Is It All Autographic?
Samples from the Musical Avant-Garde of the 60s

Panos Vlagopoulos

Dept. of Music Studies, Ionian University, Greece
pvlag@ionio.gr

ABSTRACT

A usual critique voiced against Nelson Goodman's symbolic theory of art is related to his strict adhesion to an extensional semantics and, with it, the failure to account for the artist's intentions. In fact, Joseph Margolis even doubts the sustainability of the autographic / allographic distinction by claiming that since stylistic features are "profoundly intentionalized, historicized, incapable of being captured by any strict extensionalized notation, then it may well be that all so-called allographic arts are ineluctably autographic". This however would amount to practically collapse the distinction between score and performance, which in turn is, if anything, a strong engaged aesthetic view about musical works. I would like to suggest that, in trying to understand the peculiarities of Avant-garde music works of the 50s and 60s (graphic-score music-works and prose music), one can find it very useful to use Goodman's autographic / allographic distinction, without necessarily subscribing to Goodman's extensionalism. Against suggestions to the contrary, the two elements (either the pictorial and the musical, in graphic-score music-works; or the discursive and the musical, in prose music) should be addressed together as two irreducible aspects of graphic-score or prose music-works. These types of music works rely on a *sui generis* combination of autographic *cum* allographic elements. On the other hand, rehearsal represents an essential stage of these music works, next to the preparation of the score, on one end, and performance, on the other. I will try to illustrate this by using samples from the work of Earle Brown, La Monte Young, and Anestis Logothetis.

I. IS IT ALL AUTOGRAPHIC?

Almost anyone in the field agrees that musical works are some kind of abstract types, instantiated by performances, brought about with the help of notations (see Kania, 2008). In 1968 Nelson Goodman came up with a distinction that became -along with other key notions in his *Languages of Art*- the object of fervent debates, as well as a favorite target of aestheticians and philosophers of music: the allographic /autographic distinction. The distinction was embedded in Goodman's overall extensionalist, nominalist project: there really are only scores and/or performances, the latter either right or wrong, the criterion being compliance of performances to scores. In music, authentic instances of multiple works are individuated by strictly adhering to the compliance criterion. (In painting, by identifying the unique physical object that the painter actually painted). Music is allographic *par excellence*; painting is autographic *par excellence*. Therefore, painting is theoretically forgeable, whereas music is theoretically not. This is, more or less, the basic framework of Goodman's path-breaking distinction. Objections to various aspects of Goodman's theory were voiced almost as soon as the book was published. In particular, the allographic / autographic distinction has been heavily criticized: forgeability cannot be a criterion, since clearly style can be forged, as the case of Goodman's own van

Meegeren example illustrates (see Stalnaker, 2001: 400). Thus, if Rembrandt's style can be forged, why not conceive a forgery of an unknown or lost Bach piece (i.e. in Bach's style)? On the other hand, it has been claimed that notation and performance is insuperably autographic; thus, the very sustainability of the distinction between autographic and allographic has been questioned. Margolis claimed that since stylistic features are "profoundly intentionalized, historicized, incapable of being captured by any strict extensionalized notation, then it may well be that all so-called allographic arts are ineluctably autographic" (23). Nan Stalnaker (2001: 400) argued that the distinction could be saved, but on pain of taking into account the intention of the artist to create either a type (allographic) or a unique object of art (autographic); thus compromising (by reverting to "intentions") the overall extensionalist project. Stalnaker goes on remarking that, "as Goodman recognizes […] artists can, and frequently do, work against the grain of a standard practice" (ibid.); he then gives as examples Sol Le Witt's allographic murals (which Le Witt dubbed "musical scores"), and autographic, "pure jazz", music performances. However, not every music example is as easy to judge according to the autographic/allographic distinction as Beethoven's Fifth or a "pure jazz" concert. What about graphic notations or prose music?

In comparing the relationship between score and performance to similar cases in the other arts (between script and film, theatrical text and theatrical play, blueprint and building), Ted Nanniccelli writes: ""However, if graphic scores such as this [his example is *Treatise* by Cornelius Cardew] are indeed works of art, it is because they are drawings—not because they are scores" (2011: 403). I would like to argue that this is plainly wrong. (In the whole article not once does the allographic / autographic distinction (or either of the two terms) get mentioned.) In dissociating the pictorial from the musical aspects of the mentioned works, Nanniccelli misses the point of graphical-score-music-works, which is, I think, not in any way to substitute the pictorial for the musical aspects, but to enlarge the conception of music by combining the allographic-notational with the autographic-pictorial element. In fact, this conception enhancement begins already on the score level only to be answered later by the conception enhancement on the performance level: the pictorial (autographic) aspect is bent towards the allographic pole, by being used as a score; the performance's allographic aspect (according to the degree the performance respects some kind of the compliance principle; more on this later) tends heavily towards the autographic pole. But one needs to take into account this dynamic of displacements of both the graphic score and the music performance between the allographic and the autographic poles, if one is to address the unique experimental nature of graphic-score music-works. In fact, the displacement I'm

talking about (the one between the notational and the performative) takes place already during the composition process.

Figure 1. Earle Brown, *December 1952* (1954).
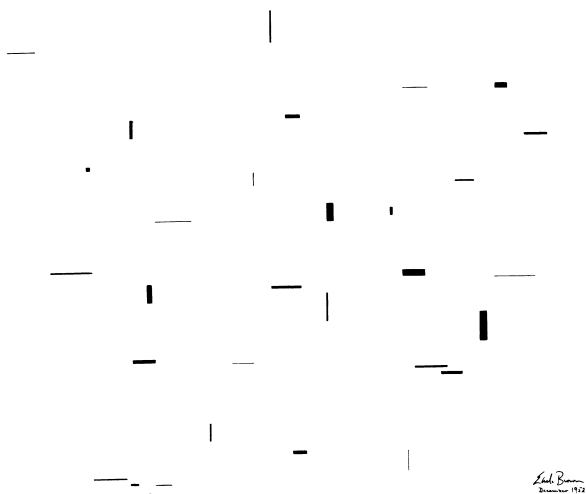
In a text on his seminal *December 1952* Earle Brown argued that what distinguishes his approach from Cage or Feldman is that, coming from a jazz-musician background, he was interested in bringing the composing and the improvising aspects as close as possible. He dubbed *December 1952* the first "improvisational score" which ideally served as a basis to "a way of performing, not a performance itself" (Brown, 2008: 7 & 10). That means, a graphic score is not substitutable by a 'normal' score, which ideally would come about as a result of the latter successfully deciphering the former; a graphic score is unique in the sense it can guarantee a unique "way of performing", as opposed to a unique, compliant performance which would successfully pass, what Goodman calls, the 'retrievability test'. Moreover, one could formulate the reason why addressing separately the pictorial from the performative in graphic-score music-works misses the point, like this: in doing so, the radical element which lies in the peculiar, one wants to say, metaphysical, connection of score to performance in graphic-score music-works gets watered down. One doesn't need to do this in order to claim the autographic character of a performance. (After all, according to the general view, all performance -that is, even of common-practice music- is autographic [see e.g. Margolis, op.cit.]).

A general point: Goodman's distinction doesn't hold on detailed examination, since one can always produce counterexamples. His merit remains, though, that he came up with an original and insightful distinction, which can survive the production of –even successful- counterexamples. Take his famous example for the compliance requirement between score and performance, namely that a performance of Beethoven's Fifth with a single wrong note would not qualify as an instance of Beethoven's Fifth "for by a series of one-note errors of omission, addition, and modification, we can go all the way from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony to Three Blind Mice" (Goodman 1968: 187). This example has been the favorite target on Goodman's theories over the years, and there can be no doubt that Goodman here (and elsewhere) is counterintuitive. However Goodman's example of what a

flawed performance is only takes the argument to its extreme logical consequences, and this has nothing to do with the importance of the compliance requirement itself. He did this by consciously downplaying those performance elements that are left underdetermined in notation and which distinguish one performance from another (of the same work) and which are responsible for the unavoidably autographic character of each performance. The same goes for his allographic / autographic distinction. The production of counterexamples is relatively easy, especially if one enlarges the domain of possible music examples to include jazz, pop, techno and Avant-garde music. However, this does not diminish the very achievement of making the distinction. In fact, the very formulation of the allographic / autographic distinction enables one, theoretically, to conceive of a kind of music, which combines the allographic and the autographic aspects on both the notational and the performative level. The peculiarity of graphic-notation music-works lies in the kind of autographic / allographic combination they exhibit on the notational level.

Consider now a sample of what is usually called 'prose music':

Figure 2. La Monte Young, Prose music (1960).

Piano Piece for David Tudor #1

Bring a bale of hay and a bucket

of water onto the stage for the

piano to eat and drink. The

performer may then feed the piano

or leave it to eat by itself. If the

the [sic] former, the piece is over after

the piano has been fed. If the

latter, it is over after the piano

eats, or decides not to.

<div align="center">October 1960</div>

And:

Composition 1960 #10
      to Bob Morris

Draw a straight line
and follow it.
<div align="center">October 1960</div>

The situation here invites for two different responses, depending on the addressee: "the average reader of prose, not accustomed as is the musician to reading scores as a collection of commandments, may take the command as a metaphor [...]. The musician, on the other hand, might be inclined to take the instruction literally [...]. [It is] a salient (though not exlusive) feature of prose music [...] that the nature of a given composition depends largely on the reader" (Rzewski, cited in Gligo, 1988: 97).

In other words, prose music pieces can be read either as literature or scores, with significant consequences in each case: in the latter case, they would require an extra stage essential to the artwork they exemplify: writing, rehearsing, performing. This would be an extra stage regarding the two stages of traditional Western-canon music. But this is also true for graphic-score music-works. The difference between graphically notated and prose music has to do with the combination of autographic / allographic aspects they exhibit and the even more loose appliance of the compliance criterion in prose music: other as in graphic notation, the text itself is purely allographic (taken either as literature or score), something I think is underlined by the fact that the text is typed and not written in the hand of the composer; on the other hand, both the rehearsal during which the concrete-performer determined performance emerges, as well as the performance itself, are insuperably autographic.

II. NOTATION - REHEARSAL - PERFORMANCE

Anestis Logothetis (1921-1994) had a major contribution in the evolution of graphic notation, being responsible for a number of graphic-score music-works from 1959 to 1982. In his *Sign as Material State of Music* [Zeichen als Aggregatzustand der Musik, 1974] he proposed a systematic view of graphic notation, referring *expressis verbis* to Earle Brown as his immediate model. The two composers knew each other and Brown had conducted Logothetis's work (Brown, 2008: 10). Logothetis thought that the situation around 1959 was ripe for the graphic notation to move to the next level, i.e. beyond pure improvisation: "Let me stress again here that this [Logothetis's] way of notating should convey sound-character events; by no means it is to be construed as a stimulant for improvisation. I form my signs in a sound-informative way and I understand them as signs to be read and realized in sound"; and a little further: "If music and sonority are to achieve a [novel] material state through notation and sign, then this state will be valid only *qua* a visual state of sound in the bindingness [Verbindlichkeit] of its deciphering of sounds " (all translations mine; Logothetis, 1974: 27). In his essay, Logothetis distinguishes three types of signs to be used in a graphic score: a. signs representing concrete pitch ("Tonhöhensymbole zur Vermittlung von Tonkonstellationen"), b. action signals ("Aktionsignale"), and c. 'factors' bearing association to dynamics, timbral change and sound characteristics ("Assoziationsfaktoren für Lautstärke, Klangfarbenwechsel und Toncharaktere": 24; see Figure 3).

What is of interest here in relation to a Goodmanian approach is that it's not the case that a new kind of notation is proposed for which the retrievability test be irrelevant (as, for example, one could argue for Cage's chance operations or even for La Monte Young's 'prose music' pieces); what is important in Logothetis (as well as Brown) is that a compliance / retrievability criterion *is* at work here, only not the of the traditional kind (which, incidentally, is the only considered as valid by Goodman himself). What could this compliance criterion be like? One has no other way of answering this, except than comparing performances to graphic scores, and,

even better, comparing different realizations of the same work to its graphic score. In all cases, this much could be certain, if one is to take seriously Brown's and Logothetis's intentions: the resulting performance should be both a plausible performance of the individual graphic-score music-work in hand and at the same time open to collective improvisation (Brown) or variant (Logothetis), hence, never identical to itself.

Figure 3. Anestis Logothetis, *Agglomeration* (1960).
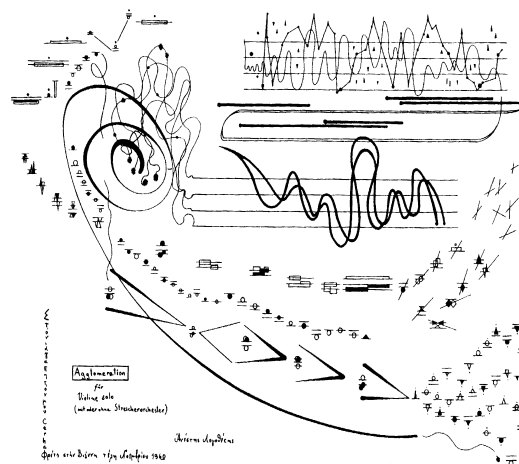
In both cases, it is disciplined rehearsal (a kind of empirical *symbiosis* of the performers with the graphic score, ideally under the composer's guidance) over and over again which guarantees the twofold requirements of a successful realization of the graphic score. In the above-mentioned text on *December 1952* Brown writes of his experience in preparing his piece for performance: "After one hour or two hours [of rehearsal] the performers can almost visualize what is in front of them, and they do not have literally to read it, although what they play is directly relevant form their experience of rehearsing and doing it" (Brown, 2008: 11). As far as the conductor's role in the rehearsal is concerned, Brown writes, in a passage where he also refers to his rehearsal of Logothetis's work: "Now, unless one simply *talks a lot*, one cannot get from musicians the difference of quality between a score like *December 1952*, which looks very geometric and pure, and a score of Logothetis, which looks extremely noisy and messy" (ibid.: 10; my emphasis). Or to bring in another important Goodmanian aspect, one that has to do with the number of stages essential to an art form: it seems that where traditional Western music is a two-stage art, consisting of composition (score) and performance, a graphic-score music-work is essentially a three-stage art: composition, rehearsal, performance.

III. CONCLUSION

Most discussions of Goodman in relation to graphic notation revolves around Goodman's notation theory, only to find it inadequate *vis-à-vis* Avant-garde music, because of his

prejudice in favor of the traditional Western music-work concept (see e.g. Goehr, 1992, and esp. Gligo,1987 & 1988). However, in trying to understand the peculiarities of Avant-garde music works of the 60s (graphic-score music-works and prose music) one can find it very useful to use another part of Goodman's theory, namely the one regarding the autographic / allographic distinction. Against suggestions to the contrary (Nanniccelli, 2008 and Evarts, 1968), the two elements (either the pictorial and the musical, in graphic-score music-works; or the discursive and the musical, in prose music) should be addressed together as irreducible aspects of graphic-score or prose music-works. These types of works rely on a. a *sui generis* combination of autographic *cum* allographic aspects, b. a new kind of compliance/retrievability principle that differs from the one applying to traditional Western art music, while at the same time retains the indispensable link between score and performance, and c. on the existence of essentially three stages (in stead of the two stages of a traditional Western art-music): composition, rehearsal, and performance.

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