

Kant's Expressive Theory of Music

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Abstract:

Several prominent philosophers of art (e.g., Kivy, Dahlhaus, Schueller) have worried whether Kant has a coherent theory of music on account of two perceived tensions in his view. First, there appears to be a conflict between his formalist and expressive commitments. Second (and even worse), Kant defends seemingly contradictory claims about music being beautiful and merely agreeable, i.e., not beautiful. Against these critics, I show that Kant has a consistent view of music that reconciles these tensions. I argue that, for Kant, music can be experienced as either agreeable or beautiful depending upon the attitude we take towards it. Though we might be tempted to think he argues that we experience music as agreeable when we attend to its expressive qualities and as beautiful when we attend to its formal properties, I demonstrate that he actually claims that we are able to judge music as beautiful only if we are sensitive to the expression of emotion through musical form. With this revised understanding of Kant's theory of music in place, I conclude by sketching a Kantian solution to a central problem in the philosophy of music: given that music is not sentient, how can it express emotion?

§1. Introduction

As philosophers like Peter Kivy and Stephen Davies have emphasized, one of the central issues in the philosophy of music is the problem of expression.¹ Frequently when we hear a piece of instrumental music, we describe it as expressing an emotion, e.g., Beethoven's 'Eroica' symphony sounds triumphant or Chopin's *Étude* in E Major (Op. 10, No. 3) sounds sad.² Yet even though we *do* describe music in these expressive terms, there is a question of whether we *should*. After all, we normally regard emotions as something expressed by someone or something that feels that emotion. However, to borrow Davies's formulation of the problem, "Given that music is nonsentient, how could emotions be expressed in it?"³

Although there are a number of contemporary solutions to this problem on offer, these efforts have a historical precedent.⁴ In the 17th and 18th centuries, thinkers like Jean le Rond d'Alembert, Thomas Reid, Daniel Webb, among others began to argue that music is best understood as a form of art that expresses emotion. This line of thought coalesced into the so-called '*Affektenlehre*', which became the dominant view of music during this time period.⁵ It should

not be surprising, then, that when Immanuel Kant writes about music at the end of the 18th century, he too characterizes it in expressive terms.⁶ Music, Kant claims, is an art-form that takes the ‘language of the affects’ [*Sprache der Affekten*] and “puts that language into practice for itself alone, in all its force.”⁷ Given that the relationship between music and the expression of emotion is precisely what is at the heart of the problem of expression, we might be led to wonder whether Kant has anything to say that could contribute to solving this problem. On the face of it, however, this line of thought seems less than promising, for it has often been denied that Kant has anything coherent to say about music. What is more, the charge of incoherence is often based precisely on a perceived incompatibility between Kant’s scattered remarks on a possible role for emotion to play in aesthetic appreciation and his seemingly more central claims about the exclusive importance of form. This contradiction appears to manifest most concretely in his discussion of music, since Kant at once seems to claim that music can be beautiful, but then also seems to relegate it to the merely agreeable precisely on account of its connection to emotion.

Given that Kant’s discussion of expression in music seems to raise more problems than it solves, it has been argued that we should treat emotion as ancillary to Kant’s account of music. As Herbert Schueller makes this point,

Kant did not base his theory of musical judgment on that which music expresses. It is clear that Kant does not maintain that musical judgment is the judgment either 1) of the emotions music expresses or 2) of the relationship between the music and the emotions.⁸

This is bolstered by the argument put forth by Peter Kivy, among others, that there is nothing distinctively Kantian in Kant’s discussion of expression in music; rather he is simply parroting the “shopworn view of the musical experience” that dominated the 17th and 18th centuries.⁹ In which case, it seems his comments about expression in music can be dismissed as, in Carl Dahlhaus’s words, “historically ‘contingent’ and not systematically necessary” and that we should, instead, reconstruct Kant’s considered theory of music on the basis of his more general aesthetic theory.¹⁰

Against these critics, I argue that Kant, in his explicit treatment of music, offers a consistent and nuanced theory of music. I proceed by considering two apparent tensions in his view, taking up, first, the ostensible tension between his formalist and expressive commitments (§§2-3), and second, the alleged inconsistency between his claims, on the one hand, that music can be beautiful, and, on the other, that it cannot be beautiful, but is rather merely agreeable (§4). In defending what I take to be Kant's coherent account of music, I argue that on his view, music can be experienced as *either* agreeable *or* beautiful depending upon the attitude we take towards it. While it might be tempting to think that, for Kant, we experience music in the former way when we attend to its expressive qualities and in the latter way when we attend to its formal properties, I demonstrate that he is committed to a view I call 'expressive formalism', according to which we can judge music as beautiful only if we are sensitive to the expression of emotion through musical form. In which case, far from regarding emotion as irrelevant or a hindrance to our experience of music, Kant both accepts and insists that emotion has an ineliminable role to play in our aesthetic judgments about beauty in music. I conclude by offering a sketch of how Kant's views might contribute to the contemporary debate about musical expression (§5).

§2. The Four Moments of Taste and Kant's 'Formalism'

Before we take up Kant's theory of music *per se*, I want to briefly situate it within his aesthetic theory more broadly. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant describes aesthetic experience as involving a special kind of judgment: a 'judgment of taste'. Unlike a 'cognitive' judgment, which is *primarily* grounded in our observation of the world around us, Kant claims a judgment of taste is an 'aesthetic' judgment, one that is *primarily* grounded in something subjective, *viz.*, our awareness of how an object pleases or displeases us.¹¹ Of course, the most important kind of judgment of taste for Kant is the judgment of beauty. And, as we find in the 'Analytic of the Beautiful', Kant thinks there are four

features, or 'Moments', that are implicitly contained in the otherwise seemingly simple judgment: x is beautiful.

In the First Moment of Taste concerning quality, Kant claims that in order to judge something to be beautiful, the pleasure or satisfaction we take in it must be 'disinterested'. On his view, we take an interest in an object when we desire it and we make a judgment grounded in interested satisfaction, when we judge that the existence of the desired object would please us. Kant describes two types of interested judgments: judgments of the agreeable, in which the object is something that pleases or 'gratifies' [*vernünftig*] the senses,¹² and judgments of the good, in which the object is something that pleases reason.¹³ The pleasure involved in judgments of beauty, by contrast, is not grounded in a desire for the existence of the object, but rather it is the *representation of the* object that pleases us:

[in judgments of the beautiful] one only wants to know whether the mere representation of the object is accompanied with satisfaction in me, however indifferent I might be with regard to the existence of the object of this representation. It is readily seen that to say that it is **beautiful**... what matters is what I make of the representation in myself.¹⁴

My pleasure, for example, in Botticelli's *Venus* is not a pleasure in Venus herself or in the canvas as a trophy to add to my collection; it is in his representation on the canvas. Furthermore, Kant claims this disinterested pleasure is generated not through desire, but through our *contemplation* or *reflection on* the representation of the object: a judgment of the beautiful is "**contemplative**, i.e., a judgment that, indifferent with regard to the existence of an object, merely connects its constitution [*Beschaffenheit*] together with the feeling of pleasure."¹⁵

In addition to being grounded in reflection and disinterested satisfaction, in the Second and Fourth Moments of Taste concerning quantity and modality, Kant claims that in judgments of the beautiful we judge the object to be an object of universal and necessary satisfaction. That is to say, we take the pleasure we have in the object to be one that should be felt by *all* judges and is demanded of *any* judge:

if [someone] pronounces that something is beautiful, then he expects the very same satisfaction of others: he judges not merely for himself, but for everyone, and speaks of beauty *as if* it were a property of things.¹⁶

Kant elaborates on the nature of this sharable pleasure by arguing that it has a unique provenance: it is grounded in the ‘free play’ or ‘harmony’ of our cognitive capacities, specifically, our imagination (our capacity for spatially and temporally organizing what we intuit) and understanding (our capacity for thought). In ordinary cognition, Kant maintains that the imagination is ‘constrained’ by the understanding: it organizes our intuitions in such a way that the understanding can apply concepts to them.¹⁷ By contrast, in judgments of taste, Kant suggests that this constraint can be lifted and our imagination and understanding can engage in ‘free play’. On my interpretation, free play involves, on the one hand, our imagination being free to organize what we perceive into a variety of spatial or temporal patterns, e.g., I can see Botticelli’s *Venus* organized according to a three-fold structure, foreground/background structure, etc. On the other hand, our understanding no longer has to apply a single concept to what we perceive; it is free to think of different themes that unify this representation, e.g., is it ethereal beauty, tranquility, or the meeting of heaven and earth that dominates Botticelli’s *Venus*?¹⁸ And when both the imagination and understanding operate in this way, they stimulate one another, in a process that involves the “animation of both powers of the mind (the one through the other)”: while the imagination can uncover new sensible patterns for the understanding to think about, the understanding can prompt us to see the work of art in a new way.¹⁹ Kant, in turn, argues that being in this state of free play brings about a distinctive kind of pleasure, a pleasure that can be shared by anyone with these cognitive capacities, regardless of our personal preferences.²⁰

The final aspect of judgments of the beautiful left to discuss, and the one that is perhaps most relevant to music, is the Third Moment concerning relation. Here, Kant points towards the distinctive kind of relation that he thinks holds between the judging subject and the beautiful object.

He calls this relation ‘purposiveness’ and suggests that we take the object to be *purposive for* our mental capacities, i.e., for bringing about free play in us.²¹ Now, according to Kant, it is, in particular, the object’s *form* that we judge to be purposive: “The judgment of taste has nothing but the *form of the purposiveness* of an object... as its ground.”²² While what exactly Kant means by a ‘form of purposiveness’ is a vexed issue that we cannot address fully here, for our purposes, I want to focus on the connection Kant appears to draw in the Third Moment between the ‘form of purposiveness’ and the formal properties of a work of art.²³ Having introduced his general conception of a ‘form of purposiveness’ in §§12-13, in §14 Kant offers an ‘Elucidation by means of examples’.²⁴ It is this section, in particular, that suggests Kant takes the ‘form of purposiveness’ to be related to the formal features of a work of art because he argues that, “what constitutes the ground of all arrangements for taste is... what pleases through its form.”²⁵ With painting, for example, he maintains that in order to judge it to be beautiful, we must focus on the formal arrangement of its lines, i.e., its underlying ‘drawing’, and its shapes.²⁶ He makes a similar claim about music: in order to judge a piece of music to be beautiful, what we must attend to is the formal ‘composition’ [*Komposition*] of the piece, e.g., its melody, harmony, rhythm, etc.²⁷ Summing up this line of thought, he asserts that “**drawing** in [painting] and composition in [music] constitute the proper objects of the pure judgment of taste.”²⁸

Even if there is more to the ‘form of purposiveness’ than the formal features of an object, Kant emphasizes the latter because he takes the form of an object to be something that, regardless of our personal preferences, can bring about free play and disinterested pleasure in any and every subject. To make this point, Kant contrasts sensitivity to form with sensitivity to two subjectively contingent aspects of our experience of an object. The first of these is ‘charm’ [*Reiz*]. A charm, for Kant, is a sensation that pleases our senses, e.g., when you particularly like the sound of a violin particularly pleasing.²⁹ He argues that since what pleases our senses is dependent upon personal

proclivities, charm cannot ground a judgment of the beautiful, but only of the agreeable.³⁰ Form, by contrast, is something we can be all be sensitive to, Kant thinks, regardless of our sensible penchants.

The second subjectively contingent item that can interfere with judgments of the beautiful is what Kant calls *Rührung*, a term often translated as ‘emotion’:

Emotion [*Rührung*], a sensation in which agreeableness is produced only by means of a momentary inhibition followed by a stronger outpouring of the vital force, does not belong to beauty at all.³¹

The translation of ‘*Rührung*’ as ‘emotion’ is a bit misleading. For, as the passage indicates, Kant is not talking about emotions *in general*, rather he has in mind a very specific type of emotion associated with a feeling of tension being followed by an intense feeling of animation or, perhaps, ‘being alive’. Given this, it would be better to translate *Rührung* as ‘being stirred’, as I shall do in what follows. Kant’s point in this passage is that if being stirred grounds your liking for the object, then you cannot make a judgment of the beautiful about it, only a judgment of the agreeable. Instead, you should be attuned to the form as a source of pleasure that is not subjectively contingent.

Of course, when this claim about *Rührung* gets applied to Kant’s analysis of music, commentators are encouraged to think that Kant is a strict formalist, i.e., he holds the view that the only aesthetically relevant properties of a piece of music are its formal properties.³² Indeed, on this reading, the Third Moment of Taste seems to suggest that if emotion plays any role in our experience of music, it is only to get in the way of our ability to judge music as beautiful. However, we should resist concluding that in the Third Moment, Kant dismisses emotion out right as relevant to aesthetic judgments about music. For, as noted above, the passage from §14 that seems so damning is not about emotion *in general*, but rather about the very specific type of emotion involved in being stirred. In fact, Kant continues in the Third Moment by arguing that it is not our judgments about beauty, but about the *sublime* that involve being stirred: sublimity is that “with

which the feeling of being stirred [*das Gefühl der Rührung*]) is combined.”³³ A more circumspect reading of §14 would then suggest that Kant has ruled out the possibility that the specific emotion, being stirred, can be involved in our judgments of taste about music; however, he has not yet ruled out the possibility that other types of emotions or perhaps another way of relating to emotions might play a role in those judgments. Indeed, it is this possibility that he takes up later in the third *Critique* in his so-called ‘Doctrine of Fine Art’.

§3. Kant on Expression in Music

In §§51-53 of the third *Critique*, Kant, as was common practice in the 18th century, offers a system of the fine arts [*schönen Künste*], in which he divides and ranks various art-forms, specifically, the arts of speech, like poetry and oratory; the pictorial arts, like painting and sculpture; and the arts of the ‘play of sensations’, like music and the ‘art of colors’.³⁴ Kant suggests we could differentiate the art-forms according to their ‘expressive’ characteristics:

Thus if we wish to divide the beautiful arts, we can, at least as an experiment, choose no easier principle than the analogy of art with the kind of expression [*Ausdruck*] that people use in speaking in order to communicate to each other.³⁵

According to Kant, when we communicate with one another, we rely not only on our words, but also on our gestures and the tone of our voices to express ourselves.³⁶ Though ordinarily all three features are present in conversation, he claims that each art-form highlights one of them: the arts of speech highlight words, pictorial arts highlight gesture, and music highlights tone.

Tone, for Kant, is the vehicle through which we communicate how we feel about what we are saying. Given that how we feel contributes to what we are trying to express, failing to grasp a speaker’s tone amounts to failing to fully understand her. As Kant describes the role of tone in communication:

every expression of language has, in context, a tone that is appropriate to its sense [*Sinne*]; that this tone more or less designates [*bezeichnet*] an affect [*Affect*] of the speaker and

conversely also produces one in the hearer, which then in turn arouses in the latter the idea [*Idee*] that is expressed in the language by means of such a tone.³⁷

Indeed, he claims that our ability to communicate with one another depends on the “language of affects,” something he thinks is “universally comprehensible to every human being.”³⁸

It is worth dwelling on the notion of an ‘affect’ because it will help clarify Kant’s view of emotions more generally, as well as the role he sees them playing in music. Kant tends to divide emotions into two species: passions and affects.³⁹ Passions, on his view, are emotions connected to the faculty of desire and some end we have a ‘sensible desire’ or ‘inclination’ for.⁴⁰ For example, your passion for revenge is connected to your desire to take vengeance on a particular person.⁴¹ Given that passions are connected to practical reason in this sense,⁴² Kant thinks that they tend to develop over time, as we reflect on what we desire: “[passion] takes its time and reflects, no matter how fierce it may be, in order to reach its end.”⁴³ An affect, by contrast, is the kind of emotion that is connected to our feelings of pleasure and displeasure and, for this reason, tend to arise ‘quickly’ or ‘rashly’ in response to a situation we presently find ourselves in, e.g., a sudden feeling of joy.⁴⁴ As Kant sometimes puts it, affects involve ‘surprise through sensations’.⁴⁵ Unlike passions which are borne of reflection, Kant suggests that affects “make reflection impossible” and are, therefore, “imprudent [*unbesonnen*].”⁴⁶ We must be careful at this point, however, for although *unbesonnen* is translated as ‘thoughtless’, Kant’s point is not that affects are necessarily disconnected from thought all together. Rather his point is that they arise suddenly and this prohibits a certain type of reflection, viz., “the lack in reflection in comparing this feeling with the sum of all feelings (of pleasure and displeasure).”⁴⁷ As we might make this point, when we are in the grips of an affect, we lose perspective as to whether the intensity of that affect is appropriate. To use Kant’s example, when a servant breaks a rich man’s ‘beautiful and rare crystal goblet’, the rich man becomes irate and is not able to consider that, on the whole, the loss is of little significance; instead, “he feels as if his entire happiness were lost.”⁴⁸

Following the Scottish physician John Brown,⁴⁹ Kant further divides affects into two sub-species: ‘sthenic’ affects, which involve excitation and ‘asthenic’ affects, which involve debilitation or weakening.⁵⁰ He claims that whereas sthenic or ‘masculine’ affects come “from strength [*aus Stärke*] and “excite [*erregenden*] the vital force,” asthenic or ‘feminine’ affects come “from weakness [*aus Schwäche*]” and “relax [*abspannenden*] the vital force.”⁵¹ He draws the same distinction, albeit with different labels in the third *Critique*, where he argues that an affect can be of the ‘courageous sort’, in which case it “arouses the consciousness of our powers to overcome any resistance (*animi strenui*)” or it can be of the ‘yielding kind’, in which case it “makes the effort at resistance itself into an object of displeasure (*animum languidum*).”⁵² Affects such as grief, feeling shy, feeling cowardly would fall in the asthenic category, whereas affects like courage, joy, and (presumably) being stirred [*Rührung*] would fall in the sthenic.⁵³

With this picture of affects in place, we can now return to the third *Critique*. As we saw above, Kant argues that in ordinary conversation, we must be sensitive to what affects are being communicated through someone’s tone in order to fully understand what they are saying. And he sees music as the art-form that is most closely connected to this feature of communication. Summarizing his view in the *Anthropology*, Kant claims that, “sounds [in music] are *tones*... a communication of feelings [*Gefühle*] at a distance to all present within the surrounding space.”⁵⁴ More specifically, in the third *Critique*, Kant argues that in a piece of music, a composer “puts [the] language [of affects] into practice *for itself alone*, in all its force.”⁵⁵ Typically, when we listen to someone, we use her tone *as a means to* understanding the thought she is trying to convey. By contrast, in music, Kant suggests a composer calls attention to those affectively laced tones themselves, focusing on them *for their own sake*.⁵⁶ For example, whereas in conversation my lamenting tone might communicate my sadness at not being able to drink this champagne, a

composer can put that lamenting tone on display for itself, e.g., through a blaring tuba, without necessarily using it to express any further thought.

However, given the intimate connection Kant describes between music and emotions in these later sections, how are we to reconcile these expressive claims with his earlier formalist claims? While we might be tempted to regard his expressive commitments as in conflict with his formalist commitments, in what follows I suggest that Kant, instead, advocates for a position we might call ‘expressive formalism’, according to which our appreciation of the formal structures of a piece of music must be guided by our appreciation of how those structures express affects.

The best place to begin our discussion of Kant’s expressive formalism is with his theory of ‘aesthetic ideas’. At the most basic level, an aesthetic idea is, for Kant, the idea an artist expresses through a work of art.⁵⁷ More specifically, he characterizes these ideas as representations of the imagination, which she, in turn, executes in her preferred medium.⁵⁸ In addition to aesthetic ideas being imaginative representations, Kant claims they contain a wealth of meaning; indeed, so much so that they are simply too rich to ever be exhaustively described:

by an aesthetic idea... I mean a representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., **concept**, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible.⁵⁹

As we might make this point, there is no paraphrase we could give of a great novel or symphony, which would fully capture the imaginative world it contains. Likewise, although we can come up with interpretations of such a work of art, insofar as the work always remains open to new ways of understanding it, no *single* interpretation can exhaust it.

Kant suggests that there is a specific type of aesthetic idea music expresses, which he connects to the ‘dominant affect’ of a piece:

[music involves] the aesthetic ideas of a coherent whole [*eines zusammenhängenden Ganzen*] of an unutterable fullness of thought [*einer unnenmbaren Gedankenfülle*], corresponding to a certain theme, which constitutes the dominant affect in the piece.⁶⁰

For example, we might say Duke Ellington's 'Mood Indigo' involves an aesthetic idea that expresses the dominant affect of an indigo mood or a slightly dreamy feeling of the blues. Yet, as with other aesthetic ideas, by simply saying this piece is about an indigo mood, we have not yet captured the surplus of meaning present in it for it also involves 'a coherent whole of an unutterable fullness of thought'. Furthermore, as we saw above, there can be no single interpretation of the piece's aesthetic idea that will exhaust it. This latter claim, in fact, is of special interest in our discussion of music for there is an extra layer of interpretation involved here that is not at work in many other art-forms, viz., the interpretation of the piece by the performer. When we hear a piece of music, we do not just hear the score; we hear how that score is interpreted by the performer. As a result, our interpretation of the piece is dependent upon the prior interpretation of the performer. With music, then, there are two dimensions in which aesthetic ideas outstrip a single interpretation: neither the audience nor the performer need be confined to a single interpretation of that aesthetic idea.

However, it is crucial to see that not only does Kant think aesthetic ideas are central to music, but also that he sees them as connected to musical form:

since [musical] aesthetic ideas are not concepts nor determinate thoughts, *the form of the composition* [*Zusammensetzung*] of these sensations (harmony and melody) *serves* only, instead of the form of language, *to express*, by means of a proportionate disposition [*Stimmung*] of them... *the aesthetic ideas* of a coherent whole....of thought.⁶¹

I take this to be the key to Kant's expressive formalism: it is through the formal features of a piece, e.g., harmony, melody, key, rhythm, that a composer is able to communicate her aesthetic idea and its dominant affect.⁶² If the composer wants to convey a sense of joy, perhaps she will choose a major key or if she wants to convey grief, perhaps she will choose *largo*. This, in turn, means that in order for the audience to grasp the aesthetic idea of the piece, we have to be attuned to how it is expressed through musical form.⁶³

Let's now consider what implications this has for how we understand judgments of the beautiful in relation to music. This is an especially pressing issue because it has been argued that, for

Kant, the emotive character of music is ‘extra-aesthetic’, i.e., that it is not relevant to our judgments of beauty. Here is Schueller again,

If it is true that the origin and appeal of music lie in its likeness to language, then music must be expressive. But such expressiveness is probably not aesthetic in Kant’s terms... Pure aesthetic judgment [of beauty] exists, but in actual practice it is supplemented by extra-aesthetic considerations, one of which is the expressive.⁶⁴

Indeed, Schueller among others has argued that emotions, in fact, detract from our experience of music as beautiful: “if the source of music is in the emotional, to the degree to which it continues to appeal to the emotional it is so much less beautiful.”⁶⁵ There are, at least, two reasons one might be tempted to think the emotive character of music is extra-aesthetic. First, as we saw above, given Kant’s comments in the Third Moment of Taste, we might think it is only form, not emotion that matters for judgments of taste. Yet in light of the narrow scope of Kant’s claims in §14 and the expressive formalism he argues for in these later sections, this does not seem like the right interpretation. To be sure, in these later sections he avers the relevance of musical form to judgments of taste:

On this mathematical [i.e., musical] form depends the satisfaction that the mere reflection on such a multitude of sensations accompanying or following one another connects with this play of them as a condition of its beauty valid for everyone; and it is in accordance with it alone that taste may claim for itself a right to pronounce beforehand about the judgment of everyone.⁶⁶

However, he makes these claims about musical form immediately after his claim that musical form is that through which aesthetic ideas are communicated. In which case, far from emotion being ‘extra-aesthetic’, our ability to judge music as beautiful depends upon our appreciation of form as *expressive of an affect*.

Nonetheless there is a second reason the emotive character of music might be dismissed as ‘extra-aesthetic’: it is claimed that the affects expressed in music cannot solicit the required free play of our cognitive capacities.⁶⁷ As Christel Fricke argues, for Kant, only form can prompt free play:

On the one hand, [Kant] accords to music the status of a fine [beautiful] art, whose works engage our cognitive powers. This he does by emphasizing the structural, formal aspects of musical sensations. On the other hand, he understands music as the expression and trigger of emotions and thus as something that is more likely to allow us to experience feelings of pleasure [of the agreeable] than to stimulate our cognitive powers to engage in free play. But as a source of mere pleasure music is not a fine art.⁶⁸

Taking a slightly different tack, Kivy claims that the aesthetic ideas involved in music “do not engage the free play of the cognitive faculties,” but instead “only have a bodily payoff: a sense of bodily well-being.”⁶⁹ For this reason, Kivy, suggests that “music fails to fully qualify as fine art.”⁷⁰ So understood, we could rephrase the worry about music being unable to stimulate free play as a worry about whether music is merely an agreeable art. It is to this vexed issue we shall now turn.

§5. Music as the Lowest Form of Art?

At times, Kant suggests that music is a beautiful art. He, for example, defines music as the “**beautiful play of sensations**” and he describes instrumental music as a “free beauty.”⁷¹ However, at other times, Kant appears to maintain the opposite, for example, when says, “music deserves to be counted as agreeable rather than as beautiful art.”⁷² Commentators have interpreted these seemingly contradictory claims in different ways: commentators like Arden Reed have argued, for Kant, “Music is in some way undecidable, situated in the gap between the beautiful and agreeable.”⁷³ Others, meanwhile, have made sense of this tension by suggesting that Kant’s account is incoherent: while he begins by suggesting that music can be beautiful, in the later sections, he, as Kivy puts it, “backslides” into the view that music is merely an agreeable art, like jokes.⁷⁴

The ambiguity over music’s status stems, in part, from Kant’s ranking of the various art-forms. Notoriously, in Kant’s ranking, music occupies the lowest place.⁷⁵ In §53, Kant claims that if what is at issue in our ranking is the cultural value of a work of art, then music falls to the bottom:

If... one estimates the value of the beautiful arts in terms of the culture that they provide for the mind... then to that extent music occupies the lowest place among the beautiful arts ... because it merely plays with sensations.⁷⁶

On Kant's quite specific understanding, something is culturally valuable if it contributes to the "enlargement [*Erweiterung*] of the faculties that must join together in the power of judgment for the sake of cognition," i.e., if it contributes to the expansion or development of our cognitive capacities (sensibility, imagination, and understanding). Kant thinks the pictorial arts, for example, clearly contribute to this because they appeal to and strengthen our cognitive capacities, e.g., insofar as a painting like Cézanne's *Still Life with Apples* (1890) depicts objects familiar to us from everyday experience, it will engage the capacities typically at work in everyday experience.⁷⁷ Music, by contrast, 'merely plays with sensations', or as Kant puts it elsewhere music "speaks through mere sensations without concepts" and, as a result, "does not... leave behind something for reflection [*Nachdenken*]."⁷⁸ This is due in large part to what he describes as the 'transitory' nature of music, i.e., the rapid and constant changes in the notes.⁷⁹ Although we may be quite moved by a particular series of notes, this experience is 'only temporary', as we are already inundated with the next series.⁸⁰ This seems very different from, say, reading a novel like *Anna Karenina* where there is much fodder for reflection. Since, however, the cultural value of a piece depends on it being able to appeal to all our cognitive capacities, music's lack of obvious engagement with the understanding, results in its low ranking in Kant's eyes.⁸¹

This being said, Kant does claim that if we used a different metric for ranking the arts, viz., what involves charm or movement of the mind [*Gemütsbewegung*], then music would outrank poetry and the pictorial arts. However, this is faint praise, another way to emphasize its inferior status. For this way of ranking the arts does not rank them as beautiful arts, but as *agreeable* arts. Hence his claim that music "occupies perhaps the highest place among those [arts] that are estimated according to their agreeableness."⁸²

Yet if music is the highest ranking agreeable art, in what sense does it still count as a beautiful art? Indeed, one begins to worry that in spite of his initial claims to the contrary, Kant

regards music wholly as an agreeable art. This, in fact, appears to be the view he puts forth in §54,⁸³ a section that has led many to agree with Kivy's claim, "Kant opts unequivocally, in §54, for music as an agreeable art *tout court*."⁸⁴ Here, Kant discusses a particular type of bodily pleasure that he calls 'gratification' [*Vergnügen*].⁸⁵ On his view, when we undergo certain 'changing free play of sensations', we will also experience a distinctive feeling of bodily pleasure, which he describes as a sense of overall well-being or health.⁸⁶ When listening to a joke, for example, Kant thinks that as we laugh, tension in our body relaxes and we have a sense of well-being.⁸⁷ But it is not only jokes that have this bodily cathartic effect:

music and material for laughter... can gratify merely through their change, and nevertheless do so in a lively fashion; by which they make it fairly evident that the animation in both cases is merely corporeal, although it is aroused by ideas of the mind.⁸⁸

Kant then makes a striking suggestion: jokes "like music deserves to be counted as agreeable rather than as beautiful art."⁸⁹ In one fell swoop, Kant seems to relegate music entirely to the category of agreeable art. As Kivy (colorfully) describes this move, Kant seems to descend into "the abysmal depths of a conclusion that makes no more of our enjoyment of the expressive in music than an aid to digestion: the sonic counterpart of Tums for the tummy."⁹⁰

This, of course, conflicts with Kant's earlier descriptions of music as beautiful; however, the ambiguity about music's status appears to be something he might acknowledge and embrace. For at the end of §51, he claims,

one cannot say with certainty whether a color or a tone (sound) is merely agreeable sensations or is in itself already a beautiful play of sensations, which as such involves a satisfaction in the form in aesthetic judging.⁹¹

It is this claim that has led commentators like Reed to suggest that Kant was simply undecided about the status of music. Yet, upon closer inspection, we should note that in this passage, Kant is not making a claim about an entire piece of music, but rather about a single tone. Given Kant's claims about the importance of the formal composition of the piece in our judgments of taste, it stands to

reason that he (like Webb before him) does not think a single tone, in isolation from its relation to other notes, can ground either a judgment of the beautiful or agreeable.⁹² Read in this way, the passage need not indicate Kant was ultimately undecided about the status of music; his point is that no single tone can be judged as beautiful or agreeable.

But this claim about a single note is not, in fact, his primary concern in this passage; what he is really interested in is how we can judge a series of notes to be beautiful or agreeable. For he immediately goes on to argue even if we cannot judge a single tone to be beautiful or agreeable, nevertheless we *can* judge a series of tones in one of two ways: either “as **agreeable** sensations” or as “the beautiful play of sensations.”⁹³ This claim, I take it, holds the key for reconciling the apparent tensions in Kant’s view: music can be *experienced as* either agreeable or beautiful depending upon the attitude we take towards it. In which case, Kant’s seemingly contradictory descriptions of music’s status are best read as clarifying the nature of either one or the other of these attitudes.

To see this, let’s return to §54. As I suggested above, some commentators have taken this section to reveal that, in the end, Kant thinks music is merely an agreeable art; however, this does not follow from the text. Kant does compare music to jokes insofar as they produce bodily gratification in us; yet, he does not say that this is the *only* response we have to music. Rather, at the outset of the section, echoing the First Moment of Taste, he claims that, “Between that **which pleases merely in the judging** [*Beurtheilung*] and that which **gratifies** (pleases in the sensation) there is, as we have often shown, an essential difference.”⁹⁴ His ensuing discussion jokes and music is then offered as an analysis of gratification and, implicitly, judgments of the agreeable. In which case, I take Kant’s claim that jokes ‘like music deserves to be counted as agreeable rather than beautiful art’ to amount to the claim that if the determining ground of our judgments about music or jokes is bodily gratification, then we are judging both wholly as agreeable art.

Yet the fact that I *can* judge music to be agreeable does not preclude the possibility that I *could also* judge it to be beautiful. Indeed, the possibility of judging something to be agreeable or beautiful seems to be built into the various ways we can approach any work of art. Just as I could judge Monet's *Haystacks* (1890-1) as agreeable if his palette pleases my eyes, or as beautiful if the experience involves free play and disinterested pleasure, shouldn't we expect the same experiential possibilities to be built into our experience music? Consider one of Kant's own examples of dinner guests vaguely listening to background 'table music':

[the table-music] sustains the mood of joyfulness merely as an agreeable noise, and encourage[s] the free conversation of one neighbor with another without anyone paying the least attention to its composition [*Komposition*].⁹⁵

Suppose, however, you sneak off into the corner and listen to the composition of the piece, contemplate its dominant affect, etc., in this case, couldn't you experience the piece as beautiful?

Delineating these two ways of experience music is, in fact, precisely what Kant endeavors to do at the end of §51. In one vein, indeed, the vein he picks up on in §54, Kant argues that if our judgment of a piece of music is grounded in bodily gratification, then we judge it as agreeable. On his view, music produces vibrations in the air, which, in turn, impact our bodies.⁹⁶ He argues that the form of the vibrations in the air is simply too fine-grained for us to be able to judge; instead, he claims we are aware of those vibrations only through "the **effect** of these vibrations on the elastic parts of our body."⁹⁷ And since we are not perceptually acute enough to grasp the form of vibrations in the air, then our judgment of the piece will be grounded solely in the bodily effect it has on us. In which case, we will judge the piece in terms of what pleases our senses, hence, as agreeable.

However, Kant goes on to say that this does not exhaust the nature of our response to musical tones. Echoing claims we have already seen, he maintains that rather than attending solely

to how music pleases our ears, we could consider the form of the piece.⁹⁸ When we do this, Kant claims in §14 that,

the mind does not merely perceive, by sense, their [i.e., tones's] effect on the animation of the organ, but also, *through reflection*, perceives the regular play of the impressions (hence the form in the combination of different representations).⁹⁹

This means *if* we are reflectively attuned to the formal features (of course, as expressive of an aesthetic idea), *then* we can judge the music to be beautiful:

then... tones would not be mere sensations, but would already be a formal determination of the unity of a manifold of them, and in that case could also be *counted as* beauties in themselves.¹⁰⁰

In which case, the upshot of §51 is that, on Kant's view, it is open to us to experience music either as agreeable or as beautiful depending upon the attitude we takes towards it.

There are a couple of questions that this discussion raises. First, we may wonder about how we enact one or the other of these possibilities. Suppose I happen to like Duke Ellington's sound, could I ever be in a position to judge 'Mood Indigo' as beautiful? The First Moment of Taste indicates that the judgments we make depend on the mindset we have with regard to a piece. If our attention to and pleasure in a piece is guided by some interest we have in it, then we will judge it as agreeable; if, by contrast, it is guided by free play and reflective contemplation, then we can judge it as beautiful. Frequently we do not choose these mindsets; we are unconsciously shunted into them. However, according to Kant, we can switch from a judgment of the agreeable to a judgment of the beautiful if we rely on,

a faculty for judging that in its reflection takes account (*a priori*) of everyone else's way of representing in thought, in order **as it were** to hold its judgment up to human reason as a whole...Now this happens by one holding his judgment up not so much to the actual as to the merely possible judgments of others, and putting himself into the position of everyone else, merely by abstracting from the limitations that contingently attach to our own judging.¹⁰¹

His language in this passage indicates that there is something we can *do* to change how we judge a work of art: through a reflective effort, we can try and step back from our own personal proclivities

and look at the piece from a more impartial point of view. This appears to be a matter of choosing to adopt one mindset over another.¹

However, this raises a second question: are we ever in a position to know whether we are judging a piece to be beautiful or agreeable? This worry about uncertainty is one that Allison, for example, has emphasized,

even though [Kant] does not say it in so many words, the clear implication of Kant's analysis is that we can *never* be certain in any instance that we have made the correct subsumption, that is, that one's judgment is based solely on the relation of the faculties in free play.¹⁰²

It may be right that, on Kant's view, we are not able to know exactly what motivates us when we judge a work of art; however, I take this to be a problem not particular to judgments of taste, but rather to judgments about our *motives*. For we find Kant raising a similar problem in the *Groundwork*, where he argues that we cannot ever be certain whether our motives for an action stem from duty or self-love:

For at times it is indeed the case that with the acutest self-examination we find nothing whatsoever that – besides the moral ground of duty – could have been powerful enough to move us to this or that good action... but from this it cannot be inferred with certainty that the real determining cause of the will was not actually a covert impulse of self-love.¹⁰³

However, even if we can never be sure what exactly motivates us, Kant clearly thinks we nevertheless have an obligation to try and fulfill our moral duty. Likewise in the aesthetic case, even though we may be uncertain as to the ultimate source of our pleasure in a piece of music, we can nevertheless make an attempt to judge it from a less egocentric perspective.

It is at this point that I wish to return to the role of free play in musical experience. Since Kant clearly maintains we can experience music as beautiful, then he must, *pace* Kivy, think music can induce free play in us. I wish to suggest that Kant's expressive formalism is the key to seeing how this is possible. It is perhaps fairly straightforward how music might engage the free play of our

¹ Admittedly, there might be cases in which we are simply unable to make this choice. If, for example, your liking for an artist or style is so entrenched that you are simply unable to divorce yourself from it, you may not be able to adopt the mindset required to judge something as beautiful.

imagination: the formal features of the piece present us with material we can organize and re-organize as we listen, e.g., hearing strings of notes as melody lines, hearing resolution from a minor to a major chord; holding temporally distant parts of the piece together, etc. The real problem appears to arise when we ask how music can appeal to the understanding. Since music, Kant thinks, ‘speaks through mere sensations without concepts’ and ‘does not... leave behind something for reflection’, how could it ever engage our understanding?¹⁰⁴

In the first place, it should be noted that the fact that music speaks without concepts is not necessarily a problem within the Kantian framework. For, on Kant’s view, “The **beautiful** is that which pleases universally without a concept.”¹⁰⁵ That is to say, in pure judgments of taste, our judgment is not grounded in a concept, but in sharable pleasure, i.e., ‘universal satisfaction’.¹⁰⁶ Even so, there is nevertheless a difference between representational works of art, i.e., works of art that represent concepts we are familiar with, and music. For music, according to Kant, relies primarily on formally structured tones (sensations), not concepts, to communicate to us. However, even if the *vehicle* of communication is not conceptual, the *content* of what is communicated, viz., an aesthetic idea, still engages our understanding. For, as we saw above, musical aesthetic ideas involve ‘coherent whole of an unutterable fullness of thought’. So even if music does not speak through concepts, it, nevertheless, presents us with a wealth of thought. In which case, music can stimulate our understanding and, thus, the worry that it cannot elicit free play should be removed. And, once again, we find that on Kant’s view the emotive character of music is not ‘extra-aesthetic’; to the contrary, our ability to experience free play and so make judgments of taste about music depends upon our appreciation of musical form as expressive of emotion.

§6. Kant and Contemporary Theories of Musical Expression

In this paper, I have tried to demonstrate, first, that in spite of what seem like contradictions in his account, Kant does have a coherent theory of music. Second, I have argued that we can appreciate the coherence of his view only if we recognize that expression is not ancillary, but central to his view. By way of conclusion, I want to consider where Kant's views should be situated within contemporary approaches to musical expression and what distinctive contribution he can make. In particular, I want to discuss Kant's relation to three popular views of expression in music: the arousal view, the persona projection view, and the resemblance view.

Let's begin with the arousal theory, according to which a piece of music expresses an emotion only if that emotion is aroused in the listener.¹⁰⁷ This is the view that has been most often attribute to Kant.¹⁰⁸ Kivy has been most explicit about this, arguing that Kant uncritically buys into the variety of the arousal theory popular in the 18th century referred to as the '*Affektenlehre*':

It was natural, though regrettable, that Kant should acquiesce in the old and familiar doctrine that music arouses the emotions through its representations of the passionate accents of the human speaking voice.¹⁰⁹

Yet it is not clear that Kant buys into this view wholesale. To be sure, Kant agrees with other 18th century thinkers who suggest that music communicates emotions through tones. And, as we saw in our discussion of §14, he thinks it is *possible* for music to arouse a feeling of being stirred in us.

However, we need not read Kant as committed to the view that music *always* arouses this emotion of being stirred. On his view, music expresses affects *in general*, i.e., both sthenic and asthenic affects.

Given that being stirred is but one sthenic affect, there is a whole suite of other affects that could be at work in a piece of music that need not stir us in the way Kant thinks is inappropriate in judgments of the beautiful.

Even still, one might worry that even if Kant is not committed to the view that music moves us in the way specific to being stirred, nevertheless he would endorse the view that whatever affect is expressed will be aroused in the listener, e.g., if the music is sad, I will feel sad. A closer look,

however, reveals that Kant, in fact, offers us an alternative to such an arousal theory. To see this, we need to remind ourselves of the *reflective* nature of judgments of the beautiful. As we saw above, unlike judgments of the agreeable or good that involve desire, judgments of the beautiful are contemplative and involve reflection. And it is in this space of reflection that our cognitive capacities are able to engage in the free play, which, in turn, produces sharable pleasure in us. Applying this to music, rather than claiming that music merely arouses emotions in us, Kant should say that our judgments of music involve reflection and the free play of our cognitive capacities. Indeed, he should say that when we experience music as beautiful, we fruitfully contemplate how an aesthetic idea of a dominant affect is expressed through the formal properties of a piece. For example, I can listen to Chopin's so-called 'Sadness' *Étude* in E major without myself feeling sad, but instead noticing how he uses the melody, harmony, rhythm, dynamics, etc., to convey this affect. When we understand Kant's view in this light, we find that far from endorsing the arousal theory, Kant offers a compelling reflective alternative to it.

Another popular view I believe Kant would reject is what we could call the 'persona projection' theory, according to which we experience a piece of music as expressive of an emotion because we project a persona behind the piece who is expressing that emotion.¹¹⁰ One of the main motivations for this theory is the claim that we take emotions to be something a being with a psychological state expresses, e.g., the sounds of your voice express your delight or the bark of a dog expresses its fright. It has seemed to some natural to apply this model of emotional expression to music, in which case in order to experience music as expressing an emotion, we must think that there is someone (either the composer or some imaginary persona) who is expressing herself through the music.

I do not believe Kant would endorse such a view. Recall that Kant claims music takes the language of affects that normally underwrites our conversations and 'puts that language into practice

for itself alone, in all its force'.¹¹¹ I take this to mean that while ordinarily the tones of our speech express the affects we feel, the composer can bracket this and, instead, focus on tones and affects for their own sake. A composer, for example, can explore how joy sounds, without necessarily having to explore what he or someone else might be joyful about. In which case, we need not see the rules of expression that govern ordinary speech as operative in the same way in music.

The final theory I want to consider is the 'resemblance' theory.¹¹² On this theory, music can be *expressive of* emotions in virtue of possessing features that resemble how emotion is expressed in ordinary contexts.¹¹³ There are two dominant versions of this theory. First, there is the *behavioral* version, according to which music resembles the ordinary expression of emotion in virtue of sharing *behavioral* features with it, e.g., the fast pace of someone who is angry can be mirrored in the fast pace of several notes.¹¹⁴ The second *speech-based* theory, by contrast, emphasizes that music expresses emotion by echoing certain features of our expressive speech, e.g., the sadness in a lover's voice can be echoed by the sad tones of a violin.¹¹⁵

On my reading, Kant's theory would be best categorized as a speech-based resemblance theory. However, I see Kant's view as distinctive on, at least, two fronts. First, Kant does not think a piece of music simply *imitates* tones and affects from ordinary speech; rather, he argues that in a piece of music familiar affects and tones are enriched with an aesthetic idea. As Kant says of aesthetic ideas more generally, they can "aesthetically enlarge" and add "much that is unnamable" to what ordinary feature of our world is presented through them.¹¹⁶ When we understand music in this light, we should be led to think that, for Kant, far from simply imitating emotions, a piece of music can develop those emotions beyond their ordinary bounds. Second, and relatedly, Kant offers a compelling analysis of the phenomenology of our experience of emotion in music. As we just saw, he rejects the claim that our only access to emotion in music is through arousal. But Kant also eschews the view that our experience turns on simply identifying the emotion. Instead, our

experience of emotion in music is a reflective one, characterized by the free play of our cognitive capacities, and it is one that ultimately produces a distinctive kind of pleasure in us, a pleasure we can share with others.

Given the distinctiveness of Kant's approach to expression in music on these two fronts it recommends itself as a promising account, one that deserves closer scrutiny in the future. For now, however, perhaps it is enough to simply suggest that Kant may have had a glimmer of the sort of insight Marcel Proust attributes to Swann in *Swann's Way*,

He knew that... the field open to the musician is not a miserable scale of seven notes, but an immeasurable keyboard... on which... a few of the millions of keys of tenderness, of passion, of courage, of serenity... compose it.¹¹⁷

¹ The following formulation of the problem of expression draws on the standard presentation of it in Davies, Stephen. *Musical Meaning and Expression*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press (1994): x and *Themes in the Philosophy of Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2003): 169; Kivy, Peter. *Sound Sentiment: An Essay on Musical Emotions*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press (1989): 6; and Trivedi, Saam. "Expressiveness as a Property of the Music Itself," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 59 (2001): 411 and "Resemblance Theories" in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*. Eds. Theodore Gracyk and Andrew Kania (2011): 223.

² In this paper, I shall restrict my analysis to Western instrumental music, leaving aside non-Western music, vocal music, and music in nature, e.g., the song of a bird.

³ Davies (1994): x

⁴ In §5 I return to contemporary solutions to the problem of expression in more detail.

⁵ See Schueller, Herbart. "Imitation' and 'Expression' in British Music Criticism in the 18th Century." *The Musical Quarterly*, 34 (1948): 544-66; Kivy, Peter. "Thomas Reid and the Expression Theory of Art." *The Monist*, 61(2) (1978): 167-183; Forchert, Arno. "Vom 'Ausdruck der Empfindung' in der Musik" in *Das musikalische Kunstwerk*. Ed. Hermann Danuser. Laaber (1988); and Bicknell, Jeanette. "The Early Modern Period" in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*. Eds. Theodore Gracyk and Andrew Kania (2011): 273-283, I shall turn to the *Affektenlehre* in more detail below.

⁶ References to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* are to the section number and A and B pagination of the first and second editions (**A/B**): *Critique of Pure Reason*. transl. by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1998). All other references are to the section number, volume, and page of *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (KGS): *Kants gesammelte Schriften*. eds. Deutschen (formerly, Königlichen Preussischen) Akademie der Wissenschaften. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902. **GW** (KGS 4): *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. transl. Mary Gregor and revised by Jens Timmerman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2012). **KU** (KGS 5): *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. transl. by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2002). **MS** (KGS 6): *Metaphysics of Morals*. In *Practical Philosophy*. transl. Mary Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1996). **Anthro** (KGS 7): *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. transl. Robert Loudon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2006). *Opus Postumum* (KGS 22). transl. Eckhart Förster and Michael Rosen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1993). "On Philosophers' Medicine of the Body" in *Kant's Latin Writings: Translations, Commentaries, and Notes*. transl. Mary Gregor. Ed. Lewis White Beck. New York: Peter Lang Publishing (1986): 228-43. **R**: *Reflexionen*. Ed. Benno Erdmann. Leipzig: Fues's Verlag (1882).

⁷ KU 5:329

⁸ Schueller, Herbert. "Immanuel Kant and the Aesthetics of Music." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 14, No. 2 (Dec. 1955): 218-247, 224. He continues by saying that, "The judgment of music must be something else if only because, like Plato, Kant held the emotions in low esteem" (224-5).

⁹ Kivy, Peter. "Kant and the *Affektenlehre*: What he said, and what I wish he had said" in *The Fine Art of Repetition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1993): 250-264, 252.

¹⁰ Dahlhaus, Carl. "Zu Kants Musikästhetik." *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, 10.4 (1953): 338-347, 346, my translation. More recently, Ginsborg has presented the outline of a Kantian view of music built more on the basis of the Analytic of the Beautiful than his explicit characterization of music ("Kant" in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*. Eds. Theodore Gracyk and Andrew Kania (2011): 328-338, 337).

¹¹ As Kant makes this point, "The judgment of taste is therefore not a cognitive judgment, hence not a logical one, but is rather aesthetic, by which is understood one whose determining ground **cannot be other than subjective**" (KU 5:203).

¹² KU 5:205

¹³ KU 5:207

¹⁴ KU 5:205

¹⁵ KU 5:210

¹⁶ KU 5:212, my emphasis. Kant's qualification that we speak of beauty 'as if' it were a property of things is crucial, since he does not take beauty to actually be an objective property of things (see KU §§1, 2).

¹⁷ KU 5:316

¹⁸ In this regard, I am more sympathetic to what Paul Guyer ("The Harmony of the Faculties Revisited" in *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2005): 77-109) has called a 'multi-cognitive' approach to free play, according to which there is an "indeterminate or open-ended *manifold* of concepts" involved (84) (see Seel, Gerhard. "Über den Grund der Lust an schönen Gegenständen: Kritische Fragen an die Ästhetik Kants" in *Kant: Anhsen – Probleme – Kritik*. Eds. Hariolf Oberer and Gerhard Seel. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann (1988): 317-56; Rush, Fred, Jr. "Thee Harmony of the Faculties." *Kant-Studien* 92 (2001): 38-61; Allison, Henry E. *Kant's Theory of Taste*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2001)). This is opposed to the 'precognitive interpretation', according to which there is no concept involved (see Henrich, Dieter. "Kant's Explanation of Aesthetic Judgment" in *Aesthetic Judgment and the Moral Image of the World: Studies in Kant*. Stanford: Stanford University Press (1992): 29-56; Crawford, Donald. *Kant's Aesthetic Theory*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press (1974); Guyer, Paul. *Kant and the Claims of Taste*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1st ed. (1979), [changed in 2nd ed. (1997)]; Ginsborg, Hannah. "Lawfulness without a Law: Kant on the Free Play of Imagination and Understanding." *Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 25, No.1 (Spring 1997): 37-81; Meerbote, Ralf. "Reflection on Beauty" in *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics*. Eds. Paul Guyer and Ted Cohen (1982): 55-86; Makkreel, Rudolph. *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1990)). The multi-cognitive interpretation is also distinct from Guyer's (2005) 'metacognitive' approach, according to which we experience a feeling of unity that "goes beyond anything required for or dictated by satisfaction of the determinate concept... on which the mere identification of the object depends" (99). I opt for the multi-cognitive interpretation because I read Kant's analysis of free play in light of his discussion of aesthetic ideas in KU §49. On Kant's view, aesthetic ideas are involved in anything we judge as beautiful: "Beauty (whether it be beauty of nature or of art) can in general be called the **expression** [*Ausdruck*] of aesthetic ideas" (5:320). I find particularly instructive Kant's claims that aesthetic ideas are representations that "occasion much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., **concept**, to be adequate to [them]" (KU 5:314), "let one think more than one can express in a concept determined by words," (KU 5:315), and "really animate the mind by opening up for it the prospect of an immeasurable field of related representations" (KU 5:315). These passages indicate that rather than free play being prior to or devoid of thought, it is in fact overflowing with it. To be sure, Kant emphasizes that in pure judgments of taste we cannot allow a specific concept of how the object should be determine our relation to it; however, this does not preclude us exploring multiple conceptual possibilities in the free play occasioned by the object.

¹⁹ KU 5:238

²⁰ Though I cannot pursue this thorny topic here, in KU §§9, 21, and the Deduction, Kant argues that insofar as pleasure in the free play of our cognitive capacities is grounded in something we all share, then pleasure resulting from the free play of those capacities is something we could all share as well.

²¹ Of course, in §§10-11 Kant suggests that this is a 'purposiveness without a purpose', by which he means the purposiveness we experience in the object is not mediated by a further thought of an actual or objective purpose of the object.

²² KU 5:221

²³ See Guyer (1997): Chapter 6 and Allison (2001): Chapter 6 for a detailed analysis of what Kant means by a 'form of purposiveness'. Though in the ensuing paragraphs I explore the connection between the form of purposiveness and

formal features of a work of art, I take this to be but one aspect of Kant's more complicated analysis of the 'form of purposiveness'.

²⁴ KU 5:223

²⁵ KU 5:225

²⁶ KU 5:225

²⁷ KU 5:225. Kant mentions harmony and melody at KU 5:329 and alludes to rhythm [*Tact*] in music at *Anthro* 7:248 and R618 (15:266). Although it is not clear that Kant was familiar with the more modern conception of form, e.g., sonata form, I agree with Peter Kivy ("Designs à la Grecque" in *Antithetical Arts: On the Ancient Quarrel Between Literature and Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2009): 29-52) who suggests that Kant's notion of 'composition' can accommodate this conception of form: "if composition in music is being analogized to design in painting, then what Kant is referring to are the larger outlines of musical form, sonata, theme-and-variations, rondo, and so forth, even though he probably had no specific knowledge of the particulars of musical forms, and what they are called" (43).

²⁸ KU 5:225

²⁹ KU 5:224. By 'sensation', here, Kant has in mind what he earlier defines as an 'objective sensation', i.e., a sensation that is of a sensible quality of an object, e.g., color, texture, sound, etc. (KU 5:206).

³⁰ As Kant makes this point, "the quality of the sensations [e.g., of green or the violin] cannot be assumed to be in accord in all subjects, and it cannot easily be assumed that the agreeableness of one color in preference to another or of the tone of one musical instrument in preference to another will be judged in the same way by everyone" (KU 5:224).

³¹ KU 5:226

³² This is the sort of formalism attributed to the 19th century philosopher of music, Eduard Hanslick (see Grey, Thomas. "Hanslick" in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*. Eds. Theodore Gracyk and Andrew Kania (2011): 360-370).

³³ KU 5:226, translation modified. As he makes this point in the Analytic of the Sublime, 'the feeling [*Gefühl*] of a momentary inhibition of the vital powers and the immediately following and all the more powerful outpouring of them; hence as being stirred [*Rührung*] it seems to be not play but something serious" (KU 5:245, translation modified). See also *Anthro* 7:243: "The sublime is therefore not an object for taste, but rather an object for the feeling of being stirred [*Rührung*]" (translation modified).

³⁴ According to Schueller (1955) the 'art of colors' refers to "non-representation pieces as created by the color organ... best known in Kant's day as emanating from the Abbé Castel's color piano" (218).

³⁵ KU 5:320. Kant, in fact, thinks of the expression at stake here as the expression of aesthetic ideas (a topic we shall come to shortly): "the reader is to judge this only as an attempt to judge of the combination of the beautiful arts under one principle, which in this case is to be that of the expression of aesthetic ideas (in accordance with the analogy of language)" (KU 5:323 fn).

³⁶ KU 5:320

³⁷ KU 5:238

³⁸ KU 5:238

³⁹ See *Anthro* §§73-88, KU 5:272-4, MS 6:407-8, and 'On the Philosophers' Medicine of the Body' (1786). For a further discussion of emotions in Kant, see Borges, Maria. "What Can Kant Teach us about Emotions?" *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 101, No. 3 (March 2004): 140-158 and "Physiology and Controlling of Affects in Kant's Philosophy." *Kantian Review*, 13.2 (2008): 46-66.

⁴⁰ *Anthro* 7:251

⁴¹ *Anthro* §83

⁴² *Anthro* 7:267

⁴³ *Anthro* 7:252

⁴⁴ KU 5:272 footnote, *Anthro* 7:251, MS 6:407

⁴⁵ *Anthro* 7:252

⁴⁶ *Anthro* 7:252, translation modified

⁴⁷ *Anthro* 7:254

⁴⁸ *Anthro* 7:254

⁴⁹ In *The Elements of Medicine*, Brown offers a system of diseases and his principle of organization stems from the distinction between two kinds of affects in our bodies. More specifically, he argues that all diseases fall in one of two categories: either they are the result of over excitation, i.e., 'sthenic' affects, or the result of a lack of excitation or debilitation, i.e., 'asthenic' affects (see London: J. Johnson, Volume I, Sections LXVI-LXVIII (1788)). Although a publication of this text was not available in Germany until 1794, Brown's ideas were already in circulation and it appears Kant was familiar with them either by 1786 or 1788, for he employs a 'Brunonian' analysis of affects in his lecture 'On Philosophers' Medicine of the Body' (which has been traced to either one of these dates). In addition to citing Brown in the *Anthropology* and the 'Medicine' lecture, he discusses Brown at MS 6:207; *Opus Postumum* 22:300, 407; and R 1539

(15:963). For more on the relationship between Kant and Brown, see Gregor's introduction to the 'Medicine' lecture (1986): 217-225; Factual Note 65 at the end of the *Opus Postumum* (270-1); and Shell, Susan. *The Embodiment of Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1996): 369, fn65. For more on the influence of Brown in Germany, especially after Kant, see Tsouyopoulos, Nelly. "The Influence of John Brown's Ideas in Germany." *Medical History*, Vol. 8 (1988): 63-74.

⁵⁰ *Anthro* 7:355

⁵¹ *Anthro* 7:255-6

⁵² KU 5:272

⁵³ Insofar as being stirred involves a feeling of inhibition followed by the outpouring of the vital force, it will ultimately produce excitation and, therefore, is sthenic. However, it should also be clear that being stirred by no means exhausts all sthenic affects. Consider the phenomenological difference between being stirred and other sthenic affects, such as courage which involves "composure of the mind to take on fear with reflection," hope which involves "the unexpected offering of the prospect of immeasurable good fortune," exuberant joy "which is tempered by no concern about pain," or feeling puzzled which involves the mind being "arouse[d] to collect itself for reflection" (*Anthro* 7:256, 255).

⁵⁴ *Anthro* 7:155

⁵⁵ KU 5:238, my emphasis

⁵⁶ As Kant says rather suggestively in the *Anthropology*, whereas an 'experienced person' might not be easily astonished, surprised, or startled, "it is proper for art [*Kunst*] to represent the usual from a point of view that will make it startling" (*Anthro* 7:255).

⁵⁷ For more on this interpretation of aesthetic ideas, see Matherne, Samantha. "The Inclusive Interpretation of Kant's Aesthetic Ideas." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 53(1) (Jan. 2013): 21-39.

⁵⁸ For example, from a Kantian perspective, we could say the aesthetic idea behind Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* is complex imaginative representation of the characters, the plot, what it means to be the 'lost generation', etc., that he wants to present through the words on the page.

⁵⁹ KU 5:314

⁶⁰ KU 5:239. In what follows, I will describe the emotion expressed through music in fairly simplistic terms; however, I see no reason why Kant would not allow for the dominant affect of a piece to be quite complex and difficult to articulate.

⁶¹ KU 5:329, my emphasis. As has been noted, Kant not only talks about the form of the piece in terms of its composition, but also in terms of the form of vibrations in the air that result from instruments being played, e.g., in KU §§14 and 51. I will return to this latter notion of form below.

⁶² Christian Friedrich Michaelis, who was inspired by Kant and Schiller, captures this view of expressive formalism when he writes in *On The Spirit of Music, with Respect to Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* (1800), "Composition is now, as it were, the *form* of a language, through which the aesthetic idea of the whole of an indescribable wealth of ideas is expressed in accordance with a specific *theme*, which dominates in the piece" (quoted by Fricke, Christel. "Kant" in *Music in German Philosophy: An Introduction*. eds. Stefan Lorenz Sorgner and Oliver Fürbeth. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (2010): 42). For more on the relationship between Kant and Michaelis, see Parret, Herman. "Kant on Music and the Hierarchy of the Arts." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (1998): 251-264, 258-9.

⁶³ This being said, it is important to note that Kant does not require that we be able to explicitly identify these formal structures, as he puts it, this mathematical form need "not [be] represented by determinate concepts" (KU 5:239). So, even if you do not know what the key of B sounds like or what a rondo is, I take Kant's point to be that you will be aurally sensitive to how emotion is expressed through those forms of the piece, even if you do not or, perhaps, cannot reflectively represent these structures to yourself in a determinate fashion (e.g., on a musical score, in conversation, etc.).

⁶⁴ Schueller (1955): 232

⁶⁵ Schueller (1955): 233. See also Kivy (1993): 259.

⁶⁶ KU 5:329

⁶⁷ See, by contrast, Guyer's (1997) claim that in virtue of having no concept, music is the paradigmatic case of free play (82).

⁶⁸ Fricke (2010): 38

⁶⁹ Kivy (2009): 42, 41. See also Kivy (1993): 256, 262.

⁷⁰ Kivy (2009): 42. See also his earlier (1993) claim: "insofar as [music] is *expressive* [it is] an agreeable rather than a fine art" (259).

⁷¹ KU 5:324, 299. This also conflicts with his claims that music expresses aesthetic ideas and that "Beauty... can in general be called the **expression** of aesthetic ideas" (KU 5:320).

⁷² KU 5:322

⁷³ Reed, Arden. "The Debt of Disinterest: Kant's Critique of Music." *MLN*, Vol. 95, No. 3 (April 1980): 563-584, 569. Parret (1998): 254 makes the same claim about music's undecidability.

⁷⁴ Kivy (1993): 258. See also Weatherston, Martin. "Kant's Assessment of Music in the *Critique of Judgment*." *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (1996): 56-65, 60; Ginsborg (2011): 336-7

⁷⁵ For an alternative analysis of Kant's low ranking of music, see Parret (1998). As will become apparent, I disagree with Parret's claim that the tension is generated by Kant's official doctrine of musical as beautiful and unofficial doctrine of music as cathartic.

⁷⁶ KU 5:329

⁷⁷ "The pictorial arts... conduct a business by bringing about a product that serves the concepts of the understanding as an enduring and self-recommending vehicle for its unification with sensibility and thus as it were for promoting the urbanity of the higher powers of cognition" (KU 5:329).

⁷⁸ KU 5:238

⁷⁹ Kant claims that "[music involves] only a **transitory** [impression]" and that these impressions tend to be "either entirely extinguished, or if they are involuntarily recalled by the imagination, are burdensome rather than agreeable to us" (KU 5:330).

⁸⁰ KU 5:239

⁸¹ He also criticizes music for a lack of 'urbanity' because it can impose itself on people who do not want to listen to it (KU 5:330). Apparently, Kant found it difficult to work when people in a nearby prison would sing spirituals (KU 5:330fn).

⁸² KU 5:329

⁸³ Although in the original this section is not labeled §54, it is preceded by §53 and followed by §55. As such, I will follow the practice of referring to the Remark as §54.

⁸⁴ Kivy (1993): 260. See also Reed (1980): 570; Kivy (1993): 258-60, 262-3; Weatherston (1996): 63; Ginsborg (2011): 336-7

⁸⁵ KU 5:331

⁸⁶ KU 5:331, 332

⁸⁷ "In the joke... since the understanding, in this presentation in which it does not find what was expected, suddenly relaxes, one feels the effect of this relaxation in the body through the oscillation of the organs,, which promotes the restoration of their balance and has a beneficial influence on health" (KU 5:332).

⁸⁸ KU 5:332

⁸⁹ KU 5:332

⁹⁰ Kivy (1993): 259. Parret (1998), by contrast, praises this feature of Kant's account, heralding it as Kant's "repressed official doctrine" (256, 259).

⁹¹ KU 5:325

⁹² For an argument along these lines, see Daniel Webb's *Observations on the Correspondence Between Poetry and Music* (New York: Garland Publishing (1970). Originally published 1769, translated into German in 1771). Webb argues that it is only a succession of sounds, not a single sound, that can influence how we feel: "No sound, therefore, can act as a single impression, since we cannot have a feeling of it but in consequence of a succession of impressions" (3). For this reason, Webb emphasizes the role of movement in music. For a discussion of Webb, Lippman, Edward. *A History of Western Musical Aesthetics*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press (1992): 103-4 and Bicknell, Jeanette (2011): 273-283, 278-9.

⁹³ KU 5:325

⁹⁴ KU 5:330

⁹⁵ KU 5:305

⁹⁶ KU 5:325. At KU 5:224 Kant suggests that if we apply Euler's theory of colors as vibrations of the air to sound, we find that "tones are vibrations of the air disturbed by sound."

⁹⁷ KU 5:325. According to Kant, the "rapidity of the vibrations... of the air... probably far exceeds all our capacity for judging immediately in perception the proportion of the division of time... by means of them" (KU 5:324-5).

⁹⁸ As he puts it, we could consider "what can be said mathematically about the proportion of the oscillations in music" (KU 5:325).

⁹⁹ KU 5:224, my emphasis. There is some debate about how to translate this passage, for he includes a parenthetical remark at the end qualifying the claim we can perceive the form in the combination of different representations. In the first and second editions, the text reads, "I very much doubt" (this claim about form) and in the third edition, it reads "about which I have very little doubt." Kivy (2009) has argued that we should accept the first and second editions as the canonical text because he reads the 'form' at stake here to be the form of the vibrations in the air, which it seems we most likely cannot perceive (45-6). I, however, take the form to be at stake in this passage to be the mathematical form of the musical piece, which as our discussion of §53 revealed, is something we are sensitive to in our judgments of

beauty in music. Weatherston (1997), for one, has denied that Kant thinks we can grasp mathematical form. However, on my reading, it is the form of vibrations in the air that we cannot grasp, not the mathematical form of the piece, even if we cannot fully articulate it to ourselves (KU 5:329).

¹⁰⁰ KU 5:224, my emphasis

¹⁰¹ KU 5:293-3. In this passage, Kant is discussing the ‘*sensus communis*’, which I cannot pursue further here.

¹⁰² Allison (2001): 178.

¹⁰³ GW 4:407

¹⁰⁴ KU 5:328

¹⁰⁵ KU 5:219

¹⁰⁶ KU 5:211: “§6. The beautiful is that which, without concepts, is represented as the object of a *universal* satisfaction.” As Kant makes this point in §16, “In the judging of a free beauty (according to mere form) the judgment of taste is pure. No concept of any end for which the manifold should serve the given object and thus which the latter should represent is presupposed, by which the imagination, which is as it were at play in the observation of the shape, would merely be restricted” (KU 5:229-230).

¹⁰⁷ See, e.g., Ridley, Aaron. *Music, Value and the Passions*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press (1995); Matravers, Derek. *Art and Emotion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press (1998); Robinson, Jenefer. *Deeper than Reason: Emotions and its Role in Literature, Music, and Art*. Oxford: Clarendon Press (2005); Nussbaum, Martha. *The Musical Representation: Meaning, Ontology, and Emotion*. Cambridge: MIT Press (2007).

¹⁰⁸ Dahlhaus (1953): 346; Kivy (1993), (2009); Fricke (2010): 38; Schueller (1955): 233

¹⁰⁹ Kivy (1993): 257. See also (1993): 252-3 and (2009): 37.

¹¹⁰ See Collingwood, R.G. *The Principles of Art*. Oxford: Clarendon Press (1963); Levinson, Jerrold. “Musical Expressiveness” in *The Pleasures of Aesthetics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press (1996): 90-125 and “Musical Expressiveness as Hearability-as-expression” in *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*. Ed. Matthew Kieran. Oxford: Blackwell Press (2006): 192-204; Robinson, Jenefer. “Can Music Function as a Metaphor of Emotional Life?” in *Philosophers on Music: Experience, Meaning, and Work*. Ed. Kathleen Stock. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2007): 149-77 and “Expression Theories” in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*. Eds. Theodore Gracyk and Andrew Kania (2011): 201-211.

¹¹¹ KU 5:239

¹¹² Also called the ‘contour’ and ‘appearance’ theory. See Davies (1994), (2003), and “Artistic Expression and the Hard Case of Pure Music” in *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*. Ed. Matthew Kieran. Oxford: Blackwell Press (2006): 179-91. See also Kivy (1989), although he has subsequently eschewed this view (*Introduction to a Philosophy of Music*. New York: Clarendon (2002)). For criticism of this view, see Scruton, Roger. *The Aesthetics of Music*. Oxford: Clarendon Press (1997): 146-8.

¹¹³ For these theorists, it is important to draw a distinction between something *expressing* an emotion and something being *expressive of* an emotion. Whereas a persona-projection theorist assumes music can express an emotion only if there is some persona who is expressing it, resemblance theorists argue that it is possible for something to be *expressive of* an emotion, even if there is no one who is actually doing the expression (See, e.g., Kivy (1989): Chapter II). Just as we can see a ‘weeping willow’ without taking the willow to actually be said, so too can we hear a piece of music to be sad without presupposing there is someone who is expressing that sadness.

¹¹⁴ See, e.g., Davies (1994), Kivy (1989)

¹¹⁵ This is a core thesis of the *Affektenlehre*.

¹¹⁶ KU 5:315, 316. While in these passages, Kant claims that aesthetic ideas contribute to an enlargement of the concept at stake, he is using the term ‘concept’ in a broad sense to refer not to a representation of the understanding, but to the ‘end’ the artist wants to bring about through the piece: “as a talent for art, [genius] presupposes a determinate concept of the product, as an end” (KU 5:317).

¹¹⁷ Proust, Marcel. *Swann’s Way*. Transl. Lydia Davis. New York: Penguin Books (2002): 362-3. I would like to thank Karl Ameriks, John A. Fisher, Pierre Keller, Lara Ostaric, Peter Thielke, Joseph Tinguely, Clinton Tolley, Reed Winegar, Melissa Zinkin, and two anonymous referees for helpful feedback on this paper.