Department of Music

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Music in Plato's Laws

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Introductory Speech

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Hosting the Seminar for Greek and Roman Music is the Hellenic Music Research Lab, a semi-autonomous unit inside the Music Department of the Ionian University.

Each of the colleagues in the Lab deals with different aspects of Greek music, from antiquity to modernity - this meant in a temporal descriptive sense, i.e. without assuming any evolution or continuity narrative.

In a crucial sense, my activity as coordinator of the Seminar gains its full meaning only in the Lab framework: my principal field of research being Greek twentieth-century Avant-garde music and aesthetics, I find inspiration in ancient Greek ideas on music and on art; at the same time, the presence in Corfu each year of so many distinguished Greek music scholars makes up for the relative lack in the Lab of a Greek music scholar proper (with the exception of Andromache Batziou, who teaches 'Ancient Greek Music' in the Department)!

The rest of my talk aspires to offer an exemplification of this activity in the form of

THREE ROUTES TO AND FROM PLATO

a. The first route will get us from Arthur C. Danto thru Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz to Plato.

Step one is the so-called Principle of Indiscernibles:

> (PoI): '[…] if two things have all the same properties they are identical, and that identity means that, for every property F, *a* is identical with *b* |in case, whenever *a* is F, so is *b* (Danto 1981, 35).

Danto thought that the Leibnizian PoI is useful in dealing with works of art that are indiscernible with other 'things' which either are not works of art, like a. the Warhol and b. the grocer's Brillo boxes; or they look exactly like other works of art, at least in the 'properties that meet the eye' (*ibid.*), as in the famous Borges story about the *Don Quixote* by the fictional Pierre Menard. Well, they are clearly not identical, and this must be due to something that doesn't meet the eye; something invisible.

Danto's answer was a definition of a work of art that could be summarized as follows:

> [S]omething is a work of art if and only if (i) it has a <u>subject</u> (ii) about which it projects some attitude or point of view (has a style) (iii) by means of rhetorical ellipsis (usually

> metaphorical) (iv) which ellipsis engages audience participation in filling in what is missing, and (v) where the work in question and the interpretations thereof require an art historical context. […] (Adajian 2007).

Step two/a is the formulation of the PoI in Leibniz at the beginning of §9 of his *Monadologie*: 'Il faut même que chaque Monade soit differente de chaque autre'. Like Platonic ideas, the Monads are simple substances 'c'est à dire, sans parties'; moreover, they have neither 'étendue' nor 'figure' (§1), and it's inconceivable that such a simple substance can perish ((§4). Unlike Platonic ideas, however, a Monad, as every thing created, 'est sujet au changement' ((§10). Monads (and Souls) are metaphysical points; they are undivided and non-extended *but* real (whereas physical points are real but divided; geometrical points are undivided and ideal). Leibniz is capable of providing an individuation criterion for the *type* according to which Monads can be differentiated from one another: each one being a different *point of view* of the whole universe; but, admittedly, he could not describe exhaustively any particular Monad: only God can, i.e. only God has *complete notions*. That is so because no human can handle the volume of the 'petites perceptions' and apperceptions required in order to have a complete description of a Monad. For Leibniz, the PoI is designed to guarantee 'individuation without demonstratives' (Strawson 1959, 123).

Step B/b (deviation up to Strawson): According to Strawson, this can be most efficiently accommodated if one construes Monads as having 'the status of types or universals or concepts' (126). But Strawson proves that it still can't accomplish the task it has been assigned to, I repeat: to secure individuation without use of demonstratives, because demonstratives can be used only in the spatio-temporal world; Strawson's answer to Leibniz's Monads individuation problem is that they are not souls nor particular consciousnesses nor concepts, but PERSONS, taken as primary particulars (with consciousnesses as secondary particulars); persons, which combine both a seen (body) and an unseen (soul) aspect; this allows back the use of demonstratives in dealing with the individuation problem.

Step three, and the end of the route, is Plato. The basic characteristic of the Ideas or Forms is their simplicity. But for Plato, whilst every concrete particular is composite

and visible, an Idea is simple and invisible. 'And the invisible is always constant, whereas the seen is never constant?' (*Phaedo* 79.9). Leibniz, even if his Monads *a*re subject to change, described himself as a Platonist. This price he was willing to pay for defending his theory of the *innate ideas* without resorting, as Plato did (in *Phaedo*), to the cyclical argument and metempsychosis. Strawson's logically-motivated (as vs. theo*logically*) construal of Monads-as-persons, on the other hand, finds an even more elegant solution in taking up Leibniz's problem of building on his understanding of Platonic Ideas as souls; i.e. in identifying the Leibnizian Monad-notion with persons, consisting of both spatio-temporal *and* non-extended a-temporal; both visible and invisible aspects (exactly like a work of art!).

It seems to me, really, that Danto's brilliant move to use the PoI as a way out of the theoretical problems he had to deal with in his encounter with modern artworks in the likes of those by Andy Warhol, George Segal, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns etc. was in deed prepared by 'Strawson's Leibniz'.

b. The second route will take me from Vattimo thru Nietzsche to Plato.

Step one: Gianni Vattimo emphasized the re-discovery by Nietzsche of the Platonic account of art, and suggested the importance of this account to an assessment of Nietzsche's own philosophy and to aesthetic theory in general (see his "Arte e identitá" in his 2000 collection of essays devoted to Nietzsche).

Vattimo further uses this aspect in Nietzsche's thought as the Lydian Stone in order to assess modern readings of Nietzsche's philosophy (namely, by Derrida and Adorno). Especially Vattimo's Adorno-critique leads to interesting consequences in our understanding of the twentieth-century history of music: Adorno is famous, among other things, for overvaluing the 'progressive' Schoenberg and his school above all modern composers, and for undervaluing the 'reactionary' Stravinsky, in a monograph (the *Philosophie der neuen Musik*) that led many new composers to follow this 'progressivist' conception of history and was responsible, in a crucial way, for the serialist bloom of the post-war Darmstadt-style avant-garde (one might add: even for the serialist turn of Stravinsky himself!). An answer is due to Adorno and his followers; an answer based on the failure of Adorno to rise to the Nietzschean account

of the Dionysian element in art, because of his adherence to the authority of the humanistic, cultivated, bourgeois Subject (*das Kulturbürgertum*); in other words, a failure to see positively in Stravinsky one of *the most* Dionysian composers of the twentieth century.

Step two is Nietzsche. His writings on the 'battle between Dionysus and Apollo', and on its role in the formation of the 'tragic culture of the Greeks'; or on the Greek in comparison to the barbaric Dionysian element, were, of course, largely influenced – among other things- by his readings of (**Step three**) the relevant Platonic elaborations on *mania*, as something ranging from simply inebriation to poetic possession and the divine *mania* of the philosophers.

Platonic-Nietzschean features of art (*mania* and the Dionysian, together with purely Nietzschean themes as the Will to Power and the Superhuman, or the Eternal Recurrence) were important to a number of different artists and theorists in twentieth-century art. Nothing, however, can match the significance of the *mania* resulting to **disidentification** in art as the leading Platonic-Nietzschean notion.

c. **The third route** runs in the opposite direction and is more short and dense: it leads *from* Plato to Plutarch, then to Longinus, and Lucian.

Plato's link between art and madness was immediately forgotten, up to Nietzsche (see R2). Aristotle took up the notion of *mimesis* and made it a central notion of his theory of art; His is a harmless –in comparison to Plato's- art concept, wherein art is a vehicle to the good education of the young; the *bildung* of the Ideal Citizen. If we turn our look to later authors, like Plutarch**,** Longinus, and Lucian, the Platonic approach is not only forgotten, but literally turned on its head.

Step one: Plutarch writes that "future philosophers must not avoid poetry" (R&W, 194); contrary to Plato's rejection of imitation in the case of unworthy subjects, Plutarch finds that an imitation (be it in pictures or in words) of e.g. "Thersites the buffoon or Sisyphos the seducer or Batrachus the brothel-keeper" must not be judged by the *what,* but by the *how* of the imitation : "To imitate something beautif*ul* is not the same as to imitate it beautiful*ly*" (R&W, 198; my emphasis).

Step two: Turning to **Longinus** (irrespectively of matters of authorship and exact dating), things, as far as Platonic genealogy is concerned, get quite ironical: the Platonic philosophical argument against art because of the latter's link to madness, *is* forgotten; in fact, in *De sublimitate,* Plato is considered primarily as a *writer* (i.e., in a sense, as an artist), and a possible source of 'imitation' himself (for younger writers) in that, since the ideal-writer notion has acquired a new aspect (i.e. the emulation of *classic* writers); Moreover, Plato is considered to be the source of this very special path to the Sublime (Longinus gives as an example Plato's emulation of Homer!). In a simile that turns the gist of Plato's corresponding ring-simile on its head, Longinus speaks of classical poets as the 'oracular cavern' which produces the sublime effects on later authors, as does the actual cavern to Pythia. Finally, in being the target of critique as a writer on matters of style, Plato -Longinus tells us- is sometimes "ridiculed" by "people" as he is "often carried away by a sort of literary madness [here lies the irony] into crude, harsh metaphors or allegorical fustian" (R & W, 175). (Of course, earlier in the text 'madness' in a positive sense was an attribute of 'emotions' and thus could be used as a *via regia* toward the 'Sublime' (R & W, 150); the crucial thing, however, is that 'Plato', in this context, is not the philosopher that wants to claim reason's victory over art, on grounds of the latter's link to madness, but, quite on the opposite, he is construed as an artist, whose example sanctioned the 'imitation of the ancients' as a way to the Sublime and who sometimes gets "carried away" by an artist's madness (to the point of becoming the target of ridicule)).

Step three: Around maybe the same time, **Lucian** adopts a somewhat neutral theory of *mania* - 'neutral' because not clear, about its effect being good or evil - with a touch of sympathetic folk-medicine; There is nothing incompatible between philosophy and poetry or rhetoric, for Lucian. In fact, there is a straightforward *parallelism* between philosophy and music [cf. locus]. It must have been short after 150 AD that Lucian met in Rome Nigrinus the Platonic and became a lifelong admirer. Although Lucian's overall philosophic commitment is *not* straightforward, the dialogue named after him (*Nigrinus* Or *On philosophical character*) contains some outspokenly Platonic ideas –at least in origin- on *mania* (maybe, more common good than only Platonic, by the time of Lucian?!): Nigrinus, we are told, has succeeded in piercing his heart with his philosophical arrow and in pouring the right

quantity of *φάρμακον*; 'right' meaning: enough to make him feel a philosophical *eros* for Nigrinus; not every man is able to feel it, though: just like those in an audience who are able to enter a state of *mania* under the spell of a Phrygian *aulos*, only because they are already possessed by 'Rhea's spirit'; i.e. a similarity is posited as the prerequisite of mania coming about by way of sympathy! Moreover, Lucian's own *mania* is described as contagious to his interlocutor (example: like those bitten by, say, a dog with rabies). What is now left to Lucian and his friend? "We ought do what Telephus did.-Namely? –Go to him who wounded us and ask him to cure us".

Somewhere here my three routes come to an end. Please, forgive my being sentimental when, in declaring this Seminar officially started, I say that, being myself philosophically wounded each year for six years in a row, I return for the seventh time to be cured -as well as to be struck again – by your arrows!

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