

Kant's situated approach to musicking and joking

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Background in the history of musical aesthetics. Kant's denigration of music to the lowest form of art (alongside the art of telling jokes) was due to a transitory phase that musical aesthetics experienced around 1790: both philosophers and musicians recognized that there are no correspondences between types of musical passages and the emotions elicited by the listener (as the previously dominant doctrine of affects claimed). Rather, music brings about "an unspeakable wealth of thought" that had not yet been acknowledged as a proof of its superiority over other arts, as Romantic philosophers proclaimed soon after Kant's time.

Background in cognitive neuropsychology. No explicitly comparative research into humour *and* music appreciation exists (as opposed to humour *in* music). However, a juxtaposition of the findings of separate studies of those two domains reveal that the pleasure both humour and music cause is based on violations and confirmations of participants' expectations. It has been shown that dopaminergic release during humour and music appreciation has to do with the intrinsic reward of learning. In these studies, the mind is described as deeply embedded in the environment.

Aims. The aim of my study is to juxtapose Kant's controversial thoughts on the affinity between music and humour with the findings of recent studies in the same areas by cognitive neuroscientists.

Main contribution. The claim of my article is that the views on music and humour as set out by Kant and present-day researchers are mutually illuminating. For one thing, Kant's explicit association of musicking and joking prompts a comparison of recent studies in these disparate domains. Secondly, the juxtaposition stimulates a rethinking of the relations between the hedonistic and information-processing aspects in the appreciation of both music and humour. Kant believed that the feeling of refreshment and sensual pleasure brought about through music was related to the oscillation of inner organs, distinct from any mechanism of cognition. In the light of the current research findings, however, it has become clear that the degree to which individuals experience such visceral reaction is largely dependent on the mind's engagement in the task, in terms of predicting imminent and future outcomes. Present-day researchers hold that pleasure derived from both music and humour arises not only from prediction confirmations, but also from errors since these also contribute to the understanding of environment. This insight diverges from Kant's account, but at the same time helps resolve the discrepancy between his two incompatible viewpoints: "music as culture" (the appreciation of aesthetic forms) as opposed to "music as the free play of sensations" (sensual pleasure).

Implications. My study challenges the common view that the computational theory of mind and the 4E-framework (cognition as embodied, embedded, extended and enacted) are two comprehensive paradigms in music cognition that strictly oppose each other. In both Kant's account and current empirical research findings, seemingly disembodied mental representations and intra-cranial processes cause sensorimotor and visceral reactions.

Keywords: Kant's aesthetics of music, ecological approach to music cognition, French sensualism, incongruity theory of humour.

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In his *Critique of Judgement* (*Kritik der Urteilkraft*, first published in 1790), Immanuel Kant could not decide which aesthetic category music was supposed to belong in. In paragraph 53 he argues that the definition depends upon one's viewpoint: either "we must explain [music] as the beautiful play of sensations (of hearing), or else as a play of pleasant sensations. According to the former mode of explanation music is represented altogether as a beautiful art; according to the latter, as a pleasant art..." (Kant, 1914, p. 213). As he juxtaposes music with painting, he suggests that colours and pleasant tones exhibit charm (*Reiz*), but it is the composition in both arts that "constitute[s] the proper object of the pure judgement of taste" (Kant, 1914, pp. 75—76). In the philosopher's view, pure colours and tones "only deserve to be called pleasant" (p. 73); they "add to beauty ... because they make the form more ... intuible, and besides by their charm awaken and fix our attention on the object itself" (p. 76).

This remark may prompt the conclusion that Kant distinguishes between the material and the form of music, deeming the material of music to be pleasant, and the form of music to be beautiful. However, in paragraph 54 he appears to designate music as art, and "merely pleasant". The reason for this is a likeness that Kant finds between "the art of tones" and "the art of joking": for Kant, both belong to the domain of "the free play with sensations":

Music and that which excites laughter are two different kinds of play with aesthetic ideas, or of representations of the understanding through which ultimately nothing is thought, which can give lively gratification merely by their changes. [...]

In music this play proceeds from bodily sensations to aesthetic Ideas¹ ... and then from these back again to the body with redoubled force. In the case of jokes ... the play begins with the thoughts which together occupy the body ... and as the Understanding stops suddenly short at this presentment, in which it does not find what it expected, we feel the effect of this slackening in the body by the oscillation of the organs, which promotes the restoration of equilibrium and has a favourable influence upon health. (Kant, 1914, p. 222)

In other words, the "cause" of jokes consists "in the influence of the representation upon the body, and the reflex effect of this upon the mind" (p. 225). Compared to music, it is exactly the other way around, so that the two arts relate to one another reciprocally. Their major common feature involves the influence of mental representations and the oscillation of the inner organs, leading to refreshment.

Furthermore, the impact of neither music nor "the art of joking" is lasting; in both cases, the impact is only transitory and cannot be retained in memory (unlike poetry, for instance). "Like all enjoyment", these two arts require "constant change" and do not "bear frequent repetition without producing weariness" (p. 218). All in all, they both are "rather enjoyment [Genuß] than culture" (p. 217). Culture as defined by Kant is something that expands the faculties of the mind, which "must concur in the

¹ Hereafter I replace the old-fashioned adjective "aesthetical" in Bernard's translation with "aesthetic."

Judgement for cognition" (p. 220). "Music does not invite reflection (Nachdenken), which is the essence of culture" (Parret, 1998, p. 255). Seen from this viewpoint, music "will have the lowest place" in the Kantian hierarchy of the arts: from this it follows that the philosopher holds that both music and "the art of joking" contribute the least to cognition. Instead, in both music and jokes

the animation ... is merely bodily, although it is excited by ideas of the mind; and that the feeling of health produced by a motion of the intestines corresponding to the play in question makes up that whole gratification of a gay party. (Kant, 1914, p. 222)

Thus, "the play of sensations" that underlies jokes and music is presented by Kant as profoundly embodied. Herman Parret (1998) notes that in this passage Kant adopts the "Epicurean perspective", according to which these experiences cause pleasure at the bodily level (p. 263). This perspective works rather "subversively" for the whole Kantian framework and hence it was "repressed in his official doctrine" (p. 256).

This remark is all the more noteworthy since it is quite common to present Kant as a thinker for whom the body does not play any major role. As Mark Johnson (2015) states, "Kant was not a Cartesian substance dualist (where 'mind' and 'body' are two different kinds of substance); rather, he has a dualism that aligns sensing and feeling with the body, and conceptualizing and reasoning with acts of a transcendent ego..." (p. 3) Logical relations and logical inference for Kant

are supposedly in no way dependent for their structure on the bodily makeup or experience... This "disembodied" view of understanding has seemed just right to many so-called functionalist philosophers of mind, since they regard mental operations as functional programs for manipulating representations based only on their formal (syntactic) properties. Kant's view ... perfectly fit[s] the information processing view of mind that arose in the middle of the last century. (Johnson, 2015, p. 3)

It is noteworthy that the German term *Leib* (human lived body) does not include the assumption that the *Körper* (physical body) is separated from the mind, as is the case in the tradition of Platonic or Cartesian thinking (Borsche, 1980a, p. 174). Kant, however, does not use *Leib* any single time throughout the whole *Critique of Judgement*, which subsequently led to a criticism from some phenomenologists.

In their monograph *Das Andere der Vernunft* (1985), the brothers Gernot and Hartmut Böhme accuse Kant of downgrading the living body to a mere instrument for obtaining data. Such an instrument-body mechanically serves "the scientific observer" who actually remains "completely cut off from the body and who knows his body only as an unaffected, numb element in the experimental construction" (Böhme and Böhme, 1985, p. 109).

In the light of this, it seems no wonder that the "Epicurean remark" on the connection between music and joking did not exercise sustainable influence even on Kant's faithful adherents. His characterization of music as "merely pleasant" alongside jokes was obviously explained away as an embarrassing testimony of the philosopher's insufficient competence in musical matters. Instead, Kant's successors put great

efforts to “improve” his aesthetics by applying and adopting his categories of “the beautiful” and “the sublime” to musically related experience.² Enrico Fubini (2008) points out that it was not so much the remarks upon music as Kant’s more general concept of form that exercised influence upon formalism in the nineteenth century musical aesthetics as represented by Eduard Hanslick (p. 172).

Unlike poetry or visual arts, music is ambiguous for Kant, owing its existence to mathematically determinable conditions, yet producing movements of the mind (“*Gemütsbewegungen*”) that have nothing in common with mathematics (1914, pp. 218—219). As Rüdiger Görner notes, in music Kant is confronted with a medium that allows the non-sensual (mathematical science) to interact with the sensual, the physical with the transitory, the natural with the artistic (Görner, 2018, p. 84).

Kant seems furthermore to have paired music with the art of the joke by deeming the latter no less an ambiguous art than music, and as one that also has latent mathematical underpinnings. Despite being designated by Kant as a merely pleasant art, joking involves a discordant relation between the cognitive faculties of the understanding and the imagination, both at play in judgments on the beautiful and the sublime. As Patrick Giamario has shown, joking reveals a particular affinity with a peculiar Kantian subcategory of the mathematical sublime that “arises when the subject attempts to aesthetically ‘comprehend’ something ‘great beyond all comparison’ like the Egyptian pyramids.” In such aesthetic experience the “reason asks the imagination to represent the ‘unrepresentable’” (Giamario, 2017, p. 163).

The current article is devoted to these few but controversial and thought-provoking aspects of Kant’s association of music and joking, which - in light of recent development in musical thought (both in the domain of humanities and sciences) has – become more relevant than his long-celebrated theory of aesthetic form. In the first section I raise the claim of the influence of French sensualism on some important remarks from the paragraphs 53 and 54 of the *Critique of Judgement*. This influence helps to explain why Kant was palpably fascinated by the ambiguity of music but felt obliged to assign it a low rank in the hierarchy of the arts. Then, I discuss the rather obscure notion of aesthetic idea, which Kant employs in relation to both music and humour. After that, I examine just how ritualized or spontaneous the forms of music and joke that Kant envisioned were, focusing on the Kantian notions of disinterestedness and non-utility. The final section is devoted to research findings in empirical psychology and cognitive neuroscience. The former reveal changes in our awareness of the role of expectation in creating emotions in both humour and music, since Kant’s time. Evidence from the latter reveals that some neuronal networks involved into the processing of music and humour largely overlap. The crucial finding that seems pertinent to our reading of Kant, is that even seemingly passive music listening like the perception of humour have to do with an embodied mental exploration of the environment.

² In particular, see the publications of Christian F. Michaelis that appeared during Kant’s lifetime (1795, 1801).

The rise of sensibility in music aesthetics

Kant's seemingly disrespectful treatment of music appears all the more perplexing since already his lifetime adherents (Christian Michaelis) and the first posthumous successors (Artur Schopenhauer) assigned music to the most significant rank among the arts. But we have to take into account that precisely the years preceding the publication of *Critique of Judgement* marked a transitional moment in the history of aesthetics. Enrico Fubini (2008, pp. 150—155) shows that with the notable exception of the treatise by Yves-Marie André *Essai sur le beau* (1741), Pythagorean tradition was in decline. For this reason, it was no longer common to ascribe any kind of metaphysical meaning to numerical relations in music with the aim to justify the exceptional position of music among other arts. Rather, since the seventeenth century the common way to approach music was to treat it as a kind of sign system belonging to the vast domain of rhetoric, which Roland Barthes (1988) designated as a “metalanguage prevalent in the West from the fifth century B.C. to the nineteenth century A.D.” (p. 12). While nobody claimed that music might persuade through arguments like speech, music theory borrowed two other ideas from rhetorical theory: (1) the common divisions of the creative process into *inventio*, *dispositio* and *decoratio* (also called *elocutio*), and (2) the general aim to move the passions of the audience with the help of codified figures. In the predominantly German musical thought of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, two closely-related theories, *Figurenlehre* and *Affektenlehre*, represented affects as codified compositional means. George J. Buelow, a distinguished historian of baroque music, points out that it was “a result of its intricate interrelationships with rhetorical doctrines” that “Baroque music assumed as its primary aesthetic goal the achieving of stylistic unity based on... Affects” (Buelow, 2001, Affects section). Sadness, hate, love, joy, anger, doubt and so on were no sudden indefinable afflictions, but rather idealized, rationalized abstractions.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the rhetorical tradition in the domain of the spoken and written word began to encounter increasing criticism. Some remarks in *Critique of Judgement* show that Kant shared this unfavourable stance:

Rhetoric, in so far as this means the art of persuasion, i.e. of deceiving by a beautiful show (*ars oratoria*), ... borrows from poetry only so much as is needful to win minds to the side of the orator before they have formed a judgement, and to deprive them of their freedom; it cannot therefore be recommended either for the law courts or for the pulpit. (Kant, 1914, pp. 216—217, emphasis added)

Thereupon, in the footnote to this passage, he shares his more personal attitude:

I must admit that a beautiful poem has always given me a pure gratification; whilst the reading of the best discourse, whether of a Roman orator or of a modern parliamentary speaker or of a preacher, has always been mingled with an unpleasant feeling of disapprobation of a treacherous art, which means to move men in important matters like machines to a judgement that must lose all weight for them on quiet reflection. (Kant, 1914, p. 217)

Apart from the aversion for manipulation as a threat to the freedom of opinion, this passage reflects the waning of the previously predominant “mechanistic philosophy” understood as the way of explaining natural (and sometimes cultural) phenomena “in terms of artificial, man-made devices and the ways the various parts of these artefacts interact and move in relation to each other...” (Gouk, 2013, p. 36). Speeches should now be convincing because they flowed from within the soul or heart, not because a particular technique was applied as skilfully as possible.

As for musical thought, while “a concern with the passions ... remained central to the later 18th century, [...] the conventionalized representations of the affects found in earlier works began to seem stereotyped and unnaturally static” (Buelow, 2001, Affects section). Instead, the passions were held to be highly changeable and uniquely individual. Instead of objectified emotional states, “sentiments, the heart’s subjective responses to sensuous stimuli, were considered not only delicate and tender, but also – because wordless – necessarily vague” (Coward, 1984, p. 265). Completely in line with the anti-mechanistic movement, Kant rejects the fundamental assumption of the *Affektenlehre*— that a particular musical passage can elicit a particular emotion. He concedes that music can elicit *some* affects, but their content remains indistinct because it is dependent on individual proclivities and the emotional constitution of the subject.

In the way Kant describes emotional responses to the arts, it is hard to overlook the influence of the pan-European (though largely British in origin) aesthetic movement, “which posited immediacy of emotional response as a surer guide than intellect to proper moral behaviour” (Hertz and Brown, 2001). In Germany this movement was called “Empfindsamkeit” (translation of “Sensibility”) and manifested itself particularly vividly in the theoretical treatises and compositional practice of the musicians at the court of Frederick the Great – Joachim Quantz and C.P.E. Bach. It is highly unlikely, however, that Kant ever took into considerations these writings. Rather, his comments on the proximity between music and humour bear traces of the influence of the French sensualists. Rejecting Cartesian mind-body-dualism, Denis Diderot, Charles Batteux, Étienne-Bonnot de Condillac and Jean-Jacques Rousseau sought to account for emotional reactions with subtle physiological processes. The Cartesian analogy between the human body and clockwork or a hydraulic machine was too crude for them. In his treatise on logic from 1780, Condillac compared the nerve fibres with strings that, while receiving sensations, transfer them to other fibres in a similar way that vibrating strings engage other strings in resonance (Condillac, 1798b, pp. 73—74). Moreover, he picked up an idea initially formulated by Diderot that the brain nerves are analogous to vibrating strings of a cembalo because of their capability for resonating not only neighbouring strings, but also remote ones (Thomas, 1996). In Diderot’s and Condillac’s view this phenomenon resembles the capacity of human mind to make sudden leaps: the first idea gives rise to the second, both to the third, all three together to the fourth, and so on, thus letting the course of thought engage in free analogies (Diderot, 1875, p. 114; Condillac, 1798b, pp. 84—85).

The comparison of the mind with the cembalo is admittedly not of Kant’s type. Nonetheless, the cord metaphor plays a crucial role in his explanation of the effect of joking:

Laughter is an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing. ... It is remarkable that in all such cases the jest must contain something that is capable of deceiving for a moment. Hence, when the illusion is dissipated, the mind turns back to try it once again, and thus through a rapidly alternating tension and relaxation it is jerked back and put into a state of oscillation. This, because the strain on the cord as it were is suddenly (and not gradually) relaxed, must occasion a mental movement, and an inner bodily movement harmonising therewith, which continues involuntarily and fatigues, even while cheering us (the effects of a motion conducive to health). (Kant, 1914, pp. 224—226)

Herman Parret infers from this passage that “there can no longer be any doubt that the mind is” conceived by Kant to be “a stringed instrument, one which vibrates” (1998, p. 262), although this is actually the only occasion when Kant resorts to the string metaphor.

As for the role of free associations, Kant's treatment is much more differentiated than Diderot's or Condillac's. Within the realm of associated ideas, the philosopher distinguishes those that arise unwittingly in a mechanical way (1914, p. 218) and those that come about in a free play of imagination (1914, p. 100). Most strikingly, in a key remark about musical impact, Kant integrates the law of association with another crucial insight from the French sensualists: the notion of voice modulation as “a universal language of sensations intelligible to every man” (Kant, 1914, p. 218). Condillac, who had already put it forward in his first treatise *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* of 1746, suggested that the universal intelligibility thereof is due to the mutual origin of music and language from the vocal inflections of primitive men (Condillac, 1798a, 317 f.). Charles Batteux in *Les beaux-arts reduits a un meme principe* (1747) stressed that music “surpasses mere words in its ability to speak directly through the sentiment to the heart [...] through its imitation of passionate vocal inflection” (Cowart, 1984, p. 255). Both propositions were developed further by Rousseau. He argued that the unity of a musical piece comes about not so much due to “concinnity and connections we may easily perceive” as through a “pleasure of interest and sentiment” evoked by melody that imitates lively speech (Rousseau, 1779, pp. 454—455).³ The following passage by Kant seems to implicitly contain the same conceptual spectrum:

...the art of tone employs [voice modulation] by itself alone in its full force, viz. as a language of the affections, and thus communicates universally according to the laws of association the aesthetic Ideas naturally combined therewith... Now these aesthetic Ideas are not concepts or determinate thoughts. Hence the form of the composition of these sensations (harmony and melody) only serves instead of the form of language, by means of their proportionate accordance, to express the aesthetic Idea of a connected whole of an unspeakable

³ Marion Hobson proposed that the ambiguous status of music in Kant's hierarchy of the arts was directly borrowed from Rousseau: the most dependent among all arts, but in other ways above them all because it “moves more inwardly” (1980, p. 291).

wealth of thought [“die ästhetische Idee eines zusammenhängenden Ganzen einer unnennbaren Gedankenfülle”], corresponding to a certain theme which produces the dominating affection in the piece. (Kant, 1914, p. 218)

Nevertheless, the most interesting part is not so much what Kant took from the French sensualists, as how he appraised their ideas and supplemented them. The essential point of Kant’s argumentation prefigures the later viewpoint of Romantics: As an expression of “an unspeakable wealth of thought”, music communicates the ineffable. However, since the sphere of the inexpressible was not yet widely valued in 1790, this “unspeakability” of music is both good and bad for Kant. It is good because it precludes the mechanistic, dehumanising manipulation of people. It is bad because the mind cannot retain musical messages and reflect upon them.

Aesthetic ideas in jokes

The *content* of what music conveys is, for Kant, “A connected whole of an unspeakable wealth of thought.” The essential innovation, however, consists in Kant’s explanation of the way in which this content is communicated to the recipient: namely, through an aesthetic idea. As Kenneth Rogerson notes, “In the description of aesthetic ideas Kant relies on a distinction developed in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant’s first Critique) between concepts (*Begriffe*) and ideas (*Ideen*).” While “concepts are rules for organizing manifolds of sense,” ideas “are representations ... that refer to objects and states of affairs beyond sensible experience” (Rogerson, 2009, pp. 26—27). By an *aesthetic* idea, Kant understands “that representation of the Imagination which occasions much thought, without, however, any definite thought, i.e. any concept, being capable of being adequate to it; it consequently cannot be completely compassed and made intelligible by language” (1914, p. 197). He contrasts an aesthetic idea to a *rational* idea, which “is a concept to which no intuition (or representation of the Imagination) can be adequate” (Kant, 1914, p. 197).

What appears puzzling is not so much this definition itself as Kant’s claim that the play with aesthetic ideas underlies both “music and that which excites laughter” (p. 222). What is “ineffable” in jokes? All of the examples of the jokes that Kant cites actually have very clear verbal meanings. The essential component, however, seems to be not the sign system of jokes but the emotional impact they exercise: such an impact could be only elaborately described in retrospect but not adequately conveyed in definite concepts. As the above-quoted string metaphor might suggest, the commonality of the effects of music and joking consists for Kant in the rapid change of impulses.⁴ This property is responsible for a transitory but agreeable effect on the body, and it is more essential than the difference in the nature of their signs, which have clear linguistic meanings in joke but only suggestive meanings in music.

Kant’s conception of humour is commonly assigned to the so-called incongruous theory of humour: Humour arises when we perceive “something that violates our

⁴Kant does not stipulate, though, that various affects in music should be in contrast to one another or that tension should be succeeded by release and so on.

mental patterns and expectations” (Morreall, 2016, The Incongruity Theory section). The content of the aesthetic idea is defined by Kant in the case of music as “a connected whole of an unspeakable wealth of thought”; in the case of a joke as “something absurd” (Kant, 1914, p. 224). Patrick Giamario stresses that a joke as described by Kant “confronts the understanding with aesthetic ideas that it cannot comprehend with its concepts and rules. After trying and failing to subsume these aesthetic ideas under its concepts and rules, the understanding suddenly relaxes, and the subject laughs” (Giamario, 2017, p. 168). Despite being based on clear linguistic meanings, joking actually stimulates “the imagination to make associations that congeal into a notion of something that we cannot meet with directly in experience” in the same manner as other arts in Kant’s theory do (Rogerson, 2009, p. 29).

Music or musicking?

Nowhere does Kant specifically describe the forms of music or “that which excites laughter”. Since he is discussing the arts, a modern reader would expect that the art of humour has to do primarily with a comedy or a pantomime. Likewise, we would expect that a discussion of music uses appropriate examples such as sonatas, masses or symphonies. In reality, Kant mentions neither such genres nor even any kind of stage performance. Instead of concerts or comedies he refers to a very different type of cultural event where both music and joke play an important role: dinner parties.

Pleasant arts are those that are directed merely to enjoyment. Of this class are all those charming arts that can gratify a company at table; e.g. the art of telling stories in an entertaining way, of starting the company in frank and lively conversation, of raising them by jest and laugh to a certain pitch of merriment; when, as people say, there may be a great deal of gossip at the feast, but no one will be answerable for what he says, because they are only concerned with momentary entertainment, and not with any permanent material for reflection or subsequent discussion. (Among these are also to be reckoned the way of arranging the table for enjoyment, and, at great feasts, the management of the music. This latter is a wonderful thing. It is meant to dispose to gaiety the minds of the guests, regarded solely as a pleasant noise, without any one paying the least attention to its composition; and it favours the free conversation of each with his neighbour.) (Kant, 1914, p. 187 [§44])

The epithet “wonderful” reveals that Kant’s attitude to dinner parties is far from being contemptuous or condescending. In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (another late work of his), he calls dinner parties “civilized bliss” because they resolve the otherwise immanent conflict between the “inclination to pleasurable living and inclination to virtue” (Kant, 1996, pp. 185—186). Furthermore, “Kant describes dinner party jesting as an activity enjoyed by ‘men of taste’ – that is, men who have a particular sensitivity to the beautiful” (Giamario, 2017, p. 167). Alix Cohen stresses that for Kant dinner parties have cognitive dimension: “One of the crucial dimensions of dinner parties has to do with the intellectual stimulation of the understanding via conversation, what Kant calls a ‘refreshing play of thoughts...’” (Cohen, 2008, p.

322). In *Lectures on Anthropology*, Kant says that in parties “One maintains oneself through lively thoughtlessness; although the conversation is not interesting, yet it cheers one up. It is not only easy to collect one’s thoughts from it, but one can also reflect better and more actively” (Kant, 2012, pp. 540-541).

As essential components of dinner parties, Kant mentions not only jesting and telling funny stories but also the background music that accompanies the meal (*Tafelmusik*, see Kant, 1914, p. 187). His suggestion that the latter also indirectly contributes to the improvement of cognitive faculties has striking correspondence to recent empirical research into the impact of background music on performing cognitive tasks. First, it has been established that not all kinds of background music are conducive to the learning process, but instrumental music with a fast tempo and a soft character is (Lehmann and Seufert, 2017, p. 2). There are reasons to suppose that Kant’s *Tafelmusik* largely corresponded to these criteria. Second, it has been shown that listening to short stories (albeit not necessarily funny ones) can have an equally positive effect on learning, provided that the participants prefer stories to music (Nantais and Schellenberg, 1999).

Although one should be cautious with referring to a philosopher’s life in order to explain his writings, an account by Kant’s amanuensis may cast light upon the kind of music that might have inspired him (apart from *Tafelmusik*). The theologian Andreas Christoph Wasianski (1804) recalled that during the last summer of Kant’s life in 1803,

...the music of the changing of the guard delighted him more than before. When they passed in front of his house, he would open the door to the room in the back, listening to the fanfare attentively and with pleasure. One might have thought that the profound metaphysician would only have derived pleasure from music expressing a pure harmony, resolute modulations, elegantly resolved dissonances, or from the music of a learned composer such as Haydn. But this was not at all the case... (pp. 151—152; English translation in Parret, 1998, p. 252)

Such evidence prompts three inferences. Firstly, it seems that Kant preferred both music and joke in ritualized but interactive formats. Secondly, I suggest that Kant’s favourite forms of music experience resemble most what has been called musicking in recent times. Musicking means any activity involving or related to music performance – not only performing or composing, but also listening, rehearsing, and even remembering music. Initially, the introduction of this notion by David J. Elliott (1991) and Christopher Small (1998) was meant to legitimize musical experiences that go beyond the rigid frames of a written piece or a ritualized concert as proper subjects for academic research, as well as to abolish the opposition of active engagement and passive perception. Finally, the implications of Kant’s depictions of musicking and joking seem to contradict his own thesis, that in pleasant art the representations should be regarded as “mere sensations” and accompanied by pleasure, whilst in beautiful art the representations “are regarded as modes of cognition” (1914, p. 185). Kant’s description of musicking and joking in fact implies neither thoughtless entertainment, nor the dulling of cognitive faculties. Does Kant,

then, consider the purpose of pleasant art to be that of fostering the cognition of other objects?

Such a conclusion would be hasty, since for Kant there is no strict correlation between the pleasant and the utilitarian. In § 16 he distinguishes “two kinds of beauty; free beauty (*pulchritudo vaga*) or merely dependent beauty (*pulchritudo adhaerens*). The first presupposes no concept of what the object ought to be; the second does presuppose such a concept and the perfection of the object in accordance therewith” (1914, p. 81). There could be little doubt that Kant himself considers free beauty to be a higher value. The philosopher’s examples of free beauty are flowers, seashells, wallpapers, singing birds, and, strikingly enough, “music phantasies (i.e. pieces without any theme), and in fact all music without words” (1914, p. 81). To put it differently, Kant likens instrumental music to *natural* beauty, which is however not to be confused with a beautiful *art*; hence music can simultaneously remain “merely pleasant” and also represent “free beauty.” Similarly, Kant sees the origin of joking in a disinterested play of the faculties: the play of thoughts “springs merely from the change of representations in the Judgement; by it, indeed, no thought that brings an interest with it is produced, but yet the mind is animated thereby” (1914, p. 222 [§54]; see also Giamario, 2017, p. 167).

All in all, just as music, for Kant, could be either beautiful or pleasant depending upon one’s point of view, so could both musicking and joking be both utilitarian and non-utilitarian. This profound ambiguity is often overlooked by researchers whose theories are formulated in contradistinction to Kant. Ellen Dissanayake, one of the first anglophone scholars who addressed the arts from the perspective of evolutionary biology, examined the role of art in increasing evolutionary fitness (how art helps people survive and reproduce), and in doing so sought to define art in terms of ethological values through opposition to a so-called Kantian view of art. Yet Dissanayake’s argument, that the origins of art lie in “a universal inherited propensity of human nature to make some objects and activities special” (1988, p. 107), is by no means incompatible with the Kantian stance. Kant’s refusal to draw a firm distinction between background and concert music, between party jesting and comedy, is compliant with an ecological approach to music cognition, as an approach that eradicates strict boundaries between the extrinsic and intrinsic environments.⁵ While hearing a sound, the perceiver is prompted to recognize its source and understand its meanings in order to act appropriately, be that on a street or in a festive reception (= a reaction to extrinsic environment). But while being focused on the intrinsic properties of a musical piece at a concert, the perceiver is likewise prompted to identify some sounds, for example, “as leading up to the final cadence” in order prepare oneself “for the applause that will follow,” as Eric Clarke aptly exemplifies (2005, p. 7). Both cases illustrate cognitive competences related to awareness and adaptation to the environment.

⁵ Mark Reybrouck (2005) convincingly argues that ecological approach to music cognition could also be called “biosemiological”.

Towards the incongruity theory of music perception

The cited evidence testifies that in his association of music with joke, it is unlikely that Kant was have been inspired by contemporaneous musical pieces that purposely intended to elicit laughter, such as Mozart's *Musikalischer Spaß*, or Haydn's "Joke" Quartet in E-flat-major, op. 33. Contemporary psychological discourse takes for granted an insight articulated only in the 1950s by the renowned musicologist Leonard Meyer, that arousing affects via music (including laughter) have to do with the manipulation of listener expectations. Fifty years later, music psychologist David Huron formulated the principal purpose of his influential book, *Sweet Anticipation*, to revisit Meyer's topic and to put forward a comprehensive theory of expectation, based on a considerable volume of research findings (predominantly in evolutionary biology) accumulated in the intervening decades (Huron, 2006, p. 3). In his chapter on musically-induced laughter, Huron draws on Kant's remark, on "the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing". Yet, Huron's study indicates that the transformation of strained expectations is a necessary precondition for arousing pretty much any kind of emotional response via music.

Much in line with Kant's account on humour, Huron explains musically-induced emotions by the contrast between the fast *reaction response* and the slower *appraisal response*. The first "represents a 'quick-and-dirty' assessment of the situation followed by an immediate somatic (bodily) response. The second response represents a more 'thoughtful' assessment of the situation—a response that takes into account complex social and environmental factors" (p. 13). Now, Kant points out that this "transformation of a strained expectation into nothing... is certainly not enjoyable to the understanding" (1914, p. 224). Huron also states that any kind of surprise always initially causes stress. The pleasure derived from musical surprises, however, consists in the contrast between the immediate *negative* reaction response with a positive appraisal response. Huron even goes so far to claim that the degree of pleasure depends on the degree of this contrast (pp. 293-294).

Although Huron is not an outspoken proponent of embodied cognition framework, he arguably adheres to the paradigm in which cognition is mainly considered from the viewpoint of perception. This paradigm treats emotions "as outcomes of that kind of a prediction-based pattern processing", holding "that a mismatch between particular perceptions and predictions would cause tensions that find their way towards bodily expression, emotion, and, ultimately, reward" (Leman, et al., 2018, p. 748). In his conception of humour, Kant's writing could be considered to prefigure important aspects of this "cognition-in-perception" account.

The "mismatch" that Leman et al. point to is a notion close to that of incongruity: the key notion of the theory of humour to which Kant adheres. Various research findings in cognitive neuroscience provide further evidence in support of Kant's controversial association of musicking and joking, although there are no existing comparative studies of music and humour appreciation. However, a brief juxtaposition of disparate research findings - those dealing with music, and others dealing with humour appreciation - suggest that pleasure in both domains is associated with the detection and resolution of mismatch and incongruity by the participants. Amongst other factors that arouse pleasure in music and humour processing, researchers notably mention the

reward stimulus from learning; increased ability to filter and distinguish relevant information; (dis)ambiguation; successions of tension and relief; physiological release; pleasurable surprises, and active inference (Gold et al., 2019; Koelsch 2011; Neely et al., 2012; Samson et al., 2009; Vrticka et al., 2013). Cognitive mechanism and sensory-motor aspects are closely intertwined.

A much-quoted pharmacological study by Ferreri and colleagues (2019) demonstrates how musical pleasure may be computed from the violation of temporal or harmonic expectations. In this view, thwarted predictions during music listening cause dopaminergic release (Goupil & Aucouturier, 2019, p. 3365), which might be regarded as an equivalent pleasure to that which Kant naively attributed to the motion of the intestines. Gold, Pearce, Mas-Herrero, et al. (2019) proceed from the premise that music ranks among the greatest human pleasures and consistently engages the reward system (p.1). They delve into the question to what extent “the manageable challenge of foreseeable musical surprises” could help explain musical pleasure (p. 4). The researchers arrive at the conclusion that pleasure arises not only from prediction confirmations, but also from errors, since they are both “essential for understanding one’s environment...” In other words, pleasure is derived via the “intrinsic reward of *learning*” about the environment (Gold, et al., 2019, p. 1, emphasis added). Precisely for this reason, participants generally preferred listening to musical pieces with “an intermediate degree of predictability”, since completely predictable events and completely unforeseeable surprises are equally unhelpful (Gold, et al., 2019, p. 5).

Likewise, a research into neural correlates of humour detection (Neely et al., 2012) testifies that

To optimize appreciation of humor, both the introduced incongruity and the correspondent resolution must present enough of a cognitive challenge to be satisfying. ...jokes just outside of comfortable cognitive mastery are those most preferred across all age groups... While canned jokes might allow for more strictly controlled visual variation across stimuli, using such comic media necessitates that participants possess a comparable mastery of language to resolve the incongruities suggested by dual meanings of words or concepts and get the joke. (p. 1789)

This passage gives the impression that the authors actually proceed from a completely “disembodied” viewpoint on the mental processing and head-bound conceptions of the mind that has been so much challenged by the proponents of the embodied cognition paradigm. The same approach is exhibited by another group of neurocognitive researchers of humour, who define their subject merely as “mental play with words...” (Vrticka et al., p. 861). Likewise, neuroimaging studies of the similarities between music and language reveal “striking similarities between neural patterns associated with the processing of music and language—notably, in the study of participants’ responses to elements that are incongruous with their musical or linguistic context” (Featherstone et al., 2012, p. 81); yet there is no single mention of embodiment. Despite this, I argue that both Kant and present-day researchers espouse a “situated approach” to music and humour cognition: what is always taken into

account is the subject's prior familiarity with the material she encounters, and it is obvious that the extra-bodily environmental processes play a crucial role in determining the subject's expectations. Hence, what this approach describes could be rightly called extended cognition (Seibert, 2020, p. 11).

Conclusion

The reasons Kant himself offers for his approximation of joking and musicking appear quite superficial, entailing a couple of critical questions and objections. Recent empirical findings, however, bolster Kant's intuitive conjecture with substantial research evidence. In Kant's time, the discourse of musical anticipation had not yet been established. Yet, in his likening of musicking and joking, there lies an implicit conjecture that a particular order of successive mental representations yields visceral, corporeal impact; overwhelming evidence now confirms that slight violation of expectation may indeed induce sensual pleasure in both humour and music appreciation.

Kant presents the elements of music's impact arising in the following order: (1) bodily sensations, (2) aesthetic ideas, (3) the oscillation of inner organs, (4) the feeling of refreshment and enjoyment. In the case of joking, the impact proceeds from mental representations to aesthetic ideas but then ends in the same way. Music and the art of the joke are inferior to poetry because the *final* element of poetry's impact is reflection, whose value Kant deems higher than that of enjoyment.

In the light of the newest research findings, however, it has become clear that the degree of the visceral reaction is largely dependent on the mind's activity in making predictions. Present-day researchers hold that pleasure derived from both music and humour arises not only from prediction confirmations but also from errors, since these contribute to the individual's understanding of their environment. Such mental operations occur largely unconsciously and have been revealed only in recent decades by neuroimaging technology. This does not mean, however, that the appreciation of them necessarily ruins Kant's order of the stages of impact. It only needs to be supplemented by putting predictions in the second place beside aesthetic ideas.

The most fascinating consequence of the juxtaposition of Kant and recent findings is, of course, the idea of deriving pleasure from learning about one's environment. This reward could be provided by musicking and joking equally well. This insight enables us to close the gap between Kant's two incompatible viewpoints: the formal aspect ("music as culture") and the ludic aspect ("music as enjoyment"). It is reasonable to think that Kant might have been able to solve this antinomy if he had realized that culture does not manifest itself in the perception of the arts only in the judgement of the form. The mental operations of predicting and exploring environments presuppose cognitive competences that can be acquired only with years of practice. This practice consists of self-improvement in solitude on the one hand, and social interactions on the other – two factors defined by Kant as indispensable for the arduous journey from initial rudeness to culture (Eisler, 1930, p. 323).

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