantly intended structure standing above its performances, as well as for the experience of one self are produced by the theory of art by **Jean-Paul Sartre** (1905–1980), outlined in one of his early works, *L’imaginaire*.¹⁷ Some of its conclusions are developed in his other philosophical writings. Sartre ascribes to art the character of imaginative consciousness. He is interested in it primarily in order to clarify the relationship between the being of the world and the being of consciousness, in the hope of contributing to general ontology. By this he moves away from the issue of art but on the other hand he offers a view which explains the intoxicating mystery of the entrance into a contact with a work of art. Sartre assumes that perceiving and imagining consciousnesses are two different states, mutually excluded, and “the images thus can be described only by an act of the second order, when the look turns away from the object and focuses on the manner in which the object is given”,¹⁸ is a reflection of the object. What appears in perception and in imagination, although based on the same object, is in a different relation to consciousness: “In the first case consciousness ‘meets’ a chair, in the second it does not.”¹⁹ If I perceive the object, I have it in front of me, when I imagine it, I have to make it present, bring it into my consciousness because the object itself is otherwise absent from consciousness. Perception of course is packed with a wealth of perceptive aspects by which a thing is presented, as it was described by Husserl in his theory of adumbration, and therefore it is constituted gradually only, on principle it is infinite. The imagination that is not awoken by what for me is an external object, is produced by an inner reason and cannot add anything to the object

¹⁵ Alfred Schütz, “Fragments on the phenomenology of music”, *Music and Man*, 2 (1976), p. 5–71, here p. 28. The text was written probably in 1948.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *L’Imaginaire* (Paris, 1940).

¹⁸ “Imaginace a imaginárno. Intencionální struktura obrazu”, *Estetika*, 6 (1969), p. 135–146, here p. 135. This article is a translation of parts from the first and the last chapter of Sartre’s *L’Imaginaire*.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

("an irreal object is distinguished by essential poverty"²⁰). Objects escape from the bonds of obligatory constitution because "they are viewed from several sides simultaneously."²¹ Sartre adds that objects present to imagination a particular position, which, however, is a random one and dissolves, or "it compresses each position of the elements of the object into an invariable form."²² This postulation of the so-called immanent perception (with intention focused on one's own experience) for the whole sphere of art is very audacious, for instance it does not explicitly assume such an aesthetic object, which, in the words of Ingarden, is a concretization of the work (a particular aesthetic object). In a similar way Husserl contrasted the work and the real object. In Sartre, aesthetically experienced and valuable is the work in itself, the irreal objective whole, not its representation or its animation: "Beauty is a value which can only be related to the imaginary and which is linked with the negation of the world in its essential structure."²³ "The artist wanted to create a set of real tones which would produce the manifestation of this irreality."²⁴ This shows the existentialist conclusion at which Sartre arrived, namely that man is endowed with freedom of consciousness, which in the end alienates him from the world.²⁵ Imaginative acts are of course merely a training for this movement: "Since imagination is a negation of the world from a particular aspect, the imaginative image can only appear *against the background of the world* and in unity with this world."²⁶ Moreover, persisting in the imaginary consciousness can bring the desirable transformation in experiencing oneself and the world: "In imagination even a total 'poverty of things' can satisfy the feeling. The feeling will neither be surprised or disappointed by them, nor guided by them."²⁷

We have discussed the conceptions of the character of a work of music which come from philosophers-phenomenologists. Husserl typically gives only a sketchy description of a work of music through general categories, into the description of which many realities can be substituted. Schütz thinks in a similar way but he defines the polythetic manner of the constitution of a work of music, which enables him to set it into the context of other arts, comparable to the work of music, and a fundamental description of its specificity may be attempted. Greatest similarity is to be found in Conrad and Ingarden, in whom the development of thinking Husserl – Conrad – Ingarden can be traced.²⁸ It could be

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 139.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

²⁵ In order to be able to posit the world, we have to be able to leave it (e.g. in acts of imagination), by which we of course negate the world: "so that consciousness can realize imagination it must with its substance escape from the world". (*Ibid.*, p. 142)

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

²⁸ Husserl's notes on works of music at that time were still unpublished. Conrad, however, as Husserl's pupil, could have known or derived them, due to their general character.

supported by the real (briefly indicated) dialogue of Ingarden with an older study by Conrad. In Sartre it is possible to think of a link between his hypothesis of the unadumbrated presentation of a work of music and Conrad's emphasis put on the requirement of a fixed standpoint when an aesthetic object is perceived. Sartre's thesis, however, appears to be hardly acceptable especially for visual art, which always served as a basis for Husserl in his explanation of the phenomenon of adumbration in perception, which Sartre thus drastically denies (in particular with respect to visual art). Still Sartre really searches for the experienced sense of art and that is a real phenomenological deed.

Translated by Jaroslav Peprník

Die Irrealität eines musikalischen Werkes in der phänomenologischen Ästhetik

Zusammenfassung

Die Nicht-Existenz eines musikalischen Werkes in Form eines realen Gegenstandes basiert auf traditionellen ästhetischen Überlegungen, welche die Welt der Töne als etwas Entmaterialisiertes ansehen. Das hängt insbesondere damit zusammen, dass die in der Musik hervorgebrachten Töne, im Gegensatz zu anderen Sachen, nicht primär in ihrer räumlichen Lokalisierung zu erfassen sind, sondern dass sie als etwas, was sich in dem uns umgebenden Raum befindet, wahrzunehmen sind. Die Irrealität des musikalischen Werkes wird allerdings von der phänomenologischen Ästhetik fast mit derselben Gültigkeit für alle Arten der Kunst erklärt und stützt sich auf die Beziehung eines permanenten Wesens des Werkes zu seinen verschiedenen Vergegenwärtigungen in der Situation der Rezeption, resp. auf einen besonderen, dem Werk immanenten Charakter seiner Botschaft. Im Gegensatz zu Husserl, welcher die Musik für einen idealen, unter verschiedenen Umständen identisch erscheinenden, Gegenstand hielt, betonten Conrad und Ingarden, bei denen eine Meinungskontinuität zu verfolgen ist, eine fehlende endgültige Bestimmtheit des musikalischen Werkes, welcher erst Ingarden eine grundsätzliche Rolle für die Bestimmung der historischen Identität des Werkes und seiner Offenheit für Veränderungen im Bereich der Rezeption zuerkannte. Deren Standpunkt konzentriert sich auf das Verhältnis des Werkes zu einem ästhetischen Objekt, wobei Schütz die Problematik des Charakters des musikalischen ästhetischen Gegenstandes außer Acht lässt und sich mit seinem Inhalt und mit dem spezifischen Charakter des musikalischen Werkes als eines idealen Gegenstandes unter idealer Gegenständlichkeit als solchen auseinandersetzt. Conrad und Sartre stellen sich die Frage nach dem spezifischen Charakter der Rezeption des musikalischen Werkes: Conrads Betonung der Suche nach einem festen Standpunkt für die Wahrnehmung des Werkes und Sartres Auffassung des Kunstwerkes als eines Gegenstandes der Imagination bieten die Idee, dass das Wahrnehmen des Kunstwerkes in einem Modus des immanenten, an den eigentlichen Akt der Werkbeziehung orientierten

Wahrnehmens, vor sich geht. Nur für Ingarden ist das musikalische Werk nicht ein idealer Gegenstand, sondern er sieht darin einen rein intentionalen Gegenstand, wobei er den Aspekt der Genesis des Gegenstandes (Datierbarkeit seines Entstehens) und nicht den Charakter der Sinnkonstitution, die er im Unterschied zu dem idealen Gegenstand nicht einbezogen hat, berücksichtigt.

Irealita hudebního díla ve fenomenologické estetice

Shrnutí

Neexistence hudebního díla v podobě reálného předmětu se opírá o tradiční estetické úvahy, které tónový svět spatřují jako odhmotnělý. To souvisí zejména s tím, že zvuky, které hudba využívá, neuchopujeme primárně v jejich prostorové lokalizaci, jako jiné věci, nýbrž jako pobývající v prostoru, který nás obklopuje. Ireálnost hudebního díla je ovšem fenomenologickou estetikou vysvětlována s téměř stejnou platností pro všechna umění a opírá se o vztah stálé podstaty díla a jeho různých zpředmětnění v situacích recepce, resp. o zvláštní charakter sdělení, nesený dílem. Oproti Husserlovi, který považoval hudbu za ideální předmět zjevující se za různých okolností identicky, zdůrazňují Conrad a Ingarden, mezi kterými lze sledovat názorovou kontinuitu, nedourčenost hudebního díla, které teprve Ingarden přiznává zásadní roli pro určení historické identity díla a jeho otevřenosti pro změny v oblasti recepce. Jejich stanovisko se soustředí na poměr díla k estetickému objektu, zatímco Schütz opomíjí problematiku povahy hudebního estetického předmětu a zabývá se jeho obsahem a specifickou povahou hudebního díla jako ideálního předmětu mezi ideálními předmětnostmi vůbec. Conrad a Sartre si kladou otázku po specifické povaze recepce hudebního díla: Conradův důraz na hledání pevného stanoviště při vnímání díla a Sartrovo pojetí uměleckého díla jako předmětu imaginace nabízejí myšlenku, že vnímání uměleckého díla probíhá v modu imanentního vnímání, orientovaného k vlastnímu aktu vztažení k dílu. Pouze Ingarden nepovažuje hudební dílo za ideální předmět, nýbrž za předmět čistě intencionální, přičemž se opírá o aspekt geneze předmětu (datovatelnost vzniku) a nikoli o povahu konstituce smyslu, kterou odlišně od ideálního předmětu nepojal.

Keywords

Ideal object; intentional object; ontic status of a musical work of art; perception of music; immanent perception.