

Contending with Binary Oppositions in Musical Aesthetics through Eros

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Abstract

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Throughout history, musical aesthetics has been characterized by binary oppositions. For example, some argue music's expressivity is rooted in its internal, formal configurations while others do so by pointing to music's representational qualities. Or some emphasize music's sensorial nature, i.e., the necessity of music to be implicated in sound and time, while others emphasize its incorporeal aspect. However, looking at these oppositions through the lens of Eros gives us a more fruitful understanding of musical aesthetics where integration of opposing views is possible. Eros, when defined as a drive/instinct to sublimate oneself in order to create higher unities, can explain these opposing views while incorporating the sense of longing and delight that accompanies musical experience. Music triggers erotic desire in us through its sensorial beauty which is manifested in sonic configuration of forms. Eros can be seen as a modified version of behavioral mimesis which is a primaevial impulse to be like the other. Thus, while affirming the formalistic creed, Eros also redefines the representational view by redeeming the concept of imitation in music.

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Introduction

For millennia, people have been fascinated by the power of music. The way it evokes emotions and transports the listener has been a topic of perennial interest. Accordingly, there have been many attempts to formulate the nature of music and its relationship with the listener. Some have expressed this in terms of our bodily reaction to music, some as a mode of detached contemplation which endows us with a glimpse of incorporeal realm. Some have tried to articulate music in terms of mathematical order, some as a kind of language. At some point, one notices a pattern in these arguments and that is, these are usually articulated in terms of binary opposition. Indeed, as Edward Lippman points out, the history of musical aesthetics has been one of polemics and it is in the context of polemics the aesthetics has thrived.¹ My thesis is an attempt to look at musical aesthetics through the lens of Eros. I believe this will contribute to an integration of two opposing views. I also believe applying the frame of Eros in musical aesthetics will shed a light on issues such as emotions and expressivity. There are three sources of inspiration that led me to consider Eros as helpful in the discussion of musical aesthetics.

The first is Freud's notion of Eros as articulated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Here, Eros is understood as one of the two basic drives that govern human behavior. Eros is the life drive which seeks to sublimate oneself and create higher unities. The opposite drive is Thanatos which seeks to return to the original state every organism came from, which is the state of being a non-organism, the death.

¹ Edward Lippman, *A History of Western Musical Aesthetics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 26.

The second, which is related to the first, stems from a reaction to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's argument on musical expressivity. Referring to Freud's death instinct, Adorno and Horkheimer identify artistic impulse as essentially "the trend to lose oneself in the environment instead of playing an active role in it; the tendency to let oneself go and sink back into nature."² I do not agree with their view and argue that artistic impulse takes its root in the opposite instinct, Eros.

The last is theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar's exploration of faith. His notion of faith is articulated not so much in terms of propositional knowledge but in terms of Eros, a movement toward the beautiful. In this notion, what acts as the main driving force of faith is "the active principle of longing or attraction."³

In this work, my primary focus will be on instrumental music. This is first because as a pianist I believe I am more qualified to discuss instrumental music than, say, opera. Second, as soon as words come into play in relation to music, the direction of the study necessarily takes a different turn, namely, that of the relationship between music and words. This is not the focus of my study. Instead, my interest lies in music as tonal structures and progressions.

Historically, the discussion of musical aesthetics has revolved around two schools of thought: One advocates music as self-sustaining structures of interrelated tonal play, usually aligning itself with some version of formalism. The other finds musical meaning in its ability to relate to extramusical references. Eduard Hanslick and Peter Kivy belong to the former. Liszt, Wagner

² Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 227.

³ Edward Oakes and David Moss, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 134.

and representational theorists such as Raymond Monelle, Robert Hatten and Jerrold Levinson belong to the latter.

For those who argue for music's autonomy, music is "tonally moving forms," to borrow Hanslick's famous definition. Because music does not rely on extramusical reference for its beauty and expressivity, it is "absolute." Hence, absolute music is usually articulated in negative terms, i.e., it is not a narrative nor picture nor a representation of any non-musical realities. Because of its refusal to be articulated in non-musical terms together with its primary focus on form, it is usually understood as some version of purism.⁴ Even though absolute music is "not so much an agreed idea as an aesthetic problem,"⁵ these purism and formalism are what usually define the notion of absolute music. In Roger Scruton's words, absolute music is defined not by what is but by what is not, i.e., it is not "subordinated to words (as in song), to drama (as in opera), to some representational meaning (as in programme music), or even to the vague requirements of emotional expression."⁶ It also falls under the umbrella of "intrinsic" view of music in that everything is explainable in terms of what is intrinsic to music.

Sitting on the other end of the spectrum is the extrinsic view. Program music is a good example. It is usually contrasted with the notion of absolute music and therefore, is characterized by an attempt to depict non-musical realities such as narratives or concepts.

Oxford Grove Music Online defines program music as "music of a narrative or descriptive kind; the term is often extended to all music that attempts to represent extramusical concepts without

⁴ Peter Kivy, *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 2002), Locations 818-820, Kindle Version.

⁵ Roger Scruton, *Oxford Music Online* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2008), "Absolute Music".

⁶ Ibid, "Absolute Music"

resorting to sung words.”⁷ Even though there is a distinction between program music and music that “represents” extramusical concepts,⁸ I will nonetheless draw from the latter half of this definition – music that attempts to represent extramusical concepts – to refer to any theory that is opposed to the “formal” understanding of music.

Closely related to this dichotomy of formal and representational definitions of music is the dichotomy between the roles of the intellect and the sensual. Understanding music primarily as an intellectual exercise usually aligns with the formalistic argument because both concern with discernment of relationships, harmonies and orders. On the other hand, the imitative or representational side usually draws its argument either from *music's* ability to imitate extramusical realities or *our* physiological reaction to “imitate” music’s movement. More than once in history, there has been a fruitful interplay of both sides. For example, the formalistic side (usually aligning itself with some version of Platonism) incorporated the notion of “imitation” by arguing that music is a reflection of an invisible, immutable reality. This was the crux of the argument of St. Augustine and the late eighteenth and nineteenth century idealists. Or as Schopenhauer argued, music was articulated as a representation of the Will (as opposed to a representation of a representation of the Will which was what all other forms of art essentially were). Or as Mark Burford argued, both Hanslick and the New German School, i.e., Liszt, Wagner, shared many common assumptions. For example, they both put the sensorial, the material nature of music at the forefront of their argument as a vehicle for music’s expressive

⁷ Roger Scruton, *Oxford Music Online* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2008), “Programme Music”.

⁸ Liszt’s *Symphonic Poems*, Berlioz’ *Symphonie Fantastique*, or Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony are programme music whereas Couperin’s *Tic Toc* is not. “The logic of Couperin’s piece is purely musical, even if its thematic material is derived from the imitation of a clock.” see, Scruton’s article on “Programme Music” on *Oxford Music Online*. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2008).

power.⁹ In addition, they both acknowledged music's spiritual content. Where they diverged was that for Hanslick, the spiritual content resided in the musical form itself whereas for the New German School, the spiritual content pointed to an extramusical reality.

Underlying all these dichotomies is a dichotomy between beauty and expression. Lippman writes that the polemics of musical aesthetics boils down to a contest between beauty and expression.¹⁰

Is music essentially a form of beauty manifested in interdependent relationships between musical elements or is music primarily a mode of expression? If we stretch these questions then we can ask: is music's beauty rooted in its expression or is music's expression rooted in its beauty? In either case, what determines the nature of its beauty and expression?

I want to argue that while music retains its origin as a mode of expression, it is from its formal beauty that music draws its expressive power. And it is through this beauty music is able to attract us and trigger a certain desire in us, a desire to sublimate ourselves and create higher unities, Eros.

The goal of my thesis is to show that Eros enables us to redeem the notion of imitation in music by pointing back to our primaeval desire to be "like" the other, while affirming the formal beauty as the essence of music. What is more, if Eros is defined as 1. Delight in beauty manifested in sensuous forms; 2. Desire to sublimate oneself and create higher unities, then it is able to give rise to a mode of understanding rooted in a mode of love that aids and complements pure intellectual endeavor. Thus, it is able to reconcile the dichotomy between the intellect and the sensuous which has been another main binary opposition defining musical aesthetics. This is the

⁹ Mark Burford, "Hanslick's Idealist Materialism," *19th-Century Music* 30, no. 2 (2006): 166-81.

¹⁰ Lippman, 26.

main focus of studies by of St. Augustine and Jenefer Robinson's. Finally, the dichotomy between the beauty and expression can be reconciled by using the analogy of dance which is fueled by Eros. Many scholars have used a dance analogy to describe emotions we feel in music. They argue our experience of listening to music is like dancing with the music. For example, Roger Scruton argued we recognize expressive gestures in music and *lean on to* them to appropriate our emotions.¹¹ I would add it is also beauty that we recognize, which in turn, evokes a desire in us to sublimate ourselves and create higher unities. This in turn, draws us in to participate in a back and forth movement with it. Hence, into a dance.

There is one element that takes an important part in our examination of the role of Eros, and that is behavioral mimesis. This differs from the traditional notion of representation or resemblance which is usually the term used in musical aesthetics. Behavioral mimesis should be thought of as a kind of impulse, an innate human inclination to identify oneself with the Other. It is so hard wired in us that it forms a core part of who we are, i.e., babies imitate mothers' facial gestures before they develop language or self-consciousness. Mimesis goes beyond merely copying external qualities. It is "imaginatively entering into the world of the one that is imitated."¹² In this sense mimesis and Eros are very similar and they share common processes such as empathy and aspiration. However, if mimesis is a kind of reflexive mechanism that can be triggered without beauty, Eros depends on the presence of beauty. Hence, by bringing in Eros we are able

¹¹ Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 352.

¹² Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 247.

to affirm and emphasize the importance of formal beauty as the essence of music. This is why I believe that in music it is more appropriate to talk of Eros as the fundamental drive than mimesis.

The first chapter will examine arguments of St. Augustine and the early Romantic idealists who retained an interplay of two opposing values. St. Augustine was faced with a dilemma of the power of sensuous music. From the Platonic point of view, which he held, music was supposed to be regarded as a pure intellectual, theoretical exercise untainted by physicality. However, he could not deny the emotional effects of practiced music and the benefits thereof. He resolved this dilemma through what Carol Harrison calls “affective cognition,” a mode of understanding that is rooted in an attraction to beauty through which things that the intellect alone cannot grasp are revealed. This way, he was able to reconcile music as sensuous practice and music as intellectual exercise. The early Romantic idealists, standing in the same Platonic tradition, also saw music as a reflection of an immutable, incorporeal reality. Thus, despite their Platonic tendency with a heavy emphasis on immutable forms, by acknowledging the significance of the senses, they reconciled the notion of music’s imitative and formal qualities by claiming that music was a reflection of a spiritual realm. However, what we see in the later periods is a gradual polarization which deepened the gap between the formalistic view and the representational view. In these theories, we no longer see the dynamic interplay of two opposing views we used to see in earlier periods, at least not to the same level. These opposing sides will be presented by the arguments of Peter Kivy who stands for formalism and Levinson and Robinson who advocate for representational theories.

The second chapter explores how mimesis and Eros can be brought in to create integration of these dichotomies. First, I will focus on the mechanism of behavioral mimesis – an impulse to be “like” the other – and its role in the process of composing and listening to music. Then I will

examine raw materials that constitute music, which I will divide into studies of form, time, sound and music's relation to language and power. This is to explore what elements in music attract us. Then I will argue that through these elements music is able to trigger Eros in us and it is through Eros we understand and experience musical expressivity to its fullest.

Chapter 1.

This chapter will briefly survey some of the discussions on musical aesthetics that have taken place at various points in history. My goal is to show that historically, there have been cases that allowed integration of opposing views that are characteristic of musical aesthetics. It is only in recent years that the opposition has widened and polarization deepened.

As mentioned in the introduction, the inquiry into the nature of music and the source of its expressivity has been a topic of perennial interest and fascination for millennia. In most cases, what lies at the heart of this quest is binary opposition: is music formal or imitative? is it primarily an intellectual exercise or sensual practice? And is music a form of beauty or expression? The dynamic of opposition is so deeply seated in the debate it seems that even before any systematic account of musical aesthetics came into existence, this was what formed the core of this inquiry. The modern version of musical aesthetics was established as a branch of philosophy in the eighteenth century. However, the debate on the nature of music had begun long before then as we know from the writings of Plato and Aristotle. For them, it was clear that the arts had power over the soul. The problem was that they were often practiced in a manner that did not always match their ideals of good citizens. As Carol Harrison argues:

the ancients did not see the relation between music as a liberal discipline and music in performance in anything like the same way: one was a matter of eternal, immutable, incorporeal truths to be understood by the intellect; the other was a matter of temporal, mutable, all too sensuous sound – worse, it was often practised by dubious characters in dodgy contexts and played on the most distracting of human passions.¹³

For the ancients, the tension lay in the irreconcilable opposition between music as intellectual exercise and music as sensual practice. One belonged to the higher realm of the spirit and the

¹³ Carol Harrison, *On Music, Sense, Affect and Voice* (London: T&T Clark, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 6.

intellect, the other to the lower bodily senses. This opposition between the rational and the sensual in fact becomes a recurring theme in the later periods.

Binary opposition is also what gave birth to the first documents of the modern history of musical aesthetics. In his book *A History of Western Musical Aesthetics*, in a passage that deals with music's new preoccupation with sung words in the sixteenth century, Edward Lippman identifies the tension between the ideals of mathematics and rhetoric as the driving force in the rise of the modern musical aesthetics:

Concern with language was quite different from the concern with mathematical structure and regulated dissonance; the two ideals had very little in common and were potentially incompatible; they were the musical representatives, in fact, of mathematics and rhetoric and thus of the two contrasting groups of studies of the liberal arts — the quadrivium (arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, and music) and the trivium (logic, rhetoric and grammar). It was the conflict between these two principles that produced the first documents of the modern history of musical aesthetics. Indeed, aesthetics has thrived on controversy throughout its history, which is to a great extent a history of polemics.¹⁴

These polemics, he argues, is also fundamentally a contest between beauty and expression.

As it will become clearer, however, this polarization is not only unnecessary but unhelpful in understanding musical aesthetics, especially when it concerns the question of emotions. I would like to argue the components that make up these binary oppositions, e.g., intellect vs sensual; formal vs imitative; beauty vs expression are dependent upon one another and thus work together to activate a certain desire in us, Eros: the desire to sublimate oneself and create higher unities.¹⁵

¹⁴ Edward Lippman, *A History of Western Musical Aesthetics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 26.

¹⁵ This definition of Eros is taken from Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. My argument for Eros is also inspired by theologian Balthasar's explication of Eros in its role in faith. For more detail see Oliver Davies, "The Theological Aesthetics" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar*, edited by Edward T. Oakes, S. J. and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 131–42.

But first, to see how the debate has played out in history – sometimes with reconciliation and sometimes with further polarization – I will examine three instances: 1. St. Augustine of Hippo’s account of music in *De Musica* (387-391 CE); 2. The idealist aesthetics at the turn of the nineteenth century; 3. The more modern dialogue between the formalists, who advocate for the source of musical beauty from its own intrinsic structures, and the representationalists, who find that source in music’s ability to represent extramusical realities.

St. Augustine attempted to reconcile the music practiced by uneducated masses with the music as an intellectual discipline shared among the elites. Standing in the Platonic tradition, he regarded the practice of sensorial, temporal music as low and impure. However, he concluded later that it is precisely through this sensorial nature that music enabled one to exercise a highest form of intellectual endeavor, the contemplation of the divine. In his theory, since our intellect is fallen, it cannot grasp things belonging to the transcendental realm; therefore, we have to rely on sensuous manifestation of the immutable harmony in order to grasp what our rational minds cannot. I will present his arguments as reflected in his *De Musica*. His contribution is noteworthy because it shows that issues that were to become recurring themes in the future were discussed as early as the fourth century. One such debate occurred within the circle of idealist aesthetics at the turn of the nineteenth century. Both St. Augustine and the idealists had to grapple with the question of whether music was to be thought primarily as an intellectual or sensuous practice. Or whether music was, in essence, formal or representational.

The idealist aesthetics of the nineteenth century stands in marked contrast to the aesthetics of the previous centuries. Nineteenth century discourse revolved around the language of spiritual and incorporeal whereas eighteenth-century and to some degree, seventeenth-century aesthetics were

articulated in terms of the mechanistic and the physiological. For example, Descartes thought music provoked emotions in us by triggering bodily movement that imitated movement of the music. In this respect the shift that happened at the turn of the nineteenth century reflects a similar conflict the ancients faced – that between the intellect and the body. Like St. Augustine, the idealists thought music was a reflection of the unreachable spiritual realm. Like the ancients, their philosophy placed spirit over body. However, what distinguishes the idealist aesthetics from that of St. Augustine is the difference in the weight they put on music's materiality. For St. Augustine, music was apt to reflect immutable order and harmony precisely because these qualities were communicated through sensorial – that is, sonic and temporal – means. However, for the nineteenth century idealists, what justified music's status as having a close relation to spiritual realm was its incorporeal nature. It was this incorporeality – the ethereal nature of sound and time – that gave music wings to fly to a higher realm. Mark Evan Bonds quotes Schlegel to describe this sentiment which was prevalent among the idealists:

Sound, according to Schlegel, is the "innermost" of the five senses, dealing with transitory phenomena in a play of successions; and music, as exemplified by the sound of the chorale (quite apart from any underlying text), provides us with "an intimation of harmonic perfection... through the image of heavenly bliss." Because of its incorporeality, "one must accord music the advantage of being ideal in its essence. It purifies the passions, as it were, from the material filth with which they are associated, in that music presents these passions to our inner sense entirely according to their form, without any reference to objects; and after touching an earthly frame, it allows these passions to breathe in a purer air."¹⁶

In this light, it is not surprising to see the genre of instrumental music being elevated to a higher status at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Through its lack of referential clarity and concrete semantic contents, instrumental music was able to appropriate the inexpressible "absolute."

¹⁶ Mark Evan Bonds, "Idealism and the Aesthetics of Instrumental Music at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50, no. 2/3 (1997): 405.

Another aspect of the idealist aesthetics that is of interest to my thesis is its fluid combination of music's formal aspect and its ability to reference extramusical realities. It did not seem to present a problem for the idealists to believe that these two qualities can exist side by side. It did, however, provide a seed for later polarization. The consequence of this polarization is reflected in the dialogue between modern musicologists. For this, I will examine arguments of Peter Kivy, who stands for formalistic ideals, and Levinson, who pioneered Persona theory.

St. Augustine's *De Musica*

De Musica was part of St. Augustine's ambitious project to tackle all seven disciplines of the liberal arts. The treatise on music consists of six books. The first five deal with technical explanations of rhythms and measure but it is the sixth book that is of relevance here. It is a treatise on what the modern reader would identify as musical aesthetics.¹⁷

The sixth book can be summed up as a fruit of St. Augustine's attempt to find the relationship between practiced music which is sensual and spiritual music which is intellectual. Harrison writes:

As an intellectual, a scholar and a teacher, trained in the disciplines of the liberal arts, he (St. Augustine) wants to hold fast to the rational, intellectual theory of music, or measured movement, as it exists independently of sensuous, temporal performance. But as a Christian convert, deeply aware of his fallen inability to apprehend truth and acutely sensitive to the compelling and moving power of the Church's Psalms, hymns and songs, he found himself involuntarily overwhelmed by precisely that sensuous, temporal performance he was so suspicious of.¹⁸

¹⁷ It is worth bearing in mind that the "music" dealt with in this treatise is very different from the Western classical music with which we are familiar. Music in St. Augustine's time was closely associated with poetry. Thus, music in *De Musica* is defined as the "knowledge of measuring well." As Carol Harrison argues: "The theoretical structure of rhythm was taught and analysed through the various types of poetic metre which, for centuries, had been handed down by the grammarians and poets. In this context music was a way of structuring the sound of the spoken voice so that it communicated, not only through words but through a rhythmic beat." See, Harrison, 1.

¹⁸ Harrison, 2.

St. Augustine resolved this dilemma by first positing that everything which is created from nothing is beautiful insofar as it possesses form.¹⁹ This is because all things come from “that supreme and eternal origin of rhythms and similarity and equality and order (*illo summo atque aeterno principatu numerorum et similitudinis et aequalitatis et ordinis*).”²⁰ He also makes it clear that “whatever exists, exists because it possesses measure, number and weight; if these things are taken away, or if they are lost, then it falls back into nothingness.”²¹ Hence, he makes two explicit claims: 1. Created things, albeit not to the same degree as the eternal, immutable reality, nevertheless possess and “retain vestiges of beauty.”²² This is because; 2. Created reality owes its existence to the Creator of All that is immutable.²³

Here what we see is that, without blurring the two distinct realities (and to certain extent, hierarchy of those realities), Augustine is creating a picture of a dynamic relationship between the immutable reality and the temporal reality. Here, the “eternal” is manifested through the temporal. Also, in this definition, the sensuous reality is, in and of itself, not evil since it owes its existence to immutable reality which is good. So, how do these claim help understand the role of performed music in relation to the grasping of the eternal truth that so many philosophers, including Augustine, sought after?

Even though Augustine does not hold the view that created things are in and of themselves evil, it is nonetheless inferior to the things belonging to the spiritual realm. Hence, St. Augustine is a

¹⁹ Harrison, 49.

²⁰ Augustine, *De Musica* 6.17.57 as cited in Harrison.

²¹ Harrison, 42.

²² *Ibid*, 49.

²³ *Ibid*, 42.

Platonist, which means that in his account of music, the sensorial is subservient to the spiritual.

This is particularly reflected in his distinction between delight *of* the senses (which should be avoided) and delight *through* the senses.²⁴ In other words, one should not make the enjoyment of music as an end goal but as a means by which things of the eternal is enjoyed. He argues:

Therefore, delight of the sense is one thing; delight *through* the sense is something else (*Aliud ergo sensus, aliud per sensum*). Graceful movement delights the sense, but the timely import of the movement delights the mind alone *through* the sense (*per sensum*). This is more easily noticed in hearing: whatever has a pleasing sound (*jocunde sonat*), that it is which pleases and entices the hearing itself. What is really signified by that sound is what is borne to the mind through the messenger of our hearing ... our praise of the metre is one thing, but our praise of the meaning is something else (*Aliter metra laudamus, aliterque sententiam*).²⁵

This relationship between the sense and the mind is, according to his opinion, what enables music to educate the soul. He argues that this delight *through* the senses is what gives formative power to music:

Those who direct all these rhythms which belong to the body and exist towards the reactions of the body (*aduersus passiones corporis*), and those among the rhythms that are contained in the memory, not to carnal lust (*carnalem uoluptatem*) but solely for his bodily health ... Does he not activate all those rhythms without being trapped in any of their snares? For he both chooses the health of the body, so as not to be hindered, and refers all those activities to usefulness for his neighbour, whom he is commanded to love as himself because of the natural bond of a universal law (*communis iuris naturale uinculum*).²⁶

This formative power of music was in fact a prevalent idea among the ancients. For example, Plato identified “the possibility of an extra-rational aesthetic activity that prepares the soul for

²⁴ Harrison, 55.

²⁵ Augustine, *De Musica* 2.15.42, as cited in Harrison.

²⁶ Augustine, *De Musica*, 6.14.45, as cited in Harrison.

reasoned judgment” because he believed the soul was musically constructed.²⁷ Likewise, Aristotle wrote, “it is plain that music has the power of producing a certain effect on the moral character of the soul ... and we seem to have a certain affinity (*suggeneia*) with tunes and rhythms (*harmoniais kai tois ruthmois*); owing to which many wise men say either that the soul is a harmony or that it has harmony.”²⁸

Thus, *De Musica* anticipates what poet Geoffrey Hill calls “sensuous intelligence” or what Jenefer Robinson calls “affective appraisal,” a mode of knowledge that is obtained prior to any cognitive evaluation. According to Harrison, St. Augustine was acutely aware of the “affective cognition” which was capable of affecting our emotions and therefore, actions.²⁹ This theme of “affective cognition” has gained a fresh momentum in recent years among researchers. For example, Jenefer Robinson has put forward the theory of affective appraisal by integrating evidence from clinical research in neuroscience and her philosophical insights to explain mechanism of emotions in art. She argues it is through affective appraisal, which precedes cognitive evaluation, that one comes to experience emotions in arts. What is of particular relevance to my paper is that, unlike any other art, music can trigger emotions by having a direct effect on our motor system. She calls this process Jazzercise Effect. (This will be dealt with later in the paper.) St. Augustine already recognized the effect music can have on our emotions that are not shaped by pure cognitive, intellectual endeavor. Theories based on these pre-cognitive, affective modes of understanding put forward by Robinson and St. Augustine – standing some fifteen hundred years apart – are worth keeping in mind because I believe this mode of cognition

²⁷ Nina Valiquette Moreau, "Musical Mimesis and Political Ethos in Plato's "Republic"," *Political Theory* 45, no. 2 (2017): 192.

²⁸ Aristotle, *The Politics*. Loeb Classical Library (London: New York: W. Heinemann; G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1932), 661.

²⁹ Harrison, 73.

is closely bound up with Eros. Eros, which is a desire and a movement toward the desired object, also operates prior to any cognitive evaluation. This is why Freud termed it as a drive, or an instinct. St. Augustine's affective cognition is dependent on the recognition of beauty which in turn causes a movement toward that beauty, which to certain extent, gives rise to a mode of delight and understanding that is of a different nature from an acquisition of information. In other words, affective cognition relies on Eros.

Thus, long before any systematic account of musical aesthetics came into existence, St. Augustine had already anticipated and dealt with two issues that were to be pivotal in musical aesthetics: 1) tension between two opposing qualities – intellectual vs sensual; formal vs imitative; 2) music's formative power that can shape our emotions which are not educated by acquisition of factual information.

Aesthetics of Idealism

St. Augustine's *De Musica* stands in the venerable tradition of idealist aesthetics along with Plato and Pythagoras. In this school of thought which prioritized the spiritual over the material, art was seen "as a means by which to sense a realm of the spiritual, the infinite." In the nineteenth century, the field of aesthetics was emerging as "the basic discipline and the organ of metaphysics."³⁰

³⁰ Mark Evan Bonds, "Idealism and the Aesthetics of Instrumental Music at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50, no. 2/3 (1997): 390.

Aesthetics of idealism therefore elevated the status of art to an unprecedented level in the realm of philosophy. Prevalent in this aesthetics is the idea that music acts as a bridge between the earthly realm and the spiritual realm. Music frees the listener from the commonality of everyday life and transports the listener to the realm of the ideal. To the twenty-first century listener, this may not sound particularly striking, but the fact that this belief emerged toward the eighteenth century is noteworthy. The eighteenth-century world view was deeply rooted in naturalism, a branch of philosophy that sought to explain every phenomenon in the universe in terms of natural cause and effect. Consequently, it rejects any claims which cannot be proven by empirical observation.

In his essay, *The Idealism and the Instrumental Music at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century*, Mark Evan Bonds defines idealism as follows:

In the broadest terms, idealism gives priority to spirit over matter. Without necessarily rejecting the phenomenal world, it posits a higher form of reality in a spiritual world beyond: objects in the phenomenal world- including works of art--are understood as reflections of noncorporeal ideals. From an aesthetic standpoint, idealism holds that art and the external world are consonant with one another not because art imitates that world, but because both reflect a common, higher ideal. Through idealism, the work of art became a central means by which to sense the realm of the spiritual, the infinite. By the early nineteenth century, the field of aesthetics was beginning to emerge as “the basic discipline and the organ of metaphysics...” An individual's response to a given work of art, in other words, was seen as a reaction not so much to the work itself as to the ideal manifested in that work. Idealism did not deny the emotional power of music. To the contrary: the aesthetics of idealism fostered some of the most soaring descriptions of instrumental music ever written. The object of description, however, had shifted from music's effect to music's essence, or more specifically, to the ideal realm reflected in that music.³¹

Hence, the idealist aesthetics not only allowed incorporeal reality in its discourse but relied on it as a crucial factor. Seen in this light, it is not surprising that the genre of instrumental music was elevated above vocal music – the exoteric nature of instrumental music with its lack of

³¹ Bonds, 390.

referential clarity meant it provided greater freedom for the listener's imagination to reach that immutable cosmic reality.

Likewise, idealists' take on the infinite and a sense of longing paved a way for the early Romantics' rhetoric of absolute music. This is most famously reflected in E.T.A. Hoffman's review of Beethoven's Fifth symphony written in 1810:

When we speak of music as an independent art, we should properly refer only to instrumental music which, scorning the assistance and association of another art, namely poetry, expresses that peculiar property which can be found in music only. It is the most romantic of all the arts, one might almost say the only really romantic art, for its sole object is the expression of the infinite. The lyre of Orpheus opens the doors of Orkus. Music discloses to man an unknown kingdom, a world having nothing in common with the external sensual world which surrounds him and in which he leaves behind him all definite feelings in order to abandon himself to an inexpressible longing.³²

Therefore, even though Beethoven's instrumental music may have provided inspiration and impetus for Hoffman's enthusiastic outburst of praise of instrumental music, Bonds argues the philosophical foundation had already been laid before he arrived on the scene.³³

One of the most famous instrumental pieces that is often described in this spiritual overtone is Beethoven's last piano sonata, Op.111. Particularly, concerning the second movement, it seems impossible to listen to it without a sense of the transcendental. Thomas Mann, in consultation with Theodor Adorno, termed it as an "end without any return."³⁴ The second movement has often been described in opposing terms to the first movement: Hans von Bülow described it as the "Samara and Nirvana," Edwin Fisher as the "Here and Beyond," Alfred Brendel as the "real

³² Arthur Ware Locke, and E. T. A. Hoffmann. "Beethoven's Instrumental Music: Translated from E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Kreisleriana" with an Introductory Note." *The Musical Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (1917): 127.

³³ Bonds, 411.

³⁴ Thomas Scherman, and Louis Biancolli, *The Beethoven Companion*, first ed. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972), 1055.

and the mystical world.”³⁵ The extended trills at the end of the second movement have always been described in mystic, contemplative tone seeped with a sense of eternity and redemption. Indeed, as Robin McCabe writes, “There is a feeling of emerging from the ‘crucible,’ so to speak, of the first movement, and the extended C major seems almost a catharsis.”³⁶

One may think, because of the idealists’ predilection for the “inexpressible,” (as was evident in Hoffman’s writing) they would see program music as incompatible with their philosophy. However, music with programmatic titles or even detailed program were compatible with their ideals on the grounds that “any verbal interpretation is necessarily limited”³⁷ to express the inexpressible.

In fact, what one notices from the idealist aesthetics is a process of polarization which gradually deepened the gap between the formalists and representational theorists. Just as the idealist aesthetics was compatible with programmatic music, so was it compatible with the notion of absolute music. One may easily recognize a close connection between the idealist aesthetics and absolute music. Both refuse to be grounded in terms of what can be clearly identified. (Yes, the idealists believed music “represented” the spiritual realm but there is a difference between representing earthly objects and representing an incorporeal reality.³⁸) However, the modern definition of absolute music in purely formalistic terms, i.e., “music is structures of sounds and does not represent anything,” is a later development. The early Romantics defined absolute music not as what is not – as it is understood today – but as what is – namely, an image of the

³⁵ William Kinderman, *Beethoven* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 236.

³⁶ Robin McCabe, private communication.

³⁷ Bonds, 416.

³⁸ Bonds, 416.

Absolute.³⁹ Thus, even though it is anachronistic to apply the modern definition of absolute music to the way early nineteenth century idealists understood the concept, it is clear that the idealist aesthetics provided the framework necessary for the development of the modern-day definition.

As was evident in Bonds' earlier quote ("music's essence... [is] the ideal realm reflected in that music"), early nineteenth century aesthetics not only allowed room for music's imitative capacity but crucially depended on it for justification of music's status as having a close connection to a suprasensory realm. This is most clearly evident in the first edition of Eduard Hanslick's *On the Musically Beautiful*. What comes right before the famous definition of music as "tonally moving forms" is the following:

If we now ask what is to be expressed with this tone-material, then the answer is musical ideas. A musical idea brought to its appearance is already autonomous beauty; it is already an end in itself and in no way primarily a medium or material for the representation of feelings and thoughts, *even if it is capable of possessing, at the same time, a high degree of symbolic significance in its reflection of the great laws of the world, which is something we find in all artistic beauty.* Sounding forms in motion (tonally moving form) are the sole and exclusive content and object of music.⁴⁰

Mark Evan Bonds identifies this passage as the ringing culmination of Hanslick's treatise. However, the part in italics was deleted in subsequent editions. By the time his treatise became widely read and reprint was necessary, the opposition between the formalists and the New

³⁹ Bonds, 420.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 415.

German School had been so polarized that any hint of music's imitative quality coming from the formalistic camp was likely to have been disapproved.

It is clear that Hanslick saw compatibility between idealism (which embraced music's imitative qualities) and formalism. As Bonds points out,

He (Hanslick) recognized that the aesthetics of idealism allowed instrumental music to retain its autonomy through an intrinsically musical, self-referential content without thereby being isolated from "extramusical" ideas. The important distinction is that this "spiritual content" was seen to reside not in the music itself, but rather within the "disposition of the listener."⁴¹

This emphasis in the "disposition of the listener" is what distinguishes the nineteenth century's aesthetics from that of the previous century. A predilection for the mental as opposed to the physical became a means by which the spiritual was brought back to the scene. In the worldview of the previous century, anything that was not proven by empirical observation was denied any legitimacy as a basis for an argument. This shift may reflect the turbulent times that the Western Europe saw – the French Revolution, the rise and fall of Napoleon, and the Biedermeier sentimentality, all within a span of less than six decades. The confidence in human reason and the optimistic outlook on the new possibilities were soon disillusioned. In this light, it does not come as a surprise that the eighteenth century's predilection for explaining musical expressivity in terms of mechanistic cause and effect was replaced by non-materialistic idealism.

If the eighteenth-century understanding of music relied on rather passive, involuntary physiological changes in the listener, the nineteenth-century listener was expected to engage in music with a greater intensity of mental focus. With this shift from the physiological to the mental, the listener took on a more active role. What was required of the listener was the power

⁴¹ Bonds, 417.

of imagination – *Einbildungskraft*, the power of forming into one. It denotes an inward-directed activity with a sense of constructive power, and was regarded as the basis of all creation.⁴²

For example, echoing Hanslick, Adolf Bernhard Marx (1795-1866) insisted that the "interplay of tones is the primordial essence of music [*Urmusik*]; it has always been and will always be the mother earth from which everything that lives in music draws its life's power, its existence."

However, Marx also argues for the existence and the importance of the listener's mental engagement in music:

Man cannot play endlessly and without a goal. Above all, he seeks himself in the play, the play should be his play; it should have the imprint, the expression of his being. Even in the play of tones, his fantasy seeks the feeling of his being. It is precisely because man gives artistic form to the constraining relationships and moods of real life that he feels himself to be master of this self-created world. And in this transfigured reflection of the real world, he considers himself redeemed and free.⁴³

A.B.Marx's manifesto revolves around the idea of *Idee*. *Idee* can be thought of as a kind of extramusical idea. As Scott Burnham explains, "...evident in Marx's criticism is the unquestioned assumption that a spiritual elevation... is directly proportional to their ability to portray very specific extramusical content... the *Idee*, a spiritual essence that seems all too material."⁴⁴

This may appear contradictory to some readers since it sounds directly opposed to his remark that the "interplay of tones is the primordial essence of music." However, to understand his

⁴² Bonds, 393.

⁴³ Bonds, 416.

⁴⁴ Scott Burnham, "A.B.Marx's Early Reception of Beethoven," *19th-Century Music* 13, No. 3 (Spring, 1990), 189.

argument it is necessary to clarify what he means by *Idee*. First, it mainly stems from the necessity of describing music as a process, especially temporal process:

It is clear that Marx's *Idee* is related to concrete reality, that it has a kind of metaphorical "life", and that this life is expressed in terms of a potential for temporal realization. When Marx actually demonstrates the existence of an *Idee*, he explicitly associates it with extramusical representation.⁴⁵

For example, Burnham argues that in identifying the "succession of soul states portrayed with deep psychological truth,"⁴⁶ Marx hears in Beethoven's music, he also identifies temporal coherence – "a psychologically valid dramatic process in which each stage follows coherently from the preceding one."⁴⁷ This is why he needs to resort to music's relation to extramusical contents, to assert music's ability to represent external, temporal processes.

In other words, more than anything, "extramusical" idea is the process of time itself, or any narrative that unfolds within time. If music is "representing" anything, it is time. Just as Hanslick had to resort to the "extramusical" metaphor of movement in order to argue for music's pure formalism, so did A.B. Marx have to resort to the "extramusical" idea of process to argue that the "interplay of tones is the primordial essence of music."

To help understand Marx's position better I lay out a summary of Burnham's interpretation of A.B. Marx's criticism:

⁴⁵ Scott Burnham, "Criticism, Faith, and the "Idee": A. B. Marx's Early Reception of Beethoven," *19th Century Music* 13, no. 3 (1990): 187-8.

⁴⁶ Burnham, 188.

⁴⁷ Burnham, 191.

1) the *Idee* acts as a guarantor of a work's unity, the symbol of its totality. Each work has an individual *Idee* and a corresponding individual form. 2) Form is the incarnation of the musical artwork. 3) Marx's definition of spirit is the working together of the diverse components of human mentality, such as reason, imagination and emotion. Therefore, a genuine experience of musical expressivity arises between 4) Totality (artwork born of the total powers of a human being) and Totality (interpreter likewise engaging the total powers of a human being). In other words, one's nearest resource for understanding the spirit of another, expressed in the totality of an artwork, is the totality of one's own spirit.⁴⁸

In this formula one can clearly see the significance of *Einbildungskraft*. Without engaging one's reason and imagination, the listener is not able to fully grasp the totality of work.

Another point of discussion is Marx's notion of "knowing". Burnham points out that Marx uses the verb "erkennen" instead of "wissen." In German, there are two different words that denote two distinct modes of knowing. One is "wissen" which usually refers to a kind of knowledge that pertains to scientific knowledge. It is impersonal, and its strength lies with knowledge that is repeatable, fixed, which consists of verifiable "pieces" of information e.g., she is five feet tall, has brown hair and lives in Seattle, etc. "Erkennen" refers to a kind of knowing that pertains to an interpersonal relationship. It is not fixed nor repeatable. Instead, it is embodied, evolving, and requires a more holistic approach that goes beyond acquisition of factual information. By using the word *erkennen* to describe what the listener should do with the *Idee* Marx implies that the mode of knowledge required here is not unlike an act of faith, "a relinquishing of the normative criteria for judgments of truth. Knowledge of an *Idee* is like knowledge of oneself... true in a

⁴⁸ Scott Burnham, "Criticism, Faith, and the "Idee": A. B. Marx's Early Reception of Beethoven," *19th Century Music* 13, no. 3 (1990).

personal sense but not verifiable by means of human reason.”⁴⁹ This means that the *Idee* resides in the listener “providing an index of his intuitive reception of the work.”⁵⁰

I believe that this mode of knowing – knowing that is true, not in a scientifically verifiable sense, but in a personal sense -- is important in the operation of Eros. A work of music does not draw us in by revealing verifiable facts. Instead, it draws us in by evoking in us a sense of being *spoken to* by someone, which in turn, awakes a desire in the listener to sublimate oneself and create a higher unity.

Like Marx, Johann Fridrich Herbart (1776-1841) insisted that musical beauty is found in tonal structures and progression. Nevertheless, he resorted to musical imagination [*musikalische Phantasie*] for “apperception” – the mental activity by which the cumulative mass of mental content interacts with and conditions newly absorbed content.⁵¹

Most of all, Hanslick acknowledged the importance of *Einbildungskraft* and argued that there is "spiritual content" in the "disposition of the listener" that "unites the beautiful in music with all other great and beautiful ideas."⁵² In the same vein, he writes:

The auditory imagination, however, which is something entirely different from the sense of hearing regarded as a mere funnel open to the surface of appearances, enjoys in conscious sensuousness the sounding shapes, the self-constructing tones, and dwells in free and immediate contemplation of them.⁵³

⁴⁹ Burnham, 190.

⁵⁰ Burnham, 190.

⁵¹ Lee Rothfarb, "Nineteenth-Century Fortunes of Musical Formalism," *Journal of Music Theory* 55, no. 2 (2011): 178.

⁵² Bonds, 414. The English translation of *On the Musically Beautiful* by Geoffrey Payzant was the edition I used for my research. However, this version was based on the eighth edition which means this passage was not found in the English version.

⁵³ Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music*, trans. Geoffrey Payzant, (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Pub., 1986), 30.

However, with the deepening dichotomy between formalism and representationalism, Hanslick had to abandon any argument that hinted at any kind of musical representation. And with this abandonment, *Einbildungskraft* also had to give way to a more strict version of formalism that did not allow any notion of extramusical references. For example, the following passage which appeared in the first edition was deleted in subsequent editions due to its illustration of music's connection to things in nature:

It is not merely and absolutely through its own intrinsic beauty that music affects the listener, but rather at the same time as a sounding image of the great motions of the universe. Through profound and secret connections to nature, the meaning of tones is elevated high above the tones themselves allowing us to perceive at the same time the infinite in works of human talent. Because the elements of music – sound, tone, rhythm, loudness, softness – are to be found throughout the entire universe, so does one find anew in music the entire universe.⁵⁴

What acts as a consistent underlying theme in all these arguments by Marx, Herbart and Hanslick is the significance of the listener's imagination, *Einbildungskraft*. This is akin to St. Augustine's delight *through* the senses. Just as St. Augustine's "delight through the senses" leads to the "delight of eternal forms" *Einbildungskraft* bridges earthly music with the harmony of a spiritual realm. Just as St. Augustine's aesthetics was able to bridge the gap between the earthly and the spiritual, so was the idealist aesthetics able to reconcile those two realms through the listener's imagination. What we see in both cases is the integration of the mental and sensorial, and of form and imitation. However, in the idealist aesthetics what we start to witness is the decrease in the significance of the sensorial. With the growing emphasis on the mental, the experience of the beautiful became more and more dependent on mental prowess of the listener. With this change, the sensuous nature of music which acted as a central mechanism in Augustine's theory became secondary and almost downplayed. For idealists, it was music's ethereal nature that justified their

⁵⁴ Bonds, 414.

christening of music as being the same in essence with the Absolute. For example, Schlegel insisted that because sound is the “‘innermost’ of the five senses, dealing with transitory phenomena in a play of succession,”⁵⁵ music could reflect the cosmic harmony of the invisible “‘heavenly bliss.’”

Another phenomenon that was evident from the development of the idealist aesthetics was the deepening dichotomy between formalism and representationalism.

In the later versions of Hanslick’s *On the Musically Beautiful*, a spiritual or ideal content that resided in a work of music which was consequently detected by the listener, is replaced by musical forms:

... and still less can we talk about an ear-pleasing play of tones and other such images, by which the lack of a mental source of animation tends to become emphasized. Thus, in order to make our case for musical beauty, we have not excluded ideal content but, have insisted on it...what we have done is to transfer the beauty of music to tonal forms. *This already implies that the ideal content of music is in the most intimate relationship with these forms...* the forms which construct themselves out of tones are not empty but filled; they are not mere contours of a vacuum but mind giving shape to itself from within. Accordingly... music is actually a picture but one whose subject we cannot grasp in words and subsume under concepts. (emphasis mine)
56

Hence, the crux of Hanslick’s claim is that since music’s subject has no counterpart in nature, this ideal content can only be the configuration (i.e., formal structure) of tones.

He continues: “since music has no prototype in nature and expresses no conceptual content, it can be talked about only in dry technical definitions or with poetical fictions.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Bonds, 405.

⁵⁶ Hanslick, 8th edition, 30.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 30.

And this is precisely what we see in subsequent generations. With the widening gap between the two sides, it has become harder and harder to encounter a view that incorporates two sides. For example, even though theories like enhanced formalism allow possibility of music possessing emotional properties (hence, allows some notion of “expression”), they nonetheless trace the root of these emotional expressions to tonal configuration. Within formalism everything is explainable in terms of forms and leaves no space for representation to play any fundamental role in expressivity. If it allows any elements of representation, it is no more than a by-product of tonal configuration. There is no sense of music being a “reflection” of anything let alone that reflection being the essence of music.

Another difference is the specialization of musical aesthetics as a field of study independent of the participation of composers which resulted in the lack of real-life musical examples. This not only severed musicology from practiced music but prevented musical formalism and musical representationalism from living in a healthy tension which used to be the case when composers were actively involved in these debates. Up until the nineteenth century, there was a fluid exchange between composers and critics so much so that what one insisted had an effect on the other. For example, Monteverdi contended with these contesting ideas and reflected his stance through his work. Theoretically, he took a clear stance with one side as did Brahms and Liszt. However, these composers did not shy away from incorporating qualities the opposite side was arguing. For example, even though he was an avid advocate for the *seconda prattica* Monteverdi nonetheless produced works based on the practice of *prima prattica*. Bach, although renowned for his mastery in *stile antico*, did not shy away from writing in *stile moderno*, as works such as the B Minor Mass testify. Brahms, who closely associated himself with formalism, mainly through his symphonies, still wrote pieces that were plainly based on poems and other forms of

literature. Wagner, one of the most renowned advocates for representational music, nonetheless accepted the notion of absolute music toward the later part of his career as the final part of his Ring Cycle shows. This trend stops once we arrive in the twentieth century. Although composers still identify themselves with a certain school of musical training and reflect their philosophy in their works, the kind of exchange that used to exist between composers and aestheticians does not happen anymore, at least not with the same level of vibrancy. Instead, it seems the field of musical aesthetics has taken a path of its own, independent of what the composers do. What we see in recent years is various collaborations with psychologists and neuroscientists rather than with composers. The next chapter will draw on some of these collaborative works. By doing so, I would like to show why incorporating the notion of Eros can offer us a way of contending with binary oppositions in musical aesthetics. But before that, I would like to study the modern definition of formalism and its argument against representational theories.

Formalism and Persona Theory

The idealist aesthetics which fluidly combined the formalistic aspect of music (because they emphasized harmony and order in music) and the freedom of imagination, branched out into two very different paths. In the course of polarization, the language of the “inexpressible” morphed into the language of “absolute” as something that could only be articulated in terms of what is *not*. As Kivy writes:

Formalism is best defined, initially, in negative terms: in terms, that is, of what music is not. According to the formalist creed, absolute music does not possess semantic or representational content. It is not of or about anything; it represents no objects, tells no stories,

gives no arguments, espouses no philosophies. According to the formalist, music is “pure” sound structure; and for that reason the doctrine is sometimes called musical “purism.”⁵⁸

On the other hand, listener’s imagination that allowed access to the immutable, infinite reality was now to be engaged to create narratives and objects of earthly realm.

As the final section of this chapter I would like to explore arguments of contemporary philosophers Peter Kivy and Jerrold Levinson (along with Jenefer Robinson) as examples of those who consider music primarily as structures of sounds within self-contained forms and those who see it as a representation of extramusical ideas.

The past decades have seen the rise of what is called the “new musicology,” an interdisciplinary study which attempts to place music in wider hermeneutic contexts such as politics, literature, sociology, et cetera. Inevitably, in order to make sense of music in light of these issues, programmatic content is usually found in a work of study. Theoretical analysis would be brought in to study the internal dynamic and architecture of a musical work not for music’s own sake but for the purpose of making a point on whatever issue that needs to be addressed. In the midst of this new intellectual milieu, Kivy stands as one of the few advocates for the “old” school of formalism. He believes, along with Hanslick, that music is first and foremost sound patterns. He argues:

Formalism, then, is the view that absolute music has neither representational nor semantic content. Absolute music is a structure of sound: but a structure that is of musical interest not only for its form; for that too, of course; but for the elements of that form as well. According to formalism, we are interested, musically, in all of the “sensuous” properties of the musical work, its form being one of those, albeit perhaps the most important.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Kivy, location 818-820.

⁵⁹ Kivy, location 825-827.

Adorno also expresses the same sentiment by drawing comparison between music and painting:

One can clearly hear the echo of Hanslick with its emphasis not only on structure but also on the “sensuous” properties of music. (This will be dealt more in detail in the next chapter.) Kivy also recognizes, like Hanslick, that the sound events occur with a connecting musical “logic” or “sense.”⁶⁰

Kivy likens the beauty of music to that found in nature. While acknowledging that to certain extent, one’s perception of beautiful owes to a social construct – e.g., Wagner’s Tristan chord would have sounded “ugly” to his contemporary whereas it sounds “beautiful” to us – he nevertheless claims that the beauty found in musical “patterns” and the “structures” are like those we find in a sparkling gem or a shiny golden nugget.⁶¹ In this way, he seems to suggest there is something universal in discerning beauty.

At this point, it is important to point out that Kivy is *not* claiming that music is incapable of possessing emotional properties. What he is claiming is that it is not music’s *primary* concern. In the same vein, he explains that what Hanslick was denying was *not* that music was incapable

“The moment one art imitates another, it becomes more distant from it by repudiating the constraint of its own material... Painting and music speak by virtue of the way they are constructed, not by the act of representing themselves; they speak all the more clearly the more profoundly and thoroughly they are composed in themselves, and the figures of this essential form are their writing. What can be designated as such with some justification in each case, is the stamp of a quality, immanent character, not the communication of something external to this complexion of work. In music, this has occurred through the mortal contraction of all its imitative moments, not only its programmatically descriptive elements, but its traditionally expressivity, as well, which requires from conventions linking what is expressed with its signifier.” Adorno, Theodor W. "Music and Culture: On Some Relationships Between Music and Painting." *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (1995): 67, 71.

⁶⁰ Kivy, Location 857.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, Location 1037.

of expressing emotions but merely that this was not music's primary goal. In other words, he stood against the view that music was beautiful insofar as it can express emotions.⁶²

Thus, Kivy acknowledges the presence of heard emotional properties in music but sees them as by-products of the "beautiful" manifested in the forms:

In other words, the emotive properties of music, like such other properties as turbulence, or tranquility, or its being major at one point, minor at another, or simply that it has one kind of melody here, and another kind next, can be explained, initially, in terms of the simplest facts of musical structure: that is, sonic patterns, and that patterns consist of repetition and contrast. And the appeal to repetition and contrast as explanations for why a musical work is of a certain character here, another there, is an appeal valid for any musical qualities, including, of course, emotive ones.⁶³

Indeed, this particular version of formalism is called "enhanced formalism": the doctrine that absolute music is a sound structure without semantic or representational content, but, nevertheless, a sound structure that sometimes importantly possesses the garden-variety emotions.⁶⁴

He does not think that these two notions – music as structures of sound possessing emotional properties and music as pure sonic forms – are incompatible. In fact, he recognizes music's potential for expressiveness. For example, he acknowledges musical motifs can express emotions either by imitating contours of bodily gestures e.g., joy with expansive leaping figures, or sadness with a descending scale, or by convention, e.g., pastoral peacefulness can be communicated by 6/8 signature in key of F with the use of oboe and such. He terms this theory

⁶² Peter Kivy. "What Was Hanslick Denying?" *The Journal of Musicology* 8, no. 1 (1990): 3-18.

⁶³ Kivy, Locations 1100-1103.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Location 1218.

“contour and convention theory” of musical expressiveness.⁶⁵ However, he does not believe expression of emotions is music’s primary purpose. He makes it clear that emotive properties can be “explained, initially, in terms of the simplest facts of musical structure: that is, sonic patterns, and that patterns consist in repetition and contrast.” For Kivy “the object of the emotion is the beauty of the music.”⁶⁶

Hence, there are several notable differences between modern definition of absolute music and the idealist’s definition thereof. If in the system of idealist aesthetics, musical forms and tonal processes were subservient to the “image of the absolute,” in modern formalism any “imagery” or “representation” is now regarded as a byproduct of musical structures. The power of imagination, the *Einbildungskraft* that used to act as a central mechanism to bridge the materialistic to the spiritual now no longer has the same significance.

If idealist aesthetics paved the way for the development of modern formalism it also gave rise to more systematic accounts of representational theories. If the “inexpressible beauty” that resided in forms was translated into the “absolute,” the reflection of the incorporeal reality was now translated into reflection of narratives or objects found in corporeal reality. Modern representational theories belong to the latter camp. They focus on the “expressive” quality of music.

But surely, one needs to ask the question of what it means to say music is expressive. As we have seen, one popular answer is that music is expressive of emotions but our experience tells us there is a vast difference between the kind of emotions we feel in music and in our ordinary life.

⁶⁵ Peter Kivy, *The Corded Shell: Reflections on Musical Expression*. Princeton Essays on the Arts; 9. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), Chapter 8.

⁶⁶ Kivy (2002), Location 1577.

For example, the kind of sadness we feel in Beethoven's *Pathétique* is different from the sadness we feel when we lose our loved ones. What lies at the bottom of all musical experience is a kind of pleasure regardless of what kind of emotions the music is trying to express (otherwise, we would not listen to music). This question of what it is that we experience as expressive in music will be the main focus of the next chapter. But before diving into that question there is one clarification that needs to be made and that is the difference between representation and expression. Here I resort to Roger Scruton who offers a helpful explanation:

It is important to understand, therefore, what might be meant by "representation" in music. The first distinction to make is that between representation and expression. It is only recently that attempts have been made to formulate the distinction with any precision, and there is no agreement as to the relation between the terms. But that a distinction exists seems obvious to any lover of the arts. A painting may represent a subject (the Crucifixion, say) and it may also express an emotion towards that subject. To represent a subject is to give a description or characterization of it: it is to say (in words or in images) what the subject is like. Such a description may or may not be accompanied by an expression of feeling. Furthermore, there can be expressions of emotion that are not accompanied by representation. Mozart's *Masonic Funeral Music* is certainly an expression of grief, but it contains no attempt to represent or describe the object of grief. It has been argued that all music expresses emotion. If that is so, then, unless some distinction can be made between representation and expression, all music would have to be regarded as representational. To say that would lead to the conclusion that there is no essential distinction between music and painting in their relation to the world.

He continues:

What passes for representation might often be more accurately described as "imitation", for instance when a piece of music mimics the sound of a cuckoo. That there is a difference between representation and imitation is clear. An architectural detail can imitate the curve of a seashell without becoming a representation; or a man can imitate another's manner without representing it. Representation is essentially descriptive: it involves a reference to objects in the world and an attempt to describe them. Imitation is merely copying, and its intention may be no more than decorative....It is nonetheless debatable whether music is made representational by imitation alone.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Roger Scruton, "Programme Music" *Oxford Music Online*. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Beethoven's Sixth Symphony is a good example which embodies these various layers of expressions/representations. There are sonic imitations of things found in nature, i.e., the cuckoo, which contributes to the bigger "picture" the piece aims to "represent" and "describe", namely, the pastorale scenes. At the same time, Beethoven makes it clear that this symphony is not a painting but an expression of feeling – "mehr Ausdruck der Empfindung als Malerey."⁶⁸

Composers achieve musical expression by means of melody, rhythm harmony and structure. For example, Schubert was able to evoke a sense of wandering through his idiosyncratic harmonic language. In his last piano sonata D. 960, the sudden shift from B flat major to G flat major in the exposition is powerful enough to evoke an imagery of wandering or a change of landscape as in a dream.

Molto moderato. (Componirt im September 1828.)

The image shows a page of musical notation for the first movement of Beethoven's Sixth Symphony. The tempo is marked 'Molto moderato.' and the date '(Componirt im September 1828.)' is noted. The music is in B-flat major and 3/4 time. The first system begins with a piano introduction marked 'pp ligato'. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, various note values, rests, and dynamic markings like 'pp'.

⁶⁸ Roger Scruton, "Programme Music" *Oxford Music Online*. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2008).

(Schubert Werke Breitkopf Serie 10 No 107 D 960)

The sudden shift from Bb to Gb happens throughout the first bar and the third bar of the fourth system.

Also, Schubert writes his second theme in F# minor which, in the traditional scheme of sonata form, would be considered as “wrong” since the second theme is usually in the dominant key.

This unconventional use of harmony has fascinated many scholars and as such, much theoretical scrutinization followed. One such attempt is the theory of the hexatonic cycle. This system deviates away from the traditional tonic and dominant relation and instead centers around minimal tonal displacement.⁶⁹ For example, the hexatonic cycle of C major would be: C (C,E,G), C Minor (C,Eb,G), Ab (C,Eb,Ab), G#Minor (B, D#, G#), E Major (B, E, G#) E Minor (B, E, G). In this system, F# minor chord that comes as a surprise would be interpreted as the one standing on the opposite pole of Bb: **Bb (Bb, D, F)**, Bb Minor (Bb, Db, F), Gb (Bb, Db, Gb), **F# Minor (A, C#, F#)**, D Major (A, D, F#) D Minor (A,D,F).

In a more traditional terminology, this F# minor would be spelled as “enharmonic equivalent of the flat submediant minor.”⁷⁰

Whether articulated in hexatonic cycle or in traditional terms, this harmonic progression is apt to express a sense of wandering away from home and it is clear that Schubert exploited the potential of this harmonic devise.

⁶⁹ Suzannah Clark, *Analyzing Schubert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 152.

If this kind of theoretical analysis is a version of inductive attempt to understand an underlying dynamic of a given piece there is also a deductive kind which attempts to come up with a frame that would be applied as a tool to understand musical expressivity in general.

Among various attempts I would like to focus on Persona theory. This theory proposes that the listener imagine a fictional character, a person undergoing an emotional journey. Jerrold Levinson who pioneered this theory, proposes the following definition:

P expresses (or is expressive of) *a* if and only if P is most readily and aptly heard by the appropriate reference class of listeners as (or as if it were) *a sui generis* personal expression of a by some (imaginatively indeterminate) individual.⁷¹

Jenefer Robinson takes up this theory to argue that emotions in music (especially that of the Romantic period) should be understood in terms of a protagonist undertaking an emotional journey. To illustrate this, she analyses Brahms' Op.117. No.2. Below is the summary of her analysis seen through Persona theory. The words used in the analysis were lifted directly from her analysis. The original analysis can be found on pages 337-344 in her book *Deeper than Reason*.

⁷¹ Jerrold Levinson, *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2011), 338.

Andante non troppo e con molto espressione

The image displays a musical score for piano, consisting of three systems of music. The first system is marked *p dolce* and *col Ped*. The second system continues the piece. The third system is marked *pp* and *p* and includes a large slur over the bass line with *Ped* and asterisks below it.

Bars 1-9 First theme (a) in the tonic B flat minor, i.

Theme (a) is built from descending seconds and rising fourths.

The image displays a musical score for piano, consisting of four systems of music. The first system features a treble and bass clef with dynamics *pp*, *p*, and *espressa.*. The second and third systems include the dynamic *dim.*. The fourth system includes *rit.* and *p*. The score is written in a key signature of three flats and a 3/4 time signature. The music is characterized by intricate, flowing lines with many slurs and ties, suggesting a highly technical and expressive piece.

Bars 9-22 Variation on (a), =(a')

Bar 1- 22 =(a)+(a') = Theme A

The image displays a musical score for Theme B in relative major D flat, spanning bars 22 to 38. The score is presented in three systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is D flat major (two flats). The first system (bars 22-25) features a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes the instruction *legato espress. e sostenuto*. The second system (bars 26-29) includes a *rit.* (ritardando) marking and a *p dolce* dynamic. The third system (bars 30-33) also includes a *rit.* marking and a *p dolce* dynamic. The score concludes with a final measure in bar 38. The music is characterized by flowing, legato lines in both hands, with expressive and sustained phrasing.

Bars 22-38 Theme B in relative major D flat.

Opening of B theme is based on opening of the A theme. B is a rhythmic diminution in a different key.

The A theme is arpeggiated and ranges over a wide register. The B theme = single 16-bar period = two 8-bar phrases = into two 4-bar sub phrases, like a question and answer. For the most important notes in the melody are on the downbeat, unlike the more rhythmically off-beat A theme, and the predominant rhythmic activity is twice as slow as that of the A theme. On the other hand, despite its ostensibly sturdier quality, the inner voices of the B theme reflect the restless chromaticism of the A theme.

The main point to note in terms of harmony is how Brahms continually postpones resolution to the tonic while leading us to expect it. The first convincing cadence in any key is that to the relative major (D flat) at the beginning of the B theme.

Bars 38-51: Restatement of the A theme.

Bars 51-71: Further development on the A theme. (Score not included.)

Robinson argues:

If, now, we think of the piece as a psychological drama, then the A-B-A' structure turns out to be not just a conveniently unified musical form, but a dramatic psychological structure. One way of construing this structure would be as a conflict between two different characters in the music. However, since the two themes are so closely related harmonically and melodically, I think it makes more sense to hear them as a single character, responding in two different ways to the same material. The overall experience of the persona or character in the music is bittersweet

because the music goes back and forth between the two themes and between the major and minor modalities.⁷²

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system is marked "Più Adagio" and "dolce", with dynamics "p" and "f". The second system is marked "legato espress." and "dim.", with dynamics "p" and "f". The third system is marked "rit. molto" and "pp", with dynamics "p" and "pp". The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Coda: 72- end.

Return of the B theme in B flat major. B theme intertwined with the A theme. The key is ambiguous between B flat minor and B flat major before resolving into the tonic minor.

She concludes:

There is clearly some kind of contrast or conflict between the two themes, although if we listen to those inner voices in the B theme, we can hear that the A theme has to some extent infiltrated the B theme from the start. I myself hear the sturdier B theme as in a sense

⁷² Robinson, 341.

overwhelmed by the A theme, but not entirely so: the B theme, although vanquished, has left its mark on the A theme. Its inner restlessness has always had some affinity for the A theme but its outward calm has affected the A theme and has reduced the A theme's restless questing. On the other hand, the B theme has certainly not tamed the restlessness completely. I hear the B theme as modifying to some degree the quality of the passionate A theme, as though the character has accepted that yearning is to be his fate has recognized that he will not achieve his desire, and sorrowfully, reluctantly, has resigned himself to that realization. The B theme's absorption by the A theme is not a foregone conclusion: the music fluctuates between minor and major and it seems possible that the B theme will predominate with both its rhythm and its major tonality. But at bar 81 it becomes clear that although the A theme has taken on the calmer rhythm of the B theme, the dark minor totally will predominate. Because the piece ends up back in the tonic of B flat minor and sounding a variant of the A theme but in the rhythm of the B theme, it sounds as though the A theme's passionate yearning has been neither satisfied nor conquered, but it has to some extent been subdued. The final resolution shows how far the character still is, however, from simple acceptance. It comes in the tonic B flat minor, the key of the A theme, but the resolution is hardly very resolute, since it occurs in an arpeggio that extends over three bars, beginning on the lowest B flat on the piano and rising to the highest. The insistent passionate questing has been transmuted into a certain degree of calm and resignation, but it has not been utterly *resolved* either musically or psychologically. The persona is only partly reconciled to his fate. Indeed it would also be possible, I think, to hear the ending as despairing, as the first theme crushed into the recognition that it never will achieve its goal.⁷³

One of the strengths of this theory is its ability to take into account the coherence of a work.

Doggy theory (contour theory), for example, by taking music's gestural resemblance as source of its expression, inevitably fails to accommodate music's coherence since in this system, a musical piece becomes no more than patches of unrelated emotional states. Persona theory on the other hand, is able to take into account the cause and effect of emotions represented. For example, the illusion of the A theme in the B theme and coda can be interpreted as unresolved residue of emotions felt by the protagonist.

However, apart from the criticism of Kivy that these emotive properties can be "explained, initially, in terms of the simplest facts of musical structure," this theory poses several problems.

⁷³ Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than Reason : Emotion and Its Role in Literature, Music, and Art* (Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 2005), 344-45.

One is that this cannot provide sufficient explanation for works outside of the Romantic era. Listening to a piece of music as if hearing a fictional protagonist undertaking an emotional journey cannot explain the musical process of say a Bach fugue, nor a mass by Palestrina.

Robinson tries to validate Persona theory by reminding the reader that this is precisely how the Romantic composers approached when composing, namely, creating their compositions as a musical depiction of a protagonist undertaking an emotional journey.⁷⁴ We can think of Shumann's *Kreisleriana*, *Carnaval*, *Davidsbündler* as examples. However, a composer's intention does not validate a claim on what makes music expressive. The correct question would be: what properties in musical motif did composers recognize that inspired them to use this particular medium to communicate what they were aiming to express?

Or in Scruton's much more articulate words:

There is another, and deeper reason, for rejecting Levinson's "imaginary subject." When we hear expression in music, Levinson suggests, this is like hearing another person express his feelings. But in what way like? We have no prior conception of what it would be to express feelings in music: if we can think of someone doing this, it is because we have an idea of the expressive character of music, and therefore can imagine someone choosing just this piece of music, to convey just this state of mind. Our ability to imagine a subject expressing his feelings in just this way is predicated upon our ability to recognize the expressive content of the music. Only if we can independently recognize the emotional content of music, therefore, can we embark on the thought-experiment required by Levinson's definition. Once again, the definition leans upon a notion of musical expression, and does not provide it. What theories that place such definition at the center of theory for explaining musical expressivity fail to recognize is that this definition leans upon a notion of musical expressions, and does not provide it.⁷⁵

So, is there a better way of understanding musical expression? And why do we have such a strong inclination to attribute extramusical qualities to music? (As I was reading Kivy's

⁷⁴ Robinson, 344.

⁷⁵ Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 352.

Introduction to a Philosophy of Music I could not help but notice the sheer amount of analogies and metaphors he used to make his point. It seemed more than anything, attributing extramusical metaphors was the easiest, and clearest way of making a case for music's pure formalism, the irony of which I found very intriguing.)

More importantly, how does Eros help us better understand musical expressivity? And how does Eros reconcile these various dichotomies we have examined? If Eros is defined as the delight in sensual forms and desire to sublimate oneself in order to create higher unities, what role does Eros play in our experience of emotions in music?

These are the questions I will address in the next chapter.

But first, here is the summary of arguments laid out in this chapter to help the reader transition to the next chapter:

Historically, musical aesthetics has been characterized by binary oppositions. Should music be thought of primarily as an intellectual exercise or a sensual practice? Is music formal or imitative? Is music essentially about beauty or expression? What we see from the accounts of St. Augustine and idealists is that there has been dynamic interplay of opposing views before they developed into more systematized binary arguments. St. Augustine for example, resolved the tension between the roles of the sensuous and the intellect in musical perception through affective cognition. This gives rise to a mode of understanding that is not dependent on cognitive evaluation but is rooted in a kind of "loving knowledge" toward the beautiful. Idealists saw music as a bridge between the earthly realm and the spiritual realm. Thus, they were able to incorporate the notion of imitation and formalism together by claiming that music's harmony and order were a reflection of order and harmony of an incorporeal, spiritual reality. However, through

a process of polarization, we no longer see the same level of integration of opposing views. Instead, what we see is more systematized versions of strict formalism and representational theories.

Chapter 2.

To answer the questions mentioned at the end of the last chapter I will lay out my arguments in the following order:

- a) We can only understand any one thing in terms of another. Our mechanism of understanding is very much dependent on seeing similarities and differences between things. The process of understanding can be described as a process of creating metaphors. This explains why we have such a strong tendency to attribute extramusical ideas to music, such as narrative or pictures. One of the most popular extramusical realities that we ascribe to music is person. There is a body of evidence that suggests we register music as a living organism. We know at least from our experience that we react to music as if it was a living organism, like a person. However, whether it is a person or an object, metaphorizing music does not give us understanding in essence of music. It is a recursive way of understanding it, i.e., one listens to music → evocation of a picture or a story arises in the listener's mind → listener understands music as a representation. However, this is not to say ascribing extramusical ideas is wrong. As Scruton says, it just means understanding and describing are two different activities.⁷⁶
- b) An exploration of the notion of mimesis – Mimesis is behavioral, and is different from representation, imitation or resemblance. It is an innate human desire. More precisely, it is a desire to be “like” the other. It operates as one of the central instincts of human, i.e., babies mimic mothers' facial expressions and their vocal prosody long before they develop self-consciousness or language. Music triggers this mimetic desire in us which is usually suppressed. (This is the crux of Adorno's aesthetic theory.) This desire to be “like” the other can also be thought of as a kind of “pull”, an “attraction” toward the

⁷⁶ Roger Scruton, *Understanding Music : Philosophy and Interpretation* (London ; New York: Continuum, 2009), 51.

Other. Music “attracts” us by provoking this suppressed mimetic desire in us and invites us to participate in a kind of “dance” with itself. (The dance analogy is the crux of Scruton’s theory of musical expressivity.) In Harrison’s words, we become the music while the music lasts.⁷⁷ We become part of its harmony. (The Greek term for harmony implies being interlocked.) I would like to argue that what fuels this dance is the delight in forms and beauty manifested therein, and desire to be assimilated to this beauty, in other words, Eros.

c) Music’s power to awake this mimetic desire is rooted in a kind of beauty that pertains to music only. This musical beauty consists of:

- 1) Form, particularly as an expression of relationship, and as “betweenness.”
- 2) Time and sound (Sensuous nature).
- 3) Its relation to power. I will draw on Iain McGilchrist’s research to argue that music existed before language. What differentiates music and language as a mode of communication is their relation to power. McGilchrist argues referential language arose out of a desire to exercise power over others. Music (prosody to be more precise) is a mode of communication without this desire for power.

I would like to argue these elements make up what is *musically* beautiful and draw the listener toward the music.

d) Eros can be used as a term that fuels the dynamic interplay of all these phenomena: a delight in beauty (form), mimetic desire to be like the other, a sense of “being drawn to”, and desire to create higher unities which eventually give rise to a kind of dance with the

⁷⁷ Harrison, 54.

music. What is more, Eros is also able to encompass *Sehnsucht*, a sense of longing that accompanies the experience of intense beauty. This is because the intense longing that marks *Sehnsucht* is accompanied by a desire to be assimilated to that beauty one is facing. Even though the phenomenon of *Sehnsucht* is usually associated with the Romantic period, it is known to be a universal phenomenon in music regardless of which period the music was written.

Eros can also be seen as what fuels the “sympathetic dance.” The term coined by Scruton is a beautiful analogy of what happens when the listener encounters musical expression. Here, the listener recognizes expressive gestures and *leans* into them as a vehicle to appropriate her own emotions. If we understand Eros primarily as a delight in form and a desire to sublimate oneself to create a higher unity with this form, then it is through the Erotic desire we are drawn, and participate in this dance.

However, in a dance, the distance between the dancers is what creates a choreography. In that sense, would it be possible to imagine the intense longing in *Sehnsucht* as this distance in dance which prevents us from reaching a full assimilation? Can it be the case that the more we assimilate into the dance and are interlocked in its choreography as to become the dance itself, the more acutely we feel the distance? This will be the question with which I leave as I conclude my thesis.

Metaphor

Metaphor, in Greek, means to carry across. It implies something that carries you across a gap. Contrary to our general belief that metaphor is nothing more than a literary tool, it forms a core part of how we understand things. As Iain McGilchrist argues, “any one thing can be understood only in terms of another thing.”⁷⁸ The process of understanding is then the process of traversing a gap – from the realm of the implicit to the realm of the lived world. It has to “come down to something that is experienced, outside the system of signs.”⁷⁹ In that sense, language itself is also *metaphorical* in that it traverses from thought to thought and from experience to experience. In other words, it does the job of carrying across. McGilchrist explains this dynamic with the analogy of money: “Money takes its value from some real, possibly living, things – somebody’s cows or chickens, somewhere – and it only really has value as and when it is translated back into the realm of daily life.”⁸⁰ It is through this lens McGilchrist investigates the relationship between language and how we come to understand things.⁸¹ He argues:

Metaphoric thinking is fundamental to our understanding of the world, because it is the *only* way in which understanding can reach outside the system of signs to life itself. It is what links language to life.⁸²

Aristotle takes up the same theme and argues it is central to man’s ability to perceive things:

The greatest thing of all is to be a master of the metaphor. It is the only thing which cannot be taught by others; and it is also a sign of original genius, because a good metaphor implies the intuitive perception of seeing similarity in dissimilar things.⁸³

⁷⁸ Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 118.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 118.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 116.

⁸¹ McGilchrist however acknowledges that language is also what creates a gap between experience and experience because language itself is also a system of signs: “the gap across which the metaphor carries us is one that *language itself creates*. Metaphor is language’s cure for the ills entailed on us by language”, 116.

⁸² *Ibid*, 115.

⁸³ Edward Rothstein, "Contemplating the Sublime," *The American Scholar* 66, no. 4 (1997): 523.

“Intuitive perception of seeing similarity in dissimilar things.” I argue this is what accounts for the many programmatic interpretations in music. We are applying the principle of metaphORIZING when we listen to music because that is “the *only* way in which understanding can reach outside the system of signs to life itself.” Now, some may argue that music is not a system of signs but raw experience of sound structures, therefore we do not need metaphORIZATION. This objection is valid and it is indeed the crux of the formalist argument. However, it is precisely this sound structure that cries for metaphORIZATION. Scruton points out that even Hanslick, the most prominent advocate for absolute music had to resort to metaphorical language when he articulated musical forms in terms of “movement”:

This might seem to confirm the judgment that Hanslick is a formalist, on account of the prominence given in the definition to form. But form is mentioned only in the context of movement. And this idea of musical movement is an irreducible metaphor, which can be explained only through our response to music. It is associated with other metaphors — and in particular with the metaphor of life. In hearing the movement in music we are hearing life conscious of itself; and if, sometimes, we use words like “expression” to convey the character of this life, is this not merely a natural extension of the metaphor? In short, Hanslick has given us no alternative to the theory that he criticizes: on the contrary, he has tacitly accepted its most important claim that music is the object of a metaphorical perception.⁸⁴

Apart from movement, the most natural and popular metaphor we give to music would be person. Clinical research suggests that “understanding music is perceived as similar to knowing a person; we freely attribute human qualities to music, including age, sex, personality characteristics and feelings.”⁸⁵ Levinson’s Persona theory is a systematic attempt to theorize this tendency. As to why we so freely attribute persona, there is interesting research that connects music with our modes of “knowing.”

⁸⁴ Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 353.

⁸⁵ McGilchrist, 96.

In a chapter titled “Language, Truth and Music” McGilchrist explains two different modes of “knowing.” In many European languages, these differences are reflected by two distinct words such as *kennen* and *wissen* in German or *connaître* and *savoir* in French. As for the first group, it is:

the way we naturally approach knowledge of a *living being*; it’s to do with *individuals*, and permits a sense of *uniqueness*; it’s “mine”, *personal* not something I can just hand on to someone else unchanged; and it is not *fixed* or *certain*. It’s not easily captured in *words*; the *whole* is not captured by trying to list the *parts*; it has at least something to do with the *embodied* person; it resists *general* terms; it has to be *experienced*; and the knowledge depends on betweenness (an encounter).⁸⁶

On the other hand, the mode of knowing that pertains to *wissen* or *savoir* takes the opposite qualities of those just mentioned. In regards to this mode of knowing, McGilchrist argues:

its great strength is that its findings are repeatable... an affinity with the *non-living* with ‘pieces’ of information; *general, impersonal, fixed, certain* and *disengaged*, e.g., the local train timetable, the date of the Battle of Trafalgar, and so on.... It’s fixed. It doesn’t change from person to person or from moment to moment.⁸⁷

Not surprisingly, he gives music as an example of “an apparently non-living entity that appears to require us to know it in the sense of *kennen* rather than *wissen*” because “the empathic nature of the experience means that it has more in common with encountering a person than a concept or an idea that could be expressed in words...such living creations are seen as being essentially human in nature.”⁸⁸

⁸⁶ McGilchrist, 95.

⁸⁷ McGilchrist, 95-96.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 96.

Seeing similarities goes beyond the level of cognitive activity. It reaches back to our primitive desire. As Walter Benjamin says:

Nature creates similarities. One need only think of mimicry. The highest capacity for producing similarities, however, is man's. *His gift of seeing resemblances is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else.* Perhaps there is none of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role. (emphasis mine) ⁸⁹

Accordingly, we will investigate what role this behavioral mimesis plays in music.

Mimesis

Let's first begin by clarifying the difference between representation and mimesis. When the word representation is used in music, it usually denotes imitation or resemblance. For example, Bach's descending chromatic bass in "crucifixus" in his B Minor Mass can be said to be a representation of lament or an act of descending to death because it imitates the gesture involved in lamenting and descending – both the musical motif and real-life emotion share the same gesture. This is a valid analysis and there is no doubt that composers such as Bach and Monteverdi had this principle in mind when they sought to "express" such emotions in their compositions.

However, what these representational theories do not explain is why these musical motifs should give rise to emotions. In other words, why should we experience intense emotions and longing in music if what we are recognizing in music is merely a sonic depiction of extramusical ideas?

A more fruitful way of addressing the problem of imitation in music would therefore be to look at it in terms of behavioral mimesis, as an innate human propensity. Being better acquainted with mimesis will pave the way for us to see what role this mode of behavior plays in our experience of music.

⁸⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Reflection: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writing* (1986), 332, as cited in McGilchrist, 249.

Behavioral imitation is very hardwired in us. Babies as little as forty-five minutes old imitate facial gestures.⁹⁰ This mechanism should be understood as a mode of “identifying with.” And it is, first and foremost, a movement. In this sense it differs from representation or imitation which refers to a static, finished state. Mimesis runs through, and provides basis for all other forms of social passions. As Max Paddison summarizes Burke’s notion of imitation:

Burke makes the concept of imitation central to his case for what he calls the “social passion,” consisting of *sympathy* (what might be called the social impulse to “identify with”); imitation (which he describes as “one of the strongest links of society; ... a species of mutual compliance which all men yield to each other, without constraint to themselves”) and ambition (the sense of excelling and “going beyond”, the “mind always claiming to itself some part of the dignity and importance of the things which it contemplates”).⁹¹

Paddison, in his article *Mimesis and the Aesthetics of Musical Expression* attempts to introduce a less familiar but older understanding of mimesis. What forms the core of this theory is the notion of imitation which is understood as movement, inclination and more importantly as an impulse. This is why I believe there is a close connection between mimesis and Eros. Both are forms of mechanisms that lie deeper than what can be processed cognitively. They operate before we exercise our conscious will on them. Mimesis is an impulse – almost a reflexive mechanism – to identify with others and Eros is also an impulse, a drive to create higher unities with others. Adorno argued that mimetic impulse is essentially death drive (Thanatos).⁹² This is because, when a mode of “identifying with the Other” is stretched to its limit, one loses oneself to the

⁹⁰ Andrew N. Meltzoff and M. Keith Moore, "Newborn Infants Imitate Adult Facial Gestures," *Child Development* 54, no. 3 (1983): 702-09, as cited in McGilchrist, 249.

⁹¹ Max Paddison, "Mimesis And The Aesthetics of Musical Expression," *Music Analysis* 29, no. 1-3 (2010): 130.

⁹² Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 227; Paddison, 135; Also, see Dragana Jeremić Molnar and Aleksandar Molnar, "Adorno, Schubert, and Mimesis," *19th Century Music* 38, no. 1 (2014): 67. Even though at one point, Molnar's question whether it is right to understand Adorno's notion explicitly as Thanatos, they nonetheless acknowledge the basic dynamic involved in the process is that of losing oneself, See p.67 of Molnar.

surrounding environment, leading to a loss of the self. However, I disagree with this idea and believe the opposite is true, that mimetic impulse is fundamentally a life drive, Eros. But more will be said on this matter later. Let us return to mimesis and its role in art. Paddison brings in theories of various philosophers including Walter Benjamin, Roger Caillios and Adorno to broaden and challenge the conventional concept of static imitation in music and argues for more dynamic behavioral mimesis as what lies underneath all artistic experience. Aristotle also recognized imitation (mimesis) as a primitive human inclination and as what gives rise to the desire to create, as writes in his *Poetics*:

Imitation comes naturally to human beings from childhood (and in this from other animals, i.e., in having a strong propensity to imitation and their earliest lessons through imitation); so does the universal pleasure in imitations Given, then, that imitation is natural to us, and also melody and rhythm (it being obvious that verse-forms are segments of rhythm), from the beginning those who had the strongest natural inclination toward these things generated poetry out of improvised activities by a process of gradual innovation.⁹³

Even Hanslick recognized mimetic desire as what prompts the composer to create.

Where elements present in nature, being to some extent musically effective because of their rhythmic or sonorous character, are taken over by composers, not as something to be “imitated”, but as something that lends itself to their impulse to create musical motifs out of autonomous musical beauty, which with artistic spontaneity they conceive and actualise.⁹⁴

Based on these arguments, it seems reasonable to conclude that mimesis plays a central role in creative process. In fact, Paddison, Aristotle and even Hanslick would agree that we cannot create without a desire to imitate. Some might feel discouraged by this. Does it mean then we are only able to imitate and not create in the true sense of the word?

⁹³ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath (London; New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 6-7.

⁹⁴ Paddison, 132-33. This passage appears in earlier versions but not in later versions. Just like the deleted passage we looked at in the first chapter, this passage, with its illusion to imitation, probably got deleted for the same reason.

Not necessarily so. McGilchrist argues there is no necessary opposition between imagination and imitation. In his view, imitation and imagination are closely bound together. Our experience confirms this. When we imitate someone we do not merely copy the external qualities of the person. We enter into the world of his/her thought and life. It is in this sense McGilchrist argues that “imitation is imagination’s most powerful path into whatever is Other than ourselves.”⁹⁵ He continues:

We are imitators, not copying machines. Human imitation is not slavish. It is not a mechanical process, dead, perfect, finished, but one that introduces variety and uniqueness to the ‘copy’, which above all remains alive, since it becomes instantiated in the context of a different, unique human individual. Imitation is imaginatively entering into the world of the one that is imitated.⁹⁶

Therefore:

Imitation gives rise, paradoxically as it may seem, to individuality. That is precisely because the process is not mechanical reproduction, but an imaginative inhabiting of the other, which is always different because of its intersubjective betweenness. The process of mimesis is one of intention, aspiration, attraction and empathy.⁹⁷

Mimesis and Eros are closely connected because both are fueled by an inclination to draw close to the Other and be assimilated to the reality of the Other. This is why we see conflation in qualities involved in the processes of mimesis – intention, aspiration, attraction, empathy – and Eros. The difference would be that in Eros beauty plays a significant role whereas in mimetic impulse that is not the case since it is more like a reflexive mechanism that can be triggered without beauty.

⁹⁵ McGilchrist, 248.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 247.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 249.

Mimetic desire can also be thought of as an antidote to the many problems the modern world is facing. Adorno thus makes mimesis as one of the central concepts in his aesthetic theory. For Adorno, problems of the modern world are deeply rooted in our habit (and desire) of subjugating the Other for our benefit. It is a habit of seeing everything as a means to an end. It is a curse of not being able to see the Other for what it truly is and instead seeing it as nothing more than something to be utilized. It does not matter whether this is an environment or a person, the philosophical worldview since the Enlightenment justified the process of utilizing the Other for the sake of progress and development. And in order to exercise this control, one needs to stand aloof, detached from his/her environment. However, art does not exercise, nor requires this detachment. On the contrary, it is only through the opposite desire, the desire to identify oneself with the Other that one is able to fully enter into the world of art. One cannot enter into this world without intention, aspiration, attraction and empathy. This is why Adorno defined art as “the refuge for mimetic behavior.”⁹⁸

If mimesis is an impulse, it is also a contagion. In recent years, scientific discovery of the mirror neurons in our brains, along with evidence from other clinical research, have provided a fresh impetus to bring mimesis back into the discussion of musical aesthetics. Jenefer Robinson is an example of those who make such an attempt. She makes the concept of pre-cognitive mimetic impulse central to what she calls the “Jazzercise Effect.” This theory suggests that music affects our moods, not through cognitive evaluations such as “this is good” or “this is bad,” (although that part comes later) but through “autonomic changes, motor activity, and action tendencies.”⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Richard Wolin, “Utopia, Mimesis, and Reconciliation: A Redemptive Critique of Adorno's Aesthetic Theory,” *Representations (Berkeley, Calif.)* 32, no. 1 (1990). See also Paddison, 126.

⁹⁹ Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and Its Role in Literature, Music, and Art* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 2005), 405.

According to the Jazzercise effect theory, music “infects” us by having a direct effect on our motor system which then causes physiological changes. These changes, e.g., change in heartbeat and blood pressure, prompt us to label them as emotional states, e.g., happy or sad. Studies have shown that march style music, rhythmic melodies, high loudness conditions, white noise, fast tempos, stimulative rhythm, produced different effects on the respiration rate, blood pressure, muscular tension, motor activity, and stomach contractions from music that was slower, sedate and chordal.¹⁰⁰

She argues that this change in physiology creates a certain mood which is conducive to emotions. She quotes Elain Hatfield’s work to describe the process of contagion of emotions in ordinary life:

1. In conversation, people tend automatically and continuously to mimic and synchronize their movements with the facial expressions, voices, postures, movements and instrumental behaviors of others.
2. Subjective emotional experiences are affected, moment to moment, by the activation and/or feedback from such mimicry.
3. Given processes 1 and 2, people tend to “catch” others’ emotions, moment to moment¹⁰¹

She concludes:

In other words, the mechanism of emotional contagion relies on feedback from motor mimicry. In a sense music does induce us to mimic its movements. More generally, however, music affects our emotions through affecting our motor and other bodily systems.¹⁰²

This theory of Jazzercise Effect applies to music only and not to any other forms of art such as painting and literature. This theory is part of a bigger theory called theory of affective appraisal.

¹⁰⁰ Robinson, 395.

¹⁰¹ Robinson, 392.

¹⁰² Ibid, 392.

It seeks to explain mechanisms for emotions in art. Not unlike St. Augustine, this theory argues there is a noncognitive mechanism that recognizes and evaluates situations which in turn triggers corresponding physiological reactions.¹⁰³

Thus, not unlike St. Augustine, Robinson places a non-cognitive mode of appraisal as a central mechanism for experiencing emotions in art.¹⁰⁴

From these arguments, it is safe to say that mimesis is deeply involved in the process of composing and is also responsible for emotions in the listener.

One popular analogy often used to describe musical experience is dance. This analogy of dance is indeed a recurring theme in many musical aesthetics. Scruton uses it to describe the phenomenon of emotion in music and Jennifer Robinson titles one of her sections on musical expression as “the Dance of Love.”

Through the process of being assimilated to music -- both by mimetic desire and erotic attraction -- one enters into a kind of dance with music. This analogy of dance will be dealt with more in detail later but first I would like to explore what elements of music attract the listener and invite us into this dance.

¹⁰³ After laying out different arguments on what should actually count as “non-cognitive”, Robinson concludes: “The substantive point is that such fast emotional appraisals exist and that they do not require any higher processing. If an automatic appraisal of pleasure, aversion, or novelty counts as affect, virtually everyone now agrees that affect can occur prior to any higher cognitive processing. I will call such appraisals ‘affective appraisals’, and I shall assume that they are ‘non-cognitive’, in the sense that they occur without any conscious deliberation or awareness, and that they do not involve any complex information processing.” p.45.

¹⁰⁴ Despite very similar terminologies -- St. Augustine’s “affective cognition” (coined by Carol Harrison) and Robinson’s “affective appraisal” -- I recognize there are differences in these two notions. Mainly, St. Augustine’s affective cognition acts as an attractive force which draws the listener to music and reveals things that are not otherwise perceptible through intellectual endeavor. In other words, it’s a way of expressing a mode of love. On the other hand, Robinson’s affective appraisal is a theory, the primary purpose of which is to explain a specific kind of mechanism that bypasses a cortex in our brain which is responsible for cognitive evaluation. However, what is of relevance to my thesis is that both arguments place noncognitive mode of appraisal as what is responsible for emotions in music.

Music's Nature

Mimetic impulse is operative when composers write and when we listen, because it is out of desire to imitate “things found in nature” that composers are moved to write and it is out of desire to identify with music that we participate in a dance with music. This mimesis is different from static “representation” which is the term often used in musical aesthetics. Mimesis is essentially movement and impulse. So, if mimetic desire is what “pushes” us to draw closer to music, then what is it in music that pulls us toward it? To explore this question, I will examine some of the properties of music that I believe make it “attractive.” I will focus on three areas: 1. Musical forms and structures; 2. Time and sound; 3. Music’s relation to language and power. These are properties that pertain to music specifically. They work together to give rise to music’s power to “draw in” the listener, and in turn, evoking Eros in the listener.

1. Form

Every piece of music possesses form. Whether it is a strict fugue or an improvisation, every musical idea is developed and realized by taking on the dynamics of how a structure unfolds. In this sense, music is structures. This is the central concept of absolute music – music’s content and beauty should be articulated first and foremost in terms of its form. But what is form? Form in music should be primarily thought of as relationships. It is how each element relates to one another. This principle also applies to the basic constituents of music: melody, harmony, and rhythm. These cannot exist outside the realm of relationship. Melody cannot exist without each

note taking on the meaning of the previous note and by doing so, it transforms and reveals the meaning of all the other notes. For example, think of the opening line of the second movement of Bach's concerto for two violins. The opening F does not mean anything on its own. It is the same F that opens Beethoven's Romance for the violin. What distinguishes it is what follows it – a simple descending scale with a little turn at the end which invites the entrance of the second violin. However, it is only by hearing it in its relation to the rest of the notes that follow that we hear the opening F for what it is: a note pregnant with a most poignant sense of longing. In this sense form is also betweenness. On this matter no one articulates more clearly and beautifully than McGilchrist:

Music is the relations *between* things more than entities in isolation....Music consists entirely of relations, 'betweenness'. The notes mean nothing in themselves: the tensions between the notes, and between notes and the silence with which they live in reciprocal indebtedness, are everything. Melody, harmony and rhythm each lie in the gaps, and yet the betweenness is only what it is because of the notes themselves. Actually the music is not *just* in the gaps any more than it is just in the notes: it is in the whole that the notes and the silence make together. Each note becomes transformed by the context in which it lies. What we mean by music is not just any agglomeration of notes, but one in which the whole created is powerful enough to make each note live in a new way, a way that it had never done before.¹⁰⁵

This betweenness is what congeals music as an object, a thing. Adorno wrote that time is what congeals music to an object.¹⁰⁶ But time is also a form of relationship, a reality that cannot be thought of outside the realm of interdependence. Therefore, it would not be wrong to argue that betweenness is what "congeals" music into a thing. The nineteenth century philosopher Robert Zimmerman said that "form in aesthetic objects requires two or more components that can be

¹⁰⁵ McGilchrist, 72.

¹⁰⁶ Theodor Adorno, "Music and Culture: On Some Relationships Between Music and Painting," *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 1, (1995).

compared with or related to each other.”¹⁰⁷ Or “the material contained within aesthetic forms may change over time, but the forms that necessarily please in exhibiting harmoniousness, balance, proportionality, and so forth, are eternal.”¹⁰⁸ This platonic take on form reminds us of the aesthetics of St. Augustine and the early Romantics. Indeed, from very early on in history, the concept of form seems to have been closely connected to the idea of harmoniousness and proportionality. As St. Augustine also identified:

This match – or agreement or concord or consonance or whatever the right word is for the proportion of one to two (*haec enim congruentia, siue conuenientia, vel concinentia, uel consonantia*) – is of enormous importance in every construction (*compaginatione*) or interlock (*coaptatione*) – that is the word I want – of creation. What I mean by this interlock (*coaptationem*), it has just occurred to me, is what the Greeks call *harmonia* (ἁρμονίαν).¹⁰⁹

Interestingly, beauty too, has been understood in the same terms. It seems qualities such as harmony and relationship are essential to the concepts of both beauty and form – these two realities were inseparably bound up with one another. Indeed, the Latin term for beauty is *formosa*.

Edward Rothstein likewise identifies ratio and proportion as metrics by which “beauty can be measured.” Ratio and proportion “require comparison between one object and another, a measurement of their relationship, and an assessment of their differences and similarities.”¹¹⁰

If ratio is “the quantitative comparison between two things or aggregates belonging to the same kind or species,”¹¹¹ proportion is the comparison between two things that belong to different universes. Hence, the Greek term for proportion *analogia*. This should remind the reader of the

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Lee Rothfarb, “Nineteenth-Century Fortunes of Musical Formalism,” *Journal of Music Theory* 55, no. 2 (2011): 183.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 184.

¹⁰⁹ St. Augustine, *De Trinitas*, 4.2.4, as cited in Harrison, 24.

¹¹⁰ Edward Rothstein, “Contemplating the Sublime,” *The American Scholar* 66, no. 4 (1997): 519.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 519.

importance of seeing differences and similarities in the process of understanding. As we briefly explored at the beginning of this chapter, what is crucial in the process of understanding something is the process of mapping and making connections between different values. In other words, the act of traversing a gap, the act of metaphorization. As Gregory Bateson says:

All knowledge has to be knowledge of distinction, and it is of something other than the self. Equally one might say that all experience is experience of difference. Even at the sensory level we cannot experience anything unless there is a change or difference: our sensory nerves quickly ‘fatigue’, and we become accustomed, for example, to smell, or to a sound. Our sense responds to the difference *between* values -- to relative, not absolute values.¹¹²

Taking on Bateson’s argument, McGilchrist claims:

It seems that knowledge and perception, and therefore experience, exist only in the relations *between* things. Perhaps indeed everything that exists does so only in relationships, like mathematics or music: there are aspects of quantum physics that would support such a view.¹¹³

One cannot but wonder if there is an intrinsic connection between perceiving beauty and truly seeing something. But this is beyond the scope of this thesis and I will suffice merely with posing the question for the reader to ponder.

Returning to relationship and betweenness in music, I would like to explore some concrete examples of how this betweenness is manifested on a structural level.

Kant’s definition of form is also articulated in terms of relation: “[form]...effects that the content of a phenomenon can be arranged under certain relation.”¹¹⁴ For Kant, what should be the focus of aesthetic experience is the discernment of the “purposiveness of form”:

Any taste remains barbaric if its liking requires that charms and emotions be mingled in, let alone if it makes these the standard of its approval. ... A pure judgment of taste is one that is not influenced by charm or emotion (though these may be connected with a liking for the beautiful), and whose determining basis is therefore merely the purposiveness of the form [*Zweckmäßigkeit der Form*].¹¹⁵

¹¹² McGilchrist, 97.

¹¹³ Ibid, 97.

¹¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, as cited in Rothfarb, 171.

¹¹⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Judgement*, as cited in Rothfarb, 170.

This definition was, and still is reflected in the way musical analyses are done. They seek to find musical coherence in terms of how musical motifs unfolded in a given structure. In identifying this trend, Lee Rothfarb argues:

What is formal in the presentation of a thing is the harmony of its manifold to form a unity... In music, purposiveness of form would refer to a dynamic process in which interdependent musical functions participate and by which they create a purposeful, goal-direct series of actions in the closed system we call a musical work.¹¹⁶

The works that instantly come to mind when reading this remark would be doubtlessly those of Beethoven, particularly the ones from his Heroic period.

Beethoven's sub-thematic motifs are apt to undergo "a process by which they create a purposeful, goal-directed series of actions." His *Eroica* symphony is a good example. Here, the fragmentary, cell-like motifs undergo constant development, evolution, and a metamorphosis. At the end, they emerge with a sense of finally having realized their full potential. Throughout their development they retain the theme and by retaining the theme the motifs are unified. For example, in the excerpt below one can see how the cello line retains the theme without being too explicit about it. As Charles Rosen points out this is one of the ways Beethoven treats motivic development and hence unifies a large work.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Rothfarb, 172.

¹¹⁷ Charles Rosen, *Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 393-94.



Besides motivic development there are other means through which Beethoven achieves a sense of goal-directedness. Scott Burnham explores how a telos-driven narrative is created by focusing on Beethoven's rhythmic treatment. For him, rhythms of action and reaction, down beat and upbeat are pivotal in understanding the narrative of the heroic as each large-scale, long-anticipated downbeat releases tensions.¹¹⁸ For example, in the sonata form, the exposition is treated as a downbeat, and the development as an upbeat because it is less stable than the exposition or the recapitulation which is again treated as a downbeat. This dynamic of large-scale rhythmic process serves to create a sense of completion, a kind of self consummation. Because Beethoven's music relies heavily on the thematic development which itself could only be fully understood from the standpoint of conclusion, the telos, Beethoven's motivic development could be said to be musical manifestations of future in the present – the paradox of already but not yet.¹¹⁹

Advocating for musical beauty from a purely formal perspective is one of the foundations of the ideals of absolute music. It is central to the principle of formalism which seeks to understand music primarily from the way interdependent musical elements unfold within a self-contained

¹¹⁸ Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 123.

¹¹⁹ Burnham, *Beethoven Hero*, chapter 4.

form. Likewise, they resist any attempt to identify non-musical entities as a source of musical expressivity. Therefore, in the formalist definition “the object of the emotion is the beauty of the music.” As Kivy argues:

Formalism, then, is the view that absolute music has neither representational nor semantic content. Absolute music is a structure of sound: but a structure that is of musical interest not only for its form; for that too, of course; but for the elements of that form as well. According to formalism, we are interested, musically, in all of the “sensuous” properties of the musical work, its form being one of those, albeit perhaps the most important.¹²⁰

Kivy argues that “form” is one of the “sensuous” properties that constitute music. However, if Kant is right, then form can exist in abstract too – “[T]he form [of all phenomena] must lie ready a priori for them in the mind, and consequently can be regarded separately from all sensation [*Empfindung*].”¹²¹

Therefore I would expand on Kivy’s statement and argue that there are two different levels of “sensuous” properties in music. The first layer concerns the “raw materials” of music which are sound and time. These make up the second layer which is form. (The term applies both to form as musical structures and form as what brings music to existence.)

Hence, the first layer of ‘sensuous’ properties will be the topic of discussion in the next section.

Time and Sound

1. Time

A sense of transcendence that usually accompanies the experience of hearing music has caused many to associate music with non-temporality. The idea is that through music, one can step

¹²⁰ Peter Kivy, *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* (Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press, 2002), Location 825-827, Kindle.

¹²¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, as cited in Rothfarb, 171

outside of the time and step into the eternal where time is no more. And this provides us with a kind of experience and a form of consciousness that are not readily available in our mundane life. Indeed, a mode of existence that is not affected by temporal flow is what characterizes the pastorale tradition – a genre of arts and literature that centers around the longing for a lost paradise. Musical examples that express this state of timelessness abound. The extended trills at the end of Aria of Beethoven’s Op.111 is one of them.

However, as Rowan William says, “If music is the most contemplative of the arts, it is *not* because it takes us into the timeless but because it obliges us to rethink time.”¹²²

McGilChrist concurs:

Music does not so much free time from temporality as bring out an aspect that is always present within time, its intersection with a moment which partakes of eternity. Similarly it does not so much use the physicality to transcend physicality, or use particularity to transcend the particular as bring out spirituality latent in what we conceive as physical existence, and uncover the universality that is, as Goethe spent a lifetime trying to express, always latent in the particular.¹²³

In this sense, Heinrich Schenker’s low view on performed music, as quoted below, is questionable:

Certainly, music is intended to sound; but merely because amateurs cannot hear it in any way other than through performance alone, it by no means follows that all of musical training would have to aim from the outset toward merely an introduction to “performance” – an introduction which as we know, is provided mostly in the manner of an exercise in parroting back –; far less still does it follow however, that even artists themselves should accordingly be always obliged to remain on a level so low as that of the amateurs, so low that they too could actually hear music only when they hear it literally.¹²⁴

¹²² Rowan William (1989), as cited in Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 29.

¹²³ McGilchrist, 77.

¹²⁴ Heinrich Schenker, *Beethoven’s Last Piano Sonatas: An Edition with Elucidation*, volume 3, trans. John Rothgeb (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 5.

Even though this remark could be read as a critique of the way music education was executed at his time, it is clear that Schenker puts the “inner” hearing that is not contingent on the sensorial sound and time above that of music heard in performance. However, this view is highly contestable. As Barford and Slonimsky point out, “We sometimes forget that the greatest power of sound is known in performance.”¹²⁵

It is only by going through the grain of time one truly hears what each musical motif is meant to be. For example, the “reconciliation” of the two subjects in a sonata recapitulation would be incomprehensible if one did not hear exposition and development sections. One gets to hear the true meaning of a musical motif presented at the beginning of a piece only when it arrives at the end after having gone through stages of development. This is especially so with Beethoven. It was probably in this sense that Adorno said: “structurally, one hears the first bar of a Beethoven symphonic movement only at the very moment when one hears the last bar.”¹²⁶

This “hearing anew” or “hearing truly for what it is” also happens in Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*. Bach finishes the entire set by recapping the Aria theme note for note. However, at this point the listener gets a sense that she is hearing the theme for truly what it is for the first time. It does not come across as the same, sterile repetition. It comes to us as a new revelation of what we always thought we knew. Experiencing this sense of revelation would be, however, impossible without sitting through an hour of development. In a way, the Goldberg Variations can be thought of as a musical depiction of T.S. Eliot’s poem “Little Gidding”:

¹²⁵ Thomas Scherman and Louise Leopold Biancolli, eds. *The Beethoven Companion*, First ed. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972), 1045.

¹²⁶ Richard Leppert, "Music "Pushed to the Edge of Existence" (Adorno, Listening, and the Question of Hope)," *Cultural Critique* 60, no. 60 (2005): 115.

...We shall not cease from our explorations
 and the end of all our explorations
 will be to arrive where we started
 and know the place for the first time.

-- the last of his Four Quartets, "Little Gidding."

Time reveals to us what we could not hear before. Music, by allowing us to hear the past, present and future in a new light enables us to reconcile and celebrate them. Music shows time can be redemptive. The listener recognizes a glimpse of "what could have been" which is revealed through time. In turn, we are drawn to this glimpse, which attracts us with its innate beauty. Indeed, Edward Rothstein was right when he argued that music is an act of discerning the beautiful. The listener has to constantly connect and compare between themes and motifs as the ear moves backward as it moves forward in time.¹²⁷

Sound

That music is communicated through sound can at first, seem so obvious one might wonder why it needs to be mentioned at all. However, music's relation to sound has not always been so straightforward. That sound is both sensuous and ethereal has given justification to many opposing arguments. As we discussed earlier, St. Augustine had to grapple with the inevitable power of music communicated through sensuous sound which stood in stark contrast with music

¹²⁷ Rothstein, 522.

as an intellectual discipline untainted by sensuality. His treatise on musical aesthetics arose precisely from this dilemma – its sensuous property was too materialistic to aid the contemplation of the divine.

On the other hand, it was precisely music's sonic property, which was regarded as the most incorporeal out of all five senses, that prompted the idealists to crown music as "being ideal in its essence":

Sound, according to Schlegel, is the "innermost" of the five senses, dealing with transitory phenomena in a play of successions; and music, as exemplified by the sound of the chorale (quite apart from any underlying text), provides us with "an intimation of harmonic perfection"... through the image of heavenly bliss. Because of its incorporeality, one must accord music the advantage of being ideal in its essence. It purifies the passions, as it were, from the material filth with which they are associated, in that music presents these passions to our inner sense entirely according to their form, without any reference to objects; and after touching an earthly frame, it allows these passions to breathe in a purer air. ¹²⁸

However, Hanslick clearly saw the importance of sensuous nature when he argued:

If people do not acknowledge the abundance of beauty residing in the purely musical, one may blame the undervaluation of the sensuous, which we find in the older systems of aesthetics favoring morality and aesthetic sensitivity and in Hegel's system favoring the "Idea". Every art originates from and is active within the sensuous. ¹²⁹

Grounding musical beauty in sonic properties and other sensuous elements is pivotal to the concept of absolute music. In this sense, the notion of absolute music is more materialistic than it is usually thought to be. For some, the way absolute has been articulated, i.e., in negative terms, as what is not, has made it easy to associate absolute music with a sense of abstractness.

However, it is grounded in the least abstract reality as it always directs the listener's attention to the purely "materialistic" aspect. Its refusal to be defined in terms of what one can easily relate

¹²⁸ Bonds, 405.

¹²⁹ Hanslick, 30.

to in the real, sensual world is at the same time its appeal to be defined purely in terms of its physical, sensual elements.

This is the main focus of Mark Burford's argument when he pointed out that "Hanslick advocated for *recognition* of beauty that resides in the purely musical aspect of a work... the composer works with the 'material' of music...as an architect does with stone."¹³⁰

Music transports the listener not by pointing to a reality that lies outside the realm of the ordinary but by bringing out what is usually unnoticed in the ordinary. As with time, the way sound is structured in music is another way music elicits "spirituality latent in what we conceive as physical existence." In that sense, the idealists missed an important point when they put too much emphasis on music's incorporeality and its relation to the suprasensory realm, and not enough on its material aspect.¹³¹

This is not to deny that music has power to evoke a sense of transcendental in the listener. Our own experience as well as the writings of musicians and thinkers constantly testify that there *is* indeed a connection. However, it is important not to forget music's other strength, which is its ability to reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Music awakes delight in the listener through its sensorial manifestation of relationships. It also reveals a certain kind of beauty hidden in the ordinary sensorial reality which we usually fail to recognize. Through its beauty, it draws us in. Its embodied and empathetic nature means our encounter with music is more like an encounter with a living organism. We recognize its beauty

¹³⁰ Mark Burford, "Hanslick's Idealist Materialism," *19th Century Music* 30, no. 2 (2006): 173.

¹³¹ In idealist aesthetics, to borrow Hanslick's words, music has "no counterpart in nature... indeed none in this world." This metaphysical claim laid the foundation for music's status as having an intimate relationship with a suprasensory realm. See Burford, 177.

and we are drawn to it. And I argue it is Eros, the desire to sublimate oneself in order to create higher unities, that fuels our movement toward music.

There is one final element which is conducive of Eros to which I direct the reader's attention.

And that is music's relation to power.

Language and Power.

There have been many attempts to understand music in linguistic terms. There is no doubt a close connection between language and music exists. They are both a mode of communication.

They are both a means of expression. Music's ability to express is so obvious and powerful many attempts have been made to understand music as a kind of language. That is why Lippman

argues the history of musical aesthetics has been that of a contest between mathematics (order and harmony) and language (expression). So, I would like to spend some time examining the

relationship between music and language and see how this relates to a sense of Eros we feel toward music. One might wonder what this has to do with power. I will draw heavily on the

work of McGilchrist to argue that music is a mode of communication absent of desire for power.

It is through music's failure to exercise power we experience the power of music. In other words, music's lack of power is the source of its power.

Even though we recognize semantic qualities in music, there is a limit to how much we can explain music in terms of language. Language, it is argued, is arbitrary. That is, there is nothing

"tree-ness" about the word "tree." That the word tree signifies the object tree is purely a social construct. However, in music this arbitrariness does not apply. If we recognize any semantic or

emotive qualities in a musical motif it is because the sonic properties of that motif reflect the particular reality of the semantic meaning. Here is an example. The phrase "he is excited" itself

embodies no more excitement than the phrase “he is not excited” even though the meaning of the sentence is the opposite.¹³² On the other hand, in music, a sense of excitement is communicated by everything that is exciting such as fast tempo, tremolo, rapid crescendo and so on. The opening of Grieg’s *Holberg Suite* is a good example. In other words, “the visceral realities of sounds as ‘signifiers’ in music are themselves of relevance, materially, culturally and subjectively.”¹³³ It is for reasons like this many are opposed to applying linguistic principles to music. Our intuition also tells us that despite a strong sense of connection between music and language, the analogy has to stop at some point. Mendelssohn once remarked “the thoughts that are expressed to me by music I love are not too indefinite to be put into words, but on the contrary too definite.”¹³⁴ Nietzsche likewise said, “compared with music all communication by words is shameless; words dilute and brutalise; words depersonalize; words make the uncommon common.”¹³⁵

So, what are we to make of the similarities we sense between language and music? It is not for no reason that music is considered a universal language. Our experience tells us that music clearly has an aspect of communication like language. The most primitive form of communication that happens between babies and mothers shows this well. Their “conversations” are more like a musical call and response than anything else. Moreover, in music, we get a sense that we are being spoken *to*. Even though Levinson’s *Persona* theory lacks logical consistency, it describes well the impression we get from music, the feeling that we are being spoken to. So how can we understand the relationship between music and language? And what does it say about music’s relation to power?

¹³² Bierwisch (1979), 62, as cited in Begbie, 22.

¹³³ Shepherd and Wicke (1997), 114, as cited in Begbie, 23.

¹³⁴ Mendelssohn, letter to Marc-André Souchay dated 5 October 1842, as cited in McGilchrist, 74.

¹³⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann, (New York: Viking, 1968), 428 as cited in McGilchrist, 74.

McGilchrist, among many others, argues that music existed prior to language. Not only that, he sees music as the origin of language. His claim is made on evidence from fossil records of primitive humans as well as recent neurological research. He first refutes the hypothesis that the expansion of the left hemisphere in the human brain was caused by the development of language. It has been commonly believed that the asymmetry of the human brain, i.e., the left hemisphere being bigger than the right, was caused by language development. However, McGilchrist refutes this hypothesis on the basis that “fossil records of primitive humans from the earliest periods, long before anthropologists believe language developed, already show this typical pattern of brain asymmetry.”¹³⁶ Quoting a researcher, he argues “it is safe to assume that the asymmetry that ended up leading to language is unlikely to have appeared because of language... it is likely to have appeared for some other reason and basically got co-opted by language.”¹³⁷ For spoken language to be possible we need “sufficient brain space to house the dictionary and grammar” and vocal apparatus (along with articulatory bits and pieces of tongue and mouth) “enabling us to articulate a wide range of sounds, as well as on a remarkable degree of respiratory control, allowing us to sustain long, fluent, articulated phrases, and to modulate intonation subtly over the length of a single breath.”¹³⁸ Then he points out that “*homo heidelbergensis*, the common ancestor of *homo sapiens* and *homo neanderthalensis* had this large brain and vocal apparatus comparable to those of modern humans.”¹³⁹ He goes on, “admittedly they were not civilised in the true meaning of the word. But they survived and thrived as *social* animals, living in groups.”¹⁴⁰ He concludes: “for the explanation of this sophisticated control and modulation of

¹³⁶ McGilchrist, 99.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 100.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 101.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 101.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 101.

the production of sound, in the absence of language as we know it, has to be that it was for a sort of non-verbal language, one in which there was intonation and phrasing, but no actual words:

and what is that, if not music?”¹⁴¹ He continues:

Neurological research strongly supports the assumption that “our love of music reflects the ancestral ability of our mammalian brain to transmit and receive basic emotional sounds,” the prosody and rhythmic motion that emerge intuitively from entrainment of the body in emotional expression: “music was built upon the prosodic mechanisms... that allow us effective emotional communications through vocal intonations.” Presumably such mechanisms were highly important for group survival. They were also likely to have deep roots: “the deeply emotional stirrings generated by music,” writes the influential anthropologist Robin Dunbar, “suggest to me that music has very ancient origins, long predating the evolution of language.”¹⁴²

Music therefore arose from the need to communicate and metaphorize (carry over) emotional expression. In this sense, we could say “expression” triumphed over “beauty” in its origin.

However, as Susanne Langer points out, “the history of music has been a history of more and more integrated, disciplined, and articulated forms.”¹⁴³ Therefore, it would be wrong to talk about music without taking into account both the realities of formal beauty and expression – music is an articulated form while retaining its origin as a mode of expression. This mode of expression is enhanced by beauty because it is shaped and communicated through forms. And this is why music is able to trigger a certain mode of desire in us. Expression alone cannot draw us in the way music does.

So, what does this finding have to do with music and its relation to power?

¹⁴¹ McGilchrist, 102.

¹⁴² Ibid, 103.

¹⁴³ Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*. 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), 216.

McGilchrist argues that we do not need language to think or communicate. Even though our instinct would disagree with his claim, his many examples make it hard to refute his claim. He writes:

Many examples exist of famous scientific problems that were solved without language. After much cogitation, Kekulé seized the shape of the benzene ring, the foundation of organic chemistry, when the image of a snake biting its tail arose from the embers of his fires... Einstein wrote that ‘the words or the language, as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in the mechanism of my thought.’¹⁴⁴

In these instances which involved extremely complex cognitive processes, language did not seem to have played a decisive role. He takes this claim further and argues that not only do we not need language to communicate but that “language, unlike more intuitive, musical, forms of communication, is the perfect medium for *concealing*, rather than revealing, meaning. (emphasis mine)”¹⁴⁵ Quoting John Napier, he writes: “if language was given to men to conceal their thoughts, then gestures’ purpose was to disclose them.”¹⁴⁶ Indeed, it is estimated that over 90 per cent of communication between humans is by non-verbal means, through body language and especially through intonation.¹⁴⁷ Taking on this evidence, McGilchrist goes on to venture into the origin of language:

What then is language for? An expansive body of evidence ranging from the anatomical studies of pre-human fossils to the current clinical research seems to suggest whatever the answer might be, it is not out of the need to communicate. Indeed, American neuroscientist Norman Geschwind ventured that “language may not, after all, have originated in a drive to communicate -- that came later -- but as a means of mapping the world.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ McGilchrist, 107.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 106.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 71.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 106.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 113.

McGilchrist goes on further and arrives at a rather gloomy conclusion to claim that language arose as a “means of manipulating the world”¹⁴⁹:

Words alone make concepts more stable and available for memory. Naming things gives us power over them, so that we can use them...and category formation provides clear boundaries to the landscape of the world, giving certain view of it greater solidity and permanence. That may not have begun with humans, but it was obviously given a vast push forward by referential language. Language refines the expression of causal relationships. It hugely expands the range of reference of thought, and expands the capacity for planning and manipulation. It enables the indefinite memorialisation of more than what could otherwise be retained by any human memory... *Language in summary brings precision and fixity, two very important features if we are to succeed in manipulating the world.* And specifically, though we may not recognize this, it is good for manipulating other human beings. We can't easily hide the truth in non-verbal communication, but we can in words. (emphasis mine)¹⁵⁰

He asks:

Was it drive for power, embodied in the will to control the environment, which accelerated symbol manipulation and the extension of conceptual thought – already present in some apes, and present in our early ancestors – resulting in the expansion of the left hemisphere before language evolved? In this light, language can be seen as an expression at the phenomenal level of a deeper lying drive: effective manipulation of the world, and beyond that competition with other species, and with one another.¹⁵¹

However, music operates differently:

Communication, after all, does not only mean the kind of language we use to talk *about* things. Music is communication -- but it speaks *to* us, not *about* things. It does not refer (to a third party): it has an ‘I-thou’ existence, not an ‘I-it’ existence.¹⁵²

If his argument is correct, then music, despite being a mode of communication, stands in stark contrast to language. Here we see two different modes of relationship through which language and music operate. One is an I-it relationship. It is a world driven by language where the subject

¹⁴⁹ McGilchrist, 113.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 114.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 115.

¹⁵² Ibid, 106.

takes whatever that is Other under his control to manipulate and utilize for his benefit. The other mode of relationship is an I-thou relationship of music where the need or the desire to control the Other is absent. In the I-it relationship, it is pieces of information that are being communicated, something that is not about you and me. Here, I am being spoken *about*. In the I-thou relationship, I am being spoken *to*.¹⁵³ The I-it relationship implies detachment. One has to stand aloof from its environment. Music does not operate in this way. The dynamic that defines the relationship between the listener and music takes on the opposite values. It involves a desire to become “like” the Other. It is one of empathy.

Here, one is reminded of Adorno’s claim that music is “absolute.” Not in the sense of formal versus representational, but in the sense of how music’s exoteric nature resists definition. Music’s lack of clear semantic content and the fluidity of what it can represent means it is able to provoke a continuous web of associations in the listener’s mind. In Susanne Langer’s famous definition, it is an unconsummated symbol.¹⁵⁴ Thus, music stands against the mechanism of the modern world where the process of subjugating the non-identity under the identity governs every phenomenon.¹⁵⁵

In a world where everything is taken as a means to an end, including a person, the process of identification is crucial because only then one can stand aloof from its environment and subjugate the Other under its control. Music refuses this subjugation. And this tendency is shared by nature. This is why for Adorno, “natural beauty represented the irreducible Other ...the

¹⁵³ McGilchrist, 106.

¹⁵⁴ Langer, 240.

¹⁵⁵ Richard Wolin, "Utopia, Mimesis, and Reconciliation: A Redemptive Critique of Adorno's Aesthetic Theory," *Representations (Berkeley, Calif.)* 32, no. 1 (1990): 33-49. See page 40.

residue of non-identity in things in an age when they are otherwise spellbound by universal identity.”¹⁵⁶ According to Richard Wolin, this non-identity takes up a central place in Adorno’s aesthetic theory. “The beautiful in nature is different from both the notion of a ruling principle and the denial of any principle whatsoever. It is like the state of reconciliation.”¹⁵⁷ Wolin argues that “it is this conceptual triad nonidentity/ reconciliation/utopia that increasingly assumes central significance in Aesthetic Theory.”¹⁵⁸

Adorno’s theory on the relationship between music and utopia seems to have inspired many.

Richard Wolin and Richard Leppert both explored this theme in detail particularly with a focus on music’s similarity to nature. Here I quote Leppert as an example of their exploration:

Landscape by definition marks distance, the extreme otherness. We see a landscape specifically at a remove from ourselves. Literally as a kind of *fata morgana*. The closer we approach, the more the landscape disconcertingly at once becomes more real and less of what it first appeared to be. Put differently, landscape is not whatever we take into our line of vision when we are outdoors and in the country; landscape is something special that we choose to see as such. Landscape involves the realm of the imaginary, typically scenes of striking beauty in which the gaze finds itself locked onto something so mesmerizing that the sense of sight falters. Landscape, in short, is cultural; it is a product of the soma and the psyche; and yet it exists outside of both. The “magic” of landscape ultimately can be held onto by one of two (impossible) means: by suspending time-as-progress- we stop to stare; we halt our future for the look of the scene; or alternatively, by holding the scene in our mind’s eye afterwards as an afterimage.

Landscape is like music to the extent that it is at once material and ethereal. Neither can really be grasped; both are invariably just out of reach. What matters is the instant of their realization, which can be retained by repeating the gaze, by replaying the piece, or in memory but never more than fleetingly. *In an age defined not simply by the myth of progress but, concomitantly, by the ideology of objective possession, landscape and music alike refuse their cooperation. In that refusal Adorno hears articulated the possibility of an alternative, a momentary hint of reconciliation between subject and object: “As indeterminate, as antithetical to definitions, natural beauty is indefinable, and in this it is related to music ... Just as in music what is*

¹⁵⁶ Wolin, 40.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 40.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 40.

beautiful flashes up in nature only to disappear in the instant one tries to grasp it. Art does not imitate nature, not even individual instances of natural beauty, but natural beauty as such." (emphasis mine.)¹⁵⁹

Neither the beauty of music nor that of nature cooperate with one's attempt to grasp its reality. For many, including Adorno, this phenomenon is intrinsically bound up with a sense of utopia and reconciliation. The reader might have noticed a hint of another phenomenon that pertains to both nature and music. It is a prevalent phenomenon that accompanies our experience in nature and music, particularly at the height of their beauty. What marks this experience is a feeling of intense longing. It is Sehnsucht.

Sehnsucht, Dance and Eros

Even though the notion of Sehnsucht mainly arose as a part of the Romantic concept, it is a universal phenomenon that stretches back to the earliest parts of history. It is somewhat akin to the pastoral tradition, a literary genre that mainly deals with the longing for lost paradise. Classical Greek tradition abounds with examples of pastoral tradition as do many other literary traditions that come before the Greeks. The Genesis account of the Fall in the Old Testament is a good example.

It is usually said that music as a genre represents pastoral sentiment because a lot of times the experience of listening to music accompanies a sense of intense longing.¹⁶⁰ If the pastoral tradition stands for longing for the lost paradise, the "unreachable", then one can immediately see why music would be in its essence, pastoral. At the height of experiencing musical beauty,

¹⁵⁹ Richard Leppert, "On Reading Adorno Hearing Schubert," *19th-Century Music* 29, no. 1 (2005): 58.

¹⁶⁰ For example, Raymond Monelle makes this point in his exploration of pastorelle tradition. Adorno also expresses the same sentiment in many of his writings on musical aesthetics.

what one senses is intense longing, Sehnsucht. The difference between the pastoral tradition and Sehnsucht would be that if the object of longing in pastoral tradition is known, i.e., toward the lost paradise, it is not so clearly defined in Sehnsucht. One may object that the notion of lost paradise is not something we can define clearly, either. But this is beside the point. What is important in this discussion is that what intensifies longing in Sehnsucht is precisely rooted in the fact that the object of longing is unknown. It is this unknowability that characterizes the phenomenon.

In Sehnsucht, what comes with the bittersweet longing is a desire to be one with the beauty we are beholding. For example, when we see a beautiful sunset we almost want to melt into the sunset and be one with it. If Eros is defined as a desire to sublimate oneself and create a higher unity with the Other, then it is not difficult to see a mode of Eros operating in our experience of Sehnsucht.

It is worth pointing out at this point that there is a fine line between what one means by sublimating oneself – which is associated with life instinct, Eros – and surrendering oneself – which is associated with death instinct, Thanatos. Indeed, for Adorno, this “surrendering” attitude that accompanies behavioral mimesis was in essence, Thanatos, the death drive.¹⁶¹ He saw the desire to be “like” the other as essentially the desire to surrender oneself to the environment leading to a dissolution of organism.

The process involving a somewhat complicated interplay of life drive Eros and death drive Thanatos in Sehnsucht is beautifully captured in a novel *Till We Have Faces* by C.S. Lewis. This

¹⁶¹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 227.

is a reinterpretation of the ancient myth of Anima (Psyche) and Eros (Cupid). In this rendition, when Psyche is about to be sacrificed as an offering to Eros she says the following:

“It was when I was happiest that I longed the most. It was on happy days when we were up there on the hills...with the wind and the sunshine...Do you remember? The colour and the smell, and looking across at the Grey Mountain in the distance? And because it was so beautiful, it set me longing, always longing. Somewhere else there must be more of it. Everything seemed to be saying, Psyche come! But I couldn’t (not yet) come and I didn’t know where I was to come to. It almost hurt me. I felt like a bird in a cage when the other birds of its kind are flying home.”¹⁶²

Psyche’s happiest moment of intense beauty was always marked by “indefinable” longing.

Somehow, she knew that she could not attain what she desired except through death. In this rendition, the unification with Eros is achieved through Thanatos.

Just like Psyche’s experience of Sehnsucht in nature, it seems the phenomenon of Sehnsucht in music also involves a dynamic interplay of life drive and death drive – Eros and Thanatos.

However, there are several reasons why I argue Eros is the primary drive in music. First, whenever we are trying to describe music, it seems impossible to escape the yoke of words associated with movement. What do we mean when we say the melody is rising? Or that there is a big leap from one note to another? Or much more fundamentally, what do we mean when we say things like the “pulse” of a piece? Indeed, as Scruton points out, “the experience of musical form is an experience of movements and gestures.... in hearing the content of a piece of music, therefore, we are also hearing the life which grows and fulfils itself in tones.”¹⁶³

Scruton also points out that when Hanslick resorted to the word “movement” in his famous definition of music as tonally moving forms he was doing nothing less than metaphorizing music

¹⁶² C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces; a Myth Retold*. 1st American Edition (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1957), 47.

¹⁶³ Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 357.

with life: “In hearing the movement in music we are hearing life conscious of itself.”¹⁶⁴ There is another reason I believe Eros is a more adequate way of understanding musical expressivity. Even though in music we do have a sense of surrendering ourselves to the environment, this surrender always leaves us with a clearer sense and awareness of emotions we are experiencing. In other words, it increases the clarity of consciousness of the experience which in turn, gives us a clearer sense of the self. In Barford and Slonimsky’s words, “the vitality of pure musical thinking establishes the form of consciousness which is itself a significant way of experiencing.”

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This recognition of emotions in us becomes more defined as we get more involved in the movement of music and become united with it. As the Greek term *harmonia* implies, unity means integration not dissolution. This sense of coming to know one’s feelings as one moves “with” the movement of music is what forms the central concept in Scruton’s definition of musical expressivity, which is expressed through an analogy of dance:

The expressive character of art is connected with its role in the *Entäußerung* or “realization” of our feelings. We encounter works of art as perfected icons of our felt potential, and appropriate them in order to bring form, lucidity, and self-knowledge to our inner life. The human psyche is transformed by art, but only because art provides us with the *expressive gestures towards which our emotions lean* in their search for sympathy - gestures which we seize, when we encounter them, with a sense of being carried at last to a destination that we could not reach alone, as when a poem offers us the words of love or grief which we cannot find in ourselves. Art realizes what is otherwise inchoate, unformed, and incommunicable. It does this because we recognize its expressive properties, and appropriate them as vehicles of our own emotion. (emphasis mine.)¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 357.

¹⁶⁵ Philip T. Barford, and Nicolas Slonimsky, *The Beethoven Companion*, 1st edition, edited by Thomas Scherman and Louise Leopold Biancolli (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972), 1045.

¹⁶⁶ Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 352.

This dance is one of understanding and integration. Understanding because one leans onto expressive gestures in music to appropriate them as vehicles of one's own emotion, and integration because this understanding arises as a result of participating in a dance, in a call and response, in the gesture of receiving and giving, in interlockedness. One may argue that because it is the "expressive" gestures which enable this dance, representational theories are right after all. But that is not so, as mentioned before, expression alone cannot provoke desire in us to sublimate ourselves and be one with music. There has to be an element of beauty in order for music to attract us. It is through formal and sensuous beauty which encapsulates expressive gestures that music attracts us.

By recognizing its expressive gestures and beauty we are drawn to it and enter into a dance with it. I argue what fuels this dance is mimetic desire which seeks to enter into the reality of the music, and what fuels this mimetic desire is Eros: delight in the beautiful and desire to be integrated to it, a desire to sublimate oneself and create higher unities.

The question I leave as I conclude my thesis is: if in a dance, distance is what creates and forms choreography, then can Sehnsucht be thought of as an attempt to traverse this distance? Can it be that the more we assimilate into the dance and are interlocked in its choreography as to become the dance itself, the more acutely we feel the distance? Since complete assimilation to the music is impossible and the distance is what creates choreography in our dance with the music, can the longing which forms the core part of Sehnsucht be considered as our being acutely aware of this distance?

Conclusion

What have often been considered as irreconcilable dichotomies in musical aesthetics can in fact be reinterpreted as a form of dynamic interplay if seen through the lens of Eros. If Eros is defined as a delight in beauty and a movement toward the beautiful with desire to sublimate oneself to create higher unities, then Eros is able to reconcile many binary oppositions in musical aesthetics such as the contest between the intrinsic view and extrinsic view or the role of the sensual and intellectual. This is because first, attraction toward sensual beauty (a mode of Eros) gives rise to a kind of emotional intelligence, or “loving knowledge” which precedes cognitive, rational evaluation which means the contest between intellect and sensuous is now forming a dynamic interplay. This idea was explored by St. Augustine in the fourth century and also by Jenefer Robinson in recent years. This so-called affective cognition does not negate intellectual cognition. On the contrary affective cognition aids rational endeavor by educating our emotions which our intellect alone cannot. In other words, it forms and empowers us to see and do things the intellect cannot. This theme is recapitulated in the theory of Affective appraisal which is pioneered by Jenefer Robinson. Like St. Augustine, she places non-cognitive appraisal at the center of her theory. Recognizing there is a mechanism operative in our perception of music which does not rely on rational evaluation but operates more like an instinct toward a sensorial object, she also argues that music can be used to educate our emotions. Idealists at the turn of the nineteenth century also grappled with the question of music’s essence by arguing that the harmony and order of corporeal music was a reflection of that of an incorporeal, heavenly realm. Thus, they were able to reconcile the dichotomy of music’s formal and imitative qualities. However, these interplays shown by St. Augustine and idealists undergo polarization which

gives rise to more strict versions of formalism and representationalism. I again argued that these oppositions can be reconciled through Eros. What plays along with Eros is mimetic desire. It is a desire to be like the other but it goes deeper than mere copying of external qualities. It is a desire to enter into the reality of the other, and as many neurological research shows, this desire is hard wired in us. It forms a core part of who we are and what drives us to be who we are. Naturally, this mimetic impulse is deeply involved in the process of composing and giving rise to felt emotions in music. The process and qualities involved in mimesis and Eros are very similar. Both incorporate values such as aspiration, attraction, intentions and empathy. What distinguishes mimesis and Eros is the significance in beauty. If mimesis is like a reflexive mechanism that can operate without beauty, Eros is an intensified version of mimesis that is triggered by recognition of beauty. Music is able to trigger this Eros in us by revealing beauty of often unnoticed qualities of relationships, time and sound. In addition, studies on the relationship between music and language have shown that music probably preceded language as a mode of communication. What is of relevance to my argument is that unlike referential language, the desire to control others is absent in music. All these qualities work together to provoke Eros in the listener. With mimetic desire and Eros, the listener is drawn to the music and participates in a dance with the music. In the dance we recognize two things: expressive gestures which we lean on to appropriate our own emotions, and beauty manifested in sensuous forms. This dance is one of understanding and integration which is fueled by a mode of love and a desire to be united with the beauty. Therefore, Eros redeems the notion of imitation in music by pointing back to our primaeval desire to be “like” the other, while affirming the formal beauty as the essence of music.

Eros can also explain the phenomenon of Sehnsucht because like Sehnsucht, Eros encompasses a sense of longing, and a desire to be assimilated into the Other.

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