

# Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art

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Art and Emotion



# In this lecture...

- We introduce central problems concerning the connection between art and emotions, focusing on the first one: why do we describe in emotional terms artworks such as abstract paintings and works of instrumental music? (We shall focus on music).
- Some accounts of this phenomenon are considered. The **EXPRESSION THEORY** and the **AROUSAL THEORY** attempt to explain it by locating the emotion in either the artist or the appreciator.
- **RESEMBLANCE THEORIES** argue instead that we should consider expressive properties (the music's sadness, happiness, etc.) as dependent upon music's resemblance to expressive behavior.



# Two puzzles

1. EXPRESSIVENESS: The connection of some artworks to emotions is relatively obvious: some of the individuals represented/described in the artwork are in a given emotional state, so we say that the work is happy/sad, etc. But in the case of abstract paintings and instrumental music, things are not so clear.
  2. EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO FICTIONS: Real-life emotions are motivated by what we know (or think to know) about the world. How can we feel emotions in response to fictions, if we know that they are not true?
- This lecture will consider some possible answers to the first of these two puzzles.



# The structure of emotions

- Emotions are a complex phenomenon, and they are studied by several disciplines (psychology, physiology, neuroscience, anthropology, philosophy, etc.)
- When it comes to clarifying the conceptual structure of emotions, it is useful to distinguish three possible components of emotions:
  1. FEELING STATE. The particular way it feels like to be in a certain emotional state.
  2. COGNITIVE COMPONENT. A belief, desire, or other kind of attitude that is involved in the emotional state (you are angry because you *believe* that you deserved a better grade).
  3. INTENTIONAL OBJECT. Something “out there” that our emotion is directed to (you are afraid of x, you love y, you feel pity for z).



In scenario 1, you are walking in a forest and encounter a wild tiger.

In scenario 2, you find a giant huntsman spider (harmless to humans) on your car.

How would you characterize each of the three components of emotions in these two scenarios?



1. FEELING STATE
2. COGNITIVE COMPONENT
3. INTENTIONAL OBJECT







Edward Munch, *Death in the Sickroom* (1893)



# Adagio for Strings

String Quartet

Samuel Barber

Transcribed by Neo Scott

Adagio

Violin I *pp* *espr. cantando*

Violin II *pp* *p*

Viola *pp* *p*

Violoncello *pp* *p*

5

10

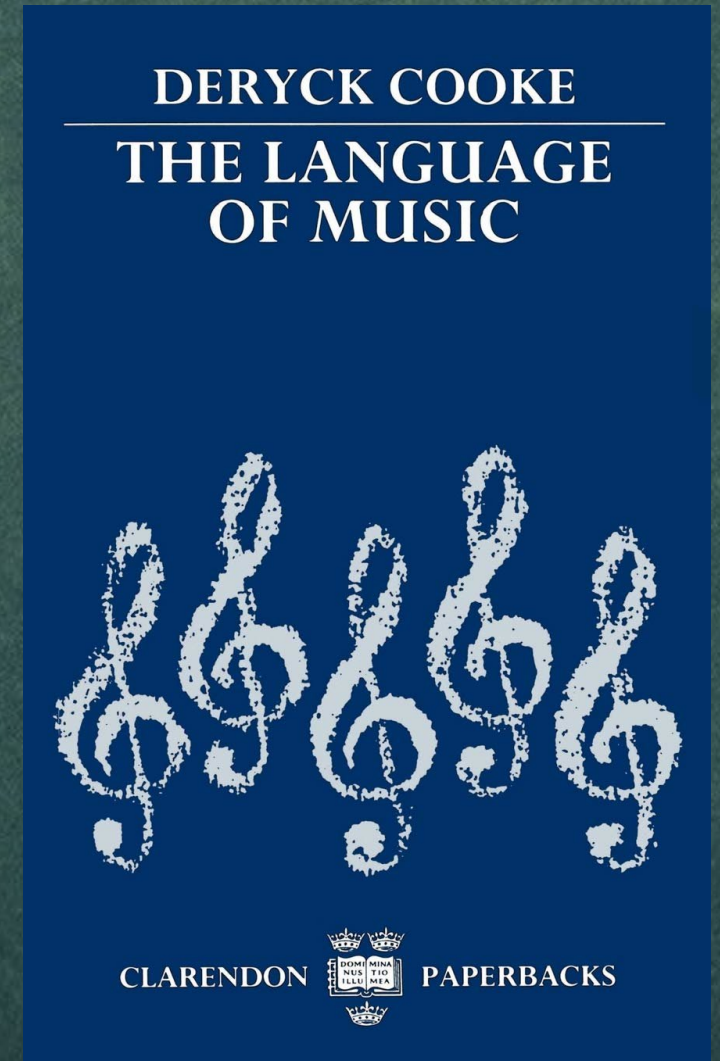
*mf* *p* *pp* *mf*



# Expression theory

- The EXPRESSION THEORY holds that artworks are expressive of an emotion  $E$  because their creator was in the emotional state  $E$  when making them.
- The theory assimilates expressive artworks to other pieces of expressive behavior (smiling, crying, etc.).
- What are some possible problems for this view?

NOTE: One should distinguish between the expression theory *of art* and the expression theory as theory of the relation between art and emotions.





# Arousal theory

- The AROUSAL THEORY suggests that emotion words are applied to instrumental music whenever they have the capacity to arouse in us a given emotional state.
- To say that the music is 'sad' is to say that it makes us sad when we listen to it (or at least, it has such a potential).
- What are some possible problems for this view?

NOTE: One may reject the arousal theory and still concede that music may arouse emotions in the listener.



# Emotions in the music

- Both the expression theory and the arousal theory attempt to trace back the emotions “in the music” to the emotions experienced by the music’s composer (expression theory) or listener (arousal theory).
- Perhaps a solution to the problem is to accept that emotion words (‘sad’, ‘happy’, etc.) are applied to instrumental music in a way that is different from their standard use, though still related to it.



# Expressive properties as properties of artworks

- Expressive properties are perceptual properties of the artworks that possess them.
- They cannot depend on the work's history (expression theory) or on its effects on an audience (arousal theory).



“[...] the sadness is to the music rather like the redness to the apple, than it is like the burp to the cider.” (Bouwsma 1954: 98)





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# Resemblance theories

- The idea behind RESEMBLANCE THEORIES is that we sometimes use emotion words to describe the characteristic way emotions are manifested, independently of whether there are actual emotions involved (the dog's face looks *sad*).
- Perhaps music is described in emotional terms for the same reason: it resembles typical human behavioral manifestations of emotions, either bodily, or vocal.
- What are some possible problems for this view?



Lasciatemi morire!  
No longer let me languish  
Canto from the opera "Ariana"

65

English version by  
Dr. Theodore Baker

Claudio Monteverdi  
(1567-1643)

*Lento*  $\text{♩} = 58$   
*p dolente*

Voice

La - scia - te - mi mo - ri - re! la - scia - te -  
No long - er let me lan - guish! no long - er

Piano

*p dolente*

*p* *f*

mi mo - ri - re! E che vo - le - te che mi con -  
let me lan - guish! What dost thou fan - cy can stay one