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Music, metaphors and secondary meaning

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Abstract Scholars do not agree on whether descriptions of music in terms of emotions should be considered literal or metaphorical. I begin by introducing the intuitively convincing idea that emotion words apply metaphorically to music. After guaranteeing this approach the support of nominalism, I argue that it is still unable to ground expressive descriptions in musical properties. As an alternative, I present some literalist accounts based on resemblances and focus especially on the advantages of Contour theory. Although it manages to anchor expressive descriptions to the perceivable structure of music, Contour theory has difficulty in accounting for expressive descriptions of musical items that do not resemble any behavioural expression. In order to overcome this deficiency of the theory, I suggest that a combination of multi-dimensional theories of emotions along with the Wittgensteinian notion of *secondary meaning* helps to avoid the appeal to resemblances, thereby accounting in a literalist fashion for the application of emotions terms to musical objects that do not resemble human expressions.

0. Introduction

People often describe music by means of emotion words. This widespread habit crosses borders of expertise and those of culture. The jingle that accompanies a commercial might be described as sounding cheerful by a listener without 'trained' musical competence, but musicologists and composers also describe musical pieces in terms of emotions. Sometimes this kind of description refers to the capacity that a piece or a musical gesture has to elicit one's emotional reactions, such as the feelings of anxiety aroused by thriller movies' soundtracks, or the feeling of comfort provided by lullabies; some other times, however, descriptions of music in terms of emotions are intended to ascribe emotional qualities to the music itself – rather than to describe the feelings that music can elicit in listeners. I will call the latter "expressive descriptions", for they refer to the emotions or, more broadly, to the affective states that music allegedly *expresses*. What exactly justifies such descriptions and whether they are or not literal is a matter for philosophical debate. I will begin my argument by introducing the view that metaphors govern our expressive descriptions of music. I will then turn to strategies based on resemblances between music and emotions. After addressing some criticisms that have

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been levelled at this approach, I will suggest that these can be overcome by a combination of multi-dimensional theories of emotions and the Wittgensteinian notion of *secondary meaning*.

1. Expressive descriptions as metaphors

British philosopher Nick Zangwill has repeatedly claimed that expressive descriptions of music are *obviously* metaphorical, defending what he calls the Aesthetic Metaphor Thesis (Zangwill 2001, 2007, 2010, 2011). In short, he argues that describing a piece of music as joyful amounts to using the term "joyful" metaphorically instead of literally. Zangwill's view captures a plausible intuition: for a term to be used literally is for it to apply to something that possesses the related property. For the term "white" to apply literally to the snow, the snow should possess the property of "whiteness"; for the term "joyful" to apply literally to an object, this object must possess the property of "joy". Therefore, if something cannot be joyful because of its metaphysical nature – it cannot *feel* joy – then, it cannot be literally joyful.

Zangwill defends the Aesthetic Metaphor Thesis for expressive descriptions via two main sets of arguments. First, he endorses an overtly stipulative definition according to which an emotion is defined as a mental state with a certain qualitative character and distinctive rationalization, i.e., a specific relation to beliefs (Zangwill 2007: 393; 2011: 2). Therefore, if something neither has emotional mental states accompanied by distinctive qualitative characters, nor stands «in any obvious relation to something that has these characteristics» then the application of an emotion term to such an object must be considered metaphorical. (Zangwill, 2007: 393). Second, Zangwill derives his conception of how emotion terms are applied to music from his belief that most aesthetic descriptions are metaphorical. Let us consider the term 'delicate': taken literally, it refers to something liable to break. However, the philosopher notes, something that is *aesthetically* delicate need not be liable to break. The same holds for *aesthetically* "balanced" items as opposed to physically balanced ones. Thus, «Since "delicate," "balanced," "high," and "moving from note to note" are clearly metaphorical descriptions of music, we should treat 'angry' similarly» (Zangwill 2007: 392). So, Zangwill concludes, while «ordinary folk are right to use emotion descriptions when talking about music; the theorists are wrong in their literal understanding of those descriptions» (Zangwill 2007: 392).

By his own admission, Zangwill's anti-literalist account is neither supported by a specific theory of metaphor, nor by a specific theory of emotions.[1] This makes it objectionable on both counts. On the one hand, by considering metaphor as the application of a predicate to an object which is not *commonly* maintained to have the property to which such a predicate *usually* refers, the view sets extremely vague criteria to determine whether and to what extent an application is metaphorical. On the other hand, by stipulating an admittedly loose definition of emotion – that nevertheless fixes the necessary conditions for an emotion to be instantiated – the account overlooks more fine-grained theories of emotions that might challenge the approach. The claim that

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[1] Zangwill has actually defended a broadly Davidsonian theory of metaphorical uses of language elsewhere, treating metaphor as the appropriation of the literal meanings of words. He suggests that literal meanings are particularly advantageous conventions within the evolutionary game theory of meaning (Zangwill, 2014: 149). This account, however, does not set a criterion that excludes emotion descriptions of music from the realm of literal descriptions. One might for instance think that the use of emotion terms to describe music emerged as a particularly suitable convention from the very beginning, thereby questioning the metaphorical nature that Zangwill attributes to them. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for bringing this article to my attention.

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attributions of emotion properties to inanimate objects imply a metaphorical use of emotion terms requires a deeper insight both in the nature of emotions and in that of metaphors.

Some support for Zangwill's proposal can be sought in Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art*. According to Goodman's nominalism, what property an object possesses depends on the predicate that applies to it (Goodman 1968: 51-52). There exist two ways in which an object can possess a property: "literal" and "metaphorical possession". For instance, while the colour label "grey" applies literally to a grey picture (as Goodman also says, the grey picture *exemplifies* the label "grey"), Goodman argues that «only metaphorically does [the picture] possess sadness or belong to the class of things that feel sad» (*Ivi*: 51). Analogously, in the musical case, for a piece of music to be "joyful" amounts for it to *metaphorically possess* the property of joy.

Thus, like Zangwill, Goodman is a non-literalist about the use of emotion terms in music descriptions, as he admits that animate and inanimate beings entertain different relations with emotion labels. Whereas emotion terms apply literally to their "native realm" – which is that class of objects that literally possess emotions – they can apply to artworks only by virtue of a *shift* of labels from their native realm to a foreign one – that of inanimate objects (*Ivi*: 70). This theory of metaphors as labels moving from one original realm to another buttresses Zangwill's conception of aesthetic descriptions, insofar as aesthetic attributions can be considered as labels shifting from their native domain (that of space, physics, motion, and so on) to the aesthetic domain.

Some intertwined questions naturally arise at this stage: why do metaphorical shifts occur? That is, why do we use emotion words to describe music and physical labels like 'balanced' or 'delicate' to describe artworks? Why do we take such terms to apply appropriately or more appropriately than others? How do we grasp the meaning of these words despite their metaphoricality? Although they diverge in their treatment of the involved properties, neither Goodman's nominalism nor Zangwill anti-literalism offer a satisfactory reply.

On Goodman's view, the fact that metaphorical shifts take place does not have to do with the possession of the labelled property by the described object. Contrary to what Zangwill claims, there *are* sad paintings, just as there are grey paintings, and the fact that a predicate is applied metaphorically does not depend on the particular metaphysical nature of the property in question. Accordingly, both animate and inanimate beings do possess (or exemplify) emotion properties, though in different fashions.[2] However, when it comes to the question of *why* predicates apply metaphorically rather than literally to certain objects, Goodman is explicitly dismissive:

> The question why predicates apply as they do metaphorically is much the same as the question why they apply as they do literally [...] the general explanation why things have the properties, literal and metaphorical, that they do have [...] is a task I am content to leave to the cosmologist (*Ivi*: 78).

Zangwill, for his part, believes that metaphors come into play when we need to communicate something that is, in fact, *ineffable* (Zangwill 2011). Aesthetic properties satisfy this ineffability requirement since, he argues, they cannot be fully described in language. So, the only way to share aesthetic experiences that involve aesthetic

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[2] Notably, Zangwill is aware that Goodman's has some affinity with his own view, but he admits finding it «hard to understand what [Goodman] means by the idea that metaphoricality qualifies the exemplification relation rather than uses of language» (Zangwill 2007: footnote 16). However, Goodman's nominalism clarifies this point: the exemplification relation *is determined by* the uses of language and so are the involved properties – rather than the other way round.

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properties is the metaphorical application of labels that have their literal application somewhere else in the semantic universe.[3] Lacking appropriate words, we do our best with what we have. This is precisely what happens to music expressive of emotions: we describe it with emotion terms because we lack more appropriate terms.

Even if we are willing to grant that emotion terms do not apply literally to music, and even if we concede that aesthetic properties (whatever they are) are ultimately impossible to seize literally, the question concerning the criteria for the application of emotion terms remains: we need to explain why we choose those very terms rather than others in order to capture what we experience. There must be something in the way music sounds or at least in the way we hear it sounding that justifies such choices. Goodman's nominalism provides no informative criterion to determine what kind of property music should be experienced as having in order for it to be literally or metaphorically sad. Zangwill's ineffabilism leads admittedly to a form of mysticism that, far from being deplorable *per se*, risks to undermine the attempt to further explore the nature of the emotion properties that are ascribed to music.[4] Thus, while they capture an important aspect of our linguistic practices – namely that there is a difference between the use of emotion terms to describe sentient beings and the use of those same terms to describe non-sentient objects – both Goodman's and Zangwill's non-literalist accounts lack a property-based criterion to distinguish between literal and transferred (metaphorical) applications of labels.

2. Quasi-Metaphors

There has been an extensive debate about the metaphorical nature of aesthetic descriptions among scholars in analytic aesthetics, whose ideal starting point can be considered Frank Sibley's 1959 *Aesthetic concepts*.[5] So long as it has the virtue of softening the distinction between metaphorical and literal uses of words by focusing on the properties that they refer to, Sibley's proposal is worth sketching. The general premise of his theory is that most terms that we use in aesthetic discourse are applied metaphorically, that is, have their original and literal use in some domain other than the aesthetic one. Notably, he distinguishes between those concepts that are used metaphorically and those that, although they have been borrowed from other domains of experience, «*have come* to be aesthetic terms by some kind of metaphorical transference» (Sibley 1959: 2). This latter case is that of "quasi-metaphors", that is, of metaphors that gradually lose their metaphorical status and become part of the standard vocabulary of art criticism.[6] As soon as a usage becomes a widespread linguistic habit in the aesthetic domain, the application ceases to sound metaphorical and seems perfectly suitable to us. Sibley explains such a suitability in terms of the relation that the transferred term continues to bear to its original domain:

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[3] For a detailed critique of Zangwill's account that casts light on the difficulties that it encounters at a metaphysical level, see Budd (2008: 176ff).

[4] «This is mysticism, I admit. My view is that there are some aspects of the *world* which cannot be described without metaphor, for I think that the world has properties that are literally indescribable […] I am unrepentantly embracing the idea of thought content which outruns the possibility of direct literal expression in language. The impossibility is one which derives from the nature of the properties» (Zangwill 2001: 174).

[5] For an in-depth discussion of Sibley's work, see Brady and Levinson (2001).

[6] Max Black has called this phenomenon "catachresis", i.e., what happens when existing words are used to «remedy a gap in the vocabulary». For example, «'Orange' may originally have been applied to the color by catachresis; but the word is now applied to the color just as "properly" (and unmetaphorically) as the fruit» (Black 1954: 280 ff).

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> There is nothing unnatural about using words like 'forceful', 'dynamic', or 'tightly-knit' in criticism; they do their work perfectly and are exactly the words needed for the purposes they serve. We do not want or need to replace them by words which lack the metaphorical element. In using them to describe works of art, the very point is that we are noticing aesthetic qualities related to their literal or common meanings. […] Aesthetic concepts, all of them, carry with them attachments and in one way or another are tethered to or parasitic upon non-aesthetic features (*Ivi*: 17).

Thus, while believing that quasi-metaphorical descriptions of aesthetic properties are perfectly appropriate and cannot be replaced by the literal application of other terms, Sibley maintains that the words we use to refer to aesthetic properties are indissolubly linked to those non-aesthetic properties that they literally and originally refer to. This link to their original, non-aesthetic realm of application explains why they are so kindly welcomed in the new realm.

Two aspects of Sibley's idea are worth developing for the scope of this discussion. First, the nature of the link between the non-aesthetic and the aesthetic domain to which the labels apply must be clarified. In the case of expressive descriptions of music, this clarification requires an assessment of the nature of the link between emotions and music, such that it justifies the borrowing of emotion terms for the description of a non sentient being. Second, the semantic status of quasi-metaphors must be distinguished more precisely from that of literal and of fully metaphorical uses of words. In the next section I will show that theories of expressiveness based on resemblances, and especially Contour theory, develop both of these aspects but also face some problems.

3. Resemblances

Apparently, resemblances provide a natural way to deal with both issues. They indeed seem to justify the application of the same words to properties belonging to different domains. In his famous 1978 article, Donald Davidson argues in favour of a resemblance-based account of metaphors relying on the idea that metaphors direct our attention to resemblances that hold between the source and the target domain:

> A metaphor makes us attend to some likeness, often a novel or surprising likeness, between two or more things. […] Ordinary similarity depends on groupings established by the ordinary meanings of words. Such similarity is natural and unsurprising to the extent that familiar ways of grouping objects are tied to usual meanings of usual words (Davidson 1978: 33-34).

Transferred to the case of emotion properties, this amounts to saying that to describe a piece of music as cheerful is to cast light on the likenesses between that piece and some instantiation of cheerfulness. If we extend this hypothesis to other aesthetic properties, we might say, for instance, that describing a painting as balanced consists in making salient through language the similarity between the structure of that painting and something whose weight is evenly distributed. Hence, it is reasonable to think that the properties of music to which emotion terms apply have something in common with emotions, something that makes them suitable to be described in terms of emotions.

This intuition grounds "resemblance theories", namely those views that explain musical expressiveness in terms of the resemblances between music and emotions. An early advocate of this approach, Carroll C. Pratt (1931) points at the resemblances between musical movements and those kinaesthetic movements that characterise emotions. By

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observing the phenomenology of our experiences and our language habits, he connects feelings, bodily movements and musical movements:

> Forceful, weak, languid, agitated, restless, calm, excited, quiet, indecisive, graceful, awkward, clumsy, tripping, rhythmic, fluent, and so on through a long list, are all words which appropriately characterize how one feels […] however, these words fit the qualities of felt bodily movement [...] Descriptions of music reflect this variety in the use of such words as: rise, fall, ascend, mount, leap, bound, spring, shoot, tower, soar, surge, drop, sink, slide, swoop, tumble, shift, swerve, tremble, quiver, flutter, pulsate, etc. And the use of the word "movement" for differences in tempo and rhythm, as well as the divisions of the sonata and symphony, need hardly be regarded as a derived meaning (Pratt 1931: 183).

On this view, the use of the same words to describe music and emotions is justified by the fact that music and emotions possess the same movement-components. Along the same line, Malcolm Budd (1985; 1995) argues that «the sense in which you hear the emotion *in* the music – the sense in which it is an audible property of the music – is that you perceive a likeness between the music and the experience of the emotion» (Budd 1995: 137). In this case, the use of emotion words is justified by the possibility that one might «hear the music as sounding like the way [the emotion in question] feels» (Budd 1995: 136).

More recently, resemblance-based approaches have been proposed by Peter Kivy and Stephen Davies, both supporters of – slightly different versions of – so-called Contour theory (Kivy 1980). They have claimed that the similarities holding between the perceptual profile – or contour – of music and perceivable typical expressions of emotions of humans justify expressive descriptions. According to Kivy: «We hear [musical sounds] as human utterances, and perceive the features of these utterances as structurally similar to our own voices when we express our own sadness in speech» (*Ivi*: 51), while according to Davies: «[…] music expresses emotions by presenting or exemplifying the appearances of emotions» (Davies 2005: 129).

The strategy adopted by Contour theorists can thus help to clarify the semantic status of quasi-metaphorical descriptions introduced by Sibley. Given their intermediate condition in between metaphors and literal uses, quasi-metaphors lend themselves to different interpretations.[7] The way in which Contour theory deals with expressive descriptions can actually be considered one of these interpretations. Davies (1994; 2011) contends that emotion words in expressive descriptions are not used metaphorically. Instead he remarks that emotion words refer *literally* not only to felt emotional states, but also to their related behavioural expressions. The label 'sad' denotes literally a psychological state *and* the posture, the tone of voice, the facial expression typically characterising such a state (Davies 2011: 25). As a consequence, it is not the case that whenever we offer expressive descriptions we imply the presence of some psychological affective state, the absence of which makes the description metaphorical. On the contrary, we describe comportments and physiognomies by employing emotion words literally. To put this in Goodman's terms, the "native" realm of emotional expressions also can be legitimately considered the "native" realm of emotion labels. Thus, Davies concludes, by calling a piece of music 'sad' we are just exploiting a literal but "extended"

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[7] Sibley's notion is admittedly elusive. Budd (2008: 142ff) provides an insightful analysis of quasi-metaphorical descriptions, pointing out that Sibley never states nor examines the relation between the aesthetic quality noticed and the literal meaning of the metaphor. This leaves Sibley's account of aesthetic properties attributed by means of the metaphor, incomplete.

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or "secondary" use of that emotion word, the one that standardly describes behavioural expressions (*Ibidem*).

Contour theory, therefore, accounts for the relation between the native domain of emotion words and the domain of music, in terms of resemblances between perceptual patterns. Yet, the resulting linguistic use is considered a secondary (but still literal) application of those words to musical features that resemble human expressions.

Convincing as it may appear, several authors have noticed that Contour theory achieves the goal of explaining expressive descriptions only partially. In particular, it struggles to account for cases in which resemblances between music and expressive behaviours are not manifest (Trivedi 2001; Noordhof 2008; Ravasio 2017; Benenti and Meini 2017). Targeting aesthetic descriptions more generally, Budd casts doubts on the justificatory role of resemblances:

> There is, of course, a question as to how exactly this idea of a perceived resemblance is to be understood, and whether there are any aesthetic qualities — and if so which — for which the idea of perceived resemblance figures in the specification of the intrinsic nature of the canonical basis of a judgement that a certain item possesses that aesthetic quality (Budd 2008: 138).

As to music more specifically, Matteo Ravasio has recently listed three significant examples where the comparison of audible features with behaviours is not enough to ground the use of certain emotion words. These features are *timbre*, *harmonic intervals*, and ambiguous cases where we cannot decide what behavioural expression, among the many that are compatible with a musical gesture, is best suited to sustain the comparison, thereby leaving expressive ascriptions underdetermined (Ravasio 2017: 24-27). A similar perplexity can be found in Noordhof (2008): to observe that we sometimes notice resemblances between certain musical features and typically expressive behaviours, he remarks, is not to imply that whenever we experience a piece of music as melancholy we necessarily hear it *as resembling* a melancholy voice or behaviour. Therefore, noticing resemblances cannot be a necessary condition for describing music as expressive of emotions. This sort of objections weakens the explanatory power of resemblances in an account of expressive descriptions of music. As a consequence, the possibility of treating expressive descriptions of music as quasi-metaphorical (understood as literal but extended) descriptions that rely on resemblances is also undermined.

In the remainder of this article, I will suggest that an approach which combines multi-dimensional, constructivist theories of emotions and the Wittgensteinian notion of secondary meaning might offer a fruitful strategy for overcoming this two-faced problem.

4. Emotions as composite patterns

In order to account for a relation between music and emotions that justifies expressive descriptions, theories emerging in contemporary emotions studies offer some helpful insight. Emotions are complex and composite items whose functional roles, neural implementation, and metaphysical nature are still much debated (e.g. Griffiths 1997; Russell 2003; Barrett 2006; Zink and Newen 2008). One point of disagreement concerns the necessary conditions for the instantiation of an emotion and for the kind of concept that is best suited to identify it (Scarantino and De Sousa 2018). Arguably, if emotions are essentially identified by their intentional object (e.g. Stecker 1984), then the concept of, say, "sadness" will literally apply to what one can be sad about. Conversely, if emotions are identified by typical mental states, the related concept will literally apply to

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that typical mental state (e.g. Zangwill 2007). And if they are identified by the physiological reaction that corresponds to a certain phenomenology, the concept will correctly apply only to such a reaction (e.g. Prinz 2004).

Claiming that an unwarranted essentialist assumption is responsible for the disagreement about what emotions are and what concepts better identify them, constructivist theories of emotions stress a multi-dimensional view (Barrett and Russell 2015). Instead of looking for what is essential to every occurrence of an emotion, constructivism argues that we should accept that emotion concepts encompass all those features that our common language games refer to (Russell 2003; 2015). Physiological reactions, motivational, evaluative (i.e. cognitive) and feeling components, tendencies to action, motor activations, bodily and facial expressions, the neural systems and subsystems that implement all these factors and the social and normative variables that can affect the emotional process all fall under the broad category of emotion that, originally adopted as a folk-notion, progressively needs to cover all those factors and components that scientific research brings about (Russell 2015: 429). These components are organised along the core dimensions of *valence* and *arousal* on which are grafted more complex components of cognitive, meta-cognitive and contextual (that is, specifically cultural) nature (Russell 2003: 147).

Considering emotions as complex patterns of heterogeneous components, rather than as mental items with an essential kernel, is particularly helpful in assessing expressive descriptions of music.[8] Besides being compatible with Davies' claim that emotion words refer literally to bodily expressions and therefore to musical expressiveness, constructivism sheds light on the fact that perceivable features of the environment, such as sounds, colours and shapes, are detected by the organism as affectively charged (Russell 2015: 195 calls these features "affective qualities"). As a consequence, not only musical profiles, but also lower level features of music like the ones discussed by Ravasio (2017), i.e. timbre and harmonic intervals, can be considered legitimate components of emotional patterns. If this is the case, then the appeal to resemblances that justify expressive descriptions proves worthless, for the link between emotions and expressive music is provided by what emotions actually *are*, i.e., composite patterns that – besides feelings, mental states and behaviours – include affectively charged perceivable properties.[9]

The adoption of such a constructivist perspective helps dealing with the question of the relation between emotions' properties and expressive qualities ascribed to music. Relying on a liberal definition of emotions, which is nonetheless grounded in the empirical research, this strategy also underlines how simple auditory features belong to emotion patterns. What remains to be explained, though, is how words apply when they are at work in the related expressive descriptions. Whilst resemblances may no longer be a problem, the way in which emotion words end up applying to non-sentient beings asks for further clarification.

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[8] Cespedes-Guevara and Eerola (2018) contended that most empirical psychological results about musical expressiveness regarding both adults and children are best interpreted through the constructivist dimensional lens, as opposed to traditional theories of basic emotions.

[9] This view shares an underlying intuition with the cross-domain account of experience and related language games famously proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), namely that our experiences are organized along a continuum that undermines sharp linguistic categorical distinctions. Constructivism maintains that our affective experiences are organized along the core axes of valence and arousal, prior to more fine-grained conceptual classifications. However, whereas Lakoff and Johnson put forward a theory of cognitive *metaphor* as pervasive of our experience, the more modest view I endorse invites the reader to adopt a *literal* treatment of those experiences that bring about emotion descriptions. I shall thank two anonymous reviewers for insisting on this point.

5. Secondary meaning

The notion of secondary meaning to which Davies refers is borrowed from Ludwig Wittgenstein's writings.[10] However, Davies exploits secondary meaning only to a limited extent, namely for cases where resemblances can justify expressive descriptions of music. Still, I suspect that it offers a way to account for a wider range of cases, especially those where resemblances are not present. Here are some of Wittgenstein's observations:

> Given the two ideas 'fat' and 'lean', would you be rather inclined to say that Wednesday was fat and Tuesday lean, or *vice versa?* (I incline decisively towards the former). Now have "fat" and "lean" some different meaning here from their usual one? —They have a different use. —So ought I really to have used different words? Certainly not that. —I want to use *these* words (with their familiar meanings) *here.* —Now, I say nothing about the causes of this phenomenon. They might be associations from my childhood. But that is a hypothesis. Whatever the explanation,—the inclination is there.
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> Asked "What do you really mean here by 'fat' and 'lean'?"—I could only explain the meanings in the usual way. I could *not* point to the examples of Tuesday and Wednesday.
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> Here one might speak of a 'primary' and 'secondary' sense of a word. It is only if the word has the primary sense for you that you use it in the secondary one. […]
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> The secondary sense is not a 'metaphorical' sense. If I say "For me the vowel *e* is yellow" I do not mean: 'yellow' in a metaphorical sense, —for I could not express what I want to say in any other way than by means of the idea 'yellow' (Wittgenstein 1953: 216).

In these passages, Wittgenstein examines the use of terms of which we already know the meaning – i.e., that we use literally in the standard cases – to refer to objects or in contexts where they do not seem to apply straightforwardly. On the one hand, secondary meaning is literal and not metaphorical in that one cannot substitute the employed word with any other.[11] As we have seen, the same holds for aesthetic quasi-metaphorical predicates according to Sibley. On the other hand, it is not a paradigmatic use of a term, since it cannot be used to explain the meaning of the involved words (Diamond 1967: 192). This entails that one's understanding of secondary meaning depends on the understanding one has of primary (literal) meaning. Moreover, contrary to Davies' conception, the Wittgensteinian formulation of secondary meaning does not require the detection of any resemblance anchoring the application.

Let us now reconsider the case of expressive descriptions of music that are not justified by resemblances, e.g. the description of a chord as sounding sad.[12] Firstly, it seems that,

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[10] References to secondary meaning can be found in Wittgenstein's *The Blue and Brown Books*, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, *Culture and Value*, *Philosophical Investigations*.

[11] This criterion seems to imply that, unlike secondary meaning, metaphors can be paraphrased. Notably, Wittgenstein does not have an explicit theory of metaphors and, needless to say, this assumption is debatable. According to a milder interpretation of Wittgenstein's claim, what actually distinguishes secondary sense from metaphor is that the former does not even allow to «begin on a paraphrase or an explanation» (Sharpe 2000: 46), whereas metaphorical meaning allows for such an attempt (which may, however, impoverish the expression). One can also allow for a more continuist approach between paradigmatically metaphorical and paradigmatically literal expressions (Budd 2008: 139).

[12] Far from being just a common stereotype, a widespread tendency to hear major chords as positively valenced and minor chords as negatively valenced has been empirically confirmed by several studies

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in order to convey the intended meaning, we cannot replace the word 'sad' with other words. Secondly, if we were asked to explain the meaning of 'sad' we would not choose the example of a chord, but we would rather point at some typical behaviours or feelings that are paradigmatically described as "sad". Hence, our understanding of the application of an emotion term to an object is parasitic on our understanding of its meaning in paradigmatic applications to inner feelings or to human expressions. So far, Wittgenstein's criteria for secondary meaning do apply: we cannot replace the term and we need to know its primary meaning. But what about the justification of our descriptions in these cases? Why choose *these* words, instead of others in the absence of similarities?

In the *Brown Book*, Wittgenstein examines the word "strain" which identifies both physical and mental phenomena. If asked to justify this double use, he observes, it is difficult to point at what physical and mental strain *have in common*, that is, in what way they *resemble* each other. The use of the word does not seem to be constrained by the possibility to recognise any manifest resemblance:

> it would have been wrong to say "I called them both 'strain' because they had a certain similarity", but that you would have had to say "I used the word 'strain' in both cases because there is a strain present in both".

Drawing an analogy with the case of the blue colour he adds:

> Should you say we use the word "blue" both for light blue and dark blue because there is a similarity between them? […] To say that we use the word "blue" to mean 'what all these shades of colour have in common' by itself says nothing more than that we use the word "blue" in all these cases (Wittgenstein 1958: 133-134).

This reference to colours is no coincidence. It hints that we tend to behave with the word "strain" in a way that is similar to when we talk about colours, that is, by taking for granted that the exhibition of the referent is the ultimate available justification for our ascriptions.

I suggest that expressive descriptions of music that are not based on resemblances can be considered as one further example of words used in their secondary meaning. By calling a minor chord "sad", we make use of an emotion word without detecting any resemblance between what we hear and typical emotional expressions nor feelings. Instead, we seem to be saying something like: 'there is sadness in there', or, 'that is what sadness sounds like'. Similarly to the case of colours, we behave as if disagreement about a description might ultimately be settled by the exhibition of the described properties; similarly to the case of standard expressive descriptions, we need to master the meaning of emotion words in order to enter the discussion.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, secondary meaning is a controversial notion. As some interpreters of Wittgenstein have pointed out – and as his examples about weekdays above seem to attest – secondary meaning can go unjustified, that is, there might be no feature of the world that confirms or disconfirms the descriptive appropriateness of the term (Tilghman 1984; Hanfling 1990; Sharpe 2000; Ter Hark 2010). This lack of a

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conducted both on adults and children (Heinlein 1928; Crowder 1985; Kastner and Crowder 1990; Pallesen et al. 2005; Curtis and Bharucha 2010). Whether this tendency is fully determined by psychoacoustic properties or is rather culturally acquired, is debated (see Crowder 1984 for a thorough discussion and an intermediate position).

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rationale, however, has been understood in two distinct ways that may shed different light on the case of expressive descriptions of music.

One first reaction has been to discard the more idiosyncratic examples provided by Wittgestein and to privilege cases (especially in aesthetics) where a rationale for the application of words with secondary meaning could be found. Properties such as the 'dynamism', the being 'mathematical' or 'profound' of a piece of music are some of the examples that have been treated this way (Tilghman 1984: 160; Hanfling 1990: 128; Sharpe 2000: 45 ff.; Budd 2008: 139). According to Budd, for example, if we look for a justification of expressive descriptions of music in the phenomenology of our experiences, all we find is the *suitability* of a given emotion term to describe what we hear. In other words, we apply an emotion term to an audible stimulus whose appearance justifies the application, like a shade of blue justifies the application of the word 'blue' (Budd 2008: 149). Far from being conclusive, this conception tries to make sense of Sibley's quasi-metaphoricality in terms of those perceptual patterns that our descriptions are about and which are ultimately instantiated in our experiences. Thanks to the adoption of a liberal, multi-dimensional theory of emotions like the one introduced above, these perceptual patterns figure among the components of what emotions are.

A second interpretation invites us to consider the application of terms in their secondary meaning not as *descriptions* with a traceable rationale, but rather as primitive *expressions* that, in Wittgestein's words, force themselves on us (Wittgenstein 1953: 215). As in the paradigmatic example of 'pain' (*Ivi*: 89), the use of emotion terms to describe musical features would be a way to express one's own experience, rather than to describe a state of affair about which others can agree or disagree. On this view, the linguistic game that consists of applying emotion terms to sounds would be as primitive as that of exhibiting one's own pain, feeling, emotion (Ter Hark 2010).

Choosing one of these two interpretations is a matter for further research and deeper exegesis of Wittgenstein's work. I am inclined to think that, whereas the first one accounts for the use of emotion terms within a properly *aesthetic* discourse – e.g. art criticism – the second one can account for more basic and maybe inchoate descriptions of music and sounds. Importantly, what may hold for expressive descriptions of music in the absence of resemblances, shall not be extended automatically to all expressive descriptions, let alone all aesthetic descriptions.

6. Concluding remarks

Dissatisfied with those theories that explain musical expressiveness in metaphorical terms, I have landed on Contour theories that account for the relation between emotions and affective properties of music in terms of resemblances. In order to explain how expressive descriptions work when music – or its features – do not resemble behaviours, I resorted to multi-dimensional theories of emotions. In order to explain how words apply when they cannot be justified by resemblances, I resorted to the notion of secondary meaning. Thanks to its hybrid nature of un-paraphrasable but still parasitic meaning, secondary use of emotion words shows that certain perceivable features of music exhibit their intrinsic link to emotions, either as descriptions of perceptual patterns or as primitive expressions of one's experience. Clearly, the extremely wide range of expressive properties and, more broadly, of aesthetic properties deters one from applying the same or a similar strategy unrestrictedly. Nonetheless, secondary meaning seems well suited to account for at least some instances of expressive descriptions that resemblance-based theories struggle to explain.

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Acknowledgments

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