17 Musical aesthetics of the *Siècle des Lumières*

GEORGIA COWART

Introduction

The term 'aesthetics' was derived from the Greek *aesthetikos*, sensation or perception through the senses. It entered the sphere of philosophical enquiry with Alexander Baumgarten's treatise *Aesthetica* (1750), which defined the term as the ability to perceive and judge beauty by means of the senses, rather than through the intellect or reason. This formulation, unthinkable a century earlier, owed its existence to a series of eighteenth-century French debates over reason, the senses, taste and authority. These were connected to changing epistemologies, most notably the challenge of empirical experience, growing out of Newtonian science, to René Descartes's notion of *a priori* reason. The Enlightenment enterprise is characterised by attempts to reconcile reason and the senses, to balance the tensions between them and to find a synthesis that could encompass both. During this period a multifaceted, overarching dialectic between rationalist and empiricist thought embraced a series of subsidiary *querelles*, including debates over imitation versus expression, ancient authority versus modern, and universal versus individual taste. All of these held profound importance for the field of music, which was simultaneously being rocked by its own internal conflicts. Over the course of the century, writers argued the relative merits of ancient versus modern music, tragedy versus opera, French versus Italian music, melody versus harmony, and the music of Lully versus Rameau, Pergolesi versus Rameau, and Gluck versus Piccinni. The body of musical thought resulting from these debates constitutes one of the most impressive accomplishments of the *Siècle des Lumières*, and indeed of any historical period.

In the eighteenth century, French writers began to explain the aesthetic response to music in subjective terms that could account for discrepancies in individual taste. An intensely subjective musical style had emerged in the madrigal, monody and opera in the early seventeenth century, and moving the passions or affections constituted a primary aim of music in early opera. Theorists, however, viewed the compositional process primarily as a rational endeavour, based on the rules of composition and

The conception of this chapter owes a debt to Jacqueline Waeber, whose scholarship on Rousseau and on melodrama is cited below.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9780511843242.022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

principles of rhetoric, by means of which a composer or musical performer could manipulate the emotions of an audience.[1] Around the turn of the century writers began to account for the effects of music in more subjective terms that allowed for an interior, personal and individualised response. There is some truth to the over-generalisation that musical aesthetics moved from the Aristotelian and Cartesian reason of the seventeenth century to an intense, emotional subjectivity bordering on the Romantic with Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78). More valid, however, is an assessment of eighteenth-century musical aesthetics as a series of attempts to balance reason and sense (in its two meanings as physical sensation and later subjective emotion or sensibility).

Music, reason and the senses

The conservatives in the quarrels over sense and reason turned to two principal authorities: Aristotle and Descartes. According to Aristotle, art and music represented a direct imitation of nature, specifically human nature. A central tenet of Aristotelian thought, seized upon by advocates of rationalism, was *ratio*, the innate ability of human beings to reason. Another was *katharsis*, the purging of emotions by the direct experience of those emotions, mainly pity and fear, through tragedy. These, along with Aristotle's treatise on rhetoric, brought a new dimension to the performing arts: the possibility of catharsis through a direct imitation (*mimesis*) of the emotions through speech, or through the sung speech of vocal music. In seventeenth-century France, the Aristotelian doctrines of *mimesis* and *ratio* took root and thrived in the local soil of Cartesian rationalism. Descartes's *Discours de la méthode*, based on an epistemology of innate ideas and *a priori* knowledge, provided a method of deductive reasoning by which one could arrive, through the act of thinking, at clear and self-evident truths. His widely influential *Traité des passions de l'âme* provided a rational, physiological and descriptive basis for understanding and portraying the passions or affections. Descartes's distrust of the senses caused him to dismiss the idea of beauty, musical or otherwise, from his philosophical system. Following Descartes, seventeenth-century thinkers criticised music for addressing only the physical sense of hearing, and consequently for failing to create a profound experience in the listener.[2]

Musical quarrels over sense and reason reach back to ancient times, when the followers of Pythagoras and Aristoxenus vehemently debated whether mathematics or the ear was the ultimate determinant of musical temperament. Through the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the ear tended to be generally distrusted in favour of the mind. This distrust was

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9780511843242.022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

reinforced by seventeenth-century rationalism. Beginning in the eighteenth century, however, French writers began to look to England, where John Locke and Thomas Hobbes had developed epistemologies based on perception. According to these writers, the mind can know only what it perceives through the senses. In France, this belief found expression in theories of *sentiment* or impression of the senses. Throughout the eighteenth century, French writers used various means of incorporating *sentiment* into a rational, imitation-based model.

Modern aesthetic theory arose out of the disputes over taste in the early eighteenth century. According to the rationalists, taste was the result of universal reason, which would remain forever codified by the rules of the ancients. (Since ancient music was unknown, the 'ancient' music of Jean-Baptiste Lully often served as an equivalent standard.) To advocates of the senses, it was a more relative phenomenon that depended on sensory impressions (*sentiments*) unique to each individual. In reality, most writers based their theories on varying permutations of these two positions. The association of taste and *sentiment* can be traced back to Antoine Gombaud, chevalier de Méré (1607–84), who defined *bon goût* (good taste) as 'judging well all that presents itself, by some *sentiment* that acts more quickly and sometimes more directly than reflection'.[3] A few years later Pierre Nicole opposed this taste to knowledge of the rules: 'This idea and strong impression, which is called *sentiment* or *goût*, is completely different from all the rules in the world.'[4]

Like so many of the contributions to an emerging aesthetics of music, the first systematic discussion of the 'beauties' of music was provoked by a musical *querelle*. It began with François Raguenet's *Paralèle des italiens et des françois, en ce qui regarde la musique et les opéras* (1702), an encomium of the merits of contemporary Italian opera in comparison to the French. The champion who rose to defend French music (primarily the *tragédie en musique* of Lully and his followers), Le Cerf de la Viéville, was, like Raguenet, a musical amateur. His *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique françoise* (1704–6), however, adumbrated the aesthetic issues that would be debated over the course of the century and, in its comparative analysis, laid the basis for the beginnings of modern musical criticism. Le Cerf admits an element of sense into his rationalistic doctrine when he calls good taste 'the most natural *sentiment*, corrected or confirmed by the best rules'.[5] Following contemporary theorists of literature and the theatre, he bases his argument on the Aristotelian ideal of the imitation of nature. He insists that such imitation, the ultimate goal of all the arts, is achieved through a proper combination of word and tone, and a strict adherence to the rules of clarity, simplicity and expressiveness. In its conformity or lack of conformity to these standards, music, like literature,

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9780511843242.022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

can be judged by the mind. But music must also be judged through the exercise of an inner aesthetic faculty based on the senses and feelings. This *sentiment intérieur*, as Le Cerf calls it (probably following Méré, whom he admired), can be determined by the simple process of asking if an air has flattered one's ear or moved one's heart. Finally, since for Le Cerf the heart can be moved only by the intellectual content of an affectively set text, the feelings of *sentiment* end by being circumscribed by the rules of reason.[6]

Jean-Pierre de Crousaz (1663–1750), a Swiss philosopher whose *Traité du beau* appeared in Amsterdam in 1715, is known for applying Cartesian principles and scientific tools (drawn chiefly from physics and geometry) to the apprehension of beauty. Qualities stemming from geometry ('beauties of ideas'), such as unity, variety, order, proportion and regularity, are universally perceived and admired. But this universal judgement is complemented by a relative judgement more dependent on the physical senses and feelings ('beauties of *sentiment*') that vary according to the individual's capacity. For Crousaz, the highest form of aesthetic judgement (*bon goût*) depends on an equal partnership of reason and *sentiment*. Although he assigns priority to reason, Crousaz also emphasises the relativity of musical beauty, attributing it to the differences in humours among human beings and the differences in the ways musical sounds interact with the physical senses.[7]

The *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* of Jean-Baptiste (abbé) Dubos (Paris, 1719) gives an unprecedented place to theories of *sentiment* within an Aristotelian doctrine of imitation. Dubos sees *sentiment* as an immediate sense perception akin to seeing or tasting, and assigns it a status more important than reason in the judgement of a work of art: '*Sentiment* is a far better guide to whether a work touches us, and makes the impression it is supposed to make, than all the dissertations composed by critics to explain its merits and calculate its perfections and faults.'[8] Reason should intervene in the general judgement we make of a poem or a painting only to support a decision of *sentiment*, and to explain which faults prevent it from pleasing, and which are the pleasing aspects that make it attractive. For Dubos, *sentiment* refers not only to the five senses, but also to a 'sixth sense' located in the heart, an internal faculty that perceives beauty through the external senses. This sense acts immediately, unlike the intellect, which can only confirm its judgement.

Dubos discusses music and the other arts only after treating a more general philosophy of the beautiful, and these sections represent more conventional Aristotelian mimetic theories. The goal of art, according to Dubos, is to produce pleasure by imitating objects that arouse our passions. For music, the imitative principle must be focused on the imitations of feelings. He agrees with earlier rationalists that music set to a text is

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9780511843242.022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

preferable to instrumental music, and he deplores music whose interest depends on richness of harmony, which he compares with mere colour in painting or rhyme in poetry. Nonetheless, in his theory of musical signs, Dubos introduces an opening for the eventual elevation of music as an art of feeling. As the painter imitates the forms and colours of nature, he writes, the musician imitates the tones of the voice – its accents, sighs and inflections. Dubos distinguishes these musical 'signs' of the passions (*signes naturels*), which relate directly to nature, from spoken words (*signes de convention*), which constitute more arbitrary 'symbols' of the passions. Dubos's theory of musical signs was developed by later writers, most notably Rousseau.[9]

One of the most wide-ranging and intellectually rigorous treatments of the concept of beauty, Yves-Marie (*père*) André's *Essai sur le beau* (1741), grew out of the second great musical *querelle* of the century, between the conservative followers of Lully and the progressive followers of Rameau. The quarrel erupted after the premiere of Rameau's first opera, *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733), which the *Lullistes* accused of being confusing, devoid of melody and generally 'painful'. The dismay caused by this new style also occasioned the first musical application of the term 'baroque', a word occasionally used before this time to mean 'bizarre'.[10] It was amid this controversy that treatises on good taste and beauty began to proliferate, and the aesthetic implications of the quarrels over the new music and the old began to find clarification. Of all the eighteenth-century theorists, André displays the most thorough grasp of the aesthetic problem of reason versus the senses. Beginning with the theories of Pythagoras and Aristoxenus, he finds the most successful synthesis in the *tragédie en musique* of Lully. Like other conservative writers dating back to Le Cerf, André admires the domination of the text and therefore of rational meaning in Lully's music. He speaks out against the empiricists, for whom *sentiment* is the only judge of harmony, the ear the only judge of beauty, and for whom no universal rules of art exist. André, while acknowledging sensual pleasure and the validity of individual taste and national styles, insists that universal reason should guide the apprehension of true artistic beauty.[11]

The most influential theorist at mid-century, Charles Batteux (1713–80), also maintains a rationalist foundation. In *Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe* (1746), he argues for the imitation of nature and adherence to the rules of art. Like the other theorists discussed here, however, he makes room within his conservative system for a theory of *sentiment*, which he equates with sensory perception. Music, through its imitation of passionate vocal inflection, surpasses mere words in its ability to speak directly through *le sentiment* to the heart. What Dubos calls the 'sixth sense' Batteux calls taste – the ability to sense (*sentir*) the good, bad and mediocre in art. Batteux

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9780511843242.022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

posits good taste as rational and universal. It is to the arts what intelligence is to the sciences: a means of discerning the good and the beautiful, as in science intelligence is a means of discerning the true. This *bon goût* regulates all the arts through its immutable laws, the first of which is the imitation of *la belle nature*. Finally, though, even Batteux (perhaps the most conservative of these writers) finds a place within his hierarchy for the concept of individual tastes, which he calls *goûts en particulières*. Tastes can be different, then, while still true to nature and thus good. The richness of nature and the infinite possibilities of using its materials are compared to the many different perspectives from which an artist may depict his model; each aspect will be different, and yet the model remains the same.

Gradually the term *sentiment* began to take on connotations of feeling, in the beginning only as it resulted from sensory impression and strong opinion. By degrees an emotional element made its way into the standard dictionaries. By the mid-eighteenth century the term was being applied to the more gentle emotions, such as love and esteem, and often figured in such phrases as *sentiments tendres* and *sentiments délicats*. Early eighteenth-century writers refer to music as expressing *les sentiments et les passions*; here *sentiments* refers to 'feelings' as opposed to strong emotions. Dubos, for example, uses the term in a dual manner: in the singular, it refers to the internal sense that apprehends artistic beauty; in the plural, it refers to the feelings in nature that music is supposed to imitate (*l'imitation des sentiments*). As *sentiment* continued to take on more emotional meaning, its sister-term *sensibilité* was becoming the focus of expanded meaning and a new vogue in French *moeurs*. Originally, while *sentiment* had signified sensory perception, *sensibilité* had signified the capacity of animals (in contrast to plants) to have this ability. Gradually it acquired the meaning of 'disposed toward the sentiments of tenderness and love'.[12] This term's vogue reached its height with the novels of Madame de Tencin, Nivelle de la Chaussée and Rousseau. Rousseau's novel *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) created a fashion for *sensibilité* that – corresponding to the sentimental novel in England and the *empfindsamer Stil* in Germany – dominated much late eighteenth-century literature. Not surprisingly, *sensibilité* would constitute a cornerstone of Rousseau's musical aesthetics. By the end of the century, the terms *sentiment* and *sensibilité* were used interchangeably, but their meanings vary according to context. In the field of music few writers went as far as Rousseau in the direction of a proto-Romantic association with pure feeling.

In the continuing dialectic between reason and the senses, writers in the second half of the eighteenth century remained as diverse in their approach as in the first. Significantly, a few theorists began to turn from a

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9780511843242.022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

rationalistic approach altogether. Some fell under the influence of Étienne Bonnot (abbé) de Condillac (1715–80), a follower of Locke, and the more radical acceptance of sense perception found in his *Traité des sensations* (1754). One of these was an author named Boyé, who wrote a treatise entitled *L'expression musicale, mise au rang des chimères* (1779). Dispensing with the doctrine of imitation altogether, Boyé advocates instead the physical beauty of music and harmony.

The binary opposition of reason and senses, an artificial construction at best, was complicated by a wide range of issues, especially as the century progressed. For one thing, the idea of a rationalist aesthetic or even a wholly rationalist philosophy had always been something of a contradiction in terms; as Thomas Christensen has pointed out, all rationalist theories must eventually intersect with empirical evidence. At mid-century, some thinkers began to foreground these kinds of intersections. As Christensen puts it, it was easy to reconcile Descartes's mechanistic metaphysics with newer theories of sensation 'simply by stripping away the former of innate ideas and God'.[13] At the same time, the vehemently anti-rationalist Rousseau, radically progressive in his rejection of French music and in his advocacy of a feelings-based subjectivity, could still clothe his theory in the tenets of Aristotelian mimesis. Likewise, certain medical writers, addressing the role of music in healing, combined mimetic theory with ideas of sympathy and sensibility.[14] These developments reflect both the ferment of the period and an increasing sophistication in the handling of aesthetic complexity. They also reflect the Enlightenment propensity for the forging of intellectual synthesis in the fire of polemical debate.

The incorporation of the senses into doctrines of reason meant that the individual as a sensing being could now make decisions on the basis of inner feelings rather than outward authority, be it church, state or academy. It also meant that music, whose primary function was formerly seen as moving the emotions according to the principles of rhetoric and oratory, was now viewed as a means of personal pleasure, and of understanding humanity and the self.[15] The move away from intellectual models and a growing acceptance of a subjective approach to music, however, were balanced by a widespread belief in the universality of the musical experience. This balance, manifested in a variety of ways, distinguished the musical thought of the Enlightenment from that of the later Romantic era.

The *philosophes* and Rameau

Most of the major contributors to French musical thought during the late eighteenth century were self-styled *philosophes* – public intellectuals (not

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9780511843242.022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

necessarily philosophers) who addressed a wide variety of topics with the mission of disseminating knowledge while critiquing and correcting error. Many also contributed to the vast Enlightenment project known as the *Encyclopédie*. Though the *philosophes* rarely saw eye to eye, they shared a common critical outlook and search for underlying principles, and these principles served as the basis for their writings on music. In 1748 the chief editor of the *Encyclopédie*, Denis Diderot, commissioned Rousseau to write the articles on music, which Rousseau completed over the space of only a few months in 1749. He later collected these in his *Dictionnaire de musique* (1768). The expanded *Dictionnaire* summarised a philosophy arising not only from Rousseau's contributions to the *Encyclopédie*, but also from a new series of fiery debates on the relative merits of French and Italian music and on the nature of musical expression. These had begun as part of the *Querelle des Bouffons* (1752–4), the third great musical *querelle* of the century, which had been provoked by the performance of several *intermezzi comici*, including Giovanni Battista Pergolesi's *La serva padrona*, by a comic Italian troupe (the Bouffons) from August 1752. The *Querelle* became a vehement debate over the relative merits of modern Italian opera versus the operas of Rameau, which the progressivists now considered outdated. As in the earlier *querelles*, new ways of thinking about music arose out of the polemics of the debate.[16]

Rousseau had himself composed an opera, *Le devin du village*, which intended, in its recitative at least, to emulate the Italian style.[17] It was enthusiastically received in 1752. It is not surprising, then, that Rousseau entered the fray as spokesman for Italian music. His *Lettre sur la musique française* (1753), peremptory in its dismissal of French music, nonetheless brought a philosophical spirit to the quarrel, and a new perspective, largely linguistic-based, to earlier discussions of the nature and meaning of music. In it Rousseau sets out his theory of the primacy of language and melody, according to which the viability of a national musical style (both vocal and instrumental) is ultimately derived from the innate musicality of the language that informs it. According to Rousseau, musicality and rationality are mutually exclusive, and nations with languages that had developed as a means of rational discourse, such as France, cannot hope to have a national music. As proof of his theory, he analyses Lully's famous monologue from *Armide*, showing how the defects of the French language result in the impossibility of a successful musical setting. The ideas set forth in the *Lettre* were considerably influenced by Rousseau's theories on the origins of language, which he was developing at this time; these would be published in his *Essai sur l'origine des langues* (1781). Already in the *Lettre*, however, Rousseau proclaimed his central theory of 'unity of melody' (*unité de mélodie*), which denounced counterpoint in favour of a single melodic

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9780511843242.022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

line. (As Jacqueline Waeber has shown, Rousseau's abhorrence of musical complexity may have arisen as the result of a hearing defect.[18])

Rousseau's *Lettre* was answered by Rameau himself, whose *Observations sur notre instinct pour la musique et sur son principe* (1754) offered a bar-by-bar defence of Lully's recitative and the French style. Rameau also used this opportunity to summarise essential elements of his musical philosophy. In contrast to Rousseau, who based his aesthetics on melody and language, Rameau bases his own system on the foundation of harmony and the *corps sonore*, the overtone series whose discovery had been announced by Joseph Sauveur in 1701. By the time of the *Observations*, Rameau had become a firm adherent of sensation in music, an epistemology grounded in and dependent on the natural phenomenon of the *corps sonore*. At the same time, he continued to frame these beliefs with a Cartesian adherence to universal formal principles, deductive reasoning and self-evident mathematical truths.[19]

In 1755, Rameau once again attacked Rousseau, especially his advocacy of melodic unity, in his *Erreurs sur la musique dans l'Encyclopédie*. In this exchange as in their later writings, both Rameau and Rousseau reveal a mixture of progressive and traditional views. Despite the vehemence of their debate, both adhere to the belief in the imitation and expression of the passions. Rousseau, however, dismisses Rameau's extreme view of music as physical sensation and with it the primacy of harmony and instrumental music. Instead, he roots his theory of music (like his views on language and society more generally) in the equally radical ground of feeling (*sensibilité*). In Rameau's debate with Rousseau, we see a growing divide between the advocates of *sentiment* as physical sensation and those of *sensibilité* as feeling, and a nascent split between the advocates of music as a formalist discipline rooted in mathematics and science, and as a humanistic discipline rooted in language.

With the notable exception of Rousseau, many of the *philosophes* were strongly attracted to, and influenced by, Newtonian experimental science. Its tenets of scientific observation and empirical evidence tended to further weaken the hold of rationalistic epistemologies, or, as in the case of Rameau, to coexist with them. Jean le Rond d'Alembert (1717–83), co-editor of the *Encyclopédie*, vociferously championed Newton and denounced Descartes in the 'Discours préliminaire' to the first volume of the *Encyclopédie* (1751). D'Alembert is also known for popularising Rameau's theories and for his conciliatory role in the quarrels over French and Italian music. His *De la liberté de la musique* (1759), written at some years' remove from the heat of the *Querelle des Bouffons*, advised composers to take what was best from both the French and Italian styles.[20]

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9780511843242.022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Denis Diderot (1713–84), like d'Alembert, sought to mediate and synthesise opposing views, though his sympathies, like those of the other *philosophes*, lay with Italian music. His early writings, such as the *Mémoires* and the article 'Beau' in the *Encyclopédie*, embraced the theories of Rameau and, like the writings of Rameau, rested on a rationalist foundation of proportional relationships. Unlike the composer, however, who believed that harmonic proportions grounded in nature assured a uniform, universal response, Diderot admitted differences based on the sensory perception of the individual. Over time Diderot grew disenchanted with Rameau, whose advocacy of the *corps sonore* had begun to verge on metaphysical obsession. In the late 1750s, the period of Diderot's sentimental plays *Le fils naturel* and *Le père de famille*, he turned from the abstraction of mathematical proportions to an emotional sensibility approaching Rousseau's. *Le neveu de Rameau*, a satire dating probably from 1761 or 1762, critiques Rameau through the caricature of Rameau's actual nephew, a musician living in Paris. A multivalent and complex work, it has received widely varying interpretations. Cynthia Verba, following Otis Fellows, makes a convincing case that the novel represents an intermediary phase in Diderot's transition from a position of *sensibilité* to one of reflection, restraint and conscious artistic control.[21] The 'Moi' of Diderot's narrative represents the latter position, while the Nephew ('Lui') represents creative furore taken to the point of madness. Yet the ravings of Lui, an early portrait of the modern 'genius', are not devoid of validity. The exchange between Lui and Moi may ultimately be seen as the tension between subjectivity and objectivity in the aesthetic experience, a dialectic representing the extremes that Diderot, like other Enlightenment philosophers, sought to recognise if not to reconcile.

Staging the arts of a new era

An important result of the eighteenth-century *querelles* was the emergence of a respect for the arts as the beacon and embodiment of a new society based on the Enlightenment ideals of love, peace and sensuous (and sensual) beauty. This assessment of the arts directly opposed the old Horatian doctrine of 'Ut pictura (musica) poesis', a corollary to the theory of Aristotelian mimesis, which had seen all the arts as different forms of imitation adhering to the same rules as poetry. It was natural for writers to assign mimetic values to the fine arts, for the stories, histories and allegories signified in painting could easily be 'read'. But the Aristotelian theory that art imitates nature (more specifically, human emotions) was more difficult to apply to music because of the elusive nature of musical

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9780511843242.022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

meaning. In the seventeenth century, the art of music had suffered in comparison to literary genres; if opera was found lacking, instrumental music tended to be dismissed or ignored. Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle's frequently quoted *bon mot*, 'Sonate, que me veux-tu?', summarised the conservative view of instrumental music predominating until at least 1750. This view was increasingly challenged in the later part of the century. A growing emphasis on the senses, without the need for recourse to a verbal text, encouraged an unprecedented rise in prestige for music in general, and for instrumental music in particular. In 1765 François-Jean Chastellux claimed that the 'inarticulate' sound of instrumental music, instead of weakening its effect, actually made it the preferred language of the passions. Michel-Paul Guy de Chabanon's *Observations sur la musique* (1779) uses instrumental music – along with the non-verbal response of animals, babies and savages – as the basis of his attack on reason and imitation. Like Boyé, Chabanon insists that music pleases independently of imitation, and acts immediately on the feelings. Robert Neubauer discusses these developments as an 'emancipation' of music from language, though as Downing A. Thomas points out the term may be a misnomer, since this development can more appropriately be viewed as a synthesis in which music is regarded as an equal partner.

Since sensuous beauty was a quality more associated with women than with men, the verbal or intellectual content (in semiotic terms, the signified) of a musical work tended to be seen as masculine, its physical quality (the signifier) as feminine. An increasing emphasis on the artistic signifier alarmed those who privileged the mind over the ear. Both painters and musicians were warned against the 'seductive' charms of colour and musical sound, just as a young man would be warned against the charms of prostitutes. In music and literature, these charms were associated with Italy. Le Cerf characterises French music as an innocent virgin, Italian music as a brash hussy. Such language would intensify throughout the century. One writer calls Italian music a coquette who only knows three or four words, which she repeats 'mincingly'.[22] Another compares Boccherini's sonatas for keyboard and violin, Op. 5, to a woman who, instead of maintaining a consistent affection, 'demands and uses sweetness and reproach one after another'.[23] The language of Boyé in his *L'expression musicale mise au rang des chimères*, an all-out defence of musical sensation, becomes positively orgasmic:

> How old are you, Messieurs, to look upon physical pleasures with disdain? Have you always thought like that? If you had consulted pretty women and even ugly ones, surely you would have cancelled these words [that the art of sonority should be considered only from the point of view of physics]. For

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9780511843242.022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> myself, when certain musical effects spread to all parts of my being, this voluptuous shudder that we vulgarly call goose bumps, I prefer this precious thrill to all the tempests of cool observers.[24]

In the *ancien régime*, women led a movement away from the expert and towards the amateur, and away from the intellect and towards the more delicate feelings and sensations. Trained in the less intellectual atmosphere of the salon rather than in the humanistic disciplines of the schools and academies, they were more apt to appreciate the sensuous qualities of colour and sound than intellectual content. As a strict, humanistic university training gave way to a less rigidly educated class of scholars in the eighteenth century, a common body of knowledge began to break down. The separation and rise of the artistic signifier, that is, the appreciation of music *qua* music and painting *qua* painting, parallels this disintegration of humanistic knowledge. It also seems to parallel a disintegration of political authority, for when there is a political message to be conveyed, whether within the institution of church or state, a high level of verbal or intellectual content is demanded. Louis XIV, like the Catholic church, expected from his court painters and musicians a discursive art that would propagandise the historical and allegorical symbols of his authority. In the eighteenth century, artists such as Couperin and Watteau, and later Rameau and Boucher, did not work under such rigid political constraints, and their art reflects a move away from the intellectual 'message' of music to its sensuous surface.[25]

A feminine salon culture had a direct impact on eighteenth-century aesthetics through a cult of love dating back to the salons of Catherine de Vivonne, marquise de Rambouillet, and Madeleine de Scudéry. A fascination with 'the little things', including flirtatious games and conversation, and with utopian dreams of societies based on salon ideals, emerged as an alternative to the neoclassical ideals of tragic heroism and the arts of the absolutist state. The study of subtle emotional nuance likewise became an ideal allowing salon women an introspective understanding of the self, independent of the patriarchal domain of state and family. Concomitantly, the concept of *honnêteté*, given definition by the chevalier de Méré and other salon theorists, began to emphasise the pleasing rather than the edifying goals of musical rhetoric.[26] After Lully's death these ideals merged with the aims of a progressive group of artists at the Paris Opéra, including André Campra, Antoine Danchet, Antoine Houdar de La Motte and Michel de La Barre. The genre of the *opéra-ballet*, emerging around 1700, became a manifesto for love versus militarism, sense versus reason, and libertine pleasure versus stultified academicism. With the mythological figures of Venus, Cupid and Folly (la Folie, the female fool

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9780511843242.022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and goddess of comic madness) as its icons, this genre emphasised a spectacular element and the voluptuous pleasures of music and dance at the expense of complex plots and heroic posturing (see Chapter 4).[27]

Opposing the aesthetic and ideology of the *tragédie en musique* and court ballet, a series of *opéras-ballets* actually satirised a group of older court ballets with similar titles. For example, *Le triomphe des arts* (1700), by La Barre and La Motte, may be seen as a satire and ideological reversal of Louis XIV's court ballet *Le ballet des arts* of 1663 (music by Lully, *livret* by Isaac de Benserade), and a self-reflexive celebration of the progressive arts of the public sphere. The court ballet, an exhibition of the liberal arts in the service of Athena, goddess of war, had celebrated the arts in the service of Louis XIV as a symbol of the peace obtained through his military victories. *Le triomphe des arts* updates the symbolism of the court ballet by presenting the arts as leading the way to a new, peaceful society under the direct inspiration of Venus. In the prologue, the goddess of love challenges the monarchical figure Apollo by successfully dedicating a rival temple to Cupid, and in succeeding *entrées* she serves as patron to a series of artists who use their art to establish the values of love and beauty in the service of humanity. In the final entry, Venus effects the transformation of Pygmalion's statue into a living woman, symbolic of a new society based on love and sensual beauty rather than absolutist glory. The *livret* confirms that the living sculpture of Pygmalion's statue can be understood as the dance itself, literally bringing to life the utopian qualities suggested in the ballet. The final dialogue of the allegorical characters Music and Dance, complementing the succession of previous *entrées*, points to the larger genre of the *opéra-ballet* as the site of the confluence of the arts of love and peace.

Serving as the climax of *Le triomphe des arts*, Ovid's tale of Pygmalion later became the subject of a series of musical stage works representing successive eighteenth-century aesthetic theories.[28] As such they reflect the philosophical developments discussed above, including a preoccupation with the nature of the senses and subjectivity. In 1734, the dancer Marie Sallé danced her own choreography of this story (probably to music by Jean-Joseph Mouret), creating a prototype of the genre known as the *ballet d'action*. This genre dispensed with the stylised costumes, masks and wigs, along with the symmetrical dances of the earlier ballet. Sallé, creating a scandal of international proportions as the animated statue, was the first to trade the customary corseted costume for a flowing tunic and to incorporate pantomime, at that time known only in the popular context of the fairs and street theatre. At a climactic moment, the animation of the statue is followed by a series of dances by means of which the sculptor teaches her to dance. Like *Le triomphe des arts*, Sallé's

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9780511843242.022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Pygmalion represents a meta-celebration of dance and of the new genre it represents.[29]

If Sallé's *Pygmalion* represents the art of dance, Rameau's *Pygmalion* of 1748 claims superiority for music. Much of the *livret* of this work, by Ballot de Sovot, is drawn from *Le triomphe des arts*. As Leanne Dodge suggests, however, Rameau uses the work as a platform for his theory of music as the animating force behind all other forms of sensation and knowledge, and his advocacy for the supremacy of sound in sensory and intellectual development. Tellingly, the moment of the statue's animation is accompanied by the diegetic presence of the *corps sonore*, the fundamental generative force of Rameau's aesthetic theory, and it is the statue's sensibility to music that leads to her transformation as a fully human self. Dodge believes that Condillac's *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (1746), written just two years before, had a profound influence on Rameau's *Pygmalion*. Likewise, Condillac's famous use in his *Traité des sensations* (1754) of an awakening statue to illustrate the awakening senses may have been influenced in turn by Rameau's *acte de ballet*.[30]

Rousseau's *Pygmalion*, written in 1762 and first performed in 1770, was a staged (spoken) monologue interspersed with twenty-six musical passages, mostly by the composer Horace Coignet. It represented at once a demonstration of Rousseau's aesthetic theory and an introduction of a new genre, the melodrama. In *L'essai sur l'origine des langues* (1781), Rousseau elaborated on his theory of the anthropological origins of music, according to which music, language and gesture had originally been fused, allowing a full expression of the passions of the heart. With civilisation and the passage of time that fusion had been ruptured, and the communicative nature of music lost. Given the utter failure of French opera to communicate in the language of the passions, in *Pygmalion* Rousseau offered a recombination of music, language and gesture (pantomime) that could once again speak to the human heart. Like earlier settings of the Pygmalion story, Rousseau's *Pygmalion* represents a meta-celebration of a new musical genre, in this case the melodrama.[31]

More overtly than the other settings of the Pygmalion story, Rousseau's represents a meditation on the relationship between the artist and his work, and on the complicated play of consciousness and subjectivity that defines that relationship. Pygmalion and his sculpture share a common self: as Galathée awakens she points to herself while uttering, 'Moi', then to the sculptor while uttering, 'Encore moi'. The work ends with Pygmalion's declaration that he has given 'all of his being' to the statue and exists only through her. In the end, as Shierry Weber puts it, *Pygmalion* is about the nature of art as the product of the self. Despite Rousseau's lip service to imitation, then, in *Pygmalion* he replaces mimetic notions with an

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9780511843242.022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

exploration of the nature and role of subjectivity in the artistic process. It is, however, important not to oversimplify this interpretation: in Weber's analysis, the multiple subjectivities of sculptor and art work derive from Rousseau's notion of the reflective, discontinuous nature of the self.[32]

The Pygmalion story was presented as an allegory not only for different composers' and librettists' artistic theories, but also for the nascent field of aesthetics itself. It reflected a newly found interest in how art is created (the relationship of art and artist) and how art is perceived and received (the relationship of art and audience). Subjective and inter-subjective experience is central to both of these. Pygmalion, alone in his studio, uses his art to bring to life a part of himself, and then to witness the process and effect of that transformation. The statue also represents an audience, learning to appreciate the senses and the sensuous beauty of the arts. Pygmalion's statue, then, represents a new manner of creating and perceiving the arts, and each of these musical settings celebrates in its own way a form of art for a society learning to know itself in a new way.

Notes

1 On musical rhetoric in seventeenth-century France, see Jonathan Gibson, 'Le naturel et l'éloquence: the aesthetics of music and rhetoric in France, 1650–1715' (PhD thesis, Duke University, 2003); and Catherine Gordon-Seifert, *Music and the Language of Love: Seventeenth-Century French Airs* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 40–57, 138–84, 275–80.

2 Georgia Cowart, 'Introduction', in Georgia Cowart (ed.), *French Musical Thought* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989),1–2. On Descartes and his influence on early eighteenth-century theorists, see Charles Dill, 'Music, beauty, and the paradox of rationalism', in Cowart (ed.), *French Musical Thought*, 197–210. I am also grateful for excerpts and insights from Dill's book in progress, '*Entretiens musicals*: music and language in early modern France'.

3 Antoine Gombaud, chevalier de Méré, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Charles-H. Boudhors, 3 vols (Paris: Fernand Roches, 1930), vol. I, 55; Georgia Cowart, 'Sense and sensibility in eighteenth-century musical thought', *Acta musicologica*, 56 (1984), 252–3.

4 Pierre Nicole, preface to *Recueil de poésies chrétiennes et diverses* (1671), formerly attributed to Jean de La Fontaine. The passage quoted is from La Fontaine, *Oeuvres diverses*, ed. Pierre Clarac (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 782.

5 Jean-Laurent Le Cerf de la Viéville, *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique françoise*, 3 vols (1704–6; repr. Geneva: Minkoff, 1972), vol. II, 284.

6 On seventeenth- and eighteenth-century quarrels over French and Italian music in the context of aesthetics and criticism, see Georgia Cowart, *The Origins of Modern Musical Criticism: French and Italian Music, 1600–1750* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1981).

7 On Crousaz, see Dill, 'Music, beauty'.

8 Jean-Baptiste Dubos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (Paris: J. Mariette, 1719; 6th edn, 1755), vol. II, 340.

9 On Dubos, see Rosalie Sadowsky, 'Jean-Baptiste Abbé DuBos: the influence of Cartesian and neo-Aristotelian ideas on music theory and practice' (PhD thesis, Yale University, 1959).

10 See Claude V. Palisca, '"Baroque" as a music-critical term', in Cowart (ed.), *French Musical Thought*, 7–21; and Charles Dill, *Monstrous Opera: Rameau and the Tragic Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 1998).

11 Cowart, *The Origins of Modern Musical Criticism*, 99–100.

12 Arthur M. Wilson, 'Sensibility in France in the eighteenth century: a study in word history', *French Quarterly*, 13 (1931), 44.

13 Thomas Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 215.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9780511843242.022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

14 Downing A. Thomas, *Aesthetics of Opera in the Ancien Régime, 1647–1785* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 199–200.
15 The rhetorical principle faded slowly, and in the later eighteenth century was applied to instrumental music. See Elaine Rochelle Sisman, *Haydn and the Classical Variation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); and Mark Evan Bonds, *Wordless Rhetoric: Musical Form and the Metaphor of the Oration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).
16 On the *philosophes* and music, see Cynthia Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment: Reconstruction of a Dialogue, 1750–1764* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and Cowart, *The Origins of Modern Musical Criticism*, 87–113.
17 See Daniel Heartz, 'Italian by intention, French of necessity: Rousseau's *Le devin du village*', in Marie-Claire Mussat, Jean Mongrédien and Jean-Michel Nectoux (eds), *Échos de France et d'Italie: liber amicorum Yves Gérard* (Paris: Buchet Chastel, 1997), 31–46.
18 Jacqueline Waeber, 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "unité de mélodie"', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 62 (2009), 79–143.
19 On Rameau as a theorist and aesthetician, see Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought*.
20 Robert M. Isherwood, 'The conciliatory partisan of musical liberty: Jean le Rond d'Alembert, 1717–1783', in Cowart (ed.), *French Musical Thought*, 95–119.
21 Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment*, 91; see also John T. Hamilton, *Music, Madness, and the Unworking of Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 23–32.
22 C. R. Brijon, *Réflexions sur la musique et la vraie manière de l'exécuter sur le violon* (Paris: l'auteur, 1763), 5.
23 Claude Philibert Coquéau, *Entretiens sur l'état actuel de l'Opéra de Paris* (Paris: Chez Esprit, 1779), quoted in Hugo Goldschmidt, *Die Musikästhetik des 18. Jahrhunderts and ihre Beziehungen zu seinem Kunstschaffen* (Zurich, 1890, 1915; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968), 239–40. (Goldschmidt attributes this work to a pamphleteer named Ginguiné.)
24 Boyé, *L'expression musicale mise au rang des chimères* (Paris, 1779; facsimile Geneva: Minkoff, 1973), 26.
25 Georgia Cowart, 'Inventing the arts: changing critical language in the Ancien Régime', in Cowart (ed.), *French Musical Thought*, 228–9. On the disintegration of humanistic thought, see Antoine Adam, *Grandeur and Illusion: French Literature and Society, 1600–1715*, trans. Herbert Tint (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972), 142–8.
26 On the rhetoric and aesthetics of *honnêteté*, see Don Fader, 'The *honnête homme* as music critic: taste, rhetoric, and *politesse* in the 17th-century French reception of Italian music', *Journal of Musicology*, 20 (2003), 3–44.
27 Georgia Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure: Louis XIV and the Politics of Spectacle* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 161–252.
28 My discussion of settings of the Pygmalion story is indebted to conversations with Devin Burke, a PhD candidate at Case Western Reserve University, who is writing a dissertation on Pygmalion in the context of animated statues on the French musical stage, 1650–1770.
29 Susan Leigh Foster, 'Dancing the body politic: manner and mimesis in eighteenth-century ballet', in Sara E. Melzer and Kathryn Norberg (eds), *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 162–81.
30 Leanne Dodge, 'The sensible listener on stage: hearing the operas of Jean-Philippe Rameau through Enlightenment aesthetics' (PhD thesis, Yale University, 2011), 230–301. On Rameau's use of the *corps sonore* at the moment of transformation, see Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought*, 228–31.
31 On Rousseau and the melodrama, see Jacqueline Waeber, *En musique dans le texte: le melodrame, de Rousseau à Schoenberg* (Paris: Van Dieren, 2005), 17–50.
32 Shierry M. Weber, 'The aesthetics of Rousseau's *Pygmalion*', *Modern Language Notes*, 83 (1968), 900–18.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9780511843242.022 Published online by Cambridge University Press