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The Disappearance of Mimesis in Musical Expression

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The Disappearance of Mimesis in Musical Expression

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Introduction

During the eighteenth century the philosophy of music underwent a profound change. Since the Greeks introduced mimesis [μίμησις] to their theories on art and musical expression, music had been considered in mimetic terms. For the Greeks, music was considered as a mode of poetry. They thought that musical expression was caused by some form of mimesis, that is, its expressivity was based on some form of imitation or emulation. While the definition of mimesis varied between thinkers and even within the thought of individual philosophers, it is only in the eighteenth century that we see a clear break from the mimetic approach to music. This raises an obvious question: *why does mimesis disappear from the discourse at this point in time?* As mimesis had dominated musical theory for almost two millennia, a shift away from mimesis constitutes a significant discontinuity. This question can be divided into at least three parts:

1. What is the classical understanding of mimesis with regard to musical expression?
2. What was the understanding of mimesis during the eighteenth century and what were its limitations?
3. Which approach to musical expression replaced the mimetic approach and how do modern aestheticians make do without resort to mimesis?

With this essay I aim to formulate an answer to these three questions. In the first part I explore three mimetic approaches to music: first I will expound upon Aristotle's presentation of music as a mode of theatre in the *Poetics* to get a better grip on one of the main sources of inspiration for mimesis in the performative arts. From Aristotle I move to a late mimetic debate on (operatic) musical expression in pre-revolutionary France: the Querelle des Bouffons. This debate between Jean-Philippe Rameau and Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the nature of musical expression shows two distinct modern mimetic approaches just before mimesis' fall from grace. As such, the debate foreshadows the limitations of mimesis in musical theory and thereby can tell us something about the shift toward non-mimetic musical theory. The second part is

dedicated to two pioneers in non-mimetic musical theory: the Scottish empiricists Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith. In their analysis, musical expression is justified not by imitation in music, but by the nature of the human experience of art. Their epistemological approach to the arts is, I argue, not without precedent. Hence the second major influence on mimesis in the performative arts, Platonic mimesis, is presented to contrast and compare the (dis)advantages of approaching musical expression without mimesis. Finally, in the third part the balance is made up: why did the approach to music change around the eighteenth century and can musical theory make do without mimesis with all types of music: instrumental and vocal music? The development of complex instrumental music faced musical theorists with a challenge: how to account for music that is not clearly imitative of something outside itself? The non-mimetic empiricist accounts excel at understanding the recently emancipated instrumental music, even so, mimetic accounts make a convincing case for the expression of operatic music. Still, as instrumental music is given a place within aesthetics by the Scottish, crucial aspects of the mimetic account of operatic music are lost. By analysing this period of musical and theoretical upheaval one becomes aware of the need for a two-pronged approach to musical expression, and the need to distinguish between two types of music: mimetic music and what I will call structural music.

Part 1: Musical Mimesis in the Guerre des Bouffons

1.1 Setting the Stage

Ever since the renaissance and the influx of original classical treatises through humanist research, the position of music in early modern European society changed. While in medieval Europe music as an art was strongly tied to Christianity, from the fifteenth century onwards a development in musical practice occurs away from church towards the courts and (re)emerging cities. This had profound consequences for musical theory. In this movement the thought on the nature of music changed. Much of Christian musical theory was Platonic in origin.¹ Music was used in church-service to bring us closer to God by supporting scripture. Detached from scripture, its effect on the senses could lead humanity away from the *good*. We can see argumentations like these in Boethius and Augustine, music in their view only *moral* if expressive of the gratitude at the ever-exceeding magnificence of God.² Their interpretation of music rested on the idea that music as a mimetic art could imitate the divine harmony through a ‘language of spirituality’.³ The main idea was that the soul could reach for the structural harmony of the universe thanks to numerical relations and properties manifested in music. This concept can be traced to the Platonic and Pythagorean presentation of music where mimesis was used to clarify music as imitation of the supralunar world.

As the ties between church and music got looser, new theories about musical expression were introduced. Particularly the development of opera as a re-emergence of classical tragedy

¹ Thomas Christensen, “Music Theory,” In *The Cambridge History of Medieval Music*, ed. Mark Everist and Thomas Kelly (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 359-360.

² Arianna Phillips, “Exaltation of the Rational: The Treatment of Music by Plato and St. Augustine,” *The Pulse* 4 no. 1, 1-5; David Chamberlain, “Philosophy of Music in the Consolatio of Boethius,” *Speculum* 45, no. 1 (1970), 81.

³ G.T. Baleng, "Augustine on Music as the Harmonious Language of Spirituality: An Apophatic Theological Study," *In die Skriflig* 58, 1 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v58i1.3064>.

changed the views on musical expression. In Italy opera developed out of the struggle between ‘first practice’ and ‘second practice’ music: a debate originating in the conflict between Giovanni Artusi and Claudio Monteverdi on the telos of music. The first practice adhered to early renaissance composing habits -traditional polyphony- and disavowed the more equal embrace of words and monophonic music propagated by the ‘seconda pratica’. Its proponents generally adhered to strict rules of counterpoint. The second-practice composers used dissonance and chromaticism instead to support the setting to music of text.⁴ Thereby, the baroque composers introduced new ways of engaging with music. Whereas church music operated on the premise of replicating the supranatural as additional reinforcement of the (Platonic) idea of the good, the second practice composers instead focus on music’s worldly effects.⁵ By complementing the expressiveness of text with music they emphasise the emotional effect of music, thereby (re)opening ways of interpreting music in dramatic terms. The incorporation of dissonance thereby challenged the notion of music as imitative of the supranatural. Musical expression in the ‘seconda pratica’ remained imitative, but was in nature theatrical and humanist, therefore requiring an alternative theory of expression. In Monteverdi’s phrasing: ‘music should be at the service of the world.’⁶ Hence musical expression was linked first and foremost to the movement of emotions (affetti) in its audience.⁷

The dramatic shift is no coincidence. As the renaissance reacquainted composers with classical theory, they inserted classical ideas on theatre in their work. A reemergence of Aristotle’s theory on tragedy could be observed in operas like *le Nozze di Enea*. Michelangelo

⁴Jeffrey Levenberg, “*Seconda Pratica* Temperaments, *Prima Pratica* Tempers: The Artusi-Monteverdi Controversy and the Retuning of *Musica Moderna*.” *Acta Musicologica* 92, no. 1 (2020): 21–22. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27134334>.

⁵ Julius Portnoy, *The Philosopher and Music: a Historical Outline* (Da Capo Press, 1980), 127.

⁶ Eva Dolinšek, "Monteverdi and *Seconda pratica*: Music should be at the Service of the Word" (lecture at The Seventh International Symposium, Ljubljana, 7-05-2022. pp146.

⁷ Judy Tarling, *The Weapons of Rhetoric*, (Corda Music, 2004), 69.

Torcigliani, the librettist of *le Nozze* argued that tragedy should centre around known heroic figures as this allows audiences to *believe* and *be immersed* by opera: ‘those things believed to be true seem to move the affections more than those believed to be imaginary and also stay in the memory longer.’⁸ The ultimate goal of tragedy became the plausible conveying of affections; a reinterpretation and implementation of an Aristotelean sense of mimesis in the production of opera and composing.⁹ It is this classical sense of mimesis that was passed on to the eighteenth century. To understand what eighteenth-century mimesis consisted of, and how this mimesis differed from the Aristotelean understanding of mimesis in music we must first sidestep into Aristotle’s *Poetics*.

1.2 Aristotelean mimesis

Aristotle’s theory of mimesis in art stems from his exploration of tragedy. In the *Poetics* Aristotle writes: ‘Epic poetry and tragedy, [...] and most flute-playing and lyre-playing, are all, viewed as a whole, modes of imitation.’¹⁰ That is, forms of replication that differ in *means of imitation*, *objects imitated*, and *imitative manner*. The means of imitation is the structure, substrate, or tool used to imitate. For music these are harmony and rhythm. The object imitated (in the case of theatre) is action. Action, as the visible exponent of character shows the ethical dilemmas at the heart of tragedy. Ethical choices are what move a plot and hold the interest of audiences. Finally, the manner of imitation concerns the way by which the means and objects are presented. In theatre one could think of the plot being narrative-driven through an external

⁸ Ellen Rosand, “Monteverdi’s Late Operas,” In *The Cambridge Companion to Monteverdi*, ed. John Whenham and Richard Wistreich (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 230-231.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Aristotle. “Poetics,” in *The complete Works of Aristotle, Volume Two: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton University Press, 1997), 1447a10.

storyteller, or the plot being enacted. Both are manners of presenting in theatre.¹¹ Aristotle's theory of tragedy is thus a theory of mimesis: a theory covering various types of performative arts. Art in Aristotle's view must always be relatable for it to be convincing; therefore, it must be modelled after something in the world. By presenting art this way, Aristotle can justify art as ethically motivated. Through art audiences may deepen their understanding of the world. As man is 'the most imitative creature in the world, and [man] learns at first by imitation', the arts provide man with an opportunity to explore what might otherwise be inaccessible;¹² for instance, amorality can be staged without consequence, relationships explored risk-free, hypothetical choices made without actual repercussion. In summary, imitation occurs in all arts, though the medium, means, and objects vary according to the nature of the artistic expression. Poetry's end is ethical, its motivation curiosity, its means affective. The act of performing and experiencing theatre concerns action, action calls forth an emotional response. Choices on stage can be painful to watch, bring joy, cause one to reflect.

What then is the imitation of tragedy's musical mode? In Tragedy, all imitation is imitation of action; action which can either be better, worse or similar to our frame of reference.¹³ Music specifically is referred to as part of the tragedians' toolbox. Its mimesis is discussed only by implication in *Poetics* 1449b 21-35:

A Tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious, and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions. Here by 'language with pleasurable accessories' I mean that with rhythm and harmony; and by 'the kinds separately' I mean that some portions are worked out with verse only, and others in turn with song.

As they act the stories, it follows that in the first place the spectacle must be some part of the whole; and in the second melody and diction, these two being the means of their imitation. Here by diction, I mean merely this, the composition of the verses; and by melody, what is too completely understood to require explanation.¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid., 1448a20.

¹² Ibid., 1448b5-20.

¹³ Ibid., 1450a15.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1449b21-35.

Music here is thus referred to as part of the ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ tragedy. Rhythm and harmony are employed to support the credibility of the imitated action, and provide pleasurable accompaniment. The melody then as means of imitation is the structure by which rhythm and harmony are embedded within the totality of the piece. While it seems reasonable to assume that by referring to music as ‘pleasurable’ Aristotle emphasises the affective nature of the musical imitative mode, it is a pity he ends this section with the announcement that there is no need to divulge on the topic of melody. While this knowledge might have been commonplace then it poses a challenge to modern readership.

Solace can be found in the *Politics*. In a discussion on education Aristotle asks himself what ‘psychological and cultural functions music can fulfil, and what kinds of music are appropriate for the formation of the citizens of the model polis.’¹⁵ In this discussion, Aristotle broaches the topic of musical mimesis separately from the question of mimesis in musical poetry. Aristotle establishes a theory of ‘character’ residing in music itself. That is, ethical qualities attributed to people are also found in music. Aristotle’s exposition of this claim is presented at 1340a18-24. He starts with the observation that ‘rhythm and melody supply imitations of [...] qualities of character, which hardly fall short of the actual affections.’¹⁶ The proof for which can be found in the changes of our state of mind listening to music. Aristotle uses a visual analogy to prove his point: if one gladdens seeing a *depicted* object, gladness will necessarily ensue upon seeing the *actual* object. If music gladdens, it must be an imitation of actual gladness. With the referral to a visual object Aristotle takes a conceptual leap, why would it be the case that correspondence in visual arts –which allow for straightforward

¹⁵ Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems*. 1st edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 237.

¹⁶ Aristotle, “Politics,” In *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume Two: The Revised Oxford Translation*, trans. B. Jowett (Princeton University Press, 1985), 1340a18-24.

correspondence based on qualities shared by the depicted and the actual object (form, colour, etc.)– functions in the same way as correspondence in music? The answer lies for Aristotle in the necessary correspondence between artwork and reality in our perception: ‘The objects of no other sense [i.e. non-musical] [...] have any resemblance to moral qualities.’¹⁷ In other words, there is only a natural likeness to qualities of character in perceiving music. Musical mimesis must correspond to states of mind as it moves us to different states of mind. The fact that we are changed in the process of hearing music proves that the qualities changing us are already in the music itself.

At this point in the argument, it pays to carefully examine Aristotle’s phrasing: Aristotle uses the terms *sêmaia*, *homoiômata*, and *mimêmata* in his argument. The first contrast Aristotle makes is between likeness of character [*homoiômata*] and signs [*sêmaia*] of character. Music is an example of the first, paintings of the latter. While depicting an angry person by painting the reddening of a face may signify the imitated character, it is not the same as the painting likening itself to that character trait. ‘By contrast, melodies themselves contain mimetic equivalents [*mimêmata*] of character, and this is readily clear from the fact that the scales [*harmoniai*] possess natural qualities that make each of them having a different effect on listeners.’¹⁸ Music naturally possesses qualities corresponding to character mimetically while paintings can only signify qualities of character. The reverse also holds, painting naturally likens itself to qualities like colour whereas music can only signify these qualities. Musical mimesis thus runs deeper than mere signification.

Aristotle presents a theory of mimesis remarkably close to the early-modern Affektenlehre. Because music alters the listeners mind in the process of listening, it must be the

¹⁷ Ibid., 1340a29-30.

¹⁸ Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, 240.

case that music itself imitates qualities of character. Properties corresponding to character are ‘intrinsic to musical structures and instances of affective resemblance or equivalence.’¹⁹

To properly understand music in both a poetic and independent sense one must thus take both the *Poetics* and *Politics* into account. The first presents music as ‘pleasant accompaniment’, and tragedy as a whole as an imitation of action; in the latter we see an interpretation of mimesis in music alone. Note however that the latter presentation of musical mimesis does not conflict with tragic imitation. Already in the *Poetics* Aristotle shows awareness of the correspondence between our states of mind and music. As the goal of tragedy differs from ‘just’ playing music, the imitated object shifts slightly. But the difference is one of scale, not nature. Whereas tragedy imitates action, which in turn signifies character, music imitates states of mind directly. The former employing words, staging, acting and music; the latter rhythm, melody, and harmony.

1.2.1. Musical Expressivity in Early Modern Europe

The rediscovery of Aristotle by the baroque composers allowed for a renewal of the theoretical framework of the performative arts, music included. Still, as Aristotle seems ahead of his time by arguing in a similar fashion to 18th century musical theorists, it must be asked why in the *Guerre des Bouffons* Rousseau and Rameau work with his ideas instead of simply copying his theory. Before we arrive at this point first some general remarks on the modern development of mimesis.

The fact that a new primary source of musical expression was introduced by rediscovering Aristotle does not mean that the Platonic notion of mimesis was lost. During the following centuries, the debate on musical expressivity continued to surface as several major

¹⁹ Ibid., 244.

developments came to challenge standard (Aristotelean and/or (Neo-)Platonic) theory of music: the maturation of instrumental music, the development of complex harmonic theory, and the evolving societal role of opera. As instrumental music developed, the self-evident link between poetry and musical expression lessened. Furthermore, as the theories of art introduced by Plato and Aristotle originated as theories of theatre rather than theories of instrumental performance, theories of musical expression needed to accommodate musical development. Additionally, the development of harmonic theories by the likes of Jean-Philippe Rameau introduced music to the modern rationalist scientific method which did not necessarily correspond well with the ancient approaches to music. Finally, the differences in operatic styles that grew out of the first and second practice – opera seria and opera buffa – called for a revision of classical theory on musical expression. Classical theory framed music in terms of mimesis in the context of tragedy, the development of comic opera during the eighteenth century challenged the self-evident assumptions and called for a reinterpretation of the mimesis. A prime example of such an attempt came to be known as the *Querelle des Bouffons*: an aesthetic disagreement between the Encyclopaedist modernists and conservative French opera adepts. While the modernists embraced the Italian operatic style known as Opera buffa, proponents of the French ‘Tragédie Lyrique’ were less eager to embrace the novelties of Opera Buffa. As both sides struggled to defend their perspective on music, interesting shifts in the theory of musical expression occurred. Could musical expression still be understood using the Greek mimetic conceptual framework, or do the developments of the eighteenth century show the limits of mimesis?

1.3 *Querelle des Bouffons*

Before engaging with the theories themselves a short introduction is in place. Central in the *Guerre des Bouffons* were the composer and theorist Jean-Philippe Rameau and Jean-Jacques

Rousseau, who was a philosopher, but also a relatively well-known composer in his time. While initially Rousseau reiterated much of Rameau's thought on music, when asked to write the musical entries of the *Encyclopédie* Rousseau came to reject Rameau's theory on musical expression. The ensuing debate highlights the tension between a Cartesian essentialist notion of musical expressivity and an early romantic affective (sentimentalist) understanding of music. How do these thinkers ground musical expression and to what extent do their theories differ from the classical mimetic accounts? Is musical expression still a matter of affective mimesis for querulous composers, or are they able to pass by imitation in grounding musical expression. In the following sections the theories of the two thinkers will be set out, after which a comparison between the classical account of mimesis and the early modern mimetic positions will be made. While many aspects of the Querelle come to the fore in the following sections, it should be noted that actually the Querelle ranged much wider than the Rameau-Rousseau debate, covering many aspects of music as well as inspiring many thinkers, musicians and scientists.

1.3.1 Jean-Philippe Rameau's Cartesian approach

The enlightenment era in France inspired heated debates on the scientific and aesthetic role of music. This debate sparked in light of three developments:

- I. Rameau's *discovery* of the fundamental base.
- II. The compilation of the *Encyclopédie*.
- III. The diverging opinions on the primacy of French or Italian operatic styles.²⁰

Discussions in the Querelle often shifted in focus, though a guiding thread constituted the question of expression in music and the source of musical expressiveness. The debate sparked

²⁰ Cynthia Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment: Rameau and the Philosophes in Dialogue*. 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2016), 2.

following the encyclopaedia entry *Opéra* by Rousseau where he compares French and Italian music. Rameau strongly disagreed with this essay. However, before continuing onto the disagreement first some context on Rameau's theoretical background.

Rameau as a composer should not be conceived of as a systematic theorist, still, throughout his career he developed theories to support his compositional choices. Already in 1722, Rameau posited in his *Traité de l'Harmonie Réduite à ses Principes Naturels* the idea that the structure of Western music could be reduced to the existence of the fundamental bass: the idea that all harmonic progressions derive significance from the natural phenomenon of a 'root' in harmonic relations.²¹ The fundamental bass with its harmonic overtones together form the 'corps sonore'.²² The bass is thereby considered as the tone that generates the intervals in which we can identify harmonic relations and thus melodies. Shifting the fundamental bass disrupts and subsequently generates 'movement' in music and thereby induces emotional modulation. Melodies, moving up and down the pitches within and outside of the harmonic overtones receive their musicality and emotionality due to the natural principle of the fundamental bass producing regularly spaced overtones.²³ Musical expressiveness must for Rameau thus be understood as natural affective expressiveness. As Rameau theorised in the context of opera, he sought ways to theoretically support how it is that music can help elevate the emotional depth already apparent in text and acting.

While Rameau's analysis of sound is similar to earlier Pythagorean accounts of harmony—both examine the principles of sound using mathematics—, Rameau's approach differs in that it is not the exact ratio of intervals that interests him. Instead, Rameau is interested in the way

²¹ Jean Philippe Rameau, *Traité de l'Harmonie Réduite à ses Principes Naturels*, (Paris: Imprimerie de Jean-Baptiste-Christophe Ballard, 1722).

²² Thomas Christensen. "Eighteenth-Century Science and the 'Corps Sonore': The Scientific Background to Rameau's 'Principle of Harmony'," *Journal of Music Theory* 31, no. 1 (1987): 23.

²³ Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment*, 25-26.

music expresses different characters by determining the nature of harmonic structures: how can one experience affective shifts in harmonic shifts? While the idea of music expressing affect was commonplace in Enlightenment France Rameau's conceptual approach differs strongly from the more 'sociologist' approaches of Rousseau and the Encyclopaedists. Rameau retained a(n old-fashioned) Cartesian conceptual scheme of the nature of affects and incorporated this scheme in his analysis of the working of music; not only conceptually, but also methodically.

Descartes in *Les Passions de l'Âme* of 1694 presents human emotions in an Aristotelean fashion.²⁴ Like Aristotle, Descartes defines six primitive passions, 'wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness' ordered as pairs of opposites.²⁵ Wonder, already identified in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, was taken as prime mover of philosophical thought. Aristotle shows that rather than for the sake of utility, people first (re)act out of curiosity. Descartes slightly rephrases Aristotle's sense of wonder: he presents wonder as the first passion because to him novelties do not immediately prove their utility or harm to us. Objects first present themselves empirically, then by mediation of surprise one is moved -motivated- to explore the object and broaden one's passionate response. Cartesian wonder thereby becomes an intellectual passion concerned not as much with the object itself, but rather our response to being presented with an object.²⁶

Rameau does not directly refer to Descartes, yet Cartesian influences can be identified within his thought. Starting from the general statement that music can express different emotions by choice of consecutive pitch: 'The subdominant will produce nearly the same effect whether climbing or descending, just like the dominant: on the flat side is felt this species of

²⁴ René Descartes, "The Passions of the Soul," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch (Cambridge university Press, 1985), 325-404.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 353.

²⁶ Charles Dill, "Rameau's Cartesian Wonder," *Eigteenth Century Music* 14, no. 1 (2017): 42-43.

humiliation previously discussed, and on the sharp side this species of pride that one desires.’²⁷ Rameau moves onto the way in which passion and melody move analogously: music does not directly steer human passion, the (intellectual mediation) of ‘wonder at seeing oneself thus transported from one hemisphere to the other [...] without having to think about it’²⁸ is what the actual experience of music entails. By engaging with harmonic shifts one is transported into different affective states and shown the analogous movement of music with our affective response.

The distinct Cartesian outlook of Rameau on musical expressiveness becomes clearer when placed next to the criticism of Jean-Baptiste Dubos. Dubos, who provided much of the groundwork for the later Encyclopaedist positions, argues against the need for mental processes when defining listeners’ responses to works of art. What matters for Dubos is the primary response when faced with sense-data. One simply *knows* whether music is good or bad, uplifting or sad. Our response to art is not intellectually mediated, it is not science, it simply is. For Dubos, feeling and knowing can be used interchangeably. Dubos thereby shows himself a proponent of the ‘sensibility position’.²⁹ That is, the position that ‘assigns a primary role to sensibility, rather than reason, in the imitation of the passions.’³⁰ Sentimentalist hold that passions can be imitated and heightened in music and experienced sensibly rather than rationally. Comparatively, while Dubos proposes a theory of direct sensible experience, Rameau’s counteroffer is one of indirect, mediated affectionate response. Dubos seems to argue that the art of music is itself affective, Rameau speaks of music’s passionate effects. The two seem to divide Aristotelian aesthetic theory amongst themselves: Dubos retains the notion of

²⁷ Ibid., 40.

²⁸ Ibid., 41

²⁹ Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment*, 52.

³⁰ Ibid., 39.

mimêmata as affection residing within music in a literal sense, while Rameau emphasises the distinction between harmonic shifts occurring naturally, and the recognition of the mimetic relation between the passions and harmonic shifts within music.

1.3.2 Possible deficiencies in Rameau's argument

Rameau's Cartesian approach to musical expressiveness is one of the main issues between Rameau and the Bouffons. Whereas Rameau originally meant to describe music as essentially harmonic, during the Querelle Rameau boldens his claim: harmony not just generates musically affectionate response, rather musical expression is solely harmonic, rhythm and melody are derivative. Rameau defined music as movement in harmonic shifts, rhythm and melody also constitute movement, but only as an effect of harmonic shifts.³¹ This emphasis foregoes the practice of composing familiar to Rameau. He knew the importance of melody and rhythm to music. Why insist on harmony as ground for all of music?

The querelle originated in a conflict of taste between either the Italian or French operatic styles. Gradually the fundamental question became the question of musical expressivity. Rameau, as an exponent of Cartesian rationalism made a case for indirect affective expression.³² Analogous to Descartes, Rameau first posits the innate logic of the rational subject and uses this rationale to explain how it is that music is expressive at all. The recognition of expressivity originates in harmony but resides in our *wondrous response*. The affective journey of well-composed music is harmonic. Harmony is defined as modulation both in the corps-sonore and outside of it, but its recognition requires an inquisitive mind. In this way, Rameau incorporates both rationalist and empiricist elements into his account. Still, this combined approach opens

³¹ Ibid.

³² Dill, *Rameau's Cartesian Wonder*, 1.

the door for criticism: if the individual response to music is so significant, how can Rameau maintain that harmony -as a universal principle behind music- is uniformly perceived? Experience tells us the same harmonic shifts can be experienced differently. Is Rameau's theory not better suited to an individualist account of musical expression?

Rameau starts from the premise that in nature the fundamental base naturally occurs. All vibrating systems generate harmonically related overtones that get their expression from the tonic. As such, confusion of affect cannot occur at the level of the sound itself. The overtones related to a single fundamental base can be recognised by the audience, whom Rameau in his late *Code* describes as the "Corps Passivement Harmonique".³³ The audience is thus by nature receptive of the corps sonore and tonal shifts affecting the corps sonore. As each root pitch generates a set of regularly spaced overtones, a sudden shift of the fundamental bass upsets the sensibility of the audience: not by direct sensory-bodily reaction, but through the mediation of intellect. Surprise leads to wonder, which leads to the discovery of passions analogous to the harmonic mobility. For one to agree with Rameau's analysis one must agree on at least two points: the natural occurrence of the fundamental base and the collective natural receptiveness of the human intellect mediated by his senses to the movement of the fundamental bass. Rhythm and measure, which are also recognisable movements, are of secondary importance. The usage of rhythm and measure are determined not by nature, but by convention. Both, however, can lead to a shared individual experience of music: the movement within music can be both traced back to its natural origin and cultural context, as such individuals carrying the same cultural background can have a generally coherent affective experience of music. Differences in cultural baggage and musical receptiveness can thus account for diverse but

³³ Ibid., 46.

similar experiences in the ‘Corps Passivement Harmonique.’ Hence Rameau seems unable to uphold his hypothesis that musical pieces are generally interpreted the same.

A second issue identified by Rameau’s philosophical contenders was the vehemence with which Rameau defends harmony over other aspects of music. It takes on extreme forms. That there is such a thing one can distinctively perceive as a harmonic relation, and that mathematical ratio’s divide harmony proves to Rameau that one can reduce music’s natural expression to a single source and ground music’s expressiveness in a system of natural laws developed by physicists. Rameau does not stop while ahead, riled up in the essay *Erreurs* he argues that as music is subject to proportionality, so is science. Scientific discovery is a byproduct of the regularity witnessed in music. Science became palpable to humanity only by our instinct for music, thereby science stems out of humanity’s capacity for music. Rameau implemented musical law in the form of the Corps Sonore to the point of absurdity.³⁴

Rameau’s metaphysical tendency has been a major point of contention for many of his interlocutors amongst the philosophes. Rameau’s understanding of music sets forth a rigid interpretation of musical expression that even he himself tacitly acknowledges to be limited in practice. Even for Rameau the practical application of music often trumped his theoretical reality. Rameau had to be increasingly ‘pliant’ to accommodate for inconsistent, irregular harmonic relations that remain meaningful; in which case he invokes ‘musical genius’ and instinct as extenuating factors.³⁵ Also, Rameau conceded that some musical modes were culturally rather than naturally determined: thus, he concedes that some music is conventionally unnatural.³⁶ Musical expression could also originate in convention if the passionate reaction to certain passages did not correspond to theoretical expectation. Rameau himself thus already

³⁴ Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment*, 64-65.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

operated at the limits of his own theoretical framework. A fact certainly noticed by the Bouffonists.

1.3.3 Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Rousseau wrote many of the entries of the *Encyclopédie* on musical matters. While lacking formal musical education, in his youth Rousseau received some musical tuition. Furthermore, as employee of the French embassy in Venice he acquainted himself with the novelties of Italian opera instigated by the Venetian and Neapolitan schools. In his early writings, he commented on the naïve simplicity of Italian music being inferior to the French tradition of complex harmonies as established by Rameau and Lully.³⁷ However, later in life Rousseau's perspective radically changed; possibly motivated by the personal enmity between Rousseau and Rameau, certainly exacerbated by the polemical nature of the French pre-revolutionary intellectual debate.³⁸

During Rousseau's life Rameau was already established as a central figure within the French musical tradition. It is in this context that Rousseau composed an opera based on Italian operatic principles: *Le Devin du Village*. This opera became highly popular, firmly entrenching Rousseau amongst court and citizen audiences. Rameau was less enthusiastic; he snubbed Rousseau during one of the opera's performances.³⁹ While contributing to the enmity between the two it would stretch too far to argue that their personal dislike accounts for the entirety of their disagreement. A serious philosophic concern is raised by their polemic, starting with Rameau's spiteful response to Rousseau's *Opéra* in the *Encyclopédie*: Rameau's defence of

³⁷ Jean Jacques Rousseau, "No 1. (1750.) Schreiben an Grimm über das Französische und Italienische Musik-Drama," in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau als Musiker*, ed. Albert Jansen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1884), 455-456.

³⁸ Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment*, 11.

³⁹ John Scott, "The Harmony between Rousseau's Musical Theory and His Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59, no. 2 (1998): 289.

harmony over melody.⁴⁰ Rousseau responded to Rameau in the *Lettre sur la Musique Française*.⁴¹ Whereas Rameau focussed on competing musical styles, according to him the French being superior to the Italian, Rousseau redefined the debate by focussing on the character of music itself. How can one speak of competing styles without clarifying musical expression?

Rousseau views music as a combination of harmony, melody and rhythm. Harmony is the least important, especially considering the merit of national styles. For him as well as Rameau harmony is based on universal principles, whereas melody and rhythm are not. The latter two are determined by convention as they arise out of vocalisations. This holds true even for instrumental music as instrumental music is based on the conventions established in vocal music. The expressiveness of music is for Rousseau directly linked to human vocalisation: the way passion is expressed in language. As expression in and of itself music is thus prone to difference as cultural areas differ. Rousseau subtly inserts affect into both music *and* language. As language can be passionate, so can music.

How does Rousseau justify his claim that musical expression derives from language? Contrary to the generally held belief that language arises out of rational need, Rousseau proposes that languages are originally constructed passionately; not necessarily logically. This idea supports a core tenet of Rousseau's (political) philosophy: the idea that culture originates out of interpersonal exchange in a pre-cultural setting. Culture is born in encountering similar otherness in the state of nature; this friction facilitates the origin of language. Language is a cultural product stemming from the need to communicate (dis)pleasure to the actions of others. Consequently, language cannot be a priori naturally or logically structured as is the case for

⁴⁰ Ibid., 293-294.

⁴¹ Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment*, 18.

Rameau's harmony. Instead, Rousseau writes in the *Lettre* that in confrontation uncultured vocalisations would either be expressions of agitation or mellowness. Language, as a more complex means of expression develops out of these initial vocalisations.⁴² Hence language does not derive from a rational need to communicate ideas, as was commonly held, but developed as affectionate response. While the theory of languages origin was not yet actually in the *Lettre*, it was already implied in his defence of melody over harmony. The theory of the origin of language itself was first published in full in the posthumously published *Sur l'Origine des Langues*.⁴³

How does Rousseau identify affect in language? As language organically develops, it determines particular melodic and rhythmic conventions: 'it is the prosody of a language that determines it's character.'⁴⁴ This convention is taken up by music. Rousseau stands in the sentimentalist tradition of Dubos. Rather than interpolating reason, Rousseau agrees with Dubos that the way to judge music is to accept its sensibility. Music needs to be felt directly to portray itself. Still, where Dubos holds on to a notion of universal expressibility of passions in music, Rousseau takes a leap. As language is culturally dependent, the effectiveness of musical affect is too. The passions evoked by music are therefore not universal, they are personal and subject to taste.⁴⁵ Music, as descending from language, must be judged by whether a language is fit for musical expression. Rousseau writes: "which of all the languages has the best grammar, I would say it is the one where the people reason the best; and if one asks which of all the people must have the best music, I would say it is the one where the language is most appropriate for

⁴² Ibid., 44.

⁴³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues : où il est parlé de la Mélodie, et de l'Imitation Musicale*. (Chicoutimi: J.M. Tremblay, 2002).

⁴⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre sur la Musique Française*, (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 2007) 9.

⁴⁵ Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment*, 39-40.

it.”⁴⁶ He goes on: “Rhythm is to melody almost what syntax is to discourse.”⁴⁷ We must remind ourselves that Rousseau writes these polemical passages in response to Rameau as he propagates the Italian over French musical tradition. The rigidity of French is ill equipped to music as it is a language of logic. For it to conform to melody, melody adapts to the language rather than the other way around. As such, French is unfit for music as compared to the vowel-rich, clear Italian tongue: it is this ‘accent’ of a language stemming from the basic naturalistic bellowing in the state of nature that sets the musicality of a language apart from the rationality of language.

Music for Rousseau is pure communication of affect. Technically this effect is achieved not by harmony, which is a universal principle, but through the cultural development of melody and rhythm. Language can convey both affect and knowledge, but ascends out of emotion. While Rousseau and Rameau hold different theories on musical expression they agree upon the general idea that music’s purpose is to express emotions. The context in which they write is not one of instrumental music. The *Querelle des Bouffons* is aptly named, it is a conflict of operatic style. That is, a conflict of not music alone, but of operatic music. The question of expressiveness must thus be brought in relation to questions of operatic expression, and thus to the notion of mimesis presented in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. How does expression occur in an interdisciplinary artform like opera, and does the context of the music change the nature of musical expressiveness, and what is it that music actually expresses?

⁴⁶ Ibid., 19-20.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 20.

1.4 Rameau and Rousseau as Mimetic Theorists

Historically, to question the expression of music in opera is to ask the question of mimesis. Rameau and Rousseau share an Aristotelean mimetic aesthetics. Both retain a notion of imitation in performative art. For them, musical expression is imitation of either immediately sensible affective utterances or rationally mediated wonder. While both retain a notion of imitation, a crucial development seems to have taken place as compared to the Aristotelean sense of mimesis: musical expression for Rameau and Rousseau is possible independent of the theatrical context as well as possible outside of an ethical context. While Rameau and Rousseau remain mimetic theorists, their debate shows us a modern way of approaching mimesis in music.

First a brief revisit of Aristotle's *Poetics* to rehash the role of mimesis in the context of tragedy. Aristotle uses the term to describe the character of all performative expression as a representation or imitation of action. Imitation occurs in all (performative) arts, though the medium, means and objects vary according to the nature of the particular case. Tragedy as a whole is an imitation of action. It is at its heart an ethical speculation: what could possibly occur, how do people respond to what could have been the case and how should one in similar circumstances act? In the *Poetics* music is referred to as one of the modes of tragedy that allows for the imitation of action.⁴⁸ As music's object is qualities of character, i.e. sentimental response, music is used [rhythm, harmony, and song] as 'pleasant accompaniments' in tragedy.⁴⁹ The actors personify -imitate- character in such an immersive environment by using the tragic modes and thereby allow the audience to come to grips with the emotions, choices and dilemmas of the play without actually needing to live these experiences. Tragedy thus is

⁴⁸ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450a5-15.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1449b21.

not representational nor historical. It allows us to engage with *what could have come about*.⁵⁰ Tragedy does not concern itself with epistemology, Plato's requirement of truthfulness misses the mark for Aristotle, it is an artform concerned with the exploration of actions and thus ethics.

Now onto the second prong of the performative exchange: the audience-artwork relation. For Aristotle, mimesis is a process that takes place internally by the modes of tragedy: music mimetically taking on qualities of character, actors imitating the actions and interpreting the direction of the plot, et cetera. The relationship between the modes of mimesis and the public are of a slightly different sort. Tragedy can be either pleasurable or not: if successful it portrays a possible reality and conveys 'the tragic fear and pity' inherent in proper tragedy.⁵¹ Man, as 'the most imitative creature in the world [...] learns at first by imitation. And it is also natural for all to delight in works of imitation.'⁵² For Aristotle tragedy is an educational tool: art can become a mirror; a proper imitation of life on stage so we may experience the 'pity and fear' and undergo what it means to be human through a projection of the self in a hypothetical situation. This is not imitation directly, but a possibility for reflection with a possibly *cathartic* effect upon the audience. Aristotle recognises that the performance of a tragedy can feel more immersive than, say, just reading tragic poetry. As tragedy contains multiple modes of imitation that affect different aspects of human perception the span of the artwork allows for a truly immersive exploration of action. The music itself imitating qualities of character mimetically also at the same time can convey these qualities through the usage of *Harmoniai* naturally having particular effects upon its listeners.

To a certain extent mimesis is still present in the Querelle, though it seems the locus of imitation had changed. Rameau holds that music reflects natural harmony, and as such derives

⁵⁰ Ibid., 1451a37-1451b19.

⁵¹ Ibid., 1453b1.

⁵² Ibid., 1448b5-10.

its expressiveness from the natural occurrence of the tonic. The actual mimetic process that occurs does not take place on the level of the naturally occurring tonic: rather mimesis takes place in the analogous movement to human sentimentality discovered in the music. Both in music as well as in the human body variations upon the tonic are detected. The affective experience itself then is rationally mediated wondrous response upon hearing music. By contrast, Rousseau argues that music imitates not the natural, but the culturally determined flow of language, which in turn is a representation of our instinctive reaction to the world: sentimentality.

While neither philosopher directly refers to Aristotle's *Poetics*, it is clear they build upon the Aristotelian theory of tragedy. This becomes evident not only by their implementation of imitation, but also by the context in which their discussion takes place. The name *Querelle des Bouffons* is not coincidental. The Querelle originated as a disagreement about the proper construction of opera, not expressivity. The development of Opera Buffa -Neapolitan comic opera- is linked to the rediscovery of the Aristotelean epos in the fifteenth century. Aristotelianism pervaded early opera and influenced its aesthetics. Therefore, it is all the more important to note where and why the eighteenth century diverged from Aristotle. Can Rameau and Rousseau still be called mimetic theorists or do they present a new imitative aesthetics?

In a nutshell: both remain reliant upon the mimetic conceptual framework, though they do innovate quite extensively upon the original Aristotelean sense to define musical expressivity. While Rousseau comes close to Aristotle in saying it is sentiment that is aroused in music by its imitation of language, with music creating a possible world that can be experienced while partly remaining an observant to the emotional ark of the piece, Rameau leans more towards a (neo)-Platonic, rationalist understanding of imitation. Musical expressiveness for him is caused by the natural order of the world to which humans are sensitive. By behaving analogously to our own affect music is capable of perpetuating or

derailing our sense of propriety: through wonder at music's (dis)similitude the sentimental effect of music is reached: a Cartesian interpretation of Aristotelean aesthetics. Harmonic progression determines the directionality of music. It also creates apprehensiveness or assurance by dissonance and consonance in its audience. Rameau's conception of musical expressivity could be explained as a mimetic process occurring at the level of music with the natural order and secondly an analogous imitative relation between music and human emotions. Only by the recognition of the nature of harmony and the recognition of proportionality by audiences a type of rationally mediated emotional catharsis can be reached. Catharsis for Rameau would thus be very different from a Rousseauian understanding of catharsis in art. Rameau would argue that it is a return to order, to a single unifying principle that allows for music to be experienced as good. Rousseau is much more versatile in how musical mimesis achieves emotional catharsis; it might even be troubling for him to argue for a universal musical catharsis as music's value is protoculturally -relatively- determined in human emotional response to precultural confrontations. An Italian is better suited to notice the sentimental subtleties in Verdi than a Frenchman.

Concludingly, while both Rameau and Rousseau work within a mimetic framework, the way they use mimesis as an explanative tool for musical expression varies greatly and is distinct from the original Aristotelean sense. Neither Rousseau nor Rameau frame the question of musical expression as a question of ethics. Imitation is used by both without its ethical connotation. If this is the case, one can wonder why it is that a notion of imitation is still apparent in both their arguments. If Aristotle originally frames mimesis in an ethical sense, why would a theory of musical expressivity that shed its ethical connotation still resort to such a(n antiquated) notion? Is it possible to frame musical expression outside of the mimetic conceptual framework?

1.4.1 The limits of mimesis

Before continuing in the second part to attempts to make do without mimesis I will highlight some of the problems that arise for Rameau and Rousseau (partly due) to their reliance on mimesis. First a return to the basics: both agree upon the basic building blocks of music: rhythm, harmony and melody. They agree that one of these is foundational for the other two (albeit a different one). Also, both agree that musical expression exists which can be witnessed in emotive response, even if the cause of expression is justified differently. Both would agree that music can either be emotionally convincing or superficial. Some music is well composed, other less so. So much for concord. Both theories face conceptual and practical challenges: in particular the role of reason in experiencing the expressiveness of music.

Neither are willing to resort to the unexplainable. Let me clarify what I mean here: both believe that one can philosophically justify musical expression rationally. This requires of them that they provide a conclusive explanation of musical expression in mimetic terms. However, in both theorists' work reality surpasses theoretical comprehensiveness: either in the form of instinct or genius surpassing their explanative attempts. While we have seen that for Rameau in theory the entirety of musical expression can be attributed to the nature of the *corps sonore*, pushed to the extremes, the composer's choices are reduced to 'musical brilliance': even without knowledge of musical theory, a composer's genius enables him to properly implement the rules of harmony. Composing is a matter of *instinct* as well as reason.⁵³ Furthermore, Rameau is aware of the limits of his theory in practice. In some cases, theoretical fidelity must be ignored in favour of the specific musical requirements: these can be irrational -go against musical theory- without in effect jeopardising the effectiveness of music. Rameau strongly

⁵³ Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment*, 33.

emphasises the science of music as an all-encompassing, rational system, but must in some cases concede that the objective principles fall short and must resort to the notion of “taste, instinct, [habit] or music as art.”⁵⁴ While Rameau in Cartesian fashion attempts to reduce musicality to a single fundamental principle, he does not completely succeed in this endeavour. To a certain extent the system necessitates and is facilitated by irrationality.

For Rousseau the existence of anomalies is by no means a threat to his philosophical structure. Music is language, language is systemised disorder and as a result tension within musical expression can occur unproblematically within his system. Music is not science: it is ‘expressive art’. Those sides of music bordering on the natural sciences such as tonality or harmonic theory are in the end only a part of the narrative of musical expression. The fact one can systemise harmony does not diminish the origin of music’s effect on its audience: the fact that music imitates mankind’s utterance of sentimentality in the face of the other. Man plays with nature and thereby ‘culturalises’ natural phenomena such as harmony and tonality. Man mimeticises naturally occurring effects in his own image.

But what distinguishes musical language from ‘regular’ speech? We need to return to Rousseau’s understanding of imitation. For him, the simple idea of imitation is the idea that by engaging in melody music is able to relay emotions familiar to the audience because it resembles the vocalisation of sentiment within their own culture. The question becomes then: is the communication of emotion exclusive to the mimetic working of music? For instance, can one say of a sculpture that it imitates qualities of character, and thereby argue that it expresses mimetically without originating in spoken language.⁵⁵ Perhaps the easiest way of accounting for this difference is to retain the Aristotelean difference between *homoiômata* [likenesses] of

⁵⁴ Ibid., 58.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 51.

character and sêmaia [signs] of character. Music likens itself to sentimental utterances, sculptures signify sentiment. The signification of sentiment is not exclusive to music; the mimetic likening of music *is* exclusively musical. Hence the following description of the art of the musician as compared to the art of the sculptor:

[...] the art of the musician consists of substituting for the imperceptible image of the object [pure representation of for instance a man], the movements that its presence excites in the soul of the spectator: it does not represent directly; but it awakens in our soul the same feeling that one experiences in seeing it.⁵⁶

Music represents more freely than the other arts because of its mimetic proximity to the vocalisation of sentiment. Music still has an object, but not one that can be perceived directly through the senses. Furthermore, it represents not as a still, but in a temporal stretch. Music by its very nature likens itself to the dynamic movement of the emotions. Even if the topic of the music originated from a stilled moment, the representation of the moment *must* be extended itself. Rousseau does not ignore mimesis; as a language, as an art, music still has an object that can be traced back in the ears of the beholder. However, there is a remarkable freedom in music as compared to the other arts due to its distance from the object. As he argues in the *Opéra*, it is the suggestion that implies imitation.⁵⁷ As such, what is imitated musically is very different from what is implied in language. Language itself lost its musicality, its suggestiveness of natural emotions, by transitioning from pure vocalisation of sentiment to a system of differentiation and signification [sêmaia]: a system of argumentative ‘need’ rather than a vocalisation of passion.⁵⁸ Rousseau is thereby capable of offering a modern comprehensive theory of musical expression within a mimetic framework. The question whether mimesis is strictly necessary for a satisfactory theory of musical expression remains and shall be the topic

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Cynthia Verba, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Radical and Traditional Views in his Dictionnaire de Musique,” *Journal of Musicology* 7, No. 3 (Summer, 1989): 321.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 315.

of the next section. If one can cleanly justify musical expression without mimesis, Ockham must be allowed to do his work.

1.4.2 Concluding remarks

Should we take the arguments raised in the querelle as philosophically salient? In the paragraphs above I hope to have shown two intricate theories on music, which were written in a socio-politically dynamic age. A case could be made for a sociopolitical rationale behind the way Rameau and Rousseau frame their argument on the expressiveness of music. After the middle-ages a transition from an ecclesiastical aesthetics of faith to a civil aesthetics occurs. Musical development was no longer as strongly regulated and the productive centres shifted from the cathedral to the palace and market. Opera especially was an artform geared towards the aristocracy. The development of operetta (in Italy) diversified the operatic themes to better relate to new common audiences. Opera Buffa no longer relied upon the Greek pantheon or the great rulers of the past as primary subjects. Instead, comic opera related to its audience by presenting (exaggerated) stereotypes of common people. For example, Rousseau's *Devin* starred Colin and Colette in a pastoral setting telling the story of two 'simpleminded' naïve lovers. Rameau wrote instead about mythology, aimed more directly at a courtly, ancien régime audience. It could be argued that the move of the philosophes was also politically inspired. French opera was traditionally associated strongly with Versailles and courtly life. Italian opera offered the theorists behind the revolution an alternative. Still, given the complexity of both Rousseau and Rameau's arguments it goes too far to reduce their theoretical efforts to political strife. The criticism laid against Rameau's Cartesianism must be interpreted as an honest attempt at improving the understanding of the principles behind music(al) expression. Furthermore, while there are many legitimate grounds for criticising both Rameau and the philosophes, the fact that such a controversy could arise at this time points to a shift in the

philosophy of music. A shift from a Cartesian theory of music to a modern perhaps best defined as preromantic understanding of music in which no longer the natural order but the *emotional effect* of music determines the reality of musical expression. This, I would suggest, must be seen as the completion of the humanist, individualist movement of the fifteenth century, and also one of the main causes for the decline of mimetic theory.

What then are the consequences of the *Guerre des Bouffons*? What does the polemic between Rousseau and Rameau contribute to the discussion on music's expressiveness? After Aristotle, and as we will see in a bit, Plato, we are left with a mimetic aesthetics of music. Both thinkers start their enquiry into music by addressing tragedy, theatre. As such their focus lies not so much on music itself, but on music as a mode of tragedy. One can try to extrapolate a theory of expression of music alone, but to do so requires a justification of music's merit without reliance on other performative arts. Taking a laymen's perspective, it becomes immediately apparent that music does not signify in the same way as theatre or language. As we will see in Plato's *Republic*, music (poetry) cannot be reasoned against in the traditional sense, only its effect criticised. With Aristotle we do get an amicable approach towards music as a mode of tragedy, and a foreshadowing of thought on music alone in his *politics*. Aristotle presents theatre and music as a way to step outside one's own world and learn by imitation. Music alone highlights the emotional aspects of imitated action. Musical expression can thus be justified through the usage of mimesis and the belief that harmony influences people. The possibility of composing music outside of a mimetic context – music for different purposes does not seem to be at the forefront of Aristotle's mind. Aristotle's theory of mimesis in the arts limits his explorative scope.

The ideas of Rameau and Rousseau built upon the mimetic heritage of Plato and Aristotle, but their place in the history of thought allows for a different approach. Especially Rousseau's theory distances itself from the classical mimetic theories by emphasising the

inessential nature of musical expression. Music is essentially communicative for Rousseau. By imitating the cultural response to confrontation with otherness music is able to affect and alter perspectives. It is able to mellow or agitate. In this sense, music alone is able to enter in a dialogue with its audience. Though it is a dialogue of a different sort: a dialogue of repetition rather than argument.⁵⁹ The idea behind Beethoven's fifth is not complete with its four opening notes. This melodic pattern comes back again and again in different iterations. The advent of Romantic sentimentalism thus opens up new possibilities for the theories of musical expression and raises the question: if what music expresses is inessentially determined, why would musical expression be necessarily mimetic? Can't music simply express without recourse to something outside itself? Perhaps the most salient consequence of debates like the *Guerre des Bouffons* is that it shows the transition from premodern to modern theories of musical expression. Both Rameau and Rousseau approach music scientifically in their own way. Their discussion heralds the entry of a very influential take on musical signification: the notion of music as sentiment.

⁵⁹ Peter Kivy, *The Fine Art of Repetition: Essays in the Philosophy of Music*, ed. Peter Kivy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 333-337.

Part 2: Can Musical Expression Occur without Mimesis?

The reliance on imitation in the *Guerre des Bouffons* stands in a long tradition. However, mimesis' prominence in relation to expression started to be contested at the same time, mostly due to a recognition of the limited reach of demonstrable imitation. This constitutes a break from the thought dominant since the Florentine Camerata. While the sentimentalist position had not yet developed fully during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, imitation was deemed necessary for affective expression as music was supposed to imitate and enhance the emotions present in the text accompanying music.⁶⁰ French thought differed slightly before the arrival of the Bouffons by emphasising the imitation of nature as the source of expression; these theories envisioned the imitation of music as an indirect process: by bringing out the colour in the ideas already present in poetry, or by arousing imitations of true passions and thereby conferring affect: recognition of *what was imitated* was not per se necessary for listeners. Discussions on music largely remained within the tragic scheme of imitative arts as proposed by Aristotle within France and Europe more broadly.⁶¹

In the eighteenth century we do see a shift away from the Greek mimetic frame in the discussions on music. Particularly the discussions on music in the Anglo-Scottish enlightenment show alternative approaches to musical expression. Instead of an ethical or political approach, thinkers like Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith approached musical expression epistemologically. This is not due to a lack of familiarity with the French debate on music and imitation, Hutcheson is known to have conversed with Diderot who commented on the *Querelle* in his book *Le Neveu de Rameau*.⁶² The epistemological approach to music in

⁶⁰ Claude V. Palisca & Thomas J. Mathiesen, *Music and Ideas in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Studies in the History of Music Theory and Literature*, 1st ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 180.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁶² Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts: Collected Essays*, 2nd edition. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 201.

Scotland is not without precedence. Plato, while judging music ethically also shrouds his thoughts on music in metaphysics and epistemology. Plato's ethical dislike of music was justified by his analysis of the natural impact music had on the youth, and the liberties performers could take in (re)presenting reality.

As the eighteenth century rejuvenates an epistemological approach to music without mirroring Plato's use of imitation, we must answer how it is that the eighteenth century made do without mimesis whereas Plato could not. A comparison between Platonic theory and the eighteenth-century theorists is appropriate. In the following sections first the Platonic mimetic approach will be set out. Afterwards through the mediation of Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith an early non-mimetic account of musical mimesis will be introduced to find out whether mimesis is a necessary component of musical expression.

2.1 Plato

The idea of music as affect was by no means new, the idea of music as affect without resort to imitation was. Having discussed one of the two main instigators of mimesis in musical theory, we now must consider Platonic mimesis. In some respects, Aristotle's theory of mimesis addresses crucial difficulties of the Platonic account of music and theatre. Whereas Aristotle presented music in a predominantly aesthetic and secondarily ethical sense, Plato discussed the topic of music not only from an ethical point of view, but also from the point of view of metaphysical and epistemological questions. Perspectives to which the sentimentalist theorists of the eighteenth-century return in their analysis of music.

Plato is most well-known for his remarks on the character-building effect of music in his *Republic*, there highlighting the ethical component of music within society. However, some scholars have pointed to the latent exposition of the nature of musical expression across Plato's

dialogues. Stephen Halliwell in his *Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* presents a particularly convincing case for the Platonic use of mimesis and the philosophical difficulties Plato identifies concerning mimesis: ‘1. the fundamental value of mimetic art and 2. The relation between ‘the “secondary” representation of artistic mimesis (the images, poems, music that fill the city of luxury according to Socrates’ description in the Republic) within the overarching framework of a philosophy of “primary” representation (as embodied in human thought, perception, and language as a whole).’⁶³ Throughout his dialogues, the sense in which Plato uses the term mimesis shifts depending on the issues which are addressed in the text. Plato thus shows an awareness of the different senses in which the term mimesis were used in his time:

1. Visual resemblance.
2. Behavioural emulation/imitation.
3. Impersonation and dramatic enactment.
4. Vocal or musical production of significant or expressive structures of sound.
5. Metaphysical conformity.⁶⁴

The fact that Plato often mediates between the senses of mimesis in his dialogues is, according to Halliwell, traditionally overlooked. Subsequently, on mimesis Plato has been presented as a systemic thinker. This forgoes the nuanced understanding of mimesis necessary for a proper reading of the dialogues. It is possible to reach an overarching concept of Platonic mimesis in an ethical or metaphysical sense, but one must always be aware of the different focal points of the dialogues. It does not do to reduce Platonic theories of mimesis to his stance on education in the *Republic*, or his notion of the tiered imitation of reality in the *Timaeus*. These are two separate implementations of mimesis that only indirectly relate to each other. Plato’s view on mimesis in the arts is nuanced, perhaps best characterised as exploratory. Respecting these nuances allows one to formulate a tentative definition of mimesis and musical expressiveness.

⁶³ Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, 37.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

2.1.1 Formulating Plato's Stance on Mimesis in Music

The earliest dialogue in which the notion of mimesis is connected with music is the *Ion*; while the *Ion* is not a dialogue on music per se, the exploration of 'divine inspiration' gives us a sense of the way in which mimesis finds a place in Plato. The *Ion* chronicles a discussion between Socrates and Ion on the subject of the performative arts. Socrates questions the famous rhapsode Ion on what he does when delivering poetry: whether Ion is able to convincingly recite the verses of Homer by knowing what makes good poetry, or by being blessed with 'divine inspiration'. Socrates concludes that Ion as a portrayer of Homer does not act out of poetic knowledge, but through inspiration. Ion admits of being incapable of paying attention to, or portraying other poets than Homer. This speaks against his mastery of the inner workings of poetry. The *Ion* touches upon the difference between 'having knowledge of' and 'inspirationally passing on'. It is in the functioning of inspiration that we get an insight into the germinating Platonic concept of mimesis in the context of music. This insight comes particularly to the fore in the following metaphor Socrates offers:

That's not a subject [poetry] you have mastered, [...] it's a divine power that moves you, as a "Magnetic" stone moves iron rings. This stone not only pulls those rings, if they're iron, it also puts power *in* the rings, so that they in turn can do just what the stone does -pull other rings- so that there's sometimes a very long chain of iron pieces and rings hanging from one another. And the power in all of them depends on the stone. In the same way, the Muse makes some people inspired herself, and then through those who are inspired a chain of other enthusiasts is suspended. [...] For a poet is an airy thing, winged and holy, and he is not able to make poetry until he becomes inspired and goes out of his mind and his intellect is no longer in him. As long as a human being has his intellect in his possession, he will always lack the power to make poetry or sing prophecy."⁶⁵

Poets do not make compelling art by knowing what it is that they speak about, poetry is not about explaining. Instead, each poet and subsequent rhapsode is inspired by an external source: they take the power of something original and pass this expressive power on. This passing on

⁶⁵ Plato, "Ion," in *Plato: Complete Works*, trans. Pajul Woodruff, ed. John M. Cooper (Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 941-942.

of poetry is not an intellectual matter, rather it seems to involve emotions. Poetry does not explain the world, nor gives truth, it is about ‘enthusiasm’ and a kind of intoxication whereby the poet is able to ‘go out of his mind’.

Music works in the same way. While nowadays the link between rhapsody and music lacks the self-evidence that it did for Plato and his audiences, in Plato’s time the two arts were intertwined. The fact that rhapsodes brought poetry in a musical way rather than a conversational or argumentative manner points to the possibility of broadly applying the concept of mimesis here. While the poet’s art is not that of a modern musician –rhapsodes combined speech with music to arrive at a hybrid form of music and poetry–therefore the dual nature of rhapsody prohibits an overeager implementation of Ionic mimesis to music in a modern sense. The argument of the *Ion* does show Plato’s general theoretical approach to performative art, music included. Hence it deserves attention.

What is mimesis in the *Ion*? A central aspect which comes to the fore here and in later dialogues is the epistemic value Plato ascribes to performative art. The fact that rhapsodes perform not out of knowledge of the actual thing tells us something about poetry’s truth-value. An example is helpful in this instance: say the rhapsode impersonates a soldier, it is the soldier who *knows* how to fight that determines the accuracy of the rhapsodes portrayal. The poet merely acts *as if* he is a soldier. This points to the core idea that for Plato performative worth is always derivative of reality. A type of imitation occurs which strips the original topic of its content and combines the essential markers of the topic with artistic prowess. The ethical consequences of this belief are well known and worked out in *Republic*.

What sense of mimesis does Plato use here? Corresponding the type of mimesis with the categories indicated above, the imitation in the *Ion* appears one of ‘dramatic enactment’. The rhapsode interpreting and imitating the original sense of the poet, the poet himself being inspired by the muses. For the purpose of this discussion this indicates several things. First, the

mimetic process here is *in form* analogous to the descriptions of the theory of forms in the *Timaeus*. Secondly, while the original source of imitation is necessarily singular, Plato shows that he is aware of the possibility of imitating the same topic multiple times. Whether this means that the same imitation occurs several times, or each individual imitation is in itself unique is not indicated in the *Ion*. Finally, what ‘divine inspiration’ is, is not expounded upon here. From Plato's viewpoint justifiably so: his perspective does not necessitate a justification of the Muses. Still, given the description of the role of the muses it can be argued that mimesis as imitation of original forms is foreshadowed in the *Ion* as ground for performative expression.⁶⁶

Cratylus

The second dialogue in which Plato pays attention to musical mimesis is the *Cratylus*. The *Cratylus* is a discussion on the accuracy of naming. The main issue at hand is whether the way we name things is naturally determined, or a matter of convention. The dialogue combines etymology with metaphysical concerns. When does a name accurately capture *what is*? In this dialogue, mimesis is mentioned when comparing musical or vocal imitation to the etymological act of naming. Socrates argues:

Hermogenes: [...] but then what sort of imitation is a name Socrates?

Socrates: In the first place, if we imitate things the way we imitate in music, we won't be naming them, not even if the imitation in question is musical. And the same holds if we imitate the things music imitates. [...] Don't you think that just as each thing (we name) has a color or some of those other qualities we mentioned, it also has a being or essence?⁶⁷

In section 423, Socrates clarifies the difference between names capturing the essence of things and music imitating qualitative aspects. Just before the quoted segment Socrates works out and negates the theory ‘that a name is a vocal imitation of what it imitates, and that someone who

⁶⁶ Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, 43.

⁶⁷ Plato, “Cratylus,” in *Plato Complete Works*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve, ed. John M. Cooper (Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 423c-d.

imitates something with his voice names what he imitates.’⁶⁸ However, while this theory works in the case of onomatopoeia, this definition swiftly derails. We do not refer to sheep by bleating.

In the section above Socrates offers a new approach to naming by comparing it to imitating (musically). Names must capture ‘being or essence’, whereas when we ‘imitate in music, we won’t be naming them’. Instead, musical imitation seems to concern qualitative imitation. Here again we see the ordering of ways of engaging with the world in Plato. While both music and language capture parts of reality, it is only language (as solidified thought) which can reach the essence of things, whereas music can only imitate qualitative aspects of reality. Furthermore, in imitating music seems to require a direct relation to the object represented while a name can outwardly appear unrelated to its object. Plato allows music a limited role: whereas language captures reality in naming, the imitative nature of music means that it can only reflect on aspects of reality without capturing realities essential nature.⁶⁹ The arts operate not like language which aims at capturing the essence of reality. Does this mean that the arts are more of an interpretation of reality?

If we test Socrates’ argument this seems likely. If music interprets the sound of sheep, it does not capture bleating’s essence. Music if not directly representing must be concerned with representing some qualitative aspect of bleating to be recognised as such. As Halliwell phrases it, music is to “show” and “signify” the sensorially perceived world by likeness, not by defining.⁷⁰ Music is therefore not a vehicle of truth per se, it operates on a different *mimetical* scheme. Language is also a form of imitation, but functions on a different imitative level. What it is that determines the value of music is not its capturing reality’s essence, but its

⁶⁸ Ibid., 423b.

⁶⁹ *Not just music, painting too is said to imitate as music. A broader imitative notion is presented here.*

⁷⁰ Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, 44.

correspondence to the experience we have of the imitated; the arts are not seen as ways of engaging with reality in the *Cratylus*, though they are valued as qualitative imitations of reality.

As it stands, the *Cratylus* presents a strenuous relationship between the arts and truth: if the arts replicate aspects of reality, why is it that they cannot be trusted as conveyers of reality? Do they not work with the same base material as language does in naming? While names might correspond to reality by accident, -as is the case with onomatopoeia- the arts in the traditional sense seem to adhere truthfully to reality by presenting direct imitations of it. Undoubtedly, this understanding of artistic mimesis more easily applies to painting than music. In music's case, the recognition of qualitative imitation suggests an affective understanding of musical imitation. The combined use of mimesis to describe painting and music in the *Cratylus* complicates the matter, in other dialogues the assumption that all arts function alike is let go. By referring to colour in the quoted section Plato connects a quality particular to the visual arts to music.⁷¹ However, if we look at other dialogues like the *Republic*, we do get a differentiated notion of mimesis when comparing different forms of art. What category of mimesis it is that Plato uses in the case of the *Cratylus* is unclear. He seems to use mimesis to describe both visual resemblance, musical expressive structures of sound and metaphysical conformity of names to reality. The *Cratylus* exemplifies the nuanced use of mimesis in one dialogue.

Republic

Mimesis is finally further fleshed out in the *Republic* as Socrates discusses the ideal state with his interlocutors. (Musical) mimesis is found in two separate discussions in book three and ten.⁷² Book three starts with the premise that stories are types of statements which can be false

⁷¹ Ibid., 146-147.

⁷² Ibid., 48-49.

or true, but regardless thereof can be good stories by virtue of their function. Socrates and his conversationalists discuss whether soldiers must be allowed to listen to poetry. They decide against this as poets can influence the character of the guardians. As Halliwell points out, stories can be quasi-propositional in form and function: stories use imitation (form) and through them poets can influence their audience (function). Poetry is presented to ‘induce and shape belief in their audiences’.⁷³ Book three presents the imitation of poetry, which is a way of storytelling, as performative. The way this is proposed to work is by *emulation of the public*. This emulation is made possible by the form in which the story is brought. This can be either as pure narrative, the poet speaking himself; or by narrative that is itself mimetic, the rhapsode speaking as if he were the character.⁷⁴ The way Socrates frames the argument in book three condemns art in an ethical sense, but it does show a respectful attitude to the mimetic force of rhapsody.

As the ideal state is presented in the *Republic*, Socrates is concerned with the adverse effects of immorality in art carrying over to the citizenry. This concern plays on two fronts. Both of which are reminiscent of the discussions in the other dialogues. The first concern is the impressionability of youngsters. As book three and ten attest to, art by virtue of having a natural influence on the character of (impressionable) men has to be responsibly implemented in society. Socrates recognises the strength of mimesis in influencing these men. When adverse character traits or unethical decisions are flaunted on stage, young men could internalise these traits; the reverse also holds, hence restraint is in place.

The second concern is of an epistemological nature. In book ten Socrates famously remarks upon the existence of ‘an ancient quarrel between it [poetry] and philosophy, which is evidenced by such expressions as “the dog yelping and shrieking at its master,” “great in the

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁷⁴ *Consider Republic book III, 393b-e*

empty eloquence of fools,”⁷⁵ While poetry is charming (in multiple senses), it is generally empty eloquence. As the *Ion* explores, poets have mastered the art of imitation, but by thoroughly knowing their subject. Worse, like the Pied Piper, rhapsodes can distract the impressionable and lead them away from truth. Again, we see the lesser value Plato attaches to mimesis compared to reason in accessing reality, combined with Plato’s emphasis on the natural power of imitation and emulation the *Republic* shows that the ethical concerns stem out of epistemological and metaphysical concerns. If the performative arts are incapable of accurately conveying the essence of reality, the world of forms, and at the same time through their imitative form are capable of having the public emulate poetic falsehood, then the ethical argument is grounded in the nature of the performative arts and the workings of the human mind.

Another aspect highlighted here is the emphasis the *Republic* puts on work. Art as proposed in book three must be performative for it to be art. The artwork itself only comes forth powerfully when enacted.⁷⁶ The mimetic effect of poetry comes across only in the interaction between poet and audience. Reading, listening, perhaps even simply watching must therefore also require activity on the audience’s behalf. Without interaction, art ceases to be art. Mimesis must be understood as a verb in the *Republic*. The emphasis on work is notably different from a static understanding of art. While a statue or a painting could be seen as timeless, music and poetry cannot. For Plato it seems the statue is not art irrespective of its audience either. While an artist produces an artwork, the artwork *needs* active participation of the public. The locus of mimesis is not only in the interaction between artwork and reality, a second act of ‘mimetic’ embodying by the audience occurs. This does not go as far as constituting a relation of methexis, the public does not actively participate in the construction of the poetry. However, Plato does

⁷⁵ Plato, “Republic,” in *Plato Complete Works*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, ed. John M. Cooper (Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 607b5-8.

⁷⁶ Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, 52.

emphasise the (subconscious) active role required of the audience.⁷⁷ If we extrapolate this to the case of music in a modern sense the mimetic relationship becomes even more complicated: is it the composer that produces music? The performer(s)? The audience? Or a complex triangular interplay? The same type of problem arises when considering the discussion on the role of plays within the polis.

In the tenth book, mimesis is widened to include (define) all forms of artistic expression, instead of just dramatic performance.⁷⁸ To that end, Socrates embeds mimesis of the musical kind in the wider Platonic usage of mimesis in the metaphysical sense. He posits a tripartite scheme of originality. The first level being that of the (godly) original form; the second level that of particular expressions of the former; in Socrates example a bed. The final level of creation is that of the imitator who engages not with the original form, nor actual instances of the form, but the appearance of particular expressions of the form. Socrates attaches a hierarchy of value to this 'tripartite' for his argument against poets proclaimed wisdom to land.⁷⁹ The original form is superior to instances of the form, the imitated captures only a part of the essence of the particular instances of the form. Socrates then extrapolates the example of the bed to the case of poets.

The line of argumentation follows the classic theory of forms but adds the extra layer of the imitator. The original form of 'the bed' could only be created once and thus must be created perfectly so as to incorporate all derivations on the original idea. Secondly, particular examples of beds are created by carpenters, these instances partake in the original form. This is not imitation yet, as something is still created on the basis of the essence of the original form.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 56.

⁷⁹ Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, rev. C.D.C. Reeve, Plato Complete Works, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 595-599.

Imitation finally is what occurs on the third level: that of the arts. Painters replicate not the essence of a bed, instead painters imitate a particular appearance of a particular example of an original form. Hence Socrates and Glaucon discuss the following:

[Socrates] ‘What about a carpenter? Isn’t he the maker of a bed?’

[Glaucon] ‘Yes.’

‘And is a painter also a craftsman and maker of such things?’

‘Not at all.’

‘Then what do you think he does do to a bed?’

‘He imitates it. He is an imitator of what the others make. That, in my view, is the most reasonable thing to call him.’

‘All right. Then wouldn’t you call someone whose product is third from the natural one an imitator?’

‘I most certainly would.’

‘Then this will also be true of a tragedian, if indeed he is an imitator. He is by nature third from the king and the truth, as are all other imitators.’⁸⁰

Poets as imitators do not capture the essence of virtue, education or reality as they are thrice removed from reality. They only ever imitate particulars by ‘creating’ a mirage. The nature of art is what disqualifies poets in ethical sense for Plato. Poetry and the arts in general do not concern themselves with the forms, yet they are able to deceive lesser minds into thinking that they do. Art cannot lead one to knowledge of the essence of things. Poets should be likened to imitators as they write not out of expertise on every aspect of the things they write about.

2.1.2. Platonic mimesis

Several comments can be made after taking stock of Plato’s argument against poetry in the ideal state. First of all: is it truly the case that all art imitates appearances, or can one also argue that poetry is not concerned with the appearance of particular forms, but with the creation of poetry itself. One could argue that good poetry likens itself to what can be experienced – it takes on the appearance of the world of particulars – but is itself not engaged with the essence of things. It is concerned with creating poetry. A variation upon this argument has been made by Aristotle

⁸⁰ Ibid., 597d6-e6.

and can be read in the *Poetics*. For Aristotle, the truth-value of poetry is irrelevant, relevant is whether poets succeed at creating a coherent, possible world with their art. Aristotle does not require of art that it addresses reality, instead he implores of art that it explores the possible that could have occurred.

Plato's ethics colour his understanding of the arts. Because of his insistence on the influence of art on the impressionable, Plato seems unwilling to truly consider the merits of art. Still, he does recognise the influence art can have on the character of its audience, and through the usage of the concept of mimesis is able to explain how it is that poetry and music can be portrayed by its performers. Furthermore, Plato requires mimesis in the arts as to distinguish music and other expressions of art from naturally occurring phenomena. Music distinguishes itself from naturally occurring sound as a statue distinguishes itself from its object: it is only an (ethically powerful) imitation of an appearance rather than an instance of a particular. Art already carries the appearance of particulars inside it, therefore imitation is necessary on the part of its vehicle, be it a painter or performer. Finally, similar to Aristotle, Plato argues that the public is able to recognise the appearances of the performance and be beguiled by it. Musical art for Plato is capable of being emulated by its audiences in such a way that the audience is beguiled by it and loses the ability to adequately question the ideas conversed through it. The final word on the matter shall be given to Socrates:

So great is the natural charm of these things – that he speaks with meter, rhythm, and harmony, for if you strip a poet's works of their musical colourings and take them by themselves, I think you know what they look like.⁸¹

⁸¹ Ibid., 601a.

2.2 Francis Hutcheson

From Plato we are now able to move to an early example of non-mimetic aesthetics. The eighteenth century questioned the notion of (in)direct imitation as a necessary component of musical expression. For instance, it was argued that even without recognition of imitation, the beautiful remains beautiful, which is proven by children listening to music.⁸² A shift that seems to occur here is from imitation to original expression: music no longer imitates metaphysical ideas, emotions or appearances thereof; it offers emotionality a language instead. A reason for this philosophical shift might have been the maturation of instrumental music. While it could be argued that before music alone was meaningful as an exercise in imitating (the supralunar) through a careful arrangement of harmonic intervals, now one might say that the harmonic structure itself becomes autonomously meaningful. That music even if not recognised as an imitation of natural order, or (indirect) imitation of cultural expression carries within itself its own self-explanatory justification. An early example of this approach to (instrumental) music is Francis Hutcheson's *An Inquiry concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design*.⁸³ In the inquiry, Hutcheson justifies the idea of an innate sense for beauty in man that is linked to the appearance of 'uniformity amidst variety' (UAV).⁸⁴ He proposes an ontology of beauty: Beauty is reliant upon its audience, while also already located in the objects around us. In a subtle way, Hutcheson emancipates art from the imitative tradition.

Hutcheson matured as a philosopher in the British empiricist tradition, holding alongside Locke that ideas make up man's experience of the world. The sensually experienced world is naturally given to man as simple and complex ideas; complex ideas consist of

⁸² Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, (London, 1729), 19-20.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Patricia M. Matthews. "Hutcheson on the Idea of Beauty," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 36, no. 2 (1998): 234.

compounded structures of simple ideas.⁸⁵ For example, the complex idea of a flute is built out of the simple ideas of its colour, shape, form, material, et cetera. Within this context, Hutcheson sets out to identify why we call some things beautiful. For Hutcheson, it can be quite clear for certain simple ideas to appear beautiful or ugly: certain colours appear pleasing to a person whereas other colours are deemed repulsive by an internal sense of beauty. Beauty is thereby partly subjective.

With complex ideas it is more difficult to explain beauty's nature. While separate tones may please, some chords can appear ugly, dissonant. Hutcheson's solution is that the human sense of (dis)pleasure is crucial in identifying beauty. Objects arouse an accompanying sense of pleasure internal and innate to man in the face of appealing (complex) ideas. This pleasure perceived by the internal sense is what Hutcheson calls beauty. An object can thus have the quality of being *beautiful* in perceiving it. Hutcheson, like Rousseau, places what it is music expresses in the eye of the beholder.

Unlike Rousseau, Hutcheson's theory contains one crucial innovation: while beauty is the internally sensed simple idea of beauty indicated by a sense of pleasure, this internal sense is *stimulated by the structure of the externally observed compound object*. As we have seen in the argument against imitation, it is not necessary to recognise in advance why one finds beauty in a complex idea to recognise it possessing the quality beauty. A piece of music can appear pleasing without recognising it as imitating something familiar. One needs not know *what* stimulates the internal sense, instead Hutcheson identifies music as having 'uniformity amidst variety'.

Understanding the uniformity of an object helps us to take in an object that might otherwise appear overwhelmingly complex and impossible to take in all at once or to retain as a whole over time [...]. Studying UAV can help educate us so that we can fully perceive the complex objects that are the source of beauty. Although someone who appeals to the UAV of the object

⁸⁵ Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, 2-3.

is not convincing us of the object's beauty with reasons, he is opening our eyes to the object and allowing us to appreciate its beauty.⁸⁶

Objects in the world can be very complex, but still retain a sense of coherence. This sense of coherence is what Hutcheson identifies as uniformity amidst variety, and is what is the source of its beauty. However, simply being structured is not enough to gain the qualifier 'beautiful'. Internal coherence is only a necessary and not a sufficient requirement of beauty. Beauty resides in recognition, but this recognition is not subject to imitation. Simply recognising complexity is enough to call something beautiful. Hutcheson thereby individualises the notion of beauty. The consequence for musical expression? Hutcheson's theory problematises universalist positions. Musical expression resides not just in the object but in the interplay between object and subject. While uniformity amidst variety is a universally recognisable quality, receptivity to uniformity amidst variety is not. Expression rests in the eye of the beholder and the satisfaction of the internal sense of the perceiving agent. Expression is now determined by our internal sense instead of musical expression imitating an extramusical idea. The only thing that determines musical expression is the sense that directs the listener to a primal reaction: good idea, bad idea.

Still, is the notion of imitation entirely lost in the work of Hutcheson? Beautiful complex ideas manifest uniformity amidst variety. This is not what is generally meant by 'imitation', but it is an overarching structure capable of arousing the sense for beauty without itself being necessarily noticed. One could argue that this structure carries an undercurrent of mimesis which still influences Hutcheson's thought: shifted to the internal workings of a piece. What is uniformity amidst variety if not a pattern in art. Patterns require repetition, repetition is a form of (auto-)imitation. While Hutcheson establishes the self-sufficiency of musical pieces,

⁸⁶ Matthews, "Hutcheson on the Idea of Beauty," 252.

potentially this is only possible by music being internally imitative. At the very least, what Hutcheson does achieve by this shift in focus is giving an alternative to mimesis by bringing music into an empiricist theoretical framework.

2.3 Adam Smith: empirical sentimentalism

To flesh out this empirical account of music it is useful to turn to an ardent student of Hutcheson. Adam Smith worked on distinguishing in what way the ‘imitative arts’ interact with people. While returning to a notion of imitation, Smith’s sentimentalist approach to music frames imitation in music in an unconventional way that can be understood as distinct from the earlier mimetic accounts. Starting from the hypothesis that the closer an imitation is to the imitated, the less appreciated the artifice, Smith develops a distinction between vocal and instrumental music. The former having beauty from its proximity to language, the latter’s beauty truly self-supportive due to its inability to imitate genuinely without losing expressiveness.⁸⁷

The imitative arts draw their expression by imitating the sensible. Smith seems to interpret imitation literally: imitation as *copying*, or *re-presenting*. Appreciation -which is the goal of art for Smith- of an imitation generally requires recognition. However, the further distanced from the original, the more tasteful we may find an imitation. For instance: Phidias’ humanlike statues tastefully portray idealised figures, but these statues would lose appeal once coloured or carved more realistically. To go along with Smith, it is the suggestion of being the same that guides our taste, not exact imitation. Music as an imitative art operates in a similar manner to the other imitative arts like painting and sculpting. However, while a statue or painting in imitating necessarily hides part of what it depicts, in music one can also contribute

⁸⁷ Adam Smith, "Of the Nature of that Imitation which takes place in what are called The Imitative Arts," in *Adam Smith: Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, ed. W.P.D. Wightman & J.C. Bryce (Liberty Classics, 1982), 195.

to the imitated. The general rule of the imitative arts remains unchanged: a perfect imitation is no longer imitative, however music can hide and magnify what it imitates: it embellishes the beauty of what it imitates by ‘melody and harmony, which like a transparent mantle [...] serve only to give brighter colour [...] to every beauty which they infold.’⁸⁸ Music by its nature sets itself apart from the other imitative arts. While imitation is still crucial, music is also performative. Apart from the imitation and enrichment of sentiment, music is able to imitate speech, as well as the gestures of the performer. Good music often reflects the emotional state of the performer. If the performer does not experience the song, the music will come across differently. If some piece is performed sternly, the effect of the music will be different; its movement tainted by “the soul which animates him, which informs every feature of his countenance.”⁸⁹

In Smith’s analysis music holds a special place. No less than half the essay is dedicated to it. An important part of his argument concerns the differences between the imitation of vocal and instrumental music. While in vocal music text and music mutually support the recognisability of the imitated, instrumental music cannot imitate in the same manner without undermining its expressiveness. Instrumental music may imitate in a different way: it does not imitate in the literal sense as it is unclear whether the object of imitation can confer to the listener without some extramusical aid: text, pictures, et cetera. Due to this ‘lack’ of instrumental music, the beauty caused by its imitation must be of a different sort.⁹⁰

Instrumental music, like all music, follows the law of ‘natural connection between acuteness in tune and quickness in time or succession, as well as between gravity and slowness: an acute sound seems to fly off more quickly than a grave one: the treble is more cheerfull

⁸⁸ Ibid., 193-194.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 194.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 195.

than the bass; its notes likewise commonly succeed one another more rapidly.’⁹¹ By the continuous succession of different sounds and variations in repetitive themes instrumental music can capture our undivided attention and this causes the mind ‘itself to be successively led into each of those moods or dispositions; and is thus brought into a sort of harmony or concord with the music which so agreeably engages its attention.’⁹² However, unlike other arts this is not due external imitation. Instrumental music does not imitate emotion outside itself. ‘It is not [...] by sympathy with the gaiety, the sedateness, or the melancholy and distress of some other person that instrumental music soothes us into each of those dispositions: it becomes itself gay, a sedate, or a melancholy object.’⁹³ Hence, what we feel by instrumental music is an ‘original and not a sympathetic feeling: it is our own gaiety, sedateness, or melancholy; not the reflected disposition of another person.’⁹⁴ If we recall the sentimentalist position on music defended by Jean-Baptiste Dubos, Smith presents a sentimentalist account of instrumental music whereby instrumental music itself already contains the emotional charge conferred to its audience.

At this point, one might object: where does the affect lie? First Smith attributes emotions to music itself. Then Smith argues it is our own feeling that is stirred up by instrumental music. Does this mean that the music itself is emotional and that music engages in a relationship of correspondence with each individual listener? Secondly, while the role of the performer is noticed by Smith, where lies the role of the composer in instrumental music? The composer is presumably aware of what he intended to compose, the performer was also said to be able to

⁹¹ Ibid., 197.

⁹² Ibid., 198.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

significantly alter the affective effect by his mood, does this point hold when considering instrumental music?

First the question of affect. Smith answers this apparent ambiguity by a witty rebuttal of 'Mr Rousseau of Geneva'.⁹⁵ He tells us that music and emotions are not the same. The quality of stirring up emotions is in the object, our responses to music are our own original response. Instrumental music is necessarily devoid of anything but itself, as it can only be said to accompany other imitations when there are non-musical signs (scenery, text, opera, background knowledge of the composers experiences, et cetera). Without these, it is impossible to situate instrumental music.⁹⁶ While instrumental music can appear emotionally charged, this must be understood in a fashion similar to Hutcheson's uniformity amidst variety: the pleasure we receive from this type of music is due to the recognisable structure of the music. If upbeat, then we find it gay, and vice versa.

Of course, if there are no non-musical signs in instrumental music, it might still be possible to situate music by locating its proximity to natural sounds. However, this does not fundamentally change the nature of instrumental music for Smith. Music may copy natural sounds such as gusts of wind or birdsong, but it can only do so at the cost of melody and harmony. Repeated usage of these tricks reduces their effect and reduces the likelihood of interpretative agreement in the audience. Only a master of instrumental music is able to consistently influence his audience by adding qualities of interpretation to the music.⁹⁷ In instrumental music Smith also waylays a role for the composer. Beauty in instrumental music lies not in trickery, for Smith it lies in its ability captivate the continued emotional response and thereby intriguing, capturing the total attention of its audience by its internal structural

⁹⁵ Ibid., 198-199.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 200.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 201.

complexity. The effect of anticipation and surprise, or release of tension as the music progresses generates not just a ‘very great sensual, but a very high intellectual pleasure not unlike that which it [the mind] derives from the contemplation of a great system in any other science.’⁹⁸

Smith’s instrumental music is thus an empty art, non-imitative except as a self-referential, circular art. Its structure beautiful in itself – holding the quality of beauty – and by following the law of velocity determining affect able to emotionally and intellectually captivate. Music alone is thereby expressive of nothing besides itself. Its expressiveness is its own and thereby lies already within each individual piece.

2.4 Is Circularity Sufficient?

The Scottish Empiricists provide a sentimentalist account with which they justify the affectional charge of music. Crucial to their account is their epistemology: music is material and thus sensible. Because of its structured nature it can be emotionally charged and in turn appreciated. This interpretative scheme gives them a straightforward manner of analysing the nature of music, particularly instrumental music. Smith and Hutcheson are able to make do without resort to the different senses of mimesis that are still used by the French. One reason for this difference can be found in the different starting point of both the Greeks and French, the empiricists musical philosophy does not originate in opera. Theirs is not a theatrical question, but one of musical expression, and the interplay between artwork and audience. How come *I* find beauty in music? From this point they work out what music is and expresses. This is a different way of approaching music, as a result they arrive at different philosophical conclusions. But, does their approach sufficiently account for all musical expression? Their approaches hinge on the

⁹⁸ Ibid., 205.

notion of musical circularity. For instrumental music this seems to work well, but is operatic music also circular? Can vocal music be understood without returning to some notion of mimesis?

Plato's mimetic approach to music was grounded in a rationalist metaphysics. To give the world of ideas as big a place in the ideal state as possible poetry, therefore music, had to be curtailed. Due to the nature of humanity and its impressionability of character mimesis was required to grasp how it is that music can alter gullible audiences. Plato's focus is first on the nature of poetry itself, for which he needs mimesis to account for poetry's truthfulness, and secondly on the relation between poets and audience. The empiricists work with the same facts as Plato, but account for it differently. While they too observe musical emotionality, they do not require Plato's rationalist framing to account for music's emotional charge. Instead of exploring the nature of poetic truth (*Ion*), or the relation between music and character (*Republic*), Hutcheson and Smith simply accept music as is. Circular and therefore repetitive. The circularity of instrumental music particularly is expressive for us because of our innate sense for beauty. That structure is sufficient for them to work out a sentimentalist theory of music. Such music does not require mimesis. It is structured nothingness, as contradictory as that sounds, that allows one to attribute meaning to instrumental music. The fact that the 'rules of music' moulded music into stratified repetitive forms (sonata, rondo, etc) adds credibility to their argument.

Does the sentimentalist account hold for vocal music? Hutcheson is in his theory not concerned with differences between vocal and instrumental music. His aim is to explain why we find beauty in music. As long as music holds the quality of internal uniformity the internal sense for beauty can be individually appeased. In the case of opera one wonders whether the addition of text matters for Hutcheson. Does text rupture the circular regularity required for the internal sense of beauty? It seems that this needs not be the case. While the addition of text,

staging et cetera can support the individual interpretation of the musical pattern and thereby appease the internal sense of beauty, this does not seem to significantly challenge his understanding of music. A possible objection is that Hutcheson underestimates the value of text in vocal music. Music in his system is reduced to patterns. The sense for beauty that grounds his aesthetics is therefore unconcerned with the context of ideas surrounding the artwork. Whether you find this problematic simply comes down to your philosophical preference. More problematic for Hutcheson's theory seems to be his highly individual approach of art. While Rousseau and Rameau, as well as the Greeks start their enquiry from the understanding that a communal experience of music is possible, severing the link between music and the external world bereaves music of true communal experience. While individuals can share similar experiences of the same piece, there is nothing in Hutcheson's theory to warrant such experiences.

Smith does differentiate between operatic (vocal) and instrumental music. Furthermore, his work emphasises the imitative nature of music. However, we noted that imitation is defined literally. It is distinct from the manifold senses of Platonic or Aristotelean mimesis. While instrumental music seems to be the odd one out in Smith's account of the imitative arts, vocal music for him is truly an imitative art. As music is performative, vocal and theatrical music imitates the affective context in which it is performed. Hence vocal music 'brightens the colour of all beauty which it infolds'. The imitative purpose of music is therefore slightly different from other imitative arts which imitate material objects. Smith thereby comes quite close to Aristotle's interpretation of music in the *Poetics*. Music as one of the modes of theatrical performance supports the poetic idea presented in theatre. However, while for Aristotle music is discussed as one of several modes, Smith as common in modernity singles music out as a separate form of art. Furthermore, while the Aristotelean sense of music holds that music imitates qualities of character, with Smith we do not get this type of an 'exclusively supportive'

notion of vocal music. Smith's sentimentalism is more radical than Aristotle's musical 'mode'. Vocal music does not only imitate qualities of character, but it also embellishes the imitated qualities and, in a way, enhances the capability of these qualities to express themselves. Smith accounts for music's capacity to do so by equating rhythm with mood. This gives Smith space to argue that vocal music, while imitative, can still function without recognising or comprehending the context of the music. 'Thoughts' informing the musical development are supplementary to musical function in a sentimentalist account, whereas for Aristotle theatre starts from the contextual idea and only after includes music as a way of embellishing the imitation of action.

Does the requirement of internal coherence introduced by the empiricist sufficiently account for musical expression? Or do the empiricists present a convincing case for musical expression without mimesis? Perhaps. What the Scottish approach to musical expression proves is that, if willing, one can justify a modern individualistic account of musical expression that is particularly successful considering instrumental music. Although vocal music can likewise be examined through similar interpretative frameworks, the self-evidence that characterized earlier mimetic and universalist approaches to vocal music seems lesser taking the Scottish route. Is there not something *more* than structuredness that determines beauty in opera? Does the idea behind an opera not inform and deepen the quality of the internal sense for beauty? The Scottish approach seems to separate the aesthetic from the intellectual response to vocal music. However, to separate the two seems to do injustice to the way one can experience both the beauty *and* the moral, political or societal complexity of ideas in art. To fundamentally reduce art to a sentiment of beauty is to deny art's (mimetic) complexity. To properly understand musical expression, one needs to incorporate aspects of both mimetic and nonmimetic approaches to music.

Part 3: Duality of Musical Expression

During the eighteenth century the self-evidence of mimesis in music disappeared. The development of instrumental music, as well as the development of ‘Art’ with a capital ‘A’ elevated both vocal and instrumental music to the level of the other Fine Arts.⁹⁹ While the emancipation of musical theory from mimesis opened the way for a Romantic musical aesthetics, as well as the development of the ‘absolute music’ concept, the period’s distancing from mimesis has the consequence that specific forms of musical expression are less easily understood. While the origin of mimesis lies in analyses of music in a poetic context, in general the mimetic approach allowed theorists to broadly contextualise music; be it through literal imitation, by connecting the arts with epistemology, by a relation between nature and music, or by different variations upon the mimesis theme. In short, it allowed theorists to ground musical expression not *just* in music itself, but in its context. To speak in a Cartesian fashion, by letting go of mimesis one either has to view music as a primary substance, fully capable of independent expression, or as entirely insubstantial except *in* human experience.

The British, in favour of a radical form of absolute sentimentalism, free (instrumental) music from presumptions of contextual bind, but simultaneously put a large burden of proof on music and its listeners. Smith reduces affect in music to *individual* human experience. What characterises music is no longer its imitation of human affect, or the natural order of things, but simply its organisation of sound which individual listeners affectionately colour following the general observations ‘gaiety quick, solemnity slow’ and ‘beauty in structure’. While their account seems tailored to instrumental or absolute music, it is unclear why music with a historically mimetic character needs a non-mimetic approach. For operatic music, it simply

⁹⁹ Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts*, 164.

makes sense to stick to mimetic theories. If one separates the musical experience from the operatic content, one might render opera incomprehensible.

Then again, the turn away from mimesis also holds appeal. It releases one of the need to justify music's situatedness, and allows for an individuated notion of musical expression. Rameau, by appealing to the natural qualities of harmony, struggles with irregularities in individual musical experience. Rousseau's emphasis on the cultural origin of music binds music to language in a possibly problematic way. If music is at its heart communicative because it is an imitation of contingent human utterances, how come we can appreciate and understand music cross-culturally? If one is raised in a certain tradition, then one is less aware of the particular cultural mores of different nationalities. Furthermore, how would Rousseau account for the expressiveness of complex instrumental music? The instrumental music of his day was highly structured and developed. Starting with an exposition, the themes of a piece would be developed by repetition and subtle alteration. By arguing music holds beauty and meaning because it holds the character of uniformity amidst variety, Hutcheson's approach appears to strike at the heart of the matter. He describes wonderfully what music at its core is. One might object that Rousseau's position that music is reducible to original affective utterances does not fully grasp the complex reality of instrumental music. Hutcheson and Smith do not encounter these types of problems; their analysis starts with observations about the human perception of art. From there they deduce the self-sufficiency of music's expressive capability: not by arguing that music is by itself expressive, but by noticing that the structuredness of music gratifies our internal sense for regularity.

In short, both accounts hold merit. How are we then to approach musical expression? The fact that these two approaches to music both hold merit, and both seem limited in scope poses an interpretative question: are both approaches incomplete, simply wrong, or is the question itself based on an erroneous assumption. Is there really *one* type of musical expression,

or should we differentiate between different *senses* of music. An interesting observation pointing towards the latter is made by the American philosopher Peter Kivy. In the essay *Is music an Art* Kivy argues that, since the sixteenth-century, music has wrongly been regarded as a singular type of art.¹⁰⁰ Music has been singularly understood as a fine art, which some music admittedly is. However, the (re)introduction of complex instrumental music and the notion of absolute music emerging in the eighteenth century defies such a classification. Hence Kivy suggests that approaching music monolithically is problematical from the outset. Whereas traditionally music has been categorised as one of the fine arts, which main guiding principle is that of imitation, Kivy argues that the development of complex instrumental music in the eighteenth century reintroduced a different category of music: decorative music. If one accepts that instrumental -perhaps better qualified as ‘structural’- music is characterised by non-mimesis, then it becomes possible to approach the question of musical expression in a twofold manner.

3.1 Kivy’s proposal

How did the development of two types of musical expression occur? Kivy notes that the general consensus in aesthetics is that the classification of music as a fine art occurred in the sixteenth century. This development described in full by Oskar Kristeller is traced back to the work of Charles Batteaux. He was one of the first early-modern philosophers to categorise the arts by an appeal to a single unifying principle: ‘on aura la différence particuliere des Ars dont l'object commun est l'imitation de la belle Nature’¹⁰¹ That is, all fine arts which are either visual or audible are united in their imitation of beautiful nature. This notion influenced the view on arts

¹⁰⁰ Peter Kivy, “Is Music an Art?” *Journal of Philosophy* 88, no. 10 (October 1991): 544-54.

¹⁰¹ Charles Batteaux, “de la manière dont les art sont leur imitation.,” in *Les Beaux Arts Réduits à un Même Principe*, ed. Durand Durand Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 2007), 37.

in the following centuries and coloured the approach to music as well. While before the sixteenth-century no clear widely accepted systemic view on the arts existed, afterwards the understanding of music became coloured by the notion that all fine arts are an 'imitation de la belle nature'. While the eighteenth century did away with mimesis, the idea that music as an art could be categorised as a fine art remained. The fine arts as a group are defined by their dependence on the world as context. An imitation is always an imitation of something else. From this assumption it follows that instrumental music, classified as a fine art, also holds some external content; That it is expressive of something (else) without being imitative. However, as we can observe from the mutual interpretative difficulties of the Bouffonists and British, these interpretative difficulties are lesser when one divides music into two categories: theatrical - mimetic- music belongs to the fine arts, instrumental music belongs to the structural arts. Of course, this does not mean that poetic music and instrumental music are essentially different. Both remain variations of music, but they are two distinct branches that need to be understood differently: the one using mimesis as an interpretive tool, the other relying upon its structural coherence for its expressiveness. Preferably, one accounts for both in a single theory, but if need be two separate theories can be used provided there is no conflict. If we take the Bouffonist and empiricist theories as an example, of course it is the case that these two theories contradict each other. An inclusive understanding of musical expression needs to allow for a differentiated approach to musical expression.

3.2 Concluding Remarks

In the previous sections I have presented several historic accounts of musical expression that together mark a shift in the philosophical understanding of music. Our understanding of music, like all things in life, is susceptible to change. As Kivy notes, theory has to adapt to worldly

change, not vice versa. As music developed, so must our understanding of it. If we are to understand music as an art we must be able to address it in all its versatility. The shift that occurred during the eighteenth-century from a mimetic aesthetics towards a non-mimetic aesthetics shows that, at the very least, one needs a two-pronged approach to clarify modern musical expression. Moreover, the nuances in approach between and within the different mimetic accounts spanning all the way from Plato to Rousseau show the required versatility of a theory of musical expression. One needs to account for both the epistemological, metaphysical and ethical concerns raised by mimetic music. Simultaneously, one's approach to music should differentiate between mimetic and nonmimetic music. The ethical concerns that one might have regarding mimetic music do not necessarily transfer to instrumental music. Similarly, one's justification for the expressiveness of instrumental music cannot spontaneously account for mimetic music. At the same time, the way one approaches the two prongs of music cannot cause internal contradictions. While the Greek mimetic approaches excel at giving a universal account of musical perception, a modern approach to musical expression must be able to justify both an individual and universal account of musical experience. The distancing from mimesis was both a necessary and unfortunate consequence of the scientific and philosophical developments in eighteenth-century Europe, its consequences we need to deal with and take lessons from in formulating a modern dual understanding of all musical expression.

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