

Original Paper

The Relationship between Music and Philosophy in the Light of Gestaltism: Case of Music of Ahmed Malek

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Abstract

Music is not only a field of knowledge or an art but is also life which is considered as a philosophy. The purpose of this research is to show the relationship between music and philosophy in the light of Gestalt theory. In doing so, some musical pieces of the Algerian musician Ahmed Malek who left his fingerprint in the Algerian artistic field were selected and analyzed as a case study. The result shows that his music is composed of part-whole, a quality, and a dependency and is not made haphazardly but after a deep research, where the musical note MI recurs in all the performances except for one performance that represents the film "White and Black".

Keywords

music, philosophy, Gestalt theory, Algerian music, Ahmed Malek

1. Introduction

Music is expressive forms composed of a universal code shared by different people over the world. It is understandable by individuals although have different cultures. It can be described as a group of notes that can form a rhythm that goes on par with the culture of a particular community; at the same time is a hint to display the identity of different societies. People use it as a milestone to bring back their souvenirs, i.e., it is necessary for people to energize them and call back their very ugly or beautiful experience. This research grew out of some Algerian pieces of music that represent the suffering of the Algerian people during French colonialism and miserable life through many films, where the skeleton of music, though hinges upon musical notes that belong to the same range of the universal code, is unique and presents sadness of the Algerian people during the 50's, 60's and 70's. Two research questions are asked to investigate this survey.

- 1) Is there any relationship between music and philosophy?
- 2) Is the accompaniment of the music and film serendipity or a discovery due to a research?

The following hypotheses are presented to test the research questions.

- There is a relationship between music and philosophy
- The Algerian music is married with films to exhibit the suffering of people is not a coincidence.

The purpose of this survey is to delve into some pieces of Algerian music composed by the Algerian musician Ahmed Malek and show the impact of philosophy, mainly Gestalt theory on these pieces of music. In this vein, 9 pieces of music are explored and are as follows:

Children of November, *Awlad Nofamber*, *Omar gatlatou*, Leila and the Others, *Leila et les autres*, the Trip of Chwiter, *Rihlat Chwiter*, Barriers, *Alhawajiz*, Autopsy of a Conspiracy, *Tashrih Muamara*, the Out Laws, *alkharijounaniaqanoun*, Black and White, *kahladawa Bayda*, and Fire, *alharik*. This work comprises a literature review about music, music and philosophy, Gestalt theory, and mouth music, and a practical survey is dedicated to investigation, method, and data analysis.

2. Music

Thinking about music always comes very late, because music cannot be found in the three tenses; present, future and the past, instead it is discovered in the due course and evaporates with its last performance forever. Furthermore, even if music is recorded in a particular time or is placed in the archives or is reproduced by means of technical devices, it can appear again to impose itself. The idea behind all this is that music lives for and within itself as a concrete set of sounds and performances.

Music is different from literary writings, painting and artistic practices; the reason is that it does not leave behind any immediate concrete trace, it is, however, parallel to its performance, irrespective of time and space that are associated to the performance with regard to the listener.

Music is an independent area because only experts and musician can grasp it; it is the least descriptive of all arts. People are skeptical about whether the very huge amount of music is a sign or not, therefore it is very hard to decipher some musical messages such as electronic music. Youngsters' culture, for instance, is far behind understanding if one does not know about their musical taste; they have some traits regarding their styles of music. Augusto Ponzio, in this respect, argues that the world we are living in is about communication and communication production as well, in other words, we contribute, tremendously, to the commodification and consumption and circulation of the message and practice the model of addresser and addressee and the message directly or indirectly in all our activities of life. Because contrary to the message whose nature is creative and mental and is composed of meaning straight away when a person muses apropos of his communication, the need of production for consumption focuses on our preferences and functioning of the merchandise, i.e., it does not require profound thinking (Tarasti, 2002).

2.1 Music and Philosophy

There is a controversy among philosophers about music; nominalists argue that musical works are considered a group of performances and the label which is given to musical works is only the sketch of the categories composed of reducible pieces. So, all musical works are said to be fragmented pieces. This is debatable because musical works cannot be split into performances or pieces of performances. For instance, Beethoven's Fifth grew out of the symphony of Mozart and Haydn. Simply put, performances are assembled with regard to works. So, division of these performances implies the presence of performances and not the opposite.

Intriguingly, philosophers argue that musical productions are concrete and abstract at the same time; they are intangible if they are not conducted with performances or scores. Philosophy of Plato, for instance, sees that musical productions are universals, that is, music exists as figures in the sphere of the forms. To put it in another way, the notion of yellowness exists in sun, rainbow, and butterfly. So, to refer to the properties of these objects to get the idea of yellowness is gibberish because the concept precedes the object. Langer, in this respect, argues that a sign that represents something brings about the notion and not vice versa, i.e., the sky imports immediately to mind the notion of blue not the opposite. On the other hand other philosophers argue that musical works are created not discovered. The reason is that they are born when the composer chooses, suggests and recommends endless forms (Davies, 2005, p. 31). The valorization of musical works is debatable. Not many semioticians spoke about music as a sign. Umberto Eco, for instance, argues that music has a symbol but no meaning. The musical note LA is a good instance. Roland Barthes refers to the small units of music as the kinesthetic sense found in music. Claude Lévi-Strauss in turn states that music is obtained from language but is different from language in that this latter is composed of signifier and signified, while music is made of signifier only but the listener fills it with meaning which is inevitable (Tarasti, 2002, p. 5).

As for understanding music, some people argue that they understand, others not. Those who grasp it have to justify. The essence of this elegant debate regarding music reveals that when the listener accepts that music carries a sense, this is an alibi for his understanding of music. So, music bears a meaning but how to interpret this meaning? Meaning is to answer the others about our understanding regarding music, in other ways, what attracts us to appreciate. In the life-world a response for understanding music is to detect the change of musical notes in a particular musical performance. In addition, the extension of music can produce feeling thanks to the antecedent passage. People do not experience music only as a series of notes played by different instruments but go also to the progress and modification of its form. Simply put, understanding music hinges first and foremost on the possibility of justifying and not explaining (Davies, 2005).

2.2 Gestalt Theory

Christian von Ehrenfels is the founder father of Gestaltism. He has provided psychologists with instances regarding perceptual characteristics of objects labelled Gestalt quality that identifies the

whole (Rescher & Oppenheim, 1955, p. 94). Gestalt hinges upon three things; whole, quality and system. The whole is always made up of parts. This idea is omnipresent. Any attempt to think about the whole should incorporate the parts, in other words, some guidance is found for the construction of the whole. Kohler clarifies this by his following example: the collection of three pebbles from different places haphazardly cannot build a whole, although they are segments. Without let or hindrance here are the conditions for constructing a whole:

- The whole needs to have some trait with regard to its stand in the group; this trait is related to it.
- The segments need to have a reliance on themselves.
- The whole needs to have a structure specific to it.

In what follows an account for the above points is given:

The notion of trait identifies the particularity of the whole. Olive oil, for example, is composed of 6 major elements that are attached by the carbon atoms palmitic (6.30-20.93%), palmitoleic (0.32-3.52%), stearic (0.32-5.33%), oleic (55.23-86.64%), linoleic (2.7-20.24%), and linolenic (0.11-1.52%) (Aparicio & Harwood, 2013, p. 164).

The concept of reliance is presented by A. Myer who states that the floating pieces of cork with injected magnet needles exposed to a big magnet form circles with the same centre, in another way, their dependence on each other plays a significant role in forming this circle (Rescher & Oppenheim, 1955, p. 94).

The entire stands for the knitted set of organized bits. The structure of a coordinated whole is made up of segments, structure and task. To make it very clear, these three components are very necessary to construct the whole. The segments, position; whether located in first, mid or last position in terms of space or time, their task governs each part. Without further ado here an example to explain the notion of whole-part:

A musical performance is composed of tones considered as parts where the position of parts is known by the pauses between the tones and number of tones is taken as the duty (Rescher & Oppenheim, 1955).

2.3 Mouth Music

There are five formants which are referred to as F1, F2, F3, F4 and F5 (Connor, 1973, p. 71). They are places of resonances of speech sounds and voice of singing as well. They are like microphones or loudspeakers that bring about their sonority and like a violin box that causes two tones; a wood tone and air tone. Places of resonance in the mouth are similar to the aforementioned resonators in terms of generating sounds but different in terms of modifying speech and music because they are flexible, therefore are fundamental for speech since they change their dimension to produce the whole range of vowels and diphthongs as well (Robin, 2002).

3. Practical Survey

This work tries to examine some pieces of music composed by the Algerian musician and philosopher Ahmed Malek who is unique in his time, this is because he has the ability to compose wonderful pieces of music and play several musical instruments such as the flute, the piano and the violin. The pieces of music he composed represent the Algerian identity which can be felt through the Algerian films. We list some of them: *Children of November*, *Awlad Nofamber*, *Omar gatlatou*, *Leila and the Others*, *Leila et les autres*, *The Trip of Chwiter*, *Rihlat Chwiter*, *Barriers*, *Alhawajiz*, *Autopsy of a Conspiracy*, *Tashrih Muamara*, *The Out Laws*, *alkharijounianialqanoun*, *Black and White*, *kahladawa Bayda*, and *Fire*, *alharik*. Table 1 shows the name of the films in Arabic, their translation in English and the musical notes applied to each performance. The first musical performance which represents the film under the heading: *Awlad No famber*, contains 8 musical notes; LA, SOL, FA, MI, RE, DO, FA sharp and LA minor, the second performance of the film *Omar gatlatou* entails 7 notes; LA, DO, MI, DO, RE, DO and MI, the third performance that regards the film *Leila et les autres* comprises 10 notes; LA, RE, LA, RE, LA, MI, RE, DO, MI, and LA, the fourth performance that is related the film *Rihlat Chwiter* embraces 7 notes; MI, LA, RE minor, MI, RE, DO and SI. The fifth performance that evokes the film *Hawajiz* entails 9 notes; LA, FA, MI, LA, DO, RE, MI, LA, and MI. The sixth performance *tashrihmuamara* has 2 notes; LA and MI. The film *alkharijounianialqanoun*; the seventh performance is made up of 2 notes LA and MI. The film *kahlawabayda* is represented by the eight performance entails 8 notes; RE, DO, FA sharp, RE, DO, FA, SOL and LA. The ninth performance representing *alharik* is composed of 7 notes; FA, RE, DO, FA sharp, LA, SOL, MI.

Table 1. Representation of Films by Musical Notes

Name of the film in Arabic	Translation	Musical notes
<i>Awlad Nofamber</i>	Children of November	LA SOL FA MI RE DO FA sharp LA minor
<i>Omar gatlatou</i>	Omar gatlatou	LA DO MI DO RE DO MI
<i>Leila et les autres</i>	Leila and the others	LA RE LA RE LA MI RE DO MI LA
Rihlat Chwiter	The trip of Chwiter	MI LA RE minor MI RE DO SI
<i>Hawajiz</i>	barriers	LA FA MI LA DO RE MI LA MI
<i>tashrih muamara</i>	Autopsy of a Conspiracy	LA MI
<i>alkharijoun ani alqanoun</i>	the Out Law	LA MI
<i>kahla wa bayda</i>	Black and White	RE DO FA sharp RE DO FA SOL LA
<i>Alharik</i>	Fire	FA RE DO FA sharp LA SOL MI

4. Data Analysis

The above pieces of music have various expressive forms that are made of a combination of notes ranked within the range of the seven musical notes; DO RE MI FA SOL LA SI DO. We note that All these pieces of music contain one repeated musical note which is MI, except for the piece of music labelled *kahla w bayda* whose skeleton is made of RE, DO, FA sharp RE, DO, FA, SOL and LA, and the piece of music that represent the film of *alharik*.

As has been mentioned above, there are two types of music; music performed by the organs of speech and, mainly, by the five formants; referred to as **F1 F2 F3 F4 F5** and represent the places of resonance; larynx, pharynx, back part of the mouth, front part of the mouth and the nasals, and music performed by instruments that are adjusted to the places of resonance. The musical note MI that is repeated in all performances is produced by the nose and lips; it is a nasal bilabial consonant where the two lips are pressed together to block the air to pass from the oral cavity, i.e., the soft palate is lowered to allow the air to move freely from the nose and this is the sound used to express mourning, melancholy and sickness. Without let or hindrance, Table 2 displays the musical notes, their description and place of resonance involved.

Table 2. Description of Musical Notes

Musical notes	Description	Cavity
LA	Lateral alveolar	Oral cavity
RE	Post alveolar Approximant	Oral cavity
MI	Bilibial Nasal	Nasalcavity
DO	Alveolar plosive	Oral cavity labial cavity
FA	Labiodental fricative	Oral cavity
SOL	Alveolar fricative	Oral cavity and labial cavity
SI	Alveolar fricative	Oral cavity

The aforementioned pieces of music express the suffering of the Algerian people because they contain the musical note MI, thus the accompaniment of films with these musical performances is tailor made, i.e., the composition of these performances were not made randomly but with a profound thinking. The reason is that one's listening to these performances irrespective of films, one can bring back immediately all the events and the scenes that convey melancholy. Simply put, although these performances are seen as a whole, they can be fragmented into parts, quality and structure. The following example is a good demonstration of the point. Water and olive oil have the same structure, i.e., liquid, nevertheless are different regarding components and quality. While olive oil is composed of 6 major components that are attached by carbon atoms; palmitic, palmitoleic, stearic, oleic, linoleic and linolenic, water is made of oxygen and hydrogen. So, they are different in terms of components, colour and even structure; one dense and the other light. These musical performances, then, are special and are of the same type, i.e., although they belong to the same range of musical notes; DO, RE, MI, FA, SOL, LA, SI and DO, they are totally different from the other musical performances. Additionally, these Algerian performances are unique and are made up of combination of the seven musical notes and as a result give birth to a new style of music performance that represents the suffering of the Algerian people.

5. Conclusion

This paper tackled the philosophical notion of music and tried to investigate some Algerian pieces of music composed by Ahmed Malek; an outstanding figure of music who left his fingerprint in the Algerian art. The research talked about the following areas: music, music and philosophy Gestalt theory and phonetics, thus a practical study was applied where 9 pieces of music were examined and led to the following results:

- Musical performances are made of a combination of the seven musical notes.
- They are not composed as a coincidence but after a profound thinking.
- They have a quality, structure and whole-part.

- They are unique.
- They give birth to a new style of music performance that represents the suffering of the Algerian people.
- Music is an abstract thing because it is found in the sphere of the forms.
- Music is concrete because it is discovered and represented by forms and amalgamated by culture.

This research was merely an attempt to delve into the field of music and its relation with philosophy.

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