

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Imagination and the Mind's Ear

Margaret E. Moore

This dissertation provides an analysis of the phenomenon of musical imagery, or the internal “hearing” of music. I hold the view that musical imagery, as a kind of auditory imagery, is a kind of sensory or perceptual imagination, and should not be incorporated into a propositional model of imagination. I further argue that musical imagery differs in important respects both from visual imagery and from other types of auditory imagery, such as inner speech. This project makes a contribution to a possible larger project of analyzing the sensory or perceptual imagination through comparative work in each sensory modality and their various combinations.

Chapter 1 provides the necessary background on theories of imagination, and demonstrates the lack of attention currently paid to auditory imagination in general and to musical imagination in particular. The analysis of musical imagery then proceeds from three points of view: phenomenological, conceptual or analytical, and empirical.

Chapter 2 gives a phenomenological description of our subjective experiences of musical imagery. While this description is of the phenomenological aspects of our experiences, it is not an example of work in phenomenology proper, as practiced by the followers of Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty or Heidegger. Rather, the method is necessarily first person, but appeals to the idea that musical imagery experiences occur along a spectrum of possible abilities. That is, while there is much variation among reports of subjective musical imagery, it still makes sense to appeal to a kind of normal imaginative experience, and, as a result, the reliance on introspection does not result in hopeless idiosyncrasies.

Chapter 3 discusses four topics related to content of musical imagery. First, I address the question of what makes auditory imagination specifically *auditory*; second, I examine the relationship between auditory imagination and imagining hearing; third, I address questions about the ontology of sounds and the ontology of music in the context of my claims about auditory imagination; finally, I discuss whether the contents of musical imagery, as a type of auditory imagination, should be thought of as conceptual or non-conceptual.

Chapter 4 addresses the question of the ontology of the mental image, discussed both by Gilbert Ryle and by participants in the mental imagery debate in the field of psychology. Having demonstrated that scientific inquiry into the mechanisms of mental imagery does not involve commitment to ontologically problematic mental entities, I then survey empirical work in cognitive psychology and neuroscience that sheds light on the neural underpinnings of musical imagery. In conclusion, I discuss issues regarding the integration of historical, empirical, conceptual, and phenomenological methods I use to develop a theory of musical imagery as sensory imagination.

MARGARET E. MOORE
Ph.D., Department of Philosophy
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Temple University
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19122

Advisory Committee: Noël Carroll, David Wolfsdorf, Joseph Margolis, Gerald Vision, Susan Feagin

EMAIL: margs1102@gmail.com