

Musical Musical Nuance

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*I remember when, I remember, I remember when I lost my mind. There was something so pleasant about that place, even your emotions have an echo in so much space.*¹

With every word, Gnarls Barkley's Cee-Lo Green is on the verge of falling off the beat from the back end, pulling against our timing expectations. In a different context, this is the same effect Frank Sinatra achieves:

*Fly me to the moon; let me, swing among those stars. Let me see what spring is like on, Jupiter and Mars. In other words, hold my hand. In other words, baby kiss me.*²

A musical nuance is typically defined as a note performed slightly raised or lowered in pitch or slightly early or late in time (music theorists and cognitive psychologists prefer the term "expressive variation"). A cellist or vocalist may perform a raised A-natural which we perceive to be slightly high yet not high enough to perceive as an A-sharp; a drummer or pianist may strike certain eighth-notes slightly late, and we may perceive them to be late yet still perceive them to be eighth-notes (as opposed to dotted eighth-notes).³ In what follows, I will emphasize that a musician performs this kind of minute variation *for a reason*, namely, in order to alter the way the music sounds; for example, nuances may alter a listener's perception of musical structure, "brighten" a chord, result in rhythmic tension (as in my opening examples), or relatedly, nuances may result in grooves such as a swing rhythm's *feel* of being "in the pocket" or of leaning forward (a groove is, roughly, the perceptual feel of a rhythm).

Traditionally, regarding classical music, nuances are taken to be features only of performances.⁴ Although nuances are obviously important in this role, I believe that nuances are even more important in rock music (broadly construed to include hip-hop, etc.). Ted Gracyk has argued that rock musical works *just are* the recordings.⁵ Since nuances are ubiquitous in recordings, they are features of rock musical works themselves. As Stephen Davies writes, regarding Gracyk's ontology, "If the primary works in rock are recordings, then these works are very thick with properties. Every aspect of the sound captured by the recording technology is constitutive of the work."⁶ Nothing in this essay rests on that view; I mention it here, by way of introduction, in order to highlight the likely importance of obtaining a correct account of musical nuance for examining rock music.

Diana Raffman's account of musical nuance, put forward in her *Language, Music, and Mind*, is the predominant account of musical nuance in analytic philosophy of music.⁷ In what follows, I will move through a critical analysis of Raffman's view toward a suggested reorientation of the examination of this phenomenon.

II. RAFFMAN ON MUSICAL NUANCE AND INEFFABILITY

Raffman adopts a cognitivist view of perception, drawing from Jerry Fodor's modularity of mind thesis; musical experience results from a multileveled structure of computations over mental representations. She understands the final cluster of computations in terms of Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff's Chomsky-like, generative grammar of tonal music ("M-grammar"), which offers an explanation for an underlying competence that allows listeners to make sense of a string of tones; it is an account of just what a listener "does," sub-personally and unconsciously, to organize the musical surface into structured music.⁸ But most relevant for our purposes is the *shallowest* level of conscious perception where our pitch sensations (etc.)⁹ are disorganized and chaotic. Prior to being in-put to the M-grammar, our sensations

go through an organizing phase, which Raffman clarifies by drawing upon the work of the psychologists John Anderson, J.J. Bharucha, *et al*, on *schemas*. Schemas are mental organizing structures that are conceived as enduring, long-term representations; they act as grids or templates that sort the incoming pitch sensations into type-identifiable categories.¹⁰

Schemas transform our initial sensations into pitch-time events; they transform uncategorized "nuance pitches" into tokens of chromatic pitches, such as C-natural, F-sharp, etc. These chromatic pitches are the pitch input to the M-grammar, representations "instantiating the sequence of pitches specified by the score . . . the input to the M-grammar is a mental recovery of the score. Call this the *mental score*" (p. 64, emphasis in original). "Thus the mental score—the shallowest *grammatical* [i.e., structural] level of representation—is already an abstraction from a still shallower level at which the nonstructural nuance values are recovered" (p. 67, emphasis in original); the latter level is what Raffman calls the nuance-level. But note that our ability to recognize transposed melodies (etc.) suggests that we hear melodies not in terms of fixed pitch categories, but rather, *relationally*; our schemas must sort nuance pitches relationally rather than in terms of fixed pitch categories. A perceived melody is mentally represented first and foremost as a sequence of chromatic intervals. As Raffman writes, "my point is that what transforms your N-level [nuance-level] into a mental score is the representation of incoming acoustic events as instantiating certain *relationships*—specifically, relationships of the kind embodied in your C-interval [chromatic-interval] schema" (p. 72, emphasis in original). Thus, according to Raffman, musical nuances just are those perceptions of pitch (etc.) that we are conscious of but have not yet schematized; pitches (etc.) that are perceived at the shallowest level of conscious representation.

Raffman begins the book with quotations from Cavell, Langer, and Dewey, which she interprets as having to do with art's ineffability. Raffman writes, "Despite considerable

differences in ideology, objective, and style, these theorists join in giving voice to one of the most deeply rooted convictions in modern aesthetics: our knowledge of artworks is, in some essential respect, ineffable. In apprehending a work of art, we come to know something we cannot put into words" (p. 2). The main objective of Raffman's book is to "develop a cognitivist explanation of musical ineffability" (p. 3). "To put it simply," she writes, "I want to see how these empirical disciplines [psychology, psycholinguistics, etc.] might explain the apparent fact that conscious musical experience gives rise to claims of ineffable knowledge" (ibid.). When all is said and done, Raffman concludes that one central kind of musical ineffability consists of unschematized pitches, time-values (etc). We can discriminate many more pitches (etc.) than we can conceptualize; the pitches that we cannot conceptualize just are musical nuances. Thus, Raffman's ineffability claim comes *through* her account of musical nuance: she develops an account of musical nuance, and argues that nuances are ineffable.¹¹

To be sure, Raffman's ineffability claim does follow directly from her characterization of nuances: musical nuances are ineffable because nuances are perceived at a level prior to schematization. Our schemas make our perceptual information effable; schemas enable us to remember and re-identify that which they organize. Our limitations regarding categorization are due to limitations in perceptual memory: "we can't name them [nuances] because we can't recognize them, and we can't recognize them because we can't *remember* them" (p. 84, emphasis in original).¹² Furthermore, our inability to *report* nuances rests upon this ineffability due to lack of schemas. As Raffman succinctly expresses the point in a section heading, "Why We Cannot Report the Nuances: No Verbalization Without Schematization" (p. 83).

III. DIRECT VERSUS INDIRECT DESCRIPTION

For Raffman, achieving the goal of explaining a central kind of *musical* ineffability rests on *accurately describing* our perceptual experiences of musical nuances. I want to begin the critical portion of this essay by calling into question the adequacy of Raffman's description of nuances. In W. E. Kennick's 1961 essay, "Art and the Ineffable,"¹³ he criticizes the ineffability claims of John Dewey, Suzanne Langer, and D.W. Prall (two of the same philosophers Raffman begins by quoting). I will draw upon one of Kennick's main points, and apply it critically to Raffman's ineffability claim. Kennick makes a distinction between *directly* and *indirectly* describing a feeling or quality; direct description is essentially *naming*, while indirect description involves characterizing the circumstances and context in which a feeling is experienced. While direct description typically falls short of adequately characterizing subtle feelings, indirect description is more effective. Objecting to Langer's claim that facts about feelings cannot be depicted by language (discursive symbols), Kennick writes,

Mrs. Langer makes the mistake, often made in such discussions, of supposing that describing a feeling is the same as naming a feeling. This is because she takes as the prototype of all descriptions the sort of "direct" description we frequently give of people and objects, e.g., the sort of description one might find on a "wanted" poster in a post office: "Height, 5'11"; weight, 170 lb.; color of hair, dark brown; eyes, blue; complexion, ruddy; small horizontal scar over the right eye. . ." This kind of description *can* be given of feelings, but usually it is not, either in daily life or in novels. More frequently we employ a sort of "indirect" description which includes a description of the circumstances in which the feeling is felt.¹⁴

Kennick borrows this distinction between direct and indirect description from Wittgenstein, who, in *The Brown Book*,¹⁵ considers the feeling or experience of familiarity. Wittgenstein points out that there are *different* experiences, or feelings, of familiarity. (To anticipate where I am going with this, note the analogy between different experiences of familiarity and different F-sharps.) Wittgenstein claims that in order to correctly describe a *particular* feeling of familiarity, we must describe the circumstances or context in which the feeling is experienced.

Different experiences of familiarity: *a)* Someone enters my room, I haven't seen him for a long time, and didn't expect him. I look at him, say or feel "Oh, it's you"—Why did I in giving this example say that I hadn't seen the man for a long time? Wasn't I setting out to describe *experiences* of familiarity? And whatever the experience was I alluded to, couldn't I have had it even if I had seen the man half an hour ago? I mean, I gave the circumstances of recognizing the man as a means to the end of describing the precise situation of the recognition.¹⁶

Following this passage, Wittgenstein refers to a direct description of a table (giving the shape, dimensions, etc.); he then notes that an "indirect description" of the table might be the kind of description one finds in a novel: " 'It was a small rickety table decorated in Moorish style, the sort that is used for smoker's requisites'. . . . if the purpose of it is to bring a vivid image of the table before your mind in a flash, it might serve this purpose incomparably better than a detailed 'direct' description."¹⁷

If indirect description can render musical nuances effable, then perhaps we can reject Raffman's ineffability claim, and simply fault her for failing to consider indirect description. After all, Raffman does characterize nuances in terms of applying names to these perceptual

properties, and as we have seen, she then concludes that limitations of perceptual memory prevent us from successfully *reapplying* these names. Consider this passage:

[R]ecall the numerical N-pitch names "A-natural(1)," "A-natural(12)," "B-flat(17)," and so forth introduced in preceding chapters; these could serve perfectly well for enunciating the [representational] content in question. . . . the ineffability of the content of nuance representations derives not from the absence of terminology adequate to its verbal expression, but rather from the psychological impossibility of *applying* such terms "by introspection" (p. 140, emphasis in original).

In a review of Raffman's book, the philosopher of mind Georges Rey expresses a criticism related to the one we have just considered.¹⁸ Rey does not discuss the efficacy of including considerations of *context*—that is, he does not seem to have indirect description in mind as a solution (he does not invoke Kennick or Wittgenstein)—but he does criticize Raffman for limiting herself to something like direct description. Moreover, he suggests that literary devices such as metaphor could be employed to render nuances effable: "Discussions of 'ineffability' often tend to focus on cases where there aren't single words for the job and neglect the possibility afforded by complex descriptions. Where we lack schemas for nuances, why mightn't we evoke them by exploiting standard compositional resources, including simile, metaphor, and the like?"¹⁹ We will see that such descriptive devices can, indeed, be effectively employed in an indirect description of nuances.

In sum, our being unable to employ terms such as "B-flat(17)" due to limitations of perceptual memory does not necessarily establish the ineffability of musical nuances, because an *indirect* description may render these seemingly ineffable features effable.

IV. STRUCTURAL OBJECTIVES OF NUANCES

Are we justified in criticizing Raffman for not considering indirect description? As I mentioned at the outset, it is crucial to emphasize that a musician performs a nuance *for a reason*, namely, in order to alter the way the music sounds, to give rise to some quality or element in the music; call this the nuance's *objective*. Now, an effective indirect description ought to include (at least) (1) a reference to the nuance's objective, (2) a description of the musical context, and (3) a reference to the nuance itself. Given what I have said so far about Raffman's account, and given Rey's critical comment, you will be surprised to learn that Raffman herself offers a detailed *indirect* description of a nuance, which includes all of the elements I have just mentioned, as well as a thought-provoking use of metaphor:

Many fine-grained differences in interval width—indeed the most interesting and important ones, for our purposes—are fully intended *expressive* features, as when a flutist ever so slightly raises ("sharpens") an F-sharp sustained over a D-natural across a modulation from b minor to D major. . . . The flutist's objective is to widen ("brighten") the major third between D-natural and F-sharp, thereby emphasizing and strengthening the new key of D major (p. 66, emphasis in original).

This is an example of the depth to be found in Raffman's book, and one reason why it rewards close attention. But unfortunately, in the very next paragraph, before acknowledging and developing the import of this indirect description, Raffman turns back to the task of developing her account of musical nuance in terms of direct description. Why didn't Raffman explore the possibility that indirect descriptions, such as the one she gives above, render nuances effable? What is it about her assumptions that led her away from believing that nuance objectives and musical context are relevant to rendering nuances effable? I believe an

answer can be found by considering the influence on Raffman of the account she adopts of nuance objectives.

In the indirect description above, Raffman explains that the flutist's objective is "to widen ('brighten') the major third between D-natural and F-sharp, thereby emphasizing and strengthening the new key of D major." For Raffman, the important aspect of the objective is the emphasis, the strengthening of the new key. The view of nuance objectives that Raffman adopts, a standard view, is that a performer employs a musical nuance in order to lead a listener to hear the musical *structure* as he, the musician, hears it:²⁰ Raffman writes, "As I have repeatedly noted, the performer's objective is to mold these fine-grained features in such a way as to communicate his hearing of a work's structure" (p. 86).

I want to suggest that Raffman does not take the above nuance objective to be relevant to describing the nuance because she takes the objective to be characterizable in terms of structure; the nuance objective is categorizable, conceptualizable. She believes that the F-sharp itself is the only element relevant to the musical nuance because it is the only element that is not conceptualizable. Raffman explicitly distinguishes between the structural and the nonstructural features of music; one of the defining characteristics is that structural features are conceptualizable, or, in her terminology, "type-identifiable"—and the nonstructural features are not.²¹ (Another example of a structural nuance objective is a nuance's resulting in our hearing a passage of music in one meter rather than another.) According to my interpretation, Raffman sees nothing in the indirect description that can bring us closer to grasping the nuance, nothing that can render it effable, because all of the elements—other than the raised F-sharp itself—are conceptualizable; they can be described in terms of music-theoretic concepts, or terms such as "emphasis," which she also takes to be conceptualizable.

V. NONSTRUCTURAL OBJECTIVES OF NUANCES

Let's be clear about two positions you may adopt at this juncture. You may agree with Raffman that nuance objectives are conceptualizable, and you may agree that indirect description is irrelevant to an account of musical nuance; nuances remain ineffable. Or, you may conclude that Raffman's indirect description inadvertently undermines her own ineffability claim; after all, in this indirect description, we are given a very detailed description of the musical context, the nuance objective, and a reference to the nuance itself (that is, you may hold that she is not wrong about nuance objectives being conceptualizable, but still, that she is wrong in her belief that an indirect description cannot render nuances effable).

Adopting either position would be premature at this juncture; we need to turn our attention to the fact that some nuance objectives are not conceptualizable; to be consistent with Raffman's terminology I will call these "nonstructural" nuance objectives. The existence of nonstructural nuance objectives is, perhaps, especially obvious to those aware of the role of nuances in rock music, because, when it comes to the effects of nuances, rock musicians are more concerned with quality than structure.²² However, we do not need to draw from rock examples to make this point; Raffman, herself, mentions a nonstructural nuance objective in the indirect description we have been considering. Recall the latter portion of the indirect description she offers of the raised F-sharp: "The flutist's objective is to widen ('brighten') the major third between D-natural and F-sharp, thereby emphasizing and strengthening the new key of D major." It is thought-provoking that the metaphor of brightening is placed in parentheses. The brightening is surely an effect of the nuance but it is not what Raffman typically refers to as a nuance objective; it is not *merely* a matter of hearing musical structure in one way or the other, and it is not conceptualizable. It is crucial for our purposes that one consequence of the raised F-sharp is a brightening of the interval. But what should we say

about this kind of nuance objective?

Notice that the second position floated above—indirect description renders nuances effable—now seems questionable, because this brightening, and other nonstructural objectives, seem descriptively elusive. We now find ourselves with something like a new ineffability problem, since F-sharps raised to slightly different degrees will make the same segment of the performance sound different: a slightly raised F-sharp in this context may, indeed, emphasize the new key, but an F-sharp(13) and an F-sharp(14) will each emphasize the new key in a *qualitatively* different way. Music-theoretic concepts are too coarse-grained to adequately characterize this difference. One way to characterize the difference in the effect of these slightly raised pitches, which Raffman's indirect description seems to invite, is to say that each differently raised pitch will result in *differently brightened* major thirds. But it seems that our indirect descriptions, including metaphorical description, will fall short of rendering these qualitative differences effable. In order to accurately characterize the differences in terms of brightness we will need to invoke descriptive terms that we will not be able to remember and reliably reapply, in Raffman's sense. There will be distinguishable brightenings too subtle to be captured by the metaphors we *can* reliably remember and apply ("bright," "shimmering," "radianc," etc.). However, next, we will see that these nonstructural nuance objectives do *not* add to the air of ineffability; rather, acknowledging the existence of nonstructural objectives helps us to discover just how indirect description is useful in understanding musical nuance.

VI. REORIENTATION

The reorientation begins by considering the way rock musicians deal with the *practical* difficulty of communicating about musical nuance.²³ It is not unusual for a serious band of rock musicians to invest a significant amount of time in attempting to communicate about

nuances. Why? At the outset, I mentioned Gracyk's view that rock musical works *just are* recordings, and I pointed out that since nuances are captured in the recordings, they are features of the musical works. Here, I would like to highlight this importance of nuances in rock music in a different way, namely, through the perspective of the creative process. For rock composers, nuances are of central concern in the creative process. Consider an example in which the nuance objective is nonstructural. It is often the case that a composer envisions not merely a certain rhythm (which is a matter of structure) but a certain *groove* (which is the *feel* of a rhythm, a nonstructural objective). She might imagine a rhythm that feels as though it *pulls* against the guitars to a specific degree (which is brought about by certain notes in each measure being repeatedly drummed slightly late). If, upon trying to create this groove with her band, she discovers that the pulling between the drums and guitars cannot be achieved to her satisfaction, the composer may opt for a different rhythm altogether. In such a case, a nonstructural nuance objective matters *more* than structure for the emerging musical work.²⁴

Above, regarding brightness, we preliminarily concluded that this nonstructural kind of nuance objective seems to be ineffable in Raffman's sense. But there is a common way that rock musicians move beyond such limitations of indirect description for practical purposes. Rock musicians (and other musicians, of course) share a fine-tuned familiarity with a large number of recordings; by referring to these recordings, they add *comparisons* to indirect descriptions. They often begin with an indirect description and then, in order to add specificity, refer to an example: "the brightness I have in mind is a brightness just like the one *so-and-so* achieved on the recording of *that* song." A composer may say to a drummer, about a target groove, "lean the shuffle beat forward—not like the *recorded* version of The Beatles' 'All My Lovin' but like the Washington D.C. live performance of the song from 1964." By adding a comparison to indirect description we have added a degree of specificity to our

ability to communicate about nonstructural nuance objectives. In this case, musical nuances are effable enough for the practical purposes of rock musicians, and I would expect, through similar devices, for the practical purposes of musicians in general.²⁵ After all, musicians do manage to communicate about nuances. Thus, ineffability seems to be relative to the task at hand, and as far as the perceptually rich, practical task considered above, nuances are effable enough.

Objecting to Raffman's ineffability claim by invoking comparison in addition to indirect description is not the pivotal idea to emerge from the consideration of rock musicians' practical dealings with nuances. A crucial point has come to light: in order to acquire the improved specificity awarded by comparison, rock musicians do not focus on the nuances themselves (the raised or lowered pitches, early or late notes); that is, they do not focus on nuances characterized in terms of direct description, such as "F-sharp(13)," and often, they do not focus on the *structural* objectives of nuances. Instead, in many cases, rock musicians are focused on nonstructural nuance objectives. That which is placed in parentheses (in other words, downplayed) in Raffman's indirect description is often *the emphasis* of the rock musician's practical concern. In the rhythm example, the composer is not focused on exactly *how late* those eighth-notes should be played, and she is not focused on how the listener should hear the structure; rather, she is concerned to convey to her drummer just to what degree the rhythm should *feel* as though it is leaning backward or pulling. This is a nonstructural objective of a musical nuance.

This shift in emphasis is also manifest in relation to non-composing rock musicians. All good rock musicians are reflective about the fact that they are able to play notes slightly early, late, raised, or lowered; but their focus, like the focus of composers, is often on the nonstructural objectives of these minute variations rather than the variations themselves. In fact, in these cases, the aspects of experience that *confirm* to a musician that she has

accomplished what she set out to accomplish in performing a minute variation *just are* these nonstructural objectives. This requires, not a focused perception of the slightly raised F-sharp, but a perception of what it accomplishes in its context. For a bit of variety, let's consider a timbre example. Consider harmony singing. A backup singer makes numerous slight variations in pitch and timbre; the timbral variations are sometimes controlled by the shape of his lips in pronouncing a word. His ultimate *criteria* for judging the effectiveness of the variations are not perceptions of just how the lip adjustment affects *his* timbre, but rather, perceptions of the *effect* of his variations in context. The relevant effect is often discussed in terms of a metaphor of a *blending* of the voices, which is a nonstructural objective of this variation.²⁶

Here, now, is the principal question that leads to the reorientation: Raffman grants that musical nuances are perceptual properties,²⁷ so, *which* perceptual properties should be the focus of an examination of musical nuance? —which perceptions? That is, what should we take to be our explananda? First, let's remind ourselves of what we have discovered Raffman's nuances to be. Raffman does not take her indirect description to be relevant to her task; she does not take nuance objectives and the details of musical context to be relevant to describing musical nuances. Moreover, she characterizes her explananda directly: "recall the numerical N-pitch names 'A-natural(1)', 'A-natural(12)', 'B-flat(17)', and so forth introduced in preceding chapters; these could serve perfectly well for enunciating the [representational] content in question" (p. 140). In other words, the term "B-flat(17)" is her method of picking out and describing a nuance. What is a B-flat(17)? It is a raised B-flat. Music-theoretic context does not provide traction for distinguishing between a B-flat(17) and a B-flat(18). The numbers—(17) and (18)—represent the most important aspect of those pitches, for the purposes of Raffman's account of musical nuance; the numbers represent the *nuance aspect* of those pitches. Raffman characterizes these nuance aspects as detectable pitch differences

that can be directly described with terms such as "B-flat(17)."

So again, *which* perceptual properties should be the focus of an examination of musical nuance? I believe that we should not follow Raffman in taking the perceptual properties enunciated by terms such as "B-flat(17)" and "eighth-note(4)" to be the explananda of the examination of musical nuance. The kind of perceptual experiences that inform Raffman's characterization of musical nuance—that is, the data, the perceptual experiences that ground her claim that we can distinguish between a B-flat(17) and a B-flat(18)—are, in some cases, not even *musical* experiences. Consider one of her "policy statements": "Many of the experiments pertinent to our investigation employ synthesized sine tones (i.e., tones lacking the overtones inherent in any instrumental or vocal tone), and stimuli are often presented independently of any tonal or otherwise musical context" (p. 64). If we start with real musical experiences, we are naturally led to different explananda. The explananda of an account of musical nuance should be the raised/lowered pitches and early/late notes *as they are perceived in their musical contexts*. Now, what is it to perceive a B-flat(17) *in its musical context*? Hearing a B-flat(17) in its musical context is not to perceive that pitch as an isolated property; hearing a B-flat(17) in its musical context *just is* either to perceive its structural objective or its nonstructural objective. Clearly, structural nuance objectives do not deserve to be called nuances because they are conceptualizable, they can be characterized in terms of music-theoretic (or other) concepts. Thus, on my reorientation, *the explananda of an account of musical nuance ought to be the nonstructural objectives of raised/lowered pitches, early/late notes, etc. A musical nuance just is the nonstructural objective of a musician's slight adjustment: a brightened interval or a leaning groove*. A musical nuance is not the varied note itself, characterized in terms of direct description. We are, after all, using the term "*musical* nuance"; what is truly *musical* about a B-flat(17) is what it does in a perceived musical context.²⁸ (If we were following music theorists and psychologists in using the term

"expressive variation," I would make the same point: a B-flat(17) only becomes *expressive* in its musical context.)

There are practical reasons to prefer this change in explananda. This approach to examining musical nuance is more fruitful than Raffman's because it will yield observations that are more musically relevant. After all, Raffman's explananda lead to ineffability; this does not help us to understand anything *about the music* except that there are some *contributors to it* that we cannot retain in our perceptual memories. On Raffman's view, in attempting to say something about the brightened interval and the pitch variations that bring it about, all we can say is that the F-sharp is slightly raised, and that this difference in pitch is a difference that we are able to perceive but not remember and re-identify; it is ineffable. We are not provided tools or leverage for describing the *purpose* or *end* of the variation in the music. The centrality of the new explananda to musical practice is also obvious in that nonstructural objectives are the explicit goals of musicians who perform slight pitch variations (etc.), and goals of (at least) rock composers who envision them. These explananda are not only central features of the music itself but can function as answers to questions about why a composer or musician created *this* particular feature at *this* particular juncture in a given performance or recording. Focusing on these new explananda predisposes us to seek to elucidate elements of performances and recordings that are relevant to musical descriptions that can ground evaluations.

It should be clear that I am not disputing the observation that we can, in fact, discriminate more finely than we can categorize (which has been raised by psychologists, Raffman, and philosophers of mind writing on nonconceptual content—see note 11). In fact, it is useful to notice how this observation fits into my reorientation. The fact that we can discriminate so finely provides only a *causal explanation* (at the level of our perceptual systems) as to *why* it is that minute variations in pitch, timing, etc., have *subtle* effects in

musical contexts. In other words, we *are able* to hear a difference between an F-sharp(12) and an F-sharp(13) (as psychology experiments demonstrate), and that is *why* such slight variations result in subtly different perceived brightenings in a musical context; that is *why* the nonstructural objectives of minute variations *are nuanced*. But as I have claimed, it is the nonstructural objectives that are the proper explananda of an account of musical nuance rather than the minute variations themselves.

VII. CONCLUSION

Diana Raffman's account of musical nuance is driven by direct description; her claim that nuances are ineffable follows as a result. By considering the efficacy of indirect description, we were led to the discovery that her account centers on the wrong explananda. For Raffman, musical nuances are the perceptions of the pitches (etc.) themselves: F-sharp(13), eighth-note(12). Considering indirect description resulted in broadening our perceptual perspective, which led to noticing the musical significance of the *effects* of these minute variations. My reorientation rests on the claim that the explananda of the examination of musical nuance ought to be the nonstructural *objectives* of minute variations: a brightened major third, a groove, etc.—*these* are musical nuances, on my view. Indirect description, including metaphor and comparison, renders *these* musical nuances effable enough for practical purposes. In addition to the rendering effable of nuances, on what other grounds do I propose this change in explananda? Musicians perform and (at least rock) composers stipulate minute variations *for the purpose of the effects they have in a perceived musical context*; minute variations acquire their musical significance in their effects. Terminologically speaking, an A-natural(12)—call it a "*musical* nuance" or an "*expressive* variation"—only becomes *musical* or *expressive* in a perceived musical context. Focusing on the ends of minute variations is the key to understanding what musicians and composers are up to when they

perform or stipulate variations. This kind of understanding is required for grounding evaluations of performances and music that include these variations; this reorientation predisposes us to construct musically relevant descriptions because the effects of minute variations are already embedded in the music. (In this regard, Raffman's account yields only a cognitivist explanation of our perceptual limitations with respect to minute variations, and a claim that minute variations are ineffable.) Raffman and I both take our explananda to be musical nuances, but on her view a musical nuance is (for example) a slightly raised A-natural—the means—whereas, on my view, a musical nuance is the slightly raised A-natural's nonstructural objective in a musical context—the end.²⁹

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Endnotes

1. "Crazy," Gnarls Barkley, *St. Elsewhere* (Atlantic, 2006).
2. "Fly Me to the Moon (In Other Words)," *Sinatra at the Sands* (Warner Brothers, 1966).
3. Two rock music nuance timing examples: A contributing factor to the perceived *power* of Jon Bonham's drumming is his tending to play "behind the beat"; that is, he plays certain notes slightly late. A contributing factor to the perceived *buoyancy* of Ringo Starr's drumming is that he does not play behind the beat; in fact, Ringo tends to play a bit ahead of the beat. In cases where Bonham and Ringo are both be playing time-values that are correctly categorized as eighth-notes, certain of Bonham's eighth-notes are slightly farther apart than Ringo's. Regarding hip-hop, one of the genre's significant innovations is the exploration of just how far behind the beat notes can be placed without being perceived as rhythmically chaotic.
4. Raffman adopts this view (see her chapter 4). If nuances have anything to do with classical musical works, it is most likely through a composer's assumptions about performance practices. For a relevant discussion see Stephen Davies, *Musical Works and Performances* (Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 110 and 116.
5. Theodore Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise: an Aesthetics of Rock* (I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1996), chapter 1.
6. Stephen Davies, "Rock Versus Classical Music," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57 (1999): 193-204, p. 200.
7. Diana Raffman, *Language, Music, and Mind* (MIT Press, 1993). Page references to this book will be given parenthetically in the body of the essay.
8. The Generative Theory of Tonal Music posits four sets of analytic rules which a listener "applies" to pitch-time events; these rules have been unconsciously abstracted from exposure to the music of the listener's culture; the rules constitute the musical grammar ("M-grammar"). See Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (MIT Press, 1983).
9. Raffman focuses on pitch but recognizes the existence of many other kinds of nuances: "as I noted early on, I conceive the N-pitches and N-intervals as just two among a constellation of nuance features, each engendering a similar speechlessness. There is every reason to suppose that musical performances sustain fine details of duration, loudness, speed, articulation, and timbre, among others..." (Raffman, 90). The music theorist Justin London criticizes Raffman for not examining research on rhythm perception. See London's review, "The Fine Art of Repetition: *Essays in the Philosophy of Music; Language, Music, and Mind*," *Music Theory Spectrum*, vol. 16, no. 2 (Autumn, 1994), p. 269.

10. Schemas are formed as a result of repeated exposure to one's culture's music; a hierarchical structuring of pitches is the result. As Bharucha writes, "The tonal hierarchies used in Western music are the 12 major and minor keys. . . . These hierarchies are internalized by members of a culture, and facilitate the processing of music of that culture" (Quoted in Raffman, p. 69).

11. Prior to Raffman's work, some psychologists, philosophers, and others, acknowledged that perceptual discrimination outstrips conceptualization; see e.g., Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford University Press, 1982). The import of Raffman's book is to apply such an observation to the consideration of musical ineffability. Note that the thrust of Raffman's ineffability claim has resonance in the philosophy of mind literature on nonconceptual content (which has roots in Evans); see Christopher Peacocke, "Does Perception Have a Nonconceptual Content?" *Journal of Philosophy* 98 (2001): 239-64.

12. One might wonder whether experienced musicians can improve their abilities to *recognize* nuance pitches (etc.). Some of Raffman's critics have failed to notice that she addresses this. Raffman cites findings to the effect that even Indian musicians, whose scales are microtonal, are unable to reliably categorize more finely than semitones. The main point being that, although we might acquire more finely-tuned schemas, "it is overwhelmingly unlikely that we could acquire interval schemas as fine-grained as the pitch and interval discriminations we can make" (p. 84). Also consider: "The limits of our schemas are the limits of our language, and qua perceivers we are so designed that the grain of conscious experience will inevitably be finer than that of our schemas, no matter how long, or how diligently, we practice" (p. 136).

13. W.E. Kennick, "Art and the Ineffable," *Journal of Philosophy* 58 (1961): 309-20.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 317-318, emphasis in original.

15. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, 2nd ed. (Harper & Row, 1965).

16. *Ibid.*, 181, emphasis in original.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Georges Rey, "Review of *Language, Music, Music, and Mind*, by Diana Raffman," *The Philosophical Review*, 106 (Oct. 1997): 641-645.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 643.

20. The psychologist Eric F. Clarke writes, "It is an assumption of most performance research that expression is primarily used to convey musical structure to listeners" (Eric F. Clarke, "The Perception of Expressive Timing

in Music," *Psychological Research* 51 [1989], p. 3). By "expression," Clarke means expressive properties such as nuances.

21. Raffman writes, "The structural description is so called because it represents the signal as instantiating the basic structural elements of the music—namely its pitches and rhythms—as well as the more abstract structural features inferred therefrom. In calling these the *structural* features, I mean *inter alia* that they constitute a system of elements whose tokens are (1) discrete, (2) type-identifiable by some finite mechanical procedure, and (3) combinable in certain role-governed ways. . . . The structural description does not, at least not explicitly, capture what I shall call the *nonstructural* features of the music. Dynamics (loudness levels), tempi (perceived speeds), and timbres (tone 'colors') come immediately to mind. . . . For the time being I shall characterize the nonstructural features, unhelpfully, as those audible features of the music that fail to satisfy the trio of conditions just cited" (Raffman, 25). The more thorough characterization of nonstructural features Raffman signals here turns out to be her account of nuances. Unfortunately, she understands these to be discrete properties that are characterizable in terms of direct description.

22. Some minute variations in pitch and timing have timbral effects (objectives), and some timbral adjustments contribute to more global timbral effects. These sound qualities are central in rock, as Gracyk emphasizes: "Rock is a music of very specific sound qualities and their textural combination. *Specific* sounds are as central to the music as are specific colors in painting" (Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise*, p. 61).

23. This picture emerges from my own experience; this is (at least) a way that some rock musicians deal with musical nuances. I certainly do not mean to imply that classical musicians are less conscious of nuances.

24. Something similar may occur in classical composition, but the nuance considerations will be less specific, I believe, limited to *types* of nuances (cashed out in terms of performance practices and, perhaps, stipulated in a score's supplementary instructions). See note 4.

25. Notice that we may take the comparisons used by good critics to have a very similar function.

26. Paradigm examples of this kind of timbral adjustment, and the resulting blend, are found in the singing of The Jordanaires (known as Elvis Presley's back up singers), and in Marty Robbins's back-up singers, especially the tenor.

27. That is, Raffman does not identify nuances with acoustic events; in this regard, see especially her criticism of Nelson Goodman (Raffman, pp. 115-116, 119).

28. Even though many psychologists seem to define nuances—"expressive variations"—as Raffman does, some

have noted the distinction between nuances and something like what I have been calling nonstructural objectives. Consider these two examples. John Sloboda writes, "We can hear rhythmic imprecision and rubato with appropriate training, but fine differences in timing are more often experienced not as such, but as differences in the quality (the 'life' or 'swing') of a performance" (John A. Sloboda, *The Musical Mind: The Cognitive Psychology of Music* [Oxford University Press, 1985], p. 30). Eric F. Clarke writes, "auditory events, or more specifically musical events, are inherently multi-dimensional, and . . . although they may be theoretically, and even empirically, decomposable into unitary components, this may destroy or conceal emergent properties of the whole event" (Eric F. Clarke, "The Perception of Expressive Timing in Music," p. 3).

29. In seeking to understand the way subtle perceptual properties operate in other kinds of artworks, it seems to me that we may similarly benefit from orienting toward ends. ¶ First and foremost, I owe thanks to Lydia Goehr and Michalle Gal. Related papers were presented at *The American Society for Aesthetics*, Eastern Division Meeting (2008) and the second *Aesthetics Anarchy* (2008); I benefitted from the comments of those present. Thanking everyone who has helped me to think about musical nuances would require naming many former band mates—first on that list would be my father, Les Roholt. For comments on related papers, and support, I would like to thank Hanne Appelqvist, Christopher Bartel, Taylor Carman, David Clowney, Joseph Dubiel, Ted Gracyk, Garry Hagberg, Sean D. Kelly, Hagi Kenaan, Margaret Moore, Jonathan Neufeld, Christopher Peacocke, Eric Rubenstein, Sirine Shebaya, and Brian Soucek. Of course, I am responsible for any errors that remain. Finally, I would like to thank Michael Root for helping me to begin thinking about these issues as an undergraduate in his metaphysics course.